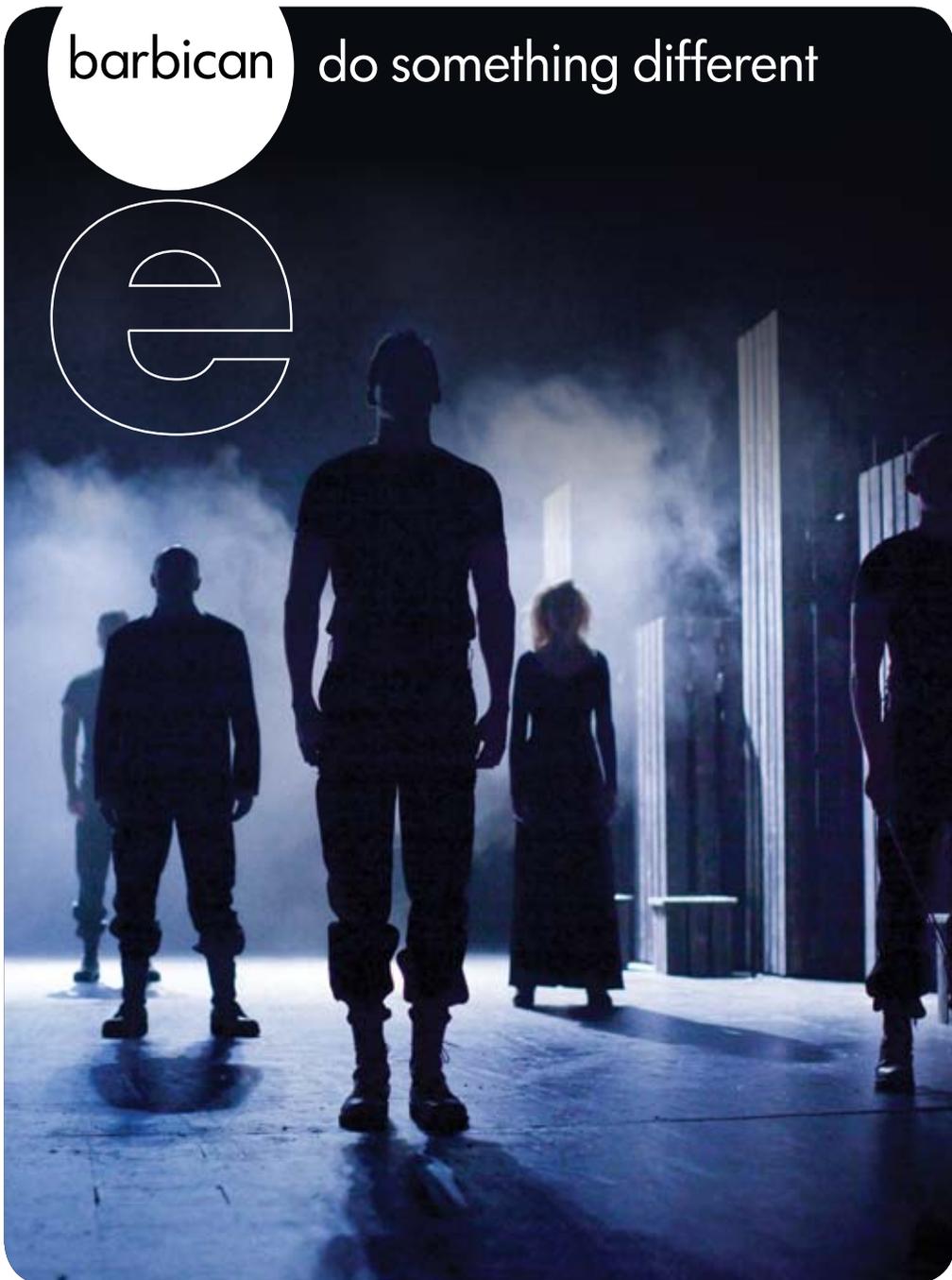


barbican do something different



Cheek by Jowl

Macbeth

By William Shakespeare

Teaching Resource

Contents

Why do Shakespeare?

