



Introduction to the Play

Background to *The Tempest*

The Tempest is generally believed to be the last complete play written by Shakespeare. It is also considered to be the finest of his romance plays. As a dramatic romance, the play includes important romantic features that set it apart from his comedies, as well as his tragedies and histories.

A key component of a Shakespearean romance is the setting. The plays must take place in exotic, distant, and mysterious locations. These fairy-tale locations give the sense almost of a myth. The myth and mystery, while being obviously unreal, compels the viewer to realize that the play's themes and ideas in fact have something to say about everyday life.

A second characteristic of romance in Shakespeare's time was the focus on separation and then reunion of family members. This is often embedded in a story of exile and return, in which the exiled family member is reunited with family and returned and restored to his or her rightful place. This restoration of the family gives these plays importance and delight that is deeper than the love stories of courtship and marriage that are part of Shakespeare's comedies. Shakespeare's romances—*The Tempest* in particular—end with a spirit of hope. There is marriage and restoration, both of which come about through the action of mercy and forgiveness and the joyful intervention of providence.

Another feature of romance is that the characters are not so much fully realized people as

they are symbolic. In *The Tempest*, Prospero represents the great artist-philosopher who learns about reconciliation and forgiveness. Caliban represents “natural man”—uncivilized humanity. Many Shakespearean scholars have even argued that Caliban represents the American natives who inhabited the Americas prior to the colonization of America by Europeans. This theory is based on the fact that England was engaged in voyages of discovery and settlement to the Americas. In fact, a letter by William Strachey, written in the early 1600s, details his shipwreck near the island of Bermuda. His description of his experiences emphasized the miraculous survival of everyone on the ship and the beauty and loveliness of the island. These features are evident in *The Tempest*.

Another important component of romance is the spectacle or masque. The *masque* is a show within the play that is accompanied by music, dance, and remarkable visual effects, and it suggests that the supernatural invades and controls human life in order to bring about mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In *The Tempest*, Prospero stages the masques at a banquet in Act three, a blessing dance of the Goddesses for Miranda and Ferdinand's engagement in Act four, and the chess game of Ferdinand and Miranda in Act five. One might also argue that the shipwreck scene in Act one is also masquelike because it is controlled by Ariel. Also, all the victims are miraculously saved from drowning.

because Ariel would not carry out the evil deeds she requested.

Prospero threatens to imprison Ariel in the pine tree for another twelve years if he does not stop complaining. Ariel swears obedience, and Prospero promises to free him in two more days.

Miranda wakes up, and she and Prospero go to visit Caliban. Caliban calls down curses on Miranda and Prospero, and Prospero says that he will punish Caliban with cramps. Caliban complains that Prospero stole the island away from him since he lived on it first with his mother, Sycorax. He says that Prospero deceived him by being nice to him at first and teaching him language. In response, Caliban showed Prospero all the beauties and benefits of the island. Now he regrets that he did so. Prospero replies that he would have treated him better except that he tried to rape his daughter. Now Caliban is kept safely away from Miranda, and he must fetch wood and make the fires. In disgust, Caliban exits.

Ariel enters with Ferdinand. Ferdinand cannot see Ariel, Prospero, or Miranda. Ariel sings a lovely song that lifts Ferdinand's spirits. He thinks he is the lone survivor of the shipwreck.

Ariel sings again about the drowning of Ferdinand's father. The song is one of transformation, of sea change "rich and strange." Prospero prompts Miranda to look at Ferdinand, and she is enraptured with his appearance.

Ferdinand sees Miranda and is equally attracted to her. He tells her that if she is a virgin and not engaged to anyone else, he will marry her and make her Queen of Naples.

Prospero, not wanting Ferdinand to take Miranda for granted, accuses Ferdinand of being a spy and arrests him. Miranda protests against her father's harsh treatment of Ferdinand, and Prospero tells Miranda she is foolish because all she has to compare Ferdinand to is Caliban. Ferdinand is sad about his circumstances, but if he can see Miranda once a day, it is worth it to him.

