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***The Tempest* and the Interplay of Spaces**

**Interakcja przestrzeni w *Burzy* Williama
Shakespeare’a**

Abstract

Shakespeare’s ‘last play’ is famous for keeping the three (neo)classical unities of time, space and action. This paper’s main argument concerns transformations of the postulated one space in line with the diversified groups of characters who all have their own narratives concerning the island. Though Caliban, Ariel, Prospero, Miranda and the castaway sailors and aristocrats all meet on the same island, they all seem to experience vastly different territories, as different as their experience, motivations and aims. Above all of them hovers the vision of the magic of the theatrical space which brings the diversified worlds together with a sharp focus on society and politics.

Keywords: theatre, play, the world of the audience, the fictional world, space transformations, structure of the text.

Abstrakt

O *Burzy* zazwyczaj mówi się w kontekście neoklasycznej koncepcji trzech jedności. W artykule przeprowadzona zostaje analiza transformacji

przestrzeni w odniesieniu do zróżnicowanych grup postaci, które snują własne narracje w odniesieniu do wyspy, na której się znaleźli. Wprawdzie Kaliban, Ariel, Prospero, Miranda i rozbitkowie spotykają się w końcu na jednej i tej samej wyspie, ale w sumie, mając różne motywacje i cele, doświadczają bardzo różnych terytoriów. A nad całością króluje wizja sztuki teatru rządząca przestrzenią w którą wprzęgnięci są odbiorcy tkwiący we własnym kontekście społecznym i politycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: teatr, dramat, świat widza, świat wyobrażony, transformacje przestrzeni, struktura tekstu.

The Stage and the Island

Shakespeare's openings are important; they are significant gates to what the plays contain. The Witches place evil at the front of the tragedy's significance in *Macbeth*; Richard III's soliloquy focuses on the intelligence, wit, and ambition of the central character; seemingly insignificant conversation between Kent and Gloucester with the former's "I cannot conceive you" opens the tragic consequences of man's inability to gauge the essence of human relationships; Duke Orsino's famous words, "If music be the food of love" introduce us to all the mistaken 'ifs' and their bitter surprises. But none of the plays make us aware of being in the theatre and of experiencing that specific complexity of simultaneous different worlds – that of the theatre and that of the (im)possible reality of the play. None, except *The Tempest*.

The play begins with a rendering of the storm, violent and threatening: the ship is tossed by high waves propelled by a tempestuous wind towards an inevitable wreckage against rocks. The crew and the passengers alike are frightened and their tense nerves add quarrels to danger. The captain and the boatswain do their utmost to keep the ship afloat, but to no avail. The passengers' desperate cries from below the deck mark the moment of catastrophe: the ship gets split and everybody perishes. A real *tour de force* for actors to convince the audience of the truth of the tempest, this opening draws our attention to the art of theatre, to the magic of performance and to the materiality of the theatrical space from which performance takes off to very different spaces.

Any place where a play may be staged belongs to our experience of reality. A theatre building, a hall, a garden are all those spaces which we identify as existing material objects; we understand their topography and function. All may also be used as specific locations which we accept

as a stage in which the fictional world is grounded¹; real space becomes with the first moment of action a very different location: a plain stage may become a street or a market place, a hall may be transformed into a ship on sea, while a garden may be turned into an Athenian wood. The staging convention is not really important. The stage may be bare or filled with trees or rooms complete with furniture. The production may rely on complex design of changing lights or on the natural light of the day on which the spectacle is produced. The magic moment of creating another reality may come to existence irrespective of the actual condition of the stage design. Unlike a film in which representation of specific locations and of the time of action must be visible, a play depends on a combination of what is said and what is seen, with a specific understanding of 'the visible' which may be actually seen, but may also depend on what is said.