How does a director choose what to direct?

How do you begin when directing a Shakespeare play?

Historical context for Macbeth – Witchcraft in the early 17th Century

Themes in Macbeth

Act by Act Synopsis of Macbeth

Interview with Assistant Director Owen Horsley

25 Years of Cheek by Jowl by Professor Carol Rutter





Why do Shakespeare?

There are some very irritating things about the plays that we choose: they're incredibly old, many of them are written by dead people, and they're full of words. I am not particularly wedded to any of these things. It's just that they happen to be very great plays that you can decide to tour for a long period of time, because they give an array of parts, that deal with apparently modern subjects – politics, sex, love, the supernatural. All of those things seem to be explored well at the heart of those plays we present. (Declan Donnellan talking to Maria M Delgado in *In Contact With The Gods*, ed Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage, Manchester University Press, 1996)

I choose to work on the plays of Shakespeare because he continues to surprise me. I think you need to approach Shakespeare in a state of humility and ignorance. I don't think he is there to teach us anything, I think he takes us by the hand and guides us, as an equal, in some absolutely extraordinary language. (From an interview given by Declan Donnellan to Professor Miquel Berga of Girona University, November 2009)

'you need to approach Shakespeare in a state of humility and ignorance.'

How does a director choose what play to direct?

It varies. Sometimes, the play comes first; sometimes the actor. In Russia, where we have a stable ensemble, normally we choose the play to suit the actors we have, so we decided on *Three Sisters* (2005) because we knew Alexander Feklistov would make a wonderful Vershinin. It's always good to have actors you know and then build the cast around them.

It always helps to choose a really great play that you know will repay your interest, with the performances gaining in vitality as the tour progresses. That's why we perform Shakespeare's work, and why we chose *Angels in America* – unusually, it was a complex and imaginative new play that we knew would more than repay long-term exploration. In order to support the level of work that we do, you have to have a big, rich text, robust, surprising and richly felt and experienced by the author. (From Aleks Sierz's interview with Declan Donnellan in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, ed Maria M Delgado and Dan Rebellato, Routledge, 2010)

'you have to have a big, rich text, robust, surprising and richly felt.'

How do you begin when directing a Shakespeare play?

Getting people on their feet is very important, and we do a lot of work on the verse with movement when we do a Shakespeare play. I do a lot of work with the verse even when we do a Russian play. The rules should be few and good. So there are certain rules we have to start with. If it's verse you have to understand what that is and how to do that. Even when people have done verse a thousand times before, they may have to redo and redo because it's always going to slightly change. And then verse is best rediscovered through movement; it's connected through breathing and how the breath sustains the long thought, the extended thought. We do a lot of work on plastique, on the body of the actors, and how they act together; on how to

wake up the sleepy body and how to understand and pay attention to every muscle and every nerve of our bodies and not just with our eyes, and how to come to an increasing awareness, which is mostly done by removing things rather than giving things. There are a few things you can give, a few very specific exercises on verse for example. When we started to rehearse *Cymbeline*, we did an Irish dance called 'The Siege of Ennis'. We never used that dance in the end, but it was a binding device that structured us through text, language, movement.' (Declan Donnellan talking to Maria Shevtsova in *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, 2009)



'The rules should be few and good'

How do actors begin to approach Shakespeare's verse?

