Transcending Shakespeare from text to screen
Looking at Gender Politics in The Tempest

Paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels-Spaans by Liesbet Bouckaert

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August 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Foremost, I am deeply grateful to my advisor Prof. Sandro Jung for his profoundly interesting lectures that inspired the topic of my thesis. I also thank my advisor for his permission to let me continue my research which I have greatly enjoyed, for his continuous support, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge on the subject.

Furthermore, I would also like to acknowledge with much appreciation the University of Ghent’s library that provided me with an extensive Shakespeare collection that has encouraged and inspired me in all the time of research and writing of this dissertation.

Finally, I have had the support and encouragement of friends and family. In particular, I am grateful to my brother Dieter Bouckaert who provided me with the comfort and motivation I needed to complete this dissertation.
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INTRODUCTION

“It is Shakespeare’s verbal virtuosity and his knowledge and understanding of human nature that make him the greatest dramatist of English literature, that have let his works to survive over decades and centuries until being appraised as classical”(Weiss 13). It is for this reason that so many adapters in the past century have been drawn to adapting these classical works for the contemporary and dominant medium, namely, film. It has become a popular commonplace that had Shakespeare been alive today, he would’ve been a filmmaker (Lanier 61). This is of course hard to image and yet it is surprising how well these sixteenth –and seventeenth century plays translate unto the screen. It is of course never simple to transfer a work of art from one medium to another. It is not a coincidence that the Academy of Motion Pictures annually distributes two separate awards for best original screenplay and best adapted screenplay. It is an art form on its own to be able to transform a classical text unto a new medium. In order to execute this transformation, however, certain necessary liberties are required and this is the source for the current of adaptation criticism today. Shakespeare has become more than a classic, he has become the standard for English greatness and pride. Therefore, every change and alteration to his work is feared and dreaded due to the universal prejudice that no adaptation can or should touch Shakespeare’s virtuous work. On the basis of these two existing tends, namely the belief that Shakespeare’s plays were destined for film and the belief that Shakespeare’s classical work should not be altered in any way, arises the question whether or not Shakespeare’s plays can really be considered as a classic work of art able to transcend media.

While adaptation criticism has always tended to belittle and denigrate adapted works as secondary or derivative, Walter Benjamin seemed to affirm the western tendency to adapt classical works of art when he said that “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories”
In her work *A theory of Adaptation* Linda Hutcheon defended adapted works of art by stating that “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing” (9). Writers haven been adapting, transforming and reinventing classical works for centuries but none was ever so sensitive as the adaptation of a Shakespeare play in the twentieth century. Although not all of the Shakespeare canon has been selected for the screen, out of the 37 plays there have been a few favourites such as *Hamlet* (57 original screen versions, 6 modernised adaptations and 13 parodies), *Romeo and Juliet* (33 original, 8 modernised adaptations and 11 parodies), followed by *Macbeth, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Julius Caesar, Othello* and *King Lear* (Weiss 14-15). Some of these transformations haven been respected and well received, nevertheless, most have been scrutinized into triviality. Nevertheless, Charles Marowitz commented that an adapter should challenge the classical works of art, a director ought to be the person who makes use of mise-en-scène to create an opposition of ideas, past and present: “Without that confrontation, that sense of challenge, true direction cannot take place, for unless the author’s work is engaged on an intellectual level equal to its own, the play is merely transplanted from one medium to another” (6).

Another popular choice for modern adaptation is Shakespeare’s final masterpiece *The Tempest*. Unlike most screen transformations of a Shakespeare play, *The Tempest* has known more innovation and adaptation than any other play. The play is set on a secluded island where Prospero, the exiled duke of Milan, executes with the help of the airy spirit Ariel a plan of vengeance against those who wronged him in order to restore his daughter’s rightful place on the throne. Prospero’s scheme is set in motion through his ‘art’ or his magical capabilities that allow him to create illusions and enforce sleep. For this reason, *The Tempest* has been described as “Shakespeare’s most unrealistic play” (Vaughan and Vaughan 200). During the course of the 20th century there have been several cinematic and countless theatrical
adaptations of the same Shakespearean play. A somewhat surprising fact, considering the moralizing story line and 17th century verse. Nonetheless, *The Tempest* has proved to be an interesting challenge in the eyes of many film directors. The first recorded performance of *The Tempest* took place on 1 November 1611 at the court of King James I, the second recorded performance was also performed at court in celebration of the marriage of the King’s daughter, Princess Elizabeth. One can see how this performance suited the occasion perfectly (Hopkins 4). Over a time span of four centuries, Shakespeare’s final tragicomic play has been subject to radical and inventive reinterpretations, influenced by the many cultural shifts that have coloured the world of the dramatic arts throughout the centuries. Even though every change has undergone opposition and suffered criticism by Shakespearean purists, the continual reinvention of Shakespeare’s words are the main reason the playwright from Stratford-upon-Avon remains a constant presence in our modern-day lives.

In order to analyse the manner in which Shakespeare is transcended from text unto the screen, this thesis will focus on one particular adaptation of *The Tempest*, namely, Julie Taymor’s adaptation of *The Tempest* (2010). Taymor’s adaptation will prove useful in this discussion for three distinct reasons. The first reason is that Julie Taymor is a theatre director who crossed over into film directing and therefore can contribute an interesting perspective on the transcendence of Shakespeare’s play from text to stage and ultimately to screen. Secondly, Taymor accepted the challenge of remaining loyal to Shakespeare’s original text while focusing on modernising the enchanting island, Prospero’s magic, and the spirit Ariel’s illusions through the use of special effects and computer-generated imagery. The third and final reason is perhaps the most significant one, Taymor’s adaptation reversed one element of Shakespeare’s original text that altered every character relationship in the play, that is, Prospero’s gender. Particularly, Taymor made the artistic choice to reverse the main character’s gender and cast actress Helen Mirren for the role of Prospera, duchess of Milan. A
study of this reinterpretation of Shakespeare’s play can not only demonstrate how *The Tempest* translates unto the screen but also how Shakespeare’s rewritten text can speak to modern concerns and values. In other words, Taymor’s adaptation will prove how a rewritten adaptation of Shakespeare can remain current and valuable while still maintaining the Shakespeare tradition.

**THESIS STATEMENT**

In this dissertation I would like to illustrate how a seventeenth century Shakespeare play is transformed and reinvented in the twenty-first century, how it evaluates through time, culture and genre in order to stay relevant as a great work of art. What is the role of the original text in an adaptation? How does a rewriting stay true to the traditional script? Do the characters reflect modern values or do they reflect Renaissance culture?

There is a longstanding acting tradition that influences how Shakespeare is performed and determines how the actors interpret their characters in a modern performance. Furthermore, there are some unavoidable issues of adaptation that come with transforming a classical text for the screen and that dictate how the reworking of the play is interpreted. There is the question of how the repetition and reworking of certain Elizabethan themes and motives remain attractive and current to a modern audience. Adaptation criticism of the past century has been passionately discussing how a classical text should be adapted for the screen. Additionally, our modern culture also notably determines how an adaptation is perceived. Similarly, an adapter is faced with the issue of bringing a play written for a primarily aural culture to a visual audience.

Adaptation and by extension reinterpretations of narratives and plays may be current, but adaptation theory and criticism is still a budding research area, especially concerning the aspect of performance. It might prove an interesting inquiry then to investigate how a literary
analysis of a classical text can further the reading and understanding of the reinterpretation or rewriting and moreover, whether it can add to the interpretation of the performance of a modern Shakespeare adaptation. It can show how closely the traditional text is related to the rewritten interpretation of that text and whether that close relation is intrinsic to the original text or culturally determined.

**CORPUS**

This dissertation’s corpus consists of three individual chapters. The first chapter is designed to outline the different aspects that come into play in a screen adaptation of Shakespeare. It presents the evolution of adaptation criticism and offers theoretical sources that illustrate the methods behind a translation of a classical text and its performance. This chapter is meant to introduce issues of adaptation and how they are addressed in a postmodern adaptation of *The Tempest*. The second chapter presents a detailed analysis of the construction of masculinity and femininity in Shakespeare’s text. Each gender is introduced through a theoretical framework that constructs the analysis of the identity formation. The results of this analysis will be repeated and addressed in the final chapter during the discussion of Taymor’s rewriting. This chapter will similarly introduce a theoretical framework that will guide the discussion of the performance of Prospera.

**METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the first chapter is to address the different aspects of screen adaptations of *The Tempest*. The first chapter consists of three different subdivisions that outline the aspects that come into play in a screen adaptation of Shakespeare. Firstly, the chapter will discuss the ways in which an adapter translates a classical text. These different methods correlate with the dialectical current of adaptation criticism of the twentieth century. In addition to these aspects,
the chapter will also address an issue that is often overlooked when examining a screen adaptation, that is, the issue of performance. The evolution of acting traditions influences how a classical text is brought to live on stage or on screen. This chapter is meant to introduce the issues of adaptation that determine how an adapter adapts a classical work of art and how that adaptation is to be interpreted by a modern audience. Taymor’s adaptation of *The Tempest* will serve as an illustration of how these issues are handled in a postmodern production of Shakespeare’s play. Furthermore, the analysis of Taymor’s reinterpretation of *The Tempest* will focus solely on the character of Prospera and how Taymor’s rewriting alters the original text.

Consequently, the final two chapters will look more closely at the aspect of gender politics in *The Tempest*. The literary analysis in the second chapter functions as a framework in which the rewriting and the performance of Prospera will be analysed. The detailed analysis of the construction of gender identities and power hierarchy in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* will illustrate how the rewriting differs from the traditional script.

The third chapter focuses on the rewritten character of Prospera and the altered relationships between the different characters in the play, and in particular, in relation to the gender identities constructed in the original text. This chapter will introduce a new theoretical framework in which the performance of Prospera can be analysed so that the narrative consequence of Taymor’s rewriting remain limited, namely, Judith Butler’s theory on gender performativity.

The socio-historical context of the gender politics presented in *The Tempest* is mapped through a literary analysis focusing on gender identity. The literary sources each depict a complete theoretical framework through which the gender construction can be identified. The French Feminist Luce Irigaray developed a theory called ‘gender as a property model’ in which she depicts the different social functions a woman can embody in relation to men.
Through this framework, I was able to analyse how the character of Miranda gains her feminine gender identity in *The Tempest* in relation to her father Prospero and her suitor Ferdinand. Reversely, Bruce R. Smith developed a theory on the process of self-identification in the construction of masculinity. By using this theory, I explained how Prospero establishes his masculine authority as well as his power identity through his relationship with Miranda, Ariel and Caliban. The result of employing these two frameworks in the analysis of gender identity in *The Tempest* is a complete overview and understanding of the gender politics in Shakespeare’s original text.

The starting point of the examination of Taymor’s rewriting is the reading of Prospera’s character in the film. The reading of the rewriting in combination with the understanding of the gender politics in the traditional text, illuminates the alterations and narrative consequences that derived from Taymor’s rewriting. Each relationship is revalued and redetermined from the perspective of the literary analysis. The differences are not to be denied. Secondly, a new theoretical framework is introduced that reads the character of Prospera in a more contemporary way and neutralizes most of the alterations. The scene analysis demonstrates this reading as it proofs that while Taymor’s gender reversal did change the relationships between the character, the power hierarchy present in the original text remains the same.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE’S THE TEMPEST ON SCREEN, TRANSLATING A CLASSICAL TEXT TO A NEW MEDIUM

1. SCREEN ADAPTATIONS OF THE TEMPEST

1.1. CREATING A WORLD OF WORDS IN THE VISUAL AGE

The analysis of a Shakespeare text can only go so far. What keeps Shakespeare interesting is that his work was always meant to be performed. And each performance breathes new life into Shakespeare’s original play. A performance of a Shakespeare play can be as much about the interpretation of the performance as it is about the story itself. Each actor’s performance of a Shakespeare play demands a new interpretation in the same way that a director’s creative choices demand a fresh reading of the play. What makes a performance of Shakespeare problematic today is the direct result of our modern culture being primarily visual rather than verbal.

Moreover, what fundamentally defines a Shakespeare play is that it creates a world with words. The humanity that characterizes Shakespearean characters and that still enables a modern audience to relate to his plays today is expressed through Shakespeare’s imaginative language. A typical Shakespearean device, for example, is to counterbalance different words or ideas in order to portray a fully human character that is full of ambiguities and contradictions. This device consists of a way of writing that reveals a character’s humanity through the performance of those words. To understand Shakespeare is to understand the words that are being performed. In the prologue of Henry V act I, Shakespeare requests his audience “gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play” (I. Prologue. 35). In this prologue, Shakespeare instructs his audience to listen and let their imaginative forces work (I. Prologue. 18).
Shakespeare actor and director John Barton co-founded the Royal Shakespeare Company with Sir Peter Hall in 1960 and together they have been credited with bringing Shakespeare to live in the twentieth century. In the 2003 TV documentary *The Shakespeare Sessions*, Barton explains that an actor in a modern Shakespeare production is charged with the task to make his audience listen to every word, because that is what Shakespeare wanted his audience to do (22:52-23:13). A modern audience, however, is no longer trained to listen but rather trained to understand a narrative through visual imagery. To perform Shakespeare to a visual audience can then only be done successfully if the actor manages to not only understand the emotion but succeeds to adopt and project the intended expression onto the audience for them to read and understand. In the words of John Barton, a Shakespeare play “only has value if it comes alive in the performances of living and breathing actors” (6).

The appeal of experiencing a Shakespeare play in the theatre is undeniable. A considerable difference between a narrative told on screen or on stage lies in the connection between the audience and the performance. In fact, the relationship the audience experiences with the live performer lies at the heart of the theatre. The performer – audience relationship is what gives the theatre that special quality. Barton explains that “if a text is alive and works, it will reverberate unto [the audience]” (*The Shakespeare Sessions* 7:20 – 7:24). The question that remains then is how to translate the intimacy and connection the audience feels to the performance in the theatre unto film? Director Julie Taymor is in a unique position to give some perspective on this conundrum. While *The Tempest* (2010) is Taymor’s fourth feature length film, Taymor’s career as a director began in the theatre. When directing *The Tempest* on screen and before that *Titus* in 1999, Taymor had already directed both plays on Broadway. In fact, the first Shakespeare she directed on a small stage in New York City was *The Tempest* in 1986. In an interview with Anne Nicholson Weber, Taymor admitted that the joy of theatre is that it works intensely on the human imagination whereas film is more literal:
“And that, to me, is where theatre potentially surpasses film, because it is better equipped to deal in the abstract, in layers of imagery and symbolism” (Weber 44). In the theatre, Prospero’s “art” is exhibited through the medium of theatre lighting, Taymor says that this presents an invitation for the audience “to believe that the tempest had begun” (Taymor 13).

For Taymor, *The Tempest* offers unlimited opportunities for creative adaptations – “from its wondrous and diverse parts for actors to visual dimensions and challenges that are ripe to be realized through extraordinary locations and experimental visual effects” (Taymor 13). Additionally, a film director has to be more “visually precise” because the director is in complete control of what the audience sees or how something is perceived on screen. For this reason Taymor insists that “[a]ll of these techniques – close-up, long shot, high angle or low angle, dark or light – should be part of your vocabulary to tell the story” (Weber 45). Taymor believes that the cinema’s ability to present an expressive landscape can equal the theatre’s ability to portray Shakespeare’s inherent subtleness and layers of meaning (Weber 50). Taymor’s response to how a film director should deal with Shakespeare’s imaginative language is the following:

A play on the page is not theatre. […] Theatre is not a script of words; it’s what one puts on stage. […] Shakespeare’s poetic language demands a poetic visual language as well. […] In filming *Titus*, I wanted a visual world that balanced the world of the language. For instance, in the opening sequences, I tried to create the feeling that the child, Lucius, was falling through an Alice in Wonderland hole of time. And that collision of three different historical periods as the setting for the film in fact follows Shakespeare’s own model – he mixed up Greek mythology, Virgil, Roman, and Elizabethan history with his own Christian morality (Weber 45-46).
One daring aspect of Taymor’s Shakespeare adaptations on screen is that, for the most part, the script stays loyal to the original text. In Taymor’s opinion, performing Shakespeare’s language on screen allows an audience that is unfamiliar with Shakespeare to better understand Shakespeare’s words. Furthermore, in combination with the visual background, it enhances that audience’s ability to discover the multiple layers of meaning inherent to the text:

Audiences have become so accustomed to fast editing that they get bored if they have to sit and watch one image for a long time while someone is delivering a long speech. On the other hand, Shakespeare’s language comes through better on film. It’s difficult for a contemporary audience to get all of Shakespeare unless they have studied it, but as soon as you can see the actors’ lips, as you do on film, you can understand what they are saying a hell of a lot better than you do from forty feet away. […] Also on film, Shakespeare’s language can be played so much more naturally and under the breath (Weber 50).

