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# Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the Folks Un Jugnt-Teater

## The Staging by Leon Schiller 1938/1939

### Abstract

The production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* staged by Leon Schiller with scenography by Władysław Daszewski in the Folks un Jugnt-Teater in Łódź (October 9, 1938) is considered to be one of the greatest achievements of Yiddish theater in Poland. The author describes the political background of the production. The significance of the cooperation of a distinguished Polish director with a Yiddish theater was stressed by speakers at the banquet which took place after the premiere, while the reviewers uncovered the political undertones of the production. Daszewski's scenography on a shallow stage was a great achievement, as was the part of Prospero

played by Abraham Morewski, one of the most eminent Jewish actors of the 20th century. The Łódź production also turns out to be an important reflection of the evolution of the interpretation of Shakespeare's play in Schiller's work, as well as an important element of his artistic achievement.

### Keywords

Leon Schiller, Yiddish theater, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Władysław Daszewski, Folks Un Jugnt-Teater, Abraham Morewski, Jewish theater in Poland

### Abstrakt

#### **Burza Szekspira w Folks un Jugnt-Teater: Inscenizacja Leona Schillera (1938/39)**

Inscenizacja *Burzy* Shakespeare'a w inscenizacji Leona Schillera ze scenografią Władysława Daszewskiego w Folks un Jugnt-Teater w Łodzi (9 października 1938) uchodzi za jedno z największych osiągnięć teatru jidysz w Polsce. Wagę współpracy wybitnego polskiego reżysera z teatrem jidysz podkreślali mówcy na bankiecie, który odbył się po premierze, a recenzenci odkrywali polityczne podteksty spektaklu. Scenografia Daszewskiego na płytkiej scenie była wybitnym osiągnięciem, podobnie jak rola Prospera grana przez Abrahama Morewskiego, jednego z najwybitniejszych aktorów żydowskich XX wieku. Łódzki spektakl zalicza się także do najważniejszych osiągnięć wśród szekspirowskich inscenizacji Schillera, ale i w całej jego twórczości.

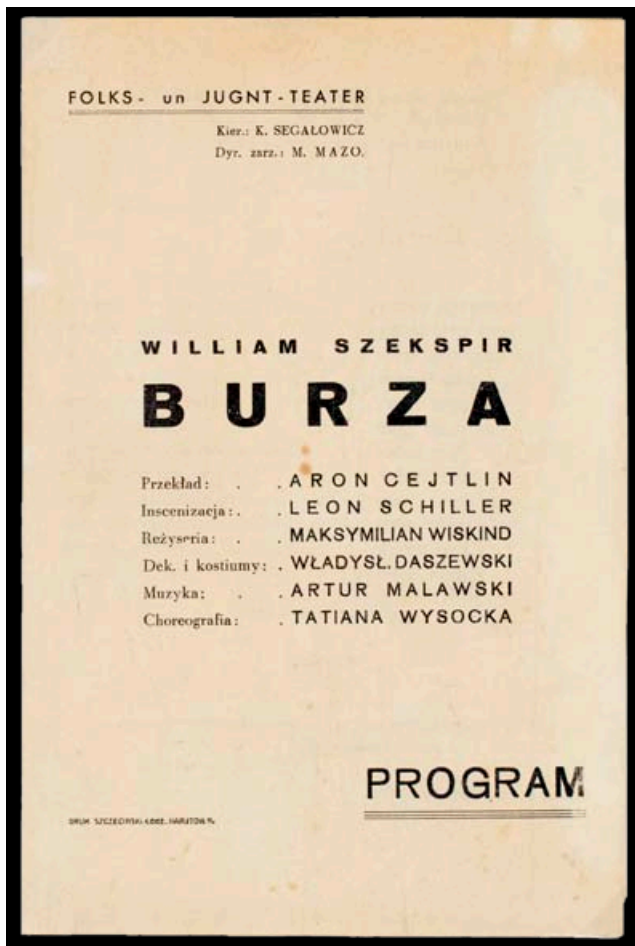
### Słowa kluczowe

Leon Schiller, teatr jidysz, *Burza* Shakespeare'a, Władysław Daszewski, Folks Un Jugnt-Teater, Abraham Morewski, teatr żydowski w Polsce

