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'Tis Pity She's a Man: Cross-Cast Prospero in Shakespeare's The Tempest

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Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the theatre artists dedicated to innovative, feminist, socially just theatre.

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"O brave new world": Introduction

This project began in high school. Like many American students, my Anglophilia began in the classroom. In 10th grade, my English teacher always let me read for Portia. I asked every day during our *Merchant of Venice* unit until she eventually caved and assigned me the role without comment. Portia became important to me: she is clever, intelligent and she even cross dresses, disguising herself as a lawyer to best her husband. I saw myself in Portia. In that class, I learned to love the poetry of Shakespeare and experienced the power of representation. Around the same time, I watched Julie Taymor's *The Tempest*, where Helen Mirren plays Prospera—my introduction to gender-swapping as a means of expanding beyond the text. These representations meant the world to me as a confused high school student and a burgeoning feminist. The ability to see myself in characters like Prospera and Portia brought me a sense of belonging and hope. To find that thing that spoke to me, where I saw myself, that is where I saw a future beyond where I was.

I was born and raised in the Seattle area where I have had near consistent access to affordable, live theatre. Seattle has a thriving theatre community, for not just classical theatre, but also musical theatre and dance and organizations like TeenTix encourage young patronage of the arts. Throughout my high school years, I attended numerous professional musicals, plays, operas, and ballets, experiencing a variety of performances and modes of representing. I performed too, singing, dancing, and acting throughout college. In the world of educational theatre, women audition at probably double the rate that men do. Any high school theatre kid can attest to that. I have also personally benefited from cross-gender casting. In high school, I performed as the gender-swapped Don Joan in our Wild West *Much Ado About Nothing*. In college, I cast several musicals in nontraditional ways, often casting women or femme people in

male roles or changing the gendered text to make characters female or nonbinary. Based on my personal experiences, cross-casting puts the most talented person in the best role, making productions stronger. But even as my artistic opportunities were musical theatre and choreography related, Shakespeare and his plays continued to be my guiding light as I moved onto college.

In the summer of 2018, I was awarded a fellowship from the US-UK Fulbright Commission to attend a three-week program at the Globe Theatre in London. That summer was Michelle Terry's inaugural season as artistic director and I was able to see her play Hamlet. That summer, the Globe Ensemble, a diverse group of players with a 50/50 gender split, performed not only *Hamlet*, but also *As You Like It*. Already prone to cross-dressing and gender bending, this production of *As You Like It* starred Jack Laskey as Rosalind and Bettrys Jones as Orlando. Nadia Nadarajah played Celia using British Sign Language. I loved this production so much I saw it twice. They took risks in casting; the unconventional choices moved me deeply as an audience member in their willingness to dismiss traditional boundaries. Both productions were not limited by the gender binary, a strict temporal setting, or even the spoken word. They communicated Shakespeare in an incredibly humanistic, diverse way. The Globe Ensemble showed the potential of cross-cast theatre to communicate the human condition, without the pesky, constructed social boundaries, prefiguring a more utopian world. These productions and my entire experience in London were thrilling and transformative and unforgettable.

When I returned to Seattle, I took an English class with Dr. Allison Meyer where we looked at local, all-femme productions of Shakespeare. All-femme, in this instance, means a cast of female performers and non-binary performers, a term more inclusive and more accurate than "all-female." During the course of that class, I saw *Richard III*, a collaboration of upstart crow

and Seattle Shakespeare Company, and *Much Ado About Nothing* put on by The Fern Shakespeare Company. This was my opportunity to combine my personal love of Shakespeare and my academic love of performance and gender. That class complicated the idea of gender on stage, by introducing productions that move beyond the binary, asking how we incorporate non-binary people into contemporary scholarship of Shakespeare and gender.

That next summer, I was hired by the Seattle Shakespeare Company as a site manager for their outdoor season. That job involved taking donations, passing out programs, coordinating volunteers, and a little bit of crowd control. The two shows that summer were *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In an auspicious twist, *Twelfth Night* was an all-male cast and *Romeo and Juliet* all-femme. *Romeo and Juliet* became a new favorite. Not only were these productions stunning to watch, and I saw each about fifteen times, but they also allowed for fruitful conversations with actors, production staff, and audience members about cross-gender casting. Some reacted with confusion: one patron told me that she did not like the fact that the man playing Maria had a beard. Other just loved it and were really surprised by how much they enjoyed unconventional casting. I had several conversations with Heidi, the Seattle Shakespeare Company Development Director, about the enjoyment of seeing a powerful group of feminine performers and how much that changed the text for the better. The cast and crew of *R + J* would constantly talk about how welcoming and comforting the rehearsal process had been with women and non-binary people.

I list these productions to tell a narrative about the power of cross-gender theatre. I can personally attest to it. Seeing theatre has transformed my life in so many ways. Feeling represented in the media and art I consumed was a huge part of that. But representation does not occur often enough for people of marginalized identities. I write from the position of a white,

middle-class, heterosexual woman who has been very lucky to see myself represented in Shakespearean texts and productions. Characters like Portia, Beatrice, and Rosalind, even when performed traditionally, remind me of myself. While this project will focus primarily on gender, all kinds of identity difference are important and interconnected. Gender is one form of social organization based upon embodiment. So is race, so is sexuality. While intersectional and diverse productions are essential to the future of Shakespeare, this project will be limited to gender, for the most part. There is more work to be done to understand embodiment through Shakespeare and performance, but that is beyond the scope of my project and area of expertise.

Questions about Shakespeare are not just questions about text, theatre, or performance. Shakespeare is so deeply ingrained into our Anglo-American history and cultural imagination that to ask about Shakespeare is to ask about who we are or who we can be. Because Western writers, scholars, and artists imagine Shakespeare at the center of the literary canon and as the greatest writer of all time, we place a lot of weight on representations of Shakespeare. We look to Shakespeare to define large archetypes of man, woman, hero, villain. In looking at Shakespeare, we see humanity. In this project, I look at how theatre artists have expanded and redefined what it means to be human, giving access to a new, diverse audience, pushing the limits of these representations.

I have been writing this paper since fall quarter 2019, but now, in the spring of 2020, every theatre in the United States is shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Center for Disease Control guidelines along with state regulations have banned public gatherings, including theatre. Broadway is shut down for the longest period in recent memory and will remain closed until September. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival is closed through the fall. The Seattle Shakespeare Company canceled the rest of its season and its summer productions.

Because I am a box office associate at the Seattle Shakespeare Company, I was laid off until the season resumes. Thousands of theatre artists, professionals, and administrators have been fired or furloughed. Undoubtably, there will be shows never produced because of this global crisis and theatres that will never reopen their doors. And while theatre is by no means the only industry severely damaged by the pandemic, the arts in the US have been consistently underfunded for decades, meaning their recovery will be extremely slow, relying on individual generosity instead of government intervention. As you read this, consider donating to a local theatre or arts organization. Once we are on the other side of this pandemic, I hope we all can commune again and together experience some life-changing Shakespeare.

But now, I am realizing more than ever the power of theatre and its extraordinary ability to be accessible. The need to adapt has led to creative solutions. Lots of theatre has moved online like live play readings over Zoom. The Globe and National Theatre Live are regularly posting professionally filmed productions on YouTube for free. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival created its own streaming platform. The original cast production of *Hamilton* will be available on Disney+ in July. As playwright Jeremy O. Harris said in a tweet on May 7, "If sex work (the height of intimacy) can […] transition to digital so can theatre" (@jeremyoharris). Even though nothing can replace live theatre, as is evident, the move to online platforms has created a kind of radical accessibility that hopefully will remain after the theatres reopen.

"What's past is prologue": Text, Theatre, and Literary History of *The Tempest*

In order to understand the impact that cross-gender casting can have, we need to understand the text and the theatrical and literary history of *The Tempest*. *The Tempest* was written in 1610/11 and performed first in 1611 at the court of King James I/VI and later at either the indoor Blackfriars or the outdoor Globe. *The Tempest* was the first listed play in the 1623 First Folio and is one of Shakespeare's more stable and shortest texts. *The Tempest* also has a less than average number of characters. Of the 13 named characters, the only female character is Miranda. While not Shakespeare's final play, *The Tempest* was among the last before he died in 1616. Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale* the same year as *The Tempest*. Later, he also wrote *Henry VIII*. Most likely, Shakespeare's last play was *The Two Noble Kinsmen* written with John Fletcher in 1613/14. But none of these plays are nearly as popular as *The Tempest*.

Prospero is the Duke of Milan, wrongly exiled by his usurping brother Antonio on a Mediterranean isle. He has lived there for about twelve years with his fourteen-year-old daughter Miranda and rules over the island and its inhabitants, Ariel, "an airy spirit" (Hulme and Sherman 3) and Caliban "a savage and deformed slave" (3). The play begins with a storm ordered by Prospero and performed by Ariel. This tempest causes a shipwreck that brings the aristocrats of Milan to Prospero's isle, including Antonio, the King of Naples, and other Italian lords. Separated from the others, Ferdinand, the only son of the King of Naples, lands on the island too. Prospero takes this as an opportunity for revenge, taunting the aristocrats with his magic. Miranda and Ferdinand quickly fall in love, but Prospero torments and tests the young prince. Prospero eventually performs a masque to celebrate their union. In the meantime, Caliban has joined forces with the drunken Stephano and foolish Trinculo to take down Prospero. The play ends with Prospero confronting those who betrayed and denied him, choosing virtue over

vengeance as he takes back his title as Duke of Milan. He forgives his brother and frees Ariel. Miranda and Ferdinand are officially engaged to marry. They all return to Italy, leaving behind Ariel and Caliban.

In terms of plot and characters, *The Tempest* is one of Shakespeare's most unique plays. Nearly all early modern plays are pulled from a specific source text: *The Winter's Tale* is based on a sixteenth-century prose romance and *Henry VIII* is based on Holinshed's *Chronicles*. *The Tempest's* novelty perhaps speaks to its popularity and creative engagement. *The Tempest* defies traditional genres of Renaissance theatre, as it is neither a comedy nor a tragedy. Because of the restorative ending, early editors labeled *The Tempest* a comedy. But due to the seriousness of the tone and genuine peril of the characters, later editors place this play, along with a few others, in the category of "romance," a renaming of the "tragi-comedy" category (vii). Other Shakespearean plays categorized as romances are his later works: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Romances contain the threat of tragedies, but the happy endings of comedies usually aided by a long passage of time or magical intervention.

Prospero is undeniably the main character of the play. He has the most lines, experiences a character arc, and speaks the play's epilogue. Prospero is a father, slighted political leader, and the ruler of the island. His age is not specified in the text. Whether or not he is a good father depends upon interpretation and a person's personal understand of the father's familial role. His wife's fate is unclear; presumably she is dead. He is a patriarch with total control over his environment and daughter. Prospero can compel Miranda to listen and to sleep, shown in Act 1 Scene 2. In the same act, we learn that Prospero took over the island from the witch Sycorax. He is violently defensive of his daughter's virginity, saying to Ferdinand before their wedding masque: "But / If thou dost break her virgin-knot before / All sanctimonious ceremonies […]

barren hate, / Sour-eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew / The union of your bed" (IV.i.14-16,19-21). His treatment of Caliban and Ariel seems abusive and angry. He threatens Ariel, claiming he will imprison him in a tree like Syrocrax did: "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails" (I.ii.294-5). However, there is a clear tenderness between Prospero and Ariel. Caliban is explicitly the slave of Prospero, forcing Caliban to do the manual labor on the isle. He calls Caliban a "poisonous slave," (I.ii.319) savage, and vile.

Prospero is a magician and artist, which, to Prospero, are one and the same: "There lie my art" (I.ii.25) he says to his magical cloak. Prospero's magic is somewhat vague in origins. The implication is that magic comes from his staff and books. When he plans to give up his "rough magic" (Vi.i.50) he says: I'll break my staff / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I'll drown my books (V.i.54-7). His magic is learned and scholarly, coming from books, not from the Devil or the natural world. Productions of *The Tempest* are known for utilizing cutting edge technology to recreate Prospero's magic in creative ways. Prospero's magic and art then come to mean the magic and art of the theatre. Restoration playwright John Dryden wrote of "Shakespeare's magic" (121) in his prologue to a 1670 edition of *The Tempest*. In 1709, English dramatist Nicholas Rowe wrote of Prospero's magic and of Prospero as a magician. Magic and artistry are an essential aspect to Prospero and become tied to the playwright.

Like all of Shakespeare's works, *The Tempest* has been continually reproduced for crowds all over the world. An audience member's reaction to Prospero can be as varied as the audience itself. The early modern British audience might have seen Prospero as a strange, foreign Italian or maybe they saw their king. Gender and family structure are other identities that can impact an interpretation of the text. Fathers who have daughters will sometimes see

themselves in Prospero. Location, race, and ethnicity are all factors that can impact viewing. Many postcolonial readers, artists, and scholars are drawn away from Prospero to Caliban and find him to be the most sympathetic character in the play. Feminist readers find the play disappointing in its lack of women and how Prospero treats his daughter. However, the literary and performance history of Prospero as Shakespeare lends itself to a favorable viewing for a twentieth and even twenty-first century US or UK audience.

Famous and memorable lines like "We are stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV.i.155) gain a new meaning when we imagine an aging Shakespeare leaving behind his magnificent career, or a mature playwright with a masterful grasp of plot and poetry. Because of this, *The Tempest* is seen to "correct" some of the questions in other texts. Some see *The Tempest* as a combination of themes that have been brewing for decades. We can also see *The Tempest's* unique plot and characters as a sign of Shakespeare's ability to be truly creative and personal. But by labeling this text as mature, then actors and scholars, like John Dryden and Nicholas Rowe, are less likely to criticize the plot and the actions of the characters, including Prospero.

