



William Shakespeare – Tempest – Summary and Analysis



Tempest is believed to be the last independent play written by William Shakespeare during the period of 1610-1611. This was based on the fact that there is a record that “Tempest” was performed for King James I on November 1st, 1611. Another incident that supports this dating is the Bermuda shipwreck of 1609. The shipwreck and the stories that followed were believed to be the inspiration for the play. Tempest is a short play but still is written in the traditional ‘five act’ form and follows all three unities of Aristotle.

Tempest: Act I, Scene I Summary

Scene: ship at sea stuck in a tempest

A ship carrying the King of Naples and other noble men gets stuck in a violent storm and the scene opens with the entry of the ship-master. He asks the boatswain to cleverly maneuver the ship with the help of mariners. He accepts his duties and tries to encourage the sailors. At the same time Alonso [King], Sebastian [King’s brother], Antonio [brother of Prospero], Ferdinand [son of Alonso], Gonzalo [Counselor] and others enter the deck.

Alonso asks for the ship-master for which boatswain advises them go down and wait till the storm recedes. He says that the King’s men are interfering with their business and are helping the storm. Gonzalo reminds that it is the King of Naples who is in the boat. However, boatswain clearly states that King has neither power over the storm nor is his life precious than his. With that Gonzalo exit [with others] feeling that the boatswain will help to save the ship from the situation.

The men return after a few minutes only to the discomfort of boatswain. Sebastian and Antonio start to vex the man as he tries to steady the ship. Mariners lose hope and say that all is lost. The King’s men prepare to sink along with their King who bids farewell to his family.

Tempest: Act I, Scene I Analysis

The first scene generally acts as an introductory scene showing the predicament, characteristics, emotions, etc. of the characters. However, Shakespeare starts with a tempest where the major characters are in turmoil and feel like they are doomed. The immediate impression that one would get is that the noble men are indifferent towards the circumstances and are looking to order their way out of the storm. The stern reality as portrayed by the boatswain – “What cares these roarers for the name of King?” is not realized by Sebastian, Antonio and Gonzalo. Finally, everyone realizes that there is nothing they can do and resort to prayers. The scene shows class conflict, power of Nature, triviality of human



authority, magic and many themes which makes it a very complex scene [especially for the audience it was meant to].

Tempest: Act I, Scene II Summary

Scene: An island, before the cell of Prospero

Miranda witnesses the strange storm and pleads her father Prospero to stop it at once. She says that the suffering of the men aboard can be felt by her too. Prospero assures that no men are harmed and what is done is done to ensure protection and care to his daughter. Prospero claims that he is more than a master of a cell in a forlorn island. He bids Miranda to listen to his story and asks if she can remember anything from her childhood. Miranda replies that she often feels that during her childhood she was tended by maidens, but she felt that it was a dream.

Prospero says that it is true and he once was the Duke of Milan. He was revered by people within the Kingdom and out of it. He says that as time grew politics disinterested him and he started to spend more time in studies. So, he entrusts the politics and the matters of the Kingdom to his brother Alonso. Prospero tells Miranda that he loved his brother so much that no caution was taken before or after entrusting the Government. Unfortunately, Alonso became obsessed with power and began to feel as the rightful Duke of Milan.

Miranda feels sad and says that deafness can be cured while listening to the story of Prospero. He continues with the story and reveals the reason for him and his daughter to live in an island. Alonso treacherously made the King of Naples turn against Milan [and the Duke Prospero who knew nothing of the coup]. With the help of Gonzalo and few other royal subjects, Prospero barely gets out alive with his daughter. Prospero tells Miranda that it was Gonzalo who provided him with an escape boat, food supplies, water, clothes and books from his study/library.

Prospero relates the story and Miranda asks to reveal the reason behind the raising of the tempest. He says that his enemies have approached the island and puts Miranda to sleep. Prospero calls for the spirit Ariel who enters praising Prospero. He asks the spirit about the tempest and their plan to separate the King's men on the ship. Ariel depicts every little detail about the creation of the wild storm, setting flames and separating men. Ariel also says that no soul is harmed and everyone is ashore put together based on Prospero's orders. According to Ariel, the mariners and the ship are safely harbored in a corner of the island without any worries about the sea. The remaining people are safely sent back to Naples with the thought of destruction of the ship and the noble men.

