

street-smart sensibility to the roles: the boys in particular developing a caricatured confidence when under the influence of love-in-idleness, swaggering and gyrating towards Helena. The girls, meanwhile, adopted brassy attitudes and became aggressive with one another and towards the men, attempting to retain poise while Lysander and Demetrius became increasingly ridiculous and sexualised. In one sequence, Helena yielded to Demetrius kissing her and pulling her down to the floor, before she realised that Lysander was also getting inappropriately involved.

Jonathan Broadbent drew the biggest laughs throughout as a petulant, childish Oberon. At his first appearance, he threw off the dressing gown he had worn as Theseus to reveal a superhero costume. This Oberon threw tantrums, rolling and kicking on the floor, when he didn't get his way. In an early scene he lay across a swivel chair and propelled himself across the stage for his exit, pretending to fly, until a crash was heard offstage. For the rest of the performance he wore a sling. He took a simplistic, cruel delight in the misfortunes of others. Ferdy Roberts's Puck, meanwhile, acted as his minder. Within the rock concert aesthetic, Puck was a bearded, aging roadie, with utility belt and walkie-talkie (with which he communicated with Oberon). Stage-managing the whole show, his measured pace and lazy smile offered an amusing contrast to his manic master. Their key moment together came as the four lovers finally met in the forest, and the two men pulled up camp seats, cracked open a beer and enjoyed the show. As the lovers became more violent, running around the audience and beginning to throw food at one another, Puck and Oberon distributed supplies to the front rows and led the auditorium in a giant collective food fight, culminating in a unified assault on Hermia with pieces of bread.

It was at this point, however, that the knockabout humour began to seem uncritically cruel. As Hermia was driven back into her tent by the barrage of missiles from cast and audience, the atmosphere was one of exultance at her final collapse. Yet the production never asked its audience to reflect on their complicity in this act of abuse, nor had Hermia done anything to "deserve" such treatment. In indulging and involving its audience, the company abdicated any perceived social obligations, encouraging the bullying humiliation of a female character at the point when she asserted her own rights. To liberate an audience to pursue this course of action seemed, to this reviewer, reprehensible.

This is perhaps an overly harsh judgement, however, of a production which aspired far more towards innocent fun. The actors clearly enjoyed their moments of absurd humour, such as the crea-

tion of childish sing-song voices for the fairies, or the duel between Lysander and Demetrius. After leaving "cheek by jowl" (III.2.339), they reappeared and posed in the style of an arcade game, limbering up as if preparing to deliver multiple-hit combos. Following their warm-up, however, they launched into a live action version of the much slower classic arcade game "Pong", an amusing anticlimax. In another moment that brought down the house, and caused the company to corpse, the translated O'Donnell bit off more than half of a carrot being dangled by Puck, which he was then forced to chew for a minute or more before being able to continue with his lines.

While the relentless humour would not have been to everyone's taste, Filter's purpose was to recast the play itself as an act of ramshackle performance akin to that of the Mechanicals. The simple performances, spontaneous improvisation and audience complicity in humour echoed the spirit of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, replacing emotional investment with a kindly disposition towards well-meaning entertainment. Yet the pastiche of teenage dating behaviour, and of Oberon's selfish controlling of events, offered a useful critique for the predominantly young audience, in which excess and self-indulgence became not just Bottom's problem, but that of the majority of characters. It remains an open question, however, as to whether the uproarious comedy and participatory atmosphere reinforced or buried the more serious points at the play's heart.

Peter KIRWAN

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*The Changeling*, directed by Joe Hill-Gibbins, Young Vic, London, 25 February 2012, side stalls.

Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, set in a morally dubious universe (ostensibly, Alicante, Spain), is a Jacobean tragedy that transcends time in its exploration of the dark side of human passions. The heroine, Beatrice-Joanna, is a hybrid creature: part victim, part aggressor. When she falls in love with a tall dark stranger, Alsemero, she hires her father's man, De Flores, to kill her fiancé, Alonzo, whom she considers to be dull but worthy. Showing a blithe disregard for human life, she reasons that because "Creation" has made De Flores "the ugliest creature", he must therefore be "framed for some use" — for *her* use (II.ii.43-4). But to her shock, though not to the audience's, which has been privileged to De Flores's asides from the first, De Flores rejects her "salary" (III.4.63) and instead demands her "virginity" (III.4.117). The confrontation between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores forms one of the highlights of the play.

