

Richmond Shakespeare

Play Guide

THE TEMPEST

By William Shakespeare

Prepared by
Richmond Shakespeare
Educational Outreach

P.O. Box 27543
Richmond, VA 23261-7543
804-232-4000 voice
804-232-4400 fax
www.richmondshakespeare.com

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Pre-performance

Sources and history for *The Tempest*

Written between 1610 and 1611, *The Tempest* is thought by many to be Shakespeare's last play written without collaboration, and possibly his greatest. It was first published in the Folio of 1623 after his death, apparently from a transcript of a theater prompt book rather than any quarto edition. (The Folio was the printed collection of all of his plays; quartos were individual editions) The first recorded performance of *The Tempest* was on November 1, 1611, at Whitehall Palace for King James and the court. It was also performed, among other pieces, for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Prince Palatine Elector in the winter of 1612-1613.

The Tempest is one of a few of Shakespeare's plays in which Shakespeare did not "borrow" the main plot from an earlier story. However, it does seem to contain elements of various accounts of the wreck of the *Sea Venture*, originally bound for Virginia, in 1609.

The *Sea Venture* was the flagship of a fleet of ships carrying settlers and supplies to the Virginia colony when it encountered a 3 day hurricane that separated it from the other ships and blew it near the Bermuda islands. The flagship carried the new lieutenant Governor, Sir Thomas Gates, Admiral George Somers, William Strachey, secretary for the Virginia Company, John Rolfe and his pregnant wife. The rest of the fleet made it through, but the *Sea Venture* was wrecked on the shores of one of the islands. Because it had become wedged between two coral reefs, everyone on board made it to shore alive. Nine months later, two boats had been constructed by the wrecked passengers and crew from salvaged materials and native trees and they continued the voyage. Unfortunately, John Rolfe's child, a daughter named Bermuda, had died on the island. And his wife died shortly after they arrived back in Jamestown. When the *Sea Venture* arrived at Virginia, these passengers found they had been luckier than many in the colony itself, who had starved during the winter. The *Sea Venture* had been the ship carrying most of the supplies in that ill fated fleet of ships.

In 1610, Sir Thomas Gates returned to London. With him was a letter composed by William Strachey containing a description of the wreck, called, "A True Reportory of the Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, Knight..." The Virginia Company suppressed the printing of the letter because it contained some unflattering opinions of the Virginia Company. However, Shakespeare seems to have gotten his hands on it- or at least had a good look at it.

How do we know that Shakespeare might have read it? Some sections he seems to have lifted almost verbatim from the report. For example, in describing what seems to have been St. Elmo's Fire (an electrical phenomenon of balls of light during storms:

an apparition of a little rounded light, like a faint star, trembling and streaming along with a sparkling blaze, half the height upon the mainmast, and shooting sometimes from shroud to shroud, tempting to settle as it were upon any of the four shrouds: and after three or four hours together, or rather more, half the night it kept with us, running sometimes along the mainyard to the very end and then returning.

This is echoed in Ariel's speech, Act I, scene 2, describing the action of the storm:

*I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak
Now in the waist the deck, in every cabin,
I flam'd amazement: sometime I'd divide
And burn in many places: on the topmast
The yards and the bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join.*

In another "coincidence," Strachey, in one of his notes, refers to an early description of the Bermudas by Gonzalo Ferdinando Ovieda. Two of the characters in *The Tempest* are Gonzalo and Ferdinand.

Some sources for other parts of the play: Gonzalo's speech about an ideal society has strong echoes of Michel de Montaigne's essay entitled, "Of the Caniballes." (It also happens that the name of the island creature, Caliban, is an almost exact anagram for the word, cannibal.) Elsewhere, Prospero's last speech starting with "Ye elves of hills," etc., has a strong parallel in Medea's invocation found in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.