Prospero inquires of the time of the day and intends to give more work to Ariel. However, Ariel reminds him of the promise made i.e. to set the spirit free. Prospero does not like being reminded of his promises, hence he reminds Ariel of the cruel times with Sycorax. Ariel was made to do foul things by the witch and when the spirit resisted, Sycorax imprisons Ariel in a pine tree. Prospero reminds about the suffering of Ariel when he found him. He reminds that the island is isolated expect for the spirit Ariel



and the son of Sycorax – Caliban. Ariel asks to forgive about the words uttered previously to which he replies that after completion of the deeds he shall liberate Ariel in two days.

Prospero gives instructions to Ariel and sends the spirit away. He wakes up Miranda and asks her to accompany him to meet Caliban. Miranda does not like to look at Caliban; however, her father says that he is the only source for their wood. As they meet him, Caliban uses abusive words against them claiming the island to be his own. Prospero reminds how much care he used to take and how he [Caliban] tried to betray him by attempting violation against Miranda. He reminds Caliban about teaching him language and other important skills. Caliban does not stop using his profane language and Prospero with a firm tone orders him to fetch fuel and threatens to fill his body with pains and cramps. Caliban immediately begs Prospero to not use any power against him and agrees to get wood.

Ariel approaches Ferdinand, son of Alonso and is invisible. The spirit starts to play and sings a song. Ferdinand amused and confused follows the voice. Ariel leads Ferdinand straight to Miranda and Prospero. Miranda is immediately attracted to Ferdinand and so is the case with son of Alonso. However, Miranda's father does not like their union to happen so quickly hence accuses Ferdinand to be a traitor and spy. Miranda tries to support Ferdinand but Prospero speaks harsh to his daughter as well. He orders her to come without making any trouble.

Tempest: Act I, Scene II Analysis

Scene two of Act one is very lengthy and explains the whole of the story on contrary to the chaotic situation in Scene one. Shakespeare reveals everything about the plot and how circumstances might end up. Prospero reveals his tragic isolation on the island, Ariel separates the King and his men, Miranda shows affection towards Ferdinand and Prospero through words reveal that he has sewn a plot for everyone in the island. Further, the audience would come to know that the Tempest in the first scene is a creation of Ariel as ordered by Prospero.

The contrast between Sycorax and Prospero has been shown. Sycorax is banished from Algiers because of witchcraft. Prospero is banished from Naples because of his involvement in studies. An encounter between them shows that good always wins against evil – a possible outcome of the play shown by Shakespeare with these two characters.

Tempest: Act II, Scene I Summary

Scene: Another part of the island

Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, Antonio, Adrian and others survive the shipwreck and are brought to another side of the island because of Ariel. Gonzalo tries to merry Alonso as the king feels that his son is dead because of the tempest. However, the rest mock Gonzalo and the King becomes frustrated of the attempts of his Counselor. The King rues the fact that he gave his daughter as bride to an African who lives far away. He believes that his heir lost in the tempest and Alonso is lost too. Francisco, however,



tries to comfort the King by stating that he saw Ferdinand fighting the waters and swam to the shore. No one is ready to accept this as the King and the others believe he is dead.

Ariel, invisible, approaches the group and uses his magic to put them to sleep. He leaves Sebastian and Antonio who watch over Alonso and the rest. Antonio looking at an opportunity proposes to Sebastian that they kill the group whilst they are sleeping. If Alonso and the rest are killed, then Sebastian will become the rightful heir of Naples. Antonio presumes that Ferdinand is dead and the King's daughter is married. She cannot rule Naples while staying in Tunis and she cannot frequent visits from such a long distance. Antonio says that this makes the next person to be the heir is Sebastian. After listening to Antonio, the curiosity of Sebastian is aroused. He accepts the plot of Antonio and decides to kill the king, Gonzalo and others.

They draw swords and point at Alonso and Gonzalo. Ariel, invisible, enters and sings to Gonzalo about the conspiracy. He wakes before it is too late and so does the king. Alonso is alarmed by looking at the two men who are drawn. He inquires the reason and they say that they heard a dangerous sound nearby of lions. They accept the reason and all of them decide to go in search of Ferdinand.