Schiller's first encounter with Jewish theater happened before the First World War. In a 1927 interview with the weekly, he said, "I know the old Jewish folk theater, while I was still in Cracow, I watched various [Abraham] Goldfaden plays with the *intermédie*, they were simple and filled with folklore." Then, he recalled *The Dybbuk*, a staging by David Herman at the WIKT (Warsaw Jewish Art Theater), as well as watching Yevgeny Vakhtangov at the Habima, during the theater's guest performances in Warsaw, in 1926.<sup>1</sup> He probably also saw other Hebrew plays that Habima had in its repertoire at the time. Perhaps while attending the jubilee of MXT (Moscow Art Theatre) in Moscow, in October 1928, he had visited the Moscow Jewish Theater, in addition to other theaters, for Habima left the USSR permanently in 1926. In the early 1930s he watched Peter Martin Lampel's *Revolt in the Reformatory* and Eugene O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, directed by Jakub Rotbaum, performed by the Vilna Troupe at the Scala Theater in Warsaw. He spoke highly of these performances, despite his conflict with Rotbaum, which began over who would have priority for the Warsaw premiere of Sergei Tretiakov's *Roar, China!* Schiller also valued Michał (Michael) Weichert's Jung Teater, saying, "quite interestingly run, showing excellent acting and staging results."

In 1927, at the end of his interview in the *Literarische Bleter*, Schiller declared that he would have taken up directing in a Jewish theater "without hesitation" and "willingly." However, this did not happen until ten years later. On October 9, 1938, he staged Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the Folks un Jugnt-Teater, in Łódź. The troupe was founded thanks to the efforts of the Jewish Theater Committee, headed by Klara Segalowicz as the artistic director and Mordechaj (Mordechai) Mazo as the administrative director. The theater did not have a permanent venue, so *The Tempest* was played on the stage of the Łódź Philharmonic. Klara Segalowicz, an outstanding actress and director, was advocating for collaboration between the Jewish and Polish theater. It was in her youth theater that Jan Kosiński had made his debut a year prior, doing set design for Itzik Manger's version of Goldfaden's *Di Kiszefmacherin* (*The Sorceress*), which had its opening night in Warsaw, on March 5, 1937, and was directed by Jakub Rotbaum. Now she invited Leon Schiller to work with her, who at the time was assisted by Maksymilian Wiskind as director. The set design and costumes were the work of Władysław Daszewski, the music was composed by Artur Malawski, and the

<sup>1</sup> "Bajm bawustn režiser Leon Schiller," an interview by Szmuel Lejb Sznajderman, *Literarische Bleter*, no. 1 (1927): 20–21, <https://cbj.jhi.pl/documents/747174/o/>.



Playbill for *The Tempest* dir.  
by Leon Schiller, Folks un Jugnt-  
Teater, Łódź, 1938

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choreography was by Tacjana Wysocka. The cast (according to the playbill) was: Prospero—Abram (Abraham) Morewski, Miranda—Cypora Fajnzylber (Zipora Feinzyliber), Ariel—Ester Goldenberg, Caliban—Mojżesz (Moshe) Lipman, Alonso—Daniel Szapiro (Shapiro), Ferdinand—Leon Kaswiner, Gonzalo—Solomon (Shlomo) Kon, Antonio—Symcha (Simcha) Rożen, Sebastian—Mojżesz (Moshe) Garbarz, Stephano—Władysław Godik, Trinculo—Abram (Abraham) Kurc, Boatswain—Salomon Rybak (Shlomo Ribak). The play was performed according to Aaron Zeitlin's translation.

Maksymilian Wiskind, listed in the playbill as director, was Schiller's student and had graduated from the directing department of PIST (State Institute of Theatrical Arts) in 1936. Wiskind's fellow students at PIST remember that he was favored and respected by Schiller. After graduation, he worked for

the Vilna Troupe, making a name for himself as a talented director. He was presumably murdered during World War II, in Ponary, near Vilnius. In 1952, recalling the graduation performances of the PIST Theater Workshop, Schiller mentioned his “lamentable memory of Maksymilian Wiskind.” In his work on *The Tempest*, he was of invaluable support to Schiller, who did not know Yiddish himself.

