CHAPTER THREE: PORTRAIT OF A LADY

That the stage, and indeed scholarship, is subject to fashion seems only to have been acknowledged during the last fifty years. Michael Dobson cites a number of attacks made upon Thomas D'Urfey by his successors for plagiarism and indecency. [1] The point, as previously made, is that D'Urfey was attempting to capitalise on popular, *contemporary* taste. In exactly the same way, subsequent productions of the play reflect shifting attitudes.

Garrick's adaptation, like D'Urfey's, reflects its political and theatrical context. Having been criticised for 'unBritish' adaptations of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Cymbeline*, following *Harlequin's Invasions* and the composition of the song *Hearts of Oak*, ultimately emphasises Garrick's patriotism in establishing a final 'Pax Britannica' where no Roman tribute is paid.[2] However, this aspect alone does not explain its popularity.

Of the adaptations in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Garrick's is much the closest to Shakespeare's original – despite stringent excisions in Act 5. Following D'Urfey's practice, Garrick's adaptation transposes some scenes in order to facilitate changes of location and to make the best use of theatrical scenery. Any remaining masque-like elements move to Cloten's aubade in Act 2 scene 3; Jupiter and the soothsayer are cut. Dobson discusses at length Shakespeare's growing status as National Poet in the eighteenth century and Garrick's deliberate attempts to gain authority through identification with him (p.166-177). Garrick, however, purports to be simply shortening the play from theatrical expediency whilst "letting the sheer weight of Shakespeare's wording come across the footlights" as Stone puts it.[3]

Odell regards Garrick's as "the most accurate" of the eighteenth century acting versions, quoting Garrick's own justifications to "bring it within the Compass of a

Night's Entertainment".[4] George Winchester Stone, writing in 1975, sees this edition as "an excellent acting text […] injuring no important character in the excisions". [5] Thus Garrick, as a man of the theatre, seems to have been able to fit the play for the theatre of his time. Stone claims

> Such was his touch in text, inspired performance, and ensemble direction that […] he gave the town a taste for the play. [6]

Carol J Carlisle states that

> *Cymbeline* […] enjoyed one period of high popularity on the stage, and only one, since Shakespeare's own day: from 1761, when Garrick successfully revived it, until 1776, when he retired from the stage.[7]

Statistics would certainly seem to support this. The play was acted one hundred and seventy five times between 1751 and 1800, only seven of which were in Hawkins' 1759 adaptation. *Cymbeline* was the tenth most performed Shakespeare play in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the fourteenth most performed in the eighteenth century as a whole.[8] Between 1761 and 1776 it was performed one hundred and thirty-two times.[9] As with Shakespeare, it is perhaps Garrick's knowledge of the theatre, and his audience, that allows him to achieve this success.

Garrick's production won over some of the play's sternest critics. Francis Gentleman, who considered that Hawkins's drastic alteration was preferable for the "fanciful *reader*" had been, according to Stone "conquered by the skill of Garrick's *performance*" (my italics). Gentleman concedes

> *Cymbeline*, as it is now performed, stands a good chance of being a stock, or living play, as long as theatrical entertainments are in esteem.[10]

Gentleman, like Dr Johnson in his 1765 edition, ultimately regards the play, however well received it might be *on stage*, as intrinsically flawed. However, Gentleman's comments testify to its success as a piece of *theatre.*

The features that are commented on by eighteenth century reviewers provide an insight into what was regarded as important. Visual aspects (including the actresses' appearance) are clearly of interest – Garrick's production specifically advertised "new scenes and habits". [11] Acting, principally Garrick's, is commented on, as is the extent to which the production accords with current notions of good taste. An anonymous contemporary reviewer writing in the *Court Magazine* devotes the majority of his article to rather critical comments about Garrick's own performance, qualified comments on other actors and praise for Miss Bride, newly appearing on stage as Imogen. She apparently possessed an "agreeable" figure, and "ease in manner" despite her youth; her person appeared "extremely delicate" as the page and she was expected to make "a very useful actress" in the future. The article concludes with comments about the excellence of the scene painting, which "does no little honour to the abilities of the artist, and the judgement of the manager".[12] Another reviewer (March 1762) writing in *The Universal Museum* comments

> It is very strange that so admirable a piece as this play should have remained so long unacted; but at last Mr Garrick, to whose taste we owe so many excellent revived pieces, has brought it on the stage.[13]

He commends Garrick's performance as Posthumus, praising especially how he "discovered the emotions of his soul" at various dramatic moments. Catherine Alexander comments that at this period the "ability to feel and, most particularly, to display feeling – is the approved […] response". [14] Whilst the reviewer's comments on other actors are not uncritical, he concludes "It is a noble play, and its revival does honour to Mr Garrick's taste".

