Notes on the Tempest
Author(s): Giorgio Strehler and Thomas Simpson
Reviewed work(s):
Published by: The MIT Press on behalf of Performing Arts Journal, Inc.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3246343
Accessed: 18/09/2012 04:40

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Giorgio Strehler (1921–1997) established the Piccolo Teatro di Milano in 1947 with a production of Carlo Goldoni’s Servant of Two Masters that went on to international acclaim and created the director’s reputation as the leader of Italian theatre in postwar Europe. Over four decades he produced definitive versions of Shakespeare (Lear and Measure for Measure along with two productions of The Tempest), Brecht (The Threepenny Opera and The Good Woman of Setzuan), and the great Italian dramatic authors (especially Goldoni’s The Villeggiatura Trilogy, and Pirandello’s Henry IV and The Mountain Giants). His first version of The Tempest was performed in the Boboli Gardens in Florence in 1948 with a translation by the poet Salvatore Quasimodo, and featured characters who emerged from the Garden’s famous fountains and reflecting pools. The second production, from which the following text derives, was initially staged in 1978 with a translation by longtime collaborator Agostino Lombardo, and performed in the United States in 1984. In this piece Strehler re-imagines the first twenty minutes of The Tempest through the eyes and mind of a spectator. This piece, “Shakespeare, oltre La Tempesta” was first published in La Nuova Rivista Europea, Vol. 2, No. 5, May–June 1978, 23–40; and then again in the volume Inscenare Shakespeare by Giorgio Strehler, Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1992, pp. 106–131.

In a theatre, at the proper hour, a storm bursts. Sea, wind, lightning, crashing waves batter the stage and the put the house in turmoil. In the wild disorder of the rising and breaking waves, between one flash and the next, appears a warship, miniscule. In mortal danger, the ship slips and spins helplessly, overwhelmed. As the din builds pitilessly and the freezing wind whirls even through the theatre, the ship vanishes, and before the audience there now appears an enlarged fragment of the same ship, crowded with dark shapes rushing this way and that in panic. The caped figures stand out starkly against a shred of taut sail battered by the wind, barely held by the mainmast whose top disappears up into the flies, powerful and useless. The dark wooden floor, shiny with water, rises and lowers, heaves left and right with irregular motion, driving the figures this way and that on the shipstage. Desperate for stability they grab at ropes, struggling against the force
overwhelming them. From an opening, dark within the darkness, appear and disappear the faces of other figures, faces of the “nobles,” pale and ridiculous in their festive, theatrical costumes: a king in his crown, a counselor in his plumed hat, two figures in mourning. Terrified, they talk, scream, shout remarks, insult each other, as the tempest grows ever wilder in a crescendo of cruel rapid bursts. A bos’n at a rope tries to give orders and yells at the nobles who peek out of their hole like frightened mice, to go below decks. Their titles and reigns count nothing now in this world in torment. What can a king do when nature is in chaos? Command the elements to relent? Restore order with a proclamation or law? Save life with a nod? Go ahead and try, he says. But it can’t be done. So go, go down . . . . . . By now the tempest is at its peak. The mainmast bends slowly before splitting. Overwhelmed, the figures let go their ropes. All hope is lost. The waves rise to cover the fragment of ship and the human cargo that we have seen and heard for a moment among the lightning bolts and crashing thunder. They rush about as each plays their role, tragic or comic, though we still can’t make sense of the story or the characters. But there was life, some fragment of life, a microcosm, a flash of life among the electric flashes of the tempest; now it suddenly disappears in a crash of splintered wood as the sea rises to the heavens to the sound of human cries and lament, high prayers, hopeless tears. The last lightning bolt, then darkness.

In the dark the tempest moves away and widens, persistent but far off. Less thunder now, it takes on a rhythmic sound, a musical allargando.

In the stage’s emptiness, under a sky still dark and looming but with a huge slowing breath, as the sea slowly gives way, sucked away from the stage and disappearing into a blue edge, there appears a rocky form as though on a raft suspended over stilled ripples. Another fragment of the world flowering up out of the primeval elements.

On top of the rocky shape, seen from the back, the outline of a man, alone, his arms wide open, hands sensitive and imperious, in the act of directing an unseen orchestra. With supreme craft he is quieting it down and marks out the last tremors, the final heartbeats, ever more rare. The sounds respond to his gestures. Who is this mysterious conductor in a shabby robe whose shoulders we make out, the way we see all the conductors of all the orchestras in all the theatres in the world when they ascend onto their platform? What is the meaning of his gestures and his command? He is somehow ordering the sounds that invaded the theatre moments before, he directs the tremendous lightning that, just a moment ago, was blasting away at the lives of men.

