

Prospero's Island as Self-referential Space of Trauma and Despair in Warlikowski's Production of *The Tempest*

Abstract: The main aim of this paper entitled "Prospero's Island as Self-referential Space of Trauma and Despair in Warlikowski's Production of *The Tempest*" is to investigate the solutions that Krzysztof Warlikowski adopted as a director in his production of *The Tempest* at the Rozmaitości Theatre in Warsaw (2003) to explore the abyss of pain, trauma, and the improbability of forgiveness. Warlikowski, considered today as one of the most distinguished European theatre and opera directors, filters the canonical texts of the past through contemporary sensitivity and checks how they can resonate now. Notorious for his drawing on Shakespeare, Warlikowski imbues his 2003 production of *The Tempest* with the twentieth century experience of terror and totalitarianism. In the analysis, special attention will be paid to the strategies Warlikowski employs to enhance the self-referential character of the production and to convey a consistent artistic message about forgiveness that may as well be harnessed to obtain power.

Keywords: Krzysztof Warlikowski, *The Tempest*, self-referentiality, trauma, forgiveness.

Krzysztof Warlikowski (br. 1962), with his forty theatre and opera productions directed so far, is recognized worldwide as the vanguard of a new theatrical language who was capable of re-forging a strong bond with his audience. The director mixes freely the canonical texts of the past from Sophocles and Euripides to Kafka and Proust with contemporary authors and cinematographic techniques to delve deeply into the sensitivity of his viewers and to invite them into fascinating, though at times painful, search for meaning. In this respect, Warlikowski is notorious for his drawing on Shakespeare, starting with *The Merchant of Venice* in 1994 up to *African Tales after Shakespeare* from 2011. The director admits that he derives inspiration and stimulus from Shakespeare for, he claims, nobody has been able to synthesize the truth about man like him, and compares his plays to an absorbing riddle you cannot liberate yourself from¹.

¹ Krzysztof Warlikowski, "Burza wciąż nieujarzmiona", interview by Dorota Wyżyńska, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 30, 2002, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/133105.htm>.

Warlikowski considers *The Tempest* as “a philosophical treatise on life”² and the most difficult play he has staged so far. He first directed *The Tempest* at the Stadt-Theater in Stuttgart in 1999 where the island turned into the space of initiation and ritual, with strong utopian and fairy-tale undertones. The second confrontation with Shakespeare’s romance drama took place at TR Warszawa (The Rozmaitości Theatre in Warsaw) in 2003 and Warlikowski interpreted the play differently. The production was affected deeply by the account of the massacre in the town of Jedwabne in 1941 as well as the celebrations held in 2001 to mark its anniversary. The publication of *Neighbours: the Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne* (2000) by Jan Tomasz Gross caused a storm of political conflict and controversy for it presented the pogrom of the Jewish people in Jedwabne as organized by their Polish neighbours, not by Nazis as it had been believed. For decades to come, the pogrom in Jedwabne has remained a matter of major dispute and attempts have been made to bury the memory of the atrocities even after Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski apologized for the massacre to the Jewish people in 2001 during the celebrations to commemorate its 60th anniversary³. The citizens of Jedwabne boycotted the celebrations and the anniversary itself, remembrance and misremembrance of Jedwabne, inspired Warlikowski to design a production that delves deeply into the problem of guilt, denial, and responsibility that stigmatizes the next generations.

At the time of its premiere the reviewers inscribed the production with the immediate actuality of this heinous crime, however, the production contains no explicit references to the massacre. As Warlikowski said, “Everybody needed to deal with Jedwabne on their own and decide whether what had happened there gives hope or causes pessimism. (...) Jedwabne helped [him] to understand the gravity of what Shakespeare wrote about life”⁴. With the passage of time, it proves to be one of the most important Polish interpretations of Shakespeare’s canonical text, grappling with difficult and thorny issues⁵. The context of Jedwabne imbues *The Tempest* with the twentieth century experience of terror and totalitarianism and poses unsettling questions about the burden of the past that affects the succeeding generations of victims and perpetrators. Therefore the main aim of this article is to conduct an analysis of Warlikowski’s techniques aimed to explore the abyss of pain, trauma, and the improbability of forgiveness. Special attention will be given to numerous solutions that enhance the self-referential character of the production and form

² Krzysztof Warlikowski in an interview with Piotr Gruszczyński, *Szekspear i uzurpator. Z Krzysztofem Warlikowskim rozmawia Piotr Gruszczyński* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B, 2007), 151.

