Incomplete Dramaturgies

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In recent years, attempts by theaters to address the misogyny of early modern plays have yielded mixed results. I argue in this article that many of these attempts have failed to recognize the ways in which early modern plays have misogyny baked in as an essential component of their dramaturgies. The results of this failure are what I call incomplete dramaturgies. The misogyny of these works goes deeper than line counts and casting, down to the structures, logics, and assumptions that hold the plays together. The problems that these plays present for twenty-first-century audiences, readers, and theater practitioners, then, are neither superficial nor merely historically contingent (i.e. "of their time"). Rather, they are structurally linked to systems of inequality that have their roots in the past, but continue to affect the present moment. As Edward Said notes in *Orientalism,* teaching or performing or reading Shakespeare is as political as learning about contemporary foreign affairs (Said 9). While perhaps engagement with Shakespeare does not seem to have "direct political effect upon reality in the everyday sense," works of literature and drama (and, crucially, their repetition and representation through performance) do affect our reality through their effects on individuals—who, after all, are the ones comprising and constructing politics (Said 9−10). In addition, as scholars such as Kim F. Hall and Ayanna Thompson have long argued, we can see in the drama and literature of the early modern period the seeds of the prejudices that still inform and shape our society in the present day.[1]

Live performance adds another layer of complexity to this equation, compounding the political and cultural power that Shakespeare wields. Performance reactivates the politics and prejudices represented in these plays in a contemporary context. As a live and embodied medium, performance replicates the four-hundred-year-old misogynist dramaturgies of these plays in the bodies of twenty-first-century actors, for twenty-first-century audiences. Historicizing and contextualizing the violence of early modern plays has an important place in scholarship, but performance brings the logics, assumptions, privileges, and oppressions represented by these plays into the present. The performance of sexual violence becomes, in this context, an embodied reality for actors. To use *Measure for Measure* as an example, if Angelo assaults Isabella in act two, scene four, then the audience sees not only an act of violence between four-hundred-year-old characters, but also and equally violence enacted on and by twenty-first-century bodies. For this reason, my aim here is to note the ways in which extant early modern plays participate in and perpetuate the oppressive structures of misogyny through repetition in performance. In particular, I look to the persistence of Shakespeare's plays in the professional theater to investigate how performance might replicate the logics of misogyny by continuing to produce plays that rely upon it for their structural integrity.

My understanding of "misogyny" here is informed by Kate Manne's definition in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2017), which constructs misogyny as a system that serves to "uphold patriarchal order, understood as one strand among various similar systems of domination," and which visits "hostile or adverse social consequences on a certain (more or less circumscribed) class of girls and women to enforce and police social norms" (Manne 13). My understanding of misogyny as a system is also influenced by Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, which describes what Crenshaw has called the "double jeopardy" that Black

women, specifically, can find themselves facing due to legislation that considers discrimination cases along *either* a race axis *or* a gender axis, but not both (Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality"). This theory has since been appropriated and developed to apply in a variety of contexts, such that "intersectionality" now is both a description of "how people experience multiple social systems at once," and "a scholarly approach to analyzing and researching this multiplicity of identities, oppressions, and privileges" (Schalk 7).[2] Taking Manne and Crenshaw together, the insidious nature of misogyny becomes clear; it is entrenched at a systemic level, and so its solutions must be systemic in nature.

We might consider dramaturgy, then, as the system that holds the play together: its organizing structures and principles, as well as the discussion and realization of those principles through the processes of rehearsal and performance. I draw this definition from the work of Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt, whose conception of dramaturgy encompasses "the composition of a work" and, furthermore, "the *discussion* of that composition": the doing of dramaturgy as well as the structures, logics, and assumptions we might read in the work itself (Turner and Behrndt 5). Turner and Behrndt are also careful to acknowledge the processual nature of theater as a live event, as an art form "open to disruption" (5). This processual aspect of dramaturgy is particularly important to my arguments here regarding Shakespeare and early modern drama; while these texts are often construed as fixed aesthetic objects, they are in fact plastic, changeable through the processes of rehearsal, performance, and revival (not to mention publishing).[3] Unmooring our conception of "Shakespeare" from a fixed, unchanging text and canon creates spaces within which alternative dramaturgies can emerge.

This unmooring is important because the misogyny that is endemic to the plays of this period cannot simply be excised through judicious cutting or casting changes. Furthermore, the

misogyny that inheres in these plays intersects with similarly systemic oppressions such as racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. These misogynist dramaturgies therefore present intersectional problems that cross "multiple social systems at once," both creating and reinforcing interlocking systems of privileges and oppressions across a "multiplicity of identities" (Schalk 7). So deeply entrenched are these privileges and oppressions that intervening in the institutions and processes through which Shakespeare is produced can seem a "structural impossibility" (Wilderson and Williams 42).

I argue, then, that Shakespeare's plays, down to their very bones, both reproduce and reinforce what Manne calls "patriarchal norms and expectations," such that the misogyny of these plays survives attempts to ameliorate its effects through representational means (19). This is at the heart of my interest in dramaturgy as a site of meaning-making: if misogyny is a *structural* problem, then its solution must be found in attention to the structures and systems that govern these plays—in other words, in their dramaturgies.

