THE IDEAS OF POWER, SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*: A POLITICAL RE-READING BASED ON HIS CHARACTERS' PURPOSES

Jordi Salas-Leal, University of Girona

Email: jordi.sala@udg.edu

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Abstract: Power, slavery, freedom are three words that define some insistently frequent semantic fields in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. These are very large figures: an extraordinary frequency, which is obviously not coincidental. This article aims to show that these three semantic fields define the three main pillars that enable a re-reading of the characters in *The Tempest* based on the analysis of the life positions of each of them, and ultimately in light of contemporary political thought.

Keywords: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, political reading, allegory, theatre interpretation, word frequency, lexical fields.

Resumen: Poder, esclavitud, libertad son tres palabras que definen algunos campos semánticos insistentemente frecuentes en *La tempestad* de William Shakespeare. Son cifras muy grandes: una frecuencia extraordinaria, que obviamente no es casual. Este artículo pretende mostrar que estos tres campos semánticos definen los tres pilares fundamentales que permiten una relectura de los personajes de *La tempestad* a partir del análisis de las posiciones de vida de cada uno de ellos, y en definitiva a la luz del pensamiento político contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: *La tempestad* de Shakespeare, lectura política, alegoría, interpretación teatral, frecuencia de palabras, campos semánticos.

1 INTRODUCTION

Power, slavery, freedom are three words that define some insistently frequent semantic fields in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. If my calculation is correct,¹ the semantic field

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¹ The calculations were made based on the concordances of the play, which can be found on the Internet at <https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/concordance>, among other websites.

of power ('power', 'powers', 'master', 'masters') appears thirty-two times throughout the play; the semantic field of slavery and submission ('slave', 'slavery', 'servant', 'service', 'to serve') thirty times; and the semantic field of freedom ('free', 'freedom', 'freely', 'liberty') on thirty-two occasions. These are very large figures: an extraordinary frequency, which is obviously not coincidental. This paper aims to show that these three semantic fields define the three main pillars that structure one of the major themes in the play, or to put it more precise the pillars that enable a re-reading of the characters in *The Tempest* based on the analysis of the life positions of each of them, and ultimately in light of contemporary political thought.

2 "...THIS ROUGH MAGIC I HERE ABJURE"

In the great critic William Hazlitt's words (cited in Palmer 1991: 57): "*The Tempest* is one of the most original and perfect of Shakespeare's productions, and he has shewn in it all the variety of his powers. It is full of grace and grandeur". Not long afterwards, in 1836, an equally eminent critic and one of the most learned representatives of European romantic poetry, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (in Palmer 1991: 57), stated that "The language in which these truths are expressed [in *The Tempest*] was not drawn from any set fashion, but from the profoundest depths of his moral being [Shakespeare's], and is therefore for all ages". And this is not an exclusively nineteenth-century appreciation; as early as 1753, Joseph Warton (in Palmer 1991: 32, 36) had written:

Of all the plays of Shakespeare, *The Tempest* is the most striking instance of his creative power. He has there given the reins to his boundless imagination, and has carried the romantic, the wonderful, and the wild, to the most pleasing extravagance. [...] The poet is a more powerful magician than his own Prospero: we are transported into fairy land; we are rapt in a delicious dream, from which it is misery to be disturbed; all around is enchantment!

In previous centuries, however, this positive appraisal did not correspond to audiences' knowledge of the original *The Tempest*, but rather to an outlandish version of it: from the 1660s to well into the nineteenth century, the most well-known and performed version of *The Tempest* was an adaptation by William Davenant and John Dryden called *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island*, which was tremendously, even grotesquely, different to Shakespeare's play.² Nonetheless, in one way or the other and in different eras, *The Tempest* has occupied a privileged position in the Shakespeare corpus, and this appreciation is not limited to past centuries or remote eras: the fascination with *The Tempest* among readers, spectators, critics, scene directors, scenographers and actors throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first has been enormous, although it is unclear whether they have all been able to adequately account for this fascination, and even less clear whether they

2 This version, which came out on 7 November 1667, includes only a third of Shakespeare's text, but introduces various characters who do not appear in the original: a little sister of Miranda's called Dorinda; a girlfriend of Ariel's called Milcha; a sister of Caliban's, Sycorax, whose hand is sought by Stefano and Trinculo; two more comic companions for Stefano and Trinculo, Mustacho and Ventoso; and a guard in Prospero's service, Hippolito. Davenant and Dryden's version basically consisted of a large format theatre performance to show off the theatrical magic of the play.

all agree on its causes. To uncover this mystery, the hypothesis put forward in this paper refers to an implicit reading in political terms that points to a hypothetical future society; but to start, this hypothesis must be underpinned by an analysis of the history of both the classic and the most recent readings of *The Tempest*.

Appraisal of the play has always been supplemented with readings and interpretations that largely explain the era that has produced them, so as with all the great classics *The Tempest* is likewise a compendium of the evolution of the ideas and history of culture. In general, and as is implicit in the quotes from Warton, Hazlitt and Coleridge, criticism prior to the twentieth century considered the work as simply an enchanting fantasy, leaving aside the more disturbing aspects. The creative imagination has always been highlighted, especially during the Romantic era. And later, as is well known, the Victorians read the play as an allegory of the genius of Shakespeare himself, desirous to liken the author to the main character, Prospero. This reading is very evident in essays which, like Edward Dowden's "The Serenity of *The Tempest*" (1875), sparked a trend in critical thought³ that would last well into the twentieth century, and would only be interrupted by poststructuralist, and especially postcolonial, criticism starting in the decade of the 1970s.

In effect, what we could call the "classic" reading of the play is underpinned by a core idea, which is that of identifying Shakespeare himself in Prospero. The fact that the play was one of the last works he wrote before retiring to his native Stratford-on-Avon served to reaffirm this idea among classical scholars, who assumed that *The Tempest* was the last play written exclusively by Shakespeare, although he would later collaborate with John Fletcher on large parts of other plays, most notably *Henry VIII*. However, what is certain is that there is no indisputable proof that *The Tempest* was written after *The Winter's Tale* or *Cymbeline*.⁴ Classical scholars unquestionably took *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare's

3 In a similar line was G. Wilson Knight's (1947, in Palmer 1991: 111-130), who emphasised the fact that the themes and poetic texture (image, metaphors) of *The Tempest* are the final result of the entire works of Shakespeare, both the tragedies and the comedies. Likewise, E.M.W. Tillyard (1938) made significant contributions about the relationships between the play and the other romances.

