

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



***The Changeling* presented by Shakespeare's Globe at the Sam Wanamaker
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Directed by: Dominic Dromgoole. With Hattie Morahan (Beatrice-Joanna), Trystan Gravelle (De Flores), Sarah MacRae (Isabella), Pearce Quigley (Lollio), Brian Ferguson (Antonio), Thalissa Teixeira (Diaphanta), Peter Hamilton Dyer (Jasperino/Pedro), Tom Stuart (Alonzo), Joe Jameson (Tomazo), Adam Lawrence (Franciscus), Liam Brennan (Vermandero), Simon Harrison (Alsemero), Phil Whitchurch (Alibius), Matt Doherty (Servant/Madman)

Since the opening of the Globe's intimate indoor space in 2014, there has been much talk of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (SWP) as a venue especially suitable for Jacobean tragedies. Its candlelit atmosphere, the argument goes, is eminently appropriate for stories of blood, lust and corruption. The first two seasons demonstrated this logic in their programming: *The Duchess of Malfi* opened the theatre in January 2014, followed by productions of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Broken Heart*, and *The Changeling*. Michael Billington went so far as to identify a 'house style' for the new theatre in its second season, one defined by 'Jacobean tragedy [...] played in strict period with subdued lighting, a satiric undercurrent, and a strong female presence'.¹ Never mind that the only production from the inaugural season to be revived in 2014-15 was a comedy, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and that the 2016 winter season was dominated by romances.

¹ Michael Billington, 'The Changeling review—Hattie Morahan is chillingly good in grisly masterpiece', *Guardian*, 21 January 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jan/21/the-changeling-review-hattie-morahan-sam-wanamaker-playhouse-london>> [accessed 3 October 2016].

Although I am sceptical of Billington's generalisations about the SWP – as well as the implication that period tragedies are what the space *should* be used for – I have to admit that the claustrophobia of Middleton and Rowley's play felt well-suited to that space, particularly given this production's emphasis on locked doors. Plus, as Catherine Love put it, attending an event in the SWP requires 'an effort of supreme will just to stop perving on the carpentry'.² Love goes on to praise Dromgoole's *Changeling* for accepting that the SWP itself 'is the immediate star of any show it stages', and so it was, even a full year after its inaugural production.³ Of course, the SWP is absolutely 'gorgeous', a 'jewel box shimmering in amber candlelight', and unlike any other theatre currently operating in London.⁴ As in the outdoor Globe, the theatre building becomes a player in the drama, functioning much like a National Trust house in encouraging us to imagine a time – if not a space – different from the one in which we find ourselves.

Although the Globe's financial success is largely dependent upon its status as part of the heritage industry, it is also important to critique its appeal to heritage and nostalgia – particularly when the notion of authenticity is used to justify glossing over or ignoring the more difficult aspects of four hundred-year-old plays. Susan Bennett's reminder that nostalgia is inherently conservative and preservationist resonates all-too-clearly within the glorious acoustic of the SWP.⁵ Using the authority of a pseudo-heritage building to avoid the knotty questions of gender and class presented in *The Changeling*, as I argue Dromgoole's production did, creates more problems than it resolves.

Of course, periodised authenticity is always a fraught concept for Shakespeare's Globe, particularly in their newly-built indoor playhouse. As any tour guide or academic visitor will tell you, fire exit markings, electrical lighting, stewards, and orderly ticket-collection are all compromises made with history in the interests of health and safety; many similar compromises are also made silently in the interest of modern aesthetics, acting techniques, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre-going practices. In addition, where and when these compromises occur is a highly selective matter. Visitors to the SWP frequently complain about the discomfort of the theatre, for example.⁶ The

² Catherine Love, 'The Changeling, Sam Wanamaker Playhouse', *Catherine Love: Arts Journalist, Theatre Critic and Editor*, 21 January 2015 <<http://catherinelove.co.uk/2015/01/21/the-changeling-sam-wanamaker-playhouse/2015>> [accessed 3 October 2016]

³ Ibid.

⁴ Andrew Dickson, 'New Globe playhouse draws us inside Shakespeare's inner space', *Guardian*, 7 January 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jan/07/sam-wanamaker-playhouse-shakespeare-globe>> [accessed 17 December 2015].

