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## Authority in Crisis? The Dynamic of the Relationship Between Prospero and Miranda in Appropriations of *The Tempest*

# ABSTRACT

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda is fairly typical for Shakespeare's way of portraying parental authority and filial obligation. A strong and authoritative father, an absent mother and a (potentially) rebellious daughter are character types reused in many of his plays. In *The Tempest*, authority, power and ownership, be it political or domestic, are important themes. In criticism, Prospero is frequently discussed through the prism of his attitude to his "subordinates"—Ariel, Caliban and Miranda—and the play's narrative is interpreted in the context of the theatre of power. Parental authority, a social construct, is a dynamic thing, and the Renaissance patterns discernible in Shakespeare's plays are refashioned and changed in contemporary adaptations and appropriations of his plays. Informed by New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in relation to gender studies, this article seeks to examine the changing dynamics of the Prospero-Miranda relationship in three films—Derek Jarman's (1979), Paul Mazursky's (1982), and Julie Taymor's (2010)—as well as Philip Osment's 1988 play *This Island's Mine*. Focusing on the issue of authority, power and ownership, the article aims at showing how stereotypical social and gender roles resonate with various political contexts of power.

**Keywords:** *The Tempest*, Julie Taymor, Philip Osment, Derek Jarman, fathers and daughters.

In their famous show, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, the Reduced Shakespeare Company rightly notice that Shakespeare was a formula writer: “Once he found a device that worked, he used it over and over and over again.” One of such successful formulae used repeatedly in his plays is a family with an authoritative father, a rebellious daughter and an absent mother.<sup>1</sup> Whether such a family pattern is to be treated as a comment on, or a reflection of, the patriarchal system of Shakespeare’s times, or merely as a replication of similar relations proliferating in, as Kate Chedzoy phrases it, “male-dominated literary culture” (13), the fact remains that Shakespeare’s plays abound in motherless daughters struggling with their overbearing fathers. Hermia and Egeus, Katherina, Bianca and Baptista, Jessica and Shylock, Princes Katherine and the King of France, Ophelia and Polonius, Desdemona and Brabantio, King Lear and his three daughters, Prospero and Miranda, and many more, follow the same pattern. The father stands for power and authority, very often being literally a political authority, like Lear or Prospero, with nearly unlimited power over his daughter, whom he treats not only as his property but also often as an asset in his political or economic agenda. The daughter seeks ways either to accommodate to her father’s wishes or to negotiate her own agenda. The mother is not present and often not even mentioned, which renders the daughter even more helpless. This also stresses the institutional insignificance of the mother figure and the social powerlessness of the female.

The pattern, dramatically successful regardless of the genre, works in a similar way in Shakespeare’s comedies, problem plays, tragedies and romances.<sup>2</sup> Typically, the equilibrium between the father/owner and daughter/property is unbalanced when the daughter attempts to challenge the authority of the father.<sup>3</sup> In tragedies, regardless of whether the daughter

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<sup>1</sup> As Lynda E. Boose observes, “father and daughter appear in twenty-one dramas” by Shakespeare (325).

<sup>2</sup> It is slightly different in his history plays where women are treated largely as political assets, which shifts the focus away from the family context.

<sup>3</sup> In the majority of cases she does that by falling for a man not to her father’s liking, like Hermia, Jessica, Desdemona or Ophelia, although that is not necessarily the only scenario, as *King Lear* might illustrate. Boose again notices that “almost without exception the relationships . . . depend on significant underlying substructures of ritual. . . . And the particular ritual model on which Shakespeare most frequently drew for the father-daughter relationship was the marriage ceremony” (325). She further describes the symbolic significance of the marriage ceremony, as featuring in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, in which, through the agency of the priest, the daughter is transferred from the father to the husband. She very aptly stresses that in the transactional structure of the marriage ritual “[t]he mother of the bride is a wholly excluded figure—as indeed she is throughout almost the entire Shakespeare canon” (327).

successfully rebels (like Desdemona) or gives in to her father's authority (like Ophelia), she is bound to be punished for her disobedience by death. In comedies and romances, the daughters come out alive, although not necessarily victorious.<sup>4</sup> *The Tempest* offers an interesting variation on the theme of the daughter's rebellion against the father's authority, as it ends in triumph for both sides. The daughter marries the man she loves, but he is at the same time her father's choice. Still, there is an echo of the traditional scheme with a less fortunate ending occurring in the marriage of princess Claribel, Alonso's daughter, to the King of Tunis.<sup>5</sup> In this paper I wish to explore the relationship between Prospero as an authority father figure and Miranda as a (quasi)rebellious daughter in several versions of *The Tempest*. Each are different in terms of approach and medium, for they show the nature of that relationship in various cultural contexts. The texts to be analyzed are three film versions of the play—Derek Jarman's (1979), Paul Mazursky's (1982), and Julie Taymor's (2010)<sup>6</sup>—as well as Philip Osment's play inspired by and evoking *The Tempest*, *This Island's Mine* (1988).

#### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

In *The Tempest* the theme of power and authority is prevalent, and new historical, feminist and postcolonial readings help to highlight that aspect of the play. Greenblatt's seminal reading of romances, with a special focus on *The Tempest* in the context of the social practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is tellingly entitled "*Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne*" (emphasis mine). It indicates that the question of authority is central to the play. Across criticism and performance, Prospero is often seen as the figure denoting quintessential authority, and the associations of this character with Shakespeare and his institutionalized position not only in English but also global literature and culture help to establish his unfailing position of power.

