 Summary of The Tempest in the context of module A

The Tempest like all of Shakespeare texts examines the storm that is the human condition. Within the play, Shakespeare, the humanist, showcases human beings innate desire for meaningful relationships contrast against their simultaneous thirst for power and control. This, the play reveals, culminates in a prism of vengeful spite which arises when these competing desires, want of meaningful relations set against thirst for power and control, are not met.

The plot of the play uses the dramatic device of a physical storm engineered by the characterisation of an all-powerful and vengeful deposed duke and crafty magician Prospero as the driving force behind the central story, to restore control over his own life and regain his regal power. This conjured tempest precipitates several sub plots where a variety of characters en-route to a royal wedding in Italy are swept up and trapped on different parts of an island and in circumstances which force them to reflect on their own historic personal flaws of character, before they are “set free” from the vengeful ramifications of these competing desires (innate desire for meaningful relationships contrast against their simultaneous thirst for power and control) to reinter the world.

The play’s metatheatrical elements highlight and reinforce the central motif of the play- the trappings of perspective. Prospero is cast as both a character trapped within the action of the play in his revenge plot on the island, and the director of the narrative within it, staging tempests and masques, before he himself trapped in the metatheatre of his own creation reflects on his own flawed duality of character. As a result he is “set free,” at the end having learnt ironically from the vengeful mirroring experiences he himself contrived on the prison island, symbolically drowning his book, the source of his thirst for power and revenge and returning home accompanied by friends and family.

The disrupting effects of the tempest in the play is an analogy for the disrupting potential of art and theatre on the individual. Both are released through the use of magic and the audience is encouraged to suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the transformation of characters to broaden their own understanding of themselves and the world and to speculate about their own experiences. This disruption represents a contextual shift for the audience, which results in a new perspective informed by a deepened understanding. This creation of varied and new values mirrors the audience’s response to the characters within the world of the text.

Ultimately, the disruption, the tempest, is the mirroring effect of art on the human condition, and through art, we can be released from the stifling effects of our own fixed perspective, imprisoned within our own social, personal, historic and cultural context.

The play highlights the trappings of perspective which lead human beings who need meaningful human relations into this prism of corrupting power. This central message is developed in the play through:

* the characters which represent different aspects of this duality at the centre of the human experience (desire for meaningful relations, power and control, revenge)
* the setting which acts as a physical prison representing the trappings of perspective which prevent us from diagnosing the cause of our pain and suffering (corrupting force of power and control)
* the plot/s which drives this central coda of the narrative (corrupting force of power and control)
* the themes of imprisonment, power and revenge- established through the narrative elements of the text as recurring motifs
* the metatheatrical aspects of the play which emphasise the power of narratives to act as mirrors and assist us to reflect on our understanding and free ourselves from the trappings of perspective.

Scene by Scene Questions

Act 1 scene 1-The Storm

The magic of disruptions- art and theatre



The first Scene of the play begins with a disturbance of order, a violent storm which acts as a disruption to the natural hierarchical social stratification of society in Shakespearian times. We see members of the royal court challenged by the ship’s crew when they encounter a tempest. This establishes the central theme of power and power relations in the play.

1. The setting of this scene is on a ship at sea. What might this represent about control?
2. Consider storms as a motif across texts. What do storms represent generally? What might this storm represent?
3. How is a hierarchical social structure established in the text?
4. How does the Boatswain challenge the authority of the king and the courtiers?
5. Compare Gonzalo’s exchange with the Boatswain to Sebastian’s and Antonio’s. Consider what “styles” of power each exchange and thus character might represent?
6. What does this power struggle suggest about the nature of power and its pursuit?
7. How does Shakespeare position us to view the pursuit of power?
8. What is the difference between control and power?