To illustrate this point, I turn my attention to casting as an especially fertile ground of inquiry. As any actor will tell you, casting is always political. This is hardly a modern phenomenon: we can look to the all-male professional companies of early modern London and the introduction of actresses to professional English stages in 1660–1 as pertinent examples of "politics" directly influencing professional theater practice. In the more recent contexts of film and television, Kristen J. Warner argues that casting "has long-range implications both materially and symbolically and is a key factor in our contemporary media landscape [. . . .C]asting operates in every area of our lived experiences" (Warner 3). Although theater audiences are smaller than film and television audiences, they are still influential and influenceable, especially in relation to the educational market. Schools and universities fill theaters large and small in

4

order to expose their students to Shakespeare and early modern drama in performance, and those same students, as Jeremy Lopez argues, tend to choose plays for their own performance work based on what they encounter in those settings (Lopez 35–6). It is therefore important, as Warner points out, to understand the operations of casting, particularly within institutions that "brand themselves as ideologically socially progressive"—as many theater companies are keen to do (Warner 4).[4]

The practice of casting against "traditional" representations of a character, whether along race, gender, dis/ability, or other identity lines, is not uncontroversial, despite its long history— indeed, Tony Howard refers to female Hamlets specifically as a "Shakespearean subculture," and provides evidence of actresses playing the Dane as early as 1741 (ix, 38).[5] As Angela C. Pao notes in her study of casting in the American theater, such practices "issue their challenge to Eurocentric conceptions of American society and culture from inside the very institutions dedicated to preserving a European-American dramatic heritage," and Shakespeare is certainly one such institution (Pao 2). Despite "nontraditional" casting practices being "designed to dislodge established modes of perceiving and patterns of thinking"—worthy goals in relation to Shakespeare, particularly—there are limits to how much casting alone can accomplish (Pao 2). While critics such as Terri Power and Gemma Miller have proclaimed cross-gender casting as a form of "feminist activism" (Miller 4), Ayanna Thompson points out that "nontraditional" casting practices can actually "replicate" the stereotypes they aim to destroy (*Passing Strange* 77). With regards to race specifically, Thompson argues that this replication happens "*because* we have not addressed the unstable semiotics of race (when we see race; how we see race; how we make sense of what race means within a particular production)" (*Passing Strange*, 77, emphasis original). Thompson hits here on what I identify as "incomplete" in the thinking that

informs these practices: casting should be a first step among many for those who wish to intervene in the problematic dramaturgies of plays like Shakespeare's; instead, casting is often the first *and* last step taken. As a result, casting alone assumes the responsibilities of adaptation, interpretation, representation, and resistance.

Failing to acknowledge the limits of casting as an intervention leads many productions into the trap that I call incomplete dramaturgy. Incomplete dramaturgy denotes a failure to adapt and intervene in these plays at a structural level, and represents instead taking a shortcut, hitting on a marketing strategy, picking up on a "trend," or (with all the good intentions in the world) trying to cast marginalized performers in star-making roles—but perhaps failing to think through to the end of the decisions being made and to consider how they will affect the play at a holistic level. In practice, this might involve casting a woman as, say, Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* or Angelo in *Measure for Measure* without taking steps to negotiate the violence such choices can engender in the interaction between the actor, the character, and the dramaturgy. If, as I argue, misogyny resides deep in the bones of these plays, then it cannot be ameliorated by merely adding women to the cast. Indeed, as Thompson argues in *Passing Strange* and as I will show, such choices can (paradoxically) end up propping up the same oppressive structures they claim to be dismantling or challenging.

Theoretical Contexts for Incomplete Dramaturgy

Shakespeare's plays make potent case studies for this work because they are often framed as exceptional and "universal." Recognizing and critiquing the deep misogyny of, for example, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* or John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* does not require wading through centuries of entrenched Bardolatry and Shakespearean exceptionalism. Shakespeare's status as a global cultural phenomenon, however, makes

challenging his assumed universality—and, as part of that universality, his assumed moral and artistic "goodness"—more controversial. Rafia Zakaria warns feminists about the dangers of "the great lie of relatability," which implies "that there is one truly neutral perspective, one original starting point against which all others should be measured" (7). When it comes to Shakespeare, there are still many who subscribe to a myth of relatability, investing in, as Thompson puts it, an "uncomplicated view of [his] cultural capital" (*Passing Strange* 5). This is not a problem unique to Shakespeare—Jaye Austin Williams, for example, has critiqued the "tyrannical violence" of theater's insistence on propping up an "over-determined utopian dream" of universalism (Wilderson and Williams 31)—but Shakespeare weighs heavy within the industry writ large.

