

Transcript of “The Woman’s Part in Shakespeare” Discussion

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Southern Oregon University

1:00-4:00 PM

Moderator: David McCandless, Director of Shakespeare Studies, SOU

Participants:

Pamela Brown, Professor of English, University of Connecticut.

Christiana Clark, Actor, Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Dawn Monique Williams, Artistic Associate, Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Lisa Wolpe, Former Director, Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare’s Company

David McCandless:

We have, in fact, today, a kind of variety show (I like to call it). We have a lecture by Dr. Pamela Brown, a panel discussion, and also a show so, it seems to me, a wonderful smorgasbord of possibilities! Before introducing Dr. Brown, I just want to say, briefly, that our topic today is (I think) a really fascinating one, and a bit broad -- but it just has to do with: what are the unique challenges and rewards of being a female performer of Shakespeare’s female and male characters? [We have] Lisa Wolpe on board, so of course we’re going to talk about that. Christiana has played a few male roles herself. So, we’ll talk about that, and (as I say) it’s a broad topic, but an interesting one. I hope that you [*the panel*] will be able to talk about, also, Shakespeare’s unruly women – the so-called shrews and villainesses, as well.

That’s really, I think, all I wanted to say. I’ll introduce the panelists after Dr. Brown’s lecture and we’ll roll on from there. So, let me introduce Pamela Brown, who’s the professor of English at the University of Connecticut and a distinguished specialist in this field of female performers in Shakespeare’s era. We have this perception that there were none, but she’ll disabuse you of that very quickly and eloquently. She’s the author of *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England*, as well as the forthcoming *The Diva’s Gift: The Italian Actress and the Shakespearean Stage*. Also, she’s edited and contributed to a volume of essays entitled *Women Players in England 1500 to 1660: Beyond the Male Stage*. Her lecture is entitled, “For What’s a Play Without a Woman in It?” Dr. Brown.

Dr. Pamela Brown:

Thank you, David. [*Referring to microphone*] I guess I have to bend over. I’m very short, but— this doesn’t pull up. No. I’ll just speak loudly.

I wanted to talk about the one phrase that David just used: “beyond the all-male stage” instead of “the male stage.” I was just having a discussion with some friends of mine about how-- that

for us, the people who work on female performance studies, beginning to think about the all-male stage as being not only outmoded, but that phrase itself is really becoming a thorn in our sides: what are we going to use instead of “all-male”? It’s a real issue because it sounds like [*in a gruff masculine voice*] “all male,” full of red-blooded— all-male stage, but it was anything but, especially with the boy actor of various ages and gender identities. The fluidity is what is coming to the forefront, rather than this “all-male-ness.”

I want to begin my story-- because I know that the rest of the day, I think, the focus will be on, quite rightly, contemporary work, contemporary stories, and theater and acting. But I want to begin my story in London in the late 1580s, before Shakespeare’s plays begin to appear onstage. The city was growing rapidly, feeding its new commercial theater business, which was barely ten years old. The Armada crisis produced a wave of nationalist fervor, while Marlowe and Kyd produced the first blockbuster hits: *Tamburlaine* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, both starring the great Edward Alleyn. For the Italophilic Queen Elizabeth and her court, John Lyly was turning out women-centered pastorals full of goddesses, androgynous boys, and cross-dressed maidens. All this made its mark on Shakespeare, who had just come to London. The theater business continued to expand, and by 1600 many Londoners were seeing new plays several times a week. But despite the constant demand for new plays, and for variety and novelty, the English had to go abroad if they wanted to see one famous spectacle: a professional actress in a woman’s part. In this respect, England was a stubborn anomaly. In France, Spain, and Italy, mixed-gender playing was on the rise, thriving alongside all-male performing traditions in those countries. The most important development occurred in Italy in the 1560s, when actresses began to appear as full members of itinerant *commedia dell’arte* troupes. The most talented played the new *Innamorata* role opposite her lover the *Innamorato*. [*Referring to slide*] You can see them on the right, there, along with *Pantalone*, *Zanni* and the other characters, [*unintelligible*]

Unlike the male masks, such as *Pantalone* and *Zanni*, the unmasked lovers could convey both elegance and pathos in acting serious emotions such as jealousy and despair. The all-male *comici* traveled year-round and played a mix of scripted and improvised comedies and acrobatic shows. Because of the advent of actresses, the Italian professionals were able to extend their repertory beyond mask-based comedy, offering romance, pastoral, and even tragedy. They proved such a popular draw that the troupes launched northward across the Alps in the 1570s to seek new markets, traveling constantly.

Despite the hardships of travel and the linguistic, political and legal barriers they encountered, they managed to spread their fame and disseminate their methods and materials throughout Europe. Some of the most talented actresses became international stars, playing the leading *Innamorata* in plays both scripted and improvised, winning royal patrons and influencing the rise of mixed-gender playing across the map. Their impact on female roles was immediate and far-reaching. As the fame of the diva grew, the *Innamorata* role gained in variety, length and importance, and the woman in love became more autonomous and appealing. Until actresses arrived on the scene, most Renaissance comedies had followed the male-centric plotlines of Plautus and Terrence, centered on fathers and sons who clashed over their obscured objective

of desire: the largely mute *Virgo*, who stayed out of sight, or hovered at a window – a marginal figure, at best. The skilled actresses invented ways to claim center stage, replacing the passive *Virgo* figure with the willful, voluble and charismatic *Innamorata*, whose sexual choices mattered, and whose glamour pleased crowds. Humanist playwrights began to write new kinds of plays that featured women acting on their own desires, and the troupes created their own improvised comedies in part by piecing together old and new humanist plots. Virtuoso actresses who excelled in this role took stage names such as Lavinia, Florinda, and Isabella and competed for fame. They drew fervent admirers, and soon Italian dukes and French kings and queens became protectors and patrons, affecting both playwriting and their company's fortunes.

The first female stars on the Western stage extended the gendered boundaries of play-making, and pointed the way to a new kind of theatre. The greatest among them, Isabella Andreini, wrote poetry and plays that she published, corresponded with humanists, and was given the unheard-of honor of being a woman inducted into the all-male academy of the *Intenti*. [Referring to slide] I'll just let you read those. As you look at this pair, this is a husband-and-wife acting team: according to Siro Ferrone, "the advent of women on the stage is the most important innovation in Cinquecento European spectacle, and one of the decisive factors in the formation of the theatre of the professionals."

The woman actress signaled a fundamental watershed in the history of manners, acquired a civil and artisanal persona unknown before this moment, became a worker who asked for respect due to a professional calling or *mestiere*, or a craft, *arte* (that's the *arte* of *commedia dell'arte*), and distinguished herself as a constitutive and determining element of a process of production destined for public circulation. It's not too much to say, as I do in my forthcoming book, that they altered every genre they touched. Within fifty years of their advent in Italy, the impact of the actresses proved nothing short of revolutionary, expanding comedy, reviving stage pastoral, and paving the way to experiments in tragicomedy and opera.

The English caught wind of these innovations early on in the 1570s, first from English ambassadors who saw mixed-gender troupes in Paris, and then from the Italians themselves in 1574, who tumbled and acted on the streets of London and performed comedies and an innovative pastoral (possibly Tasso's *Aminta*) for the Italophilic Queen Elizabeth on her summer progress. More Italians continued to arrive in London over the next few years, including a celebrated troupe with actresses that drew crowds in 1577 and 1578. English travelers and returning players continued to bring home enticing details about the *comici*, which worked their way into plays. Most important, they learned that the *comici* were heightening the dramatic importance of the young woman in love. In theatrical terms, this innovation was an enormous gift. Even the all-male stage benefitted from it. How they used this gift is the story of "English bodies in Italian habits", in Keir Elam's phrase.

