

‘What country, friends, is this?’: Tim Supple’s *Twelfth Night* Revisited

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Trevor Nunn’s 1996 film version of *Twelfth Night* is the play’s best known and most popular cinematic incarnation.¹ It was warmly received by journalists and academics alike: Mick La Salle writes, ‘Nunn conceives the play in [...] wistful terms. There’s an ever-present sense of loss, of time passing, of beautiful moments that can’t be held and dreams that can’t be realized’ while Peter Holland shares this sense of contented sorrow pronouncing that the film ‘is nearly as satisfyingly unsatisfying as the play could demand, more than adequately alive to the text’s awareness of the fragility and vulnerability of the possibilities of happiness’.² Philippa Sheppard probably overstates her case when she writes, ‘In his subtle and intelligent screen adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, English director Trevor Nunn has improved on Shakespeare’s original’ but her conclusion is more measured: ‘Trevor Nunn’s *Twelfth Night* is evidence that it is possible to make Shakespeare’s plays truly filmic without losing what is Shakespearean about them’.³

In a documentary to accompany his 2003, Channel 4 television version of *Twelfth Night*, Tim Supple is similarly anachronistically adamant about the suitability of the film medium to the works of Shakespeare: ‘The truth is that this film would not have been made if Shakespeare was around because he’d have made it himself’.⁴

Supple's version offers a striking contrast to that of Nunn. Indeed one might assume that in his parodying of Nunn's film at various points, Supple was explicitly 'writing back' to the earlier version. However, in an email of 4 June 2018 Supple writes: 'to be very honest I can't remember if I saw [Nunn's] film before I started work on [my] film or during or after!'⁵ This he reiterates in a subsequent email (17 June 2018): 'there is categorically zero intended reference.'⁶ But in spite of Supple's insistence on a lack of deliberate allusion, he is fully prepared to allow a critical engagement with the films as a contrasting pair: 'it is entirely valid to read them together, and for a critical eye to see one as arising from some oppositional thinking to the other on broad and subliminal, cultural and artistic terms' (TS2).

Although made only seven years later, Supple's version feels distant from Nunn's film – historically, culturally and generically. If Nunn's is an elegiac Edwardian comedy which ends happily as the lovers, in the company of Olivia's full household, celebrate their double wedding by dancing in the gallery of an aristocratic mansion, Supple's is a contemporary mixture of thriller and fantasy which ends with Olivia's tears and an uncertain melancholy. Whereas Nunn had Andrew and Cesario duel in the manner of a knock-about comedy with their swords getting stuck in apple baskets and Andrew being firmly kicked in the crotch, Supple's version of the scene has Andrew and Cesario slashing dangerously at each others' faces with carving knives whilst Toby and Fabian savagely goad them on – as Supple's co-screenplay writer, Andrew Bannerman, puts it, 'the duel does have to have an edge of danger about it'.⁷ Whereas Nunn prefixes the box-tree scene with Malvolio comically checking his toupee against his reflection in the

garden fountain and haughtily correcting the sundial according to his pocket watch, while the conspirators huddle behind a hedge, Supple prefixes his with Fabian and Maria rigging up a closed-circuit television camera and microphone: Nunn traditionally uses eavesdropping, Supple mordantly uses surveillance. Whereas Nunn's Andrew enters with a grazed head and Toby with a tiny cut over one eye, Supple has Andrew's and Toby's shirts covered in blood from gaping head wounds. Whereas Nunn incarcerates Malvolio in a coal house which is filthy and cold, Supple has his Malvolio, hooded in a wine cellar, his hands bound to wine racks and cut by the smashed glass resulting from his enraged struggle. Whereas Nunn has Antonio arrested by elegantly uniformed, cutlass-wielding cavalry, Supple has his apprehended violently by two plain-clothes, secret-service men, one of whom holds a hand-gun menacingly to Antonio's temple in the style of a Tarantino hit-man. As we hear of the death of Olivia's brother, there is a sudden flash of an *Inspector Morse*-style Jaguar car buckled from a road accident and as Sebastian tells Antonio of his parentage – 'My father was that Sebastian of Messaline whom I know you have heard of' (2.1.16) – we cut to a flash of a much decorated military junta, who looks not unlike Augusto Pinochet, followed rapidly by a black-and-white news photo of the same man lying on the street with blood pouring from his head, the victim of a political assassination. 'Violence', observes Alfredo Michel Modenessi, is 'the keynote to Supple's reading of *Twelfth Night*'.⁸ But what Modenessi suggests is Supple's gloss on the play, Supple himself urges is part of its essence: '*Twelfth Night* is a very violent play and all the more so for the repression and restraint of that violence [...] the violence of frustrated desire, the extreme condition of not getting what, or doing, or

