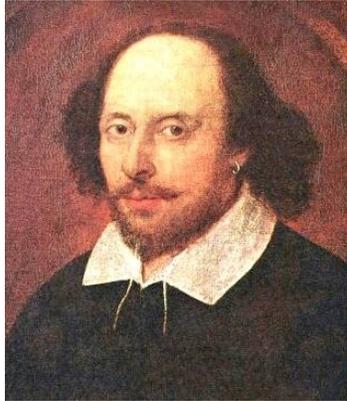


# THE TEMPEST

by William Shakespeare



## THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

*The Tempest* may have been Shakespeare's last play (first performed in 1611), and falls into the ill-defined category of the Romances. The story line is not based on an old manuscript, but on contemporary news - in 1609, a group of settlers heading for the Jamestown colony in North America was blown off course and marooned for a year on the island of Bermuda. Some speculate that the playwright himself enacted the role of Prospero.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Alonso - King of Naples, he was involved in the plot that cost Prospero his dukedom. He is the father of Ferdinand.
- Sebastian - Alonso's brother, power-hungry and corrupt, who plots to murder his brother and Gonzalo.
- Prospero - The rightful Duke of Milan, who has magical powers. He rules the island on which the ship is wrecked, and has caused the tempest in order to regain his dukedom. He has a fifteen-year-old daughter, Miranda, and rules over spirits like Ariel and savages like Caliban.
- Antonio - Prospero's brother, who has usurped his dukedom twelve years before the story begins. He plots with Sebastian to murder Alonso and Gonzalo.
- Ferdinand - Son of Alonso, he falls in love with Miranda at first sight.
- Gonzalo - An honest councilor to the King of Naples, he helped save Prospero when he was overthrown by his brother.
- Caliban - A deformed savage whose name is probably an anagram of "cannibal," he is the son of a witch and the slave of Prospero.
- Trinculo - Alonso's drunken jester, he gets involved in a comic conspiracy with Stephano and Caliban to kill Prospero and take over the island.
- Stephano - A drunken butler whom Caliban worships as a god.
- Miranda - Prospero's daughter, a naive young girl who has never seen any human beings besides her father; she falls in love with Ferdinand at first sight.
- Ariel - A spirit under Prospero's command.

## NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"I have great comfort from this fellow. Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows." (Gonzalo, Ii, 26-28)

"Full fathom five they 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 -  
Ding-dong!  
Hark! Now hear them -  
Ding-dong bell.” (Ariel, Iii, 396-405)

“Thou think’st there is no more such shapes as he,  
Having seen but him and Caliban. Foolish wench!  
To th’ most of men this is a Caliban,  
And they to him are angels.” (Prospero, Iii, 478-481)

“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.” (Gonzalo, Iii, 144-153)

“Fair encounter  
Of two most rare affections! Heavens rain grace  
On that which breeds between ‘em!” (Prospero, IIIi, 74-76)

“Be not afeard. 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 sometimes 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, IIIii, 132-140)

“Travelers ne’er did lie,  
Though fools at home condemn ‘em.” (Antonio, IIIiii, 26-27)

“Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition  
Worthily purchased, take my daughter. But  
If thou dost break her virgin-knot before  
All sanctimonious ceremonies may  
With full and holy rite be minist’red,  
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall  
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,

Sour-eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew  
The union of your bed with weeds so loathly  
That you shall hate it both. Therefore take heed,  
As Hymen's lamp shall light you!" (Prospero, IVi, 13-23)

"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 solem 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, IVi, 148-158)

"O, wonder!  
How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world  
That has such people in't!" (Miranda, Vi, 181-184)

## NOTES

**Act I, scene 1** - A ship carrying Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Ferdinand, Gonzalo, and other retainers is beset by a storm at sea. This brief scene contrasts the characters of Gonzalo on the one hand and Antonio and Sebastian on the other. It also illustrates the meaninglessness of social standing in the face of nature's power.

**Act I, scene 2** - Miranda reveals her tender heart by begging Prospero to stop the storm, but he assures her that no one has been harmed. He then tells her for the first time the circumstances that placed them on the island - the fact that he had entrusted the day-to-day administration of his dukedom to his brother Antonio while he devoted himself to his studies; that Antonio had suborned his people and seized the dukedom, conspiring with Alonso. In the middle of the night, Antonio's men seized Prospero and Miranda (then three years old) and put them out to sea in a leaky boat with no oars or sail. Gonzalo, however, saw that they were supplied with food, water, clothing, and Prospero's beloved books. They ran aground on the island they now inhabit. He then tells her that the ship he has just wrecked contains his enemies, and that this will be his opportunity to regain his dukedom.