In my version of this narrative, the diva developed the *Innamorata*, the English observed and adapted the role, and the boy player brought her to life. This new role took root in both court plays and popular drama just as the commercial theater gained momentum. Innovative women

in love springing from Italian models appeared in pastorals and tragedies, on the English stage in the 1580s, and a bit later in Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, and romances. Some were full protagonists such as Thomas Kyd's *Bel-Imperia*, Christopher Marlowe's *Dido*, Webster's *Vittoria Corombona*, and Shakespeare's *Viola*, *Rosalind*, *Juliet*, *Portia* and *Cleopatra*.

And going to my title, *Bel-Imperia* of Thomas Kyd's deeply influential *Spanish Tragedy* (which leads, for example, to *Hamlet*), is an especially important example. [Referring to slide] Let me just get *Bel-Imperia*—yes, you may know this title page. *Bel-Imperia* witnesses the murder of her lover *Horatio* and vows revenge—she's a Spanish *Infanta*. The tragedy culminates in a bloody play-within-the-play written by the mad *Hieronimo*. To trick his son's killers, he colludes with *Bel-Imperia*. Urging her to take the lead, he says his play cannot succeed without her, "for what's a play without a woman in it?"

Coming from a stage with no women on it, *Hieronimo's* question is provocative indeed. With it, Kyd raises the alluring specter of a professional actress capable of playing tragedy as well as comedy, both scripted and improvised. Kyd shows he's aware of this innovation. When *Hieronimo* rehearses his own impromptu troupe for the play-within-the-play, he urges them to imitate "the Italian tragedians who are so sharp of wit that in one hour's meditation they would perform anything in action." *Bel-Imperia* proves a formidable tragedian, co-acting with her enemy, then stabbing him dead. Ignoring the script, she then turns the knife on herself, and the king applauds her improvisatory *coup de theatre*: "This was bravely done!"

While iconic diva roles on the order of a *Bel-Imperia* or a *Cleopatra* are rare, they are among the greatest parts in the canon. I think all are theatrically self-aware and deeply Italianate, even in non-Italian settings. *Cleopatra*, in many ways, is more Italian than Egyptian. Even when she is boyed, or should I say manned, by an English male such as *Mark Rylance*.

But the *arte*-style *Innamorata* made her mark in scores of smaller roles as well. When we look closely at the Italian-style theatricality of *Bianca* in *Taming of the Shrew*, *Jessica* in *The Merchant of Venice*, or *Maria* in *Twelfth Night*, we can clearly discern their debts to the second *Innamorata* and the playful *Serveta* of the Italian popular stage. And if we fast-forward into the 17th century, we see those examples multiplied many times over.

So, there you have it: great female roles arising on an all-male stage. This dynamic is truly remarkable when you consider that female roles were entirely marginal to the English adult repertory until the last quarter of the 16th century. *David Mann's* study of role length shows that female roles were tiny or non-existent before 1576. Female characters rarely spoke more than a few lines and half of all plays had no women speakers at all. In the crucial year of 1576, when the theater opened for business, a sudden change occurs. From that time forward, not one play lacks a female speaking part and the total number of female lines mushrooms, reaching a third of the play's total in some cases. By the 1590s, many secondary female roles were more varied and nuanced than ever before, while stellar leading female roles are longer, more complex, and more challenging, expanding to 500-700 lines with the longest, such as *Juliet* and *Rosalind*.

Now some might argue that playwrights wrote more female roles simply because they knew that the theater business needed the pennies of new audiences, and those audiences wanted genres in which women featured. But it's also arguable that their appetite for exotic Italianite playing was honed to a sharp edge in the 1570s by the repeated visits of Italian players to play for Elizabeth on her summer progress. They also played on London stages, and at Elizabeth's court. The most important tour was that of a troupe of actors led by Drusiano Martinelli, which lasted for several months in 1577-78. The diva was Angelica Alberghini, and in the coming decades the company, complete with the original *Harlecchino* (Tristano Martinelli, who was Drusiano's brother), went on to burnish its fame by playing in Madrid and twice in Paris, performing at the French court's request at wedding celebrations for Henry IV and Marie de' Medici in 1600-1601.

The visits of these and other Italian players to England gave many Londoners a chance to see the *comici* and their glamorous actresses first-hand. But, even more important, over time, was the influx of news circulating from Italians at court and in the city, from returning English players and patrons who had been abroad, and from travelers and diplomats, which stirred curiosity and the desire to see Italian glamor in action onstage – a desire that playwrights hastened to satisfy.

In calling this change revolutionary, I seek to alter and enrich our concept of what constitutes early modern theater as a whole. Did the all-male stage generate an enduring canon based on the radical exclusion and silencing of women, as Dympna Callaghan has cogently argued? My view is that, on the contrary, the threatening stardom of the actress and the presence of women in the theater as spectators, workers, and patrons were crucial to the spectacular growth of English drama, pressuring writers to form innovative plays featuring theatrically vibrant "women." Some women players, in parish drama and the masque, for example, were English. But my focus is on the Italian divas who achieved international stardom in leading roles, and whose impact was immediate and profound, extending across borders rapidly and irreversibly. Like many others, I aim to challenge the common perception that the theatrical world in which Shakespeare worked was exclusively male and exclusively English. Court officials and royal and aristocratic patrons, some of them performers themselves, viewed the linked arenas of courtly display and theater as highly competitive and trans-national in scope, a worldview shared by players they employed and patronized. Aiming to satisfy these cosmopolitan elites and London popular audiences, English players lacked one vital commodity. They had stars like Alleyn and Burbage for rebels, kings and lovers. For celebrity clowns they had Will Kemp, Robert Wilson, Robert Armin. But for attractive female leads, they had no stars at all – only apprentice actors whose careers were brief. A few boys had rare talents – people like Dickie Robinson, Solomon Pavy or Stephen Hammerton later on. They won reputations that made them favorites of playwrights, but the pool of specialists who could play demanding *Innamorata* roles was always small. Nonetheless, playwrights continued to raise the bar, creating ever-more complex leading women. That they did so is an indicator of the enormous pressure on the commercial theatre to produce plots of all kinds featuring what passed for glamorous foreign women.

On the issue of female impersonation, Stephen Orgel's question is still relevant: Why did the English stage take boys for women? (He asked that over 15 years ago.) While I build on his work (and that of many others) on the boy player, I want to restate his question so as to focus on professionalism rather than eroticism: Why did the English stage take boy players for actresses? My question uses the lens of history to narrow the issue. It is a fact that English professionals knew about Italian women playing abroad, and English women playing at home. Yet they persisted in using male actors instead of actresses until 1660. Having established this as our ground work, it's vital to ask how they pulled this off despite the pressure to change. How did Lyly, Kyd, Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster, and Fletcher, come up with roles in plays that made their substitution so successful? For a full answer, you're going to have to read my book when it comes out. [Audience laughter.] I pray it'll be this year, maybe early next year. But just for now, just for today because I have limited time I'm going to confine myself to just one genre of comedy, and I have good reason for this, because comedy, as you probably know, is the get-penny staple of professional theater everywhere and comedy was the first genre to undergo a radical make-over.

In the hands of players like Vincenza Armani, Vittoria Pisimi, and Isabella Andreani, the comic *Innamorata* was no longer a counter passed between men, but an agent crucial to the evolution of romantic comedy. Glamor was her mask, but versatility redefined her dramatic function. Each of her scenes might require a different emotion and speech genre: in one play she could outmatch her lover in witty conceits or philosophical debate, flirt with a woman while dressed as a man, wither a bragging *Capitano* with her disdain, sing a show-stopping lament, or coerce a lovesick clown into kissing her slipper. Such scenes were crowd-pleasers, and troupes quickly created and adapted scripts and scenarios to showcase the best actresses and their skills. The mobile, talkative, new romantic leading women owed their elegant poeticism to Ovid, Petrarch, and their Renaissance imitators. And they found models for their audacity in *novelle*, romances and humanist drama. But it was the actress's ability to animate such passionate women that attracted crowds and kept them coming back for more. The phenomenon led playwrights to pay new attention to the once-marginal *Innamorata* role, as they rushed to develop brilliant, women-centered romantic comedies, and new generic experiments in pastoral and tragicomedy. (This is in Italian theater that is traveling all over Europe.)

