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# ***Cymbeline* and Empire**

PAUL INNES

Bits of Shakespeare can be deleted or at least ‘dispensed with’.<sup>1</sup> This is the possibility mooted by the editor of the Second Arden edition of *Cymbeline* (J.M. Nosworthy) and it appears in the notes to the wager scene, I.v. The element to be dispensed with is the difficult staging of the minor characters present: Philario, a Frenchman, a Spaniard and a Dutchman. The last two in particular cause editorial concern:

Granville-Barker suggests that the Dutchman and Spaniard may have worn distinctive national costume or that they may have been given an explanatory line or two, now lost. It is possible, however, that both characters were dispensed with when the play was actually brought to the stage. That they were depicted as drunk past the power of speech is not beyond Jacobean possibility.<sup>2</sup>

The play’s editor quite rightly gestures towards various dramatic possibilities here, although all three are negative: either some lines are missing, or the characters were in fact deleted for performance, or perhaps they functioned as Jacobean national stereotypes, presumably for cheap laughs.<sup>3</sup>

One way to explain these minor details may be simply for the reader to acknowledge the breadth of editorial expertise and then move on with the rest of the play, this being no more than an editorial concern with the intricacies of textual notation. However, a more recent edition of the play also draws attention to the scene. In his commentary to the edition of the play in the third Penguin series, John Pitcher fully describes the source material as well as contextualising the scene in terms of the Renaissance masculine politics of reputation.<sup>4</sup> But he, too, feels the need to explain it away, and his version is that:

it is possible that Shakespeare, prompted by the setting in *Frederick of Jennen*, intended them to play a larger part in the scene, but subsequently changed his mind.<sup>5</sup>

So now we have a fourth possibility for a scene that at first sight does not merit such attention. It is tempting at this point to generalise, to construct an argument that both of these editors are displaying symptoms that are familiar from the critical tradition (a need to produce smooth sets of meaning, which they then deflect back on to Shakespeare's intentions, and so on). This is of course familiar enough, but it may well do a disservice to the critical instincts that support the editorial gloss. Perhaps something is going on in this scene, although pinning it down may not be particularly easy.

An alternative to the assault on the critics just described would be to take another route: that of performance. From this perspective, the alternatives thrown up by the critical editions can seem positive. After all, the history of Shakespearean performance is exactly one of excision, textual manipulation and rewriting for the purposes of dramatic exposition. And if the Shakespearean text needs to be recast for the exigencies of the dramatic present, then so be it.

But the requirements of Renaissance performance add another dimension, one that is not necessarily reducible to a Jacobean belly-laugh. The characters in question could quite easily function as interested onlookers, a kind of silent chorus. They are positioned as an onstage audience, a common enough element in a drama that is notorious for its preoccupation with its own status as spectacle. A Renaissance audience would not find this function unusual at all. The point here is that such observation is almost never neutral, because the watching characters have their own perspective. The ones in this scene are themselves representatives of contemporary empire.

## **Whose Empire?**

Italians, Spaniards, Dutchmen, Frenchmen and Englishmen: all are members of nations vying for economic and political power in the great game of international empire in the period we call the Renaissance. And all become present on the stage in this scene. So rather than quibble about why they might be removed, why not present them as the text has it? The wager between Iachimo and Posthumus takes on a new dimension when visually contextualised by means of dynamic conflict. The players in this scene, whether or not they speak, are emblematic of the play's imperial concerns. So by foregrounding what seems to be a marginal editorial quibble over

some minor problems of character presentation, one can begin to unpick a whole series of very serious contemporary resonances that can so easily be occluded:

Apparently minor scenes or passages of the plays are often the very ones lopped off not only in theatrical production but by our reading practices – though they are often the sites of the dismantling of what only looks whole without them.<sup>6</sup>

Here Patricia Parker problematises the seemingly marginal as a kind of structured forgetting, the inability of subsequent criticism of the plays to account for disturbing elements that can put in question the assumptions of the critics. The impossibility of direct access to the culture in which these plays were constructed makes a marginalising process extremely likely. It also impoverishes our practice of reading the plays (to use Parker's language) by effectively foreshortening them.

The importance that can be placed upon empire in supposedly inconsequential areas such as I.v points towards the ways in which nationality permeates the play. *Cymbeline* seems to be a limit text in this respect, since its jumbling together of nationality and identity marks it out as even less historically reliable than other Shakespeare plays.

