



# The Tempest

Study Guide by Course Hero



## What's Inside

|                           |    |
|---------------------------|----|
| 🕒 Book Basics .....       | 1  |
| 🕒 In Context .....        | 1  |
| 👤 Author Biography .....  | 2  |
| 👤 Characters .....        | 2  |
| 🗺 Plot Summary .....      | 5  |
| 🕒 Scene Summaries .....   | 10 |
| ❝ Quotes .....            | 21 |
| 🐦 Symbols .....           | 24 |
| 🎭 Themes .....            | 24 |
| ▤ Motifs .....            | 26 |
| ▤ Suggested Reading ..... | 27 |

## 👁 Book Basics

### AUTHOR

William Shakespeare

### YEAR WRITTEN

c. 1611

### GENRE

Drama

### ABOUT THE TITLE

*The Tempest* takes its title from the storm that casts the men aboard Alonso's ship onto Prospero's island.

## 🧭 In Context

### Geographic Exploration

*The Tempest* was written and performed during an age of geographic exploration. During the 17th century European countries were exploring new territories around the world and establishing colonies. With each new colony European countries expanded their political, economic, and cultural influence.

The primary result of colonization for the natives in these newly "discovered" regions of the world, however, was exploitation and slavery. Families were divided or destroyed, ownership of land and a way of life were surrendered, and people were forced to serve new masters. Additionally the colonists often brought diseases that wiped out native populations and practices that altered the natural world forever. It is within this context of colonization that William Shakespeare explores the budding issues of exploitation that come when one culture dominates another. Prospero's slave Caliban reflects how Europeans considered the natives they encountered in their explorations to be "savages" who must be "educated" and "civilized" in order to be saved.

### Utopia and Idealism

Often the new territories in Africa and the Americas were quite different from the homelands of the European colonizers. Exposure to these exotic locations inspired Europeans to imagine more idealistic governments and to develop romanticized notions about the natives of these lands, imagining them as more primitive, "natural" beings living in innocent harmony with the world around them. Some believed that the less developed, less populated locations provided the opportunity to create a new social order—a utopia—where

humans could establish a heaven on earth.

In *The Tempest* the character Gonzalo reveals his vision for an idealistic commonwealth in Act 2, Scene 1, in a speech recognized by scholars as linked to the Frenchman Michel de Montaigne's description of an indigenous South American society in his essay "Of Cannibals." In this essay first published in 1580, Montaigne questions the superiority of his own culture and suggests that in more primitive societies individuals are better able to live in harmony with nature. Also it is likely that Shakespeare was influenced by the writing of the British humanist Sir Thomas More, whose *Utopia* (1516) uses an exploration of life on the fictional island of Utopia, where a European traveler lands after being separated from his party, to criticize his own culture under the reign of Henry VIII.

## Theatrics

The original staging of *The Tempest* occurred in a time when there was no electricity or sound systems. They kept their stage sets simple because they had to. Yet Shakespeare includes plenty of special effects in the magical world of Prospero's island.

Actors used their bodies, sounds, firecrackers and other pyrotechnics, and props to create the effects of thunder, lightning, and a sinking ship, for example, when staging the terrific storm in the first scene of the play. They had to execute impressions of an elaborate banquet that magically appears and disappears as well as a masque with goddesses singing and dancing, using trapdoors and wires that allowed actors to hover above the stage. A curtain was often used to hide a smaller rear area of the stage so that surprises could be "revealed," as when Ferdinand and Miranda are found playing chess together at the end of the play. Together these theatrics would have captured the audience's imagination in new ways and conveyed a sense of the wonder in the play.

## Author Biography

William Shakespeare, born in April 1564, was an actor and a writer in a successful theatrical company in London, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which performed his plays. He was also part owner of the Globe, an outdoor theater across the river Thames from London. After Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603,

King James I further legitimized the company and changed its name to the King's Men.

Shakespeare published most of his work from 1594 to 1613. He wrote *The Tempest* around 1611, which was also the year of its first performance—for King James I. The play is considered by most scholars to be the last play that Shakespeare wrote by himself (he may have contributed to other authors' plays). By the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, he had written dozens of plays of varying types: histories, comedies, and tragedies. In his later years he wrote a number of works that contained both tragic and comedic features but didn't fully fall into either category, which are now called his "romances," and *The Tempest* was his final one. Many scholars believe that through the character of the magician Prospero in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare gave his own farewell to the theater. Like Prospero, Shakespeare used the powers of his own art to create other worlds.

Most of Shakespeare's plays are masterfully rewritten versions of already existing stories, but if the playwright used an existing story for *The Tempest*, Shakespeare scholars have not found it. However, the shipwreck in the story is likely based on the famous shipwreck of a British ship on the island of Bermuda in 1609. In May of that year a fleet of nine British ships set sail from England for the colonies in Jamestown, Virginia. During a terrible storm one ship was separated from the others and crashed in Bermuda where the crew was able to make it safely ashore. The reports of the wreck intrigued many in England, particularly the descriptions of the island, which were unlike anything most British people had ever seen. In addition the utopian society that Gonzalo imagines establishing on the island is inspired by an essay titled "Of Cannibals," by the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616.

## Characters

### Prospero

The magician Prospero is the main character in the play, both as the focus as well as the orchestrator of all the action. As the duke of Milan Prospero was too focused on magical study and left the running of his dukedom to his brother Antonio, who

eventually deposed him. Exiled to an island, Prospero and his daughter Miranda have lived in near isolation for 12 years. During that time Prospero has become a more powerful magician. When fate brings the men who conspired against him within reach, Prospero uses his powers to elevate his daughter's position in society and program revenge against his enemies, including the very brother who took his dukedom from him. In the end Prospero abandons his plan for vengeance and forgives his enemies of their offenses. He regains his dukedom and plans to return with his newly engaged daughter to Italy.

## Ariel

Prospero's faithful spirit servant, Ariel, helps execute Prospero's plans to gather his enemies on his island in order to repay them for their traitorous crimes against him. Ariel is still haunted by his former experience as a slave to the witch Sycorax but serves Prospero willingly, enticed by the promise of freedom, which Ariel receives at the end of the play. It is primarily Ariel's magic Prospero uses to manipulate the other characters throughout the play.

## Miranda

Exiled with her father when she was only three years old, Miranda has grown up on an island with no humans other than her father and their slave, Caliban. When she meets Ferdinand she is awed by his beauty and immediately falls in love. As she is exposed to more people, she cannot help but be amazed by all that humanity can be. Engaged to her beloved Ferdinand at the end of the play, she prepares to travel to Naples for their wedding. Miranda's name means "to wonder at or be admired," and she generally acts with wonder and admiration to most of what she sees, including the ship, Ferdinand, her father's explanation of how she came to live on the island, and the other nobles.

## Caliban

Son of the deceased witch, Sycorax, the half-human Caliban loses control of the island when Prospero and his daughter Miranda arrive there 12 years earlier. Although Prospero and his daughter try to educate Caliban in their language and ways

and claim they treated him with respect and kindness at first, he later tried to rape Miranda. He is now a bitter, frequently punished slave. When Caliban meets some of the castaways from the ship, Trinculo and Stephano, he hopes to serve a new master. He soon realizes that the new master is worse than Prospero.

## Alonso

Alonso, the king of Naples, is onboard a ship returning to Italy from Africa, where his daughter has married the king of Algiers. After the shipwreck Alonso despairs over the presumed drowning of his son, Ferdinand. When Ariel reveals Alonso's part in the exile of Prospero, Alonso repents of his past sins. Buoyed by Prospero's forgiveness and overjoyed at his son's reappearance, Alonso celebrates over the coming marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda.

