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**Title:** *'The Past Dreams the Future Present:*

Dream as Political Visual Historiography in the work of Artist and Film Maker

Derek Jarman

### **Introduction**

The word dream is often used in connection with Derek Jarman's oeuvre and in his 1996 book on Jarman entitled, *Dreams of England*, Michael O'Pray observes that a bracket of sleeping or unconsciousness was often used by the artist in his films ( 115). Jarman himself referred to his creativity as being part of the 'dream world of the soul' ( *Kicking the Pricks*, 108) and in a stretching of the dream definition, his love of home movies as "a longing for paradise" ( *Kicking the Pricks*, 54). This paper will argue that Jarman's direct, and indirect utilisation of the dream in his work, is a creative and disruptive act that facilitates a temporal play across the past, the present and the future, constructing a unique personal and political visual historiography. To establish the substance of the dream in informing this historiography, alongside the attendant concepts of the vision and the alchemical, we need to explore, what Rowland Wymer describes as "Jarman's life long preoccupation with the Renaissance" (Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, p 4).

The films, *Jubilee* (1978), *The Tempest* (1979), *The Last of England* (1987), *The Angelic Conversation* (1985), and *Caravaggio* (1986), all reference the Renaissance. The inclusion of Shakespeare's sonnets in *The Angelic Conversation* and the interpretation of *The Tempest* are obviously direct engagements, but figures from the Renaissance, John Dee, Elizabeth I, populate the world of *Jubilee*, while dreaming and alchemical symbols are seen throughout Jarman's work in films such as *The Garden* (1990) and his final film *Blue* (1993) whose single colour he referred to as alchemy in delivering a type of liberation (Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, 9).

The Elizabethan world was one of "spirits good and bad, fairies, demons, ghosts and conjurors" (Yates, *The Occult the Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 87) where the dream reigned supreme as prophecy and wish fulfilment but was constantly riven with concerns around demonology and the occult (Bevington, *Dreams and Visions in Shakespeare's Plays*, 264). Shakespeare's use of the dream and engagement with dream theory departed from that of his contemporaries. Applied

in development of poetics, Shakespeare used the dream to test the parameters of his art creating tension between truth and fiction, illusion and reality in the theatre 'dreamscape'. Rather than strictly symbolic, the dream in Shakespeare becomes much more psychological, facilitating the revelation of a truth for his characters (and for the audience). The lover's nightmares in *A Midsummer's Nights' Dream* for example serves to create awareness of vulnerabilities as Hermia's loss of Lysander is delivered to her in a nightmare about a serpent who eats her heart clarifying her fear of betrayal, a fear that seems resolved on waking, as Bevington observes "their tribulations seem to them only a scary dream from which they awaken into better self-understanding" (Bevington, *Dreams and Visions in Shakespeare's Plays*, 260). The role of dream as a tool of revelation is a technique that goes on to form the basis of Freudian dream analysis. (Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor and Metamorphosis*, 6 ) The particular approach to the dream by Shakespeare extends the meaning of the dream state to that of the audience as well as the dreamer, to the waking as well as the sleeping. In many Shakespeare plays the audience has something revealed to it through a character's dream before the dreamer themselves are aware of it, compounding the psychoanalytical connection in the mirroring of the exchange between analyst and patient and between the idea of the latent and manifest content of the dream. Abounding in puns, miscommunication and ambiguity, as Garber notes, Shakespeare's use of the dream scrutinises interpretation and reality itself (Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor and Metamorphosis*,5-6).

Jarman's referencing of dream or sleeping states via his focus on the Renaissance could be seen to embrace this role of the dream as a space of potential reinvention and transformation aligning with his self-identification with Elizabethan alchemist John Dee (Szönyi, Wymer, "John Dee as a Cultural Hero", 189-209). In this context the dream becomes an alternative world of desire, possibility and imagination which not only portends reality but can become reality (Chatterjee, "Shakespeare in Dream and Shakespearean Dreams" 100). As Renaissance dream theory expands its application, as previously suggested, from containment in the nocturnal to include that of the waking world, the boundary between illusion and reality also becomes more permeable, creating a unity or "exchange of states" (Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor and Metamorphosis*, 6) where one could become the other elevating the imaginative life of the artist to that of a facilitator of active transfiguration.

