The Tempest

William Shakespeare
Directed by Nicholas C. Avila

Notes by Kristin Leahey

Who's Who

Prospero: The former Duke of Milan, who was ousted by his younger brother and driven out to sea, has taken up residence on an island and ruled there for the past dozen years.

Miranda: The daughter of Prospero, Miranda remembers no other home but the island she shares with her father.

Ferdinand: The young and noble prince of Naples.

King Alonso of Naples: A king with faults but also a deep love for his son, Ferdinand.

Antonio: The younger brother of Prospero, Antonio has spent many years ruling as the Duke of Milan.

Ariel: A spirit of the island, Ariel has much power, but has spent many years serving Prospero after he defeated Ariel's former master, Sycorax.

Caliban: A native inhabitant of the island. While he used to rule with his mother, Sycorax, Caliban is now enslaved by Prospero and does menial tasks for him.

Gonzalo: An honest nobleman of Milan, he provided Prospero with provisions when he was first banished and forced out to sea.

Sebastian: Brother of Alonso, the King of Naples.

Stephano: The King's butler, who has a strong love for liquor.

Trinculo: The King's jester.

The Story

Prospero, the dethroned Duke of Milan, has suffered more than a decade of banishment. Cast away at sea with his 3-year-old daughter, Miranda, Prospero was betrayed and left for dead. Yet, when he came upon an island, Prospero commanded the island's residents Ariel and Caliban to be in his service. Years have passed, and Prospero's daughter is now nearly a grown woman. Prospero, too, has grown—in his mastery of magic. With Ariel's help, Prospero conjures a terrible storm that consumes the ship of King Alonso of Naples, who dethroned Duke Prospero and bestowed Milan on Prospero's usurping younger brother, Antonio. The King's ship splits, and everyone onboard washes up on different parts of the island. Over the course of a magical day, those who

have done evil are made to confront their demons, those who have been servants try their hands at a life as masters, and the king's son, Prince Ferdinand, and Prospero's daughter, Miranda, discover what it might mean to defy all odds and fall in love. Over this stormy journey, we see both those Prospero has wronged and those who have wronged him navigate not only the literal storm, but tempests of the soul that—at least for some—lead to a form of forgiveness.

A Play of Ambiguity

When readers open the 1623 *First Folio*, they immediately encounter *The Tempest*. Why it was placed first of the comedies and first in the Folio remains a bit of an enigma. Many scholars argue it received such an eminent position in the canon because of its popularity and significant role in the cultural conversation of the day. The play was not printed during Shakespeare's lifetime, as he died in 1616, which further shrouds the work in mystery. Unlike the Bard's other plays, it is not directly based on a history or a classical allegory or another fiction, but rather it seems to be an original with a few remnants of inspiration from a story of a shipwreck in the New World, an essay titled "Of Cannibales," and strains of the work of Virgil. In the 1753 *Amazing Wildness of Fancy*, Joseph Warton wrote:

> Of all of Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest* is the most striking instance of his creative power. He has there given the reins to his boundless imagination, and has carried the romantic, the wonderful, and the wild, to the most pleasing extravagance.

Adding to the work's vagaries, including its opaque genesis, is its setting. In the 1922 publication *Shakespeare's Final Period: Books and Characters*, Lytton Strachey attests to this conundrum:

> In *The Tempest*, unreality has reached its apotheosis. Two of the principal characters are frankly not human beings at all; and the whole action passes, through a series of impossible occurrences, in a place which can only by courtesy be said to exist. The Enchanted Island, indeed, peopled, for a timeless moment, by this strange fantastic medley of persons and of things, has been cut adrift forever from a common sense, and floats, buoyed up by a sea, not of waters, but of poetry.

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The remote location where the ship en route from Africa to Italy runs aground—where Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel have been marooned for about the past 12 years—is not clearly indicated. It's assumed to be somewhere in the Mediterranean, but many theatrical interpretations have set the destination justifiably as the Americas and rendered the play explicitly a narrative of colonialism.

