

ABSTRACT

Gender itself is a societal structural performance that is enacted daily by everyone based on preconceived understandings of how men and women are supposed to act. As a nonbinary person, I aim to dive deeper into what gender performance means to me and how it might be similar or different to what it means for a cis-gendered individual using my *First-Person Authority*. As theatre spaces are where enacted performances of gender are constantly viewed and commented on, I am interested in discovering modes of gender performance that do not hinge on caricatures or stereotypes (though I am not excluding these types of gendered performance). This thesis, *Acting Outside of While Inside the Box: Performing Gender as a Nonbinary Actor*, will discuss my findings in Streetlight Shakespeare Ensemble's (SSE) season and selected excerpts from the Lamplighter Staged Reading series to discuss how the *flow* exercises used in rehearsals helped to shape character and, therefore, gender performance and how the process of enacting gender in performance comes from physicality in addition to mentality. Lastly, this thesis is to take up space in a world that wishes to erase the history and experiences of people like me.

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Introduction

Erasing our history won't erase us and other similar sentiments erupted after the 2nd Trump Administration stripped the existence of transgender and queer people from the Stonewall National Monument on February 14th, 2025. The Stonewall Inn is considered the birthplace of the Pride movement after many riots occurred in response to police brutality and a raid targeting queer individuals in 1969. This protest was not the first of its kind and won't be the last, as LGBTQ+ people have been fighting for fair treatment and representation by the US government since the early 1900s. Among the several recent blows the LGBTQ+ community has gone through, this one hurt me as a trans femme nonbinary person, especially as Pride began as a protest with transwomen like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera in the driver's seat. This specific attack on the trans community makes the work and lives of trans people more critical than ever before. As it tends to be, it is our job to continually make ourselves known and fight for the rights we as people deserve. We will not be erased; our voices will be heard.

Gender itself is a societal structural performance that is enacted daily by everyone based on preconceived understandings of how men and women are supposed to act. As a nonbinary person, I wear my queerness on my sleeve in spaces where I feel safe. Though my outward expression of my gender fluctuates on the spectrum of masculine and feminine, it is hard to conceal my transness under the guise of heteronormativity fully. This understanding of myself and how I present myself in any scenario means that no place is entirely safe as transphobia continues to rise in this country. I, as a trans person in this world, have the First-Person Authority (an idea coined by scholar Talia Mae Bettcher) to make my voice and my experience with gender known. My thesis, "Acting Outside of While Inside the *Box*: Performing Gender as a Nonbinary

Actor,” aims to showcase my work in Streetlight Shakespeare Ensemble’s (SSE) season and my process of performing representations of gender while not subscribing to binary notions.

I am embarking on this thesis journey for several reasons. As this will be my third higher education thesis, the first reason is to combine the ideas and scholarship from my previous theses in conversation with practice as research. Similarly, I aim to dive deeper into what gender performance means to me as a nonbinary person and how it might be similar or different to what it means for a cis-gendered individual by crafting my own specific practice and theory. As theatre spaces are where enacted performances of gender are constantly viewed and commented on, I am interested in discovering modes of gender performance that do not hinge on caricatures or stereotypes (though I am not excluding these types of gendered performance). With that, this work aims to add my voice to the ongoing conversation of gender diversity and inclusivity in contemporary theatre spaces to center my identity in this research in a world that wishes I didn’t exist. This thesis will discuss SSE’s season chronologically, touching on the four main show genre processes: Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (Education Show) and *King Lear* (Small-Scale), Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (Blackfriars Show), and John Suckling’s *The Goblins* (Renaissance Show). These sections will discuss how, above all, the *flow* exercises used in rehearsals helped to shape character and, therefore, gender performance and how the process of enacting gender in performance comes from physicality in addition to mentality. My commentary on *Much Ado About Nothing* is from the viewpoint of an observer, with responses from other actors regarding gender performance. To continue, *King Lear* and *The Goblins* will only be my research as an actor in these processes. Lastly, *Bartholomew Fair* will include my findings as an actor and a designer. This thesis will also include short excerpts of my conclusions from the Lamplighter Staged Reading Series, presented chronologically in between the main four

shows, as they provide interesting information on performing gender in the fast-paced style of staged readings.

Before diving into the process, I must define specific terms that I will use frequently throughout this portfolio to frame my work. The first term to explain that also appears in the title is *the box*. This “box” is less literal than figurative, serving as a framing device born from the *King Lear* process that refers to the world in which the play is built. Imagining the world of the play as a *box* we were building helped us contain the story we were trying to tell. *The box*, in conversation with the aesthetic of the play (which I explain more in my section on *Lear*), helped us to turn the more extensive play into a palatable version performed by five actors. In building *the box*, our conversations centered on several questions: 1) What already lives in *the box*? 2) What lives outside of *the box*? 3) What begins in *the box* that moves out of *the box*? 4) How do things outside of the box affect the world inside of the box? Regarding its use in my thesis title, *the box* also points to the body enacting a performance. “Outside of the box” refers to the deviation from the binary norms of gender and gender performance. In contrast, “inside the box” refers to the body on which gender performance is read and the heteronormative rules of the world. The use of the terms in tandem with one another, both as the world we play in and the body playing in it, reflects the idea of adhering to while actively challenging the world's rules.

