STUDIA UBB PHILOLOGIA, LXIX, 3, 2024, p. 139 - 158
(RECOMMENDED CITATION)
DOI:10.24193/subbphilo.2024.3.08

"THE STRENGTH OF THE(IR) ILLUSION" (*MACBETH* 3.5.27): TRANSMISSION OF MAGIC AND THE AMBIGUITY OF MAGICAL SPACES IN *MACBETH* AND *THE TEMPEST*

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Article history: Received 01 March 2024; Revised 28 June 2024; Accepted 01 September 2024; Available online 30 September 2024; Available print 30 September 2024.

ABSTRACT. ***"The strength of the(ir) illusion" (*Macbeth *3.5.27): Transmission of Magic and the Ambiguity of Magical Spaces in* Macbeth *and* The Tempest.** Starting from Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen's 2016 taxonomy of space in Shakespearean drama, our paper focuses on setting and social/ gendered space. What we aim to discuss is how two of Shakespeare's plays involving magic—namely *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*—associate various settings with witchcraft and magic, while also constructing space simultaneously as magical and political, a topophrenic "thirdspace" (cf. Tally, 2019; Soja, 1996), where disorder rules and where power relations in general, and gender

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relations in particular, are negotiated between ordinary characters and magic-wielding ones (the witches and Hecate vs. Prospero and Ariel, as well as Sycorax). The paper also discusses what "rough" magic is in these plays (a term used in *The Tempest,* first addressed critically by Robert Egan, 1972), roughness being, on the one hand, a reference to the impurity of the art employed, and, on the other, a nod to the transgression(s) implied by magic practices.

Keywords: *gender, performance, magic, thirdspace, transgression, transmission*

REZUMAT. *„Puterea iluziei (lor)" (*Macbeth *3.5.27, t.n.): Transmiterea magiei şi ambiguitatea spaţiilor magice în* Macbeth *şi* Furtuna*. Pornind de la cartea editată în 2016 de Ina Habermann şi Michelle Witen despre clasificarea spaţiilor în dramaturgia shakespeariană, lucrarea de faţă se concentrează asupra spaţiului scenic şi a celui social/de gen. Ceea ce ne propunem să discutăm este modul în care două dintre piesele lui Shakespeare unde apare magia—şi anume, *Macbeth* şi *Furtuna*—asociază diferite locaţii cu vrăjitoria sau magia, construind în acelaşi timp spaţiul ca magic şi politic deopotrivă, un „spaţiu terţ" şi topofrenic (sau „thirdspace", cf. Soja, 1996; Tally, 2019) în care domină neorânduiala, iar relaţiile de putere în general, şi relaţiile de gen în special, sunt negociate între personajele obişnuite şi cele care practică magia (vrăjitoarele şi Hecate vs. Prospero şi Ariel, precum şi Sycorax). Lucrarea discută, de asemenea, ce înseamnă magia „aspră" în aceste piese (un termen folosit în *Furtuna*, abordat pentru prima dată în mod critic de Robert Egan, 1972), „asprimea" fiind, pe de o parte, o referire la impuritatea artei folosite iar, pe de altă parte, o aluzie la transgresiunea (sau transgresiunile) pe care le implică practicile magice.

Cuvinte-cheie: *gen, magie, scenă, spaţiu terţ, transgresiune, transmitere*

Introduction

At the crossroads of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the study of space has undergone a profound transformation across the disciplines, including the humanities. Place and space, mapping and geographical imagination have brought new perspectives on a variety of analytical fields and affected, for instance, the study of early modern drama and its relationship with spaces, leading to the investigation of a relational spatial system which connects the stage, the playhouse, and the city. This interdisciplinary 'spatial turn', as it became widely known, was prompted by the theories of several French philosophers like Michel Foucault and his heterotopias, Henri Lefebvre's production of space, Michel de Certeau's distinction between "lieu" and "espace," and Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological poetics of space, as well as other scholars such as Edward Soja's "thirdspace", Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism, with its focus

on "spatiotemporality", "transgressivity" and "referentiality" (2011, 9, 37, 75), or Robert Tally Jr.'s spatiality and literary cartography. In brief, such theories convincingly demonstrate that "literature functions as a form of mapping […], situating [readers] in a kind of imaginary space", helping them to "get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come" (Tally 2012, 2). In other words, spaces are cultural and political, as well as historical, imaginative and representative entities for the communities that create them, while people's interactions with such spaces are subjective and culture-bound, influencing not only social practices, but also ideologies. As Tally (2012, 5) explains, "space and place are indeed historical, and the changing spaces and perceptions of space over time are crucial to the understanding of the importance of spatiality in literary and cultural studies today".

