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***Love's Labour's Lost* et *Love's Labour's Won* : Conversation avec Christopher Luscombe**

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Alors que la comédie de Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, vient d'être mise au programme de l'agrégation (2014-2015 et 2015-2016), il se trouve, par un heureux hasard, que la pièce figure en ce moment à l'affiche du Royal Shakespeare Theatre à Stratford-upon-Avon. Christopher Luscombe, le metteur scène, relève un pari audacieux : pour la première fois, il monte ensemble *Love's Labour's Lost* et son hypothétique suite, *Love's Labour's Won*, pièce dont nous ne savons quasiment rien mais que Francis Meres, maître d'école et grammairien, cite dès 1598 dans son *Palladis Tamia* où il fait l'inventaire des pièces et poèmes à l'actif du dramaturge. Comme Meres ne mentionne pas *The Taming of the Shrew*, on s'est demandé à juste titre si cette dernière ne correspondait pas à l'énigmatique *Love's Labour's Won*, dont le titre peut évoquer la fin heureuse des amours tumultueuses de Katherina et de Petruchio.

Si séduisante fût-elle, cette hypothèse va être invalidée en 1953, année où, grâce à la découverte d'un certain Solomon Pottesman, *Love's Labour's Won* réapparaît aux côtés de *Love's Labour's Lost* sur le fragment d'un inventaire du Registre des Libraires datant d'août 1603.¹ Sur ce document, *The Taming of a Shrew* est bel et bien citée dans la liste. Désormais, après de longs débats entre critiques, il semble que ce soit *Much Ado About Nothing* qui réunisse le plus de suffrages. Écrite aux alentours de 1598-99, cette comédie comporte en effet plusieurs points communs avec *Love's Labour's Lost* dont elle partage le goût du mot d'esprit (« wit »), l'amour du verbe et l'exubérance. Autre atout non négligeable en faveur de cette hypothèse, le dénouement joyeux et relativement traditionnel de cette pièce par opposition à la fin, plus

¹ William C. Carroll indique que c'est T.W. Baldwin, Shakespearien ayant pignon sur rue, qui découvrit ce fragment (Shakespeare 39-40, Introduction), alors que ce fut ce Solomon Pottesman, passionné de livres anciens, qui dénicha la fameuse liste établie en 1603 par Christopher Hunt et qui la montra ensuite à Baldwin.

grinçante, de *Love's Labour's Lost*. Les partisans de *Much Ado* tiennent donc là un argument de poids. La conclusion si peu festive des événements qui se déroulent en Navarre s'explique en effet beaucoup mieux s'il ne s'agit effectivement que d'un dénouement provisoire laissant attendre une suite.

De fait, les personnages de *Much Ado* ne sont clairement plus ceux de *Love's Labour's Lost* puisque l'on passe de la Navarre du roi Ferdinand à la Messine de Leonato sans justification ni logique apparentes. Cela dit, il n'en est pas moins vrai que le couple formé par Beatrice et Benedick n'est pas sans rappeler le tandem Berowne/Rosaline, tout en joutes verbales, piques acerbes et répliques assassines. Par conséquent, même s'il n'existe aucune preuve irréfutable que *Love's Labour's Lost* et *Much Ado* formaient à l'origine un diptyque, l'idée de les réunir ne pouvait que s'avérer tentante pour une Royal Shakespeare Company toujours avide d'innovations.

Gregory Doran, son directeur artistique depuis septembre 2012, avait besoin d'un metteur en scène chevronné pour une double affiche jamais encore expérimentée au théâtre et son choix s'est logiquement porté sur Christopher Luscombe, homme à la fois énergique, inventif et passionné par les ressorts multiples de la comédie. L'année 2014 coïncidant avec la célébration du centenaire de la Grande Guerre, Doran lui a proposé de situer l'action des deux pièces de part et d'autre de la guerre de 14-18². Or, cette idée qui pouvait surprendre au départ fonctionne en réalité plutôt bien, car chacune des comédies aborde en creux le thème de la guerre : alors que la première, sans jamais les nommer, évoque les guerres de religion en France, la seconde s'ouvre sur le retour victorieux à Messine de Don Pedro et de ses compagnons d'armes.