Act 1 scene 2 – a new context

The Island as a lens to view degrees of control- power, colonisation, usurpation, corruption

Shakespeare continues explore the nature of power and control through the controlled environment of an unnamed island, a literary trope used to represent both a paradise and a prism of truth. Here we meet Prospero and through his recounted conversation with his daughter we learn of his past usurpation and loss of control over Milan. Here he also recounts his flawed leadership style, yet we see him consumed by a desire to avenge the injustice of his usurpation. This leads to the present plot as we the audience becomes aware of Prospero’s plan of revenge through conjuring the magical storm designed to bring those who conspired against him on the isle of truth, including the innocent Ferdinand, the son of the conspiring usurping King Alonso.

Parallel plots of usurpation are interjected in this scene as we discover Prospero’s cunning deception of the powerful witch Sycronax leading to his control of the island. This resulted in Prospero’s enslavement of the physically strong Caliban and the powerful yet dutifully obedient spirit Ariel.

A modern post-colonial reading would cast this scene as an example of a Shakespeare exploring the impact of colonisation through the characters pursuit to gain control and power in their respective situations, from their privileged and entitled perspective.

This scene culminates in the emergence of a blossoming love story, albeit conspired for in an elaborate revenge plot, which foreshadows the fundamental human need for meaningful relations

A modern feminist reading of the play would cast this scene as an example Shakespeare’s sexist casting of gender roles.

1. This scene and the remainder of the play is set on an island. Consider islands as a motif across texts. What do islands represent? What does this island represent and how might it be used to examine the theme of power and control?
2. Throughout this scene a confinement motif is established. Discuss all the examples of confinement as represented in this scene.
3. Miranda dominates as questioner towards the second half of the recounting exchange. Explain how a greater contextual awareness encourages Miranda’s questions? How does this process help Miranda to make sense of the tempest situation? What affect does wider contextual understanding have on her perspective of the situation?
4. Consider the story of Miranda as a coming of age narrative. The motif of sleep and dreams is established in this scene. How might this narrative style and motif be used to convey ideas about how perspective is shaped and meaning is made?
5. Prospero acknowledges his influence over Miranda: ‘I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit’/ Than other princes can’. This passage illustrates his skills as a teacher.

Explain Prospero’s role as a teacher. Trace the way he asks her if she is listening and her responses to him. What lessons does he impart?

1. Prospero’s story is one of usurpation. Recount it?
2. Prospero’s brother Antonio deceived and usurped Prospero. Analyse Prospero’s language when he describes his brother. How does this position the audience with the events and characters?
3. Prospero makes reference to Antonio’s ambition and his own ambition with his study. What do the audience and Miranda learn about ambition and its consequences? Does Prospero accept responsibility for his leadership shortcomings?
4. Comment on Prospero’s tone when speaking to Arial and how and why it changes? How does Prospero control Arial?
5. Consider Prospero’s tone when addressing Caliban. What derogatory language is used to describe him?
6. Shakespeare explores parallel plot points with Prospero being usurped by his brother and Prospero’s usurping of the native Caliban. How does Prospero maintain his control and power over Caliban?
7. How has Shakespeare depicted Caliban? What does the audience discover about colonisation for the natives and the colonisers?
8. Highlight the differences between Arial and Caliban as servants? What might this represent about the nature of servitude and society in general?
9. This scene contains a number of subplots and backstories centred on the theme of power. What point is being made here about power and how it should be exercised? Use the table to help you answer the question.

| Theme – Nature of Power | Representation Device | Quotes | Value and explanation |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Control – Power  | IslandCharacterisation of ProsperoCharacterisation Ariel and Miranda | Prospero: “master of a full poor cell”Ariel: “All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I comeTo answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,To swim, to dive into the fire, to rideOn the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding taskAriel and all his quality”.Miranda: “If by your art, my dearest father, you havePut the wild waters in this roar, allay them” | Shakespeare contrasts Prospero’s power and control on the island with his power and control over the state of Milan to explore the corruptibility of power in general.Prospero’s usurpation and mistreatment of Caliban, Sycorax and Ariel set against his own narrative of betrayal and suffering following similar experiences reminds us of the corruptibility of power infused with revenge. |
| Incompetent/ Failed Leadership | Characterisation of Prospero | Prospero: “Tis time, Lend thy hand,And pluck my magic garment from me”“Duke of Milan andA prince of power.”“The government I cast upon my brotherAnd to my state grew stranger, being transportedAnd rapt in secret studies. “ “I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicatedTo closeness and the bettering of my mind”“my libraryWas dukedom large enough” |       |
| Corruption of power – Usurpation | Characterisation of AntonioCharacterisation of Prospero |       |       |
| Abuse of Power – Colonisation | Prospero’s derogatory languageConfinement of Caliban | “Hag-seed, hence!”“Deservedly confined into this rock,Who hadst deserved more than a prison” |       |
| Civil surrender of Power | Confinement of Ariel | *“*Let me remember thee what thou hast promised,/ Which is not yet perform'd me*”* |       |
| Uncivilised and out of control | Characterisation of CalibanAnagram of CanibalName a biblical allusion to Cane and Abel- The evil brother | “You taught me language; and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language!”“O ho, O ho! would't had been done!Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else/ This isle with Calibans.” |       |