⁵ Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 5.

⁶ See, e.g., Quentin Letts, 'A bloody, brutal tale (even my seat was murder!)', *Daily Mail*, 22 January 2015, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2922687/A-bloody-brutal-tale-seat-murder->

design of the seating, like the scaling of the ticket prices, is a concession to history. Indeed, the theatre is decidedly *more* comfortable than the lost original on which it is based, partly thanks to changes in clothing styles and personal hygiene. The space is candle-lit and the costumes are roughly in period, although not to the extent of Rylance's costuming experiments when the Globe opened in the late 1990s. The *Changeling* production also forwent the pearlescent make-up used in the 2014 *Malfi* and, apparently, by early modern actors.⁷ The presence of women on the stage, the use of set pieces such as the iron gates in *The Changeling*, and the lack of stage-sitters all belie the SWP's authenticity – particularly to academic early modernists, who make up a fair proportion of its target audience.

Billington's definition of 'strict period' as quoted above, then, willingly overlooks these compromises, and the modifier 'strict' becomes a marketing tool, cuing audiences to expect an 'authentic' theatrical experience. For my purposes, the relative faithfulness of the SWP and its productions to the lost and, to some extent, imagined original early modern indoor theatre is less important than the effect that a claim to this kind of faithfulness has on the practitioners and patrons who operate within its sphere. In other words, the selective nature of the Globe's approach to history is inevitable and, on its own, not particularly problematic. Shakespeare's Globe markets itself, however, on the authenticity of both the actors' and the audience's experience of the space: even as it reminds us that the theatres are a 'best guess' at their early modern equivalents, the Globe claims a goal of building spaces 'that Shakespeare would have recognised'.⁸ This institutional insistence on authenticity – particularly in the face of difficult political and social conversations about the kinds of plays it stages – and the selective way in which historical research was applied at the Globe under Dromgoole creates an interesting tension that I will explore in greater detail in the context of the 2015 *Changeling*.

When the Globe wants to justify a choice in its commercial productions, the default is often an appeal to authenticity or neutrality. Actor Hattie Morahan, for example, has asserted that *The Changeling* does not require any 'slanted, modern interpretation', by

[Quentin-Letts-reviews-Changeling.html](#)>, [accessed 10 October 2016], and the SWP's [TripAdvisor](#) reviews.

⁷ See Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), esp. pp. 89-110.

⁸ These adages are constantly repeated by press from the Globe, including within the '[About Us](#)' section of their website; the claim that the SWP would be recognisable to Shakespeare was also repeated by the architectural firm in charge of the project in an interview with the *Guardian*: see Maev Kennedy, 'Globe theatre to get sister building—with a roof', *Guardian*, 4 August 2011, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/aug/04/globe-theatre-to-build-roof>>, [accessed 25 October 2016].

which she seems to mean a feminist interpretation.⁹ Whilst I do not necessarily advocate an understanding of Middleton, Rowley, or their contemporaries as feminists, I would also suggest that it is not possible or even desirable for a modern audience to attend performances of these plays without viewing them through their modern eyes. The idea that any interpretation taking account of modern sensibilities must be ‘slanted’ implies that the 400-year-old text is neutral. This is a problematic perspective for a number of reasons; to suggest, for example, that the level of control Vermandero, Alsemero, and De Flores attempt to exert over Beatrice’s body in *The Changeling* is neutral or normal behaviour is a dangerous game. Theatre practitioners and scholars alike, therefore, must continue to ponder Kim Solga’s question with regard to early modern drama: ‘[h]ow do we square this work’s enormous cultural capital with its profound distance from contemporary attitudes toward social justice and human rights?’¹⁰ Indeed, in the distinctly undemocratic space of the SWP, confronted with a production that insists on its own neutrality, how can the issues of ‘social justice and human rights’ even be introduced?

