

Reviews

“Shakespeare’s final play is steeped in magic.”
- Toronto *Sun*

“A play worth bragging about.”
- New York *Times*

“*The Tempest* is of such epic quality that every staged invention and every decoration appears unnecessary and even vulgar.”
- Peter Brook



The infant Shakespeare attended
by nature and the passions
Painted by George Romney.
Engraved by Benjamin Smith

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The Tempest

a playgoer’s guide

The Plot

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on . . .”

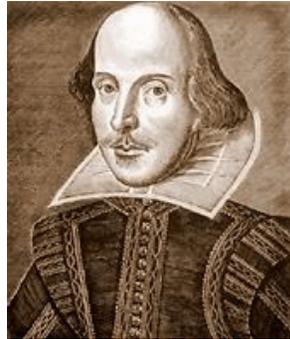
King Alonso of Naples and his entourage are sailing home to Italy after having attended his daughter’s marriage in Tunis, Africa, when they encounter a violent storm, and are forced to jump overboard. The passengers and crew, although many are separated from one another, are washed ashore on a strange island inhabited by Prospero, who has magically conjured up the storm. Prospero is, in fact, the rightful duke of Milan, who had been usurped and cast out to sea with his young daughter by his brother, Antonio, now sailing with Alonso. Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, live in his “cell” on the island with two servants, the magical sprite Ariel, and the ugly, sub-human Caliban. Caliban, deeply resentful of Prospero, hatches a plot with two members of Alonso’s company to murder him. Meanwhile, Miranda has fallen deeply in love with Alonso’s son, Ferdinand, whom the rest of the ship’s company believe drowned. All of the characters are magically led to Prospero’s cell, where the plot of Caliban and his consorts is foiled, and all of the characters who have betrayed Prospero are rebuked. The play ends with offenders repenting, Ferdinand reuniting with Alonso, and Prospero regaining his dukedom and setting Ariel free. Finally, the company leaves the island and sails homeward.



Ferdinand and Miranda Playing
at chess, painted by Francis
Wheatley, R. A. Engraved by
Caroline Watson

William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden on April 23, 1564, in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England. All that is known of Shakespeare's youth is that he presumably attended the Stratford Grammar School. The next record we have of him is of his marriage to Anne Hathaway in 1582. The next year she bore a daughter to him, Susanna, followed by the twins, Judith and Hamnet, two years later.

Shakespeare was a prolific playwright, composing a total of 38 plays. Many of these were performed at the Globe Theatre in London before nobles and commoners alike, until, on June 19, 1613, when a cannon fired from the roof of the theatre for a gala performance of Henry VIII set fire to the thatched roof and burned the theatre to the ground. The audience ignored the smoke from the roof at first, being absorbed in the play, until the flames caught the walls and the fabric of the curtains. Amazingly, there were no casualties, and the next spring, the company had the theatre "new builded in a far fairer manner than before." Although Shakespeare invested in the rebuilding, he retired from the stage to the Great House at New Place in Stratford which he had purchased in 1597, where he continued to write until his death in 1616 on the day of his 52nd birthday.



History of *The Tempest*

The Tempest first appeared in print in the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's works. Since it was his last play, *The Tempest* is often said to have been the truest expression of Shakespeare's own feelings. Prospero, many feel, was intended to be a representation of Shakespeare himself.

The first performance of *The Tempest* took place on Hallowmas night in 1611, when it was presented at Whitehall before the king.

The Tempest's popularity was not as great as that of many of Shakespeare's works, leading to its revision by Davenant in 1667. The revised *Tempest* contained only a third of Shakespeare's original text,

had additions and deletions of characters, contained many more comic scenes, and even included song and dance numbers. This greatly altered *Tempest* had a great deal of success after 1674, when Shadwell transformed Davenant's text into an opera. It was produced with elaborate scenic machinery, and became one of the greatest spectacles of the time. Between 1710 and 1732 it is said to have taken in the greatest profit in the history of Drury Lane. It was not until the 19th century that directors began returning to Shakespeare's original text in productions of *The Tempest*. At this point, machinery and spectacle became less important, and directors began to focus on the characters.

Note on Caliban

Kemble's 1806 Covent Garden production of *The Tempest* marked the beginning of a return to an earlier interpretation that looked toward emphasizing Caliban as a tragic figure. The director no longer wanted Caliban to be associated with the comic and the burlesque. He envisioned a monster, not a jester. Beginning in the 1890's, academics increasingly contested that the relationship between Caliban and Prospero was a representation of imperialism, in which Prospero represented the domineering European, and Caliban, the island's disenfranchised native. Today, some productions continue to interpret Caliban in this way, while others understand Shakespeare more literally, and portray Caliban once again as a monster.

Note on Ariel

In Shakespeare's text, the character of Ariel is described as an "airy spirit." Based on this characterization, Ariel has often been performed as a delicate, magical, feminine character. During the Old Vic production of *The Tempest* in 1930, however, this changed when Ariel became a male role for the first time in over two centuries. No longer was Ariel emphasized as a principle of grace and freedom that Prospero was forced to relinquish. Instead Ariel became an alien figure in bondage, distinctly non-human. This portrayal undoubtedly had an effect on post-war productions.