Le metteur en scène, qui procède essentiellement par allusions et qui prend garde à ne jamais forcer le trait, a toutefois décidé d'ouvrir *Love's Labour's Won* sur un décor rappelant de manière explicite la Grande Guerre. À la vue des lits d'hôpitaux alignés dans la pièce d'une vaste demeure anglaise, on pense en effet à *Downton Abbey* avant de se laisser emporter par un tourbillon de dialogues aussi vifs que rythmés et précis. Christopher Luscombe respecte le texte qu'il interprète comme une partition, et on lui en sait gré.

² Robin Phillips en 1978, Ian Judge en 1993 et Trevor Nunn en 2003, avaient déjà choisi de situer les événements de *Love's Labour's Lost* dans le contexte de l'Angleterre édouardienne, juste avant le début de la Grande Guerre.

Commencées au cours de l'été 2014, les répétitions ont font place à la première qui a eu lieu le 23 septembre. Le succès a tout de suite été au rendez-vous, et pour cause : refusant tout élitisme, le metteur en scène fait de *Love's Labour's Lost*, premier volet du diptyque, une comédie légère dont les moments forts sont la balalaïka du bal des Moscovites et l'opérette joyeuse des Neuf Preux. De manière plus générale, la pièce est scandée par les accents d'une musique entraînante et omniprésente, celle du compositeur Nigel Hess, fidèle de la RSC. Seule l'arrivée de Marcadé à la fin vient assombrir la suite quelque peu chaotique des festivités du royaume de Navarre. Le roi et ses amis, jusque-là aussi immatures que brillants et gaffeurs, se métamorphosent dès lors pour abandonner leur pays de cocagne même si, a priori, rien ne les destinait à affronter les épreuves de l'existence. Désormais, fini de rire. La mine grave, parés d'uniformes militaires, ils quittent la scène pour s'en aller prendre part aux combats qui, quatre années durant, vont ravager la France et l'Angleterre.

Dès le début de *Love's Labour's Won*, les mêmes acteurs, à l'exception notable de Leah Whitaker (la princesse de France), réapparaissent, comme transfigurés par les épreuves et la souffrance. Mais on retrouve la même atmosphère de music-hall tandis que l'hilarant Costard (Nick Haverson) se réincarne en Dogberry, perpétuant ainsi les lapsus, quiproquos et autres jeux de langage inaugurés dans le monde clos et utopique imaginé par Shakespeare. Néanmoins, les jeunes gens semblent cette fois plus mûrs, moins insoucians, et ils prennent enfin l'amour au sérieux. La scène hilarante où Berowne, dissimulé dans un sapin de Noël, écoute ses amis faire l'éloge de Beatrice, ne nous fait pas pour autant oublier les enjeux du mariage au sein de la bonne société. La seconde pièce se clôt ainsi sur les unions que Shakespeare avait suspendues à la fin de *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Soucieux de cohérence, le metteur en scène abandonne Navarre et Messine au profit d'une Angleterre résolument édouardienne. Le décor est celui de Charlecote, domaine du très protestant Sir Thomas Lucy, où Shakespeare, selon la légende, se serait adonné au braconnage³. Ainsi Chris Luscombe crée-t-il une forme de continuité entre les deux comédies sans jamais forcer l'interprétation, préférant les subtils jeux d'échos à une symétrie rigide et systématique.

³ Cette histoire fut d'abord diffusée par Richard Davies à la fin du 16^e siècle avant d'être relayée par Nicholas Rowe au début du 17^e (Dobson et Wells 266).