<sup>4</sup> There are comedies in which the daughter truly triumphs, like Hermia or possibly Jessica, although it must be stressed that it is the father who is left in despair. A more bitter ending, however, is not unusual, like in the case of Katherina.

<sup>5</sup> This motif is forcefully visualized in Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, a film that with its focus on words, Prospero and authorship does not centralize the father-daughter relationship. Yet, Greenaway includes a shot of Claribel in the bedchamber of the king of Tunis, naked and bleeding in her marriage bed clearly after the act of consummation. As Ryle notices, the image illustrates Claribel's agony "lost to the machinations of political dynasty building" (183).

<sup>6</sup> Both Jarman and Taymor use the text of the play, although Jarman cuts and rearranges it more freely than Taymor, to the point that his film is sometimes treated as a commentary on, rather than an adaptation of the play. Paul Mazursky's film, in an offshoot mode, loosely retells the play's narrative without the use of the playtext.

In Prospero's own words, he is "the Duke of Milan and / A prince of power" (1.2.54–55). His desire to regain this ducal position is the driving force of the events. Eventually he not only gets his throne back and successfully restores his authority in Milan, but also by marrying Miranda to Ferdinand manages to put his heirs on Alonso's throne, thus, extending his political authority through a peaceful conquest of Naples.<sup>7</sup> Prospero is also the ruler of the island. Having arrived on the island, he took possession of it and its inhabitants, Ariel and Caliban.

The position of Prospero as the ruler of Caliban and Ariel is strongly marked in their initial exchanges. When Ariel first appears before Prospero, he says:

All hail, great master, grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding task  
Ariel, and all his quality. (1.2.189–93)

Ariel's language is the language of trained submission and servitude. He starts by saluting Prospero, and addresses him as a "great master" and "grave sir." What follows is an impressive litany presenting Ariel's readiness to perform any possible task to Prospero's "best pleasure." Prospero's response reaffirms the power relation between them: "Hast thou, spirit, performed to point the tempest / That I bade thee?" (1.2.194–95). With no unnecessary politeness the master demands from the servant a report on the assigned duties. Their further conversation develops in a more friendly vein as Prospero is pleased with Ariel's performance, yet his words of praise remain possessive: "my brave spirit" (1.2.206), "that's my spirit" (1.2.215). The tone of the conversation, however, changes dramatically at Ariel's mention of the promise of his liberty. Immediately, Ariel is brutally reminded of his obligations towards his saviour and master. Prospero calls him a liar, a "malignant thing" (1.2.257) and "my slave" (1.2.270), and in an act of psychological abuse forces him to relive the nightmare of the tortures Ariel suffered at the hands of Sycorax. Prospero finishes the discussion with a threat:

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<sup>7</sup> This conquest is quite consequential as Miranda, although a woman, is stronger and perhaps even more intelligent than Ferdinand. At the same time, she remains a puppet in her father's hands, unable to see through his ploys. Politically, that makes Ferdinand, the future king of Naples, a puppet in Prospero's hands.

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak  
And peg thee in his knotty entrails till  
Thou hast howled away twelve winters. (1.2.294–96)

Prospero thus obtains an apology from Ariel—

Pardon, master;  
I will be correspondent to command  
And do my spiriting gently. (1.2.296–98)

—and restores his absolute power over the unruly servant.

The relationship between Prospero and Caliban, much more violent than that with Ariel, is based on the same dynamic. Prospero addresses Caliban as a “poisonous slave” (1.2.320), “most lying slave” (1.2.345) or “abhorred slave” (1.2.351), and yields absolute power over him. Caliban only manages to curse his master but, unable to successfully challenge his power, he is bound to bear whatever is demanded from him. Although the play consequently juxtaposes Ariel and Caliban on a number of levels, they are both clearly positioned as Prospero’s servants, and in this way they are aligned with each other, as well as with Miranda.

In comparison to other father-daughter relations in the Shakespearian canon, the Prospero-Miranda one is not necessarily seen as abusive. Boose, for example, stresses that “Miranda, like Perdita and Marina, is the force that preserves her father,” that Prospero is motivated by concern for Miranda’s welfare, and that “of all the Shakespearean fathers of daughters, Prospero is undoubtedly the most successful in enacting his proper role” (340). Fletcher and Novy notice that *The Tempest* frequently notes moments of paternal affection.<sup>8</sup> One touching example they quote is the scene when Prospero recalls “little Miranda’s smile” (50). Still, they argue, “[h] owever common and desirable, affection was not the only crucial ingredient in the parent-child relationship” (Fletcher and Novy 50), and they continue to list more pragmatic—“patrilinear, primogenitural, and patriarchal,” as Stone would have it (qtd. in Boose 325)—aspects of familial

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<sup>8</sup> In their argument they contest the views of Stone (qtd. in Boose 325), who argued that in Elizabethan England parents treated children with formal distance and family relations were devoid of affection. Instead, they quote historians such as Wrightson, who finds ample evidence documenting “affection between parents and children in Elizabethan England” (Fletcher and Novy 50). Similarly, Boose clearly notes that fathers in Shakespeare’s plays frequently display strong emotional attachment to their daughters, which would seem to run counter to historical evidence on the family life of the period as related, for example, by Stone (325).

bonds. Indeed, in the context of *The Tempest's* central problems it is important to remember that Prospero is not only Miranda's father, but also the possessor and ruler of her political and redemptive potential. Although their relationship can be seen as emotional and caring, it denotes the same power status as Prospero's relation to Ariel or Caliban.

