JOURNAL OF

# The Wooden O

Volume 24

*Published by*


Southern Utah University Press
in connection with the
Gerald R. Sherratt Library and the
Utah Shakespeare Festival

The *Journal of the Wooden O* (ISSN 1539-5758) is published annually by the Southern Utah University Press in connection with the Gerald R. Sherratt Library and the Utah Shakespeare Festival on the campus of Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah.

Subscription rates are $15.00 plus postage for individuals and libraries. Subscriptions and correspondence should be sent to: Southern Utah University Press, 351 W. University Blvd., Cedar City, UT 84720, or by e-mail to press@suu.edu.

The *Journal of the Wooden O* is a peer-reviewed academic publication focusing on Shakespeare studies. It is published annually by Southern Utah University Press in connection with the Gerald R. Sherratt Library and the Utah Shakespeare Festival.

The Wooden O Symposium is a cross-disciplinary conference that explores Medieval and Renaissance studies through the text and performance of Shakespeare's plays. The symposium is held annually in August in Cedar City, Utah, and coincides with the Utah Shakespeare Festival's summer season. Plays from Shakespeare's canon are performed each summer in the Englestadt Shakespeare Theatre, a unique performance space modeled after the Globe Theatre, Shakespeare's own "Wooden O."

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David W. Hartwig and Elissa Cruz
Weber State University and University of Utah

## Introduction

Subversive energies abounded in early modern English theater. This was partly due to evolving political and economic systems as England moved toward a capitalist society. As commercial enterprises, the early modern theaters became sites wherein the emerging conflicts of political and socio-economic changes both pressured the theatrical venture and were dramatized by it. Nowhere are these conflicts more manifest than in the clown characters. The theatrical clown may have functioned as a means of controlling the audience's (or specific audience members') subversive energies. By controlling audience responses, and encouraging audience interaction when, and only when, it served the drama, the clown may have been upholding the political and socio-economic *status quo* by encouraging textual veneration and ensuring a well-ordered and controlled theatrical event.[1] However, examining the careers of the actors who played the clown characters–their improvisations which resisted government censorship, the connections they forged with what we would today call working-class audience members, and their subversion of the play-text itself–suggests that early modern theatrical clowns could not be so simply categorized.

Richard Preiss usefully challenges "...if clowning ultimately suggests a tension between text and performance, it should prompt

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 1-22

ISSN: 1539-5758

us to ask why we 'read' theatre at all."[2] At the same time, we cannot recover a complete and accurate understanding of the entire early modern theatrical event, nor would every event (even subsequent performances of the same play) be identical. Therefore, we posit an approach that combines an examination of the texts that we can access alongside an examination of extratextual theatrical phenomena such as theatrical interludes that bookended or interrupted the play, audience interactions, and the actor playing the clown, in order to better understand the subversive potential of the clown. In this paper, we focus on William Kemp, and one of the characters he originated, Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. We situate Kemp's work within both the continuum of clowning practices during the early modern period and our understanding of the political and socio-economic climate at the end of the sixteenth century. We also examine Kemp's textual contributions to the early modern theatrical *oeuvre*, including his jigs and his *Nine Days' Wonder*. Through this examination, we argue that Kemp represents a particularly subversive figure, and said subversiveness can be seen in his character Dogberry and in his relationship with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, especially in the ending thereof. Our argument will extend to the theatrical practices of clowning beyond the texts that have been retained, to the shift in the clown characters in Lord Chamberlain's Men plays that coincided with the hiring of Robert Armin as the main clown, and to Kemp's work after leaving the company.

## Extratextual Subversion

As theatrical texts, the plays of the early modern period provide a majority of the evidence of the early modern theatrical event, and are woefully ineffective in telling us all that encompassed said theatrical event. Therefore, we begin by surveying the extant evidence regarding the broader theatrical events of the period, focusing specifically on extratextual theatrical phenomena involving the clown character/actor (for, the two were often conflated by audiences). In doing so, we will trace some of the ways in which the theater-state of the time sought to control the dramas, as well as the audiences, and examine some of the ways the clowns may have been subverting both.

### *Before the Play*

As part of a day's entertainments, it is likely that there was some sort of musical prelude to the theatrical event. To our knowledge, the clowns were not necessarily involved in these, but there were other peripheral phenomena that did involve the clowns. For example, prior to the beginning of a play, the famous clown Richard Tarleton had created a ritual of "pulling faces" to grab the attention of the audience, and possibly to focus its attention upon the stage. Preiss notes that, in doing so, Tarleton "made himself a grotesque extension of the audience's will."[3] Additionally, in the early days of Elizabethan theater, clowns often "performed" the news on the stages of London.[4] This performance was often satirical in nature, but for the largely illiterate audiences, it was also the main source of news *qua* entertainment. While this solo practice seems to have died out in the 1580s, it is plausible that it continued as part of the preluding entertainments of the theatrical event. Both of these examples show the clown endearing himself to the audience members, connecting with the largely lower-class members of the audience through physical spectacles and/or the comical presentation of news. The clown thus served as something of the ringleader for the theatrical event, providing both the prelude and, as we shall outline in a moment, the encore.

The clowns of the early modern theater were its first celebrities. From Tarleton to Kemp to Armin (among others), the clowns were instantly recognizable figures to the audiences of their respective eras. By comparison, William Shakespeare would have been a relatively anonymous figure in the early part of his career, while Kemp would have been known to virtually every theatergoer. It is important to note that the title page of the 1600 quarto publication of *Much Ado About Nothing* does ascribe the play to William Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. If that first printing happened, as is widely believed, within a year or two of its initial performance, then the primacy of the author and the company, as opposed to the clown, suggests a locus of conflict between the presumed authority of the author and the subversive popularity of the clown.

### *Improvisation*

The clown's popularity not only influenced the preceding entertainments, but commanded attention during the play as well.

Because of the clown's popularity, Preiss suggests that the clowns in the early years of English theater were means by which the company mediated between its product (the play) and the audience. The clown "remained an intuitive figure of control" simply because he exerted control over the audience, at least as much as possible, since he was "the source of affinity for the audience."[5] As David Wiles notes, Tarleton drew from the familiar Lord of Misrule tradition, which influenced later clowns as well, and therefore clowning quickly began to rely on "inversionary enactments of 'misrule' to create a sense of release" for the audience.[6] This appears to suggest that the clown was little more than a puppet for the enforcement of social mores or class hierarchies. Alternatively, we argue that Tarleton's and Kemp's use of the tradition subverted the institution itself, since the Lord of Misrule was an elected amateur who served only once for a specific festival, yet neither Tarleton nor Kemp could be considered an amateur, nor were they "elected' to the position but chose the Misrule character for themselves, picking it up and setting it down at will depending upon whether or not they were on stage or in front of an audience.[7]

While in front of an audience, however, the clown–the self-appointed "Graund-Captain (of all mischéefe)," as Phillip Stubbs defines the Lord of Misrule in his 1583 *The Anatomy of Abuses*–controlled the stage through the chaotic use of improvisation, which often upended the play proper.[8] Molly Clark explains that theatergoers would not have been surprised by improvisations during the play itself, and may well have expected them, since there are plenty of anecdotes about Richard Tarleton's tradition of improvised rhyming, as well as the textual evidence of "Kemp's tiny role of 'Peter' in *Romeo and Juliet*, which is so slight on the page as to imply that a good deal of extemporary comedy must have made the casting of the star clown worthwhile."[9] In addition, she speculates that it is uncertain whether the scene where Touchstone ridicules Orlando's verses was fully scripted or partially improvised in the early performances of *As You Like It*.[10] Through all of these examples, clowns commanded the stage as they subverted the scripted play through their comedic improvisations. As Clark wryly comments, "With an audience constantly in suspense, half waiting for the actor to go off-piste, one can play tricks with expectations."[11]

Improvisation did, indeed, play tricks with expectations, to the consternation of both the playwrights and the political leaders of London. The Mayor of London attempted to outlaw improvisation in 1574 and the Master of the Revels insisted on reviewing the entire script before a play could be staged; however, the clowns' improvisations could (and often did) skirt the Master of the Revels' interventions since their antics were not scripted.[12] And of course, the most famous example of a playwright's frustration with the improvisation of clowns appears in *Hamlet* when the eponymous character gives advice to a hired company of actors:

> And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh, too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That's villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. (3.2.40-47)[13]

Though it is unclear whether the ambitious villainy of clown improvisation was the actual belief of Shakespeare and those in his company or merely a humorous joke made at the expense of the comic actors, this passage does demonstrate how improvisation could subvert the playwright's intended purpose and set the stage for a conflict of interest between clown and poet. Given that *Hamlet* debuted for the Lord Chamberlain's Men sometime between 1599 and 1601, and Kemp left the company in 1599, it is likely this passage does refer to Kemp and is a direct allusion to the Lord Chamberlain's Men's transition to being what Shapiro calls "a playwright's theater"[14] courting a higher-class, more intellectually engaged audience. Kemp's appeal to the working-class audience members would have been untenable in the company's new direction.

This conflict of interest was well-documented historically, especially the conflict between Shakespeare, along with other writers working with him, and William Kemp.[15] David Wiles suggests that "Kemp had to adapt himself to the demands of writers" but "writers had to adapt themselves to the demands of Kemp" as well.[16] Kemp appears to have gone off-script to extemporize so often that Shakespeare began to expect and plan for it. Preiss argues that the clown roles written for Kemp became more and more secluded from the play in order to mitigate the clown's,

and by extension Kemp's, subversive role. The company and its playwrights began to "compartmentalize the clown's parts into marginal scenes where his improvisations (and any corresponding audience participation) would minimally derail the plot, and to install the increasingly regular postlude of the stage jig in order to displace [the clown] from the plot altogether."[17] In doing so, we argue, a division was created between clown and company, with the playwright the prime representative of the company. The sequestration of the clown characters, and Kemp's undiminished popularity as a performer, led to conflict between clown and writer for control over the performance itself. This conflict, we suggest, is likely what led to Kemp's resignation from the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

Control of the clown character became an easier task once Kemp left the company. For example, during *King Lear*–performed during the years when Robert Armin was the company's comedian–the improvisational nature of the clown was written into the scripted play itself, since it is the characters who improvise, but not the actors themselves, though the doggerel rhyme used by the clown characters "reminds the audience of times in which these same actors were improvising."[18] Though now tightly confined to the script, the clown character continued to delight audiences with his comedic prowess, which may still have encouraged audience participation during the play proper. The audience would have remained an active participant in the play, and the audience "was not in the habit of keeping its reactions private."[19] In sum, we argue that in allowing the audience to fashion the performance in some ways (by interacting with the clown), the early modern theaters may have been trying to control the subversive tendencies of both actor/clown and audience, but the historical evidence suggests that this strategy of containment was not always successful.

## *After the Play*

The festivities in the early modern playhouses did not end when the actors finished their final lines. Roger Clegg and Lucie Skeaping explain that the play was "surrounded by a great variety of improvisational and un-play-like entertainment that was lumped together under the guise of the dramatic jig."[20] During

Tarleton's years, this entertainment was often a satirical ballad sung to a popular tune, but he was more famous for his "extemporized rhymes accompanied by pipe and tabor."[21] At the end of the play, Tarleton would "exchange quips with audience members; someone would pipe up with a 'theme', often a prepared rhyming question or observation, and he would respond with a cutting answer or put-down also in rhyme."[22] We conjecture that Robert Armin, who was considered Tarleton's heir to the rhyming tradition, used the time immediately following the play to practice his improvisational rhyming with the audience, interspersed with singing, for which he was also well-known.

However, it was in the hands of Kemp and other clowns of the last decade or so of the sixteenth century and into the first part of the seventeenth century that dramatic jigs quickly evolved:

> They became a meeting point of various branches of song, dance, slapstick, sword-play, satire, word-play and popular comedy, most characteristically taking the form of short musical dramas and featuring ebullient stock characters and dialogue feathered with *double entendre*. The scripts that have survived are likely to have been the starting point for the creation of a drama that revelled in the immediacy and veracity of the moment and allowed for reaction to the audience, inclusion of dance episodes, deviation to incorporate ephemeral or topical material and the display of individual skills and *shticks*."[23]

Jigs were spectacles that would have kept the audiences easily entertained and the jigmakers/clowns incredibly busy, as they were constantly pressured to produce new content that would appeal to those in the yard and the galleries alike. This would also mean that clowns in particular would have had their finger on the pulse of popular culture, so to speak, since they would be mining it for use on stage. Moreover, we argue that jigs were the counter-content of the play to which they were attached. They allowed the audience to "deconstruct the finale of the play."[24] For example, kingly tragedies were followed by a comedic jig where domestic quarrels reigned supreme, while comedies ending with romanticized marriage were countered by a jig concerning infidelity and other less romantic squabbles.[25] In terms of plots, the clown typically "starts the jig in a predicament, and the audience's pleasure consists in seeing

how he extricates himself. The clown is an anti-hero in the misrule tradition, for he is the lowest of the low in all respects–wealth, status, fighting ability, even intelligence (for his ploys are never his own idea)–in everything, in short, except dancing ability."[26] Therefore, there were multiple levels of subversive elements embedded in all that the clown did on stage during the dramatic jig.

The subversive impact of the jig was concerning to both ecclesiastical and civil courts; the latter finally ruled to suppress the jig in the October 1612 Middlesex General Session. As Clegg and Skeaping explain, the government recognized that jigs "brought into sharp focus opposition between literary ambition and sub-literary popular culture, civic order and public disorder, controlled and uncontrolled behavior, lawfulness and lawlessness, morality and immorality, and that they encouraged spectators to laugh *at* as well as, more controversially, *with* the performers."[27] In addition, these jigs often mocked the men and women of the galleries, "some of whom must have ostentatiously left the playhouse before the jig began–passing, on their way out, others who had waited until the play was over before coming in."[28] Evidence that many of the working-class came only to see the jig was captured in the 1612 suppression ruling: "...divers cutt-purses and other lewde and ill disposed persons in greate multitudes doe resorte thither at th'end of euerye playe many tymes causinge tumultes and outrages wherebye His Majesties peace is often broke and much mischiefe like to ensue thereby."[29] This would suggest that audiences may have literally shifted to a more working-class core group as the jig began. As David Wiles explains, from a sociological standpoint, "the economically dominant occupants of the sixpenny gallery and the lords' room, together with the actors' patrons in the Privy Council, were able to dictate the tone in the public theatres; but at the end of a day's performance the balance shifted, and the actors surrendered a degree of control to those who stood in the yard."[30] It is therefore reasonable to consider the jig as the dance of the working-class. As Kemp was the self-crowned king of this dance, he thus became the spokesman for the working-class members of the audience.

## Kemp's Dogberry

Of William Kemp's beginnings, we know little. Scholars and historians have not been able to locate him in the historical record before his 1585 performance with Lord Leicester's Men, but some speculate that he may have had some connection to the gentry through the wealthy Catholic Kempe family in Kent. Even if this connection is accurate, Kemp did not attempt to cultivate a genteel persona; while other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men pursued and secured coats of arms for their family–including Shakespeare and Burbage–Kemp, who certainly had the money to do so, eschewed such heraldic trappings. Instead, he was particularly adept at curating a clown character that appealed to the working-class majority in the audiences of the time. The character of Dogberry from *Much Ado About Nothing* is a particularly excellent example of the type of clown character Kemp often played, and the documentary evidence suggests the part was written specifically for him.

Dogberry is the "Master Constable" (3.3.17) of Messina, and his position closely resembles the constables of Elizabethan England.[31] Historically, English constables were chosen from the village householders and were elected by the villagers to serve for one year.[32] However, gentlemen were exempt from this duty, so only those of the lower classes carried out this work. Therefore, all of the constables in the play, Dogberry included, belonged to the working-class. Not only was the constable of lower social status, but also the position itself was seen as an unwanted civic duty, and the eligible villagers who could afford to do so would have hired others to serve in their place.[33] This meant the men who held the position were often too old or too ignorant to execute the office properly, and therefore they did not command any real respect, particularly from those of the upper class.[34] Clearly, this is how Leonato, the governor of Messina, feels about Dogberry and his partner, Verges. He tells them, "Neighbors, you are tedious" (3.5.17) when they come to tell him about the arrest of Borachio and Conrade. Another example is when Don Pedro, the visiting Prince of Aragon, gives the sarcastic retort that "this learned constable is too cunning to be understood" (5.1.238-239) when Dogberry attempts to explain the prisoners' offenses. Clearly

Dogberry is one of the "too ignorant" serving in the constable position. Therefore, Dogberry not only typifies the working-class, but Elizabethan audiences would have seen him as a character so far removed from the world of the nobility that he would be unable to understand that world, no matter how hard he might try.

Yet, in his ignorance, Dogberry takes pride in what he sees as his rise in society. He believes the position elevates him above the other working-class people because he interacts with members of the upper class on official business. Louis Althusser considered such misbeliefs as those harbored by Dogberry a function of ideology. Robert Dale Parker explains Althusser's conception of ideology as "an unconscious set of beliefs and assumptions, our imaginary relation to real conditions that may not match what we imagine. […] In [this] sense of the term ideology, we mostly misunderstand the world around us and the reasons that lead us to act in the ways that we act."[35] Therefore, Dogberry misunderstands the world he is in because of his misbelief that his status has been elevated, and this is one of the reasons audiences find him so funny; he attempts to act as part of the bourgeoisie and gets it wrong time and time again. For example, in Act 4, Scene 2 he blindly walks into the examination of Borachio and Conrade, believing his position as constable makes him qualified to understand the law. However, it is clear to everyone, except him and Verges, that he has no idea about the true nature of an examination or how to wisely judge the information offered by the Watch:

*First Watchman*: This man said, sir, that Don John, the Prince's brother, was a villain.
*Dogberry*: Write down Prince John a villain. Why, this is flat perjury, to call a prince's brother villain!
*Borachio*: Master constable—
*Dogberry*: Pray there, fellow, peace. I do not like thy look, I promise thee.
*Sexton to Watch*: What heard you him say else?
*Seacoal*: Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.
*Dogberry*: Flat burglary as ever was committed.
*Verges*: Yea, by Mass, that it is. (4.2.41-53)

In this passage, Dogberry misunderstands the First Watchman's testimony and incorrectly labels it as perjury–through context we realize Dogberry believes that Borachio is slandering the prince's good name. Dogberry also sees the exchange of money between Don John and Borachio as theft on Borachio's part. Neither of these conclusions are correct, but Dogberry is unable to see through his own misbelief. It is clear that he cannot think on the same level as his social superiors, though he repeatedly tries. While this passage is often viewed as nothing more than comic malapropisms, we argue that, following Althusser's understanding of ideology, the scene reveals much more about the character. Dogberry is of the working class, and he can only see the world through the eyes of a working-class man. Far from a simple confusion of vocabulary, Dogberry's telling misbelief in his own knowledge of the law indicates that, to most (if not all) of the largely illiterate commoners, the law was a complex entity wielded exclusively by those with power and money.

Ignorant though he may be, Dogberry is earnest in carrying out his duties to the best of his abilities. It is because of his willingness to do his part, his representation of the audience's own circumstances, and also because of his comedic manner that audiences root for him, and when he succeeds in uncovering Don John's plot, audiences were reminded that it is the dogged persistence of the working-class, and not the wisdom of the ruling class, that saves the day. For example, it is Dogberry's Watch that overhears Borachio brag to Conrade about being paid to ruin the reputation of Hero (3.3.87-170); it is Dogberry that sets up the examination of Don John's henchmen (3.5.55-62); and it is Dogberry's bumbling questioning that eventually brings Don John's villainy to light and clears Hero's name (4.2.1-89). Dogberry proves that his humorous, working-class ideology is a more potent force than the vain power flaunted by the bourgeoisie. In fact, the ruling class men of the play "are not only less successful than the fools in seeing truth, but are mocked by one fool's aping of their witty pretensions."[36] In essence, the clown's performance subverts class structures as it questions and mocks the dominant worldview.

Another way in which Shakespearean clowns–Kemp in particular–used their performances to subvert and overturn class structures and hegemonies was through their connection with the

audience. This strong connection could be seen at work in the clown's direct interactions with the audience, which often happened improvisationally. Kemp, and other clown performers, took advantage of the downstage position in these direct interactions, because downstage was "close enough to all the spectators for some facial expressions and breathing to register, close enough for [the clown] to seek inspiration from the audience as he seems to extemporize."[37] As Robert Weimann put it, downstage was where the audience could find "characters less inclined to accept the assumptions–social, ideological, and dramatic–of the localized action. These characters, by means of aside, wordplay, proverbs, and direct audience address offered a special perspective to the audience."[38] In other words, clowns, because of their proximity to the edge of the stage, were situated between the audience and the other characters, therefore creating a bridge between the real world of the audience and the world of the play.

Only one such opportunity for Dogberry to directly address the audience appears in *Much Ado About Nothing*. At the end of Act 4, Scene 2, after Conrade has called Dogberry an ass and Dogberry has responded, the constable tells his officers to take the prisoners away. Dogberry then gives his one-sentence monologue–the last recorded line of the scene: "O, that I had been writ down an ass!" Though short, this line is important, not only because it allows Dogberry to address the audience, but also because it would have given Kemp an opportunity to ad-lib additional lines and action as the rest of the characters exited. Kemp was known as a great improviser and would often "engage the audience in conversation, an activity called 'gagging' in the theatre."[39] He rarely changed or removed lines, but he frequently added to what was already written.[40] In fact, Wiles argues that all the roles written for Kemp were structured in such a way that at least one of his monologues came at the end of a scene so that he could "extemporize without risk to the rhythm of the play or direction of the narrative," as demonstrated here in Act 4, Scene 2.[41] This opening would have given Kemp a chance to make a connection with the audience, particularly with those of the working-class who stood closest to the stage. Therefore, Kemp, like his predecessor, Richard Tarleton, "performed not so much *for* an audience as *with* a community of spectators who provided him with inspiration."[42]

Dogberry's brief moment in Act 4, Scene 2, also illustrates the ways in which the clown's opportunities for extemporization were increasingly sequestered by Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Earlier plays with prominent clowns–such as Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the aforementioned Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Lancelet Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*–all include opportunities for extemporaneous clowning, whether it be physical or verbal. If modern stage practice is any indication, Bottom's portrayal of the death of Pyramus in Act 5 of *Dream* provides an opportunity for physical humor, audience-baiting, and improvisation that has the potential to, as Hamlet's advice quoted earlier suggests, distract the audience from the "necessary question of the play." Lancelet Gobbo's part in *Merchant* is even more interesting when we look at the dramatic text for implicit evidence of clowning practice. In Act 3, Scene 5, Lancelet teases Jessica about her heritage, in a scene that is often drastically cut in modern performance because of its anti-Semitic overtones. When Lorenzo engages the servant clown, he presents an interesting accusation: "The Moor is with child by you, Lancelet" (3.5.38). Other than the Prince of Morocco, no Moorish character has been introduced to the audience in this play, nor are Lancelet's romantic/sexual pursuits a topic of conversation at any other time. This suggests to us that the extramarital and interracial pregnancy mentioned here is likely the predicament from which the clown must extricate himself in the jig that would follow the conclusion of this play.

The crucial element of these three examples, all dating to earlier in the relationship between Shakespeare and his clown Kemp, is that the clown is afforded the opportunity for verbal and physical action as *part of the scene*. Given the reputation Kemp had for adding to the script, and his noted physical prowess, there can be little doubt that he would have taken these opportunities for improvisation, endeared himself to the audiences, and in the case of *Merchant*, set up the plot of the jig that would follow the play, in which Kemp/Lancelet would become the central figure in his own drama. What Dogberry's sequestered opportunity for improvisation and audience connection suggests to us is that by the final years of the sixteenth century, the partnership between playwright and clown had become strained. Rather than a clown

part that is fully integrated into the action of the drama in the sense of the character not only being essential to the plot but also being afforded the opportunity to clown, Kemp/Dogberry's lone moment to truly go off-script is confined to the final lines of not only the scene, but also the act. He appears only once more in the first scene of Act 5, when he is mocked by Don Pedro, Borachio speaks on his own behalf, and Dogberry is finally dismissed by Leonato with a presumably modest reward for his actions. It is in this final scene that we, the audience, realize that Dogberry is the true hero of this play, without whom the peaceful resolution of the plot's conflict would not have been possible. His final lines show us his attempts to rise to the level of the nobility. As Leonato dismisses Dogberry, the constable compliments Leonato's speech as that of "a most thankful and reverent youth" (5.1.330-331). He is likely attempting to flatter his employer, who is clearly not young. As he prepares to depart, Dogberry fills his final lines with rhetorical devices that mimic the style of the nobility, saying "God keep your Worship! I wish your worship well. God restore you to health. I humbly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wished, God prohibit it" (5.1.338-341). As his social and economic superiors tend to, Dogberry fills his speech with amplifying pleonasm, repeating the phrase "your Worship" far more than is necessary, and continuing to add details, most of which are nonsense. In fact, immediately after Dogberry and Verges exit, Leonato and his brother unironically engage in exactly this practice, with Leonato saying, "Until tomorrow morning, lords, farewell," and his brother echoing, "Farewell, my lords. We look for you tomorrow" (5.1.343-344). While the nonsensical nature of Dogberry's valedictions may demonstrate his subservience to his social superiors, he has adopted their language patterns, seeing in his good service the possibility for social mobility.

## Kemp's Jigs

As the sequestration of Kemp/Dogberry indicates, the concluding jig became the locus for staging subversion, both socio-economic and dramatic. Unfortunately, relatively few jigs remain, and the texts that do are woefully inadequate evidence for a complete understanding of this element of the theatrical

event. David Wiles's study of what evidence we have reveals that Kemp's jigs were more tightly constructed than those danced by other clowns of the period, which tended to "focus on a clown who is controller rather than butt of the humor."[43] This means that, though the lower-class clown character appears to be the initial ridiculous figure of the jig, he "rapidly makes everyone else appear more ludicrous."[44]

An excellent example of Kemp's subversion of authority in this way can be seen in the jig, *Singing Simpkin*. This jig, which Clegg and Skeaping suggest is probably the Stationer's Register entry on October 12, 1581, listed as the "ballad called KEMPS new Jygge betwixt, a souldier and a Miser an Sym the clown," was attributed to Kemp, but it is unclear if he wrote it or simply popularized it.[45] In line five of the extant text, a later version preserved by Robert Cox in his 1655/6 book, *Actaeon and Diana*, the clown, Simpkin, has cuckolded an old man who is wealthy enough that he "often a hunting goes out."[46] The husband is unaware of his wife's infidelity and is deceived by his wife into thinking that Simpkin is an "honest friend" who has been wrongfully accused of thievery by a blustering soldier, who is actually another suitor courting the wife behind her husband's back.[47] Once the soldier leaves the house, the old man is further portrayed as a fool after he rescues Simpkin from the chest where he was hidden from the soldier:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Wife*: | Good husband, let the man [Simpkin] stay here 'tis dang'rous in the street. |
| *Old Man*: | I would not for a crown of gold the Roarer [soldier] should he meet.<br>For should he come by any harm, they'd say the fault were mine. |
| *Wife to Simpkin*: | There's half a crown, pray send him out to fetch a quart of wine. |
| *Simp*: | There's money for you, Sir–Pray fetch a quart of Sack. |
| *Old Man*: | 'Tis well, 'tis well, my honest friend, I'll see you shall not lack. |
| *Wife*: | But if he should dishonest me, for there are slipp'ry men. |
| *Old Man*: | Then he gets not of his half crown one peny back again. *Exit* [*Old Man*].[48] |

In this passage, not only is the upper-class husband sent away by his wife and her young lover, the working-class clown of the jig, but is paid by them for allowing them to continue their infidelity. Kemp's character hilariously upends the intentions of both husband and soldier, both of whom are of a higher class than his character. The clown mocks upper-class wealth by paying the wealthy man whose wife he will bed. In addition, the wealthy man becomes the servant of Simpkin, sent to fetch wine for the clown and his lover. Clegg and Skeaping suggest that the original jig likely ended with Simpkin inviting the audience to a christening in forty weeks, as seen in line one hundred of Cox's version of the jig, though the extant version includes two additional stanzas likely added by Cox that give the power back to the old man: he catches Simpkin with his wife and beats him.[49] If line one hundred is the original ending, as evidence suggests, then Kemp's clown in this jig has subverted the socio-economic structure of Elizabethan society by bringing the working-class to the top of the social strata–for a few moments, at least. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's theories on social change, the clown, therefore, took on the role of an *organic individual*, a leader "who arise[s] from within the people and can use civil society–education and the media–to express the people's ideas that the people might not be ready to express for themselves."[50]

That a jig happened after every performance speaks to the power Kemp's clown character could (and did) tap into. Day after day, performance after performance, he upended the dominant class and power structures of Elizabethan England every time he took to the stage, bringing the working-class audience along with him. Therefore, as Wiles suggests, his jig was an important dramatization for the Elizabethan proletariat:

> In most discussions of Elizabethan theatre the jig is brushed aside and forgotten. Yet from a sociological standpoint the jig has to be seen as an essential component in the fragile balance with the Elizabethan theatre set up between popular and courtly modes. To a large though far from complete extent, the economically dominant occupants of the sixpenny gallery and the lords' room, together with the actors' patrons in the Privy Council, were able to dictate the tone in public theatres; but at the end of a day's performance the balance shifted, and the actors surrendered a degree of control to those who stood in the yard.[51]

The jig, then, was an opportunity for Kemp, as representative of the working-class, to overwhelm the bourgeoisie and assume a sort of anarchic power–a temporary but spontaneous proletarian revolution couched in raucous song and dance, which delighted the working-class audiences and worried the upper-class spectators. As Kemp's jigs also tended to subvert the unity of the dramatic event that preceded them, as evidence from *Merchant* suggests, then the very existence and popularity of the jig suggests that the clown's potential to subvert the authority of the playwright–and the government authorities to whom the playwright was subservient, such as the Master of the Revels–was a likely source of significant conflict within the company, so much so that by 1598-1599 and the first performance of *Much Ado*, the clown's role had to be sequestered in the drama so as to avoid intrusion.

At Benedick's command, and in the Folio stage direction, the play concludes with a dance to celebrate the double wedding. It is unknown how the Lord Chamberlain's Men transitioned from this dance celebrating the resolution of the principal plot to the masque which would have brought Dogberry back to the foreground. We could conjecture several possibilities, but rather call for further research and experimentation. Modern reconstruction theaters such as the Blackfriars in Staunton, Virginia, the Globe in London, or Utah Shakespeare Festival's Engelstad Shakespeare Theatre could utilize research-supported original practices to experiment with how this transition could have happened on the early modern stage. But as we have shown, Kemp's Dogberry and the jig that followed the play, including the tension potentially created by this unknown transition, represented the economic and social turmoil that continued to boil under the surface of Elizabethan society and the theatrical endeavors burgeoning within it.

## Kemp's Departure and Subsequent Ventures

In 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men embarked on their most ambitious capital venture: the building of the Globe in Southwark. Kemp was a shareholder in the company, and thus stood to make a good deal of money if the venture was successful. And yet, by the time the new theater opened, Kemp had left the company. One important physical feature of the Globe has often been overlooked

in conjecture over Kemp's departure. At the Theatre, as at most of the playhouses from the early era of English theater (1574-1599), the audience entered through a single set of doors, and only separated to the galleries or the yard once inside. At the Globe, however, two entrances were constructed, one that led to the yard, and the other to the galleries.[52] The segregation of the working-class audience, the half-decade of seeing his parts increasingly pushed to the margins of the stage dramas, as well as the possible entrance of a rival clown in the figure of Robert Armin, are all indicative of the deeper contention that precipitated Kemp's departure: the struggle over control of the performance. Leslie Hotson suggests that Armin was hand-picked by Shakespeare, who sought a newer, word-centric comedy for his plays.[53] This is possible, and while we know Armin was on the Globe stage by August 1600, there is no evidence precluding him from having joined the company sooner.

After leaving the Chamberlain's Men, Kemp embarked on several performance ventures, including a tour on the continent, but his most notable production was a marathon morris dance he completed between London and Norwich in February 1600. Kemp was famous for his impressive morris dancing skills–he was able to leap higher and further than most dancers–which had made him popular with audiences when he was on stage as well as his morris dancing in public.[54] He was powerfully built, as the only image we have of Kemp illustrates, which appears on the title page of Kemp's own record of his London to Norwich morris dance. That Kemp was able to dance the nearly 120 difficult miles between the two cities attests to his stamina. Preiss says that this event "was reversing English social history, returning a beloved and endangered pastime to its provincial roots and renewing the bond between the people and their ritual festivity. It was a triumphant piece of capitalism in defense of pre-capitalist ideas."[55] Indeed, as with most of his financial ventures, it seems that the art was more important to Kemp than the spoils, and his own account suggests he collected little of the money promised him. But Preiss also ties the morris dance, the jig, and Kemp, to the ritual origins of festive comedy: the fertility and harvest festivals that preceded the organization of commodified dramatic events. These pre-dramatic festivals were truly of, and for, the common people in pre-capitalist societies, and it is to these origins, we argue, that Kemp returned

in this performance. His own final commentary on his morris dance both draws attention to the tumultuous socio-economics of the time period and seems to hearken back to the "simpler" days when social class and financial well-being were fixed elements of a person's identity:

> If our merchants and gentlemen would take example by this man, gentlemen would not sell their lands to become bankrupt merchants, nor merchants live in the possessions of youth-beguiled gentlemen, who cast themselves out of their parents' heritages for a few out-cast commodities. But, wit, whither wilt thou?[56]

While Kemp may have crafted his stage persona as representative of the working-class, he seems here to champion a more feudalistic sense of class division, one that kept merchants and gentlemen in their "proper" places, a position subverted by both his characters and his performances, as our reading has suggested.

## From Clowns to Fools

Kemp's exit precipitated significant stylistic changes in the company's plays. When exactly Robert Armin came into the Lord Chamberlain's Men may be unclear, but upon Kemp's departure from the company there can be no doubt that he became its chief clown. Armin was short and slight, not the physical presence that Kemp was, and he had made a name for himself as a singer and writer prior to joining the company. From Shakespeare's works, it is likely that Armin originated the roles of Feste in *Twelfth Night*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and the Fool in *King Lear*, among many others, and the evolution from clown to fool that we see during the Armin-Shakespeare years of the company leads Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson to conclude that Armin "effectively invented the dramatic character of the motley fool."[57] These fool characters become much more integrated into the fabric of the dramas, as Armin's style of satirical improvisation was far less likely to sidetrack the play itself. Catherine Henze suggests that, like Kemp, Armin's stage characters and his own identity as an actor often became conflated,[58] but his fools did not present the working-class audiences with a mirror of their own position. Armin's fools served the nobility, and were comfortable walking in the world of monarchs. As Armin was not a dancer, we conjecture that the

jig fell out favor with the company, replaced, perhaps, by solo performances by Armin which may have included "improvising responses to audience suggestions, sometimes in song, and employing multiple voices in ventriloquist acts."[59] Though Armin was a popular entertainer, it is unlikely that his performances allowed the working-class audience members the same level of anarchic power that they wielded when the clown led the jig.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and later the King's Men, cultivated a more genteel audience during this time period, in both the Globe and the Blackfriars' playhouses, and the bawdy jig and physical clowning that characterized Kemp's clowns fell out of favor as the company's audiences became less populated by the working-class of early modern London, which gravitated more to other theaters during the early Jacobean period. These changes ushered in a new era of drama, which was tightly controlled by the playwright and the company, giving space for a modicum of verbal improvisation, but within the context of the drama. While some texts of this time period suggest the possibility that fools could reflect working-class attitudes,[60] the subversive energy of the clown, and especially the clowns embodied by William Kemp, directed both at the actual socio-economic hegemony outside the theater and at the burgeoning autocratic power of the "author" inside it, was largely dispersed.

## Notes

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60. For example, Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, likely first performed at the Blackfriars' by a boy company, features a tightly scripted interruption by the audience which leads to the apparently spontaneous composition of a new play starring the Citizen's Apprentice, Rafe. However, this play is widely considered to be a satire, poking fun at the poor taste of the audience, rather than empowering them.

# Power Play: Turning Patriarchy to Matriarchy in Aduibert's *Taming of the Shrew*

Jennifer Flaherty
Georgia College & State University

In 2019, Justin Audibert used cross-gender casting in the RSC's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, setting the play in an alternate Elizabethan era where women hold power over men.[1] Inspired by Naomi Alderman's matriarchal sci-fi novel *The Power*, Audibert's production changes characters and lines in the play to reflect a matriarchy that is the direct inverse of the patriarchy portrayed in Shakespeare's *Shrew*.[2] In a casting experiment some reviewers dismissed as a "gimmick"[3] or an attempt at "political correctness,"[4] Audibert swaps the genders of most of the characters in the play, with an emphasis on placing female characters in roles of power. Katherine and Bianca (Bianco, in this production) are re-gendered as male and many of the male characters are re-named and re-written as female (Petruchio becomes Petruchia, Lucentio is Lucentia, etc.). There is particular resonance to using this technique with *Shrew*, which owes its problem-play status to the brutality of the power imbalance in the central relationship between Katherine and Petruchio. The visual and textual coding of female authority and male subservience in the production demonstrates that the societal inequities of Shakespeare's Padua go beyond the Katherine/Petruchio marriage, however. Audibert's world-building reverses the power imbalance in Shakespeare's *Shrew* rather than removing or correcting it, illustrating that any systemic power imbalance is destructive to communities as well as

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 23-40

ISSN: 1539-5758

individuals. Although Audibert's staged matriarchy is not idealized as a solution for patriarchy or for the problems of the *Shrew*, his gender-swapped casting presents an innovative alternative for gender parity on the Shakespearean stage.

## On Not Fixing *Shrew*

Ayanna Thompson named *The Taming of the Shrew* as one of Shakespeare's three "toxic plays" (along with *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*) that continuously inspire (failed) attempts "to recuperate them and make them progressive texts." Thompson argues that no matter what changes a director makes, "ultimately, those three [plays] end up kind of circling us back to a really regressive and uncomfortable standpoint… with *Taming of The Shrew*, it's deep misogyny."[5] The same instinct that Thompson observes in directors who try to rehabilitate the play also drives audiences to expect rehabilitation in appropriation. That Audibert's production was advertised as a matriarchy contributes to the expectation of a social solution in the performance choices. Due to the idealization of an imagined matriarchal pre-history and goddess culture[6] among first-wave feminist thinkers who "regard patriarchy as downfall rather than progress,"[7] audiences might have expected a more positive portrayal of powerful women rather than a matriarchal society that reinforces many of the constraints and inequities associated with patriarchy.

The most consistent fault that reviewers found with Audibert's *Shrew* was that gender-swapping had not fixed the play, and that the problems of patriarchy are not solved by putting women in power instead of men. Responses to the production regularly included praise for the show's directing, acting, costuming, and movement, but many reviewers and scholars also observed that the matriarchal setting did not present a positive alternative to patriarchal control. Amy Borsuk's review issues a definitive verdict: "I think the results are clear: gender-swapping alone isn't really 'fixing' the problems of the play, or of our world, if it repeats the power imbalances of the patriarchy."[8] Gerald Berkowitz offers similar criticism, maintaining that "a male Katherine being tamed and broken in spirit by a female Petruchio does not solve any of the play's problems and creates new ones."[9] In her thoughtful academic

review for the *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Ella Hawkin is likewise clear that "exchanging the play's patriarchy for a matriarchy did not fix the problems inherent in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Rather than attempting to explain, erase, or problematize the structures of control and abuse represented in Shakespeare's text, this production simply transferred all accountability to women."[10] Fulbright scholar and playwright Katharine Cognard-Black admits similar frustration with Audibert's production. Despite her "high hopes that it would address the troubled issue of gender in Shakespeare's text," Cognard-Black expresses concern both that the production "actually villainized women in an attempt to make clear the aggressions of men in the flesh-and-blood world beyond the theater" and that the staging of Katherine's final monologue reminds audiences that they are "still in a patriarchy rather than a matriarchy."[11] Her disappointment helped motivate her to write and direct her own creatively critical response to Shakespeare's *Shrew*, which has since been performed and published. Reactions such as these reveal that our collective expectation of systemic gender inequality is so deeply ingrained that a performance portraying a reversal of the problem can be criticized for not being a solution.

Yet Audibert never implies on stage or states in interviews that oppression is better coming from women than from men. In fact, his program notes suggest the opposite—that audiences will find the play more shocking because mothers are controlling sons rather than fathers controlling daughters.[12] During the play's initial run in Stratford-upon-Avon, I was fortunate enough to interview Audibert about the production to gain some insight into his choices, which were designed to call attention to play's problematic power imbalances rather than solving them. He explained the thematic implications of the gender-swapping as a way of forcing audiences to confront the inequities of our own history of gender roles: "it is about power and about a power imbalance and about how…when you live in a society where the rules of that society are unequal… what does that do to people? And that's the thing, I suppose, that we explore, we just explore it the other way around."[13] There is a tendency to focus solely on the play's central Katherine/Petruchio relationship as a physical and mental power struggle between two individuals—an isolated battle of the sexes. Audibert's gender-

swapping makes it clear that Katherine's taming cannot be easily separated from the larger societal inequities surrounding gender. Audibert's production mainstains that it is not the "patria" of patriarchy that is the problem, but the drive of any group to hold dominion over another. The production illustrates a reversed patriarchy that explores existing and historical power dynamics by throwing them into stark relief, and it uses the novelty of female dominance to suggest that any systemic power imbalance can overwhelm individual strength and resistance.

## Cross-Gender Casting and Representation

The cross-gender casting of Audibert's *Shrew* does not provide an in-world solution to the problems of gender inequality within Katherine's Padua or an implied solution to the patriarchal constraints women face today. The production does, however, present an important case study for expanding representation for women in performances of early modern plays that have more male than female characters. Because the inequities the production explores are systemic, the cross-gender casting is extensive and consistent with the production's world-building. In coordinating the reversed gender ratio of the actors on the stage with the inversion of the power dynamics of the play, Audibert's *Shrew* enacts an alternate framework for casting women on the contemporary Shakespearean stage. As published, Shakespeare's play has only three female characters, but directors regularly try to find ways to include more women on stage. For companies such as the Globe or the Royal Shakespeare Company, this practice demonstrates a commitment to equity on stage. The RSC 2019 summer season, which included Audibert's *Shrew*, emphasized efforts to build a diverse and inclusive company. The casting call for *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, and *Measure for Measure* included a promise to build "a consciously diverse cast" for all three productions.[14] For some directors, though, particularly those working for high school and college theatre programs, cross-gender casting becomes a necessity because performers of one gender might make up the majority of the audition pool. Audibert's conscious re-gendering of the most socially powerful characters in a play to indicate a matriarchal society and explore the aesthetics

of female power could be a useful technique for directors looking to address issues of onstage gender equity in their own protections.

Casting women in traditionally male Shakespearean roles, even those that convey power and authority, is not in itself a new or unique practice. The history of cross-gender casting in Shakespearean stage and film, spanning from before Asta Nielson's 1921 Hamlet to after Helen Mirren's 2010 Prospera, is too long and varied to address in this article. It is worth noting, though, that the years preceding Audibert's *Shrew* featured some key stage performances by prominent actresses taking on traditionally male roles. Glenda Jackson played Lear at the Old Vic in 2016 and on Broadway in 2019. Tamsin Grieg played Malvolio as Malvolia for the National Theatre in 2017.[15] Gwendoline Christie played Titania for the Bridge Theatre's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2019, but with many of Oberon's key lines given to Titania, reversing the Oberon/Titania roles in the Bottom subplot. Cross-gender casting in Shakespeare has become more prominent as companies such as Shakespeare's Globe and The Royal Shakespeare Company have established goals of moving towards gender equity in casting decisions. Globe director Michelle Terry took on the role of Hamlet herself in 2018[16] as part of establishing equal representation for men and women through a "50/50 split on gender across her inaugural season."[17] The Globe production of *Shrew* in 2016, directed by Caroline Byrne, similarly aimed for gender parity by casting seven women and seven men in the company.[18] To promote the casting of the 2019 season that included Audibert's *Shrew*, artistic director Gregory Doran explained the importance of making the RSC "a company which reflects the nation in terms of gender, ethnicity, regionality, and disability" by arguing that representation matters in connecting with audiences: "If you look in the mirror and you don't see your own reflection ... then why would you engage?"[19] In his *Shrew*, Audibert creates a world that audiences will only recognize as a skewed reflection of their own—an inverted patriarchy where all the characters who hold societal power are reimagined as women.

In Audibert's *Shrew*, the women who joined the play were cast in roles of power (matriarchs, wealthy landowners, suitors, lead servants), while the men took on more subservient roles to reinforce the power dynamics of the matriarchal alternate

history. When asked about the impact of his casting choices in an interview with *The Standard*, Audibert does not suggest that his matriarchy is going to be a flattering depiction of female authority. Instead, he focuses on what the matriarchal world-building will mean for actresses and audiences who rarely get to experience onstage spaces controlled by women: "representation-wise it's going to be f***ing great, seeing all these powerful women really embodying these front-footed characters."[20] In the 2016 Globe production, Byrne achieved gender parity in casting while also calling attention to societal gender inequity by casting women as Tranio, Biondello, Grumio, and the Tailor—roles that are lower on the social hierarchy. In Audibert's production, women play the characters with more social authority, and the female servants (Trania, Biodella, Curtis) demonstrate power and confidence above that of the male servants and tradesmen (Grumio, Tailor, Haberdasher). Audibert notes that this casting choice pushed male actors who were used to playing more socially powerful roles to adjust to showing deference: "when we were auditioning, the men found it so hard. You realize how much more subtle it is to have to play on the back foot much more, something that so many of these traditionally female characters have to do."[21] Audibert's inverted power structure provides opportunities for actors, actresses, and audiences to experiment with different images of what power might look like—to consider a different take on a familiar character or plot through the reimagined setting and cast.

Even reviewers and scholars who criticized or expressed confusion about the cross-gender casting included at least one comment about how the casting made them rethink lines, scenes, or characters in the play. Berkowitz notes that "the sight of all those women onstage might make us aware of how very few females there are in the original text."[22] Billington praises the actresses portraying Bianca's suitors in the "subplot, which for once is clear and comprehensible," giving particular attention to the humor and "lasciviousness" that Sophie Stanton brings to the role of Gremia.[23] The cross-gender casting in this production emphasizes the gender of the characters as much as the actors. While viewers of an all-female production would see even more female representation onstage than the equity promised by the 2019 RSC summer season, the vast majority of the actresses would be dressing in masculine

clothing to portray male characters in a text that is still dominated by men. Women performing masculinity has subversive potential, as evidenced by Phyllida Lloyd's all-female staging of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Globe in 2003,[24] but the visual and verbal landscape of the play changes when most of the power comes from the matriarchal aesthetic of dressing and speaking as women in power. In his examination of cross-gender casting in stage productions of The *Taming of the Shrew*, Peter Kirwan distinguishes Audibert's re-gendering of the characters from the cross-gender casting used by single-gender companies such as Lloyd's production or Propeller's all-male version in 2007. Kirwan's essay adopts a classification system for gender-swapped casting, reworking casting terms used by Ayanna Thompson and the Non-Traditional Casting project to refer to casting actors of different races and ethnicities. Because the setting is an imagined matriarchy, Audibert's *Shrew* exemplifies what Kirwan calls "translocation, in which the setting of the play is changed to explore different structures and power relations."[25] The alternate universe of Audibert's production proved striking and disconcerting for audiences, inviting them to see power as female.