## **Interpret As You Will**

A comparison with the other plays that deal with semimythical British history such as *King Lear* or *Macbeth* is obvious, but it is also salutary. The reason for this is that the comparison tends to the detriment of *Cymbeline*, precisely because of its relative narrative inconsistency. The play violently yokes together massively disparate elements that are then subsumed into a grand reconciliation. The resolution of the conflicts engendered in the play is not going to be an easy or straightforward process. Indeed, the play points to its own obsessive negotiation of issues of interpretation. Leah Marcus has noted the problem:

Reading, if it works at all in the play, works by inspiring the reader to marvel at the truth he or she has managed to decipher. And yet, here again, discomfort with the interpretive process is overtly thematized.<sup>7</sup>

So perhaps a critical quest for unity misses the point, and the play's apparent incoherence is symptomatic of a deep concern with dramatic conflicts of meaning. The issues perceived by Marcus are a far cry from the straightforward assumptions of an earlier criticism:

The dramatic conduct of *Cymbeline* requires that Posthumus and Imogen should be parted and re-united, that Imogen's lost brothers should be found, that the wrongs done to Belarius should be set right, and that all discordant circumstances should be resolved into a final invulnerable unity.<sup>8</sup>

Here we return to Nosworthy, who accords with the genre criticism of his time. For him, the play is a historical romance, and so the ending succeeds in its job of artistic closure as all tensions melt away in the glow of multiple reconciliations.<sup>9</sup> But this 'final invulnerable unity' is undercut by a powerful moment of performance as Posthumus hits Imogen (V.v.229).<sup>10</sup> Now of course Posthumus is still unaware that the page is in fact his betrothed, but to strike a young man of rank in the presence of one's monarch with very little provocation is a deeply unsettling act. There is also the matter of the attendant dramatic irony, since the audience is well aware of the real identity of the page. Performance here undercuts unity, fracturing the ending along the lines of force set down by the play's power and gender politics: what these dramatic fictions function to represent is brought into sharp relief by unexpected violence.

### *L'Etat, C'est Moi*

The standard Renaissance metonymy by which a monarch stands for the kingdom seems inapplicable to *Cymbeline*. Partly this is a result of the colourlessness of the play's king, as noted by Nosworthy: 'Cymbeline himself is, as Tillyard concedes, an almost meaningless cipher'.<sup>11</sup> He continues: 'He is a puppet who never comes to life'.<sup>12</sup> Of course, it would be simple to state that this contradicts the 'invulnerable unity' Nosworthy finds in the play due to the generic requirements of its resolution, but in fact his editorial comments point to a much deeper issue. As happens in *Julius Caesar*, the eponymous protagonist seems to be peripheral to the major actions of the play. *Cymbeline* is enacted upon, by his wife, the unnamed Queen, and prior to the play's beginning by the whispering campaign against

Belarius. But, by the logic of identification of the king with the state, if Cymbeline is a nonentity, then so is his Britain.

The play's multilayered, even contradictory, treatment of national identity has caught the attention of most recent criticism. What 'Britain' means is put into question, both in terms of the action's time and location, and in terms of its contemporary resonances. These latter associations inevitably colour the whole issue of nationhood, at least for Leah Marcus:

In terms of the play's contemporary context, Jove is clearly to be identified with King James I, the creator of Great Britain, who had a similar habit of intruding upon his subjects to lecture them when his plans for the nation went unheeded or misunderstood.<sup>13</sup>

She goes so far as to state baldly that 'Jupiter is James'<sup>14</sup> and to identify the Leonati as metaphorical Scots: 'Posthumus' continuing deprivation is a "harsh and potent injury" upon a "valiant race", the race of the Leonati, or the Scots'.<sup>15</sup> Of course, one might wonder about such a multivalent play being so simple in its production of important one-to-one correspondences.

