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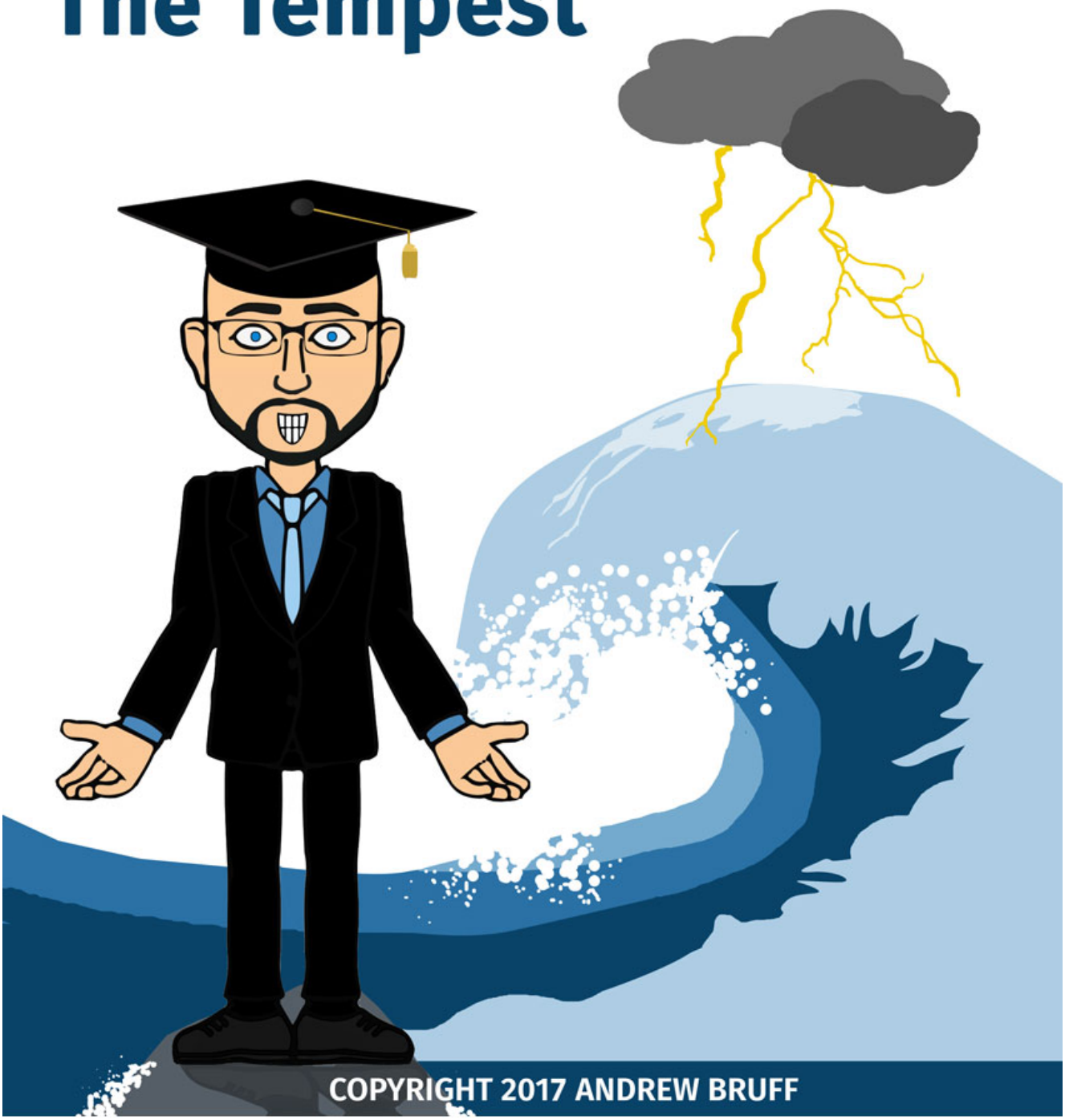
MR Bruff's Guide To

'The Tempest'



Part 5: Analysing Act 1, Scene 2

At the beginning of the scene. We learn about the characters' relationship with the term of address 'dearest father' and, in the first two lines of the scene, Miranda links Prospero to magic when she asks him to stop the storm:

> *If by your art [magic], my dearest father, you have*
> *Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.*

By depicting Miranda's pity for those on board, Shakespeare creates sympathy for her and encourages the audience to regard Prospero as a powerful magician. Through her reaction and frequent exclamations (for example, 'O, I have suffered/With those that I saw suffer!'), Miranda's compassion for those affected by Prospero's magical power is established.