Since the seventeenth century, critics and authors have associated Prospero with an aging Shakespeare (Smith 240). This will not be surprising for many modern audience members, who have seen a production of *The Tempest* with an old, British, white, male Prospero. If we consider *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare's "swan song," (Hulme and Sherman vii) then the associations between Prospero and Shakespeare come easily. Perhaps the first to make this connection were John Dryden and William Davenant when they re-wrote *Tempest* in 1667. Their version, retitled *The Enchanted Island*, was very popular from the Restoration period to the nineteenth century. This is not uncommon; many drastically different Shakespeare adaptations became the more

popular and more common version of the play from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. In 1922, critic Lytton Strachey wrote "it has often been wildly asserted that [Prospero] is a portrait of the author" (136). The location of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's ultimate work is essential to this interpretation, as *The Tempest* cannot be his "swan song" if it is not his final play. Over and over again, critics laud the play's greatness as Shakespeare's final work, even though *The Tempest* was not his final play.

Emma Smith, in her book *This is Shakespear*e, emphasizes how the "Prospero as Shakespeare" theory is built on shaky evidence. There is no historical evidence to suggest that Shakespeare saw himself as Prospero. But scholars and artists often turn to the melancholy epilogue as proof that Prospero is Shakespeare. While the end of the play is restorative, Prospero is reinstated as the Duke and Miranda and Ferdinand secure their nuptial blessing, the final moments of the play are bittersweet. This epilogue is Prospero's farewell:

> Now I want
> Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
> And my ending is despair,
> Unless I be relieved by prayer
> Which pierces so, that it assaults
> Mercy itself and free all faults.
> As you from crimes would pardoned be,
> Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue.13-20)

Like other epilogues, Prospero directly addresses the audience. He asks for forgiveness and for praise as he ends the play. Words like "despair" and "mercy" along with lines like "thence retire to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave" (V.i.310-1) show a deep sadness

with the gloom of death hanging over the otherwise cheerful end. This speaks to the genre of romance, but also to the character of Prospero as a great, retiring artist, giving up his art. But Smith notes the circular logic of the Shakespeare-as-Prospero argument:

> It is because we want the play's closing movement to read as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage that we place *The Tempest* at the end of Shakespeare's career, and then we use that position to affirm that the play must dramatize Shakespeare's own feelings at the end of his career. (Smith 242)

Cultural context and readerly desire create this reading. Our feelings about *The Tempest* and Shakespeare have preceded and created an interpretation outside of the text. If we accept the fabrication that *Tempest* is his swan song, then "Prospero's farewell is not only Shakespeare's farewell to the stage, but his dying breath" (243). The result: "readings that associate Prospero and Shakespeare also produce very positive readings of Prospero's character" (249).

The combination of seeing Prospero as Shakespeare and Bardolatry, the excessive idolization and worship of Shakespeare, leads to the idolization and deification of Prospero. If we think of Shakespeare as the greatest author of all time, and many do, then that overwhelmingly positive reading can easily translate to Prospero. Shakespeare can do wrong, same goes for Prospero. There is an undeniable masculinity and nationality to these readings. If Prospero is Shakespeare, Prospero must be male and British. These positive readings are contested by postcolonial and feminist writers. For many years, Prospero was seen as a lovable and benevolent ruler, despite his unsettling actions. But this positive portrayal has faded away in recent years, as theatre makers focus instead on Prospero's flaws like his tyrannical rule over the island and its inhabitants. This shifted focus will be shown in several of the productions I explore. "One way, then," and a rather new way, Smith says "of seeing Prospero is as a distinctly

unlikeable, manipulative control freak" (250). How we read Prospero is important to understand when productions break from the traditional rules of Prospero casting.

This shift in interpretation can be shown in Prospero's obsession with Miranda's virginity. If we see Prospero as Shakespeare, who was a father to two daughters, we give him the benefit of the doubt. If we historize the production and think of Prospero as the 17th-century Duke that he is, then of course he has claim over his daughter's virginity and marriage. Miranda has never met a person outside of her family and falls in love with the first cute boy she meets. Some hesitation and parental guidance can keep her from making regrettable choices. Prospero wants to make sure that Ferdinand deserves his daughter, his daughter whom he loves more than anything in the world. He also knows that Miranda's value comes from her virginity. To lose that would be potentially devastating. The early modern world sanctions Prospero's behavior.

On the other hand, we can take a different approach to Prospero and Miranda. Nowadays, we see his behavior as not only uncomfortable but borderline abusive. Miranda chooses and loves Ferdinand, and Prospero ignores her wishes and desires. He keeps them apart and forces Ferdinand to do manual labor against Miranda's pleading. Prospero is overbearing and controlling, acting like a misogynistic tyrant. He has no business speaking to Ferdinand about her virginity. And we can see the marriage as merely strategic for Prospero, as this means he is now part of the royal family. The marriage to Ferdinand is self-serving from him. The same dualistic interpreting can be done to his treatment of Ariel and Caliban. In the early modern world, slavery was legal in England and therefore Prospero's dominion over other sentient beings would have been legally appropriate, even if morally questionable. Today, Prospero's cruelty reminds us of a violent history of slavery and colonialism.

Trends in casting Prospero reflect that literary view of Prospero as Shakespeare, in that the expected and most common choice of actor for Prospero is a white, heterosexual, British man, over 50 years old, someone like Ian McKellen or Anthony Hopkins. Prospero is a presumably heterosexual and a widower. There is only a passing reference to his wife, Miranda's mother. As a father confident in his heir, there is no reason for him to remarry. Within the social context of early modern England, Prospero's sexuality would not be questioned. And unlike the character of Ariel, which is often played by effeminate men, Prospero is always played straight. Likely this is also related to notions of power and power as masculine. Political power, the power Prospero holds, is coded as masculine, both in the play and in the modern world.

Another consistent adjective to describe Prospero is old. The role of Prospero is generally played at the end of an actor's career. Unlike Lear, Prospero does not hold the prestige and glamour for an older, male actor. There is no sense that every man must have "his Prospero" like he has "his Hamlet." Because of the association of Prospero with an aged Shakespeare and a man nearing retirement, actors play Prospero into their 80s ("Casting Shakespeare"), even though Prospero's age is never specified. While it is not unheard of for a 30- or 40-year-old man to play Prospero, in recent years Prosperos have skewed much older. Eric William Lin notes that male actors have more choices in terms of leading roles as they age; Prospero is one example of this. The same goes for white actors. In Lin's data collection, there is one recorded instance of a non-white actor playing Prospero and four instances of women playing Prospero. At the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of the world's most prominent Shakespeare companies, Prospero's average age is 56.8, based on ten exemplary productions. Every actor was a white, British man. While this is only one UK theatre company, their historical trends speak to larger trends in the UK and US ("Production History").

Casting is impacted by contradictory interpretations: these are not exclusive to *The Tempest* and not exclusive to Prospero. The ambiguity in the text allows for creative license on the part of actors and directors. Perhaps more than any role, Caliban varies drastically across time and place but generally speaks to what a director thinks is monstrous. The casting of Caliban is plagued by racist stereotypes and the continual effects of racism (Vaughan 390). The role of Caliban is quite troubled. The text does not make it clear exactly what he is; instead we receive more descriptions of his character than his body: "poisonous slave" (Hulme and Sherman I.ii.319), "abhorred slave" (I.ii.350), "a most delicate monster" (II.ii.85). According to the *dramatis personae*, Caliban is "a savage and deformed slave" (3). We do not know what Caliban looked like on the Globe stage in 1611. Sometimes, Caliban is played as a man with a physical deformity, like Edward Machan in 1749 (Vaughan 394). For a while, Caliban was portrayed as fish- or animal-like, "with scales, fins, and other aquatic attributes" (390). In the text, Trinculo asks if Caliban is fish and Stephano calls him a "cat" (Hulme and Sherman II.ii.79) and "moon-calf" (II.ii.101). As directors become more sympathetic, choices change. When Darwin's theories of human development became standard, many Calibans were the "pre-civilized missing link," of human evolution, like the 1873 book *Caliban; the Missing Link*" (Vaughan 399). Caliban was then played by actors of color, generally Black men, like Joe Morton in 1981 (405). This makes Prospero a colonial oppressor and places questions of monstrosity on a racial hierarchy. This trend is still very common today. The only instance of a female Caliban I can find is in the all-female Donmar Warehouse production. As Emma Smith puts it: "We get the Shakespeare we need at different times. Shakespeare's plays generate questions rather than answers" (252). This is true for Prospero and for Caliban and, as I will show later, for Ariel too.

As with all of Shakespeare's texts, many critics and theatre lovers make a claim for the universality of the text. However, "universal" Shakespeare may be, his texts are equally controversial and have long been a sandbox to explore social issues. In the recent Norton Critical Edition of *The Tempest*, the editors write; "the universality of *The Tempest*'s relationships [. . .] have helped make it one of *the most adaptable texts* of the entire literary canon, and it has been reread and rewritten more radically than any other of Shakespeare's texts" (Hulme and Sherman x, my emphasis). Beyond Dryden and Davenant's seventeenth century *Enchanted Island*, today *The Tempest* is an immensely popular Shakespeare play produced continually by theatres across the country and the world.

In terms of retelling the stories of Shakespeare, there are two main styles: reproduction and adaptation. Reproduction maintains the text as written, with minor cuts and additions, like any number of regional classical theatre companies and the many productions on stage and film. Adaptation takes the plot and creates a very different story, like the 1999 teenage romantic comedy, *10 Things I Hate About You*. Based on *The Taming of the Shrew*, the film is a drastically adapted story, set in Padua High School in Seattle, Washington. The characters and plot are inspired by the play; the updated time and place create a very different but still familiar story. When working with *The Tempest*, artists often exercise creative license and create adaptations. There are a number of operas based on *The Tempest* and songs across many genres. A 1956 science-fiction film *Forbidden Planet* is inspired by *The Tempest* and, in turn, there is a jukebox musical based on *Forbidden Planet*. Famous film adaptations include *Prospero's Books*, 1991 avant-garde film directed by Peter Greenaway, featuring mime, dance, music, and animation. The movie shows Prospero as an author, clearing indicating that Prospero is a Shakespeare stand-in. Postcolonial thinkers have taken to *The Tempest* more than any other

Shakespeare work, like Aimé Césaire's 1969 play *Une Tempête*. In Césaire's version, Prospero does not relinquish control of the isle. Postcolonial theories generally work to decenter Prospero and look at Caliban with sympathy, foregrounding issues of colonialism and race.

There is a deeply cultural love of Shakespeare and reproducing and adapting Shakespeare is a lucrative business. Adaptions are popular for several reasons. Shakespeare himself was writing adaptations, he "transferred his culture's stories from page to stage and made them available to a whole new audience" (Hutcheon 2). Linda Hutcheon writes that adaptions are self-conscious but incredibly common throughout time and genre. They are more than a bastardized version of the source text, but a whole work in their own right. Adapting can lead to "unease" (3), particularly when the adaption bridges genres. But in the case of Shakespeare, the stories are so familiar and thus audiences are comfortable sitting in that familiarity. In adapting, an author can make a bold move to reclaim a text or work that has, in the past, ignored or left out people of certain identities. Adaptation can be politically motivated, like many all-female or gender-swapped productions of Shakespeare. These hundreds of years of adaptation speak to something malleable about the tale of *The Tempest* making it the perfect candidate for gender-swapping.

Women have taken to *The Tempest* and Prospero both in text and on the stage. In the four cross-cast productions of *The Tempest* I explore in this paper, all were directed by women. Shakespeare scholar Virginia Vaughan wrote about *The Tempest's* feminist potential in her essay "Female Prosperos and What They Tell Us." Vaughan take on a question asked by Ann Thompson: if "it is possible 'for a staging of *The Tempest* to convey anything approaching a feminist reading of the text'" (Vaughan 347). Vaughan concluded, after exploring several examples, "none of the performances discussed here can fully satisfy the objections raised by Anne Thompson" (355). She concludes that a rewriting is necessary. Feminist authors have taken

up that task. In 2016, speculative fiction writer Margaret Atwood wrote *Hag-Seed*, a modern retelling where a theatre director is exiled by his colleagues and must accept a position in a prison. Madeline Miller, a classicist and author, known for *Circe* (2018) and *Song of Achilles* (2011), is currently writing a retelling of *The Tempest*.

Female Prosperos are undeniably a part of the larger trend of cross-casting that began in the 1990s (Power 84), motivated by feminist policies and the desire to diversify theatre and offer leading roles to talented, older actresses. However, within this trend, there are certain roles that invite a cross-cast approach and Prospero is one of them. There are several reasons for this fact. First, there is power in the act of adaptations. The numerous, varied interpretations of *The Tempest* across media show this. The popularity and name recognition of the play make it a reasonable candidate for retelling. But the text itself invites a woman's role, in the speech in Act 5, Scene 1. While doing an incantation, Prospero paraphrases Medea, from book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Prospero says:

> Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
> And ye that on the sands with print less foot
> Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
> When he comes back (Hulme and Sherman V.i.33-6)

The monologue goes on for dozens of lines and is noticeably different in style from the rest of the play. These lines are taken from speech spoken by Medea. Ovid's text states:

> Ye air and winds: ye elves of hills, of brooks, of woods alone,
> Of standing lakes, and of the night, approach ye every one,
> Through help of whom (the crooked banks much wond'ring at the thing)
> I have compelled the streams to run clean backwards to their spring. (85)

It was common in Renaissance theatre to pull large sections of text from other authors. There were neither cultural nor legal protections for copyright or plagiarism. And given how Renaissance education taught the Greek and Latin classics, Shakespeare's audience would have clocked this reference to Ovid's *Medea*. But, in a play that is so unique, this passage stands out. Taymor cites this as one reason to gender swap the role, seeing Prosper as feminine within the text, justifying the casting of Helen Mirren ("The Tempest: Julie Taymor interview").

