

Autumn No.2

Autumn Lectures 2016, for the Angel Foundation, by Peter Milward

No.2 on Saturday October 15, back at Parlor No.5, on *Cymbeline*

In succession to *Pericles*, so successful on stage and in print.

though rejected by editors of the First Folio in 1623 as collaborative,
now placed by them at end of tragedies as "The Tragedy of Cymbeline",

though belonging like *Pericles* to genre of "tragi-comedy"

but by no means so successful as *Pericles*, first staged about 1610.

Note hidden connection with *King Lear*, as in case of *Pericles*,

being two plays by Shakespeare on prehistoric Britain

but KL on 7th century BC Britain, with no mention of "Britain",

rather set in England in contrast to Cornwall (and Wales) and Albany (Scotland)

as third portion of Lear's kingdom reserved for Cordelia but denied to her

whereas Cym. at beginning of Roman Britain, paying tribute to Augustus Caesar
with frequent mention of "Britain" some 25 times

Why? Sh evidently thinking in KL of Elizabethan England

whereas in Cym. thinking of Henry VIII and separation from Rome in 1534

his assertion of independence from "Christendom" (as inversion of Brexit)

and claim of descent through the Welsh Tudors from King Arthur

Note characteristic of three tragi-comedies, *Per. Cym. WT*, looking to *Henry VIII*

Per. opening in Act I (G Wilkins) with love affair of Antiochus and daughter

echoing scandal of Henry VIII with wife and daughter Anne Boleyn

as related in history of the *Origin of Anglican Schism* by N.Sander (1585)

only in Latin, not trans. English till 19th cent. (hidden reason for lack in FF)

Cym. opening with frowning of king on daughter Imogen for her secret marriage

owing to second marriage with unnamed queen for whom gave up tribute to Rome

his plan to marry Imogen to her worthless son Cloten

(parallel with Henry's second queen Anne Boleyn

Imogen as daughter to first queen Katherine, Princess Mary)

Imogen's secret marriage to Posthumus Leonatus (son of a lion = Plantagenet)

(parallel with Reginald Pole, last Yorkist heir of the Plantagenet kings)

while she is kept at court, but under father's displeasure, he is banished to Rome

But there he is described by semi-villain Iachimo, visiting Imogen,

"He sits amongst men like a descended god/ He hath a kind of honor sets him off/

More than a mortal seeming... A sir so rare/ Which you know cannot err."

(In fact, Pole was created cardinal, presiding over Council of Trent in 1545.
 coming one vote short of election to Papacy in 1549
 proposed while yet a layman if cardinal as suitable husband to Queen Mary
 appointed Cardinal Legate, Abp of Canterbury, for reunion of England with Rome)

Such is the situation at the beginning of this complicated, confusing play

Then Roman general Caius Lucius comes to demand payment of tribute to Rome
 but refused by queen with Cloten, praising Britain as "a world by itself", and
 "the natural bravery of your isle, which stands/ As Neptune's park, ribbed and
 paled in/ With rocks unscaleable and roaring waters."
 recalling speech of John of Gaunt on "this England" in *Richard II*
 when England was one with "Christendom" (now advocated by "Brexit")

Hence Lucius returns with Roman army to Milford Haven in Wales
 all movement of play to this one place (where Henry Tudor landed in 1485)
 as in *King Lear* all moves to Dover for conflict between British and French
 but in *Cym.* it is the Roman army that is defeated by unexpected champions

Meanwhile Imogen makes her lonely way to Wales, meeting with two princes
 brought by loyal counsellor Belarius, and living simple life in countryside
 recalling Friar Laurence, "Nature hath meal and bran, contempt and grace"
 and praise of Duke Senior in *As You Like It* on "this our life"
 then taking potion for weary spirit, making her seem dead, like Juliet
 after having been welcomed by the others as "an angel" and "an earthly paragon"
 they sing a dirge over her, "Fear no more the heat of the sun/ Nor the furious win-
 ter's rages/ Thou thy worldly task hast done/ Home art gone and ta'en thy wages."
 Then, on opening her eyes, she meets the Roman general, who takes her to his service,
 while unknown to her, Posthumus has come and fights on the British side
 and out of the ensuing complexity there emerge two events, heavenly and earthly.

The heavenly event involves the descent of Jupiter on an eagle down on Sicilius
 the father of Posthumus who cries,
 "No more, thou thunder-master, show/ Thy spite on mortal flies."
 to whom Jupiter replies,
 "Whom best I love I cross, to make my gift/ The more delayed delighted."

The earthly event involves the meeting of British victors and defeated Romans
 with peace and (as Cymbeline proclaims) both pardon and renewal of tribute
 now that the wicked queen has ended her own life, "with horror, madly dying"

Finally, there is a general reconciliation, with an "ecumenical" ending,
 "Set we forward, let/ A Roman and a British ensign wave/ Friendly together