



# *The Tempest*

by  
William Shakespeare

## Audience Guide

researched and written by  
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# Shakespeare's Romances

Modern scholars traditionally divide Shakespeare's plays into one of the following categories: Comedy, Tragedy, History, or Romance. The Romance label, however, is relatively new. It was first proposed by Edward Dowden in 1877. He argued that several of Shakespeare's plays could not be neatly assigned to the existing Comedy or Tragedy categories because they contained elements of both genres. In Shakespeare's day, most of these plays had been labeled as comedies, but ongoing academic scrutiny found more and more contradictions with this original categorization. The plays in question are Shakespeare's five last works: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*\*. Another word frequently applied to the Romances is "tragicomedy," denoting a blending of the two genres.

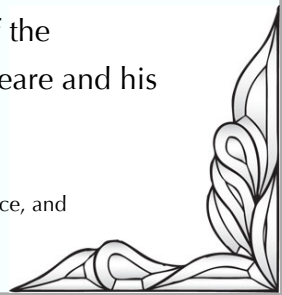
When one hears the word Romance today, quite often one thinks of romantic situations, young infatuated lovers, and a light, uncomplicated story. The label of Romance in Shakespearean or classical terms is far more complex, and is applied to plays which share many thematic elements and plot devices. In a classic Romance, the protagonist is not often a lover, but someone who most often either makes a dreadful mistake or suffers incredible misfortune. Throughout the course of the play, s/he is punished and tested, only to have all restored to him/her through divine goodwill.

Most Romances feature adventure; long, epic journeys; prophecies; reunions of long-lost family members; miraculous restoration of life; and frequently, but not always, direct intervention from supernatural deities. Frequently, the Romances are grounded in popular, ancient myths. Most use the Greek world for their setting and feature the gods of the Greek pantheon directly in their narratives. Many Romances are also highly allegorical and feature characters who are archetypes rather than three-dimensional realistic characters, such as the character of "Time" in *The Winter's Tale*. Tonally, the Romances are often melancholic and dark, but share a faith in the ultimate goodwill of Providence.

The Romance genre is not unique to Shakespeare. In fact, towards the end of his career, there was a rise in popular Romance plays from playwrights such as Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. Shakespeare was merely taking on an existing style and making it his own.

*The Tempest* embraces many of the elements of the classic Romance. Believed to be Shakespeare's last solo effort, *The Tempest* displays a master of the style exploring in great depth the possibilities of the genre. From the magical interventions of Fate (and of Prospero), and the wondrous reunion of families to the quest for revenge and restitution by so many of the characters, *The Tempest* provides one of the richest explorations of the Romantic potential found among the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

\*The Two Noble Kinsmen is sometimes classified by some scholars as a Romance, and by some as a Comedy.



# The Tempest

## *A Synopsis*

**Please note: Below is a full summary of the play. If you prefer not to spoil the plot, consider skipping this section.**

As the play begins, we witness a terrible tempest (a violent sea storm) in which it appears a ship carrying members of a noble court has been destroyed and lost. From the coast of a nearby island, a young girl, Miranda, beseeches her father, the magician Prospero who she perceives has caused the storm, to calm it. After assuring Miranda that none of the passengers have perished, Prospero tells her the story of their past, which he has not yet revealed to her.

Twelve years earlier, Prospero reigned as the powerful Duke of Milan. Being more and more absorbed in his study of magic, however, he turned the business of government over to his brother Antonio, who acted in his stead, and who Prospero trusted completely. After some time, Antonio began to believe himself to be the rightful Duke, and conspired with Alonso, the King of Naples, to overthrow Prospero. One night, Antonio and Alonso's forces captured Prospero and his then three-year old daughter Miranda, and expelled them from Milan. Cast out to sea on a small boat – with limited provisions and some of Prospero's prized books secretly given to him by a kind lord named Gonzalo – Prospero and Miranda had drifted at sea until

### A Tempestuous Noise

Although Elizabethan theatres were not equipped with fancy lighting and sound capabilities, they could still produce an effective storm. Stagehands lit fireworks or struck “thunder sheets,” which were large metal sheets hanging from the ceiling, to create thunder and lightning. A cannon ball could also be rolled down a wooden trough to produce the din of thunder while loose lengths of canvas could be turned on a wheel to simulate the sound of high winds.

they happened upon the island on which they have lived ever since. Prospero explains to Miranda that “by Providence divine” all of his enemies have now come within his grasp, which is why he conjured up the sea storm to wreck their ship.

