

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Between Realms: The Island as a Liminal Space of Redemption and Fantasy in 'the Tempest' and 'Lost'

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This article embarks on a comparative analysis to uncover the role of the island as a liminal space in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the television series *Lost*, exploring its function in facilitating redemption, fantasy, and transformation. The study elucidates how both narratives utilize the island not merely as a setting but as a crucial catalyst for character evolution and thematic depth. Through an examination of geographical, temporal, and psychological dimensions of liminality, the article demonstrates the island's pivotal role as a space where human complexity, the quest for identity, and aspirations towards redemption unfold. The comparative inquiry highlights narrative and thematic correspondences, underlining the interpretive richness offered by the concept of liminality within literary and media studies. This analysis accentuates the enduring significance of liminal spaces in fostering significant personal and collective transformations, despite disparities in medium and historical context.

Introduction

This article endeavors to elucidate the multifaceted nature of the island as a liminal space, instrumental in facilitating processes of redemption, fantasy, and transformation within William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the contemporary American TV series *Lost*. By scrutinizing the island's function as a delineator of physical, temporal, psychological, and social boundaries, this analysis unveils the manner in which these narratives do not merely employ the setting as a backdrop for unfolding events but rather as an essential catalyst for the evolution of character and thematic profundity. Through a methodical comparative analysis, this study demonstrates how the inherent liminality of the island acts as a pivotal arena for the unraveling of human complexity, the existential quest for identity, and the aspiration towards redemption. This exposition underscores the perpetual significance of such spaces in precipitating significant personal and collective transformations. Despite the disparities in medium and historical context, both texts similarly deploy the motif of the island as a liminal zone—a domain of transition,

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ambiguity, and potential metamorphosis—thereby probing the contours of identity, society, and reality. This comparative inquiry not only illuminates narrative and thematic correspondences but also accentuates the interpretative richness derived from applying the concept of liminality as an analytical lens within literary and media studies.

Liminality, an anthropological concept first coined by Arnold van Gennep (1909) and developed by Victor Turner, refers to a transitional phase where individuals or narratives exist “betwixt and between” structured positions within society (Turner, 1991, p. 95). In literary and media studies, liminality highlights the in-between spaces that characters, plots, and audiences occupy as they transition from one state to another, offering rich possibilities for exploring ambiguity, transformation, and renewal. In literature, liminal spaces—whether physical, temporal, or psychological—are where conventional boundaries dissolve, allowing characters to undergo significant transformations in identity and self (Thomassen, 2009). These spaces, such as unknown territories or otherworldly realms, facilitate self-discovery, redemption, and the renegotiation of personal and social values (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Szakolczai, 2009).

Liminality in narrative settings, such as islands, desolate landscapes, or blurred realities, forces characters to confront their deepest fears and contradictions. These spaces evoke transformation through symbolic and narrative techniques that challenge perceptions of reality (Zipes, 1979). For example, the isolated island settings in *The Tempest* and *Lost* function not just as backdrops but as crucibles for character evolution. As Grydehøj (2020, p. 15) notes, islands often create an illusion of self-containment, stripping characters of societal roles and compelling them to redefine their core selves. This isolation intensifies their psychological and existential journeys, reflecting broader questions of identity, morality, and societal constructs. In both texts, the island represents the ambiguous and transitional nature of life itself, serving as a powerful metaphor for human transformation.

The two texts under examination are William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the contemporary American TV series *Lost*, which are profoundly anchored in the unique settings of mysterious islands that play a pivotal role beyond mere backdrops to the unfolding dramas. These islands are not only crucial to the physical narrative but imbue the stories with symbolic depth, serving as liminal spaces where conventional reality is blurred, and characters undergo significant transformations.

The Tempest, believed to be one of Shakespeare's last plays, written around 1610-1611, unfolds on a remote, enchanted island. Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan and a master magician, has been exiled onto this island together with his daughter, Miranda. The play begins with Prospero conjuring a storm to bring his usurping brother Antonio and other complicit nobles to the island to exact his revenge. However, the island becomes much more than a stage for retribution; it is a place of magic, transformation, and reconciliation. Through the interactions between the shipwrecked courtiers,

Prospero's enslaved spirits (most notably Ariel), and the island's original inhabitant, Caliban, the play interrogates themes of power, freedom, and forgiveness. The island, with its ethereal qualities and Prospero's control over its natural and supernatural elements, highlights the play's exploration of art, illusion, and the nature of authority. It is a liminal space where characters are stripped off their social hierarchies and are compelled to confront their desires, flaws, and capacities for change.

Lost, a critically acclaimed television series aired from 2004 to 2010, begins with the crash of Oceanic Flight 815 on an unidentified island in the Pacific Ocean. The survivors find themselves in an environment replete with inexplicable phenomena, including mysterious structures, a strange group of inhabitants known as "the Others," and supernatural occurrences. The island, with its shifting landscapes and hidden powers, becomes a character in its own right, a crucible for the survivors. It forces them to confront their pasts, challenges their understanding of reality, and compels them toward personal growth and discovery. The island's mysterious properties — such as its apparent ability to heal injuries, manipulate time, and summon visions of the dead — deepen the narrative's exploration of fate, free will, and the quest for redemption. The setting emphasizes the themes of survival, identity, and the human capacity for change, underscoring the series' complex narrative structure and character development.