living as, you really want and moreover having to repress that thing you really want within the restraints of your social condition' (TS2).

When Supple directed *Twelfth Night* on stage at the Young Vic in 1998, the critical consensus seemed to be that the style of the piece was earnest, even grave. Michael Billington noted the production's 'refusal to bang home the comedy.'⁹ David Benedict described how Sandy McDade, who played Maria, 'ditches the usual bawdy Elizabethan-style Joan Sims [in favour of a] quick and lean [persona]' while Andy Williams's Aguecheek is 'Far from the traditional dandy.'¹⁰ Robert Smallwood criticised the production as underselling the play's comic dimensions: 'The mood [...] was monotonously gloomy. There is, of course, a certain melancholy wistfulness about *Twelfth Night*, but there is hope too, even joy, and these were lost in the general dourness'.¹¹ Similarly, for Maurice Hindle, Supple's Channel 4 film is marred by 'an inappropriate seriousness' and he goes on, 'to perform *Twelfth Night* as earnestly as this is to do it too much violence'.¹² Clearly Supple has very different ideas about *Twelfth Night* to those of Nunn (and we might add Smallwood and Hindle), since both his stage and film versions dwell on the play's 'darker purpose' (*King Lear*, 1.1.36). While the objections of Smallwood and Hindle raise interesting questions about the process of reviewing since each is judging the stage or film versions according to his own reading of Shakespeare's play rather than evaluating the production or movie in terms of its own success or failure, the fact that they both identify Supple's attitude towards Shakespeare's play as cheerless or sombre, suggests that Supple's agenda is more sceptical or possibly more urgent than that of Nunn. In fact, Supple's film raises awkward political questions

about racism, multi-culturalism and social class and its contemporary setting precludes the comfort of historical distance which Nunn's Edwardian *mise en scène* ensured. As Supple puts it, the point 'of the film was to translate everything into convincing contemporary form' (TS2).

Instead of the English Heritage feel of Nunn's cinematic locations, Supple thrusts us into a night-time *coup d'état*. The film's titles roll as the sound of a slamming car door, the smashing of glass and the muffled shouts of an invasive guerrilla manoeuvre are heard. Sebastian (played by Ronny Jhutti) is seen shaking awake his twin sister, Viola (Parminder Nagra). He is holding a hand-gun and gestures for her to keep quiet. As she gets up, he peeps outside from behind a shutter to see a group of soldiers dragging their mother away. She looks back pitifully over her shoulder but she is heavily outnumbered and Sebastian is unable to help her. As she leaves the frame, a soldier throws a burning match onto a puddle of petrol and torches the house. Sebastian and Viola crouch on the window sill of the room and disappear into a star-lit sky. This sequence is intercut with an extreme close-up of Orsino (Chiwetel Ejiofor) luxuriating in the heartfelt intensity of a soprano's private performance (Claire Wilde). The contrast between the life-threatening situation of the twins on the one hand, and the Duke wallowing in his own frustration on the other, could not be more pointed.

We then cut to the hold of a transport ship as Sebastian, Viola and their relatives are stowed away as illegal immigrants. A tense Antonio (Andrew Kazamia) enters and receives payment for their transport and leaves them locked in the hold. The sounds of a