Shakespeare also uses embedded stage directions (hints in the text at specific stage actions) to introduce the theme of magic. For instance, Prospero asks Miranda to help him take off his 'magic garment', thereby drawing attention to his magical cloak. This movement therefore underlines his connection with the theme of magic, helping the audience to suspend disbelief when they later see him using magic.

Much of this scene is an **exposition**, which introduces essential background information about events and characters to the audience. Prospero's long speeches and rhetorical skills illustrate his power as he **holds the floor**. By educating Miranda with his version of the past, he has the power to control the way she thinks, making her see the world in the same way as him. For example, Prospero admits 'neglecting worldly ends' for 'the bettering' of his 'mind'. In other words, he ignored his responsibilities as a ruler so that he could study magic. The way he phrases this, however, makes it seem to Miranda that he was, by improving his mind, doing something noble and good when in fact he was neglecting his people. Another example is that he calls his brother Antonio 'perfidious' (deceitful, untrustworthy) and 'false', with some justification. It is true that Antonio betrayed him but, had Prospero taken responsibility for his own estates and ruled wisely, he would never have put himself in a vulnerable situation by allowing Antonio to manage them. Prospero further controls the way that Miranda thinks by stressing his own good points (he states that he 'loved' Antonio), which conveys the idea that he is an innocent victim of betrayal.

Prospero's dominance can be seen in his use of the third person to describe himself: 'Thy father was the Duke of Milan and/A prince of power—'. The pompous alliteration with 'prince of power' stresses his feelings of self-importance, which are dashed when Miranda, taking him at face value, asks 'Sir, are you not my father?'. This comic moment keeps the attention of the audience.

Prospero's power can also be seen through his frequent questioning of Miranda to check that she (and by extension the audience) is listening to this lengthy exposition. Prospero asks 'Dost thou not hear?' and Miranda replies 'Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.' On the surface, she is confirming that she can hear him; the words suggest that Prospero is speaking loudly because he is impassioned by his story. A modern actress might say the line in a defensive tone, a little like a rebellious teenager. A contemporary actress would have been unlikely to show such an attitude because in a patriarchal (controlled by men) society, Miranda was less likely to question her father's words.

As high-status characters, Prospero and Miranda speak in **blank verse**, which is suitable for important topics such as power, love and politics. Blank verse is easy to identify because each line begins with a capital letter and the line might not finish at the end of the page. (It looks like a poem.) Blank verse consists of unrhymed lines of ten syllables of alternating stress (if the lines are rhymed, this is called **iambic pentameter**). In the following quotation, the stressed syllables in are in bold and underlined:

> *This **King** of **Na**ples **being** an **en**e**my***

The regular rhythm of blank verse is like a beating heart. In this example, the blank verse, combined with the *-k, -p* and *-b* sounds replicate the thump of an angry heart, as Prospero plots his revenge.

To avoid monotony, Shakespeare does not always stick to the rules for creating blank verse. Sometimes he adds or drops syllables, and he varies the rhythm. If we return to Miranda's opening lines, we can see this:

> *If **by** your **art**, my **dear**est **fa**ther, **you** **have***
> ***Put** the **wild** **wa**ters in this **roar**, al**lay** them.*

In the first line, we have an extra syllable, which emphasises (with the extra stressed syllable 'you') her suspicions of her father's power and responsibility for the storm. In the second line, the rhythm of the blank verse completely

breaks down, mirroring the wild unpredictability of the storm and the turbulence of Miranda's emotions.

An alternative way to say the first line could be to put the stress on the first four syllables (this is called **double spondee** if you want to sound cool):

> ***If by your art**, my **dear**est **fa**ther, **you have***
> ***Put** the **wild wa**ters in this **roar**, al**lay** them.*

Say it out loud: you now sound more accusatory. We therefore see that Shakespeare matches the rhythm of his blank verse to the topic and mood of his speeches, but it can change in line with the speaker's presumed intention.

