



William Shakespeare

The Tempest

CONTEXT

The last play written exclusively by Shakespeare, the *Tempest* was probably first performed in 1611 and again the following year as part of the celebrations held for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of King James I. Scholars have not been able to locate any clear source for the play's story line, but there is a whole variety of allusions to classical literature: references to Carthage and the Widow Dido recall the *Aeneid*; Prospero's renunciation speech echoes Medea's in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; and Ariel's name is taken from the *Old Testament*. But even the action of the whole play is allusive: the fact that an entire past fraught with guilt and betrayals is being transformed and redeemed as the condition for bringing a new community into existence—the “brave new world” of which Miranda speaks (V, i, 183)—suggests the *parousia* of the *New Testament* and the *Book of Revelation*. Critics have often seen parallels between Prospero, the master of *legerdemain*, the art of illusion, giving up his magic at the end of the play and Shakespeare himself, the master dramatist, renouncing his powers and bidding farewell to his art in a play in which he deals explicitly with the theme and power of art. It is also an appropriate finale to Shakespeare's consideration of political regimes. Remember, this is the same poet who gave us a profound reworking of the ancient world in his Greek and Roman plays, of the medieval world in the history plays, and of the (early) modern world in plays like *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Much Ado*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*. Some of the more serious thinkers of the Renaissance, Machiavelli included, believed that the divisions wracking Europe couldn't be overcome till the internal divisions tearing Italy apart were resolved. In the *Tempest* Shakespeare shows Prospero not only healing the wounds of a past but doing so in such a way that he creates the conditions for unifying the north and south of Italy, Milan and Naples, and bringing into existence a new kind of community.

SUMMARY

The play opens with a wild storm striking a ship; after calling his Boatswain to stir the mariners, the Master withdraws and is not seen again. The ship carries Alonzo, the King of Naples; his brother, Sebastian; Alonzo's son, Ferdinand; Antonio, the Duke of Milan; Gonzolo, the aging advisor to Antonio; and several noblemen. They are returning to Italy

from Africa where they have just celebrated the marriage of Alonzo's daughter to the Prince of Tunis. The nobles press their services on the Boatswain, but he tells them they do "assist the storm," and that if they can use their "authority," to do so; otherwise get below. The storm is so fierce that they give their lives up for lost, crying as they run off, "To prayers, to prayers! All lost!"

Scene ii shifts to an island where Prospero reassures his daughter, who saw the ship break up, that her heart need not grieve as his magic has prevented any harm coming to the passengers. He tells Miranda that the hour has come for her to know about her past and reveals for the first time that twelve years before this he had been the Duke of Milan. His love of studies had so preoccupied him that his brother Antonio took advantage of his neglect and conspired with Alonzo, the King of Naples, to drive him out of his dukedom and claim it for himself. The conspirators carried Prospero and Miranda off by night and set them adrift in an unrigged ship with every expectation that they would not survive the sea. The kindness of Gonzolo, one of his counselors, had supplied food and clothing and Prospero's beloved books, and Divine Providence had landed them on this island.

Today, he tells her, Fortune has brought his enemies to the shores of his island. Finishing his tale, he charms Miranda to sleep and summons Ariel, his magic sprite. Ariel reports to his master that all of his instructions have been carried out: everyone but the sailors abandoned the ship during the storm which he created, and all made it safely to the island where they are now separated, the nobles in one group, Stephano and Trinculo in another, and Ferdinand by himself, each believing that all the others had perished. Prospero is pleased and instructs Ariel to make himself invisible to all but him.

He then wakens Miranda and together they go to speak with their slave Caliban, who is the offspring of Sycorax, the witch who had inhabited the island before Prospero and Miranda arrived. Caliban calls down curses on them for having made him a slave after he had loved them and shown them all the virtues of his island. Prospero responds with promises of cramps and pinches all night long for his ingratitude, saying that the two of them had treated him well, educating him and letting him live with them until he attempted to rape Miranda. Caliban is sent off to fetch firewood, and the invisible Ariel enters, playing on a pipe and singing, followed by Ferdinand. Miranda and Ferdinand see each other for the first time, and both are amazed. Before this moment, Miranda had only known her father and Caliban and assumes Ferdinand must be a spirit. Ferdinand on his side assumes she must be the goddess who inspires the music he has been following. They are immediately enamored of one another, but Prospero will not let the match proceed, not at least until the lovers have had to overcome real hardships: he does not want them to take each other too lightly. He names Ferdinand a traitor and drags him off a prisoner over the pleadings of Miranda.

