

National Division
English Department
Grade: S2
Class:

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Name:
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The Tempest Act 5, Scene 1 and Epilogue Summary + Questions

Prospero, accompanied by Ariel, enters the stage wearing his magic robes again. He has everything under control: "Now does my project gather to a head./My charms crack not, my spirits obey, and time/Goes upright with his carriage." Ariel reports on where the king and his followers are. The whole group of men is deeply distressed, especially "good old Lord Gonzalo" whose "tears runs down his beard like winter's drops/From eaves of reeds." Ariel suggests that if Prospero saw them, his heart would soften toward them. Prospero is moved and agrees that as a fellow human, he should be even more compassionate than Ariel since his wrongdoers have shown repentance. Acknowledging that "The rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance," he commands Ariel to release all the prisoners and bring them to him.

Prospero draws a circle on the ground. He then speaks to the various spirits he has used in this magical work over these last years. He acknowledges their role and names some of the things he has been able to do through his magic. But then he explains his plan to give up his magic by breaking his staff and drowning his book after he finishes dealing with King Alonso and his men.

Ariel brings Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, Antonio, and the other men into the circle Prospero has drawn. They are still paralyzed by a magic spell and do not recognize Prospero or hear him. Prospero announces that he will "cure thy brains" and restore their senses. Seeing his loyal friend Gonzalo, Prospero is moved to tears and promises he will return home safely. Then Prospero turns to the men who forced him into exile and recalls their crimes, including Sebastian and Antonio's murderous plot against Alonso. Instead of condemning them as expected, he forgives them. He takes off his magic robes and puts on his former ducal robes before waking the men. He reminds Ariel that the spirit will soon receive freedom but first must fetch the sailors still under a sleeping spell in the ship.

When the king and his men wake they see Prospero as he looked when he was the duke of Milan. They are frightened by the sight, not sure whether it is really Prospero or some kind of ghost. They are also filled with guilt for their role in

deposing Prospero of his dukedom. But Prospero, instead of condemning them, comforts and welcomes them, showing great honor toward his old and loyal friend Gonzalo. He tells Sebastian and Antonio he knows of their plot against Alonso, but he will not reveal it. He publicly forgives even his brother, but demands, "My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know/Thou must restore." Antonio does not say anything in response.

The grieving Alonso tells Prospero about the loss of his son Ferdinand. Prospero withholds information about Ferdinand's safety and commiserates with the king about the loss of his own daughter. Alonso wishes that the two young people "were living both in Naples,/The King and Queen there!" Prospero then reveals Ferdinand and Miranda happily playing chess together in his house. When Miranda sees the crew, servants, and nobles, she exclaims, "O wonder!/How many goodly creatures are there here!/How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world/That has such people in 't!" Alonso is astonished that Ferdinand is alive, and Ferdinand is overjoyed to see that his father lives. The prince explains to his father who Miranda is and the nature of their coming marriage. Alonso, remembering his guilt in the exile of Prospero, begins to apologize, but Prospero stops him with an eye to the hopeful future: "Let us not burden our remembrances with/A heaviness that's gone."

Gonzalo says a prayer of thanksgiving and retraces all that has happened and how much has been gained since their journey began. Ariel then appears with the sailors who share the amazing news that the ship is in perfect condition. It is Ariel who has done this reparation of the boat, and Prospero praises the spirit for it.

Finally it is time for Prospero to deal with Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are brought in, still drunk. Prospero describes their bad behavior, including Stephano's plan to become king of the island. Stephano, coming to his senses, realizes that "I should have been a sore one, then." Prospero sends the men away to get cleaned up before he pardons them. Caliban admits that he was foolish to see Trinculo as a god and promises to seek Prospero's favor in the future.

Prospero tells the men that the next day they will all set sail for Naples to celebrate the wedding of Ferdinand and Miranda. Then he will resume his position as duke of Milan where he will grow old in peace. Then he frees the faithful Ariel.