After finishing this tale, Prospero charms Miranda to sleep and summons Ariel, an airy spirit now in his service. Ariel proudly relates how, to Prospero's exact orders, Ariel created the sea storm and safely scattered some of the shipwrecked passengers about the island. When Ariel demands her freedom from Prospero in return, he admonishes Ariel, recounting how his magic had released the spirit from the terrifying prison in which it had been placed by the evil witch Sycorax, the island's original ruler.

After sending Ariel off on further “assignments” related to the shipwrecked nobles, Prospero awakens Miranda and they summon their servant Caliban. Caliban curses his master Prospero, whom he believes stole the island from him. Prospero orders him to gather wood, and Caliban, frightened of Prospero's power, obeys.

An invisible Ariel then leads Ferdinand (son to the King of Naples) to Prospero and Miranda. Ferdinand and Miranda are instantly

infatuated with each other, but Prospero, wanting to test their devotion, calls Ferdinand an impostor and spy, and threatens to imprison him. Outraged, Ferdinand draws his sword, but Prospero disarms him with magic and leads him away.

Elsewhere on the island, King Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, and Gonzalo wander in search of Prince Ferdinand, who they fear was drowned in the tempest. Ariel charms the courtiers to sleep, save Sebastian and Antonio. Antonio quickly persuades Sebastian to kill the King (his brother) and assume the crown. Antonio vows to kill Gonzalo. As they are about to commit the murders, Ariel reawakens the sleeping King and courtiers and halts the murder plot. The nobles then venture on in search of Ferdinand.

On another part of the island, Caliban discovers Trinculo (King Alonso's fool) and Stephano (the King's drunken butler) who have been washed ashore in the tempest. Caliban, emboldened by the wine which Stephano has managed to salvage, renounces Prospero, proclaims Stephano to be his god, and vows to follow him.

Miranda sneaks away to see Ferdinand, now enslaved by her father. The two profess their love and their desire to marry. Prospero, watching from afar, is pleased.

Caliban convinces a very inebriated Stephano to kill Prospero and become king of the island. Stephano and Trinculo like the plan, but become distracted by magical music (played by an invisible Ariel) and follow it.

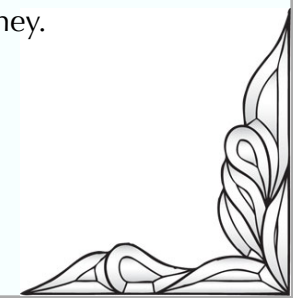
Wearied from wandering, Alonso and his company decide to rest. Suddenly Ariel appears with a magical banquet. As they are about to

feast, Ariel, in the form of a harpy, rebukes Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso for the wrongs they committed against Prospero. The guilt-ridden King rushes away to drown himself, and the others follow after him.

Meanwhile, Prospero consents to the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. Spirits celebrate their betrothal in an elaborate masque, but Prospero abruptly ends the festivities. Remembering Caliban's plot against his life, Prospero and Ariel lay a trap for the would-be usurpers, who are chased away by hell hounds.