Prospero uses magic to control his daughter when he says 'Here cease more questions. /Thou art inclined to sleep'. Miranda duly falls asleep and Prospero can talk to Ariel. This is the first time that we see Prospero perform magic, and we see how it can be casually used in a domestic context to make his life run more smoothly. The use of magic is a convenient dramatic device to end one exposition and begin another when Ariel enters.

The power relationship between Prospero and Ariel can be seen through the **terms of address**. At the beginning of their conversation, Prospero calls Ariel 'My brave spirit'; the adjective 'brave' is intended to praise and flatter; it also establishes with the audience that the actor is playing the part of a 'spirit'. The possessive pronoun 'my', however, illustrates that Ariel is a slave. In turn, Ariel calls Prospero 'great master', with the adjective and noun heightening their difference in status. While we expect Prospero to address Ariel using 'thou' to show that he is talking to someone of a lower status, Ariel (unlike Miranda who uses the respectful 'you') also uses the informal 'thou'. This suggests a close relationship. Although it is a close bond, Shakespeare suggests the relationship between the two is not straightforward: firstly, it is unclear how powerful Prospero's magic is without Ariel to execute it; and secondly, close to the end of the play, Ariel is the readier of the two to offer mercy to the shipwrecked aristocrats, telling Prospero 'if you now beheld them, your affections/Would become tender'.

Prospero wields power over Ariel by using a range of ***language functions***. We have already seen ***flattery***, but if Ariel shows any desire to be set free, Prospero becomes ***abusive***, calling Ariel a 'malignant thing'. As with Miranda, Prospero shows his power by ***controlling his version of the past***. In another **exposition**, he says he must ***remind*** Ariel 'once in a month' how he rescued him

from the witch Sycorax's imprisonment in case Ariel forgets and ceases to be grateful. Moreover, he ***psychologically bullies*** Ariel by forcing him to remember the pain of being imprisoned in the pine tree ('thy groans/Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts of/ever-angry bears'). Prospero ***suggests that he has stronger powers*** than Ariel because he could break Sycorax's spell and rescue him ('It was mine art…that made gape/the pine, and let thee out'). By ***making Ariel relive this experience***, Prospero is positioning himself as his heroic rescuer. Just to ensure that Ariel fully understands his subordinate position, Prospero ***threatens to use his magic*** to imprison him in an 'oak' tree. By controlling Ariel's past and how he thinks about his life, Prospero retains his power over the spirit and minimises the chance of Ariel's rebellion. Finally, Prospero ***tempts Ariel with the possibility of freedom***, telling him 'after two days I will discharge thee'. These methods ensure that Ariel is a willing slave, hoping all the time that, if he co-operates, he will be set free.

There is a distinct contrast between Prospero's treatment of Caliban and his handling of Ariel. Caliban, says Prospero, is a 'whelp, hag-born'. The noun 'whelp' was an insulting word for a boy. It also means puppy, which fits with the verb 'litter' that Prospero uses instead of the phrase *give birth to*. Prospero is saying that Caliban's mother, the witch Sycorax, has given birth to an animal 'not honoured with human shape'. However, Caliban can talk, sing, dance and perform menial tasks such as making the fire, fetching wood and so on. Prospero here is using **hyperbole** (exaggeration) to show his contempt for Caliban.

Prospero's contrasting attitudes towards Caliban and Ariel are made explicit when Prospero calls Caliban a 'tortoise' (suggesting that he is slow, lazy and close to the ground) and a 'poisonous slave; got by the devil himself' (implying inherent wickedness). Sandwiched between these curses, he addresses Ariel: 'Fine apparition! My quaint [i.e. 'ingenious'] Ariel'. This compliment heightens the difference in Prospero's attitude toward the two slaves (Ariel is clearly the cleverer, slighter and more pleasing to the eye).

Each slave represents an aspect of nature: Ariel is a spirit of the air while Caliban represents an earthy nature that cannot be controlled or control itself. We learn in another **exposition** that Prospero has reason to despise Caliban because he once attempted to rape Miranda. As well as being a shocking act rape would probably make its high-born victim unmarriageable in Elizabethan and Jacobean times. Fernando asks Miranda if she is a virgin, stating 'if a virgin…I'll make you Queen of Naples'. High-status men expected to marry virgins.