The Łódź premiere in October of 1938, and the Warsaw performance in the spring of 1939, became artistic, social, and political events in the Jewish community, especially within the intellectual circles. A correspondent of the Cracow-based *Nowy Dziennik* (a Polish-language Jewish newspaper) wrote:

The announcement that Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, interpreted by Aaron Zeitlin and staged by Leon Schiller would be performed on the Jewish stage in Łódź sparked lively interest in the city's cultural circles, which grew and extended to wider circles when the premiere date was postponed twice, all the more so since it was generally known that this was done out of a willingness to prepare the performance as meticulously as possible. A celebratory mood prevailed in the hall and foyer of the Philharmonic, adopting a festive form. This mood intensified moment by moment as leading representatives of Jewish cultural life in Łódź began to appear in the audience, as well as numerous representatives of the Warsaw press, and also when word spread that Schiller, Wysocka—the ballet director, and Daszewski—the costume and set designer, as well as the translator and numerous guests from Warsaw had come to Łódź to see the performance.<sup>2</sup>

During the “celebration of the Jewish stage,” as the opening night was pompously described, Polish actors along with Łódź theater director Aleksander Rodziewicz, had also shown up.

<sup>2</sup> L.G., “Szekspir na scenie żydowskiej: Otwarcie sezonu teatralnego w Łodzi,” *Nowy Dziennik*, May 13, 1938, morning edition. I'd like to thank Mariola Szydłowska for finding this article in the Jagiellonian Library. Certainly Yiddish-language magazines ran articles about the staging of *The Tempest*, both in Łódź and in Warsaw. Only publications from the Polish-language press were used here, and probably not all of them. For example, a set from the newspaper *5-ta Rano*, from 1939, is missing, where, I assume, Jacek Frühling's review was printed. Apart from quotes from *Nowy Dziennik*, the following articles were used: Władysław Polak, “W fotelu i za kulisami: Burza Szekspira w inscenizacji Leona Schillera na scenie żydowskiej,” *Głos Poranny*, October 20, 1938; “Uroczysta premiera *Burzy* w Filharmonii łódzkiej,” *Nasz Przegląd*, October 11, 1938; Jakub Appenzlak, “Teatr żydowski w polskiej koncepcji,” *Nasz Przegląd*, October 13, 1938, 11, <https://cbj.jhi.pl/documents/921234/10/>; Leon Finkelstein, “*Burza Szekspira* po żydowsku,” *Nasz Przegląd*, October 16, 1938; Eli Baruchin, “Święto teatru żydowskiego w Łodzi,” *Nasz Przegląd*, October 17, 1938 [here an excerpt from Schiller's speech, not used in his bibliography]; “Wielki spektakl teatralny w stolicy,” *Nasz Przegląd*, April 24, 1939; Jakub Appenzlak, “Scena żydowska: *Burza*,” *Nasz Przegląd*, May 8, 1939.

# דער שטורעם

א שפיל אין 8 בילדער פון וויליאם שעקספיר

מיט א פראָלאָג און עפילאָג

פערזאָנען:

פראָספּעראָ, דער אמת'ער מילאָנער פירשט . . . . .	אברהם מאָרעווסקי
מיראַנדאַ, זיין טאָכטער . . . . .	צפורה פיינזילבער
אַרעל, אַ גייסט . . . . .	אסתר גאלדענבערג
קאַליבאַן, אַ ווילדער מענטש . . . . .	משה ליפּמאַן
אַלאָנזאָ, קעניג פון נעאַפּאָל . . . . .	דניאל שאַפירא
פּערדינאַנד, זיין זון . . . . .	לעאָן קאַסווינער
גאַנזאַל, דעם קעניגס אָנפאַרטויער . . . . .	שלמה קאַן
אַנטאָניאַ, פראָספּעראָ'ס ברודער . . . . .	שמחה ראזען
סעבאַסטיאַן, דעם קעניגס ברודער . . . . .	משה גאַרבאַרוש
סטעפּאַניאַ, דעם קעניגס שר המשקים . . . . .	וולאַדיסלאָו גאַדיק
טרינקולאַ, אַ ליץ . . . . .	אברהם קורץ
באַטסמאַן . . . . .	שלמה ריבאַק

מאַטראָסן, הויפּלייט, גייסטער.

הפסקות:

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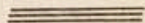
# Burza

William Szekspira.

