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We also know that, when Prospero was booted out of Italy and set adrift with his infant daughter, Gonzalo was the one who made sure Prospero had enough food and water to survive. Gonzalo didn't just make sure Prospero would have supplies to physically sustain him, he also made sure Prospero had fancy linens and books—the kinds of things that would keep a guy like Prospero comfortable: By Providence divine.Some food we had, and some fresh water, thatA noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,Out of his charity, being then appointedMaster of this design, did give us, withRich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessities,Which since have steaded much. So, of his gentleness,Knowing I loved my books, he furnished meFrom mine own library with volumes thatI prize above my dukedom. (1.2.190-200) Always Look On The Bright Side Of LifeAfter washing up on shore, Gonzalo is the one who reminds everybody else that they should be celebrating because they're alive: "Beseech you, sir, be merry. You have cause— / So have we all—of joy, for our escape / is much beyond our loss" (2.1.1-3). Gonzalo gives voice to the idea that, despite the (seeming) loss of the ship, the survivors can uncover something even greater. In fact, this seems to be one of the play's biggest messages. Check out what Gonzalo has to say at the play's end:In one voyageDid Claribel her husband find at Tunis,And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wifeWhere he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedomIn a poor isle; and all of us ourselvesWhen no man was his own. (5.1.249-254)Literary critic Robert Langbaum writes that Gonzalo's speech sums up the philosophy of the genre of tragicomedy—that we lose in order to recover something greater, that we die in order to be reborn to a better life." In other words, violence and tragedy are "all part of a providential design." Notice the way Prospero associates Gonzalo with "fate"? Earlier, we saw how Gonzalo believes that "fate" determined whether or not he and the rest of the party would drown during the storm. Here, Prospero directly associates Gonzalo with the workings of "Providence divine," as if Gonzalo is an agent of fate. This is a pretty big deal because, in the play, we get the sense that some force greater than even Prospero's magic is at work guiding the lives of each of the characters. Gonzalo also makes a big utopian speech that literary critics like to compare to a passage from Montaigne's "Of Cannibals," a famous essay that Shakespeare totally cribbed when he wrote Gonzalo's lines. We talk about this more in "Symbols" so check it out if you want to know more. Timeline Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. 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Painting by William Hogarth Character Profiles[] Summary by Act[] Modern Adaptations[] Caliban as depicted by Folger Theatre's 2007 production of The Tempest You are here >> Home » Shakespeare Works » Plays » Comedies » The Tempest » Character Studies » Gonzalo in The Tempest: 5 Inspiring TraitsAlright, continuing on in our discussions about the characters of The Tempest, let's take a look at one specific character who, I've always thought, doesn't quite get the limelight he deserves - I'm talking about old Gonzalo. In a play that's fair crackling with magic and some rather dodgy dealings, Gonzalo in The Tempest, he's a bit like a warm hearth on a blustery day. He's this counsellor to Alonso, the King, and, bless him, he's an optimist, almost stubbornly so. You know the type, right? The sort who, if the ship's going down, would likely remark on teh surprising buoyancy of the wreckage.Illustration of Gonzalo from Shakespeare's comedy "The Tempest"Now, this fella, Gonzalo, he's not just some background fluff. Not at all. He's got a heart of gold, that is. He was Gonzalo, way back before the island shenanigans, who actually saved Prospero and little Miranda. When they were chucked out of Milan, he was the one who snuck them food, water, and - crucially - Prospero's books. Those books! Without 'em, Prospero's just another castaway, not the powerful sorcerer he becomes. Makes you think, doesn't it? Such a small act of kindness, a bit of rebellious compassion, and it changes the whole trajectory of the story. It's these quiet acts of defiance against cruelty that, for me, really sing.And then there's his big speech in (Act II Scene I). Oh, it's a classic. Stuck on this supposedly deserted island, what does Gonzalo do? He starts dreaming up his perfect little society. No rulers, no work, just everyone living in harmony with nature's bounty. Pure Utopia, or so he imagines. Of course, those two Umlaufbahnen—I mean, those two scheming nobles, Antonio and Sebastian—they just rip into him, mock his idealism something fierce. But is it just idealism? I often