The play opens with a shipwreck on an enchanted isle where the usurped Duke of Milan, Prospero, and his lovely daughter, Miranda, have been living for 12 years. Prospero has become a master magician, and Miranda has grown into a charming maiden. Prospero, with the aide of his sprite Ariel, has conjured a violent storm to cause the shipwreck. All those aboard the ship—Alonso, the King of Naples, his brother Sebastian, Alonso’s son Ferdinand, Alonso’s counselor Gonzalo, and Prospero’s brother Antonio—jump overboard for fear of dying in the storm. Miranda, having watched the storm wreck the ship, is assured by her father that it was all a magical illusion. He relates the tale of their journey to the isle—how his brother Antonio teamed with Alonso to overthrow him. Though Prospero and Miranda were abandoned at sea, they were able to survive because Gonzalo secretly stowed money, clothes and Prospero’s sorcery books on the boat. Prospero and Miranda eventually landed on the island and encountered Caliban, a demon son of the witch Sycorax, now slave to Prospero.

After relating their history, Prospero causes Miranda to sleep and commands Ariel to ensure that the nobles are safe on the island. Ariel informs Prospero that the rest of the fleet has returned to Naples believing that Alonso is dead. Ariel has pledged allegiance to Prospero because Prospero freed Ariel from Sycorax’s curse. Prospero, in return, promises to free Ariel when his plans are complete. Ariel scatters the nobles around the island, leading Ferdinand into a cave where Miranda, never having seen any other man besides her father, falls instantly in love. Though Prospero approves of the match, he pretends to be critical of Ferdinand and sets him to work hauling logs.

Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo and the lords Adrian and Francisco wander the island, presuming Ferdinand dead. Gonzalo conjectures that Ferdinand could still be alive since they survived the shipwreck. Ariel lulls all to sleep except Sebastian and Antonio, who plot the murder of Alonso to take over Naples. Ariel, cloaked in invisibility, overhears the plan and wakes Gonzalo, who warns Alonso just in time. On another part of the island, the drunken Trinculo, another survivor of the shipwreck, encounters Caliban; they are soon joined by the king’s butler, Stephano. After tasting “spirits” from Stephano, Caliban declares him to be a god and vows devotion.

Back at the cave, Prospero spies as Miranda and Ferdinand exchange vows of love and promise to marry. Prospero, happy with the match, blesses their union. Caliban encourages Stephano to kill Prospero, marry Miranda and take over the island. Ariel overhears the scheme and leaves to warn his master. To torment the nobles, Ariel and other spirits reveal a lavish banquet that vanishes as they try to eat. Ariel appears in the form of a Harpy to rebuke them for their cruel behavior toward Prospero, declaring it the cause of their current sorrow. At the cave, Prospero conjures a performance by goddesses and nymphs. When Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo show up to enact their plot, Prospero sends Ariel and other fairies after them to torment them and keep them out of the way.

The royal party is brought, spellbound, to Prospero, where he forgives them for the injuries of the past. He reveals the supposed-dead Ferdinand and his own daughter, Miranda—both safe, playing chess and newly engaged. As father and son reunite, Prospero frees Ariel and returns the island to Caliban’s control. Stephano and Trinculo repent their scheming, and Alonso restores Prospero’s dukedom. All board the ship to return to Italy. Prospero renounces his magical powers and requests that Ariel provide calm seas for the voyage home.
A Whole New World

Colonization:
The practice of creating settlements in a new territory with ties to the parent state.

Virginia Company:
A colonizing company chartered by King James I in 1606.

Pinnaces:
Small, two-masted sailing ships, often used as messenger ships or to accompany larger ships on journeys of exploration.