Notably, Prospero's first words to Miranda are imperatives and orders:

*Be collected;*  
*No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart*  
 There's no harm done. (1.2.13–15; emphasis mine)

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He has full control over her, putting her to sleep and waking her up as he pleases, and manipulating her into falling in love with Ferdinand to secure Prospero's political victory. Their relationship throughout the play is very much a replication of the power arrangement from their first talk, in which he uses the language of power and manipulation, obsessively checking whether she is listening to his story, and channelling her thoughts, interests and feelings. His plan for Miranda's role in the revenge agenda—introducing the naïve Miranda to the isolated Ferdinand, imposing instant obstacles and consequently piling them up to foster their feelings, and eventually giving the young lovers his consent but delaying the fulfilment, proves that he treats her as a property that can yield profit if used wisely, and as an object that can be freely applied in his scheming. Seen in the context of the Early Modern politics of marriage, especially in aristocratic families, Miranda appears mainly as Prospero's personal property and a political asset, where her virginity is of crucial importance.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the play's opening provides a series of Prospero's skilful manipulations of those who are at his disposal—first Miranda, then Ariel and Caliban, and then again Miranda and Ferdinand—which defines Prospero as the ultimate authority and the quintessential ruler. As the play develops, those traits are only replayed in various other contexts and circumstances, eventually leading to the restoration of Prospero's legal authority and celebration of his rightful power.

Understanding Prospero as a magician, having command over spirits but also over words, further stresses his power as the dominating principle of the play. For Greenblatt, his “potent and disturbing power of magic”

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<sup>9</sup> She is a truly valuable political asset only as long as she can bear Ferdinand's legitimate children, thus securing the throne of Naples for Prospero's heirs. That attitude is clearly visible in Prospero's conversation with Ferdinand about keeping Miranda's chastity before the wedding (1.4), where her virginity seems to be treated in a strictly proprietary sense.

(142) is the exemplification of the strategy of “salutary anxiety” (20): it is the source of the characters’ fear and unease, as well as the mechanism of the final happy resolution. A master of the words, Prospero literally teaches Caliban to speak and controls others by his words. He uses the language of command and ownership,<sup>10</sup> heavily relying on possessive pronouns and imperatives. Also metaphorically, the play’s magician is the figure of poetic and dramatic authority, a metaphor of Shakespeare and his command of words.

Unsurprisingly, *The Tempest* and its main protagonist has become an inspiring subject of scrutiny for feminist and postcolonial discourses which offer politically charged readings of Prospero’s patriarchal and colonial authority, and which open the play’s power relations for new contexts (cf. Loomba, Greenblatt, Orgel, Kamps, and others). There exists a vast body of critical work analyzing Prospero’s behaviour as an illustration of the functioning of a patriarchal system and/or the mechanisms of colonial oppression. Miranda, Ariel and Caliban, as well as Sycorax, have been studied as victims of oppressive and discriminating practices, and their actions as reflections of various patterns of dealing with such practices. In such political perspectives, the possible ways of looking at *The Tempest* are essentially of two types, following either the subversion or the containment model, that is seeing the play either as a mere reflection of the existing status quo and an affirmation of the presented power arrangements (containment), or as a critical vision of those, attempting to challenge the presented status quo (subversion). Prospero’s power might then be seen as legitimate and his doings as just and moral, with Miranda and Ariel seen as the means and agents necessary for the execution of justice and order, while Caliban as the disruptive element that needs to fail and be eventually punished. Using such interpretation feminist and postcolonial scholars show how *The Tempest* can be understood as a play informing readers of the Renaissance frame of mind and social reality. A subversive reading would look for disruptive potential within the play, for instance in moments when the power relations on which the play is based are undermined by the play’s narrative.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A very good example of such language is the exchange between Prospero and Ferdinand when they speak of marriage. Finally agreeing to let Ferdinand marry Miranda, Prospero says: “Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased, take my daughter” (4.1.13–14).

<sup>11</sup> One of the most frequently mentioned instances is the reading of Caliban’s poetic observations on the island’s beauty as proof of his native sensitivity to his natural habitat. This is contrasted with Prospero’s inability to feel at home on the island seen in his reliance on Caliban for fire or food, and on Ariel for control of the elements, as well as in Prospero’s obsessive desire to return “home” to civilization.

Also unsurprisingly, numerous adaptations of the play take a similar path, interpreting the characters and relations among them in ways that challenge the play's structure. It is very interesting to observe the various strategies employed for dealing with this power-infused play. They centre round Prospero's authority figure and question or defy that authority by re-imagining the play's hierarchies and power relations. The four different versions of the play that I will analyze in various ways deconstruct and contest *The Tempest's* structure, specifically concerning the relationship between Prospero and Miranda.

### DEREK JARMAN'S *THE TEMPEST* (1979)

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For a long time Derek Jarman's 1979 film was marginalized and dismissed as not being faithful enough for an adaptation and treated more as an attempt to "remake" Shakespeare's play into "a commentary on the 1970s counterculture movement" in Britain "intended for punk and gay audiences" (Vaughan and Vaughan 200, 209). But it is precisely the fact that Jarman's film is an example of anti-establishment politics, counterculture art and acute social commentary that makes it particularly interesting in the context of authority as it radically repositions the play's power and gender relations.