Much scholarship about space and place at the theatre is broadly semi-otic, which means it reads space as one of several theatrical languages, or sign systems, at play in performance.² Michael Issacharoff in his seminal study³ demonstrates a semiotic reading of the visible and the invisible, of the shown and the spoken. The shown, the props present on the stage, are a mimetic representation of the fictional world; a diegetic representation is contained in words. The specific advantage of his analysis is the demonstration of the role of language in the theatre. Language is (except in case of artistic experiments) essential in creating both the visible and the invisible of the fictional word. As Issacharoff states, 'the Word becomes flesh'⁴ by, on the one hand, referring to whatever is visible on the stage validating the meaning of the stage design, costumes, figures, etc., and on the other, by referring to the invisible with words, by creating what he calls an off-stage reality, or, if you prefer, the reality of the fictional world. His analysis is a theoretical frame of the following discussion which considers the unstable territory between the text of the play and its potential realisation on the stage, concentrating on the importance of the verbal (diegetic) representation of the fictional spaces.

1 Jerzy Limon, *Między niebem a sceną* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2002), 28–29.

2 Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiotics of Theatre* (Montreal: Presses de Université du Québec, 1976); Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980); Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

3 Michael Issacharoff, *Discourse as performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 57–75.

4 *Ibidem*, 68.

The text of a play is always the first hard fact which the director and actors have to take in hand; in case of Shakespeare's plays, the text, as unstable as it may be, is of the utmost importance because it was composed for actors to change words into action which develops in a fictional reality, i.e., in a space which does not exist and in time which is not ours. The potential power of Shakespeare's dialogues and monologues must be fully recognized because the importance of the diegetic representation was dominant in Shakespeare's theatre. Shakespeare understood the absolute essence of theatre and of the art of performance. The proof is in the fact that for the last four hundred years and more, in endlessly changing circumstances and theatrical conventions, experiments and adaptations, his plays made of words get transformed into fascinating fictional worlds on various stages.

The opening scene of *The Tempest* is the best demonstration of the power and potential of words which lead to performance, which in turn creates the immaterial fictional world on the very material floor of the stage. The boards of the stage do not physically change into the wild waves, yet the waves toss the ship with its helpless crew and frightened passengers. The catastrophe is all represented diegetically: the captain's orders and the boatswain's curses do not describe the effort in fighting the fury of the sea and wind, they *are* the very effort and the expression of the accompanying stress. The orchestration of the voices is equally important: the quarrelsome voices of the courtiers blend fear with mistaken notions of the state of the world around them; the voices of the desperate passengers from below deck are the third instrument in the chorus of the people perishing in the horrible storm. The sounds of the howling wind and breaking masts, as well as lightning, thunder and the sound of rain may be added to voices – indeed they are often added with frightening veracity, but without the diegetic effect of people fighting and losing the battle with the elements, they would create an empty space of no semantic value.

The effect of the space in which,
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch
But that the sea. mounting to th'welkin cheek,
Dashes the fire out.⁵

5 All quotations are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ser. The Arden Shakespeare, eds. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Thomson Learning, 2000). Here: I.2.3–5.

must be convincingly performed, so that the audience could understand and empathize with Miranda's terrified concern, and, in turn, get comforted that 'there's no harm done'. The confrontation of the performed action with the reality of Prospero's island is further strengthened in the dialogue of Prospero with Ariel where the latter performs 'to point the tempest' in words,

Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin
I flamed amazement. Sometime I'd divide
And burn in many places – on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors
O'th'dreadful thunderclaps more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not.⁶

The amazement is the effect of performance. In case of Miranda it is what she *says* she has seen. Then it is again what Ariel *says* he has done. Ariel's words are the words of the performer; the 'amazement' of the crew and passengers and the 'amazement' of Miranda are the reaction of the audience to the performance. The performance takes place between the sea and the sky, the audiences are placed variously on deck the ship, under it, or on the shore of the Island. Prospero, the master mind of the performance watches the spectacle without emotions, but with careful vigilance over the execution of the amazement.