It can clearly be seen that when some non-contemporary writers laud or condemn particular adaptations or performances, they judge them not according to the values of the time in which they were produced, but by those of their own time.

William Winter, writing in 1916, doubts that *Cymbeline* can really have been successful in Garrick's 1761 adaptation. [15] He admits that Garrick's alterations are "deftly made" but claims that Garrick's own performance as Posthumus did not inspire much interest, querying the comment made by the contemporary review in the *Dramatic Censor* that he had "never [acted] more happily" than in the role. [16] Winter is certain that as Garrick excelled in tragic roles, this negates the possibility of his excellence in *Cymbeline.*

Writing from a late twentieth century perspective, Barbara Eaton argues Imogen's centrality, regretting that Garrick's adaptation gave the male roles excessive dominance. [17] She attributes to Sarah Siddons the development of Imogen as a starring role – overlooking the fact that Siddons played the role very infrequently (a total of fourteen times).[18] Although the actress gained a most profitable benefit night on Monday 29 January 1787, netting a total of £650 - £700 (her first London performance in the role), even by November 1787 Mrs Taylor had succeeded her.[19] This would suggest that it was the actress, not the role, who drew the audience on 29 January.

Eaton quotes James Boaden, Siddons's biographer, to prove that her Imogen was active and full of self-reliance. Because Siddons is known as the quintessential Lady Macbeth, Eaton claims that she therefore influenced the public's perception of Imogen. This, I suggest, is wishful thinking. Siddons may well have regarded Imogen as spirited and independent but rather than identifying her with the role, other writers have regarded it as one for which she was ill-suited. Sandra Richards quotes Boaden to prove Siddons's figure was unsuited for latter part of the play: "the breeches part […] needed a form less majestic". [20] William Winter also cites Boaden's comments, stating that although Siddons was superb with Iachimo, having

"exquisite variety of manner", her "majestic style and lofty beauty prevented sustainment of illusion" when dressed as a boy.[21]

In foregrounding Sarah Siddons, Eaton diminishes the claims of Helena Faucit (who played Imogen in Charles Macready's nineteenth century productions) to be the actress to whom Imogen's centrality can be attributed. She quotes Frederick Whyte's claim in *Actors of the Century* that Faucit was not pretty, her features "rugged and plain" although Wingate calls her "one of the loveliest" of his time (1895).[22] Eaton finds the identification of Imogen with a nineteenth and early twentieth century concept of idealised passive femininity hard to accept (as indeed did George Bernard Shaw).[23] Apart from the fact that the play is written by Shakespeare, whose status as National Poet in the eighteenth century, according to Julia Hankey, progresses to canonization in the nineteenth, probably the only reason that *Cymbeline* is still performed in the theatre after 1830 is the identification of Imogen as the perfect woman.[24] The iconic role becomes the essence of its theatricality.

This idealisation of Imogen can first be seen in Hazlitt's essays on Shakespeare's characters.[25] He regards Shakespeare as supreme in portraying "the true perfection of the female character" – self-effacing, submissive, and dutiful (p.3). His discussion of Imogen appears first in the volume; he sees her "unalterable fidelity" as the central issue of the play (p.8), applauding her creation as an "inimitable picture of modesty and self-denial". Similarly Anna Jameson, in 1832, eulogises Imogen as "the angel of light" whose "lovely presence pervades and animates the whole piece".[26] She gives a detailed analysis of the 'poem' as she calls *Cymbeline*, commenting (p.230) on her domestic skills as shown in her "neat cookery". She regards Imogen as a better role model than the comic heroines as she possesses "sense, truth and tender feeling" rather than "wit" (p.231).