Act II opens on the nobles, who were cast ashore on another part of the island. While the lords give thanks for their safety, Alonzo grieves over the loss of his son. Ariel, still invisible, enters and plays music that charms all to sleep except Antonio and Sebastian. Antonio takes advantage of the opening given him to persuade Sebastian that a great opportunity lies before him, that he can claim the kingdom of Naples as his own:

Ferdinand is presumed drowned; his sister Claribel, who would be next in line for the throne, is too far away by reason of her recent marriage. It would be easy to kill his brother, Alonzo, as he lies sleeping, and take the throne. Sebastian agrees, but before they are able to carry out the murder, Ariel startles Gonzolo awake, and his shout wakens the others. They all rouse and leave to search the island for some sign of Ferdinand.

Meanwhile, on another part of the island, Caliban is gathering wood. Seeing Trinculo approach, he mistakes him for one of Prospero's avenging spirits and attempts to hide. Trinculo enters seeking shelter from the lingering storm and decides to take cover with Caliban. Stephano stumbles in, singing drunkenly, and hearing Caliban's pleas for mercy, he decides that the monster needs a drink. Trinculo recognizes Stephano's voice and it is not long before the three of them sit down together to drink the liquor Stephano has rescued from the ship. Caliban quickly learns the virtues of liquor and swears to serve Stephano as a god.

Act III opens on Ferdinand hauling the wood that Prospero has commanded him to carry. Miranda enters and begs him to rest a bit. The two declare their love for one another, and when Miranda freely offers herself, Ferdinand joyfully responds in kind. Prospero, who has been watching the young lovers unseen, approves and then exits to complete his plans.

Scene ii shifts back to Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano who are now all outrageously drunk. Caliban has proposed killing Prospero so that Stephano can rule the island, a plan that appeals to both Stephano and Trinculo. As Caliban repeats his plan, Ariel, who is invisible to all three of them, imitates their voices and provokes them to quarrel with one another. Ariel plays a tune on his pipe and drum that they had sung earlier, and the three of them follow the sound of the music.

Scene iii returns to the king and his noblemen searching for Ferdinand. Alonzo has given up all hope for his son, and Antonio and Sebastian quietly reaffirm their intention of killing the King at the next opportunity. Prospero enters unseen and commands a troop of Spirits to bring in a table loaded with a banquet. The men are all amazed, but as they begin to eat, Ariel swoops down in the guise of a harpy and the banquet vanishes. Ariel proclaims himself a minister of Fate, declaring the powers that be have not forgotten what was done to Prospero and his child but merely delayed their judgment: it is Alonzo's guilt that has cost the life of his son. Ariel vanishes, leaving Alonzo to add guilt to his grief and stirring Antonio and Sebastian to a guilty frenzy that sends them off in pursuit of the Spirit.

Act IV opens with Prospero speaking to Ferdinand and Miranda, explaining that all of his anger had been feigned to test the young Prince. As Ferdinand has passed the test, Prospero gives Miranda to him with the stern warning that her virginity must remain intact until after the rites of marriage have been performed. He summons Ariel to call the Spirits to perform a Masque for the lovers. The Masque ends abruptly as Prospero suddenly recalls Caliban's plot on his life. He excuses himself and calls on Ariel to bring some of the finery from his cell to hang on a line as bait for the three conspirators.

Stephano and Trinculo enter complaining that what Caliban had called a harmless fairy had led them on a fool's chase and into a stinking pond. Caliban pleads for both their patience and their silence as they are now approaching Prospero's cell. At the entrance they see the rich garments that Prospero has hung out as bait and are immediately distracted by them. In vain, Caliban urges them to restrain themselves, not to be such fools but do the murder first. Suddenly a host of Spirits in the shape of hunting hounds appears, driving them off and pursuing them as they flee.

