

A Touching Text: Dundee, Tehran and *The Winter's Tale*

Marion Wynne Davies

Abstract

*This essay explores the changes undertaken by the Dundee Repertory Company on their production of *The Winter's Tale*, when they performed the play at Fajr International Drama Festival in Tehran. The essay begins with an account of the 2001 presentation in Dundee, focussing upon the way in which the director, Dominic Hill, interpreted the play to emphasise comic exuberance and female autonomy. The second part explores the necessary decisions made by Hill and the cast to ensure that the play could be performed in Tehran, alterations that undercut the earlier focus upon humour and women's roles in society. The paper concludes with an interrogation of how political and artistic discourses are inextricably bound together in twenty-first century theatre.*

Following the attacks of 11th September 2001 and initiation of the 'war on terror', in October 2002 the Joint Resolution to Authorise the use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq was agreed and in November of the same year the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 allowed the resumption of weapons inspections. By the end of 2002, however, Britain and the United States were preparing for war against Iraq and on March 20th 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom had begun. In the midst of these world events, in January 2003, the Dundee Repertory Theatre Company took their production of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* to the 21st International Fajr Theatre Festival in Tehran. The play, first performed c.1611, is divided into two sections: the first three acts show how Leontes, king of Sicilia, imprisons his pregnant wife, Hermione, because he unjustly suspects her of having an adulterous affair with Polixenes, king of Bohemia; and her subsequent 'death'. Act III ends with the motherless baby, Perdita, being abandoned in Bohemia where she is discovered by shepherds. The second part of the play reverses this tragic narrative, opening in Act IV with Perdita, who has grown into a beautiful and gracious young woman being wooed by Polixenes' son, Florizel, although they are forced to flee to Sicilia because his father opposes their marriage. The final scene of the play reconciles all parties and there is a particularly effective sequence in which Leontes is shown what appears to be a statue of Hermione, which is then revealed to be the real queen who has lived in hiding until she could be reunited with her repentant husband. The title of this paper refers to precisely that moment when Leontes realises that Hermione is a living body as he 'touches' her, a moment that was perfectly acceptable on the Dundee stage, but which had to be excised for the performance in Tehran. This essay acts, therefore, as a case study, exploring the ways in which the Rep's production developed and changed in order to address the differing demands of an Islamic performance. In particular, it focuses upon the construction of female identity and the comic elements of the play, in order to excavate the tensions between the cultural expectations of Dundee and Tehran audiences. Finally, the essay examines the way in

which political discourses and the historical circumstances of the production influenced the director, cast, production and reportage.

Dundee

The Dundee Rep was founded in 1939 and has become a unique organisation in the UK, since it is not only a producing theatre company, but also employs on a permanent basis an ensemble company of actors alongside directors, dancers and other drama workers. The company is a small and closely-knit group that responds to the needs of Dundee's community, putting on a range of plays that reflect the city's cultural identity. As such, productions vary from well-known plays (often those being studied for the Scottish Schools' Higher curriculum), through community productions and hugely successful pantomimes, to some radical and less well-known works. The choice of *The Winter's Tale* demonstrates both the company's investment in producing traditional works, as well as its commitment to innovation, in that the play had not been performed in Scotland for over 50 years. The Rep first presented the play in 2001 and received instant critical acclaim. For example, *The Guardian* noted that the play was 'sensitively handled in a superb ensemble performance, reinventing the play for a modern audience without losing its depth.'¹ In contrast, the Scottish press saw the company's success in nationalistic terms, with *The Scottish Daily Mail* commenting that the play starred 'an Ensemble cast fast achieving the status of Scotland's mini National Theatre.' The production was subsequently nominated for the TMA UK Best Director award, and Ann Louise Ross was awarded TMA UK Best Supporting Actress in a Supporting Role for her interpretation of Paulina.

Dominic Hill, the director, made only two significant alterations to the text: the music for the pastoral scene was country and western, and at the conclusion of the play Paulina was not married off to Camillo. Both of these elements deserve further interpretation. First, the director of a repertory company must be aware of the particular strengths and weaknesses of its performers so that she or he may construct a production that will use the cast to best advantage, often playing on repeated 'types' to elicit the complicity of an audience that is familiar with the actors. Second, while these alterations might have been driven by necessity, they also uncover the way in which Hill constructs a wider thematic interpretation of the play.

