Players of Shakespeare 4

This is the fourth volume of essays by actors with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Twelve actors describe the Shakespearian roles they played in productions between 1992 and 1997. The contributors are Christopher Luscombe, David Tennant, Michael Siberry, Richard McCabe, David Troughton, Susan Brown, Paul Jesson, Jane Lapotaire, Philip Voss, Julian Glover, John Nettles, and Derek Jacobi. The plays covered include *The Merchant of Venice*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth*, among others. The essays divide equally among comedies, histories and tragedies, with emphasis among the comedies on those notoriously difficult 'clown' roles. A brief biographical note is provided for each of the contributors and an introduction places the essays in the context of the Stratford and London stages.

Players of Shakespeare 4

Further essays in Shakespearian performance
by players with the
Royal Shakespeare Company

Edited by
Robert Smallwood

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Preface

This collection, like its three predecessors, brings together a series of essays by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company. The essays discuss thirteen performances in eleven productions between 1992 and 1997 and the actors who write them had all talked about the roles with members of the programme of courses jointly run by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford. All but one of the roles (as well as five of the plays) are new to the *Players of Shakespeare* series and the exception (the title role in *Richard III*) has not previously been considered in a production of the play independent of the *Henry VI* trilogy. The essays divide equally among comedies, histories and tragedies, with emphasis among the comedies on those notoriously difficult 'clown' roles which have figured little in earlier volumes in the series. The four essays on histories concentrate their focus on two plays, in each case contrasting the perspective of the titular character with that of his principal female antagonist. Among the essays on the tragedies are two on Roman plays which have not previously featured in *Players of Shakespeare* volumes. As in the preceding volume, references and quotations are from the New Penguin edition of the plays, the text normally issued to actors in RSC rehearsal rooms. A biographical note on the writer, with emphasis on work for the RSC and on Shakespearian roles elsewhere, appears at the beginning of each essay, and at the end of the volume there is a list of credits for the productions covered.

I am grateful to the editors of *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *Shakespeare Survey* for permission to repeat in the Introduction to this volume material that appeared first in the pages of their journals. I am grateful also to colleagues at the Shakespeare Centre and the Shakespeare Institute for their support, and particularly to Sylvia Morris of the Shakespeare Centre Library for generous assistance with the illustrations, to Margaret Walker for remarkable patience with some difficult manuscripts and to Paul Edmondson for help with one of the essays. Sonja Dosanjh,

the RSC Company Manager, still finds time, among all her other responsibilities, to organize, with unfailing friendliness and efficiency, the elaborate programme of involvement of members of the RSC in university courses at the Shakespeare Centre from which the essays in this volume ultimately derive. To her, once again, my grateful thanks.

R.S.

The Shakespeare Centre
Stratford-upon-Avon

Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice* and Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost*

Christopher Luscombe

CHRISTOPHER LUSCOMBE played Launcelot Gobbo in David Thacker's production of *The Merchant of Venice* and Moth in Ian Judge's production of *Love's Labour's Lost* in the same 1993 season. Both productions were at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and were seen at the Barbican Theatre the following year. Earlier work for the RSC had included Francis the Drawer in 1 and 2 *Henry IV* and Dapper in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. He returned to Stratford in 1996 to play Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*. In the mean time he had created and performed in *The Shakespeare Revue* at Stratford and the Barbican, in the West End, on national and overseas tours and on BBC radio. His one-man show *Half Time* has also been seen on British and overseas tours, as well as in London and Stratford.

Why are actors so reluctant to take on these particular roles? Whenever I told anyone that I was going to Stratford to play them I always seemed to be greeted with sympathy. It appears that Launcelot Gobbo has become an archetype of the impossible Shakespearian clown. Michael Green says that he had the part in mind when he wrote *The Art of Coarse Acting*:

FIRST CLOWN: Mass, 'twould make a neat's tongue turn French tailor and cry old sowter from here to Blackfriars, would it not?

In fact, Gobbo defies parody with his obscure references: 'My nose fell a-bleeding on Black-Monday last at six o'clock i' th' morning, falling out that year on Ash-Wednesday was four year in th' afternoon' (II.v.24–7), not to mention the archaic vocabulary: 'Do I look like a cudgel or a hovel-post?' (II.ii.62) and relentless wisecracks: 'Bid them prepare for dinner' – 'That is done, sir. They have all stomachs!' (III.v.43–4).