³ The book was first published in Polish: *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka*. (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000) and then followed by its English translation: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001), and it has raised a lot of controversy and elicited a plethora of polemics. In *The Neighbours Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic present some of the most important voices in the ensuing debate (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴ Krzysztof Warlikowski, “Pesymistyczne źródła optymizmu”, interview by Jacek Cieślak, *Rzeczpospolita*, January 4, 2003, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/75214.html>

⁵ Krzysztof Warlikowski’s *The Tempest* was issued in *Poland’s Modern Shakespeare DVD series*, together with Jan Klata’s *H.* and Grzegorz Jarzyna’s 2007 *Macbeth*.

a consistent artistic message about forgiveness that may as well be harnessed to obtain power.

Prospero's island in Warlikowski's production does not display the enchanting and eerie quality presented by Caliban when he says that "the isle is full of noises,/ sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not" (3. 2. 134–135)⁶. Yet, it is a weirdly beautiful place, though it is sinister and disturbing at the same time. Warlikowski allows Caliban to describe the pleasures of the island with transfixing delight only to contrast his words with the space the director created for his production. You will hear neither chirping birds nor rustling leaves there, there are no sounds of crumbling waves either and the space actually lacks any signs of vegetation. What comes to the fore is its sterility and coldness that provides background to the acts of brutality, reported or presented on stage, punctuated by moments of prolonged silence. Dulled and murky light envelops the spectators with the air of melancholia, which to Janusz Majcherek does not designate just the inner paralysis the main characters have been crippled by, but above all, it represents Prospero's despair and his philosophical stance on life⁷.

The beauty of the space springs from its rigorous austerity for it is almost entirely devoid of any objects. The acting area consists of two planes where the lower one is covered with the mirror-like glass floor, and the upper part is situated on the raised platform enclosed by a white, wooden wall, with windows partially blinded by planks. This wooden wall seems to be a reference to the pogrom in Jedwabne for it might metaphorically represent a barn where Jews were burnt and as such it intensifies the mood of sadness and grief. Both surfaces display clean geometric lines and a remarkably regular pattern due to the layout of rectangular elements. The lower plane is Prospero's house, it is a space where Prospero (Adam Ferency) speaks about his past and where he meets his oppressors, and where Ferdinand (Redband Klijnstra) courts Miranda (Małgorzata Hajewska-Krzysztofik) and where they marry, so it is a point where the past sins mingle with the promises of the future. The upper plane is a space of conspiracy and lust for power, it is where Caliban (Renate Jett), Stephano (Jacek Poniedziałek), and Trinculo (Stanisława Celińska) as well as Antonio (Andrzej Chyra) and Sebastian (Marek Kalita) secretly plot the downfall of their rulers. The conspirators share the same ambition to rule, however, their staging continues to feel disturbingly discordant as if merging incongruous, oneiric landscapes. The murderous trio of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo are seated on stools by a high bar, drinking vodka as if entertaining themselves in a club. The shipwrecked noblemen, on the other hand, occupy air plane seats for they survived an air crash (instead of a sea storm). On their way back from a wedding, they are dressed in black dinner jackets and black ties, relaxed and undisturbed, smoking cigars. However, despite wearing crisply starched white shirts and listening to Chopin's music on their laptop,

⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 752. Subsequent citations from the play will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁷ Janusz Majcherek, "W czym leży sekret *Burzy*", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, no. 99, April 26, 2008, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/54741.html>

the survivors prove that noble birth does not guarantee the nobility of spirit. Consumed with ambition and driven by their base instincts, Sebastian and Antonio consider the shipwreck to be a suitable occasion to kill the king with a pen as a deadly weapon directed at his temple. They prattle and conspire, seated so that they face the audience, and the static character of the scenes resembles the focus on the haunting image that characterizes the style of David Lynch who blends freely a stark realistic shot and dreamscape.

This effect is felt most powerfully when Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, accompanied by Ariel, are getting drunk and the whole scene seems to convey their thrill and intoxication. Stephano, without his trousers, in white briefs and uniform-like jacket, and his hair combed back with brilliantine, slips with his companions into a mesmeric trance. They get befuddled by alcohol as well as by the prospect of their seizing power over the island. Comic at first, they look more and more threatening, pogoing around the stage. To express his subjugation to a new master, Caliban licks Stephano's foot who, in turn, paints his face red as if getting ready for war with Prospero. Warlikowski enhances the unreality of the scene by cross-gender casting where male roles, including Caliban, are given to women. Trinculo is played by Stanisława Celińska, a rather plump, mature actress, dressed in a black petticoat, barefoot, with heavy make-up and an unruly head of blonde hair. She competes for Stephano's attention and presses his head against her big bust. The same goes with Ariel played by Magdalena Cielecka, who transforms smoothly from a willowy boy into a woman in a bold, red wig and glitter top, and the device introduces ambiguity into his relationship with his master, Prospero.