Marcus' article points to the importance of the play's Renaissance context and she is not alone in this respect. Ronald J. Boling has drawn attention to another element of contemporary concern: Wales. He analyses English concerns about the Welsh: 'Both Marlowe's Welsh characters and Peele's early scenes suggest that to the Elizabethan English a nationalistic Welsh rebellion still remained conceivable'.<sup>16</sup> Boling goes on to discuss the ambivalence of Welsh responses to the Spanish Armada, invoking the vulnerability of Milford Haven as a possible landing site.<sup>17</sup> The upshot is that *Cymbeline* may not be straightforward in its depiction of Cymbeline's Britain. This is the substance of one of the best known of the recent batch of articles on the play, that by Jodi Mikalachki: 'Imogen alone remains as a possible icon of pure Britishness in the complex of gender, sexuality and nationalism I have been describing'.<sup>18</sup> Mikalachki's article widens the contemporary context by relating Early Modern notions of nationalism very clearly to gender ideology. The title of her essay signals this important issue, but it also slips from Roman Britain to English nationalism. The two are not the same. However, the slippage mirrors a similar operation in *Cymbeline* itself. In the second Arden edition of the play Nosworthy reduces nationalism to a minor element: 'Nevertheless, this national ethos seems to me to have no more real

prominence than that of regeneration'.<sup>19</sup> But more recent work has conclusively demonstrated that such an easy dismissal is no longer adequate to the play's complexities.

## What Is My Nation?

*Cymbeline's* treatment of national identity is messy at best. Inflected with gender, it slips from notions of Englishness to alternative, perhaps competing ideas of Britishness. It attempts to negotiate a whole range of contradictory elements even as it brings them together with the need for some kind of formal, artistic closure. The Queen's speech, which Mikalachki also quotes at length,<sup>20</sup> concentrates the problems, following on from her son's cue:

*Cloten:* There be many Caesars ere such another Julius:  
Britain's a world by itself, and we will nothing pay  
For wearing our own noses.

*Queen:* That opportunity,  
Which then they had to take from's, to resume  
We have again. Remember, sir, my liege,  
The kings your ancestors, together with  
The natural bravery of your isle, which stands  
As Neptune's park, ribb'd and pal'd in  
With rocks unscaleable and roaring waters,  
With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats,  
But suck them up to th'topmast. A kind of conquest  
Caesar made here, but not made his brag  
Of 'Came, and saw, and overcame:' with shame  
(The first that ever touch'd him) he was carried  
From off our coast, twice beaten: and his shipping  
(Poor ignorant baubles!) on our terrible seas,  
Like egg-shells mov'd upon their surges, crack'd  
As easily 'gainst our rocks. For joy whereof  
The fam'd Cassibelan, who was once at point  
(O giglot fortune!) to master Caesar's great sword,  
Made Lud's town with rejoicing-fires bright,  
And Britons strut with courage. (III.i.12–34)

The history of all this is of course exceptionally dubious, even by Shakespeare's standards. There may be echoes of the speech that Elizabeth purportedly delivered at Tilbury during the armada crisis, but even so this patriotic speech is made by the supposedly evil

character of the Queen, which serves to undercut the effect of its rhetoric. The position of the island fortress is further complicated by Cymbeline's declaration of submission to Rome at the end of the play.<sup>21</sup> But much more than historiographical accuracy is at stake here. The dramatic conflict between different discourses is surfacing in a very specific form, begging the question: what exactly *is* 'Britain'?

The Queen has no doubts: Britain is an island-fortress, secure in its sea-girt cliffs and stormy weather, so much so that even Julius Caesar could not subdue the place. Her intervention is decisive, resulting in war. Following Mikalachki's cue, it is possible to see the Queen's representation as inflected by gender by means of negative stereotyping, picking up on associations of the wild, uncontrollable nature of Boudicca among others.<sup>22</sup> A traditional analysis would go on to contrast this with the truth of Imogen's Griselda-like suffering for the truth of Britain and chastity, as in the Victorian popularity of the play. But Imogen herself can also be interpreted as a less than straightforward figure, because of the way she changes sides and disguises so often.<sup>23</sup> So the interrelationship of gender and nationality is confusingly complex, as with so much else in this play.