The play finishes with an epilogue that Prospero speaks directly to the audience. He asks to be released from the play so that he, a regular man now, can travel to Naples. He reminds them that the goal of his magic was to please, and now he wants to be set free.

Analysis

At the beginning of this scene Prospero is wearing his magic robes and has everything under his control. Prospero is at the height of his power. Yet Ariel reminds him there is a limit to this magical event they are orchestrating, which began "When first I raised the tempest." The conversation hints that the theatrical pageant is coming to an end, and this end was planned from the very beginning. This suggests Prospero's magic was only to serve a certain purpose and not to gain magical control for good.

No sooner has it become clear how powerful Prospero is than he uses his power to reverse what seemed to be his plan of revenge. After considering how much more compassionate he should be to penitent humans than Ariel, he reflects on how important it is to use reason and virtue to control emotions and vengeance. The theme of forgiveness and restoration reemerges, completing the transformation of the power of revenge into a beneficial power produced for the good of many.

When Prospero makes his speech to the spirits and vows to "break my staff" and "drown my book," it isn't yet entirely clear why he is ready to give up all his magic. He has gotten to the height of his power and orchestrated everything he wanted to, but when it comes time to act out his final revenge he is unwilling to harm anyone. Perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting great power does not satisfy unless it is used for good.

Instead of enacting justice against men who deserve some kind of punishment, Prospero turns justice on its head and extends mercy and forgiveness, even if it is "unnatural." In many of his revelations about what the men have done to him, he is speaking while the men are still under a spell. They do not hear him. In this way the old magician absorbs the crimes himself and does not exact payment for their evil. There is a unique power in mercy and forgiveness to restore the characters in the play. Sebastian is so surprised by Prospero's behavior, in fact, that he first ascribes it to evil rather than good: "The devil speaks in him." The forgiveness is almost too good to believe—in fact, it creates its own "magical"

power because it comes out of nowhere and restores people to good relationships. Justice does require, however, that Prospero's dukedom be restored.

The theme of power continues through the end of the play, although now it is not for the purpose of exploitation but for restoration. Prospero has given up his ultimate plan of revenge, but he is still in control of the events. He controls Sebastian and Antonio by not revealing their treachery against King Alonso. And he remains in control of Alonso, as well, by depicting his own lost daughter and explaining that he lost her "In this last tempest," before revealing that both Miranda and Ferdinand are alive. All the way to the final lines of the play, Prospero uses his knowledge and power to manage the outcome of the events. However, since Antonio never repents and does not offer the dukedom to Prospero, the repentance and forgiveness of the last scene seem incomplete, which implies that while Prospero can manipulate circumstances, his power over individuals is limited.

The audience is reminded of Miranda's innocence when she sees so many humans together for the first time. Despite the corruption that has tainted the various characters, Shakespeare reminds the audience of the marvel of humanity through Miranda's joy at seeing so many people. Perhaps Shakespeare is reminding his audience there is value in stepping back and marveling at the wonder that makes humanity unique in the world. Channeling the good in humanity creates a power that is difficult to reckon with.

The theme of magic supported by the symbols of sleeping and dreaming emphasize the natural and unnatural elements of the events on the island. When the boatswain and other sailors return, they marvel that they "were dead of sleep" and when they woke up they were free and the ship was in perfect order. "Even in a dream were we divided from them," the boatswain says. Shakespeare continues to keep the lines murky between illusion and reality through the use of Prospero's magic, just as Shakespeare uses the false reality of a play to show the audience the way humans and the world function.

At the end of the play Prospero's use of magic and his control of the island and its spirit residents can come to an end because he has regained his position as duke. Now he can "retire me to my Milan, where/Every third thought shall be my grave." The magician has grown old, and he is eager to re-embrace a more normal, human condition.

