

The Tempest Exercises

Dr Gabriella Edelstein, The University of Newcastle

Question 1

What does *The Tempest* tell us about Shakespeare's context?

Question 2

Why do you think you're studying *The Tempest* now? What does it say about what's important to our context?

Question 3

Imagine you are directing *The Tempest*.

- How would you design the setting?
- What would the characters look and act like?
- Why are you making these kinds of directorial choices – what are you trying to bring out in the play's meaning?

Question 4

Read Caliban's speech to Prospero:

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,
Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' the island. (1.2.331-44)

What does this speech tell the audience about:

- Caliban's relationship to the island?
- Caliban and Prospero's relationship?
- The island itself?

What kind of language is being used to represent these things?

Question 5

Find some examples of the kinds of language that characters use to Caliban throughout the play. What do you notice?

Question 6

Read this dialogue between Ariel and Prospero.

ARIEL

Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,
Let me remember thee what thou hast promised,
Which is not yet performed me.

PROSPERO

How now? Moody?

What is 't thou canst demand?

ARIEL

My liberty. (1.2.287-291)

- Why do you think it's important that Ariel is asking for his 'liberty'?
- What does this tell us about the play's themes?
- Can you find any other references in the play to the words 'liberty', 'freedom', or 'free'?

Question 7

Read Gonzago's speech about creating a utopia on the island. A utopia is an imagined place where everything is perfect.

I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty;--

...

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people. (2.1.162-171, 175-180)

Now read Michel de Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" (1580). It's a complex text – it's a philosophical tract after all!

- What is Montaigne arguing in "Of Cannibals"?
- What similarities or differences can you notice with Gonzago's speech?
- Why do you think Shakespeare is using this intertext?
- Can "Of Cannibals" help us understand Caliban differently?