Where are we, the readers or the spectators? Whether with the text in hand or sitting in a theatre, we are fully conscious of the immateriality of the performed spaces and we are equally anxious to get the performance of the tempest fully convincing, otherwise our own 'amazement' would not take place.

Jerzy Limon's studies in space and time of the phenomenon of theatrical performance offer a clear model allowing us to consider the gap between what I would describe as reality of the reader/audience and the reality of the fictional world of the play. In a thick volume *Między niebem a sceną*,⁷ he explains a spectacle as the time of the actual performance of a play in the theatre, taking place within the material space of the theatre and its stage. The stage – the element of the building's structure (or of any place where spectacle takes place) – becomes during the spectacle the place in which the fictional space is grounded: it becomes the sign of the fictional space. Whatever and whoever we see on the stage becomes

6 1.2.197–202.

7 Limon, *Między niebem a sceną*, 28–29.

the sign denoting the fictional world's elements and figures. The audience understands the semiotic convention and is able to simultaneously imagine what does not exist and yet never doubt the materiality of the stage, of the building of the theatre, or of the seat's comfort (or lack of it). Refining his views,⁸ Limon points to time as the deciding factor in organizing the experience of the theatrical performance. Our mind perceives two streams of time flow simultaneously, the real and the fictional one, as one present time, which allows us to experience ontologically different spaces at the same time. This model is, in proportion, applicable to the imaginative reading of Shakespeare's plays. The dialogues of the opening scene possess full diegetic potential to represent convincingly the terror of the storm on sea to the extent that readers often ask why Miranda and Ariel, as audience and performer respectively, relate those terrors again. The answer lies in the specific force of the whole play which is to a certain extent a debate on the art of theatre.

The play's narrative is a sequence of incidents all of which carry the characteristic features of a spectacle: the island becomes the space on which various characters observe other characters or events. Miranda observes the storm from a safe spot on the coast, the castaway courtiers and servants watch tricks played on them by Ariel, Miranda and Ferdinand watch a wedding mask, Prospero watches their love scene, Caliban watches the drunken performance of Trinculo and Stephano, while the denouement is centred on the performance of Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess. The specific space of those theatricalities is the Island which at the same time is nothing else but the stage which we, the audience watch from wherever we stand or sit. The Island is the creation of words. "Here in this island we arrived," Prospero says⁹ and it is on the Island that his "poor cell" is located. The tempest as seen by Miranda is firmly defined as a spectacle provided by Prospero's magic powers:

The direful spectacle of the wreck which touched
The very virtue of compassion in thee,
I have with such provision in mine art
So safely ordered, that there is no soul –
No, not so much as a perdition as an hair
Betid to any creature in the vessel
Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink.¹⁰

8 Jerzy Limon, "Theatre's Fifth Dimension," *Poetica* 41/1-2 (2009): 33–54. Full Polish version: Jerzy Limon, *Pięty wymiar teatru* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006).

9 I.2.171.

10 I.2.26–32.

Thus, the play is about the tempest which is not a real event but a performance for Miranda as well as for us. Prospero the magus is at the same time a representation of the author's/director's power to create and direct. He acts in care of Miranda, but at the same time in care of us, exposing the art of merging the real and the fictional spaces. We watch all the ensuing events constantly reminded of the Island becoming the stage exactly because it is a replica of the theatrical stage. We see the stage and the Island, we watch the actors and the characters who, in the space of the Island, function as actors and spectators.

This complex ontology of materiality vs. vision gets direct comment in Prospero's monologues, "Our revels are now ended"¹¹ and "Ye elves of hills,"¹² as well as in the Epilogue.

The revels Prospero mentions are all of his making and his creation knows no limits:

I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war; to the dread roaring thunder
Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt.¹³

It is the power of words, the power of the poet to make us see the invisible. It is also the performance of the director and actors to make us accept the stage as the Island and the actors as living creatures on that island. "The baseless fabric of this vision," however, disappears when the performance ends:

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like the insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.¹⁴

What is left is the amazement at the creative power of the poet and of the performers. If in the two monologues the ostensible audience of Prospero were Miranda and Ferdinand or the elves of hills and brooks, in

11 4.1.148–158.

