

York Shakespeare Project

2010-2011 Newsletter No 10 October *Final* Issue

Paul Toy has made his choices:

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

Cast List:



The Prologue

Priam, King of Troy

Hector, his son

Andromache, wife to Hector

Troilus, another son to Priam

Paris, another one

Helen (of Troy), estranged wife to Menelaus

Cassandra, daughter to Priam, a prophetess...

Cressida, daughter to Calchas

Pandarus, uncle to Cressida

Agamemnon, the Greek General

Menelaus, his brother

Aeneas, a Trojan Commander

Calchas, a Trojan priest

Achilles

Ajax

Ulysses

Nestor

Diomedes

Patroclus

Thersites

Alexandra

Servants, soldiers, musicians, attendants

And ladies of easy virtue

Karen Millar

Harold Mozley

Andy Crisp

Beth Fuller

Alan Flower

Richard Johnston

Anna Rogers

Clancy McMullan

Virginia Hartmann

Ray Alexander

Ian Giles

Nick Jones

Tom Straszewski

William Lee

Daniel Wilmot

Jon Adams

Maurice Crichton

Sam Valentine

Matthew Wignall

James Osman

James Rotchell

Katy Devine

Brenton Spyker

Bill Laverick,

Esther Redhouse White et al

The Venue: Upstage Centre Youth Theatre, 41 Monkgate, York YO31 7PB

Performances: Tues 15th to Sat 19th November at 7.30pm
(matinee on Sat 19th at 2pm)

Tickets are available [here](#). But for some learned insight into the actual play, here is a guest contribution from our very own Julia Atkinson...

“What’s aught but as ’tis valued?”: Shakespeare and the Legacy of a Legend

Troilus’ question, triggered by a debate over whether Helen of Troy should be returned to the Greeks, could equally well be asked of the Trojan War itself. Over the course of three thousand years the legend came to be valued as a celebration of martial valour, a national foundation myth, a background for the love story of Troilus and Cressida, and source material for imperial and dynastic propaganda. All these interpretations left their mark on Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, a play so disconcertingly “modern” it had to wait over three centuries to find acceptance with critics and audiences.



Oooh Alan, what a lovely left hand – Bruno Tonioli (an 8!)

It is deeply ironic that although 21st century audiences are inclined to empathise with Shakespeare’s dissection of love and heroism, the Trojan War itself has virtually no cultural resonance for us. Our familiarity with the legend is likely to begin and end with popular retellings based on Homer’s *Iliad* and a couple of undistinguished Hollywood films, so Shakespeare’s unheroic versions of Achilles, Ajax, Ulysses and almost every other principal character can seem bizarre and incomprehensible. It comes as something of a shock to see Achilles, the greatest Greek warrior, presented

as a vain, self-obsessed hypocrite who stands back and lets his followers perform the act for which he is most celebrated – the killing of Hector. Ajax, Achilles' principal rival in the heroism stakes, is transformed into a dim-witted thug easily outwitted by the fool Thersites. Ulysses, who as Homer's Odysseus is one of the most likeable characters in classical literature, undergoes a sea-change into the Machiavellian, lottery-rigging boss of the Greek secret service. All of which prompts the question – why are Shakespeare's characters so unlike their Homeric originals?

Part of the answer lies in the existence of a highly critical, anti-heroic view of the war dating back to Roman times and continuing into the Renaissance. Although Shakespeare had access to Homer's original story of the Trojan War, most notably through George Chapman's 1598 translation of seven books of the *Iliad*, he was far more strongly influenced by the work of the Roman poet Virgil. Virgil's *Aeneid*, written during the reign of the Emperor Augustus, paints a very different picture of the Trojan War, one that helps to explain the seeming oddities of *Troilus and Cressida*.

In the *Aeneid* Virgil fleshed out some minor Homeric characters and incidents to create the saga of Aeneas, a son of King Priam who survived the destruction of Troy and led a band of refugees to Italy, where his descendants eventually founded Rome. The Julian family of which Virgil's patron the Emperor Augustus was a member claimed descent from Iulus, the eldest son of Aeneas, and the book glorifies Augustus' achievement (predestined by the gods) of bringing peace to Rome after years of civil war. By casting the Trojans not only as heroic underdogs but as the ancestors of the Romans, Virgil was obliged to show the Greeks, especially Achilles and Ulysses, in a much harsher light than Homer had done. The *Aeneid* became a mainstay of classical education in England and generations of grammar school boys, including Shakespeare, would have been familiar with it; Virgil's striking description of the last hours of Troy is echoed by Shakespeare in the Player King's speech in *Hamlet* and also in the poem *The Rape of Lucrece*.