Reluctance to complicate Shakespeare's cultural centrality can lead to dark places. In a 2019 keynote—later published in *Teaching Shakespeare*—Peter Kirwan looks carefully at a repudiation of content notes for students of Shakespeare by director David Crilly, in which Crilly suggests that any student who is not already aware that *Titus Andronicus* is a violent play "shouldn't be on the course" (Kirwan, "Offence" 7). Kirwan picks up on this notion that knowledge of Shakespeare is "somehow innate, a cultural prerequisite even, and the corollary assumption that familiarity with Shakespeare renders his work safe," and argues instead that "his repeated deployment in the service of dominant cultural values has often made Shakespeare a Trojan Horse for problematic ideologies" (7). In other words, an assumption of familiarity—and the further assumption that such familiarity removes the potential for harm—opens the gates for the reification of the plays' participation in "cultural violence" (7).

Indeed, as the work of premodern critical race scholarship has long shown, Shakespeare's supposed universality—which is often bundled with a sense of universal associability, his assumed relevance and goodness and importance in all his cultural interactions, his "lie of

relatability"—crumbles under even mild scrutiny. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons that Shakespeare's association with "dominant cultural values" is so aggressively defended by academic and theatrical gatekeepers alike. In her landmark 1995 article "Uses for a Dead White Male," for example, Kim F. Hall meditates on undergraduate students' responses to her courses on Shakespeare and early modern drama, in which she "insist[s] that [. . .] students learn to talk in informed ways about race, nationality, sexuality, and class as constitutive factors in a script with as much force as the familiar elements we discuss—plot, character, theme, and so on" (Hall, "Uses" 56). Hall recounts students' disconcerting responses, from walking out mid-seminar because "I thought this class was going to be about Shakespeare," to visiting her office hours to complain that she "wasn't spending enough time on the 'beauty of the language'" ("Uses" 56). In reflecting on her students' desire for her to "affirm them through a mutual love for the Bard," Hall comes to realize that she and her students sometimes "enter the classroom at cross-purposes" ("Uses" 56). Hall, in Sara Ahmed's terms, puts herself "in the way" of these students' particular investments in an apolitical, universal Shakespeare (Ahmed 65). More recently, Vanessa Corredera reads *Key & Peele*'s comedy sketch "Othello Tis My Shite" as a critique of Shakespeare's supposed universality, arguing that their "satire invokes Shakespeare in order to expose the racialized boundaries of the dramatist and his iconic work" (Corredera 29). Shakespeare's "universality," in other words, becomes no more than a "shibboleth for approved 'high' culture often imagined as white" and male (Corredera 28). Hall addresses this issue by refusing to teach Shakespeare with a view to generating "canonized, 'apolitical,' formalist reading[s]"; instead, in the same spirit as the *Key & Peele* sketch Corredera discusses, Hall's "entire class estranges Shakespeare and moves away from the comfortable readings and assumptions students bring from previous educational experiences in order to open up the text to

its many, often contradictory nuances" (Hall, "Uses" 58, 59). That Hall and Corredera, writing twenty-five years apart, can engage the same issue with such force underlines the problem: Shakespeare's most harmful mythologies are deeply entrenched.

Working through a similar problem from the perspective of feminist theater studies, Elin Diamond argues that theater-maker and theorist Bertolt Brecht's notion of *Verfremdungseffekt,* or "strange-making," could be marshalled in service of specifically feminist rehabilitative or revisionist approaches to canonical drama; in her 1988 essay on "Gestic Feminist Criticism," she argues that 'feminist theory and Brechtian theory need to be read intertextually' ("Brechtian Theory" 82). Diamond's later framing of the contingency of "truth" in her book, *Unmaking Mimesis* (1997), is relevant here: "For feminist historians, philosophers, and literary critics," she argues, "truth and the sameness that supports it cannot be understood as a neutral, omnipotent, changeless essence, embedded in eternal Nature, revealed by mimesis. Rather, Truth is inseparable from gender-based and biased epistemologies" (*Unmaking Mimesis* iv). Unpicking both Ancient Greek and modernist philosophies of culture through a feminist lens, Diamond concludes that "a feminist mimesis, if there is such a thing, would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not reproducing the same" (*Unmaking Mimesis* xvi).

Sarah Grochala, more recently, identifies what she calls "liquid dramaturgies" in contemporary political plays. These, she argues, "produce dramatic structures which attempt to capture more effectively the increasingly liquid nature of lived experience under the pressures of global financial capitalism" (Grochala 220)—pressures which, as I will explore in more detail below, are necessarily "organized around gender, reproduction, and sexuality" (Hong 57). Rather

than linear, Aristotelean structures, "liquid dramaturgies," according to Grochala, embed uncertainty and possibility:

> Temporal structures shift away from the axis of succession and towards the axis of simultaneity. Spatial structures become more virtual and layered, with multiple contradictory spaces existing simultaneously, enfolded into each other. Causation becomes less mechanical and increasingly indeterminate, offering a network of possible and equally valid causal connections that produce multiple shifting interpretations of events. (220)

While Grochala is writing specifically about new plays, such a framing opens up adaptive possibilities and gives a certain kind of permission for radical dramaturgical interventions in older plays, too—which, after all, have their afterlives in precisely the same "pressures of global financial capitalism." However, in proposing a "liquid dramaturgies" approach to Shakespeare, I am conscious of Jaye Austin Williams's reminder that there are different stakes for different practitioners in undertaking this work: "I realize," she says, "there are plenty of writers and directors [. . .] who trouble the Aristotelean arc and catch a certain degree of hell for disrupting it. But I catch a very different kind of hell" (Wilderson and Williams 20). For Williams, the stakes of dramaturgical work demand that practitioners "look way beyond the interpersonal dynamics of a motley confluence of individuals, toward a set of figures who illustrate a devastating architecture of power relations" (45).