But why is Moth taken to be the short straw in *Love's Labour's Lost*? Well, he is fairly insufferable I suppose at first sight. Even Don Armado tires of his precocious wit: 'I love not to be crossed' (I.ii.32). The part has tended to become a breeches role taken by young actresses who would

much rather be playing Rosaline (indeed Amanda Root has now played both parts for the RSC). The other obvious option is to cast a child. This inevitably leads to a good deal of cutting, because of the fiendishly complex prose and the treacherous acoustics of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. And just when the young actor is beginning to find his feet (and his voice), the union rules demand that he is replaced by another newcomer – yet more rehearsals for the hapless Don Armado. So it's a relatively unexplored role, and that in itself is an incentive at Stratford.

I don't think I was aware at first that the RSC had offered me a poisoned chalice. I was just finishing my first season with the Company, and relished the idea of going back to Stratford with a couple of parts I could get my teeth into. In a vague way I felt that I had some sort of affinity with them, and throughout the months that followed I tried to keep faith with that initial instinct. A long rehearsal period can sometimes muddy the waters. So much of a performance is governed by instinct. It's only afterwards that one can anatomize it and explain one's decisions. The best bits, I find, are based on a natural response to the text; other more conscious choices can seem calculating or knowing (a particular problem in comedy) and often get dropped in performance. So most of what I did in these plays was less rational than it may now appear, and it's only with the advantage of hindsight that I can find ways of justifying myself.

The Merchant of Venice and *Love's Labour's Lost* both had strong directorial concepts. The former was set in a modern city landscape, Venice becoming, to all intents and purposes, a yuppified City of London. The latter conjured up a late-Edwardian Oxbridge idyll, all dreaming spires and golden sunsets. So there were very clear parameters for our work, and when the actors gathered together on the first day of rehearsal a lot of decisions had been made for them. (Actually, whilst Ian Judge breezily kicked off with the completed designs and a play-through of the music, David Thacker would not be drawn on his steel-and-glass vision for a week or so, until I could bear the suspense no longer and asked him outright: 'OK, so when's it set?')

I have to say that all the actors were (I think) happy about these choices. Apart from the fact that the main house at Stratford demands bold design and strong direction, both concepts seemed to fit particularly well, giving the characters a recognizable context in which to operate. *The Merchant of Venice* was clearly set in a world obsessed by money, where racism plausibly festered within a superficially polite, glamorous

society. Navarre's 'little academe' (I.i.13) in *Love's Labour's Lost* fitted an Oxbridge quadrangle so well, with its 'three years' term', that you kicked yourself for not thinking of it first. And the pre-First World War period added a chilling poignancy to the lovers' separation at the end.

As for Launcelot Gobbo and Moth, they immediately fitted into these distinct worlds. The former was transformed from domestic drudge into office tea boy, a suburban lad ill at ease in his new hi-tech surroundings. Terrified of his martinet boss ('the very devil incarnation' (II.ii.24)), he'd rather work (who wouldn't?) for the complacent, likeable Bassanio 'who indeed gives rare new liveries' (II.ii.101) – clothes allowance too! The characters in *Love's Labour's Lost* found their places with similar ease. Holofernes had to be the Classics Professor, Sir Nathaniel the Chaplain, and Moth the Choirboy. I quickly promoted him to Head Chorister. This made him the big fish in a very small pond and accounted for his bumptiousness; it also allowed him to be a little older than I'd originally envisaged, maybe fourteen or fifteen. In 1914 the choristers often stayed on longer than they would today, taught the younger boys, were tutored by the dons and, if their voices had broken (mine had!), took a non-singing role in Chapel. I felt sure that Moth would have much preferred carrying the cross or turning pages in the organ loft to being one of the crowd in the choir stalls.

As I have said, everyone seemed worried on my behalf when I accepted this job, especially the offer to tackle Launcelot Gobbo. A friend who played it at Birmingham Rep some years ago told me that he had managed to 'work out a gag for every single line'. He offered a word of advice: 'don't work out a gag for every single line'. I took this to heart. It seemed much more important to create a believable character, and I was greatly helped in this by our eminently 'real' setting. I wasn't a stand-up comedian, but a character who happened to be funny. I'd just been working at the Barbican with Rob Edwards, who played the part in John Barton's 1981 RSC production. He told me that at the first preview, as he watched Old Gobbo exit, tapping his way with a white stick into the Venetian sunset, he found himself filling an awkward pause with an *ad libbed* 'mind the canals!' It brought the house down, but the next morning John reminded the company of Hamlet's advice to the players: 'Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them' (III.ii. 37).