1.2. CINEMATIC FEATURES OF THE TEMPEST

It is a unique characteristic of Shakespeare’s final play The Tempest that it seems to be susceptible to an infinite number of transformations and adaptations. English professor Lisa Hopkins appropriately noted in her work on screen adaptations that “few plays have been more frequently or more extensively adopted than The Tempest” (27). There truly seems to be no limit to the ways in which this tragicomedy can be metamorphosed to befit different cultures and different generations. Not only has The Tempest served as the source of inspiration for numerous works of art, the various forms that this play has embodied also ranges from novels (Mama Day), short stories (“The Masque of the Red Death”), poems (“Caliban on Setebos”), plays as well as films (Forbidden Planet). Moreover, in the last two
decades *The Tempest* has been the subject of countless articles, essays and debate among academic circles and literary critics from around the globe.

Considering that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* offers a complex history with a multitude of diverse characters who each present different levels of emotion and priorities, it is therefore not astonishing that so many writers and directors have opted to adopt the play. Moreover, similar to the wide range of characters, the play touches upon an extensive array of diverse themes that offers stage, film and television directors great liberty in their interpretation of those themes as well as a great freedom in their creative choices. Nevertheless, the relation between *The Tempest* and the medium of film is not so straightforward as it would seem. *The Tempest* in particular poses some specific challenges that do not necessarily translate well onto the screen.

Douglas Lanier affirmed in his survey of Shakespeare on screen that “[i]t has become a popular commonplace that had Shakespeare been born in the twentieth century, he would have been a filmmaker” (61). Fundamentally, Shakespeare’s theatrical drama lends itself well to film adaptation. Since the birth of Shakespearean cinema at the turn of the century there have been over five hundred cinematic productions of Shakespeare’s work. *The Tempest*, however, follows the classical unities of Aristotle and according to Michael Anderegg, “it is a popularly held conviction that film depends on rapid movement from place to place together with a unique ability to expand, compress, or in a variety of ways distort time” (“Strange Bedfellows”). Although Anderegg stresses that these elements are not indispensable, the fact that *The Tempest* takes place in one day, on one location and consists of long interactions and few intervals would make this a highly unsuited play for a popular film adaptation. In spite of this, many directors would agree that the magical aspect of *The Tempest* is better suited for the medium of film than the theatre.
1.3. CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATIONS OF A CLASSICAL TEXT

Rather than presenting a history of screen adaptations of *The Tempest*, this chapter follows James S. Holmes’ theory on how modern productions of a classical text deal with the issue of history. Holmes argues that the translator of a classical text is faced with problems not only of a linguistic nature but also socio-cultural problems (104). The first problem deals with language, or rather the fact that the original text is written in an older “temporal dialect” (Holmes 105). Holmes also recognizes a literary and poetic level that deals with rhyme and other poetic devices that are now considered “a relic of a bygone poetic tradition” (Holmes 105). Moreover, the translator should also be attentive to the reality that is presented in the original text, including the believes, traditions and world views of that particular historical period. Considering these three issues, each translator is faced with a choice and “[t]he choice in each individual case may be to attempt to retain the specific aspect of the original poem, even though that aspect is now experienced as historical rather than as directly relevant today” (Holmes 105). In other words, the translator can strive to maintain the historical accuracy of the original text on all three levels or the translator can choose to compromise or modernise on some of the levels. The reasoning behind this compromise lies in the danger of either distancing a modern audience too far from the translation or distancing the translation too far from the original text (Weissbrod 46). Holmes named this approach to a modern adaptation a “historicizing translation” or a “retentive translation” (Holmes 105). In regard to Shakespeare adaptations, Rachel Weissbrod wrote that “in keeping with Holmes’ assumptions, filmmakers adapting Shakespeare to the screen often choose […] : partial updating (resulting in anachronism and sometimes giving the impression of timelessness) and total modernisation” (48).

Admittedly, few screen adaptations of *The Tempest* have chosen to preserve the original play as it appeared in the first folio edition (1623). Nonetheless, John Gorrie’s BBC
version of *The Tempest* (1980), as is to be expected from a BBC production, attempted to create the impression of Elizabethan antiquity on all three levels suggested by Holmes. Weissbrod argues that this choice of adaptation “was in accord with the role played by the BBC – as a public, respectable and educational institution – in British culture” (48). This conservative approach, however, was not only critiqued but also regarded as fictitious. Hopkins commented that because the adaptation “stayed stultifyingly close to the original text,” Gorrie’s version was criticized as being a transparent and pale reading of the play (Hopkins, 42-43). Furthermore, Weissbrod commented on this Shakespeare adaptation by questioning the possibility of realizing the illusion of antiquity. She argued that “since each performance implies an interpretation, and [the director] is not an Elizabethan after all, even his adaptation of Shakespeare reflects a modern world view – a finding which puts in question the very ability to preserve the antiquity totally, on all levels” (Weissbrod 48-49).

Moreover, in the history of screen adaptations of *The Tempest*, the majority of directors chose to compromise on the socio-cultural level of the original text. Considering how Shakespeare’s relevance today is attributed to the elegance, intelligence and artistic potency of his words, few directors have even considered modernizing his language. The choice of compromise in cinematic versions of *The Tempest* correlates with some particular issues of adaptation discussed by Lisa Hopkins in her work on screen adaptations of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

The first issue of adaptation concerns the choice of genre, location and timeframe. Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan criticized Peter Brook’s “experiment” when he directed *The Tempest* in ‘documentary style’ arguing that it was not appropriate for “Shakespeare’s most unrealistic play”(200). This experimental production, however, is exactly what Holmes meant when he discussed the partial updates that resulted in anachronism and discrepancies. What Brook intended to accomplish corroborates this theory,
he wanted to “achieve a synthesis of style relevant to our time” (Croyden 125). Greenaway’s style in *Prospero’s Books* would appear to be more suited for “Shakespeare’s most unrealistic play,” with its whimsical and absurdist editing style. Derek Jarman’s avant garde style also complemented the visual spectacle that is *The Tempest*. Jarman’s version of Shakespeare’s final play is set in a gloomy, candle-lit castle. The manner in which the story unfolds, however, characterizes a cinematic model that is far removed from Shakespeare, namely, the genre of horror. Weissbrod considered that Jarman’s “use of a cinematic model identified with popular culture is meaningful: Jarman thus liberates Shakespeare from the bondage of ‘high art’” (50).

The choice of location not only influences the visual style of the production but also the adaptation’s relation to the play’s history. Taymor, for instance, chose to adopt in her version of *The Tempest* “an eclectic design principle to implicate the play in “history” without specifying a specific moment in time” (Worthen 39). Furthermore, the location determines the political undercurrent of the play. The setting of *The Tempest* in either the Caribbean, Africa or India involuntarily opens up the discussion of the play’s relation to the colonial enterprise. Similarly, Jack Bender’s 1998 television version of the play set in Mississippi linked *The Tempest* to the American Civil War (Hopkins 52).

The choice of timeframe is similarly loaded. Hopkins noted that “[t]o a Renaissance audience, *The Tempest*, with its classicising masque and Virgilian allusions, would have appeared to be ostentatiously advertising its grounding in the classical past” (33). Despite the play’s interest in the past, modern productions have opted to portray *The Tempest* “as an allegory of the future” (Hopkins 33). Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) is a perhaps the most noteworthy illustration of an reworking of *The Tempest* as an allegory of the future as the play is set in a world where genetic engineering dominates society.
A second adaptation issue deals with the role of the original text in a modern production. Weissbrod analysed the effect of preserving Shakespeare’s language in a modern screen adaptation. She noted that “adaptations which preserve the Shakespearean dialogue but update the play on other levels shatter the illusion of a real world” (Weissbrod 50). Weissbrod attributed the preference for preserving Shakespeare’s language in a modern screen adaptation to a characteristic of post-modernism, arguing that post-modernists believe that art forms based on traditional models cannot reflect reality. By combining traditional models with modern tendencies they create discrepancies that confirm this belief: “Post-modernist thinking thus encourages the use of a Shakespearean dialogue in a contemporary world filtered through modern models (such as the model of an MTV clip in Luhrmann’s Romeo and Juliet, 1996)” (Weissbrod 50).

In regard to preserving Shakespeare’s language, it should be noted that several adaptations of The Tempest have partaken in a form of rewriting of the original text. The act of rewriting often results from the unprecedented social and political movement from the 1960s that evolved into postmodernism, postcoloniality and postpatriarchy (Zabus 1). Writers of diverse social backgrounds and ideological orientations have made it their mission to take The Tempest ‘beyond’ Shakespeare. The choice to rewrite can either originate from a need to comment on the original text itself or to introduce the text to a postmodern audience. Zabus employed the Derridean concept of ‘hauntology’ to explain that “the contemporary rewrite looks like it is haunted rather than inhabited by the meaning of the original” (6). Hopkins examined the character of Caliban in screen adaptations and concluded that “very often the changes made have had the intention (or at least the effect) of pressing the text into the services of arguments for or against colonialism” (27). Chantal Zabus argued in her book Tempests after Shakespeare that Shakespeare had meant for the power relationships in The
Tempest to be unequal. Therefore, “21st century (re)writers have dismantled this hierarchy and given equal importance to these Tempest-protagonists” (Zabus 1-2).

Firstly, when it comes to reading Prospero in a postmodern performance there is a noticeable disruption with readings from the first half of the twentieth century. While earlier productions tended towards a presentation of Prospero’s actions as benevolent and fair, recent productions have found it more interesting to question Prospero’s motivations while dethroning the protagonist from his god-like status. R. S. White insisted that whichever reading of Prospero is adopted inevitably depends on how the audience identifies with the character of Caliban. In other words, a reading of Prospero as a ‘privileged Western White Male Global Oppressor’ stands in contrast with the quintessential postmodern view of the world. Zabus argues that postmodern rewriting intends to “point to the interchangeability of Prospero and Caliban in a more nuanced manner” (177). Nonetheless, Hopkins observes about Derek Jarman’s The Tempest (1979) that “Jarman’s film is virtually alone among close adaptations of The Tempest in being able to entertain the idea of a Prospero whose authority is flawed and questionable” (49-50). Furthermore, in Forbidden Planet “Caliban becomes a Freudian projection of Prospero’s (Dr. Morbius’s) own conscious mind, a thing of darkness which the magus must acknowledge as his own in the deepest sense” (White 5).

Secondly, in the postcolonial framework the character of Caliban has received more attention than ever before. Since the Renaissance, Caliban’s character has been represented as animalistic. As his costume consisted of some sort of animal skin with complementary wild hair, Caliban could never be considered as an important character in the play. In the first film version of The Tempest, a 12-minute silent, black and white film made by Percy Stow in 1908, Caliban is effectively presented as an animal in contrast with a superior human

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2 The actual first film adaptation of The Tempest came out in theatres in 1905 but the film has been lost. So the present history of The Tempest on screen begins in 1908. (Vaughan and Vaughan, 201)
Prospero. Hopkins states that “Stow’s film is entirely confident in the polarities of the relationship it depicts: Caliban is bad, and Prospero is good, and there is not even the faintest possibility of any relationship between the two” (39). R. S. White explained that the present phenomenon of identifying with the character of Caliban is “a Romantic creation of Schlegel, Coleridge and Hazlitt, and it has proved tenacious” (7). The character of Caliban has in recent years evolved beyond the play itself and has taken on a life of its own as a symbol of repression and subjugation. Nadia Lie and Theo D’haen created the discipline “Calibanology” to evaluate literature from the point of view of Caliban instead of Prospero (Hopkins 28).

Aimé Césaire’s *Une Tempête* (1969) is a prime example of a rewriting that transforms *Shakespeare’s The Tempest* to fit a discussion of decolonization. Conversely, many screen adaptations of the play have purposely evaded the colonial issue by casting an Australian, Indian or white male for the role of Caliban.

Finally, it is interesting to note that recent political readings of *The Tempest* have largely focused on Caliban as a repressed victim of colonization but have (un)consciously underplayed Miranda’s role as a victim of oppression. Admittedly, from a feminist perspective, the role of Miranda provides little material to work with. Feminist critic Ania Loomba is one example of a feminist reading of the play that strives to combine colonial critique with gender issues, focusing primarily on the figure of Sycorax and her female perspective on racism and patriarchy in the third world. In response to Loomba’s innovative research, Professor of Renaissance Literature Jyotsna G. Singh has called out for more current readings and rewritings that acknowledge the relation between gender conflicts and liberation movements (208-209). While feminist readings of *The Tempest* are becoming more and more frequent, feminist rewritings in screen adaptations remain suspiciously absent. On the other hand, there are examples of feminist rewritings to be found in fiction by female writers, for example, Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* (1988) and Maria Warner’s *Indigo, Or Mapping the*
Waters (1992). Carol Chillington Rutter did acknowledge in her research on Shakespeare women on screen that “[a]s film deprivileges Shakespeare’s words, so it coincidentally redistributes the balance of power between men’s and women’s roles: not only are there more women in Shakespeare films than play texts but they have much more to perform” (243). This theory, however, does not apply to screen adaptations of The Tempest.

Notably, many screen adaptations of the play have focused on the thematic presence of magic, fantasy and illusion, arguing that these elements come to live on screen while they stay in the artificial realm on stage. Additionally, the thematic aspects of the play that conduce to so many diverse appropriations can be summarized as being of transcultural relevance. Themes such as authority, justice and the art of ruling are universal themes that can speak to any point in time or place. Similarly, the topic of slavery, subjugation and oppression in a patriarchal hierarchy can be applied to many contexts and possesses many intertextual connotations. In discussing the elements of The Tempest that contribute to the play’s extraordinary number of adaptations, R. S. White said that “[o]ne could say that The Tempest illustrates to an extreme degree two tenets of recent literary theory: that all culture is intertextual, and that literature is not an absolute ‘given’ but something constructed and reconstructed by readers, and other creative writers” (6).

Ultimately, there are interpretations of The Tempest that decide to modernise Shakespeare’s classical text on all three levels, for example, Fred M. Wilcox’s film Forbidden Planet (1956). While the film still preserves the plot and meanings inherent to the original text, there exists a genuine debate on whether this film can even be considered as an adaptation of The Tempest (Hopkins 58). The story takes place in the 23rd century on the planet Altair IV. The character of Prospero is present in the figure of Dr Morbius and Robby the robot takes on the role of Caliban. Placing the timeframe and location of the adaptation in the future automatically implies a change in genre as well, that is, the genre of science-fiction.
Weissbrod added that “[t]he time of production hints that this new version of colonialism, which involves the desire to rule outer space, reflects the anxieties and apprehensions aroused by the Cold War” (52). Wilcox’s film remains one of the most successful screen adaptations of *The Tempest* to date.

2. ADAPTATION CRITICISM

2.1. THE DIALECTICAL CURRENT OF ADAPTATION CRITICISM:

WORD/IMAGE WARS

Always a “hybrid” subject, literature on screen was too literary for film studies and too film-based for Literary Studies, and has tended to occupy an uneasy place between the two (*Literature on Screen* 1).