Williams's commitment to this broad scope of dramaturgy highlights a key point: not only is programming Shakespeare a political choice, but *how* his works are approached in

rehearsal and in performance is also political. Feminist dramaturgical strategies can be used, I suggest, to disrupt the problematic familiarity of Shakespeare. Insisting on the familiarity (and/or universality) of a play such as *The Taming of the Shrew* or *Measure for Measure*—and, for my purposes, especially its technologies of misogyny and sexual violence—permits the past to dictate, to a certain extent, the horizons of normality and acceptability in the present. Indeed, as Ruben Espinosa argues, the continued cultural currency of Shakespeare may depend precisely upon "inevitably localized readings" that "have the potential to let us see Shakespeare anew" (57). In other words, an insistence on Shakespeare's supposed universality is in fact an insistence on "[t]he perception [. . .] that Shakespeare is best situated within an old-world, Eurocentric similitude" (Espinosa 57). Making Shakespeare strange—and, by extension, insisting on recognition of the contexts in which his plays have *always* been strange—opens up the possibility of making strange the ideologies that his plays have come to represent, too.

Case Study: *Measure for Measure,* The Donmar Warehouse, 2018

My notion of incomplete dramaturgy arises from these contexts of feminist performance theory, premodern critical race theory, and performance studies. Incomplete dramaturgies result in unproductive frictions, where some combination of the performer, the production, the character, the playwright, and the play are in tension with each other, or where untenable gaps and fissures are created through a failure to follow through at a dramaturgical level. Hayley Atwell's dual roles in the 2018 production of *Measure for Measure* at the Donmar Warehouse, directed by Josie Rourke, provide a clear example of this problem in practice.

The production employed a complex structure that played *Measure for Measure* twice back-to-back—once before and once after the intermission—with severe cuts to the text in order

to keep the running time down. Importantly, the key plot points remained intact, despite the deep textual cuts: the Duke appointed Angelo as his Deputy and seemed to leave town, while actually disguising himself as a friar and spying on Vienna; Angelo used his new powers to crack down on promiscuity in the city, including tearing down brothels and arresting Claudio and Juliet for fornication; Claudio's sister Isabella, about to take her vows as a nun, was commissioned to plead to Angelo for his life; and so on. Angelo's subsequent indecent proposal, the bed trick, and the final act of big reveals were all retained as well (although, notably, the "head trick" was cut).

While the same trimmed text was used in each version, the first half utilized traditionally-gendered casting and early modern dress, with Isabella, the supplicant (Atwell), in a rough-spun nun's habit, complete with veil, and Angelo, the Deputy (Jack Lowden), in doublet and hose. The second half, however, replayed the action in a modern setting, complete with smartphones, and switched the genders of some (but, crucially, not all) characters; most significantly, Atwell took on the role of the Deputy and Lowden became the supplicant for his brother's life. The side-by-side comparison of two very different stagings of the exact same text makes this a rich case study and a stark demonstration of incomplete dramaturgy: it lays bare the ways in which Rourke and her team asked gender and setting to do the work of interpretation and intervention, and where that attempt engendered violence in the production.

The actors retained their first-half character names even when they changed roles in the second half: Atwell was still called "Isabel" even though she was playing the "Angelo" role; similarly, Lowden was still "Angelo" despite being in the "Isabella" role.[6] To make sense of this choice in conjunction with the second half's drastic change of setting, I consider the transition which took place shortly before the intermission, in which Atwell filled the infamous lacuna of Isabella's response to the Duke's marriage proposal with a primal scream. As she screamed, loud

music played, lights flashed, the set was turned over, and the cast changed into their second-half, modernized costumes After this explosive transition, as the lights came down on the first half, the audience was left with an image of Isabella in business attire, anticipating her ascent to power. The scream, the flashing lights, the onstage transition—combined with the return of Atwell to Isabella's nun costume at the very end of the second act—suggest that the second-half version of *Measure for Measure* in this production can be read as a kind of perverse fantasy of power reversal. At the end of the first half, the explosion of anger from Atwell's Isabella—an emotion that Soraya Chemaly argues "*automatically* violates gender norms" when expressed by women "in institutional, political, and professional settings"—has the potential to "beget transformation" (xvii, emphasis original). Isabella, faced with the Duke's proposal, screams into existence a topsy-turvy world in which she, and not Angelo, holds the power of life and death.