## OSOBY:

Prospero, prawdziwy książę mediolański	ABRAM MOREWSKI
Miranda, jego córka . . . . .	CYPORA FAJNZYLBER
Ariel, duch powietrzny . . . . .	ESTERA GOLDENBERG
Kaliban, dziki człowiek . . . . .	MOJŻESZ LIPMAN
Alonzo, król neapolitański . . . . .	DANIEL SZAPIRO
Ferdynand, syn króla neapolitańskiego . . . . .	LEON KASWINER
Gonzalo, powiernik króla . . . . .	SALOMON KON
Antonio, przywłascz. księstwa mediol. . . . .	SYMCHA ROZEN
Sebastian, brat króla neapolitańskiego . . . . .	MOJŻESZ GARBARZ
Stafano, piwniczny królewski . . . . .	WŁADYSŁAW GODIK
Trynkulo, trefniś . . . . .	ABRAM KURC
Bosman . . . . .	SALOMON RYBAK

Marynarze, dworzanie, duchy.



Inspektor sceny: S. SZEFTEL

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“The huge audience hall of the Philharmonic,” further quoting quoting *Nowy Dziennik*, “seating over twelve hundred viewers, was filled to the brim with a crowd excited, solemn and affected by the gravity of the moment.”

There was an enthusiastic applause for the artists when the curtain raised, and this enthusiasm took on an almost exuberant character when, after the performance was over, Director Mazo appeared on stage and gave a short speech, after which Leon Schiller, Aaron Zeitlin, Tacjana Wysocka, and Władysław Daszewski showed themselves among the artists. Such a rousing ovation is rarely seen in theaters.

The ovation, according to *Nasz Przegląd*, lasted “for several minutes.”

By November 20, more than thirty performances had been given in Łódź, always to a packed audience, often twice a day. People “came in throngs” from Warsaw and other cities to see the performance. A special evening conversation, a so-called “live review,” was held at the Jewish Cultural Society on October 28, 1938, attended by director Mordechaj Mazo, editor L. Rozenberg, and Prof. Nachman Blumental. Warsaw’s first showing was held at the Teatr Nowości on April 28, 1939, and by June 4 it had been played more than 20 times (also offering matinees). The *Nasz Przegląd* newspaper reported, “an audience overflowing with Jewish intelligentsia,” and “*The Tempest*—the topic of Warsaw,” though just to be clear—Jewish Warsaw. The Polish press was silent.<sup>3</sup> Even *Wiadomości Literackie*, a weekly Polish cultural magazine, usually keenly interested in what Leon Schiller was doing, remained silent.

But let’s go back to Łódź. The premiere was followed by a banquet, during which several speeches were given. The editor-in-chief of *Nasz Przegląd*, an excellent theater critic, Jakub Appenzlak, noted that the performance “had opened a new chapter in the history of Jewish theater in Poland.” He stressed that it had also its national aspect. For it was a combined effort of both Jewish

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<sup>3</sup> The topic “Shakespeare and the Jews” had appeared in the press, but in a very peculiar way. On April 4, 1939, Teatr Polski in Warsaw held the premiere of *Hamlet*, staged by Aleksander Węgielko. Stanisław Piasecki in *Prosto z Mostu*, a weekly right-winged literary magazine, was outraged as to “why exactly now” the usually deleted scene was reinstated of the march of Fortinbras’s army. He observed “the pacifist recommendations of Hamlet, who wonders for what reason a battle should be fought between Poles and invaders over a patch of empty land” This ineptitude “is somehow unnoticed . . . only by Mr. Szyfman and Mr. Węgielko,” Stanisław Piasecki, “*Hamlet i Cyrulik sewilski*,” *Prosto z mostu*, no. 16 (1939): 8. Antoni Słonimski laughed at the bizarre insinuations in *Wiadomości Literackie*, writing that Piasecki is apparently suggesting here “a Jewish-Hitler alliance,” Antoni Słonimski, “Kronika tygodniowa,” *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 26 (1939).



artists and the representatives of Polish art, who both rose above the various racist currents so fashionable these days. Polish art gave the nomadic Jewish theater the priceless gift of pointing it towards the concept of true art.