But that sudden tempest, so compelling, so full of anguish, so “real”; it wasn’t real? Those human beings dying in travail; they weren’t real? That wasn’t theatrical verisimilitude? It was “pretend,” theatre within theatre! It seemed real theatre, it seemed like reality, but instead it was a theatrical invention. It must have been “commanded” by someone, someone out of sight, who pulled the strings and created the sounds and the events, from behind those beaten sails. It was a theatrical effect, the rainstorm in a show within a show, a theatrical illusion! And now that’s
how we see it immediately. Because now, coming up from below in tears and hugging the man on her knees, scared to death and wet with rain, we see a little creature, a young girl, and she starts to talk as the last thunder rolls away. She speaks to her “father.” So the old conductor must be a father.

Father of what? Of the world? Of the theatre? Of the spectacle of life or of the stage? Is the old man who directs the scene the “eternal father”? Because maybe the stage is the universe? It is only our planet, or is it only an island in the ocean, or is it just a miserable part of a theatre put there in front of people who watch and don’t know or can’t ever know quite what they’re seeing? True, the father commands and nature—theatre-sound-light—obeys. The father is “someone who commands.” The daughter in tears implores him to quiet the waters and the sky and the wind, if he’s the one (as he obviously is) to provoke that natural catastrophe, that disorder. Or maybe things were already driving toward catastrophe on their own? And then the old conductor ordered the chaotic fury into a kind of design or plan according to a mysterious order known only to him? Like God? But the old conductor is not God, just an impoverished old man in worn-out clothes, his robe worn away by a thousand rains and a thousand winds, who, in the midst of a naked stage, a symbol for the world, on the set-piece of a rocky reef, now with his last gestures, placates nature-theatre by smothering the flashpot lightning and the tin-sheet thunder.

Now there is only a murmur of sounds and voices, mysterious, a sound coming from the wings and the flies, impalpable, quiet and disquieting. Now everything is immobile under a hanging sky that pulses just barely, with just a trace of blue, threatening. The light is still, blinding, pitiless. The glow from the sky outlines the black profile of the rock set on the shimmering black, burned, ancient and sinister, of the raft-island-world-within-a-world of the theatre.

On this black which seems suspended in the geometry of a motionless, eternal sea, there are residue of ships dragged in by the tide, tree trunks encrusted with algae and shells, virgin white stripes of sand, and over there, sheltered by the rock, we can make out the remains of a “scientific civilization” (an old telescope on a tripod, a sextant, a few books, a mysterious locked chest; is it a treasure chest or merely a worn old box of props?). It might contain “theatre” or a magician’s tricks, tricks of a stage wizard or a wizard not of the stage. Who is this old man, then? Not merely a father, apparently, not merely a conductor who runs a show. Could he be a scientist, an astronomer, an explorer? Or is he a wizard? And if so, what kind? A wizard only in the theatre, or in the whole world? At this moment, in fact, he is tracing out mysterious signs in the air as he murmurs incomprehensible words, as he descends with the girl from the rock to the stage floor. We can now see more clearly how he is dressed: over a threadbare cassock he wears a very old and strange robe, torn in places, with magic signs picked out in gold and silver, but in extreme disrepair; a code of magic symbols going to pieces, remains of memory, old symbols of waning power, which the young girl nevertheless takes from her father’s shoulders; in obedience to his order, with great respect and with ritual movements, she folds it and places it back into the chest.
Giulia Lazzarini as Ariel, Tino Carraro as Prospero, and Fabiana Udenio as Miranda in the Piccolo Teatro di Milano’s production of *The Tempest*, directed by Giorgio Strehler. Photo: Courtesy Pepsico Summerfare ’84.
Now the two are seated side by side, with the girl’s head resting sweetly on the old man’s shoulder, before the immense ocean and the audience that waits, listening. The old man speaks, telling a tale; we shall now learn much more about these two still mysterious characters. We will now learn *almost everything*.

A terrible story, and one repeated thousands, millions of times in different ways in mankind’s history. A story of usurpation and crime, of betrayal between brothers. The old man was a “duke,” a king “dethroned by his brother” while he concentrated on mysterious, profound studies. The girl is his daughter. They were betrayed, abandoned on the sea on a wreck of a ship with only a few possessions saved for them by a good soul, a human being who is nevertheless a succubus and accomplice of evil: Gonzalo. They were left adrift among the waves, prey to storms like the one we have just seen, and by “divine providence”; they were saved, beached on this island, this narrow strip of land or last object of theatre. An evil and a blessing, everything that happened, as always in the life of men. And everything happened exactly twelve years ago.

At the time of their escape by night, the girl, whose name we still don’t know, was not yet three years old. She wept; this we know. Nothing else. Now she must be fourteen-and-a-half, more or less, by now she is most certainly in the phase of being born again, as a woman. She can’t remember anything else about her past. Only a few shadows, of a woman leaning over her, a shadow among shadows, in the dark “behind,” in the abyss of time.