By changing the pastoral setting to a ranch-house style celebration Hill both carefully utilised the skills of his cast and created a jubilant festivity at the

¹ All press quotations are taken from the Dundee Rep Archive, unless noted otherwise. This paper focuses, given the word count, upon a single production and, as such, has not been able to include as wide a critical and theoretical framework as I would have liked. This is a brief note of some critical influences: material on the 2004 'Shakespeare and Islam Season' at the Globe in London; Matthew Dimmock's work, especially, *New Turkes: Dramatising Islam and Ottoman in Early Modern Britain* (2005); Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin's edited collection of essays, *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (1998), especially the essays by Jerry Brotton and Loomba herself; Jerry Brotton's book, *The Renaissance Bazaar* (2002); for a history of stage productions: Dennis Bartholomeusz, '*The Winter's Tale*' in *Performance* (1982); Carol Thomas Neely's feminist interpretation in her book, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (1993).

heart of the play that was readily accessible to his Scottish audience. Keith Fleming, who played Autolycus, is a comedian and singer, more adept at the knowing aside to the audience than the introspective moods required by Jacobean tragedy (Hill produced *The Duchess of Malfi* with the same company; 2002). Fleming was well cast and succeeded in obtaining the audience's complicity through a series of verbal confidences and physical comic pieces. His broad Scots accent presented him as the common Dundonian man, while his bright, broad-shouldered suit and exaggerated hairstyle gave him an air of the spiv of British television comedies. Fleming occupied the space of a particularly gendered stereotype, that of delinquent masculinity. For example, in Act IV scene iv, when he comes upon Camillo, Florizel and Perdita discussing their escape, Fleming as Autolycus, covertly approached the front of stage and, sitting cross-legged, displayed the profits of his thievery proudly to the audience, and, as the three romance characters approached him, neatly repacked everything away in his suitcase, which he proceeded to sit on – cross-legged once again. Moreover, in the final act, any possible repentance, or even dilution of delight, was undercut as Autolycus followed the Clowns offstage brandishing their purses, yet again, for the audience's approval. However, Fleming's most significant contribution was the performance of the country and western song, again standing front centre stage, cowboy hat set jauntily over one eye, guitar raised on one knee with the two 'cowgirls', Mopsa and Dorcas, whistling and clapping at his side. Such specific cultural references would inevitably have to be altered for an Iranian audience for whom country and western clothes and music would have been alien.

The tone of this whole sequence was exuberant. The set, designed by Gregory Smith, was a wide blue-sky vista, reminiscent of western movies, the dance sequences, choreographed by Sean Feldman, were wild, raunchy and irreverent, and the music, specially composed by Steve Kettle, was a toe-tapping fiddle rendition. The men wore cowboy hats and the 'shepherdesses' short, fringed skirts, which shimmied as they wheeled about in the dance. The dancers kissed and embraced, and there was even one point at which Mopsa and Dorcas begin a catfight to the whistles and shouts of the onlookers.



Cowgirl/shepherdess dance sequences (all images courtesy of Dundee Rep Archive)