The major challenge facing criticism of a cinematic Shakespeare adaptation is a question of priority, or in other words, the degree of fidelity the film maintains towards its literary counterpart. Robert Richardson already stated in 1972 that this “new literacy, the ability to “read” streams of visual images […] is not a negation of the older sort of literacy, but an expansion or an enlargement of the idea of literacy itself” (13). Richardson added that both media could benefit from each other. Richardson’s view, however, received little support in academic circles. The degree of loyalty to the original text formulates the most controversial issue in the debate on adapting classic literature onto the screen. The issue of fidelity is one that invades the illusive terrain where literature ends and film begins. Presently, the debate between literary criticism and film studies has yet to reach a unified conclusion on which degree would integrate the best of both media. The discussion of fidelity aims to establish a theoretical paradigm of screen adaptations and includes questions of interpretation, creativity and the evolution of the classic narrative in modernity.

Historically, the majority of adaptation critics have leaned towards prioritizing the literary text above the medium of film. Since the late 1940s, the issue became a sore subject
of debate in academic circles. The literary wing claimed that any attempt at an adaptation is inevitably doomed to fail. They insisted that literature on film could never rise to anything other than a pale copy of its original (Literature on Screen 2). Meanwhile, the cinematic wing tried to either interact with or extract the film medium completely from the clutches of the literary text in order to create more flexibility in the creative process.

Near the end of the 20th century, however, there transpired a shift amongst literary critics towards more creative screen adaptations. According to Imelda Whelehan, the popular “not so good as the book” approach towards cinematic adaptations that was adopted by the majority of film critics in the 20th century whose “unselfconscious display of ignorance about film as art has marred adaptations criticism” (Literature on Screen 3). Whelehan’s survey on screen adaptations has tried to “free our notion of film adaptations from this dependency on literature so that adaptations are not derided as sycophantic, derivative, and therefore inferior to their literary counterparts” (Literature on Screen 2).

In addition to this shift in criticism, the subject of adaptation criticism in general has become a somewhat more ‘accepted’ subject in academic circles. Whelehan even coined the work on cinematic adaptation a ‘hybrid’ study and may be viewed as an intermediate brand of criticism that moves between literary criticism and film studies (Text to Screen 4). Whether the co-existence of word and image, or what Kamilla Elliott named the literature/films “wars” (1), will ever reach a perfect balance remains uncertain, the evolution of how a classic narrative is told in the 21st century, however, is reaping the benefits of these territorial wars.

From the 1960s onwards, there has been a moderate but steady flow of publications dealing with this ‘hybrid’ study (Text to Screen 4). The dynamic of this discourse relates largely to the impact of history on contemporary performances of literature. In her book Shakespeare’s Culture in Modern Performance (2003), Maria Jones discusses the current debate surrounding this dynamic in modern Shakespeare performances. Jones proposes that
due to the impact of New Historicism and Cultural Material analysis from the 1980s, the influence of history on a modern Shakespeare productions has gained weight once again (2). Jones agrees with the new historicist tendencies most famously articulated by Stephen Greenblatt in his work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) where he states that “great art is an extraordinarily sensitive register of the complex struggles and harmonies of culture” (Greenblatt 5). In Jones’s reading of this statement she views these ‘complex struggles’ as both local and historical, “relevant only to the time and place of a past age” (Jones 5).

Accordingly, Jones proposes that a modern performance of a Shakespeare play pulls back to an early modern historical moment. This provocative statement can be understood as the dialogue a modern performance produces with its historical moment of origin. Jones argues that this dialogue is made possible because original early-modern cultural history is the result of a modern understanding of the past (5-15). This view on Shakespeare productions in the modern age reiterates H. R. Coursen’s statement that to prevent a modern Shakespeare production from becoming rapidly irrelevant they “must leave at least a window open to the past, that is, to the moment of the script’s origination” (qtd. in Jones 13). Nevertheless, Jones also echoes Walter Benjamin when she adds that “[n]ew technologies enable the work of art to shake off its ritualistic authority and release it for shared ownership and political efficacy: release it to popular culture” (3). According to Jones, the importance of the connection between past and present is that it is able to unlock a ‘dialogic window’ that propels the audience to consider the pull of history and their individual role in it (13-14).

Jones recognises, however, that at the same time another movement pulls a modern performance away from history, resulting in a new dialectical current of discussion on the influence of history in modern Shakespeare performances. This second movement is characterised by the fact that it no longer views the literary text on which the adaptation is based as being of primary importance. In addition to the work of Cartmell and Whelehan
mentioned earlier, R. S. White argues that due to recent academic literary research, Shakespeare’s original text can no longer be construed as a stable and fixed entity, he states that:

What we have, then, under the title of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, is not an authoritative text against which all subsequent performances can be judges as authentic or inauthentic but rather a pretext for an unending series of imitations and adaptations – and even the non-existent, originary work by Shakespeare was merely a pretext to adapt the works of others to the stage (White 2).

In other words, film adaptations are part of a continuum of creative energy that links a collective of transformations to each other and its source. In this respect, Robert Stam regards film adaptations as “readings” and “critiques” and “interpretations” and “rewritings” of the original text (Stam 46). Whelehan explains that Stam views a film adaptation “as part of a continuing dialogical process (*Literature on Screen* 3). Stam wants to distance himself from the so called “fidelity” criticism and promotes a view of both media as a form of art that communicates with each other and other art forms. Furthermore, in his introduction to *The Theory and Practice of Adaptation*, Robert Stam explains the trinity of prejudices against film adaptations. Stam acknowledges that while the most persuasive argument against screen adaptations derives from the fact that many transformations of classic literature on film can be characterized as “mediocre” and “misguided,” Stam recognizes three more factors that contribute to the hostility against screen adaptations (4). The first prejudice is based on the theory of “historical anteriority and seniority” that refers to the commonplace assumption that artistry from the past surpasses that of the present (4). Secondly, the prejudice against screen adaptations is acquired from a form of “dichotomous thinking that presumes a bitter rivalry between Film and Literature” (Stam 4). As this chapter on adaptation criticism confirms, this
claim of institutional rivalry between both media is not delusional. Nevertheless, Stam describes this form of dichotomous thinking in “terms of Bloom’s ‘anxiety of influence’, whereby the adaptation as Oedipal son symbolically slays the source-text as ‘father’” (4). The third source of prejudice is described as “iconophobia”. This refers to the anxiety that iconic visual media will exterminate the symbolic value of words. In other words, “[f]ilm and other visual media seems to threaten the collapse of the symbolic order, the erosion of the powers of the literary father, patriarchal narrators, and consecrated arts” (Stam 5).

The difference then between Jones’s view on the role of history and the second movement that pulls away from history is that the first firmly believes in the impact of the source text on the modern performance whereas the second bestows more attention to the dialogue between the modern performance and earlier performances than on the dialogue with the source text. The source text is viewed in relation to earlier rewriting and transformations of the source text as an equal contributor to the modern interpretation of the text.

Alternately, there are critics who believe that the impact of the original text disappears completely in the modern adaptation and that only the interaction between the adaptation and its predecessors serves as a contributing factor to the interpretation of the performance. In their introduction to *Shakespeare The Movie*, Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt argue that somehow ‘Shakespeare has always already disappeared when transferred onto film’ (11). Rather than referencing a Shakespeare original, the film adaptation references other films and are more characterised by their internal intertextuality than by a Shakespeare tradition (*The Movie* 8-22).

In his 1983 essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Frederic Jameson evaluated how postmodernism can effectively construe the role of history when a postmodern history is primarily based on nostalgia rather than historical reality. Jameson argued that our postmodern society consists of “historical amnesiacs” whose nostalgia determines history in
their quest to recapture the past in modernity. Jameson protests this nostalgic desire claiming it will inevitably lead to the “failure of the new, and the imprisonment of the past” (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society”). Furthermore, these critics argue that the Shakespearean tradition has already disappeared from modern performances and that the need to return to the original Renaissance tradition is inevitably destined to fail. As a result, the nostalgia surrounding a Shakespeare tradition is holding back the evolution of modern narrative while maintaining a false sense of history instead.

3. PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE IN POSTMODERNITY

John Barton explains in *The Shakespeare Sessions* that the clues to a performance are *in the text* (9:01-20:15). Barton believes that the way Shakespeare wrote can guide and direct an actor performing his text (*Shakespeare Sessions*, 1:03). In fact, the best guide for an actor to play Shakespeare’s works comes from the playwright himself who was also an actor. An illustrative example of Shakespeare’s advice to the actors performing his play is Hamlet’s famous speech “Speak the speech, I pray you” (3.2.1-10) where he warns the actor not to complicate the emotions nor to play the mood as a consequence of the speech but rather to play the mood as if it comes to live in the moment of speaking.

Christopher B. Balme wrote that “[b]ecause Shakespearean dramas contain a plethora of such stage-related indications (if they are read in this way) a whole generation of scholars in the 1960s and 1970s advocated that plays by definition contain something approaching an intrinsic performance” (123). Balme argued, however, that while some Shakespeare academics transcend the basic paradigm of historical issues and view these performance-cues inherent to Shakespeare’s text as a layout for performance, performance analysis should not be limited to Shakespeare’s stage cues:

To apply it to contemporary productions of Shakespeare would be to assume a normative and ‘correct’ way of reading the text against which individual
productions and performances should be adjudicated. It may be that directors and actors do indeed take such cues from the text; but they may also choose to ignore them. It is not the task of performance analysis to engage in this kind of historical ‘back-reading’ – testing the performance against an assumed correct reading of the text. It must rather seek to uncover the codes and strategies employed by the production team in their particular interpretation (Balme 123).

3.1. DRAMATIC PERFORMATIVITY

The performance of classical drama in the modern age is influenced by our modern acting traditions. W.B. Worthen’s consideration of ‘dramatic performativity’ falls back on Judith Butler’s analysis of the interconnectedness between language and enactment (10). According to Worthen, western drama today derives its meanings from its textual form as well as from the institutional practices that translate the text into stage behaviour and that provide its meaning in dramatic performance. This meaning (or, to use Worthen’s term, force) implies the amalgamate of the ‘performative’ which is fundamentally based on the analysis of J.L. Austin in *How to do things with words*. Austin’s theory on the ‘performative’ was later more broadly applied to modern culture by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Excitable Speech*. Furthermore, the interconnectedness of scripted drama and its performance is what Worthen calls “dramatic performativity” and constitutes the paradigm of performance:

As a citational practice, theatre – like all signifying performance – is engaged not so much in citing texts as in reiterating its own regimes of performance. Plays become meaningful in the theatre through the disciplined application of conventionalized practices – acting, directing, scenography – that transform writing into something with performative force: performance behaviour. (9)
While Butler herself has refrained from applying her theory on ‘performativity’ to the terrain of the dramatic arts, Worthen draws on Butler’s dissection of ‘performance’ to rewrite the function of the dramatic script in a dramatic performance. As Butler stated that “the performativity of the text is not under sovereign control” (*Excitable Speech* 69), Worthen argues that “dramatic writing alone cannot exert “sovereign” force on its performance. Dramatic performance becomes meaningful by deploying the text in recognizable genres of behavior, regimes that finally determine what the text can mean as performance” (Worthen 12). Consequently, it is important to understand a modern performance of Shakespeare as a form of interplay between the original text and the modern acting traditions of the twenty-first century drama culture.

### 3.2. SHAKESPEAREAN PERFORMATIVITY

Worthen ascribes Shakespearean drama as a part of modern drama (26). Worthen refers to ‘Shakespearean performativity’ as “the sense that a Shakespeare play can, or sometimes should, evoke the pastness of the text and what the text represents – early modern values, behaviors, subjects – in the present action of performance” (29).

In order to further explain the concept of “Shakespearean performativity,” one must understand how a modern actor ‘acts’ Shakespeare. Considering the spectacular amount of research and literary analysis concerning Shakespeare’s work that is published on a yearly basis, it is surprising how little has been said on the performance of his plays. Truly, there can be no universal theory on how to ‘act Shakespeare’ for much of it relies on instinct and conjecture. It is a rare occurrence that a Shakespearean verse or prose line can be clearly or objectively interpreted, the understanding of Shakespeare is often highly subjective. Nevertheless, as Hamlet’s advice to actors suggests, the best guide to Shakespeare’s work is provided in the text itself. John Barton emphasized, however, that there is no one way to do Shakespeare, for “that way madness lies” (7).
Moreover, what makes a performance of Shakespeare so challenging is the fact that Shakespeare’s plays were written for a specific group of actors in a specific moment in time. It is essential to take into account that when a modern actor with a modern acting habit embodies a Shakespeare character, that actor is combining two traditions, namely, the modern acting tradition and the Elizabethan acting tradition (Barton 21). The first tradition is strongly influenced by modern psychology, the modern media age, modern acting traditions and our modern culture. Under the influence of dramatic theories, such as Stanislavsky’s system, modern actors are encouraged to focus on ‘characterization’, ‘intention’, ‘background histories’ whether it is present in the script or not (Barton 10-11).

The complexity and depth presented in Shakespeare’s drama suggests that even though modern dramatic jargon (such as ‘motivation’, ‘intention’, etc.) was unknown in the Elizabethan era, the same practice was probably applied: “Shakespeare both accepted his own theatrical tradition and yet transformed it. In a sense I think that he is the unconscious inventor both of characterization in depth and of naturalistic speech” (Barton 13). One key element that distinguishes the Elizabethan acting tradition from the modern acting tradition is that the Elizabethan was a verbal culture. In modern culture, words are both spoken and written. In contrast, words in the Elizabethan era were sounds and audiences were trained to pick up the details in various voices and different inflexions (Barton 16). Furthermore, the Elizabethan actors depended on the power of words and language more than a modern actor would know to do instinctively.

Generally, Shakespeare’s plays were innovating in terms of characterization and natural speech. In this respect, modern and Shakespeare traditions melt together. Barton called this the golden rule of Shakespeare performance: an actor must marry cultivated language and naturalistic traditions, or in other words, find “a fine balance between the heightened and the naturalistic elements” (Barton 18).
Nevertheless, experienced Shakespeare actor sir Ian McKellen added that a modern actor’s style is not so much influenced by the style of writing rather than the acting style of the previous generation against which the actor rebels. McKellen argues that naturalistic acting today differs from naturalistic acting in the nineteenth century because then it was determined by a different more self-assured world view due the security provided by the British Empire. On the other hand, modernistic ambiguous insecurities and the complexity caused by modernity has forced the modern actor to be more introspective and focus on details rather than perform grand declarations (Barton 20). In other words, Shakespearean performativity should not be considered as something that “arises […] from the text of the plays, but is carved from a wider spectrum of performance that can only be demonstrated by thinking about the interruptions and continuities between Shakespearean performativity and other dramatic and nondramatic performances” (Worthen 26-27). The belief that Shakespeare’s original text might convey its Elizabethan origin “into performance not only sustains projects like the Globe, but also characterizes Shakespearean performativity in the modern era” (Worthen 31).

In their discussion of Laurence Olivier’s and Kenneth Branagh’s film adaptations of *Henry V*, Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin emphasized that the popularity these adaptations enjoyed was strongly determined by the political atmosphere of the time. The twentieth-century political climate in combination with Margaret Thatcher serving as acting prime minister, Howard and Rackin suggest that “[t]he twentieth-century popularity of these two film versions of *Henry V* suggests a public longing for narratives of strong male heroes who embody national prowess through their military achievements and their mastery of them women of other nations (9). Sarah Werner’s book *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance* deals with the impossibility of putting on a performance of a Shakespeare play in the modern age without mirroring it to our own assumptions and cultural background. Similarly, R. S.
White argued in his introduction to contemporary critical essays of *The Tempest* that: As well as lending itself to endless adaptations, then, *The Tempest* provides a testing ground for virtually all the new literary theories that can be devised [...] new historicism, historico-political, postcolonial, feminism, Marxism, cultural materialism, psychoanalysis, and so on. [...] *The Tempest* raises social and political issues that have a contemporary currency (White 11). In this respect, Julie Taymor’s *The Tempest* cannot escape the cultural implications derived from recent colonial and feminist studies.

