

Such Stuff podcast
Season 5, Episode 9: The Shakespeare Diaries, A Midsummer Night's Dream

[Music plays]

Imogen Greenberg: Hello and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

This week, we're back with another episode of the Shakespeare Diaries. Every fortnight, actor and Shakespeare's Globe artistic director Michelle Terry sits down with actor Paul Ready to discuss a different Shakespeare play from isolation.

This week, in celebration of the upcoming summer solstice, we turned our attention to A Midsummer Night's Dream. As ever, in advance of this episode, we collected questions from you – our wonderful audience – to put to Michelle and Paul. Thanks again for the fantastic array of questions. Next time, Michelle and Paul will be discussing Love's Labour's Lost so do keep an eye on social media and send in your questions!

Now, back to the riotous magic of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

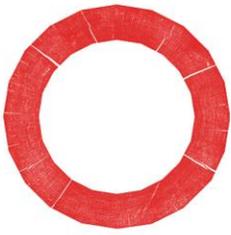
Michelle starred as Titania and Hippolyta in our 2013 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream on the Globe stage. And alongside listening to this episode, you can watch that 2013 production with Michelle, on YouTube for free, until Monday 22 June.

The breadth of this play and its sheer scope is so extraordinary and Michelle and Paul's discussion ranged from climate change and chaos in the cosmos, to the relationship between jealousy and power, and the pervasive idea of capture that spans the play.

Over to Michelle and Paul...

Michelle Terry: Hello, my name's Michelle Terry.

Paul Ready: And my name's Paul Ready.



MT: And today we will be talking to you about A Midsummer Night's Dream. Have you ever been in a Midsummer Night's Dream, Paul?
[laughs]

PR: No, I've never been in a Midsummer Night's Dream.

MT: There's a running theme now...

PR: What I did forget is that I have actually been offered twice to be in A Midsummer Night's Dream in my life, and both times I've turned it down.

MT: Interesting.

PR: Puck.

MT: What?!

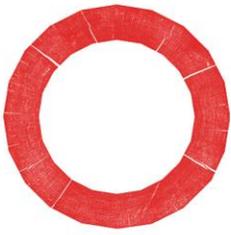
PR: Don't worry about it. Puck. And Lysander.

MT: OK, let's start there. Why did you turn it down?

PR: But I also want to say, before you get onto me about this. [laughter] It has been one of those plays I think in my life that I've thought I just never want to see it again. I never need to see it again, I've seen it so many times. And then I watched the production you did at the Globe and I was blown away by that, it was so powerful and so good and spoke to me in a way that it hadn't spoken to me before, that it completely changed my view on it. And [laughs], and then there was year, which was last year, there were three A Midsummer Night's Dreams and I saw them all within like two weeks of each other and they were all really good and really interesting.

MT: And all really different.

PR: Really different.



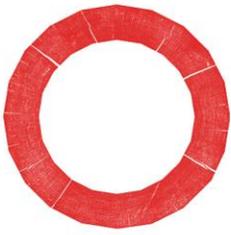
MT: I know and I think there is something. I remember when I, when that 2014 production, and likewise I was like 'oh A Midsummer Night's Dream, like, what am I going to learn from doing that one, I know that one, that's the one with the fairies and all the magic'. Like you say. And then you start to read it and you're like, I think there's a question about the darkness is there, about the play...

PR: Here you go, I'll read you the question. There's also this, there's two questions here. First about the popularity of the play. What is it about the idea of midsummer's eve and the mischief and the madness that plays out that you think so appeals to audiences, it's always a hugely popular play. I think why is the play so popular?

MT: Yeah.

PR: OK, and here's the other question I think you were pointing at. Dream is often pitched as light hearted and whimsical but between the captured Amazonian queen, a daughter threatened with a nunnery if she doesn't marry her father's choice, drugging and sexual harassment and use of misogynist and racist language towards women, what's your view of the dark side of the dream?