Act V opens on Ariel telling Prospero that he has made his enemies prisoners and undone their minds, just as he had instructed. He observes that if Prospero could see them, their plight would make him tender. When Prospero asks if he really thinks so, Ariel replies, he would be moved, were he human. Prospero is moved and sends for them. Ariel leads in Alonzo, who is plainly witless. They are followed by Sebastian and Antonio, who are in the same state. Prospero greets them and forgives them the wrongs they did, and slowly their senses begin to return. As they come to themselves, they wonder if the shape before them is really Prospero or whether it isn't a spirit of the island. Contrite and still amazed, Alonzo releases Milan to Prospero and begs pardon for his wrongs. With his mind restored, he remembers the loss of Ferdinand, and Prospero tells him that he too has lost his daughter and then reveals Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess together. The whole company is struck dumb to find the young heir alive, and Miranda, amazed at the number of handsome creatures who have suddenly appeared on her island, cries out, "O, brave new world that has such people in it" (V, i, 183). Ariel enters with the sailors from the ship, who report that it did not break up in the storm after all and that all hands are safe. Caliban enters with Stephano and Trinculo, who are wearing Prospero's stolen finery and the three are promptly sent off to clean up his cell. Prospero invites Alonzo and his following to join him for the evening so that he can tell them more fully how all this has come to pass and make plans with them to return to Italy. Turning to Ariel, he gives him one last command—to assure calm seas and safe passage for the return voyage—and then gives him the freedom he has been wanting since before the beginning of the play.

The play ends with Prospero stepping forward to deliver an Epilogue. He acknowledges to the audience that unless they give him their hands (in applause), he will be confined on the island as Ariel was before him. He says that he now lacks "spirits to enforce, art to enchant," and that his ending will be despair unless they relieve him "by prayer." "As you from crimes would pardoned be," he concludes, "Let your indulgence set me free."



Things to Think About

1. Keep in mind that the discovery of the New World (America) coincided with Reformation impulses to found new theocracies dedicated to God. Two new colonies were springing up whose political (and religious) roots were English, the Jamestown (1607) colony in the south and the Plymouth colony in the north (1620), the first commercial in orientation, the second religious. The *Tempest* is very much about regimes, old and new, and about colonies, the one Prospero has founded on the island and those new ones springing up in the world that might learn from his.
2. Take special note of the play's setting, both those in the foreground and those in the background: the island on which the action takes place but also Milan and Naples, the two centers of political intrigue, and Tunis, Africa. In reconciling Milan and Italy, Prospero not only unifies the north and south of Italy, he unites Italy with Africa through the marriage between the Prince of Tunis and Alonso's daughter. Reflect on the implications of this accomplishment: not only of the extent of the unity Prospero achieves by the end of the play but of the spirit of political justice and amity or peace in which that unity is realized. Notice also the link between time and settings in the play. The past and future are set in Milan, a realm of politics and an ancient civilization; the present of the play is set on an island in a realm of magic, nature, and seemingly supernatural events. Is what takes place on the island meant to be seen as a power of renewing this ancient civilization or is it pointing towards some utopian colony?
3. It is important to set off the island and the political worlds and intrigues it brings into focus against the *sea*. How are we to understand the image of the sea in the play, its powers of requital, its link to "the powers" which themselves do not forget and which seem to wait for the right moment to act?
4. Be aware of the analogies between a theater and Prospero's island. The ship's company is on the island for about the time it takes to perform a play. The timing isn't accidental; the correspondences or analogies between Prospero's island and a theater performance are extensive and suggestive. If the *Tempest* encourages us to see a correspondence between what Prospero does on the island and what the poet does on the page that finally gets translated into a theater performance, what is Shakespeare saying about *art* and *the imagination* and their role in realizing *political* ends? The role of the imagination is central to this play. Be aware of illusions, which come in various guises. Don't overlook the more subtle examples that are referred to as having happened prior to the action of the play itself.

