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CYMBELINE



William
Shakespeare

Edited by Jonathan Bate
and Eric Rasmussen



The RSC Shakespeare

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CYMBELINE

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Edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen

Introduction by Jonathan Bate



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INTRODUCTION

“AND VIEWED HER IN HER BED”

Many commentators have observed how fitting it is that *The Tempest* is printed at the beginning of the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. Its reflections on art, together with the resemblance of Prospero to a dramatist and his island to a theater, where a play is staged within the play by actors who are spirits, make it seem like a Shakespearean showpiece, a summation of his art. Far fewer commentators have considered how equally appropriate it is that *Cymbeline* is printed at the end of the First Folio. Though entitled *The Tragedy of Cymbeline*, it ends not with multiple deaths but with family reunion and political reconciliation. “Pardon's the word to all” as revelations pile in upon one another, each of them “a mark of wonder,” while a nation is restored to peace: the play could equally well have been classed as a comedy or a British history. The stylistic experimentation almost serves as an ironic epilogue to the Folio's tripartite division into comedies, histories, and tragedies: tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, *Cymbeline* would have been Polonius' favorite work in the canon. Furthermore, in a manner analogous to the wittily extreme variations on classical motifs in Baroque art, both the narrative arc and the characterization revisit and revise, in a highly self-conscious manner, an array of favorite Shakespearean motifs: the cross-dressed heroine, the move from court to country, obsessive sexual jealousy, malicious machiavellian plotting, the interrogation of Roman values.

For Shakespeare, the material provided the opportunity to reach back to some of his earliest work. As in *Titus Andronicus*, a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is brought onstage as a prop. It is Innogen's bedtime reading: “She hath been reading late, / The tale of Tereus. Here the leaf's turned down / Where Philomel gave up.” The allusion marks the moment at which Innogen is betrayed. An eyewitness account of a performance of the play in 1611 makes much of this scene, in which the machiavellian Iachimo emerges from a trunk. Watching for the plot, what Dr. Simon Forman seems to have remembered most vividly was Innogen's bedchamber:

Remember also the story of Cymbeline king of England, in Lucius' time, how Lucius came from Octavius Caesar for tribute, and being denied, after sent Lucius with a great army of soldiers who landed at Milford Haven, and after were vanquished by Cymbeline, and Lucius taken prisoner, and all by means of 3 outlaws, of the which 2 of them were the sons of Cymbeline, stolen from him when they were but 2 years old by an old man whom Cymbeline banished, and he kept them as his own sons 20 years with him in a cave.

And how [one] of them slew Cloten, that was the queen's son, going to Milford Haven to seek the love of Innogen the king's daughter, whom he had banished also for loving his daughter, and how the Italian that came from her love conveyed himself into a chest, and said it was a chest of plate sent from her love and others, to be presented to the king. And in the deepest of the night, she being asleep, he opened the chest, and came forth of it, and viewed her in her bed, and the marks of her body, and took away her bracelet, and after accused her of adultery to her love, etc. And in the end how he came with the Romans into England and was taken prisoner, and after revealed to Innogen, who had turned herself into man's apparel and fled to meet her love at Milford Haven, and chanced to fall on the cave in the woods where her 2 brothers were, and how by eating a sleeping dram they thought she had been dead, and laid her in the woods, and the body of Cloten by her, in her love's apparel that he left behind him, and how she was found by Lucius, etc.

“Viewed her in her bed ... and after accused her”: whereas in *Titus* Lavinia's quoting of Philomel's tragic tale is the means to the revelation of her own rape, Iachimo can destroy Innogen's reputation simply by looking at her. His removal of the bracelet from her arm is a symbolic violation of her chastity. In Shakespeare's other rape story, the poem of *Lucrece*, Tarquin presses violently down on his victim's breasts, but here Iachimo merely watches and reports, noting in particular an identifying mole on her left breast. It is the eyes of a spectator that do the undressing here, not the tearing hands of a Tarquin. When Iachimo himself alludes to the rapacious emperor—“Our” Tarquin, a fellow Roman—he rewrites the night scene of *Lucrece* in a lyrical mode: “Our Tarquin thus / Did softly press the rushes, ere he wakened / The chastity he wounded.” The sibilance seems tender rather than sinister: “Softly press” suggests not only stealth, but also a lover's touch. And “wounded” grossly understates the severity of Tarquin's deed. This has the effect of sublimating the image of rape—Philomel gives up as in a dream, not in brutal reality as on the stage of *Titus*, thus making it easier for the audience to put itself in the position of Iachimo. To note and to wonder at the beauty of the sleeping Innogen does not seem to do any harm. Yet “yellow Iachimo” does work harm, and it takes all the play's twists and turns, including an apparent death and an actual physical violation when Posthumus strikes Fidele/Innogen, to undo that harm.