1. The plot moves from a focus on revenge to a focus on love. What is the effect of this shift in genre? How does Ferdinand and Miranda’s speech suggest that the power of love conquers all?
2. Review Miranda’s response to Ferdinand towards the end of the act (408-482). Consider how her context on a secluded island has shaped her perspective?
3. A modern audience first becomes aware of the treatment of women in the Elizabethan context through Miranda’s excessive display of emotions throughout this scene, Prospero reference to his wife, ‘thy mother was a piece of virtue,’ Ferdinand then enquires, ‘O, if a virgin, / And your affection not gone forth, I’ll make you / The Queen of Naples’. What is the expectation of women and how are they treated? What does this representation of Miranda reveal to the

audience about her character and the use of gender stereotypes? Would this feature have been a cause of controversy in Shakespearean times? What does this help you to understand about how meaning is made?

Act 2 scene 1–Dashed Utopian Ideals Noble pursuits contrast against corrupt ambition

This remote and isolated island prison, like the ship, allows characters to escape the strict confines of the rigid social hierarchy and subvert social expectations and authority. Shakespeare breaks the characters into scattered groups upon the island, each group’s interactions representing a sub-plot in the narrative, and all ironically engages in similar power struggles of social hierarchy in desperate bids to arrange themselves in pecking orders of power.

Only one character, Gonzalo enters this “green world” with an open and free mind to speculate and imagine an ideal world where he would be a just king. This is contrast against Sebastian and Antonio, who malevolently speculate about killing and usurping power from Alonso.

1. This scene is set on “a remote part of the island”. What might the significance of this setting be?
2. Use this ALARM Matrix to consider the different representations of Power in this scene:

| Literal – Quote | Figurative – Style and Technique | Thematic – Nature of Power | Conceptual – Value Represented |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gonzalo grateful to survive “The masters of some merchant and the merchantHave just our theme of woe; but for the miracle,I mean our preservation, few in millions”“Here is everything advantageous to life” | CharacterisationOptimistic toneJuxtaposed to Sebastian and AntonioUtopian IdealsSleep motif |       |       |
| Antonio | Mock GonzaloMalevolent tone juxtaposed to GonzaloEntice Sebastian with imagery of leadershipSymbolic reference to his own clothingSleep motif |       |       |
| Sebastian | Mock GonzaloRacist mockMalevolent tone juxtaposed to GonzaloSebastian’s response to Antonio’s proposition |       |       |
| Alonso | Concerned over FerdinandRepetitionSleep motif |       |       |

What does the audience discover about humanity and individual’s pursuit to gain power and control?

1. At a time when Europeans were running around calling natives in the Americas "savages," Montaigne suggests that the Brazilian Indians live a utopian lifestyle while European colonizers were the real barbarians. In this essay, the concept of the "noble savage" arises.

Montaigne’s essay ‘Of cannibals’ was well read in Shakespeare’s time and set a precedence for the questioning of colonialism and thus the emergence of post-colonial values. In his essay Montaigne presented the colonialists as the barbarians while he admired the Brazilian Indians values who had ‘no kind of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, no use of service, of riches or of poverty, no contracts, no successions... no occupation but idle, no respect of kindred but common, no apparel but natural, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corn, or metal.