In recent interpretations of the play, Caliban can be viewed as representing the resentful colonised indigenous (i.e. native) people of the time. (England was busily colonising the Americas and Ireland in the early part of the 17th century). In contrast to Ariel, he is not quite so easy to dominate physically, and Prospero resorts to controlling him through magical torments such as 'cramps/Side-stitches', etc., against which he has no defence. In response, Caliban uses language as a weapon, exchanging insult for insult: 'You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse'. The pause after 'Is' followed by the monosyllabic 'I know how to curse' emphasises his hatred of Prospero, whom he sees as an imperialist and patriarchal oppressor. After Prospero insults Caliban's mother Sycorax, Caliban attempts in return to put an evil spell on Prospero, responding with this vivid and violent imagery:

> *As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd*
> *With raven's feather from unwholesome fen*
> *Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye*
> *And blister you all o'er!*

These curses contain imagery to do with evil ('wicked') and witchcraft ('raven's feather'), unhealthy land ('unwholesome fen'), unhealthy wind ('south-west') and implications of disease ('blister'). These words remind us that his mother was a witch, practising black magic. We assume that Caliban has not inherited his mother's powers, however, as we never see him perform magic (another contrast with Ariel, of course) and thus his curses have no effect.

In Caliban's following words, we encounter directly his resentment at Prospero's becoming ruler of the island. In this speech, the bitterness of the colonised at their treatment by the colonising power is made very clear:

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

Caliban asserts his right to the island.

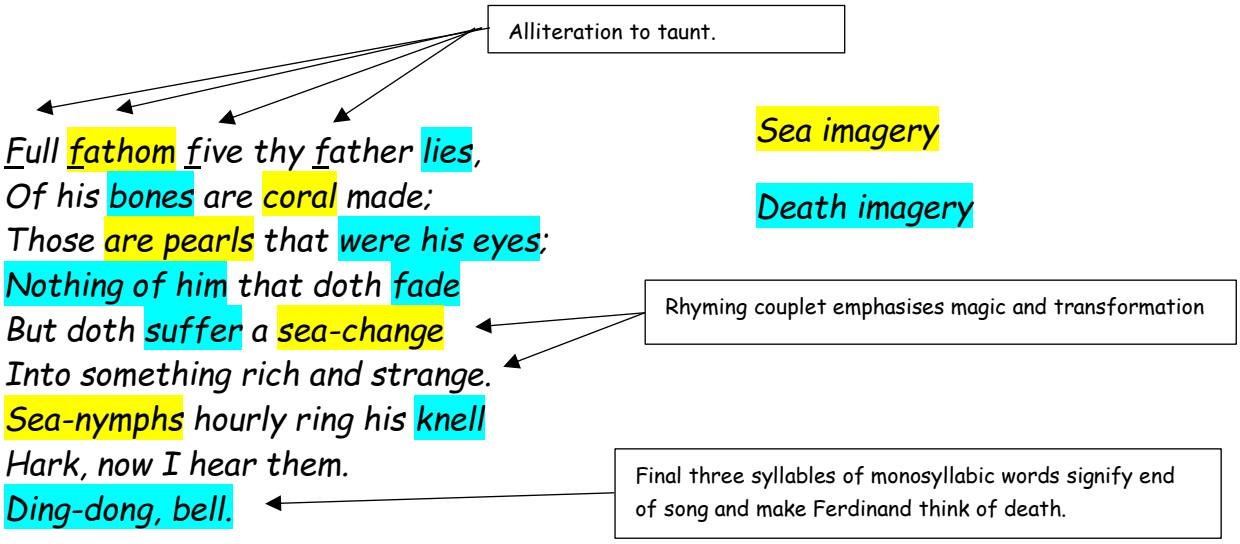
Deliberate use of 'thou' to cause offence.

Caliban was petted (dehumanised). Note that Prospero and Miranda taught him their language: they had no desire to learn his. This links to the historical context of the colonisation of America.

He loves good and bad qualities of the island.