gathering storm, wind and waves, menace over the churning engine in the background and, to the groans of the ship disintegrating, the screen whites out. As Supple remarked, 'We didn't film the shipwreck; we wanted to give the idea of contemporary catastrophe.'¹³ Not only did this have an obvious financial advantage (as producer, Rachel Gesua, points out in the accompanying documentary), but it provides an original take on the traditional opening of the tempest.¹⁴ Moreover, in replacing the threatening elements of the storm and the drowning sequence of Nunn's version with the huddled vulnerability of a pathetic group of newly dispossessed asylum-seekers, Supple has emphasised an immediately pressing man-made threat of political usurpation. The potency of the natural elements upon which Nunn's opening sequence meditates is here replaced by the destructiveness of a corrupt social system. This is intensified when we see the rescued Viola on board a trawler offer the Sea Captain (Vic Tablian) several of her bangles: 'there's gold' (1.2.16). Her beautiful sari, now tattered and wet as well as her jewellery, suggest she was once politically and financially powerful. In this we see Supple's stated priority: to make a film 'that fully updated [Shakespeare's play] and that would be most alive and most vivid.'¹⁵

Remarkably a film made in 2003 has anticipated the migrant crises of today (which have risen to catastrophic levels in the aftermath of the Syria conflict), the rise of the populist Right, Brexit and the emergence of political isolationism typified by Trump's 'America first' policy. When asked about this Supple responded, 'Shakespeare constantly gives exile a firm, harsh political context and started as he meant to go on in *Comedy of Errors*. *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It* – all these exiles are men

and women forced by revolution or war to flee.' Of central concern to our understanding of Supple's *Twelfth Night* however is his elaboration, '*Twelfth Night* is [...] acutely about England... Viola is a refugee to England' (TS2).

The importance of making the work up-to-date was emphasised by Bannerman who eschewed the valedictory tone of Nunn's film (though without mentioning it, explicitly), remarking, 'You couldn't do it with a whole load of people prancing about in a pretty park with box trees and doublet and hose; it just wasn't going to work like that. [...] I felt that we could actually translate it into contemporary terms.'¹⁶ While Smallwood and Hindle regard this updating as a 'violence' upon the play, Paul Edmondson defends it: 'This uncompromisingly modern and multi-cultural interpretation is full of clever interpretative choices, which are sufficiently integrated to avoid becoming mere conceits.'¹⁷ Stephanie Merritt concurs with this, calling the device of casting the twins as fleeing asylum-seekers, 'a modernising touch which doesn't feel at all forced'.¹⁸ Modenessi reads the violence of Supple's version as a symptom of unresolved cultural and racial tensions: 'Conflict and violence abound in Illyria, and a good part of this may reflect on the stark ethnic and social contrasts therein.'¹⁹ As we will see, the ending of Supple's film is less assured by the mixed marriages of the double couples than is the homogeneously 'white' weddings which conclude Nunn's version.²⁰

Clearly there is some critical disagreement over whether Supple's reading is in harmony with the play but the one thing all the critics agree upon is the film's

pronounced multi-culturalism. In fact, this was a deliberate objective of the film's producer, Rachel Gesua:

We'd all known from the very beginning that we wanted it to be a multi-cultural, multi-racial cast that reflected the Britain that we all live in today and would make it more accessible to people who think of Shakespeare as something for white, middle-class, middle-aged audiences.²¹

In the light of this stated intention, the choice of Supple to direct was obvious. Supple has a track-record of working on projects that reflect contemporary multi-cultural concerns. In 1999 he adapted and directed Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* for the National Theatre as well as *Midnight's Children* for the RSC in 2002 (which starred Zubin Varla who also plays Feste in *Twelfth Night*). His 2000 production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the National (which featured Chiwetel Ejiofor as Romeo who is the film's Orsino) was set 'in an apartheid state; this Verona was segregated on racial grounds with the Montagues cast as black actors and the Capulets as white'.²² Charles Spencer opined that this device was trivial, 'It's been glibly colour-coded so that the Capulets are a white family, the Montagues are black, and Mercutio and Friar Laurence are Irish' but Peter J. Smith maintained that this casting raised important social questions: 'the racial divide only served to intensify an already volatile Verona and while the device could so easily have been a lazy shorthand for the clans' internecine politics, Supple ensured that it was merely an additional source of friction rather than its only cause'.²³

