10-1-1996

Review Of "The Tempest" By W. Shakespeare And Performed By Broadhurst Theatre

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In spite of its clear and creative attempts to disrupt both Prospero's and Shakespeare's control of the island, the production indulges a degree
of nostalgia for both of them. While watching the wedding masque for Miranda and Ferdinand, Patrick Stewart's Prospero moves downstage,
lays on his back, closes his eyes, and begins rapturously fingering the sand that covers the stage. What unfolds is clearly for his personal
pleasure as much as it is a wedding present: Brazilian stilt-walkers circle the bride and groom as gigantic camped-up versions of Iris, Ceres, and Juno; Bunraku puppets appear in a wonderful dance, joined not only by Miranda and Ferdinand but--somewhat stiffly--by Prospero himself. The masque allows Prospero and his audience to enjoy an apparently carefree celebration of cultural diversity that momentarily displaces the production's provocative exploration of colonialism. By the miracle of his own fantasy and stagecraft, Prospero can dance along
with the inhabitants of the island he so nervously and brutally controls.

Prospero's hold over the audience is strengthened by Stewart's rapport with Carrie Preston's wonderful Miranda, a tomboy in knee-breeches. At one point, after Prospero has chastised the couple yet again, he turns away from them to hide not jealousy but laughter; meanwhile they collapse giggling behind his back. That single moment both acknowledges and diffuses the sexual tensions that attend Miranda's long sojourn
on a desert island with Stewart's Prospero. Beautifully refurnishing The Tempest's well-worn preoccupations with incest and daughterly
obedience, Wolfe, Stewart, and Preston gave Prospero and Miranda an emotional power and freshness that profoundly complicates the
production's equally powerful meditations on the colonial enterprise.

Patrick Stewart's fame, an essential component to the production's overwhelming popularity, rests upon his reputation as the man who can pilot the crew of The Next Generation's starship safely through uncharted worlds of inter-species hostility and cooperation. He is, in other
words, a much-loved symbol for the hope that the future will hold a place for European commanders no matter who else is granted membership in the Federation. He is also a fine actor; it is a strength of this production and of Stewart's performance that they leave both the
fantasy of hegemony and critique of hegemony intact. When Prospero abjures his magic arts and steps forward to speak his epilogue, the
master loses his power, the house lights come up slowly, the backdrop lifts to reveal the theatre's bare walls, and Patrick Stewart emerges "in
person," in the figure of a nervous actor utterly beguiling to audiences who know him only from the safe space of televised performance. His
staging of vulnerability, in other words, while it enacts the all-important stepping down from command, simultaneously engaged the audience in another level of hero worship. Prospero leaves the island, but the stage remains firmly in the possession of Patrick Stewart, and star-struck audiences remain complicit in the fantasy of Prospero as the master who controls theatrical space.

Stewart's immense appeal aside, however, the production makes some brilliant efforts to pull [End Page 383] [Begin Page 385] theatre away from the European tradition. The opening shipwreck scene relies on actors in traditional costume, accompanied by a prompter. They are supplant...
and Miranda, the gifted performers who impersonate Betty Davis while planning to sell Caliban ultimately play into the hands of the European Commander whom audiences still crave.

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