

Shakespeare in Mzansi

The Tempest

On the island of our imagination, a banished king summons his magical powers to avenge his exile, repair the natural order and restore hope...

The Tempest takes us to an imagined island of magical possibilities. Ruled over by the deposed king UMUNTU and his daughter WASMZANSI, the island is a place of beauty, danger, peace, chaos and magic. Onto the island come those responsible for the king's overthrow. Slowly, using his powers and the spirits of the island that he commands, UMUNTU reclaims his daughter's birthright and secures a peaceful and prosperous future for everyone.

The island is an imaginary one but takes its references from the landscape of the Cape. It combines the historical relevance of Robben Island with the natural currency of the Cape peninsula. We, the camera, are one of the spirits of this island. Under UMUNTU'S control and leadership we are integral to the telling, the guiding and the resolution of the story.

This story is allegorical. Through it we come to re-examine events and characters in our South African context and we are able to debate the resolution of those stories. The Tempest is a vehicle to stimulate the viewer into thinking about the future of South Africa and how that future can only be secured through our efforts to accept responsibility for our past and our actions in the present day.

The Format

We are intimate with UMUNTU in that he appears to have power over us. We, through the camera, are twinned with UMUNTU'S chief spirit, AVANHU. As spirits we have the power to move across the island with ease and speed. We also have the power of invisibility to the other characters, allowing us to observe them closely and to affect their actions.

Our movement through the world of The Tempest, directed by the orders of UMUNTU, informs the movement of the camera. We are able to move quickly or to be very still, simply observe or directly affect the other characters, intimately report or observe from a distance.

The characters of the story have allegorical position and power in the context of modern Mzansi. There are overblown false leaders, wise spiritual guides, delinquent foreigners, peace loving gentlemen and lazy youth. We allow the behaviour, language and costume to inform these character types without being didactic and the audience is stimulated to form opinions of each as the story unfolds. The conflicts of the story become representative of the wider context and their resolution gives us hope for a positive future.

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The Characters

UMUNTU:	The deposed King of Mzansi. He has been exiled to the island with his daughter, WASMZANSI. UMUNTU has a magical coat that gives him powers over the spirits of the island to do his bidding as he brings his enemies under control and restores the rightful order.
WASMZANSI:	The beautiful and innocent daughter of UMUNTU. She initially knows nothing of her history but comes to understand as the story unfolds. She falls deeply in love with the handsome CEFU.
KGOSI:	UMUNTU'S usurper. A cunning and greedy man who tries to get everyone to join his evil plans by pretending to have their interests at heart. However he thinks only of his own glory and wealth.
OHLOLEHILE:	Was part of the overthrow of UMUNTU and his banishment. He thinks that UMUNTU is dead and is truly remorseful when his weakness is shown up by UMUNTU. A good man who looked the other way.
TSHEPAHALE:	OHLOLEHILE'S brother he is a genuinely mean person. Luckily TSHEPAHALE is lazy as well as suggestible and he fails to act before UMUNTU prevents the planned fratricide.
CEFU:	OHLOLEHILE'S son. He is at first lazy and impudent. However he meets WASMZANSI, and is transformed by love for her.
MORAPELEDI:	A spiritual leader. Though aged and wise, he is a bit naïve. He sees the island as a potential paradise but the other characters, with meaner minds, mock his vision of a perfect future.
WABUNU:	An eloquent but savage inhabitant of the island. The offspring of a witch who used to rule the island but was driven out by UMUNTU. He believes the island is rightfully his and tries to take it back.
BATWANTLE and: MORUMIWA	Two foreigner journalists in the court of KGOSI. They are drunk for most of the story, and enslave WABUNU by feeding him alcohol.
AVANHU:	The main spirit of the island. He was trapped on the island by the witch who was also WABUNU'S mother. UMUNTU has promised to set him free if AVANHU carries out UMUNTU'S plans.

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The Synopsis

A small aeroplane is caught in a violent tempest and crash lands on a remote island. On board are dignitaries from the land of Mzansi, including the false king KGOSI, the dukes OHLOLAHILE and TSHEPAHALE, the spiritual leader MORAPALEDI, two foreign journalists BATWANTLE and MORUMIWA, and CEFU, OHLOHALE'S lazy son.

On the island, UMUNTU, the exiled true king of Mzansi, explains to his daughter, WASMZANSI, that he was once king but was usurped by the greedy KGOSI. He explains that he ordered AVANHU, his slave spirit, to conjure the storm but ensure that all survive the crash. His enemies are now at his mercy.

