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# 'An Isle Full of Noises': The Perception & Influence of Sound in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

## **Abstract**

Since the play's authorship in 1610, actor-managers and directors alike have struggled over staging the opening scene of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The physical presence of the ship, the sounds and lighting effects of thunder and lightning, the dialogue of the actors, and the use of music have varied from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present in an effort to appeal to the audience. The presentation of these elements, especially sound cues and music, prepares audiences to understand the dynamics of Prospero's powers and transformation as a character. Depending on how sound and stage technologies were implemented in performance, directors have been able to present audiences with a Prospero that is depicted as either more or less of a sympathetic character.

## **Keywords**

The Tempest, Shakespeare, noise, environment, sound

## **Disciplines**

Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory | Reading and Language | Theatre History

'An Isle Full of Noises': The Perception & Influence  
of Sound in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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## **Introduction**

“*On a ship at sea: a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard. Enter Mariners wet.*” (I.i.sd). A Boatswain and his crew scurry around the deck of a large 17<sup>th</sup> century ship, frantically attempting to batten down the hatches and furl the sails. Waves pound up against the vessel, knocking it close to the point of tipping. Rain streams down from the dark storm clouds above, intermittent lightning provides the only source of light, and thunder shocks the mariners through their cold, wet clothes. “*A confused noise within*” (I.i.sd) is heard and before they can fathom what it is, the boat is split in two and the crew is plunged into the choppy ocean waves. And this is just the first scene of our play.

Since the play’s authorship in 1610, actor-managers and directors alike have struggled over staging the opening scene of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (Dymkowski 3). The physical presence of the ship, the sounds and lighting effects of thunder and lightning, the dialogue of the actors, and the use of music have varied from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present in an effort to appeal to the audience. The presentation of these elements, especially sound cues and music, prepares audiences to understand the dynamics of Prospero’s powers and transformation as a character. Depending on how sound and stage technologies were implemented in performance, directors have been able to present audiences with a Prospero that is depicted as either more or less of a sympathetic character.

## **Literary Analysis**

Act I.i opens with a shipmaster, boatswain, and crew attempting to safely get their ship through a treacherous thunder and lightning storm that has begun to brew out on the high seas. The crew rushes about the vessel trying to maneuver the rigging and sails in order to prevent the

shop from sinking. As the storm brews, a “noise is heard within,” indicating that the boat has been torn to pieces and the crew is cast into the water. The tempest in the opening scene leads the main characters to end up on an island controlled by Prospero’s sorcery through his servant, Ariel, for the remainder of the play (Dymkowski 113). By starting the play with a tumultuous storm in Act I.i, Shakespeare cleverly trains the audience to respect and appreciate the powers that Prospero has, including the powers he has through Ariel’s manipulations. Shakespeare achieves this respect from the audience by relying on an audio cue to signal when Prospero will use his supernatural wrath to teach a moral or to control the other characters on the island. For example, in the opening scene, a “*confused noise within*” (I.i.sd) is the first indication to the audience that the ship has been split in two. It is revealed in the next scene that Ariel was sent by Prospero to orchestrate the shipwreck in order to put into motion a plan to take revenge on Antonio for usurping Prospero’s right to be the Duke of Milan. Therefore, the “confused noise” is an indicator that Prospero is going to use the upcoming stage action to seek justice.

Beginning the play with a major demonstration of powerful brutality sets the stage for a drastic transformation of tone throughout *The Tempest*. Because this harsh image is immensely enhanced by sound, such as rain, waves, thunder, and destruction of the vessel, the audience makes an association between sound and Prospero’s manipulations of those around him. Therefore, whenever music and sound effects are heard or when a character alludes to the storm later in the play, the audience’s mind is triggered to recall the immense power that Prospero has displayed and to anticipate him using his sorcery to teach the characters a moral and achieve his own desires.

