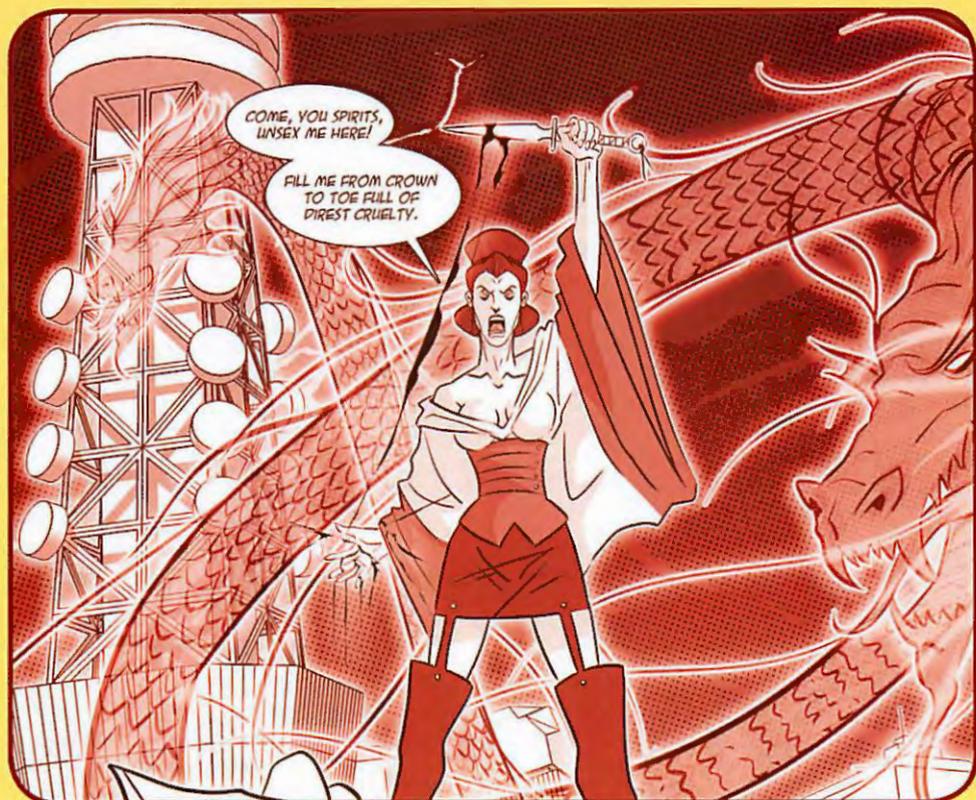


The  
**Upstart  
Crow**  
*A Shakespeare Journal*



SHAKESPEARE'S FEMALE ICONS

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Elizabeth Rivlin



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# THE • VPSTART • CROW

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Dear Readers,

It is a particular pleasure to introduce Volume 31 (2012), "Shakespeare's Female Icons," featuring an essay section guest edited by Francesca Royster of DePaul University. Drawing from a 2010 Shakespeare Association of America seminar, this section and the issue as a whole examine the ways in which female icons continue to transform the cultural value of Shakespeare.

Professor Royster's introduction theorizes the significance of Shakespeare's female icons for contemporary discussions of gender, race, and power. Natalie Loper analyzes the celebrity presence of the former teen icon Julia Stiles and the way that her "real-life" personae inform our perceptions of her Ophelia, while Dee Anna Phares offers an alternate perspective on Stiles, calling attention to the visuality and lack of vocality of her Desi in the film *O*. Challenging the premise that icons are necessarily visual, Kendra Leonard focuses on the musical score of Kenneth Branagh's *As You Like It*. Niamh O'Leary charts the dynamic new perspective on *Hamlet's* enigmatic Gertrude offered by Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*, and Catherine Thomas studies the varied representations of another highly ambivalent icon, Lady Macbeth, in recent graphic novels. Coming full circle, Royster returns to the icon as postmodern celebrity as she juxtaposes the public reception of Condoleezza Rice to Shakespeare's Cleopatra, a raced, gendered agent and receptacle of fantasy. At the end, Ayanna Thompson reflects on the relational status of the icon, suggesting that this collection demonstrates the extent to which "These icons have lives that accrue meaning through repetition, revision, and restaging."

Our performance reviews examine current theatrical embodiments of Shakespeare's female icons. From the failure of the Globe Theatre to confront Katherina's iconicity to Seana McKenna's Richard III at Canada's Stratford Festival, our reviews cover some of the most noteworthy productions of the past two years, including the New York Public Theater's *As You Like It* and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The book review section, edited by Professor Will Stockton, addresses recent titles which are germane to this special issue. Featured are a new edited collection on Elizabeth I and Kathryn Schwarz's *What You Will*, as well as books by Stephen Greenblatt, James Stone, Philip Davis, and edited collections by James Schiffer, and Randall Martin and Katherine Scheil.

It has been a privilege to serve as editor of *The Upstart Crow* for the past eight years. In spirit, the journal will be reborn under the editorship of my colleague, Will Stockton, as an online, open access journal entitled *Upstart: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, independent of the university press. The new journal will feature work on Renaissance and early modern literature studies including Shakespeare and will strive particularly to publish the work of younger and emerging scholars, though it will continue to welcome the work of more established scholars, as well. Will and I hope you will support *Upstart* by sending us your submissions, recommending us to others, and most of all, reading our content. Vol. 1, which will feature a cluster of essays addressing the question "Is Shakespeare Our Only Contemporary?" and will go live in the coming months. See p. 164 (below) for more details.

Elizabeth Rivlin, Editor

## INTRODUCTION TO “SHAKESPEARE’S FEMALE ICONS”: SORCERERS, CELEBRITIES, ALIENS, AND UPSTARTS

Francesca T. Royster, *DePaul University*

A Shakespearean icon might include any form of a character, scene, idea, or moment as it circulates and is reproduced in a visual mode: a particular performance frozen in memory (Sarah Bernhardt as the cross-dressed Hamlet, for example); an often quoted scene, as it travels (i.e., Ophelia, floating to her death); or a particularly striking and highly recognizable visual representation of a character (i.e., Marge Simpson as Lady Macbeth). Icons allow us to explore issues of spectacle, visual pleasure, and ultimately audience. Icons are highly metaphorical and have a totemistic quality—their meanings and psychic power are often in excess of what is immediately apparent. Given icons’ associations with religious worship and ritual, the study of Shakespearean characters’ iconicity also helps us to understand the powerful resonance of Shakespeare’s plays as makers—and unmakers—of cultural and even spiritual meaning, revealing why we continue to return to these particular characters. Why, for example, do we continue to think and rethink Katherine, as she is tamed or not? W. J. T. Mitchell theorizes that this return is built into the nature of the icon itself. Mitchell suggests that icons are relational—they operate in ways that elicit our response. As he provocatively proposes, icons are “something like life-forms, driven by desire and appetites”; they “want to be kissed.”<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare’s female icons are an especially effective way to think about how Shakespeare’s plays continue to entertain, provoke, confound and seduce us—that is, how they stay alive, even as they shift and change.

From Lady Macbeth to Ophelia to Desdemona to Cleopatra, Shakespeare’s female icons have become useful shorthand for exploring highly recognized, highly charged images of femininity in the contemporary moment. This special issue of *The Upstart Crow* explores the mass circulation of some of Shakespeare’s most famous characters as they have grown to become icons, as well as their translation and adaptation into new forms that are highly visual and ultimately spectacular. Icons fascinate in the ways that they tap into the desires and anxieties of the culture that worships them and in the ways that they reflect a changing culture. Shakespeare’s female icons both reflect Shakespeare’s still central place in our culture and the transformation of Shakespeare’s cultural value. Through the analysis of these icons in film, graphic novels, manga, performance, and other locations in the public sphere, the essays presented here not only seek to expand Shakespeare’s meaning in our culture but also reflect ongoing transformations of sexuality, race, gender, and power as they get performed in Shakespearean adaptations and revisions.

As several recent critics have discovered, when we bring together Shakespeare, mass media, and gender, we uncover telling assumptions about women as representations, readers, and consumers. Starting with Laura Mulvey’s work, feminist analyses of visual media such as film, television, and comics have asked us to think critically

about the dynamics of desire, image, and the gaze.<sup>2</sup> These questions have become central, too, to feminist Shakespeare studies, especially those that focus on adaptation and appropriation. For example, Carol Chillington Rutter suggests that filmic adaptations necessarily supplement Shakespeare's texts, particularly in the medium's potentially more intimate treatment of embodiment and the gaze, through close-ups, framing, and *mise en scène* and other filmic techniques. Beginning with Mary Pickford's famous wink at the end of *Taming of the Shrew*, the history of Shakespeare on film parallels the heightened, even fetishized interest in the female body reflected in the history of film itself: "in beauty and its wreck, in the monstrous, the regulated, the stereotyped."<sup>3</sup> In addition to their formal qualities, film and other media exceed the meanings of Shakespeare's texts through their engagement with contemporary gender politics of fandom and popular filmic consumption. For example, Richard Burt charts young women viewers' negotiation of the 1990s loser/slacker image through the consumption of Shakespearean images of women, and suggests that teen Shakespeare films like *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *Never Been Kissed* (1999) reflect among other things a continuing bifurcation in our culture of sexual good girls (allied with The Bard) and sluts. Shakespearean fandom and identification with Shakespearean heroines might offer itself as a strategy to distance oneself from the 1990s loser-slacker image of cool for some women viewers, Burt argues.<sup>4</sup> And certainly the emergence of multiple feminist voices in the production and critique of Shakespearean adaptations, from Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) and *The Tempest* (2010) to the Canadian television series *Slings and Arrows* (2003-06), brings to light new issues of the cultural relevancy of Shakespeare's treatment of gender and sex. For example, Lisa Starks suggests that Taymor's *Titus* brings to the foreground issues of desensitization, abjection, suffering, and war through a feminist lens.<sup>5</sup> My own recent essay on *Slings and Arrows* considers the show's treatment of gender and specifically masculine vulnerability in the cultural context of The War on Terror.<sup>6</sup> Such issues of form, audience, and the larger cultural context will be key to the discussion of Shakespeare's female icons presented here.

In a spectacular example of the icon as both the repetition of a well-known image and that repetition with a difference, Taymor's film adaptation of *The Tempest* features Helen Mirren as Prospera, a reinvention of Shakespeare's sorcerer and patriarch. Mirren, 62 and fresh from her machine gun-toting role as a trained assassin in the graphic novel remake, *Red* (2010), as well as her signature tough woman work in *Prime Suspect* (1991-2006) and toughness of another kind in *The Queen* (2006) brings to the role a combination of warmth, vulnerability, and haughtiness. Distinct from Vanessa Redgrave's genderblind performance of Prospero on the London stage ten years before, Mirren's Prospera is most definitely female and human. In her first appearance on screen, she is orchestrating the tempest with her staff, and she wears a huge, flowing, feathered cape, the hood shaped like the head of an eagle. There on a cliff of Hawaiian black rock, overlooking the turbulent Pacific ocean, short greying hair whipping in the wind, her profile is powerful, but softened around the edges. She makes a war cry, and thanks to the clarity of digital film, we notice that she's either dripping in sweat or tears. Her cry, something like Kathy Bates's "Towanda!" in *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), conveys rage, retaliation for past hurts, vulnerability,

and volatility at once. As Taymor tells *USA Today*, “Prospera is a volcano herself, about to erupt . . . and you know Helen Mirren. When she invokes the black powers, she’s got the rage. She’s got it all.”<sup>7</sup>

Prospera’s anger is one of the most palpable ways that recent audiences can experience the transformation of Prospero into a distinctly feminist figure, calling on second wave feminism’s focus on assertiveness and voice, as well as more recent feminist models of talking back and acting out, as in the 1990s Riot Grrrl movement.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Mirren’s performance lends Prospera a charismatic sensuality that surpasses ageist assumptions about older women as desiring bodies. Moreover, Prospera’s ambivalence about her own power over her daughter, as well as over Caliban and the rest of the island, engages recent Third World feminist discussions of empire that use *The Tempest* as a frame.<sup>9</sup>

Mirren’s Prospera also provides Taymor with an opportunity to explore the creative and intellectual power of women, a theme she also pursues in other films. *Tempest* takes care to convey the “backstory” of Prospera’s exile from Milan as the result of the devaluation of women’s knowledge. She depicts Prospera in these sequences as a young Marie Curie, surrounded by test tubes and beakers, a small cradle containing Miranda just within sight. The importance of knowledge seeking and imagination were also important for her female heroines in *Frida* (2002) and *Across the Universe* (2007). Indeed, the trailers of the film invite us to identify Prospera with Taymor herself, as creative maverick. The opening frames announce: “From Julie Taymor, visionary director of *Across the Universe*, *Frida*, and *Titus*,” and the film flashes on Mirren as Prospera, orchestrating her storm.

One of the most important aspects of this feminist reinterpretation of Prospero is its depiction of Prospera’s warm friendship with her daughter Miranda, who frequently calls her “Mom.” These scenes convey the closeness and complexity of mother and teenage daughter; the two walk arm in arm or put their heads together, whispering in conspiracy. Mirren translates Prospero’s demands into gentler maternal guidance, sometimes tempering her words with a touch on the neck or back. Mirren conveys protectiveness of Miranda’s innocence and also envy. We see regret and longing flicker across Mirren’s face as she watches Miranda and Ferdinand’s courtship from afar, sometimes hugging herself in sympathy.

Prospera is a more empathetic and empowered female icon of powerful womanhood than Jessica Lange’s incestuously protective mother in *Titus* or the upper-class, undervalued, and ultimately ineffective suburban mother in *Across the Universe*. Critic Andrew O’Hehir describes Mirren’s performance as that of a “sadly elegant mom-magician,” and there is something strikingly domesticated about this description, a gendered take on Prospero’s admission that once he returns home, “every third thought will be his grave” (5.1.314).<sup>10</sup> But counter to the retiring, death-imbued tone of this final scene, when Prospera does utter these lines in Taymor’s adaptation and reconciles with Duke Ferdinand in this final act, she does so while implying that she has not fully given up her powers. Indeed, Prospera’s costume and bearing shift from the gentle tattered nymph look of an Isadora Duncan to a post-modern, punky, *Discipline and Punish*, Lady Gaga-inspired leather frock, complete with form-fitting corset and multiple studs and golden zippers (designed by Sandy

Powell). Taking up her lost position as Duchess of Milan, Mirren's Prospera is both forgiving and still a little intimidating, her lines delivered in her best Elizabeth II smartly decisive tones. What we might be seeing is a generational shift in the image of motherhood, from the soft, if witchy earth-mother to "bad mother (shut your mouth)" leather and studs. Here, we see the suggestion that feminist assessments of power must always be in a state of revision.

The film's handling of *The Tempest's* legacy of colonialism is a more muddled, sometimes troubling mixture of fear, sexual frisson and empathy. Mirren's tone vacillates from haughtiness to delight in her dealings with Ariel. And when Prospera confronts Caliban, conceived of stereotypically as a mud-painted, loin-clothed, African native and played by Djimon Hounsou, the camera films them at a tilt, so that Caliban towers slightly above Prospera, emphasizing their differences in height and strength. There is frustration in Prospera's eyes and her throaty voice, compounded by barely contained fear, especially in the lines that allude to Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda in act one, scene two. As Mirren delivers the lines,

I have used thee,  
 Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee  
 In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate  
 the honor of my child, (1.2.348-351)

she stands between Caliban and her daughter and brandishes her large black staff at him, her own black phallus countering his, shaken but determined. Interestingly enough, Taymor keeps Miranda silent in this scene, cutting some of these more explicitly racist lines:

When thou didst not, savage,  
 Know thine own meaning, but would gabble like  
 A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
 With words that made them known. But thy vile race,  
 Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures  
 Could not abide to be with. (358-63)

But this production doesn't make the portrait of Prospera's relationship with Caliban entirely transparent, either. In Prospera's final scene, after she quietly acknowledges Caliban as her own "thing of Darkness," the two lock eyes in silence, a mystery language of unsaid tenderness exchanged. *New York Times* critic A. O. Scott suggests that "Ms. Mirren, regal and vulnerable, emphasizes the character's sometimes cruel dignity, her need for affection and also her stubborn loneliness."<sup>11</sup>

What might Taymor's film be suggesting about the continued valence of the "White man's burden" of authority and power found in many post-colonial critiques and revisions of *The Tempest*, from Césaire to Gloria Naylor—and in particular, white women's role in them? Prospera continues the tradition of white women as the central, definitive figures of motherhood, even if this mother sweats, loses her temper, and lusts after her daughter's lover and her darker neighbor. But she brings

a self-awareness about her position of power and eventually denounces her role as righteous matriarch. There is suggested in Prospera's meeting of Caliban's eye in that final scene a sense that the history of white over black should end here. This updating not only suggests the opening of the pantheon of Shakespeare's female icons. It also takes part in an ongoing conversation about femininity, whiteness, colonialism, and imperialism taken up by recent Shakespearean scholars like Jyotsna G. Singh, Ania Loomba, Dymphna Callaghan, Natasha Korda, Kim F. Hall, Joyce Green MacDonald, Sujata Iyengar, and Peter Erickson, among others. As Mirren's performance gets attached to the Shakespeare icon, as image of "culture," "history," and "universalism," we might insist that issues of race, gender and power continue to be important to how we understand Shakespeare's cultural relevance.

Shakespeare's female characters continue to provide powerful cultural scripts for racial, gender, and sexual representation and/or self-fashioning on the stage, screen, and in the public sphere. We might consider, for example, the ways that Nicole Simpson continues to be framed as a Desdemona figure, Katherine Heigl as "The New Shrew," or the embrace of Cleopatra as an image of glamour and power by Lady Gaga, Lil' Kim and Nikki Minaj. How does the recurrence of these characters work as a way of "explaining," justifying, or interrupting dominant notions of femininity in particular cultural moments, giving evidence to Marjorie Garber's notion that "Every age makes its own Shakespeare"?<sup>12</sup>

Helen Mirren's performance of Prospera gives testimony of the continued importance of Shakespearean performance as sites of interventions in gender, race, and power. Other examples might include Julia Stiles's riot grrrl Kat in *10 Things I Hate About You* and Jessica Lange's tattooed Goth queen in *Titus*. Shakespearean feminist theory has had profound effect on the ways that Shakespeare's female characters are translated, acted, and performed, whether we consider this on the level of acting and directing, or of theoretical analysis.

Embodiment is a particularly important aspect of the construction of Shakespeare's female icons as they engage and elicit desire for their audiences. As Penny Gay suggests, "[b]eautiful, grotesque, sweaty, shouting, whispering, crying, laughing, moving bodies are, first and last, the producers of the texts of drama."<sup>13</sup> Several of the essays in this issue highlight new discourses on the interlocking identities of sexuality, race, class, and nation as they inform the ways that we analyze the performance of gender in Shakespearean characters. New and continuing representations of Shakespearean feminine embodiment, both within the context of the plays and as they travel outside of them—as desirable, untamed, unruly, pathetic, mysterious, seductive, even as sources of fear—will be explored by using the framework of icons and iconicity, emphasizing their circulation and their relational involvement with their audiences.

These essays also explore the meanings of Shakespeare's female characters as shaped by new technologies and economies, drawing primarily from popular cultural forms like Hollywood and Hong Kong films, graphic novels and comic books, as well as theatrical performances that make use of popular media and technology as central to their productions. As the global marketplace opens up the ways that Shakespeare takes form, our conversation ultimately also has to integrate new questions about circulation and audience, as well as content. What do we learn from

these examples about the markets for Shakespeare, inside and outside of the classroom? What's gained and lost historically and aesthetically in the effort to be timely for contemporary audiences? In what ways might we think of these new icons as examples of the ways that Shakespeare must necessarily adapt to the language and media most used by its audiences? Many of these essays consider these questions, highlighting, as Mark Burnett suggests, how "global flows, media technologies and questions of difference as they play out in the screen" interplay with our ideas of "Shakespeare," in terms of identity, difference, and belonging.<sup>14</sup>

Recently, theater scholar Dorothy Chenski has suggested that "theater that doesn't address contemporary people with the communication modes that shape all other facets of their world is doomed to failure."<sup>15</sup> This holds true for other forms of art as well, especially given the ways that the exponential development of new technologies of entertainment and social interaction has meant that competition for our attention continues to grow. Ultimately, we think of these recent Shakespearean female icons as part of a history of a present that is in a state of rapid change.

### Coming Attractions

Shakespeare on film is an important site for mass circulation of Shakespeare's female icons, probably one of the most noted aspects of Shakespeare's adaptation, revision, and reinvention. The first two essays in this collection consider female sexuality and subjectivity in popular film. As I've discussed, the casting of Shakespeare's female icons can have a powerful effect on the afterlife of Shakespeare's plays—Helen Mirren's Prospera a case in point. Likewise, Shakespeare's female icons have the power to transform the careers of their screen performers—consider the new level of artistic seriousness lent Elizabeth Taylor's career after performing in Zeffirelli's 1967 *Taming of the Shrew*. In her essay "Ordinary Stardom: The Tragic Duality of Julia Stiles's Ophelia," Natalie Jones Loper considers the new visibility lent to Shakespeare's female icon by actor Julia Stiles's stardom, from her breakout role as Kat in *10 Things I Hate About You*, to her turn as Desi in *O* (2001), to her portrayal of Ophelia in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). Loper reminds us that a star's polysemy, or combination of other roles and publicly available image, can affect our interpretation of a particular character. Publicly, Julia Stiles has been portrayed as a fresh-faced beauty with Ivy League intelligence, liberal politics, and an ability to remain in the public eye, not for her romances with co-stars, but for her well-spoken opinions and public service. Stiles works carefully to maintain this image, both on-screen and off, choosing characters with rich interior lives or complicated back stories. Stiles's career as Shakespearean film diva illustrates the ways that new artists challenge and innovate these past images and conversations. Stiles transforms the iconicity of Ophelia, for example by lending her a richly developed private life. As a result, Ophelia's madness and death are even more tragic than they are in the play because the audience has been able to see more of her than exists in the world created for her by Shakespeare's text.

Dee Anna Phares turns to another Julia Stiles performance, as Desi in Tim Blake Nelson's revision of *Orhello, O*. In "Desi 'was a ho': Desdemona, Ocular (Re)proof,

and the Story of *O*,” Phares explores the film’s reanimation of fears about female sexuality and power. The women of *O* inhabit a world that is hostile towards their sexuality and their ability to denigrate male reputation through infidelity, Phares argues. Women are offered far fewer opportunities to establish their characters and voice their thoughts and feelings. Instead, the women of *O* operate as voiceless bodies to be observed and scrutinized. This is especially true of Desi, whose character seems to undergo the most radical revision from the Shakespearean source. In comparison with the voluble heroine of Shakespeare’s play, *O*’s Desi is more often *seen* than heard and is forced to endure more surveillance, exposing her and her sexuality to greater speculation by Odin (Othello), Hugo (Iago), and the audience.

Kendra Preston Leonard’s essay, “Rosalind’s Musical Iconicity in Branagh and Doyle’s *As You Like It*,” explores the relationship between ocularity and aurality through soundtracks. Leonard interrogates film composer Patrick Doyle’s use of Western and Pan-Asian musical conventions to convey the shift in Rosalind’s gender identities. By employing motifs with differences in texture, instrumentation, and ethnic sources, Doyle’s music for the film serves as a guide for audiences in understanding Rosalind’s dual natures as both female and male, sophisticate and rustic, student and teacher. Leonard suggests that the film’s visual and aural links to a fantastic Japan become a musical means to identify a split Rosalind, one linked to the feminine Western court, and the other, more androgynous Rosalind linked to the forest. Leonard suggests ways that visual iconicity is integrated with aurality to convey a fantasy of travel into newly gendered and national/ethnic worlds in the film.

Likewise, Niamh O’Leary considers filmic constructions of Asian identity and aesthetics in recent reinventions of Shakespeare’s female characters, this time as produced from within Hong Kong cinema. In “Ambition and Desire: Gertrude as Tragic Hero in Feng Xiaogang’s *The Banquet* (2006),” O’Leary takes into account the traditions of the dragon-lady and martial arts cinema to suggest that Xiaogang remakes Little Wan (Gertrude) as the emotional center of his film. Xiaogang changes all the faultlines of desire in *Hamlet*, invoking and critiquing the long critical and representational history interested in the Oedipal tensions between Gertrude and Hamlet. At the same time, *The Banquet* helps us understand Shakespeare’s role in the trafficking of Hong Kong films for Asian and world-wide audiences, combining familiar storylines with new innovations in character, as well as movement, costume, and spectacle. Leonard’s and O’Leary’s essays foreground recent ways that the ideal of Shakespeare’s “global” reach is represented *and* the ways that Shakespearean icons circulate transnationally on film.

Moving from popular film to graphic novels, Catherine Thomas explores the commanding presence of Lady Macbeth in recent graphic novels in her essay “(Un)sexing Lady Macbeth: Gender, Power, and Visual Rhetoric in Her Graphic After-lives.” Thomas pays particular attention to the way these illustrations figure the play’s problematic relationship between gender and power in three pivotal moments in the play: the witches’ prophecy, the “unsex me here” speech, and the pre-suicidal sleepwalking scene. Graphic novels’ integration of text and visuality might potentially introduce new updatings of characters and multiple narrational directions to its often younger audiences. Thomas explores the feminist and dramatic potential of

these new imaginings of Lady Macbeth and the witches as aliens and superheroes.

Moving from film to the public sphere, I foreground issues of racialized embodiment in the performance of politics in my essay, "Condi, Cleopatra, and the Postcolonial Condition: Performing Conscience in an Age of Celebrity and Neoliberalism." I use the iconicity of Shakespeare's Cleopatra as a figure of desirability, politics, mystery, and racial difference to reflect on the public image of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Given her signifi- cance as a black female leader in a pre-Obama age, why are we discouraged from examining her ambition, motives, and contradictions? In a social context irrevocably influenced by the circulation of black women's bodies as highly visible and hypersexualized, Rice's sometimes paradoxical image as an icon of both diplomacy and conspiracy adds a new layer to the ways that we think and talk about public, powerful women.

The issue concludes with a summary essay by Ayanna Thompson, scholar of Shakespearean performances of race, gender, and violence in contemporary culture. In her Afterword, Thompson returns to two aspects of iconicity presented in this volume: the masculine function of icon as doer and the traditionally feminine aspect of the icon as that which "is," "performs," or "embodies." Such questions bring back to the fore the ways in which icons reflect and also expand Shakespearean texts by engaging contemporary issues of representation, gender, and power.

### Notes

1. W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 6, xvi.
2. Foundational work on "the gaze," feminism, and the psychoanalysis of the power of looking includes Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6-18, Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Jacqueline Rose's *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), and bell hooks' *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992). We can see the impact of this work in Shakespeare Studies in scholarship that looks at the power of the gendered and raced gaze in early modern visual culture, including Kim F. Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), *Early Modern Visual Culture*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), and Sujata Iyengar's *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005); the gaze in early modern theatrical performance, including Barbara Freedman's *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Celia Daileader's *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire and the Limits of the Visible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Carol Chillington Rutter's *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001); and the gaze in Shakespearean film, including Courtney Lehmann's *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), and many of the essays in the collection *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, ed. Lisa Starks and Courtney Lehmann (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).
3. Rutter, 243.
4. Richard Burt, "Te(e)n things I Hate about Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990's," in

*Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 205-32.

5. Lisa Starks, "Cinema of Cruelty: Powers of Horror in Julie Taymor's *Titus*," in Starks and Lehmann, 121-42.
6. Francesca Royster, "Comic Terror and Masculine Vulnerability in *Slings and Arrows*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41 (2011): 343-61.
7. Anthony Breznican, "First Look: Helen Mirren in Lead Role in Julie Taymor's 'Tempest,'" *USA Today*, May 9, 2010, [http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2010-05-07-tempest07\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2010-05-07-tempest07_ST_N.htm).
8. For an excellent critical discussion of the second and third waves of feminism, see *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).
9. Here, I'm thinking in particular of Sylvia Wynter's landmark essay, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demoniac Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" in *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 109-27, as well as Michelle Cliff's novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (NY: Plume Books, 1996) and Gloria Naylor's novel *Mama Day* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), both *The Tempest* reenvisionings set in Jamaica and in the Georgia Sea Islands, respectively. These reenvisionings have in common their attention to silenced or marginalized female characters in Shakespeare's play. Such changes also force us to rethink the "naturalness" of Prospero's power and are in line with the more reflective "Prospera" captured in Taymor's film. For more on Third World women's critical "retakes" of *The Tempest*, see Thomas Cartelli, "After *The Tempest*: Shakespeare, Post-Coloniality and Michelle Cliff's New World Miranda," *Contemporary Literature* 36.1 (Spring 1995), 85-102, and Barbara Bowen, "Writing Caliban: Anticolonial Appropriations of *The Tempest*: Text and Reception in Southern Africa," *Current Writing* 5.2 (1992): 80-99.
10. Andrew O'Hehir, "'The Tempest': Helen Mirren's Sadly Elegant Mom-Magician," Salon.com, December 10, 2010, <http://www.salon.com/2010/12/10/tempest/>. This and all other quotes from Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 1997.
11. A. O. Scott, "Dread Rattling Thunder! Yes, it's Shakespeare," *The New York Times*, December 9, 2010, <http://movies.nytimes.com/2010/12/10/movies/10tempest.html>.
12. Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).
13. Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), 3.
14. Mark Burnett, *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 3.
15. Dorothy Chenski, review of *Theater in a Media Culture: Production, Performance and Reception Since 1970*, by Amy Petersen Jensen, *Theatre Journal* 61.4 (December 2009): 647-48.

## ORDINARY STARDOM: THE TRAGIC DUALITY OF JULIA STILES'S OPHELIA

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In 2010, Julia Stiles joined Stolichnaya Vodka's ad campaign under the tagline "Would You Have a Drink With You?"<sup>1</sup> Both the print advertisements and the television commercials feature two sides of Julia Stiles who meet at a ritzy club. The "Hollywood dish" Stiles, as she is labeled in one of the print ads, wears a short black one-shouldered cocktail dress. Her hair is slicked back in an elegant ponytail, her smoky eye makeup is red carpet-ready, and her demeanor is aloof and preening as she sips a martini. The ads' "Hollywood-ish" Stiles wears jeans and a loose-fitting tank top, her makeup is minimal, her long hair hangs loosely around her shoulders, and she is relaxed and smiling as she orders a glass of Stoli Razz and soda. In the thirty-second commercial spot, girl-next-door Julia is late for her night out with Hollywood Stiles.<sup>2</sup> Their conversation focuses on Stiles's acting choices and allows her to joke about her star image: the "serious" Hollywood actress reveals that she has "learned everything [she] know[s] from watching reruns" and is not making indie films anymore, just "movies—big, fat, expensive movies. Films are nice," she says, "but movies make sick money." Girl-next-door Julia looks taken aback and asks, "What about artistic fulfillment?" "Overrated," Hollywood Stiles says. "Besides, with all the money I can make, I could do something really meaningful." Julia retorts, "So what you're saying is you'd buy shoes." With a slight shrug, Stiles raises her eyebrows and sips her drink, and the commercial cuts to the tagline, in which a deep male voice asks, "Would you have a drink with you?" The next shot is of the words "Julia Stiles Hollywood Original," while the voiceover continues: "The most original people deserve the most original vodka."

The Stoli ad campaign builds on the idea of originality by posting the following criteria on its website:

It's not about [her] fame or fortune. It's that [she] dare[s] to challenge convention, unafraid to break new ground. [She's] bold enough to attempt things that most say couldn't, or even shouldn't, be done—and [she's] passionate enough to achieve them. But most of all, [she has] truly lived life.<sup>3</sup>

According to this description, Julia Stiles somehow transcends her acting career, her media presence, and the money she has made from her work. She is seen as someone who breaks the rules in order to pursue her dreams and who is world-wise and daring. She represents a certain type of young female celebrity, someone who is self-aware, passionate, intelligent, and bold. Even when she is criticized for her choice of roles or her public statements, Stiles nevertheless has a sense of humor about her image, as the Stoli campaign demonstrates: as a down-to-earth and respected artist, she can challenge the integrity of her Hollywood-starlet side. She can admit to loving money as long as she acknowledges that such pursuits are subject to criticism.

The commercial plays on the dual nature of Julia Stiles, which has become a part of the image she has cultivated since becoming an actress at a young age. On

the one hand, the “serious actress” has played three of Shakespeare’s most iconic women in a trilogy of teen films that launched her career: *The Taming of the Shrew*’s Katherine (Kat in *10 Things I Hate About You*), *Othello*’s Desdemona (Desi in *O*), and Ophelia in *Hamlet*.<sup>4</sup> Stiles has a thriving stage career and has formed a close partnership with writer David Mamet, and she has worked to build a reputation based upon her work ethic, not her social life. On the other hand, she is a product of Hollywood who confessed in 2011 that she ran out of money in Cuba because she was unaccustomed to operating on a cash-only budget,<sup>5</sup> who has made lots of money by starring in big Hollywood blockbusters, and whose most recent Golden Globe nomination was for her work on the Showtime television series *Dexter*.<sup>6</sup> Julia Stiles is simultaneously the glamorous actress and the fresh-faced girl next door, the big-time star and the independent artist, the earnest scholar and the self-deprecating prankster, the upscale shopper and the outdoorsy philanthropist. She is a self-proclaimed feminist whose movies have been criticized for promoting anti-feminist agendas and a teen star who has transitioned into grown-up roles, evolving from an MTV Movie Award-winning teen icon to a sophisticated actress who greets criticism with self-parody. Stiles demonstrates the careful balance between career and personal life, past and present, that together control her star image. In playing Shakespeare’s female icons, Stiles’s star image works with and against Katherine, Desdemona, and Ophelia, who in her portrayal are made young and vulnerable agents grappling with patriarchal control. On-screen, Stiles brings an immediacy to these heroines, relating them to contemporary concerns about the role of young women in society; her star presence adds to the commercial viability of these films while offering contradictory views of Shakespeare’s characters.

Over a decade after becoming a household name with her starring role as Kat in *10 Things I Hate About You*, Julia Stiles’s career continues to be shaped by her relationship with Shakespeare, who helped to make her “an icon of teen femininity.”<sup>7</sup> But whereas many scholars have discussed her portrayal of Kat in *10 Things* and, to a lesser extent, of Desi in *O*, none have focused extensively on Stiles’s portrayal of Ophelia in Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet*. The role is important, though, because in the film the dualistic and divided nature of Stiles’s stardom filters into her portrayal of one of Shakespeare’s most tragic heroines. Stiles presents a conflicted and contradictory Ophelia, who is torn between filial duty and the desire for an independent life and who gestures toward rebellion but is unable to defy her father. Stiles’s Ophelia is more central to *Hamlet*’s story than her counterpart in Shakespeare’s play, and yet many of her lines are cut, leaving her more silent. Stiles’s acting and her stardom fill in these silences, adding depth to the character and demanding that she be noticed, so that her suicide becomes even more tragic than the death of Shakespeare’s Ophelia. The duality of Stiles’s stardom becomes an important aspect of Stiles’s Ophelia by showing how difficult it is to balance a multifaceted career and a personal life; Ophelia becomes, in Stiles’s portrayal, a young woman who self-destructs when she finds herself unable to balance her competing desires for independence, romantic love, and familial approval. The Stoli campaign calls Stiles an “original” because of her willingness to embrace life, to take risks, and to achieve her desires. In contrast, Ophelia moves in the opposite direction: away from life, risk, and desire.

Her iconicity runs counter to Stiles's image, which is full of life and vitality. If Ophelia continues to circulate in public consciousness, it is largely through her madness and death, romanticized most famously on canvas by John Millais, but also by critics who claim she achieves subjectivity and agency only after she has gone mad.<sup>8</sup> In the events leading up to her breaking point, Ophelia is largely void; she requires a critic, an artist, or an actress to add meaning and depth to her character.<sup>9</sup>

Examining Stiles as a star-text fills this void by offering a particular way of reading the character. In *Stars*, film theorist Richard Dyer uses semiotics to examine the ways in which stars' lives intersect with the characters they play.<sup>10</sup> A star's polysemy, or "the multiple but finite meanings and effects that a star image signifies,"<sup>11</sup> is determined by a combination of the star's publicly available image—accessed via interviews, articles, press releases, public appearances, tabloid reporting, personal websites or social networking pages, and other media texts—and the star's other roles, which together can affect an audience's interpretation of a particular character. A star's roles do not always match exactly with her image, but they do rely on elements of her image and stardom to create a particular character on screen. "From the structured polysemy of the star's image," Dyer argues, "certain meanings are selected in accord with the overriding conception of the character in the film."<sup>12</sup> According to this theory, characters can be analyzed and understood based on certain performance signs and on the theorist's understanding of the star's image. Julia Stiles contributes to the characterization of Ophelia based on not only her acting but also her star presence: "As regards the fact that a given star is in the film, audience foreknowledge, the star's name and his/her appearance (including the sound of her/his voice and dress styles associated with him/her) all already signify that condensation of attitudes and values which is the star's image."<sup>13</sup> Julia Stiles's presence already offers a certain set of "attitudes and values" based upon her star image, and her performance in *Hamlet* adds to the construction of Ophelia. Audiences blend this foreknowledge with their foreknowledge of and opinions or expectations about Ophelia (whether from a literary, theatrical, and/or filmic point of view), and Stiles's portrayal (along with Almerayda's screenplay and direction) will go along with these preconceptions, negate them, or combine them in some way. In an age of celebrity culture, then, Shakespeare's female icons operate on many levels, blending audience expectations of both the character and the star who plays her. In the case of Julia Stiles, this foreknowledge includes the range of meanings associated with her image, a combination of the other roles she has played—particularly her other Shakespearean characters—and her publicly available private life.

Julia Stiles's biography shows a driven young woman who began acting and writing at a young age but whose early success came from her relationship with Shakespeare; this success continues to influence her career and her media presence. After performing onstage, in commercials, and in several movies, Stiles starred as Kat Stratford in *10 Things*; the film, released just after the actress's eighteenth birthday, established her as a star. Her association with teen Shakespeare was cemented with *O* and *Hamlet*, and she proved her financial viability with the popular *Save the Last Dance*.<sup>14</sup> Like her peer Claire Danes, Stiles continues to be associated with Shakespeare and with a certain ideal of female intelligence, and both actresses have

been praised for their transitions from teen stardom to more mature roles. As an adult, Stiles has performed in big Hollywood films (the *Bourne* trilogy; *Mona Lisa Smile*), smaller independent films (*The Business of Strangers*; *The Cry of the Owl*), stage plays (*Oleanna*; *Fat Pig*), and television (*Dexter*).<sup>15</sup> The Stiles biography found on the Stoli web site summarizes the aspects of her life and work that appear in most other media accounts. Under the banner "Award-Winning Actress," the page mentions her recent work on *Dexter*, her talent, her four Shakespearean roles (including Viola in New York's Shakespeare in the Park), her other starring roles alongside well-known actors, her various film awards and nominations, her stage credits, and her college degree from Columbia University. She is a celebrity who garners attention for her talent and her ability to adapt to new projects, which in turn enhances her image. In *Big-Time Shakespeare*, Michael Bristol considers Shakespeare's presence in contemporary popular culture: "In an odd way the striking adaptability of Shakespeare within the market for cultural goods and services tends to confirm the vernacular intuition that his works have some real social worth and importance above and beyond their contingent market value."<sup>16</sup> Julia Stiles, I argue, operates in a similar fashion for those wishing to exploit her star status. Her variety of roles and presence across different media cultivates the idea that she is important for more than just the characters she plays (the Stoli "original"), and in turn her characters benefit from the image she has cultivated.

Part of this image includes both intelligence and ordinariness. Known for her "fierce intelligence" and labeled "the thinking girl's movie star," Stiles chooses roles that feature smart women (her Shakespeare characters, an Ivy-League bound student in *The Prince and Me*, one of the school's brightest pupils in *Mona Lisa Smile*, an intelligence officer in the *Bourne* movies, and so on).<sup>17</sup> Stiles publishes her opinions about not only the roles she chooses to play but also other issues she finds important, such as the difficulties facing immigrant children detainees, the joys of cheering for her favorite baseball team, the New York Mets, and the challenges of traveling in Cuba.<sup>18</sup> In her personal blog, "You Know My Steez," Stiles posts pictures of her travels, videos she has made, and short fictional pieces she has written.<sup>19</sup> She talks about political issues, addresses critical responses to her work and her published articles, and promotes her latest projects. The blog adds to the image of Stiles as intelligent, pop culture-savvy, world-wise, and humorous, and it invites fans to communicate with her directly by commenting on her posts. In this way, Stiles appears approachable, but the content reminds readers that she is *not* like them: she is a star with access to people, places, and experiences beyond the realm of most ordinary people. Like Shakespeare, whose works continue to be considered elitist and canonical while also circulating in popular culture in an ever-widening understanding of "Shakespeare," Stiles is both accessible and inaccessible, an Ivy League-educated actress who depends on popular favor to retain her significance and maintain her career.

Despite Stiles's overall positive image in the press, her choice of roles and her personal remarks have drawn her into a feminist debate about the social roles and responsibilities of women in the media, a debate that recalls scholarly discussions of Ophelia's changing signification. Several of Stiles's films have proved problematic for critics and scholars, particularly for how they portray women. For instance,

in 2004, *Guardian* reporter Zoe Williams “spent ages trying to make her [Stiles] criticize *Mona Lisa Smile*” because, to Williams, the film—in which Stiles plays a character who chooses to get married rather than attend law school—is “smaltzy,” “sentimental,” and “formulaic,” while its 1950s setting promotes “retrogressive” ideas about women.<sup>20</sup> Williams was not the only person to criticize the film along these lines, but Stiles defended it, both in this interview and elsewhere, even going so far as to publish a defense of the film in the same newspaper. Stiles claims that contrary to what critics say, the film does have feminist undertones, but because of its date—“the period just prior to the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*”—she argues that “to show a group of young women in the 1950s so quickly ascribing to a modern sense of empowerment would be historically inaccurate. Critics of such movies have to watch them in the context of the gradual progression of the women’s movement.”<sup>21</sup> Toward the end of the article, Stiles notes, “Ironically, the F word [feminism] is now pejorative in the mainstream because it is seen to represent a woman’s renunciation of her femininity. . . . [W]omen of my generation have not employed self-censorship, but rather we challenge the notion that being a feminist is in opposition to being feminine.” Stiles alludes to the stereotypical idea that all feminists are bra-burning militants, and she asserts that feminists can and should embrace their femininity, balancing the dualisms of home and career, appearance and intelligence.

Many have been critical of Stiles’s attitude toward feminism because it oversimplifies the movement, despite her knowledge of its history and her self-identification as a feminist; but perhaps the problem lies not so much with Stiles’s ideas about feminism as with how the feminist movement has been perceived in the public eye. In her article on the Shakespearean teen films *10 Things* and *She’s the Man*, Jennifer Clement outlines the problem with recent representations of feminism in the media and on film by arguing that these two films “exploit the generational divide between second and third-wave feminism in order to ridicule both forms of feminism and to suggest that feminism in general is outdated, irrelevant, and even harmful.”<sup>22</sup> The media, she argues, tends to exploit the differences between feminists, including those associated with the second and third waves, while the public perception of feminism differs from how feminists represent themselves. “Shakespeare’s work,” Clement concludes, “continues to be invoked as the basis for conservative critiques of feminism that oversimplify feminist debates and market the movement as, at best, irrelevant, and at worst, harmful for teenage girls.”<sup>23</sup> Stiles, by playing Shakespeare’s characters in contemporary films and by speaking publicly about feminism, is subject to the kinds of criticism that Clement describes.

In the most comprehensive essay on Julia Stiles to date, Elizabeth Deitchman highlights the association between Stiles, Shakespeare, and feminism. Focusing on Stiles’s image in relation to her three Shakespearean film roles, Deitchman argues that Stiles represents “a clearly defined ideal of American girlhood based on her appearance, achievements, and personality.”<sup>24</sup> This image is restrictive, however, when viewed within the context of her films: “Together Stiles and Shakespeare sell a disturbing image of American teen girlhood, an image based on and perpetuating idealized representations of race, class, and gender.”<sup>25</sup> The essay aligns Stiles with the

1990s “Girl Power” movement, which Deitchman argues is “sold to girls as strength and empowerment” but which “is really about preserving patriarchal values, and particularly about protecting heterosexual masculinity.”<sup>26</sup> In *10 Things*, she argues, Stiles’s character Kat Stratford initially identifies with the more blatantly political Riot Grrrl movement, but both she and the film move toward a “defanged version of Girl Power,” which Deitchman views as repressive and ultimately silencing.<sup>27</sup> Deitchman criticizes Stiles’s own views toward feminism, arguing that Stiles is “a responsible Girl Power icon” who does not want to be perceived as a bitch or a “man-hating femi-nazi” but who instead “carefully regulates her self-expression” in order to preserve her reputation.<sup>28</sup> This Girl Power iconicity leads to Deitchman’s assertion that Stiles’s subsequent portrayals of Ophelia and Desi (Desdemona) rely heavily on her “Good Girl” image and her whiteness, which together stress the characters’ sexual purity. The essay does an excellent job of discussing Stiles’s image, and mostly I agree with Deitchman’s conclusions about these films, particularly that *10 Things* and *O* uphold hegemonic values and present restrictive views of Shakespeare’s heroines.

I cannot agree, however, that all of Stiles’s films should be read the same way, especially when the primary text for this analysis is *10 Things*, a film that lends itself to criticism based on its deliberate presentation of feminist issues, nor do I think it’s entirely fair for critics to attack Stiles herself for not conforming to their versions of feminism. I am not saying that critics’ remarks about Stiles’s films and her public statements are wrong; rather, I am trying to push for another way of understanding her image beyond this one issue. When examining the star-text of Julia Stiles, it is important to acknowledge the contradictions of her image and the ways these contradictions contribute to the characters she plays—particularly Ophelia, a character more restricted by Shakespeare’s text than, say, his comic heroines. Williams summarizes the complexity of Stiles’s star image by describing the actress as “a strange mix . . . independent but not as radical as you’d think she’s going to be, or certainly not outdoors; very articulate and clear, but at the same time unreadable; with bona fide screen idol looks, but the bolshie yet self-effacing manner of a girl who’s only ever been appreciated for her quick darning and Latin declension.”<sup>29</sup> The Stiles image, then, is both clearly defined and elusive—the star likes to surprise people, but she remains in the public eye a beautiful, intelligent woman whose ambition is matched by a tendency to self-censor in order to remain likeable. This duality, established early in Stiles’s career, carries over into Stiles’s portrayal of Ophelia, who takes on similar qualities in Almercyda’s film. Critics such as Carol Chillington Rutter,<sup>30</sup> Christy Desmet,<sup>31</sup> and Richard Finkelstein<sup>32</sup> suggest that Ophelia’s subjectivity begins at the point of her madness or death, but I argue that it begins much earlier in Almercyda’s film: the moment Julia Stiles appears on-screen as Ophelia, her star presence invites viewers to see her as something more. Specifically, the dualisms of Stiles’s youth and maturity, her intelligence and ordinariness, work with the idea that she is both a contemporary teen and an iconic screen presence, in order to make Ophelia resonate with modern audiences. Although Stiles herself is no longer a teenager and the film was released over a decade ago, the actress’s media presence continues to move along a trajectory established early in her career; her continued success adds further complexity to her Ophelia, particularly when we view the character within the context of a film that emphasizes Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s struggles

with figures of authority and their nostalgic desire for an idealized past.

Set in modern-day Manhattan while retaining Shakespeare's words, Almereyda's *Hamlet* focuses on its youthful characters and their experiences within the fast-paced and technology-driven world of corporate America. In the preface to his screenplay of *Hamlet* (2000), Michael Almereyda remarks that even though he originally resisted the idea of adapting *Hamlet*, which already existed in "dozens of versions" on film, he kept "thinking back to [his] first impressions of the play, remembering its adolescence-primed impact and meaning . . . the rampant parallels between the melancholy Dane and [Almereyda's own] many doomed and damaged heroes and imaginary friends: James Agee, Holden Caulfield, James Dean. . . ." <sup>33</sup> From its inception, the film was an act of nostalgia, as its director sought to create an adaptation that resonated with his own memories of the play and of his childhood heroes. At the time Almereyda began his project, no actor under the age of thirty had played Hamlet on-screen, and most were over forty. Almereyda wished to "entrust the role to an actor in his twenties," for "[t]he character takes on a different cast when seen more clearly as an abandoned son, a defiant brat, a narcissist, a poet/film-maker/perpetual grad student—a radiantly promising young man who doesn't quite know who he is." <sup>34</sup> He chose twenty-seven-year-old Ethan Hawke to play the lead, and the two collaborated "to see how thoroughly Shakespeare can speak to the present moment, how they can speak to each other." <sup>35</sup> Their goal was to create a film that incorporated their own experiences with the play, to use Shakespeare's text to create something personally meaningful and modern, to infuse it with a youthful perspective.

Both Almereyda and Hawke claim to be influenced by characters from popular culture, both fictional and real, whom they see as modern incarnations of Hamlet. According to Hawke,

the reason Hamlet comes off so annoying, infantile, and self-indulgent is that the guy playing him is ten to twenty years too old for the part. He is a bright young man struggling deeply with his identity, his moral code, his relationship to his parents and with his entire surrounding community. These are archetypal young man's concerns. Hamlet was always much more like Kurt Cobain or Holden Caulfield than Sir Laurence Olivier. <sup>36</sup>

In other words, Hamlet is a young man whose problems stem from his relationship with various figures of authority, including himself, his parents, and the community at large. Neither Almereyda in his preface to the screenplay nor Hawke in his introduction focuses on Ophelia, but their youthful emphasis affects her character as well, particularly in the casting of a young and promising star. In his notes to the screenplay, Almereyda praises Stiles's performance: "Julia Stiles, at seventeen, had an uncanny ability to intimidate almost everyone on the set. Her calm seriousness, a sense of unbudgeable inner gravity, could be beautifully unsettling." <sup>37</sup> Despite all of this, the tendency of both Almereyda and Hawke, who ignore Ophelia—as well as critics writing about the film, who focus on Hamlet, on the film's use of technology, or on more broadly generational concerns while scarcely acknowledging Ophelia—demonstrates the ways in which the character fades into the background, emerging

through the performance signs of Stiles's star-text.<sup>38</sup>

From her first appearance on-screen, Stiles's presence invites comparisons between her star image and the character she plays. According to Dyer, appearance—including physiognomy, dress, and the star's image—"indicates" a character's "personality, with varying degrees of precision" and provides nonverbal clues about that character's interiority.<sup>39</sup> At the time *Hamlet* was made, Stiles was described in the media as a "fresh-faced blonde" and a "fresh-faced star."<sup>40</sup> On film, she "casually plays against her luminescent pre-Raphaelite glow," while in everyday life, she "looks more student than starlet. With her snug tee, drawstring capris, slip-on sneakers, and I-pulled-an-all-nighter tousled hair, she could pass for an average Ivy Leaguer."<sup>41</sup> The comparison demonstrates how the Stoli depiction of glamorous starlet versus casual girl-next-door was already at work early in her career, while her mix of intelligence and ordinariness implies that Ivy League students—like film stars—are average, despite their elite social position. Another interviewer notes, "Her physical beauty offers instant gratification, but it's icing on a cake whose ingredients include smarts, wit, and ambition."<sup>42</sup> Julia Stiles's physical appearance is carefully designed to shift the focus to her mental abilities, and Ophelia's overall look resembles Stiles's own wardrobe, sparse makeup, and long wavy hair of the late 1990s (which also resembles her style in films such as *10 Things, O*, and *Save the Last Dance*)—baggy pants, tiny tee shirts, and hooded sweat-shirts. Because of this, the audience is prompted to hold similar expectations about Ophelia's "smarts, wit, and ambition." The similarities between the actress's and the character's appearances help to transform and update Shakespeare's Ophelia from an early modern daughter to a late twentieth-century teenager.

This is not to suggest, however, that Ophelia somehow becomes a screen version of Stiles herself, a Shakespearean doppelgänger of the young actress. Because Ophelia's character does not match exactly with the overall image of Julia Stiles, Almereyda's film employs what Dyer calls a "problematic fit" between the star and the character. The contradictions between Stiles and Ophelia add pathos to the character by suggesting the type of woman she could become. Ophelia, like Stiles herself, can be dualistic and difficult, but unlike the actress, who appears to thrive on challenging situations and who is a model of female independence, the character is unable to balance competing desires or to handle the pressures of her life. Shakespeare's Ophelia submits to her father's authority and participates in an adult plot to spy on Hamlet; those who wish to discuss her independence and rebellion typically limit their analysis to Ophelia's madness. Throughout the film, Stiles's Ophelia resists male attempts to control her through facial expressions and gestures, but Shakespeare's text mandates her break from Hamlet, her descent into madness, and her death by drowning. Stiles's star-presence adds to these plot points by depicting an Ophelia whose creative potential is stifled but not always silenced; she becomes a young woman for whom suicide is not only a way to escape personal tragedy but also a final reckless act of self-expression.

As befits a young woman in modern-day Manhattan, Stiles's Ophelia lives alone, occupies her time with photography, and does not appreciate her father's and brother's attempts to meddle in her personal life. Although it is unclear whether she is financially independent, is a student, or has a job, this Ophelia is nonetheless more in control of her own destiny than her counterpart in Shakespeare's play. She

actively pursues a relationship with Hamlet, who appears to be her only friend and confidante. As Barbara Hodgdon points out, Almercyda cuts many of Ophelia's lines, but rather than reducing the part, his screenplay and Stiles's performance expand on it.<sup>43</sup> The film inserts Ophelia into scenes in which she does not appear in the play, and several nonverbal scenes situate her in various Manhattan locations, where she is typically alone: when not with her father, brother, or Hamlet, she is shown riding her bicycle through the busy city streets, waiting for Hamlet at a fountain, or developing photographs in her apartment. Ophelia appears in several of Hamlet's Pixelvision video diaries, to which he returns throughout the film, and in his story montage at the end of the film. The film thus expands the role to make Ophelia one of the most important characters in the film, whose intimate relationship with Hamlet becomes a key component of the plot. In this way, Ophelia becomes an independent young woman comfortable navigating city streets or being filmed when alone with her boyfriend, but her frequent silences suggest a hidden inner life that she cannot express. Ophelia carries with her the complexities of Stiles's star-text, recalling Williams's assessment of her as "independent but not as radical as you'd think she's going to be . . . articulate and clear, but at the same time unreadable."<sup>44</sup> Ophelia appears approachable and sympathetic; she wears the clothing and hairstyle of other young women of her generation, and she experiences the problems of dating and family life that appear in Stiles's other film narratives (for example, both Desi in *O* and Ophelia are in relationships of which their fathers disapprove, and Kat in *10 Things* has experienced male rejection, as Ophelia will). But Ophelia is also "unreadable" because the script limits her words, and audiences are left to infer what she is thinking through Stiles's gestures and expressions.

In her career choices and in interviews, Stiles embraces challenging roles and controversial characters, but she also feels the need to defend her choices: *Mona Lisa Smile* is one example. Similarly, her Ophelia projects an air of unconcern but is deeply affected by what people think of her. During the press conference scene in which Claudius discusses his marriage (1.2, a scene in which Ophelia does not appear in the play), Ophelia divides her attention among Hamlet, Claudius, her father Polonius and brother Laertes, and a small gold packet on which she has drawn a picture of a waterfall and a time, "3:30?". Her self-consciousness is apparent as she glances around to see whether Hamlet is watching her, and she rolls her eyes in frustration when Laertes refuses to pass Hamlet the packet. After the press conference, Ophelia and Hamlet break away from the group, but first Polonius and then Laertes assert their control over her by interrupting the couple's whispered conversation. Throughout the scene Ophelia appears small and controlled, torn between Hamlet, who occupies her attention, and her father and brother, who both seem uneasy about the relationship and who listen to Claudius halfheartedly because they are so concerned about keeping Ophelia away from Hamlet. Stiles's youthful face and her movements show not only Ophelia's stubbornness—she makes sure Hamlet notices her and she breaks away from the group to talk to him—but also her vulnerability as she is physically pulled between her family and her boyfriend. This vulnerability resurfaces when later she sits alone at the waterfall fountain, looking around and struggling to fight back tears: Hamlet has missed their rendezvous. The sequence

reveals Ophelia's alienation and her inability to control her life, which is constantly negotiated by the men around her: she speaks to no one but Hamlet and appears trapped by her family. The camera's frequent reaction shots of Ophelia ensure the character's primacy in the film's narrative, while Stiles, who became famous playing one of Shakespeare's most iconic female characters, ensures the character will be noticed. Stiles's ability to convey emotion wordlessly, coupled with her reputation as an intelligent young woman, evoke sympathy for her character as the narrative progresses and her alienation becomes more pronounced.