Supple contributed to the RSC's Complete Works Festival. His *Indian Dream* (as it became known) used a company from across the Indian subcontinent and was performed in no fewer than seven languages (Tamil, Malayalam, Sinhalese, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and English). When it played in the Swan in June 2006 the theatre was transformed 'into something between a temple, a playground and a circus ring' and produced what Michael Dobson considered to be 'an intelligent, original and cogent reading of the play'.²⁴ For Elinor Parsons the production's significance was specifically in its blending of different cultures and customs: 'The project took over two years to evolve. It pushed at the boundaries of conventional actor / audience relationships, integrating English theatrical culture with Indian and Sri Lankan performance traditions.'²⁵

Supple's proven strength in multi-cultural work means that this aspect of his *Twelfth Night* is no mere accessory, but essential to the film's vision. As Bannerman put it,

This is where I think the production company have done so well with this production. It is the most multi-cultural *Twelfth Night* that I have ever seen and I think that that does bring a very particular flavour to a play which is, in a sense, all about identity and expression. [...] Sebastian and Viola are shown in the way that they assimilate themselves to the society that they come to and also the values that they themselves bring to that

society and I think that's an interesting point for our multi-cultural society today.²⁶

Identity and expression, for Bannerman, are seen to go hand in hand. As the twins are reunited, they address each other in their native Hindi and their mother tongue both separates them from Orsino and Olivia as well as binding the two of them together. Both in the East End café, where Antonio and Sebastian meet, as well as in the shots of Brick Lane's exotic market stalls, there is a pronounced sense of cultural and linguistic hybridity. Kendra Preston Leonard registers the play's far-fetched narrative features as being similar to those of contemporary Asian cinema: 'The play itself [...] has many qualities that dovetail well with the Bollywood film genre, including the use of melodramatic story lines mixing tragedy with comedy, the separation and reunion of siblings, love triangles or forbidden romances, and convenient coincidences'.²⁷

Fittingly for one of Shakespeare's most musical plays, the film's score is an amalgam of various musical traditions. Of Nitin Sawhney's percussive music, Supple comments:

I think music in this film provides an inner temperament. The fusion of traditional Indian and Western and African musics – it's a culture that characters in *Twelfth Night* share. Music is very important to the emotion of contemporary existence. What the music in the film does is link the

collision of cultures; the music interlaces itself with what the characters do and say to provide the emotional inner score.²⁸

What Supple identifies as 'the collision of cultures' can be seen in the co-existence of the soprano's classical voice, Feste's folk-song rendering on acoustic guitar of *O Mistress Mine*, as well as the electronic techno of *Hold Thy Peace* with Toby's thrash electric guitar sound and Andrew's febrile percussion. At one point Olivia is animated by a vision of her brother's ghost playing a jaunty piano melody. But what Supple calls 'fusion' is the basis of the film's predominantly Banghra style of accompaniment so that as much aurally as visually, this world of the film is thoroughly mixed while English and Asian influences are most conspicuous.

Of course the Anglo-Indian experience is the topic of such postcolonial texts as *Midnight's Children* and *Haroun*, both of which, as we have already seen, Supple has adapted. Rushdie's novels are possibly the most conspicuous examples of 'magical realism' and when Billington reviewed Supple's stage version of *Twelfth Night*, he noted that 'Supple succeeds in creating an Illyria filled with madness and magic realism'.²⁹ Supple's film version also demonstrates a postmodern self-consciousness which is typical of Rushdie's fiction: a willingness to deploy self-conscious narrative strategies, to complicate the linearity of plot, and radically to challenge the univocality of canonical authority (in Rushdie's case, notoriously, *The Koran*, in Supple's, Shakespeare). Perhaps most pointedly postmodern is the film's hyperreality. Gavin Finney, the film's cinematographer, talks about the virtues of the hand-held camera used to shoot the market scenes: 'Tim did want a gritty, hyperreal, pushed look.'³⁰ This technique produces a

reality-TV style and intensifies what Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy identify as the film's proclivity to 'introduce a contradictory set of markers, apparently specific and intensely topical but actually serving to cast adrift any concrete sense of time and place.'³¹ Supple suggests that this is a quality for which he deliberately strove: 'a heightened kind of beauty or intensity that would not pretend that you really were in that place' and again, 'You mustn't pin him [Shakespeare] down in too literal a space'.³² More recently Supple has reconsidered the location of his film's setting in a way which stresses both its mythical elusiveness and its English topicality: 'Shakespeare invents a place with a name that obviously calls to mind both illusion and delirium and this is immediately not anywhere. At the same time it feels exactly like England. Bang on.' (TS2).