Plane and Tuttle's research on dreams and dreaming in the modern period (*Dreams, Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, 2014) points to a contemporary reinterest in dreams as historical documents in themselves, beyond psychological tools of interpretation. To this extent they identify a "new historiography of dreaming" (Plane, Tuttle, *Dreams, Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, 928). Developing Chatterjee and Yate's ideas on the exchange between the sleeping and waking dream, Plane and Tuttle point to a science of dreaming that "affirms the potential for dreams to elucidate historical and cultural change" (Plane, Tuttle, *Dreams, Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, 920) in their reporting of individual rites of passage and collective social transformation. From this context the dynamic of the dream in Jarman's work as disruptive and transgressive has the potential to reveal both the conflicts of an individual and collective history of the 1980s and 90s when the films were made. In their temporal and visual re-configuration, new narratives that prophetically underline the lesson of the past in the possible fabrication of an alternative future.

With reference to the film's *Jubilee* (1978), *The Tempest* (1979) and *The Last of England* (1987), this paper will address how ~~in his films~~ Jarman's films "Dreams the Future Present" as ~~he has~~ John Dee state in the opening sequence of *Jubilee*. Applying the Renaissance scholarship of Yates, and the Jarman focussed research of Ellis and Wymer, amongst others, the dream will be pursued as an active rather than passive reverie. The legacy of dream theory in modern psychoanalysis will help elucidate the exchange between audience and film, implicit in the viewing experience of Jarman's work which is visceral and immersive. It is here perhaps that the alchemical act of transformation is at its height. (Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 188.) We will also draw on *Jarman Now* a series of recent talks between colleagues and friends of Jarman, curated by Peter Fillingham in collaboration with the authors over summer 2021.

### **Identifying the Dream Device in *Jubilee*, *The Tempest*, *The Last of England***

As already observed the dream presents itself in these films frequently through the use of a bracketing device. In *Jubilee* it is the past of Elizabeth I which begins and ends the film and which conjures up a dreamlike, or nightmare vision of Punk England, "*the shadow of this time*",

as the Angel Ariel says. That Jarman conceived of *Jubilee* as a dream is made clear in *Dancing Ledge*, his first book based on his diaries where he writes: "In Jubilee the positives are negated, turned on their heads. Its dream imagery drifts uncomfortably on the edge of reality, balanced like Hermine on the tightrope." (Jarman, 170).

In *The Tempest* it is Prospero's sleeping face which brackets the film and which clearly suggests that what has taken place is a dream. The dream device as Jarman explained "enabled [him] to take the greatest possible freedom with the text" (Davis, "Rounded with A Sleep: Prospero's Dream in Derek Jarman's, *The Tempest*", 188). Most characters in the *Tempest* either are, or think they are dreaming, as Bevington notes, the Boatswain, in Act V, reports the strange noises that he and his companions hear in the night, and when 'awake', they see their storm-battered ship fully rigged, and "were then transported, "Even in a dream," to Prospero's cell". Miranda describes remembering her childhood in Italy "rather like a dream than an assurance" (Bevington, *Dream and Vision in Shakespeare's Plays*, 277).

This existence of the dream in multiple formats in *The Tempest* presented a wonderful mutability for Jarman, which allowed him to disrupt ideas of temporality and blur boundaries between reality and fantasy. *The Last of England*, similarly disrupts the boundaries between the dreamt or imagined and the real. The film opens with shots of Jarman sitting at his desk in Phoenix House, writing in his diaries and reflecting, while we hear the voice over spoken by Nigel Terry. Filmed in monochrome, coloured images flash on the screen, intimating they are emerging from the artist's mind. As Jarman yawns and rubs his eyes we are encouraged to think that the director, like the magician Prospero, sleeps and dreams the images that will unfold. Wymer confirms Jarman "resolved to make a film which would explore 'through metaphor and dream imagery the deep-seated malaise in current Britain'," (*Derek Jarman*, 110). This dream framework is extended to the viewer through the particularly immersive experience of watching the film. Many have described it as difficult in its fast paced, confrontational use of the image, compounded by a lack of dialogue, the soundtrack comprising music, found sounds and short passages of voice over it could be felt to be audience unfriendly.