Additionally, *The Tempest* has a theatrical history of gender fluidity. The character of Ariel, a magical spirit with an ambiguous body, was historically played by women, one of the first roles in Shakespeare to be consistently cross-cast. When Shakespeare was alive, women were legally barred from performing publicly so Ariel would have been played by a young man or boy. Ariel is magical, gentle, in a subservient role, all characteristics that can be easily coded as feminine. Given that there is only one female role in *The Tempest*, it makes sense to add another role for women. This gender-swapped history is plagued with regressive gender roles of servantly women, as much as racism plagues the casting of Caliban. "Ariel was almost invariably a female role from the Restoration onwards, until the (male) dancer Leslie French played it at the Old Vic in 1930" (Button). Today, nearly all productions of *Tempest* employ a male Ariel, reflecting the gender in the text. Sometimes, Ariel is played effeminately, by people like Ben Whishaw in Taymor's film, who flies across the screen, speaks softly, and gently fades in and out. Coding Ariel as gay again plays into stereotypes of femininity and gay men. Like with Prospero, Ariel is nearly always played by white performers. Prospero's relationship to Ariel can be quite fraught, like his relationship to Miranda. *The Tempest* exhibits various hierarchies within which gender is played with; Ariel's gender exists in relation to Prospero's gender. Their genders determine the social expectations of that relationship. Ariel is the servant of Prospero,

giving him more agency than Caliban, but certainly less than Miranda. The subservience to Prospero is easily gendered as feminine, making the isle a replication of a patriarchal household. Adding one female character does not do the radical work needed to undo the sexism in the text. The history of Ariel shows the historical precedent for cross-gender casting and it also shows how shifting the gender of an actor and a character changes the subtext of a production.

Casting choices within productions of *The Tempest* are and have been deeply fraught by social issues of their times. Shakespearean productions continue to tell us more about the time we live in than about early modern England. It is from this muddled and sometimes troubling place that we begin to address women playing Prospero, and how those productions are tied to questions of gender, and questions of who owns and who gets to be Shakespeare. Cross-casting Prospero is different than cross-casting other roles in the Shakespearean canon. By narrowly defining Prospero as Shakespeare, the greatest writer of all time, women's re-appropriate of the role becomes more powerful and more transgressive.

"Such stuff": Literature Review

There are many scholarly approaches to the act of cross-dressing and as many motivations, techniques, styles, and approaches for artists. In order to give a thorough sample of this scholarship, my literature review will consider four approaches to cross-gender performance: historical, technical, theoretical, and feminist/queer. These approaches are informed by a variety of fields, including Shakespeare and literary studies, performance studies, feminist and queer theory, and sociology. These four strands occasionally overlap but mostly speak to the diversity within the field. Even with this vast collection of scholars, there is not a robust field for women's cross-cast Shakespeare. This is particularly shocking when we consider that over the last four hundred years, Western academia have produced more work on Shakespeare than perhaps any other author. My final sections, about feminist and queer interventions, form the point from which this project will begin, but all sections are important to understand how the field has reached the most cutting-edge work on women's cross-cast Shakespeare.

Much of the literature review is focused on exclusively Shakespeare; he does stand as a unique figure in Western literary and theatre studies. However, Shakespearean theatre is not the only kind of cross-casting. Cross-cast theatre exists in various cultures and traditions, such as drag or Japanese Kabuki. Some of the works look at non-Shakespeare, theatrical cross-casting. Additionally, while most examine on-stage cross-casting, cross-dressing can occur in other, off-stage contexts that speak to the changing understanding about gender and gender performance. Because theatre and Shakespeare performances do not exist in a cultural vacuum, I have included works such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* that consider performance broadly but are not explicitly about either theatre or Shakespeare per se.

Historical Approaches

A historical approach to Shakespeare's cross-gender casting roots itself in the theatre practices and social world of early modern England. These scholars ask the whats, hows, and whys of cross-cast theatre, often called transvestite theatre, on the English stage. Many scholars have written about the boy-players who played all the female roles. Because women were barred from performing publicly, if we look at Shakespeare historically, we automatically center men, and see women's performances or presence as secondary. Since the late twentieth century, scholars have been looking at the history of early modern English theatre through the lens of gender, seeing that stage as unique among Europe.

Steven Orgel, in his book *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender is Shakespeare's England* (1996), analyzes the context of early modern theatre. The theatre was considered morally dangerous; that is why English women were legally barred from acting, even as women could act on the stage in other European nations. Orgel looks to that unique, all-male stage to look at gender. Women's legal exclusion from public places, like the theatrical stage, was not only not unique but also not total. Women did get on the stage, either illegally or privately. Orgel argues that gender may have been more fluid than binary. Orgel was perhaps the first scholar who sought out the "unnoticeable and invisible" (Orgel 9) on the stage. By writing about the context of early modern theatre, instead of taking that context for granted, we can explore how gender is constructed, how theatrical performances conformed to past cultural norms, and how theatre can both create and reflect gender. His conclusions about gender in the early modern period are a jumping off point to understand gender, then and now, as both complicated and constructed.

Scholars like Jean Howard take a feminist-historical approach and look at women's performance and cross-dressing in the early modern period. Howard argues in "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England" (1988), that the "sex-gender system" of this historical moment was "under pressure" and "crossdressing, as fact and as idea, threatened a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination" (Howard 418). Howard writes about cross-dressing done both on stage and by private women in the city of London. Howard notes that "to be at the theatre, especially without a male companion, was to transgress the physical and symbolic boundaries of the middle-class woman's domestic containment" (440). Cross-dressing was popular among women even when it was illegal. She, like Orgel, places the location of the theatre as greatly important to the construction of gender:

> To go to the theatre was, in short, to be positioned at the crossroads of cultural change and contradiction–and this seems to me especially true for the middle-class female playgoer, who by her practices was calling into the question the 'place' of woman, perhaps more radically than Shakespeare's fictions of crossdressing. (440)

Like Orgel, Howard looks at history and the stage to understand gender, but Howard looks at women almost exclusively.

Since Orgel, many scholars are looking to find evidence of early modern women's performance. Clare McManus is one such feminist scholar, who writes on early modern literature, theatre, and women's performance in early modern England. McManus has found that women did perform on stage, legally in private like Queen Anna who performed a masque while pregnant and illegally in public in the case of Mary Frith, alias Moll Cutpurse. McManus says in an interview for the Folger Shakespeare Library:

> If you think about people performing using their bodies rather than their voices, you find all different kinds of people. Acrobats, tumblers, sword dancers, rope dancers, tightrope walkers—all of whom perform in streets, in playhouses, in Inn-yards, alongside people who would be doing what we think of as Shakespearean acting. ("Women Performers in Shakespeare's Time")

Women were allowed to perform privately too, in court settings like masques, one of the most distinctive forms of theatre in early modern England. Masque is a distinct kind of entertainment that involves elaborate costumes and scenery, choreographed posing, and music, telling classical and mythic stories. We even see a wedding masque in *The Tempest*. Masques were always private, with hired professional actors and courtly women who would pose and move but never speak. In the court of King James, men and women would perform separately.

McManus's work focuses on women in early modern England and does not look at Shakespeare specifically. But she has found a considerable amount of historical evidence that, contrary to our popular understanding, women performed often in early modern England. McManus's work matters when actors like Mark Rylance, through a desire for historical accuracy and a deep love of Shakespeare, recreate "Original Practices." "Original Practices" means not only costumes made without sewing machines and heavy, white makeup, but also all-male casts. Rylance played Olivia at the Globe and on Broadway, to much critical praise. This kind of cross-gender casting is about historical recreation, not contemporary gender. Excluding women in research about early modern English performance, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that continues to exclude women from the contemporary stage and our cultural imagination.

James Bulman's work on Shakespeare and performance, particularly *Shakespeare Re-Dressed* (2008), looks at a variety of Shakespearean cross-dressed performances. In his

introduction, he analyzes the history of all-male Shakespeare and the history of the scholarship of all-male Shakespeare. This work often looks at the homoerotic potential in the boy-players. This book takes the conversation about Shakespearean performance into today, but still looks at mostly men and all-male productions. The history of cross-casting, baked within Shakespeare, has the potential to "foreground the artifice of gender construction" and to "prompt audiences to interrogate conventional assumptions about the nature of sexual desire, hetero- and homosexuality, and the 'naturalness' of human behavior" (Bulman 12). He cites Howard and others who have begun this work. "Performance scholarship has not kept pace with contemporary theatrical practices" (12). There are many feminist and queer theory scholars trying to keep up, whom I will discuss in the fourth section, Feminist and Queer Approaches.

Gender Theory Approaches

What does gender mean in the context of cross-gender casting? Gender is a socially constructed category meant to organize difference along the lines of sexed bodies. In the Western tradition, there have been two genders, male and female, with different and opposite characteristics. With this difference comes hierarchy and patriarchal systems which place men above women, claiming them to be natural leaders, as well as more rational and more intelligent than women. This gender binary allows us to say "opposite" gender with clarity. This is true throughout the Western world, of both our time and Shakespeare's, even as gender has become more fluid in the twenty-first century. Performance and theatre reveal gender to be constructed, even performed. Our attempts to get at the root of gender prompt the deeply theoretical and philosophical questions that arise when looking at cross-gender casting. When looking at gender and performance, every feminist writer, myself included, is indebted to Judith Butler and her

1990 book *Gender Trouble*. Feminist Shakespeare scholars who look at performance, such as Teri Power and Elizabeth Klett use Butler to understand gender.

My engagement with gender comes from Butler's theory of social constructivism, shown in *Gender Trouble*. Butler argues against gender as an inherent or natural quality or state of being, and against using "women" as a monolith from which activism and philosophy begin. Gender is constructed by society, and is a speech act and a performance. Gender is "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires [that] create the illusion of an interior and organized gender core" (Butler 185–6). Instead of the sexed body coming before and predicting a visible gender and related sexuality, "the body" is "the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for 'culture' to emerge" (177). In the end, feminist theory should not be about seeking this "gender core" as "genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth" (186). This is not to say gender is not "real." We live our lives in gender, in genders that are legitimate but not inevitable. Our genders impact our lives experience. But we must understand gender broadly, on a social level. Gender is as much about how it is read as what one feels. Butler defines gender as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through the *stylized repetition of acts*" (191, my emphasis). Here, I will examine how gender is performed on stage, while acknowledging the gender of the performers. But it is important to understand that we can understand gender through theatre because gender is the theatre of everyday. And, like Butler, I want to push against gender essentialism and the heterosexual matrix.

When Butler is talking about gender as performance, she is not speaking literally about performance art. But she does use an extended metaphor about drag, because drag "suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and

performance" (187). Much like cross-gender Shakespeare, she points out that "drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency" (187). More recently, Butler has pushed back against the attention that metaphor has received among feminist and queer scholars. In the 1999 Preface: "It would be a mistake to take [drag] as the paradigm of subversive action, or, indeed, a model for political agency" (xxiii). Her response attempts to speak to the specifics of mainstream drag, which is critiqued by people like Lesley Ferris, as men mockingly adopting the aesthetics of femininity while not acknowledging the lived experience of women. The art form of drag, which is one method of cross-casting, has its own, separate field within gender studies.

Theory that focuses exclusively on the impact and philosophy of cross-gender theatre sees it as a theatrical method of doing and undoing gender constructs. The nature of cross-dressing, drag, and other methods of gender fluidity on the stage often but not always convey different ideas of gender. In the introduction to *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing* (1993), Lesley Ferris complies a combination of cross-dressing styles and the various reactions those performances incite, acknowledging the long history of cross-dressing in theatre. This book covers a wide swath of time and theatrical traditions, from ancient Rome to the twentieth century. The introduction includes a lot of Shakespeare, as Shakespeare's all-male company has become the historical paradigm for cross-casting. Across these traditions, Ferris writes:

> I propose that transvestite theatre—cross-dressing in performance—is an exemplary source of the writerly text, a work that forces the reader/spectator to see multiple meanings in the very act of reading itself, of listening, watching a performance. […] A performance text operates in dimensions of real time and real space. Its primary mode of

> communication is not the spoken or written word; communication occurs through the human body: it's movement, gestural language, physicality, costume. (8)

That multiplicity creates a variety of interpretations. Thus, even when we have direct quotes and interviews from performers and directors, the audience impact will always be as diverse as the audience itself. In the theatre, gender is a creation between author, director, performer, and audience. All are complicit in attempting to read that gender. We require signs or semiotics, like movement, gestures, and costumes to make sense of that gender, even more so when looking at cross-cast theatre, where gender can become the focus. Semiotics will be explored further in the next section. When gender becomes messy or ambiguous, some audience members feel anxiety, but others feel liberated.

Both Butler and Ferris's work is not unchallenged. Leslie Feinberg and other radical queer and transgender theorists critique 90s feminist writings for engaging with stereotypes of queer, gay, and transgender people. Reviewers critique her limited scope and Feinberg specifically asks for a more thoughtful inclusion of the transgender spirit. Much like how Butler addresses criticism in her prefaces, I feel it is important to be aware of more recent transgender theory, like Power does in *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice*.

Cross-dressing theory applies to real life in our consumption of it. We learn to be who we are based on what we see and experience, not only through interactions with other people but through media, like TV, movies, and theatre. Sociologists call this social scripting. The unspoken social scripts are how we learn to interact with each other, and also how we learn our genders and sexualities (O'Brien 134). Dramaturgical theories of sociology use the language of theatre to describe behavior. Thus, it feels appropriate to apply these theories to theatre. One of the major sources of our scripts is media (141). Starting at a very young age, we learn to speak and talk

about ourselves by seeing others, primary groups like parents and siblings, and secondary groups like school and media. Theatre in particular is a place where we learn scripts, scripts both familiar and divergent.

The idea of theatre as a gender laboratory comes across in many works, not just Ferris, but also Howard and Klett. Power has an entire chapter dedicated to the cross-gender workshop. "Because theatre requires a public form" both now and in Shakespeare's time, "performance can become a kind of battleground for shifting moral dilemmas and social and cultural change" (Ferris 8). For this reason, scholars have looked at gender on stage to think about gender in everyday life. The stakes in creating theatre are high because they reveal deep seated, often invisible, cultural beliefs. Theatre allows for potentials beyond how we live now. Audience members, and theatre artists, can use and create new social scripts, forcing us to see the everyday as performance.