MT: Let's think about why last year might there have been three versions of A Midsummer Night's Dream? The country was in crisis, Brexit was happening, fracture was happening, there's no doubt that there was a clear... like if you put Dream in the title and you put Midsummer in a title, it sounds expansive, it sounds transformative, it sounds light, it's the one that you think you know. And it does end, the thing you remember, is the end. The thing you remember is a sense of unity, 'give me your hands if we be friends and Robin shall restore amends'. It ends with the fairy grace and blessing this place. You are left with a feeling that even though you've been through something traumatic, there is a healing that comes out at the end of it. So I think yes, the journey of the play takes you to the most... like if you were going to do this in reality, I mean the queen of the fairies gets drugged, somebody gets turned... like the bestial transformation of Bottom and this relationship between a queen and



a donkey, the darkness of the patriarchy, the abuse of power, the misuse of power, as somebody said there's the use of racist language in the play. I mean it kind of, he throws, everything is thrown up in the air. But it doesn't head to a place of whimsical, or for me it doesn't head to a place of whimsical fantastical unity, I do feel like there is some kind of, whatever happens by the end... We'll never know for example, when Titania wakes up from having been drugged and she turns to Oberon and says 'tell me how it came this night that I was sleeping here was found with these mortals on the ground' and then they go. We never know what that conversation was, we never know whether he tells her the truth, we never know actually whether their relationship is alright, because the next time they see them, you're reminded of this elevated place of 'we are their parents and original', we have to find balance, we have to restore some kind of balance, whatever friction or fraction... [laughs] I'm doing maths! Whatever...

PR: It's not your strong point.

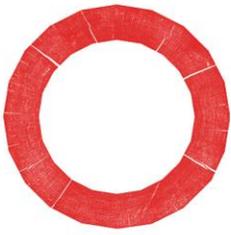
MT: [Laughs] It's really not!

PR: No it is, it's much better than my maths.

MT: But whatever friction or fracture has happened, at some point there was a responsibility to find a way to reconcile across difference. And I think you are left with... that's the bit that's the memory for everybody. When you're watching the play or reading the play, that's what I was reminded of was, you know that amazing speech by Titania about the seasons alter. This is the climate change speech, that the world is in chaos, cosmically, climatically... is that a word? Climatically.

PR: I'll think about it.

MT: Cosmically, ecologically, everything is in chaos. Domestically, the families are in chaos, the lovers are in chaos and where are these two figures, these mythic representations of parents that go we have to somehow find a place to find unity if we have any hope



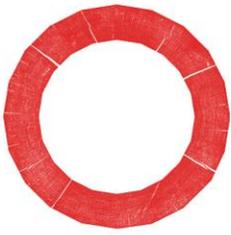
of balancing chaos and order. Like I don't think there's any... I know you're going to say something and I'll just quickly finish this. I don't think, for me the joy of it is it's so honest, he doesn't pretend that the world is full of really light fairies. I mean Puck is not a nice fairy. He doesn't pretend that the world is just one single place of light. He balances light and dark. For me, the honesty is that the melancholy and the joy, the darkness and the light, the chaos and the order, are always balanced, are always in opposition and when they are out of balance, somehow he uses the play to restore balance again, but doesn't deny the existence of both sides.

PR: That's really good.

MT: Oh thanks Paul! [laughs]

PR: I think that's really good, really true. And also I was interested in the fact you said dream, like the idea that a dream appeals perhaps in a time of chaos. And for me the play has only become more relevant for the very reason you just said, about climate change and you know the dangers, the dangers that are here, the catastrophe that already here and happening and unfolding. Something that... this is all my kind of take on it, but you know, we know something is happening in the world, we know something is happening to nature, it's obvious, we watch the news, we see the storms, we see the floods, the fires and it speaks to me of kind of ignoring. What our society does so well is like stay on the surface. Because it has to I suppose, like the economy is the surface. But underneath there is the dream and the unconscious and the subconscious and I feel for me the appeal of this play becomes that that is brought into the theatre in a very intriguing, mysterious, it starts to talk to those things that are within us as human beings that we can't focus on.

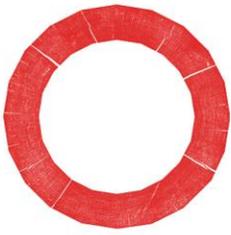
MT: So this is the moment where Oberon and Titania meet, 'ill met by moonlight, proud Titania, what jealous Oberon' and throughout the course of this scene, they argue yet again and Titania tries to explain to Oberon that they can't keep meeting like this because every time they meet, they argue and the more that they argue,



their arguing is causing such profound disfunction in the world, in the cosmos.

Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound.
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazèd world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension.
We are their parents and original.

MT: And again that goes back to that thing of how do we take responsibility for what is happening now. I mean you can't not hear the idea that 'rheumatic diseases do abound' without recognising the moment of time we are, in a global pandemic of this silent killer and as Paul said, we know about the floods and the fires, 'the childing autumn, angry winter change their wonted liveries'. It's hard not to hear the climate crisis we are in now also being referenced in A Midsummer Night's Dream through Titania. That line we are their parents and original, what he doesn't say is: we are the gods and goddesses, we are the king and queen of the fairies, the status that he gives to Oberon and Titania is parental. And what it does is immediately make your responsibility for chaos domestic, the chaos that happens in the home is also the microcosm of the macrocosm and representative of the chaos that happens in the world. And often, what's so brilliant is what he doesn't say, oh it's somebody else's problem, someone else will figure that, Titania goes we are their parents, we are the people, we have to take responsibility for that, so he, it's mythic and domestic all at the same time. Like when I think about our responsibility as parents, it's not somebody else's



responsibility to create adaptation, to create that home, like we are responsible. And of course he plays on all those levels because you've got the mythic level of Titania and Oberon, you've got the kind of mytho-historical level of Hippolyta and Theseus, and then this domestic level of Hermia playing the relationship out with her father or the lovers playing their relationship out with each other, and then there's, whether you think it's the underworld or wherever these fairies exist, these otherworldly creatures.

[Music plays]

PR: You can tell me whether this is right or not, but like a lot of it is moving around the idea of jealousy and eros. Eros. You know?

MT: What do you mean?

PR: Well, I mean [laughter], Michelle I refer to 'what, jealous Oberon'.

MT: Oh yes, yes.

PR: No, but there's jealousy...

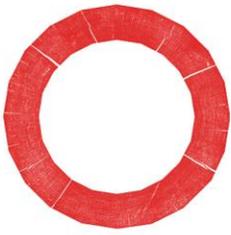
MT: And jealousy of the Indian boy.

PR: And then the jealousy between the lovers of who has Hermia's love.

MT: Yup. Yup.

PR: Like, very, very human but very, very powerful emotion, jealousy. Discuss.

MT: Discuss. Yeah. I don't think I've actually thought about... yes, well. What is the consequence of the green eyed monster? And in this play, it plays out in quite dark ways. You're right there is something around jealousy, but then I'm also going there's also something around power? Maybe there is something in the jealousy



and the power play between Hippolyta and Theseus, I mean Oberon is certainly jealous of Titania's relationship with the Indian boy.

PR: I suppose what I mean by bringing jealousy into the room is, as I said, that's very human and it causes a lot of destruction. Love, which it also centres around, is... can be destructive in a way. No, love can't. I suppose love is a... What can be done in the name of love is quite destructive. I think that's interesting that you said power. What do you do with jealousy? Do you try and get power over somebody because you are jealous?

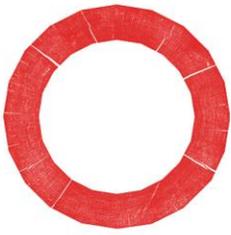
MT: Which is what plays out and that, that, and I'm just thinking about where the play begins. And what's hard for me is to remember how the written play because I do think there was something about that production that you talked about, that framed, created a framing device...

PR: I'd forgotten this and I probably I wouldn't even have been aware what was happening as I watched it, so this, this I think probably changed it a lot for me. Michelle, what is it?

MT: [laughs] Because if you take the play literally, the play begins with the imminent marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta, they make reference to the fact that Hippolyta has been captured, you can't really ignore the fact that she says 'this night of our solemnities', the word solemn is in there somewhere, but it's all geared around what we would naturally assume is a... a marriage in our modern understanding is a union, a happy, chosen union between two people that love each other on whatever degree of love they feel. But historically, there is an argument that that audience would have absolutely known the Herculean, the feats of Hercules.

PR: Yeah the twelve labours.

