

The Tempest

Many see the playwright depicting himself, a magician capable of conjuring entire worlds, creating tempests, wrecking ships and rescuing nobles, educating and colonizing, taming and redeeming, then laying his pen down for good. Surrendering his powers to the vasty deep. Shakespeare's powers come from letters, from his books. His education.

Here's Caliban (anagram for cannibal?) in Act III:

Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him,
I' th' afternoon to sleep: there thou mayst brain him,
Having first seized his books, or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember
First to possess his books; for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command: they all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books.
He has brave utensils,--for so he calls them--
Which when he has a house, he'll deck withal
And that most deeply to consider is
The beauty of his daughter; he himself
Calls her a nonpareil

And in Act IV, scene 2, listen to Prospero himself and judge whether you hear Shakespeare himself:

PROSPERO
You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismay'd: be cheerful, sir.
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-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Ye 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. Sir, I am vex'd;
Bear with my weakness; my brain is troubled:
Be not disturb'd with my infirmity:
If you be pleased, retire into my cell

And there repose: a turn or two I'll walk,
To still my beating mind.

The play set on a mostly deserted, barren island inhabited only by Prospero, his daughter Miranda, Prospero's native slave, Caliban, daughter of Sycorax, and (sort of) Ariel, his spirit indentured servant working for his own release.

By setting a mini-civilization in otherwise uncorrupted nature, Shakespeare is doing his thing: He's contrasting the court with nature, corrupt "civilization" with uncorrupted, free, rustic, dangerous nature. Caliban is nature; Miranda is nurture. Many read into this a critique of England's efforts to conquer the New World, because the native in this story, Caliban, representing the colonized, the slave, is ultimately a failure of Prospero's art and education. Caliban hates his master, as we see above. Prospero and his books is the cultivated, learned man. Caliban is the natural man.

A little bit of background: The text was first printed as part of the First Folio in 1623, though play written early 1610. Notably, it's the first play in the volume even though it's one of Shakespeare's last plays. Scholars agree that this is likely least "corrupted" text in canon because this play has perhaps the most complete stage directions as any in the Folio.

In Shakespeare's time, colonization was defended as a bringing of true religion to the savages. Natives need to be "civilized." A contradiction, because at the very same time, the myth held that pure nature is naturally pure. Uncorrupted. The "natural man" is the uncorrupted man.

The play also celebrates the self and the soul as a product of the battle between reason and passions (the Rider and the Elephant). Ferdinand is able to tame his passions and to be, therefore, a worthy suitor to Miranda, which is probably the real reason Prospero brings the shipwrecked party to his shores. The reason isn't primarily, then, the revenge it seems. Shakespeare at least hints that what rules us also defines for us what is good, or what we think is good, or what we think is worth pursuing.

This tension is presented through the many fools in the play, "beasts" ruled only by "passions," seeing and pursuing only the "goods" that passion can conceive, such as power. Several in the party seek power here, to become ruler of this distant rock.

Shakespeare also presents harmony in marriage, marriage as harmony. Ferdinand, who is ruled by both passion and reason, is joined with Miranda, the virginal, educated, western princess in this Garden of Eden as the sort of mythical Adam and Eve from which all future population will come, and

Prospero orchestrates it all, as all Dads not so secretly wish to do. (BC's Toyota Forerunner story.)

Prospero and Miranda were exiled by being drifted out to sea on a hulk of a mast-less, sail-less boat, ending up on this island. They were sent from "civilization" to this uncorrupted, isolated, uncivilized natural preserve. (So whatever law they had, they invented for themselves. What should their law do? Ha!)

We note the very different reactions of the shipwrecked crew upon landing. Gonzalo sees paradise. Antonio and Sebastian a career opportunity in the absence of civilization and, therefore, a government. Antonio sees also a chance to rule again, making him a fool. Notably, Caliban sees these fools as gods. (Caliban: "I'll be wise hereafter/And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass/Was I to take this drunkard for a god" V. i. 299-301.)