Scholar W. B. Worthen aids in this discussion by addressing the uniqueness of Shakespearean performance and the sociological impact of reproduction. In the 2014 book, *Shakespeare Performance Studies*, he writes: "Shakespeare performance sometimes seems to evoke a specific and relatively narrow sense of genre: performance that depends on, exists to reproduce, is defined by the determining algorithm of Shakespeare's writing" (Worthen 1). Any writing about Shakespeare must keep in mind the privileged position he holds in the Western canon, different from any other playwright. "Technologies of cultural creation and transmission" (2) help us understand Shakespeare as different from other writers. Worthen proposes a separate field of Shakespeare performance studies, not just Shakespeare studies and performance studies. This approach is particularly helpful when addressing questions of reception, authenticity, and

legitimacy. The scholarship around Shakespeare needs to understand both the power of theatre to create and recreate gender and the role that Shakespeare has in defining and redefining theatre.

Technical Approaches

But what does it look like when a person cross-dresses? And what do we call it? And how do we react? The wide variety of cross-casting techniques all utilize semiotics to inform our understanding of the significance of signs like language and clothing. Some attempt to achieve realism, others emphasize parody. This is shown in costume and makeup, but also in mannerisms and acting styles and approaches. Scholars and critics have documented, described, and tried to define these approaches.

How we discuss these performances is important too; both accuracy and respect in language are important. In *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice*, Power, a scholar, artist, and pathbreaker, uses theory and practice to devise new descriptions of non-conventional casting, updating scholarship from the outmoded language of "transvestite theatre." Power's phrases are helpful for describing the intention and effect of these productions. Power uses "cross-cast" as an umbrella term, expressing a production that has actors or actresses performing any gender different from their own. Next is "crossed-dressed" performance. This performance style is naturalistic and does not seek to emphasize or focus on the gender or bodies of its performers, like Mark Rylance playing Olivia or Vanessa Redgrave's Prospero. In a cross-dressed performance, gender is stable and meant to be convincing within the context of the play. The final category described by Power is a "trans-dressed" performance. This is when a character go between genders, move fluidly back and forth, or perform as neither man nor a woman, or both woman and man. This kind of cross-casting embodies "other" genders within a single

performance. Lloyd's Donmar Warehouse trilogy qualifies as "trans-dressed." Drag is separate but related: "camp and/or theatrical performances of gender that essentially are the hyper- and meta-theatrical performance of the socially prescribed performance of gender" (Power 8). All categories challenge the gender binary in different ways. None of Power's categories look at the cutting of or rewriting part of the text. Another technique is re-gendering, where the play's language has been altered to change in the gender of the character, like Taymor's film and the Seattle Shakespeare Company production. Nearly always, characters are re-gendered to reflect the gender of the performer.

In order to describe those acting in these productions, there are no neutral choices. Actor is technically a gender-neutral word but implies male; many women reject the title "actress" because they see it as a bastardized version of "actor." Others do not feel that way. The false choice between actor and actress also excludes other gender options. To avoid this dilemma, I opt to use "performer" generally.

Further language problems are the usages of "women" and "crossing," but both are addressed by other scholars. In the past, and even presently, there are legitimate political reasons to lump together women in the theatre world, like when fighting for equal pay and opportunities on and off the stage. Or as Butler says, "categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics" (Butler 175). The issue remains that not all women are the same and not all women have the same issues. Often when discussing "women's" issues, the unspoken adjectives are straight, white, middle-class, able-bodied, or normative in many other ways. Shakespearean spaces, either academic or artist, are often predominantly white and wealthy. Additionally, by focusing on women, we ignore the gender issues of non-binary people and men, more

specifically trans men. This paper focuses on white, cis women playing Prospero and their white, cis female directors. This is not to exclude performers of other genders, but the access to productions and scholarship is more readily available when it is about white cis women. This paper is not meant to reify the gender binary or any gender roles or stereotypes. Instead, I seek to find revolutionary, liberating potential within cross-cast Shakespeare while still acknowledging the need for radical diversity in contemporary Shakespeare.

Because gender studies is a shifting field, as even the term "women's studies" feels outdated, it is challenging to stay on top of the language. Klett notes that the whole idea of crossing implies a gender binary, one binary to another. But, like Klett, "I take the prefix 'cross-' to indicate a fluid movement across a spectrum of gender identities" (Klett 4) instead of referring to a binary. In the book, *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity*, she uses cross-dress and cross-cast. Terms are both interchangeable and specific. Cross-cast is my preferred term, but I will use a variety of words. I will make every effort to use language that is inclusive and appropriate. The language I use will never be perfect and will not age well. Writing about cross-cast Shakespeare is an emerging field, as the world evolves and gender evolves with it, we as scholars need to be attentive to culture and the people we write about. Now that I have addressed language, we can move on to techniques.

Important to our ability to read gender is the field of semiotics, the practice of examining signs, both visual and verbal, to understand how they produce meaning. This is crucial when attempting to read gender (meaning) through gesture, costume, language, intonation, makeup, and hair (signs). Scholars of performance, gender, and Shakespeare examine those signs. Cross-cast Shakespeare does something different with traditional theatre signs and thus challenges the viewer. Klett cites philosopher Jacques Derrida saying that "[E]very sign, linguistic or

nonlinguistic [. . .] can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender indefinitely new contexts" (7). Theatre is not mere mimicry, but the creation of new signs and meanings. That optimistic characterization shows not only theatre as the transmitter of scripts, but again as a laboratory.

To describe styles, I will use two essays from Bulman's *Shakespeare Re-Dressed* and a more recent essay from *Shakespeare On Stage and Off.* In his piece "Prospera's Brave New World: Cross-Cast Oppression and the Four-Fold Player in the Georgia Shakespeare Festival's *Tempest*," Andrew James Hartley wrote about a gender-swapped Prospero: "the practice of cross-casting—or rather regendering—creates loci of competing discourse which reflect ideologically on issues of authenticity and which are, in turn, shaped by the material conditions of the community in which the production is staged" (Hartley 134). Authority is a complicated issue for the director and performers to deal with while cross-casting, even more so when women do the cross-casting. This production re-gendered Prospero, played by a female performer, into Prospera, using the classic feminine ending. Despite their claim of authenticity, this performance was not well-received, a common response for women's gender-swapped Shakespeare. The costumes were restrictive Restoration style and this "Prospera was, from the outset, angst ridden, controlling, full of dark anger and, increasingly, guilt" (137), conveyed by actress Jan Akers. By acting alongside other gender-swapped roles, the production created a unique theme for *The Tempest*.

Judith Rose in "Performing Gender at the Globe: The Technologies of the Cross-Dressed Actor" examines the Globe's *Twelfth Night* which employed Original Practices. Rose describes "the use of authentic costumes, makeup, and wigs" (Rose 210). The historical boy actor was brought to the forefront of the mind of the audience, provoking "the spectators to reconsider the

nature of the play itself" (211). Cross-casting can have that effect. The makeup and costumes were unconvincing, totally incapable of disguising the real gender of the actor. Costumes are important in any production, to convey the setting among other things, but even more important when portraying gender. We live in a world of extremely gendered clothing and it is an excellent way of telling the audience the gender of a character. In this *Twelfth Night,* the "high artificiality" made the female characters "patently unreal" (213), making the gender unconvincing.

Roderick H. McKeown, in "'The Slutty Clown Speaks the Prologue': Cross-gender Casting on the Toronto Stage" (2019) looks at more contemporary instances of gender-swapped Shakespeare, examples of *Hamlet* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. He argues that "small change in casting had far more extensive ramifications for the play's exploration of gender and sexuality, an exploration far more radical than the gender-blind" *Hamlet* (McKeown 48). Using just two plays at one theatre company, McKeown shows the variety of approaches to cross-gender casting. By examining the productions, he looks at interactions between cross-cast characters, the incorporation of ASL, costume, and depictions of sexuality. McKeown ends with notes about the "unintended consequences" and the "openness of response" to the productions (59). By looking at specific productions, scholars point out the essential elements of a production that speak to gender and performance: usually a combination of costume, makeup, voice, gesture, and language, and also how the reception of cross-cast Shakespeare can be incredibly fraught.

Our reactions to different kinds of theatre are not neutral, and they are even less neutral when it comes to Shakespeare. The question of reception is key. Ayanna Thompson writes about race and Shakespeare, focusing on cross-racial productions in the US. Obviously, gender and

race are different. It is inappropriate to compare racial oppression with gender oppression, particularly in the United States. But race and gender are both socially constructed categories that can be legibly read on the stage. Like cross-cast production, Shakespeare that employs Black or other non-white actors can be controversial. Seeing race, or not seeing race, is a cause of great anxiety. In "To Notice or Not To Notice: Black Actors, Performance, and Reviews" Thompson writes about the challenges theatre reviewers face when writing about race. She asks: "Is it better to notice or not notice race in one's review?" (Thompson 2). Reviewers struggle to write about race—mostly because they are not used to it and do not have the resources to learn. She concludes reviewers should attempt to include race; "a more progressive and responsible reviewing style would take into account the complexities of race in performance" (13).

Kim Solga writes about questions of authority and ownership over the text of Shakespeare in "Shakespeare's Property Ladder: Women Directors and the Politics of Ownership." Shakespeare's supposed owners have been male, leading us to "gendered expectations that still accrue to the work of women directors" (Solga 106). A handful of women have been "allowed" to own Shakespeare and Solga asks if these women create more progressive Shakespeare than their male counterparts. Women are more likely to be assigned to smaller productions, educational productions, or shows that are supposedly about gender, like *The Taming of the Shrew*. Women directors are caught in a battle about whether or not their art can be or must be feminist. Women-led Shakespeare is also more likely to encounter criticism because of deeply ingrained sexism not only in the theatrical world but because of our conceptions of Shakespeare. The same is true for directors of color. Even so, there have been numerous women directing Shakespeare all over the US and UK, creating exceptional art. In the

four productions I examine, all were directed by women, many of them women at the height of their career and highly respected in their artistic communities.

Feminist and Queer Approaches

And now, faced with a massive amount of work on the theatre practices in early modern England, contemporary analysis of the social performance of gender, and an understanding of the styles and techniques that go into a theatrical performance, feminist and queer theorists take up the question of cross-cast. What changes when we center women in cross-gender Shakespeare?

Often scholars and contemporary theatre makers have explicit feminist aims. Gemma Miller, in her article "Cross-Gender Casting as Feminist Interventions in the Staging of Early Modern Plays," writes on how these production and theatre companies are doing activist, feminist works by drawing on the power of theatre. Miller is writing from a position as a scholar of women and gender studies, not as a Shakespearean. She, like Solga, says that cross-gendered casting "questions the 'authority' of the originating (male) author; it challenges the hegemony of male-dominated theatrical institutions; and it disrupts culturally embedded ideas of gender hierarchies" (Miller 4). She writes on the importance of displacing history, taking on these hyper masculine plays, like *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*. "By deconstructing the hierarchies of spectator and performer, subject and object, the actors were thus able to disrupt male/female hierarchies and expose gender as a discursive formation" (12). She grants high praise upon specifically Phyllida Lloyd's *Julius Caesar* and optimistically states that these unconventional productions can reveal the true power of theatre, "the potential for bringing about wide-ranging and radical political change" (13).

In *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity: Wearing the Codpiece*, literary scholar Elizabeth Klett focuses on women's cross-gender Shakespeare, revealing "what

is released onstage, and what happens to the spectator, to Shakespeare, and to the culture when women dare to wear the codpiece" (Klett 3). Klett emphasizes transgressions and centers women in the discussion of cross-gender casting to undo years of focus on men's performance and men's drag. Her book was published in 2009, only a year after Bulman's, but it pushes the conversation about cross-gender Shakespeare in a more progressive, feminist direction. She adopts the theories of gender and cross-casting from Butler, Ferris, and many others who see theatre as a gender laboratory. Klett explores the unsettling of English national identity through five examples of cross-cast women's Shakespeare in the early aughts. She pays close attention to the details of production and reception, quoting numerous critics and including the sexist reactions. Her chapter "Gender in Exile" describes perhaps the first notable cross-cast Prospero, Vanessa Redgrave at the Globe. I have adopted Klett's methodologies. Her book is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of women's cross-cast Shakespeare. From her, I take the focus on "identity," a fairly modern concept, and an idea that is particularly timely. Klett sees gender and Shakespeare tied to England's identity as a nation, but we can also see gender identity through women-led cross-cast Shakespeare. Cross-cast women and "their courageous performances" (30) have the power to upset traditional notions of Shakespeare and the self.

Terri Power, in her book *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (2016), collected the most robust and up-to-date work on cross-cast Shakespeare. Power uses Butler's theory as a starting point to discuss the practice and potential of cross-gender productions of Shakespeare, but also includes transgender theorists like Kate Bornstein. Power writes on "how women playing male roles in Shakespeare's plays offers equality on our stages and liberates women from limitations placed upon them in our patriarchal society" (Power 1). And in a gender-neutral casting system, like the Globe Ensemble, cross-casting can be liberating for people of all genders, to play roles

out of type. Like many scholars, Power notes the political motivations as well as the epistemological result of women's and all-female cross-gender casting. Her book is particularly helpful for anyone interested in gender and Shakespeare on the stage, as she includes many digestible sections about conceptions of gender and practices within casting. It more than just theory and can easily be read by a non-specialist.

Power notes the growth of all-female and gender-swapped Shakespeare in the past 30 years. Because she looks at practices of gender, her book is centered around productions and production companies doing interesting things with gender. As shown before, there are many ways of doing cross-cast Shakespeare. Power defines all them and speaks to actors and directors about their techniques for creating gender. Power writes about all-female and all-male companies like the New Globe, Propeller, Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, and The Queen's Company. She also lists many productions that take a cross-cast or queer twist on Shakespeare, both adaptations and reproductions. Power also writes about the major success of Phyllida Lloyd's all-female Donmar Warehouse trilogy.