As David Hirst argues in *The Tempest*: *Text and Performance*, "*The Tempest* is a play about power," which Oregon Shakespeare Festival director Nicholas Avila hopes to convey in his interpretation. Prospero's brother Antonio and Alonso, the King of Naples, cast Prospero and Miranda out to sea. They live because of the generosity of Gonzalo, an advisor to Alonso, who was also aware of the treasonous plan and secures Prospero and Miranda's survival by providing them rations and Prospero's sources for magic.

Once the family drifts ashore to the island, Prospero occupies it as his own and assumes it as his small kingdom—as

James Ryen and Amy Lizardo, who last appeared together in 2021's *It's Christmas, Carol!*, are once again castmates in *The Tempest*. Photos by Jenny Graham.

colonizer, he rules over a colony of three, fueled by his magic: Miranda, along with Ariel and Caliban, whom he has conscripted into various forms of servitude. In Act 1, Scene 2, the audience witnesses Prospero's tyrannical nature, which J. Wilson in his 1969 monograph, *The Meaning of The Tempes*t, compares to King Lear. Prospero harshly demands his beloved daughter Miranda's full attention, he threatens Ariel when they ask for freedom, and he cruelly does the same with Caliban. These characters, respectively, obey and disobey, all the while striving for their liberty and autonomy, away from the self-empowered and patriarchal Prospero.

As the play happens in real time, beginning with Prospero employing Ariel's magic to cause a shipwreck, he is able to claim power over the men of Italy who once disempowered him, and he has them confront their pasts and future on his claimed territory with the aspiration of returning to his former position as Duke. Additionally, he secures the marriage of his daughter to Ferdinand, son of Alonso, thus fortifying the power of Prospero's bloodline through the royal couple's future progeny. After he successfully regains his status as Duke, Prospero frees Ariel and Caliban, and then, in a perplexing turn, he forgives all and asks forgiveness for himself:

> As you from crimes would
> pardoned be, Let your
> indulgence set me free.

From what transpires onstage and what is revealed of the characters' pasts during the three hours, audiences will likely observe that men conquer both land and people, as well as betray, to achieve power, as this is the ultimate goal. This tragicomedy, along with *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*, which were all written between 1607 to 1613, are considered Shakespeare's romances for many of their shared characteristics. For instance, in romances characters are often provided second chances and there is reconciliation, regardless of the wrongdoings. In *The Tempest,* one of Shakespeare's most evolving politicized and polarizing plays, reparations are not made but rather once ultimate power is obtained by Prospero, the enslaved are freed, all persecutors and oppressors are absolved of their crimes, the traditional hierarchy of power is restored, and Prospero gives up the thing that empowers him: his magic. Would a man driven by power so easily give up the very thing that emboldens him? Would those, equally hungry for power, who betrayed him before not attempt to betray him again? And can all these men truly expect forgiveness for the wrongs they've committed and the oppression they've caused?

Perhaps the Bard, who many believe represented himself through Prospero, could also predict the future and the brutal future and relationship with enslavement and white men's insatiable desire for power in the "new world."

