

THE TEMPEST (1980)

Directed by: Derek Jarman

Starring: Heathcote Williams (Prospero); Toyah Wilcox (Miranda)

Derek Jarman a painter who began working in theatre design had his first professional involvement in films when Ken Russell invited him to create the sets for "The Devils". He continued to work with Russell on "Savage Messiah" and the unfinished "Gargantua". He finally turned down the offer of designing "Tommy" and with the help of the Arts Council made his first film - the critically acclaimed "Sabastiane". His second film made in 1978 and inspired by the punk movement was "Jubilee", a black comedy set in the near future when society had collapsed, which also starred Toyah. The "Tempest" is his third film and although made on a small (in film making terms) budget of £150,000 it is an atmospheric and visually compelling film.

The film is remarkably simple using only two sets - an empty Victorian House (Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire) and a deserted shore, both made potent by clever camerawork. The casting is no less radical with Prospero, the Wizard, on whose magical isle his enemies are cast by the tempest he created, played by Heathcote Williams as a young man instead of the old man he is usually portrayed as, and Toyah Wilcox plays Miranda as a robust tomboy rather than the prissy Victorian heroine of more traditional versions. The film is also made more relevant by taking it visually out of the period by dressing some actors in Victorian costume, some in Renaissance and some in modern dress.

Stephen Lock

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