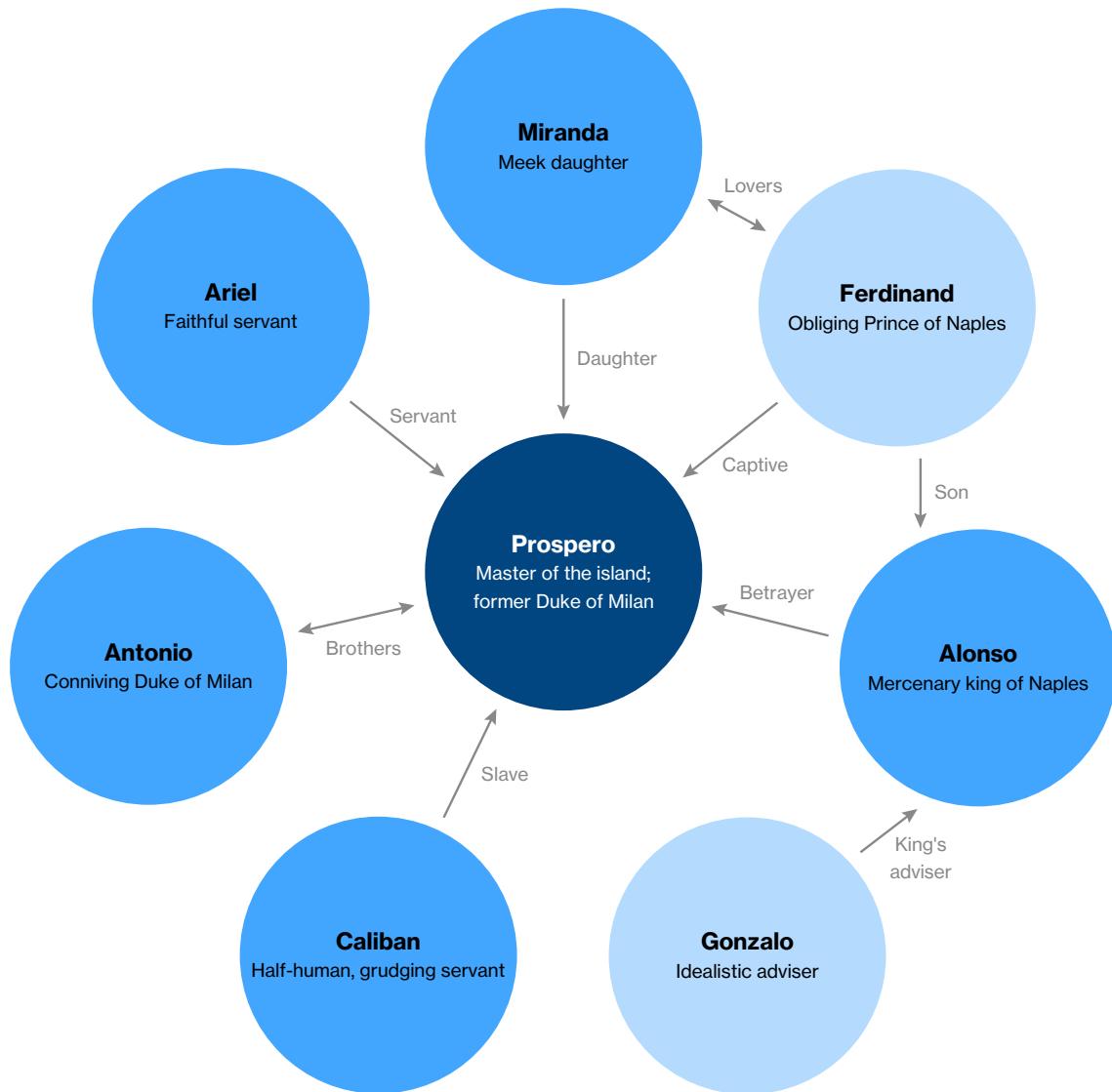
## Gonzalo

Gonzalo, King Alonso's advisor and Prospero's old and loyal friend, is the idealist in the play. When he sees the beauty and purity of the isolated island, he considers the utopia he might create there, eliminating poverty and wealth as well as social classes. Because he helped Prospero escape long ago, he has earned Prospero's gratitude.

## Antonio

Antonio is the current duke of Milan after undermining his brother Prospero's power and exiling him from his home 12 years before. A greedy and unsympathetic character, he blames King Alonso for the shipwreck and the supposed drowning of Ferdinand. He then plots with Sebastian, King Alonso's brother, to kill Alonso and take power. Though forgiven by his brother Prospero in the end, Antonio shows no remorse over any of his behavior.

## Character Map



● Main Character

● Other Major Character

● Minor Character

# Full Character List

| Character     | Description   |
|---------------|---|
| Prospero      | Prospero, the magician, is the former duke of Milan who was ousted by his brother Antonio.      |
| Ariel         | Ariel is a spirit who serves Prospero as payment for being rescued from imprisonment in a tree. |
| Miranda       | Miranda is Prospero's 15-year-old daughter.   |
| Caliban       | Caliban, slave of Prospero, is a native inhabitant of the island.                               |
| Alonso        | Alonso is the king of Naples.   |
| Gonzalo       | Gonzalo is an advisor to King Alonso and old friend of Prospero.                                |
| Antonio       | Antonio, the current duke of Milan, is Prospero's brother.                                      |
| Adrian        | Adrian is a lord in King Alonso's court.  |
| Boatswain     | The boatswain is the leader of the boat's crew.   |
| Ferdinand     | Ferdinand is the son of the king of Naples.   |
| Francisco     | Francisco is a lord in King Alonso's court.   |
| Mariners      | The mariners are the sailors on the ship.   |
| Other spirits | Iris, Ceres, Juno, and the Nymphs are spirits that appear in the play.                          |
| Sebastian     | Sebastian is the brother of Alonso.   |
| Shipmaster    | The shipmaster is the master of Alonso's ship.  |
| Stephano      | Stephano is the butler of King Alonso.  |

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Sycorax  | Sycorax is Caliban's mother, a witch who uses magic in evil ways. |
| Trinculo | Trinculo is King Alonso's jester.                                 |

## Plot Summary

Traveling from Africa to Italy, a ship faces a terrible storm. Onboard is Alonso, the king of Naples, who has just married his daughter to the king of Tunis. Although the sailors become frustrated by the interference of the nobles above deck, all are desperate to reach safety.

Meanwhile on the shore of an island, the magician Prospero and his daughter Miranda watch the ship being tossed and turned in the storm. The two have been stranded on the island for 12 years since their escape from Milan when Prospero was deposed by his traitorous brother, Antonio, and forced to leave the city. Prospero reveals that his brother and other enemies who exiled him are the very men on board the ship. It becomes clear Prospero has used his magic to orchestrate the storm and the events that will follow in order to exact revenge. He has Ariel separate those onboard into three groups: the nobles, Ferdinand, and the "comics" Trinculo and Stephano.

Prospero has two servants, the first of whom is a spirit named Ariel, who has been promised freedom in two days. The loyal Ariel can also perform magic and is sent to spy on the shipwrecked men. Prospero's other servant, Caliban, is a "monsterlike" man, the son of a terrible witch, Sycorax, whom Prospero defeated when he came to the island. Taught language by Prospero, Caliban has used none of his knowledge for good and perpetually curses his master.

Ferdinand, the son of King Alonso, has been saved from the storm, but he reaches the island alone. He is certain the rest of the ship's passengers have drowned. As soon as he and Miranda see each other they fall in love. Although this is part of Prospero's plan, he pretends to be hostile to Ferdinand and orders him to perform hard labor, effectively playing "hard to get" to ensure that Ferdinand remains interested in Miranda.

The rest of the king's party has survived and makes it to shore on a different part of the island. Alonso is certain his son has drowned. Antonio and the king's brother, Sebastian, mock the king's grief, blaming him for the voyage that brought them to

this fate. His loyal adviser, Gonzalo, admonishes them. Gonzalo is delighted with the beautiful island and considers the utopia he might create if he were in charge—a country without wealth, poverty, work, slavery, or royalty.

As the others sleep Antonio and Sebastian come up with a plan to kill King Alonso so that Sebastian can become king. Antonio reminds his friend that he did the same thing to his brother, Prospero.

Elsewhere on the island Trinculo, the king's jester, stumbles on Caliban, who is sleeping beneath his cloak. He climbs under the cloak as well, only to be discovered by Stephano, the king's butler, who mistakenly believes he has found a four-legged monster. Upon hearing Stephano's voice, Caliban wakes and believes he is seeing a god. He swears to serve this new god, who gives him wine. Together the men get very drunk and come up with a plan to kill Prospero so that Stephano can become the ruler of the island.

The king and his men search for Ferdinand with no luck. Exhausted and without hope they are startled when a magical banquet appears before them. Just as they prepare to eat, however, everything disappears again. Already vulnerable the men are further startled when Ariel tells them of their sins against Prospero. The king quickly expresses both his guilt and regret. Antonio and Sebastian, however, show no sorrow and are intent on carrying out their plot against the king.

As Ferdinand's love is tested, Prospero is pleased to learn that he is genuine in his devotion to Miranda. He gives his blessing to their union but commands Ferdinand not to sleep with Miranda until after they are married. In honor of the engagement Prospero calls forth a celebratory masque with music and dancing by a host of spirits. Midway through the party Prospero remembers that Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo are coming to kill him, and he ends the celebration.

At Prospero's bidding Ariel has led the three men through briars and thorns and a filthy pond. As they approach Prospero's cell to kill him, glittering garments Ariel has strung outside distract them. Instead of going directly into the cell to carry out their plan, Stephano and Trinculo try on the clothes, pretending to be noblemen. Suddenly dog-shaped spirits drive them off in terror.

The king and his men are terrified of what they have seen and of what might become of them. Realizing he has everyone under his control, Prospero also realizes he does not want to

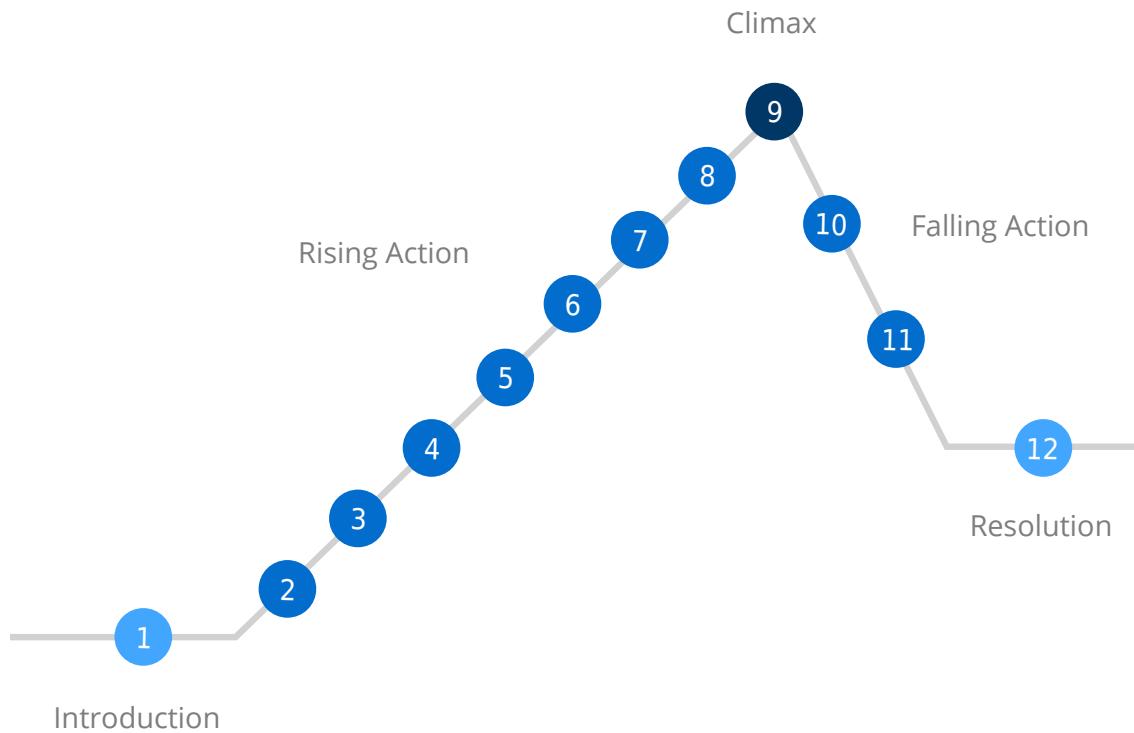
execute revenge but wants to extend mercy instead. He vows to give up his magic after he has brought about restoration. Ariel brings the men, who are under a magic spell, to Prospero, who declares the various crimes that have been committed against him. Then he announces his forgiveness of them all.