The comic sequences in the second part of *The Winter's Tale* are, therefore, transformed into a festive setting, with modern music and ribald comedy, familiar to the Dundee Rep's regular audience. This is where, as *The Guardian* critic pointed out, Hill successfully reinvented 'the play for a modern audience.' But while Hill was undoubtedly deploying his cast carefully and responding to local tastes and sensibilities, he also developed a particular interpretation of the play. Common with other Shakespearean evocations of pastoral, *The Winter's Tale* includes romance figures, those of noble birth enacting the role of shepherds and shepherdesses, alongside the rustic clowns. Hill divided his cast in terms of both costume and accent, with Florizel and Perdita in up-market country wear (Burberry mackintoshes, Hunter wellingtons and a Boden-like dress) and the Clowns in country and western garb, with the addition of comically large wellingtons. The two lovers speak in the 'accentless' tones of the BBC, while the rustics express themselves in broad Scottish accents, thereby mocking class and racial stereotypes in a classic comedic fashion. The key figure in Hill's construction of the pastoral sequence was, however, Fleming's Autolycus, an unrepentant, consummate and likeable rogue. As has already been demonstrated, Hill maintained the traditional function of Autolycus as bridging the gap between the audience and stage action, but his redemptive role as the conveyor of good fortune to Perdita, was reduced. Instead, Fleming's interpretation of the part gave precedence to the tradition of rogue literature from Greene to Jonson; thus Autolycus is forgiven by the audience for providing comic pleasure rather than recognised as servicing the development of the main plot. And it is here that the audience is constructed as specifically Scottish, and indeed, specifically Dundonian. Fleming is one of the main comic staples of the Dundee Rep and, as he colluded and joked with the audience, mirroring their accents with a strong sense of complicity, the upper class romance figures were relegated to a darker world, and one that was stereotypically English. This is precisely why *The Scottish Daily Mail* could assert that Dundee Rep was attaining 'the status of Scotland's mini National Theatre.' At the end of the play, such national implications were subdued by Hill's sombre conclusion, but the vitality of the pastoral sequence and Fleming's tour de force performance as Autolycus remained the most vibrant part of the production and the one that Hill remembers as his favourite.² As such, comic misrule in Hill's production is sustained and, in a Bakhtinian celebration of the 'lower bodily orders', the Rep's interpretation of *The Winter's Tale* presented the body in its jubilant excesses – bawdy humour, drinking, dancing and touching. Yet these were precisely the elements that had to be cut for an Iranian audience.

Before turning to the changes Hill was required to make to the production before it was allowed on stage in Tehran, it is important to explore the second alteration made, before that visit, cutting Paulina's union with Camillo. Hill felt the play 'shows how women are particularly strong,' a judgement that was backed up by Ann Louise Ross (Paulina), who commented that, 'women are definitely stronger in *The Winter's Tale* [...] Paulina is very strong and I admire her hugely.'³ Again, Hill used his repertory cast effectively since Ross is a character actor who has become well known

² Interview with Dominic Hill by Marion Wynne-Davies, 3rd March 2006.

³ Dominic Hill interviewed by Claire Stewart, *The Aberdeen Press and Journal* 8th January 2003. Ann Louise Ross, interviewed in *The Evening Telegraph* 16th January 2003.

for her representation of strong, articulate women. As has already been noted, she won an award for her role as Paulina, and has recently returned to Dundee after joining the RSC. In *The Winter's Tale* she interpreted her role as solemn and isolated, alone within the male-dominated world of Leontes' court, yet remaining loyal and determined. In Act II scene iii she berates Leontes, alone amongst the male coterie, challenging their bonding as she moved from one to another with barely controlled fury. In the final scene she maintained this combination of dominance and isolation until Hermione embraced Leontes, at which point she brought mother and daughter together, first moving to Perdita and then breaking the royal couple's embrace with a gentle touch. In Hill's production, therefore, Paulina is not only a strong woman, but also one whose support for other women is unquestioned and sustained throughout the play. She cannot be neatly married off by a still-patriarchal monarch, because of her innate independence and because Hill's *Winter's Tale* withdraws from the anarchic world of the pastoral scenes, to a darker understanding of gendered relationships. There can be no return to the ideal love between men and women seen so briefly at the start of the play and Paulina's slow lone exit offstage emphasises this.

Act V scene iii returned to the sombre black and white set of the play's Sicilian beginning, although the lighting shifted from a sombre blue, to an array of muted jewel colours, giving a sense that a qualified redemption was possible. But the final embrace, when Hermione 'hangs about [Leontes'] neck', was too long and too close for any sense of ease, giving the impression of deep sorrow for the past, alongside a realisation that that world could never be fully regained. Hill saw the final embrace as key to the whole production, demonstrating the way in which 'morbid jealousy' prohibits a full restoration of love and mutual trust. Significantly, Hill's background reading for the production is included in the production's working papers and he chose John Langton's article on jealousy for inclusion in both the Scottish and Iranian programmes.⁴ Langton concludes that,

It is remarkable that Leontes appears to make a complete recovery – even when his queen returns to him – as morbid jealousy is renowned for its persistence.⁵

For Hill such a complete recovery is never an option, and as the production closed in darkness with Hermione and Leontes facing one another across the stage, there could be no certainty of redemption. It was essential to Hill's production, therefore, that Hermione and Leontes first embrace silently and persistently, but then draw apart to face an uncertain future. Their touching was an essential antithesis to their separation, allowing the play to end in ambiguity and renewed tension. But like the bodily exuberance of the pastoral scenes, this too was to be cut by the Iranian censors.

