The People in the Play

The Islanders

PROSPERO, the deposed Duke of Milan

MIRANDA,
his daughter, cast away on the island with her father

CALIBAN,
a monster born on the island, Prospero's slave

ARIEL,
an airy spirit once imprisoned on the island, now earning his freedom by serving Prospero

VARIOUS SPIRITS CONJURED BY PROSPERO'S MAGIC

The Shipwrecked

ANTONIO,
Prospero's brother, who usurped his dukedom

ALONSO, KING OF NAPLES, who helped him

FERDINAND, son of King Alonso

SEBASTIAN, envious brother of Alonso

GONZALO,
an old nobleman of Milan who tried to help Prospero

TRINCULO, a jester

STEPHANO, a drunken butler

THE CREW

The action takes place on an enchanted island, twelve years after Prospero is usurped and cast adrift at sea.

The Tempest

It seemed to Miranda as if she had lived all her life on this lonely little island. Her father, Prospero, had told her differently, but for twelve years this island had been her home and she remembered no other. She recalled the past like a dream, the people like characters in a fairy story. She and her father had been cast adrift in an unseaworthy ship by her uncle Antonio, who wanted to be Duke of Milan in place of Prospero. Alonso, King of Naples, and his brother Sebastian had both helped set the ship adrift. The castaways would certainly have died at sea but for the kindness of an old friend. Gonzalo, at peril to his life, had secretly stocked the ship with food and water. His bravery had undoubtedly saved Prospero and little Miranda. But it

was fate which had cast them up on these uninhabited shores.

No, the island was not quite uninhabited. Before Prospero, it had belonged to the witch Sycorax. She it was who had landscaped it with thorn bushes and bent-backed trees, stinking bogs and naked rocks. She it was who had captured spirits of sky and sea, like a great black spider catching flies in her web, and made them serve her as slaves. When one airy spirit defied her, she had pinned him inside a split pine tree to howl his days away in agony. She it was who had left behind, when she died, her grotesque son Caliban, to drag his knuckles around the beaches and thickets of the island.

But Prospero knew magic, too, and the longer he lived in lonely exile, the more he perfected the magic arts. He coloured the island with flowers and grassed over its bare rocks. He hung fruit in its trees and put fish in its lagoons. He freed the spirit Ariel from the split pine tree. He even tried to educate and civilize the monstrous Caliban until the task proved too hard. And all the time he waited. What was he waiting for? For rescue? Surely not, for though he had been Duke of Milan, here he was emperor of a magic realm.

Then one night, to Miranda's dismay, Prospero

raised a storm. He pored over his book of spells, drew symbols in the sand, milked mysterious magic out of the clouds and, with Ariel's help, raised up such a tempest as the island had never seen before. The heaving sea holed the sky; the pitchy rain mottled the rocks; twisting palm leaves slashed the air to ribbons. Out at sea, a passing ship was ensnared in the storm's centre. Ariel charred it with lightning, clung to its masts in the shape of fire, split its canvas with hail, and blinded passengers and crew with rain. The ship was driven headlong against the cliffs, where it was held in a cleft as Ariel had been within his tree.

Full fathom five thy father lies.
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

Ariel, ACT I, SCENE II

'Why, Father?' begged Miranda. 'Such a dreadful storm! All those poor people lost! Why would you do such a thing, Father?'

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

Miranda, ACT I, SCENE II

'I have my reasons,' said Prospero, allowing the wind to drop. 'And they're not all drowned. Take this young man coming towards us now, for instance. What do you make of him?'

Miranda looked down from the dripping doorway of their mountain cave and saw a young man roaming the island paths in a daze of grief. Every now and then, he would call out.

'Father! Father! Anyone! Is no one left alive, then, but me?'

'What is it, a god?' whispered Miranda, pressing her fingers to her mouth. 'He's so beautiful. Did you ever see such beauty, Father?' She was accustomed to the blue-green, feathered loveliness of Ariel, but this was nothing like it. This was flesh and blood. This was a wonder.

And yet Prospero did not welcome Ferdinand with sympathy and kindness. On the contrary, he was horribly fierce with him, accusing him of having come to the island expressly to steal it. A spy, he said, a treacherous dog fit for nothing but a kennel and a stout length of chain. When Ferdinand drew his sword

to resist, Prospero's magic robbed him of all power to move, and though Miranda pleaded desperately on his behalf, Ferdinand was shackled like a convict and put to work carrying firewood.

Prince Ferdinand hardly cared. He had seen Miranda, miracle of the island, and she had looked back at him with the same love-struck eyes. Nothing else seemed to matter.