Verse works a little like jazz. In jazz there is a sense of what is regular, say 4/4 time; then this is the beat that is 'square'. Jazz is not as independent of beat as it sometimes sounds. Jazz musicians know they depend on a highly disciplined beat that they can then disobey. And this disobedience releases energy. Verse works in a similar way. Verse creates an expectation of beat. Tee-tum, tee-tum, tee-tum, etc., and suddenly, if we meet not a tee-tum, but a tee-tee or a tum-tee or a tum-tum, we react; our anticipation has been denied. We have predicted something, however unconsciously... and when it doesn't happen as expected, we get a jolt. In verse this jolt seems to be a bolt out of the blue, a hit of external energy. As we have seen, sources of external energy are precious for the actor. Verse supplies a ready supply of outside energy. (*The Actor and the Target*, Declan Donnellan, Nick Hern, 2002)



'Verse creates an expectation of beat'

Historical context for Macbeth

During the reign of James I:

- The first folio of Shakespeare and the King James bible were printed
- Inigo Jones built the Whitehall Banqueting House
- Francis Bacon introduced the inductive method of reasoning
- William Harvey discovered the circulation of blood
- John Napier invented the notation of decimal fractions still used today
- The foundations of the British Empire were laid by the East India Company, Virginia Company and the Plymouth Colony
- Trade flourished and new commodities, including tobacco, china tableware and tropical fruits, appeared on the market

Witchcraft in the early 17th Century

King James had, before his arrival in England, not only examined in person a woman accused of witchcraft, but had given a very formal account of the practices and illusions of evil spirits, the compacts of witches, the ceremonies used by them, the manner of detecting them, and the justice of punishing them, in his dialogues of Daemonologie, written in the Scottish dialect and published in Edinburgh. This book was, soon after his accession, reprinted at London, as the ready way to gain King James's favour was to flatter his speculations, the system of Daemonologie was immediately adopted by all who desired either to gain preferment or not to lose it (Samuel Johnson).



Themes in Macbeth



Magic and Illusion

'I feel now the future in the instant.'
(Act 1, sc 5, 57-58)

The whole play is very much about the imagination. To what degree are the witches imagined? How does the imagination affect what we do? How dependent are we on the imagination, and what happens when the imagination becomes cancerous? What happens when we use imagination to defy the rules of time; as Lady Macbeth says 'I feel now, the future in the instant.' Is she defining the great 'now'? It is because the play is about imagination, that we wanted to encourage the audience to imagine as much of the play as we possibly could, and that's, for example, one of the reasons why we used so much mime; because the audience needs to take responsibility for imagining the play. (Declan Donnellan in conversation with Professor Miquel Berga)



Conscience and Guilt

'Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him'
(Act 5, sc 1, 37)

I used to think that *Macbeth* was about a man and a woman who conspire to murder an old man but I now realise that's more of the prologue to the play. The play proper starts when the two of them start to realise what they have done,

and more specifically how they try to deny the growing realisation of what they have done. This is more primitive than conscience. Conscience is quite a complex reaction that is connected to morality and our sense of right and wrong; I am talking about something much more basic, just the simple realisation of what we have done. In the sleepwalking scene Lady Macbeth famously asks: 'who would have thought that the old man had so much blood in him?' I used to think that the magnificence of the line lay at the end of the line – the poetic intensity of the amount of blood an old man might contain, but more and more I realise that the important part of the line is in fact the beginning. It is the 'who would have thought' - that is the moment that shows us that, in other words, "I wouldn't have murdered him if I had known that he would die as a result". I am afraid one of the many terrible things which we do in life, is that we never face up to the consequences of our actions. I don't think the Macbeths would have murdered Duncan if they had realised that he would die as a result. I don't think any of us can point the finger and say how stupid they are because such stupidity is part of the human condition, it is not to do with a lack of intelligence, it is do with self-deception. (Declan Donnellan in conversation with Professor Miquel Berga)

Absence and 'Nothing'

'it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury Signifying nothing.'
(Act 5, sc 5, 26-28)