This idea is enforced when Ariel places Ferdinand, Antonio’s son, separate from the rest of the mariners and entices him to follow Ariel’s singing to where Miranda is standing:

Come unto these yellow sands,  
And then take hands;  
Curtsied when you have, and kissed  
The wild waves whist,  
Foot it featly here and there,  
And sweet sprites bear  
The burden. Hark, hark! (I.ii.374-380)

Ariel is signaling to the audience that he is about to use the power with which Prospero has entrusted him to somehow influence Ferdinand so that he may become a pawn in Prospero's large scheme to cause pain to Antonio. By using song, Ariel effectively extends an invitation to the crew to feel welcomed by the yellow sands. He further comforts them by metaphorically taking hold of their hands, which reassures Ferdinand of the island's safety. The use of music to do this further lulls Ferdinand into a false sense of security because of the melodic tones. The sweet sounds strongly contrast the thunderous storm noises that Ferdinand last heard before washing up on shore and present him with a moment of peace to ease his feelings of vulnerability.

Furthermore, by having music, Shakespeare is giving a clue to the audience to help them suspect that an element of revenge is soon to come since the last time they heard sound it was the breaking of the ship. The boat was the main device that assisted Prospero in getting Alonso and his crew to the island so that he may enact his revenge plot. If Shakespeare's insertion of song in this scene is any indication of what is to become of Ferdinand, one can assume that he is about to be heavily manipulated and is not safe in his venture inland.

As Ariel sings on, he mentions that the waves from the storm are being curtsied and kissed into silence. Not only do these lyrics further reassure Ferdinand by extending him a helping hand, but they also introduce a subtle sexual undertone which foreshadows the interaction between Ferdinand and Miranda. The idea of curtsying indicates a first-time introduction to a woman and the action of kissing hints at this newly formed relationship becoming an intimate, loving relationship. Ariel is clearly using the imagery of female sexuality to play to the weaknesses of man and use a real manipulation, rather than a magical one, to reach his desired end.

Ariel's song also raises the question of how Ariel and Prospero perceive themselves and how they use their supernatural powers. The end of this verse indicates that Ariel believes he is kindly carrying the burden behind wooing Miranda to fall in love with Ferdinand. Ariel furthers the thought through the double meaning of "burden" by using it to signify the chorus or refrain of a song. The musical definition enhances the imagery of Ariel carrying out his orders by using sound as one of his magical powers. However, by saying to Ferdinand that he merely has to walk at ease towards Ariel's voice, Ariel assumes that Ferdinand wants to fall in love with Miranda, someone whom he has never met.

The difference between how Ferdinand and Antonio were brought to the island demonstrates Prospero's lack of consideration for the characters emotions and instead emphasizes his motives. The audience discovers through Prospero's recounting to Miranda at the beginning of I.ii that he is "neglecting worldly ends" (I.ii.89) and putting the characters on the brink of death solely to encourage them to behave how he desires by fighting to attain their self-interests. Instead of simply bringing the characters to the island, Prospero places them on the brink of death through the tempest and capsizing of the vessel. These actions manipulate

Ferdinand into being more receptive to a peaceful marriage and for Antonio's crew to be agitated and fight for power.

The cruelty of antagonizing the crew resonates with the audience and encourages them to ask if Prospero is justified in making marital choices for Ferdinand, since he is clearly taking mean-spirited and extreme revenge upon the group through the violent storm at the top of the play. This fine line between revenge and cruelty continues in Act II.i when Antonio, Sebastian, and the rest of the mariners awake on the island. Alonso is extremely worried that his son, Ferdinand, drowned in the storm, while Ariel is actually keeping Ferdinand from him. This action seems unjustified since Prospero is preying on the deep emotional connection between a father and son, as well as the deep pain of a parent outliving their child, which wrongly involves Ferdinand in a matter that should be settled between Antonio and Prospero.