MT: The twelve labours, one of which was Hippolyta and her girdle. There's knowing that Hippolyta was the daughter of the god of war. You would have probably known that Hippolyta was a warrior, a



leader of an all-female army. That is quite a lot of dense information that immediately elevates Hippolyta to a place of independence and supreme power. And what that framing thing was for the 2014 production was basically do what they do in Hamlet, was effectively do a dumb show which was just to catch the audience up on what, just enough information to know what has happened before the play begins. So this battle between the sexes and then the capture of Hippolyta, and that within that capture, that is a really uncomfortable place to begin a play and a really uncomfortable place to begin a play that is about relationships, union and...

PR: Masculine, feminine...

MT: Masculine, feminine power dynamics. So if you don't have that, the density, of what those two figures represent, how the play begins is now fair Hippolyta, off we go to get married.

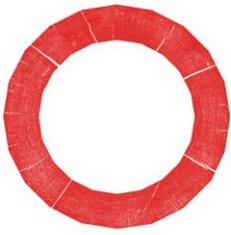
PR:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon. But oh, methinks how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

MT:

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night.
Four nights will quickly dream away the time.
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

MT: If now fair Hippolyta is an active way of trying to communicate to someone that you have just beaten in battle and now captured, that's a very different transaction. So it felt important, to that production, to just frame the play in a different way and of course



then you watch those power dynamics play out, within a patriarchal system, like there's no doubt that, you know, Hermia is owned by her father. Yeah, so where does jealousy sit within that power and the need to reclaim power when you feel like you have been disempowered. So Oberon somewhere feels disempowered by the relationship Titania has with her, there's a relationship she has with another woman and has promised to look after, and has the custody of this child, there's no doubt that Oberon is playing something out and he feels disempowered and in order to reclaim power he has to disempower Titania. Similarly with Theseus and Hippolyta, similarly with the lovers, throughout the going into the woods. But yeah, jealousy and power...

PR: It's interesting how he disempowers her.

MT: Oberon?

PR: Yeah.

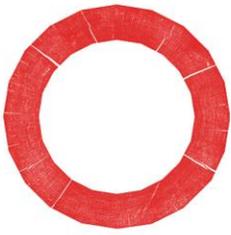
MT: Yeah.

PR: It's not imprisonment, which is another, it's not capture, you know what I mean?

MT: Well he drugs her. If you had the modern day parallel of rohypnol, you know, it's pretty dangerous what he does to her.

PR: Dangerous yes.

MT: But with the consequence that... I mean certainly, when I... it's some of the most beautiful, poetic language, when she speaks to Bottom about how much she loves him. But mind you she captures him, doesn't she? She finds a way to, she talks about the ivy, like wrapping him in ivy so that he's only hers. Like there is a possession that comes with that kind of love, it's not. Like now you've said that I sort of go where in the play is love equal, like... is he also looking at how a misunderstanding of love that is built on possession or ownership or power. Are there relationships in the



play where the love is equal? Maybe, maybe the lovers by the end, they reach a place of equality? But even that's questionable, isn't it?

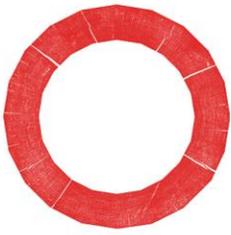
MT: Er, this is just picking up on that idea of capture that we were talking about, the capture of Hippolyta by Theseus, the capture of Titania by Oberon with the drug and this idea that Titania somehow also captures Bottom, she captures him with her love, she falls in love with him at first sight, she says 'I pray thee mortal, sing again' and I think that word mortal is something that I think we've sort of skirted around by talking about earthly creatures, domestic creatures, mythic creatures but there's a very clear distinction between the gods and then these mortals. Yeah so she says 'I pray thee mortal, sing again'. She says to him 'thou art wise and beautiful' and he responds by saying if I had enough wit to get out of this forest or out of this wood, he threatens to leave the wood. And Titania's response is:

Out of this wood do not desire to go.
Thou shalt remain here whether thou wilt or no.
I am a spirit of no common rate.
The summer still doth tend upon my state.
And I do love thee. Therefore go with me.

This idea that, we've heard her in the previous scene sort of chastise Oberon for the fact that their relationship is causing destruction in the world, she has ultimate power over the seasons. And here, now, she's using her power, her capacity to control the seasons as an example that if she can control the summer, she can certainly control a mortal. And that whether he wants to go or not, she will use her power to keep him here. And actually, by the end of the scene when she's said to the fairies, fairies take him away, she says:

Tie up my love's tongue. Bring him silently.

