

Summary and Analysis Act III: Scene 1

Summary

Ferdinand enters carrying a log, which he claims would be an odious task except that he carries it to serve Miranda. His carrying of the logs is a punishment but one he willingly accepts because thoughts of Miranda make the work seem effortless.

Miranda enters and, when Ferdinand will not rest, offers to take up his chore so that she might force him to rest, but Ferdinand refuses. Although she was instructed not to reveal her name, Miranda impulsively divulges it to Ferdinand. Ferdinand, for his part, has known other beautiful women, but he admits to having never known one as perfect as Miranda. Miranda confesses that she has known no other women, nor any other man, except for her father. Now, she would want no other man except for Ferdinand. At this, Miranda remembers that she has been instructed not to speak to their guest and momentarily falls silent. When Ferdinand avows that he would gladly serve her, Miranda asks if he loves her. At his affirmative reply, Miranda begins to weep. She tells Ferdinand that she is unworthy of him but will marry him if he wants her. He quickly agrees, and the couple finally touch, taking each other's hands, as they pledge their love.

Prospero has been listening, unseen. He acknowledges Miranda and Ferdinand's natural match as being "Of two most rare affections" (75) but he has other plans that need his immediate attention, and so he turns to his books and other waiting business.

Analysis

This scene leaves no doubt that Prospero is the absolute ruler of his small island. Ferdinand is set to the same task as Caliban, carrying logs. Although he is a prince, Ferdinand must bow to the same authority that Caliban, a slave, observes. Even Miranda is not exempt from Prospero's rule. She is not supposed to speak to Ferdinand. Moreover, she is not permitted to even give him her name, although she does. As part of Prospero's power, he must pretend to oppose the romance between Miranda and Ferdinand; however, the audience knows that Prospero is not opposed to such a union, and in fact, he had hoped that they would love one another. But Prospero must maintain the illusion that he is in absolute control, and so, he imposes rules to guarantee his authority.

In part, Prospero is playing the role that any father must play when his daughter has a suitor. Protecting Miranda's worth is tied to protecting her virginity; thus, he watches the courtship, unseen. Miranda is an obedient daughter, as proved by her dismay when she forgets herself and reveals her name to Ferdinand. But she is also a young woman in love, and when her father is occupied, she immediately looks to release Ferdinand from his labors.