By the time Shakespeare wrote The Tempest in 1611, Londoners were accustomed to stories of fantastic voyages abroad. More than a hundred years after Christopher Columbus first landed in the Americas, colonization and exploration of the unknown islands west of England continued to be frequent topics of conversation as many travelers returned with amazing stories of the unknown. On June 2, 1609, a fleet of ships from the Virginia Company left Plymouth, England, and headed toward the colony of Jamestown, Virginia, with supplies and new colonists. On their way past the islands of Bermuda on July 24, a storm scattered the fleet. The flagship, the Sea Adventure, (carrying Admiral George Somers and the future governor of Virginia, Sir Thomas Gates) disappeared and was presumed lost at sea. Amazingly, almost a full year later on May 23, 1610, two pinnaces, or light sailing ships, appeared at Jamestown carrying the crew and passengers from the Sea Adventure. The ship had crashed on the island of Bermuda where the crew found that this notoriously dangerous island, often referred to as the “Isle of Devils,” was actually quite delightful, with plenty of food and shelter, as well as wood to build their new sailing ships to complete the voyage to Jamestown. Their survival caused a sensation in England and led to the publishing of several accounts of their adventure, including A Discovery of the Bermudas, Otherwise Called the Isle of Devils by Sylvester Jourdain and The True Repertory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates by William Strachey. The Virginia Company also wrote an account of the story, titled The True Declaration of the Estate of the Colony in Virginia.

In this map of North America, dated 1797, you can trace the journey of the Sea Adventure from the shipwreck on Bermuda back to Virginia. This famous shipwreck could have been a source for Shakespeare’s The Tempest.

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In his account dated July 15, 1610, William Strachey describes some harrowing experiences in the storm that Shakespeare appears to echo in some of Ariel’s manipulation of the crew in *The Tempest*.

**Strachey’s Account:**
“A dreadful storm and hedeous began to blow, which swelling and roaring as it were by fits, at length did beat all light from heaven: which like a hell of darkness turned black upon us, so much the more fuller of horror…and over mastered the senses of all...” Four days into the storm they saw “an apparition of a little round light, like a faint Starre trembling and streaming along with a sparkling blaze, half the height upon the mainmast and shooting sometimes from shroud to shroud...”

Both Strachey and Ariel describe St. Elmo’s fire, a natural phenomenon that legendarily guided lost sailors to safety. The light was, in fact, a glow that occurred on dark stormy nights produced by gathering static electricity. Shakespeare’s audience would have read or heard some of these accounts and would have immediately identified with Ariel’s descriptions.

**ARIEL**
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flam’d amazement: sometime I’d divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly.
(I.ii.197-200)

The shipwrecked vessel in *The Tempest* is returning to Naples, Italy, not from the New World but from Tunis in northern Africa, where a royal wedding has taken place. Shakespeare’s audience might have been familiar with Tunis as the Moslem city that was conquered and temporarily converted to Christianity by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1535. This would place Prospero’s island somewhere in the Mediterranean. Shakespeare, however, plays to his audience by intermingling Mediterranean and North American influences. Londoners during Shakespeare’s time had become fascinated with and sometimes terrified by stories of the native peoples in the New World.
In opposition to this portrayal of the perfection of native people, Shakespeare creates Caliban, the only mortal native of the island. A rough and uncivilized character who resents Prospero and violently opposes his oppression, Caliban embodies the potential dangers of colonization and society’s attempts to tame the natural world. Even his name, Caliban, is an original play on the word “cannibal” which had recently worked its way into the vocabulary of Elizabethan Englanders from New World accounts. The word “cannibal” came into use after Columbus’ voyage in 1492, when man-eating habits were discovered among a group of Indians in the islands now known as the West Indies. Assuming that they could tame and teach him, Prospero and Miranda allow Caliban to live with them. Caliban attempts to rape Miranda, shattering their trust and leading Prospero to treat Caliban as his slave. In some ways, however, it is too late for Prospero to enslave Caliban. Prospero and Miranda had already transformed Caliban beyond being “primitive” when they taught him their language. Just as Gonzalo states “letters should not be known,” Shakespeare seems to warn against this injection of modern language into native life, as Caliban deeply resents Prospero’s influence and uses his new gift of language to curse and argue with him:

CALIBAN
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!

(I.ii.365-367)

Caliban eventually attempts to murder Prospero. After his plan fails, Prospero forgives him and finally leaves the island with Miranda and the others.

