

# The tempest essay sample

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



The shipwreck in Act I, Scene 1, in a 1797 engraving based on a painting by George Romney

The *Tempest* is a play by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written in 1610–11, and thought by many critics to be the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone. It is set on a remote island, where Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, plots to restore his daughter Miranda to her rightful place using illusion and skillful manipulation. He conjures up a storm, the eponymous tempest, to lure his usurping brother Antonio and the complicit King Alonso of Naples to the island. There, his machinations bring about the revelation of Antonio's lowly nature, the redemption of the King, and the marriage of Miranda to Alonso's son, Ferdinand. There is no obvious single source for the plot of *The Tempest*, but researchers have seen parallels in Erasmus's *Naufragium*, Peter Martyr's *De orbe novo*, and an eyewitness report by William Strachey of the real-life shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* on the islands of Bermuda. In addition, one of Gonzalo's speeches is derived from Montaigne's essay *Of the Canibales*, and much of Prospero's renunciative speech is taken word for word from a speech by Medea in Ovid's poem *Metamorphoses*.

The masque in Act 4 may have been a later addition, possibly in honour of the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Frederick V in 1613. The play was first published in the First Folio of 1623. The story draws heavily on the tradition of the romance, and it was influenced by tragicomedy and the courtly masque and perhaps by the *commedia dell'arte*. It differs from Shakespeare's other plays in its observation of a stricter, more organised neoclassical style. Critics see *The Tempest* as explicitly concerned with its own nature as a play, frequently drawing links between Prospero's "art" and

theatrical illusion, and early critics saw Prospero as a representation of Shakespeare, and his renunciation of magic as signalling Shakespeare's farewell to the stage. The play portrays Prospero as a rational, and not an occultist, magician by providing a contrast to him in Sycorax: her magic is frequently described as destructive and terrible, where Prospero's is said to be wondrous and beautiful. Beginning in about 1950, with the publication of *Psychology of Colonization* by Octave Mannoni, *The Tempest* was viewed more and more through the lens of postcolonial theory—exemplified in adaptations like Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* set in Haiti—and there is even a scholarly journal on post-colonial criticism named after Caliban.

Because of the small role that women play in the story, *The Tempest* has not attracted much feminist analysis. Miranda is typically viewed as having completely internalised the patriarchal order of things, thinking of herself as subordinate to her father. *The Tempest* did not attract a significant amount of attention before the closing of the theatres in 1642, and only attained popularity after the Restoration, and then only in adapted versions. In the mid-19th century, theatre productions began to reinstate the original Shakespearean text, and in the 20th century, critics and scholars undertook a significant re-appraisal of the play's value, to the extent that it is now considered to be one of Shakespeare's greatest works.

It has been adapted numerous times in a variety of styles and formats: in music, at least 46 operas by composers such as Fromental Halévy, Zdeněk Fibich and Thomas Adès; orchestral works by Tchaikovsky, Arthur Sullivan and Arthur Honegger; and songs by such diverse artists as Ralph Vaughan

Williams, Michael Nyman and Pete Seeger; in literature, Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *With a Guitar, To Jane* and W. H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*; novels by Aimé Césaire and *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence; in paintings by William Hogarth, Henry Fuseli, and John Everett Millais; and on screen, ranging through a hand-tinted version of Herbert Beerbohm Tree's 1905 stage performance, the science fiction film *Forbidden Planet* in 1956, Peter Greenaway's 1991 *Prospero's Books* featuring John Gielgud as Prospero, to Julie Taymor's 2010 film version which changed Prospero to Prospera (as played by Helen Mirren), and Des McAnuff's 2010 Stratford Shakespeare Festival production which starred Christopher Plummer.

#### Characters

\* Prospero, the main character. The overthrown Duke of Milan. He now lives on an island and has become a great sorcerer. \* Miranda, Prospero's daughter, who falls in love with the Prince of Naples, Ferdinand. \* Ariel, a mischievous spirit who does Prospero's bidding and is visible only to him. He became Prospero's "slave" because he was saved by Prospero from being trapped in a tree by Sycorax. \* Caliban, a villainous island native, son of a witch named Sycorax (see below), who ruled the island before Prospero arrived. He now works as Prospero's slave but despises him. In the play, he is known to have said many colorful curses. An example is "a southwest wind blow on ye and blister ye o'er". \* Sycorax, a deceased Algerian sorceress and mother of Caliban who was banished to the island before Prospero arrived and enslaved the spirits on the island, including Ariel. She is not seen or heard in the play, only referred to by other characters. \* Iris, Ceres, and Juno, spirits and goddesses

- \* Alonso, King of Naples
- \* Sebastian, Alonso's treacherous brother.
- \* Antonio, Prospero's brother, who usurped his position as Duke of Milan. He and Sebastian plot unsuccessfully to kill Alonso and his family to come to the throne.
- \* Ferdinand, Alonso's son. Falls in love with Miranda.
  
- \* Gonzalo, a kindly Neapolitan courtier, who secretly provided Prospero and Miranda with food, water, and books when they were pushed out to sea.
- \* Adrian and Francisco, lords.
- \* Trinculo, the King's jester and friend of Stephano.
- \* Stephano, the King's drunken steward and friend of Trinculo who tries to help Caliban overthrow his master
- \* Boatswain
- \* Master of the ship