Caliban speaks in **blank verse** (used by high-status characters) throughout, which might reflect de Montaigne's ideas about the 'noble savage'; despite being a slave, Caliban regards himself as superior to the Europeans and the original 'king' of the island. We see that his spirit is free even though physically he is a slave. Two final points: despite his feelings in this speech, Caliban later volunteers to serve the drunken Stefano ('I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject, for the liquor is not earthly' Act 2, Scene 2). This might be because he believes that Stephano is a heavenly being, or perhaps he sees an early opportunity to flatter Stephano and thereby encourage him to kill Prospero. Secondly, any audience will find it difficult to empathise completely with his character, as he has no regrets about attempting to rape Miranda, saying he wished he had succeeded and 'peopled' the island with 'Calibans'. To conclude, Shakespeare has created in Caliban a complex character who is capable both of cruelty and great poetry, a character who is not wholly victim or villain.

In this most musical of Shakespeare's plays, music is very strongly associated with magic. Ariel is Shakespeare's most musical character and draws Ferdinand towards Prospero and Miranda with two songs, the spirits joining in. In Ariel's second song, he reminds Ferdinand of his father's apparent death:



The song, which aims to confuse or perhaps console Ferdinand, follows a loose pattern with the rhythm and rhyme, but it is not fixed. This adds to the supernatural tone because, like spirits, it has fluidity. The use of sea and death imagery illustrates the power of nature to transform the king, reminding us that he has no power over nature. It also illustrates the power of magic to turn his bones to 'coral', eyes to 'pearls', and so on. Moreover, every part of Alonso has been changed into something rich and strange beyond the effects of decay; this might be interpreted as preparing Ferdinand for his meeting with Miranda in which he will think she is a 'goddess'. Magic and illusion therefore emerge as important themes, as we will see in later scenes.

Ferdinand states that he has been 'weeping' over his father and comments 'The ditty does remember my drowned father'. The alliteration with 'ditty does…drowned' emphasises his emotional vulnerability. Because Ferdinand is vulnerable in his grief, Prospero observes 'The Duke of Milan/And his more braver daughter could control thee/If now 'twere fit to do't'. Prospero's use of the third person and title to describe himself reminds the audience of his status, emphasising that his power is greater than that of the prince. Moreover, not only does Prospero comment on the power he has over Ferdinand, but he uses the 'double' comparative form of the adjective brave ('more braver') to emphasise that, although he wants Miranda to control Ferdinand through the power of love, she is the one who will be taking the risk.

Shakespeare emphasises Prospero's role as a chess grand master controlling his pawns Ferdinand and Miranda in a game of revenge. Prospero says to Miranda 'The fringed curtains of thine eye advance/And say what thou seest yond'. He is telling her to open her eyes and look at Ferdinand but, with the metaphor of 'fringed curtains' to describe her eyelashes, his language is extremely formal. It also connotes that, like opening curtains, this is not only a new day in her life but a momentous one. Telling Miranda to describe 'what' (who) she sees combines with the formal language to emphasise this particular moment in time when she first sets eyes on Ferdinand. It is also a significant moment in Prospero's life because there is a limit to his magic: he does not have the power to make them fall in love with each other, hence his stage management of their meeting.

It is at this point that we begin to see examples of **aside** in the stage directions (there will be more throughout the play) as Prospero shares his plans with the audience. An aside is a short comment that a character addresses to the audience to share his or her thoughts, but the other characters on stage do not

hear what is said. Through Prospero's aside, we learn that he is hoping that the young couple will fall in love: 'It goes on, I see/As my soul prompts it'. The use of the abstract noun 'soul' illustrates the depth of Prospero's desire for their relationship to flourish: Miranda is a means for Prospero to be restored to a high-ranking position in society; in addition, by presenting the young couple's union to Alonso as a decided event, not only will Prospero join the houses of Milan and Naples, but he will ensure that one of his grandchildren will one day become king of Naples. Interestingly, he does not say that he wants this union with his *heart* and soul; this suggests the depth of his love for Miranda is still more profound than simple sentiment.

We see religious language when Miranda calls Ferdinand 'a thing divine' and Ferdinand calls Miranda a 'goddess'. As well as illustrating their mutual attraction, this vocabulary emphasises that the pair are essentially good people, (which directly contrasts with the behaviour of many of the courtiers).