5. Be especially aware of the theme of authority, the tendency of people to take it too lightly on the one hand, the temptation it poses to those who inordinately desire it on the other. What does the play help us understand about the extent and limits of authority? What is the intrinsic link between *ruling* and *knowledge*? Can someone rule well who doesn't know what he's doing or who's so absorbed in his studies that he doesn't know what's going on around him? Keep in mind the importance of Prospero's books in this context. The Master of the ship comes out and gives orders at the beginning of the play and then disappears, not to be seen again till the very end. Why? The nobles, who are used to ruling but who are afraid of losing their lives, try to run the ship when they are threatened by the storm. What do we learn immediately about them from their actions? What should they have done? Even before the chain of events unfolds on the island, are we given some sense of what the lords will do from their actions on the ship? What do we learn? Carry these ruminations on the opening scene of the play into the rest of the drama and what unfolds on the island.
6. Closely related to this theme of authority is that of art. If the *Tempest* is in part Shakespeare's valedictory reflections on the power and limits of art, and one of the main themes of the play is authority, then presumably, the play has something to teach us about the *authority* and *purpose* of art. What is it? How are art and authority related? To what or to whom is the artist accountable? Set Prospero as an artist next to Sycorax, the witch whom he replaces. Sycorax, as you recall, not only gave birth to Caliban, she kept Ariel confined in a tree. It is Prospero who released him and promised him his freedom. What is the difference between Prospero and Sycorax and the way they use their powers? Is it simply incidental that Sycorax is feminine and Prospero masculine or does it matter? Sycorax's child is Caliban, Prospero's Miranda. Is it simply incidental that Sycorax's child is masculine and Prospero's is feminine. What light do these relationships shed on their characters and their powers or the motives behind their use of them?
7. Property rights are central to the main theme of the play. Prospero allowed his love of studies to interfere with his care of Milan, his former Dukedom, and he lost it. The men who seek power don't just seek power; they want it partly because it brings with it vast extents of land: Milan, Naples, Africa, the island itself. Consider the motives behind Antonio's original plot to unseat his brother Prospero; Sebastian's plot to kill Alonso; Caliban's efforts to use Stephano and Trinculo to usurp Prospero's rule on the island. Caliban wants power in part because he believes he has a greater right to the island than Prospero since he was there first. Is his right greater—does he have "squatter's rights"—or is Prospero's? What entitles men to the land they oversee? Is there ever any "real" authority without knowledge or love? Set all of these questions about land and authority against the ideal commonwealth Gonzalo wants to construct.
8. There is an interesting contrast in *The Tempest* between art and imagination versus science and reason. Clearly the play favors the former over the latter. In addition, the play presents magic as the power which seems to resolve all issues with interpersonal relationships and even political problems, such as tensions in Italy at the time. It is worthwhile to remember these Shakespearean themes of the late Renaissance in

regard to their contrasts with the Rationalism of the early Modern period and such thinkers as Descartes, Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes.



Study Questions

1. The play opens with the Master of the ship calling his Boatswain, giving orders, and then withdrawing. He has only a few lines, after which we don't see him again. Why? In a play dealing essentially with people who exceed their authority, what is Shakespeare showing us in his presentation of the ship's Captain?
2. How does the opening scene anticipate the action of the whole play?
3. Gonzalo says of the Boatswain "He'll be hanged yet,/ Though every drop of water swear against it/ And gape at wid'st to glut him" (I, i, 55-56)? What do we learn about Gonzalo and the Boatswain from this observation?
4. How old is Miranda and how do we know?
5. What was it about Prospero's management of his dukedom that allowed Antonio to usurp him (I, ii)? Whose fault was it that Prospero lost his dukedom?
6. Did Prospero's brother Antonio take over Milan by himself or did he have help? And if help, from whom and why?
7. When Miranda hears Prospero's story of their exile for the first time and asks how, finally, they came ashore, Prospero replies, "By providence divine" (I, ii, 159) and recalls the help given them by Gonzalo. How are we to understand Prospero here?
8. His account coming to a close, Miranda asks her father why he raised the sea-storm (I, ii, 176-77). Prospero replies,

"Know thus far forth.