Rather than engage with these issues, the SWP *Changeling* dodged Solga’s question by consistently appealing to neutrality of interpretation. I have already taken issue with Billington’s insistence that the production was staged in ‘strict period’; as Morahan’s comment suggests, it also was not a self-consciously modern interpretation of the play. Indeed, it gave the impression of actively avoiding interpretation – which, of course, constitutes an interpretation in and of itself. Interviewing Morahan on her portrayal of Beatrice, Holly Williams notes that ‘they’ve not tied themselves in knots over the occasionally thorny politics of the play’.¹¹ Morahan herself sees the lack of political commentary in the production as unproblematic and even desirable, because she reads the play as ‘strong enough to stand on its own two feet’. Whilst she concedes that in ‘[s]ome of those early modern plays, you have female characters that don’t have any agency or a voice’, and ‘[t]hen I feel one’s beholden to do a kind of comment’, Morahan also maintains that, in *The Changeling*, ‘the characters are so strong, you can just say, “This is the story”’. This claim that the play can ‘stand on its own two feet’ and needs no ‘modern interpretation’ seems designed to exempt Dromgoole’s production from

⁹ Quoted in Holly Williams, ‘Hattie Morahan on *The Changeling*: an unsavoury role played with relish’ *Independent*, 19 Jan. 2015, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/hattie-morahan-on-the-changeling-an-unsavoury-role-played-with-relish-9988771.html>>, [accessed 25 October 2016].

¹⁰ Kim Solga, *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance: Invisible Acts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), p. 2.

¹¹ Williams, ‘Hattie Morahan on *The Changeling*’. Additional quotations in this paragraph are from the same interview.

engaging with the play's more difficult components. Indeed, the affirmative, definite confidence that 'This *is* the story' demonstrates the power of the neutrality narrative: Morahan, Dromgoole, and the rest of the cast and creative team have apparently accepted a way of doing early modern drama that does not require them (or us, as audience) to think about the implications of a given play's politics in the present.

Using the SWP Stage

This is not to say that the SWP *Changeling* did not have its strengths. There were, for example, a number of moments of strategic and inventive staging. At the end of the central scene for Beatrice and De Flores, in which he claims her virginity as his reward for murdering her fiancé, Gravelle's De Flores swept Beatrice off her feet and carried her bridal-style off stage through the central doors. Her posture during this action was one of stunned stillness, perhaps as an attempt to justify De Flores' line 'silence is one of pleasure's best receipts' (sig. F1v).¹² Later, when Alsemero put Beatrice to a virginity test – and she accurately faked the desired result – he carried her offstage in precisely the same way, and her troubled stillness hearkened back to that earlier, fateful exit. The repeated image foreshadowed the breakdown of Beatrice and Alsemero's relationship in the final scenes and powerfully underlined Beatrice's unwillingness to consummate her marriage on her wedding night.

The appearance of Alonzo's ghost in the first scene of Act 5 was also cleverly staged: at the end of the madmen's dance rehearsal in Act 4, Scene 3, the ensemble took hold of the chandeliers and pulled them back to the corners of the stage, as if about to let them swing – candles still lit – into various sections of the audience. At the last moment, rather than letting the chandeliers fly, they spun them around and blew out the candles before letting go and running off stage. The chandeliers were raised to upper gallery level, still spinning and swinging, as the next scene began, and the sense of imminent danger remained. Solitary candles, held by Beatrice and De Flores, allowed the swaying chandeliers to cast eerie, shifting shadows on the stage. This same lighting scheme created shadows that obscured part or all of Tom Stuart's body as the ghost. Watching from the pit, the sight of Alonzo's bloody hand reaching over Beatrice's shoulder came as a scary surprise: the darkness and shadows made it almost impossible to see him moving across the stage, and so the appearance of his hand in the light of her candle was truly gruesome. Her line, 'Bless me! It slides by / Some ill thing haunts the house, t'has

¹² All references to the text of *The Changeling* are from the Scholar Press Facsimile of the 1653 quarto text, edited by N.W. Bawcutt.

left behind it / A shivering sweat upon me' was felt, viscerally, in the audience (sig. H1v). This staging choice took advantage of the SWP's unique strengths and was one of the few genuinely unsettling moments in my first viewing of the production.

However, this impressive moment in the production was not available to every audience member, as the SWP is more economically stratified than the outdoor theatre, and performances there look and feel completely different depending on the price bracket of your ticket. I saw the SWP *Changeling* three times: once at the beginning of its run, in January 2015, once in the middle, in February, and once at the end, in March. My budget stretched to one ticket in the pit (£60), but my other two tickets were for the much more affordable upper gallery.