Adding to the existing scholarship on the 'spatial turn' in Shakespeare, Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen's edited collection *Shakespeare and Space: Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm* (2016), offers an interpretation of the early modern stage "as a topological 'node', an interface linking different times and spaces in a multidimensional theatrical experience." (Habermann and Witen 2016, 2-3) The scholars identify seven types of space, which are particularly significant for Shakespearean drama: "(1) structural/topological space, (2) stage space/setting/locality, (3) linguistic/poetic space, (4) social/ gendered space, (5) early modern geographies, (6) cultural spaces/contact zones, and (7) the material world/ cultural imaginary." (Habermann and Witen 2016, 3)

Combining geocriticism and close-text analysis as methodological approaches, this study aims to explore how two of Shakespeare's plays involving magic—namely, *Macbeth* (1605) and *The Tempest* (1611)– build magical spaces as dual and ambiguous. In these plays, space is simultaneously magical and political, a "thirdspace" (cf. Soja 1996) where power relations are negotiated between practitioners and non-practitioners of magic. Therefore, especially relevant to our purpose here are the stage/setting and social spaces, according to Habermann and Witen's hierarchy. Stage space is concerned with performance, with how specific places are evoked/ represented on stage. The theatre combines the physical space with virtual reality, "staging in material form fictions and fantasies" (Habermann and Witen 2016, 5). Further complementing Habermann and Witen's definition of stage space is Edward Soja's revolutionary concept of "thirdspace" by which the scholar sought to transform the divide between physical and mental spaces. Primarily a social or "directly lived" space (Soja 1996, 67), "thirdspace" is also hybrid, in-between, "simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical" (Soja 1996, 65). It is a space where "*everything* comes together", "the knowable and the unimaginable, […] the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history." (Soja, 1996, 56, emphasis in original). In the case of theatre, "thirdspace"

results from the interplay between the material stage and the places represented on it. According to Soja, most of our lived spaces are constructed socially, with individuals, artists included, impacting other individuals and "actively transform[ing] the worlds we live in" (1996, 67). As a result, "thirdspace" can always be reimagined and recreated and is thus fertile ground for "counterspaces".

Furthermore, we link our reading of Soja's "thirdspace" to Robert Tally's "topophrenia", defined as "a constant and uneasy 'placemindedness' that characterizes a subject's interactions with his or her environment" (2019, 1). In Tally's view (2019, 9), although 'placemindedness' is fundamental to human thought and experience, an affective geography of place involves "a condition of disorder or 'dis-ease'", i.e. "the less salutary or utopian visions of place, such as places of fear or loathing that nevertheless condition our approaches to space and place in narrative."

On the other hand, social/gendered space conceives the world as a set of social connections, the result of political, cultural and power-based relations. Enabling the interaction between the actors on the stage and the audience in the stalls or ground, the theatre "dramatizes and displays social practice", and provides images and symbols of representational space through which space is lived and also gendered (Habermann and Witen 2016, 6). The latter aspect is all the more important when we consider that the stage was dominated by men, given that all characters in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama were played by male actors, whereas the audience was a mixed gender and social group.

In light of this, magical space in the two Shakespearean plays we discuss here may be read as an illustration of Soja's "thirdspace", simultaneously real and imagined, while also being socially and politically produced by the people who inhabit it or pass through it and who rely on various social practices, be they ritualised or not. Moreover, magical space is the result of the interactions between characters who wield magic—and therefore have the upper hand in negotiating power relations—and those who do not. Since in early modernity magic was an ambiguous art at best, we will explore how spaces where magic was practiced create a sense of 'dis-ease' and ultimately cause chaos and disorder.

Transmission of magic

In an exciting and well-documented book on witchcraft and popular magic in the sixteenth-century Duchy of Württemberg, Germany, Edward Bever (2008, 11-20) investigates, among others, the psychological and neurophysiological implications of *maleficium*, including "assault, poisoning, ritual spell-casting, and curses" (2008, 21), on the bodily health of people who thought themselves at the receiving end. Bever aptly observes that, in early modernity, people were concerned with the material/physical consequences of the spoken word, and

"[t]he tongue was widely regarded […] as a powerful source of evil because of its power to curse" (2008, 23). By contrast, in modernity, people focus more on abstract notions, "on the *ideas* conveyed by the words used in verbal expression, both because of our cultural orientation toward language and because, in the case of early modern witchcraft, words are mostly what the documents record" (Bever 2008, 23, emphasis added). However, he further notes that there is another, crucial, dimension to the uttered words, namely the tone of voice—or prosody (timing, pitch and stress)—which carries emotional information that completes, or even contradicts, the meaning of the spoken words. Interestingly enough, the two emotions most easily recognizable in the tone of voice are anger and fear, thus seriously impacting interpersonal interactions, alongside other such forms of nonverbal communication as "facial expression, bodily contact, gestures (including posture), and spatial behaviour" (Bever 2008, 24).

As the quote in our title suggests, magic is transmitted and perceived as a form of attack especially through ritualised spells or cursing (cf. Bever 2008, 22-23). Both spells and curses are uttered as a string of words, which create a strong illusion in those at the receiving end, impacting their psychological wellbeing and bodily health. A commonly held belief, especially in early modern Protestantism, was that language—and implicitly the tongue used as a 'tool' to utter it—was regarded as a medium for evil and the supernatural to seep into the human mind and impact human behaviour. It is words that can create powerful bonds, or *vinculi*, between the materiality of the world and the power of imagination.