Though seemingly based on stories of the New World - and physically set in the Mediterranean - Shakespeare seems to have created a world that is everywhere and nowhere. A major theme of the play is to contrast the virtues of this island and its "natural" qualities with those of the "civilized" world. This is echoed in the marriage of Miranda (raised on the island) to Ferdinand (raised in Naples.) Prospero embodies this influence, having been cast out of civilization (Milan) by a treacherous brother, and landing on this island uninhabited by humans, and becoming a better man for it in the end. With a bit of help from Prospero's magic, Fate brings all of his enemies to the island. Prospero tests them all; each one in a way that brings forth their true character, while they believe they're unobserved. At first, Prospero seems motivated by a desire for revenge, until the island itself, in the shape of the spirit Ariel, changes his mind. He says of Ariel:

*Hast thou (which art but aire) a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not my self
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?*

He then reforms these enemies through forgiveness. As he says, "The rarer action is in virtue, than in vengeance." He too has been reformed.

Many people have noted that in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare seems to be bidding farewell to the

stage and to his art. Numerous similarities exist between Prospero, the magician of the island, and Shakespeare, the magician and controller of illusion. Metaphors for the stage and actors abound throughout Shakespeare's plays, but especially in *The Tempest*. One of the most notable is Prospero's speech after the marriage ceremony for his daughter---in which he says that the actors are all spirits and are melted into air, and that everything they have just seen, "the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces...the great globe(!) itself" are illusions that dissolve away into nothingness. Just like a play. This is followed later by the famous speech at the end of the play when Prospero boasts of his power: "...I have bedimmed the noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds, and 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault set forth roaring war," which could represent what Shakespeare himself did with his plays on the bare stage of the Globe before the eyes of thousands of audience members.

The epilogue of *The Tempest* is the final example, when the actor playing Prospero, stepping out of character, asks the audience to help him leave this "bare island" of the stage with the help of their hands and their breath. Coincidence? And is it by coincidence that Shakespeare has Prospero give up his art, break his magical staff and "retire me to my Milan," just as Shakespeare himself was about to retire back to Stratford? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

But it makes for a great story.

The Elizabethan Playhouse

The Globe, the theater most commonly associated with Shakespeare, was not the only theater in London, but it is the most famous. Others include the Rose, the Curtain (both mentioned in *Shakespeare in Love*) and the Swan. The Blackfriars was an indoor "private" theater used by Shakespeare's company (known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, then later as the King's Men) that was generally frequented by playgoers of higher social ranks. The public theaters were all open to the sky in order to take advantage of the natural lighting.

All of the open theaters had arena-style stages (with the audience on three sides), with the poorer audience members (the groundlings) standing on the ground right next to the stage, and the more wealthy audience members sitting in galleries in a circular fashion all around the yard (the open area where the groundlings stood). The atmosphere was fairly raucous (more like NASCAR or WWE wrestling), with people constantly moving around, throwing hazelnut shells on the ground and talking--UNLESS they were intrigued by what was going on onstage. We think that with Shakespeare's plays the audience would have been pretty attentive.

Because the plays took place in the early afternoon and the players (actors) could see the audience and vice versa, it is thought by many scholars that Shakespeare intended for the audience to be involved in the play itself. An actor might refer to an audience member to make some reference to a character not on stage, and this interaction with the audience contributes to the performance's humor and excitement.

People often ask how long Elizabethan performances of Shakespeare's plays were. The plays certainly seem long when we read them. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Prologue alludes to "the two hours traffic of our stage." If the actors really meant that, there would be a very fast pace-- no

long pauses or slow exits and entrances. This makes sense if you consider that the normal groundling had the attention span of today's average five-year-old child and liked to throw things.