Tempest: Act II, Scene I Analysis

The contrast between the righteous and sinister is given for the audience to observe. Gonzalo tries to comfort his King whereas Antonio and Sebastian criticize the Counselor for his attempts. The Counselor speaks of their great achievement in surviving the tempest whilst the others are sad as they are on an abandoned island. Apart from these, Shakespeare creates a sympathetic feeling towards Alonso at the end of this scene. He almost becomes a part of betrayal that he once tried on Prospero. The intention behind Ariel putting few of them to sleep is to know about the characters. Prospero though does not appear in this scene, maneuvers everything they do through the spirit – Ariel.

The plot against Alonso creates a sympathy that carries to the end when he is confronted by Prospero. As "Tempest" is a comedy, the audience should feel the reconciliation justified. Hence, Shakespeare uses a murder plot to show the character of Alonso to be 'not entirely bad'.

Tempest: Act II, Scene II Summary

Scene: Another part of the island

Caliban with wood appears on the stage cursing Prospero for making him a slave. He fears every sound and sight on the island is destined to watch over him through the spirits. He watches a man walk towards him and feels that it is a spirit sent by Prospero. He hides under a cloak with legs partially covered. The man is Trinculo, the court jester, another survivor of the tempest. Trinculo believes that there is another storm coming and looks for shelter. As he observes a creature lying on the ground [Caliban] he thinks that it is half fish and half man. Trinculo immediately thinks of profits he could get when he sells the creature in England. However, as he hears a thunder he hides under the cloak of Caliban. Now, it appears as though the 'creature' has four legs with partial covering of the legs.



Caliban is fearful of Trinculo who enters the cloak and pleads to not torment him. Stephano, the butler, comes to the place and looks at this odd creature with four legs. He too thinks of the profits in England with the creature. The pleading of Caliban continues and Stephano decides to pour wine into the mouth of Caliban. He resists and Trinculo hiding recognizes the voice of Stephano and comes out. However, Stephano feels that the creature has two heads and tries to pour wine into the other head. After some confusion Stephano recognizes Trinculo and both them feel happy to have found each other.

Caliban takes a liking to the wine “celestial liquor” and pledges to serve his new masters. Caliban offers the finest things in the island including fertile land, springs, berries, fish, wood, etc. The both excited and asks him to lead the way. Caliban feels free of Prospero and sings in joy.

Tempest: Act II, Scene II Analysis

Caliban is as wretched as his mother Sycorax which is revealed through his soliloquy. He is not accepted by Prospero [who treats him as a slave because of misbehavior with Miranda] and Nature [where the animals tease him]. Therefore, he seeks solace with drunkards like Trinculo and Stephano.

The similarity between thoughts of men in the court is shown in this scene in comparison to the previous one. Antonio and Sebastian seek opportunity to become the rulers of Naples by killing the current King. Trinculo and Stephano seek opportunity in Caliban who can be sold in England. In addition, they make him their slave with the use of tricky words. Political struggles of high and low are touched by Shakespeare through these scenes.

Tempest: Act III, Scene I Summary

Scene: Before the cell of Prospero

Ferdinand is seen carrying logs as ordered by Prospero. He thinks only of Miranda and believes that he could achieve any task for her. Miranda enters and watches over the painful task given to Ferdinand. She asks him to rest as Prospero is busy reading his books. However, they do not realize that Prospero is nearby observing their movements carefully. Miranda asks Ferdinand to rest while she offers to pile up the logs. Ferdinand denies the offer for he says that he would break his back before letting her work.

As Ferdinand asks her name, she says Miranda and immediately realizes that she has gone against the instructions of her father. However, Ferdinand woos her with soft words and admiration. He says that she is the most beautiful of all women for which she replies that she has never seen another woman. Ferdinand further tries to impress her and claims himself to be a Prince or a King, as fate has it. But, Miranda disinterested in such boasts directly asks whether he loves him. Miranda is overjoyed with the expression of love. Prospero who is watching them is happy too for he planned this. As the two are involved in a lovely conversation and exit together, he too gets back to his study to accomplish other tasks.

Tempest: Act III, Scene I Analysis



Prospero is shown as the supreme leader of the island and an able man. His works are in contrast to the way he handled things in Naples. Every string he pulls has a great meaning, thus showing him as an able King who could rule Naples [if not for his deep interest in studies].

Ferdinand is put into the shoes of Caliban for he is ordered to fetch logs. However, there are no curses and disinterest as he admires Miranda. This is complete opposite to the character of Caliban who is not interested in working for Prospero but tries to misbehave with Miranda.

