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REVIVING ELIZABETHAN PERFORMANCE CONVENTIONS FOR THE POSTMODERN STAGE/SCREEN: ADRIAN NOBLE'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

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Differences always arouse interest, which eventually leads either to superficial, discriminatory rejection of what does not fit into the pattern of the intolerant observer or to thorough study by a critical eye that, nonetheless, brings about a fair assessment of and respect for what deviates from the general norm as established at a certain point in time and space. The conventions by which plays were put on in the Elizabethan outdoor theatres have not escaped this rule. Undeniably, throughout the centuries, with the change of the aesthetic paradigms and, hence, of the performance principles (equally sustained by the progress of the technical means available for theatrical performances), many of the commonplaces of the Elizabethan popular theatre were looked upon as obsolete, despised, or rather disregarded both by certain critics and stage directors, who, too busy 'digging up' for the hidden meanings of the Shakespearean plays, have sometimes forgotten to take into account the fact that their dramatic discourse, like that of many other Renaissance plays, was shaped up in perfect knowledge of and agreement with the rules that governed the way works were produced in the theatres of the time. This fault seems all the more grievous with the stage directors who, trapped indeed between their own desire to put forth an original interpretation of the Shakespearean text and the expectations/ tastes of their contemporary audiences, have come to 'sacrifice' in their performances the very plurality of meanings that certain conventions and theatrical devices lent to the Elizabethan performances. There is, however, an entire generation of Shakespearean scholars who have made a special subject of study of the playhouses, players and performances of the Elizabethan times, which they have tried to describe as accurately as possible starting from various documents of the age preserved until nowadays as well as from the plays themselves (that contain hints as to the way in which they were supposed to be performed). The endeavours of these scholars have not been lost on some producers, stage and film directors of the 1990s who have embarked upon a so-called "*fin-de-siècle* project" meant for "the recuperation of traditional literary culture" in the postmodern world in which mass-media has been constantly gaining ground (Lainier in Burt and Boose, 2003: 154). The British director Adrian Noble belongs to this trend and his perspective on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* should be considered in this context as representative for the way in which the revival of Elizabethan theatrical conventions could be aimed at fulfilling a double goal: preserving, on the one hand, the intrinsic unity between the written text and the performer's text characteristic of the Shakespearean original, and supplementing, on the other hand, the meanings conveyed in order to simultaneously address issues of relevance to the postmodern audiences thus "us[ing] the past to help make sense of the present" (Reynolds, 1991: 50).

Noble first experimented with Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1994-5 as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Stratford-upon-Avon and touring programme(Burnett, 2000: 89). The success of the theatrical performance he directed

determined Channel Four Films, the Arts Council of England and Capitol Films to submit, in their turn, film-goers, obviously accustomed to Hollywood-like consumerism, to an equally interesting experiment by releasing in 1996 a film version of Noble's performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Though much less successful than the theatrical version, criticized for its being rather 'uncinematic' precisely because of displaying relatively little distance from the conventions of the theatre, the 1996 production stands out, in fact, as a wonderful example of film shot mainly in what Jack Jorgens calls the "theatrical mode," which "has the look and feel of a performance worked out for a static theatrical space and a live audience." (Shaughnessy, 1998: 18) Amazingly, next to the postmodern-specific intertextuality (given by the numerous allusions to nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century children's literature, e.g. James M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat* or L. Travers's *Mary Poppins*), the reverence for the Shakespearean original and the intention of more or less explicitly connecting turn-of-the-century – i.e. 1590s and 1990s – theatrical practices make Adrian Noble's "theatrical" film particularly appealing both as an exercise meant for the revival of a past when theatricality, not realism, was the ideal in performance, and as an artistic exploration of postmodern concerns.