I want to talk about how the English adapted this model. The English adapted the skills of the actresses and the comic traits of their *Innamoratas*, altering the gender dynamics and erotic charges as they refit them to the bodies and voices of boy actors. Remember that so-called "boy actors" could be anywhere from twelve to twenty-one and many scholars think there were some who were even older. The English boy actress, as he is sometimes called, was given Italianate scripts laden with *befe*, which are elaborate tricks and plots, and briefer *lazzi*, which is comic stage business of all kinds, verbal and gestural. And he often teamed up with other boy actresses to carry them out. Think of alliances such as Beatrice, Hero, and Margaret in *Much Ado*, Mistresses Page, Ford, and Quickly in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, or Paulina and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*. As in the *arte*, comic leading women might be self-possessed and witty at most times, but turn physically and verbally explosive at others. Shakespeare tends to stress

their elegance and *sprezzatura*, along with their keen delight in playing. This more refined comedy marks, for example, the French princess and her ladies in *Love's Labors Lost*, and Rosalind in *As You Like It*. On the other side of the coin, there's Kate beating Bianca in *Taming of the Shrew*, and Beatrice's cannibalistic wish to devour Claudio's heart in *Much Ado About Nothing*. These exhibit the rough-and-ready farcical side of the comic *Innamorata*. In many plots the diva performs the showy theatergram of disguise. In Italian popular comedy, she adroitly impersonated not only lovelorn pages, but pilgrims, gypsies, Turkish slaves, magicians, and learned doctors, posing some of the same challenges that faced boys playing Imogen, Helena, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola. Like her Italian counterpart, the Englished diva type is deeply competitive as a player. In *Merchant of Venice*, for example, Portia eagerly anticipates performing at the Venetian court, and brags to Nerissa about her superior acting ability and pretty-boy looks. "I'll hold thee any wager when we are both accoutred like young men, / I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two / And wear my dagger with the braver grace." In the self-aware manner of a Richard III or a Puck, the diva-type builds a special connection with the audience: she often speaks in asides, soliloquies, and other forms of direct and oblique address. She may milk a big scene by drawing it out like Portia delaying her ruling on the bond before the Venetian court, and she eagerly devises and performs in plays-within-plays like *Bel-Imperia*. Not every leading female role emulates a full-blown *Innamorata al Italiana*, of course. Some, like Catherine in *Taming of the Shrew*, spring largely from native popular tradition. Others, like Imogen of *Cymbeline*, explicitly reject theatricality as un-English and improper.

But by analyzing comedies staged from the 1580s to the 1620s, I found numerous female roles modeled on the comic *Innamorata*, forged in the performances of the foreign divas. I looked for commonalities and whittled it down to the following list— [referring to slide] okay, now you can see my professor side. This is my definition, this is the core of my book, handy-dandy.

While they may not have every trait listed, all Italian-style *Innamorate* in English comedies, not just Shakespeare, conform to this outline's basic shape. [Referring to slide] I'm not going to read it out, I'm just going to interpret it for you.

First, her foreign status will suggest a degree of sensuality and artfulness to English audiences. Her status is key: she's usually an unmarried daughter, occasionally a bride or a wife, from a respectful family, propertied, literate, and sometimes even learned. Sexually, she's a paradox: an amorous virgin who flirts and jokes with brio, sometimes bawdily, yet remains chaste in reputation (at least, chaste enough to marry). Generically, she is versatile. Often in serious trouble or wandering far from home, she can evoke pathos as well as laughter. Theatrically self-aware, she frequently declares her pleasure in acting and wit-play, and in some cases on-lookers praise her verbal acuity and improvisatory inventiveness. As a stage commodity, she always adds value. Playwrights stress her audience appeal with star scenes (this is a core argument in my book). A star scene is comic plotting and tricks (often in disguise), over-the-top laments, jealous tirades, virtuosic solo songs, comic soliloquies, and scenes of madness.

English plays featuring this type always cite, allude to, adapt or employ outright Italian players' methods and materials. These include their comic male roles in masks, their hyperkinetic farces,

their skill at improvisation and devising plots, their use of women for women's parts, and their ensemble playing based on character systems. What I mean is there are some plays that actually have Italian women players in them. This combinatory model usefully stresses the *arte* profile, and overt histrionicism of the new Italian type. It has the advantage of singling out elements that cannot be attributed to or rooted in comedies performed by boys or men in Italy or England, most of which give marriageable virgins few speeches, or keep them off-stage. They also can't be attributed to the novella tradition.

I want you to notice the last item in particular on this list, which is my touchstone. The only one I think I say "always." The Italian-style *Innamorata* on the English stage is always defined by the company she keeps. She is always associated with other features and players from Italian popular comedy – especially its character systems in which figures are defined dialogically in relationship to other characters, generally within family groups. Standard combinations used in play after play include the *Innamorata* debating her lover, confiding in her *Balia* or nurse, and outfoxing her nemesis, *Pantalone*, who either plays her father or lecherous suitor. Most Italian players, like the diva, perform one role type throughout their careers, so over time the *Innamorata* actress amassed vast experience in playing every kind of plot and scene with co-actors. Almost every scene was based on either antagonism or cooperation, which helped structure improvisation and prepare actors for a given encounter. To make her name, an actress had to be versatile within that *sola persona*, in order to play in ethnic or gender disguise, and tailor her acting to all three genres (the Renaissance genres were comedy, pastoral, and tragedy.) The most striking examples of the Italian-style *Innamorata* in England also show great versatility. Like the divas, the adapted *Innamorata* can play any gender, and can range vocally and emotionally to suit the situation. "I can sing both high and low," as Viola brags in *Twelfth Night*.

When the English imitated the Italians, they kept the flavor of this system of linked fixed types while loosening its restrictive framework of two *Senexes* and their families and servants. Plotlines pitting the *Senex Errata* (the angry father) against his son became less prominent and, in some cases, fathers disappeared altogether – we can think of *Twelfth Night* again. As in the *arte* repertory, this fertile new theatregram of headstrong daughter versus irate father held the potential for tragic as well as comic effects. The system operates in recognizable *arte* style in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Egeus threatens Hermia with death, *Much Ado About Nothing*, when Leonato bewhores Hero, and *As You Like It*, Duke Frederic exiles Rosalind and rages at Celia. But it's also found in a tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, when Capulet violently abuses Juliet. Such scenes were strongly codified set-pieces, yet flexible in performance, drawing on actors' skill in engaging audience and co-payors. As the father's fury mounts, he might draw out his threats, trying to strike her, to draw a weapon, or sputter on and on in impotent fury as Capulet does, saying "Out baggage! My fingers itch" (and many other phrases like that). The *Innamorata* might react with rising defiance and rage, or with floods of weeping, and then go on to feign submission and plot against his tyranny, just as Juliet does.

The Italian troupes often elected to multiply couples in their entitlements, presenting three, four, or even more pairs of lovers at a time. Sometimes these are siblings of the primary

Innamorati. The *comici's* propensity for generating subplots, missteps, and plot twists by multiple pairs of lovers also marks out English comedies affected by them. Lacking actresses, English playwrights used Italianated boys in their comedies, with intertwining plots about multiple pairs of lovers and rivals. Shakespeare apparently wanted to show he could match, or even out-do, the brilliant foreign players across the sea with plots that showed off groups of play boys in splashy and difficult female roles. *Merry Wives of Windsor* is an example. It's been called "the most English of comedies," but its character systems could not be more Italian, featuring patterns familiar from scenarios of the *arte*, such as the vain *Capitano* pursuing two female allies who mock him (which is found in many scenarios) and the *Innamorata* pursued by her lover and two unwanted *Zannis* who are exposed and mocked. *Merchant of Venice* has three pairs of lovers, and all three women cross-dress, and both *As You Like It* and *Midsummer* have four sets of lovers. The hyper-sophisticated *Love's Labors Lost* boasts no less than five couples, and the games of the aristocrats emulate courtly performances by French courtiers and kings, as well as the Italian players that they patronized.