Editor Jecheskiel Mojsze Najman wrote: "to the Polish artists, who in these difficult times for Jewish people, gave their cooperation and proved their brotherhood with Jewish artists, tribute and recognition is due." Corresponding phrases were heard in many other speeches. The banquet, which lasted until dawn, ended with a "beautiful speech" by Abraham Morewski: "I thought that my dreams of seeing Shakespeare on the Jewish stage would never come true." He continued

I firmly believe that if we Jews, the olden wanderers of the world, in an age of picket lines and broken windows, can break away from this reality and create such a beautiful Shakespearean show we will also survive the storm raging all around us.

The not-so-distant future was to contradict this optimistic vision in extremely atrocious ways.

Leon Schiller was also among the speakers. Raising a toast to the Jewish theater, he said,

I am sincerely touched by the reception I have received from the Jewish audience, as well as from our artistic Jewish brothers. It has been pointed out here that my cooperation with a Jewish ensemble is, in a way, symbolic. I adamantly state that there is no heroism whatsoever on my part, nor on the part of my fellow Christians, who have worked with me, in putting together this magnificent Shakespearean piece.

A team that rose to such an artistic level deserves the utmost help. I have always held the artistic Jewish theater in high regard. Today's performance of *The Tempest*, especially the inspired performances of such artists as Morewski, Lipman, and others, must garner recognition for this theater. I do hope that the Jewish theater can now finally break from its nomadic existence, so that when the circumstances become more favorable, it can diligently work on the development of Jewish art.

The newspapers in Łódź had also noticed "the fact that the finest representatives of the Polish theatrical world collaborated" with the Jewish theater, "in times of triumphant racism." A similar tone was seen in the spring of 1939, during the performances in Warsaw, underlining the importance of the show "especially in the present, when it is so difficult to get out of the shackles of reality." And the reality of late 1938 and the spring of 1939 was indeed full of dramatic, as well

as shame-inducing events foreboding the dark days of the near future: Hitler's success in Munich, the German occupation of the Sudetenland, the incursion of Polish troops into Trans-Olza, the pogroms of Jews in Germany and the Kristallnacht, the waves of Jewish refugees escaping the Third Reich, the death of Pope Pius XI (who was sympathetic towards Poland, where mourning services took place in all Polish synagogues), the decree of the Polish president abolishing Freemasonry, Hitler's April speech demanding Danzig and the Polish Corridor, Polish foreign minister Beck's decisive negative reply in the Polish parliament, Germany seizing Klaipeda and entering Prague—the fall of Czechoslovakia, a rushed armament in Poland—fundraisers for the National Defense Fund and air defense loans (which were met with appeals from tzadiks towards the Jewish community to pitch in). In Poland anti-Semitic violence was on the rise—the breaking of windows, graffiti on walls,<sup>4</sup> the picketing of Jewish stores and stalls, incidents at universities, ghetto benches,<sup>5</sup> and a disgusting racist campaign by the nationalist press. It was on the eve of the Łódź premiere of *The Tempest* that we found the newspapers reporting on the notorious assault on Father Tadeusz Puder, while he was conducting mass at Warsaw's Dominican church, who was of Jewish descent.

Włodzimierz Słobodnik, horrified by the news coming from Germany, wrote in a poem about Heine:

Over the Rhine's sapphire today  
 The bard's spirit has lost his way. . .  
 He looks for mermaids in vain,  
 There are none—there's only SA.<sup>6</sup>

*A March into Darkness* was foreseen by another poet, Władysław Szlengel, who is regrettably quite overlooked today:

Where will the bloodbath begin anew  
 Where will the borders be sealed shut?  
 What will follow? What will happen tomorrow?  
 Stop! Why are you marching into the darkness?  
 Europe is dancing—dancing in lunacy

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<sup>4</sup> *Głos Poranny* reported on December 5, 1938 that Marian Zyber was sentenced, in Łódź, to seven days in jail "for painting anti-Jewish slogans," which is probably worth noting today.

<sup>5</sup> In February 1939 in Lviv, a Jan Kazimierz University professor, and former prime minister, Kazimierz Bartel, gave a speech in the Polish senate protesting "anti-Semitic terror at universities"

<sup>6</sup> Włodzimierz Słobodnik, "Heine," *Nasz Przegląd*, February 19, 1939.



