

James Wallace

Staging *Arthur*

In 2019, the author of this essay directed a rehearsed, script-in-hand performance of Thomas Hughes's The Misfortunes of Arthur in Gray's Inn Chapel. This essay records the rehearsal process, staging, and design. It explains the choice of this play for revival and how text-cutting shaped the way the story was to be told. The author also discusses the play's language, including echoes of it in Shakespeare's Macbeth, and asks what staging this play tells us about the relationship between Inns of Court drama and the wider world of English professional theatre and, more generally, European theatre of the time.



Figure 1. Production photograph of Arthur (Oliver Senton). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

Beginning

The project came before the play. In March 2018, Romola Nuttall contacted me to ask: would I be interested in providing a performance element for a conference about the early modern Inns of Court that she and Julian Neuhauser were

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organizing? They knew I had already worked on Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (ca 1562) for Shakespeare's Globe's Read Not Dead (RND) project, and they suggested I once again focus on this play. *Gorboduc*, in fact, had already received two RND outings, both directed by Oliver Senton, once in 2008 (which I had acted in) and again in 2013 in Inner Temple Hall, the site of its original performance.¹

My involvement with RND had begun as an actor in 1998, and I have remained committed to the project ever since, as an actor, director, and regular audience member. In 2014 I set up a company named 'The Dolphin's Back' to put neglected plays that deserved revival into full production. This company also became a vehicle to bring actors and academics into collaboration through workshops and at various conferences. I had already worked in four Inns of Court halls — staging George Gascoigne's *Supposes* at Gray's Inn, Richard Edwardes's *Damon and Pithias* at Middle Temple, and *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (possibly by George Peele) at Inner Temple (all with RND) as well as filming a scene from Ben Jonson's *Eastward Ho!* at Lincoln's Inn for the Shakespearean London Theatres project (ShaLT) — so this new project would offer an opportunity to continue and deepen that work. In my own research, I had also become interested in John Lyly's family connections to the Inns, especially as the potential addressee of two of John Donne's verse letters, to 'Mr I. L.', so the topic of the conference itself was intriguing to me.

Of course, I said yes.

Choosing the Play

I was reluctant to work on *Gorboduc* again, however, so Nuttall proposed three other plays: *Tancred and Gismund* (written and originally performed by gentlemen of the Inner Temple sometime in 1566 or 1568–9); Jasper Heywood's *Thyestes* (his translation of Seneca's tragedy with the addition of his own ending, written 1559–60); and Thomas Hughes's *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587).² Of the last, she said 'it completely threw me with violence and incest right from the word go, and it has very interesting links to Senecan drama'.³ The fact that it had been written and first performed by members of Gray's Inn — the site for our performance — clinched the choice of *Misfortunes*. Our staging would be open to members of the public and not just conference attendees, so it might also attract those interested in Arthurian legend. The venue became even more appropriate when we were offered the chapel rather than the hall to perform in, as the author Hughes had become dean there in 1618.

The play is most often abbreviated to '*Misfortunes*', but perhaps this name is the equivalent of calling it 'The Lamentable Tragedy' in a period before fixed categories of tragedy, history, and comedy existed as we, post-Shakespeare's Folio, understand them. If you want to sell tickets, *Misfortunes* is quite literally inauspicious. So — and despite the Dudley Moore film of the same name — we preferred *Arthur*, the title used in this article.

It would be a script-in-hand performance, and therefore an opportunity to develop work done with RND. A common remark after a performance of those staged readings is that the chosen play probably would not work as well with a week's rehearsal rather than just the single day that the project generally affords. RNDs certainly thrive on the exuberant intensity of a group having just six hours together in the theatre to prepare that afternoon's show, allowing actors and audience to share a sense of live discovery in performance. This outcome, however, results from trying to do as much as possible within the time available and is not necessarily a virtue in itself. Given the density of Hughes's text, extra days to rehearse would be valuable.