*By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. Here cease more questions:
Thou art inclined to sleep; 'tis a good dullness,
And give it way: I know thou canst not choose."*

What do these words reveal about the extent or limits of Prospero's powers?

9. Describe the circumstances by which Ariel came to serve Prospero. What has Prospero promised him if he serves faithfully and well?
10. Characterize Ariel; what are his (his/her?) powers, his "nature," and what does the fact that freedom means so much to him suggest about his character?
11. Characterize Caliban. What do we learn about him from the following words?

*"I must eat my dinner.
 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" (I, ii, 330-344).*

12. How does Antonio persuade Sebastian to murder his brother (II, i)?
13. In Act II, i, Ariel's music puts all the King's company to sleep except Alonzo, Sebastian, and Antonio. Sebastian and Antonio urge Alonzo not to resist the heaviness of his eyelids and sleep. Trusting them, he follows their advice and falls off to sleep. While he sleeps, the other two plot his murder and a takeover of his Kingdom. Why does Shakespeare handle the scene the way he does? Why do you suppose it is this three who are proof against "music" and "sleep"?
14. In Act II, ii, the Caliban-Trinculo-Stephano sub-plot is set in motion. All seems fun on the surface, but is it only fun? What do the individuals involved in this group bring into focus for us in the play? The scene begins, for example, with Trinculo not seeing Caliban for who he is. In words that ironically mean far more than he intends, he says, "There would this monster make a man; any strange beast there makes a man" (II, ii, 29-30). In what ways do these figures stand in contrast to those in the main plot, and equally importantly, what light do they shed on those in the main plot? What does all this "fun" about misperceiving, drinking, scheming, and serving have to do with what is going on in the main plot?
15. As act III begins, Miranda is so distressed at seeing Ferdinand slave that she offers to help. This exchange between the couple moves us to the center of the play where the plot thickens. Prospero's actions seem cruel; he's placed Ferdinand in a position of

servitude that is or appears to be no different from Caliban's. Is he being perverse or despotic? Or is he up to something that neither Ferdinand nor Miranda sees? How important, for example, is it that the two learn to serve? Can one be a good ruler without serving? Do you think Alonzo has properly prepared his son for the task of ruling that is ahead of him?

16. What is the first and most important thing Caliban wants Stephano to do in carrying out the plot to overthrow Prospero (III, ii, 84-99)? What does Caliban's pre-occupation tell us about Prospero? What about himself?
17. In Act III, iii, Prospero has Ariel put on a masque and banquet for the nobles. The masque is enchanting, causing Alonzo to say, "What harmony is this?" When the lords are about to eat, Ariel appears to the sounds of thunder and the flashing of lightning and reminds the men of their sins. What is the function of this masque and banquet? Why do you suppose Prospero introduces it here? Is there a deeper metadramatic symbolism at work?
18. Act IV, i, presents Prospero before his cell with Ferdinand and Miranda, telling the young lovers that if the burdens he placed on them were austere it was because he had so much to protect. As with the nobles, Ariel again puts on a masque, this time involving exchanges between Iris, Ceres, and Juno, the goddesses who oversee nuptial and fertility rites. The three goddesses have come to celebrate the wedding between Ferdinand and Miranda, but Venus and Cupid are missing. Ceres has foresworn their company, and Iris says not to worry, she met them flying back to Paphos, their home. What is the function of this masque? Why are Venus and Cupid missing? What is Shakespeare doing here? Is this mere ornament, showmanship, a great poet showing off or does the masque have some intrinsic relationship to the whole play?
19. As a part of his reconciling with Alonzo, Prospero pulls back the veil to show Ferdinand and Miranda engaged together. What are they doing, and what do you suppose is the significance of their pastime?
20. Identify the following quotes by speaker and context:

*"You mar our labors:
keep your cabins: you do assist the storm."
"Know thus far forth.
By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop."
"You taught me language; and my profit on't*

*Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!"*

*"Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."*

*"You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,
That hath to instrument this lower world
And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea
Hath caused to belch up you; and on this island
Where man doth not inhabit; you 'mongst men
Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad;
And even with such-like valour men hang and drown
Their proper selves. [Alonso, Sebastian, etc. draw their swords]*

*You fools! I and my fellows
Are ministers of Fate: the elements,
Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well
Wound the loud winds.... If you could hurt,
Your swords are now too massy for your strengths
And will not be uplifted. But remember—
For that's my business to you—that you three
From Milan did supplant good Prospero;
Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,
Him and his innocent child: for which foul deed
The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
They have bereft; and do pronounce by me:
Lingering perdition, worse than any death
Can be at once, shall step by step attend
You and your ways; whose wraths to guard you from—
Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls
Upon your heads—is nothing but heart-sorrow
And a clear life ensuing."*

*"O, it is monstrous, monstrous:
Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass.
Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded, and
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded
And with him there lie mudded."*

*"Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and*

*Are melted into air, into thin air:
 And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
 The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on; and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep."*

*"The rarer action is
 In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
 The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
 Not a frown further."*

21. What does Shakespeare gain in displaying both the full extent and limits of man's powers of reason in the natural order and the power of the miraculous or supernatural in the affairs of men in the *Tempest*? How is the *Tempest* working to do in drama what St. Thomas did in philosophy, the reconciliation of faith and reason?
22. Some critics see Prospero trying to play God. His actions show him to be a worker of justice, a judge, a miracle worker, a bestower of grace, mercy, etc. Consider the temptation the *Tempest* must present to religious-minded people to do the same. What must Prospero learn before he takes on the roles mentioned above? And can he just will to do these things or does it matter that the occasion has to first present itself to him ("fortune" brings the ship's company to his island, he can't force it to come simply because he has a score to settle); and what have his years of "penance" done to prepare him for the moment once it does come?
23. Reflect on the sea in the *Tempest* as image of grace. How does Shakespeare use natural images, things from nature, as a way of revealing God's work in the world?



Questions on Language and Form

1. Identify the structure of the play: the *opening conflict*, the *complication*, the *crisis*, the *denouement*, and the *resolution*.
2. Masques within a play, such as those Prospero put on for Miranda and Ferdinand and the nobles, were a standard feature of Renaissance drama. What role do they play in the *Tempest*?
3. Recognizing multilayered plots has become by now, we hope, an accustomed way of reading Shakespeare. Identify all of the plots and describe what it is they have in common. What is it that unifies them?
4. The Island as Theater: the characters who arrive on Prospero's island are there for approximately the time it takes to perform a play. Prospero works his characters exactly as a playwright does. Identify all the ways in which the *Tempest* shows its awareness of its own powers *as poetry*.
5. Language: the action of the *Tempest* can be described as a movement from a tempest to music, from those conditions in Italy which were characterized by disorder, injustices, and betrayals, to those same conditions on Prospero's island transformed—made "musical." The virtues at work in this transformation, this "sea-change," are familiar enough; they are truth, justice, goodness, beauty. What makes them special in this case is that they cannot be thought of or even appreciated apart from *music*. Consider the themes of freedom, nature, colonies, music, storms, the sea, the differences between men and monsters. Find allusions or metaphors that are used to render or give dramatic form to *each* of these and see how they help advance or make richer this overarching theme expressed in the movement from tempest to music.

*Our Editor-in-Chief, Joseph Pearce, the author of **The Quest for Shakespeare** (available at Ignatius.com), is one of the most articulate defenders of the traditional view that the actor William Shakspere (spelled variously) was the author of the Shakespeare canon of plays and verse. However, we would be remiss if we failed to inform our students that there is a huge and growing debate about the true identity of the author of the Shakespeare plays, so we offer the following suggestion for side reading on the matter.*

Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time
The Case of Shakespeare v. Shakspere
by Joseph Sobran

What do Sigmund Freud, Orson Welles, Henry James, Kenneth Branagh, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, John Galsworthy, Vladimir Nabokov, Charlie Chaplin, Michael York and Sir John Gielgud, Derek Jacoby, Mortimer Adler and Supreme Court Justices Blackmun, Powell and Stevens have in common? They all believed that *William Shakespeare* was a pseudonym for Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, not for Will Shakspere the actor (whose only other known work is a barely illiterate will) to whom the authorship of the plays by William Shakespeare has been generally attributed for the last 400 years.