In one of his studies about what he considers the supreme art of Renaissance, magic, the Romanian historian Ioan Petru Culianu evokes two important intellectuals and practitioners of the art of magic, Giordano Bruno and Marsilio Ficino, who had the intuition of a psychic revolution when they defined the invisible connections among humans and between humans and the universe as *rete* (networks, in Ficino) or *vincula* (chains, in Bruno). In *Iocari serio*, Culianu defines magic as an act of transmission, a process which applies the Neoplatonic theories of sensible knowledge . In the links and networks laid out by the magic 'operator', a transfer of influence takes place, manipulating the human cognitive apparatus. (Culianu 2003, 110) Of the senses, sight and hearing are essential for the performance of the magical act, which triggers immediate, strong reactions of attraction or revulsion. Extrapolating this Neoplatonic theory and employing a metatheatrical perspective, similarly to Shakespeare's operators of magic who bewitch and manipulate other characters on stage through their spells, so too is the audience in the theatre hall subject to the magic of the play's plot and atmosphere. A Shakespearean example which brings these two aspects together is Puck's concluding monologue in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when the play is paralleled to a dream ("you but have slumbered here", 5.1.421) or an

enchantment, in which both Athenian characters and fairies were "visions" who "did appear" (5.1.422) on stage, holding the audience under their sway for the duration of the performance. The end of the play coincides with the lifting of the magic spell.

Considering the magic on the stage, it can be argued that, in an age when the prestige of the powerful art started to be questioned, the aura (whether positive or negative) of this practice and its practitioners starts to vanish as a result of overexposure. Magic, visualized by the masses on the stage and behind the scene, with its *modi operandi* exposed as special effects, gives way to mechanics and the performance of feats which are perceived as "wonders of nature" (Butterworth 2005, 42). The atmosphere of gloom sustained by the scholarly fashion of demonology studies, encouraged by the general ignorance of the common people, is replaced in the seventeenth century by the farce. The practitioner of magic is now a conjurer performing tricks and the invisible connections created by the art of magic have by now turned into the pleasant effects of entertainment, or a business, unspecialized and unritualized.

Attitudes towards magic around 1600

Magic is wielded ambiguously in Shakespeare's Jacobean plays, which are projected against a very specific Zeitgeist, explained by Frances Yates (1999) in the context of King James' ascension to the English throne, and by Ioan Petru Culianu (2003) in the context of the radical transformations of mentality brought about by the Reformation. Both factors deal a significant blow to the way the theme of magic is presented in literature and on the stage. The much darker mode of *Macbeth* and the more nuanced depiction in *The Tempest* are important deviations from both earlier Elizabethan interpretations, and from contemporary or later directions. The literature encouraged at the court of the Virgin Queen was clearly influenced by the Neoplatonic philosophy. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), for example, displays an idealized perception of 'good' magic, processing sophisticated astrological and numerological patterns, and embracing an original prophetic and imperial vision. The poem demonstrates that Elizabethan literature and philosophy, especially the hermetic poetry, employed occult language and imagery in order to undermine continental religious messages and to oppose theological pressures and threats. If this direction featured magic in a positive, as well as important, superior light, another direction downplayed it, depicting it as unimportant, but harmless. The Elizabethan stage presented comedies featuring sorcerers, tricksters, and conjurers, and consequently signalled a relaxation of taboos about how magic was perceived. On the stage, the human practitioners of magic and the (imaginary) demons or familiars are presented as a good joke. Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon*

and Friar Bungay (1594), for instance, aims to prove that the occult recipe is not successful when all hidden forces are undermined by human stupidity and incompetence. As learned as the magicians may be, as efficient as their equipment may be (a magic glass and a brazen head), as much political support they may have (from the king), the magic experiment is a failure: Friar Bacon misses the astral moment because he falls asleep and his servant rides to hell on a demon's back.

But, once King James I ascended to the throne of England, a mutation can be observed in the literary imaginary. The problem of occultism (and witchcraft) became more acute than ever because the monarch was against the English disciples of Neoplatonism, all former favourites of the Virgin Queen, and also had strong opinions on demonology. He expressed these views in a manner that was fashionably scholarly at that moment—a treatise on this subject, *Daemonologie*, *in the Form of a Dialogue, Divided into Three Books, etc.*, written in 1597. The king, who believed himself to be a rationalist, put a great deal of effort to demonstrate scientifically and with practical examples how witchcraft worked and, very importantly, what punishment should be applied to the devil's accomplices. It is important to remember that the king had first-hand experience of witch trials, which he had ordered and conducted himself, against alleged maleficent agents (Thurston 2013, 162; Greenwood 2013, 141). The North Berwick witch trials, in 1590, were the first of this kind on the British Isles, judging the potential involvement of witches in a plot against the king and his Danish bride. Against this backdrop, King James wrote a dialogue between the rationalist Philomathes and the wise theologian Epistemon, expert in magic. With philosophical arguments doubled by details collected from the experience of the trials, King James sought the "natural" causes of the devil's manifestation in everyday life and the practical measures to be taken against it. It is easy to recognize, in Shakespeare's description of the witches' appearance, lodgings, potions, incantations and declared purposes, in *Macbeth*, a summary of the academic debate laid out by King James in his *Daemonologie.*

If *Macbeth* is a gloomy tragedy of witchcraft and demonic influences, a while later, when the monarch's children reached adulthood, the official attitude towards magic became more nuanced, as Frances Yates argues (1999, 187). Prince Henry embraced Queen Elizabeth's Protestantism, her anti-Spanish attitudes, and her imperial imagery. Princess Elizabeth became the bride of Frederick V, the Elector Palatine, an alliance that was regarded on the Continent as clear evidence of the anti-Catholic feelings of England. Alongside *The Tempest*, during the wedding festivities, other plays were staged, among which *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1604?), attributed to Thomas Heywood and Thomas Dekker. In this very light comedy, Peter Fabell is a magician called to use his powers in order to reunite two lovers against their families' plans. A "merry" devil is a long shot, compared to the weird sisters in the Scottish tragedy, but also to the

enlightened magus in *The Tempest*. But this playful depiction of magic *modi operandi* is a spirit that becomes dominant on the seventeenth-century stage. Ben Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass* (1616) portrays demons as clownish creatures who are easily outwitted by humans. There is neither mystery nor maleficence in the spirits from hell, whose agenda to corrupt the human race is doomed to fail since humanity has reached a degree of sophistication and decadence that even the devil finds difficult to counter. The ultimate punishment for the demon is very mundane indeed—he is thrown into Newgate Prison like a common thief.