4 Curiously and inexplicably, the play leads the First Folio and it does so, logically, under the epigraph of the comedies. Regarding its staging, which is what in the end determines where it is placed chronologically among Shakespeare's last plays, we know that *The Tempest* was performed in the court of King James I of England (and VI of Scotland) on 1 November 1611; and we also know that it was performed again at the royal court during the winter of 1613 as part of the festivities of princess Elizabeth's wedding. Numerous studies have argued that the play would have been written especially for this event; but the fact that it had already been performed for the first time two years previously, that three other plays apart from *The Tempest* were performed as part of the wedding celebrations (including another one by Shakespeare, *Othello*), and that the play had probably already done a season in both Blackfriars playhouse and The Globe, are clear indications that this argument is on shaky ground. (The Blackfriars and The Globe were two playhouses which, as early as the reign of James I, belonged to Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, a title given to them in 1603 at the start of his reign; The Globe, the Shakespearian theatre par excellence during the last years of his career, is indirectly mentioned in *The Tempest* in one of the most important speeches, "The solemn temples, the great globe itself, / Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve", IV,i, 153-154). The matter would be of little importance if it were not for the numerous attempts to justify the inclusion of the masque in Act IV, a surprising parenthesis in the dramatic action of the play, as a reference to the royal nuptials, but what is certain is that this masque is an almost parodical imitation of a theatrical form that was in fashion in the court of the time and which other dramatists, among them Ben Jonson, often used. For the audience of James I's reign, the masque was in effect a very familiar art form, which included spectacular theatre effects, magic, dance, music, poetry and the presence of extravagant and mythological characters.

last work, and their reading was based on this assumption; but, in fact, they deduced their assumption from their reading –a reading wherein Prospero is Shakespeare's *alter ego*. (This point has been completely clarified by a very recent contribution by Emma Smith.⁵) Critics from various eras have subscribed to this line of thought, perceiving the play as the author's testament, and at times as vehemently as did J. Middleton Murry in 1936 (in Palmer 1936: 94):

I find it impossible to deny that Prospero is, to some extent, an imaginative paradigm of Shakespeare himself in his function as poet; and that he does in part embody Shakespeare's self-awareness at the conclusion of his poetic career. To this conclusion I am forced by many considerations. The simplest and weightiest of them all is this. That there is a final period in Shakespeare's work, which exists in reality and is as subtly homogeneous as a living thing, is to me indubitable. It is equally certain that *The Tempest* is, artistically, imaginatively and 'sensationally', the culmination of that period. And, finally, it is certain that Prospero's function in the drama of *The Tempest* is altogether peculiar. He is its prime mover; he governs and directs it from the beginning to the end; he stands clean apart from all Shakespeare's characters in this, or any other period of his work. He is the quintessence, of a quintessence of a quintessence.

This is the reading that poststructuralist critics deconstructed: that *The Tempest*, the supposed last play written exclusively by Shakespeare, is the author's "testament", demonstrated by the content of the epilogue, by Prospero's magnificent, disquieting speech in Act IV and by the extraordinary monologue in Act V (the "this rough magic I here abjure" speech). This was indeed the way these verses of the epilogue (an odd epilogue due to the use of a type of metric line that was most unusual for Shakespeare), recited by Prospero, were interpreted: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's mine own, / Which is most faint. [...] / Now I want / Spirits to enforce, art to enchant; / And my ending is despair" (epilogue, 1-3, 13-15).⁶ In this epilogue, Prospero paradoxically finds himself in a position of slavery: of submission to a superior power, the audience, to whom he appeals for his freedom. While the main actor addressing the public to solicit applause was certainly a theatrical convention of the era, the impression in *The Tempest* is that when Prospero does so he is still in character: in other words, it is not so much the actor but Prospero himself who is talking to the audience. Regarding the speech in Act IV, this is where the game of theatre-within-the-theatre seems to start, and so in this moment it is easy to understand Prospero, if one so wishes, as Shakespeare himself: "Our revels now are ended. These our actors, / As I foretold you, were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air" (IV, i, 148-150). Moreover, and again if there is the will to do so, it is even

5 In Smith 2019, we can read: "Key to this association is the insistent idea that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's last play. The evidence here, as elsewhere in Shakespeare's career, is patchy. Although it definitely dates from towards the end of Shakespeare's active theatrical work in London, there is no definitive external evidence to confirm that *The Tempest*, written and performed in 1610-11, is Shakespeare's final play. We can't completely guarantee its place amid the other late plays *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, either of which could be later. It is because we want the play's closing movement to read as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage that we place *The Tempest* at the end of Shakespeare's career, and then we use that position to affirm that the play must dramatize Shakespeare's own feelings at the end of his career" (Smith 2019: 306).

6 For all the textual quotations of *The Tempest*, I used Greenblatt 2016.

easier to read the monologue in Act V (the famous monologue that begins “Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves”) as Shakespeare bidding farewell to his career: “But this rough magic / I here abjure [...] / I’ll break my staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I’ll drown my book” (V, I, 50-51, 54-57). In line with the classic reading, what we are ultimately witnessing is a self-referenced play, a play-epigraph of Shakespeare’s career as an actor, director, playwright and theatre businessman. It may go without saying that despite its “romantic attraction” this reading is too simple and above all commits the (romantic) error of a criticism that bases its thesis on the playwright’s biography. Obviously this does not deny the evidence that the texture, thematic networks and certain characters and speeches in *The Tempest* make this a very self-referenced play that oozes awareness (a very baroque awareness) of its condition as a theatre play.

The break with the classic reading of the play that radiated from the heart of radical, critical positions that has become known generically as poststructuralist thought⁷ began, naturally, in postcolonial theory. There are two pioneering texts of this approach. First, in 1968 the communist poet Aimé Césaire (born in Martinique, then a French colony, in 1913) re-wrote the play from the point of view of Caliban, calling it *Une tempête*, portraying Prospero as little more than a tyrannical slave owner (Césaire 1969). But the text that most influenced this hermeneutic stance after the 1970s was a book called *Psychologie de la colonization*, written in 1950 by Octave Mannoni, a colonial French official, and translated into English for the first time in 1956 with the title of, no less, *Prospero and Caliban* (Mannoni 1950). Mannoni’s book was in fact an anthropological essay exploring French domination in Madagascar, but what is interesting about it is that it proposed the concepts of the “Prospero syndrome” to refer to the neurotic disorder that manifested in the colonialists’ use of brutality, and the “Caliban syndrome” to refer to the submissive, albeit resentful, behaviour of the colonized natives.

From this moment onwards the door was left wide open to establish a reading (or perhaps more accurately a counter-reading of the “classic” reading of the play) that turned the hierarchy of the established order between Prospero and Caliban on its head to appeal to the reader or the spectator to take a sympathetic view and identify with the supposed monster rather than the magician. This is a tendency that has abounded in the critical biography of *The Tempest*,⁸ and one that has obviously had a decisive influence on various theatre productions of the play. In this reading, Prospero would become a tyrant who has stolen the island from its legitimate owner Caliban, for the purpose of exploiting him;

7 The contributions of poststructuralist thought to *The Tempest* have been very carefully detailed in a book written, curiously, not in the Anglo-Saxon world, but in the Spanish one: *‘The Tempest’ en el paradigma posmoderno* (Muñoz Valdivieso 1999). The majority of the readings included in it correspond to postcolonial and psychoanalytical theories, and to a lesser degree to feminist literary theory.

8 Among the most influential works on the origins of the postcolonial reading are Fiedler 1972, Greenblatt 1976, Brown 1985 and Barker & Hulme 1985. To these, many other more recent readings with new details can be added, among which the most important are Wylie 2000, DeCoursey 2003, Singh & Shahani 2010, Borlik 2013 and Lahiri 2015. Especially original was a contribution by J. Brotton (1998), who pointed out that postcolonial readings of the work mainly focused on America, the ‘New World’, although Prospero cannot be the British imperialist of the 19th century: the play shows us “the belatedness and subsequent subordination of English forays into the Mediterranean, and not the rise of English colonialism” (37).

passing over, of course, the fact that neither was Caliban a true aboriginal of the island, which had been deserted prior to his mother, the witch Sycorax, arriving there having been banished from Argel, just as Prospero had been banished from Milan. Thus, *The Tempest* that Shakespeare wrote would be reduced to an acritical representation, and in the worst-case scenario, accomplice to Europeans' exploitation of the New World. Shakespeare has been accused of providing a Eurocentric vision of colonization in the play, rather oblivious to the fact that any European from the beginning of the seventeenth century could hardly have done otherwise. What is more, Shakespeare also gives Caliban a voice, ascribing this monster some of the best speeches in the play, such as the one that begins "Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises" (III, ii, 128); without forgetting that, as we will see later, a very different perspective of the primitive ideal is given through Gonzalo.