Andy - a great big showy old Hector (9)

Virgil's reworking of the Troy legend was imitated by Geoffrey of Monmouth, a 12th century priest of Anglo-Norman descent whose *History of the Kings of Britain* was

still influencing historians and poets in Shakespeare's day. Although the work was supposedly based on "a very ancient book written in the British language", essentially Geoffrey used his vivid imagination to compensate for the fact that virtually nothing was then known about pre-Roman Britain. His version of events borrowed heavily from Virgil in relating the story of Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas, who after much travelling and many adventures was told by the goddess Diana that he was destined to found a second Troy in the island of Albion (the Greek name for Britain). Together with a band of followers, Brutus landed at Totnes in Devon and discovered that the island was uninhabited except for a race of giants. After defeating them Brutus founded a line of kings that included Shakespeare's Lear and Cymbeline.

Although Geoffrey is probably best remembered for his contributions to Arthurian literature, during the Renaissance his Troy-based national foundation myth was taken much more seriously than the exploits of King Arthur. Court masques and civic pageants made much of London's status as Troia Nova or Troynovant, the "New Troy" (a name inspired by a misunderstanding of *Trinovantes*, the first British tribe encountered by Julius Caesar during his invasion of Britain). Statues of Gog and Magog, who according to Geoffrey were two of the British giants killed by Brutus, adorned the Guildhall. Geoffrey's version of the myth combined with Virgil's in the complex iconography of Elizabeth I, who was described by playwright Thomas Heywood as "the beauteous queen of second Troy" and frequently compared to Dido, the powerful Queen of Carthage in the *Aeneid*.

Troilus and Cressida was written towards the end of Elizabeth's long reign, by which time the cult of Gloriana was in decline. No amount of government spin or poetic flattery could conceal the fact that the monarch was an elderly woman in failing health, presiding over a court more notable for greed and infighting than deeds of chivalry. The play has been tentatively dated to 1601, shortly after the Earl of Essex's shambolic attempted coup resulted in the execution of the former royal favourite often called "the English Achilles". The myth of the Trojan War also suffered debasement – the name Ajax lent itself handily to puns on "a jakes", a jakes being a squalid non-flushable toilet, and the swaggering thugs employed as hired muscle in brothels were known as "hectors".



Ajax 'spray and wipe' (Jon - only a 3 I'm afraid)

Thanks to contradictory information on the title pages of the two earliest editions of *Troilus and Cressida* it is not known for certain if the play was performed in Shakespeare's lifetime. However, it seems reasonable to assume that Shakespeare's contemporaries – be they playgoers or readers – would have been much less surprised by his treatment of the Trojan War than their 21st century counterparts.

Missed our AGM?

Our Chair, Janet Looker's Annual Report 11th Oct 2011

Our production of *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* last summer meant we took a break in the winter and the Committee took the opportunity to try to do some forward planning. After some discussion we agreed to make *Much Ado about Nothing* our major production for the summer of 2011 – and finding Rowntree Park was available for June/July we committed ourselves once more to an outdoor production; the first since *As You Like It* in the Minster Gardens.

As well as the production we also applied to be part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's 'Open Stages'. This is part of the RSC's celebration of Shakespeare in 2012 and signing up for the project means opportunities for joining workshops, taking a production to Stratford, and in 2012, if we are successful, being invited to take part in a showcase of performances. Meanwhile we are able to use the RSC logo on our programmes and publicity material.

In January we set to work to appoint a director for *Much Ado* and after significant interest we appointed Paul Taylor-Mills a young director from London. Paul was delighted with the park setting and enthusiastic about the project – but working with a director based in London and only able to come to York for long weekends posed some significant problems. The cast had to get used to rehearsing intensively over Sunday and Monday and the time given for rehearsals seemed briefer than we have been used to. But Paul's interpretation was interesting (setting it in the aftermath of the Second World War, and using a lot of 40s music) and gave it an energetic feel – and the cast rose to all the challenges magnificently. The production in Rowntree Park was a huge artistic success – we got some of our best reviews; and our day trip to the Dell by coach was a triumph – but sadly audience figures were disappointing and we made a loss – manageable but disappointing after so much hard work. A mixture of weather (we lost two shows to rain), late publicity, difficult to say – but for those of us who saw it, it was a YSP show to remember.

One of the feedbacks we get from directors is that we don't have a regular back stage production team; so with *Much Ado* we put in some hard work in trying to recruit the backstage team at the same time as we recruited the cast. This is an ongoing issue, and we shall build on that team and are hoping to take them forward with us to our next production. A good director only takes you so far, you need a strong corps of people to manage sound, lighting and the score of things that need to be planned and provided before a show hits the stage.