The plot seemed straightforward enough. The first act begins with the ghost of Gorlois returning from the underworld seeking revenge for Uther Pendragon's theft of his wife. Arthur (Uther's son) is about to return to Britain after nine years abroad fighting the Romans. In Arthur's absence, his wife, Guenevora, has become incestuously involved with Mordred, his son *and* nephew, himself the product of incest between Arthur and his sister Anne. The second scene sees Guenevora in frantic despair anticipating her husband's return, torn between killing herself or him. After advice from her waiting woman, Fronia, and her sister, Angharad, the queen resolves instead to forsake Mordred for a convent. Rather than repenting his crimes, Mordred decides to usurp his father's crown, ignoring the advice of his advisor, Conan. After an initial but inconclusive offstage ambush, Gawain urges Mordred, his brother, to lay down his arms and seek forgiveness, but Mordred instead gathers forces from Britain, Ireland, and Saxony and prepares for a final battle with his father in Cornwall.

We first meet Arthur at the start of act 3 being urged by his men, Cador and Howell, not, as he wishes, to seek a reconciliation, but to pursue and kill Mordred. Only after receiving a taunting message from Mordred's Herald does Arthur decide to fight, urging his soldiers, augmented by forces from Denmark and Norway, towards victory. Act 4 features the second Nuncius (or messenger) describing the battle, culminating in Mordred's death; Mordred, we learn, was skewered on Arthur's sword, but first got close enough to deliver the king a mortal wound. In the last act, Arthur grieves over Mordred's body before exiting to die

offstage, thus leaving Gorlois to gloat over his destruction of the house of Pen-dragon. Interspersed among these acts are symbolic dumbshows and a recurring Chorus.

The play's examination of power struggles and illicit lust, its use of the supernatural, its foreboding sense of impending doom, and its extrapolation of the personal into the fate of nations, all offered material with the potential to make something theatrical. But long formal speeches and debates, dense verse, apparently static scenes, and seeming lack of dramatic variety — of onstage action, of comic characters or scenes — offered challenges. *Arthur* is an intensely serious play, but that was also its appeal.



Figure 2. Production photograph of Guenevora (Laura Rogers) and Mordred (Patrick Walshe McBride). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

Preparation

Staging any piece of drama from the early modern period is both an opportunity and a challenge — how do we open a window to view something that existed in the past, and how do we bring that past work into the present to make it work in performance for a modern audience? I took the original text from a facsimile of

the original 1587 octavo and modernized it myself, keeping an eye on W. Carew Hazlitt's edition, to create a script laid out on the page to be as clear and easy for the actors to use as possible — a process that also meant I had to concentrate on each word and piece of punctuation in advance of rehearsal.⁴ The brief was to stage the play within ninety minutes, so significant cuts were necessary. Simple decisions accounted for the bulk of these cuts.

Some plays of the period can gain from the presence of a watching Queen Elizabeth I figure — for example, John Lyly's comedies allow an audience's awareness of the potential emotional impact upon a queen character to heighten tension. Here, however, such a figure's reactions to an intellectual, political debate would have nowhere near the same interest for a modern audience. Without the real Elizabeth's physical presence, the flattering introductory speeches directed towards her lose much of their charge, so these were the first to go. I also cut lines obviously directed to the queen that popped up awkwardly mid-speech, for example, Gorlois's lines about 'Cassiopæa ... sweet celestial star ... placed in imperial throne' or 'virtuous Virgo' (1.1.54–7, 5.2.14).⁵ Unusually, the printed early modern text contains alternative speeches for Gorlois, penned by William Fulbecke, recording the original performance text. By concentrating on Hughes's lines, our production would not replicate original performance but rather offer the first time the play would be performed solely using Hughes's words, allowing our audience to hear his voice purely.

