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Cymbeline (Arkangel Shakespeare - Fully Dramatized) (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)



Synopsis

[Full-Cast Audio Theater Dramatization. Sophie Thompson is Imogen, and Ben Porter is Posthumus. Cymbeline is played by Jack Shepherd while Suzanne Bertish is the Queen. Stephen Mangan plays Cloten, and Ron Cook plays Iachimo.] This strange, dark romance includes two songs composed by Shakespeare that are amongst the most beautiful in the English language. Imogen, the daughter of King Cymbeline, is persecuted by her wicked stepmother, the Queen, and by Cloten, the Queen's foolish son. Disguised as a boy, she sets out to find her husband, the banished Posthumus. On her journey, she unwittingly meets her two brothers, stolen from the court as infants and brought up in rustic innocence, unaware of their princely identities. Posthumus, meanwhile, has been convinced by the villainous Iachimo that Imogen is unfaithful to him.

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Customer Reviews

"Cymbeline" is my favourite Shakespeare play. It's also probably his loopyest. It has three plots, managing to drag in a banishment, a murder, a wicked queen, a moment of almost sheer pornography, a full-on battle between the Romans and the British, a spunky heroine, her jealous but not-really-all-that-bad husband, some fantastic poetry and Jupiter himself descending out of heaven on an eagle to tell the husband to pull his finger out and get looking for his wife. Finally, just when your head is spinning with all the cross-purposes and dangling resolutions, Shakespeare pulls it all together with shameless neatness and everybody lives happily ever after. Except for the wicked queen, and her son, who had his head cut off in Act 4. "Cymbeline" is, then, completely nuts, but it

manages also to be very moving. Quentin Tarantino once described his method as "placing genre characters in real-life situations" - Shakespeare pulls off the far more rewarding trick of placing realistic characters in genre situations. Kicking off with one of the most brazen bits of expository dialogue he ever created, not even bothering to give the two lords who have to explain the back story an ounce of personality, Shakespeare quickly recovers full control and races through his long, complex and deeply implausible narrative at a headlong pace. The play is outrageously theatrical, and yet intensely observed. Imogen's reaction on reading her husband's false accusation of her infidelity is a riveting mixture of hurt and anger; she goes through as much tragedy as a Juliet, yet is less inclined to buckle and snap under the pressure. When she wakes up next to a headless body that she believes to be her husband, her aria of grief is one of the finest WS ever wrote.

Cymbeline is among Shakespeare's last five plays, four of which are romances: "Pericles," "The Winter's Tale," "The Tempest," and "Cymbeline." "Cymbeline" is the least performed of the four; the plot is complicated, and the characters are mostly one dimensional (except for the heroine Imogen and the Machiavellian Iachimo). The play is ambitious, too, and entails all of Shakespeare's favorite subjects: love, loss, treachery, the unequal conflict between the good and the evil, and the fragile balance between men and women. However, Imogen is one of the Bard's inspired creations, on the level of Rosalind, but put through a far more harrowing experience. Helen Faucet, the 19th century actress, suggested the play should be retitled "Imogen, Princess of Britain." She has a point. The reason to read the play (so say the critics) is for Shakespeare's particularly exquisite verse. "Cymbeline" is perhaps an acquired taste, but worth seeing for unsinkable Imogen, who has been played by a number of great actors down through the years, including Vanessa Redgrave and Dame Judi Dench. No less than Charles Van Doren has counted it among his five favorite plays by William Shakespeare. More about that later. The story is reminiscent of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs--with added pitfalls. Imogen's stepmother, the evil queen, wants her to marry her son, clueless and irredeemable Cloten. Against the Queen's wishes, and that of her father, King Cymbeline, she marries Posthumus. Posthumus is then banished from Britain. Before departing for Rome, he gives a bracelet to Imogen. In Rome, Posthumus meets the cunning interloper Iachimo, who tells him that his wife can be made unfaithful.

Cymbeline is one of Shakespeare's least performed and least read plays. You do not stumble on it, you work your way through Shakespeare's opus and finally get there. The historical context is the war between Britain and the Roman Empire, and the action is hot and heavy, requiring five acts and

twenty-seven scenes. Perhaps it is this complexity of plot that retarded Shakespeare's character development. Fewer lines have entered our lexicon from this play than most. Two exceptions are "the tongue is sharper than the sword," and to have "a bellyful of fighting." It is an excellent tragedy, however, combining elements of King Lear and elements of Othello. In its mystic elements it also resembles The Tempest. The core of the plot is the bet between Posthumous, the king's son, and Iachimo, who wagers ten thousand ducats that he can seduce Posthumous' wife, Imogen. Posthumous, in turn, wagers a ring that Imogen has given him that Iachimo will not succeed. Initially, we are amused by the idea, but upon further reflection, it is clear that the gambit cannot have a happy ending. Either the seduction is successful, breaking up the marriage, or it isn't, in which case Iachimo will certainly claim that he has seduced Imogen, simply to win the ring. In the process he sets himself the Iago-like task of converting love to hate. The play is also full of classic Shakespearean gadgetry, including a potion that causes a trance resembling death, mystical soothsayers, the intervention of gods, women disguised as men, and a historical tableau which would have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience. It is a quintessential Shakespearean play, comprising nearly all of the classical elements of tragedy.

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