Jarman's primary focus in adapting the play is the relationship between Prospero and Ariel, making it "the emotional centre" of the film (Harris and Jackson 97). He frames the whole film as a dream vision or a fantasy of Prospero, and "place[s] the action entirely within the mind of Prospero" (Collick 99). In the opening sequence Prospero is shown asleep, tossing and turning, dreaming a troubling dream of the tempest, and wakes to thunder. The film finishes with Prospero peacefully sleeping to the voiceover of his famous lines "[o]ur revels now are ended. . . . We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.148–58). Framed as a dream, the film's narrative escapes clear logic and Prospero's world is hardly controllable, least of all by him. Judith Buchanan claims that "Jarman's Prospero has only an erratic control over his world" (163) and suggests that Prospero is presented "as the victim of his own imaginative vision" (164). Crucially she also remarks that "[u]ndermining Prospero's authority was in keeping with Jarman's attitudes more generally" (164) and quotes Jarman saying: "I distrust all figures of authority, including the artist" (164).

What adds to Prospero's status of undermined authority is that, consistently with Jarman's political agenda, the film celebrates gay fantasies, foregrounding homoerotic tension between Prospero and Ariel. Within



the dream vision frame Ariel can be interpreted as Prospero's suppressed homosexuality that, like Ariel in the play, demands to be released.<sup>12</sup> Thus, since the film's central focus is on Prospero's fantasies of desire towards Ariel and on the intimate, turbulent and tense relationship between them, Prospero appears much less of a father figure, his relatively young age in comparison to Miranda's further complicating the authenticity of the father-daughter relation. Consequently, his paternal authority is deliberately minimized. How unimportant Miranda is for him is communicated in the very fact that they do not share many scenes. Miranda is frequently shown on her own, wandering around the mansion, hardly her father's central interest, and very much left to her own devices.

Freed from the dominating presence of her father, Miranda appears as the far more empowered character. She is played by Toyah Wilcox, a punk star, which gives her character the off-screen context of rebellion, non-conformity and power. Also her solo appearances in the film, when she roams the gothic mansion with no sense of fear, or when she rehearses moves on the stairs in preparation for a more civilized life, as well as when she tries on clothes to see what she likes, define her as a woman who is quite independent, who can take care of herself, and who makes decisions for herself. Miranda is consistently interpreted as empowered and self-confident, in relation to Prospero, Caliban and Ferdinand alike.

Her relationship with Caliban, for example, is deprived of the shadow of revulsion and sexual threat. Although Caliban, played by Jack Birkett, is rather disgusting, he is neither seriously threatening nor in any way dangerous for Miranda. They often share childish jokes and seem to be at ease with each other. In a crucial scene defining their power relation Caliban is shown entering Miranda's bedroom as she is washing herself, half-naked. Although she is alone in the room, she is unconcerned about Caliban's entry. When he does attempt to touch her, she confidently kicks him out of her room, and laughs jovially when he intentionally farts on leaving her room.

In relation to Ferdinand she is also placed in a position of power. Ferdinand from the beginning is marked as vulnerable.<sup>13</sup> There is a long scene in which he, naked, wades through the sea to get to the shore. He does it with visible effort, and the length of the scene makes a point of

<sup>12</sup> Similarly to the reading of Harris and Jackson (97), both Ariel and Caliban in their binary opposite structuring can be read as two opposing forces within Prospero's (sub)conscious, Caliban standing for base physicality and heterosexuality, and Ariel for sublime eroticism and homosexuality.

<sup>13</sup> Caliban, similarly, is marked as vulnerable, and therefore harmless, by the very fact that he is played by Jack Birkett, *The Incredible Orlando*, a blind gay performer.

his exhaustion and weakness. His full frontal nudity is, in this context, deprived of its sexual potential and becomes a marker for his defencelessness. When he finally reaches the mansion, he lies down on a heap of straw and curls up in an embryo position. This is how Miranda finds him, and this confrontation again stresses that his nakedness marks not his sexual attractiveness but his physical weakness. Ferdinand's inferiority to Miranda is then restated in their game of chess. As Renes puts it,

She takes one of Ferdinand's pieces, presumably beats him at the game and corrects him verbally for his bad play after a servant has placed a perfectly-fitting, beautiful shoe on her foot, which pertains to her wedding dress. The whole vision is meant to be empowering and does away with the innocent play at tennis and hide-and-seek of Ferdinand and Miranda in previous scenes. She sheds her childlike mask, clarifies that the time for play is over, exhorts him to take serious action and actively participates in the political business of usurpation under way (min.75). (5)

Indeed, in her "trying out" the outfits and choreographing her movements the consciousness and intentionality of her actions is foregrounded—she first checks if she likes the new role she is to play, and only having decided that she finds it fitting does she embrace it. Hence, in the wedding scene she sits on the throne, radiant and happy, a confident new queen of Naples, while Ferdinand appears as her retinue rather than a partner or king.

In her childlike playfulness she retains elements of Miranda's innocence from the play, but she is not an object that can be freely manipulated. She is an independent subject that makes her own choices. Further, with a clear focus on repressed homoerotic desire as Prospero's central interest and driving force, the transactional value of Miranda is less significant. As Prospero and Ariel take the emotional and erotic charge of the film, Miranda's physicality, as well as her sexual and biological potential are largely dismissed. In this subversive way, she is also de-objectified, both as the father's property and as the play's redemptive tool. Very importantly, the redemptive power of the final union through Miranda, so crucial for Shakespeare's romance, is dismissed in Jarman's film, as the real coda is the release of Ariel—the release of homosexual desire—and Prospero's final satisfaction in sleep.