Opening with credits that are virtually limited – contrary to the Hollywoodian practice – to simply mentioning the film producers and introducing the actors as a performing company (which is indicative of the film displaying relatively little deviation from the conventions of the theatrical performance that had made the director famous in the first place), Noble's filmic version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reveals its connecting back to the Elizabethan conventions from the very moment when the change of setting from the Mechanicals' meeting place – here, a "corrugated hut" full of "fire extinguishers, dartboards and old sporting trophies […] as telling indicators of the 1940s" (Burnett, 2000: 94) – to the fairies' 'forest' occasions the first appearance on stage/ screen of Titania and Oberon. The viewers are then surprised to discover that the actors performing the two roles – Lindsay Duncan and Alex Jennings – are the same who entertained them as Hippolyta and Oberon. That is not in fact the only case of doubling of roles: Barry Lynch is both Philostrate and Puck, while the Mechanicals – with the exception of Bottom (Desmond Barrit) – turn later into fairies (Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed). For the small groups of professional players making up theatrical companies in the Elizabethan times, "the doubling and [even] trebling of roles for most actors was a requirement of their employment." (Reynolds, 1991: 5) (Only the minor roles and the 'mutes' were played by 'hirelings'. – Reynolds, 1991: 5 and Hattaway, 1982: 70-1) Some of the Renaissance playwrights apparently feared that the convention of doubling roles might be confusing to the audiences; hence, their announcing entrances in advance, having characters firmly named as soon as they entered the stage, and paying special attention to costume details of utmost importance in distinguishing between characters performed in practice by the same actors. Actually, far from being confusing, such a convention was – and still is – rather perceived as "an agreeable demonstration of a player's versatility." (Hattaway, 1982: 72) And it is indeed artful resourcefulness and flexibility that Noble requires from the two leading actors Lindsay Duncan and Alex Jennings when he has them play parts to which he lends an extra-charge of meaning by explicitly drawing attention to the relationship they establish with the only character he adds to the original Dramatis Personae of Shakespeare's comedy: the Boy (Osheen Jones). Several sequences in the film are so conceived as to achieve this goal: the very beginning of the film shows the Boy waking up and leaving his room full of toys in the attic to search for and spy on Theseus and Hippolyta whose wooing game takes place in the dinning-room of the same Victorian house; then he is shown identifying with the Indian boy Titania and Oberon quarrel over; he is constantly present either to enjoy Titania's dances with the fairies and her love games with Bottom or to witness, somewhat frightened, Oberon's plotting with Puck to have his revenge on his fairy queen; finally, having witnessed

the Mechanicals' performance, he is taken by Puck/ Philostrate to join Oberon, Titania, their feathery diaper-clothed fairies as well as the Mechanicals, to receive Oberon's blessing and to enjoy his last Peter Pan-like flight carried by the loving arms of all those who surround him like a family. All these sequences, occasionally counterpointed by the Boy's crying out for his mummy, gradually build up the image of a child – mother – father triangle, thus revealing the director's intention of taking advantage of the doubling of roles to simultaneously psychoanalyse the twentieth-century family, questioning its (un)tenability, to explore the child's psycho-sexual development and to reveal his initiation in the adult sexual practices. (Burnett, 2000: 91) (There are obvious traces of an Oedipus complex in the interest in and the delight with which the Boy takes part in Titania's 'affair' with the ass-headed Bottom, as well as in his fearing the roars of the vengeful Oberon, in whom he might see the castrating father figure.)