Premiere Productions

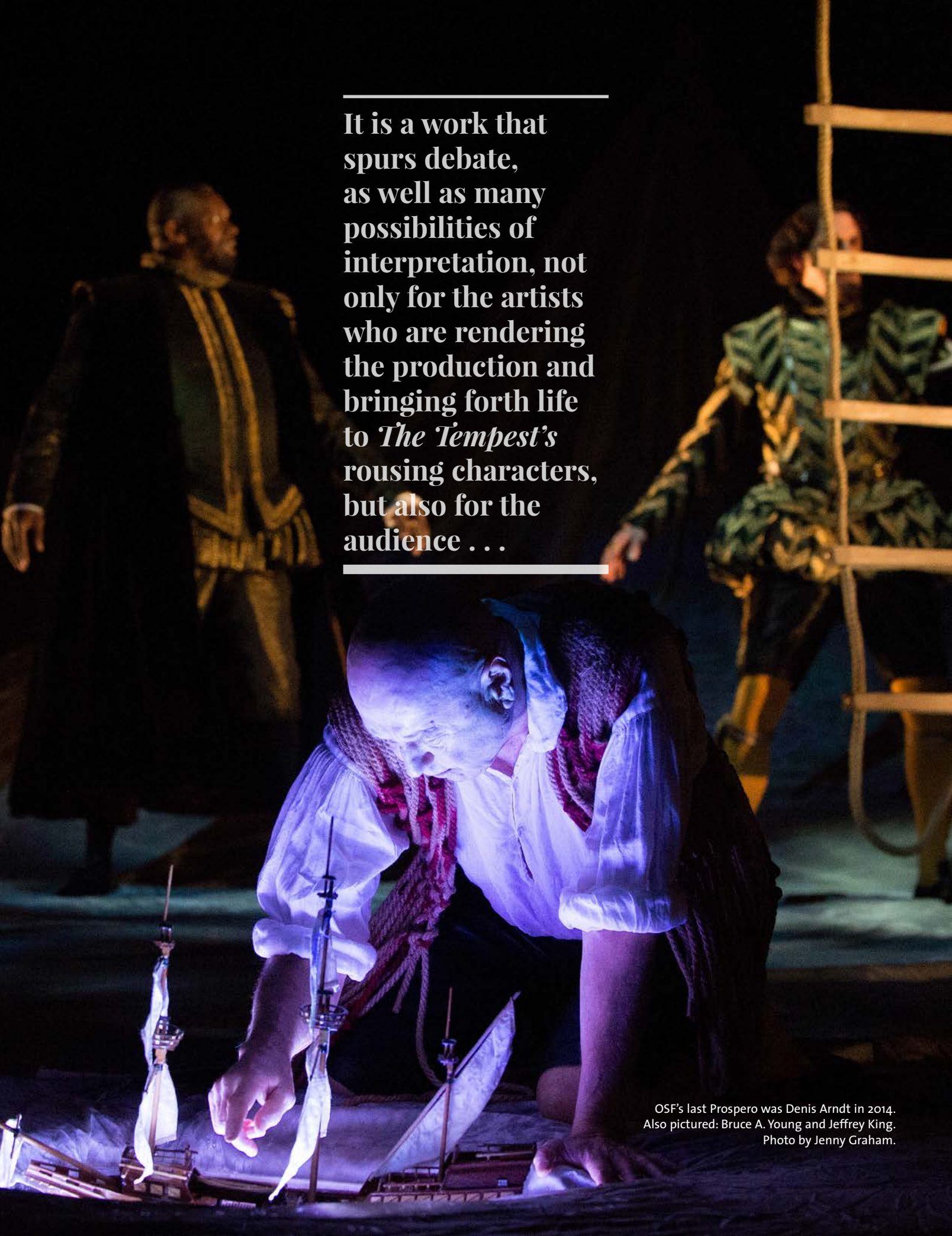
The play was written during the Jacobean period, when England was solidly establishing the first British colonies in the Americas between 1607 and 1620 in Jamestown, Virginia, and Plymouth, Massachusetts, which surely influenced Shakespeare, who was invested in the vanguard.

In her book *The Tempest: Shakespeare in Performance*, Virginia Mason Vaughan shares that Shakespeare created *The Tempest*—the last work scholars believe he independently wrote during the reign of King James I—in 1610 or 1611, and it was first performed for King James on All Saints' Day, November 1, 1611, at the Banqueting House of the Whitehall Palace, the primary residence of the monarch at the time. The play was remounted sometime between 1612 and 1613 at the same location to celebrate the betrothal of King James I's daughter Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector Palatine of Bohemia. The wedding took place on February 14, 1613, and research leads us to believe that the King, the couple and the court likely saw this production sometime between December 1612 and May 1613. Many scholars argue that the masque that appears in Act 4 was added specifically for this performance to celebrate the nuptials.

