CONCLUSION: CHANGING THEATRICALITY

In order to please more recent audiences there have been immense changes to the ways in which Shakespeare's plays are staged. [1] W.B.Worthen claims that Granville-Barker, Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook are responsible for "'restoring' Shakespeare through modern theatrical practice". [2] In 1962 William Gaskill's production was expected to be a "prototype" for future *Cymbeline*s, according to Roger Warren.[3] Gaskill staged the play virtually "word-for-word as Shakespeare left it". [4] This production, whilst simply set on a bare white stage, employed the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's resources, such as a revolving stage, with dazzling theatricality. In the restored masque, the appearance of Jupiter to the caged Posthumus achieved an extraordinary *coup de theatre*. Rather than trying to rationalise the play's contradictions, it celebrated them – one reviewer describes it as a "collision between the Snow-Queen and Decameron".[5] Theatre critics were incredulous (and almost apologetic) at having been so thoroughly entertained by the play and even permitted to laugh - "Bard got the Bird" as one headline ran.[6] What this production apparently captured, brilliantly, was the appropriate visual and dramatic style for that particular moment in time.

A return to some elements of 'Shakespearean' staging, ironically, constitutes part of "modern theatrical practice". This can be seen at the Globe theatre, London, in the Swan, the new Courtyard theatre, and the projected reconfiguration of the RST in Stratford-upon-Avon. However, Dennis Kennedy considers that "what constitutes fidelity" to Shakespeare is shifting.[7] Rather than 'archaeological' reconstruction, he advocates "a fidelity to the spirit of the play as understood at a given moment". Shakespeare's plays present challenges to directors and designers "to discover new

and appropriate styles that illuminate the texts and yet ring true in a world almost totally transformed".[8]

This can be seen in Dominic Cooke's 2003 *Cymbeline*. Again using a virtually uncut text, Cooke used the resources of the Swan theatre, and a range of innovative theatrical techniques, to create an original contemporary production that was well received by its Stratford audiences.[9] Michael Dobson comments on its use of something other than "more-or-less naturalism with metre" in utilising freeze-frames, and physical techniques influenced by companies such as Shared Experience.[10] Life-sized puppets were also used for the apparitions. The descent of Jupiter, preceded by a six second blackout that seemed like a power-cut, was truly spectacular. 'Jacobean' elements can be identified: a much closer actor-audience relationship was created through the physical shape and thrust stage of the Swan theatre. Asides (mostly cut in nineteenth century scripts) were delivered (as was Posthumus's soliloquy against women), directly to targeted members of the audience.

Other companies have chosen to approach the play very differently, however, finding something of the "new immediacy" that John Russell Brown describes in open-air performances in Asia where the actors learned to "play with – and play off – their audiences".[11] Brown argues that such vitality is in the spirit of Shakespeare, especially where small innovative companies seek for "a popular and lively audience for theatre".[12]

This was the case with The Pantaloon's small-scale open air production of *Cymbeline*. The text was very heavily cut, with narrative passages from Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* interpolated for exposition.[13] Like Dominic Cooke's production, the Pantaloons employed a variety of theatrical techniques: they too used puppets (for the fight between Cloten and Guiderius); they added a great deal of humour with

improvised sequences akin to stand-up comedy, and mispronounced names (Imogen became Fiddly in Wales). They made a virtue of their small cast (they were six in number), hilariously managing the final scene with the aid of quick changes and hats on sticks; Jupiter's eagle was simply musician Dom Conway energetically flapping his 'wings'. These elements may sound crassly farcical, but the director's intention was to "recapture an aspect of Shakespeare's drama which the modern naturalistic theatre has lost: the riotous energy of the clown".[14] The Pantaloons utilised their (mostly human) resources to bring "a vital sense of "play" back to Shakespearean performance".[15] This company, graduate students from the University of Kent, were informed by their knowledge of Jacobean theatre, and used an interactive approach to build a close actor-audience relationship. As a touring production heading for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, their *Cymbeline* was carefully crafted to communicate with its target audience – largely non-Shakespeareans, children and tourists, people with little or no knowledge of the play but who sought outdoor entertainment.