The character of Caliban comes full circle by the end of the play when he recognizes "What a thrice-double ass/Was I to take this drunkard for a god,/And worship this dull fool!" He vows renewed allegiance to Prospero as he admits to Prospero's power of him and the futility of disobedience. The audience wonders if Prospero will take Caliban to Milan or leave him behind on the island. Either way Caliban is a tragic figure in the midst of the play's happy ending. The best he can hope for is isolation on a deserted island or a life of physical servitude to his master, Prospero.

Romantic love finds its final fullness in Act 5, Scene 1, when both Prospero and Alonso bless the engaged couple that will, one day, rule Naples.

Many scholars view Prospero's epilogue as Shakespeare's description of his own surrender of his writing power. Just as Prospero gives up creating magic on the island, Shakespeare has finished his work and gives up creating magic on the stage. Like the old Prospero who wants to simply live out his life as a regular human in his home in Milan, Shakespeare pleads with his audience to "release me from my bands/With the help of your good hands." In other words, give him the applause he needs so he will know he has accomplished his purpose in pleasing the audience. Their accepting applause is the mercy that will "set me free."

Questions:

1. What is the role of the Epilogue in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

An epilogue is a section of writing in a novel or a speech in a play that comes after the resolution and provides additional commentary or information about what happens to the characters. In the epilogue of *The Tempest* Prospero appears as though he is both a character in a play and like an actor addressing the crowd, blending reality with the illusion of theater. Prospero, the character, summarizes how he has gotten back his dukedom and forgiven those who wronged him. Then he asks the audience to show they have been enchanted by the play "or else my project fails." Prospero says their appreciative applause will be the fuel that sails him to Naples, which is, again, an illusion. Through the epilogue Shakespeare wraps up the events of the play while reminding the audience that in the end it is just a play.

2. Considering that Prospero is in some ways meant to represent Shakespeare as a maker of art, what might Prospero's release of magic at the end of *The Tempest* signify?

Just as Prospero is the orchestrator of the plot that plays out as the result of the tempest, so is Shakespeare the author of Prospero's drama. These parallels point to a metanarrative that contemplates the nature of artmaking. Prospero retreats from his responsibilities as duke in pursuit of magic, which he is ultimately, after banishment, able to exercise through Ariel, who is in many ways Prospero's muse. In the end when Prospero surrenders his magic, he loses the ability to control the other players. In parallel when Shakespeare closes a play, he relinquishes his position as the all-powerful creator of his characters.

3. Why doesn't Prospero reveal Antonio and Sebastian's plot against King Alonso in Act 5, Scene 1, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

Prospero likely keeps the plot against King Alonso a secret for several reasons. First Prospero is extending forgiveness to everyone, despite the nature of their sins. He is reestablishing the right order of things through his mercy. It is clear that Antonio and Sebastian's plan will now be thwarted, so there is no reason to reveal it to the king. Prospero's reasoning may not all be pure kindness, however. By not revealing the plot Prospero keeps control over Sebastian and Antonio. They will want to remain in his good graces lest he expose their treasonous plan to Alonso sometime in the future.

4. How do the discussions of power and magic in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* relate to early modern ideas about these forces?

During the Renaissance highly regarded thinkers began to embrace the notion that the spirit realm was real and could possibly be harnessed for good and selfless purposes. This concept stood at odds with the pursuit of absolute power that manifested through colonialist endeavors across Europe, and it is seen in the set of usurping leaders in the play. Prospero is endowed with the belief that he is harnessing the spirit world through his command of Ariel. He intends to use white, or good, magic to reconcile men, moving past the quest for revenge by forgiving and restoring order. Yet in doing so Prospero secures for himself a degree of absolute power. He has not only been reinstated as the duke of Milan; he will also have a ruling say in Naples, where his daughter Miranda will sit on the queen's throne. The contradictory idea of using selfless, good magic to gain absolute power is reminiscent of Gonzalo's contradictory idea of using his authority to create a perfect society in which no one would have authority.