Now to some choice excerpts, which cover many of the themes of our course, including education, the theater of the mind, love (both fatherly/parental and romantic), identity negotiation, redemption and legacy. As added bonuses, we get colonization, nature v. nurture, and the spirit world.

Act I, scene 2

>>Miranda asked her Dad, why didn't those who exiled us not simply kill us?

PROSPERO

My tale (AH! Narrative! Story! The power of narrative!) provokes that question. Dear, they durst not,
So dear the love my people bore me, nor set
A mark so bloody on the business, but
With colours fairer painted their foul ends.
In few, they hurried us aboard a bark,
Bore us some leagues to sea; where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a boat, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
Instinctively had quit it: there they hoist us,
To cry to the sea that roar'd to us, to sigh
To the winds whose pity, sighing back again,
Did us but loving wrong.

MIRANDA

Alack, what trouble
Was I then to you!

PROSPERO

O, a cherubim

Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile.

Infused with a fortitude from heaven,

When I have deck'd the sea with drops full salt,

Under my burthen groan'd; which raised in me

An undergoing stomach, to bear up

Against what should ensue.

MIRANDA

How came we ashore?

PROSPERO

By Providence divine.

Some food we had and some fresh water that

A noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,

Out of his charity, being then appointed

Master of this design, did give us, with

Rich garments, linens, stuffs and necessaries,

Which since have steaded much; so, of his gentleness,

Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me

From mine own library with volumes that

I prize above my dukedom.

MIRANDA

Would I might

But ever see that man!

PROSPERO

Now I arise:

Resumes his mantle

Sit still, and hear the last of our sea-sorrow.

Here in this island we arrived; and here

Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit

Than other princesses can that have more time

For vainer hours and tutors not so careful.

MIRANDA

Heavens thank you for't! And now, I pray you, sir,

For still 'tis beating in my mind, your reason

For raising this sea-storm?

PROSPERO

Know thus far forth.

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,

Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. Here cease more questions:
Thou art inclined to sleep; 'tis a good dulness,
And give it way: I know thou canst not choose.

MIRANDA sleeps

Same scene

>>Look for colonization, slavery, exploitation, miscegnation and identity,
racism >> A little learning can be dangerous

CALIBAN

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both! a south-west blow on ye
And blister you all o'er!

PROSPERO

For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made 'em.

CALIBAN

I must eat my dinner.
This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,
Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' the island.

PROSPERO

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.

CALIBAN

O ho, O ho! would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

PROSPERO

Abhorred slave,
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which
good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock,
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

CALIBAN

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

Later in the same, incredibly long scene
>>Look for love (always!), in this case father-daughter

FERDINAND

The ditty does remember my drown'd father.
This is no mortal business, nor no sound
That the earth owes. I hear it now above me.

PROSPERO

The fringed curtains of thine eye advance
And say what thou seest yond.

MIRANDA

What is't? a spirit?
Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,
It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.

PROSPERO

No, wench; it eats and sleeps and hath such senses
As we have, such. This gallant which thou seest
Was in the wreck; and, but he's something stain'd
With grief that's beauty's canker, thou mightst call him
A goodly person: he hath lost his fellows
And strays about to find 'em.

MIRANDA

I might call him
A thing divine, for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble.

PROSPERO

[Aside] It goes on, I see,
As my soul prompts it. Spirit, fine spirit! I'll free thee
Within two days for this.

FERDINAND

Most sure, the goddess
On whom these airs attend! Vouchsafe my prayer
May know if you remain upon this island;
And that you will some good instruction give
How I may bear me here: my prime request,
Which I do last pronounce, is, O you wonder!
If you be maid or no?

MIRANDA

No wonder, sir;
But certainly a maid.

FERDINAND

My language! heavens!
I am the best of them that speak this speech,
Were I but where 'tis spoken.

PROSPERO

How? the best?

What wert thou, if the King of Naples heard thee?

FERDINAND

A single thing, as I am now, that wonders
To hear thee speak of Naples. He does hear me;
And that he does I weep: myself am Naples,
Who with mine eyes, never since at ebb, beheld
The king my father wreck'd.

MIRANDA

Alack, for mercy!