In our production I was in fact able to speak *less* than was set down for me thanks to David Thacker's pragmatic approach to the text. He

encouraged me to make my own cuts, feeling that the comic actor is probably the best judge of what he can make work. I was certainly ready with the blue pencil when even the Arden editor admitted defeat ('this passage has not been explained', he comments ominously in the footnotes):

> 'It is much that the Moor should be more than reason; but if she be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for'. (III.v.37–9)

One is reminded of John Cleese's three laws of comedy: no puns, no puns and no puns.

Sometimes we made changes purely for the sake of clarity. In my first scene the Elizabethan use of the word 'father' meaning 'old man' complicated the gulling of Old Gobbo for a modern audience, so I simply said the latter. I also checked the first folio and the two quartos for textual alternatives. 'I'll take my leave . . . in the twinkling of an eye' (II.ii.155–6) seemed a preferable exit line to just 'in the twinkling'. Similarly I liked the idea of ironically referring to Jessica as 'Mistress Lorenzo' on my last entrance (v.i.47). The bonus of cutting and editing is that it forces you to grapple with the text. I did dither over the serviceability of certain lines, including them or omitting them at different performances in a sort of controlled experiment. But I am convinced that Shakespeare is better served by judicious cuts than a slavish attempt to breathe life into every last syllable. I was sure that, contrary to popular opinion, a lot of Gobbo's dialogue is very funny, and I didn't want the audience to miss the wood for the trees.

The real challenge of the part was to find a believable character who could accommodate a hint of stand-up comedy – even Shakespeare refers to him as the 'clown' in his stage directions (v.i.38). It's often suggested that Shakespeare's clowns rely on 'personality performances', where the perceived idiosyncrasies of the actor are more important than detailed characterization. Will Kemp, who created so many of these roles (including Gobbo), began his career as the Earl of Leicester's fool, and one can only assume that his solo work informed his acting style. Our own generation has seen comics such as Frankie Howerd as Bottom – or was it Bottom as Frankie Howerd? That blurring of edges seems to me to be part of an honourable tradition. A true comic spirit is hard to define, but it's obviously essential for the full realization of these parts. Meticulous psychological realism, unfortunately, is not enough, and indeed I suspect that it would be wrong to rationalize Gobbo's clowning

5 Christopher Luscombe as Launcelot Gobbo, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act II, Scene ii: 'Launcelot, budge not . . .'

too much. Two minutes after sharing a profound dilemma with the audience, he is idly 'trying confusions' with his father (II.ii.33); an anxious examination of his palm reveals the ludicrous forecast of fifteen wives. Such ambiguity is a familiar comic technique of course. In a recent television interview, Norman Wisdom spoke movingly of his impoverished East End origins. With tears in his eyes he referred to his 'very sorry childhood', adding, as if by reflex, 'both my parents were very sorry'.

Equally, I believe it would be wrong to dismiss Gobbo simply as 'comic relief'. Much of the part does depend on comic personality, but there's more to it than that. As well as an effective piece of stand-up comedy, the opening soliloquy is a dramatization of the moral confusion at the heart of the play: should we be ruled by the devil or 'hard conscience' (II.ii.25)? The episode with his father is not only a front-cloth sketch; it is also a comic version of the filial tensions in both Jessica and Portia's stories. And although he enjoys a unique rapport with the audience through the soliloquy and a number of asides, Gobbo does become drawn into the plot as Jessica and Lorenzo's go-between; he adds to the moral argument of the play (notably in the third act); and it is

possible to detect in his behaviour character-based motivation – fear of Shylock, love for Jessica and jealousy of Lorenzo, for example.

