

SABINA LASKOWSKA-HINZ
[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-7014-2093](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7014-2093)
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

WHO ARE OUR GODS? THE ICONOGRAPHIC,
RELIGIOUS AND COSMIC COMMENTARY
ON WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*
BY WOJCIECH SIUDMAK (1978)

Słowa kluczowe: Chrystus, intermedialność, Prospero, Szekspirowski plakat teatralny, Zeus

Keywords: Christ, intermediality, Prospero, Shakespeare theatre poster, Zeus

Abstrakt: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przybliżenie krytycznego potencjału sztuki plakatu w kontekście dramatów Wiliama Szekspira. Semiotyczna i intermedialna analiza plakatu Wojciecha Siudmaka *Burza* (1978) odsłania zakodowane w plakacie nawiązania do sztuki chrześcijańskiej Europy Zachodniej oraz komentarze dotyczące samej treści dramatu. Konstrukcja kompozycyjna zastosowana w *Burzy* Siudmaka stanowi odwołanie do tradycyjnego przedstawienia postaci na tronie. Dlatego, w ramach analizy porównawczej, plakat zestawiany jest z dziełami wykorzystującymi podobne ramy kompozycyjne, czyli z przedstawieniem *Zeusa na Olympie* dłuta Fidiasza, wizerunkami *Maiestas Domini*, *Christ in Judgement* czy grupy *Deisis*. W plakacie pojawiają się także odwołania do wizerunków św. Hieronima, obrazów galaktyki spiralnej czy Saturna (planety). Wspomniane rozwiązanie kompozycyjne, odwołania i motywy stają się podstawą analityczną do zdekonstruowania i zrekonstruowania nie tylko postaci Prospera jako człowieka o quasi-boskich cechach, ale także miejsca akcji jako odpowiednika konfesjonu i/lub piekła oraz wydarzeń mających miejsce na wyspie jako etapów dobrej spowiedzi.

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to emphasise the critical potential of poster art concerning William Shakespeare's dramatic texts. The semiotic and intermedial study of *The Tempest* by Wojciech Siudmak reveals iconographic and literary comments on the Christian elements embedded in the image. The designer's work is based on the traditional composition depicting an enthroned figure and this essay juxtaposes it with a range of artworks employing similar iconographical arrangements: *Zeus at Olympia* by Phidias, images of *Maiestas Domini*, *Christ in Judgement*, and the *Deisis Group*. Further associations include the portraits of Saint Jerome, images of a spiral galaxy or Saturn the planet. The exploration of these motifs allows to de- and reconstruct the detailed characteristic of Prospero, Shakespeare's protagonist, highlighting his quasi-divine features, but also the nature of the island, as well as the structure of the play referring to the requirements of a good Confession.

INTRODUCTION

Deprived of their royal affluence and banished from their kingdom, Prospero, the protagonist of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and his daughter Miranda appear on the lonely island – a prison, refuge and new kingdom.¹ The man remains the king, an anointed by God and god-like figure – merciful, forgiving, responsible – who governs and controls life and death in his new land.

Prospero has been identified as a divine character in numerous studies. In *The Shakespeare Conspiracies. Untangling a 400-Years Web of Myth and Deceit* (2007), in the chapter devoted to *The Tempest*, Brian McClinton associates Shakespearean characters, on the one hand, with divine figures originate in Greek and Roman mythology: “Prospero serves both as Zeus or Jupiter and as Orpheus; Miranda, daughter of Prospero, is Proserpina, daughter of Jupiter or Zeus; (...) and Ariel, Prospero's servant, is Hermes (or Mercury), the servant and agent of Zeus (or Jupiter).”² On the other hand, the scholar points to the references highlighting the divine – ancient and Christian – character of Prospero: “Zeus or Jupiter uses Hermes or Mercury and God uses the Spirit, just as Prospero uses Ariel.”³ Moreover, basing on an extensive bibliography regarding religious reading of *The Tempest*, it is possible to identify in Shakespeare's dramatic text connotations of the biblical Paradise, the Apocalypses, the mystery of God-figure, as well as holy sacraments. Hannibal Hamilton in *The Bible in Shakespeare* (2013) mentions that *The Tempest* “is imbued throughout with high moral passion, it presents in Prospero a worker and teacher of the moral law, a God-man, a Logos, a Trinity in Unity, which, moreover, is the Christian Trinity in Unity.”⁴ In *The Exploration of the “Trinity” Prototype in ‘The Tempest’* (2013) Yu Hao and Ren Chi discuss Shakespeare's characters as representants of the Trinity and providers of the biblical redemption.⁵ Furthermore, Steven Marx in *Shakespeare and the Bible* (2000) establishes parallels between Shakespeare's text and the biblical books of *Genesis* and *Apocalypse*, as well as Prospero and God. He argues that “[j]ust as the Bible's God makes the world he populates and then interacts with it, Prospero conjures up the world of *The Tempest* with his magical utterances and peoples it with his own offspring, along with the demons over whom he has taken control.”⁶ Marx provides an extensive argumentation to demonstrate evident similarities between the dramatic text and the Apocalypse:

The book of Revelation and *The Tempest* share a four-part structure consisting of (1) an introduction of setting and participants and movement to another world, (2) a pageant of battles in which good triumphs and evil is defeated, followed by images of resurrection, judgement, and the dissolution of the world, (3) a new pageant combining recreation with marriage, and (4) the closing of the vision and a return to the setting of this world.⁷

Other publications offer comprehensive studies of Shakespeare's dramatic text in the context of Christian beliefs.⁸ Especially relevant for the analysis of the poster by Siudmak is *Shakespeare and the comedy of forgiveness* by Robert G. Hunter (1965) examining the motif of forgiveness.⁹

Wojciech Siudmak's *The Tempest* appears to be an iconographical reference to the archetypal depiction of power. It is exceptionally rich in interpretative clues stemming from the novel and provocative employment of various art conventions. The designer employs a compositional arrangement characteristic for the

¹ The article is a part of my PhD thesis prepared at the University of Warsaw and supervised by dr hab. Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk, prof. ucz. The thesis is titled *The image of it gives me content already: The Critical Interpretations of Polish Theatrical Posters for Shakespeare Productions in the Years 1966–1989. A Study of Motives and Approaches* [*The image of it gives me content already* („Już sam obraz sprawia mi radość”): *Potencjał interpretacyjny polskich plakatów teatralnych do spektakli szekspirowskich w latach 1966–1989. Studium motywów i ujęć*].