It is these qualities with which Helena Faucit is associated by both Winter and Wingate. She had:

> [A] slender and beautiful person, innate dignity, alert and fine intelligence, keen perception, excessive sensibility, exceeding charm of personality, great refinement in nature and manner, an unconscious, unobtrusive instinct for propriety, inherent virtue and ardent feeling.[27]

As Hankey points out, though, it is because of this apparently submissive femininity that Faucit is often now overlooked in her portrayal of the role in favour of Sarah Siddons and Ellen Terry. Faucit herself did not see Imogen as passive. As with her portrayal of Lady Macbeth, her slight, feminine appearance may have given a gentler appearance to a strongly felt performance. Her portrayal of the character owed nothing to previous stage performances as she never saw Imogen acted on stage; the role had been a favourite in her solitary, imaginative childhood, when she acted out the Welsh scenes for her governess.[28] Unlike Ellen Terry, who found the role difficult, Faucit's detailed account of the character's motivation and personality shows huge understanding and empathy. She researched the role as thoroughly as any twentieth century Method actor. She claims to have "thought [her] thoughts and spoken [her] words".[29] This strong emotion was apparently conveyed to the audience – remarkably Faucit was criticised by some for being too vehement, too unfeminine in her denunciation of Iachimo.[30]

A play-bill for a performance on Wednesday 11 March 1857 at the Theatre-Royal, Edinburgh, gives insight into *Cymbeline*'s theatrical appeal at that time. The poster features Helena Faucit's name first, the font size of 'Faucit' being the largest used. '*Cymbeline'* as a title is second in size, just over half way down. 'Imogen by Miss Helen Faucit' is repeated under this, the other actors' names appearing subsequently in a much smaller font. Helena Faucit's name appears three times in the poster. Because Faucit has become famous for the role of Imogen, it is she who

would draw the popular crowd. By the mid-nineteenth century it is therefore a popular actress and "the divine Imogen" that primarily constitute the play's attraction.

To a certain extent this continues to be the case with Henry Irving's 1896 production. Henry James suggests that *Cymbeline* was chosen to give Ellen Terry the opportunity of playing the role. [31] Reviewers give much attention to Terry's acting, praising her emotional range and "gifts hitherto unsuspected". [32] Shaw gives a close analysis of the excellence of her playing in his piece in *The Saturday Review*. [33] This is somewhat ironic, however, as he had previously given her detailed instructions about her performance.[34] In his letter of 6 September 1896 (more than two weeks before opening night) he promised: "I will declare in the *Saturday Review* that your dramatic instinct and delicacy of feeling are guiding you", which, indeed, he does.[35] He is also, in his letter of 23 September, very critical of how she had spoken in Act 4 scene 2 "You actually bawled out the words "a headless man!" before you had half seen him." [36] He then advises her on how it *should* be done. In both this letter and his review, Shaw is very critical of the scenery, going so far as to claim that the "inappropriate prettiness and sunniness of the landscape scenery […] handicap Miss Ellen Terry." [37] In future she should (according to his letter of 25 September) "dictate the scene plot before you think of anything else – even of your dresses". [38] He concludes "At the Lyceum the scenery is always imagined pictorially instead of dramatically".[39]

Other critics do not seem to have regarded this as a disadvantage. Gordon Crosse writes:

> This was an instance of the artistic resources of the modern stage applied on the most splendid scale to a Shakespearean revival. [40]

The critic in *The Theatre* praises the design:

> The stage pictures are from first to last remarkable for the richness of their colouring – Mr. Alma Tadema vouches for their accuracy.[41]

Irving's acting edition of the play, which he categories as a comedy, devotes the page following the 'Persons Represented' to a list of the scenes, and their artists. This suggests that 'stage pictures' were considered to be at least as important at the end of the nineteenth century as they had been earlier. An annotated copy of the 1810 Kemble adaptation (essentially Garrick's script with minor alterations) for the 1837 Macready production lists twenty-four scenes comprising eleven different sets.[42] Carlisle, in her analysis of Macready's productions, comments on the realism used in bedchamber scene and the "painting of a mountainous landscape" for Wales. [43] She describes (p.149) the spectacular final battle that enabled the audience to see soldiers moving upstage through cut wooden flats. The same scenery was used in the Drury Lane production of 1864, attracting favourable comment.