Furthermore, the introduction of the Boy in the play may be given additional interpretations that paradoxically relate in a very subtle manner to another particular aspect of Elizabethan performances. Despite the fact that, at a first sight, the creation of this new character may be perceived as an unquestionable deviation from the original text, a more thorough consideration of what it might stand for in the context of the director's new interpretation of Shakespeare's play could reveal an unexpected connection with the attempt at recuperating, at least to some extent, the traditions of the Elizabethan theatre. Throughout most of the film, the camera stays mostly with the Boy, presenting the viewpoint and following the movements of this subjective narrator-protagonist. It is the Boy's imagination and creativity that become the sources of the play's dream-world and his being in possession of a puppet-theatre, as shown in the opening bedroom-surveying scene and then recurrently underlined, explicitly anticipates his key role in the exploration of the theatricality that lies at the very heart of Shakespeare's comedy, equally sustaining the metafictional dimension of Noble's postmodern approach to it. The Boy peeps though the keyhole to spy on Theseus and Hippolyta planning their wedding, witnesses the lovers' troubles and follows them curious to see their outcome, falls through a rabbit-hole-like tunnel into the old hut right on time to watch the Mechanicals preparing their performance, flies down into the world of the fairies holding an umbrella handle and populates it blowing soap-bubbles into his puppet-theatre, shares with Oberon control of the lovers and occasionally controls Oberon and Puck pulling the strings, like a master-puppeteer, to lift them up when Titania arrives in the 'forest', joins Titania and Bottom in their ride across the moon-lit sky, attends the performance of the Mechanicals, pulling the strings of the curtains, and, finally, leaves his spectator's seat in the theatre-hall to go backstage and integrate in the big family of actors and fairies. Two interpretations could be attached to this new character, one of which is obliquely relevant for Noble's look back on Elizabethan theatrical conventions. Adopting strictly the stance of a critic of postmodern performances, Douglas Lanier advances the idea that the Boy might be looked upon "as an embedded surrogate for Noble himself, a means […] for him to recast the image of the high-concept director and his relationship to the play, its players, and the public." (in Burt and Boose, 2003: 163) The question then might rise how that could relate back to the Elizabethan performance peculiarities since

> "Shakespeare's theatre had no one occupying such role. The theatrical conditions of his day (absolutely minimal time for rehearsal, and a vast repertory of plays) did not permit the luxury of supporting someone who did not contribute to the work of the company either as a writer or performer." (Reynolds, 1991: 27)

Under the circumstances, "a leading player and/ or shareholder in the company (…) may have given minimal practical instruction to his fellow players in matters where it was required." (Reynolds, 1991: 27) Here a biographical detail must be paid special attention to: Shakespeare

himself was, luckily, a writer, performer and one of the owners of Lord Chamberlain's Men; hence, he could have sometimes (at least) assumed the position of the 'director'. Keeping then in mind Noble's fondness of the project of recuperating in his performance some of the Elizabethan conventions and adding to that the fact that it is the Boy's imagination that engenders the dream-like fairies from the forest, one might rather agree with Mark Thornton Burnett who sees the Boy in a dramaturge-like position. (2000: 91)

Noble seems to have concentrated his efforts of reviving Elizabethan performance practices especially in re-creating for the stage/ screen the fairy-forest where several lines of subplot meet: the lovers' pursuits, the fairies' 'wars' and the Mechanicals' rehearsals. Thus, one can easily identify Elizabethan influences in the conception of the setting.

It is an already unanimously acknowledged fact that "the performance convention" governing the various acting spaces – the front stage, the rear stage and, to some extent, the balcony of the tiring-house – in an Elizabethan outdoor theatre "was *non-representational*:"

> "…there was no attempt to imitate reality in terms of setting. Representational or illusionistic staging is a much later phenomenon that only really became possible in the mid nineteenth century. […] The conventions of Shakespeare's theatre made no attempt to disguise the fact that the audiences were consuming, and the players manufacturing, fictions. The active collaboration of the audience's imagination was sometimes called upon to make up for the inability of the stage to create realistic images." (Reynolds, 1991: 77)

