

Study Guide on William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Act V begins with Prospero's announcing, "Now does my project gather to a head" (V.1.1¹). What is Prospero's project over the course of this play?

- Is it to encourage repentance and forgiveness? (See V.1.25–30.) What aspects of mercy and moral recognition seem to be in Prospero's mind?
- Is it "to please" (Epilogue 13)? If so, to please whom, and to what end?
 - Does he intend to make his daughter happy?
 - What pleasures does Prospero recognize in the play, and how does he treat them?
- What aspects of justice, politics, and right order are at work in Prospero's project? Does he seek to get back his rightful dukedom? To restore right order and peace to Milan and Naples?
- How might these different goals relate to one another—are they woven together? If so, does one of these nevertheless seem foremost in Prospero's mind?

By the end of the play, what, if anything, has Prospero accomplished for each character?

- Does Alonso better understand himself and his errors? Has his moral character improved? What has he recognized about the dukedom of Milan, and why does he resign it to Prospero (V.1.118–9)?
- Consider Ferdinand. What did Prospero intend for him? Has this plan come to fruition?
 - How has Ferdinand's character changed by the end of the play, if at all?
 - On account of his time on the island, will Ferdinand be a better husband, son-in-law, ruler? Has he learned about or improved in any other aspects of his life?
- Do Sebastian and Antonio regret their sins and repent? If not, are there signs that they might be on the road to recognition and repentance?
- How has he dealt with Stephano and Trinculo? Have they learned anything from their few hours free from all authority? For men like these, is authority necessary?
- What, if anything, does Prospero accomplish with respect to Caliban?
 - Are we to believe what Caliban says at V.1.295–8: "I'll be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace . . ."? Has Caliban learned about himself and proper order, or is he just glad to be free from Stephano and Trinculo?
 - How do you think Caliban will conduct himself once he is alone on the island, just as he was before Prospero arrived?

¹ Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Edited by Peter Holland. New York: Penguin Group, 1999. (All act, scene and line numbers refer to this edition.)



- What has caused these changes in the characters? Do they recognize Prospero as deserving to rule, or do they merely fear him and his powers? Have any of them recognized the desirability and greatness of justice and mercy?

How did Prospero lose the dukedom of Milan? Was he at fault in losing it? If so, what was his error? (See 1.2.66–116.)

How does Prospero regain his dukedom? How has he arrived at such a state as to be able to say, “At this hour / lies at my mercy all mine enemies” (IV.1.262–3)? What has he learned, or how has he changed, in order to achieve this?

- Has he recognized the necessity of action and actively ruling, something beyond speculative thought and studying? (Consider, for example, IV.1.139–42, along with the stage directions preceding.)
- Depending on your answer, has this change been an improvement for himself, for his daughter, and for his future rule of Milan?
- How do you think being charged with raising his daughter, Miranda, may have effected these changes in Prospero?

What kind of rule does Prospero exert over the island during his exile? How has he governed each of the other three long-term inhabitants?

- How does Prospero rule Ariel? How do praise and threatening, alternately, play a role in this? Do Ariel’s nature as a spirit and his fervent desire for freedom demand this manner of rule?
- What kind of nature does Caliban seem to have? Is he ruled by reason, brute passions, or a mix? Does this require the treatment that he receives from Prospero? (See I.2.341–51.)
- How has Prospero brought up his daughter, Miranda?
 - What characteristics, desires, and inclinations does she exhibit? Consider her reaction to the storm-tossed ship, her interaction with her father, her disgust with Caliban, her relation to Ferdinand, and her reaction to first seeing the rest of the ship-wrecked party.
 - What does Miranda’s character say about Prospero’s rule? Is her virtue sufficient to call him a good ruler over all the island?

Does this play portray knowledge or education as a good to every person?

- Compare the results of Prospero’s education of Miranda with the results of educating Caliban.
- Was it generous or naïve for Prospero to try to educate and civilize Caliban, and for Miranda to teach him to speak? (See I.2.351–65.)
- Did Caliban’s perversion come from a natural necessity, or could he have chosen to become civilized?

Why do you think Shakespeare named this play *The Tempest*?



- Which “tempest” is referred to—is it merely the physical storm with which the play begins, or are there other significations?
- Note also the three places where thunder is heard (I.1, II.2., III.3). What is the significance of these three instances? What does the thunder signify or foreshadow in each? Are the tempests many in number, or one? Are they many in kind, or one?

Why does Prospero decide to renounce his arts? “But this rough magic / I here abjure . . . / I’ll break my staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I’ll drown my book” (V.1.50–7). Does he desire to have a different kind of life during his second rule over Milan? If so, in what way? What is the purpose of the epilogue, and how does it relate to the conclusion of the play?

Recall the early lines of Antonio, as the tempest is raging about the ship: “Where’s the master, bos’n?” (1.1.12) What does Shakespeare teach us in this play about “the master”? Given that political realities are at times tempestuous, who should rule?

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.