I found Alonzo's ghost much less frightening when viewed from the upper gallery, primarily because his entire stalk across the stage, from the door stage left to Beatrice and her candle downstage right, was visible. From the pit, his body was barely discernable until his bloodied hand crept into the light thrown by Beatrice's candle. From above, however, the candlelight appeared to illuminate more of the stage, and Stuart's body was not as hidden by the shadows. As a result, the play of light, darkness, and shadow was much less pronounced, and the ghost's menace – which relied on his body remaining nearly invisible for much of the scene – was reduced, generating one of what Pascale Aebischer calls the SWP's 'anamorphic' stage images.¹³

Press around the opening of the SWP implied – although of course no one confirmed this outright – that the scaling of ticket prices in the SWP is intended to reflect the discrepancies between the cost of tickets at the Globe and the Blackfriars theatres in the seventeenth century: Holly Williams' 2014 article about the new space notes that the tickets are 'much more expensive than the Globe's' and quickly quotes James Shapiro calling the Blackfriars the place to go 'if you wanted to impress somebody'.¹⁴ Seventeenth-century indoor playhouses were more expensive, and more exclusive, than their outdoor cousins and therefore, logically, the SWP must be more expensive and more exclusive than the new Globe. The argument makes sense from a modern-day

¹³ Pascale Aebischer, 'Candlelight and Architecture at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse: *The Changeling* (2015) and *The Tempest* (2016)', *Shakespeare, Spectatorship, and the Technologies of Performance*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press., p. 2. With many thanks to Pascale for sharing her work in progress and discussing the production with me on numerous occasions.

¹⁴ Holly Williams, 'All the world's a stage (or two): Shakespeare's Globe to be joined by a candlelit indoor theatre', *Independent*, 21 June 2013, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/all-the-worlds-a-stage-or-two-shakespeares-globe-to-be-joined-by-a-candlelit-indoor-theatre-8665385.html>>, [accessed 10 November 2016].

economic point of view, of course: the SWP accommodates significantly fewer people than the outdoor Globe, where 700 £5 tickets are available for every performance, so it makes sense that tickets should cost more.¹⁵ Less than one-twentieth as many tickets are available in the lowest price bracket at the SWP, at £10 each, with a severely restricted view of the stage.

Another moment at which the seating position affected the production's impact occurred during the ghost's first appearance in the play, at the end of the dumbshow. This moment has been handled in a variety of ways throughout the play's modern performance history, but the SWP was the first production I have encountered to stage a rape of Beatrice in which Alonzo's ghost was a participant. Towards the end of the dumbshow, as the other characters '*passe[d] over in great solemnity*', De Flores pulled Beatrice into the discovery space, lifted her skirt, and began thrusting into her from behind. Alonzo's ghost appeared behind De Flores, joining in the thrusting motion and shoving his bloodied hand in Deflores' face. It is unclear whether Beatrice herself was aware of the ghost's presence; as I note elsewhere, her next line ('This fellow has undone me endlessly' [sig. F2r]) was played for laughs. This grotesque moment is a clear departure from the quarto description of the dumbshow, which was followed to the letter in the rest of the performance. As Kate Lechler notes, there has been a tendency to 'interpolate extratextual sex scenes' in productions of early modern tragedies specifically since the 1960s, which 'answer the texts' unanswered questions about what happens when the characters are offstage'.¹⁶ Such staging choices can sometimes generate particular interpretations of moments that are often ambiguous in the playtexts; considered within the spatial politics of the SWP, as Aebischer argues, they can also 'turn ethical certainty into something that demands critical thinking and judgement'.¹⁷ The sex act at the end of the SWP dumbshow is a particularly complex example because it resonated differently in different parts of the playhouse.

Patrons in the most expensive seats, at least in productions directed by Dromgoole, are imagined as the model spectators, whose gaze is privileged and prioritised within the playhouse. As Aebischer argues, '[a]udience positions within the playhouse determine *what* is seen, *how* what is seen is perceived, and what it *feels like*'.¹⁸ Aebischer, Farah Karim-Cooper, Will Tosh, and others have pointed out and Martin White's experimental *Chamber of Demonstrations* shows that the candelabras that light the

¹⁵ These numbers are accurate as of summer 2016.

