

Cymbeline

Constructions of Britain

ROS KING



STUDIES IN PERFORMANCE AND EARLY MODERN DRAMA

CYMBELINE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF BRITAIN

In *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain*, Ros King argues that because of previous misunderstanding of the nature and history of tragi-comedy, critics have mistaken the tone of Shakespeare's play. Although it is often dismissed as a pedestrian 'romance', or at best a self-parodic reworking of previous Shakespearean themes, she proposes that *Cymbeline*'s fantastical, black comedy and its facility for keeping multiple plots all in the air together are in fact a *tour de force* of dramaturgical construction.

King's multi-faceted approach combines strikingly perceptive commentaries on the text's most notoriously difficult passages, with descriptions of performance, and analysis of the text's historical, cultural and literary contexts. In this wide-ranging study, the play becomes a focus for considering early modern England's encounters with its Scottish king, with religious struggle in Europe, and with the indigenous peoples of North America. King demonstrates that the play's dramaturgical structure enables it to raise daring questions about the nature of government, the rights of birth and of succession, and the concepts of 'empire', supplying a curiously bitter and indeed tragic undercurrent to the final 'happy' ending while attempting to neutralise contemporary religious conflict.

Having explored the influences that went into the writing of *Cymbeline*, King devotes her final chapter to the play's later reception and shows how it has been made to respond to different cultural pressures over time. Using as a test case the outrageously ebullient production at Shakespeare Santa Cruz, 2000, for which she was dramaturg, King outlines an ethic for interpretation and considers the problems to be faced in both criticism and performance when realizing the text as living theatre for a modern audience.

Ros King is Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. A textual editor as well as a musician, theatre director and dramaturg, she is the author of *The Works of Richard Edwards: Politics, Poetry and Performance in Sixteenth-century England* (Manchester University Press, 2001) and many articles on Shakespeare and performance.

STUDIES IN PERFORMANCE AND EARLY MODERN DRAMA

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Helen Ostovich
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This series presents original research on theatre histories and performance histories; the time period covered is from about 1500 to the early eighteenth century. Studies in which women's activities are a central feature of discussion are especially of interest; this may include women as financial or technical support (patrons, musicians, dancers, seamstresses, wig-makers) or house support staff (for example gatherers), rather than performance per se. We also welcome critiques of early modern drama that take into account the production values of the plays and rely on period records of performance.

CYMBELINE

Constructions of Britain

ROS KING

University of London

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General Editor's Preface

Helen Ostovich
McMaster University

Performance assumes a string of creative, analytical, and collaborative acts that, in defiance of theatrical ephemerality, live on through records, manuscripts, and printed books. The monographs and essay collections in this series offer original research which addresses theatre histories and performance histories in the context of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century life. Of especial interest are studies in which women's activities are a central feature of discussion as financial or technical supporters (patrons, musicians, dancers, seamstresses, wig-makers, or 'gatherers'), if not authors or performers per se. Welcome too are critiques of early modern drama that not only take into account the production values of the plays, but also speculate on how intellectual advances or popular culture affect the theatre.

The series logo, selected by my colleague Mary V. Silcox, derives from Thomas Combe's duodecimo volume, *The Theater of Fine Devices* (London, 1592), Emblem VI, sig B. The emblem of four masks has a verse which makes claims for the increasing complexity of early modern experience, a complexity that makes interpretation difficult. Hence the corresponding, perhaps uneasy rise in sophistication:

Masks will be more hereafter in request,
And grow more deare than they did heretofore.

No longer simply signs of performance 'in play and iest', the mask has become the 'double face' worn 'in earnest' even by 'the best' of people, in order to manipulate or profit from the world around them. The books stamped with this design attempt to understand the complications of performance produced on stage and interpreted by the audience, whose experiences outside the theatre may reflect the emblem's argument:

Most men do vse some colour'd shift
For to conceal their craftie drift.

Centuries after their first presentation, the possible performance choices and meanings they engender still stir the imaginations of actors, audiences, and readers of early plays. The products of scholarly creativity in this series will, I hope, also stir imaginations to new ways of thinking about performance.

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I am also grateful to Peter McCullough, Nigel Alexander and Michael Dobson for reading and commenting on various parts and drafts of the book, and to the readers at Ashgate; to Laurie Maguire, Robin Headlam-Wells and David Lindley for invitations to talk about the play; Ton Honslaars for help in chasing up an illustration; and various groups of students and conference delegates who have witnessed my enthusiasm for this play over the last two years. Finally, I would like to thank Erika Gaffney, Ann Donahue and the staff at Ashgate for their efficiency and patience.