12 5.1.32–50.

13 5.1.41–46.

14 4.1.152–156.

the Epilogue, Prospero's words pierce the fourth wall and turn him into an actor/director who addresses anybody who has attended a theatrical production or has just finished reading the play. 'Let me not dwell', he says,

In this bare island by your spell,
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.¹⁵

The applause means we understand the end of the "baseless fabric of this vision" and yet accept the fact that

we are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.¹⁶

The art of the theatre depends on our need to dream. It is the need to look for and live in that alternate space to the materiality of our reality without losing the consciousness of both. In this way we can see our own world in a new way, perhaps understand more, or better, our human lot by participating in an act of art.

The Play's Fabric of Spaces

The Sea and the Island

The first scene of the play takes place on the sea, not on the island. Its diegetic force of the representation of the sinking ship stresses the element of water, however, the danger lies in the rocks surrounding the entrance to a safe bay, to the seeming safety of the firm land. Tadeusz Sławek in his brilliant essay on *The Tempest*¹⁷ offers an enlightening analysis of the shore which separates the sea and the land: a partition of and a merger for two very different spaces. One is the land which means one can be and feel "here even if the here is unknown" and threatening. The other is the sea which offers no such comfort: "the sea never

15 5–10.

16 I4.1.156–158.

17 Tadeusz Sławek, *Furia i szlachetniejszy rozum. Próby o Burzy Williama Szekspira* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2022), 9–47.

offers anything like 'here', it is always a 'there' which has no concrete localisation."¹⁸

The threatening vastness of the tempestuous sea and the equally threatening impenetrability of the island are the two funding spaces of the fictional world and of the whole existential and moral experience of the characters. The two spaces continually merge forming one geography in which Milan, Naples, Tunis and the Island depend in their localisation on the sea which knows no localisation. The people sail across, but they cannot see (localize) the paths and do not know where the sea will take them. Prospero and Miranda are tossed onto an unknown space of the Island in their meagre boat just as twelve years later the waves throw the ship against the rocks of the Island.

There is a meaningful difference between the audience in the theatre and the various audiences in *The Tempest*. The latter do not suspend their disbelief and do not interpret what they witness as a system of signs. They take what is shown to them as truth. The short exchange between distraught Miranda and Prospero at the beginning of I.2. is Shakespeare's first hint at what is at stake in the play:

Be collected,
No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart
There is no harm done.¹⁹

When Miranda watches the tempest from the safety of the 'here' on the Island she does not experience it as a show. Her compassion is rooted in the truth of the storm out there in the space of the rough sea which apparently is annihilating "some noble creatures" dashing the ship "all to pieces." And even when assured that "There's no harm done," she still takes the space of the sea as an inseparable part of the Island (of her world) which is the 'here' only because it is surrounded by that monster of 'nowhere'.

Prospero in the recollection of his and Miranda's trial describes the sea as an inimical space where one must perish:

... they hoist us
To cry to th'sea that roared to us, to sigh
To th'winds, whose pity, sighing back again,

18 „Łąd mówi nam o tym, co *tutaj*, nawet jeśli to *tutaj* jest całkowicie nieznanne [...]. Morze nigdy nie oferuje nam żadnego „*tutaj*”, jest zawsze *tam*, do którego nie ma żadnej konkretnej lokalizacji” (English translation is mine). *Ibidem*, 37–38.