My project is based upon the practices of Klett and Power, using their approaches to cross-gender casting. As Power says, there are "very few books dedicated solely to the subject of women's and 'other' cross-gender performances" and that "this area of performance, women's on-stage portrayals of masculinities, lacks documentation, scholarship and acknowledgement" (6). Their approaches combine feminist politics, seeing gender as performance, the uniqueness of Shakespeare, and the complications of reception, ownership, and authenticity. I am stepping into that vacuum.

"And women too, but innocent and pure": Four Cross-Cast Productions

Starting from the premise that performance is where theory meets art, and combining feminist politics that regard gender as performance while respecting the uniqueness of Shakespeare and complicated ideas of reception, ownership, and authenticity, I will now explore four different productions of *The Tempest* that feature a female performer in the role of Prospero. These four productions were in the US and UK from 2000 to 2019. All are directed by women. By looking at four different productions, I will explore differences in goals, styles, techniques, and reactions of women's cross-gender casting.

For each production I will look at several elements that speak to the approaches, technologies, and reactions. I will introduce each production, its director, its Prospero, and the setting. Then I will move to the specifics of that Prospero by looking at costumes, language, gender roles, and reception. Through these productions, we will see the diversity of approaches to cross-casting. There are a variety of feminist aims as well; directors articulate the importance of hiring seasoned, older actresses and telling stories that center women's experiences. These productions speak to an ongoing cultural moment where we determine how we want to understand and see gender while centering women. As gender changes and evolves, the stage is one of those places that we can most clearly see those changes.

Vanessa Redgrave at the Globe, 2000

In 2000, at the Globe theatre in London, Lenka Udovicki directed Vanessa Redgrave as Prospero. The Globe did several all-female productions in the early aughts, justified as a chance to feature talented women but also meant to protect the Globe for criticism after years of all-male productions headed by Mark Rylance (Klett 139). This New Globe is an exact replica of the

Globe that burned down in 1613, constructed only a few miles from the original. The thrust stage and open roof make it a singular theatre, limited in space compared to contemporary theatres. Most Globe productions rely entirely on natural lights and acoustics with very few set pieces. Many audience members, known as Groundlings, stand around the stage which sits about four feet above the ground. The performers are extremely close to the audience, frequently using direct address, even touching audience members. This unique space creates a theatre-going experience foreign to a modern audience member and creates unique opportunities. The experience is incredibly communal, given the proximity to the actors and audience members. It creates an incredible sensory experience, standing on your feet for hours, in the rain or the sun, smelling and touching both audience and actor. There are no convincing illusions in the Globe. Because I cannot access a filmed version of this production, I rely on Klett's description and analysis, with production photos as my only primary source. Because I cannot detail the experience of this production, I will focus most strongly on reactions and criticism.

Director Udovicki chose to emphasize the theme of political exile in this production. As a Croatian immigrant to the UK, she viewed Prospero as in exile and used Eastern European music and dress (90). This production clearly exists to be a reaction to Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, shown in its Balkan theme. Vanessa Redgrave was and is considered one of Britain's greatest actresses. Redgrave was 63 at the time of this production and her fame played an important role in the creation of this production. This was not the first time Udovicki worked with Redgrave; they collaborated professionally and worked together on migrant activism. While both the director and Redgrave have participated in that activism, the production team denied any feminist goals for their *Tempest* and claimed to ignore gender in the rehearsal process, though Redgrave did bring her personal experiences to the role (100).

During the production, Redgrave "embodied androgynous qualities" (88). One of the aspects conveying that androgyny was clothing. Her magical cloak was large and bulky, bright blue with gold accents. But her primary outfit was made to look like combat gear, black boots, nude-colored and loose pants, and a vest with many pockets. It appeared both comfortable and utilitarian. Critics described her looking like a farmer, Balkan guerrilla, and a blend of Gypsy, warlord, explorer, and Robinson Crusoe (99). In this production, there were many layers to Prospero's gender that could be read all at once. Klett notes specifically her earring, a singular dangling earing which can be read as masculine or feminine. Because of the realism and the material realities of the Globe, Redgrave's gender was apparent (93). There was no attempt to make Redgrave look like a man.

Klett is not specific about any cuts or changes to the language. From her chapter, I assume that this production did not change the gendered language to match the gender of the performers. Prospero and Ariel were both played by women, but it seems the text was not changed. This indicates that this was a cross-dressed performance, not a re-gendering, and also not drag or any form of gender impersonation. Perhaps this choice reflects a disinterest in gender from a directorial standpoint or a strict reverence of the text.

Klett argues that Redgrave was both masculine and feminine in her gender performance. Redgrave also leaned into the contradictions and complexities of Prospero, taking on the role of both father and mother. In this production, Redgrave played a Prospero who loved his daughter but was furious if disobeyed. This was mirrored in his relationship with Ariel, played by Geraldine Alexander, who seemed another daughter. This sits in contrast with Prospero's relationship with Caliban, which was harsh and cruel. Again, this duality speaks to a simultaneous masculine and feminine presentation, as both caring mother and stern father.

Redgrave's authority and prestige as a well-regarded Shakespearean actor "authorized her portrayal of Prospero" (112) and thus expectations for this production were incredibly high. The production received mostly poor reviews, not because Redgrave was a bad actor, or the production was unsuccessful, but because expectations were not met in that Prospero was decentered. British theatre criticism is known for being venomous and it is important to critique the critics. Klett posits that the reviews were negative because reviewers went into the production with expectations about authenticity, Shakespeare, and Prospero. Klett writes that "Redgrave refused to comply with the expectation of many theatre reviewers" (89). Critics felt that she "underplayed the role" (113). Redgrave is known for her Shakespearean acting, and yet her voice was criticized by theatre reviewers who found her verse-speaking unsatisfactory. Critics' knee-jerk reactions to a woman playing Shakespeare needs to be read through the lens of Shakespearean authority. This kind of sexist criticism will appear at almost any cross-cast production of Shakespeare and reflects criticism of women who are public figures. In the positive reviews, critics praised Redgrave's gender-swapped performance; celebrating that Redgrave brought "qualities to the role that could not have been conveyed by male actors" (113).

The Balkans theme and the decentering of Prospero created a version of *The Tempest* that unsettled a British national identity which values Prospero as a central, powerful figure. That is Klett's main takeaway. This production decentered Prospero, focusing more on the other island inhabitants. That move feels feminist, as the aim of feminists is to de-center the masculine subject. But the choice to cast Redgrave as Prospero still speaks to that belief in the greatness and majesty of Prospero. Redgrave can be seen as deserving of this role, because of her Shakespearean family, her long career on the stage, her whiteness and nationality.

Klett concludes that, though the Globe's unique space can actually function "to reveal the performativity of gender," this production "had precisely the opposite effect: because the audience's heightened awareness of Redgrave as Prospero, they were not able to forget that they were watching a cross-gender performance" (93). Ultimately, this production did something different with Prospero: "Redgrave's Prospero show how women's performances of male Shakespearean roles can transform our perceptions of the character, the play, the author, and the theater itself" (114). That transformation shows both the importance of the gender of the actor, and the potential of cross-gender casting.

Helen Mirren on Film, 2010

Julie Taymor's 2010 cinematic version of *The Tempest* starred Hellen Mirren, another very famous British actor, as Prospera. Taymor, the only credited non-William-Shakespeare screenwriter, changed the gendered language, making Prospero a woman and mother and added a sympathetic backstory. This Prospero is stern but undeniably parental and kind to Miranda. The movie highlights, perhaps unintentionally or through an ignorance of the production history, the racial politics of the play, leading to a racist depiction of Caliban. Taymor leans into the cinematic potential of film, making full use of dramatic cinematography, computer-generated imagery (CGI), scene locations, creative editing with panning shots and flashbacks, and total control of audience point of view. For example, the film opens with Miranda, looking out onto the sea and viewing the titular tempest. We cut in between Miranda, played by Felicity Jones, running across the sand and through the trees and the Italians on their ship. Filmed in the Hawaiian Volcano National Park, this production appears explicitly Pacific in its setting and emphasizes song and music in several genres, including rock.

Julie Taymor, an American director known for her puppetry on stage and her psychedelic influences in films, has been nominated for several Tony Awards and won the MacArthur Fellowship in 1991. There are not many big-name female directors; Taymor is one and has a certain amount of artistic clout and respect. She is known for her bold cinematic choices, also shown in *Across the Universe* (2007), a Beatles jukebox musical, and *Frida* (2002), a biopic of Frida Kahlo. She also directed *Titus* (1990), based on Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, a colorful and anachronistic film starring Anthony Hopkins. Her most successful stage show is *The Lion King* which opened in 1997 and is still running on Broadway. In her *Tempest*, we are treated to a kaleidoscopic, astrological marriage masque in her signature style.

Much like Taymor, Dame Helen Mirren is a well-respected artist and a staple of the British stage, working at the Royal Shakespeare Company at the beginning of her career in the 1960s, playing just about every one of Shakespeare's women. She has been in many television productions and movies across genres, won an Academy Award for her 2007 performance in *The Queen*, a Tony in 2015, and a handful of Emmys. She became a Dame in 2003 and has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Mirren was 65 years old when *The Tempest* was filmed, and as Prospera she appears unglamorous. She is a formidable actress, making clear her claim on this role in the opening moments. We first see Prospera standing with her staff above her head, holding with both arms, yelling, almost in pain. The camera zooms in on her face. Her eyes are wide and wild. Courtney Lehman writes of this "crazed expression, grossly ajar mouth, and wild eyes that mingle casual cruelty with deep sorrow" (Lehmann 51). She is not wearing makeup. Her hair is not styled; it flies with the wind. Her haircut is short and all white, a natural hair color for a woman in her mid-60s. When approached by Miranda, Mirren's Prospera softens her face and disappears the

storm. She is both stately and tired. Prospero's magical cloak in this production looks natural, like a shiny beetle's wing. On the isle, she wears a loose dress that appears to be a patchwork of several fabrics over pants. Prospera's return to Milan is framed as a sacrifice for Miranda; she must change from her comfortable island clothes into a restrictive corset and gown. Ariel laces up the back of her corset tightly and Mirren winces, clearly indicating her discomfort. "To return to Milan is to become re-embedded in a masculine world" (Crowl 396). The island offers freedom and comfort while Milan is a society that literally restricts women. "Prospera commands Ariel to fetch her "skirt and bodice"; but the difference between these accessories and Prospero's request for his "hat and rapier" (Shakespeare 5.1.84) is not merely sartorial—it is ontological" (Lehmann 59). The costuming is undeniably a mark of her feminine gender identity, as Mirren only wears dresses. But the real distinction is between the island and Milan. Prospera is a woman whether she is on or off the island but being a woman in Milan means participating in a patriarchal society.

This film does change and add language to Shakespeare's text. First is the re-gendering of Prospera. She becomes a mother, a ma'am. Her gender is never in question. Her outfits look comfortable but are clearly women's clothing. The gender-swapped language speaks to the realism we expect from film even as Taymor's films exercise both verisimilitude and veritable fakery. But Prospera's singularity is clear; she is the only gender-swapped role and thus her gender stands out. It is doubly powerful: Mirren's star power also makes Prospera stand out. Gender difference is essential to the film but so is gender stability. Mirren's own gender matched the gender of Prospera which was reflected with feminine language and clothing.

The biggest and most controversial change to Shakespeare's text is an extended background story, "with a dozen lines of faux Shakespearean verse [Taymor] creates a feminist

version of Prospera's exile from Milan" (Crowl 395). The original Shakespearean text is Act 1, Scene 2. The story overall remains intact, but the most significant change is the motivation of Antonio. Instead of a mere usurping brother, he is a misogynistic opportunist;

> Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since thy mother held the Dukedom of Milan and its princely power [. . .] who long ago was wife to him who ruled Milan most liberally who, with as tolerant a hand toward me gave license to my long hours in pursuit of hidden truths of coiled powers contained within some elements to harm, or heal I brooked no interruption but your squalling for thou, child, art a princess born [. . .] Upon thy father's death, authority was conferred as was his will to me alone thereby awaking the ambitions of my brother and thy uncle, call'd Antonio. (*Tempest* 6:14-7:19)

Interestingly, the story conveys that conferral of power and authority to Prospera by a man through his will. Perhaps Taymor felt audiences would be less sympathetic to a woman who seized power on her own. This speaks loudly about US culture's deeply ingrained sexism in how an audience presumably cannot accept powerful women who lacks the approval of a man. The story continues to describe their exiling in the middle of the night.

> I pray thee, mark me that a brother should be so perfidious! He whom I did charge to execute express commands as to the prudent governing of fair Milan instead undid, subverted [. . .] Dost thou attend me? Perverting my upstanding studies now his slandering and bile-dipped brush did paint a faithless portrait. His sister, a practicer of the black arts! A demon, not a woman, nay a witch! And he full-knowing others of my sex have burned for no less! The flames now fanned, my counselors turned against me. Dost thou hear? [. . .] To credit his own lie he did believe he was indeed the Duke confederates wi' the King of Naples to give him annual tribute and bend my Dukedom yet unbow'd to

> most ignoble stooping. […] Now the condition. The King of Naples, being an enemy to me inveterate hearkens my brother's suit which was, that he, should presently eradicate me and mine out of the dukedom and confer fair Milan with all its honours upon my brother. (*Tempest* 7:22-8:42)

Slow, dramatic music, composed by Taymor's frequent collaborator Elliot Goldenthal, plays while Mirren narrates, heightening the tension. There are specific early modern references to witchcraft and primogeniture. The added text feels naturalistic and Shakespearean in the film. If the viewer has never read or seen the play before, this backstory would fit in seamlessly. Given that Prospero's backstory is vague in the text, this addition gives Prospera a sympathetic motivation, familiar to a modern feminist audience. In this additional text, Prospera is obviously a wronged character and a victim of unquestionable sexism. She is a victim because of her gender. Antonio falsely claiming that Prospera is a witch attempts to damage and minimize an educated woman. It reminds the viewer of the deadly history of witch hunts. It justifies Prospera's revenge; Antonio was not merely attempting to exile Prospera but ruin her reputation and get her killed.