5. What does the character of Miranda represent throughout Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

Miranda is a purely innocent character in the play. Having left Italy as a young child, she has grown up as a product of the lush and beautiful island where she has been kept separate from the problems of the civilized world. She cannot tolerate human suffering—when she sees her father orchestrating the tempest at the beginning of the play she begs him to stop. When she first sees other humans she marvels at their beauty. The one evil she has faced is Caliban, but her powerful father has protected her with his magic. Miranda symbolizes a view of humanity that suggests that at birth humans are pure and innocent and only learn evil from the society around them.

6. Why is the state of Ferdinand and Miranda's relationship at the end of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* significant?

At the end of *The Tempest* the engaged couple is ready to set sail for Naples where they will be married and eventually become king and queen. King Alonso and Prospero fully support their marriage. The impending wedding is the "happiest" part of the ending of *The Tempest*. Not only does it bring joy to Miranda and Ferdinand, but it is in this union that all the wrongs of the past have been righted. Their marriage reestablishes a social order that is good for those around them, suggesting that Shakespeare also believes that good and just governance is important for society, not just for individual happiness. From a

more cynical viewpoint it also shows that Prospero has secured a very advantageous marriage for his daughter. The king of Naples is a greater ruler than the duke of Milan, so Prospero has advanced his family's social position as well as regaining his original one.

7. Why is it significant that so many characters express the desire to rule the island throughout Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

At the beginning of the play Prospero has taken over as the ruler of the island. Caliban is eager to regain control over the island. When Gonzalo sees the beauty of the island he imagines the ideal commonwealth that he might establish there. Stephano, too, becomes greedy and ambitious about making the island his own dominion. The motivation for becoming ruler is different for the different men, but in each case they suggest that they would be the best ruler. In this way Shakespeare suggests that everyone has some desire to control and to order the world the way he or she wants. He also raises the question about what the "right" kind of control should look like.

8. What is the difference between the magic of the witch Sycorax and of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

Readers learn about the nature of the witch Sycorax early in the play when Prospero explains how the "foul witch Sycorax" had performed "mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible." She imprisoned Ariel in a tree before she died. Nothing about Sycorax's use of magic was noble or life affirming, and there are many allusions made in the play that suggest her powers came from controlling hellish or devilish spirits. Prospero, on the other hand, has learned magic in order to put things to right, and the spirits he controls are connected with more positive ideas of angels and natural forces. Also Prospero does not harm anyone, even keeping the sailors in a sleeping spell while he brings about restoration with his brother, the king, and others. In the end Prospero uses his magic to release Ariel from any servitude.

9. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* how did Prospero rule Milan before he was exiled, and how might he rule differently when he returns?

Prospero was a distracted and gullible ruler when he was the duke of Milan. His desire to study his books kept him disengaged from his people, and he put his brother in charge of many aspects of his government. Now that Prospero has seen the outcome of poor leadership, he is ready to return to Milan and rule differently. He has learned to rule in his time of isolation, and he is at ease with wielding power over others. He destroys the very books that were once his

obsession, showing restraint and a willingness to self-sacrifice. Throughout his experience Prospero has learned the value of patience, justice, and of mercy, all elements of a virtuous and benevolent ruler. However, Prospero hints at the very end of the play, just before the Epilogue, that he plans to "retire me to Milan, where/Every third thought shall be my grave." This suggests that a part of him will remain contemplative and philosophical despite his satisfaction with being restored as the rightful ruler of Milan.

10. What is the significance of the relationship between music and Ariel in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

Ariel is associated with the higher, spiritual order of human nature and its expression through poetry and music. Critics such as Rutland Boughton posit that the value of music in *The Tempest* is its ability to call forth the "rhythms and moods" of the spiritual world in a way that poetry can only approximate. Prospero's belief about the link between music and the spirit world is made evident when he speaks of Ariel's art as "some heavenly music" and discloses that it is on account of this music that he can "work [his] end upon their senses" in Act 4, Scene 1. When Prospero frees Ariel from his service, he also sets down his staff and ability to use magic to access the musical spirit world.