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 Prospero promises 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 music that puts Gonzalo and Alonso to sleep. While they sleep, Prospero 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. They mistakenly think Prospero a god 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.

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 skills give 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 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 chooses to give up his magic power and reconcile with his enemies.

Ariel – A spirit and Prospero’s servant. Ariel 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 servant.}

The Tempest

Author Bio

Full Name: William Shakespeare

Date of Birth: 1564

Place of Birth: Stratford-upon-Avon, England

Date of Death: 1616

Brief Life Story: 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.

Key Facts

Full Title: The Tempest

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

Protagonist: Prospero

Antagonists: Antonio, Alonso, Sebastian, and Caliban

Historical and Literary Context

When Written: 1610-1611

Where Written: England

When Published: 1623

Literary Period: The Renaissance (1500-1660)

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.

Historical Context: English people in the Renaissance period were aware of the efforts by their government (and that of other European governments) to explore and colonize distant lands. When Shakespeare was writing The Tempest, the Jamestown colony had just recently been established in Virginia.

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.
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 world “canibal,” 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 Prospero. He is a power-hungry and conning 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.

Themes

In LitCharts, each theme gets its own corresponding color, which you can use to track where the themes occur in the work. There are two ways to track themes:

• Refer to the color-coded bars next to each plot point throughout the Summary and Analysis sections.

• Use the ThemeTracker section to get a quick overview of where the themes appear throughout the entire work.

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, who uses visual and aural illusions to manipulate his enemies and force their true selves out. At nearly every point in the play, Prospero’s magic gives him 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 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 Prospero to seek revenge.

Ultimately, it is only when Prospero breaks the cycle of violence by refusing to take revenge on Alonso, 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 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.”

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 re-inforces 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 are shown in red text whenever they appear in the Plot Summary and 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 his 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.

Summary and Analysis

The color-coded bars in Summary and Analysis make it easy to track the themes through the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section. For instance, a bar of red indicates that all four themes apply to that part of the summary.

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 roarer 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 turn to be with King Alonso as the ship goes down, while Gonzalo prays for land, any land, to save him from drowning.

Act 1, scene 2

Miranda and Prospero watch the tempest from the shore of an island. Miranda pities the seafarers, and says that it’s time to tell Miranda about her past. He takes it off when he decides to tell Miranda the truth about her past.

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 especially gave Alonso full 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. 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.

Gonzalo’s response to his powerlessness is to make it easy to track the themes through the sections of this LitChart. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section. For instance, a bar of red indicates that all four themes apply to that part of the summary.

Prospero thanks 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.

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.

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

Antonio says, “I have suffered with those that I saw suffer!” (2.1.5). Suspecting that this is the work of his 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.

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.

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.

Prospero makes Caliban, who had been king of the island, a counselor to the king, jokes that he’s no long...
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 gibble 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 pours 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 his own home. Yet, in response, Caliban 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 gibble 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 pours 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.

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 ruined in him losing his autonomy.

Like Ariel, Caliban submits to Prospero's power. Ariel submits 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 believing 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.

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.

Elsewhere on the island, the other courtiers find themselves washed up on the island's shore. 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 so 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.

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.

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 (2.1.144-151). He elaborates on 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.

Act 2, scene 1

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.

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'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 slily presents his plan 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.

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, drop their swords and exit, followed by Ariel, who plans to tell Prospero of the plot he has foiled.

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 hides down and hides under his cloak.

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 "sturge 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).

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 begins 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.

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. Stephano 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.

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.

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. 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.

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 pumach him with a stake, or cut his wezard 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.

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).

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 exults, still playing music, and the three men follow the bewitching sound.

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.

Suddenly, strange music fills the air. Spirits enter, assaying lavish banquets 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, and 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.

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 that 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.

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.

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.

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.

At this moment, Prospero almost seems to lose control. It’s as if he has just caught upon in his “art” that he has 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 uses the illusion of the banquet to remind the men of how hungry and desperate they are. They try to explain the mysteriously appearing banquet, based on stories they have heard from explorers of the New World.

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?
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 matter. He points out Prospero’s cave close by and reminds them of the ultimate reward, saying “Do that good mischief which may make this suit fail; for ever and ever, I say 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.

![Image](https://www.LitCharts.com/download/123456.png)

**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 / Become tender” (5.1.18-19). Prospero, moved by 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 / Become tender” (5.1.18-19).

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.

Here Prospero catalogues 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:

By changing into the clothes he wore as duke, Prospero is not using magic, but is still using illusion 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.

The restoration of order, called gratified is twice Here Caliban seems to inspire a particularly strong rage in the other characters, he’s lists his triumphs 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.

The restoration of order, called gratified is twice Here Caliban seems to inspire a particularly strong rage in the other characters, he’s lists his triumphs 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.

