

# Summary of the tempest - shakespeare birthplace trust

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



A fictitious theatrical art can only be enjoyed by the spectators only if they willingly, consciously, and, yet provisionally, choose to suspend their disbeliefs, to allow their imagination enjoy the indulgence of suspension of disbelief. Coleridge, a literary critic, suggests that a successful hoax is one that encourages its readers to suspend their disbelief, which does not necessarily mean to participate in the belief, rather to view the fiction as a possibility or truth for a moment, mainly to entertain that belief and enjoy it. This willed conscious choice relinquish rational of magic or transoceanic spirits begins by one's abandonment of disbelief and such decision requires a kind of faith put into work of literature for the purposes of enjoyment. Coleridge coined the term Poetic Faith to explain the way in which readers experience joy in a poem through momentary suspension of disbelief. The notion of poetic faith and its importance in attracting spectator's attention in hopes of disseminating the author's intended messages is vividly observed throughout *The Tempest* written by William Shakespeare. This extraordinary play exercises the audience's poetic faith as the story is entirely fictitious; it uses supernatural characters with a magical island as its setting in order to create a tone that is dreamy and magical. Shakespeare's use of a mysterious island with magical powers creates an imaginative story and the spectator has to have faith in the play to make the choice of suspending disbelief, in pursuit of gaining joy as they follow the plot without rational. In addition to poetic faith being an essential component in momentarily believing in the supernatural characters and a magical setting, it is also important for overall understanding of the play's themes, motifs, tone and genre. In the absence of poetic faith, potentially through rationalization, the audience fails to

accept fiction as reality, thus lacks the attention to follow the plot and understand Shakespeare's intended messages and themes. Although poetic faith is not a necessary component in all works of literature, its importance can be seen through *The Tempest* through Shakespeare's use of character's with supernatural abilities, a mysterious island as a setting and its significance in understanding the play's overall messages.

*The Tempest* invokes its audience to use poetic faith through the use of fictitious characters, particularly evident through Prospero, the protagonist in possession of magical powers, and Ariel, the spirit who helps Prospero. Central to the play's story is the main character, Prospero, who single-handedly generates the entire plot using various schemes, spells, magical manipulations in pursuit of designing his grand revenge and reestablishing his status as the Duke of Milan. Shakespeare develops Prospero as an enigmatic character who possesses and uses his magical knowledge throughout the play. For instance, Prospero uses his magical spells to rescue Ariel from a long imprisonment under a witch Sycorax and declares him as his spirit-helper until he decides to release him. It is evident that Prospero's magical spells renders him an extremely powerful role; thus, making his character and magical powers a central component of the plot that the audience must follow along to understand the story. Furthermore, Prospero's unwillingness to return Ariel's freedom is mainly due to his desire to use this spirit's immense powers. In Ariel's first line in the play he states, "To answer thy best pleasure, be 't to fly, to swim, to dive into the fire, to ride on the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding, task Ariel and all his quality." This line not only explains the spirit's various range of abilities and impressive

qualities, but also alludes to his power that can command a large number of other lesser-spirits. Shakespeare's use of magical powers and spirits as characters demands the audience to use poetic faith in order to suspend any disbeliefs, which otherwise would lead to their inability to interpret and focus on the plot. In particular, by incorporating magical power to the protagonist's character, rather than any of the other characters in the play emphasizes the importance of poetic faith in understanding the overall plot. In other words, failing to have faith in The Tempest's play would lead to the audience's inability to follow Prospero's character, who possess majority of the play's lines, leading to a vague understanding of the whole story. The possession of poetic faith is not only important in believing in the play's fictitious characters but also in accepting an imaginative magical island as the setting of the plot.

Most of the actions taken in The Tempest occurs in a small isolated, yet magical and illusionary island which once again implores the audience to have poetic faith in order to momentarily believe such place exists in reality. Although the real and precise location of island remains a mystery to Shakespeare scholars, this setting plays a significant role in developing a dreamy and mysterious atmosphere that is essential to the story's tone and theme. By setting a mystic atmosphere, Shakespeare can easily manipulate the audience's imagination and invoke a momentary belief in all the magical characters and actions taken place on the island. For example, by placing Prospero in charge of an island and allowing him to have possession over Ariel and his commanded spirits, strange and magical events continuously

occur in isolation of the outside world. In addition to that, by designating a remote island as essentially the only setting of the whole play, Shakespeare follows the Unity of Action - a component of the theory, proposed by Aristotle, called Classical Unities: the three essential components for a successful dramatic tragedy. Furthermore, the Unity of Action suggests that a play's plot should only contain one main setting in order to reduce other extraneous plot lines with little significance in order to redirect focus only on the main actions that help formulate the tragic story. By integrating the notion of Unity of Action, Shakespeare helps maintain the audience's attention on the strange events and magical actions taken by the characters rather than overwhelming them with insignificant details on different settings. Therefore, the use of an isolated island as the major setting on the play, Shakespeare avoids losing the spectator attention which would otherwise interrupt their poetic belief in the play.

The poetic faith allowed Shakespeare to use imagination, creativity, and art to establish a famous play which is read as exploration of colonialism and moral dilemmas, but this could potentially have some risks if the imaginations do not hook the audience successfully. If the author uses too much unreal moments along the story being beyond the imagination level of the audience, it may not attract the audience and one's attention if the spectator fails to imagine the events happening along the story or relates the events to some unrelated historical events. In addition to lose of audience's attention, there is potentially the risk of misinterpretation of the story and the message that is conveyed throughout the story. To conclude,

The Tempest might seem a simple imaginative story, but many important messages, interesting tonal fluctuations, and confictions are observed throughout the play by applying poetic faith, which in essence, is willing suspension of disbelief and sacrifice of realism for the sake of moment. The imaginative setting of the story in terms of the unity of time and the unity of the action help Shakespeare to emphasize the illusion of justice throughout the story which might not happen in the real life. The story is restricted to the island and it covers as much as time is required to complete the story. In other words, the real life may not be compatible with our natural sense of justice, expecting good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people, and injustice of the reality cannot be ignored in the real world. Sacrificing the realism for the sake of enjoyment gives an opportunity to the author to give magical power to Prospero, the main character of The Tempest, to take advantage of the features of the mysterious place and time to bring all his enemies at the same place. Prospero used his power to confront his enemies, to forgive them, to take his power back from them, and to relinquish his magic once he reprimanded Alonso, the king of Naples, and his brother, Antoni, for their treachery. Also, it is a considerable factor that the author establishes the idea of justice to give power and control to the good character of the story to make the bad characters of the story repent. This illustrates the importance of poetic faith and creativity of the author in shifting the story from threatening beginning to the happy ending although applying the poetic faith to the story could potentially represent some risks of inability of disbelief or misinterpretation of the story.