The first opening scene, set on the lower platform, proves crucial to the play's interpretation and sets the tone for the whole production because the director removes the scene of a plane disaster almost until the end and combines it with Ariel's speech from Act Three. Contrary to the original, however, Ariel does not appear to the noblemen as an avenging harpy, but a flight attendant who gives the passengers safety procedures. Soon the noblemen's bodies go into strong convulsions that shake their bodies and twitch their faces. This break of the sequence of events introduces a dreamy quality to the events presented that is further strengthened when behind the aeroplane seats there appear figures who look like the noblemen's mirror reflections, impeccably dressed in black dinner jackets.

At the beginning of the play, the disaster is just signalled by a sound of radio messages and plane fans, coming from the off-stage. When darkness envelops the stage and Miranda lights a match it is a clear indication that the play will explore the inner feelings of the characters. The production starts with Scene Two when Miranda is horrified by the catastrophe she sees. Her compassion and graphic images she gives of "waters in this roar", "the sky (...) pour[ing] down stinking pitch" (2. 2, 2–3), suffering and cries of people are contrasted with Prospero's passive indifference. The slow pace of the dialogue delays substantially his declaration that he has orchestrated the storm and that they are all safe. The emphasis is shifted to accentuate his lack of concern and sympathy, which is generally strengthened by the configuration of the characters that from a start suggests

distance and lack of emotional involvement. Miranda, in a floral dress and sneakers, is sitting at the table, cutting out men from paper, and a silent boy in a blue tracksuit, who will later turn out to be Ariel, watches her, standing still, hidden in the shadow. The girl's face is covered almost entirely by curly hair and only in later scenes will the audience see that it is a face of a mature woman.

Warlikowski will pursue this strategy throughout the play, omitting certain passages in order to darken the image of the island and its inhabitants. When, for example, Ariel sings a song in Act One, Scene Two, the passage about walking along sandy beaches and kissing is cut out. What remains of it is the second stanza that conjures up a frightening description of a corpse whose body slowly decomposed at the bottom of the sea. Similarly, when Prospero gets Ferdinand to chop heavy logs of wood, the aside in which he explains that the physical labour is inflicted on the young man on purpose, just to make an infatuated couple appreciate more their moments together, is again missing. In this context, Prospero's threats that he will "manacle thy [Ferdinand's] neck and feet together" (1. 2. 463) and feed him with sea water and "withered roots" (1. 2. 463) acquire a different tone and sound rather sinister.

The desired effect to make the island a menacing location is achieved also by another manipulation of the original script which leaves almost intact the lines spoken by Caliban. Therefore what comes to the fore in Caliban's descriptions is that the island is a place of brutality where he is pinched and cramped by unseen spirits until he roars in pain. Additionally, Warlikowski stresses this effect by his choice of casting an Austrian actress in the role of Caliban; she speaks Polish with a heavy accent and thus her every word differentiates her from the rest of the cast and classifies her as the Other. Therefore Caliban, in a woollen cap and overalls, seems to constitute the representation of the oppressed and brutalised who, in turn, cherish a dream of being aggressors themselves.

When the moment of confession comes, Prospero begins his story. In his worn⁸, loose black sweater, Prospero may look like an ordinary man and the big table may epitomize the memory of the family's past, of moments spent together, engraved in the solid wood of the furniture. However, both impressions are misleading and the table confounds these expectations, and throughout the production it would rather constitute a sign of a barrier that separates than a site of a family gathering. The construction of the stage that is surrounded from three sides by the audience might seem ideally suited for the confessional character of Prospero's revelations, yet the glassy floor is another factor that destroys any sense of intimacy. The people at the table seem to be embedded in their own traumas that thwart any attempts at communication. When they talk, they avoid eye contact, which is additionally prevented by Miranda's long hair, hiding her face like a thick

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the production's deprecation of aesthetic ideals and its employment of motifs of ugliness and decay, see: Jacek Fabiszak, "Ugly' Tempests: The Aesthetics of Turpism in Derek Jarman's Film and Krzysztof Warlikowski's Stage Production", in *Eyes to Wonder, Tongue to Praise*, ed. Agnieszka Pokojńska and Agnieszka Romanowska (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2012), 115–128.

