Enchanted Islands Floating on the Foam of Perilous Seas

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In localizing The Tempest on "an uninhabited island," the 1623 Shakespeare Folio associates the setting with the floating island that some masque machines represented. Such machines acted as movable stages to transport masquers from within the set to the spot from which their dances would begin; other masques allege that their immobile sets were also floating islands. Though the stages, permanent or temporary, on which The Tempest was performed were not mobile, they nonetheless were a kind of island surrounded by spectators, on which the magician Prospero, aided by Ariel, writes, casts, and directs a play whose roles are unwittingly performed by the Neapolitans who think themselves wrecked on an island that itself may be considered to be floating as the islands of masque were alleged to be.

$\mathcal{D}$espite living in an island kingdom, Shakespeare rarely says anything about islands even incidentally. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona* Panthino mentions voyages "to discover islands far away" (I.iii.9), in *Richard II* John of Gaunt blazons "this sceptr'd isle . . . set in the silver sea" (II.i.40-46), in *Othello* a Turkish fleet aims "toward the isle of Rhodes" (I.iii.16) and Cassio addresses "the valiant of [this] warlike isle" (II.i.43). In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes' envoys praise Delphos with "fertile the isle" (III.i.1-2).

In contrast to these limited references to islands in very few plays, dialogue in *The Tempest* uses "island" and its synonym "isle" twenty-four times and "islanders" twice, repeatedly reminding the audience that, after the opening scene on the ship, the stage represents the island where Prospero creates, casts, and watches a multi-plot theatrical performance. The Folio's "The scene, an uninhabited Island" (whatever its authority) relates this imagined setting to the machines of Stuart masques, which transported up to sixteen noble masquers (with as many or more attendants) from within the set to the space for their dances on the masque house floor. To persuade viewers that mobile machines did not rumble forward on wheels but floated on stage water, Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones employed their own "most potent art[s]." In three masques, *Beauty, Neptune's Triumph,* and *The Fortunate Isles,* such machines were called floating islands; similar machines under different names were used in *Blackness* and *The Temple of Love*. Dialogue asserts that the scenic object through which masquers came in the 1592 Gray's Inn show called *Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* has floated to its present location in Elizabeth's court, and the island in Chapman's *Memorable Masque* (1613) also moved only verbally.

Jones's first marine scenic device, in *Blackness* (1605), is called "a great concave shell," not strictly a floating island but a kind of boat "made to . . . rise with the billow"[1] as wave machines turned. Jonson's text does not say how the masquers dismounted from this bobbing "pageant," though the machinery must have stopped for their descent, or how, at the end, they "took their shell" for their exit, perhaps contrived by pulling the machine through the painted "night-piece" behind it, or by pulling up the curtain which had concealed it before the masque began. In *Beauty*, three years later, the masquers were "discovered" on a much more elaborate machine built by "the King's master-carpenter" William

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[1] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness* in *The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), lines 51-3.

Portington.[2] Jonson's text calls this machine "an island floating on a calm water,"[3] implying that Portington did not venture to construct wave machines. His "island moved forward on the water" while its various levels "turned with their several lights. And with . . . three varied motions at once, the whole scene shot itself to the land,"[4] alias the front of the stage (which may not have been much elevated above the floor of the masquing house where the masquers were to dance). The "island" remained in place until "they danced their last dance into their throne again, and that turning, the scene closed."[5] Except for the perspective seascape behind it, this machine differed hardly at all from wheeled pageants of Henry VIII's reign, like the one "deuised like a mountayn," on Twelfth Night 1511

> with vices brought up towardes the king, and out of the same came a ladye appareiled in cloth of golde, and the chyldren of honor called the Henchemen, . . . and danced a Morice before the king. And that done, re-entred the mountaine and then it was drawn back.[6]

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[2] Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Beauty,* ed. Orgel, line 235.

[3] *Ibid*., line.146.

[4] *Ibid.,* lines 222-3.

[5] *Ibid.,* lines 353-4.

[6] Edward Halle, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Houses of Lancastre and Yorke* 1548, reprinted in 1809 as *Hall's Chronicle containing the history of England* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 516. On Shrove Tuesday 1511 what must have been an even larger "pageaunt of a great quantite . . . opened . . . and out issued . . . foure knyghts, . . . on horsebacke with great plumes on their heddes." (Halle. 517). Martin Butler observes that in both *Beauty* and *Blackness* "the masquers . . . arrived on what underneath were old-fashioned pageant cars" (*The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama,* ed. A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway [Cambridge UP, 1990], 139).