In a calm voice, the father interrogates her and reveals her identity to her, her history. It is the *proper* moment, says the old man. Now you must know, he says. “Why?” So he also tells her his own story. He wants to tell it to his daughter with detachment so that she learns “objectively” what her father’s past was, what he was. Everything. But he can’t remain detached in telling it because little by little, inside, roars a deep pain, a craving for revenge, rebellion at the betrayal, that fraternal, institutional betrayal that still burns like an open wound in Prospero’s heart. The old man’s name, in fact, is Prospero. It’s ironic, almost, in the face of the story he tells; everything has gone quite against him, nothing has prospered.

A happy name for an unhappy man. An anti-name. Therefore now our conductor, director, god, father of a young daughter, scientist-wizard, appears also as a “duke robbed of his land and title.” Not only is he a quiet old man in hard-won solitude thinking over his past; he is also a human being still filled with hatred and pain, tortured by memory, who doesn’t want to let it show. There on the island, twelve years have gone by this way. The girl has grown. The man has grown old. He has studied the sciences, the mysteries under the night sky, he has read deeper and deeper into his books, “the dearest of his realm”; he has entered ever further into “the magic arts,” into the science of real and imaginary theatre, that he can now summon forth in a flash with a gesture or a thought.
Thousands of spectacles and inventions have flashed through his solitary mind and perhaps—no, certainly—he has realized some of them, for himself alone and for his daughter. Until the moment when—this is the moment when the old man speaks—“by accident most strange,” no longer by divine providence (we shall never know whether what takes place is due to providence or rather mere chance, because Prospero will never tell us), the past has arrived on the island. Suddenly, by strange accident indeed, a ship, another ship out on the ocean, has happened to find itself crossing nearby this island, and inside this ship are all of them, by accident most strange indeed, all of “the enemies of Prospero,” those responsible for his evil fate: brother Antonio, the wicked brother who cannot be a real brother, the enemy king Alonso, Alonso’s younger brother, Sebastian, the humane and humanely cowardly counselor Gonzalo (the one who saved the books for the fateful flight). All of them, together with sailors, dignitaries, and jesters.

That ship carries the summation of the world “against Prospero,” his entire past history now re-presents itself twelve years later in this cargo of evil. Now we finally know what that boat in the storm was all about. We know who those figures were that we glimpsed stricken with panic among the lightning bolts and swept into the sea. Now we know that the storm, that chaos, was a vendetta of Prospero. We know that Prospero has killed his enemies. But we doubt, because Prospero tells his daughter that “no harm was done,” that “all was for the good.” Is the old man lying to placate his daughter? That could well be, since the old father-wizard-scientist-conductor-director-exiled and marooned duke has also shown himself, in the way he treats his daughter, sometimes despotic and authoritarian.

For Prospero the educator—so he tells himself—his daughter is merely a beloved object of obedience, virtue, and good manners, quite “as appropriate” to a princess. There, in that remote place, at the edge of the Earth or in the heart of the Mediterranean, on an island that represents “far away,” that stands for a new world, the just-discovered new world where everything is still possible, that stands for a new world of history and a new kind of theatre, open before: a theatre of marvels, of fantastic images, appearances and disappearances, music and song, a theatre of deceptions, scenic phantasmagoria; and for history, the possibility of renewing everything, to expiate the error and blood of the past, the failure of the dream of renaissance, with a new man now at the center, master of science and the occult and mystery, master of politics, ruler of reason . . . There, in that place, is a “young princess” who has learned “honest” and virtuous comportment from her paternal guide. Just as she would have in Milan, at the royal court! In this new world, education is repeating something old and possibly useless for “the new situation.” But Prospero doesn’t know that. At least, not yet.

The two talk, or rather the father speaks softly, with sudden moments of desperation and then return to self-control, and the daughter gradually falls asleep. That voice that knows how to be so calm and persuasive has something hypnotic about it. Prospero has something of the person who knows the mysteries of “hypnotic technique.” Now that the young creature is asleep, Prospero rises and says to
himself: I am ready now. He calls a name, gazes up toward the sky with a wide open
gesture and says: Ariel . . . come. And from the suddenly moving sky descends in
shivering air a fantastic creature that rolls onto the ground next to Prospero like a
little cloud lowered to earth, pulsing in constant movement.

The fantastic being is attached to the sky with a long silver thread and now it greets
Prospero with a light voice and the sound of tinkling cymbals and silver bells
attached to its clothing. The fantastic being is a being of air, “an air-spirit.” It has an
ambiguous appearance, ageless, without sex, hair the color of air, the body gray and
white with a touch of blue. Prospero meets it with enchanted tenderness. But
Prospero will immediately reveal himself a severe master, too severe, bringing again
to light his authoritarian, despotic character. As a divine father, Prospero is rather a
cruel one.