wonder if Shakespeare's poking us a bit, showing us this yearning for a better world, a world so different from the backstabbing courts these characters come from. It's this persistent, almost childlike hopefulness that makes Gonzalo in The Tempest such a fascinating bloke. He's seen bad things, horrible things, yet he still believes in the possibility of good. And in a world that often feels a bit too cynical, well, there's something to be said for that, isn't there?Okay, look, if we're chatting about characters from The Tempest who really stick with you - not necessarily the ones with all the flashy speeches, but the truly decent ones - then Gonzalo, he's your man. W. J. Rolfe, in his editorial work on this play, describes Gonzalo in The Tempest this way:"Of the minor characters the most interesting is Gonzalo, who is one of Shakespeare's most admirable old men"Prospero himself calls Gonzalo a "noble Neapolitan" (Act I Scene II). That's some praise! I mean, this fella has some qualities that, if you ask me, are pure gold. It's not always about the grand gestures, is it? Sometimes it's the quiet goodness and wise counsel that really connects.Unwavering Kindness: This just pours out of him, doesn't it? It's not just talk. Think about it - when Prospero and little Miranda were shoved into that rickety boat, basically sent to their doom, who was it that actually did something? Gonzalo. He didn't just wring his hands; he stuffed that boat with essentials - food, water, even Prospero's beloved books, which, let's be honest, were his lifeline. That's not just being nice; that's some serious, risk-your-own-skin compassion. It's the kind of thing that makes you nod and think, "Yeah, that's a proper good human being right there."Boundless Optimism: Honestly, this one always makes me chuckle a bit, in a good way! The ship's wrecked, they're stranded on who-knows-what island, and what's Gonzalo doing? He's like, "Hey, our clothes are surprisingly dry and clean!" (Act II Scene I). Then he goes off on his tangent about creating this perfect, no-work, all-play society. The other nobles, all cynical like, they just scoff. But isn't there something pretty amazing about a bloke who, no matter how grim things look, can still find a sliver of sunshine, or even dream up a whole new sun? That's a big part of what makes Gonzalo in The Tempest so memorable, that refusal to let the gloom win.Steadfast Loyalty: Now, Gonzalo, he's loyal, through and through. He sticks by King Alonso, offering comfort and counsel even when the king's lost in his own misery. But it's not a blind, follow-him-off-a-cliff kind of loyalty, you get me? His earlier actions, helping Prospero (the rightful Duke, remember), show he's loyal to what's right, not just to whoever's currently wearing the crown. It's a tricky line to walk, that one, and I think he manages it with a kind of quiet dignity. Takes character, that does.Unyielding Integrity: You just don't see Gonzalo mucking about with the nasty stuff. No sir. While others are whispering plots and dreaming of power grabs, Gonzalo's... well, he's just being Gonzalo. Honest! Straightforward. He's called an "honest old counsellor" in the play, and he earns that title every step of the way. In that whole messy, ambitious, revenge-fueled world of Gonzalo in The Tempest, he's like a moral compass, always pointing true north. It's not flashy, his integrity, but it's solid as a rock. You just know where you stand with him.Remarkable Resilience: Let's not forget what this fella goes through. A terrifying storm, a shipwreck that would rattle anyone, stranded, surrounded by some pretty shifty characters, and his king is a mess. Does Gonzalo fall apart? Nope. He might be a bit bewildered, but he keeps his head. He tries to soothe, to organize, to keep hope alive. This knack for just... keeping on, for weathering the storm with his spirit more or less intact, that's something special. It's what makes Gonzalo in The Tempest more than just a nice old man; he's a survivor, in his own way. Shows a real strength of spirit, and I, for one, find that pretty inspiring.Here's the thing about Gonzalo in The Tempest, and this is something I chew on quite a bit, especially after, say, catching a late show here in Stratford and mulling it over - he's not just wallpaper, you know? His job in the play, his whole impact, it's sneaky important. Like the quiet guy in the back of the room who actually knows what's what."So, let's start with a rather significant point, and I'm quite serious about this: without Gonzalo, there essentially would be no Tempest. It truly is as simple as that. Just think: if he hadn't found the courage, or perhaps acted from sheer human decency, to secretly give Prospero and Miranda those vital supplies - especially those all-important books! - when they were cruelly shoved out of Milan to basically perish at sea, the story we know