If we paraphrase Ioan Petru Culianu's study on Renaissance magic, *Iocari serio*, "playing the game seriously" (2003), we can argue that the ambiguous attitude towards magic displayed in the Jacobean theatre is part of a game which is played quite seriously at the end of the Renaissance. According to the Romanian scholar's original thesis, first presented in his seminal study *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (1999), the culture of magic—as art and science—was inhibited by the Reformation, which stifled the movement with its rationalizing and moralizing agenda. This inhibition worked powerfully on the imagination, operating "a phantasmatic censorship" (Culianu 2003, 24). As a result, practitioners of magic were annihilated or hid behind other, more harmless, or more mundane activities. But the magic game was 'serious' because, far from being a mere practice, it was a vision of the world and an epistemology. Discussing Marsilio Ficino's and Giordano Bruno's Neoplatonic ideas, Culianu argues that these two 'magicians' demonstrated that the minds connected with the help of networks (*rete*) and chains (*vincula*) can generate the most efficient forms of manipulation. The art of magic consists of bringing together two minds or two objects, by means of a pneumo-phantasmatic operation (Culianu 2003, 110). When comparing this theory with the history of witch hunts and the witches' persecution, Culianu dismantles the latter as oversimplifying and monodimensional, though harmful and resilient as a vision of the world, which dominated western mentalities for many centuries. It is not a coincidence that the English plays about magic 'operators' are contemporary with the surge of witch hunts in Western Europe and, therefore, with what Culianu calls a mutation in the collective imaginary (2003, 68).

As for the representation of the operators of magic, Charles Zika (2003) writes that, in sixteenth-century Europe, witches were often visually portrayed as women seeking to appropriate male power and sexuality, leading to a disruption in the proper gender, social, and moral order, which resulted in the creation of a new term to designate them—"*siemann* or She-man" (2003, 270). Zika further shows how witchcraft was often conceived of in association with sexualised practices and rituals (2003, 274), on the one hand, and on the other, with female practitioners as a group that was "separate from mainstream society, and especially separate from the mastery of men" (2003, 281). Witches thus challenged any form of male definition, control or dominance.

Nonetheless, although witchcraft has usually been associated with deviant, marginalised female practitioners, there have been cases of men accused, too. In a thoroughly researched chapter about male witches in the south-east of England in the seventeenth century, Malcolm Gaskill looks at "witchcraft as a power that caused suspects to be identified as witches" (2009, 173). In the religiously troubled context leading to the Civil War, in Suffolk, for example, men who became victims of such accusations were not only associated with witchcraft as a feminised practice/ ritual but were also suspects of religious and sexual deviance (as Catholics and homosexuals), thus challenging their own masculinity: "A real man, it was felt, had no need of magical power to make his way in the world." (Gaskill 2009, 176) It was generally believed—the scholar goes on to argue—that those men who resorted to magic for whatever reason (be it to advance socially, to get rich or to seduce women) had actually "failed as members of a divinely ordained natural world and Christian community", and "had also failed the test of manhood" (Gaskill 2009, 178), by not abiding by the standards which early modern masculinity defined itself against. Gaskill pertinently concludes that the main reason for the public censure of male witches was their perceived masculine alterity; they were othered "less because they aped female values than because they failed to measure up to male ones" (2009, 184). In short, male practitioners of magic replicated feminine behaviour and were failures as men by not effectively exercising the attributes of patriarchy.

Shakespeare's magical space(s)

The three witches of *Macbeth*, whose conversation opens the play, inhabit natural but peripheral spaces, which are deserted, barren and dim. For example, the uncanny space where we first encounter them is barren, while the witches themselves are associated with the elements (thunder, lightning, rain, fog, and air), which they are able to control. The dimness that surrounds the witches indicates danger that is even further emphasised by the mentioning of the sun setting, which limits vision even more, creating a feeling of anxiety and foreshadowing several types of deaths: from the symbolic end of the day to the loss of human lives in battle or as a result of murder.

1 Witch: When shall we three meet again?
In *thunder*, *lightning*, or in *rain*?
2 Witch: When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost, and won.
3 Witch: That will be ere *the set of sun*.
1 Witch: Where the place?
2 Witch: Upon the heath.

3 Witch: There to meet with Macbeth. […]
ALL: Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
Hover through the *fog* and filthy air. (1.1.1-10, emphasis added)[3]

This peripheral, topophrenic space is characterised by disorder and dis-ease (cf. Tally 2019, 9), and governed by the logic of inversion, according to which "Fair is foul and foul is fair". This topsy-turviness foreshadows the social and political chaos about to be unleashed, as well as the disintegration of the protagonist's morals, integrity and life. This uncanny space in the first scene is later replaced by the heath, where the witches meet Macbeth and Banquo. The heath indirectly connotes aggression since the men return from the battlefield covered in the blood of slaughtered enemies. Slightly later, when upset by the witches' imperfect predictions, Macbeth refers to the place as "this blasted heath" (1.3.77), further associating the space with anger, usually a masculine-coded emotion.