L'entretien que m'a aimablement accordé le metteur en scène à l'issue du spectacle du 25 octobre 2014 éclaire la vision, les partis-pris et les choix de la RSC. Il met en lumière l'importance du jeu, du rythme, de l'interprétation, et vient à toutes fins utiles rappeler ce qu'est le théâtre, dont la fonction est de montrer autant que de dire. De ce point de vue, Christopher Luscombe aura réalisé ici un vrai travail d'orfèvre. Muni de toutes les éditions récentes des pièces qu'il fait revivre, il s'est efforcé d'obtenir l'adhésion du public, n'hésitant pas à couper, relire, réviser un texte parfois ardu à la lecture, mais qui fut d'abord écrit pour être joué... et pour faire rire. Ce qui peut paraître abscons ou verbeux dans les répliques et les tirades d'origine s'éclaire alors comme par magie sur la scène. Le plaisir n'est alors plus un vain mot. N'oublions pas Shakespeare—comme Christopher Luscombe—avait d'abord été un acteur...

Your current production of Love's Labour's Lost, which has sometimes been regarded as an elitist play, is very funny and highly enjoyable. Do you regard it as a popular play?

I didn't want it to be oversimplified, but I think *Love's Labour's Lost* should be popular. It's a dazzling piece of comic writing. Of course, it must always have been enjoyed on different levels, but it's got some very broad comedy in it—think of the Nine Worthies, Costard, Jaquenetta—that's not designed to appeal to a very... rarefied audience, that appeals to the man in the street I think.

I was interested in the idea of pairing two comedies, Love's Labour's Lost and Much Ado which is presented here as the play behind the mysterious title Love's Labour's Won, and of casting the same actors in both. But the cross-casting is not exactly cross-casting, as it turns out. There are parallels, of course, but similar roles are sometimes played by two different actors in Love's Labour's Lost and Love's Labour's Won.

Yes, I first thought it should be Nathaniel and the Friar, Dull and Dogberry. Then I thought no, it's not the same person. For example, Dogberry relates more to Costard than to Constable Dull. Will Kemp originally played both Costard and Dogberry. So I decided to be free and easy: sometimes I suggested links, and sometimes not. Sometimes it's interesting to see an actor tackling two contrasting roles, but only up to a point.

You're playing with our expectations!

Yes! It's when you're actually staging the play that you really discover what's going on and just how much there's a link (or not) between the two.

Who had the idea of producing the two plays as a diptych?

Oh, it was Greg Doran. I'd been in *Love's Labour's Lost* as an actor in 1993, in Ian Judge's production of the play, and I was intrigued by the notion of this mystery play *Love's Labour's Won*. It was Greg who said look, there's a theory that it could be *Much Ado* (a play I also appeared in at Stratford, in 1996). But it was no more than an experiment to put the two together. That was all it was meant to be. Strangely, no one's paired them before, as far as we know. But I wouldn't want to make any great claims. I do think there are links and resonances. Shakespeare probably had *Love's Labour's Lost* in his mind when he wrote *Much Ado*. There are certainly echoes between the two.

How did you decide to set the two plays on both sides of the First World War?

Once again, it was Greg's suggestion. It seemed a good way for the RSC to mark the centenary of the War.

What about the main couples in Love's Labour's Lost and Love's Labour's Won? Did you notice many similarities between them?

The main couples, Rosaline and Berowne, Beatrice and Benedick, are very similar; even though in the first play they are more naïve. Indeed, they always seem younger to me.

There is one major difference, though. In Love's Labour's Lost, Berowne speaks in verse whereas in Love's Labour's Won, Benedick says that he "was not born under a rhyming planet" (5.2.30-31)!

There are stylistic differences, yes. But their personalities are similar. And in fact Berowne has just as much trouble writing a love sonnet as his counterpart in *Much Ado*. They have very similar soliloquies on the subject. Edward Bennett has a natural flair for the language. He's played Shakespeare a lot before. He played Roderigo in *Othello*, Demetrius in *The Dream*, Laertes in *Hamlet*... He also famously understudied the lead in *Hamlet* (and went on, to great acclaim) so it seemed only fair that he should now have the opportunity to play both these star parts.