Ferdinand was wrong to think his father dead. Though Prospero (who had orchestrated every note of the storm) knew the truth, he did nothing to put the boy's mind at rest. Indeed, he had Ariel become invisible and sing sad songs of drowning in Ferdinand's ear.

But Ferdinand's father, King Alonso, was not dead. He and half the nobility of Naples and Milan were strewn round the island's shore, in accordance with Prospero's plan – soaked, exhausted, but alive. Among them was Prospero's deadly enemy Antonio.

King Alonso was devastated with grief, for he in turn believed his son had drowned. His companions – particularly Gonzalo – tried to comfort him by saying that Ferdinand could have swum ashore, but no one really believed it. Some were more sincere in their sympathy than others. For no sooner had the King and

Gonzalo gone to sleep than Antonio resorted to his favourite pastime: plotting and murderous intrigue.

'If you were to kill Alonso now, while he's sleeping,' he whispered to Sebastian, 'and I were to put an end to that prig Gonzalo, you would go home from here King of Naples. You're heir to the throne, aren't you?'

'Me? Take Naples? Like you took Milan from your brother?'

'Yes, and how well his robes look on me!'

Sebastian hesitated. 'I don't know if I *could* . . .'

'Nothing simpler,' urged Antonio, insidious and tempting. 'Three inches of steel – that's all that stands between you and the crown of Naples. Don't think about it. Let's just do it . . .'

They could not know that every word spoken on the island rang loud in Prospero's ear. Quickly he sent Ariel to wake the victims, and Alonso and Gonzalo stirred in the nick of time to escape having their throats cut. The murderers' moment was lost; their crime had to be postponed, and the four went on searching for Alonso's lost son.

Meanwhile, Caliban the monster was busy cursing his miserable existence when he heard someone coming. He hid, for fear it was one of Prospero's spirits sent to punish

his laziness with pinches. He lay down and hid – and that was how Trinculo and Stephano (two more survivors of the shipwreck) came upon him. Trinculo, Alonso's jester, looked round for shelter from a fresh burst of rain and, seeing Caliban's cloak, crept underneath it. Stephano, Alonso's butler, had stumbled across most of the island before he stumbled across Caliban. Owing to a lucky find – several bottles of wine washed ashore after the shipwreck – his brains were pretty much afloat in drink. Seeing what he took to be a two-headed, four-legged fairground freak, he generously slopped wine into the mouth at each end.

'Trinculo, this end is you!'

'Stephano, you're alive!'

'Can I have some more wine?' asked Caliban, and they both jumped out of their wits. So it was that two rogues were reunited – and Caliban discovered a taste for strong liquor. He thought it so marvellous that he was ready to bow down and worship the god-like creatures who gave it to him, ready to serve them with slavish devotion – to show them his island, to let them *have* it, if they would just kill Prospero first. His head reeled with the drink. His fish fins slapped like a performing seal's as he thought of dancing on Prospero's corpse. He should have known that every word spoken

on the island could be heard by Prospero. Prospero sent Ariel to accompany the trio's drunken singing on pipe and drum, and the music impelled them to dance, like it or not, through thistles and thorns, pits and ponds up to their chins. Even so, he could not remove from their hearts the determination to kill Prospero and take his island from him.

Be not afear'd. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices
That if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again

Caliban, ACT III, SCENE II

'Please sit down and rest! I'll carry some of your logs! Let me! But please rest! You look so tired.'

'I'd rather my back broke under the strain! And anyway, how can I be tired when you are here to keep me company?'

Prospero smiled with delight as he watched, unseen, his daughter and Prince Ferdinand. It was impossible to tell which of them was the more in love, and nowhere in the world could you have found two more admirable

young people together in one place. He had planned their meeting from the very beginning, and had treated Ferdinand so cruelly only to test his mettle and be sure of his worth.

Now he put an end to their distress, wrapped Ferdinand warmly in his arms, and granted his wish to marry the beloved Miranda. 'She will make you even happier than you suppose, boy. I've had her by me here for twelve years and I know her for the perfection she is.' Then he entertained his visitor as he would have liked to have done from the first, with hospitality and friendship, and with a 'masque' or play to celebrate their forthcoming marriage. Though it was an illusion acted out by shadows, a prettiness which faded like a rainbow after rain, Ferdinand and Miranda were enchanted.

Only Prospero could not derive any pleasure from his own magic. Inwardly he was seething with rage at the thought of Caliban – evil, ungrateful Caliban – urging along his worthless conspirators, bent on bloody murder. Together with Ariel, Prospero loosed the goblins of the island to kick and prick, pummel and pound the three drunkards. It was as if Prospero hated Caliban for being a hideous brute in his beautifully crafted paradise.

