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William Shakespeare, *Tempestad*
Teatro Circo
Murcia, 25 October 2013

Isabel Guerrero
*Universidad de Murcia*

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

*Actors*: Víctor Duplá, Quique Fernández, Antonio Galeano, Xabier Murúa, Agustín Sasián, Eduardo Ruiz, Javier Tolosa

*Director*: Sergio Peris-Mencheta

*Translation*: Fundación Shakespeare

*Assistant director*: Pepe Lorente

*Art Director*: Antonio Vicente

*Costume design*: Raúl Amor

*Video*: Joe Alonso

*Steady*: Víctor M. Ramírez

*Steady Assistant*: Mikel Saukillo

*Set Construction*: Quique Fernández

*Lighting Design*: Manuel Fuster

*Musical direction*: Dudu Ruiz and Antonio Galeano

*Sound Design*: Dudu Ruiz y Joe Alonso

*Physical training*: Diana Bernedo

*Graphic design*: Antonio Vicente and Victor Monigote

*Production managers*: Nuria-Cruz Moreno and Rebeca Ledesma

A year after its creation in 2012, the Spanish company El Barco Pirata presented its production *Tempestad* in the Teatro Circo in Murcia, a venue that seems especially suitable for this imaginative work because of its wide and open stage, which invites audience’s participation. The director, Sergio Peris-Mencheta, is currently involved in two Shakespearean productions: he appears as an actor in *Julius Caesar*, directed by Paco Azorín, and has also ventured to direct *The Tempest*.10 Instead of preserving the original title, the production is called simply *Tempestad*, extending the storm that takes place at the beginning to the whole play. *The Tempest* is recast as a

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10 Sergio Peris-Mencheta has been awarded the Ceres Award to the Best Director for *Tempestad* [*Tempest*] and *Un trozo invisible de este mundo* [*An invisible piece of this world*], two of his latest productions.
play-within-a-play, creating a meta-theatrical frame where the spectators are asked to decide which parts belong to Shakespeare’s text and which do not. To that end the play kicks off with a group of male actors who are about to begin their rehearsal of *The Tempest*. They complain, ramble and warm-up until they start the rehearsal, reading their roles directly from the text. Little by little, the actors abandon their scripts and the play turns from rehearsal to the “real” story, introducing the audience into Shakespeare’s universe.

The version stresses the contest for power between different characters: Prospero is the master of the island; Antonio and Sebastian try to kill the king to get power, etc. This stress on power enhances the colonialist vision of the play as Ariel and Caliban – the “locals” on the island – appear completely subordinated to Prospero, the foreigner who has come to conquer them. Feelings are suppressed as far as Prospero’s relationship with his subordinates is concerned; Ariel and Caliban appear as mere instruments that serve Prospero’s purposes. This emphasis on power results in the loss of Ferdinand and Miranda’s love story which, together with Miranda’s astonishment at the presence of other human beings, is omitted.

![Image](image.png)

*Fig. 1. Photograph from the performance. Published by permission of Barco Pirata Producciones Teatrales.*
Reviews

Even though the production uses techniques typical of contemporary theatre (e.g. intermediality, physical theatre, etc), the fact that it is an all-male production echoes Renaissance practice. Instead of reducing the cast, the seven actors give life to over twenty different characters, doubling or even tripling the roles that each of them performs, which was of course another characteristic feature of early Modern English playmaking. In order to differentiate the characters, garments are changed from role to role. However, the actors do not change their outfit completely, they simply retouch what they are wearing, turning, for instance, the King’s crown into Caliban’s handcuffs. Most of the transformations from one character to another are made on stage, giving the audience the opportunity of seeing how some simple changes help to create a completely different character. In contrast to the doubling of characters that each actor performs, the role of Ariel is brought to life by three actors who perform it simultaneously. Even more innovative is the performance of Caliban: the actor interprets a character who seems mentally handicapped, which may not suit the taste of all the members of the audience. It is also notable that the actor playing Prospero and his brother Antonio is the same that performs the director of the play-within-a-play. The decision to use a director who is also an actor recalls the role that Shakespeare himself may have had in the King’s Men, that of author-director-actor.

At the beginning of the production, the actor playing the director states that this play cannot be staged in a theatre, that it needs a real beach where the moonlight will replace the artificial lightning. In an attempt to bring the seaside closer, the set imitates a beach, a small island where the action takes place. The set is composed of a circle of sand, a ladder that allows for different staging options (e.g. it serves as a vessel in the opening tempest and adds a third dimension, with characters climbing the ladder on occasion), two buckets, and a screen at the back where a variety of projected images helps to convey both the ambience and magic of the play. The production is designed to catch the attention of the audience by stimulating their senses, as exotic scents invade the venue before the play starts. Water plays an important role too; one of the buckets is filled with water and is used to recreate the shipwreck of the king’s vessel with a small toy ship, and the actor-director throws water at the men in the vessel to increase the veracity of the shipwreck during the tempest. Apart from water and
sand, the other two classical elements – air and fire – also appear on stage: the second bucket is used to make a bonfire to warm up Alonso and his men and, as could not been otherwise, air appears in connection to Ariel, as the three Ariel actors carry a balloon tied to their trousers. Despite its apparent simplicity, the set is characterised by chaos because the initial storm – conveyed through the movement of the actors and by a fan that helps to recreate the wind – leaves the stage covered by the paper sheets that the actors were reading at the beginning of the rehearsal.

Magic is conveyed through various means. For instance, Prospero uses the different cameras situated on stage to control everything that happens in his island. Thanks to the cameras Prospero is not only ubiquitous, but he is also able to exert his control over the visitors on the island, which helps to enhance the production’s emphasis on power. Regarding Ariel, he is performed by three actors simultaneously. Two are the effects of tripling Ariel: firstly, his magic features are heightened, since he can act simultaneously in different places; and secondly it functions as an instrument of power as well, as Prospero’s omnipresence is extended through the constant presence of this “triple” character. The three Ariels are dressed as schoolboys and the silver balloons tied to their trousers symbolise the fact that they are bound to Prospero. When they are not performing, they sit at the back of the stage and play music that the other characters hear, portraying Ariel’s invisible presence in several scenes.

All this results in an ambitious production in which the tempest at sea is transformed into a tempest of theatrical techniques. However, the use of so many different theatrical resources is sometimes excessive, and the loss of certain parts of the story makes the production difficult to follow for someone not familiar with Shakespeare’s text. Although most of the audience was fascinated with the mise-en-scene, the fact that several spectators left the venue halfway through gives rise to a series of reflections on the expectations that a Spanish audience may have when attending a Shakespearean production. Did they decide to leave because the play did not meet their conception of “classical” Shakespeare? Was there any other problem with the production? Both aspects may coincide. Perhaps the play did not meet the expectations occasional theatregoers may have about Shakespeare. Moreover, although the
production was well performed, the venue itself played against it at some points, because some parts of the action were slowed down as a result of the considerable width of the stage. Nevertheless, this *Tempestad* is a good example of how to recreate *The Tempest*’s fantasy world on the stage using 21st century theatrical resources.