The audience, then, is forced to confront its own complicity in Iachimo's deed. His gaze is ours. Shakespeare makes the point by means of the chimneypiece in the bedroom. While in the room, Iachimo records “the contents o'th'story.” In his subsequent narration to Posthumus he reveals them:

The chimney

Is south the chamber, and the chimney-piece
Chaste Dian bathing: never saw I figures
So likely to report themselves; the cutter
Was as another nature dumb, outwent her,
Motion and breath left out.

The gaze is fixed on the naked Diana bathing: Iachimo and with him the audience stand in the position occupied in Ovidian mythology by the hunter Actaeon, who is metamorphosed into a stag and torn to pieces by his own hounds as punishment for his desiring gaze upon the goddess of chastity. Shakespeare uses this reference to introduce the motif of auto-destructive sexual desire. The poetry almost makes us forget that we never saw the chimneypiece: what we witnessed was the sleeping figure of Innogen, as mediated through the language of Iachimo's gorgeous but prurient soliloquy.

The art of the chimneypiece, like that of Hermione's statue in *The Winter's Tale*, is said to have outdone nature. A few lines earlier, Iachimo has reported that the tapestry in the chamber told the story of Mark Antony meeting Cleopatra at Cydnus; here Shakespeare echoes back his own recent play in which Enobarbus describes Cleopatra at Cydnus as being so desirable that "but for vacancy" the air would have joined the people of the city in going to gaze on her. The fictive chimneypiece recapitulates and goes beyond this: the artist's figures seem on the verge of speech and movement, they are "likely to report themselves," and though they are "dumb" they seem to make nature seem dumber. The air has vacated nature and entered the artwork. When we associate Diana with Innogen, the goddess seems to step down from the chimneypiece and become embodied on stage in the form of a lovely boy actor. The image effects in the audience's mind what *The Winter's Tale* feigns to deliver in performance: the metamorphosis of art into life. This is late Shakespeare at his most sophisticated and self-consciously inventive.

Simon Forman's report reveals how much detail an attentive spectator could grasp in a complex Shakespearean drama—though he does seem to have momentarily muddled Cloten and Posthumus, just as Innogen/Fidele does. The account also suggests that Shakespearean playgoers worried little about the plot's dependence on frequent coincidences. Strikingly, though, this spectator's enthusiasm peters out toward the end: the closing reunions and the descent of Jupiter in Posthumus' dream do not merit a mention. The long and outlandish final scene is extremely difficult to stage effectively: it has sometimes been played as parody, is often heavily cut, and has even been comprehensively rewritten (by George Bernard Shaw).

In the movement of the action from court to country, *Cymbeline* has a structure similar to the more popular and better-known *Winter's Tale*. The two plays were probably written within a year of each other. The similarities are abundant. A man is falsely led to believe in his wife's infidelity, with the result that his powers of reasoning are distorted and his language collapses

into crabbed, dense invective against female wiles:

Is there no way for men to be, but women
Must be half-workers? We are all bastards,
And that most venerable man, which I
Did call my father, was I know not where
When I was stamped. Some coiner with his tools
Made me a counterfeit ...

...

... for there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
The woman's: flattering, hers: deceiving, hers:
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers: revenges, hers:
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
Nice longing, slanders, mutability,
All faults that may be named, nay, that hell knows,
Why, hers, in part or all ...

In fact, throughout Shakespeare's works, most of these vices and faults are to be found in the men's parts, not the women's. It is the woman—Marina, Perdita, Innogen—who restores harmony.

In *Cymbeline*, as in *The Winter's Tale*, she does so in combination with the forces of nature. The febrile air of court intrigue is cleared when we move outdoors and encounter princes disguised as shepherds. It is perhaps in *Cymbeline* that Shakespeare's art of natural observation is at its most acute. The supposedly dead Fidele is apostrophized with the phrase "The azured harebell, like thy veins." The color and structure of the harebell does precisely resemble those of human veins. Then there is Belarius speaking of how his two adopted sons show princely natures even as they are dressed as shepherds:

O thou goddess,
Thou divine Nature, thou thyself thou blazon'st
In these two princely boys! They are as gentle
As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
Their royal blood enchafed, as the rud'st wind,
That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
And make him stoop to th'vale ...

