

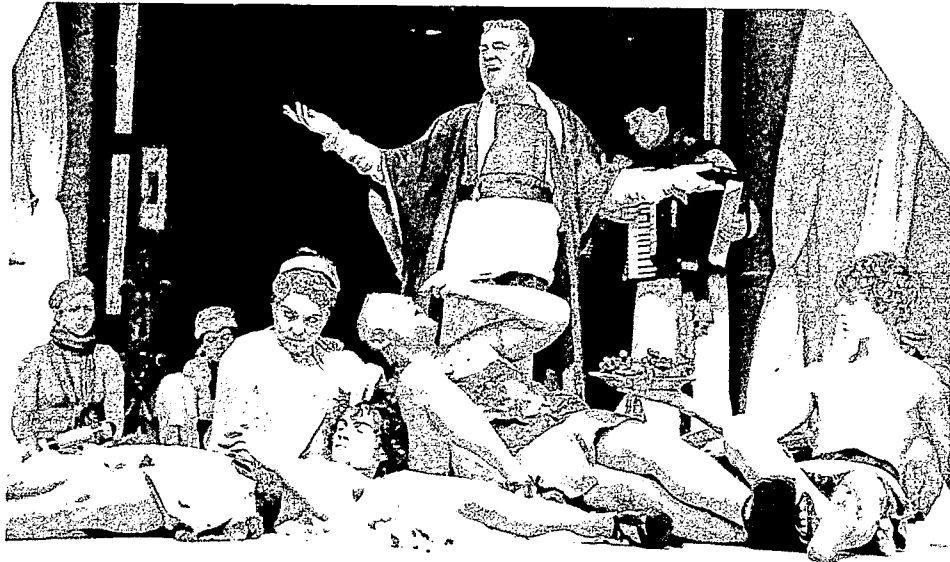
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This is the second season running upon which I have reported on the Globe for *The Upstart Crow*.<sup>1</sup> I entitled my first report last year, “Looking up.” While it may appear unnecessary to unpack the stuffing of my joke, it rather cleverly, if I say so myself, referred to a new optimism (as in “things are looking up”) inspired by the succession of Dominic Dromgoole as Artistic Director following the moribund reign of Mark Rylance, while also suggesting the arched necks of the yard’s spectators. While the latter remains a tiring reality for the groundlings (we press are seated in otherwise prohibitively expensive seats as detailed below), the former, to judge by the 2009 season, was a case of me speaking too soon. Of the four Shakespearean shows staged at the Globe this season, *As You Like It*, directed by Thea Sharrock, was reasonable, *Troilus and Cressida*, directed by Matthew Dunster, was weak, and *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Dromgoole, was unconscionable. The press night of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* was canceled.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there were three new plays, none of which need detain us here.

Entitled “Young Hearts,” the repertory brought together the pastoral ebullience of Rosalind’s pursuit of Orlando, the tragic star-crossed lovers of Verona, and the jaded pessimism of love’s betrayal during the Trojan wars. The plays did speak nicely to each other across genres and across a variety of dispositions from the juvenile nescience (rather than innocence) of *As You Like It* to the knowing cynicism of *Troilus*. Had individual productions been up to scratch, this could have been, overall, a compelling season. Unfortunately, as will become clear, the optimism I expressed last year was both premature and ill-founded.

In an effort to preempt a mass exodus during Rosalind’s final speech, our theatre programs bore a post-hoc sticker: “Please note that the epilogue for *As You Like It* has been included in this production. However, in the spirit of experimentation, it will feature after the traditional Globe jig. We hope you will stay on to catch it.” Implicit in this piece of special pleading is the recognition that a large portion of the Globe audience uses the jig as a cue to exit and get clear of the theatre’s courtyard before the general crush. The sticker is indicative of both the Globe’s obduracy in retaining such an apparently extraneous “tradition” (Thomas Platter has a lot to answer for) as well as its haughty subtlety in its conspicuous declaration of its own originality—much virtue in that “spirit of experimentation.” In the event, it proved redundant on both counts, for not only was the presence of Naomi Frederick’s Rosalind sufficient to hold the audience, but Sharrock’s interpretation of the play needed no justification. It was a clear, competent, and in many ways, innovative production and, without doubt, the best thing at the Globe this season.