Isabella's power-grabbing fantasy, however, represents a highly individualistic and typically white approach to women's "empowerment" that depends upon proximity to and imitation of white patriarchal power. Rather than imagining an alternative reality of collective resistance or shared power, and taking the opportunity to, in Williams's terms, "interrogate rather than reify notions of redemption," the production limits itself to a neat reversal that fails to imagine other forms of power beyond Angelo and the Duke's coercive and manipulative ones (Wilderson and Williams 22). Isabella's fantasy is not one of freedom or empowerment—even for herself—but rather of individual ladder-climbing that frames success and power in the same terms as the men who abused her in the first half of the production. Catherine Rottenberg's definition of "neoliberal feminism" maps onto key characteristics evident in Atwell's portrayal of an Isabella who holds political power, and Rourke's limited vision of a "gender-reversed" society: the neoliberal feminist subject is "mobilized to covert continued gender inequality from

a structural problem into an individual affair" (Rottenberg 420). Furthermore, as Grace Kyungwon Hong argues, neoliberalism is inherently a white supremacist framework, coming into being "as a response on the part of global racial capital to the growing inadequacy of [imperial] modes of social relation, based on exclusion from institutions of citizenship and nationalism" (56). Hong notes that the neoliberal mindset "equates capitalist development with political and social freedom," while co-opting "certain formerly marginalized populations" into "forms of power" that are "repressive and affirmative, necropolitical and biopolitical [. . .] at the same time" (Hong 59, 57). This logic is in evidence in the selective gender-switches in the Donmar *Measure*'s second half: Angelo, Isabella, and Mariana were switched, but not Mistress Overdone, Pompey (played as a woman throughout, by Jackie Clune), Lucio, and the ensemble of sex workers, nor Claudio and Juliet, nor the Duke, Escalus, the Provost, or other government functionaries. From the beginning of the second half, the production presented neither a "liquid dramaturgy" (Grochala 220) nor a thoughtful critique of "a devastating architecture of power relations" (Wilderson and Williams 45), nor even a "womb-theater" imagining a more just world into existence (Diamond *Unmaking* xi). Rather, Rourke presented a neoliberal feminist landscape, in which an individual woman grappled for power without addressing the structural problems that created the apparent inequalities in the first place—and throughout which, as I will discuss further below, the production's sole character played by a Black actor remained incarcerated.[7]

The fact that Isabella, having assumed power in the selectively topsy-turvy world of the production's second half, still enacted the same sexual violence on Angelo that he perpetrated on her in the first half exemplifies this problem. My objection here is not to the representation of a woman as a sexual predator *per se*; rather, I take issue with the incomplete dramaturgy of this

14

production, which mobilized neoliberal feminist logics alongside Shakespeare's built-in misogyny to paint Atwell's second-half character into a problematic corner. The production indulged Shakespeare's misogynist dramaturgy and the problems it created rather than confronting them and taking steps to change them at a systemic—in other words, dramaturgical—level. As Kirwan notes in his review, the production fell into this trap even before the intermission, when the audience saw the made-over Isabella "excited to the point of licking her lips at the possibility of power"; in this moment, "the production leaned into the worst dog-whistle right-wing fears of the ambitious woman" (Kirwan, "Measure for Measure"). Atwell, in other words, performed the "strange monster" of an ambitious womanhood that Simone de Beauvoir identifies (163).

While Henry Hitchings, reviewing the production for the *Evening Standard*, sees the production raising "questions about how men and women can do exactly the same thing and be judged differently," I argue that it is precisely the *differences* between Lowden's and Atwell's turns as the Deputy that entrench Shakespeare's misogynist dramaturgies and reveal the fissures in Rourke's attempt to adapt the play (Hitchings). Far from the reluctance to power that Angelo expresses in the text ("Let there be some more test made of my mettle / Before so noble and so great a figure / Be stamped upon it" [1.1.49–51]) and that was borne out by Lowden's first-half performance of the role, Atwell presented the audience with a power-hungry, neoliberal woman Deputy salivating for power, like a grotesque right-wing caricature of Hilary Clinton. This problem was especially evident when comparing the production's two versions of act two, scene four, the scene containing the Deputy's coercive proposition to the supplicant. In the playtext, as the scene escalates, Isabella threatens to go public: "I will proclaim thee, Angelo;" she says, "Sign me a present pardon for my brother, / Or with an outstretched throat I'll tell the world

aloud / What man thou art" (2.4.151–4). In the second half of the Donmar production, Atwell's

Deputy responded to this threat by implying that she would use manufactured tears to undermine

any testimony against her from Lowden's supplicant. As Kirwan and others noted at the time, the

recourse to this misogynist trope (manipulative feminine emotion weaponized against innocent

men) felt particularly galling given the production's proximity to Dr Christine Blasey Ford's

Senate Judiciary Committee testimony (Kirwan, "Measure for Measure"). Atwell's performance

in this moment contrasted strikingly with Lowden's first-act performance of the same moment,

and the contrast was all the more pronounced given the ways in which the production's second

half elsewhere self-consciously replicated details of other performances in the first half: at

Angelo's first entrance, for example, Adam McNamara as the Provost dropped the same file

folder of papers, at precisely the same moment in each half of the performance. This attention to

repeating certain minute details of the first-half performance highlighted the significant

departures, almost all of which took a misogynist turn.