### Setting and Inspiration: Alderman's *The Power*

Locating the play in an alternate-universe Elizabethan era complements the production's use of another of Kirwan's terms: "conceptual casting, which casts non-traditionally in order to enhance the play's social relevance… this may involve a change in the character's gender and pronouns [and] is designed to cause cognitive dissonance that generates interpretive significance."[26] The "cognitive dissonance" that Audibert's play generates for audiences results from the transformed gender "structures and power relations" of the imagined setting, which takes inspiration from Naomi Alderman's speculative novel *The Power*, which depicts an alternate universe in which women develop the ability to deliver painful electric shocks with a touch. Alderman's alternate universe begins as a patriarchal society nearly indistinguishable from our own, but the global power dynamics of the world gradually shift as it becomes clear that this new ability has made every woman a potential physical threat. At first, most women use their new power defensively, to fight back against patriarchal oppression, but

women increasingly step into the roles of oppressors themselves as it becomes clear that all women can easily injure or kill men with their bare hands. The society that emerges as women gain power is also similar to our own, but with the genders reversed. As reviewer Michael Schaub explains "the atrocities that women visit upon men in Alderman's novel—humiliation, torture, genital mutilation—are all, of course, things that happen today, but with the genders reversed. That is, perhaps, the point of the novel… [it] asks us to consider a dystopia that already exists, and has for centuries."[27] Physical dominance is linked with authority and control, and the matriarchy that emerges in the novel is simply an inverted patriarchy.

Audibert takes the same approach to matriarchy in constructing the gendered power structures of his *Shrew*. Rather than speculating about "how a matriarchy might operate with reference to contemporary or historical examples of matrilineal societies" he focuses on mirroring patriarchal oppression, but with women as the oppressors.[28] Alyson Miller's analysis of the use of inversion in *The Power* could just as easily be describing Audibert's *Shrew*:

> Inverting paradigms, however, is arguably essentially pragmatic, a means through which to observe how inequality is manifested in order to debunk its seeming naturalness and provoke transformation…The possibility of matriarchal rule, then, is not the point… its function in the narrative is not to suggest a new way of being, but rather to underline an existing dynamic in which self and other perpetually collide.[29]

In both Alderman's novel and Audibert's play, the emphasis is not on presenting matriarchy as a viable alternative to patriarchy, but to use inversion to show that systemic power imbalances are always destructive. The novel's influence on the production is acknowledged with a brief description of the novel's premise in the program next to a full-page illustration of a woman's hand, with a bolt of lightning gathering at her fingertip.[30] The setting for Audibert's *Shrew* is not the same as that of *The Power*, however. There is no indication that the women in Audibert's play pose a physical threat to men akin to Alderman's electric shocks, and no clear explanation for why this universe is under matriarchal control. Instead, the action of the play focuses on the dissonant

effect of women's power, with an emphasis on showing the aesthetic elements of the world-building rather than making the reason for the matriarchal rule clear to the audience.

## The Aesthetics of Matriarchy

One of Audibert's stated goal in staging matriarchy is that he "wanted to see what it would feel like when the male voice is not the dominant one."[31] He explains further in his *Standard* interview: "I've sat in these classical [rehearsal] rooms a lot and I struggled with the idea that I would again have 67 per cent of the lines said by men."[32] By flipping the ratio, Audibert creates a play that features women as the voices of majority, and he rewrites Shakespeare's lines to further establish the world as a matriarchy. In addition to changing the pronouns and the names of the characters to reflect their re-gendering, the production also alters key lines to show an emphasis on women's legal and social authority. Fathers are not mentioned in discussions of lineage because estates pass from mothers to daughters. Petruchia is therefore mourning the passing of her mother, Antonia, when she comes to find a man "rich enough to be Petruchia's husband" and "wed wealthily in Padua."[33] Trania hires a traveler to impersonate Lucentia's mother Vincentia; when the real Vincentia travels to Padua later in the play, Petruchia and Katherine play at mistaking her for a "fair, lovely boy" instead of "a woman, old, wrinkled, faded, withered, and not a virgin, as thou say'st she is."[34] The cultural history of this alternate Elizabethan era is reframed by gender-swapping even the characters' allusions to myth and legend. Instead of the patience of Shakespeare's Katherine's making her "a second Grissel, and Roman Lucrece for her chastity" (35.2.1.298-9), Claire Price's Petruchia lauds Joseph Arkley's Katherine for being "a second Job, and Greek Narcissus for his chastity."[35] Gremio's "yea, leave that labour to great Hercules" (1.2.256) becomes Gremia's "yea, leave that labour to some great Amazon."[36] Almost every scene includes at least one small change in dialogue to reinforce the flipped power dynamic through a soundscape that associates feminine voices, pronouns, names, and myths with a legacy of power.[37]

The world-building of Audibert's *Shrew* uses clothing and hairstyles to challenge audience members' subconscious

expectations for how men and women occupy space—onstage and in life. In the official program for his *Taming of the Shrew*, Audibert explains that "Hannah Clarke's costumes also help create our world—the costumes worn by the female actors will be beautiful, imposing, expensive and involve lots of material. They will dominate the space. The costumes the male actors will wear will be much more delicate, even subtle."[38] The contrast between the two is particularly striking in the opening dance sequence, which replaces the Induction and serves to illustrate the transformed hierarchy of the staged world. The women enter first, moving smoothly in their imposing dresses to stand confidently as powerful music plays with a strong beat. When the men enter moments later, it is to lighter, higher music. The men wear smaller costumes, their hair is loose, and their steps are mincing as they move to a place on stage where they are surrounded by the women, who gaze at them before moving in to dance with them. While the aesthetics of the male characters could be described as feminized, particularly Bianco's long, flowing hair and flower-patterned clothing, the women are not costumed in men's clothing or presented in a masculine way.[39] Their authority and their clothing are coded as female, turning the characteristics of restrictive clothing for women in the Elizabethan era (corsets, heavy skirts, complicated hairstyles) into signifiers of power. The puffed sleeves and elaborate collars or ruffs of the dresses make the women wearing them seem larger and more important. The fabrics are rich, with the appearance of velvets or brocades, and the colors show connections among the characters (darker colors for the residents of Padua, red for Lucentia and her servants, green for Petruchia and hers). Their hair is heaped in elaborate updos: most of the upper-class women wear their hair in twin piles of coils, curls, and braids, often adorned with pearls or jewels. These hairstyles emphasize volume, adding inches to the height of each actress, particularly Petruchia's heaps of red-blond curls. Ella Hawkins notes that the "striking heart-shaped hairstyles" combine with the clothing to give an impression of "grandeur, authority, and dominance."[40] The women of Audibert's *Shrew* take up space.

Audibert's direction and the work of movement director Lucy Cullingford complement the costumes and reinforce how women confidently control the stage. The wide puffed sleeves accentuate the sweeping gestures of the women, who often stand with their

hands on their hips or lift their arms high in greeting to each other. The use of movement to claim space and status is taken to a comic extreme when Trania assumes Lucentia's identity and raises her arms dramatically over her head with a flourish of music every time she enters a formal social situation. Female characters also use their full, swirling skirts to demonstrate social hierarchy, showing authority by requiring other characters to step back or around the wide profiles of their dresses. Actresses who use the walkways at the front of the thrust stage take up most of the width of the walkway with their dresses, so when men enter or exit with women, the men step back because there is not room for them at the woman's side. For Biondella, whose skirts are more contained to accommodate the wheelchair she uses, the wheelchair itself fulfils a similar function as she speeds across the stage, causing other characters to jump out of her way. As Berkowitz notes, "zipping about in her wheelchair, Amy Trigg turns the very small role of Biondella into a Puck- or Ariel-like spirit directing traffic and keeping things moving."[41] Charlotte Arrowsmith, who plays Curtis, also has skirts that are less full to indicate her position as a servant, but her use of sign language to communicate gives her another way to use large movements and show confidence and power in her conversations with the other servants. The aesthetics of the production turn signifiers of femininity or disability (skirts, a wheelchair, sign language) into markers of power by connecting them to large movements and control of the stage.

The large movements that Audibert and Cullingford give to the female characters are a crucial part of the world-building, encouraging audiences to imagine a world where women do not face societal pressure to move cautiously or make themselves seem smaller. In her study of women and body image, Cecelia Hartley argues that in 21st century America, "a woman is taught early to contain herself, to keep arms and legs close to her body and take up as little space as possible."[42] Psychologist Taryn A. Myers similarly notes that "Western culture forces women to not only become smaller not only physically but also to take on a smaller, quieter role in society."[43] These observations are not limited to academic studies; they are part of our popular culture. Infotainment site *Elite Daily* explains that women consistently move through public and private places differently than men do:

> Why is it that being female means we have to be aware of the space that we "deserve" to occupy? For our entire lives, women learn to be accommodating and amenable, while men are taught to be adamant and stand their ground. Even physically, we fold up into ourselves, cross our legs and feel small in a chair. Guys, however, have no problem stretching out and taking up too much space …We see this trend: females feeling pressure to minimize themselves -- on multiple levels.[44]

From diet culture to seating on public transit, women often face societal pressure to seem unimposing, unobtrusive. Audibert's production reverses this dynamic, staging powerful women who use their gestures and their costumes to try to show power by occupying space and moving others aside, while the male characters' movements are smaller and more deferential. While Audibert's matriarchy is not depicted as fair or desirable society, seeing women confidently controlling the stage resonates with audiences.

Audibert's inversion of societal expectations of movement builds on the ways that previous directors have utilized cross-gender casting, especially Mark Rylance and Phyllida Lloyd at Shakespeare's Globe in London. Women playing men on the Globe stage, such as those who worked with movement coach Marcello Magni on Lloyd's all-female *The Taming of the Shrew* (2003), were "encouraged to 'take up more space' and open out their shoulders" to embody "masculine movement," much like the gestures used by the actresses on Audibert's stage.[45] The notable difference comes in the way that Audibert re-genders the characters; the cross-gender casting on Lloyd's stage is a performance of masculinity, while Audibert's actresses code their confident, powerful movements as female. By contrast, men playing women on the Globe stage were advised to take "very small steps" because "400 years ago, a woman's clothing meant that she couldn't take huge strides."[46] In Rylance's all-male *Twelfth Night* (2003, 2012), the actors playing female characters (including Rylance himself as Olivia) appear to be "floating across the stage as if on wheels," an illusion created by short, rapid steps concealed by long skirts.[47] Chad Allen Thomas describes the movement in the prelude to the play: "Rylance and Shorey begin to glide, limited by their costume pieces into

taking smaller steps, their flowing movement distinguishing their characters as highly stylized versions of femininity.[48] In Audibert's production, the actors playing Katherine, Bianco, and the widow use more restricted movement than the women, but the men do not use the gliding steps popularized by the Globe productions. Instead, the technique is adopted by some of Audibert's female characters, particularly Sophie Stanton's Gremia, who moves so smoothly and rapidly that she seems almost to be flying. While Rylance's Olivia uses the movement to show both the high social status of the character and the societal restrictions that come with her status and gender, Stanton's Gremia seems to embrace her version of the glide as a power movement without restraint.[49]

While women's movement in the performance is used to demonstrate social control, their power is rarely ever enforced by violence on stage. There is an implication that the military presence of the world is female and that weapons demonstrate social position. Trania's exaggerated gestures show her glee and pride when she receives Lucentia's sword and cape as symbols of her raised status when she takes on Lucentia's identity. Claire Price explains that because her Petruchia is a soldier, "we redefined the corset as a kind of armour, a status symbol. It has to be credible that Petruchia can use a sword and handle herself."[50] Many of the women wear swords, and the men do not. These weapons are almost never drawn onstage, however, except for comic effects. For example, Gremia spends several minutes struggling to get her sword out of her scabbard before awkwardly brandishing it to defend Vincentia when Trania tries to have her arrested. The few moments of actual violence in the play are staged without weapons. When Petruchia attacks her male servant Grumio for not knocking at the gate, he cries as he covers his head in self-defense, constrained by both his gender and his social class to not hit his mistress. Bianco (and Bianco's suitors) treat Katherine as a potential physical threat, and Katherine defiantly strikes Petruchia on their first meeting, but he quickly backs down in the face of her threat of retaliation, and he does not attempt physical violence in the rest of the scene. Even when Petruchia restrains Katherine in a headlock, her control over his movement comes more from her ability to express confidence and dominance through language than from actively defeating him in combat. The fact that Katherine is taller and presumably

physically stronger than Petruchia is a sticking point for some audience members, who question why Katherine does not use violence to fight back against Petruchia's physical manhandling (womanhandling?) and psychological manipulation.

While violence is central to the enforcement of and the rebellion against the social structures in *The Power*, it is less important to the world of Audibert's *Shrew*. As Kirwan observes, "Audibert retained all of the power dynamics of a structural patriarchy but with a key tool of that system – the threat of physical/sexual violence – downplayed if not entirely removed."[51] Michael Billington conversely complains that the play "never shows why physical abuse and financial opportunism are any more endearing when practised by women than by men."[52] Academics accept Alderman's speculative premise of a reversed patriarchy developing because women become more physically threatening than men, recognizing the plot device as "replicating a structure in which power is always divided upon gendered lines, exchanging a castrated object for a castrating subject."[53] When Audibert uses the same tactic of replication and inversion without clearly establishing any reason why women could be a physical threat to men, however, critics and scholars are more inclined to question the matriarchal worldbuilding. Our understanding that patriarchal power stems from an implicit threat of violence is so deeply engrained that it is sometimes easier to accept the premise that women could learn to channel electricity with their hands than to imagine a systemic gendered power imbalance that is not enforced through physical threats.

## Holding the Mirror Up to Nature

In his advice to the players, Hamlet asserts that "the purpose of playing" is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to Nature; to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.20-2). The year she took on the position of Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe, Michelle Terry justified her commitment to 50/50 gender parity in casting the 2018 season by explaining that "if our job is to hold a mirror up to nature, then we've got to truly reflect the society in which we live."[54] Audibert's *Shrew* reminds us that mirror images

are reversed. The gender-swapped world of this *Shrew* is not presented as a matriarchal utopia, and the play does not suggest that female dominance is any better than male dominance. Instead, it reinforces the idea that systemic societal inequities are destructive both to individuals and to society as a whole. But reversing the gender dynamics in Shakespeare's play offers an opportunity to re-define the circuits of performance available for women. The practices of translocation and conceptual cross-casting utilized by Audibert here can be used elsewhere to give actresses a chance to perform power without tying that power to a performance of masculinity, illustrating another way that directors and companies can fulfil their commitments to onstage equity.

## Notes

1. This article cites both Shakespeare's text and the adjusted text of the RSC performance. Where Shakespeare's text is used instead of the production text, the following version is used: William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series Complete Works*, eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, and HR Woudhuysen (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

2. *The Taming of the Shrew*, written by William Shakespeare, dir. Justin Audibert, costumes Hannah Clark, movement Lucy Cullingford, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England, June 19, 2019.

3. Richard Hall, "*The Taming of The Shrew* -The Lowry, Salford," *The Reviews Hub*, September 29, 2019. https://www.thereviewshub.com/the-taming-of-the-shrew-the-lowry-salford/

4. Robert Tanitch, "All the Male Roles are Played by Women and all the Female Roles are Played by Men," *Mature Times*, November 12, 2019. https://www.maturetimes.co.uk/robert-tanitch-reviews-rscs-the-taming-of-the-shrew/

5. Ayanna Thompson, "All That Glistens Is Not Gold," interview by Gene Demby, *Code Switch*, NPR, August 21, 2019. https://www.npr.org/transcripts/752850055?storyId=752850055?storyId=752850055

6. For more information on the ideas surrounding feminist pre-history and goddess culture, see Mary J. Magoulick, *The Goddess Myth in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture: A Feminist Critique* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022). Magoulick notes that "the mythic goddess's prehistoric period is portrayed by believers, in boldly utopian terms, as peaceful, nature centered, and worshipful of women," which gives some context to why audiences might have expected a matriarchy to be portrayed positively (31).

7. Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861–1900 (*Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 122-3.

8. Amy Borsuk, "Review: *The Taming of the Shrew* at Barbican," *Exeunt Magazine*, November 8, 2019. http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-taming-shrew-barbican-rsc/

9. Gerald Berkowitz, "*The Taming Of The Shrew*: RSC at Barbican Theatre," *TheatreGuide: London*, Winter 2019-2020. http://www.theatreguidelondon.co.uk/reviews/taming19.htm

10. Ella Hawkins, "*The Taming of the Shrew* dir. by Justin Audibert (review)," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 38.1 (Spring 2020): 156-160.

11. Katharine Cognard-Black, "*Taming of the Shrew(s)*": Explorations of Gender and Power in Directing an Original Adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*," (Honors Thesis, Bucknell University, Fall 2021), 35, 46. https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/honors_theses/article/1591/&path_info=CognardBlack_Katharine_Honors121521.pdf

12. Justin Audibert, "Program Notes: *The Taming of the Shrew*," dir. Justin Audibert, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England, June 19, 2019, 6.

13. Justin Audibert, "*The Taming of the Shrew*," interview with the author, June 27, 2019, audio recording, 55:43.

14. Lauren Sharkey, "The RSC Just Committed To Casting A Truly Diverse Cast For 2019 & It's About Time," *Bustle*, September 12, 2018. https://www.bustle.com/p/the-royal-shakespeare-company-makes-diversity-in-theatre-a-priority-for-2019-tbh-its-about-time-11885385

15. Elizabeth Schafer, "Why Female Thespians Like Tamsin Greig Shouldn't Get their Hands Off Male Roles: She has Completely Reconceived Shakespeare's Character," *The Independent*, March 21, 2017. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/tamsin-greig-twelfth-night-malvolia-malvolio-national-theatre-gender-bending-roles-thespians-a7641331.html

16. Natasha Tripney, "Hamlet, Thy Name is Woman: Why Michelle Terry's Globe is Staging Post-Gender Shakespeare," *The Independen*t, May 16, 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/hamlet-globe-michelle-terry-shakespeare-gender-blind-cross-cast-as-you-like-ensemble-deaf-a8350886.html

17. Yan Chen, "The Path to Gender Parity on Shakespearean Stages," *Hartford Stage*, 2018. https://www.hartfordstage.org/henry-v/stagenotes/gender-parity-in-shakespeare/#:~:text=At%20Shakespeare's%20Globe%20in%20April,small%20parts%20played%20by%20men

18. For a more detailed account of Byrne's *Shrew*, see Emer McHugh's chapter in *The Taming of the Shrew: The State of Play*, eds. Heather C. Easterling and Jennifer Flaherty (London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2021).

19. Sharkey, "The RSC Just Committed."

20. Fiona Mountford, "Justin Audibert interview: 'I Struggled with the Idea that 67 Per Cent of Lines would be Said by Men,'" *The Standard*, February 11, 2019. https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/justin-audibert-interview-shakespeare-taming-shrew-a4063176.html

21. Mountford, "Justin Audibert Interview."

22. Berkowitz, "*The Taming Of The Shrew*: RSC at Barbican Theatre."

23. Michael Billington, "*The Taming of the Shrew* Review – RSC's Battle of Reversed Sexes," *The Guardian*, March 19, 019. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/mar/19/the-taming-of-the-shrew-review-rsc-royal-shakespeare-theatre-stratford-upon-avon

24. See Peter Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew: Cross-Gender Casting in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Taming of the Shrew: The State of Play*, 128.

25. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew," 128.

26. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew," 128.

27. Michael Shaub, "Electrifying 'Power' Flips the Gender Script to Unsettling Effect," *National Public Radio*, October 11, 2017. https://www.npr.org/2017/10/11/555689738/electrifying-power-flips-the-gender-script-to-unsettling-effect

28. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew," 135.

29. Alyson Miller, "'Day of the Girls': Reading Gender, Power, and Violence in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*," *College Literature* 47 (2020): 406-7.

30. "Program Image: *The Taming of the Shrew*," dir. Justin Audibert, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England, June 19, 2019.

31. Audibert, "Program Notes: *The Taming of the Shrew*," 6.

32. Mountford, "Justin Audibert Interview."

33. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

34. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

35. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

36. *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Justin Audibert, 2019.

37. I was surprised to check one of Lucentia's lines against Lucentio's and find it unchanged: both Trania and Tranio are "as dear as Anna to the queen of Carthage was" (1.1.153).

38. Audibert, "Program Notes: *The Taming of the Shrew*," 6.

39. The exception is Petruchia, who spends the wedding scene and much of the second half of the play dressed in men's clothing (a larger and more imposing version of the costumes that the men in the play wear). Katherine, by contrast, wears a white shirt that hangs like a nightgown over bare legs. This abrupt shift disrupts the costume coding of female power that the audience experiences in the first half of the play, with the effect of reverting the stage pictures back to the patriarchal norm of a character in masculine clothing abusing a character in feminized clothing.

40. Hawkins, "*The Taming of the Shrew* dir. by Justin Audibert (review)," 157.

41. Berkowitz, "*The Taming Of The Shrew*: RSC at Barbican Theatre."

42. Cecelia Hartley, "Letting Ourselves Go: Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship," *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, ed. Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 61.

43. Taryn A. Myers, "Feminist Theories on Eating Disorders," in *The Wiley Handbook of Eating Disorders*, eds. Linda Smolak and Michael P. Levine (Chichester: Wiley, 2015), 242.

44. "The Proliferation of the Shrinking Woman: How Women Are Taught To Grow Inward," *Elite Daily*, December 30, 2013. https://www.elitedaily.com/women/growth-proliferation-shrinking-woman-taking-space-woman

45. Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Mark Rylance at the Globe* (London: Bloomsbury Arden: 2017), 180.

46. Purcell, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, 179-80.

47. Chad Allen Thomas, "On Queering *Twelfth Night*," *Theatre Topics* 20.2 (Sep 2010): 106.

48. Thomas, "On Queering *Twelfth Night*," 106.

49. On the night that I attended the production (June 19, 2019), the audience burst into spontaneous applause at Gremia's movements, and I overheard young students from a school group debating whether or not she might have been concealing a skateboard under her skirt.

50. Natasha Tripney, "'Women are the Powerbrokers': Gender-Flipping Shakespeare's Shrew," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/feb/25/women-are-the-powerbrokers-gender-flipping-shakespeares-shrew

51. Kirwan, "The Turn of the Shrew,"135.

52. Billington, "*The Taming of the Shrew* Review."

53. Miller, "Day of the Girls," 406.

54. Chen, "The Path to Gender Parity on Shakespearean Stages."

# "Against her will, as it appears": Making Margaret Quiet and Good in *Much Ado about Nothing*

Kelsey Brooke Smith
Brigham Young University

*Much Ado about Nothing*, Shakespeare's most frequently performed comedy,[1] often centers on the witty banter and relationship of Beatrice and Benedick. Though the dramatic plot centers around Hero and Claudio, the actors playing Beatrice and Benedick are nonetheless the first billed in theater and film adaptations, and the pair's romance features heavily in *Much Ado* marketing. In their content advisory for example, the Utah Shakespeare Festival described their 2024 production of *Much Ado* by claiming that Beatrice and Benedick are one of Shakespeare's "most popular and best-matched couples" and also warning that the play comes with "sexual puns and innuendo" and "themes of deceit and infidelity."[2] Placing Beatrice and Benedick at the fore is a good marketing strategy, but the omnipresent "themes of infidelity" are often cut or softened in modern productions. One of these softening approaches is the routine abridgment of the character of Margaret—Hero's waiting gentlewoman—who plays a key role in the central deceit of the play.

Despite recent trends which add female roles to modern Shakespeare productions,[3] the paring down of Margaret's character still smacks of a modern agenda. Margaret's character can be interpreted as challenging modern conceptions of "good women" —women who are independent, decisive, fully agential, and who refuse to be pitted against other women either romantically or

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 41-58

ISSN: 1539-5758

sexually. In her few brief scenes, Margaret demonstrates a wit to match Beatrice's, an impressive knack for innuendo, a purported illicit romantic encounter, and a few flirty moments with Benedick that may tarnish his happily-ever-after with Beatrice. Additionally, Margaret's choices and motivations remain frustratingly ambiguous throughout the play, and her character adds to the play's unpopular subtexts of female rivalry and a wandering male gaze. Yet an unabridged Margaret more faithfully embodies *Much Ado*'s pervasive anxiety about infidelity and reveals modern audiences' continued discomfort around cheating, unstable relationships, and women who do not conform to current ideals of good women.

## Margaret's Origins & Textual Persona

Margaret's role, while small, is nonetheless integral to the central plot of the play—the impending marriage between Claudio and Hero. Borachio, a henchman of the play's rather flat villain, Don John, proposes to thwart the upcoming nuptials by staging an amorous encounter between himself and Margaret to fool Claudio into thinking that Hero is unchaste. While the characters of Beatrice and Benedick are largely thought to be Shakespeare's own plot creations,[4] the Hero and Claudio plotline and the Borachio-Margaret deception are drawn directly from Shakespeare's presumed sources.[5] A maid or waiting gentlewoman who assists in her mistress's besmirching, is found in three of his sources: *Orlando Furioso, The Rocke of Regarde,* and *The Fairie Queen*.[6]

In each of these three sources, the motivations and intentions of the Margaret character are much clearer than in *Much Ado*. In Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the Margaret character, Dalinda, is an "unwitting accomplice" to villain Polinesso's machinations.[7] While Dalinda reveals that she wore her mistress Ginevra's clothes during an amorous encounter with Polinesso, Dalinda does not intend for her temporary roleplay to frame Ginevra. Rather she intends to please Polinesso without knowledge of his devious intentions. While Dalinda does "[take] on greater complexity as a maid who resembles her mistress and enjoys becoming her substitute,"[8] her devious intentions toward Ginevra are minimal. The Margaret character in Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queen*, Pyrene, is motivated by similar, unquestioning

devotion to the villainous Philemon. Spenser describes Pyrene as a "Mayden proud through praise, and mad through loue,"[9] who is easily persuaded to don her mistress's clothing in response to Philemon's manipulative flattery. Dalinda and Pyrene are both foolish and perhaps a bit vacuous, but aren't villainous.

In *The Rocke of Regarde,* the Margaret character, Rosina, is more conniving. She is described as "wild" and intends to directly compete with and deceive her mistress, Giletta.[10] Rosina assists the villain Frizaldo in drafting a false letter to her true love interest, Rinaldo, though she doesn't don Giletta's clothing during her amorous encounter with Frizaldo. When Frizaldo inevitably turns on Rosina and tries to kill her, she evades death and later is instrumental in revealing Frizaldo's villainy and ensuring the marriage of Giletta to Rinaldo.[11]

Margaret is in many ways an amalgamation of Dalinda, Pyrene, and Rosina. While Shakespeare's text supports her portrayal as "an unwitting accomplice," Margaret's intentions are more ambiguous than any of her counterparts because there is no written moment in *Much Ado* where Margaret addresses her encounter with Borachio or even performs it. In their respective sagas it is Dalinda, Pyrene, and Rosina who personally confess and vindicate their mistresses. In *Much Ado*, however, it is instead the bumbling Dogberry and his watchmen who uncover Borachio's machinations. While Margaret's existence and purported cooperation with Borachio is pivotal to the plot of *Much Ado*, her small speaking parts in acts 2, 3, and 5 do little to illuminate her intentions and instead present rather bemusing peripheral complications to the central plot.

Margaret's first appearance in the play comes in act 2, scene 1, when she briefly dances with Benedick and then Balthasar at the beginning of the masque. The first textual indication of any relationship between Margaret and Borachio is in act 2, when Borachio (without Margaret present) tells Don John that his favor with Margaret allows him to "appoint her to look out at her lady's chamber window / . . . at any unseasonable instant of the night" (2.2.16-18).[12] Borachio explains that Don John should position Prince and Claudio so that they can view this late-night encounter and "hear me call Margaret 'Hero,' hear Margaret term / me 'Claudio,' and bring them to see this the very / night before the intended wedding" (2.2.43-45).[13] The window scene itself is

not scripted, and the encounter is only relayed to the audience second-hand by Borachio as he drunkenly recounts to fellow henchman Conrade how he "wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, / by the name of Hero" (3.3.145-46). Borachio tells Conrade that Margaret leaned out Hero's window bidding Borachio, "a thousand / times good night" (3.3.147-48), and that his own villainy "and partly the dark night" (3.3.157) convinced the Prince and Claudio that they were witnessing an amorous encounter between Hero and a lover.[14] Later, when Borachio is brought before Leonato in act 5, scene 1, he adds the detail that he courted "Margaret in Hero's garments" (5.1.248), which surely helped the deceit's success.

Margaret's motives and the extent of her unchastity remain unknown during act 4, scene 1, when Claudio shames Hero at the altar. What he sees transpire between Borachio and Margaret is not necessarily an explicitly sexual encounter but a "talk," albeit a rather raunchy one. Claudio asks Hero, "what man was he talked with you yesternight / Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?" (4.1.88-89), and Don Pedro, Don John's non-villainous brother, testifies that he, Claudio, and Don John did see Hero, or rather Margaret,

> talk with a ruffian at her chamber window
> Who hath indeed, most like a liberal villain,
> Confessed the vile encounters they have had
> A thousand times in secret. (4.1.95-99)

Don John probably further hyperbolizes the encounter by describing it as "not to be spoke of! / There is not chastity enough in language, / Without offense, to utter [the vile encounters]" (4.1.101-103). The unchastity that Claudio and Don Pedro have purportedly seen is at most a raunchy conversation, and the encounter's most vile descriptions come from Don John, a particularly untrustworthy narrator.

Margaret's innocence is eventually established by Borachio who defends her when his own villainy is revealed in act 5. Leonato says he believes Margaret "was packed in all this wrong, / hired to it by [Don John]" (5.1.313-314), and Borachio swears,

> No, by my soul, she was not
> Nor knew not what she did when she spoke to me,

> But always hath been just and virtuous
> In anything that I do know by her. (5.1.315-318)

Considering that the Borachio characters in *Orlando Furioso* and *The Faerie Queen* try to kill Dalinda and Rosina after their amorous encounters, Borachio's defense of Margaret is laudable (as far as villains go). Borachio's testimony that Margaret is "just and virtuous" seems to be enough to vouch for Margaret's innocence, and Leonato hurriedly forgives Margaret before the final wedding scene, declaring that Margaret "was in some fault for this / Although against her will, as it appears / In the true course of all the question" (5.4.4-6). Ultimately, Margaret is not given the chance to explain herself. She is portrayed as an "unwitting accomplice," but her role in Hero's besmirching remains enigmatical.

But what are Margaret's intentions toward the man with whom she actually has conversations? While Margaret has no scripted moments with Borachio, she does have two with Benedick, though the first is subject to some editorial disagreement. Margaret's first speaking part in act 2, scene 1, is listed in the 1623 Folio as a short exchange with Benedick and Balthasar[15] during the masque scene:

> *Bene*: Well, I would you did like me.
> *Mar*: So would not I for your own ſake, for I Haue manie ill qualities.
> *Bene*: Which is one?
> *Mar*: I ſay my prayers alowd.
> *Ben*: [sic] I loue you the better, the hearers may cry Amen.
> *Mar*: God match me with a good dancer.
> *Balt*: Amen.
> *Mar*: And God keepe him out of my ſight when the daunce is done: anſwer Clarke.
> *Balt*: No more words the Clark is anſwered.[16]

The 1600 Quarto of *Much Ado* has the same character speech attributions in this scene though they are spelled slightly differently.[17] However, many editions of *Much Ado*, including scholarly editions like the Oxford edition, have "corrected" this scene by assigning all the lines in this exchange to Balthasar.[18] Given the many speech attribution errors in the first editions of *Much Ado*, "corrections" of this nature are often merited, but this is a chaotic scene with few stage directions in general, and assigning Benedick's lines to Balthasar in this scene is presumptuous.

Benedick's lines with Margaret in this exchange are clearly flirtatious, which supports earlier textual references to Benedick's reputation as a ladies' man. In act 1, scene 1, Beatrice describes Benedick as a "good soldier to a lady" (1.1.53), and Leonato jokes that he was not worried about his wife being unfaithful before giving birth to Hero "for then [Benedick] was a child" (1.1.105-06). If Benedick is indeed a womanizer, as he's been described, his flirtations with Margaret aren't surprising. Whether Margaret is resisting or responding to them is more interpretive. When Margaret's claims that one of her "ill qualities" is that she says her prayers aloud, and Benedick responds, "I love you the better; the hearers may cry / 'Amen'" (2.1.103-104), Benedick may be insinuating that any hearers of Margaret's prayers would have intimate access to her bedchamber and that such prayers or cries of "Amen" could occur during lovemaking. Balthasar, who is Margaret's next dance partner appears to have overheard their conversation, cheekily opening his exchange with Margaret by saying, "Amen." Of course, how amorous or flirtatious these exchanges are performed or received is largely left up to the actors and directors of *Much Ado*. However, modern adaptations often replace Benedick with Balthasar, or even Borachio during this scene. Perhaps modern directors want to give the audience context for the impending Margaret-Borachio window scene, which is now frequently staged, as well as to downplay any suggestion of romance or sexual tension between Benedick and Margaret.

## Margaret in Modern Film & Stage Adaptations

Film and stage adaptations of *Much Ado* in the past four decades regularly abridge and adapt Margaret in favor of a more stream-lined and stable romance between Beatrice and Benedick.[19] The 1984 BBC *Much Ado* adaptation does *not* abridge any of Margaret's lines, but downplays any romantic tension between Margaret and Benedick in both their scenes. The actor playing Margaret is not flirtatious and appears annoyed with both her masked dance partners in act 2. Her line, "God match me with a good dancer," literally refers to her bumbling dance partner's missteps and isn't taken as sexual innuendo. Yet neither of her two masked dance partners are Benedick whose first appearance in the

scene is when he dances with Beatrice a few lines later. The BBC adaptation remains faithful to almost the entire original script and there is no window scene shown between Margaret and Borachio.[20]

The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2014 *Much Ado* adaptation replaces Benedick with Balthasar for the entire conversation, and Margaret, who is Hero's maid in Edwardian England, is clearly of lower social status. This production likewise does not stage the window scene.[21] The Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2024 stage production of *Much Ado* also faithfully omits staging the window scene, though they replace Benedick with Borachio as Margaret's dance partner in act 2, scene 1, implying a clear relationship between the two. In this production, Margaret also draws attention to her sexual desirability. She wears the most cleavage-baring dress of any woman in the play and her exchange with Borachio is decidedly suggestive.[22]

In Kenneth Branagh's 1993 film adaptation of *Much Ado,* Borachio again replaces Benedick in this scene. Margaret and Borachio are depicted as giggling and groping each other in a corner while she admits to saying her prayers aloud. Branagh also stages the window scene as explicitly sexual. There is no talking at the window save for Borachio loudly calling out Hero's name during sex.[23] In Joss Whedon's modernized 2012 film adaptation of *Much Ado*, Benedick is replaced with a nameless henchman who flirts with Margaret, depicted as a maid, during an extravagant garden party. In this adaptation, Margaret's window scene also involves explicit sex between Margaret and Borachio, with the added detail of Margaret wearing Hero's wedding dress which gives interesting context to Margaret's reluctance for Hero to wear it in act 3, scene 1.[24]

Filmed stage adaptations, including Jonathan Coy's 2011 adaptation in Wyndham Theatre and the National Youth Theatre's 2023 performance, also keep Margaret's masque exchange but replace Benedick during this scene. In Coy's adaptation, Margaret flirts with a waiter, not Benedick, during the masque and then has a drunken encounter with Borachio during the bachelorette party. Her character is mistaken for Hero because Borachio has her wear Hero's bridal veil during their drunken hookup, thus implying Margaret's unwitting, and perhaps even nonconsensual participation in the deceit.[25] The National Youth Theatre's

modernized and heavily adapted 2023 stage performance cleverly frames *Much Ado* as a reality television show, and Margaret and Borachio are presented as a couple from the get-go. Benedick is replaced with Borachio in the masque scene, and with the help of Borachio, Don John surreptitiously films one of Borachio and Margaret's sexual encounters in a way that deceives Claudio.[26]

That's all to say that recent adaptations of *Much Ado* tend to explicitly show the window scene and portray it as much more involved than Margaret merely "talking with a ruffian at her chamber window." Perhaps directors feel that making the Borachio-Margaret encounter more explicit is essential for modern audiences' sympathy, or at least credulity—toward Claudio's outrage (even if his determination to humiliate Hero at the altar is still seen as misguided). In a play whose original and derivative dramatic core is not only about Hero's presumed cheating but also her loss of virginity, it's the cheating that's played up in modern adaptations.[27] Ironically, however, many modern adaptations replace Bendick with Borachio or Balthasar in act 2, scene 1, to downplay any insinuation that Benedick is a cheater or interested in Margaret.

Yet the specter of cheating is paramount to the play itself. Beatrice and Benedick are clearly preoccupied with infidelity. In act 2, scene 1, Beatrice implies that she and Benedick have had a past relationship, and something went awry: "Marry once before [Benedick] won [my heart] of me with false / dice" (2.1.275-76). In the same scene, she responds to Leonato' s joke that she'll never marry by implying that any husband of hers would have horns because she would surely cuckold him (2.1.25-27). In some of the last lines of the play Claudio states that Benedick will be a "double-dealer" unless Beatrice "look exceedingly narrow to [Benedick]" (5.4.118, 120), and in the most nascent stages of marriage, he nevertheless implies that to marry is to be cuckolded: "There is no staff more reverend than one tipped / with horn" (5.4.127-28). These persistent references to Benedick's reputation and the propensity of both Beatrice and Benedick to stray don't mean that cheating is inevitably in the couple's future. Yet the omnipresent fear of cuckolding and infidelity is textually supported, and Margaret's deception and flirtatious interactions with Benedick certainly highlight those themes.

**Margaret as Beatrice's Rival?**

It goes against a fundamental theme of the play to minimize scenes that support widespread anxiety of cheating and cuckolding. Yet the almost ubiquitous removal of Margaret's initial exchange with Benedick, in both text and performance, suggests that modern directors and audiences are a bit squeamish about cheating. This may be why many productions of *Much Ado* also often cut or abridge the conversation between Margaret and Benedick in act 5, scene 2. This conversation is already short, only 25 lines, and occurs after Beatrice and Benedick have declared their love for each other but before they discover that Hero's innocence has been proven. What Margaret knows or doesn't know about Claudio's accusations against Hero and her pretended death remains unknown. The conversation between Margaret and Benedick begins with Benedick's request that Margaret help him "to the speech of Beatrice" (5.2.2). Benedick's desire to speak to Beatrice is clear, but Margaret is determined to turn the focus on her:

*Margaret:* Will you then write me a sonnet in praise of my beauty?

*Benedick:* In so high a style, Margaret, that no man living shall come over it, for in most comely truth, thou deservest it.

*Margaret:* To have no man come over me why, shall I always keep below stairs?

*Benedick:* Thy wit is as quick as the greyhound's mouth, it catches.

*Margaret:* And yours as blunt as the fencer's foils, which hit but hurt not.

*Benedick:* A most manly wit, Margaret, it will not hurt a woman. And so I pray thee call Beatrice. I give thee the bucklers.

*Margaret:* Give us the swords. We have bucklers of our own.

*Benedick:* If you use them, Margaret, you must put in the pikes with a vice—and they are dangerous weapons for maids.

*Margaret:* Well, I will call Beatrice to you, who I think hath legs.

*Benedick:* And therefore will come. (5.2.4-25)

In this exchange Margaret is clearly the character who introduces flirtation and innuendo. Magdalena Adamcyzk argues that

Benedick's "come over" is literal and gentlemanly while "Margaret's intention behind using it is to communicate bawdry."[28] Yet Benedick's and Margaret's intentions can be read in myriad ways: as an innocent or meaningless interaction, a more involved "skirmish of wit" (1.1.61), or perhaps a revelation of genuine sexual or romantic interest. Benedick does praise Margaret's beauty, "for in most comely truth, thou deservest it," and Margaret eventually relents and fetches Beatrice, though perhaps Benedick's comment on "pikes in vices," a culmination of the phallic and vaginal references, could be read as Benedick's dismissal.

Carol Cook reads this exchange as a larger commentary on female and male relations within the play. She argues that *Much Ado* consistently uses phallic imagery in a violent way: "In exchanging quips with Margaret, Benedick describes her wit as a 'grey-hound's mouth' that 'catches' (5.2.11-12), but he claims swordlike phallic wit as a masculine prerogative that women only wield through usurpation."[29] Johannes Ungelenk similarly argues that the "phallic implication [of the conversation] is exposed by Margaret in an exchange of witty remarks with Benedick, who, tired of talking to her (instead of Beatrice), acknowledges his verbal defeat."[30] Whether this exchange is a symbol of the limits of female (or male) wit or a gesture of sexual interest—either solely by Margaret or by both Margaret and Benedick—is unclear.

Consequently, many modern portrayals cut this scene which can feel abrupt and contextless especially if Benedick has already been replaced with Borachio or Balthasar in act 2. Three adaptations of the six previously discussed keep most or portions of this scene: the BBC's 1984 adaptation, Whedon's 2012 modernized adaptation, and the RSC's 2014 adaptation. Only the BBC adaptation retains the entire exchange and Margaret, who has been portrayed as whiny and generally unappealing throughout the adaptation, is a clear annoyance to Benedick who just wants to talk to Beatrice. While Margaret seems flirtatious, Benedick's line, "you must put in the pikes with the vice," offends Margaret who leaves in huff.[31] In Whedon's version, Margaret performs the line "Will you then write me a sonnet?" sadly and wistfully. In Whedon's adaptation, Margaret is portrayed as sincerely interested in Borachio and is perhaps becoming aware that she's being used. Benedick's offer to write her a sonnet is more gallant than

flirtatious in this context. In this film Benedick never delivers the "pikes with a vice" line, and Margaret leaves of her own accord after admonishing Benedick that women "have bucklers of their own."[32] In the RSC version, where Margaret has been portrayed as a kindly, older servant, Benedick and Margaret's conversation is cut after Benedick's line where he calls Margaret's wit "quick as the greyhound's mouth," and before Margaret introduces any explicit innuendo.[33] While this scene can be performed in a way that doesn't threaten the development of Beatrice and Benedick's relationship, its smutty potential is perhaps troubling enough that it's frequently cut or abridged.

Yet in the text Margaret clearly serves as a witty foil and possible romantic rival for Beatrice. Furthermore, her banter with Benedick and Beatrice is laced with innuendo and points toward a reality wherein if "men were deceivers ever" (2.3.65) there must be women that assist them in that sexual deceit (and Margaret may have already assisted Borachio). Margaret's social status, and thus romantic rival potential, is also up for interpretation. In *Much Ado*, she is Hero's "waiting gentlewoman" and not a maid as Whetstone's *The Rocke of Regarde* portrays her, and ladies-in-waiting were often prime objects for sexual conquests and, if of high enough status, romantic rivals for the ladies they waited upon.[34] Margaret's cheeky punning and banter may also imply an elevated social status. In her study of punning ladies-in-waiting in Shakespeare's plays,[35] Adamcyzk posits that during "Elizabethan times puns enjoyed their highest status ever," so lower-ranking characters like Margaret punning with their social superiors of Beatrice and Benedick "was not necessarily considered an outward [indication] of . . . impertinence."[36] But Margaret's play on language does serve as a persuasive argument that she is meant "to be perceived as a sharp-witted [figure]."[37]

Paul Rapley interprets Margaret as Shakespeare's clear nod to the "frequency of extra-marital intercourse among the highborn" and argues that her "lexical knowingness . . . [in her conversation with Benedick in act 5]" implies obvious sexual experience. Rapley further insinuates that Margaret's potential sexual rivalry with Beatrice would have been familiar to London audiences: "the boy playing Margaret certainly has been given plenty with which to project a type of woman who might, indeed, dwell in London

or be watching from the galleries."[38] While Margaret is generally interpreted as an "unwitting accomplice" in *Much Ado*, she can still be interpreted as a symbol of the reality of extra-marital escapades and perhaps as a threat to Beatrice's relationship with Benedick.

This is reinforced by Margaret's longest verbal exchange where she establishes herself as a rival to Beatrice's wit. In act 3, scene 4, a scene less frequently abridged in *Much Ado* productions, Margaret has a passive aggressive conversation with Hero about Hero's wedding dress.[39] When Hero responds that her heart is heavy (perhaps dismayed to be the vanguard of quaint fashion), Margaret saucily responds that her heart will "be heavier soon by the weight of a man" (3.4.27-28). Margaret then defends her remark by claiming she was ostensibly defending marriage: "Is there any harm in 'the heavier / for a husband'? None, I think, an it be the right / husband and the right wife" (3.4.34-36).

When Beatrice enters the scene, Margaret swiftly makes Beatrice her new target and leaves behind any pretense of honorable marriage in her innuendo when she riffs on Beatrice's declaration that she has a cold and is "stuffed" or unable to smell (3.4.62): "A maid, and stuffed! There's goodly catching of cold" (3.4.63-64). Beatrice is a "maid" with purportedly no current romantic attachments, and to be stuffed—either pregnant or sexually penetrated—would be a tad more scandalous. Beatrice professes shock at Margaret's "apprehension" (3.4.66) to which Margaret proudly declares that her wit "become[s] me rarely" (3.4.67-68) and then pointedly prescribes "distilled carduus benedictus" for Beatrice's "stuffing" (3.4.71). Margaret proceeds to deliver something of a sermon, admonishing Beatrice that she believes Beatrice looks "with [her] eyes as other women do" (3.4.88-89), and that she too will be converted to love.[40] The scene ends quickly after that, but the audience is given a rare moment where Beatrice is bested in a battle of wits. Margaret gets the literal last word declaring that her own wit keeps the pace of a "fast gallop" (3.4.91) which, in this case, is faster than Beatrice's. While Margaret's "witty reveal" doesn't occur until this scene, her emergence as a sparring partner worthy of Beatrice does make her conversation with Benedick in act 5, scene 2 smack more of rivalry.

## A Quiet and Good Margaret

*Much Ado* thematically centers on the tenuousness of reputation and reality and how easily hearsay can undo and create realities. Yet modern adaptations rarely rely on Margaret to communicate any sort of thematic tenuousness. Instead, her character is abridged or performed to make her as unproblematic as possible. She is often portrayed as a maid, or someone clearly less marriageable than Hero and Beatrice: a minor character who is sexually interesting to Borachio but irrelevant to Benedick. Margaret's wittiest exchanges are cut or abridged not only because they involve Benedick but because they are difficult to contextualize within the broader context of her deceit. Is Margaret unbothered that Hero's been declared as dead after she is accused of unchastity? Does Margaret not realize the devastating effects of her roleplay with Borachio?

Directors and actors are frequently keen to answer those questions by visibly exonerating Margaret from culpability in Don John's deceit to soothe audiences who may be distracted by the lack of closure regarding Margaret's intentions. In Branagh's film version of *Much Ado,* there's a close-up of Margaret during Hero's initial wedding scene where she appears shocked and horrified that her rendezvous with Borachio is the source of Claudio's accusations. Margaret is also shown during the final wedding scene, visibly flustered and penitent, as she is pithily cleared by Leonato's statement that she participated in Don John's scheme "against her will, as it appears" (5.4.5).[41] In fact, most adaptations include Margaret in the final wedding scene to provide the audience with a sense of clear, positive resolution.