### PAUL MAZURSKY'S *TEMPEST* (1982)

Paul Mazursky's *Tempest* retells the narrative of Shakespeare's play in a very interesting way. As Buchanan notices, in the film Mazursky's typical "preoccupation with drifting, purposeless men unwilling to, or incapable of, mak-

ing active determinations about their own lives” collides with the “naturally antithetical concerns of the play” (167–68). Philip Dimitrius, the Prospero figure, is a New York architect who struggles with a midlife crisis. Restless and self-absorbed, he quits his job. When he realizes that his wife, Antonia—a replacement for the treacherous Antonio—an actress and celebrity, has an affair with Alonzo, Philip’s former boss, he decides to go to a desert island in Greece to reassess his life. His daughter, Miranda, turns away from the mother and decides to go to Greece with Philip. On the way to the island they meet Aretha, an Ariel figure, who goes to the island with them. They stay on a small island, their only company being a local inhabitant, Kalibanos, and his goats. Incidentally, Antonia, Alonzo and a couple of other people, including Alonzo’s son Freddy, spend their holidays on a yacht nearby and a storm brings them to Philip’s island. Once all the characters get together, the family crisis is resolved and Philip and Antonia are reconciled.

One of the major changes in relation to the play, where Prospero’s authority positions all other characters as subordinates, is the focus on the theme of man’s midlife crisis, which places Philip/Prospero in the position of powerlessness. Additionally, the fact that the film features Philip’s wife, which gives Miranda a mother, dramatically alters the play’s power arrangements within the family. Essentially, Philip’s crisis of masculinity is presented in relation to three powerful women—his wife, his daughter and his lover—who each in her own way highlight Philip’s failures and weaknesses.

Antonia and Aretha serve to reveal certain aspects of Philip’s personality, and to illustrate the mechanism of his midlife crisis. In comparison to Antonia, who is reasonable but at the same time very kind, and who shows understanding and concern for him and his anxieties, Philip behaves in a childish, self-centred and irrational way. Aretha provides a different contrast. Unlike Antonia, she is intuitive and happy-go-lucky, but in her chaotic pursuit of love and happiness she is, in fact, oriented on other people’s needs and problems, which highlights Philip’s uselessness and egoism.

The most important relation, however, is that with Miranda. Miranda is a teenager, herself struggling with a difficult period of puberty. She is typically rebellious, and her problems with her awakening sexuality make her mother a natural enemy. Antonia is presented as a sensible, caring and loving mother, and a rather understanding wife, in contrast to Philip, who is selfish and irresponsible, both as a father and a husband. However, when Miranda finds out about her mother’s affair, which is prompted by Philip’s failure as a husband, she sees it as a legitimate reason to push her mother away and form an alliance with her otherwise incompetent father. By contrast, she has no problem with her father having a lover and she eagerly befriends Aretha.

Thus, the film shows the alliance of Philip and Miranda as a result of *her* choice, Philip having done very little to deserve it. The father in crisis can function as an authority to Miranda only because she chooses this substitute in an act of revolt against her mother. For Miranda, in her immature understanding of the world, her father stands for freedom and a lack of compromise, but in time she realizes that he only cares about his own freedom and she begins to miss being taken care of. While she appears to be lost in her puberty turmoil as much as Philip is in his midlife crisis, she comes round quicker and emerges from the experience on the Greek island as someone who is more mature and more complete.

Miranda's strength in contrast to Philip's failure as a father is particularly visible in the context of Kalibanos. The eccentric Kalibanos, who lives in a cave with his goats, is the only resident of the island before the arrival of Philip and Miranda. Like Shakespeare's Caliban, he is the force of nature—direct, physical and instinctive. He is attracted to Miranda, being the first to actually acknowledge her transition from girlhood to womanhood, and keeps stalking her and making clumsy sexual advances. Philip genuinely perceives Kalibanos as a threat to Miranda's virginity and seems to be honestly worried about his daughter's safety, but not to the point of giving up on his own indulgence in the blissful life of the island. In this, he again fails as a father, prioritizing his comfort over what he believes to be a threat to his daughter.

Luckily, Miranda is not afraid of Kalibanos, and is perfectly capable of managing the "threat" on her own. Her confidence, as well as her growing awareness of her femininity, is shown in a scene when Kalibanos invites her to his cave to show her a treasure. She accepts the invitation not because she is too naïve to sense the danger, but because she knows there is no true danger. The treasure, proudly presented by Kalibanos, appears to be a TV set. Kalibanos turns it on and Miranda, missing the little joys of civilization, happily begins to watch a film. As she is watching it, Kalibanos has a quick wash and dresses up for her. She catches a glimpse of his mating preparations but dismisses them with a laugh. Then he sits close to her and expresses his desire to make love to her. She allows him to kiss her hand and seems to be actually considering the possibility of sex, but eventually pushes him away and leaves the cave. In tone, the scene is reminiscent of that between Caliban and Miranda in Jarman's film. The women in both films are aware of their attractiveness to Caliban and Kalibanos respectively, but they do not treat the man as a threat because they trust in their ability and power to take care of themselves. Unlike in the play, where Prospero is the guardian of Miranda's body, in these two films Prospero/Philip holds no power, be it possessive or protective, over Miranda, and the daughter proves stronger than the father.