curtain. When Prospero asks a few times whether his daughter is listening to him, the audience might have the impression that he demands obedience rather than seeks contact. The same controlling behaviour turns into violence when he exacts obedience from Ariel and twists his body, pressing it hard to remind him of the tree where he was imprisoned by Sycorax. Caliban's entrance generates further emotional tension, as well induces acts of brutality. Caliban puts Miranda's paper men into his mouth, hits her head, wants to stab himself, and the climax comes with the reference to the attempted rape. Miranda hits Caliban and rips off the woollen cap from his head, but it only demonstrates how powerless she feels. From this perspective we can interpret her neurotic behaviour of hiding her eyes and fidgeting nervously with the dress as rooted in the past trauma of abuse and psychological distress. Her naive exclamations from the original text are contrasted throughout the production with the face of a mature woman and this disparity further accentuates the emotional price she paid for the isolation she endured on the island. The most painful and memorable manifestation of this condition is the scene of courtship when she exchanges gifts with Ferdinand and they both seem to be naive in their childish clumsiness, which, however, finishes in Miranda's escape when Ferdinand's wooing turns into sexually abusive behaviour.

It is yet another example of the binary structure Warlikowski uses repeatedly in the production that is implemented through stark contrasts and powerful counterpoints. What is especially interesting is the way Warlikowski copies and at the same time transforms certain solutions when compared to Shakespeare's original, which in itself is a play of mirrors, in which scenes, characters, and speeches match each other by either resemblance or contrast. It is enough to mention Sycorax, who is "a distorted mirroring of Prospero"⁹ or Act Three, Scene Two that echoes Act Two, Scene Two where power-hungry characters wander aimlessly around the island. Warlikowski additionally complicates these reiterations and introduces some alterations. For example, in the original both Caliban and Ferdinand carry heavy logs under Prospero's coercive powers, their attitudes, however, to the task are totally dissimilar. Ferdinand treats it as service to Miranda and anticipates the forthcoming award, that is her hand in marriage, Caliban, on the other hand, considers it as yet another attempt to subdue his struggle for liberation. Ferdinand's courtly manner turns a spotlight on Caliban sexually assaulting Miranda, thus his suffering is treated as a deserved punishment. In the modern production, the doubling is missing as far as Caliban is not performing any exhausting task for his master and, as it was already mentioned, the burden of carrying logs is replaced with an effort made to chop them. It is an occasion that Warlikowski uses willingly to introduce on the stage an axe that Ferdinand at some point cuddles close and this gesture may be suggestive of his hidden propensity for violence. With this pairing missing, the director introduces another one that is a sexual abuse on Miranda. As it was mentioned earlier, Caliban's assault

⁹ Peter Holland, "Introduction", in *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 731.

is referred to at the beginning of the play and it is doubled by Ferdinand's brutish behaviour towards Miranda in the courting scene. This infamous act is juxtaposed with Ferdinand's courtly language and the preceding scene in which the father, Prospero, requests him to control his desires and not to violate Miranda's honour and he readily agrees, as if surprised at the supposed allegations that he might have acted otherwise.

Another scene that takes place on the lower platform seems to be the most substantial alteration introduced by the director because the masque is replaced by a scene of his own design. The original masque, "Some vanity of mine art" (4. 1. 41), as described by Prospero, is his gift for Ferdinand and Miranda in which spirits summoned up by Ariel act out the mythological figures of Iris (the personification of the rainbow and a messenger of the gods), Juno (the queen of gods connected with all aspects of women's life), and Ceres (the goddess of the growth of food plants). The masque constitutes an important aspect of the play and, as Davidson claims, can be considered "an indicator of concealed meaning" "fabulous mythological matter is utilized to provide illumination of a higher order than previous knowledge would allow"¹⁰. It is in a way a manifestation of harmony and the generative potential of the world motivated by love, though marred by Caliban's plot since the masque is disrupted when Prospero suddenly remembers the hour nearly has come for the conspirators to make attempt on his life. Using a term introduced by Shklovskij, Warlikowski employs a technique of defamiliarization¹¹ for he replaces the masque with a scene where three older village women in folk dresses bring the young couple bread and salt and glasses of vodka and give the blessing that can be heard at a traditional Polish wedding. The incompatibility of the scene with the context of Shakespeare's play surprises members of the audience to such an extent that they cannot suppress laughter especially that the doggerel verse is recited in a crude manner by real amateurs. Some reviewers believe that this scene's truthfulness and directness restores "a true hierarchy of values"¹². Others claim that this play enabled the involvement of the audience in the ritual that resulted in their cheering the young couple to kiss¹³. These interpretations do not seem valid in the context of the whole production for when the women continue to prattle on with their folk couplets, the defamiliarization technique exposes their lack of authentic emotional involvement, which in turn proves the blessing to be nothing more than threadbare clichés, repeated over and over again, without reflection. As it was intended by Formalists, the prevention

