

Short Report

The Induction Scene in *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Abstract

The director John Rando's interpretation of the Induction scene in William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* is examined. A comparison is made between Shakespeare's text and Rando's rendering of the Induction in performance. The play was performed at the Lowell Davies Festival Theatre in Balboa Park, San Diego, California from June 23 to August 4, 2002. Rando adds a modern touch, as well as a re-working of the text, to imagine a slightly different beginning to this play.

Introduction

Many directors have re-interpreted William Shakespeare's plays into their own modern vision. In that respect, the theatre director John Rando is no different. Most directors, however, focus on an entire play. A recent example of this would be the movie director Baz Luhrmann's version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Rando zeroes in on the Induction scene in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, both tweaking the text and allowing for a present day irritant to make its way into the play. He stops at the Induction, however, and adheres to the text for the subsequent five acts. Rando's molding of the text to his own modern vision of the Induction will be discussed.

I

The Induction is divided into two scenes. The opening scene of the text version has Christopher Sly, referred to by the Lord in the scene as a beggar, but clearly the town drunk, arguing over his bill with the hostess of an alehouse on a heath. She leaves to call the constable when Sly refuses to pay and Sly is left alone on the stage and promptly falls asleep, or passes out drunk.

The Lord then enters with his hunting party and servants. Sly remains passed out in front of the alehouse. After some preliminary conversation amongst the Lord's party the Lord notices Sly in a heap akimbo the alehouse.

Sly's drunkenness brings out the prankster in the Lord and he has his servants carry Sly to his home. There, in scene two, Sly is made to believe that he is in fact a lord and the whole household has a laugh at Sly's expense. When Sly awakes he is greeted by the Lord's page Barthol'mew, who acts as Sly's wife, and by the Lord's servants, who convince Sly he must be and act like a lord. This persuasion works easily on Sly and after awhile he believes in his exalted station.

The Induction ends in front of a group of players who have come to the Lord's home and been instructed

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by the Lord to perform for Sly (and his wife) as if he was the lord of the house.

II

John Rando inserts his personal touches into the Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew* right from the start. Just before the play begins the PA announcer asks the audience to turn off their pagers and mobile telephones. The lights then dim and the players come out to start Act I of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The players are quickly interrupted, however, by a ringing mobile phone. The offending mobile is in the audience. People look around to see who the offender is. A commotion can be heard. There is arguing. Then the players actually stop their performance and the house lights come on. It is at this point that the perpetrator comes into view. It's a young man, obviously drunk, stumbling down the stairs toward the stage with his girlfriend in tow. They are both scuffling with the ushers, who are trying 1. to get them to turn off the phone, and 2. leave the theatre. The couple look as if they've been clubbing, although with a 7p.m. start time for the play this is hard to believe. The man is dressed in a suit, no tie, with an open collar, and the woman is wearing a revealing dress fit for a night out dancing and drinking at some of the swankier places in downtown San Diego. The man is rude and gets physical with the ushers, pushes them off and stumbles headlong toward the stage, which he manages to tumble onto before he passes out at the players' feet.

While this has been going on the players have asked for park security to be called. And wouldn't you know it, they duly arrive just as the players are gathering around the drunken man while his girlfriend attends to him.

A conversation ensues between the players on stage and park security over what to do with the man. It is here that the last members of the audience who had believed this to be an actual disturbance realize for certain that everything is part of the play itself because the park security fail to take the man away.

The players have come up with a great idea. They want to dress the drunk in their period costume and when he wakes up convince him he's an actual lord from Shakespeare's time who has entreated these players to perform for him.

Park security goes along with the gag and they leave the players to put their plan into action. While this is going on the man's date has managed to disappear backstage. She is no longer needed because one of the male players will dress up as a woman to be the lord's (drunken man's) wife.

The drunk has his clothes changed (the players encircle the drunk and make a wall of tapestries that allow for his changing). After he's awakened he needs some initial convincing of who he is, but after his wife is introduced he finds her/him attractive, and goes along with being a lord. He and his wife are then ushered to a stage balcony to watch the players' performance. The opening act is started once again.

III

The changes Rando has made to the play can be divided into two categories: modern and textual. The modern changes are obvious to all. The drunk is not a beggar but a loud, obnoxious modern man with girlfriend, out to spend some money and have a good time. The use of the mobile is a nod to a modern irritant and the park service security serves as the constable.

The textual change comes from the use of the players as the pranksters. In the text the Lord sees the drunken Sly and comes up with an idea for a little fun at Sly's expense. Rando starts his version with the players beginning their performance of Act 1 of the play. There is no lord, no alehouse hostess, no hunting party or servants; a girlfriend is added. The audience is left ambiguous, or in another modern touch, we, the paying customers, are the actual audience.

Rando has the players, themselves, come up with the idea of persuading this drunken man that he is a

lord of Shakespeare's time and they are here at his urging to perform their play.

Rando's interpretation is in keeping with the humor of the play even as it plays with the sequence of the text and omits many of the characters from the opening scene. The following five acts adhere to Shakespeare's text but the audience is still left feeling that they've seen something out of the ordinary.

Usually a director will decide either to interpret Shakespeare in a modern way or to keep to the original. Rarely do they mix the two like John Rando.

Works Consulted

Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. New York: Airmont Books, 1966.