In Mazursky's film the relationship between Miranda and Philip takes a confrontational turn in the disturbing scene when Philip almost forces himself upon his daughter. He sees her practising dancing in an evening dress, with make-up, and admits he thought she was her mother. Telling her she is beautiful, like her mother, he wants to dance with her, which she refuses. He then keeps forcing her to dance with him, and she tries to get away from him. He eventually holds her tight, giving her a weird look. It seems that at this moment he realizes what Kalibanos has seen from the beginning and what Miranda came to understand fairly quickly—that his daughter is no longer a child but a woman. He instantly lets her go and the tension is gone, but the feeling of awkwardness remains. This is the moment for the ultimate collapse of Philip's position of paternal authority, and of Miranda's consequential assertion of her will. She tells him that she hates the island and that he is crazy. This assertion is, at the same time, the end of her teenage rebellion against the mother, so when Antonia appears on the island Miranda is ready to embrace her as a mother and admit that she still needs to be taken care of. Thus, she becomes an agent in restoring family harmony.

The film offers a happy ending which, like in the play, is possible due to the redemptive power of a woman, or rather of all three women with whom Philip interacts. They help him to acknowledge his failures—as a husband, as a father, as a lover, and as a human being—by encouraging him to stop looking primarily at himself. Aretha urges him to reconcile with his wife saying “it's time to forgive,” but when he approaches Antonia it is him who actually asks her forgiveness. Easily forgiven, he is surprised, but Antonia explains: “I love you.” Miranda's maturity shows him the extent of his stupidity, Aretha's selflessness shows him his egotism, and Antonia's forgiveness and love gives him hope for the future.

Prospero's royal and paternal authority in Shakespeare's play is in the film translated into Philip Dimitrius's illusion of control over his family or his life, an illusion revealing masculinity in crisis. Mazursky challenges Philip's failing masculinity by granting more authority and maturity to Miranda, and by highlighting other strong female characters—Antonia and Aretha. “Girl power,” however, is not shown as aggressive or confrontational. Instead, drawing from the formula of Shakespeare's romances, femininity is redemptive, offering solutions through love, forgiveness and kindness.

#### PHILIP OSMENT, *THIS ISLAND'S MINE* (1987)

Philip Osment's *This Island's Mine* was a play written for, and performed by, the Gay Sweatshop in London in 1987. As “[a] sweeping update of the systemic colonialism and oppression from the time of *The Tempest*, translating

early modern conditions into their current analogues” (Fischlin and Fortier 255), the play became part of Osment’s struggle against Thatcher’s oppressive home politics. It offers a blend of postcolonial, feminist and queer perspectives, with particular characters resonating with Shakespeare’s play. The Prospero/Miranda dynamic is mirrored in the relationship of Stephen and Marianne. Stephen is an American businessman in his mid-sixties, a WW II veteran, as well as a man of power and success:

White hair in stylish cut  
 Tanned urban face  
 Expensive grey suit  
 Looking half his age  
 Relaxed and powerful. (Osment 266)

His daughter, Marianne, lives in London. She entered into a marriage of convenience with Martin, who is gay, and she is living with her partner, Debbie, and Debbie’s son:

Marianne, a southern belle,  
 Escaped to England to become a dyke  
 Away from the persistent scrutiny of her North Carolina family.  
 From a mother whose little girl can do no right  
 And a father whose little girl can do no wrong—  
 Both impossible to live up to. (Osment 261)

Their relationship in the play is one of several intertwined subplots and is told in episodes. Their first confrontation occurs when they meet during Marianne’s father’s business trip to England. They meet in a restaurant and Marianne, preparing for the meeting, tries to build an aura of defiance around her. For her, this confrontation is one of many attempts to prove her independence from her father, and to establish herself as a fully developed person, no longer his little daughter. The ways in which she tries to challenge his power—not just paternal power, but also the power of his money and confidence—are naïvely provocative. When first greeting him, she deliberately mentions her partner and her child, which he smoothly passes over:

MARIANNE “Sorry I’m late, Dad,  
 I had to give Debbie’s kid his tea  
 When he got home from school.”  
 Trying to make this reference to her  
 English lover seem

Natural and spontaneous.

BOTH

Chasms open.

STEPHEN

He hands her the menu.

“I’ve only just gotten myself.

It all took longer than expected.” (Osment 266–67)

Also, she is wearing a provocative badge, which he notices after a while:

“Hell, Marianne,

What is that button you’re wearing?”

...

He holds it

A tiny badge

In his large paw

With its raw message:

US BASES OUT OF BRITAIN.

He looks at it for several moments

Then hands it back.

“Have you ever considered buying a place to live over here, Marianne?”

(Osment 267)

Again he ignores her provocation but this time he strikes back with a weapon that never fails him—money.

Later in the play it turns out that Stephen offered to buy Marianne a house, and Marianne apparently falls into the trap of her father’s material superiority and authority. In a conversation with her partner, Debbie, it is clear how Marianne’s thinking is clouded by the life of luxury and comfort that her father can offer her under his dominating care:

MARIANNE “Oh God, it’s such a big decision.

What do I do?

If I say yes,

Then I’ll feel that they’ve gotten hold over me again.

It’ll be like I never left the States.”

DEBBIE “Then say no.”

MARIANNE “If I say no,

It just feels like a childish gesture.” (Osment 270)

Marianne appears to be trapped between her desire to contest Stephen’s control over her life, and her inability to successfully redefine their

father-daughter relationship. Unwilling to become totally estranged from her father, she is, at the same time, unable to communicate with him on terms different than his.