Ophelia's nonverbal cues work to show her vulnerability as well as her resistance to male efforts to control her. In Shakespeare's 1.3, Laertes warns Ophelia against becoming too involved with Hamlet because his future may not include her. The film follows this scene closely, but Stiles's gestures work with objective correlatives to show her as a young woman pulled between nostalgia for the past and hope for a future with Hamlet. According to Dyer, particular objects both "reflect or express character" and "may also reveal personality by the character's attitude to and 'control' over things."<sup>45</sup> In *Hamlet*, Stiles's Ophelia is a photographer and appears in several scenes with her camera, her photographs, or a box containing notes, photographs, and other mementos of her relationship with Hamlet. The film's version of 1.3 begins with a shot of an old black-and-white photo of a young Hamlet, crouched in a closet beneath men's jackets, presumably his father's closet. He holds an old camera and looks straight ahead, his gaze just to the left of the lens. Ophelia holds this photo, studying it while her brother lectures her about its subject. The photo works on several levels: it suggests that Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet is longer lasting and deeper than Laertes would like to believe; it represents Ophelia's art, which enables her to control the images she produces; and it becomes a symbol of Ophelia's nostalgia for her relationship with Hamlet. As Ophelia's main creative outlet, photography symbolizes the competing goals of personal expression and hiding from the world behind her camera, of rebellion versus filial duty. Photography also represents Ophelia's future, which would afford her independence should she choose to pursue it as a career, as well as her nostalgia for an idealized past—an idea that saturates the film and foreshadows the tragedy because its characters are so consumed by the past that they are unable to imagine the future.

In addition to demonstrating this pull between the past and the future, the scene shows the contradictions of Ophelia's character as filtered through Stiles's stardom. As the scene opens, Ophelia and Laertes sit in their father's apartment; she examines the photograph while Laertes speaks: "Perhaps he loves you now, / and now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch / the virtue of his will" (1.3.14-6).<sup>46</sup> Ophelia does not look at her brother but, in profile, chews her gum and fingers the photograph with blue-tipped nails, showing her preference for Hamlet and her art over lectures by her brother. When Laertes suggests that Hamlet cannot continue to love her because "his will is not his own / For he himself is subject to his birth," she sighs, looks at the ceiling in frustration, puts down the photograph, and begins to pace the room, still not looking at her brother (1.3.17-18). Stiles's body language and facial expressions show Ophelia's resistance to Laertes's words. She paces the room, agitated, before sitting again, and when she does look at her brother, her expression is

blank and emotionless. But when Laertes warns her not to get too close to Hamlet, or else she may “lose [her] heart, or [her] chaste treasure open / To his unmastered importunity,” she grows still and stares straight ahead as he tells her to “fear it” (1.3.31-3). Her pained expression echoes the sadness she showed at the fountain. Rather than fearing for a future act that could threaten her honor, Ophelia appears to reflect on Hamlet’s recent distance and the changing nature of their relationship.

According to Laertes, the real cause for fear, however, is not an uncertain future but is instead something more personal, dependent upon her age: “Youth to itself rebels,” Laertes concludes, “though none else near” (1.3.44). Inherent in youth, he says, is rebellion, but for an adolescent female, rebellion is to be avoided at all costs. Elsewhere in the play, rebellion is gendered: Hamlet connects rebellion, youth, and sexual desire with an absence of virtue when he confronts his mother in her closet: “O shame, where is thy blush? / Rebellious hell . . .” (3.4.81ff). In this sense, the sexual nature of rebellion (for women, at least) is perverse and corruptive, able to ruin a woman who has no shame. Ophelia should fear rebellion because it can sneak up on her, and it can destroy her. Stiles’s Ophelia bristles at her brother’s admonition about rebellion. Her response to him is incredulous and self-assured, and Stiles’s knitted eyebrows, raised chin, and expressive eyes connote her annoyance at the double standard and recall Stiles-as-Kat’s facial expression in *10 Things* when she tells her father and sister that she will not date high school boys like her arch-enemy Joey Donner because they are “miscreants.” In both films, Stiles’s character asserts her right to choose whom and when to date. Here, she tells Laertes that she will keep “the effect of this good lesson”—being wary of Hamlet’s intentions—as long as Laertes holds himself to the same standard of sexual responsibility (1.3.45). Like the outspoken Stiles who defends her definition of feminism, Ophelia will not abide a double standard. Stiles conveys with a simple look an Ophelia who may concede to keep Laertes’s warnings in mind, but who will do so on her own terms. Although Shakespeare’s text mandates that Ophelia listen to her family’s advice regarding Hamlet, Stiles’s nonverbal responses show that early modern ideas about female chastity and submission to male authority are problematic in modern times. Despite her resistance to some of Laertes’s words, however, Ophelia listens to him and to her father, whose authority she continues to respect.

Almeryda’s film replaces Shakespeare’s 2.1 with a scene in Ophelia’s apartment that highlights her potential independence and her conflicted desire for Hamlet’s love and her father’s approval. Shakespeare’s scene includes Ophelia’s longest speech and strengthens the father-daughter relationship by stressing her dependence on him to analyze Hamlet’s strange behavior; Polonius apologizes to his daughter, telling her that he misunderstood Hamlet’s intentions. Deleting Shakespeare’s scene loosens the bond between Ophelia and Polonius, while the added scene shifts the focus to the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. This relationship represents Ophelia’s desire to regain a childhood companion while allowing her to rebel, should she ignore her family’s warnings. Instead of the conversation between Ophelia and Polonius, Almeryda provides a sequence that builds on Ophelia’s relationship with Hamlet, shows her private personal life, and stresses her contradictory desire to pursue her relationship with Hamlet while also submitting to her father’s authority; Stiles’s ges-

tures emphasize this pull between independence and filial duty. The sequence shows Hamlet, in the wake of a visit by his father's ghost, deciding to reach out to Ophelia. After watching old footage of her on his camera, he sits in a coffee shop struggling to write her a love letter ("Doubt thou the stars are fire . . . but never doubt I love" [2.2.115-8]). Hamlet takes it to Ophelia's apartment, a cozy, bohemian flat located in an old building across from a discount supermarket. He finds her absorbed in her work, developing photographs at the back of her dimly lit apartment. She does not hear him come in, but she welcomes him wordlessly with a warm embrace that expresses comfort, gratitude, and passion. Their encounter is brief: they embrace, he gives her the crumpled letter, and she reads it while he looks on anxiously. Before she has a chance to respond, Polonius lets himself into the apartment bearing gifts for his daughter. The disapproval on Polonius's face is clear, and so Hamlet kisses Ophelia quickly and rushes away. On her face is a mixture of fear, annoyance, and bewilderment—what did Hamlet's visit mean, why did her father have to interrupt them, and what will happen next? She tries to follow Hamlet, but her father stops her, causing her to drop the letter. She bites her finger and swipes at her hair nervously as Polonius picks it up. The scene emphasizes the choices Ophelia must make: on the one hand, Hamlet and a life of her own, and on the other, her father and his efforts to control her choices. At this point, Stiles's star-image and Ophelia begin to diverge; Stiles the artist represents choices that afford financial and personal independence, whereas Ophelia cannot free herself from her father's control.

The letter and her father's interference trigger the beginning of Ophelia's mental breakdown, while Stiles's star image allows the audience to imagine a parallel life for the character, one in which she learns to balance the various aspects of her life. Stiles is represented in the media as someone who has always known what she wanted: at the age of six she wrote a letter to the mayor of New York offering a solution to the city's garbage problem.<sup>47</sup> At eleven, she wrote a letter asking stage director Bob McGrath to let her audition for one of his plays; she got a part in his next production.<sup>48</sup> At twelve, she hired a manager. At sixteen, she became the youngest student at the Sundance Screenwriter's Workshop, where she co-authored a screenplay.<sup>49</sup> She acted onstage, did commercials, and gained screen presence until *10 Things* made her a star. As her career has continued to grow, Stiles has played up the duality of her persona, as represented in the Stoli ad, in order to control her image. In contrast, we do not know much about Ophelia's past except for what is revealed through the dialogue and, in Almereyda's film, through images such as Ophelia's photographs and Hamlet's videos. Ophelia cannot be independent or happy as long as she continues to go along with her father's misguided ideas, but she is incapable of outright rebellion because she still seeks his approval.

Ophelia's struggle comes to the fore in another scene in which her character does not appear in Shakespeare's play (2.2); her presence in this scene signals the early stages of her withdrawal into madness and foreshadows her death. Polonius leads her by the hand to visit Claudius and Gertrude at their indoor swimming pool, and while her father is talking, Ophelia stands behind him, clearly distraught—she alternates between crossing her arms tightly in front of her, shoving her hands in her pockets, and wiping at her hair, and her face reflects a mixture of anger, grief, and stubborn

refusal to believe her father's words. When Polonius shows Claudius and Gertrude Hamlet's letter, Ophelia tries to grab it unsuccessfully. Ophelia's participation in the scene—the visual reminder of her unwillingness as co-conspirator to reveal Hamlet's love for her—again showcases her duality. She does not want her father to share the letter, but she does not stop him. As the others discuss her relationship with Hamlet, Ophelia distances herself from them. She walks along the edge of the pool as if it is a balance beam and stops by the edge, gazing into the water; when Polonius reports that he told her Hamlet was “a prince out of thy star. / This must not be” she jumps in (2.2.141-2). The camera is positioned underwater at the bottom of the pool, looking up at Ophelia as she slowly sinks, her hands moving up to cover her face. This Ophelia has made a choice: she escapes the prying eyes of controlling adults, taking her life into her own hands. As the possibility of her drowning begins to sink in, a jump cut reveals that it was just a vision; she is still standing, dry, by the side of the pool. She starts, as if surprised to realize the power of her vision, and wipes her face nervously. Almereyda, by inserting Ophelia into this scene, shifts the focus from the adults to the troubled teen. The scene depicts her alienation and misery and foreshadows her death by drowning, showing what will happen if she cannot stand up for herself or balance her competing desires for acceptance and independence, which—as Stiles's star-text shows—do not have to be mutually exclusive. A young woman in the twenty-first century can be a loving daughter, a faithful partner, a hard-working career woman, and an independent person. Constrained by Shakespeare's play, however, Ophelia must descend into madness and eventual death.

The remainder of the film builds on the disjuncture between Stiles's star image and the character of Ophelia. At times, the actress's mettle shows through, highlighted by a defiant look in Ophelia's eye. But Shakespeare's character is unable to escape her fate, and Stiles portrays her as a lost and hopeless young woman who dies because she cannot see beyond rejection and loss. Stiles's presence both critiques and makes meaning of Ophelia's reliance on male approval: Stiles is independent and driven, but many of the characters she plays depend on the men in their lives for personal fulfillment. In this film, her character is unable to stand up to figures of authority, and this inability to rebel costs her dearly.

Stiles portrays Ophelia's madness as a mind torn asunder by its inability to navigate its own duality; unable to please her father *and* Hamlet, to forgive the one for killing the other, to imagine a future in which she answers to no one but herself, Ophelia becomes unhinged. According to Dyer, audiences relate to characters by “placing” them “in terms both of the understanding we are to have of a character and our judgment of or feeling for him/her.”<sup>50</sup> Through certain “cultural/ideological values and attitudes” associated with a character and through the *mise en scène*, films encourage viewers to feel a certain way about characters.<sup>51</sup> Almereyda's *Hamlet* works to evoke sympathy for Ophelia by privileging her story, including her in more scenes, and casting a talented young star. Her madness is particularly jarring, then, when she appears at a gala in the Guggenheim Museum looking wild-eyed and unstable, tearful and confused. Whereas Shakespeare's Ophelia conveys her madness by singing bits of old songs about lost love and death, Almereyda cuts most of her lines and rearranges the scene in order to focus on Stiles's physical performance. In

his screenplay notes, Almereyda describes the power of this performance:

One of my sharpest peripheral memories of her is very simple: Julia crouched on the floor, facing a particular bend of the wall in the Guggenheim Museum, her head lowered under Walkman headphones, her arms crossed. It was four or five in the morning; I was feeling particularly useless; the crew was clattering away. When the camera was ready Julia quietly removed her headphones, stood and moved into the frame, and in the guise of “acting” some desperate grieving part of herself came swimming up in her eyes.<sup>52</sup>

This grief is just behind the erratic behavior of Stiles’s Ophelia in the scene. At times, her voice is distant, her eyes blank as she sings about her loved one being “dead and gone” (4.5.29-30). She screams at Gertrude, “Pray you mark” and tearfully tells Claudius, “Pray let’s have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this” (4.5.35, 46-47). Instead of singing the Saint Valentine’s Day song as Ophelia does in the play, Stiles moves to the center wall of the spiraling atrium and screams out over the open space. She has to be dragged away by a bodyguard.

This public spectacle resembles Shakespeare’s play in that Ophelia’s madness has the power to resist and trouble the dominant social order. Elaine Showalter explains that feminists have discussed “Ophelia’s madness as protest and rebellion. For many feminist theorists, the madwoman is a heroine, a powerful figure who rebels against the family and the social order; and the hysteric who refuses to speak the language of patriarchal order, who speaks otherwise, is a sister.”<sup>53</sup> Ophelia’s rebellion also poses a threat to the court, which many critics fail to mention. Before she enters for her famous mad scene, a gentleman reports to Gertrude and Horatio that

The unshaped use of [Ophelia’s speech] doth move  
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,  
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,  
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.8-13)

This suggests that Ophelia, in her madness, has gathered an audience, and her words command attention and have the potential for causing mischief. Horatio voices this concern: “’Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds” (14-15). He leaves these “dangerous conjectures” unspoken, but in an aside, Gertrude fears her “guilt” will be “spilt” (19-20). Ophelia’s mad speech, with its open discussion of sex, defies Laertes’s bid to keep her chastity close and private. Ophelia also resists others’ efforts to silence her. Gertrude and Claudius both attempt to speak with her, but they manage only half lines, while she scarcely acknowledges their presence (34, 56). Shakespeare’s Ophelia, then, challenges the notion that female rebellion should be avoided at all costs, as Laertes advises. On the contrary, it is precisely by refusing to be contained—by using the words and actions of a madwoman—that Ophelia challenges the patriarchal order, forces her voice to be heard,

and breaks free of the restrictions put upon her by the men who would control her life.

Stiles's Ophelia achieves a similar feat by causing a spectacle in front of an audience, museum patrons who strain to see the source of the public disturbance. Arguably, the textual cuts reduce the broadly social ramifications of Ophelia's madness and rebellion to a more personal scale. But Stiles's performance, which disrupts the quietude of an elite social function, is not one that will be easily forgotten, even though Ophelia's audience turns away after Claudius waves them off and Gertrude smiles reassuringly. In this way, the film's adults reduce her behavior to that of a troublesome teenager who disturbs their peace, but whom they can control, both physically and socially. At the same time, however, Stiles's star presence suggests that perhaps Ophelia has not submitted to their authority so fully.

The rest of Ophelia's mad scene takes place in a private side gallery, where her only witnesses are Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes. No longer raving, she is lost in her own world, teary and wistful, her eyes full of loss. In her hands are Polaroid pictures, which she drops on the floor, one by one, crying, "He will never come again" (4.5.191). She briefly responds to Laertes, but then her eyes go blank, she begins to cry again, and she returns to her pictures, tearfully naming each flower and its quality. Rosemary, "for remembrance," goes to Laertes, as does rue, which she also keeps for herself (4.5.173-4, 178-9). The artist, left alone with only her images and her grief, has become lost in the past. At the end of the scene, Ophelia strokes her brother's cheek and says, "I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end" (4.5.181-3). The last time we see her alive, she is sobbing into her brother's chest. The scene is poignant because of the emotional connection the film has sought for its young star. Gone is the ambitious feminist, the aloof starlet, the passionate artist, and the rebellious daughter. All that remains is a broken young woman with nothing left but memories of the past. And yet, Stiles's body serves as a physical reminder of what Ophelia could be instead—a talented young woman who listens to music on her Walkman, whose work ethic intimidates even seasoned directors.

In this film, the madness of Stiles's Ophelia appears to stem from dual causes: grief for the loss of the life she had with her loved ones as well as a life she wished she had. Susan Bennett argues that "nostalgia is constituted as a longing for certain qualities and attributes in lived experience that we have apparently lost, at the same time as it indicates our inability to produce parallel qualities and attributes which would satisfy the particularities of lived experience in the present."<sup>54</sup> Ophelia's ravings indicate that she has become obsessed with a life she can never reclaim or perhaps never had: both a trusting, intimate relationship with Hamlet and a loving, safe relationship with a caring and supportive father. Neither her brother, nor Hamlet who is still alive, nor anyone else will satisfy her longing for a different sort of life. She may have had the option of a happy, independent future, but Ophelia's nostalgia does not allow her to seek this life; she is unable to find the balance that shows through in Stiles's star image.

Almeryda's film connects Ophelia's death with the tragedy of other teens who, unable to imagine a more hopeful future, resort to suicide. Instead of an extended description of her death, Gertrude reports that "One woe doth tread upon another's heels, / So fast they follow. Your sister is drowned, Laertes" (4.7.162-3). The film cuts to a wide-angle crane shot of the fountain where Ophelia had waited for Ham-

let earlier. In an inversion of the pool scene, the camera looks down on Ophelia's body, which floats face-up in the shallow basin, her arms stretched out at her sides, sheets of paper floating around her. A security guard enters at the top left of the screen and wades into the fountain. In medium close-up, he pulls her body out of the water. The red and white box that had contained Hamlet's "remembrances" floats to the surface, its contents scattered throughout the fountain. All that Ophelia leaves behind is paper, containing memories to which she clung.

The film's Ophelia commits suicide because she cannot balance the competing pressures placed on young women in contemporary society: she cannot be the dutiful daughter, the loyal sister, and the faithful girlfriend because the men in her life force her to choose between them, and her inability to choose destroys her. Without their approval, she cannot imagine a future, and she fails to embrace her independence. Instead, she withdraws into madness and seeks recourse in death. Stiles injects these final scenes with pathos that challenges her audience to realize the full effect of Ophelia's loss because her star image demonstrates Ophelia's potential for another sort of life. Stiles's Ophelia is not just some girl who wanted to marry a prince, not just the daughter of a diplomat, not just a crazy person who fell out of a tree and drowned. She has potential, is an artist, could have a future. Instead, she commits suicide. This death is enough to force Hamlet to seek his fate, to make Laertes want to commit murder, to prompt Gertrude's grief. But the death transcends the play and the film both: it connects Ophelia's story to those of other girls like her. Like Julia Stiles, these girls may be ambitious, intelligent, and artistic; but unlike Stiles, they succumb to despair and, like Ophelia, choose to leave this life. Stiles the star is not without controversy: she has been criticized for her not-feminist-enough feminism, her participation in films that uphold hegemonic values, and her tendency to self-censor and to court popular favor when it appears that she might alienate her fans, but she does not let criticism paralyze her. Instead, she plays the two sides of her life against each other, making light of her image and building on it. Ophelia, too, is criticized for her relationship with Hamlet, for her deference to her father, and for her inability to take a stand on the direction of her life, but unlike Stiles, she is unable to move forward and instead seeks solace in a watery grave. Like a falling star, she shines for a moment before disappearing from view but not from memory. And yet, Ophelia's story continues beyond death. In life, she may have been unable to rebel, but in death, she serves as a reminder to young women to learn from her mistakes; she demonstrates the importance of resisting the urge to collapse when faced with rejection or loss. The museum patrons may turn away from Ophelia's disturbing voice, but it has forever shattered the peaceful silence of high society.

### Notes

1. Stolichnaya Premium Vodka. <http://www.stoli.com>. The "Would You Have a Drink With You?" campaign ended in 2011, and the website no longer contains the Stiles content. The television advertisements are archived on youtube.
2. Stolichnaya Premium Vodka. "Julia Stiles Stoli Vodka Commercial 'Would You Have a Drink With You?'" Television advertisement, August 1, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/>

watch?v=FXZ6G5K7I9E.

3. Stolichnaya Premium Vodka. Other Stoli originals include *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner and Twitter co-founder Biz Stone, <http://www.stoli.com>.
4. *10 Things I Hate About You*, directed by Gil Junger, 1999 (Touchstone Home Entertainment, 1999), DVD; *O*, directed by Tim Blake Nelson, 2001 (Lion's Gate Home Entertainment, 2001), DVD; *Hamlet*, directed by Michael Almereyda, 2000 (Miramax Home Entertainment, 2000), DVD.
5. Julia Stiles, "Traveler's Tale: I Was Flat Broke and Stranded in Havana," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, January 15, 2011, <http://www.proquest.com>.
6. *Dexter* (Showtime Networks, 2006-present), TV.
7. Elizabeth A. Deitchman, "Shakespeare Stiles Style: Shakespeare, Julia Stiles, and American Girl Culture," in *A Companion to Shakespeare in Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 478.
8. For instance, Carol Thomas Neely argues that Ophelia is "freed" for madness, and her death significantly separates her from the pressures put upon her as daughter, lover, and political subject while driving others to act. See "Feminist Modes of Shakespearean Criticism," *Women's Studies* 9 (1981): 3-15, esp. 10-11, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost. Carol Chillington Rutter argues that Ophelia attains subjectivity after death, when she forces audiences to look at and account for her dead body in its grave, and that the *Hamlet* films directed by Olivier, Kozintsev, Zeffirelli, and Branagh deny her this power. See "Snatched Bodies: Ophelia in the Grave," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.3 (Autumn 1998): 299-319, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2902261>.
9. Elaine Showalter argues that understandings of Ophelia typically reflect cultural attitudes: "The alternation of strong and weak Ophelias on the stage, virginal and seductive Ophelias in art, inadequate or oppressed Ophelias in criticism, tells us how these representations have overflowed the text, and how they have reflected the ideological character of their times, erupting as debates between dominant and feminist views in periods of gender crisis and redefinition. The representation of Ophelia changes independently of theories of the meaning of the play or the Prince, for it depends on attitudes towards women and madness. . . . There is no 'true' Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of all her parts." See "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," in *Shakespeare and The Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Routledge, 1985), 91-92. Showalter is right: readings of Ophelia frequently are divorced from readings of the play as a whole, as well as from readings of Hamlet's character; readings and depictions of Ophelia reflect cultural attitudes and critical trends; and it is impossible to pin down the character according to any one reading. Publications about Almereyda's *Hamlet* support these ideas.
10. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998).
11. Dyer, 63.
12. *Ibid.*, 127.
13. *Ibid.*, 126.

14. *Save the Last Dance*, directed by Thomas Carter, 2001 (Paramount Home Video, 2001), DVD.
15. *The Bourne Identity*, directed by Doug Liman, 2002 (Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD; *The Bourne Supremacy*, directed by Paul Greengrass, 2004 (Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD; *The Bourne Ultimatum*, directed by Paul Greengrass, 2007 (Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD; *Mona Lisa Smile*, directed by Mike Newell, 2003 (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD; *The Business of Strangers*, directed by Patrick Stettner, 2001 (MGM Home Entertainment, 2002), DVD; *The Cry of the Owl*, directed by Jamie Thraves, 2009 (Paramount Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.
16. Michael Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 1996), xi.
17. Leah Rosen, "The Prince & Me (Film)," *People*, April 12, 2004, 41, MasterFILE Premier. Jennifer L. Smith, "Julia Gets Real," *Teen People*, April 2000, 112-15, MasterFILE Premier. *The Prince and Me*, directed by Martha Coolidge, 2004 (Paramount Home Video, 2004), DVD. The film is a loose romantic comedy adaptation of *Hamlet*, in which Stiles's character meets the disguised prince of Denmark (much less sullen, but just as rebellious as Hamlet) who helps her learn Shakespeare and teaches her how to take time out of her busy school schedule for love.
18. Julia Stiles and Rosie Amodio, "I Had to See for Myself," *Marie Claire*, January 1, 2004, 36-38, 40, 42, <http://www.proquest.com>; Julia Stiles, "Baseball: Making New Memories," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, New York, NY, April 17, 2009, <http://www.proquest.com>; Julia Stiles, "Traveler's Tale."
19. Julia Stiles, "You Know My Steez," <http://juliastilesblog.com>.
20. Zoe Williams, "Of Muse and Men," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2004, LexisNexis Academic.
21. Julia Stiles, "Who's Afraid of the 1950s?," *The Guardian*, June 17, 2004, <http://www.proquest.com>.
22. Jennifer Clement, "The Postfeminist Mystique: Feminism and Shakespearean Adaptations in *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*," *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 3.2 (Summer 2008): 1-23.
23. *Ibid.*, 18.
24. Deitchman, 478.
25. *Ibid.*, 479.
26. *Ibid.*, 481.
27. For other arguments about the film's negative depictions of feminism, see Clement, "Postfeminist Mystique"; Melissa Jones, "An Awful Rule': Safe Schools, Hard Canons, and Shakespeare's Loose Heirs," in *Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television*, ed. James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 137-54; and Monique L. Pittman, "Teen Shakespeare and the Trouble with Gender: *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*," in *Authorizing Shakespeare on Film and Television: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Adaptation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 97-136. Michael Friedman views the film more sympathetically, arguing that Kat's evolution from a second-wave to a third-wave feminist is a positive marker of her

32 *The Upstart Crow*

growth. See Michael D. Friedman, "Shakespeare on Film: The Feminist as Shrew in *10 Things I Hate About You*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 22.2 (Summer 2004): 45-65.

28. Deitchman, 485.
29. Williams.
30. Rutter's essay focuses on the film versions of *Hamlet* directed by Laurence Olivier (Two Cities Films, 1948), Grigori Kozintsev (Lenfilm Studio, 1964), Franco Zeffirelli (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1990), and Kenneth Branagh (Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996). She argues that all of the films "snatch" Ophelia's body by failing to focus on "the representation of female death" during the graveyard scene, which in turn suppresses the character's importance in the play (300).
31. In *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics and Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), Desmet argues that Ophelia "gains speech . . . at the price of her selfhood and her life" and that her death prompts Hamlet's eloquent assertion of his own identity (34). More specifically, Ophelia is most outspoken after she has gone mad.
32. Richard Finkelstein, in "Differentiating Hamlet: Ophelia and the Problems of Subjectivity" (*Renaissance and Reformation* 21.2 [1997]: 5-22), argues that Ophelia resists notions of subjectivity, while her body resists male efforts to contain her: "Ophelia's manner of signifying cannot be separated from challenges female bodies pose to gendered concepts of fixed subjectivity. . . . In the masculine discourse of the play, reason and the logical closure of meaning indicate, to rephrase Claudius' words, a unified self and judgment. The men in this tragedy have confidence that they are intact when they believe themselves logical. They struggle to ignore or contain Ophelia not just because her speech, but her body itself, resists the kind of logical closure they find necessary to their own experience of feeling bounded" (13). Her body itself is a "political threat" to the patriarchal state (14). In this reading, Ophelia represents a threat to the patriarchy, but Finkelstein suggests she becomes most powerful only in madness.
33. Michael Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's Hamlet*, Screenplay (New York: Faber and Faber, 2000), viii.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, ix.
36. *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.
37. *Ibid.*, 137.
38. Some critics do discuss Stiles's presence in this film, but their comments frequently are situated within broader arguments about Almereyda's *Hamlet* or about groups of Shakespeare film adaptations. See, for example, Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: The Kenneth Branagh Era* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 187-202, esp. 196-97; Deitchman, 488-89; and Barbara Hodgdon, "Cinematic Performance: Spectacular Bodies: Acting + Cinema + Shakespeare," in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, ed. Diana Henderson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 96-111, esp. 106-09.
39. Dyer, 109.

40. Gary Brumburgh, "Mini Biography for Julia Stiles," IMDb.com; Lesley Goober, "The Hottest Chicks in Hollywood," *Cosmopolitan*, December 2001, 192+, MasterFILE Premier.
41. Alec Foege, "Stiles and Substance," *Biography*, July 2002, 74+, MasterFILE Premier; "Julia's Sweet Style," *Cosmopolitan*, March 2004, 20, MasterFILE Premier.
42. Jeff O'Connell, "Catch Her Eye," *Men's Health* 22.7 (September 2007): 144, Academic OneFile.
43. Hodgdon says Stiles offers "a silent performance" because she is "[g]iven little to say (by Shakespeare and even less in Almereyda's script)." Surrounded and controlled by the male characters, Stiles's Ophelia "inhabits [the screen's] margins." And yet, argues Hodgdon, "her performance crackles around those edges: although she seems to be doing less, she is actually doing more, calling up thoughts and emotions that fill her to the brim but which she cannot, dare not, express" (107).
44. Williams.
45. Dyer, 112.
46. All references are to *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, Arden Shakespeare (1982; Walton-on-Thames Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997).
47. Jancee Dunn, "Is Julia Stiles Too Cool for School?," *Rolling Stone*, April 12, 2001, 89+, MasterFILE Premier.
48. Foege.
49. Dunn.
50. Dyer, 121.
51. *Ibid.*, 122.
52. Almereyda, 137-38.
53. Showalter, 91.
54. Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 5.

DESI “WAS A HO”: OCULAR (RE)PROOF AND THE STORY OF *O*Dee Anna Phares, *North Central College*

In Dimitri Buchowetzki's 1922 silent film adaptation of *Othello*, Desdemona is by and large silent, choosing not to engage with either her father's brutish bullying or her new husband's abrupt abduction of her. Instead, she hides in Othello's shadow until she can find what she thinks is safe haven beneath his cloak and his legal status as her husband. While facing Brabantio, the Duke, and the Venetian court, Desdemona literally becomes the *femme couverte* (the covered woman)<sup>1</sup> whose voice, body, and legal status are subsumed by her husband—a “covering” mirrored in the violent final scene where Othello's substantial form looms above his wife's small lifeless body.

While it might be tempting to attribute Desdemona's passivity to the ubiquity of the damsel in distress motif in contemporary melodrama, not all silent movie heroines are silenced; Asta Nielsen (*Hamlet*, 1921), Francesca Bertini (*Cordelia*, 1910; *Juliet*, 1912), and Theda Bara (*Juliet*, 1916) are just a few of the strong women who find voices on the soundless screen.<sup>2</sup> In the 1922 *Othello*, Ika von Lenceffy's Desdemona is stifled by the film's self-consciously expressionist visuals and its tendency to treat her, not as a character in her own right, but as the site/sight of conflict between Werner Krauss's Iago and Emil Jannings's Othello.

Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001)—a present-day retelling of *Othello* which offers a restored version of the Buchowetzki film as a bonus in the two-disc deluxe DVD edition—presents a similarly muted yet highly conspicuous Desdemona figure in the form of Desi Brable (Julia Stiles).<sup>3</sup> Relocated to a contemporary setting—an American high school—and divorced from Shakespeare's early modern language and culture, *O* seems to offer the possibility for an exploration of postmodern gender dynamics and an examination of violence as a reaction to female sexual and lexical expression. Nelson's film seems deliberately constructed to critique patriarchy and its emphasis on whiteness, wealth, and women as subordinates. Yet, regardless of its intentions, *O* repeatedly reinvokes patriarchal values through its clichéd representations of race and sex and its overaccentuation of the visual.

Scholars such as Barbara Hodgdon and Frederick Luis Aldama have delved into the ways that *O* “loads the representational deck, relying on strategies that approach, even as they also work to overturn, familiar [racial] stereotypes,” but few critics have dealt with how the adaptation/update reinforces gender stereotypes.<sup>4</sup> Instead of taking up Gregory M. Colón Semenza's call for fuller analysis of the film's “complex, problematic”<sup>5</sup> female characters, critics have been content to simply label *O* an example of “Shakesploi”<sup>6</sup>—a term for late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century teen-centric versions of Shakespeare which offer “dumbed down” versions of the plays for a young mall-going audience. However astute Richard Burt's insights into “girlene” cinema are, they do not fully explain *O*—a film that self-consciously stages class and gender conflict, and does so without the knowing wink of *Jawbreaker* (1999) or *Never Been Kissed* (1999).<sup>7</sup>

Other critics have tended to eschew analysis of the film's presentation of the

Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca equivalents and instead point to Stiles's portrayal of Desi in the context of the actress's depiction of other Shakespearean heroines in contemporary adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* (*10 Things I Hate About You*, dir. Gil Junger, 1999) and *Hamlet* (dir. Michael Almereyda, 2000)—adaptations that feature purportedly pluckier, feistier, more individualistic, and more intellectual versions of Shakespeare's women.<sup>8</sup> This appraisal of both early modern female characters and recent cinematic revisions of these characters is simplistic, relying as it does on a teleological vision of female representation which supposes that today we inhabit a postfeminist universe where "super-dainty Kate" becomes kick-ass Kat, and "sweet Desdemona"<sup>10</sup> transforms into the self-assured Desi. In reality, Desdemona is not simply a patriarchal patsy and Desi is not a girl-power icon.

As in Shakespeare's play, the women of *O* inhabit a world that is hostile toward their sexuality and their ability to denigrate male reputation through infidelity. Yet, this retelling of *Othello* privileges the visual while simultaneously devaluing the vocal, creating a text markedly different than Shakespeare's—and one with radically different implications for the portrayal of women. As Eamon Grennan rightly observes, in *Othello*, "The speech of the women . . . occupies a pivotal position in the play's moral world," with Desdemona's speech taking on particular significance in this "play *about* voices, [which operates as] an anatomy of the body of speech itself, in all its illocutionary variety."<sup>11</sup> Desdemona is an oral and aural force in Shakespeare's tragedy, and it is the interpretation—and misinterpretation—of her speech that propels the action. Yet, unlike the voluble heroine of the play, *O*'s Desi—and the other female characters in the film—are more often *seen* than heard, and are forced to endure more surveillance than Othello's bride, Iago's wife, and Cassio's paramour—exposing them and their sexuality to greater speculation by Odin (*Othello*), Hugo (*Iago*), and the audience. While Nelson seeks to expose the destructive potential of the male gaze, the scopophilic nature of contemporary film in general, and the overreliance on image in this film in particular, further fetishize and objectify the women of *O*, opening them to ocular reproof by all.

**"O, fie upon thee, slanderer!"<sup>12</sup>**

Much of the critical attention paid to *O* has concentrated on its depictions of gun violence, and especially on the ways the film invokes the specter of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century school shootings in the United States, such as the one at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in April 1999.<sup>13</sup> This tendency to read Nelson's movie through the prism of Columbine is natural given that Miramax—the original distributor of *O*—decided to shelve the project, which was in post-production at the time of the massacre, because of fears that audiences and Washington legislators would not see Shakespeare in the grisly final scenes of the film, but would instead see Columbine perpetrators Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.<sup>14</sup> Nelson's admission that it was the spate of "shootings [in the late 1990s] that interested me in making this film" has also promoted such interpretations.<sup>15</sup>

*O* and *Othello* are, at their centers, texts concerned with violence specifically inflicted on women by men engaged in homosocial competition. However, the mi-

sogynist nature of that brutality in *O* is suppressed by a critical focus on “teen violence” as “a combination of inextricably linked social and psychological factors” such as “race, social status, and materialism” that does not acknowledge sexism.<sup>16</sup>

With its concentration on adolescent bellicosity on the basketball court and in the halls and dormitories of Southern preparatory school Palmetto Grove Academy, *O* attempts to reposition *Othello* in a modern context while still maintaining the martial and masculinist character of seventeenth-century Venice and Cyprus. Yet, as James M. Welsh is right to point out, “Shooting hoops instead of Turks is a less than subtle difference.”<sup>17</sup> Changing the geographic and temporal locus creates a variety of unsubtle differences as well, many of them related to the film’s highly self-contradictory presentation of race, especially its deployment of African American stereotypes and its invocation of black-on-white domestic violence, such as the most famous modern example of the crime—the alleged murder of Nicole Brown Simpson by her ex-husband, athlete and actor O. J. Simpson.<sup>18</sup>

One of the primary differences between *Othello* and *O*, however, is *how* violence—and especially violence against women—is exhibited to the audience. Sara Munson Deats observes that Shakespeare’s play “depicts a society that authorizes violence as a solution to problems, particularly those involving male honor and male shame,” but she also points out how *Othello* presents “patterns of spouse abuse remarkably similar to those appearing in numerous statistical profiles of [modern] conjugal crime.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, *O* consciously depicts a culture which sanctions antagonism and aggression, though they exist in the ritualized forms of school cliques and team athletics, and presents teen dating violence in a manner consistent with recent studies on the topic which show women aged 16 to 24 most likely to face abuse from a romantic partner.<sup>20</sup> But because Shakespeare’s play is self-consciously aural as well as visual, and because the reader or theatergoer’s perspective is not limited to a single character’s point of view, the verbal and physical mistreatment that Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca endure is contextualized and condemned, even in a society that institutionalizes female inferiority; these women function as individuals who exist apart from male constructions of them. In contrast, *O*’s women are representative, pictorial, existing as images in the male characters’ consciousnesses. Regardless of Nelson’s intentions, because the film sets up one primary point of view—that of Hugo Goulding (the Iago character, played by Josh Hartnett)—the audience is forced to see the women through his eyes, and as he tells Odin midway through the film, “You know, sometimes I see things that aren’t really there,” something he declares “a weakness.” It becomes “a weakness” of the film itself as Hugo’s—and Odin’s—warped vision of femininity stands as the only vision of femininity, and agency and speech are erased until nothing—0—of them is left.

Both *O*’s and *0*’s are omnipresent in the film. Eric C. Brown painstakingly tracks “the film’s near obsession with the visual and aural properties of ‘O’”<sup>21</sup> as sound, as literal shape, as character name, as absence, and as narrative trajectory—pointing out the ways that dramatically and visually *O* comes full circle.<sup>22</sup> While acknowledging that the “sexual dynamics of the letter ‘O’ are pervasive in the film,” Brown does not read the aggressive sexuality inherent in the very first “O” the viewer sees.<sup>23</sup> In its opening frames, the film slowly fades in from a series of shots of hazy, unfocused,

white shapes on a black background to a clearly delineated dole of doves perched on a ledge beneath a round skylight, a kind of oculus focused on the darkened heavens. Accompanied by the muted strains of Verdi's *Otello*, the disembodied voice of Hugo Goulding declares, "All my life, I always wanted to fly; I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you are not supposed to be jealous of anything, but to take flight, to soar above everything and everyone: now that's livin'."<sup>24</sup>

Hugo's monologue—and its visual backdrop—establishes one of the film's most ubiquitous motifs: the hawk contrasted with the dove. Not only does the hawk figure as a symbol of Odin "O" James (the film's Othello, played by Mekhi Phifer) and the mascot of the Palmetto Grove Academy basketball team, but because of its association with virility and physical competition, the hawk also suggests a violent masculinity. The doves in *O* are a more problematical emblem to interpret. Traditionally associated with love, peace, constancy, femininity, and even the Holy Spirit,<sup>25</sup> the dove appears to be a fitting antithesis to the predatory male hawk, intimating that female amity will be consumed by destructive masculinity in the film. And, by and large, this is an accurate characterization of what happens in *Othello* and *O*; however, it is important to analyze *how* the doves are represented in the opening scene of the film in order to comprehend the complexity of the symbol.

After a series of dissolves which show the doves from distorted angles—thereby disorienting the viewer and denying a logical and coherent space for the birds to inhabit—the camera slowly pans down, revealing the birds perched upon a shadowy circlet of masonry beneath darkened, but reflective glass. The *chiaroscuro* produced by the use of blue filters and low light renders an arresting image: a gaping-toothed maw. What is more, the visual echoes of the birds in the window are not simply reflected but refracted, giving the viewer the impression that this "O" is an orifice populated by several sets of jagged teeth—an image strikingly similar to both a hell-mouth and a *vagina dentata*, a figure representing the castrating power of the female genitalia.<sup>26</sup>

Though most likely an inadvertent allusion in the film, a similar figure of devouring femininity appears in the play *Othello*. As part of his wooing, Othello stimulates his paramour's imagination with tales "of the Cannibals that each other eat"—and he informs her father and the senate that "these things to hear / Would Desdemona seriously incline" (1.3.157, 159-60). Othello also refers to fantasies of female consumption while lamenting a man's inability to control his wife's sexuality: "O curse of marriage! / That we can call these delicate creatures ours / And not their appetites!" (3.3.299-301). Disorderly and destructive by nature, female carnality makes a true union impossible; men can only "*call* these delicate creatures" theirs (my emphasis).<sup>27</sup> Iago's wife, Emilia, refutes this claim by a kind of inversion, telling Desdemona:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man:  
They are all but stomachs, and we all but food:  
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full  
They belch us. (3.4.108-111)

What becomes clear is that Emilia and Othello's visions of the sexes—though each

focuses on the consumptive quality of female-male relationships—really do differ. Emilia presents male sexuality as consuming until glutted, while Othello explains female sexuality as depraved and unquenchable. It is Othello's presentation of feminine sexuality—or rather Iago's presentation ventriloquized through Othello—that predominates in *O*. It is telling, therefore, that the initial image of the toothed "O" is revealed during Hugo's monologue; his distorted vision becomes the audience's vision and his narration becomes the soundtrack to accompany both.

The director draws attention to the contrast between male and female narratives in the soundtrack when Desdemona's final aria from the operatic version of the story, *Otello*, is brusquely brought to a halt by a scene break which features a quick cut to a close-up of Palmetto Grove's avian mascot as well as a shift from "Ave Maria" to West Coast hip-hop artists, Roscoe and Kurupt, rapping about using "my AK" and "my 9 [millimeter]" in "We Riddaz."<sup>28</sup> In essence, Hugo—and the film—silences the female voice, leaving behind the unintended visual echo of a carnivorous femininity, then controlling it through the utilization of an intensely masculinist soundtrack<sup>29</sup> and a shift to *O*'s chosen field of battle: the basketball court. In this arena, women are literally on the sidelines, and their voices and bodies are absorbed into the crowd while men like Odin, Hugo, and Michael Cassio (Andrew Keegan) work as a team yet maintain their individuality.

*Othello* is concerned with martial values, with personal valor, and with the question of whether it is possible to be a soldier and a lover; however, while the threat of attack by the Turks initiates Othello's removal to Cyprus, when act 2 begins the enemy has already been destroyed, and so there are no battles to be staged. *O*, on the other hand, stages a number of skirmishes—three games and a slam dunk competition, as well as various practices—which help to reinforce the notion that this is a man's world where women are, at best, spectators, and at worst, the objects of speculation. In these stylized "warfare" scenes, women are vastly outnumbered, with cheerleaders and the players' girlfriends constituting the most obvious female presence. Their voices are rarely individuated in the scenes, and, instead, they simply blend into the crowd's roar or are muted by the male hip-hop artists on the soundtrack.

The suppression of Desi's voice is most evident during the Southeast regional high school slam dunk contest; while the chanting of the entire audience is removed to place the focus on the rhythmic pounding of Odin dribbling the ball on the court, the close-up of Desi—repeatedly mouthing "O, O, O,"—highlights the way that she is silenced by Odin's penetrating stare and the destructive power of his dunk, which shatters—"rapes"—the backboard.<sup>30</sup> When *O*'s cocaine and jealousy-fueled fury erupts, leading him to not only shove a young ball boy but to hoist the basketball hoop over his head, Desi simply gapes in amazement, her mouth forming an incredulous "O."

While Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello* are not only allowed to speak for themselves but are even permitted to defend themselves and their sex, Desi and Emily (the film's version of Emilia, played by Rain Phoenix) are rarely given the same opportunities. When Iago accuses his wife of being too loquacious, Desdemona declares, "O, fie upon thee, slanderer!" (2.1.125). And when Iago jovially lists the faults of women, Desdemona not only refutes his points, she denies his right to in-

struct his wife on her spousal duty: "Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband" (2.1.173-174).<sup>31</sup> Further, Desdemona not only stands up to her father, telling Brabantio that her duty now belongs "to the Moor my lord" (1.3.205), she also informs the Duke of her desire to "live with" Othello, even in a time of war (1.3.265). In contrast, O's Desi is significantly less valuable. In fact, though present in many of the early scenes, Desi does not speak until the moment she is asked about the nature of her relationship with Odin—and this is more than ten minutes into the film's ninety-four-minute running time. When Desi does speak, it is not with the passion and force of her theatrical progenitress. Having been told that Odin has raped his daughter, Desi's father and head of the school, Dean Brable (the film's Brabantio, played by John Heard), asks for a meeting with O, Coach Duke Goulding (a version of the Duke of Venice, played by Martin Sheen), and Desi. After O declares, "If Desi says that I did anything even close to wrong to her, I'll leave the goddamn school, okay," Desi appears in the coach's office. Coach Goulding ushers her in, saying, "Come in, sweetheart"; she is shown a seat, while all the men in the scene remain standing around her. Leaning in, Dean Brable asks his daughter to explain the nature of her relationship with Odin:

DEAN BRABLE. Honey, we've never had any secrets before, right? [*Desi nods in agreement.*] So, I just want you to tell me the truth. Did Odin ever harm you? Force you to do anything you didn't want to do? Anything at all?

DESI. [*Pauses*] Odin and I have been together now for four months.

DEAN BRABLE. Together, wha, wha, what does that mean 'together'?

DESI. Dad, that's none of your business.

DEAN BRABLE. I asked you a question.

DESI. And I said, it's none of your business.

Desi's responses to her father's queries seem strong, calling as she does for privacy and for individual identity separate from her parent. But, on closer inspection, not only are her replies less forceful than they initially appear, thanks to various editorial, textual, and performance choices, but also Desi's commitment to Odin and her strength of character are made dubious. In the opening moments of the exchange, the camera moves from a medium shot—in which Odin, the Dean, and Desi are in frame—to a close-up of Brable, who gently asks, "Did Odin ever harm you? Force you to do anything you didn't want to do?" As he continues—"Anything at all?"—the camera shifts to a close-up of a stoic Odin. Nelson and editor Kate Sanford do not give Desi a reaction shot during her father's lines, so the audience is denied a view into how this young woman feels about the horrible charges being leveled at her boyfriend. In fact, when the camera does move in for Desi's close-up, Stiles's deep breath before flatly and meekly stating, "Odin and I have been together now for four months," offers little clarification on how to read the scene. Further, Desi's deflection of the question about her consent does not eliminate the possibility that Odin *has* forced her into a sexual affair; what is more, it does not stress her own agency in the relationship.

Whereas Othello's Desdemona is manifestly "half the wooer" in her romance,

Desi is not presented as an equal partner in the early stages of the courtship with O (1.3.191)—quite the contrary, in fact, since in a later scene, Desi informs the audience that Odin was the pursuer; unlike the initially oblivious Othello of the play, “The second sentence out of [O’s] mouth was, ‘Do you have a boyfriend?’” This notion of O as the more aggressive and more invested partner is evident throughout the remainder of the scene in the coach’s office: Odin wants to make it clear that “what [he and Desi] have is beautiful,” while Desi makes no claims about the romance beyond its four-month duration. Where Desdemona sues for the chance to accompany her husband to Cyprus—“if I be left behind . . . a heavy interim shall support / By his dear absence. Let me go with him” (1.3.272, 275-76), Desi does not utter another word after “it’s none of your business,” as Duke Goulding shepherds her from the room, saying, “Let’s give them [the Dean and Odin] a chance to talk.” What is ironic is that Coach Goulding declares “this is a family matter” and suggests “Maybe we shouldn’t be discussing it here” right before ushering Desi out, intimating that she has no voice in her own family. The filmmakers suggest the paternalism of all the men present in this scene, offering a critique of these individuals who are physically and psychically encircling Desi—Odin among them. But this critique is blunted both by the camera’s circumscription and the script’s redaction, so that Desi becomes the object of inquiry and the subject of the conversation, not a participant in either.

Desi is similarly silenced and marginalized later in the film, when she and Odin meet for a romantic assignation at the Willows Motel. Their first real sexual encounter begins tenderly, but once Desi becomes more assertive, straddling her lover and repositioning herself to enhance her own pleasure, Odin begins to view his girlfriend, and the coition, differently. He not only lapses into a dark fantasy in which Desi is unfaithful, he also imagines himself disappearing from the current scene, replaced by Mike Cassio—his friend and teammate. Odin reacts violently to this erasure of power, first by reclaiming his spatial primacy through inverting their positions on the bed, and then by demonstrating his mastery of her body through forced sexual intercourse. Odin is deaf to Desi’s repeated cries to “Stop” because she is no longer a participant in the scene but an object to be controlled.

Remarkably, after Desi has been sexually abused, she makes excuses for Odin’s mistreatment of her, telling Emily, he “may not be a saint, but he’s never done anything even close to that before”—echoing O’s own words when he responded to Dean Brable’s accusation that he raped his daughter. But when O enters the scene and questions his girlfriend—“you’d never give out no love behind my back now, would you?”—Desi is horrified and tries to defend herself. Unfortunately, “Are you kidding me?! That’s really shitty!” is not a sufficient response to the particularly knotty rhetoric of the query posed to her; what is more, as earlier she initially deflects the question as opposed to refuting the veracity of the claim at its heart. She does respond, but by using a kind of defiant and emasculating means of expression to which the men of the film react badly: “That is not what I meant. What the hell is wrong with you? . . . If you wanna ask me if I’m cheating on you, get some balls and ask.” Desi asks O to leave, but she has unknowingly issued a challenge, and there will be bloody consequences because she finally demands the respect she does

not demand earlier: "You're the only person I've ever been with and you're the only person I wanna be with. And if you want to be with me, don't ever talk to me like that again, ever."

By using her voice to declare Odin's effeminacy and her own agency, Desi is aligning herself with other female characters who evaluate the men of *O*, and who therefore offer the potential for humiliation and emasculation. At the slam dunk contest, three of the five judges are women—and while all of them ultimately award Odin a perfect score, he expresses a hostile bravado toward the female official who tells him, "You have one minute to do three dunks" and that he can "throw out the two lowest." His brusque retort, "I'm only doing one," operates as a show of his own virility that defies her implication that he might need more than one try to get a winning score. A similar kind of judgment and resistance occurs when Hugo and Odin are challenged by their female English teacher because of their inattention to her lesson on, ironically enough, *Macbeth*. When it becomes clear that the boys are not listening to her lecture on how Lady Macbeth "purposely uses this maternal imagery to get [Macbeth] into doing this dirty work," the teacher asks: "would either of you care to name one of Shakespeare's poems for me?" Brown suggests that "this query implies a broader scholastic ignorance"<sup>32</sup> of the students, and Semenza argues that the "question implicitly conveys a common assumption in mainstream America about the cultural illiteracy of teens."<sup>33</sup> While this line may be a self-referential joke about the audience of this film being uninformed about the source material, the gender implications of the question should not be ignored. After all, the teacher is instructing these students about a woman's rhetorical power, about her ability to use her feminine wiles to control a man. The "mischievous trickery in the question" is its potential as a show of power; the teacher asks a question beyond the scope of their lesson in order to embarrass Odin and Hugo, thereby highlighting their lack of knowledge and her own expertise.<sup>34</sup> Semenza's tongue-in-cheek question—"would '#130' have been a correct answer?"—gets to the problematic nature of the teacher's query which seems designed to flummox the boys and gain their undivided—and chastened—attention.<sup>35</sup> Hugo, who is getting "another 'A' in English," despite his inability to connect the Bard with *The Rape of Lucrece*, wins the power-play by performing for his classmates: "I thought he wrote movies." With no witty retort, the teacher resorts to petty patronization: "Perhaps you two should pay attention. That way, after you've won this nationally televised championship, you'll have something more profound to say than—" The film silences her attempts to mock Hugo and Odin's superficiality by abruptly cutting to the dialogue in the next scene and Emily's interrogation of Desi about Odin's "rough" treatment of her at the Willows. The shift from the classroom to the girls' bedroom, and to a discussion of the rape, suggests that the threat of violence always trumps a woman's ability to be "on top"—whether on the basketball court, in a classroom, or in a bedroom. It also points to Nelson's acknowledgement of the male adolescent's desire to stifle all potential for female critique.

Perhaps this is why Desi utters only two lines during her death scene: "What time is it?" and "Odin." While this directorial choice does highlight men's fears about the female voice—and does echo sentiments expressed by Othello in 5.2—Desi is denied any agency at the moment of death and Odin is presented as having

all of the physical and rhetorical power as he whispers “Go to sleep.” Desi is never given the opportunity to pray, to answer O’s accusations, or to beg for mercy as in Shakespeare’s play. Odin simply moves from embracing her to strangling her, all the while charging her with crimes she is unable to refute. He has judged her and found her guilty of infidelity. Or, more accurately, he has gagged her before her speech or perceived sexual offenses diminish his reputation as “player” and “playa.”

This idea is further reinforced by two of the seemingly more playful male-female interchanges. Early in the film, Desi and O take off their clothes and lie naked in bed because Odin “just likes feeling your skin next to mine.” When Desi teasingly responds to Odin’s boasting about his “player skills,” with “Oh, ladies and gentlemen, he’s getting a little cocky,” O laughs and counters with, “Hey, hey, don’t be sayin’ ‘liddle’ and ‘cocky’ in the same sentence when it comes to me—especially when you know the deal.” The exchange reads as nothing more than good-natured banter at this stage in the narrative, but it seems more ominous in the context of O’s subsequent assault on his girlfriend at the motel. He silences her perceived jests about his potency by using it as a weapon against her.

Hugo and Emily enact a similar gender conflict that is superficially playful. Though he has shown her nothing but contempt throughout the film, Emily picks up Desi’s absentmindedly dropped scarf—the film’s equivalent of *Othello*’s handkerchief—and brings it to Hugo, who, like Iago in the play, has been hoping to use the token as part of his stratagems. When Emily enters Hugo’s dorm room and announces, “I have something for you,” Hugo—just as Odin does in the “Little Cocky” scene—engages in word play as he dully observes, “You have things for lots of guys.” As well as suggesting a sense of sexual attraction, the reference cannot help but invoke the ubiquitous Shakespearean pun on “nothing” as “no thing” or no penis;<sup>36</sup> Hugo’s contention that she has multiple “things” implies Emily’s promiscuity. After Emily presents the scarf to Hugo, he says, “You’re amazing,” as he begins to kiss her and lay her back on the bottom bunk. Hugo’s smiling at her and showing her the first positive attention she has received from him in the film causes Emily to note, “All this time, I’ve been looking for romance, and all I had to do was steal something.” What is ironic is that the stolen token becomes a prop in their night of “romance.” Hugo places the scarf over Emily’s face, “draping it like a shroud” before “forcing [it] into her mouth.”<sup>37</sup> The act of covering her visage serves to obliterate her individual features, to make Emily simply a body to be used; her gagging eliminates any possibility of the kind of verbal resistance O encounters at the Willows. It is obvious that it is not Emily but the scarf that Hugo is having intercourse with; he even uses the same verb, “borrow,” when discussing what he plans to do to the scarf and to Emily—a verb associated with the temporary possession of objects, not people. As well as being a fetishized item, the scarf also behaves as a sheath—a prophylactic that acts as a barrier between Emily and Hugo. Constantly imagining her as a whore and her body as unclean, Hugo constructs Emily as potentially contaminating. His earlier portrayal of all white girls as “horny snakes” not only equates young women with lust and manipulation but with poison and infection, invoking as it does a literary tradition that holds that “the poison of asps and dragons is more curable and less dangerous to men than the familiarity of women.”<sup>38</sup> The scarf is then a

protective barrier that allows him to bed her safely and a means for "closing off vulnerable exposure" through her speech and her womb.<sup>39</sup> Like Othello's handkerchief, "There's magic in the web" of the scarf (3.4.73).