With the limited resources of time and money available to us, it would have been difficult to do justice to the elaborate prop- and costume-heavy intra-act dumbshows devised by four Gray's Inn members, so I cut these too. This cutting left just over two thousand lines. As a rough rule of thumb, one thousand lines of text equal an hour of stage-time, so further cuts were required. Unnecessary repetitions became obvious targets. Doubling choices helped decide cuts too. A cast of eight played the original speaking parts. I retained that cast size but felt free not to try to work out or emulate the original allocation of parts. No doubt the actor playing Gorlois, who only appears at the beginning and end of the play, would have doubled as other characters. I wanted to keep Gorlois onstage at all times, however, partly as a constant reminder that the unfurling action was caused by his desire for revenge and partly to use him as a ghostly ringmaster, who would physically aid and direct the staging. In this role he could then assume the person of other characters, his spirit infusing their bodies, appearing as a provocateur driving Arthur towards his doom.

Since the three women's parts only appear in the first two acts, I chose to have the three actresses become the Chorus, existing as their own entity, an observing

trio of Fates. They could both talk to Gorlois and freely comment upon him, as well as play roles allotted by him to serve his plan. In that capacity they could take on the roles of the foreign kings and British nobility joining either Mordred or Arthur in battle. Gorlois would be a purely malevolent and active supernatural force, while they would be empathetic, yet, despite their power of insight and foresight, powerless to intervene. As observers to the action rather than drivers of it, then, their poetic descriptions and lamentations offered the biggest target for cuts.



Figure 3. Production photograph of Guenevora (Laura Rogers), Gorlois (Alan Cox), and Angharad (Lucy-Rose Leonard). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

The two messengers presented further doubling and cutting opportunities. I combined the parts of the First Nuncius — the messenger arriving ashore ahead of the returning Arthur to narrate his sovereign's exploits fighting Rome — and Cador, one of Arthur's chief advisors, into one character. I similarly combined the role of Conan, Mordred's advisor, with the Second Nuncius, enabling the one character to both counsel Mordred and then return to report and describe his death while maintaining his emotional connection to him. Since Conan is present in act 4 with the Second Nuncius, this decision meant reassigning his

lines to the Chorus, along with some of the lines of the eliminated character Gildas. The Chorus became the Second Nuncius's onstage audience, anticipating their verbal interaction with Arthur in the final scene.

In total, I cut 460 of Hughes's lines, concentrating on the Chorus (105), Arthur (65), sections of the very long Second Nuncius speech (59), Gildas (47), Conan (49), First Nuncius (28), Gorlois (39), and Epilogue (32).⁶ Mordred lost just nineteen lines, Guenevora just two. These totals reflect my priorities. The bulk of the cuts were concentrated towards the end of the play.

Admirable fundraising gave us enough of a budget to work with a cast of eight for a week. Although a last-minute job offer received by one actor required a quick replacement, each of the actors I asked to participate had experience of performing in RND before, three of them in Inns of Court Halls, so they all already understood the format we would build on.



Figure 4. Production photograph of Gorlois (Alan Cox) and Cadour/Nuncius 1 (Matthew Flynn). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

Rehearsal

Our first two days of rehearsal were in converted office space in London Bridge rented out by The Nursery Theatre. Unlike RND, which must rehearse on its feet from the start, much of our time was spent simply sitting trying to untangle the knotty language and work out its meaning. But as we worked on the text, the verse became more impressive. The language is densely written, but is sophisticated for its time — a definite advance on *Gorboduc*'s stiff blank verse, with its plodding iambic rhythm and relentlessly end-stopped lines that often feel padded out simply to fit the metre. While it was doubtlessly innovative for the 1560s, Vita Sackville-West's judgment on her ancestor's play is brutal but honest: 'sometimes noble, and always dull'.⁷ Just the first nine lines of *Arthur*'s opening scene provide an example of how Hughes surpasses *Gorboduc* and offers an actor opportunities to play with:

GORLOIS Since thus through channels black of Limbo lake,
 And deep infernal flood of Stygian pool,
 The ghastly Charon's boat transported back
 Thy ghost, from Pluto's pits and glooming shades
 To former light, once lost by Destiny's doom,
 Where proud Pendragon, broiled with shameful lust,
 Despoiled thee erst of wife, of land, and life,
 Now (Gorlois) work thy wish, cast here thy gall,
 Glut on revenge — thy wrath abhors delays.