¹⁶ Kate Lechler, 'Thomas Middleton in Performance 1960-2013: A History of Reception', Doctoral Thesis (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 2014), pp. 24, 40.

¹⁷ Aebischer, 'Candlelight and Architecture', p. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 9 (emphasis in original).

space produce different effects for audiences on the lower and upper levels of the theatre.¹⁹ Whereas patrons in the lower gallery – the most expensive seats – perceive a lowered level of lighting when the candelabras are raised, for example, patrons in the less expensive upper gallery will actually experience an *increase* in light as the candles move closer to them. Aebischer’s invocation of the anamorphic image – as seen most famously in Hans Holbein the Younger’s 1533 painting ‘The Ambassadors’ – therefore neatly encapsulates the experience of spectatorship in the SWP: the image itself changes depending on your viewing position.

The sexual encounter between Beatrice, De Flores, and Alonzo at the end of the dumbshow was fundamentally changed by the location of the viewer. Viewed end-on from the pit or lower gallery, Alonzo’s ghost was clearly visible and clearly involved in the action. Beatrice herself became almost an afterthought, with the focus on De Flores’ reaction to the ghost and his bloodied, four-fingered hand. It was unclear whether Beatrice was even aware of the ghost’s presence; her blank expression gave nothing away except, perhaps, a ‘utilitarian approach to sex with De Flores’.²⁰ From above, Beatrice’s face was hidden, but her body was, from many seats, the only clearly visible part of the encounter. Alonzo’s ghost was all but invisible, with only his hand in view from some sections of the upper gallery. De Flores’ body, partially hidden by the door frame of the discovery space, merged with the ghost’s, such that it was not necessarily clear that a third body was even present from many places in the upper gallery. This partial view of the scene, Aebischer argues, is the ‘anamorphic view’, which, perhaps accidentally, ‘deepened the sense of “ethical undecidability” and “moral muddle” readers have found characteristic of the play’.²¹ Without access to all of the information, as it were, these less privileged spectators were forced to ask questions about what had happened. From the ‘model spectator’s’ point of view, the scene offered a comforting, if false, sense of ‘ethical certainty’: having been offered an uninterrupted view, they were neither asked nor encouraged to question the version of events as presented to them.²² It strikes me that Dromgoole’s own reading of *The Changeling* is perhaps evident in his blocking decisions here: the play is pretty much about De Flores, and Beatrice kind of enjoyed all that coerced sex, anyway.²³ Given that the view of the production from the

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 9, the 2014-15 and 2015-16 season programmes for the SWP, and Martin White, *The Chamber of Demonstrations: Reconstructing the Jacobean Indoor Playhouse*, (Ignition Films, 2009) [on DVD]

²⁰ Aebischer, ‘Candlelight and Architecture’, p. 24.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ For more on twentieth-century directors’ conviction that Beatrice actually enjoys her coerced sexual relationship with De Flores, see Roberta Barker and David Nicol, ‘Does Beatrice Joanna Have a Subtext?:

upper gallery does not seem to have been a concern for Dromgoole, the accidental activation of spatial politics through the anamorphism of this extratextual moment shows, perhaps, what the director did *not* want us to see.

At other times, however, the production seemed concerned with making sure that all audience members could see the action on stage, even when making use of the discovery space. For example, towards the end of Act 4, when Isabella disguises herself as a madwoman, a conceit was set up whereby Lollio's 'Wardrobe' (sig. G2v) was contained within the discovery space, and Isabella disappeared inside it to change herself from keeper's wife to faux inmate. Just as she clambered into the closet, however, her husband Alibius entered, and Lollio was left to cover for her absence. In the SWP production, Quigley's Lollio found increasingly silly excuses to stand in front of the doors closed over the discovery space, such that Phil Whitchurch's Alibius became suspicious of what might be behind them. As he flung open the doors and very nearly discovered Isabella, Alibus initiated an exchange that usually feels out of place, both in the text of the play and in performance:

Ali. She [Isabella] shall along to Vermandero's with us,

That will serve her for a monthes liberty.