Only then can Caliban regain control of the island and find peace, free of men who would enslave or exploit him but also totally alone. Arguments of whether colonization saved or ruined the inhabitants of newly colonized areas such as the Americas were rampant in Elizabethan society. Shakespeare, in The Tempest, raises questions about his society’s obsession with colonization. Out of wonderful firsthand accounts from explorers, a miraculous shipwreck story from Jamestown and perhaps his own desire for his world to find hope in a new land, Shakespeare crafts The Tempest and creates a tale of love, redemption and the possibilities of a new beginning.
The Tempest is considered by most scholars to be the last play written by Shakespeare without collaborators. As with most of his plays, the dates and circumstances of The Tempest’s publication and first production are not accurately known. Clues gathered from the play and accounts from the time indicate that the play was probably written sometime in 1611, and was first performed at Whitehall, most likely before James I. The Tempest’s position at the end of Shakespeare’s career is an important one, particularly if Shakespeare was aware that this would be his last play. It is very tempting to think of The Tempest as Shakespeare’s “goodbye to the stage.” Many readers see a strong parallel between Shakespeare and the character of Prospero, who at the end of the play announces:

I’ll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I’ll drown my book.

(V.1.54-57)

Just as Prospero, a master sorcerer, gives up his art to return home, so does the master playwright, Shakespeare. However, there exists no evidence to support that Shakespeare knew that The Tempest would be his final play. Shakespeare does not give up his art; he goes on to collaborate on two more plays. He does return to his home in Stratford, although unlike Prospero’s immediate departure from the island, Shakespeare gradually removed himself from life in London. Shakespeare’s final play, though an interesting culmination of the life’s work of a major playwright, may or may not be his way of announcing his retirement.

When Shakespeare’s friends and fellow company members Heminges and Condell published his collected works in 1623 (known to us as the First Folio), they included The Tempest first. This was more an issue of popularity than chronological precision—as Shakespeare’s last play, it would have been one of the most familiar to the original readers of the First Folio.
story, but one that is full of improbable adventure and many highs and lows. Characters in romances travel to the depths of misery and, generally, recover what they have lost by the end of the play. The romances tend to have much more substantive subject matter than comedies; the subjects of slavery, exile and death dealt with in The Tempest are rarely seen in the lighter comedies. Shakespeare’s trend toward romances at the end of his career is significant—after 1605, Shakespeare wrote only tragedies and romances. It could have been a growing trend in audience taste, or Shakespeare’s recognition of his own mortality, that caused this abandonment of comedy in favor of darker, more complex writing styles. Or perhaps Shakespeare, his craft improving with age and practice, was better able to deal with more serious subject matter.

In his last play, Shakespeare chooses to include a device rarely found in any of his other plays—the masque. Characterized by an emphasis on spectacle, masques became popular after James I became king. Prior to The Tempest, Shakespeare’s plays were visually fairly plain—very little or no set, simple costumes, natural light—and so actors and audience alike tended to rely heavily on the text of the play. The Tempest was first performed at the palace at Whitehall, a venue that demanded much more spectacle and fanfare than the Globe or the Blackfriar’s Theatre. Scenes such as the banquet scene or Ferdinand and Miranda’s wedding masque lend themselves to a more elaborate staging. Foreknowledge that the play would be premiering at Whitehall may have prompted Shakespeare to include uncharacteristically lavish scenes. Some scholars claim that Shakespeare added the wedding masque two years after the play’s debut, when it was performed at the wedding of James I’s daughter Elizabeth, who was married in February of 1613.

The Tempest provides much fodder for scholars hoping to get a glimpse of Shakespeare’s later years from what he wrote in his last play. As much as The Tempest is a play about the end of Prospero’s art (or Shakespeare’s), it is also a play about new worlds, new love and a fresh start for Prospero and Miranda.

Also interesting is how The Tempest is categorized in the First Folio. The play is listed under “Comedies,” as opposed to “Histories” or “Tragedies.” Many scholars have argued against the classification of The Tempest and Shakespeare’s other late plays (Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale) as comedies. Many of the characteristics of the comedy genre—multiple weddings at the end (and a general preoccupation with love and marriage throughout), characters that are ordinary as opposed to extraordinary, everyday situations—are notably absent from The Tempest. How, then, to categorize Shakespeare’s last play? Not as a tragedy—the ending is a fairly happy one, and no one dies in the play. And certainly not as a history—The Tempest is one of a very few plays whose plot is entirely Shakespeare’s invention. Many scholars have landed on the term “romance,” not to imply a love

First lines of The Tempest as recorded in the First Folio.
The Elizabethan economy was one of great disparity of wealth between the classes. The wealthiest families could afford to keep many servants for the maintenance of their household. As the mid-level merchant class began to grow, the most visible sign of success was the ability to employ servants. In Elizabethan England there was an understood relationship between master and servant known as “credit.” A servant did his master credit by obeying him in all things and making sure his master always looked his best. In turn the master dressed his servants in good clothes and never abused his power so his servants would represent him well outside of the house.