The two scenes involving the Prince of Morocco were combined in our production, which meant that my soliloquy grew naturally out of Shylock's first scene, set in his sleek City office. In fact, I hope the audience assumed I was an extra, and were then taken aback to find me talking to them. I had appeared a few minutes earlier with a tray of coffee, so I was probably thought to be non-speaking. I mention this because I was anxious to be part of the Venetian world, not a 'turn' interrupting the play. The juxtaposition of scenes also meant that Shylock and I collided, set up our relationship (I dropped some files, he hit me with them) and I was given an impetus to embark on my speech. Since I'd made coffee for the others (literally – it was a great way to allay stage fright) I decided to treat my first scene as elevenses, an opportunity to take a break with a KitKat (again literally), and to chat to the audience. After the highly-charged verse of the previous scene, my prose did sound very like 'chat', and I tried to capitalise on that. It seemed that there was something inherently comic about an intimate coffee break in a Shakespeare play, especially sharing it with fifteen hundred people.

In looking at Gobbo's comic style, I was interested to see how much he anticipates the clowns of our own time. The neurosis of the soliloquy, with its conflicting voices (' "Budge," says the fiend. "Budge not," says my conscience' (II.ii.17–18)), is reminiscent of the angst-ridden Woody Allen. This helped me to plunge into a real dilemma, not just a comic routine. The maddening digressions ('being an honest man's son, or rather an honest woman's son . . .' (II.ii.13–14)) recall Ronnie Corbett's endless subordinate clauses, and this contributed to the homely style I was after, totally at odds with Shylock's hard-headed business world. The cruel duping of Old Gobbo that follows ('Master Launcelot . . . is indeed deceased, or as you would say in plain terms, gone to heaven' (II.ii.55–9)) came to mind when I saw Spike Milligan on a chat show recently. 'What's the funniest joke in the whole world?' asked the well-meaning host. 'You,' replied Milligan. In other words, the true comic is not concerned with pulling punches, and in this scene there's no denying the pain that Gobbo inflicts on his blind father ('I pray you tell me, is my boy, God rest his soul, alive or dead?' (II.ii.65–6)). It seemed important to face up to this unattractive trait in the character and not smooth it out to suit our 90s sensibilities. Nonetheless, I did undermine Gobbo's slick display. When he was really showing off to his audience I had him

mime elaborate piano scales on his boss's computer keyboard. This went horribly wrong for him when the screen scrambled before his very eyes. One could only imagine Shylock's subsequent reaction. I quite liked the ambiguity of this moment – did it really take Gobbo by surprise or was it just another of his jokes?

Although not as overtly anti-semitic as many other characters in the play, Gobbo does derive comic mileage from the racial tensions in Venice. As we've just seen, he's not afraid to offend if he thinks there's a laugh to be had. I was at pains to show that his love for Jessica was sincere, but when he bids her farewell he displays a curious insensitivity, repeatedly labelling her 'most beautiful pagan, most sweet Jew' (II.iii.10–11). In the same speech, I played on the words 'adieu / a Jew' to suggest both a lapse of taste and an instinctive verbal dexterity. He knew he shouldn't have said it, but he just couldn't resist it. As Feste points out in *Twelfth Night*, 'a sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit; how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward' (III.i.11–13). But I couldn't help feeling that as an outsider himself in this ruthless, macho world, he is primarily commenting on contemporary mores rather than condoning them. His references to race often seem to be an attempt at satire – risky business though that may be. We played his later scene with Jessica as a heavily ironic Bible class, with Gobbo preaching palpable nonsense for comic effect: 'Yes truly, for look you [searching in the Bible for the reference], the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children. Therefore . . . I think you are damned' (III.v.1–5). Gobbo had been transformed by Belmont into a politically correct satirist.

The character's trip to Portia's estate did in fact seem to reflect a spiritual journey too – albeit less profound than that of his new master – and we were able to suggest this in the costuming. The production's modern dress was wonderfully helpful, because choices 'read' so clearly to the whole audience. So much could be signalled by the pattern of a tie or the cut of a jacket. I felt he should be uncomfortable in the Venice scenes – a fish out of water. While all the other office workers wore the *haute couture* of Armani and Versace, my costume was bought off the peg in Stratford High Street. Gobbo's Debenhams blazer was probably acquired (no doubt his mother, Margery, helped him choose it) when he landed his job with Shylock, or maybe he wore it at school. Either way, it reeked of suburbia in a world of urban sophistication. A pullover under the jacket ensured that he sweated whenever his boss was in the room.