In a "Roundtable Discussion" focusing on the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2016 production of *Much Ado*, director David Ivers explained that he included Margaret in the final wedding scene to provide that sense of resolution:

> There's no prescription for Margaret being in the scene or not [but] I think it's seriously troubling if she's not . . . Kelly Rogers, who plays Margaret, felt very strongly that we should find a moment for her to have a chance to say, 'Whoa, this thing . . .went too far.' . . . that might go a long way with a modern audience to validate this larger family. After all, the whole play is about watching how information affects people to change or not. I have to believe in the choice because I

> believe it gives someone voice, potentially, that doesn't have one.[42]

Leslie Lank, who played Hero in the 2016 adaptation also explained that this moment between Hero and Margaret allowed audiences to see a positive relationship between the two women:

> Kelly [the actor who played Margaret] and I have also found a moment at the end where Leonato says that Margaret was a part of the deception but she didn't know what was happening. Then Kelly comes over to me and we have a little silent moment of forgiveness. I love it. We kind of just hold each other, and sometimes she says, "I'm sorry." If that moment didn't exist at the wedding, if she stood away from me, and I obviously don't know what's happening and why she's avoiding me, it might be harder for me to forgive her. After all, the girls have each other's backs, and that's a truly important relationship.[43]

Karen Martin-Cotton who played Beatrice concurs,

> I also love that in this production, David has Margaret woven in closely as one of the girls who are almost part of the family. I like the dynamic of a world in which women can live different ways. For some women, it is part of what they're expected to do to be chaste, but other women certainly can make their own choices.[44]

Modern audiences *are* seriously troubled when women don't have each other's back: when Margaret is either villainous or completely unwitting, when Margaret appears unconcerned with Hero's fate, or when Margaret is too flirtatious with Benedick. It's an intriguing idea that a visual reconciliation between Margaret and Hero gives Margaret "a voice" when her original textual voice is so frequently tweaked, abridged, and cut to make her, and *Much Ado's* plot, more palatable to modern audiences.

Margaret's literary predecessors, Dalinda, Pyrene, and Rosina, are absolute pawns to the men they wish to end up with. But whether unwitting or purposefully deceitful, women who allow themselves to be controlled and used by men at the expense of their female relationships are often considered the worst types of women by modern audiences. These bad women sacrifice female comradery on the altar of patriarchy, and use their agency to go after other women and prioritize misguided self-interest.

Shakespeare's Margaret is a more nuanced rendering than her predecessors, but her character functions to serve the plot's focus on hearsay and infidelity rather than provide any further insight into her motivations or desires. While it's speculative to wonder at early modern reactions to Margaret, Dalinda, Pyrene, and Rosina, it's likely these women would be interpreted as bad for their unchastity rather than for their lack of agency and self-respect.

Making Margaret "good" in service of creating a more modern comedy is an appealing and marketable project. So many aspects of *Much Ado* read as modern and inclusive; Beatrice is one of Shakespeare's most well-developed and agential female characters. Messina is a lovely setting where men repent of their troubling treatment of women, where women have each other's backs, and where egalitarianism in heterosexual relationships is hopefully gestured at. But by portraying and buying into that Messina, we, like the play's main characters, are complicit in choosing a fantastical reality that ignores the unresolved issues surrounding infidelity, relationship instability, and the tenuous social positions of the female characters. The neat packaging of Margaret as a good and sympathetic woman for modern audiences reflects our continued discomfort with infidelity and relationship instability. When we are clamoring for more female representation in modern Shakespeare adaptations, it is ironic that modern adaptations largely silence a female character who doesn't support contemporary ideals of good monogamy, good friendships, and good women.

## Notes

1. Royal Shakespeare Company, "Much Ado about Nothing Dates and Sources," 2024. https://www.rsc.org.uk/much-ado-about-nothing/about-the-play/dates-and-sources.

2. Utah Shakespeare Festival, "Much Ado About Nothing," 2024. https://www.bard.org/plays/much-ado-about-nothing/.

3. These casting choices may involve protagonist gender-reversals like Helen Mirren as "Prospera" in the 2010 film version of *The Tempest*, but more often female actors are cast in smaller male roles, e.g., The Royal Shakespeare Company cast Nadia Albina as the Duke of Venice in their 2015 production of *Othello*, and Claire Price as Escalus in their 2019 adaptation of *Measure for Measure*. When director Simon Godwin cast a female actor in the role of "Timon" in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2018 *Timon of Athens*, he stated that when women are cast in "parts traditionally played by men," modern audiences can then "discover that Shakespeare was really interested in what's humane, what's universal, [not]

what's gender specific": Royal Shakespeare Company, "Women Playing Male Roles," 2018. https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/archive/women-playing-male-roles.

4. Royal Shakespeare Company, "Much Ado about Nothing Dates and Sources."

5. Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources: Comedies and Tragedies* (London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1957): 53.

6. Geoffrey Bullough, ed. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 62-66. Another of Shakespeare's presumed sources is Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* (1554) which features a heroine whose chastity is unfairly maligned but includes no lady-in-waiting character.

7. Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, 53

8. Jack D'Amico, "The Dangers and Virtues of Theatricality in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso," *MLN* 130.1 (2015): 42-62, 43.

9. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki, and Shohachi Fukuda, eds. *Spenser The Faerie Queen*. 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 10.2013), 192.

10. George Whetstone, *The Rocke of Regard Divided into Foure Parts: The First, the Castle of Delight...* (London: H. Middleton for Robert Waley, 1576. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Digital Collections): 46-47. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A15046.0001.001.

11. In these stories, the unchastity of the heroine's "waiting gentlewoman" provides a startling counterpoint to stories whose dramatic core hinges on the consequences of the presumed unchastity of their mistresses. There's very little plot devoted to unpacking the consequences of the unchastity of the lady-in-waiting or maid.

12. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

13. Editors disagree on whether Margaret calling Borachio "Claudio" is a printing error. Either this is a mistake, though this "mistake" is found in both the Quarto and Folio editions of *Much Ado*, and should be replaced with "Borachio," or rather, as the Folger editors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine suggest: "Margaret may be led to think that she and Borachio are pretending to be Hero and Claudio," 202.

14. Borachio's admonition is fortuitously overheard by Dogberry's watch and is what leads to Hero's eventual exoneration.

15. Balthasar's only other speaking moment in the play is when he sings "Sigh No More" in act 2, scene 3.

16. Folger Shakespeare Library, "Read a Shakespeare First Folio," 2025: 124-25 of 912. https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeare-in-print/first-folio/bookreader-68/

17. The1600 First Quarto lists Margaret in this scene as "Mar." or "Marg." Benedick is listed as "Bene" only, and Balthasar is listed as both "Balth" and "Balsth." Boston Public Library, "Facsimile Viewer: Much Ado About Nothing, Quarto 1," 2025: 16 of 76. https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/overview/book/Q1_Ado.html.

18. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, The Oxford Shakespeare The Complete Works, Second Edition, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 575.

19. For this project, I analyze seven productions of *Much Ado about Nothing*. I watched six film and filmed stage adaptations of Much Ado available via Digital Theatre Plus, the BYU Library. I also attended the Utah Shakespeare Festival 2024 stage production in August 2024. The modern adaptation of *Anyone But You* that I mention in footnote 23 is available on various online streaming services. Additionally, in lieu of available copies of the filmed stage adaptations of the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2012 *Much Ado* and the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2016 *Much Ado*, I analyzed textual critiques.

20. This BBC stage production was performed in 1984 but transferred to DVD in 2001: *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. Jonathan Miller et al. Performed by Robert Lindsay, Cherie Lunghi, Jon Finch, and Pamela Moiseiwitsch (New York: Ambrose Video Pub., 2001), DVD.

21. *Love's Labour's Won* (*Much Ado about Nothing*), directed by Christopher Luscombe and Robin Lough. Performed by Edward Bennett, Michelle Terry, John Hodgkinson, and Emma Manton (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2014), Digital Theatre+.

22. *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Brad Carroll. Performed by Walter Kmiec, Melinda Parrett, Rodney Lizcano, and Valerie Martire (Utah Shakespeare Festival, August 7, 2024), Stage Performance.

23. *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Kenneth Branagh. Performed by Kenneth Branagh, Emma Thompson, Denzel Washington, and Imelda Staunton (MGM Domestic Television, 1993), Prime Video.

24. *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Joss Whedon. Performed by Amy Acker, Alexis Denisof, Reed Diamond, and Ashley Johnson (Lionsgate, 2012), Prime Video. The 2023 romantic comedy *Anyone But You*, loosely based on *Much Ado*, features Margaret as Ben's (Benedick's) ex-girlfriend with no connection to the Hero or Beatrice characters. Margaret is a straight-forward romantic rival for Beatrice and there is no cheating deception in the film. *Anyone But You*, directed by Will Gluck. Performed by Sydney Sweeney, Glen Powell, Gata, and Charlee Fraser (Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2023), Netflix.

25. *Much Ado about Nothing*, directed by Josie Rourke. Performed by David Tennant, Catherine Tate, Adam James, and Natalie Thomas (Wyndham's Theatre, 2011), Digital Theatre+.

26. *Much Ado about Nothing*, directed by Josie Daxter. Performed by Daniel Cawley, Isolde Fenton, Jack D'Arcy, and Nathaly Sabino (National Youth Theatre, 2023), Digital Theatre+.

27. Some modern adaptations, including Iqbal Khan, *The Oxford Shakespeare The Complete Works*, 2nd ed.'s 2012 adaptation of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Much Ado* continue to emphasize the themes of chastity and honor. In this adaptation, set in contemporary India, Khan stages act 4, scene 1 as something that Meera Syal, who played Beatrice, describes as "almost an honour killing . . . where the men turn like a pack of dogs on an innocent woman." Sita Thomas, "*Much Ado about Nothing*, dir. by Iqbal Khan (review)," *Asian Theatre Journal* 32.2 (2015).

28. Magdalena Adamczyk, "Interactional Aspects of Language-Based Humour in Shakespeare's Comedies: The Dynamics of Punning by Ladies-in-Waiting," *Atlantis* 36.1 (2014): 11-30.

29. Carol Cook, "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in Much Ado about Nothing," *PMLA* 101.2 (1986): 186-202.

30. Johannes Ungelenk "Caressing with Words: *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Touching at a Distance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 170-171.

31. *Much Ado*, Jonathan Miller.

32. *Much Ado*, Joss Whedon.

33. *Love's Labour's Won*, Christopher Luscombe.

34. Some fifty years before *Much Ado* was first performed around 1598, Henry VIII had numerous affairs with his wives' ladies-in-waiting, and did, over the course of his life, marry three of them. John S. Morrill, "Henry VIII, King of England," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 29, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VIII-king-of-England.

35. In her study of punning ladies-in-waiting in *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, and *Much Ado*, Adamczyk acknowledges the ubiquity of punning in Shakespeare's plays, but demonstrates that ladies-in-waiting discourse is "proportionately more punning than that of seemingly more heavyweight punsters" (15). For example, Margaret's "pun-to-word ratio" is 7.3%, far higher than the clown Feste, from Twelfth Night, who has a ratio of 2.6% (17).

36. Adamczyk, *International Aspects*, 18

37. Adamczyk, *International Aspects*, 26

38. Paul Rapley, "Fudging the Outcome of *Much Ado about Nothing*: How the Villains, Don Pedro and Count Claudio, Are Allowed to Stay and Dance," *Critical Survey* 34.1 (2022): 56-73.

39. Margaret declares that she's seen the Duchess of Milan's dress and then comments that while the Duchess's dress has "cloth o'gold" and is "laced with silver, set with pearls" (3.2.19-20), Hero's gown is only "fine, quaint, graceful, and excellent" (3.2.22) in comparison.

40. At this point in the text Beatrice has not gone public with her affection for Benedick and she does not know she has been tricked into this affection by the machinations of Hero, Ursula, and Margaret in act 3, scene 1.

41. *Much Ado*, Kenneth Branagh.

42. Michael Don Bahr, "Acting Shakespeare: A Roundtable Discussion with Artists from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2016 Production of *Much Ado About Nothing*," *Journal of the Wooden O* 16 (2016): 38-55. 49-50.

43. Bahr, "Acting Shakespeare," 50.

44. Bahr, "Acting Shakespeare," 50.

# Heavenly Dances and Mortal Fights: Dance and Swordplay in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

Fred Hook
Queen's University

## Introduction: Dance, Swordplay, and Language in *Romeo and Juliet*

Dance and swordplay played important roles in the early modern playhouse. Considered to be complementary arts, they were a feature of many plays of the time, including William Shakespeare's.[1] Actors would have needed to be skilled in dancing and fencing to fulfil their roles in such plays. To accurately portray a wide range of societies and characters and to appeal to the range of audience members in the playhouse—from the working classes to gentlemen—acting companies would have to know both elite and common dance and fencing practices.[2] Presenting a pavane on stage, for example, would resonate with upper classes in the audience, while a country or morris dance would be recognizable by working-class audience members.[3] In his plays, Shakespeare uses dance and swordplay as part of the play's action, and in his rhetoric to develop characters' personalities, create stylistic figures, portray tropes, and perform other functions.[4]

*Romeo and Juliet* use both of these modes of embodied communication as part of action and verbal references, most recognizably in its well-known fight sequences and in the Capulet ball scene. While early modern audiences would have been able to understand the various meanings of dance and swordplay, both

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 59-75

ISSN: 1539-5758

in visual and verbal forms, contemporary audiences frequently miss this layer of meaning due to missing cultural context.[5] The importance of dance and swordplay in Shakespeare and other playwrights' works has been discussed by many scholars, and there are several works on dance, swordplay, and cognition in early modern plays.[6] These scholars argue that there is a need for increased knowledge of dance and swordfighting—as well as early modern society's understanding of them—to uncover "much of the layered meanings in Shakespeare's work."[7] Florence Hazrat argues that dramatic context and language can help us recover possible moments of embodied communication in Shakespeare's plays and that we can and should informedly speculate about the presence and kinds of movement and dance in his plays.[8]

In this essay, I build off previous scholarly work. My analysis of the role of dance and swordplay in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* looks at the interplay of these modes of embodied communication with each other and with rhetorical language, and how they help to communicate the play's dramatic intent. In my analysis, I equate dance with love, and swordplay with violence and hatred. Using these equivalences, I argue that dance and swordplay in *Romeo and Juliet* work with language to express the meshing of love and violence in this Veronese society. I begin with a brief discussion of the destiny set out in the prologue, followed by an exploration of the following scenes: the street fight in the first act, the Capulets' masked ball, the fights between Mercutio and Tybalt and between Romeo and Tybalt, and the final scene at the Capulets' vault. For each of these scenes, I suggest how dance and/or swordplay may have been staged, and then analyze how the presence and use of dance and swordplay can enhance our understanding.

## The Prologue: A Doomed Love Written in the Stars

The prologue spoken by the Chorus at the start of *Romeo and Juliet* informs the audience how the play will end and gives the audience contextual information about the society within it. However, I argue that it also acts as a marker of how dance and swordplay are intertwined. The audience hears of the "two households, both alike in dignity" who "from ancient grudge break to new mutiny."[9] Perhaps more importantly, the Chorus

foreshadows the entanglement of love and violence in Romeo and Juliet's relationship, introducing them in relation to their parents' feud:

> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Doth with their death bury their parents' strife. (Prologue 5-8)

The brief mention of the "star-crossed lovers" is bookended with references to the Capulets and Montagues' feud, placing Romeo and Juliet "both structurally and thematically in their familial frameworks" and their associated violence.[10] Even the lovers' birth is mentioned in relation to death, as the Chorus describes them coming from "the fatal loins of these two foes," their parents. Here, "loin" means both the reproductive area of the body and the product of reproduction: children.[11] This double-meaning signals not only that any child born from the Lords and Ladies Capulet and Montague is doomed to die, but also that—as their only two descendants—Romeo and Juliet are themselves "fatal," both to each other and themselves. They are, in fact, born to die.

The phrase "star-crossed lovers" is also of importance to Romeo and Juliet's destiny as doomed lovers. According to the *OED*, this is the first use of the phrase "star-crossed"—now frequently used in relation to lovers—and is defined as "thwarted by bad luck or adverse circumstances (originally considered to be a result of malign planetary influence)," further enshrining Romeo and Juliet's love as doomed.[12] Their ill-fated love, in relation to planetary influence, is reinforced in the masque, as I will discuss later. I argue that the link between love and violence, emphasized in the Prologue, is brought to fruition by the use of dance and swordplay.

### Act 1.1: Setting the Stage for Violence

The street fight in Act 1.1 establishes how deeply ingrained the Capulet/Montague feud is in their Veronese society. This scene is the first of several fights in the play and would have been a familiar sight to early modern audiences, who witnessed acts of swordfighting both within and outside the playhouse: in war, streets, sporting tournaments, and fencing events.[13] Audiences

would have been knowledgeable about the types of weapons used and fencing techniques, and would have been able to read what Colleen Kelly calls the "complex language of theatrical swordplay" that uses both "the language of rhetoric and the language of the sword."[14] By analyzing this language, we can gain a deeper understanding of the scene.

The first characters on stage are Samson and Gregory, servants of the house of Capulet. Yet before we even know who they are, they enter "*with swords and bucklers*" (1.1.0 SD), traditional English weapons that were still in use by the working class, but were no longer used by noblemen.[15] The association of swords and bucklers with working-class men not only tells us that these two characters are servants, but also extends the reach of the feud between "two households, both alike in dignity" (Prologue, 1). While the prologue tells us of the noble houses' participation in the feud, the sight of serving men with weapons hints at the metastatic reach of this feud and its violence, so entrenched in Veronese society that the nobles' servants get involved as well. The reach of violence and its roots in the Capulet/Montague strife are reinforced when Samson and Gregory's dialogue quickly shifts to the language of fighting. The two begin conversing about work, as Samson tells Gregory "on my word, we'll not carry coals" to which the latter replies: "No, for then we should be colliers." Samson rapidly picks up on the possible word play, telling him "I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw" (1.1.1-3). The word "draw" here refers to drawing a sword, and while at first this aggression may be directed toward their employers, it soon shifts to their employer's enemy when Samson says that "a dog of the house of Montague moves me" (1.1.7). This reference to the Montagues occurs before members of this house even appear on stage, foregrounding the feud's effects on this society.

The arrival of Montague servants, the ensuing fight, and the introduction of numerous other characters into this brawl cements the feud's infectious violence that permeates every level of society. While readers know through stage directions that Tybalt, Benvolio, citizens, and Capulet and Montague join the fray, audience members would be able to identify the different ranks of these new actors by their weapons. As we later learn (1.5.54), Tybalt, a young nobleman, uses a rapier; another of that class, Benvolio would also have used the rapier and dagger.[16] Stage directions indicate that

the citizens use clubs or partisans (1.1.70 SD), and Capulet calls for someone to "give me my long sword, ho!" (1.1.73).[17] As Evelyn Tribble explains, "[t]he differences in fencing styles are used as a means of vividly drawing the characters," and in this scene, their choice of weapons identifies their age and social rank.[18] Average citizens use clubs and partisans; servants use sword and bucklers; young noblemen, rapiers and daggers, and Capulet's preference for a long sword shows his old age and class.[19] The medley of weapons present in this brawl indicates that, while the prologue may identify this feud as one between two noble houses, it encompasses all of Verona.

Romeo introduces the association between violence and love when he arrives and notices the brawl's aftermath: "O me, what fray was here? / Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all. / Here's much to do with hate, but more with love" (1.1.171-173). With this last line, Romeo switches topic from the brawl to his love for Rosaline, but implies that what can be said about love also applies to hate, and to this fight. In his love-sick state, he rhetorically asks, "Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate, / O anything of nothing first create" (1.1.174-175), merging love and hate. Romeo explains that both love and hate can arise out of little or nothing, as the recent street fight demonstrates. He further supports the resemblance and interconnectedness of love and hate with the line "Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms" (1.1.177). As previously mentioned, dance and swordplay were viewed as similar arts, and dance was often used to symbolize love, while fencing and swordplay more clearly relates to hate and violence.[20] This line may be a reference to the "forms" of fencing and dance, here technically correct but "misshapen" into the chaos of the fight, rather than the beauty of dance. In this way, *Romeo and Juliet*'s first scene not only establishes the play's context, introduces characters, and entertains the audience with sword fights, but it sets the stage for the pervasiveness of violence in the play; immediately after the fight Romeo establishes the interconnectedness of love and hate and their counterparts dance and swordplay.

### Act 1.4: The Capulet Masque and the Lovers' Celestial Dance

The Capulet ball is a pivotal moment in *Romeo and Juliet*, as it introduces Juliet, and with her the beginning of the play's

romance. It is also centered around a dance, and as such is rich with interpretative meaning. The ball in Act 1.4 is a masque, which in the Tudor period was simple and informal.[21] According to Anne Daye, masques featured social dancing, particularly improvised dance forms, such as the galliard.[22] In plays, masques would have been much briefer than they would be in a court ball, but would be similar in style and manner.[23] They could be used to display actors' talents, further the plot, and add an air of festivity.[24] It is the topic of much debate whether Romeo participates in the dancing at the Capulets' ball; however, I argue that Romeo *does* dance, if only for a short period of time. That said, he does initially refuse to dance, telling Mercutio to "Give me a torch. I am not for this ambling, / Being but heavy I will bear the light" (1.4.11-12). Masques would have required much lighting from candles, torches, and lamps. Most of these light sources were displayed in the scenery, but they were also supplemented by torchbearers.[25] Romeo, melancholic because of his unrequited love for Rosaline, proposes to be one of these torchbearers rather than participate in the "ambling" of dancing. However, once struck by Juliet's beauty, Romeo "forg[ets] [Rosaline's] name and that name's woe" (2.3.42), as he falls in love with Juliet. Once Romeo is cured of melancholy— caused by his love for Rosaline—there is no reason for him not to dance, and as Hazrat states, "it makes perfect sense for them [Romeo and Juliet] to participate in the possible slow and stately measure and its cultural associations of wooing and serious love."[26] I agree that Romeo and Juliet dance part of a measure together, but propose that before this, the masque features a pavane and a galliard.

Walter Sorell says that masques would be followed by a galliard, while according to Daye, they would normally begin with a processional pavane, followed by other measures.[27] Robert Mullally suggests that they would begin with Old Measures, and then galliards and other dances.[28] Given the multiple meanings of "measure," defined as both the specific dance "measure" and a general term for any dance—Fabio Ciambella observes that some treat the pavane and measure as the same dance—I suggest that the masque in *Romeo and Juliet* could have begun with a processional pavane, where the members of the Capulet house are introduced, followed by a more energetic galliard, and a courtly measure.[29] The pavane is a stately dance with a slow pace, where dancers parade

around the hall in a procession.[30] It would have been an ideal dance to take place during Capulet's welcome speech, with his promise that "Ladies that have their toes / Unplagued with corns will walk a bout with you" (1.5.16-17). The processional nature of the pavane would work well here to introduce the ladies and gentlemen with whom guests could dance, and the use of the word "walk" can be read as referring to the pavane, a slow dance resembling a walk about (or "a bout") the room.[31] Necla Çikigil suggests that after Capulet's speech, a pavane most certainly followed, but Sorell disagrees, arguing that "[t]he necessity to quench the fire because, due to the dancing, the room had grown too hot" means a slow dance "simply would not fit the text."[32] However, given that dances in plays would have had to be brief and only "*approximate* the style and manner in which they were probably done," it would have been possible for multiple short dances to be staged.[33] Therefore, a short pavane could occur during Capulet's introduction, and after he calls "Come, musicians, play" (1.5.25), the musicians could begin playing more energetic music for a galliard. As a more vigorous dance, the galliard would also have needed more space and energy, hence Capulet's request for "A hall, a hall! Give room and foot it, girls" (1.5.26). The galliard's similarity to the cinquepace—a dance made of five steps, four of which are kicks—its fast rhythm and movements would work as clever wordplay with "foot it," both because of the galliard's speed and its intricate footwork.[34]

If, as I argue, a galliard is performed after the pavane, it would be during this dance that Romeo first notices Juliet, wondering: "What lady's that which doth enrich the hand / Of yonder knight?" (1.5.41-42). While Juliet has not yet been formally introduced, we see her through Romeo's gaze and description. Throughout the play, she is frequently associated with brightness, light, and the sun, a comparison that begins as Romeo muses upon Juliet:

> O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear,
> Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear. (1.5.43-46)

At this point in the masque, Romeo is still a torchbearer, and Juliet's brightness invites him, as well as the torches, to burn brighter, letting go of his melancholy. Romeo's comment further likens Juliet to the sun and stars with his use of the contrasting imagery

of Juliet and night, and a jewel and an "Ethiop." In comparison to night and an "Ethiop's ear," Juliet is light, shining brightly in the night sky as stars do. Finally, the last line quoted above can signify that Juliet's beauty is too expensive for the world to afford, but also that it is too precious to belong to earth; she belongs to heaven (or the sky) instead. The rhetorical language used to describe Juliet positions her as a celestial being, an idea reinforced by the dances in the masque. To Sir John Davies, the sun and earth danced a galliard since they imitated the steps of the dance.[35] By introducing Romeo to Juliet as she performs a galliard, the dance adds another layer of symbolism to Juliet's description as the sun, a celestial body. This symbolism is further strengthened by the era's belief in the cosmic dance. Alan Brissenden explains that from the second to eighteenth century, it was thought that the universe's balance depended on "the joyous dance of the heavenly bodies," a belief that associated dance with the movements of the planets and stars, as well as with love, harmony, and order.[36] The play's rhetorical language connecting her with the sun and stars, the association of dance with celestial bodies and love/harmony, and the galliard's association with the dance of the sun and earth work together to create a picture of Juliet as a heavenly being.

The play's text and sparse stage directions do not indicate when Romeo approaches Juliet, only that he begins speaking to her at line 1.4.92. Romeo's speech tells us that he will wait to speak to her: "The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand / And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand" (1.4.49-50). As mentioned earlier, "measure" can refer to any dance, and would be a natural description of a galliard. Romeo waits for Juliet to finish the galliard before approaching her where she "stand[s]" after the dance. After this line, the dialogue then moves to the argument between Tybalt and Capulet, and so there are no indications as to what Romeo does prior to first speaking to Juliet. I suggest that it is at the end of Romeo's speech that the galliard ends and Juliet moves to the side, before Romeo takes her hand to lead her into the next measure. The play would show Romeo and Juliet dancing briefly, while Tybalt and Capulet argue. Once the argument ends, the lovers remove themselves from the dance floor, and the other masquers continue dancing in the background during Romeo and Juliet's famous sonnet. This short measure would support

Hazrat's argument that Romeo and Juliet likely danced as they spoke, and given the measure's cultural associations with love and its symbolism of matrimony, it would support their presentation as lovers.[37] Romeo's inclusion in the measure ties him into Juliet's cosmic dance, showing their love as divine and emphasizing the prologue's description of it as fated. Furthermore, if Romeo only dances one measure with Juliet, her later comment to the Nurse that identifies him as "he… that would not dance" (1.5.131) holds—he does not dance the galliard—while still supporting Juliet's reference to him as "one I danced withal" (1.5.142). Finally, the simultaneous action of Romeo and Juliet's measure and Tybalt and Capulet's argument would serve to create a contrasting picture on stage of a harmonious dance and the threat of violence when Tybalt calls for his rapier (1.5.54). He will use the same rapier the following day to challenge Romeo and murder Mercutio. In this way, the split-stage reminds us that it is not just Romeo and Juliet's love that is fated, but also their deaths.

### Act 3.1: Bringing Love to a Sword Fight

The beginning of Act 3 marks the turning point of *Romeo and Juliet* from romance to tragedy, brought on by Mercutio and Tybalt's deaths, after which no more dancing occurs. Romeo refuses to fight Tybalt, stating that "the reason that I have to love thee / Doth much excuse the appertaining rage / To such a greeting. … farewell; I see thou knowest me not" (3.1.61-64). To Benvolio, Mercutio, and Tybalt, who do not know of Romeo and Juliet's marriage, this response comes as a shock. Joan Ozark Holmer explains that according to Vincentio Saviolo's fencing manual *Vincentio Saviolo his Practice*, "Romeo's refusal to duel with Tybalt would be viewed … not as vile submission but rather as courageous wisdom," following Saviolo's honour code.[38] However, to the characters of the play, whose lives have been so permeated with violence and for whom "these hot days, is the mad blood stirring" (3.1.5), Romeo's move from violence to love is a sign of weakness and his inability to defend his reputation. It is Romeo's "calm, dishonourable, vile submission" (3.1.72) that spurs Mercutio to fight Tybalt, and I argue that it is this same shift to love rather than violence that causes Mercutio's death. However, before discussing

Mercutio and Tybalt's duel, I must first briefly examine Brandon Shaw's analysis of Romeo and Tybalt's duel to establish Romeo, Tybalt, and Mercutio's demeanors at the time of the first duel.

In his analysis of the fight between Tybalt and Romeo (which occurs after Tybalt has slain Mercutio), Shaw compares Tybalt's fighting style to dance, a method that, if used with an opponent using the same practice, shows much skill. However, against an opponent who is "primed to kill," like Romeo after Mercutio's death, Tybalt's dance-like fighting proves a fatal mistake.[39] This deadly Romeo is a different man than the one before Mercutio's demise. The Romeo that first arrives onstage in Act 3.1 is a dancing one; the melancholy that weighed him down before meeting Juliet is gone, and as I have argued above, Romeo is now able to dance, being once again light of foot. Thus, at the start of the scene, he is better suited to a dance than a duel, while Tybalt and Mercutio are primed to fight. Tybalt is still full of choler and gall (1.5.88 and 91), enraged by Romeo's presence at the masque, while for his part, Mercutio has "mad blood stirring" (3.1.5) and seethes with anger at Tybalt for insulting Romeo.

Earlier in the play, Mercutio mocks Tybalt, calling his use of techniques such as the *passado* and the *punto reverso* clownish and posturing (2.4.25-30), giving audience members—and current scholars—a hint of Tybalt's fighting style. The blow that proves fatal to Mercutio is Tybalt's *punto reverso*, the same that Mercutio makes fun of earlier. This technique is "a thrust … delivered from the attacker's left side, usually over but sometimes under the opponent's weapon."[40] When Romeo enters the fight in an attempt to stop it, he and Mercutio figuratively become a single opponent to Tybalt, where Romeo's arm takes the place of Mercutio's weapon, and as in a *punto reverso*, Tybalt "*under Romeo's arm thrusts Mercutio in*" (3.1.89), killing him.[41] In joining Mercutio, Romeo adds his dancing love to Mercutio's hatred, ultimately weakening the pair against Tybalt's untainted and deadly hatred. Romeo himself realizes his role in Mercutio's death, as he laments that:

> My very friend, hath got this mortal hurt
> In my behalf (…)
> O sweet Juliet,
> Thy beauty hath made me effeminate
> And in my temper softened valour's steel! (3.1.112-117).

Not only has Romeo's inaction spurred Mercutio to defend him, but Juliet's beauty, and by extension his love, has "softened valour's steel." Romeo's shift to love and his attempt to stop Mercutio from fighting Tybalt lead to Mercutio's death. His death thus reinforces the interconnectedness of love and violence, and demonstrates that when set against each other, hatred wins out.

As mentioned earlier, the play features no more dances following Mercutio's death; however, it does include more swordfights. After losing his friend, Romeo shifts back to hatred with a promise that "[t]his but begins the woe others must end" (3.1.122). It is both a promise to kill Tybalt and a foreshadowing of the many deaths to come. From this point on, Romeo swears that "fire-eyed fury [will] be my conduct now" (3.1.126), and, strengthened with hatred, he swiftly kills Tybalt. While the stage directions, "[t]*hey fight. Tybalt falls*" (3.1.133), do little to show what happens, Benvolio's description of the fight to the Prince, Capulets, and Montagues, who arrive on stage after the fight has taken place, can provide information of the attack.[42] Benvolio takes twelve lines to describe the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt (3.1.160-171), but only three are needed to describe Tybalt and Romeo's: "to't they go like lightning, for, ere I / Could draw to part them was stout Tybalt slain, / And as he fell did Romeo turn and fly" (3.1.174-176). Benvolio is too slow for Romeo's "newly entertained revenge" (3.1.173). Before Benvolio can stop them, Romeo has already killed Tybalt. While this shift back to violence permits Romeo to defend himself against Tybalt, it also sets up the violence of the rest of the play.

### Act 5.3: Violence for Love

As the play started with violence, so it ends, the final scene marking the deaths of three characters: Paris, Romeo, and Juliet. At this point in the play, both Romeo and Juliet have expressed a wish to die if they cannot be with each other. Romeo's turn to violence and death is mirrored in Juliet, who makes several comments linking her wedding night to death. When she first hears of Romeo's banishment, she tells the Nurse that she will retire to her wedding bed: "And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead" (3.2.135-137). After being informed that she must marry Paris, she asks Lady Capulet to delay the marriage: "Or, if you do not,

make the bridal bed / In that dim monument where Tybalt lies" (3.5.200-202). As Juliet realizes that her love for Romeo may not surpass the odds, she turns to death for comfort, even if she must bring it on herself. As she lays a knife by her side the night before her marriage to Paris, she knows that if all else fails, "This shall forbid it" (4.3.24). Romeo is of the same mind; his turn to violence soon turns inwards. After he hears of Juliet's death, he resolves to end his life, vowing that "Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight" (5.1.34). He views the poison he procures as "cordial and not poison" because it will allow him to be with her forever (5.1.85). While Romeo and Juliet's celestial dance at the Capulets' masque etched their love into the stars among the planets, it could not save them from the Capulet and Montagues' feud and its infectious violence, and so they turn to a different form of violence—suicide—to save their love.

The final scene has less swordplay than in the rest of the play, but what there is works with the earlier dancing, swordfighting, and rhetorical language to support the play's meaning. The fight between Romeo and Paris creates a visual representation not only of the shift to violence but of the shift *in* violence to a melancholic action born out of perceived necessity rather than hatred. Whereas Romeo aimed to kill Tybalt after Mercutio's death, here he is reluctant to kill Paris. He tells him that "I love thee better than myself, / For I come hither armed against myself" (5.3.64-65). However, when Paris stands firm in his defense of Juliet's grave, Romeo attacks him to carry out his intended suicide.

Once again, not much information is given from the stage directions for Romeo and Paris's fight, limited to "[t]*hey fight*" (5.3.70), and none of the play's characters can act as witnesses to describe the events afterwards.[43] Drawing from his knowledge of extant fencing manuscripts, Shakespeare's plays, and current techniques of swordfighting, J. D. Martinez proposes possible choreography for their fight.[44] He explains that after so much senseless death, Romeo is less willing to kill Paris than he would have been in the past, as Romeo does not want to "Put another sin upon [his] head" (5.3.62). Before explaining the choreography of the fight, Martinez sets the stage, stating that they would be fighting in the confined quarters of the Capulet vault. He also specifies each man's weapon: a "single hand English broadsword"

for Romeo and "rapier and lantern" for Paris.[45] I agree with Martinez that at this point in the play, Romeo is more reluctant to kill Paris, but I disagree with other parts of his analysis. Since the sets in Shakespeare's plays tended to be very minimal, it seems unlikely that the set design would suggest or depict a vault, or that the actors would limit themselves to its confines. Moreover, while Martinez depicts Paris holding an electric stage lantern instead of the traditional dagger, I believe that he would be holding an unlit torch during the duel with Romeo.[46] At the start of the scene, Paris says to his page, "Give me thy torch, boy. Hence, and stand aloof. / Yet put it out, for I would not be seen" (5.3.1-2), clearly indicating that his source of light is a torch that he then extinguishes. Finally, I disagree with Martinez's interpretation of Romeo's weapon choice. As I mention earlier, citing Evelyn Tribble, young noblemen tended to carry rapiers and daggers rather than an English sword, and there is no reason that Romeo would differ from his contemporaries Mercutio, Benvolio, Tybalt, and Paris, who all use the rapier and dagger.[47]

While I disagree with parts of Martinez's interpretation, I concur that Romeo and Paris's fight would be subdued. Instead, I propose that while Paris fights with a rapier and torch, Romeo fights only with a rapier, having put down his torch earlier to open the tomb.[48] While Romeo could pick up a dagger to defend himself, it would be incongruous with his fervent desire to die at this tomb. After all, he is not fighting Paris in an effort to kill him and remain alive, but only to gain access to Juliet's tomb to then die. Paris's use of a torch instead of a dagger and Romeo's lack of a defensive dagger would force them both to be more tentative. The muted swordfighting, along with Romeo's sympathy for Paris afterwards, deeming him "One writ with me in sour misfortune's book" and promising that "I'll bury thee in a triumphant grave" (5.3.82-83), creates a visual representation of a change in the play's violence. Instead of the anger and hatred present in the first street brawl and the duels between Mercutio and Tybalt and Romeo and Tybalt, we see here a resigned violence, arising from Romeo's desire for self-inflicted death to be with Juliet.

As the action moves towards Romeo and Juliet's deaths, the imagery of the torches recalls the Capulet masque where Romeo and Juliet first meet. Indeed, the cultural association of masques

and torchbearers and the play's prominent imagery of torchbearers at the masque parallels their first meeting.[49] Once again, Romeo waits to meet Juliet, but this time in death. Romeo strengthens the link between their first and last meetings when he comments on Juliet's tomb, exclaiming that it is not a grave but "a lantern … / For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence full of light" (5.3.84-86). Even in what Romeo believes to be in death, Juliet continues to "teach the torches to burn bright" (1.5.43). Despite this reminder of their first meeting and their danced measure, Romeo reunites with Juliet through violence rather than dance. Even so, he infuses his final violent act with love, pronouncing that "[t]hus with a kiss I die" (5.3.120). While Romeo attempts to meet Juliet in death, she is still alive, unbeknownst to him, and so it is she who finally reunites them with her suicide. Juliet's death is not the result of a duel, yet her use of a dagger is akin to other swordplay in the text. With this final act of violence, Juliet not only joins Romeo in death, but enacts the death of the play's violence itself by ending the feud between Capulets and Montagues. As she searches for a way to kill herself, she finds that Romeo has used all the poison, and instead uses Romeo's dagger, the same one he uses in his fight against Paris.[50] Taking the dagger, she says that "This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die," before stabbing herself (5.3.170). By "sheathing" Romeo's dagger inside of her and styling her body as the place where it will rust, Juliet symbolically and physically puts away one of the many weapons in the play, signalling an end to the feud. As prophesised in the prologue, the Capulets and Montagues accept the lovers' deaths as the final chapter in their enmity, and with Capulet's line "O brother Montague, give me thy hand" (5.2.296), they mark their newfound peace with held hands, an action that is reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet's joining of hands in Act 1.4.

**Conclusion: The Languages of Dance, Swordplay, and Rhetoric**

In *Romeo and Juliet*, two forms of embodied communication, dance and swordplay, work with rhetorical language to emphasize the portrayal of love and violence in the world of the play. In so doing, they demonstrate the pervasiveness of violence promised by the Chorus in the Prologue. The street brawl's clash of varied weapons and characters presents a strong visual image of the feud's

reach, while the Capulets' masque sets Romeo and Juliet's meeting against a backdrop of dance that calls to mind "the joyous dance of the heavenly bodies," inscribing their love among the stars.[51] The duels, first between Mercutio and Tybalt and then between Romeo and Tybalt, and the resulting deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt, signal the play's tragic shift away from dance and the love it signifies, articulating love's futility against hatred and violence. Finally, Paris and Romeo's fight demonstrates Romeo's resignation to violence as the only solution left, while Juliet's violent death is used to reunite the two lovers and end the play's feud. I have argued that dance, swordplay, and rhetorical language work together in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to create a layered meaning of the interplay and struggle between love and violence, dance and swordplay, supporting the destiny of fatal love that the Chorus sets out in the prologue. While readers can achieve this interpretation in large part from the text alone, an understanding of early modern dance and swordplay adds nuanced meaning, emphasizing the emotional impact of the story. An analysis of the visual forms of dance and swordplay also serves as an important reminder that Shakespeare's plays were created to be seen.

## Notes

1. Brandon Shaw, "Shakespeare's Dancing Bodies: The Case of Romeo," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, eds. Lynsey McCulloch and Brandon Shaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 183.

2. Walter Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 83 (1957): 367-87, 367; Jennifer Nevile, "Introduction to Part I: Shakespeare *and* Dance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, 18.

3. Fabio Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 37.

4. Nona Monahin, "Decoding Dance in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*, 50.

5. Monahin, "Decoding Dance," 50-1.

6. See for example Alan Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981); Fabio Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*; Charles Edelman, *Brawl Ridiculous: Swordfighting in Shakespeare's Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); J. D. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare: An Illustrated Guide to Stage Combat Choreography in the Plays of Shakespeare* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1996); Erika T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Florence Hazrat, "'The Wisdom of Your

Feet': Dance and Rhetoric on the Shakespearean Stage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Dance*.

7. Nevile, "Introduction to Part I," 17.

8. Hazrat, "Dance and Rhetoric," 222-23.

9. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weis (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), Prologue 1, 3. Subsequent references to *Romeo and Juliet* are of this edition and will be written as in-text citations, with act, scene, line format.

10. Jonas Kellermann, *Dramaturgies of Love in* Romeo and Juliet (New York: Routledge, 2022), 28.

11. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "loin (*n.*)," September 2023, doi: 10.1093/OED/1090020551.

12. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "star-crossed (*adj.*)," December 2023, doi: 10.1093/OED/3948036788.

13. Colleen Kelly, "Figuring the Fight: Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Swordplay," in *Theatre and Violence*, ed. John W. Frick (Tuscaloosa: Southeastern Theatre Conference and University of Alabama Press, 1999), 99.

14. Kelly, "Figuring the Fight," 107.

15. The stage direction quoted in this sentence is included in the 2022 Arden edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by René Weis. As Weis indicates in his editorial notes, this stage direction is also found in the second quarto (Q2), as seen in William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet: Second Quarto, 1599*, facsimile (London: Chiswick Press, 1949), 1.1.0 SD. Subsequent references to stage directions are quoted from Weis 2022 and are followed by endnotes indicating whether this stage direction comes from the first quarto (Q1) or Q2. All quotations from Q2 come from this edition. The reference to use of English weapons by working class men comes from Evelyn Tribble, *Early Modern Actors & Shakespeare's Theatre: Thinking with the Body* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 72, 84, 86.

16. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 86.

17. Stage direction, Shakespeare, *Second Quarto,* 1.1.79 SD.

18. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 86.

19. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 85.

20. Alan Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1981), 65.

21. Emily Winerock, "'We'll measure them a measure, and be gone': Renaissance Dance Practices and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*," *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 10. 2 (2017): para. 9.

22. Anne Daye, "Dancing at Court: 'the art that all Arts doe approve,'" in *Performances at Court in the Age of Shakespeare*, eds. Sophie Chiari and John Mucciolo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 138.

23. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 375.

24. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 16.

25. Anne Daye, "Torchbearers in the English Masque," *Early Music* 26.2 (1998): 247-62, 247.

26. Hazrat, "Dance and Rhetoric," 232.

27. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 375. Brissenden is of the same opinion as Sorell, stating that dances would begin with measures, followed by

more energetic dances. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 7. Daye, "Dancing at Court," 139. Çikigil is of the same opinion as Daye (Necla Çikigil, "Renaissance Dance Patterns in Shakespeare's Italian Plays: An Analysis of Dialogues," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 26. 3 (2006): 263-72, 266).

28. Robert Mullally, "More about the Measures," *Early Music* 22.3 (1994): 417-38, 418.

29. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 10; Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon*, 139.

30. Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon*, 127; Çikigil, "Renaissance dance patterns," 266; Daye, "Dancing at Court," 139.

31. Weis, *Romeo and Juliet*, 167n.

32. Çikigil, "Renaissance dance patterns," 270; Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 378.

33. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 375 (emphasis mine).

34. Ciambella, *Dance Lexicon*, 91, 104.

35. Sorell, "Shakespeare and the Dance," 376.

36. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 3, 65, 110.

37. Hazrat, "Dance and Rhetoric," 232, 233; Monahin, "Decoding Dance," 57.

38. Joan Ozark Holmer, "'Draw, if you be Men': Saviolo's Significance for *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45. 2 (1994): 163-89, 182.

39. Shaw, "Shakespeare's Dancing Bodies," 185-87.

40. Holmer "'Draw, if you be Men,'" 167.

41. William Shakespeare, "Appendix 2: Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*," in *Romeo and Juliet,* ed. René Weis (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), lines 1168-69.

42. The stage directions are written as "*Fight, Tibalt falles*" in Q1 (Shakespeare, "Appendix 2," line 1216) and as "*They Fight*. Tibalt *falles*" in Q2 (Shakespeare, *Second Quarto*, 3.1.136 SD).

43. Stage direction: Shakespeare, "Appendix 2," line 2177.

44. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare*, 1.

45. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare*, 134.

46. Martinez, *The Swords of Shakespeare*, 134, 135.

47. Tribble, *Early Modern Actors*, 85.

48. As Paris sees Romeo approach the tomb, he remarks: "What, with a torch?" (5.3.21) before hiding away. Q1 also indicates, *"Enter Romeo and Balthasar, with a torch, a mattock, and a crow of yron,"* (Shakespeare, "Appendix 2," lines 2134-35). However, Romeo would undoubtedly need two hands to open the heavy tomb, and would therefore need to put his torch down to do so.

49. Daye, "Torchbearers in the English Masque," 247.

50. In a footnote to the stage direction "[*Takes Romeo's dagger*.]" (5.3.169 SD), Weis argues convincingly that the dagger Juliet uses is Romeo's.

51. Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 3.

# "A spirit to resist": Women's Non-Traditional Casting and/as Feminist Intervention in *The Taming of the Shrew*

Emily Pickett
Queen's University

As Shakespeare director and scholar Sara Reimers puts it, the "very idea of a feminist *Shrew* is arguably an oxymoron."[1] For anyone familiar with the play, it is not difficult to understand how such an argument could be made. While Shakespeare's later comedies are often lauded for the liberating journeys undertaken by their heroines, *The Taming of the Shrew* can be read as a shockingly misogynistic mirror image. Although at first glance it is extremely troubling, it remains one of Shakespeare's most frequently performed plays.[2] Certainly, there have been modern productions that uncritically restage *Shrew's* early modern sexism for laughs, but thankfully most modern producers realize that Petruchio's beliefs and behaviors cannot fly as straightly-played comedy. As a result, modern Shakespeare practice has developed several strategies for staging feminist interpretations of the play that are more tolerable and useful to modern audiences, including both traditional and non-traditional casting approaches.

Performance theorist Elaine Aston describes "feminist" productions of canonical works as those which "act as a sphere of disturbance" in the play's meaning, usually by highlighting and upturning "representational systems (of gender, sexuality, class, race, etc.)."[3] Traditionally-cast modern productions of *Shrew*—where the male roles are played by men and the female roles by women with no changes made to the characters' original genders—often

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 76-90

ISSN: 1539-5758

seek to disturb the play's misogyny through subversive readings of Kate's ultimate submission, using the wiggle-room afforded by actor chemistry and line delivery to soften, undermine, or overtly condemn the patriarchal overtones of her final speech.[4] This is important work and is uplifting to see, but Reimers observes that it is still nearly impossible to achieve a "feel-good" *Shrew* for feminist audiences.[5] In an effort to push the limits even further, a few major producers like the Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company have turned to casting women non-traditionally in their search for a feminist staging, which Peter Kirwan frames as a "turn[ing]" point in the play's interpretation.[6] I could not agree more that non-traditional casting offers avenues of interpretation that cannot be achieved through any other performance model, and the impact of these practices—especially within the rich and well-established field of feminist Shakespeare praxis—can be highlighted by exploring how they do not exist in a vacuum. It would be understandable to assume that bringing more women into the play—either by cross-gender casting[7] or genderbending—would upset the subversive readings introduced by traditional casts, but I argue that these approaches actually work together quite well.[8] The violence woven into the play means that a "feel-good" version of *The Taming of the Shrew* arguably remains out of reach. However, women's non-traditional casting can build on theatrical feminist disturbances to the play's meaning by simultaneously opening up a metatheatrical sphere of disturbance, where the system of gender signifiers—both in the play and in the real world—can be exposed and dismantled in the gaps between actor/character and character/gender scripts.