Dick Bird designed a court in which display was central. A pair of drummers flanked the upstage wall, which was hung in black, and half a dozen or so narrow columns as well as the main pillars supporting the stage canopy were draped in cloth of the same color. Frederick (Brendan Hughes) entered through the pit as though



*Troilus and Cressida*: Back Row: Genevieve Wilkins, Phil Hopkins, Jon Banks. Center: Matthew Kelly. Middle Row: Ania Sowinski, Ben Bishop. Front Row: Toby Parkes, Joseph Scatley.



on a royal progress before climbing up the central stairs to the stage to be crowned. The pageantry was deliberately overpowered by the somber setting. (Frederick was wearing doublet and hose of black as were his surrounding courtiers.) Celia's Elizabethan cream dress and Rosalind's blue gown set them apart visually. There was a clear sense of foreboding in the setting, which was pointed up by Frederick's arrogant grin and his supercilious progress back through the groundlings. Even before the script proper had commenced, Sharrock and Bird had instilled an atmosphere of anxiety perfectly suited to the context of usurpation and fraternal betrayal with which the play opens.

This prologue provided a resonant setting for the fraternal conflict of the play's first scene. Jack Laskey's Orlando proved to be a viciously effective wrestler, and the extent of his physical violence against his elder brother (Jamie Parker played Oliver) made complete sense of his subsequent "surprise" victory over Charles. Usually, it is Orlando's youth and tenderness, and his position as the bout's underdog, which arouse Rosalind's sympathetic support, but here it was clear that he was well able to fend for himself. Oliver's "Let me go I say" (1.1.61) was delivered as his younger brother pinned him aggressively to the floor.<sup>3</sup> Outrage and fury at his dispossession had replaced the more usual respectful submission at this point. Both Frederick's interpolated coronation and this brotherly brutality darkened the tone of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy in interesting and inventive ways. (At the opening of her production of *Julius Caesar* playing simultaneously at the RSC's Courtyard Theatre, Lucy Bailey had Romulus and Remus, as two lupine savages with bare knuckles, fight to the death. Sibling rivalry is clearly fashionable at the moment.)

This sinister tone was maintained in the court's smallest details. As Le Beau (Gregory Gudgeon) announced the wrestling, he dropped Touchstone's "sceptre" on the floor in a gesture of contempt; and as Charles summoned his opponent with his intimidating question: "where is this young gallant that is so desirous to lie with his mother earth?" (1.2.188), Orlando replied with a high-pitched and insolent "Ready sir," in the manner of Mustardseed from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as though to brush off with derision Charles's threat. The effect was darkly comic.

As we moved to the forest of Arden, this tense quality was replaced with a more playful tone. The black shrouds covering the columns were pulled up into the heavens, revealing, unsurprisingly, so many tree trunks. Rosalind entered in a brown leather doublet and hose, identical in every way to what we had seen Orlando wearing earlier. There was a neat double-take here: questions were being asked not merely of sexual identity (in Rosalind's reincarnation as Ganymede) but about the narcissism of love (in Rosalind's reincarnation as Orlando). The wooing scenes were insistent on this self-regarding quality; and Rosalind functioned as a mirror to Orlando rather than his equal and opposite. An unfortunate side-effect was the eclipsing of Rosalind's independent identity and the creation of her as a kind of sounding board for Orlando's self-indulgence. He it was who excitedly ran around the theatre, standing on the banisters of the yard's lower story and relishing the confetti of his poems sprinkled over the upper gallery. In comparison, Rosalind was relatively static and some of her most poignant lines—"Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (4.1.101)—unfortunately went for very little.