¹⁰ Clifford Davidson, "The Masque within *The Tempest*", *Notre Dame English Journal* vol. 10, no. 1/2 (1976): 12.

¹¹ The Russian Formalists coined the term "defamiliarization" or "making strange" to refer to one of the chief characteristics of literary language which forces us to see common things in an unfamiliar or strange way in order to lay them open to reappraisal. Today it is a central concept of twentieth century art, in theatre defamiliarization makes the spectator aware of the operations of sign-vehicles. On defamiliarization in theatre see: Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 16–19.

¹² Piotr Gruszczyński, "Zmierzc bogów", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 3, January 19, 2003, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/75484.html>.

¹³ Joanna Krakowska-Narozniak, "Burza, czyli zdobycie władzy", *Dialog* no. 4, 2003, <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/75158.html>; Grzegorz Niziołek, Warlikowski. *Extra Ecclesiam* (Kraków: Homini, 2008), 126–127.

of “over-automatization”¹⁴, presenting a common thing, a village betrothal, in a strange context, enhances our perception of the familiar and allows the audience to see the blessing as mindless recitation, deprived of genuine depth.

The final scene clasps the production like a buckle for Prospero meets the people from his past at the same table at which he recounted the story of his brother’s betrayal in the opening scene. Contrary to Shakespeare’s text, the magical attributes of Prospero’s rule over the island are missing; he neither casts a spell over his guests nor wears his magic robes. Instead, like other noblemen, he is wearing an elegant black dinner jacket, the table is covered with a white cloth, and Caliban and Stephano as waiters serve champagne in long, slim glasses. In the background, on the upper platform, Trinculo sings Armstrong’s song “What a Wonderful World”, wearing a long, black, evening dress like a real jazz diva. One of the most life-affirming songs of all times provides a background to the scene where the tension among the men sitting at the table is almost tangible. The effect is even doubled, for Miranda seeing the elegant gathering at the table, exclaims her famous “O brave new world, that has such people in’t!”. Her childish delight strikes yet another note of dissonance and appears to sound almost cynical for at the table there is no forgiveness nor remorse. Prospero recites his lines dispassionately and in this respect it draws a clear parallel with the preceding scene of the wedding blessing. Such an arrangement of scenes and the way of acting, allows the audience to see Prospero’s speech as a regular ritual, something he knows should be said for the future well-being of the community, but it is just an empty gesture that has lost its power of rejuvenation. Prospero watches long his brother who says nothing and almost chokes with his tight throat on the drink that spills on his chin and after awkward silence asks everybody to leave. Grzegorz Niziołek writes that the production makes us experience in an almost physical way the problem of guilt and forgiveness deprived of theatrical conventions and easy theatrical solutions. In this way the critic notices an affinity with the conclusions made by Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur, who claim that forgiveness, regret, and reconciliation all became a part of socio-political spectacle, a tool, which has nothing to do with the experience of forgiveness that should verge on the impossible¹⁵.

As Derrida says: “There is always a strategical or political calculation in the generous gesture of one who offers reconciliation or amnesty”. This, he says, has nothing to do with forgiveness: “forgiveness does not, it should never, amount to a therapy of reconciliation”¹⁶.

It is interesting to notice that all the three scenes that take place on the mirror-like floor combine two discordant objectives, on the one hand, the suppressed feelings of harm and damage, on the other, the efforts to overcome the situation. Prospero does not pardon his brother, the deceiver, but rather enacts the formula of forgiveness, allows

¹⁴ Viktor Shklovskij, “Art as Technique”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998), 16.