Reimers encapsulates the three major schools of feminist interpretation for traditionally-cast productions. First is the increasingly popular and deceptively multifaceted "redeemed by love" model.[9] At their most optimistic, these productions depict Kate and Petruchio as social outcasts who fall in love with each other's shrewishness, "mutually" teaming up to mess with others while Kate submits to Petruchio willingly out of love. Reimers spotlights Toby Frow's 2012 production at the Globe starring Samantha Spiro as Kate and Simon Paisley Day as Petruchio as an example of this approach.[10] In an interview with Farah Karim-Cooper, Spiro explains how she, Frow, and Day decided that "this was about two broken people that go on a journey'" where

Petruchio "feels the cruelty too and they both learn from it."[11] The mutuality that Spiro describes here is observable in the recorded performance For example, once Kate has finally relented and agreed that the sun is the moon, Petruchio invites her to enjoy this gaslit submission by commanding her to greet Vincentio as a young woman; Spiro discovers great joy in performing the prank.[12] From this point onwards, Spiro and Day shift towards emphasizing the compatibility between their characters, reframing Bianca's quip that they are "madly mated" (3.2.251) into a celebration of their mutual unconventionality.[13] Since her Kate discovers that Petruchio will permit her to embrace her shrewish instincts (so long as they are not directed towards him), Spiro plays the final speech sincerely and contentedly.[14] Spiro tells Karim-Cooper, "[Kate] is a woman that has newly fallen desperately in love. The size of that emotion is overwhelming for her and she would lay down her life for him."[15]

Spiro's interpretation of Kate does afford her a level of agency and self-fulfillment in submission but, as *Guardian* reviewer Michael Billington observes, "you can't get away from the big issue: that the action hinges on physical and psychological dominance" culminating in Petruchio's declaration "that a lasting marriage is based on 'awful rule and right supremacy.'"[16] It is important to remember that no matter how compatible they may be or how much they grow to love each other, Petruchio undeniably abuses Kate; his "taming method" involves isolating Kate from her family, starving her, demonstrating his capacity for violence on his servants (and in some productions), depriving her of sleep, and gaslighting her with mind games until she gives in and agrees to accept whatever he says is reality. In Frow's production, these situations are "laughed off"[17] as a clownishly[18] virulent battle of wills between Kate and Petruchio, and consequently, Billington concludes that it is a "conventionally jolly evening that never troubles to dig far below the play's disturbing surface."[19]

The cavalier tone of the 2012 production may indeed have been due to negligence on Frow's part, but it is worth noting that the abusive plot elements remain sticking points in most "redeemed by love" productions, even those that consider the implications of such behavior more seriously. The Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2024 production is an excellent example here, as it offered

a slightly different take on the "redeemed by love" model by ending with a moment of mutual submission between Kate and Petruchio.[20] When Catherine Wise's Kate—who, according to one reviewer, begins the play as "a Tasmanian Devil of hissing ferocity, attacking everyone around her"—finally reigns her destructiveness in to kneel before John DiAntonio's Petruchio, he kneels back.[21] Immediately after seeing it in the play-within-the-play, this "act of mutual respect and partnership [is] echoed by [Toby Embry's] Christopher Sly," encouraging him to make amends to the Hostess for his belligerent drunkenness, which reinforces "the theme of mutual consideration in relationships."[22] However, despite the consensus among reviewers that in this production it is "clear Kate's transformation is necessary," they are hesitant to applaud Petruchio's actions.[23] B.F. Isaacson subtly betrays this anxiety when asserting that Kate was "a creature in obvious need of rehabilitation. . .whatever Petruchio's role in the matter."[24] Keolanani Kinghorn is more forthright in warning that the production's "content may be triggering for victims of domestic abuse. After all, we are dealing with problematic and dated gender roles that have been adapted for modern audiences."[25] Whether Petruchio's abuse is motivated by a patriarchal ego or a general concern for all humankind, the question, "can violence ever be overlooked in the name of love," endures.

As Reimers explains in her overview, some productions opt to expose the play's ethos of abusive patriarchal oppression in all its ugliness rather than trying to "redeem" or justify it.[26] In *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice,* Terri Power describes Connal Morrison's 2009 production at the RSC starring Michelle Gomez as Kate, which did exactly that. Power writes: "There was no withholding on the physical, emotional and psychological abuse of the character at the hands of her husband … [T]he audience watched in horror as she lifted up her skirt, bowing over a table, and offered herself to Grumio as part of her submission."[27] Charles Spencer of *The Telegraph* states that Morrison, "pays Shakespeare the compliment of presenting the play he actually wrote," realizing "[t]here is something deeply unattractive about watching a woman being abused for three hours."[28] These productions might best be described as "genre-bending," since rather than asking audiences to

laugh off or rationalize abuse, they instead emphasize the tragedy and horror of domestic violence.

The final tactic Reimers identifies is to side-step defining the circumstances behind Kate's submission altogether by opting to play the final speech ironically, so she is never truly "tamed."[29] This can be done with a sly glance to the audience—covertly letting them know she does not mean what she says—or by having Kate openly mock Petruchio's demand for submission. Reimers describes how Charlotte Dowding—who played Kate in Reimers's own production of *Shrew* at the London Fringe in 2017—"delivered the offer to place her hand beneath her husband's foot with searing sarcasm."[30] This might seem like a particularly contemporary reaction, but Paola Dionisotti explains her ironic take on the speech in Michael Bogdanov's 1978 production at the RSC: "To Petruchio she's saying, 'Is this what you want? The man I was having [fun fighting] with in the street, does that man want me to do this?'"[31] Ironically, disturbing the speech's meaning is feminist intervention because it creates space for women's resistance within patriarchy. Moreover, since Shakespeare's words are being turned on themselves, this is arguably the most pointed disturbance of the three that Reimers identifies. Unfortunately, however, it still does not fully escape the play's oppressive structures. Kate is compelled to give this speech, no matter how she says it, and the play's final emphasis on masculine physical superiority (5.2.164-7) implies that Petruchio could make her pay a terrible price for her moment of defiance after the curtain falls.

Taking a step back to examine these various approaches together illuminates how Reimers can at once celebrate the avenues of feminist disturbance that traditional casts have found and maintain that none of them result in an entirely "feel-good" *Shrew*. The common drawback in all of them is that, barring any major overhauls to the plot, they cannot completely transcend the problem of violent patriarchy in the play. However, as a few modern productions have found, combining these theatrical strategies with women's non-traditional casting can be a powerful tool for subjecting *The Taming of the Shrew* to the metatheatrical sphere of disturbance, disengaging the plot from patriarchal systems and ideologies.

Phyllida Lloyd's 2003 *Shrew* staged at the Globe, starring Kathryn Hunter as Kate and Janet McTeer as Petruchio, featured an all-women cast. Elizabeth Klett describes it as "a highly comic, swift -moving production that burlesqued the play's misogyny."[32] Theatrically, Lloyd's adaptation drew on the same strategies traditional casts use to disturb the meaning of the play. McTeer, for example, "did not hesitate to present Petruchio as brutish as well as charming," at times using her six-foot-one height to become alarmingly physical with Hunter's "tiny" Kate— even dangling her upside-down during their initial "wooing" scene. In protest, Hunter played the final speech very ironically, turning Petruchio's demanded submission into a farce.[33] This combination of exposing abuse with an ironic final speech is perhaps the closest it comes to a "feel-good" *Shrew* within the theatrical sphere. The defiance of patriarchal power in Kate's open refusal to be tamed is heightened all the more when she successfully holds her ground against an unflinchingly threatening Petruchio. That said, while the final scene of text was staged in a way to suggest that Kate has triumphantly "tamed" Petruchio's patriarchal ego—exiting behind his back to leave him hanging and embarrassed on "Come on and kiss me, Kate" (5.2.196)[34]—this "mockery … of male dominance" does not negate the possibility that Petruchio will retaliate.[35] Indeed, Kirwan describes how the couple exited "only to reappear having a screaming row in Italian."[36] Since, as noted, Kate's mockery does not necessarily neutralize the play's assertion of masculine physical superiority, the possibility of further conflict (which we can clearly see coming to fruition in Lloyd's conclusion) means she is left in a dangerous position. However, in this case, the lingering threat of male violence was dismantled metatheatrically by McTeer's performance as Petruchio, which Klett argues "worked with the rest of the all-female cast to destabilize the meanings of Shakespeare's problematic comedy."[37]

According to Klett, McTeer "embodied the standard of manliness that governed the world of the play," making her "presence in the role of Petruchio intensely magnetic and sexy, in ways that problematized normative gender ideologies. Her physical performance denaturalized gender by simultaneously citing masculinity and femininity."[38] What Klett describes is the "gap" between McTeer's gender and her character's, which subjects the

system of gender signifiers to a sphere of disturbance. The audience can see that she is a woman, yet McTeer is able to "perform" masculinity with ease. Kirwan describes McTeer's performance in the 2003 production as a "deliberate attempt to exaggerate and heighten behaviour.[39] This self-conscious performance of gender is obvious in clips of McTeer reprising her role in 2016 (again, with an all-women cast and in collaboration with Lloyd).[40] From the moment she emerges through a trap-door, her confident gait, smooth, powerful movements, and churlish body language are simultaneously farcical and unnervingly realistic. Reimers points out that masculine swagger in a female performer undermines the patriarchal logic of the play, as its assertion that women are "soft" and "weak" (5.2.181) does not stand up to the viewer's metatheatrical experience.[41]

Moreover, in addition to dismantling the play's essentialist justification for male dominance, seeing McTeer successfully exhibit the strength and self-determination reserved for the male characters raises the intriguing possibility that Kate could do so as well. Of course, it is possible to play Kate as a powerful woman, one who is not afraid to give as good as she gets from Petruchio. But in that case one risks portraying her as perpetuating the play's violent gender hierarchies, which likewise falls short of a "feel-good" outcome. McTeer, on the other hand, is able to take on domineering masculinity during performance purely to expose and ridicule it, thus metatheatrically reassuring feminist viewers that Kate would be able to defend herself and remain untamed without making her complicit in a violent society.

The feminist potential in the "gap" between actor and character is often explored in studies of women's non-traditional casting. Rhonda Blair aligns with Klett's views, declaring cross-gender casting a feminist device when the audience experiences it through Brecht's alienation effect, which requires the audience to remain aware of the performers and performance instead of losing itself in the illusion of the play.[42] This dual awareness is the mechanism by which McTeer can demonstrate women's capacity for violence without bringing it into the world of the play. But what happens when genderbending closes this gap? For the audience, without a gap to explain discrepancies between gender scripts, some things feel unfamiliar and strange. I felt this strangeness when I watched

Justin Audibert's genderbent *Shrew* staged at the RSC in 2019, starring Joseph Arkley as Kate and Claire Price as Petruchia. This production did a complete gender swap; all the male characters became women, and all the female characters became men, but the violence and power imbalance remained unchanged. The RSC's description explains that in this "reimagined 1590, society is a matriarchy"—which is definitely a huge disturbance.[43] I went in hoping this might be the "feel-good" feminist *Shrew* no other casting approach could provide, but I was wrong.

This production does not manifest a "feel-good" reading partly because, on the theatrical level, it uncomfortably combines exposing abuse and redeemed by love models. When Kate is a man, his initial shrewishness does seem more dangerous for the other characters. In his first appearance, he threateningly crosses the stage towards Hortensia: "But if it were, doubt not [his] care should be / To comb your noddle like a three-headed stool / And paint your face and use you like a fool" (1.1.64-66), emphasising the end of the last line by jabbing at her with the chicken drumstick he is eating. Bianco, too, appears in danger of physical harm as Kate torments him while his hands are bound, threatening him with a pair of sheers.[44] Kirwan observes that Audibert's production "deliberately chose not to portray the dominant sex as physically stronger, to the extent that when Katherine made a gesture as if to be violent, many of the women stepped back in fright."[45] This is observable in the recorded production, but at the same time, the framing of the matriarchal society appears to contain this threat. While women are usually the marginalized minority in Shakespeare's plays, here they far outweigh the men both in number and societal power. Indeed, Senora Baptista demonstrates in 1.3 that she is quite capable of controlling her sons, with even Kate effectively (if "sulkily")[46] complying with her verbal corrections.[47] Kirwan goes so far as to assert that, despite his outbursts, Arkley's Kate is so reluctant "to step too far out of the gender role ascribed to him by this society … [that it ] raised a serious problem for the play, in that Katherine came pre-tamed."[48] The result was one very similar to the Utah Shakespeare Festival's production where even if Kate's shrewishness was in clear need of reform, it was not threatening enough to justify the violent taming process.

Petruchia's behavior, by contrast, was presented as unflinchingly abusive. While the rest of the cast (particularly Laura Elsworthy's Trania) often over accentuated their lines, and paired them with stylistic, comedic poses (bringing in an element of clowning even stronger than Spiro and Day's in Frow's production), Petruchia's most violent moments were played with understated realism, particularly once the taming process had begun in earnest. Her skirmishes with Kate during the wooing and wedding scenes were primarily larger than life, but upon entering her house in 4.1 Petruchia's anger towards her household takes a chilling turn.[49] She quietly raged against them with no remnant of her previous joking tone, legitimately beating Grumio (Richard Clews) about the head with his own hat and abruptly raising the serving tray to strike the servant who spilled water, only being stopped by Kate's intervention.[50] While this production did not show Petruchia enacting physical violence directly against Kate, he appeared in terrible condition when seen again in 4.3 stripped to a dirty undershirt, desperate for food, and angry: "My tongue will speak the anger of my heart / Or else my heart, concealing it, will break" (4.3.83-4).[51] Arkley delivered the line with such heartbreaking authenticity that Price recalls bursting into tears the first time he spoke it to her in the rehearsal room.[52] Combined with the framing of Kate's limited threat, playing Petruchia as genuinely dangerous seemed to be setting up the perfect conditions for exposing abuse while expressing irony in the final speech (similar to Lloyd's approach in 2003). However, this is not the way that Audibert decided to go. Instead, the couple fell in love at first sight, and Petruchia turned on dimes throughout, showing Kate enough moments of gentleness that he submitted genuinely in the end.[53]

Arkley directed parts of Kate's final speech to the audience, clearly condemning patriarchy in the real world by breaking the fourth wall on lines like "I am ashamed that [men] are so simple / To offer war where they should kneel for peace" (5.2.177-8).[54] In an interview, Price describes women in the crowd cheering when he gave it, and here, we start to get into the ways in which non-traditional casting can influence feminist theatrical strategies at play.[55] When introducing her interview with Spiro, Karim-Cooper cites Holly A. Crocker's assertion that "representing submissive femininity" without "disturbing" a twenty-first-century audience

is a "near impossibility."[56] Indeed, as repulsed reactions like Reimers's demonstrate, for many viewers the "redeemed by love" model is hardly considered feminist at all, let alone a "feel-good" interpretation. In this instance, however, women in the audience cheer because genderbending has transformed what it means to be redeemed by love in the play. Rather than a woman giving up her "spirit to resist" (3.2.225) and submitting willingly to patriarchal oppression, Kate is a man renouncing male violence and resistance to women's authority.

Thus, genderbending has the potential to take submission and metathetarically transform it into the ultimate ironic reading—if overshadowed by the fact that even when the genders are swapped, the play inherently confines the redeemed by love model within an oppressive power hierarchy. Therefore, the success with which Audibert's production turns Kate's submission into an anti-oppression statement depends on how one reads its exposure of abuse.

There is obviously feminist value in condemning patriarchy, but I have to agree with Billington's assertion that while it is subversive for a man to say, "Thy wife is thy lord," the swap "never shows why physical abuse [is] any more endearing when practised by women than by men."[57] This, crucially, is the point: the RSC makes their intention clear in their description of the production on their website, explaining "we turn Shakespeare's fierce, energetic comedy of gender and materialism on its head to offer a fresh perspective on its portrayal of hierarchy and power."[58] If cross-gender casting enabled McTeer to keep women's violence out of the play, Price's Petruchia brought it right to the heart and center, making a statement on patriarchal oppression that on the surface seems decidedly counterproductive. However, it was not just the idea of women becoming the oppressors that did not sit right; it was how Price did it. Strangely, Petruchia disturbed me more than Petruchio ever has.[59] She was a truly horrifying gaslighter, demanding supremacy with an eerily calm, entitled aura. But about halfway through the recorded performance, I realized that is probably how a lot of early modern men would have done it, and this is how genderbending can function as feminist intervention in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Reflecting on genderbending, Harriet Walter muses: "If it looked or felt wrong, wouldn't we have to ask

ourselves useful questions as to why?"[60] Why did it feel eerie to see Petruchia so self-assured in her right to dominate? And why does it not seem strange when Petruchio asserts his authority, even when he is played by a woman like the "incredibly magnetic and sexy" McTeer?[61]

In Kirwan's comparison of Lloyd and Audibert's productions, he initially groups them together under the heading of "Conceptual Casting," which "may involve a change in the character's gender and pronouns…or not. . .[in either case] such casting is usually designed to be noticed, and to generate interpretive significance through cognitive dissonance."[62] Crucially, however, once he gets into his analysis of Audibert's production, Kirwan acknowledges that there is a difference between the kinds of cognitive dissonance each approach creates. By aligning the characters' gender identities with that of the performers, Audibert "eschewed the models of formal disruption that characterize Brechtian theatre. . .[therefore] unlike the Globe production. . . any effect of alienation was dependent on the audience's assumed prior knowledge of an Elizabethan history and dominant patriarchal structures against which the inverted world of the production could be assessed."[63] When Blair breaks down cross-gender casting, she asserts that actors go through an "oscillation of identity in performing the other gender."[64] The ability to oscillate between identity categories is possible with cross-gender casting because distance is maintained between the character and the performer playing the role, allowing the audience to unconsciously view them through their expected gender scripts without contradiction. When genderbending removes the safety of that barrier, we instead experience oscillation between the woman Petruchia and the "maleness" of *her* gender script. Genderbending did not provide a "feel-good" version of the play, but it did open a new gap between our culturally engrained expectations of women and the way they are presented to us when pronouns change, making the internalized ubiquity of the script itself glaringly visible. In Lloyd's production, women's non-traditional casting extends the disturbing power of theatrical strategies by tying them into the metatheatrical sphere; in Audibert's, it defamiliarizes them to let us confront the assumptions that underly the roles of the play and our response to them.

So, if women's non-traditional casting can make metatheatrical feminist interventions in *The Taming of the Shrew* through theatrical strategies pioneered by traditional casts, does that mean we have finally achieved a "feel-good" version of the play? Fellow Shakespearean Bernice Mittertrenier Neal's response to that question was to return a question of her own: "What does it even mean to 'feel better' after having seen a production of *Taming*?"[65] We may leave Lloyd's production having cheered Kate on as she mocked Petruchio *and* be reassured that she will be alright by McTeer's representation of strength, but we are still left with a violent, misogynistic world at the end of the play, one that, as Neal points out, the viewer may notice mirrors our own.[66] We do not find relief from such a world in Audibert's production. We may see a (very problematic) matriarchy onstage, but the strangeness of that experience only highlights the degree to which we remain unshocked by its patriarchal opposite. These are not lighthearted or particularly empowering realizations for feminist audience members, and that—alongside the abusive elements in the plot—suggests that no matter how it is staged, a completely "feel-good" version of *The Taming of the Shrew* may simply be impossible. That said, it is important to remember that there is a difference between a "feel-good" experience and a good one. We must understand the systems of patriarchal oppression in Shakespeare's world as well as in our own if we are to challenge either effectively. It may not be pleasant to watch, but we should feel good about the ways in which *The Taming of the Shrew* can move us toward that goal.

## Notes

1. Sara Reimers, "From Theory to Action: Staging a Feminist Production of *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Shakespeare* 20. 2 (2024): 260, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2023.2208104.

2. Dan Kopf, "What is Shakespeare's most popular play?" *Priceonomics*, September 22, 2016, https://priceonomics.com/what-is-shakespeares-most-popular-play/.

3. Elaine Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 17-8. It is also worth noting that Aston emphasizes the idea that feminist theatre practice should not "be designed to 'fit' a 'theory'. … [Rather,] practice constitutes a process of endless beginnings, discoveries, unforeseens, contradictions and, inevitably, confusions. What guides us through … is our commitment to exploring different ways of representing or 'seeing' gender" (18).

4. Of course, in Shakespeare's theatre it was "traditional" to have all-male casts, but I use this label to describe modern productions where men play men and women play women because this has been the default expectation in Western theatre since actresses became a common fixture on the English stage after the Restoration (and we now tend to think of the all-male early modern model as "original practices").

5. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 262.

6. Peter Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*: Cross-Gender Casting in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Taming of the Shrew: The State of the Play*, eds. Heather C. Easterling and Jennifer Flaherty (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), 125.

7. Where female actors play male roles, I use the original he/him pronouns.

8. Where a character's pronouns, titles, etc., are changed in the script to align their gender identity with the female actor. This practice is also known as "regendering," but I prefer "genderbending" because it better reflects both the temporary, non-exclusive effect of the production in question and the fluidity of typically-gendered traits.

9. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 262.

10. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 262.

11. Farah Karim-Cooper, "Re-creating Katherina: *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare's Globe," in *Women Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception, Performance*, eds. Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen Orlin and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014), 307-8.

12. Toby Frow, director, *The Taming of the Shrew*, by William Shakespeare, featuring Samantha Spiro and Simon Paisley Day (Globe Festival, London, 2012), 2 hrs., 47 mins., 11 sec., *Drama Online* video, DOI: 10.5040/9781350997530, 02:15:30-02:19:15.

13. Quotes are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Barbara Mowat et. al. (Simon & Schuster's Folger Shakespeare edition, 2014), https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-taming-of-the-shrew/.

14. Frow, 02:38:20-02:42:05.

15. Karim-Cooper, "Recreating Katherina," 309-10.

16. Michael Billington, "*The Taming of the Shrew* Review – RSC's Battle of Reversed Sexes," *The Guardian* (March 19, 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/mar/19/the-taming-of-the-shrew-review-rsc-royal-shakespeare-theatre-stratford-upon-avon.

17. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 262.

18. Frow's production is "clownish" in the sense that Spiro and Day over exaggerate their anger and the violent moments in the play to the point where they can be taken less seriously in service of the "redeemed by love" model, without moving their depiction of abuse beyond the scope of realism. By contrast, other traditionally-cast productions have used clowning in a Brechtian sense to alienate the audience from the taming process. For example, in the Globe's 2024 production directed by Jude Christian, Petruchio (Andrew Leung) speaks through a marionette of himself while wooing Kate (Thalissa Teixeira), who plays the scene straight until she abruptly kicks him in the groin to cheers from the crowd. Jude Christian, director, "'If I be waspish …': Taming of the Shrew: Summer 2024:

Shakespeare's Globe," posted July 23, 2024 by Shakespeare's Globe, *YouTube*, 1 min., 36 sec., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azryIuqKaZU&t=3s.

19. Michael Billington, "*The Taming of the Shrew* – review," *The Guardian*, July 05, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jul/05/taming-of-the-shrew-review.

20. I am aware that Rachelle's production did utilize women's non-traditional casting for a few of the minor roles, featuring Cassandra Bissel as Tranio and Chloe McLeod as Biondello. I choose to discuss it alongside the traditionally cast productions because the major roles, most importantly Kate and Petruchio, were traditionally cast.

21. B.F. Isaacson, "Comedy Untamed: Utah Shakespeare Fest's *Taming of the Shrew*," *Utah Theatre Bloggers*, June 26, 2024, https://utahtheatrebloggers.com/916185/comedy-untamed-utah-shakespeare-fests-taming-of-the-shrew.

22. Keolanani Kinghorn, "Shrewdly Hilarious: Campy Shakespeare at Its Best," *Rhetorical Review*, July 29, 2024. https://rhetoricalreview.com/2024/07/29/taming-of-the-shrew/.

23. Kinghorn, "Shrewdly Hilarious."

24. Isaacson, "Comedy Untamed."

25. Kinghorn, "Shrewdly Hilarious."

26. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 261-3.

27. Terri Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 12.

28. Quoted in Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice*, 12.

29. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 271.

30. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 271.

31. Quoted in Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: Routledge Women's Press, 1989), 23.

32. Elizabeth Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece: Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 156.

33. Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece*, 158-60.

34. Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece*, 160.

35. Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece*, 160

36. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 134.

37. Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece*, 160.

38. Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece*, 158.

39. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 131.

40. Phyllida Lloyd, director, "The Taming of the Shrew Montage – Shakespeare in the Park 2016," posted June 09, 2016 by PublicTheatreNY, *YouTube*, 1 min., 24 sec., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcEbVmEwSmY.

41. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 266. It is worth noting that Reimers makes this observation in relation to her own production. As part of her effort to stage a feminist *Shrew*, she purposefully cross-gender cast a woman, Rachel Smart, to play Grumio (one of the most physical characters in the play), in order to achieve a similar undermining of its ethos of male physical superiority. Reimers, "From Theory to Action," 265-6. Again, although Reimers did utilize women's non-traditional casting, I chose to discuss the ironic final speech alongside the traditionally cast productions because Kate and Petruchio were traditionally cast.

42. Rhonda Blair, "'Not … but'/'Not-Not-Me': Musings on Cross-Gender Performance," in *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter*, eds. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 292.

43. "The Taming of the Shrew." *Royal Shakespeare Company*, 2019, https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-taming-of-the-shrew/.

44. Justin Audibert, director, *The Taming of the Shrew*, by William Shakespeare, featuring Joseph Arkley and Claire Price (Stratford-Upon-Avon: Royal Shakespeare Company, 2019), 2 hrs., 38 mins., 10 sec., *Drama Online* video, DOI: 10.5040/9781350993761, 00:05:30-00:08:30; 00:32:00-00:33:40.

45. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 137.

46. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 137.

47. Audibert, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 00:33:30-00:34:40.

48. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 137.

49. Audibert, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 00:44:10-00:49:45; 01:20:25-01:21:15.

50. Audibert, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 01:32:15-01:35:00.

51. Audibert, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 01:46:25-01:58:15

52. Claire Price, "Playing Petruchia at the RSC – an Interview with Claire Price," interview by Andrew Smith, *To Be or Not to Be: Lockdown Shakespeare*, 2020, audio transcribed and edited by Maria McNair for *Shakespeareforall.com*, https://www.shakespeareforall.com/blog/claire-price.

53. Audibert, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 00:44:00-02:33:45.

54. Audibert, *The Taming of the Shrew*, 02:30:10-02:33:45.

55. Price, "Playing Petruchia at the RSC."

56. Karim-Cooper, "Re-creating Katherina," 304.

57. Billington, "RSC's Reversed Battle of Sexes."

58. "The Taming of the Shrew," *rsc.org*.

59. This is an example of how the production, as Kirwan puts it, "deliberately court[s] the recognition of difference." Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 135.

60. Harriet Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines: Playing Shakespeare's Roles for Women* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), 157.

61. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 128.

62. Kirwan, "The Turn of the *Shrew*," 136.

63. Klett, *Wearing the Codpiece*, 158.

64. Blair, "'Not … but,'" 291.

65. Bernice Mittertrenier Neal, email exchange with the author, October 18, 2024.

66. Neal, email exchange, October 18, 2024.

# "The Teeth of All Rhyme and Reason": Shakespeare's Dental Fixation[1]

Jarrod DePrado
University of Connecticut

> For there was never yet philosopher
> That could endure the toothache patiently
> *Much Ado About Nothing* (4.2.35-6)

Much has been written about the breadth of knowledge that William Shakespeare displays in his work, allowing scholars to combine historical and biographical details to speculate on his impressive range of intellect. While numerous articles discuss the relationship between the Bard and the medical field,[2] comparatively less attention has been paid to his discussion of dentistry. This article aims to provide a holistic look at the various components of dental care that were on the audience's mind at the time: the numerous factors that negatively impacted the quality of one's teeth, leading to toothaches; attempts to clean teeth to stave off their removal; the persistence of halitosis; and the supernatural relevance ascribed to toothaches, natal teeth, and other dental abnormalities, such as harelips. Comparatively few scholars have discussed the expansive role and influence of dentistry in the early modern period in depth, and this article looks to compile the disparate research into a concise view of the problems plaguing Shakespeare's audience. Additionally, without speculating on how much personal experience Shakespeare had with the unsettling dentistry practices of the time, this article discusses how he reflects his audience's understanding of these issues throughout his canon.

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 91-114

ISSN: 1539-5758

Nearly every play[3] mentions teeth in a variety of applications, and he ultimately draws a correlation between one's dental condition and social status: from the toothpicks used by the upper class, to the low opinion held of tooth-pullers, to the maliciousness ascribed to Richard III because of his natal teeth. Shakespeare's works reveal a communal dental experience that united audience members from the Queen to the peasants, yet still reaffirmed cultural differences in how they did—or did not—address their dental problems.

Since the Elizabethan era was rife with dental issues—tooth decay affected most early modern adults[4]—Shakespeare was acutely aware of the physical symptoms of the sufferers. Examining the overlap between the historical, dental realities of the time and how they are represented in Shakespeare's plays reveals a correlation between class, dental condition, and the tools available for rectifying dental issues. Many of Shakespeare's characters directly address dental problems as an indicator of class; the lower classes have limited access to dental tools, such as toothpicks, and are often equated with having poor dental hygiene. While higher-class members of the audience also struggled with dental concerns, their on-stage counterparts are often spared from similar pains. Even Richard III's natal teeth become a mythologized representation of his destined malevolence, one of many examples of teeth as a symbol for strength, whether literal or metaphorical. Tapping into existing superstitions and social stigmas concerning teeth, Shakespeare demonstrates an understanding of the spectrum of dental problems (and their equally dangerous solutions) to reflect a nuanced look at the performative overlap between class and dental hygiene.[5]

## Toothaches

Much like his understanding of the human body and medicine, Shakespeare demonstrates a deft awareness of an array of dental issues, as dentistry was not yet a reliable stand-alone trade. Nicholas Culpeper's (1616-1654) posthumously published writings, particularly the section on treating ailments for the mouth, teeth, and gums, outline contemporary medical practices.[6] Though he was born and practiced after Shakespeare's death, his compiled remedies reveal the extent to which doctors were diagnosing and

treating dental issues into the seventeenth century. In Elizabethan England, there were very few remedies for dental infections, which were both painful and dangerous. From 1583-1599, nearly two percent of the deaths reported by St. Botolph's parish—located near Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London—were dental-related and these problems were the second largest cause of death in children under the age of one.[7] In Shakespeare's works, toothaches are not fatal but are a source of physical discomfort with limited remedies. They were such a visible part of society that a change in tomb design in the early seventeenth century, from an "image of the deceased [...] lying on its back praying up to heaven" to one in which they "lie on [their] side gazing at onlookers and supporting the head on one hand" became known as the "toothache position."[8] When Iago tells Othello, "being troubled with a raging tooth, / I could not sleep," it is a believable premise for overhearing the alleged sleep-talking Cassio (3.3.417-8).[9] This correlation between dental discomfort and insomnia is also in *Cymbeline*. When Posthumus faces execution, the jailer philosophically acknowledges, "he that sleeps feels not the toothache" (5.5.142-3). In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick explains away his moodiness with the excuse, "I have the toothache" (3.2.20). While he is not believed and instead taunted for being in love, the short conversation reveals much about the commonality and discomfort of toothaches at this time, as well as the suspected causes. When Don Pedro asks Benedick, "What? Sigh for a toothache?" Leonato adds, "Where is but a humor or a worm" (3.2.24-5). Shakespeare refers to the Elizabethans' belief that the primary cause of toothaches and decay was either an excess of phlegm—one of the four humors—or worms inside the teeth.[10]

Treatments for a toothache caused by an upset to the humors often included bloodletting[11] (or bleeding) of the gums and other body parts.[12] Depending on their suspected cause, toothaches were also treated with various mouth rinses, including vinegar. Although vinegar had been recognized as an acidic danger to teeth long before the Elizabethan era, killing a potential infection was worth the risk.[13] Shakespeare uses this consumption of vinegar, also referred to as "eisell," as an analogy in Sonnet 111, writing, "like a willing patient I will drink / Potions of eisell 'gainst my strong infection" (9-10). The common treatment for "toothworms" was burning henbane, a narcotic in the nightshade family, to smoke

out the worms, which no doubt alleviated pain "and the soporific effect probably helped blur the fact that seedbuds of henbane, when burned, leave an ash resembling worms," seemingly confirming the toothworm theory.[14] Though many had discounted this theory by the seventeenth century, other superstitious beliefs became associated with the cause. Benedick's toothache, for example, is fitting since those in love were often thought to be afflicted with toothaches.[15] However, this also carries negative implications, as toothaches were associated with cuckoldry, when "the metaphorical appearance of a cuckold's horns on his head is compared to the process of an infant cutting their teeth."[16] The diagnosed causes were many, both physical and emotional, while accuracy and effective treatment were only sporadic. Regardless of the cause, many Elizabethans considered the manageable agony of toothaches preferable (and hopefully temporary) compared to the equally painful and dangerous tooth removal.

For most social classes, invasive dentistry was generally handled by either barbers or surgeons.[17] One common remedy, which remained under the jurisdiction of barbers until the twentieth century, was pulling or "drawing" teeth. When Benedick mentions his toothache, Don Pedro's immediate response is "Draw it" (3.1.21). After Benedick responds with "Hang it!," Claudio jokes, "You must hang it first and draw it afterward" (3.1.22-3), a reference to the teeth that were removed and hung in windows to advertise dental services.[18] However, the dental field was full of practitioners of various skill, ranging from those trying their best but limited by the technology of their time, to those who were "incompetent," to quacks and charlatans preying on the vulnerable.[19] Shakespeare's sole overt reference to a "tooth-drawer" is an insult in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Holofernes's face is, they mock, one that resembles St. George's imprinted on a lead brooch "worn in the cap of a tooth-drawer" (5.2.688). This is a clear reference to the dress of the "tooth-drawers" of the time—the more affordable option for those who could not go to the barber-surgeon—who often wore such a hat, as well as a belt ornamented with teeth they had pulled.[20] Blacksmiths also pulled teeth for sufferers on a budget, though they did not dress the part. Shakespeare reinforces existing stereotypes that tooth-drawers were foppish, lower-ranking members of society who often relied on drawing attention

to themselves with their outlandish clothes.[21] Antithetical to the typical aristocratic brooch-wearers, those who pulled teeth were hardly respected, not least because there was a booming market for snake oil salesmen to pitch dental remedies. In addition to the risk of damage to healthy teeth, gums, and jaw bones, having teeth pulled was incredibly painful, as referenced in *Sir Thomas More.*[22] When Jack Falconer vows to avenge himself on his barber, he promises it will "be worse [...] than ten tooth-drawings" (9.258-9).

**Blackened Teeth**

Even Queen Elizabeth I was not immune from dental problems, who was described in contemporary accounts as having yellow and missing teeth.[23] Other accounts confirm that she suffered from pyorrhea, or periodontitis, causing the blackening of her teeth, which lead to the loss of her front teeth, and her reliance on cloth to fill out her cheeks.[24] However, Elizabeth, the highest-ranked person in England, also set social trends, including her trademark pale complexion and red cheeks. Makeup used by women, including the Queen and actors playing women,[25] was made up of "Mercury, lead and arsenic-based compounds."[26] While the white lead and mercury gave the applicant the desired physical appearance, there was a dangerous list of side effects, including receding gums and loose teeth that acquired a grey film.[27] As Morris Tilley reports from contemporary accounts of the time, there was equal difficulty in working to obtain white teeth and white skin.[28] In a time of limited dental remedies, the sufferers were often dependent on masking the problems instead of addressing them; hence, instead of treating them, blackened teeth eventually became fashionable,[29] reflecting one's financial access to items like "sugarplum, coffee, and tobacco" that stained the teeth.[30] As such, Elizabethans would either intentionally let their teeth rot or blacken them with soot to mimic the aristocratic look. While tooth cleaning was available from barber-surgeons, their tools were limited to toothpicks, cloth, and a whitening solution made from citric acid; unsurprisingly, this ate away at the enamel and led to further tooth decay.[31] Additionally, between the side effects of scurvy[32] and the accessibility of refined sugars (for those who could afford to indulge), the rate of decaying teeth increased

exponentially in the 1600s.[33] Fortunately, after Elizabeth died in 1603, the blackened-teeth fad faded. In *Henry VIII* (c.1613), Chamberlain says of the Cardinal that there is "No doubt he's noble– / He had a black mouth that said other of him" (1.3.57-8). While the meaning of "black mouth" here seems to imply one who lies, it could also be a coy remark to the strange fashion statement that determined nobility only twenty years earlier. It would have been those with a "black mouth" who ultimately determined who was or was not "noble."

Additionally, Elizabethans suffered from a large outbreak of syphilis (or "pox," a favorite topic of Shakespeare's),[34] accounting for nearly half of all hospitalizations, with side effects that included the loss of cartilage from the nose and palate.[35] While some could afford to wear a false copper nose to address the former, artificial palates could assist but also exacerbated the loss of the roof of one's mouth, and there was little cure for those who lost the ability to speak altogether.[36] The treatment for syphilis was *also* mercury: applied to the skin, taken orally, or used as a "fumigant" in "mercury vapor treatment," where the patient would inhale the fumes from heated mercury,[37] not dissimilar from the fumigation process for driving out supposed toothworms. As many have noted, this led to the popular saying at the time, "A night with Venus, a lifetime with Mercury."[38] Not surprisingly, the side effects of the mercury treatment also exacerbated problems with the mouth, including "sore mouth and throat, sometimes involving ulceration, [and] copious salivation."[39] This is why Elizabethans would often "[equate…] loose teeth with loose morals."[40] Also, various emetics were a common treatment for most medical maladies, which led to the "acidic erosion of the enamel."[41] Despite the ability to look the other way at the Queen's bad teeth, Elizabethan society still recognized dental hygiene as an attractive physical attribute, as seen in *Love's Labor's Lost* when Boyet is described as having "teeth as white as whale's bone" (5.2.331). Even in *The Winter's Tale*, when Florizel describes Perdita's hand as being "white as [... an] Ethiopian's tooth" (4.4.366-7), Shakespeare uses black skin to establish a contrast to appealing white teeth.[42] While historically dental issues were a social equalizer suffered by the rich and poor alike, there is a clearer social divide in Shakespeare's plays. Characters like Coriolanus place a greater social emphasis on

hygiene, demanding that the citizens "wash their faces / And keep their teeth clean" (2.3.60-1) before they approach him to ask for his assistance. However, there were limited options for doing that.

## Dental Hygiene

Since using a napkin or one's fingers to clean one's teeth was considered poor manners, the enduring dental hygiene aid at this time was the toothpick.[43] While rudimentary toothpicks have been used since the evolution of modern humans, by Shakespeare's time they had become a luxury item of the upper class; made of fine metals or encrusted with jewels, they could be dowry items or worn around the neck on a chain.[44] Shakespeare refers to this in *All's Well That Ends Well*, in Parolles's comical aside on virginity, calling it "out of fashion, richly suited, but unsuitable, just like the brooch and the toothpick, which wear not now" (1.1.155-8). While scholars have used this line to point out that wearing a toothpick was perhaps already an outdated practice by the end of the sixteenth century, [45] it is difficult to discern because, later in the same play, Lavatch (or the Fool) has observed Bertram "pick his teeth" (3.2.7-8).[46] Similarly, in *The Winter's Tale*, the Clown recognizes that Autolycus "seems to be the more noble in being fantastical: a great man, I'll warrant; I know by the picking on's teeth" (4.4.753-5). In these two plays, lower-class characters see higher-ranked characters using toothpicks and associate toothpicking with the upper classes. While the aristocracy had more access to dental resources, those of the working class often suffered from the materials related to their occupations. Potters suffered from lead poisoning and painters worked with "noxious substances" that affected their complexion and teeth.

Additionally, several plays also label toothpicks a foreign novelty, as in *King John*, when Philip (the Bastard) imagines a fictional conversation with a "traveller," specifically noting "his toothpick" (1.1.189-90). In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick demonstrates his loyalty to Don Pedro by performing ambitious tasks, including an offer to "fetch you a toothpicker now from the furthest inch of Asia" (2.1.251-2). Shakespeare's plays contain potentially contradictory references to toothpicks: somehow both rare, foreign treasures and outdated trinkets of the upper class. But

Robert Collmer argues that the pervasive references to toothpicks in other contemporary writings, not least of all Ben Jonson, reinforce the belief that those of high quality remained tools of the aristocracy, a symbol of one's foreign travel or nationalistic identity, and a keepsake for those who had an "aspiration for gentility."[47] Just as the handkerchief was a "love-token" that also conveyed "social dignity and bodily hygiene," the same argument could be made for the standing of the toothpick in society.[48] Lacking access to higher-quality toothpicks, social aspirants relied on those of inferior quality, which Shakespeare's contemporaries recognized led to irritation and infection in the gums, having an inverse effect on one's health and hygiene.[49] Yet, as their usage became more widespread, they lost their "prestige" by the mid-seventeenth century and eventually became associated with criminality by the twentieth century.[50]

## Halitosis

Perhaps the most potent symptom of poor dental hygiene, after the discoloration and loss of teeth, was halitosis.[52] It is worth noting that another side effect of mercury poisoning (whose rampant usage is discussed above) is bad breath; the same is true for syphilis.[53] Whatever the cause, Shakespeare's characters often associate the quality of one's breath with class. *Coriolanus* makes bad breath a running characteristic of the common people who have, per Brutus, "stinking breaths" (2.1.233); per Coriolanus, "breath I hate / As reek o'th' rotten fens" (3.3.119-20); and, per Menenius, "The breath of garlic-eaters" (4.6.99). Throughout the play, Coriolanus cannot disassociate discussing the tributes—"The tongues o'th' common mouth"—or the common people in dental terms, demanding to know from those in power, "You being their mouths, why rule you not their teeth?" (3.1.37). His dismissive attitude toward the people reduces them to being unhygienic and easily manipulated, unlike "the will of the nobility" (3.1.40).[54] Shakespeare also intrinsically links bad breath and the impoverished, not simply because of their hygiene but also their eating habits. For example, in *Measure for Measure*, Lucio says that Claudio "would mouth with a beggar, though she smelt brown bread and garlic" (3.1.446-7), signaling that it is not just potent foods but the low

quality of the bread which "rapidly turned musty and affected the breath."[55] Also, it was common for bread to be weighed down with stones to make loaves appear heavier, which damaged teeth when bitten into.[56] Once again, the references Shakespeare makes must be well-known enough to land with an audience that spanned the full socioeconomic strata. As Danielle Nagler recounts, smells in general "mirrored [one's] inner essence" and directly correlated with a perception of one's lifestyle.[57]

Shakespeare specifies other foods that cause the offensive odor, as in Bottom's advice to the actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to "eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath" (4.2.38-9), or an aside in *2 Henry VI* that Jack Cade will speak "stinking law, for his breath stinks with eating toasted cheese" (4.7.9-10). This exchange continues, using a play on dental words. When Cade swears that his "mouth shall be the parliament of England," Nick quietly replies, "Then we are like to have biting statutes, unless his teeth be pulled out" (4.7.12-5). In both cases, Shakespeare mixes their metaphorical breath (language) of performers, or those who speak in public, with their bodily breath, implying that the latter can pollute the former. Compare this to Casca's recounting of the aftermath of Julius Caesar turning down the crown, where the plebians "uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked Caesar" (1.2.246-8). Like Coriolanus, Casca associates bad breath, even if only metaphorically foul, with the common folk owing primarily to their encouragement of Caesar's crowning. This is taken a step further in *The Tempest*, when Prospero tells Sebastian that "to call [him] brother / Would even infect my mouth" (5.1.130-1). Here exchanging pleasantries with certain classes or individuals is so distasteful that it can bring about a metaphorical infection. Shakespeare's references to the corruption of words or audiences through the quality of the air is a humorous analogy that relies on an audience's awareness of pervasive bad breath, though he uses it primarily to describe contempt for lower-class characters.

While halitosis remains a derogatory association with the lower classes in Shakespeare, bad breath is also a source of power. Amy Kenny recounts that, in *Julius Caesar*, the stinking breath of the plebeians is a powerful force that enacts change; if bad smells were associated with disease,[58] their chants infect the body politic and

upend the social order.[59] Elizabethans were leery of bad smells in general, which they believed could infect them in close-knit public spaces (like the theatre), where they would be more susceptible to diseases, especially the plague.[60] However, as much as breath often signified rank, smells that permeated one's clothing (such as at a theatrical performance) "erase[d] class distinction; all playgoers emerge contaminated by the stench" of the on-stage blood and pyrotechnics.[61] Specifically, as Bottom's advice above shows, actors were a class often associated with bad smells.[62] While the scent of the theatre-going experience was a social equalizer, bad breath either signified disease or a lack of basic hygiene. Contemporary accounts specify the difference between bad breath caused by food stuck in one's teeth and a larger problem with humors settling in the mouth, stomach, or lungs.[63] Elizabethans utilized various types of "mouth-water," an early version of mouthwash, to address bad breath;[64] often made from a base of honey or white wine, they were boiled with items as varied as alum, rosemary leaves, flowers, cinnamon, and cumin seeds, depending on the diagnosed cause.[65] Yet, because of the sugar indulged in by the aristocracy (including in the polish applied to teeth, a useless precursor to toothpaste) and the dental procedures that exacerbated complications or resulted in the loss of teeth, dental issues remained a problem that everyone grappled with—the difference lay in the access to tools and irritants that fell along social lines.

Shakespeare recognizes that bad breath is particularly off-putting from a romantic standpoint, reflected in Sonnet 130: "in some perfumes is there more delight / Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks" (7-8). While "reek" may lack our contemporary meaning, it reinforces an existing comparison between good- and bad-smelling breath. Once again, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the dental-versed Benedick observes that "if [Beatrice's] breath were as terrible as her terminations, / there were no living near her" (2.1.234-6). Characters (and, by extension, Elizabethans) were aware of the isolating effect of offending breath since Benedick recognizes that even "the North Pole" would not be far enough away from it (2.1.236).[66] As seen above, Shakespeare names garlic as a specific odorous offender, and it is used again to comical effect in *The Winter's Tale*, where Dorcas asks for "garlic to mend [Mopsa's] kissing with" (4.4.163-4), indicating that her breath

can only be improved by the smell.[67] Just as Shakespeare lists foods to avoid to preserve one's breath, he also reveals a remedy: "sweetmeats," or candy, which could be used as breath mints. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio's Queen Mab speech says that ladies whose "breath with sweetmeats tainted are" are "plague[d]" with "blisters" as punishment (1.4.75-6), since attempts to hide offensive breath were often associated with venereal disease.[68] Similarly, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Egeus lists "sweetmeats" among other elements of "cunning" that Lysander has used to "[filch his] daughter's heart" (1.1.34-6). There is no escaping the pervasive references to bad breath, even poetically, as in *As You Like It*, when Amiens uses the dental analogy to describe the invisible yet powerful wind: "Thy tooth is not so keen, / Because thou art not seen, / Although thy breath be rude" (2.7.178-80).