You know this idea of capture we've been talking about throughout the play, here yet again Titania's way of keeping hold of the thing



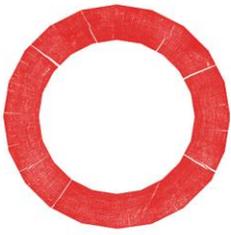
that she loves, having power over the thing that she loves is by capture, is by tying him up and bringing him silently.

[Music plays]

PR: So, this question: as with *As You Like It*, the characters retreat to the forest. What is it about the woods? Why does Shakespeare return his characters here again and again? What does it offer the characters in *Dream*? And I just... we were just talking about being in the patriarchal system and *Hermia* being owned by her father. And then she goes into the forest where the patriarchy doesn't exist in this world. Or does it? I don't know. So I'm going here she is in society, in a patriarchal world, but she disappears into a forest that Shakespeare uses again and again. Somewhere where the rules are different.

MT: Well they go into the wilderness don't they, they go into the wild. And somewhere in the middle of these plays, a descent into chaos occurs and usually that is, he takes the characters out of the context of their original setting, moves them into a wilderness and then somehow returns them. *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, it's not a pastoral comedy, early comedies but they'd go... he hasn't picked up on the pastoral theme in these plays yet, they are still quite located in some kind of city or the manor house in *Love's Labour's Lost*. He removes them into complete chaos or disorder but he doesn't relocate them. And then suddenly, like you say in *As You Like It*, something about what a forest represents, what the woods represent. The association with wilderness and darkness and danger, like what lives in the woods, the beasts, the... it's something about it's less known? There's something fantastical about the woods, something that's not quite literal about the woods, something otherworldly about the woods that has the wild of the wilderness about it where, as you say, all the rules, all the confines that we recognise within society, or within the city walls, it's not recognisable. Suddenly all bets are off.

PR: Well I suppose a society and a city being a place where nature has been beaten back and built on and... is forever keeping, in



order to have a society, forever keeping the chaos of human nature at bay, you know, have a police force, have the rules, have the government, whatever, everything that takes a society, and it's like in order to make that society we've had to build it, as civilisations grow, and we've built it on nature.

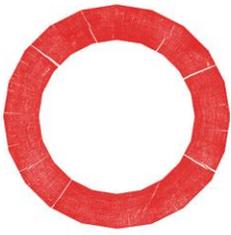
MT: Yeah that's right.

PR: But nature is always at the edge. And as soon as humans go, nature will just pop through. There's all those images of Chernobyl after the disaster and the people left and how nature reclaimed it but it doesn't take long for nature to reclaim a city if humans go.

MT: But also nature reclaims... you are reclaimed in nature. Like, just thinking about the question earlier about the cruelty of those lovers to each other. In the civil world, you don't... you probably wouldn't say some of those things, but suddenly you are at your most primal, most bestial, bestial, whichever way you say it, you become your most natural self and that is equally as savage as it is civil. There's something about the unconscious, needing to go to sleep and the lover's having to go to sleep and then when they wake up, there's that bit with Hippolyta and Theseus talking about being on the hunt, there's something about hunting that's also primal in all of us, whether it's hunting for a lover or hunting deer. I mean that comes up, that comes up in all of them: that's in Taming of the Shrew, Love's Labour's Lost, this one, this idea that we are, in our nature we are hunter gatherers.

PR: Mmm. Actually, while you're on it, just a small thing that you told me that you'd read about the idea that we are naturally foragers, hunters, foragers. And the idea that, you know, having now living in cities, I don't who wrote this, I don't know who wrote this but the forager in us, having no place to go, goes to the shopping centre.

MT: Well yeah, right now, I mean I'd love to know what the Amazon sales are in lockdown. Like online, forage, forage, forage, what do I need? What do I need? But the truth is we don't really need



anything anymore because we're not, we know where to get the berries and the leaves from, but um...

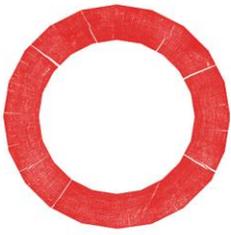
PR: Aldi.