> Most critics were charmed by the visual beauty of the new production – the *Morning Post* (19 Oct. 1864) described the furniture of Imogen's bedroom as 'one of the most elegant and effective specimens of stage upholstery the theatre has yet produced'. [44]

It is very likely, however, that in Victorian theatre not only has *Cymbeline* become a challenge because of the tendency is "to hug closer and closer to scenic illusion" but it fails to offer a central male role of sufficient status to satisfy the dominant actor-managers.[45] This could account for the growing infrequency of productions. Henry Irving, like Macready after 1843, played Iachimo. This can perhaps be explained by a taste for melodrama that drew audiences to the theatre in this period, and for which certain theatres, including Drury Lane, had a reputation. Irving's "spectral, ghoul-like" appearance in the bedroom scene was said to be in "the best Lyceum tradition". [46] Henry James describes experiencing "a shudder almost pantomimic" at this point. [47] Even Shaw describes it as "fresh and novel […] no

vulgar bagful of "points," but a true impersonation […] without a single lapse in the sustained beauty of its execution". He admits "I witnessed it with unqualified delight".[48]

Comments are mixed with regard to Irving's adaptation of the text. "To produce the play in its integrity would have been impossible" the *Athenaeum* reviewer writes as "large hunks […] are wholly unsuited to stage exposition as at present understood". [49] Warwick Bond approves of Irving's transposition of scenes to conclude Act 1 with the wager scene as it provides "a much better curtain".[50] Shaw, whilst conceding "For the purposes of the Lyceum […] *Cymbeline* had to be cut, and cut liberally", this should have been done by himself, not Irving who "does not merely cut plays: he disembowels them". [51] It seems clear, however, that Irving had a purpose behind his extensive excisions – although many of these substantially follow Garrick's. [52] The most surprising, perhaps, is the eventual deletion of the whole of Act 1 scene 3, Pisanio's account of Posthumus's departure, which reduces Imogen's role quite substantially.[53] One result of Irving's cuts is to allow Iachimo and his repentance to dominate the final act of the play. [54] Irving, like Garrick and Shakespeare before him, knew his theatre and his audience. His *Cymbeline*, therefore, is also produced with pragmatic theatrical considerations in mind. If Shaw's comment can be trusted, it seems to have worked – he describes the first night audience "proceed[ing] to roar until it dropped from exhaustion". [55]

---

[1] Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, pp.102, 103 quotes from Langbaine *An Account of the English Dramatic Poets*, and *Wit for Money, or, Poet Stutter*, 1691, and Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of English Stage* (1698)
[2] Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, pp.199-207
[3] George Winchester Stone, Jr., ' A Century of *Cymbeline*; or Garrick's Magic Touch' reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism* 15, p. 8
[4] George C. C. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1920), pp.336-90, exerted and reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, p.5
[5] George Winchester Stone, Jr., ' A Century of *Cymbeline*; or Garrick's Magic Touch' reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism* 15, p.10