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All of the open theatres had arena-type stages (seating on at least three sides), with the poorer audience members (the Groundlings) standing on the ground right up next to the stage, while the more wealthy sat in galleries in a circular fashion all around the "yard" (the open area where the Groundlings stood). The atmosphere was fairly raucous (more like Nascar or professional wrestling), with people constantly moving around, throwing hazelnut shells on the ground and talking - UNLESS they were intrigued by what was going on onstage. We think that with Shakespeare's plays the audience was pretty attentive. However- there were no intermissions, so patrons still had to move sometimes. With Shakespeare's plays, they would probably hurry back.

Because the plays took place in the early afternoon and the players (actors) could see the audience and vice versa, it is thought by many scholars that Shakespeare intended for the audience to be involved in the play itself. An actor might refer to an audience member to make some reference to a character not on stage- pretty funny then AND now.

Finally - how long WERE these plays? They seem pretty long on the page. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue mentions "the two hours traffic of our stage..". If the actors really meant that, there would be a very fast pace: no long pauses or slow exits and entrances. This makes sense if you consider that the normal Groundling had the attention span of today's 5 year-old and liked to throw things.

Synopsis

Act I

A hurricane has struck the fleet of the King of Naples on the way home from the marriage of his daughter in Tunis. The king's ship goes down and is presumed lost. The rest of the fleet sails home. Meanwhile, on a nearby island, Miranda is distraught about the sinking and questions her father, the magician Prospero, why he did nothing. He tells her that everyone is safe and that he himself created the storm. He then reveals that he was once the Duke of Milan, but was overthrown by his brother, Antonio, with the help of the King of Naples---all of whom are on the ship. Miranda is amazed. Prospero uses his magic to put her to sleep then calls his spirit, Ariel, for a report.

Ariel describes what he did in the storm, that indeed everyone is safe and on the island, with the king's son, Ferdinand, separated from the rest. Prospero says there's more work to do and Ariel gets testy. Prospero gets angry and reminds him that the witch, Sycorax, had imprisoned him

(Ariel) and that it was he who had freed him because Sycorax had died. Ariel is properly penitent, and Prospero sends him off on other business.

Prospero wakes Miranda and they go to visit Caliban, his slave. (Caliban is son of the witch) Caliban is his usual uncooperative, nasty self and Prospero has to get nasty back. Then, using magic, Ariel leads Ferdinand to Prospero, who shows him to Miranda. She thinks he's a beautiful spirit and vice versa. Prospero tells her that Ferdinand was one of the men in the shipwreck. She falls immediately in love, and vice versa. Prospero is pleased because this is what he intended all along, but now he must test their love---so he accuses Ferdinand of being a spy and puts him into chains to carry logs. Miranda is mortified.

Act II

On the other side of the island, everyone is safe but variously upset: Alonso, the king, grieves for his son; Gonzalo and Adrian try to cheer him up. Meanwhile, Antonio(Prospero's brother) and Sebastian (Alonso's brother) deride these attempts. Suddenly, a drowsiness (created by Ariel) falls over everyone except Antonio and Sebastian. Antonio urges Sebastian to take advantage of the situation to kill Alonso and become king. Antonio finally persuades him (Sebastian is pretty dense) and they are about to strike when Ariel wakes everyone. Gonzalo is suspicious of Sebastian and Antonio and everyone draws their swords to continue their search of the island. In yet another part of the island, Caliban is carrying logs and grumbling. He hears a noise and hides. In comes Trinculo the clown, searching for a place to get out of the rain. He sees Caliban (under a cloth) and thinks its some kind of dead man-fish. But he decides to crawl under Caliban's cloth anyway to protect himself from the thunder. Stephano, the butler, comes in drunk and can't figure out what kind of creature he is seeing. Trinculo reveals himself. Caliban decides to become their servant after they give him sack (a type of alcohol).

Act III

Back at Prospero's place, Miranda has secretly gone to see Ferdinand. They reveal their love for each other. Prospero, who has been invisibly watching, is glad.

Caliban has decided he will serve Stephano because Stephano has the bottle. He encourages Stephano to become king of the island by killing Prospero. Ariel makes Trinculo look bad by putting words in his mouth that make him seem to disagree. This gets him into trouble with Stephano.