To make the situation worse, Ariel enters playing solemn music to put Alonso and all of the men, besides Sebastian and Antonio, asleep in order to present a moment in which they can plot to kill and overthrow Alonso. Although the idea of rebellion may have already been in Sebastian and Antonio's heads, Antonio finds the circumstance strange:

They fell together all, as by consent;  
They dropped as by a thunder-stroke. What might,  
Worthy Sebastian, O what might—? No more.  
And yet methinks I see it in thy face,  
What thou shouldst be. Th' occasion speaks thee, and  
My strong imagination sees a crown  
Dropping upon thy head. (II.i.200-207)

Antonio describes the way in which Alonso fell asleep quickly and in a rushed manner, as if he had fainted or was instructed. The idea of being instructed is furthered by the way in which Antonio hesitates to bring up the idea of overthrowing Alonso but then is compelled to doubt himself and believe Sebastian's face registers the same idea. The "strong imagination" lends itself to Ariel implanting this idea in Antonio's head and making him see visions of a crown falling onto Sebastian's head while he stands before him.

Furthermore, the way in which Antonio describes the quick nature with which Alonso and the men fall asleep, as if the men had been struck by lightning, promotes the idea that Ariel, who can control the weather, is responsible for the coup. Shakespeare uses the imagery of lightning to gesture back to the opening scene and reminds the audience that Prospero is still controlling the lives of Antonio and Sebastian through Ariel by creating circumstances to manipulate their personal ambitions. Additionally, the description of this strange circumstance as taking the form of lightning can foreshadow that Prospero will influence the characters' lives again shortly, since thunder is always found shortly after lightning.

This thunder metaphorically arrives at the end of the scene when Ariel reappears and uses music to abruptly wake Gonzalo. He warns Gonzalo, "If of life you keep a care,/ Shake off slumber, and beware" (II.i.301-302). Ariel falsely assures Gonzalo by encouraging him to believe that he has an input in his own life and can decide whether or not he wants to live and when to be asleep or awake, blatantly demonstrating how the characters are being completely blindsided in their perceptions of the island or of each other's motivation for Alonso's throne.

In Act III.ii, Prospero again validates the notion that he is playing with the characters' motives through the way he influences Caliban. In this instance, Prospero neutralizes some of the negative, controlling nature by balancing this behavior with the positive aspirations he instills in

those that live on the island. For example, as Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo plan to overthrow Prospero, invisible Ariel is sent to foil the plot by causing fear amongst the traitors by playing the song they are singing back to them on his tabor and pipe. Caliban quickly dismisses Stephano and Trinculo's fear:

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,  
That if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked  
I cried to dream again. (III.ii.133-141)

Caliban's apathetic reaction to hearing the mimicked melody coming from the island is revealed by how he treats this occurrence as routine, which the mariners see as strange and derived from the devil. By describing the island as "full of noises" and comprised of "a thousand twangling instruments," Caliban demonstrates that he has had prior experience with hearing sounds throughout the island and in a variety of tunes. In addition, he cites the source of the pleasant noises as coming from the island rather than a person, meaning that he is unaware that Prospero, through Ariel, is the source of the auditory influences.

The manner in which Prospero presents these musical enticements expresses his ability to be sympathetic towards Caliban and the boat crew by supplying them with pleasure via their dreams and awakens their desires to assert themselves, despite Prospero's motive to distract the

group from conquering him and claiming Miranda for Stephano's queen. Caliban recalls his past experiences with music from the island as "sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not," which evokes a tranquil and enjoyable experience. This notion is furthered by his description of "twangling instruments," "a hum bout [his] ears" which would lull him back to sleep after resting for a long time, all of which conjure a calm and peaceful mood which Prospero kindly permits the island natives to enjoy. Lastly, Caliban reminisces about the vivid dreams which would accompany the music and provide him with images of riches and personal desires which he valued so deeply and caused him to cry in longing to relive the memory. While this may seem antagonistic of Prospero, and therefore a motive for Caliban to aspire to kill Prospero so that he "shall have [his] music for free" (III.ii.143), Caliban is not aware that the music is not possible without Prospero's power and Prospero is providing him a reward of a few moments of enjoyment in exchange for Caliban's toils, rather than simply holding him as a prisoner.