The theme of 'Nothing' is also alluded to many, many times in *Macbeth*: the theme of unbeing. It is an audacious aspect of Shakespeare's work that he often tries to stage the thing that isn't. Staging the thing that is, is much easier. Staging the thing that isn't is more difficult. For example, we cannot really stage death, because the essence of death is that it is about absence and it is extremely difficult to make absence present. Of course we can stage people killing each other, but the experience of absence is very very difficult to stage. In *Hamlet* and in *Troilus and Cressida*, and indeed in *Lear* and *Macbeth*, Shakespeare expounds the outrageous theme of inaction. Most drama is about action and he attempts, normally with terrific success, to stage the effects of inaction or inactivity itself. This is part of the great challenge of Shakespeare and part of his genius that he often tries to stage the other side, the side that we must experience in order to be fully human. In order to experience experience itself, we must also to a certain degree experience non-experience. It is a tremendous attraction for Shakespeare and for us all, that we feel these themes running around *Macbeth* in lines like 'What's done cannot be undone.' The theme of the thing undone is very important. (Declan Donnellan in conversation with Professor Miquel Berga)



Act 1

In a thunderstorm, three witches decide to meet again on the heath, when the battle that is currently raging, is over. A wounded captain reports to King Duncan that Macbeth was victorious and that the Thane of Cawdor was traitorous to Scotland during the battle. The three witches confront Macbeth and Banquo on their way home from the battle. They predict that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and Banquo, though never king himself, will father kings. The witches leave and Ross informs Macbeth that he has inherited the title Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth contemplates the witches prediction, and wonders if he should act in order to bring it to fruition. The king then warmly greets Macbeth and Banquo, but to Macbeth's dismay, King Duncan names his eldest son, Malcolm, as heir to the Scottish crown. At Inverness Castle, Lady Macbeth learns of his encounter with the witches and decides that she will persuade Macbeth to fulfill his destiny through foul play. On hearing that Duncan is coming to her castle to stay the night, her decision to murder the King strengthens. Macbeth appears and his wife tells him she will do the deed herself. Duncan arrives and Macbeth tells his wife he doesn't want to murder the King. Lady Macbeth talks her husband into framing Duncan's own guards for the murder.



Act 2

Past midnight, Macbeth is having trouble sleeping and converses with Banquo, who has experienced a similarly troubled night and they agree to discuss the witches' prophecies at a later point. When alone, Macbeth hallucinates that a bloody dagger is in front of him. Macbeth meets his wife and tells her he murdered Duncan. He begins hearing voices. Macbeth forgets to return the daggers to the king's guards, so his wife does it for him, bloodying herself. They return to their chambers as Macduff and Lennox appear at the castle gates to be greeted by the Porter. Macbeth greets them and they ask to see Duncan. Macduff and Macbeth "discover" the body. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee to England and Ireland, fearing for their own lives. This convinces the rest of the company of their guilt and they are denounced as having engineered their father's murder. Consequently, Macbeth is declared king.

Act 3

At Forres Castle Macbeth contemplates his fears that Banquo might father children who would overthrow Macbeth. To allay his fears Macbeth hires men to murder Banquo and his son, Fleance. Macbeth scares his wife by informing her of Banquo and Fleance's impending death. The murderers successfully murder Banquo, but Fleance escapes. At dinner, Macbeth disrupts the company when he imagines he sees Banquo's ghost, causing his wife to excuse the dinner guests.

Act 4

On the heath, the three witches make an incantation. Macbeth approaches and asks three questions. The witches prophesy: 1. Beware Macduff, 2. No one born of woman will harm Macbeth, and 3. Macbeth shall never be conquered until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill. Finally, the ghost of Banquo appears, showing his eight future royal offspring. Macbeth is told that Macduff has gone to England to convince the innocent Malcolm to join arms against Macbeth. Macbeth vows to fight them at Fife. Lady Macduff laments that her husband, as a traitor, is virtually dead. Macduff's castle is attacked and his wife and son killed for their association with a traitor. In England, Macduff and Malcolm agree to fight together against Macbeth. Ross delivers the devastating news to Macduff that his son and wife are dead.

Act 5

A doctor and servant observe Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking and sleep-talking about Duncan's death. At Dunsinane Castle, Macbeth is informed that an army of 10,000 is near. Malcolm orders his soldiers to cut the trees of Birnam wood and use them as disguises. In the castle, Macbeth learns that his wife has died, then hears, to his dismay, that Birnam wood is "moving" toward the castle. The army arrives and Macbeth fights and kills young Siward. Macduff and Macbeth fight. Macduff informs Macbeth that he (Macduff) was ripped from his mother's womb, and thus is not born of woman. Soon after, Macduff kills Macbeth. Macduff then crowns Malcolm the new King of Scotland.