That the three witches can manipulate weather also indicates their ability to use the elements, especially the wind, to physically harm ordinary humans, who become victims of magic. In Act 1, scene 3, the first witch is particularly vindictive of a sailor's wife who did not want to share her chestnuts; as a result, the witch plans to cause the woman's husband to lose sleep, mental sanity and life, securing in this respect the support of the other two witches. By showing the others "a pilot's thumb/ Wrecked as homeward he did come" (1.3.28-29), which she keeps in her handkerchief, the witch reveals that she has already been successful in such exploits.

Later on, in Act 4, scene 1, lines 12-34, we find the witches together with Hecate in a cave, where they actually perform a ritualised form of magic around a cauldron. Similarly to the heath, yet away from daylight and ordinary people's view, the cave also connotes barrenness and darkness, but above all death, particularly emphasised by the ingredients used in spell-casting. What is significant is that here the trio itself is associated not so much with plants (e.g. "root of hemlock", "slips of yew") but rather with sacrificial animals (e.g. "brinded cat", "hedge-pig", "a baboon's blood"), and especially with animal body parts (e.g. "fillet of fenny snake", "eye of newt", "toe of frog", "tongue of dog", etc.), or even human ones ("liver of blaspheming Jew", "nose of Turk", "Tartar's lips", or "finger of birth-strangled babe"). Two things must be noted here. The first has to do with the choice of ethnicities mentioned in the witches' ritual—Jews, Turks and Tartars. At the time, they were considered especially inferior because of their main occupation (the Jews were best known for their practice of usury, an aspect approached by Shakespeare himself in *The Merchant of Venice*), or because of the threat they posed to the European geographical and political status quo (a topic Shakespeare explores in *Othello*). The second issue

[3] All quotations from *Macbeth* are from *Arden Shakespeare. Third Series. Complete Works*.

worth mentioning is that two out of the four references to human body parts are connected to speaking and indirectly with a form of rebellion or cursing: the Jew is linked to blasphemy, i.e. speaking against God and thus proving himself un-Christian, whereas the "lips" of the Tartar are singled out most likely because of associations with paganism and the occult. At the same time, the lips are an important 'tool' when cursing or uttering spells; therefore, the fact that the witches use the lips as a physical ingredient in the horrible broth gives even more strength to the vile potion. Overall, the ritual not only evokes dark, life-threatening magic but also suggests a perverted form of cooking emphasised through the mentioning of "hell-broth" (4.1.19) and "gruel" (4.1.32). Moreover, considering that all the things thrown in the cauldron are mere body parts, the cave may also be read as a symbolic altar, where animals and humans are ritualistically sacrificed for the ingredients necessary to the witches' spells.

By contrast, in *The Tempest*, the island where the plot is set is represented like a geographical and social bubble, a topophrenic space of 'dis-ease', where anger and revenge dominate, and where most characters have their bodily and mental integrity threatened. It is not just a peripheral space in relation to the civilised Naples and Milan, but also an uncanny one, as it boasts unusual fertility through its luxurious vegetation and musicality, through the harmonious instrumental sounds and voice hums it seems able to create—as it emerges, for instance, from Caliban's speech about the isle being "full of noises,/ Sounds and sweet airs,/ that give delight and hurt not" (3.2.1533-34).

Furthermore, the island is a space where social relationships are renegotiated especially between those who wield magic and those who do not. In particular, the isle bears connotations of banishment, symbolic imprisonment (a wall-less cell) and punishment, but also of revenge, forgiveness and reconciliation. The first to be abandoned on the island is Sycorax the witch, banished from Argier/Algiers because of her witchcraft. Her trial seems to have ended not in death but in a life sentence, most likely because she was pregnant with Caliban. The sentence, given as a result of her being found guilty of witchcraft and sexual practices, is carried out by a group of all men, the sailors, and it entails Sycorax's anger and her thirst for revenge. The pattern is repeated when Prospero and his daughter Miranda are shipwrecked on the island, although in their case, this happens following an act of divine intervention rather than punishment for wrongdoing since they are the ones wronged against.

Shakespeare's practitioners of magic

As mentioned earlier, Zika (2003, 270, 274, 281) writes about witches being often visualised in relation to sexualised practises and rituals, as a group of women separate from the control of men, seeking to disrupt the strictly

ordered early modern world. Consequently, witches—Shakespeare's included—resist all forms of masculine identification and control, as we shall see below.