Arguing from evidence in the plays and poems, author Joseph Sobran demonstrates that the authorship debate can and ought to be relevant to the enjoyment and understanding of the plays. That is our position as well - that knowing the authorship of the great plays written by "William Shakespeare" can be an enormous help in understanding them and appreciating their nuances and full historical significance. For that reason we invite our students to dip their toes into this great literary debate by reading Sobran's *Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time*. It will greatly enrich their experience reading the Shakespeare plays, regardless of their conclusions regarding the authorship of the plays.

The following all apply to only one man of the time the plays by *William Shakespeare* were written: only one man of his day wrote as *William Shakespeare* wrote; personally experienced many of the significant events in his great plays as they appear in his plays; visited many of the somewhat remote places that appear in his plays; held the high offices about which he so often wrote; lived in the rarefied atmosphere of royalty and wealth so often depicted with unerring accuracy in his plays; intimately knew the expressions, thoughts and mannerisms of courtly life to a level of detail virtually impossible for one who had not long experienced them to guess at or fake; wrote poems containing hundreds of resemblances to the plays; used images, themes, turns of phrase, rhetorical figures and general diction as one finds in the plays; used words only used one other place in the English language - in the plays by *William Shakespeare*. That man was Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. It was not the actor William Shakspere.

Following are two reviews of Mr. Sobran's book, *Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time*.

Joseph Sobran has written an elegant and persuasive condensation of the case for Edward de Vere's authorship of the Shakespeare canon, updating the previous efforts of passionate and intelligent students of the Shakespeare question such as Charlton Ogburn Junior, Bernard M. Ward and John Thomas Looney. The book cogently and persuasively presents a much-maligned theory which counts among its recent adherents such intellectual lights as Derek Jacoby, Michael York, John Gielgud, Mortimer Adler and Supreme Court Justices Blackmun, Powell and Stevens.

As other reviewers have noted, it does not matter so much whether Sobran's arguments are correct -- this reader finds many of them persuasive -- as that the subject itself warrants serious and sustained attention. At present champions of the orthodox Shakespeare retain their intellectual monopoly within higher education primarily by means of excluding non-specialists such as Sobran from the debate over the Shakespeare question and vociferously denying, against a host of contrary evidence that the subject even exists.

On the contrary, anyone who cares for the future of literary studies should acquaint themselves with the arguments made in this book. Not all of them are, in my opinion, equally valid. But that is no cause to ignore or belittle Mr. Sobran for tackling an important question which (sorry) ain't going to disappear just because a few powerful Shakespeare industry insiders insist on feeling threatened by it rather than seeing it as one of the greatest boons which could befall a shrinking intellectual discipline. "Shakespeare" has never been more interesting or more real than he is in this book. For readers in search of a compact, intelligent, entertaining introduction to the authorship question -- a question which is only now, after many years of suppression and neglect, beginning to come into its prime as one of the great questions of our day --

this book is a great place to begin. Roger Stritmatter

Most people accept the tradition that the plays and poems attributed to William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon were indeed written by him, and they assume that doubters of the Stratford man's authorship (anti-Stratfordians) must be irrational elitists. They might also assume that anti-Strats have nothing to offer those who simply wish to understand and enjoy the plays. But all of these assumptions are either debatable or wrong. In any case, though both sides of the authorship debate have been known to engage in circular arguments based on questionable evidence and to hurl childish ad hominem at one another, this is not true of Joseph Sobran who is reasonable in his arguments and civil toward his opponents. Rather than ask whether anti-Stratfordians are elitists, Sobran suggests that we ought to be asking if Shakespeare was one. For example, Shakespeare often makes cruel, unfair fun of social-climbing commoners exactly like Will Shaksper (a common variation of his name in contemporary legal documents). Arguing from evidence in the plays and poems, Sobran also demonstrates that the authorship debate can and ought to be relevant to the enjoyment and understanding of the Works.