There may be two reasons for this. One is supplied by the play's own historical context, post-armada and post-Elizabeth. Another could well be a textual trace of matrilinear Celtic Britain, sliding through the various problematic histories used by Shakespeare, despite all attempts to efface it. Hence the lack of the Queen's name and the disappearance of the name of Imogen's mother. The specificity of inheritance via the female must not be allowed to sully the masculine world of Roman Britain. After all, Cloten threatens to become heir to the throne through marriage to Imogen. Also, in an utterly ahistorical manner, this play's Britain is already incredibly Roman in its monarchy, culture and deities. The whole complex of the 'meanings' of Posthumus Leonatus and the visions is fundamentally Roman: his name is Roman and the iconography of the visions is resolutely Imperial Roman in the form of Jupiter (or Jove) and his eagle (V.v.30ff). It is as though the Celtic culture of the native Britons is excised from the world of the men in the play, returning as a disturbing displacement via the Queen and Cloten on the one hand, and the Welsh cave on the other. One should remember that to the Romans Celtic Britain was about as barbaric as it was possible to be, although of course this may have been a pretext for their extermination of British religious culture. Governor Paulinus'



expedition to Mona removed him from the centre of power at exactly the moment that Boudicca rose in revolt.

Therefore the play has to construct a representation of the British Isles before it can move on to its imperial theme. The history of Celtic Britain has to be carefully aligned with an overall British Renaissance project, with England of course as the senior nation. But such a project immediately and inevitably runs into a very serious obstacle: the English were not British, at least to start with. They may have remade Britain in their own image by the time of the Renaissance, but they were Germanic invaders who conquered and displaced the indigenous Celtic populations. This is why Wales is so important: it is the location of the remnants of Cymbeline's Britons. It is also fundamentally associated with the Tudors and James of Scotland's claim to the British throne. And there remains the possibility that the Renaissance English were at some level aware of these issues, as in the pun in *Henry V* at V.iii.14 on the 'nook-shotten' shape of the English coastline, recalling what is still known as East Anglia. The very title of *The Compleat Angler* also comes to mind.<sup>24</sup>

This is why the martial vigour of the young princes operates in the way it does. Symbolically, their time in Wales re-energizes the royal blood of Britain by removing it from a court with a cipher for a king, returning the bloodline to its ancient British roots. Tudor and Stuart propaganda did exactly the same thing, with the fateful return of Arthur, Prince of Wales to Ludlow after his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and the investiture of Henry Stuart as Prince of Wales over a century later in 1610.<sup>25</sup> In other words, *Cymbeline* replicates the manoeuvre by which English culture takes to itself the very mythical British figure who fought against its encroachment: King Arthur.<sup>26</sup> Shakespeare even adds another non-Brythonic Celtic layer by incorporating the Hay story from Scotland.<sup>27</sup>

### **From *Pax Romana* to *Pax Britannica***

It is tempting to describe the play's attempts to make Britain Roman as an appropriation of Imperial Roman ideology by and on behalf of a Renaissance British imperialism. However, this seems too neat for such a fractured play. Instead, it is possible to see the dramatisation of disparate elements as a managing of the various implications of an emerging British Empire. In this respect Britain's relationship with

Imperial Rome is crucial. *Cymbeline* is absolutely insistent on the classical roots of its representation of imperial power. There are many reasons why this should be so. The mythical history of Britain annexes the Trojan War to give Britain a spurious heroic pedigree for its kings in exactly the same way as the Romans did. So in this respect the totally unhistorical British defeat of the Romans (under Augustus of all people!) can be seen as a kind of reunification of cousin states. In other words, the play attempts to combine different histories as part of its resolution. Britain's debt to Rome is made to seem natural, so much so that Britain is made to seem the obvious heir to masculine Roman *virtus* and Empire:

With the exclusion of women from the action, the stage of Roman Britain becomes the 'exclusive preserve' of men, both British and Roman. This triumph of exclusion is figured in the masculine embrace that is the dominant trope of these final scenes, invoked as a metaphor of empire and embodied in the stage embraces of male Britons by Roman commanders and in the symbolic merging of their national emblems.<sup>28</sup>

By noting the integration of nations here, Mikalachki connotes the emergence of a British nationhood based on Roman ideas of empire. She continues: 'In historiographical terms, I would argue that in early modern England an originary engagement with Rome was necessary for the formation of an autonomous national identity'.<sup>29</sup> The play represents the progression from Roman Empire to British Empire as natural, continuous and unproblematic, because the historical incorporation of Britain into the Roman Empire is rewritten so as to be misrepresented as voluntary. Shakespeare found some elements of the story in Geoffrey of Monmouth's history, although he moves them back a generation and excises the marriage alliance that appears in the chronicler's version of events.<sup>30</sup> Such questions of historiography are no mere antiquarian interest. In his article 'Questioning History in *Cymbeline*', J. Clinton Crumley discusses at length the primacy of Roman historical writings for a contemporary Renaissance understanding of the play.<sup>31</sup> He references Simon Forman's patchy and confused report of the play in a way that demonstrates the play's perception of *Cymbeline*'s Britain as already Roman.