In the second half's version of act five, for example, audio of Atwell's Deputy enjoying

herself in bed with Frederick (the second half's Mariana equivalent, played by Ben Allen) was

played as evidence of their union, to laughter and derision from the male characters onstage.[8]

There are several intersecting problems to untangle here. One might be tempted towards a

simplistic "empowerment" reading, which would credit this choice as a bold—if bungled—

attempt at centering and critiquing public disgust toward woman's sexual pleasure. As Breanne

Fahs points out, "performances of sexual liberation occur with considerable costs to women,"

and Atwell's Deputy was certainly punished in the production when the evidence of her capacity

for sexual pleasure came to light (10). It is important to recall, however, that the Deputy has

raped someone vulnerable—or at least, thinks she has. It is clear that Shakespeare's Angelo

16

understands his intended rape of Isabella in this way because he says that he feels guilty about it: "This deed unshapes me quite" (4.4.18). Although it is clear in the playtext that Mariana has consented to the act, a reader is also reminded that Angelo "thinks he knows that he ne'er knew [Mariana's] body, / But knows, he thinks, that he knows Isabel's" (5.1.200–1). Additionally, the play asks us to see the Deputy and the scorned fiancé(e) as a legitimate couple, and their marriage as the resolution imperative to the comic genre; this awareness underwrites both the bed trick and the Deputy's sexual pleasure. When her identity is revealed in the playtext, Mariana declares herself "affianced this man's wife as strongly / As words could make up vows" (5.1.225–6), and the Duke's first act following his big reveal later in the scene is to legitimate that vow by insisting that Angelo and Mariana get married. Although Angelo begs for "Immediate sentence and sequent death" (5.1.371), the Duke instead instructs him to take Mariana and "marry her instantly" (5.1.375). Their marriage takes what might have been a problematic coupling—representing the intended rape of Isabella and the deflowering of Mariana—and makes its legitimacy crucial to the play's comic conclusion.

All of these factors contribute to the violence enacted upon Atwell's female Deputy in the second-half act five of the Donmar production, and preclude a reading of the sex tape moment as "empowering." This was a woman (Atwell) playing a role (Angelo) written by a man, as a symbol of patriarchal power: without dramaturgical intervention, the very structure of the play leads to misogynist conclusions. In other words, everything that this female Deputy did was still filtered through Angelo and, furthermore, filtered through Shakespeare. But whereas the first version—partly by virtue of its Jacobean setting—left its audience without evidence that Angelo had derived perverse sexual pleasure from what he assumed was a rape of Isabella (even if he later expresses regret in 4.4), the gender-reversed, modern-dress second half gave us evidence of

that pleasure and ascribed it to the body of a woman. In Atwell's embodied presence he was, furthermore, the exact same woman whom we had recently seen in the opposite position, as a survivor of Angelo's violence.

Rourke's production never intervened in the play to untangle these threads, and instead enacted violence on Atwell and her character by retaining the constraints of sexual desire set out by Shakespeare's play. These operate strictly within a patriarchal frame; as Fahs puts it, "part of being an oppressed person is that you are *in reference to* the dominant ideologies of those in power—in this case, men's sexual fantasies, desires, wishes, wants, pleasures, representations, interests, needs" (Fahs 5–6, emphasis original). Alex Wood's review points out, for example, that the already-problematic bed trick reads differently when "cooked up by three men in fraternal solidarity" (Wood). For Atwell's Deputy, it was triple jeopardy: she was shamed for her experience of pleasure; at the same time, that pleasure was framed through a patriarchal worldview, in which context pleasure can legitimately be derived from a coercive and violent (as Angelo understands it) sexual encounter; and the situation also somehow ended in marriage, upholding heteropatriarchal norms via the legalizing and blessing of an otherwise "illegitimate" coupling. The addition of a sex tape to the play's final scene therefore communicated nothing about women's sexual pleasure at all: rather, it spoke to patriarchal power, and to the question of who would be authorized to wield it. Atwell's Deputy was humiliated for her attempt to make use of the patriarchal power that she seized in this topsy-turvy version of the play—the result, however, was not a reckoning for white feminism and neoliberal power, but rather a misogynist fever dream, where the worst patriarchal assumptions about women in power were realized. This Deputy was simultaneously power-hungry, corrupt, hyper-sexual, *and* a woman—and the

18

production created no opportunities for those characteristics to either resolve into something productive or to generate a meaningful commentary.