As defined by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, the hyperreal is that 'in which reality is fabricated by technology'.³³ Along with the hand-held camera, the other obvious technological device which the film employs in order to achieve this sense of hyperreality is bluescreen. As we have noted above, when the twins bail out of their burning house, they fade into a star-filled sky which resembles something out of a Disney fairy tale (compare Rushdie again). The reunion of the twins and Orsino comforting the weeping Olivia take place against a similar sky while, throughout, Orsino's court is pictured against a magnificent dawn panorama complete with diffuse sun and gentle surf. Supple describes how 'bluescreening was a practical way of expanding the vision of the film – a kind of poetry so that there would be a heightened kind of feeling to the skies that you saw'.³⁴

In contrast with Orsino's open plan and sparsely furnished salon with its enormous rectilinear opening onto magnificent swathes of sky, Olivia's house is a place of dark corners. As in Nunn's film, there is a Miss Havisham-like dread of brightness. As Tom Pye, the production designer of Supple's version put it, 'If Orsino's is a place of light, Olivia's is a place of total darkness.'³⁵ In Olivia's house, there are three principal interior spaces: the chapel, the basement and the porter's lodge. The latter, Fabian's den, is festooned with photos of the former boxer's triumphs and girlie calendars, and functions as the place from whence he (Fabian is played by Vincenzo Nicoli as a Mafioso heavy) allows entry to the gated garden via an intercom buzzer system. The office also provides the haven in which huddle the box-tree conspirators to monitor, via a TV-screen from a safe distance, the posturing of Malvolio – an innovation which is typically Supplesque in replacing the comic immediacy of the eavesdropping scene with the more sinister mode of electronic bugging.³⁶

The below-stairs world of cakes and ale is, again typical of the film's melancholy world view, the storage space for the possessions and reminders of Olivia's deceased brother. We see Toby (David Troughton) slumped drunkenly over a photo album of the family on the occasion of a birthday or celebratory get-together. There are skis, cricket bats, a set of golf clubs and a fencing mask as well as a record collection and other memorabilia. The dart board fixed to the wall is a low-life parody of Orsino's archery target. The intention seems to be to banish these painful memories to the basement in order to lessen Olivia's pain. The locked wine cellar, a wire-meshed enclosure, itself part of the basement, will become Malvolio's mad cell. In the closing sequence, as Malvolio

is released and Olivia (Claire Price) pronounces that he 'hath been most notoriously abused' (5.1.375), she looks around her and clocks the higgledy-piggledy possessions of her brother along with photographs of him and, throwing Malvolio's letter behind her, rushes out in tears. As Supple observes of the setting: 'They're rich people, playing and drinking in the mess of their past lives.'³⁷

The third interior setting – the chapel – demonstrates most graphically Supple's directorial inventiveness as well as, paradoxically, his faithfulness to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Supple remarks apropos the Elizabethan period how the play 'is about England at the time politically and in one sense it tells the story of the great clash that was taking place between Catholicism and Protestantism'.³⁸ This religious rupture, seemingly anachronistic in the film's modern setting, is described in terms no less divisive, albeit more secular:

the specifics of Shakespeare's moment translate into something that reverberates through time and across cultures. [...] The great schism in the heart of the play is the wider conflict between [Olivia's] past loyalties (of which Toby has become the moth-riddled Falstaffian standard-bearer and Aguecheek is the laughable champion) and the new Puritanism of which Malvolio is the unpalatable self-proclaimed spokesman. The Catholic / Protestant 1000-year civil war is internalised into the core of the play and becomes character, psychology and narrative (TS2).