“Though thou writ’st ‘maid’, thou whore in thy affection,” he informs her, adding, “’twas chang’d from thy first love, and that’s a kind of whoredom in thy heart” (III.4.143-44). In using contrast and *polyptoton* (heard in the repetition of “whore” in “whoredom”), he employs rhetoric to break down her resistance before physically forcing her to a “yielding” (III.4.169). As the saying goes, murder will out, and much of the entertainment in the second half of the play lies in the unravelling of the heroine as she attempts to cover up the crime both to the authorities and to herself. How could she be guilty if she did not commit the murder herself? And how could murder be a crime when it clears the path to true love? The moral questions linger long after the applause has ended.

Middleton and Rowley’s script is a mix of silky verse and coarse prose, of bawdy sex jokes and elegant, even sublime, orations on love and death. Yet, as if distrusting that the Jacobean script has the power to fascinate a modern audience, director Joe Hill-Gibbins revises the play for the iGeneration. The alterations are jarring. Alibius’s use of the iPhone to video his patient, the leads’ song-and-dance dumb show — inspired by Bollywood films and set to the boum-boum-boum of Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies” — come off as gimmicks. In addition to these revisions, the director has allowed certain actors to overact by attacking their lines with much vim and vigour; speaking a line at a crescendo does not necessarily heighten its dramatic power. The rushed speeches, the play’s lack of intermission and near-instantaneous scene changes, where the actors double as stage hands, leave the audience little time to reflect. This is high-octane drama designed to overpower one’s senses, to leave one’s ears ringing and eyes blinking.

An exception to the theatrical excess is Daniel Cerqueira’s controlled, as well as humane, performance as De Flores. Cerqueira is mesmerizing. With his greasy hair, lumbering gait, slightly disfigured face, and old-fashioned dress (tailcoat and trousers à la *Downton Abbey*), Cerqueira’s De Flores is the opposite of the young, athletic, and handsome Alsemero (Kobna Holdbrook-Smith). Although Beatrice-Joanna calls De Flores an “ominous ill-fac’d fellow” (II.1.53) and treats him like an underling, he resists these labels by insisting on his “gentleman” status (II.1.49). Cerqueira draws out both De Flores’s craftiness — as when he tells Beatrice-Joanna, “Why, are not you as guilty [...] As deep as I?” (III.4.83-84) and “you forget your self. A woman dipp’d in blood, and talk of modesty” (III.4.125-26) — and his vulnerability — as when he rejects Beatrice-Joanna’s money, explaining, “see I have thrown contempt upon your gold; / Not that I want it not for I do piteously” (III.4.111-12).

Because he enjoys the “good respect” of her father (I.1.135), Vermandero (Howard Ward), De Flores has many opportunities to spy on Beatrice-Joanna from the periphery of the stage. During one of his asides, De Flores states he “cannot choose but love her” (I.1.236). Soon, however, De Flores shifts from spying to acting: “I’ll haunt her still,” he declares, “though I get nothing else, I’ll have my will” (I.1.238).

The Maria studio is an ideal space for Hill-Gibbins’s experimental direction. With its walls of gray cement blocks, its unadorned dry-wall, its exposed metal piping, and its black mesh nets (to prevent audience members from tampering with the wires that criss-cross the auditorium), this space is swiftly transformed into the nave of a church, an office, a dining room, or a bridal chamber. The spatial fluidity complements the theme of “change”. Aside from the psychological and moral transformation of the leads, change is manifested in the confusion of genres. Thus, despite the tragic conclusion, the main-plot begins like a comedy: a father denies his daughter her choice in a mate. And despite the comic premise, the sub-plot reverberates with tragic undertones. Whereas Beatrice-Joanna is imprisoned in a “labyrinth” (III.4.72) of her own construction, Isabella (Charlotte Lucas) is physically tied to a metal-cage, forced to endure kisses and caresses from both Antonio and Lollio. The presentation of Isabella as a victim of a series of near-rapes knocks the wind out of the comic plot. To further upset the audience’s expectations, the imprisoned lunatics of Alibius’s asylum emerge from their lockers as the leads: Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna, and Vermandero. The idea of unstable identities is reinforced by the doubling of roles: Tomazo/Antonio (Henry Lloyd-Hughes), Diaphanta/Isabella (Charlotte Lucas), and Jasperino/Lollio (Alex Beckett). Even the audience becomes implicated in a rabbit-duck illusion. In the asylum scenes, Lollio sometimes addresses the audience as spectators of the Bedlamites and other times as the “fools and madmen” that fill the “house” (I.2.45-46).

The review cannot end without a mention of jello. In the play, jello is used as a substitute for blood. The spilling of virginal blood on a wedding night is suggested by the smearing of jello across breasts, thighs, and mouths. Lustily, actors plunge their hands into bowls of red jello, rubbing it across themselves and others. Jello is not the only food that is transformed into a signifier of violence. Instead of throwing punches, characters hurl pieces of (vanilla) wedding cake whilst expounding high moral passions. In a theatrical space as small as this, one’s nose becomes instantly filled with the smell of powdered sugar and vanilla extract and cardamom (or, perhaps, that was cinnamon).