These lines are packed with imagery and unease, the visceral, heightened language charged with alliteration and assonance within and between lines. Enjambement allows Gorlois's fevered thought to spill over the end of the verse line. While syntactically dense, the speech never loses momentum in reaching its end, where the invocation of time pressure amplifies the emotional energy already generated. Although the first eight lines are indeed iambic, Hughes's verse does not feel trapped but powered by metre. On the ninth, he uses the surprise of the initial trochee on 'glut' to enhance the sensual violence of the word, the appetite and excess of its meaning. In just nine lines and a single sentence, Hughes sets up the whole story and creates multiple worlds in space (the underworld, the earth, the heavens) and time (the last years of Gorlois's life, his afterlife, the urgent present, the revenge to come). The verbal and imaginative fireworks begin exploding as soon as the box has been opened.

Of course, twenty years had passed between the first performances of *Gorboduc* and *Arthur*, so while the former's influence was no doubt important, since we've lost nearly the entirety of the professional drama written between the two plays, that influence is impossible to map exactly. We must also consider that *Arthur* was presented in the same season at court as John Lyly's *Gallathea* and *Endymion*, two other plays of finely wrought linguistic sparkle and display, if of entirely contrasting moods.⁸ *Arthur* is also contemporary with Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, but rather than generating rhetorical effect through hyperbole, its energy comes from wordplay, especially alliteration, assonance, and repetition. Characters take and reuse each other's words, throwing them back at each other. We tried to work out the rhythms and resonances within the scenes that these shared and repeated words created. The actors had to work their lips and tongues hard, especially to play at speed.

In rehearsal, we were struck by the number of similarities between *Arthur* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Gorlois's infernal machinations resemble the Wayward Sisters' plot, but more than the parallel themes of vaulting ambition, royal usurpation, and the supernatural between the two plays, some of the images themselves make striking comparisons. For example, when Arthur declares, 'fame's but a blast that sounds awhile, / And quickly stints, and then is quite forgot' (3.1.178–9), he presents a sentiment similar to Macbeth's:

Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. (5.5.22–5)⁹

To make more of this shared language I cut the last six lines of the epilogue so that our performance would end on the lines

This breath and heat, wherewith man's life is fed
Is but a flash, or flame, that shines a while,
And once extinct, is as it ne'er had been. (Epilogue, lines 42–4)

I then gave these last lines to Laura Rogers, playing Guenevora, who had also played Lady Macbeth in Lucy Bailey's memorable 2010 production at Shakespeare's Globe. The epilogue continues: 'Corruption hourly frets the body's frame'. The close similarity of Hughes's 'hourly frets' to Shakespeare's 'frets his hour', coming so soon after the former's image of 'life' as a 'flame that shines a while' and of the latter's 'life' as 'a brief candle', makes it more plausible that Shakespeare had Hughes's text in mind when he wrote Macbeth's speech. Given

how few English plays had entered print at the beginning of Shakespeare's career, it should be no surprise that he had read those that had.

Scholars often classify *Arthur* as a 'debate' or 'counsel' play. Many of the scenes attempt persuasion suitable for the examination of the mechanics and logic of argument before its intended lawyerly audience. In this play, however, few actually take the advice given to them. While Guenevora is persuaded against suicide, she maintains her resistance to Mordred's arguments. He pursues his course of action despite Conan's advice. Arthur only changes his mind and decides to fight Mordred when he has been stung by his son's taunting message. For that reason, in our production Gorlois metatheatrically assumed the role of the Herald, acting as a provocateur only when Arthur's advisors had failed in their counsel. Whether advice was taken or not, however, these scenes provided clear arguments for the actors to play, ones that connected them directly to each other in listening and reacting — the dialogue presented not sterile intellectual debates but emotionally charged verbal battles.