In both *The Tempest* and *Lost*, the island setting transcends its role as mere location to become a driving force within the narrative framework, a space where the boundaries of the known world are transcended, and characters are tested and transformed. These islands serve as mirrors reflecting the characters' innermost selves and as gateways to realms of possibility and change. They encapsulate the essence of liminality—being thresholds that characters must navigate, offering opportunities for redemption, self-discovery, and the reevaluation of values and beliefs. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome (1980/1987), we can understand the fragmented narratives of *The Tempest* and *Lost* as creating a network of connectivity, where themes of transformation and identity are interwoven in complex, non-linear ways. The rhizomatic structure, characterized by its multiple entry points and interconnected nodes, mirrors the non-linear, episodic structure of *Lost*, where the narrative unfolds through a series of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and temporal shifts. Similarly, *The Tempest* employs a multi-layered narrative where time, magic, and power interweave unpredictably, reflecting the complexity of human experience and the fluidity of identity.

The differences between the stage play and serialized television also significantly affect how these themes are experienced by the audience. In *The Tempest*, the temporal constraints of a live stage play compress the narrative into a concentrated experience, where the audience witnesses the transformation of characters like Prospero in real-time, within the confines of a single performance. This immediacy heightens the sense of liminality,

as the audience is drawn into the magical world of the island and the rapid unfolding of events. In contrast, *Lost*'s drawn-out, episodic structure allows for a more gradual exploration of liminality. The series' non-linear narrative, spread across multiple seasons, gives viewers time to engage with the evolving mysteries of the island and the characters' extended journeys of self-discovery. This serialized format mirrors the rhizomatic structure proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, where the narrative can be entered at multiple points and connections between themes, characters, and events are continually reconfigured. Through these differing mediums, *The Tempest* and *Lost* both utilize the island setting as a liminal space that drives their respective narratives forward, but they do so in ways that reflect the unique possibilities and constraints of stage and screen. The island, in both works, becomes a central node in a rhizomatic network, where time, identity, and power are constantly in flux, challenging characters and audiences alike to reconsider their understanding of the world and their place within it.

Literature Review

The scholarly discourse on island fiction encapsulates a nuanced examination of islands not merely as geographical entities but as rich narrative devices that intersect with themes of spatiality, identity, and metaphor within literary and cultural studies. Central to the conversation are Crane and Fletcher's seminal works (2016, 2017), which introduce the concept of "performative geographies," positing that the depiction of islands in literature is a dynamic process that both influences and is influenced by narrative genres and reader perceptions. This foundational perspective opens avenues for exploring how islands function within narratives, not just as settings but as active agents in shaping genre conventions. However, their analysis, while pioneering, occasionally skirts the complexity of island representations across diverse cultural contexts, suggesting a potential oversight of non-Western literary traditions. Expanding the discourse, Fletcher (2011) advocates for an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates literary analysis, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory, enriching the understanding of island narratives through the lens of colonial and postcolonial identities. This comprehensive framework, though insightful, risks overshadowing the distinctiveness of individual island stories within the larger postcolonial narrative. Graziadei et al. (2017) further the dialogue by proposing "island poetics," a framework that emphasizes the sensory and experiential dimensions of island life, offering a novel perspective on the interaction between individuals and island spaces. This approach, while refreshing, raises questions regarding its universal applicability, particularly in non-Western contexts where cultural specificities might shape perceptions of island spaces differently. Kinane (2016) focuses on the evolution of the Robinsonade genre, exploring contemporary reimaginings of traditional island motifs. This investigation highlights the adaptability of island tropes, though it is somewhat limited by its primary focus on Western narratives, missing opportunities for cross-cultural analysis. Riquet (2019) contributes to the field with an examination of the aesthetics

of island spaces, advocating for a “geopoetic” approach. This valuable perspective underscores the intertwined nature of physical geography and imaginative creation in constructing island spaces. Yet, this focus may underplay the tangible realities faced by island communities, such as environmental and socio-economic challenges. To further enrich this discourse, incorporating broader perspectives from global literatures and acknowledging works like Bongie’s (1998) and DeLoughrey’s (2007) explorations of empire, exile, and the cultural trajectories of island narratives, alongside Hau’ofa’s (1994) vision of interconnected island communities, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of island representations.

In short, while existing scholarship on island fiction offers insightful analyses into the roles and representations of islands in literature, it also presents avenues for critical expansion. Although earlier studies have provided valuable groundwork by identifying islands as significant literary motifs, they sometimes lacked the depth or interdisciplinary approach necessary to fully articulate the islands’ roles as thresholds of transformation. This article, through its detailed comparative analysis and theoretical grounding, not only fills these gaps but also opens new avenues for future research into the liminal capacities of island spaces across various media and genres.

The scholarly landscape surrounding *The Tempest* and *Lost* reflects a vibrant discourse on the intertextual echoes and thematic resonances between Shakespeare’s canonical work and the modern narrative intricacies of the television series. A rich body of research has engaged with themes of isolation, power, identity, and the boundaries of societal and metaphysical constructs, which unveils a fascinating exploration of narrative and thematic resonances that transcend time and medium. Barnes (2015) and Hatchuel & Laist (2016) establish foundational parallels between the two narratives, highlighting the use of island settings as platforms for narrative development and character transformation. While Barnes emphasizes geographical and cosmographical reflections, Hatchuel and Laist focus on the structural and thematic semblances to Shakespearean romance. Furthermore, Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of Renaissance self-fashioning (1980) provides a useful framework for understanding how *The Tempest* reflects notions of identity typical of Renaissance England. Prospero’s manipulation of events on the island can be seen as a reflection of the Renaissance humanist drive for self-creation, where identity is both constructed and performed. These perspectives initiate a compelling conversation about the adaptation of early modern motifs in contemporary storytelling. Expanding this discourse, Heyer (2013) situates *Lost* within the Robinsonnade genre, tracing its literary lineage to *Robinson Crusoe* and, by extension, *The Tempest*. This genre-centric approach enriches the understanding of island narratives as frameworks for exploring survival, civilization, and moral introspection. *Lost*’s engagement with postmodern themes, such as the destabilization of grand narratives and the fragmentation of identity, resonates with contemporary philosophical concerns about subjectivity and truth. Favard (2016) delves into *Lost*’s narrative complexity,

examining the series' employment of "mystery boxes" to engage viewers in a multilayered interpretive process. Favard's analysis underscores the sophistication of *Lost*'s narrative structure, drawing indirect parallels to the thematic depth of *The Tempest*. Kotarscak (2015) and Martin (2017) offer nuanced insights into the power dynamics and spectacle within the play, enriching the dialogue with considerations of authority and subjugation. Zimmerman (2010) further extends this analysis to *Lost*, exploring the series through a hermeneutic lens that reveals the island as a heterotopic space of societal critique and transformation.