The charitable nature of Prospero is further exemplified in Act IV.i through the masque which Prospero presents to Miranda and Ferdinand in celebration of their engagement. For the masque, Prospero calls upon Ariel to gather spirits to present the couple with a play about the sanctity of marriage, the importance of remaining chaste until the nuptial is complete, and the joy of the fruits of matrimony. The spirits are dressed as the goddesses Ceres, Iris, and Juno. Ceres, who represents the goddess of earth, air, agriculture, and marriage (Orgel, 1987), presents Prospero's wishes in a chariot above the stage in the form of a soft song:

Earth's increase, foison plenty,  
Barns and garners never empty,  
Vines with clust'ring bunches growing,  
Plants with goodly burden bowing;

Spring come to you at the farthest,  
In the very end of harvest  
Scarcity and want shall shun you;  
Ceres' blessing so is on you. (IV.i.106-107, 110-117)

Ceres emphasizes through the imagery of agricultural bounty that Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage will be extremely prosperous. The goddess uses the symbolic nature of grapes to highlight the idea of cohesion necessary in a marriage by accentuating the importance of growing together in clusters and thriving together. This interconnected nature of marriage is furthered in the metaphor of Ferdinand and Miranda being compared to plentiful harvests, granaries that overflow with seed, and thriving grapes which are too heavy to stay on the vine, which all hint at Prospero's wish for the couple to produce heirs.

Seasons are employed to further the agricultural metaphor of fall harvest in comparison to their marriage. The idea of autumn implies that the couple has diligently fostered their relationship over time and is ready to reap the rewards, despite the relatively brief time that they have known one another. These rewards are a reinforcement of Prospero's wish for the couple to overcome their desire to consummate their marriage immediately by reiterating the greater satisfaction in waiting until after the formal ceremony. Prospero, through Ceres' song, emphasizes that satisfaction represents the lack of all want and needs. Because the lyric is phrased in the negative, Prospero suggests that the punishment for the early loss of Miranda's virginity would result in the lovers becoming shunned and destitute. Ultimately, Prospero gives his blessing through Ceres by wishing for time to pass quickly over the hardships of winter and onto the renewal of spring. Ceres hints at the symbolism of Ferdinand and Miranda enduring

until spring as a reigniting of their passions for one another and for the building of their future family.

However, the masque can be interpreted as another method for Prospero to continue his control over the inhabitants of the island and his daughter. The character of Iris reinforces Prospero's view of himself as powerful. She represents the goddess of the sea and sky, but most profoundly the notion that "storms are the triumph of ... art" (Orgel, 1987). Iris' traits allude to the opening storm and embody Prospero's vision of himself as a creator of worlds and manipulator of those who inhabit his world. Therefore, this authoritative stance that Prospero personifies by seeking a brutal retribution from Alonso and his crew is emulated in the masque via Iris. Shakespeare creates a parallel between Act I.i and Act IV.1 by showing Prospero's power through a spirit figure who is carrying out his desires. In both cases, the character that acts as a vehicle for Prospero's powers is placed above the scene, whether it is Ariel conducting the tempest over the boat or Iris singing morals in a chariot above the lovers. This elevated stance further solidifies the way in which magical art creates the storm of instilling Prospero's moral sentiments below it.

While this character choice for the masque in Act IV.i can be interpreted as Prospero attempting to take control once again, Shakespeare also includes melodious and soft music, suggesting that Prospero's motives are genuine instead of spiteful. In both Act III.ii and in Act IV.i, there is a sharp contrast between the euphonious melodies represented in these two scenes and the ominous tones presented in Act I.i during the tempest. In creating a bold antithesis between the two categories of sound, the author encourages the audience to reevaluate their understanding of Prospero as a character. Because of the jarring disparity between cacophonous

storm sounds and the presentation of softer instrumental music, the later scenes evoke a sense of Prospero's mercy towards Caliban, Ferdinand, and Miranda.

Shakespeare creates these scenes to raise awareness of Prospero's dynamic personality and character traits. When Prospero relinquishes his power of his own accord in Act V.i, he recognizes the tyrannical ways in which he forced Alonso's crew and the island inhabitants to conform to his moral convictions. In addition, Prospero decides that "...The rarer action is/ In virtue than in vengeance..." (V.i.27-28) and therefore forgives Caliban and Alonso for their treasonous actions and chooses to relinquish his powers:

...But this rough magic  
I here abjure; and when I have required  
Some heavenly music—which even now I do—  
To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book. (V.i.50-57)

In defining his magic as "rough," Prospero indicates the powers are too great for humans to handle and therefore he surrenders them. He destroys his magical implements in such extravagant ways through earth's elements of "airy charms," drowning his spell book, and deeply burying the pieces of his staff. The burial of the books and staff in the deep ocean reinforces Prospero's immense motivation to prohibit these items from resurfacing and becoming usable by other mortals. The imagery also exemplifies the returning of the magical powers to the earth and raising awareness of the mystery and control that the natural world has over humans.