Debbie, in contrast, struggled for years to get out of her marriage and worked for her independence without anybody's help—"I've made my choices. / My kid, / My home, / My independence" (Osment 270). Her blunt comments present a very different view of Marianne's dilemma, exposing the mechanism of Marianne's subservience to Stephen's power:

DEBBIE "She wants sympathy now!  
She's got the luxury of being able to torment herself  
About whether she accepts a handout of seventy thousand quid,  
She spends hours bellyaching to me about it,  
Till I'm ready to climb up the wall  
And on top of that she wants sympathy!" (Osment 270)

Later Marianne meets her childhood companion, Jody, the daughter of her parents' black maid who raised Marianne, and learns two major facts about her farther. One is that Stephen is also Jody's father. As Jody puts it,

"... from what I understand he pursued her,  
...  
What was she do to?  
He was white,  
A man  
Her boss.  
She was black  
A woman  
His maid.  
And it was 1949." (Osment 280)

Jody, who works for a charity organization, also tells Marianne that Stephen's company was selling cheap, unscreened blood to the Third World, a scandal over which Jody and Stephen had a serious argument. These revelations are crushing for Marianne, and she seeks comfort in both Jody and Debbie. When she confronts her father, however, "pale, nervous, her lip trembling at the audacity of her accusations," Stephen is "quiet, thoughtful, listening to her, allowing her to finish" (Osment 282). He then tells her his version of the story, presenting both situations in a very different light. His rational arguments are only part of his strategy with Marianne, his ultimate weapon being his appeal to her love for him and his love for her:



STEPHEN “Do you know who brought the sweetness back?  
You did, Marianne.  
When you came along I couldn’t believe my good fortune.  
You’re not going to turn against your old Dad now, are you?”  
MARIANNE “I . . .”  
STEPHEN “And you’ll come out with me on Thursday night?  
It’s my last night in London.”  
...  
“Do you love your old Dad, Marianne?” (Osment 282)

What is striking in this final exchange between Marianne and Stephen, after which they indeed go to the theatre on Thursday night before he goes back to the States, is Stephen’s absolute belief that he is always right. Stephen, being a white affluent American man comes across as a person who knows, truly and deeply, that he is always right and that he is a good man. He has an answer for everything, and his version is always the strongest because he has both the money and the power which are as solid as rock. In that sense, there is no way of winning an argument with him, and Marianne feels that too. The play seems to suggest that in the end Marianne might accept the offer of money from Stephen in order to buy herself a place in London.

Osment’s play is a rare case of a reinterpretation which instead of looking for ways to undermine Prospero’s authority uses Shakespeare’s character to point to the fact that in the contemporary world there are numerous Prospero-like figures who hold power regardless of any social or political change. As Susan Bennett argues, “England may well have lost its Empire, but, as Osment’s play powerfully demonstrates, the Prosperos have not lost their will for imperialism” (148).

Marianne’s lack of independence, or, perhaps worse still, her lack of awareness of how dependent on her father’s authority she remains, is not criticized but rather shown as a result of larger mechanisms. Her determination to change the dynamic within her family is shown as futile, because the power that her father represents is overwhelming. Stephen’s paternal and patriarchal authority is governed by the same principles according to which rich white men rule the world’s economy and politics, rendering others—be it women, children, people of colour, homosexuals, or the working class—inescapably marginalized and disempowered. Moreover, the status of people like Stephen places them beyond simple categories of good or bad. Whatever they do is validated by the very fact that it is them who do it, which makes any attempt at defying or criticizing them problematic. Marianne herself is painfully aware of the fact that her attempts to challenge her father may be seen as childish or silly. Like Shakespeare’s

Miranda, she may eventually do what her father would like her to do, seeing it as the only, and therefore,—good choice.

### JULIE TAYMOR'S *THE TEMPEST* (2010)

Julie Taymor achieved critical acclaim for being awarded a Shakespeare scholarship in 1999 when she directed *Titus*, a visually impressive and interpretatively interesting adaptation of Shakespeare's early tragedy. Her second Shakespearean film, *The Tempest*, was awaited with much expectation, especially owing to her decision to have Prospero replaced with a woman, Prospera, who would be played by Helen Mirren. However, the film largely failed to satisfy audiences and critics.<sup>14</sup> Visually spectacular, especially in portraying magic, it proved quite uninspiring interpretatively, approaching the text in a traditional way. Jordison, for example, calls it "stagey and static," and admits it is a "straightforward rendition of *The Tempest*, but for the fact that Prospero becomes Prospera." Ebert also believes that "the best thing [Taymor] does is change the sex of Prospero," and that with this change "all the relationships on the island curiously seem more natural when the character becomes a woman."

For a reading of power relations and authority in the play, the change of Prospero's gender is heavily consequential. Prospero, being male, royal and white, simply *has* the power. It is a default setting of a kind, a position taken for granted, the effects of which echo in Osment's play. When the authority character is a woman, however, the default setting is no longer valid. A woman has to prove she can establish authority and maintain her power over the island, over its inhabitants, and over the men that arrive on the island.

It is very noticeable in the film that Prospera constantly has to struggle to keep her position. In Shakespeare's play Prospero never really performs any magic. He only issues commands and orders, and the magic is performed by Ariel, who then reports back to Prospero. In Taymor's film, Prospera is shown performing magic herself, starting with the initial tempest that shipwrecks Alonso and his company. Ariel does accept her commands but their relationship is slightly different: as both of them work hard to magically implement Prospera's plan, Ariel seems more of an accomplice, or a helper, than just a servant. Although Taymor does not alter Shakespeare's text, she retains the harsh reprimand that Ariel gets from Prospera when at the play's beginning he asks for his freedom. The fact

<sup>14</sup>The film proved to be a financial fiasco; with a budget of around twenty million dollars it made less than three hundred thousand over the first two months (see [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

that Prospera is shown not just as someone who gives an order but also as a working magician gives a touch of partnership to their relation.