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Speed and Lance (as two clowns) assess the virtues and vices of women. When the former offers, "she has a sweet mouth," the latter replies, "That makes amends for her sour breath" (3.1.319-20). This play on words is comical but revealing. "Sweet mouth" can be seen as a synonym for "sweet tooth," with a connection to the discussion of sugar above, but also as a reference to the sweetmeats that were used to compensate for bad breath.[69] Shakespeare makes several references to "sugared" words,[70] but in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Bassanio looks upon Portia's portrait, he recognizes her "severed lips / Parted with sugar breath" (3.2.118-9). Whether he is referring to Portia literally or not is unclear, but Shakespeare depicts sweet breath as captivating just as foul breath is unappealing. Just as bad breath (literal or figurative) can contaminate, he uses the opposite motif several times. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia returns the prince's "remembrances," recognizing that they were with "words of so sweet breath composed / As made the things more rich" (*Q2* 3.1.97-8). Here, she refers to the figurative breath, but there is a correlation between the idea of good/bad breath and the reception of the message. Since the "perfume [is] lost," she requests that Hamlet "Take [them back] again" (*Q2* 3.1.98-9). Similarly, in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare writes, "For from the stillitory of thy face excelling / Comes breath perfumed that breedeth love by smelling" (443-4). Far from the negative examples above, here one's breath is the appeal that draws Venus in. Similarly, Adonis's

"speech," comes from a "honey passage" (452) and in *Cymbeline*, Iachimo remarks of the sleeping Imogen, "Tis her breathing that / Perfumes the chamber" (2.2.18-9).[71] Here, rather than needing an external perfume to mask it, her breath is so entrancing that it positively affects the physical space. Notably, these mortal characters with sweet breath are all *aristocratic* women, retaining the social divide that lower classes are associated with foul smells and higher classes with sweet smells.[72]

**Age and the Loss of Teeth**

Shakespeare also speaks to an existing spectrum of romantic attractiveness that establishes a correlation between age, marriageability, and the number of teeth one has, which winds through the plays. Several characters use their limited teeth to self-identify as aged. The Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* admits that she has "but four" (1.2.14) when expressing her disbelief that Juliet is already fourteen. Similarly, in *As You Like It*, Adam declares, "I have lost my teeth in your service" after being referred to as an "old dog" (1.1.78-9, 77). Whether other characters reference their age or not, these two lower-class servants associate age with dental status and see both as factors to be lamented as a point of sensitivity when speaking to their social superiors.[73] Shakespeare returns to the experience of equating aging with dental problems in a further analogy in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Benedick, while contemplating changing his mind on marriage, reflects, "A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age" (2.3.230-2), a reference to the dullness (or lack) of teeth as time progresses.[74] Shakespeare also uses toothlessness to mean lacking potency or threat,[75] and recognizes that it denotes a loss of personal respect.

Since Shakespeare's audience is all too familiar with the frustrations of missing or dull teeth, it is not a leap for them to understand the analogies Shakespeare makes using teeth as the central focus, such as in *Pericles* when Cleon says, "So sharp are hunger's teeth that man and wife / Draw lots who first shall die to lengthen life" (1.4.45). Additionally, the aged Lear laments "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child" (1.4.281-2), using the analogy "Sharp-toothed unkindness"

(2.2.330) to show how pained he is by his children's treatment of him. A similar sentiment occurs in *All's Well That Ends Well* when Lafeu offers the assessment, "I'll like a maid the better whilst I have a tooth in my head" (2.3.41-2). While Suzanne Gossett and Helen Wilcox argue he means a "sweet tooth [or] a taste for pleasure,"[76] it also can be read as another commentary on the limitations of age. As in Benedick's example, the "hunger" for a maiden may still be there, but the physical ability to enjoy her may have faded. In that case, being toothless is not merely about being weak or unthreatening, but impotent as well: all threats to Elizabethan masculinity and the quality of attractiveness.

As for marriageability in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Grumio displays the negative side of toothlessness when suggesting that Petruchio could be married off to "a puppet or an aglet-baby, or an old trot with ne'er a tooth in her head" (1.2.78-9). Yet, returning to the above conversation between Speed and Lance, their list of vices also includes a humorous reflection on the potential benefits of toothlessness:

> *Speed*: *Item: She hath no teeth.*
> *Lance*: I care not for that neither, because I love crusts.
> *Speed*: *Item: She is curst.*
> *Lance*: Well, the best is, she hath no teeth to bite. (3.1.331-4)

As with the quality of one's breath, the condition and quantity of one's teeth were noticeable traits that correlated with attractiveness as much as they were indicative of age. This is also seen later in *As You Like It*, in the closing line of Jacques's "All the world's a stage" speech; presenting yet another spectrum of the stages of life, the reflection on the "last scene" ends with one "sans teeth" among other afflictions (2.7.164, 167). Again, many of Shakespeare's references correlate dental condition with social standing: bad breath or missing teeth are ascribed to the impoverished, aged, or unattractive characters, not the young, virile aristocrats. However, while teeth can be an impetus to one's romantic relationship, this connection is complicated in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. When the Daughter recites, "Friend, you must eat no white bread; if you do / Your teeth will bleed extremely" (3.5.81-2), it is a warning to not beget an illegitimate child ("white bread") due to the ongoing superstitious belief that a man's teeth ache when he gets a woman pregnant.[77] Shakespeare and his audience recognized an existing

mythos concerning teeth that extends beyond personal hygiene and connects to a larger superstition.

## Superstitious Beliefs

Many of the dental issues discussed are theoretically things that the individual can control: their level of personal hygiene, what they eat, and what they put in and on their body. However, the same beliefs about causation are applied to birth defects, specifically those born with a cleft lip, also referred to as a "harelip." As Kennedy recounts, it was a common belief that "if a pregnant woman were to see, be startled by or long for the taste of a hare, the child would surely be born with the mark of the hare, the cleft lip."[78] While Shakespeare references "harelips," he labels their cause as supernatural. Edgar in *King Lear*, when demonizing Gloucester's appearance, labels him: "the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet," who, in addition to "giv[ing] the web and the pin, squinies the eye,"[79] "makes the harelip" (3.4.114-7). Similarly, Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* sings an ode to newlyweds, with a hope that "the blots of nature's hand" do not affect them:

> Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar
> Nor mark prodigious, such as are
> Despised in nativity,
> Shall upon their children be
> (5.1.405, 7-10)

However, unlike the stigma attached to those born with natal teeth (discussed below), none were attached to those born with cleft lips or their parents.[80] In a time when Elizabethans were leery of the dangers and limited success of surgery, the procedure for correcting cleft lips was considered easy, performed by both barber-surgeons and mountebanks; repairing cleft palates was a very different story.[81] In discussing both examples, Kennedy points out that "Shakespeare is exceedingly unusual in that he is the only early-modern playwright to make reference to the cleft lip in a literary setting, and he does it twice."[82] While steering clear of labeling interactions with a "hare" as the cause, Shakespeare does engage with the idea that demonic or magical creatures have the ability to affect one's dental condition, connecting them to superstitious beliefs held by his Elizabethan audience.[83]

The most enduring example of the overlap between teeth and superstition is Richard III being "born with teeth" (*3H6* 5.6.75): the *presence* of teeth, rather than the loss, becomes the source of problems. Babies born with natal teeth,[84] about one in every 3,000 births, historically have been seen as demonic and were sometimes even killed for this irregularity.[85] As Kanner recounts, most civilizations viewed natal teeth similarly to other bodily abnormalities: an omen of the "inevitable fate" of "a disastrous life" and treated with "distrust and ill-treatment,"[86] even into the mid-twentieth century.[87] Richard III is no exception to this belief, as can be seen when the titular king at the end of *3 Henry VI* accuses the murderous Richard: "Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born / To signify thou cam'st to bite the world" (5.6.53-54). Much like in the opening of *Richard III*, Richard accepts his supposed preordained fate and leans into playing the villain, proudly espousing his belief in the superstition after murdering the King:

> The midwife wondered and the women cried,
> "O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!"
> And so I was, which plainly signified
> That I should snarl, and bite and play the dog. (5.6.74-7)

Richard "appropriates" the "hearsay" concerning the circumstances of his birth, which he uses to craft a narrative to both "strengthen his political position" and "authorize his transgression of moral, familial, and generational bounds."[88] Much like the other physical characteristics that Shakespeare endows Richard with, his teeth quickly become a defining feature. Even within an upper-class family, Richard's teeth ostracize him and threaten to undercut his social standing. In *Richard III*, Queen Margaret also refers to him as a "hell-hound [...] that had his teeth before his eyes, / To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood" (4.4.48-50). Leo Kanner connects this imagery to biting and blood drinking, which evokes demonic and vampiric behavior.[89] Richard's teeth make him not simply villainous but monstrous, giving his actions and influence over others a superstitious undercurrent.

Additionally, while Richard grapples with the arguably self-fulfilling prophecy of his destined villainy, his dental story (and its supposed ramification) has already passed into legend. The young Duke of York recounts, "they say my uncle grew so fast / That he

could gnaw a crust at two hours old" (2.4.27-8).[90] Shakespeare's characterization also helped solidify Richard's perception and legacy *outside* of the play, however historically inaccurate it was. Emily Huber concisely traces the origin of the story of Richard's natal teeth, which can ultimately be read as slanderous and revisionist, to an opportunistic biographer practicing "bumbling unreliability, mean-spiritedness, or ambitious cronyism" to curry favor with the Tudors.[91] Shakespeare, through the Duchess of York, does acknowledge that all the details of Richard's birth are merely hearsay: when pressed, the Duke says that "Grandam, [Richard's] nurse," told him the story, to which the Duchess reminds him that "she was dead ere thou wast born" (2.4.29-34).[92] Even diegetically, the story of Richard's ominous natal teeth is in question. Yet that does not stop characters from finding it prescient and accepting it as fact, including Richard himself. Queen Margaret, a perpetrator of the myth, even speaks of Richard in dental terminology. She warns Buckingham, "Look when [Richard] fawns, he bites; and when he bites, / His venom tooth will rankle to the death" (1.3.289-90). Later, she refers to the political turmoil going on in the country as "prosperity begin[ning] to mellow / And drop into the rotten mouth of death" (4.4.1-2). As much as Shakespeare relies on available dental references to connect to his audience across the socioeconomic strata, Richard III is an example of Shakespeare contributing his own enduring entry into existing dental folklore. Despite the skepticism of Shakespeare's characters and the questionable nature of the source, Richard III's natal teeth have become his most noted characteristic after his (also exaggerated) hunchback even though they are as historically inaccurate as Richard's sterility in the play.[93] Unlike lower-class characters whose identification with their dental conditions hampers them, the imagined dental peculiarities of Richard move him beyond mortal limitations.

## Metaphorical Dentistry

Shakespeare's discussion of teeth extends beyond physical attributes and superstitions; teeth are often a stand-in for something intrinsic, such as personal character traits embodied by dental features. Teeth are such a precious commodity that characters use their willingness to sacrifice them to demonstrate

their commitment. For example, in *1 Henry VI*, Charles swears that the townsfolk would "rather with their teeth / The walls they'll tear down than forsake the siege" (1.2.39-40). This is reflected later in the play when a Servingman says, "if we be forbidden stones, we'll fall to it with our teeth" (3.1.89-90). While hyperbolic, the idea of potentially sacrificing one's teeth for the greater good has real stakes in a time of limited options for tooth replacement. For those characters looking to keep their teeth intact, Shakespeare often relies on the phrase "set one's teeth" as another way to express determination. Presumably, it means to grit one's teeth in a show of resolve or bare one's teeth in a show of strength. Certainly, that is how several characters use that phrase. Marc Antony tells Cleopatra, "I'll set my teeth / And send to darkness all that stop me" (3.13.186-7); and an inspirational speech from Henry V calls on the men to "set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide, / Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit / To his full height" (3.2.15-7).[94] Shakespeare shows that functional teeth can symbolize strength as much as missing or dull teeth can symbolize weakness. As often as he creates instances where characters reclaim dominance of a tenuous dental situation, there are examples where the teeth are in control over the character.

As previously mentioned, the still-used phrase "sweet tooth" indicates that one has an inherent taste or desire for sugar, driven by the tooth's implied control over the rest of the body. A similar analogy is present in *The Winter's Tale* when Autolycus sings:

> The white sheet bleaching on the hedge,
> With heigh, the sweet birds, O how they sing!
> Doth set my pugging tooth an edge,
> For a quart of ale is a dish for a king.
> (4.3.5-8)

As John Pitcher argues, a "pugging" or thieving tooth is similar to a "sweet tooth": an inherent desire to steal, allegedly driven by the tooth. In context, he argues that the sight of the unguarded sheet drying drives his desire to steal it by "setting his tooth on edge."[95] However, Pitcher also argues that the moment could be read sexually. Since both "hedge" and "pug" referred to prostitutes, this could mean that the sight of the bedsheet drives his physical desire.[96] This would be another instance of using a dental analogy as a stand-in for physical arousal, as with Lafue's remark in *All's Well*

*That Ends Well* discussed previously. In either case, the use of yet another phrase still spoken today reflects the idea that one's mental (or physical) status is reflected in the position of one's teeth—either set in determination or set on edge in disturbance—making the teeth a window into one's confidence and comfort. Losing one's teeth is a sign of weakness but willingly sacrificing them for a greater cause is a sign of strength that elevates a character above his or her station.

With an eye toward external factors, Shakespeare also endows actions and emotions with teeth to personify them to make connections for the audience. For example, in *Richard II*, Bolingbroke says, "Fell Sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more / Than when he bites but lanceth not the sore" (1.3.302-3). Shakespeare leans into medical terminology to work through the analogy of being unable to release and move past pain. This extended metaphor fleshes out some of Shakespeare's most potent imagery in a way that resonates with an audience sensitive to dental struggles. The same is true of Edgar in *King Lear*, who admits, "I know my name is lost, / By treason's tooth bare-gnawn and canker-bit" (5.3.119-20). Shakespeare draws up two distinct dental images to consider: a name, like a mouth, that has been chewed and destroyed by sharp teeth. Shakespeare references "cankers" (a dental term still in use for mouth sores today) frequently, though with meanings that often refer to botanical pests—both weeds and caterpillars.[97] While it could connect to the toothworms discussed above, Shakespeare also uses this specific infection to discuss societal ills metaphorically.[98] In these cases, Shakespeare harkens back to an important issue for the Elizabethans: how to deal with dental issues that seem out of their control.

Just as Richard III uses the mythos of his teeth to redefine his destiny, many of Shakespeare's characters attempt to exercise control over a precarious facet of their lives—the strength and sharpness, quality, and quantity of their teeth. As much as upper-class characters look to categorize poor hygiene and breath as symptomatic of lower-class characters and lifestyles, many of the lower-class try to break away from those stigmas, but with limited resources to address both issues. While using dentistry as a shared experience to connect to audience members across the socioeconomic spectrum, Shakespeare reveals much about the

ingrained classicism of teeth; from the preordained malevolence of King Richard III, to Coriolanus's fixation on lower-class hygiene, to Benedick's toothache, dental language pervades the plays as characters fixate on teeth in various ways. The greatest irony is that often the ways that Elizabethans looked to address their multitude of dental issues simply made them worse. While Shakespeare pokes fun at the array of dental issues that one could run across in Elizabethan England, he also uses those problems as a frame of reference to better understand issues of class and character. Shakespeare combines the poor Elizabethan dental problems with the biting perceptions of character studies to create works that speak to a continuing human tendency to see class differences through dentistry.

## Notes

1. A quote from Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (5.5.124-5). All quotations are taken from *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series Complete Works*, though some commentary comes from the individual Arden editions cited below.

2. Usually focusing on the correlation between his usage of medical terminology and his daughter Susanna's marriage to the physician John Hall.

3. Except for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Twelfth Night*. However, the latter two use "fang" as a verb.

4. Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (Ithaca: Yale University Press, 2007), 23.

5. See Ronald Paulson. "The Perfect Teeth: Dental Aesthetics and Morals," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Jan. 2008): S130–45.There continues to this day a tradition of equating the quality of one's teeth with the quality of one's character and morals, as Paulson outlines when discussing more recent works, as well as the film version of *Much Ado About Nothing*. As he writes, "Teeth become a synecdoche that replaces the whole body" (144).

6. Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Last Legacy: Left and Bequeathed to His Dearest Wife for the Publike Good: Being the Choicest and Most Profitable of Those Secrets Which While He Lived Were Lockt up in His Breast and Resolved Never to Be Publisht till after His Death* (N. Brooke, 1657), 106-113. He begins the section on teeth by warning, "IF you will keep your teeth from rotting, or aking, wash your mouth continually every morning with juyce of Lemmons, and afterwards rub your teeth either with a Sage leafe, or else with a little Nutmeg in powder, also wash your mouth with a little faire water after meats, for the onely way to keep the teeth sound and free from paine, is to keep them cleare" (108-9).

7. Malvin E. Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry: Teeth and Oral Care in the Writings of the Bard," *Journal of the California Dental Association* 24.4 (1996): 17-18.

8. See John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah S. Marcus (London:

Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014). As referenced in *The Duchess of Malfi* (4.2.149-52) and contextualized by Leah S. Marcus (280).

9. In the following scene, Othello asks Desdemona for her handkerchief under the pretense of having "a salt and sullen rheum" (3.4.51), occasionally labeled a cause of toothaches. See Laura Kennedy, "'Carry Not a Picke-Tooth in Your Mouth': An Exploration of Oral Health in Early-Modern Writings," (PhD Dissertation, Loughborough University, 2012), 46. If this is a belief held in the play, perhaps Othello has Iago's toothache story in mind when confronting her.

10. Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 18.

11. A medical treatment commonly in use. Though not in a dental context, Shakespeare mentions it in a metaphor in *Richard II*, when the titular king advises peace: "Let's purge this choler without letting blood" (1.1.153).

12. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 43.

13. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 45.

14. James Wynbrandt, *The Excruciating History of Dentistry: Toothsome Tales & Oral Oddities from Babylon to Braces* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 23.

15. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 48.

16. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 53.

17. Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 17. Stemming from a 1540 charter granted to the Royal Guild of Barbers, legally dividing responsibilities between barbers and surgeons, but failing to limit dentistry to one (17). Shakespeare's references to barbers are generally in the context of beard-shaving, and surgeons are usually called for when a character receives a serious bodily wound. Neither is mentioned by name as performing dental work.

18. Claire McEachern, editor of Arden's *Much Ado About Nothing*, points out the double meaning here: "hanging and drawing (another term for disembowelment) was the punishment for traitors" (267). Additionally, tooth-drawers were not the only ones who resorted to macabre advertising. Barber-surgeons, who generally handled bloodletting and leeching, advertised by leaving out buckets of blood, despite ordinances preventing them from doing so (Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 46).

19. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 32.

20. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 33.

21. Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 19.

22. A play of mixed authorship, this section admittedly comes from the unidentified Hand C, not explicitly from Shakespeare. However, it reinforces the shared unpleasantness of tooth removal in Elizabethan England.

23. Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 17.

24. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 48.

25. Hamlet to Ophelia: "I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another" (*Q2* 3.1.141-3). Also, "Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick" (*F* 5.1.192-3).

26. Kathryn Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*: *Snakebites, Stabbings and Broken Hearts* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 238.

27. Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 238.

28. Morris P. Tilley, "The 'White Hand' of Shakespeare's Heroines," *The*

*Sewanee Review* 19.2 (Apr. 1911): 211.

29. Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 239.

30. Cockayne, *Hubbub*, 23.

31. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 49.

32. Stemming from a lack of vitamin C, scurvy is mentioned several times in Shakespeare. However, he uses the term as an insult and does not discuss the disease. For example, in *Othello*, Emilia deduces, "The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave, / Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow" (4.2.141-2).

33. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 45-6.

34. As with scurvy, Shakespeare's usage of "pox" is often a curse directed at characters, rather than an overt discussion of the disease. For example, Doll's remark to Fallstaff in *2 Henry IV*: "A pox damn you, you muddy rascal!" (2.4.40).

35. As Kennedy recounts, words like "'snuffle', meaning 'To speak through the nose' are often used in literature of this period to refer to those whose palates have been rotted away by venereal disease" (64). A conversation between Moth and Armado in *Love's Labour's Lost* may reference this: while discussing ways Armado can win Jaquenetta, Moth suggests singing a song "sometimes through the throat as if you swallowed love with singing love, sometimes *through the nose* as if you *snuffed* up love by smelling love" (3.1.13-5, emphasis added).

36. Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 231; Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 154.

37. Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 238. Referred to as "the powdering-tub of infamy" in *Henry V* (2.1.75) and, per Kathryn Harkup, in Sonnet 153: "a seething bath, which yet men prove / Against strange maladies a sovereign cure" (Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 238). Mercury, or "quick-silver" is mentioned by both Falstaff (*2H6* 2.4.226) and the Ghost of Hamlet's father (*F* 1.5.66) as an analogy for speed.

38. Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 234.

39. Harkup, *Death by Shakespeare*, 238.

40. Cockayne, *Hubbub*, 31.

41. Cockayne, *Hubbub*, 23.

42. Pitcher, *Winter's Tale*, 282.

43. Farah Karim-Cooper, *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage Gesture, Touch and the Spectacle of Dismemberment* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 45-6.

44. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 210; Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 21.

45. Kanner, *Folklore*, 90; Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 21.

46. A variation of this phrase, with a very different meaning, is seen in *King Lear*: when Edgar fights with Oswald, he taunts, "Ch'ill pick your teeth" (4.6.240). R. A. Foakes points out that this was a proverbial phrase meaning to "be more than a match for you," though also cites other scholars who say that Edgar may use this phrase while wielding Oswald's knife to use against him, metaphorically "picking his teeth" by inflicting a fatal blow (Foakes, *King Lear*, 346).

47. Robert G. Collmer, "A Collection of Toothpicks from *The Winter's Tale* to

*Leviathan*," *Connotations* 31(1993): 13-4, 17.

48. Karim-Cooper, *The Hand*, 47-8.

49. Collmer, "Collection of Toothpicks," 21.

50. Collmer, "Collection of Toothpicks," 22.

51. Cockayne, *Hubbub*, 30.

52. Before the popularity of dentures later in the 1600s (Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 150).

53. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 181.

54. Contrary to Coriolanus's characterization of the common people as teeth in the mouth of those that control them, Philip (the Bastard) of *King John* uses the analogy of teeth for weaponry, heralding "The swords of soldiers are his teeth, his fangs, / And now he feasts, mousing the flesh of men" (2.1.353-4).

55. Braunmuller and Watson, *Measure for Measure*, 282.

56. Cockayne, *Hubbub*, 91.

57. Danielle Nagler, "Towards the Smell of Mortality: Shakespeare and Ideas of Smell 1588-1625," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 26.1 (1997): 42-3. See Nagler's article in its totality for a discussion of the smells (good, bad, and neutral) that permeated Elizabethan society and how the importance of the olfactory senses is reflected in the plays of the time.

58. A larger concern that extended into other elements of Elizabethan life, especially privies. See Dolly Jørgensen for attempts to address the issues related to both smell and logistics of waste removal. Dolly Jørgensen, "*The Metamorphosis of Ajax*, Jakes, and Early Modern Urban Sanitation," *Early English Studies* 3 (2010).

59. Amy Kenny, "'A Deal of Stinking Breath': The Smell of Contagion in the Early Modern Playhouse," in *Contagion and the Shakespearean Stage*, eds. Darryl Chalk and Mary Floyd-Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 51.

60. Kenny, "Stinking Breath," 49. See Nichole DeWall, "The Smell of Dover: Shakespeare, Stink, and the Inspired Poet," *Pennsylvania Literary Journal* 14.3 (Sept. 2022): 101–25. As DeWall recounts, whenever there was an "outbreak" of the plague, "a mass exodus occurred: the rich would flee the diseased air of London for the clearer air of the country, drawing accusations of indifference from those they left behind" (103).While their instinct to avoid bad air correctly anticipated a later understanding of germs, this approach further entrenched class differences, though there was no escaping the other pandemics: syphilis and dental decay.

61. Kenny, "Stinking Breath," 52.

62. DeWall, "Smell of Dover," 108

63. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 29.

64. Also referred to as "sweet water," which is mentioned in *Titus Andronicus* (2.3.6) and *Romeo and Juliet* (5.5.14), to improve the smell of Lavinia's hands (mockingly, as she has none) and Juliet's tomb respectively. "Rose-water," also used for breath freshening, is mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew*, also for the cleaning of hands (Intro.1.55)

65. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 28-9. Culpeper recommends these mixtures to treat bad breath caused by gastrointestinal issues (130-1, 157). His other suggestion is to "Take the juice of Rue, and black Mints, (I think he means Horse-mints) and snuffe it up the Nolstrils" (Culpeper, 106), seemingly assisting those affected olfactorily rather than the patient with the halitosis.

66. Beatrice, as always, proves to be Benedick's equal in verbal jousting concerning the quality of one's breath. When she demands to know "what hath passed between [Benedick] and Claudio," and he replies, "Only foul words - and thereupon I will kiss thee," she reflects, "Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome, therefore I will depart unkissed" (5.2.47-52).

67. Pitcher, *Winter's Tale*, 270.

68. Weis, *Romeo and Juliet*, 163. In *Othello*, Cassio refers to Bianca as a "perfumed [...] fitchew" (4.1.145), reinforcing the characterization of her as a prostitute and someone who is trying to smell better than her social status. The idea of hiding one's breath (or any bad smell) to change one's social opportunities is also seen in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, when Arcite reassures Palamon that they have, among other things, "Perfumes to kill the smell o'th' prison" (3.1.86).

69. In this conversation, Speed mentions that the woman in question "is not to be kissed fasting in respect of her breath" (3.1.315), indicating yet another belief that the stomach affected one's breath. In this case, Lance says that the problem "may be mended with a breakfast" (3.1.316), before moving on to the discussion of her sweet mouth.

70. For example, the King to Suffolk in *2 Henry VI*: "Hide not thy poison with such sugared words" (3.2.45).

71. Another example is in *The Taming of the Shrew*, when Lucentio remarks of Bianca that "with her breath she did perfume the air" (1.1.174).

72. DeWall takes it a step farther by arguing, using some of these examples, that those who smelled good (particularly their breath) were equated with godliness, "the heavens and, thus, to salvation" (DeWall, "Smell of Dover," 115). Similarly, Holly Dugan argues that the early modern stage utilized smell to denote power, class, and sexuality in the female characters, especially when portrayed by youthful men, tapping into an existing understanding of "'invisible' social differences" (230). Dugan, "Scent of a Woman: Performing the Politics of Smell in Late Medieval and Early Modern England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38.2 (2008).

73. Though they are closer to social equals, Claudio, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, refers to Leonato and Antonio as "two old men without teeth" (5.1.116).

74. Ring, "Shakespeare and Dentistry," 20.

75. In *2 Henry IV*, the King assures his audience that he has taken actions to safeguard the Prince against threats by ensuring his "friends [...] Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out" (5.1.334-5).

76. Gossett and Wilcox, *As You Like It*, 197.

77. Potter, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, 276. The image of bleeding teeth here, seemingly for metaphysical reasons, is very different from the threat of violence seen from Cleopatra when she threatens to give the Chairman "bloody teeth" for praising Caesar (1.5.73).

78. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 82.

79. Note references to cataracts (Foakes, *King Lear*, 280).

80. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 81.

81. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 89-90, 93.

82. Kennedy, "Carry Not," 100.

83. The hare is not entirely detrimental to one's dental condition. Culpeper recommends "Take the brains of a Hare, or the brains of a Hen, and rub the childs Gums with them once or twice a day, and it will make the Teeth cut without pain" (111).

84. Also referred to as "embryonal," "milk," or "deciduous teeth" (Kanner, *Folklore*, 13, 26). Though sometimes referred to interchangeably as "neonatal teeth," natal teeth refer to teeth that are present, or have erupted, at birth; neonatal teeth present themselves within the first month after birth.

85. Wynbrandt, *Excruciating History*, 227. Contrast this with the imaginary (presumably "normal") baby with "boneless gums" that Lady Macbeth imagines killing to prove her resolve to her husband (1.7.57).

86. Leo Kanner, *Folklore of the Teeth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 10.

87. Emyr Wyn Jones, "Richard III's Disfigurement: A Medical Postscript," *Folklore* 91.2 (1980): 219.

88. Bethany Packard, "Richard III's Baby Teeth," *Renaissance Drama* 41.12 (2013): 108, 118.

89. Kanner, *Folklore*, 11.

90. The usage of "gnaw" as a term for chewing is generally reserved for animals or something more serious like the "poisonous mineral" of mental imagery on Iago's insides in *Othello* (2.3.295). It is applied to the animalistic Richard III twice in the play, here and later: "The King is angry. See, he gnaws his lip" (4.2.27). Desdemona, before she is killed, asks Othello "why gnaw you so your nether lip?" perhaps revealing he has also lost his humanity by this point in the play (5.2.43).

91. Emily Rebekah Huber, "*Ricardus Tertius Dentatus*: Textual History and the King's Teeth," *Philological Quarterly* 94.4 (2015): 322.

92. Details of Richard's birth conveyed at this time included how he was born "an undigested and deformed lump," or "with [his] legs forward (*3H6* 5.6.51, 71), not to mention the larger signs in nature (*3H6* 5.6.44-48).

93. Huber, "*Ricardus Tertius Dentatus*," 326.

94. Additionally, the phrase is used in *Coriolanus*, when Valeria describes Virgilia's son as going from playing with a butterfly to, when "his fall enraged him, [...] he did so set his teeth and tear it" (1.3.65-6). Also in *2 Henry VI*, Suffolk says he wishes he could deliver fatal curses "strongly through my fixed teeth" (3.3.313). Another version of this phrase comes from Claudius, in an aside, when he admits that we are "compelled / Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults / To give in evidence" (*Q2* 3.3.63-4).

95. The same phrase is used in *1 Henry VI* by Hotspur, to insult the sound of the "metre balad-mongers"; he argues he would "rather hear a brazen can'stick turned / Or a dry wheel grate on the axle-tree, / And that would set my teeth nothing on edge, / Nothing so much as mincing poetry" (3.1.127-30).

96. Pitcher, *Winter's Tale*, 250-1.

97. Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, 1472

98. Pitcher, *Winter's Tale*, 251. Hamlet asks Horatio, regarding the actions of Claudius, if "is't not to be damned / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil?" (*F* 68-70); Falstaff lists off a collection of "the cankers of a calm world and a long peace" in *1 Henry IV* (4.2.29-30).

# Organology, Infinite Semiosis, and Gender Fluidity in *Twelfth Night*

Eduardo Solá Chagas Lima and Julie Thompson
Burman University

William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1599) is known for its recurrent themes of music and gender—themes that have been the focus of scholarship in various disciplines. Musicology and English literature studies have addressed these central elements of the play. Yet, while most of these analyses have been carried out within the purview of their separate subject areas, only a handful of scholars have addressed these topics in conjunction. Most notably, Marcus Tan focuses on the music likely used in the performance of *Twelfth Night* as a commentary on gender ambivalence.[1]

Our paper analyzes references to music that are more overarching in scope than the possible music used in the play's performance. These references lie *within* the text of the play but draw upon elements that are *outside* the narrative. Shakespeare's use of these extra-diegetic components in the text of *Twelfth Night* not only carries the potential to enhance the gender fluidity of his protagonist, Viola, but also to complicate the expectations of his audience. In particular, we use Peirce's theory of infinite semiosis to understand gender signification in the play, as compounded by additional layers of gender ambiguity and fluidity.

Tan finds evidence for gender elusiveness mainly in the "key" and tonal polarity within the song "O Mistress Mine"—allegedly one of the most popular musical selections in the play.[2]

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 115-133

ISSN: 1539-5758

His suggestion is problematic in many respects. Firstly, there is inconclusiveness in Shakespeare's usage of specific music settings for *Twelfth Night* on stage. Secondly, Tan identifies the key of G major used in Thomas Morley's (1599) and William Byrd's (ca. 1619) settings of the song as lying "in between," within the span of a diatonic scale.[3] The argument for this conclusion is unclear in Tan's text.[4] Besides, Morley's tune does not fit Shakespeare's original words, thus pointing to the existence of an alternate tune prior to the publication of the First Folio.[5]

Finally, in using analytical concepts from post-Enlightenment music theory such as "tonic" and "dominant" to identify tonal polarity in these music settings, Tan[6] poses an anachronistic approach to late-Renaissance[7] and early-Baroque repertoires, which are still essentially modal. Much of Renaissance modal music may be understood as "elusive" when it is analyzed from the Romantic standpoint of "tonality." Our alternative analytical perspective in this paper focuses instead on a specific and intentional reference to music in *Twelfth Night*. This gendered musical allusion has significant implications for the audience's expectations of gender norms on the early modern English stage.

While there are terminological inconsistencies in the way different documents refer to bowed instruments in the late Renaissance inside and outside England, it is evident from organology and iconography that two families of such chordophones coexisted.[8] Here they are shown in *Sciagraphia* (1619), an appendix to the second volume of Michael Praetorius's *Syntagma Musicum* (1614-1620).[9]


Figure 1. Plates XX and XXI in Praetorius's *Syntagma Musicum,*[10] showing Instruments in the violin (left) and viol (right) families.

They share conceptual as well as anatomical characteristics but differ largely in the quality of the resulting sound. The viol family first appeared in Spain in the fifteenth century and was popularized in continental and insular Europe by the late sixteenth century. It comprises fretted, bowed instruments played in an upright position on the lap or between the legs. One of the principal acoustic characteristics of the latter is a sweet, ethereal tone.

Boyden[11] suggests that the viol had been established and widely circulated throughout the Renaissance[12] and it was not until the rise of the violin family in the 1520s that its popularity was endangered. The violin family encompassed unfretted, bowed instruments with greater projection power and louder volume, such as the violin itself and the viola (played horizontally on the shoulder) or the violoncello (commonly played between the legs). In particular, Boyden alludes to English documents and paintings referring to various types of violins and the musicians who played them throughout the sixteenth century.[13] These documents also suggest a growing consistency in reference to instruments in the violin family toward the second half of the century. Consequently, the violin family slowly displaced the viol family.[14] During Shakespeare's life, and especially by the time *Twelfth Night* was first performed in 1599, the term "viola" had been widely employed across Europe in reference to instruments both in the viol family

(such as the *viola da gamba*) as well as in the violin family (such as *viola da braccio, viola d'amore, viola da spalla, viola pomposa*, etc.).

There are historical instances of conceptual association between the viola as a musical instrument and the idealized female body in the Renaissance, featuring narrow shoulders, a slender waist, and pronounced chest and hips. David Schoenbaum draws particular attention to how this relationship is depicted on the English stage.[15] These instances include the work of Shakespeare, which we begin to address with an analysis of *Twelfth Night*. Such references are recurrent in his work and remain consistent in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary works. Notable examples of such objectification of the female body include John Johnson's *Academy of Love*, replete with explicit sexual puns and innuendos: "very few men but they are experienced in the Vi-hole [viola], and when they have almost spent their substance, then they begin to practise the Base: the men practise much of the Virgin-holes [virginals]."[16] Later, John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* states: "like the notes of a fiddle, she sweetly, sweetly raises the spirits, and charms our ears."[17]

Historically, the names used for different parts of bowed instruments in the English language further suggest a direct reference to their analogous parts in human anatomy such as head, neck, shoulders, ribs, back, and body. For instance, on top of the pegbox, viols featured a carved human head, often depicting feminine features.[18] One exception is the *viola d'amore*, whose pegbox shows Cupid blindfolded—a considerably gender-fluid character in Greco-Roman mythology—depicting the blindness of love. The end of the pegbox is later substituted by a scroll in the violin family but it retains the term "head" until the mid-eighteenth century. Additionally, there is a marked presence of bowed instruments—especially those in the violin family—in sensualized iconographies of women. Examples are the anonymous and famous depictions of the scandalous *la volta*—often associated with Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester in the early 1580s (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Anonymous depiction of the *la volta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), showing Queen Elizabeth I dancing with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.[19] The painting is currently at Penshurst Place, Kent.

Figure 3. Anonymous depiction of the *la volta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), showing a ball at the Valois Court featuring a string band, c.1581.[20] The painting is currently at the Rennes Museum.

Depictions of sensualized women appear in numerous paintings involving the violin, licentiousness, and festivity as seen in works by various European visual artists. Dirck van Baburen's (c.1590-c.1624) and Hendrick ter Brugghen's (1588-1629) paintings (Figures 4 and 5) are notable examples from the Netherlandish school. In Baburen's painting (Figure 4), the woman on the left holds the socially constructed symbol of her body as she averts the viewer's gaze, as does her older female companion. Although the instrument she holds is a violin and instruments of this family increasingly feature a scroll at the pegbox's end, this one has a woman's head, drawing attention to the anthropomorphic parallels. Following a mannerist trope of sensuality, her outfit is revealing and she laughs in the company of two men, who, in turn, meet the viewer's gaze.

Figure 4. Baburen's *Loose Company*, 1623,[21] depicting a woman holding a violin. Landesmuseum, Mainz.

This is among other paintings by Baburen picturing several recurring tropes—a brothel setting, a semi-nude prostitute in "merry company," who is embraced by her client, and her older procuress.[22] In other versions of the painting, she holds a lute, instead.

Figure 5. Ter Brugghen's *The Concert*, 1629, picturing a man playing a violin and a seminude woman resting her arm on a lute.[23] Currently at the Gallerie Nazionali Barberini Corsini.

A similar, yet more conservative trope is noticeable in a religious context. In an embodiment of sound—both as muse and patron saint of musical arts—St. Cecilia appears in several settings playing the violin, as observed in paintings by Guido Reni (1575-1642), Bernardo Cavallino (1616-1656), and Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639) (Figures 6-8).

Figure 6. Reni's *St. Cecilia*, 1606, picturing the patron saint of music playing the violin in vertical position.[24] The painting is hosted at Norton Simon Museum.

Figure 7. Cavallino's *Saint Cecilia*, 1645, depicting the saint playing the violin.[25] The painting is held at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

Cecilia's chest is normally covered and the setting does not appear sexually charged, except for the implication of ecstasy—a semiotic and literary religious concept often associated with sexual pleasure.[26]

Figure 8. Gentileschi's *Young Woman with a Violin (Saint Cecilia)*, c.1612.[27] This painting is currently at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The intersections between religious, musical, and sexual ecstasy were readily identified in early modern England. Similarly, the prominence of instruments of the violin and viol family during this period suggests that Shakespeare's choice of the name Viola for the female protagonist of *Twelfth Night* is not accidental. Additionally, the Italian term *viola*, and its variants, is a female-gendered noun used in reference to instruments of either the viol or violin family across continental and insular Europe.

Although the name Viola does not occur as a character name anywhere else in Shakespeare's work, his references to the viol and violin families in connection with female characters are worth noting. One is found in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which Benedick—referencing stringed musical instruments—observes: "Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" (2.3).[28] The character is referring here to the organic material from which strings in instruments in the viol and violin families, as well as lutes, guitars, and *teorbos* are made: sheep's dried and treated guts. Another instance is found in *Pericles,* in which the male protagonist says to Antioch's daughter:

> You are a fair viol, and your sense the strings;
> Who, finger'd to make man his lawful music,
> Would draw heaven down, and all the gods to hearken;

> But being play'd upon before your time,
> Hell only danceth at so harsh a chime. (1.1.129-134)[29]

In *Twelfth Night*, comedic effect is added when Sir Andrew, the narrative's fop and player of the *viola da gamba* (1.3), paradoxically struggles to get his way with women in the plot.

One of the fundamental questions that sparked this paper pertains to the teleology of this linguistic choice on the part of Shakespeare. The playwright's awareness of the usage of the musical term and its gendered meanings bears significant implications for a play known to be charged both with references to music and sexuality. It is plausible, thus, to infer that the protagonist's name in *Twelfth Night* may have played an instrumental role as a linguistic signifier in retrieving or emphasizing the audience's expectation of femininity.

It is important to note, nonetheless, that the name Viola does not occur in the script until the end of the play (5.1). The gender swap between Viola and her male alter-ego, Cesario, happens early on in the plot (1.4). Although other characters refer to Viola with masculine pronouns while she presents as Cesario, there is a high degree of gender fluidity within the character. The audience attending early performances of the play would have been aware of the gender swap itself, but Viola's name would not have been uttered on the stage until the narrative's turning point when her female gender is revealed. In shedding her male disguise, she discloses: "I am Viola" (5.1), thus confirming her feminine identity in this complex diegesis.

For the reader of the play, instead, or for audiences with access to a list of characters prior to watching its performance, Viola's name as a signifier may have had an analogous but essentially different function in *reminding* the public of the character's femininity throughout the work. Regardless of the mechanisms of this linguistic objectification of the female body, this extra-diegetic reference is intensified by the complex, multilayered nature of gender in *Twelfth Night* and the early modern practice of cross-dressing on the English stage.

Studies in linguistics and name theory point to the complexity of signification through denotation and connotation. When connotations are combined, they may generate longer signifying circles. Charles Sanders Pierce's theory of infinite semiosis posits

that a *sign* signifies an *object* depending on the personal and culturally shared relationships of significance.[30] This *interprétant* of each sign—or culturally established grounds for signification—determines the qualia of the object in question, to which the sign ultimately points. In the process of signification, the *interprétant* of a sign, along with the object it signifies, becomes itself a sign, thus generating an infinite chain of signification.

Within the scope of Peirce's theoretical proposition, both "Viola" (the proper name for the character or *dramatis persona*) and "viola" (the musical instrument and its correlated organological relatives) function terminologically as *signs*. In the early modern period, the aforementioned relationships between the instruments in the violin family and the female body would have constituted the premise for the circular significance therein. Hence, the process of signification involving each sign would have pointed to the other, according to Peirce, thus creating a semiotic loop, instead of an endless chain. Viola the character and viola the musical instrument share a relationship of circular connotation whereby one term references the other. The former evokes instruments in the violin family—along with their organological properties, such as shape, anatomical connotations, and established cultural usages. The latter, in turn, connotes not only Viola's femininity in the play but, most importantly, signifies her ultimate role in a larger social order. This signification loop works as a Möbius strip—infinite yet cyclical, circular—affording an additional layer of complexity to the already multilayered narrative fabric.

Evelyn Conley[31] and Christoph Prang,[32] for instance, apply Pierce's theory of infinite semiosis to their analysis of signs and signification in literary texts, arguing that processes of signification can emulate an unending semiotic circle. This effect affords space for ambiguity where relationship is fundamental for signification. Conley suggests that

> [w]e are therefore confronted by a 'place of unlimited semiosis (as for Peirce), where each term is explained by other terms and where each one is, through an infinite chain of interprétants, potentially explainable by all the others.' (15) Internal references become paramount to an understanding of the concepts at hand, whereby '[r]elationship is everything. And if you want to give it a more precise name, it is ambiguity' (49).[33]

This ambiguity is reflected not only in the circular connotations of viola/Viola, but also in the gender fluidity inherent to the female character and the boy player underneath.

Moreover, in Peircean theory, "viola" (*sign*) may be connotative of both the female body in general and the specific character Viola (*object*) precisely because of its terminological possibilities (*qualisign*) and its general referential relations (*legisign*). It would also have connoted the female body as a token (*icon*) of likeness or semblance, natural anatomic/organological connection (*index*), arbitrary connection (*symbol*) by virtue of the *interprétant*, rhematic representation (*rheme*) by terminological quality, and symbolic law of habit (*argument*). Conversely, "Viola" would have been connotative of the musical instrument "viola" (*object*) because of the factual proximity between the two terms (*sinsign*). Similarly, "Viola" would also have connoted "viola" as an *icon, index, symbol, rheme,* and *argument.*[34] Shakespeare not only uses this as a rhetorical device at the climax to affirm Viola's gender and social role but also uses it throughout to underscore the gender fluidity inherent to the play.

The practice of cross-dressing was controversial during the early modern period due to the belief that "women are become men and men transformed into monsters" as is evident in contemporary pamphlets *Hic Mulier* [The Man-Woman] (1620) and *Haec Vir* [The Womanish-Man] (1620).[35] According to Sandra Clark, *Hic Mulier* is "narrated from a single viewpoint which states the conventional moral case against this sort of unfeminine behaviour [sic] [with] its style based on that of oral delivery," whereas *Haec Vir*, "is written in the form of a dialogue between two characters, Hic Mulier and… Haec Vir," much like a play.[36] Both documents, however, agree that men must take the first step in restoring order.

Even though this masculine gendered expectation of restoring order is complicated by the boy playing the female romantic lead on stage, who is then disguised as a boy—creating a cyclical chain of signifiers emphasizing Viola's gender fluidity—Shakespeare does follow masculine expectations for his cross-dressing comedies: *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In these plays, Shakespeare upholds heteronormative expectations in the romantic relationships that eventually lead to heteronormative marriage. The heroes are "attracted to the

disguised heroine because of the feminine attributes intuitively perceived behind the disguise [which] reassure[s] the audience of [the] heterosexual normality."[37] This expectation plays out between Duke Orsino and Viola—the imagined female body—in *Twelfth Night*, but unlike Shakespeare's other cross-dressing plays, Oliva also competes for Viola's affections, as Cesario—the imagined masculine body as well as the actual body of the boy player. These signs and signifiers create another infinite cyclical chain of gender fluidity, which can be interpreted as Shakespeare using these competing suits of Duke/Viola and Olivia/Cesario to complicate audience expectations in *Twelfth Night*.

Shakespeare first complicates gendered expectations of Viola by presenting her as a gender-fluid character within the first act of the play. In 1.2, Viola is presented as a helpless damsel in distress after her shipwreck—bedraggled but costumed in a gown befitting her status as a gentlewoman. Viola calls attention to the fact that she is a heterosexual female by highlighting the marital status of Duke Orsino as "[h]e was a bachelor then" (1.2.30), to which the Captain responds, "[a]nd so is now" (1.2.31), thus giving the audience the expectation of matrimony of the eligible bachelor and fair maid as per early modern tropes.[38] Viola also sets up the expectation of tension between herself and Oliva by asking "[w]hat's she?" (1.2.35). This question refers to Oliva's social status, but is also used as a comedic moment to solidify Viola and Oliva as rivals for Duke Orsino's affections.

The Captain—shipwrecked with Viola—calls attention to her femininity by addressing her as madam and lady throughout the scene (1.2.2, 8, 22) until Viola charges him to "[c]onceal... what I am... / [and] present me as an eunuch to [Duke Orsino]" (1.2.53, 55), which changes the Captain's language from madam to eunuch for the remainder of the scene. Notably, Viola offers musical services to the Duke as she will "sing / And speak to him in many sorts of music" (1.2.60-61). This connotes Viola as a musical instrument for an early modern audience, although her musical name is not revealed until the final act. For the rest of the play, however, Cesario is referred to as a boy or youth, indicating that his manhood is intact, instead of the feminine, musical eunuch that Viola sets out to be.

Act one, scene four is the first time the masculine character of Cesario appears in *Twelfth Night* and further confuses Viola's gender. There is, however, an element of sensuality between Duke Orsino and Cesario that reminds the audience of the female character underneath the disguise. Particular attention is paid to Cesario's lips as they are compared to the goddess Diana, the Roman goddess of fertility. Duke Orsino tells Cesario that

> . . . Diana's lip
> Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe
> Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound;
> And all is semblative of a woman's part. (1.4.31-34)

Shakespeare prepares his audience to objectify Viola's body, and later Olivia's, as a musical instrument with the wordplay on "pipe" and "organ." This scene serves two purposes: first, to foreshadow the connection between Viola's body and her connotative name revealed in Act V, and second, to remind the audience of her female gender as she pursues Olivia on Orsino's behalf. Some productions stage these lines with Duke Orsino and Cesario interacting physically to create sexual tension between the two characters.[39] Orsino breaks this tension upon realizing that he is embracing another man and thus sends Cesario to woo Olivia.

