



Teaching Shakespeare's Greatest Plays & Sonnets

with Dr. Joshua Avery

Lecture 9: The Tempest

Outline:

The Tempest

- Big picture themes
 - This deals with colonial matters (questions of authority, power, and virtuous governance).
- Act I, Scene I
 - Social convention in relation to nature.
 - Boatswain: Your aristocracies mean nothing to nature.
 - Another major problem of the play is the reality of a thing versus the appearance of a thing. Can you judge based on appearances?
 - Gonzalo comments: I can handle dying, but I want to die on land. There's something about dying in your home.
- Act I, Scene II
 - What went wrong with Prospero? His passion for esoteric studies was strong in him.
 - Prospero has curiositas, intellectual lust, lust of the eyes. Nothing else mattered to him.
 - Now that he is made to govern an island, can Prospero show good governance?
 - What is Miranda thinking and why (connecting physical beauty with truth)? Can you look at the surface of something and know what it is?
 - One running theme of the play is Prospero's imitation of God. He talks like he is over Ferdinand's conscience. Even human magic only goes so far.
- Act II, Scene I
 - What does utopia have to do with The Tempest?
 - Prospero is here in this wild place with his magical powers. What can he do?
 - This is broadly about governance, wisdom of that governance.
 - Problems of virtue in the play: To what extent do nonmaterial things meet our needs?
- Act II, Scene II
 - Caliban is following a religion based on hedonism.
 - Trinculo says that he would kill his god if it was convenient to do so.
 - This is equivalent of a people adopting a religion because it makes them feel good, in the most immediate and literal sense.



- What kind of order encourages people to seek for the true and the good as something above and outside of their pleasures?
- What can religion become and still be thought of as religion?
- There are religions and political allegories here.
- Act III, Scene I
 - Pain becomes pleasure (happiness, something beyond pleasure).
 - Miranda had been told not to say the things that she said. Why doesn't Prospero get upset with Miranda? Prospero looks at the spirit of what is happening. You can see the generosity and non-literal grace in him.
- Act III, Scene III
 - Can people change? And if so, how?
 - They are being drawn into a state of wonder. Wonder creates openness. Wonder has a way of bringing about happiness. The soul is looking for something above, to something more akin to faith.
 - "Lingering perdition, worse than any death can be at once." This is a picture of Prospero's god. The very language is that of Hell. They are being tortured by not killed.
 - Running theme of the play: Prospero's application of power standing in the role of God.
- Act IV, Scene I
 - There is a theme of pleasure and the governance of pleasure that recurs again. There must be a higher end in mind. Make sure you're focusing on the end of marriage.
 - Marriage is not about you, marriage is about what it brings about.
 - Prospero is somber, and this is very striking. He is vexed. What does it mean for Prospero's identity? He really behaves like God. Prospero has a keen awareness of the limits of his own magic.
 - He thinks maybe the whole world is a magic trick. This raises interesting questions about the meaning of divine creation.
 - What about the universe? Is it in the end more true?
 - Ariel tells the group that Prospero has charmed them. Can the person be regenerated?
- Act V, Scene I
 - Ariel is making a plea for the release of the presently damned company. This is clearly an attempt at persuasion. The models the problem of counsel.
 - The temptation of Prospero is to enjoy unending torment of those who wronged them.
 - He says he is functionally a god.
 - There is something rough in a human being able to resurrect another human being.
 - There are images of submission about burying the books (of magic).
 - Miranda has childlike wonder, which allows you to enter into mystery and spiritual largeness.
 - This conveys the possibility of change.



- Epilogue
 - This is seen as Shakespeare's send off.
 - This is all a very comic (hopeful) ending.
 - Prospero puts aside his powers, and admits he needs intercession.
 - What is he saying? Why is he saying it? What has happened to him?