¹⁵ Grzegorz Niziołek, *Warlikowski. Extra Ecclesiam*, 134–135.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), 40–41.

the past to be forgotten and forgiven, figuring a better future to come. The performance of forgiveness is closely related to the space in which it is enacted. The mirror floor generates a very thick field of associations and enhances substantially the semiotic potential of the production. Its glassy surface reflects and multiplies the stage reality, endowing it with eerie and oneiric quality. Moreover, since the mirror represents in many ways the concept of duality, the reflecting surface adds to the mirror-like construction of the play, the pairing of characters or their configurations, the division of space into two separate planes. On another level, the mirror epitomizes the interdependence between reality and staged fiction frequently explored by Renaissance playwrights and Shakespeare himself. Theatre is a close imitation of the world and, as in *Hamlet* by means of "The Murder of Gonzago", may be a vehicle for revealing the truth. On the other hand, however, *condition humaine* can be perceived in theatrical terms and the topos of *theatrum mundi* that saw the world as a stage and man as an actor, with all the philosophical implications of this comparison, underlies many Shakespeare's plays¹⁷. In fact, as the original play, Warlikowski's production of *The Tempest* abounds in metatheatrical practices that point at Prospero as the creator of the ensuing events. It is the magus who conjures up a storm and stages his revenge, orchestrating the movements of the characters on the islands. Owing to his magical powers, Prospero does not kill his enemies, but instead enacts a theatre of magic which is "an elaborate inward restaging of loss, misery, and anxiety"¹⁸. Prospero repeatedly acts as a director who casts Ariel into costume and praises his performance as he does, for example, in the already mentioned scene when disguised Ariel confronts the noblemen with their crimes and threatens them with punishment. Warlikowski's production makes it evident that Ariel just mouths the script that his master taught him for the spirit forgets and stumbles over his lines. On other occasions, however, Prospero's agency is less apparent. The revelation of his control over the events is either delayed or he limits himself to just observing the development of the situation, with a tired and silent face lit by a spotlight. It seems though that the reflecting surface of the floor may in many ways bring out the self-referential quality that is considerably weakened by the presentation of the main character.

All these devices remind the audience continually of the made-up quality of what they are watching, the effect of which Warlikowski strengthens with the use of many strategies discussed so far. Elements of the performance are carefully arranged to construct a coherent and powerful artistic statement, where forgiveness is yet another element of a bigger spectacle of power. Strangely enough, although the production places forgiveness within this context, it weakens neither the intellectual nor emotional responses

¹⁷ The topos of *theatrum mundi* is largely developed by Warlikowski in his production of *The Taming of the Shrew* through the director's choice of the stage design, costumes, and the play's construction, see A. Suwalska-Kolecka, "Warlikowski Provokes. Gender in His Production of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Dramatyczny Theatre in Warsaw", in *Art, Ethics and Provocation*, ed. Izabella Penier and Anna Suwalska-Kolecka (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), 171–183.

¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 144.

of the audience. The intimacy created between the audience and the characters by the layout of the stage culminates in the final monologue. As in the original, Prospero's final monologue is the culmination of metatheatrical practices that underscore the whole play. Prospero, in a tired voice, pleads for our cooperation in fabricating the artifice of the performance because the audience's participation is a necessary condition for the justice of his cause and well-being of his daughter. Prospero no longer wants to "be confined by you [the audience]" (...) to "dwell in this bare island by your/their spell" (Epilogue, line 8). Translating his poetic language into academic discourse, Prospero knows that recipients are a necessary prerequisite for communication in theatre "which is made possible through a system of theatre signs (...) which evolve before the spectator as a stage text, rendered by its creators to be 'read' and experienced"¹⁹. Keir Elam, encapsulated the phenomena of theatrical communication briefly: "It is with the spectator, in brief, that theatrical communication begins and ends"²⁰. In Prospero's words, without the spectator, contributing their attention and response to the creation of the fictional reality, the characters and the spaces they inhabit "are melted into air, into thin air" (4. 1. 150).

The ending does not strike a chord of a general sense of resolution and hope that can be heard in Shakespeare's text. It rather crowns the director's coherent strategy to turn the enchanted island into the space of trauma and suffering that results in existential emptiness and inability to build any close relationship on the part of the characters, accentuated emphatically by the bleak, glassy floor. The sadness on Prospero's face tells its own tale about the dichotomy between the need to forgive and the improbability of forgiveness. Villains remain surly and impudent and they do not express contrition or remorse. Their ruthless ambition, unchecked by moral constraints, may again wreak destruction as they deeply desire power and advancement. Therefore, in the light of solutions Warlikowski adopted in his production, it seems legitimate to claim that Prospero's words: "And my ending is despair" (Epilogue, line 15) may prove crucial to its interpretation.

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¹⁹ Jerzy Limon, *The Chemistry of the Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

²⁰ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 97.

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