***The Tempest***

1. i. The tempest

ii. Prospero tells Miranda the past; Ariel reports to Prospero while Miranda sleeps; Prospero and Miranda speak to Caliban; Caliban exits, invisible Ariel returns singing, Prince Ferdinand enters, he and Miranda fall in love with each other, and Prospero pretends great severity.

1. i. The first court-characters scene: general conversation followed by four sleeping while two conspire, followed by Ariel intervening to wake the sleepers without exposing the conspirators.

ii. The first servant-characters scene: Caliban, jester Trinculo, and butler Stephano.

1. i. Ferdinand and Miranda plight their troths.

ii. The second servant-characters scene is concluded with music to lead them astray.

iii. The second court-characters scene: a banquet seen by everyone is followed by accusations heard only by guilty parties, who go mad; the innocent become anxious.

1. i. Prospero sanctions the betrothal and conjures up a masque to bless and entertain the lovers. After it, they exit, a trap is set, Trinculo and Stephano fall for it, and they, along with Caliban, are chased off stage to be beaten.
2. i. Ariel brings court-characters to Prospero, who restores the mad, reveals himself, restores the King and the Prince to each other, has Ariel fetch Captain and Boatswain from ship, brings on the servant-characters to work for their betters, and promises to tell the court characters how he did it all. Then he tells us he’s done.

The classical unities

In this play, Shakespeare complies with the classical tradition that a play should take place at one time and in one place and should have a plot that is essentially one action.

Genre

Where the comedies gave us stereotypical but recognizable (i.e., semi-realistic) characters, settings, and actions, this romance gives us allegorical types (unmixed exemplars of good and of evil rather than some mixture of good and evil in most characters), a magical realm, and supernatural interventions.

More subtly, we no longer have complications for comic effect, eventually resolved into social order; instead, we have the quest-ordeal-vision pattern of folk tale and myth. (Note that *As You Like It* is much more like *The Tempest* than any of the other comedies, thanks to its eventual derivation from folk tale.)

Exposition

The economy of the first two scenes is admirable. We meet court characters during a tempest in the first scene, and they are swiftly characterized. In the second scene, Prospero explains these human characters to his human daughter and the supernatural storm to his supernatural assistant, Ariel. Then we meet Caliban, so we now have the history of Prospero’s becoming an exile and both Ariel’s and Caliban’s versions of the twelve years since he arrived on the island. Before the end of the second scene, we have our first advance in the plot: the meeting of Ferdinand and Miranda.

Plotting

Separating the three interwoven plots reveals analogous but not identical patterns: everyone is allowed to reveal their true nature before Prospero intervenes, and then after he intervenes everyone receives their just deserts (i.e., what they deserve). Specifically –

* Ferdinand and Miranda show themselves wholly positive in their mutual desire in their first appearance, endure Prospero’s opposition in their second appearance, and are granted their desire (to be fulfilled in the future) and given supernatural blessings in their third appearance.
* The court characters turn out to be mixed in their desires in their first appearance. An intervention puts some but not all of them to sleep. Is this (a) planned to give villains apparent opportunity for villainy, (b) indicative of villains’ resistance to positive enchantment, and/or (c) due to non-mourners’ not needing the healing power of sleep? This scene ends with a second intervention, to prevent the villains from acting on their evil intentions. In their second appearance, they are shown the apparent blessing of a banquet, but it is removed by a spirit who curses some of them. This intervention, like the first one, does not affect them all, thus making a second division of them into good and bad, but not the same division as the first one made; those who repent move from the bad group to the good group. Their third appearance grants all lawful and penitent desires and restrains all villainous ambitions.
* The servant characters are shown to be base and venal in their first appearance and even more so in their second, which therefore ends with an intervention. Their third appearance begins their punishment.

Character revealed by the island setting

Gonzalo wishes to make the island an ideal commonwealth. Ferdinand considers it already a paradise. The servant characters regard it as a place that will indulge their senses. The villains pay no attention to it, as their ambitions are for power in the place they come from rather than in the place they’re in.

Images of Divinity

Caliban thinks Stephano a god; Ferdinand and Miranda think each other deities; everyone except Prospero considers the spirits whom he commands to be superior to themselves. To what extent does Prospero act like God in this play? Why does he resume mere humanity and mortality at the end of it?