Shakespeare reconnects the message of Prospero's final actions with the audience by weaving in elements of sound into this speech. The "heavenly music" returns to the motif of placing commanding powers in the hands of the nature. Throughout the final scene, solemn music plays which suggests the notion of death or mourning. This music represents a central shift from Prospero, a sorcerer, to Prospero, a man.

Prospero tries to reconfirm his identity as a man and reintegrate into society by appealing to the audience in the epilogue. He asks the audience to decide whether or not he should be imprisoned or be allowed forgiveness for his actions. By including this appeal in the performance, Shakespeare challenges the audience to learn from the lessons presented in the play and bring these ideals outside of the theater. Shakespeare gives the audience supreme control over Prospero's fate and presents the audience with a chance to grant mercy through another sound — applause. Through Prospero's request for applause to fill his sails and set him free, the viewers are reminded of the opening image of the play. The bookends of vicious storm and gentle epilogue bring the audience full circle to the central question: what is the proper balance between justice and mercy?

### **Historical Analysis**

The variety of answers to *The Tempest's* central question is best exemplified through the different directorial choices for the play's opening scene. Scholars feel that Shakespeare could have easily omitted this scene from his play, as it is not necessary for the plot and could have been summarized in the following scene during Ariel's monologue. However, it is believed that this scene was included in order to fill the stage and the audience's mind with a physical

presence, emphasizing the profundity of the circumstances which occur in the rest of the show (James 28). Shakespeare made sure that this would occur in the play's first performance.

It is debated as to whether the play was first performed in 1610 or 1611 and whether the show was indoors at the Blackfriars or outdoors at the Globe Theatre. Either way, a bare stage was used to represent the ship (Dymkowski 71). The First Folio does not include any stage directions that suggest a vessel to be physically present on stage. Rather, the scene was probably staged using small stage props such as ship's rigging, ropes swinging, and confused fighting in and out of the stage doors (Griffiths 15). Some historians believe that lords and mariners emerged from the trap to indicate 'below deck' and from the gallery to act as 'the mast of the ship' (Dymkowski 71). In order to enhance the visual and auditory effect of the scene, the first company used sea machines of pebbles tumbling in a drum to mimic the sounds of the ocean, drums and squibs (fireworks) strung across the rear of the stage to indicate thunder and lightning, and wind machines composed of loose pieces of canvas turned on a wheel (Vaughan 165).

Despite the lack of elaborate sets and music to accompany the opening scene, Shakespeare's first productions allowed the audience to use their own imaginations to enhance what they were seeing and to decide how to interpret Prospero's actions. The Blackfriars engaged the audience through the use of basic instruments and props, allowing audience members to have greater freedom in construing the stage actions. This method invited the viewers to take their own creative role in the plot, to decide whether Prospero was right in his actions, and how to handle these ideals in their own society.

In Thomas Shadwell's 1674 production, a backdrop of cloudy sky, rocky coast, and agitated sea evoked the power of the storm and was enhanced with bright bursts of light which were used to indicate a 'shower of fire' on the ship. Similarly, William Macready's 1838

production used a painting of a tranquil sea and a fleet of ships, which became covered with dark clouds as the scene progressed. However, Macready went a step further and added thunder and lightning sound cues, demons in the rafters shining intermittent lights to mimic lightning, an already shattered ship on stage, and green hay bales to represent waves (Dymkowski 72). By creating this stage spectacle, Macready paved the way for the majority of 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century productions to omit the words of the opening scene in favor of scenic elements and music (Griffiths 117).