Read the extract from Of Cannibals:

These nations then seem to me to be so far barbarous, as having received but very little form and fashion from art and human invention, and consequently to be not much remote from their original simplicity. The laws of nature, however, govern them still, not as yet much vitiated with any mixture of ours: but ‘tis in such purity, that I am sometimes troubled we were not sooner acquainted with these people, and that they were not discovered in those better times, when there were men much more able to judge of them than we are. … [T]o my apprehension, what we now see in those nations, does not only surpass all the pictures with which the poets have adorned the golden age, and all their inventions in feigning a happy state of man, but, moreover, the fancy and even the wish and desire of philosophy itself; so native and so pure a simplicity, as we by experience see to be in them, could never enter into their imagination, nor could they ever believe that human society could have been maintained with so little artifice and human patchwork. [In these countries] wherein there is no manner of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name of magistrate or political superiority; no use of service, riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no dividends, no properties, no employments, but those of leisure, no respect of kindred, but common, no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of corn or wine; the very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, detraction, pardon, never heard of.

In which one of his characters did Shakespeare make this intertextual reference? Does this mean that Shakespeare endorses Montaigne's ideas about New World inhabitants? Without this contextual insight and awareness of the intertextual reference, how might your understanding of the meaning of the text be affected?

1. How does the portrayal of Caliban’s savagery affects the impact of Gonzalo’s speech?
2. Prospero controls the ending of this scene “My master through his art foresees the danger/ that you, his friend, are in; and sends me forth--/ for else his project dies--to keep them living. Explain the significance of Ariels comment? What does this tell us about Prospero and the nature of power?
3. By the end of this scene there are three imprisoned women in the play. Who are they? What are they restricted by and who determines their fate?
4. Identify the use of the motif of sleep and dreams in this scene. How does it compare to Act 1? What themes are represented through the motif of sleep and dreams?

Act 2 scene 2– Not so funny-savage pursuits of power

Sebastian and Antonio’s assassination and usurpation plot represent a serious danger to Alonso. Paralleled to this is the farcical Trinculo and Stephano plot against Prospero. Through the use of bawdy humour, these two are represented as incompetent drunken failures. Caliban, is represented as foolish and naiveté due to his admiration of the idiotic Trincalo and Stephano and by having allied himself with buffoons who would also enslave him given the opportunity.

The disruptive effects of the island setting highlight the central irony of the paradoxical human condition whereby despite the removal of strict social power structures are removed yet individual’s perception of hierarchy and privilege in society organically unfold. Caliban’s inferiority is noted as is his desire for a better life and his freedom from oppression. Ironically, he switches his allegiance from one controlling master to another who also has ill intentions.

1. The setting of this scene is “Near Caliban’s cave”. What does a cave represent? What might a cave represent in the context of this scene?
2. Explain who you think has rightful authority of the island?
3. Write an extended response to this question:

The Tempest explores the harsh treatment of colonisers on native inhabitants and the rigid class system present in Europe and Jacobean England. How does Shakespeare explore social structures and colonialism in the time of Jacobean England?

What does this say about human nature in relation to power and control?

In your answer refer to:

* The representation of Caliban thus far
* Gonzalo’s characterisation and intertextual references to Montague’s famous essay Of Cannibals (I.ii 144-153)
* Trinculo and Stephano’s description of their first view of Caliban. (II.ii. 23-69).
* Prospero’s treatment of Caliban and derogatory references to Caliban (I.ii 345-371)
* Derogatory language used by Trinculo and Stephano to describe Caliban? (II.ii)
* Caliban’s admiration of the rabble, ‘That’s a brave god, and bears celestial liquor. I will kneel to him’ and ‘I’ll swear upon that bottle to be a true subject, for the / liquor is not earthly.’
* Caliban as servant of Prospero to being a servant of servants
* The effect of the use of farce in this scene

Act 3 scene 1–The disrupting effects of love and love as a positive form of bondage

In this scene strict social status and expectation is overturned with Ferdinand completing manual labour and Miranda asking him to marry her, calling into question existing power structures through this romantic plot.