## Flight of the Eagle

Revealingly, Cymbeline's lost princes are associated with imperial iconography from their first appearance on the stage. Belarius tells them to 'stoop' as they enter their Welsh dwelling (III.iii.2), a term from falconry. Guiderius picks up on this, referring to himself and his brother as 'unfledg'd' (III.iii.27). So there are associations of nobility even before Belarius explains their history to the audience in soliloquy; and it also links them with the growing imagery strand of Jupiter's eagle. So although the princes have been brought up in Wales, the play takes pains to stress their royal lineage in terms that by this point are recognisably those of the Roman Britain of Cymbeline.

Similarly, Posthumus is completely Romanised, in terms used even by Iachimo to Imogen:

*Iach:* He sits 'mongst men like a descended god;  
He hath a kind of honour sets him off,  
More than a mortal seeming. (I.vii.169–171)

The whole complex of associations between Posthumus and Jupiter is being set up here through the adversary. Iachimo continues with this imagery, utilising it to trick Posthumus in Rome:

*Iach:* By Jupiter, I had it from her arm.  
*Post:* Hark you, he swears: by Jupiter he swears.  
'Tis true, nay, keep the ring .... (II.iv.121–123)

Because Iachimo swears by the supreme deity, Posthumus automatically takes his oath at face value. For Posthumus, Jupiter is a guarantor of absolute truth, and even becomes for him a kind of titular patron. The linking of the name of Posthumus with that of Jupiter paves the way for his vision and its resolution as a full symbol of the new Roman British accord and Empire. In fact, the British are already Roman in their religion, as Leah Marcus makes clear:

The fact that characters in the play so frequently evoke 'Jove' or 'Jupiter' in their oaths and supplications adds to the sense of the deity's overriding presence in Britain.<sup>32</sup>

If Britain is such a preserve of the supreme Roman deity, then there are two corollaries: Britain's native, Celtic religious culture is

nowhere to be seen; and Britain is already an obvious successor to Roman power at its zenith.

Marcus, among others, has already recognised the importance of this motif: 'The eagle of empire will pass from the Rome of Caesar Augustus to a reunited Britain'.<sup>33</sup> In an article on *The Tempest*, Barbara Fuchs gives a full articulation of exactly how this operation takes place:

By *quotation* I mean the references by colonial writers to the works of earlier explorers and planters as well as the larger rhetorical maneuver of assimilating the unknown by equating it with the already-known. Such quotation does not overlap perfectly with the notion of *translatio imperii* – the westward translation of Rome's imperial tradition to the nascent European empires. However, the quoted discourse may use *translatio imperii* as its particular justification.<sup>34</sup>

Fuchs moves on from this position to relocate *The Tempest* in the Renaissance Mediterranean, thus recontextualising that play in relation to the perceived threat from the Ottoman Empire. But her theorising of *translatio imperii* is exactly relevant to *Cymbeline* as well:

*Sooth:* Last night the very gods showed me a vision  
(I fast, and pray'd for their intelligence) thus:  
I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, wing'd  
From the spongy south to this part of the west,  
There vanish'd in the sunbeams, which portends  
(Unless my sins abuse my divination)  
Success to th'Roman host. (IV.ii.346–352)

The soothsayer gets it wrong here, and has to correct his interpretation after Cymbeline's voluntary submission to Rome. His later version incorporates the state of Roman Britain:

*Sooth:* For the Roman eagle,  
From south to west on wing soaring aloft,  
Lessen'd herself and in the beams o' the sun  
So vanish'd; which foreshadow'd our princely eagle,  
Th'imperial Caesar, should again unite  
His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,  
Which shines here in the west. (V.v.471–477)

Multiple re-interpretations are of course common in this play. But this later version 'lessens' the Roman eagle as it fades into radiant

Britain, subsuming the Roman Empire into the British. The eagle's westward course enacts *translatio imperii* in precisely the manner outlined by Fuchs.