With additional patronage from the monarch, Shakespeare's acting company under Queen Elizabeth, known as the

Kevin Kenerly, pictured as Oberon in 2008's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, will be playing with magic once again—this time as Prospero. Photo by David Cooper.

It is a work that spurs debate, as well as many possibilities of interpretation, not only for the artists who are rendering the production and bringing forth life to *The Tempest's* rousing characters, but also for the audience . . .



OSF's last Prospero was Denis Arndt in 2014. Also pictured: Bruce A. Young and Jeffrey King. Photo by Jenny Graham.

Lord Chamberlain's Men, became the King's Men in 1603, when King James I ascended the throne. Although the company continued to perform at the Globe during the summer months, as of 1608, they also occupied the Blackfriars Theatre, which was indoors, creating an accommodation for the winter months. This theatre also served a private and elite patronage, where *The Tempest* played. Shakespeare likely wrote the play for this indoor, more innovative space because he called for musical effects in the stage directions, which was common for an indoor space where organ accompaniment was available. Additionally, Prospero exits at the end of Act 4 and re-enters at the beginning of Act 5, which was customary if there was an inclusion of a musical interlude. Vaughan notes in *The Tempest: Shakespeare in Performance*, "but everything in the stage directions could be performed at the Globe." Whether it was performed at the Globe additionally between 1612 and 1613 remains uncertain, particularly as the Globe burned down in 1613.

Origins

Although *The Tempest* is original in nature, it is likely that Shakespeare was influenced by three sources, which H. R. Coursen unpacks in *The Tempest: A Guide to the Play*. First was Virgil's poem "Aeneid" (30 B.C.). In *The Tempest*, Antonio and Sebastian mock Gonzalo's reference to the widow Dido in the throes of an argument. In the "Aeneid," Dido, whose descendants are credited with the founding of Rome, falls in love when Aeneas's vessel is shipwrecked on an island in the Mediterranean after a storm caused by the goddess Juno. The love story, the use of magic to cause a shipwreck, and the passage in the Mediterranean Sea all demonstrate connections to the play.

A second inspiration was a shipwreck that took place in May of 1609, when a fleet of nine ships with 500 colonists headed from Plymouth, England, toward Virginia. A storm in the Bermudas separated the main vessel, the *Sea Adventure* (which carried Sir Thomas Gates, the new governor of the Virginia Colony), from the rest of the fleet. It was assumed the ship was lost at sea. But the disabled craft and entire crew miraculously made it safely to shore and experienced comfortable surroundings with plenty of food and fresh water. From the wreckage of the ship they were able to build two boats, which they sailed safely to Virginia by May of 1610. News of the successful voyage reached London by September of 1610, and three documents were created to record the events: Silvester Jourdain's publication *Discovery of the Bermudas* (1610), the Council of Virginia's *True Declaration of the State of the Colonie in Virginia* (1610), and a letter by William Strachey referred to as *A True Reportory of the Wracke*. This letter was eventually published in 1625, although it most closely aligns with the narrative of *The Tempest*, especially many of Ariel and Caliban's descriptions of the island being a paradise, in addition to addressing colonization of Indigenous people—a theme of the play. Shakespeare likely read the letter in manuscript form, as he had associations with members of the Virginia Company.

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A third inspiration is Montaigne's *of Caniballes*, which was published by 1603 and translated by John Florio in 1604. Shakespeare's Gonzalo imagines a utopia (Act 2, Scene 1, lines 148 to 172) that parallels a citation from *Caniballes*. Gonzalo states: "Letters should not be known; riches, poverty, and use of service, none . . . No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil." Montaigne writes: "It is a nation, would I answer Plato, that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service . . . " Both describe a world replete with resources without the constrains of order or law. The utopic society that Montaigne describes in the essay also inspired the character Caliban, a name derived from an anagram of the essay's title.