Bersani and Dutoit argue that the film "complicitously repeats the violence it represents. There is no distance between what Jarman does with his camera and what he condemns our culture for

doing to all of us”( Ellis, *Derek Jarman’s Angelic Conversations*, 137). Michael O’Pray however, described it as “Jarman’s most brilliant film” (O’Pray, *Derek Jarman Dreams of England*, 156). What can be confirmed is that the lack of dialogue and the aggressive editing, achieved through filming on Super 8, transferring to video for editing, then finally putting back on 35mm, subsumes the viewer, creating a trance like experience in which the ambiguous juxtaposition of images initiates the viewer into a dream state that is psychologically affecting. In this way we join Jarman on a journey, the staple of the dream formation (Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor and Metamorphosis*, 4), from which we all return changed. In this encounter with dream as transformation Jarman creates a thread of continuity from its Shakespearean application to that of the present day, where the creation of a dream state or space is visualised through image juxtaposition and ambiguity to make the real feel like the impossible and the improbable, probable.

### **The Emergence of a Visual Historiography: Re-Imagining and Re-Envisioning History**

Although the three films *Jubilee*, *The Tempest*, and *The Last of England* differ in subject matter and approaches, the emergence of a visual historiography is common to all of them and to all Jarman’s films. In her overview of British cinema, Sarah Street writes that “In many senses, Jarman’s films can be called *histories*” (Ellis, *Derek Jarman’s Angelic Conversations*, viii). Like most of Jarman’s concerns, however, his relationship to history is paradoxical, he loved for example the Elizabethan period, but also mistrusted it as the birthplace of capitalism. In many areas of his life he was a radical, including in his film making, but he refused this label saying he was a traditionalist aligning himself with the Western canon, (Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, 2-9) but it is in this very ambivalence perhaps, that his relationship to, and negotiation of, his understanding of self as he positions himself in relation to particular histories, is most clearly played out (Brydon,p.1) The utilisation of the dream in his work helps in facilitation of this negotiation and understanding, allowing a temporal mutability to be portrayed that visually reconfigures the past.

This reconfiguration is often achieved by anachronisms in the films such as the typewriter appearing in Renaissance Italy in *Caravaggio*, (Ellis, “Renaissance Things: Objects, Ethics and

Temporalities in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1996) and *Modern Nature* (1991, 337") creating a continuity and dialogue between past and present, a juxtaposition, as previously noted, reminiscent of the dream image.

One such example which conflates time and operates much like a dream is the scene in *Jubilee* where Elizabeth I with Dee and her Lady in Waiting are brought by Ariel into the present. Here the Elizabethan time travellers appear in the wastelands of Deptford to discover the corpse of Elizabeth II who has been murdered by Bod (played by Jenny Runacre who also plays Elizabeth I). The Lady in Waiting peers at the corpse and bends down to snatch away from the corpse a pair of white plastic rimmed sunglasses. She puts them to her face the wrong way around, vision turned backwards, then Dee speaks prophetic lines about the battle between the forces of darkness and light. In the next scene she is seen wandering across the wasteland the glasses contrasting with the black Elizabethan costume.

Ellis furthers this idea of trace and history in his 2014 article on the role of the object in Jarman's films. Referencing Jonathan Gil Harris's work *Untimely matter in the Time of Shakespeare* that addresses how objects resist temporal fixity, Ellis posits a similar role for objects in Jarman's work seeing them as creating multi-temporalities as they trail previous histories, contexts and experiences further informing this dialogue across time (Ellis "Renaissance Things: Objects, Ethics and Temporalities in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1996) and *Modern Nature* (1991)", 376). James Mackay, Jarman's producer and fellow film maker underlined the importance of objects for Jarman, and how "using objects at hand" in his flat at Phoenix house meant that they became characters in the films, directly therefore uniting the films through personal associations and through the tracking of place and time. (Mackay, *Jarman Now*, July, 21). Brydon extends this conception of history and time through what she describes as Jarman's "systematic imaging of gardens through flashback, rear projection and found footage that evoke multiple pasts including a personal history" (Brydon, "The Nostalgic Gardens of Derek Jarman's England", 1). It is in this way Jarman's work opens up the possibility of re-envisioning the past.