In rehearsal, one larger debate did come to the fore, one that runs through the play that we experimented with in action. Whereas the concept of time lies behind much of *Macbeth*, the twin concepts of chance and fate dominate *Arthur*. In Hughes's uncut text the first is mentioned twenty-six times, the second a mighty sixty-eight. I asked the actors to play up these words as much as possible, physically as well as vocally, to emphasize the sense of worldly characters aware of their place within a larger moral universe. The contrast between these two competing ideas is what gets played out in action.

For Mordred, chance offers an unfixd future to be gambled upon and possibly seized by strong will. He sees chance as a power devoid of moral quality but governing human action and influenceable by it: 'Whom chance hath often missed, chance hits at length, / Or, if that chance have furthered his success, / So may she mine — for chance hath made me king' (2.3.42–4). Macbeth echoes this dynamic: 'If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me / Without my stir' (1.5.146–8). Macbeth chooses to leave things to 'Time and the hour', only goaded into action when provoked by his wife, and spurred on further by the weird sisters. Mordred, in contrast, maniacally seizes opportunity, yet by generating chance and giving it power over him, he too places his future in the hands of feminine, supernatural forces to achieve his ambition before likewise being driven to his end.

Guenevora, Angharad, Arthur, Cador, and the Chorus all have in place of chance a strong sense of their lives being guided by fate — something fixed, a predestined certainty imbued with a sense of natural justice. Fate is something



Figure 5. Production photograph of Mordred (Patrick Walshe McBride). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

Mordred only yields to moments before death. The Second Nuncius reports Mordred's final words as 'What, should we shun our Fates, or play with Mars, / Or thus defraud the wars of both our bloods? ... The Fates that will not smile on either side, / May frown on both.' (4.2.210–7). Macbeth similarly has a change of heart moments before his death in battle, rejecting the supernatural feminine forces he has placed his trust in — 'And be these juggling fiends no more believed' (5.8.19) — before meeting his death at the hands of the singularly masculine Macduff, a man 'being of no woman born' (31). Shakespeare certainly develops and improves upon *Arthur* theatrically. He embodies fate onstage in the weird sisters; Banquo's ghost, while dumb, has a clearer, more immediate effect upon the other characters than Gorlois does; and Lady Macbeth demonstrates how much more persuasive and dramatically appealing bad rather than good counsel can be. Both plays draw upon the same themes of kingship and rule, fate and chance, parent-child relationships, and the supernatural's effect on mortal choices.

At *Arthur*'s core, though — the nuclear charge to power it all — lay the twisted, toxic relationships among the three central protagonists: the neglected wife attracted to and punishing her husband through his son; the son, born in

sin, re-enacting his father's crime of incest, and by emulating him, separating himself from him; and, in Arthur, a man who has committed adultery and incest being punished with those same crimes. Trying to understand and harness these emotional energies was the chief task of rehearsal.



Figure 6. Production photograph of Guenevora (Laura Rogers). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

Performance

We moved our rehearsals to the chapel at Gray's Inn on Wednesday 12 June. We had a dress run on Thursday evening and performed on Friday evening, 14 June at 7 pm. The men provided their own clothing as soldiers or, in Conan's case, as a valet-cum-civil-servant. (Conan the Librarian, as he got nicknamed.) Gorlois donned a black vintage 1930s German suit, thus suggesting a man returning from the past. To create the sense of a wealthy but decadently corrupt court, Mordred first appeared in disheveled evening dress. There was no time for a visit to the National Theatre's costume store in Oval but enough for a trip to the nearby department stores of Oxford Street. The actresses found three blue dresses on sale that had the look both of modern evening gowns, simply but elegantly cut, and of first millennia classical Graeco-Roman culture. Worn with shawls, these

costumes could also evoke early medieval tunics for the British, Irish, and Saxon princes.