Whatever the case may be, it must be borne in mind that the evolution of the postcolonial reading of *The Tempest* has also led to Shakespeare being seen as quite the opposite; a visionary of the anti-colonial struggle.⁹ Ania Loomba (1989) discussed the ideological appropriations of the play, often contradictory, by postcolonialist thought, and asserted that "the history of *The Tempest*, therefore, clearly reveals a contest over textual truth and value, and exposes dominant Shakespearian criticism as part of that struggle rather than the guardian of some irrefutable core of meaning" (145). And, some years later, she wrote: "The Tempest, for example, has been staged, interpreted and appropriated as a romance that has nothing to do with colonialism, as an imperial fable depicting the victory of the white man's knowledge over both nature and the savage, and as an anti-colonial text that depicts the struggle of the enslaved Caliban" (1998: 74). Sure as we are of the contributions of postcolonial theory, however these contributions also correspond to already 'classic' readings of the play, readings that somehow form part of our background. What I intend here is to put these readings aside in order to focus on another aspect of *The Tempest*, which is the analysis of characters, to finally offer a reading tending to political implications. For instance, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of any interpretation of *The Tempest* based on postcolonial theory must spring from an analysis of Caliban, and the possibilities for interpretation offered by this singular character are so wide that they can be entirely contrary.

Starting with Caliban, we do not know for certain whether he is an animal, a person, a demon, or a mixture of different things, among other possibilities. The other characters tend to refer to him as "monster", and throughout history he has come on stage in multiple guises: as an amphibian (we know that his father was a marine creature), a snail, a species of ape, a gorilla, a prehistoric man, a primitive native and a Neanderthal (the latter an oft-chosen alternative after Darwin's postulates were accepted), to name just a few.¹⁰ Ultimately, Shakespeare created a being that does not exist in the natural world, as John Dryden (in

9 This critical dichotomy has recently been brought to the attention of Marwan Harb Alqaryouti and Hanita Hanim Ismail who, after systematizing the bases of the dichotomic discourse of colonialism, conclude that "Shakespeare is ahead of his time to introduce the self-other dichotomy through two opposite characters; Prospero and Caliban, and to outlook the dangers of such rift. This reveals that Shakespeare's portrayal is not a colonial one as much as it is anti-colonial or critical of colonialism because the binary opposition that he presents through these two characters makes the atrocities of colonialism crystal clear" (Harb Alqaryouti & Hanim Ismail 2018: 143). For the evolution of the discourse of colonialism applied to *The Tempest*, see Brown.

10 About the passionate question of the stage representation of Caliban, Griffiths 1983 is essential reading.

Palmer 1991: 30) pointed out as early as 1679. Right from the start, the character of Caliban has held a powerful fascination for reader and spectators. In the nineteenth century, critics such as Coleridge and Hazlitt were the first to alter the traditional perception of Caliban as a savage, pointing out his positive traits like his nobility and his talent for imagination. This was made possible because Caliban has a much more complex character than first impressions belie: it is as simplifying to understand him as an evil, unscrupulous individual as it is to see him as a hero of anti-colonialism.¹¹ Of course, he had some obvious defects: according to Prospero, he is ungrateful; he is rude and gruff; he is violent, as he shows when he tries to rape Miranda, and is later unrepentant; he is a coward, as he demonstrates in the way he tries to want Stefano to kill Prospero;¹² he can be stupid, and his subjection to “king” Stefano is pathetic, as Trinculo points out. But he also has some virtues that we can implicitly acknowledge: he has a certain ingenuity, which can be seen in his relationship with Stefano; he is clever enough to have been cultured; compared with the vulgar Stefano and Trinculo, he is not only eloquent but he sometimes speaks in verse; and it must be said that he retains a certain dignity through refusing to renounce his freedom.

Caliban's complex nature facilitates the various analogies that are often made with other characters in the play, some of which are rather surprising: a/ an analogy with Prospero, because aside from the relationship they have, Prospero is for Caliban what Antonio was for Prospero – a usurper; b/ paradoxically, Caliban's striving for power on the island makes him similar to Antonio, the usurper, and in fact like Antonio he wants to kill Prospero; c/ he is the opposite to Ariel (air and fire) with the earth and water signs (explicit dualities in the play), and he is also a deformed mirror image of Ariel because like him he aspires to freedom, although Ariel submits to Prospero with a certain relish, while Caliban steadfastly repudiates his authority; d/ he also has a parallel with Miranda: Prospero teaches Miranda many things, including language, so both of them are beings for whom education, despite living on the island, has been a basic element; e/ there is also an analogy with Ferdinand: apart from the fact that both characters are introduced to us hauling wood on Prospero's orders, the two also want to take Miranda's virginity, although Ferdinand's love is pure and “matrimonial”, while Caliban would be satisfied overrunning the island with little ‘Calibans’ (I, ii, 348-350); and f/ the ambivalence of this character is clear when the same gesture is both noble and pathetic: we know he showed Prospero the whole island, and now he is willing to do the same with the drunken “king” Stefano.

Caliban is undoubtedly one of the most strange and original characters in Shakespeare's dramaturgy, and a true dramatic prodigy. It is not surprising that he is the key element underpinning postcolonial readings, even though it is likely that the New World was of little interest to Shakespeare compared with how important the old world was to him with its interminable struggles for political power. Whatever the case may be, it does not seem fair to lay the blame on Shakespeare for nineteenth century British imperialism, as Jonathan Bate, who has investigated Shakespeare's rise as the English national poet (1997: 187-216),

11 About the complexity of the character of Caliban, Lupton 2000 is highly recommended. He has recently been extensively analysed as an exemplary case of “Shakespeare's extreme”, Heffernan 2015.