just wouldn't exist. And where would Prospero be without Gonzalo? He'd have been just another tragic footnote in the annals of history. That means no wondrous magic, no enchanted island, no tempestuous storm, and certainly no marvellous play for us to talk about with such relish. Gonzalo's kindness back then, you see, is the very linchpin on which the whole narrative turns. It's a rather wild thought when you step back and consider it, isn't it?"And then, he's like... he's the good guy yardstick, isn't he? You've got your scheming villains, Antonio and Sebastian - proper sharks, those two - and even King Alonso, who's moping about, riddled with guilt. Then there's Gonzalo. It's like Shakespeare's holding him up and saying, "See? They're not all rotten in the state of Naples!" His big speech, you remember, in (Act II Scene I), about his dream island with no work and no kings? The other blokes, they just laugh their heads off. Call him an old fool. And yeah, maybe it's a bit out there, his utopia. But isn't it also a massive poke in the eye to their whole dog-eat-dog world? It's what makes Gonzalo in The Tempest more than just nice; he's a statement.And his effect on Prospero? Don't even get me started, or we'll be here all night! When Prospero finally, finally talks about what happened, who does he single out for praise? "O good Gonzalo," he says in (Act V Scene I), "My true preserver, and a loyal sir..." That's not just a throwaway line! It's huge! It tells you that even when Prospero was at his lowest, his most vengeful, he saw Gonzalo's goodness. Sometimes wonder, you know, if that little seed of acknowledged decency, knowing that one guy from that whole rotten court was actually okay, if that didn't help Prospero find his way back to forgiving everyone else. The quiet presence of Gonzalo in The Tempest, it's like a constant, gentle hum of hope beneath all the dramatic shouting. And that, my friend, that's a heck of an impact for one old counsellor to have. Character Play Similarities to Gonzalo Differences from Gonzalo Adam As You Like It Both are older, virtuous figures providing crucial, selfless aid to those unjustly treated; embody unwavering loyalty. Adam is a devoted servant offering personal savings; Gonzalo is a state counsellor whose aid, while vital, is from his court position. Gonzalo is also more overtly optimistic and philosophical. Camillo The Winter's Tale Both are loyal counsellors with strong moral integrity, choosing right over orders and providing essential help that changes characters' fates. Camillo's key act is direct disobedience to a king's murderous command, forcing him to flee; Gonzalo's aid to Prospero was more subtle. Gonzalo's pronounced optimism and utopian vision are unique. Escalus Measure for Measure Both are wise, older counsellors who champion justice, mercy, and good governance, often trying to moderate harsher figures. Escalus operates more within the state's formal legal system throughout his play; Gonzalo's influence is often more through personal comfort, hope, and his notable commonwealth speech. Helicanus Pericles, Prince of Tyre Both demonstrate profound loyalty and offer honest, moral counsel to their rulers, serving as steadfast figures of integrity through adversity. Helicanus is entrusted with governing a kingdom and actively works against treachery; Gonzalo is shipwrecked with his king and offers more philosophical comfort and utopian ideas. "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, anything. The wills above be done! but I would fain die a dry death."Gonzalo, The Tempest - Act I Scene I Gonzalo blurts this out right when that terrible storm is raging at the start of the play. It's a wonderfully down-to-earth reaction, isn't it? While everyone else is in a proper panic, Gonzalo's just wishing he was on dry land, any dry land, rather than facing a watery grave!"Had I plantation of this isle, my lord... / I' a commonweal! I would by contraries / Execute all things; for no kind of traffic / Would I admit; no name of magistrate..."Gonzalo, The Tempest - Act II Scene IHere is Gonzalo launching into his famous daydream about the perfect little society he'd set up if he were king of the island. He's trying to lift King Alonso's spirits, picturing this ideal place with no work, no rulers, just peace and plenty for all, quite different from the scheming courts they know, eh?Beseech you, sir, be merry: you have cause, / So have we all, of joy; for our escape / Is much beyond our loss."Gonzalo, The Tempest - Act II Scene IAnd here's our optimist again, doing his best to cheer everyone up after they've washed ashore, thinking they're the sole survivors and that the King's son is lost. Gonzalo, ever looking on the bright side, points out that, well, at least they're alive, which is a darn sight better than being food for the fishes!So, final thoughts on old Gonzalo in The Tempest. You