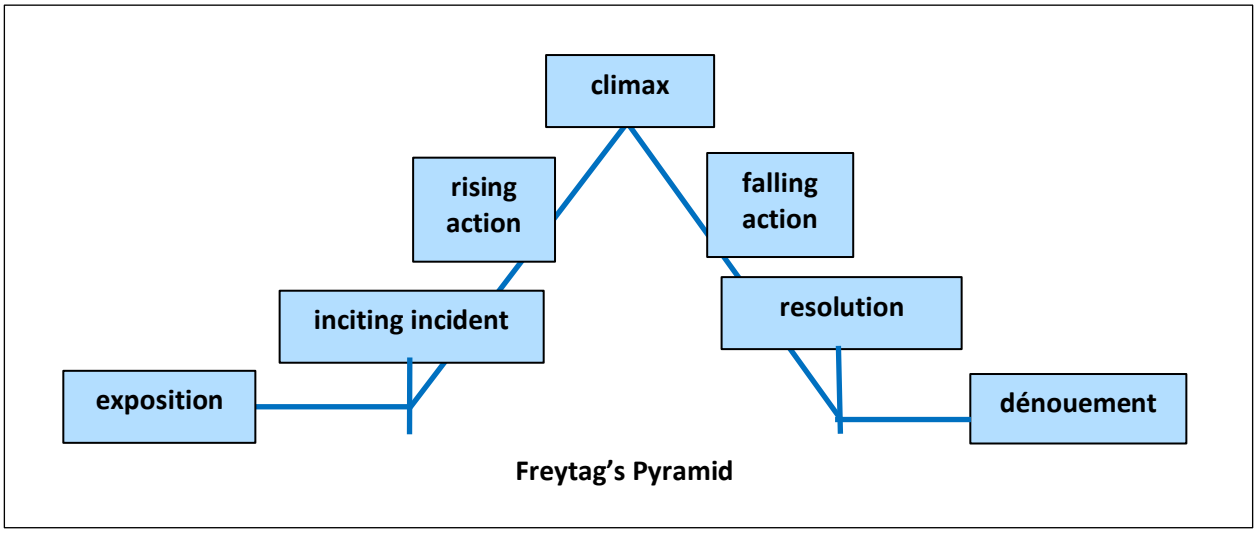
In the **subplot** of the lovers, Shakespeare introduces elements of the **romance tradition,** in which a young man must prove his love for a girl by undergoing trials set by her father. Despite planning for the couple to fall in love, Prospero is aware that 'too light winning/Make the prize light'. In other words, he is worried that Fernando will not appreciate Miranda, and he wants him to work hard to earn her love. Consequently, he uses the power of reverse psychology to further his aims by calling Ferdinand a 'traitor' and taking him prisoner. He also forbids Miranda to defend Ferdinand ('Speak not you for him: he's a traitor'), thereby strengthening the feelings of the couple for each other.

The **stage direction** 'Ferdinand draws his sword, and is charmed from moving by Prospero' shows that Prospero controls Ferdinand by magic when the latter attempts to 'resist' being taken prisoner. At this moment in the play, we see the contrast between Caliban and Ferdinand's attitudes to being prisoners. While Caliban defies Prospero, Ferdinand acknowledges his feelings and resigns himself to his imprisonment, stating:

> *My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up.*
> *My father's loss, the weakness which I feel,*
> *The wreck of all my friends, nor this man's threats,*
> *To whom I am subdued, are but light to me,*
> *Might I but through my prison once a day*
> *Behold this maid. All corners else o' the earth*
> *Let liberty make use of. Space enough*
> *Have I in such a prison.*

All his other emotions pale into insignificance beside his love for Miranda. Caliban has no such compensation. Here, we see another element of the romance tradition: the power of love is so strong that it helps the young man to overcome these obstacles. Ferdinand has endured the pain of losing his father and friends, and his imprisonment is made bearable by the hope of seeing Miranda.

The events so far can be analysed using Freytag's pyramid. Gustav Freytag was a nineteenth century German novelist who saw common patterns in the plots of Shakespeare plays and developed a diagram to analyse them:



Freytag's Pyramid

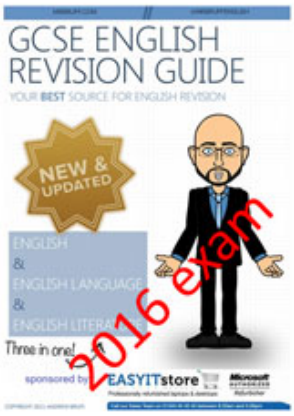
Shakespeare has completed the **exposition** in which we have been introduced to the main court characters Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio and Gonzalo in the storm scene in Act 1, Scene 1. In Act 1, Scene 2, we move from sea to land, from the mortal danger of the tempest to the magical atmosphere of the island; we meet Prospero, Miranda, Ariel and Caliban and learn about their pasts. We also meet Ferdinand, who falls in love with Miranda. The course of true love never did run smooth (as Shakespeare said in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'!), however; and it is at this point that we move to the next stage of the pyramid.