Despite these contributions, the existing scholarship exhibits limitations in its scope and depth of analysis. Many studies engage with thematic and narrative parallels without fully addressing the overarching concept of liminality that operates across geographical, temporal, psychological, and social dimensions. This oversight narrows the potential for understanding the complex interplay between character and setting, transformation and identity, across both works. This article builds on previous scholarship by offering a comparative examination of liminality in *The Tempest* and *Lost*, highlighting how these works utilize liminal spaces to explore identity and transformation. It articulates how the island motif serves as a catalyst for profound personal growth and societal reconfiguration, illuminating the multifaceted roles islands play beyond mere backdrops. This analysis not only synthesizes geographical, temporal, and psychological perspectives but also highlights the enduring relevance of liminal spaces in narrative storytelling. Hence, this paper is an attempt to contribute to existing scholarship by identifying thematic parallels in liminality across time and media, offering insights that can be further explored in future research.

Analysis of the Island Image in *The Tempest* and *Lost*

1) The Island as a Geographical Liminal Space

In *The Tempest*, as well as in *Lost*, the geographical isolation of the island setting is pivotal, serving as a stark boundary between the known world and the realm of the unknown. This isolation is not merely physical but symbolizes the characters' separation from their lived experiences and societal norms, thrusting them into a space where the conventional rules are no longer applicable. The island becomes a threshold between reality and something far more profound, mysterious, and transformative. This isolation is not merely a physical separation but a thematic device that profoundly impacts character development, narrative progression, and thematic exploration in both narratives.

In *The Tempest*, the island's geographical isolation is meticulously crafted as a realm starkly distinct from the structured society of Milan, portraying a vivid contrast that transcends mere physical separation to delve into the thematic exploration of power, freedom, and the supernatural. Shakespeare harnesses the island's isolation not only to delineate a clear demarcation from the familiar world but to establish a domain where the natural laws are

subverted by the whims of magic, thus fabricating a liminal space teetering on the edges of the known and the mystical. This strategic geographical setting allows the playwright to explore control—both over nature and humanity—and the liberation from societal norms and expectations. Governed by Prospero's magical prowess "according to the father-king model" (Kotarscak, 2015, p. 49), the island becomes a testament to the sheer force of human will to bend the fabric of reality. It embodies a space where the constraints of physical and societal laws yield to the extraordinary, underscoring the island's role as a domain where natural laws are subject to the will of magic and the supernatural (Kingsley-Smith, 2003, p. 160). More than just a backdrop, the island functions as a site where the boundaries between power and subjugation, freedom and captivity, are constantly negotiated. The relationship between Prospero and Caliban exemplifies this dynamic, with Prospero's dominion over the island symbolizing the broader themes of colonial control and the subjugation of the "Other." The island, as a microcosm, highlights the dichotomies of power and servitude, where Prospero's use of magic to control Caliban and Ariel mirrors the coercive mechanisms of colonial domination. This tension between ruler and subject not only reflects Renaissance ideas of authority but also prefigures postcolonial critiques of the play, which view the island as a site of colonial exploitation and resistance. Caliban's resistance to Prospero's control, and his assertion of the island as his own, brings to the fore the struggle for autonomy and identity within the confines of imposed power structures.

It is within this isolated domain that Shakespeare weaves a complex tapestry of themes, using the island's detachment from the conventional world to underscore the potency of the unseen and the unknown. The very isolation of the island imbues it with the capacity to act as a crucible for exploring autonomy, the ethics of power, and the potential for redemption and transformation that lie beyond the purview of ordinary existence. By situating the narrative in a place untouched by the direct influence of European society and its hierarchical structures, Shakespeare invites the audience to ponder the fundamental nature of authority and the liberating potential of stepping outside the boundaries of the known world. The supernatural becomes a conduit for revealing deeper truths about human existence, while the island itself symbolizes both the potential for control and the possibilities for rebellion and transformation. This also reflects the Renaissance fascination with the limits of human understanding and the potential of the unknown, or "supernatural intervention in the affairs of humanity" (Patterson, 2019, p. 16).

Lost's island emerges as an enigmatic sanctuary, its geographical isolation manifesting not only as a natural barrier but as a conduit to a realm brimming with mysteries that defy conventional understanding. The island is personified as "a creature with its own will," (Berendeeva, 2009, p. 60) with Locke famously asserting that "the island will send us a sign" (S01e19). This isolation encapsulates a dual nature; it is at once a picturesque escape and a

source of profound menace, hosting a myriad of inexplicable phenomena that render it a nexus of the unexplainable and the extraordinary. However, the island's role transcends its physical seclusion—it becomes an active force that shapes the characters' existential crises, driving them toward self-discovery, redemption, or despair. Moreover, the island functions as a place of trials and transformation, akin to a mythological underworld or a spiritual pilgrimage site where characters are tested and purified. Its array of mysterious properties, "including wild boars, polar bears, disease, and the infamous black smoke that judges a person's character before annihilating them," (T. Anderson, 2008, p. 70) crafts a setting that is as captivating as it is unsettling. These phenomena are not random; they seem to be manifestations of the island's will, orchestrating events that force the characters to confront their deepest fears and unresolved traumas. This aligns the island with the archetypal hero's journey, where isolation and confrontation with the unknown are necessary for transformation and enlightenment.