² B. McClinton, *Prospero's Myth*, [in:] *The Shakespeare Conspiracies. Untangling a 400-Years Web of Myth and Deceit*, Cork 2007, p. 419.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 420.

⁴ H. Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, Oxford 2013, p. 57.

⁵ Y. Hao and R. Chi, *The Exploration of the “Trinity” Prototype in The Tempest*, “Canadian Social Science”, 2013, vol. 9, No. 6, p. 197.

⁶ S. Marx, *Genesis in “The Tempest”*, [in:] *Shakespeare and the Bible*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, p. 19.

⁷ S. Marx, *A Masque of Revelation: “The Tempest” as Apocalypse*, [in:] *Shakespeare and the Bible...*, p. 132.

⁸ Cf. e.g. J.D. Cox, *Recovering Something Christian about “The Tempest”*, “Christianity and Literature”, 2000, vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 31–51; F. Song, *Purification as a To-Be: “The Tempest” and Shakespeare's World of Imagery*, “English Language and Literature Studies”, 2015, vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 145–153; D.V. Urban, *Prospero, the Divine Shepherd, and Providence: Psalm 23 as a Rubric for Alonso's Redemptive Progress and the Providential Workings of Prospero's Spiritual Restoration in Shakespeare's “The Tempest”*, “Religions”, 2019, vol. 10, No. 8, pp. 448–463.

⁹ R.G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*, New York 1965, pp. 227–241.

depiction of an enthroned figure. The image combines a wide range of iconographical references that direct the viewers' attention towards other figures portrayed in the same manner. The following study of Siudmak's poster unlocks the critical potential of the image and reveals a Christian-based approach to Shakespeare's play. Poster viewers seem to be guided with iconographical references along a literary road from a purgatory/prison to the final redemption.

The application of particular art conventions regarding compositional arrangements allows viewers to consider the protagonist of *The Tempest* in the context of divine figures. The interpretation of Prospero may be extended by references to iconographic and literary sources regarding Zeus. The iconographic tradition of employing Phidias's prototypical composition to present Jesus generates Christian-related interpretations. Thus, the context of *Maiestas Domini* prompts the discussion about the motif of freedom as both a physical and mental condition. The reference to *Christ in Judgement* provides background for discussion regarding the destructiveness of sins and liberating character of sacraments – Penance and Reconciliation. Finally, the *Deisis Group* reference provides additional approach to Miranda and Ariel as figures directing their supplications for sinners to Prospero.

Furthermore, art conventions echoed in Siudmak's poster become defamiliarised since Prospero's head is replaced with a spiral galaxy. The image implies Prospero's preoccupation with new science as well as his detachment from the real world, in both cases triggering further interpretative associations.

WOJCIECH SIUDMAK'S *THE TEMPEST* – SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The poster was designed for *The Tempest* staged in the Powszechny Theatre in 1978 [Fig. 1]. The standard set of information about the title, the author and the theatre is distributed in the three corners of the image. Thus, the upper left corner features simple capital letters WILIAM SZEKSPIR; the bottom right corner – TEATR POWSZECHNY, whereas the upper right corner the play's title – BURZA, written in more prominent lettering. The arrangement adds more weight to the right-hand side of the image and, consequently, underscores another element placed in this area – a ship with wind-blown sails.

The seated male figure dominates the whole composition. However, the static representation of unshakable power and majesty contrasts with the dynamic image of a mortal struggle with the hurricane, taking place at the rugged cliffs of the island and – at the same time – at the foundation of the throne. Pushed by some invisible force the ship speedily runs ashore, leaving the viewer uncertain as to its ultimate fate, and thus destroying the contemplative equilibrium of the picture. The suggestion of the ensuing tragedy of the miniature vehicle diverts the viewer's attention from the imperial giant and focuses it on the impending crisis.

A close analysis of the central figure reveals further ironies in the representation of power. The enthroned figure arises from the ocean, and looms against the vast background of blue waters and dark starry sky. It is a lonely figure on a dramatically little rocky island, of which he is both a ruler and a prisoner. The lower part of his draped cloak becomes in fact one with the rocky surface, whereas the naked shin and knee look motionless, as if transformed into a land feature and therefore suggesting the organic union of the man and the landscape.

A deep black crack rips the upper side of the muscular chest, with further fissures demolishing the neck and shoulders. A void fills the area meant for the head, topped with the characteristic image of a spiral galaxy which shape reminds of a cardinal's cap. The poster conveys the image of highly ambiguous power, with a strong suggestion of progressive degradation. As long as the weathering of rocks can be seen as a natural process, the weird hybridity of the image, with flesh and blood hardening into stone, suggests gradual dehumanization of the character whose inner self remains a black hole, voyaging into ominous cosmic space.

In his right-hand, the man holds a long rod with a human skull at the top which brings to mind *memento mori* and *vanitas* motifs.¹⁰ The symbol may also signify Prospero's power over life and death, hinted in one of his monologues. Jan Kott in his description of Prospero refers to Michel de Montaigne's *The Essays* and thus underlines the paradoxes of the Prince's design:

¹⁰ The skull is not the only death-related reference. In *Studies in Iconology*, Panofsky explains that a mirror, here indicated by water, "during the Middle Ages had been used as an attribute of both Luxury [...] and Death." E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, Oxford 1939, p. 82.



1. *Burza [The Tempest]* (1978), Wojciech Siudmak, 520 mm x 640 mm, print, private collection

Of all creatures man is the most miserable and fraile, and withall the proudest and disdainfullest. Who perceiveth and seeth himselfe placed here, admidst their filth and mire of the world, fast tied and nailed to the worst, most senselesse, and drooping part of the world, in the vilest corner of the house, and the farthest from heavens coape, with those creatures, that are the worst of the three conditions; and yet dareth imaginarily place himself above the circle of the Moon, and reduce heaven under his feet.¹¹

Another source of interpretative hints is the very composition of the poster. The figure monopolises the island and appears to be the only rightful ruler of this scrap of land. The muscular and well-proportioned body indicates strength and power, further reinforced by Prospero's pose. And yet the very greatness of the figure denotes its tragedy: Prosper is a prisoner of his tiny throne, estranged and lost in his self-proclaimed empire.