Ariel then brings in Alonso and his company. Stunned at the sight of Prospero, who they had thought was long dead, the King asks forgiveness and yields up his hold on Milan. Prospero confronts Antonio, and forgives him for his sins. He also demands his dukedom back, and Antonio has no choice but to relinquish it. As a final gift, Prospero reveals the newly-betrothed Ferdinand and Miranda and reunites the King with his son. Ariel enters with the Master of the Boat, who reports that their ship is magically unharmed and ready to sail home. Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban are released, and Caliban renounces the two drunkards. Prospero grudgingly acknowledges his responsibility for Caliban and gives Ariel one last task: to make the seas calm for their return journey to Naples.

In an epilogue, Prospero speaks to the audience and explains that he has relinquished his magic, and that he needs the audience's applause and good will to send him safely on his journey.



# The Tempest

## *Sources and History of the Play*

*The Tempest* is unique in the fact that, unlike the majority of his other plays, the plot is not borrowed from other sources, but rather a creation wholly of Shakespeare's making. Nonetheless a few sources probably inspired the play. In 1610, both William Strachey and Sylvester Jourdain published accounts of a shipwreck in the Bermudas, which may have influenced the events of *The Tempest*. In addition, *A True Declaration of the State of the Colony in Virginia*, published in 1610, described the conditions of England's first American colony. Its depiction of both natives and nature can be seen echoed in Prospero's island and the character of Caliban.

Of more direct impact are two literary sources. Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of the Ovid's *Metamorphosis* contains a passage with clear parallels to Prospero's Act V speech renouncing magic. In 1603, Montaigne's *Of Cannibals* was translated into English. Montaigne argued that civilizations condemned as "barbaric" are no more cruel than European societies. Scholars argue that this may have encouraged a more sympathetic depiction of Caliban from Shakespeare.

The first recorded performance of *The Tempest* was played for King James I on "Hallowmas nyght" (November 1) in 1611. The play itself was not published until it appeared in The First Folio in 1623, after Shakespeare's death.

In the Restoration era, William Davenant and John Dryden heavily modified Shakespeare's play, retaining only one-third of the original text and adding entirely new plot-lines. Emphasizing elaborate spectacle and music, this version remained extremely popular for over 150 years. The original text was not restored until William Charles Macready's production at Covent Garden in 1838.

*The Tempest* has been re-imagined in myriad ways, including ballets, symphonies, and operatic works. From Sibelius's orchestrations to Peter Greenaway's 1991 film entitled *Prospero's Books* (in which Prospero is re-imagined as the author of his own play) to more recent film adaptations, Shakespeare's grand tale of magic, revenge and forgiveness continues to inspire artists and audiences alike.

### What's in a Name?

Miranda's name derives from the Latin verb *miror*, which roughly means "to wonder at or admire." Not only do the islands' inhabitants constantly admire Miranda's beauty and goodness, but also Miranda herself is filled with wonder at meeting other humans for the first time.

# On *The Tempest*

## John Clements

I think that, of all Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest* is the most difficult to stage, because, to me at least, it is the most difficult to interpret.

Is it, as some have held, merely a fairy tale concocted for a wedding party? Or was it, consciously, his farewell play, a final masterpiece, setting within its fantasy world a last parable of good and evil?

The more deeply one considers the play, the more possible interpretations one can find. Is it a warning against the dangers of colonialism? Or a warning of the folly of dabbling with the powers of the supernatural? Is it a morality on the right of inheritance by descent and the inherent obligations contained in that right? Is it a study of the nature of innocence on the one hand and ignorance on the other and the dangers of contamination of both at the touch of civilization? Or is it a last sad sigh at the transitoriness of the human condition, a dying echo of 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow'?

Is it any of these things, or a fusion of some of them, or none?

The task of selection, of coming down positively on the side of one theme or another, confronts those of us who set out to tackle the almost superhuman task of interpreting this wonderful dramatic poem in terms of physical presentation in a theatre.

Most of Shakespeare's plays, to a greater or lesser extent, present a similar variety of choices, and it is clearly impossible to incorporate all the possible interpretations of any single text within the bounds of one production. Even to attempt to do so would confuse an audience and drive a cast distracted. Therefore, when starting on a production; one has to choose an interpretation which seems to hold the greatest truth for that particular moment in time and for that particular group of artists setting out to work together.