The spirit Ariel is a “slave” of Prospero; a frustrated slave but at the same time happy
in an infantile way to “play” for Prospero, to help him in his “enchantments” in
theatre and life. Now we know that he is the one who conducted the tempest
invented and directed by Prospero, that it was Ariel who became flame and water
and wind, just as the father-director had ordered in every detail. Ariel is the one to
see that a part of the human cargo of the warship should throw itself into the sea,
though finally nothing truly damaging has taken place, just as Prospero said.

The victims of the shipwreck are all safe; in fact, the clothes they wear are even
fresher than before, and we still don’t know why. But they are all safe, divided into
groups; on one side Ferdinand, the young son of the king of Naples; on the other the
“court”; each group believes itself to be the sole survivors of the shipwreck. In still
another place, the clowns.

The sailors of the ship that did not shatter on the reefs and pitch to the bottom as
first seemed are sunk into a deep sleep in a bay protected from the winds. This is the
outcome of the tempest ordered by Prospero and realized by Ariel. But still more
details have now been added to the story we know so far.

Having arrived on the deserted island with the infant princess in his arms, Prospero
met the air-spirit Ariel, imprisoned in the cleft of a marine pine, incapable of
moving, of riding the clouds, prohibited its true liberty. From Ariel and Prospero we
learn the other story, that of the mysterious island, this island in the theatre, this
island of theatre at the same time a new world, America still new, ancient
Mediterranean island, perhaps an island of Ulysses’ voyages or the island of Aeneas
who departed Troy destroyed by another tempest, that of war. This place, the
domain of Prospero and his daughter, was the island of Ariel, the air-spirit. It was his
abode, the place for his games of wind and light, since immemorial times of which
we no longer have even the echo. The one day, mysteriously, a pregnant woman was
left on the island (a witch, Prospero calls her), wife of the devil, of the god of
Patagonia (another mythical place), of Setebos, the god of night. A witch, but what
kind of witch? One with blue eyes, or menacing, dark ones, or eyes of glass (another
of the mysteries that remains a mystery throughout the story), banished from 
Algeria, from Africa, from the very place whence the royal ship set forth after a 
fabulous wedding, banished and saved because of a single virtuous action, one thing 
alone, that she did.

The abandoned pregnant witch gave birth to the son of the demon, a scorched little 
puppy, a puppy black as an inkstain, and she became the ruler of the island, 
imprisoning Ariel, the mythical inhabitant, the spirit free of knowledge, free of 
substance, and free of possession.

With Sycorax’s pestilent “seizure of power” began a cycle of destruction in the 
distant and mysterious place. But the “seizure of power” is relative because Ariel the 
wind-spirit commands no “real” power; Ariel is simply a presence in one place or in 
various places at a certain latitude. But just the same the violence began and the 
“witch” made the island her own. Twelve years ago. The number twelve beats a 
rhythmic cadence through the arc of the story like an ancient cabala, twelve and its 
multiples six and three, to such a degree that sometimes we can play at calculating 
the years and events of the characters on the basis of these cabalistic numbers, 
leading us to occult inquiries, esoteric secrets, and the magical capabilities of the 
wizard Prospero.

In the meantime, the son of the blue-eyed witch (cerulean eyes, the azure eyes of 
Venus?) has grown up; Ariel stuck in the cloven pine has been crying to the winds, 
and the witch has died. Now on the island there is an imprisoned spirit crying out 
to the winds and a “deformed” child (what else could be the child of a witch and the 
devil?). Unless this witch and this devil, from a different perspective, might not 
appear to us as mythical beings of a mythical civilization, obscurely Mediterranean, 
deeply rooted to the origins of a “black” civilization, foreign, strange, opposed to a 
“white” civilization, the one that is “conquering the planet and today attempts to 
conquer the cosmos.” The question will not be left hanging, but must remain 
unanswered and continue to resonate. Our story plunges deep into mystery and lives 
in a mysterious, non-rational dimension, with its spirits and monsters, its mythic 
images, its abyssal evocations.

And the island itself, even in its concreteness as a place of theatre, as a symbol of the 
world, an image of the unexplored, has in itself a wide margin of uncertainty; 
certainly it is bitter, certainly of rock, but also docile sand and mountains and trees 
and vegetation and desert all at once, rich in water, animals, and sounds, and at any 
time any of these might appear and appear they shall, awful and sweet, punitive and 
pleasing and pacifying from moment to moment and maybe according to the 
capacity of “discovery” of each person who comes there and stays, whether by divine 
providence or by the strangest of coincidences. In our story, the son of the witch 
Sycorax is named Caliban, a resonant and mysterious name and one that by natural 
assonance suggests the name Cannibal-cannibale-Caliban. Thus it figures forth the 
distant, terrifying eaters of men, the self-devourers, the blacks, the horrible monsters 
of the nights of history who devour one another. But when his mother the witch
Tino Carraro as Prospero in *The Tempest*. Photo: Courtesy Luigi Ciminaghi.