Taking into consideration Rudolf Arnheim's insights concerning perceptual forces, the preliminary analysis reveals the absence of stability within the image.¹² The notions of power and decay continuously clash, invoking a number of iconographic and literary associations. Consequently, the poster may be treated as Ronald Barthes' "tissue of quotations", with some elements borrowed directly from the established sources, and some provocatively modified.¹³

¹¹ M. de Montaigne, *Apology for Raimond Sebond*, [in:] *The Essays*, Chapter XII, quoted by J. Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, London 1965, p. 259.

¹² R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception. A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, 2nd ed., California 1974, p. 24–27.

¹³ R. Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, [in:] *Image Music Text*, London 1977, p. 146.

WOJCIECH SIUDMAK'S *THE TEMPEST* – INTERTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

ZEUS AT OLYMPIA

The statue of *Zeus at Olympia* by Phidias [Fig. 2] survived only in drawings and descriptions:

'Father and king, Protector of cities, God of friendship and comradeship, Protector of suppliants, God of hospitality, Giver of increase.' All these aspects of Zeus he [Dio Chrysostom] said, were to be found in the image, and it was precisely to underline the varied nature of the god that Phidias chose to portray him as he said.¹⁴

Generous and just, Zeus was also a cruel, jealous and vindictive god, which is well exemplified by the fate of Prometheus:¹⁵ "Zeus was [gods'] king and, as such, he combined the almighty power of a great god of nature with the weaknesses of a human king plus the attributes of the just and loving father."¹⁶ These qualities can be also found in Prospero.

Phidias presented Zeus as a mighty god seated on a throne, with Nike standing on his left-hand palm and a sceptre crowned with an eagle in his right hand.¹⁷ Instead of equipping Zeus with a thunderbolt, a traditional attribute of Zeus, Phidias added the figure of the winged goddess which: "make[s] Zeus into a milder, more majestic and less violent figure."¹⁸ Even though he is "a binder of peace after war",¹⁹ his rule was often ruthless:

Although Zeus' justice is ultimately beneficial, it nonetheless embraces tyrannical violence. This world order, ordained and upheld by Zeus, must by definition be just, but its individual applications are not always comprehensible to mortals, and vary widely in their importance and in the emotions they arouse in the beholder.²⁰

The rode topped with an image of an eagle, the king of all birds, enhances the divine and noble status of its beholder.²¹ The eagle is supposed to represent male intellect, reason and power over own existence.²²

Siudmak's poster seems to constitute an artistic paraphrase of Phidias' Zeus and, at the same time, endows Prospero with god-like status.²³ The design of Prospero's body follows the convention of depicting ancient gods as idealised male nudes. However, if Prospero matches the physical perfection of Zeus, his Olympia appears unnervingly small and crumbling. The grandeur of Prospero is also diminished by the conspicuous absence of Zeus' other attributes. There is no Nike, the winged goddess of victory, no laurel wreath, and no eagle on the rode, topped instead with the skull. The poster underlines the gravity of Prospero's situation by highlighting the organic union between the Duke and his rocky throne. Phidias' Zeus rests on a luxurious chair decorated with scenes from the history of humans and gods, thus the world he rules is literally under his feet. Prospero's realm is dwarfed by him and seems on the verge of collapsing into the sea. The miniature scrap of land both offers shelter and entraps the newcomers, starting from Sycorax and ending up with the Neapolitan ship.

¹⁴ M.J. Price, *The Statue of Zeus at Olympia*, [in:] *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*, ed. P. A. Clayton and M.J. Price, London and New York 1988, p. 64.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

¹⁷ E. Makowiecka, *Sztuka grecka*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 121–122.

¹⁸ D. Burton, *Nike, Dike and Zeus at Olympia: New Approaches*, [in:] *The Statue of Zeus at Olympia: New Approaches*, ed. J. McWilliam, S. Puttock, T. Stevenson, and R. Taraporewalla, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011, p. 51.

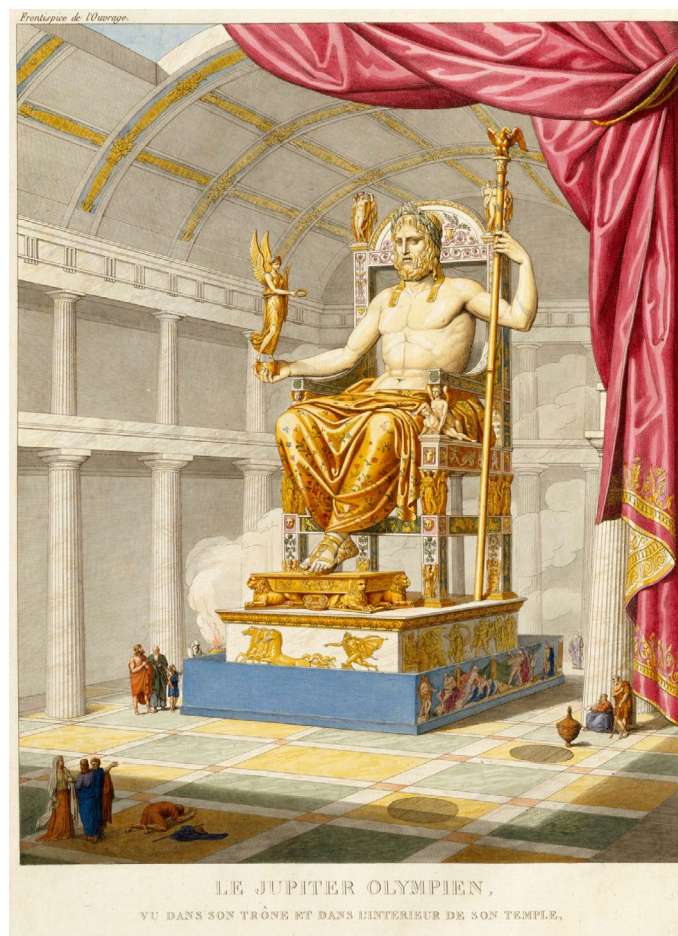
¹⁹ K. Heckenberg, *The Statue of Zeus at Olympia and the Iconography of Power and Majesty in European, American and Australian Art*, [in:] *The Statue of Zeus at Olympia...*, p. 190.

²⁰ Burton, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.

²¹ D. Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, ed. W. Zakrzewska, P. Pachciarek, R. Turzyński, Warszawa 1990, p. 241. Being an emblem of kings and gods, the bird represents the source of power and justice as well as pride. (M. Oesterreicher-Mollwo, *Leksykon symboli*, ed. L. Robakiewicz and J. Prokopiuk, Warszawa 2009, p. 207).