Act two, Scene 1

Gonzalo attempts to cheer up Alonso by going over the positive things that have happened since they left Naples. While he speaks, Antonio and Sebastian mock all his words. Nevertheless, Gonzalo asserts that their clothes are as good as new, even though they have swum to shore. Alonso rejects any comfort and says he wishes he had never started the trip in the first place. He mourns the death of his son. Francisco offers a word of hope, reporting that he saw Ferdinand swimming steadily to shore. However, Alonso is sure that Ferdinand is lost. Sebastian reminds Alonso that it is his own fault they are in this situation because everyone begged him not to marry his daughter, Claribel, to a Tunisian. Gonzalo reproves Sebastian for making Alonso feel worse than he already does. Then Gonzalo imagines the ideal world he would create on the island if he were in charge. Sebastian and Antonio continue to mock him, and Alonso asks Gonzalo to be quiet.

Ariel enters and puts everyone to sleep except for Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio. Alonso fights sleep until Antonio and Sebastian offer to guard him while he sleeps. Antonio tells Sebastian that he should consider being King

However, Ariel intervenes by using his voice to mimic Trinculo, accusing Caliban and Stephano, in turn, of lying. This enrages Caliban and Stephano, and they ask Trinculo to move away from them. Caliban lays out a plan to kill Prospero while he is sleeping and to burn his books. Then Stephano can make Miranda his queen and rule the island with Caliban and Trinculo as viceroys.

Ariel promises to convey this plot to Prospero. Then, to distract Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, he plays on a flute and a drum. The music scares them at first, because they cannot see who is playing. However, when Caliban says that this kind of music is common to the island, they agree to follow the music.

Act three, Scene 3

Gonzalo asks that they rest from searching for Ferdinand. Alonso agrees to take a break since he has given up hope of finding his son alive. Sebastian and Antonio agree to murder Alonso that very night while he is asleep, since everyone will be tired and will not be vigilant in protecting the King.

Prospero invokes a magical show in which spirits lay out a banquet and invite the group to eat. Then, the spirits magically disappear. The group is astounded by the display, and all assume that these spirits are people of the island.

Reluctant at first, they decide to eat the food, but Ariel, who is dressed as a Harpy—a bird-woman monster—interrupts them. Ariel accuses them of deposing Prospero, and that is

why they are shipwrecked on this island and why Alonso has lost his son. Ariel disappears to the sound of thunder. Then the spirits return and carry away the banquet.

Prospero compliments Ariel on his work and goes to visit Miranda and Ferdinand. Alonso goes off in deep despair, since he thinks that Ferdinand is dead because of his betrayal of Prospero. Sebastian and Antonio go off to fight the spirits with their swords. Gonzalo and the rest follow to try to keep the other three from harming themselves.

Act four, Scene 1

Prospero apologizes to Ferdinand for his harsh treatment, but notes that being able to marry Miranda should more than make up for any discomfort Ferdinand endured. Prospero praises Miranda and warns Ferdinand to remain chaste until the wedding night. Ferdinand agrees.

Ariel enters, and Prospero tells him to gather the other spirits for another spectacle. Prospero bids the spectacle to begin. Iris, the rainbow-hued messenger goddess, enters and calls upon Ceres, the goddess of Earth and all growing things, to leave the beautiful mountain and meadow and join in the celebration of Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage.

Ariel enters, dressed as Ceres, and compliments Iris on how her rain makes the earth lush and beautiful. She asks why she has been summoned.

Iris replies that they are celebrating the upcoming marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand, who

have been hit by Cupid's arrow. Juno, goddess of women and marriage, enters and sings a marriage blessing on the happy couple. Ceres blesses them with all the benefits of harvest and vineyard.

The beauty of the masque amazes Ferdinand; he wishes to live on the island forever.