**CHAPTER II**

**LITERARY CONTEXT OF SHAKESPEARE’S PLAY IN RELATION TO GENDER STUDIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY**

4. **FOUR CENTURIES OF THE TEMPEST: CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS**

The massive persistence of Shakespearean tragedy as a popular source of live entertainment is surely one of the oddest phenomena in the history of Anglophone culture. Four centuries after their composition, plays often seen as the expressions of a distinctively Renaissance understanding of mortality and its relation to social hierarchy continue to fascinate audiences otherwise long ago seduced by the rival claims of middle-class social realism, of post-modern minimalism or sheer escapism (Dobson 1).

It is indeed a mysterious phenomenon that this notoriously difficult play has been performed for four centuries in very different productions and very diverse cultures. Jan Sewell understood that in order to comprehend this phenomenon he had to examine the way
in which the play has been brought to live since the early modern period. Only then, Sewell argues, may we “gain a sense of the extraordinary variety of approaches and interpretations that are possible – a variety that gives Shakespeare his unique capacity to be reinvented and made ‘our contemporary’ four centuries after his death” (100).

On the one hand, it is not hard to grasp how the inherent themes of *The Tempest* continue to speak to a modern audience. On the other hand, to perform the play is to inevitably add to these themes contemporary values and believes, not only because the text lends itself easily to open interpretations but also because it seems impossible not to. Karin Brown commented that “*The Tempest* offers a multitude of choices for its director and a conundrum for actors seeking to build dimension from Shakespeare’s enigmatic characterizations” (109-110).

Through the exploration of these different nuances, interpretations, and revivals of Shakespeare’s play can we achieve a sense of the essence of the play. This essence of the play can be simplified as a straightforward narrative of power. The narrative of *The Tempest*, however, is open to multiple readings of the power relationships presented in the play:

The particular fertility of readings and adaptations which dwell on power relations stems from the play’s neat splicing of three different narratives of power, each of which can be manipulated depending on where one wishes to invest one’s sympathies: Prospero gaining revenge over his usurping brother, and finally grudgingly forgiving him and his cohort when they are defeated; Prospero’s control of the island’s ‘natives’, Sycorax, Caliban and Ariel (and the prior narrative of Ariel’s imprisonment by Sycorax); and the romance plot between Miranda and Ferdinand, which is rather recalcitrant in resisting Prospero’s full control. The first narrative turns on politics, the second on
The following reading of *The Tempest* will focus on the play’s power structures in relation to the gender politics present in the original text. An understanding of the dynamics between the notion of power and the issue of gender in the play is necessary to explore the most recent screen adaptation of *The Tempest* by director Julie Taymor. From a feminist perspective, Prospero’s intentions in regard to Miranda’s future can only be interpreted as a play for patriarchal control. Furthermore, Miranda’s role in the play proves problematic for a conducive feminist interpretation. Shakespeare scholar Ann Thompson already asked the question: “What kind of pleasure can a woman and a feminist take in this text beyond the rather grim one of mapping its various patterns of exploitation?” (165). For this reason, Taymor’s interpretation of *The Tempest* paves the way for a rethinking of the play’s relation between gender and power politics.

Taymor’s decision to rewrite the role of Prospero definitely lies within the possibilities of interpretation provided by the text. Taymor’s gender reversal does not in any way alter the flow of the narrative nor does it affect the essence of the play. Instead, the rewriting offers a twenty-first century perspective on Shakespeare’s play. Already in 2001, the Royal Shakespeare Company casted the renounced English actress Vanessa Redgrave for the role of Prospero in a theatre production of *The Tempest* at the reconstructed Shakespeare Globe in London. This controversial production of the play was well-received, yet offered little room for an effective feminist reading of the play for Redgrave played the role of a man as a man. In contrast, Taymor casted actress Helen Mirren to play the role of the protagonist as a woman, changing in the process the whole power-gender dynamic of the play. Therefore, in order to understand the effect of Taymor’s gender reversal, an understanding of the relation between power structures and gender identities in the original text is required. Luce Irigaray’s
vision on masculinity and femininity and their relation to each other will serve as the framework for discussing the identity construction in *The Tempest*. In addition to Bruce R. Smith’s theory on gender construction in early modern England, the next part of this chapter will provide a detailed investigation of the dynamic between power and gender in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

5. CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITIES

5.1. FEMININITY AS A PROPERTY MODEL

Luce Irigaray is one of the French feminists who is included on the list of female academics who have been instrumental in building the foundation for the theorization of feminism as an influential and critical perspective in academic studies. Others on this list include Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. Irigaray has published several theoretical works on structuralist feminism – notably *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977). This chapter will adopt Irigaray’s theory on ‘gender as a property model’ as a framework in which the representation of masculinity and femininity in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* will be discussed.

Irigaray’s theory depicted in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) reduces real women to tokens within a male symbolic or economic system, imposing on them identities which are a function of their value to men (“Property model” 59). Irigaray’s claim is that women come into being as a commodity in a male dominated society. Moreover, women are excluded from any cultural or socio-economic system and can thus only be represented in relation to men. According to Irigaray, following what she calls ‘the logic of sameness’, the patriarchal systems historically deploy women to be Man’s symbolic ‘other’ against which he can define himself (*This Sex* 33). Irigaray denies any anthropological theories which hold that “the social order *per se* is founded on the exchange of women” and instead she draws extensively on
Marx’s analysis of commodities as the primary elements of capitalist wealth to support her argument (“Performing Gender” 59). Irigaray argues that the exchange of women is the very foundation upon which our society is built. The necessity of this exchange is undeniable for maintaining the stability our society relies on. The principle of this exchange governs the rules that determine which endogamous relationships can be established, determining who one can or ought to marry. Irigaray explains that the commodification of women “assures the foundation of the economic, social and cultural order that has been ours for centuries” (This Sex 170). This statement, however, begs the following question: why is it that the singular social status that a woman can claim for herself in a patriarchal society is defined as merchandise? Irigaray’s response to this question consists of men’s prominent position in the socio-economic and political scene of our society as well as men’s commanding position as the head of the familial household. Moreover, the reason for women’s exclusion from these socio-economic and political scenes is explained in monetary terms:

The law that orders our society is the exclusive valorisation of men’s needs/desires, of exchanges among men. A sociocultural endogamy would thus forbid commerce with women. Men make commerce of them, but they do not enter into any exchanges with them (Irigaray, This Sex 172).

Derived from this theory, Irigaray proposes that there are three social values which are commonly imposed upon women, namely mother, virgin, prostitute. Following this statement, Irigaray denotes that “[t]he characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorisation of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men’s ‘activity’; seductiveness,…” (Irigaray, This Sex 186-188).

Since the publication of This Sex Which Is Not One in 1977, Irigaray’s controversial stand on female sexuality has provoked much criticism by academic scholars such as Alan
Sokal and Jean Bricmont (Dawkins 141-143). However the question whether or not her theory is an essentialist one still remains the subject of much debate in feminist circles. Nevertheless, Irigaray’s view on the social roles that are imposed on women as well as their feminine identity that serves as a function to their value to men are easily recognized in gender performances. As such, her theory will prove to be an interesting starting point for the analysis of the construction of masculinity and femininity in *The Tempest*.

5.2. MASCULINITY AND THE PROCESS OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

In *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, Bruce R. Smith goes beyond the ideal of heroic masculinity. Smith acknowledges the importance of the process of self-identification that men undertake in order to establish their masculinity. The detailed overview that is presented in his survey on the construction of the male identity in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century is divided into five chapters that correspond to five distinct components of this process of self-identification. In the first three chapters, Smith analyses Shakespeare’s most famous heroes by connecting their gender performances with the scientific knowledge, moral traditions and social behaviours that defined the notion of manliness for Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In the first chapter “Persons”, Smith explains the importance of gender as a performance. A performance that is carried out by physical persons in whose inner essence or soul gender is experienced.

In the second chapter “Ideals” Smith offers five different examples of masculinity as portrayed through examples in the theatre. He argues that audience members used the theatre, alongside moral behaviour literature, as a standard to which they can model their own masculine behaviour. Smith’s basis for this claim is his belief that “[t]he relationship between dramatic fictions and social realities was, and is, a *reciprocal* matter”(41). The most common role models include ‘a chivalrous knight’, ‘a Herculean hero’, ‘a humanist man of moderation’, ‘a merchant prince’ and ‘a saucy jack’ (Smith 44-60).
The third chapter “Passages” describes the importance of time in the development of masculinity. Smith argues that the different stages of age, from infancy and boyhood to prime and later manhood and finally to decrepit old age, contain such rites of passage that influence and determine a man’s masculine identity.

The focus of the fourth chapter is centred around the definition of a specifically English masculinity:

Early modern English facilitated that definition in two dimensions: in space and in time. To space belonged the term *nation*, for people born in the same place and hence constituting a community. To time belonged the term *race*, for people sharing a certain lineage or genealogy. Only later did ‘race’ come to acquire its biological association with bodily traits and skin colour. (Smith, 114)

The chapter goes on to explore how masculine identity is created against a foreigner’s display of an alternative model of masculinity. Similarly, by reducing a prostitute to a purely sexual essence could men assert their masculine superiority. Therefore, a masculine identity is established not only against foreigners and social inferiors, but also against women in general as well as against sodomites (Smith 101-130).

In the final chapter “Coalescences” Smith focuses on the essential existence of Shakespeare’s plays as being performed in a theatre with a live audience. Smith concludes that every performance of gender is the result of “a cultural hybrid, a coalescence of early modern ways of performing masculinity with ways belonging to another place and time” (Smith, 148). Every gender performance is thus dependent on four specific elements, namely, the protagonist, the story, the actor and the audience. Resulting in the fact that no performance of masculinity is equal to any previous performance. Hereby emphasizing that the
performance of gender needs to be analysed in a specific historical, cultural and geographical context.

6. LITERARY ANALYSIS: THE RELATION BETWEEN POWER AND GENDER

6.1. MASCULINITY AS AN HEROIC IDEAL IN THE RENAISSANCE

Robin Headlam Wells wrote in *Shakespeare on Masculinity* that no Shakespeare play is written in an intellectual vacuum (10). By this Wells meant that when one talks about masculinity in a Shakespeare play, one should consider the political and cultural history of Shakespeare’s time in order to understand what it meant to be masculine:

For the Renaissance the heroic ideal is essentially masculine. The qualities it evokes – courage, physical strength, prowess in battle, manly honour, defiance of fortune – may be summed up in a word whose Latin root means ‘a man’. As English Renaissance writers understand the term, *virtus* signifies an ideal of manhood that derives partly from classical epic, partly from medieval chivalry, and partly from Italian *realpolitik*. Though women may occasionally display heroic qualities, they are exceptions that prove the rule. Heroes in Shakespeare are, by definition, men (Wells 2)

Wells argued that in early seventeenth century England the honour code was unequivocally masculine (15). Wells draws from *The Boke of Noblesse* by William of Worcester to explain that seventeenth century masculinity appealed to courage, fierceness, manliness and strength (15). When *The Tempest* was first performed on the evening of All Saints’ Day, 1 November 1611, England’s monarch was King James I, and it was in his presence that the play was performed. King James’ predecessor was Queen Elizabeth I whose forty-five year reign ended on 24 March 1603. According to Wells, there existed a need among some Englishmen for a return to a more masculine and aggressive policy that had been lacking during Queen
Elizabeth’s regime. The quarrel with Elizabeth’s rule was grounded in the masculinist belief that women were unfit for government and that the reason for “the queen’s failure to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy was due to the simple fact that she was a woman” (Wells 15):

Shakespeare’s plays enable a fantasy of an England reborn to former greatness through a reconstruction of heroic masculinity and the reconstruction of women as sexual and domestic beings. The fact that this fantasy is based on a play written by Shakespeare gives an added weight and authority because Shakespeare in many ways has come to stand for England’s past greatness (Howard and Rackin 9).

The masculine ideal that Wells proposed corresponds with Smith’s representation of ‘a Herculean hero’. The herculean hero encompasses bravery upon the battlefield, strength and impulsive aggressive courage. Moreover, the masculine hero in *The Tempest* can be better described as a man of moderation, a man of wisdom and discipline whose guiding principles define his own masculinity as ‘a humanist man’.

In his introduction to the RSC version of *The Tempest*, the scholar Jonathan Bate states that “the narrative [of *The Tempest*] is concentrated on questions of mastery and rule” (2). Consequently, the notion of power plays a significant role in the personification and identification of the characters in the play. Furthermore, since a man’s process of self-identification transpires in some measure in contrast to the female ‘other’, the relation between power and gender becomes an additional topic to investigate. In *Shakespeare and masculinity*, Bruce R. Smith gives his readers a detailed overview on Shakespeare’s representation of early modern gender as well as an intricate account on the process of masculine self-identification against assorted “others” – like “women, foreigners, persons of lower social rank, and sodomites” (104). When one speaks of masculinity in a Shakespearean text, it is interesting to note that it was only in the 1960s that the very word ‘masculinity’ took
on the meaning of alluding to “attributes and actions seen as appropriate to males” (Smith 11). The word used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries to ascribe a masculine action or attribute was “manliness” (Smith 11). In any case, since *The Tempest* presents an almost exclusively male cast, there is an abundance of masculinity or manliness to be observed in the reading of the play.

Considering that Shakespeare’s supremacy as a playwright is partly derived from his ability to portray all the complexities of humanity in his characters, the investigation of Prospero’s masculinity will be limited to two pronounced aspects of his masculine identity, namely, Prospero as a father and Prospero as ruler of the island. In turn, Miranda’s femininity will be revealed through her relationship to her father as well as through her relationship to her suitor Ferdinand.

6.2. PROSPERO AS THE PATRIARCHAL HEAD IN *THE TEMPEST*

From the first moment the character of Prospero is introduced, the reader is presented with the ambiguity that defines his masculine authority as a father and a ruler. Specifically, the abrupt evolution in Prospero’s disposition from when he procures the raging tempest derived from his desire to rectify the conditions of his banishment to his immediate assurance that it was done wholly for his daughter’s benefit “I have done nothing but in care of thee,” (1.2.19). The caring affection with which he regards his daughter is explicitly pronounced: “Of thee my one, thee my daughter” (1.2.20). Prospero’s actions have all been for the benefit of his daughter Miranda. He has brought Ferdinand to the island for her. What is more, the objective of his master plan is to reclaim his daughter’s rightful place as the duchess of Milan as well as his own restore his own position of power. In other words, “Miranda provides the ideological legitimation of each of Prospero’s actions” (Loomba 330).

More importantly, despite this declaration of endearment, what seems to be emphasized most in the play is Miranda’s position as signifier of Prospero’s patriarchal
authority. Ann Thompson argues in “Miranda, where’s your sister?” that “Miranda’s role as the dependent female is crucial to the play’s dynamics of power” (164). Generally, Miranda is presented as her father’s possession, she is wholly subjected to her father’s will: “Here cease more questions:/Thou art inclined to sleep. ‘Tis a good dullness,/And give it way: I know thou canst not choose. –” (1.2.214-216). Admittedly, there is a delicate balance in Prospero’s dealings with Miranda that oscillates between affection and subjugation. Ania Loomba argues in “Miranda’s Schooling” from *Gender, Race, Renaissance drama* (1989) that “Miranda is ordered to sleep, awake, come on, see, speak, be quiet, obey, be silent, and be mute. She is his property, to be exchanged between father and husband” (331-332). Furthermore, Prospero’s patriarchal power is reflected in his decision “‘Tis time/I should inform thee further” (1.2.27-28), implying that he has full control over his daughter, including the power to decide when and what she learns about herself and her future: “Know thus far forth” (1.2.207). Miranda’s soft feminine naivety is illustrated when she admits that “More to know/Did never meddle with my thoughts” (1.2.25-26). The commanding voice with which Prospero addresses his daughter is parallel to the amount of respect with which Miranda addresses her father “Dost thou attend me?/Sir, most heedfully” (1.2.92-93). Miranda’s position as a subject of her father goes hand in hand with her own self-degradation. For example, upon hearing of her father’s misfortune she immediately apologizes for the trouble she must have been to him (1.2.176-178). Not once considering what she had lost in the process, namely, her noble position as daughter of a duke, her concern is wholly with her father’s fate. Miranda’s body and soul is at her father’s mercy, respecting and obeying his every wish and intention. Part of this respect is derived from their relationship as teacher and student. Through the act of teaching, Prospero has been able to control, form and manipulate Miranda to his will. Prospero believes this to have been in his daughter’s advantage when he says “and here/Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit/ Than other princes can that have more time/For vainer hours, and
tutors not so careful (1.2.200-3). During Prospero’s revelation of his past, Prospero appears to be vexed at his daughter’s silence when he exclaims “I pray thee, mark me” (1.2.81), “Dost thou attend me? – Thou attend’st not” (1.2.92-102) and “Dost thou hear?” (1.2.22). The underlying implication is that Prospero doubts Miranda is even capable to grasp the significance of what he is relating. When Miranda does demonstrate her understanding of her father’s tale she is rewarded: “Well demanded, wench” (1.2.163).