⁴ Dundee Rep, *The Winter's Tale Programme* (Dundee and Tehran); John Langton, 'A Diagnosis of Morbid Jealousy' (Proscenium Publications, 1990).

⁵ Dundee Rep, *The Winter's Tale Programme* 2001 and 2003.

Tehran

The Rep's tour to Iran was organised by the British Council in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 and the preparation by the UK and the States for war against Iraq. As such, the production of *The Winter's Tale* in Tehran must be considered in this specific political context. In late 2002 the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Iran approached the British Council asking if they could suggest a British production of Shakespeare to open their Fajr International Drama Festival. With the usual complicated reporting of such moves, the British Council presented the production as part of their own initiative, Connecting Futures, which was intended to build bridges between young people in Britain and Muslim countries. This youth-directed scheme was itself part of the larger 'Art for a Dangerous World' programme that was launched in January 2003. *The Guardian* reported Rosemary Hillhoerst, director of Connecting Futures, as pointing out that,

We are not going to change the minds of terrorists but hopefully we can influence and work with those who want to work with us.⁶

The paper went on to record that,

The hatred felt by the September 11 hijackers was not shared by the majority of young people in Muslim countries [... who] rated the United States as their most admired country in the world and placed Britain fourth after Japan and Egypt.⁷

It also quoted two Iranian students' enthusiasm for western theatre and film. There are two important elements here: first that the British Council's initiative was a distinctly political act intended to persuade young Muslims of the value of Western societies, particularly those of Britain and America; and second, that *The Guardian* itself was involved in a similar propagandist exercise, intended to separate the 9/11 hijackers from 'the majority of young people in Muslim countries'. The British Council's deep commitment to its political intervention in the guise of artistic sharing is evidenced by the considerable funds - £18 million - it devoted to the cause. In addition to the Rep's production, an exhibition of British sculpture and a weekly two-hour radio programme of western pop music were produced in Iran. As the presenter of BBC Radio's Today programme noted, the British Council's initiative was being dubbed 'the art offensive,' which although it was couched in the language of affiliation, was simultaneously recognised to be the cultural sector's contribution to the 'war on terrorism,' and specifically countering Muslim fundamentalism in a post-9/11 world.⁸ At the same time, it is not easy to untangle the discourse of government-funded propaganda (they put up an extra £10 million for the 'big push') from the essentially liberal tendencies of the British Council and those directly involved in the artistic initiatives. For

⁶ *The Guardian*, 22nd January 2003.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ BBC, *The Today Programme*, 17th January 2003.

example, Helena Kennedy, the then Chair of the British Council, pointed out on the same radio show that,

I don't think any of your listeners would question that we are living in a dangerous time with talk of war and talk of clashes of civilisations. I think it reminds us that finding ways of making connections, of linking with people, of creating opportunities for dialogue or coming together should be seized at every opportunity.⁹

There is a distinct difference between the newspaper report, which sought to uphold the seemingly universal – and therefore natural – popularity of British and American culture, and Kennedy's official British Council welcoming of difference and exchange, as well as the recognition of a mutually empowered 'coming together.'

This distinction was emphasised in the Rep's preparation for its Tehran production. Hill and others of the cast expressed some concern about the critical international situation, but stressed that their visit to Iran was not political. As Hill noted,

Of war with Iraq [...] the headlines say war is getting closer and closer, but that feels like something going on at a governmental level, and nothing to do with something that is really a cultural exchange.¹⁰