For *Neptune's Triumph*, prepared to celebrate Prince Charles's and Buckingham's safe return from Spain in 1624 but cancelled to prevent a diplomatic contretemps, Jones created a similar machine, which Jonson's text calls "a Delos,/ Such as when fair Latona fell in travail,/ Great Neptune made emergent."[7]. Along with much text from *Neptune's Triumph*, this machine was revamped for *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (Twelfth Night 1625, the last masque of James's reign) and named "Macaria . . . That hitherto hath floated as uncertain/ Where she should fix her blessings."[8]   Both texts give the same directions; like that in *Beauty* the machine moves forward,

> the masquers take time to land" during celebratory songs, "the island goes back . . . the masquers dance their entry. Which done, the first prospective of a maritime palace . . . is discovered.[9]

During the revels "*the first prospective*" was replaced by a seascape, and when the revels ended and the masquers were dancing the sortie, this changed to the "discovery" of a fleet of ships. Neither script explains how, or even if, the masquers exited into the machine, so we cannot tell whether there was a further use for it once it had "gone back."

After James died in 1625, official court masques were suspended until the 1630s, when masques of men, led by King Charles, did not ride in or come down on machines but marched in processional triumphs. In masques of ladies, Queen Henrietta Maria and her companions appeared in elevated bowers or rode in machines.[10]   For their entry in *The Temple of Love* (1635) Jones

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[7] Ben Jonson, *Neptune's Triumph,* ed. Orgel, lines 99-133.

[8] Ben Jonson, *Fortunate Isles,* ed. Orgel, lines 299-301.

[9] *Neptune's Triumph*, lines 291-302; *Fortunate Isles*, lines 372-83.

[10] Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1989), 118-19.

designed a variant floating island in a marine setting. The queen and her ladies entered in

> a maritime chariot [made of] a spongy rock stuff mixed with shells, seaweeds, coral, and pearl, borne upon an axletree with golden wheels without a rim, with flat spokes like the blade of an oar coming out of the naves . . . and floated with a sweet motion in the sea

rather like the great shell in *Blackness,* but when it came to the front of the set the "billow" machines flattened to become the "dry land" onto which the masquers stepped from their "maritime chariot" before descending to the dancing floor.[11] This may show how Jones had arranged a graceful dismount for the masquers from the *Blackness* machine, which Jonson's text does not describe.

According to surviving published texts, some physically immobile sets represented floating islands. The fiction of Gray's Inn's 1595 show, *Proteus and the Adamantine Rock,* declares that Proteus has brought "The Adamantine Rock," inside which the Inn's Christmas prince and his seven companions are voluntary prisoners, from "those still floating regions where he dwells" to Queen Elizabeth's court. Because this rock, "the seas true star," forces iron to point north, Proteus has wagered that no stronger attractive power exists, but "an Esquire of the Prince's company" proves that the Queen, the "Adamant of hearts," has more power, compelling Proteus "with his bident" to open the rock, which he then entered with his many attendants. After this "the Prince and the seven Knights . . . came forth of the Rock in Couples, and before every couple came two Pigmies with torches"[12] who "danced a new devised Measure, &c," and after dancing with court

[11] *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court,* ed. Roy Strong and Stephen Orgel, 2 vs. (London and Berkeley: Sotheby Parke Burnet & University of California Press, 1973), v. 2, lines 409-14.

[12] *Gesta Grayorum*, ed. Desmond Bland (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1968), 85-6.

ladies "took their Order again, and with a new Strain went all into the rock" which closed behind them.[13]   George Chapman's *Memorable Masque* for Princess Elizabeth's 1613 wedding also moved only in his masque's fiction; indeed, in descriptions outside the dialogue, Chapman uses the old-fashioned term "mount" for something like the Gray's Inn structure, though visually and mechanically more elaborate: "an artifical rock, whose top was near as high as the hall itself, . . . run quite through with veins of gold."[14]   Above, on one side stood the temple of Honor, on the other a grove and dead tree for the anti-masque "Baboonery." The mid-section was hinged to move forward "some five paces [and] split in pieces" to eject Capriccio,[15] who tells Plutus that this rock is a

> rich island lying in the South-sea, . . . by earth's round motion moved near this Britain shore. In which island, . . . a troop of the noblest Virginians inhabiting attended hither the god of riches, all triumphantly shining in a mine of gold.[16]

After the anti-masques, the rock's upper part "turned to a cloud" which

> opened and spread like a sky, in which appeared a sun setting, beneath which sat the twelve Masquers, in a mine of gold, twelve torchbearers holding their torches before them.[17]

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[13] *Ibid.*, 86.

[14] George Chapman, *The Memorable Masque of the two honourable houses, or Inns of Court, the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn*, in *Inigo Jones, The Theatre of the Stuart Court,* lines 109-115.

[15] *Ibid.,* lines 144-5.

[16] *Ibid.,* lines 295-308.

[17] *Ibid.,* lines, 509-11.

Led by their "Indian" torchbearers, the "Indian-like" masquers then descended to the dancing floor.