As Alonso shares his grief over his lost son, Prospero reveals that Ferdinand is alive—and engaged to his daughter Miranda. Alonso is overjoyed at his son's survival and the coming marriage.

The drunken trio of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo arrives; after naming their sins Prospero forgives them as well, and he claims Caliban as his own subject; Caliban fearfully anticipates being punished and promises to try to please Prospero in the future, admitting he was foolish to worship Trinculo. Announcing a plan to set sail for Naples the following day, Prospero then frees Ariel.

Prospero turns to the audience and asks them to free him as well by clapping to show that they have enjoyed the show.

## Plot Diagram



### Introduction

1. King Alonso's ship encounters a tempest.

### Rising Action

2. Prospero tells Miranda of their exile to the island.
3. Ferdinand reaches shore where he and Miranda fall in love.
4. The king and his men arrive on shore.
5. Alonso mourns the certain death of his son.
6. Antonio and Sebastian plot to kill Alonso.
7. Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo plot to kill Prospero.
8. At the magic feast the men's past treachery is exposed.

### Climax

9. Prospero throws a masque to celebrate the coming wedding.

### Falling Action

10. Prospero forgives all the offending parties.
11. Alonso approves of Ferdinand and Miranda's wedding.

### Resolution

12. Prospero asks the audience to release him by applauding.

## Timeline of Events

### During shipwreck

Prospero tells his daughter, Miranda, how his dukedom was taken from him.

### At same time

Antonio gives Sebastian the idea to murder King Alonso and take control.

### Some time later

Ariel spreads a magical feast before the king's men and reminds them of their guilt.

### A short time later

Prospero and Ariel frighten off Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo.

### End of Day 1

Prospero finishes the play and asks the audience to free

### Day 1, middle of storm

King of Naples's ship wrecks.

### After shipwreck

Ferdinand, though grieving his father, sees Miranda and the two fall in love.

### At same time

Caliban is discovered by Stephano and Trinculo; they make a plan to kill Prospero.

### At same time

Prospero throws a celebratory masque in honor of Ferdinand and Miranda's betrothal.

### Toward end of Day 1

Prospero forgives the king and his men first and then Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo.

him through their applause.

# Q Scene Summaries

## Act 1, Scene 1

### Summary

The sailors onboard a ship are caught in a fierce and raging thunderstorm on their journey from the north coast of Africa to Italy. As they work to take down the sails to save the ship, the noble passengers Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Ferdinand, and Gonzalo come aboveboard. Tensions rise when the boatswain insists that the noblemen return below deck. The boatswain is irritated by the appearance of the noblemen because they are loud and they disrupt the work of the sailors: "You mar our labor," he says, "Keep your cabins. You do assist the storm." When they remind the boatswain of their importance, he points out that, while they have authority over men, they have none over nature.

They return below deck only to have Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo reappear shortly after. Sebastian and Antonio are rude to the boatswain, calling him names. Gonzalo responds that the boatswain should remember the authority of the passengers they have onboard. More sailors appear, wet and weary from trying to save the ship. King Alonso, his son, and others pray desperately because it is clear the ship is destined for destruction. As the ship breaks apart Gonzalo acknowledges that they are going to drown.

### Analysis

The scene opens in the midst of a chaotic scene—the tempest—that hints at the supernatural power of forces beyond human control. Soon the characters will face more magic on the magician Prospero's island. For now the tremendous power of nature is more powerful than any human, despite the royal authority onboard the ship. Whether king or servant, all are human and powerless before storms that they cannot control. When it is revealed in the following scene that Prospero controls the tempest, the implication is it is he who has become the greater ruler.

The crisis onboard the ship reveals both the conflict between

classes and the nature of several of the characters. The class hierarchy on the ship is clear. The sailors do the hard work of sailing the ship—and they are good at it. The boatswain is irritated by the appearance of the demanding noblemen because he knows they will all be dead if the sailors cannot save the ship—their nobility is useless in this life-or-death situation. The first scene of Act 1 also introduces readers to some of the character qualities of Antonio and Sebastian, who respond to the boatswain with harsh cursing. Both men use their authoritative power to verbally abuse someone with less power. This conflict between ruler and subject begins to develop the theme of exploitation and power that will weave its way through the entire play.

## Act 1, Scene 2

### Summary

On the shore of their island home Prospero and Miranda watch the ship being destroyed in the storm. Miranda suspects that her father's magical powers may have something to do with it, so she asks him to show mercy on the ship's inhabitants. Acknowledging his role, he promises that none shall come to harm.

He then tells her the story of what brought them to the island 12 years before when she was only three years old. Prospero was the duke of Milan. In order to spend more time in his study of books, Prospero put his much-loved brother Antonio in charge of some aspects of his government. But Antonio grew more powerful and persuaded people to be loyal to him as the real leader. Eventually he was able to get the support of the king of Naples, Alonso, who helped to forcefully drive out Prospero. Prospero's people loved him, so the conspirators did not dare to kill him and Miranda, but they put them to sea in a rotting boat, anticipating they would die at sea. However, the kind Gonzalo, a Neapolitan in charge of the plan to usurp Prospero, provided them with water, food, clothing, and some of Prospero's books, so they had something to live on when they landed on the island, where they have been ever since.

Prospero then reveals the very enemies who created this trouble for him were the people onboard the ship he had just wrecked in the storm. After he tells her all of this, Miranda falls unnaturally to sleep. The sprite Ariel appears, making it clear to

the audience that the spirit has been the one executing the plan of the storm on the ship. He reports that everyone except the sailors has jumped out of the ship. The sailors are magically asleep on the ship, which has come safety to shore and is hidden in a cove. The passengers, too, are all safe and dispersed in groups around the island.

When Prospero begins to give Ariel more instructions, the spirit reminds Prospero he has promised freedom. Until now Prospero has been complimentary of Ariel, but he becomes irritated at Ariel because the spirit has not yet finished the agreed time of service. Prospero then recalls the story of how he rescued Ariel from imprisonment in a tree by the witch Sycorax. After being reminded of his former misery, Ariel thanks Prospero, apologizes, and promises to do Prospero's bidding. Prospero then sends Ariel as an invisible spy to the shipwrecked men on the island.

After Ariel leaves Miranda wakes from sleep. She and her father go to visit the slave Caliban, the son of the witch Sycorax. Caliban comes out of his cave cursing Prospero for taking the island, which had belonged to his mother, from him. Prospero calls him a liar and says he even tried to take care of Caliban in his own dwelling until Caliban tried to rape Miranda. After arguing with and cursing Prospero, Caliban leaves to go get fuel.

Now the first shipwrecked passenger appears, alone. Ferdinand, the son of Alonso, walks in with the invisible Ariel singing beside him. It's obvious that Ariel is leading Ferdinand to this specific location. Ferdinand remarks on the beauty of the song, wondering where it came from. Ariel then sings a song that suggests that Ferdinand's father is drowned, which is what Ferdinand believes.

Prospero and Miranda enter the scene, and Miranda notices Ferdinand. She has never seen another man besides her father and Caliban, and she is immediately enchanted by his handsomeness. Likewise when Ferdinand spots Miranda, he is smitten with her beauty. Prospero questions him, and Ferdinand reveals how he has seen his own father die in a shipwreck. Prospero suggests that Ferdinand is actually a spy who has come to take the island from him. Miranda is distressed by her father's lack of pity. She does not hear Prospero's asides that reveal he is merely testing Ferdinand, fearing that winning Miranda too easily will cause Ferdinand to value her less. When Prospero threatens Ferdinand, Miranda pleads with her father for mercy. Ferdinand, ready to be

imprisoned, asks only that he might be able to look on Miranda once a day from his prison cell. Prospero is pleased with the outcome of Ariel's work and his own manipulations.

## Analysis

In this scene readers learn that the "natural" tempest is actually a magical, supernatural event created by Prospero through Ariel in order to get the ship to the island, where he can execute his plan of revenge. And the motivation for that revenge becomes clear to the audience when Prospero tells the story of his past to his daughter.

As Prospero tells his story it will also become apparent that in his office in Milan he did not rule well. He was more interested in his obsession with magic and books than in fulfilling his responsibilities as a good leader. Now he is "ruling" Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban, and the audience will wonder whether he misuses his authority over his small island world, too. The scene reveals the following details of those relationships.

### Prospero's Relationship with Miranda

Prospero loves his daughter dearly, citing her as the motive for his actions and as the balm that has comforted him in his exile. Miranda depends on him because she is still in her youth. And he sees himself as the authority in that relationship, repeatedly asking her "Dost thou attend me?" He believes he is entitled to control her life, which is revealed in his orchestration of bringing Ferdinand to her. Because Miranda does not know her or her father's past, and there are no other humans on the island, Prospero also "controls" what she does and does not know about him. For example, he marvels that his brother "should/Be so perfidious!—he whom next thyself/Of all the world I loved." In their isolation Prospero is free to present himself in whatever manner he wants, particularly as the wronged party in any of his doings in the past. The audience may be left wondering if that's too much control on the part of one person over another.