### **"You should watch your girl, bro"**

The curtailing of female speech occurs so frequently in *O* that Desi, Emily, and even Brandy (the film's version of Bianca, played by Rachel Shumate) are offered far fewer opportunities to establish their characters and voice their thoughts and feelings than in Shakespeare's play. Instead, the women of *O* operate as bodies to be observed and scrutinized. In some ways, this is not surprising; after all, early modern theatergoers were as much auditors as spectators, whereas contemporary filmgoers might more accurately be described as movie-*watchers*. Because of its very nature, film is scopophilic, but *O* is especially focused on the anxiety of the male gaze.<sup>40</sup> Desi in particular faces almost constant observation and examination from myriad judging eyes: the lovesick Roger (*O*'s Roderigo, played by Elden Henson), the manipulative Hugo, the suspicious Odin, and even the envious Emily, not to mention the viewers privy to scenes that the other characters in the film are incapable of seeing. Desi is persistently displayed to spectators on and off the screen, but because she is unaware of their gaze, she cannot explain her actions to others.

In the disturbing scene in which Desi and Odin's first sexual liaison turns into a date rape, the lovemaking becomes violent because Odin—who is watching himself have sex with Desi in an O-shaped mirror—not only envisions his paramour copulating with Mike,<sup>41</sup> but also because he constructs a mental video-montage from all of his previous surveillance of Desi. Since Desi cannot see into the mirror or into *O*'s mind, she cannot control the narrative being constructed about her. Significantly, Desi's eyes are closed throughout much of the scene as she gives herself over to the pleasure, and so does not perceive that her position atop Odin—and her moaning "O, O, O" as she nears climax—are greeted with rage by her lover. Odin fails to comprehend that the name "O," and the sound of bliss, "O," are entwined: that for Desi, *he* is pleasure. What is more, what Desi does say in the film is used to confirm Odin's distorted picture of her. Desi's pre-coital declaration, "I want you to be able to do anything. I want you to do what you want with me . . . I want you to have me however you want," becomes the basis for Odin's post-coital accusation that because Desi was "all hot and shit . . . all freaky and stuff" at the Willows, she is a whore disguised as a virgin. Nelson appears to stage this scene as a way of highlighting how women's sexual experience becomes a weapon that can be used against them. But the graphic nature of the scene, and *O*'s status as the point-of-view character, encourage us to see Desi as he sees her.<sup>42</sup> Desi's willingness to let *O* do what he wants to her means that he will, but he will blame her for it and for conforming to the picture he has envisaged.

Desi's openness to Odin becomes a sign of her sexual availability or more accurately, a sign of her voraciousness. As Hugo says when attempting to stoke the fires of Odin's jealousy: "White girls are snakey. Alright, they're horny snakes. They act like we're the ones who want sex all the time, but they're just subtle about the way they go after it." It is not surprising, then, that immediately after Odin reaches orgasm, and

the “hate fuck”<sup>43</sup> ends, the scene cuts from Desi’s wounded white body<sup>44</sup> to a close-up of the white doves of the film’s opening. Remarkably, the tilt of the shot and the placement of the birds make some of the doves appear headless, as if the teeth of the *vagina dentata* have been blunted or knocked out by violent force. Odin has defanged this particular “horny snake.” By relying on his own faulty vision as well as on his misreading of her speech, O has transformed Desi’s submission into domination—a domination that he cannot abide, so it must be nullified by rape and ultimately, murder.

Emily too spends much of her time under surveillance by the film viewer and the characters on-screen. Hugo watches, waiting to find evidence of her faithlessness; so, when Michael offers Emily a hug as a casual form of greeting, Hugo declares, “Mikey gets more kisses from my girl than I do.” Whereas in *Othello*, Cassio does actually make a “bold show of courtesy,” Mikey’s welcome is more subdued; Hugo may believe he sees “kisses,” but none take place in the audience’s view (2.1.110). In essence, Hugo does not need to watch or hear Emily to know what she is doing; he is that confident in her disloyalty.

Emily, on the other hand, is presented as decidedly unsure of herself and her boyfriend, which causes her to observe others—most notably Hugo, Odin, and Desi. Whereas Hugo claims that his distrust, his need to surveil, is “a weakness,” for Emily it actually is a weakness because it provides her neither security nor power, only isolation. Like Iago in the play, the thoughts and attentions of O’s villain are focused on plotting, not on the needs and wants of his romantic partner, so like Emilia, Emily is marginalized. In the film, Emily is frequently presented as an isolated onlooker who is either scanning the scene for Hugo or jealously viewing Odin and Desi. Since she shares a room with Desi, Emily is often put into the position of making herself silent and invisible—but also deaf through the use of headphones—so she does not interfere with the couple’s romantic assignations. O, in fact, brings Emily gifts to keep her quiet and distracted—a CD, *Harlem’s Finest*, for instance—and she must cover her face and body with her comforter to keep from seeing O and Desi “naked in bed” (4.1.7). During these scenes, Emily’s face registers both resentment of her exclusion and her longing for the kind of intimacy from which she is being barred; she becomes the kind of judgmental and potentially dangerous watcher that Odin becomes later in the film. And, in view of this apparent bitterness, Emily’s theft and subsequent conferral of Desi’s scarf look like a more sinister act of betrayal than it does in Shakespeare’s play, especially since it seems to confirm the deceptive and selfish vision of women that Hugo represents. The price she plays for her betrayal—and for her inability or unwillingness to see Hugo’s villainy—is death.

Like *Othello*’s Emilia, Emily is murdered when she reveals that her partner is responsible for the false claims about Desi’s infidelity and the misdirection of the scarf. Yet Emily’s exchange with the men is brief and her death comes swiftly with a gunshot to the belly—she has no dying words to her boyfriend or Odin; she is simply dispatched as Desi was dispatched. When Emily finally affirms Desi’s innocence, informing Odin that Desi and Mike were never discovered *in flagrante delicto* and were never even rumored to have been involved, both Odin and Hugo seek to overpower Emily. In a moment eerily reminiscent of the scenes on the court, Emily blocks Odin and shoves Hugo, defending Desi’s body and her reputation while the

men talk trash about the slain woman. After deluding herself and covering up for Hugo, Emily three times declares, "You gave that scarf to Michael!" as Hugo tries to bully her into lying by warning her to "Tell the truth!" As on the previous two occasions when Desi repeats "O" three times in quick succession—during her building orgasm before the rape and at the dunk contest before shattering of the backboard—Emily is silenced by a show of devastating masculine force. Hugo's anxieties about Emily's speech, and its potential to undo him, can only be assuaged through an act of sadism which eliminates the emasculating threat<sup>45</sup>—the literal stopping of her mouth which carries out the implicit menace contained in their earlier encounter when Hugo gagged Emily with Desi's scarf. Like Odin, Hugo has had to move from viewer to actor in order to maintain control over his woman.

Of the three central female characters in *O*, only Brandy manages to survive this destructive male power—just as Bianca does in Shakespeare's play—and yet, she too undergoes a visual and oral assault similar to Desi and Emily because of the nature of her character's adaptation. Though the film is punctuated with scenes depicting drug dealing, shooting up and snorting, date rape, and ultimately gun violence, it chooses not to present Brandy as a call girl—the modern equivalent of Othello's seventeenth-century courtesan. Instead, Brandy is simply a sexually active high school girl, "a slut" whom Mike mocks for her availability. The Cassio of *Othello* speaks disrespectfully of Bianca to Iago, referring to her as "monkey" and "bauble," and joking about how she "hangs and lolls and weeps upon me, so shakes and pulls me" (4.1.140, 146, 150-151), but *O*'s Mike shows even greater contempt for Brandy by reporting more intimate details of their encounters—informing Hugo that "Ah, man, I was in the library yesterday; she took me in the back," and "Yeah, and check this out: she said, down the road, even if she's with somebody, even if she's married, she'd do me until the day she dies." Certainly, this is the kind of locker room talk—though this takes place in Hugo's dorm room—one might expect from adolescent males engaged in posturing behavior, but within the context of the rest of the film, and the earlier presentation of Brandy as "slut," this exchange comes across as raunchier, and the portrayal of women coarser, than in Shakespeare's play.

When Cassio refers to Bianca as a perfumed "fitchew" or polecat—a slang term for prostitute—and chastises her for "this haunting of me," it is clearly about saving face in front of Iago (4.1.156, 157). In the early modern period, having a relationship with a harlot beyond that of customer and client was considered seriously injurious to a man's reputation. In fact, when the lecherous Lucio of *Measure for Measure* is forced to marry the prostitute he has impregnated—instead of being executed for slandering his sovereign—he declares that "Marrying a punk . . . is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging" (5.1.545).<sup>46</sup> Cassio is clearly obsessed with his standing in the community, as is shown in his exchange with Iago after Othello has dismissed Cassio from his post after being caught drunk and brawling:

Reputation, reputation, reputation! I, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation! (2.3.256-58)

Having already suffered from the shame of his demotion and his inability to hold his liquor, Cassio cannot afford to be seen as attached to Bianca, even though when the two are alone, Cassio does show her affection, calling her “most fair Bianca,” “sweet love,” “Sweet Bianca,” and reassuring her that he wants to be with her and no one else (3.4.180, 181, 190). While this may simply be an effort to flatter her and keep her pliant, Cassio’s public abuse of her does not dampen her admiration of him, and so sweet talk hardly seems necessary to continue the relationship. It therefore appears that Cassio’s fondness is genuine.

In *O*, it is difficult to come to the same conclusion. In all of the scenes featuring Brandy before Mike refers to her as “a slut,” she is presented as a character who views and is viewed by others, but who does not speak herself. Before we see her, Brandy is simply referred to as “that girl”—the young woman that a tequila-fueled Mike is going off to find at a party. When she actually does appear on-screen, she is listening as Mike tells her about his success on the basketball court. She then shifts to a hapless bystander as Roger starts a fight with Mike—one that ends with Roger bleeding from an abdominal wound from a broken bottle. Brandy’s next appearance is oddly similar. Here, however, she and Mike are being viewed from above by a godlike Hugo who observes and plots from the balcony. The camera is his point of view and so we, and he, peer down at Michael as he holds Brandy’s hand and talks to her—though his speech is suppressed by the film’s score and by Hugo’s distance from the couple. When Brandy becomes aware of the surveillance, her face changes, registering a discomfort with the intrusive gaze. She then silently mouths her assent to Mike leaving to meet with Hugo. Though she cannot see it from her vantage point, Hugo is giving Mike Desi’s stolen scarf and informing his friend he should give the token to Brandy. She appears nonplussed, alienated, looking up at two men who have turned their backs to her so that they can confer about her. Nelson depicts her as small and vulnerable as she sits in her school uniform peering up at them. She is not the practiced courtesan who is familiar with the insults that Bianca has undoubtedly had to bear. And what is more, because her relationship with Mike is public—and we have been given no sense of anything about her past—Brandy offers no obvious threat to Mike’s reputation, which marks his later ridicule of her as casual and, therefore, more callous. Because the filmmaker has not permitted Brandy to speak for herself, the audience only has Michael to speak for her—and he reduces her to her sexuality. When Brandy finally does get to talk in *O*, she comes across as shrill and crass: “What the hell do you think you’re doing, giving me something you got from some other bitch?” Her subsequent scenes show her watching, following, left behind—an unwitting witness to the carnage. Though she does serve as the herald who informs the dorm that Hugo “killed Michael,” she again turns into a noiseless onlooker in the final moments of the film, only present as one of the survivors of the “school shooting.” Brandy is not accused of the attempted murder of Michael Cassio—as Bianca is in the play—but neither is she given the chance to confront the allegation that she is a “strumpet” as Bianca is. Mike’s claim that “She does follow me everywhere” is shown to be true: this is how she discovers that he has been shot. The rest of his assertions about her, therefore, may also be true. And she is offered no opportunity to refute them.

**"I feel like I can close my eyes with you"**

In *Othello*, the title character makes demands for "ocular proof" that he never actually receives since he is unable to see Desdemona and Cassio "naked in bed." What Othello gets instead is a sidelong glance at a handkerchief and alleged aural confirmation of his wife's infidelity through eavesdropping. In 4.1, Othello, who has withdrawn in order to overhear Iago and Cassio's conversation about Desdemona, listens as Cassio describes the "bauble" who "hangs and lolls and weeps upon [him]" (4.1.146,150). Though in reality Cassio is speaking of Bianca, Othello imagines that his former friend "tells how [Desdemona] plucked him to [Othello's] chamber," providing the Moor with sufficient evidence of his wife's crime (4.1.152). When Bianca enters to return the handkerchief she determines "is some minx's token," Othello has already convinced himself of Desdemona's adultery; in this case, *hearing* is believing. And while most modern editions of the play provide a stage direction that indicates Bianca returns the handkerchief to Cassio, neither the First Folio (1623) nor First Quarto (1622) offers any such direction, suggesting that Othello's line—"By heaven, that should be my handkerchief!"—may be nothing more than a reaction to hearing about the "piece of work" Cassio found in his chamber (4.1.161). Even granting an implied stage direction in Bianca's speech does not mean that Othello actually sees the article since he employs the rather equivocal phrase "that *should be* my handkerchief" (my emphasis). Further, when Iago asks "And did you see the handkerchief?" Othello responds with "Was that mine?"—indicating that he is unable to verify his property until Iago authenticates it: "Yours by this hand" (4.1.181-83). As happens frequently in the play, it is sound rather than sight which spurs Othello toward tragedy.

The opposite is true in *O*, as the corresponding scene in the film shows. Consumed by doubt and clouded by cocaine and alcohol—all provided by Hugo—Odin should be susceptible to Hugo's lies about Michael and Desi. But when Hugo informs O that "they're fuckin'" and "they call you 'the nigger,' man," Odin is incredulous, declaring, "Desi wouldn't say nothin' like that, man." O is almost immediately provided with more auditory evidence of Desi's infidelity as he stands on the balcony just outside Hugo's dorm room listening to Hugo and Mike discuss Brandy. As in the source, Odin believes he is hearing about Desi, hearing her referred to as "a slut," but unlike in Shakespeare's play, Odin barely reacts to the news that his lover is apparently unfaithful. While it is not surprising that Brad Kaaya's script does not provide any dialogue for the character to speak—after all, asides frequently read as artificial contrivances to audiences more disposed to naturalistic performance styles<sup>47</sup>—it is surprising to see a close-up of Odin *not* responding to the betrayal or to Mike's observations that "the ghetto just popped out of [Odin]" and that "the nigger's outta control," especially considering the fact that Odin is high *because* Hugo wants to keep him unbalanced and irrational. Suspicion turns to horrified belief and murderous rage only after Odin sees the reflection of the scarf in the glass of the balcony door—a kind of ocular proof made more powerful by its invocation of the round mirror in the motel room at the Willows. It is this image—of the scarf blended with the picture of Michael on top of Desi—that finally prompts a broken O to ask Hugo, "How are we going to kill this motherfucker?" What Hugo offers is a story of how the two will carry out the

murders of both Mike and Desi. It is presented as a kind of grainy fantasy in which Hugo and O masterfully manipulate those around them. Notably, the Desi in this daydream is shown in a childlike fashion—her wavy blond hair in a ponytail, her body decked out in her schoolgirl's uniform—so that she is unthreatening while also vaguely titillating, evoking images of Britney Spears and Japanese *manga*.

The reality of the murder does not conform to Hugo's vision of the scene, as Emily and Brandy's unwillingness to be silent complicates matters. They ultimately do what the male characters fear all women will do—open the men to gossip and public judgment. Only Desi is easily mastered and muted, but even her slaying deviates from the fantasy which minimizes her sexual power. Instead of being in her uniform, Desi is dressed in an off-white slip or nightgown, and her hair is long and loose. Because of the Southern setting of the film, it is hard not to see "Maggie the Cat" of Tennessee Williams's steamy play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.<sup>48</sup> Desi's clothing signals sexual availability and a woman decidedly more alive than "monumental alabaster" (5.2.5). Where some might see a flock of doves, Odin sees a hell mouth ready to consume and destroy him—and other men—if it is not sealed up: "she must die, else she'll betray more men" (*Othello* 5.2.6).

In *Othello*, Desdemona is murdered once her husband believes he has seen the "ocular proof" of her adultery, though in reality, there is no proof, ocular or otherwise (3.3.405). In *O*, we see what Odin sees—a mirage of Desi without form and without voice. Rarely speaking, but ubiquitously observed, Desi operates as a creature of Hugo and Odin's making. In the film, then, Desi is "a ho" because she appears to be "a ho," because she looks to be a "snaky" white girl greedy for sexual pleasure. Seen through Odin's or Hugo's eyes, Desi and the other women of *O* are open to ocular reproof because they exist *to be viewed and reproofed*, to be "loved not wisely but too well," and finally to be encircled in their winding sheets—*femmes couvertes* of a different kind (5.2.387).

### Notes

1. There are a great many texts which discuss the legal status of married women as little better than children. See Margaret Loftus Ranald, "'As Marriage Binds, and Blood Breaks': English Marriage and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.1 (1979): 68-81; Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
2. For a discussion of silent film Shakespeare and its leading ladies see Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
3. Tim Blake Nelson, *O* (Lionsgate Films, 2001), DVD, 2002. All quotations from the film are my transcriptions from this DVD.
4. The quote is from Barbara Hodgdon, "Race-ing *Othello*, Re-engendering White-out," in *Shakespeare the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video*, ed. Lynda E. Boose and Richard

- Burt (New York: Routledge, 2003), 100. See also Frederick Luis Aldama, “Race, Cognition, and Emotion: Shakespeare on Film,” *College Literature* 33.1 (Winter 2006): 204-05.
5. This suggestion that there should be further study of *O*'s female characters comes up at the tail end of note 34 in Gregory M. Colón Semenza, “Shakespeare After Columbine: Teen Violence in Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*,” *College Literature* 32.4 (Fall 2005): 99-124.
  6. Richard Burt, “Te(e)n Things I Hate about Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990s, or Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High,” in *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 205.
  7. Burt offers close readings of several films that invoke Shakespeare, including *Jawbreaker*, *The Rage: Carrie II*, *Never Been Kissed*, and *10 Things I Hate About You* (all released in 1999)—the last two are actual adaptations of *As You Like It* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, respectively. Burt comments on the neutering of the source material through a tendency to suppress queer and feminist aspects of the text, which ultimately results in conservative conclusions.
  8. See Victoria L. Reynolds, “Feminism and Celebrity Culture in Shakesteen Film” (master’s thesis, University of Georgia, 2008); Robert L. York, “Smells like Teen Shakespirit, Or the Shakespear-ean Films of Julia Stiles,” in *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, ed. Jennifer Hulbert et al. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 57-116; and Elizabeth A. Deitchman, “Shakespeare Stiles Style: Shakespeare, Julia Stiles, and American Girl Culture,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 478-93.
  9. *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Brian Morris, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Thompson Learning, 2003), 2.1.188.
  10. *Othello*, 3.3.60. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the play are taken from the RSC *Othello*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (New York: Modern Library, 2009).
  11. Eamon Grennan, “The Women’s Voices in *Othello*: Speech, Song, Silence,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38.3 (Autumn 1987): 276, 275.
  12. *Othello*, 2.1.125.
  13. While Columbine was one of the most high-profile instances of school violence, it is only a single example. Between 1996 and 2001—the years between the start of production and the release of *O*—there were a significant number of shootings across the U. S.: Moses Lake, Washington (February 1996); Scottdale, Georgia (February 1996); State College, Pennsylvania (September 1996); San Diego, California (August 1996); Bethel, Alaska (February 1997); Pearl, Mississippi (October 1997); West Paducah, Kentucky (December 1997); Jonesboro, Arkansas (March 1998); Edinboro, Pennsylvania (April 1998); Fayetteville, Tennessee (May 1998); Springfield, Oregon (May 1998); Richmond, Virginia (June 1998); Littleton, Colorado (April 1999); Conyers, Georgia (May 1999); Mount Morris Township, Michigan (February 2000); Lake Worth, Florida (May 2000); Santee, California (March 2001); El Cajon, California (March 2001). More recently, there have been a growing number of shootings at universities, including the massacre at Northern Illinois (where I was teaching in February 2008) and the bloodiest incidence of school violence, the murders and woundings at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia (April 2007). For a comprehensive list of US school shootings, see the PDF, “Major School Shootings in the United

States Since 1997," available on the website for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, <http://www.bradiycampaign.org/xshare/pdf/school-shootings.pdf>.

14. Semenza, 99-100.
15. Tim Blake Nelson, "Cast and Crew Interviews," *O*, DVD.
16. Semenza, 111.
17. James M. Welsh, "Classic Demolition: Why Shakespeare is Not Exactly 'Our Contemporary' or, 'Dude, Where's my Hankie?'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 30.3 (2002): 225. Welsh's pithy remark zeroes in on one of the more problematic issues raised by the change of period and venue. *Othello's* presentation of religious and racial conflict between the Christian Venetians and the Muslim Turks in the early parts of the play resurfaces in more subtle ways as Iago manipulates the other characters' fears about difference. Race and the politics of race are certainly part of the milieu of high school, college, and professional sports where predominantly white team owners, managers, and coaches actively recruit a high percentage of African-American players. And, indeed—as in *Othello*—the prestige and financial gains associated with participation in sports potentially provide young men and women of color educational and social opportunities historically denied to them. *O* offers the potential for an exploration of the political implications of Odin's status as the only person of color on his team, but the film fails to fully engage in an examination of racism, instead only gesturing at it. What is more, the film's satirical portrait of the Southern obsession with sports further highlights the ways that basketball is not war, regardless of how seriously the fans, coaches, and players approach athletics—a move which belittles those players who view basketball as a means to a better life. For a discussion of European xenophobia and its influence on *Othello*, see Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Global Discourse: Ventians and Turks," in *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13-34. See also Lawrence Danson, "England, Islam, and the Mediterranean Drama: *Othello* and Others," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2.2 (Fall/Winter 2002): 1-25; Emily Carroll Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: from Alcazar to Othello* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For an exploration of the politics of race in relation to sports, and especially basketball, see *Sport: Sport and Power Relations*, ed. Eric Dunning and Dominic Malcolm (London: Routledge, 2003); *Commodified and Criminalized: New Racism and African Americans in Contemporary Sports*, ed. David J. Leonard and C. Richard King, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); Reuben A. Buford May, *Living Through the Hoop: High School Basketball, Race, and the American Dream* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); and Tamela McNulty Eitle and David J. Eitle, "Race, Cultural Capital, and the Educational Effects of Participation in Sports," *Sociology of Education* 75.2 (April 2002): 123-46.
18. In the film, the Othello character's name is Odin James (O. J.).
19. Sara Munson Deats, "From Pedestal to Ditch: Violence Against Women in Shakespeare's *Othello*," in *The Aching Hearth: Family Violence in Life and Literature*, ed. Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker (New York: Insight Books, 1991), 81, 84.
20. See Jay. G. Silverman, et al., "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Abuse, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286.5 (2001): 572-79; and Christian Molitor et al., "Gender and Contextual Factors in Adolescent Dating Violence," *Prevention Researcher* 7.1 (2000): 1-4.

21. Eric C. Brown, "Cinema in the Round: Self-Reflexivity in Tim Blake Nelson's *O*," in *Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television*, ed. James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2004), 73.
22. One of the film's taglines is "Everything Comes Full Circle."
23. Brown, 77.
24. All quotations from *O* are my transcriptions.
25. Frank B. Gill, *Ornithology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1994), xxii.
26. The myth of the toothed womb has a long history and appears in cultures across the world from India and Europe to various Native American tribes as a way of describing the male fear of internalized female genitalia. See Jill Raitt, "The *Vagina Dentata* and the *Immaculatus Uterus Divini Fontis*," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48.3 (September 1980): 415-431; Solimar Otero, "'Fearing our Mothers': An Overview of the Psychoanalytic Theories Concerning the *Vagina Dentata* Motif F547.1.1," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56.3 (1996): 269-88.
27. Recently, a variety of critics have taken up the topic of appetite—and more specifically Desdemona's appetite—in *Othello*. In "Iago's Clyster: Purgation, Anality, and the Civilizing Process," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55.2 (Summer 2004), Ben Saunders explores the ways that Iago presents Desdemona as a creature who sexually gorges herself until sick with excess; see 153-55. Loomba points out the ways that racial stereotyping impacts the presentation of appetite in *Othello*, with Desdemona's Venetian heritage and her desire for the Moorish Othello marking her as whorish even as her general deportment seems to contradict this categorization; see 97-103. Perhaps the most extensive exploration of "disordered female appetite" can be found in Gail Kern Paster's *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 17-134. In her chapter, "Love Will Have Heat," Paster delves into the ways that characters such as Brabantio, Iago, and Othello construct Desdemona as humorally imbalanced and therefore prone to craving exotic narratives and romantic partners, as well as being disposed toward sexual insatiability.
28. Krupt and Roscoe, "We Riddaz," on *O: Music Inspired by the Motion Picture*, Antra, 2001. The transcriptions are mine.
29. There is a great deal of provocative and enlightening scholarship on gender and hip-hop culture, especially on common negative representations of women and positive but violent presentations of men. See bell hooks, "Sexism and Misogyny: Who Takes the Rap?," *Z Magazine* (February 1994), n.p.; Bakari Kitwana, "Where Did Our Love Go? The New War of the Sexes," in *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 85-120; Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).
30. This dunking scene comes close on the heels of the scene in which consensual sex turns to assault when O's fantasies about Desi's infidelity make him want to punish her. Hodgdon points to the smashing of the backboard as another kind of rape (103).
31. Desi does talk back to Hugo, but in an abbreviated and less witty form: "Could you stop being a sarcastic asshole just once?"

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32. Brown, 79.
33. Semenza, 109.
34. Brown, 80.
35. Semenza, 110.
36. For a discussion of the pun—including the sense of “no thing” as lacking a hymen, see Patricia Parker, “*Othello* and *Hamlet*: Dilation, Spying, and the ‘Secret Place’ of Woman,” in *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts*, ed. Russ McDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 105-46.
37. Brown, 78.
38. Abbot Conrad of the Premonstratensian Community at Marchthal in 1272, quoted in Margaret Hallissy, *Venomous Women: Fear of the Female in Literature* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 89. For a further discussion of the poisonous or serpentine woman myth, see Hallissy and Norman Mosley Penzer, *Poison-Damsels and Other Essays in Folklore and Anthropology* (London: Sawyer, 1952).
39. Brown, 79.
40. See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44.
41. This same technique is employed in Oliver Parker’s *Othello* (1995). Laurence Fishburne’s Othello is plagued by a dream about Desdemona (Irène Jacob) writhing naked with Cassio (Nathaniel Parker)—both laughing at him and his cuckoldry.
42. This scene operates very much like the equivalent scene in Parker’s *Othello*. Russell Jackson astutely comments on the problematic nature of images which depict Desdemona’s imagined infidelity because their presentation also potentially validates Othello’s irrational fears in the minds of viewers. See *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28.
43. In her review of *O, Village Voice* film critic Amy Taubin uses this term. “Character Flaws,” *The Village Voice Online*, August 28, 2001, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-08-28/film/character-flaws/>.
44. See Deitchman, 491, for a discussion of Desi’s/Julia Stiles’ whiteness.
45. See Mulvey, 840.
46. The quotation is from Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen’s edition of *Measure for Measure* (New York: Modern Library, 2010).
47. Many late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century filmic adaptations have opted for a less theatrical and ostensibly more modern imaging of Shakespeare’s works. In *Shakespeare: From Stage to Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Sarah Hatchuel points out that directors such as Kenneth Branagh, Oliver Parker, Trevor Nunn, and Michael Hoffman have chosen “to film Shake-

spear in a more accessible way by finding a relationship of immediate support for the story and characters in order to clear away the effect of strangeness produced by Shakespeare’s language” (27). L. Monique Pittman’s *Authorizing Shakespeare on Film and Television: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Adaptation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011) explores the ways that televisual and cinematic adaptations of the plays are caught in a double-bind between the authority of the original text(s)—and author(s)—and the director’s (re)envisioning of the source material. Pittman notes that adaptors frequently reclaim authority over their creations by claiming a “need to reinvigorate the Shakespearean text” or “Offering an edgy alternative to elitist theatrical production” (2). *O*’s transformation of Shakespeare’s language into contemporary parlance, its transplantation of the setting to a Southern prep school, and its presentation of plausible young people align the film with Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000) and other more naturalistic renderings of Shakespeare. Notably, Michael A. Anderson’s *Cinematic Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) suggests that erasure of “nonnaturalistic devices, including soliloquies, asides, nonlocalized spaces . . . can be destructive to Shakespeare” since “too much detail can bring the drama down to earth” (33). The literalizing of the scarf in the “overhearing” scene and the presentation of Odin as high on cocaine and alcohol not only bring the story “down to earth,” but shut down possibilities of ambiguity in the text—especially in relation to the female characters.

48. Williams’s 1955 Pulitzer Prize-winning play focuses on the marriage between the sultry Maggie and the impotent former football star, Brick Pollitt. The 1958 film version, starring Elizabeth Taylor, features the iconic image of Taylor in an off-white full slip.

## ROSALIND'S MUSICAL ICONICITY IN BRANAGH AND DOYLE'S *AS YOU LIKE IT*

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In her study on androgyny and “the boy heroine,” Phyllis Rackin has written that “Shakespeare refuses to dissolve the difference between the sex of the boy actor and that of the heroine he plays; and he uses his boy heroines’ sexual ambiguity not only to complicate his plots but also to resolve them.”<sup>1</sup> In *As You Like It*, the fact that Ganymede is in fact female resolves the problem of Phebe’s attraction to Rosalind, allowing the play to end with the marriages of four couples. Rackin further notes that the identities of the female characters “become provisionally real,” requiring the existence of a suitable male substitute in order to return to the sex assigned to the role. However, Rosalind’s identity as a boy is fleeting—she is rarely playing Ganymede for more than a moment in Orlando’s presence before she returns to her true persona. In addition, her masculine guise is not particularly strong, and Phebe’s romantic interest in her complicates the scenario only slightly beyond the relationships of the three primary couples (Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, and Touchstone and Audrey). The audience is never actually asked to believe in Rosalind as Ganymede, but in Rosalind as Ganymede as Rosalind.

In Kenneth Branagh’s 2006 film adaptation of the play, made for HBO, Rosalind’s disguise is particularly subtle and marked as much by musical as visual signifiers.<sup>2</sup> In most discussions of iconicity and performance, visual performance plays a primary role. In this analysis, however, I consider in what ways music works in tandem with clothing and other embodied aspects of performance to contribute to Rosalind’s iconicity in Branagh’s production of *As You Like It*. The unconventional setting of this production—“a fantasy of Japan,” according to the film’s titles—allows for unique musical means for the film experient<sup>3</sup> to know Rosalind’s developing character. The feminine, sheltered, Western Rosalind of the court and the slightly (and always only briefly) androgynous but more independent and worldly Rosalind of the forest are delineated by the use of different musical modes and instruments that while understated and often very similar in range are easy to hear even for experients with no special musical knowledge. In this way, we see the ways that Rosalind’s iconicity integrates gender as well as national and racial performance through music.

The score for this *As You Like It*, which is set in an English enclave in nineteenth-century Japan, is by longtime Branagh collaborator Patrick Doyle, who also appears in a brief cameo, as he usually does in Branagh productions; here he plays Amiens the musician. The cast includes a number of Branagh alumni, including Brian Blessed as both Dukes, Adrian Lester as Oliver de Boys, and Richard Briers as Adam, as well as Bryce Dallas Howard as Rosalind, Romola Garai as Celia, David Oyelowo as Orlando, Alfred Molina as Touchstone, and Kevin Kline as Jaques. The film opens in a traditional Japanese home, where English lords are entertained by Japanese musicians and actors performing a Noh play. Ninjas—perhaps the most fantastical element of the entire production—attack the court. In a few brief moments, the dastardly Duke Frederick has overthrown his brother and sends him

out into the Forest of Arden, which *The New York Times* identified as the “moderately Asian-looking Wakehurst Place in West Sussex, England.”<sup>4</sup> Celia and Rosalind, along with the fool Touchstone, leave the niceties of the house for the well-groomed forest, where the remainder of the film is located.

Branagh's adaptation of the play as a “fantasy of Japan” is apparently meant to indicate that it is a fantasy viewed and experienced through Western eyes, both those of the film's primarily non-Japanese characters, who as members of the English trading colony live in a protected enclave set aside for foreigners, and those of the experients who view and hear the film. There is no question that the setting is problematic in its reductive treatment of Japanese culture, but by couching it in the terms of an escapist vision, Branagh manages to mitigate some of the issues surrounding the mostly non-Asian cast and the characters' appropriations of select Japanese cultural practices and traditions. Positioning most of his cast as Western merchants also helps account for the use of non-Asian actors among the court roles. Asian actors play Phebe, Silvius, and William, true natives of the forest of Arden who always appear dressed in traditional Japanese peasant clothing, in contrast to the Western clothes of the members of the court. However, Corin and Audrey are white, and are costumed in Western garb without comment or explanatory material. Unsurprisingly, Branagh's casting and directorial decisions received mixed reviews: some critics derided Branagh's decision to place the action of the play in this setting, calling it a “culture-clash gimmick”<sup>5</sup> and writing that the “setting is a distracting plot device,”<sup>6</sup> while others welcomed the change of scene from the more common English and French settings of the play. Maureen Ryan of the *Chicago Tribune* felt that the lush setting was “a visual treat” and praised the “beautifully minimalist Asian flavor; even the forest scenes are reminiscent of the gardens of Kyoto”;<sup>7</sup> Matthew Gilbert of *The Boston Globe* wrote that the choice of Japan “adds an exotic and picturesque flair, as the movie opens during a Noh performance, Orlando goes *mano á mano* with a sumo wrestler, and Orlando's love notes to Rosalind are written in Japanese calligraphy.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to the items on Gilbert's list, the film exploits public desire and appreciation for exoticism in several ways: at court, some ladies are dressed in kimono, and Duke Ferdinand is first shown wearing traditional black Japanese battle armor, masked and encased in a shell of lacquered wood. Additionally, he is repeatedly filmed from below, which in combination with the costume creates a visual “ghost” of both Darth Vader and Blessed's performance as the Ghost in Branagh's 1996 *Hamlet*—a fearsome enemy indeed. The carefully sculpted garden used as the Forest of Arden includes Japanese lanterns and Shinto arches, and Jaques meditates in a Zen garden. Touchstone and other members of Duke Senior's court practice tai chi, and Amiens plays the koto, a plucked string instrument.

However complex the implications of the setting are, the concept of a fantasy Japan does provide Doyle with the opportunity to use a number of Eastern instruments in the score, including the koto, finger cymbals, taiko drums, and gongs, as well as several different musical modes, departing from the Western tonal harmonic language used in the majority of films. Reviewer Christopher Coleman notes that the film's dramatic introduction uses a rich palette of indigenous sounds: “Early in the soundtrack we hear a stronger Japanese influence than we do at its conclusion.

Track 1: 'Kabuki Attack' is clearly the most 'Japanese' of all the music—depicting a Kabuki performance before the royal Duke's court, we hear the flute accompanied by harp, finger cymbals, koto and cello.<sup>9</sup> Doyle aurally establishes the film's location immediately: the experiential understands through these sounds and the visuals of the Noh play and the ninja attack that the action will unfold in Japan. After this scene, however, Doyle is tasked with signifying the Englishness of the play's main characters, and the use of Japanese instruments, save the bells, which have a rather universal sound, and the koto, a plucked string instrument, falls away. Doyle returns to his usual medium of a Western orchestra and uses the Japanese instruments only as incidental color for the bulk of the film's music.

However, there is considerable nuance in this coloring, which can be heard in Doyle's application of instruments and modalities throughout the score, particularly in creating a musical character for Rosalind. Both the flute and the violin, associated at the beginning of Act 2 with Rosalind, are featured solo instruments throughout the film. Frequently accorded the topmost lines of Doyle's set pieces, they are easily heard against the accompaniment of the orchestra. The flute is used in conjunction with a Western orchestra and clearly indicates Rosalind's role first as a beloved daughter and later as a young, independent-minded Englishwoman. Indeed, as the dazed Duke Senior walks into the forest looking at the picture of his daughter, it is the flute that accompanies him and indicates that his thoughts are on her rather than his own situation. At this point, Doyle's score also establishes a typical musical gender convention for Rosalind by associating her femininity with the flute, which is generally accompanied by the orchestra. As the film progresses, Doyle makes subtle differences in the scoring, transferring Rosalind's five-note motif to the violin. The violin, in contrast to the flute, is often accompanied by the koto. The shift from the soft, orchestra-supported flute to the louder violin, accompanied by only one other instrument and thus heard as a more independent line, is a musical means of representing Rosalind as she becomes more independent and worldly, transformed through her experience of living, however superficially, as a man. Although much of the film is unscored in order to allow the text to take precedence, the use of music in scenes depicting Rosalind serves as both a mirror and a guide to her persona and state of mind at any given time.

The kinds of harmony associated with each of the two solo instruments are also telling. The first morning in the forest is accompanied by pastoral music in the Dorian mode (a scale often used in English folk music and based on the pattern whole step—half step—whole step—whole step—whole step—half step—whole step) scored for flute and horn, reminiscent of traditional European art-music markers of the rural life, in which pipe, horn, and drum signify the fields and the forest, the hunt and the rustic life. As the trio of Celia, Rosalind, and Touchstone make their way into the unfamiliar but well-groomed forest and are presented with the figures of Silvius in his Japanese garb and other obvious non-Westerners, the violin enters, and Doyle shifts briefly from the Dorian mode of the pastoral to a pentatonic scale (a five-note scale, or five notes bridging the octave, e.g., C—D—E—G—A), long associated in Western music with the exotic Orient. The pentatonic, frequently used to indicate the Other both as non-Westerner and as female,<sup>10</sup> is

used particularly when identities are mistaken and fantastical “topsy-turvydom” (as Gilbert and Sullivan would term it) is in play, while musical pastoralism reminds the experient of the civility and Westernness—indeed, Englishness—of the Duke’s court, even in exile. Doyle’s pentatonic melodies are easily translated into and harmonized by traditional Western tonality, and are more flavorings that, like the koto, provide a brief, mostly superficial taste of alterity without alienating audiences. In the first scene (2.6) showing Duke Senior and his men roughing it in the forest, they are still maintaining a very court-like existence, indicated by the men’s activities and the music. Here the goings-on, scenery, and music are redolent of the English countryside and the luxurious lifestyle that that implies: no one is hungry, the weather is pleasant, and the Duke’s courtiers talk to one another in small groups. Although Amiens plays the native koto, the tune he performs is the traditional English “Under the Greenwood Tree.” The song text, with its insistence that the Duke and his men have “no enemy / But winter and rough weather” (2.5.7),<sup>11</sup> mitigates the seriousness of their plight, and is used by Branagh and Doyle to invoke the otherwise pleasant aspects of the exile. The tune is not altered to fit the native pentatonic mode, and instead remains a familiar song played on a vaguely unfamiliar looking instrument that nonetheless sounds relatively like the lute or any other plucked strings from the West. This limited exoticization of the music that appears in the play further reminds the experient that regardless of the geographical setting, the action takes place among Englishmen and -women, and that their identity and cultural heritage are minimally affected by their surroundings. Because Doyle generally privileges tonal harmony and uses modality as coloring in the same way he privileges Western instruments and employs Japanese ones for effect, the score’s commentary is fairly subtle. Unfamiliar modalities always resolve tonally, indicating to the experient that the characters are never in danger of losing their status, lives, or cultural heritage, and that a full and satisfying resolution can be found to any problem.

Once the primary setting and its aural aesthetics have been established, Doyle is able to freely make use of the flute and violin in his scoring of Rosalind’s narrative. While, as Amiens’s performance indicates, the modal and pentatonic soundscapes are used occasionally as contrasting musical elements for the remainder of the film, the greater and more interesting contrast is in the instruments assigned to Rosalind’s personas, which, while both high in pitch, are easily distinguished. The flute, first distinctly paired with Rosalind when it is used to accompany her father gazing upon her portrait, serves as the aural indicator for Rosalind’s court life, when her femininity was expected to be on display through dress, mannerisms, and speech. The violin, playing in a pentatonic mode, which Doyle uses to accompany Rosalind once she has taken on the identity of a the youth Ganymede, signifies Ganymede’s somewhat freer and less constrained life in the forest. Yet the music does not indicate that Rosalind becomes a native of the forest, as she later claims; Doyle’s writing creates a more complex signification. The use of the violin is obviously pseudo-Asian, retaining the five-note motif assigned to Rosalind before she becomes Ganymede, and is representative not of authentic Japanese music but of how many Westerners heard and expressed Japanese music in early dealings with the country, as for example in Gilbert and Sullivan’s own fantasy of Japan, *The Mikado*. Therefore, working with these negative

indicators of authenticity, Doyle creates in the violin a musical signifier of Rosalind's pseudo-male self, and later, Rosalind's self that has been altered by her stint as Ganymede. In short, Doyle, cognizant of Britain's musical reception of Eastern music, offers a suitably inauthentic version of it for the inauthenticity of Rosalind's façade while still indicating the changes she undergoes during her life as Ganymede. At the same time, the use of the violin, an instrument capable of greater volume than the flute, further mirrors Rosalind's increased agency when she is in male guise.

At the end of the film, Rosalind's theme is scored for both instruments, indicating that although she has become more independent and capable of solving knotty problems such as those created by the four sets of lovers through her experience away from court, she nonetheless respects much of that institution's rules and is happy to return to it. In marrying Orlando and seeing to the various matches of Celia, Touchstone, and Phebe, she acts as the arbiter of social normativity and heteronormativity, and the film indicates that with Duke Senior restored, the couples will return to their previous, likewise "normal" places in society; the final scenes show the new couples moving their wedding dance from the open air of the forest to indoors at the Duke's home.

The transition from flute to violin and thence to a commingled use as Rosalind's musical signifier is neither immediate nor unmitigated. At times, the flute is recalled during forest scenes to indicate Rosalind's emotions as stemming from her court life or to emphasize her gender identity at a particular point in time. As a whole, the use of music to signify Rosalind's dual genders and her developing self echoes her speech to Orlando in 3.2, in which she characterizes effeminate behavior as something shared between women and young men.<sup>12</sup> That she is musically portrayed by two treble instruments furthers this view of the effeminate as a trait shared by both of Rosalind's personas over the course of the play. Doyle's theme for Rosalind, presented in the flute and violin, adhere precisely to what early modern music scholar Linda Austern identifies as "the early modern construction of Woman [. . .] light, vain, and delicate."<sup>13</sup>

Following the attack on Duke Senior's home, Celia and Rosalind create their new identities and leave for the Forest of Arden. It is with this shift from the court to the rural forest that Doyle begins to score Rosalind's two identities. For several acts, Rosalind is mostly accompanied by the flute; she is in the company of Celia and Touchstone, and her identity to her compatriots is, of course, her own. The music that accompanies the two ladies of the court and their fool is, appropriately, that of the English court. In 3.2, as Celia tells Rosalind that the poetry she has found on the forest's trees is by Orlando, the flute, playing Rosalind's five-note motif, accompanies her delight. The harmonic language behind the flute is modal and recalls the music of the first morning in the forest, when Rosalind was fresh from her first meeting with Orlando and giddy with excitement. However, when Orlando and Jaques enter, the flute fades away. Rosalind approaches Orlando and Jaques as Ganymede, and the violin enters with the same theme carried earlier by the flute, alerting the experient that Rosalind is now in her guise as a man. The modality that accompanied the flute is likewise replaced by the less typically Western pentatonic scale, suggestively backing up Rosalind's claim that she is a "native of this place" (3.2.344).

As Rosalind and Celia set up house in the shepherd's hut and Rosalind becomes more comfortable in her role as Ganymede, her music also begins to indicate not

only her current identity but also how her gender is understood by other characters. Doyle uses the violin to indicate the superficial success of Rosalind's male persona in 3.5 when the truly native Phoebe falls in love with Ganymede. Similarly, when Orlando thinks of Rosalind after hearing the news of Celia's engagement, the music includes both the inverse (upside-down version) of Rosalind's theme and its usual form played simultaneously, signifying the topsy-turvy situation Orlando finds himself part of in regard to the woman he loves and the ersatz woman playing her in the forest. The two mirrored versions of her theme signify Rosalind's playing of herself through the intermediary persona of Ganymede. Even if the experiant does not recognize the inversion of Rosalind's motif, the highly audible counterpoint of the two melodic lines suggests the complexities of identity and role-playing taking place.

At the cue "Fake Wedding" (4.1), Doyle creates the first instance of noticeable musical interaction, rather than alternation, between Rosalind's two musical personas. As Rosalind, playing Ganymede, playing Rosalind, entreats Celia to be the priest for her "wedding" to Orlando, the violin and flute, accompanied by bells, enter together. In a cleverly designed overlap, the flute retains its earlier modal melody, indicating the presence of Rosalind the woman, and the violin plays its pentatonic line, representing Ganymede's independence. Here Rosalind's two roles are combined more than at any other point, and her musical cues mirror the action of the scene. The violin is layered above the flute in register; Rosalind is able to maintain the premise of being Ganymede over her true desires for Orlando, but just barely: the resulting harmonic tension is most audible when Rosalind, literally falling down with ecstasy and almost falling out of her Ganymede persona, is physically caught by Orlando and brought back to reality. There the flute falls silent, signifying that Rosalind will remain in her guise of a man, and indeed the violin continues, just as she continues playing her role of Ganymede. The unfulfilled desire expressed in the scene is also mirrored in the music, as the violin's line ends the scene with a whole step that sounds, in the context of the previous supporting harmonies, as if it should harmonically resolve (arrive on a final consonance) by ascending a whole step and then another half step in a diatonic manner (moving from scale degrees 6 to 7 to 1). But because the line does not resolve diatonically as the harmony suggests that it should, the cadence instead feels unfinished, just as Orlando and Rosalind feel unsatisfied by the false nuptials to the point that both proclaim the need to end the role-playing. Orlando states that he "can no longer live by thinking," and Rosalind agrees and promises to produce his beloved the following day (5.2.48). Aurally, the experiant hears that this union is not a true one, and that the lovers' desires are not fully realized, however real the scene may feel. As Rosalind makes her promise to produce herself to Orlando the next day, the flute returns and stays with her as she murmurs with excitement to herself. Musically and textually, she is ready to discard her male persona.

It is only at the end of the film, when the final pairings of characters are made, that the musical tension of the "Fake Wedding" cue is resolved. The wedding scene opens with the primary theme in the violin accompanied by the koto. Over the course of the scene, Doyle then moves the theme to the flute and trades it back to the violin again as the couples and crowd gather, and as Orlando does not immediately see Rosalind and grows confused as to what is about to occur. When Rosalind finally

appears, she is dressed as a woman but in kimono, in contrast to her previous Western dresses, her masculine persona, and Western male garb. The flute, as would be expected, accompanies her arrival, but as she explains her actions, the violin accompanies her words, once again musically confirming that the flute's modal theme signifies Rosalind's origins, and that her identity as Ganymede was a variation thereof, adjusted to fit the situation. The flute and violin play together following her explanation of the events that have occurred, twining the modal and pentatonic melodies together and ending on the same final pitch in the more typically Western Dorian mode, signifying Rosalind's permanent return to herself, albeit with a small infusion of the East, represented by her Japanese dress. This conclusion to the contrasting modalities reaffirms Rosalind's heritage as non-native and as English, while the ultimate use of the flute rather than the violin confirms her female gender identity. The song and dance which follow and end the film are decidedly of the rustic, pastoral British variety, and could well have come straight from English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams's folksong collections. The song further identifies all of those present—not just Rosalind—as English or under significant English influence. As the wedding party returns to the Duke's home, leaving the forest behind, the musical elements of exoticism, such as the pentatonic scale and indigenous Japanese instruments present during their exile, are diminished. By the time the group begins to dance indoors within the English community's compound, their presence has disappeared completely. All that remains to suggest the forest adventure are the women's kimonos. Musically, visually, and in terms of status and privilege, Rosalind has experienced a different kind of life while in the forest, but as suggested here, she ultimately seems to take little of her experience with her when she leaves. Duke Senior's restoration equates with the restoration of all of his court, and marriage to nobility means that Celia and Rosalind will once again be expected to behave in a certain manner, one that does not include dressing in drag or playing at shepherdesses. That the wedding festivities find Rosalind and Celia in kimono hints at the women's appreciation for the culture they briefly encountered in the forest, but, as noted above, they come into contact with a very limited number of actual natives "of this place"; rather, like many tourists who only superficially engage with a culture, they borrow foreign aesthetics that please them, bringing them without context into their own cultures. Doyle's score confirms this reading of the film: the relative lack of Japanese instruments throughout indicates the novelty with which they are treated, and the complete absence of Japanese music reveals the dearth of true intercultural exchange taking place in the film; again, the music supports the concept of a fantasy of Japan, not an encounter with the real nation or its peoples. Likewise, the use of Western instruments and English modality to represent Rosalind signifies her disengagement with the culture outside of her courtly circle; pentatonicism, symbolizing her contact with the East, is always dominated by or transformed into pastoral modality or tonality. The score is honest: these English merchants, while geographically far from home, remain unshakably close to their roots, brushing away elements of their host country as easily as they return to their enclave at the end of the film.

Doyle's score also provides forthright commentary on the nature of Rosalind. In this adaptation, she never takes her male alter ego particularly seriously, even though

it is proposed as a way of ensuring safer travel for herself and Celia in the forest. Posing as Ganymede allows Rosalind to speak more freely both as a man and as a youth playing a fickle woman, and to control her own life and actions in the forest. However, we see little of her apart from her wooing of Orlando, and in this context, as Rackin notes, Rosalind never actually suppresses any of her feminine attributes. Instead, she camps up the role of a woman by being more demanding of Orlando than she might as herself in order to test him and to prolong their game. Doyle aptly captures this in the use of similarly pitched instruments that differ in timbre, and while the gendering of Rosalind's material through these instruments whose ranges match the high female voice is perhaps predictable, it nonetheless indicates the lack of major differences between the two personas and Rosalind's disinterest in creating any kind of verisimilitude in regard to Ganymede's maleness. Perhaps most importantly, though, the instrumentation also allows the experiant to easily hear Rosalind's five-note motif on top of the rest of the orchestration and harmony. Ultimately, the score's motivic focus on Rosalind and its subtle mirroring of her narrative of gender identity and ethnic allegiance provide an aural guide to understanding her nature, perhaps not so changeable but, as Silvius remarks, "all made of fantasy, / All made of passion and all made of wishes, / All adoration, duty, and observance, / All humbleness, all patience and impatience, / All purity, all trial, all observance" (5.2 98-101). In Doyle's score, the experiant hears the fantasy, passion, and wishes of and for the East, as well as the compliance with adoration, duty, and observance of the West.

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In this essay, I consider the result of building a *Hamlet* adaptation around Gertrude and evaluate how Wan's character revises this most filmically marginalized of Shakespeare's women. I argue that Feng places Little Wan as the emotional center of his film. Consequently, he changes all the fault lines of desire in *Hamlet*, invoking the long critical history and representational tradition interested in the Oedipal tensions between Gertrude and Hamlet. *The Banquet* features the relationship between Claudius (Emperor Li) and Gertrude, which exists primarily in the wings of Shakespeare's play. Promoting their intimacy to center stage invites the audience repeatedly into Gertrude's closet, making the private spaces of Wan and Li's court more crucial than the private regions of Wu Luan's mind. Meanwhile, Wu Luan is presented as passive in the extreme, soliloquy-less, friendless, and stripped of the verbal vigor traditionally ascribed to Hamlet. In addition, Feng preserves the Ophelia character in Qing, who is rendered all the more tragic by her unending devotion to an abusive and disinterested Wu Luan. Refocusing the plot on Little Wan's story of resistance to Wu Luan's story of loneliness, exhaustion, and sorrow, the film invites us to contemplate a *Hamlet* centered on an active, rather than passive or pensive, protagonist. Ambition and desire are Little Wan's weapons against Wu Luan's loneliness and Qing's pathetic devotion and are the characteristics that define her as the film's true tragic hero.

**The Many Faces of Gertrude**

Gertrude appears in only half of the twenty scenes that comprise *Hamlet* and speaks less than two hundred lines in the entire play. Despite, or perhaps because of, her relative silence, she has traditionally fascinated and confused readers, audiences, and scholars. A. C. Bradley claimed Gertrude was a "very dull and very shallow" character with "a soft animal nature," while Janet Adelman reads Gertrude

as “a woman more muddled than actively wicked,” one who is “less powerful as an independent character than as the site for fantasies larger than she is.”<sup>4</sup> Yoshiko Uéno asserts that Gertrude’s “reticence,” which “does not allow her to disclose to us what she really thinks and feels,” leads scholars and readers to presume she is a weak character.<sup>5</sup> Akiko Kusunoki calls her “the most controversial” of Shakespeare’s female characters, noting, “since the text leaves crucial aspects of her motivation undefined, critics tend to treat her not as an individual but as a mirror reflecting other characters’ inner states.”<sup>6</sup> According to Rebecca Smith, Gertrude is one of Shakespeare’s female icons that we’ve been rewriting—or misreading—for generations. Smith argues that film productions misrepresent Gertrude as “a sensual, deceitful woman,” when in the play text she is actually presented as a “soft, obedient, dependent, unimaginative woman.”<sup>7</sup> Richard Levin notes that accounts of Gertrude’s sexuality in *Hamlet* are unreliable, as they are filtered through the perceptions and biases of her son and late husband: “Unfortunately for her, Gertrude is the victim of a bad press, not only on the stage and screen and in the critical arena, but also within Shakespeare’s text, since she and her libido are constructed for us by the two men who have grievances against her and so must be considered hostile and therefore unreliable witnesses, while she herself is given no opportunity to testify on her own behalf.”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Maurice Hunt has recently argued that Gertrude “possesses a surprisingly complex interiority,” largely located in her silences, and primarily fixated on what Hunt calls “a fantasy of family.”<sup>9</sup> Gertrude has been read as a representation of male anxieties about “female intervention in patrilineal culture,” as a figure for “the aging body” of Queen Elizabeth, and as “a strong-willed woman” whose remarriage is “a demonstration of female agency.”<sup>10</sup>

Gertrude has been variously read as weak, simple, complex, manipulative, manipulated, and strong-willed. What happens to these contradictions as Gertrude becomes Little Wan in *The Banquet*? Productions of *Hamlet* generally settle on a single interpretation of the Queen, so what is Feng’s? According to Charles Ross, Little Wan is less an adaptation of Gertrude than an embodiment of one aspect of Ophelia: “Earlier films make Ophelia childish. Modern versions make her angry. Feng gives the childish persona to Qing Nü and saves anger for Wan. But his film is feminist in a larger sense because, arguably, the central figure is not Wu Luan, but Empress Wan. Her role is far greater than Gertrude’s, while Wu Luan’s is much less than Hamlet’s.”<sup>11</sup> Ross does not read Wan as a direct analogue for Gertrude, but as a coopting of Ophelia’s anger and madness. Woodrow B. Hood sees a more immediate connection between Wan and Gertrude, commenting, “[t]he film recenters the play by switching the locus of the protagonist from Shakespeare’s titular character to the generally subordinate character of Gertrude.”<sup>12</sup> According to Hood, the film presents a virgin/whore binary in its two female leads, and Empress Wan is the whore in the equation. She is an incarnation of the “Dragon Lady” trope, an American characterization of Eastern strong women who are “domineering and manipulative,” power-hungry and destructive: “[a] Dragon Lady is characterized typically by her beauty, seductive power, and evil nature, and she is always punished for overreaching.”<sup>13</sup> Dragon Ladies are also always two-faced. Hood feels that the film falls back on this stereotypical assumption of female character, ultimately leading “down a gender regressive path” in

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which Wan is relegated to her clichéd fate: she is punished for overreaching.<sup>14</sup>

I disagree with both Ross's and Hood's analyses. Wan is more than an embodiment of Ophelia's anger and she is not "trapped" by a cinematic stereotype. I read Wan as a dynamic character, full of ambition and desire. While she does eventually fall, she falls less as a result of her ambition and more as a consequence of the roles she is forced to play by other characters and by our own interpretation of her. Neither Ross nor Hood fully considers Wan's significance as a revision of Gertrude. When considered as such, she *clearly* is more than a stereotypical, angry femme fatale. As I will show in this essay, she is also self-sacrificing, and ultimately, she is aware of how she has been commodified—both by the Emperor and by us, the audience—and she turns an accusing gaze on the camera, inviting us to reexamine our assumptions about Gertrude.