19 I.2.13–15.

Did us but loving wrong.²⁰
[...]
By providence divine.²¹
[...]
Here, in this island we arrived.²²

The royal outcasts, like no other characters are aware of the two spaces which depend in their definitions on the danger of the 'here' and of the 'nowhere'. On the one hand, it is expressed in Gonzalo's voluble comfort offered to Alonso:

You have cause
(So have we all) of joy, for our escape
Is much beyond our loss. Our hint of woe
Is common: every day some sailor's wife,
The masters of some merchant, and the merchant,
Have just our theme of woe. But for the miracle,
I mean our preservation, few in millions
Can speak like us.²³

The cause of joy is the 'here' of the Island, even if it is an unknown, therefore dangerous, space. Yet Alonso, convinced of having lost his son Ferdinand in the sea does not and cannot get out of that other space. His mind is oblivious to the comforts of the land under his feet:

Would I had never
Married my daughter there, for coming thence
My son is lost and (in my rate) she too,
Who is far from Italy removed
I ne'er again shall see her.²⁴

It is the other space which, as it seems to him, has erased the safety and joy of the existence on land for ever. The sea has devoured, has sucked in his life into its 'no space', its 'nowhere'.

20 1.2.148–151.

21 1.2.159.

22 1.2.171.

23 2.1.1–8.

24 2.1.108–112.

Is there one Island?

There is a striking compartmentalisation of the characters who form together a specific representation of society: Prospero owns two slaves (Ariel and Caliban) and gains a new one (Ferdinand); he arrests prisoners (Alonso with his court, Antonio and Gonzalo); he deals with riotous drunkards (Stephano and Trinculo). The particular groups are kept apart on the Island's separate locations, separate 'heres'. Those separate locations are the effect of their perceptions which are rooted in their experience and emotions. Those spaces are all represented diegetically. What the characters say is 'the here' for them. In effect the fictional Island is transformed into many different islands.

The castaways: Alonso's brother Sebastian from Naples and Antonio from Milan treat the Island as the space of political opportunity. For Alonso the Island is, as mentioned above, a space of grief and distress. A specific 'nowhere'. But his brother seeing the opportunity for the seizure of power, conspires with Antonio. "The quality of 'th'climate"²⁵ gives Antonio the idea that a sudden drowsiness of the rest of the group becomes an excellent opportunity for Sebastian to murder Alonso and take over the kingdom of Naples:

The occasion speaks thee, and
My strong imagination sees a crown
Dropping upon thy head.²⁶

For them the Island is not full of strange events or of magic sounds. The sea does not leave them in stress, fear or despair. In the storm scene they curse the sailors and see them as the source of danger rather than the tempestuous waters and rocks. When Antonio tempts Sebastian, he invites him to play "on the concept of tides that can *flow*, stand still or *ebb*,"²⁷ metaphors that refer to political power – a space that is and is not the space of the Island and certainly was the space of Milan. The political dimension of the play, a very strong narrative thread, merges the space of the time before, the time now and the time to come: the *coup d'état* which took place in Milan twelve years earlier was repeated by Prospero when he came to the Island and took it from Caliban; it is planned by Antonio and Sebastian, as well as by Caliban with Stephano and Trinculo.

25 II.1.200.

26 II.1.207–209.

27 II.1.221–228.

Kim Solga²⁸ stresses that space studies concerning theatre have provoked a deliberate recognition of the politics of space, so ultimately space has become recognised as a theatrical and a performative property now because it organizes understanding of our social relationships; it structures our relations of power, it is the physical, psychical, and social framework that contains and enables all human interaction. Also, it inevitably transforms into territory, into something to be argued over, fought for, colonised, decolonised, hunted, owned, and lost.

If we agree to treat space as the product of social interrelations and a “powerful element in the armoury of legitimisation of political strategies,”²⁹ then we can perceive how the play merges all those micro-spaces (the particular ‘heres’ designated by particular characters or groups of characters) into the overall spatial design, which in terms of Foucault’s heterotopias³⁰ discovers the merging of the play’s diegetic invisible space with the mimetic representation on the stage within the space of the immediate theatrical reception involving “the rectangle of the stage” (Foucault’s term) with the audience and its space of social relations and interactions.