And nothing could stimulate the audience's imagination better than the imagery within the dramatic discourse itself. It is, however, true that the textual references to the environment and atmosphere in which the events in the plays took place were often rather meant "to establish economically the time and the place of the action" (not to "implicitly lament the lack of theatrical resources to create scenic illusion") (Hattaway, 1982: 34) and that, far from being completely absent, props/ visual devices were used to lend at least some visual appeal to the performance. Despite the absence of lighting and painted scenery, metonymic portable properties ("crowns, swords, scutcheons, and targets") as well as non-portable, larger ones (thrones, 'banquets', council tables, tombs, beds, chariots, trees, moss-banks, etc.) were frequently brought on the stage ("when the action required them") or thrust up through the stage trap (which also stood for the 'hell-mouth' wherefrom demonic creatures could emerge). (Hattaway, 1982: 35-7 and Foakes in Braunmuller and Hattaway, 2001: 19) Furthermore, wood-panels, the wall and balcony of the tiring-house hinted at town/ castle walls and battlements. Yet, props were not there to create the illusion of a realistic performance, but rather to carry a symbolic message and to render a minimal sense of location.

Noble's 'fairy' setting is equally minimalist and metonymic, in utter contrast with the other settings that are representative either for the turn-of-the-century Victorian world which the performance engages, in many ways, in an intertextual dialogue with (the Boy's attic bedroom, Theseus and Hippolyta's parlour, the theatre hall) or the turn-of-the-history war-shaken 1940s (the Mechanicals' hut). The twentieth/ twenty-first century spectator, accustomed to the idea that "at bottom Shakespeare is a realist" (Jorgens in Shaughnessy, 1998: 19) and expecting hence to enjoy the sight of authentic costumes and settings, is puzzled to discover that, under Noble's direction, the space of the forest is reduced to an empty stage lit by yellow bulbs that hang from the ceiling like the fruits from the trees. Nonetheless, various properties appear on stage: some are portable, like the umbrellas the fairies fly down by, the puppet-theatre in which the Boy blows soap-bubbles that engender more fairies and which becomes the 'playground' of Oberon and Puck as they plan to interfere in the mortal youth's quest for love, or the bike that Bottom rides together with Titania and the fairies; larger properties are equally made used of, for example Titania's

umbrella-like bed or the doors that the Mechanicals, frightened by Bottom's transformation, knock against and that the lovers, charmed by the love-in-idleness flower and toyed with by Puck, slam in their violent pursuit of each other.

Yet, Noble's exploitation of setting and props in the performance he directs significantly surpasses the slavish reproduction of some Elizabethan performance conventions. Lighting – totally ignored in the Renaissance performances that benefited only from day light – is beautifully made use of in creating the contrast between the yellow glow of the bulbs making up the forest and the huge blue moon rising over a stretch of water, on the one hand, and the darkness of the empty stage, on the other hand. The entire setting, with all its props, is charged, in a typically postmodern fashion, with symbolic connotations that add further substance to the psychoanalytical interpretation of this particular performance. The empty stage stands for the Boy's 'tabula-rasa'-like innocence which needs filling with information regarding different types of sexual behaviour. The blue-dark water the fairies float on is indicative of the tapping, in the creation of the fairy-world, of unconscious energies that, given also the association with another feminine symbol, that of the moon, stir the desire of the return to or resistance to the separation from the maternal womb. It is not in vain that the Boy is shown sadly watching Titania's red bed-umbrella floating adrift while the fairy queen and her ass-headed lover enjoy one of the most sexually-explicit, physical scenes of the performance: their love-making act is the sublimated reflection of an Oedipal dream of union with the mother which will be gradually taken distance from, not without certain regrets, by the son who is about to discover his own sexuality. Umbrellas of changing colours play an equally significant part in this context: as Mark Thornton Burnett suggests, the handle of the umbrella, which the Boy holds tight while falling through the air into the fairy world and which is obviously focused on in the love scenes between Titania and the charmed Bottom consummated on a red, bed-sized, upside-down umbrella, becomes a symbolic representation of the floating phallus. (2000: 94)