know, when the lights come up and you're walking out of the theatre, he's one of those characters who kinda sticks with you, not for any big sword fights or booming speeches, but for something quieter, eh? It always seems to me he's more than just the "nice old fella" in the story. He's... I dunno, he's like the play's conscience, maybe? Always there, trying to nudge things towards the sunny side of the street.Think about it - this whole crazy story, it's got betrayal, guys trying to knock off their brothers, magic like you wouldn't believe. And then there's Gonzalo. He's the one who, way back when, actually did something good - helping Prospero and little Miranda survive. Prospero himself says it, right there in (Act V Scene I), calls him his "true preserver." That's not small potatoes, that! It tells you that that even Prospero, with all his plans for getting even, remembered that one act of pure, unselfish kindness. And I often think, what if Gonzalo hadn't done that? Poof! No story. That's how vital Gonzalo in The Tempest really is.And his whole "perfect island" speech in (Act II Scene I) - you know, where he'd have no bosses, no money, just everyone happy and looked after by nature? Yeah, the wise-guys Antonio and Sebastian, they have a good laugh. But isn't he just saying out loud what a lot of us feel sometimes? That longing for something simpler, something... better? He's not a revolutionary, not our Gonzalo. But that dream of his, it mingles in the air, making all the scheming and nastiness look even uglier. He's the steady hand, the quiet hope. Gonzalo in The Tempest, he's like that one relative who, no matter how bonkers the family get-together is, just keeps smiling and offering everyone a biscuit. A good soul. A truly good soul, and the play's all the richer for him, that's for sure.Q: Why does Gonzalo in The Tempest always look on the bright side of everything?A: Gonzalo? Oh, him. Well, that's just... Gonzalo, isn't it? Some folks are just a glass-half-full I guess. In every situation he's like, "right, but what if...?" and tries to find some little scrap of good, mostly for the others, y'know, to keep them from going right off the deep end. Q: That whole speech he makes about creating a perfect island, no work, no rulers, was he serious, or was he just playing around with them?A: Ah, his Cloud Cuckoo Land speech! Serious? Well now, that's a question, innit? I've always figured it's... well, it's a bit of this and a bit of that. He's definitely trying to pull King Alonso out of his misery, give him something else to chew on for a minute. But then, you listen close, and it's also pure Gonzalo spilling out - that deep-down wish for a world where folks are just... kinder, simpler. Q: What's the deal with what Gonzalo did for Prospero and little Miranda way back when?A: Oh, that was absolutely clutch! When Prospero got booted from Milan, Gonzalo was the one, the only one, who snuck them life-saving stuff. We're talking water, food, decent clothes, and - this is the kicker - Prospero's magic books! Without that stuff, especially the books, Prospero's just another castaway.Q: Is Gonzalo a bit of a pushover or is there more to him?A: See, he might come across as a bit wide-eyed sometimes with all his hopefulness, but don't let that fool ya. There's a real backbone of steel in that man's goodness. His loyalty and kindness - those aren't signs of weakness; they're choices he makes. He's way tougher than he looks, just in a quiet, steady sort of way. Get 1 free answer with LitCharts AI New The rightful Duke of Milan who was overthrown and exiled by his brother Antonio and Alonso, the King of Naples. Prospero has lived for 12 years with his daughter Miranda on a deserted island... read analysis of Prospero A spirit and Prospero's servant. Prospero rescued Ariel from a prison in which he was placed by the dead witch Sycorax. Now Ariel uses magic to carry out Prospero's commands. Ariel wants his... read analysis of Ariel Prospero's unwilling slave. As the son of the witch Sycorax, who ruled the island before she died years prior to Prospero's arrival, Caliban believes that he should be master of the island. When Prospero... read analysis of Caliban Prospero's daughter, the rightful princess of Milan. Miranda knows nothing of her past until Prospero fills her in during the second scene of the play. Miranda is a compassionate, dutiful daughter, and her only... read analysis of Miranda Alonso's advisor. Gonzalo was charged with carrying out the kidnapping of Prospero and Miranda. A kind soul, he pitied the pair and arranged for them to have provisions for survival in exile. Gonzalo... read analysis of Gonzalo Alonso's son. Ferdinand finds love with Miranda. Their union seals the reconciliation between Alonso of Naples and Prospero of Milan. Ferdinand is kind, courteous, and dutiful. His love for and loyalty to his... read analysis of