The treatment of Atwell as the Deputy represented one of a series of directorial choices that emphasized the incomplete dramaturgical logic of this production. As I note above, Sule Rimi—the sole Black actor in the cast—played Claudio, who spends the majority of the play incarcerated. Claudio is, furthermore, arrested for the bogus crime of impregnating, via a "most mutual" union (1.2.149), his fiancée Juliet (who was cut entirely from the Donmar production). This casting clearly activates racist stereotypes around the criminality and hyper-sexuality of Black men, a problem exacerbated by the fact that Rimi wore an orange prison jumpsuit in the second half. Additionally, the Duke (Nicholas Burns) was reduced to a homophobic stereotype in the second half, where his attraction to Lowden's character became handsy, and his proposal in act five "sinister" (Saville). As Holger Syme puts it, the production substitutes "sexuality [. . .] for religious boundaries" in the second half: "the Duke's transgression is not that he disregards Isabella's holy vows but that he ignores Angelo's sexual orientation" (Syme). He kissed Lowden on the lips as he consoled him over Claudio's death (an act from which Lowden recoiled), and he knelt extravagantly when he proposed in the final scene, despite Lowden's clear disinterest.

Perhaps (as some have suggested to me) the misogynist treatment of Atwell's Deputy, the casting of the only Black man in the company as incarcerated Claudio, and the recourse to homophobic tropes in the Duke's second-half performance represent merely a "realistic" portrayal of the very oppressive systems that I aim to critique, and therefore open up space for awareness and analysis. To this reading, I respond that demonstration is not the same as commentary. To merely show violent systems such as misogyny, racism, and homophobia in action is not to undermine them. Instead, as Williams and Thompson argue, the replication of

19

such tropes *through* uncritical performances of them—particularly performances that take place in the context of a canonical early modern play and are therefore legitimized through their association with heavyweight cultural capital—reinforces their power in society (Wilderson and Williams 42; Thompson *Passing Strange* 77). Power does not reverse itself neatly or willingly, and, therefore, simple changes of gender cannot independently do the work of dramaturgical intervention. The Donmar *Measure* did not account for all the ways in which putting a woman into Angelo's role and a man into Isabella's role fundamentally affects the power dynamics at play. The choices that I have outlined here leant into the misogyny of Shakespeare's dramaturgy rather than working to dismantle it. In other words, the dramaturgy of this production was woefully incomplete.

Looking Forward; Gutting Shakespeare

Incomplete dramaturgy uses, among other tactics, mixed-gender or all-female casting as a shield that protects the creative team from questions about the intersectional politics at play. As Sujata Iyengar points out, casting issues are almost always intersectional issues: audiences are primed to read the semiotics of race and gender in conversation with each other, and "surprise or even discomfort" along one of these axes can prompt a heightened awareness of the other (55). For a startlingly clear example, see Harriet Walter's book *Brutus and Other Heroines*, in which she reflects on decades of performing Shakespearean roles. In her chapter on playing Brutus for Phyllida Lloyd's all-female production of *Julius Caesar* (one-third of their critically acclaimed Donmar Shakespeare Trilogy, 2012–16), Walter explains her initial process working with Lloyd to build their concept for the show. They felt that a prison setting would provide a plausible frame for an all-female cast in a play about war and power. In discussing their approach to

casting, Walter is blunt in her racist assumptions: "once the prison idea had established itself, we needed a cast that could believably represent the racial and social mix of a prison population" (160). Never mind a cast that could believably represent the "racial and social mix" of modern London—or, for that matter, early modern London—or, for that matter, Ancient Rome.[9] No: according to Walter (and, implicitly, Lloyd), it is only British prisons where a multicultural group of women performing a Shakespeare play will not seem out of place.

Walter and Lloyd's approach reproduces the logics of carceral and colonial feminisms, positioning women of color in the social roles that those frameworks insist upon.[10] As Zakaria notes, "feminism itself has never been disaggregated from the white gaze. [. . .] And that means that, most of the time, when women speak of 'feminism,' they unintentionally take on the cadence and concerns of whiteness" (11). This is, fundamentally, the same incomplete dramaturgical thinking that led to Rourke casting her only Black actor as the main incarcerated character in *Measure for Measure,* intersecting with latent misogynist assumptions in the theater industry at large. Walter frames the choice to set the production in a prison as a necessity, an inevitability within a post-Stanislavskian mimetic framework that demands verisimilitude: note the way in which she ascribes agency to the idea itself in the quotation above, referring to it as "establishing itself." By insisting that "we need to make it make sense"—i.e. we need the actors' genders *not* to signify—the production reifies the need to justify conceptually perceived departures from a particular version of reality. This is insidious logic because it invites attempts to "rationalize" the casting of women and especially women of color. Instead of asking, "what happens to Shakespeare when we cast it this way?", Walter and Lloyd enshrine Shakespeare's play as a fixed object and perform mental gymnastics in an effort to make everything else "fit." Lloyd even reaches for a universality argument in justifying the choice in a BBC interview with

21

Will Gompertz in 2012; as reported by Power: "Lloyd explained [. . .] that working on it would be an adventure, stepping 'beyond the issue of all-female' casting, as its themes deal directly with 'eternal resonance' and potency" (35). Rather than making space for an estranged Shakespeare, Lloyd and Walter go out of their way to frame their interventions in Shakespeare as comfortable, natural, immediate, and in line with an existing view that Shakespeare speaks for universal themes of "eternal resonance"—at least to their white audiences. In their anxiety to strip away gender as a signifier, so that audiences "can look beyond gender to our common humanity" (Walter 2014, n.p.), the production's conception fails to address its own problematic assumptions. Instead, the prison framing invites audiences to make and re-entrench assumptions of their own. Rather than striving for a "liquid" dramaturgical intervention that startles and jostles and calls for action, Lloyd and Walter explicitly filter their project through a lens of assimilation with the "normal"—through a logic of immediacy that does not ask its audiences to consider the framing in too much detail because, after all, it just makes sense. This is incomplete dramaturgy at its most insidious: entrenched norms lurking like specters behind a sheen of progressivism.