In the first part of the diptych, spectators can see poppies in the background. Are they intended to be an allusion to the war?

It was an accident if I'm honest! Originally, we did intend to have a poppy field in the second half, but it all felt a bit obvious. Then I was looking for a way of heightening the romantic duet in the Nine Worthies, and we had the idea of the ensemble scattering petals. That came in very late—in preview in fact. I like it, because it's funny, but also rather beautiful, which is an unusual combination. Even later in the preview period, we thought that we needed another element at the back of the stage. So we 'planted' some poppies. We put a bit of light on them, so that people could make the connection. But I wanted it to feel suggested rather than stated. The comic petal drop takes on another meaning when the couples separate, and the men go off to war. I was very nervous about the ending being too heavy-handed. I wanted it to be simple. The men enter in uniform and then they march off. We don't need to say anything. It's quite a big leap to imply that the men are going to serve in the trenches, but I think making it something as particular as that actually makes the unexpectedly sombre ending of the play more believable, and—perhaps—moving.

Intriguingly, in the diptych, the quartet becomes a duet. I mean that there are four couples in Love's Labour's Lost, reduced to just two in Love's Labour's Won. Since the two plays are paired, are we to understand that two couples have been killed during the war?

I wouldn't want to be too definite about that. I've always thought they were different people really. In my view, the men all died in the War. But I don't think that I want the audience to know that. You can make up your own mind about that.

How about the many cuts in the text? I suppose that with a text that has so many puns and difficulties for a modern audience they are inevitable but, for instance, in Love's Labour's Lost, we learn in 5.1 that Katharine's sister died of love. Why did you cut the allusion?

How long have you got? ... That was cut originally because I felt it was an unnecessary digression. Frankly, I was not very interested in it—after all, the death of an off-stage character is of limited significance for an audience. Then the actresses in the scene were very concerned to honour this serious strand of plot, which throws an interesting light on the character of Katharine. So I said, of course, let's try it. We put it in. We then got into a tangle with it. The problem is that the audience has to

know that we are talking about Cupid. ‘Cupid killed your sister’, that’s what Rosaline means when she tells Katherine “‘A killed your sister” (5.2.13). Many people in the audience, I believe, would not have registered that we are talking about Cupid. They would just hear the words “killed your sister”, and assume that she has been murdered. The truth is that people don’t die of love. It’s an Elizabethan concept, and not one that registers with a modern audience—or indeed in the Edwardian world of the production. Moreover, if Katherine’s sister died, it was very hard to believe that the women in the scene wouldn’t show more sympathy. So it’s difficult to make it real. The girls seem to say it rather casually and then move on. My strong conviction is that the play should be festive until the moment when it turns serious. Perhaps a death in the family was less of a deal in Elizabethan society (although surely the death of a sister would be traumatic at any time?), but certainly today it would take us down into very painful territory. I wouldn’t normally resist anything that adds to the drama, but in this particular instance I feel that Shakespeare wants everything to be light until he twists the knife with the news of the King’s death. At that earlier point in the show, it would have preempted Marcadé’s speech. I have a feeling that if Shakespeare were here he would say that the banter about Katherine’s sister was meant to show how the girls tease each other rather than the opening up of a wound. And it’s very hard to believe these women could ever discuss the death of a young woman dispassionately. It’s a very light comedy, I think, and it’s about people who have money and time and leisure... The sky is blue, the sun shines, and then everything changes at the end. That may sound simplistic, but I think one has to honour the tone of the writing, and I think the tone is comic—mainly high comedy, some low comedy—but comic nonetheless.

I also wondered why you chose to cut Holofernes’s reply to Berowne in the pageant of the Nine Worthies: “This is not generous, not gentle, not humble” (5.2.614). I’ve always thought that this line made him human... He is finally less silly than we imagine him to be.