The play's most recent incarnation is produced by Cornish based company Kneehigh, who were invited to present their interpretation of *Cymbeline* as part of the RSC's Complete Works Festival (April 2006 to April 2007). Kneehigh has created a piece of theatre that communicates the essence of Shakespeare's play despite using little of Shakespeare's language. Some of the text emerges at emotional high points – in many of Imogen's speeches, in the funeral dirge, and in some of the final reunions - but Shakespeare's language is woven so seamlessly with others' (writer Carl Grose's poetry, or the actors' own words from improvisation) that an audience member not knowing the original play would be unsure at times which was which. In this respect, Kneehigh's play is more like D'Urfey's adaptation than any subsequent stage version.

Kneehigh, again a touring company, often performs outdoors, and an awareness of their audience and its needs shapes the company's work. Emma Rice told me that she had not known *Cymbeline* before agreeing to direct it, something that she found liberating as she had no preconceptions. [16] She had no expectation that Shakespeare's play would be familiar or even comprehensible to her audience who would, in all probability, be cold and wet. She is adamant, therefore, that the play that she is presenting must be accessible, entertaining and amazing. Pace, vigour and robustness are essentials – as they would have been for the audience at Shakespeare's Globe. She treasures the uniqueness of each performance, where the temporary community of that night collectively experiences the laughter and the tears, the profound shared sensations that can only be found in live theatre.

Rice defines *Cymbeline* as a fairy tale, seeing the familiarity of such seminal fables as the means by which we learn who we are. Rice wants her production to celebrate the child in all of us and aims to evoke images such as "night terrors and knitted blankets, […] hot chocolate on a rainy Sunday" that represent "belonging".[17] On stage, children's toys, baby shoes, safe beds and hugs physically present these, encapsulated ultimately in the bedtime sequence that closes the show.

Crucially in Rice's adaptation, Cymbeline himself, and through him the concepts of family and identity, become the play's focus; it is his 'tragedy', the loss of his family, and his grief, are at its heart. Through music and song as much as through dialogue, Kneehigh's play presents Cymbeline's suffering explicitly, asking its audience to share his pain, and to celebrate his regeneration. His relationship with the Queen, his nurse, is displayed more overtly than in Shakespeare's text. Her madness and death – here seen, rather than reported - are caused by her loss of power, not

through Cloten's disappearance. Drugs have corrupted her as well as blinding Cymbeline.

Imogen's journey into the wild is only one of many voyages of self-discovery. Rather than finding herself with Welsh mountaineers, Bellarius and the brothers are rough-sleeping squatters; this gives a contemporary resonance to Imogen's experience of being homeless. The war is explained by Rice as a metaphor by which the stasis is blown apart, reinvigorating Cymbeline and returning Iachimo and Posthumus to confront their betrayals. Posthumus and Imogen literally step through the scattered pieces of the war board-game, by which the battle has been staged, for their final reconciliation.

Kneehigh's theatrical style contains devices and techniques that can be described as Jacobean in essence. Restormel Castle is circular in shape and the audience sit on various levels round the thrust stage. Properties such as beds are brought out from an inner area not unlike the discovery space. An upper level, shared with the musicians, is used for some palace scenes. In this adaptation there is much doubling of roles, extensive use of clowning, and some ad-libbing, especially from the added pantomimic narrator-figure, Joan Puttock. Entrances are made through the audience and direct actor-audience communication occurs frequently. A trapdoor is used and pyrotechnics employed for battle effects. Costumes are contemporary. The mimed sequence that begins the play could be seen as a pre –Shakespearean 'dumb-show' except that it presents what has just happened rather than 'the argument' of what is to come.