Following Ganymede's fainting, Oliver bent down behind "him" to hoist him back to his feet. As Oliver put his arms around Ganymede in order to lift him, he was clearly surprised to feel Rosalind's breasts and his challenge, "You a man?" (4.3.165), came out as a bewildered question. When we next saw Orlando, Oliver had clearly brought him up to speed and Orlando's reply to her inquiry, "Did your brother tell you how I counterfeited to swoon?," was pointedly knowing: "Ay, and greater wonders than that" (5.2.27). By the time she came to declare her magical powers: "I can do strange things" (57), his broad grin suggested he was well aware of her cross-dressing, and his humoring of her betokened an affectionate indulgence. He attempted to kiss her before the sudden entry of Silvius and Phoebe (Michael Benz and Jade Williams) interrupted them. The price of this extra layer of intrigue is obviously that her final revelation is surplus to requirements, at least in Orlando's case.

Tim McMullen's sonorous Jaques was a dysfunctional public-school boy. His sense of his own superiority meant that Orlando's gibes bounced straight off him. His relationship with the audience was especially interesting. He entered through the groundlings but, unlike Frederick, he was cognizant of them. His glossing of the term "ducdame"—"Tis a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle" (2.5.56)—was delivered not to Amiens (Peter Gale) but to the Globe's audience, and his panoramic sweep made explicit our circular configuration and his scorn for us. His speech on the seven ages of man was delivered directly to us with great aplomb and was tremendously moving.

Dominic Rowan's Touchstone was less stimulating and provided the production's vulgarly comic interpolations which are all too characteristic of the Globe's populism. After the interval, he played a game of "Spot the Goat" with a puppet goat whose head appeared from the stage trap like a pantomime apparition; I was half expecting chants of "He's behind you." He turned to us and, apparently ad libbing, remarked cornily, "It's just a stage I'm going through." Again his speech on the degrees of the lie was punctured by a rather weak ad lib: "Your If is the only peacemaker—not pacemaker." Of the two relationships with the audience, Jaques's was by far the more compelling.

Summer 2009 saw the election of two Members of the European Parliament from the British National Party (the UK's fascist-leaning contingent). In such fraught circumstances, and in such a cosmopolitan city as London, to see the only



*As You Like It:* Naomi Frederick as Rosalind and Jack Laskey as Orlando. Photo by John Trammer.

black actor in the company cast in the “exotic” role of Hymen was startling. Ewart James Walters emerged from the pit and presided over the multiple marriages (there was a nice echo of Frederick’s opening entrance). His performance was competent, though unremarkable, while his casting (what is the opposite of color-blind?) was anything but.

Rosalind’s epilogue—the speech advertised ahead of time by the program stickers—was delivered from the stage-right walkway which ran into the pit. At her “If I were a woman . . .” (5.4.212) she lifted her skirts to expose her brown leather hose beneath. The genital confusion of the moment was more than any sticker could do to keep the rapt attention of her audience. Would that the level of engagement in this *As You Like It* had characterized the other Globe productions this season.

I was unable to attend the designated press night of *Romeo and Juliet*. As a result the customary press tickets which carry the price tag £00 were unavailable and I was given a pair of tickets each costing £33. Had I actually paid £66, the Globe would by now be the recipient of a sheaf of letters from my legal team demanding a full refund and compensation for wasting three precious hours of my drinking time. The case for the prosecution would be legally unarguable: I would have expected to pay (and frequently do) a reasonably high price to see actors who are professionally qualified, but on this occasion I had foisted on me only marginally more than amateur dramatics. Ukweli Roach’s complete c.v.: “Ukweli trained at RADA [Royal Academy of Dramatic Art] and this is his professional debut.” He played Tybalt. Jack Farthing’s complete c.v.: “Jack trained at RADA and this is his professional debut.” He played Benvolio. Adetomiwa Edun appears to have been in just three professional theatre productions (with speaking roles?). He played Romeo. Ellie Kendrick hasn’t even been to drama school; in fact, she is still waiting to go to university: “Ellie is currently on her gap year before going to study English Literature at Cambridge.” She played . . . Juliet! A proud day for the Kendrick family—Ellie getting into Cambridge—and I wish her all the best with her studies. After she has been involved in the student drama club there for three years, trained at drama school, and done several seasons in minor roles, she’ll be ready to audition for Juliet. By then my hypothetical £66 would have racked up significant compound interest.