Miranda sleeps, and Prospero summons Ariel, who reports on the results of the storm. All from the ship are safe, and have landed in groups separate from one another - the ship safely in a hidden harbor with the sailors in a magical sleep on board, Ferdinand by himself, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo together, and Stephano and Trinculo in a different place. Ariel asks Prospero for his freedom, and the wizard reminds the spirit of the bondage from which he had delivered him, left imprisoned for twelve years in a pine tree by the witch Sycorax (Caliban's mother), then promises to free him in two days if he finishes the job at hand.

Ariel leaves, Miranda awakes, and she and Prospero go to see Caliban. Caliban curses them, and Prospero says he will suffer cramps all night when he tries to sleep. Caliban accuses the wizard of stealing his island from him, but Prospero reminds him that he treated him kindly until he tried to take advantage of Miranda. Prospero orders Caliban off to fetch wood. Ferdinand then appears, led there by Ariel. He thinks his father and the others from the ship have died in the storm. Miranda sees him; this is the first person she has ever seen besides her father. When he spots Miranda, he thinks her a goddess, and they fall in love immediately. This is Prospero's intention, but he doesn't want things to go too smoothly for them, so he accuses Ferdinand of being a spy. He casts a spell on Ferdinand to immobilize him, but Miranda begs for his release.

**Act II, scene 1** - The scene begins with banter among the nobles, with Gonzalo expressing gratitude for their safe landing, and the others complaining and mocking him. Alonso mourns what he believes to be the death of his son Ferdinand in the storm. Gonzalo speaks of the utopian commonwealth he would form were the island his to rule. Under Ariel's enchantment, all sleep except for Sebastian and Antonio, who hatch a plot to kill Alonso and Gonzalo and seize the throne of Naples, but Ariel intervenes, waking the intended victims in the nick of time.

**Act II, scene 2** - Caliban, returning with a load of wood, encounters Trinculo and Stephano, and thinks them to be gods or spirits. Trinculo, on the other hand, can't decide whether Caliban is a man or a fish, but takes refuge under the monster's cape during a rainstorm. Stephano arrives in a drunken state and thinks the Caliban-Trinculo combination is a four-legged monster. He gives the "monster" a drink to pacify it, then Trinculo emerges from under Caliban's cape. Caliban, meanwhile, decides he likes the liquor, and that he who gave it to him is a god deserving of worship (not unlike the native American response to European invaders). Stephano tells him that he used to be the Man in the Moon. Caliban vows to serve him rather than Prospero.

**Act III, scene 1** - Prospero has set Ferdinand to the task of moving a thousand logs; Miranda pities and encourages him, even offering to carry some of the logs, and Ferdinand feels his labors light because of her presence. They profess their love to one another and pledge to marry, under the approving gaze of the hidden Prospero.

**Act III, scene 2** - This comic scene begins with Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban thoroughly drunk. Caliban tells them of Prospero, and encourages Stephano to kill him while he sleeps, make Miranda his queen, and take possession of the island. Ariel sports with them, overhears their conversation, and goes to report it to Prospero.

**Act III, scene 3** - The nobles, who have been searching to no avail for Ferdinand, are exhausted and give up their search. Sebastian and Antonio agree to execute their plot as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Prospero then sends spirits in strange shapes to set a banquet before the nobles. As they are about to eat, Ariel appears in the form of a harpy, the food disappears, and he accuses Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian of plotting against Prospero and depriving him of his dukedom years before, and prophesies doom and misery for them unless they repent and change their ways. The table then also disappears. Alonso is full of guilt, but Sebastian and Antonio are ready to fight the spirits that have appeared to them. Gonzalo, who neither heard nor saw Ariel, thinks the others are going mad as a consequence of their guilt.

**Act IV, scene 1** - Prospero tells Ferdinand that his trials were merely a test of his love, and that he gladly gives him the hand of his daughter, warning them at the same time to remain pure until after the wedding. They readily agree. Prospero summons spirits to bless their marriage and again warn them against premature coupling. He then remembers the plot hatched by the clowns. He dismisses the lovers and summons Ariel, who tells him that he has been leading the clowns a merry chase through thorns, briars, and stinking pools. The clowns then enter, still determined to kill Prospero. They find rich clothes that Ariel had left outside Prospero's cell, and Stephano and Trinculo begin to argue over them, forgetting temporarily their plot against Prospero. Spirits then appear in the form of dogs and chase the clowns from the stage, with Prospero vowing to plague them with cramps and convulsions.