Tino Carraro as Prospero and Giulia Lazzarini as Ariel in *The Tempest*. Photo: Luigi Ciminaghi.
dies, Caliban is still a child. A child abandoned on a “friendly” island, the realm of his mother and now his own.

The child Caliban is the legitimate heir of power on the island. A power already born from usurpation, taken from the spirit Ariel. For twelve years Ariel was prisoner in the cloven pine while Caliban and his mother were “masters of the island.” Until the day came when the witch died, without first liberating Ariel, who was thus condemned eternally to his dark prison. Our story doesn’t tell us when during these twelve years the witch left the child Caliban alone, king of the island, as tiny and lost king of the island. But everything that happens leads us to believe that Caliban had time to “learn” from his mother how to survive, to recognize his world, to identify its parts, to make it his own.

All this leads us to think that Caliban must have a natural “culture” of his own; he may observe certain rituals, he must certainly have his own language. It must surely have helped him survive in his solitude, the company of the animals and nature, trees, and waters, the infinite sea and the clouds, the sun, the moon, the gulls. The friendly island has raised him, little by little transforming nocturnal terror into sweet sounds, the thousand noises of the inhabitants of the woods and rocks into friendly and pacifying murmurs.

Caliban has been alone but marvelously alone, master, king, and brotherly companion of “his island.” And he has grown up. Twelve years or maybe ten, or six . . . Certainly a long time. Then suddenly at the striking of twelve years, the “white men,” the foreigners, the stranger, arrived on the island. A ragged stranger with a baby in his arms, a child of slightly more than three years, or perhaps exactly three years. With few possessions, but strange ones, unrecognizable objects, roped to a sort of raft. The stranger is Prospero with his daughter. And here takes place a meeting that we can only imagine but that certainly must have been incredibly important.

The first gestures, the first words, between Caliban and Prospero, the first attempt to communicate, the reciprocal diffidence, the fear. Prospero’s discovery of an “other,” a “strange” child (later he will say deformed, but deformed may mean “formed differently,” the alien, the one of a different “color”). And for Caliban, the discovery of another man, of the unknown “father,” surely the paternal figure, the one who “knows,” who is wise, knowledgeable, who protects, who teaches. A bond forms between the child king and the dispossessed duke wizard Prospero. The one “protects” Caliban, teaches him “language” (obviously English or Italian or whichever is the language in which we tell the story) and teaches him science as well, gives him “culture,” and the culture of science. For his part, Caliban teaches Prospero “all of the island,” its beauties and dangers; Caliban practically consigns the entire island to Prospero and Prospero takes possession of it, without force, simply by virtue of the situation. He is the elder, the wiser, he now has the responsibility of raising two creatures, his own and the “deformed” Caliban. Here begins a great experiment in education, as a human and “social” experiment might naturally begin.
There is an uninhabited island that is inhabited, there is a new world where evil seems not to exist, where there are no social structures, no betrayal and hate, but only the brotherhood of nature and of things with men.

Therefore it is the dreamed-of new world, the new earthly paradise where man may try, if wise enough, human enough, to create a different “civilization,” different from that in Milan, different than the civilization of the whites, far from the chain of crimes and usurpations that seem characteristic of “civil” history. Democratically, fraternally, Prospero will educate his daughter together with the “deformed,” the wild man, the black; he will create a miniscule but self-sufficient society of good will and wisdom where study, the human sciences, astronomy, and magic can expand without fear or constraint. It is a poor and hard life, but free and new. For his part Caliban knows how to work and work hard, he can well provide everything that the three might require to live. And as for the “studies,” the magic, and for the magic the “theatre,” that theatre of which Prospero has been a master: the whole island is now his stage, all obedient nature his repertory company, even more so now that another fundamental meeting has taken place—the meeting between Prospero and the prisoner Ariel. Here, however, Prospero has acted differently than he has with Caliban. He has liberated Ariel from his wooden prison with a reciprocal pact. With his air-spirits, Ariel will serve Prospero for a certain period of time, he will assist Prospero in his enchantments, his fantastic raptures, in his illusions, in his theatre games for their own sake, for years and years—twelve? they could certainly be twelve—and at the expiration of the twelve years of the contract, Ariel shall once again be free. We are in this moment now at the end of these twelve years. When the tempest is raised, true or false depending on your point of view, twelve years are coming to an end and it is exactly two o’clock in the afternoon.

The story will come to an end at precisely six. Just as stage shows began and ended in the era in which the poet wrote his tale.