12 Contrarily, Wystan Hugh Auden sees Caliban as quite a strong character, an opinion expressed in his original, provocative reading of the play contained in *Lectures on Shakespeare* (Auden 1947).

ironically claimed. Postcolonial reading has, nonetheless, had a huge influence on stagings of *The Tempest* in the last forty years, and sometimes at the hands of outstanding creators. The most famous of these stagings is one by Peter Brook, in which Caliban was a kind of heroic man from Java, a pre-historical man who effectively raped Miranda and ended up ruling the island after triumphantly beating Prospero to death.¹³

Perhaps not as influential, but nonetheless no less creditable, is another poststructuralist interpretation of *The Tempest* based on the postulates of psychoanalysis, focusing, as would be expected, on the character of Prospero. This hermeneutic stance is, in fact, older than postcolonialism, evidence for which can be found in the critical bibliography of the 1940s, and reaching as far as the 1990s.¹⁴ In general terms, this line of thought tends to read Prospero as basically a jealous father who has a suspected oedipal relationship with Miranda, understood thus as a substitute figure for the mother. This would explain, then, why Prospero places obstacles in the way of the love between Ferdinand and Miranda; and the fact that he finally gives Ferdinand his daughter's hand could be interpreted as a sign of healing. (Obviously, this reading too easily ignores the fact that the love match between Ferdinand and Miranda is conceived and designed by Prospero in the first place.) To this effect, the play as a whole can be interpreted as a metaphor for the liberation of Prospero's mind, which in the end achieves a positive individuation. Within this framework, both Ariel and Caliban would be projections of unconscious aspects of Prospero's psyche (the *ego*): Ariel would represent sublimation (the *superego*) and Caliban the instinct of regression (the *id*). Curiously, in an implicit way this was clearly the meaning conveyed in a film based on the plot and characters in *The Tempest*, called *Forbidden Planet*, a 1956 science fiction film directed by Fred M. Wilcox, which has become a cult work for fans of the genre, where there is a type of Prospero called Dr. Morbius who unconsciously generates a mysterious, malign force (the correlate of Caliban) who ends up destroying him.¹⁵

As already pointed out, the psychoanalytical readings have necessarily focused on Prospero, and in fact the importance of this character makes him the undoubted protagonist of the play: to a great degree, Prospero is *The Tempest*. If Caliban displays different facets

13 The same Peter Brook put on another production of the play in Paris in 1990, which aimed to radically distance itself from the postcolonial reading that he himself had propagated, opting to make Prospero and Ariel black, Miranda Indian and Gonzalo Japanese, making Caliban the only white man; a supposedly enormous irony.

14 Among the most well-known and influential contributions we can mention Abenheimer 1946, Holland 1964, Sundelson 1980, Nevo 1987 and Sokol 1993.

15 *Forbidden Planet* is certainly an interesting production, but at the same time it is significant that, in fact, all the cinema versions of *The Tempest* are odd, strange, even really weird, and always verging on psychoanalytical reading; this is true of Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*, a 1979 British film with a punk setting, and also of the extremely interesting, controversial version by Peter Greenaway, *Prospero's Books* (1991), a postmodern pastiche with the great John Gielgud in the leading role. Another very odd one is a *derivative* very divorced from Shakespeare's text, nonetheless called *Tempest*, directed by Paul Mazursky in 1982. Most cinematographic versions of *The Tempest* (with the exception, perhaps, of Julie Taymor's in 2010), be they faithful to Shakespeare's text or not, are variously successful authentic recreations whose authors have taken the original work as little more than a starting point. And it is unsurprising that they do so: unlike so many of Shakespeare's plays, which are "easily" adaptable to the cinema, *The Tempest*, with its inane plot and fantastical imaginary, poses enormous problems for cinema as the art media. In fact, the strangeness of the play has also fostered the writing of other literary recreations, such as the admirable *The Sea and the Mirror* by W.H. Auden, written between 1942 and 1944 (Auden 1944).

that make him a complex figure, then this is even more true of Prospero. The complexity of the protagonist comes from the ambivalence we, as readers and spectators, feel for him: on the one hand, he is the character with whom we identify most easily from the moment we learn that he is the victim of a betrayal, and moreover it is he who narrates his past history (I, ii); on the other hand, we keep our distance from him because of his tyrannical methods, especially when they are in no way justified, as in his attitude towards Ferdinand. He can be seen as haughty and arrogant, and he is bad-tempered not only with Caliban, but also with Miranda and Ariel: the tiniest insinuation from Ariel about his desire for freedom sparks in Prospero an enormous attack of rage, leading him to torture his servant while reminding him of his past and threatening him (I, ii). It seems that after the decadent way in which he governed Milan, on the island Prospero has an imperious need to wield his power in an authoritarian, despotic manner. In the last two acts, on the other hand, he is more agreeable: he forgives his enemies, gives Ariel and Caliban their freedom, and renounces the worldly power of Milan.

Apart from his circumstance as protagonist of the play, Prospero is the author of the entire plot, the focal point from where the story develops. Everything that happens he himself has prepared and designed, almost as if it were a game of chess, or as a playwright would write a play, creating the story with the live material he has at hand and taking it to a denouement that fits with his idea of justice. Gonzalo's affirmation at the end of the play, according to which the nobles have finally found themselves - "no man was his own" (V, i, 213) - can be understood in the sense that in fact all the world was Prospero's, all the world was a piece on the chess board provided by Prospero. His final magnanimousness seems to signify that he has renounced the absolute exercise of power, the need to control everything, to rule over everyone else.

Given the foregoing, the name Shakespeare chose for his main character is somewhat curious: Prospero, meaning 'fortunate', 'lucky', 'happy'. Was he being ironic? Harold Bloom (1998: 667-671) interprets it so, suggesting that Shakespeare wanted to portray an anti-Faustian character (Prospero is a name meaning the same as Faust in its etymology), making *The Tempest* a kind of response, or a parody, of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Whether it was intentional or not on Shakespeare's part (probably the latter, as when he wrote *The Tempest* Marlowe had been dead for years and his shadow extinguished), what is certain is that there is an obvious parallel between Prospero and Faust: like Faust, he is a sage, a learned man whose wisdom and erudition is largely based on an understanding of magic. It must be remembered that the people of that era were strongly affected by magic: King James I was hugely interested in the subject of witches. The line between the erudite man and the magician was not a clearly defined one, as illustrated by Dr. John Dee who, according to some Shakespearean scholars (and since Frances A. Yates suggested this in 1975), was the person who inspired Shakespeare to create his Prospero.¹⁶

16 John Dee was a famous mathematician and geographer, a renowned scientist who, nonetheless, died in disgrace (in 1608, so three years before *The Tempest* first came out) in the midst of great scandal because he was said to be a magician with supernatural powers: it was even said that he practiced black magic. Obviously, for contemporary audiences, Prospero's declaration that he had brought the dead back to life ("Graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth / By my so potent art", V, i, 48-50) must have been very disconcerting, as it would have been associated with witchcraft and sorcery, and ultimately black magic.

Feminist literary theory has also approached *The Tempest*, despite this play never having been a strong candidate among Shakespeare's corpus for the analysis of feminist thought.¹⁷ In fact, it is precisely the lack of female representation in the play, apart from Miranda, that has attracted most attention from feminist thought. The only supposedly "positive" female representative, for being an alternative to the classic notion of womanhood and for not being submissive, is Caliban's mother, the witch Sycorax, who is an absent character as is Ferdinand's sister, Claribel, and Miranda's mother (it can be deduced that she died during childbirth), who is mentioned just once and whom we know nothing about apart from the fact that, according to Prospero, she was a virtuous woman. The most interesting aspect of the play for feminists is the juxtaposition between Miranda and Sycorax: the goddess and the witch, the virgin and the prostitute, the representation of subjugation to the patriarchal order and uprising against it.¹⁸ Many feminist readings of the play take Miranda to be a passive object of the patriarchal (and colonial¹⁹) society, who passes from father to husband; to this effect, Prospero's justification in having done everything for the good of his daughter ("I have done nothing but in care of thee— / Of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter—who / Art ignorant of what thou art, naught knowing / Of whence I am", I,ii, 16-19) can be taken as evidence of the hypocrisy of this society. In any case, it must be said that references to chastity and lust are frequent in the play right from the beginning, creating a thematic context in the form of a network that is very usual in Shakespeare.