In spite of all the possibilities, there is no single one that goes more than part of the way towards providing a sufficiently basic motivation for a production, and none of them allows for a full realization of the splendour that lies locked away in the text.

In fact, the rather hotch-potch plot and the routine and sometimes self-contradictory characters are not the starting point for finding the clue at all, for they are subordinate to the all-enveloping magic of the play's verse. If it is not stretching the argument too far, one could say that the plot and characters of *The Tempest* are abstractions and it is the hypnotic power of the verse that is the reality.

For *The Tempest* is first and foremost a great piece of music, every note of which must be played with the feeling, tone, rhythm and accuracy which a conductor must draw from an orchestra playing a work of, say, Delius or Debussy. It is, indeed, very much like a massive tone poem — the fury of the storm, the majesty of Prospero's conjurations, the rumbustiousness of the comings, the tenderness of the love scenes fusing together on a verbal level, not on the level of character, each individual element contributing its own colouring to the whole work...

*The Tempest* stands alone in [Shakespeare's] opus as a play which is from the first moment to the last suffused with the feeling of music.

Perhaps it is impossible to translate this understanding of *The Tempest* as a great tone poem successfully to the stage. It may be that it is too ephemeral a concept to be expressed in the concrete terms that a stage presentation necessarily entails.

Perhaps those who say that we should not attempt it, that it is to be read and imagined, not seen, are right. Or, perhaps, only by hearing the play on the radio or on a recording, with one's powers of imagination allowed full rein, can one win the most from it.

But Shakespeare wrote for the theatre. Recordings and radio are welcome fringe benefits, nothing more. Divorced from regular physical performance his plays would die — or at best be translated into something quite different from their basic nature. As long as there are actors and directors, who work with living stages for living audiences there will be, again and again, attempts to achieve the impossible.

It is the certainty of that above all which makes the theatre, to me, the exhilarating, heartbreaking, nerveracking and glorious place that it is.

From John Clements' essay "*The Tempest*"

# Who's Who in *The Tempest*

## THE ISLANDERS:

**PROSPERO:** Father to Miranda and the rightful Duke of Milan, usurped by his brother, Antonio

**MIRANDA:** Prospero's daughter and only child; raised on the island from the age of three

**ARIEL:** An "airy spirit" who is native to the island. Once enslaved by Caliban's mother, Sycorax, and now indentured to Prospero who freed Ariel from the witch's power

**CALIBAN:** A native of the island, he is the son of the dead witch, Sycorax; originally cared for by Prospero, and then enslaved by him



## THE NOBLES:

**ALONSO:** The King of Naples, father to Ferdinand, older brother of Sebastian; aided Antonio in the plot to usurp Prospero twelve years ago

**FERDINAND:** Alonso's only son, and heir to the throne of Naples

**SEBASTIAN:** Alonso's brother

**ANTONIO:** Prospero's younger brother and the usurping Duke of Milan; conspired with Alonso to set Prospero and Miranda adrift at sea

**GONZALO:** An aged councilor to the King of Naples; kind to Prospero and Miranda twelve years before when they were cast out of Milan

**ADRIAN:** A nobleman in the company of the King of Naples

## THE CLOWNS:

**TRINCULO:** A jester in the service of Alonso, King of Naples

**STEPHANO:** Alonso's drunken butler

Murell Horton's costume designs for Prospero and Miranda for the 2014 production of *The Tempest* at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.