The ideal servant was almost psychic. He would anticipate his master’s wants before the master asked. The worst quality a servant could demonstrate was ingratitude. While Elizabethan England was not a democracy, it was possible to rise in status. Through hard work and obedience, the stable boy could become master of the horses, the kitchen maid could become head cook. The new merchant economy meant that anyone who invested what little money they had in the right business could find themselves members of the emerging middle class. Those with new money did not necessarily have the same respect as those with old, but they began to demand a voice in how that country was run. The audiences of Shakespeare’s time would most likely have been more comfortable with the depictions of masters and servants in The Tempest than audiences today.

The Tempest provides audiences with a variety of master and servant relationships. Prospero is served by Caliban, a sort of half-human, and the spirit Ariel. Prospero lavishes praise on Ariel since he believes the spirit can be trusted. Caliban was also once a trusted servant. Caliban overstepped his bounds and became Prospero’s despised slave. Then there are the relationships between those on the ship. Alonso the king is served by a trustworthy counselor, noblemen, Trinculo the jester and Stephano the butler. Even the king who appears fair to all who follow him is deceived and almost murdered.

As a master, Prospero has received both criticism and sympathy from audiences. His harsh treatment of Caliban and enslavement of Ariel may seem cruel to modern theatregoers. Elizabethan audiences may have seen Prospero’s initial kind treatment toward Caliban as his mistake as a master and his authoritarian approach in the play as restoring the balance. Ariel’s constant reminders that he is owed freedom might smack of ingratitude to an Elizabethan theatregoer.

The play ends with Prospero and Alonso forgiving all who have wronged them—wayward family and servants alike. Elizabethan audiences may have seen this as the structure of their society having been toppled for a day. Servants were allowed to plot and run wild and, though unsuccessful in their pursuits, they did not suffer retribution. A modern audience might see these as the actions of just rulers. Perhaps Shakespeare recognized the excitement of the New World—a new land where the authority of the crown and government was significantly weaker. Shakespeare’s audience might have found the ending not only happy but also a little thrilling.
Many of Shakespeare’s plays include elements of the supernatural—from ghosts to fairies, witches to goddesses. *The Tempest* is the only play, however, with a magician as the main character and a magical setting at the heart of the play.

**Prospero’s Art**

Prospero is a powerful magician, able to control all aspects of his island and its inhabitants. Caliban reveals to us that Prospero’s power lies in his vast library of books:

> Remember,
> First to possess his books, for without them
> He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
> One spirit to command. (III.ii.89-92)

When Prospero speaks of his time in Milan as the rightful duke, he brags about his reputation as a scholar. He gave the leadership of the land to his brother, saying that “my library / Was dukedom large enough” (I.ii.109-110). Instead of carrying out the affairs of state, he became “rapt in secret studies” (I.ii.77).

Prospero’s command over man and nature is derived from his scholarship, or “secret studies.” In the Middle Ages, there were two kinds of scholars: religious and secular. Religious scholars studied theology and philosophy. They discussed God and God’s relationship to the world. Their subject matter was considered the highest goal of human reason. Prospero could be interpreted as a religious scholar in the play. His books might be biblical texts, and he may derive his power from a deity. Some productions of *The Tempest* have emphasized Prospero’s God-like nature by costuming him in religious robes (see photographs below.)

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**Secular:**
Of or relating to the world, not overtly or specifically religious.

**Theology:**
The study of religious faith, practice and experience.

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Two Prosperi in bishop-like costumes. Left, William Haviland in a production at His Majesty’s Theatre in London in 1904. Right, Derek Jacobi in the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 1982 production.
Alchemist: A scientist who experimented with base metals to attempt to transmute them into gold.