Lost utilizes the island's isolation to delve deep into themes of mystery and the unknown, pushing the boundaries of the viewers' suspension of disbelief and inviting them into a world where the ordinary laws of nature and science hold no sway. The island becomes a mirror reflecting humanity's innate fascination with and fear of the uncharted and the unseen, challenging both characters and the audience to question their perceptions of reality. The landscape, as González (2017) suggests, shapes the way people conceptualize and give meaning to their world and location. Thus, the island's secluded nature not only accentuates its allure but also its danger, making it a labyrinth of secrets where the natural and supernatural collide and intertwine.

In this sense, the island is not just a setting but a spiritual crucible, a place where characters undergo trials that are as much about the mysteries within themselves as about the island itself. By confronting the unknown, the characters embark on a journey of spiritual and existential significance, echoing mythological narratives where heroes must venture into the unknown to gain wisdom or achieve redemption. *Lost* "creates its own mythology and symbolism, and the setting of a desert island serves as an ideal location for an alternative lifestyle to become possible" (Jeschke, 2012, p. 1), positioning the island as a liminal space that facilitates profound personal and collective transformation. Through its portrayal of the island, *Lost* articulates a complex dialogue between humanity and the mysteries of existence, using the island's geographical isolation as a pivotal element that propels the narrative into realms of mystery, exploration, and the speculative. The series masterfully captures the essence of the unknown, using the island not merely as a setting for survival and discovery, but as a narrative device that invites contemplation of the mysteries lying just beyond human understanding. In the liminal spaces between the known and the unknowable, the island's isolation becomes a profound catalyst for exploring the human condition, elevating the series into a seminal exploration of existential themes and spiritual trials.

Both narratives utilize the concept of the island as a geographical liminal space, but they differ significantly in their representations, reflecting their distinct narrative purposes, themes, and the mediums through which they are conveyed. In the play, the island is a carefully constructed stage where Shakespeare explores themes of power, control, and the moral implications of authority and forgiveness. The geographical isolation of the island from Milan serves as a microcosm for Prospero to exercise his magic, manipulate natural and supernatural elements, and orchestrate a complex plan for revenge and reconciliation. The island's liminality is closely tied to Prospero's magical intervention, which suspends the ordinary laws of nature and society, allowing for the exploration of human agency, transformation, and the restoration of order. The geographical isolation here is utilized to highlight the Renaissance fascination with magic, the unknown, and the potential for human enlightenment and transformation within the bounds of a controlled, almost theatrical setting. The island's separation from the known world facilitates a narrative where characters can confront and resolve their past conflicts in a concentrated, introspective environment.

Conversely, *Lost* presents its island not just as a backdrop for narrative developments but as an almost sentient entity with its own mysteries and rules. The series' use of the island as a geographical liminal space delves into modern existential dilemmas, touching on themes of destiny, identity, and the human struggle for meaning in an ambiguous world. Unlike *The Tempest*, where the island's isolation is a stage for Prospero's machinations, in *Lost*, the island's geographical isolation propels a diverse group of characters into situations that challenge their understanding of reality, ethics, and interpersonal relationships. The island's mysterious properties — time distortions, healing abilities, and seemingly supernatural occurrences — serve not to advance a single individual's agenda but to explore the collective human experience of facing the unknown. *Lost* uses the concept of geographical liminality to push its characters and the audience to question the nature of reality, the power of fate versus free will, and the complexity of human connections in the face of existential uncertainty.

Hence, while both narratives utilize the island as a liminal space to explore themes beyond the ordinary confines of society and reality, *The Tempest* focuses on the transformation and redemption of its characters within a magically charged, isolated environment. Whereas *Lost* leverages the island's geographical isolation to weave a complex tapestry of mystery and human experience, reflecting contemporary concerns with identity, community, and the search for meaning in a chaotic and unpredictable universe. The differences in their representation of the island underscore the varied ways geographical liminality can be employed to navigate the boundaries between the known and the unknown, serving as a powerful narrative device that resonates across different eras and mediums.

2) The Island as a Temporal Liminal Domain

The play *The Tempest* and the television series *Lost* employ innovative narrative techniques that manipulate time, creating a sense of temporal dislocation that deepens thematic exploration and character development. Liminality, carrying the trait of “in-between-ness,” not only creates “a zone of ambivalence” (Zhang & Lin, 2021, p. 38), but also “forms and states [that] problematize the notion of temporal linearity from the past to the present and to the future” (p. 37). The temporal manipulations serve to disorient the audience and characters alike, drawing them into a more profound engagement with the narrative’s underlying themes and emotional currents. The island serves as a catalyst for this reflection, providing a space where the usual linear progression of time is disrupted, together with “disruption to natural story chronology” (Bentley, 2020, p. 155) and “the disruption to the traditional cause and effect structures” (p. 177), hence, the characters are given the opportunity to redefine themselves.