Abram Morewski as Prospero in  
*The Tempest* dir. by Leon Schiller,  
Folks un Jugnt-Teater, Łódź, 1938

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On a stack of newspapers lambet-walk.<sup>7</sup>

No wonder that within that hostile environment the reviewers (in fact there were not many of them) elicited anything from the play that countered the approaching “times of contempt.” For Jakub Appenzlak, *The Tempest* was “an apologia for human freedom, unfettered thought, the legitimate power of good versus the ignorance, stupidity, and exploitation practiced by the usurping powers.” The critic pointed out that Stephano’s words “Thought is free” were given by Schiller to Ariel instead, and treated as a chorus. *Nowy Dziennik* stated, “In the past, Shakespeare’s most profound work, *The Tempest*, was made into an opera.

<sup>7</sup> Władysław Szlengel, “Lambet-walk,” *Nasz Przegląd*, November 27, 1938. A few of Szlengel’s pre-war poems have been reprinted in various Polish anthologies. His collected poems were published as *Co czytałem umarłym: Wiersze getta warszawskiego*, ed. Irena Maciejewska (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1977).



*The Tempest* dir. by Leon Schiller, Folks un Jugnt-Teater, Łódź, 1938

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But it was the Jewish theater that captured, and suitably emphasized, the proper meaning of the play, the struggle between the man of books and Caliban. (“Remember / First to possess his books; for without them / He’s but a sot,” says the bankrupt Caliban to his ally.) The press also wrote that Schiller’s staging “fills people of goodwill with encouragement and hope,” especially the finale scene, which inspires optimism at a time “when one has the impression that Prospero really died in the storm, and Caliban has become the sole ruler of the world.”

However, it was not only the “astonishingly clear, transparent interpretation revealing the humanistic significance of the play” and its timely message that moved the audience. The artistic shape of the show was admired as well. This

is evident by comparing it to Habima. In the opinion of Jewish viewers, this was the highest compliment: “some parts are worthy of Habima.” Appenzlak hoped that just as Vakhtangov had shaped Habima, Schiller would influence Jewish theater.

*Nasz Przegląd* called *The Tempest* the “greatest achievement” of Jewish theater in Poland, and the Łódź-based *Głos Poranny* believed that the production “brings honor to the Jewish stage,” where often “surrogates” and “trumpetry”<sup>8</sup> appear. Till this day, Aleksander Bardini is of a similar opinion, maintaining that Schiller’s staging (he watched the Warsaw production) was an exceptional event not only in regard to Jewish theaters, where “folk rubbish” and “vulgarity” prevailed (in order to appeal to the needs of unrefined audiences), but was an outstanding artistic phenomenon in the theatrical panorama of Warsaw of its time. The performance, especially Morewski’s role, made a great impression on Erwin Axer, who believed that the staging at the Jewish theater was superior to the one at the Polish Army Theater after World War II. Prominent Jerusalem-based historian of Jewish literature and theater Chone Szmeruk, a student at the University of Warsaw at the time, remembers *The Tempest* as a high-profile event among the Jewish intellectuals. In particular, recalling Daszewski’s “bright and extremely colorful sets and costumes.”

“Nine pictures changed in less than two and a half hours, lightly and swiftly as if on a revolving stage,” raved a reviewer from *Republika*. Władysław Daszewski had to overcome tremendous technical difficulties, yet managed to create one of his best artworks. Today, his work on *The Tempest* is ranked among the best in the history of Polish set design. Years later he recalled:

We went to Łódź, Schiller and I, to survey the stage. And what did we see? A stage only four meters deep! *The Tempest*—there is so much going on there! Schiller, eloquently, in his own way, talked to me about the numerous places of action. Then came summer, vacations, and we parted ways. I took a copy of the play with me. I studied the Shakespearean stage. I understood the author’s information—“Prospero on top,” as “on the top floor.” Hence the idea to build a horizontal structure, a platform for the characters of Ariel and Prospero. The platform was narrow, one meter deep—kind of risky! It was these conditions that brought about the idea. The producer provided the resources, wanted a set suitable for a traveling theater, a kind that does not

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<sup>8</sup> Hence the joy expressed by *Nasz Przegląd* on May 3, 1939, that the level of Jewish theater was high enough to “carry the weight of such an impressive show!” The author of this article would like to thank Aleksander Bardini, Erwin Axer, and Chone Szmeruk for their input regarding the staging of *The Tempest*.

have a permanent stage and workshop. My idea of the design for the prologue was to enclose everything in a circle, and mine also was the idea of an old map as a background. Schiller liked old symbols, magic, so he suggested zodiac signs all around and an inscription on the map: “Totus mundus histrionem agit.”<sup>9</sup> Schiller also thought of Ariel as three different persons setting fire to the ship. I remember the applause of the audience was so loud that it would often drown out the words.