In the first meeting we witness between Prospero and Ariel, past, present, and future mix together, as do the relations between Prospero and the spirit Ariel, between the wizard-tyrant-director and the disciple-spirit-subject-indentured servant—collaborator, assistant director, and actor Ariel. Very complex, antagonistic relations, composed of love—and also of a certain hate. Ariel trembles with craving to have his freedom back. Prospero is brutal to deny it him, but at the same time Prospero loves Ariel almost morbidly, his feelings almost sensual toward the asexual Ariel, the spirit of air, his chosen aide, uniquely capable of staging and performing Prospero’s scenarios. The complex, profound polyvalence of symbols thus continues, the characters and actions emblems of themselves and other things as well, both at the same moment, repeating echoes that resonate on the metaphysical and historical themes of human societies. Here, the theme of the “mysterious,” necessary bond between Prospero and Ariel is terribly clear and at the same moment wrapped in a sort of shadow, a fold in sense and feeling and thus even more violent than Prospero’s oppression, his tyranny (this also necessary? excessive? solitary? oppressive in the way that social and generational status are? as wisdom is?) over Ariel. Right away, as
always, though perhaps not for always, Prospero compels Ariel back to his “duty,” as though Ariel were a “recalcitrant” schoolboy, a whining, slothful child, or like a wild young lover, or like a member of a theatre company who rebels at the old “maestro” and demands “too much autonomy” . . . who insists in fact that the master “prepare a spectacle” for him and him alone. Let Ariel remain invisible but change himself into a sea nymph, in any way he chooses and without explaining how, his appearance to be a surprise, delightful because visible only to Prospero and not to the others.

As Ariel exits to transform into a sea nymph, as we await Ariel’s return, Prospero—hypnotist and magician—awakens Miranda from her deep sleep. Did he put her to sleep (as now seems clear) to “be able to speak” alone with Ariel, without witnesses? Is his relationship with Ariel “secret” and invisible? Or did he put Miranda to sleep for some other reason? After the tale “of the past,” Miranda has a past of her own, now she knows something about herself and her father, something she never knew before. Miranda now has an identity, where only a few moments before she was a “virgin,” born to life only yesterday, with no markings and no status beyond that of “daughter”; now she is someone. Perhaps she needed to sleep after this process of identification, perhaps it was all too much for her, maybe the sleep served to “fix” this identity to her heart.

There is certainly something necessary and mysterious in that sleep summoned by Prospero for Miranda. Now, in waking her, Prospero exhorts her to cast off her slumber; he seems to us a bit brutal about it. But Prospero is sometimes brutal, despotic, lacking tenderness; now he places her before the still-unseen figure of Caliban.

Now we shall see the child grown large, become man, now we see the deformed one, the childhood playmate of Miranda. Oddly, however, Miranda doesn’t want to see him. She says he’s a brute, a savage. Prospero explains to her that he is still useful, that he works for them. But why isn’t Miranda friendly to Caliban? Why does she find him repulsive? Was he not included in that educational experiment, that work of constructing a new world? Why is Prospero so cruel, Miranda so “against”? Caliban is about to appear, but here now just for a moment and only to Prospero there appears suddenly Ariel, as a sea nymph. From the still sea waves, perhaps, a feminine, sinuous shadow, veiled with algae, to the sound of music? Miranda cannot see it, but may be able to hear the music. For a moment, Prospero is happy, bravo Ariel, such an imagination that boy, almost a genius . . . and now out comes Caliban. The monster emerges from the dark, the blackness, from a hole in the stage where he is shut up. Just before this, Prospero had bent down and lifted up from the stage-island an iron ring, and opened a trapdoor, and turned over the wooden planks onto the wooden stage floor, with a cruel noise, prison-like.

The stage-island reverberated as ancient dust rose off the planks, the line of sand vibrated, and a pile of wooden stumps encrusted with barnacles and shells dragged
Michele Placido as Caliban and Tino Carraro as Prospero in *The Tempest.*
Photo: Luigi Ciminaghi.
from the sea, and left to dry in the sun, then cut into boards, has fallen into the open
dark hole with a deep splash and echo coming up from below.

We heard that eternal sound of the chambers below the stage, that sound from every
theatre in the world, and for a moment “the magic of theatre” took shape, “the
mystery of its demons” buried in the nooks and crannies of its storage rooms and
basements, just as before we heard the air-spirits “in the flies” up out of sight in the
high wooden ceilings above the proscenium. Theatre’s Inferno and Paradise with
clouds, winds, lightning, flame, music and voices, whether for drama, tragedy, or
comedy. And monsters. But what appears now from below is no monster. What
slowly rises up out of the hole, first hands, then straining arms, and then the head,
from which a rivulet of blood trickles down the chin, is a “being of the shadows,” a
being of blackness, a black, or a blue, a blue black, or a red black or a dark red,
naked, shining or opaque, encrusted with ancient mud or matted with sweat but still
a human being.