The wind has the capacity not to move a violet but to flatten a mountain pine: Shakespeare likes that paradox.

The association of Innogen with nature goes back to the bedroom scene. The key token of recognition, the mole on her breast, is “cinque-spotted: like the crimson drops / I’th’bottom of a cowslip.” Is there any other English poet save the country laborer John Clare who could have created such a simile, who has such an eye as acute as Shakespeare’s for the intricacies of natural history and the apt metaphorical application of them to human encounters?

THE CRITICS DEBATE

Perhaps more than any other Shakespearean play, *Cymbeline* has polarized critics and audiences in their judgments on its quality as a work of art. Yet despite an uneven critical heritage, the twentieth century going into the early twenty-first has seen a massive resurgence in its popularity on both page and stage, and recent criticism now widely accepts it as a masterwork that no longer needs to be explained away or apologized for.

Historically, critics have been divided over the play’s mixed genre, improbable plot, characterization, moral texture, difficult language, bifurcated political position, and contrived ending. Dr. Johnson’s view, in his 1765 edition of Shakespeare, is typical:

This play has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues and some pleasing scenes, but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.¹

George Bernard Shaw was even more dismissive:

I do not defend *Cymbeline*. It is for the most part stagey trash of the lowest melodramatic order, in parts abominably written, throughout intellectually vulgar, and judged in point of thought by modern intellectual standards, vulgar, foolish, offensive, indecent, and exasperating beyond all tolerance.²

But the play has always had its defenders. The early nineteenth-century essayist William Hazlitt thought that:

Cymbeline is one of the most delightful of Shakespear’s [sic] historical plays. It may be considered as a dramatic romance ... The reading of this play is like going on a journey with some uncertain object at the end of it, and in which the suspense is kept up and heightened by the long intervals between each action. Though the events are scattered over such an extent of surface,

and relate to such a variety of characters, yet the links which bind the different interests of the story together are never entirely broken. The most straggling and seemingly casual incidents are contrived in such a manner as to lead at last to the most complete development of the catastrophe. The ease and conscious unconcern with which this is effected only makes the skill more wonderful.³

The last act, in which all the plot threads reconvene in a series of almost comically improbable revelations, has, like the play as a whole, been for a long time the object of critical scorn before more recently finding a reacceptance, especially in performance. Critics are now in fairly unanimous agreement on its dizzying, strange brilliance: “The finale is an intricate, beautiful machine in which an astonishing number of disguises are removed, misunderstandings swept away and reunions accomplished.”⁴

Traditionally, the play’s three main plots have been identified as the marriage/wager plot (involving Innogen’s marriage to Posthumus, his resultant banishment, Cloten’s attempted “revenge,” and the wager Posthumus makes with Iachimo over Innogen’s fidelity), the dynastic plot (involving the return of Guiderius and Arviragus, Cymbeline’s long-lost sons, and, unbeknownst to them, the future rulers of Britain), and the nations plot (involving the Roman invasion of Britain over Cymbeline’s refusal to pay the required tribute, and the eventual reunion of the two powers). Critical concerns have recently engaged with each of these elements and debated the politics of the play in terms of gender and state and the interplay between them.

THE WAGER PLOT

The wager story had its roots in popular folklore, narrated many times in the medieval period, though Shakespeare seems to have based his plot on a version in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (Day 2, Novella 9), in which:

The villain, Ambrogiuolo, gets into Ginevra’s bedchamber in a chest and steals a ring, a purse, a girdle and a gown. Bernabò, the husband, is convinced, not by these, but by the description of a mole with golden hairs under his wife’s left breast. He orders a servant to kill Ginevra, but the servant helps her to escape in male clothes.⁵

Many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics chose to take sides over the wager plot, and to make moral judgments upon the action. For a long time Innogen was seen as an ideal portrait of womanhood and wifely virtue:

in Imogen we have an embodiment of the highest possible characteristics of womanhood—untainted health of soul, unshaken fortitude, constancy that withstands all trials, inexhaustible forbearance, unclouded intelligence, love that never wavers, and

unquenchable radiance of spirit.⁶

Unsurprisingly, many critics denounced Posthumus:

The wrong of Posthumus is the commonest of moral perversions, the false sense of honour that dares not refuse a challenge, whatever the moral cost implied in its acceptance, it is the perversion which is the product of social narrowness and artificiality; the duellist dreads the sentiment immediately surrounding him in the coterie that has dubbed itself “men of honour,” and forgets the great world with its balanced judgements and eternal principles of right.⁷

More recently, masculine anxieties and a male-driven culture of commodity have also been seen as driving the wager. Twentieth-century feminist criticism was especially interested in the socially constructed “virgin/whore” binary that women are fetishistically bracketed into by men, and the wager plot can be seen as a literal playing out of this, with the two men betting over Innogen’s chastity. Her sexual purity has been interpreted as prudery, and, paradoxically, the very thing that makes her an object of sexual desire. Rather than the moral touchstone or untouchable object of desire that towers above the other characters in the play, Innogen has also been seen as marginal to the male relationships in the play, subjugated by a domineering, insecure, and oppressive patriarchy: “Innogen begins the play as its primary defining figure, defining herself, her husband, and the dramatic focus of the audience; by the end, she has learnt her place.”⁸ In psychoanalytic critic Janet Adelman’s formulation, the play’s “happy ending” is seen as “radically contingent” on Innogen’s “self-loss, on the ascendancy of male authority and the circumscription of the female... the unmaking of female authority, the curtailing of female pride, as much for Imogen as for the wicked queen.”⁹

Although we know Iachimo is lying about sleeping with Innogen, critics have argued for a kind of sexual conquest in the “trunk” scene, and this violation has also been seen as a metaphorical playing out of one of the play’s other plots:

In this context, Giacomo’s [modernized spelling of *Iachimo*’s] intrusion into Innogen’s bedroom becomes itself a tale of a British “haven” infiltrated by scurrilous foreign forces. His secret incursion becomes an enemy “voyage upon her,” its invasive metaphors speak of assaulting the “walls” of Innogen’s honour, the “temples” of her mind.¹⁰

THE DYNASTIC PLOT AND THE PASTORAL MODE

Although the figures of Cymbeline’s sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, came from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, Shakespeare’s source for the play’s quasi-historical narrative, the Wales plot has its roots in romances and folk stories. This part

of the drama has frequently been seen to share in the conventions of pastoral: “In common with a number of his other plays from *As You Like It*, via *King Lear* to *The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* uses an excursion to a wilderness setting so that characters can return to their normal lives and roles, refreshed and, to an extent, sorted.”¹¹ The pastoral environment has been seen as shaping the princes and providing them with an earthy, simple model of morality they can apply to courtly life on their return:

The fine young men, schooled to endurance by their teacher and their habitat, take their places among the other courtiers naturally enough, their youthful discipline offering the promise that Cymbeline’s kingdom will be reorganized on new and different moral lines. Nature has raised these boys so that they can return to a birthright compromised in their absence and purify it by the simple strengths of their natural characters.¹²

A more recent critic has argued conversely that:

Cymbeline is innovative because it dares to follow the characters home and suggests that their moral transformation may not last ... What marks the boys’ nobility out as far as Belarius is concerned is their ability to imagine themselves into his heroic stories, to occupy another world that they have never personally known. Ironically, however, this imaginative understanding of the “other” is merely a restitution of the unexamined heroic but also brutal values that caused Belarius to flee in the first place.¹³

The culmination of the fictitious pastoral and the play’s move back into history, where the princes can become kings, as well as the mixing of plots and genres, has been brilliantly described by the critic Robert Henke:

Belarius recognizes that the arrival and killing of Cloten spell the beginning and the end of his protected, pastoral theatre and initiates the move back into history ... The killing of Cloten initiates a more active interplay between pastoral and history than that effected by Belarius’s cave stories. Violence inappropriate to the pastoral decorum invades its boundaries—although the displacement of violence offstage adjusts the levels of violence in a manner appropriate to a tragicomic decorum. And Belarius realizes that as an uncanny messenger, Cloten is an earnest of further negotiations with the court. As “pastoral-historical,” *Cymbeline* aims to join the “lopp’d branches” to the “old stock” of the “stately cedar”: to graft the pastoral denizens Guiderius and Belarius back onto the British dynastic tree.¹⁴

KING OF BRITAIN

A number of critics have emphasized the play's roots in fairy tale. Northrop Frye, one of the most influential critics of the twentieth century, saw the play as unhistorical, and its fairy-tale elements as defining:

Cymbeline is not, to put it mildly, a historical play: it is pure folk tale, featuring a cruel stepmother with her loutish son, a calumniated maiden, lost princes brought up in a cave by a foster father, a ring of recognition that works in reverse, villains displaying false trophies of adultery and faithful servants displaying equally false trophies of murder, along with a great firework display of dreams, prophecies, signs, portents, and wonders.¹⁵

Much recent criticism, however, has focused on the play's politics in the widest sense, on the play's treatment of Rome as well as its evocation of British nationhood. J. P. Brockbank adjudged the accounts of Holinshed to be "consonant" with the adventures of Brute, founder of the British nation according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, and noted that Shakespeare's dovetailing of sources creates a magical, principally theatrical, yet brilliantly researched historical narrative:

Shakespeare's reading offers a paradigm for an action which makes the reconciliation with Rome a high event in the magical movement of British history from the vision of Brute to the golden prospect of the vision of Cadwallader ... but he had scope still to exercise his imagination on other elements in the chronicle. In pursuit of that "odd and distinctive music" he chose to modulate from the Brutian into the Roman key and from the Roman into the Renaissance Italian.¹⁶

Earlier in the twentieth century, G. Wilson Knight had seen the play as dramatizing the passing of the baton from Rome to what would become England, which could be read in terms of the neoclassical world of the Renaissance taking up—in no small part through Shakespeare's art—the torch of the classical world:

Certainly we are to feel the Roman power vanishing into the golden skies of a Britain destined to prove worthy of her Roman tutelage. Jupiter's blessing on Posthumus' marriage and the soothsayer's vision thus make similar statements. Both symbolise a certain transference of virtue from Rome to Britain. Shakespeare's two national faiths are here married; his creative faith in ancient Rome, felt in the dramas from *Titus Andronicus* to *Coriolanus*, and his faith in England.¹⁷

Other critics felt the union between the two nations, based on mutual respect,

rather than the supersession of one over the other, was key:

I find it difficult to accept [G. Wilson] Knight's idea of Britain taking over from Rome. Iachimo is a corrupt Roman and he repents. Cloten is a villainous Briton and he is killed. Although there can be no doubt that some in the Jacobean audience would indeed see themselves as the successors of Rome, the play is not talking about the succession of empires but about the only true form of empire, which is when vassalage is removed, and union is a contract freely entered into.¹⁸

Gendering has also been identified as central to the Roman thread of the play, leading to the banishment of the Queen—who stands in defiant vocal opposition to Rome—from the final act: “powerful and rebellious females in native historiography threatened the establishment of a stable, masculine identity for the early modern state.”¹⁹ This gendering of nations has had a powerful hold on recent interpretations, including application of a “parthenogenesis” theory, which argued for *Cymbeline*'s desire to expunge the female from his world; not only his wife, the wicked Queen, but also the memory of the mother of his sons, and ultimately find union with the male world of Rome (also used to explain the play's perceived structural problems):

In *Cymbeline*, a plot ostensibly about the recovery of trust in woman and the renewal of marriage is circumscribed by a plot in which distrust of women is the great lesson to be learned and in which male autonomy depends upon the dissolution of marriage. Moreover, the effect of the Imogen-Posthumus plot is everywhere qualified by the effect of the *Cymbeline* plot, and the two plots seem to be emotionally at cross-purposes: if one moves toward the resumption of heterosexual bonds in marriage, the other moves toward the renewed formation of male bonds as *Cymbeline* regains both his sons and his earlier alliance with an all-male Rome, the alliance functionally disrupted by his wife. Hence the emotional incoherence of the last scene: the resolution of each plot interrupts the other, leaving neither satisfactorily resolved.²⁰

The scholar Robert S. Miola has argued that the play's treatment of Rome veers in and out of, and ultimately rejects, the social and behavioral codes Shakespeare had worked so carefully to delineate in his previous, less fantastical, Roman plays:

Cymbeline's loose aggregation of miniatures combines to portray a Rome that gradually yields to Britain. The chaste Roman matron Lucrece finally gives way to Imogen, the British maiden for whom honour and reputation are idle impositions, oft lost without deserving. Comic flexibility, evident in Posthumus as well as in

Imogen, succeeds tragic constancy as austere *Romanitas* dissolves into historical-pastoral romance.²¹