On the *Today* programme Ross likewise commended the exchange for building bridges and promoting 'a wider exchange for theatres' and in an interview with *Scotland on Sunday* pointed out that the company, 'were so worried not to make a political statement as the first British company to perform in Iran for 25 years [...] It was not our place'.¹¹ The cast were also well aware that the last performance by a British theatre company in Iran had been prior to the Islamic revolution with Sir Derek Jacobi's *Hamlet* in 1977. Moreover, the last production of Shakespeare at the Festival itself, by an American company, had been closed down and the director prosecuted for 'raping the public innocence.'¹² The issue of political repercussions was, perhaps, heightened for the Rep Company through a pre-production exchange of emails between Nichola Young, the Rep's press and publicity officer and the British Council. The Rep, keen for publicity, had suggested that UK journalists might be given prior information about the tour in the hope that the British media would send journalists to cover the performance. The Director of the British Council in Iran, Michael Sargent, had vetoed this suggestion because of,

The extremely negative reaction of the Iranian regime to the copy filed by other UK journalists that the British Council has supported to visit [sic] Iran and report on our activity there, even when it has seemed to UK eyes that the articles produced were completely innocuous, indeed positive. It is difficult to anticipate the reaction of a Govt

⁹ *Ibid.* Lord Kinnock took over the Chairmanship of the British Council in 2004.

¹⁰ Dominic Hill interviewed in *The Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 8th January 2003.

¹¹ Today, *op.cit.* Ann Louise Ross interviewed in *Scotland on Sunday*, 2nd February 2003.

¹² Dominic Hill, article for *Scotland on Sunday*, 12th January, 2003.

[sic] like Iran's to ANY piece of writing – however innocent. Their reaction if hostile can obviously impinge on our ability to work in the country, where there is an atmosphere of particular tension right now, because of internal manifestations of hostility to the regime and the generally volatile Middle East political climate.¹³

It was finally agreed that the story of the Rep's visit to Tehran should be included as part of a general release on arts initiatives, so that while the tour was covered, its strategic immersion within a wider package of activities would ensure that the media would not send staff to Iran specifically to cover the play. Instead, the British Council would rely on local Tehran journalists who were 'adept at composing pieces that use the "deep" language this sort of regime renders necessary.'¹⁴ With this warning in mind, it is hardly surprising that Hill and the cast should have been so wary of political involvement, even that which might be unintentional. Still, the complexities of these negotiations and the actual press coverage of the tour, demonstrate a series of tensions between the political and artistic agendas.

The British Council anticipated that the Iranian government would have problems with reports made by any UK-based media, although these concerns were attributed exclusively to the irrational bias of 'this sort of regime.' Further, the British Council expressed its belief in the innocuous and positive nature of British press reporting, implying a political impartiality. As such, the UK organisations were presented in such a way as to reinforce political, racial and cultural hierarchies, entrenching difference – thus if the British media are innocuous and positive, then Iranians must be read as offensive, negative and guilty. But if we look back at the reports in *The Guardian* and on the BBC's *Today* programme, Iranian fears begin to look more justified. The newspaper naturalises Britain's popularity, while the radio programme employs the discourse of war – expressions such as, 'offensive' and 'big push' are hardly innocuous and certainly not impartial. Indeed, these two highly respected sources match the British Council's assumption of a value-laden construction of difference. But this was complicated further by the relationship between arts practitioners and public funding bodies, in which political issues are subsumed within a rhetoric of artistic support and encouragement. Kennedy's personal views might well have underlain her dedication to engaging with otherness, but in her role as Chair of the British Council she was also enunciating the official discourse, in which political motives are mediated through the language of liberal provision. Like other government funded UK bodies, for example, the Arts Council upon which the Rep is also dependent, the British Council was founded, in 1934, with the specific aim to promote Britain through 'cultural propaganda'.¹⁵ The artistic and political aims of the British Council are therefore inextricably bound together, at the same time as they contest each other's legitimation. But, with yet another complexity, it is important to recognise that the relationship between the Rep and the British Council at the time of the Iranian tour was immersed in the politics of patronage. Hill and the cast were clearly committed to sustaining the integrity of their production, but at the same time, they had of

¹³ British Council email 18th December 2002 (Dundee Rep Archives).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For full details of the British Council's foundation see:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/en/about-us/75th-anniversary/A-story-of-engagement/>

necessity to accept the ideological position of the British Council as their own, although this, in turn, meant rejecting the political import of what was an essentially government-funded operation. The *Today* programme rightly called it, 'the art offensive.'

