

Finding Romance under Constraint: Three Late Plays

Alice Dailey, Villanova University

The Winter's Tale. 2008. Shakespeare at Notre Dame /
Actors From The London Stage. Harold Prince Theater,
Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, the University
of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. 12-14 November.

Cymbeline. 2008. Directed by Marcus Geduld. Folding Chair Classical
Theatre. 78th St. Theatre Lab, New York. 9 October-2 November.

The Tempest. 2008. Directed by Brian Kulick. Classic
Stage Company, New York. 9 October-2 November.

Abstract

This essay considers stage productions of *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest* mounted in Fall 2008 by three diverse professional theater companies. Each production introduced practical constraints that challenge the terms by which we conventionally define Shakespearean romance. By either reducing the number of actors, diminishing the spectacular elements of the play, or both, these companies stripped away the usual features of romance to expose the tension between erotic deferral and fulfillment that animates the form.

Genre critics at the turn of the twenty-first century define romance according to a constellation of arresting spectacle, transformative witnessing, delayed desire, and awakened faith.¹ But few

critics have attended to the interdependence of these features in dramatic performance. Three 2008 productions of Shakespeare's late plays illustrate this interdependence through explicit testing of the parameters of the romance genre. By imposing constraints on the element of spectacle, these productions heighten our generic awareness and put increased pressure on the other constituent dynamics that organize dramatic romance.

A Performative Provocation: The Statue Scene Without Hermione

A particularly bold constraint imposed by the 2008 Actors From The London Stage (AFTLS) production of *The Winter's Tale* suggests the extent to which these productions manipulated the romance form. The cast consisted of only five actors; in staging the final scene, AFTLS was confronted with the problem of how to negotiate Hermione and Perdita, both of whom had been acted by Erin Brodie. At the opening of 5.3, Brodie played the part of Perdita, so that the scene at Paulina's home unfolded before an empty pedestal, with no actor's body figuring Hermione's statue. Action around the statue was pantomimed: Perdita's reaching for her mother's hand to ask a blessing, Leontes's examination of the statue's "veins" and "the figure of her eye," and his sensing of "the air [that] comes from her" (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.64, 66, 78).² At the moment of Paulina's famous command, "It is requir'd / You do awake your faith," Brodie left the role of Perdita and ascended the pedestal, finishing the play as Hermione (5.3.94-95). In the very final moments, she and Leontes exchanged a kiss.

The choice not to figure Hermione-as-statue is a provocative one, a theatrical moment that invites constructive dialogue between the domains of text and performance. Is something necessary missing here, and if so, how do we articulate it? Are there fruitful ways to discuss the essential content of a play or genre? How do we locate that content, discuss it, and perform it without falling into reductionist modes? And what is the relationship between textual content and the theatrical bodies that perform it, be they absent or present? If our thinking about romance conventionally constellates around the mysteries of resurrection, transformation, and, above all, spectacle, the exclusion of Hermione in her statuesque state compromises all three of these elements, subverting what we tend to regard as fundamental features of the genre. In both the literal and figurative senses, then, the absence of Hermione forces us to look elsewhere for the content of the scene. In this way, the moment presents an opportunity for AFTLS to construct the content of romance otherwise — to make an argument for locating the essential elements of the genre beyond the spectacular, transformative, or sacramental.

This is an opportunity that AFTLS's *The Winter's Tale* shared with two productions that appeared in New York in Fall 2008: Folding Chair Classical Theatre Company's *Cymbeline* and

Classic Stage Company's *The Tempest*. By subverting the expectations conventionally associated with romance, these three productions invite us to revisit the terms by which we understand the genre. More specifically, each production — by either reducing the number of actors, diminishing the spectacular elements of the play, or both — stripped away conventional features of romance to expose other dynamics that animate the form. Thus, even where they did not succeed — or perhaps especially in moments of failure — these productions can contribute usefully to the ways in which we think about, write about, watch, and teach Shakespeare's late plays.

Minimizing Spectacle in *The Winter's Tale*

In addition to its reduced cast of five actors, AFTLS's *The Winter's Tale* further pared back the spectacular elements of the play by using no sets, basic lighting, and minimal props and costumes. A British company whose original founders included Patrick Stewart, AFTLS is principally a touring company, now housed at Notre Dame, that visits American universities to offer workshops and performances. The minimalist staging of *The Winter's Tale* is indicative of what AFTLS describes as their language-focused approach to the text, one that dismisses directors, sets, and other theatrical trappings in order to stage a purer, more "imaginative engagement with the play's words."³ This particular performance appeared at the University of Pennsylvania's black-box Harold Prince Theater in November 2008.