²² M. Lurker, *Przesłanie symboli w mitach, kulturach i religiach*, trans. R. Wojnakowski, Warszawa 1990, p. 291.

²³ Jove, another name for Greek Zeus, is mentioned in *The Tempest* two times, once in the context of Ariel's speed and Jove's bolts of lightning 1.2.201–203, and as Vaughan points, "Prospero declares that he has appropriated Jove's *own bold* for his magic in 5.1.46." M. Vaughan and T.A. Vaughan, *The Tempest. Introduction*, London 1999, p. 185.



2. Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, *Le Jupiter Olympien vu dans son trône* [Olympian Zeus in the sculptured antique art], 1815, 304 mm x 237 mm, © Photo: Royal Academy of Arts, London. Photographer: Prudence Cuming Associates Limited

The compositional strategies used by Siudmak underline Prospero's aspiration to greatness, both in terms of his imperial grandeur and intellectual pursuits. Styled as Zeus, Prospero appears powerful, but the symbolic attributes of divinity – either missing or modified – augment the sense of ambiguity of his rule. According to Heckenberg, even though Phidias's statue was destroyed probably in the fifth century, *Zeus at Olympia* became an artistic convention, “a model for the portrayal of power and majesty in subsequent eras. [It constituted] an important precedent for the depictions of Christ.”²⁴ With time, the convention found its further use in Christian iconography in numerous variations. Hence Siudmak's Prospero inevitably enters in dialogue with various sacral and secular works subscribing to this tradition.

MAIESTAS DOMINI (ALSO CHRIST PANTOCRATOR)

The enthroned Jesus in *Maiestas Domini*, like Siudmak's Prospero, belongs to the visual tradition of depicting majestic beings in the seated position established by Phidias's work. Consequently, the same antique convention connects figures of Prospero and Jesus depicted on a throne, for instance in *Maiestas Domini*, images of *Christ Pantocrator* and *Christ as Judge*; or images of the *Deisis* group, where the sitting Jesus appears as a part of the company including the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist.

The depiction of *Maiestas Domini* (*Jesus in Majesty* or *Christ in Glory*) is characterised by fixed compositional arrangements [Fig. 3].²⁵ Sitting on a throne, Christ's body and face are directed frontally toward

²⁴ Heckenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

²⁵ To recognise a particular image as *Maiestas Domini*, the enthroned Jesus must be accompanied by the four “beasts” symbolising four Evangelists: an eagle – St. John, an ox – St. Luke, a lion – St. Mark, and a winged man – St. Matthew. The textual sources of the image are the Bible (Iz. 6.1 in, Ez. 1 and 10, the Apocalypse of Saint John) and writings of Saint Hironimus.



3. Haregarius, *Maiestas Domini* from the Vivian Bible, known as Charles the Bald's Bible, 844–851, an illustration, 500 mm x 380 mm, The Yorck Project (2002) 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei (DVD-ROM), distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH. ISBN: 3936122202, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=152562> [accessed: 12.12.2020]

the viewers. His feet are resting on a round object which stands for the globe and depicts three separate continents. The figure is surrounded with a mandorla, which in contrast to the halo around Jesus's head, circles his whole body.²⁶ The decorative semicircles, circles or eight stars placed around the figure are used to accentuate his deity. The figure is entirely clad, and the ornamental clothes divert the attention of viewers from the human nature of Christ, which is underlined whenever his body is presented as naked or semi-naked. The arrangement of hands conveys various messages such as blessing or teaching gestures, or an oratorical signal indicating that the person is either speaking at the moment or has the right to speak.²⁷ One hand holds a book which is usually interpreted as the New Testament.

Viewed against the background of Christian iconography, Siudmak's poster articulates still greater anxiety about the actual status and prerogatives of Prospero. A master of the island, Prospero also claims certain spiritual authority and frequently assumes the role of a judge of fellow human and superhuman creatures such as Ariel (scorn for ingratitude), Caliban (condemned for bestiality), and the whole Neapolitan party (subject to trial, penance and final absolution). Hence Prospero's omnipotence apparently extends to spiritual realm where he examines and judges the attitudes and acts of fellow beings. The religious authority assumed by Prospero appears transgressive as he himself is frequently portrayed as losing control over his actions or emotions, squaring accounts rather than nourishing unconditional love. In the picture, Prospero might be

²⁶ In Figure 3 mandorla consists of two parts, one circling the upper part of Jesus's body and the other the lower part.

²⁷ P. Brown, *Church and Leadership*, [in:] *A History of Private Life*, Vol. I: *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. P. Aries and G. Duby, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1985, p. 272.

thought to assume the traditional pose of Christ Pantocrator but he lacks other religious attributes which enhance the image of the universal harmony of the Creator and Creation. Moreover, Christian iconography underlines the harmony of the world governed by Christ, while in the poster Prospero-ruler appears lonely, with the universe largely indifferent to his aspirations.

In the poster, Prospero at first may be seen as a Christ-like figure but the suggestion derives from his pose and not from the substance of the representation where individual elements push the interpretation towards some secular associations or contradict divinity, therefore rendering the whole arrangement a risky (if not blasphemous) mimicry of omnipotence. At the same time the use of cosmic imagery in place of Prospero's obscured face endows the image with a symbolic dimension, underscoring human longing for knowledge and understanding, and the fascination with the sky where he finds distant galaxies but fails to commune with God. Thus, in a symbolic way, this Prospero loses his head for his Faustian dreams, and gradually vanishes with his body turned into stone, and thoughts dispersed in cosmic void. The absence of Prospero's face and the ominous darkness spreading from the crack in his body may, from the religious point of view, be interpreted as a serious disintegration of the figure, a sign of corruption – either inflicted or developed from within – which destroys Prospero.

CHRIST IN JUDGEMENT

Another version of the enthroned Jesus with the globe under his feet, a halo around his head and a mandorla around his body, is *Christ in Judgement* [Fig. 4]. In one of the versions of the judicial motive [Fig. 5] – Christ is depicted half-naked and muscular with the red robe pulled aside above the waist. The exposed body reveals the wounds of the Passion,²⁸ as well as his human nature.²⁹ With open arms, Jesus embraces all human beings, displays signs of redemptive suffering and validates his sacrifice on the Cross. The iconographical reference to a divine figure facing sinners and deciding about their fate – Heaven or Hell – implies Prospero's relationship with other characters in the play and emphasises the power over his subjects.