Ariel, the instrument of Prospero's revenge, began to feel sorry for his master's victims – not Caliban but

the noblemen on whom Prospero was now wreaking revenge for his twelve years' exile. But he obediently carried out Prospero's instructions.

He prepared another masque, taunting Duke Antonio, King Alonso, Sebastian and Gonzalo with visions of banquets which disappeared before they could taste the food. He had Ariel trap them within a thicket of saplings, powerless to move, and forced to listen to their crimes cried aloud through the tree-trunk bars of their cage. 'You, Antonio! You, Alonso! You, Sebastian! We know you! You are the sinners who usurped Duke Prospero and sent him and his little innocent daughter to their deaths in the heaving sea! You see, Alonso, how you have paid for the death of a child with the death of your own son? That's right, weep for your crimes!'

'Where are they now, Ariel?' Prospero asked.

'Where you told me to put them, master, and so miserable that, if I were human, I would take pity on them.'

'You would? Then so shall I, my faithful Ariel. I promised you your freedom if you served me loyally, didn't I?' At the mention of freedom the blue-green feathers fluttered like a seabird hovering over the sea. 'I shall keep my word soon. Release my enemies and bring

them here.' With his staff Prospero drew a magic circle on the ground in which to pen them a while longer.

It was dawn. The first warmth of the day touched him and Prospero unfastened his magician's cloak at the throat. The mystical signs woven into its fabric glistened and flickered. His mane of white hair made him god-like as he stood overseeing his island kingdom. And yet he leaned heavily on his staff as he addressed one last time the spirits of the island.

'Goodbye to you, wraiths of the rockpools, you ghosts of the green sea, you woodland sprites. My magic has given me such mastery that I could eclipse the sun or waken the dead to dance. But all that is finished now. Men are not gods and if they try to be so, they become tyrants.'

He let the cloak fall from his shoulders. He broke his wizard's staff and, fetching his book of magic from the cave, he hurled it down into the sea. The spine burst, and its pages hovered on the rising air like a thousand gulls.

Ariel brought all Prospero's enemies within the magic circle. They looked up to see, white-maned and king-like, on a high promontory, the man they had thought long drowned in the sea.

'Prospero!?' they all gasped.

'Yes, Antonio, Alonso, Sebastian. I am Prospero, the Duke of Milan you cast adrift on the open sea. I have tormented you for it in body and mind. But now I forgive you. All I require of you is the return of my dukedom.'

'Oh it's yours, it's yours!' exclaimed Alonso. 'Every brick and pane of it. This last storm's taught me that a dukedom's nothing to lose compared with a son.'

'You must be patient in your loss, Alonso,' said Prospero sagely. 'I myself lost a daughter in last night's storm, but I have resigned myself to the loss.'

'You did? Oh heavens! How?'

Then, seeing that Alonso was truly a changed man, Prospero drew the curtain which hung across the mouth of the cave. There sat Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess! Alonso's amazement was matched only by Miranda's when she looked up to see her empty world suddenly populated by so many human faces.

Ariel, obedient to the last, lifted down the ship from its cleft in the cliffs, and woke the sailors who, all the while, had slept a magic sleep below decks. The voyage of the Duke of Milan and King of Naples, interrupted by the tempest, could safely continue.

Even Stephano and Trinculo, pinched and bruised,

fell aboard at the last moment and lay in the bilges, howling.

Fair weather and a safe passage were the last gifts Prospero was able to pluck out of the treasure chest of magic. After that, all he could give Ariel was his freedom, all he could give his daughter and son-in-law was his blessing as a father, and all he could give his subjects in the dukedom of Milan was the wisdom of an old man.

Caliban was left alone on his island. No one remained to torture him with pinches or force him to carry firewood. No one remained to call him vile and hideous. No one remained for him to curse or envy or hate. But there again, no lovely Miranda remained; no magic to paint the air with music; no one to blame for the day's disappointments; no one to rouse tempests out of the sea. No one at all.

Sometimes, in the blue-green season of the year, he would glimpse Ariel riding on a snatch of wind or somersaulting through circles of sea left by a tunny's tail. Perhaps he wept at the sight. Who can say? No one remains to tell us.

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.

Prospero, ACT IV, SCENE I

About the Author

Geraldine McCaughrean has written over one hundred and sixty books, mostly for children. Her novels and retellings have won her the Carnegie Medal, Guardian Children's Fiction Award, Blue Peter Book Award, the Costa Book Award and many other prizes. A prolific author who writes for all ages, she lives in Berkshire with her family.