There is a varied element of comedy throughout Shakespeare’s, The Tempest. The main characters and plot reflect a subtler, sarcastic comicality. The humor’s indirect style helps to maintain the seriousness of the play’s mood, whilst still keeping the audience captivated. In contrast to the main comedy of the play, From Act II Scene II to the midpoint of Act III, the comedic feel of the play undertakes a drastic change in mood from the subtle, to the blatant with the introduction of the drunken duo of Stephano and Trinculo. The pair of sailors’ retorts at the other characters showcases another way of capturing the audience’s attention, with a sheer disregard of respect for the other characters. Together the two forms of comedy give the play an interesting feel amongst the turmoil of the events of the play.

The Tempest is an undeniably amazing play, but even though it is classified as a comedy, its humor is not forth standing. The play is at first glance much more reminiscent of Shakespearean drama rather than a comedy, however when examined further the underlying elements come out in the form of subtle touches of wit in the dialogue. There is also at times a very blunt humor deployed during the play, and while not Shakespeare’s finest, this method does still manage to invoke laughter. This thought out precise comedic effect sets The Tempest apart from many of Shakespeare’s other comedies such as Much Ado About Nothing, and the blatant wisecracks of the drunkards only hinders the script in a minor way, making The Tempest an excellent culmination of an incredible playwright.
The subtler side of the comedy in The Tempest is shown by the main characters, namely Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and Ferdinand. Out off all the characters in the play Prospero is the one who exhibits the most comedic aptitude, as he takes up a common sight in Shakespearean comedies, self-deception. In this case, Prospero’s self-deception is the act of doing one thing, typically the wrong thing, and deceiving yourself into believing it is the right action to take. Prospero often orders his companions to do one thing as he himself does another, and then criticizes them for not following his example when things inevitably go wrong. In similar fashion to her father, Miranda, daughter of Prospero takes to self-deception as well, but it is in a different manner. Miranda often deceives herself in believing her father’s choices are right when they are often cruel. She forces herself to follow Prospero in an almost hysterical act of loyalty to her father, despite her feelings for Ferdinand. Miranda does show distaste when following her father however, often through a bit of wit such as when she states to her father, “Your tale sir, would cure deafness,” (Miranda in Act I Scene I of Shakespeare’s The Tempest) as he explains his actions. It is only later in the play that Miranda breaks free and follows her own will, leaving Prospero’s care and seeking her true love, Ferdinand.

The drunken sailors, Stephano and Trinculo, introduce the more blatant comedic element in The Tempest. In Scene II Act II the pair come into the play and due to their deceitful nature instantly befriend Caliban, the plotting servant of Prospero, and seek to help him gain control of the island. Even as the sailors are formulating the plot with Caliban however, they still do not take the matter seriously and instead choose to spew slander as they wander through the story throwing insults. Even as serious confrontations –
take place around them Stephano and Trinculo choose to demean their adversaries, rather than confront them. The conniving ways of the sailors portray a well-known way of humor in showing no respect or understanding, only witticisms such as in the following tune:

The master, the swabber, the boatswain, and I, The gunner, and his mate, Lov’d Mall, Meg, and Marian, and Margery, But none of us car’d for Kate, For she had a tongue with a tang, Would cry to a sailor Go hang! She lov’d not the savour of tar nor of pitch, Yet a tailor might scratch her where'er she did itch. Then to sea, boys, and let her go hang! This is a scurvy tune too; but here's my comfort. (Drinks) (Stephano in Act II Scene II of Shakespeare’s, The Tempest)

Throughout The Tempest there are varied features of comedy, from the drunkards Stephano and Trinculo to the self-deception of Prospero and his daughter. While the play takes the overall shape of a drama, the comedy there is, is well done. Throughout the story I was kept at attention as I searched through the dialogue, every time experiencing the play with a different view on the subtle comedy of its main characters, while finding ever another way to enjoy the ranting of the drunken sailors in The Tempest, the crowning achievement of the greatest playwright ever known.

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