### *Hamlet as Martial Arts Period Piece*

Despite her position in a *wuxia*, or "sword-fighting knight errant" tale, Wan is a very modern woman in some ways.<sup>15</sup> She has to work hard to convey and maintain that modernity within the restrictions of the various genres the film incorporates. Alexander Huang analyzes Feng's film, noting its uniqueness in the way it blends several traditional genres: "Multiple slow-motion shots and fight sequences presented as stylized dance movements suggest a close affinity with other Chinese martial-arts films that have enjoyed popularity in the West but have been harshly criticized in the Chinese-speaking world. . . . What distinguishes Feng's film from this group of films is its uses of masks as motifs and narrative devices." In the end, Feng's film is a mix of *wuxia*, martial arts, and masking, creating what Huang calls "a mask theater infused with the supernatural; a type of martial-arts performance that gives primacy to visual articulation."<sup>16</sup> And yet, even as it references and incorporates elements of these several genres, the film does not sit easily in any one category—even a specifically Chinese one. Huang explains that critical response debated the film's "dual identity," as "nearly all European judges found the film to be too Shakespearean in outlook to be a viable Chinese film to interest Western audiences. . . . Yet according to most Chinese critics, the film was a disappointing, indulgent costume epic aimed at a 'completely non-Chinese audience.'"<sup>17</sup> Whether too Shakespearean or too Chinese—fascinatingly strange accusations to begin with—*The Banquet* does manage to wholly remake a familiar story into a foreign one, allowing the viewer to experience *Hamlet* again, for the first time.

The film is set in 907 AD China, on the verge of the Tang Dynasty's fall. Prince Wu Luan (Hamlet) has run away to study storytelling, music, and dance in order to console his broken heart because three years ago, his father married the woman Wu Luan loved, Little Wan (Gertrude). So, in this film, Gertrude is not Hamlet's mother, but rather Hamlet's ex-girlfriend. This romantic history affects the way Wan treats Wu Luan throughout the film, most obviously in her efforts to protect him from the ambition and violence of his uncle, Emperor Li (Claudius). Seeking to protect the Prince and ensure her own safety, Wan agrees to marry the Emperor, simultaneously sending messengers to warn the Prince of Li's assassination of his fa-

ther and usurpation of the throne and beg him to return to court. As Wan attempts to protect Wu Luan from the Emperor, Li desperately tries to win her heart as well as her body, and thus Wan is torn between her desire for Wu Luan, Li's desire for her, and her own ambition for power.

At court, Wu Luan appears absent of desire, except as manifested in introspective, artistic endeavors. He mourns his father and half-heartedly reunites with Qing (Ophelia), his former betrothed who has remained devoted to him throughout his three-year absence. Wan and Wu Luan engage in tense conversations that verge on cruel as Wan criticizes Wu Luan for his inaction. At the same time, we witness the Emperor's persistent efforts to seduce Wan and to test her loyalty. More than once, Wan steps in to save Wu Luan from his uncle's plots against his life. She sends Yin Sun (Laertes) to save the Prince from assassins when Emperor Li sends him as an ambassador to live in a foreign land. She also steps in and disarms a soldier who was carrying a real sword when the Prince was practicing with wooden blades. Meanwhile, she taunts and punishes Qing for her continued devotion to the Prince, even going so far as to whip her for expressing a desire to accompany Wu Luan on his travels.

Little Wan plans to poison the Emperor at a state banquet by pouring the venom of the black scorpion into his wine, but is thwarted when the Emperor offers Qing his cup of wine in a toast. She drinks, and then performs a song in memory of the reportedly deceased Wu Luan. In the middle of the performance, she collapses in the arms of one of the dancers, who unmask to reveal that he is Wu Luan. Qing, clearly poisoned and bleeding from the mouth, dies in the Prince's arms. Wu Luan fights off palace guards and challenges the Emperor, but Li is so overcome with horror at the notion that Little Wan wanted to poison him, he voluntarily drinks the rest of the wine and dies at her feet. Wan then kneels before Wu Luan and calls him Emperor, begging him to decide her fate. He rejects the title, but intervenes just as Yin Sun, bearing a poisoned knife, rushes to kill Little Wan. Grabbing the blade, the Prince is cut and absorbs the poison. Wan reacts by instantly killing Yin Sun, then weeps over Wu Luan's body, and finally rises to the shouts acclaiming her as Emperor. Thus, in the climactic banquet scene, Feng's Ophelia dies Gertrude's death, Gertrude kills Laertes, Claudius commits suicide when he realizes he never had Gertrude's love, and Gertrude triumphs over all.

As the film closes, we see Little Wan alone in her chambers, at first nostalgically reminiscing over her past, and then maniacally embracing her present identity as Emperor. Just as she glories in "rising like a phoenix" from the flames of ambition and desire, she is stabbed in the back (literally). We never see who stabs her, and the film ends with her death.

### **A Silent Hamlet and a Scheming Gertrude**

In making Little Wan its central character, *The Banquet* works many significant changes on Hamlet, Gertrude, and Ophelia. In the case of Hamlet, Feng's film strips Wu Luan of many of Hamlet's memorable attributes. First, this film contains no Horatio, Rosencrantz, or Guildenstern. Wu Luan, played by Daniel Wu, is essentially friendless in the court and has no one to talk to except Little Wan and

Qing. Second, there is no ghost, and so Wu Luan never receives an order to seek vengeance for his father's death. Third, Wu Luan does not deliver a single soliloquy. That hallmark of Hamlet's compelling interior life is completely absent from this film and is replaced with various shots of Wu Luan reclining by a fountain in the palace or standing before his father's armor. Without Hamlet's verbal cogitation, Wu Luan becomes an excessively lonesome, silent figure, and his passivity functions to underscore Little Wan's activity.

In the context of modern film productions of *Hamlet*, the quiet loneliness of Daniel Wu's introspective, artistic Prince Wu Luan stands in stark contrast to Kenneth Branagh's 1996 performance<sup>18</sup>—littered as it was with winks and smirks that broke the fourth wall and directly addressed the audience. Unlike Branagh's Hamlet—unlike the *Hamlet* tradition in general—Wu Luan is primarily silent and, at least initially, hidden from the audience. When Wu Luan is first introduced, the camera almost completely fails to differentiate him from his surroundings: he is one of several dozen costumed dancers and singers, all wearing the white robes and white masks of their trade. During the ensuing battle scene as Emperor Li's soldiers attempt to locate and kill the Prince, the viewer never knows where Wu Luan is. Only when the battle is finished do we learn that he has been hiding beneath a small bridge, presumably the whole time. This initial anonymity is wildly unusual for a *Hamlet* story, as the Prince traditionally enters productions in stark contrast to those around him—dressed to mourn his father even as the rest of the court is celebrating his mother's and uncle's nuptials.<sup>19</sup> Instead of a more traditional, highly visible Hamlet, Wu Luan is initially an obscured, hushed, and anonymous character. Wu Luan lacks ambition, and unlike Hamlet, he does not pause to admire the ambition and efficacy of a brash Fortinbras; instead, he is moved to action only by the sudden death of Qing.<sup>20</sup> But Wu Luan is still a figure of desire. He desires Wan but seems not to be willing to act on this desire; he desires vengeance for his father's death but seems similarly frozen in pursuing this; he desires an end to his loneliness but he only connects with Qing, whom he ultimately rapes. Though he does not talk through his conflict in Hamlet's soliloquies, he performs it in his leashed tension, sudden explosions of violence, and general confusion.

There is no hush or obscurity when it comes to Feng's vision of Gertrude. Little Wan enters the screen in as dramatic a fashion imaginable, which I will discuss below. Like Wu Luan, she is also largely friendless in the film. She sees Qing as a rival for Wu Luan's affections and thus is antagonistic toward her. While we see Wan consent to marry Emperor Li, we are also aware from the beginning that her decision is not based on affection—although affection arguably grows between them—and that she is constantly scheming to thwart his efforts to eliminate Wu Luan. Therefore, Feng's Gertrude does not have the comfort of either a friendship with Ophelia or a happy marriage to Claudius. We do not see her seeking the counsel or support of a wise Polonius or an estranged son; instead, she is a figure of frustrated desire—desire for power and desire for Wu Luan.

In expunging Horatio, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern; in making Gertrude and Ophelia rivals rather than friends; and in depicting a Gertrude who is always struggling against and manipulating Claudius, *The Banquet* focuses almost exclu-

sively on the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude. This focus is embodied in the extended, two-part rendition of the closet scene, as well as the various intercut scenes of Wu Luan and Little Wan acting independently.

After the opening sequence showing Wu Luan in the Yue province, the camera turns to the palace and focuses on Little Wan. We enter the court in a long tracking shot, following behind Little Wan as she approaches the chamber where her dead husband's suit of armor is on display. Wan is dressed in elaborate white robes with a stunning, cathedral-length train. The camera tracks her steady progress through an immense set—the single biggest stage ever constructed for use in a Chinese period film<sup>21</sup>—and to the Western eye evokes a bride slowly walking down the aisle on her wedding day. The color white is traditionally associated with death and mourning in China, and so she is dressed to mourn at her husband's monument. But the more Western suggestion of a bridal gown is not entirely out of place, because Little Wan encounters Emperor Li and his marriage proposal in front of the armor. White also carries the symbolic suggestion of innocence and it ties Wan's initial appearance to Wu Luan's, as both are clad all in white. But this sympathy of costume does not last.

Feng makes the interesting choice to stage Little Wan's decision to marry Emperor Li. This is a continuing crux for readers and scholars of *Hamlet*: why does Gertrude marry Claudius? Is it lust? Weakness? Meekness? Complicity in his nefarious usurpation? For Little Wan, the decision to marry Li at first seems to fulfill all of our most critical readings of Gertrude: she chooses position and power, climbing the ladder to maintain the social station she has grown used to. But as the film unfolds, it becomes clear that she also intends to use her position to watch over and protect Wu Luan.

Approaching the suit of armor, Wan discovers that Li has put the helmet on his own head and tells him, "The helmet does not sit well on you." He scolds her:

EMPEROR LI. To call your Emperor "you" is not appropriate. The correct address is "Your Majesty."

LITTLE WAN. It is hard for me to adapt so quickly, brother-in-law.

Wan's refusal to call him by his title is saucy, and her reminder of his actual relation to her—that he is her brother-in-law—attempts to put him firmly in his place. Wan undermines Li's campaign by pointing out the speed of his usurpation, simultaneously referring to him in familial terms that neither suggest nor encourage romance. This fails, as he exits the room announcing, "The kingdom will not wait," suggesting that he and Wan have been locked in debate about marriage prior to this scene. Just as the door is about to close, he places his hand through the opening, calling to his "sister-in-law." The camera focuses on his upturned palm, and we see Little Wan place her hand in his, saying, "The correct address is 'Empress.'" The scene is short, but richly dramatic. Their verbal sparring about proper forms of address shows each character's ambition and eagerness to claim what they see as their "right" position in the court. This anxiety over title and address returns again in the first part of the film's closet scene, in the climactic banquet scene, and in the film's denouement. It echoes similar anxieties in *Hamlet*, expressed in Hamlet's addressing Gertrude

as “good-mother”—which means “step-mother”—on several occasions (1.2.77, 3.2.106, 3.4.26), and his angry “You are the Queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, / But—would it were not so—you are my mother” (3.4.14-15). This quibbling about title highlights the sort of conflict Gertrude may have experienced as she debated her position as Dowager Queen or Queen consort, and encourages the audience to admire Wan’s cleverness as she negotiates how to maintain her position in the palace.

*The Banquet* depicts a Gertrude struggling with the notion of marrying Claudius. In a subsequent scene, the film elaborates its depiction of Li and Little Wan’s relationship during a conversation at her vanity. She is presumably preparing for bed while he leers at and gropes her and she seeks to gain information about Wu Luan’s safety, revealing her secondary motivation for marrying Li:

LITTLE WAN. Your brother should not have trusted you.

EMPEROR LI. The death of the late Emperor had nothing to do with me.

LITTLE WAN. Is the crown prince still alive?

EMPEROR LI. Sister-in-law seems very concerned.

LITTLE WAN. I am his step-mother, after all.

EMPEROR LI. He is four years older than you are.

LITTLE WAN. Brother-in-law is familiar with the way I remove my makeup.

EMPEROR LI. Not just your makeup, but also the way you enter your bath.

*(At this point, the Emperor gropes inside the front of Wan’s dress. She grabs his hand to stop him.)*

LITTLE WAN. Will brother-in-law let the Prince go free?

EMPEROR LI. Will you let my hand go free?

At the beginning of the conversation, Wan is clearly suspicious of Li and attempting to gain information. However, Li remains entirely focused on fetishizing her bedtime ritual, ogling her, and groping her body. The scene implies that Li has been voyeuristically lusting after Wan for some time, as he is familiar both with her makeup removal and her bathing habits, and in an interview, Feng states that Li’s motivation to kill his brother was his lust for Wan.<sup>22</sup> The tension is palpable and even the playful repetition of “brother-in-law” and “sister-in-law” cannot dispel it. At the scene’s close, the camera provides a close-up of Wan releasing Li’s hand with an expression of stony acceptance, not titillation or ambition, and we are led to believe that this is one in a series of sacrifices she makes as she constantly negotiates to protect Wu Luan and ensure he is not harmed. Rebecca Chapman claims, “Through the figure of Wan, the film offers an image of a woman who must continually renegotiate her role in a world where power and desire are continually at odds.”<sup>23</sup> This Gertrude, then, cannot be accused of an excess of lust leading her to quickly remarry after her husband’s death.

The film’s interest in Little Wan and Li’s relationship continues as it documents them interacting with the court’s ministers, playing polo, supervising torture, and

in bed together. Hong Kong cinema expert Bey Logan comments that all of these scenes exist in *Hamlet*, but that they are offstage: “*Hamlet* refers to the kind of passion that’s driving this relationship, particularly in the closet scene . . . We only see a suggestion of it and here that’s really brought to the front of the stage.”<sup>24</sup> But it is not simply made visible; this passion is characterized in a unique way. We see in the film a Claudius overwhelmed by passion and not a Gertrude overwhelmed. *Hamlet*’s Gertrude succumbs to her lust or to Claudius’s manipulations; in *The Banquet*, it is Claudius who succumbs to his lust and to Gertrude’s manipulations, and it is Claudius who suffers for the weakness. It is crucial to my analysis of this film to acknowledge that this Claudius is weakened by his lust. Feng’s depiction of the slaving, desperate, eager Li shows an Emperor completely subject to the sexual favors of his Empress.

The focus on Li and Wan’s sexual partnership is completely different from *Hamlet*, in which, as Levin notes, the private conversations between Claudius and Gertrude are “utterly sexless.”<sup>25</sup> For example, early in the film, we see Li and Wan in bed together, presumably post-coital, and Li is massaging Wan’s back.<sup>26</sup> As he does so, he questions her about how he compares to his deceased brother in terms of virility, demonstrating an anxiety about his own performance and an intense desire to please Wan. The conversation then turns to the struggle between love and power, which Li claims “has tormented past emperors for centuries.” He further comments that “Before tonight, everything was simple. I cared only for my kingdom. But after tonight, when there is you, Sister-in-law . . . what need do I have of a kingdom?” (Later in the film, when Wan is showing off her elaborate coronation robes to him, Li comments similarly, “Who cares about losing a kingdom when in the presence of such rare beauty?”) This cavalier attitude toward his kingdom and lavish praise for the Empress’s beauty is of course an overstatement, because when Wan suggests that Li give away his kingdom and retire to the woods with her, he is displeased. Just like Shakespeare’s Claudius, Li refuses to sacrifice “My crown, mine own ambition and my Queen” (3.3.55). But rather than having the Emperor make this confession alone, while attempting to pray, Feng stages Li confessing this ambition and passion directly to Wan. Even more startling, shots of Wu Luan returning to the palace and confronting his father’s armor are interpolated with the heady, passionate conversation between Li and Wan. These shots stand in for Hamlet’s conversation with the ghost of his father. Thus, the iconic scene from *Hamlet* is here subordinated to a scene absent from Shakespeare’s play: Claudius and Gertrude in bed together. While the interpolation of the two scenes raises elements of the Freudian, sexual complexity of the play, it primarily points out this film’s unique perspective on the story. In this film, the sexual tension of Hamlet’s closet scene is relocated to Gertrude’s bedroom encounters with Claudius. Charles Ross calls this a thematic shift “from uncertain ghost to uncertain women.”<sup>27</sup> This time, we are behind the scenes with Gertrude, rather than outside the palace gates with Hamlet.

Each interaction between Li and Wan overflows with tension. Li continually tests and challenges Wan’s loyalty, and Wan continually makes sacrifices to protect Wu Luan. Later in the film, we see her presiding over the torture and death of an innocent man in an attempt to prove her loyalty to Li; feigning disinterest when

Wu Luan is nearly killed; and scolding the Prince for failing to bow to his uncle. But the bile she may be choking on as she accedes to Li's every wish is released with unfortunate cruelty on Qing. Many scholars have noted a friendship and tenderness between Gertrude and Ophelia.<sup>28</sup> But in Feng's film, there is no such tenderness, and certainly Wan never looks out for Qing. Instead, she seizes every opportunity to taunt and torment her young rival. Her interactions with the poor young woman echo the manipulation Li visits upon her.

When we first meet Qing, she is running into the palace, having been summoned to the Empress's chambers, wondering if Wu Luan has come home. The shot of the running Qing is a dramatic contrast to the earlier introductory shot of Little Wan's stately, sedate progress through the rows of soldiers to her husband's armor. This contrast immediately establishes an impetuous, youthful eagerness in Qing, which in turn highlights Little Wan's crafty reserve. When Qing arrives before Little Wan, she kneels and addresses her with respect. Their drastically different characters are again reinforced visually: this time, it is in the contrast between Qing's white and cream costume and Little Wan's rich black gown embroidered in gold. Initially, Wan doesn't address Qing, instead instructing her maids to hang up a bolt of red fabric she had requested for inspection. As Wan pulls on the bolt of fabric, sending folds of bright red cascading across the screen, she says, "This material was originally intended for your wedding to the Prince. However, it is now used in my coronation." It is a rude dig at Qing, and is followed by Wan questioning why the younger girl ran all the way to the court, adding censure to the previous barb. In what follows, Qing describes how she and Wu Luan communicate "through dreams," claiming that, while he never writes to her, she dreams of him each night and they speak to one another in dreams. When asked what Wu Luan had told her the previous night, she says, "He told me not to eat too many sweets. But then he also said, 'Young girls tend to like sweet things. It is not really a bad habit.'" The words she claims Wu Luan spoke to her highlight her youth and innocence, and Little Wan smiles to hear them, looking almost jealous. Finally, the Empress responds, "I used to like sweet things." This comment both brings the two women closer together and distances them: Little Wan identifies with Qing's youth but also suggests she has moved on from it, claiming a maturity she does not see in her young courtier.

The initial interaction between Wan and Qing sets the mode for the remainder of the film: Wan is cruel and dismissive of the young woman, while Qing is hopeful and childlike. Wan sees Qing as an unworthy rival for Wu Luan's affections and simultaneously envies the young girl for her innocence. Their interactions escalate to violence, as Wan has Qing whipped because the younger girl expresses a desire to follow Wu Luan to the Khitan province. After the whipping, which occurs off-screen, Empress Wan pays an unexpected visit and finds a calm Qing lying on her side, her face turned away from the Empress and her abused back exposed for Wan's examination. Cruelly, Wan sits next to her and runs her fingernails along the cuts as she taunts the young girl, asking, "Does it hurt?" The extreme close-up of Wan stroking and scratching Qing's back evokes a threatening, sadistic sensuality that escalates when Wan pushes her onto her back, caressing her face and leaning over her. Despite the fact that the actress playing Qing is actually three years older than

Zhang Ziyi (Wan), the costuming and position make Qing appear younger and passive. She is reclining on a chaise, wearing a loose night robe that exposes her arms and most of her back. Her hair is down and her face bare. Wan appears in a rich gold gown and heavy, embroidered black robe. Her hair is elaborately coiffed and she is decked out in an impressive array of gold jewels. The sexually charged sensuality in this scene promotes Wan's manipulations from the realm of childlike petulance to mature mischief. As she leaves the room, she orders Qing branded and exiled—an order that is never carried out, and yet it demonstrates her terrifying power.

### A Closet Divided

*The Banquet* offers a protracted exploration of Gertrude's mysterious sexuality. I have discussed how the film portrays Wan and Li and Wan and Qing, but what of *Hamlet's* iconic closet scene? Where, in Feng's film, do we see the sexual tension between Wan and Wu Luan? A two-part rendition of the closet scene provides the answer, but before examining it, it is useful to recall production traditions surrounding this scene. Traditionally, productions of *Hamlet* stage a physically dominant prince looming over Gertrude in the closet scene, brandishing portraits and a sword, and flinging Gertrude onto the bed or a chair, until the second visitation from the Ghost chides him. As June Schlueter and James P. Lusardi note, "Traditionally, in production, Hamlet is rough, even brutal with his mother, pushing her down and restricting her movements with force."<sup>29</sup> Schlueter and Lusardi back this claim up with a detailed reading of the way Olivier manipulated the camera in his 1948 film to show "the progressive violence of Hamlet's demeanor and his quick seizure, by force and terror, of the dominant position in the scene."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in the Zeffirelli *Hamlet* (1990), Mel Gibson's Hamlet throws Glenn Close's Gertrude on the bed and violently holds her down, miming intercourse and shouting abuse at his mother, who ends his tirade with a passionate kiss. Edward Eaton has read in this production a Gertrude who enjoys the activity: "When Gertrude cries 'Oh, Hamlet, speak no more!' she is not asking him to be still; rather, she is begging him to concentrate on the task at hand."<sup>31</sup> In Branagh's 1996 version, Hamlet storms around the bedroom, shouting at Gertrude as she sits on the bed, and nearly strangling her when attempting to show her the two portraits.

In total contrast, *The Banquet* depicts a submissive Wu Luan in both incarnations of the closet scene, and it is Wan who maintains physical dominance. Where Hamlet draws his sword to slay the unseen Polonius, Wan draws Wu Luan's blade to challenge him to a playful fight. Where Polonius spies on Gertrude and Hamlet, Li overhears Wan and Wu Luan—and his eavesdropping is unplanned. Wan doesn't require the unseen support of an advisor; she encounters Wu Luan alone, in her bathrobe, fearlessly. Instead of the presence of Polonius's dead body—visual evidence of Hamlet's physical dominance and potential for violence—Feng's film features the paper cutting and the mask that Wu Luan brought with him from his studies in the Yue province, both symbols of his art, and both marked by blood from his experience of the initial attack—a battle in which he did not fight. And despite their relative sizes—Zhang Ziyi is quite diminutive in contrast with Daniel

Wu—Wan remains physically dominant in each scene. She out-duels him in the first incarnation of the closet scene, at various points standing before him as he kneels and slapping him across the face in frustration. In the second incarnation, she stands over him as he reclines at the fountain and combs his hair in a maternal gesture, ultimately storming out and leaving him lying there, unmoving, impotent.

The first of the two separate “closet” scenes occurs a scant twenty-five minutes into the film, a full hour before the closet scene’s appearance even in Zeffirelli’s drastically shortened film version, and certainly far earlier than the confrontation in the play. It contains elements of both *Hamlet* 1.2 and 3.4 as Wan attempts to persuade Wu Luan to leave his studies (“Go not to Wittenberg”), and addresses the Prince’s implications that his father was murdered. In *Hamlet*, the closet scene features Hamlet’s famous description of (and disgust with) Claudius and Gertrude’s sexual relationship. Feng’s film does not ever overtly raise this question, even though Wan has just come from the Emperor’s bed. Wu Luan asks about his father’s death, but for the remainder of the scene, he answers questions about his own ambitions and desires. Unlike Olivier’s film, in which “the dramatic symbol for Gertrude is a luxurious canopied bed,” in *The Banquet*, no beds are visible and Wan and Wu Luan are dwarfed by the cavernous spaces of Feng’s dramatic interiors.<sup>32</sup>

Jockeying for command of the space, the Empress and the Prince return to the trope of playing with forms of address: Wu Luan calls Little Wan “Empress Mother” and “Your Majesty,” and is scolded by Little Wan who orders him to call her “Step-mother.” In making this request, she appeals to their prior relationship, when she was simply his stepmother, and not also his step-aunt; she also focuses on the familial, and not the political, elements of their relationship in preferring “stepmother” to “Your Majesty.” This exchange also mirrors Hamlet’s comment to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is not mad, in which he refers to Claudius and Gertrude as “my uncle-father and aunt-mother” (2.2.312-13). Not only does this echo remind us that Hamlet’s friends are absent in this particular production, but also, it moves the conversations, jokes, and information shared between Hamlet and his friends into exchanges between Hamlet and this film’s reimagined Gertrude. This has significant implications for how Feng’s Hamlet understands the intrigues of the palace and for how Feng’s Gertrude feels about her (step-) son. Firstly, Wu Luan’s knowledge is filtered almost entirely through Wan. Rather than testing out his theories with Horatio or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he is restricted to conversation with his stepmother, who is chief orchestrator of palace intrigue in this film. Secondly, the fact that the majority of Wu Luan’s private conversations occur with Wan focuses our attention on the intimacy of this relationship, inviting the audience to contemplate the confused tenderness and frustration between the two characters.

Little Wan is given the unique opportunity to defend herself that Gertrude never gets. Perhaps this is because Little Wan and Wu Luan get much more private time, alone together, than Shakespeare ever granted Hamlet and Gertrude. Of course, Wan’s defense depends upon a kind of self-knowledge that Gertrude does not appear to have, as she never admits to awareness of Claudius’s schemes. When Wu Luan asks, “Did I come back to grieve for my father or to congratulate my step-mother?” (a line that occurs in *Hamlet* and Horatio’s joking exchange in 1.2.175-

80), Little Wan responds, “Do not use such a cruel tone of voice against a helpless woman. I have sacrificed more than enough for you and your father.” Implicit in this defense is the notion that Wan continues to make sacrifices through marrying Li to protect Wu Luan. This is not only a defense, but also an accusation: Wu Luan doesn’t do anything but react, emotionally, to the events around him. Little Wan *acts*. She protects and preserves Wu Luan and the entire empire. Here, she voices a frustration with Wu Luan, angry that he cannot or will not see the offstage actions she takes to help him—actions which this film chooses to stage for the audience, while *Hamlet* renders them invisible. We see Little Wan sleeping with Emperor Li, we see her alone contemplating her situation, and we see her taking many dangerous steps to protect Wu Luan.

However, the prince is either unable or unwilling to see this and persists in asking her if his father was murdered, kneeling before Wan with his head bowed. Passionately embracing him, holding his head to her chest and kissing his forehead, Wan begs him to stop asking dangerous questions in a fascinating departure from Gertrude’s position of ignorance in the play: “Wu Luan, the pain in your eyes breaks my heart. Don’t ask so many questions. Don’t think too much. Promise me? The best way to soothe your father’s spirit . . . is to make sure we are both safe. Especially you.” This brief speech provides several clues to Little Wan’s character. She hints at a deeper knowledge of how Wu Luan’s father died, but does not elaborate, underscoring the idea that she is well aware of Emperor Li’s machinations. In *Hamlet*’s closet scene, Hamlet forces his mother to confront the reality of Claudius’s evil nature; in *The Banquet*’s, Little Wan seeks to protect Wu Luan from full knowledge of his uncle’s ambition. Explicitly voicing her desire to protect Wu Luan, Wan inspires rather than gratitude or obedience a sort of embarrassed awareness of their relative positions—both socially and literally—and Wu Luan hastens to distance himself, breaking dramatically from the embrace, pushing Wan away from him, lowering his head in shame, and stating that his shabby clothing has stained “the Empress’s bathrobe.” While *Hamlet* contains a Gertrude who is frequently hushed and dismissed by Claudius in exactly the manner Little Wan hushes and dismisses Wu Luan, Feng’s film promises a stronger, more vibrant queen, one who intimidates those around her.

Wu Luan’s reference to the disparity between his and Little Wan’s dress underscores their different social stations. The contrast appears to distress Wan and leads her first to slap him and then, to begin to laugh. The slightly manic quality of this exchange impresses us with the depth and wealth of emotion Wan is constantly keeping under control, and that control is beautifully realized when she soon after challenges him to a demonstration of sword fighting/martial arts skill. The stunning exhibition—which Wan handily wins—serves to point out again her superiority to Wu Luan in terms of her greater physical prowess. Wu Luan attempts to opt out, stating that he now only uses the short sword for paper cutting, a statement which further distances Wu Luan from the man of action that Wan urges him to be. According to her, he is not a true man, because a man “should not be a lonely musician, a product of warm hills and soft streams.” But Wu Luan persists in articulating a doctrine of loneliness that he argues is the definition of the human experience: “No one can really understand another person. If we did, we would not feel so lonely.”

Here is Feng's answer to Hamlet's anxious inquiries into the meaning of life, the morality of vengeance, and the necessity of action: Wu Luan does not ponder these things, but clings to an ideal of the lonely man. In his audio commentary on the DVD, Bey Logan states that mainland Chinese martial arts period films "tend to be about the defeat of the one by the many," as opposed to older *kung fu* films that valorize the triumph of the individual. This loneliness and preordained defeat inspire Wu Luan not to struggle, not to argue with others or himself, but rather to adopt a subordinate and submissive position both literally (in many scenes he is reclining, seated, or kneeling while others stand over him), and dramatically (as he does not work to initiate almost any action within the film, with the exception of staging a *Mousetrap*-like performance at the coronation banquet). This excessive, repeated narrative of loneliness stands in stark contrast to a Gertrude who nearly bursts at the seams with schemes, ambition, and action.

In the second half of the closet scene, which occurs fifty-four minutes into the film, Little Wan chastises Wu Luan for his passivity again, only this time, rather than suggesting he abandon his art, she tells him he is unskilled at it. Little Wan is clearly frustrated with his inability to protect himself when she accuses him: "You are incapable of even the most basic play-acting. Your sorrow, anger, bitterness and uncertainty are there for all to see. You permit danger to follow you everywhere. You think hiding behind a mask can elevate your art? The highest level is to use your own face and turn it into a mask." For the duration of their conversation, Wu Luan is reclining by the fountain. At the beginning of the scene, Wan combs his wet hair, tending to him like a maid, but by the end, she leans domineeringly over him, mocking him. Wu Luan does not move, embodying an extreme motionlessness in contrast to Wan's energetic exit as she sweeps out, her long robes trailing behind her. The visual aspects of this scene underscore each character's approach to communicating his or her emotions. Wan's long, dark robes imply the obscurity she wishes Wu Luan had. They also are heavy and ornately embroidered, demonstrating the weight of her responsibility and the gravity of her person. Meanwhile, Wu Luan is dressed in lighter robes, showing a nature less tethered to the real. His robes are a bland taupe in color, such that he almost blends into the gray stone of the fountain where he is reclining, providing a very dull, monochromatic backdrop for the stunning black of Wan's robes. Wu Luan's very wardrobe is passive and unremarkable, whereas Wan's both communicates and conceals her nature.

The film continually contrasts Wan's activity and Wu Luan's passivity. Wan plays polo and intervenes to save Wu Luan's life repeatedly while the Prince is docile even in battle. This docility is evident in the opening scene, described above, where he is revealed to be hiding beneath the bridge while the Emperor's party slaughters his companions at the compound in the Yue territory. Later, when he becomes aware en route to Khitan that his escort has been ordered to kill him, he closes his eyes and awaits the blow, remaining unmoving as Yin Sun and his guard defend the Prince and save his life. Ultimately, he does not even kill Laertes or Claudius, but watches helpless as Wan's poison finally finds its mark in the Emperor and Wan stabs Yin Sun in revenge for his accidental slaying of the Prince. Wu Luan is certainly not presented as a pompous, self-important, or proud duelist, as the Prince is at the close of

*Hamlet*, when Claudius depends upon Hamlet's inherent pride to force him to meet Laertes' challenge. The only time we see Wu Luan exert any violent action is in the disturbing scene where he rapes Qing.<sup>33</sup> Even this scene ends, though, with a pietà-like pose, as Qing cradles the limp and weakened Wu Luan in her arms like a child.

The climax of the film, the banquet itself, is a tour de force of Little Wan's wide-reaching ability to effect change, influence events, and commit to action. It is Wan who ultimately kills the Emperor (Claudius) via poison and not Wu Luan. It is also Wan who kills Yin Sun (Laertes)—though, in this film, he is no threat to Wu Luan. And it is Wan who (inadvertently) kills Qing, so that even Ophelia's death can be just as readily traced to Gertrude as it can to her sense of loss from Hamlet's disappearance.<sup>34</sup> Feng's Hamlet doesn't kill anybody, as Minister Yin, the film's Polonius, lives in exile at the end of the film. When the result of Little Wan's long struggle to protect and promote Wu Luan is finally achieved, when she kneels before him and addresses him as "Your Majesty," Wu Luan collapses, recoiling from the honorific: "Please do not lay this sinful title on me." He refuses to do what is expected of him: to mete out punishment upon Little Wan for poisoning the Emperor and causing Qing's death. This refusal, this continued inaction, leads to Yin Sun's frustrated attempt to kill Little Wan, as he runs at her from behind, with the intention of driving his knife into her back. But Wu Luan reaches out to save her and stops the knife with his hand, sustaining the injury that will kill him (the blade is poisoned), and Little Wan kills Yin Sun in immediate repayment. Little Wan is not slow to punish those who kill the one she loves, and her action starkly contrasts with Wu Luan's overwhelming inaction.

Scholars frequently point to the fact that Gertrude's insistence upon drinking a toast to Hamlet is the only time she disobeys Claudius. However, in *The Banquet*, it is Wan who warns Qing not to drink the poisoned cup. In shifting this exchange from occurring between Gertrude and Claudius to Qing and Wan, Feng's film again suggests a possible sexual dimension to the relationship between his remade Gertrude and Ophelia. Recall the way that Wan leans over Qing's whipped and bleeding body, gloating, but also tenderly stroking her. In addition, Li's choice to knowingly drink the poisoned wine in the climactic banquet scene echoes Olivier's Gertrude's conscious drinking of the poisoned cup in order to warn her son. This cinematic reference not only demonstrates Feng's awareness of participating in a tradition of *Hamlet* on film, but also highlights some of Feng's production's major differences. First, *The Banquet* stages both the ignorant figure drinking the poison and the knowing martyr. Second, Li is here scripted in the feminine, martyred position. His choice to martyr himself to satisfy Wan is echoed moments later when Wu Luan stops Yin Sun's knife, destined to kill Wan. Unlike Shakespeare's Hamlet, Wu Luan doesn't receive his mortal wound while engaged in a duel; rather, he is killed trying to protect Wan. And Wu Luan doesn't retaliate for the wound; it is Wan who kills Yin Sun.

Although weeping over the Prince's body, Little Wan rises to the Chamberlain's shouts of "Long Live Her Majesty." The closing scene is incredibly powerful as we get a glimpse of Wan in triumph. Gathering bright red cloth in her arms—the same red cloth she admired early in the film and used in her coronation outfit; the same red cloth that was reportedly originally bought for Qing's wedding to Wu Luan—

she contemplates her identity and her ambition in the film's only soliloquy:

When was it that I started to forget my name? Perhaps it was the day your father married me. You left and nobody used my name anymore. Gradually even I forgot what it was. Then your uncle married me . . . and again I was called the Empress. But from now on, nobody will call me Empress anymore. Instead, they will call me Her Majesty, the Emperor. Do you know why I like this particular red? Because it is the color of the flame of desire. Yes . . . Desire. How many lives have been consumed by this flame? Only I shall rise out of it like a phoenix.

Seeming to address the dead Wu Luan, Little Wan does not dwell on her grief. Instead, she returns to the theme of title and identity, embracing her future as "the Emperor." As soon as she finishes speaking the last gloating word, she is stabbed in the back by an unseen assailant and dies. Wan is killed at the height of her sense of self-knowledge and at the achievement of her goals. Cutting her down right as she asserts her ability to rise again like the phoenix startles both Little Wan and the audience. The film never reveals who killed her, but the commentary suggests that it was Ling, one of her maids, who has been a silent witness to all of her schemes and all of her plots. If it is the maid who kills her, then Ling is arguably an even more enterprising woman than the Empress. Feng decided in the final cut of the film not to reveal the identity of the murderer, relishing instead the ambiguity and the sense that even Little Wan could not escape justice. There is also a sharper sense of tragedy at the close of this film because Wan doesn't have the opportunity, like Hamlet, to turn to a Horatio and ask that her story be told. She is, instead, cut off in the midst of telling her own story, and given no concluding praise from a conquering Fortinbras or a beloved friend.

In a film where Gertrude kills Claudius, Ophelia, and Laertes, there is no place for "Frailty, thy name is woman." *The Banquet* re-renders *Hamlet* into a story less about the birth of the modern thinking man and more about the potential of a strong, ambitious woman. While she is killed, this Chinese Gertrude is at no point depicted as a victim. Her choices are all her own, and she is neither ignorant nor a pawn in Li's or Wu Luan's scheming. Is this a Gertrude for the twenty-first century? Or is some larger unsettling of the *Hamlet* myth at work in Feng's film? If the latter, then we can admire Feng for pushing the story so far, for building a new Gertrude who is independent, strong-willed, and not merely a vessel for Claudius's ambitions and Hamlet's petulance. And yet, this extraordinary Gertrude is ultimately silenced. She pushes the limits of power and ambition but in the end is cut off in her prime. While the film decidedly undermines Hamlet's stylized loneliness and introspection, it also pointedly refuses to espouse ambition as a valid paradigm.

What is the result of building a *Hamlet* story around an active, rather than passive, protagonist? Ultimately, the active Wan is still silenced, and we could argue that the film, like the play, shows the futility of human action to an extent. But there is something else at stake. In the silencing of Little Wan by an unseen assailant, we are invited to contemplate what larger entity could undo the most ambitious, pas-

sionate, and resilient of all characters. As she dies, for the first time in the entire film, Wan breaks the fourth wall by turning to stare directly at the audience, reaching out her hand in accusation and supplication, implicating us, the viewers, in her death. We are the final abusers and consumers of her ambition and energy, and her story is the ultimate sacrifice. At this moment, we are accused of making her the Dragon Lady, of forcing all our interpretations and assumptions on this incredibly mysterious character, and we are punished for our audacity by never learning the identity of her murderer. So while Wan turns to no Horatio to ask him to tell her story, she turns to us to challenge us to forget it.

Many critics have said that *Hamlet* is a play you cannot ever experience for the first time, at least in a traditional Western context. So much of its language has passed into common use that students often find the experience of reading it a trip down memory lane. Thompson and Taylor call this “the sheer (over-)familiarity of the play’s language.”<sup>35</sup> What Feng Xiaogang has so successfully done is re-rendered the story in terms that preserve the crucial themes of desire, action and inaction, family and power, but surprise us with their newness. And in the conclusion, Little Wan’s death asks us to reflect on our own insatiable desire for the story, our own capacity to destroy it and to render it anew, bringing us full circle back to the film’s opening, where Wu Luan is learning the art of storytelling.

### Notes

1. J. Anthony Burton, “The Lady Vanishes or, the Incredible Shrinking Gertrude,” in *Acts of Criticism: Performance Matters in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries. Essays in Honor of James P. Lussardi*, ed. Paul Nelsen and June Schlueter (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 217-31.
2. *Legend of the Black Scorpion*, directed by Feng Xiaogang (2006, Santa Monica, CA: Dragon Dynasty, 2008), DVD. This Chinese film, *Ye yan*, is known internationally as *The Banquet*, but the American DVD release is titled *Legend of the Black Scorpion*. I will refer to it as *The Banquet* throughout this essay.
3. For your reference, here’s a brief chart of the character equivalencies between *Hamlet* and *The Banquet*:

<i>The Banquet</i>	<i>Hamlet</i>
Prince Wu Luan	Hamlet
Empress Little Wan	Gertrude
Emperor Li	Claudius
Qing Nu	Ophelia
General Yin Sun	Laertes
Minister Yin	Polonius

4. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth* (1904; New York and London: Penguin Books, 1991), 159; and Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 15, 30.

5. Yoshiko Uéno, "Three Gertrudes: Text and Subtext," in *Hamlet and Japan*, ed. Uéno (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 156.
6. Akiko Kusunoki, "'Oh Most Pernicious Woman': Gertrude in the Light of Ideas on Remarriage in Early Seventeenth-Century England," in Uéno, *Hamlet and Japan*, 169.
7. Rebecca Smith, "A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude," In *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 194.
8. Richard Levin, "Gertrude's Elusive Libido and Shakespeare's Unreliable Narrators," *SEL* 48.2 (Spring 2008): 323.
9. Maurice Hunt, "Gertrude's Interiority," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 78 (Autumn 2010): 14, 25.
10. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, "Introduction," in *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), 39-41; Kusunoki, 170-71.
11. Charles Ross, "*The Banquet* as Cinematic Romance," in *Asian Shakespeares on Screen: Two Films in Perspective*, ed. Alexander C. Y. Huang, special issue, *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 4.2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 5.
12. Woodrow B. Hood, "A Thousand Universes: Zhang Ziyi in Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*," in Huang, *Asian Shakespeares*, 1.
13. *Ibid.*, 2.
14. *Ibid.*, 4.
15. Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 230.
16. *Ibid.*, 230-31.
17. *Ibid.*, 234.
18. *William Shakespeare's Hamlet*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (1996, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD.
19. A good example of this would be the 1996 Branagh film, in which Branagh's Hamlet is dressed all in black, standing to the side of a grand hall filled with revelers dressed in festive white and military red for Claudius and Gertrude's wedding.
20. See 4.4.30 in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet encounters Fortinbras's army pursuing a small, inconsequential territory, and in response gives the "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy. This and all Shakespeare quotations come from *Hamlet*, Thompson and Taylor (eds.), and are cited parenthetically in the text.
21. This detail comes from Hong Kong cinema expert Bey Logan, who provided the audio commen-

- tary on the American release of the DVD, titled *Legend of the Black Scorpion*.
22. Feng Xiaogang, "Master of Ceremonies: An Exclusive Interview with Director Feng Xiaogang," *Legend of the Black Scorpion*.
  23. Rebecca Chapman, "Spectator Violence and Queenly Desire in *The Banquet*," in Huang, *Asian Shakespeares*, 2.
  24. Logan, *Legend of the Black Scorpion*.
  25. Levin, 322. The scenes Levin refers to are 4.1.5-32 and 4.5.75-96.
  26. In staging the consummation of Li and Wan's marriage, Feng's film seems to answer the question of whether or not Gertrude had an adulterous affair with Claudius while her husband was still alive. See Uéno, 160; Bradley, 160; Kusunoki, 170; Noel Blincoe, "Is Gertrude an Adulteress?" *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews* 10.4 (Fall 1997): 18-24.
  27. Ross, 4.
  28. See, for example, Immy Wallenfels, "Gertrude as a Character of Intersection in *Hamlet*," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 6 (2006): 90-99.
  29. June Schlueter and James P. Lusardi, "The Camera in Gertrude's Closet," *Shakespeare and the Triple Play: From Study to Stage to Classroom*, ed. Sidney Homan (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1988), 160.
  30. Schlueter and Lusardi, 163.
  31. Edward Eaton, "Hamlet and His Women: A Study of Four Films," *Philological Papers* 45 (1999): 52.
  32. Smith, 195.
  33. Ross points out that this is related to the rape of the Ur-Ophelia in Saxo Grammaticus (3).
  34. Harmonie Loberg and Stephen Ratcliffe are among those who have read Gertrude as involved in Ophelia's death. Loberg notes that "Ophelia appears as a true threat to every role that the Queen possesses" (64), and this sense of threatened authority and affection is again embodied in Feng's film. See Loberg, "Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer," *Atenea*, 24.1 (2004): 59-71; also Ratcliffe, "What Doesn't Happen in *Hamlet*: The Queen's Speech," *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10.1 (Spring 1998): 123-44.
  35. Thompson and Taylor, 25.

**(UN)SEXING LADY MACBETH:  
GENDER, POWER, AND VISUAL RHETORIC IN HER GRAPHIC AFTERLIVES**

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As audience members, we need memory in order to experience difference  
as well as similarity.<sup>1</sup>

—Linda Hutcheon

Lady Macbeth's status as one of Shakespeare's most devious and fascinating characters has been recognized in the proliferation of criticism on and adaptive works of *Macbeth* over the past 400 years. Of particular concern has been how she achieves her ambitions and advances her and her husband's political interests while working within a stringently patriarchal society. One way critics have explained Lady Macbeth's relative success is through her associations with demonic forces and the fateful powers of the notorious three witches. Others have looked at how in the play she verbally manipulates gender values and expectations to suit her purposes. As Cristina León Alfar reminds us, "Lady Macbeth's 'evil' is . . . an ideologically inscribed notion that is often linked in our literary tradition to strong female characters who seek power, who reject filial loyalty as prior to self-loyalty, and who pursue desire in all its forms—romantic, adulterate, authoritarian, and even violent."<sup>2</sup>

In Shakespeare's play, Lady Macbeth's portrayal begins with the powerful elements of her ambitious and successful plotting of Duncan's demise, effective rhetorical manipulation of her husband to "be a man" and take action, and her position—potentially—as Macbeth's equal in their relationship, his desired "dear partner of greatness." And yet, for the most part, these powerful moments are all in the service of disorder (of tyrannical usurpation of the monarchy and the usurpation of control within her marriage) and the unnatural (through her affiliations with the supernatural in the "unsex me here" speech). Her guilt-filled sleepwalking scene and later suicide register therefore as bodily signs of her corruption and as (self-)punishment for her transgressive, "evil" ways.

From the beginning, Lady Macbeth's cultural value has generally included the sense that she is monstrous—she not only has crossed the boundaries of appropriate behavior for a wife and subject, but she has called on demonic forces to help her achieve her goals. The play's narrative about her ambition to obtain position and fame collapses into a heavily gendered cautionary tale about tyrannical overreachers and their demise. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth borrows from earlier "monstrous women" stereotypes but also provides an iconic model for later interpretations of her character.

Are there other productive ways of representing Lady Macbeth without reinscribing her within traditional evil female stereotypes such as the witch and seductress? Many stage, film, and artistic works to date would seem to reply "no." Her stereotypical representation makes her immediately familiar and thus culturally recognizable. However, what signifies as culturally recognizable becomes more fluid as

social stereotypes are challenged and altered, and as more roles for strong women become available. Graphic novel and manga editions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* provide a newer critical arena that both places Lady Macbeth in a long artistic and literary tradition and opens the door to different interpretations available from other genres such as superhero comics and science fiction. In this way, illustrators elaborate on and modify the iconic meanings that have accrued around her over the years.<sup>3</sup>

To see how these graphic renditions figure Lady Macbeth's character and the key debates over the relationship between gender and power in the play, I will examine four adaptive works, two of which are graphic novels and two that are manga: *William Shakespeare's Macbeth*; *Macbeth: The Graphic Novel*; *Shakespeare's Macbeth: The Manga Edition*; and *Manga Shakespeare: Macbeth*.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, most of these representations fall back into old, clichéd stereotypes, thus reinforcing traditional gendered expectations about who is authorized to use power, express ambition, and pursue a wider range of desires. However, one of the manga editions, *Manga Shakespeare: Macbeth* drawn by Robert Deas, offers an interesting alternative reading of the play and her character—one which potentially destabilizes stereotypes and updates the story for the (post)modern reader. This last edition, which takes place in a post-apocalyptic world, presents Lady Macbeth as an action heroine, worthy of equal footing with her male counterparts. Deas's illustration of Lady Macbeth as a strong, heroic figure in her own right makes strides in breaking the play and her character free of years of visual representation that sought to make her ambitious grasps at power and personal fulfillment understandable and safe, or alternately, marginalized and ultimately contained.<sup>5</sup>

### I. Illustrating Lady Macbeth: Past and Present

Looking back at earlier visual representations of Lady Macbeth, it is not difficult to see from where modern stereotypes for her character have come. Georgianna Ziegler's study of Lady Macbeth in Victorian portraiture, engravings, and prints reveals two trends in the way earlier artists and critics viewed this character: "as barbaric and passionate or domesticated and caring."<sup>6</sup> On the darker side, throughout the 1800s, Lady Macbeth is compared with witches, demons, viragos, snake-women (à la the Fall and Lamia stories), and iconic "evil women" like Medea. In this way, she becomes safely contained as a figure from the past and/or an "other," and thus alien from "normal" Victorian women.<sup>7</sup> Alternately, during this same period, critics like Anna Jameson, author of the popular *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, posit that while Lady Macbeth is an evil character, she still has passion, intellect, and drive—all admirable qualities.<sup>8</sup> The queen retains our sympathy and respect because her crimes are done in the service of being a good wife who wishes to advance her husband. Yet others try to explain away her behavior as the product of loneliness or sorrow at not having a child.<sup>9</sup> Whether offering us a dark or sympathetic Lady Macbeth, nineteenth-century artists and critics feel the need to categorize, contain, and explain this striking and complex character in terms that are relevant to their age and culture.

Ziegler concludes that these nineteenth-century stereotypes are still with us today in modern advertising and political commentary, as exemplified by the invective

against Hillary Rodham Clinton, once described as “the Lady Macbeth of Little Rock.”<sup>10</sup> “Lady Macbeth continues to figure our society’s conflicted admiration for and fear of women’s rights, power, and professional success. She frightens us, as she frightened our forebears, because of her perceived ability to empower the feminine while disempowering the masculine.”<sup>11</sup> But modern advertising is not the only visual medium still playing with these gendered valuations. Stephen Orgel argues that “the most significant and far-reaching modern developments in Shakespearean illustration have surely been in cinema.”<sup>12</sup>

While I do not have space here to fully address the film history of Lady Macbeth, it is worth mentioning a few more recent productions that seem to participate in this stereotypical reworking of her character. *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* first came out as a BBC animated television series in 1992 and later in DVD format from Ambrose Video Publishing in 2004. Its version of *Macbeth*, designed and directed by Nikolai Serebriakov, offers a Lady Macbeth whose power relies on her bodily seductiveness to bring Macbeth to the conclusion that he must act against Duncan and seize the throne. After receiving his letter about the witch’s prophecy, she welcomes him home with embraces and constantly strokes his shoulder as she discusses their next moves. Later, during the “unsex me here” speech, a skull-faced jester pounds a drum while flames burn high behind him. Lady Macbeth writhes in the shadows, clasping her hands to her face and smoothing them over her curves. Her hair whips around her face in snaky tendrils as well, all conveying a sense that power is a turn-on and that death and hellfire are only a small step away. As she cries out the lines “Come to my woman’s breasts,” she rips open her dress and both a horse and horned and toothed lizard creature spurt forth in a scene of unnatural birth.<sup>13</sup> These striking images conjoin female eroticism and demonic monstrosity as the foundations of her power and expressions of her ambition.

Another cinematic example of the extraordinary lengths to which Lady Macbeth’s power is sexualized and linked to the transgressive can be found in director Andrzej Wajda’s 1962 film *Siberian Lady Macbeth*.<sup>14</sup> While not a direct adaptation of *Macbeth*, the narrative translates Lady Macbeth’s (here, Katerina’s) desire for power into desire for love and freedom outside of her marriage and the confines of her father-in-law’s household. And she is willing to kill for it. Alternately, Geoffrey Wright’s 2006 *Macbeth*, set in the gangster world of Melbourne, Australia, envisions a Lady Macbeth in mourning for a lost child and pronounces on the advertising cover, “Something wicked this way comes,” alluding to one of the witches’ lines in *Macbeth*.<sup>15</sup> Wright’s Lady seems suicidal and depressed from the beginning and turns to cocaine as an escape from her emotional prison. While these versions of the story creatively imagine Lady Macbeth in different settings and contexts, they still describe her empowerment as brief and fleeting, attaching it to sexual desire and in many cases, forms of psychological and/or emotional breakdown. These depictions therefore borrow heavily from earlier models of transgressive female behavior and its consequences.

If we look to the genre of comic books and graphic novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these observations continue to hold true. By and large, the Lady Macbeths depicted in these works glorify the character’s potential to embody power, desire, and ambition; yet ultimately any images of agency that are established earlier

in the texts are undermined in rather traditional ways. Through visual rhetorical markers, Lady Macbeth's power is explained through old tropes of witchcraft and physical seduction, and once her plot is foiled and her position of wife is less central, she fades away into madness and eventually, suicidal death. Further, many of these graphic works insist upon links to the weird sisters/witches who tell Macbeth of the prophecy of his kingship. Depending on the work, they are either ambiguously gendered or ultra-feminine, but regardless, they are not seen as neutral parties to the plot.

As I discussed earlier, these choices may be attributed to the themes of the Shakespearean play text itself and the strong gender-biased conventions of the comics genre that for a long time targeted primarily young men.<sup>16</sup> Due to their length and complexity, later graphic editions rely even more on the power of the visual to encapsulate cultural values and judgments about the characters and actions they represent. In addition, they invite readers to participate in textual interpretation and collaborative meaning-making. As Will Eisner reminds us, "Comic book art deals with recognizable reproductions of human conduct. Its drawings are a mirror reflection, and depend on the reader's stored memory of experience to visualize an idea or process quickly."<sup>17</sup> To make this practice of social recognition and textual interpretation successful, he argues, comic art relies on stereotypes and symbolism to connect with the audience. I would contend, however, that while popular comic art certainly draws on contemporary culture's imaginative storehouse for its images and ideas, it is a medium that still allows room for the expansion and subversion of dominant tropes without sacrificing audience appeal. Increasingly, popular media, whether online, televised, broadcasted, or printed, are populated with multiple models for gendered and sexual behavior. "Norms" are being questioned and rewritten, despite pressures from established institutions governed by old stereotypes.<sup>18</sup>

While the graphic novels and manga I examine tend to represent Lady Macbeth in ways that rehearse negative female stereotypes, the last work, *Manga Shakespeare: Macbeth* by Robert Deas, allows the most interpretive space for a positively empowered reading of her. By working with more than one stereotype and set of genre conventions, Deas provides an intertextual Lady Macbeth who supersedes the limitations of her traditional roles and moves into the realm of the heroic. In this way, Lady Macbeth's iconic value continues to evolve and accrue meaning, as her culturally inflected renditions multiply.

## II. (Un)sexing Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" speech in and of itself may be considered iconic for all the critical acclaim it has produced, both onstage and on the page. No production of *Macbeth*, to my knowledge, has gone without it. In the space of these roughly 14 lines in 1.5, she invokes the images of death, sex, maternal purgation, and wounding. A number of scholars, such as Janet Adelman, have pointed to this scene as evidence of Lady Macbeth's "evil" or "unnatural" behavior due to the invocation of the murderous spirits, which additionally resonates with the incantations of the supernatural "witches" (or fates) earlier in the play.<sup>19</sup> Others have used this to prove their cases about how she "violates the dictates of gender."<sup>20</sup> She clearly asks

to have the feminized traits of pity and sympathy and bodily signs of motherhood removed (“Stop up th’access and passage to remorse,” “Come to my woman’s breasts / And take my milk for gall, you murd’ring ministers” [1.5.42, 45-46]). However, there has been some debate as to whether she is asking to be desexualized or masculinized when she invites the spirits to “unsex [her] . . . / And fill [her] from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty” (1.5.39-41). In either case, her avid rejection of the symbols of traditional womanhood—mercy and pity, the maternal breast—in favor of single-minded intent, murderous determination, and cruelty (often associated with excessive masculine violence) has made Lady Macbeth into a most memorable and troubling vision of female power.

It is not my goal here to fully rehash the discussions about this important speech’s analytical value and its implications for the gender/power dynamic in the play. Rather, I rehearse the generalities of the debates over those particular lines because I believe they have catalyzed later dramatic and graphic representations of Lady Macbeth’s character. Not surprisingly, many graphic editions make cuts to the play text, and although few that I’ve seen seriously truncate the “unsex me here” speech, those that do make cuts generally leave in these lines. They are, I would argue, the most suggestive and visual of the whole speech, so this choice makes good sense, both interpretively and artistically. As we will see, however, the issues this speech invokes come into focus not only in that textual moment, but in the portrayal of the weird sisters, and later in the play, during Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene.