The repurposing of objects and symbols can be seen in *The Last of England* in the film's use of the Union Jack and the home movies of Jarman's childhood. The Union Jack is draped over a bed on which two men aggressively, desperately and drunkenly, yet seemingly unsatisfactorily have sex. One of the men is naked the other in paramilitary uniform, his face concealed by a balaclava, suggesting that real intimacy and contact is never actually achieved. Ideas of destruction permeate the scene, the unclothed civilian pouring vodka down himself, spilling onto his body as though to reach oblivion, before he clambers onto the seemingly comatose soldier; afterwards the man is seen throwing and smashing bottles, in anger or frustration. On the one hand this staging of gay sexuality with all the connotations of the homosexual as unpatriotic could be seen as a desecration of the flag, or an emptying out of the potency of symbols. On the one hand the meaning of the extended sequence is, however, more ambiguous, as it is suffused with a longing, a need, for real connection, for a past when sex was not likely to kill you, for a past even if that past is imagined, the searching for an English Arcadia located in Elizabethan England.

This sense of longing is further underlined by the interjection of images of Jarman's childhood that occur in the film and that show a particular version of the past, which in its nostalgia for a middle-class family life, and Jarman's belief that all creativity starts in childhood, cannot be easily categorised as a rejection of that past and lifestyle. In both, the presence of the Union Jack and the representation of family there is foregrounded a locus of a particular construction of identity, that inherently needs to be acknowledged, worked through and presented rather than rejected. Like all the paradoxes in Jarman's work this ambivalence aims to interrogate rather than erase. The dream like structure of *The Last of England*, both literal and metaphorical, facilitates this interrogation its mutability enabling a fluidity of colour that helps blur the distinction between past and present.

Rejecting the conventional use of black and white to indicate memory and colour to define the present Jarman intermingles this colour codex, as Wymer points out the home movies of Jarman in the garden as a child are the most heightened in terms of colour, while scenes in the derelict warehouse representing contemporary England and Tilda Swinton's wedding scenes are in black and white (Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, 114-5). In this way the past is enabled to press on the present



in the dreamscape of the imagination, one being seen to be the product of the other. We also see this used to good effect in *The Tempest*, where colour confuses waking and dreaming, present and past to allow the magical and mundane to co-exist. The prophetic quality this seems to suggest and the sense of heightened anxiety in *The Last of England* also provide an historical point of continuity. The Elizabethan age was equally one of division and conflict around national identity and its implications after the 1603 rise of James VI of Scotland to James I, King of England and his attempts at a united government. The implications of this Shakespearean ‘Sceptred Isle’ persist into our present day resonating with Brexit and interestingly a forthcoming documentary about Covid bearing this title (*Jarman Now*, July, 2021).

Jarman’s re-configuring of history, his re-envisioning of culture is crucial, as he views a culture that is resistant to re-thinking, as we can see in his films and writing, is no longer a culture of value. Yet he is also clearly aware that all establishments rewrite history, to make a version that is acceptable to them. In *Dancing Ledge*, Jarman’s entry for the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1983 entitled ‘Consumervision’ reads:

“Ian Sprout, the Tory minister, is in the *Guardian* (sic) this morning quoted as saying that *Chariots of Fire* helped the government over the Falklands with public opinion in the USA; it confirmed all my suspicions about film which plays a tune reactionaries like to hear.”  
(Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 220)

Jarman then recounts how the publicity around the actor Ian Charleson who starred in the film *Chariots of Fire* (1981) but who had also previously played one of the twins in *Jubilee* was manipulated, the director of *Chariots of Fire* David Puttnam suppressing any mention of Charleson’s role in *Jubilee* and claiming it was Charleson’s first film. Jarman continues: “All establishments rewrite history. No shadows are to be cast over the Royal Command Performance. In Mitterrand’s France these dubious manipulators were careful to protest their Socialism.” (*Dancing Ledge*, 220) Jarman’s disdain at the rewriting of history and the erasure of gay filmic history and of his work is evident, yet as stated before Jarman was in favour of

reconfiguring history when that endeavour was to create new lineages in which to place himself and new communities.