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Abbreviations

Add.	British Library, Additional Manuscript.
Ash.	Bodleian MS Ashmole.
<i>Barriers</i>	Ben Jonson, <i>The Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers</i> , in Orgel and Strong (1973).
BL	British Library.
<i>Britannia</i>	William Camden, <i>Britannia</i> , tr. Philemon Holland, London, 1610.
CCP	Calendar of Cecil Papers.
<i>Chester</i>	<i>Chesters Triumph in Honor of her Prince, as it was performed upon S. Georges Day</i> . [The pageant devised by R. Amerie; the verses by Richard Davies], London: I. B.
CSP Venetian	Calendar of State Papers, Venetian series.
<i>Description</i>	William Harrison, <i>The Description of England</i> , in Raphael Holinshed, <i>Chronicles</i> , vol. 1, London, 1586.
<i>England</i>	Raphael Holinshed, <i>The Historie of England</i> , in <i>Chronicles</i> , vol. 1, London, 1586.
G.E.C.	G.E.C., <i>Complete Peerage</i> , 1913.
Garrick	<i>Cymbeline. A Tragedy by Shakespeare with alterations by David Garrick</i> , London, 1767.
<i>Ireland</i>	Giraldus Cambrensis, <i>The Irish Historie</i> , tr. John Hooker, in Raphael Holinshed, <i>Chronicles</i> , London, vol. 2, 1587.
Kemble	William Shakespeare, <i>Cymbeline, King of Britain: A Historical Play</i> , revised by J.P. Kemble ... as it is acted at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden, London, 1810.
<i>London's Love</i>	<i>Londons Love to the Royal Prince Henrie</i> , London: N. Fosbrooke, 1610.
McIlwain	C. H. McIlwain (ed.), <i>The Political Works of James I</i> , Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918.
<i>Memorials</i>	Ralph Winwood, <i>Memorials of Affairs of State in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I</i> , 3 vols, London, 1725.
<i>Metamorphoses</i>	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> , tr. Mary M. Innes, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
Nosworthy	William Shakespeare, <i>Cymbeline</i> , ed. J. M. Nosworthy, Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, first printed 1955, reprinted 1997.
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> .
<i>Order</i>	<i>The order and solemnite of the creation of the high and</i>

- mightie Prince Henrie ... Together with the ceremonies of the Knights of the Bath. Whereunto is annexed the royal maske*, London: J. Budge, 1610.
- RSC
Philaster Royal Shakespeare Company.
Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Philaster*, ed. Andrew Gurr, London: Methuen, 1969.
- Scotland* Raphael Holinshed, *The Historie of Scotland*, in *Chronicles*, vol. 1, London, 1586.
- Tethys Festival* in *Court Masques*, ed. David Lindley, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

For Danny Scheie,
and the cast and production team of *Cymbeline*,
Shakespeare Santa Cruz, California, 2000

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Introduction

Cymbeline is an extraordinary play. It has a plot of such complexity that there are some thirty denouements in the final scene, except that they are not revelations to the audience, who know all but one of them already.¹ It has some of the most beautiful and affecting lines of poetry that Shakespeare ever wrote – and some of the worst. Its vocabulary is relatively simple, yet its syntax is so convoluted that it is an absolute killer to read. It is highly experimental – and highly conventional. Part history, part myth, with elements of fairy tale, romance and murder thriller thrown in, it does not fit common conceptions of Shakespearean design. It is one of the most neglected plays in the canon. We just have not known how to take it.²

The work that would result in this book began when I was asked to be the dramaturg for a production of the play to be directed by Danny Scheie for Shakespeare Santa Cruz, California, in the 2000 summer season. Up to that point, I too thought the play something of a mishmash. Attempting to annotate it on a previous occasion, I had noticed that editors tended to give up what they obviously felt was the thankless task of explaining its mannerisms at around the beginning of Act 2, falling back (*verbatim* in some cases) on the nineteenth-century *Variorum* edition by H.H. Furness. In the intervening period, however, I had edited a number of Shakespearean and other Renaissance plays specifically for performers, paying much more attention to the needs of the speaking voice than is commonly the case in academic editions. I had developed a working theory about the punctuation practices of both writers and printers in the sixteenth century, and another about the interplay between rhythm and metre in English Renaissance poetry, based on analysis of the ways in which sixteenth-century composers set words to music.³ I also had a completely different understanding of the development of pre-Shakespearean Elizabethan drama, having been the dramaturg for a production at the Globe Theatre of Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias*, the earliest designated tragicomedy in English, first performed at court at Christmas 1564–5.