These floating islands (visibly mobile or not) exploit the commonplace that insular Britain was a world apart, mythologized as a "demi-paradise" and protected by the sea from "the envy of less happier lands."   Jonson's *Blackness* calls "Britannia, this blessed isle . . . A world divided from the world."[18]   Chapman's *Memorable Masque* calls Britain

> (for the excellency of it) divided from the world (*divisus ab orbe Britannus*), and that though the whole world besides moves, yet this isle stands fixed on her own feet, and defies the world's mutability.[19]

In *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* Jonson makes Cupid answer the Sphinx's riddle with "Britain's a world the world without."[20]   The *Blackness* and *Beauty* floating islands carry seekers of a boon from the king of this "world the world without," but the remaining floating islands bring gifts and blessings from afar. From "The Adamantine Rock, the sea's true star . . . The wide Empire of the Ocean . . . Should follow . . . wheare e'er it should be sett".[21] Chapman's "mine of gold" promises metallic wealth from Virginia; to reciprocate, the king will teach the Virginian princes true religion. In *The Memorable Masque* and *The Fortunate Isles,* floating islands joined the one "isle . . . fixed on her own feet," suggesting the incorporation of Britain's Irish and American colonies with the mother country. In *Neptune's Triumph* the god (though representing King James, he does not

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[18] *Blackness*, lines 226-8/

[19] *Memorable*, lines 294-7.

[20] Ben Jonson, *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly*, ed. Orgel, line 241.

[21] *Gesta Grayorum*, 82.

appear in the masque) has sent "a floating isle" from Britain to "the Hesperian shores" to fetch his son Albion, his comrade Hippius/Haliclyon, and Proteus, "master of disguise," a transparent allegory of the fleet that fetched Prince Charles, Buckingham, and the diplomat Francis Cottington from Spain. Both Charles and Buckingham would have danced in the masque, but the singing role of Proteus would have gone to a professional. In *The Fortunate Isles,* Macaria (glossed as "happiness" in Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*), having "hitherto . . . floated as uncertain/ Where she should fix her blessings, has "adhered to . . . Britannia."[22] In *The Temple of Love* the "maritime chariot" carried Queen Indamora of Narsinga, where the East India Company's chief factor in its new headquarters at Masulipatam was "to have command over those factories that shall be planted [there]."[23]

All floating islands were laden with emblems of beauty, love, fertility, and/or riches. *Beauty*'s was "adorned with lights and garlands . . . curious and elegant arbors . . . a grove of grown trees laden with golden fruit."[24] *The Memorable Masque*'s barren rocks and dead tree were replaced by a "mine of gold,"[25] the foundation of the Temple of Honor. The floating island in *Neptune's Triumph* bore the self-replicating "tree of harmony, [whose] boughs . . . taking root afresh,/ Spring up new boles, and those spring new, and newer."[26] On the floating island of Macaria,

[22] *Twelve Goddesses*, lines 300-02

[23]   K.N. Chaudhuri. *The English East India Company: The Study of an Early Joint-Stock Company 1600-1640* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 47.

[24] *Beauty*, lines 153-205

[25] *Memorable*, lines 510-11

[26] *Neptune's Triumph*, lines 143-49

> nothing grows but smiles, . . . no intermitted wind/ Blows here, but what leaves flowers or fruit behind, . . . no sickness . . . old age . . . grief . . . hunger . . . envy of state . . . ambition.[27]

These name conditions all-too-present on Twelfth Night 1625, as hostility to Buckingham increased and James, visibly failing, would die within three months. (Though Jonson would not have dared to imply the king's death, his list of what Macaria does *not* contain displays the overemphasis of denial.) In *The Temple of Love* the "maritime chariot" bore exemplars of chaste Platonic love from Narsinga to the court of England; when "Indamora did appear," the gates of "Love's true temple . . . would open and the mists dry up/That . . . concealed it from the general view."[28] After dancing as Indamora, the queen joined the king as herself while "the sea . . . changed into the true Temple of Chaste Love,"[29] from which emerged a symbolic ballet as tribute to their exemplary marriage.

Masque floating islands by whatever name were stages to display noble masquers amid symbolic accoutrements. The masque stage had to make room for those that delivered the masquers to the dancing floor, waited for the masquers' exit as in *Beauty* (and perhaps in *The Fortunate Isles*), or moved back to be hidden by new scenery as in *The Temple of Love*. The commercial theatre's fixed platforms could not accommodate such machines, yet on them were enacted fictions contrived to evoke wonder just as did Jonson's verses, Jones's machines, and dances to elaborate music by costumed courtiers. The "uninhabited Island" of *The Tempest*, though neither mobile nor able to produce much in the way of wondrous changes in appearance, gives a name to a stage

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[27] *Ibid.*, lines 316-47.