It is essential to note here a terminological aspect in relation to the practitioners of magic in *Macbeth*, namely that Shakespeare's trio of magical characters often referred to as "witches" are actually designated as "weird sisters" in most editions of the play. Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass observe that it is now common practice for editors to include a footnote connecting the word "weird" with the Old English "wyrd" or "fate" but, interestingly enough, the Folio version records three times "weyward Sisters" and another three times "wayard Sisters" (de Grazia and Stallybrass, 1993, 263-64). Pia Brînzeu (2022, 195) further explains that it was Lewis Theobald who, in 1733, modernized the "weyward sisters" into "Weïrd sisters" in order to be consistent with Shakespeare's main source of inspiration for the Scottish play, namely Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, where the "weird sisters" appear once only. Furthermore, it was Theobald who made the explicit connection between the trio and the Norse Norns or Fates. The eighteenth-century scholar's opinion was later shared by other Shakespearean scholars such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Kitteridge or Kenneth Muir. However, apart from this possible modernization in the spelling of "weyward", de Grazia and Stallybrass (1993, 263) draw attention to the fact that the Folio's adjective "weyward" could be modernized into "wayward" and that a minor change such as a vowel can, in fact, produce a remarkable semantic shift, moving the sisterly trio from the world of witchcraft to a world of perversion and vagabondism. What is more, Ayanna Thompson (2010, 4) persuasively argues that the sisters' "weywardness" derives in part from their ethnic alterity as Scottish.

When Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches in Act 1, scene 3, they each ask "*what* are you?" (1.3.148, emphasis added) and "*what* are these…?" (1.3.139, emphasis added) respectively. The pronoun used indicates that the two war heroes see the witches as not entirely human but rather monstrous, otherworldly creatures, inspiring disgust and fear:

> So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
> And yet are on't […] You should be women,
> And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
> That you are so. (1.3.40-42, 45-47)

The witches' ugliness is rather graphically described: they are wrinkled and dishevelled; they have beards, "chappy fingers", and "skinny lips", while later in the play, they are referred to as "secret, black and midnight hags" (4.1.47), or as "filthy hags" (4.1.114), where "hags" clearly links them to old age and physical

unattractiveness. Taking his cue from the weird sisters' repulsive physical aspect, Walter Clyde Curry convincingly argues (2015, 413-415) that, in a medieval Christian taxonomy, the sisters would be categorized as demons and even their speech is an illusion given that "their forms clothe the demonic powers which inform them." (Curry 2015, 215) In a more modern reading and from a visual point of view, the witches can be read as examples of androgynous she-men, posing threats not only to the gender order and patriarchal power constructed in phallic terms, but also to the integrity of the male body, raising fears of emasculation and castration (cf. Zika 2003, 302-303).

However, in Act 4, scene 1, when Macbeth seeks the witches' help once more, we see them gathered around a bubbling cauldron, an object that clearly identifies the witches as female, "for it link[s] witchcraft with the female activities of the hearth and distribution of food" (Zika 2003, 274). The cauldron, where ingredients are mixed and over which spells are openly cast, is a means by and around which social relations are both made and broken. It must be mentioned here that, although the witches look masculine (particularly because of their beards) and inhabit rather masculine-coded, topophrenic spaces (barren, aggressive, bloody, dark), they seem feminised if we consider their motherly attitude towards Macbeth, as they do their best to make him happy and fulfil his demands.

Significantly, while the three witches and Hecate do appear as embodied characters in *Macbeth*, Sycorax, the witch of *The Tempest*, is 'present' in name only, always described by the words of other people like Prospero and Caliban. She seems to haunt the entire play, silenced for ever by Prospero who colonised her island and imposed his learned version of magic as an art. Sycorax and, implicitly, her witchcraft, receive attributes of ugliness, foulness, old age and damnation. Only in Act 1, scene 2, when Prospero recalls his arrival on the island, the magus refers to her in an accumulation of angry, offensive terms as "foul witch" (1.2.259), "damn'd witch" (1.2.265), and "hag" (1.2.271)[4].

Prospero's anger may well be a sign of his envy, jealousy, or fear. The only structure that seems to combine a positive and a negative attribute is "this blue-eyed hag" (1.2.271), which brings together, as if in an oxymoron, the seductive appeal of the witch's blue eyes and the unattractiveness of "hag". On the one hand, he may be envious that her magic was a natural talent and stronger than his "art" learned from books. On the other hand, he might be jealous since she may have refused his advances; while, for Prospero, she may have been the only adult woman available and within reach, Sycorax saw herself first of all as a single mother who needed to protect herself and her son.

[4] All quotations from *The Tempest* are from Shakespeare's *Romances and Poems*, edited by David Bevington.

Additionally, Prospero's mention of the witch's eyes, singled out from all possible references to her body characteristics, may suggest her special ability of casting the evil eye and the popular superstitions surrounding the power of the angry stare (cf. Bever 2008, 25). That he ultimately does away with Sycorax may also be the end result of his fear of catching the evil eye and being contaminated with her base witchcraft.

In Prospero's view, the magic practised by Sycorax has very negative connotations of evil and abhorrence—"her earthy and abhorr'd commands" (1.2.275), "her grand hests" (1.2.276)—as well as of vindictive, destructive anger—"her most unmitigable rage" (1.2.278). Her rage in particular sets her apart as a she-man, a threat to male power, all the more so since Prospero values his own unmitigated rage positively, seeing it as a validation of his vengeful plan and ability to wield magic.

Even if Prospero discursively sets himself apart from the female witch in terms of the ways and purposes for practising magic, they both operate on the same pattern, using and abusing someone else—Ariel and Caliban—to achieve their goals. Moreover, much like the witches in *Macbeth* who can control the elements, Prospero too can manipulate the weather: he is the one who stirs the initial tempest (Act 1, scene 1) that causes his usurping brother and his entourage to shipwreck on the island, just as he can create fog at will, separating Ferdinand and Miranda from the rest of the people on the island (Act 5, scene 1).