As I embarked on the research for *Cymbeline*, I realized with increasing excitement how very carefully and cleverly the play had been constructed. Far from being the courtly romance of most nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism, one of a group of plays seen as a late flowering of a new development in Shakespeare's art or, as in some more recent work, variously a royalist apology for James I's aspirations, or an expression of English anxiety about the Scots,⁴ I saw a direct descendent of Richard Edwards's political satire: a bold, bloody and hilarious tragicomedy that was using a sophisticated knowledge of classical and

contemporary iconography and literary theory to ask fundamental questions about England's place in history, her experiment with religion, and her future in the world.

This book tries to explain how the extraordinary language of this play works. It also seeks to explore those features of the culture and conflicts of the early seventeenth century that fed Shakespeare's imagination, many of which still trouble us four hundred years later: the union of the countries and peoples that make up the British Isles; the uses of history; the nature and form of monarchy; the problems of religious difference and of colonialism. These are all, indeed, such contentious issues that it is perhaps no wonder that in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions and criticism that set the tone for later reception they were simplified, and presented not as problems but as messages about the virtues of domesticity and of patriotism, thus appealing to a Britain that had by then achieved both union (under English hegemony) and a foreign empire, and whose project was therefore maintenance and consolidation rather than change. Those versions, however, have all required alterations to the text: usually cuts that focus attention on the love story, but sometimes interpolations, such as at Bath in 1798, where a benefit night was given to raise money for the defence of the country against the threat of a French invasion. For that production, patriotic material was added, including an afterpiece of Britannia, and a speech recalling the Spanish Armada that urged the audience 'Be but resolv'd – immortal is your cause, / 'Tis for your King, your Liberties, and Laws'.⁵

Cymbeline as written, however, offers startling opportunity for reinterpretation in modern performance precisely because it deals so deftly with the, literally, burning problems in the culture of its own time and place. The global issues inherent in its setting on the geographical and temporal edge of the Roman Empire at the time of the birth of Christ, a period of epochal change for ancient Britain and for the Mediterranean world, are used to reimagine analogous epochal changes in process at the time of writing: the rise of competing western European empires, and the split in Christianity. Its strangely ahistorical setting and complex plot, encompassing Renaissance Italy, Ancient Rome and a Celtic Britain that is both classicized and contemporary, expresses a whole gamut of opinions and positions, thus allowing the peculiar logic of the play world to interact with the opinions of its audiences. In so doing, it raises the question, which transcends cultural difference, of what it means to cope and survive in a time of schism. We are perhaps better placed to understand this now, in our own fragmented, globalized world, as we watch (and some of us worry about) the rise of an American empire, than in any other period since the text was written. This is a play whose time has come.

This book is therefore trying to do a number of different things, sometimes simultaneously. I shall explore just how the text as we have it, preserved in the First Folio of 1623, is put together. I will try to explain the performance implications of its peculiar syntax, so difficult to read on the page but such a joy to watch and listen to when well performed, and I will analyse the cultural and historical forces at work in early seventeenth-century England that inform and inspire its imagery. I shall look

at how later performances have reshaped the text to fit their own period's cultural and political imperatives and will show how analysis of those changes (both what has been added and, just as importantly, what has been left out) can be used to highlight the structure of the original. And I shall consider ways in which the play can be performed now to speak to our own concerns. This multifaceted methodology is a demonstration of a different kind of approach to Shakespeare: one that is fully dramaturgical. By this I mean an holistic analysis of the construction, performance and reception of a piece of theatre that is simultaneously historical, cultural, theatrical, linguistic and performative. I intend to explore the sounds and gestures that are written into the words as well as their meanings; ask how these have been and might be realized in performance; examine the historical context as well as the intrinsic plot and genre; and analyse the interface between the material that informs the writing of a text and the reception and reimagination of that text by successive generations. In doing so, I hope to be able to progress beyond the 'presentism' that is fatally inherent in New Historicism⁶ and show instead how the specific vagaries of the Folio text are capable of continual reinvention, whereas other related texts (be these later rewritings and cut versions of the play, or other texts written at the same period, perhaps even for the same occasion), are not.

This book starts where the play does with the language of the opening scene. This is an outstanding example of Shakespeare's skill as a dramatist rather than a poet, and also an indication of the difficulties of extracting Shakespeare's play *as a play* from the only surviving evidence for it, the printed pages of the 1623 Folio. It will move from that to a reassessment of the play's genre. Having established *how* to read it, the subsequent chapters will explore the historical and cultural context in which, and for which, the play was written. Throughout, I shall use explicit examples of the play in performance, not so much to chart a performance history as to ask what these can tell us about the original text.

Quotations from the play are taken from my own unpublished edition prepared for the production in Santa Cruz, but with line numbers keyed to the Oxford edition of *The Complete Works* for ease of reference and purposes of comparison. Other Shakespeare quotations are also from the Oxford edition. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are taken from the Geneva version.