Kneehigh also uses modern technology. A radio-controlled red car links many scenes. Concepts (and stage directions) are spray-painted on pieces of card attached to the 'backdrop', a tall metal fence with gates in it that can be opened out, for Italy, or

bolted shut to represent Britain. The live music is electronically amplified; stage lighting and powerful electrical torches are used to enhance mood. Ultimately, Kneehigh's *Cymbeline* is a life-enhancing, fresh and vigorous play which responds to Shakespeare's text and presents its essence in a style that is congruent with both Jacobean and contemporary theatre. Its core issues – family, identity, drugs, homelessness – are key concerns in society today.

Dennis Kennedy quotes Peter Brook's analysis that in each period of stage history, Garrick's, Kean's, Tree's or Craig's, Shakespeare's plays have been staged appropriately:

> Each was justified in its own time; each would be outrageous out of it. A production is only correct at the moment of its correctness, and only good at the moment of its success. [18]

Thus when Shakespeare wrote *Cymbeline* originally he was creating a play that could be staged to please a diverse audience. At the Globe its populist elements could appeal to the less sophisticated; at the Blackfriars its artifice could amuse the intelligentsia and the fashionable masque delight through spectacle. In *Cymbeline* Thomas D'Urfey sought a solution to a company's financial crisis. His alterations were designed to make optimum use of actresses on the more visual stage, and to please contemporary taste. Garrick rationalised the play for the eighteenth century, popularising Posthumus (or himself in the role) and utilising the human and physical resources of his theatre with great success. From the nineteenth century, the divine Imogen, embodied by a popular actress, was sometimes allowed to take centre stage. The play's varied settings were a challenge for designers in the age of pictorial realism. The potential melodrama in Iachimo's scenes offered some scope for leading actors – but not enough to justify the play being staged frequently. It was seen as a silly fairy-tale, incompatible with the elevated status of the Bard.

Today *Cymbeline*'s relationship with the stage is still changing. Anne Thompson concludes her discussion of the play: "There is in a sense no such thing as *Cymbeline*, but a multitude of different *Cymbeline*s available to audiences and readers".[19] The play's self-contradictory nature – "tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited" – offers scope for many different stagings: pantomime, melodrama, fantasy, fairy-tale, or any combination of these. Productions can use more or less of Shakespeare's text, and employ techniques and technologies selected from the whole range that is available.[20] Whatever the fashion, theatre, audience or director's intentions, the play offers limitless possibilities for future adaptation and stage representation.

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[1] J.L.Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), p.1
[2] W.B.Worthen, *Shakespeare and the force of modern performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p.83
[3] Roger Warren, *Shakespeare in Performance: 'Cymbeline'* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.61
[4] George Bernard Shaw, foreword to *Cymbeline Refinished* (1945) reprinted in *Shaw on Shakespeare: An Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Plays and Production of Shakespeare* ed. by Edwin Wilson (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1961), p.62
[5] Anonymous review, *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 18 July 1962
[6] Anonymous review, *Sunday Telegraph*, 22 July 1962
[7] Kennedy, Dennis, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-century Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.9
[8] Kennedy, Dennis, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-century Performance*, p.14
[9] *Cymbeline*, directed by Dominic Cooke, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon (2003)
[10] Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England 2003', *Shakespeare Survey*, 57 (2004) p.274
[11] John Russell Brown, *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the audience and Asia* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.41
[12] John Russell Brown, *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the audience and Asia*, p.196
[13] *Cymbeline* directed by Steve Purcell, The Dell, Stratford-upon-Avon, 30 July 2006
[14] *Cymbeline* directed by Steve Purcell, The Dell, Stratford-upon-Avon 2006, programme notes
[15] *Cymbeline* directed by Steve Purcell, The Dell, Stratford-upon-Avon 2006, programme notes
[16] Interview with Emma Rice, 18 August 2006
[17] Kneehigh theatre, *Cymbeline* directed by Emma Rice, programme notes
[18] Peter Brook, *The Modern Theatre: Readings and Documents*, ed. by Daniel Seltzer (Boston: 1967), p.256, quoted by Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-century Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.165
[19] Ann Thompson 'Cymbeline's Other Endings' in *Essays mainly Shakespearean*, ed. by Anne Barton (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p.217
[20] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* ed. by Harold Jenkins (London: Thomson Learning, 1982), 2.2.392