### Prospero's Relationship with Ariel

In most of his dealings with Ariel, Prospero is complimentary and affectionate. He does not respond well, however, when Ariel, a servant, asks for a favor of his ruler. He retells the story

of his imprisonment and uses that as a way to control Ariel's gratitude and behavior. Yet Prospero also continues to promise to free Ariel in two days. Again the audience will wonder about the nature of power and what defines a good ruler-and-subject relationship. It is worth noting that Ariel seems to do the majority of Prospero's magic for him; he has actually created the tempest and manipulated the position of the ship and its passengers. This suggests that Prospero devotes a lot of his magical energy to enslaving people to do his bidding for him rather than just doing his own magic; even magic, it seems, is primarily a tool of power and dominance.

## Prospero's Relationship with Caliban

It is difficult to know exactly how Shakespeare sees Caliban. On the one hand Caliban attempted to rape Miranda, suggesting that his nature really is "brutish"; on the other his legitimate claim to the island makes Prospero seem as much like a usurper as his brother, Antonio. It is thought that Shakespeare included the attempted rape as a justification for Prospero's enslavement of Caliban—and thus, by extension, the Europeans' enslavement of Africans and Native Americans. This is complicated, however, by the fact that Caliban is treated cruelly and makes a compelling case for why he should be the owner of the island rather than a slave.

From the beginning Caliban is introduced as the embodiment of exploitation. Prospero controls Caliban through enslavement and speaks to him in a way he speaks to no one else in the story: "Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself." Unlike his treatment of his other subject, Ariel, Prospero's treatment of Caliban is harsh, insulting, and demanding. He never promises Caliban his freedom, though Caliban was free before Prospero ever came to his island.

When Miranda and Caliban argue, she reminds him that she and her father taught him language when he, a savage, "wouldst gabble like/A thing most brutish." Caliban agrees that the use of their language has enabled him to curse them. Here Shakespeare touches on both the power of language and the issues surrounding exploitation of any person by another. He seems to question whether it is really noble to teach someone to learn another language or culture if that person is not given the full expression of such learning. The play was written during a time of colonization when Europeans would travel to places they considered to be more primitive cultures, and they would force the native people there to adopt European

customs, religion, and language. History has revealed the ill effects of such colonization. In the case of Caliban, his dominion over the island was taken away from him when a European nobleman landed on his territory, and he points out the island actually is his by rights, as he inherited it from his mother. (However, Sycorax herself is actually not from the island—she was born in Algiers, and imprisoned Ariel, who was there first, when she came to the island.)

Toward the end of this scene the audience learns that Prospero has not only orchestrated the terrible events of the storm. He has also orchestrated the meeting of Miranda and Ferdinand but wants there to be some challenge because "too light winning/Make the prize light." Although Prospero wants revenge on his enemies, it appears he also has good intentions in bringing these two together, even though Ferdinand is the son of an enemy. Perhaps the ultimate goal of Prospero is restoration rather than revenge?

Finally the theme of romantic love is introduced in this scene. Miranda and Ferdinand merely cast their eyes on one another and they are in love. There is a comical element to this, in part because Miranda has never seen any other young man except Caliban, who is represented as not being fully human.

## Act 2, Scene 1

### Summary

The scene opens with everyone from the king's party except Ferdinand. Gonzalo encourages the nobles to see the good in their circumstances. They have escaped a deadly disaster and find themselves on a beautiful island. Adrian, too, praises the features of the island where "The air breathes upon us here most sweetly." Meanwhile Antonio and Sebastian maintain a private running mockery of Gonzalo's positive attitude. When Gonzalo says, "How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!" he is quickly derided by Antonio ("The ground indeed is tawny") and Sebastian ("With an eye of green in 't"). Gonzalo also marvels that their clothing has not suffered from the sea wreck and are "now as fresh as when we put them on first in Africa, at the marriage of the King's fair daughter Claribel to the King of Tunis." This explains where the king's party has been. They have just been to the wedding in Africa and were on their return voyage home when they ran into the terrible

storm. This places the island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

King Alonso, believing his son Ferdinand is dead, is consumed with grief. At mention of his daughter's marriage he laments he made her marry so far from home because the journey was the reason for Ferdinand's loss. Now he has lost both his children. When Francisco tries to give him hope that Ferdinand is alive, Alonso insists he is dead. Antonio and Sebastian are cruel to the king in the face of his grief. They suggest that "the fault's your own" because Alonso let her marry an African rather than a European. Gonzalo gently reprimands the pair, but they are not affected.

Gonzalo then describes the type of utopian commonwealth he would develop if he were in charge of the island. In his commonwealth there would be no trade or lawyers, no rich or poor, no slaves or kings. Everyone would share the bounty of nature that would provide "all abundance,/To feed my innocent people." Antonio and Sebastian mock Gonzalo's vision, reminding him his ideal includes Gonzalo actually being the ruler himself.

Ariel, invisible, enters the scene and puts everyone but Antonio and Sebastian to sleep. Then Antonio begins to plant an idea in Sebastian's mind. He suggests that Sebastian has long cherished a secret hope to become king in Alonso's place. With Ferdinand surely drowned and Claribel far away in Africa, Sebastian is heir to the throne and might supplant Alonso. Antonio reminds Sebastian of how he did the same to Prospero and feels no guilt for it: "Look how well my garments sit upon me." Sebastian is convinced, and they agree to kill both Alonso and Gonzalo that very moment. But Ariel returns and wakes the sleeping men. When Alonso and Gonzalo question why the men have drawn their swords, Antonio and Sebastian make the excuse they thought they had heard lions and were preparing to defend the king. The whole group decides to go again in search of Ferdinand's body.

## Analysis

Act 2, Scene 1, is more about the true nature of the important characters from the king's party—particularly the unrealistic optimism of Gonzalo and the scheming nastiness of Sebastian and Antonio. Where Gonzalo sees a beautiful landscape and hope, the other pair sees tigerlike danger as well as an opportunity to show ill will toward others. They show no

respect for the older counselor in commenting, "he will carry this island home in his/pocket and give it his son for an apple." Even before they develop their scheme against the king, it is clear they are selfish, ungrateful men who do not have anyone else's interest at heart.

What the audience has learned about Gonzalo's optimistic character paves the way for the ideas he presents about the perfect commonwealth he envisions. Gonzalo's utopia is in many ways the opposite of the basic structure of English society at the time and undoubtedly owed a debt to an essay by the French writer Montaigne, "Des Cannibales," which gave an idealized view of the indigenous peoples of the New World.

In Shakespeare's time the fact that social classes and economic barriers restricted people from any social mobility and land ownership was the key to a powerful and wealthy existence for the nobles. Although Gonzalo says there will be no sovereignty, he does not eschew all authority as he suggests that he will "govern" the commonwealth, which Sebastian, who raises a legitimate criticism of the feasibility of Gonzalo's utopian vision, points out. It is a vision that belongs to *someone*, and that *someone* is the default ruler, even if that someone decries authority. Moreover while Gonzalo is a goodhearted man—he helped Prospero to survive when he was exiled, and he is deeply loyal to his king—he is not a particularly perceptive or effective person, and he is not able to do much practical good. The discussion again raises the issue of who should rule whom and how leaders should best govern those they serve—the theme of exploitation and power that recurs throughout the play.

The theme of magic also appears again in this scene in a number of ways. Gonzalo notices the men's clothes have not been affected by the sea or their current circumstances. The strangeness reminds the audience that things are not as they seem; an extended metaphor involving clothing begins here for the purpose of contrasting Gonzalo's idealism against Sebastian and Antonio's realism and opportunism. Gonzalo is actually correct: their clothing is fresher than before the shipwreck, whereas Sebastian and Antonio's pragmatism hold them bound to the illusion Ariel has created. Prospero's magical control and ability to see into the future is also seen at work in the sleep of all but Antonio and Sebastian. Their plotting itself is part of Prospero's overall plan. Shakespeare uses the symbol of sleep to illustrate just how much Prospero, through Ariel, is able to manipulate circumstances exactly as he wishes.

Taken together these magical elements reveal how Prospero controls all, and, like a playwright, creates an illusionary world to fulfill a specific purpose. Antonio and Sebastian's plot against the king parallels Antonio's earlier plot against his brother Prospero. Antonio urges Sebastian to pursue a form of revenge against his own brother, but it is Prospero, in pursuit of his own revenge, who is controlling what happens. The audience wonders what Prospero's ultimate purpose is for bringing the men to the island—is it merely revenge, or might there be more to it?

## Act 2, Scene 2

### Summary

As this scene opens Caliban is cursing his master, Prospero, whom he believes has cursed him by sending spirits to provoke him. Hearing noises, Caliban lies down under his cloak to hide. Trinculo, Alonso's jester, enters. Seeing Caliban and mistaking him for dead, Trinculo wonders whether Caliban is a fish or a human. He suggests that if he dressed Caliban up and took him to England, he could make a lot of money off the strange, dead creature. Fearing he will be caught in another storm, he lies down next to Caliban, beneath the monster's cloak.

A drunken Stephano, Alonso's butler, now enters and sees what he believes is a four-legged monster beneath the cloak. Caliban's unusual speech leads Stephano to think the monster is sick with a fever and having a fit. He considers taking the monster back to Naples to make money and gives Caliban some wine to help with his fever. Trinculo recognizes Stephano's voice, but Stephano believes the monster is a devil and Trinculo's voice is a trick. When the confusion is cleared up, the two men determine that they are the only two survivors of the shipwreck. Stephano has escaped by holding onto a barrel of wine, so there is plenty yet to drink!

Caliban is enchanted by Stephano and the "celestial liquor" he believes the wine to be. Thinking Stephano is a god or the man in the moon, Caliban swears to be his loyal subject. The two drunken friends make fun of Caliban even as he continues to swear allegiance: "*Ban, 'ban, Ca-caliban/Has a new master. Get a new man./Freedom, high-day!*" By the end of the scene, all three men are drunk, and they set off for a tour of the island with Caliban.