I take your point. It’s just... choices. I think I prefer him to be ridiculous and pompous to the end. We did try the line, but it felt like a repeat of the sequence with Sir Nathaniel, who forgets his words. I didn’t want the audience to feel sorry for him. We should feel sorry for Sir Nathaniel, whose nerves get the better of him, I think, but not for Holofernes. We love him, but we also think he’s ridiculous.

Can I also ask you about another cut? You removed the spring song at the end of Love's Labour's Lost. How do you account for your choice?

Well, I just trimmed the owl and the cuckoo refrain. I thought it was too trivial given the First World War setting. In Shakespeare's play, the lyrics of the song are about the seasons, and the eternal cycle of nature. I wanted to slant this so that it became a patriotic song, a song about everything we love about England, and why we want to defend our country. I was inspired by the wartime song "Keep the Home Fires Burning" which is about ordinary village life, and how that's worth fighting for. So I kept all the lines about the changing seasons, but simply cut the rather whimsical tag about the birds, which is delightful, but doesn't really fit in with our setting. I replaced it with lines from Berowne's sonnet, in which he talks of faithfulness to a lover, and, by implication, fidelity to one's country.

You chose a Christmas setting in Love's Labour's Won. How did that come about?

Simply because the First World War came to an end in November. So I thought that *Love's Labour's Won* could start about month later in December, when the men are returning home. Moreover, *Love's Labour's Lost* is presumably set in the height of summer, and I wanted a complete contrast between the two plays. *Much Ado* is usually set in high summer, and it was useful for us to explore a different season and see what it gave us. It helped to make the production feel distinctive from the first day of rehearsal.

So the link between Love's Labour's Lost and Love's Labour's Won here would be Berowne's notion that the ladies "dash[ed]" the masque of Muscovites "like a Christmas comedy" (5.2.462).

Indeed that's one of the very few references in Shakespeare to Christmas.

Benedick looks like a green man when he is seen emerging from the Christmas tree!

Oh yes, I hadn't thought of that, but it's an interesting idea.

Originally, Love's Labour's Lost is set in a utopian landscape. In your production, everything happens in a stately home, in Charlecote Park, an Elizabethan construction remodelled in the 19th century, and

which is actually situated only a few miles away from Stratford. Why did you choose Charlecote as a setting for both plays?

Once I'd been given the concept by Greg of doing the plays either side of the War I thought it would make sense to unify them. The action of both plays takes place on an estate. I thought we have to be in England to make sense of the soldiers returning home – and anyway I think that's the world that Shakespeare's really writing about, for all that he suggests an exotic location—Navarre in one play, Messina in the other. And anyway any stately home is really an attempt to create a utopia. During this part of the year in Stratford the audience tends to be a local audience rather than tourists, and I was keen to appeal to them. A third play is going to be staged here shortly, with the same company of actors, called *The Christmas Truce*, and it's set largely in Warwickshire during the Great War. I was looking through books about stately homes with Simon Higlett, the designer, and we decided that we should set our plays in Warwickshire too. We looked at local stately homes. And then I remembered Charlecote. As you say, it was partly remodelled in the Victorian period (which made sense of our Edwardian family living there), but Shakespeare would still recognize the house today. The silhouette hasn't changed much since 1600. Shakespeare was (allegedly) arrested for poaching deer in the grounds!

And there are also echoes with the hunting scene in Love's Labour's Lost!

Exactly! I was pleased to have that connection, and deer still graze in the Park. I should also mention the motto carved above the fireplace in the library: "live to learn and learn to live". That pretty much sums up the King's oath.

The library reminds us of Montaigne's study or of the first scene of Dr Faustus. Yet, there are lots of gags in your production. The teddy bear, in the sonnet scene in Love's Labour's Lost, works very well for instance.