Thus, if Siudmak's Prospero is read against the archetypal image of *Christ in Judgement*, the emphasis falls on the theme of sin, penance and reconciliation, all central to the play's plot. In fact, the complex plot devised by Prospero serves to test his trespassers and make sure they are ready to receive his forgiveness. Without their repentance, Prospero, a self-centred perfectionist, finds it difficult to love his neighbours. Everything that takes place on the island, is either planned or controlled by Prospero. Therefore, he can detect any manifestation of evil, such as Sebastian's and Antonio's plotting against Alonso (2.1.240–297 and 3.3.11–17). Prospero is also aware of his brother's persistence in evil-doing and the absence of remorse on his part, as manifest in Antonio's ridicule of conscience:

Ay, sir; where lies that? If 'twere a kibe
 'Twould put me to my slipper, but I feel not
 This deity in my bosom. Twenty consciences,
 That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they
 And melt ere they molest! (2.1.277–281)

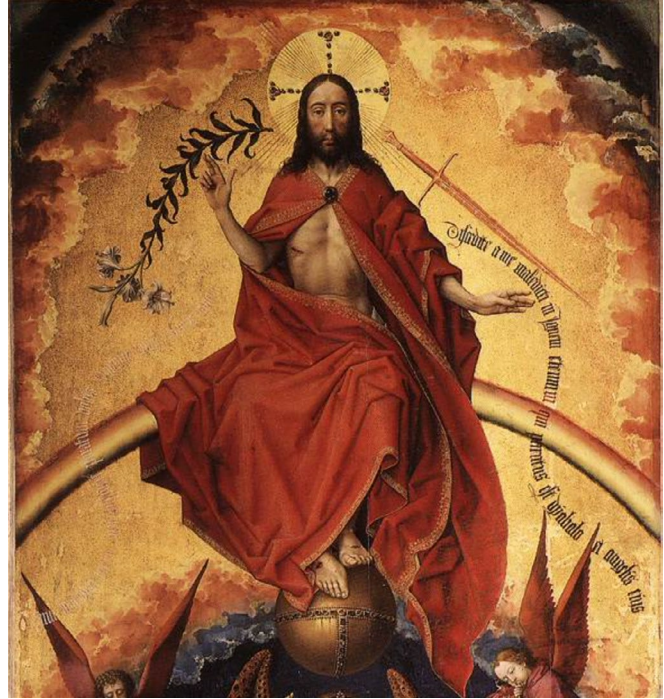
Significantly enough, Prospero's ultimate forgiveness is conditional: "At this time / I will tell no tales." (5.1.128–129), warns the Duke. Prospero only temporarily promises to keep the secret to himself and suggests that this knowledge constitutes a kind of insurance against Sebastian's and Antonio's potential rebellion in the future. Another condition is the restoration of kingdom: "I do forgive / Thy rankest fault – all of them; and require / My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know / Thou must restore." (5.1.131–134). Far and foremost, squaring of accounts begins with the storm and the Harpy scene which both serve as a dreadful purgatory for the whole party, irrespective of their measure of responsibility for Prospero's banishment. It seems that the ethical, moral nature of divine beings disagrees with Prospero's behaviour. Christ offers forgiveness, eternal life, redemption, resurrection, whereas Prospero threatens with death.

²⁸ G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, Vol. 2: *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, London 1972, p. 102.

²⁹ Sinners, angels, saints and other creatures may surround the central figure of God.



4. Coppo di Marcovaldo (attribution), *Christ in Judgement*, c. 1225–1330, the mosaic on the vault of Florence Baptistery (detail),
Dudva – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18665775> [accessed: 09.10.2020]



5. Rogier van der Weyden, *Jesus Christ Judgement*, from *The Last Judgement* (detail), 1446–1452, oil on panel, 2200 mm x 5460 mm, Rogier van der Weyden - Web Gallery of Art: Image Info about artwork,
Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15466647> [accessed: 10.10.2020]

THE *DEISIS* GROUP

Another example associated with motifs of judgement and forgiveness is the *Deisis* group [Fig. 6]. It is the image of the enthroned Jesus approached by the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist who ask for mercy for humanity during the Last Judgement. Such a scene is not represented in *The Tempest*; nevertheless, it is possible to find certain similarities between the Christian figures and some of the characters in the play. Miranda, a virgin intercedes for suffering souls:

MIRANDA

O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and
The fraughting souls within her. (1.2.8–13)

Ariel also pleads for mercy:

ARIEL

.... Your charm so strongly works 'em
That, if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.

PROSPERO

Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL

Mine would, sir, were I human.



6. *Deisis*, 12th century, an icon from St. Catherine's Monastery Sinai
Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=85744> [accessed: 02.10.2020]

PROSPERO

And mine shall.

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? (5.1.17–24)

In both cases, Prospero listens to the requests of those who ask for compassion and forgiveness for others. Nevertheless, all iconographical associations with Jesus, the holy Sacraments and Christianity in general are undermined and jeopardised once the motif of the enthroned divinity is questioned. Thus, Kott's comment about Prospero-god gains significance:

A great magician, whom the elements obey, at whose command graves [open] and the dead rise, who knows how to eclipse the sun and to hush the winds, rejects the magic wand and renounces power over human fate. He is now an ordinary mortal, defenceless as everybody else.³⁰

In the poster, the rejection of the divine nature seems to be marked by a profound modification of the traditional motif. The introduction of the cosmic elements directs the viewers' attention towards either space-related or humanistic interpretations of the character.

³⁰ Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*..., p. 240.

THE UNIVERSE – A SPIRAL GALAXY AND PLANETS

Siudmak's works – illustrations for and covers of science fictions books or graphics for the *Nowa Fantastyka* magazine³¹ – as well as his poster for *The Tempest*, betray the designer's fascination with astronomy, astrophysics, the solar system and the space beyond.³² Setting aside the iconographic source featuring similar positioning of the main figure, there is a single distinct element of Siudmak's poster which calls for further analysis. Above the black hole obliterating the chest and neck of the figure, one can see a luminous belt of stars and further above a conspicuous shape of a spiral galaxy [Fig. 7], reminiscent of a cardinal's cap or the planet Saturn viewed from a distance.³³

The motif of a spiral galaxy replacing or signifying Prospero's head might encourage viewers to think of the Prince as an aspiring mind of Renaissance science. Kott in *Prospero's Staff* notes that the play may be interpreted in the context of the ground-breaking achievements of modern thinkers, philosophers, scientists and artists because: "The great themes of the Renaissance will then be restored to *The Tempest*: those concerned with the philosophical utopia; with the limits of experience; with man's efforts to conquer the physical world; with dangers threatening the moral order".³⁴ Consequently, Prospero's mind is portrayed as lost in scientific inquiries, and dominated by the Prince's longing for knowledge of the universe understood as cosmic space rather than religious heaven.