When he left Shylock's house (we decided that he rented a room from him) he became even more buttoned up, with a voluminous anorak and a suitcase tightly strapped onto a trolley. I hope that this helped to suggest the constrained atmosphere of the household, where Gobbo can't seem to do right for doing wrong ('Who bids thee call? I do not bid thee call' (II.v.7)). But Belmont proved his salvation. Not only was there time for leisured badinage with Jessica, but he was able to move into weekend 'casuals': polo shirt, checked chinos and sandals (with socks of course). I had planned to ride a bicycle in Act V as a modern equivalent of horse-riding (he is mimicking a hunting horn), but the steep rake of the stage and a number of steel columns presented me with a tricky slalom course. So at the eleventh hour I opted instead for jogging gear and a walkman: not only did it seem right that he should have adopted a fitness regime, but the headphones accounted for the fact that he couldn't hear Lorenzo (in the original it's his horn impressions that deafen him).

I first appeared in *The Merchant of Venice* while still at school, not as Gobbo, but as Lorenzo, sporting some unlikely headgear and a pair of wrinkly mauve tights. We performed in the grounds of a stately home, and I thought I should always associate the beautiful fifth act ('The moon shines bright . . .' (V.i.1)) with hay fever and the whiff of hot dogs from the hospitality tent. I was offered the part of Launcelot Gobbo a few years ago in another outdoor production (once bitten by midges, twice shy, I'm afraid), so I was very pleased to tackle it (indoors) for the RSC, particularly in such a stimulating reassessment of the play.

For Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost* I was not required to relate to the audience, or to draw on my own personality, as I was with Launcelot Gobbo. The challenge instead was to create a more conventional character performance. Somehow I had to think myself into the cloistered world of a teenage chorister. The obvious first step was a trip to Oxford, and I spent a day shadowing the choir of Christ Church Cathedral School. This confirmed my hunch that Ian Judge's Oxbridge setting was going to fit like a glove. The choirboys are bright, confident and inquisitive, and of course highly educated, musically and academically. In class they proved to be just as 'quick in answers' (I.ii.29) as Moth. They also mix on a daily basis with the undergraduates in chapel, so Moth's ease with the adult characters seemed entirely credible. I realized that laboured attempts to mimic the movement of a young child would be out of place. These were socially adept young men, and too much

gaucherie in the performance would be patronizing. I did introduce one moment of crisis for the character, when he attempts to introduce the 'Russian' lords, and is overcome with the responsibility of it all ('they do not mark me, and that brings me out' (v.ii.173)), but this only seemed to emphasize how well he copes the rest of the time. He even manages to maintain an ironic detachment from his supposed superiors and their extraordinary conversation: 'They have been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps' (v.i.36–7).

Of course I did have to address the question of ageing down. For once I was grateful for the wide open spaces of the RST, and always relied on the fact that distance probably does lend enchantment. I think too that the costume helped with this. The cassock, the broad Eton collar, the breeches rather than trousers and the school uniform all served to create the right image, and having observed the boys at Oxford, I simply tried to reproduce their uncomplicated ebullience. First impressions are crucially important in the theatre, and in my initial scene with Daniel Massey as Don Armado, we sat on a slanting gravestone, he towering over me at the top end, while I squatted at the bottom, munching a packed lunch. In fact, Dan and I are about the same height, but it was an effective optical illusion. We had at first thought that Armado should be Professor of Modern Languages at the university, but playing on the word 'Don' was perhaps a bit too contrived, and he gradually became a more enigmatic figure – the sort of eccentric hanger-on that all such institutions seem to attract. It never seemed far-fetched that he and Moth should have developed such a cheerful rapport, sitting in graveyards after choir practice, musing on melancholia, love and literature.

I should perhaps mention that there has long been a battle between editors about the correct form of Moth's name. At the beginning of the season I blithely told a distinguished academic at Stratford's Shakespeare Institute that I was playing Moth, to which he retorted 'yes, I prefer Mote'. I then went on to mention that Jeremy Northam was joining the company to play Berowne and was corrected again: 'yes, I prefer Biron'. Even the *dramatis personae* of this play seemed to be a minefield. In fact there are very good reasons for opting for either spelling (see Appendix D of the Oxford Edition) but in production it felt like a slightly pretentious gesture to deviate from centuries of stage tradition. I also thought that the word 'Moth' was helpfully suggestive of something small, busy and irritating. And it sits happily with Costard's description of him as a 'most pathetical nit' (iv.i.149).