To this end, Olivia's mourning rituals take place in a recognisably Catholic chapel. We see her receive Holy Communion from Ewart James Walters's frocked Priest and the candle-lit altar before which she kneels is draped with rosaries and relics of her brother – photos and trinkets, like those which cluster around the shrines of saints in contemporary Spanish and Italian churches. As Toby staggers in to bring the news of the arrival of 'A gentleman' (1.5.114) his apostate contempt for this religion, which is incarcerating his niece in her own grief, is nicely signalled by his unashamed and lengthy fart – 'A plague o' these pickle herring!' (line 117). But his delirium tremens cause him to double-take at the altar, and the memory of his nephew and Catholic ritual merge in a feverish panic: the camera jump-cuts between his horrified expression and the festooned altar as Toby collapses. The comical mis-hearing of Olivia's 'lethargy' for 'lechery' (line 121) is too trite for such a moment of spiritual crisis and is cut. In this way, Supple accounts for Toby's sudden and unexpected religious exclamations: 'Let him be the devil an he will, I care not. Give me faith, say I' (line 123). In the light of this eschatological frenzy, the insistence on the 'gate' ('There's one at the gate', line 121) takes on a sinister connotation as a hell's mouth and adumbrates the devilish transformation which Cesario undergoes in the yearning rhetoric of Olivia: 'A fiend like thee might bear my soul to hell' (3.4.212).

The world of Catholic ritual is a darkly oppressive one with Olivia kneeling obediently in front of the presiding priest and watched hawkishly by Michael Maloney's Malvolio. Miraculously at one moment Olivia looks up to see the ghost of her smiling brother at the piano, playing a childish jingle, and as she smiles at her remembrance of

him the elaborate chandelier over her shoulder mystically burns more brightly as if to symbolise her fraternal adoration. In spite of her perverse determination to sequester herself in darkness, we remember that Cesario describes her as 'Most *radiant*, exquisite, and unmatched beauty' (1.5.163, my emphasis). Just as her inner light, veiled in the rigmarole of Catholic mourning, is hinted at in this way, so her sexual promise is also alluded to by the presence in the chapel of several Titianesque canvases displaying the naked forms of supine women. The camera tracks down one of the painted bodies as Olivia dwells on the 'five-fold blazon' (line 283) of Cesario and we cut ingeniously to Viola, laying on her bed wearing only Cesario's loosely buttoned shirt. She approaches the mirror and unbuttons it to contemplate her own breasts: 'Fortune forbid my outside have not charmed her [...] I am the man' (2.2.18-25). The scene of intimate self-revelation balances that in which we saw Viola (like Imogen Stubbs's Viola in Nunn's film) bandage her breasts in affectation of a masculine torso. As in Nunn's film, questions around identity and appearance are underlined: the publicity of disguise contrasting neatly with the privacy of revelation. The sensuousness of the nudes in Olivia's chapel anticipates the use of Orsino's Petrarchanism as he compares his adoration of Olivia to an intense religious experience: 'You uncivil lady, / To whose great and unuspicious altars / My soul the faithful'st off'rings hath breathed out / That e'er devotion tendered' (5.1.110-13). As in the poetry of John Donne, there is little to choose between religious passion and sexual ecstasy.

In spite of its tonal distance from Nunn's, as well as Supple's assertions about 'zero intended reference' (TS2), there are several intertextual references (regardless of

the degree of deliberation, accident or otherwise). While Orsino fantasises about Olivia in Nunn's film, laying in the bath, Cesario sponges his back and steals glimpses at his naked form under the water. Supple's version is more explicit and Orsino calls Cesario to him while he lolls in a sunken bath which demands that Cesario sit on the floor behind him while she sensuously anoints and massages his shoulders. As he remarks upon Cesario's 'happy years' (1.4.30) which give 'him' the appearance of a woman, Orsino steps up out of the bath and stands naked in front of Cesario / Viola. Her face is a fleeting mixture of embarrassment, astonishment and arousal before she recovers her composure and passes him the towel.

Elsewhere the two of them listen to Feste's singing *Come Away Death* (2.4.50f). Here the person of the fool is taken by a compact disc player which leaves Cesario and Orsino alone to discuss the nature of desire. The absence of the fool echoes the related scene in Nunn's movie when master and servant smoked and played cards over the instrumental version of Feste's song. In Supple's version, at Viola's 'I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too; and yet I know not' (lines 120-1), Orsino remains in his seat while a ghostly image of him rises to kiss her – the fact that such 'trick' photography is used so sparingly, makes it all the more effective. Clearly, like Olivia seeing her brother's ghost at the piano, this is a moment in which phantasm blends with fantasy.