While it may be humiliating for them, there is a reason that newly qualified actors appear, if they are lucky enough to find an opening, as spear-carriers and waiting women. It’s the same reason that newly qualified roofers (for the first few months) get to make the tea for their experienced colleagues or that recent legal graduates spend several years as junior clerks. Would you really want your eyes operated on by a surgeon who qualified three days ago? Would you really want to fly to New York with a pilot who has only ever been on a flight simulator? Tybalt, Benvolio, Romeo and Juliet are not exactly minor roles in this play. What was Dromgoole thinking when he cast such under-experienced actors in such significant parts? One of the nice things about the Globe’s open plan is that it is so easy to get up and leave. One of the awful things about promising to write an essay on the Globe’s season is that, even in the case of a production as poor as this, one is forced to remain and, worse than that, return after the interval.

As Thumper, the baby rabbit, says in Walt Disney’s *Bambi*, “If you can’t say something nice . . . don’t say nothing at all.” But the theatre reviewer has to come up with the goods, come rain or shine. It is not enough merely to report on a season’s successes while politely and tactfully drawing a veil over its disasters. I was optimistic about Dromgoole’s tenure at the Globe. Well, to paraphrase Hermione, for expressing such optimism, I never wished to see me sorry; now I trust I am.

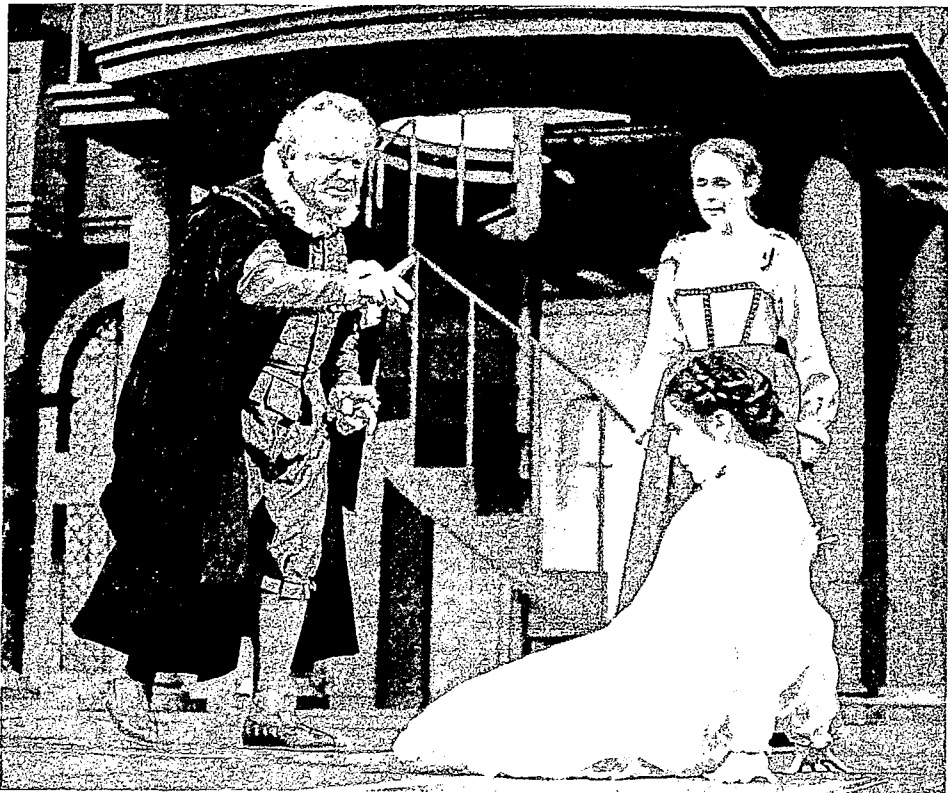
Alan Armstrong’s brilliant “*Romeo and Juliet* Academic Theatre Review Kit” half-comically sets up a pattern according to which reviewers can evaluate productions of the play without actually having to write a word.<sup>4</sup> The template he provides offers a series of multiple-choice boxes about the production which demonstrate the tendency of this particular play in performance to revert to default options—about the nurse, for instance, “young and bawdy” or “old and funny”? One of the choices Armstrong offers concerns costume. Can it really be true that directors of *Romeo* so frequently feel the need to color-code the Capulets and Montagues? Well, Dromgoole clearly did: Capulets in red, Montagues in blue, while the neutral gold, yellow, and green were used for Escalus, Mercutio, and Benvolio, respectively. As if this were not bad enough, the characters were forced, moment by moment, to announce their current loyalty with regular costume “updates.” As Romeo attended the Capulet party he wore a red (Capulet) cloak over his blue (Montague) doublet and hose. (Oh! I get it—he’s trying to look like a Capulet at their party while remaining a Montague under his disguise.) When we saw him subsequently in Lawrence’s cell, he had assumed a pair of red sleeves and Juliet had swapped her red dress for a blue one, a sort of reciprocated matrimonial color-by-numbers. As Romeo arrives at the contention between Tybalt and Mercutio, the latter remarks: “I’ll be hanged, sir, if he wear your livery” (3.1.56) but Romeo *was* wearing it! Following the death of Mercutio, Romeo’s newly animated fury at Tybalt was preceded by the clumsily conspicuous tearing-off of his red Capulet doublet. These liveries were hardly subtly symbolic when deployed in such literal-minded ways.