Interview with Owen Horsley, Assistant Director on *Macbeth*

Owen Horsley interviewed by Hannah Proctor - 17th December 2009

Owen Horsley trained at Drama Centre London. He has worked as Declan's Donnellan's Assistant Director on *The Changeling* (2006), *Cymbeline* (2007), *Troilus and Cressida* (2008) and *Macbeth* (2009-10).

How did you come to work for Declan and Cheek by Jowl?

I trained at Drama Centre, London under the director Di Trevis who helped me to get a placement for me at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon where Declan was directing *Great Expectations* in 2005. I went there for a week. I met Declan and Nick at the Stage Door and just had a great week. Seeing how they work in the technical rehearsal, taking Declan's notes, speaking to him in the auditorium, getting to know Jane [Gibson - Movement Director] and Catherine [Jayes - Composer]. A few months later Di Trevis told me that Declan wanted me to be his assistant for a couple of weeks on *The Changeling* while he looked for a new Assistant Director. I went along for the first day of rehearsals. I was very very nervous walking into the room, as I'm sure everyone was. These few weeks just continued and then I was eventually asked to work on *Cymbeline*. We worked very well together. I wanted to learn and I had a good energy that Declan could feed off in the room.

Do you think there's something specific about working with Cheek by Jowl's Creative Team (especially Nick Ormerod Designer and co-artistic Director of Cheek by Jowl) who have been working together for such a long time?

I think that all good works of art come from some form of collaboration. It's really amazing to be in the rehearsal room for a Cheek by Jowl show because it is exactly that. It is not just one man running the show and making all the decisions. You need to collaborate when you have something as big as a Shakespearian text

to deal with. Many people manage to do more by themselves and that's their way of working but I particularly enjoy this way of working with the emphasis on collaboration. Also, because they've all worked together for so long they can really read each other's thoughts and they're all pulling in the same direction. We all have the same priorities - the story, the experience, honouring the text and the world of the play. We all know that's what we're working towards, however we get there; we all have the same goal.

How has working on *Macbeth* differed from the Cheek by Jowl shows you've worked on in the past?

It's a small cast. When we started with *The Changeling* we had a small cast but they got bigger until on *Troilus and Cressida* we had 16. So suddenly *Macbeth* felt very intimate again with a cast of 12. Declan and Nick were talking from the very early days about not wanting to make certain characters specific. They didn't want a Ross or a Lennox. They didn't want these people to be recognisable faces and characters because they didn't want to take away from the journey of the couple at the heart of the play. They were always talking about this couple being at the centre and everyone else being a chorus revolving, changing and reacting to them and that was something they viewed as important from the word go. That was very different because it was more about the experience of what this couple go through. Declan has said the play's not about them murdering Duncan but about them realising they've murdered him. That was very different, to work in that way. The past

two years in particular, with *Cymbeline* and *Troilus and Cressida*, we've spent being dramaturgs trying to figure out how to tell these very difficult stories. Shakespeare doesn't really do you many favours in those plays, they're fantastic plays and they have amazing parts but there are massive problems so you spend most of your time trying to figure out how to tell the story to the audience. Whereas with *Macbeth* the story is there, it's amazing and it has some of Shakespeare's best writing in it. We weren't spending ages and ages changing scenes and editing. It was very much about creating a world and working on the couple and the chorus around them.

Can you talk about what work you did in rehearsals on the couple and the chorus to help that evolve?

The rehearsals begin with Declan, Jane and Catherine working together to get the actors to move in the space together. It sounds very simple but it's actually really really difficult and so important to start a rehearsal with that. Once you've got that it never really goes away. When everyone is walking in the space together and doing things and reacting to what Jane is doing that's the most useful way to start a rehearsal process. Of course, you want to get right into that first word and into the first scene and the most dramatic bits. But if you do that one person is speaking and the rest aren't speaking and what do the other people do? You create a weird dynamic in the room and you're not an ensemble, you're 12 individuals waiting your turn.