Secular scholars studied the earth and its elements. Shakespeare lived during a time when medieval beliefs in the supernatural were still strong, though on the decline due to scientific advancements. The belief that the heavens were the unknowable realm of an omnipotent creator was being replaced by the idea that humans could unlock the secrets of universal motion through experimentation and observable data. For example, the public in Shakespeare's time no longer believed that the sun revolved around the earth, but still retained many of the customs of celestial prophecy, believing that eclipses portended great disruptions in nature and that medicinal herbs must be gathered in accordance with the movement of the planets. These early scientists, who could tap into the mysteries of the universe, had access to knowledge that was until that time considered mystical. Many scientific practices were considered sacrilegious because they contradicted the teachings of the church. Certain scholars, including some alchemists, cultivated the belief that they consorted with spirits and practiced magic. Alchemy was a chemical science that aimed to transmute base metals (such as lead) into gold, discover a universal cure for disease and prolong life indefinitely. Many practitioners of alchemy referred to their work as an "art," but the history of alchemy and what we know now as the modern "science" of chemistry are surprisingly intertwined. Prospero, with the power to control elements of nature, could be seen as an early scientist or chemist, studying the mysteries of the earth. He also refers to his magical ability as his "art" throughout the play. Certainly with Prospero's reliance on his "secret studies," Shakespeare's audience could have seen Prospero's books as early scientific texts or even the magical tomes of the alchemists.

Prospero's "art" also has been seen in a different light. Prospero creates the tempest in the first scene and is the motivating force of all other action in the play—manipulating the other characters around him and crafting their fates. For this reason, some describe Prospero as a playwright himself, using his "art" to fashion his own story. Shakespeare may have seen his reflection in Prospero, likening his own art as a playwright to a powerful kind of magic, creating and destroying worlds on a whim. The books in The Tempest, then, could have been the plays and stories Prospero created.
That Old Black Magic

Witches and witchcraft were also daily concerns of Shakespeare’s audience. James I was a self-proclaimed expert on witchcraft and published a book on the subject in 1597 called *Daemonologie*. The book described the black-magic practices of witches and called for their swift destruction. Witch hunts, which eventually spread to the American continent, became more and more popular in England during James’ reign. Those convicted of witchcraft were most often innocent people who lived on the fringes of society. These outcasts became scapegoats for accidents, illnesses or deaths in their villages. Witches were believed to have sold their souls to the devil and would do his work on earth. They were believed to keep beer from fermenting or butter from hardening, to force men and women to commit adultery, and to prevent women from getting pregnant as well as to cause miscarriages or stillbirths. Midwives, women who helped to deliver babies, were often accused of witchcraft. Their understanding of natural remedies and the female body, which would be considered medical knowledge today, was still misunderstood and fraught with superstition in Shakespeare’s time.

While Prospero’s magical abilities may be interpreted as close to witchcraft, Prospero only uses his power for good. Another character on the island, Caliban, is the offspring of a witch and the devil. The deformed half-man, half-monster is a native of the island and the son of “the foul witch Sycorax” (I.ii.258). Shakespeare made up her name, possibly from a combination of the Greek words for “pig” and “crow,” which is not surprising, as witches were believed to have animal companions called *familiars* who would do their bidding.

Shakespeare’s audience would have had strong images and associations with witches. Caliban is introduced as the son of a witch before he even comes out on stage. Shakespeare undercuts the audience’s expectations after we meet Caliban, though; while he is a deformed and ugly monster, Shakespeare gives him some of the most beautiful language in the play. Also, despite the fact that Caliban’s mother was a powerful witch, he is one of the most powerless characters on the island.
An Airy Spirit
Ariel, introduced in the list of characters as “an airy spirit,” is the servant of Prospero and another agent of magic on the island. The name means “lion of God” and is reminiscent of names of Biblical angels like Gabriel, Uriel, Rafael and Azrael. What kind of creature Ariel is remains unclear. Throughout the centuries, Ariel has been represented as many different kinds of creatures, and while generally considered male, Ariel also has been represented as female and genderless.

In Shakespeare's time, Ariel may have been represented similar to the fiery spirit at right, from a masque designed by Inigo Jones. Because of the angelic name, Ariel often has been represented as a winged creature. In the 19th century, Julia St. George played the role as an innocent-looking, winged, little girl at Sadler's Wells, a London theatre famous for its great revivals of Shakespeare. In 1982, the Royal Shakespeare Company cast Ariel as a male actor in a multi-colored body suit with bleached white hair. In 1998, the same company had Ariel in a harness with giant outstretched wings that overtook the entire stage. While the source of Ariel's magic is never revealed in the play, we know that “he” can fly, create fiery apparitions in the sky, become invisible and create storms on the sea. The way a production chooses to represent Ariel reflects on Prospero and the nature of magic in the play.