Returning now to witchcraft as a form of gendered social practice, if *Macbeth*'s witches are linked to waywardness as gender deviance and ethnic alterity, we argue that, Sycorax too may be read as wayward, particularly through her association with anger and motherhood. In stark contrast to the trio of witches, Sycorax is unambiguously feminine. It is precisely her sexualised body with its abilities to seduce and to give birth that places her at the other extreme in relation to the witches of *Macbeth*.

The relation between witchcraft and gender is further explored by Shakespeare through the ambiguity of Prospero's character. Whereas the witches and Sycorax are masculinised through looks and/or behaviour, Prospero seems to construct himself as asexual; the only woman he has a relationship with is his daughter Miranda, whom he uses as a pawn in his plan for revenge. What is most intriguing about him is that, unlike the female witches, he needs a lot of objects (the robe, the book, the staff) in order to verbally transmit his magic into materialising. Prospero defines his magic as an art, i.e. the product of culture. He has learnt it from books, whereas the witches seem to have been born with knowledge of it. In addition, considering Gaskill's (2009) perspective on male practitioners of magic in the former half of the seventeenth century, we can safely argue that, by resorting to magic in order to plot and achieve his revenge, Prospero fails to measure up to the idealised early modern virtues and

standards of masculinity. This may well be why he ultimately identifies his magic as "rough"—a performance of feminised rituals and of femininity—and has to abjure it so that he can be fully reintegrated, as a man, into civilised, patriarchal society. Despite being benign, restorative in purpose, Prospero's magic is rough also because it is strictly associated with the uncanny, uncivilised space of the island, the geographical and social bubble, and disallowed in civilised European society. In this respect, he seems to have internalised the lesson in the tale of Sycorax, who had been banished to the island precisely as a result of practising her witchcraft in a cultured environment.

Magic, rough but white

As mentioned earlier, it is significant to observe that the two plays involving the supreme art were written in an age of crisis and transition, when the Reformation brought about a suppression of the Renaissance imagination, dominated by the witch hunts. In this context, the serene mode in which traditional criticism reads *The Tempest* and Prospero's magic can call for reconsideration. Let us take Prospero's abjuration scene in Act 5, scene 1, in which he announces his plan to drown his book, commonly interpreted as the Bard's own farewell to the stage:

> 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. (5.1.50-57)

What is most striking and unnerving in this passage (but is also a legitimate explanation for the abjuration of his "rough magic") is Prospero's mention of his command of the dead ("graves at my command/ Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth") by his "so potent art" (5.1.48-50). This clearly casts Prospero not only as a demiurge but as a practitioner of black magic, much like Sycorax. When, in the next line, he renounces his project, it is precisely this dark aspect of necromancy, anger and revenge that he intends to distance himself from, and not the entire art, all the while embracing a Christian attitude of enemy forgiveness.

On another note, Prospero is almost universally described as a magus and enlightened monarch. If we apply Culianu's theory about the Neoplatonic definition of the "total magician", we can describe Prospero's role in *The Tempest* as follows:

> The science of the Renaissance attempts to capture, by means of deciphering the arcane writings of the world, the celestial forces which respond to the structures of these writings. In other words, the scientist—that is, the magician—finds in the writings of the world those figures and formulas which correspond to the visible and invisible entities above him. These formulas have coercive power over the entities and enable the magician to appropriate their prestigious service. This may be, indeed, the 'total magician', who has appropriated all the 'ciphers' in the writings of the world. (Culianu 2003, 33, our translation)

But Prospero's theurgical project seems flawed, judging by the quote above. Before he evokes the "heavenly music" and the "airy charm", which suggest the harmonious workings of 'good' magic, he describes an apocalyptic scene, full of destruction and violence, that affects nature ("bedinn'd the noonshine sun", "mutinous winds", made the promontory "shake" and "pluck'd up the pine and cedar"). We know it is also meant to affect humans, as this is the vengeance prepared to punish "the three men of sin", Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian. No wonder, then, that Prospero assesses his own project, once it reaches its climax, as "rough", and decides to "abjure" it. There is a dark side to his "potent art", dangerous and harmful, the maleficent agency clearly stated: "elves", "demi-puppets", and "weak masters" "whose pastime is to make midnight mushrooms" and other unnatural actions. Criticism of *The Tempest* has struggled to demonstrate this is not proof that Prospero has been contaminated by Sycorax's evil practices, or that Prospero bears, after all, some resemblance to the weird sisters in *Macbeth*. Wondering about the 'roughness' of his magic, Cosmo Corfield concludes that Prospero's project is ill-timed and therefore brought to fruition after a certain "auspicious star" has disappeared (1985, 38). Duke Pesta argues that a literal interpretation of the "rough magic" risks breaking the spell of the play with its "benevolent, other-world-centered ontology" (2004, 50), of early modernity, where witches, elves, angels, and monsters had their place. In other words, like in a fairy tale, no moral condemnation of Prospero is necessary because "the role of magic, illusion, and enchantment" should be interpreted "from the perspective of those societies that produced them", a perspective on a "dreamy and unattainable other world" (Pesta 2004, 49).