The performance began energetically enough, with the actors in a downstage line playfully listing the *Dramatis Personae*, each naming the multiple characters he or she would act. It soon shifted, however, into the relatively static mode that would characterize the production generally. Aside from the putting on and taking off of costume pieces, there was a conspicuous lack of physical movement in the first three acts, perhaps one of the side effects of being without a director. For example, most of the pivotal conversation between Leontes and Camillo in 1.2, in which Leontes reveals the depth of his suspicion and commands Camillo to murder Polixenes, was stationary. Leontes sat on a bench about ten feet from a static, standing Camillo until he at last stood up at the phrase, "horsing foot on foot," seventy-five lines into the exchange (1.2.288). Stage pictures like these, in which there was little relationship between the mounting tension of the conversation and the physical action, were common in the production and created discrepancies between the basic conflicts of the scene and the physical relationships indicated by the actors' bodies. Moreover, a nearly uncut, five-actor production of Shakespeare in a black-box theater with stripped-down costumes and lighting must create visual interest if it is to keep the audience engaged. The lack of physical dynamism and the discrepancy between language and movement in the first three acts created the effect of a staged reading rather than a dramatic production.

This is not to say that the performances were not emotionally charged, for they were. However, the emotions often did not seem to be generated by the language of the play, a problem located primarily in the company's unmetred elocution. Without attention to Shakespeare's verse, the performance was bogged down by excessive pauses that negatively affected the pace of the play and impeded the building of dramatic tension. The production would have been much improved by a shift away from the method acting that appeared to inform it — with its frequent pauses to consider, motivate, and generate each phrase — to a Shakespearean style that relied more heavily on the language of the plays to do the work of producing emotion.⁴ The latter seems not only more appropriate to the performance of Shakespeare but more in keeping with the stated pedagogical and aesthetic aims of the company. The production's disregard for the verse was particularly troubling for an acting company that states its object of central concern to be Shakespeare's language. Indeed, it is not entirely clear what this mission means if the staged performances manifest no apparent commitment to meter.

Some of the issues that slowed the first three acts were managed with greater success in act 4, due largely to the vigorous physical performance of Matthew Douglas in the role of Autolycus. His energy and movement seemed to infect the rest of the production positively, and an improved pace carried over into act 5. While the five-person cast had not been a significant element in the first three acts, the sheep-shearing scene featured nine speaking parts (a tenth, the servant, was eliminated). Erin Brodie, who had played Hermione, now doubled as Perdita and Mopsa; Robert Mountford, earlier Leontes, was the Shepherd; and Douglas played not only Autolycus, but also Polixenes and Florizel. Each character was signified by a costume piece: Perdita was distinguished from Hermione by a flower in her hair, and she hitched up her skirt to reveal colored tights in her moments as Mopsa; Florizel was marked out from Polixenes by a purple scarf draped over his shoulder; and before revealing themselves, Polixenes and Camillo (played ably by William Hoyland, who also played Antigonus) wore cotton fishing hats as both disguise and character marker. When characters remained present in the scene but their actors were busy playing other parts, another character would hold up the costume piece to signify the absent presence. For example, when Douglas stepped out of the Florizel role to deliver Polixenes' lines, Perdita held up Florizel's purple scarf — as though it were draped over his shoulder — to signify the character's still being there. Likewise, she occasionally looked at where the actor's face would be as though she were sharing reactions with Florizel. All of this served to heighten the comic elements of the scene as the stage business became a joke of its own — a virtuoso performance of too many parts by too few bodies. While there is nothing particularly original about this conventional comic device,

it worked especially well in the final confrontation between Florizel and Polixenes, with Douglas deftly delivering both sides of the argument between Florizel and his unrecognized father. In this exchange, the devices of doubling and in-the-moment character change were used at their best to create irony and humor.

As Florizel and Perdita encountered parental impediments and the tone of the scene shifted, however, the pantomimic strategy felt suddenly out of place, exposing itself rather abruptly as distinctly comic business that went amiss in darker moments. This became a significant problem in the final scene of the play, which included both Polixenes and Florizel. Rather than perhaps eliminating one of the characters, the production continued to signify Florizel's absent body with the scarf prop. This was problematic for several reasons. Because doubling of actors had functioned as the principal source of comedy in the sheep-shearing scene, its use in the final scene constituted an intrusion of a comically coded device into a space that did not easily accommodate it. Moreover, the requirement to hold up Florizel's scarf forced Brodie into an awkward physical posture that competed with the illusion of her as Perdita and rendered her, instead, the actor holding up and talking to a scarf. This might not have troubled a production that had deliberately cultivated an alternative, mannerist visual vocabulary, but in one that was not explicitly stylized — that had gone so far as to "naturalize" Shakespeare's verse into prose — it was disruptive. Significantly, the device foregrounded absence and made the actors' management of *aporia* the central content of the final scene.