It would not go amiss to mention a couple of details about Miranda so as not to oversimplify her character, which is certainly less complex than Caliban's and Prospero's but does have more than one facet. Miranda is just fifteen years old, but she is already a warm-hearted heroine full of compassion for others, as is evident from her first appearance where she laments the supposed victims of the storm. She is obviously an ingenuous, passive person, subject to male authority, as was usual for a woman in her circumstances. Nonetheless, she has some hidden traits that make her a more interesting person than a purely passive, subjected object. First, she is genuinely outraged by Caliban, and she fully expresses her rage (I, ii). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even a good part of the twentieth century, the words Miranda speaks to Caliban ("Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of all ill", I, ii, 350-352) were attributed to Prospero in different editions and representations of the play, because it did not seem plausible that such a tough response could be uttered by such a good girl as Miranda. The amendment to Shakespeare, made by the editor Lewis Theobald, however, was unnecessary (in the First Folio, it is quite clear that it is Miranda who replies): in this moment, Miranda is speaking on behalf of her father, and in so doing reveals a less sweet facet of her personality than we are used to. Second, Miranda comes across as a passionate girl; she falls in love instantly with Ferdinand, offers herself to him in marriage and is in no two minds about fighting for her love to the point of almost questioning paternal authority. And third, it is

17 The works of Leininger 1980, Loomba 1989, Thompson 1995 and Singh 1996 are the most noteworthy among those with this theoretical perspective.

18 See Chiclana 2006 about the supposed positive value of Sycorax and her symbolic contrast with Miranda.

19 "Miranda is the most solitary of Renaissance woman protagonists, and moves on an exclusively male stage. [...] She indicates the apparent exclusion of women from the colonial arena" (Loomba 1989: 153).

precisely her ingenuity that makes her sexuality, her erotic desire for Ferdinand, so explicit with surprising naturalness (III, i) and without the restraints imposed by civilization. This is to be expected: it is difficult to imagine Prospero giving his daughter sex education.

3 “...SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON”

Poststructuralist theories evidence the enormous hermeneutic density of *The Tempest*, despite its appearance of banality: far from being banal, the play is so complex that it allows for extremely diverse readings. The play “... constitutes an invitation to every reader, actor, director and designer to imagine for themselves how the play might be performed, and it allows an almost infinite number of legitimate responses to that invitation”, writes Rex Gibson (2004: 35), quite rightly. Historically, above all in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the play often “invited” great scenic effects, and later during the twentieth century, it “invited” scene creators to spark the imagination in as many ways as possible. But what is surprising, as we just pointed out, is that this complexity and versatility is based on an apparent banality: there is no intricate plot or great design in the dramatic action, the play in fact having very little action and a plot that barely progresses. Perhaps this is what fascinates the contemporary world: the implicit “promise” of hermeneutic density hidden beneath a banal appearance. Hence, this density must be analysed in an attempt to deconstruct the network of themes and motivations woven into the play. In this way, we can approach the hypothesis put forward in this article.

If we review the different lines of action in *The Tempest* in an orderly fashion, we realise immediately that not only do they amount to very little as a whole, but they are not expected to create true dramatic tension among the audience. Generally speaking, these plot lines are: a/ the love and promise of matrimony between Miranda and Ferdinand (although the union is a foregone conclusion right from the beginning as we know that the obstacles Prospero places in their way are fictitious); b/ Sebastian and Antonio’s attempts to kill Alonso (although this tension is resolved in the middle of the scene and then disappears without a trace); c/ the grotesque trio’s conspiracy against Prospero (even though this issue is presented to the audience as an attempt that has no chance of succeeding because it is controlled by Prospero through Ariel); d/ Prospero’s preparations for revenge on the usurpers (this seems to be the real dramatic heart of the play, but in the end it comes to nothing); and e/ to add to this, the action is interrupted several times not only by Ariel’s songs but also by the masque with imaginary characters, which takes up an entire scene in Act IV. Very little, then, upon which to structure a truly dramatic plot - at least in the classic way.

Obviously, apart from these lines of action, more relationships are weaved among the characters during the play in the form of a network: and is it here, in the construction of the characters and their relationships, that we approach the main points of interest, which are: a/ the exposure of past events that have affected Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel (I,ii); b/ Prospero’s relationship with Ariel; c/ Prospero and Miranda’s relationship with Caliban; d/ Gonzalo’s relationship with the noble usurpers; e/ Alonso’s suffering at the supposed death of his son Ferdinand; f/ the dynamics between the members of the grotesque trio –the

role alcohol plays and his political “programme” for the island-; and g/ the presence of supernatural elements: Prospero’s magic, and Ariel and the other spirits’ activities.

In this network of relationships, the hermeneutic key of the play is undoubtedly what Prospero aims to achieve with his plan. It is quite clear that he has a plan almost from the beginning because he himself refers to it. First, the plan in question obviously has an ultimate goal, which is the restitution of order in Milan disrupted twelve years previously by Antonio’s usurping power with the help of Alonso, and which will be achieved through Miranda and Ferdinand’s union. But second, hanging over this is the question of Prospero’s intentions for the usurpers (Alonso and Sebastian, but especially his brother Antonio), irrespective of what he effectively does at the end of the play, which is pardon them. Did Prospero intend to forgive them right from the start? Or was revenge his intention (probably including murder), and at some point in the proceedings he had a change of heart? This is the great ambiguity of Prospero’s plan that gives rise to the ambiguity in the ultimate meaning of the play.

In effect, the meaning we give the entire story depends on what we understand as Prospero’s principal aim. And on this point we must turn back to the “classic” readings of the play. Some critics, such as E.M.W. Tillyard (1938), defended that Prospero always intended to pardon them, usually citing the magician’s refusal to allow Sebastian and Antonio to kill Alonso as proof. This argument is nonetheless weak, as it could be counter-argued that Prospero wanted to exact revenge himself, and not only on Alonso but also and especially on his brother Antonio; and what is more, he must save Gonzalo from this assassination attempt. The most usual readings, to which we must subscribe to heighten the play’s dramatic intensity, take the opposite stance: Prospero changes his original intention from revenge to forgiveness. This turnabout must occur at some point in the plot, begging the question as to when - and this matter is in no way unessential to understanding *The Tempest*, as we will see soon.

The most classic reading of the play is that it is a kind of tale, a fable of compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. To this effect, it has even been claimed that *The Tempest* is the play that upholds the most Christian ideals in the entire Shakespeare corpus,²⁰ a most questionable stance given that at the end of the play neither Antonio nor Sebastian seem particularly repentant of the act of usurping power twelve years previously or the attempt to murder Alonso and Gonzalo just a few hours before (although Alonso does); and, as is well known, in the doctrine of the Christian faith repentance is a necessary condition of forgiveness. Certainly Antonio’s silence in the last act, where he only makes a couple of utterances, is a source of enormous ambiguity, and the situation becomes even more confusing if we consider that Antonio and Sebastian’s agitated state caused by Ariel’s appearance as a harpy (III, iii) is interpreted by Gonzalo as a sign of guilt. After all is said and done, these are all richly ambiguous gifts from Shakespeare to modern-day creators and interpreters.

