

1. Comedy is about love, and the courtship of one couple is very simple, taking place in a single day.
 2. The history element, the plot for the crown, occurs in greatly simplified action in one scene.
 3. The tragedy element is simple: Prospero, having lost his crown long ago, nevertheless has his island.
- D. It uses suggestive situations and figures of modern myth.
1. An unpopulated island, which has become enchanted through Prospero's power, suggests America.
 2. Prospero is a great invention of the early modern period, a great magician, a figure of power.

II. Recent productions and criticism connect *The Tempest* with the nascent imperialism of early modern Europe.

- A. An imperialistic outreach was just beginning in Shakespeare's time.
1. Shakespeare used material from the Virginia colony, about one of the ships shipwrecked in Bermuda.
 2. Other travel writers may also have influenced him.
- B. Modern designers sometimes suggest the New World in sets and in the costumes for Caliban and Ariel.
1. Caliban is a natural being without the nurture of civilization.
 2. Caliban has been represented as a Native American or as an African.
- C. Caliban also provides a measure of the progress and corruption of civilization.
- F. He lacks the virtue and self-control of Miranda and Prospero.
2. He lacks the corruption of Antonio and the folly of Trinculo.
- D. The interpretations of Caliban represent varying views.
1. Interpreting Caliban as "nature" risks the imperialistic obliteration of what might have been his culture.
 2. Interpreting Caliban as a victim of imperialism stresses Prospero's moments of anger and tyranny.
 3. But Prospero is a castaway, not an imperialist exploiting a colony to enrich a home country.

- III. The play presents Prospero's power not as political but as magical.
- A. The practice of magic was a genuine pursuit in Shakespeare's time.
1. Magic in Shakespeare's time was a matter of learning and proto-science, not the fairy spells of medieval literature.
 2. We may object to Prospero as a professional magician, people of early modern times believed in magic.
 3. The study of magic requires self-discipline as well as knowledge and skill, and it leads to power.

4. Magic was one of the great Renaissance dreams of power, a magician was a scientist.
5. It was like voyages of discovery, the new political theories of Machiavelli, or Bacon's academy.
6. The practice of magic might be spiritually dangerous, leading to arrogance and pride.

B. What we see are the human results, what happens to Prospero as he practices magic.

1. Prospero's intentions are an open question for most of the play.
2. We see Prospero's moments of frustration as well as delight.

C. What we see is a play about forgiveness.

1. Prospero must be himself, overcome passions, and forgive.
2. The non-human Ariel moves Prospero to pity in Act 5.
3. Prospero forgives the "three men of sin" although only one is clearly repentant.
4. The end boasts of Prospero's power, but the power exists to be set aside.
5. In a Christian world, magical power must give way to love—romantic love and forgiveness.

Readings:

Essential: Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

Recommended: Orgel, introduction to *The Tempest* (Oxford ed.); Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (University of California Press, 1988), chapter 5; Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (Columbia University Press, 1965), chapter 10

Questions to Consider:

1. Discuss the nature of power in this play, comparing it with another play where balances of power shift.
2. Describe what Caliban contributes to *The Tempest*.