Ben Paplham: Close Reading Draft Feedback
This is really quite a nice essay in most respects. I’m particularly impressed how you use the compare/contrast model to make a very strong, well-supported claim (students often get hung up on this process without focusing on the argument that emerges from it). Indeed, your claim is persuasive, well-reasoned, and well-supported with evidence. Good work! However, as my marginal comments below show, there are a few important gaps in your argument, and some material that feels less focused (and well-evidence) than they might. Here are the major things I’d focus on:

1) I’d restructure your discussion of Prospero a bit. The second paragraph, as I note below, starts to reach beyond the evidence you provide. A strategic (and pretty easy) revision would be to combine it with your third paragraph, providing one point/paragraph that explains how Prospero has the opportunity to not make the moral mistake he made before. More importantly, I would devote more space (i.e. a separate paragraph) to explaining how exactly Prospero renouncing his magic amounts to a moral decision. I’m still unclear on that—but I think it’s evidence-able.

2) I think that you want to flesh out your treatment of Caliban a little more, as well. As I note below, there’s a long discourse on the “tempest” there, which offers too many points all at once (and not enough evidence). To fully examine Caliban as a foil to Prospero, you’re going to want to cut that down and discuss how he, too, has a chance at reclaiming his right to rule, but squanders it. I think that this will mean looking a bit more closely at the Trinculo/Stephano subplot, which you refer to (smartly) at the end. While your references to it make sense, I really think it is part of your reasoning that needs fleshing out.

3) I would also tweak your introduction and conclusion. The latter, I think, doesn’t need to be two separate paragraphs, especially if you devote space to T&S. The former, while logically sound, is a bit vague, as I note below. I would elaborate on the parts of your problem frame a bit further, making it clear where these observations about the text are coming from. This might be a natural way of forecasting your compare/contrast methodology here.
Summoning the Storm: The Role of Power and Opportunity in *The Tempest*

The setup for *The Tempest* is to make the course of power run smoothly, vigorously plotted to restore Prospero as the Duke of Milan. Prospero’s ultimate achievement seems to advocate the righteousness in the absolute authority of a man who genetically inherits power. Except Prospero undergoes a moralistic transformation between the time he was last Duke and at the denouement when power is restored. Ignoring the interdependent nature of virtue and power in any given leader grossly inflates an unfair vindication for that person’s authority. *The Tempest* subverts the notion that power is an assumed right, suggesting that power is granted to only those who capitalize on an opportunity to prove their moral worth.

The purpose of *The Tempest* is to restore balance into the world, namely Prospero in his objective to return to his rightful Dukedom in Milan. However, the restoration can only be fulfilled if Prospero is given an opportunity first, and not only an opportunity but he also must capitalize on the moment he is given. Recognizing this, Prospero tells Miranda that “A most auspicious star, whose influence / If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes / Will ever after droop” (1.2.182-184). Although Prospero is playing with a stacked deck, he still does not hold all the cards in this island adventure. He exhibits tremendous magical power and foresight, but those factors overshadow underlining reality that his foundations are built on decisions he cannot control. It is highly coincidental or lucky—divine intervention, in fact—that the very people he seeks amendments with are sailing back from an unlikely marriage between Alonso’s daughter...
and the King of Tunis near the island he happened to discover, which is inhabited by a man-like creature/creature-like man that is able to help them live off the land and a fairy who will execute any deed Prospero asks of him. Remarkable. **Prospero acknowledges that a higher power is testing his virtue**, granting him one last opportunity to make of it as he will.

Through extraordinary coincidence, divine intervention, and maybe a bit of both, Prospero has redemption at his fingertips. His moral stumbling had been in neglecting his duties as a Duke to pursue his own interests, as he explains, “I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated / To closeness and the bettering of my mind” (1.2.89-90). He was then usurped quickly, Antonio gathering support for his forced abdication. However, Prospero is not resentful or bitter about his experience; instead, he blames his own faults. He had been slothful and prideful, believing his own needs to be above the needs of his people. On the island, his opportunity allows him to redeem himself for those mistakes, choosing this time to be diligent and humble. His diligence is proved through his meticulous plotting and manipulating the shipwrecked to achieve the best possible outcomes. Ferdinand, for instance, is separated to best give him and Miranda the opportunity to fall in love. Alonso is joined with Antonio and Sebastian to examine the King’s compassion and contriteness while also testing the other two’s greediness and envy. Prospero’s pride is also given a second chance, and he passes the test when he pronounces that “this rough magic / I here abjure… / I’ll break my staff” (5.1.50-51, 54).

After relinquishing his magical powers, Prospero is able to claim his rightful position as Duke of Milan. He has displayed both diligence and humility, proving himself worthy of power on a moralistic scale.

In contrast to Prospero stands Caliban, who is the other character in *The Tempest* that can claim power through inheritance via Sycorax. Caliban is Prospero’s foil—Prospero losing power
because of breaking two of the Deadly Sins, while Caliban for lust and attempting to Miranda.

Unlike Prospero, who shows remorse for his actions, Caliban finds pride in it, exclaiming, “O ho! O ho! Would’t had been done! / Thou didst prevent me; I had people else / This isle with Calibans” (1.2.52-54). As it stands, Caliban does not begin The Tempest on the highest of moral grounds; however, just as the storm is Prospero’s redemption, it can also be the same for Caliban if he seizes the opportunity. Working against Caliban, though, is that Prospero creates the tempest knowing full well the divine favor he has received. Caliban is unaware of what the tempest could mean for him. Before the shipwreck, Caliban could have attempted to kill Prospero and claim the island for himself. He had twelve years to do so; yet he still held back. There are three possible reasons for his hesitation. One is that the risk of provoking such a dangerous enemy that would endanger own life far exceeds the possible returns. He is too much afraid of Prospero’s sorcery to undertake such a bold move. The second reason is that he the only reason he is aware of his own identity within the context of empowered or subject or ruler is because his education had been through Prospero and Miranda. Thus, he feels a strange begrudging gratitude toward them. The last explanation might be that he is afraid of being alone again on the island. The arrival of Prospero and Miranda gave him human companionship for the first time, and even though he harbors resentment toward them, he still believes it better to be with them than alone without them. Whatever the case may be, the tempest provides Caliban with his own opportunity to gain power over the island.

The key difference between Prospero and Caliban is that when the opportunity arises, Prospero rises while Caliban stumbles. Both are given respectively equal opportunity in terms of redemption—Prospero atoning for his sloth and pride while he was the Duke of Milan and Caliban for lusting after Miranda. Prospero is able to display a change in virtue while Caliban is
not. Caliban exchanges one master for another, is entrapped into gluttony through an excess of alcohol, and allows wrath to spur him to attempt a deadly revolution against Prospero. Working as a foil against Prospero, Caliban shows that even though power may be his by right, he has no claim to it on a moralistic level.

In a broader, more global sense, *The Tempest* suggests that true right to power should be granted not because of an inherent right but because of seizing opportunities to prove one’s integrity and compassion. To those in power, it forces the question of whether any leader, under the same circumstances as Prospero, would act in the same manner. And if not, then they are more worthy to be led shamelessly led astray by a couple of drunken fools.