FERDINAND

Yes, faith, and all his lords; the Duke of Milan
And his brave son being twain.

PROSPERO

[Aside] The Duke of Milan
And his more braver daughter could control thee,
If now 'twere fit to do't. At the first sight
They have changed eyes. Delicate Ariel,
I'll set thee free for this.

To FERDINAND

A word, good sir;

I fear you have done yourself some wrong: a word.

MIRANDA

Why speaks my father so ungently? This
Is the third man that e'er I saw, the first
That e'er I sigh'd for: pity move my father
To be inclined my way!

FERDINAND

O, if a virgin,
And your affection not gone forth, I'll make you
The queen of Naples.

PROSPERO

Soft, sir! one word more.

Aside

They are both in either's powers; but this swift business
I must uneasy make, lest too light winning
Make the prize light.

To FERDINAND

One word more; I charge thee
That thou attend me: thou dost here usurp
The name thou owest not; and hast put thyself
Upon this island as a spy, to win it
From me, the lord on't.

FERDINAND

No, as I am a man.

MIRANDA

There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple:
If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
Good things will strive to dwell with't.

PROSPERO

Follow me.
Speak not you for him; he's a traitor. Come;
I'll manacle thy neck and feet together:
Sea-water shalt thou drink; thy food shall be
The fresh-brook muscles, wither'd roots and husks
Wherein the acorn cradled. Follow.

FERDINAND

No;
I will resist such entertainment till
Mine enemy has more power.
Draws, and is charmed from moving

MIRANDA

O dear father,
Make not too rash a trial of him, for
He's gentle and not fearful.

PROSPERO

What? I say,
My foot my tutor? Put thy sword up, traitor;
Who makest a show but darrest not strike, thy conscience
Is so possess'd with guilt: come from thy ward,
For I can here disarm thee with this stick
And make thy weapon drop.

MIRANDA
Beseech you, father.

PROSPERO
Hence! hang not on my garments.

MIRANDA
Sir, have pity;
I'll be his surety.

PROSPERO
Silence! one word more
Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What!
An advocate for an imposter! hush!
Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he,
Having seen but him and Caliban: foolish wench!
To the most of men this is a Caliban
And they to him are angels.

MIRANDA
My affections
Are then most humble; I have no ambition
To see a goodlier man.

PROSPERO
Come on; obey:
Thy nerves are in their infancy again
And have no vigour in them.

FERDINAND
So they are;
My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up.
My father's loss, the weakness which I feel,
The wreck of all my friends, nor this man's threats,
To whom I am subdued, are but light to me,
Might I but through my prison once a day
Behold this maid: all corners else o' the earth
Let liberty make use of; space enough
Have I in such a prison.

PROSPERO
[Aside] It works.

To FERDINAND

Come on.
Thou hast done well, fine Ariel!

To FERDINAND
Follow me.

To ARIEL

Hark what thou else shalt do me.

MIRANDA
Be of comfort;
My father's of a better nature, sir,
Than he appears by speech: this is unwonted
Which now came from him.

PROSPERO
Thou shalt be free
As mountain winds: but then exactly do
All points of my command.

ARIEL
To the syllable.

PROSPERO
Come, follow. Speak not for him.

Exeunt

Act III, scene 1
Before PROSPERO'S Cell.

In this first passage, listen for redemption and flow

Enter FERDINAND, bearing a log

FERDINAND
There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off: some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
And makes my labours pleasures: O, she is

Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed,
And he's composed of harshness. I must remove
Some thousands of these logs and pile them up,
Upon a sore injunction: my sweet mistress
Weeps when she sees me work, and says, such baseness
Had never like executor. I forget:
But these sweet thoughts do even refresh my labours,
Most busy lest, when I do it.

Enter MIRANDA; and PROSPERO at a distance, unseen

MIRANDA

Alas, now, pray you,
Work not so hard: I would the lightning had
Burnt up those logs that you are enjoin'd to pile!
Pray, set it down and rest you: when this burns,
'Twill weep for having wearied you. My father
Is hard at study; pray now, rest yourself;
He's safe for these three hours.