In terms of the geography of the British Isles, Wales has a further significance as one continues the westwards movement. The play not only appropriates suitable elements of Welsh culture: the country's subjugation is re-invented in the play as both an internal affair of the British Isles and the first step towards the creation of the new British Empire as it looks to the west.<sup>35</sup> This explains the convoluted function of Wales in *Cymbeline* and the multiple uses to which it is put. It also explains why the play is put under such stress to accommodate so many disparate elements.<sup>36</sup> The directional force of empire will increase, through Ireland and on to the Americas.

### False Italian

An emerging British Empire in the Renaissance might engage with notions of classical Roman imperialism, but it also needs to set itself aside from another, contemporary Rome: that of the Popes. The religious difference between these two versions of Rome is absolutely crucial, and it is surprising that this aspect of *Cymbeline* has attracted very little comment. The play must re-invent classical Roman *virtus* and it must also represent contemporary Italy as corrupt, deceitful and utterly untrustworthy. A whole host of dramatic and literary associations of the Roman enemy of the Protestant British Isles is lurking in the background here. Leah Marcus has noted the importance of religion for the play's historical setting:

The most important action occurring in *Cymbeline* as the peace of Augustus descends upon Britain may well be what happens offstage and unmentioned within the play: the birth of Christ, which took place during the reigns of Cymbeline and Caesar Augustus, bringing a new 'gracious season' of love and reconciliation among humankind.<sup>37</sup>

But if this is so, why, as Marcus notes, does the play leave this monumental event unsaid?

*Cymbeline* may not deal with Christian issues directly, but it does go to great lengths to Romanise Cymbeline's Britain by means of Jovian terminology, as noted earlier. The opposite of this world of *virtus* is, of course, Iachimo, and he represents a displaced form of

contemporary Renaissance Italian behaviour, that of the sexually degenerate Machiavel figure. In other words, Iachimo enacts the emblematic connotations of English misrepresentations of Italy, and so Catholic Rome is to be understood as present in the play in a disguised form. Marcus sees this as a textual trace of Scottish distrust of the Church of England, following the singular logic of Jamesian associations discussed earlier.<sup>38</sup> But again, wider issues are at stake in such a complex play, and Marcus goes on to note that ‘With the exposure of Iachimo, the last vestiges of Posthumus’s suspicion of Imogen are dispelled, and the corruption of Italianate Rome is clearly separated from the virtue of its Augustan antecedent’.<sup>39</sup> This is an extremely important comment and should serve to remind us that the politics of religion are never far away in a Renaissance English, or indeed British, dramatic text.

The vocabulary used by Pisanio when he delivers Posthumus’ letter to Imogen is dense with connotations of the Machiavel. His entry in soliloquy sets the tone:

*Pis:* How? of adultery? Wherefore write you not  
 What monster’s her accuser? Leonatus!  
 O master, what a strange infection  
 Is fall’n into thy ear! What false Italian  
 (As poisonous tongu’d as handed) hath prevail’d  
 On thy too ready hearing? (III.ii.1–6)

Pisanio, of course, is correct, but what is interesting here is the way in which he enumerates the stereotypical behaviour of the Italian Machiavel: he is monstrous, infectious and poisonous, both by tongue and by hand. He continues in this vein as he hands Posthumus’ letter to Imogen:

*Pis:* But if I were as wise as honest, then  
 My purpose would prove well: it cannot be  
 But that my master is abus’d: some villain,  
 Ay, and singular in his art, hath done you both  
 This cursed injury.  
*Imo:* Some Roman courtesan?  
*Pis:* No, on my life .... (III.iv.120–125)

And here we have another stereotype of Renaissance Italy, with Imogen’s immediate assumption that it is sexual corruption in the form of a courtesan that is behind all of this. Pisanio, equally

immediately, denies that this will be the case: perhaps Posthumus is too British to fall this far while in exile. So the characterisation of Iachimo's Italy is radically opposed to that of the classical elements of the play. It has to be, by the logic of dramatic differentiation that sets up the new locus of empire.