One of the earliest graphic novel versions of the drama, *William Shakespeare’s Macbeth*, illustrated by Von and first published in 1982, is billed as an illustrated play. As such, the primary goal of the illustrator is to bring Shakespeare’s language to life and to preserve a large amount of that language; the drawings in theory accompany the text rather than make artistic substitutions for it. And yet, images do create a distinct narrative—one that can interpretively narrow the range of meanings available in the playscript. The “unsex me here” passage in Von’s illustrated play brings stark attention to the ways in which Lady Macbeth’s invocation parallels the witches’ earlier ones. Through her positioning and dress, she becomes essentially a fourth witch. Her “witchy” portrayal in this scene does not appear later in the book, suggesting that with this speech Lady Macbeth becomes momentarily revealed as “other” through her quest for authority and advancement. She is powerful, clearly, but that power is dangerous and otherworldly. She is even more threatening because she is able to mask her true nature from the court until the end of the play, when she drifts into madness.

The witches appear in the opening scene (1.1) as elementals of a sort—closely tied to the dark, stormy nature images around them. The sky is painted a dark violet with silver lightning and black smoke trailing across it. In the foreground of the “When shall we three meet again” panel (1, 1.1.1), a large screeching bat and black cat lurk among the roots of a spiky bare tree whose branches echo the long-nailed, gnarly fingers and grizzled facial features of the witches. Despite the witches’ repeated naming of each other as “sister” and their lack of beards, Von’s portrayal of these three figures still suggests the androgyny posited by Shakespeare’s text in Banquo’s line, “You should be women and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so” (7, 1.3.43-45). They each wear a neutral-colored hooded robe—black,

brown, and grey—and their bodies do not show stereotypical marks of gender such as rouged lips, breasts, huge biceps, facial hair, or defined abdominals seen elsewhere in graphic novels and in the comic genre in general.

The inconsistency of including Banquo's line but illustrating beardless individuals might encourage us to think of these figures as women, regardless of what the text bubble says. However, I would suggest that this slippage could also gesture to the witches' asexuality and otherworldly nature.<sup>21</sup> If markers like breasts and beards clarify a woman or man's physical maturity, the witches' depiction resists our efforts to place them easily in a tradition of powerful male antagonists or seductive, subversive women and further defines them as ambiguously human creatures of the night and occult spell-casters. This is especially evident when they fly in the air during the lines "Fair is foul, / And foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air" (1, 1.1.10-11) and appear consistently grouped together (three-as-one) with fog and lightning swirling about them as they chant and summon the visions later in the story. While the actions of the weird sisters undeniably count as stereotypical "witchy" behavior—spell-making, body part snatching, having familiars (bats, cats), conjuring Hecate and omens of the future—Von's illustrations stress the sisters' roles as elemental, otherworldly figures over and above their gender identity. This emphasis provides a helpful context with which to analyze the graphic novel's treatment of Lady Macbeth's character and motivations.

The "unsex me here" speech is contained in one large, page-long frame, and it is enclosed in a speech bubble rimmed with licking flames (15). Every sentence is punctuated by an exclamation mark. These two details immediately communicate the impassioned, forceful nature of the passage's content. Lady Macbeth stands in the backlit window of a castle tower; the golden glow behind her further fuels the fieriness of the moment and suggests a gateway to Hell. Filling the window, Lady Macbeth stands, arms upstretched with clenched fists. While we can only barely see them here, her nails are painted dark red and are sharp, almost like claws or talons. She faces the reader front-on, defiantly, and we only see the top two-thirds of her body. Her scarlet hooded cloak whips in the wind, and her heavy gold jewelry sets off her cut arm muscles. With her furled brow, angry wide eyes, and mouth opened in invocation, this Lady Macbeth means business. Her body posture projects aggression and incredible strength, and our eyes are immediately drawn to her figure before tracking down the page to the "enflamed" text of the speech. The text itself, while offering a narrative of Lady Macbeth's imagined actions, is also a part of the image presentation. This design merges image and meaning in a way that icons themselves do. As a result, we as readers are encouraged to experience this page-long, arresting frame as a powerful, self-defining moment when speech and image combine to create Lady Macbeth's iconic value.

Notably, this is the only time in the illustrated play that Lady Macbeth wears a hooded robe. The only other characters who wear such an article of clothing are the three witches. The reader therefore is visually led to associate the supernatural figures with the potent queen. The red robe and red nails are also not incidental. Since we do not see much of her body's shape in this robe, I read the red color not as indicative of sexual power per se, but rather with regard to the bloody deeds she intends to carry out and the blood she is asking to stop up her "natural" pity. The red nails prefigure the

bloody hands she will have later, as well as the “out damned spot” speech. Additionally, they resonate with the other fire-related details of the frame. The overall argument of the frame is that Lady Macbeth is allying herself with the dark supernatural, becoming witch-like if not a witch entirely. Her power is fueled by the flames of passionate ambition and desire, but this fire also will lead to her damnation. Von’s version of the “unsex me here” speech does not leave room for Lady Macbeth to be anything but evil and dangerous, no matter how impressive or formidable her presentation.

This moment of power and assertiveness starkly contrasts the sleepwalking scene in 5.1. In fact, Von’s illustrations are almost mirror opposites in terms of the color scheme, tone, and sartorial symbolism (not to mention the act-scene numeration). The several pages dedicated to 5.1 are washed in dark greys, blues, white, and black (74-76). Partly this is because the scene is set at night. However, the sickly pallor of Lady Macbeth, the doctor, and the female attendant lends an ominous and even ghostly quality to the passage. In contrast to the fiery red robe and contained hair of Lady Macbeth in 1.5, here her black glossy locks are unbound and fall in loose waves around her shoulders. This rendering of her long, lush hair signals a return to traditional (here, pretty and vulnerable) femininity, as well as the fact that we’ve caught her in a private moment. The panel depicting the “Out, damned spot” speech (75, 5.1.30-34) shows Lady Macbeth staring wide-eyed and agape at her grey-blue claw-nailed hands while garbed in a long, flowing white robe open down the center.

Interestingly, her mouth is rouged in purple, and her ample cleavage and belly are exposed against the folds of her clothing. These illustrative choices define Lady Macbeth clearly as all woman and a sexualized one at that; but we are led to understand that point in the context of her “undoing”—physically, mentally, emotionally, and politically. Her undone hair, undone robe, and words indicating an undone mind and plot all signal her reduction into a cipher of madness and female victimhood. She is the object spoken *about* by the attendant and doctor. Her actions are watched, judged, and classified. She has a voice, but the voice is contained in opposition to her body, which has become an anxious spectacle of surveillance rather than the determined instrument of agency. Von’s reading of the play gives us a Lady Macbeth whose power and desires are comprehensible only by her becoming an asexual, ambiguously gendered “other”; the woman divested of her purpose and success falls back into the compartment of sexualized object. The difference in treatments of her character here is unusual; as mentioned earlier, typically, witches are known for their sexual seduction powers and their physical orgiastic encounters with the Devil. Von’s portrayal of Lady Macbeth separates out these elements and relegates the woman to a safer stereotypical role.

Classical Comics’ *Macbeth: The Graphic Novel* (Original Text, 2008) similarly uses the unabridged play text as its core. The tag on the front cover claims that the play will be “brought to life in full color.” Similar to Von’s portrayal of Lady Macbeth, Jon Haward’s Lady is allied with demonic spirits and hellfire. However, Haward does not closely connect up the weird sisters and Lady Macbeth through visual cues of dress and scenery. Rather, the witches fit more traditional visual stereotypes of evil conjurers, while this Lady Macbeth relies more on her wifely position and femininity to establish her power. The “unsex me” speech is the one moment in this

illustrated play where her power seems grounded in aid from evil spirits; yet we as readers are encouraged to see this as related to her sexuality.

In 1.1 and 1.3 of the adaptation, Haward's witches are illustrated with both close up facially focused panels and several group panels featuring the three chanting or conjuring the wind (8, 12-15). The jagged bare tree and bat (signs of the "spooky") show up in the very first frame but not much thereafter. In this way, these two objects briefly set the tone but do not suggest, as in Von's portrayal, a continued reminder of the witches' affiliations with dark nature. And while the lightning and wind's presence in nearly every panel in these two scenes might seem to contradict my previous assertion, it is interesting to note that they, too, seem more atmospheric than symbolic, in providing stormy visual sound effects and a reason for the artist's repeated attention to the witches' blow-away stringy hair. The witches are not otherworldly elementals, but rather conjurers of disorder, which their actions throughout the adaptation highlight.

Many panels provide close-up shots of the weird sisters, and these emphasize their monstrous appearance: unruly grey hair, glowing red eyes, pointy teeth, warty green skin, scraggly beards, snout or hooked noses, tattered robes, and skull-and-bones accessories. Their humanity seems tenuous at best; they look more akin to the orcs in the *Lord of the Rings* movies or the typical monsters in a *Scooby-Doo* cartoon than anything else. Haward builds on these early sketches in 4.1, where he focuses the illustrations on the unusual arcane ingredients of the cauldron and the burning fires that surround the maid-mother-crone Janus-face of Hecate as she calls on the weird sisters (78-86). In the flame-ridden background, the reader can see fairies, eyeless dripping-jawed monsters, and horned beastmen—all with the telltale evil red eyes of the witches.

While there remains some gender ambiguity in these figures' appearances, and their natures do not seem at all sexual in nature, they clearly are affiliated with traditional female witch stereotypes. Still, their visual presence seems markedly distinct from that of Haward's Lady Macbeth. They all may call on the demonic, but they do this in very separate registers. In this way, it is hard to see a very strong connection between the weird sisters and the lady; however, we might understand them as similar in the sense that they present two different models of female agency. And both models rely on dark forces to underwrite their power.

The "unsex me" speech is split between two of three horizontal frames on the page, and notably, the "speech" occurs completely in thought bubbles (21). The series of thought clouds, in sets of three and two, creates an extended, devious internal monologue. This invocation exists completely in Lady Macbeth's mind, making the act seem an example of borderline madness or psychopathic design. The internalization of her deadly plans highlights the bad thoughts that lead to later bad deeds. To all appearances, she is not a witch; she is a sexy, clever woman. But this pretty façade barely disguises her thirst for power and domination, keeping her well within the realm of consideration for potential sorceress.

In the first frame of the speech, she stands in the shadow of a tower window, gazing outside at the misty night sky (complete with ominous full moon) and the interior walls of the fortress. We see her face in dark profile, as the thought bubbles cascade, like the mist, to the right of the frame. This establishes a strong contrast to the second frame, in which the speech culminates (see figure 1). Here, Lady Mac-

beth faces the reader front-on, with her eyes closed and her rosy lips parted. Her slightly claw-like hands grasp her own bulbous breasts, while her gold-bound long dark braids bounce off her shoulders. She seems to sway to the side, seductively entranced, with her dark crimson gold-edged gown flaring behind her. The backdrop is constructed of orange and yellow flames, with demonic howling horned faces drawn into them.

The arrangement of this frame makes the reader into a voyeur. Her bodily posture and expression suggest we are witnessing an autoerotic moment, as if the very



Figure 1: “Come to my woman’s breasts. . .” (21). Copyright © Classical Comics.

thought of her calling on the spirits to unsex her has had the opposite effect—it turns her on and makes her orgasm. Two of the background spirits seem to reinforce this idea, as the one on the left is staring directly at her grasped breasts, and the one directly on the right glares menacingly at her waist and genital area (conveniently highlighted by a low-sitting gold girdle that has a knot at the V of her legs). One might see this as Haward’s literal interpretation of the line “Come to my woman’s breasts” (1.5.45), but I suspect it is a choice to present Lady Macbeth’s body as titillating and her power as sexually driven and sexually available to characters and readers alike. Such buxom, sexualized women are no strangers to the pages of many graphic novels, comics, and cartoons; they seem to be stock figures attractive to a male target audience.<sup>22</sup> Haward’s Lady Macbeth thus falls back into stereotypical female power roles as well. While at her zenith, Von’s Lady manifests her power as a kind of asexual fourth witch, Haward’s appears as a succubus who dances with the fires and denizens of hell.

We strongly get a sense of this through its contrast in the 5.1 sleepwalking scene (104-107). The panels are washed in the grey-blue of a nighttime scene, and Lady Macbeth is constantly illuminated with a single taper she carries and then sets down

on a table. Gone are the fires, the confidence, and the focus on her sexuality. The Lady Macbeth in this scene is unadorned, unbound by crown or belt or robe, and wanders distractedly through the halls of the castle (104-105). While her breasts are softly outlined in the dress in 5.1, no skin or marked cleavage is revealed. Rather, we as readers are encouraged to focus on her now unbraided shiny jet black hair and her anxious face, with pinched brows and wide eyes. All of these signs create the sense that she is emotionally vulnerable and untethered to the power, ambition, and sexual energy that once anchored her. Her unraveling is further communicated via the uneven wavy boundaries of her speech bubbles, in contrast to the uniform oval lines surrounding those of the doctor and attendant. She stares into a wall mirror during the “out damned spot” speech, providing a unique moment of self-reflection, self-accusation, and reflexive judgment; she is criminal, judge, and jury in the dream state she occupies. The scene has turned Lady Macbeth into an object of her own surveillance, even as the doctor, the attendant, and we as readers continue to look on. Haward’s depiction of Lady Macbeth seems to operate in a nearly opposite manner to that of Von’s—she begins as a powerful, sexualized agent of change and ends up a desexualized, unbounded subject-object.

Turning now to the manga editions of *Macbeth*, it is worth briefly reviewing the key traits of the art style and examining its differences from traditional American comics. Manga originated in Japan, and many of its techniques were influenced by the work of a 1940s artist named Osamu Tezuka.<sup>23</sup> Today, manga is more popular than ever in the U. S. and a number of its stylistic techniques have worked their way into American comics and graphic novels (particularly the latter). Scott McCloud explains how the use of “iconic characters,” “sense of place,” “variety of character designs,” and “subjective motion” (among other techniques) contribute to manga’s success in making readers feel more like they are a part of the action versus watching it from afar.<sup>24</sup> Whereas North American comics focus on character positioning—a physical expression—to convey emotion, manga represents the internal self and its emotions often through “a montage of floating, expressive faces, cascading down the page” or “the exaggerated transformations of entire bodies.”<sup>25</sup> Will Eisner also notes that in comic art “The reader is expected to participate. Reading the imagery requires experience and allows acquisition at the viewer’s pace. The reader must internally provide sound and action in support of the images.”<sup>26</sup> Like graphic novels, manga works call on their audience to be active participants in the creation of the experience and the interpretation of meaning.

In many ways, therefore, this “experiential” vs. observer approach to artistically rendering the text may equal or even exceed the performative nature of a stage production, where the actors often attempt to involve the audience in what they’re watching but audience participation is not required for the production to be successful. The manga reader may identify more with the characters represented and hence be more involved in unpacking their words and actions. In the introductory essay to *Shakespeare’s Macbeth: The Manga Edition* (2008), Adam Sexton, one of the co-creators, states that

Perusing a Shakespeare manga, the reader can linger over speeches, rereading them in part or altogether. . . . this allows for an appreciation of the

playwright's craft that is difficult if not impossible as those soliloquies move past us during a performance. Overall, turning the pages of a manga version of one of Shakespeare's plays is something like reading the text of that play while attending a performance, but at one's own pace.<sup>27</sup>

Sexton reminds us of the benefits of the textual and artistic fixity of this medium, while also celebrating its potential performativity. Manga thus has the dual benefit of graphically performing actions while more deeply involving the reader in the interior lives of Shakespeare's characters.<sup>28</sup>

*Shakespeare's Macbeth—The Manga Edition* presents the play primarily in the shōjo style, with its intense focus on the characters' bodies, facial expressions, and positions in each frame. As a result, the play's plot becomes much more psychological in nature, and readers are invited into the minds and emotions of the characters in an intimate way. The visual cues attached to the characters and their interactions with one another thus can seem overdetermined and dramatic in order to convey the strength of emotion in any given scene. This manga edition of the play openly argues that the power of women is located in seduction and manipulation. The witches are unequivocally portrayed as scheming women who tease and tempt Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth becomes a black widow figure, luring her husband into her ambitious plans with smiles and embraces only to eventually destroy him. While this reading of the play certainly ascribes significant power to women, it also falls back on uncomplicated notions of their characters, demonizing their sexuality and lumping them together under the stereotype of the *femme fatale*.

The focus on the witches' bodies in the manga edition strikes one from the start. On page 8, during the "Where the place . . . Fair is foul and foul is fair" passage (1.1.10-11), the reader finds three long rectangular inset boxes on a page-long panel, each featuring the hair, lower face, and neck of a weird sister. Their beady, malicious eyes are blanked out, though, covered instead by a speech bubble ("See no evil"?). Immediately, we are encouraged to think of the archetypal female model of maid-mother-crone, as each witch is successively older moving left to right. Age is visually marked by hair consistency and style, skin wrinkles, and dress model. The youngest, "maid," sister has long, thick, luscious hair that curls around her face and shoulders; the artist calls on familiar symbolism of curly, lush hair to indicate sexiness and seductiveness. Her face is without blemish, and she wears a clingy strapless dress with a tendril-wave pattern on the top bust-line, echoing the curves of her hair. The second, "mother," sister's hair is upswept into a bun with a few strands escaping to brush her face. She has age lines under her cheeks and around her mouth, and her slim long dress is made more modest by a wrap that drapes around her back and across her front, concealing any cleavage. Finally, the "crone" sister shows her significant age with long stringy hair that maintains a slight wave but not nearly the snaky waves of her younger companions. Her figure is hidden in a shapeless robe, and wrinkles extend vertically all over her face.

There are enough visual similarities between the figures that we might consider them aspects of one evil superwoman, which makes the connections to Lady Macbeth later in the work much more appreciable. But it is not just looks that ally the four; additionally, the witches' bodily positioning to Macbeth in later cauldron vi-

sion scenes suggests the parallel (118-135). The scene opens with a fully hooded and cloaked Macbeth entering a cave mouth dripping with spiderwebs and moss. The interior of the cave adds teeth-like stalactite details, making the cave into, effectively, a *vagina dentata*. The witches circle him, touch him, seduce him with eye and lip and tongue (which features are highlighted in inset box panels within larger scenes). Since this behavior so closely mimics that of Lady Macbeth's in the "unsex me here" speech and beyond, the artists' renderings argue that to be a powerful woman is to use one's sexual wiles and clever tongue to seduce and entrap.

The "unsex me here" speech occurs in two closely placed frames but is followed by three small blocked frames, which are significant for understanding these illustrators' take on Lady Macbeth's power (26-27). In all but one, we get a tight focus on a part of Lady Macbeth's body, tracking us through her emotions. In the first, we view a close-up of her long-fingered, long-nailed hand trailing across her dark lips (26). Her brow is knitted and her gaze off to the side of the page. She wears a dress with a modesty veil above the relatively low neckline, casting a seemly aura about her person. As she calls on the spirits to unsex her and come to her breasts in two successive speech bubbles, we witness her distracted gaze and pensive pose. The emotional intensity is heightened in the bottom frame, however, as we see only her dark-pupiled eye and disheveled dark locks. We, as readers, look directly into her eye as she calls on the night. The effect is one of introspection and singular focus. We are invited to dive into her thoughts here, which seem to swirl about. Lady Macbeth's power appears to be in her plotting—not in her supernatural connections and not in a hypersexualized body and clothing.

Lady Macbeth, while not a sexual object per se in this manga edition, does not evade the power/sex dynamic completely. In the following three frames at the top of the next page, we get close-ups of Lady Macbeth staring back toward a bare-chested and finely muscled young Macbeth (27). This is followed by a shot of her seemingly lipsticked bow-shaped mouth drawn up in a smile. (Notably, this smile resembles those of the witches earlier in the play adaptation.) The final frame at the top contains Lady Macbeth enthusiastically planting a kiss on a wide-eyed and shocked Macbeth. He seems to be holding his hands up in surprise, while her hands cradle his face. This would appear innocuous enough—the lady is happy to see her husband and greets him with a loving kiss—except that we have just heard of her dark plans. The successive frames show her pulling him in tighter and tighter to the point of touching foreheads as she asks in pieces about Duncan's arrival and proposes that she'll take care of the plan to do away with him. Her "loving" hands and arms thus act on this page as winches to wind him into her embrace and plot. The Macbeth in these images looks surprised at best, and even more, dubious and wary. The illustrators Sexton, Grandt, and Chow, instead of making Lady Macbeth into a witch or sex kitten, place her into a different, still sexualized power category: the "black widow"/man-eater. We even get a visual clue of this portrayal, for Lady Macbeth's relatively modest gown is covered in a spiderweb pattern. Her body becomes the widow amidst the webs, and in these frames she pulls in her mate to consume him.

The widow seems to have lost all her energy and power, though, by the time she reaches the sleepwalking scene. At first glance, the manga edition appears very similar to Haward's rendition. Lady Macbeth wanders the castle's stone halls carrying a taper

and delivers her ruminations and self-condemnations near a mirror (158-61). However, some of these features work a bit differently than the previous edition's. First, Lady Macbeth's dress is far more somber and shapeless—a black shift and formless thick robe—and this reminds us more of the garb of the crone witch than anything else, as if Lady Macbeth has run her political and life courses to their ends. It also may portend her forthcoming suicide. Her hairstyle remains essentially the same—partly upheld in a bun, partly left long to frame her face and shoulders. What the illustrations most draw our attention to are her wide, narrow-pupiled eyes with wrinkly bags under them (a sign of sleeplessness, but also a sign of age) and long, slim-fingered hands she continually waves and clenches as she speaks. These elements fit nicely with the associated “out damned spot” passage and Lady Macbeth's neurotic need to wash clean phantom blood and moral sin. Instead of using the mirror to give Lady Macbeth one more moment of agency (being the looker), the artists instead have it in the background, prop-like, perhaps to signal to readers simply that this is a reflective moment. She keeps her back to the mirror the whole scene, and this suggests her inability to face her own deeds. The visual cues of this passage completely erase the seductive, poisonous power of Lady Macbeth and reduce her to nothing more than an anxious babbler with one foot in the grave. The *femme fatale* poses a threat no longer.<sup>29</sup>

Of the four editions treated in this essay, *Manga Shakespeare: Macbeth* (2008), illustrated by Robert Deas, provides the most provocative treatment of Lady Macbeth. In some ways it adheres to the hypersexualized female power stereotypes described earlier. However, Deas's casting of Lady Macbeth as an action heroine challenges an easy and monolithic reading. I would argue that this presentation best captures the gender complexities of her role and offers a vision of female empowerment that is more inclusive of women's range of physical and emotional qualities.

This version of *Macbeth* is set in a futuristic Japanese techno-world “of post-nuclear mutation.”<sup>30</sup> Aside from the visual *dramatis personae* section, the majority of the manga is printed in black and white, creating a bleak tone for the piece and emphasizing the shapes and patterns of lines and dots constituting each image. Interestingly, this stark contrast in style carries over into the characters' portrayals; they vary in their dress between traditional Japanese garb (kimonos, obi sashes, samurai armor) and modern, more Western-style clothing (tank tops with track pants, army fatigue pants with utility belts, army dress uniforms). The conscientious juxtaposition of past, present, and future dress is somewhat disorienting visually but indicates that the issues the play grapples with are grounded in the past (Shakespeare's seventeenth-century England) yet continue and will continue to be critical ones across time and cultures.<sup>31</sup>

Further complicating and enriching the interpretive value of this adaptation are the characters that appear inhuman or differently figured. The witches, whom I will discuss in more detail shortly, are depicted as serpentine humanoids that hover above the ground in fiery red kimonos. Alternately, Macduff is a hulking, muscular man with blue skin and two sets of arms, one set of which is extensively tattooed. The overall effect of these narrative and illustrative choices is to make the adaptation into a superhero sci-fi rendition of *Macbeth*. Both superhero comics and science fiction have for many years served as important platforms for writers and artists to explore cultural assumptions about social and political norms, as well as to imagine alternative realities.

Deas nods to the Japanese heritage of manga, while engaging two other key genres to provide ample proving ground for his examination of the play's subject matter. In particular, Deas's choices of venue and character dress highlight the complex gender and power dynamics surrounding the alien witches and heroic Lady Macbeth.

Jeffrey Brown contends that action heroines are critically important precisely because they are boundary-straddlers:

She [the action heroine] does muddy the waters of what we consider masculine and feminine, of desirable beauty and threatening sexuality, of subjectivity and objectivity, of powerful and powerless. Rather than replicating the simplistic binary logic that our society all too often resorts to for interpreting the world around us, the contestability of the action heroine challenges our basic assumptions and may force a new understanding of cultural norms.<sup>32</sup>

Deas's Lady Macbeth, who takes control of her own destiny, claims her desires, and works alongside her husband to achieve power in a world turned strange by previous conflicts, is just such a figure. His Lady Macbeth may be highly sexualized in form, but she possesses the visual props of a powerful dominatrix; her striking appearance is simply a part of her, not a blatant tool of seduction in the world of the story. Further, her suicide is portrayed in more detail and somewhat ambiguously, opening up the possibility that it wasn't simply a result of her mental breakdown but was more of a "death before dishonor" effort. While the landscape and some characters may seem startlingly alien to the *Macbeth* story and our own expectations of it, Deas uses these various juxtapositions to question the norms themselves and offer a more sympathetic and heroic vision of Lady Macbeth.

The narrative opens with a two-page spread showing a bleak, ashy landscape littered with toppled skyscrapers and in the foreground, heaps of fallen samurai soldiers with arrows and swords sticking out of their dead bodies. Lightning cracks across the sky. The three "witches" hover off to the right of the right-hand page, staring at the destruction and human carnage before them (12-13). Their long white hair ripples in waves behind them and their kimonos drape to points, almost like tails. They have no discernible legs, but they do not require them as they hover above the earth. Their large, oblong faces possess sharply angled features and slitted, upturned eyes with extended wavy eyebrow tendrils. The notches on their throats and brows suggest reptilian scales. While they seem to possess the shadow of a slight bustline in their robes, they are not decidedly female or male in appearance. Casting the witches as snaky aliens and establishing the play's heath as a post-apocalyptic wasteland contribute to the tumultuous and anxious mood that the opening scenes establish. The sense of "otherness" is pervasive.

Those choices also resonate more deeply with particular lines. "When the hurlyburly's done, when the battle's lost and won" (12, 1.1.3-4) references fighting between warlords, but it also reminds the reader of the nuclear fallout of a previous war that ended in the mutation and annihilation of countless people and parts of civilization itself. Banquo's remark to Macbeth about the weird sisters, "What are these, so withered and so wild in their attire, that look not like the inhabitants of the earth?"

(28, 1.3.37-39), draws our attention to the fact that these are not women at all, but *aliens*, and makes their encounter even more unpredictable and potentially frightening. Did the aliens have anything to do with the nuclear holocaust? Are they here to take over now that humanity has suffered a blow? Or are they simply eerie observers and forecasters of humanity's failings? Regardless, these otherworldly creatures are not arcane but extraterrestrial, and thus the thematic and gendered connections to Lady Macbeth's character in this manga edition would seem tenuous at best.<sup>33</sup>

Deas's portrayal of Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" speech is similarly a dramatic two-page spread with two inset panels on the right-hand page (50-51). A huge communications tower rises to Lady Macbeth's back left. She stands on a rocky and somewhat phallic precipice, legs spread in an aggressive stance, one hand cut and bleeding while the other is raised aloft clutching a bloody dagger (see figure 2). Her clothing blends the dominatrix with the geisha: thigh high boots connected by garter straps to a mini-skirt; a tight, ribbed bodice with an inverted v hemline accentuating the creased v of fabric at her crotch; an off-the shoulder geisha robe with trailing sleeves and neckline exposing her unnaturally large and round breasts. Her face is angular and sharp, eyes wide and furious, mouth open and screaming the lines, hair in a large clubbed bun that could be geisha or samurai in style. Around her swirl three shadowy dragon spirits and four small speech bubbles with brief lines from the speech. Notably, this is the most truncated form of the speech out of the four editions.

It would be easy to dismiss this image as quasi-pornographic and crafted for male titillation. The clothing leaves nothing to the imagination, and Lady Macbeth's sexual-



Figure 2: "Come, you spirits. . ." (50-51). Copyright © SelfMadeHero, 2008. Illustrations by Rob Deas.

ity is apparent in her plenteous bosom and the v-patterned emphases on her genital area. She is clearly in control here, not represented as a sexualized victim, but rather as a woman who is both sexually potent and dominant. Her dominance comes out in a number of ways, though, which makes this image particularly arresting. While she comes across as sexually provocative, she is also the one standing tall and firm on the cliff and controlling the phallic dagger. Her confident possession of both the space and weapon are reflected in her stature and aggressive stare directly at the reader. She reads as a combination of a geisha-dominatrix-samurai.<sup>34</sup> Lady Macbeth is dressed to entice and entertain; she owns that attraction and uses it powerfully; she takes control and becomes the woman-warrior, a rival to the male soldiers of the play.

The dragon spirits are an additionally interesting feature to this reading. While there is a loose parallel to the three reptilian witches, the resemblance here is not nearly as strong as to make the parallel obvious or sure. She calls on them with the blood sacrifice from her hand, but they don't seem to be interested in attacking her or staring at her body lasciviously. They swirl in the background with sharp-toothed jaws, echoing the open-mouthed rage she expresses. Dragons have a number of meanings in Japanese culture, but most of them do not connote evil nor mark the creatures as harbingers of hell. Most often dragons are water spirits or avatars of the ancestors, particularly emperors.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps then, these dragon spirits are included to empower Lady Macbeth with warrior knowledge, confidence, and divine aid and purpose from past generations. If we go a step further and take them as imperial avatars, their invocation signals a kind of spiritual and political investiture that foreshadows her role as queen. Lady Macbeth's apex of power would be symbolized by the visual imagery of the dragons, the tower, the cliff, and her sexualized, angry, aroused body.

Despite the edgy dress it portrays, Deas's illustration ultimately provides a less misogynistic (if not unproblematic) vision of Lady Macbeth's power and motives. She participates in the physical and political life of her world and uses all of the qualities she possesses to succeed in it. Her beauty and sexuality are but two of these weapons. She wields a dagger and her words with just as much skill. In this way, Deas refashions Lady Macbeth's iconography to appeal to a generation of readers more comfortable with and excited by the idea of an ambitious, sexually powerful woman doing what it takes to obtain her desires.

But does Deas's depiction of the sleepwalking scene change her into a cipher or sexualized object and rob her of the power she claims in the "unsex me here" moment, as occurs in the other graphic editions of the play? At first, the answer appears to be yes; but again, Deas complicates such an easy conclusion. The sleepwalking passage here, similar to those described earlier, shows Lady Macbeth in her robe wandering the halls of the castle. Her robe is parted down the middle to the navel, exposing ample cleavage. Her hair has come slightly undone, with wisps sticking out from the bun. She seems upset and unaware of the onlookers (154-58).

Gone, however, are the candles, mirrors, and fearful looks. The panels switch between facial shots and close-ups of her hands and mouth. Her face appears to swing between concern and anger: pursed lips or open screaming mouth, tension lines on her forehead, eyes open and thin-pupiled but not exaggerated (156-57). The different emotions portrayed here, as well as the illustrative focus on hands and

mouths, keeps our attention on how, even in sleep, Lady Macbeth is a woman of action—both in words and deeds. She is worried and angry but fears nobody. The cuts to Shakespeare's text help reinforce this image: gone are the nervous repetitive phrases, the cries of "O!," the query about Lady Macduff. Deas's Lady Macbeth speaks in declarations: "Out, damned spot! Out I say!"; "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown."; "Come, give me your hand." We can conclude that this Lady Macbeth offers an alternative reading of her character—that in her last moments, she is defeated politically but maintains her willful spirit and agency.

In a departure from the play and the previous graphic editions discussed, Deas does not end Lady Macbeth's illustrated presence with that scene. Intercut with



Figure 3: "Out, out, brief candle. . ." (180). Copyright © SelfMadeHero, 2008. Illustrations by Rob Deas.

panels of Macbeth discussing the possibilities of a siege with Seyton are several showing Lady Macbeth actually jumping from the edge of a building and plummeting to her death (176-77, 5.5). Her cry during the fall is recognized by Macbeth's query and Seyton's response that "It is the cry of women, my good lord" (177, 5.5.8). Whether Lady Macbeth was, in this edition, supposed to be truly "mad" or not, her suicide suggests that she wanted to take control of the one thing she knew she absolutely could—her life. We can conjecture whether her suicide was initiated out of illness or a purposeful decision to escape dishonor and capture or death at the hand of the enemy. Yet the fact that Deas includes those scenes heightens our sympathy with her and sets up the fateful climax that follows.

Several panels later, Macbeth is brought news of his wife's death and we see him rushing to her fallen corpse (179). Her body is splayed out, with collision cracks radiating out from her head and her eyes, nose, and mouth oozing blood. Macbeth delivers his "Out, out, brief candle!" speech kneeling, clutching a sword in his right hand and Lady Macbeth's broken body to his chest with his left one (180, 5.5.22-27). Against the backdrop of destroyed skyscrapers, lightning arcs down from the sky (see figure 3). We know that Macbeth is

about to die at the hands of Macduff, so this brief interlude in some ways foreshadows the sense that just as the Macbeths were united in life, so they shall be in death. It additionally reminds us, however, that Macbeth thought of his wife as his “dear partner of greatness” and while overly ambitious, the couple may have had a more caring and equal relationship than many.

By showing Lady Macbeth’s suicide and Macbeth’s physical and emotional response to it, both characters are humanized and recognized as complex beings, rather than reduced to tyrannical villain-types. Lady Macbeth doesn’t disappear into silence either; she holds a place by her husband’s side and chooses her end. These elements ally her with other woman warrior figures from ancient and modern popular cultures, who fight hard and are acknowledged by men not just for their beauty, but for their intelligence and talents: the Greek goddesses Athena and Artemis; the Amazons; Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni; Xena, Warrior Princess; Starbuck in *Battlestar Galactica*; Selene in the *Underworld* series; Buffy the vampire slayer; and even Disney’s Mulan (their G-rated cousin).

Deas’s renderings of Lady Macbeth allow her to become a new world tragic hero. She is no less ruthless in this incarnation, but instead of being reduced to an evil or deranged cipher, her power rises, explodes, and dies with her. As Brown aptly notes, “. . . the tough action heroine is a transgressive character not because she operates outside of gender restrictions but because she straddles both sides of the psychoanalytic gender divide. She is both subject and object, looker and looked at, ass-kicker and sex object.”<sup>36</sup> Straddling past and present genres, gender norms and transgressions, and empowered and powerless positions, Lady Macbeth continues to stand firm as one of Shakespeare’s most provocative iconic figures.

### Notes

I would like to thank the members of the 2010 Shakespeare Association of America conference seminar, “Shakespeare’s Female Icons,” for their helpful feedback on and encouragement of this essay in its early stages. Particular thanks go to Francesca Royster for her leadership of the seminar and editorial efforts for this special journal issue.

1. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 22.
2. Cristina León Alfar, “‘Blood Will Have Blood’: Power, Performance, and Lady Macbeth’s Gender Trouble,” *Journal x: A Journal in Culture and Criticism* 2.2 (Spring 1998): 180.
3. We might also think about how these illustrated works function as “palimpsests” in the ways in which they reenvision and often reset the play. As Hutcheon reminds us, “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works [are] haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly” (6-22). And yet, this experience does not preclude us evaluating the adaptive works on their own critical terms. My epigraph also speaks to this idea, as the reader/viewer/audience requires prior remembrance and knowledge of the original text in order to recognize familiar character and plot patterns in the adaptation but also to be able to discriminate its departures and their significance.
4. See William Shakespeare (w) and Von (i), *Macbeth*, Cartoon Shakespeare/Graphic Shakespeare

Library (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 1982); William Shakespeare (w) and Jon Haward (i), *Macbeth: The Graphic Novel—Original Text* (Litchborough, Towcester, UK: Classical Comics, Ltd., 2008); William Shakespeare (w) and Adam Sexton, Eve Grandt, and Candice Chow (i), *Shakespeare's Macbeth: The Manga Edition* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2008); and William Shakespeare (w) and Robert Deas (i), *Manga Shakespeare: Macbeth* (New York: Amulet Books, 2008).

5. In this way, I see Deas's manga edition potentially doing some important cultural work. As Julie Sanders offers, "The adaptation of Shakespeare invariably makes him 'fit' for new cultural contexts and different political ideologies to those of his own age." See Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 46. It is notable that more recent films, graphic novels, and manga have not reenvisioned Lady Macbeth in a significantly progressive manner. While Deas's work may not fully count as gender progressive, I do think it provides a more empowered vision of Lady Macbeth than is traditionally offered in popular media.
6. Georgianna Ziegler, "Accommodating the Virago: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Lady Macbeth," in *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, ed. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 137.
7. *Ibid.*, 122-29.
8. Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (London: Bell, 1909). Ziegler notes that Jameson's work was so popular that it went through approximately forty reprints between its first publication in 1832 and 1911. See Ziegler, 121.
9. Ziegler, 129-35.
10. *Ibid.*, qtd. on 138.
11. *Ibid.* For a fascinating study examining theatrical portrayals of Lady Macbeth and their connections to attitudes about America's First Ladies, see Gay Smith, *Lady Macbeth in America: From the Stage to the White House* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). As Smith rightly notes, "Just as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth posed dramatic questions about women in power in his own time, the actors interpreting Lady Macbeth in America have reflected audience's questions about powerful political wives in their times" (185).
12. Stephen Orgel, "Shakespeare Illustrated," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91. Orgel sees film as essentially the successor to a long tradition of illustrated print adaptations of Shakespeare, and one that is particularly sensitive to shifts in cultural values. While I agree with him to a point, this essay demonstrates that graphic novels and manga continue a lively illustrated history for Shakespeare's texts and are increasingly being granted critical attention as complex Shakespearean adaptations and as worthy literary-artistic works in their own right. Douglas Lanier also discusses how "the graphic novelization of Shakespeare takes up and extends the conversion of Shakespeare to visual form so central to film Shakespeare of the nineties." See Lanier, "Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital," *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 110. Lanier is especially interested in the transfer of popularity, "cultural capital," and critical investment from 1990s Shakespearean film adaptations to the growing industry of graphic novel and manga editions of the plays.
13. *Macbeth*, directed by Nikolai Serebriakov, *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*, vol. 4 (1992; New

York: Ambrose Video Publishing, Inc., 2004), DVD; 1.5.45. All citations from the play may be found in William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Volume 2, The Later Plays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 845-98.

14. *Siberian Lady Macbeth*, directed by Andrzej Wajda (1962; Kino Video, 2002), DVD.
15. *Macbeth*, directed by Geoffrey Wright (2006; United States: Starz/Anchor Bay, 2009), DVD.
16. The exception here would be manga, which offers shōjo style works for girls and “ladies” books for adult women.
17. Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 11.
18. For examples of this trend, we can look to the increase (however gradual) of women writers and illustrators in the comic arts field who are subtly pushing back on dominant gender ideology, as well as language usage trends in Japanese manga. As Ueno’s study shows, the female characters in shōjo and ladies’ manga tend more often to use nontraditional language inflections and vocabulary; in other words, they are appropriating inflections and words usually reserved only for men. These works demonstrate, in effect, an expansion of girls’ and women’s range of emotional and intellectual expression. For more on this, see Junko Ueno, “*Shōjo* and Adult Women: A Linguistic Analysis of Gender Identity in *Manga* (Japanese Comics),” *Women and Language* 29.1 (Spring 2006): 16-25, and Wendy Siuyi Wong and Lisa M. Cuklanz, “Critiques of Gender Ideology: Women Comic Artists and Their Work in Hong Kong,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 11.3 (Fall 2002): 253-66.
19. Janet Adelman, “‘Born of Woman’: Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*,” in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 97. See also Ziegler, 126, and Dymnna Callaghan, “Wicked Women in *Macbeth*: A Study of Power, Ideology, and the Production of Motherhood,” in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, ed. Mario Di Cesare (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992): 355-69.
20. Alfar, 180.
21. Akira Kurosawa’s film adaptation of *Macbeth*, *Throne of Blood* (1957), notably also adopts this approach to representing the weird sisters (in the figure of the Old Ghost Woman).
22. Women increasingly are an audience for these genres; however, most critics agree that the primary target audience remains male. It is interesting to consider whether such representations of women will remain hypersexualized or change as more women become part of the reading audience. Given the prevalence of idealized body image in women-targeted magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, I would guess that graphic works will not change unless the illustrators and creators make a concentrated effort to differentiate their female figures.
23. “Manga” in Japanese translates roughly to “whimsical pictures.” See Adam Sexton, “Suiting the Action to the Word: Shakespeare and Manga,” in Sexton, Grandt, and Chow, 2. While the word itself gestures to the imaginative and fanciful image style of the genre, it is important to note that manga often take on quite serious and adult subject matter.
24. Scott McCloud, *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels* (New

York: HarperCollins, 2006), 216.

25. *Ibid.*, 220. This style choice is intrinsic to “shojo,” manga works targeted for young women. “Shonen,” male-targeted manga, tends to represent emotion through striking facial gestures and frames with “subjective motion and dizzying p.o.v. framing” (221). The two manga editions of *Macbeth* that I will discuss have qualities of each.
26. Eisner, 69. See also the discussion of this issue in Kevin J. Wetmore, “‘The Amazing Adventures of Superbard’: Shakespeare in Comics and Graphic Novels,” in *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, ed. Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, and Robert L. York (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 173.
27. Sexton, 3.
28. While I do not have space here to fully explore the connection, it is worth mentioning that this reading practice parallels the kind of audience involvement demanded from other modern media, such as multiplayer online video games and social media sites like Facebook. Users are similarly asked to digest visual and textual content, interpret character/friend interactions and plot/news elements, make decisions about their narrative and spatial paths through the material, and determine what that material “means.” This emphasis on audience-media interaction may recognize and mark a shift in the way we read and interpret information as a whole.
29. This manga therefore seems to be borrowing pretty heavily from a film character type. As Jeffrey Brown notes, “The highly sexualized and villainous femme fatale of film noir challenges the masculine presumption of looking. She dares to assume a powerful position—to pursue her own pleasures and desires, to assume her own right to look, and to manipulate the male gaze for her own purposes. The femme fatale ruthlessly and manipulatively goes after whatever she wants . . . [b]ut, by the film’s end, she is thoroughly punished for her transgressive behavior.” See Jeffrey A. Brown, *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 211.
30. Deas, 3.
31. Lanier discusses manga editions’ shift to new and sometimes unusual settings as “consolidating the mobility of Shakespearean narrative” and “extending Shakespeare tales to pop contexts once thought incompatible with the Bard.” Part of the novel setting may be attributed to the primary audience for these works, what he terms “hip geek culture” (110-11). While I tend to agree with Lanier here, I suspect as these works increasingly are mass marketed as educational texts for school use that their novelty and potential “geek factor” may decrease. As I mention earlier in this essay, I also think that the use of alternative settings is in large part a function of genre crossover. Graphic novels and manga regularly borrow from romance, science-fiction, and superhero models, just to name a few, for their characterizations and narratives.
32. Brown, 10.
33. The choice of the science-fiction framework for *Macbeth* is rather unusual. I am aware of only two other adaptations of *Macbeth* that employ it. The first is an issue called “Ray Bradbury’s The Exiles” (1986) in the *Alien Encounters* comic series. Here, the witches of *Macbeth*, along with other literary characters and authors, try to prevent astronauts from destroying the last copies of any non-scientific texts on Earth. (They are unsuccessful.). The other adaptation is a short film created by a group of high school students, called *Star Wars: Macbeth* (2001). Shakespeare’s play

is only a very loose setting for the plot that develops. Descriptions of both these works may be found in *Shakespeares After Shakespeare: An Encyclopedia of the Bard in Mass Media and Popular Culture*, ed. Richard Burt, vol. 1 (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 35, 102.

34. While I would like to leave the possibilities for queer sexuality open in my analysis of Deas's Lady Macbeth, I find Jeffrey Brown's definition of "dominatrix" critically useful to interpreting her: "a complex symbol that combines and exploits power (both physical and social) along the axis of gender (both masculine and feminine)" (59).
35. For more on this subject, see Carol Rose, *Giants, Monsters, and Dragons: An Encyclopedia of Folklore, Legend, and Myth* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2000); Anne C. Petty, *Dragons of Fantasy* (Cold Spring Harbor, NY: Cold Spring Press, 2004); and Joe Nigg, *Wonder Beasts: Tales and Lore of the Phoenix, the Griffin, the Unicorn, and the Dragon* (Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1995).
36. Brown, 47.

## CONDI, CLEOPATRA, AND THE PERFORMANCE OF CELEBRITY

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Condoleeza Rice dismisses *30 Rock*'s humiliated Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin): "Take that, Turkey." The diss comes after a classical "battle of the bands," his flute no match for her agile piano solos.<sup>1</sup> In this dual role as Donaghy's former girlfriend and as herself, Condi is relaxed and elegant as she shoos Jack from her book-lined office. Decked in a spiffy grey tweed Chanel mini-dress and pearls, her smile is more than a little mischievous, reaching beyond him to us, her TV audience. "You'd better leave, Jack, before this gets too weird." And it *is* a little weird. On the surface, Rice's 2011 appearance on *30 Rock* as Jack Donaghy's former girlfriend would seem to be random, even more so than Al Gore's appearance as a Climate Change superhero a few seasons before. What might George W. Bush's former Secretary of State and most trusted member of his cabinet be doing playing a cameo on a show created, directed by, and starring the notoriously liberal Tina Fey? Perhaps Fey is cutting Rice some slack despite their ideological differences in acknowledgment of Rice's success in withstanding the pressures of a male-dominated administration, a struggle similar to that which Fey explores in her own 2011 best-selling memoir of her career as a writer, performer, and director in the male-dominated comedy world, *Bossypants*.<sup>2</sup> Maybe Rice was a little *too* good for her former boss, the episode suggests. The plotline gives a chance to level a criticism at the former administration while also praising Rice. On the show, Jack Donaghy is forced to call on Rice's expertise—despite the fact that things ended badly with her—when his journalist girlfriend Avery is kidnapped by Kim Jong-il. (Jack confesses, among other things, that he'd broken up with Rice by text.) Was Rice underappreciated by the Bush administration? Did she run intellectual circles around Bush, Rumsfeld, and her other colleagues in the same way she runs circles around Jack in the scene? Freed for the moment from the panic of September 11, the shared responsibility of Katrina's mishandling, those missing weapons of mass destruction, and other events that have been sore spots for Bush's presidency, Rice is allowed the upper hand, as well as a sense of humor and her own nerdy beauty (insisting to Jack, for example, that *Mars Attacks* is the best movie of all time). Here, Fey would seem to be expressing a desire that others might also have—to know Rice. What would Condoleeza Rice sound like if she were truly a free agent, without the boundaries of past political loyalties or the pressures of history? Would she be less distanced, more familiar? Would she be funny?

Like other examples of Rice's iconicity, her distance as well as her spectacularity as a beautiful black woman are often at play. Rice's name was first mentioned on the show as the neoconservative Jack Donaghy's down-low inamorata in *30 Rock*'s first season, in 2006. In Season One's "The Break-Up" episode, we discover that Jack is having an undercover affair with an unnamed "highranking African American in George Bush's Administration," as he tells Liz Lemon (Fey). A little later, we hear Jack exchanging love coos with his Condi over the phone but never see her. The two break up because "Condi" doesn't have enough time to spend on their relationship and ap-

parently won't appear in public with him. It's clear, though, that Donaghy still holds a torch for her, and in a mock-courtly flourish he threatens to kick Vladimir Putin's teeth in for daring to touch the small of her back during a diplomatic visit. Condoleeza Rice is the perfect former undercover lover for Jack Donaghy, who is politically connected and a bit of a rake, as well. Single, beautiful, poised and a person of great accomplishment, Rice is an insider in the world that uber-conservative Donaghy most admires. And she is seemingly unattainable—a perfect way to stage Donaghy's own ambitions. Rice serves as an idealized icon of Republican celebrity and glamor, inaccessible and yet the subject of fantasy. Here, Fey and the other *30 Rock* writers might well be bringing a satiric eye to past rumors that Rice was George W. Bush's own down-low inamorata (reinforced by Rice's purported real-time slip of the tongue in calling Bush her "husband" at a Washington, D. C. dinner party), and to the national pastime of matching her with other powerful leaders, including Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay, Moammar Kadafi, and, yes, even Vladamir Putin.

Rice's dominant image as undercover lover of powerful men—despite her impressive intellectual accumen and accomplishment (political science professor, former Stanford Provost, ranked four times one of *Time's* 100 most influential people)—is one of the several ways that she's linked to the iconicity of Shakespeare's Cleopatra. In Shakespeare's, as well as others' writing of her, Cleopatra is a source of desire, distraction, and excess for the already betrothed Mark Antony:

Nay, but this dotage of our General's  
 O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,  
 That o'er the flies and musters of the war  
 Have flowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn  
 The office and devotion of their view  
 Upon a tawny front. (1.1.1-6)<sup>3</sup>

In Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra's tawnniness becomes synomous with her desirability as well as her potential danger to distract. This link between racial difference and sexual power informs the unspoken but still lurking aspect of titillation behind the Condoleeza and George W. Bush rumor. Yet in the same play that Cleopatra is seen hopping in the marketplace among the rabble with her Antony, Cleopatra is also Queen, Egypt itself, larger-than-life image of beauty, sexuality and power. There is often the sensation in *Antony and Cleopatra* that we are watching an icon at work, the idea of a woman, rather than flesh and blood.

While the image of Rice as undercover lover might seem to be in contradiction with her as prim, proper icon of Republican womanhood, I'd like to suggest that these images are really two sides of the same coin—symptoms of the anxiety surrounding Rice as a primarily political figure, as an agent rather than an object of power.

I have to admit that I've shared this anxiety as well. I've wanted to see Condoleeza Rice as the face of power but not necessarily as its source. As I've followed Rice's career, I've wanted to read her choice to work for the Bush administration either as the pawn in a cynical game by others—to put a friendly and brown, feminine face on the War on Terror—or even better as an infiltrator, subverting the structures

of power from within on the highest levels. As I've read her post-Bush Administration memoir, *No Higher Honor*, I've scanned the pages for admissions of shame and disidentification, despite the clear allegiance of the title.<sup>4</sup> I underlined in red pen the glimmers of the personal in her writing, phrases like "I'm still mad at myself,"<sup>5</sup> or even her admission when first meeting George W., "I liked him."<sup>6</sup> I found myself returning to the front cover photo to find accessibility and yes, likeability in her eyes, her crow's feet, her gap-toothed smile that reminds me a little of my sister's.

In this essay, I will explore the links between Condi and Cleopatra, two hypervisible and hypernotorious women haunted by rumor, speculation, and fetishization. Both have bodies whose sexual desires and presentation of racial identity are the subject of avid speculation. Both are wielders of incredible political responsibility, while at the same time serving as figureheads, sometimes at risk of being dismissed as eye candy. Both pique and ultimately resist our knowledge of their political motives. How might we reconcile the desire to "know" Condi and Cleopatra with our admiration for their tantalizing public masks? How might we untangle the desire to watch some unplanned exposure of private self—celebrity shaming—with the desire for political analysis and accountability? In what ways does the machinery of celebrity work in tandem with the mechanisms of neoliberalism and the contemporary postcolonial condition to mystify workings of power, challenging an analysis of conscience or accountability? And what happens after Condoleezza becomes the property of the public? As a still living icon, can she control the narratives that her iconicity suggests in a way that Cleopatra, now a fully fictionalized historical figure, cannot?

If, as many Shakespeareans have documented, the Bard has been appropriated to talk back to empire,<sup>7</sup> we might also think about the ways that Shakespeare's characters and narratives, freed from the immediate context of their surroundings, offer themselves not only to moments of resistance, but also potentially as tools of distraction to resistance in this particular cultural moment. Paul Gilroy suggests that while one of the positive aspects of the postcolonial condition has been the appropriation and annexation of creative space for formerly colonized subjects to "Strike back" against empire through music, literature and other forms of art,<sup>8</sup> yet this acting up and talking back have been countered by the diminishment of rights post-September 11, along with the effective dismantling of the welfare state and the public good through privatization. These forms of oppression appear in the midst of a (revised) discourse of multiculturalism, inclusion, tolerance, and global progress.<sup>9</sup> The juxtaposition of these two states of being, Gilroy suggests, produces a state of melancholia characterized by distraction as much as dis-ease. I'd like to suggest that we can use the Cleopatra icon, as embodied by Condoleezza Rice, as a means to bring to light the political uses of distraction, as well as the dynamics of collaboration, cooptation, and erasure that are an aspect of our current postcolonial state. From the rumors of Condi's love life to the opportunity to laugh with her on *30 Rock*, Rice has continued to serve as a source of distraction, despite the seriousness of her role. Her inclusion in Bush's cabinet, and her highly spectacular presence in press conferences, diplomatic appearances, and elsewhere promotes the ideal of a post-racial present in a way that anticipates uses of the Obamas' image—a distraction perhaps from still salient critiques of white supremacy and racism.

During Rice's service under the Bush administration, as well as afterwards, our culture has been more focused on Rice's mysterious love life than on her political strategy and her shared responsibility for some of the most controversial world events of the twenty-first century thus far. Indeed, we might question whether the sexualization of Rice's role is a mere distraction from her political agency or an acknowledgment of the ways that bodies and desires are part of the political equation. During the Bush administration, Rice's love life has been a concern of both conservative and leftist writers and activists. In his nationally syndicated comic, *The Boondocks*, Aaron McGruder suggests that finding Rice a boyfriend might be the solution to world problems. "Maybe if there was a man of the world who Condoleezza truly loved, she wouldn't be so hell-bent to destroy it," McGruder's precocious young character Caesar suggests.<sup>10</sup> On conservative fan sites, she is an image of grace and sexiness, and the sign of Bush's openness to racial difference—Bush's on-duty trophy wife. In these sites, she, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, is praised for her powerful entrances and her ability to capture the attention of the room. For the organization CODE PINK, a feminist organization that uses the performative tactics of groups like ACT UP and Queer Nation to bring attention to issues like militarization, abortion rights, and queer rights, Rice is betrayer, the coopted black woman, a Malinche figure who has sometimes been seen as a projection of Bush's power. Now that Bush's term is over and she has stepped down from this public position, Condoleezza has emerged as the human face of the former administration's otherwise invisible diplomacy. If when she was in office we were discouraged from examining her motives, her ambitions, and perhaps her contradictions, her memoir *No Higher Honor* gives her space to voice some of these questions. These aspects of Rice's iconicity not only distract us from her agency as an actor in complex world politics; they reflect the ways that women of color are often reduced to their sexualized and spectacular bodies in the public eye. We might see parallels to the attention given to Michelle Obama's well-developed biceps in the early days of Obama's presidency, a distraction from the anxiety of having a black couple in the White House, perhaps.

Such projections of desire have a history in representations of women marked as other, nationally and racially. As I've returned again and again to the Cleopatra icon, I've sought to explore through her what we can discover about the performance of difference, here especially feminine difference in the face of power. I find glimmers in Shakespeare's portrait, and even more significantly in Cleopatra icons that come later in her popular history, the performance of the experience of being an object of desire. From Elizabeth Taylor's excess to Tamara Dobson's haughty uprightness in the blaxploitation film *Cleopatra Jones*, Cleopatra, like Rice, exhibits a kind of double consciousness, a mask that covers a self-awareness of her own story and the ways that she serves as a pleasure source for others, particularly through the gaze. For each of these Cleopatras, this masked self-awareness is a key strategy for negotiating the powers around her, and for gaining her own power.

A second link, then, between Condoleezza and Cleopatra might be their masking, the element of the unknown in terms of their motivations and loyalties—and the ways that rumor, speculation, and attention to beauty participate in that masking. As I've written in my earlier study of the Cleopatra Icon, Shakespeare's Cleopatra inspires in those who love her the desire to know her.<sup>11</sup> An image always still in

formation, Cleopatra slides out of the poet's and scholar's grasp. Enobarbus says that

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies. (2.2.240-43)

It is not for nothing that Shakespeare's most memorable description of Cleopatra is put in the mouth of one of his most articulate cynics about both love and politics. While I've spent some time thinking about Cleopatra and her powers of invention, I've often wondered but never fully explored the moments in Shakespeare's drama where her motivations seem to be the most elusive. Why exactly does Cleopatra appear to flee battle when fighting with Antony on the seas? Has she convinced Antony to fight a sea battle because this is where her own military strength lies? What do we make of the omen that swallows have built nests in her sails? Has Cleopatra made negotiations with Octavius Caesar to protect her own interests even before the battle is lost? In Plutarch's *Lives*, one of Shakespeare's sources, Cleopatra is explicitly self-serving in her strategy, bartering for the protection of Isis's tomb and for her hold on Egypt even before the battle is lost. Shakespeare complicates the picture of Cleopatra's loyalty with descriptions of her desirability and eroticism. Might Cleopatra's masking have something directly to do with her role as a "notorious" figure of desire? At those moments where we might most want to know what she's thinking and what she wants, we find out instead what others want and fear of her. She is and continues to be the screen onto which others project their desires.