Not a deformed being, but “different,” an other, the eternal other of history and the
other of the “colony,” yesterday America, today new planets in a cosmos populated
with “monsters,” one who spoke a moment before from the darkness, “like us” with
perfect speech, a line terrible with irony and desperation: There’s wood enough
within. He’s responding to the mass of wood that just came crashing down on him.
Now we know the deformed slave is not like Prospero said. We know that Prospero
was too “cruel” in his descriptions of Caliban, but we still don’t know whether
Caliban’s soul is truly evil so as to deserve Prospero’s adjectives. Clearly, something
didn’t work in the “educational project,” in that experiment in social engineering.

Now Caliban curses the two whites, the black curses the whites in his perfect white
speech. And he tells a story of oppression and disappointed love, of innocence and
happiness. The lost paradise existed at the beginning, but it wasn’t Caliban who
destroyed it; it was Prospero. This is the truth. The truth of Prospero, “usurper and
slaveowner.” Now Prospero is a “colonizer.” Something has been added to the
complex portrait of Prospero, and it is not agreeable. It was all useless, answers
Prospero to cursing Caliban. It was useless to teach you to speak, to educate you.
Caliban responds that having learned to speak the language of Prospero and
Miranda, he really knows only one thing: how to curse with cruel, crude words “in
the language of whites,” of the others.

We now find out from Prospero what took place. In his project, Prospero had
forgotten many things: first of all, the reality of the possession of others (he, the
dispossessed duke); second, the possible value of another “culture” to be defended
and saved, another alignment of “nature,” different from the educated, knowledge-
able, magic, scientific, cultured one; third, the physical reality of life. At the moment
he began their education, Miranda was three years old, Caliban twelve. One male,
the other female. How could his project of their “education” together carry on
successfully in complete innocence?
In utopia, in the irreality that is one of the continuing errors of Prospero, sage wizard and scientist and director. An error of “reality,” the error of imagining reality different—better or worse—than the real. And that innocence was and is not another utopia, or a convenient scheme or the constricting enchainment of social “custom.” It was fated that one day Caliban—again let’s say twelve years later, that is, when he was twenty four—must “naturally” attempt to violate Miranda, fourteen. Why then this tone of indignation, this horror at rape, this anguish of Prospero? Why has the “black,” the other “raised” in his home with Miranda, dared to try to violate, not the “maiden” but “my daughter,” as he says? . . .

Thus another theme appears in the action, a hidden theme, barely made out but ever-present: Prospero’s passion for his daughter, love that is paternal but precisely as such “in reality,” is also veined with incestuous shadows, with jealousy, with a deep sense of “possession,” flesh of his flesh that he must nevertheless give to “others” because that is the nature of things. But to a “deformed” creature of the dark, no, this no . . . and the theme of unsuspected incest unites with the theme of the colonizer.

This part of the story thus ends with the slave who drags himself off to work, though we now know that the slave is not by nature a slave but rather a king, dispossessed, that the slave is not deformed but different and that he keeps in his heart the memory of a happy moment: that of the arrival of his “white father,” the Prospero who betrayed him. And at the same time we know that Prospero believes himself betrayed by the “monstrous” conduct of Caliban. And at the same time that such conduct is not monstrous, but “simply” natural. Since that moment in their earthly paradise, Prospero dressed Caliban and Miranda in clothing to hide their respective “shames”! And since that moment Caliban has become the hopeless slave laborer condemned to serfdom and toil without reward for master Prospero and his daughter.

As for Miranda, her repulsion for Caliban may tell us that beneath it there is a sort of terrible memory of violence almost experienced, and that this memory is negative but not completely, not totally. Miranda will have too many uncertainties in describing Caliban as brute or savage, as non-man and then instead as “one of the men I have seen,” in a perennial oscillation. The intact young maiden near womanhood has had, though in negative form, the shiver of sex, the image of the violator, an indistinct shadow of black on black.

In just a moment Miranda will meet love. In the high clear light of full afternoon in the island theatre, on the sea, in the sea, the air sounds with echoes and vibrations. A sea nymph, shining and invisible, visible only to Prospero and to us, sings sweetly from the placid waves. It sings of golden sands and onto this conjured sand a young man places his foot and follows, drawn by the sound of music, a blond young man, pale and gentle. He is the exact opposite of Caliban, the black. The young man emerges from the real waters of the theatre as though nude, sculptured in his “masculinity.” Nude without being so, defenseless and confused, he seeks his father,
his friends. He is lost. We now learn the young man is Ferdinand, the son of the
king, scattered in the tempest. He believes, as we did before, that his father is dead;
the nymph sings him a song of death and metamorphosis; a king who transforms
into coral, his eyes into pearls. Mysterious sea bells peal and distant voices respond.
On one side of the stage, the lost young man searches, on the other side Miranda,
whose father has closed her eyes as though in a game. The meeting between the two
beings is ready. Miranda opens wide the fringed curtain of her eyes and shall see her
“man.”