The production was frequently marred by an obvious failure, whether on the part of director or actors, to understand the script. As Capulet humorously mourns his lost youth he remarked to his cousin, “I have seen the day / That I have worn a visor . . . ’Tis gone, ’tis gone, ’tis gone” (1.5.21-4), yet, even as he spoke these words, he was wearing a visor. If this was merely a minor slip, the muddled articulation of Juliet on the balcony or at “Gallop apace . . .” (3.2.1) implied that Kendrick really was not sure what it was that Juliet was saying; three years at Cambridge might help here.

Perhaps most culpable was the company’s tendency to “act out” every single line. There was an inability to keep still and allow the words to do the work. Every single thought demanded a physical gesture or movement. Perhaps most egregious was Edun’s Romeo, who seemed to skate around the stage, leaping and swerving like a cross between Michael Jackson and Errol Flynn. In places this obsessive movement pulled focus entirely away from what was being said. As Romeo read out the names on the Capulets’ invitation list, Fergal McElherron’s irritating Peter undertook a bizarre and distracting series of gestures—now a baboon, now a staggering drunk, now a whistling lecher and so on, ad nauseam. Lady Capulet’s (Miranda Foster)

description of Paris was accompanied by a series of peculiar facial expressions, as though she were the odds-on favorite at some girning competition. Tom Stuart's idiotically beaming, public-school Paris draped himself absurdly around the shoulders of Capulet—it got a huge laugh but nobody seemed to know why Paris was behaving thus. As Mercutio apostrophized Romeo with his scornful catalogue: “Romeo! Humours! Madman! Passion! Lover!” (2.1.7), it was necessary on every term to perform an act of simulated violence upon Benvolio: electrocuting him, strangling him, bugging him on all fours. As he knelt downstage center fantasising about Rosaline’s “quivering thigh, / And the demesnes that there adjacent lie” (2.1.19-20)—here unaccountably changed to “domains”—Mercutio put his tongue out full length and mimicked the act of cunnilingus to huge audience applause. The Globe seems unable to resist appealing to the lowest comic denominator.