On the other side of the island, the king's men are tired and decide to rest. In come beautiful spirits who set up a feast. The men start to eat, when Ariel, in the figure of a harpy, berates them and recounts how each man took part in the overthrow of Prospero. The men are astounded and run for it.

Act IV

Prospero apologizes to Miranda and Ferdinand for his tests, then starts a large ceremony, including goddesses, celebrating their engagement. In the middle of it, Prospero remembers that Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban are coming to kill him. He ends the ceremony, sends everyone away, then sends Ariel to hang some fancy garments to tempt Trinculo and Stephano.. In they come. Caliban wants to kill Prospero immediately, but Trinculo and Stephano get sidetracked by the clothes and start beating Caliban. Prospero sends spirits to chase and torment them.

Act V

Now that his enemies are here, Prospero seems ready to take his revenge but Ariel gives him information that causes him to be merciful. He tells him to go bring them in and then invokes all the spirits he has used, promising to give up his magic when he is done. Ariel brings them in (under a spell). Prospero dresses himself in his old duke's clothing and reveals himself. The men are amazed, he forgives them and requests the return of his dukedom. He then reveals Miranda and Ferdinand to the group and there is a grand reunion.

The sailors are brought in (by Ariel), then Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban. All is resolved and Prospero promises to tell the story of life on the island, then send them all safely back to Naples--and he to Milan. All go into his cell (his shelter). Prospero frees Ariel who disappears, then Prospero breaks his magical staff. Finally he speaks to the audience, asking them to free him by clapping their hands..

Post-performance

People/Happenings in the play

Multiple choice

- Prospero makes his magic with:
a) his book b) his cloak c) his staff d) all of these.
- The only person who helped Prospero when he was cast out of Milan was:
a) Alonso b) Gonzalo c) Sebastian d) Antonio
- Prospero's island seems to lie in:
a) the Atlantic b) the Caribbean c) the Mediterranean d) the Black Sea
- When Prospero refers to his cell, he means:
a) his house b) his jail c) his church d) his magic
- Why didn't Prospero stop his brother from taking the dukedom?
a) He was out of the country. b) He was too busy with his study of magic. c) He was taking care of his daughter. d) He was ill.
- Antonio took the dukedom from Prospero with the help of:
a) Ariel b) Gonzalo c) Alonso, King of Naples d) Sebastian.
- What do Trinculo and Stephano have in common with Antonio and Sebastian.
a) They are drunkards b) They are twins c) They are plotting to murder someone d) They are all from Milan.
- Who does Prospero say is Caliban's father:
a) Prospero b) Sycorax c) Alonso d) the devil.
- Where was Ariel when Prospero arrived?

a) imprisoned in a tree b) imprisoned in a cave c) he brought her from Milan d) on the other side of the island.

10. Prospero's "art" is:

a) Tai chi b) log sculptures c) his magic d) sand paintings

11. What amount of time passes in the play?

a) a few hours b) a few days c) a week d) a month

12. One of Prospero's favorite punishments for Caliban is:

a) pinching all over b) locking up in a cave c) chaining the neck and feet together d) feeding him only bread and water.

**Matching (match the character with the description or line spoken by him/her/it)
(more than one answer may fit)**

- | | | |
|--------------|-------|---|
| 1. Miranda | _____ | a) "thou let'st thy fortune sleep" |
| 2. Prospero | _____ | b) "what's past is prologue, what to come in
yours and my discharge" |
| 3. Caliban | _____ | c) "I flam'd amazement" |
| 4. Ariel | _____ | d) "What see'st thou else in the dark
backward and abysm of time?" |
| 5. Ferdinand | _____ | e) "This island's mine" |
| 6. Gonzalo | _____ | f) Prospero's daughter |
| 7. Antonio | _____ | g) "How lush, how lusty the grass looks" |
| 8. Trinculo | _____ | h) former duke of Milan |
| 9. Stephano | _____ | i) "The ditty does remember my drown'd father" |
| | | j) Alonso's son |
| | | k) " Sir, are not you my father?" |
| | | l) "misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows" |
| | | m) "O brave new world" |
| | | n) Prospero's servant |
| | | o) "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance." |
| | | p) "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." |
| | | q) " I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject" |
| | | r) "The isle is full of noises" |
| | | s) "I do begin to have bloody thoughts." |