A workable vessel with a crew of 30 boys, rain boxes, wood crashes, wind machines, iron floor sheeting upon which a cannonball could be dropped to create a rolling metal sound, dim lighting, and rolling thunder sounds made Charles Kean's 1857 production come to life in a roar of sound effects instead of conventional dialogue. Actors paced the stage in front of the inflated linen ship while screaming and creating chaos, until the ship finally deflated, indicating that it had sunk (Dymkowski 73-75). As much as this approach engaged the audience and mentally prepared them for the story of *The Tempest*, the scene change took so long that an overture was played while a crew of over 140 people cleared the stage (Coursen 146). This production set a century-long precedent that stage mechanics and spectacle were more important than action which advanced the plot (Griffiths 117).

It is uncertain as to whether or not Kean's production would hinder or foster the poignancy of Shakespeare's opening scene. The removal of the dialogue definitively emphasizes the extremity of Prospero's rage towards Alonso and his crew, which creates the idea that Alonso greatly mistreated his brother and therefore deserves the severe punishment that Prospero is enforcing. However, when the dialogue between the crew members is present and their agony is displayed, the crew gains the sympathy of the audience and views Prospero as exceeding the

punishment that Alonso deserves. Despite Kean's directorial choice to make Prospero seem justified in his treatment of the crew, the use of an overture to entertain the audience during the long scene change repudiates the message of his production. The sustained, melodic music contradicts the sentiment that the opening scene's sound cues give and distracts the audience from referencing the messages present in the beginning of the play as they continue to experience the world that Prospero creates in the later scenes.

Subsequent productions began using the spectacle of the opening scene as an advertisement ploy to get audiences to attend the performances (Lindley 7). Leeds Royal Amphitheatre's 1865 advertisement read "magnificent scenery, novel machinery, enchanting music, immense cast, and the great storm at sea," which was used to appeal to the general public's interest in contemporary cutting-edge stage technologies. Robert Atkins' 1938 production highlighted the transformation of the storm scene into a ballet with female dancers emanating the waves that would rise and crash upon the ship (Dymkowski 75). George Bernard Shaw felt outraged by this trend, feeling that "the best scenery you can get will only destroy the illusion created by poetry" (Coursen 146). However, Shakespeare's language continued to be cut and replaced with music (Lindley 8).

Additional orchestration was not a new addition to productions of *The Tempest* and even began as early as 1674 with Thomas Shadwell's twenty-four piece orchestra of violins, harpsichords, thorbos, and voices (Dymkowski 95). Adding orchestration became increasingly popular into the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but directors noted that they would have to make the sacrifice of removing the language or stopping the music every time there was a line to allow for the speeches to be heard by the audience (Griffiths 14).

David Garrick (1765) went a step farther and changed the entire play into an opera. However, he began the play with Ariel's entrance in Act I.ii, and then returned to Act I.i without the dialogue. Changing the placement of Act I.i became an occasional practice and still occurs in some modern productions (Dymkowski 95). By changing the order of the scenes, Garrick allowed the audience to discover Prospero's plot and hear about the successes of the shipwreck prior to viewing it. This sequencing may have allowed audiences to become sympathetic with Prospero since his side of the conflict with Alonso was the only one presented prior to the tempest. After viewing the storm and then finding Alonso's crew safely on shore in the next scene, the sustained suspense of whether or not the crew survived was removed, and viewers might have less sympathy for the crew members.

Even though the question of where to place the storm scene within the rest of the play still occurs today, many scholars have argued that the trend to remove the dialogue from the first scene ended in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dymkowski 96), whereas others believe that the practice was still popular until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Peter Hall's 1988 production, which used the dialogue during the tempest scene but without theatrical sound, was the endpoint of this era (Lindley 9).

Another short-lived staging choice began in the 1930's and extended to the 1960's; in this case, the focus was on the use of nautical accuracy. The phenomenon is thought to have begun in Harcourt Williams' 1930 production in which nautical terms already in the dialogue were accurately carried out by the actors and were followed with corresponding sequences of whistles from the shipmaster. The 1934 William Bridges-Adams production hired mariners to determine the correct angles which a ship in a storm would rock back and forth. This nautical obsession

was carried further in Oliver Neville's (1962) addition of dialogue in which sailors accurately responded to the boatswain's orders (Dymkowski 102).