If space is the product of the society,³¹ then it becomes clear that the Island denotes a clearly delineated political space. That space is obviously also inhabited by Caliban and Ariel: the former by his continual though ineffectual mutiny against Prospero’s usurpation and tyranny as well as by his plunging into an immediate decision to welcome Stephano as an alternative king. Also by Ariel, a character who must serve bound by the imposed gratitude for having been freed from Sycorax’s imprisonment, but who dreams of freedom from Prospero’s enslavement.

One more dimension may be added to the conglomerate space of the Island, namely the dimension of romance. Romance in Shakespeare’s world referred to narratives in which the fictional world combined the adventurous, the dangerous, and the magic with sudden, passionate and mutual love. In *The Tempest* the romantic space is integrated into the political space and is the result of the sea adventure and the miraculous meeting on the firm land of the Island. Miranda and Ferdinand

28 Kim Solga, *Theory for Theatre Studies. Space* (London: Methuen 2019), 1–2.

29 Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2007), 24–25.

30 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Architecture/Movement/Continuité* October (1984): 1–9. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec. Accessed February 5, 2026. https://www.academia.edu/28361383/Of_Other_Spaces_Utopias_and_Heterotopias

31 Cf. Solga, *Theory for Theatre Studies. Space*; Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

are no less passionate in discovering each other than Romeo and Juliet, no less than the unhappy lovers from Verona entangled into the social tensions, and finally much more fortunate by the miraculous operations of Prospero's magic.

The space of the safe land with its unforeseeable 'here' opens up many different localisations which also function as different social spaces inhabited by different groups of the Island's inhabitants who stray along different paths which for them are spaces of their own social reality.

The Four Elements as Yet Another Kind of Space

The opposition of the sea and the land is essentially identical with the opposition of water and earth. But the ancient fundamental components of the physical world were four elements: apart from water and earth, there are air and fire. In early modern Europe, following ancient and medieval philosophy, the world was held to be their composite. Within the cultural space of Shakespeare's time the four of them constitute in the play metaphors for very different locations: the sea and the land are spaces of people and in the play they denote the physicality of the fictional world. Also, as we shall see, locations of moral politics.

The physicality of earth is particularly strong in relation to Caliban. He lives in the space of earth and does not seem to exist outside it unlike the rest of the characters. The ambiguous descriptions of Caliban make him almost identical with the notion of earth as a specific element; consider the words of Prospero and Miranda:

What ho, slave! Caliban,
Thou earth.³²
Filt, as thou are.³³
A thing most brutish.³⁴
This misshapen knave.³⁵
This thing of darkness.³⁶

and later of Stephano and Trinculo:

32 I.2.313–314.

33 I.2.347.

34 I.2.358.

35 V.1.268.

36 V.1.275.

some monster of the isle.³⁷
 this is a devil and no monster.³⁸
 how now, mooncalf.³⁹
 A most scurvy monster.⁴⁰
 A howling monster, a drunken monster!⁴¹

These descriptions locate Caliban into the space which is dark, dirty, frightening and evil, belonging to the depth of the earth rather than its surface. Caliban is excluded from the 'here' of the land, pushed into the region which people avoid, like hell where devils exist; Caliban is not accepted as a human being, he is a monster, therefore must not exist within the human space, and if, then only as a slave.

Such earth, though, is not identical with the Island. Shakespeare places Caliban on the Island rather than in the depth of darkness. For Caliban the Island is the safest and the fairest of spaces; it is an island which the other characters do not see and do not inhabit.

The isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.⁴²

Caliban knows the Island well. For him it is the paradise with fresh water, fertile soil, sweet berries and nuts, birds and marmosets. It is the land which the others would readily exploit and occupy, but would never enjoy. Caliban's space of earth, so different from the spaces of land and sea, is a striking argument of the right to possess one's own place, one's own and private piece of earth which must not be invaded by others. Something, we, from the perspective of our time, see clearly as strong criticism of the colonial order and colonial thinking.