Considering the relationship between legacies of the past and the new in his book *Capital Realism* (2009) Mark Fisher discusses T.S. Eliot's, essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* 1919 stating that the essay "described the reciprocal relationship between the canonical and the new." Fisher goes on:

The new defines itself in response to what is already established; at the same time, the established has to reconfigure itself in response to the new. Eliot's claim was that the exhaustion of the future does not even leave us with the past. Tradition counts for nothing when it is no longer contested and modified. A culture that is merely preserved is no culture at all. (Fisher, *Capital Realism*, 3)

We see an awareness of this position in Jarman's attitude to the heritage film, suggested by the earlier remark about the film *Chariots of Fire*, which he saw as a process of ossifying the past, "there is nothing more excruciating than English Historical Drama" (*Dancing Ledge*, 14). In this form, as in his comments in *Dancing Ledge* attest, he felt history can be put to work for the establishment, nationalism and ultimately as *Jubilee* suggests, consumer goods. Yet as we have seen in *The Last of England*, and which is also present in *Jubilee*, there is another history that challenges rather than supports the present and may in fact have a therapeutic dimension and the dream is central to this. Describing the *The Last of England's* structure as a dream allegory Jarman writes:

In dream allegory the poet wakes in a visionary landscape where he encounters personifications of psychic states. Through these encounters he is healed. *Jubilee* was such a healing fiction, it harked back to *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. Which was a socio-political tract. In *Jubilee* the past dreamed the future present. *The Last of England* is in the same form, though this time I have put myself into the centre of the picture. (*Kicking the Pricks*, 188)

To write alternative histories becomes necessary for marginal groups, a revisionist history, but also, following Fisher's thinking, for an understanding and process that disrupts dominant thinking. Reimagining a past therefore can also be seen, more specifically as a need to imagine an alternative to the status quo of late capitalism, 'capital realism' as Fisher terms it:

The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or Das Kapital, a monetary value. (Fisher, *Capital Realism*, 8)

*Jubilee* points to this world where everything is reduced to monetary value. In the scene following Amyl accidentally breaking her Churchill mug, Mad sees the book called *Teach Yourself History by Amyl Nitrate*. Mad mockingly reads aloud Amyl's alternative history. The first section is *The History of England*, she reads:

'It all began with William the Conqueror, who screwed the Anglo-Saxons into the ground, carving the land into theirs and ours. They lived in mansions and ate beef at fat tables, whilst the poor lived in houses minding the cows on a bowl of porridge.' ( Jarman, *Last of England*)

As Mad 'performs' Amyl's potted history of England, we see Amyl gluing together the Churchill mug, and the lesson concludes with England self-destructing through civil war and sinking in to the sea. The main point of Amyl's history, according to Ellis, "is that once everything has been commodified, it becomes impossible to make distinctions based on any other scheme of value" (Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, 60)

Jarman creating new histories-but always in dialogue with an established canon more forcibly achieves Fisher's contestation. For example, in *Caravaggio* Jarman places emphasis on a reading

of the artists' work in relation to his sexuality but rather than just 'queering the canon' the film looks to present a construction of queer identity, avoiding period detail in favour of the previously mentioned anachronistic creation that allow the worries of the present to be seen in relation to their past enabling a continuity of critique that oscillates as much as the movement between stylised speech and contemporary vernacular in the films dialogue (Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, 155).

### **Dreams, Alchemy, Transformation: *The Tempest***

It is the power of the dream that on waking one often feels bewilderment as to the time one is actually in. Jarman's films are of course now reflections of the time of their making, but perhaps, like the dream, one may have a sense that the film is taking place in the present and representing the now. Of course, film does happen or unfold in the present of the viewing moment and so the experience of it, and the potential impact of that experience is, as in Walter Benjamin's conception of history, always informed by, and implicated in, the current moment. (Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 196-209 ) This play of time that Jarman evokes is spoken about by Freud in relation to dreaming "Dreams give us knowledge of the past. Although derived from the past, the dreamer perceives the dream as occurring in the present and, as a result, they influence the future. In this respect, dreams can be prophetic" (Goldstein, "Dreaming the Collective Awakening: Walter Benjamin and Ernst's Bloch's Theories of Dreams", 52) If the dream at least on immediate waking may make us question lived reality, then Jarman, in his frequent application of it, can also be seen as an advocate of changing reality, further witnessed in the slippery interface between past and present that we have identified across his work.