From the point of view of Prospero, it is in his interest as both father and ruler that he insists on the preservation of Miranda’s virginity for that is what makes her valuable to him. Furthermore, Caliban’s punishment for trying to rape Miranda and in the process rob her of her virtue has then less to do with defending Miranda’s honour and more with protecting Miranda’s value. Here we return to one of Irigaray’s social values imposed on women, namely the value of a virgin. As Miranda serves as a commodity to be exchanged between father and husband, her body is most valuable, that is, the purity of her body that is reflected through her virginity. Ferdinand too has been educated to understand the value of a woman’s virginity. The moment the young prince Ferdinand first laid eyes on Miranda, he pronounced himself helpless in front of her beauty, calling her “goddess” and sighing “Most sure! The goddess/ On whom these airs attend!” (1.2.488-89). Yet, in an almost comical fashion, he then hastily remarks: “my prime request,/which I do last pronounce, is – O you wonder! – /If you be maid or no?” (1.2.492-94), recognizing the importance of this value. Immediately after receiving Miranda’s confirmation that she is “certainly a maid”, Ferdinand repeats the conditions upon which his affections rest: “O, if a virgin,/And your affection not gone forth, I’ll make you/The Queen of Naples” (1.2.520-22). Miranda’s body becomes sexualized and defined in terms of marriageability.

Undoubtedly, as a benevolent magus, Prospero wanted what was best for his daughter. Nevertheless, it is his prerogative as head of the family to make any decision regarding his
daughter’s future without taking her will into consideration. The fact that Miranda’s will and
desire to marry Ferdinand are in line with her father’s intentions could be interpreted as an
affirmation that she is truly her father’s subject. So much so that she wants what Prospero
desires for her and claims it as her own will. On the other hand, it could also have been the
playwright’s intention to romanticise the wedding ceremonies. The second recorded
performance of *The Tempest* was after all performed at court in celebration of the marriage of
the King James’s daughter, Princess Elizabeth (Hopkins 4).

Moreover the reciprocation of Miranda’s amorous feelings by Ferdinand pushes the
notion of a daughter’s duty to marry to the background. This notion, on the other hand, is
more pronounced at the mention of Claribel’s marriage to the king of Tunis (2.1.71-72).
Alonso’s daughter Claribel was shipped off to Tunis as a pawn in a political play benefitting
her father, the king of Naples. Act 2 Scene 1 presents a discussion between the stranded
aristocrats that serves as an illustrative example of the benefits of “patriarchal control of
daughters and the function of marriage in securing dynastic inheritance” (Sewell 93-94). In
correspondence with this discussion, Antonio refers to Claribel’s social value and non-
existent power when he states that she poses no threat until she has born a son and raised him
to be a man:

> She that is Queen of Tunis: she that dwells
> Ten leagues beyond man’s life: she that from Naples
> Can have no note, unless the sun were post –
> The man I’th’moon’s too slow – till new-born chins
> Be rough and razonable (2.1.273-77)

On the one hand, Claribel’s story can be interpreted as being a supporting narrative providing
a legitimate reason for the aristocratic party to be in Prospero’s reach, or rather his tempest,
although Prospero insisted to Miranda that the enemy had arrived “By accident most strange,
bountiful Fortune – /Now my dear lady – hath mine enemies/Brought to this shore” (1.2.208-10). On the other hand, Claribel’s story can be interpreted as a foretelling of Miranda’s future. From the moment Miranda lays eyes on Ferdinand, the transaction commences and the control over Miranda shifts from father to lover. Upon meeting Ferdinand, Miranda uncharacteristically defies her father’s command: “Speak not you for him” (1.2.536), when she pleads on Ferdinand’s behalf: “Beseech you, father”/Sir, have pity” (1.2.553-55). The indignation with which Prospero replies to this sudden development in his daughter’s attitude tells us much about the balance of power in their relationship. The exclamation “What, I say,/My foot my tutor?” (1.2.547-548) is a clear indication that Prospero has always been the teacher and Miranda the dutiful student. Obviously this balance of power is immediately rectified when Prospero reprimands his daughter for her rebellious stand against him: “Silence! One more word/Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What./An advocate for an impostor? Hush!” (1.2.557-559). Nevertheless, Prospero’s hold over Miranda weakens as the moment of the exchange from father to husband draws closer. For example, Miranda disregards her father’s command yet again when she reveals her name to Ferdinand and exclaims “O my father/I have broke your hest to say so” (3.1.44-45). At this moment the transition is initiated from when Miranda’s identity is formed in relation to her father to when it is formed in relation to her husband. At this moment, her duties are divided and her identity is in flux. Prospero’s authority rapidly declines from the moment Miranda confesses to Ferdinand “I,/Beyond all limit of what else I’th world,/Do love, prize, honour you” (3.1.83-85). Whereas in the first act her self-degradation was linked to her being her father’s subject, now we see the same self-degradation in relation to Ferdinand when she sobs at her own unworthiness (3.2.91-92). In addition to her duties, we see a shift in Miranda’s dependence when she vows “I am your wife, if you will marry me:/If not, I’ll die your maid” (3.2.98-99). At the beginning of act four scene one, the exchange comes to completion when Prospero
officially promises his daughter to Ferdinand: “Then, as my guest, and thine own/acquisition/Worthily purchased, take my daughter” (4.1.13-15). The emphasis on the word “acquisition” in these verses is unmistakable. Moreover, the image of an ‘exchange’ is completed by the use of the verb “purchased”. This particular scene is undeniably important in the portrayal of Miranda’s femininity. The commodification of Miranda by both her father and her future husband confirms her social role in a patriarchal society. At the same time, both Prospero and Ferdinand express the essence of Miranda’s social value, that is, her virginity. The importance of this is emphasized when Prospero threatens:

If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be administered,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed, with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both. Therefore take heed,
As Hymen’s lamps shall light you. (4.1.15-23)

Since Ferdinand understands the importance of Miranda’s virtue he promises to comply. The exchange then is celebrated with a feast. The masque, performed by the spirits in the shapes of mythological figures summoned by Prospero, praises the performed contract of love (4.1.67-126).

In The Tempest, Prospero speaks of another woman who has reinforced his position as a patriarchal head. That is to say, Prospero’s wife. The mention of his wife is rather brief but effective. In fact, Prospero only speaks two verses to inform Miranda of her mother. In the first verse he relates to Miranda that her mother has passed by using a past tense. In the
second he confirms that Miranda was of noble birth. And although Prospero describes Miranda’s mother as “a piece of virtue” (1.2.67), the only other piece of information he divulges about his late wife is that she gave birth to his daughter. Thus emphasizing the reproductive labour required of a wife and mother. Moreover, his wife only receives her identity as the woman who bore his legitimate heir. Ann Thompson commented on this verse that:

This is apparently all that needs to be said about her. Some fifty lines later, Miranda demonstrates that she has fully internalised the patriarchal assumption that a woman’s main function it to provide a legitimate succession when asked to comment on the wickedness of Prospero’s brother: “I should sin/To think but nobly of my grandmother:/ Good wombs have borne bad sons’ (1.2.138-39) (Thompson 156).

Moreover, Stephen Orgel remarks in “Prospero’s Wife” that in response to Prospero’s demand that Miranda ‘tell me/If this might be a brother’ (1.2.135-36), “Miranda takes the question to be a charge of adultery against Prospero’s mother” (16). Both Miranda and her mother were subject to Prospero’s patriarchal authority and both women receive their feminine identity in relation to him. So what is really established and greatly emphasized in the play is Prospero’s position as the patriarchal head of the family in addition to his superiority as a wise and powerful man worthy of being served.

It would also proof valuable to look at Prospero’s relation to the other woman mentioned in The Tempest, Sycorax. Although Sycorax has no official part in the play, she is mentioned several times by both Prospero, Ariel and Sycorax’s son Caliban. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin note in their work Engendering a nation that women in Shakespeare’s history plays are “strategically peripheralized (subplots of the narrative) or meant to function to define what is not English, what is foreign and dangerous” (30). The first mention of
Sycorax occurs when Prospero accuses Ariel of forgetting the worthy service he had done for him (1.2.290). He reminds Ariel that “The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy/Was grown into a hoop” (1.2.304-305) had “painfully” imprisoned the spirit into the rift of a cloven pine for a dozen years (1.2.325-327). Here it is revealed that Sycorax was born in Algiers from which she was banished “for one thing she did” and lived in exile upon the island where she gave birth to her son Caliban (1.2.314). Before the arrival of Prospero and Miranda, Sycorax had died on the island leaving her son Caliban in charge.

The language with which Prospero recounts this tale is drenched with insults and accusations. His threatening language reveals his unquestioning assumption of authority over the island and its subject. He speaks of “This damned witch Sycorax,/For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible”(1.2.311-312). The accusation can be interpreted as derived from a need to establish his authority over his subject but it can also be interpreted as racist and misogynistic.

Curiously, there are several parallels to be drawn between Prospero and Sycorax. Both characters are said to have magical powers for which they were forced into exile along with their child upon the island. Nevertheless, Prospero shows no sign of empathy or understanding towards the woman from Algiers. Prospero himself takes great care to distance himself from all comparison to Sycorax. Ania Loomba argues in *Gender, Race, Renaissance drama* (1989) that Prospero’s “repeated comparisons between their different magics and their respective reigns of the island are used by him to claim a superior morality, a greater strength and a greater humanity, and hence legitimize his takeover of the island and its inhabitants” (328). Prospero’s racist language could then serve as a way to reflect this superiority over Sycorax. It is possible that he still feels the need to defend his claim on the island because the influence of Sycorax’s magical powers are still felt through the presence of Caliban. When provoked by his master, Caliban attests to his mother’s strength and power to express his
disdain of Prospero and Miranda: “As wicked dew as e’er my mother brushed/With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen/Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye/ And blister you all o’er!” (1.2.378-81). Caliban facilitates the memory of Sycorax to threaten his master: “All the charms/Of Sycorax – toads, beetles, bats – light on you!” (1.2.397-98). Even Prospero admits that Sycorax was “so strong/That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs./And deal in her command without her power” (5.1.305-307). Nonetheless, Prospero will not regard her as an equal. Even though he suggestively admits in the final act of the play that “this think of darkness I/acknowledge mine” (5.1.311-12).

At the beginning of the play both Prospero and Miranda refer to his magic as “art” (1.2.1-1.2.30). On the other hand, Sycorax is accused of being a witch, practicing witchcraft, which grants Prospero moral superiority. Moreover, when Prospero refers to her illegitimate pregnancy, the implicated promiscuity puts Sycorax in the category of the prostitute, inferior to and dependent on men. From this perspective, Prospero revalidates and confirms his masculine superiority in relation to Sycorax. So between the foreign witch Sycorax, the obedient and virginal Miranda and Prospero’s fair wife, the women of The Tempest divide between them the patriarchal gender stereotypes of mother, virgin and prostitute.

**6.3. AMBIGUOUS GENDER ROLES**

The ambiguity surrounding Miranda’s gender is derived from her educational upbringing. Similarly, Prospero plays an ambiguous gender role as he functions as both a father and a mother to Miranda. Additionally, the servant Ariel’s gender ambiguity allows the spirit to be contrasted with Miranda herself. All of these ambiguous elements affect the power hierarchy that is established in The Tempest.

Firstly, Shakespeare’s Miranda initially invites a simple reading as a passive figure who is merely a pawn in her father’s plan of vengeance. Nonetheless, her character’s behaviour sometimes contradicts this traditional reading. Firstly, Ania Loomba remarked that
Miranda’s education has a double purpose. On the one hand, Loomba observes that having her father as her teacher, Miranda “has been schooled into obedience” (331). On the other hand, Loomba believes that “Miranda’s schooling calls upon her to participate actively in the colonial venture” (331-32). In this regard, Hopkins noted that Miranda has a uniquely powerful position within her own culture:

As coloniser, Miranda functions as representative of her own culture, and yet her position within that culture is itself fraught with insecurity. Not only has she had no contact with any member of it other than her father Prospero, whose suitability to initiate her into it may perhaps be called into question, but she is, moreover, an oddity within the patriarchal society from which she originates, in that her status as only child of a duke is set to position her as that anomaly of Renaissance culture, a female ruler (Hopkins 13).

Nevertheless, while her social class might allow her to exercise power over that “abhorrèd slave” Caliban, at the same time, her gender undercuts that power because it makes her vulnerable and helpless in face of Caliban’s masculinity. In addition, Miranda might have had more power in Milan, on the island she is less like a coloniser and more like a native woman.

Secondly, Anna Jameson noted in her book Shakespeare’s Heroines (1832) that Miranda’s perfection is derived from her being “so perfectly unsophisticated, so delicately refined, that she is all but ethereal” (148-49). Yet we have seen that this is not always the case, she is not always so refined, so docile or so innocent. She also proves to be more sophisticated than she appears for in the final act of the play she is seen playing chess. In "Ferdinand and Miranda at Chess" (1982), Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor pose the question why, “[i]f Shakespeare’s young lovers are intended to be surrounded by an aura of chastity,” did Shakespeare choose to depict a tableau where the young lovers are playing chess?

Miranda even playfully accuses Ferdinand of cheating: “Sweet lord, you play me false”
(5.1.189), displaying some assertive confidence that is uncharacteristic of her innocent persona. This revelation of Miranda’s assertiveness and intellectual confidence adds to her character’s ambiguity concerning her gender.

Furthermore, Prospero’s respect for his daughter gives the impression that she might be more to him than a valuable commodity after all. In the first act, for example, he acknowledges that if it had not been for Miranda’s existence, he would not have possessed the courage to face his condition in exile:

O, a cherubin
Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile,
Infusèd with a fortitude from heaven,
When I have decked the sea with drops full salt,
Under my burden groaned, which raised in me
An undergoing stomach, to bear up
Against what should ensue. (1.2.178-184)

Prospero speaks of him and Miranda as “The Duke of Milan/And his more braver daughter” (1.2.510-11). When Prospero hands his daughter over to Ferdinand he promises that “she will outstrip all praise/And make it halt behind her” (4.1.10-11).

Secondly, the above-mentioned father-daughter relationship that is established in act one scene two, sets the tone for the rest of the play. However, the father-daughter gender relationship is more complicated than it would appear on the surface. First, in terms of Miranda’s education and upbringing, Prospero has performed both the role of father and mother to Miranda. In accordance with the orthodox view on parenting, Prospero has been the authoritarian and disciplinary father figure while at the same time he has provided a loving and nurturing presence in Miranda’s life (Shin “Single Parenting”). The following lines performed by Miranda display her soft demeanour and compassion “O, the cry did
knock/Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perished” (1.2.8-9). She is distraught, hysterical and pitiful as she pleads to her father in what is a generally accepted feminine disposition. Notably, the very compassion that defines Miranda’s sweet female nature might be instilled in her through Prospero’s unorthodox parenting for she admitted she has no memory of her mother: I do not know/One of my sex; no woman’s face remember, Save from my glass, mine own” (3.1.58-60).