But Titania/Hippolyta and Oberon/Theseus are not the only ones involved in the Boy's sexual and social education; the lovers also play an important part in it. Their door-slamming counterpointed pursuit of each other reveals them crossing the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious, prying into the deepest corners of their mind to refine from among their desires and fears their true feelings for each other and their sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual love). The lovers' performance is, in fact, conceived as very lively and physical, occasionally even violent (like, for instance, the fight between Demetrius and Lysander parodied in the former uselessly trying to impress his adversary with his funny karate movements, or Hermia's attack on Helena which is artistically rendered in a sort of ballet), marked by slightly overemphatic love-making mimicry (which Puck also delights in) meant to reveal (mainly) some of the secrets of heterosexual love, but also some "interludes of homoerotic attraction" (Burnett, 2000: 95). Helena and Hermia's long kiss in the Victorian parlour, Lysander's almost embracing Puck in his dream, Demetrius and Lysander's homoerotic alliance against Helena disclose, next to Oberon and Puck's very 'close' relationship or to Puck's riding on Bottom's back, another kind of sexual behaviour, offered as an alternative to the heterosexual one. All in all, as long as they are trapped in the fairy-ruled forest, Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius embark on a dynamic process of identity re-negotiation that is equally suggested by the changes in colour of their clothes.

When it comes to the characters' costumes, Noble's performance is not, actually, very faithful to the Elizabethan convention. To be more specific, the costumes worn by the Elizabethan actors were "true examples of Elizabethan magnificence" (Hattaway, 1982: 86), carefully selected and recognizable as such by the audiences according to "an elaborate contemporary dress code which was actually enshrined in law." (Reynolds, 1991: 87) Often purchased from the nobility (which was not unproblematic), worn to define the nature of the

characters rather than to mark the period of the play, the costumes that amazed the groundlings created "splendid visual images" (Reynolds, 1991: 87) and were inherent parts of the visual code by means of which a certain message could be conveyed to an audience familiarized with very specific colour codes:

> "characters of high degree wore robes with heraldic or ecclesiastical emblems, the ceremonial dress of the present rather than fancy dress from the past. Kings wore crowns, devils wore horns, doctors' gowns were of scarlet, lawyers' gowns of black, rustics and clowns wore 'startups' (boots that reached to mid-calf), allowed fools wore long coats of motley woven of coarse wool and particoloured green and yellow, 'in the weave of the material and not in the cut of the coat'; virgins wore white, prologues wore black with a crown of bays, ghosts wore leather pilches (garments made of skins dressed with hair), shepherds wore white coats and carried staff and bottle, sailors wore canvas suits, servants blue coats or slops." (Hattaway, 1982: 87)

For the postmodern director, costume remains "a language, a system of signs" (Hattaway, 1982: 86) and "a vital ingredient in making successful performances" (Reynolds, 1991: 87); yet, if, in the case of Theseus and Hippolyta, costumes are still aimed at helping locate the characters historically in the Victorian age, in the case of the lovers, simplicity of cut makes any association with a certain social group or historical period pretty difficult. Still, what impresses while considering the visual text is a commitment – similar to the Elizabethans, though not dictated by a rigid socially-relevant dress code – to colours as illustrative for a certain type of personality and for changes in the characters' states of mind. To expand, in this respect, on the lovers as pictured by Noble, the shift from blue – dark in the case of Hermia's dress, light in that of Lysander's shirt – to violet and respectively green is indicative of the need to learn, while going through dream ordeals (in which Lysander temporarily changes allegiance to another woman), to temper impulses in order to eventually find the *balance* between reason and passion (Hermia's violet dress) and to enjoy a thus *regenerated* love (Lysander's green shirt). As for Helena and Demetrius, the unchanged colours of their clothes – the orange of Helena's dress and the light blue of Demetrius' shirt – imply a certain constancy of affection: Helena is the only one who seems to hold the secret of the balance between reason and libido and, despite Demetrius' rejection, she remains faithful to him until she is duly accepted. Demetrius is first trapped in the entangling contradictions of human nature – his mind dictates him to marry Hermia, while his heart pushes him secretly towards Helena – but, in the bluish moon-dominated world of the midsummer night's dream, passion eventually prevails and he opens his heart to happiness next to a woman who was all the time so close and yet so far from him. (For further interpretations of colour symbolism, see Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1994)

