

Radio

Aural experiences

My invitation to a prehearing of *The Tempest* made it fairly clear that this was to be an opportunity not simply to hear the play and the speaking of it, but to hear it in quadrophony—that is to say sound out of four loudspeakers, one in every corner of the room. The listener, placed at careful equidistance from them all, can then enjoy the original Super-Circumambient Aural Experience—and one thing to note about this is that it is not at present available in the home, nor without colossal outlay on equipment and the dedication of a special Aural Experience Chamber, is it ever likely to be.

Ian Cotterell produced and I think it must have been his intention to realize the isle full of noises by means of a faint background tapestry of sound—an excellent idea, but its translation into practice sounded too often like interference from some remote and avant garde continental station. It was another promising idea to render Ariel as if he were an inner voice, but again the effect was unfortunate—speaking his lines in a monotonous sibilant and fortissimo whisper, Ronnie Stevens sounded as if, struck down with laryngitis, he were trying to address a public meeting. If Prospero was ill-defined, the same could be said of most of the other characters—indeed of the whole cast the only ones to leave much impression were

Caliban (Patrick Stewart) and Goneril (Timothy Bateson). ^{Aural experiences} This back to my invitation to enjoy quadrophony, I cannot help wondering if the same concern had not dominated matters in the studio: wonders (and problems) of technology first, performance some way after.

In your modern radio playwright (with any luck) technique and content are so well integrated as to be inextricable. In fact, most people still write plays with sound effects—they demand nothing that couldn't be satisfied by some other medium. One of the few writers of whom this cannot be said is Gabriel Josipovici whose *A Life was* ^{as such, an unrepentant} drama is one of the few creative areas of radio and the one in which more than any other writers and producers have the impression of addressing the void. If playmakers need criticism, they need it particularly here. But I confess there have been good and non-dramatic things: Radio 3's *Issues of our Time* began well and should be worth following; another series of *This Island Now* was first class of its kind; likewise Brian Ford's documentary and phone-in, *Heart Attack*. Out there in the hard world of commerce, Tennessee Williams said to Marsha Hunt, "You mentioned me and some other playwright . . .". Yes sir. Shakespeare. But more of that another day.

David Wade