MT: [Laughs]. When Hippolyta talks about 'I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder', like the idea of sweet thunder and musical discord, like constantly, yet again, it's this constant everything's in opposition to each other which I think is part of the appeal and maybe in this play, because it is, the chaos is so out of balance, you cannot cut the savagery, you cannot cut the darkness out of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There's something again so primal and animalistic about it, like he's constantly exploring, it feels like and certainly in *Dream*, it's like unapologetically going: we are attached to the gods and the goddesses, we are attached to nature, we are attached to the earthly realm of whatever that is, like all I've got in my head now is foraging, people foraging down aisles in Amazon [laughs]. But our capacity, because it's still... the meta-theatrical bit is it's still that amazing speech that Theseus has about our imagination. It's all made up! It's all reliant, totally reliant on the players and the audience engaging in an imaginative transaction. These people don't really exist. But what he puts on stage is your capacity, like I wonder when you watched the 2014, was that experience because the mythic in you was played out, the domestic in you was played out, the animalistic in you was played out, the primal in you was played out? He is just going... these are just actors, playing out all of these different elements of...

PR: That's true, I was exhausted.

MT: [Laughs].

PR: No, but it is all those things, I think that's... without knowing why, I mean I felt so, not refreshed, I was invigorated, and I felt a lot of powerful things watching it and I think it's for all of those reasons.



MT: And again you go, but it's just a bunch of people in a space telling a story. And as you say, when it's done really well, you saw it three times in the space of two weeks. I think there is something really transcendent and transformative, because transformation happens, you watch transformation play out when you're watching it. But it'd be interesting, we'll have to find that Theseus speech about imagination because where that comes in the play will not be an accident.

MT: So this is the speech that Theseus gives over midway through the play, the dream has happened, everyone has woken up and he gives this amazing speech about the imagination.

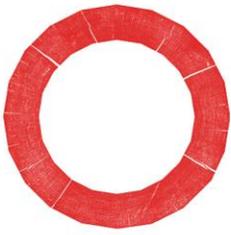
PR: The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to heaven.
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination.

[Music plays]

PR: Right here is some, another question. The Mechanicals are a bit of a marmite bunch, what do you make of them and their roll in the play? We don't need to answer this, we will not be forced to answer.

MT: [Laughs]

PR: Because they're like a lot of humour comes from the mechanicals, they're an incredible creation I think and there is a lightness that they bring.



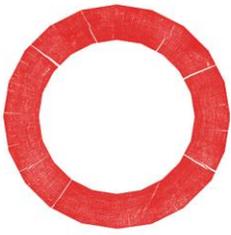
MT: There is also but also they're the every people, they are the people off the street, the local am dram company that really wants to put on a play and really wants to impress people by putting on a play, it goes back to that metatheatrical thing. At the same time as you've got gods and goddesses and these really cheeky, naughty ethereal fairies and warriors and the huntress and Amazonian figures, all like really kind of huge ideas and representations, then you've got tinker, snug the joiner. Like he constantly reminds you you are also these people too. You are also the people that like telling fairy stories to each other and like putting on costumes. It's like. And I think...

PR: Do you think they're the most human?

MT: Yeah and I think when they're done well that is why you love them because most people will know someone who does amateur dramatics.

PR: Or knows someone who wants to play the lion too.

MT: Wants to play the lion too. Give me the lions... exactly, exactly. But also they're nto without myth, I mean bottom is like straight out of Ovid, what happens to Bottom, he gets transformed into a beast. The Pyramus and Thisbe, again straight out of Ovid. They go to these mythic places, this idea that we're not all capable of living mythically or thinking mythically, he's... I think they're the most beautiful tool of Shakespeare going... and they come in really late as well. Isn't it interesting, right, here we are, however many minutes into this episode and now we're talking about the mechanicals, exactly in the same way that he's gone: myth, history, battle and then he goes dum-de-dum de-dum de-dum de-dum, here we have people that just like telling stories. And... not just like telling stories, they live for telling stories, they make their money out of telling stories exactly the same way that the King's Men were doing at exactly the same time, it's so self-referential. That Flute stuff at the end, the thing about moonshine and I was in I don't know how many performances of that show that I did and I was, was always



so, it was so moving that bit and hilarious, but it absolutely has to be done, and by being done well I mean it has to be so painfully human. And I think that's the danger with those, is you sort of make them into these commedia dell'arte caricature figures when actually they've got to be the most human characters in the play. So that, for an actor, that takes a stripping off of everything as opposed to adding on.