I want to end with something about *As You Like It*, which I worked on in a teaching edition. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare deliberately works in broad references to the *comici's* interlocking types, notably in Jacques' showpiece on the ages of man, basically a roll call of a traveling company. Starting with the nurse (the *Balia*), the son/lover and his mistress, the bragging bombastic soldier *Capitano*, the garrulous gluttonous man of learning (the *Dottore*), the lean and slippery *Pantaloon*s, and even more doddering *Senex* or *Pantalone*. The actress-dominated mode of pastoral spurs its own allusions: Corin the shepherd invites us to a "pageant truly played" between disdainful Phoebe and lovelorn Silvius, which spurs the *Innamorata* Rosalind to jump in and improvise: "I'll prove a busy actor in their play." In fact, this unique play has more lines for women than in any other play in the entire period. Spectators can easily apply the old chestnut he gleans from his travels, "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." The duke prompts him with a remark about the transnational nature of theater with this nod to foreign playing: "This wide and universal theater presents more woeful pageants than the sea wherein we play in." With these allusions, Shakespeare reminds audiences that women, too, are players in the wide and universal stages of the world far beyond England. There's much more to say, but I want to hear from you. I hope we'll have time for questions. I just wanted to end by painting some dark shadows on this overly sunny picture, which I have to do because I'm sticking to comedy, right?

Imitation is never transparent or unmediated. Plays that translate the diva type to the English stage show an abiding ambivalence toward the flamboyant foreigner – the Circe from abroad. Attitudes range widely from cautious admiration to chronic vulgarization to savage satire. Some plays actively exploit their audiences' xenophobia, portraying the alluring *Innamorata Italiana* as a dangerous siren or even a female *Macchiavel* – think of *The White Devil*, or *Othello*, or *Troilus and Cressida*, or *Volpone*. By a variety of means, plays cast suspicion on Italian or Italianate women for being artful and theatrical, hence devious and incontinent, whether a woman is innocent or not. These kinds of characterizations suggest one kind of answer for why the English stage resisted actresses and remained all-male until 1660. A skilled actress may have been perceived as suspiciously foreign, Catholic, decadent -- but she was also enticing and

spectacular, fascinating and desirable. So much so that in other countries, fierce opposition never managed to keep her offstage for long.

Why was it so different in England? My view is that economics and entrenched stage tradition had far more to do with the delay than simple misogyny or xenophobia. Many theatre professionals saw the Italians as potential economic rivals and perceived the actress as a threat to their control over stage representation. The jingoistic reaction of Thomas Nash is often quoted, and it is a case in point: he praises the English players as “manly tragedians” at all times, and reduces all Italian theatre to obscene farces played by a whore, a *Pantaloone*, and a *Zanni*. His colleague, Thomas Haywood, sneers at Italians’ offerings, as “nothing but jigs.”

The English were not alone in perceiving the actress as threatening rivals or in equating actresses with whores. Italian and Spanish anti-theatricalists targeted the *comici* and their actresses, often viciously, but their fulminations could not turn back the clock. The actress might be simulated, emulated, or bewhored, but she could not be ignored. And that’s not an alternative fact. Thank you.

David McCandless:

Thank you so much. I’m going to do this [*on the computer.*] Hey Parthy, do you want to put the screen up? Do you know how to do that? [*She responds, inaudible.*] I think so, yeah.

Parthy McCandless:

We’ll find out!

David McCandless:

[*Laughs*] Okay, thank you very much, Pam! So, let me introduce our panelists: Christiana Clark and Lisa Wolpe, and Dawn Monique Williams. I didn’t see you come in,

Dawn Monique, I’m glad you made it. Pam, please do sit—as you anticipated, we do want to have a little time at the end for questions for all of you, and it just may be that your perspective may enter into the conversation here.

So many of us are locals and know these people well, but I just want to say: Christiana trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Art. In addition to four distinguished seasons at OSF, she has performed off-Broadway in such regional theatres as the Guthrie and the Goodman, and she has played a wide variety of roles at OSF. I’m so grateful to have her for many reasons, but not least that she’s played such a wide variety, including Helena, who people kind of regard as a doormat, and then the ultimate feisty unruly one, Beatrice, as well as Proteus in the all-female production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and also recently Horatio in *Hamlet*.

Speaking of playing male roles, Lisa Wolpe has made a career out of that. Not to say that she hasn’t played Shakespeare’s women as well, because she has, but in a recent profile in *American Theatre Magazine* it was said she has performed more of Shakespeare’s male characters than any woman in history.

Dawn Monique Williams, artistic associate at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, is currently directing *Merry Wives of Windsor* which, again, very appropriately and pertinently, is going to feature some cross-gender casting. She is a former Associate Artistic Director at Impact Theatre in Berkeley and recently the recipient of the award from the Princess Grace Foundation, which supports emerging artists in theatre, film, and dance. She has an M.A. in Drama from San Francisco State University, and an M.F.A. in Directing from the University of Massachusetts.

So, could I just, again, come back to that basic question, really: I think we'd all be interested to hear your own experiences, your own trajectories as female artists dealing with Shakespeare's women characters and the extent to which your own sensibilities as women in 2017 inform the approach to characters both male and female in an era so long ago, and in a patriarchal world. Christiana, do you want to start us off?

Christiana Clark:

The idea of myself playing Shakespeare's women or men when I first started learning about theatre— I didn't grow up knowing theatre as we know it. What I did see, especially when it came to any of the classics, especially theatre, was a lack of anything that looked like me at all. To be a part of a Shakespeare festival was never anything on my radar. I didn't think it possible. I didn't feel invited in it, either, because it seemed to be a world so full of— or at least, purported to me, those that were so educated in the world, and that you had to have these years of experience in the study of it to even approach the taking in and the appreciation of what it is.

I was lucky to fall into the first opportunities to work professionally with a theatre company that was all about breaking that down and stripping that away and investing in the life and the humanity and the complexity of it and taking an approach to Shakespeare that allowed more folks in. That was with a theatre company in Minneapolis led by a fantastic woman, Michelle Hensley, called Ten Thousand Things Theatre. Anyone that's ever sat in with a discussion with me has heard me talk about this theatre company. Their mission statement is taking theatre to communities that don't have access to come to the theatre. It's largely prisons, homes for shut-ins, homeless shelters, detention centers, and on and on and etc. The first Shakespeare that I did professionally I played Emelia in *Othello*. A female role that is very specific in her function, but also has this amazing speech that speaks to the contradiction of being a woman and being a wife and being seen to be as being a tool for the goings-on of your husband alone and what it does to us and what it says and what we give up and what we agree to, knowingly, on a level, in being a part of this function of society at this time. Getting a chance to speak those words in a women's prison where there were women who may not have had all the scholarly teachings of Shakespeare and theatre history, but lived the life of a woman where there's automatic assumptions of what you think, what your experience is, what your point of view is, simply by showing up somewhere in the gender that you are regardless of anything else -- of your economic status, of any orientation, of any upbringing. By showing up at a place as a woman there's an assumption of who you are. To be able to live in that woman's skin, who you see act one certain way through much of the play and has one moment to say, "this is what's going on.

Also, this is what I'm aware of. I don't have an answer outside of it, but I can take this moment with Desdemona to say 'you have a chance, perhaps, to have a different approach in how you go forward in this agreement.'"

So that opened up my living in Shakespeare's time— or world, as these women. I actually get more of the question of, "has it been tough for you being a tall woman to get in plays?" than has been strictly being a woman alone. People do, all the time. "You're tall! Is it hard for you to get work?" I'm baffled, a little bit by it. But then I understand, because again it falls into the convention of what you assume to see in the body of the leading lady and how you assume to see the couples paired. But, because of that, it's offered up opportunities more readily for me to play these different male roles because it's automatically a little bit easier for folks to see a six-foot body with a deeper voice inhabit something male.