AVANHU, who only UMUNTU can see, reminds UMUNTU of the promise to free him from the curse of the old witch Sycorax who used to rule the island but died. UMUNTU says he will keep his word if AVANHU obeys his instructions.

WABUNU, the savage offspring of Sycorax, appears and berates UMUNTU for turning him into a slave on his own island. UMUNTU reminds him that he was treated with kindness until he attempted to rape WASMZANSI.

AVANHU returns with CEFU. The young man is handsome but lazy and disaffected and has been drawn away from his group by AVANHU'S singing. The moment he sees WASMZANSI he falls deeply in love with her and she, having never seen another man (besides WABUNU), falls equally for him. UMUNTU steps in though and says that CEFU is now his slave and must work for his freedom.

The rest of the crash party are exploring the island. OHLOLAHILE is mourning the supposed loss of his son. MORAPALEDI is enchanted by the promise of the island. KGOSI tries to get TSHEPAHALE to kill his brother OHLOLEHILE and take his power and position. AVANHU overhears and puts the whole party to sleep with music.

BATSWANTLE and MORUMIWA have been separated from the others and are exploring the island. They come across WABUNU and feed him liquor until he offers himself to be their slave.

BATSWANTLE, MORUMIWA and WABUNU, now very drunk and staggering around the island, are looking for UMUNTU as WABUNU has told the other two that they can kill UMUNTU and take WASMZANSI as a bride and rule the island.

AVANHU has played tricks on the others as well, chastising them for overthrowing UMUNTU and banishing him from Mzansi. They are badly shaken by this magic and fear for their lives.

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UMUNTU summons CEFU and offers WASMZANSI'S hand in marriage if CEFU will promise to be chaste before the ceremony. CEFU makes a solemn promise to be worthy of his beloved MZANSI.

BATSWANTLE, MORUMIWA and WABUNU try, with hilarious incompetence, to tell UMUNTU that they are now in charge of the island. UMUNTU laughs and conjures some wild spirits to chase them off.

UMUNTU tells AVANHU to bring the others before him. AVANHU reminds him to use mercy not vengeance. They beg his forgiveness and KGOSI surrenders the kingship. UMUNTU is true to his word of mercy but declines the kingship, instead bestowing the future leadership of Mzansi on the reformed CEFU and WASMZANSI. He then tells all that AVANHU has restored the aeroplane and they will be returning home.

All but UMUNTU go to the beach, leaving UMUNTU alone with us, the camera. As a soft, nurturing rain falls, he solemnly removes his magic coat for the last time and in a translation of one of Shakespeare's most poignant speeches, promises to surrender his powers and live out his life as an ordinary, contented citizen of Mzansi.

The Geography

The story takes place entirely on the island on which there are 5 ain locations;

1. UMUNTU'S 'CELLS': A small set of abandoned buildings that are suggestive of an abandoned prison. Central on the island, backed by the mountain, surrounded by the forest and with a view of the beach.
2. A BEACH: where the aeroplane crashes. BATWANTLE and MORUMIWA return to the beach to find alcohol on the crashed aeroplane.
3. THE QUARRY: an abandoned quarry where UMUNTU sets CEFU to work breaking stone. It is hot, bright and working there requires a genuine effort.
4. THE FOREST: on the slopes of the mountain and sweeping down to the coast, a place of hidden groves and sparkling waterfalls. It is also the place where the spirits live and torment the various characters.
5. WABUNU'S HOVEL: a cave and rough shelter on the mountain. The area around it is littered with the remains of his eating and living.

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The Style

CAMERA: The camera operates mostly on steady-cam in order to catch the sensation of our being a 'spirit' on the island. This gives us fluidity of movement that can transfer smoothly across and over locations. It also gives us the opportunity to move swiftly to keep up with the action, especially through dense foliage in the forest.

As representing the audience the camera sees and hears everything, and is sometimes part of the action. Only AVANHU, UMUNTU and WASMZANSI can 'see' us, to the other characters we are invisible.

SETTINGS: Costume and props are heavily informed by their representative role and/or allegorical necessity. Although ostensibly modern, we are in an imaginary space that is undergoing transformation. We are also informed by the basic plot of a crash on a remote island. The spirit world of the island draws on traditional African concepts of spirit representation and modern interpretations of the same.

LANGUAGE: The language is quite formal. All of the characters are in their way eloquent and of high status, even the 'savage' WABUNU, and their language reflects this intelligence. Because the Shakespeare original has some of the most lyrical speeches we look to translate some of these as closely as possible, capturing and transferring the philosophical beauty of the original into a current mode.