For Rice, this element of the unknown has eased some since Bush has left office. Rice has been able to talk about at least some of her responses to major decisions and problems of the era in her memoir. She reflects on the significance of her role as the first black Secretary of State. She acknowledges regrets, as well as differences she had with Bush and others on some major decisions. For example, on her decision to go shopping during the first hours of Hurricane Katrina, she admits that she was regrettably tone-deaf:

Clearly the response of the federal government was slower than the President himself wanted it to be, and there were many missteps, both in perception and in reality. I'm still mad at myself for only belatedly understanding my own role and responsibilities in the crisis.<sup>12</sup>

But even as she carefully documents her role in some of the Bush administration's biggest decisions, from the first hours of September 11 to the decision to invade Iraq, there are still gaps in our knowing. In particular, the memoir still leaves us guessing about the motivations of her loyalty to Bush, her reasons—political, ethical and otherwise—for supporting his administration from the beginning.

To some degree the masked nature of Cleopatra icons and of Condoleezza Rice as she has emerged as an icon is an aspect of the way that celebrities circulate in mass media. In his book *Celebrity*, Chris Rojek writes that "The public presentation of

self is always a staged activity, in which the human actor presents a ‘front’ or ‘face’ to others while keeping a significant portion of the self in reserve.”<sup>13</sup> In the case of celebrity, the public split between the I (one’s own sense of self) and the Me (the self seen by others) is both disturbing and tantalizing. From Charlie Sheen’s downward spiral to John Travolta’s recent outing and sex scandal, the collapse and humiliation of the celebrity promise for the fan an entry into the intimate lives of these distant figures and perhaps a democratic leveling. And as celebrity becomes increasingly ubiquitous, and our ways of watching, processing, and reconfiguring celebrity performances become even more numerous and innovative (from tabloids to blogs to YouTube Videos), the breakdown of the celebrity has become even more interactive and aesthetically heightened. The audience now has an important and more visible role in shaping the drama of celebrity shaming. Yet we might also identify a counterforce to this mass-media induced desire to know: the viability of celebrificaiton, and especially political celebrificaiton, as a means of distraction and obscurantism.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, even before the heightened political ambiguity in the play’s second half, Shakespeare describes the experience of loving and wanting to know Cleopatra as akin to the experience of the fan, yearning to understand the gap in knowledge, the crux between the public and private selves. This desire to know leads to an undoing of the self. Enobarbus reports that he once watched Cleopatra

Hop forty paces through the public street.  
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted  
That she did make defect perfection,  
And, breathless, power breathe forth. (2.2.228-32)

Shakespeare expertly describes the state of being a fan, of desiring connection with the “I,” the personal, and of enjoying or taking part in the physical essence of the celebrity, here the absence of breath. Likewise, the fan orients his body to that of the celebrity, seeks the knowledge of the unknown through little bits and pieces of the star: an autograph, a lock of hair, or perhaps a sex tape. The fan seeks knowledge of the celebrity by attempting to become that person; the fan might dress in the same fashions as the star or wear the same hairstyle or buy the same pets, all to capture somehow that elusive mojo. Yet in this age of celebrity overexposure, the fan might well be self-conscious or even cynical, well aware of the workings of celebrity. He or she might know that our knowledge of the star is as elusive as that puff of air. Yet celebrities can still make that absence into a kind of power. Cleopatra pants and we pant. Cleopatra’s breathless playacting at being one of us, one of the people of the street, changes the shape of the air, so that we are suspended from the everyday. We are forced to either reorient our relationship to that air or suffocate.

Cleopatra is an expert manipulator of the hunger that she produces, most dramatically in her manipulation of her own death and her threats of blinding herself. If she blinds herself—she threatens to scratch out her eyes at the news of the marriage of Fulvia and at the idea of being put on display by Octavius Caesar—she can no longer participate in the exchange of looks. The desire for the star can now only go one way. Looked at, she can never return our gaze, our fear of fears. Creating

desire from the threat of lack is the strategy of the striptease; the promise of exposure coupled with the fear that there might not ever be enough.

And Rice, too, has been an excellent strategist of the abstract wedded with the physical: Condi, lover of football, that ballet of bodies; scholar of the arms race, that surreal counting of how many ways we can destroy ourselves a million times over. Despite my political disagreements with her, I suspect that she has been underestimated by many as an effective scholar of the wedding of strategy and slight of hand.

Like Cleopatra, Condoleezza Rice has continued to capture her audience's attention through her elusiveness, her containment, and an element of mystery. But unlike the highly eroticized Cleopatra, Rice, the prototypical Southern Black Lady, a neocon preacher's daughter, policy wonk, classical pianist, and amateur ice skater, goes against the grain of widely circulated representations of black female sexuality as highly theatrical and accessible—a point made much of by both fans and foes. As Lisa B. Thompson writes, Rice's performance of an idealized middle-class black womanhood has meant the shielding of her own desires and body from the eyes of outsiders: "This performance relies heavily upon aggressive shielding of the body; concealing sexuality; and foregrounding morality, intelligence and civility as a way to counter negative stereotypes."<sup>14</sup> This tension between the image of prim striver and the black woman as always already "knowable" informs Rice's celebrity and, I'd argue, her political success.

The tantalizing prospect of seeing behind Rice's mask becomes a key selling point for Elizabeth Bumiller's 2007 biography *Condoleezza Rice: An American Life*. Bumiller promises in her introduction that we will learn about the flesh-and-blood woman behind the myth:

In recent years Rice's life story has taken on elements of myth, promoted in part by Rice herself. The official narrative is one of a precocious child, nurtured by adoring, ambitious parents, who threw off the yoke of her forebears and marched from one triumph to the next. Like most myths, this one contains elements of truth, but is far from the real story. Rice, like everyone else, had moments of doubt, disappointment and real crisis. She was not an academically brilliant student. She liked parties, dated football players, and spent part of her college years floundering. As provost at Stanford, she so antagonized the faculty that the Department of Labor began an investigation, still ongoing, into discrimination at the university against women. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Even more significantly, Bumiller promises us to show us the real Rice behind the image of loyal follower of Bush, especially in the politically sensitive moments immediately following September 11. She suggests that

Rice is a collected and controlled presence in public, but her life has been extraordinarily turbulent underneath. Her years at the White House and State Department have been marked by battles over policy and ideology, not only with Donald Rumsfeld, the former defense secretary who was her well-known nemesis, but with the powerful and secretive Cheney, a far more formidable adversary.<sup>16</sup>

I'd argue that the suppression of conflict, desire, bad taste, and certainly goofiness in Rice's public image is shaped by the politics of 1960s racial uplift (Rice was born and raised in Birmingham, the only child of a powerful minister and a society matron), the aesthetics of middle-class black conservatism in an age of affirmative action, the folksy everyman tone of the Bush administration, and its contradictory lack of transparency of policy. Disappointingly, while Bumiller does present a complicated image of Rice as both product of the civil rights movement and only child of black middle-class strivers (and in fact a whole generation of strivers), she does less to particularize the political Rice. The biography sticks mostly to Rice's public face: her increasingly important role in the post-9/11 White House, deciphering and translating often conflicting intelligence reports for Bush, eventually becoming one of the administration's most visible international diplomats and the "chief saleswoman" to the public for the war in Iraq and specifically the existence of those Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Rice's mask seems to work both to provide an image of feminine strength and success of the black female striver and to suggest the transcendence of individual biography for the national good. In fan sites and postings on YouTube, we can see exploited the tension between Rice as a representation of widely circulating and therefore available black female sexuality and as a mask of containment and respectability of style and body. Many spoof her "squareness" and unhipness by either making her rap or dance. One video juxtaposes a prim and proper Rice in jonquil yellow Jackie O suit, nodding hesitatingly while (apparently) listening to a nearby concert given by dancehall rapper Shaggy.<sup>17</sup> A more politically heightened offshoot of this genre uses the supposed contradictoriness of Rice's image as a warning sign of her complicity with power. This-JustIn.com reimagines a Condoleezza who, questioned by Barbara Boxer, gets "pissed" and transforms into "Condolicious."<sup>18</sup> As "Condolicious," Rice raps about the "Haters" who critique the war in Iraq, and who gossip about her lovers (here, Bush and Mary Cheney). Alternately blowing kisses (like Lil' Kim) to Fox News and then breaking into a mean robot in skin-tight fatigues, "Condolicious" is as unapologetically righteous as Queen Latifah in a power suit: "Neo Con. Word Is Bond. Make Iraq like Vietnam."

A second category is the fan video, produced by groups like "Rice for President"<sup>19</sup> and "We Love Condi.Com."<sup>20</sup> These videos juxtapose slightly sexually suggestive images of Rice in diplomatic mode (kissing, hugging, apparently nuzzling world leaders) with old-fashioned cheesy love songs by white performers like Elvis, Kenny Rogers, and Connie Francis. These videos seem to yearn from afar for Condi's hip to be squareness, sometimes without irony, although one video interrupts its old-fashioned praise of her beauty to call attention to her "lovely legs and thighs. Encore!" There are of course some videos that promise more explicit findings. A "Condoleezza Rice" sex tape features a photoshopped Rice enjoying toe sucking time with a young stud in a hot tub,<sup>21</sup> and many others make use of "unguarded moments" of intimacy with Bush.<sup>22</sup> Many of the Bush-Loves-Condi videos are clearly critical of both (i.e., "Condi & George Love in the War on Terror"),<sup>23</sup> but the critique is mostly gentle. I was only able to find a few videos that contained sustained critiques of Rice and her policies.<sup>24</sup> So while Rice's YouTube celebrity exploits the juxtaposition of Rice's respectability with her visibility as a black woman, these tensions seem to distract both fans and detractors from any sustained questioning of her policies or her role as a strategist.

Mary Louise Pratt has argued that narratives of romance, sexuality, and sentiment have been used to obscure the workings of power from Pocohantas to La Malinche to Bartholomé de las Casas.<sup>25</sup> And certainly the proliferation of innuendo about a Condi/ Bush romance might be seen to fit into this mold. If we think of the significance of Bush's choice of Rice as only a matter of sexual titillation or Rice's loyalty as only a matter of romance, we fail to see Rice as both postcolonial subject and actor/agent. This narrative is part of the tradition of the sexualization of the go-between, in which the dark woman falls in love and betrays her people. Yet Rice also reminds us of the need for a new political language and the outdating of postcolonial frameworks that fail to acknowledge the roles of leaders of color in the construction of a neoliberal state.

In *No Higher Honor*, Rice speaks of the impact that her very person has had on the ways that we think of U. S. history. She describes looking up at Benjamin Franklin's portrait as she is sworn in as Secretary of State:

What would he have thought of this great-granddaughter of slaves and child of Jim Crow Birmingham pledging to defend the constitution of the United States, which had infamously counted her ancestors "three-fifths" of a man? Somehow, I wanted to believe, Franklin would have liked history's turn toward justice and taken my appointment in stride.<sup>26</sup>

With Rice, Powell, and now the Obamas at the helm, we see leaders of color admitted into the highest ranks of power, while the ghosts of former history still haunt.

The story grows more complicated as we reconsider the image of Rice as an insider/outsider body at the same time that she had become the gatekeeper of the fight against the War on Terror, especially in terms of torture. In particular, we might consider how the "War on Terror" (and protest against it) has been used as a means of monitoring good and bad political subjects on a transnational scale. During George W. Bush's term, Rice's mostly successful maneuvering of U. S. discourses of black female respectability put her in the complex and perhaps troubling position of the most visible figurehead for his foreign policies, and in particular his policies on torture, the surveillance of good and bad bodies. This continues to haunt Rice, and her justifications of these policies are taken up further in *No Higher Honor*. And while Rice uses that space to disagree with some of her strategic decisions (she admits, for example, that she clearly had not done enough to warn against the threat of al Qaeda right before the 9/11 attacks), she does not recant Bush's policies on torture.<sup>27</sup> We might think of the case of Condoleezza as an example of the state of postmodern melancholia and the challenge of cosmopolitanism that Paul Gilroy suggests is part and parcel of the postcolonial and postmodern condition, writ large.

Rice's mask, constructed both by her own performance of black womanhood and the particular dynamics of loyalty and protectionism of the Bush administration, has been quite successful overall in creating a political Teflon coating, distancing Rice from the administration's most controversial decisions, despite Rice's central role in policy formation and execution as national security advisor and Secretary of State. In a Washington Post-ABC News Poll conducted in 2008, when opposition to the Iraq War was approaching its height, Rice enjoyed a "Favorable-Unfavorable" rating of

nearly two to one.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Rice's negotiation of power and harnessing of an ideal of the transcendence of identity has been held up as a potential new model of politics for the future. *New Yorker* writer Dana Goodyear has coined the word "Condishly" to describe an aesthetics and packaging of female leadership that emphasizes loyalty and the defense of national interests while "transcending" gender and race.<sup>29</sup> Another blogger uses the phrase "Condi-like" to describe Sarah Palin's effective if morally questionable and mercurial rise to potential power. (An example from the blog Jabberous, "What did you think of Gov. Palin? Did she reach Condi-like heights of being a good looking Republican woman who likes guns, beer and killing wildlife?")<sup>30</sup>

In 2007, the *New York Post* became the site of the staging of a very odd and interesting moment (not the first time). The paper features a series of antiwar protesters from CODE PINK confronting Condoleezza Rice during a House Foreign Affairs committee hearing where Rice was set to testify about a "two-state" Solution in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> CODE PINK successfully interrupted Rice's testimony and surrounded her with red-painted raised hands to confront her as a "war criminal," caught "red-handed." The photographs from this protest have become some of CODE PINK's most widely circulated images, still used on their site as a sign of their success. I find the photographs very revealing as two contrasting performances of politicized femininity: CODE PINK, borrowing the image of hysterical womanhood (and bloodiness), appropriating it for their own uses as a sign of critique; and Rice, masked facial expression, body folding in on itself to avoid the taint of the paint. Rice effectively avoids getting blood on her hands and avoids meeting the eyes of the protesters or the camera. *The New York Post* is ambiguous in its presentation of who is hero and who is victim. We might think of this image as an example, among many, of how Rice's body is the staging point for several political debates even as she seems to efface herself.

As I think about my own gaze on her, wanting to see in that carefully coiffed hair and spit-shined image another facet of the history of black resistance to racism (Rice did after all come from the same neighborhood as Angela Davis!), I've grown suspicious or at least more aware of my own desire to read Rice's mask as another kind of sly civility. Am I just as guilty as others of projecting my desires on her? Like Cleopatra, Rice presents a disturbing category crisis—she presents a "gap in nature," producing desire and labor where she seems to yield none. Both are more than mere blank or screen of projection—they create the conditions of performance and are therefore the sites of productivity and knowledge. What might take even more bravery is to look hard at the knowledge she represents.

### Notes

1. "'30 Rock': Condoleezza Rice is Jack Donaghy's Ex-Girlfriend (VIDEO)," story and link to video first televised March 24, 2011, posted by *The Huffington Post*, March 29, 2011, updated June 29, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/29/30-rock-condoleezza-rice-\\_n\\_855527.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/29/30-rock-condoleezza-rice-_n_855527.html).
2. Tina Fey, *Bossypants* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011).

3. All references to Shakespeare's works are from *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).
4. Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011).
5. *Ibid.*, 399.
6. *Ibid.*, 2.
7. The rich body of recent work on the use of Shakespeare to talk back to empire includes Jyotsna Singh's "Othello's Identity, Postcolonial Theory and Contemporary African Rewritings of *Othello*," in *Women, Race and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Paticia Parker (New York: Routledge, 1993), 287-99; Singh's "Caliban versus Miranda: Race and Gender Conflicts in Postcolonial Rewritings of *The Tempest*," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 191-209; Thomas Cartelli's *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (New York: Routledge, 1999); *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba (New York: Routledge, 2005); Natasha Distiller's *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005); Martin Orkin's *Local Shakespeares: Proximity and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Peter Erickson's *Citing Shakespeare: The Reinterpretation of Race in Contemporary Literature and Art* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).
8. See, for example, Gilroy's discussion of appropriation in "*There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*": *The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
9. Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 8-9.
10. The episode, which circulated in 250 newspapers worldwide, ran in early October 2003. *The Washington Post* suspended and then reinstated the strip, defended by *Post* Ombudsman Michael Getler, "Putting 'The Boondocks' in the Dock," *The Washington Post*, Sunday, October 19, 2003, B06.
11. Francesca Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1-2.
12. Rice, 399.
13. Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 11.
14. Lisa Thompson, *Beyond the Black Lady: Sexuality and the New African American Middle Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.
15. Elizabeth Bumiller, *Condoleezza Rice: An American Life* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2009), xxii.
16. *Ibid.*, xxii.
17. "Condi Rice Jams to Shaggy at DC Concert," Youtube video, 1:30, posted by sethjohnson, June 19, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCMzF3ZEAA>.

18. "Condi Rice Raps," YouTube video, 2:05, posted by vlogkarate, February 6, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0f2dHJ6A18>.
19. Rice for President," a Yahoo group, has posted several videos. "Condi Rice Raps- Need for Speed-Most Wanted for President," YouTube video, 1:28, posted by GUILIANIvsRICE, September 10, 2007, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAP\\_LEbZyRI&playnext=1&list=PLC88B108ED71F35D4&feature=results\\_video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAP_LEbZyRI&playnext=1&list=PLC88B108ED71F35D4&feature=results_video). More recently, the group has supported Rice as Mitt Romney's running mate in the 2012 presidential elections.
20. See, for example, "Oh Condi. We Need you Today," YouTube video, 1:14, posted by WeLoveCondi, September 5, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAZEDx5XsSE&feature=relmfu>.
21. "Freaky Condi," Youtube video posted by Yas12, May 28, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3rsx-lG2L8&feature=fvsr>.
22. See "Condi and George: A Love Story," Youtube video, 4:15, set to Dan Hill's song "Sometimes When We Touch," and posted by ramarie, February 25, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88nv0kdIyPM>.
23. "Condi & George: Love in the War on Terror," Youtube video, 3:44, posted by apnsw, October 13, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxfWEQJ5JPU>.
24. Several of these focus on Rice's testimony to the 9/11 Commission, including "Condoleezza Rice Lying About Terror Threat to 9/11 Commission," YouTube video, 7:25, posted by MrLiestoUs, May 12, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUsR8kUF-aY>.
25. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
26. Rice, 302.
27. *Ibid.*, xvii.
28. Hendrick Hertzberg, "Condiment: Comment," *The New Yorker* (online edition), March 17, 2008, [http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/03/17/080317taco\\_talk\\_hertzberg](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2008/03/17/080317taco_talk_hertzberg).
29. Here, the phrase is used to describe a conservative female candidate for Japan's Prime Minister, Yuriko Koike. Dana Goodyear, "Postcard from Los Angeles (and some notes from Japan): Female Politician Stew," *The New Yorker* (online edition), September 12, 2008, [http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/danagoodyear/2008/09#slide\\_ss\\_0=1](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/danagoodyear/2008/09#slide_ss_0=1).
30. Mark Martin, "For the Children," *Jabberous*, September 9, 2008, <http://jabberous.blogspot.com/2008/09/for-children.html>.
31. Cynthia R. Fagan, "Protester Attacks Condoleezza Rice on Capitol Hill," *New York Post* (online edition), posted October 24, 2007, [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/national/item\\_IMLYX-w2uxD3Oof3h6GqS8M](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/national/item_IMLYX-w2uxD3Oof3h6GqS8M).

## SHAKESPEARE'S FEMALE ICONS: DOING AND EMBODYING

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When Francesca Royster asked me to write the afterword for this special edition of *The Upstart Crow*, I jumped at the chance, but not because I had something canned to say. Rather, I was stymied by what the phrase “Shakespeare’s Female Icons” actually signified and excited by the challenge of unpacking it fully. I had a sense that an *icon* is a “person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of a culture or movement; a person, institution, etc., considered worthy of admiration or respect,” and that *iconic* designates “a person or thing regarded as representative of a culture or movement; important or influential in a particular (cultural) context.” But I did not fully appreciate that these are relatively recent uses for the words (e.g., from the late twentieth century); nor did I realize that these definitions are only twenty-first-century “draft additions” to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>1</sup> To address the iconic, then, one must recognize the relational (i.e., icons only signify in specific and particular cultural contexts), and one must consider these relations in particularly twentieth- and twenty-first-century contexts: scholarly positions that I welcome and value.

Nonetheless, it was the combination of Shakespeare + Female + Icon that gave me pause. Like many, I have been to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon and walked through the “Shakespeare Hall of Fame,” which is lined with thirteen images of Shakespeare’s “icons.” The images in the bannered hall seem to impart the message that it is easier to become a Shakespearean icon if one is male, as only two women have been inducted into this hall of fame: Ellen Terry and Judi Dench.<sup>2</sup> While their eleven male counterparts are poets (Ben Jonson), playwrights (David Garrick), novelists (Charles Dickens), filmmakers (Akira Kurosawa, Sam Wanamaker), and actors (Laurence Olivier, Kenneth Branagh, Patrick Stewart, Leonardo DiCaprio, Paul Robeson, and David Tennant), the two female icons in the Birthplace Trust are both actresses, leading one to speculate as to whether female iconicity comes from being gazed upon like the now iconic John Singer Sargent painting of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth. (see figure 1).

Sargent’s 1889 oil painting captures the power of Lady Macbeth as she usurps the crown for herself, “a bit,” Stephen Orgel reminds us, “that Terry and Sargent had added to the play: it appeared in neither the text nor the production.”<sup>3</sup> Terry’s Lady Macbeth in Sargent’s painting is powerfully tall, elongated by the vertical flow of her “costume covered with beetles’ wings”<sup>4</sup> and the two parallel “magenta hair” plates that descend below Terry’s knees.<sup>5</sup> Yet her power is rendered as self-delusional through Terry’s deranged askance gaze. With lips in the now-iconic pornographic position of openness, Terry’s light blue eyes search forever into some unreachable and distant horizon. While the crown hovers above her head, her gaze demonstrates that she will never possess the power to place it securely there; her usurpation will be fleeting at best. Lady Macbeth may be an icon of power and action, but Sargent’s portrait of Ellen Terry captures a Lady Macbeth over whom the audience,



**Figure 1:** “Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth” by John Singer Sargent (1889). Tate Gallery, London.

the gazer, has all of the power. The viewer’s power comes precisely from that fact that we know something this Lady Macbeth does not: she desires power but cannot own it. The tension between defining icons as ones who do, who are agents and active participants in their worlds and cultures, and ones who embody their worlds and cultures, is perfectly emblemized in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s Hall of Fame: the male icons do—they write, discover, and create—while the female icons perform and embody.

The tension between doing and embodying lies at the heart of this special edition in which women are positioned squarely in the center of the frame of analysis and their iconicity is fully interrogated in the light of “new discourses on the interlocking identities of sexuality, race, class, and nation,” as Royster puts it in her introduction. Enabling us to think about the ways identities are constructed in multiple and sometimes incongruent terms, Royster invites

an intense dialogue about what it means *to be* and *to do* as a female icon. The two essays that address Julia Stiles, for instance, reach radically different conclusions about Stiles’s iconicity because they read the power of embodiment differently. For Natalie Jones Loper, Julia Stiles becomes iconic of a quiet girl’s intellectual power because she reads the polysemy of Stiles’s performances as accruing meaning not only through each new performance, but also through each new interview and public declaration (whether creative or journalistic). For Dee Anna Phares, on the other hand, the desirability of Julia Stiles’s iconicity as Shakespeare’s teen queen is debatable because her Desi in *O* becomes one of the many silenced “zeros” in the film. While Phares does not engage with polysemy in the explicit way that Loper does, Phares does imply that the polysemy of Stiles’s intelligent vocalicity gets invoked in

the negative; Stiles could speak because she repeatedly performs her ability to do it effectively, but she chooses to embody a character that does not speak, thereby tacitly accepting Desi's zero-sum position. Despite the fact that both Loper and Phares contextualize the common perception of Stiles's intelligence in terms of the implicit hierarchies of interlocking identities (Stiles is white, middle-class, Ivy League-educated, and frequently outspoken), they read the meaning and significance of her iconicity in radically different ways.

Yet, I wonder if Julia Stiles's actual vocal quality, with its deep and velvety timbre and crisp enunciation, which is quite exacting, is a type of aural embodiment that literally speaks volumes about her identity and helps to give voice to her iconicity. Do we hear her voice even when she is silent? If so, does her voice register as a type of agency? If so, for whom and at what moments does it do this? Of course, *icon* comes from the Greek *εἰκὼν*, which was an image or a portrait, a likeness or a semblance,<sup>6</sup> but I think it is important to add vocal quality and vocal memory to our list of elements that make up the modern sense of iconicity. Yes, Stiles looks the part of an empowered teen icon (a wealthy, white athletic blond), but she also sounds the part (authoritative in pitch, tone, and accent). Her iconicity would be completely different, for example, if she sounded like Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer Lopez, or Paris Hilton. While these three women are considered by many to be twenty-first-century icons in their own rights, I do not believe Stiles would be a *Shakespearean* icon with any of their voices.<sup>7</sup> In other words, we must consider the complete (moving and sounding) image of Shakespearean iconicity.

The strength of this special collection, then, is that it demonstrates just how many layers and facets there are to cultural icons. While the original sense of the Greek *εἰκὼν* was one defined solely by visual rhetoric, this collection forces the reader to consider the icon as something that lives, breathes, talks, remembers, and forgets on its own. As W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, certain images have "lives" of their own.<sup>8</sup> These icons have lives that accrue meaning through repetition, revision, and restaging: the polysemy discussed by Loper; the intertextuality discussed by Thomas; and sounds discussed by Leonard. The focused consideration of the embodied aspects of performance move this collection beyond the typical focus on the playwright's, director's, or even actor's intentionality. Instead, these essays force us to consider what Mitchell calls "the relationality of image and beholder."<sup>9</sup>

It is with this in mind that I would like to circle back to the dilemma performed by the "Shakespeare Hall of Fame" in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust: male Shakespearean icons act while female Shakespearean icons embody. Niamh O'Leary's and Francesca Royster's essays touch on the issues of action and embodiment in rich and thought-provoking ways. O'Leary's reading of Feng Xiaogang's 2006 film *The Banquet* poses fascinating questions about how to read gendered actions in foreign adaptations of Shakespeare. O'Leary does an excellent job not to naturalize the Chinese film even though it is an adaptation of *Hamlet*; and she does an equally excellent job not to de-naturalize (or Other) the film too much. The film's rewriting of Gertrude as an explicitly independent and self-governed character is neither read as a rejection of Western values nor as being predeter-

mined by its Chinese Otherness. Instead, O’Leary reads Feng’s Gertrude as an icon for female agency (“She pushes the limits of power and ambition, but in the end is cut off in her prime”), and asks us to consider if such a revision is based on modern sensibilities (are they universal?), the desire to destabilize the *Hamlet* myth (has this become universal in the twenty-first century?), or a critique of individual ambition in general (is this culturally specific? to China?). Whatever the answers to these troubling questions, O’Leary claims that Feng creates a new icon for female ambition, one that is located equally in action and embodiment (doing and being).

And Francesca Royster’s essay beautifully problematizes what it means to want to be like Cleopatra. Although one might assume that being like Cleopatra means being powerful and in control, Royster demonstrates how Condoleezza Rice’s appropriation of this subject position serves to erase, deny, and evade responsibility: it serves to deny agency even as one wields it destructively. Royster’s questions about the roles that race and gender play in iconicity and the methodological tools we can use to unpack them remain. We need new theories, methodologies, and terminologies to discuss Shakespeare’s female icons in all of their relational variability.

To conclude, I want to analyze a photo from a 2009 Oregon Shakespeare Festival production; a photo that was used on their official promotional poster for the year (see figure 2). The photo shows a powerful black man (played by Peter Macon) crouching over a white woman (played by Robin Goodrin Nordli) who is lying on a bank of steep and winding stairs. In the photo the black man’s right hand is foregrounded holding the woman down.



**Figure 2:** Peter Macon (Macbeth) and Robin Goodrin Nordli (Lady Macbeth) in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s 2009 production of *Macbeth* (directed by Gale Edwards). Photo by Jenny Graham.

The woman, however, has her neck arched, pointing her chin toward the man, and she is smiling. There is violence in the image, but it is mutual and participatory. On the poster, the image has no title; it simply advertises the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

I have had this poster hanging outside of my office for two years, and students and colleagues frequently remark that the image must be from a production of *Othello*. And, in fact, the black actor in the image starred in *Othello* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival the previous year, 2008. This image stems from OSF’s nontraditionally cast production of *Macbeth*. While OSF was clearly attempting to challenge traditional narratives about race, sex, and power in this

production of *Macbeth* (which was incredibly successful), I could not tell what work the poster was attempting to accomplish. And I think the trouble I have reading this image stems from the iconicity of doing and embodying in Shakespeare. While I want to read both our black Macbeth and our white Lady Macbeth as enjoying a moment of shared agency and power (he holds her down, but she holds the letter and him), the traditional ways of reading the icons for black masculinity and white femininity clash with this interpretation. In the performance, this clash was productive and the audience was invited to move beyond those assumptions. The poster, however, is completely decontextualized from the performance, especially for my students and colleagues at Arizona State University, who naturally did not see the production in Oregon. While I argued above that in Julia Stiles's silences one could hear her voice, this is only accomplished because she is a film star, whose talents are shared by the many (and in repeatable fashion). The stars at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, however, do not usually have recognition outside of the festival. I do not think that the casual viewer of this image will have a voice memory for either this performance or these particular performers.

So I end back at the critical role relationality plays in defining Shakespeare's female icons. If I see an image of the Gertrude figure from Feng Xiaogang's film *The Banquet*, I may not read the image as being iconic of action; just as the people outside my door may not read Robin Goodrin Nordli's image in the OSF poster as being iconic of action. Absent the context, these women remain bodies that may not do anything. As Francesca Royster so aptly warns, even postcolonial frameworks, which seem to be more attentive to issues of race and gender, can fail to acknowledge the complexity of the power networks that construct agency. Our critical task is to find ways to let these icons literally move and speak beyond embodiment.

### Notes

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "icon," 2nd ed., 1989; online version September 2011, accessed December 1, 2011, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90879>.
2. For more details see [http://shakespeare.about.com/od/triviaquizzes/a/Shakespeare\\_Greatest.htm](http://shakespeare.about.com/od/triviaquizzes/a/Shakespeare_Greatest.htm).
3. Stephen Orgel, *Imagining Shakespeare: A History of Texts and Visions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 63.
4. *Ibid.*, 62.
5. Sargent to Isabella Stewart Gardner, January 1, 1889, in the *John Singer Sargent Letters Online in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art*, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/john-singer-sargent-letters-9061/more>.
6. "Icon" etymology, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

7. For more on aural quality, race, casting, and theater reviews see a discussion of Peter Sellars's 2009 stage production of *Othello* in Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168-77.
8. When I refer to images as having "lives," I am, of course, borrowing this phrase and notion from W. J. T. Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
9. *Ibid.*, 49.



*PERFORMANCE REVIEWS*





*Julius Caesar*: Frankie J. Alvarez as Metellus Cimber, Vilma Silva as Julius Caesar, Brooke Parks as Marullus. Photo by Jenny Graham.



## THE 2012 SEASON AT LONDON'S GLOBE THEATRE

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This has been London's special summer: the Olympic followed by the Paralympic Games in Stratford *not* upon Avon in East London—the other Stratford. Accompanying this cornucopia of sporting excellence was the cultural Olympiad. This included the BBC broadcast of the second tetralogy, entitled *The Hollow Crown*, new productions of *Timon of Athens* at the National and *King Lear* at the Almeida as well as a magnificent exhibition at the British Museum entitled, somewhat immodestly, *Shakespeare: Staging the World*. The Globe's offering to the Olympiad was the production of thirty-seven of Shakespeare's works in thirty-seven different languages within a period of six weeks. There was a *Richard III* in Mandarin, a *Hamlet* in Lithuanian, a *Twelfth Night* in Hindi, and a *Love's Labour's Lost* in British Sign Language. Conspicuously and with superb English tactlessness, the only offering in English to *Globe to Globe* was the crassly jingoistic *Henry V*. All the visiting foreign companies had come to pay homage to Shakespeare's Globe, in a city located at the heart of the Empire. The host nation responded with a play that not only belittles the French but caricatures the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish. In order to underline the superiority of we native Englishmen over the macaronic mutterings of these visiting Calibans, *Henry V* was allotted not the single or couple of slots allowed to all the other productions but a full run in the repertory. While all the foreigners took their versions of Shakespeare home with them (and good riddance!), the Globe's English Shakespeare outstayed them all and, in true Blitz spirit, saw off their challenges. Well, that's one reading anyway; more than any other play, it seems to me, *Henry V* is crying out for a production in French.

Although nationalism was a dominant theme at the Globe this summer, Shakespeare's women were also amply on display in three shows which ought to make them suitable fare for this volume's theme, Shakespeare's female icons: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It* and *Richard III*, though the latter proved to be disappointing in this respect.

*The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by Toby Frow, was a two-dimensional production for a two-dimensional theater. It never interrogated the darkness of Shakespeare's drama of violence and brutality, preferring instead to seek an amused approval from its audience. As Samantha Spiro's Katherina abased herself in front of her husband without a hint of irony, a huge cheer filled the auditorium. Nobody seemed to notice that Katherina's submission had been forced from her by her being starved, sleep-deprived and domestically abused. Shakespeare's script ends with Hortensio and Lucentio marveling over Katherina's taming, but their exchange was cut so that the last words of this production were "God give you goodnight" (5.2.193).<sup>1</sup> It was the ultimate appeal for audience collaboration and accord, which were readily granted.

Part of the strategy for obtaining this appeal was the production's populism. This started with the pre-show diversion of Christopher Sly's loutish and inebriated soccer



*The Taming of the Shrew*: Samantha Spiro as Katherina and Simon Paisley Day as Petruchio. Photo by Manuel Harlan.

vandal (Sly and Petruchio were played by Simon Paisley Day). Wearing an England football shirt and a white cap with the red cross of St. George, Sly made his way onstage from the ramp which bisected the pit. There was much feigned objection from stage managers and ushers as Sly unzipped his trousers and urinated up one of the stage columns. Distracted, he turned to the audience and continued pissing over the head of one of the groundlings (one trusts a company “plant”). Sly collapsed onstage and chucked up a mouthful of sick. All of these high jinks were greeted with audience laughter, none so much as when one stage manager threatened to “stop the show.” We were miles away from Michael Bogdanov’s 1978 RSC production in which Jonathan Pryce’s Sly abused the theater staff and started drunkenly to smash up the set. The Globe’s was *staged* violence—pretend commotion—and so the brutality of Shakespeare’s play was immediately defused even before it had got underway.

The relationship with the audience was augmented when Sly, having been told he was a lord, turned to a member of the yard for confirmation. “Am I a lord?” (Induction, 1.67), he asked her and she nodded. Then, in a piece of pure pantomime, he repeated the question to all of us. “Am I a lord?” was met with a roar of assent. We were part of this knockabout plot to deceive the indigent drunk and we took our responsibility for his deception with a massive pinch of salt. Given this good-humored fraud, it was little wonder that the remainder of the production consisted of *Commedia dell’arte* lazzi rather than anything more significant or serious. This was a romp, a playful evening’s frolic and on these terms it was perfectly attuned to the populism of this particular theater.

Mike Britton’s design consisted of six arches supporting a balcony, upstage of which was painted an Italian cityscape. Costumes were full Renaissance. A ramp ran from the stage down into the pit which offered the opportunity for Vincentio and Tranio to embrace one another and roll over each other down among the groundlings—other than that, it didn’t do much. Here and throughout, the production insisted on taking the easy, comedic way out. Petruchio was followed by Pearce Quigley’s morose Grumio who trotted behind him making the noise of horses’ hoofs with a pair of coconut husks (lifted straight out of the 1975 film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*). As Petruchio remarked that “Antonio, my father, is deceased” (1.2.53),

Grumio kicked a tin bucket. This was a nice touch, but after it had been used for the third time it lost its comic charge.

The production's reliance on visual gags meant that it never fully engaged with Shakespeare's play. As he entered for his wedding, Petruchio stripped down to a priapically loaded thong, which allowed him, simply by turning upstage, to get a naked arse gag (exactly the same device at exactly the same moment occurred in Edward Hall's *Shrew* of 2006). After all this lightheartedness, Petruchio's brutal claiming of Katherine, "She is my goods, my chattels . . ." (3.3.102ff), caused only amused audience approval and they exited down the ramp and out through the groundlings, she riding Grumio, piggyback. Gremio's response, "Went they not quickly I should die with laughing" (113), spoke for the entire audience.

As they arrived at Petruchio's house, there was much stage business with plates and spoons which served only to distract from what it was the characters were actually saying. It was as though the production felt the necessity to accompany every exchange with a visual gag. The result was to stifle the text, to dilute the domestic violence with a heavy dose of slapstick comedy. At one point Tom Godwin's Biondello circled the Pedant, his sword drawn, in an elaborately choreographed prancing, though this was merely another layer of unjustified stage business.

The only place that the production even engaged with Shakespeare's story was in the sun and moon sequence between Petruchio and his disobedient wife. But her eventual capitulation—"be it moon or sun or what you please / . . . Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me" (4.6.13-15)—signaled a genuine adoration for his obduracy and his caress of her cheek was a sincere token of affection. But quite where this affection originated was anyone's guess—it seemed to have come out of the blue. Thereafter, climaxing in her submission speech, she was utterly at his disposal. It might be too much to expect that such a riotous comic production engage with the story of Petruchio and Katherine but I couldn't help feeling as I made my way home that this show, and perhaps the Globe's very aesthetic, tends to deliver Shakespeare lite.

The longest female role in Shakespeare, Rosalind (over fifty lines longer than the next longest, Cleopatra), ought to offer a reviewer of *As You Like It* an easy way into a special issue devoted to Shakespeare's female icons. The role played by Dorothea Jordan and Ada Rehan, as well as, closer to our own time, Edith Evans, Peggy Ashcroft, Vanessa Redgrave, Juliet Stevenson, and Katy Stephens is, *par excellence*, Shakespeare's gift to female comic actors. But Shakespeare's comedies are also collaborative ventures; unlike the male protagonists of the tragedies, Shakespeare's heroines are unusually reliant on the rest of the company and the production to set them off. While Deirdre Mullins was in no way an indifferent Rosalind, James Dacre's *As You Like It* was indifferent and one could only feel sorry that her assay of this prominent role appeared amid such a flat and weary production.

Unlike the other two shows reviewed here, *As You Like It* was a Globe touring production which was playing at home, having visited ten venues over the previous eight weeks. It might be unfair to judge it according to the same standards as shows designed and rehearsed for this particular space—touring requires, after all, a flexibility and an improvisatory quality that must meet the vagaries of each venue and as such cannot tailor its sequences and speaking to a single auditorium.



*As You Like It:* Deirdre Mullins as Rosalind.  
Photo by Fiona Moorhead.

Then again, the shortcomings of this production were nothing to do with the technical difficulties of moving from space to space; rather, they originated in an almost lazy indifference to the script, an irritating tendency to make visual and verbal quips, and a complete refusal (or inability?) to engage with the soaring verse of the wooing scenes. As Le Beau (Tobias Beer) answered Orlando's (Will Featherstone) question, "Which of the two was daughter of the Duke?" (1.2.259) by noting her height, he attempted a pointless and lame joke: "indeed the shorter is his *dorter*" with all the subtlety of an advertising jingle, though what purpose this exaggerated rhyme might have served is anyone's guess. Later, as Celia rehearses her pseudonym she remarks that she will call herself "No

longer Celia, but *Aliena*" (1.3.127). Here Beth Park, who played Celia, broke the name into "alien" and added a suffix "-er." What this was to signify and why it caused such widespread laughing was beyond me but it typified the production's tendency to wring "humor" out of the play's airy beauty, cudgeling its poetry in the process.

Hannah Clark's design set the action somewhere in the late Victorian period. At the opening, there was much intrusive business with a camera on a tripod and the formation of family groups for photo opportunities. Perhaps the intention was to suggest the hypocrisy of Frederick's court which underlay a formality and etiquette characteristic of late Victorian or Edwardian society. Unfortunately, the setting allowed Olly Fox to compose the most mock-Cockney (Mockney?) settings of Shakespeare's poetry. Song versions of "If music be the food of love" (*Twelfth Night*, 1.1.1) and "The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she" (*As You Like It*, 3.2.10) were reduced to ditties like those from *Half a Sixpence* or *My Fair Lady*.

Adam (Will Mannering) and Orlando were dressed in long brown apron coats and resembled furniture-removal men. This may have had something to do with Clark's set which was a huge wooden crate, the size of a shipping container which opened up at the beginning of 2.1 to reveal a painted forestscape complete with waterfall. Traps hinged open in its roof and its walls to reveal various characters—at one point Touchstone (Mannering again) and Audrey (John O'Mahony) appeared naked, quaffing champagne and surrounded by a cloud of soap bubbles as though bathing together. The major sequences were played downstage of the crate but the effect of its presence was to imply that the actors would soon be on their way—perhaps an appropriate suggestion for a touring production but one which, nonetheless, gave the sense of them merely going through the motions.

Emma Pallant's Jaques was the show's most interesting characterization. Played as a brittle and deeply depressed Victorian dowager, hers was a character too old for this world of young love. Her seven ages of man speech petered out into a grumpy resignation that she no longer qualified for the naïve excitements of life's first half. Her sexuality seemed repressed by her social setting and she made a desperate lunge after the young Orlando. Her "Will you sit down with me, and we two will rail against our mistress the world?" (3.2.271) was reminiscent of Anne Bancroft's predatory Mrs Robinson ordering Dustin Hoffman's Benjamin into bed in Mike Nichols's *The Graduate*.

But in the main, the production relied on a series of poor gags which precluded any sophisticated characterization. Much business was made of the fact that Audrey was played in the final scenes by a cardboard cutout: since O'Mahony was playing Senior, he was unable to double here as Audrey. In fact Senior took Hymen's lines so that the supernatural consecration of the marriages at the conclusion was merely a secular blessing—nothing the matter with that. However, the decision to cut the epilogue, Rosalind's most intimate exchange with the audience and the high point of the role's many lines, served only to mute Mullins's achievements here. I do hope she gets to play the role again in a more conducive production—little chance of this one elevating this Rosalind into anything like one of Shakespeare's female icons.

With Tim Carroll's production of *Richard III*, I'm going to do what every reviewer shouldn't—that is, judge the production according to what wasn't there. I know it is not appropriate to criticize a production for not being the one I wanted it to be; the reviewer is supposed to talk about what was onstage and evaluate it in its own terms but, as you will see, there are reasons why I am departing from the usual protocol.

Mark Rylance is one of the greatest actors of his generation. Between 2009 and 2011 he played Johnny Byron in Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* as a hard-drinking outcast, holed up in his caravan, evading council eviction officers and dealing drugs to local thugs. But towards the end of the play the character communes with the rural spirits of Olde England, and this petty criminal rapidly comes to personify the atavistic independence and dogged self-reliance of a peculiarly insular kind of Englishness, a sort of foul-mouthed stiff upper lip. Byron's solid muscularity, tattooed arms, and plenteous moustache suggested a masculinity which, for all its belligerence, was heroic, courageous, and oddly patriotic. Here was a man with real cojones!

What a treat it would be to see Rylance return to the Globe, a theater which he more than anyone can reduce to total silence. He plays this theater like a musical instrument; his Hamlet, Cleopatra, and Olivia have demonstrated his staggering variety of tones. His manipulation of the audience is remarkable and his voice (which sounds as though it will break any minute) is enough to draw you in with adamant concentration. As the box office (sold-out even before the show opened) suggested, this would be a Richard worth watching. Except it wasn't.

When Rylance played the Duke in the Globe's *Measure for Measure* (2004), he stressed the character's uncertainty with a stuttering insecurity. The Duke seemed perched on the edge of a nervous breakdown, unable to declaim his authority. Similarly his hugely sympathetic Hamlet, his best Shakespearean performance to date (2000), was made vulnerable by a pensive hesitancy. "To be or not to be" was delivered with Rylance facing upstage, every word embraced by the pin-dropping silence of the audi-

torium. Slowly, quietly, and modestly, he unwrapped Hamlet's dilemmas and we felt the paralysis and pathos of the character's impasse. But Richard III is not Vincentio nor Hamlet. Richard bustles from one murderous plan to the next, from one brutal seduction to the next, from one nihilistic frame-up to the next. This is a character of febrile energy, improvising his way around problems even as the next arises to obstruct him. If Hamlet is a resonantly dripping stalactite, Richard is a gushing waterfall.

Why then have this superlative actor play Richard as though he were a kindly uncle, an affable old buffoon? As he confided to us that "Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous" (1.1.32), he put his finger to his lips and cheerfully told us to "Shhhhhhh." It was the affectionate intrigue of an elderly male relative who is hinting that there is a large and unexpected present under the Christmas tree. One can only assume that the intention was to get the audience on his side, to make us complicit in his schemes. But these plots involve the murder of his own brother, his wife, his nephews—they are not party tricks. As he talked of marrying Anne he nonchalantly mentioned to us, "What though I killed her husband and her father?" (1.1.154). He gave us a little frown, a glum wink of pretend guilt as who should say, "What a naughty boy I've been."

In its desire to turn Richard's psychotic and ruthless ambition into a harmless bit of mischief, this production utterly castrated the protagonist and the tension in Shakespeare's play. Yes, Richard is an early modern incarnation of the medieval Vice, but he is so much more. As he urged the assassins not to hear Clarence speak, lest he (Clarence) talk them out of their murderous mission, Rylance rendered the lines "do not hear him plead; / F-f-f-f-f-f-f-for Clarence is well-spoken" (1.3.347). His was a mumbling, careless, stumbling, avuncular, *likeable* Richard, a kindly old chap. Later as he quizzed Buckingham (Roger Lloyd Pack) on his acting capacities, he asked him, "canst thou quake and change thy colour, / M-m-m-m-m-m-m-murder thy breath in the middle of a word . . ." (3.5.1-2). This staged stammer had the effect of making Richard vulnerable and sympathetic and the character's danger, not to mention his iniquity, were airbrushed away.

How were we supposed to respond to this? What was the production trying to show us? That Richard was really a genuine chap who was much misunderstood? Well, the ever increasing pile of corpses gave the lie to that. That Richard's evil is in all of us and that we too could quite easily slaughter half our family? Probably not. Or was it just that the production was deeply confused about what it was aiming for? Most likely. Jenny Tiramani's design didn't help. Rylance wore a huge padded belly to which was pinned a tiny wizened hand. His jolly corpulence and his Halloween novelty claw transformed him into a Falstaff sporting a spoof medal, part roly-poly pudding and part joke shop.

Given the muddled way in which this production characterized its Richard, the moments where he bared his fangs came out of the blue. The strawberries scene (3.4) allows Richard to ask his counsel what the punishment ought to be for those "that have prevailed / Upon my body with their hellish charms" (61-62). He accuses Jane Shore, and Hastings attempts to defend his mistress with "If they have done this deed . . ." (74). Richard responds, "If? Thou protector of this damnèd strumpet" (76). Here Rylance hurled the first word at Hastings (Paul Chahidi),



*Richard III*: Johnny Flynn as Lady Anne and Mark Rylance as Richard III.  
Photo by Simon Annand.

“IFFFFFFFF,” his sudden top volume coming as rapidly as flicking a switch. There was little sense of the deliberation behind the Machiavellian tactic of which Shakespeare’s play hints.

More successful was the utterly ruthless command that Catesby (Peter Hamilton Dyer) should spread the rumor of Anne’s physical decline and imminent death. As the king instructed him, he turned his head towards Anne (Johnny Flynn) who was standing right next to his throne so that Richard’s injunction, “give out / That Anne, my queen, is sick, and like to die” (4.2.58-9) was a cold-blooded death sentence. She stood, frozen to the spot, her humanity nothing more than the object of his murderous calculation. This moment, more than any other, offered us a Richard both tyrannical and terrifying—would that this menacing character had figured more conspicuously elsewhere.

The scenes with the queens were subverted by a comic playfulness. Anne’s seduction was another party game so that Richard’s suggestion that he occupy her bed drew not the sharp intake of breath that the outrage calls for but rather an indulgent audience laugh—“oh look, that mischievous Richard is up to his old tricks again.”

The parallel episode, when Richard woos Queen Elizabeth in order to get to her daughter, was another party piece. So successful was he that Elizabeth (Samuel Barnett) seized Richard and planted a smacking kiss on his mouth. Richard's sense of surprise was matched by that of the audience.

The production's desire to send up the play was perhaps most obvious in its cutting of its dark malevolence. Queen Margaret, the exiled widow of Henry VI, haunts the play with prophecies and curses; the part was entirely cut. The scene in which the three queens mourn the murder of their male relatives was also missing. It was as though the production could not cope with the play's concentration of evil, misery and pain. But if you cut these scenes and play Richard as a pantomime villain, you are directing, at best, an *adaptation* of *Richard III* and perhaps at this point the theater reviewer is entitled to point out what is missing. In conclusion we might just add that, with the best will in the world, attempting to make this production of *Richard III* speak to a special issue on female icons is like trying to win the Olympic hundred meters wearing full Elizabethan dress.

### Notes

1. All line numbers refer to *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. John Jowett et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005).

## THE 2011 OREGON SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

Michael W. Shurgot, *Seattle, WA*

For its seventy-sixth season, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival staged a rollicking *Love's Labor's Lost* and an energetic *2 Henry IV* on the Elizabethan Stage; a stunning *Julius Caesar* in the New Theatre; and an intense, controversial *Measure for Measure* in a tent, aka "Bowmer in the Park," after one of the major support beams of the Angus Bowmer Theatre cracked during a rehearsal of *Measure* in late June. The loss of the Bowmer for six weeks while engineers repaired the beam necessitated the company's rapid shift of all the Bowmer plays to a huge white tent in Lithia Park, a large garden and nature preserve below the theater complex adjacent to downtown Ashland, where the plays had to be completely reimagined. While the seats were raked so that even spectators in the very back of the tent had decent views of the stage, nonetheless the intimacy between actors and spectators that characterizes productions in the Bowmer was inevitably lost. That said, Artistic Director Bill Rauch and the entire professional staff deserve enormous credit for persevering through what could have been an artistic and financial disaster for the OSF.<sup>1</sup>

This season OSF directors Amanda Dehnert and Bill Rauch made distinctive casting choices that resonate with the theme for this volume of *The Upstart Crow: "Shakespeare's Female Icons."* Dehnert cast the superb Vilma Silva, one of OSF's most distinguished actors, as Caesar in a riveting production of *Julius Caesar*; and Rauch cast the Latina actress Stephanie Beatriz as Isabela in *Measure for Measure*. Silva's Caesar was serene and self-confident, spoke beautifully, and moved gracefully among the men of the play. Unlike other reviewers perhaps, I did not find watching a female Julius Caesar at all distracting. Silva's Caesar was first a political leader of immense stature and only secondarily an actress forging new roles for women in Shakespeare's plays; Silva's performance simply transcended gender. As Isabela, Beatriz convincingly transferred one of Shakespeare's most iconic female figures from Vienna to the turbulent, multi-racial barrio of an American city.

Director Shana Cooper, scenic designer Christopher Acebo, and costume designer Christal Weatherly turned the verbal feast of *Love's Labor's Lost* into a visual spectacle designed primarily to attract youthful spectators. The Elizabethan Stage was covered with the green AstroTurf left over from the 2010 production of *Twelfth Night*. The stage opening was covered by tall, knotty pine planks that created a crude fort-like structure; within this fort the youthful King of Navarre and his courtiers were to make their three-year war against affections. Tacked to the planks on a white board was a silhouette of a woman in black, surrounded by a red circle with a slash through the center. Dressed in prep school shorts and striped rugby shirts, the would-be scholars stood in front of a large trash bin into which they emptied their worldly possessions: a box of donuts, cigars, teddy bears, a rugby ball, copies of *Playboy* that they scanned quickly before discarding, and a large plastic female doll that they dropped head first into the can. They were oh-so-serious and oh-so-silly; in Cooper's words, "impulsive, uncontrollable youth in pursuit of impossible ideals"

that were quickly undermined.<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Haugen as Costard, in white t-shirt and rolled-up blue jeans, swaggered onstage and immediately punctuated his betters' youthful absurdity by bragging about having been "taken with a damsel" (1.1.280) whose virginity he then denies;<sup>3</sup> and Jack Willis as Don Armado, a dashing Don Quixote wannabe in his billowing cape, feathered hat, leather boots, sword, and leather vest, pontificated pedantically upon love with such sweet volubility that surely the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh would doom the four preppies hidden inside their makeshift stockade.

And it did. The Princess and her ladies were silly, giddy, eager twentysomethings in the brightly colored party dresses, matching hats, white gloves, and high heels of the 1950s. When the King and company greeted the ladies they wore brightly colored dress shirts, bow ties, and madras plaid pants that sort of matched the colors of the ladies' dresses, suggesting which erstwhile lover boy would eventually woo which courtly lady. Cooper cast Robin Goodrin Nordli as an older female Boyet, therefore creating a fascinating dynamic between Boyet and the four young women she was sent to monitor. Nordli seemed at times wistful about the younger women's romantic intrigues, and, perhaps bored with the plot's romantic nonsense, downed several martinis. At other times she was determined to guard the young women's virtue; just before the men entered as fantastically clad Russian dancers she monitored their movements with an electronic sensor and headset that allowed her to warn her charges of the men's approach. In the final scene, as the eight potential lovers slowly bade goodbye, Nordli descended to the level area below the stage perimeter, detached from the play world, and slowly walked stage right to left, gazing up longingly at the young courtiers and their ladies, wishing perhaps for a place among them. But for her, there is no one; on the perimeter of the stage, she remained an outsider.

The King and his court, determined to keep their oath yet not wanting to seem too rude, emerged from behind their stockade and "welcomed" the ladies with sleeping bags, a huge tent, and four large bags of camping equipment, including several rolls of toilet paper. (Presumably the portable honey buckets were somewhere off-stage.) Suddenly the AstroTurf seemed appropriate: a green field outside the boys' impromptu fort. As the only man onstage with any sense of man's lustful simplicity, Costard (Jonathan Haugen) emerged as the play's reining deity. He and Jaquenetta (Gina Daniels) were in cahoots throughout; they deliberately mixed up Berowne's and Don Armado's love letters, and bumped fists together to celebrate their chicanery. Costard appeared often on the upper stage, gazing down on the absurdity of the lovers' antics below, and the ladies "hunted" in 4.1 from above also, again suggesting visually their superiority amid the bawdy talk of shooting and hitting targets.

Michael Winters's plump Holofernes, in an outrageous three-piece plaid suit, and Charles Robinson's more sedate Nathaniel in a parson's black suit, chatted and drank tea as they praised the pedant's wit in 4.1. With Costard peering down on them from above, the men, all in hunting gear, entered to praise their ladies. Berowne groaned his confession, as if compelled to do so by the Princess's "two eyes." As the King entered Berowne scrambled partway up a ladder stage right. The King's verses were scribbled on a long sheet of construction paper that he unfurled across the stage as he read, and Longaville's were scratched on a roll of toilet paper that



*Love's Labor's Lost*: Tiffany Rachelle Stewart as Maria, Kate Hurster as The Princess of France, Christine Albright as Katherine, and Stephanie Beatriz as Rosaline. Photo by Jenny Graham.

was indeed, as Maria says, “too long by half a mile” (5.2.54). Dumaine entered with a boombox that played his verses as he jived to them with swirling hips, à la Elvis Presley. Once Berowne’s letter was reassembled by Dumaine the four erstwhile scholars joined in a sexy dance and celebrated their liberation by smashing into each other’s faces the pies left by Holofernes and Nathaniel. They made a glorious mess of the green field.