Giving It All Away
Whatever the source of Prospero’s magic, The Tempest is often seen as Prospero’s journey toward relinquishing his “art” and accepting his position in society. At the end of the play, when Prospero has finally righted the wrong done against him by his brother, he begins the next chapter of his story, not as a magician, but as a man:

But this rough magic
I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd
Some heavenly music – which even now I do, –
To work mine end upon their senses, that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (V.i.50-57)

Prospero has destroyed his book, the source of all his power. Ariel and Caliban, the magical characters in the play, are freed from their servitude. They remain on the island as the humans return to their lives in Milan.

However a production chooses to interpret the nature of magic and the supernatural in The Tempest, by the end of the play, Prospero must recant that power and return to his home. The play can be seen as Prospero’s journey from a solitary and omnipotent magician to a man reunited with his family, ready to govern his people.
Tell me about your mother...

“I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection.”

Sigmund Freud
Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis
1856-1939

through the separation and then reuniting of the family—specifically between father and daughter. Either entirely absent or missing for prolonged periods of time in all four plays are the mothers. Scholars, too, have a preoccupation with the father-daughter relationships in Shakespeare’s final plays and the possible link to events in Shakespeare’s life.

Shakespeare’s final work, *The Tempest*, not only completely eliminates the mother figure but also examines the father-daughter relationship free of all societal influences. Miranda, having grown up on a deserted island, is entirely unaffected by the outside world. Until the arrival of the strangers on the ship, the only other human she has ever known is her own father, Prospero. Her scope of existence rests solely in him and his teachings.

Unlike the other romances, there is no reunion scene between father and daughter, for there never is a parting. Not only is Prospero Miranda’s whole world, Prospero himself finds his reason for living in Miranda. He tells her:

O, a cherubin
Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile,
Infused with a fortitude from heaven,
When I have deck’d the sea with drops full salt,
Under my burthen groan’d; which rais’d in me
An undergoing stomach, to bear up
Against what should ensue.

(I.ii.152-158)

The ideal father-daughter relationship remains intact throughout the play. The only conflict in their relationship is manufactured by Prospero when he forbids Miranda to speak to Ferdinand. There is no need for forgiveness at the end of the play—by all indications, their relationship has known no discord.

By the time Shakespeare finished penning *The Tempest*, he had 22 years of extraordinary success as a playwright. While Shakespeare was acquiring fame in London, his wife and family remained behind in Stratford. Little is known of how often he visited his home or how involved he was in family life. Was Shakespeare merely an aspiring playwright unconcerned with the needs of his family? Or was the bard a doting father, making trips home whenever possible to spend time with his wife and children?

Whatever the facts may be, and there is little hope that we will ever know the truth, Shakespeare exhibits a preoccupation with daughters at the end of his career in the four plays characterized as romances—*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*. In each of these plays the relationship between father and daughter is central to the story; these daughters are strong women that are indisputably kind, fair and virtuous. There is also a common theme of reconciliation and forgiveness.
As he approached the end of his career, Shakespeare's two daughters, Susanna and Judith, had come of marrying age. Records show that he spent more time traveling between London and Stratford at this time, perhaps to oversee their marriages. Possibly Shakespeare had begun to have feelings of guilt over the amount of time that he had spent absent from his family. The repetition of reconciliation scenes in the latter plays could reflect the writer's desire to reclaim lost time. Or perhaps Prospero's duty to Miranda as sole tutor and caregiver might demonstrate the solace Shakespeare found in the relationship that had finally grown with his children.

Information about Shakespeare's relationships with his wife and daughters is based largely on his final will. Scholars suggest that Shakespeare revised his will based on the mate each daughter chose. Susanna evidently chose well; her husband, John Hall, was a respected doctor in Stratford. Judith was wed at the age of 31 to a tavern keeper of ill repute just 10 weeks before her father's death. Shortly after the marriage, Shakespeare rewrote his will, radically reducing Judith's share in the inheritance. All of Shakespeare's personal property was willed to Susanna. He left his wife their second best bed.

The events that unfolded in the last days of Shakespeare's life seem to indicate that whatever relationship he had with Susanna and Judith, feelings were certainly very intense and much was at stake. Whether it was due to parental concern, guilt over lost time, a father's love, or a mixture of the three, it is certain that the tone in Shakespeare's later plays reflects what may have been foremost on his mind at the end of his life.