Arts One 2015/16: Seeing and Knowing

Essay Topics, Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

1. How might the play’s setting on “an uninhabited island” serve to highlight problems of authority? Focus on characters and relationships of your choice, and discuss how *The Tempest* addresses issues that pertain to the basis and legitimacy of power.

2. The question of effective kingship has been central in many of the texts we've read so far, with Sophocles, Plato and Mengzi offering descriptions of how a king should, and should not, act in order to be effective. Choose one of Sophocles, Plato or Mengzi, and argue how they would judge Prospero’s leadership, & why.

3. Compare the use of dramatic irony in *Oedipus Rex* and *The Tempest*.

4. Provide a reading of *The Tempest* that focuses on its portrayal of gender identity and sexual relations.

5. How does *The Tempest* address issues of nature and nurture? Do we find a preference for one of these over the other embodied in either the characters or events of the play?

6. What significance can you attach to the fact that Ariel is invisible to everyone but Prospero?

7. The *dramatis personae* calls Caliban “a savage and deformed slave.” In what ways if any is this characterization accurate? Is Caliban the only character in the play who might fit this description?

8. *The Tempest* is written at a time when England is actively engaged in colonization. What attitudes towards colonization does the play present?

9. 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” (Shakespeare 1.2.362-364).

Consider the role of language in *The Tempest* and its connection to the nature/ nurture issues the play seems to raise.

10. How does *The Tempest* refer to and/or problematize the relationship between vision and knowledge, or vision and power?