And the meeting takes place. The two look at each other, see each other, they
“change eyes,” and each falls hopelessly in love with the other, like Romeo and Juliet
repeating in an echo of theatre on the deserted island. Just as suddenly and
hopelessly as those two. Miranda is more simple, Ferdinand more formal in his
speech. With extreme realism, the story also tells us here about two “human beings”
in a specific situation with different “histories,” sex, age, and “social condition.”
Miranda cannot be like Ferdinand, nor speak like him; neither can Ferdinand have
the same complete willingness that Miranda has. But the love is there. Prospero
wished it. Why give the son of his enemy to Miranda? How was this new plan born,
and to what secret purpose? Why put together, face to face, two people from enemy
houses like the Capulets and Montagues who will fall in love and die for it? Here on
a deserted island the situation of an ancient tragedy repeats itself. So the ending
must be the same here also. Will Miranda and Ferdinand be divided by the hatred
of their fathers, by Prospero’s vendetta, by the punishment of the guilty? Will
Prospero make his daughter suffer, make her fall in love so as then to take away her
beloved?

The question remains open. We feel that Prospero has a design for this meeting. But
we don’t well know what it is; it might be a monstrous design, of which Miranda
could be the victim. From what we’ve seen of him so far, Prospero does not
discourage our thinking so. And in fact, now Prospero intervenes cruelly toward
Ferdinand. With sudden fury, with mean-spiritedness. Prospero hates Ferdinand, we
hear it and see it. He insults him, reviles him, humiliates him, and subjects him to
labor and shame. He condemns and punishes him like Caliban, on the same level as
Caliban. Miranda is shocked, aggrieved, she doesn’t understand her father anymore,
she implores him but the “noble father” is immovable. Ferdinand is to be punished:
he is an infamous traitor. Or is Prospero’s tone perhaps a bit too “theatrical” in its
sudden choler toward Ferdinand, so that it leaves us suspecting that this infuriated
father is actually “doing it on purpose”? But like Miranda, we still cannot
understand why. True, a moment before Prospero had made a strange comment,
pronounced like a justification: these two run too fast. I must block them, slow
them down. It could be almost a comic remark, or a tragic one, to consider that
Prospero, seeing the perfectly licit love between Miranda and Ferdinand, wishes
almost unconsciously to slow down the moment when his daughter will no longer
be his. She will be of the other—not the black one, the blond one—but still another,
of an other. In Prospero’s intervention there is perhaps an unconfessed tremor that
will be dissolved only farther ahead, much farther ahead in our story.
The story for now stops to take a breath. Ferdinand overwhelmed by the enchantment of love and by the enchantment of the wizard-father who takes his daughter from him and humiliates him with miserable labor. Miranda, confused at the useless, clearly unjust cruelty of her father, already wavers between devotion to her father and devotion to love.

Prospero secretly upset, filled with hate toward the enemies in his possession in his theatre-island-world, undecided what to do with them but prey to homicidal impulses, and active accomplice to his daughter's love, as though it were inevitable, inevitable that she fall in love with an unknown young man of high lineage who "by accident most strange" is the son of his worst enemy.

The moment closes in great suspense, great uncertainty; it had opened in the anguish and disorder of nature. Order is still far off, all questions still open. We still know too little, but we also already know a great deal. We know a great number of facts and feelings and possible situations, a very high number of realities and symbols. We have entered into the world of the island where the world repeats itself, remakes itself in every moment, where everything can happen and has already happened, where human beings find one another and get lost, and find and lose themselves, where profound mystery surrounds all things and where spirits live and slaves suffer and toil in darkness. Where civilization, instead of recreating its lost paradise, creates a colony of ancient exploitation, where fathers love their daughters and cast them into the arms of others, where the real reveals itself false and where the false may and probably will reveal itself to be true. We are not only in the world but also in the theatre, where musicians play and stagehands make phantasms descend from on high and move veils and waves of the sea. Where an old wizard director prepares shocking, sweet spectacles for certain private aims of revenge and wonder and passion . . . We are . . . we are . . . only a minute or two from the beginning of a play.

Still less than a half an hour and all this has already taken place. A part of the theatre of the world has come to life, opened, developed, and closed. In little more than twenty minutes.

THOMAS SIMPSON, senior lecturer in Italian at Northwestern University, has translated plays by Eduardo De Filippo for the Long Wharf Theatre and ACT in Seattle. His translation of Marco Paolini’s theatrical monologue, “The Story of Vajont,” is available from Bordighera Press.