Language

Match the original line with the modern meaning.

1. "Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him."
2. "What's past is prologue"

A) I never even thought of asking about it.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>3. " I endowed thy purposes with words that made them known."</p> <p>4. "But this rough magic, I here abjure"</p> <p>5. "Here's neither bush nor shrub to bear off Any weather at all."</p> <p>6. "Ariel, they charge exactly is performed"</p> <p>7. "What seest thou else in the dark backward backward and abysm of time"</p> <p>8. "Let me remember thee what thou hast promised"</p> <p>9. ""More to know did never meddle with my thoughts"</p> <p>10. "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance"</p> <p>11. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on"</p> | <p>B) We are insubstantial and won't last.</p> <p>C) What came before is only the beginning.</p> <p>D) He doesn't look like he's marked for death.</p> <p>E) I am giving up these dark arts.</p> <p>F) There's nothing here to hide under.</p> <p>G) I taught you how to speak.</p> <p>H) What else do you remember?</p> <p>I) You did exactly as I asked.</p> <p>J) Let me remind you about your promise.</p> <p>K) It's better to be kind than to take revenge.</p> |
|--|---|

Match the example with the English usage they illustrate.
alliteration simile metaphor irony

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. "Dearly my delicate Ariel. Do not approach til thou dost hear me call."</p> <p>2. "The fringed curtain of thine eye advance and say what thou seest yond"</p> <p>3. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on"</p> <p>4. "I have suffered with those that I saw suffer."</p> <p>5. "Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him, his complexion is perfect gallows"</p> <p>6. "I am not Stephano, but a cramp"</p> <p>7. "The ditty does remember my drown'd father"</p> <p>8. "Slave! Caliban! Thou earth, thou, speak!"</p> <p>9. "Make thyself like a nymph o'the sea"</p> <p>10. "Would I have never married my daughter there: For coming thence, my son is lost."</p> | <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> |
|---|---|

Questions for thought.

1. If Prospero is a magician, why didn't he stop his brother from taking over? Discuss how his magic changes from Milan to the island?

2. What did Prospero gain personally by his magic? by giving it up? How does this relate to Shakespeare's life?
3. Part of the premise of *The Tempest* is that, left in a totally "natural" environment, man will revert to his true self. Prospero provided this for his enemies, by setting up certain situations for each, and then observed.
4. Describe the situation each set of characters falls into on the island, their responses, and what it reveals about the characters.
 - a) Antonio and Sebastian
 - b) Trinculo and Stephano
 - c) Ferdinand
 - d) Alonso
5. It has been argued that Prospero and *The Tempest* reflect the attitude of white Europeans (especially of the Colonial eras) toward "natives." Explain.

EXTRA

How does Prospero's tale about how they were expelled from Milan show that Shakespeare's knowledge of Italy was not entirely accurate?

What other Shakespeare plays illustrate the contrast between the "civilized" world and the more "natural" world? Compare and contrast how these different "natural" worlds affect the characters.

Special Encore! Trademarks

Shakespeare's primary company probably had about fifteen actors per show, but we know that in the evenings some members of the company played on tour. Often playing for patrons in their homes, this smaller troupe of players often had only five or six actors.

Encore! is truly privileged to continue this tradition. Have a look at *The Tempest's* cast of characters. How would you cast the show with just five people? How would you cast it with fourteen?

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