FERDINAND

O most dear mistress,
The sun will set before I shall discharge
What I must strive to do.

MIRANDA

If you'll sit down,
I'll bear your logs the while: pray, give me that;
I'll carry it to the pile.

FERDINAND

No, precious creature;
I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,
Than you should such dishonour undergo,
While I sit lazy by.

MIRANDA

It would become me
As well as it does you: and I should do it
With much more ease; for my good will is to it,
And yours it is against.

PROSPERO

Poor worm, thou art infected!
This visitation shows it.

MIRANDA
You look wearily.

FERDINAND
No, noble mistress;'tis fresh morning with me
When you are by at night. I do beseech you--
Chiefly that I might set it in my prayers--
What is your name?

MIRANDA
Miranda.--O my father,
I have broke your hest to say so!

FERDINAND
Admired Miranda!
Indeed the top of admiration! worth
What's dearest to the world! Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear: for several virtues
Have I liked several women; never any
With so fun soul, but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed
And put it to the foil: but you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature's best!

>>Miranda knows only two men, each a paradigm. She has no one, then, to compare these two men, one her father and the other her suitor.

MIRANDA
I do not know
One of my sex; no woman's face remember,
Save, from my glass, mine own; nor have I seen
More that I may call men than you, good friend,
And my dear father: how features are abroad,
I am skillless of; but, by my modesty,
The jewel in my dower, I would not wish
Any companion in the world but you,
Nor can imagination form a shape,
Besides yourself, to like of. But I prattle
Something too wildly and my father's precepts
I therein do forget.

FERDINAND

I am in my condition
A prince, Miranda; I do think, a king;
I would, not so!--and would no more endure
This wooden slavery than to suffer
The flesh-fly blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service; there resides,
To make me slave to it; and for your sake
Am I this patient log--man.

MIRANDA

Do you love me?

FERDINAND

O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound
And crown what I profess with kind event
If I speak true! if hollowly, invert
What best is boded me to mischief! I
Beyond all limit of what else i' the world
Do love, prize, honour you.

MIRANDA

I am a fool
To weep at what I am glad of.

PROSPERO

Fair encounter
Of two most rare affections! Heavens rain grace
On that which breeds between 'em!

FERDINAND

Wherefore weep you?

MIRANDA

At mine unworthiness that dare not offer
What I desire to give, and much less take
What I shall die to want. But this is trifling;
And all the more it seeks to hide itself,
The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning!
And prompt me, plain and holy innocence!
I am your wife, if you will marry me;
If not, I'll die your maid: to be your fellow
You may deny me; but I'll be your servant,
Whether you will or no.

FERDINAND
My mistress, dearest;
And I thus humble ever.

MIRANDA
My husband, then?

FERDINAND
Ay, with a heart as willing
As bondage e'er of freedom: here's my hand.

MIRANDA
And mine, with my heart in't; and now farewell
Till half an hour hence.

FERDINAND
A thousand thousand!

Exeunt FERDINAND and MIRANDA

Act IV, scene 1

>>Listen for Prospero's warning to Ferdinand not to take his daughter's virginity; I used these very words to Zack, who responded using Ferdinand's words.

>>Listen in Ferdinand's words for a description of the good life.

PROSPERO
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 minister'd,
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 lamps shall light you.

FERDINAND
As I hope
For quiet days, fair issue and long life,

With such love as 'tis now, the murkiest den,
The most opportune place, the strong'st suggestion.
Our worser genius can, shall never melt
Mine honour into lust, to take away
The edge of that day's celebration
When I shall think: or Phoebus' steeds are founder'd,
Or Night kept chain'd below.

PROSPERO

Fairly spoke.

Sit then and talk with her; she is thine own.

What, Ariel! my industrious servant, Ariel!

Enter ARIEL

...

PROSPERO

Look thou be true; do not give dalliance

Too much the rein: the strongest oaths are straw

To the fire i' the blood: be more abstemious,

Or else, good night your vow!

FERDINAND

I warrant you sir;

The white cold virgin snow upon my heart

Abates the ardour of my liver.