Miranda is shown as an obedient daughter who is dearly attracted to Ferdinand. She follows everything Prospero says except for the mistake of giving out her name. Her desperation in love is understandable as she has never seen a man other than Prospero and Caliban.

Tempest: Act III, Scene II Summary

Scene: Another part of the island

Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban are quite drunk. Caliban reveals about Prospero and the power behind her books. He offers his help to Stephano in killing Prospero and marrying Miranda. Stephano is tempted as he can become the King of the island with Caliban as his slave. Caliban plans to destroy the books of Prospero first as it becomes easy to kill a powerless man. Ariel carefully listens to the plot and decides to reveal it to Prospero. At that moment, the three begin to sing and Ariel [invisible] plays music. Trinculo and Stephano are terrified but Caliban reassures them that it is common in the island to hear such tunes. The three follow the music dancing and singing.

Tempest: Act III, Scene II Analysis

The idea of freedom can make anyone think beyond their capabilities. This is shown by Shakespeare through Caliban who is uncivilized, improperly educated and savage in his ways. But, when the time presented, he cooks a plan to destroy the books of Prospero, which is quite intelligent. He grasps that books are the source of power to Prospero and reveals this secret to Trinculo and Stephano. However, Prospero is prepared for everything and his spirit Ariel diverts the group through music.

Tempest: Act III, Scene III Summary

Scene: Another part of the island

The royal party is exhausted and do not wish to move any further. The King loses hope of finding Ferdinand. Antonio and Sebastian still believe that they could kill Alonso that evening. All of a sudden many spirits appear offering a tempting banquet and dance off. The royal party despite being hungry feels that the banquet is magical and hesitate to approach it. However, hunger wins over their instinct as they approach the banquet. Prospero, invisible, watches them as he has planned this too for a purpose.



Ariel transformed as a harpy appears before them. Antonio, Sebastian and Alonso are terrified but due to power of Ariel they cannot lift their swords. Ariel reminds the three of their sins and mentions about Prospero. The spirit states that the sea is taking vengeance for their sins against Prospero and his daughter, who are abandoned to water and let to die. Alonso is terrified of the fact that the harpy reminds of his brother Prospero. Ariel disappears and the banquet is taken away by the spirits. Alonso runs away while Antonio and Sebastian try to fight the spirits. Gonzalo worried about them asks Francisco and Adrian to go after them.

Tempest: Act III, Scene III Analysis

Another short scene, revealing the powers of Prospero and the disability of the King against such power; where he seems helpless. Prospero uses Ariel to remind the sins of his brother in a way that Nature has set to work justice for Prospero. This effectively puts the fear of Judgment and reminds of the sins committed. As a result, it would become easy for Prospero to bring the whole plot to an end without having to do much personally.

Tempest: Act IV, Scene I Summary

Scene: Before the cell of Prospero

Prospero is happy with Ferdinand and decides to unite him and Miranda. However, she reminds that under no case shall the chastity of Miranda shall be broken. Ferdinand promises to do no such act and Prospero call Ariel to prepare for a Masque. Three spirits appear in the form of Juno, Ceres and Iris attend the masque. They bless the couple and two of them go to summon some nymphs to perform at the masque. Suddenly, Prospero remembers about the plot of Caliban and it is near the time they enter the cell. Hence, the masque comes to a sudden halt.

Ferdinand and Miranda are afraid about the predicament of Prospero; but, he reassures that is only a shift of emotion caused by age. The two exit leaving Prospero and he immediately summons Ariel to ask about the Caliban's group. Ariel explains that they were led to filthy pond and are distracted according to plan. Prospero asks Ariel to place fine clothes in the part of a cell for the three to find and steal. The spirit does as ordered and the three are attracted towards the clothes. Trinculo and Stephano try to get their hands on everything while Caliban coming to his senses asks them to follow the plan. But, they do not listen to the words of Caliban. Spirits appear in the form of horrendous hounds and chase the three from the cell.

Tempest: Act IV, Scene I Analysis

Prospero is mindful in his duties as a father. This can be witnessed with the testing of Ferdinand to be a man of honor in earlier scenes. Further, he only accepts for the engagement of the two after taking word from the prince about protecting the virginity of Miranda. Prospero summons spirits that are in the form of Juno, Ceres and Iris.