### Analysis

The slapstick comedy and misunderstandings in this scene are amusing in contrast to the murderous plot of Antonio and Sebastian in the preceding scene. Shakespeare often creates this effect in his plays to give the audience a break from story lines that will eventually weave themselves back together. Notably the more serious scenes nearly always feature aristocrats; more comical scenes involve lower-ranking people like servants.

Caliban believes all the natural problems he encounters are a part of Prospero's magic, so he is wary of noises, animals, and insects. His misery about his current master prompts him to quickly swear his allegiance to the drunk Stephano, who he naively believes has "dropped from heaven." Although he was once his own master on the island, Caliban looks to anything new that he thinks can nullify the magical power of Prospero, whom he fears. It helps that Stephano gets him drunk. Yet Trinculo and Stephano have already spoken of ways that they might exploit him. Although the more "primitive" Caliban thinks he is finding an escape, there is no guarantee that these other foreign men will treat him any better than Prospero. Caliban's gentleness will cause the audience to wonder how much of a monster he really is.

Shakespeare includes some social criticism of England when Trinculo suggests taking Caliban there to make money: "When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian." He means that the English will pay to see a "freak show" but won't spend money to help the helpless and destitute among them.

## Act 3, Scene 1

### Summary

The action returns to Ferdinand and Miranda's story as Prospero watches in secret. Ferdinand is carrying logs as required by Prospero, but he does not complain because it allows him to serve Miranda: "The very instant that I saw you did/My heart fly to your service, there resides/To make me slave to it." He only regrets that she is sad for his hard labor. Miranda encourages the exhausted Ferdinand to rest, and she even offers to carry the logs herself so that he doesn't have to.

Miranda disobeys her father and tells Ferdinand what her name is. Ferdinand pledges his deep love and devotion to her.

Prospero, hearing their exchange, recognizes the true nature of their love and celebrates it. Then he sets his mind "to [his] book/For yet ere suppertime must [he] perform/Much business appertaining" and hurries away to perform the other activities he has to orchestrate that day.

## Analysis

Romantic love is the focus of the scene as the two young lovers explore the character of their affection. Ferdinand confesses that he has admired other women for some qualities, but it is Miranda alone who is perfection: "But you, O you,/So perfect and so peerless, are created/Of every creature's best." There's some humor in Ferdinand's declaration because Miranda has actually never seen another woman. She has been isolated on the island for as long as her memory goes back. Nor has she seen any other men to whom to compare Ferdinand except her father and Caliban. But while Prospero's treatment of Ferdinand may seem manipulative, it is noteworthy that Ferdinand mentions liking, and eventually rejecting, other women before Miranda. This suggests that Prospero's decision to make Miranda hard to get may actually be wise and necessary.

Shakespeare plays on the idea of slavery in this scene. The audience has encountered an actual slave in the story—the miserable Caliban, whose primary task is to carry wood for Prospero. But Ferdinand's slavery for Prospero is a different kind—a voluntary servitude intended to keep him near his beloved. Miranda, too, offers slavelike devotion to Ferdinand: "I am your wife if you will marry me./If not, I'll die your maid. To be your fellow/You may deny me, but I'll be your servant/Whether you will or no." Both lovers exhibit a romantic view of love in which lovers have no defects and allegiance is total.

Prospero's testing of Ferdinand and Miranda is complete when he realizes the extent of their devotion to one another, and he is able to say with a glad heart "Heavens rain grace/On that which breeds between 'em!" After he sees their love is genuine he is ready to move on as the magician and theater master to his next "act." Both the theme of magical power and the symbol of magical books continue as Prospero, the artist, rushes away to his book to help him juggle all the circumstances and individuals he is manipulating and

orchestrating throughout the play.

## Act 3, Scene 2

### Summary

The drunken trio of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo returns. Caliban's complaints against Prospero are ongoing, and he promises his loyalty to Stephano instead. However, Caliban has no loyalty to Trinculo, and the two have constant conflict. When Ariel, invisible, enters the scene their conflict increases. Using Trinculo's voice several times, Ariel accuses Caliban of lying. This enrages Caliban, who asks Stephano to deal harshly with Trinculo. Stephano repeatedly asks Trinculo to stop being a nuisance, which only frustrates Trinculo more because he is not actually speaking. In the confusion Stephano ends up beating Trinculo.

Caliban describes how Prospero cheated him out of his island through sorcery and urges Stephano to destroy Prospero and take what belongs to him, including his daughter Miranda. Caliban explains that he can take Stephano to exactly the right place at the right time. He even gives him a specific strategy: first take away his books, which will make him powerless, and then "brain him" or "batter his skull" or "paunch him with a stake,/Or cut his weasand [windpipe] with thy knife."

When Caliban asks the other men to sing, invisible Ariel again intervenes and plays a more beautiful song. The men are afraid, but Caliban tells them not to fear. He explains the beautiful and dreamlike natural music of the island in one of the most well-known speeches of *The Tempest*:

*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.*

At the end of the scene Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban eagerly leave the stage following Ariel's song.

## Analysis

Although Prospero is again physically absent from this scene, he is very much in control of what is happening among the three men. Thanks to Ariel's intervention, their actions are undermined and false conflict develops between Trinculo and Caliban as well as between Trinculo and Stephano. In his annoyance and desire to gain power over the island through Caliban's help, Stephano actually beats his friend Trinculo. Ariel's actions in this scene also have a humorous effect because the audience can see that it is Ariel rather than Trinculo speaking, but the characters do not.

The treatment of Caliban by Stephano and Trinculo develops the theme of power and exploitation. Caliban, a "native inhabitant" of the island, wants to be ruled by Stephano rather than by Prospero. This raises the question: Why can't Caliban rule himself? The false idea that "primitive" natives needed to be ruled by wiser, more sophisticated people was very appealing to Europeans who wanted to build colonies, so Caliban's desire to be ruled may be an attempt to represent that idea in action.

The audience witnesses the growing greed and lust of Stephano, who is quick to join Caliban's scheme in the hopes of becoming king and taking Miranda to his bed as queen. Unlike Gonzalo's dreams of ruling the island as an idealistic utopia, Stephano's dreams pursue his own comfort and power. In some ways Stephano seems to take care of Caliban's needs now that he has some authority over him. He tells Trinculo to

stop accusing Caliban: "The poor monster's my subject, and he shall not suffer indignity." At the same time he is only supporting Caliban because he enjoys the position of control and knows that he can gain much by using Caliban. He promises to destroy Prospero but tells Caliban to "Kneel and repeat it. I will stand, and so will Trinculo," a gesture that keeps Caliban in a subservient position.

Perhaps Caliban is trickier than it seems on the surface. His plan for revenge against Prospero is fully unveiled in this scene. He is clever enough to entice Stephano into doing his dirty work. To Stephano he says, "If thy Greatness will,/Revenge it on him, for I know thou dar'st." Caliban also promises that if he kills Prospero "Thou shalt be lord of it, and I'll serve thee." By mentioning the beauty of Miranda, Caliban further ensnares Stephano into doing his bidding. The audience wonders: Is Caliban going to move from one master to another, or is Caliban, like Prospero, controlling people toward his own ends? Might Caliban have a plan to eventually take control of his own island again?

The symbol of the magic books reappears in this scene. Caliban explains their importance to Stephano as part of the plot to destroy Prospero. To neutralize his power, they must first "possess his books, for with them/He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not/One spirit to command."

For the second time the audience hears beautiful and positive language coming from the monster, who otherwise seems full of hatred and anger. What explains this language and his use of the symbols of sleeping and dreaming? Perhaps Caliban, a true native of the island, is the most fit to truly understand its nature and beauty. Perhaps the human intervention of Prospero and his magic have brought trouble to an island not meant for habitation by "civilized" people. Whatever the case this speech gives the audience a glimpse into a more human side of Caliban.

## Act 3, Scene 3

### Summary

After a long search for Ferdinand, the king and his party are exhausted and have given up hope of finding the prince. As they stop to rest Antonio encourages Sebastian to carry out their plan against Alonso—tonight. Out of nowhere music

starts, and a strange procession of spirits appears carrying a banquet. Prospero, invisible, also arrives to watch. The men are astounded and marvel at the island, wondering if anyone would believe them if they described what they have seen. But just as the hungry men prepare to eat the feast, thunder and lightning (a mini tempest) appear, and Ariel, in the shape of a mythological creature (a harpy), descends and causes the banquet to vanish. Ariel then pronounces three of them are "men of sin" and they were brought to the island because of their betrayal of Prospero. He explains that their swords are powerless against the invincible spirits of the island and curses them to their fate. Just as quickly Ariel disappears and the banquet reappears.

Prospero praises the work and devotion of Ariel and relishes how his enemies are now in his power. He leaves them in the spirits' control for now and goes to visit Ferdinand and Miranda.

Alonso expresses a sense of guilt for the first time about the action they took against Prospero, but Sebastian and Antonio are still focused on killing Alonso. Gonzalo, fearing what all three men might do in the circumstances, prays to the spirits to keep watch over them.

## Analysis

Magic plays an important role in this scene as illusion and reality weave in and out to control and confuse the men. Prospero's plan of exposing the three guilty men comes to its climax as Prospero watches from the sideline. Ariel does Prospero's bidding by disarming the men through music and the magical appearance of the banquet. In the midst of their exhaustion, grief, and confusion, he is able to name their crime: "But remember—/For that's my business to you—that you three/From Milan did supplant good Prospero." Ariel tells the men divine powers are angry at their crime against Prospero and they have caused nature to rise up against them.

The symbol of the tempest appears again. The mini tempest that accompanies Ariel brings judgment on the men, just as the original tempest brought them to the island to face their judgment. Perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting that supernatural intervention is required to bring some people to the truth.

Gonzalo's generous and positive character is further revealed.