Also Prospera's relation with Caliban radically changes due to the sex shift. Caliban, played by a West Indian actor, Djimon Hounsou, appears as a strong, muscular and physical man, clearly a threat not only to Miranda but also to Prospera. In confrontations with Caliban Prospera's underlying weakness and her effort to keep him under control are visible. For her, it is a constant struggle, and she has to literally defend herself with her magic staff. Throughout the film she appears carrying the staff, which becomes an extension of her power, a phallic representation of the assumed, or perhaps even usurped, authority that she as a woman does not have. The final confrontation with her treacherous brother and his company, when she forms a protective circle of fire around her and her enemies, visually marking the areas of her power and control, also illustrates how much of a strain it is for a woman to prove capable of dominating men. It seems that she accepts her victory with much relief and leaves the island happily, released of the necessity to command others. Ebert rightly notices that, being female, Prospera shows "more ferocity than resignation" in comparison to a typical reading of Prospero as the figure of a magician saying farewell to his magic. But what lies at the core of that ferocity is not will but necessity—for a woman in a man's world it takes immense strength to achieve the status that is normally granted to men.

The second consequence, central to the focal point of this paper, is Prospera's relationship with Miranda. Ebert notices that a daughter at the side of a mother is "more suited" and that Prospera "empathizes with [Miranda] as Prospero never did." The mother and the daughter are very often shot together, standing side by side or with Prospera protecting Miranda. Visually, their relationship is far from the confrontational arrangement that the commanding and dominating language of the play suggests. Prospera, herself aware of her physical weakness, is protective of her daughter not because she treats her as an asset and property, but because she sees an even weaker woman in her. While Shakespeare's Prospero is motivated primarily by his political agenda and treats Miranda, like other characters, instrumentally, Prospera's impulses to secure her daughter's future appear to be both royal and maternal. The moment when she eventually gives Miranda to Ferdinand clearly shows the true nature of her feelings for her daughter. When saying goodbye to Miranda she finds it hard to part with her and they hold hands for a long time. It seems that Prospera's harsh treatment of Ferdinand is not only a way to inject a sense of passion between the young couple, but also a test of his character to assure the mother that as a man he would be a worthy hus-

band for her daughter.<sup>15</sup> When Prospera speaks to Ferdinand about Miranda's virginity, the motivation behind the mother's concerns is highlighted. Prospero's words

If thou dost break her virgin-knot before  
 All sanctimonious ceremonies may  
 With full and holy rite be ministered, (4.1.15–17)

are cut by Jarman and subverted by Mazursky; Taymor, in turn, gives them an interesting resonance. What the mother is concerned with is not her daughter's political position and the security of her progeniture, but Miranda's future *happiness*. The mother wants to make sure that Ferdinand will love and respect her daughter. Satisfied with the look on his face she gently urges him: "Sit then, and talk with her" (4.1.32), hoping he will take good care of Miranda.

Shakespeare's characters and plays are flexible enough for readers and interpreters to mould them to their liking. In the case of *The Tempest* it is interesting that contemporary writers and directors tend to depart from the image of power and authority that Shakespeare's Prospero embodies, and not only seek to challenge the traditionally positive image of Prospero, but also to renegotiate the very sense of the character's authority. Jarman disarms Prospero in two ways: by empowering Miranda he takes away Prospero's paternal and possessive qualities, and by shifting the centre of attention to the homoerotic tension between Prospero and Ariel he explores Prospero's vulnerability, making Ariel the character with ultimate control and redeeming power.

Mazursky quite blatantly strips Philip (Prospero) of his status exploring the character's midlife crisis. He shows him as being arrogant, egoistic, useless and failing. It is through confrontations with the female characters—his wife, Antonia, who is strong and caring, his girlfriend Aretha (an Ariel figure) who is deeply empathic and totally selfless, and his daughter Miranda, growing mature and confident—that he finally learns to look beyond himself and earns his redemption.

Julie Taymor in a way tries to keep Prospera's power but at the same time justifies her ferocity and ruthlessness. As a woman, Prospera has to constantly prove to the men around her that she deserves respect, and as a mother she really has no choice because her daughter's future prosperity

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<sup>15</sup> The fragment in which Prospera apologizes to Ferdinand for the way she treated him and explains that it was only to test his love sounds very honest, and the scene when she talks of how much Miranda means to her is a touching declaration of motherly love. Although the film retains Prospero's words calling Miranda an "acquisition worthily purchased," Prospera sounds very passionate and makes it clear that Miranda's value to her is not economic or political, but emotional.

and happiness can only be guaranteed through brutal negotiations with those who hold power in a man's world.

Osment remains the closest to the essence of Prospero's strength. His Stephen unflinching and arrogantly believes in his unlimited power and uses it to the full. While Osment stresses the attempts of other characters, like Marianne (Miranda),<sup>16</sup> to challenge the system of oppression, be it in areas such as class, ethnicity, sexuality or gender, he also highlights the ultimate challenge for all subordinates: the challenge of what Jean Genet has called "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized repression" (qtd. in Churchill 245).

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<sup>16</sup> Marianne's struggles are paralleled by the narrative of Selwyn—the Caliban character—a black gay actor who runs his own crusade for social acceptance.

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