**Purdy**

**The Tempest**

**Comprehension Questions**

**ACT ONE**

1. Act One, Scene i shows the "tempest" of the play's title. How do the different characters react to crisis?

2. Who is Miranda? What is her reaction to the scene she has just witnessed?

3. Who is Prospero? How does he know that everyone has survived the storm?

4. How did Prospero and Miranda come to be on the island?

5. Who is Ariel? Why should he be grateful to Prospero, and just do what he's told?

6. Who was Sycorax? How does Prospero feel about her? Are there any parallels between Sycorax's story and Prospero's?

7. Who is Caliban? What is his attitude towards Prospero's control of the island?

8. What event led Prospero to start treating Caliban as his slave?

9. Who taught Caliban to speak? How does he tend to use language? Why?

10. Why does Miranda think that Ferdinand might be a "spirit"?

**ACTS TWO-THREE**

11. How does Prospero treat Ferdinand? Why? How is this treatment like and unlike the treatment of Caliban?

12. From what event were the Italians returning when they were ship-wrecked? What is their attitude towards the event?

13. What kind of society would Gonzalo like to found on the desert island (II.i.146-70)? What is the reaction of his companions?

14. What do Antonio and Sebastian want to do to Alonso and Gonzalo? Why? What does Antonio mean when he says, "What's past is prologue" (II.i.254)?

15. Read with special care the scenes with Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano (II.ii, III.ii). What does Caliban think Trinculo is? What does Trinculo think Caliban is? What does Stephano think Trinculo and Caliban together are? What is their plan, and what happens to it? To what extent would you call this plan revolutionary?

16. What role does Ariel play in III.ii?

17. The Harpies are characters from classical mythology who punish a bad king by always destroying his meals with their filth. What role do the Harpies play in III.iii? Why is Gonzalo the only character who doesn't see and hear the speech given by Ariel in the form of a Harpy?

**ACT FOUR**

18. What is Prospero's major admonition to Ferdinand and Miranda? Why do you think he is so concerned about this?

19. For the benefit of Ferdinand and Miranda, Prospero has Ariel stage a masque, or symbolic pageant, celebrating betrothal and marriage (IV.i). Ceres, goddess of the harvest and fertility, and Juno, goddess of marriage, as well as Iris, the goddess of the rainbow (associated with covenant or contract), all have speaking parts. Why isn't Venus invited to the wedding masque?

20. What makes Prospero interrupt the masque?

21. How does Ariel get the best of the low-life plotters?

**ACT FIVE**

22. Does Prospero plan to continue to practice magic when his plan is brought to completion (V.i.33-57)?

23. Who first asks Prospero for forgiveness? Who might you expect to ask Prospero for forgiveness?

24. What does Miranda mean by the phrase, "Brave new world" (V.i.185)?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Prospero presents himself as the civilized discoverer of a desert island, with Caliban and Ariel as its not-quite-human inhabitants. How does Caliban's history of the island differ from Prospero's? Whom do you think Shakespeare agrees with, Prospero or Caliban? Whom do you agree with, Prospero or Caliban? Give textual evidence in working out your answers.

2. How does the island function as a laboratory for testing human nature? For Prospero? For Shakespeare?

3. How does Trinculo and Stephano's discovery of Caliban resemble aspects of Prospero and Miranda's first encounters with him? What do these scenes of discovery reveal about the political, religious, or social attitudes of each character?

4. What are the goals of the conspiracy staged by Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban (II.ii, III.ii)? What does each party want to get out of it? Do you ever feel that they are likely to succeed? How (if at all) does the playwright let us know whose side he's on?

5. What is the play's attitude towards uncontrolled sexual desire on the one hand and unregulated political ambition on the other? Key scenes include: the story of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda (I.ii.347-50); Gonzalo's imaginary commonwealth (II.i.146-70); and the betrothal masque (IV.i). In each, what is the relation between law, erotic desire, and political ambition? How might Freud have used The Tempest as an example of "civilization and its discontents"?

6. What do you think happens on the island once the Italians leave? What kind of community, society, or form of life can you imagine Ariel and Caliban forming either together or alone?