

Guardian

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(edit)

Men don't come off at all well in Declan Donnellan's revival of Shakespeare's late romance.

In the tale of Imogen, who loves and is loved by Posthumous, and is pursued by Cloten, who wants her as much as you might want a new iPod, we see men at war and men in love. Often there is not much difference, and the masterstroke of Donnellan's production is to have both Posthumus, who comes to doubt Imogen's fidelity, and Cloten played by the same actor: Tom Hiddleston. Remember that name, because one day the lad is going to be a star, and deservedly so.

Men in dark suits populate Cymbeline's court, a place of deep misogyny. It is the male gaze that holds sway here. The men lounge around in gangs, like bullies at the edge of the school playground, with Cloten as cock-of-the-walk. Jodie McNeen's Imogen exists only in the eyes of men, until she leaves the court disguised as a boy, and discovers herself.

Designer Nick Ormerod has stripped the stage back to create vast, fluid space in which the characters are grouped like eddies and tides in a great sea. One scene pours into another. It is both intensely studied and as natural as real life.

Donnellan is a master at not just placing the actors but also drawing your attention to the space between them. Imogen and Posthumus' leave taking is conducted at a distance; Gwendoline Christie's Queen towers over her husband like a Valkyrie. There are other terrific touches too: the lighting by Judith Greenwood is exceptional, at times making it seem as if the sky itself is boiling.