The dream format and its utilisation as alchemy, both literally, in the symbolic, visual references to the esoteric in his films and in the central themes of psychological and societal transformation is perhaps most clearly evident in Jarman's 1979 adaptation of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. As already noted, *The Tempest* is a play totally shot through with the idea of the dream, in both sleeping and enchantment, and as previously cited by Bevington, every character believes they are in some kind of dream. This fact allowed Jarman to revel in the dream potential, using *mise*

*en scene* to underline the feeling of bewilderment and engender questioning disorientation and juxtaposition in what becomes for Jarman a dreamscape on many levels.

Reconfiguring the totality of the play as Prospero's dream, permits Jarman to radically restructure the play for the film as he runs with the Renaissance idea of connections between the sleeping and waking world. Opening with a sleeping Prospero we see found footage of a storm-stricken ship literally conjured up as Prospero's nightmare, the sound track of sleeping breath and the blue tinted colour confirming we are in the world of dreams. This colouring, even in outside shots a blue filter was used, (Davis, "Rounded with A Sleep: Prospero's Dream in Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*", 93) breaks down any distinction between the sleeping and waking dream pulling on its potential to not just visualise change but enable it. If we are in any doubt as to Jarman's conceiving of the totality of *The Tempest* as a dream it is confirmed in the epilogue spoken in voice over by Prospero while he continues to sleep consigning the whole film to his dream (Davis, "Rounded with A Sleep: Prospero's Dream in Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*", 93).

For Wymer (*Derek Jarman*, 77) the opening scene is therefore an important initial pointer to the particular focus of Jarman's interpretation which he identifies as a psychological journey into self with the possibility of transformation and as Jarman states "the concept of forgiveness in *The Tempest* attracted me" (*Dancing Ledge*, 202). This, as in much of Jarman's work, enables a certain paradox in the presentation of Prospero which the dream framework assists. More than just the controlling, self-serving figure that Prospero is traditionally presented as, Jarman allows the quality of forgiveness to co-exist in his representation (Davis, 2013,0.99). Even while, as the originator of the dream, Prospero controls all within it, the situating of the masque at the end of the film reflects Jarman's concern, and Prospero's, whom many have established as a key figure of self-identification for Jarman. (Wymer,*Derek Jarman*,76, Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, 68) That concern is to embrace a sense of transgressive community which the film achieves in its culminative representation of a chorus line of sailors dancing to *Stormy Weather* sung by Elisabeth Welch as the Goddess achieving full spectacle and sunlight as we finally emerge out of the shadows.

The reference to Hollywood musicals and Gilbert and Sullivan opera creates a quality of spectacle and liberation that is celebratory and subversive in its sexual inclusivity and its inversion of imperial representation in the male bonding of the sailors (Harris, Jackson, "Stormy Weather: Derek Jarman's "The Tempest", 95). As Jonathan Murray says "ultimately, Jarman's interpretation of Shakespeare posits the idea that sexual liberation potentially forms the enabling precondition for other kinds of social reformation" (Murray, "A Vision of the Past: Revisiting the Films of Derek Jarman", 6). This creation of community, something which Jarman in his own life pursued, is equally part of Prospero's dream casting him in a more forgiving role, and with the masque placed as the film's culmination, indicating this theme, as Jarman asserts, as the works focus.

It is the dream format makes this possible. The radical restructuring of Shakespeare's text, where the speeches are broken into smaller units and spread across the action, intermingling with each other, and shifting the masque to the end of the film, is itself a product of the conceiving of the play as a total dream, creating a quality of dream experience in the viewer through the form of juxtaposition embraced by the transfer to film. The masque trails with it the original function it played in Elizabethan drama which was that of uniting players and audience, often bringing them onto the stage and emphasizing a spectacle in which everyone is involved mirroring the unity or harmony of an inclusive social order. (Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, 72) In Jarman's *Tempest* a similar unity or point of contact with the audience is created by having characters talk directly to camera. Having the masque occur as the climax of the action in the film emphasizes the role of the dream and imagination in the realisation of change, in Shakespeare's time it was used to reveal the divide between illusion and reality where Jarman appears to employ it to bring these two qualities closer together.