Moreover, Prospero is the person who controls the household and orders Caliban to fetch logs (1.2.427). He appears to have never taught Miranda how to perform the duties required of a lady of the house. The reason for this is probably because a father is not supposed to raise his own daughter. In his essay “Single parenting” Shin draws from The Mirrhor of Modestie (1579), a popular book of conduct for women, in which Renaissance humanist Thomas Slater defended the education of women as long as it was committed to install the Christian female virtues of silence, chastity and modesty. According to the Renaissance code of female conduct, women should be taught by women, not men, and separately from men, so not alongside Caliban. Furthermore, even though Prospero embraces the female orthodox values of silence, modesty and virginity, at the same time his educational practices are fairly unorthodox. As a humanist man of reason, Prospero has taught her more worldly knowledge such as science, politics and rhetoric. The Renaissance humanists who did believe in women’s education restricted their efforts to religious, philosophical, and moral instruction (Shin “Single Parenting”). Miranda’s education obviously goes beyond the socially approved subjects of Renaissance society. Although the play conveys little information about Miranda’s schooling, her speech reveals knowledge of legal practices when Miranda stands up for Ferdinand and vows to be his “surety” (1.2.556). Consequently, from an Elizabethan point of view, Miranda has been raised as a son rather than a daughter.
Thirdly, the ambiguity surrounding Ariel’s true gender identity has been the subject of much discussion among Shakespeare academics. This ambiguity is essential in the analysis of Propsero’s patriarchal control over the spirit. Following the spirit’s introduction in the play, Ariel is given a specific male gender identity. The spirit presents himself to his master Prospero as “Ariel and all his quality” (1.2.223). Henceforth, the spirit may be identified as being male. The reason for the ambiguity surrounding Ariel’s gender specification is twofold. The first reason for challenging Ariel’s masculinity is derived from his disposition towards Prospero. For Ariel’s manner of behaviour can be interpreted as being feminine. Moreover, the qualities with which Ariel’s conduct can be described, such as modesty, grace and tenderness, present a striking resemblance to those Anna Jameson used to characterize Miranda in Shakespeare’s Heroines (149). Notably, Prospero’s love for his angelic daughter is echoed in his fondness towards his subject Ariel. Just as Prospero expresses his love for his “cherubin” Miranda (1.2.178), he admits to his appreciation of his “dainty Ariel” (5.1.100):

Ariel: Do you love me, master? No?

Prospero: Dearly, my delicate Ariel

(4.1.51-52)

This delicate nature of Ariel can also be interpreted as Prospero’s legitimation for obtaining the spirit’s services. When Prospero reminds Ariel of his previous master Sycorax, he suggests that Ariel was ‘a spirit too delicate/To act her earthy and abhorred commands” (1.2.320-321). In this statement Prospero is implying that, in contrast to Sycorax’s “grand hests” (1.2.322), his “art” will be more befitting to the airy spirit.

Another noteworthy feature of Ariel’s disposition is his obedient and loyal service to Prospero. Historically, all of these features have been attributed to women. The spirit’s obedience and eagerness to please his master is apparent through his discourse on several occasions: “That’s my noble master! What shall I do? Say what? What shall I do?” (1.2.352-
The second reason for questioning Ariel’s masculinity is explained by Ann Thompson in her influential essay “Miranda, Where’s Your Sister?” Thompson writes that “while Ariel is clearly a male spirit, he is also required to impersonate a nymph of the sea and a half-female harpy, indicating a degree of ambiguity about his gender” (403). Ariel’s femininity can be interpreted as serving as a function of his value to Prospero: tricksy, dainty etc. These feminine qualities with which the performance of the male spirit Ariel is construed are in line with the play’s emphasis on masculine control and authority.

In contrast to Prospero’s authority over Miranda, which is justified through his social role as a father, Ariel’s servitude is based on an agreement struck between both parties, specifically, Ariel’s release from imprisonment in exchange for service. Prospero’s indignation at Ariel demanding his liberty “Before the time be out?” (1.2.288) implicates a time limit to the spirit’s service: It goes on, I see./As my soul prompts it.– Spirit, fine spirit: I’ll free thee/Within two days for this (1.2.485-487). This notion of service requires some further investigation. Considering how Irigaray proposed that “men make commerce of [women], but they do not enter into any exchanges with them” (This Sex 172), the deal made by Prospero confirms Ariel’s masculinity. At the same time, Ariel’s feminine qualities enforce the image of authority held by Prospero. Moreover, the implied femininity of Ariel’s character also provides the crucial power balance in the play. The slight imbalance at the beginning of the play caused by Ariel demanding his premature liberty is completely overthrown by Ariel’s release in the final act: “Why, that’s my dainty Ariel. I shall miss/Thee: but yet thou shalt have freedom” (5.1.100-1). This aspect of Ariel’s service stands in significant contrast to the unceasing servitude Caliban faces. Ariel’s elevation to freedom also stands in contrast to Miranda, who instead of gaining liberty and independence, was simply handed down to a new master and husband.
6.4. GENDER AND POWER HIERARCHY IN THE TEMPEST

Apart from having parental authority over his daughter Miranda and procuring the services of the spirit Ariel, Prospero legitimized his enslavement of the savage and deformed creature Caliban after he attempted to violate the honour of Miranda. Prospero establishes his masculinity as well as his authority through his power over these three subjects. Apart from the connection between masculine authority and the construction of femininity, this chapter will demonstrate that the formation of masculine identity occurs not only against women, but also against foreigners and social inferiors (Smith 104).

This chapter will draw on Smith’s theoretical framework to analyse Prospero’s masculinity in relation to the character of Caliban. The relationship between Prospero and Caliban can be characterized as one of mutual hatred and distrust: ‘Thou most lying slave,’ (1.2.403) or ‘Thou liest, malignant thing.’ (1.2.303). Nonetheless, following the above mentioned theory depicted in Shakespeare and Masculinity, Prospero needs Caliban as a social inferior against which he can define his own manliness. Prospero even expresses his need for Caliban: “We cannot miss him: he does make our fire./ Fetch in our wood and serves in offices/That profit us” (1.2.366-68). The process of Prospero’s masculine self-identification is complicated by Caliban’s own masculinity. Caliban’s display of his own manliness as an alternative model of masculinity enforces Prospero’s need to assert his own model as superior. For Caliban was not always a slave, he was born the son of a powerful woman as well as the legitimate heir of the island.

Caliban’s social position in The Tempest has been the subject of much debate between traditionalist and colonialist Shakespeare academics. Shakespeare’s concerns with colonialism, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, were very much alive in the Renaissance period and are announced very early in the pay. The Tempest’s preoccupation with questions of usurpation and appropriate government administrations in Milan invites its audience to draw
parallels with the situation of Europe in the New World (Critical Controversies 93). On the other hand, writers such as George Will argue in favour of a traditionalist reading and consider it absurd to impose our twentieth century concerns with “the imperialist rape of the Third World” on Shakespeare’s early modern play (Critical Controversies 94). This analysis of Caliban will argue neither for nor against a colonialist reading, but instead will focus on the role Caliban plays in Prospero’s gender construction.

When Caliban recounts the history and events that transpired between himself and his master, he explicitly stresses that before Prospero’s arrival he enjoyed freedom: “I am all the subjects that you have,/ Which first was mine own king” (1.2.399-400). The relationship between Caliban and Prospero has been compared by Shakespearean scholars to resemble the ‘noble savages’ depicted by Michel de Montaigne’s essay ‘Of the Cannibals’ (Bate “Introduction” 7). However, considering how Montaigne’s savages were neither noble nor good, simply no worse than sixteenth century Europeans, this comparison seems to negate Prospero’s moral superiority in the play. Shakespeare’s use of Montaigne’s work as a creative source, however, has been affirmed in Hugh Grady’s book Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne.

Nonetheless, before Caliban’s salacious attempt to rape Miranda, his relation to Prospero appeared to be profoundly different. In fact, Caliban himself describes his relationship to Prospero before his enslavement in a way that appears similar to Prospero’s relationship to both Miranda and Ariel. Before Caliban revealed his own masculine prowess, he enjoyed kind words and education from Prospero. The fact that Caliban shared a bed in the same cabin as Prospero and Miranda, leaves room for the interpretation that he was not even considered a servant, but shared an equal position as Miranda in the hierarchy of Prospero’s household. Since the loyalty to Prospero as head of the family that is demanded from both Miranda and Caliban is characteristic of the English Renaissance society, Caliban’s disobedience to Prospero’s will could be explained as a cultural misunderstanding.
Nevertheless, Caliban expresses his sorrow at the dissolution of the state of their relationship before the attempted rape:

When thou cam’st first,
Thou strok’st me and made much of me: wouldst give me
Water with berries in’t, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I love thee
And showed thee all the qualities o’th’isle,

(1.2.390-395)

Caliban goes on to pronounce this initial trust to have been a grave mistake: “Cursed be I that did so!” (1.2.397), for by showing Prospero all the qualities of the island, he willingly gave away all the leverage he possessed against Prospero’s authority. But from where came this sense of authority? For when Prospero first arrived upon the island with Miranda, he had been exiled, stripped from position and power. From a colonialist perspective we might presume that Prospero’s initial authority was derived from being a white male. Another reason for this original establishment of authority might be that Prospero possessed more knowledge. Yet Caliban too possessed knowledge, and considering their situation, one might pronounce Caliban’s knowledge to be more worthy or valuable. Or could it have been Caliban’s loneliness that immediately made him subject to Prospero’s will? On the one hand, Prospero acknowledges Caliban’s original position of authority when he argues that he had treated Caliban “with humane care, and lodged thee/In mine own cell” (1.2.404-06). On the other hand, Prospero’s use of the possessive pronoun suggests that he had already established his authority from the moment of his arrival, immediately laying claim upon a the island.

Moreover, it was merely out of his own goodness that he “Took pains to make thee speak” (1.2.414). Implicating that Prospero gained his control over Caliban through language.
Jonathan Bate wrote in his introduction to *The Tempest* that “[a]ccording to humanist theory, the learning of language is what makes man god-like as opposed to beast-like, but Caliban’s only profit from the language lessons delivered to him by Prospero and Miranda is the ability to curse” (“Introduction” 7). Caliban rejects Prospero’s lessons realizing the prize he paid for them was subjugation: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t/Is, I know how to curse. The red-plague rid you/For learning me your language”(1.2.423-25). Returning to the comparison of Caliban with Montagne’s concept of a noble savage, the idea that “what makes Caliban ‘filth’ may be the lessons in which Prospero has taught him that he is ‘filth’”(Bate “Introduction” 7), validates this comparison.

Smith’s argument that Prospero would need Caliban to define his own masculinity is complicated by Jonathan Dollimore’s concept of the ‘perverse dynamic’ which he describes as “that fearful interconnectedness whereby the antithetical inheres within, and is partly produced by, what it opposes” (33). Grounded in Derrida’s theory of binary opposition, Dollimore’s ‘perverse dynamic’ implies that “the hated foreigner may turn out to be you”(Smith 127). In other words, because Prospero, the man of reason, needs Caliban, the beast-monster, to define his own masculinity, this beastly nature will continually “threaten to erupt from within” (Smith 127). If we accept this theory, the disturbingly harsh language used by Prospero to address Caliban “Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself” (1.2.376) could be derived from his need to suppress his own beastly nature and establish his masculine superiority as a rational man.

Additionally, this very fear of becoming the animal that is Caliban by defining himself against the animal, explains perhaps why Prospero took ‘great pains’ to eradicate Caliban’s animal nature through education. Having failed at educating Caliban into humanity, Prospero emphasizes Caliban’s animal nature in order to distinguish himself from the man-monster he does not want to resemble. In fact, Prospero literally uses animal references to address
Caliban: “Come, thou tortoise!” (1.2.372). Bate argues in his introduction that even though Prospero talks about Caliban as “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/Nurture can never stick” (4.1.204), the beautiful verses spoken by Caliban immediately repudiates Prospero’s claim (“Introduction” 7). This confirms in some degree the proposition that the foreigner might indeed turn out to be more similar to his master than the master would like to admit. However, the fact that Caliban believes an alcoholic butler to be like a God shows how highly Caliban believes the white man ranks on the social hierarchy of life. Similarly, it is because Shakespeare’s English audiences would have realized how low Caliban ranks in the same social hierarchy that the slave’s illusion could be received as comical. Robert Langbaum, argues in his book The Modern Spirit for the importance of these differences of degree within the human scale:

Caliban’s crime in conspiring against Prospero is a sin against degree – like the plot of Antonio and Sebastian against Alonso, and Antonio’s usurpation of Prospero’s throne. Prospero erred in attempting to educate Caliban, just as he erred in allowing Antonio to play duke in Milan. In both cases, he blurred distinctions of degree and helped create the disorder that followed. (Langbaum, 190-91)

Langbaum hereby implies that Prospero’s authority is based on the social hierarchy of the early modern period that determines Caliban is inferior to him, on the grounds that nature is inferior to culture.

In spite of these arguments, Prospero’s process of self-identification is not so easily defined as by simply asserting his mastery over his subjects. Smith analyses Prospero’s masculine identity in relation to the many binary oppositions present in his speech. He argues that ”[f]ar from presenting himself as an all-powerful magus or confident imperialist, Prospero describes himself as a deeply divided man” (Smith 141-42). These antipodal
characteristics are caused by Prospero’s complex identity. Aside from displaying some autocratic tendencies, Prospero is also a man of learning, representing the qualities of ‘a humanist man of moderation’. Smith proposes that the audience should be encouraged to view the play as an attempt to consolidate the oppositions of Prospero’s divided self. He argues that the humility with which Prospero performs his final speech promotes this view of The Tempest as a story of coalescences:

The story he tells this time will be one of oppositions reconciled, of the private scholar regaining public rule, of liberal arts put into the service of government, of ‘I’ and ‘my brother’ atoned, of reputation and reality being made one and the same (Smith, 141-42).

However touching Prospero’s final speech may appear: “Now my charms are all o’erthrown./And what strength I have’s mine own,/Which is most faint: now ’tis true” (5.1.361-63). Present in his discourse is an undeniable request to be released: “But release me from my bands” (5.1.369). Many academic scholars have interpreted these last verses as Shakespeare’s farewell speech to the world of theatre. And while this interpretation is not disputed, this request implies an imbalance of power that stands in great contrast with the rest of the play. From the first act Prospero has been portrayed as the powerful master who possesses full control over his subjects. In Prospero’s final speech, however, we learn that the hierarchy of men’s society includes the masters: “The masculinity of men […] is defined with respect to their social others, both below and above” (Smith, 120). Perhaps we ought to consider, as A. O. Lovejoy proposes, that Plato’s concept of the Great Chain of Being still enjoyed considerable strength in the early modern period (315-334).
CHAPTER III

LOOKING AT JULIE TAYMOR’S SCREEN ADAPTATION, ALTERING POWER AND GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

7. JULIE TAYMOR: REWRITING \textit{THE TEMPEST}

7.1. GENDER REVERSAL

Before Shakespeare’s reinvention as “the bard” in the eighteenth century, his plays were continually revisioned and rewritten to speak to time sensitive cultural needs of the audience (Keenan 65). Notably, \textit{The Tempest}’s most celebrated adaptation by Dryden and Davenant called \textit{The Tempest; or, Enchanted Island} (1667) has known a larger stage history than Shakespeare’s original play during the Restoration age. The favourable outcome of this adaptation is most likely due to its focus on usurpation and restoration, as was the focus of most early Restoration plays (Keenan 65). Moreover, Dryden and Davenant’s prominent revision of Shakespeare’s original could address issues of gender that were unimaginable in Shakespeare’s time. Dryden and Davenant were able to comment on male-female relations by rewriting the original text and casting female actors for the performance. Therefore, \textit{The Tempest} was able to stay current and speak to a Restoration audience in a way the original text could not have done. In this regard Jonathan Bate commented that great works of art can only survive when they can be transformed to speak to the concerns of the new age:

As with natural selection, the quality that makes a really successful and enduring cultural artefact is the capacity to change in response to new environments, new cultural circumstances. Certain works of art are able to speak in new ways to later generations because they are very successful at plugging into the archetypal struggles that make up the human condition or
because they give distinctive form to the enduring narratives that make us habitual storytellers and listeners to stories (Bate “Enter Ariel” 9).