The chapel served as our set. Gorlois rose from the underworld from behind the altar, which also became a place for Arthur, as an early Christian king, to seek divine guidance. The seating was fixed — ten pews on either side of a central aisle — so sightlines would be a problem unless we could raise the actors slightly. A promised large platform proved too unstable to use, but we found a small podium and anchored the actors into a series of tableaux on and around it. The result may sound like relatively static staging, but within that constraint, small differences — a shift of weight, the turn of a head, a step taken back — counted for more. In a play like *Arthur* the situations into which the characters are thrown, rather than the physical action, create dramatic intensity — they are trapped by circumstances, and by each other, poised on emotional precipices. These situations — along with the actors' vocal, emotional, and imaginative commitment to them — drove the play.

Even though the dumbshows were absent, the performance still revealed something of their function — they would not only have provided a break for the ears, but also served as a cryptic game for the audience to play, offering a puzzle to be solved and demanding that subsequent action be interpreted against them. We suspect the dumbshows would have proven impossible to completely understand in the moment — 'inexplicable dumb-shows' as Hamlet might have described these exact ones — only having their full meaning revealed retrospectively during the act that follows, and perhaps only after the whole performance finished, offering a possible post-show talking point for the audience. Without them, however, as with the limitation of movement, our production threw focus onto the characters without distraction, and the story drove to its conclusion without interruption. We sold out, and, with a generously attentive audience, the performance held its intensity to the end.

As I was working on *Arthur*, I was also preparing a RND of another play that provided a fascinating comparison: Jan Kochanowski's *The Dismissal of The Grecian Envoys* (1579), the first tragedy written and performed in the Polish language.¹⁰ Set in Troy, it observes Aristotelian ideals of unitary time and space, concentrating on the moments outside the doors of the assembly hall where Greek ambassadors are received and then request the return of Helen. They leave empty handed, and Cassandra prophesizes war. The play has five short scenes, or 'episodes', of between forty and eighty lines; these scenes are interspersed with a chorus of observing, lamenting women and bookended with a prologue and epilogue. Like *Arthur*, the central provocation for war is unlawful lust. Like *Arthur*,



Figure 7. Production photograph of *Arthur* (Oliver Senton). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

this piece was presented at court, in this case as part of wedding celebrations in Warsaw. And also like *Arthur*, its vernacular text drew on ancient classical theatre for a contemporary political purpose, in this case to warn of impending conflict with Russia.

My staged reading of *The Dismissal of The Grecian Envoys* took place two weeks after *Arthur* in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, a venue with restricted sightlines, where for actors to remain visible to all they need to stay within the central third of the stage — a pattern I had used there before and even drawn upon for *Arthur*. I staged *The Grecian Envoys* even more centrally, asking the actors to play tightly along a single line from the centre doors straight out towards the imagined coast beyond the audience. In both productions, the stillness of the actors forced the audience to concentrate on what they said. My ability to cast some of the same actors further highlighted the comparison between the two plays — audience members who saw both productions would have observed Paris (Patrick Walshe McBride, in his same coat), Helen (Lucy-Rose Leonard, in her same dress), Jennifer Shakesby (part of a three strong Chorus, also in her same dress), and Mark Hammersley (again *The Messenger*, and in his same clothes).



Figure 8. Production photograph of Conan/Nuncius 2 (Mark Hammersley). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.



Figure 9. Production photograph of Fronia (Jennifer Shakesby) and Angharad (Lucy-Rose Leonard). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.



Figure 10. Production photograph of Mordred (Patrick Walshe McBride). Photo credit: Daniela D'Amato.

Conclusion

I began by saying that the project came before the play. Thanks to *Early Theatre's* interest, the play has become part of a bigger project, one that re-examines *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and its place within the literary and dramatic culture of its time, and which allows the opportunity for reflecting further on parallels between *Arthur* and *The Grecian Envoy*s. One drawing on ancient Roman tragedy, the other on ancient Greek, these plays reminded those who saw them both that early modern theatre in England, especially that of the Inns of Court, should be viewed as part of a wider European culture that was bringing millennia-old dramatic texts (relatively newly available in print) into present-day vernacular theatres. By doing so, they each used the power of performance, and the liberty afforded by use of classical drama, to open up contemporary debates, giving voice and artistic agency to a burgeoning, increasingly educated, bureaucratic middle class.