The inclinations to solitude, intense relation with nature, the depth of scholarly inquiries, as well as the visual similarity of "head-like" spiral galaxy to a cardinal's cap [Fig. 9 and 10], bring to mind yet another association of Prospero with a renowned figure of Christianity i.e. Saint Jerome (died in 420).³⁵ The saint was one of the fathers of the Church, a scholar, humanist and writer. Likewise, Shakespeare's protagonist, in his professional life Jerome was surrounded with books.³⁶ Thus, the Saint is usually depicted in a space arranged as a *studiolo*³⁷ with an open book at hand [Fig. 10] – "[t]he book is a scholar's emblem. In Jerome's case it refers to his numerous exegetical writings and Vulgate edition of the Bible."³⁸

The Prince of Milan and the saint might be said to share a few characteristics. Jerome was described as a man of stubborn and choleric nature, violently opposing his enemies:³⁹

while impressing all Rome by his personal holiness, learning and honesty, [Jerome] had also contrived to get himself widely disliked; on the one hand by pagans whom he had fiercely condemned and on the other by people who were offended by the saint's harsh outspokenness and sarcastic wit.⁴⁰

Similar to Saint Jerome, Prospero has the qualities of a devout thinker, an ambitious learner and charismatic teacher. However, with time he becomes acutely aware of "the misery and greatness of man."⁴¹ Prospero's final if metaphorical rejection of knowledge – "books" – proves that in his view neither Caliban nor the society in Milan would readily welcome his ideas. In this sense Prospero becomes a Renaissance thinker

³¹ *New Fantastic* [*Nowa Fantastyka*] is a Polish periodical devoted to science fiction and fantasy literature with numerous articles, reviews, and short stories.

³² Siudmak's art is usually described as magic realism – a trend that finds its origins in Dalie's and Magritte's surrealism. However, "the artist himself prefers to operate under the banner of 'fantastic hyper-realism' which is also a more than accurate way to describe Siudmak's [...] cosmic imagery." To *'Dune' and Beyond: The Interstellar Hyper-Realism of Wojciech Siudmak*, 2017, https://dangerousminds.net/comments/to_dune_and_beyond_the_interstellar_hyper-realism_of_wojciech_siudmak [accessed: 31.08.2020].

³³ In the poster, the employment of space element such as the spiral galaxy might be regarded as a further reference to Andromeda as both one of spiral galaxies and a beauty chained to a rock [Fig. 8]. As one of possible allusions, the reference draws the viewers' attention to female elements of Prospero's nature and his maternal role in Miranda's education.

³⁴ Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*..., p. 242.

³⁵ Surprisingly, Saint Jerome had never been appointed to cardinal position and the hat appearing in the saint's depictions "is the result of a mistaken interpretation of [his] life in the Middle Ages. He was never a cardinal, and the hat he wears is anachronistic, since this type of hat only began to be worn by cardinals around 1252." R. Giorgi, *Saints in Art*, ed. S. Zuffi, Los Angeles 2002, p. 180.

³⁶ For a more elaborate discussion regarding Prospero's library see, for instance, P. Phelan, *Numbering "Prospero's Books"*, "Performing Arts Journal", 1992, vol. 14, No. 2, p. 43 or B.A. Mowat, *Prospero's Book*, "Shakespeare Quarterly", vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 1–33.

³⁷ *Studiolo* was a carefully designed and decorated room where humanists would collect books, maps, documents as well as other scientific instruments, precious objects and works of art – everything that characterised the owners' taste and interests. S. Zuffi, *Jak czytać włoskie malarstwo renesansowe*, trans. and ed. D. Folga-Januszewska, Kraków 2010, p. 40.

³⁸ Giorgi, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

³⁹ For a more elaborate discussion regarding Saint Jerome see F.X. Murphy ed., *A Monument to Saint Jerome: Essays on Some Aspects of his Life, Works, and Influence*, New York 1952.

⁴⁰ A. Butler, *Butler's Lives of the Saints. Concise Edition*, ed. M. Walsh, San Francisco 1759, p. 309.

⁴¹ Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*..., p. 259.



7. The Andromeda Galaxy, 2012, photography, NASA/JPL-Caltech – NASA, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=19525315> [accessed: 17.10.2020]



8. Domenico Guidi, *Andromeda and the Sea Monster*, 1694, marble sculpture, 1635 mm x 879 mm, Domenico Guidi – This file was donated to Wikimedia Commons as part of a project by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. See the Image and Data Resources Open Access Policy, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57103550> [accessed: 17.11.2020]



9. Master of Grossgmain, *Saint Jerome as a Cardinal*, 1498, oil on panel, 670 mm x 490 mm, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, © Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



10. Master of Grossgmain, *Saint Jerome as a Cardinal* (detail), 1498, oil on panel, 670 mm x 490 mm, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, © Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

who has lost faith in the redemptive power of knowledge and returns to the real world of Milan to think about death (5.1.311–12) because “[t]his is the fate of those who abandon life in solitude, life devoted to reflexion and contemplation, in order to live in cities among people full of sin.”⁴²

Finally, Prospero’s fascination with science, which would include the so-called new astronomy, his solitude and intellectual detachment as well as his melancholy which becomes his mental ailment, all these features bring about some associations of the Prince with the planet Saturn.