While Supple picks up these wistful moments from Nunn's autumnal version, the films' endings are quite different. Nunn's party atmosphere celebrates the twins' double

weddings while Malvolio *et al.* are banished from the country house. Supple's ending is much less confident. As the twins are reunited Olivia registers the irrevocable fact that she is married to the 'wrong' one. Still traumatised by the photos of her brother and the savagery of the treatment meted out to Malvolio, she bursts into tears. What is usually a triumph of diplomacy as Orsino pronounces his intention to enjoy Olivia's party invitation, is here very much an attempt to make the best of a bad job and comfort Olivia in her weeping. As the film closes, we see Olivia and Orsino embrace and the twins also embrace but the unusually conspicuously married couples are not positioned as such. While the seated Viola and Orsino kiss, behind them Olivia merely strokes Sebastian's cheek. The film ends with the couples close but not yet commingled and there is the suggestion that there is much further to go. As Supple reflects, 'The fact that Shakespeare's marriages in *Twelfth Night* are between two who are from "here" and two who are "others" and the fact that Olivia has discovered her Cesario is not who she thought he was and Orsino is re-focussing his intense passions ... I wonder how this can possibly be assured!' (TS2).

How might we read the ending of Supple's version? Might its dissonance be a marker of the instability of marriage as a binding institution in the contemporary world? Are Olivia's tears the index of the religious upheavals which Supple has attributed to the period of the play's composition or do they register the emotional trauma of something much more modern such as the claustrophobia of an apparently emancipated feminism which remains subjected to the residual cultural weight of patriarchal control (particularly through the institution of marriage)? And what of the film's attitude to multi-racial

Britain? Does it encourage inter-racial relationships which constructively wrench authority from the homogenous white establishment? The casting of a black actor as the Duke suggests that it does but, if so, why does the Asian-white couple never embrace? Leonard reads this modesty in the light of Bollywood's expectations: there is 'little or no sexual contact between romantic partners until after their marriage has been formalized' but Shakespeare, as Stanley Wells has so convincingly argued, seems generally less worried by explicitly erotic encounters than Bollywood.³⁹ Supple himself suggests that the complexity of his film's ending is essentially Shakespearean rather than taking its cue from the presence of multi-cultural partners: "I feel that the endings are never about easy, definite wrap-ups, however good that might feel for audiences. Uncertainty, ambivalence, unease, complexity of feeling – that's what he's getting at and that's what life feels like for most of us" (TS2).

Perhaps the safest way to conclude is with the rather pedestrian observation that Supple's is a very *different* film to that of Nunn. Supple's own description of the two films is that they are 'respectfully antagonistic and competitive, that they lay out diametrically opposed views of the play and perhaps of priorities in playing Shakespeare' (TS2). What is certain is that whereas Nunn's settles in romantic confidence, Supple's leaves these social and political questions hanging in mid-air. The fact that the endings of these film versions (which are separated by a mere seven years) are so diverse, illustrates as much about the kaleidoscopically shifting tones of Shakespeare's play as it does about the pressing nature of contemporary cultural concerns.

¹ For an analysis of Nunn's film and especially its maritime imagery, see Peter J. Smith, 'Goodbye Wave: Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* – A Maritime Valediction', *Shakespeare*, 14 (2017), 390-8.

² La Salle, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 November 1996, and Holland, 'The Dark Pleasures of Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night*', *Shakespeare Magazine*, 1 (1997), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5877ceae5016e102ef4f18f4/t/5894b4a2725e25602079bfc8/1486140581298/The_Dark_Pleasures_of_Trevor_Nunn_s_Twelfth_Night.pdf [accessed 9 April 2019]

³ Philippa Sheppard, *Devouring Time: Nostalgia in Contemporary Shakespearean Screen Adaptations* (Montreal, 2017), pp 303 and 319.

⁴ *21st Century Bard: The Making of Twelfth Night*.

⁵ Email to the author, 4 June 2018. All subsequent references to this email will be referenced in the text as 'TS1'. I am extremely grateful to Tim Supple for his assistance with the writing of this essay as well as his thoughtful correspondence.

