



[The Tempest](#), by William Shakespeare

In A Nutshell

The Tempest is a comedy that William Shakespeare wrote around 1610. This play is about a magician who was once banished to live on an island as a result of treachery, and how the magician avenges the wrongs committed against him. *The Tempest* is best known as Shakespeare's last play (if you're nitpicky, it's the last play he wrote entirely by himself), and is important as Shakespeare's goodbye to the theater. One of the most interesting thoughts you might hear about this play is that Prospero, the main character, is a sort of semi-autobiographical character for Shakespeare. From this perspective, the details of the plot become secondary; we should really pay attention to the story of a master craftsman coming to the realization that it's time to give up his art. Prospero's story about leaving behind his magic can also be viewed as Shakespeare's own feelings about giving up his art – writing plays. This sad but beautiful theme makes this a romantic play (in the heroic quest sense, though there is a fair bit of necking implied).

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- 1 The politics of ruling occupy much of the play – Prospero 's dukedom was taken from him, but he admits he did none of the duties of a ruler. Further, Caliban was the only inhabitant of the island, yet Prospero claims to be its ruler, taking on its locals as his servants. Are there just premises for ruling, or are they always pretenses? Is there room for titled rulers in the natural world?
- 2 What is the nature of possession in the play with regards to females? Is Miranda just an object, to be handed from father to husband? Miranda 's virginity is highly valued by the men around her, but does she even recognize it as important, or feel the same way? Is Miranda used by the men around her, or does she have agency too?
- 3 How relevant is race to this play? Can it be thought of as a proxy for ruled and ruler, given the time of England 's national conquests? Trinculo comments that the English will pay good money to see "a dead Indian" though they won 't give alms to a beggar, and Caliban is referred to as a dark monster of the earth, in contrast to Ariel being an airy spirit. Knowing what we know about Shakespeare 's other treatments of ethnicity (Othello the Moor and Shylock the Jewish moneylender, among others), do we have any frame of reference for Caliban as a native islander? What can we make of Caliban 's portrayal as a black man in many productions of the play?

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