In his play, Shakespeare employs temporal compression and magic as pivotal narrative tools, effectively manipulating the passage of time and perception to deepen thematic resonance and character development. The entire play unfolds within a single day, contrasting sharply with the extensive backstory of Prospero’s twelve-year exile and Miranda’s growth — from a little girl into womanhood, thereby creating a profound sense of temporal dislocation. The audience is made acutely aware of the time that has passed and the rapid pace at which significant changes are occurring on the island. The play’s temporal structure allows characters to undergo significant changes in a relatively short period, highlighting the island’s capacity to accelerate personal growth and resolution. For example, the rapid development of the relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda, as “Ferdinand’s passion for Miranda develops in no time,” (Sultan & al-Khawaldeh, 2010, p. 262) set against the backdrop of Prospero’s long-term plotting, suggests a timelessness where profound connections and revelations become possible. This compression not only enhances the narrative’s urgency but also its magical ambience, accentuating the island’s role as a liminal space where conventional time and reality are suspended. The use of magic by Prospero further distorts the sense of time as he manipulates the environment and the perceptions of the other characters, creating illusions that blur the lines between past, present, and future as is “emblematic of Shakespeare’s interest in the playful conflation of past, present and future” (Fretz, 2021, p. 96). His magical manipulation of events and characters not only underscores the themes of illusion versus reality and the potential for change but also establishes the island as a timeless realm. This narrative approach, where time is both compressed and distorted through magic, serves to highlight the transformative power of the island setting, where characters are compelled to confront their past actions and embrace the possibility of redemption and reconciliation, free from the linear constraints of time.

In *Lost*, the intricate use of non-linear storytelling, encompassing flashbacks, flash-forwards, and, notably in its later seasons, flash-sideways, intricately weaves together a narrative rich in complexity that delves into the characters' pasts, presents, and speculative alternate realities. This methodical narrative structure permits a profound understanding of the characters, unveiling their motivations, traumas, and defining life events, both prior to and subsequent to the plane crash. The employment of flashbacks extensively details individual backstories, linking past experiences directly to the characters' current predicaments and actions within the island's confines. Flash-forwards introduce a layer of narrative complexity, disclosing certain characters' fates post-departure from the island and the repercussions of their choices. The introduction of flash-sideways in the concluding season presents alternative timelines, thus challenging the audience's perceptions of the characters' destinies and the island's inherent nature. This non-linear narrative engenders a temporal dislocation, oscillating across varied timelines and realities, accentuating themes of destiny versus free will as the characters endeavor to align their desires with their circumstances amidst navigating their multifaceted temporal realities. This narrative technique creates a complex temporal landscape, or "a universe in which time is not immutable...that disrupts natural chronology," (Bentley, 2020, p. 39) where the characters' lives before and after the crash are in constant dialogue, underscores the island's enigmatic attributes that enable time to operate differently. Furthermore, *Lost* intricately explores temporal liminality, utilizing its complex narrative to compel the Oceanic Flight 815 survivors to confront and reconcile with their personal histories, occasionally altering their life trajectories. The island acts as a reflective catalyst, disrupting the traditional linear time progression, which, in tandem with the narrative's non-linear fabric, posits the island beyond conventional time constraints. This provides a unique space for characters to challenge their past actions, envisage alternate life courses, and redefine their identities. The manipulation of time not only deepens the narrative's exploration of identity, redemption, and the interconnectedness of the characters' lives, but also "stress the mysterious abilities of the island" (Berendeeva, 2009, p. 112). Flashbacks illuminate pivotal events shaping the characters, while flash-forwards and flash-sideways offer glimpses into potential futures, emphasizing destiny's fluidity and the significant impact of personal choices. Characters like Jack Shephard and John Locke face profound temporal dislocation, prompting them to reevaluate their beliefs, motivations, and the essence of their existence on the island, thus driving critical decision-making moments that influence their actions and interrelations on the island. This temporal dislocation invites audiences to reflect on the problematic nature of time, memory, and the possibility of change, reinforcing the power of narrative to transcend the ordinary limitations of human experience, as Miles observes that "our experiences in the past and the future occurred before these experiences right now" (S05e11). Through its narrative complexity, *Lost* not only delves

into the transformative power of temporal liminality but also invites contemplation on the nature of time, identity, and the potential for personal reinvention.

As discussed above, both texts employ the motif of an island as a pivotal temporal liminal space, yet they do so to distinctly different ends, reflecting not only their unique narrative structures but also the profound cultural and philosophical underpinnings of their respective eras. Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, embedded within the early modern period's fascination with exploration and the burgeoning curiosity about the "New World," utilizes the island's temporal liminality to explore themes of power, reconciliation, and the transformative potential of forgiveness. The island, under Prospero's magical dominion, becomes a stage where characters are compelled to confront their past actions and moral failings within a compressed timeline that underscores the urgency of human redemption and enlightenment. This temporal manipulation reflects a Renaissance engagement with the human capacity for moral and spiritual renewal, using the island's isolation to strip characters of their societal roles and confront the essence of their identities in a concentrated, almost alchemical process of transformation.

Conversely, *Lost* unfolds in the early 21st century, a period marked by global interconnectedness, existential uncertainty, and a cultural zeitgeist deeply influenced by postmodern skepticism and the narrative possibilities opened by new media. The series' intricate use of non-linear storytelling and the island's mysterious temporal anomalies delve into contemporary anxieties about identity, destiny, and the search for meaning in a fragmented world. The island serves as a crucible for the characters' personal histories, traumas, and aspirations, with the series' temporal dislocations — flashbacks, flash-forwards, and flash-sideways — creating a narrative labyrinth where characters navigate the complexities of their lives across multiple realities. This narrative strategy not only engages with postmodern concerns about the nature of reality and the fluidity of identity but also offers a meditation on the human condition that resonates with a contemporary audience's experience of time as nonlinear and reality as multifaceted. Through its temporal liminality, *Lost* articulates a 21st-century existential inquiry, using the island's ambiguity as a space for characters (and by extension, viewers) to explore the "what ifs" of their lives, challenging deterministic views of destiny and championing the potential for personal reinvention.