⁶ Email to the author, 17 June 2018. All subsequent references to this email will be referenced in the text as 'TS2'.

⁷ *21st Century Bard*.

⁸ Alfredo Michel Modenessi, "'This Uncivil and Unjust Extent Against Thy Peace': Tim Supple's *Twelfth Night*, or What Violence Will', *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (2008), 91-103, p. 97.

⁹ Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 4 June 1998.

¹⁰ David Benedict, *The Independent*, 15 June 1998.

¹¹ Robert Smallwood, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 1998', *Shakespeare Survey* 52 (1999), 229-53, p. 235.

¹² Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film* (Houndmills, 2007), p. 241.

¹³ *21st Century Bard*.

¹⁴ The film was shot in four weeks on a budget of £870 000.

¹⁵ *21st Century Bard*.

¹⁶ *21st Century Bard*.

¹⁷ Paul Edmondson, *Twelfth Night: The Shakespeare Handbooks* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 63.

¹⁸ Stephanie Merritt, *The Observer*, 4 May 2003,

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/250525009?accountid=14693> [accessed 9 April 2019]

¹⁹ Modenessi, 'Supple's *Twelfth Night*', p. 99.

²⁰ 'About multi-cultural casting ... this is constantly evolving for me and has subsequently (since India 2005) developed into what I would call international casting or casting beyond culture. [...] If we are gazing through the lens of the RSC, and more recently Globe, traditions; only through the habits of British theatre; only through the experiences of single cultures then our understanding will be limited also. [...] For me, mixing it up is the core project ... mixing it up for me, the artists and the audiences. What we lose is context, what we gain is depth and breadth and richness' (TS1).

²¹ *21st Century Bard*.

²² Peter J. Smith, 'Review of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Tim Supple', *Cahiers Elisabethains*, 59 (2001), 96-8, p. 96.

²³ Charles Spencer, *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 2000, and Smith, 'Review of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Tim Supple', p. 97.

²⁴ Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2006', *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007), 284-319, pp. 301 and 302. Jonathan Bate's reaction to the production, if a little overawed is, nonetheless, not unique: 'On leaving *Dream* that warm June night, I stood on Waterside with a group of seasoned Stratford playgoers. For some moments, we were unable to speak. I then said: "That is the most magical night I have ever spent in a theatre". Everyone agreed. Several people present had seen Peter Brook's 1970 production, habitually cited as the greatest show in RSC history. They all said that this was its equal, probably its better', 'Introducing the Complete Works Festival', *Cahiers Elisabethains: Special Issue*, ed. Peter J. Smith and Janice Valls-Russell (2007), 3-6, p. 4.

²⁵ Elinor Parsons, 'Review of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Tim Supple', *Cahiers Elisabethains: Special Issue*, ed. Peter J. Smith and Janice Valls-Russell (2007), 38-9, p. 38.

²⁶ *21st Century Bard*.

²⁷ Kendra Preston Leonard, 'The Sounds of India in Supple's *Twelfth Night*' in *Bollywood Shakespeares*, ed. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (New York and Houndmills, 2014), 147-63, p. 148. It seems nothing could have been further from Supple's own imagination: 'I had not a jot of thinking about Bollywood, I knew very little about Bollywood then and what I did know I had little interest in. I can honestly say that there was zero reference to Bollywood movies in the whole process!' (TS2.)

28 *21st Century Bard.*

29 Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 4 June 1998.

30 *21st Century Bard.*

31 Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy, 'Our Shakespeares: British Television and the Strains of Multiculturalism' in *Screening Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh, 2006), 90-112, p. 103.

32 *21st Century Bard.*

33 Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (London and New York, 2016), p. 330.

34 *21st Century Bard.*

35 *21st Century Bard.*

36 The fact that the conspirators are not physically close to Malvolio makes 'Her c's, her u's, and her t's' (2.5.88) unworkable and it is cut.

37 *21st Century Bard.*

38 *21st Century Bard.*

39 Leonard, 'The Sounds of India in Supple's *Twelfth Night*', p. 148. See both Stanley Wells, *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 2004) and his *Shakespeare, Sex and Love* (Oxford, 2010).