The *crème de la crème* of this conceit comes in the replacement of De Flores's "naked Rapier" (as indicated in the original stage directions at III.1) with a kitchen blade. By giving such a starring role to food, the director positions the play as a revenge tragedy — a tribute to *Thyestes*, *Titus Andronicus*, etc. This interpretation is intriguing though not directly supported by the script. The only "revenger" (Tomazo, brother of Alonzo) of the play is all talk and no action. One thing is sure: jello deprives the final scene of its seriousness, delivering on the poster's promise of *The Changeling* as "a darkly comic tale of sex, love, and panic".

Penelope GENG

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*King Lear*, directed by Andrew Hilton, The Tobacco Factory, Bristol, 29 February 2012, in the round.

It is surely the case that no other of Shakespeare's plays would benefit as much as *King Lear* from the claustrophobic auditorium of the Tobacco Factory. Not only was the proximity of Gloucester's eye gouging sickening so close up, but the plaintive laments of the suicidal Earl, the panic of the fleeing Edgar and the intrigue plotting of his bastard brother were all intensified by being almost within reach. The playing of the action against four banks of spectators added to the sense of shared shock as their reactions to the play's more extreme moments were clearly registered on their expressions.

Hilton's past Shakespeare productions have rightly attracted high praise [see *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 79 (2011), 77 (2010), 76 (2009)] and this *King Lear* is of a piece with them. Characteristic of Hilton's direction is a clarity, not only of language but plot. The prevailing tone of this production was rage. Delicacy and pathos were not appropriate to a production which emphasised the play's insistence on injustice and inhumanity. The irony was that such anger arose from what the first scene dramatised as little more than a parlour game.

The royal family took their places, sitting around a low table. Cordelia (Eleanor Yates) entered late with a giggle, and her father welcomed her with a kiss: clearly she was his "joy" (I.1.82); she is destined to receive a dowry "more opulent" than her sisters. Goneril (Julia Hills) and Regan (Dorothea Myer-Bennett) seemed to take the game in their stride. Although the prizes were significant, the stakes high, there was something small-scale about the domestic setting which reduced the scale of the action. The effect was to make Cordelia's refusal to play along rather priggish or prissy. Lear's response to her ingratitude was, to begin with anyway, quite matter of fact. John Shrapnel's King disinherited her with a calm

rationality: "Here I disclaim all my paternal care" (113). Only as he reached the "barbarous Scythian" (116) did the King begin to rage and Kent's (Simon Armstrong) well-intentioned impertinence served only to magnify this anger.

Following Kent's exit, Lear turned his attention to Cordelia's suitors. As he received the news that her dowry had evaporated, Burgundy (John Sandeman) protested. The King's response, "Nothing. I have sworn. I am firm" (245), was punctuated, on the first word, with a sardonic nod towards Cordelia. Subsequently, as she took leave of her sisters, they moved to embrace her; she cowered away from them. These gestures were typical of Hilton's attention to detail.

The subplot took its angry tone from the main action. Jack Whitam's Edmund addressed members of the audience on the injustice of his illegitimacy. The questioning began as wry and funny but rapidly became irritated and thrusting as he dwelt on the various repetitions of "bastardy" and "base". What started as a chumminess with the audience rapidly darkened as he began to scribble the letter that would frame his brother. Again, Gloucester's (Trevor Cooper) response to Edmund's evasions was one of anger. He seized the letter and with devastating precipitance condemned Edgar on this fabricated evidence. The effect of this rapidity was to draw attention to the fact that Gloucester's astrological pessimism was (mis)guiding his decisions. Never before have I seen a production that registered so profoundly the significance of what Edmund labels dismissively "the excellent foppery of the world" (I.2.116).

The production's emphasis on rage characterised many of the later sequences. Goneril's "By day and night he wrongs me" (I.3.3) was the beginning of a snarling exchange between her and the Fool. Alan Coveney's Albany rapidly mutated from a hen-pecked and emollient husband to a scathingly contemptuous soldier whose satirical greeting of Regan was half-spat at her, "Our very loving sister, well bemet" (V.1.16). But perhaps it was Byron Mondahl's maniac Cornwall who best personified the production's violent fury. As he entered at the top of Act III Scene 5 he yelled "I will have my revenge ere I depart his house" (1) and his subsequent blinding of Gloucester and the following action in which Regan kills the servant and Cornwall is fatally wounded was insanely savage.

The production kept the mock-trial scene which appears only in the Quarto version of the play though again, its key note was anger. Amid all this ire, the Fool's penetrating jokes had little effect and during the storm scenes, as Lear ranted at the elements, Christopher Bianchi's jester sat with his