After a brief flirtation, Olivia invites Cesario to inventory her parts with a particular focus on her lips, eyes, and neck, echoing the interaction between Duke Orsino and Viola in the previous scene:

> It shall be inventoried,
> And every particle and utensil labelled to my will: As, Item:
> Two lips, indifferent red; Item: two grey eyes, with lids to
> Them; Item: one neck, one chin, and so forth. (1.5.225-228)

The neck, analogous to the upper section of viols and violins, is highlighted in Viola and Olivia's inventories and draws a connection between the female body and the viola. After a sensual exchange, Cesario passionately demands to "[m]ake me a willow cabin at your gate /… And make the babbling gossip of the air / Cry out 'Olivia'!" (1.5. 248, 253-254), mimicking a sexual climax and subsequently rousing Olivia's desire. The cry of "Olivia" is Olivia's turning point from grief to desire.[40] This connection would be particularly strong in the mind of Shakespeare's audience as a sexual climax was referred to as a "little death" in the early modern period.[41]

Soon after Cesario exits the stage, Olivia, in a soliloquy, reinforces his masculinity once again by drawing on her desire and giving an inventory of his parts: "'I am a gentleman.' I'll be sworn thou art; / Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit / Do give thee five-fold blazon" (1.5. 271-273). This inventory serves to remind the audience of Cesario's masculinity but also harkens back to the feminine inventory Olivia conducts of herself earlier in the scene and the one Orsino gives of Viola. This mixing of masculine desire and feminine form contributes to Viola's gender fluidity as the three inventories serve to foreshadow Viola's objectified female body.

Viola's gender fluidity continues to exist as a Möbius strip—depending on which court she is attending—throughout Acts II, II, and IV. This fluidity begins to erode, however, when Olivia commands, "Cesario, husband, stay!" (5.1.137) in the final act. Subsequently, the masculine accomplishments of Cesario are inventoried as proof of his perceived heteronormative status. The marriage of Olivia and Cesario is confirmed by the priest who marries them (5.1.151-158) and the assault of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby is demonstrated by the bloodied appearance of the two characters pointing to Cesario as their attacker. These events create comedic, dramatic irony as the audience is aware that Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, performed these actions. This is the beginning of Viola's gender fluidity disintegrating for the audience.

It is in the final act that Viola's gender fluidity is dismantled and she steps back into her feminine role and the gendered expectations therein. The entrance of Sebastian, Viola's twin, enhances her gender fluidity by confusing Cesario's identity with those onstage and lends an undercurrent of homoeroticism to the audience's perception. Sebastian's declaration of "thrice welcome, drowned Viola" (5.1.232) reveals that the gender-fluid character, Cesario, is actually named after a musical instrument representative of a woman's objectified body with strings to be fingered and plucked. This revelation of Viola's name to the audience is a comedic shock since her character has moved like a Möbius strip of masculinity and femininity, with an apparent limitless agency, for the entire play. Sebastian, through the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic constructs of the time surrounding the viol and violin families, objectifies Viola so that she returns to the feminine

sphere and the gender roles therein. Accepting this, she takes it upon herself to echo her name twice in quick succession using the link between the violin and a woman's body to remind the audience that she is a woman with a woman's body. Viola further emphasizes her femininity by rejecting her "masculine usurp'd attire" (5.1.241) and desires to visit "a captain in this town / where lies my maiden weeds" (5.1.245-246). The disintegration of the gender fluid Möbius strip that is Viola is caused by the rejection of masculinity and her subsequent embrace of femininity. This return to the "proper" gendered sphere gives Shakespeare's early modern audience the heteronormative relationships they expect at the end of a play.

Although Shakespeare provides the ending his audience expects, he also complicates it with homoerotic suggestions throughout the play and, specifically, in 5.1. He chooses to juxtapose the masculine Cesario and the feminine Viola with a reference to the boy player underneath. Sebastian's reflection, "were you a woman, as the rest goes even" (5.1.230), reminds the audience that this is a boy playing a female character who is disguised as a male, reinforcing the cyclical chain of signifiers. Considering Shakespeare's love of wordplay, one can postulate that this juxtaposition is not accidental. He highlights the male body underneath the character to create a dissonance with the musical connotations of Viola's name when it is revealed in the next line. In reality, there is a male body onstage engaged in a physical relationship with another male body—Duke Orsino. There is no reference like this in regards to Olivia who, although she is also performed by a boy player, stays firmly in the realm of femininity for the entire play. In addition to the homoerotic undercurrent of Olivia and Cesario's relationship throughout the play, Viola and Orsino's relationship retains its homoerotic undertones in Act V. This is due to Orsino never uttering Viola's name. Although he does ask to see her in her "woman's weeds" (5.1.263-264), he still calls her Cesario and boy. Although Duke Orsino and Viola give the audience an illusion of the expected heteronormative relationship, Shakespeare retains the homoerotic nature that has defined their relationship throughout *Twelfth Night*.

In light of the prominence of instruments within the viol and violin families in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-

century England and their constructed association with the female body, Shakespeare's choice of the name Viola for the female protagonist of *Twelfth Night* is not accidental. In fact, her name plays an instrumental role as a linguistic signifier in retrieving and emphasizing the audience's expectation of femininity. Shakespeare foreshadows a connection between Viola's body and her connotative name by using multiple inventories of the female body. In particular, he focuses on connecting the female body to a musical instrument. In Act V, he then uses the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic constructs of the time surrounding the concept of viola to give the audience a comedic surprise by revealing Viola's name and objectifying her in the same moment he moves her back to the feminine sphere and the gender roles therein.

## Notes

1. Marcus Tan, "'Here I am… yet Cannot Hold this Visible Shape': The Music of Gender in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 32.1 (2001): 99-125.

2. Tan, "The Music of Gender," 106.

3. Tan, 99-125.

4. Tan, 99-125.

5. J. H. Walter, "Music in *Twelfth Night*" in *The Player's Shakespeare: Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare (London: Heinemann, 1959), 188-191.

6. Tan, 99-125.

7. Scholars in musicology use "Renaissance," instead of "early modern," to refer to musical repertoire ranging from c.1400 to c.1600.

8. Robin Stowell, *The Early Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 34.

9. Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum*: *Tomus Secundus: De Organographia* (Wolfelnbüttel: Michael Praetorius, 1619).

10. Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum*, plates XX-XXI.

11. David D. Boyden, *The History of Violin Playing from its Origins to 1761: And its Relationship to the Violin and Violin Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

12. Especially in the context of the English viol consort.

13. Boyden, *The History of Violin Playing*, 41.

14. Boyden, 120. David Schoenbaum, *The Violin: A Social History of the World's Most Versatile Instrument* (London: W. W. Norton, 2012).

15. Schoenbaum, *The Violin: A Social History*.

16. John Johnson, *The Academy of Love: Describing the Folly of Young Men and the Fallacie of Women* (London: Humphry Blunden, 1641).

17. John Gay and Johann Christoph Pepusch, *The Beggar's Opera* (London: John Watts, 1728).

18. Called "scroll" today.

19. Boyden, plate 14.

20. Boyden, plate 13.

21. Wayne Franits, "Dirck van Baburen and the 'Self-taught' Master, Angelo Caroselli," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* ( 2013), accessed August 29, 2024, https://jhna.org/articles/dirck-van-baburen-self-taught-master-angelo-caroselli/#illustrations.

22. Norbert Schneider, *Vermeer, 1632-1675: Veiled Emotions* (London: Taschen, 2000), 24.

23. "Il Concerto," *Gallerie Nazionali Berberini Corsini,* accessed August 29, 2024, https://barberinicorsini.org/artwork/?id=WE4773.

24. "St. Cecilia," *Norton Simon Museum*, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/F.1973.23.P/.

25. "Saint Cecilia", *Museum of Fine Arts Boston*, accessed August 29, 2024, https://collections.mfa.org/objects/32557.

26. Sigrid Harris, "Transcending the Body: Music, Chastity and Ecstasy in Reni's St Cecilia Playing the Violin," *Early Music* 51.1 (2023): 91–108, https://doi.org/10.1093/em/caac067.

27. "Young Woman with a Violin (St. Cecilia)," *Detroit Institute of Arts*, accessed August 29, 2024, https://dia.org/collection/young-woman-violin-saint-cecilia-45747.

28. All references to Shakespeare's plays in this paper are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

29. Frequently attributed to Shakespeare but likely co-authored with George Wilkens. Ton Hoenselaars, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists* (Utrecht: The University of Utrecht Press, 2012), 107.

30. "The Playwright and the Pimp: Who Wrote Pericles?" *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, accessed August 29, 2024, 30, https://www.rsc.org.uk/pericles/about-the-play/the-playwright-and-the-pimp-who-wrote-pericles. Albert Atkin, "Peirce's Theory of Signs," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Stanford University: Metaphysics Research Lab, Spring 2023), accessed February 27, 2025, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/peirce-semiotics/.

31. Evelyn Cobley, "Closure and Infinite Semiosis in Mann's 'Doctor Faustus' and Eco's 'The Name of the Rose,'" *Comparative Literature Studies* 26.4 (1989): 341-361.

32. Christoph Prang, "The Creative Power of Semiotics: Umberto Eco's 'The Name of the Rose,'" *Comparative Literature* 66.4 (2014): 420–37. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24694582.

33. Cobley, "Closure and Infinite Semiosis," 344.

34. Atkin.

35. William Harrison, *The Description of England: the Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life* (Toronto: Dover Publications, 1994).

36. Sandra Clark, "'Hic Mulier,' 'Haec Vir,' and the Controversy over Masculine Women," *Studies in Philology* 82.2 (1985): 157–183, www.jstor.org/stable/4174202.

37. Clark, "The Controversy over Masculine Women," 164.

38. Clark, 157-183.

39. Productions of *Twelfth Night* staged at Shakespeare's Globe (2012) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (2018) take this approach.

40. Jami Ake, "Glimpsing a 'Lesbian' Poetics in 'Twelfth Night,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.2 (2003): 375–394, www.jstor.org/stable/4625073.

41. Barbara Correll, "Symbolic Economies and Zero-Sum Erotics: Donne's 'Sapho to Philaenis,'" *ELH* 62.3 (1995): 487–507, www.jstor.org/stable/30030088.

# Shylock's Slavery Argument

Todd H.J. Pettigrew
Burman University

Ask Shakespeare critics what is Shylock's most indispensable monologue in *The Merchant of Venice*, and we should not be surprised if the answer is, more frequently than not, the "Hath Not a Jew" speech in which Shylock denounces Antonio for mistreating him despite the fact that all men share the same essential characteristics (3.1.50-69).[1] The reasons that this particular speech have fascinated readers and critics need hardly take up much space in the main text of this article. Suffice it to note that the speech has been called, in its appeal for Shylock's humanity, "the only moment of genuine nobility and dignity" for the character, and an opportunity for Shakespeare to expose "the irrationality and evil of prejudice."[2] And yet, despite the attention paid to "Hath Not a Jew," I will argue that the most interesting and significant speech given by Shylock in the play is his less appreciated speech on slavery in the trial scene, a speech I will refer to as "Many A Purchased Slave."[3] Where "Hath Not A Jew" shocks by its stark evocation of hatred, its vitriolic confrontation of the ideology of difference, and its chilling promise of "hard" vengeance, "Many A Purchased Slave" challenges us to wrestle with a more complex and nuanced production of Shylock's rhetoric and to do so in a more suggestive social and historical context.

Up until the moment when Shylock delivers the slavery speech, a powerful defense of his claim for the forfeited pound of flesh, his

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 134-150

ISSN: 1539-5758

descriptions of his own motivations for revenge on the merchant Antonio have been largely private. We have heard, for instance, his dream about catching Antonio "once upon the hip" (1.3.43), but that is in an aside; we have heard, likewise, second-hand, how he has shared his revenge plan with two close confidants, Tubal and Cush (2.3.284-285); and he gives his wild and impromptu rant to just two other men in the "Hath not a Jew" speech already mentioned. But in the trial scene Shylock is called upon, for the first time, to advance his position formally, publicly, and on the record, a discursive context which necessitates a more sophisticated, and consequently more dramatically fascinating rhetorical attack than he has yet attempted.

Of course, no speech in Shakespeare has been completely ignored, and modern readers have found much to appreciate in "Many a Purchased Slave," even, if, as I will argue, there are further complexities to explore and alternative readings to propose. In particular, readers have often approved of what they see as an oppressed character using the Venetian practice of slavery to turn the ethical tables on a tyrannical elite just when and where they are unable to legally silence him—as much as they might like to. In this vein, Shylock, suggests one critic, "exposes the slave-owning Venetians for the hypocrites—or morally frail creatures—that they are." Another writes: "Shylock effectively counters Antonio's accusations of inhumanity with the Christian example of inhumanity, slavery." Still another calls this one of the "sharp satiric thrusts he sends to the interstices in his enemies' armour of righteousness."[4]

Such readings are attractive because they see the play advocating the same values of tolerance and resistance that we ourselves routinely advance today. Conversely, such readings are *so* consistent with today's values that we ought to pause, since the ethics of past centuries so often fail to align with our own. Indeed, a careful reading of the slavery speech reveals a number of complexities and complications which call into question the enticingly tidy interpretation which sees the speech as a masterful and defiant rejoinder by an indomitable survivor towards a complacent ruling class. Thus, as an alternative view, this essay proposes that the speech is far less critical of Venetian morality than critics usually allow. In my view, the speech does not indict

Venice for its cruelty, nor does it seek to humiliate its citizens for their hypocrisy. Indeed, it does not even succeed as a logical defence of Shylock's own case for enforcing his fatal bond. In fact, in "Many A Purchased Slave," Shylock, rather than landing a knockout blow against his oppressors, swings wildly and misses, bruising his own legal, civil, and moral authority just when he needs it most. And that, as far as the larger play is concerned, is precisely the point. These sites of confusion and contradiction are not flaws in the speech; they are exactly what makes it the most intriguing speech in the play.

As an additional prelude to this argument, I must note that when one writes of slavery one is naturally prone to think in terms of race, and from today's vantage point, that usually implies African peoples who are enslaved. To be sure, early modern Europe saw African slaves, but the racial realities of slavery in the late sixteenth century were complex. While Ian Smith argues that the matter of race has been downplayed by historians and that even by the sixteenth century, slavery was often associated with blackness,[5] the fact remains that slaves in the period could originate in any racial group depending on circumstance. Many Venetian slaves, for instance, were captured from the borders of the Ottoman empire, with the understanding that if Turks captured Venetians to make slaves, it was acceptable to do the reverse.

To complicate, or rather simplify the reading of the play in this nuanced historical context, we must notice that when Shylock invokes slavery it is specifically, explicitly, and deliberately in the context of the slave's status as owned property. He does not invoke any racial categories of the slaves he mentions, and audiences would have understood that no racial, religious, or national identity protected one so fully that some future misfortune might not lead to an enslaved existence, including, by the late sixteenth-century, the "escalating numbers of Englishmen being captured and enslaved in the region."[6]

## I

Challenged in the trial scene to explain his "strange apparent cruelty," and urged to provide "a gentle answer" to the Duke's request for "mercy and remorse" (4.1.20-34), Shylock responds with calculated impudence. After some evasive back-and-forth,

he goes on the attack, pointing out to them that "you have among you many a purchased slave" as part of his argument that the court must allow him his promised forfeiture, a pound of his enemy's flesh (4.1.90). By setting his own personal grievance next to the social problem of slavery, Shylock might seem to be landing a powerful *you-too* uppercut. In fact, Cooper calls it exactly that, saying "Shylock is able to use the *tu quoque* argument very effectively" here, arguing that "Shylock is not the only one in Venice to assert the rights of ownership at the cost of the claims of humanity."[7] After all, the Jew only seeks retribution against a particular Venetian merchant who has unapologetically belittled and undermined him. Slavery, by contrast, is, in the late sixteenth century, an ongoing outrage ready to bloom into an epochal atrocity. What moral standing does the Duke have, demanding "human gentleness and love" from Shylock (4.1.25), while he, apparently, participates in and benefits from such a system?

Put another way, Shylock is exploiting a single, once-in-a-lifetime attempt to pay back Antonio for his abuse, whereas the Venetians' prosperous port city and extensive empire is built upon longstanding systems of oppression. By speaking this truth to Venetian power, Shylock can be seen as "the harbinger of a discourse that exposes hypocrisy and partiality, not only in Venetian laws, but above all in its society," leaving the readers of the play with still another reason to call into doubt the justice of his ultimate defeat.[8] The moneylender, in this view, leaves the stage defeated, but not before he "confronts" his accusers "on their own inhospitable ethics,"[9] and his powerful critique of Venetian oppression remains, even as he himself becomes a victim of it. Another variation on the theme is that that "the Venetians cannot claim to have clean hands in this scene […] For all their talk of mercy, they are, as Shylock points out, slaveholders."[10] Shylock, by exposing the suffering of the least powerful of Venetians, calls that practice and the values that underlie it into question.[11] At least one critic has gone so far as to suggest that Shylock's attempt to murder Antonio is morally *superior* to the slave-owners since slaving was contrary to "Christian law" whereas what Shylock proposes is technically legal.[12]

Slavery, had, of course, been a feature of European life since ancient times, whether through various kinds of sale, indentured

servitude or, especially, slaves having been captured in war. Shakespeare's Othello is a notable Venetian sold in slavery after having been captured (*Othello*, 1.3.139-140).[13] The Bible features numerous instances of enslavement, and theologians had long considered slavery as a natural consequence of man's fallen state.[14] Nearer Shakespeare's time, Portuguese slave traders had been bringing enslaved African people to southern Europe at least since the middle of the fifteenth century, some of whom served, for instance, as gondoliers in Venice, ferrying men like Antonio through the canals of the early modern republic.[15] English households also sometimes made use of African domestics, but the law tended to emphasize the master's legal right to their labour, rather than ownership of the servant *per se*.[16] Nevertheless, as an institution generally, European slavery had declined after the Roman period for a variety of reasons, including an increasingly anti-slavery stance from the Christian Church.[17] Shakespeare's England prided itself on being, at least in theory, a land without slavery— though the reality was more problematic and complex.[18] Thus, despite Shylock's claim about the "many" slaves owned by the aristocrats in attendance at the trial, real-life slaves were not especially numerous in European cities of the period; they would have been understood as something of a luxury item in Shylock's Venice.[19]

Though wealthy households still employed slaves in the period, "slavery was on the decline by the sixteenth century."[20] Indeed, Venetians were often more concerned about being *captured* as slaves than owning them.[21] Thus it is possible that Shylock's initial remark that the Venetians have in their possession, "many a purchased slave" may be a deliberate exaggeration for rhetorical effect. After all, a few slaves may be brushed aside as an irrelevant anomaly, but "many" slaves suggest a pattern woven into the fabric of Venetian existence.[22] Alternately, given the place of the slave as an expensive status symbol, and given that real Venetian Jews were not permitted to own slaves,[23] Shylock's claim that "you have among you many a purchased slave" he may be deliberately emphasizing *you*, meaning not Venetians generally, but the upper classes: the Duke, his court and the other wealthy grandees of the Serene Republic. *You* have slaves, he may be hinting, whereas *I*, Shylock the humble moneylender, had only a single household

servant, and now I make do even without him. In this way, his statement to the Venetian elite may be that if that wealthy men like *you* take pride in owning expensive slaves consisting of human flesh amounting to hundreds or thousands of pounds, how can you begrudge a hardworking and comparatively poor Jew like *me* his single pound of flesh?

## II

All this said, that Shylock even makes the slavery argument is curious, given that his initial position in court is that he need make no argument at all. Indeed, his opening gambit is to decline to offer any defense of his suit demanding Antonio's flesh, saying flatly that he need not give reasons at all, or, if some reason must be given, that it is merely his humour, a quirk of character for which no account need be given nor sought (4.1.40-43). On the basis of inscrutable motives, some men, Shylock says, may be driven by hatred to unprofitable excesses. But such men are still within their rights to harbour their unfathomable hatreds and to pay dearly for very little if they so choose (4.1.44-46). This response is cunningly vacuous: an argument may be refuted, but a non-argument cannot be reasoned against. And it seems as if Shylock hopes to leave it at that, if he can, but pressed by the court to defend this position more fully, Shylock finally does give a more detailed defense of his claim, and indeed, as we have seen, he gives a quite careful one based on a complex analogy: the owning of slaves.

In fact, so carefully crafted is his response in this scene, that it provides a razor-sharp counterpoint to the informal defense he has given to Salerio and Salanio earlier in the play in "Hath Not a Jew." While that earlier speech is in prose, suggesting *ad hoc* invective,[24] "Many a Purchased Slave" is in highly regular iambic pentameter, connoting careful reasoning and honed grandiloquence. Notice, for example, the metrical regularity in the crux of the speech: "The pound of flesh which I demand of him / Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it." (4.1.99-100). For all his protests that he should not be required to give reasons, and indeed, that he cannot give reasons, Shylock has, after all, anticipated that the court will not take "I'll not answer that" (4.1.42) for an answer, and he has a secondary line of defense scrupulously prepared. Like Othello who

claims to have no skill in oratory and then provides the Venetian senate with an elaborate and moving defense of his elopement with Desdemona (*Othello* 1.3.83-96), Shylock pretends to have no defense before revealing his expertly crafted *apologia*. Thus, he reminds the court:

> You have among you many a purchased slave,
> Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
> You use in abject and in slavish parts,
> Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,
> "Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?
> Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds
> Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
> Be seasoned with such viands"? You will answer
> "The slaves are ours." So do I answer you:
> The pound of flesh which I demand of him
> Is dearly bought, is mine and I will have it. (4.1.90-100)

As we have seen, critics have often argued that Shylock not only defends his own bond with Antonio; he simultaneously exposes the Christian Venetians as hypocrites and tyrants. The myopic Venetians look to the mote of cruelty in the Jew's eye, even as they ignore the great plank of slavery in their own. The gentiles claim to value mercy, but their overworked slaves, no better than beasts, sleep on hard floors and chase after scraps of food — all giving the lie to supposedly Christian virtue. Hence, Phyllis Rackin has argued that "Shylock reminds the court that the universalizing measure of money […] eradicates every other standard of value," and Jason Gleckman has called this passage a "powerfully subversive speech equating Venetian contract law with slavery."[25] And yet, revisiting the details of the text, we find that Shylock never actually attacks the practice of slavery, nor does he take the Venetians to task for using it. He invokes slavery, of course, but not to condemn it. Instead, he employs the reality of slavery solely to bolster his own case about owning human flesh. Indeed, it would be counterproductive for him to condemn slavery here because his own case relies not just on its existence but on its moral legitimacy. For Shylock, it is not that a single murder can be overlooked when countless men are enslaved. Rather, it is that the very existence of slavery proves what Shylock proposes is not murder at all. He endorses a broad atrocity to excuse a particular crime.

Shylock neither pillories the Venetians for owning slaves, nor condemns them for considering their slaves as fundamentally worse than other men. After all, Shylock himself clearly sees himself as much better than a slave, for earlier in the play he has scorned the humiliating notion of acting like a slave before Antonio, bowing low and whimpering deferentially in a "bondman's key" (1.3.121). Instead, Shylock agrees that it would be absurd to treat slaves as equals, for the obvious reason, he says, that the slaves are not equals. He does not deny that slaves are property; he emphatically insists that they are property. The ownership of human bodies—the very definition of slavery in his account—proves that it is legally permissible to own human tissue. And if it is legally allowable to own a human body constituting, say, two hundred pounds of flesh, then it must be allowable for a man to own just a single pound of the same commodity. Therefore, Shylock should be able to own part of Antonio—in this case the pound of flesh closest his heart. And if Shylock owns a pound of flesh, it follows that he has the right to take it, for every man has the right to have what he owns, otherwise ownership would be meaningless. John Owen Havard, in the context of Antonio as a prisoner, argues that Shylock compares the merchant "directly" to a slave to justify his position. My reading, by contrast, emphasizes the idea that slavery is invoked to show that the human body can be owned. Shylock's argument, in my view, is not the direct "ruthless equivalency" that Havard sees, but has intricate, indirect logical moves, and that is part of what makes it fascinating.[26]

In this reading, Shylock does not serve as a voice of conscience to the slave-owners; rather, he wholeheartedly endorses their barbaric system; if anything, he is morally worse than the slavers on this point, because he accepts their practice and extends its brutal suppression to all men. Shylock does here precisely what he promised to do earlier in the play: executing the villainy he has been taught but bettering the instruction (3.1.67-69). As such, this speech is not subversive; it is not a critique of slavery nor its attendant cruelties. If that were Shylock's purpose, we should expect that he would have pointed to examples of extreme brutality towards slaves. He does not, though other Shakespeare works include such details. In *Merchant* there is no mention of the terrorizing one's trembling bondmen (*JC* 4.4.43-45), or the

murdering of a "worthless slave" (*Lucrece* 515). Shylock merely indicates that slaves lack the luxuries and privileges of free men: soft beds, tasty food, aristocratic brides, and so on.[27]

Even this systematic oppression is cruel from our vantage point, but is not cruelty in Shylock's estimation; the deprivation of the slave, he argues, is justified by the fact that the slave is property which, in turn, proves that, in Venice, some human flesh belongs to other persons. Those owners can move it and remove it as they see fit. Shylock can no more be forbidden his pound of Antonio's flesh than the Duke can be forbidden from sending one of his slaves to find him some bread. The Duke, therefore, is not embarrassed by Shylock's foregrounding of slavery as Arron Kitch has argued when he suggests that "the Duke's threat to dissolve the court at this moment suggests that Shylock has articulated a difficult truth."[28] In assigning this "threat" to the Duke's reluctance to discuss Venetian slavery, Kitch, in my view, overstates the value of the juxtaposition.

Admittedly, it is conspicuous that neither the Duke nor anyone else even tries to rebut Shylock's actual argument about the legality of owning human flesh. Earlier in the play, when Shylock argues for the morality of usury as the kind of thrift enjoyed by the biblical Jacob, Antonio immediately presents a counter-argument that offers a different interpretation of the same biblical incident (which Antonio sees not as thrift in general, but as a divinely-sanctioned venture [1.3.87-91]). But here, no one jumps in with a rejoinder of any kind. Still, the lack of a counter-argument seems to arise, at least in large measure, from the fact that Shylock, cleverly, does not pause to entertain one. The Duke's suggestion that he may "dismiss" (not dissolve) the court seems to arise from Shylock's demand for a decision at the end of his speech ("I stand for judgement. Answer: shall I have it?" [4.1.103]) rather than the effectiveness of the slavery argument earlier. Moreover, the Duke immediately goes on to imply that the dismissal would be temporary, expressly to allow him time to consult the legal expert Bellario (4.1.105-107). In other words, the Duke's point seems to be that he will not be bullied into giving his decision before he is ready and he will not be ready at least until he has spoken to legal authorities.[29] Moreover, if the Duke is stymied by Shylock's slavery

argument, it may be in that way in which one knows an argument is wrong, but cannot articulate precisely why.

Indeed, as I read the scene, the Duke sees no reason to be ashamed, nor does Shylock ask him to be. Shylock is not "repudiating the Christian practice of slavery" in favour of a more moral Jewish tradition as Roger Stritmatter contends.[30] Nor, I would argue, is Antonio made "a dispossessed person, akin to a slave," as Amanda Bailey has suggested.[31] Rather, Shylock forces the Venetians to grapple with a conundrum: slaves are human flesh; slaves are owned; therefore, human flesh can be owned; therefore, Shylock can own a pound of Antonio's flesh and take it when he chooses. Today's readers and audiences simply reject that argument by rejecting its premise: human beings cannot be owned in any moral society. But no one in the Duke's court seems to entertain that strategy, nor, as it turns out, are they forced to.

## III

The absolute moral failing of Shylock's pro-slavery argument need hardly be elaborated: to make his case, he endorses one of the most profound evils in our history. Even in the play, however, the argument, though superficially cunning, does not stand scrutiny. As powerful as it seems in Shylock's formulation, the slavery argument, with only a little critical pressure, fails as disingenuous and irrelevant. Shakespeare gives Shylock an argument that resembles a display of upright dominoes: impressive but designed to collapse in spectacular fashion.

For one, though Shylock maintains that his pound of Antonio's flesh is "dearly bought" (4.1.100), it does not follow that he should necessarily be permitted to simply physically carry it away then and there as if it were the "flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats" that he has joked about earlier (1.3.166). If it were really a matter of the exchange value of a commodity, there would be any number of ways of resolving the claim. If a man has a thing that belongs to his neighbor and the item cannot be feasibly returned, the man can replace the item. Or he may provide a monetary reimbursement in a suitable amount. Indeed, reimbursement is precisely what Bassanio offers: to pay a more than reasonable sum in lieu of the specified forfeit. Bassanio's claims fall on deaf ears of course—just

as Jessica said they would (3.2.283-287). Shylock is not concerned about the flesh's monetary value—for it has no monetary value, something he has admitted to Bassanio already (1.3.164-166). He does not really suppose the flesh connected to Antonio's sternum and ribcage is actual commercial property that he should be able to convey home like the diamond he bought in Frankfurt (3.1.79-80). That is not a legal argument so much as a legal fiction. His satisfaction will come in the cutting itself, the maiming and murdering of his enemy. Shylock is not balancing his commercial books; he is feeding fat the ancient grudge he bears Antonio, as he promised to from the first moments he is onstage (1.3.45). This speech completes, thematically, what Shylock began early in the play when he called Antonio a "good man," but insisting that "good" meant wealthy, and scoffed at Bassanio for naively thinking that such an adjective could refer to something as trivial as a man's character (1.3.15-17).

More significantly, to make his argument, Shylock has to contradict his earlier claims to universal humanity. Prior to this scene Shylock has taken Antonio to task more than once for treating him like a dog rather than a fellow human being (1.3-116-117, 3.3.6-7). But in the "Many A Purchased Slave," he suggests there is nothing wrong with Venetians treating their slaves "like your asses and your dogs and mules" (4.1.91). Similarly, in "Hath not a Jew," Shylock pillories Antonio for failing to see the common humanity among all people, possessing the same living bodies and the same human feelings (3.1.54-62). But in the trial scene, Shylock abandons this earlier broad-mindedness because it no longer serves him. We might have expected Shylock to oppose slavery on the grounds that a slave is warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter as a free man, but here he makes no such observation. With a hypocrisy too little noticed, Shylock no longer cares that a slave will laugh when tickled or bleed when pricked. The slaves, however much they may resemble the Jew, will not resemble him in their freedom (cf. 3.1.59-64).[32]

Shylock's rhetorical use of slavery also opens up a flaw in his larger legal argument. By invoking slavery, Shylock accidentally reminds the court that rights in Venice are not distributed equally. This notion fatally undermines his other main assertion in the scene, that he has a contract, and that the republic must enforce all

contracts, regardless of who has made them—otherwise there is, as he says, "no force in the decrees of Venice" (4.1.102). Shylock's case against Antonio, in other words, is predicated on the universal applicability of justice. Indeed, Shylock bets everything on the assumption that, as Antonio himself admits, the Duke cannot deny the right to equal treatment under the law to anyone, not even a Jew (3.3.26-31). But by pointing out one notable case where the law provides different rights and privileges to different people—that is, masters and slaves—Shylock invites the argument that Jews do not deserve the scrupulous application of the law that Christian citizens do.

In the case of the bond, Shylock's bet, at least initially, seems to pay off, since the Duke (and Portia ostensibly) is loathe to simply vacate the contract— even as Bassanio argues that the problematic precedent is only "a little wrong" in contrast to the "great right" of preventing Antonio's murder (4.1.214). Indeed, the one point of broad agreement in the play is that Venetian prosperity is based on trade with "all nations," and foreigners must be satisfied that their dealings in Venice will be even-handed, or they will take their business to other ports (3.3.26-31).

Once the matter of contracts is obviated by the loophole in the bond's language, however, the differential application of the law comes back to bite Shylock like the dog he admits to being (3.3.7), for he is quickly found to be an alien who has conspired against the life of a citizen (4.1.345-360). Now on the defensive, Shylock cobbles together a case that employs the same logical shadiness that he employed in the slavery argument. That is, throughout the trial scene, Shylock takes the implicit position that he has the legal right to Antonio's flesh and is not responsible for the consequences of insisting on that right. His official position is that Antonio's death would be a legally irrelevant side effect of enforcing the bond, and that any medical consequences to Antonio are simply not Shylock's responsibility (4.1.255-60).

But later in the scene, Shylock will make the reverse argument in regard to his own life. When the court proposes taking all of Shylock's wealth as a penalty for conspiring against Antonio's life, Shylock argues that the court cannot simply enforce the law without regard for the consequences of that ruling. Specifically, without capital, he cannot earn income, and without income he

will starve: "You take my house when you do take the prop / That doth sustain my house" (4.1.373-74). Shylock now insists that the court must consider the foreseeable consequences that follow from the enforcement of statutes. If the court's larger intention is to spare his life, than it must consider the effects of taking his livelihood. They must not execute the man by executing the judgement.

The Venetians might well reply that the consequences of enforcing the confiscation judgement (Shylock starves) are surely just as irrelevant here as when Shylock sought to enforce his bond (Antonio bleeds out). Shylock, just a few minutes earlier, had refused to give any weight to the fact that collecting his pound of flesh would be, effectively, murdering the merchant. Now, Shylock insists that taking his money is cruel, because depriving him of income deprives him of his life. The moneylender's hypocrisy is stark: Shylock seizing what is legally his property is morally acceptable regardless of the consequences; the state seizing what is legally its property is barbaric because of the consequences.

Shylock's positions in the scene conspicuously contradict one another. When he needs the exemplar of slavery to justify owning human flesh, then some men are little better than beasts; but when he needs to argue that his bond cannot be vitiated, then all men are equal before the law. When it comes to the death of his enemy, consequences are nothing; when it comes to saving himself, consequences are everything. It is not quite that Shylock changes his principles; it is that he has no principles at all. He has only rationalizations that support his own interests in the moment.[33] He is precisely the man Antonio says he is early in the play: "An evil soul producing holy witness […] a villain with a smiling cheek" (1.3.97-98).

In "Many a Purchased Slave," Shylock does what he has done elsewhere in the play: provide a seemingly rational argument for a position that is really self-serving and amoral. This speech is akin to his defense of usury early in the play, and his defense of revenge generally a little after that. This failed argument, like all his failed arguments, need not be seen as "merely sensational"; it fails and must fail.[34] Indeed, its very failure is the point. Shylock's slavery speech demonstrates that any position, no matter how contradictory and ethically questionable it may be, can be couched in the language of reason and justice. And it is no coincidence that

in nearly the exact centre of the play, Bassanio gives a long speech on this very topic, that the appearance of virtue is not the same as virtue itself, that a fine beard, for instance, may conceal a wicked heart (3.2.83-86). Thus, when we hear Shylock's claim that cold-blooded murder is legal and right, and that the existence of slavery proves it, we are reminded of Bassanio's complaint about how, in law, a gracious voice can superficially season any plea no matter how "tainted and corrupt" (3.2.75-76).

## Notes

1. All references to Shakespeare are in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare Sixth Edition*, ed. David Bevington (New York: Pearson, 2009).

2. Jerome Carlin, "The Case Against *The Merchant of Venice*," *The English Journal* 42.7 (October 1953): 389. doi.org/10.2307/809133; Anthony J. Lewis, "Response to Prejudice in Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, and King Lear," The English Journal 61.4 (April 1972): 491. doi.org/10.2307/813555. John Cooper terms the speech "the chief piece of evidence for the sympathetic interpretation" of Shylock. John R. Cooper, "Shylock's Humanity," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21.2 (1970): 117. Similarly, Amy Greenstadt contends that the speech "contributes to a nascent vision of human equality." Amy Greenstadt, "The Kindest Cut: Circumcision and Queer Kinship in *The Merchant of Venice*," ELH 80.4 (Winter, 2013): 949. Neema Parvini sees the speech as a response to "bullying" in which Shylock seeks to be but is unable to be understood as a recognized member of the Venetian community. Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare's Moral Compass* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 11. And yet, critics have also noted that this nobility is undermined to some extent by the fact that the speech is, in the end, a justification for murder. Thus, the speech poses "a stirring question, even though Shylock may well be fingering his sharp blade as he voices his complaint." John Scott Colley, "Launcelot, Jacob, and Esau: Old and New Law in *The Merchant of Venice*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 10 (1980): 184.

3. While it is impossible to measure precisely how much attention any given speech has received, at the time of writing, the version of the JSTOR scholarly database available through my institution returns 396 results for "hath not a jew" but only twenty-six for "many a purchased slave."

4. Derek Cohen, "The Rage of Shylock," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 18.3 (1982): 198. Joan Ozark Holmer, "The Education of the Merchant of Venice," *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900 25.2 (Spring, 1985): 309. Ron Klingspon, "Play and Interplay in the Trial Scene of *The Merchant of Venice*," *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor* 9.1 (1986): 39.

5. Ian Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009): 45-46.

6. Guasco, Michael, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014): 144.

7. Cooper, "Shylock's Humanity," 122.

8. Marcone Costa Cerqueira, "Shylock and Individual Freedoms in Classical Liberalism," *Prometheus: Journal of Philosophy* 38 (April, 2022): 83.

9. Sophie E. Battell, *On the Threshold: Hospitality in Shakespeare's Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023): 96.

10. Paul A. Cantor, "Religion and the Limits of Community in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 70.1 (1987): 254.

11. Indeed, in China, where theatre goers are less familiar with the details of Western theology, this speech is sometimes read as one of the moments where the play calls into question the entire system of early capitalist thought. After all, if the commercial success of Venice produces racism and enslavement, where is its real value? Thus, "Though Shylock is a supporter of the system of private ownership, his frank exposure of his own suffering and that of others can be regarded as a condemnation of the Renaissance commercial system. Since the conflicts in Venice are conflicts among people who share the same mercantilist commercial values, the correct solution must denounce the values of commerce and law in Venice in their entirety." Fan Shen, "Shakespeare in China: *The Merchant of Venice,*" *Asian Theatre Journal* 5.1 (Spring, 1988): 27-28.

12. Ming-kae Wang, "A Legal and Moral Discourse on the Roles of Shylock and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Tamkang Review: A Quarterly of Comparative Studies between Chinese and Foreign Literatures* 25.3 (1995): 320. A related view says that the speech points to a contradiction in early modern cultures: that trade required increased traffic with foreigners even as those foreigners were often denigrated and despised. Kim F. Hall, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Colonization and Miscegenation in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992): 94-95.

13. Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era," *Past & Present* 205 (November 2009): 8.

14. Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 14-16.

15. Kate Lowe, "Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 66.2 (Summer 2013): 413. Lowe notes that most Venetian slaves served as domestic servants (421), though some freed slaves served as gondoliers (415).

16. Amanda Bailey, "Shylock and the Slaves: Owing and Owning in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.1 (Spring 2011): 13.

17. Fynn-Paul, "Monotheism and Slavery," 15-17.

18. Camille Slights shows how "English culture … exhibited contradictory understandings of the nature of slaves and slavery" seeing it as familiar and yet denying its existence. Camille Slights, "Slaves and Subjects in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.4 (Winter 1997): 381. Others have noted that English people used the term "servant" broadly so as sometimes to include slaves and other bound laborers, without explicitly saying so. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, "*The Tempest* and Early Modern Conceptions of Race," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 146. Still further: "just as Tudor Englishmen were increasingly inclined to insist that they were unique in a global

and European context to their commitment to liberty, there was a perceptible rise in the incidence of human bondage within England and some serious discussion that the nation could benefit from the application of certain kinds of slavery in unique circumstances (Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 25).

19. According to one historian, had Europeans been the only clients for African slaves, the trade may well have died out in or not long after the sixteenth century. William D. Phillips Jr, *Slavery From Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 169-70.

20. Rothman, "Contested Subjecthood," 428.

21. For this reason, Venice established a slave-ransoming office in 1586. By 1620, the cost of redeeming Venetian slaves had become a serious problem. Robert C. Davis, "Slave Redemption in Venice, 1585-1797," in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 456-458.

22. Jamie Paris has argued that Portia's Belmont estate was probably "staffed with slave labor"; her claim depends heavily on the interpretation that the unnamed "Moor" with whom Launcelot is said to have had an affair is, in fact, a slave (3.5). Paris suggests "serving woman" might be a euphemism for slave, but I have been unable to locate that phrase in the play. Jamie Paris, "Mislike Me Not for My Complexion," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 20. 4 (Fall 2020): 41.

23. James O'Rourke, "Racism and Homophobia in The Merchant of Venice, *ELH* 70.2 (Summer, 2003): 394. O'Rourke argues, rightly in my view, that in this speech Shylock points out that "slavery was an institution that produced categorical distinctions between Christians and others" but where he implies Shylock is deliberately pointing out a broad moral failing in Venice, I argue that Shylock is embracing that moral failing, at least as long as it serves his rhetorical purpose.

24. As Jacob Tootalian notes, it is well established that Shakespeare employs prose for certain characters and situations as, for instance with "madmen." Jacob Tootalian, "Without Measure: The Language of Shakespeare's Prose," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13.4 (Fall 2013): 48. More specifically, Warren D. Smith has argued that if Shakespeare intended "Hath Not A Jew" to be a grand piece of philosophical reasoning, he would "in accord with his usual custom […] have cast it in poetic verse rather than in prose." Warren D. Smith, "Shakespeare's Shylock," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.3 (Summer, 1964): 198.

25. Phyllis Rackin, "The Impact of Global Trade in *The Merchant of Venice*" *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* 138 (2002): 79. Jason Gleckman, "*The Merchant of Venice*: Laws Written and Unwritten in Venice," *Critical Review* 41 (2001): 84. By contrast, some critics have considered Shylock's desire for Antonio's flesh in terms arising from a perceived erotic pun where flesh means *penis*, even after the play specifies the flesh in question is Antonio's chest, not his genitalia. Along these lines, James Shapiro sees the taking of the flesh as an implied circumcision, but does not emphasize, as this essay aims to do, Shylock's own explicit characterization of the act. See James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 126-130. Janet Adelman builds on this reading, seeing circumcision tropes throughout the play, but not emphasizing the slavery argument. Janet

Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 99-113 passim.

26. John Owen Havard, "Calculating Shylock: Commerce, Captivity, and the Free-Born Subject," *The Eighteenth Century* 60.3 (2019): 341.

27. In fact, in Venice, slaves could marry though it was rare for slaves to marry free people. If the free spouse was unaware of the slave's status at the time of the union, the marriage could be annulled. Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves*, 1260-1500. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019): 77. Indeed, some Venetian slaves were freed, in theory after no more than four years or once they were baptized, though these rules were not scrupulously followed. Conversely, for some freed slaves, their former masters became important patrons as they established their new lives in the complex social world of Venice. E. Natalie Rothman, "Contested Subjecthood: Runaway Slaves in Early Modern Venice," *Quaderni Storici* 47.140 (August 2012): 427-428.

28. Aaron Kitch, "Shylock's Sacred Nation," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.2 (Summer 2008): 150.

29. Kitch, "Shylock's Sacred Nation," 150.

30. Roger Stritmatter, "'Old' and 'New' Law in *The Merchant of Venice*: A Note on the Source of Shylock's Morality in Deuteronomy 15," *Notes and Queries* 47.1 (March 2020): 70.

31. Amanda Bailey, "Shylock and the Slaves," 12.

32. On occasion, real Venetian slaves who were not set free did seek freedom, and it was up to the Senate to decide their fate. In one late fourteenth century case, a freed Tatar man came to Venice with the aim of living as a free Venetian. Unfortunately, he fell into the hands of another freed Tatar named Antonius who sold him to one Zanino Calcaterra who, in turn, sold him to a Catalan. Antonius was punished and Calcaterra compensated, but whatever became of the unfortunate freed slave is not known. Barker, *Precious Merchandise*, 27.

33. Theatre directors who see Shylock as sympathetic here might well consider his self-serving hypocrisy. Indeed, at least one director takes a sympathetic Shylock as, rather than one interpretation, a matter of settled fact: "Of course, it is impossible to stage *The Merchant of Venice* antisemitically, because the bearer of sympathy in the play is really Shylock and always will be Shylock." Peter Zadek and James Leverett, "Radical Stagings of Shakespeare," *Performing Arts Journal* 4.3 (1980): 110.

34. Bailey, "Shylock and the Slaves," 12.

# "To be wrenched with an unlineal hand": The Temporality of Legacy in *Macbeth*

Sara Subotić
Loyola University Chicago

Why does Macbeth order the murder of Macduff's family? Macduff is a threat to Macbeth's power, and Macbeth has been warned to beware Macduff. Although the murder of Macduff's family serves as an act of revenge for Macduff's resistance, Macbeth's order is an exercise of tyranny over the people and lineal successions—over the present and the future. Macbeth's tyrannical desire for greater power is a shared characteristic with Shakespeare's other tyrants. Particular to *Macbeth*, however, is the focus on inheritance and lineal succession. Macbeth's attempts to prevent the lineal rule of Duncan and Banquo, while simultaneously trying to establish his own hereditary dynasty, suggests the desire to extend his rule and power to a longer stretch of time—to a new scale. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the different scalar operations of time—temporality and eternity—are reflected in the different scalar operations of politics—the individual and the body politic. Macbeth's tragedy lies in his attempt and ultimate failure to cross the scalar threshold of temporal politics.

In this paper, I argue that the concerns with succession and the transition of power in *Macbeth* encompass a broader concern about the nature of sovereignty. I begin with an overview of the political concerns of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and how *Macbeth*'s concerns with stability and sovereignty gesture to this historical context. Scholars have long

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 151-170

ISSN: 1539-5758

read *Macbeth* in the context of Jacobean politics and Elizabeth I's succession crisis. Though my argument is grounded in the question of succession within the play itself, this political context sheds light on Shakespeare's broader concerns with sovereignty. I then turn to an analysis of the play that focuses on the prophecy and Macbeth's relationship to lineal succession. My argument is indebted to the works of scholars who have analyzed the temporality of politics in *Macbeth* and who have specifically focused on the questions surrounding children in the play. Finally, I conclude with a brief look at Scotland's future at the end of the play. Whereas some scholars read *Macbeth* as cyclical and point out that Macbeth's defeat and Malcolm's bestowal of new titles echo the actions of Macdonwald and Duncan suggesting that the conditions for tyranny are not remedied, others argue that Malcolm's political reformation heals Scotland's corrupt body politic. I maintain that the disruption of lineal succession and the prophetic foreknowledge that Banquo's issue will be kings (indeed, James I's Stuart lineage claims descent from Banquo) leaves Scotland's future ambiguous and accentuates the precarity of sovereignty.

*Macbeth*'s concern with stability and sovereignty, as exhibited by Macbeth's relationship to lineal suggestion, gestures towards the politics of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The question of succession at the end of Elizabeth I's reign raised concerns about the transition of power. Though *Macbeth* was written after James I's crowning, this debate lingers in the background.[1] Elizabeth I's status as the Virgin Queen is key to the succession crisis; without an heir, who would succeed the throne upon her death? Elizabeth I's lack of a direct heir was a cause for concern because of the number of claimants to the throne. Despite James VI's of Scotland's stronger hereditary claim to the English throne, there were numerous rival claimants.[2] James VI therefore believed that he needed official endorsement of his right to succession from Elizabeth herself.[3] The explicit endorsement and confirmation by parliament has parallels to the system of tanistry that is seen in *Macbeth*. Despite James VI's status as the most likely successor and heir apparent, Elizabeth I refused to recognize him formally. Elizabeth I had legitimate political concerns for doing so, such as deterring Scottish policies that clashed with English interests, but her refusal (much like Macbeth's desire to hold on

to power without an heir) also indicates her desire to maintain her own position of power.[4] Arthur Bradley reads *Macbeth* as the story of a "power struggle no[t] merely over the ancient throne of Scotland but over possession of a sovereign future that clearly extends up to, and includes, the Stuart monarchy of Shakespeare's own time."[5] The parallel between the power struggle over who would succeed Elizabeth I to the English throne and Macbeth's power struggle to claim the Scottish throne is clear.