[28] *Temple of Love*, lines 248-56.

[29] *Ibid.*, line 458.

which could represent anything any play's fiction required with little but language, costumed actors, and portable properties.

The island of *The Tempest* is initially placed in the Mediterranean between Tunis and Italy. Dialogue names cities—Milan, Naples, Tunis, and Argier—well known to England's trade and diplomacy. Maps, sea charts, and the experience of diplomats, travelers, merchants, and ship-masters, would have meant that many in the audience would have an idea of their relative locations and distance from each other. Yet the marriage of Claribell, "she that is Queen of Tunis," has removed her "ten leagues beyond man's life" (II.i.241-42), unbridgeably far from Naples. Words link the island to "the still-vex'd Bermoothes" in the Atlantic and may suggest other "islands far away." Real geography thus becomes fictional—inland Milan in *The Tempest*, like inland Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale*, is relocated to the coast—so translating the island from the world of its named places into a floating island like those in masques, findable only by the witch Sycorax on the Argier ship, or by the white magician Prospero in the Milan "hulk." By his controlling magic, through Ariel Prospero creates the storm that seemingly brings the royal fleet to the island, but may equally be thought to bring the island to the fleet.

The word "this" governs "island" and "isle" nine of the twenty-four times these synonyms occur. Caliban asserts that "This island's mine" (I.ii.333) and that Prospero "by sorcery . . . got this isle/ From me he got it" (III.ii.52-53). Elsewhere he names "the isle" and "the island" with but slightly less emphasis. In the epilogue Prospero, clad "as I was sometime Milan" (V.i.86), begs the audience *not* to make him "dwell in this bare island" (Epilogue.7-8).   "This" implies gestures by both actors to encompass the stage, designating "*this* place," a bare platform surrounded by spectators seated, as at a masque, on three sides. When Prospero halts the betrothal masque, he calls it a "pageant," the name for scenic cars in Henry VIII's court entertainments and in London's Lord Mayors' shows. "The isle" and still more "this island" direct audience attention to the site of performance,

whether to the permanent stages of the Blackfriars and Globe or to temporary court stages in 1611 and 1613. Though perhaps the King's Men, like the boy actors, sold seats on the Blackfriars stage, any stage belonged to the players, not to those who paid to intrude upon it. Like Caliban and Prospero, any actor could assert "This island's mine" while playing his role.

Although dialogue never calls Prospero's island a stage, the experiences it offers to Caliban, Miranda, and the Neapolitans are theatrical. Script, direction, and machinery (a rotating table and a flying device) allegedly originate with Prospero as magician-playwright-designer. Like all actors, those who give his script body assume multiple roles. Ariel, Prospero's chief actor as Burbage was Shakespeare's, enacts many parts: as invisible spirit, "nymph of the sea," musician to Ferdinand, "taborer" to Stephano and Trinculo, Harpy to the king's party, Ceres in the masque, and huntsman to chase Caliban and his two allies. Besides these visible roles, he recalls the multiple parts he played on the royal ship:

> . . . now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin
> I flamed amazement;
> Sometime I'd divide; and burn in many places
> . . . then meet and join (I.ii.198).

Near the play's end Ariel becomes a tireman who transforms Prospero/Burbage from magician to duke by helping him into a different costume (V.i.85-94, and SD). Ariel's fellow spirits, too, play many parts, among them the "Shapes" who like "necessary attendants of the stage" fetch the laden banquet table, mutely invite the king's party to partake, and, after Ariel's Harpy act, "with mocks and mows" carry out the bare table. Later they enact goddesses, nymphs, and reapers in the masque, and then become the "dogs and hounds" (IV.I.1.254,SD), which hunt Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban.

Prospero himself is a "Johannes Fac Totum" who as playwright assigns Ferdinand the successive roles of spy, usurper,

and replacement Caliban to "remove/ Some thousands of these logs" (III.i.10). Having acted the "heavy father" to Miranda, he then becomes the audience for her role of disobedient child and Ferdinand/Caliban's of her wooer-servant.   From his godlike position "on the top, invisible" Prospero observes as the King's party act like those masque spectators who "assaulted" refreshment tables after the performance. Caliban declares that Prospero is always both director and watcher, sometimes controlling his slave with pain from hedgehogs underfoot and pinchings (by invisible agents, as if they were grotesque antimasques), sometimes with "sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not" (III.ii.136) (like main masque harmonies of music and patterned dance). Ariel haunts the king's ship with illusions suggestive of the lights and changing scenes of masque, before the king and courtiers undergo their purgatorial experience in the island's bounded space. The theatre and the masquing house were likewise bounded spaces, each accessible only through a controlled entryway. As on the island, so in the theatre and the masquing house, things impossible in reality were, for the time of performance, presented to suspended disbelief, at least the disbelief of an ideal audience.

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