A more compelling illustration 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.

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 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 trump’d for a god and worship this dull fool?” (5.1.293-295).

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” (5.1.184).

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

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.

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.

Gonzalo observes that this voyage has served to unite people with each other and with their true selves. He says, “O rejice 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, when no man was his own” (5.1.206-213).

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.

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

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.

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 Ferdin- and did it’s hard not to pity Caliban’s ignorant naïveté when he curses himself for worshipping Stephano.

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 duke-dom will pass to Ferdinand.

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

Epilogue

The once-nightly 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 Shake- speare’s own farewell address to the theater.
Important Quotes

Act 1 Quotes
What cares these roarsers for the name of king? – Boatswain, 1.1.15-16

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. – Miranda, 1.2.5-9

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,
To what tune pleased his ear, that now he was
The ivy which had hid my princely trunk,
Dashed all to pieces. – Prospero, 1.2.363-364

Fathom five thy father lies
Of his bones are coral made;
Full fathom five thy father lies
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,
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. – Prospero, 1.4.147-158

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick… – Prospero, 4.1.188-189

Act 2 Quotes
I’ll’t commune with you. 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, tillth, 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
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
…O rejoice
That has such people in’t! – Miranda, 5.1.183-184

…O rejoice
That has such people in’t! – Miranda, 5.1.183-184

Act 3 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. – Ferdinand, 3.1.1-7

Give me thy hand. I am sorry I beat thee. But while thou liv’st, keep a good tongue in thy head. – Stephano, 3.2.103-104

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. – Caliban, 3.2.127-135

Act 4 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. – Prospero, 1.4.147-158

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick… – Prospero, 4.1.188-189

Act 5 Quotes
Mine would, sir, were I human. – Ariel, 5.1.19

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 kindler moved than thou art? – Prospero, 5.1.21-24

...The rarer action is
In virtue, than in vengeance. – Prospero, 5.1.27-28

...But this rough magic
I here abjure... I’ll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
I here abjure... I’ll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
...O brave new world
That has such people in’t! – Miranda, 5.1.183-184

...O rejoice
That has such people in’t! – Miranda, 5.1.183-184

Copyright © 2009 LitCharts. All rights reserved.
www.LitCharts.com
The LitCharts ThemeTracker is a mini-version of the entire LitChart. The ThemeTracker provides a quick timeline-style rundown of all the important plot points and allows you to track the themes throughout the work at a glance.

### Theme Key
- Loss and Restoration
- Power
- Magic, Illusion, and Prospero as Playwright
- Colonization

### Scene Summary

#### Back story
- Antonio and Alonso overthrow Prospero, and Antonio becomes Duke of Milan.
- Prospero and Miranda land on the island, enslave Caliban, free Ariel, and enslave Ariel.
- Prospero traps his enemies with the tempest.

#### 1.1
- The frightened courtiers and sailors battle the storm.
- The boatswain orders the courtiers around, much to their anger.
- The ship goes down (or so the courtiers think).

#### 1.2
- Prospero and Miranda watch the ship in the storm from the shore.
- Prospero tells Miranda about her past and how they came to the island.
- Prospero reminds Ariel of his debt and promises to eventually free him.
- Prospero and Caliban clash over who should rule the island and their past.
- Ferdinand and Miranda meet and fall in love, and Prospero enslaves Ferdinand.

#### 2.1
- The courtiers awaken on the shore.
- Antonio and Sebastian plot Alonso's murder, but Ariel intervenes.

#### 2.2
- Caliban meets Stephano and Trinculo.
- Stephano and Trinculo give Caliban wine. He mistakes them for gods who can free him from Prospero's tyranny.

#### 3.1
- Ferdinand performs labor for Prospero, and Miranda pities him.
- Miranda and Ferdinand pledge their mutual love and agree to marry.

#### 3.2
- Caliban persuades Stephano and Trinculo to murder Prospero, and Ariel overhears their plot.

#### 3.3
- Antonio and Sebastian resume their plan to murder Alonso.
- Ariel appears as a harpy, accuses the men of treachery, urges them to repent, and binds them in a spell.

#### 4.1
- Prospero blesses the union of Ferdinand and Miranda, throwing them a celebratory masque.
- Prospero suddenly stops the masque when he remembers Caliban's plot against his life.
- Prospero and Ariel ensnare Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban in a trap by enticing them with gaudy clothes.

#### 5.1
- Prospero heeds Ariel's advice and decides to forgive his enemies and give up his magic.
- Prospero releases the courtiers from their spell and presents himself to them.
- Alonso and Prospero make peace, and Alonso reunites with his son.
- Prospero releases Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban but subjects them to ridicule.
- Prospero promises safe travels home for all.

#### Epilogue
- Alone on stage, Prospero asks the audience to set him free with their applause.