The preparations for the Rep's production in Tehran were, therefore, fraught with covert political manoeuvrings. The Rep itself, because the funding depended upon it, declared a neutral stance, in compliance with the British Council's demands. The British Council couched its public face in terms of liberal support for international arts, while colluding, of necessity, with government anti-fundamentalist propaganda, because it too was dependent upon state funding. The Iranian government, in turn, recognised the inevitable political impact of the production and its representation in the UK-based media. Moreover, both British and Iranian journalists, while clearly employing a certain degree of political 'spin,' represent accurately the fraught confluence of external expression and underlying propaganda particularly with regard to questions of gendered representation. But how did this affect the Rep's performance of *The Winter's Tale*?

The Rep had been advised as to what changes would be essential to the production before they set out for Tehran when Hill visited Iran in December 2002. The alterations primarily involved re-costuming, cutting props associated with alcohol, and the removal of all sequences in which men and women touch. The women of the cast all wore scarves and long robes that covered arms, legs and necks.



Ann Louise Ross and Meg Fraser

All physical contact between men and women was cut, with the exception of the final embrace, which as has already been pointed out, was a key moment in Hill's interpretation of the text. Indeed, before they went out Hill, in an

interview in *The Scotsman*, recognised that, ‘we are going to take a huge risk [...] but for the sake of art it’s a risk we’ll just have to take and face the consequences.’¹⁶ They had also intended to leave in the scene where Hermione touches Polixenes’ hand, which is referred to in the text by Leontes – ‘padding palms, and pinching fingers’ – and is crucial in promoting his suspicions of adultery, but this was eventually removed and the contact only implied. And, of course, the dance sequences had to be altered: in the opening sequence the night club atmosphere was replaced by a more sedate dinner and the pastoral sequences were changed so that men danced with men and women with women, although even this surprised some of the audience.¹⁷ Autolycus’ more bawdy lines were also cut. In line with these changes, the programme cover image was altered to include only men:



Dundee Programme Image

¹⁶ Dominic Hill interviewed by Tara Womersley in *The Scotsman*, 13th January 2003.

¹⁷ Interview with Janine Mellor who played Perdita, in *The Courier*, 31st January 2003.



Tehran Programme Image

The Rep Company arrived in Tehran on Saturday January 18th. On Sunday 19th the artistic director, Hamish Glen, had a meeting with the director of the festival, Dr Sharifkholdaei, at which point, as Glen notes, 'it becomes clear that [he] is under growing pressure not to be too liberal in the content.'¹⁸ Conversely, Hill also remembers Sharifkholdaei as wanting to push the boundaries of what would be allowed, and that any pressure to alter the production did not come from him. Dr Sharifkholdaei was later removed from his post.¹⁹ The dress rehearsal took place on Tuesday 21st, watched by Dr Sharifkholdaei and Iranian officials, whose role was to vet the production. At this stage only one change was suggested, that when Autolycus and Florizel change clothes, they should not display their naked legs. This was greeted with relief and amusement by Glen, Hill and the cast, who had been reluctant to make more changes and who had fully expected any concerns about costume to be directed at the female characters. This meant that the long

¹⁸ Hamish Glen, diary for *Scotland on Sunday*.

¹⁹ Dominic Hill in interview with Marion Wynne-Davies, 3rd March 2006.

concluding embrace between Leontes and Hermione had apparently been passed by the censor.

However, on the night of the first formal performance, Wednesday 22nd, ten minutes before the start Hill was approached by another official who requested that the embrace be cut since there was a contingent of clerics attending that night. Hill recalled that,

First of all, they asked very nicely if I would mind cutting it so I said I would mind and that I wanted to keep it in. Then a few minutes later they came back and said, 'Actually, do you think there's another way you can do it?' So I said I'd try to make it a bit shorter. Then one minute before the show was due to start, the deputy minister [of culture] came and said, 'Actually, it needs to go,' and asked whether in a spirit of cultural exchange I would omit it.²⁰