For me, it started with the opportunity to see myself in here at all in these plays. Then it's constantly a journey of that knowledge of what the assumption is when I step into a role -- how we take that assumption and spin it on its head, or get a chance to lean into it. I'm continually learning and growing each time. Those on this panel, though, have even more experience living in and through it and I feel like I should give you all a chance now.

Lisa Wolpe:

That was a great lecture. Thank you.

Clark:

Yes.

Brown:

Oh, thank you!

Wolpe:

Really great. I would say my life has been influenced by this whole economic difficulty as well as the misogyny in our culture, which is rampant. I've been doing the work for forty years. I created the Los Angeles Women Shakespeare Company twenty-five years ago, which I just closed before the election [of 2016] thinking my work was done. [*Audience laughter.*]

Brown:

Oh, god.

Wolpe:

And I refuse to do the twenty-five years over, because people like Bill Rauch are picking it up and going, "I have thirty-five million dollars, let me help." I have acted less because I've directed twenty all-female productions and ten reverse gender productions and I've raised a million dollars for the arts. I have to make the world in which the women can succeed. My theater company was never more than fifty percent white. We were in Los Angeles, so that was fine. But when I tour my work to Indiana or Virginia the blowback is serious. They're doing all-white

productions, for one thing. There's a lot of pushback around expanding the woman's role onstage, even from the actresses themselves. They don't have the courage to take the power that they deserve to have onstage.

So now I have a critical eye everywhere, I'm traveling internationally, I'm doing a reverse gender original pronunciation *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Prague in July, in which I play Puck. I just played Mackers in New York in a three-person iteration that I created where a man played Seyton and Lady M and kind of revolutionized this idea that bearded women are the evil that men can blame. I'm way down the road of flipping, adapting, working with the trans community. Two of the recent college productions I directed (*Twelfth Night* in Boulder and *Taming of the Shrew* in New York City), I cast a woman and came back three months later and that person had gone trans. I was like, "I don't know if this is even an all-female production anymore," but now Sarah is Calvin and Hannah is Luke and everything is shifting. The spectrum is arisen and it will not be stopped. The binary is an old-school idea, which is kind of how I created my first work. Let me step into the male, let me step into the male silhouette. I played Hamlet twice, Richard III twice, and Iago twice. I played everything I want to play except Richard II, but I now have to do it again because there's another way of looking at gender and personhood and identity that did not exist forty years ago, but needs to be supported now. It's fascinating.

The pushback— your [Dr. Brown's] brilliant explication of the Italian scene and the resistance in England is similarly happening here. In the year 2000, when you saw Mark Rylance celebrating his Cleopatra, he had green-lighted me to play Richard III as the first production that was all-female on the Globe stage and Tina Packer was to direct it, and it had a \$350,000 campaign underway, and PBS was green-lighted to do a documentary. It was our tenth anniversary (this [gesturing] is my technical director and scene designer Mia Torres -- we've worked together for twenty-five years.) Suddenly, he changed his mind halfway through the thing and I flew over to England going, "Excuse me, this is everything to me," and he was just watering his plants and floating around his office going "Green light, oh, yellow light, red light!" Playing with my life like a god with a fly. I will never get over the pain of that dismissal. Or the numerous one-offs that are given to directors that haven't spent thirty years in the field that are just going, "Look at this brilliant young person who's coming up with an all-female production," I'm going "Mm hmm. And how much have they thought about this? You just re-gendered what's-it – did you read the play?" Somebody asked me to play Caliban this summer, and I said, "Now, why do you want a woman to play a man who's a rapist, who's an animal, who's a monster, and wears the magical quality?" and they just said, "We just thought you were a good actor, so we're putting you in it." I sat with that for a couple of months and I pulled out, and went "That's not a reason." You have to understand *The Tempest*. I've done these plays so many times that it's not okay to walk into a show that you haven't thought through. I just played Antonia in *The Tempest*, regendered that in Orlando while I did the original— The first translation project *Pericles* in which I played Lychordia and the bawd and the vestal virgin and a whole bunch of stuff that's super easy to do. Then I created Thaliard (the murderer) in a full beard and not one reviewer mentioned it because they didn't know that was me.

When I play a man, you can't tell it's me – you think I'm a man. But almost every other human is not doing that. They're going, "We just really don't want to do that, we want to still see that that's a woman playing a man." They will never tell me why to the satisfaction of my theatrical imagination. Like, why? Because if I have Rosencrantz played by a woman, which happened because of a fluke when a director left and I was left with his casting, then I, as Hamlet, I'm like, "Well, if Rosencrantz looks like that, then I slept with her. And now she's standing in the room with my mother and Ophelia, and that changes the play, and then I kill her and I don't care?" That's strange. That makes me a different Hamlet, if I'm going to murder a woman. It makes it different.

Every re-gendering asks a question, and I love the questions. But I think it's fascinating, Dr. Brown, what you're talking about, where this comes from, and I'll be getting your book. Because there's a pattern, and it's getting—[*crosstalk*]

Brown:

I need some pressure, more pressure, it's good—

Wolpe:

Do it! Because the way you verbalized some characterization of meanness with which they were mocking what the Italians were celebrating is exactly what I'm seeing in the American theatre today. I just directed *Othello* with Peter Macon in Colorado, and they had one Equity contract for a woman. First they gave it to Brabantio before they considered that I might need an Equity actress to play Emilia and another one to play Desdemona. "We'll get a university kid to do it, it'll be fine." It's so complicated to play Emilia and Desdemona. Getting an old white man to yell at somebody for twenty minutes is not hard. [*Audience laughter*] Anybody can play Brabantio. You don't need an Equity actor to be playing Brabantio because it's of limited scope anyway.

But no amount of activism on my part could make them move that money into a woman's pocket. Because they knew that the desperate women would accept \$300 and no housing to do twice as much work. I'm all about following the money. The great patrons that are celebrating and uplifting the art – thank you for making opportunities for people to explore and respond to what the next world's going to look like.

Williams:

There's simultaneity of things that were happening as multiple paths converged on my journey. One: I started in theatre as an actor. I was in a high school and then subsequently a college theatre department that was simply more women than men, so many of us were asked to play men's parts -- that was common practice, it never seemed odd or strange – from the time that I was fourteen. Similar to what Christiana shared, given my "type" I was never the ingénue, so I played plenty of men's roles and never thought otherwise. In fact, I was like "that's great, I have work, I'm acting."

But my relationship with Shakespeare is a much more contested one in that I never enjoyed Shakespeare until my early 20s. We didn't perform Shakespeare in high school so my only contact with Shakespeare was in an English class, and I was bored to tears. I couldn't understand it. It had no meaning. It was really completely lost on me until I did a conservatory acting program where my acting teacher was a Chicano man – Tommy Gomez. I asked him, "Hey, you know, as a black woman, am I always just going to play welfare mothers and drug addicted [sic] and psychics?" And he's like, "Well, what about classics?" And I was like, "I literally don't understand them." And he's like, "Well, we're going to do some scenes – we're going to do *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in this class." He set me on a path. He told me – this was in the '90s – he told me, statistically, more actors of color work in classical plays and musical comedy than anything else. I think that's probably still a true statistic – I haven't done the math. So, he turned me on to Shakespeare and it was through embodying the characters that I came to love the plays. It was never a literary appreciation. It was always about how hard they were – the actual muscle it required to get in there, to understand it, to make sense of it, and then to be able to communicate that to other people so that they could understand it. I became obsessed and it has become my singular passion. So, I was still an actor and wanting to do a lot, a lot of Shakespeare.

Then over time, I shifted into directing, and met with many, many, many more gatekeepers as a-- People still call me young. I don't see myself as young, but I get that I'm part of that demographic of young female directors of color. We are not appreciated in any way as an authority on Shakespeare, at all. It just doesn't happen. The opportunities that Bill Rauch is giving to directors of color and to young women directors to do these classic plays is entirely rare. You do see many more one-offs – to Lisa's point – of some stunt thing. Somebody said "Hey," (some regional theater) "you need to shake it up, you need to get your act together," so they just— The rolodex of who's young and hot and that's who they call, regardless of how many years they've committed to this work.