The fluidity that the dream allows enables Jarman to emphasize the resonance to the moment of the film's making in the late 1970s. The sense of national identity, division and exploitation of certain sectors of the community in late 1970s Britain finds its echo in Jarman's interpretation of *The Tempest* a play that would equally have had social relevance to Shakespeare's 1611 in its interpretation as a reflection on the developing colonialism of the new world in its articulation of authorised ownership. Murray sees the film as an "incisive commentary on its own specific time"

(Murray, “A Vision of the Past: Revisiting the Films of Derek Jarman”,<sup>6</sup>) with themes of hierarchy, division and the plight of the exploited visually emphasised in the film’s *mis en scene* and casting. As Murray continues there is a prevalence of butterflies in the film, pinned butterflies seen under a magnifying glass by Prospero as he summons Ariel and again a dead butterfly that distracts Miranda as Ferdinand is captured by her father. The metaphor seems to stand for something beautiful not being able to reach its full potential, thwarted by power and ownership something being played out in the film’s contemporaneous England seeming to prophetically conjure Thatcher’s measures to control class and workplace unrest which created an arguably unstable economy dispossessing many of the means to thrive.

This contemporary connection is further facilitated by the use of costume that hints at period specific but is largely disparate and actually cannot be fixed in time. Miranda’s braided hair for example sits somewhere between a 1970s appropriation of corn braids and Elizabethan curls, Prospero has a quality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic, perhaps a deliberate point to the New Romantics emerging in 1970s/80s Britain which Jarman described, in a deleted section of *Dancing Ledge* 1984, available in the BFI archives (Wymer, *Derek Jarman*, p.73) as a product of the times insecurity and conservatism, and Ariel consistently appears in a boiler suit. This approach to costume, again enabled by the dreamscape, avoids the period fixity Jarman so much loathed in the heritage film. Instead, we get a sense of the duration of the play, its persistence through time, its costumes reflecting each period in which it has been performed, it equally enables enduring relevance and persistence of its underlying themes for its many audiences. This is consolidated, as Ellis (Ellis *Derek Jarman’s Angelic Conversations*, 76-79) and Wymer discuss, by the casting of Jack Birkett as Caliban, Prospero’s slave “..a figure of indefinable racial origin with a Northern accent” he is described by Wymer as so not conforming to any of the stable figures of otherness to create a sense of difference that is truly ‘other’ (*Derek Jarman*, 75). Such instability we could say is the very subject of dreams.

It is however perhaps in the power of alchemy and Jarman’s seeming equation of that with the cinematic and the imaginative life of the artist that the dream enables a particular articulation. Belief in alchemy maintains the persistent possibility of change, it also suggests unity in its bringing together of disparate elements to create something new.

Informed by reading of the psychology of Jung, who embraced alchemy as a psychological search for lost unity, we can see Jarman's concerns with this in framing *The Tempest* as an ultimate search for self in which the permeable dream world becomes a key tool "the shifting boundaries between waking and sleeping, illusion and reality, freedom and control" (Harries, Jackson, "Stormy Weather: Derek Jarman's "The Tempest", 97). In Jarman's identification with John Dee, said to be represented as Prospero, we also get a continued casting of the artist in the role of alchemist. Szönyi and Wymer in their article *John Dee as Cultural Hero*, suggest that for Jarman Dee's scrying glass or crystal ball needed updating, a new portal into other worlds needed to be found. It seems that this becomes the lens of the camera and the art of film "a wedding of light and matter-an alchemical conjunction" (Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 188). This equation is made clear in *The Tempest*, with the drawings on the floor of Prospero's study standing in for alchemical drawings in the film but actually being blueprints for pinhole cameras drawn and then made by the artist Simon Reade (Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 188). As in the dream world of *The Tempest* we are encouraged to break through any veils of appearance to a truth and it seems the camera provides this transparency, "it is through transparency that the world is discovered. The camera lens" (Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p.64). Jarman's films become their own kind of alchemy then, presenting and potentially engendering change with the dream as the format for the viewer to experience and understand it, the legacy of Renaissance magic and dream theory for the 20<sup>th</sup> century artist. Jarman's radical visual innovation does indeed create its own historiography enabling an understanding of the present through the continuation of the past via the scrying glass of the camera lens.