We spent a lot of time this year trying to think ahead more: one of the problems over the last few years is never having the next play lined up so that we always seemed to spend a lot of time discussing the merits of various plays which took a lot of Committee time and energy. This year we have had to be very focused; in part this is

because 2012 is not just Olympic Year (I don't think we will compete with them), but York is putting on the Mystery Plays in the Museum Gardens once more – and we quickly realised that with the best will in the world there would be a lot of York's actors wanting to be in such a high profile event. According to our rough schedule of plays, 2012 should have been the year we did *Hamlet* but (with some reluctance) we decided that we could not expect to do such a big play in competition with the Mystery Plays, so we have put that back to 2013 and agreed that for 2012 we will do *Merry Wives of Windsor* in the summer – probably earlier than usual to avoid too much competition – and then *Othello* in the winter.

Keen followers of YSP will realise we are now on the fast track to some of Shakespeare's biggest plays – the tragedies, some of his darker plays *Measure for Measure* and *Winter's Tale* – which is going to put a lot of hard work and challenge the Committee's way. But also a real sense of excitement: I am sure our productions have been going from strength to strength over the last few years and I know York will rise to these challenges.

We have done some fundraising this year, mostly focused on our annual street collection in Kings Square, where we presented scenes from Shakespeare, and rattled tins to great success; a big thanks to all who took part and to any who came and put some money in a tin. We need the fundraising to act as a buffer for shows that do not always show a profit. We will be out again in 2012 so look out for us.

We are not forgetting the non dramatic works of Shakespeare. We now have a design for *Venus and Adonis* ready to go when we can find the venue; I am hopeful we will get this sorted for next year. Then we will also need to build into our thinking and planning some of the other poems and never forgetting the sonnets.

We are also making some links with the Pocklington Arts scene; one of our supporters lives in Pocklington, and with her help we are exploring opportunities to take our shows to Pocklington and give ourselves some additional exposure.

Finally can I thank the Committee most warmly for all their hard work and support; it has been a hard year but we have put in place some processes that I hope will pay off in future years – putting on two shows a year is challenging but so very much worth it and I do hope some of you will put up your hand to join the Committee for 2011/2012; we do have fun; as the Olympic slogan has it "It is good to be part of it". With some of the changes we are hoping to make to our constitution, it will be possible even if you do not feel you want to join the Committee itself, to be part of one of our sub-committees. One I would like to highlight is a group to look for venues. Some of our most memorable shows have been in some non-traditional sites. But it takes time and effort tracking them down and sounding out owners etc. but something a small dedicated group might take on and find some really good and interesting venues for Shakespeare.

So I thank everyone again, for taking part, for working behind the scenes, for supporting us and I look forward to another memorable year in 2011/12.

Janet Looker, Chair

****Coming Soon**** [all tickets YTR [online box office.](#)]

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Robert Louis Stevenson
Adapted by Damian Freddi. Feat: Damian Freddi, Harold Mozley, Matthew Wignall, Daniel Wilmot, Tom Straszewski. York Horror Tours. Golden Fleece Inn, 16 Pavement. 6.45pm. Every night till 16th October 2011.

Close. A new play written by Rocky Kilmaszewska and Anna Rose James
Directed by Hannah Wallace. Feat: Gemma Sharp, Anna Rogers. Six Lips. Friargate Theatre. 7.30pm. 25th to 29th October 2011.

Noel 'Coward and Cole' Porter: a selection
Paul Laidlaw, piano. Feat Toby Gordon. York Musical Theatre Company. Joseph Rowntree Theatre. 7.30pm (Sat/Mat 2.30pm) 27th to 29th October 2011.

Travels With My Aunt. Graham Greene, adapted by Giles Havergal
Directed by Jan Kirk. Feat: Jamie Searle, Matt Simpson. YSCP. Upstage Centre Youth Theatre, 41 Monkgate. 7.30pm (Sat/Mat 2.00pm). 23rd to 26th November 2011.

Shakespeare in 100 treasures: Number 10

Wordsearch + Sheer Quotability

So, for a certain man recently revealed of a chin:

Is his head worth a hat? Or his chin worth a beard? - *AYLI*

Delay me not the knowledge of his chin

And his chin new reaped showed like a stubble-land at harvest home - *1H4*

Your wind short, your chin double, your wit single - *2H4*

For who is he whose chin is but enriched with one appearing hair that will not follow these culled and choice drawn cavaliers to France - *H5*

De chin.

