

The Tempest

Background Info

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

America. People were fascinated by reports of indigenous cultures and human survival in wild places, while philosophers such as Montaigne pondered the nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized peoples. Many scholars believe that the play was inspired in part by a manuscript that circulated in London in 1610. It was written by William Strachey and told of a hurricane that wrecked a ship full of colonists bound for Jamestown in 1609. The ship ran aground on a deserted island in the Bermudas. Everyone survived, but they struggled to adapt to the unfamiliar island environment and to maintain order and harmony as they built new ships and prepared to sail once more for Jamestown.

Extra Credit

Shakespeare or Not? There are some who believe Shakespeare wasn't educated enough to write the plays attributed to him. The most common anti-Shakespeare theory is that Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, wrote the plays and used Shakespeare as a front man because aristocrats were not supposed to write plays. Yet the evidence supporting Shakespeare's authorship far outweighs any evidence against. So until further notice, Shakespeare is still the most influential writer in the English language.

Plot Summary

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

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

Prospero charms Miranda, and she falls asleep. He then summons his spirit-servant **Ariel**, who created the storm. Ariel says that he has made sure everyone made it to the island alive, but scattered separately, then mentions that Prospero promised to free him from servitude early in return for good service. Prospero angrily reminds the spirit that he saved him from the prison in which the witch **Sycorax** put him. (Sycorax was the previous ruler of the island.) Ariel apologizes and follows Prospero's orders—he makes himself invisible and goes

to spy on the shipwrecked courtiers. Prospero then awakens Miranda and summons his servant **Caliban**, the son of Sycorax. Caliban curses Prospero, and denies that he owes Prospero anything for educating him. To prove his point, he recounts how Prospero stripped him of his rulership of the island.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Characters

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

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

Ariel – A spirit and **Prospero's** servant. Prospero rescued Ariel from a prison in which he was placed by the dead witch **Sycorax**. Now Ariel uses magic to carry out Prospero's commands. Ariel wants his freedom, which Prospero has promised

to grant someday. In the meantime, Ariel serves Prospero loyally, and seems to enjoy the mischievous tricks he pulls on Prospero's enemies. At the play's end, Ariel's compassion for those enemies moves Prospero to release and forgive them.

Caliban – **Prospero's** unwilling slave. As the son of the witch Sycorax, who ruled the island before she died years prior to Prospero's arrival, Caliban believes that he should be master of the island. When Prospero initially came to the island, Caliban showed him friendship, and in return Prospero educated Caliban. But Caliban eventually came to realize that Prospero would never view him as more than an educated

savage. Though capable of sensitivity and eloquence, Caliban is furious and bitter and wants nothing more than to rid himself of Prospero. Caliban's name is a near anagram for the word "cannibal," and in many ways he is a symbol of the natives that European explorers encountered. Through Caliban, and his relationship to Prospero, Shakespeare explores the themes of colonization and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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. Prospero, meanwhile, gives up his magic rather than seeking revenge and frees Ariel before returning to Milan. In contrast to Alonso, **Antonio** and **Sebastian** never show remorse for overthrowing Prospero and prove to be ambitious killers in their plot to murder and overthrow Alonso. **Stephano** and **Trinculo**, in their buffoonish way, likewise seek power through violence. And Caliban, as opposed to Ariel, hates Prospero, and gives himself as a slave to Stephano in an effort to betray and kill Prospero. As **Gonzalo** observes in the last scene of the play, the characters "found ... ourselves, when no man was his own" (5.1.206-213).

Power

From the opening scene of *The Tempest* during the storm, when the ruling courtiers on the ship must take orders from their subjects, the sailors and the boatswain, *The Tempest* examines a variety of questions about power: Who has it and when? Who's entitled to it? What does the responsible exercise of power look like? How should power be transferred? The play

is full of examples of power taken by force, and in each case these actions lead to political instability and further attempts to gain power through violence. **Antonio** and Alonso's overthrow of **Prospero** leads to Antonio and Sebastian's plot to overthrow Alonso, just as Prospero's overthrow and enslavement of **Caliban** leads Caliban to seek revenge.

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

Magic, Illusion, and Prospero as Playwright

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

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

Colonization

During the time when *The Tempest* was written and first performed, both Shakespeare and his audiences would have been very interested in the efforts of English and other European settlers to colonize distant lands around the globe. *The Tempest* explores the complex and problematic relationship between the European colonizer and the native colonized peoples through the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. Prospero views Caliban as a lesser being than himself. As such, Prospero believes that Caliban should be grateful to him for educating Caliban and lifting him out of "savagery." It simply does not occur to Prospero that he has stolen rulership of the island from Caliban, because Prospero can't imagine Caliban as being fit to rule anything. In contrast, Caliban soon realizes that Prospero views him as a second-class citizen fit only to serve and that by giving up his rulership of the island in return for his education, he has allowed himself to be robbed. As a result, Caliban turns bitter and violent, which only reinforces Prospero's view of him as a "savage." Shakespeare uses Prospero and Caliban's relationship to show how the misunderstandings between the colonizer and the colonized lead to hatred and conflict, with each side thinking that the other is at fault.