Iris calls for the nymphs to come and dance for Ferdinand and Miranda. Then she calls for farmers to come and dance with the nymphs. They dance beautifully together until Prospero realizes that Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo will arrive at any moment to act on their plot to kill him. Very upset, he calls for the masque to end. He tells Ferdinand not to worry—that the masque was all magic and illusion, just like their lives.

Ariel reports to Prospero how he used his music to lead Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban through thorny woods and into a filthy pool where he left them, submerged chin-deep. Ariel leaves to bring them to Prospero. Ariel then returns with beautiful clothing, which he hangs on a line as bait. The traitors enter, but they cannot see either Prospero or Ariel.

Stephano and Trinculo complain to Caliban that they smell foul and have lost their bottles in the pond. Caliban tries to reassure them that all this effort is worth the prize. They start toward the cave where Prospero lives, but Trinculo and Stephano are distracted by the beautiful clothes that were brought in by Ariel. Caliban warns them to leave the clothes and finish the murder first or Prospero will pinch them all over and tear them up. They disregard

Caliban's wishes and continue to admire the clothes. They give him a heap of beautiful clothing to carry back to their camp.

Prospero causes the spirits to be like hunting hounds, which chase the three villains offstage. Prospero commands that the three be filled with cramps and pinches. As they exit, Prospero promises Ariel his freedom very soon.

Act five, Scene 1

Ariel tells Prospero that everyone is under Prospero's spell. All Prospero's plans have been accomplished in one day. Ariel notes that if he were human, he would feel sympathy for these people. Prospero promises to forgive them once they are sorry for their actions against him. Prospero tells of all the incredible acts he has done with his magic. Once he has finished his work with those on the island, he will break his staff and refuse to do magic ever again.

Ariel brings in Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio along with Adrian and Francisco. They stand in a circle, charmed by the magic spell of Prospero. He speaks words of praise to Gonzalo for his loyalty. Then, he accuses Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio of betraying him.

Ariel dresses Prospero in kingly robes and then goes to the hidden ship to wake the crew and get the ship ready for sailing.

Prospero reveals himself to the group. Alonso hardly believes that Prospero is real, but he repeals the tribute paid by Milan to Naples in recompense. Prospero then forgives his brother Antonio.

However, the audience in Shakespeare's plays expected a spectacle for the price of admission. Therefore, there were many devices to produce a gasp from the audience. For example, a device in the loft of the theater could raise and lower actors so that they could play gods, ghosts, or other unusual characters. Additionally, a trapdoor in the stage offered a chance for a quick appearance or disappearance. The actors could suggest a beheading or hanging with various illusions on the stage. Sound effects suggesting thunder, horses, or war were common. Music was important, and drums and horns were often played.

Most important to the sense of spectacle were the costumes worn by the actors. These were elaborate, colorful, and very expensive. Therefore, they often purchased these outfits from servants who had inherited the clothes from their masters, or from hangmen, who received the clothes of their victims as payment for their services.

Though Shakespeare's stage directions are sparse, definition of a few key terms will be helpful for the reader. The following is a brief glossary of stage directions commonly found in Shakespeare's plays.

Selected Glossary of Stage Directions in Shakespeare's Plays

Above: an indication that the actor speaking from above is on a higher balcony or other scaffold that is higher than the other actors

Alarum: a stage signal, which calls the soldiers to battle; usually trumpets, drums, and shouts

Aside: words spoken by the actor so the audience overhears but the other actors on the stage do not. An aside may also be spoken to one other actor so that the others on stage do not overhear.

Calls within: a voice offstage that calls to a character on the stage

Curtaains: fabrics draped around a bed that could be opened or closed for privacy

Draw: Actors pull their swords from their sheathes.

Enter: a direction for a character to enter the stage. This can be from the audience's right (stage right) or the audience's left (stage left).

Enter Chorus: a direction for an actor to come to the center of the stage and offer some introductory comments, usually in blank verse or rhyming couplets. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Chorus delivers a sonnet, a form of poetry associated with love.

Exeunt: All characters leave the stage, or those characters named leave the stage.

Exit: One character leaves the stage.