De sin. Le col, de nick; de menton, de sin.

Alas, poor chin, many a wart is richer. *TnC*

I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will. As item: two lips, indifferent red; item: two grey eyes, with lids to them; item: one neck, one chin, and so forth. *12thNight*



Notes on a Voice and Text Workshop
led by Michael Corbridge RSC
Contact Theatre , Manchester.

Open Stages Performance workshop
attended by Tom Straszewski, Anjali
Vyas-Brannick and Maurice Crichton
at different times during the day...
24.07.11

This workshop used Romeo's speech
to the Friar *'Tis torture, and not
mercy...* from Romeo and Juliet III iii
29-52.

It was made up of a series of exercises:

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1. With as free a head and heart as possible read aloud in your own normal voice the text while moving around and exploring the space, including auditorium.
 2. Standing in a tight circle, shoulder to shoulder, read the text round the circle from punctuation mark to punctuation mark trying to pick up from the speaker before to hold and develop the sense of the speech. Don't start trying to work out which bit will be yours.
 3. Picking out certain words and putting a specific action to them to begin to awaken and insist upon a physicality to accompany the words. Practise the moves. Then attempt in a square each to his own, to read the speech putting in all these actions.

banished/exile	one step forward
Romeo/he/I/my/mine	hand to chest
Juliet/her	looking and pointing up to right
Flies	turning right round in distressed dizzy whirl
Fly	flapping arms camply
Cat	putting out hand to suggest height of a big cat
mouse	of a big mouse
dog	of a big dog
Heaven	pointing straight up
Hell	pointing straight down
Death	making a slitting of the throat gesture

4. Then identifying how certain words appear in the speech alongside at some other point their antithesis. Eg torture/mercy, heaven/hell, cat/dog, cat/mouse. There are loads. Now read the speech with a very deliberate hop from foot to foot each time a word that has an antithesis appears.
5. The last word in every Shakespearian line is important. Say them. Savour them. Then one by one walk to the middle of the circle and launch the end word into the air

as if throwing a ball straight up in the air with a flourish. Then in response to a push on the shoulder from facilitator walking round the outside of the circle, in the same way launch the whole line to support the last word of the line.

6. Choose your 3 favourite words in the speech. Eg Here, Howlings, Heart. Going round the circle, when it is your turn walk into the middle of the circle and embody one of your three chosen words while saying it.

7. Shadowing. Supporting an actor in rehearsal who needs less pressure on line recall and the chance to be fully in the scene. So, supporting actor stands behind him giving him the speech, sense unit by sense unit (use punctuation again) so that the lines are completely secure and actor can concentrate on physicality and interaction.

8. Resistance. Actor is physically held back by the arms when directing speech at the Friar. Midway through, the grip is released so speech is delivered with real sense of being restrained. Rest of the group support the scene.

Want to get better at it?

Michael Lambourne. (Who starred in YTR's in-the-round season as Oxford in *Two Planks*, Roger the Dog in *My Family*) is holding adult acting classes at York Theatre Royal. Check these out [here](#).

Audrie Woodhouse (Titania in YSP's *Dream*, physical movement coach for Mooted Theatre's *Macbeth*) has set up City Drama Lab [here](#).

Neil Tattersall (Oliver in YSP's *As You Like It*) is getting folk together in association with Jorvik Viking Centre for a proper fight workshop [ha!](#)

Good people all.

****The next YSP Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 1st November 2011****

A Final Special Moment

This is the last of the MCVI. It has been a blast but as our regular reader(s) will have noticed the MCVI has recently run out of steam. This forlorn attempt to live up to legendary Newsletter editor Al Carr is at an end. I know I speak for us all when I say O Captain! My Captain Alistair Carr! Haste ye back.

In the meantime, it is fondly hoped this august organ (and no other) will pass into the capable hands of Matthew 'I-want-something's-flesh' Wignall. I know, I know. If it happens we will all be pleasantly surprised. But *malgré tout*, the boy has wit enough.

Paid-up member? Want to plug your show? Miffed I hadn't the gumption to do it unasked? Email your plug to the address below and I will forward it Wignallwards.

Latest comments:

- 'Monthly' Newsletter my arse. I have not had one since June. [*Fybogel is the answer - ed.*]
- Matthew 'THE EDITOR' Wignall. I like it. Understated yet still demanding respect. - *verbatim MW text*
- Vanity initiative? Believe me, you ain't seen nothing yet. - *Mrs A*

*Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please.*

Feedback to:
The Maurice Crichton Vanity Initiative
maurice.crichton@ntlworld.com