While I am not wholly on the side of the underdog anti-Strats, I believe that Stratfordian scholars (which too often means mainstream scholars) have done such a disservice to the general public's enjoyment and understanding of Shakespeare that I must take them to task. Some are so fanatical in their defense of the Stratford man's claim to authorship that they seem to believe that if there were no tradition that he wrote the Works, they could conclusively prove from scratch that he did; but they could not for the same reason that anti-Stratfordians can never prove beyond a shadow that he didn't or that one of their alternative candidates did: The trail is old, and the case is cold. If ever there was a smoking gun it has long since turned entirely to rust. The strongest and best evidence that the man from Stratford wrote the Works is the tradition that he did, which, while not being conclusive, is simply difficult to dismiss.

But this tradition is not much. 'Anxious to uncover any details to fill out his biography, overzealous Stratfordians have accepted and taught many dubious legends and read a fanciful biography of the Stratford man into the plays and poems. The anti-Stratfordians see through this mess because they have no desire to add more to the Stratford man's biography than the documentary record will bear or to connect the biography to the Works where such a connection is based on pure guesswork. (Of course, they have motive to see other things that are not there, but here I speak only of how the anti-Strats are right.) For example, it was an anti-Stratfordian who realized that the famous "upstart crow" quotation has nothing whatever to do with

Shakespeare, but instead clearly refers to an actor who did not write plays but was merely guilty of adlibbing. (More often, each side is equally at fault.

I know of at least one instance where both sides used the exact same piece of evidence to prove their opposite conclusions. Upon further examination, it turned out that the evidence in question proved nothing whatsoever regarding authorship, yet each side had found in it proof of what it wanted to believe.) Meanwhile the Stratfordians reject the clear evidence from the plays that Shakespeare had far more learning than could have been provided by any formal education available to the Stratford man. In and of itself, this might not rule out the possibility that he was self-taught-except that the mainstream scholars HAVE ruled this out. They long ago boxed themselves into a corner by declaring that Shakespeare could not have had a vast education and any evidence that he did, no matter how compelling, cannot be admitted. (Once they assume that the Bard had little formal education, many orthodox Shakespeare scholars underestimate Shakespeare's learning and assume that a degree in literature somehow makes them Shakespeare's betters in matters such as, of all things, sixteenth-century Italian geography where it actually turns out that Shakespeare is the master.) Students are misleadingly told that they should readily understand Shakespeare because he wrote in ordinary language, aside from archaic words and grammatical constructions (as if these were not formidable enough). This is belied by the demonstrable fact that Shakespeare employed abstruse legalistic metaphors, used idiomatic Italian phrases (that he only partially translated) and demonstrated arcane knowledge of such subjects as heraldry. This and much more is explained in Sobran's book.

My only criticism of Sobran is that he gets so caught up in his persuasive case for the candidacy of the Earl of Oxford (which understandably persuades him) that he leans too far toward assuming Oxford's authorship to be a proven fact. In this, Sobran is like other participants in the authorship controversy. The authorship debate is a good example of my maxim that wherever there are only two sides to an argument both are usually wrong. Just because there is reason to doubt that Will Shaksper authored the plays and poems does not prove that he did not, and just because a case can be made that someone else might have written them does not prove that he or she did. The anti-Stratfordians are correct to point out that the biography of the traditional candidate does not fit the apparent biography of the author of the Works, and the Stratfordians are right to point out that the anti-Stratfordians cannot prove that one of their alternative candidates is the true author. Part of the argument of each side is correct, but neither side is free of error. That being said, Sobran's contribution to the anti-Stratfordian cause is extremely readable and thought-provoking. He sums up the best evidence as it stands. If the average reader ought to read only one book by an anti-Strat, this is the one. Miles N. Fowler Charlottesville, VA USA