After the intermission one of the ladies erected the large tent by jumping from above while holding onto the rope that pulled up the top, and the rest of the play was staged from within and in front of this tent. In 5.2 the ladies appeared in their pajamas and lying on the sleeping bags as they mocked their gifts; Boyet, quietly tipsy, emptied her martini glass stage right as the women babbled giddily. Boyet warned them of the men’s approach with her sensing device, and the mess of Russians, in sexy white tights, long beards, fur hats, and red sashes around their waists exploded onstage to Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker Suite* while Moth held up a huge red heart emblazoned with Russian letters. The men danced furiously as paper flowers dropped from the upper stage, all part of the men’s plan to woo their ladies. When at 5.2.311 the men returned in their “proper dress”—i.e., brightly colored dress shirts, ties, and madras plaids—as Berowne spoke about Boyet’s betrayal of their Muscovite scheme, the ladies changed back into their original dress in silhouette within the tent, a sexually alluring scene that mocked the men’s denial of their desires. The Pageant of the Nine Worthies, who emerged from within the tent as if from an inner stage, was indeed one show worse than the Russians’ cavorting, and was both vocally and visually hilarious. Costard as the punk rocker Pompey, in dark glasses and crowned with

a laurel wreath, channeled John Belushi as he bellowed his lines into a microphone; Nathaniel as Alexander was swathed in towels; for all his earlier pedantry Holofernes as Judas was angrily “out of countenance” (5.2.603); and Armado wore numerous ties around his waist, a red cape, and a helmet with a large paintbrush glued upside down at the top. During the Pageant the men and women ate popcorn that Berowne pulled from one of the bags of camping gear, and the men mocked the poor actors incessantly. As Holofernes reminds his presumably socially superior spectators, “This is not generous, not gentle, not humble” (5.2.626). Shakespeare’s impromptu play-within-a-play here emerged as a crucial factor in the ladies’ decisions to assign their puerile admirers to painful, sobering penance for a year and a day.

Marcade’s announcement of the French King’s death suddenly silenced the stage and made Berowne’s speech “Honest plain words best pierce the ear of grief” (5.2.749-72) seem totally shallow. As the couples paired off around the large stage, each Jack with his Jill yet strangely alone, they gradually parted, the ladies finally leaving stage left up the vomitorium and out a side door, the men left standing on-stage, watching them walk away. Armado, who doth have his Jaquenetta, sang the songs of the owl and the cuckoo, and sent us away pondering the futures of these



**2 Henry IV: The Set and Cast Ensemble. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.**

couples as darkness descended on their merriment.

Unlike *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, the set of *2 Henry IV* was visually stark and suggested a giant erector set. A large metal staircase occupied the inner stage and was moved forward only for the final scene, when it became the stairs down which Henry V walked to meet and dismiss Falstaff. On either side of the stage stood metal scaffolding that framed the action. The play opened with a dumb show played in front of a huge banner that descended from the very top of the stage. This banner identified the dumb show, or Mummer’s Play, as a quick visual summary of the main actions of *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*. Actors, mostly in grey clothing, presented in pantomime Bolingbroke seizing the crown from Richard and several scenes from *1 Henry IV*, including the robbery at Gad’s Hill, the tavern scene of 2.4, Falstaff’s stabbing of

Hotspur at Shrewsbury, and Hal's chivalry in battle and triumph over Hotspur. As the players disbanded, Rodney Gardiner, who had played Hotspur, wearing a black t-shirt with red tongues painted upon it, emerged as Rumour and tore down the illustrative banner to begin properly *2 Henry IV*. For much of the play Rumour sat on the staircase, observing the often chaotic action, and grinning in apparent devilish glee at the violence unfolding before him.

Director Lisa Peterson employed some fascinating doubling patterns. Among these were Eddie Lopez as Travers, Fang, Wart, and Thomas Duke of Clarence; Mark Bedard as Lord Hastings, William, and Feeble; Michael J. Hume as Archbishop of York and Justice Silence; Brian Demar Jones as Snare, Mouldy, and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester; and Daisuke Tsuji as Francis, Shadow, and Prince John. Peterson's casting thus placed several actors on different sides of the play's convoluted history. As in last year's *1 Henry IV*, John Tufts played Prince Hal, but this year's Falstaff was Michael Winters rather than David Kelly, who did not request the role of Falstaff for this season. Seeing Tufts play Hal in *Part Two* provided dramatic continuity between the two central plays of the Henriad, and while seeing King play Falstaff would have significantly increased the poignancy of his dismissal in *Part Two* after seeing his delicious theatrical triumphs in *Part One*, nonetheless Winters's portrayal of a less agile, less vocal, less vital Falstaff ("I am old. I am old," he laments in 2.4) seemed appropriate to the autumnal tone of this play. Winters moved slowly and, in contrast to Kelly's wide-eyed exuberance in the tavern scene of *Part One*, creaked around the tavern in *Part Two*, settling finally on a chair as if exhausted by his considerable bulk and the many diseases that his boy reports were found in his water (1.2.3-5). Other actors, including Richard Howard as Henry IV, Christine Albright as Lady Percy, and Howie Seago as Poin returned from *Part One* and added to a sense of continuity between the two plays.

In contrast to the grey metallic set Peterson employed colorful clothing of varied styles and eras, suggesting that the action of the play transcended a particular historical period. Richard Howard as King Henry wore a white floor-length gown throughout, ironically suggesting his innocence, that became his shroud on his deathbed in 4.5. The conspirators wore monochromatic grey/black robes, jackets, and pants; Justices Shallow and Silence sported Edwardian gentlemen's jackets, creased pants, leather boots, straw hats, and brightly colored plaid vests; York displayed the black and purple finery of a contemporary Archbishop; while the Lord Chief Justice wore stately black and a white collar. Conversely, Falstaff fumbled around the stage in vibrant motley: black boots; grey pants with the same red stripe as on Prince Hal's pants; a tie-dyed shirt appropriate to a Grateful Dead concert; and an orange leather jacket that barely concealed his rotundity. In his clothing Falstaff embodied both defiant disorder and zestful carelessness.

Falstaff's motley was replicated among the denizens of the tavern. Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet strutted in low-cut yellow and red pastel dresses and *huge* hair, while Pistol, Bardolph, and later Hal and Poin wore parti-colored vests of red, yellow, and orange patches that visually symbolized the tavern's vitality. The fight initiated by Mistress Quickly's anger at Pistol turned violent and nasty (Pistol pulled a gun and pointed it at her) and eerily echoed Northumberland's call for

chaos in 1.1.153-58: “Now let not Nature’s hand / Keep the wild flood confined! Let order die, / And let this world no longer be a stage / To feed contention in a lingering act; / But let one spirit of the firstborn Cain / Reign in all bosoms.” Peterson’s sense of the relationship between Northumberland’s lines and the tavern brawl was superb. The food, bottles of sack, and furniture scattered about the stage after Bardolph finally chased Pistol downstairs captured brilliantly the continuing disorder plaguing England under a thieving king. As in *Part One* Falstaff mocks the reigning monarch with a bottle of sack in his hand and a moldy pillow for his crown, so in *Part Two* one sees why the laws of England must never be at his command. Doll Tearsheet’s dash offstage to be with her old lover one more time seemed all the more poignant given the disorder that plagues Falstaff. As Winters hobbled offstage, one sensed the demise of this once vibrant and immensely entertaining theatrical spirit.

As in *Part One* last season, John Tufts as Prince Hal and the deaf actor Howie Seago as Poinc worked well together using American Sign Language, especially in 2.2, where Hal complains of being “exceeding weary.” Hal carried a six-pack of cheap beer into the tavern, and despite his knowing from the Page that Falstaff is still accompanied by “Ephesians . . . of the old church” in Eastcheap (2.2.142), and despite having seen the violent argument minutes before, just before he left the tavern Hal embraced Falstaff. This is the last time they are onstage together until the dismissal, and Hal’s embrace, while probably suggesting some lingering affection for his fat friend, might as well have signaled a final parting. Knowing what must be, and wishing that it were not so, I assumed both and felt a twinge of nostalgia.

Immediately after The Hostess’s exultation of Tearsheet’s sexual energy: “O, run, Doll, run, good Doll. Come— / She comes blubbered.—Yea, will you come, Doll?” (2.4.389-90) occurred a thrilling theatrical moment. As Doll exited stage right, King Henry, weak like Macbeth from lack of sleep, stumbled forward amid the tavern’s trash and knelt, cursing the god of sleep and asking why he “liest with the vile / In loathsome beds, and leavest the kingly couch / A watch-case or a common ‘larum bell?” (3.1.15-17). Henry’s kneeling in this filthy tavern—home to lawless swaggerers, dissolute drunks, and decadent whores, a collective image of his violent, diseased kingdom—brilliantly captured an inescapable truth about this play, this England. As Warwick and Surrey entered in contemporary military dress they helped Henry to stand, and then they sat at the same table where Falstaff had sat moments before the brawl began. One table is serviceable to two thieves; the stage is the tavern is the court is the kingdom from which all evil must be eradicated: Quickly, Tearsheet and Pistol will soon beat a man to death; the lovable Lord of Misrule must be dismissed; and death will soon remove the sickly, thieving king. In this chaotic and wonderfully symbolic setting Warwick’s lines about the “history in all men’s lives” that eventually prophesize “the hatch and brood of time” (3.1.80, 86) referred not just to the ailing Henry but also to his son and Falstaff.

The scenes involving Shallow, Silence, and Falstaff at their country retreat, John’s treacherous “defeat” of the rebels at Gaultree Forest, and Hal’s eventual reunion with his father in 4.5 were visually very different and emphasized the numerous locales of the second half of the play. Falstaff wore sunglasses and ambled slowly as he surveyed the sickly recruits that Shallow and Silence had sharked up, but exploded

when Pistol told him the old king was dead, again hurling food and furniture away as he prepared to ride all night to his expected welcome. The rebels and John's men wore contemporary military coats, suggesting perhaps WWI era, and as Rumour drummed a slow rhythm they drank wine from tables placed onstage where first Falstaff and then King Henry had sat.

In 4.5, the King, wearing the white gown from 3.1, lay on a large bed that rose from below stage. Hal wore a bright red jacket and, significantly, the same grey slacks with red stripe as Falstaff's shabby version. When Hal "stole" the crown, repeating his father's crime, he seized it quickly and walked confidently from the stage. While the Oedipal struggle that this scene suggests was not apparent in Hal's initial deliberate actions, when Hal returned Henry suddenly raged at him and pushed him away. Hal was stung when he realized what he had done, and crumbled to his knees and shook as Henry berated him. When Henry, clearly exhausted, finished, Hal slowly removed the crown and returned it to the pillow. In one of his finer scenes at OSF, John Tufts as Hal evoked genuine remorse and guilt. Tufts convinced me that Hal's description of the crown as a malignancy that has fed upon his father was not mere rhetoric but rather an image that accurately described Hal's view of that which ironically he says earlier is his "due" from his father. As Hal promised to "rightfully maintain" (4.5.224) the crown, on the stage where he had embraced Falstaff, he raised his sickly father and for a long, genuinely tender moment in a hushed theater held him to his heart.

Resplendent in white jacket, pants, and cape pinned at the neck with a diamond-studded clasp, wearing a gold crown and holding in one hand a golden scepter and in the other a golden globe, King Henry V descended the metal steps now thrust center stage into the place which late had been the tavern, the court, the battlefield. Falstaff, his motley now utterly garish, hobbled up a few steps, reached out and touched Henry's right arm. Recalling his earlier vigor, Falstaff bellowed: "My King! My Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!" (5.4.46). Hal stopped, declared "I know thee not old man. Fall to thy prayers" (5.4.47-48) while staring straight ahead, and only looked at Falstaff as he completed his speech. Falstaff stumbled backwards, head bowed, and for a moment, despite all we have seen in this play, his dismissal seemed unnecessarily harsh. With his sagging body Winters evoked the pity we may feel for this wretched yet lovable old man whom we know must go to debtor's prison: "Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pound" (5.4.72). It is a testimony to Winters's performance of this aging thief, self-deluded to the end, that one can recall the violence of the tavern scene and his damnable abuse of the King's press and still want to believe that he shall be "sent for soon at night" (5.4.90-91). But 'twill not be.

Amanda Dehnert, who in 2009 directed a fascinating *All's Well That Ends Well* in the New Theatre, returned to that venue to direct a production of *Julius Caesar* that crystalized Peter Brook's "Rough Theatre." The actors welcomed spectators to their seats by walking up to them, introducing themselves as their characters, and urging them to cry "All Hail Julius Caesar!" and to flash the "V" signal when prompted to do so. We did—vociferously. As did Lisa Peterson in *2 Henry IV*, Dehnert employed considerable doubling, using seven actors to play a range of characters of conflicting and changing political loyalties. Kevin Kenerly, for example, played the senators Casca and Lepidus, as well as the rebel Messala; and Kenajuan Bentley played both



***Julius Caesar***: Vilma Silva as Julius Caesar and Jonathan Haugen as Brutus. Photo by Jenny Graham.

and Antony spoke; the raised bed on which the slaughtered Caesar lay; and the tables around which Brutus and Cassius and later Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus plotted their strategy or marked their opponents for death. The murder of Caesar was the bloodiest I have ever seen; who would have thought the emperor could have stashed so many vials of red liquid under her sparkling white gown? The use of the table on which Caesar lay murdered as the table on which Antony numbered his political enemies and plotted his attacks visually reinforced the play's insistence on the unanticipated consequences of seemingly well-intentioned political actions.

The "stage" for this production extended well beyond the confines of the actual theater. As one approached the entrance, and again as one walked through the interior towards one's seat, one encountered banners drawn in heavy black ink hanging from lampposts, trees, walls, and ceiling of the theater depicting political leaders who had been assassinated. The victims ranged from JFK and MLK to political leaders in Latin America, Europe, and especially Africa. While few spectators would have been familiar with the history of all of these victims, the vast array of banners suggested that political murder, even in the name of democracy or for a similar ideal, has often led to unanticipated and uncontrollable violence. The murder of Cinna the Poet, played by Anthony Heald, grotesquely exemplified this point. Wearing a loose-fitting jacket and speaking calmly, Cinna realized too late that he had walked into a vicious trap from which there was no escape. He was surrounded by thugs with baseball bats—another modern updating; one thought of the San Francisco baseball fan who was beaten into a coma outside Dodger Stadium after a game in May—and then dragged offstage where he was clubbed to death. Often during the play, thumping sounds permeated the theater and were felt under the metallic seats, so that spectators not only heard but also felt sounds marking the play's descent into terror and violence. During the

Trebonius and Octavius Caesar. The principals were played by four of OSF's leading actors, all of whom were superb: Vilma Silva as Caesar; Jonathan Haugen as Brutus; Gregory Linington as Cassius; and Danforth Comins as Mark Antony. The play was staged in the round, and the actors—except for Silva's stunning Caesar—all wore grey/brown/black pants, shirts, vests, jackets, ponchos, and boots that indicated at once a "modern era" and all eras, suggesting the timeless nature of the political and historical issues at the center of many of Shakespeare's plays. The only props were rough-hewn slabs of plywood and tables of plywood and two-by-fours that were moved around stage to serve several purposes: as the platform on which Caesar, Brutus,

performance the actors sat among the spectators on chairs marked with an "X," so that actually and symbolically the killers of Caesar and Cinna, and the rival factions that resort to war after Caesar's death, sprung from among us. Dehnert's production thus deftly suggested that political violence, and the often unexamined motives that promulgate such violence, are not necessarily or always the work of distant, shadowy cabals or cliques, but rather can spring from the general populace. As Pogo famously observed, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Given the staging in the round, the actors moved constantly lest their backs be to any one segment of the audience for too long. This staging created a sense of urgency among the characters and an engrossing kinetic energy. Cassius, Brutus, and even Antony in his long funeral oration in 3.2 often paced as they spoke and were followed around stage by spotlights, especially in the scenes between Cassius and Brutus. The assassination was preceded by a visually stunning scene that exemplified how simple props and vivid imagination can evoke vivid theater. Ako, a diminutive actress, played the Soothsayer in a white lace gown. Warning Caesar again of the Ides of March and speaking initially in Japanese, she moved slowly towards Caesar, who lay on a platform center stage as if on her bed in her house. Recall here Caesar's report of Calpurnia's dream: "She dreamt tonight she saw my statue, / Which like a fountain with an hundred spouts / Did run pure blood" (2.2.76-78). As the soothsayer spoke Caesar awoke from her sleep and slowly sat up. From across the stage emerged the conspirators, and from the hands of Decius Brutus a huge roll of white butcher paper unfurled toward Caesar's bed. The conspirators dipped their hands into a bowl of blood carried by Brutus and then poured blood or wiped their bloody hands on the paper as Caesar stepped down and walked slowly across the blood-covered paper. As if at the climax of Caesar's nightmare, the soothsayer returned to English with "Help ho, they murder Caesar" and first Brutus and then Caesar screamed as the conspirators exited and the now thoroughly bloodied paper was withdrawn by Decius Brutus. As a visual and aural evocation of a nightmare the scene worked brilliantly.

The actual murder was grotesque and terrifying. Cassius urges Caesar to "Come to the Capitol" (3.1.120) which Silva did by simply stepping onto the raised plywood platform that became the Senatorial dais. The conspirators, all wearing heavy brown ponchos and hoods (as might be worn while trekking in the Oregon rainforest), gradually closed a circle around her, and Casca's "Speak, hands, for me!" (3.1.77) launched a vicious assault on Silva's body from all sides as red liquid squirted from her many wounds, drenching her white gown, the white sheet over the platform, and the floor. Kevin Kenerly as Casca emptied red paint from a can onto Caesar's gown, as if he and the others carried Caesar's sacrificial blood with them, and the murderers dipped their hands into this can to ritualize their deed that, despite Brutus's urging them to be "sacrificers, but not butchers" (2.1.167), was savage. Silva spun around to face her killers, and, drenched in blood, reached out to Brutus on "Et tu, Brute?" (3.1.75) before collapsing onto the table. Danforth Comins as Antony spoke with convulsive grief: "O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?" (3.1.150ff), leaning over the bloodied corpse before he too dipped his hands into the can of Caesar's blood and shook hands with the conspirators. As if sealing

his bond with the murderers, Antony stabbed his left hand with a knife, so he toiled on the body of Caesar. On Antony's "Passion I see is catching" (3.1.285) Caesar rose and stood amid her blood as the theater darkened.

Dehnert created several visually stunning moments in the second half of the play. Caesar entered and stood, ghostly and unseen, as Brutus spoke at 3.2.13ff: "Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear." She remained standing near center stage, in her blood-stained smock, as Antony, a passionate and articulate peripatetic, roamed about the crowded stage urging the citizens to hear Caesar's will. Comins spoke with superb clarity, a brilliant sense of Shakespeare's rhythm and punctuation, and a rising sense of his own ability to manipulate the increasingly restless Plebeians. He continually modulated his pace and volume as he sensed the citizens acceding to his arguments. Sensing victory, he climbed upon the table where Caesar had been murdered and read Caesar's will standing upon her deathbed. On "You all do know this mantle" (3.2.171) Antony held up Caesar's blood-drenched Senatorial robe as Caesar stood behind him. She put on the bloodied robe and lay down on the table, both dais and deathbed, and remained there until Antony finished his speech.

Once convinced that Caesar's murder was indeed butchery, not a sacrifice for freedom, the citizens turned to spectators and urged us to join them in their revenge. Finally alone, Antony sat again on the bloodied table, smirked, and on "Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot" (3.2.260) burned Caesar's will. It was a stunning gesture that shattered all pretense of morality or selflessness. As Antony exited, Caesar rose and again signaled to the spectators the "V" signal for victory that she had urged us to applaud as we initially entered the theater. Caesar thus visually transcended her death, as if her spirit were actually "embodying" Antony's words that turn the citizens into a raging mob seeking vengeance for her murder. The beating of Cinna the Poet and Antony's list of intended victims, which he jovially read while drinking whiskey, seemed but natural consequences of the political violence now engulfing Rome.

Caesar's ghost haunted the remainder of the play. She walked the perimeter of the stage in a clean white robe, watching Rome descend into violence, haunting her killers, and reminding us that the effects of political murder often transcend the event. She carried a small silver bowl, and each time a character died she approached the body and dappled the victim's forehead with a bit of clay that she took from the bowl, as if, like a neo-classical Valkyrie, she was marking the victim's passing and heralding his descent into the underworld. In 4.3, as Caesar silently paced the perimeter, Brutus and Cassius raged and circled each other like snarling cats; Haugen's and Linington's deeply passionate dialogue superbly captured the intensity of the men's egos and our sense of the grave dangers accompanying even what men believe to have been the purest of political motives. Only Brutus's report of Portia's death by "swallow[ing] fire" (4.3.155), which she enacted by entering and mimicking swallowing fire from a silver bowl, calmed them, but her death recalled Antony's burning of Caesar's will, as if fire were consuming all of Rome. This sense of inescapable violence was intensified by the battles; numerous soldiers, armed with pikes and shouting loudly, emerged from several openings and spilled onto

the stage. As soldiers died and battles ended, fewer fighters remained onstage. At Cassius's killing by Pindarus, stabbed, as he says, "Even with the sword that killed [Caesar]" (5.3.46), Caesar touched his head with clay, left the knife by his side, and then withdrew to the perimeter. When soldiers removed Cassius's body they too left the knife, and with this knife Brutus would stab himself. In a brilliant visual irony, what Brutus and Cassius believed had been a weapon wielded for Romans' liberty became the weapon that killed them both.

The final moments were superb. As the dead reemerged and circled the perimeter, Caesar approached Brutus and knelt before him. She offered him a daub of clay which he, not she, applied to his forehead, as if accepting his inevitable death and acknowledging his terrible errors. Caesar glared at Brutus for a long, tense moment, as if asking again "Et tu, Brute?" before he stabbed himself. Comins delivered Antony's "This was the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.68ff) slowly and deliberately, not only praising Brutus but also lamenting the waste that "ill-weaved ambition" (*I Henry IV*, 5.4.88) had wrought in Rome.



*Measure for Measure*: Stephanie Beatriz as Isabela, Frankie J. Alvarez as Claudio, and (in back) Anthony Heald as Vecentio. Photo by Jenny Graham.

Moving *Measure for Measure* inside the 600-seat tent in Lithia Park necessitated re-blocking the entire show in order to fit it into the tent's proscenium stage with seats arranged straight up from the front so that "Bowmer in the Park" resembled a high school auditorium. While Angus Bowmer is an amazingly versatile theater, with nary a bad seat in the house, "Bowmer in the Park" was constrictive and cramped, and necessitated the actors being miked so that spectators in the back rows (where I sat) could hear them over the intrusive air-conditioning system. Given the need to restage not only *Measure for Measure* but also four other plays originally designed for the Bowmer, one must compliment Rauch and company for ensuring that the shows would go on.

Scenic designer Clint Ramos's initial set was a business office: a large conference table stood center stage surrounded by several chairs, and behind the table

and further stage left and right two huge glass panels hung from the ceiling. Four doors, two each stage left and right, opened onto the stage. In the blue light of late afternoon, three cleaning ladies entered the stage and began sweeping and dusting the furniture. Throughout the production they entered as necessary to change the furniture as lights turned from the sedate blue of the Duke's office to the sultry red of Mistress Overdone's other "office." During scenes in the barrio we heard sirens screaming as police cars and ambulances raced along its streets. After working for several seconds the cleaning women pulled guitars from their bins and began singing, in Spanish, a song about working while lyrics in English splashed on the back wall of the stage. Throughout the production these three musicians, Las Colibri, a female mariachi band, appeared in different costumes and sang songs appropriate to a particular moment, character, or theme in the play, becoming a contemporary version of the musicians that played at The Globe and The Fortune.

The singers also introduced the location of this *Measure* as the barrio of "Vienna, an American city."<sup>4</sup> Thus, several of the principal characters—Angelo, Pompey, Claudio, Juliet, and Isabela—were played by Hispanic actors, while the Duke, Provost, and Mariana were Caucasian, Escalus was a black woman, and Elbow and Lucio were also black. This obvious emphasis on the typical multicultural mix of a major American city was reinforced by making Mistress Overdone, the "business owner" of the strip joint/bawdy house, a gay man in drag. Rauch thus introduced into his production another subculture; his Vienna was not only racially mixed and set in a minority neighborhood, but also welcomed in the barrio's "houses," as Pompey calls them, gay as well as straight customers.

This layering of ethnic and sexual minorities in an already complex and controversial play raises an obvious question: did Rauch's production concept illuminate or obscure the script? Did Rauch make the play more "about" ethnic and sexual minority communities than about the larger issues of justice and mercy, guilt and forgiveness, active vs. passive virtue that critics find at the play's center? Alternately, one can argue that there is no reason not to set *Measure* in a Latino community; certainly issues of justice and mercy prevail in these communities as well as any others, especially given the strong Catholic traditions that still pertain in Hispanic families. Issues of sexual restraint and liberty apply as readily in Latino communities as in Caucasian and African American, and among all racial and ethnic communities one can find gay and straight men and women as well as very different levels of tolerance for sexual subcultures. Further, in his tenure as artistic director Rauch has striven to create racial and ethnic diversity within his acting company as well as among his audiences, and one can argue that by bringing several excellent Latino/a and African-American actors into the OSF company Rauch is creating within a prestigious repertory theater a company that reflects the extensive diversity of American society.<sup>5</sup>

Anthony Heald as the Duke was anxious to leave his office; his suitcase was packed, and he spoke rapidly what I take to be central lines of the play—"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do" (1.1.33-36), as if the sentiment were not at the moment important to him. René Millán as Angelo appeared initially in "business casual" clothes, but when he reappeared as the duke's official deputy in 2.1 he wore a dark brown suit, white shirt, and a gold paisley tie. The gulf between the worlds

of Mistress Overdone and the convent of St. Clare was superbly evident in Lucio's summoning of Isabela. Kenajuan Bentley was a tall, lanky Lucio sporting an Afro, a half-open diamond-patterned silk shirt, tight jeans, and dancing shoes, while Stephanie Beatriz as Isabela wore a novice's simple black frock, white shirt, and black and white head scarf. Sitting behind the Duke's desk, Angelo was initially dismissive of Isabela, barely looking at her; while she pleaded he signed some papers, presumably death warrants for the city's newly arrested sex offenders. As Lucio urged her on, "Ay, well said," "That's well said" (2.2.94, 114), Beatriz's voice rose in intensity and volume, especially when she spoke of the souls that, once being forfeit, were saved when God found out a "remedy."

As if aware, no doubt from his Catholic training, of God's charity towards sinners, Angelo suddenly turned to Isabela and spoke forcibly of the law, not he, condemning her brother. On "Yet show some pity" (2.2.104), Isabela knelt before Angelo, and her "Could great men thunder / as Jove himself does" (2.2.115ff) was a passionate example of the gift that Claudio tells Lucio she possesses: "prosperous art / when she will play with reason and discourse, / and well she can persuade" (1.2.181-83). Isabela rose and moved towards Angelo as he turned to leave, and, innocently but also desperately, she claimed that upon returning she would bribe him. Angelo immediately turned towards her, and despite her hurried "Ay, with such gifts that heaven shall share with you" (2.2.153), Lucio's "You had marred all else" (1.154) signaled that for both him and Angelo Isabela's "bribe" was obviously sexual. In his first soliloquy Millán played Angelo's sudden sexual desire for Isabela as tortuous; he alternately clung to the edge of his desk—his symbol of authority—and paced the stage like a caged animal.

As Las Colibri sang of the need for justice, Juliet, who spoke no English, talked with the disguised Friar through a translator in a woman's prison. Behind the Friar and Juliet other women sat or walked carrying babies, suggesting both the prevalence of illegitimate children in the Duke's Vienna and the recent imprisonment of several single mothers. Juliet's



*Measure for Measure*: Stephanie Beatriz as Isabela and K.T. Vogt as Francisca. Photo by Jenny Graham.

“sin,” despite her promise to wed Claudio, thus seemed common; perhaps these mothers were former employees of Mistress Overdone. Angelo emerged in 2.4 still in his formal suit, but now clearly distraught. His rising voice, darting movements, and finally his tense laughter as he marveled at Isabela’s initial inability or refusal to understand his demands betrayed his loss of control. Her voice rising as she gradually perceived Angelo’s intentions, Beatriz argued that “Lawful mercy / Is nothing kin to foul redemption” (2.4.113-14) and recoiled in genuine horror when Angelo grabbed her arms and gave his “sensual race the rein” (2.4.161). Left alone, opposite Angelo’s desk, Isabela pleaded “To whom should I complain” directly to spectators, asking with a suddenly defeated and shaking voice if any one of us would believe her.

As Isabela and Angelo dominate acts 1 and 2, so the Duke dominates acts 3–5. Much scholarly kvetching about this play focuses on this structural disparity, and here Rauch’s directorial concept demands scrutiny. The predominance of Hispanic culture in this production, Rauch’s casting of Heald as the Duke, and Heald’s sudden exuberant exercise of power in the final acts, especially given his hasty exit from 1.1, suggest that Rauch and Heald saw the Duke as a white governor who, having allowed the minority cultures of his dukedom to descend into sexual depravity, now returns with a renewed determination to rescue his Hispanic citizens from their own wickedness. Casting Bentley as Lucio, who says that he knows the Duke well and like a burr will stick to him, also suggested Lucio as the Duke’s consciousness of how he has failed the Hispanic and African American communities. While most Ashland viewers (myself included) read the OSF casting decisions as racially neutral—as in last season’s white Hamlet (Dan Donohue) and black Gertrude (Greta Ogelsby)—Rauch’s choices in this *Measure* seemed deliberately calculated to promote spectators’ awareness of racial diversity and of obvious differences in power.

As the play progressed through acts 3 and 4 and Angelo’s depravity became increasingly clear to the Duke, Heald played Vincentio as not only increasingly frantic but also as increasingly pleased with his emerging cleverness. After urging Claudio to be absolute for death and overhearing Isabela fiercely condemning Claudio, he and Isabela shared a cigarette as he explained to her his proposed “bed trick.” The shared cigarette suggested not only an emerging partnership between them but also a sudden, worldly turn in Isabela that obviously excited the Duke and emboldened him to tell her that “To the love I have in doing good a remedy presents itself” (3.2.200-01). Thereafter the Duke moved quickly: he delayed Claudio’s execution; arranged the meeting between Mariana and Angelo (the Duke found Mariana in a mental hospital run by nuns); ranged about the prison filled with miscreants left over from his ineffectual rule; and endured Lucio’s constant jibing about his past, perhaps sexual, exploits. As Heald dealt with increasingly challenging and unexpected situations, he became all the more joyful, almost playful, as if under the guise of the Friar he were suddenly enjoying the exercise of power that he could not effect as Duke.

Vincentio entered act five in a classy three-piece suit and silk tie, waved to the cheering crowds onstage, clapped for the mariachi players, and walked downstage center waving his hands and urging us to cheer him as well. Here was a man now

obsessed not only with power itself but also with his self-image. Heald's portrayal of the Duke reified the questions critics constantly raise about the Duke's character and motivation,<sup>6</sup> as he here appeared manically pleased with what he believes will prove his talents and (presumably) win Isabela's love. Consistent with the contemporary setting, the Duke initially stood behind a podium and spoke into a microphone, as if addressing a holiday gathering in the barrio. Lucio, ever the Duke's scourge, spoke from among the spectators, thus distancing himself from this self-congratulatory spectacle. The Duke spoke meanly to Isabela, as if maximizing her need for courage and thus exaggerating the difficulty, if not cruelty, of asking her to forgive Angelo. Given the Duke's obvious relish of his renewed power and the surety with which he condemned both Isabela and Mariana, Heald's Duke suggested the proverbial white knight restoring order among poor, deluded women and finally exposing and condemning Angelo.

Vincenzio exploded from beneath the hood, and Lucio, who had come onstage, tried vainly to return to the audience before being stopped. After first condemning Angelo to death and then pardoning him at Isabel's initially hesitant but then beautifully passionate plea for his forgiveness, and revealing Claudio, after which (unscripted) Juliet walked onstage holding her baby, the Duke made his first offer to Isabela: "Give me your hand and say you will be mine; / He is my brother too" (5.1.503-04). Isabela turned away and walked stage left. After dealing with Lucio, the Duke turned towards Isabel and again pleaded: "Dear Isabel, / I have a motion much imports your good . . ." (5.2.545-46). Isabela walked slowly towards the podium, paused, grabbed the microphone, uttered a brief sound as if to speak, and the theater went dark. As with many contemporary productions, Isabela did not accept Vincenzio's offer of marriage; nor did she reject it. Her approach to the microphone suggested instead that her ability to speak persuasively may become the active virtue that, in the Duke's metaphor from 1.1, will go forth from her to light the way, like torches, for others. Perhaps we were to imagine Isabel as a voice in the Latino/a community for modesty, justice, virtue, and forgiveness. Perhaps . . .

### Notes

1. OSF Communications Director Amy Richards told me that after Bill Rauch announced the temporary closing of the Bowmer, ticket sales fell significantly. Apparently many ticket holders were unwilling to watch several plays in the tent and so canceled their entire season. The night I saw 2 *Henry IV* the Elizabethan Stage was at best half full.
2. *2011 Souvenir Program*, 11.
3. All textual references are to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. David Bevington (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).
4. "Director's note," *2011 Souvenir Program*, 14.
5. Rauch has extended this diversity into the deaf community as well. See my essay "Breaking the Sound Barrier: Howie Seago and American Sign Language at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 30.1 (Spring 2012): 21-36.

6. A recent, rewarding foray into this critical thicket is Herb Weil's "On Some Virtues of Inconsistent Characterization, or The Rhetoric of Teasing: The Duke and Lucio in *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Newsletter* 59.3 (Winter 2009/2010): 105-10. Weil argues that "Those who seek a reassuring unity for this play will not be satisfied unless the text is cut drastically. . . . But I do hope that it has become clear that cuts in production and omissions by silence should not seek some specious unity that would reduce inconsistencies and thereby make far thinner this rewarding problematic play" (109).

THE 2011 STRATFORD FESTIVAL: *RICHARD III* AND  
*SHAKESPEARE'S WILL*

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When we think about Shakespeare's women, our thoughts most often turn to his female characters: the viragos (including Lady Macbeth and Volumnia), the plucky heroines (like Imogene and Beatrice), and the love interests (such as Juliet and Desdemona). This year, however, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Canada has brought to the stage some of Shakespeare's more overlooked women: his wife Anne Hathaway, and . . . Richard III? In the 2011 season, Seana McKenna, a longtime Stratford actor who has portrayed Shakespearean women from Cordelia to Titania to Lady Macbeth, reprised her role as Anne Hathaway in Vern Thiessen's *Shakespeare's Will* and also commanded the stage as Richard III.<sup>1</sup> McKenna's leading roles this season invited the audience members to evaluate McKenna's acting abilities, particularly in relation to the performance of gender in both plays.

McKenna is the first woman to perform Richard III outside of all-female casts.<sup>2</sup> "It's really not any kind of a gender statement," McKenna explains—and she has a point.<sup>3</sup> Audience members can suspend their disbelief and immerse themselves in the spirit of the play without focusing on McKenna's female body. Without once mentioning McKenna's representation of Richard, Jane Freeman concludes in her program write-up that the play "draws our attention to issues of representation"; director Miles Potter (McKenna's real-life husband) similarly elides the issue of cross-gender casting in his program note, "The Triumph of Evil."

As McKenna puts it, "If the audience wants to see me as a male or an odd male, or a transgendered male, or a woman pretending to be a man, that's fine with me."<sup>4</sup> McKenna raises the key questions faced by audience members: what should they make of her performance? And what type of character does she give us? While at times I was pulled out of the play's action to see a female actor portraying a male character (including, unfortunately, giggles from a group of highschoolers in the audience when Richard kissed Queen Elizabeth), generally McKenna's Richard seemed to fall under her category of "odd male."

I argue that McKenna's Richard can best be understood in its relation to the early modern Galenic one-sex model. For Galen, and for later Renaissance physicians who adopted his views, women were deficient men: for them, a vagina was simply an inverted penis, and it was a lack of heat in utero that caused the phallus not to turn out.<sup>5</sup> Like a woman, Richard is a deficient man because of his physical deformity, which Shakespeare characterizes in relation to his mother's womb when Queen Margaret hurls insults at him:

Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!  
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity

The slave of nature and the son of hell!  
Thou slander of thy mother's heavy womb! (1.3.227-30)<sup>6</sup>

Later, Margaret addresses the Duchess of York (Richard's mother) directly: "From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept / A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death" (4.4.47-48). Richard's own mother laments, "O my accursed womb, the bed of death!" (4.1.53)<sup>7</sup> and later wishes that she had "strangl[ed] [him] in her accursed womb" (4.4.138).

If McKenna's Richard is at times slightly feminine, it primarily serves to underscore Richard's unmanliness. In the Galenic one-sex model, a person can only be identified as a man or a "less-perfect" man.<sup>8</sup> The latter category included women and boys and has been used to explain the believable portrayal of women by boy actors on the Renaissance stage. While I do not argue that the Galenic one-sex model was hegemonic in the early modern period,<sup>9</sup> I do suggest that just as the one-sex model helps explain early modern crossdressing onstage, it can also help us understand McKenna's crossdressing on the contemporary stage. McKenna's Richard was unmanly because of his deformity: like a woman, the hunchbacked Richard is a poorly formed man. While the program cover showed a picture of McKenna as Richard with shoulder-length straight reddish hair, smirking, with no visible hunchback, the Richard that McKenna actually portrayed onstage had a marked limp, a small but visible hump, and long, stringy grey-brown hair—this was a Richard whose appearance at times verged on the grotesque. McKenna transformed her rich, low, and womanly voice into a reedy, nasal, male voice. McKenna's occasionally effeminate Richard is not due to McKenna's inability to portray masculinity but rather arises from her (and Potter's) interpretation. When Richard arranges for Buckingham to present him to the people of London, Buckingham paints Richard's unmanliness as a selling point: "As well we know your tenderness of heart / And gentle, kind, effeminate remorse" (3.7.210-11). McKenna's Richard seemed the most feminine when he was losing his calm, such as the morning of the Battle of Bosworth Field when Richard is upset that the sun will not shine on the battle.



*Richard III*: Seana McKenna as King Richard and Wayne Best as Duke of Buckingham. Photography by David Hou.

McKenna's/Richard's status as a man/non-man was most clearly reflected in his pursuit of the two women: first, Lady Anne, and later, Princess Elizabeth through the proxy of her mother, Queen Elizabeth. Potter's directorial choices emphasized the corporeal in this scene: King Henry's dead body, wounds visible, remained onstage, and Anne (played by Bethany Jillard) spat on Richard's face over his corpse. Richard used his limp to get sympathy from Anne. Furthermore, McKenna physicalized Richard's deformity by not using her left hand: Richard took his ring off with his mouth to give to Anne. If she was not deterred by the fact that her husband's murderer was trying to seduce her literally over her husband's dead body, his spittle-covered ring further emphasized the heinousness of Richard's aims. Even so, the audience liked Richard in the wooing scene: after he offered Anne the sword to kill him and bared his chest to her, the audience laughed at his exhortation to "pause not."<sup>10</sup>

The costumes, designed by Peter Hartwell, played subtly on the gender questions raised by the play's casting. Richard's hump was not overly large, but it was emphasized by the cut of his long coat; both the men and most of the women wore long coats that flowed down to their ankles. Clarence (played by Michael Spencer-Davis) seemed more effeminate than McKenna's Richard. Clarence's well-coiffed shoulder-length bob was accented by a fur-trimmed long coat whose flow and length suggested a skirt. When in jail, Clarence looked almost cleric-like in his plain black frock and a white collar.

In a journal issue about Shakespeare's female icons, it would be remiss to overlook the other Shakespearean women who contributed to this production of *Richard III*. As Queen Margaret, Martha Henry continued her record of stellar Stratford performances. Henry's portrayal of Margaret as a combination of weak and powerful was utterly compelling. Her low voice expressed perfectly pitched bitterness that contrasted with her nun-like creamy white costume and headdress. As the Duchess of York, Roberta Maxwell wore a similar nun-like headdress and emanated a powerful acrimony.<sup>11</sup> Only Jillard's Lady Anne lacked stage presence: though Shakespeare's Anne does eventually capitulate to Richard, Jillard was too easily dwarfed opposite McKenna.<sup>12</sup>

By casting McKenna as Richard and reviving her role as Anne Hathaway in the same season, the Stratford Festival's artistic director Des McAnuff showcased McKenna's abilities as an actor.<sup>13</sup> It was particularly startling to see how different McKenna looked, moved, and sounded in both roles. The only visual similarity between the roles was McKenna's twinkling blue eyes: as Richard, her eyes sparkled with treachery and in *Shakespeare's Will*, her eyes glistened with tears—in both roles, at times, her eyes gleamed with loneliness and pain. Within each play, McKenna's ability to transform herself delighted the audiences. As Richard, McKenna's tone changed the instant he was left alone onstage: instantly, the friendly Richard speaking to Clarence or the misunderstood Richard entreating Anne became a plotting, self-serving man. As McKenna herself recognized and successfully projected, Richard is an actor who plays many roles to many people, while letting the audience in on his secrets.<sup>14</sup> McKenna's portrayal of Anne Hathaway presented Shakespeare's wife as an equally consummate actor who could effectively mimic and parody others. McKenna-as-Anne's impersonation of Hathaway's father was particularly colorful: when he heard that she was to marry a tutor, a Catholic, and (even worse) a



***Richard III*: Martha Henry as Queen Margaret and Wayne Best as the Duke of Buckingham. Photography by David Hou.**

Shakespeare, Anne's imitation of his "Jesus Christ in Heaven!?" (11, related in an almost maritime Canadian accent) had the audience in stitches.<sup>15</sup>

As Anne, McKenna held the audience of the Studio Theatre rapt for ninety minutes, an especially challenging task for a one-person show. Potter, who directed both *Shakespeare's Will* and *Richard III*, chose to open the scene with the sounds of waves and a lute. McKenna's voice was a rich, sultry alto that seemed especially appropriate for her opening words, "I long for the sea," and her wry first mention of her husband, "The sea was a far berter lover than you, Bill. / When it had me / I was wet and warm" (3). Thiessen set his play in the evening following Shakespeare's funeral, from which Anne has just returned. Shakespeare's widow has yet to read his will, even though his sister Joan insists she ought. "Joan is a bitch," declares Anne, whose acerbic imitation presents Joan as a shrewish nag (31). Thiessen's Anne expresses her feelings frankly, perhaps even more honestly than she would on any other day because she is still processing her often absent husband's death.

Thiessen built his play from historical facts and existing archival evidence, though he fictionalized some material and used his imagination to fill in the gaps—as he puts it, he "played 'fast and loose' with the will and its meaning" and did not attempt to offer a totally accurate historical recreation.<sup>16</sup> The Stratford audience enjoyed many of the references to historical people and events, as well as some of

Thiessen's creative additions. Anne's discussion of Shakespeare's friends (including Hamnet Sadler, John Heminge, Henry Condell, and Richard Burbage) brought the historical characters to life, but it was her mention of "Francis bloody Bacon / (Lord but he is a tedious man!)" that drew a laugh from the audience (61). The language-play between early modern and contemporary vocabulary also amused the audience: Anne relates her husband's words, "I will be back anon," and then asks, "Does that mean soon?" (26). Some of the play's humor relies on the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's reputation: when Anne first meets Bill, she asks him a series of questions, to which he responds monosyllabically, leading her to muse, "A man of few words, I think. / I like that" (9).

Just as Thiessen was not strictly faithful to his historical sources, the Stratford production might not have been faithful to Thiessen's artistic vision. Thiessen's note on style explains that "Although the language is poetic in structure—and the play somewhat based on historical incidents—it should be played without sentimentality, reverence, softness, or overt attempts at historical accuracy. Rather, theatricality, humour, brashness, and non-realism in acting, lighting, set, costume, movement, and music/sound design is encouraged" (2). Although the set (designed by Hartwell and changed from his original 2007 Stratford design) was spartan, the few props made it clear that Anne was in her cottage in Stratford-upon-Avon—the set mimicked the Renaissance neutral platform stage that invited the audience to imagine the locales both portrayed and remembered. Even though her physical location never changed, Kevin Fraser's emotive lighting design reflected the setting of Anne's nuanced and changing thoughts and reminiscences. Thiessen's play presents a not-quite-realistic situation (the recently widowed Anne returns home and talks to herself coherently for hours, while hitting on all the major points of her marriage) but Potter's and McKenna's choices led the audience to willingly suspend their disbelief. I, for one, was able to thoroughly enjoy an Anne with "modern sensibilities" and a wry sense of humor.<sup>17</sup>

The relationship between Anne and Bill presented by Thiessen (and as interpreted by McKenna and Potter) is bittersweet. Thiessen suggests that Shakespeare enjoyed the company of men, sexually and socially, but that Anne was not upset by it, though she did feel neglected by his attention to his male companion in London. At the start of their relationship, when Anne tells Bill she is pregnant, they vow to wed, "but to live / [their] own lives" (12). When Bill asks to leave for London to pursue an acting career, Anne is reluctant, but agrees. Her plea for him to not forget her is one of the most poignant moments in the play, heightened because many audience members know that he spent much of the rest of his life in London. In Thiessen's fiction, it is not Shakespeare's recent death that has separated him from Anne, but his earlier choices.

While the tension underlying *Shakespeare's Will* is Shakespeare's marital relationship and home life, Thiessen also weaves in other dramatic moments, such as a graphic description of the birth of their firstborn, Susanna, and Anne's flight from the plague with her three children. Most heartrendingly, Anne recounts the drowning of their son, Harry (Hamnet), after they had escaped the plague. McKenna's portrayal of Anne expressed her grief at her son's death as well as her irrational belief

that her husband's behavior afterward was meant to punish her. In Thiessen's play, Anne may be seen as one of Shakespeare's women because of her enduring love (and longing) for him. Ultimately, however, McKenna's Anne is her own woman who has faced a lifetime of trials and triumphs.<sup>18</sup>

As I suggested at the start of this review, the 2011 Stratford Festival has reminded audiences of a different kind of Shakespearean woman, a woman beyond Shakespeare's characters or even the historical women in his life. Seana McKenna exemplifies this other Shakespearean woman: the female actors who, since 1660, have continued to bring new life to his works. Although they are often overlooked by scholars, a consideration of today's consummate female actors (like McKenna, Maxwell, and Henry) can lead to fruitful discussions of the interpretation, representation, and reception of Shakespeare's plays.



*Shakespeare's Will*: Seana McKenna as Anne Hathaway. Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann.

### Notes

1. McKenna first performed the role of Anne Hathaway in *Shakespeare's Will* in 2007 at Stratford. Vern Thiessen's play premiered in 2005 at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
2. Kathryn Hunter was the first woman to play Richard in a major production in the Globe Theatre's 2003 all-female production. Richard Ouzounian, "Stratford Festival: Now is the summer

of Seana McKenna's great content," *The Star*, May 27, 2011, <http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/article/997488--stratford-festival-now-is-the-summer-of-seana-mckenna-s-great-content>.

3. Quoted in Ouzounian.
4. Interview with Victoria Ahearn, "Seana McKenna fulfills dream of playing Richard III at Stratford Festival," *CTV News*, May 31, 2011, <http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Entertainment/20110531/seana-mckenna-stratford-shakespeare-festival-110531/>.
5. For a detailed explanation of the one-sex model, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. chapters two and three. For a discussion of how the one-sex model relates to Shakespeare and theatrical crossdressing, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. ch. 3.
6. All line numbers from *Richard III* are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), unless otherwise noted.
7. This line is found in Q1 but not F1. This line number is taken from Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine's edition of *Richard III* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1996).
8. Laqueur, 26.
9. For arguments against the predominance of the one-sex model in the early modern period, see Janet Adelman, "Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model" in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 23-52, and Winfried Schleiner, "Early Modern Controversies about the One-Sex Model," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000): 180-91.
10. This was how McKenna delivered Richard's line, "do not pause: for I did kill King Henry" (1.2.179), in the production that I attended.
11. Henry and Maxwell, like McKenna, are also Shakespearean women, who have both played Lady Anne in Stratford productions of *Richard III* (Maxwell in 1967; Henry in 1977). Maxwell played the role of Queen Margaret in the 2007 Classic Stage production of *Richard III* (*Richard III*, ed. James R. Siemon [London: Methuen, 2009], 120). Henry directed the Festival's 2002 production in which McKenna played Elizabeth. See the Stratford Festival 2011 Study Guide, [http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/uploadedFiles/Stratford/Watch\\_and\\_Listen/Publications/Study\\_Guides/11\\_RIII\\_Study\\_Guides.pdf](http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/uploadedFiles/Stratford/Watch_and_Listen/Publications/Study_Guides/11_RIII_Study_Guides.pdf).
12. Anne is an integral character in the play and should not be played passively. Gordon Thomas goes so far as to suggest that Lady Anne has "made [Richard] what he is by her masterful manipulation of his words, his thoughts, and his self-image" (101) in "Is Frailty the name of Woman? A Reconsideration of *Richard III* 1.2," *Encyelia* 64 (1987): 95-101.
13. McKenna and Potter pitched the idea of a female Richard to McAnuff (Ahearn; Ouzounian).
14. See McKenna's comments to Ted Shaw, "All Eyes on King Richard: Stratford Festival Offers Twist on its New Season," *The Windsor Star*, May 21, 2011, <http://www.windsorstar.com/entertain->

ment/eyes+King+Richard/4820825/story.html#ixzz1NyJlyIJP.

15. Page references to this play are from Thiessen, *Shakespeare's Will* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2005).
16. Thiessen, "Post Script," in *Shakespeare's Will*, 73.
17. Colin Thomas, review of *Shakespeare's Will* (2005 Gateway Theatre Production, Richmond BC, starring Jan Alexandra Smith), February 9, 2006, <http://www.straight.com/article/shakespeares-will>. For further criticism of Thiessen's writing, see also John Coulbourn, "Shakespeare's Will' hard to believe," *Jam! Showbiz* (reprint from *Toronto Sun*), August 15, 2007, [http://jam.canoe.ca/Theatre/Reviews/S/Shakespeares\\_Will/2007/08/15/4419256-sun.html](http://jam.canoe.ca/Theatre/Reviews/S/Shakespeares_Will/2007/08/15/4419256-sun.html).
18. As Potter noted in the program of the 2007 Stratford production, *Shakespeare's Will* "could be about any woman whose husband is away working" (quoted in Coulbourn).

## THE 2011 STRATFORD FESTIVAL: *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

Owen E. Brady, *Clarkson University*

Stratford's *Titus Andronicus* was gaudily lit and costumed in the style of Hollywood's historical epics of the 1950s. Bright white light highlighted white, red, and gold costuming, giving the production an air of artificial nobility, an effect that seems central to director Darko Tresnjak's grotesque vision of a world in which a thin, false veneer of civilization disguises the barbaric core of humanity. Ultimately, in the world of this *Titus Andronicus*, justice redounded to bloody revenge and only costumes differentiated the civilized Roman from the barbaric Goth. To explore the world of honor and power, the production also blurred other traditional distinctions linked to gender. Men in power were violent, self-indulgent, and effeminate. The newly crowned Emperor Saturninus, played serio-comically by Sean Arbuckle, was a weak-willed, lubricious drunkard; Tamora's sons, the Gothic Princes, played with comic gusto by Brendan Murray and Bruce Godfree, were effeminate, yet full of adolescent aggression expressed as sibling envy and sexual desire. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of this *Titus* was a shift in emphasis from Titus to Lavinia, played brilliantly by Amanda Lisman, and Queen Tamora, played with understated rage by Claire Lautier. While many productions have emphasized Titus's rigid Roman virtue and its tragic consequences, Tresnjak unmasked the "civilizing woman" as both the source and agent of violence in a theatrical world marked by comic-grotesque moments.

From the opening Roman victory procession and bloody sacrifice, the production established visual contrasts that created the tension between the civilized and the barbaric. The fearful symmetry of revenge in *Titus* began in this production with the grotesque sacrifice of a Gothic prince and a mother's plea for pity. Titus entered solo, a long, hawser-like rope over his shoulder, pulling a funeral wagon, heavy with the load of his dead sons' bodies draped in white, the bitter but proud fruits of his long service to Rome. When the victorious, cuirass-clad Roman accompanying Titus pulled off the wagon's cover, caged captive Goths were revealed below the corpse-laden bed. In their midst, Tamora's oldest son Alarbus was pinioned, wrists tied to cage sides and head covered with a cloth bag. He became the representative barbarian, denuded of individual humanity, the symbolic sacrifice to atone for the loss of Titus's sons in battle. Rejecting Tamora's pleas for mercy, "[a] mother's tears in passion for her son" (1.1.106),<sup>1</sup> and under pressure from his living sons to revenge their brothers, Titus allows his progeny to "hew [Tamora's son's] limbs" (1.1.97). The stage sacrifice was brutal. A Roman standing atop the cage speared the Goth in the back like an animal. To heighten the horror, the killing occurred in expressionistic red light with blood gushing explosively from the wound and an ear-piercing scream filling the theater. While gore in *Titus* has a long stage history, this barbaric sacrifice undercut any pretense of nobility or piety, turning Roman virtue into a mere gilding of power's brutality.

Relying on Roman duty and tradition, John Vickery's Titus was suitably martial and masculine in his sang-froid rejection of Tamora's pleas for mercy and in his insistence on maintaining protocol in electing a new Emperor. On the other hand,



Claire Lautier as Tamora (center), Brendan Murray as Chiron, E. B. Smith as Alarbus, Dion Johnstone as Aaron, Bruce Godfree as Demetrius, Josh Epstein as Quintus (standing, left), Dylan Trowbridge as Martius (standing, right). Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann.

he seemed merely hard-headed and foolish in rejecting the imperial crown when offered to him. By refusing to take political power, Titus ironically undermines the Rome he fought for, allowing a different breed of men to emerge at the center of Roman power: the weak, self-indulgent Saturninus and the easily manipulated punk Gothic princes, Demetrius and Chiron. Though Titus seeks to “ripen justice” (1.1.227) in supporting Saturninus for emperor, he mistakes primogeniture for justice. In giving his daughter, Lavinia, to Saturninus in marriage despite her passionate bond with Bassianus, Vickery’s Titus self-righteously gave the living female symbol of his masculine honor literally into the hands of the fickle, selfish Saturninus. His folly became quickly apparent as Saturninus looked lecherously at the feral beauty of the prone, bedraggled, near-naked Tamora, even as he held Lavinia’s hand in gloating triumph over his brother Bassianus. Spotlit center stage with flute music backing the actions, Saturninus chose to raise Tamora, literally and figuratively, making her his new empress. Thus, Lavinia as well as the loyal Titus are humiliated.

With this shift in power early in the play, the production took its signature turn toward undermining civilization and gender roles. While Tamora’s maternal pleading failed, her raging desire for revenge turned to calculating sexuality as she provoked Saturninus’s lust and consequently became his empress. Using throaty sexuality, Claire Lautier’s Tamora put the barbaric Goth in the position to manipulate the

central figure of Rome. Moreover, she placed her libidinous sons in royal positions which allowed free rein for their lust to serve her revenge. Throughout the rest of the play, Tamora clearly controls Saturninus, played by Arbuckle as a grotesque image of imperial power with near comic drunken behavior; wearing his laurel crown askew and carrying a goblet, he made staggering entrances and slurred words. His Saturninus underscored the fact that the source of justice itself in the glittering center of the civilized world is unreliable and capricious; in bonding himself to Tamora, he allows Rome to become in Titus's words "a wilderness of tigers" (3.1.53). Clearly impaired and unseemly, Saturninus proved easy prey for the vengeful Tamora whom Lautier played with both disdain for the unmanly Saturninus and closely controlled rage at the self-righteous Titus. When in sumptuous imperial garb, Lautier's sometimes cool, sometimes sexually bold Tamora became more the barbarian as she inspired horrific violence in men to serve her revenge. While using her sexuality in a calculated way to manipulate Saturninus, she revealed her own hot animal desires when she conspires with her attractive, cynical Moorish lover, Aaron, played bare-chested and buff by Dion Johnstone. As they grope and mount each other in the woods while waiting to commit murder and rape, Tamora and Aaron became an image of primal human instincts: love and violence entwined on the stage floor.