This brings me to the moment with which this essay began — the statue scene without the statue — and to the questions that moment raises for how we talk about what is present in and absent from AFTLS's staging. Scholars have long regarded Hermione's reanimation as central to the play's problematizing of female sexuality. Valerie Traub has written that "the play's essential reparative act [is] Hermione's transformation, first into a statue, and then back into a woman" (1992, 42). As Traub argues, it is only through the monumentalization of Hermione that her troubling sexuality can be contained, and this containment is explicitly dramatized; the play "enact[s] the process of female objectification as the dramatic process" (26). If we agree with Traub, Hermione's body is distinctly not interchangeable with Perdita's. Rather, it is a body that has signified specifically and disconcertingly across the play. It is a body that has been publicly shamed, killed off, and turned to stone — a body that is explicitly marked with age and that has been regenerated into a non-threatening, sacred object.

Traub's discussion identifies Hermione's dramatic transformation as "essential" content of the play, and in this way her argument reflects conventional definitions of romance. What I want to suggest is that by subtracting the element of spectacular transformation by which we

identify romance, AFTLS's production highlights another, more subtle generic feature: romance's management of access to the pleasures of the eroticized body. Barbara Fuchs defines romance as "a set of mobile, adaptable strategies for making texts pleasurable" (2004, 58). Among those strategies, I would argue, is romance's playful deferral and fulfillment of erotic consummation, such as the tease of multiple threats on the heroine's chastity (Marina, Miranda, Imogen and, more figuratively, Hermione), followed by the hero's ultimate claiming of her. The structural tension between deferral and fulfillment that keeps the text in motion produces an experiential tension for the audience, whose ongoing interest is ensured by the tantalization of the eroticized body, the deferral of its pleasures, and its final vicarious achievement.

The subtraction of Hermione is therefore not merely the subtraction of spectacular transformation; it is a disruption of the romance form's strategies for managing and fulfilling erotic access. This disruption was a general feature of the AFTLS production, which failed in multiple ways to appreciate the fraught spectacle of Hermione's body. The basic costume for the four actors other than Brodie was a nondescript combination of black and ivory. (For example, Eunice Roberts, whose roles included Paulina, Mamilius, and Dorcas, wore black pants and an ivory tunic throughout the production.) Brodie's was the only exception to this basic costume. For both the Hermione and Perdita roles, she wore a purple empire-waist dress that was low-cut, fairly fitted, and sleeveless. In the scenes prior to the delivery of the infant, she wore a scarf tied around her waist that ballooned very slightly at the belly, producing a faint suggestion of pregnancy. While the character's fecundity is a point of obsession for Leontes and is central to how Hermione figures erotically, the production represented the pregnancy in only a vague way. More problematic, however, was the purple dress, which stood out as explicitly "sexy" among the nondescript, blank-slate clothing worn by the rest of the cast. The effect was much like what Barbara Hodgdon describes in her essay on Oliver Parker's *Othello*, where she argues that, in its visual representation of Desdemona and Cassio in bed together, the film implicates Desdemona by imaging her infidelity, whereas in Shakespeare's play it is only Othello and Iago who do that imaging (Hodgdon 2003, 92-93). The purple dress worked in a similar manner; leaving little to the audience's imagination, it implicated as a "strumpet" not only Hermione but also Perdita. Even more important, it disrupted the genre's driving tension between erotic deferral and fulfillment by giving us too much Hermione too early in the play.

In the final scene, when Hermione at last becomes the silent, passive object of our gaze and we are invited with Leontes to "look upon" her, the production gave us empty space (5.3.100). Had this moment been managed more thoughtfully — by withholding Hermione entirely, for example — it might have worked brilliantly as a purposive disruption of desire and expectation. Instead, the

final scene evidenced not only the production's failure to take full account of Hermione's body as it is staged and scrutinized across Shakespeare's play but also its failure to understand the form of the play — to apprehend the implications of withholding the body that the strategies of romance entice us to desire. Perplexingly, in their wondering gaze at the imagined statue of Hermione, the actors were actually not looking at the same spot. They had not agreed on a common focal point and were looking into slightly different areas of space, a technicality that became a synecdoche of problems at the heart of the production. Having evacuated the scene of both the spectacle of miraculous transformation and the object of desire, the production left the actors and audience nowhere to look.