Flourish: A group of trumpets or other horn instruments play a brief melody.

Have at: Characters begin to fight, usually with swords.

Pageant: a show or spectacle of actors in unusual costumes, usually without words

Prologue: an introduction spoken by the Chorus that gives an overview to the audience and invites them into the play or scene



Introduction to Shakespeare

A Brief Biography of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His birthday is celebrated on April 23. This is memorable because April 23 is also the day Shakespeare died in 1616.

Shakespeare was the eldest of nine children in his family, six of whom survived to adulthood.

William Shakespeare's father worked with leather and became a successful merchant early in his career. He held some relatively important government offices. However, when William was in his early teens, his father's financial position began to slide due to growing debt. After many years, John Shakespeare's fortunes and respect were restored, but records indicate that the years of debt and lawsuits were very stressful.

Historians assume that young Will went to school and took a rigorous course of study including Latin, history, and biblical study. In 1582, at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was three months pregnant. Studies of Elizabethan family life indicate that Anne's situation was not unusual since it was accepted that the engagement period was as legally binding as the marriage. The couple had a daughter, Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Not much is known about Shakespeare during the next seven years, but his name is listed as an actor in London by 1592. This was a difficult time for the theater

because measures to prevent the spread of the plague regularly closed the theaters.

Between 1594 and 1595, Shakespeare joined the Chamberlain's Men as a playwright and actor. The acting company featured actor Richard Burbage, and they were a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I. During this time, Shakespeare was writing such plays as *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even though Shakespeare was enjoying great success by the time he was 32, it was dampened by the death of his son, Hamnet, in 1596. Soon after, Shakespeare refocused on his home in Stratford where he bought an estate called New Place, with gardens, orchards, and barns in addition to the main home. He still maintained a home in London near the theater.

In 1599, Shakespeare wrote *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, and *As You Like It*. The Globe Playhouse was up and running, with Shakespeare a 10 percent owner. This means that he was able to earn 10 percent of any show's profits. This business position helped him solidify his wealth.

In 1603, Shakespeare's reputation earned his acting troop the sponsorship of James I, who requested one play performance per month. Their name changed to the King's Men. By this time, Shakespeare had written and performed in almost all of his comedies and histories. He was proclaimed the finest playwright in London.

lived in London and its suburbs. People were attracted to London because it gave many opportunities for work and financial improvement. It was also a vibrant social scene for the upper class. In fact, one honor of being a noble was the opportunity to house Queen Elizabeth and her entire party if she was in your neighborhood. If she was a guest, it was expected that her noble hosts would cover all the expenses of housing her group. She made many “progresses” through England and London, establishing her relationships with the nobility. However, several nobles asked to be released from this honor because the expense of supporting her visit had often caused them bankruptcy.

Perhaps it was better to be a flourishing member of the English merchant middle class. Their numbers and influence were rising in England at the time of Shakespeare. This was a new and an exciting development in Western European history. One major factor in the rise of the middle class was the need for wool for clothing. The expansion of the wool trade led to the formation of entire cities throughout England and sparked progress in many other areas of commerce and trade.

With the rise of the middle class came a concern for more comfortable housing. Rather than serving simply as shelter or defense against attack, housing developed architecturally and functionally. One major improvement was the use of windows to let in light. Also, houses were built with lofts and special places for eating and sleeping, rather than having one multifunctional room. However, doors between rooms

were still very rare, so that privacy in Shakespeare’s time did not really exist.

Meals in Shakespeare’s England were an important part of the day. Breakfast was served before dawn and was usually bread and a beverage. Therefore, everyone was really hungry for the midday meal, which could last up to three hours. If meat was available in the home, it was usually served at this time. A smaller supper was eaten at 6:00 or 7:00 P.M., with the more wealthy people able to eat earlier and the working class eating later. Cooking was dangerous and difficult since all meals were cooked over an open fire. Even bread was not baked in an oven but was cooked in special pans placed over the fire. A pot was almost always cooking on the fire, and the cook would put in whatever was available for supper. This is most likely where the term “potluck” came from.