So, the confluence of "yeah, we have more women – why don't they just play these parts?" and this passion for Shakespeare really has collided. I grew up in a region where we had an all-female Shakespeare company (Woman's Will, down in San Francisco Bay Area). It's been defunct for more than a handful of years now. So, I was also exposed to that as a young artist. I studied Lisa's work a lot. One time, I was directing *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and I had eighty women audition for what's essentially two roles, Maggie and May (because these were all young women, so they weren't auditioning for Big Mama). Eighty women. And we had to keep auditioning just to find a Brick and Big Daddy because we weren't getting the turnout that we needed. It was a re-affirmation for me that something is horribly wrong that we are not creating these opportunities. For *Merry Wives*, we cast K.T. Vogt – she's playing Falstaff. It's not some grand statement, it's not some *thing we're doing to the play*. K.T. is an actor with tremendous facility; she's playing Falstaff. End. Stop. For me, it really is that simple. Plenty of times I re-gender the roles, but often it's also like, "we don't need to re-gender the role because the actor has the facility to do what's needed to play the part." I approach it both ways. But I believe philosophically, at my core, that there's no reason that women and other marginalized genders should not be getting the opportunities to play these great parts.

McCandless:

In your video commentary, Dawn Monique, speaking about your upcoming production – I hope I’m not misquoting you, but I think you said you had a variety of reasons for casting women as men in the play. Is that— Am I remembering that correctly?

Williams:

Yeah, yeah.

McCandless:

Do you want to talk a little more about that?

Williams:

Sure! I had no intention of re-gendering Falstaff for this particular production, because doing so changes the play, which is okay in another version, if that’s what somebody wants to do. That’s not what I wanted to do. I knew that K.T. was going to play Falstaff as a man. But we have an actor in our company – Sara Bruner – who has a certain androgyny to her person and there’s some gender fluidity just to her person, so we cast her as Sir Evan Hugh [sic]. That was a place where I was like, “I’m just going to have a conversation with Sara, and she can tell me how she feels about approaching this role.” I didn’t want her to feel manipulated, in being used for her androgyny. But if that was something she was excited about, then we should lean into it. She told me that before coming to OSF, all she got to do was play the female ingénues and that she’s actually really excited, since coming to OSF, that she can stand in her gender fluidity and stand in that androgyny and not be relegated to the young ingénues, which she’s quickly aging out of those roles. So, she said, “I want to do it as a dude and it not be a thing.” For me, what was a really great victory was, when we sat down for our table read, one of our veteran acting company members (he’s been in the company over twenty-some-odd years) and – as Lisa said, how people sit on the gender spectrum is new, the language is new for so many of us – so I was so moved that this veteran actor-- He looked to Sara and he said, “What are your character’s gender pronouns?” And Sara said, “He, him, his.” That was all the discussion that we had to have about it, and we moved on.

Then I cast one other woman, and she’s on a double-track: she’s playing Robin, which is Falstaff’s page, and then William Page, the Page’s son. For that, she’s playing Robin as a young girl and she’s playing William Page as a little boy. That just happened to work because of where her vocal register sits [and] the conceptual thing we’re doing with the “children” of Windsor (which I’ve all but eliminated and made them all kind of teenagers). So that’s a place where I was like, “We’re going to re-gender this page.” That’s the only character that we’ve changed the gender of. Though there are other characters that might not necessarily read as queer in the play, but the actors playing those characters identify as queer, and it’s like, “That’s how you show up, so let’s start there and see where we go from there” – how that shows up in the room.

McCandless:

I want to pick up on the [*inaudible*] you said: the, perhaps, spectrum of responses when a woman plays a male role. Lisa, I think I heard you say that your goal is to play it as a man and to be non-recognizable as a woman – did you say that? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Wolpe:

I said it.

McCandless:

Yeah. Dawn Monique, just now talking about K.T. as Falstaff said, "It's K.T. as Falstaff; end of discussion." I'm wondering – and I also want to get Christiana into this discussion – but I'm wondering then, when we think about K.T. as Falstaff, is it: well, we see K.T. as a woman, so we see the co-existence of the two? Christiana, I was thinking about you as Proteus (you do that performance well), and thinking about your Horatio, as well, and how you thought of yourself in presenting those roles. I think, in fact, your choices as Horatio and Proteus were different in terms of how they were gendered. So, I'd be interested to have you pick up on that, if you wouldn't mind.

Clark:

For me, in performance, for Proteus: it was Proteus, who is a young man, and my goal was to play a young man. Again, the facilities that I have lend themselves to that a little quicker. What was really interesting is, on the mirror end of it, the actress playing Valentine – shorter, smaller frame, a higher timbre to her voice – but equally, within the scope of gender – I know men that are even smaller that have even higher voices than that actress. But again, at that time when there's knowledge in the audience of "Oh, that's a woman" they want (I've heard from people, I'm not generalizing) that there's a scrutiny to it. They're looking to poke holes in that and see what they register as feminine. So, for me it was very important that I root, as I would any character, in the reality of the physicality of this person -- the traits that align male. In all of the physicality of dropping a voice, dropping your register and taking up space and inhabiting that physically – that was very, very important, and important to how we were telling the story.

In Horatio-- Actually our director, from the start, didn't exactly know where she wanted to go, gender-wise, with Horatio, and I was up for anything. The first reading, I think we kept the male pronouns as we went through it. Then we did another reading and we flipped to the female pronouns. Then I saw the costume renderings. This was a world in which there were other females, and those females wore big dresses and had big hair and jewels. Horatio was wearing doublet and hose similar to all the other men in the production. But a thing that was brought to me time and time again was that, especially as the casting was— Hamlet, we had Danforth, who just the year before was Benedick for my Beatrice. So, there was a specificity of being here, at this place where there's such a direct correlation that, if you put us back onstage in the bodies that we have, there's a recall to that. Our director didn't want to complicate her *Hamlet* with another romance, which was our director's choice. But like you [Wolpe] said, that changes it, that changes it now that one person you're confiding in, that one person who above everything you're saying, "I choose you above the rest" is now a woman and these characters

are identified as heterosexual, here we are, how is that not another line in the plot point? For me, because we didn't have language within the story (outside of Shakespeare's language)-- There wasn't anything to speak to Horatio being either trans in a gender, either trans or completely male. Because though I was in doublet and hose, they still gave me these feminine braids and she was always spoken about as still being feminine. I didn't want to live in a place that was a spectacle or not thought through or not a fully realized being. Because if I'm representing someone who is trans, I want us to have that be able to be part of her thing. Not just a, "Well, if they see it that way," or "Well, if they don't, they don't." So, I asked that her pronouns be she/her/hers and that she lives at that. And then everybody—Whoever wants to infer or not infer anything with sexual orientation, which does not align with gender identity, which is another hard thing for people to separate. That's what I was willing to say, "I don't care what they think," on that end of it. But if I'm going to inhabit a human being, either we have to honor them fully or I'm not going to be in-between with it. For Horatio to stand as a female who wore men's clothes and was in this man's world was something I was willing to-- let the other questions, like I said, that have attached themselves to gender identity -- let people have questions in their mind about.

It's exciting for me to hear people— There were some people after *Two Gents*— I heard someone say, "It was great! I don't know why they called it all-female when there was that one dude that played--" [*Audience laughter*] That's what I want to hear in that world, as an actor, as a person who is— My commitment is to fully embody this being. This is the gender assigned; I want that to show up.