In addition to highlighting romance's structuring of desire and gratification, the absence of a statuesque Hermione dramatized the relationship between theatrical content and the bodies that perform it. Dramatic bodies matter beyond the operations of signification. They matter not merely because they are the agents of specific character functions or even because they operate within the semiotic systems in which art and culture participate. They matter because the body on stage also functions as what Jacques Rancière calls "sheer presence, without signification" (2007, 23). In *The Future of the Image*, Rancière locates the "artistic" image — either visual or literary — beyond the limits of reproductive likeness or pure semiotics, arguing rather that "the images of art are operations that produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance" (7). In other words, the bodies put in motion in a production of Shakespeare are not merely the physical agents of Shakespeare's play; they are likewise decidedly other than the play, other than the three-dimensional actors and analogues of *The Winter's Tale*. Rancière thus usefully names an aspect of dramatic content that all theatrical productions must consider: "the wordless, senseless materiality of the visible instead of the figures of discourse" (9).

The body's function as image is a particularly foundational element of romance, whose structures teach us to desire sheer presence that does not signify. Within romance's dynamics of deferral and fulfillment, Hermione's body does not merely *have* meaning; it is meaning — it is "the pure immanence of pictorial presence," a phrase Rancière invokes, not coincidentally, to describe the resurrected body of Christ (2007, 29). While Hermione as statue refers legibly and familiarly to the living Hermione of acts 1-3, she/it is also an alien object — a temporal, physical, and ontological dislocation. If this alone were not sufficient to mark her as the artistic image that Rancière describes, the statue literalizes the body's status as image by functioning visually and dramatically as art. As the place where statuary becomes drama, Hermione's body is a site where the artistic image is doubled. So too is aporia doubled when this body does not appear. The empty pedestal becomes a compound of blanks, disrupting the formal dynamics that animate the aesthetics of romance.

Generic Disjunctions in *Cymbeline*

A related set of problems and provocations arose from Folding Chair's *Cymbeline*, which appeared at the 78th Street Theatre Lab in Manhattan from October 9–November 2. Like Mike Alfreds's 2001 *Cymbeline* at the Globe, which met with mixed reviews, Folding Chair's *Cymbeline* featured a six-person cast. In Folding Chair's case, the small cast was not an explicitly experimental choice, since the company is made up of only six actors. However, the specific decision to perform *Cymbeline*, which features twelve speaking parts in its final scene, tests the limits of such a radically stripped down company. As with AFTLS's *The Winter's Tale*, Folding Chair made constraint a central feature of *Cymbeline*: actors wore street clothes, and the sets consisted mainly of four short benches that were moved around to suggest structures such as Imogen's bed and the opening of Belarius's cave. In keeping with Folding Chair's stated emphasis on "plot and character — rather than on opulent design," the lighting and costume changes were minimal.⁵

A minimalist, six-actor staging of this particular play is necessarily a choice to forego spectacle. But because spectacle is so foundational an element of romance, stripping it away makes the other dynamics that organize the genre all the more visible. The challenge Folding Chair set up for themselves foregrounded questions of genre that already complicate *Cymbeline*. The treatment of Guiderius (Paul Edward Hope) and Arviragus (Karen Ogle), for example, summarizes a number of problems embedded in the play that were exacerbated by this production. The two boys were represented as buffoons of the Silvius type — rustic country simpletons who spent much of act 3 lying down on the stage in boredom and apparent exhaustion. This might have worked effectively in a production that aimed explicitly to mock romance's claim of natural nobility. Belarius's (Gowan Campbell's) celebration of the "royalty unlearn'd [and] honour untaught" that shines through the princes' pastoral upbringing already sits uneasily in the play alongside their crass, decidedly ignoble management of "Cloten's clodpoll," inviting a critique of the dubious "royalty" and "honour" the princes represent (*Cymbeline*, 4.2.178, 184). But an ironic reading of these "sparks of Nature" would require a more sustained approach than this production seemed prepared to stage (3.3.79). By simultaneously representing the princes as buffoons and Belarius as sage and reliable, the production provided no resolution to the textual problem, instead compounding it by staging at once the stupidity of the king's sons, the wisdom of Belarius, and the cosmic justice of the innate nobility trope. This problem of characterization illustrates the production's unsure engagement with generic questions. If Guiderius and Arviragus are imbeciles, how is the audience to read the final scene of the play? Is it romance or farce? How can romance dramatize the ideals of resolution

and reconciliation if, first, its foundling princes are gaping morons and, second, the spectacle of revelation to which it has been building is performed by only six bodies?