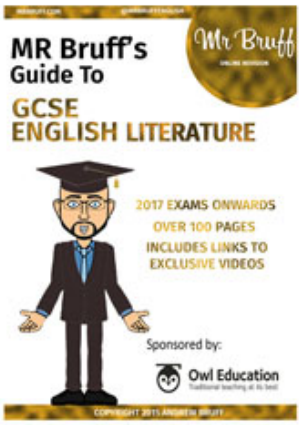
The **inciting incident** (where something happens to begin the action or conflict) is Ferdinand being taken prisoner by Prospero. It is at this point that the audience is aware that Ferdinand and Miranda will have to overcome obstacles if they hope to marry.

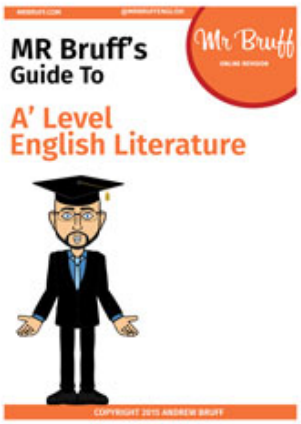
In Act 1, we see that all the characters are in some way imprisoned and powerless: those on board are powerless within the confines of the storm-

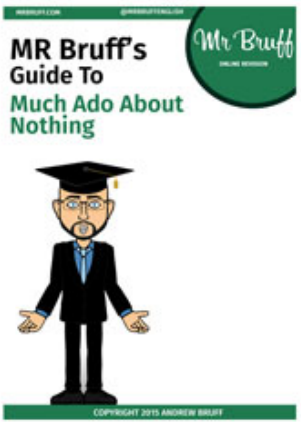
tossed ship; Prospero and Miranda are in exile, confined to the island; Ariel was released from his torments in the pine tree and is now Prospero's slave; likewise, Caliban is Prospero's slave; and finally, we see Ferdinand is a prisoner of Prospero.

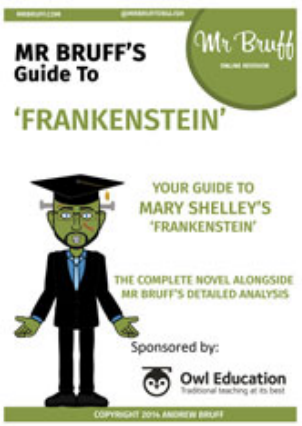
In the next act, we see that the courtiers, wandering aimlessly around the island, are also powerless in the face of Prospero's magic.

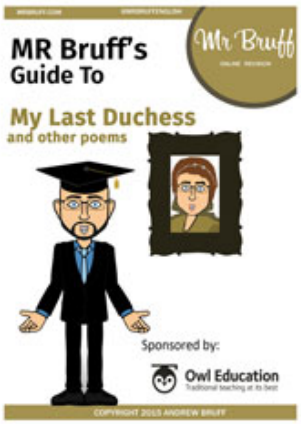


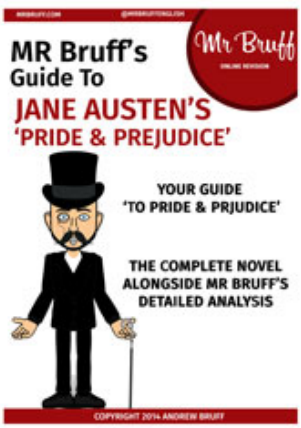


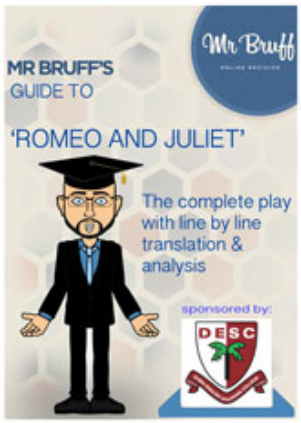












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