More or less obliquely emphasised throughout the first four acts of the performance by the recurrent foregrounding of the Boy's puppet-theatre, the issue of theatricality emerges forcefully in the final act as the Mechanicals are given the chance of acting in front of the newly-married couples (Hippolyta –Theseus, Hermia – Lysander, Helena – Demetrius). Tributary to the Victorian theatre judging by the design of the theatre-hall where the performance is held, with its small proscenium arch curtain-shielded from the audience and its richly painted rear-wall scenery, Noble's rendering of the scene of the famous play-within-the-play *Pyramus and Thisbe* still seems to somehow connect back to the Elizabethan conventions: once Pyramus and Thisbe's story of "tragic mirth" is concluded by the ridiculously comic suicide of Bottom-Pyramus (who rises theatrically from the dead to die a second time, thus cancelling all powerful emotion that his previous speech might have aroused) and of Flute-Thisbe (repeatedly cutting his/her veins and throat), the spectators step themselves on the stage to congratulate the actors and to enjoy together Bottom and Flute's bergomask. All of a sudden, "the physical division between players and audience"

(Hattaway, 1982: 17) – so neatly delineated by the very design of the Victorian theatre-hall, but utterly inconceivable in the Elizabethan one – ceases to exist. In Shakespeare's time

> "although the playhouses were open to the skies, players and spectators must have felt themselves, as in a modern circus, to be in the same space, the same 'room' […] The lack of physical division between audience and players reflected the absence of a categoric distinction between life and art: within the world of the playhouse, performer and spectator alike were at play, collaborating in a community act of imaginative and social recreation." (Hattaway, 1982: 41)

And that is exactly the feeling that Adrian Noble endeavours to create in the end of his stage/ film production when the Boy-spectator, whose perspective the audiences from beyond the screen are invited to adopt, is lured by Puck's gaze into leaving his seat in the dark hall to step on the stage and then further backstage where he can discover the dream world of the fairies that arrive floating on the dark water under the huge blue moon to adopt him as a member of their family. He receives the ritual baptism-like blessing of his 'father' Theseus/Oberon like a son who has grown and is ready to assume adulthood and his own sexuality, without, however, entirely losing his innocence and ability to dream which the theatre should have the power to stimulate any time. The collaborative nature of the Elizabethan performance which could erase the division between life and art is wonderfully evoked when, holding Puck's hand, the Boy rushes back on stage to fly one last time like Peter Pan carried by his 'father' Theseus/Oberon and 'mother' Hippolyta/Titania and surrounded by his childlike friends, the fairies and the Mechanicals/actors. It is on the stage that the flight of one's imagination can best come to life with the help of actors and the spectators are invited to enjoy this escapist experience, before returning to their everyday lives – this might be the message conveyed by the final image which shows the Boy and his big family of fairies and actors engaging the audience's eye as if drawing them into contemplating the future together.

The effectiveness of this theatrical gesture is undeniably acknowledged in the case of a live theatrical performance, but seems to be denied by certain film studies scholars as painfully reminding film-goers of "how fully the performers do not and cannot share the reality of the spectator, how the cast and the dream world they portray remain trapped within the confines of the screen." (Lanier in Burt and Boose, 2003: 165) If the central position of the Boy among the fairies and the actors might be perhaps better understood in relation to the "Boy as a dramaturge/ Shakespeare" interpretation (Burnett, 2000) than to the "Boy as a director" one (Lanier in Burt and Boose, 2003), so might the final gesture of gazing up: as Mark Burnett points out in this respect, if the 'parent' is represented as the 'boy,' then the meanings he conveyed by means of his fairy world may be at every turn of the century (and not only) brought to light in different, more or less faithful, reproductions or imitations that might fruitfully stimulate meditation upon the nature and function of the theatre (2000: 96). In this light, Noble's preserving this theatrical gesture in the filmic production as well could be seen as an expression of the postmodern questioning of the ability of the turn-of-the-century film to render the profound Shakespearean theatricality and of scrutinising a future in which the issue of the competition between the theatre and the cinema for mass popularity and for the discovery of the right key to the Shakespearean enigma is still uncertain.