In Taymor's rendition, Prospera's motherhood is emphasized. Not only is she a mother, but she is a mother to a daughter. She is incredibly gentle to Miranda. When Miranda says, "your tale, ma'am, would cure deafness" (*Tempest* 8:03-8:05), it is not silly or humorous, but an appropriate reaction to this terrifying story. When recalling her backstory, demanding Miranda's attention does not read like a haughty daughter ignoring her over attentive father. Instead, Prospero is a woman telling her daughter about a time when she experienced sexism, sharing her lived experiences. She is passing on wisdom in hopes of her daughter avoiding her fate. She is less harsh to Ferdinand too; his service seems more willing than coerced. Prospera introduces

Miranda to Ferdinand with a knowing look. She knows that Miranda will be lovestruck by Ferdinand and encourages the relationship. When speaking about how careful the young lovers must be, it reads as though she has personal experience. Her anger at him is obviously performative. The wariness around Ferdinand and Miranda's courtship does not appear to be jealously or sexist. Instead, Prospera sees her daughter as worthy of a good man. By changing Prospero into a mother, the ownership that she feels over Miranda is no longer that early modern parental role, but something more palatable and familiar, a mother trying to protect her daughter from a sexist world.

Taymor has made somewhat contradicting statements about gender-swapping Prospero. Like nearly all directors of Shakespeare, Taymor speaks about how much she loves the story, loves Shakespeare, and wants to honor the themes of the work. This is not her first go at *The Tempest*, which she directed on stage in 1986. But speaking of her movie, she said that the changes to the language "are subtle nuances that in no way alter the essence of Shakespeare's play" in the introduction to her screenplay (Lehmann 47). This comment about the "essence" speaks the unique position of Shakespeare. Taymor underplayed the role of gender and feminism in the production (47). Speaking of the film, she also underplayed the casting of Mirren, noting that "this unexpected casting came out of a casual conversation the actress and the director had at a party" (Playbill). She said she just wanted Mirren to play Prospero because it made sense to her. But "in her 'making of' documentary, *Raising The Tempest*, Taymor explains that she wanted to cast a female protagonist in her film because there is a disturbing dearth of roles for seasoned actresses in contemporary cinema" (Lehmann 47). Taymor seems to be making a strategic choice to placate both sides: the people who are slavishly devoted to the sanctity of the text and those seeking updated, feminist Shakespeare.

Like her relationship to Miranda, Prospera's relationship to Ariel is quite gentle. They appear quite fond of each other. Ben Whishaw's Ariel is a shapeshifter, changing color, texture, and shape, with an often naked but translucent body that shrinks and multiplies, in ways that challenge questions of embodiment and gender. Whishaw's naked body seems male for the majority of the movie, based upon his flat chest. But when appearing as a fury, Whishaw appears to have female breasts. He hangs close to Prospera, flying around her or leaning over her shoulder. Ariel finds enjoyment in his tasks. This relationship is particularly impressive given that Whishaw filmed all his scenes on a green screen apart from the rest of the cast.

However, Prospera is unforgiving to Caliban. When approaching Caliban, Prospera raises her staff like a weapon. These relationships are similar to the Redgrave production, though unlike that production, this Caliban seems human while Ariel is clearly a spirit. One of the issues with this *Tempest* is the uncritical casting of Djimon Hounsou, a Beninese-American actor, as Caliban. He is the only prominent character played by a person of color. When he is first shown, African-sounding drums and percussion starts playing. He wears only a dirty loincloth and prosthetics that make his dark skin look like bark. The movie leaned into the problematic and racist theatre history conveyed Caliban as a monstrous, sub-human slave, lacking any of the delicacy and magic of Ariel. This history works in tandem with negative and racist stereotypes about Black men that date back to American slavery. The lack of awareness towards the portrayal of race in the movie was criticized by reviews and critics. Did Taymor intend to make Prospera racist? That sits in opposition with Prospera's new backstory. Taymor seems unaware of the postcolonial sympathies felt towards Caliban even as she is sympathetic toward Ariel. That ignorance upholds the racist status quo. In a film that attempted to make Prospera the victim of a sexist society, they also made her a white colonizer. Race in Shakespeare is a rich topic of

study, taken up by people like Ayanna Thompson, and needs more research beyond the limits of this project.

The underwhelmed critics show how, like with Redgrave, the film failed to live up to expectation. Despite Mirren's star power, the film was panned by critics who engage with poor sexual politics and quite a bit of Bardolotry. Some reviewers thought that the film was unoriginal. Shakespearean traditionalists, who object to the creative filmic additions and the gender-swapping, call Taymor's adaption "vandalism" (Lehmann 46). Richard Brody wrote in *The New Yorker* that Taymor's "reverence stifles her creativity" (Brody). Taymor is critiqued for both her love of Shakespeare and her lack of respect for Shakespeare, showing clearly how women are held to unreasonable double standards. In *New York Press*, Armond White wrote "Everything that makes Shakespeare's final play a great expression of the dangers and risks of ambition in Western civilization is lost in this sex change." (Lehmann 49). This "everything" is incredibly coded, recalling the history of sexism and racism on the Shakespeare stage. A.O. Scott, for *The New York Times*, said that Taymor was unable to live up to the complex, emotional text of *The Tempest*. Critic Alan A. Stone even said "there were high hopes for Julie Taymor's 'The Tempest' because of her previous stage and screen successes. But this *Tempest* is an 'out-of-control ego trip'" (Stone) due to a lack of aesthetic and thematic consistency. The gender-swapped Prospero was seen as a gimmick. In a very revealing review, Drew Taylor writes of the gender-bending as a "momentary thrill" that has little to no impact on the film which "is bad. Like, really, really, bad" (Taylor). I disagree with these critics. Much like the reviews of Redgrave's Prospero, we must be critical of the critics. They are certainly grading on a curve, anticipating their expectations of Taymor and of Shakespeare. Their inability to see past traditional interpretations of both Prospero and *The Tempest* keep them from a film that some see

as an introduction to Shakespeare. This film is bold and weird and features some excellent actors beyond Helen Mirren. It is undeniably entertaining, with hilarious performances by Russel Brand and Alfred Molina as the comedic Stephano and Trinculo. The positive reviews saw the movie as a gateway to Shakespeare for a broader audience. Scholars Virginia and Alden Vaughan state that "Shakespeare's vision of an enchanted island, where even the worst of us can find forgiveness, remains relevant" through the Taymor film (Crowl 399). The Taymor film is less interesting its gender-bending and more interesting in how it updates Shakespeare in a new genre for a new time.

While the costume and setting feels traditional and old, this is undeniable a production for the now, using all the inventive technologies of film and none of the on-stage theatre techniques. By leaning into the naturalistic style of acting we expect in film, the gender of Prospera matches with the gender and body of Mirren, thus not challenging the viewer to see gender differently. Re-gendering conveys an anxiety around bodies as it insists that one's body must match their name and pronouns. This production reifies the gender binary in that way, insisting on a crossing conveyed by typical feminine traits, like she/her pronouns and motherhood. Mirren's gender is stable in the film. But in that stability, there is a familiarity to this Prospera as an older, educated, and professional woman. Taymor asks the viewer to see power and authority differently. Taymor set out to portray a modern woman, a woman who is familiar to a twenty-first century audience, but still defines herself through a gentle motherhood. Because Mirren is the only role that was cross-cast, the film emphasizes the sexism she experienced. The emphasis on motherhood is again complicated. By addressing motherhood, Taymor is able to use Shakespeare to talk about women's experiences. But by making Prospero a mother, Taymor essentializes womanhood, utilizing our cultural expectation that all women be

mothers. In most ways, this production was fairly conventional. The setting and casting outside of Helen Mirren were entirely expected. Where this production deviates from the potential of a stage play is in the cinematic potential of CGI. This production proves that gender-swapping in and of itself does not make for a radical production, but also proves that sexism is alive and well in arts criticism.

Harriet Walter at the Donmar Warehouse, 2016

This 2016 production of *The Tempest* was the final in a trilogy starring the same all-female cast and Harriet Walter in all the lead roles. The earlier shows were *Julius Caesar* (2012) and *Henry IV* (2014). Performed at the Donmar Warehouse, a London theatre known for cutting-edge work, director Phyllida Lloyd wanted to do something explicitly feminist. These productions, and their shocking frame, were a resounding critical success. After the run in London of several years, the cast transported to St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn. In 2016, all three shows were filmed at the temporary theatre in King's Cross. The filmed versions were played on the BBC and are available to stream; I watched it on Broadway HD.

British director Phyllida Lloyd is well-known for her work on-stage and on-screen. Before this trilogy, she directed all-female works at the Globe, including a well-received *The Taming of the Shrew*. She directed *Mamma Mia*, both the original 1999 West End jukebox musical and the 2008 film with Meryl Streep, and *The Iron Lady* (2011) again with Streep. Her works often centers around women and women's issues. Like Taymor, Lloyd is one of only a few well-known and well-respected female directors.

Dame Harriet Walter, like Redgrave, is a famous Shakespearean performer. She has done a handful of period films and is familiar to watchers of British television; she is best known for

her work on the British stage where she has been working since the 1970s. She made her Broadway debut in 1983, won many acting accolades, and was = named Dame in 2011. She wrote in her memoir, *Brutus and Other Heroines* (2016), about the experience of playing male Shakespeare characters after exhausting the canon of its women. Despite her great wealth of Shakespearean roles, Walter wrote about playing Brutus, a famous male role: "The problem to me had always been permission: permission from the public and permission from myself" (Walter 157). She credits Lloyd's nerve as the source of her permission. Walter wrote about her excitement around playing Prospero: "*The Tempest* is Shakespeare's most experimental play. It is his and Prospero's swansong. It is a play about creativity itself. It is about imagination and control, about projection, about parenthood. Possessiveness and forgiveness" (201).

Essential to the Donmar Warehouse trilogy is the frame, a women's prison. While Shakespearean productions often have a distinct setting, it not often that a setting and theme are this deeply integrated into the production. This framing has a fundamental impact on all aspects of the production, and manifests in incredibly unique ways. Each production is a play within a play–each performer is playing two characters, an incarcerated woman and a character in *The Tempest*. Because most of the characters in *The Tempest* are men, the performers are playing both a man and a woman, making this production trans-dressed. The transition between the prison world and the world of *The Tempest* is intentionally blurred. These fictional prison inmates are based on real women, a who participated in the Clean Break program: "Clean Break uses theatre to keep the subjects of women in prison on the cultural radar, helping to reveal the damage caused by the failures of the criminal justice system" ("About Us"). Some of the performers were formally incarcerated themselves. This directorial choice was rooted in reality

and social justice issues. As a US viewer, our ongoing mass incarceration crisis makes this production particularly timely.

Much like how Shakespeare's stage was necessarily all-male, within this created frame Lloyd's stage is necessarily all-female. This frame not only allows for an all-female cast, but a truly diverse cast with mostly women of color. The all-female cast has the dual and sometimes contradictory effect of making womanhood, women's issues, and sexism in the text ever present, while also creating gender equality that explores other kinds of social difference and inequity. The audience is constantly aware of the gender of the performers, as there is no attempt to disguise their bodies. But because the frame supplies an in-context justification for their gender, the play can go on without disruption or disturbance.

This prison frame is deeply integrated into the story of the play. In this production, the isle is the prison, presumably a UK prison. This frame is justified by lines in the text like "have I such a prison" (II.i.491), "this cell's my court" (V.i.166), and "let your indulgence set me free" (Epilogue.20). In the small, round space, the props are metal chairs and trash like garbage bags and empty soda bottles. Magic is conveyed with a simple blue light. Harriet Walter plays Hannah, who then plays Prospero. Walter begins the show by telling the story of Hannah, who at age 66 has been in prison for half her life. Walter was 66 when the production was filmed. She was the getaway driver in a politically motivated bank robbery. She refused to recognize the courts during her trail and got life without parole. This story is fictionalized but based on a real-life woman. Hannah/Prospero's inability to leave the prison becomes essential to the story. This frame allows for layers of confinement, power structures, and conflicting narratives of freedom and imprisonment.

The setting of this production is drastically different than the tropical island of Taymor's film. Lloyd made some cuts to shorten the play and added additional transitionary scenes to justify the frame. Lloyd did not change any of the gendered language of the original text. When the Italian aristocracy come to the isle, post-shipwreck, the additional dialogue introduces the new character of the warden. Speaking in contemporary speech, she tells them to put their belongings into boxes and change, as one would when entering a prison. The King of Naples asks to speak with someone in charge and the warden laughs. On the "island," Prospero has a certain amount of control over the inmates, but ultimately must cede to a higher power, the authority of the warden. There are some additional songs, usually for comedic effect, but other times to convey the sense of the real world, contrasted with the stark inside of the prison. This creation of a claustrophobic microcosm of society in the form of a prison creates, instead of a tropical utopia, a claustrophobic nightmare.

The understated costumes reflect the setting. Walter wears a gray tank top and grey sweatpants. In the small, round space, her gender is apparent because her body is apparent–her arms are almost always out and her shirt is low cut. Her magic cloak is a dark gray hoodie, very different from Redgrave's or Mirren's. None of the costumes are ornate or fancy; everyone wore sweatpants and a t-shirt. Ariel would sometimes wear a yellow t-shirt, but there is not more variety than that. The aristocrats wear suits, buttoned-up shirts, and ties before entering the island. These suits are poorly fitted, making the women look like actors in a low-budget theatre production. They looked not like aristocrats but like women who were putting on a play in a prison. The costumes create the hyper-realistic setting of a women's prison, while also deemphasizing gender. No one tries to look very feminine or very masculine. Instead, the performances stand out.

