Discussion Questions Set 3: The Tempest

1. Prospero is the hero throughout the play, but many of his actions in the earlier scenes may make the audience question his morals. How does this opening in Act 5 make him seem more humane? How does his character develop from a vengeful man to a more compassionate one? Do you think Shakespeare intended this character shift to make a Prospero more likeable hero?
   
   Yet with nobler reason 'gainst my fury
   Do I take part. The rarer action is
   In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
   The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
   Not a frown further. Go release them Ariel.
   My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
   And they shall be themselves.

   5.1.26-32

2. Miranda’s character represents innocence and goodliness, as she has not seen any of the world apart from the three others on the island that she grew up on. While the rest of the characters in the play are realizing what has happened and justice and truth are unraveling, Miranda still only dumbly comments on the beauty of humankind. What do you think is meant by this? Why is Miranda the only woman in the play, and why does she not play a bigger, more meaningful part? What is Shakespeare saying about gender roles? Oh, interesting!
   O wonder!
   How many goodly creatures there are here!
   How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
   That has such people in’t!

   5.1.185-188

3. The final Act of The Tempest is full of promises not fulfilled until the very end. Prospero proclaims at the beginning of Act 5 that he is finished with magic, yet he and Ariel continue to use it until the very end. Why does he make such proclamations before he is finished with his spell casting? Prospero also leads Ariel on throughout the play by promising his freedom and then asking more and more tasks of him, until he finally sets him free at the end. What is the importance in this? Why would Shakespeare repeatedly includes dialogues between the two about freedom? What does this say about servant/master relations?

4. Why does this play have an epilogue? Why does it include humor in the sense that Prospero asks for freedom through the audiences applause? Does it make it seem more of a comedy than a romance? What does the epilogue add to the play’s overall appeal?

Good questions! I'd push the Caliban character as giving us things to think about at the end...