**Act V, scene 1** - The final scene of the play brings resolution to all of its subplots. Ariel has left the nobles imprisoned by a spell, and almost begins to feel sorry for them. Prospero sends Ariel to release the nobles, and swears to give up his magic. He forgives the nobles their offenses against him, tells Ariel to wake the sailors on the ship, and prepares to don his former clothing so his captives will recognize him. Alonso repents and offers to resign his throne; Prospero forgives the two scoundrels Antonio and Sebastian, promises not to tell Alonso about their plot against him, and insists that Antonio restore to him his dukedom. He then reveals Ferdinand and Miranda (Alonso still thinks his son is dead), who are playing chess in his cave. Alonso consents to their marriage, and agrees that they will become king and queen of Naples. Ariel returns with the sailors, and reports to Prospero that he has restored the ship to its original condition. He then orders Ariel to release the clowns from the spell under which they were placed. He then invites all to stay the night, promising a safe and easy voyage home the next day. Prospero then fulfills his promise and sets Ariel free.

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the character of Caliban is thought to be many critics to reflect the attitudes of Europeans toward the inhabitants of the New World. Discuss this connection. What does Shakespeare's treatment of the character tell us about the mind set of Europeans in the early years of the colonial era?
2. In Act II, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Gonzalo describes what he considers to be the ideal commonwealth. Discuss his vision, which to a large extent has been borrowed from a treatise by French essayist Michel de Montaigne. Is such a society a realistic possibility? Why or why not?
3. In Act II, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the noblemen perceive the island very differently from one another. Why is this? Do the differences they see stem from their characters, or from some magical quality in the island itself?
4. Discuss the love between Ferdinand and Miranda as portrayed in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Is their love realistic? Why or why not? Is it likely to endure the pressures of ruling Naples as king and queen?

5. The magical nature of the island in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is often thought to be symbolic of the magic of the theater itself, making the play Shakespeare's final paean to the power of his art. Compare and contrast the magic of the island presented in the play to the magic of the theater. In what ways are their illusions similar, and in what ways different?
6. At the beginning of Act IV of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero warns Ferdinand and Miranda against engaging in sex before marriage. Discuss the consequences he says will flow from premarital sex. Is his picture of the dangers of such behavior realistic?
7. William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* speaks often of the relationship between reality and illusion, especially as it plays itself out in the theater. But on a broader scale, Shakespeare often compares life to the theater. Discuss the words spoken by Prospero in Act IV, lines 148-158 in this light. What is he saying about the nature of the theatrical experience? About life itself?
8. The Epilogue of *The Tempest* may have been the last words Shakespeare ever penned for the stage. Discuss the appropriateness of these words, both in relation to the themes developed in the play, and as a farewell to the great playwright's career in the theater.
9. Discuss the theme of repentance and forgiveness as it is developed in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Why does Shakespeare picture giving and receiving forgiveness as necessary in order to experience true freedom?
10. *The Tempest* is the only one of Shakespeare's plays to follow the "three unities" of the classical stage - unities of place (everything occurs in one place), time (the play runs in "real time," taking place over the span of three hours), and action (one plot, without a lot of subplots to clutter the flow of the narrative). Compare *The Tempest* to other plays you have read or seen. Does the fact that he observes the "three unities" make a significant difference in your ability to become involved with the action of the play? Why or why not?
11. In the conflict between Prospero and Caliban about the latter's servitude in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, who do you think is right? Why? Is Prospero justified in his behavior toward Caliban? Is Caliban justified in his resentment of Prospero?
12. Discuss the significance of the title of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. In your discussion, be sure to relate the title to its source, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. What parallels exist between Shakespeare's play and Huxley's novel? How does the use of the term "brave new world" change as the novel progresses? What does the phrase mean in the play?

13. Critic J. Churton Collins argues that William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* should be read as an allegory of Christianity. The play presents, he says, the following: "A power omnipotent in the world it controls has been grievously wronged and outraged, its wrongers and enemies being its own subjects, and those in whose loyalty it had right to confide. Years pass; sin and crime prosper, and retribution sleeps. At last that power asserts itself. Sin must be expiated, crime must be punished, but how? In a meshwork of irony and in perplexing mazes of apparent contradictions, inconsistencies and confusion is to come the answer, the substitution of repentance for punishment, perfect and final forgiveness for wrong done, sealed and ratified by the marriage of the child of the wronged one with the child of the wronger." Is this interpretation faithful to the text? Discuss, citing specific lines and incidents in the play to support your conclusion.
  
14. Some critics have suggested that William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was written to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of James I, to the Elector Palatine in 1613. What aspects of the play would lend themselves to this interpretation?