In sum, while both *The Tempest* and *Lost* leverage the temporal liminality of the island setting to engage with the themes of transformation and identity, their approaches reflect the distinct cultural and philosophical inquiries of their times. Shakespeare's play, rooted in Renaissance ideals, presents the island as a space for concentrated moral reflection and renewal, highlighting the human capacity for change. In contrast, *Lost* embodies postmodern preoccupations, using the island's temporal complexity to probe deeper into the existential dilemmas of choice, identity, and the search for meaning in an

uncertain world. Together, these narratives offer a rich tapestry of how the concept of temporal liminality can be deployed across different mediums and epochs to explore enduring questions of the human experience.

3) The Island as a Psychological Liminal Space for Character Development and Transformation

The play and the series both emerge as quintessential examples that leverage the motif of island isolation as a catalyst for profound psychological exploration. This analytical focus elucidates how the deliberate employment of geographical seclusion not only physically estranges the characters from their familiar societal contexts but also precipitates a deep introspective journey, compelling them to confront the labyrinthine recesses of their psyche — encompassing inner fears, unacknowledged desires, and moral dilemmas. The island, in its isolation, functions as an existential crucible, a space meticulously crafted to dismantle the facades and distractions of societal life, thus thrusting characters into an unmediated engagement with their core selves. This process of introspection, induced by the liminal conditions of the island, serves as a narrative mechanism through which Shakespeare and the creators of *Lost* explore the multifaceted dimensions of human consciousness and psychological development. By abstracting the characters from their conventional social roles and networks, the narratives construct a liminal space — both literal and figurative — that facilitates a recalibration of personal identity and moral compass, as is noted by Berendeeva (2009) that in *Lost* “the island and the situation of the crash gives the perfect opportunity for a moral growth and evolution” (pp. 85-86). The character development and transformation has been impressive, as “Sawyer went from selfish con man to lead. Ben has gone the gamut as well, starting as a weaselly villain and turning into a sympathetic, if not pathetic, character” (Pruzanski, 2015, p. 27). Hence, the liminal nature of the island serves as a powerful catalyst for the psychological journey and transformation of key characters. By comparing these transformations, we can observe how the settings not only challenge the characters’ perceptions of reality but also offer opportunities for profound personal growth and redemption.

In the play, Prospero, the ousted Duke of Milan, uses his sorcery to control the island and its inhabitants. His time on the island represents a period of introspection and transformation, as “Prospero...transforms their identity in the process” (Vanhaudenarde, 2019, p. 31) and “imposes roles ‘on the likeliest performers’ and changes the nature of one’s personality” (p. 32), allowing for introspection and growth, culminating in acts of forgiveness and the relinquishing of power. Prospero’s manipulation of the island’s elements and inhabitants to achieve his ends highlights his journey from control to release, symbolized by his final act of freeing Ariel and renouncing his magical powers. The physical separation from Milan enables Prospero to reflect on

the nature of power and authority, and doubt “the certainty and probability his ‘art’” (Abdel-Hamid, 2015, p. 502): “We are such stuff /As dreams are made on; and out little life /Is rounded with a sleep” (Act IV, Scene I).

One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
 Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?
 Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
 Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
 Do I take part; the rarer action is
 In virtue than in vengeance. (Act V, Scene 1)

And this doubt and reflection finally leads to his eventual renunciation of magic and reconciliation with his past. This thematic arc suggests that isolation can lead to profound personal growth and redemption. John Locke, in *Lost*, similarly, undergoes a significant transformation facilitated by the island's mysterious properties. Paralyzed before arriving on the island, Locke regains the use of his legs, which he interprets as a sign of his special destiny. Locke's belief in the island's purpose and his own transformation from a man of doubt to a man of faith encapsulate his psychological journey. Both Prospero and Locke utilize the island's liminal qualities to redefine their identities as well as the meaning of being, though their paths diverge in Locke's continued belief in the island as his destiny versus Prospero's decision to return to society.

Caliban, the son of the witch Sycorax, is the island's original inhabitant enslaved by Prospero. His character represents the darker side of the island's liminality, struggling with feelings of betrayal, anger, and longing for freedom. We can see that Caliban's transformation is subtle, marked by moments of insight and resistance against his subjugation, reflecting the complexity of his character caught between his nature and his desire for recognition and autonomy, as recognized by Smith that “Caliban does change at the end of the play because his negativity has been stopped, and his higher nature reveals itself... While Prospero is being transformed, Caliban is being civilized — an important parallel in the total transformation of the psyche” (1978, pp. 36–37). Caliban's transformation from subjugated “monster” to a figure who achieves a degree of self-awareness parallels Sawyer's evolution from a con man driven by vengeance to a leader compelled by his deeper moral instincts. In *Lost*, James “Sawyer” Ford is marked by a troubled past and a penchant for self-preservation at the expense of others. The island forces Sawyer to confront his past, particularly his unresolved trauma surrounding the con man who caused his parents' deaths, leading to a profound re-examination of his own identity. Sawyer's transformation is one of emotional opening and integration into the community, moving from an outsider to a leader and protector, mirroring Caliban's struggle for identity and acceptance but with a trajectory toward redemption and connection.

The psychological journeys and transformations of these characters underscore the profound impact of the island's liminal nature on their development. While Prospero and Locke grapple with power and destiny, Caliban and Sawyer, though vastly different in their narratives, both confront their identities and the possibilities of change within the confines of their environments. The island, as a space removed from the conventional flow of time and society, forces each character to confront their innermost fears, desires, and traumas, facilitating moments of significant personal growth and redefinition. Through these transformative journeys, *The Tempest* and *Lost* explore themes of identity, power, redemption, and the human capacity for change, highlighting the enduring relevance of liminal spaces in narrative storytelling for probing the depths of the human psyche. Such narrative strategies underscore the island's role not merely as a setting but as an active participant in the characters' transformative journeys, since "the island and the situation of the crash gives the perfect opportunity for a moral growth and evolution" (Berendeeva, 2009, pp. 85–86). This liminal space, marked by its isolation, becomes a reflective mirror, revealing to characters the unexamined aspects of their being and propelling them towards an evolutionary trajectory of self-discovery and change. Subsequently, the isolation of the island transcends its physicality, assuming a psychological dimension that challenges characters to navigate the complexities of their internal worlds, thereby fostering an environment ripe for personal growth and the resolution of existential quandaries.