In his assessment of the spirits he says, "Who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet note/Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of/Our human generation you shall find/Many, nay, almost any." Gonzalo sees the best in the natural world of the island and compares the kindness and gentleness of these spirits to the less admirable manners of many civilized humans. It's important to recall that Gonzalo is not guilty in the exile of Prospero as the other men are. It was Gonzalo who helped Prospero to escape and placed his magic books aboard the boat they left in. On the other hand, since these spirits are not actually welcoming the noblemen to the island Gonzalo can be seen here as too optimistic and positive.

Ariel's character also develops in this scene. Unlike Caliban, Ariel throws himself into service to Prospero and executes it to full effect, earning Prospero's gratitude and praise: "Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated/In what thou hadst to say." Ariel seems to trust that the promised freedom from Prospero is coming. And Prospero does not seem to feel any difference between doing magic himself and having Ariel do it for him, as though, by controlling Ariel, he also gets to take credit for all the good work Ariel does.

## Act 4, Scene 1

### Summary

This scene begins with Prospero acknowledging that he has only been testing Ferdinand and Miranda's love. Now that he knows Ferdinand really loves his daughter, he is willing to bless the wedding. But he severely warns Ferdinand against taking Miranda's virginity before the wedding and promises "barren hate, sour-eyed disdain, and discord" if he doesn't respect Prospero's wishes.

To celebrate the engagement and to show his powers, Prospero instructs Ariel to go and bring spirit actors to perform a masque. Iris, Ceres, Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Hymen, and Juno all feature in this dramatic production that honors the contract of marriage. Ferdinand, amazed by Prospero's powers that can call forth such spirits at his bidding, longs to stay on the island and live with Prospero as his father and Miranda as his wife.

But Prospero suddenly stops the dancing when he remembers Caliban and his companions plan to kill him and the time is fast approaching. He disperses the spirits and comforts the

disappointed Ferdinand by reminding him that everything eventually comes to an end.

*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. Sir, I am  
vexed.  
Bear with my weakness. My old  
brain is troubled.*

With his troubled mind, Prospero sends Ferdinand and Miranda away so that he can come up with a plan.

Ariel enters and together the two discuss how best to handle "Caliban and his confederates." Ariel recalls what has already been done to the men. Using music as a lure, Ariel has brought them on an uncomfortable path through "toothed briars, sharp

furzes, pricking gorse, and thorns" and then left them in a filthy, stinking pool of water near Prospero's cell. Prospero sends Ariel off to gather some glittery apparel. Meanwhile Prospero laments the devilish nature of Caliban, which cannot be broken or corrected even with the humane treatment Prospero initially offered him.

When Ariel returns they hang the fancy garments on a line near Prospero's cell. When the men enter, soaking wet from the filthy pond, they are complaining and arguing. Caliban tries to keep them focused on the matter at hand: murdering Prospero. But the men become distracted by the beautiful clothing, claiming it for "King Stephano" as Caliban becomes more and more upset that they need to "do the murder first," but the men will have none of it as they try on all the clothes. In the midst of this chaos Prospero sends spirits in the shape of hunting dogs upon the three men to drive them off.

Now Prospero recognizes that everything he has been working toward is suddenly within his control: "At this hour/Lies at my mercy all mine enemies." He only has to finish his plans and he can free Ariel.

## Analysis

The subject of marriage is central to this scene, which begins with Prospero's assent to his daughter's marriage to Ferdinand and moves into the lengthy masque. Particularly at the time of the play's writing, marriage was an institution that symbolized order and structure in society. In fact many marriages were founded on reasons other than love because the social contract between two families offered economic or political power for one or both parties.

Ferdinand and Prospero discuss Miranda's virginity and the sexual pleasures of marriage. Modern audience members might extend the theme of exploitation and power to this relationship, particularly as it was written at a time when women had few rights and a wife was considered a possession of her husband. Miranda is passed from one "owner," Prospero, to another, Ferdinand, as Prospero says, "Then as my gift and thine own acquisition/Worthily purchased, take my daughter." However, it is unlikely Shakespeare was pointing to Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage as an additional type of exploitation since their marriage is a key ingredient and source of harmony in the happy ending of the play.

Prospero's repeated admonitions to Ferdinand not to give into his passions before the wedding support the ideal of romantic love, which asserts love is a pure, holy, and honorable condition. At the same time Prospero recognizes the strength of human passion, whereby "The strongest oaths are straw/To th' fire i' th' blood." Shakespeare, through Prospero, acknowledges two powerful, sometimes opposing, forces in human nature: passion and reason. Prospero's insistence that Ferdinand and Miranda undergo the full ceremony of legitimate marriage likewise shows a concern about legitimacy and formality. Despite the fact that Ferdinand has pledged his love and fidelity and technically now has a legal obligation to Miranda, Prospero wants to ensure that Miranda's future is secure.

Prospero commands a masque to be performed to celebrate the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda. In the 17th century a masque was an elaborate theatrical production that included costumes, actors, singing, and dancing. The characters and plots were based on story lines from Greek and Roman mythology. In the masque in *The Tempest*, the goddesses in the masque symbolize fertility and prosperity within family and nature.

This scene provides more insight into the humanity of Prospero's character. Despite the murderous nature of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo's plot against Prospero, he does not severely punish them. Instead he uses magic to scare them and run them off, so that they do not try to kill him again. Prospero wishes to right wrongs, not create new ones. At the same time Ariel's devotion and Prospero's commitment to freeing Ariel are underscored. In fact there is a true, shared affection between the two, as Ariel asks, "Do you love me, master?" and Prospero responds, "Dearly, my delicate Ariel."

Prospero, who has recently been engaged with his many plans and the masque itself, stops suddenly because he has to solve a new problem. He acknowledges he is getting old and in describing the end of the masque makes clear comparisons to life itself. All the artifice of the masque is like the artifice of life, which, like a play, eventually fades. Our human lives are like short dreams that are surrounded by sleep. Many scholars view Prospero's speech here as Shakespeare's personal farewell to the theater, where his own plays and pageants "now are ended."

Prospero says at the end of the scene that "At this hour/Lies at my mercy all mine enemies," but his confession to Ferdinand

a few minutes earlier that "my old brain is troubled" makes it seem like he does not find the successful completion of his revenge plan as satisfying as he had anticipated.

## Act 5, Scene 1 and Epilogue

### Summary

Prospero, accompanied by Ariel, enters the stage wearing his magic robes again. He has everything under control: "Now does my project gather to a head./My charms crack not, my spirits obey, and time/Goes upright with his carriage." Ariel reports on where the king and his followers are. The whole group of men is deeply distressed, especially "good old Lord Gonzalo" whose "tears runs down his beard like winter's drops/From eaves of reeds." Ariel suggests that if Prospero saw them, his heart would soften toward them. Prospero is moved and agrees that as a fellow human, he should be even more compassionate than Ariel since his wrongdoers have shown repentance. Acknowledging that "The rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance," he commands Ariel to release all the prisoners and bring them to him.

Prospero draws a circle on the ground. He then speaks to the various spirits he has used in this magical work over these last years. He acknowledges their role and names some of the things he has been able to do through his magic. But then he explains his plan to give up his magic by breaking his staff and drowning his book after he finishes dealing with King Alonso and his men.

Ariel brings Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, Antonio, and the other men into the circle Prospero has drawn. They are still paralyzed by a magic spell and do not recognize Prospero or hear him. Prospero announces that he will "cure thy brains" and restore their senses. Seeing his loyal friend Gonzalo, Prospero is moved to tears and promises he will return home safely. Then Prospero turns to the men who forced him into exile and recalls their crimes, including Sebastian and Antonio's murderous plot against Alonso. Instead of condemning them as expected, he forgives them. He takes off his magic robes and puts on his former ducal robes before waking the men. He reminds Ariel that the spirit will soon receive freedom but first must fetch the sailors still under a sleeping spell in the ship.

When the king and his men wake they see Prospero as he

looked when he was the duke of Milan. They are frightened by the sight, not sure whether it is really Prospero or some kind of ghost. They are also filled with guilt for their role in deposing Prospero of his dukedom. But Prospero, instead of condemning them, comforts and welcomes them, showing great honor toward his old and loyal friend Gonzalo. He tells Sebastian and Antonio he knows of their plot against Alonso, but he will not reveal it. He publicly forgives even his brother, but demands, "My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know/Thou must restore." Antonio does not say anything in response.

The grieving Alonso tells Prospero about the loss of his son Ferdinand. Prospero withholds information about Ferdinand's safety and commiserates with the king about the loss of his own daughter. Alonso wishes that the two young people "were living both in Naples,/The King and Queen there!" Prospero then reveals Ferdinand and Miranda happily playing chess together in his house. When Miranda sees the crew, servants, and nobles, she exclaims, "O wonder!/How many goodly creatures are there here!/How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world/That has such people in 't!" Alonso is astonished that Ferdinand is alive, and Ferdinand is overjoyed to see that his father lives. The prince explains to his father who Miranda is and the nature of their coming marriage. Alonso, remembering his guilt in the exile of Prospero, begins to apologize, but Prospero stops him with an eye to the hopeful future: "Let us not burden our remembrances with/A heaviness that's gone."

Gonzalo says a prayer of thanksgiving and retraces all that has happened and how much has been gained since their journey began. Ariel then appears with the sailors who share the amazing news that the ship is in perfect condition. It is Ariel who has done this reparation of the boat, and Prospero praises the spirit for it.

Finally it is time for Prospero to deal with Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are brought in, still drunk. Prospero describes their bad behavior, including Stephano's plan to become king of the island. Stephano, coming to his senses, realizes that "I should have been a sore one, then." Prospero sends the men away to get cleaned up before he pardons them. Caliban admits that he was foolish to see Trinculo as a god and promises to seek Prospero's favor in the future.

Prospero tells the men that the next day they will all set sail for Naples to celebrate the wedding of Ferdinand and Miranda.