Rawiri Paratene managed to make one of the most exciting roles in the play, Lawrence—an intriguing Catholic disciplinarian mixed with Machiavellian pragmatist—simply boring. His flat expression suggested he was running through his script in order to learn it rather than perform it, and his final summary of the preceding



*Romeo and Juliet*: Ian Redford as Capulet, Ellie Kendrick as Juliet, and Penny Layden as Nurse. Photo by John Haynes.

plot (a difficult speech since it is entirely redundant: we have already seen what has happened) was torturous in its protraction. The only saving grace amid all this carnage was Ian Redford's Capulet. His fury with Juliet (3.5) and threats to disown her drew a deserved spontaneous round of applause. It is surely not coincidental that Redford's biography mentions that he trained at Bristol Old Vic drama school and has a number of professional engagements under his belt, including appearances at the National and Manchester Royal Exchange. I know these remarks sound waspish but, as the actors' union, Equity, would be the first to insist, there is no shortcut to professionalism and experience. I just keep thinking of those poor(er) spectators who parted with £33. It would be nice, having slated *Romeo*, to finish this season's report on a high note, but alas the Globe's third production rules this out.

*Troilus and Cressida*, like *Twelfth Night* and unlike *Macbeth*, for instance, is an ensemble piece. Its large cast and its several leading roles embed its love story within a broadly political plot populated by a significant number of prominent characters. In *Romeo and Juliet* the feuding is confined to Verona and the contextual characters (with the obvious exception of Mercutio, who is famously killed off, according to Dryden, to stop him taking over the play) are somehow “smaller” than those which surround Cressida and Troilus. *Romeo* does not demand a Thersites, a Pandarus, or a Ulysses; its tragedy is more domestic. The inclusion of both *Romeo* and *Troilus* in the Globe season offered the opportunity to compare these thematically similar but structurally diverse plays, or it could have done to a much greater extent had the *Romeo* been a more effective production.

One annoying echo of the Globe *Romeo* was evident, though it seemed too minor to be a deliberate allusion. Just as the Capulets and Montagues were color-coded, so the Trojans were in purple and the Greeks were in blue. Whether this “Shakespeare for dummies” explication is to do with the Globe's popular appeal or not, it is still a clumsy device and illustrates the tendency of design to do the jobs that acting should.

Like those in *Romeo*, the actors in *Troilus* were not uniformly strong, and indeed, some of the key performances had been woefully misconceived. Paul Hunter's misshapen Thersites, for instance, who quite reasonably was given the Chorus, became, in next to no time, a cackling intrusion. Hamlet warns the players, “let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them” (3.2.39). Would that Dunster had taken heed. Hunter's constant interpolated ad libs were lame and infuriating: “Stay at Thersites' bed and breakfast complete with off-street chariot parking,” and so on. There is a difference between working with a crowd and obsequiously seeking their approval. As he cursed Patroclus with his hyperbolic catalogue of afflictions: “the rotten diseases of the south, the guts-gripping, ruptures, catarrhs, loads o' gravel i'th' back” (5.1.18), each of these illnesses was accompanied with a daft expression or an odd leap. The plethoric madness of Thersites' list was lost in this crude spelling-out. During the battle sequence, Thersites stalked in slow motion around the stage holding up to his eyes a pair of binoculars, but his presence here, as so often elsewhere, added little.

Nor was Trystan Gravelle's characterization of Achilles readily comprehensible. Separated from the other Greeks by virtue of his broad Welsh accent, he was

effectively portrayed as an outsider but, costumed in a long white wrap-around dressing gown and with black panda bear eye make-up, he looked as though he had wandered in from a production of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Chinna Wodu's Ajax was Mr. T from *The A Team* complete with Mohican strip of hair and unfeasibly bulging muscles. Unfortunately, the depth of his characterization was also comparable to that of Mr. T.

Paul Stocker's Troilus was a workmanlike performance but failed to ignite the smoldering misogyny of the text. Stocker was one of the many physically endowed actors who clearly had been cast as much for his muscular physique as for his acting



*Troilus and Cressida*: Paul Stocker as Troilus, Matthew Kelly as Pandarus, and Laura Pyper as Cressida. Photo by John Trammer.

abilities. Indeed, there were more “six packs” on show than at a frat party! Opposite Troilus was Laura Pyper's Cressida, played mysteriously as though she were out at a drunken bachelorette party. She flung herself, screeching at the script without recognising its varieties of pace or tenor, and the painful scene in which she is kissed/assaulted by the Greek generals resembled the bride-to-be having a last fling with a group of male strippers—a travesty indeed.