By neither staging the spectacular revelation associated most strongly with dramatic romance nor engaging legibly with the genre's other organizing dynamics, *Folding Chair* was left without a clear generic foothold. The production seemed uncertain about whether it wanted to stage a more or less "straight" *Cymbeline* or a rollicking farce that exploited the play's many comic possibilities. At several junctures it pushed toward the latter, but it never pushed far enough or in a sustained way, as the production's treatment of Posthumus (Hope) and Imogen (Lisa Blankenship) demonstrates. While the scene of Posthumus' departure in 1.2 was played fairly conventionally, the bracelet he placed on Imogen's wrist was a black leather band studded with metal rivets. It was not clear how we were to parse this important prop, nor how (or whether) the production understood it. The discrepancy between the bracelet's goth-punk appearance and the tone and content of the scene was simply irreconcilable, producing an impression, very early in the performance, of generic and interpretive incoherence. Another such discrepancy occurred in Imogen's transformation into Fidele. Although the acting style and swelling background music of the Welsh scenes signaled the unfolding of epic tragedy, the Fidele disguise featured a pair of clownish, brightly colored, argyle knee-socks under a pair of rolled-up trousers. In a scene that had offered a number of competing generic cues, this comic costume contributed to the sense that the production was unsure of its own dramatic vocabulary. Images such as the bracelet and argyle socks dislocated the narrative and the visual so completely that the "dissemblance" by which Rancière defines the aesthetic image became absolute unlikeness. The bracelet neither dissembled nor dislocated the relationship between the original and its on-stage image but, rather, resisted any relationship altogether, severing tenor from vehicle in a way that cancelled the image's aesthetic viability.

Like the missing body of Hermione, these moments also demonstrated not only how erotic tension is managed by romance but also how it can be disrupted. It is important to the building of both hetero- and homoerotic desire that Rosalind and Viola appear as attractive romantic objects even when dressed as boys. So too is it necessary that Imogen's cross-dressing not shatter her function as the play's principal erotic object. Transforming her into a comic figure and making a visual joke of the sacramental bracelet exchange disrupts these dynamics by positioning the audience as superior to — and therefore in possession of — Imogen. In the process, the object of desire disappears. And without the tension between deferral and fulfillment that structures the action of the play, acts 3 and 4 were unable to sustain dramatic interest.

The production further disrupted these dynamics in the final reconciliation scene. Although the main plot of *Cymbeline* turns on Imogen's famed chastity, in this production her reunion with

Posthumous gave new meaning to the term "public display of affection," as the couple frantically kissed and groped each other on one corner of the stage. This moment is worth thinking about for the ways in which it radically subverted the play's insistence on Imogen's invisible, absent perfection. The dynamics of romance work to idealize and distantiate Imogen, creating dramatic tension through deferral even in scenes such as Iachimo's invasion of her bedchamber. By contrast, Folding Chair's production gave us an explicitly sexualized Imogen, achieved and enjoyed before our eyes. Although the production failed to engage with the interpretive possibilities these moments opened up, the Imogen-Posthumous kiss, like the subtracted body of Hermione, is an instance of dramatic failure that draws our attention to important generic dynamics. Because the final scene's giddy spectacle of revelation was so significantly pared down, the production's management of erotic access to Imogen became all the more crucial, all the more charged.

While the characterization of Imogen created a problematic disruption in the erotic dynamics that organize the play, Folding Chair's treatment of Cloten (Josh Thelin) intuited precisely these dynamics and deftly reversed them for comic effect. Complaining of his most recent skirmish at court in 2.1, Cloten stripped down to a leopard-print bikini and flopped out for a backrub — a backrub performed with wincing reluctance by a disgusted and much ill-treated servant (his two gentleman servants having been consolidated into one). The scene worked vividly to convey Cloten's fantasies of himself as a romantic prize, his crass sense of entitlement, his utterly unconscious abuse of those beneath him, and his general absurdity. It worked as comedy by giving the audience erotic access to precisely the object we do not desire. If the Imogen-Posthumous kiss failed because it provided too much information about the body that the genre of romance enticingly distantiates, the Cloten backrub succeeded as comedy because it provided too much information about a body that cannot be distantiated enough.

Cloten's scenes aside, the production's general deafness to questions of tone and genre left little likelihood that the discoveries of the final scene would be of great interest. The climactic moments were energetic enough, and the company dealt fairly smoothly with the multiple costume changes entailed in staging this scene's dizzying discoveries with six actors. The production largely managed this feat, however, by ignoring the fact of having only six actors and attempting to stage the scene straight, simulating a full cast through clever doublings and quick-change costume bits. While this choice caused no significant problems, it also did not afford the production any opportunity to provide a conclusive interpretation of the play. Like the costume business in the AFTLS production, these bits constituted an inherently comic spectacle, but little else in the scene worked in generic tandem with this device, again frustrating any attempt that the company might

have made to lampoon the excesses of the romance ending and push this production where it seemed to want to go — into parody.