Then he will resume his position as duke of Milan where he will grow old in peace. Then he frees the faithful Ariel.

The play finishes with an epilogue that Prospero speaks directly to the audience. He asks to be released from the play so that he, a regular man now, can travel to Naples. He reminds them that the goal of his magic was to please, and now he wants to be set free.

## Analysis

At the beginning of this scene Prospero is wearing his magic robes and has everything under his control. Prospero is at the height of his power. Yet Ariel reminds him there is a limit to this magical event they are orchestrating, which began "When first I raised the tempest." The conversation hints that the theatrical pageant is coming to an end, and this end was planned from the very beginning. This suggests Prospero's magic was only to serve a certain purpose and not to gain magical control for good.

No sooner has it become clear how powerful Prospero is than he uses his power to reverse what seemed to be his plan of revenge. After considering how much more compassionate he should be to penitent humans than Ariel, he reflects on how important it is to use reason and virtue to control emotions and vengeance. The theme of forgiveness and restoration reemerges, completing the transformation of the power of revenge into a beneficial power produced for the good of many.

When Prospero makes his speech to the spirits and vows to "break my staff" and "drown my book," it isn't yet entirely clear why he is ready to give up all his magic. He has gotten to the height of his power and orchestrated everything he wanted to, but when it comes time to act out his final revenge he is unwilling to harm anyone. Perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting great power does not satisfy unless it is used for good.

Instead of enacting justice against men who deserve some kind of punishment, Prospero turns justice on its head and extends mercy and forgiveness, even if it is "unnatural." In many of his revelations about what the men have done to him, he is speaking while the men are still under a spell. They do not hear him. In this way the old magician absorbs the crimes himself and does not exact payment for their evil. There is a unique power in mercy and forgiveness to restore the

characters in the play. Sebastian is so surprised by Prospero's behavior, in fact, that he first ascribes it to evil rather than good: "The devil speaks in him." The forgiveness is almost too good to believe—in fact, it creates its own "magical" power because it comes out of nowhere and restores people to good relationships. Justice does require, however, that Prospero's dukedom be restored.

The theme of power continues through the end of the play, although now it is not for the purpose of exploitation but for restoration. Prospero has given up his ultimate plan of revenge, but he is still in control of the events. He controls Sebastian and Antonio by not revealing their treachery against King Alonso. And he remains in control of Alonso, as well, by depicting his own lost daughter and explaining that he lost her "In this last tempest," before revealing that both Miranda and Ferdinand are alive. All the way to the final lines of the play, Prospero uses his knowledge and power to manage the outcome of the events. However, since Antonio never repents and does not offer the dukedom to Prospero, the repentance and forgiveness of the last scene seem incomplete, which implies that while Prospero can manipulate circumstances, his power over individuals is limited.

The audience is reminded of Miranda's innocence when she sees so many humans together for the first time. Despite the corruption that has tainted the various characters, Shakespeare reminds the audience of the marvel of humanity through Miranda's joy at seeing so many people. Perhaps Shakespeare is reminding his audience there is value in stepping back and marveling at the wonder that makes humanity unique in the world. Channeling the good in humanity creates a power that is difficult to reckon with.

The theme of magic supported by the symbols of sleeping and dreaming emphasize the natural and unnatural elements of the events on the island. When the boatswain and other sailors return, they marvel that they "were dead of sleep" and when they woke up they were free and the ship was in perfect order. "Even in a dream were we divided from them," the boatswain says. Shakespeare continues to keep the lines murky between illusion and reality through the use of Prospero's magic, just as Shakespeare uses the false reality of a play to show the audience the way humans and the world function.

At the end of the play Prospero's use of magic and his control of the island and its spirit residents can come to an end because he has regained his position as duke. Now he can

"retire me to my Milan, where/Every third thought shall be my grave." The magician has grown old, and he is eager to re-embrace a more normal, human condition.

The character of Caliban comes full circle by the end of the play when he recognizes "What a thrice-double ass/Was I to take this drunkard for a god,/And worship this dull fool!" He vows renewed allegiance to Prospero as he admits to Prospero's power of him and the futility of disobedience. The audience wonders if Prospero will take Caliban to Milan or leave him behind on the island. Either way Caliban is a tragic figure in the midst of the play's happy ending. The best he can hope for is isolation on a deserted island or a life of physical servitude to his master, Prospero.

Romantic love finds its final fullness in Act 5, Scene 1, when both Prospero and Alonso bless the engaged couple that will, one day, rule Naples.

Many scholars view Prospero's epilogue as Shakespeare's description of his own surrender of his writing power. Just as Prospero gives up creating magic on the island, Shakespeare has finished his work and gives up creating magic on the stage. Like the old Prospero who wants to simply live out his life as a regular human in his home in Milan, Shakespeare pleads with his audience to "release me from my bands/With the help of your good hands." In other words, give him the applause he needs so he will know he has accomplished his purpose in pleasing the audience. Their accepting applause is the mercy that will "set me free."

## “, Quotes

*"Me, poor man, my library/Was dukedom large enough."*

— Prospero, Act 1, Scene 2

This quote suggests why Prospero was negligent in his responsibilities as the duke of Milan. His books, his library of learning, and his study of magic was all he wanted. Because of this he put his brother in charge and eventually was usurped.

*"You taught me language, and my profit on 't/Is I know how to curse./The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!"*

— Caliban, Act 1, Scene 2

Caliban says these words to Prospero and Miranda after Miranda has criticized him for attempting to violate her and for being ungrateful for all she has done to educate him. Caliban curses them for spending time teaching him knowledge and a language that do him no good. However, in teaching him their language Prospero and Miranda have given Caliban a voice with which to rebel against his servitude.

*"Sitting on a bank,/Weeping again the King my father's wrack,/This music crept by me upon the waters,/Allaying both their fury and my passion/With its sweet air."*

— Ferdinand, Act 1, Scene 2

Ferdinand here praises the beautiful song he has heard Ariel singing. Despite the deep sorrow he feels at presumably losing his father to the sea, he acknowledges the comfort that the music brings.

*"There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple./If the ill spirit have so fair a house,/Good things will strive to dwell with 't."*

— Miranda, Act 1, Scene 2

Miranda refers to Ferdinand's body as a "temple" worthy of worship, whose very form suggests the soul or spirit of Ferdinand must also be good. She is justifying the fact that she fell in love with Ferdinand at first sight.

*"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."*

— Gonzalo, Act 2, Scene 1

Gonzalo's speech, depicting an ideal society, is one of *The Tempest*'s most well-known speeches. Gonzalo denounces almost every aspect of European society at the time of the play, from farming to education to kings and queens inheriting their royal power. The word execute plays on the idea that Gonzalo would do away with rules and laws, but he would need to rule to accomplish his goal. This suggests how difficult it would be to create the utopian society Gonzalo describes.

*"Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,/Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not."*

— Caliban, Act 3, Scene 2

Caliban speaks these words to Stephano and Trinculo when they are frightened by the sounds of the island. His praise of the sounds of the island is an acknowledgment that there is

much good in the natural world when it is not interfered with by human hands. Here, as elsewhere, the island is represented as a beautiful, mysterious new world.

*"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."*

— Prospero, Act 4, Scene 1

Prospero speaks these words to Ferdinand when the young man is disappointed that the masque has ended so abruptly. Prospero compares the end of the masque to real life where everything eventually comes to an end.

*"Look thou be true; do not give dalliance/Too much the rein. The strongest oaths are straw/To th' fire i' th' blood."*

— Prospero, Act 4, Scene 1

In this scene Prospero is warning Ferdinand to control his sexual impulses until after he has married. Here he reminds him reason and commitment are weak against the passions of the body, so he needs to be careful while spending time with Miranda.

*"The rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance."*

— Prospero, Act 5, Scene 1

Prospero has finally positioned everyone on the island so he can act out his revenge. Yet at that moment he sympathizes with the afflictions of the men and acknowledges their shared humanity. He changes his mind and decides to show mercy rather than judgment.

*"O wonder!/How many goodly creatures are there here!/How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world/That has such people in 't."*

— Miranda, Act 5, Scene 1

Miranda speaks these words when she comes forth to meet all the other men from the ship. An innocent young woman who has never known any humans except her father and Caliban, she is overwhelmed by the magnificence of humanity. Her wonder reflects the general spirit of the Age of Discovery, which was defined by a sense of newness and amazement.

*"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."*

— Prospero, Epilogue

In the final lines of the play Prospero turns to the audience, requesting their praise in the form of applause. Without this gesture showing they are pleased with him, he will not be able to be freed from the play. In a way this likens Prospero to the spirit Ariel. As Ariel was trapped in a tree, so will Prospero be trapped in Shakespeare's play. Clapping and praise, like magic, can set him free. Ultimately the audience members are the

most powerful people in the theater.

too, surrenders at the end of the play.

## Symbols

### Tempest

It's not unusual to hear someone refer to the "storms of life," meaning the various life circumstances that toss weak mortals in the winds. Storms suggest a swirling chaos of events beyond human control. Shakespeare extends this idea of the storm in *The Tempest*. The magical storm appears out of nowhere, the result of Prospero's long-held plan of revenge against the enemies who drove him from his rightful place as duke of Milan. The storm represents the eventual consequences of the treachery and self-interest of Antonio. Shakespeare suggests that when the natural order of things is disrupted, the repercussions create a conflict that goes beyond the realm of humans and into the realm of the supernatural. In the end however, the chaos of the storm produces a peaceful outcome and the restoration of order.