That was the designer's idea! Simon drew the costumes, and he always adds little character details. Do you know *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh, which features a teddy bear named Aloysius? I said it would be a nice reference and then I was worried that perhaps it was a bit too cute. We then showed the drawing of the teddy bear to the actor who plays Dumaine, Tunji Kasim. He liked it a lot, so I decided to try it. There is an element, I think, in the play that the boys are like children,

really. They haven't grown up, and I wanted a slight feeling of boys' boarding school about their scenes.

It's a play about immaturity...

Yes! And somehow, the teddy bear seems to work. It led to a lot of good jokes, and I wanted that scene to be really funny. I hope the jokes all stem from the text and the situation.

How did you have the idea of staging the sonnet scene on the roof?

I said to the designer that if we set the plays at Charlecote we could have the same basic structure for both, but we could use different rooms for different scenes. I wanted to have Don Jon's billiards scene and then go to the drawing room for the party scene in *Love's Labour's Won*, and the hunting scene and the bowling scene in *Love's Labour's Lost*... I suppose I just thought the sonnet scene should be the epitome of romance. The perfect summer night... So I said hang on a minute! We should go up on the roof! I went there with the designer, and it was fabulous. It's another *Brideshead* reference really. And there's a great speech in Alan Bennett's play *Forty Years On*, which gives an account of young men standing on the roof of a stately home listening to the nightingales on a summer night, months before the outbreak of the Great War. I wanted to reference that as well.

In the play, Berowne says he's like a demigod sitting in the sky (4.3.71). Traditionally stage-directors have him hide himself in a tree, and the other three also end concealing themselves behind a tree.

Yes we had to change the line saying that the King of Navarre was in the bush ("sweet leaves, shade folly" 4.3.36). It became 'sweet night' instead, which works just as well I think! It seemed silly to ditch the idea for the sake of one line.

What about this setting with the chimney? Is there a link to Jaques's 'seven ages of man' speech in As You Like It, in which the lover is said to be "sighing like furnace"?

Oh, I didn't think of that—well done!

Apart from the lavish setting, what also struck me in your production is the importance given to music as you seem to turn this comedy into musical. Was this deliberate on your part?

Well, it is a musical really—it contains several songs and snatches of songs. And if you're lucky enough to have a composer like Nigel Hess on board, you want to give him plenty of scope. I was very aware that, in the play, Moth has a song—Peter McGovern, who plays Moth, is a wonderful singer—and there's a substantial song at the end too, "When daisies pied". In *Much Ado* there's a dance at the end, and there's "Sigh no more"... Shakespeare clearly wanted a strong musical element. I did push that a bit. There's probably more music than there would normally be. I was interested in the way music, fashion and art changed in the time span of the productions. It was fun for Nigel to pastiche music of the period. Music is a thread through the two plays.

You seem to be more generous than Shakespeare with the characters. Originally, and especially in Love's Labour's Lost, they are being interrupted all the time.

You mean the heckling in the Nine Worthies? Yes, I included very little of that. I was very bold about it. I think that it's a killer for the comedy and for our sympathy with the men... You could very well argue that the comedy isn't everything, or that the men are flawed (as indeed they are), but I felt that the play was too long, and it needed shaping. And I think we have to like the men! I imagine that in Shakespeare's days, heckling in the theatre was acceptable. Today, no one would stand up and interrupt the show. And it would not have been the case in Edwardian England either.

This allowed you to stage the masque of Muscovites with the Red Army singing and dancing as in some touristic show! Of course this is very funny and hugely entertaining. But if we come back to the original text of the comedy, even this particular show is aborted. Isn't Love's Labour's Lost a play about interruption, about abortion as it were? It seems to me that things have been smoothed out in your production. Am I right?

In the original, the Nine Worthies just gets going and then... they're stopped! So I removed the initial interruptions. And then, in rehearsal, I thought that maybe I should not be quite so stringent with the cuts. So I put back some of the original interruptions. I even did it with an audience. But the previews confirmed my feelings. I just don't like it. Shakespeare wanted it to work, and Marcadé doesn't really score if things have already turned sour.