20 The idea comes from way back, but more recently it has been claimed that “a careful study of *The Tempest* will reveal that Luther’s ‘gospel for the masses’, and particularly Luther’s understanding of Christian redemption, are worked out within the conflict of the play”, in a daring comparison between Prospero’s conflict and the Lutheran revolution (Norton 2009). This idea, however, is highly controversial: one only has to consider the doubts generated from a Christian reading in other critics, such as Sutton 2008.

A similarly Christian analysis of *The Tempest* was made by the critic Northrop Frye (1959), who upheld the purifying reconciliation of the characters through suffering at the end of the play as the triumph of regenerative forces. Frank Kermode (1954) did not stray far from this line in his introduction to the Arden edition, highlighting the need to frame the play within the humanistic context of the sixteenth century and maintaining that the central theme of the play is the duality nature versus nurture; from this point of view Prospero's project, the maximum expression of nurture in the play, suggests the triumph of civilization over nature, represented mainly by Caliban.²¹ In effect, the notion of "primitivism" forms an entire thematic network in the play, and is certainly one of the most important. Aside from Caliban, primitivist thought is represented particularly in Gonzalo's speech (II, i), and this position (a political position after all: that of Thomas More's *Utopia*, and very *avant la lettre*, that of romantic socialism, and even that of anarchist ideology) would be counteracted by Prospero's position, the man from civilization who rules over the elements and live beings of nature with his iron rod and, let us not forget, his books: books that are magic, but are also culture. In fact, the primitivist state was the situation the island was in before Prospero and Miranda landed there; a situation which, far from being perfect, was degrading and enslaving for Ariel. It is also very significant that among the things that these two characters reproach Caliban for (I, ii), one of the most repeated is that they taught him to speak (in other words, they "civilised", humanised him, which rather than being grateful for he reproaches them for).²² In this passage, Caliban proclaims himself the mouthpiece of the marvels of natural primitivism; and although Shakespeare, as usual, gives voice to everyone, it is not difficult to detect a certain irony on the playwright's part in relation to this ideology.

This irony becomes sarcasm in the episode when Gonzalo makes his primitivist speech (II,i), and in this case it is delivered by Antonio and Sebastian. Do we need to point out that here Shakespeare feels closer to the two evil characters than the benevolent (and annoying) Gonzalo? Gonzalo represents the civilised man who, nonetheless, yearns for a remote, improbable past when supposed natural human goodness blended perfectly with a perfect nature. Even so, Gonzalo's first appearance in the play remains odd: in the first scene he comes across as a hard, even cruel man with his subordinates such as the boatswain, and it is not until afterwards that we discover that he is in fact much more agreeable than first thought. After Prospero's, his is the most complex character in the play: he is the one who out of compassion saves Prospero and his daughter, and he even lends him his books. Prospero speaks of him as a good man; he has an innate ability to

21 Nonetheless, from a position close to postcolonial theory, Ortega 2004, among others, has reclaimed the role of the "good savage" produced by a nature close to Montaigne's ideal as opposed to the image of the "savage monster".

22 The question of faculty and use of language is obviously linked to the subject of primitivism. In *The Tempest*, this is a fundamental issue: not only is there the insistence that Caliban's "culturalization" was mainly linguistic (what Caliban scorns as a sign of progress that has made him unhappy), but that, when Ferdinand meets Miranda, he exclaims "My language? Heavens!" (I, ii, 427), a visualization of the awareness of linguistic diversity which is not always patent in the Shakespeare corpus. In effect, the characters in Shakespeare's plays often come into contact with other cultures and generally have no problems with understanding each other, and in fact do not even mention the matter. There are some exceptions, such as the comic scene in *Henry V*, where the French princess Katherine is studying English because she wants to marry king Henry.

talk nonsense and the vacuousness of his discourse is noted by Sebastian and Antonio; and although these two consider him to be an old idiot he is, nonetheless, clever enough to realise that they are making fun of him and at the same time sensible enough not to care (II, ii). Effectively, Antonio and Sebastian are sarcastic about Gonzalo's primitivist ideal because in the end they too, like Prospero, represent the zenith of civilisation, although unlike the magician they show to us its darker side. It is most difficult to believe in a Shakespeare who trusts in the natural goodness of human beings and given to expounding the thesis that would later be proclaimed by the Rousseauians, although it could be argued, as did Wang Zhongxiang (Wang 2008) for example, that the play has a "symbolic value" that reveals "a 'dark green road' leading to a universal harmony of the human world". But no, what *The Tempest* in fact does is systematically dismantle primitivist political thought, exposing civilisation as an ulterior, inevitable arena, for better (Prospero) or for worse (Antonio and Sebastian). As happens throughout the length and breadth of Shakespeare's work, isn't *The Tempest* ultimately analysing the relentless political organization and the will to power, too?

The topic represented by the pun nature/nurture is central to *The Tempest*, but around this main axis there is a finely woven network of all the other themes in the play. *The Tempest*, as previously pointed out, is a play with practically no dramatic structure or progression, and to this effect it can be seen as simply a big joke, an enormous joke – or, alternatively, a game full of postmodern elements and techniques (Payyam Abbasi 2014). This does not, however, prevent a rich fabric of topics from being woven, superimposed one upon the other, conferring some extraordinary hermeneutic possibilities on the play, as we are well aware, once they are developed by the magnificent characterisation of the characters. Let us list the main of these topics.

First, there is a thematic strand that is essential to the play: illusion and magic.²³ It is not only the fact that Prospero is a musician and Ariel the figurehead of a band of magic spirits, but it is also that on an island full of fantastical visual and auditory elements²⁴ many erroneous beliefs about what is real are formed, which consequently invites a profound reflection on unreality: a/ Miranda, before I,ii, knew nothing about her past, and when Prospero tells her about it she even starts to doubt whether Prospero really is her father; b/ when they meet, Ferdinand and Miranda recognize each other as gods and not humans (I, ii), despite this being due to the nature of their love, forged in the context of courtly love; c/ in his first appearance, Stefano takes Caliban and Trinculo to be a horrible, singular creature (the hilarious scene II, ii); d/ Caliban takes Stefano to be a god because he has alcohol; e/ Alonso and the other nobles believe that Ferdinand is dead; f/ Ferdinand too believes his father has died, and therefore that he is the new king of Naples; g/ Ariel transforms and appears in different forms (as a harpy, for example); and h/ Prospero falsely accuses Ferdinand of being a traitor, turning him into his slave.

23 Regarding the theme of magic in *The Tempest* and its relationship with the science of the era, Carlson 2015 is essential reading.

24 Sounds and music are an essential part of the setting, or the soundtrack, of the play: in a very suggestive article, Neill 2008 explains how music and noise alternates throughout the play, creating a pattern which contributes to its dramatic meaning.

The fragile condition of reality through which unreality slips away takes us to another enormously important theme in *The Tempest*, which is that of the perception of humanity itself. *The Tempest* is, in effect, a play that epitomises one of Shakespeare's enigmas throughout his plays: the question of the very essence of the human condition. These are some of the manifestations of this question, which pervades the entire play: a/ Ferdinand and Miranda do not at first recognise each other as humans (I,ii); b/ Alonso, on seeing Miranda at the end of the play, asks Ferdinand if the young woman is a deity or is human (V,i); c/ Miranda explicitly states what humanity should be like in a sublime moment when, on coming upon the nobles, she exclaims, "How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is!" (V, i, 181-182), an utterance that Prospero immediately responds to with irony; d/ there are serious doubts as to whether Caliban is human; e/ throughout the play, human beings are mixed with spirits (especially Ariel, an "airy" spirit); f/ the representation of humanity includes almost demonic (Sebastian, and especially Antonio) and absolutely ridiculous characters (Trinculo, and especially Stefano); and g/ Prospero, in the famous speech in Act IV, even says that human matter is the same as the matter of dreams: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV, i, 156-158).