In the light of the arguments made above, though, we could advance other possible justifications. On the one hand, there is a wistfulness in Prospero's interrogation of Ariel's perception of the suffering inflicted on the men of sin. He may realize that, if Ariel, who is not human, feels sorry for humans, Prospero, a fellow human being, prone to imperfection, impurity and sin, should also give them a second chance, forgive all and return to Milan:

> Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
> Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
> One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
> Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason 'gaitist my fury
> Do I take part: the rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further. Go release them, Ariel:
> My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
> And they shall be themselves. (5.1.21-32)

Prospero loves Ariel for his airiness ("thou, which art but air") and loathes Caliban's basic physicality, but, eventually, he releases the former and embraces the latter, acknowledged as "mine", albeit as a "thing of darkness". He may therefore realize that, despite his science and, even more so, despite the severe chastity he imposes on himself, his daughter, and her future husband, he still is part of the world he aims to reject, just as he cannot fully embrace the world he aspires to. So he goes back to Milan, a political and sinful place, and leaves the magic behind on the island, where it belongs. His magic project may not be, therefore, fully attained, but, at least, it remains pure and unspoiled. We may imagine there is a continuum between the masque of chastity presented in Act 4 and the magician's assessment of the (im)purity of his art in Act 5. While, in anticipation of his return to the political world of Milan, Prospero's insistence on Ferdinand's and Miranda's virtue is based on dynastic calculations, the explanation for the constant emphasis on chastity may also lie with his fear of contamination. Human intervention, ignorant and sinful by definition in relation with the theurgical aspirations of the "potent art", may instantly make it "rough" and ruin its superior goal. In this logic, Prospero's plan to use magic in order to take revenge against the men of sin would suffice to corrupt the art and bring him closer to Caliban than to Ariel. He becomes aware of this when Ariel declares his sympathy for the enemies of his master, concluding, unequivocally, "the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance".

The imperfection of the art lies in Prospero's failed ambition to improve nature, human or otherwise. According to Adrian Papahagi, "although he is able to control delicate spirits like Ariel and vile natures like Caliban, to rend trees and to stir tempests, Prospero fails miserably to improve human nature." (2020, 205) Caliban cannot be converted to civilization through magic, just as the potent art cannot lead to the moral conversion of the treacherous Milanese. It

is only providence and grace, the same scholar argues, that rescues all the villains in the play.

On the other hand, after twelve years of exile on the charmed island, when Prospero's magic is expected to reach its zenith, the magus (and the spectators of the play) realize he is an old man, absent-minded or senile, who no longer has full control—of the creatures under his command, and of magic practices. His "old brain is troubled" and his temper, in contradiction with the wise serenity of white, intellectual magic, betrays a "beating mind" (4.1.163). The protagonist's portrayal as an old man reveals a universe on the verge of disenchantment, where the workings of magic are exposed as imperfect speculations or even as selfish machinations. This shift foretells the transformations operated by the farcical mode of Restoration drama, where magic moves completely into the province of deception and fraud, on the one hand, or of failed experimentation, on the other. This brings us to a comedy from 1675 by Thomas Duffet, entitled *The Mock-Tempest*, whose protagonist is an old and decrepit Prospero. The magus is a performer who has not kept up with the latest developments in theatrical special effects. Ariel, the sorcerer's young assistant, criticizes his mentor's tricks as outdated and less convincing than those used by competing playhouses. The original serenity is turned into derision, while the potency of the art is robbed of its original aura of mystery. It is equally significant that the intellectual quality of Prospero's magic in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is treated as a mere technicality, sprinkled, for good measure, with the sordid details of demonic practices.

Conclusions

Written five years apart, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* explore spaces and attitudes linked to witchcraft and magic in Shakespeare's lifetime. There seems to be a broad distinction between witchcraft—associated with evil, the supernatural/ devil, femininity and ritualised practises—and magic, a more benign form of manipulating the elements and ethereal creatures for a higher purpose. As a result, spaces related to witchcraft and inhabited by female witches are topophrenic, bearing masculine connotations of gloom, infertility, negativity and aggression to the senses, whereas spaces related to magic and male magicians are associated—as if by compensation—with femininity and fertility, enabling miracles (of forgiveness and reconciliation) to happen.

Despite the difference in the type and connotations of spaces related to witchcraft and magic respectively, there is a convergence in the *modi operandi* in which the practitioners wield their magic, with only slight differences in the details, which can also be gender-based. Most importantly, these wielders of

magic can all manipulate the elements; yet, while the trio of witches in *Macbeth* are connected to domesticity and cooking as ritualised practise, both Sycorax and Prospero in *The Tempest* exploit other individuals to achieve their goals. Whether the depiction of magical practices is clearly negative (as in *Macbeth*) or gives the impression that it has more positive connotations (as in *The Tempest*), Shakespeare casts the 'operators' of magic as deviant, in the sense that they undermine the seemingly safe and strict order of the early modern world. Moreover, the power and influence the operators transmit is ultimately corrupted, one way or another. Witchcraft, as *maleficium*, represents a form of moral and religious corruption, while the potent art turns rough when it fails to convince participants of its potential for perfection.

Shakespeare's portrayal of magic as both serene and gloomy, white and black, potent and rough, intellectual art and conjuration, is proof of an eclectic perception of magic that is transmitted throughout the seventeenth century, which is very much in line with the spirit of the age. The epistemological crisis of the time may be the main reason why the occult practices are rendered as experimental or borderline. At the crossroads between the waning religious faith and the growing power of reason, the attitudes towards magic undergo a transformation that permeates both literature and every-day life.

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