Amanda Lisman as Lavinia (foreground), Claire Lautier as Tamora, E. B. Smith as Alarbus (top left corner). Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann.

As Tamora's other self, Johnstone's Aaron was the most powerfully masculine character in the production, using reason to shape violence. He was coldly aloof and clearly amused as he manipulated the lust of the comic-grotesque Gothic princes, Chiron and Demetrius, to serve his pride and Tamora's revenge. Aaron's plan to rape the virtuous Lavinia revealed his cunning and mocked the false masculinity and nobility embodied in Murray's and Godfree's portrayal of Tamora's sons. With Aaron onstage, Tamora's two remaining sons entered in mid-thigh length, gold lamé tunics, looking more like 60s go-go dancers than nobility. The tunics seemed satiric images of civilized luxury, glittering but somehow embarrassingly inappropriate for male royalty. While Aaron watched bemused, the princes brawled comically, like two spoiled brats, biting and gouging each other as they vied for the right to love Lavinia. This scene played on audience memory, recalling the play's opening spectacle in which other brothers, Bassianus and Saturninus, fought for political power like street punks. Aaron's butting the prince's heads together like some WWE enforcer added another violent, but laugh-producing, touch. Here, as in the scenes with Saturninus and Tamora, Tresjnak links horror and laughter to mock masculine power. The production seemed calculated to draw the audience into complicity by provoking an uneasy laughter to undermine the moral revulsion that should accompany plans to rape and mutilate.

While Tamora uses Aaron as an agent of her revenge, appropriating masculinity for her own ends, Titus appropriates Lavinia's womanhood as symbol of his masculine honor and as agent of his horrible revenge. From the opening scene, Lisman's Lavinia stood apart, a pristine presence seeming to hover above the crazed Roman power struggles. Garbed in a brilliant white tunic during the opening sequence as Bassianus and Saturninus initially squabble over the Roman throne and her hand in marriage, Lisman's Lavinia remained rather static, the chaste sign of her father's honor and his commitment to Roman civilization. Her brutal rape and mutilation by Demetrius and Chiron violate Titus, too. Done in graphic stage action that produced shock and revulsion, the princes mounted her like an animal before dragging her offstage. When she returned, tongue cut out and hands lopped off, blood spilled from her mouth and the stumps of her arms, reinforcing the horror. Though mute, Lisman's Lavinia communicated the depth of her violation in wordless poetry as she stood rooted center stage, a quivering mass of horror, burbling blood.

Later, as Titus plots his horrible revenge, Lavinia sat, her white tunic glowing under the bright stage lighting, like a marble statue on a cemetery monument. While silent, her presence was powerfully felt, as if she were the muse inspiring Titus's vengeful imagination. Like Titus, the audience saw her in the moment and in memory, her seeming tranquility overlaid with the horror of her rape in a sort of theatrical double exposure. Lavinia's role in Titus's plot to defile and destroy Tamora and her sons proved that revenge is not just the domain of Goths dressed up in Roman imperial clothing. In the violation of the Gothic princes, Lavinia, the model of Roman honor and the most traditionally feminine character onstage, transcends her socially determined gender role. Ironically, garbed in flowing white robes, looking virginal, she inflicted a bloody revenge in highly sexualized terms on Tamora's rapist sons. As they are held kneeling and bent over a bench, she positioned herself

several yards behind them on the long thrust stage, her stumps covered by flowing white sleeves. As if stone, she stood, glowing and grimly white. Then, raising her arms slowly, she revealed the long, shining blades that have replaced her hands. Finally, breaking her long silence, she unleashed a furious primal scream and charged forward toward Tamora's defenseless sons. As she ran toward them, the audience gasped audibly at the prospect of a bloody, violent rape of their manhood as the stage went dark. Thus, the whirligig of time brought in its revenges and Lavinia, too, becomes an agent of the barbaric. While staging of a male rape may have served poetic justice, Lavinia now served as an avenging fury that undermines civilized notions of justice.

In the final scene of this production, mayhem reigned as Lavinia and Titus presided over a most uncivilized banquet that served his revenge, quite literally. As in scenes of horror throughout the production, Tresnjak used comic moments to both distance the audience and implicate it in the process of using civilized behavior to assert power brutally over others. The cage that imprisoned Goths in the opening scene and later Titus's sons reappeared, now serving ironically as the banquet table that furnishes Titus's horrible human pies. As host and chef, Titus tantalizes both the audience and his power-drunk guests, Saturninus and Tamora, with the promise of "two pasties" that we know but they do not are made from the Gothic princes' "shameful heads" (5.3.188). In the confines of the Tom Patterson Theatre, whose long thrust stage brings the audience close to the action, Titus ordered appetizers of human flesh passed around and waiters drifted into the aisles to offer the audience the abominable pastries. But the ghastly laughter died fast as Titus coolly killed a compliant Lavinia, thus ending her shame and his. His revenge quickly racked up the corpses and the stage broke into a barroom brawl with nobles and attendants swirling madly across the stage, a banquet with a buffet of killings and suicides.

The production's chaotic closing sequence at first bewildered the audience as murders abounded in all sectors of the stage; however, Tresnjak's interpretive edge is clear. Aaron's cynical assessments of humanity and Roman civilization were generalized in the figures of Lucius and Young Lucius, Titus's son and grandson. These two progeny of Titus led the swirling violence against family enemies. Young Lucius, played by the young, slight, blond-haired Talen de St. Croix, moved sprightly among the dying, grabbing hair and then slitting throats, administering the *coup de grace* to Tamora and Saturninus with highly theatrical flourishes. Indeed, the one character who knit the *mêlée* together in the audience's eyes, who gave it form and meaning, was Young Lucius, garbed angelically in a brilliant white toga. It was disconcerting to see this small, innocent-looking figure so swiftly bustling around the stage completing bloody family business. The thirteen bodies that littered the stage revealed the ultimate descent of civilization into barbarism. Murder is in the blood, the hectic never fully removed by civilization.

The coda to the play's violent action added a comic touch that drove home the point: a monster lies not far below our civilized surfaces. As Lucius was about to exit, he took the imperial wreath, but failed to complete the text's full speech about his desire as new emperor to "govern so / To heal Rome's harm" (5.3.146-47), leaving the audience in doubt as to civilization's future. Instead, he aborted the speech

and exited the platform with his now-bloodied son. As he passed the audience on his way to an auditorium exit, Lucius nonchalantly crowned an audience member with the wreath and the power and justice it alleges to symbolize, as if to say, “There’s no way I can do the impossible, maybe you’d like to try, eh?” or perhaps, “We are all in this bloody business together.”

Stratford’s *Titus* harkened back to Elizabethan productions of bloody revenge with a comic admixture, a distinctly 1590s, Marlovian influence also found in *Richard III*; but it also participated in the play’s modern production trend of mixing comedy and horror and emphasizing the central female characters that began with Deborah Warren’s 1987 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Following Warren’s interpretation, Tresnjak shaped this *Titus* into a grotesque vision of a political world gone wild as the populace watches barbarism disguised as civilization’s triumph.

### Notes

1. All references to *Titus Andronicus* are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

THE PUBLIC THEATER'S SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK: *AS YOU LIKE IT*  
(2012)

Cameron Hunt McNabb, *Southeastern University*



Renee Elise Goldsberry as Celia and Lily Rabe as Rosalind. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Rosalind has more lines than any other female character in the corpus—685. Lily Rabe carried every one of them.

In The Public Theater's production of *As You Like It*, celebrating Shakespeare in the Park's 50th anniversary, director Dan Sullivan managed to meld the play's multiple plot lines, witty dialogue, daunting cast, and impeccable humor into a vibrant and compelling work of art. He didn't disappoint. (Then again, does he ever?) The production transposed the Forest of Arden into the wilderness of the rural Appalachian South, and the stage melted into the surrounding Central Park, making it difficult to discern where Arden ended and the outdoor Park began. The Delacorte Theater became as much of a Green World as the Forest itself, recapitulating what the characters experienced onstage—joy, frustration, confusion, love—in the audience. Artistic Director Oskar Eustis notes that this choice was deliberate, observing that the Public picked a play “about people who, in a time of trouble, retreat into the woods and discover reservoirs of strength and optimism within themselves they didn't know existed” because we too “all need that strength, and optimism.”<sup>1</sup>

This setting also made possible Steve Martin's captivating score, strummed out by a toe-tapping, knee-slapping bluegrass band. (I would have sat in line five hours just for them.) *As You Like It* is littered with music, perhaps second only to *Twelfth Night*, and the production didn't shy away from it one bit. Instead of merely providing a soundtrack or accompaniment, the fiddle, banjo, bass, and guitar players were integrated into most scenes, and the audience couldn't help but clap along.



Lily Rabe as Rosalind. Photo by Joan Marcus.

and her gentle, yearning desire to be pursued—"her smoothness, / Her very silence, and her patience / [Spoke] to the people" (1.3.80-2). Furr's Orlando played the lovesick romantic to Rosalind's pragmatist and he, like his character, was "enchantingly beloved" (1.2.165). He won the audience's heart early as they, like the wrestling match's spectators, applauded his hard-won victory; then they watched his transformation into a lover worthy of Rosalind, and finally they cheered when he married "a love that [his] true faith [did] merit" (5.4.195).

Across the board, the cast conjured a perfect blend of physical and verbal comedy, making both aspects accessible to the audience. For instance, in the wrestling match, the fight between the slighter Orlando (David Furr) and the towering Charles (Brendan Averett) held the entire stage, as did the physical ailing of Adam (MacIntyre Dixon) and the infamous swooning of Ganymede. But if the literal punches, throws, and swoons were well choreographed, so was the line delivery. Rosalind's uproarious advice to the rustic Phoebe (Susannah Flood), "Sell when you can; you are not for all markets" (3.5.65)<sup>2</sup> had the crowd in stitches. Even the silences spoke, in the wooing scene particularly, where Rosalind's extended pauses relied on the space between the lines, rather than the lines themselves, to pack her comic punch.

I suspect that Rosalind was no stretch for Rabe to play, as both are self-possessed, confident, radiant female Shakespearean icons. Eustis rightly calls her "one of the most talented and charismatic actresses of her generation . . . whose combination of heart and brain is delightful and rare."<sup>3</sup> Rabe's Rosalind gracefully vacillated between her strong-willed, proactive role as pursuer

Andre Braugher doubled as Duke Senior and Duke Frederick, providing a link between the world of Court and the world of Arden and the plot's dual father-daughter relationships as well. Renee Elise Goldsberry's Celia did not get overshadowed by Rosalind, nor did she play a fawning second, but carefully carved out her own stage presence. Stephen Spinella's Jacques was captivating in his understated, wry cynicism, and he persuasively countered the oft-hasty romance of Shakespearean lovers with his own misanthropic, skeptical brand of love. On the opposite end of the comic spectrum, Oliver Platt's jovial and, I dare say, Falstaffian Touchstone brought cheers and laughter the entire night. In particular, his seamless shift from his lengthy exposition of the "seven causes" (delivered in a single breath) to his deadpan admonition "Bear your body more seeming, Audrey" (5.4.72) had the audience chuckling up until the end.

But the most powerful testimony to the production's excellence was that the night I attended, it poured the entire time, so much so that the play was halted for a period until the bad weather lessened. (The song promising "Here shall he see / No enemy / But winter and rough weather" was a *propos* [2.5.41-3].) But by the end of the production, after more than three hours of rain, most of the audience remained, drenched despite their ponchos, delivering a standing ovation. One rather wet audience member simply commented: "Superb."

### Notes

1. "Notes," *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, Delacorte Theater, New York, NY, June 22, 2012.
2. All references are to *As You Like It*, ed. Paul Werstine and Barbara Mowat, The Folger Library Shakespeare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1997).
3. "Notes."

*INTRODUCING**Upstart*  
A Journal of English Renaissance Studies

In late spring 2013, a new publication will launch as an independent, open-access, online journal and blog entitled *Upstart: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*. On the journal side, *Upstart* will publish methodologically and theoretically innovative work in English Renaissance Studies, with pieces ranging anywhere from 1,000 to 20,000 words. On the blog side, *Upstart* will feature book reviews, conference reviews, and short, provocative pieces about the field.



The editor currently welcomes submissions for both journal essays and blog posts. To submit, contact editor Will Stockton ([wstockt@clemson.edu](mailto:wstockt@clemson.edu)). Essay manuscripts should include a 200-300 abstract. All essays are peer-reviewed and published shortly after they complete the review and revision process.



*BOOK REVIEWS*



**Alessandra Petrina and Laura Tosi (eds.), *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.**

**Reviewed by Anna Riehl Bertolet, *Auburn University***

The editors of this collection, rather than following a traditional direct approach to the much-discussed topic announced in the book's title, opted for a multiperspectival method with a temporal twist. The book envisions the reign of Elizabeth I as a manifestation of Augustine's "eternal present" that both contains the past and promises the future. Indeed, the essays in Part I, explicitly concerned with Elizabeth's self-representation in her writing, resemble in their approach the established discourse of Elizabeth studies. In contrast, the studies in Part II, focused on masques and ceremonies, and at least half of the essays in Part III, dedicated to the fashioning of Elizabeth by her contemporaries, evoke the queen mainly by indirection, through the strategies of parallelism, contextualization, backward and forward tracing of history, and imagining how Elizabeth illuminates certain texts as an audience, a memory, and a fantasy. In many of these oblique explorations, Elizabeth looms so faintly that the reader is bound to lose sight of her altogether. Some contributors, such as Effie Botonaki, make Elizabeth's absence itself a subject of analysis and source of thought-provoking inferences; others, such as Yvonne Oram and Kavita Mudan, acknowledge the futility and risks of imagining a one-to-one correspondence between dramatic female characters and the queen and proceed to scrutinize these characters in ways that illuminate Elizabeth in careful and yet convincing ways. Still other contributors, such as Janette Dillon and Sara Trevisan, decentralize Elizabeth as a part of a larger discourse, treating her as a point on a continuum or even, as in Kristine Johanson's study of the rhetoric of nostalgia, a part of the period's collective consciousness. While these shifts of focus may be seen both as a weakness and strength of the collection, they are elegantly justified in Alessandra Petrina's introduction that not only establishes the philosophical framework of the book, built on the lines of Augustine's understanding of the human perception of time, but also recaptures the more obliquely related chapters toward the volume's general purpose of "mirroring the times, backwards and forwards" (9).

The strengths of the book are many, most notably its fresh methodology discussed above, its international scope, its interdisciplinarity, and its presentation of the lesser known textual and visual material. This truly international collection includes contributions by fourteen scholars from France, Greece, Italy, Scotland, the UK, and the USA. The multicultural angle of the discussions is especially evident in the chapters by Guillaume Coatalen and Giovanni Iamartino, which focus on and amply quote relatively obscure French and Italian texts by or about Elizabeth. Coatalen's study also offers a generous appendix of unpublished letters by Elizabeth to Henri IV of France. Discussions of the iconography and manuscripts throughout the book are almost always accompanied by plentiful illustrations, some of them little known. The studies collected here touch upon the visual culture, manuscript studies, drama, ceremonial aspects of kingship and queenship, patronage, diploma-

cy, prophecy, nostalgia, and the collective imaginary—an interdisciplinary exploration that makes this book especially rich in scope.

On the other hand, some omissions are evident as well. A casual remark is made about the lack of studies of Elizabeth's poetry and speeches, on the evidence of publications from 1975 and 1994 (85), while there have been plenty of studies on the subject in the last two decades, culminating with Ilona Bell's *Elizabeth I: The Voice of a Monarch* (2010). Likewise, an entire chapter on the personal correspondence between Elizabeth and James VI of Scotland leaves Janel Mueller's groundbreaking work on this matter unacknowledged. Yet this collection constitutes an important contribution to the conversation about the relationship between power, gender, and representation. Its overarching conceptual framework, although not easily grasped without the help of Petrina's introduction, suggests the strategies of enlarging the discourse about Elizabeth I and other historical figures whose representations reach beyond their lifetimes, constructing the past and the future as an Augustinian eternal present. Even viewed outside of this conceptual framework, the brief, focused, and informative chapters in this book achieve a diversity of fascinating subjects and viewpoints, giving the reader glimpses of previously unconsidered vistas.



**Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.**

**Reviewed by David L. Orvis, *Appalachian State University***

Recent feminist Shakespeare criticism has been particularly interested in the relationship between history and historicism—that is, between historical materials and the contemporary politics that shape interpretations of those materials. Of course, political concerns have always been at the fore of feminist criticism. But now, as Juliet Dusinberre’s *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (the landmark text of twentieth-century feminist Shakespeare criticism) approaches its fortieth anniversary, feminist critics find themselves in a better position to apply a metacritical lens to feminist historicism.<sup>1</sup> According to Phyllis Rackin, one critical assumption that needs to be reexamined is Renaissance misogyny: “With the turn to history in literary studies generally, and especially in the field of the Renaissance, feminist Shakespeare criticism has been almost completely shaped by the scholarly consensus about the pervasiveness of masculine anxiety and women’s disempowerment in Shakespeare’s world.”<sup>2</sup> One way to puncture this totalizing view of Renaissance women is, as Rackin demonstrates, through archival research that produces materials complicating the coherent narratives critics have retrojected into Renaissance texts.

Kathryn Schwarz’s *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* offers a different kind of corrective to a priori assumptions critics have made about misogyny and patriarchy. Whereas Rackin and others have pondered how narratives change when different female voices are allowed to speak, Schwarz asks, “[W]ith what agency, and to what effect, do feminine subjects occupy the conventions of femininity?” (9). Or to put it another way, why do women who follow social conventions pose a threat to the social order? Drawing upon an impressive array of primary materials and theoretical works, Schwarz examines the consequences of taking masculinist institutions such as heterosociality and patriarchy at their word and to their logical extremes. Focusing on problems arising from volitional acquiescence, Schwarz interrogates the central paradox of heterosociality: feminine will is simultaneously intrinsic and antithetical to the ideologies that maintain the heterosocial order. As Schwarz convincingly argues, Renaissance texts acknowledge feminine will as both participating in and recoiling from the maintenance of patriarchy and patrilineality; this acknowledgment compromises fantasies of masculine authority and autonomy, revealing them to be part of a complex contractual system negotiated by masculine and feminine subjects. This system of precarious heterosociality constitutes the “livable space” that interests Schwarz.

Schwarz divides her book into two parts—the first on discourses that deliberate heterosocial hierarchy as both a concept and a social practice, the second on Shakespeare’s engagement with these discourses. In the three chapters that make up the book’s first section, Schwarz delineates ways in which each discourse of heterosociality “feminizes the faculty of action, and entangles the condition of mastery in an intimate association with the object it would govern” (16). Chapter one focuses on faculty theory, which associates reason with men and will with women. Although

heterosocial logic claims that reason is the superior faculty, its reliance upon will in the enactment of virtue suggests that feminine volition plays a decisive role in the maintenance of heterosociality. Chapter two looks at the gendering of language. Building on the premise that femininity and metonymy share a capacity to create and destabilize meaning, Schwarz argues that feminine will has a metonymic relationship to heterosociality: “The twofold work of that [i.e., feminine] will verifies and mystifies principles of association, cross-coupling the natural ties and synthetic attachments, organic orders and deliberate methods, that accumulate to the compromise of heterosociality” (55). Like metonymy, feminine will makes associations only to exceed them. Chapter three explores feminine subjectivity within the conceptual framework of misogyny. Emphasizing that misogyny is a response to feminine choice, Schwarz proposes that misogynist discourse is structured by conflicted, even defensive formulations of gender and desire. As she presses these formulations, Schwarz finds that misogynist prescriptions are often designed to conceal negotiations between women and men. In at least three discourses, then, feminine will is a vital, volatile force in the preservation of heterosociality.

The second part of Schwarz’s book comprises close readings of Shakespearean texts that explore the force of feminine volition in heterosocial institutions. In each case, Schwarz’s close attention to the paradoxical functions of volitional acquiescence yields crucial insights into Shakespeare’s deployments of gender. Chapter four takes up the problem of constancy in *All’s Well That Ends Well*. As Schwarz rightly notes, Helena’s behaviors have elicited a range of visceral responses, even though she acts in accordance with the tenets of feminine constancy. Ironically, feminine will becomes problematic when it adheres to, and indeed restores, heterosocial hierarchy. Chapter five rereads the cluster of sonnets on will as an example of misogyny as masquerade. Though the sonnets deploy conventions of misogyny, Schwarz argues that expressions of volition cross, and therefore annul, boundaries between masculine subjectification and feminine objectification. Willful beauty, for instance, might belong to the speaker, the addressee, or the culture. “Misogyny,” Schwarz explains, “is not a system but a symptom, of an eccentric—both unreasoned and decentered—surfeit of wills” (150). Chapter six returns to the problem play, as Schwarz discusses Isabella’s intervention in *Measure for Measure* in a state fractured by the absence of effective will. Unmooring sovereignty from masculinity, Isabella repairs the damage caused by the Duke’s absence and Angelo’s tyranny. However, whereas Helena in *All’s Well* restores a heterosocial hierarchy to which she then subjects herself, Isabella remains detached from the structure she reestablishes. In this way, she shows that the will to virtue exists independent of heterosociality’s hierarchical configurations. Chapter seven is concerned with the wide-ranging effects of Lear’s decision to divide his realm. This decision allows feminine will to “circulate on its own terms, cut free from masculine absolutism and animated by independent intentions and desires” (182). This alienated will puts feminine subjects in conflict with patrilineal futurity, and the misogynist discourse that drives the homosocial separatism realizes its logical conclusion in the barren realm at play’s end. In stark contrast to the other chapters on Shakespeare, this reading of *King Lear* illustrates the devastation that accompanies the evacuation of feminine will.

*What You Will* makes an important contribution to feminist Shakespeare criticism. In addition to calling into question sweeping generalizations critics have made about Renaissance conceptualizations of gender, Schwarz's innovative approach to discourses of heterosociality provides a useful theoretical framework for rethinking even the most perennial debates about the formation and expression of gendered subjectivities and the institutions they negotiate. Throughout the book, Schwarz demonstrates how drastically different such familiar concepts as misogyny and patriarchy look when we reexamine them as reactions to, rather than preemptive strikes against, feminine volition. Of course, the framework Schwarz provides has obvious applications to myriad other Renaissance discourses, making *What You Will* an important book not just to feminist Shakespeare critics but to any critic interested in the salient debates of Shakespeare's day.

### Notes

1. Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London: Macmillan, 1975). The book is now in its third edition, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2003.
2. Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 15.



**Philip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking*. London: Continuum, 2007.**

**Reviewed by Ryan Singh Paul, *Allegheny College***

Cognitive theories of the embodied mind have energized many areas of the humanities, sparking responses that range from welcoming to skeptical. For some scholars, neuroscience promises a scientific foundation for humanist research, transcending the mind-body dichotomy by connecting psychic processes to the brain's physical structures. But as David Hawkes's provocative article on neuroscience as the "new materialism" demonstrates, others are far less sanguine about brain science's incursions into the humanities.<sup>1</sup> Hawkes challenges humanists engaged in cognitive studies to answer a question: "Is it true that human beings have no soul?" (21). For Hawkes, the "eliminative materialism" of neuroscience inevitably answers in the affirmative (11). The search for the physical origins of thought reduces humanity to nothing but matter, discarding the human subject as an illusion. Hawkes argues that if humanists accept the embodied mind as truth, the consequences could be devastating, and not only for humanities departments subject to "colonization" by the natural sciences (21). Neuroscience, he contends, is aligned on a metaphysical level with the capitalist project of endless commodification: it reduces humanity to another type of matter to be monetized and consumed.

Hawkes's essay engendered a series of vigorous, erudite responses, all recently published by the online journal *Early Modern Culture*. Given the influence of cognitive science on humanities research and the stakes involved, the discussion amongst Hawkes and his interlocutors is passionate, enlightening, and wide-ranging. It is unfortunate, however, that none of the participants took notice of Philip Davis's *Shakespeare Thinking*, a short but exciting work on the creative cognitive properties of language. In this book, Davis outlines a method of literary analysis that incorporates cognitive science while remaining sensitive to poetic subtleties and the dynamic relationship between mind and brain.

Davis argues that Shakespeare's dramatic verse reveals bits and pieces of "an original text or background script for the creation of life" (1). "Shakespearean thinking" is the name Davis gives to this script. Despite the materiality of the textual metaphor Davis employs, he is interested in action rather than substance. Speed is the most important feature of Shakespearean thinking, which jumps suddenly and unpredictably from place to place like a flash of electricity; it is a "quicker, more physically dispersed form of mentality" that expresses the almost pre-linguistic experience of life as it is in action, before the hardening of experience into memory and its inevitable second-order revisions (2). Rather than examining the content of thought, then, Davis attempts to trace thinking in motion, finding evidence of its passing in the transformations wrought upon language by the electrical flash of thought's sudden leaps and connections.

For the language to analyze such an elusive and ephemeral phenomenon, Davis draws on an eclectic array of sources, most notably a tradition of process philosophy that begins with William Hazlitt and moves through Charles Darwin to John Dewey, William James, and Henri Bergson. Contemplating reality as fluid motion

rather than fixed substances, these thinkers provide Davis with a nascent philosophical language to “hold open the momentary” and describe life and thought in action prior to the illusory separation of subject and object and to the fixing of experience in settled concepts (10). It is these moments and motions “between,” says Davis, that Shakespeare attempts to capture in verse: the generative processes of thinking as living energies collide with one another.

In a series of subtle and elegant close readings, Davis demonstrates the methodological implications of a focus on thinking over thought. Since Shakespearean thinking exists only when performed, it is not “in” the text. Rather, it occurs through the text, activated in and carried along by Shakespeare’s dynamic, syntactic, and semantic structures. For example, when *Twelfth Night*’s Viola laments the complex dynamics of the love triangle between herself, Count Orsino, and Olivia, her dialogue, Davis claims, is not merely expository. Viola is herself discovering the nature of her situation: as she traces the overlapping and conflicting relationships between the three, her words shift from one perspective to another. Like the audience, Viola is “as much hearing the report of her own thinking as giving it” (48). Reading Troilus’s complaint for the departed Cressida, Davis argues that the repetitions of *if*, *not*, and *this* form a repeated syntactic pattern: “called into being in the space between” these empty structures, Troilus searches for the language to explain his situation to himself (41). In Shakespearean thinking, the mind comes to recognition of itself through the creative exploration of the dynamic structure in which it is embedded. Importantly, thinking exists not just within the individual mind; rather, thinking calls the mind to imagine an external perspective from which it can recognize itself.

The multidimensionality of thinking is central to Davis’s vision for cognitive literary criticism. In his final chapter, Davis turns first to Edwin A. Abbott’s 1869 *Shakespearian Grammar*. Abbott argues that the flexible syntax of Elizabethan English offers a quicker language more responsive to the emotional demands of the moment. Such responsiveness allows for a compressed, elliptical style of striking juxtapositions and quick shifts in meaning, with the steps between elided. Shakespeare’s favorite technique for creating compact and energized language is to alter a word’s syntactic function; in particular, he loves to verb nouns. Such compressions, writes Davis, create “new life out of basic materials” (80). “[T]he quasi-synaptic connection made between one thought-firing word and another is silent” as the process of thinking jumps from one concept to another, building new connections in language “in the midst and the mix of the life it depicts” (80). Davis compares this creative process to “Thoughtland,” the imaginative realm sought by the protagonist of Abbott’s science fiction classic *Flatland*; like the two-dimensional being trying to think in three dimensions, the compressions and elisions in Shakespeare’s language reveal thinking straining beyond the barrier of the individual, attempting to think not only its own being but also “outside or above” itself (71).

Like some other entries in Continuum’s *Shakespeare Now!* series, *Shakespeare Thinking* is the beginning of a work-in-progress, so it has its share of problems. In building his conceptual framework, Davis relies on a vague definition of “life” as a creative force that is somehow analogous to or related to the process of “thinking.” He tends to conflate the two into one nebulous force without explaining their

relationship: it is unclear if thinking is similar to life, an effect of life, or perhaps even a form of life itself. And although Davis defines Shakespearean thinking as the expression of primary experience, it is only through the second-order processes of description, paraphrase, and analysis that he can recreate it. Davis sets his sights on thinking in action while at the same time placing it behind the arras of ineffable, momentary experience. Still, his ultimate hypothesis, that Shakespearean thinking can literally change the structure of the brain, shows that a cognitive literary criticism not subject to the demands of “eliminative materialism” is possible. Davis writes that *Shakespeare Thinking* is part of a larger interdisciplinary project to “recreate a natural philosophy that works between arts and sciences” (92). Hawkes and others fear that cognitive science may be a Trojan Horse that opens the humanities to conquest by the sciences. By developing a literary language that incorporates cognitive theory without raising it to the status of ultimate truth, Davis sees a way to bridge an academic divide and help humanists and scientists collaborate in the study of human life, consciousness, and creativity.

### Notes

1. David Hawkes, “Against Materialism in Literary Theory,” *Early Modern Culture: an electronic seminar* 9 (2012): 1-31, <http://emc.eserver.org/1-9/issue9.html>.



**Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.**

**Reviewed by Wesley Kisting, *Augusta State University***

*Shakespeare's Freedom* offers an engaging reflection on the ways Shakespeare “explores the boundaries that hedge about the claims of the absolute” to produce a body of work that is strikingly “allergic to the absolutist strain so prevalent in his world” (3-4). Assembled from Greenblatt’s lectures at Rice University in 2008, the contents have not substantially changed. Readers unaware of this fact will be surprised that little analytical attention is devoted to freedom—a term enlisted to lend a semblance of unity to chapters that feel drawn from separate talks about other, related concerns. That qualm aside, Greenblatt’s gifts as a sensitive reader yield frequent, valuable insights into the plays and some of their most elusive characters. Each chapter’s swift, accessible treatment of an important concern across multiple works is also an excellent introduction for non-specialists to Shakespeare’s artistry and originality.

Chapter one notes that the concerns of the subsequent chapters—beauty, negation, authority, and autonomy—all feature in Theodor Adorno’s writings. However, Adorno’s writings are virtually absent from *Shakespeare's Freedom*, save for a broad debt to his notion of “aesthetic autonomy.” This absence is strange considering that the book’s only other unifying element is its claim that Shakespeare’s distinctive alertness to the limits of power and individuality enables his remarkable artistic freedom. Against his culture’s absolutism, Shakespeare exposes officials and lovers as constrained, deluded, or fraudulent. As a result, he “finds beauty in the singular, confronts the hatred aroused by otherness, explores the ethical perplexities of power, and acknowledges limits to his own freedom” (6). Turning to *Measure for Measure*, Greenblatt argues, “Barnardine’s preemptory refusal to consent to his hanging and . . . the duke’s preemptory granting of Barnardine’s pardon”—both of which defy realism—disclose Shakespeare’s belief that “the dream of autonomy” is untenable even for the artist whom both characters emblemize (15). The rest of the chapter contains a superb analysis of Barnardine’s significance, right down to the rustling straw of his prison bed.

Chapter two discusses the Elizabethan ideal of “featureless beauty” and notable exceptions, such as the cherished scars of soldiers and martyrs or the fashion of “love-spots” (43). According to Greenblatt, “Shakespeare’s most intense celebrations of beauty repeatedly violate the featurelessness that is his cultural ideal” (42). The dark lady, for example, “is not more detailed than that of normative beauties . . . but the departure from the [fair-featured] norm itself acts out individuation” (43). One can debate whether this particular example is unconventional, but Greenblatt finds stronger evidence in Bassanio’s queasy description of Portia’s beauty, Hermione’s wrinkles, and Innogen’s mole. These conspicuous departures from the ideal of featurelessness serve as “a mark of all that Shakespeare found indelibly beautiful in singularity and all that we identify as indelibly singular and beautiful in his work” (48).

Chapter three delivers a provocative, four-page summary of xenophobic sentiments in *The Merchant of Venice*, omitting any identifying references to the play to

highlight its eerie contemporary relevance and the ease with which “Judaism and Islam succeed each other . . . in the [play’s] imaginative structure” (53). As Greenblatt examines Shakespeare’s interest in “radical individuation-through-loathing” (58), the main focus is Shylock, whose suffering spurs fuller identification with his Jewishness and intensifies his hatred of the Christians. To stay in the realm of comedy, Shakespeare stages “an assimilation to which the enemy finally consents because the alternative is to lose his life and livelihood” (70). Shylock’s hatred vanishes in a “reassuring, if uneasy, fantasy of conversion . . . . But there is no comparable reassurance in *Othello*: honest Iago’s hatred has no limits, and he is already one of us” (72). Regardless, both outcomes—Shylock’s strained absorption and Iago’s paralyzing inscrutability—attest that radical individuation is unsustainable in human society.

Chapter four explores the extent to which Macbeth, Claudius, Richard III, Prospero, Cornwall, and other figures of authority convey “a deep skepticism about any attempt to formulate and obey an abstract moral law, independent of actual social, political, and psychological circumstances” (82). This discussion appeared previously in *The New York Review of Books* under the title “Shakespeare and the Uses of Power” (April 12, 2007). The only notable change is the expansion of the final paragraph, to which Greenblatt adds that “the terrible sense of limit articulated at the close [of *King Lear*] . . . has brought with it the strange injunction that is one of Shakespeare’s most remarkable gifts, the simple injunction to speak what we feel” (94). While the chapter sufficiently demonstrates that Shakespeare could think freely against “the dominant currents of ethical reflection in his period” (82), it does not illuminate his conception of freedom.

Chapter five examines Shakespeare’s interest in autonomy. About Coriolanus, Greenblatt writes, “Only by severing his relationship to nature and abstracting himself from all claims of kinship will he become absolutely autonomous” (110). When Volumnia persuades him to relent and spare Rome, that autonomy collapses, suggesting that “Shakespeare doubted that it was possible even for the most fiercely determined human being to live as if he were the author of himself” (111). This notion of autonomy seems unusually strict. If “autonomy in [Greenblatt’s] strict sense is not a state available for any sentient creature” (111), one wonders why free-thinking Shakespeare would associate it with freedom at all (however untenable), rather than delusion or self-estrangement. What Greenblatt reads as an inescapable human subjection that disallows full autonomy, Shakespeare could regard as pleasurable participation in the natural act of compromise.

In the book’s final pages, Greenblatt does ascribe a more flexible notion of freedom to the artist, who is limited only to the extent that the audience is willing to pardon him. This ascription is the closest *Shakespeare’s Freedom* comes to considering that Shakespeare may have understood radical freedom not as a condition free of limits, per se, but as an ability to judiciously exploit limits. Greenblatt notes the very different appeals for pardon in the epilogues of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *the Tempest*—the former excusing any offense on the grounds of its dreamlike insubstantiality, the latter touting the audience’s own culpability. But the question of “how . . . [to] account for the distance between these two” only arises in the last paragraph, prompting a hurried and unsatisfying answer: “the shift . . . from ‘dream’

to 'crime' is a measure of his [Shakespeare's] deepening awareness of the nature of his craft and the risks it entailed" (122-23).

The major shortcoming of *Shakespeare's Freedom* is its unexplored notion of freedom, which never advances beyond the generic observation that "Free . . . means in [Shakespeare's] work the opposite of confined, imprisoned, subjected, constrained, and afraid to speak out" (1). Any interest in complicating this notion is lost in the centrifugal pull of the ensuing chapters. As a result, Greenblatt's astute insights into power and individuality come across as redundant proofs of Shakespeare's freedom from his culture's absolutism; they do not combine to illuminate what freedom meant to Shakespeare.



Randall Martin and Katherine Scheil (eds.), *Shakespeare / Adaptation / Modern Drama: Essays in Honour of Jill L. Levenson*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

Reviewed by M. Tyler Sasser, *The University of Southern Mississippi*

Randall Martin and Katherine Scheil's volume brings together top scholars to examine the modern adaptations of Shakespeare and the work of adaptation in modern drama. The dust jacket advertises the collection of essays as the "first book-length international study to examine the critical and theatrical connections among [Shakespeare, adaptation, and modern drama], including the motivations, methods, and limits of adaptation in modern performance media." Together, the fifteen essays and invaluable introduction also advance the pioneering work of the scholar Jill L. Levenson. They honor her by forming an adept collection that illuminates the "adaptive relationships across and within" its subjects (10).

The tripartite grouping of the essays clarifies the book's intertextual purpose: Part I: Shakespeare and Modern Drama; Part II: Shakespeare; and Part III: Modern Drama. Part I mostly centers on Shakespeare adaptations for the modern stage. Peter Holland, in the volume's opening essay "Unwinding *Coriolanus*: Osborne, Grass, and Brecht," traces the multidirectional and creative history of "four plays, three productions, one lecture, and one quasi-play" to follow the hermeneutic relationship between Shakespeare and these modern reconstructions (27-28). While Hersh Zeifman's essay discusses the existential relationship between Belgian philosopher Arnold Geulincx's image of the boat journey in Samuel Beckett's *Molly*, Tom Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the three subsequent essays concern adaptations of Shakespeare in non-dramatic media such as musicals, novels, films, and television. Andrea Most observes that *West Side Story* inhabits a hybrid form of musical comedy and Elizabethan drama in order to "express the tensions and concerns of 1950s American liberal culture" (56). Margaret Jane Kidnie turns to fictionalized treatments of live theater in *The Eyre Affair* (novel) and *Stage Beauty* (film) in order to challenge popular conceptions of "theatrical liveness" only existing in performance. John H. Astington situates political appropriations of *Macbeth* for the stage and television within the context of Margaret Thatcher's reign and what he identifies as a cultural response to "Shakespeare's plays about the abuses and corruptions of power" (108).

Katherine Scheil's discussion of Shakespeare's inclusion in recent memoirs anticipates the essays in Part II by focusing on processes of self-adaptation. By analyzing identities constructed by personal memoirs, Scheil answers the question, "In what ways does the commemoration of a particular 'Shakespeare' authorize aspects of memoir?" and explains how a past-Shakespeare is adapted to understand one's present (111). Ending Part I is Robert Ormsby's consideration of the 2007 Stratford Festival's much contested *Merchant of Venice* as an example of how the "cultivation of a tourist audience and the appeal to Shakespeare's cultural authority affect such festivals' negotiation of race, interculturalism, and economic imperatives" (127).

Since adaptation not only includes the cultural transmission of an earlier writer's work, but also the "internal process of interpretive re-creation," the essays in Part II center on Shakespeare's own adaptation of historical sources plus his habit of self-adaptation (15). James C. Bulman focuses on the ideological work in the "bawdy wordplay" and "linguistic structure" of *2 Henry IV* to explore socio-power relations in Elizabethan culture (146). His observations regarding why "recent editors have failed to gloss such wordplay adequately" illustrate how adaptation studies can alter how scholars edit Shakespeare. Stanley Wells examines how Shakespeare converts his own professional experience as a playwright into Lear's public speeches. Such speeches, argues Wells, "show Lear as his own scriptwriter," and in them, Shakespeare's "writing comes closest to a style he might have adopted for non-dramatic verse" (171). Alexander Leggatt turns to the ancient archetype of a shipwreck—first introduced in *The Comedy of Errors* but adapted anew for *Pericles* and *The Tempest*—to reflect on the evolution of Shakespeare's understanding of the relationship between human nature and imagination. Similarly, Randall Martin situates the shipwreck in *The Tempest* within Pauline discourses that shaped early modern imaginations, including Shakespeare's. Concluding this section is Hanna Scolnicov, who, after reminding readers that Lear is the only Shakespearean protagonist who actively seeks philosophical counseling, suggests that the king's conversation with Poor Tom functions as a Brechtian *Gestus* that articulates humanistic ideas in the play.

As individual chapters on adaptation studies, the three essays that comprise the final section are all strong contributions. Alan Ackerman provides an acute discussion of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, which adapts a story that "has proved endlessly adaptable"; and in the film *My Fair Lady*, Shaw's story of Henry Higgins's masculine social reform is transformed into a "postwar American" quest for freedom (236). Brian Parker offers a significant case study on self-adaptation with his discussion of *The Night of the Iguana*, a play that Tennessee Williams discussed in memoirs and letters before turning it into a short story, one-act play, three-act script, two-act script, and film. In the final essay, Rebecca S. Cameron juxtaposes Shaw, Noël Coward, and Harold Pinter's use of language games with linguistic theories to explore how these playwrights "critique the competitive, exclusionary, or coercive functions of language in modern British society" (276).

These final three essays, in their own regard, make intriguing and informed contributions to drama and adaptation studies. Nevertheless, some readers may find them somewhat tangential to the collection because they do not appear to have anything to do with the relationship between Shakespeare and adaptation. Martin and Scheil justify the inclusion of these essays when they write "that the adaptive mode may be one of the most characteristically generative features that modern drama shares with Shakespeare" (18). Likewise, they explain that the "Shakespeare of our title . . . represents neither a fixed nor an exclusive starting point. . . . Rather, it is an adaptive subject-in-process, continually reshaped by new discourses of creative and academic (re)discovery" (4). Moreover, one of the "generative features" that modern playwrights share with Shakespeare, and discussed in this section, is the practice of revision. "Just as Shakespeare reworked his own narrative genres," explain the editors, "so have dramatists from the modern period" (18). Yet while such broad

introductory statements partly explain why these comparatively unrelated essays exclusively concerned with modern drama appear in the volume, some readers may wonder how they are any more connected to the Shakespeare in the book's title than they are to Goethe, Marlowe, or Aeschylus.

Concluding the collection is a ten-page afterword assembled by Jane Freeman that showcases several personal reflections from students and colleagues regarding Jill L. Levenson's exceptional devotion to teaching, service, and scholarship. This beautiful tribute adds a certain charm and warmth to the scholarly collection. Levenson's contributions to dramatic scholarship are rightly honored through this afterword and the substantial contributions made in this volume. The essays collected here—all of exceptional quality—work individually or in dialogue with one another to provide new perspectives and create new relationships between adaptation, modern drama, and more often than not, Shakespeare. At their best, the contributions require readers to (re)think how adaptation studies influences how we read, perform, and edit texts.



James Schiffer (ed.), *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Reviewed by Nancy Selleck, *University of Massachusetts Lowell*

This volume of essays on *Twelfth Night* offers a range of approaches to the play, from a reassessment of key editorial puzzles, to explorations of the play's social and intellectual contexts, to significant instances of its performance history. Two especially rich essays elaborate the ways early modern theories of the faculties and the passions inform the language and action of *Twelfth Night*. There are also intriguing pairings of essays on topics such as exoticism and masculinity, with one essay analyzing the issue in the text and the next exploring it in specific productions. This back-and-forth between literary and theatrical criticism succeeds in raising interesting questions about the relationship between performance and scholarship as complementary modes of interpreting Shakespeare.

Schiffer's introduction gives an overview of the intertwining history of criticism and performance of *Twelfth Night* through four centuries, citing some of the most notable commentaries of each kind and demonstrating their relatedness. Much of this swift-moving "long view" provides food for further thought—for instance, about changing responses to the play's female roles on the part of producers as well as scholars. And Schiffer's lucid accounts of "twentieth-century revolutions" and "postmodern dissonance" in the evolving understanding of *Twelfth Night* would be especially beneficial for graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

An illuminating essay by Patricia Parker takes up a variety of ways in which editors of *Twelfth Night* have tended to obscure what Parker calls "the ambiguous, portmanteau, or polysemous quality" of the 1623 Folio text (58). Sir Toby's malapropisms are a case in point, through which Parker argues for a more intentional confusion in the text—a drunken multiplicity of meanings—which many editors wrongly try to simplify. She also suggests an important new reading of Viola's use of the term "eunuch" early in the play, one that attends to the "multiple resonances of its early modern meanings" (58). Subsequent essays in the collection also emphasize the early modern meanings of the play's terms, as in Bruce Smith's discussion of "fancy" as a faculty that (contrary to modern assumptions) connects rather than separates speech and sense. In this reading, "fancy" constitutes a creative capacity that's always in play and that leads not to "binary possibilities" but to the strangeness of early modern sexuality (65, 78). Similarly, David Schalkwyk starts with the early modern sense of "passions" (as opposed to the modern "emotions"), which captures "something suffered by the soul rather than moving outward—'emoted'—from within" (81). Schalkwyk's powerful reading finds competing discourses of the passions within the play: Orsino's humoral discourse is contradicted by the play's larger portrayal of the passion of love as "dedicated behavior and action" (89).

Laurie Osborne also finds a debate about love within the text of *Twelfth Night*. Through Cesario's extravagant love, which belongs to the Renaissance ideal of male amity, Shakespeare implicitly challenges Montaigne's contention that women cannot participate in that highest form of friendship (110). The focus on gender con-

tinues in a pair of essays on masculinity, in which Goran Stanivuković suggests Shakespeare is rewriting prose romances as part of a “shift from chivalric to romantic masculinity” (118) and Marcela Kostihová studies the politics of performing *Twelfth Night*—in particular, of staging the relationship between Antonio and Sebastian—in the post-communist Czech Republic.

Another group of essays turns to the topic of exoticism. Arguing against the commonplace that Illyria represented the unknown for Shakespeare’s audience, Elizabeth Pentland surveys a range of sixteenth-century texts to show that it was not just “a place of lyricism, illusion, and exotic fantasy,” but was fairly well known “as an ancient kingdom with a long and fascinating history of piracy, resistance to Rome, and female rule” (163). Exploring the figure of the stranger, Catherine Lisak contends that the play rehabilitates the notion of strangeness, cancelling the “Anglo-foreign dichotomy” and merging “*we* and *they* . . . communally and morphologically into a complex state of being” (182). Nathalie Rivère de Carles’s essay on staging the exotic is more tantalizing than successful in describing the scenic elements of recent productions—for instance, when she refers to “a horizontal stage tempted by verticality” without any further explanation or description of the stage design in question. (Unfortunately, this essay also contains a number of misquotations from the play.) More satisfying is Christa Jansohn’s account of German productions of *Twelfth Night*, which offers thicker descriptions of the stagings she discusses, and also introduces many interesting ideas and problems of performance itself—including the “recent tendency of contemporary theatre to replace traditional character concepts [with] visual appeals” (212).

Two intriguing essays toward the end of the collection focus on the play’s relation to social hierarchies. Ivo Kamps explores its representation of social class in the context of festive comedy, entertaining the idea that Malvolio too may be a figure of “Misrule” who ultimately suggests a more permanent possibility of social change than the “safety-valve” model of C. L. Barber. Perhaps, Kamps muses, the play’s ending suggests “that the rise of commoners like Malvolio cannot be stemmed”; Shakespeare may be asking his audience “to see the old madness as the new sanity” (241). On the other hand, Jennifer Vaught’s essay connecting and comparing *Twelfth Night* with the post-Civil War New Orleans traditions of Carnival—which she argues arose out of “nostalgia for a rigidly hierarchical culture”—shows that Misrule “can also be appropriated for conservative, elitist, and repressive purposes” (250). Her analysis of the *Twelfth Night Revels* extends our sense of the play’s contexts as well as the notion of performance important to this volume. Introducing the Epiphany traditions with an astute discussion of Carnival, Vaught’s essay would also be well suited to an advanced undergraduate audience.

Such is the case with most of the essays in this lively and suggestive collection, which ends with Cynthia Lewis’s amusing and salutary cautions about the unsolved mysteries of *Twelfth Night*. Despite the “profuse epiphanies” of the play’s ending, our full understanding is frustrated by deferred information, narrative gaps, and lack of complete resolution. As with an unsolved crime, “the truth is out there, but . . . it escapes human apprehension” (261, 268).



James W. Stone, *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the Difference Within*. New York and London: Routledge, 2010.

Reviewed by Erin Felicia Labbie, *Bowling Green State University*

Among the myriad of publications about gender in Shakespeare, James W. Stone's *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the Difference Within* earns a rightful place. Stone's attention to wordplay and textuality as sexuality (and vice versa) is sustained in an effective manner throughout the book.

*Crossing Gender in Shakespeare* is heralded by three well-chosen epigraphs, but Shoshana Felman's statement stands out as the most applicable among them. In "Re-reading Femininity," Felman states, "The feminine . . . is not *outside* the masculine, its reassuring canny *opposite*, it is *inside* the masculine, its uncanny *difference from itself*" (41). Sexual difference is characterized by the uncanny. The psychoanalytical framework within which sexual difference is articulated foregrounds the blend of familiarity and strangeness in the visual encounter with the anatomical female. This blend is expressed in Sigmund Freud's account of E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, where a confused protagonist Nathaniel calls the live woman named Clara an automaton, and mistakes the automaton Olympia for a live woman. In Jacques Lacan's view, the uncanny defines sexual difference as *extimacy* (*extimité*), or the simultaneous presence of the intimate and the external or foreign.

I begin this review with this brief account of how the uncanny figures into psychoanalysis and sexual difference because this quilting point characterizes *Crossing Gender* both in terms of its content and its publication. Indeed, there is something uncanny about the presentation of an argument about feminist views in psychoanalysis within a book published in 2010, but which reprints essays written in 1995, 1996, and 2002. A new introduction would have helped to situate the argument of the book within the more popularly recognized field of queer studies. The book's sense of familiarity in the form of repetition (but repetition without difference) is its most notable flaw.

While Stone presents familiar arguments about gender in Shakespeare, the element of the book that renders it uncanny is the newness and the unfamiliar manner in which the author's painstaking readings of language in Shakespeare present new ways of arriving at familiar arguments. Stone's thesis seeks to reinvigorate a discussion about psychoanalysis and new historicism as methods of reading gender in Shakespeare. Although there is no clear rationale for the choice of plays that are analyzed in the volume, Stone seems to balance a reading of comedy, tragedy, and history to foreground the political implications of sexual difference in plays that are frequently studied and taught in the classroom. His first chapter, "The Transvestic Glove-Text of *Twelfth Night*," corrects Stephen Greenblatt's reading of the glove in the play by attending to the ability of the glove to be like an envelope that (like *extimacy*) touches from within and from without. Situating his argument in the historical context of Michel Foucault's famous reading of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, Stone coins the term *hermaphroditic anamorphism*, which he defines as "the quality of being and simultaneously not being one sex; of being both male

and female, and therefore neither one nor the other" (24). The focus on wordplay and naming in the chapter offers a convincing reading of sexual difference within *Twelfth Night*, and it is evidence of a careful understanding of how psychoanalysis reads the symptom of language as a material product.

In contrast to the anamorphic multiplicity of gender in chapter 1, chapter 2, "The Sound of 'Un' in *Richard II*," focuses on negation and lack in Richard's fragile masculinity. The un-doing, un-naming, un-Kinging, un-productive (read as impotent), figure of a single prefix calls attention to the way that power is its own repressive apparatus, and masculinity as power is predominantly an illusion. Stone places Richard in the "heim," or the room of the womb in the walls of Pomfret that metaphorize the uncanny (*unheimlich*) element of his own lack, and concludes that Richard is "uncannily fractured by the difference within" (60).

Moving from "un" to "union," chapter three, "Androgynous 'Union' and the Woman in *Hamlet*" analyzes Hamlet's femininity. Citing Ernst Jones and Jacqueline Rose's readings of Hamlet as the Sphinx and the Mona Lisa respectively, Stone engages a strong history of scholarship on Hamlet's gendered identity in a masterful manner. This chapter is one of the more thorough and convincing as well as carefully nuanced chapters in the volume. Here, Stone addresses the sexuality of each character while also maintaining a clear focus on Hamlet; he provides answers to questions about Hamlet's precarious state and the state of the union, as he also engages Freud's reading of the uncanny. As Stone explains, "union" is "one of Freud's uncanny 'un' words, whose primal sense is antithetical, both itself and not itself" (76). Although androgyny figures into the title and thesis of the chapter it is less significant to Hamlet's sexuality than is his intricate and *extimate* view of the uncanny. This chapter deserves a place alongside the reading of Ernst Jones and Jacqueline Rose in a seminar study of *Hamlet*. Similarly, chapter 4, "Impotence and the Feminine in *Othello*," offers a unique approach to gender and sexual difference in the character of Othello. The juxtaposition of Hamlet with Othello reframes the way that Othello might be read; his "weak function" and his impotence resemble Hamlet's procrastination and delay.

Perhaps one form of continuity among chapters is the idea of a leader who is also androgynous and impotent. Chapter 5, "Martial Cleopatra and the Remasculatation of Antony," presents Antony as an androgynous figure. Again, this is not a new argument although this chapter has the potential to continue the theme of the "un" and the "union" with reference to Antony's name. Yet the argument is not as substantial in this chapter as a reader hopes it will be. Furthermore, the "martial" in the chapter does not foreground the political valence that gender discussions might produce. This chapter disappoints as a transition between the fourth chapter on *Othello* and the sixth chapter, "The Woman Within in *Cymbeline*," and mostly because the latter chapter's focus on parthenogenesis and cross-dressing has weighty political implications. The question of the materiality of the performance of gender and the question of "pure blood" offers a possible point of continuity with the theme of the uncanny in the book, but this final chapter does not present a metanarrative that marks this connection.

Stone saves his metanarrative for his epilogue, the title of which carries one of my favorite images, also employed by Rudolphe Gasché: "The Tain of the Mir-

ror." Here, Stone places sexual difference at the intersection of psychoanalysis and new historicism when he states, "The insistence on the *truth* of sexuality manifests itself . . . as an ideological illusion" (128). Stone then turns to Luce Irigaray, whose concept of the speculum reconfigures the feminine as *extimate* to itself; for Stone, the speculum shows how femininity is within masculinity. The feminine difference "from itself" potentially revitalizes a discussion of psychoanalytical feminism. Yet Stone's opening sentence in his epilogue could also refer to a queer analysis of the same themes that each chapter of *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare* examines.

The political, cultural, and literary currency of queer studies within Shakespeare studies deserves a gesture within the book. I am left wondering how Stone would clarify the difference between a strict focus on sexual difference in psychoanalysis and new historicism and a potential understanding of how it contributes to queer studies. Such a gesture would have helped to locate the book within a broader disciplinary discussion. Nonetheless, Stone's insistence on reinvigorating the unfinished conversation about sexual difference in Shakespeare might reframe the way in which feminist studies and psychoanalysis continue to delineate the implications of reading otherwise. Stone extends a crucial argument within literary studies broadly speaking, and recalls the impact of Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*. *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare* reminds readers not only that these debates are not settled, but also that to believe we have achieved post-feminism is itself an ideological illusion.

“There is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers that, with his ‘tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide,’ supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; being an absolute Johannes Factotum, in his conceit the only shake-scene in a country.”

— Robert Greene, *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592)



For those institutions and persons who have become subscribers over the years, I want to extend my personal thanks for your support. I know I speak for the journal’s editors, staff, and advisory board. Your help made a great difference as the Center for Electronic and Digital Publishing (CEDP) strove to maintain high standards and to do new things with this publication for Clemson University Digital Press (CUDP) since becoming the journal’s publisher with Volume XIX. Outwardly, the annual generated a new appearance—starting with volume XXI (2001). Inwardly, its organization, policies, and operating procedures were also amended to comply with the charter of the CUDP. In memory of Jim Andreas, late editor and co-founder (in 1990) of the Clemson Shakespeare Festival, we decided to change the cover and include a special section each year to match the theme of the festival. Although the Clemson festival had its last season in spring 2008, we stuck to that format for the journal, when editor Elizabeth Rivlin began introducing themes, announced in advance, and enlisted guest editors for featured sections. Sadly, the present volume, on the theme of “Shakespeare’s Female Icons,” will be the last one and the end of a history that began with William Bennett at the University of Tennessee at Martin, in 1978, on a shoestring and somewhat sporadically. After a good run at Clemson University, the impact of the Great Recession has been too great to ignore, especially in the steady decline of the journal’s subscriptions and increased overhead costs in that time. We congratulate ourselves for ending with so rich a sampling of current Shakespeare scholarship as one finds in this excellent volume.

Besides the consolation that “all’s well that ends well,” I am pleased to say that, from our *Upstart Crow* inventory, CUDP will soon be able to offer discounted volumes by direct order from an online marketplace currently under construction but expected in spring 2013. We are digitizing content for the journal’s archive, which will be available for inspection on an open-access basis on our website. The exact launch date is unclear though the two projects are correspondent. The advent of e-commerce and direct online transactions from the CUDP store will be advantageous for research scholars and for students, who will visit us as perhaps never before. Watch the Shakespeare library grow at <http://www.clemson.edu/cedp/cudp/crow/>.

Wayne K. Chapman  
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