In the history of adaptations of The Tempest, Taymor’s artistic decision to reverse Prospero’s gender is neither unique nor surprising. Jonathan Bate argued in his contributing foreword to Taymor’s book of The Tempest that Julie Taymor is merely “following in the venerable tradition of Dryden and Davenant by giving the role to a great actor who happens to be female” (10). Bate commented that in contrast with the Royal Shakespeare Company’s choice to cast Vanessa Redgrave as Prospero, “Taymor has made the more interesting, more Davenantesque choice of turning Prospero into Prospera” (Bate “Enter Ariel” 10).

Surprisingly, this reworking of the original play only necessitated a limited amount of rewriting. Similar to Dryden and Davenant’s adaptation, Taymor rewrote the original text by means of some invented lines that imitate Shakespearean language and rhythm. The most prominent change made to the original text are the “he’s” to “she’s” and “sir” to “ma’am”. Additionally, the major adjustment that was necessary to accommodate the change in plot is found in the recreation of the character’s personal history in act I scene II of the play (Taymor 14). In Taymor’s version, Prospera is the wife of the Duke of Milan and mother to her daughter Miranda. The same as her counterpart Prospero, she has dedicated her life to the study of the alchemical arts. Upon her husband’s death, the widow Prospera gains sole custody of the dukedom, thus awaking the ambition and jealousy of her brother Antonio who will then accuse his sister of witchcraft, a crime punishable by death. Here the original text resumes and Prospera, as autocratic master and vengeful mother, already suffered twelve years of exile on a deserted island. Her source of power originates from a maternal protective strength and a capability to control nature. The universal themes that have made Shakespeare’s The Tempest a timeless classic, namely vengeance, compassion and forgiveness, now become even more intricate when it comes to Prospera’s relationship with
Miranda, Ariel, Caliban and Sycorax. The following reading of Taymor’s rewriting will focus on the altered dynamics between these characters due to the protagonist’s gender switch. Considering how Taymor’s adaptation stays relatively true to Shakespeare’s original text, it is surprising how much the gender reversal affects the individual characters and their relation to each other.

The conflicting impulses that Mirren brings to her character make her Prospera an equally classic Shakespearean protagonist as her literary counterpart Prospero. Her character combines at once the figure of a mother, a scholar, a witch and a sole ruler whose emotional range extends from erratic vengefulness, passionate fury, motherly warmth to protective instincts and morally dubious and conflicting thoughts. The major difference between the reading of Prospero in the original text and the reading of Prospera in Taymor’s rewriting is again a question of priority. In the traditional reading, Prospero is most concerned with control. Prospero’s interactions and actions in the play all revolve around this aspect of control. In contrast, Prospera’s main struggle is not with control, but it is a struggle between her duties as a mother and her duties to herself. Throughout the film, it is striking how Prospera is failing in her role as a mother when she focuses on her own desires. Similarly, when she prioritises Miranda’s needs, she seems to failing herself. This interpretation of Prospera’s inner struggles is derived from a contemporary view on women and mothers in general. It speaks to contemporary female dilemmas and lies at the heart of modern prejudice and feminist criticism.

Furthermore, just like Dryden and Davenant’s adaptation, Taylor’s adaptation successfully comments on male and female relations in modern day society. In Taymor’s adaptation, a woman is shown capable of obtaining a position of power in society. Scholar Stephen Greenblatt stated in his Norton Introduction to Shakespeare, that in the days of The Tempest:
while gentlemen mastered the arts of rhetoric and warfare, gentlewomen were expected to display the virtues of silence and good housekeeping. Among upper-class males, the will to dominate others was acceptable and indeed admired; the same will in women was condemned as a grotesque and dangerous aberration” (493).

Nevertheless, upon her husband’s death, Prospera is elected as his rightful successor, above any capable male relatives such as her brother Antonio. In a flashback scene, Prospera is seen sitting in a state room with her counsellors signing official documents. Prospera’s authority is not portrayed as offensive or in any way unusual. Similarly, Prospera’s study of the alchemical arts is not presented as unorthodox, unlike Miranda’s education in the original text.

In contrast with the original text where Prospero’s lack of engagement as the duke of Milan was the cause of his exile, Prospera’s exile is the result of her brother accusing her of witchcraft. Prospera acknowledges that the practice of witchcraft is an offense punishable by death. Therefore, it is not only surprising that, upon this accusation, Prospera was exiled rather than executed. If Prospera’s power position was socially acceptable and if the character of Prospera was similarly preoccupied by her intellectual interests to prevent her brother’s usurpation, it is interesting to question why Taymor felt the need to rewrite this part of Prospera’s history. Firstly, the reason behind this rewritten accusation might be derived from a general prejudice against powerful and educated women. The accusation could serve as a comment on this prejudice. Secondly, the accusation specifically emphasizes the gender reversal. In Taymor’s adaptation, it is partly because Prospera is a woman that her dukedom was stolen from her, and the bitterness of this fact infiltrates and heightens the tension of all her actions and interactions on the island. Moreover the politics of matriarchy add another dimension to the story.
Prospera’s raising of the tempest stems not only out of a need for vengeance and the reprimanding of those responsible for her fate. Prospera’s fury towards her enemies is open and manifest “I will plague them all, even to roaring” (“Screenplay” 145). Prospera is also motivated by the guilt over her daughter’s innocent exile. On the one hand, the mother-daughter relationship present in the adaptation turns a possessive and controlling relationship into a natural and protective connection between mother and daughter. On the other hand, Mirren’s Prospera not only speaks the same lines written for Prospero, the protagonist’s behaviour seems not to have changed along with its gender. The ambiguity between these two aspects of Prospera’s character are reflected in every interaction Prospera has throughout the play.

Mirren’s performance of Prospera can produce a contemporary discussion on the function and role of a mother. The original text negates the belief there is such a thing as a good mother. The mother figures in The Tempest are not only absent, their function as a mother is limited and inconsequential. Taymor’s adaptation also comments on the role of a mother. From the beginning of the film, it is made very clear that Prospera’s role as a mother was never a priority for her, yet the rewriting offers no apology for Prospera’s neglect of Miranda. As Prospera relates their story to Miranda in the beginning of the film, she tells her daughter that her late husband accepted his wife’s desire to focus on her intellectual studies even though it might interfere with her motherly duties. As Prospera narrates that her husband “gave license to my long hours in pursuit/Of hidden truths” (“Screenplay” 37), she admitted that “I brooked no interruption but your squalling;” (“Screenplay” 37). This scene shows Prospera intently at work in her laboratory while her husband lovingly observes her work from the doorway and the infant Miranda is seen wailing in a cradle at Prospera’s feet. This scene explains why Miranda remembers the four or five women that had attended her as a
child instead of her mother (‘Screenplay’ 36). In the manner in which this scene is narrated, it appears that Prospera’s behaviour is viewed as socially acceptable.

Nevertheless, the effect of turning Prospero the father into Prospera the mother cannot be denied. On the island, Prospera is portrayed as protective, concerned, caring, and empathetic towards Miranda. The question, however, whether or not Prospera’s priorities have actually changed is answered when she enters her cell after procuring the tempest. Prospera’s cell is located in an underground cave and the interior reflects Prospera’s personality. The cell is largely occupied by an altar and a homemade alchemist’s laboratory; consisting of “handblown glass vials filled with various liquids, seeds, and strange plants sit on rough-hewn tables” (‘Screenplay’ 35). The other part of the cell shows “signs of domestic life: a primitive loom and spinning wheel, a bed constructed from a portion of a small, wrecked boat, books” (‘Screenplay’ 35). The setting of Prospera’s cell thus emphasizes that her priorities have remained unchanged. The characterization of Prospera does not adhere to the gender characteristics proposed by Irigaray. Prospera’s actions are most unlikely for a woman to perform. This aspect of Prospera’s personality is what makes Taymor’s rewriting empowering for women. While Prospera remains a woman and a mother, her mannerisms can mostly be described as masculine, equalling those of her literary counterpart Prospero.

Consequently, Prospera’s self-identification as a woman can on the one hand appear unnatural given our cultural determination of what is feminine. On the other, Prospera’s concern with her daughter’s future has become, according to Bate, “maternal in a wholly natural way” (“Enter Ariel” 10). In the reading of the original text, Prospero’s possessiveness towards Miranda and her virginity is defined as patriarchal. Bate argues that “Shakespeare’s main purpose was to stress the importance of legitimacy and respect in the marital union, not least because it is the basis for a political union of Milan and Naples” (“Enter Ariel” 10). Taymor’s rewriting transforms this cold marriage transaction into a more romantic exchange.
Prospera’s intentions with Miranda and Ferdinand are less emphasized as a political play for social advancement but rather as a mother ensuring the happiness of her daughter.

As a mother, Prospera is acutely aware of her daughter’s emotional experience as a young virgin on the threshold of marriage and womanhood. When she thus planned the encounter between Miranda and Ferdinand she will have based her actions upon this knowledge. She would not have chosen Ferdinand if he was not the right man to take care of her daughter, notwithstanding his social status. It seems more natural for a mother to test the intentions of her daughter’s young suitor ‘all thy vexations/ Were but my trials of thy love and thou/ Hast strangely stood the test here’ (“Screenplay” 130). As a woman, there will also be no male rivalry with Ferdinand, thereby stripping away the Freudian possessive implications in the relationship. This reading is corroborated by Prospera’s actions in the final act of the play. When Prospera prepares her return to Milan, she needs to put her traditional black corset back on, reclaiming her role as a widow in society. Of course, in the traditional reading of the play where Prospero puts on his robe, the intention is quite the opposite (Taymor 15). From just Prospera’s perspective, she might benefit more by staying on the island and enjoy her power position as well as her freedom to focus on her studies. Her need for vengeance and her decision to return to western civilization are not linked to each other. The first is for her own benefit, the latter for her daughter’s. Where Prospero is losing the control over his daughter, Prospera expresses the actual loss of her daughter.

The danger of this gender switch, however, is that it comfortably leads to sexualised readings of the characters in the play. When Caliban reminds Prospero in the original text that “When thou cam’st first,/Thou strok’st me and made much of me” (1.2.390-91), there is no literary critic who would argue that this line contains any sexual connotations. When Caliban speaks this line to Prospera, however, sexual innuendos immediately arise. It would be acceptable to argue that this line refers to a sexual relationship Prospera once had with
Caliban when she lodged him in her own cell (“Screenplay” 58-59). Following this line of reasoning, Caliban’s enslavement after the attempted rape of Miranda, could be due to the jealousy of a scorned woman. Caliban’s large and muscular appearance in the film also adds to this particular reading. Furthermore, if it weren’t for Prospera’s ‘potent art’, she would not be able to stand up against Caliban’s masculine prowess. Consequently, her gender makes her weaker than her literary counterpart. Caliban’s frustration and rebellion against Prospera could then be explained as a cultural confusion like in the original text, or it could be interpreted as Caliban’s refusal to be the subject of a woman. This would explain why Caliban so readily accepted the leadership of a man, though be it a drunken butler like Stephano.

Additionally, when the reading of the relationship between Prospera and Caliban is stripped from all sexual allusions, Caliban’s enslavement still cannot be interpreted as a power play between master and servant but as a power play between a mother lion and a predator. In this scenario, Caliban could have viewed Prospera as a substitute mother figure upon her arrival on the island. Prospera, then, would have taken Caliban under her wing out of any maternal instinct she might have and subsequently treated Caliban as if he was like a son (“Screenplay” 58-59). Caliban’s disillusionment at his enslavement is then derived from the realization that although he was treated as an equal, he was not good enough to touch Miranda. Moreover, the anger comes from the betrayal he feels towards the woman he had thought loved him like a mother.

Similarly, at the heart of the relationship between Prospera and Ariel, lies companionship rather than servitude. While the relationship between Prospero and Ariel is read as one between master and servant, Prospera as a woman encourages a reading more resembling one between mother and son. The interaction between these two characters becomes more tender. Additionally, Ariel’s need to please his master resembles the need of a
child to make his parent proud. Prospera’s indulgences to his efforts take on a motherly quality “This was well done, my bird” (“Screenplay” 145).

The relationship between Prospera and Sycorax has also grown more complex since the differences that had separated the male Prospero from the witch are in this scenario no longer applicable. Prospera’s identification and accusation as a witch started when her brother Antonio accused her in Milan for being ‘A demon, not a woman, nay a witch, and he, full knowing that others of my sex have burned for no less’. Nevertheless Prospera sees herself as a scientist, engaged in the study of alchemy and nature in order to understand and apply these natural forces. The knowledge of natural medicinal elements is traditionally tied to women. The identification of Nature as “Mother earth” has justified this link (Taymor 15). The battle between white and black magic, however, starts on the island with the release of Ariel and the enslavement of Caliban. The rancour between the two characters is brought into sharp focus as Prospera spews her disdain for the ‘foul witch, Sycorax’ (1.2.304). Prospera insists on a clear distinction between both types of magical powers, and yet, we recognize several resemblances between Prospera’s magic and the arts of Sycorax. Both characters are passionate women as well as mothers, proving that the line between white and black magic is not always clear and that they cannot always be neatly separated. Bate similarly argued that “[t]he more Prospera protests that her magic is white whereas that of Sycorax is back, the less convinced we become that black and white magic can be kept neatly apart in separate boxes (Bate “Enter Ariel” 10).

The feminization in this scenario is empowered by Shakespeare’s intimation to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* when in the final act Prospera conjures for the last time, resolving to abjure her magic, she uses a direct quote from Medea’s incantation “Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves”. If the black arts of the female witch Medea are the source for Prospero’s seemingly white magic, than this is justification in itself to reinvent Prospero as
female (Bate “Enter Ariel” 10-11). Additionally, this connection also reinforces the complexity of Shakespeare’s play that assumes the difficulty of making clear distinctions between good and evil in the theatre, and in the world.

8. PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS: PERFORMING GENDER ON SCREEN

8.1. GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

In the traditional orthodox perception gender is viewed as a binary opposition where both the masculine gender as the feminine gender have specific characteristics that define them as a particular group. Post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler has challenged this orthodox assumption in her most influential work *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). In the introduction of *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the very subject of feminism is based on the idea that women are a category with an existing identity (3). This approach to feminism has inadvertently reinforced the binary opposition that confines human beings in the categorical groups of men and women. According to Butler, this approach limits the field of feminism to the orthodox opposition of male and female. Furthermore she claims that even though feminists have forsaken the belief that biology creates our destiny they have still “developed an account of patriarchal culture which assumed that masculine and feminine genders would inevitably be built, by culture, upon ‘male’ and ‘female’ bodies, making the same destiny just as inescapable” (“Butler Biography”). This line of reasoning does leave room for choice or resistance.

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* interacts with the theories of some of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th century such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Michel Foucault. The latter’s influence has perhaps been the most fundamental for the development of her theory. Butler’s provocative argument that gender is merely a “stylized repetition of acts” essentially implies a form of materialism that negates any possibility of a spiritual explanation of self-identity (“Performing Gender”,
72). Significantly, if a gender identity is constituted by means of acts that have no relation to the internal, then the appearance of a particular gender core is indeed just an appearance or, as Judith Butler calls it, a performative act that both the performers as well as their audiences have come to accept as the truth. For this reason, Butler negates the existences of such a true gender identity. Essentially, Butler attacks the accepted ‘naturalness’ of gender and she pronounces the western notion of ‘a born gender’ as what it is, namely, a fabricated fiction. To justify this claim, Butler states that the actions that are associated with a person’s sexual identity are not a reflection of someone’s innermost self but rather culturally coded acts. Butler claims that no person is born with a fixed gender. Gender is not to be perceived as a manifestation of a subject’s internal essence. Alternately, one should view gender identity as a produced product of our actions and discourse. In other words, Butler proposes that mundane and routine behaviour, speech, body language and self-image produce in combination with social and cultural codes and restrictions the established definition of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’.