Performances of *The Tempest* have evolved considerably since the early and mid-1900's and have increased in the range of countries in which it has been performed, the contexts of the setting of the play, and the technologies which have evolved to create new interpretations since 1990. Peter Brook created an African style production (1990) in which traditional African instruments were used to make rain and thunder noises, a ship was created from bamboo sticks, hand-carved wooden poles represented masts and sails, actors mimed waves through traditional dance, and stage hands were visible to evoke the representation of the gods. A Chinese-style piece directed by George Wolf (1995) tried to emulate Asian street performer art by having stilt walkers carry a blue fabric on poles to represent waves (Dymkowski 103).

These African and Asian-style productions highlight the postcolonial reading of *The Tempest*, which has been overshadowed by the Western world's emphasis on the actions of Prospero. In presenting cultural elements in each of these productions, the directors have transformed the piece from being about Prospero's internal struggle between justice and mercy to the effects of this struggle on the island natives. Through the incorporation of the cultural elements in the opening scene, only to have them removed by Prospero in the subsequent scene, reinforces the play's theme of disenfranchisement of native people's by colonial expansion and lessening the audience's opinion of Prospero's revenge plot.

Not only has the play extended to wider audiences and utilized different cultural elements in creating sounds, productions of *The Tempest* have also been transformed by the use of new stage technologies. For example, one production (Jennifer Tipton, 1991) started the show ten minutes early with increasing wave sounds over the course of the pre-show. Finally, when the

show does begin, Ariel appears and claps to turn on and off the wave noises in between dialogue. However, the dialogue is performed by actors in modern dress sitting in chairs on stage with their counterparts, dressed in Elizabethan garb, standing behind them. When the first scene is over, the scripts that the plainclothes actors were reading from blow away and the show continues with the Shakespearian-clothed actors (Dymkowski 104).

Another example of a change of context occurred in Robert LePage's (1992) radical and memorable production wherein Act I opened with a rehearsal room of actors sitting around a toy boat while a piano played thunder noises. A director represented Prospero and the cast read the lines of the opening scene. The setting and costumes became more Shakespearean with each subsequent act of the play. This transformation was to represent an actor's journey through school (Dymkowski 81).

Another innovation has been the use of lights in combination with sound to involve the audience in the opening tempest. Bill Alexander (1994) had his technicians create rolling thunder that started at the back of the auditorium and moved towards the stage. Upon reaching the stage, a flash of bright lights occurred to indicate lightning. The mariners furthered this illusion by standing on a large, swaying platform and looking out past the audience. The idea was to fully engulf the audience in storm and prepare them for understanding the circumstances of the characters in the rest of the play (Dymkowski 104).

While these productions may seem to have stretched outside of the realm of the original play, they refocus the audience on what is most important about the opening scene: the transformative influence that Prospero has on the island native and Alonso's crew through the use of his power. The new contexts of modern dress and college setting in Tipton and LePage's productions, respectively, engage viewers to think about *The Tempest's* themes in their personal

lives by relying on common points of reference for contemporary audiences. Alexander's use of sound during the storm to surround the auditorium includes the audience as victims of Prospero's wrath and draws a parallel between the circumstance that Alonso's men are placed in and the personal life of the audience members.

## **Conclusion**

Since Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, the theater world has been contemplating the purpose, placement, and representation of the opening storm scene. Directors have moved the scene's placement in the plot, removed the words, added words, built elaborate sets, had no set, and even turned the play into an opera. Through the beginning scene, Shakespeare was able to intuitively train the audience to become more aware of the dynamics of Prospero's struggle between enacting revenge and being sympathetic to the characters' desire for independence with his use of music and sound. Despite the range of ways which directors have implemented auditory elements in their productions, the audience is always left to decide if they sympathize with Prospero and ultimately if they agree with the way society differentiates between justice and mercy.

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<sup>1</sup> This source was used for all citations of William Shakespeare's original text in *The Tempest*.