Despite both narratives harnessing the concept to delve into the intricacies of human psychology and existential themes, certain differences in their portrayal exist owing to the distinct narrative objectives and historical and cultural contexts. Shakespeare's play positions the island as a controlled environment orchestrated by Prospero, where the island's isolation serves as a stage for moral and personal reckoning. Prospero, wielding magic, manipulates the island's environment and its inhabitants to exact revenge, reflect on his thirst for power, and eventually, to seek reconciliation and forgiveness. The psychological liminality in *The Tempest* is thus closely linked to Prospero's internal journey from vengeance to forgiveness, highlighting the Renaissance humanist themes of redemption, the nature of power, and the capacity for personal transformation through introspection. The island, reflective of Prospero's psyche, facilitates a focused exploration of these themes, where characters are confronted with their past deeds and moral choices in a setting removed from societal norms. This use of the island reflects the early modern period's engagement with notions of authority, control, and the transformative power of forgiveness within the confines of individual conscience and societal restoration. Just as Prospero's storm forces the shipwrecked characters into a space of transformation, the crash of Oceanic Flight 815 similarly thrusts the survivors into a space where their identities and relationships are constantly tested and redefined. *Lost* presents the island as an inherently mysterious and unpredictable force,

replete with its own will and supernatural phenomena that challenge the survivors' understanding of reality and self. The series employs the island's psychological liminality not as a backdrop for a single individual's journey but as a multifaceted landscape where each character confronts personal demons, unresolved traumas, and existential questions. This narrative choice reflects contemporary concerns with identity, destiny, and the human condition in a postmodern world characterized by uncertainty and fragmentation. The survivors' experiences on the island — marked by flashbacks, flash-forwards, and alternate realities — reveal the complexities of their characters and the potential for change in the face of adversity. Unlike *The Tempest* where the island's liminality is orchestrated for specific ends, *Lost* explores the spontaneous and often chaotic nature of personal transformation within an environment that defies logical explanation, emphasizing themes of fate, free will, and the interconnectedness of human experiences.

The differences stem from their distinct narrative intentions and the cultural-historical contexts of their creation. *The Tempest*, written in the early 17th century, reflects Renaissance engagements with humanism, authority, and the reconciliation of personal desires with social harmony. The island serves as a controlled setting for exploring these themes, with Prospero's magic symbolizing the ability to shape one's destiny and seek redemption. *Lost*, instead, as a contemporary creation, mirrors contemporary existential anxieties, the questioning of grand narratives, and a fascination with the unknown and the supernatural. Its portrayal of the island encapsulates the complexities of modern life, emphasizing the unpredictability of personal growth within a globalized, technologically advanced, and culturally diverse world.

4) The Island as a Catalyst for Social Refiguration

On top of the aforesaid functions, the island setting, in a broader sense, also plays a crucial role in disrupting existing social hierarchies and norms, effectively creating a liminal space that allows for the experimentation with and reconfiguration of new social structures. This disruption forces characters to reassess their roles, relationships, and the power dynamics that govern their interactions, offering a unique lens through which to explore themes of authority, community, and social order. *The Tempest* has long been interpreted as a metaphor for colonial encounter, with "the isolated Caribbean island, as the locus of an early imperial excursion" (Hanafy, 2005, p. 1). Just as Su (2022) argued that "Caribbean islands can be read as both (...) spaces of resistance and (...) spaces of transformation" (p. 74), *The Tempest* island, as well as that of *Lost*, carries the same features. The islands somehow become thresholds where traditional structures, norms, and hierarchies are temporarily suspended, allowing for the possibility of new forms of social organization and identity; for that matter, such spaces serve as potent sites for the negotiation between reality and imagined communities, as well as between old societal forms and the emergence of newly constructed social orders.

Islands, by their very nature, are geographically distinct from mainland societies, encapsulating a physical and metaphorical separation that lends itself to the creation of imagined communities. These are not merely the product of fictional narratives but can also embody collective aspirations or ideological constructs within real-world contexts. The isolation of an island provides a blank canvas upon which both individuals and groups can project their visions of an ideal society, free from the constraints and prejudices of their originating cultures. This capacity to host imagined communities aligns with Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept, wherein communities are constructed through shared narratives and experiences, rather than through direct, face-to-face interactions. In this liminal space, the tangible realities of island life — the need for survival, cooperation, and the construction of a social order from the ground up — interact with the intangible dreams of what a community could be. The physical separation from the mainland acts as a barrier that keeps the prevailing social norms at bay, allowing the inhabitants to experiment with and embody alternative ways of living and organizing themselves.

In *The Tempest*, the island serves as a stage where Prospero, who was usurped and exiled, exercises absolute control over the environment and its inhabitants, including his daughter Miranda, the spirit Ariel, and the creature Caliban. This control upends traditional social hierarchies, placing Prospero at the top of the island's social order through his mastery of magic rather than through conventional political power or lineage, as "Caliban even evokes a hierarchal system to describe the authority that Prospero holds over him" (Boyko, 2018, p. 16). The island thus becomes a space where Prospero can re-imagine and reconstruct the social order to his design, primarily to secure his and Miranda's return to Milan and reestablish their rightful place in its hierarchy. The interactions between the characters also reflect experimentation with social structures. The relationship between Miranda and Ferdinand, for example, ignores the traditional political alliances and conflicts that might have influenced their unions at a European court, focusing instead on personal connections and mutual affections. Similarly, Caliban's rebellion against Prospero's authority represents a challenge to the imposed social order, highlighting the tensions and potential for conflict inherent in any social structure, especially those formed under conditions of inequality and subjugation, as Martin (2017) argues that "the history of society can be reduced to the struggle between master classes and slave classes, is relevant to each of the power-dynamics that Prospero institutes on the island" (p. 2).