Wolpe:

My first roles in Shakespeare were Rosalind and Viola, but then I was exploring Malvolio in workshop, just looking for greater range of thought and feeling to work on. Then my mentor, Kristin Linklater, and my other mentor, Carol Gilligan (*Freeing the Natural Voice, Freeing the Woman's Voice*), politically – created a company called Company of Women with international actors. They tagged me to play Henry V for their first production. We worked on it for three years, taking residencies as Equity actors in various universities, training faculty in self-expression that were female, finding their voices as academics, training companies of girls in ritual and magic and Shakespeare. And we dropped it in, which is a psychophysical process where you get to really own the language. I was playing Henry to Patrice Johnson (fantastic actress, who's very, very compelling – we loved each other.) After workshoping it for three years, we put the show up at Smith College and at Shakespeare and Company. The costumes came in and they gave me a form-fitting Donna Karan leather vest on like a catsuit and the Dauphin was this Belgian girl in a unitard. They said, "Now disassociate yourself because we want to do this feminist *Henry V* where Henry's disassociated and God is his father and he's not really a human being having this relationship." And I'm like, "I'm in relationship with Patrice as Henry. I understand this physical— I understand this entire relationship, including the conquest that you want to highlight" (as, she says, "It is as it shall please my father the king," and gives herself to Henry because spoils of war.) I wanted that whole human heroic journey. They didn't want to have that onstage. I felt confused between feeling sexualized, like, "you're going to look at my breasts this entire performance, you're going to look at my crotch, it's not going to

be Henry. Why are you putting this in my way as an obstacle? Why do you need this? Why do you need to remind everybody every moment that I'm a female person? I'm actually playing Henry right now. Talk to me in the bar." That really skewed my desire to have this "feminist viewpoint" because in my opinion, Ms. Williams and Ms. Clark have two completely different opinions and every woman has her own opinion. There's not a "woman's point of view" on Shakespeare. There's not one aesthetic to gender-play Shakespeare. I am somewhat androgynous, but I'm ferociously intimidating about politics. So that just pushed me around.

I just did my solo show in Prague and a Georgian television station did this hour-long feature on me, and the interviewer had two different terminal degrees in gender studies. She played hardball all night long, and I loved her. She was so smart. Because where we came from, in Hollywood, we'd be on television a lot and they'd say, "In Hollywood an all-female company is flipping the Bard," and we went, "Oh my god, this has been done for hundreds of years. Hundreds of years!" Any great actress, Charlotte Cushman, would play everything to great reviews and be the most famous person in the world as a theater purveyor. We have gone the other way so far that even my own company, which is lauded and solid and been there for decades, is called a gimmick when I wrote for a grant. I'm like, "A gimmick. No." Emma Rice-- "It's not misogyny that we just took her out of the position of Artistic Director of the Globe." [Stands up] It is misogynistic that Emma Rice was fired. [Sits] No man would ever undergo that for being an innovator in the field. Never. It's still political. It's very important.

The reason that I take on the male silhouette is because I'm looking at the patriarchy going, "If I talk like this" [Stands, demonstrates] because men are direct. They turn their head, and then the whole body is one. They say "die," or "live," and it happens. They sustain their gestures until the word shifts, and then they'll exit. Whereas women are like [demonstrates physically], "Can you break this and that and go up in high heels and go off your voice and smile and paint your face and not deal with what's around you and fall down." If you're in a tragedy, any tragedy of Shakespeare, the women commit suicide or they fall apart or they go insane and they can't handle power. In a comedy, they have to marry a man at the end of the play. Which is fine if you're a boy exploring sociopolitical sway like an alchemist, going, "I need to develop my female side. I need to understand what everybody in the world goes through, so I'm going to walk in their shoes. I'm going to be Lavinia and you can cut out my tongue and you can rape me and you can cut off my hands, but it's my father who's a fool -- not me." If a man can play Lavinia, all power to you. I'd be afraid to play it.

Usually it's much more comical when the men take on the female because they're not losing anything. They already own everything. They're going, "Let me also sparkle over here and flex over here and take your role." [Pretends to push aside Clark with her hip.] Whereas women are like, "I have one chance to show you how intelligent, how passionate, and how spiritual I am as a being. I'm an eternal, spiritual being having a temporary human existence and that's a performance. Inside me is a soul that sees all of it and is all of it and we are all one. Your diminishment of what I'm capable of is just blindness on your part. I am the prism. We are the light." In the theatre, we feel that. But we have to make a space for everybody to show up. You have to be able to practice that. Which is why every single university in the country, and in the

world, is featuring women as men. Because they need to stretch and find their strength and start writing their own plays. Until they find language which Shakespeare provides so eloquently—just having your blood pump through your heart to the rhythm of that eloquence will teach you language. Then you can go and write your own plays.

Williams:

To your [McCandless's] question about K.T.: It's tricky, because we have a resident acting company who have their own cult followings, so, there is no way that an audience who regularly attends our shows is going to miss that that's K.T. She will co-exist with the role. That is a true thing. But it is also not meant to be a gimmick. She will wear a beard because, well, one, the script tells us Falstaff has a beard. But that is also the iconic Falstaff. I'm not trying to deviate from that. She walks with a swagger. We're doing it in an Elizabethan silhouette, and clothing then was very gendered, so she's wearing her pumpkin pants; she has a massive codpiece. We're not shying away from any of that. For the people who know it's K.T. under all of that, hopefully it makes the comedy more rich. But I imagine if we picked it up and took it to another region or market where she was not known, the goal would be that she would go unrecognized as a woman. Now, what we're not doing is spending hours in rehearsal dissecting gender stereotypes or physicality. We're not doing that kind of training on the body. K.T. has adopted a swagger that – to me – isn't that much unlike her own, which is why she's such a great actor for the role. It already lives in her, as it would for all of us if we were getting this training that Lisa's talking about – getting the opportunities to explore the alchemy of our bodies and what they're capable of. She has entered the space, and she says, "Falstaff is the epitome of male privilege." She has an understanding of the character in that way. She's like, "He's entitled. Of course he thinks that he could seduce these women, because he sees himself very male, top of the food chain, he has a title." She has an awareness of that being the fabric of the role and she's going for it. But I'd be foolish to sit here and tell you, "You won't recognize K.T." because, if you've seen K.T. in shows, you'll recognize K.T. without a doubt.

McCandless:

Great. I actually have lots more questions myself, but we're, a little bit, heading into the home stretch here, so I'll open it up to the audience for questions.

Audience Member 1:

Christiana, you had talked about choosing the pronouns and yet, towards the end of the play, Hamlet says something, "as you are a man." [*Inaudible*] Could you tell any of my students who may want to know [*inaudible*] understand what was going on?

Clark:

Yeah, that was definitely a discussion. In that moment of Hamlet saying, more or less, "of all the people on this earth, in the world, you are the one my soul chooses as closest to me," and says [to Wolpe] help me...

Wolpe:

My heart of hearts?

Clark:

Yes. What's the "with the man", he says, "a man that doesn't allow passion" [*crosstalk*] Yes, "passion's slave." "Give me a man that is not passion's slave—"

Wolpe:

"—and I will wear him in my heart."

Clark:

There we go. And we chose to keep that, even though throughout the pronouns were "she" for Horatio but then he refers to her as man. That was the simplicity of that in English language "man" is the default. "He" is the default. And that is, "of everyone, of all of humanity, all of mankind." At the same time, though, because of the work that we had-- Specifically with us and this world, nodding to-- Recognizing her for whatever and whoever she would want to be. Because it was still very, very plain that she, as a woman, was dressing and somehow living as man on the outward -- at least to some extent for whatever she needed to get through this world. So that's what allowing that to live was for us.

Wolpe:

And may I say that, that in Shakespeare, the writer is so metatheatrical, in saying "All the world's a stage" that if I play Hamlet and I say, "Frailty, thy name is woman" and the audience goes, "It's a woman playing it. That's interesting. Let's move on." Or if we're doing Mackers, and it's like, "Unsex me here" or saying, "if you did it, you were a man" that is metatheatrical. When I was navigating *Henry IV Part One* yesterday, it happened all the time. "My aunt, my lord, sir, lady" I mean, it just went on. This is beyond that I can track this. This is just saying, "We're doing this. You can see that three women are playing something you've never seen women play. We can't keep up with the language; we're going so fast with the flip. So just lift your air balloon above the specific that you're actually in the room with Henry, here at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival on the cutting edge of gender-bending, and hear all this language and look at these relationships. You can come back in ten years; it's going to have gone further than that. It's metatheatrical; it's not specifically in a realistic situation. We have broken it. We're talking with you. Keep up with us because--the kids that are coming out of the acting classes that I teach are, many of them, trans, and none of this can be fit into boxes. Except for us older people where we used to have it in boxes. We can go, "I can teach you what it used to be, in case somebody asks you to play the binary. You could pronate your wrists for maleness and supinate them for female. You could break the angles of all your chi flow for female and you can cast smaller people to make you look taller and more direct."