Unlike Macbeth's accession to power, James VI's transition to power was relatively peaceful. Once in power, James I emphasized his hereditary right. The Act of Recognition made clear James I's stance on his hereditary title.[6] In doing so, James I emphasized both his hereditary right and the establishment of his own legacy. James I's inheritance of the English crown was not his inheritance of the Tudor legacy (much like Macbeth's inheritance of the Scottish crown is not his inheritance of Duncan's legacy). James I instead constructed his own Stuart legacy to legitimize his inheritance of the English crown as well as that of Scotland.[7] James I's emphasis on establishing his own legacy indicates his desire to extend his rule and influence beyond his individual reign. Inheriting the Tudor lineage would make James I part of someone else's original line, whereas establishing a Stuart lineage would make James I the founder of a new legacy. Macbeth's attempt to establish a legacy reflects Shakespeare's commentary on James I's move. But *Macbeth* cannot be reduced merely to this one, specific historical moment. The play itself is thinking through contemporary early modern political debates through the story of a medieval king.

Succession and the transition of power in *Macbeth* encompass a broader concern about the nature of sovereignty. Shakespeare's depiction of the instability in Macbeth's Scotland is, at its core, about the stable transition of power. But the questions of who succeeds and is fit to rule implicate the nature of sovereignty itself. The emphasis on Macbeth's violence and tyranny foregrounds the fear that an individual might attempt to exceed the body politic. The political concerns of *Macbeth*, then, are scalar because of the nature of the individual and the body politic. The individual represents a portion of the body politic, but the institution (in this case the monarchy) is an encompassing whole. Macbeth's concern with legacy is reflective of his concern with extending his

individual rule beyond temporal existence. Thus, the political is analogous to the temporal; the individual is to temporality as the institution is to eternity. Macbeth's tragedy lies in his attempt and ultimate failure to cross this scalar threshold; he is always bound by his scale.

From the moment of the Weird Sisters' prophecy, Macbeth is already thinking about the future and his political legacy. When the Weird Sisters disappear after their initial interaction with Macbeth and Banquo, Macbeth is the first to refer to the prophecy. The first thing that Macbeth says to Banquo about their prophetic greeting is in reference to Banquo's issue: "Your children shall be kings" (1.3.87).[8] It is significant that the part of the prophecy that Macbeth chooses to mention first is not about himself, but rather is about Banquo's issue—about his countryman's legacy. Banquo himself will not be king, but unlike Macbeth, Banquo has been promised a future. Macbeth is already thinking about the limits of his role as king; he will necessarily be bound to his time as ruler without the ability to extend his rule through a monarchical dynasty. All that Macbeth can achieve is a temporary hold on power, be it as king or thane. But a temporary hold on power is not a political achievement for Macbeth. He is always thinking about his future, and this is evident when Macbeth and Banquo realize that aspects of the prophecy are true. When Macbeth is informed by Ross that he is now the Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth realizes that one part of the prophecy is already fulfilled. All that remains is the kingship. Macbeth, ever future-minded, again refers to Banquo's issue: "Do you not hope your children shall be kings, / When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me / Promised no less to them?" (1.3.120-122). Macbeth cannot eagerly anticipate being named king because he knows that it will be a temporary rule. It is Banquo who will have a lasting legacy.

Despite knowing that his time and influence as king will be limited, Macbeth shows signs of a desire to rule. This desire is indicative of Macbeth's wish to seize control of the prophecy. Macbeth believes that if he can ensure the prophecy, then he can also prevent parts of the prophecy. In an early aside, Macbeth regards the prophecy as neutral: "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good" (1.3.132-133). The prophecy "cannot be ill" because it has given Macbeth "earnest of success / Commencing in

a truth" (1.3.134-135) by telling him that he is Thane of Cawdor. When Macbeth considers that the prophecy "cannot be good," however, he exhibits a murderous intent:

> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? (1.3.136-139)

The suggestion that Macbeth imagines is murder, for he cannot become king without Duncan's death. Macbeth's unfixed hair and erratically beating heart suggest that he fears the temptation to do evil. Indeed, while the Weird Sisters are giving the prophecy, Banquo notices Macbeth's discomfort and asks, "Good, sir, why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (1.3.52-53). From the moment he hears the prophecy, Macbeth cannot help but think about murder. For him to "yield to that suggestion" is to desire to take matters into his own hands. In the Weird Sisters' prophetic greeting to Macbeth, the only title yet to come is that of king. Macbeth at the moment of his encounter with the Weird Sisters is already the Thane of Cawdor, although he does not yet know it. But his kingship lies in the future: "All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter" (1.3.51). The title of king is the only one Macbeth can act to achieve. And if Macbeth can become king, then perhaps he can prevent Banquo's issue from becoming kings. Whatever the case, Macbeth must first work through his concerns about taking action. Though Macbeth has not yet suggested murder, that "horrid image" is already present in his imagination. His fears about the thought are so strong that they "[shake] so [his] single state of man / That function is smothered in surmise" (1.3.142-143). Macbeth claims that he cannot act because of his fear. Yet he professes that "[p]resent fears / Are less than horrible imaginings" (1.3.139-140). That is, Macbeth's fear about his temptation to murder Duncan is more terrifying than the act itself. While this reveals Macbeth's moral conflict, it also reveals his ambition because if the act is less terrifying, then Macbeth is more easily swayed to commit murder and more willing to yield to temptation to achieve political power. What, then, are the conditions of Macbeth's early inability to act?

Is Macbeth unable to act because of his conscience or because of his concerns about controlling fate? In other words, is Macbeth unable to act because his conscience tells him that murder is wrong?

Or is Macbeth unable to act because of a concern that should he take control of fate and rush the prophecy (an act that disrupts the institution), then so too could Banquo rush the prophecy of his children becoming kings (an act that shortens Macbeth's rule)? This distinction is important. In the former, Macbeth's morality and adherence to the institution is greater than his individual desire, whereas in the latter, he prioritizes his rule and legacy over the institution. If Banquo can act, Macbeth must prevent him from acting against him. In either case, Macbeth's present ambivalence about murder results in his relinquishing control to time and fate: "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir" (1.3.146-147). Donald W. Foster reads this short aside as a spur to regicide because if Macbeth is crowned king by chance, then he will have gained "[o]nly that which was foretold, a fruitless crown and barren sceptre. But he will have lost much."[9] Foster reads Macbeth as one who needs to "create *himself* as King, that he be crowned not passively by the hands of time and chance, but actively, by his own mortal hands" so that he is not "simply time's slave."[10] Though Foster's reading of him is compelling, it is unclear why Macbeth would not lose much even if he chooses to act. Even by acting to become king, Macbeth is nonetheless "time's slave" because he yields to the future promised by the prophecy. Macbeth's decision not to act is, instead, related to the psychological effects of the prophecy. The foreknowledge of the prophecy—that Macbeth will be king—results in evil that tempts him to commit regicide and the psychological undoing of himself as he wrestles with his imagination and reality: "nothing is, but what is not" (1.3.144). Leaving matters up to chance clears Macbeth's conscience should fate make him king. But if chance will not crown him, then perhaps chance will not crown Banquo's issue either. Leaving the prophecy to chance temporarily absolves Macbeth of the pressures of foreknowledge, particularly that of his failed legacy.

But this relief is fleeting: Macbeth cannot escape concerns about his legacy because the idea has already been planted. When he and Banquo meet Duncan, the king tells Macbeth, "I have begun to plant thee and will labor / To make thee full of growing" (1.4.28-29). Duncan has "begun to plant" Macbeth by naming him Thane of Cawdor. According to the logic of the prophecy, if

Duncan were to name Macbeth his heir, then Macbeth would be "full of growing." During the historical Macbeth's reign, Scotland was not a hereditary monarchy. Instead, Scotland practiced the Celtic system of tanistry, which allowed for an element of choice if several close relatives were eligible to succeed. As kinsman to Duncan, Shakespeare's Macbeth is as eligible as Malcolm is to succeed the king. But if Macbeth pinned his hopes on tanistry, those hopes are unfulfilled. Duncan instead names Malcolm his heir: "We will establish our estate upon / Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter / The Prince of Cumberland" (1.4.37-39). His choice of Malcolm as heir gestures to Scotland's gradual transition, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to a hereditary monarchy based on primogeniture.[11] Although Duncan promises that similar honors will be bestowed upon others—"But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine / On all deservers" (1.4.41-42)—these honors matter not because Macbeth desires that which has been bestowed upon Malcolm. Macbeth is now more inclined to fulfill the prophecy because of this unforeseen obstacle:

> The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
> On which I must fall down or else o'er-leap,
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires,
> Let not light see my black and deep desires;
> The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1.4.48-53)

To be king, Macbeth must either be named heir (i.e., Prince of Cumberland), or he must "o'er-leap" and give into his "black and deep desires"—murder. Since Malcolm has been named heir instead, Macbeth believes his only option is murder. But this decision does not resolve the question of why Macbeth would now choose to act, whereas before he would let "[c]ome what come may, / Time and the hour runs through the roughest day" (1.3.149-150).[12] Why does Macbeth not continue to wait for chance to crown him king?

Before Macbeth did not have to worry about Duncan establishing his legacy because there was always the chance that Macbeth could be named heir. Malcolm becomes an additional obstacle to Macbeth. Even though Malcolm is childless, Duncan has now set the precedent for a hereditary monarchy. Michael Hawkins argues that "Duncan attempts to impose not a hereditary

succession by primogeniture, but a *nominated* one: these are not identical even if the eldest son is nominated, since the whole point of nomination is that he need not be."[13] However, this overlooks the fact that in naming his son as heir, Duncan favors a patrilineal succession regardless of whether it is hereditary or nominated. Rebecca Lemon notes that the nomination of Malcolm satisfies both systems: "as both the nominated Prince of Cumberland and Duncan's son, Malcolm appears to satisfy two systems of inheritance: tanistry, the traditional, Scottish system of indirect inheritance, and primogeniture, the newer system based on direct succession."[14] Thus, Duncan's nomination of Malcolm attempts to move toward the later system. And if Duncan seeks to establish his legacy through Malcolm, then that prevents Macbeth from establishing his own. To do so, Macbeth would have to disrupt the pre-existing legacy, and such a disruption would show that he believes himself to be greater than the institution. This disruption and overshadowing of the institution is, in effect, an act of usurpation.[15] For the individual to be greater than the institution usurps it and the body politic as a whole.

Although the prophecy plants the seed, Macbeth's unfulfilled desires go beyond kingship. Indeed, he has no heir to carry out his legacy. While discussing their plan to murder Duncan, Lady Macbeth alludes to motherhood: "I have given suck and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (1.7.54-55). Whether the Macbeths ever had children is unclear; what is clear is that the babe she references is not a part of their lives.[16] Luke Wilson draws attention to how Macbeth "never directly complains about being childless, never thinks about how he might beget an heir."[17] As Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth, she should "[b]ring forth men-children only; / For [her] undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (1.7.72-74). Wilson argues that Macbeth "seems to see no relation between 'Bring forth men-children only' (1.7.72) and the idea that [Lady Macbeth] might bring forth his men-children, his heirs."[17] But why else would Macbeth focus on male children? Although his remark points to Lady Macbeth's masculine strengths and ambitions, Macbeth needs male heirs to extend his power through legacy. He cannot pass on his titles of Thane of Glamis and Thane of Cawdor because he has no sons who can succeed him. Yet, even greater than such legacy

is the Scottish throne. After Macbeth is crowned, his primary concern becomes the kingship, and his biggest threat is Banquo.

Banquo is threatening for two reasons; he knows about the prophecy, and he has a son. After the murder of Duncan, Banquo suspects Macbeth's wrongdoing: "Thou hast it now—King, Cawdor, Glamis, all / As the weird women promised, and I fear / Thou play'dst most foully for't" (3.1.1-3). Macbeth, however, does not fear Banquo's knowledge of the prophecy; nor does he suspect that his friend knows of his role in Duncan's murder. Instead, Macbeth focuses on Banquo's legacy: "They hailed him father to a line of kings" (3.1.60). Banquo is a threat not only because the prophecy states that his heirs will be kings, but also because Banquo already has a son. Macbeth's enemies are his enemies precisely because they are fathers and he is not, and this is especially the case with Banquo.[19] Macbeth says that "[t]here is none but [Banquo] / Whose being [he does] fear" (3.1.54-55), imposing his own ambitions onto Banquo. Macbeth dared to be king and acted upon that ambition. If Banquo desires the same for his heirs, then Macbeth fears that Banquo will take action, directly threatening Macbeth's life and power. While the prophecy does not state when Banquo's issue will be kings, Macbeth nonetheless fears this eventuality:

> Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
> And put a barren scepter in my grip,
> Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. (3.1.61-64)

The descriptions of a "fruitless crown" and a "barren scepter" indicate that Macbeth rages against the temporality of his rule. While "fruitless" and "barren" are markers of fertility, they also represent a promise of the future. Macbeth possesses no heirs: "no son of mine succeeding." Thus, Macbeth's crown is "fruitless" and his scepter is "barren" because without any heirs to succeed him, he will be unable to establish a political dynasty.[20] By leaping over Malcolm and murdering Duncan to become king, all Macbeth has succeeded in doing is making "the seeds of Banquo kings" (3.1.70). Even so, Macbeth retains the delusion that he can challenge the prophecy, evidenced by his desire for fate to come "into the list / And champion [him] to th'utterance" (3.1.71-72). Whether or

not Macbeth views fate as his champion, he hopes that he can overcome the part of the prophecy that foretells Banquo's legacy is.

Macbeth's desire to pick and choose what comes true from the prophecy is an oversight because it operates outside of his temporal scale, which is the present.[21] Prophecies mediate between temporality and divine truths in a way that makes them both accessible and inaccessible to the individual. Macbeth can thus try to speed up or prevent the prophecy because of its temporal nature, but foreknowledge is inaccessible because the future is unknown to the temporally bound. Macbeth's attempts to control the prophecy lead him to inadvertently yield to the prophecy. He acts to become king, thinking that he can prevent Banquo's heirs from achieving their legacies. Despite his orders for Banquo's and Fleance's murders, Macbeth cannot free himself from Banquo's issue. Banquo may be killed, but Fleance's escape guarantees Banquo's succession. As Sarah Wintle and René Weis suggest, "Children (or sons) not only guarantee a man's natural humanity, as they do for Banquo and Duncan and Macduff; they do this precisely because they also guarantee succession, the continuity of the human bond through time, both in the domestic family and in the state."[22] Macbeth, although initially distressed when he hears of Fleance's escape, comforts himself by proclaiming that "the worm that's fled / Hath nature that in time will venom breed, / No teeth for th' present" (3.4.30-32). Fleance is not a present threat and cannot yet put an abrupt end to Macbeth's temporal power. Macbeth rationalizes that he has time before Banquo's issue will be kings—time to establish his own legacy. Alternatively, Joseph Campana reads Macbeth's commitment to destroying Banquo and his heirs as a gesture that "is not merely one of self-preservation; rather, it seeks to destroy the unfolding futurity of paternity by which, ultimately, the sovereignty of a king extends into a dynasty."[23] This is true only insofar as the paternity which extends a king's sovereignty references only Banquo. If Macbeth seeks to destroy another king's extension of sovereignty, it is because he desires to establish his own dynastic succession.

Macbeth's reaction to the dumbshow of Banquo's issue that the Weird Sisters show him suggests that he is concerned with preventing the futurity of others. His agonized reaction stems from the realization that whatever he does, he cannot escape the prophecy:

> Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo. Down!
> Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs! And thy heir,
> Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first.
> A third is like the former. –Filthy hags,
> Why do you show me this? –A fourth! Start, eyes!
> What, will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom?
> Another yet? A seventh! I'll see no more.
> And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
> Which shows me many more; and some I see
> That two-fold balls and treble scepters carry.
> Horrible sight! Now I see 'tis true,
> For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me,
> And points at them for his. (4.1.111-123)

The line "will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom" is especially telling. Life is necessarily temporal; there is a beginning and an end. The same is true for positions of power, such as the title of king. An individual's reign has a beginning and an end. But the kingship, the institution, exists beyond the individual, and for a legacy to last until the "crack of doom" is to get as close to eternity (within the bounds of temporality) as possible. And it is not just that Macbeth sees Banquo's issue one by one. As Douglas Burnham notes, "Macbeth sees all the Stuart kings in the mirror *at the same time*. This is a preordained time – a time that, even from within it, is *sub specie aeternitatis*."[24] The preordained time of Banquo's issue is represented in relation to the eternal. Unlike Banquo, Macbeth is, for Burnham, in exile himself. Macbeth is exiled from eternity because he cannot establish a legacy. The apparitions remind him, in fact, that he has no future, and he cannot bear to see Banquo's legacy when he has none. As Wintle and Weis argue, "All these children, and descendants, bloody or not, cruelly emphasize the fruitlessness of Macbeth's predicament, the fact that his childlessness ensures that his achievement has no future. The visions themselves represent the future, that future which Macbeth has tried in vain to make for himself, but in this play making the future legitimately depends on the making of children."[25] If Macbeth's achievement (i.e., murdering Duncan to become king) promises no future, then what is the point? Macbeth is satisfied neither with his reign nor the confines of the present. It is at this point where time and life lose all meaning for Macbeth because he

knows that he cannot escape the bounds of temporality. He knows that without a future all that he possesses has no meaning.

Despite this meaninglessness, the only thing Macbeth can do is hold onto the power that he has. Thus, he acts to prevent the prophesies from coming true. This is clear in his dealings with Macduff. Macduff is suspicious of Macbeth from the beginning. Upon the discovery of Duncan's murder, Macbeth kills Duncan's chamberlains and claims that he did so out of "fury" (2.3.103). Macduff is the only one to question Macbeth's actions and demand an explanation: "Wherefore did you so?" (2.3.105). Macduff's obvious suspicion of Macbeth continues when he does not go to Scone to see Macbeth invested; rather, he claims that he will go home to Fife. Macduff's unstated rebuke is repeated when he chooses not to attend Macbeth's celebratory banquet. Noting his absence, Macbeth asks Lady Macbeth, "How say'st thou that Macduff denies his person / At our great bidding?" (3.4.130-132). These are two public instances where Macduff refuses to support Macbeth. Instead, Macduff flees to England to solicit Malcolm's aid. Despite this and Macbeth's earlier worry that they "have scorched the snake, not killed it" (3.2.13)—that they are safe from enemies—Macbeth does not take action until the Weird Sisters warn him to beware Macduff. Yet the actions he takes are against Macduff's issue:

> The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
> Seize upon Fife, give to th'edge o'th' sword
> His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
> That trace him in his line. (4.1.149-152)

Macduff is in England, so Macbeth harms all "[t]hat trace [Macduff] in his line." Margaret Omberg notes Macbeth's decision to murder Macduff's issue: "Yet the ruthlessness of these murders seems out of proportion to Macduff's offence or the threat he poses, particularly as he had no claim to the throne. Seen in the context of Macbeth's preoccupation with his own childlessness, however, his revenge on Macduff is more understandable and has been well prepared for during the first two scenes of Act IV."[26] Key to Omberg's reading is that the young Macduff is "murdered on stage, accentuating the priority of disposing of the heir, while Lady Macduff is killed off-stage … [This] is a visual manifestation of Macbeth's uncontrollable fury of his own barrenness which will

mean the extinction of his own line."[27] Macbeth tyrannically lashes out against his inability to produce heirs by attacking those who have children. By doing so, Macbeth's tyranny transcends temporal bounds; tyrants become enemies of the future. Stephen Greenblatt argues that "[t]yranny attempts to poison not merely the present but generations to come, to extend itself forever."[28] Nowhere is this more true in Shakespeare's plays than in ones where tyrants target children to prevent sovereign succession, as is the case in *Macbeth*. Macbeth's attacks on his enemies are actions against the future. But like a king's reign, a tyrant's reign is temporal. Even tyranny is a temporary transcendence of temporality; Macbeth's tyrannical actions in the present target the future, but once he is gone he is unable to target the future. That is, Macbeth's tyranny ends with his defeat.

Thus, the more that Macbeth resists the prophecy, the more meaningless does life itself (and thus the future) become. Once Macbeth is informed that the English forces are upon him, he displays signs of inner defeat:

> I have lived long enough. My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have, but in their stead,
> Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath,
> Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not. (5.3.22-28)

Macbeth knows that his time is coming to an end. His only legacy is a cursed one for he will forever be known as a tyrant. From regicide and withholding Malcolm's political birthright to the murders of Banquo and Macduff's wife and children, Macbeth's crimes against the people and the state are tyrannical and unjust. Scotland is a "suffering country / Under a hand accursed" (3.1.49-50). Macbeth describes the people's curses as "not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath," or whispers, and he claims that "the poor heart would fain deny and dare not." Although he recognizes that he is viewed as a tyrant, Macbeth contends that fear will keep them at bay. His tyranny is, instead, met with resistance, and the people's support of Malcolm demonstrates a commitment to justice. When Malcolm claims he would be a greater tyrant than Macbeth, Macduff

proclaims: "These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself / Have banished me from Scotland" (4.3.113-114). Macduff flees tyranny to resist it. Macbeth's continued tyranny is thus unquestionable, and he fears both failing to establish a legacy and being remembered as the tyrant he has become.

Cursed with the reputation of a tyrant and unable to achieve a political legacy deeply trouble Macbeth. Life becomes meaningless because Macbeth realizes that his attempts to transcend the bounds of his temporal scale are, and always have been, futile:

> Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
> Signifying nothing. (5.5.19-28)

Life is "but a walking shadow" in the grand scheme of "the stage," or the entire stretch of time. Similarly, the king's rule is a "walking shadow" in the grand scheme of the institution. Macbeth's time as king is limited to the "hour upon the stage, / And then is heard no more." Whereas another king may have successors to inherit the "hour upon the stage," Macbeth does not. Macbeth's lack of heirs means that the hour cannot be repeated. An heir would enable Macbeth to repeat the hour in name. Thus, his tale of being king is "full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing" because his rule cannot constitute the start of a monarchical dynasty.[29] The "sound and fury" of Macbeth's reign are his tyrannical attempts to establish a legacy in spite of the prophecy and the well-being of the body politic. Because Macbeth fails, his attempts signify nothing because they do nothing to extend the future. It is not just "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" that "creeps in this petty pace from day to day, / To the last syllable of recorded time." It is also kings that creep in from reign to reign, to the end of monarchy or to the end of time. The issue for Macbeth is that it will not be his heirs that creep in from reign to reign; it will be those of Banquo.

In the end, it is not Macbeth who wins, but time. The more he tries to control the prophecy, the more he guarantees its complete

fulfillment. When they meet on the battlefield, Macduff tells Macbeth that he will live on to be remembered as the tyrant that he is:

> Then yield thee, coward,
> And live to be the show and gaze o'th' time.
> We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
> Painted upon a pole and underwrit,
> 'Here may you see the tyrant'. (5.7.53-57)

Macbeth's desire to transcend both his temporal and political scalar bounds ends with Macbeth's curse: he will be "the show and gaze o'th' time." Rather than transcending temporality's bounds, Macbeth will permanently be confined by them. The cruelty of time that Macbeth has thus far experienced is the condition of temporality and his inability to establish a successive legacy. The cruelty of time that Macduff promises is that Macbeth will forever be known as a tyrant. Macbeth's response that "[he] will not yield / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet, / And to be baited with the rabble's curse" (5.7.57-59) is indicative of his desire to prevent the tyrannical reputation that Macduff promises. Despite all odds, Macbeth "will try the last" (5.7.62) to delay this fate. When Macbeth inevitably falls, Macduff enters holding his severed head, proclaiming: "[t]he time is free" (5.7.85). The time is free because Macbeth can no longer inflict his limited temporality onto all others. The time is free because the political system is free. Macbeth's inability to create a legacy of hereditary succession proves disruptive. As Malcolm Smuts notes, "Uncertain rules of succession are disruptive because they disrupt the bonds that connect societies to the past and the future, rendering political achievements transient and futile".[30] Indeed, this disruption usurps the political system. When Macbeth disrupts the transference of power, he destabilizes Scottish monarchy itself. Rhodri Lewis notes that it is not until Macbeth's defeat that he is referred to as a usurper: "Macbeth is thus recast as a 'usurper,' not because his election was illegitimate or because he murdered Duncan, but because he has interfered with what is now implied to be the naturally patrilineal succession of the crown from father to eldest son."[31] He attempts to prevent, in other words, a monarchical dynasty.

Although Macbeth's defeat frees Scotland from tyranny, his disruption of the political system leaves open the question

of Scotland's future. Alisa Manninen argues that "the lineages of the play remained focused on disturbances, not natural continuities."[32] Macbeth's tyranny has disrupted the future lineages of the remaining characters. Macduff is left without a wife and children. Malcolm will indeed be crowned king, but Malcolm, like Macbeth before him, has no sons. Moreover, Malcolm's lineage will necessarily be disturbed because it is Banquo's issue that will reign. David Scott Kastan notes the uncomfortable ending of reestablishing sovereignty through Duncan's lineage and argues that *Macbeth* "at once demonizes the disruption of 'lawfull discent' and seemingly insists upon it, valorizes the concept of legitimacy and discloses its instability."[33] Alternatively, Philip Goldfarb Styrt reads Scotland's future in a positive light and focuses on Malcolm's political reforms: "Malcolm's reforms represent a change in the political structure of Scotland that promises an internal Scottish solution to the troubles that have plagued the country under kings both good (Duncan) and bad (Macbeth)."[34] Styrt focuses on how the transformation of thanes into earls helps develop feudalism in Scotland, and he argues that the potential for tyranny is reduced by strengthening the nobility. Malcolm's new earls are "hereditary lords, with full power over their lands and the freedom to know that their heirs will inherit after them."[35] Moreover, all earls would be bound to counsel the king, which "decreases the degree to which the fate of Scotland lies in the hands of the king alone and increases the collective power of the former thanes."[36] Although the introduction of counsel is a compelling argument in favor of increased stability, what promises that this change to the political system in Scotland will be successful and peaceful? Shakespeare's plays are full of tyranny and violence despite the counsel of (indeed, often with help from) the nobility. Why is Malcolm any different than, for example, Richard II, whose poor counselors do not mitigate tyranny? While Malcolm's reforms may very well eliminate tyranny, the play's ending is ambiguous. Much more compelling, then, is Alisa Manninen's reading of the continued disturbances in *Macbeth*: "The play ends as it began, with the killing of a thane of Cawdor and the granting of new titles to loyal nobility. These strategies failed to contain Macbeth's treason."[37] This is not to say, however, that the play's Scotland will be plagued by tyranny. Kastan's reading of the duality of the

ending (which demonizes descent and valorizes sovereignty) best points to the ambiguity of Scotland's future. Although the promise of James I's rule and relative stability is realized in Shakespeare's present, the violent disruptions of lineal succession in *Macbeth* are not easily resolved. The play thus ends with an emphasis on the precariousness of sovereignty.

The political is scalar because of its relation to the temporal. The individual and the institution are analogous to temporality and eternity. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, these scalar operations are disrupted. Macbeth's desire to establish a dynasty at the expense of all others, including the institution itself, is his attempt to break free from his scalar bounds. Macbeth aims to place himself in a mock eternity—an existence outside of temporality—where he will reign and establish a legacy, while simultaneously reducing everyone else to temporality. But in doing so, Macbeth seeks to become larger than the whole—the body politic. The issue is not that Macbeth cannot establish a successive legacy. The issue is that because Macbeth cannot do so, he seeks to prevent others from doing so as well. The former is Macbeth's tragedy, whereas the latter is his tyranny. His tyranny is the disruption of a temporal, political process. He disrupts the succession of Malcolm, and in doing so, disrupts the institution itself. The instability of Macbeth's rule seeks to prevent the succession of all political or hereditary positions in an attempt to reduce everyone to the individual and the temporal. By disrupting succession, Macbeth seeks to prevent it. Such a disruption is chaotic because it breaks the socio-political bonds that exist across time. Indeed, Macbeth seeks to prevent those bonds from forming in the first place. But as the rebellion against Macbeth shows, no individual is greater than the body politic. Macbeth may have a fruitless crown and a barren sceptre, but Scotland itself does not.

## Notes

1. *Macbeth* is generally believed to have been first performed in 1606; James VI of Scotland was crowned James I of England in 1603. For more context, see Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson, "*Macbeth*, the Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 47.2 (2007): 380.

2. Susan Doran, and Paulina Kewes, "Introduction: A Historiographical Perspective," in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (Manchester:

Manchester University Press, 2014), 4. Though these rival claims were problematic, due to religion, foreignness, gender, or experience, they nonetheless had some stake of legitimacy that threatened James VI's claim. See the rest of *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England* for more context.

3. James VI needed Elizabeth's explicit endorsement and the confirmation of parliament "to be sure of the crown." Doran and Kewes, "Introduction: A Historiographical Perspective," 5.

4. Elizabeth I distrusted James VI. Withholding official recognition of James VI as her heir was a tactic Elizabeth I employed to keep James VI in line if his Scottish policies appeared to be against English interests. Moreover, the uncertainty regarding her succession would keep her subjects loyal to her as opposed to the heir. Doran and Kewes, "Introduction: A Historiographical Perspective," 5.

5. Arthur Bradley, "Untimely Ripped: Macbeth's Children," in *Unbearable Life: A Genealogy of Political Erasure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 74.

6. The Act of Recognition reaffirmed James I's lawful and, importantly, undoubtful, succession to the English throne, which James I himself emphasized in his first speech to parliament in March 1604. Doran and Kewes, "Introduction: A Historiographical Perspective," 12.

7. James I's Stuart legacy was "a constructed mythology of an ancient and noble lineage, similar to the Arthurian lineage embraced by the Tudors." Alker and Nelson, "Macbeth, the Jacobean Scot, and the Politics of the Union," 392.

8. All quotations from *Macbeth* are from William Shakespeare, *Macbeth, The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 2709-2774.

9. Donald W. Foster, "Macbeth's War on Time," *English Literary Renaissance* 16.2 (1986): 328.

10. Foster, "Macbeth's War on Time," 328.

11. Malcolm Smuts, "Banquo's Progeny: Hereditary Monarchy, the Stuart Lineage, and Macbeth," in *Renaissance Historicism: Essays in Honor of Arthur F. Kinney*, ed. James M. Dutcher and Anne Lake Prescott (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 227.

12. In addition to not being named heir, Macbeth may here already be showing concern with his lack of issue: "Though it does appear logical that if he is to be the new king, Duncan's heir is an obvious obstacle, there is something more sinister in his cry 'The Prince of Cumberland!' (I, iv, 350). Macbeth is likewise a nobleman of Scotland, and yet he does not have an heir." Milena Kaličanin, and Nina Miladinović, "Moral Corruption in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," *Belgrade English Language and Literature Studies* 11 (2019): 218.

13. Michael Hawkins, "History, Politics, and Macbeth," in F*ocus on Macbeth*, ed. John Russell Brown (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 175.

14. Rebecca Lemon, "Scaffolds of Treason in *Macbeth*," *Theatre Journal* 54.1 (2002): 39.

15. Macbeth does not usurp Duncan (or Malcolm) because he is officially elected to the throne, thus his title of king is legitimate. But Macbeth's disruption

of Duncan's lineage is a usurpation because it is Macbeth's attempt to be greater than the political institution.

16. Though the child in question may be Lady Macbeth's son (who is referenced in Holinshed's Chronicles) from a previous marriage, Malcolm Smuts points to the significance of Shakespeare's decision not to refer to this son elsewhere: "by suppressing any other reference to this son, Shakespeare leaves open the possibility that the Macbeths have lost a child, causing maternal feelings to become twisted into a fierce ambition tinged with rage." Smuts, "Banquo's Progeny: Hereditary Monarchy, the Stuart Lineage, and Macbeth," 240. Though Smuts only analyzes Lady Macbeth's lines, Macbeth's response, "bring forth men-children only," is equally reflective of ambition tinged with, if not rage, then obsession. Macbeth's desire for only male children is reflective of his obsessive desire to establish a political legacy through a hereditary monarchical system.

17. Luke Wilson, "*Macbeth* and the Contingency of Future Persons," Shakespeare Studies 40 (2012): 55.

18. Wilson, "*Macbeth* and the Contingency of Future Persons," 56.

19. Macbeth's principal murder targets are all fathers or sons: "The structure of the play shows Macbeth constantly coming up against one father/son combination after another." Margaret Omberg, "Macbeth's Barren Sceptre," *Studia Neophilologica: A Journal of Germanic and Romanic Philology* 68 (1996): 40.

20. Holinshed's Chronicles makes explicit in the Weird Sisters' prophecy that Macbeth will never "leave anie issue behind him to succeed in his place." Omberg, "Macbeth's Barren Sceptre," 40.

21. Prophecy itself is a different scale: "In *Macbeth*, prophetic discourse instead presumes the ability to access a third order of time, situated at some point between history and the all-seeing verities of the divine." Rhodri Lewis, "Polychronic *Macbeth*," *Modern Philology* 117.3 (2020): 336.

22. Sarah Wintle, and René Weis, "*Macbeth* and the Barren Sceptre," *Essays in Criticism* XLI.2 (1991): 133.

23. Joseph Campana, "The Child's Two Bodies: Shakespeare, Sovereignty, and The End of Succession," *ELH* 81.3 (2014): 830.

24. Douglas Burnham, "Language, Time, and Politics in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," in *Displaced Persons: Conditions of Exile in European Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2002), 32.

25. Wintle and Weis, "*Macbeth* and the Barren Sceptre," 133.

26. Omberg, "Macbeth's Barren Sceptre," 40.

27. Omberg, "Macbeth's Barren Sceptre," 40.

28. Stephen Greenblatt, "The Instigator," in *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 106.

29. Foster reads Macbeth as expressing "no desire to have his story told, for it seems a tale told by an idiot. He would not have the moment of his greatness reduced to a flickering shadow-show for generations to come." Foster, "Macbeth's War on Time," 340. Foster's claim that Macbeth would dislike these imitations of immortality overlooks the fact that what those imitations would signify is tyranny. It is not that Macbeth would not have his "moment of greatness reduced to a flickering shadow-show"—it is that Macbeth does not have a moment of

greatness. Macbeth desires his story to be told through a dynastic, political legacy, but this escapes him. His political tale is that of a tyrant, and it is one he does not wish to be imitated for generations to come.

30. Smuts, "Banquo's Progeny: Hereditary Monarchy, the Stuart Lineage, and *Macbeth*," 243. Smuts also notes that Shakespeare "underline[s] the profoundly temporal nature of political processes, the idea that although sudden violence may achieve power, settled authority and peaceful kingdoms are always products of history." Smuts, "Banquo's Progeny: Hereditary Monarchy, the Stuart Lineage, and *Macbeth*," 243 (emphasis added). "Settled authority and peaceful kingdoms" are products of time because time is a framework for history.

31. Lewis, "Polychronic *Macbeth*," 344.

32. Alisa Manninen, "Tragedy of State: *Macbeth*," in *The Genres of Renaissance Tragedy*, eds. Daniel Cadman, Andrew Duxfield, and Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 79.

33. David Scott Kastan, "*Macbeth* and the 'Name of King,'" in *Shakespeare After Theory*, 1st ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 169.

34. Philip Goldfarb Styrt, "*Macbeth*, Thanes and Medieval Scottish Feudalism," in *Shakespeare's Political Imagination: The Historicism of Setting* (Bloomsbury: The Arden Shakespeare, 2022), 50.

35. Styrt ,"*Macbeth*, Thanes and Medieval Scottish Feudalism," 59.

36. Styrt, "*Macbeth*, Thanes and Medieval Scottish Feudalism," 60.

37. Manninen, "Tragedy of State: *Macbeth*," 80.

UNDERGRADUATE PAPER

# Conquest of Land and Bodies: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Salma Naciri
Ted University

In this paper, I study William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) from environmental and postcolonial perspectives. I will analyze Shakespeare's play as a means to discuss such concepts as anthropocentrism, agency, ecophobia, speciesism, and ecological imperialism, which inherently culminate in postcolonial ecocriticism. I argue that *The Tempest* emphasizes the repercussions of colonial endeavors on humans, other beings and nature, by delineating the violent relationships that arise from conflicts, and the risks of controlling the environment. This paper also emphasizes that the play does not simply reflect colonial and environmental anxieties but actively critiques them. While many scholars have explored its engagement with anthropocentrism, speciesism, and ecological imperialism, this study builds on these foundations to emphasize two key aspects: first, the ambiguous identity of Caliban and the implications for both racism and speciesism, and second, the play's nuanced portrayal of nature as not inherently dangerous but manipulated by human intervention for political gain. By foregrounding these aspects, *The Tempest* emerges not only as a commentary on colonial exploitation, but also as a prophetic warning about environmental destruction.

*The Tempest* offers a commentary on the conquests and discoveries that were becoming increasingly popular at its time, dealing with political themes that reflect its historical context.

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 171-181

ISSN: 1539-5758

It was written around a time when journeys from England to America, especially Virginia, were taking place. The story of the play bears remarkable similarities to the voyages of explorers in the Renaissance, borrowing many elements from common European narratives of the period, such as shipwreck, ambiguous geographical setting, and the association of newly found lands with magic and savagery. Throughout the text, there are references to the trips of English explorers to new destinations, especially to the American continent. Indeed, historians have found similarities between the text of the play and historical manuscripts written by English explorers in the Renaissance. Charles Frey explains that the play's title and its events, such as the natural disasters are inspired by accounts of real voyages.[1] He also adds that, "there is good reason to believe that Shakespeare had read or heard of Magellan's encounter with the Patagonanians who worshipped Setebos."[2] These similarities manifest in the events that occur in the play such as the storm and shipwreck, as well as in certain linguistic choices. Caliban mentions the god Setebos, and compares Prospero to him: "His art is of such power, / It would control my dam's god Setebos" (1.2.367–368). Ariel also mentions Bermuda, then known as "Bermoothes": "Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew / From the still-vexed Bermoothes" (1.2.246–247). These details suggest that Shakespeare may have read the manuscripts written by voyagers of the time. Therefore, the play reflects the shift in English awareness and perception of the new world, which was the result of the voyages. This information is crucial since it suggests that the play cannot be read outside of its early colonial context. It might be set in an imaginary place, and it is sometimes performed as a solely magical play. Yet it is very political, as it mirrors the unfolding colonial process at the time.

However, the play transcends a merely descriptive role. It also hints at anxieties about the possible outcome of the discoveries. In "Discourse and the Individual," Meredith Anne Skura declares that, "if the play is 'colonialist,' it must be seen as 'prophetic' rather than descriptive."[3] Indeed, *The Tempest* emphasizes the problematic aspects of discovery and conquest as it points out the conflicts and violence that ensue because of a power struggle over land and property. To state this somewhat differently, while the play does show the adventurous side of the prospect of finding a new land,

it also sheds light on the colonial impact by highlighting the clash of interests between Prospero and Caliban. It is this second aspect of the play that shapes the main arguments of this paper, reflecting the power struggle over possession of land and nature and attitudes towards the nonhuman.

The characterization of Prospero and Caliban, their interactions, and their conversations with one another reveal the nature of their conflict. Both claim to have the right to rule the island. On one hand, Caliban views himself as rightful ruler of the island, which he inherited from his mother. Caliban exclaims, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother" (1.1.333). On the other hand, Prospero sees himself as the legitimate owner of the island and its creatures because he conquered it after the death of Sycorax. To illustrate, when Prospero plans to leave, he still views the island and Caliban as his: "…This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.277–278). Thus, from the beginning of the play, the main conflict stirs up a chain of aggression and hatred, revolving around the ownership of nature and land. Nature is seen by both Caliban and Prospero as an object to possess from the moment they set foot in it. If we consider Caliban as human, then we can say that both he and Prospero perceive nature through anthropocentric lenses. They both seek to acquire land and exert control over it, viewing themselves as the centre of the world and the island as a non-agentic body that needs ruling. This raises the issue of human and nonhuman agency in the play.

Much western scholarship considers humans superior. It posits that humans have the right to dominate other beings and parts of the ecosystem because rationality makes them agentic. Other "bodies" are considered irrational and thus inferior because their lack of rational thinking disqualifies them from being "equal" to humans. They do not think, have no intention, and hence no agency. As a result, they become property to humans, who can use them in whatever way they choose. This reasoning is what makes Prospero view himself as the owner of all he encounters. He deems everything on the island, living and non-living as his rightful property, including the island, Caliban, and Ariel. From his perspective, his magic and knowledge give him agency that makes his power legitimate. Although he is aware that the island has powers, he sees them as his to regulate. Therefore, Prospero

never questions his right to rule over the island's natural landscape. This attitude can be seen in his tone and word choice when he speaks to Ariel: "Thou, and thy meaner fellows, your last service / Did worthily perform. And I must use you / In such another trick" (4.1. 35–37). When spirits do his bidding, Prospero takes credit, revelling in his power to control nature. In other words, he sees himself as the center of the "ecosystem" and the puppeteer of the actions of inferior beings.

Caliban is not so different. Prospero may not consider him a real human and therefore not a match for him, as perhaps his mother was. Yet, Caliban's self-awareness leads to his awareness that he is as good as Prospero and that he too has the agency that entitles him to possess the island. Caliban has the "human" qualities that Prospero has, and so he too can possess nature. For instance, he points out that Miranda taught him language: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (1.2. 364–366). This linguistic ability is crucial in terms of agency, which are directly associated with rationality and the right to rule. Stephen Greenblatt explains the power of Caliban's curse: "Ugly, rude, savage, Caliban nevertheless achieves for an instant an absolute if intolerably bitter moral victory."[4] By learning the human colonizer's speech, Caliban proves that he too is capable of agency and exerting power. Hence, Caliban uses his master's tools to rebel.

Caliban learns language from Prospero, but his values and thinking have always aligned with Prospero's in his tendency to conquer nature, a tendency that Sycorax has before Prospero arrives at the island. Although, she is only mentioned a few times in the play, she uses her magic to control the creatures and elements of the island. This underlines that there is little difference between the European colonizer and the indigenous characters in how they treat and perceive nature. Both see it as a space to carry out their political intentions. This breaks the binary of colonizer/colonized by introducing nature as a space to be exploited by both. It also implies an innate tendency of humans (or human-like beings) to dominate other creatures such as animals and plants.

In the play, what the modern reader would classify as the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized creates the

power struggle between Prospero and Caliban. Both aspire to possess the island and its resources. But while Caliban is a colonized character, the play does not present him as indigenous because his mother does not originate from the island. She is Algerian and that in itself introduces colonial undertones to the play because of the Eurocentric view towards Africans. For example, Sebastian criticizes his brother Alonso for marrying his daughter to an African prince: "That would not bless our Europe with your daughter, / But rather lose her to an African" (2.1.119–120). This implies that Sebastian views Africans as inherently inferior and raises the spectre of European hostility toward Africa. However, the relationship between Sycorax, who once ruled the island, and Prospero, the European colonizer, becomes a reminder that none are indigenous to the island. This leaves Caliban and Prospero on an equal footing. Neither strictly belongs on the island, and yet both seek to control it.

The play highlights the atrocities that result from this struggle. The graphic language that Shakespeare uses to describe how Prospero enslaves and tortures Caliban is repulsive. For instance, Prospero threatens Caliban, "I'll rack thee with old cramps / Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar" (1.2.370–371). This word choice calls attention to the gruesome actions of Prospero who would do anything to wield power over Caliban. In retaliation, Caliban tries to rape Miranda, Prospero's daughter. His overtly sexual and aggressive manner makes it hard to sympathize with him. Indeed, there are racist and speciesist implications in his portrayal. Neither Prospero nor Caliban is represented in a good light. This showcases how their conflict over the right to rule makes them act monstrously. Their portrayals show how conquest leads to violent and atrocious clashes with the previous "owners" of newly found lands. This violence starts a vicious circle that harms everyone in the play. Caliban is enslaved, and Miranda lives in fear. In other words, conquest creates hatred that leaves no one safe.

The dynamics of relationships throughout the play also reveal how colonialism works. This involves not only Prospero and Caliban but most of the characters as well. In fact, when Prospero first arrives on the island, he not only enslaves Caliban, but also Ariel. Although he begins by rescuing Ariel from Sycorax, Prospero then uses the spirit as his servant. When Ariel demands liberty, Prospero

threatens him by saying: "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak / And Peg thee in his knotty entails till / Thou has howled away twelve winters" (1.2.295–297). This incident is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that even though Ariel, who is indigenous to the island, is not tortured by Prospero, he still craves freedom. He seems, in fact, exasperated with constant servitude to Prospero, which could imply that grudge and fear lurk beneath his flattery of Prospero. This hints that there are incentives for a looming conflict between Ariel and Prospero although Prospero deters it through threats. Hence, the relationship between Prospero and Ariel is not one of mutual trust but one of fear and enslavement. Caliban is not the only victim of Prospero's conquest, because Ariel is similarly deprived of free will and self-determination. Second, the dynamics between Ariel and Prospero delineate how Prospero views the beings under his control. He subordinates Ariel, believing he has every right to use this native spirit. Prospero uses similar language with Caliban when he is angry. He does not harm Ariel because he needs his obedience to carry out his revenge scheme. Yet, Prospero sees him as a being lacking agency. No matter how impressive the spirit's magical powers are, they are no match for Prospero's rationality. Thus, like the island, Ariel is property to be used to advance Prospero's political plans.

In the play, speciesism is manifested through Prospero's perception of Ariel. Prospero's readiness to punish Ariel in cruel ways shows how the latter's service constitutes slavery because it demands total obedience. But despite Ariel's fear, Prospero views him as a joyful and lovely spirit as long as the spirit does not demand his rights and follows Prospero's rules. Ariel is like a lapdog despite his powers, and if he decides to start thinking for himself, he will be vilified and punished. This also connotes a hierarchy between humans and other forms of life, be they witch, spirit, animal, or plant. Just like the land itself, spirits also fall into the domain of the nonhuman, so are easily dominated.

Speciesism is even clearer in the play in the representation of Caliban. The characterization of Caliban is infused with nuanced racism and speciesism merged together. Indeed, Caliban's identity is ambiguous. Miranda describes his nature: "But thy vile race, / Though thou didst learn, had that in't which / good natures / Could not abide to be with" (1.2. 358–361). Caliban

is the son of an African witch, not a European. He is also not "human-looking," possibly because of the common belief that witches had relations with devils. Skura explains that Caliban's identity is highly ambivalent; whether he is a human of indigenous origins or a nonhuman demonic being is heavily debated among Shakespeare scholars. She addresses how various adaptations play with Caliban's identity: "[There exist]. . . not only contemporary post-colonial versions in which Caliban is a Virginian Indian but also others in which Caliban is played as a black slave or as "missing link" (in a costume "half monkey, half coco-nut")."[5] Caliban's identity and image thus remain confusing, which opens up discussions about his pejorative portrayal. While the reasons for his nonhuman appearance are unclear, his physical identity certainly contributes to his inferiority in the play, which suggests racism and speciesism. He is represented as neither white nor fully human. If the human, and especially the European, is made the norm and the basis for superiority, Caliban's ambiguous identity places him at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. While he is often framed as an indigenous figure subjugated by Prospero, his characterization also reflects a deeper speciesist bias. Indeed, he is frequently referred to in bestial terms, with his physicality marked as monstrous and nonhuman.