Incomplete dramaturgy, then, is about a failure to think through to the end of the decisions being made and to consider how they will affect the play as a whole—but it is not necessarily a problem of intentionality: I have no wish to assume bad faith on the part of any of the practitioners or performances that I critique in these pages. I acknowledge that the necessary work of intervening in canonical texts like Shakespeare's is not always funded or supported by the larger institutions that make theater possible (cf. Pao, Williams). I also want to leave space for the possibility that the necessary work may sometimes be impossible, and that Thompson is right when she argues that plays like *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *The Merchant of*

22

Venice are irredeemably bound up in prejudice and therefore impossible to stage ethically in the present (Thompson, in Demby and Meraji). Ultimately, I argue that if you want to put on a Shakespeare play in a way that speaks back to the cultural capital and power that Shakespeare wields, you might have to gut it first: tear out its insides and rearrange them in order to get to something new. This gutting requires more—and more difficult—thinking than narratives of "nontraditional" casting usually imply. If a director wishes to make a point about gender, casting is one of many tools at their disposal in order to do so—and yet many stop at that first hurdle, relying upon casting to do the work of dramaturgy. This is why I call such dramaturgies "incomplete": they are thoughts that have not been finished.

There is not sufficient space here to develop, in detail, what a "completed" dramaturgy might look like. I can, however, gesture towards promising practices and productions that are doing the work of resisting Shakespeare's misogynist dramaturgies. In her chapter on the Public's 2019 Mobile Unit production of *Measure for Measure,* for example, Emily Lathrop highlights the ways in which paratheatrical additions to the play created space to engage and even collaborate with the various communities served by the production. Lathrop argues that the Mobile Unit sees Shakespeare as theatrical raw material that frees, rather than limits their ability to tell the stories they want to tell—and this mindset is exemplified in the space the 2019 production made "before and after the performance" for audiences "to process and reflect," as well as its deployment of color-conscious casting with an ensemble of Black women (214). The setting of the production in 1979 New Orleans during a police strike spoke, too, to the strong links the production made between the corruption of Shakespeare's Vienna, and the corruption of US police forces (Lathrop 214). Casting here worked in conjunction with the setting and the interactive aspects of the performance to intervene in Shakespeare's story and make room for

23

director LA Williams and her ensemble's voices. Similarly, the Public's collaboration with WNYC to produce *Richard II* as a free radio play in 2020 made use of paratheatrical materials, including episode-by-episode synopses, a visual guide of cast and characters, interviews with both actors and academics, and a link to the full radio play script, to frame the production ("WYNC in Collaboration"). Here, again, the majority BIPOC cast is just one element of the production's intervention in Shakespeare and is not left to do the heavy lifting of dramaturgy on its own. Productions such as these—as well as Ola Ince's 2020 *Romeo and Juliet* for Shakespeare's Globe, which made radical textual cuts and staging choices that emphasized the societal failures of Verona over and above the lovers' "star-crossed" fates (Williams "*Romeo*" INSERT CITATION WHEN KNOWN)—that are not afraid to intervene meaningfully in Shakespeare's dramaturgy strike a hopeful note with me as I look to the future.

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Notes

1 See e.g. Hall, *Things of Darkness*, especially pp. 254–68; Thompson, "What is a 'Weyward' *Macbeth*?".

2 See Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing," and "The Urgency of Intersectionality"; and Schalk 1–32.

3 For a fuller theorization of plays and performances as processual objects, see Kidnie.

4 For evidence that theater companies are eager to brand themselves as "socially progressive," look no further than the flurry of statements released following the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in response to George Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police

officers. For a full analysis of these statements and their implications for productions of Shakespeare, see Rhymes, "2020 Vision."

[5] For additional work on women playing "men's" roles in Shakespeare, see e.g. Klett; Chung.

[6] Atwell's role in the second half used the trisyllabic "Isabel" (rather than "Isabella") as a metrical equivalent for "Angelo," so as not to disrupt the verse.

[7] For a fuller discussion of how systemic issues around race can be reduced to individual concerns in performance—and of the violence that results—see Brinkman.

[8] Allen played the role of the Justice in the first half, which Helena Wilson (Mariana in the first half) assumed in the second half.

[9] For demographic data on twenty-first-century London, see Greater London Authority Demography. For records of Black early modern Londoners, see Habib, especially Chapter 2, "Elizabethan London Black Records," and Chapter 3, "Black Records of Seventeenth-Century London". For evidence of diverse diaspora communities in Roman Britain, see e.g. Eckardt.

[10] See e.g. Leila Ahmed; Bernstein; Bumiller.