Juno is the Queen of the Gods who looks after the welfare of women, Ceres is goddess of fertility and Iris is the rainbow that blesses new endeavours. This shows that Prospero is well aware of the proceedings and wishes everything to be perfect for his daughter. In addition, Prospero is also mindful of the small things that can create a great harm. Hence he brings the celebration to a halt and looks into the matter of Caliban and others. It is also an indication that Prospero is minding small things, which was not so when he was king. If he were so mindful, he would have recognized the malicious nature of Alonso and avoided lonely living in an island. The contrast indicates that Prospero has transformed into a being full of understanding and takes care of everything.

Tempest: Act V, Scene I Summary

Scene: Before the cell of Prospero

Ariel comes to Prospero to say about the royal party and their grief stricken mood. While Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian are worried about their sins; Gonzalo is crying for the King and the kingdom. Prospero assures to Ariel that they will be treated fairly from that moment and asks the spirit to summon them to the cell. As Ariel disappears, Prospero wonders about the achievements he could obtain through his powers. He feels that the time has come to give up magic and promises to drown his books in the sea after that day.

Ariel brings them to a magical circle drawn by Prospero. The charm put on the royal party is taken off and they see Prospero dressed as the Duke of Milan. By looking at them Prospero reconciles and hugs Alonso and Gonzalo. Alonso immediately repents and gives away the crown to his brother. Prospero does not judge Antonio and Sebastian for their actions but warns them to not repeat such treacherous things in future.

Everyone is gathered in a union where Alonso seems still depressed about the loss of Ferdinand. While Alonso grieves about his son, Prospero claims that he too lost a daughter because of the tempest. Alonso becomes more sober when Prospero removes a curtain revealing Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess with great smiles on their face. Alonso is relieved of his pain and says that he will look after Miranda as his own daughter.

Ariel brings the ship's master along with the boatswain. Prospero asks to bring Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano as well. The three are fearful of the powers of Prospero and he orders them decorate the cell of Prospero on the occasion of reconciliation and gathering. They decide to conduct marital ceremonies in the kingdom and prepare to leave. However, Prospero asks everyone to stay the night in the cell and listen to the twelve years of life he has spent along with Miranda.

Ariel is liberated with a final task for Prospero. He asks the spirit to ensure a smooth sail across the sea on their journey home. Prospero is left alone when he delivers the final epilogue to the audience.

Tempest: Act V, Scene I Analysis



The play is not a tragedy hence one could expect the elements of love, reconciliation and happiness at the end. All the plots used by Prospero were intended to help him reclaim the throne and find happiness in relationships. He trusts Miranda to a faithful man, frees Ariel as promised, leaves the traitors just with threats and reconciles with Alonso excusing his betrayal. There are many unexplained things that still confuse the royal party, but Prospero has no intentions of revealing them and asks Alonso to leave such things unattended.

Ariel who played a great part [almost the protagonist of the play] in helping Prospero is rewarded with freedom. He has performed deeds that eventually led to greater good. On the contrary, Caliban could not understand the methods of civilized men and became a victim of falsehood of Trinculo and Stephano. His deeds were evil but he was spared because no one was harmed.

At the end, Prospero achieves reconciliation without the use of magic and through warm words. He convinces everyone about the plight for twelve years and Alonso realizes his mistakes. Although, Antonio looked indifferent towards the sparing of him, he is nothing but a minor character that can be dealt with anytime if he tries anything. Alonso is eventually happy to see his son alive and married to the daughter of rightful Duke. Gonzalo, a man of good intellect, is happy that everyone has gathered again and the situation is ending with smiles rather than cruel deaths in a deserted island. Miranda is curious to see so many human beings on the island and happy to know that she will be married to Ferdinand. All the wishes of Prospero come true and everyone is joyful to have found one another.

Tempest: Act V, Epilogue Summary

Prospero is still bound by one chain i.e. the audience and requests them to free him. He has overthrown all his magic and united with those who were once dear to him. Prospero asks the audience to release him from the island by clapping. He says that forgiveness and mercy are the things that helped him to be blissful again and expects the audience to be the same with others.

Tempest: Act V, Epilogue Analysis

Although, the epilogue is very small and is an interaction of Prospero with the audience, it is considered purely autobiographic. Tempest is considered as the last play of Shakespeare and the words used by Prospero reflect the interaction of Shakespeare bidding leave from the audience who supported him greatly over many years.