# Glossary

## *of Words and Phrases*

### ACT I

welkin's cheek — *sky*  
 cell — *a humble dwelling*  
 teen that I have turned you to — *trouble I have been to you*  
 flamed amazement — *appeared as terrifying fire*  
 Jove — *Jupiter, the most powerful of the Roman gods*  
 bate me — *deduct from my period of servitude*  
 hests — *commands*  
 Setebos — *a god of the Patagonian natives, whom Caliban and his mother worshipped*  
 full fathom five — *five fathoms (a nautical measure of depth equalling 30 feet); 150 feet deep*  
 chanticleer — *rooster*  
 dolor — *grief*  
 chirurgeonly — *like a surgeon*  
 foison — *plenty*  
 a-batfowling — *hunting birds with a stick*

### ACT II

mow — *grimace*  
 poor-John — *salted fish*  
 doit — *a small coin*  
 gabardine — *a rough fabric; or a cloak*

moon-calf — *misshapen creature*  
 filberts — *hazelnuts*  
 crabbed — *sour; ill-tempered*  
 a thousand thousand — *a million farewells*

### ACT III

pie'd ninny — *jester in a motley costume*  
 murrain — *plague*  
 paunch — *stab in the belly*  
 nonpareil — *without equal*  
 troll the catch — *sing the song; sing the round*  
 viands — *food and drink*  
 dewlapped — *with a fold of skin hanging from the neck like cattle*

### ACT IV

amain — *quickly*  
 varlets — *servants or rogues*  
 frippery — *secondhand-clothing shop*  
 dropsy — *disease characterized by excess fluid in the body; an insatiable thirst*  
 by line and level — *properly*

### ACT V

green sour ringlets — *circles made by fairies in the grass*  
 promontory — *land jutting into the sea*  
 play me false — *cheat*  
 compass thee about — *surround you*  
 yare — *shipshape, seaworthy*  
 coraggio — *Italian for courage*  
 flyblowing — *having fly eggs laid in one's flesh*

### EPILOGUE

Mercy itself — *in this context, a higher power*  
 indulgence — *favor*

## Man of Many Words

Shakespeare used over 20,000 different words in his plays and poems. Of these, 8.5% (1,700 words) had never been seen in print before Shakespeare used them.

To give you a sense of just how extraordinary this is, consider that the *King James Bible* uses only 8,000 different words.

# Commentary & Criticism

"What is most magical about the isle...is that in being many places at once, geographically, culturally, and mythographically hybrid, it eludes location and becomes a space for poetry, and for dream. It is not found on any map. Prospero's enchanted island, while drawn from real explorations and published accounts, is ultimately a country of the mind."

Marjorie Garber  
*Shakespeare After All*

"Part of *The Tempest's* permanent fascination for so many playgoers and readers, in a myriad of national cultures, is its juxtaposition of a vengeful magus who turns to forgiveness, with a spirit of fire and air, and a half-human of earth and water. Prospero seems to incarnate a fifth element."

Harold Bloom  
*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*

"*The Tempest* is a specimen of the purely romantic drama, in which the interest is not historical, or dependent upon fidelity of portraiture, or the natural connexion of events,--but is a birth of the imagination."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge  
"Notes on *The Tempest*"

"*The Tempest* of the play, seems to me not so much to refer to the storm that occurs at sea, but the emotional storm that rages within Prospero."

Director of this production, Bonnie J. Monte

"The deepest happiness is represented in this play as a state of playful tension...The entire action of the play rests on the premise that value lies in controlled uneasiness, and hence that a direct reappropriation of the usurped dukedom and a direct punishment of the usurpers has less moral and political value than an elaborate inward restaging of loss, misery, and anxiety."

Stephen Greenblatt  
"Prospero as the Creator of Anxiety"

"Whether is it set on a distant planet or a tropical island, the contemporary *Tempest* embodies the pertinent issues of our time: the brutal realities of individual and collective power, the bitter legacy of colonialism and slavery, the difficulty of releasing the female body from male inscription and control, and the misunderstandings and violence that often accompany cultural exchange."