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

Symbols

Symbols 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 their history, and again at the end of the play when he gives up his magic. **Gonzalo** knows how much Prospero loves his books, and he arranges for them to

be placed on the ship that removes Prospero and Miranda from Milan. Without the books, Prospero would not have had the power to summon the tempest and restore order to Milan and Naples. **Caliban** advises **Stephano** to seize Prospero's books when they make plans to murder Prospero and take control of the island. When Prospero relinquishes his magic at the end of the play, he says, "I'll drown my book" (5.1.57). If, as many critics suggest, Prospero is the voice of Shakespeare as he retires from the theater, the books might also represent the power of words and ideas.

The Tempest

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

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  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 roarers for the name of king? To cabin! silence! Trouble us not."

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



Act 1, scene 2

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

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

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.

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



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



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



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

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**.

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



Ariel when describing his exploits in creating the tempest indicate



He seemed to enjoy it, and is willing to do whatever his master bids him to do. Ariel response to Prospero's power over him is cheerful...



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

Act 2, scene 1

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

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 (2.1.144-157). He elaborates this utopian vision while **Antonio** and **Sebastian** continue their snide commentary. **Alonso** remains troubled and disinclined to hear Gonzalo’s talk. Gonzalo then turns on Antonio and Sebastian, scolding them once again, this time for their mockery and cowardice.

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



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



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



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



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.



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** slyly presents a murder plot to **Sebastian**. Since **Ferdinand** is almost definitely dead, Antonio says, **Alonso’s** death would make Sebastian King of Naples. Sebastian is drawn in, remembering how Antonio overthrew his own brother. He hesitates a bit, though, asking Antonio if his conscience bothers him for what he did to Prospero. Antonio dismisses the question.

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

Act 2, scene 2

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



Act 3, scene 1

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

Ferdinand continues to cheerfully accept his enslavement to Prospero.



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

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



Act 3, scene 2

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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



Act 3, scene 3

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

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



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

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



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

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?



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

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



Act 4, scene 1

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

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



Prospero 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.

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



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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

Act 5, scene 1

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

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 rejoice beyond a common joy... in one voyage...Ferdinand...found a wife where he himself was lost; Prospero, his dukedom, in a poor isle, and all of us ourselves, when no man was his own" (5.1.206-213).

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 drunkard 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" (5.1.8-9).

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

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



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



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



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 Ferdinand did. Yet it's hard not to pity Caliban's ignorant naiveté 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 dukedom 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

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

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



Important Quotes

Act 1 Quotes

What cares these roarers 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,
And sucked my verdure out on't... – *Prospero, 1.2.77-87*

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. – *Caliban, 1.2.363-364*

Full fathom five thy father lies
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.
Hark, now I hear them, ding dong bell. – *Ariel, 1.2.396-403*

Act 2 Quotes

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

...
All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance
To feed my innocent people. – *Gonzalo, 2.1.144-161*

...She that from whom

We all were sea-swallowed, though some cast again
And by that destiny, to perform an act
Whereof what's past is prologue, what to come
In yours and my discharge. – *Antonio, 2.2.46-250*

Twenty consciences

That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they,
And melt ere they molest. – *Antonio, 2.2.75-277*

Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows. – *Trinculo, 2.35*

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, 4.1.147-158*

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 kindlier 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,
And deeper than ever did plummet sound
I'll drown my book. – *Prospero, 5.1.50-57*

...O brave new world
That has such people in't! – *Miranda, 5.1.183-184*

...O rejoice
Beyond a common joy, and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand her brother found a wife
Where he himself was lost; Prospero, his dukedom
In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves,
When no man was his own. – *Gonzalo, 5.1.206-213*

...this thing of darkness, I
Acknowledge mine. – *Prospero, 5.1.274-275*

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own—
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples, let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island, by your spell;
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair
Unless I be relieved by prayer
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon me,
Let your indulgence set me free. – *Prospero, Epilogue.1-20*

ThemeTracker™

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.

Themes	Scene
	<p>Back story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.
	<p>1.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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)
	<p>1.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.
	<p>2.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The courtiers awaken on the shore. – Antonio and Sebastian plot Alonso's murder, but Ariel intervenes.
	<p>2.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Caliban meets Stephano and Trinculo. – Stephano and Trinculo give Caliban wine. He mistakes them for gods who can free him from Prospero's tyranny.
	<p>3.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ferdinand performs labor for Prospero, and Miranda pities him. – Miranda and Ferdinand pledge their mutual love and agree to marry.
	<p>3.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Caliban persuades Stephano and Trinculo to murder Prospero, and Ariel overhears their plot.
	<p>3.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.
	<p>4.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.
	<p>5.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.
	<p>Epilogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Alone on stage, Prospero asks the audience to set him free with their applause.

Theme Key

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