Lol. What's that on your face, Sir?

Ali. Where, *Lollio*, I see nothing.

Lol. Cry you mercy, Sir, tis your nose, it shew'd like the trunck of a young Elephant.

Ali. Away, Rascal: I'll prepare the musick, *Lollio* (sig. G3f).

In the SWP production, Lollio turned the line 'What's that on your face, Sir?' into a moment of farce, distracting his master from the sight of Isabella putting on her disguise. His violent outburst of 'What's that on your face[...]?' encouraged Alibius to shout, run in circles, cover his face with his hands, and attempt to see his own nose. When Isabella was safely locked within the closet once again, and Alibius had been sufficiently redirected, Lollio informed him that, after all, 'tis your nose', eliciting laughter both from the audience and from Alibius.

Compared to the appearances of Alonzo's ghost, this moment was staged accessibly for a greater proportion of the SWP audience. Although Isabella and Lollio's antics made use of the discovery space – and, indeed, the discovery space was crucial to the comedy

of the scene – the actors moved around the space more frequently and incorporated a greater proportion of the stage in their actions. When Isabella was almost discovered, for example, she ran out of the discovery space downstage, as Lollio attempted to cover for her upstage, and Alibius snooped around behind the doors. Within a couple of seconds, all of the actors had switched places, such that Lollio and Alibius were downstage and Isabella was upstage, closer to the discovery space, within which she quickly concealed herself. As a result, a larger number of audience members had the chance to see sections of the scene. By contrast, the dumbshow threesome was relatively static, remaining in one place and therefore visible only to the same sections of the audience throughout.

The Two Plots

In fact, the madhouse plot came across incredibly well overall, and this is perhaps the only production of *The Changeling* to date for which critics, for the most part, did not decry it in their reviews. Dominic Cavendish is particularly complimentary:

Those who complain that this main plot is insufficiently integrated with another strand set in a lunatic asylum need only watch this lucid account to grasp that the same far-sighted understanding about human nature – how we are seldom in our right wits, and often the puppets of our impulses – courses through the whole drama.²⁴

There is a general consensus in the reviews that Dromgoole ‘does a good job of suggesting the links’ between the play’s two worlds.²⁵ The madhouse scenes came off as uproariously funny. At all three performances I attended, MacRae and Quigley as Isabella and Lollio in particular had the audience in stitches. Although the madhouse scenes were considered enormously successful, Dromgoole’s production seemed to encourage us to laugh not only at the antics of Antonio and Franciscus – who feign madness – but also at the ensemble who (we assume) are meant to be genuinely suffering from mental illness. Trueman summarises the behaviour of these inmates as

²⁴ Dominic Cavendish, ‘*The Changeling*, Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, review: “incandescent”’, *Telegraph*, 22 January 2015, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11358526/The-Changeling-Sam-Wanamaker-Playhouse-review-incandescent.html>>, [accessed 14 October 2016]

²⁵ Henry Hitchings, ‘Hattie Morahan brings a mix of regal wilfulness and wayward vulnerability to her role’, *Evening Standard*, 21 January 2015, <<http://www.standard.co.uk/goingsout/theatre/the-changeling-sam-wanamaker-playhouse-theatre-review-hattie-morahan-brings-a-mix-of-regal-9991929.html>>, [accessed 1 March 2015]; S. Clapp, ‘Middleton and Rowley’s Tragedy Has Never Been So Acutely Funny’, *Observer*, 25 January 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jan/25/the-changeling-review-hattie-morahan-sam-wanamaker-playhouse>>, [accessed 14 October 2016]

such: 'One fucks anything that moves. Another – hilariously – keeps bidding for freedom'.²⁶ Such commentary begs the question: should suffering be played for laughs? Is it desirable or acceptable to portray an inmate's bids for freedom or a stereotypical portrayal of mental illness as 'hilarious'?