6 Christopher Luscombe as Moth, with Armado (Daniel Massey), *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act I, Scene ii.

Initially the incessant wordplay between Moth and Armado seemed wearing to the modern ear. But we began to realize that their brittle dialogue disguise a delightfully symbiotic relationship. Moth manages to talk Armado out of his melancholic state with the 'familiar demonstration' of logic (I.ii.9), and galvanizes him into a defiant declaration of his love for Jaquenetta. This in turn creates an opportunity for Moth to demonstrate his scholarship with a catalogue of the other 'great men [who] have been in love' (I.ii.63). Thus they take it in turns to occupy the psychiatrist's chair. Armado is of course a terrible snob ('I am ill at reckoning. It fitteth the spirit of a tapster' (I.ii.40)); and Moth is quite nauseatingly opinionated ('No, no; O Lord, sir, no' (I.ii.6)). But their *folies de grandeur* are seen to be touchingly fragile. Moth's self-possession evaporates when 'presence majestical' does indeed 'put him out' later in the play (v.ii.102) and Armado may think of himself as a man of 'good repute and carriage' (I.ii.67), but 'the naked truth of it is, I have no shirt' (v.ii.706).

Our Oxbridge setting also helped to take the curse off some of this elaborate verbal wit. In academia such conversational cut-and-thrust

seemed entirely natural. Friendships are forged in the delighted discovery of new vocabulary: 'The posterior of the day, most generous sir . . . the word is well culled, choice, sweet, and apt, I do assure you, sir, I do assure' (v.i.86–9). An afternoon could quite feasibly be whiled away inventing elaborate word games: 'Now will I begin your moral, and do you follow with my *l'envoi*' (III.i.91–2). Not all the relationships were quite so cosy. While Costard takes to Moth immediately ('An I had but one penny in the world, thou shouldst have it to buy gingerbread' (v.i.66–7)), Holofernes seems almost threatened by his intellect: 'thou disputes like an infant. Go whip thy gig' (v.i.62–3). But Moth is equally dismissive: 'you hear his learning' (v.i.48). Anyone who has spent time in an academic institution would surely recognize such rivalry. I mentioned earlier the value of a suitable context for these plays, and in this case it was almost miraculous that a line such as 'is not *l'envoi* a *salve*?' (III.i.78–9) could seem like a burning question.

I expect Ian Judge first thought of making Moth a choirboy because of Armado's instruction 'warble, child: make passionate my sense of hearing' (III.i.1). Shakespeare doesn't in fact supply a lyric, but our composer, Nigel Hess, set an Elizabethan love poem to an enchanting pastiche parlour melody, and I had the nightly challenge of trying to do it justice. My other, easier set piece was the Nine Worthies pageant in Act Five, in which Moth impersonates the infant Hercules and his remarkable trick of snake-strangling. Deirdre Clancy designed an ingenious costume involving two padded snakes wrapped around my torso which I then spectacularly fought. This was always rewarded with a spontaneous round of applause, that is until the production visited Newcastle. The usually warm audiences there remained obstinately unmoved by my acrobatics, to the point where I advertised 'two snakes for sale, one careful owner' on the backstage notice board. No bidder came forward and I somehow recovered my round, and my composure, for the London run (much to the relief of my long-suffering colleagues).

For all the analysis that went into the rehearsal and performance of these plays, the most important ingredient was the instinct that the actors brought to bear. The relative success of the productions can mainly be attributed, I believe, to the fact that the directors gave us a structure which liberated our imaginations and allowed us to square up to such demanding texts. Casting is important too, of course, and there was one moment when this struck me very forcefully. It was during a costume fitting for *The Merchant of Venice*. When we had made the decision that

I should play the fifth act in jogging gear, I had impressed upon the designer that I didn't want a 'funny' outfit. It mustn't look as if I was playing for a laugh – it had to be real. She agreed with me, and so we went to Ray Fearon, erstwhile tennis player and awesomely fit actor who was playing the Prince of Morocco. We asked him what he wears when he goes jogging. He told us and we went out and bought it. I tried it on in the Wardrobe Department at Stratford, and everyone fell about laughing. It's good to know that, if nothing else, you're in the right part.