

M.A - English

Semester - 1

C.C - 2

Unit - III : The Tempest

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Character Sketch of Prospero

Prospero is one of the finest characters portrayed by William Shakespeare in *The Tempest*. He is the exiled duke of Milan and the father of Miranda, as well as a powerful magician ruler of a remote island. The play '*The Tempest*' revolves around him. Shakespeare has written more lines about him than any other character of the play. His presence is felt continuously, even in those scenes in which he does not appear personally. He is the manipulator of the action in the play. The sometimes-godlike character is well-rounded and full of contradictions, making him a difficult character to evaluate.

The play has two Prosperos - one who is a duke and the second who is the inhabitant of the island, one who is a father and a man and one who is a magician and a ruler. When he wrote '*The Tempest*' Shakespeare had acquired a serene elevation which can only be achieved after a man has seen the extremes of bliss and despair, and which can be acquired only by the truly intelligent and perceptive. As a man and a father he has all the passions of a human being, and subject to the same temptations and trials. He has enormous affection for his daughter, Miranda. In fact so much are his labours directed towards the goodness of her

of her welfare, and so incandescent is his caring that his affection for her often appears as boundless. In the deserted island he educates her with tender devotion. Miranda is his "loveliest darling", "a rich gift" who would "outstrip all praise". His joy knows no limits when he establishes that Ferdinand loves Miranda and would be a worthy husband for her. Since Miranda is a "third of his own life" it is not surprising that he cares for her so much. Apart from Miranda, Prospero has also affection for his younger brother, Antonio. He hands over his dukedom in the custody of Antonio, whose perfidy incites him to oust Prospero from Milan. It was the good old lord, Gonzalo, who provides for them enough food and clothing, but above all, provides Prospero with his magic books, not only is he saved along with Miranda, but is also well equipped to cease the initiative in life due to his books.

Prospero's love for knowledge is insatiable. As the Duke of Milan he is esteemed "for the liberal arts without parallel". But this thirst for knowledge is a passive passion in Milan. His primary task as the Duke of Milan is to the government governance of the state, and as a human being the task extends towards preservation of his own interests as well as that of his little daughter. He chooses to ~~look~~ overlook his primary duty as a ruler as well as a father. Then he chooses wrongly the man who is to govern the state on his behalf. He hands over the reins of governance to his younger brother, Antonio, who takes the help of the King of Naples to oust him from Milan. Once he loses his dukedom and is ousted from Milan necessity quickly makes him understand the value of putting his knowledge to actual use. It is this change in attitude towards knowledge that comes in so handy - whether it is used to have complete control over Ariel and Caliban, and consequently over the island, or it is used

to lure his daughters to the island to seek revenge.

Prospero is very different from most professors of magic, who use it to fulfil an unlawful contract with the devil. In comparison Prospero is grand and dignified. He first uses his magic powers to free Caliban and Ariel from eternal bondage on his arrival to the island, and later uses it to seek retributive justice. There is so much grandeur in Prospero that he looks more as a beneficent providence than as an enchanter in league with the powers of hell. Throughout the play we get repeated hints of the powers of his magic art. He has all the spirits at his mercy. Ariel, despite his repeated shows of reluctance to be held in bondage, has a distinct amount of love and affection, and even sympathy, for Prospero. The reluctance in Ariel is more due to the intrinsic nature of the spirit. He is the spirit of air and has the same instinct for freedom which characterizes air. Caliban knows this when he confesses that

"his art is of such power,
It would control my dam'g'd, Sakeas,
And make a vassal of him."

Prospero may appear stern, especially in his dealings with Caliban, but he is stern with Caliban after gentler methods fail, and in any case the moral code of the world in which he came from could not have made him reconcile to Caliban's attempted violation of the chastity of Miranda. Caliban is a natural man who treats sex just like he treats any other desire. He is thus prone to fulfil it with just as much of ease as his desire for food.

Prospero as a ruler of Milan is a major flop; in fact he is a non-starter. One of the outstanding features of Prospero's personality is his ability to learn through adversity. Once he gains control over the desert island he knows that he must not permit his earlier mistakes to surface. He does not abandon the governance of the island in favour of someone else like he did in case of his dukedom in Milan. But Prospero the ruler despite being a stern disciplinarian, who is respected and feared by his subjects, is essentially a morally upright man. It is true that we cannot explain Prospero's ousting of the natives of the island on which he is an unwelcome guest. In an odd way he is quite similar to his younger brother Antonio in this regard. If Antonio takes advantage of his elder brother's neglect of the governance of the state in order to oust him, then Prospero is the guilty of the use of his magic powers to control hapless natives of the island. But once he has got control of the island his rule is marked with benevolence. At the end of the play, Prospero sets about to rectify the one nagging doubt about his existence. He forgives his repentant enemies, gives Ariel his freedom and leaves the island free for Caliban's use.