The problem is exacerbated in the SWP production's staging and design, which featured none of the usual methods of highlighting thematic crossover between the two plots. Perhaps most crucially, there was no visual connection between the overt madness of the hospital and the concealed madness of the castle, despite reviewers' insistence on Dromgoole's success in integrating the two. The ensemble of madmen and fools were cross-cast from the rest of the production, but no attempts were made to make the audience aware of this crossover. Indeed, the actors were often wearing elaborate disguises as their nameless madhouse characters, obscuring their identities to the casual observer. This created a problematic relationship between the 'authentic' comedy of *The Changeling* and twenty-first-century sensibilities. Laughing at the madhouse antics means differently in the context of different theatrical relationships between the castle and the hospital: when we laugh at the rehearsal of the madmen's morris, for example, are we laughing at something intended as comic relief, thematically disconnected from the world of the castle – that is, are we literally laughing at the 'wild distracted measure'(sig. E3r)? Or are we laughing with recognition, understanding that the madhouse functions metaphorically as much as literally in relation to the castle? How has that laughter and its implications changed in the past 400 years? Physically, visually connecting the hospital to the castle in performance cultivates an awareness of their subtle and complex thematic connections in the audience. In such a scenario, where the audience recognises the madmen not as literal 'bedlams' but as symbolic representations of other characters and situations in the play, our laughter is problematised as much as problematic.

In fact, the SWP production is the first I have encountered that seemed determined to separate the hospital from the castle and vice-versa. Most twentieth- and twenty-first-century productions have gone to great lengths to highlight the thematic connections between the castle and the hospital, usually by physically bringing the two worlds into the same space as often as possible. From the relatively subtle 'chilled glance' between Isabella and Beatrice in Peter Gill's 1978 production to the more obvious cross-casting and meta-theatre of Joe Hill-Gibbins' version in 2012, most modern productions have

²⁶ Matt Trueman, 'The Changeling: Sam Wanamaker Playhouse', *What's On Stage*, 21 January 2015. <http://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/changeling-sam-wanamaker-playhouse_36954.html>, [accessed 20 October 2016].

manipulated the physical space of the stage and the actors' bodies in order to visually link up the two plots for the audience. These are theatrical solutions to a perceived textual problem: in the face of decades of academic scholarship decrying the hospital plot, directors have long felt the need to justify its existence in performance. The SWP production, however, distinctly separates the visual vocabulary of the two plots. The disguises worn by the actors when playing generic madmen, for example, make it clear that the audience was not meant to associate their castle characters with their madhouse characters; indeed, I did not notice much of the cross-plot casting until my third viewing of the production. Peter Hamilton Dyer, who played Jasperino in the castle plot, sported a hat, a wig, and spectacles when he became a madman; Tom Stuart, who played Alonzo in the castle plot, actually covered his face with his arm and sleeve in the madhouse scenes – a character tick that also served to disguise the fact that he was doubling roles. Interestingly, this kind of disguising *only* occurred for the generic madhouse characters: Joe Jameson and Adam Lawrence, who later played Tomazo and Franciscus, appeared in the first scene as Alsemero's servants with their faces fully exposed, and Dyer also played Pedro in Act 1, Scene 2 with his face fully visible. In fact, a non-early modernist friend who saw the show with me thought that Pedro and Jasperino were the same character. Dyer transformed into a disguised madman a few scenes later.

It is possible, of course, that the disguising of the madhouse ensemble was a choice made in rehearsal for purely practical or aesthetic reasons. This visual separation between the plots might also be read, however, as an appeal to the 'authenticity' on which this particular theatre markets itself: because the two plots only rarely intersect in the quarto text of the play, it is possible to read their separation in the SWP production as adherence to the imagined intentions of the playwrights. In other words, the apparent concern for authenticity and neutrality in the SWP production is manifest here in a seeming resistance to staging choices that could have created more possibilities for cross-plot interpretive readings. When most productions make an attempt to physically connect the two worlds, they do it by adding madmen to scenes in which they are not otherwise present, or by manufacturing moments of crossover: at the Young Vic, for example, lines between hospital and castle were blurred by the entrance of castle plot characters from cupboards and boxes that had imprisoned hospital patients just moments before; at the National, the madmen were constantly present in the 'fire escape' spaces on either side of the main stage during castle scenes; Terry Hands's RSC production and Tony Richardson's Royal Court production increasingly introduced madmen into castle scenes as the play carried on. Here, there was no physical crossover between the plots except where it is indicated in the quarto text, and the blocking patterns and stylised scene changes eliminated opportunities for characters from the two

worlds to ‘accidentally’ meet. Instead, the problems of main and sub-plot highlighted by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics return: it was unclear how the two stories connected to each other stylistically, thematically, or narratively, and the treatment of the hospital patients was crude, and even cruel. While such treatment of mental illness may be authentic to the seventeenth century, it did not come across well in a twenty-first-century playhouse.