Here we see a Prince, Ferdinand willingly suffer hardship and indignity abiding by Prospero’s “mean” test for the sake of love of Miranda. It is through this noble enterprise that Ferdinand learns the value of noble hard work to attain a desired outcome. This is set against the multitude of usurpation plots on the island and in the backstory of The Tempest which see characters achieve their desires through unethical and corrupt means.

Ironically, the couple’s open-hearted exchange of love vows is ex- pressed in terms of servitude, and bondage, an idealised echo of Caliban’s drunken submission to Stephano in the scene before. However despite the innate influence of control on all human relations, Ferdinand and Miranda, the two most innocent characters in the text thus far, are free from the ambitions of individual power, and are instead focused on achieving relationship bonds. The inversion of power structures in this scene represents a renewed perception of the future and offers the audience hope in the form of the bonds of love interrupting the poisonous temptation of individual power and its by-product, vengeful jealousy.

1. The setting of this scene is “Near Prospero’s cave”. What might this cave represent?
2. Miranda pleads with Ferdinand to have a break. He replies ‘I’d rather crack my sinews, break my back,’ How does this reflect his love for Miranda? What is Ferdinand learning through his process of hard labour?
3. How does Shakespeare subvert traditional representations of women throughout this scene? Consider Miranda’s bold marriage proposal.
4. Ferdinand further professes his love for Miranda. How is imprisonment imagery used to reveal the depth of his love?
5. How is love a form of bondage? How is bondage connected to the theme of power?
6. This scene shows the power of love. How is the power relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda different to all the other power relationships in the text thus far? In your response consider:
	* Prospero’s historic power over Milan
	* Prospero’s power over Miranda
	* Prospero’s power over the island; Caliban, Ariel, Sycorax
	* Prospero’s control of the revenge plot; Ferdinand, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio
	* Antonio’s historic power over Prospero
	* Antonio and Sebastian’s ambition
	* Stephano and Trincalo’s ambition
	* Ariel and Gozalo’s visions of power

Act 3 scene 2–The depravity of greed-a farce

The next two scenes contrast the young couple’s professions of love against the conspiracies to murder and seize power from Prospero and Alonso. In a parody of the nobles’ plot earlier, Caliban encouraging Stephano to consider a future role as ‘ruler’ of the island, through the usurpation of Prospero.

1. Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo are very drunk by this point in the play. Why might Shakespeare use this plot device in his narrative about the corrupting effects of power?
2. Stephano’s attempts to behave like a king provide moments of both parody and satire. Which lines show Stephano’s attempt to act like a king? Why are they presented humorously?
3. Trinculo’s pointed comments on their intelligence frame this scene. Highlight these comments and what is the effect of these pointed comments in representing Shakespeare's perception of the corruptibility of power?
4. What are Caliban’s motivations for suggesting Stephano kill Prospero? What does this plot device suggest about the relationship between power and revenge?
5. How does Shakespeare show that Prospero ultimate power on the island in this scene?

Act 3 scene 3–The anti-masque- a metatheatrical turning point

Antonio and Sebastian, planning to kill Alonso, are drawn to a magic banquet, with Alonso and Gonzalo. The banquet is a trap prepared for them by Prospero which vanishes in thunder and lightning. At this point Ariel delivers Prospero’s scripted speech accusing the men of their previous crimes against Prospero and warning the ‘three men of sin’ of their doom. Alonso, recognises his guilt (‘monstrous, monstrous’) and is full of remorse.

Alonso the king and his loyal servant Gonzalo are exhausted and stop to rest. Antonio and Sebastian take the opportunity to plan the murder of the king that night. Prospero provides a feast for the weary and hungry men, only to have Ariel descend as a harpy and reveal the plot to overthrow the king, removing the feast table before any had the opportunity to partake.

1. What is the effect of the spirits and music in this scene? What is a masque? Why is this scene an example of an anti-masque?
2. How has Shakespeare depicted Prospero’s power in this scene? What is the effect of this?
3. Consider Alonso’s response at the end of this scene. How is his response contrast against Sebastian and Antonio’s? What is the effect of this?
4. Consider Shakespeare’s placement of parallel usurpation plots. What is the effect of this placement?