The planet [Fig. 11] is associated with numerous contradictory features. For example, it is said to be responsible for “the melancholiac’s unfortunate character and destiny”.⁴³ Significantly enough, what caused Prospero’s misfortune was his passion for books, an intellectual urge calling for loneliness and unsociability. Moreover, the knowledge gained from reading provided him with power over natural and supernatural forces: he “presides over fathers; over old age; over magicians, demons, devils; [...] over far travels, long absence”.⁴⁴

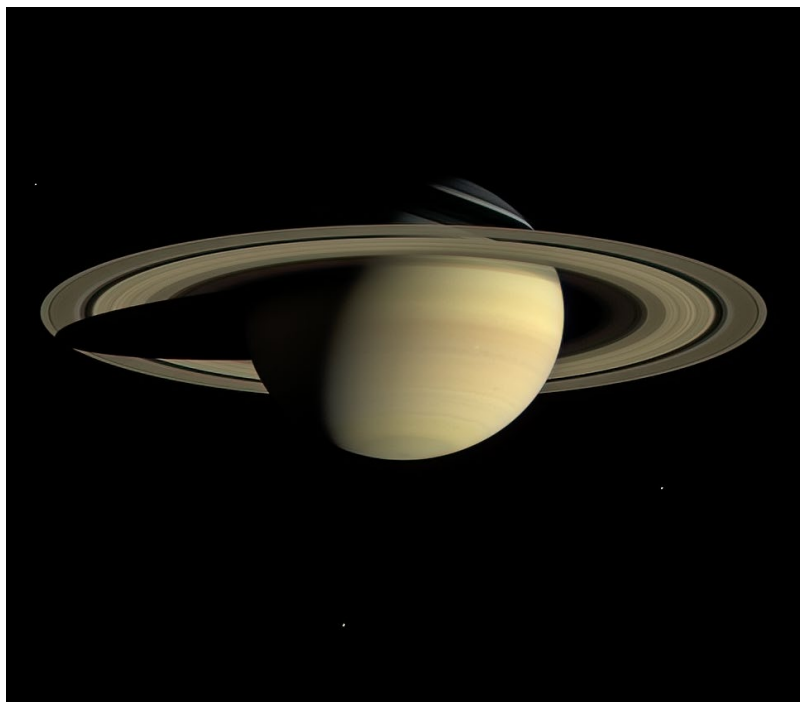
⁴² Leonardo da Vinci, *Note-Books* quoted by Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary...*, p. 264.

⁴³ R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, Nendeln 1964, p. 127. Klibansky et al. point out at other qualities of Saturn that can be found in *The Tempest*, though they do not pertain to Prospero but to Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio:

Like melancholy, Saturn, that demon of the opposites, endowed the soul both with slowness and stupidity and with the power of intelligence and contemplation. Like melancholy, Saturn menaced those in his power, illustrious though they might be, with depression, or even madness. (159)

They are all influenced by Prospero who, by inflicting madness on them, becomes the embodiment of the planet. J. Kott, *Szekspir współczesny*, Warszawa 1965, p. 360.

⁴⁴ Klibansky et al., *op. cit.*, p. 131.



11. Saturn – a planet, 2004, Kevin Gill from Los Angeles, CA, United States, CC 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons [accessed: 03.10.2020]

In the context of Siudmak's poster, Prospero, like people associated with the planet Saturn, is destined to become an influential leader. He belongs to a group of "people with mysterious wisdom and deep thoughts," philosophers "deep thinkers", men of vast knowledge and experience, who share their experience with other generations⁴⁵ but also "those who could prophesy from hidden books and knew esoteric rites of the mysteries" despite being self-centred.⁴⁶ Shakespeare's character, who might be forty five years old,⁴⁷ gives the appearance of an inconspicuous figure, but his books, knowledge and magic allow him to influence everything that lives or arrives to the island. Thus, the poster enables viewers to associate Prospero with a whole range of influences of the planet Saturn.

Like the Roman Saturn, the planet "possessed the double property of being the forefather of all the other planetary gods, and of having a seat in the highest heaven."⁴⁸ In the same manner, Prospero – a father figure – rules over the island and all-natural forces existing there.

CONCLUSIONS

Siudmak's poster presents Prospero as a complex figure, exhibiting some of the visual features derived from the well-established iconographic representations of Zeus, Jesus and Saint Jerome as well as of the Universe. Like Zeus, the righteous Duke of Milan governs nature: "The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touched / The very virtue of compassion in thee, / I have with such provision in mine art / So safely ordered," (1.2.26–29); or give orders to spirits, elves and demi-puppets, and perform magic (5.1.33–50). Consequently, Prospero can play with human fate though he is not as revengeful as the Greek god. In his attitude towards fellow subordinate creatures, Prospero resembles a Christian rather than ancient deity.

⁴⁵ Except for Caliban, Prospero teaches own daughter: "and here / Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit / Than other princes can that have more time / For vainer hours and tutors not so careful". (1.2.172–174)

⁴⁶ Klibansky et al., *op. cit.*, p. 132, 149. Ariel mentions Prospero's ability to predict future events: "My master through his art foresees the danger / That you, his friend, are in, and sends me forth / (For else his project dies) to keep them living". (2.1.298–300)

⁴⁷ Vaughan and Vaughan, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

⁴⁸ Klibansky et al., *op. cit.*, p. 152.

The poster's visual references to several images of Jesus allow viewers to read the play in the religious context. The well-known conventions of Christian art offer numerous interpretative hints as regards the play's central characters as well as the overall metaphysical framework. The poster pictures a noble figure who holds control and responsibility over everything kept under his feet: he is a ruler, a judge, a teacher, an orator and, finally, a merciful lord. All these features find their justification in the choice of visual attributes employed in Siudmak's poster. For instance, the traditional mandorla replaced by eight stars or planets and a halo signified by elements of the spiral galaxy, amplify the dignity and divinity of the figure. On the other hand, Prospero's half-naked body exposes the weakness of his human nature. The well-built torso, mighty hand and feet seem perfectly intact, but the massive crack in Prospero's chest and further damage to his body testify to something else. Viewers can see the fragility of Prospero, both in physical and spiritual sense. Siudmak's Prospero lacks any books which are present, for example, in the conventional representations of the enthroned Christ. Instead, his right hand is clenched round a rod, with fingers arranged to signal his readiness to speak.

Considering the representations of the enthroned Jesus, Prospero can be interpreted as a visual reference to the one in Glory, a divine, merciful Judge, Ruler of the World and an orator. Shakespeare's character exhibits certain similarities with the above images of Jesus, though the likeness is never complete and the emphasis falls always on Prospero's human nature. Once a scholar, teacher, speaker, ruler, Prospero becomes now a broken human being deprived of his voice; this is his new image.