To conclude, despite the accusations of elitism motivated by the dominance of the theatrical mode, of intertextuality and of sophisticated games of archetypal symbolism more appealing to the connoisseurs than to the public at large accustomed to Hollywood-like realism, Adrian Noble's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* holds an incontestable place among the productions that, at the turn of the millennium, engage in a bold recuperative act of revival of the Elizabethan theatrical conventions that are enriched with new meanings in the context of the postmodern contemplation of the past versus the present, theatre versus cinema, high

culture versus low culture paradigms. Difference-engendering changes in aesthetic paradigms are part and parcel of the very nature of cultural spaces, but that should not prevent one from either remembering the past or embracing variety in the future; by issuing a filmic version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Adrian Noble implicitly acknowledges the unstoppable rise of film as one of the types of media text most successfully shaping the cultural background of the young postmodern generation, but he skilfully uses it as a means of drawing the attention to the fact that, though based on different conventions, theatre must not be rejected as unfashionable, considered obsolete and eventually forgotten. Film and theatre must not be mutually exclusive in the new millennium culture and producing Shakespeare might just be the perfect opportunity to remind the present-day audiences how much these two types of performances can complement each other in revealing the wide range of meanings that the Renaissance literary tradition can acquire when re-contextualised and used to further raise questions regarding various problematic issues in the contemporary society.

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Abstract

Representatives of different trends in drama practices throughout the centuries have represented Shakespeare's plays according to their own aesthetic principles often disregarding or at least paying little attention to the performance conventions specific to the time when they were written and to the extent to which they influenced the very discourse of the play. It is not, however, the case of the British director Adrian Noble who, in his producing Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, first for the stage (1994-5) and then for the screen (1996), took up some of the Elizabethan performance conventions and adapted them from a postmodern perspective in order to give more prominence to the meanings he thought lied at the very heart of the Shakespearean comedy.

Résumé

Pendant des siècles, les représentants des divers courants dans l'évolution du théâtre ont mis en scène les pièces de Shakespeare suivant leurs propres principes esthétiques, souvent sans tenir compte des conventions théâtrales spécifiques à l'époque où les pièces en question ont été écrites et

de leur effet sur le discours dramatique lui-même. Ce n'est pas, pourtant, le cas du metteur en scène anglais Adrian Noble qui, dans son spectacle (1994-1995), et puis dans son film (1996), inspirés par A Midsummer Night's Dream/Le songe d'une nuit d'été de Shakespeare, a adopté certaines conventions du théâtre élisabéthain et les a adaptés, d'une perspective postmoderne, pour qu'il puisse mettre en évidence des significations qui, à son avis, représentent l'essence même de la comédie shakespearienne.

Rezumat

De-a lungul secolelor, reprezentanții diferitelor curente teatrale au pus în scenă piesele lui Shakespeare conform propriilor lor principii estetice adesea fără să țină prea mult seamă de convențiile teatrale specifice epocii în care aceste piese au fost scrise şi de impactul lor asupra discursului dramatic în sine. Nu este totuşi cazul regizorului britanic Adrian Noble care, în punerea sa în scenă (1994-1995), şi apoi pe peliculă (1996), a piesei Visul unei nopți de vară a lui Shakespeare, a preluat unele dintre convențiile teatrale elizabetane şi le-a adaptat dintr-o perspectivă postmodernă aşa încât să poată să sublinieze anumite interpretări care, după părerea sa, surprind esența însăşi a comediei shakespeareane.