I became accustomed to this idea of a two-level stage in *The Tempest*. So the stage design in the 1947 production at the Polish Army Theater was a repetition, but also an expansion of it, under relatively better conditions. We had lifts there, and stage equipment in general; it was a real stage, not a bandstand. Only the convention remained the same, a two-story Shakespeare theater, adapted to a shallow but wide stage.<sup>10</sup>

Very little was written about the actors, much like today. Of course, attention was paid to Morewski, in the role of Prospero. Abraham (Abram) Morewski (1866–1964) was an actor, director, and translator, and is counted among the most outstanding Jewish actors of the twentieth century. Born in Vilnius, he studied at Aleksei Suvorin’s acting school in St. Petersburg. Up until 1918, he played in Russian theaters, where he specialized in major Shakespearean roles. After the First World War, he transferred to the Jewish stage in Vilnius, where he created many outstanding roles, including those in *Uriel Acosta* and *The Dybbuk*. He enjoyed great success performing across Europe, the USA, and South America. He was an admirer of and expert on Shakespeare and wrote a study on Shylock. During World War II he went back to work in Russian theaters. He later returned to Poland in 1956, where he performed at the State Jewish Theater. His staging of *The Dybbuk*, and his role as Tzadik, were highly celebrated. He wrote a two-volume memoir.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> It seems that the inspiration for the decoration element with the circle and zodiac signs was Richard Teschner’s famous puppet stage. Schiller was certainly familiar with Teschner’s theater from his visits to Vienna.

<sup>10</sup> Władysław Daszewski, “Kilka uwag o współpracy z Schillerem,” *Dialog* 19, no. 5 (1974): 77–80. Reprinted in *Ostatni romantyk sceny polskiej: Wspomnienia o Leonie Schillerze*, ed. Jerzy Timoszewicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1990), 166–167.

<sup>11</sup> Marian (Meir) Melman, “Zmarł Abraham Morewski,” *Nasz Głos*, supplement to *Fołks-Sztytyme*, February 21, 1964; Andrzej Wróblewski, “Abraham Morewski (1886–1964),” *Teatr*, no. 9 (1964): 17. See also: Awrom Morewski, “Do góry nogami (o wartościach stałych i ocenach chwilowych): Postacie w utworach Szekspira okiem aktora żydowskiego,” trans. Salomon Dykman, *Teatr*, no. 10 (1960): 15–17. In Morewski’s album, kept at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the playbill of *The Tempest* and as many as seven photographs have been preserved. It is the largest number of photographic clippings from a single play the actor had performed in.





Abram Morewski as Prospero in  
*The Tempest* dir. by Leon Schiller,  
Folks un Jugnt-Teater, Łódź, 1938

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Other than words of praise and admiration, little is left to bear witness to the actor who was Prospero. He portrayed “a wise man and sorcerer, who was filled with bitterness.” A reviewer for *Republika* mentions,

the lively reactions of the audience, rationally and instinctively sympathizing with the prince of philosophers, who overcame evil earthly powers and animalistic human instincts, conjured melancholy in the minds of the oppressors and the oppressed, reminding us that existence is short and wrapped in slumber.

However, the actor’s voice indisposition, which he managed to overcome, was noted (Chone Szmeruk remembers Morewski’s hoarse voice to this day).

Honorable mentions were given to Esther Goldenberg (Ariel), Mojżesz Lipman (Caliban), and Cypora Fajnzylber (Miranda), and special recognition was given to Władysław Godik in the role of Stephano, who, “gifted with a natural *vis comica*,” introducing “bawdy humor of the noblest sort” used “measures full



*The Tempest's* finale. From left: Władysław Godik (Stephano), Abram Kurc (Trinculo), Abram Morewski (Prospero), Estera Goldenberg (Ariel), Mojżesz Lipman (Caliban), Cyprya Fajnzylber (Miranda), Leon Kaswiner (Ferdinand), Folks un Jugnt-Teater, Łódź, 1938

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of moderation and civility.” It was probably then that Godik caught the attention of Schiller, with whom he later created his highly acclaimed performance, this time in a tragic aura, on the stage of the Teatr Polski, in 1949, where he played Bitkov in Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Last Days*.