Politically self-conscious critic Terence Hawkes, meanwhile, focuses on the significance of Wales in the play's various articulations of nationhood:

After all, any future “mixing” of Roman and British ways of life is surely implicitly to be modelled on and judged by the success or otherwise of the prior mixing of the cultures of Wales and England. This, evidently, is the point the Welsh setting seeks to affirm. And that raises a major difficulty in *Cymbeline*. Assertions of an achieved Britishness certainly abound ... But where are the Welsh? Even though two-thirds of the play is set in Wales, we meet no native-born Welsh people there—unless we count the two “beggars” of whom Innogen asks directions [3.6.8–9]. Their status may be significant.²²

There has also been an interest in seeing the play as a Jacobean panegyric, and many commentators have felt that it is utterly confusing until placed in the context of the historical circumstances of James I's reign:

Cymbeline (in Shakespeare, though not in Holinshed) has one daughter and two sons; so did James I. James's elder son, Henry, was created Prince of Wales in 1610, and some editors point to 1610 as a likely date for *Cymbeline*; and in connexion with the stress on peace with which the play closes, it is perhaps of interest that 1610 was the only year, of this period, in which all the European states were at peace. Lastly, *Cymbeline*'s final submission to Rome, even after he has won the war against the Romans, might have had some topical value in view of James's efforts to enter into friendly negotiations with Papal Rome ... the audience must have made a complex identification: the peace is both the peace of the world at the time of Christ's birth, in which Britain participates, and also its attempted re-creation at the very time of the play's performance, with *Jacobus Pacificus*—who was a figure of Augustus—on the throne.²³

In the politically devolved Britain of the twenty-first century, G. Wilson Knight's slippage, in the passage quoted earlier, from “England” to “Britain” looks sloppy. And it certainly would not have made sense to Shakespeare and his original audiences, for whom 1603 was a turning point, as Queen Elizabeth of England was succeeded by King James VI of Scotland and I of England, with his project to unite the two nations into a new “Britain.”

In summary, then: as well as being a pastoral fantasy and a fairy story, complete with wicked stepmother and poison (which, thanks to an honest-hearted physician, turns out to be mere sleeping potion), *Cymbeline* is a play

about the Romans in Britain, under the auspices of the god Jupiter. The title in the Folio contents list is “Cymbeline King of Britain.” Shakespeare’s other King of Britain was Lear, who made the mistake of dividing his kingdom in three. *Cymbeline* may have been placed among the tragedies by the editors of the Folio because it traverses the same elevated ground of national history and destiny. But whereas the disarray of the divided nation in *Lear* is a negative example, perhaps intended to make the play’s original audience feel relief that King James had recently united the thrones of Scotland and England, the resolution of *Cymbeline* is altogether positive: “Never was a war did cease, / Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace.”

Cymbeline was supposed to have been king of Britain in the year when Christ was born; at that time, the Roman emperor was Augustus. Shakespeare’s audience would have known that Augustus was the Caesar to whom Cymbeline agrees to pay tribute money, despite the miraculous victory of the British when Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus (otherwise known as Morgan, Polydore, and Cadwal) hold the road against apparently insurmountable odds. The end of the play heralds an “Augustan peace,” in which Britain is imagined as the equal of Rome. Milford Haven in Wales is a vital location and point of reference in the play. The more historically and politically literate members of Shakespeare’s original audience would have recalled that it was the port where Henry Tudor—the Richmond of *Richard III* and the future King Henry VII—landed in 1485, the year that brought the Wars of the Roses to an end and established the Tudor dynasty that turned the tables on modern Rome and began to establish an image of their nation as the divinely chosen Christian successor-empire to that of Augustus.

Imagine King James watching the play: he would have seen himself as a composite version of Cymbeline and Augustus, both a British king and a neo-Roman emperor. From the point of view of characterization, the part of King Cymbeline is astonishingly underwritten. His interior life is never opened to us, as is that of Lear or, in this play, Princess Innogen. All he seems to do in the long closing scene is ask questions, express amazement, and pronounce benediction. This makes sense if he is intended to offer an oblique representation of James, King of Britain. It would not do to inquire too closely into the monarch’s interior life. Instead, Cymbeline is the ideal spectator: during a court performance, the King would have been sitting at the focal point of the hall. In a production that works, his amazement, his questions, and his acceptance are also ours.