This dehumanization aligns with historical colonial practices, where non-European peoples were often depicted as being closer to animals than to their European colonizers. Caliban is certainly represented as exotic. Trinculo suggests taking him back to Europe for a freak show: "Were I in England now (as once I was), and had but this fish! / painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece / of silver. There would this monster make a man" (2.2.27–29). Indeed, freak shows were part of colonialism as Africans and other indigenous people were represented as abnormal. Many scholars claim that the descriptive language Shakespeare uses for Caliban is a proof that the play has colonial insinuations and perhaps a speciesist agenda. For example, Paul Brown shows how certain details are added in the play to label Caliban as the villainous other, including his sexuality and inability to govern the island. Brown suggests that "the other is here presented to legitimate the seizure of power by civility and to define by antithesis (rape) the proper course of civil courtship."[6] Greenblatt

also describes the "othering" of Caliban. He claims: "Shakespeare does not shrink from the darkest European fantasies about the Wild Man; indeed, he exaggerates them: Caliban is deformed, lecherous, evil-smelling. . ."[7] However, I argue that Caliban is given a voice from the beginning to defend himself and curse Prospero. He is certainly not an angel, nor does the play show him as a complete victim of oppression. Yet, he is not a villain either since his loneliness and legitimate anger over Prospero's enslavement are emphasized. In fact, Caliban's portrayal might carry some positive aspects as well. Skura argues: "Shakespeare was [the] first to show one of *us* mistreating a native, the first to represent the inside, the first to allow a native to complain onstage, and the first to make that New World encounter problematic enough to generate the current attention to the play."[8] Thus, the portrayal of Caliban reveals nuanced racism and speciesism at work in the process of colonialism. He might be villainous, but he is given a space to justify his actions as responses to torture and enslavement. In this way, the play holds a mirror up to the darker aspects of oppression and conquest inherent in the colonial enterprise. In short, the play's nuanced treatment of Caliban suggests a more complex and critical view of colonial dynamics than many critics have acknowledged.

Moreover, the portrayal of nature in *The Tempest* raises questions about ecophobia. Ecophobia in literary works can be seen in the language used to describe nature and in the role nature plays in relation to human characters. The play explores how humans and especially colonizers perceive the environment. Prospero develops his powers by controlling nature, and other characters such as Sebastian and Gonzalo express a desire to possess the island once they land on it. Gonzalo says: "Had I plantation of this isle, my lord–" (2.1.140), and then proceeds to describe a fantasy of ruling over it. Nature is not seen by human characters as an active force but as a commodity for personal gain. Just like Caliban and Ariel are perceived as lacking agency and are therefore available for colonization, so too is nature treated, as its resources are exhausted by the white men who deem agentless and available for exploitation. This implies that colonialism enslaves not only individuals but also the environment: constituting ecological imperialism. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin highlight the ideas of ecofeminist thinker Val Plumwood, arguing that ecological

imperialism becomes "forms of instrumental reason that view nature and the animal 'other' as being either external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to them, and thus an endlessly replenishable resource."[9] Consequently, the environment as well as the body of the other are exhausted in colonial pursuits. Similarly, Prospero exploits Ariel, Caliban, other spirits and the land itself to achieve his political schemes. In line with Huggan and Tiffin's discussions, the island is considered to be "meaningful" only when it is populated with humans. Accordingly, Prospero considers it unpopulated after he has subdued Sycorax. He says: "Then was this island / (Save for the son that she did litter here, / A freckled whelp, hag-born) not honored with / A human shape" (1.2. 282–284). Nature is honored by human presence and considered empty when no walks in it. This establishes the power hierarchy in the play, at the bottom of which lies nature in the form of the island.

*The Tempest* reflects its environmental context, in the same manner that it reflects the political one. Namely, the play uses its context as an inspiration for events, and then it adds nuanced commentary to it. Sophie Chiari explains that the year in which *The Tempest* was performed witnessed dire weather, and the play reflects this, starting with a significant natural event: a tempest.[10] In the play's opening scene, characters express their fear of nature's might, creating a link between nature and suffering. Simon C. Estok argues that "the natural world, however is pictured as dangerous, unpredictable and immoral. Illustrating an ethics of dislocation from the natural world rather than one of connection: a mindset of ecophobia."[11] He suggests that the play reinforces a fear of nature. However, I argue that this is not the case because the storm in this play is not natural. The above statement would have applied to a play such as *King Lear*, where nature is really hostile. Yet, *The Tempest* quickly reveals Prospero's creation of the storm, and thus implies that humans' meddling with nature to use it for their selfish ends brings about destruction. Nature on its own is not a threat, but humans make it so. The play challenges the ecophobic perception that nature is inherently chaotic and threatening. Instead, it suggests that the true danger comes from human ambition and the desire to dominate.

Prospero's actions serve as an early warning about the consequences of ecological imperialism, where the environment is reshaped to fit human needs without consideration of its long-term effects. His control over the island mirrors modern practices of environmental engineering, such as deforestation, climate manipulation, and resource extraction—all of which contribute to climate instability. By repositioning nature as a victim rather than a villain, *The Tempest* offers a critique that remains relevant in today's discussions on environmental ethics. The play ultimately calls for a more balanced relationship between humans and the natural world, one that recognizes the dangers of unchecked exploitation and interference. At the same time, the play does not present nature as entirely benign or passive, for the island itself is imbued with a kind of agency. The play suggests, rather, a more complex and interdependent relationship between humans and the natural world, one where neither side can be fully subjugated or dominated without consequences. Ultimately, *The Tempest*'s portrayal of nature and the storm offers a nuanced commentary on the human-nature relationship. It cautions against the dangers of environmental exploitation and the illusion of complete control, while also acknowledging the inherent power and agency of the natural world.

While the play offers warnings about the outcomes of colonialism and conquest, it also introduces an ecocritical perspective. *The Tempest* is not ecophobic, nor does it celebrate or approve of ecological imperialism. In fact, it counters ecophobia and proposes a progressive idea. By pointing out the risks of interfering in nature, the play issues a warning about humans' ambition to control the environment. Similarly, it underlines the dangerous consequences of trying to use nature for gain. Moreover, the play employs the dire weather conditions of the island to reflect political corruption and entangled issues. As Chiari reminds us, "the climate of the island" can be a reflection of "the geopolitical context of the play."[12] The storm, thus, mirrors the chaotic political situation, which weighs on Prospero and leads him to revenge, creating an important link between politics and the environment. It shows how both affect one another, and indicates that conquests affect nature as humans disrupt it. In other words, political anxieties cause conflicts between powerful individuals, which

leave the environment vulnerable to exploitation. Prospero and Caliban fight over nature for political reasons, which brings about instability. Prospero takes revenge on his brother by using nature. Nature, although powerful, is considered by humans as a tool to advance their interests. This causes destruction and environmental catastrophes, as the play elucidates.

Overall, *The Tempest* illustrates the rising issues of its time and the universal and timeless issue of the relationship between humans and nature. Shakespeare does not preach any moral stance in the play, but his characters, his language and his representation of conflict, suggest that he was making a prophetic commentary about the disastrous consequences of colonialism and exploitation of nature. Since the play is not a tragedy, it does not end in mayhem but rather on a hopeful note that returns the colonizers to Europe. Yet, it leaves Caliban and Ariel in uncertainty, that prefigures the postcolonial reality in the contemporary world where people continue to struggle with climate change.

## Notes

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2. Frey, "The Tempest and the New World," 33.
3. Meredith Anne Skura, "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.1 (1989): 58.
4. Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 41.
5. Skura, "Discourse and the Individual," 47.
6. Paul Brown, "This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine," in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 63.
7. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, 41.
8. Skura, "Discourse and the Individual," 58.
9. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.
10. Sophie Chiari, *Shakespeare's Representation of Weather, Climate and Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 219.
11. Simon C. Estok, "Simon C. Estok's Talk at TEDU: 'Shakespeare and Ecophobia,'" YouTube video, 3:11:21, August 3, 2022. https://youtu.be/onikW_zXkIc?si=ou5KPIAh5MfgId5E.
12. Chiari, *Shakespeare's Representation of Weather,* 245.

# ACTING SHAKESPEARE: A Roundtable Discussion with Artists from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2024 Production of *Henry VIII*

Stuart Shelley
USF Education Director

**Featuring:** Alaysia Renay Duncan, Geoffrey Kent, Topher Embrey

***Shelley*:** Welcome, everybody. We are delighted to spend a little bit of time with you discussing *Henry the Eighth*. We're delighted that that was the common show that people selected as part of the conference, and hopefully you enjoyed that on Monday evening. We have additional actors who will be joining us. They are on their way over. But in the meantime, by way of introduction, my name is Stuart. I'm the education director at the Festival. I've been with the Festival full time now for three seasons, with a brief stint in 2016 doing summer camps and classes. We have Alaysia Duncan with us, we have Geoffrey Kent, and we will hopefully have Topher Embrey and Christopher Centinaro joining us shortly. We'll get started, and I'm going to just give the welcoming question. If you'll tell us a little bit about yourself, the roles that you play this season, *Henry the Eighth* and other plays, and where you're from. We'll get started there, and then we'll move forward.

*Journal of the Wooden O.* Vol 24, 182-203

ISSN: 1539-5758

***Duncan*:** My name is Alaysia Renay Duncan. I play Anne Boleyn in *Henry the Eighth*. I also play Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* and Petra and many others in *Taming of the Shrew*. I'm originally from Saint Paul, Minnesota, but I now live in New York City, and I graduated from Ithaca College last year with my BFA in acting. Out of school, I was first working at the Engeman Theater on Long Island, doing *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, and then I was just doing a few readings in the city and then booked this, and now I'm here.

***Kent*:** I also did *Beautiful* this year. It's a fantastic musical. That's why we're here, right? Hi. I'm Geoffrey. I play Buckingham in *Henry the Eighth*. I also played Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* and various and sundry characters in *Taming of the Shrew*. This is maybe my fifth or sixth season here. I wear multiple hats at the Festival. I've been a fight director here for a number of seasons. I directed a play here last year, and I come as an actor as well, so I kind of bounce around.

I'm an Iowa boy, but I live in Denver, have most of my life, and I love coming here because it doesn't feel that far from home. I love this conference, so I'm excited to be here.

***Shelley*:** Fantastic. Just to kind of segue into *Henry the Eighth*, what was the most surprising element for each of you as you approached this text, which is, again, not often produced? What was the most surprising element for you in rehearsal or in performance? In character discovery?

***Duncan*:** It's a good first question. For me, I guess it's always the lack of text that the women often get and how you go about navigating that. And especially with someone like Anne Boleyn, who I would say is a very iconic person historically. I think in this play Shakespeare took a lot of liberties in terms of how he told the story. And one of them is that Anne just stops talking after she gets together with Henry. I think figuring out how to still make her a full and somewhat interesting person in the moments where I do get to talk was something that I had to navigate, and figuring out how to bring personality to moments where there isn't text for me to fall back on. And figuring out the parts of the character that are Shakespeare's invention and the parts of it that are historical and just discovering the character in that way.

***Kent*:** I think at this point, I only have a couple left I haven't been in, so what's interesting about being in *Henry the Eighth* is having the perspective of other Shakespeare plays I've been in, and finding archetypes in Shakespeare where you can think, "Oh, I bet I know what actor he wrote this for."
My wife's a playwright. When she's writing, she writes for actors. She casts it in her head, and it helps her individualize their voices. She knows that's a joke that that actor would do. Shakespeare, of course, did the same. So, you sometimes wonder, "Who played this? And why did he write this part?"

As Buckingham, I'm crazy compartmentalized, right? I'm only in the very beginning and very end of the play. I played Thomas More at the end. Not that you'd know, because we don't say his name in the scene I'm in. You know, Thomas is just sitting over in the corner. Everything's going to turn out great for Thomas. And John Harrow opposite me. Our characters' portraits hang opposite each other in a very famous art display where we just glare at each other for eternity.

But as Buckingham, you have two problems as an actor. One is that I would say 70% of my lines in the play are the first ten minutes of the play, which is the worst time to have lines in a Shakespeare play, because the audience is still confused. And I, Geoff, who does tons of Shakespeare, when I go see Shakespeare, it's still usually not till the end of act one, scene one that I start to feel like my translator has kicked in. Just my ability to take words I don't know in context, translate and make sense of it. So normally when I'm watching the first scene of a Shakespeare play, I get what I call mad, sad, glad, or afraid, like the four emotions of Shakespeare acting. And you're like, "Oh, he's mad. I think I know who he's mad at. I don't know what he's mad about. Oh, he's going to die." So, I can feel your inner monologue when I'm up on the stage as Buckingham.

One of the things you have to do when you're an actor in a play, which is somewhat parallel to the academic study of the play, is to ask, why am I in the play? I have to step out of the play to go, "Why is Buckingham in this play? What is his purpose? Why does Shakespeare need him? Did Shakespeare write what I'm saying or did his writing buddy write my scenes?" And then figure out how to fill your purpose.

What surprised me was in his second scene, where he's going to go get his head chopped off. I find that at that point in the play, I can make an emotional connection with the audience, despite the fact that I've barely been in the play. Most audience members probably didn't really get the complexities of my argument, but they still connected. We still know that Shakespeare needed to snuff him out. Shakespeare needs someone to go down for us to understand the stakes of Wolsey. And for us to understand that the King didn't bother to come and talk to me, so you see the control Wolsey has over him as well. So, I'm a plot device that I have to fully realize as a character in two scenes. Shakespeare gives you that challenge often, but *Henry the Eighth* is particularly challenging.

***Shelley*:** Thank you. Very insightful. At this point, what questions do you have for the actors? I'm happy to bring the mic to you, and I'll hold it for you to ask the questions so everybody in the room can hear. What questions do you have regarding the production?

***Audience member*:** I have a question that's not necessarily, if that's okay, about the production. But I heard your comments on the number of lines and the difficulty of Shakespeare's beginnings. And it's not just you. I'm glad you said that because I know these plays, and it always takes me a good 10, 15 minutes.

I've done a lot of research on *Othello*, and a lot of actors have talked about how that role is very emotionally and mentally draining for them, especially for black men playing that role. So, I'm just curious in your experiences, both at the start of your career and later in your career. Have there been any particular Shakespeare roles that have taken that emotional or mental toll on you? Because we've talked a lot about *Othello* in the field. And so I'm curious what other roles might we be paying attention to in that same regard? The cost on the actor that literary scholars, because we're not embodying them, may not always be as attentive to.

***Kent*:** The perspectives will be different.

***Duncan*:** That's a great question. I actually haven't gotten to do that much Shakespeare outside of school. A lot of the roles I've gotten to play have actually been quite affirming. In school, one of the last shows that I did was *Julius Caesar*, and I played Julius Caesar, so I got to be the big boy in the room. I guess it took a toll on my ego in terms of having probably a big one at the time, but it didn't hurt me in any way emotionally.

I don't know if I can speak to specific Shakespearean roles, but there have been other roles I've played that have taken a lot of emotional investment that is sometimes hard to leave in the theater. I think it's very easy to take a lot of that stuff home because you're living in it, and you are, to an extent, experiencing those emotions every day, sometimes for months. A lot of how I deal with that is falling back on my training and reminding myself that, "This is not real. I can jump in and out of it. I can turn it off at the end of the night." And sometimes I need a ritual for that. Lately it has been social time after the show, like hanging out on the porch, and decompressing, getting back into Alaysia-mode rather than whatever the show is asking me to do. That is how I have navigated figuring that out.

***Kent*:** What's funny is that I discovered post-show self-care later in my career. When I was younger, I was really good at preparing for the show, like physically warming up, vocally warming up, looking at my text to try and make some new discoveries, maybe shooting some lines with some friends, if it's a comedy, shoot jokes back and forth, make each other laugh before the show. But I never really examined post-show care because I wasn't really playing parts yet that really caused me to. When you're just standing in the back and holding a weapon and saying, "Letters for you, my Lord," you don't need a ton of post-show care. My 20s were a whole lot of, "Here's this for you. Good luck."

When I played Iago in *Othello*, I was instantly confronted with the fact that I was driving home in my car with some demons. And actors are emotional athletes essentially. If we're up there to evoke a response in you, we maybe don't need to feel the depths of it, because if we feel the depths of it, we cheat you of the right to do that too, because you can then watch us feel something, versus if I can get close to feeling something and I can provoke that feeling in you. So, I discovered self-care, like bath bombs and cartoons were a really great way to come down from Iago, and it became really quite necessary.

The other joy is doing repertory, I let myself go to deeper depths when I'm only going to do it twice a week versus what I'm going to do eight shows a week. Doing *Hamlet* twice a week is a lot different than *Hamlet* eight shows a week. *Hamlet* twice a day, well, if it's an eight-show week then a two show Saturday is a very different process than two shows a week. So, there's that.

But I will tell you one small other story about losing track of things. I was doing *Timon of Athens*. You're scholars, but just in case you don't know the basics of Timon, he has all this money. He gives it freely to anyone who asks. He eventually is told he has no money. He has to borrow money. And everyone's like, no, we can't pay you back. And he just throws hot rocks at them. Then he runs away, hides in a cave, and finds a whole bunch of gold. Everyone shows up again and he throws gold at them. And then he walks into the ocean and drowns himself. It's a real picker upper. It's like Christmas Carol in reverse, right? It just goes all the way back to Scrooge twice.

And I was playing that in a staged reading that we were working on for a Shakespeare Theatre Association conference and it was going to be a bunch of artistic directors from different Shakespeare festivals. And I had a lot of lines. Everyone else was suddenly off book. They'd all memorized their lines and were no longer carrying their pages because they were aware it was an opportunity to be seen by people who might have work for them, which is the actor's life. Well, I had 900 lines, and they had like 100 lines, and suddenly I'm the only person in the show on book. I lost track of myself in that process because Timon feels betrayed, and I felt betrayed by the entire cast, many of whom were close friends of mine. And I, as we were approaching the performance, hated them more and more, and I was lost in it. I was just so mad at them and they were like, "No, we'll carry pages." But I'm like, "Yeah, but you're not looking at them. They can tell you're not looking at them." So, to spite them, in four days, I "memorized" Timon of Athens, with quotes around it, because I was making up a lot of Shakespeare, but no one knew the play. My self-care after that was ice cream.

I've never told that story.

***Shelley*:** Did we mention we publish this?

***Kent*:** Oh, please. Don't tag them in it, though. They still know I was mad at them.

***Audience member*:** So, speaking of not really knowing the play, you all are doing a piece right now that is rarely done that the audiences are probably not as familiar with. Even within the history play cycles people are going to know the Richards. They're going to know some of the other Henrys. And this play is all

talking. You're just standing around talking to each other. So how are you creating this kind of emotion?

I really felt emotionally invested. I was upset. I knew you were going to die. I knew you were going to die, and I was upset. Like, I know the play. But you all were able to create some good emotional connections with the audience. We all fell in love and were sad about Katherine. Like the entire place is behind Katherine. How are you able to create that in audiences? On Monday, you had us, and we know the play. But a lot of people are not going to know this play. What do you pull on to give a Shakespeare play which is just talking that emotional depth for audiences who maybe aren't as familiar with the texts?

***Duncan*:** I'll take this. It was actually surprising to me that so many people were so receptive to this show. I remember the first couple weeks we were open, and people just telling us, "Everyone loves Henry. They love the drama." Which is great because it is just a lot of standing and talking, and sometimes it does feel like that. For instance, with Perdita, I'm running around and jumping around and doing all this stuff. And with Anne, it's just—it's a lot of talking.

But I think a lot of how you make just talking interesting is knowing what you're saying really well and trying to convey that as clearly as you can and trying to connect it to whatever is holding you to that scene and making sure that you're tethered to your scene partners and just staying in it. Because I feel like as engaged as I can be, that's how engaged the audience is going to be. Like in the Buckingham scenes, I really do try to make sure I'm connecting how I'm feeling as Anne to the things that Buckingham is saying. And I think that just makes the world feel fuller and makes the story feel fuller. I'm glad that it's coming across.

***Kent*:** Yeah. The ones with no sword fights are hard. As a fight director, I'm like, "There's no action in this play at all." There's a brief dance and a lot of pageantry, and I think the production does honor that pageantry, which I think particularly suits the Utah Shakespeare Festival audience. It used to be they were all rooted in history and really close to how they were written. And of course, modern theater has expanded that lens. And I think you've discovered that we've started doing that here a lot more than when I first was here. But we still do make sure to give that audience

something that really is rooted as close as we can to what we're doing.

And Shakespeare is so subversive with this play because I had no idea that the Queen was going to run away with the audience's empathy. You can feel her do it. He gives her the prologue and the epilogue, and I've seen that happen before. It's often the star character that gets those. But that gives her this five act puddle skip of a character across the play.

I watched Shakespeare confined by the writing conditions he was under. He's got to write for a king that's related to someone in the play. He can't talk trash about him. He can't really talk about that religious thing. There's so many things in this play Shakespeare is trying to avoid, and he still threads the line with her and gives you something that I think is a little subversive about the power of a king, knowing the king came to see it. That's genius. I'm not in any of those scenes, but that's genius.

I think anytime you're in act one, scene one of a Shakespeare play, which I am in all three this year, it's hard. I need to negotiate it better. It's hard to start the play. It's always hard to start the play. Getting the audience's attention is hard. Getting the audience immersed in the world you're doing, even if they already know the play. This is my version of *Romeo and Juliet*. This is my version of *Hamlet*. How do you bring them along? And I think the trick is to personalize your relationship with the character you have as a scene partner.

My first scene in this play is actually a three hander that we made into a two hander. We cut a character out. That was complicated because I was getting some arguments that were the opposite of my point of view, because he combined the characters. So, I was arguing with myself, not as the show was written or intended, but as the cutting provided me a problem. So, I had to find truth in arguments with my own self.

He's my son-in-law, the character I'm up on stage with, and the minute the dramaturg told me that—We brought up the chart and she put all her photos on the chart. I love that chart she made. It has all of the people in this play and how they're all related, and then she put our headshots where we were. And I was like, "Oh, he's my son-in-law." That helped me personalize that relationship. I was now speaking to someone I had a little status over, even

though we were equal in rank, because of our relationship, and he was also having to use tactics that were like, "Look, uncle, you really should zip it."

We were also following the desire of Derek to have us speak when we were being overheard, and to play a character that believes they are all powerful and can speak openly because they have a high enough status that they're safe. And then that character gets snipped. So that's what I did; I just leaned into my scene partner. And then when the Cardinal's up above looking down on us, we quote Ghostbusters. Because it gets us to laugh and gets us to look like we're friends.

***Duncan*:** Kind of following up with the Queen Katherine through-line and the opener and the closer, it doesn't necessarily have to be her. Another thing that was changed for this production were the two ladies-in-waiting who are the gossipers. Those scenes are written for lords. They're for men. That was a specific change for this production to give the ladies-in-waiting a bit more stage time and give them a stronger perspective. That is not an element of this play that you're necessarily going to get anywhere else.

What's cool about this production is that there are moments where we took a lot of the low hanging fruit to make these relationships deeper. Like, for instance, I know Derek, our director, was talking on the first day about why he cast Margaret as a black woman and Anne as a black woman, so that that mentor-like friendship can have an additional layer, which is that they're the only two black women in this court, in this palace or community. And then the song that I sing in Katherine's chambers that was not necessarily intended for Anne, but it gives us this beautiful moment between Anne and Katherine when otherwise you don't get to see them interact at all in this show. I feel very lucky that me and Cassie get to do that twice a week, because it's definitely become one of my favorite moments.

Again, it's not something that's really supported by words, but it's showing Katherine has to pass this torch on because she has no choice. And Anne might not be ready to take this on, but she has to step into it. And what supports that story is that I don't know how to play the lute. And I had to learn for this. So, it really does feel earnest and deep.

***Audience member*:** I have a question about the costumes. In Shakespeare scholarship, a lot has been written about clothes. We have Henslowe's inventory, and the costumes cost more than the play text and more than the actors earned. And it was a big draw to the theater. And you have such gorgeous costumes. And I wonder how that feels from the perspective of an actor. I've seen old interviews with Laurence Olivier, and he was an outside-in actor, and he wanted to get the look and the walk and sort of the externals right, so he could feel the part. And I think modern actors start inside-out. But how do you deal with the costumes? How is that part of the characterization, and is it really hot up there?

***Kent*:** The answer to that is yes.

***Duncan*:** Yes. So hot.

***Kent*:** I compliment your dresses repeatedly.

***Duncan*:** I love my dresses. I love my dresses, and they do help. I do find that costumes help a lot. Obviously, they're not everything, but for this show, the costumes are so important because it really affects how you compose yourself. Like, most of the time because we have these huge sleeves, my hands can't just be flat at my side. They have to be tucked here. It affects how, for instance, I can play the lute, because I am in this big costume, so, that's something I have to prepare for. Being so sweaty every night is something that you have to adapt to. Wait, what was the question? I'm so sorry.

***Kent*:** What does costume do to you?

***Duncan*:** I think the costumes in this show really help everything feel a bit more real. When we were in rehearsals and we were just in our street clothes, it could feel a bit silly. But it adds a level of seriousness to feel that someone actually has to get me in and out of this every day. And I think about that and understand what that must have been like at the time to have to live like that. I definitely could not. I would be so crazed. Like, at the end of rehearsal every night, when I'm waiting for someone to unzip me, I'm like, "Ah!"

***Kent*:** Ladies and gentlemen, His Majesty has arrived. The king arrives.

***Embrey*:** The king's alarm didn't go off this morning. I'm so sorry.

***Kent*:** Introduce yourself.

**Duncan:** We're talking about costumes.

***Embrey*:** Oh, well continue talking about that. I'll introduce myself later.

***Duncan*:** I think a costume always helps you feel a little bit more in character. And it prepares you for the harder parts of the show where the costume might be a hindrance. I really love wearing the costumes in these plays, but it was definitely an adjustment having to adapt to the corset. And another element of that is thinking about how you can still breathe and still project when you're tucked into that corset. So that was a learning curve for sure. But yeah, gorgeous, gorgeous gowns.

***Kent*:** I want to tap back on something you said about actors in terms of outside-in versus inside-out, right? If you were to put those in a gross, stereotypical bucket of extremes, you have "I build the physical life of my character, I say the words, and then I find the truth," and then other actors who look at it and ask, "Why am I like this? What's caused me to be like this?" What I would call a pre-Freudian versus a post-Freudian approach to text. And it's really important for me as an actor, to know when I'm working with text that was written before that was really part of the consideration.

I'm more likely, in a Shakespeare play, to just trust that the line I'm saying, as long as I understand it and have a point of view on it, works. Shakespeare makes these characters take complete right and left turns all the time, and sometimes you spend so much time making your interior character's life justify every line you say that you just get trapped. You can't serve the play anymore because you're trying to serve the character you created out of clay in your apartment. So, I'm a big proponent of ensuring the text is driving everything we do. If you're not connecting to what I say, it doesn't matter that I decided as a child the king took my puppy away. I'm not making fun of interior life, though it did sound like that. But with a Shakespeare play, I approach it as an actor a little differently than I approach a modern play.

Costumes, for me, are late. I've had a few actors I see who seem to wait to act until they get their costume, to which I'll be like, "I needed that character like a month ago. It's amazing that you have found this discovery, but it's a little late in the game."

But costumes are always going to give you a gift. They're going to change the way you stand. And then sometimes I have to decide, "Do I like that, or do I want to fight against it?" As Buckingham, I power lounge in the opening scene. I lean back, and I work against the costume because I want to show someone who is defiant of status and defiant of structure. So, I'm going to do that subtly to see if that kind of comes across that he just likes to, pardon the term, man-spread himself all over that downstage bench to create a physical life that's in opposition to the costume. So sometimes I work with it, sometimes I work against it.

Topher, introduce yourself and talk about your costumes.

***Embrey*:** Hi, everyone. My costumes are beautiful. So sorry again about this morning. Sometimes, you know, your alarm doesn't go off because your phone died in the middle of the night. My name is Topher. I'm an actor here. I am originally from Virginia. This is my second season here. Last year, I played Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Bobo in *A Raisin in the Sun*. This year, I play the King in *Henry the Eighth*. And then I also play Christopher Sly in *Taming of the Shrew* and the Clown in *Winter's Tale*. What was the question about costumes?

***Kent*:** We were just talking about what that does to you as an actor.

***Embrey*:** Oh, okay. Well, I don't know if anyone noticed I had a bit of a limp going on.

***Audience member*:** We did notice.

***Audience member*:** We were wondering.

***Embrey*:** No, I'm not injured. I did that on purpose because the king had gout and he's had leg injuries or whatever you fancy. But it's also another way for me to differentiate my characters. And also in that costume, speaking of manspreading, the, what would you call them, the breaches themselves kind of force my legs to go out a little bit more than a regular pair of pants would do. So that really informed the way I walk as Henry. Also, it's very hot in that costume when it's hot outside, so there's that. But yeah that's really all I have to say about the *Henry the Eighth* costume.

***Shelley*:** I'm going to jump in here. I had an interesting conversation with the costumer Bill Black. He has retired officially from costuming and designing, and we were chatting and he said, "I held on specifically to costume *Henry the Eighth*. I've

been waiting to costume this." And he dove into the portraiture of Hans Holbein. So, most of those lead player costumes should have looked familiar. Because he really leaned into Hans Holbein's portrait. So that's a fun nod to art and art history as well.

***Audience member*:** Thank you so much. Thanks, Stuart. And thanks to all of you for being here this morning. Two questions/comments for Alaysia. Speaking of last night, your dancing brought so much joy to what was getting to be a heavier and heavier play. I really appreciate your performance in *A Winter's Tale*. That seemed to turn something for me and lead to the redemptive qualities of the play.

But back to *Henry the Eighth*. You've already alluded to props, the lute. Could you talk more about that scene where Katherine actually gives you the lute? You just referred, I think, to that when saying passing the torch, but is that—I didn't check the play. Is that in the play? How was that developed in this production?

***Duncan*:** Thank you. So, the song itself is in the play and the line of Katherine saying "Take thy lute girl," is in the play. But I think in the script it's just Lady-in-Waiting or Working Woman or something. So, Derek decided he wanted Anne to do this song. And I was like, "Okay, that's great." And I realized that they also wanted me to play the lute. And I didn't know how to play the guitar or the lute at all.

So, I was working with our music director, Brandon, who's awesome. I really love him. And he was so kind to me and helpful to me. It,s only four chords, so it's not too hard, but it's definitely hard with all the elements, like the dress and not having a strap and having to wander around. And at first that moment was pretty general. In the first few times I did it in rehearsal, I was just standing center and like playing it and singing, and it just didn't feel like anything. And so I had a lot of conversations with Derek trying to figure out why that was. We'd built this internal narrative of Cassie or Katherine offering the lute, not necessarily as a challenge to Anne, although I think it could be read that way, but to see whether the girl who was going to take her place could do this. For me, what I receive as Anne from that moment is that the Queen is asking me to do something, so I have to do this. It's kind of awkward in the moment because of everything that's going on. I have to do it in front of my fellow ladies-in-waiting. It does feel very vulnerable.

Within the song, I start off playing it a bit more hesitantly because I don't know how to play it. And then I let myself just sing it a cappella. I think that moment me and Derek talked about was Anne comforting herself, but also making the decision that what she's good at is singing and not playing the lute. So, she tries to prove her worth a bit in this way, or at least try to comfort herself in this way after this rocky start, and then she circles back in at the end, remembering that the Queen asked her to play the lute. So, Anne has to re-add that element. She has to recognize that, at the end of the day, she doesn't have a choice in this situation, just like in the wider situation of having to marry King Henry and essentially betraying Katherine. But here she's still thinking, "I'm going to do it in my own way."

Cassie and I have talked about how for her that that is the moment she thinks, "Okay, the girl is going to be queen, whether we like it or not." I think there's a lot of depth to that scene. And then at the end when I try to give the lute back to her, and she allows me to take it, I think that's probably the most passing on the torch moment of that. But it is still bittersweet and sad for both of them, because I think if they had more power, neither of them would have chosen that scenario. Thanks for asking.

***Audience member*:** In the staging for *A Winter's Tale*, what was the symbolism of the frame for those pictures? Were those mirrors? And the clock that was set back a couple hours. What was the purpose of the director in that?

***Kent*:** I can speak to that a bit, because I've probably done the most shows with Carolyn, who directed that show. I've done maybe twenty shows with her. It's fun to work with the director and develop a relationship as an actor-director over a long period of time. Carolyn in general has morphed from literal to non-literal. She really prefers the world to be more theatrical, less a concrete location and more about evoking a feeling. And she's really into crooked shapes right now. I've worked in the last few shows she's done, and some version of those frames have been appearing. Her *Lear* had a similar feel to that, and I remember going, "I think I've seen this look before, Carolyn." She told me, "I'm going through a phase," but her phase is that she wants you to feel something's out of joint.

The framing allows you to look at the story from different angles, just like you can with a painting. So, I think that's what she's trying to evoke with it. But I would say in general with the clock and the frames, she wants you feel a world that's out of joint, which—with that set? I could do twelve Shakespeare plays on that set. *Hamlet* would jump right off that set, too. So, I think she's interested in—not set changes, not scene changes, not different locations, but the idea of artistic representation of something that's a little askew reflecting on everything. So, I would say that's probably what Carolyn would say, but she'd also want to know, what did you think?

***Audience member*:** Well, I thought time was out of joint. Like possibly a mirror for us—holding the mirror up to nature, as it were, and seeing yourself, as it were, in this play.

***Kent*:** Yeah, that's a better answer than mine. So, we'll use that.

***Shelley*:** I'm going to chime in again, I apologize. You're all scholars, so you probably all know this, but I'm going to share it nonetheless. Shakespeare drew on source material from Greene's novella, which was entitled *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, which really plays into the story, the arc, the sixteen years that go by. But having that clock on stage throughout, for me, really leans into the idea of the triumph of time.

***Kent*:** And to add to that, I think Shakespeare, towards the end of his life, the end of his writing career, is now exploring forgiveness as a violent act. It's just as violent as revenge, and here we explore what forgiveness is. This is the first play I've been in of Shakespeare's that, to me, gets close to earning that forgiveness. It's not like the lotharios and the terrible boys that we forgive at the end of these plays all the time. He does that by giving you sixteen years of grief that he jumps. It takes you far enough away from the act to give you permission to choose to forgive him if you want to. I would say Caroline would never say she was directing the play towards or against forgiveness, but I think she wants the play, and I think Shakespeare wants the play, to create an opportunity for you to forgive him. I remember after my wife saw it, I was like, "So do you forgive him?" She's like, "Oh no. Dead kid. Dead kid, Geoff. Do you remember the dead kid?" I was like, "Oh yeah, dead kid." I don't think Shakespeare is saying forgive him, but I think he's trying to write a play that can create an opportunity for it.

***Audience member*:** Thank you all for the amazing performances first of all, but also for taking the time with us today. I was wondering if you could talk about the relative challenges but also joys of working in very rarely produced plays versus fairly mainstream, frequently produced plays.

***Embrey*:** So essentially, no one does *Henry the Eighth*. And I think you know why. It's a passion play. I think the alternative title is always true, which it most certainly is not. But the thing is, the joy of doing shows like that—I've done a lot of weird Shakespeares. I've done *Cymbeline*. I've done *Pericles*. Those are also not—[whispers] I know I love *Pericles*.

***Audience member*:** *Pericles* is the best.

***Embrey*:** It is. It's my favorite, actually. But the cool thing about doing plays like *Henry the Eighth* and *Winter's Tale* is that—Geoff kind of said this to me after we worked together at Denver Center doing *A Christmas Carol*—no one does *Henry the Eighth*. So, no one's going to compare anyone's performances because it's not done a lot.

I was kind of terrified doing the show. We're going to talk about the negative first, because I kept reading reviews of places that had done it, and they were terrible reviews. Now we got a good one, so I was happy to hear about that, but there is such a huge difference doing something like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because people do that all the time, or doing *Taming of the Shrew*, even though that's not one that you see often nowadays. This is my third production doing *Taming*, and I'm sure it's like Geoff's seventh. Geoff's done a lot of *Taming*, right?

***Kent*:** Oh, yeah.

**Embrey:** And the same with *Winter's Tale*, too. This is my second *Winter's Tale*. This is my second time playing the exact same tracks in *Winter's Tale*. I was really good at it. Right?

***Audience member*:** Yes.

***Embrey*:** Thank you. The joy of doing a play that's not done often is that you can't really compare it to anything else, which is actually something that works in our favor sometimes. Because you can't be like, "Oh, well, I loved seeing *Henry the Eighth* at Oregon Shakes."

***Kent*:** In 1984.

***Embrey*:** Yeah. And you know what's really cool is that Henry Woronicz played Henry the Eighth, and he was Lord Chamberlain in our show. I think I asked him how old he was when he played *Henry the Eighth*, and he said, "twenty-nine." I thought I was young at thirty-two.

***Duncan*:** I think it's really cool that I'm getting to do this play early on in my career because it's not done as much, so I don't know if I'll ever get the opportunity to do it again. So, I think that's a cool element. What's been exciting for me about doing this play is that I've really grown to love the text. As you guys have said, you really connect with Katherine in the show, and she has some great text. I think that's the joy of doing some of the less produced plays, being able to see there's a lot of merit here. And also getting to do our own take on it. I was talking about the changes that we made to allow the women to have a bit more stage time. That is exciting too, to take something that's not usually done and to put a different imprint on it and allow it to connect a bit more to modern audiences.

***Kent*:** I'll just add one tiny thing, which is when you're in a room with twenty Shakespeare actors that haven't done the play you're doing, when you're like, "Who here has done this?" and only two of the twenty raised their hands, that's exciting. One was Henry Woronicz and the other is John Harrell, who's done all. I once asked, "Who's done all the plays?" And he said, "Well, I'll just list the plays I've only done once," because he's in ASC [American Shakespeare Center] and he was there for fifteen years. So, he's been through all the plays.

It's really great to be in rehearsal on a play when no one's been through it before because it saves you what's inevitable, when you're doing *Romeo and Juliet*: "Well, the last time I did this—" That sentence comes out a lot in rehearsal, and it's kind of death to discovery. Because even though you learned something about the play, it doesn't mean it's going to work for this production of the play. I've now learned when I repeat roles or repeat plays never to say that. I do say, "I have an idea," and sometimes it's an idea that I had five years ago, the last time I played the part. But I just leave that off, so it feels like a discovery, and also so the room can reject it more freely without feeling the burden of me saying, "I've already done all this work, and I want to bring that to this choice." So,

doing new plays—new plays, I call them—plays we haven't done yet, is really fun as an actor because there's nothing to steal from. You have to build it out of whole cloth.

***Audience member*:** Hi. Doing plays in repertory and doing three very different Shakespearean plays in repertory. Do you notice an energetic difference to the audience coming in to the show, during the show? What is that difference? How does that feel? How does that affect your performances?

***Kent*:** Have you done rep before?

***Duncan*:** Not to this extent. This is the most unique schedule I've worked on. It is very unique. But yes, there's definitely an energetic difference. Like with *Taming*, it's always our biggest audience. I'm not sure if it's because it's a comedy, or maybe it's just because, out of the three, it's the most well-known because of its controversy. But people are there, and they are ready to laugh. *Henry* is a little quiet. Sometimes we get our laughter, but we have to warm them up. We know we have to get them in this world. But once we get them there, they're usually there with us, which is great. And then *Winter's Tale* can be quiet. It just depends on the day. I think last night we had a bit of a quieter audience, not laughing as—

***Embrey*:** You were all there.

***Duncan*:** Not laughing as much as they usually do. Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry to say that.

***Audience member*:** We got the jokes on Monday night.

***Embrey*:** Oh, good.

***Duncan*:** Not that we don't appreciate a quiet audience, but you do have to work. I never expect the audience to react any certain type of way to anything. I usually try to adapt to what they're giving me that day and try to have my own fun with it. But it is great to work on things that are completely different because every day I feel like I get to have a different type of fun.

***Embrey*:** I love rep for that reason. Because you never know. You never know what reaction you're going to get on a certain night. Like, for instance, I thought I was terrible last night. As a comedic actor, I'm not expecting uproarious laughter. I'm so glad everyone got the bit when I come in as the shepherd, when he's like, "Good lord, boy. When hast thou seen this?" And I had my Bea Arthur moment, and said, "Now." That's the joy of rep.

It doesn't affect my performance, no matter what the audience's reaction is or what their vibes are, because I do it for fun. Like, I don't do this job for fun; I do it for money. But I'm saying that's when you start doing it for yourself in a way. And just because the audience isn't reacting doesn't mean that they're not paying attention. And that's a beautiful lesson to learn. I toured in rep for several years at the American Shakespeare Center. We range from middle schoolers to hundred-year-olds. It didn't matter. And there's nothing like it, rep, and that's why I love doing it.

***Kent*:** I'll just say, I do rep a lot, and it's my favorite thing to do. When I'm doing eight shows a week of one play, I inherently get bored somewhere along the run. I have to push through that wall and keep discovering, but because you're doing eight shows a week, you kind of run out of discovery, and it starts to become indulgent, your discovery, because you're just trying to do something different.

Whereas in rep, I'm sure you know our schedule, but we built these three plays in seven weeks. So, each show only gets fourteen days of rehearsal, fourteen, eight-hour days of rehearsal. That's it. And on night of the fourteenth day is our opening. That means that we're memorizing and we're staging, but if any of us were to say that we have discovered the depths of what is possible in fourteen days of rehearsal, we're completely full of it, right? There's a lot left to find.

And we're only doing them twice a week. We're halfway through our run now, but I think we've only done the shows eleven or twelve times now. I've been here a month and a half and I've only done a week and a half of *Henry the Eighth*. I've only done a week and a half of *Winter's Tale*. So, you're watching us continue to discover in front of you the truth of something.

I think that makes it really engaging, because curious actors in repertory are constantly poking and prodding at things. Sometimes we come in with an idea we'll try. Sometimes you're just in the moment and you discover something that of rocks you, and you get off stage wondering what just happened. I think that's what's really cool about it. And the audience is a big reflection of that because they're the scene partner we don't get to work with until we're out there, the scene partner we change every show. There is no group mentality that is reliable in that space.

And there will be elements of the weather which have something to say. Some nights wind is bad, and we turn our amplification off. That changes the way we have to play the space. So, you're looking at a very, very alive piece of theater in repertory where we barely know the plays when we open them, in the sense of how much more depth there is to discover. So, we're going to explore it in front of the paying customers.

***Audience member*:** Thinking about repertory, that is actually closer to the original mode in which these plays would have been produced than the way that you typically see them in RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company], which is doing a massive run and there's this cast and this cast and this cast. Does that help? Like, as you think about what you're doing and how you're doing it, do you think about the original mode of performance, and do you try and bring that forward? Or is it more useful to think, "This is a new thing that I am retelling in the twenty-first century for my twenty-first century audience." Because this is such an old play, because it has this history; I hope they didn't tell you that we were all going to be there on Monday because the idea of doing a show in front of a bunch of Shakespeare scholars who are going to be sitting there judging would be terrifying to me. How much does that legacy impact the way you perform it versus doing something that was written in the 90s or the 2000s or the 2010s?

***Kent*:** I would say I certainly encounter the years the text has existed on this earth. Part of the process of creating it is knowing I have to unpack this, to make this make sense. I have to make this work. I don't think when I'm up there that I'm necessarily thinking about what it was like to do the play 450 years ago, but I am always connected to the fact that Shakespeare performed in repertory. And I think Shakespeare in repertory is always going to be fresher, because it can't fall into its structured patterns.

And knowing that Shakespeare himself hired a prompter that was hidden, that was downstage center, knowing that Shakespeare's first performance of a play was more expensive than the second one, because it was a wild ride? Like, we know he didn't rehearse very much. Just like modern theater, you don't make money when you're rehearsing. No one pays to see that. So, they would just under-rehearse and get people to pay for watching them rehearse. I think there's something about that.

I think that the joy of discovery and performance with repertory is, to me, more fun because it's less structured. I've been in so many eight-show a week plays where the light cues are very structured. I did a Much Ado, where I was doing my soliloquy to the audience, and I like to interact with the audience, but I was told, "We're going to do these four lights here, and then this light is going to fade. You're going to go to this light over here." I want to go where the audience is. You can't decide with the lights where the laughter is going to be. And they told me that's the tech. You just have to make it work.

So, then I have to go to the stage manager to go, "Okay, well, here's the deal. There's five light cues. Sometimes I'm going to skip through those real quick to get to where the fire is with the audience." And the stage manager goes, "Yeah, great. I'll just call them with you." But in outdoor repertory, we're freer to explore. I'm never in the same place as Buckingham in that first scene. I wander all over. I go to where I think the audience cares, not where the director told me where to stand. He's gone, so it's okay. He doesn't know. Anybody else want to talk to Shakespeare repertory? I may have answered that question. I'm not sure.

***Duncan*:** I think being outdoors, as Geoff said, is very helpful in feeling traditional. I performed outside before, but not Shakespeare. So, learning how to really get your reach out there was a really fun challenge. But I'm also someone who considers myself still kind of a baby in the Shakespeare world. A lot of my experience with it was in school and then here. I really don't pretend to know, or to act like I know, much about it. I think especially as a black actor, knowing that at the time these shows were first being put on, someone like me was not necessarily involved in that type of stuff, I do have to meet it initially from a modern lens. I have to ask, "How can I make this personal to me, but honor the ritual of it and the tradition and history elements of it?"

***Embrey*:** Ditto. Wait, do y'all actually want me to say something? I thought they said it beautifully.

One thing I love about repertory, and I don't know if this is answering your question or not, but the one thing that I love about repertory, especially this season, is that you get to see me play a king in one instance, you get to see me play a drunkard in one, which is tonight, and then you get to see me play a clown

in the next. And how I differentiate those is one of my favorite things. Then I also get to explore what these characters mean to me. Kind of like Alaysia, I'm biracial, so I'm half white, half black. And so someone like me was probably not doing this back in the day. What actually made Shakespeare accessible to me was seeing a black man play Oberon in *Midsummer Night's Dream* at American Shakespeare Center, and it made it accessible to me.

So, it's exciting to do something like *Henry* as a person of color and hope that if someone sees it, someone young, old, whatever, they see themselves. Hopefully not in *Henry the Eighth*. But they get to see something that they thought they could never do. That's kind of my story right now. And it had to do with repertory.

***Audience member*:** That was a great show. I saw that *Midsummer*.

***Embrey*:** Which one? The one that I was in?

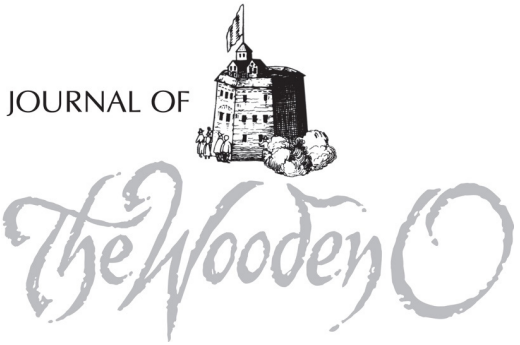
***Audience member*:** No, the one in American Shakespeare Center where the guy playing Oberon was black.

***Embrey*:** Well, there were many of those. Which one? What year?

***Audience member*:** 2014 or 15, I think.

***Embry*:** That was before my time here. I played Bottom there the last time they did *Midsummer*.

***Shelley*:** Thank you all. We are at time, so we'll wrap up. But thank you for your questions. Thank you for your expertise, your wisdom, and your experience. It has been a pleasure to spend a little bit of time with the group. Thank you all.

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c/o Southern Utah University Press
351 W. University Blvd.
Cedar City, Utah 84720
435.586.1955
woodeno@suu.edu