Unlike Luce Irigaray, Butler refutes the notion of sex as a naturally established category. Instead she claims that like gender, sex is also an acquired socio-cultural category (Gender Trouble 3-44). Butler argues that the construction of gender and sexual identity emerges out of culturally and socially established practices. These practices, including their discourses, have their own recorded history as well as their own social and political dynamics.

In discussing this notion of ‘gender performativity’, Butler stresses the importance of recognizing the distinction between performing a gender and gender as performative. Butler says that to perform a gender is to take on a certain role, to act in a particular sort of role-play that is pivotal in the creation of the gender that we want to present to the world. Nevertheless, performing a gender is not similar to the notion of ‘gender performativity’.
Judith Butler explains that “for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk, speak and talk in ways that consolidate the impression with ‘being a man’ or ‘being a woman’” (“Your behaviour”). It is a phenomenon that is produced and reproduced all the time” (“Your behaviour”).

8.2. INTRODUCING PROSPERA: SCENE ANALYSIS

Having already discussed the narrative consequences of this rewriting, this chapter will solely focus on Mirren’s performance of Prospera and how this performance resulted in the limited narrative consequences of this adaptation of *The Tempest*. As the following performance analysis of Prospera will suggest, Taymor’s adaptation of *The Tempest* has managed to maintain the compromise between preserving and modernising the play as well as marry the two acting traditions as discussed above. In the first place, Taymor’s film is designed to imitate an unspecific time in history. Both the set and costume designs leave ample room for interpretation concerning the period in which the film transpires. While the costumes imitate seventeenth century dress designs, the material from which the costumes are made such as leather decorated with zippers are more modern. Similarly, while king Alonso’s ship and Prospera’s cell furniture all refer to historical designs, the specific date remains uncertain. In this way, Taymor preserves the feeling of antiquity of the play while at the same time relinquishing the film from any obligations regarding the set or style of the adaptation. Therefore, Taymor created the perfect setting for the fusion of the two traditions.

The limited narrative consequences of this adaptation may be surprising, nevertheless, after evaluating Mirren’s performance it becomes clear why the effect of the reversal of Prospero’s gender is not as drastic as would be expected. The Elizabethan custom of allowing young boys to take on the female roles in the play didn’t affect the understanding of the play. Shakespeare’s characters are constructed through his words, and for this reason, Mirren’s performance succeeded in creating in her Prospera the equal of her literary counterpart.
Prospero. The actress Helen Mirren has long been familiar with the Shakespeare tradition, having played the roles of Cleopatra, Ophelia, and Lady Macbeth in performances of the Royal Shakespeare Company. This experience legitimizes the statement that Mirren has the “rhythms of Shakespearean verse in her blood” (Bate “Enter Ariel” 11). Mirren’s understanding of the text allowed her to portray all the complexities of the character as Shakespeare intended it notwithstanding her gender. The fusion of a naturalistic acting tradition with Shakespeare’s heightened language came across on scene through the use of close-ups and the actor’s natural execution of the speech.

The first scene under discussion reflects the essence of the character Prospera, namely, the moment she produces the tempest. The scene is introduced by a close shot of Miranda, played by Felicity Jones, standing on a beach looking out to sea. She is an untamed, natural beauty as well as a tomboy dressed in a dishevelled, rustic, and practical garment, as she looks confounded at the scene before her. Dramatic music starts playing while the camera shows fragments of the chaos on board of the ship trapped in the tempest. Meanwhile Miranda starts running through the storm towards the cliffs. The scene sets the tone to introduce Prospera, raging on a high cliff and leaning into the wind, her facial expression mirrors the tempest she generates. Her magical robe flies in the wind as she directs her staff towards the sky, in direction of the flaming, sinking ship. Taymor commented on Prospera’s costume that it was made to reflect Prospera’s internal essence:

In essence Prospera herself is a volcano, burning from within, primed to erupt and destroy, but ultimately to redeem and regenerate. […] Her magic robe is made of shards of blue/black volcanic rock placed in diagonal flows on a large conical shape. It is more a sculpture than a robe. Her everyday tunic is of natural indigo-dyed fabric, stitched together in layers, also like lave flow (Taymor 20).
The storms begin to subside as Miranda falls down at her mother’s feet, tears and rain are streaming down her face as she forces her mother to listen. The effect is instant, with one flourish of her staff, Prospera causes the storm to cease. As if she is coming out of trance, Prospera turns to her daughter and passionately assures her the tempest has done no harm. With an affectional stroke of her daughter’s hair she draws her closer and leads her away. This scene demonstrates the innate qualities as well as the extremes of Prospera’s character.

The second interaction introduces the airy spirit Ariel who appears as an element of nature, or more accurately, as a human form filled with water. This particular scene presents both characters as if she were the mother and he the child. Ariel proudly relays how he performed the tempest as demanded and enjoys Prospera’s appreciation, he appears like an excited child. When reprimanded for his excitement he scowls, sulks and stares at the floor. Nevertheless, the affection with which Prospera treats this servant is too intimate to overlook. She adores her brave spirit and when in the final scene she whispers to the wind “My Ariel, chick./That is thy charge. Then to the elements be free” (“Screenplay” 171) her emotion unintentionally reflected in her eyes.

The next interaction under discussion introduces Caliban to the scene. The scene is introduced by a shot of Prospera and Miranda crossing a desolate and grim territory in the distance. With a suspenseful theme playing on the background they arrive at a high hillock in an infinite landscape of black lava rock. When Prospera calls out to Caliban, she forcefully slams her wand on the ground, causing an intense, reverberating thump. The character of Caliban represents earth, he is of the island and when he is first seen he is positioned in a crack in a rock. His skin appears like camouflage, resembling the cerulean, black, and clay-red earth, its texture consists of hardened scales and volcano matter. Upon hearing his master’s command, Caliban grumbles and shows signs of resistance while continuing his dinner. When Caliban finally emerges out of a deep crevice in the cliff, he is standing high
above Prospera and Miranda, his towering and commanding presence overshadows the entire scene. An ominous theme is playing as Caliban powerfully spits out curses “Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye/ And blister you all o’er!” (“Screenplay” 58). In the face of Caliban’s powerful presence, Prospera looks small and outmatched while Miranda is cowardly lurking in the background. Prospera’s power only comes across when she raises her staff, which causes Caliban to collapse onto the ground as her magical powers seem to mentally and physically torment him. Nevertheless, Caliban continues to act defiant and while he shuffles around Prospera and her staff, he leans lasciviously towards Miranda, provoking her response “Abhorrèd slave” (“Screenplay” 59).

While Caliban still speaks the words “You taught me language, and my profit on’t/Is, I know how to curse” (“Screenplay” 59), Prospera’s influence on Caliban is present on his body as well: “Caliban’s head, chest, and limbs are carved with random curse words learned from his master, some formed as angry scars, some as tattoos made with squid ink and natural dyes” (“Screenplay” 56). Consequently, Shakespeare’s language receives visual aid through Caliban’s appearance. At the end of this scene, Prospera’s powerful influence causes a grumbling Caliban to retreat defeated and perform the task his master demanded. Nevertheless, the scene presented a clear power struggle. Prospera’s fragile frame and looks of pity and empathy seemed to give Caliban the upper hand. Prospera even displays a look of fear when Caliban draws near. Most of all, Prospera seems to be protecting her daughter from Caliban’s presence. When Caliban finally obeys and turns away, Prospera sighs and shows signs of relieve, displaying that this business was a burden. It also gives the impression that her actions and her demeanour in this scene were unusual or even performed. Jonathan Bate commented that “Mirren’s Prospera can be irascible and forceful, but she becomes truly herself when she is being tender – with Miranda, with Ariel, and even (in certain looks of pity and wonder) with Caliban” (Bate “Enter Ariel” 10).
As the film progresses towards the climactic confrontation between Prospera and those who have wronged her, Prospera displays once again her powers by producing a circle of fire that then recoils into the earth. This scene proves most significant as she then orders her servant Ariel: “Fetch me the skirt and bodice in my cell./I will discase me, and present/As I was sometime Milan” (“Screenplay” 155). Ariel fetches and returns in a moment’s notice and then helps her attire:

The corset Prospera has not worn for these past twelve years is pulled tight around her waist and chest, and laced from the back. Each tug of the cord by Ariel’s nimble fingers is a reminder of where she came from and where she will be going. A faint smile betrays the sacrifice” (“Screenplay” 155).

The scene then shows how Ariel leads an entranced aristocratic party into the circle of ashes in which Prospera entraps them. In the following interaction Prospera is poised and rational as she confronts her treacherous brother and his royal party. Taymor comments on this scene that “as a woman, the power and freedom she has wielded on the island will now be subject to the rules of the society to which she returns. Of course, in the traditional reading of the play where Prospero is dressed in his Duke’s robe and hat, the event represents quite the opposite meaning; his authority and status are still intact” (Taymor 20). This scene provides much discussion on the restrictions that are imposed on women in society, especially powerful women. While on the one hand, Taymor’s adaptation presents a modern audience with a strong and capable female protagonist, on the other hand, this female empowerment brings with it much discussion on current feminist issues.

Finally, in agreement with the modern rewritings of Prospero, Taymor’s rewriting conforms to the tendency to dethrone the character of Prospero from his godlike pedestal. Taymor described her idea of Prospera as both powerful and flawed:
Mirren brings many conflicting impulses to her Prospera, which makes her a classic protagonist in Shakespeare’s canon. With her erratic fury, cruelty, maternal warmth, cold authority, and poetic introspection, she plays the witch, the scientist, the poet, the ferocious tiger protecting her cub, the steely leader, and more. […] She is not perfect or benign, but twisted by a tempest within that stems from guilt over her daughter’s innocent exile and the urgency to exact revenge on those responsible (Taymor 15).

In the final scene of the film, Prospera displays the recognition that she bears some of the responsibility for Caliban’s rebellion. There is an intense moment between both characters after the final confrontation in act five. As king and his aristocratic party retreats into the cave, Prospera remains outside and turns to Caliban, who appears immobile from the anticipation of punishment. Finally, Caliban looks up to Prospera and stares intently at her staff. Caliban’s facial expression demonstrates that he is expecting her to use it against him. His eyes express how inconceivable he finds it that Prospera is not inflicting the agony he anticipates. Prospera seems to comprehend “the full measure of her own responsibility for Caliban” (“Screenplay” 171). There is a silent moment of communication between them before Caliban turns and climbs up the stairway and disappears. All alone, Prospera sighs and shows signs of relief “as if the heavy clouds of the tempest had been lifted from her shoulders” (“Screenplay” 171).

Considering Irigaray’s outlook on gender, she would conclude that Prospera’s behaviour as a mother and as a ruler are in essence ‘masculine’. Following Butler’s theory on gender performativity, however, Prospera’s actions and behaviour are merely a reflection of her innermost identity. The manner in which she appeared in Milan, namely, long white hair neatly braided and restrictive dress attire as well as her behaviour were culturally coded actions. On the island, she had the freedom to release herself from the cultural restraints
imposed on her character. So instead of defining Prospera’s behaviour and appearance as either unfeminine or unmasculine, her actions should be defined as ‘being Prospera’ in all her complexity: “But, howso’er you have/Been justled from your senses, know for certain/That I am Prospera” (Taymor 158). As the performance analysis confirms, Mirren performed Prospera as a woman, conveying all the intricacy of her emotions as she experienced them as a woman.

Performing Shakespeare in the twenty-first century is a matter of balance, namely, a matter of finding the balance between preserving Shakespearean antiquity and modernising the play to adjust to modern cultural values. In this respect, Taymor succeeded in balancing Shakespeare’s text and modern innovation. To reiterate, Worthen argued that “dramatic writing alone cannot exert “sovereign” force on its performance. Dramatic performance becomes meaningful by deploying the text in recognizable genres of behavior, regimes that finally determine what the text can mean as performance” (Worthen 12). By fusing Shakespeare’s heightened language with a naturalistic acting tradition as well as drawing on modern cultural values, Taymor created a platform upon which Mirren could create her character of Prospera as an equal to her literary equivalent Prospero. Mirren managed to transcend the 17th century verse and bring out the universal, time-honoured themes of the play, namely redemption and forgiveness. Shakespeare’s plays are treasured for his ability to show the moral complexity of humanity. However, the intention is not to judge our human weaknesses. His writing displays a sympathy for our leniencies. The inscribed nuances of Taymor’s adaptation in no way alter the essence of Shakespeare’s play, but rather give it another layer of depth as well as a new way to experience a familiar tale. The fact that neither the reading of Taymor’s rewriting nor the performance analysis of Prospera can escape modern day value and prejudices is unavoidable. As Tanja Weiss noted that the shaping of a Shakespeare play “to the view of subjects in the intellectual fashions of our own day […] is
indeed inevitable, be it only for the fact that neither the adaptor nor the distinguished critic (nor the spectator) live in historical and socio-cultural vacuums” (191).

The closing credit roll of the film is a visually stunning scene that combines Shakespeare’s verses and Prospero’s final monologue performed as a haunting musical song as Prospera’s book is seen drowning in the ocean. This scene demonstrates the power of a director capable of fusing the two traditions and one would have to agree with Jonathan Bate as he concluded that Taymor’s *The Tempest* “is a total work of art” (Bate “Enter Ariel” 11).

9. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has investigated the relationship between text and screen adaptations of Shakespeare’s final play *The Tempest*. By focusing on the gender politics in the original text, this study has been able to analyse to which extent Taymor’s rewriting of *The Tempest* has altered the reading of the traditional play. In this investigation, the aim was to assess how Taymor’s rewritten adaptation could still successfully bring across the essence of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as well as determine to which degree modern productions of Shakespeare can make creative choices that alter the original text.

The literary analysis of this study affirmed the masculine and feminine gender identifications proposed by Luce Irigaray and Bruce R. Smith. Taymor’s rewriting nearly altered every relationship in the play, adding new depth and insight into Shakespeare’s play. While on the one hand, this study has shown that it is possible for a woman to portray the role of Prospera as the equal of her literary counterpart Prospero in *The Tempest*. On the other hand, the ending of the film revealed that the female prejudice discussed by Irigaray and Smith has not yet disappeared in our modern culture. The empowering element of Taymor’s rewriting, however, is the fact that Mirren performed her role of Prospera as a woman, reacting and experiencing the narrative as a woman while still maintaining the original power
hierarchy of Shakespeare’s play. In this respect, Taymor has succeeded in paving the way for a rethinking of the play’s relation between gender and power politics. Consequently, Mirren’s performance of Prospera, enforced by Butler’s performative theory, has opened the door to more feminist rewritings as well as more strong female performances of Shakespeare’s classical work.

This study has also shown that the common thread in the discussions on screen adaptations, adaptation criticism, and performance analysis is the certifiable link that a successful Shakespeare adaptation maintains a certifiable link with the Shakespeare tradition, the history of Shakespeare readings for the past four centuries, and contemporary culture. Each individual production of a Shakespeare play needs to find a balance between performing the history of the original text and the modern acting traditions. Additionally, each adaptation should add a creative contribution to transform the original play into a valuable contemporary reading of Shakespeare speaking to modern concerns and values.

One of the more significant findings of this study has shown, while belying many adaptation critics, that it is necessary to transform Shakespeare’s classical texts and adapt them for the screen. Shakespeare on film can display a profound understanding of his plays through a contemporary medium and reinvent Shakespeare into the twenty-first century. The results from this study indicate that there still is no consensus in academic circles on the role of cinema in bringing Shakespeare’s timeless plays to a modern audience. The necessary liberties that are required to transform a classical work written for the stage in the seventeenth century into a work fit for the screen are the origin of the dialectical current of adaptation criticism. Nevertheless, as Jonathan Bate stated, great works of art can only survive if they can be rewritten to speak to modern concerns and values. Taymor’s screen adaptation not only stays true to the Shakespeare tradition, the play’s intertextual readings and the modern culture, her rewriting addresses contemporary feminist issues and modern values while maintaining
the essence of Shakespeare’s play. In other words, Taymor has successfully adapted Shakespeare into the twenty-first century.
10. WORKS CITED


