

Shakespeare

Greed, Wrath and Lust

James Garnon

What is *The Tempest* really about?

Well the plot of *The Tempest* on the face of it is quite simple. A group of people have been stranded on an island by a magician. But he's basically debating whether or not to take revenge on them and instead is learning that he needs to forgive and show mercy. But that's true of the other characters. Caliban feels wronged by Prospero. He wants to have Prospero killed. He wants to take the island back but he too needs to learn that actually forgiveness and mercy is the better road. We also get an opportunity to see Prospero as a parent, because for the Elizabethans of course a king was a kind of parent. So Prospero's daughter Miranda is important. But also too Caliban, who is in a way Prospero's son. We get to see how a bad parent produces a bad son. And we get to see that dynamic play out. So there's lots of different forms of interest, lots of different things that we can see.

Playing Caliban in *The Tempest*

Caliban is a very interesting part in that he's described by all the other characters in the play in so many different ways: he's a monster, he's a demi-devil, he's a fish, he's a moon-calf, he's deformed. A lot of these things are contradictory. How can he be a devil and a fish and a moon-calf and a deformed human? I think for an Elizabethan mind Caliban would have struck them as being a devil. As I say, he has all the vices: greed, wrath, lust. All the really bad things that people think drive them, Caliban has. But he's also kept human by Shakespeare. He doesn't have any magic. He clearly is in love with Miranda, desperately in love, but has been rejected by her and by Prospero. So his fury is coming from a place of love too. So that's how I started, was not wanting to rule anything out but try and keep everything in. So then you find a design that suits that and then you try also to do a realistic, naturalistic thing which is to imagine what it's like to be someone who was deserted on an island as a baby, his mother dies before Prospero finds him, and he's been left as a small child on an island surrounded by wild animals. There's a lot of complicated, interesting things you can do psychologically, you know, from research and through design.

What is the best age to start seeing Shakespeare's plays?

I have a ten-year-old son – in fact I have two sons, a ten- and a seven-year-old – and my ten-year-old has been coming and seeing Shakespeare since he was five. He saw *All's Well That Ends Well* when he was about five and a half and he's never been frightened of it, and he has now seen eight or so different Shakespeare plays, but because he was never told to worry about

it he's always understood it. I find it extraordinary. He on his own learnt 'To be or not to be' one afternoon just because he wanted to. And that's thrilling. I have another son who's seven. He likes doing. He likes playing. He's not interested in sitting still and watching. And when he's come to the theatre he's been bored rigid. And I completely understand both attitudes. I hate being in the theatre and watching. I love being in the theatre and playing. But I'm delighted that one of my sons can listen to the language and not be frightened by it. So, you know, Shakespeare is not something that anyone should feel they have to like, or have to sit and watch. It's something you can come and go from.

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