Harold Bloom  
*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*

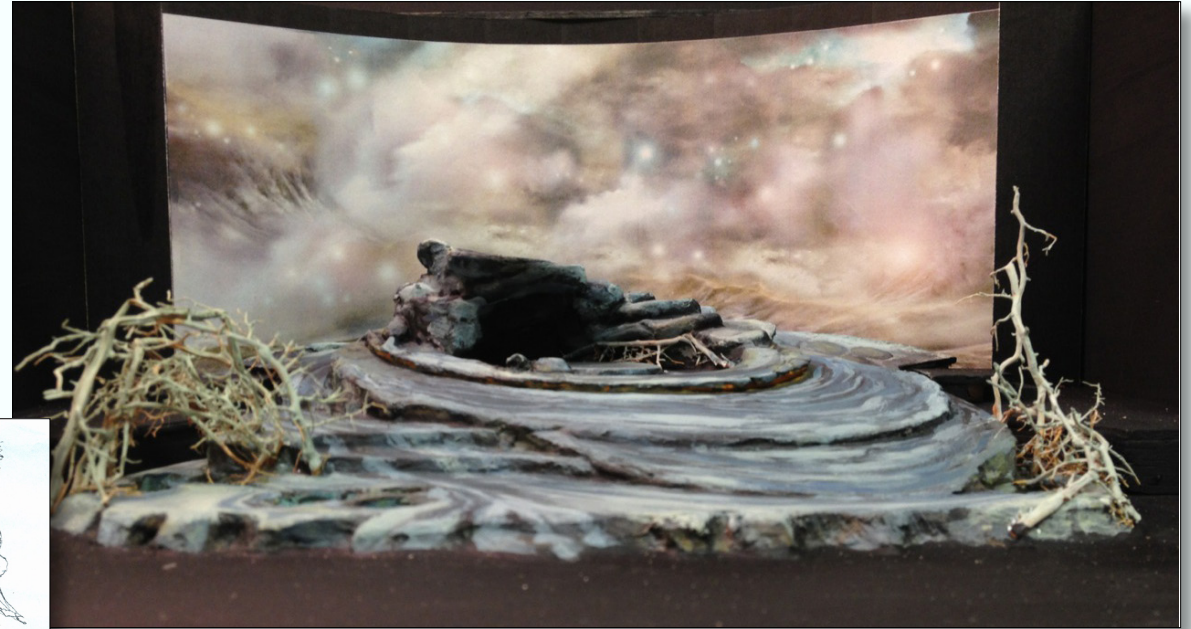
"In few of his other plays has Shakespeare created a closer relationship between the human and natural universes. In *The Tempest*, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and cruelty and gentleness are matched with the external environment, and everything works toward a positive reconciliation of the best in both humans and nature."

Muriel Ingham  
*A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare*

"*The Tempest* is more than magic and trickery...The transformations of art are entertaining, but metamorphosis within the self is more deeply satisfying. The 'sea-sorrow' that the characters undergo ultimately leads to a 'sea change.'

Norrie Epstein  
*The Friendly Shakespeare*

# In *This Production*



Above: Costume designs for Ariel as a Goddess (*left*) and Caliban (*right*) by Murell Horton.

Right Above: Set designs by Brian Clinnin.

Right Below: Rendering of the scenic backdrop by Brian Clinnin.



# Food for Thought

## What's In A Name?

**Prospero** is an Italian word meaning favorable or propitious. Prospero has been blessed by fortune with a dukedom, then with magic and a magical island, and finally with a chance to reclaim his birthright and forgive his enemies.

**Trinculo**, a drunkard, can find his name echoed in the Italian verb *trincare* or “to drink.”

The name **Caliban** is an anagram of the word “canibal,” the older spelling of cannibal. Although Caliban does not eat human flesh, Shakespeare probably had Montaigne’s essay *Of Cannibals* in mind when choosing this name.

**Ariel** is tonally similar to the adjective “airy,” and this name highlights his affinity with air and wind.

## Sounds and Sweet Airs

*The Tempest* is one of Shakespeare’s most musical plays: Ariel is given multiple songs in the text, and is described as playing the tabor; Caliban describes the sweet sounds filling the island, and even the play’s language suggests songlike tranquility. Interestingly, the original arrangements of “Full Fathom Five” and “Where the Bee Sucks There Suck I” survive. Both are attributed to Robert Johnson, a musician in the court of James I.