Director Nicholas C. Avila.

In his essay, Montaigne describes how a society deems another uncivilized because their customs are simply different than their own, which is likely another inspiration for Caliban, as well as the presence of an oppressive colonizer on the island in the play. *Tempest* scholars Alden Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan write in their *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, "Caliban has been a particularly sensitive barometer of intellectual and social change."

Caliban has become a more centralized figure in the work in more recent interpretations that directly wrestle with the play's themes of colonialism, imperialism and slavery. The character challenges the patriarchy and is inherently a rebel, striving to be free on his island, which Prospero (the patriarch) has claimed.

The origin and early productions of one of Shakespeare's most perpetually challenging though embraced plays remain a mystery. It is a work that spurs debate, as well as many possibilities of interpretation, not only for the artists who are rendering the production and bringing forth life to *The Tempest*'s rousing characters, but also for the audience in their reception to the work.

Further Reading

The Tempest: A Guide to the Play, by H. R. Coursen. Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 2000.

The Tempest: A Guide to the Text and Its Theatrical Life, by Trevor R. Griffiths. New York, Palgrave, 2007.

The Tempest: Text and Performance, by David L. Hirst. London, MacMillan, 1984.

Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History, by Alden T. and Virginia Mason Vaughan. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

The Tempest: Shakespeare in Performance, by Virginia Mason Vaughan. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011.

Al Espinosa, who was Alonso in 2014's *The Tempest*, this time portrays Antonio. Also pictured: Denis Arndt and Jeffrey King. Photo by Jenny Graham.

A Bit of Borrowed Magic . . .

Magic permeates *The Tempest*. Prospero, a human, exclusively claims his power through others who possess magic innately and through three objects of magic: his books, staff and robe. We never learn where Prospero has procured his magic items, but, unlike for Sycorax (Caliban's mother) or Ariel, they are not powers that are inherent to him. Both Sycorax and Ariel are marginalized and othered because of their powers.

The fear and strong belief that witchcraft existed was omnipresent in Jacobean England and throughout English society at the time. Audiences were delighted to see magic onstage with Titania, Oberon and Puck of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–96) or to see it rendered as horror with the witches of *Macbeth*. King James was such a strong believer in witchcraft and magic that he wrote a treatise on it titled *Daemonologie*. In 1604, as a result of the hysteria and the King's intense interest, Parliament passed statutes against witchcraft, possession and malevolent magic, which resulted in persecution such as imprisonment, torture and death.

We learn that Sycorax, pregnant with Caliban, was supposedly a witch and banished to the island from Algiers and that she, from Prospero's telling, enslaved and imprisoned the spirits of the island, such as Ariel, whom she entrapped in a pine tree. Sycorax, however, died before Miranda and Prospero arrived on the island.

H.R. Coursen's *The Tempest: A Guide to the Play* and Trevor Griffiths's *The Tempest: A Guide to the Text and Its Theatrical Life* contend how the medieval pseudoscience of alchemy likely influenced Shakespeare as well. The premise of alchemy is the transmutation of metals into gold, which was thought to heal maladies and extend lifespans. Alchemist John Dee (1527–1608) may be another inspiration for Prospero. Dee was interested not only in alchemy but also in mathematics, navigation, astronomy and predicting the future through astrology. He served as one of Elizabeth I's advisors, but with James I's abhorrence of anything concerning the occult, he no longer held the same sway over the monarch. In addition to Prospero, Dee may have inspired Christopher Marlowe's title character Dr. Faustus, as well as the title character from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Griffiths dramaturgically associates Prospero with an alchemist. He contends Prospero acknowledges that he needed to learn his magic for years, similar to what an alchemist would claim, and like the alchemist, his magic creates interesting visual effects, which audiences witness vis-à-vis the theatricality onstage. Prospero, who is human through and through and controls others who are true beings of magic, may have been more recognizable and acceptable to the King than the many actual people, primarily women, who were hanged for the false accusation of witchcraft under his reign.