A desire for *Cymbeline* to be resolved into generic unity may, as J. M. Nosworthy has argued, be contrary to Shakespeare's design. Nosworthy writes, "Cymbeline is purely Shakespearean in its recognition that life itself is not a coherent pattern leading by orderly degrees to prosperity, as in comedy, or to destruction, as in tragedy, but a confused series of experiences, good and evil, grave and gay, momentous and trivial" (Nosworthy 2004, lxxix). Nosworthy's reading of the play — that *Cymbeline* dramatizes incoherence, purposely constructs irresolvable discrepancies, and only achieves resolution through the most unexpected and spectacular deus ex machina — raises important questions for performance. Is it possible to stage Nosworthy's reading, and if so, how would that staging differ from one that simply does not recognize what is difficult about *Cymbeline*? Can it be done by a production that eschews spectacle? And how might purposive chaos look different from accidental chaos? One answer may be that if you have to ask the question, the production has not made a convincing argument that its incoherence has meaning. Folding Chair's *Cymbeline* begged the question.

Contracted Worlds in *The Tempest*

Classic Stage Company's (CSC) production of *The Tempest*, which appeared from September 3-October 19, 2008 at CSC's black-box theater in the East Village, imposed constraint in a manner different from the other two plays. Directed by Brian Kulick and starring Mandy Patinkin as Prospero, this was not a production governed by external budgetary or portability concerns. Nonetheless, constraint emerged as one of its key design elements. Jian Jung's simple but elegant set featured a square of beach sand against the midnight-blue floor and walls of the CSC space. Suspended from above was a large square canvas painted with sunset-colored clouds and sky. This squared-off central space, demarcating Prospero's island, was significantly smaller than the theater's total available playing space. Inside the box of the theater, the squares of sky and sand created a sense of boxes-within-boxes — of a world contracting instead of enlarging. Rather than offer an expansive imaginative space of magic and spectacle, this production of *The Tempest* invited us into a world whose borders were diminished and delimited.

This sense of a world contracted was further emphasized by the play's opening scene. Whereas the storm is conventionally one of the most spectacularly staged scenes in the Shakespearean canon — often complete with a ship and extravagant weather effects — CSC's production chose to miniaturize rather than enlarge the storm. With each of its four corners controlled independently, the sky canvas was lowered nearly to the floor and tilted forward to expose a model ship mounted

on the back of the canvas. As the action between the seafarers unfolded around the perimeter of the sand, Prospero's hand motions were choreographed to match subtle shifts in the angle of the canvas that caused the ship to slide back and forth on a hidden rail. The dwarfed ship, and Prospero's pantomimed control of it, did much to establish him as the grand manipulator of the diminished play world. Several times throughout the production, the canvas was tilted in response to the conjuring motions of Prospero, whose power to manipulate earth and elements was signaled repeatedly by the movement of the sky.

The specific quality of this manipulation was suggested by Prospero's first scene with Miranda, who was played by the lovely Elisabeth Waterson. For most of their conversation, Miranda sat on her knees in the center of the sand, her hands folded demurely in her lap while Prospero circled imperiously around her. The physical relationship between the two communicated his dominion over her, her accustomed place at his feet hinting at Prospero's habit of establishing hierarchies and enforcing them on the bodies under his control. Even more telling was the way in which Miranda instinctively shrank from him when he came near her, visibly intimidated by the power, energy, and manifest rage of Patinkin's Prospero, attributes intensified by the actor's potent voice and physicality. Waterson's easy tears and doe-like eyes combined with her tall, willowy frame to suggest a frail but empathetic young Miranda under the subjection of a tyrannous father.

While Miranda's modesty was signaled during this exchange by her compact posture, the appearance of a female Ariel (Angel Desai) subsequently exposed the contributions of Oana Botez-Ban's costume design to the production's visual vocabulary. The court of Naples wore Elizabethan-inspired costumes in a palette of red and gold, and all the island inhabitants were in natural-colored linen that matched the color of the sand. Miranda wore a demure, sleeveless, full-length gown, exposing long, fragile arms that seemed slightly to embarrass her. Ariel, more voluptuous in figure, was in a strapless bandeau top — designed to look like a makeshift strip of cloth tied across her chest — and very short shorts, leaving bare her shoulders, arms, midriff, and legs. Whereas Miranda wore no evident makeup and her hair was wrapped in prim buns at the nape of her neck, Ariel wore heavy eye makeup and hair styled into a wild, punkish concoction at the top of her head. She was decorated in exotic body tattoos.

The contrast between the two female characters was striking, as were the similarities. With the same hair color as Miranda and wearing the same fabric, Ariel looked like an eroticized version of her master's daughter — like Prospero's fantasy island girl. And given how powerfully the production had already established Prospero's control of all elements of life on and about the island, the physical appearance of the two women emerged as yet something else he had ordered to his liking. As the exchange between Prospero and Ariel unfolded, the dynamics between them

became a parallel but less-restrained version of what had just transpired between Prospero and Miranda: his rage grew more menacing, his threats more explicit, his impatience more palpable, and his powerless minion more cowering and intimidated, finally weeping in despair.