Fortunately, the ensemble nature of the play threw several successful performances into high relief. Chief here was Matthew Kelly's Pandarus. Kelly is best known for presenting *Stars in Their Eyes*, an obtuse and embarrassing UK television competition in which members of the Great British public pretend to be Buddy Holly, Kylie Minogue, or Frank Sinatra. Needless to say, the program is a mixture of dull-wittedness and utter insincerity on Kelly's part as he tells each contestant

that she has brilliantly out-Madonnaed Madonna. What a pleasant surprise to find that Kelly is actually a fine actor, his Pandarus both an imposing, statuesque figure with an authoritative stage presence and a clear firm command of the subtleties of Shakespeare's language, and a sniggering old queen whose ostensibly innocent question—“Know you the musicians?” (3.1.19), when delivered to a semi-naked teenage servant boy, sounded like the most disgusting of propositions. Pandarus' lewd metaphor of “grinding [and] boulding” (1.1.17) was delivered with all the engaging subtlety of a Benny Hill sketch. Yet elsewhere, as when describing Troilus' dimpled chin and attractive smile (1.2.115), there was a genuine adoration in his voice which was counterbalanced and counterblasted by his eventual sickly fury at the play's end. This was a confident and nuanced performance which illustrated the Protean quality of Shakespeare's complex characterization.

The same could also be said of Jamie Ballard's Ulysses. During the council of Greek generals (1.3), the actor playing Ulysses has a number of very long and complicated speeches. It was testament to Ballard's adroit penetration of these speeches that he made them both completely comprehensible and compelling. Physically dwarfed by those around him, this was a general who had clearly arrived at his position of authority by living on his wits, and his lean political acumen was both stimulating and terrifying. These senior politicians were like putty in his manipulating hands and his Machiavellian aptitude nicely prepared us for the deliberate snubbing of Achilles (3.3.38ff). Effective too was John Stahl's Nestor, grizzled but still physically and vocally powerful: the Greeks may have been down but they were definitely not out.

Anna Fleischle's set design was effective without being distracting. The stage pillars and upstage wall of the Globe were clad in a clay-colored wash. A rectangular balcony was suspended above the stage and functioned variously as a separate room or, with a canopy lowered down onto it, the roof of a tent. Occasionally there were rather crude attempts to “contemporize” the production. Antenor (Stevie Raine) appeared before the trading of prisoners in a Guantanamo jump suit, his head unbagged to reveal a bloodied nose and mouth. The Myrmidons entered from the pit as four urban youths in hooded tops, a trivializing short-hand for unprompted violence. As the death of Hector was announced, black streamers were dropped from the upper gallery of the theatre, but the spectacular moment was short-lived as the production moved immediately on to its conclusion. Pandarus entered dishevelled and weak, and expired in a fit of misanthropy. As he did so, the full company entered beating drums slung over their shoulders. It is refreshing to have jettisoned the customary jig but the decision to replace it with a sequence from the percussive musical *Stomp* raised more questions than it answered.

Having last year falsely prophesied the Globe's emergence from its slough of despond, one can only keep the faith. The Globe experience, on a warm summer evening, watching the engaging *As You Like It* in a theatre packed with enthralled spectators is still inspiring and proves that there is a place for popular Shakespeare in the center of London which can converse effectively with a diverse audience of native and non-native speakers, Londoners and visitors, younger and older. But the success of only one out of the three productions reviewed here is not enough

to warrant such affection and Dromgoole cannot assume that just because the previous Globe Board was misguided enough to reappoint Rylance that he is safe in his job. Finally the success or failure of the whole theatre must stand squarely on the quality of the work being done here: 33% is not a pass mark.

#### Notes

1. I would like to offer my usual thanks to James Lever of the Globe's Press Office for organising tickets for me.
2. The press night (scheduled for 30 September 2009) was canceled without explanation. The production of *Love's Labour's Lost* was a reprise of Dromgoole's production which played at the Globe between 1 July and 7 October 2007, my review of which appeared in *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26 (2008), 188-91.
3. Quotations are from *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
4. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26 (2008), 109-24.