## Boy, Oh Boy!

In Shakespeare’s England, it was against the law for women to perform on the public stage. For this reason, the female roles in plays were always performed by males, usually teenage boys who were of slighter stature than the other actors, had higher voices and no beards. (Shakespeare jokes about this in *Midsummer*, when Flute tries to be excused from playing Thisbe on the grounds that his beard has begun to come in). Miranda (as well as Ariel, now often depicted as male) was played by a boy. When reading or watching this play, consider how the tone of the performance might be different with a boy playing Miranda.

## Where in the World...

Since Alonso and his company are sailing from Tunis to Naples when they are shipwrecked, Prospero’s island most likely lies in the Mediterranean Sea. However due to the influence of New World accounts on the play, scholars have also proposed that the island lies off the coast of Virginia or in the Caribbean. Still others argue the island has a African flavor, and a few point to Ireland, which Shakespeare’s contemporaries believed was magical and inhabited by near non-humans, as a likely candidate. This production was inspired by the landscape of an actual island, Pantalleria, that lies between Sicily and Tunisia.

## It's Not Easy Being Green

*The Tempest* can be considered a “Green World Play;” or a play utilizing a natural setting in which the natural order of the world is restored and returned to its rightful balance. One could argue that the balance of the world is returned when Prospero forgives his enemies and is reinstated as the rightful Duke of Milan.

# Explore Online

A link to some YouTube videos where you can hear the difference between Olde English and Middle English

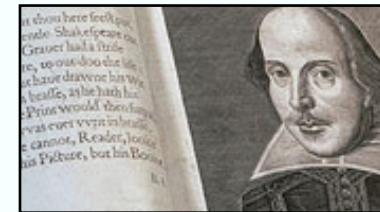
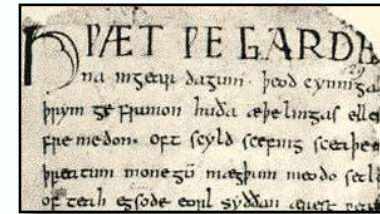
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL071DC49FD027E2A2>

A link to the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Tempest* page

<http://www.folger.edu/Content/Discover-Shakespeare/Shakespeares-Works/The-Plays/The-Tempest.cfm>

A link to the Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust website

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/home.html>



# Sources & Further Reading

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE, Introductions, Notes, and Bibliography by A.L. Rowe

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE: THE TEMPEST, edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan

A READER'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Muriel B. Ingham

ASIMOV'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Isaac Asimov

THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE,  
by Laurie Rozakis

FREEING SHAKESPEARE'S VOICE by Kristin Linklater

THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein

LECTURES ON SHAKESPEARE by W. H. Auden

THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer

"NOTES ON THE TEMPEST" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce

SHAKESPEARE AFTER ALL by Marjorie Garber

SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov

SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES by Doyle, Lischner, and Dench

SHAKESPEARE'S IMAGERY by Caroline Spurgeon

SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE, Consultant Editors Keith Parsons and Pamela Mason

SHAKESPEARE: THE INVENTION OF THE HUMAN by Harold Bloom

SHAKESPEARE OUR CONTEMPORARY by Jan Kott

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE TEMPEST, compiled by the Royal Shakespeare Company

THEATRE: A WAY OF SEEING, Third Edition by Milly S. Barranger

THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding

SHAKESPEARE SET FREE, edited by Peggy O'Brien

SHAKING HANDS WITH SHAKESPEARE, by Alison Wedell Schumacher

THE TEMPEST: NORTON CRITICAL EDITION, edited by Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman

THE TEMPEST: MODERN CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS, ed. by Harold Bloom