In its physical representation of Miranda and Ariel, the production demonstrated a sensitivity to the romance genre's strategies for managing erotic access, a sensitivity that the other two productions lacked. Prospero and Miranda mirror the erotic problem of *Pericles*, the potentially incestuous father-daughter pairing that destroys Antiochus and separates *Pericles* and Marina until she is ready to be married. In CSC's *The Tempest*, that troubling erotic energy was visually deflected onto the figure of Ariel, who appeared as the physical incarnation of Prospero's desire. This had the effect of erotically charging the triad of Prospero and his girls while not disrupting the dynamics of desire and deferral that must structure the audience's relationship to Miranda. At the same time, the production wisely located this charge in the stage images, resisting the urge to invent a romance for Prospero and Ariel. Patinkin's Prospero gave no explicit suggestion of incestuous desire for his daughter, nor was the relationship between him and Ariel otherwise eroticized. And yet the mirrored image of the two female characters was an indelible element of the production — an image worth remarking for its evocation of subtle dynamics at work in *The Tempest*, even though the production made no attempt to construct a broader narrative from it. The bodies of Miranda and Ariel as they were clothed, made up, and set before our eyes as dramatic images were what Rancière calls "pure blocs of visibility, impervious to any narrativization, any intersection of meaning" (2007, 11). Through these images, the production registered its consciousness of romantic deferral and fulfillment.

The casting of African-American actor Nyambi Nyambi in the role of Caliban was the first clear indication that race would be a significant element of the production's visual vocabulary. Miranda's accusation that Caliban is a "savage" was destabilized by his speech and appearance (*The Tempest*, 1.2.356). He wore nothing but linen drawstring pants; like Ariel, he had dark, exotic body tattoos, the largest in a stingray shape on his chest. With a graceful, toned physique and an elegant, melodious Caribbean accent, Nyambi's Caliban bore little resemblance to "[a] thing most brutish," a "puppy-headed monster" or a "misshapen knave" (1.2.358; 2.2.151; 5.1.268).

Nyambi's Caliban points to two nodes of interest in CSC's production of *The Tempest*. The first was its use of racially coded bodies to interrogate the colonialist hierarchies of the play. While the casting of white actors in the roles of Prospero, Miranda, and most of the Neopolitans and a black actor in the role of Caliban exploited a raced visual vocabulary to signify Caliban's Otherness, the production simultaneously deconstructed that vocabulary by casting its only other black actor in the role of Alonso (Michael Potts). The fact that both ends of the social hierarchy — the King and

the savage slave — were played by black men worked to subvert a symbolics of color that the racialized Caliban initially appeared to exploit. Further, Caliban was made increasingly whiter as the play progressed, his body gradually covered in a thin layer of beach sand. The sand obscured and flattened him, and as he grew to resemble his white colonizers, he also became grotesque and less human-looking.

The production's simultaneous coding and decoding of raced bodies extended beyond Caliban and Alonso to include the island's spirit figures. Kulick seemed purposively to have cast East Indian actors in the parts of Ariel (Desai) and her two assistants (Nana Mensah and Bhavesh Patel), later Iris and Juno, all of whom, like Caliban, were marked by tattooing as the "exotic" inhabitants of the island. But Patel also doubled as Adrian, a lord of Alonso's court, his serpentine foot tattoo overtly exposed below his courtly costume. Like the raced casting of Alonso and Caliban, the visibility of the tattoo on Adrian's Neopolitan foot summarized Kulick's subtle deconstruction of the race- and culture-based hierarchies that are so central to Prospero's colonizing logic, constructing instead a palimpsest of the savage and civilized. While Prospero constituted and reinforced his minions' powerlessness through narratives of their enslavement and threats of physical torture, the production consciously exploited the symbolics of raced and painted bodies to interrogate the terms by which Prospero justifies his power. In this way, it complicated the postcolonial dynamics that have come to govern many of our engagements with the play.

As it eschewed a straightforward postcolonial reading and de-emphasized dramatic spectacle, the production not surprisingly came to emphasize erotics, especially the erotics of mastery, a second key element that was exemplified by Nyambi's Caliban. Put simply, island characters in the service of Prospero were invariably semi-nude. This not only included Ariel and Caliban but extended as well to Ferdinand (Stark Sands), who wore a shirt in his first scene with Prospero and Miranda but appeared shirtless while carrying wood at the opening of act 3, having been captured and put to work by Prospero. Of the island inhabitants, only Miranda, whose chastity Patinkin's Prospero guarded menacingly, was modestly clothed. The suggestion that service to Prospero entailed an element of debasing erotic subjection was reinforced by the particularly lurid way in which Nyambi's Caliban made his repeated offers of foot-licking. Prostrating himself at the bare feet of Stefano (Steven Rattazzi), Caliban seemed about to perform an act of oral gratification taught him by his accustomed master, a form of gratification he had thoroughly absorbed as appropriate to the dynamics of master and servant.