It will be difficult to reconstruct the image of the staging from these bits. But even the few and faint testimonies that we have allow us to recognize the principal interpretive concept. It seems to be fundamentally different from the earlier ones, those from the early 1930s. At the time Schiller was a politically

committed leftist and expressed his views of the time using *The Tempest*: “I had been apprenticing to Prospero for a long time . . . Until I was finally persuaded by Caliban, joining his flock.”<sup>12</sup> In 1938, he returned to Prospero again, and Caliban became a symbol of the new barbarism, a brown-shirted one. It is significant that in staging *The Tempest* after the war, Schiller once again, as Edward Csató wrote, “tried to give Caliban’s rebellion a social context.” But at the same time, Prospero’s character, and the tone of the entire production, spoke “of the triumph of rationalism, and the victory of human reasoning.” The desire to connect the two interpretations, for “he could not decide which one to give up on,” became “a crack that interfered in a comprehensive reception.” This is probably the reason why the pre-war staging is considered superior in comparison.<sup>13</sup>

The 1947 performance, awarded at the Polish Shakespeare Festival, was widely covered and commented on, and has passed into the history of Shakespeare’s stage plays in Poland, and into the body of literature on Leon Schiller. The staging at Folks un Jugnt-Teater has been forgotten. Perhaps it is not worth contemplating why. After all, it took place at a time when only few showed signs of solidarity with the oppressed, like Professor Tadeusz Kotarbiński, who lectured while standing, to show unity with the Jewish students, propping up the walls of an auditorium, forbidden to sit.

Only the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust remembered *The Tempest*, which preceded the historical storm yet to come by only a few months. A quarter of a century later, in 1964, in an article commemorating the tenth anniversary of Schiller’s death, published in Tel Aviv, Michał (Michael) Weichert wrote:

The year was 1938, and anti-Semitism was spreading across Poland like wild-fire, preaching a full economic boycott of Jews and venting itself in assaults on Jewish students at universities and in pogroms at Jewish stalls in cities and towns. The staging of the play on a Jewish stage, by such prominent members of Polish theater as Schiller and Daszewski, was not only an act of great civil courage, but also a strong demonstration against the regime and the political forces promoting anti-Semitism.

The premiere of *The Tempest* took place in Łódź, in October 1938, and was a true celebration of Jewish theater. We admired not only Schiller’s mastery of staging and directing, for that’s what we are used to, but also a high level

<sup>12</sup> Leon Schiller, “Uwspółcześnienie teatru lwowskiego,” *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 33 (1930): 1. This pseudo-interview Schiller signed using the pseudonym Richard Judym. <https://fbc.pionier.net.pl/view/nnh5n49?p=2>.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Csató, “O niektórych powojennych inscenizacjach Schillerowskich,” *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 4, no. 3/4 (1955): 265–317. Reprinted in *Dwie strony rampy* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1956).

of balanced ensemble acting that he was able to bring out in Jewish actors of the old school, who, with the exception of Abraham Morewski (Prospero), thought little of Shakespeare's dramatic world. Mojżesz Lipman in the role of Caliban, Władysław Godik and Abraham Kurc as Trinculo and Stephano, and Estera Goldenberg as Ariel, created Shakespearean-sized characters that became deeply engraved in the memory of Jewish audiences.<sup>14</sup>

Today, a historian of Jewish theater states:

Teatr Nowości's 1938/39 season was to be the last, but it had a wonderful finale. After Ida Kaminska's troupe, Folks un Jugnt-Teater, under the direction of Klara Segalowicz performed there, giving an extremely ambitious production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, directed by a Pole, Leon Schiller. Some consider it to be the best performance of Jewish theater they have ever seen.<sup>15</sup>

Translated by Maciej Mahler

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<sup>14</sup> Michał Weichert, "Leon Schiller a żydowski teatr," *Od Nowa*, no. 12 (1964). Reprinted in *Ostatni romantyk sceny polskiej*, 266–272.

<sup>15</sup> Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1986), 335.

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