Notes

1. Attention is repeatedly drawn to these 'revelations' by lines like 'Is there more?' (5.6.49) and 'Come to the matter' (5.6.170). The same information is occasionally given more than once as different characters in turn register the truth of events. The only new information for the audience is the death of the Queen. There is also one piece of information that the audience will know is false: Belarius's line, 'In Cambria are we born' (5.6.18).
2. Samuel Johnson's complaint that the play displays 'unresisting imbecillity' is still ubiquitously cited. In 1999, Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life*, p. 367, quoting Emrys

- Jones's 1961 review article, 'Stuart *Cymbeline*' states 'we may still be "far from having got *Cymbeline* in focus"'.
3. Ros King, 'Seeing the Rhythm: an interpretation of sixteenth-century punctuation and metrical practice', in *Ma(r)king the Text: The Presentation of Meaning on the Literary Page*, ed. Joe Bray, Miriam Handley and Anne C. Henry, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, pp. 235–52 and "'Action and accent did they teach him there": Shakespeare and the Construction of Soundscape' in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, Vincent Forés (eds), Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004, pp. 180–93.
 4. Hazlitt termed *Cymbeline* 'a dramatic romance' (see Jonathan Bate (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992); Harley Granville Barker saw it as 'tragi-comedy ... or romance' and considered that it probably owed 'a few of its idiosyncrasies' to having been written for the indoor Blackfriars theatre (*Prefaces*, pp. 234, 250); see also G. E. Bentley, 'Shakespeare and the Blackfriars Theatre' SS 1, 1948. Recent criticism is indebted to Emrys Jones, 'Stuart *Cymbeline*', *Essays in Criticism*, pp. 84–99; see David Bergeron, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family*, Kansas, 1985; Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare* (pp. 116–48), which refers repeatedly to the play toeing the 'Jacobean line' while recognizing that it does not always do this convincingly; and for a more systematically ambivalent view, Willy Maley, 'Postcolonial Shakespeare: British Identity Formation and *Cymbeline*' in *Shakespeare's Late Plays*, ed. Jennifer Richards and Richard Knowles, 'The bard of Britain is himself performing sleights of hand, affirming a British monarchy that sees its reflection in Rome. What we are presented with in *Cymbeline* is a Union Jack in the box ... cloudily enwrapped in a *rapprochement* between Britain and Rome', pp. 148–9.
 5. Valerie Wayne, 'Cymbeline: Patriotism and Performance', pp. 394–5.
 6. Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, London: Routledge, 2002.

Chapter 1

Poetic Forms: Constructing Meanings

Beginnings

Cymbeline opens with two anonymous gentlemen and an immediate textual crux that hinges on some seemingly insignificant pieces of punctuation. Folio reads:

You do not meet a man but Frownes.
Our bloods no more obey the Heauens
Then our Courtiers:
Still seeme, as do's the Kings.

These lines as they stand do not make absolute sense. Something has to be done to clarify them and although, as J. M. Nosworthy observed, the ‘sense of the passage is fairly obvious’,¹ scarcely two modern editions present the text here in precisely the same way. Sometimes editors add one or more apostrophes, that is ‘Courtiers’ and, more usually, ‘King’s’; sometimes they remove the ‘s’ in ‘Kings’; all change the lineation while offering different solutions to the other punctuation. But the ‘obvious’ meaning (that courtiers have to ‘wear their faces to the bent of the king’s looks’, as the *Variorum* edition glosses it) is not the most important *dramaturgical* meaning here. These lines are doing more than just filling us in on the story so far. They are designed to help us hear that story in a more complex way than the Second Gentleman needs to know. In order to do this now, however, we have to read with an eye to the exigencies of seventeenth-century book production, as well as to the dramatic situations retold and directly presented in the scene (both the story of the illicit love of Posthumus and the princess, *and* the social position of the gentlemen courtiers).

In common with first lines in the rest of the Folio, the printing here begins with a large, decorated, drop capital letter. In this case, the letter ‘Y’ is the width of approximately eleven letters and the depth of three lines. It is at least 3 mm wider than most of the other initial capitals in the book and this means that there is insufficient remaining space in the book’s narrow column for a complete line of verse.² Editors are therefore probably right to relineate. But the colon after ‘Courtiers’, though completely unhelpful to the ‘obvious’ sense, should perhaps not be so lightly discarded even though it is most likely that it was inserted not by the playwright, but by the scribe, Ralph Crane, who prepared so many of the texts for the Folio edition.³ One of Crane’s hallmarks was a heavy use of punctuation, whereas Shakespeare, in common with many poets, probably punctuated quite lightly. Poets tend to rely on the more intrinsic features of their craft – the line length