[6] George Winchester Stone, Jr., ' A Century of *Cymbeline*; or Garrick's Magic Touch' reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, p.6
[7] Carol J Carlisle 'Macready's production of *Cymbeline*' in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage* ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge, CUP, 1986), p.138
[8] Charles Beecher Hogan, *Shakespeare in the Theatre 1701 – 1880: A Record of Performances* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.716
[9] George Winchester Stone, Jr., ' A Century of Cymbeline; or Garrick's Magic Touch' in *Philological Quarterly*, 54.1 (1975), pp.310-322 reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, ed. by Sandra L Williamson (Detroit, London: Gale Research inc., 1991), p.6
[10] Francis Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor* quoted by George Winchester Stone, Jr., ' A Century of Cymbeline; or Garrick's Magic Touch' reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism* 15, pp.5,6
[11] Pedicord and Bergmann, eds., *The Plays of David Garrick* vol. 4 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: South Illinois University Press, 1981), frontispiece
[12] 'The Green Room, no. III', *Court Magazine*, 1761, pp.171-73 reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, p.4
[13] Review, *Universal Museum* reprinted in Brian Vickers ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage: 1753-1765*, vol. 4, (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp.463-64.
[14] Catherine M. S. Alexander, ' Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century: Criticism and Research' in *Shakespeare Survey*, 51 (1998), p.15
[15] William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage* (New York, London: Benjamin Bloom, 1916), p.73
[16] Francis Gentleman, Review, *Dramatic Censor* quoted by William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p.72
[17] Barbara L Eaton 'Shakespeare's Imogen: The Development of a Starring Role' in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 13. 2, (1995), pp.28-29
[18] Charles Beecher Hogan, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, pp.183-84
[19] George Winchester Stone, Jr., ' A Century of Cymbeline; or Garrick's Magic Touch' reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, p.6
[20] J. Boaden *The Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble* (London: 1925), quoted by Sandra Richards, in *The Rise of the English Actress* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.72
[21] William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p.102
[22] William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p.105
C.E.L.Wingate, *Shakespeare's Heroines on the Stage* (New York: Crowell & Co., 1895), p.126
[23] Wilson, Edwin, ed., *An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare* (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1961), p.40
[24] Julia Hankey 'Helen Faucit and Shakespeare: Womanly Theatre' in *Cross Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-visions of Shakespeare* ed. by Marianne Novy (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.65
[25] William Hazlitt, *Characters from Shakespeare's Plays (1817)* ed. by Humphrey Milford (London: OUP, 1916)
[26] Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of women, moral, poetical, and historical* 1832 (London: Bell & Sons, 1879), p.213
[27] William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage*, p.105
[28] Julia Hankey 'Helen Faucit and Shakespeare: Womanly Theatre', pp.59-60
[29] Faucit, Helena (Lady Martin) *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (Edinburgh & London: Blackwood & Sons, 1891), introduction
[30] Carol J Carlisle 'Macready's production of Cymbeline', p.144
[31] Henry James 'Mr Henry Irving's production of Cymbeline' *Harper's Weekly*, XL, 21 November 1896, p.1150 reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, p.41
[32] Anonymous review, *Athenaeum*, 26 September 1896, pp.427-28 reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 15, p.31
[33] George Bernard Shaw, 'Blaming the Bard', *Saturday Review*, 26 September 1896, reprinted in Wilson, Edwin, ed., *An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare*, pp.49-56
[34] George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897* ed. by Dan H Lawrence (London: Max Reinhardt, 1965), pp.642-666
[35] George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897*, p.648
[36] George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897*, p.665
[37] George Bernard Shaw, 'Blaming the Bard', *Saturday Review*

[38] Wilson, Edwin, ed., *An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare*, p.49
[39] George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1874-1897*, p.666
[40] Gordon Crosse, *Shakespearean Performance I seen*, vol. 1, pp.107 -114, reprinted in Russell Jackson '*Cymbeline* in the Nineteenth Century' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 1971)
[41] Anonymous review, *Theatre*, XXVIII (1 October 1896), pp.212-15
[42] Shakespeare, William, *Cymbeline* adapted by John Philip Kemble (London: Oxberry Acting Edition, 1810) prompt copy 1837 – 1864, pencil annotations on inside cover
[43] Carol J Carlisle 'Macready's production of *Cymbeline*', p.147
[44] Carol J Carlisle 'Macready's production of *Cymbeline*', p.151
[45] Henry James 'Mr Henry Irving's production of *Cymbeline*' *Harper's Weekly*
[46] Anonymous review, *Athenaeum*
[47] Henry James 'Mr Henry Irving's production of *Cymbeline*', *Harper's Weekly*
[48] George Bernard Shaw, 'Blaming the Bard', *Saturday Review*
[49] Anonymous review, *Athenaeum*
[50] R. Warwick Bond, '*Cymbeline* at the Lyceum', *Fortnightly Review*, LX, (1 November 1896), pp.635-47 reprinted in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 15, p.37
[51] George Bernard Shaw, 'Blaming the Bard', *The Saturday Review*
[52] William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline: A comedy in 5 Acts*, as arranged for the stage by Henry Irving (London: Chiswick Press, 1896)
[53] William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline: A comedy in 5 Acts*, as arranged for the stage by Henry Irving (London: Chiswick Press, 1896), hand corrected proofs
[54] Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Thomson, 2004), p.30
[55] George Bernard Shaw, 'Blaming the Bard', *Saturday Review*