The following morning the British Council intervened demanding that the embrace be cut and pointing out that the same 'request' would be made each night for the whole of the tour if the decision was not taken immediately. The company were not particularly happy with this enforced decision. Glen wrote that the cutting of the embrace grated: 'I feel caught between an artistic, cultural independence and a wish to support the work of the British Council.'²¹ However, this was not echoed by Hill, who felt that the decision to cut the scene was in the end correct since 'there was a need to respect what they wanted.'²² Both director and cast tried to treat the changes as a challenge that offered a different interpretation to the earlier Dundonian one. What is interesting about their responses is that they focus exclusively upon the gender implications. Although the pastoral sequence had lost much of its comic exuberance, with the omission of alcohol, bawdy language and men and women dancing together, this celebration of the body in its excess, was not mentioned by a single member of the company. The alterations transformed the comic heart of the play into one that was, both symbolically and actually, containable by the theocracy. Yet, all members of the company recall the alterations in the role of women as far more important. For example, the Rep saw the play's focus on adultery as much more important in an Iranian context. Hill admitted that relevancy had not been an initial consideration but that, 'having taken it, there are a lot of resonances in the play [...] the play's about adultery [...] about gender, about the way women and men are treated.'²³ Such concern with the way in which women are perceived in an Islamic state, was also evidenced by the women of the cast, some of whom kept diaries of their experiences. Claire Dargo, who played Perdita, was the most outspoken,

In this culture, women literally take a back seat – as on the buses with the men at the front. I feel they are overpowered by the men – restrictions on clothing only apply to

²⁰ Dominic Hill interviewed by Leon McDermott for *Entertainment* January 30th – February 5th 2003.

²¹ *Op. cit.*

²² *Op. cit.*

²³ *Op. cit.*

women. I would never dare walk about the street on my own due to the unwanted attention it would create. I felt weakened by my sex.²⁴

These comments are repeated, with less emphasis, by Ross and by Meg Fraser, who played Hermione. Hill also remembered gender restrictions, recalling that there were separate entrances for men and women into buildings. For the Rep Company, therefore, the censorship of the play became part of their lived as well as artistic experience of an Islamic community, so that the prohibitions surrounding women in Iran became inextricably linked with an interpretation of the play that contains and represses female agency. Ironically, the omission of the final embrace seemed to have eroded the ambiguity of Hill's thematic conclusion, emphasising continued separation rather than redemption. Moreover, while the strong independent women of the Dundee production, who as Hill recalled, 'made sure the men didn't have an easy ride at the end of the play,' were not excised, their roles were diluted through costuming and action. This change of emphasis by the cast must be interpreted in relation to the cast's female members' own ideological construction as feminist, and as part of a long tradition of strong Dundee working women. As such, gender became more important than comic misrule in the way the cast interpreted and responded to Islamic censorship.

Nevertheless, the overall reception of the play was presented as positive in the British media, especially the Scottish press that saw the production as a national triumph, *The Courier* commenting that it was 'a real coup' and *The Scottish Sun* captioning the report as 'Scots' Iran Show isn't a Bard Idea.²⁵ It is only by reading the diaries and interviews with Hill and the cast that a more complicated perspective appears. Hill was quite ready to admit that the reception 'was mixed' and he commented perceptively on the combination of responses, from those who 'thought we were colluding with the regime by being there in the first place,' through those who responded to the artistic interpretation and could have been 'anywhere in the world', to those who saw the Rep's presence as 'a sign of tolerance.'²⁶ Hill was aware of the way in which, for the Iranian audiences as for the Dundee Rep, there was a continual tension between politics and cultural production – the universalised artistic interpretation that could be 'anywhere in the world' and the perception of theatre as intrinsically propagandistic, either as collusion or radicalisation. The Rep's production of *The Winter's Tale* cannot, therefore, be divorced from the site of its performance, from the discourses of anti-Islamic propaganda, pro-Islamist censorship, UK political propaganda, economic dependency, Scottish nationalism, and western feminism. For Hill, the play's final 'touching' moment was the most important element in his interpretation of the play, and its excision evidences conclusively the hierarchical power structures within which twenty-first century theatre must function – those in Dundee as well as Tehran.

²⁴ Claire Dargo's performance diary published in the *Scottish Daily Mail*, 1st February, 2003.

²⁵ *The Courier*, 30th January 2003. *The Scottish Sun*, January 8th 2003.

²⁶ *Ibid.*