Can you talk about the interpretation of the witches in this play? And also about how the concept of *Macbeth* as the 'tragedy of the imagination' manifests itself in this production?

One of the first things Declan said about the witches was that he wanted to do a puritan version of them. It's up to the audience to use their imagination to create the witches. So there aren't three people with lots of bags chained to them and baked bean tins rattling and cauldrons or strikes of thunder. It's very simple. He wanted to make the audience use their imagination to create the supernatural presence on stage. That manifests itself throughout the play – it starts very simply but when the imagination takes hold, when *Macbeth* begins to crack he begins to deconstruct things. It really begins to zoom in on *Macbeth's* imagination.

How does that relate to the centrality of the couple?

It's really about what happens to this couple, simple things: What do they see in each other at the beginning? How do they begin to separate? How do they cope with the blood of someone on their hands? Why do they respond to the guilt by throwing a banquet? *Macbeth's* obsession with Banquo, the murder of Duncan, the theme of sleeplessness. It's all about the couple. Even scenes that take you away from *Macbeth* are still in context of the *Macbeths* because the space is somehow all in his imagination.

Is that reflected in the design?

The design is a very simple formation of towers: it's very claustrophobic, it's very imposing. You

get a feeling that what we're seeing is the internal space and the external space is something beyond. You're seeing something forbidden in the action on stage. It's great if the audience feel like they shouldn't really be watching this, there's a tension between them and what's on stage. It helps to have the chorus sometimes on stage by the side listening but they're not supposed to be there. Nick has really created that sense of danger and menace.

Although you can't talk about this in terms of *Macbeth* yet, can you talk about how the show evolves over the course of a long tour?

We'll go from a huge space to a tiny space so that's one obvious change that you have to keep making. You can't plonk the show in wherever and expect it to work – you have to adapt. All the work is to do with the space. Nick doesn't make box sets. We go to the space, it doesn't fit around us. If it's a big space certain things in the play will be revealed that did not come out in other spaces. Great distances in the text can be felt more in a big space. In an intimate space you might find more human moments. You must adapt to the space all the time – it's never just ready to go.



25 Years of Cheek by Jowl

They've been at it now for twenty-five years, this company built on the partnership between Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod that has produced some of the finest theatre seen on the contemporary world stage: Shakespeare, Middleton, Webster, Restoration comedy, European classics (from Sophocles to Racine to Lorca), new work (like Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and *Homebody/Kabul*), re-discoveries of forgotten texts (like Ostrovsky's *A Family Affair*). Reappraising classic texts is a company trademark. When Cheek by Jowl performs them, plays by Shakespeare and the rest of the Jacobean gang feel like British premiers. When Donnellan directs them and Ormerod designs them, plays like Corneille's *Le Cid* and Pushkin's *Boris Gudonov* strike audiences in France and Russia as astonishing new work by contemporary writers.

Watching Cheek by Jowl, it's obvious why they've lasted – and why they go on making theatre that sets your pulse racing, doubles you up with laughter, and breaks your heart (sometimes all at once).

This is a company that respects actors and the creative physical intelligence they bring to the work. Donnellan believes that 'The art of the theatre is the art of the actor.' So he doesn't come to rehearsals with ideas he wants to impose. Cheek by Jowl productions grow organically out of rehearsals, out of the stuff actors discover moving in space, owning words written (sometimes) four hundred years ago, making 400-year-old arguments and actions matter – urgently – to spectators today: murder and blackmail in *The Changeling*, racism and misogyny in *Othello*, men behaving badly in *Much Ado About Nothing*. (Respecting actors is the reason Donnellan doesn't allow outsiders into rehearsals – actors need privacy for the kinds of