Ferdinand Alonso's brother. Sebastian is easily persuaded by Antonio to try to murder his brother so that he can become king. It is later revealed that he also played a part in the overthrow of... read analysis of Sebastian Alonso's butler. Stephano is a comical character who spends the whole play drunk. When Caliban mistakes him for a god because he gives Caliban wine and gets him drunk, Stephano begins to fancy himself a... read analysis of Stephano Minor Characters Alonso The king of Naples. Alonso plotted with Antonio to overthrow Prospero, but he expresses genuine remorse when confronted with his crimes. Alonso also shows a sincere love for his son Ferdinand and is distraught for much of the play, believing that Ferdinand has drowned in the tempest. Trinculo The king's jester. Trinculo is another comical character, and like Stephano, he is drunk for much of the play. Trinculo is less charismatic and more cowardly than Stephano. He resents Caliban's worship of Stephano but readily follows along with the plot to murder Prospero. Boatswain A member of the ship's crew. The boatswain speaks commandingly to the courtiers in the first scene. His assertion of his authority angers the courtiers, especially Antonio and Sebastian. Sycorax A vicious witch, and Caliban's mother. Sycorax ruled the island, imprisoned Ariel when he refused to do her nasty bidding, and died before Prospero's arrival. Adrian A minor lord in the king's court. Francisco A minor lord in the king's court. Iris The Greek goddess of the rainbow. She appears in the wedding masque. Ceres The Greek goddess of the harvest. She blesses Miranda and Ferdinand with wishes of prosperity at the wedding masque. Juno The queen of the Greek gods. She blesses Miranda and Ferdinand with wishes of wealth and honor at the wedding masque. In the play's dramatis personae (literally, a list of the "persons of the play"), we're told that Gonzalo is "an honest old counsellor of Naples." He's travelling with the King's party when he's shipwrecked with the other passengers on Prospero's island. The thing to know about Gonzalo is that he's a really good guy with an optimistic outlook on life—kind of like Dory in Finding Nemo, but with a beard instead of fins. The first time we meet Gonzalo, he's trying to break up a nasty argument between the royals and the mariners on deck during the tempest. While everyone around him is bickering and worrying about drowning, Gonzalo keeps his cool and says he's sure "good Fate" has something other than drowning in store for everyone on board the ship (1.1.31-32). We also know that, when Prospero was booted out of Italy and set adrift with his infant daughter, Gonzalo was the one who made sure Prospero had enough food and water to survive. Gonzalo didn't just make sure Prospero would have supplies to physically sustain him, he also made sure Prospero had fancy linens and books—the kinds of things that would keep a guy like Prospero comfortable: By Providence divine.Some food we had, and some fresh water, thatA noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,Out of his charity, being then appointedMaster of this design, did give us, withRich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessities,Which since have steaded much. So, of his gentleness,Knowing I loved my books, he furnished meFrom mine own library with volumes thatI prize above my dukedom. (1.2.190-200) Always Look On The Bright Side Of LifeAfter washing up on shore, Gonzalo is the one who reminds everybody else that they should be celebrating because they're alive: "Beseech you, sir, be merry. You have cause— / So have we all—of joy, for our escape / is much beyond our loss" (2.1.1-3). Gonzalo gives voice to the idea that, despite the (seeming) loss of the ship, the survivors can uncover something even greater. In fact, this seems to be one of the play's biggest messages. Check out what Gonzalo has to say at the play's end:In one voyageDid Claribel her husband find at Tunis,And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wifeWhere he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedomIn a poor isle; and all of us ourselvesWhen no man was his own. (5.1.249-254)Literary critic Robert Langbaum writes that Gonzalo's speech sums up the philosophy of the genre of tragicomedy—that we lose in order to recover something greater, that we die in order to be reborn to a better life." In other words, violence and tragedy are "all part of a providential design." Notice the way Prospero associates Gonzalo with "fate"? Earlier, we saw how Gonzalo believes that "fate" determined whether or not he and the rest of the party would drown during the storm. 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Gonzalo provides a contrast to many of the characters because he is very noble and throughout the story, and he talks positively of the situation and how beautiful he thinks the island is.