Lost presents a more explicit exploration of the disruption of social hierarchies and the formation of new social structures, as Zimmerman (2010) points out that "the *LOST* island is also a place that changes function with the society that takes over" (p. 41). The survivors of the air crash come from diverse backgrounds, each bringing their own experiences, skills, and preconceptions about social order. The island strips them of their former

social statuses and forces them into a situation where practical skills, leadership abilities, and moral choices become the basis for authority and respect. Jack Shephard, a spinal surgeon, emerges as a leader not because of any pre-existing social status but because of his medical skills and willingness to make tough decisions for the group's survival. The character of John Locke, who was once marginalized because of his disability and purposelessness, finds new respect and significance within the group because of his survival skills and knowledge of the island. The dynamics among the survivors also reflect attempts to create a democratic system of decision-making, despite the challenges posed by differing opinions, priorities, and the stress of survival. The newly formed community on the island is further challenged by the Others as "group dynamics are shaken (...) when members of The Others either assist or infiltrate their camp" (T. Anderson, 2008, p. 71). Conflicts arise, alliances form, and leadership roles shift, reflecting the fluid nature of social structures under extreme conditions. The island becomes a microcosm for exploring the complexities of community building, authority, and the human need for order and connection.

Both narratives use the island setting to disrupt traditional social hierarchies and explore the formation of new social orders. While *The Tempest* focuses on Prospero's use of the island to restore and ultimately transform his and Miranda's social standing, *Lost* delves into the complexities of creating a new social structure among a group of strangers thrown together by circumstance. In both texts, the island acts as a catalyst for social experimentation, challenging characters to redefine their understanding of authority, community, and self in relation to others. Despite all these, their representations of the island as a catalyst for social change differ significantly, reflecting their distinct historical, cultural, and narrative contexts. These differences not only shape the portrayal of the island but also reveal the underlying causes related to the periods in which these works were created and the mediums through which they are conveyed.

The island in the play serves as a stage for a complex play of power, magic, and reconciliation. Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, uses his magical abilities to control the isle and its inhabitants. The island becomes a liminal space where Prospero can enact his plans for revenge and his eventual forgiveness of those who wronged him. The social refiguration here is largely top-down, driven by Prospero's desires and his control over the natural and supernatural elements of the island. Reflecting the humanist ideas of the Renaissance, the play focuses on individual agency, moral choice, and the capacity for redemption. Prospero's journey from vengeance to forgiveness mirrors the humanist belief in the potential for personal growth and transformation. Also, it embodies early colonial attitudes, with the island representing a "new world" to be shaped by European values and control, while Caliban's subjugation reflects the colonial view of indigenous peoples as savages needing to be civilized or dominated.

Conversely, *Lost* depicts the island as a deeply mysterious and almost sentient entity that brings out the deepest fears, desires, and potentials of its stranded inhabitants. Unlike the play where Prospero orchestrates the social reconfiguration, the island itself in *Lost* seems to force the characters to confront their pasts and themselves, leading to a more organic, albeit chaotic, form of social refiguration. The survivors are compelled to negotiate their relationships, leadership, and moral values anew, in a setting that continuously challenges their understanding of reality. Reflecting modern concerns, the series delves into issues of identity, trauma, and the quest for meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe. The narrative complexity and moral ambiguity mirror the uncertainties of the 21st century, emphasizing collective experiences over individual redemption. The series embodies postmodern themes of fragmentation and incertitude, the blurring of reality and fiction, and skepticism towards grand narratives. The island, with its unexplained phenomena and influence on the characters, serves as a metaphor for the postmodern condition, questioning the very nature of society and identity.

Conclusion

This article has intricately examined how the island in *The Tempest* and the television series *Lost*, far from being mere settings, acts as an instrumental force that fosters profound personal growth, social critique, and philosophical inquiry. The geographical, temporal, and psychological dimensions of liminality are illuminated, showcasing the islands' roles in challenging and reshaping the characters' perceptions of identity, community, and existence itself. Shakespeare's enchanted isle and the mysterious island of *Lost* transcend their physical boundaries to become spaces where reality and fantasy blur, where the old societal constructs are dismantled to make way for the new. This transition is not merely a narrative convenience but a reflection of the inherent human condition — a perpetual state of in-between-ness, navigating the thresholds of what was, what is, and what could be. These narratives, through their portrayal of islands, invite us to contemplate the transformative power of liminality in facilitating moments of significant change, offering insights into the dynamics of power, freedom, and the quest for redemption.

Furthermore, the comparison between the early 17th-century play and the early 21st-century series enriches our understanding of how liminal spaces are constructed and utilized across different mediums and epochs. While the former utilizes the island as a controlled environment for Prospero's magical machinations, reflecting Renaissance humanist themes of redemption and transformation, the latter presents a more organic and chaotic form of social reconfiguration prompted by the island's mysterious forces, mirroring contemporary existential anxieties and postmodern complexities. This divergence underscores the adaptability of the liminal space concept in probing the depths of the human psyche and society across varied narrative landscapes. The liminality of the islands bespeaks the human struggle with

uncertainty, the fluidity of identity, and the relentless quest for meaning and belonging in an ever-changing world. The two narratives, in their depiction of the island as a catalyst for social refiguration, further offer a rich tapestry of human resilience, adaptability, and the unyielding pursuit of self-discovery and communal harmony, inviting us to reimagine the boundaries of our own worlds and the potentialities that lie beyond the horizon.

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