Because of both costumes and the casting, gender in this production is handled differently. Certainly, that is due in part to the all-female cast. In some ways, it is easier to ignore gender when everyone on stage is a woman. Selective gender swapping, like Mirren in the filmed *The Tempest*, creates a focus on that gender-swapping or focuses on individual relationships like sister/brother or mother/daughter. The all-female stage makes gender equitable, and we find difference in things like race and class. Additionally, almost every performer was playing a woman playing a man, creating further layers. There is no attempt to deny anyone's gender and the frame conveniently makes an excuse for why all the performers are women. As a result of the acting style of Walter and this production, it is hard to even determine what "gender" Walter plays. This kind of acting is common to Shakespeare, any of the cross-dressing heroines were men playing women who pretended to men. Walter's age and costume make her look fairly androgynous. Her clothes are loose fitting and her hair is short. Her actions are not partially exaggerated in a masculine or feminine way. By not attempting to be masculine, Walter makes a claim for a woman playing Prospero without any bells or whistles. This performance flattens the differences between genders and between fiction and reality. It speaks to the universality of Shakespeare's texts. Prospero can be an exiled Duke or he can be a female political prisoner. It is not the dismissal of the importance of gender, but instead a way of seeing beyond while still aware of gender–a prime example of Power's trans-dressed performance style.

Prospero's fury, control, and sadness were emphasized over gender or relationships to others. In other productions, Prospero's characterization is determined by his/her status as a parent, father, or mother. In this production, familial relationships are undercut to serve the greater story of power, control, and vengeance. For example, Miranda is played by Leah Harvey, a woman of color, making the family resemblance unclear as Walter is white. This was not

bothersome as a viewer but made me feel that Miranda is a surrogate or adopted daughter. The frame also justifies that reading. This is certainly an audience assumption on my end, but also speaks to how race is an identity category immutable on the stage. Perhaps due to my own internalized racial biases, it was easier for me to image Harriet Walter as a man than Leah Harvey as the biological daughter of a white woman.

Prospero also spends several scenes onstage when not indicated in the text. Walter sits about six feet above the action, perched on what looked like a lifeguard chair, watching scenes play out on the "isle." This conveyed Prospero's surveillance and power. Prospero's desire to watch and control the situations of the isle sits in contrast with Hannah's total lack of control in the prison, the real world. Prospero's sadness was indicated right after the wedding masque. After a joyous, raucous, sincere wedding, where Miranda and Ferdinand had veils and flowers made of toilet paper, Prospero fills the stage with huge, white balloons. Images of the sea, nature, forests, cars, even McDonald's are projected onto the balloons, revealing the outside world these women cannot obtain. In a moment of fury and madness, a recognition of her unending imprisonment, Hannah/Prospero pops the balloons one by one. It is loud and violent and heartbreaking. Prospero begins to weep as he says, "our revels now are ended" (IV.i.148). Ferdinand and Miranda are incredibly gentle in this moment, comforting Prospero during this mental break.

These shifted power dynamics are best conveyed through Caliban, a notoriously challenging character. In this production, Caliban is played by a middle-aged white woman. When dealing with Caliban's confessed attempt of rape, Miranda is undeniably scared. She hides under the bed when Caliban approaches her. But when Caliban claims to attempt to "peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (I.ii.348-9), the threat is different, as we know she does not have

the anatomical capability of impregnating Miranda. But Prospero's fury at Caliban makes clear that Caliban represents a real threat to his daughter. The production also explains their reliance upon Caliban, as he got them food, specifically strawberries, which seem to be a delicacy in the prison. Because there is not a sense of racial or colonial hierarchy, Caliban must represent something else. Caliban wears trash, garbage bags, and old food wrappings, like a sash across the body. This conveys the look of a littered beach or an unhoused person holding onto her possessions. Caliban's violence then seems to be attributed to untreated mental illness. Right before Caliban exits for the final time, the actress lunged at Miranda one more time. This is an extratextual addition, a moment of true terror even for a person familiar with the text. Miranda hides in the arms of Ferdinand and other women move to protect her. In the final moments, we see that Caliban was being played by a janitor in the prison. Was her assault of Miranda then an abuse of power, a non-incarcerated prison employee taking advantage of her position? Caliban is a great example of how this production reimagines power dynamics and dismisses *The Tempest's* theatrical history.

The most stunning addition of this production was the ending—Prospero does not leave the island. This is a dramatically bold departure from the source text. Instead of Prospero leaving the island, Hannah gives up her scrapbook and her jacket, sitting on her bed. The performer who played Miranda comes, wearing pedestrian clothing and outside of *The Tempest* plotline, visiting Hannah in prison. The prison inmate who played Miranda was released but Hannah never will be. This woman comes to visit Hannah, embraces her, and gives her *Hag-seed* by Margaret Atwood. The final moments of the play feature the incarcerated characters, not the characters of *The Tempest*, speaking to Hannah, thanking her, offering words of encouragement and resilience. The injustice of Hannah's imprisonment is clear and her position as a role model for other

women is also clear. By resisting a happy ending, Lloyd reminds us of the reality of so many imprisoned women.

This production was unanimously lauded. It was so successful that it was moved from London to New York and presented on the BBC. Every review I found was positive, but many also mentioned how the production overcame the "challenge" of being all-female. Many of these reviews are from well-known sources which speaks to the popularity of the production. These reviews refer to the other trilogy productions and focus on the frame. Well-respected *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley calls it "the most entertaining 'Tempest' I've ever seen" (Brantley), high praise coming from Brantley. He applauds the acting specifically, not just Walter but the entire cast. In *The Guardian*, Lyn Gardner describes the production as a "phenomenal all-female triumph." She writes, "the all-female casts and prison setting make you see the three plays afresh" (Gardner). In the opening lines of Matt Trueman's review in *Variety*, he writes how all-female Shakespeare was "dismissed as 'gimmicky' (and worse)" (Trueman) for years but credits Lloyd's work with normalizing that kind of casting. This is a glowing review and celebrates the complexities and moral questions of the play. Mark Shenton's review for London Theatre focuses on these productions in relationship to all-male Shakespeare, calling Lloyd's *The Tempest* "both unique and faithful to the spirit of a play" (Shenton). These reviews feel always comparative, comparing Lloyd's work to other kinds of Shakespeare even when being deeply complementary, emphasizing its newness. These reviews are a little surprising, not because the production was not excellent, but because I come to expect negative reviews for women's art. However, I believe the in-text justification for the all-female cast, the women's prison frame, and the surprising artistic choices led critics to feel more comfortable praising women. Because this production is so different, the casting of all-women is acceptable.

Additionally, the production was during the 2016 election cycle in which sexist criticism of women in power was a daily reality of all Americans. I hope that theatre critics learned from the way political reporters treated Hillary Clinton, and the press and media overall become more aware of gender in the age of #MeToo.

The introduction of the women's prison frame, and the constant reverberances throughout the production, created a feminist *The Tempest* that was not about just gender, but about power, choice, control, and gender. By constantly seeing women on stage, women are ever present, but the focus does not have to be gender at every moment. The frame allows a total reimagining of the hierarchies and relationships, creating something legitimately new. That is certainly one reason for its critical success and its affective impact. On a personal note, it is the best *Tempest* I have ever seen and it totally transformed how I view the play. This success cannot be separated from the diverse, female cast and creative team. Kim Solga asked if women make better Shakespeare. After watching the Donmar Warehouse trilogy, you'd be hard pressed to find someone who answers no. I do not mean to support a gender essentialist agenda but instead argue that when a diverse group of women come at Shakespeare in a new way, with sympathy and socially conscious goals, they create art that pushes the conversation forward and asks us to imagine the meaning of Shakespeare in today's world. And at the end of it, it is not about some universal sense of truth or beauty, but the interpretation of Shakespeare in a specific context that brings out new meanings.

Mari Nelson for the Seattle Shakespeare Company, 2019

Moving now to a smaller scale and more local, I will now look at the Seattle Shakespeare Company's (SSC) 2019 production starring Mari Nelson as Prospera, directed by Annie Lareau.

The play had a majority female cast, nice actresses out of the total sixteen. Nelson played the lead role of Prospero in a regendering of the patriarchal lead character. This production feels deeply reminiscent of Taymor's film. Through changes in the language and her relationship to her children, not just Miranda but Ariel and Caliban, this production of *The Tempest* attempted to soften Prospero by making her a mother while most ignoring the colonial history of the play.

Annie Lareau, the Artistic Director at Seattle Public Theater and the Institutional Funding Manager at Seattle Shakespeare Company, is a director, actor, and teaching artist who works with several theatre companies in the area. She is dedicated to seeing more diversity on stage in Seattle, and has directed at Seattle Public Theater, SSC, Book-It Repertory, ArtsWest and more. Mari Nelson is a well-regarded actor, recipient of the Gregory Award for Best Actress in a Play in 2017, who performs in both plays and musical on the West and East Coast. She has been working professionally since the 1980s. In an interview for Seattle Gay Scene, Nelson named Vanessa Redgrave as one of her acting inspirations. Recently in Seattle, Nelson has performed in all-femme upstart crow collective's *Henry VI* as York and *Richard II* as the Duchess of York.

Lareau's *The Tempest* employed a highly stylized setting of an Edwardian theatre, with swinging chandeliers and costumes that looked like they belonged on the Titanic. According to Lareau, "During the Edwardian period theatre was at an all-time high. Everyone went. And it was one of the last periods before media started to infiltrate people's lives. I wanted to capture that moment in time because I felt that we could find something really unique and different" ("Conjuring Stage Magic"). The shift of setting also displaced the notion of Prospero as a New World colonizer, breaking with *The Tempest's* theatrical history. The play's isle was instead a crumbling theatre, whose inhabitants were creations of that theatre; Ariel was ghosts of Vaudeville performers and Caliban a gargoyle. By breaking with tradition, and straying far from

the textual setting, questions of slavery and colonization were not at the forefront of this production–therefore questions of oppression and Prospero as an oppressor were also not forefronted. Instead, Prospero's magic was the magic of the theatre.

Nelson as Prospero wore a long white dress with billowing sleeves and gold accents. Her cloak was layers and layers of iridescent white fabric. Her outfit matched the setting of an Edwardian theatre, modest but elegant. Nelson was dressed appropriately for a woman from that era. Her long, white hair was curled and fell down her back. This Prospero is obviously re-gendered; a female performer playing a female character. This production made every attempt to match the gender of the character with the gender of the performer. Lareau changed the gendered language of the play to regender the characters. Prospero was a woman, referred to using she/her pronouns, called a mother and sister. Thus, Nelson played a character that matched her gender identity and body, like Mirren's Prospera. This was done for all the cross-cast roles: Alonso, Antonio, Trinculo, and Ariel. Interestingly, the names did not change unlike Mirren and words like "Duke" and "sorcerer" remained over the feminine "Duchess" and "sorceress," with the exception of Alonso who became the Queen of Naples. The inconsistent language shifts meant extra attention must be paid to the words that were changed, one of them being "mother."

The changes to the language in this production conveyed that Prospero's relationship to the island and its inhabitants was specifically maternal; she was a mother to not only Miranda but Caliban and Ariel as well. The attention on motherhood was most clear in Prospero's interactions with Miranda. Instead of a patriarchal ownership like a father who controls the fate of his daughter, Prospero instead saw Miranda as an equal, not an inferior. In Act 1, Scene 2, when Prospero gives the long-winded story of how they got to the island, Nelson knelt while Miranda sat, putting Prospero physically below her daughter. Prospero sat as Miranda recounted her

memories of life in Milan. Nelson was near tears and clasped her hands over her mouth. Actions like this showed that Prospero was attentive to her daughter and their relationship, like a caring mother.

In another equalizing move, the play began and ended with Prospero and Miranda on stage together in an extratextual moment. In the first action of the play, before the dialogue and tempest itself, a single ghost light stood lit on stage. Prospero came out from behind a curtain with Miranda following. Miranda turned off the light and silently walked off. In the penultimate moment, Prospero was alone on stage. Then, Miranda came back on stage, turned the ghost light back on, and led her mother off stage. This is countered with textually necessarily moments of control, like Prospero enchanting Miranda to sleep and forcing Ferdinand to carry logs. But the overall physical language of the production conveyed the idea that Prospero acted in the best interest of her daughter and their relationship was one of mutual respect and support.

Textual changes further conveyed this idea. Prospera, as a woman, telling Miranda that men cannot be trusted and that Ferdinand is not as handsome as she thinks, appeared then not as a jealous and overprotective father attempting to assert dominance over his child's chosen partner, but instead a concerned and wise mother sharing from real, lived experience. This is similar to Mirren's Prospera. Lines like "To th' most of men this is a Caliban" (II.i.478) were performed humorously to much audience laughter. Additionally, by removing the lines "But if thou dost break her virgin-knot before / All sanctimonious ceremonies […] barren hate, / Sour-eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew / The union of your bed" (IV.i. 14-16,19-21), the production valued Miranda outside her virginity, another decision that makes sense when Prospero is a mother that would have experienced sexism and misogyny in her own life. Prospero respected Miranda's romantic choices because she saw her as an equal. The Edwardian

setting did not lead to Edwardian sexual mores; this production choose to be modern and feminist.

In another textual change, Prospero spoke the lines that accuse Caliban of rape and the immediate response. Prospero is the one who said, "Abhorred slave…I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour / One thing or other" (I.ii.350, 352-354). Prospero's attempt to protect her daughter were not to save her sexual purity, but to keep her physically safe. By removing Miranda from this Prospero/Caliban exchange, Miranda was protected from audience scrutiny and made Prospero both mother and teacher to Caliban. Again, the text change of Prospero, not Miranda, teaching Caliban, painted Prospero as the head of a family, who would take on the responsibility of teaching.