ABOUT THE TEXT

Shakespeare endures through history. He illuminates later times as well as his own. He helps us to understand the human condition. But he cannot do this without a good text of the plays. Without editions there would be no Shakespeare. That is why every twenty years or so throughout the last three centuries there has been a major new edition of his complete works. One aspect of editing is the process of keeping the texts up to date—modernizing the spelling, punctuation, and typography (though not, of course, the actual words), providing explanatory notes in the light of changing educational practices (a generation ago, most of Shakespeare’s classical and biblical allusions could be assumed to be generally understood, but now they can’t).

Because Shakespeare did not personally oversee the publication of his plays, with some plays there are major editorial difficulties. Decisions have to be made as to the relative authority of the early printed editions, the pocket format “Quartos” published in Shakespeare’s lifetime, and the elaborately produced “First Folio” text of 1623, the original “Complete Works” prepared for the press after his death by Shakespeare’s fellow actors, the people who knew the plays better than anyone else. *Cymbeline* exists only in a Folio text that is reasonably well printed, with few errors, and showing signs—especially in its heavy punctuation—of being set from copy prepared by a scribe, who was probably Ralph Crane. The following notes highlight various aspects of the editorial process and indicate conventions used in the text of this edition:

Lists of Parts are supplied in the First Folio for only six plays, not including *Cymbeline*, so the list here is editorially supplied. Capitals indicate that part of the name used for speech headings in the script (thus “POSTHUMUS Leonatus, husband to Innogen”).

Locations are provided by the Folio for only two plays, of which *Cymbeline* is not one. Eighteenth-century editors, working in an age of elaborately realistic stage sets, were the first to provide detailed locations (“*another room in the palace*”). Given that Shakespeare wrote for a bare stage and often an imprecise sense of place, we have relegated locations to the explanatory notes, where they are given at the beginning of each scene where the imaginary location is different from the one before. In the case of *Cymbeline* the action moves between ancient Britain and Rome.

Act and Scene Divisions were provided in Folio in a much more thoroughgoing way than in the Quartos. Sometimes, however, they were erroneous or omitted; corrections and additions supplied by editorial tradition

are indicated by square brackets. Five-act division is based on a classical model, and act breaks provided the opportunity to replace the candles in the indoor Blackfriars playhouse which the King's Men used after 1608, but Shakespeare did not necessarily think in terms of a five-part structure of dramatic composition. The Folio convention is that a scene ends when the stage is empty. Nowadays, partly under the influence of film, we tend to consider a scene to be a dramatic unit that ends with either a change of imaginary location or a significant passage of time within the narrative. Shakespeare's fluidity of composition accords well with this convention, so in addition to act and scene numbers we provide a *running scene* count in the right margin at the beginning of each new scene, in the typeface used for editorial directions. Where there is a scene break caused by a momentary bare stage, but the location does not change and extra time does not pass, we use the convention *running scene continues*. There is inevitably a degree of editorial judgment in making such calls, but the system is very valuable in suggesting the pace of the plays.

Speakers' Names are often inconsistent in Folio. We have regularized speech headings, but retained an element of deliberate inconsistency in entry directions, in order to give the flavor of Folio.

Verse is indicated by lines that do not run to the right margin and by capitalization of each line. The Folio printers sometimes set verse as prose, and vice versa (either out of misunderstanding or for reasons of space). We have silently corrected in such cases, although in some instances there is ambiguity, in which case we have leaned toward the preservation of Folio layout. Folio sometimes uses contraction ("turnd" rather than "turned") to indicate whether or not the final "-ed" of a past participle is sounded, an area where there is variation for the sake of the five-beat iambic pentameter rhythm. We use the convention of a grave accent to indicate sounding (thus "turnèd" would be two syllables), but would urge actors not to overstress. In cases where one speaker ends with a verse half line and the next begins with the other half of the pentameter, editors since the late eighteenth century have indented the second line. We have abandoned this convention, since the Folio does not use it, and nor did actors' cues in the Shakespearean theater. An exception is made when the second speaker actively interrupts or completes the first speaker's sentence.

Spelling is modernized, but older forms are very occasionally maintained where necessary for rhythm or aural effect.

Punctuation in Shakespeare's time was as much rhetorical as grammatical. "Colon" was originally a term for a unit of thought in an argument. The semicolon was a new unit of punctuation (some of the Quartos lack them altogether). We have modernized punctuation throughout, but have given more weight to Folio punctuation than many editors, since, though not