

# THE INDEPENDENT

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It's said that Shakespeare also indulged in some rum, meta-theatrical recycling of his own past successes in the late romance, *Cymbeline*, but Declan Donnellan's superb *Cheek by Jowl* production reveals the benefits of downplaying the self-reflexivity and mining each moment for its emotional truth.

His minimalist, modern-dress production succeeds in imposing a spell-binding imaginative unity on a play whose convoluted plot involving jealous wagers, princes lost at birth, and rows over tribute money, unfolds in ancient Britain, Augustan Rome, Renaissance Italy and the wilds of Wales. Donnellan's account of this is full of inspired, interpretive touches - having, for instance, one actor (an excellent Tom Hiddleston) play both the hero, Posthumous, and his oafish rival, Cloten, as two sides of the same coin. It gives a further layer of unsettling significance to the notorious scene where Imogen (an ardent Jodie McNeen), awakening next to the headless corpse of the idiot, mistakes it for her husband.

The handling of the potentially ridiculous crescendo of coincidences and reunions in the final scene is quite masterly. At each turn, we see people struggling to adjust to bewildering new realities and the mood at the end is expertly mixed, allowing a sense that some things cannot be resolved to complicate the atmosphere of wonder and spiritual transcendence.