## **Conclusion**

The rewriting, or reclaiming of history, in Jarman's work becomes in itself an act of resistance, a 'queering' of history that might suggest new ways or possibilities of living now. If we conceive of the dream in Jarman's work in a way that is akin to Shakespeare's and Freud's conceptions of the dream as previously noted, as something which moves us to an understanding of ourselves, to a truth that is transformative, then the vision of a post seventies London in *Jubilee* can no longer be dismissed as mere fancy, Prospero's dream, becomes a radical rewriting to suggest a space of potential transformation, and *The Last of England* a reliving of the trauma



of Thatcher's Britain, which may or may not lead to catharsis. The accuracy of both *Jubilee* and *The Last of England* in portraying their time has been commented upon. Jon Savage for example states "*Jubilee* captured the mood of Punk better than anyone could of predicated ..it remains one of the few places where you can see the 1977 London landscape", (Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 376-377) underlining the films connection to a known reality that is being reconfigured. This opens the Shakespearean permeable border between the waking and the nocturnal world of the dream with the potential to turn the imagined into actuality (Chatterjee, "Shakespeare in Dream and Shakespearean Dreams", 100). Writing in *The Guardian* in 1994 the novelist Will Smith said of *The Last of England* " he [Jarman] offered us a set of discursive and plangent images of our own divided nature". (O'Pray, *Derek Jarman Dreams of England*, 161)

The role of the psychic life and how it interacts with our concrete lived realities is something therefore that Jarman's work evokes and as Jim Ellis notes "Jarman was an artist who well understood the role history and mythology played in the psychic life of communities" (Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, vii). One could reverse this formulation to say that Jarman also understood the role psychic life played in the creation of those histories and mythologies, for of course history is formed not only from 'fact' but how we encounter those facts and what we imagined or wanted to remember of the past. Jarman both points to the danger and necessity of this rewriting of history, one of the many paradoxes in his relationship to his material. The use of historical subject matter **is** as Ellis writes **is** 'doubled-edged' in Jarman's work **as-it-challenging** official versions of history while at same time owning it. **as** (*Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversation,s* viii). Ellis goes on: "Jarman strove in his work to invent new ways of seeing and of representing the relationship between the past and the present, of exploring the ways in which history inhabits and informs the present." (*Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, viii). His films for example, co-opt some of the emblematic stories of English nationalism, using them to create new mythologies that challenged dominant versions of the present. In Jarman's evocations of history, the movement between past and present is disruptive, in *Jubilee*, *The Tempest* and *The Last of England* this moving between past and a present, or near future, facilitated by the dream structure allows a for a remaking and re-envisioning of the past that presses on the present. His films for example, co-opt some of the emblematic stories of English nationalism, of Empire and use them to create new mythologies that challenge dominant

versions of the present. In Jarman's evocations of history, the temporal play is disruptive, in *Jubilee, The Tempest and The Last of England*, the moving between past and a present, or near future, facilitated by the dream structure allows a for a re-configuring and re-envisioning of the past that presses on the present.

There is a sense that for Jarman this re-envisioning is also a contesting of history, and that it is not only an artistic device, but intrinsic to his thinking and also, perhaps, necessary for his psychic survival as a gay man living in such hostile times. In the documentary film, *Derek Jarman: Know what I mean*, made in 1988 (Postma), Jarman passionately discusses his views on art, creativity, Section 28 and the government of the time which he views with contempt, "There's absolutely nothing in Margaret Thatcher which is, patriotic, intelligent or honourable" he rails.

Later he talks of his adaptation of *The Tempest*, how the film is alchemical, how the island in the play might be a metaphor for gay sexuality, as it is something which is 'cut off', and how the island shifts in its nature, is it an island of 'sweet airs' or an island that is vicious and attacks people? Is, one wonders, the island a metaphor for England itself? His final comment on *The Tempest*, however is telling. In Jarman's adaptation Prospero's speech from Act IV has been moved to be the concluding scene of the film so we end with lines describing the disappearance of visons. Jarman comments on this ending: "And the last speech is wonderful, 'We are such stuff that dreams are made on' ... and I like that because I never believed in reality, because if reality was the way it was served up to us who wanted it?"

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