Of course, another major theme is the idea of justice, or rather the display of unjust situations and the need for vengeance or atonement. The main threads of this topic are: a/ the entire, scanty plot of the play is structured precisely on the committing of an act of injustice (the usurpation of Prospero's power in Milan) and the need to atone for this injustice; b/ the introduction of a character, Prospero, who rules the lives of the others on the island without restrictions is also a sign that justice has been abolished, or in any case that the idea of justice that can be taken from the play is mediated by a very subjective perspective, which is that of its protagonist; c/ what has happened to Caliban is manifestly unjust, converted into a slave under Prospero's command; d/ Ariel's enslavement is likewise unjust, despite its victim being more accepting of his situation; e/ the torture that Sycorax subjected Ariel to before Prospero reached the island was abjectly unfair; and f/ injustice is also the basis of Prospero's treatment of Ferdinand, falsely accusing him (while fully aware that it was not true) of treachery.

Betrayal, very akin to the theme of injustice, is another of the leading subject matter in *The Tempest*. There are several acts of betrayal, five to be precise, narrated in the play: Antonio and Alonso's betrayal of Prospero (outside the time scale of the plot); Sebastian's attempted betrayal of Alonso, incited by Antonio (II,i); Caliban's attempted betrayal of Prospero with the help of Stefano and, more unwillingly, of Trinculo; Caliban's betrayal of Prospero (also outside the timeline of the plot) when he tries to rape Miranda (an event narrated in I,ii); and Prospero's false accusation that Ferdinand has committed a betrayal. All in all, there are three mirrored conspiracies, something very characteristic of *The Tempest*; as Marjorie Garber said in a very stimulating approach to the play, it "is structured like a hall of mirrors, a palimpsest, or a mise en abyme" (2005: 857). The mirrors clearly distort the outlines of all three conspiracies, which have in common the ultimate aim of usurping political power: Antonio and Alonso's conspiracy against Prospero (a successful attempt by Antonio to govern Milan); Sebastian and Antonio's conspiracy against Alonso on the island (a conspiracy frustrated by Ariel's intervention); and Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo's

conspiracy against Prospero, which also takes place on the island and is likewise frustrated, and is as grotesque as the three characters who plotted it.

There is yet another major, but less evident and perhaps less decisive, theme in the play. In short, it is the topic of love, developed by Shakespeare so many times and in so many ways and with so many different hues in previous plays, and which here is a type of cushion upon which the main thematic motives rest. In effect, love, and the possibility of the salvation of human beings through the conquest and practice of authentic love, also weaves the ties that bind the characters. These are the main threads of this theme: a/ the pure love between Miranda and Ferdinand, a love at first sight and an immaculate love (and Prospero warns Ferdinand that it has to be so, in IV, i), which would end in marriage; b/ the need Ariel feels for his master, Prospero, to love him; c/ Prospero's declaration of profound, unconditional love for Miranda (I, ii); d/ Gonzalo's act of love towards Prospero when he saved his life, an event recounted by Prospero himself in I,ii; and e/ Prospero's final act of forgiveness of Antonio, which can also be interpreted as an act of brotherly love. In contrast, Antonio's defining characteristic is his entire lack of loving feeling, empathy, compassion and tenderness; thus, his cruel, insensitive nature, a wickedness that verges on the diabolical.

Among all the interwoven links around the theme of love, the most surprising is Ariel's need for Prospero's affection, his need to be loved by him. Despite being one of the protagonists of the play, and without doubt one of Shakespeare's most iconic figures, we know little about Ariel: he is simply a spirit and, even though he is an enormously provocative figure, he is deprived of interiority. Just two things give his character dimension: his desire for freedom and his affection for Prospero, which is rather curious in a being that is nothing more than "air". The sexual relationship with Prospero that some stagings of the play have established is thus not only rather forced, but difficult to reconcile with any global meaning one might give the play. In any case, Ariel's dramatic importance lies in the facts that it is he who sets the plot in motion, always on Prospero's orders. To this effect, he acts as one of the driving forces of the story.

4 "...LET YOUR INDULGENCE SET ME FREE"

In light of all the foregoing, nobody could be surprised that *The Tempest* has roused so much hermeneutic interest over history, and even less so that over the last forty years it has generated multiple readings, as we have seen, through the lens of poststructuralist thought. Moreover, and despite this wide range of readings, the probably generalised understanding among critics and readers is that *The Tempest* is a play that not only talks to and about our times, but also to and about future times. Ultimately, a classic, and Shakespeare among them, is a work that talks to us "through the eras", though not always to say the same things, of course. And as sometimes happens with classics, and in particular with Shakespeare, one often has the feeling that the time has not yet come for it be understood completely: that society, culture, ideology and humanity still have to evolve that little bit more for the text to be fully understood. This seems to be particularly the case with *The Tempest*; a warning to us that any current interpretation of the play is only provisional, transitory. Despite this, from all the thematic threads we have addressed here, a play is woven that is an allegory about the human condition, and it is in this hermeneutic direction that we can propose a

reading that may enrich the wide range of possible interpretations of the play that spring from its ambiguity and richness of meanings; a reading that may adequately explain many of the aspects we have addressed throughout this article.

This reading must especially provide a convincing argument for a question we posed at the beginning, and which we have identified as a hermeneutic key of the play: why does Prospero's plan change from revenge to forgiveness, and when exactly does this dramatic turnabout occur? This question is far from insubstantial; it is crucial. Rex Gibson (2004: 51) believes that Prospero changes his mind at the moment when Ariel says that if he were human he would forgive the traitors, and Prospero replies: "Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling / Of their afflictions, and shall not myself- / One of their kind, that relish all as sharply / Passion as they-be kindlier moved than thou art?" (V, i, 21-24). In this thesis, it is then that Prospero takes the last step towards the "full humanity" required to commit such an act of compassion. Prospero thus learns from his servant Ariel. This reading, however, is not very solidly based in terms of dramatic verisimilitude: it would be almost intolerable that Prospero should change his entire plan, a plan carefully thought out right from the very beginning, just because of an utterance from Ariel. The moment in question is at the beginning of the last act of the play, which functions as an anti-climax: the climax occurs, according to Barker & Hulme (1985: 208), in the passage in Act IV when Prospero is possessed by a strange, unexpected fit of rage and makes the speech that begins "...such stuff as dreams are made on...". If we take a closer look, when Prospero speaks to Ariel at the beginning of Act V, it is the first time he has come on stage since the fit of rage. It seems very probably, then, that it is during the time lapse between one passage and the other that Prospero decides to throw aside his plan for revenge and replace it with a different one, forgiveness.