Act 4 scene 3– The masque-celebrating the power of love

The plays structure is clear as this scene moves from the theme of revenge to love, a pattern that can be mapped across all the scene in the play. Prospero moves away from his revenge plot, consumed by his selfish need to exact revenge, and instead blesses the relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda through a masque.  The purity with which Miranda and Ferdinand’s love is represented throughout the play reflects Shakespeare’s hopes in *The Tempest* to offer an alternative model of power, one that lays the foundations of a regime based on virtue and mutual compassion, not the model of greed and vengeance attainted by the corruption of the old.

The representation of the love match is a catalyst for Prospero’s forgiveness and readiness to move on. Caliban’s, Trinculo’s and Stephano’s leering plot to kill Prospero only serve as a reminder to the audience of the inherent greed that lurks within the heart of humans.

1. Prospero organises a masque to bless the union of Ferdinand and Miranda.  Shakespeare uses intertextuality of classical mythology to reveal his intention with this union.  How does Iris, the goddess of the rainbow and Cere, the goddess of harvest symbolically represent Prospero’s intentions? Consider the absence of Venus and Cupid form this intertextual reference.

What is the effect of missing the significance of these intertextual references within this scene? How do intertextual references add to the rich tapestry of a text?

1. Prospero remembers the plot to kill him and he is set to anger.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148–158)

How is Prospero reflective of human nature and the theatricality of life in this speech? How does this speech represent the self-reflexive nature of this play?

1. Prospero makes a short speech about the masque, saying that the world itself is as insubstantial as a play, and that human beings are “such stuff / As dreams are made on.”

Has Shakespeare cast Prospero as himself? Why? How can this act be interpreted as Shakespeare exploring the transitory nature of life and his own old age and the power of art a catalyst for change?

Act 5 scene 1- The tempest love- restoration of order

All the characters appear on stage for the first and last time in a grand restoration of order aligned with humanist values. Prospero is moved to compassion for the suffering of the conspirators by ironically Ariel, a spirit, who reminds him of his humanity. Prospero’s revenge plot has left the characters lacking confidence in their own perceptions, who are left questioning the nature of reality and the world they will return to, much like many in Shakespeare’s audience, questioning their own perceptions about civil society. The characters and audience have come to acknowledge their own personal journey of reflection orchestrated by a magician on his own journey, examining the human condition and himself.

1. How does Prospero’s comments, ‘The rarer action is / In virtue, than in vengeance,’ mark his epiphany and reveal he has discovered a way for all to move forward in the world? What might Shakespeare be aiming to represent here within his Jacobean context?
2. What does Prospero promise he is going to do?  Is this deliberately contrast to his previous actions to gain power and control? Why?
3. How does Prospero display his forgiveness in this act?
4. What is the role of Gonzalo in the paly? Do you agree with Gonzalo?
5. Why does Prospero ask the audience for forgiveness in the epilogue of the play? How is this part of the metatheatrical part of the play?
6. Essay question:

Consider the use of genre throughout the play. How and why has Shakespeare constructed a tragi-comedy? How does Shakespeare’s use of generic codes and conventions contribute to the overarching message of the text?

Themes

* The need for human relations
* Power and control
* Betrayal, revenge and forgiveness

The central themes of the text are constructed through the recurring motifs within the text. These motifs include:

* Magic
* Chess
* Sounds and music
* Water and the sea
* Earth and air
* Costume and theatre
* Servant and master

For each motif:

1. identify 3 places this motif is referenced in the text.
2. what is the effect of the motif?
3. what theme does it represent?

Textual Conversations

Consider how each of these motifs are used in Margaret Atwood’s Hagseed:

* 1. Identify 3 places this motif is referenced in the text.
	2. What is the effect of the motif?
	3. What theme does it represent?
	4. How is it similar/different to *The Tempest*?

Why is it similar/different to *The Tempest*?