Prospero's confrontation with his usurping brother was likewise organized by this erotics of power. Pausing between declaring Antonio (Karl Kenzler) "most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would infect my mouth" and telling that same brother, "I do forgive / Thy rankest fault," Prospero

gripped him by the neck with both hands and kissed him on the mouth with force and at length (5.1.130-32). The kiss was loaded with threat, demonstrating Prospero's mastery and Antonio's powerlessness just as Prospero announced, "[I] require / My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know / Thou must restore" (5.1.132-34). The "force" was in the kiss — which Antonio could only passively and humiliatingly endure — a kiss that stripped Antonio of his dukedom just as Prospero's mastery throughout the production had exposed the bodies of his slaves.

What was less legible in CSC's production was the transition between this manipulative Prospero and Prospero as the broker of mercy and reconciliation in the play's final scenes. Prospero's turn to mercy — "Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick, / Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst thy fury / Do I take part" — was not a moment in which Patinkin's Prospero made an especially discernible transition, nor was an alternative transition provided (5.1.25-27). Given the ferocity of Patinkin's performance of the role, this transition was imperative to the plausibility of the character's vow to break his staff, drown his book, and forgive. Although the resolution of the play fell somewhat flat as a result, Prospero's closing moments with Caliban were unexpectedly poignant. When Prospero declared, "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine," Caliban's terrified response, "I shall be pinched to death" startled his master, whose searching gaze remained steadily on Caliban as the others chattered on about Trinculo's drunkenness. It seemed the first time Prospero understood the extent to which being "his" meant being physically exposed and in pain. Prospero's final insult to Caliban — "He is as disproportioned in his manners / As in his shape" — was excised (5.1.291-92). Instead, his order to Caliban, "Go, sirrah, to my cell; / Take with you your companions. As you look / To have my pardon, trim it handsomely," was offered as a gentle apology — as a reprieve from the torture Caliban had come to expect (5.1.291-94). In Caliban's slow, grateful response, "Ay, that I will," Prospero's apology was accepted (5.1.295). It was this moment, rather than Ariel's inducement to human sympathy, that chastened Prospero and motivated the Epilogue.

The success of CSC's *The Tempest* finally had less to do with the company's resources or Mandy Patinkin's star power than with its thoughtful engagement with the subtle erotic dynamics that drive the play. Indeed, the production seemed intent on refusing the play's invitation to large-scale dramatic spectacle, instead locating meaning in a carefully constructed set of relations between body, image, and erotics. This is one of the principal reasons why CSC succeeded where AFTLS and Folding Chair foundered: because *The Tempest* dealt consciously with the aporia left by subtracting spectacle. In place of dazzling visual display, the production engaged the audience in a heightened awareness of other key generic elements — especially erotic deferral and fulfillment — that surface under constraint.

Notes

1. Thanks to my colleagues in the Philadelphia Area Working Group in Early Modern Studies for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. All quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (2001).
3. This statement comes from the AFTLS program notes. While the program and AFTLS website describe the company's staging practices in philosophical terms, the minimalist cast and staging are no doubt also shaped by budgetary and portability concerns.
4. This language-based strategy for acting Shakespeare — one in which rhythm and sound function to generate and express emotion — is articulated in Kristen Linklater's *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice: The Actor's Guide to Talking the Text* (1992), a standard text of Shakespearean acting training.
5. Folding Chair program notes.

Permissions

Permission to print the photo from *The Tempest* by kind permission of Classic Stage Company.

Permission to print the photo from *The Winter's Tale* by kind permission of Actors from the London Stage.

Permission to print the photo from *Cymbeline* by kind permission of Paul Edward Hope, Josh Thelin, and Marcus Geduld of Folding Chair Classical Theatre.

References

- Fuchs, Barbara. 2004. *Romance*. New Critical Idiom. New York: Routledge.
- Hodgdon, Barbara. 2003. "Race-ing *Othello*, Re-Engendering White-Out, II." In *Shakespeare the Movie, II*. Edited by Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose. New York: Routledge.
- Linklater, Kristen. 1992. *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice: The Actor's Guide to Talking the Text*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.
- Nosworthy, J. M., ed. 2004. *Cymbeline*. Arden Shakespeare, second series. London: Thomson.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2007. *The Future of the Image*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. New York: Verso.
- Shakespeare, William. 2001. *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*. Edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan. London: Thomson.
- Traub, Valerie. 1992. *Desire and Sexuality: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. New York: Routledge.