So there must be a clear-cut contrast between what happens before Marcadé comes in, and what happens after?

Yes, before Marcadé's entrance, the play must be festive. But I can see this is quite bold. Granted, the men are childish and behave badly. One of the actors said that the interruption was quite useful to understand why the women reject the men at the end. But only up to a point. You don't reject someone because he's heckled in the theatre! It's a bit trivial. So I said, let's get rid of the interruptions. I suppose I had the courage of my convictions, really. And the play is very long. If you do the whole thing, it's 3h20. I wanted to make it a little more manageable. It's already 2h35 which is quite long enough for a play of this nature. That was my thinking. Now when I watch the play, I debate putting things back – and also cutting other things. You're constantly reassessing.

It's work in progress, and your vision as a director can evolve from one performance to another... So now, how do you see the constable in Love's Labour's Lost? Dull, played by Chris McCalphy, is supposed to be illiterate, but spectators can see him reading a newspaper in act 4, scene 2!

I like actors having things to do on the stage! But I know that this does not really make sense at first sight! Well, Dull may simply have a look at the quizzes or at the cartoons. And I think that it works well especially when he says to Holofernes and Nathaniel "You two are book-men" (4.2.31), and asks for the answer to a riddle.

So once again you captured the jesting tones of the play!
Well, yes—it's a comedy!

... and the comic scenes are reinforced by a strong cast. We can feel that there is indeed much cohesion among the actors.

It's a troupe, like in Shakespeare's day. The actors were properly demanding, they wanted everything to be understood—which is great, I love that!

The fair actress Michelle Terry effuses charm and personality. She plays Rosaline in your production (and she doubles as Beatrice). But Rosaline is supposed to be a dark lady in Love's Labour's Lost, isn't she?

Not in this production! No, I wanted Michelle. I didn't want to eliminate her because she wasn't dark.

Have you been influenced by other productions of the play?

No, not really. Or maybe... the one I was in. That was set in the quadrangle of an Oxford college. It was a brilliant idea! Everyone was part of that Oxford life, everyone had a place in this environment. I played Moth and he was a head chorister in the college choir. So I was a bit worried when I was offered this that I would be repeating that earlier production. But the setting of Charlecote changed everything.

I copied two things. One in the sonnet scene: they wore pyjamas and dressing gowns, and I loved that idea. The other thing was the snakes. The designer was unsure what to do about the snakes. I said look, I played Moth and I had this brilliant costume. I wrote to the director of the 1993 production and I asked him, would you mind if I copy that? He said no, not at all, it was your idea, which was very nice of him. So I showed the designer and he did his own version of it. I've seen other productions of *Love's Labour's Lost*, of course, but I didn't consciously copy them. I think, having been in it, and played the material for two years with an audience, I had a very clear idea of what should be cut, what should be maintained... and above all, I had this sense that it could be more entertaining than it is often perceived to be. People who come to the show keep saying to me they'd always thought this play was boring!

When people first read the play, it always sounds quite difficult to them...

But the sonnet scene, on the stage, always works! It's such a brilliant situation. People read it though, and I don't think they are very good at imagining it when they're reading it. They have problems with obscure verbal jokes. But in fact, it's very audience friendly if you trim it down a little bit.

You trimmed it down but the parts are all well preserved. I'm thinking of the page, here. You played Moth yourself, and it's a wonderful role. Some directors have it performed by adults, others by adolescents. How did you make your own choice?

I don't really like having children onstage. It can work for a very small part and it can be quite delightful. But they don't have big voices. I wanted to have an actor who looked very young. I mean Peter, who plays Moth, is 29 but looks much younger. That's exactly what I was looking for. He's experienced, good at language, he has a good presence. He's quite sharp, isn't he? Sometimes young women have played it, but I find it hard then to suspend disbelief. That's why I went for him.