## Trading Places

It is not enough for a massive new set of discursive associations such as those of the emerging British Empire to be constituted by negative means. So an implied opposition to contemporary Italy is only part of the process. Some internal negotiations are also necessary, and again this is an area that has not been analysed in any detail by commentators on the play. The British Empire was coming into being via colonisation and trade, and it should come as no surprise to find a strand of imagery of wealth and money-value pervading the play. In its own way, such imagery is as all-encompassing as that of Jupiter and his eagle. As part of his investigation of the logic of the internal composition of the Kingdom of Britain, Ronald J. Boling notes the importance of economic advancement:

Whereas Peele's Welshmen convert to loyal subjecthood simply by encountering a true (i.e., English) king, *Cymbeline's* Welshmen are changed by disseminated English culture and imperial economic opportunity.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, empire, with its implied control of multiple states by one overarching imperial centre, is underpinned by money. But money is a slippery commodity, because it implies exchange, and the imperial centre can never entirely be sure that the exchange will automatically be to its benefit. Boling continues:

The 'benefit[s]' of learning civility and military prowess at Rome are political and economic; yet even tangible imperial benefits may not tie subjects firmly to the empire. *Cymbeline* nevertheless ultimately desires reconciliation with Rome and offers concessions to gain it; Glyndwr is the more fearful because he rejects imperial inducements, remaining an implacable rebel.<sup>41</sup>

Trade and economic exchange will be the life-blood of the British Empire. *Cymbeline* is fascinating in the ways that it manages the empire's emergence and constitution, right at the moment when the

various elements of the British Isles are trying to imagine their own future.

As in so many other ways, it is Imogen who embodies and epitomises crucial associations of wealth. As a dramatic figure she is uniquely qualified to do so, occupying the centre of a nexus of anxieties about inheritance, value and transmission of the royal line. In the famous bed-chamber scene, Iachimo explicitly characterises Imogen in terms of the treasure-chest:

*Iach:* The crickets sing, and man's o'er-labour'd sense  
Repairs itself by rest. Our Tarquin thus  
Did softly press the rushes, ere he waken'd  
The chastity he wounded. Cytherea,  
How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! Fresh lily!  
And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch!  
But kiss, one kiss! Rubies unparagon'd,  
How dearly they do't: 'tis her breathing that  
Perfumes the chamber thus: the flame o'th'taper  
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids,  
To see th'enclosed lights, now canopied  
Under these windows, white and azure lac'd  
With blue of heaven's own tinct. (II.ii.11–23)

Here Iachimo identifies himself with 'our Tarquin', so once again he is hardly an upstanding example of Roman classical virtue. The words chosen for the speech connote not only nobility and purity ('bravely', 'lily' and 'whiter') but also monetary value: 'Rubies unparagon'd', 'Perfumes' and 'Windows' of 'white', 'azure' and 'blue' (these last two being especially expensive colours for a painter to use). He then goes on to catalogue the adornments of Imogen's bed-chamber, and these are considerable. In order to support his story, he relies upon the circumstantial detail of the richness of the place. The combination convinces Posthumus of the truthfulness of Iachimo's representation, helped, as noted before, by a liberal sprinkling of oaths to Jupiter.

But this is not the only strand of the play in which wealth plays a crucial role. In a much more condensed form, the Queen's speech, quoted earlier, does exactly the same when she rather peculiarly describes Caesar's invasion fleet as 'Poor ignorant baubles!' (III.i.28). But the term used does not seem too strange when it is entered into the inventory as one of the many elements of wealth and empire in the play, right at the moment of their contestation between Rome and Britain.



## Negotiated Settlement

*Cymbeline* shuttles between semiformed notions of national identity. The play does not settle into a stable pattern and has to be forced into some kind of coherence in the final act. *Cymbeline* is fundamentally concerned with ideas that do not sit easily with one another. But perhaps this marks it out as a creature of its time, generically as well as in historical terms. The messiness so often noted by commentators is symptomatic of a deep, underlying set of tensions between different nascent ideas of empire. The play struggles to suggest and then resolve these tensions. Given that the British Empire was just emerging, it is hardly surprising that this should be the case. *Cymbeline* does not simply reflect the conditions of its initial production; it enacts them as well. Emblematic scenes such as that of the wager with which this article began can begin to make a kind of sense when seen in such a complex context. The wager scene functions to epitomise or condense the associations of emerging empire and competition between nation-states in the representative persons of the figures on stage. They may not say much, but such figural representation relies on much more than the merely verbal.