Anglocentrism too often also excludes European drama from our understanding of the theatre of Shakespeare's day, despite its clear influence. *Supposes*, the first comedy we have in English prose — which, like *Arthur*, was performed by

lawyers from Gray's Inn (in 1566, published in 1573) — was itself a translation of *I Suppositi* by Ludovico Ariosto, a play based on classical comedy presented in 1509 at the court of Ferrara before Duke Alfonso I and his wife Lucrezia Borgia. Gascoigne's *Jocasta*, staged at Gray's Inn in the same season, translates Lodovico Dolce's Italian translation of Euripides' *The Phoenician Women*. Shakespeare's early drama has close connections to the Inns of Court. *The Taming of the / a Shrew* includes scenes that adapt *Supposes*. The source for *The Comedy of Errors*, played at Gray's Inn in December 1594 (with John Lyly, by then an esquire of the body to Elizabeth, in the audience) was Plautus's Roman comedy *Menaechmi*. These, and many Inns plays, translate and adapt European theatre. The rare chance to work on a play like *Arthur* offered a valuable reminder of the role that the Inns of Court played in channeling — or 'Englishing',¹¹ as Felicity Brown explains in the following essay — drama, both ancient and contemporary, from the rest of Europe to professional theatre makers in early modern England.

My goal in staging *Arthur* had not been to recreate an historical performance or to replicate original staging conditions. Nor had I sought to identify and foreground contemporary Elizabethan politics, for example by looking for specific allusions to Anglo-Scottish dynastic relations. It was enough for me that the fear of civil war would have been firmly rooted in family memories passed down from the experience of the thirty years of the Wars of the Roses a century before, a fear addressed by the underlying premise and promise of Tudor rule. Anxiety about becoming a state divided by competing claims to power which then implodes into violence and bloodshed still resonates; every recent decade provides examples. I was interested in testing the story and the relationships that Hughes constructs out of Arthurian legend and Senecan drama. Could that story hold over the course of a performance? Could the actors make this text live in the moment in their interplay with each other? Could they make sense of the language and connect truthfully and intensely to the emotions the situations generated? Could all that hold the attention of an audience now, and generate emotions within that audience? To me, despite the challenges, and judging by the thickly charged atmosphere at the end of the show on that Friday evening in Gray's Inn chapel, it seemed that the answers to these questions are all 'yes'.

Notes

- 1 Details of these readings are available at the dedicated Read Not Dead website: <https://read-not-dead.quartexcollections.com/>
- 2 Martin Wiggins gives April 1568 as his best guess for the original production of *Tancred and Gismund*. See *British Drama: 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford, 2013), 2.23.
- 3 Personal correspondence with Romola Nuttall.
- 4 W. Carew Hazlitt, *A Select Collection of Old Plays*, originally published by Robert Dodsley, 4th edn (London, 1874), vol. 4, 249–343.
- 5 Line references to *Arthur* are based on my own count from Hazlitt's edition and will be cited in the text.
- 6 Not the 350 stated in the programme.
- 7 Vita Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles* (London, 1922), 43.
- 8 Brian Jay Corrigan, ed., *The Misfortunes of Arthur: A Critical, Old-Spelling Edition* (New York, 1992), 14.
- 9 All references to *Macbeth* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London, 2015) and will be cited in the text.
- 10 This script-in-hand performance took place on Sunday 30 June 2019, part of a two-week long 'Shakespeare and Poland' festival presented by Globe Education. We used a new English translation by Charles Kraszewski.
- 11 Felicity Brown, 'Sourcing *Misfortunes*: Translation and Tragedy', 166, in this Issues in Review, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.24.2.4878>.