### Magic Books

During Shakespeare's time it was common to compare the life of contemplation, which focused on intellectual pursuits, to that of action. Early in the play the audience learns that it was Prospero's books that kept him from ruling well in Milan: he was too focused on contemplative pursuits to be an active ruler. As a result he surrendered too much control to his more active brother. After Prospero is deposed and is escaping, Gonzalo sneaks some of his books onboard so that he will have them in his exile. Through his magic books Prospero learns to use the power that will help him execute revenge against his brother. The books symbolize Prospero's unique use of power to control the world toward his own ends. It is interesting, then, that at the end of the play Prospero surrenders his magical powers and books so that he can rejoin human society and rule well. Many scholars also believe the magic books represent Shakespeare's own writing, which he,

### Sleep and Dreams

Sleeping and dreaming are frequent pastimes in *The Tempest*. Ariel controls characters' levels of alertness and awareness by putting them to sleep so the spirit and Prospero can execute other plans. The sleep and dreams represent just how illusory human control is over life. As Prospero says in Act 4, Scene 1: "We are such stuff/As dreams are made on, and our little life./Is rounded with a sleep."

### Themes

### Language and Reality

In *The Tempest* language is power, and characters wield it to bless, curse, confuse, manipulate, or heal. Prospero is the most powerful character because of his studies of the liberal arts and advanced skill in manipulating Ariel, who is a figurative representation of Prospero's thoughts. Ariel plays out Prospero's commands "to th' syllable." Caliban deeply understands how spoken language and intentions are at the root of Prospero's powers to create illusion, control nature, and obscure reality. Prospero sends cramps, side stitches, and pinches that Caliban counteracts with elaborately structured curses. Miranda has taught Caliban to speak her and Prospero's language, and he points out that, having done so, he is now able to curse his oppressors and have them understand him. Both characters' speech patterns become more poetic and rhythmic when they battle for power through language. It is Caliban who reveals to the audience that without his books, Prospero's "but a sot, as I am, nor hath not/One spirit to command. They all do hate him/as rootedly as I."

The noble characters, even though they do not possess magical powers like Prospero's, still bless and curse in their ordinary language. For example, upon seeing Ferdinand for the first time, Alonso immediately gives him a father's blessing.

Later he blesses the marriage of the lovers, and Gonzalo adds to the blessing with a simple "Amen." In the masque the lesser spirits and the goddess Ceres speak poetry to celebrate and bless Miranda and Ferdinand's love, and there is some concern that left unfinished—unspoken—the blessing will be incomplete. When Stephano stumbles upon Caliban and Trinculo appearing as one four-legged monster, he observes that humans possess two voices: the forward voice that speaks well and the backward voice that utters foul speeches and detracts, suggesting again that pairing language with intentions for ill or good carries weight.

Alliances, another kind of power, are created between those who share the same language in *The Tempest*. Ferdinand and Miranda's love bond begins with the recognition that Miranda speaks the same language as he does, and their speech patterns match throughout the play. As much as Caliban argues in Act 1 that learning language has done him no good but to curse his masters, Caliban's shared language with Stephano and Trinculo gives him the power to entice them to overthrow Prospero and empathize with him. Gonzalo, who "prates" shallowly, fails to mock effectively, and uses faulty logic in his discourse when speaking of his utopian commonwealth—saying he would be king of a region without need of a king—fails to command respect from the language-savvy and politically ambitious Antonio and Sebastian, providing a noticeable contrast. Gonzalo, too kindhearted to carry out the original plan to murder Prospero, still lacks the intention necessary to harness language to be used as a power.

## Magic of Theater

The basic nature of any magic is its ability to change reality in unexpected and inexplicable ways. The obvious magic in the play comes from Prospero and his ability to manipulate the island's spirit and nature. A terrible storm hits a ship, but all its members survive and land in perfect sequencing upon the island. A banquet appears and disappears in thin air. A specific man comes onshore and meets the right woman at just the right time. Many scholars believe that the theme of magic represents the power of the playwright to create something out of nothing. As a magician Prospero controls and manipulates circumstances and people around him, just as

Shakespeare as a playwright is able to do the same—eventually bringing restoration and order. Prospero creates a tempest with an ultimate sequence of events in mind—his daughter's marriage to Ferdinand, the restoration of his throne, and the repentance of his enemies—and for the most part things play out exactly as he has plotted, making him seem like a clever author who can create a narrative using real-life characters.

## Power and Exploitation

The play explores the role of power and its use in exploiting other people in families and in the social order. In nearly every scene Shakespeare reveals a situation in which power and its exploitation creates a lack of harmony. Even in the opening scene the community structure is disrupted when the nobles come on board during the storm and interfere with the work of the sailors; the boatswain points out that while men may respect royalty and nobility, the storm does not, so the nobles have no authority at this moment. The events driving the play began when, back in Milan, Antonio exploited the power he was given to help his brother rule, becoming power hungry and driving Prospero into exile. But that is just the beginning. Prospero lands on an island and becomes master of Caliban and Ariel, despite Caliban's claim to the island. Antonio and Sebastian plot to take King Alonso's power for their own. Trinculo and Stephano, aware that they are superior to no one but Caliban, exploit the creature for their own gain. Gonzalo's vision of an ideal commonwealth, in which no one rules over anyone else, is treated as a naïve and unrealistic fantasy. It is not until Prospero willingly gives up his "magical" power and his need for revenge that the spell is broken and there is any hope of peace in the social order, although that peace can only come about by returning Prospero to power and marrying his daughter to an even more powerful ruler than he is: Ferdinand, the future king of Naples.

## Revenge, Forgiveness, and

## Restoration

The controlling energy of much of the play comes from individuals' desire for revenge in pursuit of some form of justice. Prospero is driven by his need to expose what was done to him and regain his rightful place as the duke of Milan. His book learning and magic are focused on correcting the wrongs of the past. Caliban, too, is set on revenging his displacement and the wrongs inflicted on him by Prospero. When offered a way to do this through Stephano, Caliban vows his allegiance to a new master—a far worse master than Prospero ever was. The only way to destroy the power of revenge is to absorb it rather than unleash it, which is what Prospero does at the end of the play, willingly surrendering both his power and his need for revenge.

Almost all of the major characters except Antonio and Sebastian show remorse over some aspect of the past, ultimately asking for forgiveness. Prospero admits he was a bad duke. Caliban regrets serving a new master, and Stephano admits he would be a bad ruler even if he only had one subject. Alonso apologizes and asks for Prospero's pardon. However, it is noticeable that Caliban does not repent having attempted to murder Prospero or rape Miranda, and Stephano and Trinculo do not repent for their part in the murder plot against Prospero. Antonio and Sebastian never show remorse, and King Alonso never discovers that they plotted against him because Prospero speaks of all the "sins" they committed while the nobles are under a spell. The thematic significance derives from that fact that Prospero's forgiveness at the very end of the play has no relation to the crimes committed or the quality of or lack of repentance made by each character at the climax of the play. Prospero offers pardon to all, even to his brother who has not asked for it. In the end Prospero frees himself from his own need for revenge through his gift of mercy, and forgiveness is shown to be the most significant power explored in the play. Through forgiveness freedom is restored to those washed up on the island, even as Prospero's position in Milan is restored.

## Utopia and Idealism

In each act of the play notions of utopian idealism are pitted against ideas of disharmony and discord, beginning with the chaotic tempest itself, which is only an illusion that causes no real harm. Gonzalo's ideal commonwealth speech in Act 2, Scene 1, presents the political ideas of a utopian society to counterbalance Prospero's description of his brother Antonio's dystopian deeds enacted before the play begins: using Prospero's money and power and believing "his own lie" to feed his growing ambition. Prospero believes in divine providence and heavenly music, the power of nature, virtue, and the pursuit of knowledge. These beliefs seem quite idealistic as compared to the forces driving Antonio. He feels no remorse and lacks virtue. He acts opportunistically, seeking to slay King Alonso within hours of being shipwrecked on a seemingly deserted island far from society and uncertain whether he will ever make it back to civilization. Prospero's idealism is consistent throughout the play—notwithstanding his treatment of Caliban, whom he must keep distant from Miranda—as he never takes real action for revenge and focuses his energies on orchestrating the ideal circumstances for love to flourish between Miranda and Ferdinand. And in turn the lovers display idealistic qualities. They each perceive the other as divine at first sight, equally enjoin to serve, and keep their vows of chastity. Those who seek disharmony and discord (Sebastian, Antonio, Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo) lose to the idealistic characters seeking harmony and balance.

## Motifs

### Drowning

The prevalence of water imagery throughout the play serves to reinforce the ever-present force of the tempest and its effects on the lives of the characters. Prospero claims that his grief over his lost dukedom could have drowned the sea; Ferdinand is certain that his father is drowned; and Alonso believes that Ferdinand is drowned. Departure by drowning suggests a profound and complete loss: nothing returns from the sea. However, loss is transformed into rebirth. Ferdinand and

Alonso are not drowned, and they reunite. Prospero, too, regains his dukedom through the marriage of his daughter Miranda and Ferdinand.

## Music

Music among other mysterious noises in the play creates a sensory and enchanting experience for the characters and the audience alike. The music reinforces the premise that the setting is magical. Ariel's music leads Ferdinand to Miranda, and it wakes Gonzalo prior to Alonso's attempted murder. The banquet and the wedding are awash in music. It is as if music enchants the island.

## Servants

Servant-master relationships dominate the play in an exploration of power: Prospero and Caliban or Ariel, for example. Shakespeare asks, in what ways is power used and abused in these unequal relationships? Then he examines the effects of power in both positive and negative lights as relationships under pressure are jeopardized or destabilized.

## 📖 Suggested Reading

Murphy, Patrick M. *The Tempest: Critical Essays*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Shakespeare, William, Peter Hulme, and William H. Sherman. *The Tempest: Sources and Contexts, Criticism, Rewritings and Appropriations*. New York: Norton, 2004. Print.

Shakespeare, William, Barbara A. Mowat, and Paul Werstine. *The Tempest*. New York: Simon, 2009. Print.

Vaughan, Alden T., and Virginia Mason Vaughan. *The Tempest: A Critical Reader*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014. Print.