Furniture was usually made of carved wood, as woodcarving was a developing craft in Shakespeare’s day. One important part of an Elizabethan home was the table, or “board.” One side was finished to a nice sheen, while the other side was rough. Meals were served on the rough side of the board, and then it was flipped for a more elegant look in the room. The table is where we get the terms “room and board” and having “the tables turned.” Another important part of a middle or an upper-class home was the bed. Rather than being made of prickly straw, mattresses were now stuffed with softer feathers. Surrounded by artistically carved four posts, these beds were considered so valuable that they were often a specifically named item in a will.

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Clothing in Shakespeare's time was very expensive. Of course, servants and other lower-class people wore simple garb, often a basic blue. But if a person wanted to display his wealth, his clothing was elaborate and colorful, sewn with rich velvet, lace, and gold braid. An average worker might earn seven or eight English pounds in a year, and a very nice outfit for a nobleman might cost as much as 50 or 60 pounds. In other words, if seven or eight healthy workers pooled their money for the entire year, spending nothing else, they could buy only one respectable nobleman's outfit.

Entertainment was an important part of life in Shakespeare's England. Popular sports were bear-baiting, cockfighting, and an early form of bowling. Bear-baiting, in which a dog was set loose to fight with up to three chained bears in the center of an amphitheater, and cockfighting, in which roosters pecked each other to death, were popular then but would be absolutely unacceptable entertainment today.

Bowling, however, has maintained its popularity in our current culture.

In London, a main source of entertainment was the theater. Some theaters were very large and could hold more than two thousand people. Even poor people could attend the theater since entrance cost only one penny (equivalent to 60 cents today), and they could stand around the stage. For a bit more money, a person could sit in an actual seat during the performance. However, some thought that going to the theater could be dangerous to your body or your soul. The theaters were closed twice during the plagues to reduce the spread of the disease. The Puritans disapproved of the theater as an unwholesome leisure time activity. And the Puritans also disliked the theater because the theaters were located in an area of London surrounded by brothels and bars. Nevertheless, the theater became respectable enough by 1603 to be supported by James I—and he was the monarch who directed the King James Version of the Bible to be translated.



ACTIVITY 7

Gonzalo: Fool or Sage?

Act two, Scene 1

Background At the beginning of this scene, Gonzalo is trying to look on the bright side of being shipwrecked as he attempts to raise Alonso's (the King of Naples) spirits. He is mocked by Antonio and Sebastian, who think that Gonzalo is wordy and foolish.

Directions You be the judge of whether Gonzalo is actually being wise and optimistic or simply ridiculous. Reread the following statements of Gonzalo, and briefly paraphrase what he is saying. Then, in a sentence or two, explain why you think the statement is wise or foolish. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. "Beseech you, sir, be merry; you have cause, so have we all, of joy; for our escape is much beyond our loss." (lines 1–3)
2. "Here [the island they were shipwrecked upon] is everything advantageous to life." (line 51)
3. "That our garments, being, as they were, drenched in the sea, hold, notwithstanding, their freshness and glosses, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt water." (lines 62–64)
4. "My lord Sebastian, the truth you speak doth lack some gentleness, and time to speak it in: you rub the sore, when you should bring the plaster." (lines 134–137)
5. "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. . . ." (lines 145–153)
6. From all you have heard from Gonzalo thus far, is he the fool that Antonio and Sebastian make him out to be? Why or why not?



ACTIVITY 8

Eavesdropping on a Conspiracy

Act two, Scene 1

Background As everyone else sleeps, Antonio and Sebastian hatch a plot to overthrow Alonso and kill Gonzalo.

Directions Imagine that you are a servant who has landed on the island, and you have awakened to overhear Antonio and Sebastian's plan. Summarize what they discussed and who was the mastermind behind it as you (the servant) retell the plan to Gonzalo or Alonso. Suggested length: $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.