risks they take.) For twenty-five years this company has been a nursery to young British acting talent and a 'reform' school for some of the best of their elders: Adrian Lester, Matthew Macfadyen, Sally Dexter, Saskia Reeves, Anastasia Hille, Paterson Joseph, Amanda Harris, Nonso Anozie, Daniel Craig – the list goes on and on. Among its best achievements, Cheek by Jowl should count the way it almost single-handedly dismantled British theatre's out-moded casting practices. While other companies were dithering about colour-blind casting, wondering whether in 1980s multi-racial Britain they could do something so radical as casting a black actor to play Othello, Cheek by Jowl cut through all the nonsense. When they realised full integrated casting for *Fuente Ovejuna* at the National Theatre in 1989, they led British Theatre into a new political and cultural awareness. Now, integrated casting is the national norm – from *King Lear* and *Rosalind* to *Emilia* and *Mrs. Overdone*. The effect? To claim all roles on the English stage for black and Asian actors, and to claim the classics for all comers.

This is a company that relishes words. Cheek by Jowl works on classic texts that didn't know they were going to be classics. Texts written before plays were considered 'literature' and subjects for schools examinations. Texts written when English was young, and primarily a spoken tongue, not a written language, when people got off on talk. Listening to Cheek by Jowl speak Middleton you're hearing political spin, hot gossip, celebrity sleaze, stand-up comedy, the rattle of hypocrisy-in-high-places, the wheeze of sanctimonious special pleading, and plenty of dark wit, dirty jokes. Talk, that is, like we hear today – only edgier, riskier, steamier, and much, much funnier. And much more of it: a ten-course meal's-worth of words, not the anorexic snacking our culture goes in for.



This is a company that fits design to actors and scripts, not the other way around. Ormerod is a genius of expressive minimalism, who strips everything away that comes between actor and spectator – but gives the workers precisely the right tools to do the job of releasing the playwright’s words, and the watchers the right visual apparatus to make sense of the story. The Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* was seven strips of green silk hung from the flies; the madhouse in *Twelfth Night*, a garden recliner set in full sun. The deadly manoeuvrings of *The Duchess of Malfi* were conducted on a floor patterned like a chess-board. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Hermia arrived in the woods clutching her sleeping bag; in *Othello*, after the ghastly dinner party, the ‘girls’ sprawled together on Desdemona’s bed – three boxes, shoved together – eased their high heels off aching feet, and laughed. In Ormerod’s design, a visual poetry of suggestion mixes with mischief and iconoclasm.

Not least, sexual iconoclasm. Pioneers in so much, Cheek by Jowl has led the way in contemporary Britain’s explorations of erotic politics: a sadie-max Bianca in *Othello*, a gang of jokily homoerotic – or were they homophobic? – Hooray-Henries in *Much Ado*; a delicious gender-bending *As You Like It*. Sex in Cheek by Jowl productions turns up in unexpected places – toying and fumbling, grinning goofily, suffering. And always challenging spectators to connect spirit to flesh, thinking to feeling, their brains to their hearts – and loins.

At twenty-five – an age when some people expect you to grow up – Cheek by Jowl shows no sign of leaving its trademark mischief, irreverence and ‘childness’ behind. Thank goodness. For our culture has a deep need for what they do. *Serio ludere*. That’s what Erasmus called it back in 1515: ‘serious play’. Play that laughs from the

belly but is profoundly spiritual. The kind of play that reminds us we’re all ‘changelings’.

Carol Chillington Rutter is Professor of English Literature at Warwick University

For more information on Cheek by Jowl’s history and our production archive, featuring cast lists, tour dates and production shots go to: www.cheekbyjowl.com



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The telephone booking line is open 10am–5pm, Monday to Friday.

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020 7382 7389/7083.

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There are toilets on all levels of the Centre.

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If you have brought packed lunches you can eat in the stalls floor foyer (Level –1) the main foyer (Level G) or outside on the Lakeside where there are plenty of picnic benches and tables.

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Contact

We would welcome feedback on this teachers' resource and on the theatre workshops accompanying the production.

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