

## The Tempest (1611)

### Historical Context:

— Written just after the settlement at Jamestown in 1609. First staged in 1611 for James I to celebrate the marriage of his daughter.

— wreck of the Sea Venture off Bermuda, in which miraculously no one was hurt.  
(Tanner) wildly diff. views of Bermuda. Sh drew on Strachey's account of the event.

— This is the "strangest" of the plays Sh ever wrote and certainly the most experimental. The island is a laboratory for testing morals and the ethics of power, but the experiment is deeply ambiguous.

Shakespeare is deeply skeptical about the authority of abstract moral systems.

— When a great artist reaches his pinnacle, his work becomes more simple, not more complex. Sh is writing himself out of existence... A great playwright's characters make their own decisions.

### Key features of the play:

-1- Initial disruption of evil (not shown in the play)

-2- separations and voyages

-3- miraculous salvation from a shipwreck

-4- reconciliations and reunions

-5- unity of beautiful children

-6- marriage, harmony (?), renewal

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-7- The play observes the classical unities / *place, time, & action*

-8- Two perspectives: a fable of creation OR a colonialist allegory.

-9- It starts in turmoil and ends in calm seas.

-10- Grace as a result of faith and good works combined with suffering and danger suffuses the later romances and a number of the mature comedies.

-11- The Tempest is a revenge play in reverse because Prospero intends to forgive the wrong-doers. Is this true???? No! He is angry throughout and this makes him interesting. What enables him to forgive at the end?

-12- Ariel = fire and air, Cal= earth and water.

-13- Notice the three endings of the play: during the masque, with Prospero's renunciation of his staff and book, and in the Epilogue with his loss of power.

### Key questions that the play raises:

-1- Who are the monsters in the play?

-2- In what ways is the play experimental?

-3- Is Caliban really a "noble rebel"? Is Prospero a colonialist oppressor?

-4- What will Prospero do with his enemies whom he has brought to the island?

-5- Is Prospero capable of forgiveness?

-6- Are humans bestial or benign?

-7- What are the limits of Prospero's power and art?

-8- Shakespeare is interested in the attempt to walk away from authority/power (Prospero, Lear, Richard II), but if a person does, what will happen? Will someone perhaps less ethical step into the void?

-9- What are the lingering questions at the end of the play?

-10- Is Caliban's revolt justified? Is rebellion in the 17th century justified?

### Notes on Shakespearean Romance

The movement of romance: Safety to separation to crucial conflict (agon) to the final state of reconciliation/renewal/grace/ rebirth. Very similar to Campbell's hero's journey!!!  
Tragedy-Comedy