## Notes

1. J.M. Nosworthy, ed., *Cymbeline* (*The Arden Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Methuen, 2002), 18. All textual quotations are taken from this edition.
2. Nosworthy, *Cymbeline*, 18.
3. In his introduction to the play, Nosworthy considers the inclusion of the characters of the Dutchman and the Spaniard to be textual traces of the play's sources. In fact, he goes so far as to state that their presence is 'otherwise inexplicable' ('Introduction', in *Cymbeline*, xxii).
4. John Pitcher, ed., *Cymbeline* (London: Penguin Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 2005) 174–175.
5. *Ibid.*, 174.
6. Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare From the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
7. Leah Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', in *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*, ed. Kiernan Ryan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 158.
8. Nosworthy, 'Introduction', xxvii.
9. Nosworthy's introduction to the play is showing its age at this point; it is half a century old. He did not have access to the kind of theorised use of performance and emblematic gesture that is needed to gloss the context of empire. It takes the explosion of postcolonial theory to do this. Even so, I would not wish here to replicate the trajectory of Barker and Hulme's essay on *The Tempest*: Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, 'Nymphs and

Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Con-Texts of *The Tempest*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 191–205. Their project is to deconstruct the ideological assumptions that lie behind traditional readings of that play, especially Frank Kermode's introduction to the Arden second edition. My interest in Nosworthy is slightly different, in that I see him as being disturbed by elements that he cannot easily analyse given the critical precepts of his time.

10. Interestingly enough, the stage direction is a later editorial interpolation; it does not appear in the First Folio.
11. Nosworthy, 'Introduction', xlv.
12. *Ibid.*, li.
13. Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', 136.
14. *Ibid.*, 154.
15. *Ibid.*, 151.
16. Ronald J. Boling, 'Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51 (2000), 47.
17. *Ibid.*, 49. See also Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London and New York, Routledge, 2002), 50.
18. Jodi Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain: *Cymbeline* and Early Modern English Nationalism', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46 (1995), 316.
19. Nosworthy, 'Introduction', xlvi.
20. Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain', 304.
21. See Richard Danson Brown and David Johnson, *Shakespeare 1609: Cymbeline and the Sonnets* (London and Milton Keynes: Macmillan and The Open University Press, 2000), 19.
22. See also other Celtic wild women such as Lady Macbeth or Goneril and Regan.
23. See Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain', 319.
24. See Andrew Hadfield, 'Spenser, Drayton and the Question of Britain', *The Review of English Studies* 51 (2000), 595. He details Drayton's use of various historiographical strands as part of his argument, the implication being that the Renaissance English educated elite were well aware of multiple sources for ideas of Englishness or Britishness. Interestingly, Patricia Parker has picked up on the gender implications of the Anglic collocations: Parker, *Shakespeare From the Margins*, 143ff.
25. See Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, 57. For details of the investiture and associated celebrations: Ros King, *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashcroft, 2005), 49ff.
26. See Boling, 'Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*', 35 for a discussion of how *Cymbeline* manages Wales *vis à vis* England. W.R.J. Baron, ed., *The Arthur of the English: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Life and Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999) compiles articles on the various aspects of the process.
27. Leah Marcus notes that the three defenders of Scotland in Holinshed's source story are supposedly the ancestors of one of James VI and I's favourite Scottish noblemen, Lord Hay ('*Cymbeline* and the Unease of Topicality', 150). There is an obvious compliment to James and his Scottish courtiers here.
28. Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain', 312.
29. *Ibid.*, 316. But note the slippage in Mikalachki's argument between Britain and England, repeated at the end of the article, 321–322.

30. Lewis Thorpe, ed., *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 119 ff.
31. J. Clinton Crumley, 'Questioning History in *Cymbeline*', *Studies in English Literature* 41 2, Spring 2001, 299–300.
32. Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', 158.
33. *Ibid.*, 152.
34. Barbara Fuchs, 'Conquering Islands: Contextualizing *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997), 47.
35. See Hadfield, 'Spenser, Drayton and the Question of Britain', 592, for a discussion of the function of Wales' incorporation into the English Tudor state.
36. Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present*, discusses the liminal status of Wales as the westernmost extremity of mainland Britain, especially in terms of its proximity to Ireland. He also notes the stresses to which the play is subject in its accommodation of elements of empire.
37. Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', 153. See also 143 for a discussion of the anxieties of the Scots Presbyterians when James VI succeeded to the English throne.
38. Marcus, 'Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality', 146
39. *Ibid.*, 152.
40. Boling, 'Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*', 47.
41. *Ibid.*, 51.