Playing for Laughs

Across both plots, one of the production’s strategies for deflecting attention from the more troubling aspects of *The Changeling* was to play for laughs. Like Diana Quick at the RSC in 1978, Morahan found humour in Beatrice’s first line of Act 4: ‘This fellow has undone me *endlessly*’, she gushed, after being raped by De Flores (and Alonzo?) before our very eyes in the dumb show. The audience obliged her with a swarm of giggles at each of the performances I attended. Similarly, in the play’s final scene, Gravelle as De Flores encouraged the audience to laugh at his death. He emerged almost triumphant from the discovery space with Beatrice: ‘Here we are,’ he said, winking, ‘if you have any more / To say to us, speak quickly, I shall not, / Give you the hearing else’ (sig. I2f). Morahan and Gravelle, under Dromgoole’s direction, were particularly prone to reaching for laughs in scenes that really should not have been funny. As José A. Pérez Díez puts it in his review of the production,

Finding the funny moments in Renaissance plays that may get a laugh in the theatre is important. But so is finding the right moments to let the horrifying reality of a tragedy take over and shock the audience. [...] They managed to make the audience assume that the play is so grotesque that it is practically a farce.²⁷

As if anticipating such objections, the production programme emphasises that *The Changeling* was added to the Stationers’ Register as a comedy.²⁸ Mainstream press reviews almost uniformly quote this component of the programme and argue that *The Changeling* really is terribly funny after all. Susannah Clapp’s review for the *Observer* puts this issue front and centre in its title: ‘Middleton and Rowley’s Tragedy Has Never

²⁷ J.A. Pérez Díez, ‘*The Changeling* (Shakespeare’s Globe) @ Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, London, 2015’, <<http://bloggingshakespeare.com/reviewing-shakespeare/changeling-shakespeares-globe-sam-wanamaker-playhouse-london-2015/>>, [accessed 14 October 2016]

²⁸ Dominic Dromgoole, *The Changeling* programme, Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, London, 2015.

Been So Acutely Funny'.²⁹ And recall Morahan's insistence that *The Changeling* does not need a 'modern, slanted interpretation': Dromgoole and his team would have us see the funny side of rape and murder as a matter of historical accuracy, of faithfulness to the text and the intentions of its authors.

A number of scholars, however, have troubled the neat generic boundaries implied by such classifications. Gordon McMullan, for example, describes tragedy in Jacobean England as 'hybrid, multiple' and notes that *The Changeling*, specifically, 'is far trickier, generically speaking, than is apparent from its uncontested appearance in anthologies of Jacobean revenge tragedy'.³⁰ In other words, generic boundaries were very much in flux in the early seventeenth century, and *The Changeling* is a prime example of a play that moves through and between genres. Rather than representing any kind of rigorous historical accuracy, then, the production relied on an unhistoricised, unsophisticated understanding of comedy in order to hide behind the 'authenticity' of the SWP as justification for its problematic choices.

Conclusion

Overall, the SWP *Changeling* was a mixed bag: success in bringing laughter to a play usually categorised as a tragedy often came at the expense of a more serious approach to its difficult politics. Even if it were possible to stage *The Changeling* and other early modern plays without a 'slanted, modern interpretation', would such a thing be desirable? It seems to me that institutions with the kind of interpretive authority wielded by the Globe have a responsibility to think through such choices, and to question the very possibility of an authentic or neutral production of a 400-year-old play, even in a theatre space that Shakespeare might recognise.

²⁹ Clapp, 'Middleton and Rowley's Tragedy'

³⁰ Gordon McMullan, 'The Changeling and the Dynamics of Ugliness', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. by E. Smith and G.A. Sullivan (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 222-35, pp. 222, 228.