This production insisted on parental relationships with all the island inhabitants, Caliban and Ariel, making them Prospero's de facto children. This parental relationship with Caliban read as motherly but stern. In the first scene with Caliban, in his "then I loved thee / And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle" (I.ii.336-7) speech, Prospero appeared happy and hopeful, like a proud mom. She even reached out her hand to stroke his back, smiling and nodding. On the line "Cursed be I that did so!" (I.ii.339), Caliban had an emotion turn. Instead of smiling and swaying, dreamily describing the island, he became furious and violent, like a child lashing out. Prospero's response was to use her magic, freeze Caliban as he launched at Miranda, and then inflict some kind of pain on him. There was a sternness and harshness that did not exist with other characters, except for a few moments with Sebastian. This was a move that felt reminiscent of the Prospero of the text, who uses violence to subdue island inhabitants. This reaction felt like a parent attempting to discipline a misbehaving child. Prospero felt like a mother to Caliban, who was certainly a non-human creature of subhuman intelligence. Removing Miranda from this

interaction, Prospero took full responsibility for Caliban. And Prospero seemed to feel legitimately responsible for Caliban. When she said, "I acknowledge mine" (V.i.275-6), it was a sympathy performance of maternal ownership, speaking like a failed parent.

Prospero worked closely with Ariel, who was played in this production by four performers. The multiplicity of Ariels introduces questions of embodiment, but also had textual justifications. The character of Ariel was perhaps over embodied in a highly unconventional directorial choice; it makes Ariel not only human but overwhelmingly human. With four bodies, the Ariel could be in many places at once and conduct magic that those of us with only one body cannot. Because the Ariels were ghosts, Prospero would often see through them, looking straight ahead while giving direction, but always smiling. With one Prospero and four Ariels, Prospero seems to conduct the Ariels, like a theatre director. The soft, loving moments were emphasized, again making Prospero seem like a mother.

From a financial perspective, this was considered a very successful production for the SSC. It sold out every weekend, which I witnessed as a box office attendant. The reasons for its success are likely varied. *The Tempest* is a popular and well-known play among frequent theatregoers. The more common plays, like *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, always draw bigger groups to Center Theatre. Nelson on her own is a draw, as she is a well-known and well-regarded actress in the Seattle area. Last season, she starred in the all-femme upstart crow's *Richard III*. All-femm/female shows are popular with the Seattle Shakespeare audience, shown through their frequent collaborations with upstart crow. This audience base is used to women playing men's roles, as gender-swapping occurs at least once a season.

Critically, the production was well-received. Kelly Rogers Flynt in Broadway World Seattle wrote that this production "makes [*The Tempest*] sharper than ever. […] With a fresh

look and clever casting, Seattle Shakespeare makes this show its own" (Flynt). Flynt praises Nelson's acting specifically. In *Drama in the Hood*, Eilish McLean wrote "To put simply, if there is only one play you can see this year, it should be this one" (McLean)/ "Nelson's Prospero is at the heart of this show, the impetus of all the action and rightfully the most mesmerizing character on the stage" (Gaston) wrote Marissa Gaston for the University of Washington's *The Daily*. Many reviews emphasize how different this production felt, though very few gave the gender swapping any more than a passing reference. But in a TeenTix review, Lucia McLaren noted how the casting made a real difference: "Increased diversity gives underrepresented groups the opportunity to see themselves in the production, and the artistic creativity makes the play more entertaining to watch" (McLaren). Like with the Lloyd productions, there is more praise than criticism. Optimistically, I assume this speaks to a growing cultural awareness of gender, a comfort with powerful women, and an audience familiar with cross-gender casting. In the year 2019, the shock of a woman playing a man has faded and a Seattle audience actually desire woman-led Shakespeare.

The audience reaction to the female Prospero, which certainly was not uniform across theater goers, was affected by gender of the character. I attended this production for an English class with fellow college students. One reaction within my class was the desire to see Prospero as the hero of the story. Prospero's gender, a signal that she would not have all the privileges of the Prospero of the text, made her more sympathetic. This reception is not because of an essential belief, that women are kinder or better parents or naturally maternal, but instead due to social conditioning that invites us to see gender in specific coded ways within the context of our lives and the world of the production. But the production was not monolithic in its love of Prospero—certainly she did things that read as uncomfortable or abusive like the treatment of Caliban. The

moments where Prospero was physically harsh, paternal instead of maternal, created a complexity that challenged the idea of monolithic womanhood and gender essentialism. Prospero still wielded physical power and control over others through magic, thus mixing traditional masculine and feminine. However, by ultimately downplaying those elements, the production was overall forgiving to its characters and focused on entertainment over a critical analysis of power structures. Like with the Taymor film, we see a sympathetic female lead in a production that seeks to ignore and dismiss the colonial overtones of the play. This is an understandable impulse–not all theatre should be heartbreaking, challenging, and uncomfortable. While this production is certainly less radical than Lloyd's, it was an undeniable joy to the production. The way the performers lovingly played with the art of the theatre made it a great production to watch. It did not necessarily challenge ideas of gender or tackle social justice issues head on, but it was a piece of art that featured talented performers of all genders doing something with joy.

"Our revels now are ended": Conclusion

The Tempest is a little bit of a weird play. It defies genre, it seems to be totally original, it has this ever-shifting performance history; but even today, productions of *The Tempest* are fertile ground from both cutting-edge and traditional Shakespeare. The deeply cultural love of Shakespeare is going nowhere, and neither is the reproducing and adapting of Shakespeare. The trends of women's cross-casting, and women's cross-casting of Prospero, will continue.

Theatre is not mere mimicry, but the creation of new signs and new meanings. This is even true with Shakespeare, the most over-produced playwright in the world. When these feminist works draw on the power of theatre, they create Shakespeare that breaks down and reconstructs the relationship between audience and actor, subject and object, masculine and feminine. They expose more than ever gender as a speech act, a gesture, a piece of clothing, or a performance. Cross-gender casting reveals gender to be performative more clearly when women are the ones cross-casting, as they challenge the practice in ways that are different and new. Men's cross-dressing is more common and therefor more expected. Women's cross-cast Shakespeare occurs at the intersection of radical art, feminist politics, performative gender, and Shakespearean ownership and authenticity. By centering women, we can come to different conclusions, while at the same time creating opportunities for women in the arts, opportunities that are continually lacking. That ability to create new scripts becomes clear in both cross-dressed, re-gendered, and trans-dressed productions. The growth of all-female and gender-swapped Shakespeare in the past 30 years reveals that cross-casting can be liberating for people of all genders, to play roles of any type.

The styles of cross-gender casting are incredibly diverse. Redgrave was both masculine and feminine in her gender performance, a cross-dressed performance, leaning into the

contradictions and complexities of Prospero. By adopting both the role of both mother and father, Redgrave played with gender roles. Mirren's re-gendering is a stable performance of gender, one that aligns language, body, and experience. But Mirren's performance suggests that gender-swapping in and of itself does not make a radical production. Women's issues are brought to the front by the selective re-gendering, making an explicitly political film that functioned with a strict gender binary. Walter's performance, along with the all-female cast, flattened the differences between genders and between fiction and reality. As a result, the production went beyond gender while still being aware of gender. In a trans-dressed performance, playing both a woman and a man, in a cast full of women, Walter's performance was unique and felt the most radical and most dismissive of the gender binary. Nelson's Prospero was re-gendered and very feminine much like Taymor's film. This Prospero was centered around motherhood, in a production that chose to ignore questions of hierarchy, power, and colonialism. In all productions, Prospero's gender signaled that she would not have all the privileges of the male Prospero of the text. This made her more sympathetic. Gender was signaled through language and costume, easy to read in the cases of Taymor and Lareau, but intentionally ambiguous in the case of Lloyd. These productions all created opportunities for talented, seasoned actresses to claim the great, male Shakespeare roles.

Sometimes cross-gender productions reinforce the gender binary and gender roles even as they emphasize contemporary sexism. The re-gendering often conveys, perhaps unintentionally, any anxiety around bodies. The insistence that our bodies must match our genders is an instance on a kind of realism and binary that does not exists in real life. The "crossing" from one normative gender to another, conveyed with traditionally feminine names, pronouns, clothing, and social roles reinforces the binary. These re-gendered productions also emphasize

motherhood, in both Taymor's film and the SSC production. This is both a powerful claim about *The Tempest* and Shakespeare's universality but also create one more cultural artifact that demands motherhood be a woman's essential role. Even so, Taymor's film creates a Shakespearean production that speaks to women who have had their voices denied. She speaks about the long history of sexism that has kept women from education, power, and justice, a message that feels timely, as in the US, women are still paid less than men and still denied the highest positions of leadership. But these productions also attempt to soften the harsh realities of the play, using a sympathetic female lead to deny Prospero's unjust enslavement of Caliban and disturbing ownership of Miranda. Ignoring the colonial history in the text and production history keeps us from being truly anti-racist.

In other instances, women-led and cross-cast Shakespeare can be radical. Lloyd's production was not just cross-cast, but all-female and racially diverse. It requires more than just women in male roles to create a production that challenges gender norms. While the re-gendered productions asked questions of women's power, leadership, and ownership of Shakespeare, they fail to reimagine what gender looks like. The complicated gender layering of the Lloyd production creates new gender scripts and reimagines bodies in feminist ways. The radical reinvention of power and hierarchies shocked audiences into seeing *The Tempest* in a new way.

Reactions to these productions over time has shifted in noticeable ways. We know these productions have power in part because of the reactionary and sexist critics who seeks to demean and devalue the work. They call gender-swapping and all-female theatre gimmicky or inauthentic. Critics say things like Shakespeare is rolling in his grave and that the productions totally violates the spirit of the text. This weaponization of Shakespearean "tradition" and authenticity is coded language that keeps women and people of color out of our conceptions of

Shakespeare. Even Vanessa Redgrave, a universally celebrated Shakespearean actress, was disappointing to critics who called her everything from understated to shrill. But in the more recent production, critics have had an easier time talking about gender. The world has changed in the past 20 years. The increasingly public discussions of women in the workplace, sexual harassment and rape, transgender issues, and women in politics has shifted the conversations about gender. As cross-gender and all-female Shakespeare productions become more common, audiences and critics are less overtly sexist. Even so, we have a long way to go until we have gender equity in the arts.

But, no matter what the approach, scrupulously literal or radically transformed, adding one female character does not do the radical work to undo the sexism of Shakespeare's text. The power of representation is just that, powerful. The more diversity on the stage, the more revolutionary that stage can be. Theatre is political. Even when it does not want to be. To do Shakespeare in a "neutral" way is to do Shakespeare that centers the Western canon, white cisgender men, and white supremacy. And, however innovative new Shakespeare is on gender issues, Shakespeareans are failing on race. Scholars like Ayanna Thompson and theatre artists like Lloyd are attempting to fix that failing. But in order to keep making new, clever, boundary-breaking theatre, we must embrace diversity and intersectionality both on stage and off to make Shakespeare for everyone, and really prove that the texts are as universal as many claim them to be.

Appendix

Production Details

May 12–September 10, 2000
Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Bankside, London
Directed by Lenka Udovicki

Prospero: Vanessa Redgrave
Miranda: Kananu Kirimi
Antonio: Martin Turner
Alonso: Terry McGinity
Sebastian: Sam Parks
Ferdinand: Will Keen
Gonzalo: Robert McBain
Adrian: Tas Emiabata
Francisco: Jonathan Oliver
Trinculo: Paul Chahidi (replaced by Steven Alvey)
Stephano: Steffan Rhodri
The Master of the Ship: Tas Emiabata
Boatswain: Jonathan Oliver
Ariel: Geraldine Alexander
Caliban: Jasper Britton
Juno: Besa Berberi
Iris: Kate Fleetwood
Nymphs, Reapers, Spirits, Mariners: Victoria North, members of the Company

Premiere: September 11, 2010
Venice Film Festival
Directed by Julie Taymor

Prospera: Helen Mirren
Miranda: Felicity Jones
Boatswain: Jude Akuwudike

Prince Ferdinand: Reeve Carney

King Alonso: David Strathain

Gonzalo: Tom Conti

Sebastian: Alan Cumming

Antonio: Chris Cooper

Ariel: Ben Wishaw

Caliban: Djimon Hounsou

Trinculo: Russel Brand

Stephano: Alfred Molina

Prospera's Husband: David Scott Klein

Guard: Bryan Webster

September 23–Dec 23, 2016

King's Cross, London

Premiered on BBC: June 17, 2018

American Premier: Jan 13–Feb 19, 2017, St. Ann's Warehouse, Brooklyn, NYC

Directed by Phyllida Lloyd

Prospero: Harriet Walter

Ariel: Jade Anouka

Ferdinand: Sheila Atim

Stephano: Jackie Clune

Sebastian: Shiloh Coke

Trinculo: Karen Dunbar

Miranda: Leah Harvey

Gonzalo: Zainab Hasan

Officer: Jennifer Joseph

Alonso: Martina Laird

Caliban: Sophie Stanton

Antonio: Carolina Valdes

Guards: Sarah Jane Dent, Rhiannon Harper-Rafferty, Liv Spencer

October 15–November 10, 2019

Center Theatre at Seattle Center, Seattle, Washington)

Seattle Shakespeare Company

Directed by Annie Lareau

Prospero: Mari Nelson

Ariel: Gloria Lee Alcala

Miranda: Allyson Lee Brown

Trinculo: Amy Escobar

Gonzalo: Marvin Grays

Master/Adrian/Ensemble: Casey Hartman

Sebastian: Laurence Hughes

Boatswain/Francisco/Ensemble: Brandon JonesMooney

Ariel: Sydney Maltese

Ferdinand: Benjamin Neil McCormack

Caliban: Christopher Morson

Alonso: Eleanor Moseley

Stephano: Peter Dylan O'Connor

Ariel: Sidney Rakowiecki

Ariel: Malex Reed

Antonio: Betsy Schwartz

Me, dressed as Don Joan, in Bothell High School's 2016 Wild West themed *Much Ado About Nothing* with Victor Puoci, dressed as Don Pedro.

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