[Music plays]

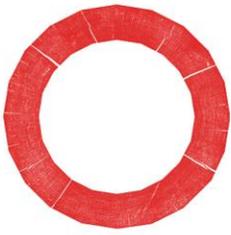
PR: So a couple of questions to finish off. The character of Puck is one of Shakespeare's most distinctive and puckish is a word that has passed into popular parlance... popular parlance... to describe certain characters or behaviours. What does the character of Puck and puckish tendencies mean to you? Is it an archetype Shakespeare is playing with or something more specific?

MT: OK, so maybe this comes back to: why didn't you want to play Puck?

PR: As an actor it depends where you are in life I think as to what appeals to you, what you're interested in following. And I think certainly at the time, it didn't appeal to me, it didn't like spark anything in me to go: yes I want to play that or I need to play that or I need to investigate that. And I think it's... that's mainly how I've made decisions when I've been allowed... what I mean by allowed, because sometimes you take what you're... you have to take things for different reasons, but the time's I have choice, that's the instinct I'm following. And I think Puck didn't light anything in me in those days.

MT: Mmmm.

PR: And the same with, at the time, at the time, with Lysander. When Lysander was offered I had a similar thing. And also it depends what precedes, like what was I doing, and I can't remember now, if I was doing a, it depends on what play I was doing before or what I was investigating before, to what I then want



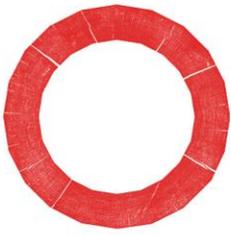
to go and investigate afterwards, but also having said that, like you said, when you started *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you weren't sure, you sort of went in with a bit of uncertainty about whether there was something you wanted to investigate and then you discovered something transformative. So I think sometimes entering into a play or a piece or a character with an ambivalence can lead you in really surprising ways.

MT: That's yeah, because actually he does play with... one of the things in the questions is about what these are representations of. So you have some named characters like Helena, Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius. Then you have some that are clearly like... Puck is a representation. Or Bottom, Snug. There's these fairytale names that somehow feel like they could create a distance between you and them. But rather than getting to an idea of Puck, what is the Puck in you? And I think, when I think about... so the most recent one I saw was Sean's at the Globe whenever it was, like 2019, where he had everyone play Puck. Like the idea that we're all, we all have the capacity to be that puckish and that cheeky and that mischievous. And then the one that I remember where it was...

PR: Trickster.

MT: Trickster, yeah. Yeah and again but those are representations aren't they, what are they called? Archetypes, right. But then I remember watching Jonathan Slinger's Puck at the RSC years ago and it was again, that lesson in going oh yeah of course. In my memory, this may not be true, but in my memory, he was this really disgruntled, dishevelled, just this rebel basically. And that famous line, 'I go, I go, look how I go'. Was just like [unhappily] 'I go, I go, look how I go'. Like he was just so sort of annoyed and resentful of having to constantly be in service to this narcissist, that's a judgement, I don't know whether Oberon's a narcissist but there's a...

PR: Unbelievable.



MT: [laughs]. But that actually, having said that, that is a... how, how with 400 years of this play being in existence and it being the most popular play, the one that is done the most, it's really hard not to judge it, how do you not judge these characters? And I think Puck is one of those that... we have so many ideas of what Puck could be, of course we do, as we should because it would as many ideas as we have of Shakespeare or have of the characters that he writes. But how do you approach it so that it's the most, it's where you and Puck and the Puck in you meet? Like I wonder what your Puck would be like now.

PR: I'm not showing you.

MT: [laughs] Probably similar to Jonathan Slinger.

PR: [laughs] Right now? Probably.

[Music plays]

IG: That's it from us but we'll be back soon with another episode of the Shakespeare Diaries. Michelle and Paul will be discussing Love's Labour's Lost, so if you have any questions to put to them, get in touch with us on social media and we'll pass them along!

And in these unprecedented times, our doors are temporarily closed, but we are finding and creating ways to stay connected and hopeful with you. As a charity that receives no government subsidy, we need donations to help us to continue to thrive in the future. Please donate what you can to help us explore how Shakespeare can continue to inspire hope and creativity.

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