The plot of *The Tempest* features numerous references to the Sacrament of Penance. These include the examination of conscience, contrition, confession, and reconciliation – as well as some additional concepts tied to this Sacrament such as temptation, awareness of sins and persistence in them, and purgatory (Ariel calls the sinners prisoners (5.1.9)). Accordingly, the poster can be interpreted as a visual reference to the motif of forgiveness (*Christ in Judgement*), compassion (the *Deisis* group), and freedom (*Maiestas Domini*) – all significant in the analysis of the play.

The interpretative context established by references to space – the spiral galaxy that replaces the head in the poster – also affects the understanding of Prospero's nature, behaviour, and studies.⁴⁹ His interest in nature, magic, humanity and space, as well as association with Saint Jerome and his cardinal cap, turn Prospero into an image of a Renaissance scholar, thinker and scientist. He might be juxtaposed with another fictional figure of a philosopher, Dr Faustus, but “unlike Dr Faustus, he uses the magical power given by his study of books and of natural philosophy, not to increase his own power and enjoyment, but to establish justice and to win men to repentance.”⁵⁰ The final rejection of knowledge and power represented by his staff and books proves his failure at playing god and enlightening the island's visitors and inhabitants. It is difficult, therefore, not to agree with Kott who sees the play as “a drama of lost illusions, of bitter wisdom, and a fragile – though stubborn – hope.”⁵¹

The ancient, Christian or symbolic parallels invoked by Siudmak's poster create a comprehensive interpretative context for Prospero. However, these are not the only interpretative possibilities. The compositional arrangement of a sitting deity might suggest similarities to Neptune or Moses, whereas the organic relationship between Prospero and the island invites associations with Posthumanism or human-earth hybridity.

⁴⁹ The connection appears to be profound, since stars influence and support his actions: “Prospero's ‘auspicious star’ has been courted to assist in bringing his enemies to his magic island.” J.C. Dean, *The Astronomy of Shakespeare*, “The Scientific Monthly”, vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 400–406.

⁵⁰ G.H. Durrant, *Prospero's Wisdom*, “Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory”, 1955, No. 7, pp. 50–58.

⁵¹ Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*..., p. 241–242.

KIM SĄ NASI BOGOWIE? ANALIZA IKONOGRAFICZNA PLAKATU WOJCIECHA SIUDMAKA DO „BURZY” WILIAMA SZEKSPIRA (1978)

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia plakat Wojciecha Siudmaka *Burza* (1978) jako źródło krytyki literackiej, ale i swego rodzaju „narzędzie”, za pomocą którego odczytujemy sens dzieła literackiego. Tekstem podlegającym krytycznej interpretacji jest jeden z dramatów Williama Szekspira pt.: *Burza* (*The Tempest*). Semiotyczna i intermedialna analiza plakatu odsłania zakodowane w nim ikonograficzne komentarze dotyczące treści dramatu i tym samym otwiera go na kolejne interpretacje.

Konstrukcja kompozycyjna zastosowana w *Burzy* Siudmaka stanowi odwołanie do tradycyjnego przedstawienia postaci na tronie. Takie rozwiązanie pozwala na zestawienie plakatu z wieloma dziełami wykorzystującymi podobne ramy kompozycyjne, czyli z przedstawieniem *Zeus na Olympie* dłuta Fidiasza, wizerunkami *Maestas Domini*, *Christ in Judgement* czy grupy *Deisis*. Wszelkiego rodzaju transformacje i odejścia od tradycyjnego schematu kompozycyjnego odsłaniają głębszy, intertekstualny (intermedialny) charakter plakatu. Pojawiają się więc odwołania do wizerunków św. Hieronima, obrazów galaktyki spiralnej czy Saturna (planety). Rozwiązanie kompozycyjne, odwołania i motywy użyte w pracy Siudmaka stają się podstawą analityczną do zdekonstruowania i zrekonstruowania miejsca akcji dramatu oraz opisanych w nim zdarzeń, a przede wszystkim postaci Prospera. Uwięziony na wyspie protagonista staje się jej władcą i sędzią, jest nauczycielem, filozofem i synonimem cywilizacji (która wcale nie jest tak atrakcyjna, jak mogłoby się wydawać).

Analizując pracę Wojciecha Siudmaka, warto zwrócić uwagę na głębokie zakorzenienie obrazu artysty w chrześcijańskiej sztuce Europy Zachodniej. W tym kontekście, ikonograficzna interpretacja dramatu Szekspira ukazuje Prospera jako człowieka/maga o quasi-boskiej naturze, który dysponuje mocą odpuszczania win. Natomiast miejsce akcji staje się konfesjonalem i/lub piekłem, a wydarzenia mające tam miejsce przybierają formę niektórych elementów dobrej spowiedzi.

WHO ARE OUR GODS? THE ICONOGRAPHIC, RELIGIOUS AND COSMIC COMMENTARY ON WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST* BY WOJCIECH SIUDMAK (1978)

Summary

This article aims to explore the interpretative potential of poster art with a focus on Shakespeare theatre posters. The images are treated as sources of literary criticism and analytical tools, allowing us to disclose senses embedded in literary artworks. For this study, a highly intertextual (intermedial) design – *The Tempest* (1978) by Wojciech Siudmak – will be scrutinised. The semiotic and intermedial study of the poster reveals iconographic references that provide the foundation for the text analysis and further drama interpretations.

The designer's work is based on the traditional composition depicting an enthroned figure. Consequently, it is possible to juxtapose the poster with a range of artworks employing similar iconographical arrangements: *Zeus at Olympia* by Phidias and images of *Maestas Domini*, *Christ in Judgement*, and the *Deisis Group*. All kinds of transformations and departures from the fixed composition scheme disclose other associations, including the portraits of Saint Jerome and images of a spiral galaxy or the planet Saturn. The exploration of these references, compositions and motifs allows us to de- and reconstruct the nature of the drama and events taking place there. However, most importantly, the study provides the detailed characteristic of Prospero. Imprisoned on an island, Shakespeare's protagonist appears as its ruler; there, he is the judge, philosopher, teacher and, eventually, the provider of the civilisation (though the idea of civilisation is not as attractive for the original inhabitants of the island as one might expect).

After analysing the poster, one might realise how deep the image is embedded in western European Christian art traditions. In this context, the iconographic interpretation of Shakespeare's dramatic text proves Prospero to be a man/magician of a quasi-divine nature; he gains the power to absolve people. Moreover, the island becomes a signifier of a confession and/or hell; simultaneously, the segments of drama action appear as developed equivalents of “a good confession” requirements (at least partly).

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