But really, I think the hallmark of a gentleman in Queen Elizabeth's time was a man that could dance, and fight, and travel, and woo a woman—

Williams:

Capers, he sings, he has verses—

Wolpe:

Yes! I would say, to Dr. Brown's point, having played so many of the male roles myself, what I don't get to do is what Christiana gets to do all the time, is become part and parcel of an ensemble that's creating something, because I don't create something and have a specific moment of outpouring. I'm always the leading guy. I don't get to do any of the ensemble work. That's a sadness that makes me feel isolated. On the other hand, it's interesting to hear that women come out of ensemble and pop up for a second whereas the men float in, deliver, and walk out, and somebody else cleans up the stage or something.

McCandless:

Good, yes, other questions. Yes?

Audience Member 2:

Dr. Brown, earlier in your talk you mentioned opera [*inaudible*] could you say a few words about female roles?

Brown:

Yeah, the late 16th century is where all the experiments and the *camerata* in Florence-- The really interesting thing is, of course, when it begins -- with Caccini, Monteverdi, etc. -- that they need actors. They need actors who can do dramatic roles, not just the singers. There were professional singers before, but some of them were in the *commedia dell'arte*. A brilliant new book is coming out from Chicago just this year about how, if you characterize -- I'm sure the actors here will confirm this -- it's very much about vocal quality in terms of portraying gender, or class or any part of an identity. The *commedia dell'arte* had this expertise in creating roles with vocal quality -- what dialect, what was your timbre, were you male/female, what age were you -- so that they were used as the--especially the women who could sing and act -- they performed in Monteverdi. Isabella Andreini's daughter-in-law was the first Arianna, for example. There's this close connection between the *commedia dell'arte* and their performers. A lot of people ask me about, "Well, what about the *castrati*?" It actually begins with women in these prominent roles, like Euridice and Arianna, and then competition starts coming in from the *castrati*. The idea is, of course, opera is drama plus, and that's where the *commedia dell'arte* is bound together there. Especially in Venice, with Monteverdi. That could be an entire other book, which I can't do, but I do have a little bit about it.

We do talk about the *arioso*, the kind of soliloquy, or the kind of lament, especially, which is like an *aria*. It's an emotive *aria*, in terms of your soliloquy, in terms of your performance. But more Shakespeareans are beginning to think (especially those who study music) that there's much more singing, and lost songs, in Shakespeare than we ever knew. Because in Shakespeare in parts---in lots of the parts, songs were left out, for example, in *Romeo and Juliet*. So there may have been singing, even, by Juliet.

Wolpe:

In terms of esoteric wisdom, and Shakespeare's plays are at least 300% more musical than any other plays of the time, it goes. On the ladder of enlightenment [*reaching up*] it goes from music and song (that's opera) [*lowering hand*] to poetry, [*lowering hand*] to prose, [*lowering hand*] to violence. So that if language breaks down in a scene, and there's nothing that can be said, it goes to physical violence. If prose is not enough, one lifts into poetry, and if poetry can't hold it, one begins to sing. They couch it in this end-jig that ends in a divine mastery. But the idea of the androgyne was the alchemist ideal: that you would understand your feminine side and allow it as much as your masculine side. That was actually sacred in some form.

Brown:

Just to pick up on that: "The Mad Scene" is a chapter in my book and, of course, the mad scene in opera becomes this *topos* -- this very, very important form. But it's in theatre first -- the mad scene, and then things like Ophelia's singing--this was done in Italy, by-- Isabella was renowned for her mad scene. *La Pazzia* was— at the 1589 Medici wedding, she stunned everyone by her singing, tragedy, comedy. She enacted every single role in the troupe. She did *Pantalone*, she did *Capitano*, *Brighella*, all their dialects. She also sang in French to the French princess. It's a truly virtuosic scene, the mad scene. Not everybody could do one. You have to seem to be generating mad-talk.

Wolpe:

Well, harmony and chaos are the themes also. I would say when you leave people out--I was just in Prague and I saw them do *Othello*. It was an all-white cast. The man playing Othello had painted himself in zebra stripes. They set it in a gun range on a border in the '60s -- in a shooting range. I will tell you that when Desdemona was strangled, nobody went to check her pulse. When Emilia was shot, nobody looked at her. Those women were dressed as whores. They put a clown onstage, which was an obese white woman painted even more white to be the clown who rolled around in a wheelchair during the entire show uttering profanity about black people. This was a vision that I had never seen before, and I saw it the week of the inauguration when Trump became President. I just want to say, in terms of international theatre, things can change if you take away the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts]. This breadth of humanity that you're having happen here in Oregon in this isolated little fabulous theatre company in the middle of a whole bunch of something else-- I've been traveling a lot, and this is a rare moment of humanity. This is a rare moment of inclusivity. I'm really grateful that Bill is rolling out world premieres all over the world -- country, anyway...no, all over the world. But the world is not all in alignment with safe spaces for creative artists to express themselves and feel included. It's a very dangerous world right now, so this is precious.

The first time I was here, advocating for all-female Shakespeare, was in 1994. I sat down with Lue Douthit. Coming down from the Shakespeare conference in Portland, I said, "We've been doing this. You've got to do this." It took twenty years.

Clark:

Yeah, yeah. It's still [*crosstalk*]

Williams:

And we don't know when it's going to happen again!

Wolpe:

I guess it must be pretty revolutionary to cause such a stir.

Brown:

I have a question, I know it's—*[inaudible]*

McCandless:

Yeah, we have time for one last question, sure.

Brown:

Something that I've come across is that-- It seems to me, maybe with my blinkers or – trying to look at 1600, in my range – that there are roles that tradition has straight-jacketed. That has declared-- That tradition can be really limiting for a female role, I'm talking about now. I think it about Portia, which is longer (you probably know) longer than Shylock, Antonio, Bassanio. It is the leading role; it is never played as the leading role. If you can reconceive-- Tradition is such a tyrant. There's an Early Modern phrase, "Custom is an idiot." I'm also thinking of a role like Tamara. A lot of times there's an implicit assumption when we mean like "Shakespeare's good women" instead of Tamara, this fantastic role. I'm just putting out that there's a tradition in talking about Shakespeare's women and female roles that with more creative approaches to the gender, what does it mean to be (and it's often discussed with Lady Macbeth, of course) to be a Portia who is really in control of all the men by the end? Or a Helena who's constantly (as David knows very well) treated abusively in the scholarly literature. Some people think she's such a bitch.

Wolpe:

Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*?

Brown:

Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*.

Wolpe:

Is in control of everyone at the end?

Brown:

She controls all their fortunes, in other words. *[Crosstalk]*, Bassanio--

Wolpe:

She doesn't, though, she really doesn't, because she ends up marrying a gay man and giving away all her power because her father set her in a trap.

Brown:

But she--we could debate it later, but—[*audience laughter*] It's with the ring trick. What I want to point out, though, is in stage tradition, her role is so savagely cut, so often – trimmed. And sometimes Act V is cut altogether, all of Act V, all of Portia's final ring trick. So anyway, I'm a big Portia advocate. She's probably the closet-- Almost like an homage to the Italian diva. I think she's a really strong protagonist who's been reduced to a minor character, or a secondary character.

Wolpe:

I will never think about the Italian plays the same way again. Thank you, Dr. Brown. This is cool.

McCandless:

Well, we're actually out of time. I want to thank our panelists.

This special presentation, "The Woman's Part in Shakespeare" concluded with a performance by Robin Goodrin Nordli of her one-woman show, "Virgins to Villains: My Journey with Shakespeare's Women."