Caliban belongs to the earth, but enjoys the air too. The delightful noises surround his earth, the sweet sounds make him dream of the clouds that "would open and show riches ready to drop"⁴³ on him. Caliban's air is a space of dreams, friendly and soothing, promising riches, while Caliban's earth is fertile and offers its riches to him.

37 II.2.64.

38 II.2.96.

39 II.2.132.

40 II.2.152.

41 II.2.175.

42 3.3.135–136.

43 iii.2.141–142.

Ariel is another character whose habitat is connected to the four elements. His main space is the air. He does not walk on earth, he flies in the air to the extent that he seems to be personification of the air like Caliban is seen as the clot of earth. Ariel, in his own words, can move in all four spaces:

... be it to fly,
to swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curled clouds.⁴⁴
Sometimes I'd divide
And burn in many places.⁴⁵

On Prospero's bidding he may be seen in many shapes, which means he is invisible, like the air. Performing the tasks on Prospero's command, he appears everywhere, the land and the sea do not limit his movements because he inhabits the air. He it is who produces sweet melodies, "the airs" – Caliban's description of the Island's "noises" diegetically identifies Ariel's agency with air. However, the earth is the space which for Ariel means imprisonment. As Prospero's servant, he counts hours to be set free because he can move not where he wants to go, but where Prospero sends him; as Sycorax's prisoner he was confined "into a cloven pine"⁴⁶; he was imprisoned painfully because he had refused "To act her earthy and abhorred commands."⁴⁷ The earth for him is the space of imprisonment and suffering; the air is the space of freedom and independence.

Conclusion

To wind up the review of the play's spaces, we must return to the idea of the art of theatre and the spaces of theatrical performance, because, as suggested at the beginning, *The Tempest* is a play about playing, about performing, about that strange and vital force of the magic garment and the magic staff of the theatre director Prospero and his assistant director and actor Ariel. Together they create the imaginative space of

44 I.2.190–192.

45 198–199.

46 I.2.277–278.

47 I.2.273.

cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
the solemn temples, the great globe itself.⁴⁸

And again the power is in the word: ‘the great globe itself’ is both the space of the fictional world and the space of the theatre in which the audiences are taken on a voyage from their own world to the spaces of the sea, the Island, the four elements, and share them with the inhabitants ‘of the baseless fabric of this vision.’⁴⁹ In the sharing we discover our own great globe.

The Tempest has been generally considered as Shakespeare’s experiment in classical unities of time, space and action.⁵⁰ However, if we want to hold to that notion of unities, we must understand that the unity of place and time concerns audience and actors alike at the time of performance (or reading). Such unity, though, does not exist within the fictional world presented and in the actions played out. As for time, the unity will hold for the time within the play’s world only if the present and the past are logically constructed between the diegesis and mimesis. On such view, space becomes unlimited in its transformations. Discovering them, we realize that a play in the theatre depends on a combination of what is said and what is seen, however, much of what is seen (imagined) depends on what is said. The force of diegetic representation in Shakespeare’s plays cannot be ignored and indeed is not by directors and actors alike, as may be seen in Greg Doran’s recent account of his experience.⁵¹

Space transformations in *The Tempest* are especially complex because the play is in fact a debate on the art of theatre. The fictional reality of Prospero’s Island is confronted with a variety of performed actions including the masque, all of which inevitably confront the reader/audience with their own experience and understanding of the amazement the art of drama and theatre may create. The amazement is doubled when we realize that space transformations open the perspectives on

48 IV.1.152–153.

49 IV.1.151.

50 Barton (Righter) Anne, “Introduction,” in William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Anne Barton (Harmondsworth: New Penguin, 1982), 15; David Daniell, “Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy,” *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 119; *The Oxford Shakespeare. Comedies. Introduction to The Tempest*, ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 957; Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, *Introduction to the Tempest* (London: Thompson Learning, 2000), 15.

51 Greg Doran, *My Shakespeare. A Director’s Journey through the First Folio* (London: Methuen Drama, 2023).

moral, social and political issues which are as central for us as they were in Shakespeare's time.

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