This conclusion is drawn through the reading that can be made of the passage where Prospero comes across as extremely irate, and somehow depressed. It comes immediately after the masque, a break in the dramatic action where we must assume that Prospero is enjoying the show. When it finishes, he remembers the conspiracy organised by Caliban and his accomplices, and it is then that he gives way to a sudden rage and profound sadness at Ferdinand and Miranda's reaction, especially the young woman's, who exclaims, "Never till this day / Saw I him touched with anger so distempered" (IV, i, 144-145). This is one of the moments most open to interpretation in the whole play, and the thesis supported, for example, by Harold Bloom (1998: 679-681), according to which Prospero's rage is directed first at Caliban, for his treachery, and then at himself upon realizing his bedazzlement with the masque has distracted him from the serious matter at hand – escape from the danger of the comic trio's conspiracy–, seems quite unsatisfactory. Can we really believe at any moment during the play that the conspiracy hatched by these three ridiculous characters has seriously had Prospero worried? Isn't it always made quite clear that Prospero, through Ariel, always controls the course of events?

It seems much more likely that Prospero's fit of rage in Act IV is caused by the fact that, after the distraction of the masque, he is forced back to reality, but not the reality of having to deal with Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo's stupid conspiracy, but the reality of having to see through the final phase of his plan: revenge on the noble traitors, and especially on his brother, a revenge that involves his murder. Prospero knows that the time has come to

exercise his most absolute power: and what greater demonstration of power is there than to dispose of others' lives? This exercise of power is repugnant to Prospero. It is so repugnant to him that, logically, he goes into depression and an irrepressible rage. After this scene, as we know, the next time he appears is at the beginning of Act V, talking to Ariel, the decision already having been taken: the repugnance Prospero feels about the deeds he is about to commit has made him abandon his plan for revenge.

Prospero's repugnance is borne of a very obvious fact: the act of vengeance, the exercise of absolute power, goes against his basic nature. Prospero is certainly a tremendously powerful man on the island; he has all the power and he uses and abuses it. But is he happy doing so? Is this his true destiny? We cannot forget that before the betrayal that led to him to being banished from Milan, Prospero was a powerful governor who did not exercise power; he was not interested in doing so, he had left this task in the hands of his brother. This he tells Miranda during the narration of previous events in I, ii, 109-110: "Me, poor man, my library / Was dukedom large enough". If Prospero is exercising absolute, even despotic, power on the island, he is doing so because of the experience he suffered in Milan; but he is not happy doing so, it runs contrary to his deepest inner yearnings. Prospero's life destiny is not the ambition of power, but the desire for freedom: this is why in the end he concedes the power of Milan (and consequently Naples) to the young couple Miranda and Ferdinand, the expression of a new generation who may do things better, more honestly, more humanely than his generation did. Of course, Prospero's change of heart after the masque has crucial political implications. Hence, Prospero's last utterance in the epilogue, and the last line in the play: "Let your indulgence set me free".

Power versus freedom: this is one of, if not *the* great theme of the play—indeed, a political one. As we pointed out at the beginning of this article, to these two must be added another element: submission, slavery, or obedience—as a general term. In effect, power, slavery and freedom not only define some unusually frequent semantic fields in the play, but they are also the structural themes that determine the life position of each of the characters. And this is so right from the beginning, right from the shipwreck, a scene in which the roleplay of power foreshadows everything that will come later. From the very beginning, all the characters in *The Tempest* form part of an allegorical structure in which one or more of the three structural topics (power, obedience, freedom) determine their past (in other words, their *precedent* status before arriving on the island as a metaphorical space) and their present (their current *status* on the island). And what is more, these three structural elements reveal each character's *purpose*, and what it is that each of them finally achieves, in other words their *destiny*. The following chart may clearly illustrate the point.

Character	Precedent	State	Purpose	Destiny
Prospero	Freedom	Power	Freedom	Freedom
Miranda	Obedience (to Prospero)	Obedience	Obedience (to Ferdinand)	Power
Ferdinand	Obedience (to Alonso)	Obedience	Obedience (to Miranda)	Power
Caliban	Freedom	Obedience	Freedom	Freedom
Ariel	Obedience (to Sycorax)	Obedience	Freedom	Freedom
Alonso	Power	Obedience	Power	Freedom
Gonzalo	Power	Obedience	Freedom	Freedom
Antonio	Power	Obedience	Power	Obedience
Sebastian	Power	Obedience	Power	Obedience
Stefano	Obedience	Obedience	Power	Obedience
Trinculo	Obedience	Obedience	Freedom	Obedience
Boatswain and master	Obedience	Obedience	Power	Obedience

Table 1. Power vs. Freedom

Some aspects of the chart could be discussed in greater detail, of course, but the basic idea can be explained in three points:

- On the island (*state*), all the characters are subject to Prospero's absolute power: they are slaves, whatever their precedent.
- Regarding *precedent*, before he arrived on the island Prospero was the Duke of Milan, but in fact he had all the freedom he wanted (books, his "kingdom"), while Antonio effectively exercised power. Miranda was always the submissive daughter and Ferdinand the submissive son, although he is granted the power his position of prince confers upon him. Caliban enjoyed his natural freedom; Ariel was enslaved by the witch Sycorax. Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio and Sebastian are powerful characters both when Prospero governed Milan and after he was banished. Stefano and Trinculo, and in part the master of the boat and the boatswain, are the representatives of the lower classes, and as such are characters who are forced to submit to power. (It is significant that in the shipwreck scene, the boatswain demands power in the context of his boat.)
- One thing is the life aspiration of each character in relation to the three structural themes (what we have called *purpose*) and something entirely different is what they actually achieve at the end of the play (their *destiny*). Significantly, both Ariel

and Caliban aspire to freedom and they achieve their goal; perhaps ironically, Ferdinand and Miranda, who appear to have been born to be each other's slaves, gain an earthly power they do not express a desire for. Alonso, who had always had a tendency for power, changes his purpose thanks to the moral growth induced by the suffering he has endured at the supposed loss of his son, and the outcome is that he gains his freedom. Gonzalo, the man who makes the play's great primitivist speech, finally gets his freedom, which is linked to Prospero and Alonso renouncing their power, and Miranda and Ferdinand's new kingdom. Antonio and Sebastian, of course, will continue to be powerful men, in line with their natural purposes, but they have lost the power they enjoyed and from now on, ironically, they will be under the authority of the young couple. Needless to say, the lower classes (the crew and especially the servants) will carry on as always, despite Stefano and the boatswain having made their unattainable desire of power quite clear, and Trinculo having revealed his more lucid purpose of freedom.

The crucial thing about this chart is Prospero's purpose and destiny, because these are the cornerstones of the ultimate meaning we can give the play at the heart of this reading. In effect, *The Tempest* appears to explain in an allegorical way that humans tend towards freedom, power or obedience: and this implies – and this is the crux of the matter – that power is not only the flip side of slavery (they are antithetical because they are complementary), but also that the will to power is incompatible with freedom. Thus, the concepts of power and freedom may not be antithetical, but they are the front and reverse side of the same coin: we are either powerful or we are free; one has to make the choice. Hence Prospero's fit of rage in Act IV, when he realises that the extreme exercising of power will deprive him of what he really yearns for, which is freedom. This is why, in short, revenge transforms into forgiveness. Prospero's purpose is not, despite his attitude on the island, power: it is freedom and that is what he achieves in the end: "Let your indulgence set me free". We are either powerful or we are free. We choose. Indeed, a great lesson! And perhaps Shakespeare's last lesson in what may have been his last play; a lesson that humanity must still learn. And perhaps this is why *The Tempest* always gives us the impression that it will not be fully understood until some decades from now –or who knows, some centuries.

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