Another term for this thesis portfolio that needs to be defined is *flow*. This exercise is an extension of Anne Bogart’s practice of Viewpoints that “encourages actors to focus less on their characters’ psychology and more on observation and movement” (Hunter). Though improvised in the moment, these observations and movements have a specific exploratory frame. The Physical Viewpoints are the ones that were used the most when they came up in rehearsal: spatial relationship, kinesthetic response, shape, gesture, repetition, architecture, tempo, duration, and

topography. The “flow” is the repetition of specific gestures and an extended open space to create and play. Though the *flows* used throughout the *King Lear* process specifically had more parameters in terms of character building and relationship, the *flow* exercise(s) helped uncover *the box*'s properties and how it affects its characters.

The last term I introduced earlier is First-Person Authority (FPA). In Bettcher's article, FPA expresses the idea that transpeople have the authority to share their personal experiences on how their identity and gender are specific to them as “gender and sex are woven into forms of life that reflect and regulate interactions” (98). The theatre has always been a literal stage for these reflections of queerness and forces the audience to interact with them somehow. No transperson's experience with their gender is the same as another's. Therefore, we have the right to share our first-person expertise with our gender expression in a world that attempts to make it invisible. Bettcher explains that we have this authority because “there is no basis for explaining the existence of first-person expertise or even the presumption thereof on a prior basis” (Bettcher 101). These three concepts will do a lot of heavy lifting for this thesis portfolio as I will use my FPA to explain my process in *the boxes* I helped to build.

Much Ado About Nothing

To help the reader imagine the *Much Ado* box a bit more, the aesthetic put forward by co-directors Abigail Olshin and Julia Sommer was a post-WWI setting that came with its own specific rules of gender presentation and performance. To borrow words from dramaturgs Austen Bell and Jess Snellings, “World War I brought into sharp focus divides in American society - gender (the men who fought in the war and the women who fought for equal rights at home); age (the older generation, conservative and patriotic, and the younger, who saw the horrors of war and sought change); and socioeconomic (the poor worked harder, and the rich got richer)” (see

Appendix #2). However, at its heart, the play is about reconciliation. As *Much Ado* is one of SSE's educational touring productions focused on middle and high school audiences, reflecting these in-text and in-era dichotomies was crucial. Though I acted as the Stage Manager for this process, as an observer *in the box*, I was interested in how other actors performed gender when playing both male and female characters, as I was preparing for the same in *King Lear*. To continue, though *flow* was not often utilized, directors Olshin and Sommer did bring the exercise into a few of our early rehearsals, allowing for the actors to work on character and world building. For this entry, I interviewed Katy Shinas (Hero/Borachio) and Anna Bigham (Margaret/Conrade) on their thoughts and findings regarding their character development in this world and how to make them distinct (see Appendix #1).

The first question I asked these actors was, "What was your process for character differentiation during rehearsal, and how did it manifest itself in performance?" Shinas's process seemed grounded in the societal expectations of the period in which *Much Ado* was set. Shinas was particularly curious about how her characters exist in the world around specific people or in a different environment. This curiosity allowed her characters more or less freedom of expression in particular spaces. Shinas's Hero clung to her hierarchical status as the daughter of the rich Leonato, which "manifested differently when she was in public surrounded by men and when she was in private, woman-only spaces." In the same vein, Borachio was laxer and more easygoing in expression as a lower-status man in this world. However, when interrogated, Shinas recalls Borachio's performance mimicking that of Hero in terms of reserved physicality. There is a clear cross-over between today's perceptions of public versus private gender expectations, in which males are more relaxed in public and pressured in private. At the same time, the female character feels interrogated by the public gaze but is more comfortable in private. Shinas

mentioned her utilization of costuming, vocal changing, and relative posture as elements that assisted in her differentiation.

Both Shinas and Bigham were interested in how the characters lived physically in their bodies. Interestingly, where Shinas utilized the characters' environment and the people they interact with most, Bigham found differentiation in the characters' energy. She mentioned finding the differentiation in practicality and movement rather than exclusively centered on gender. "I was thinking about Margaret as being a lighter mover, with weight further forward in her feet," she stated, "and Conrad as a heavier mover with the weight in his heels." For Bigham, the physical grounding and foundation of the characters helped inspire her process, which gestures toward social conventions of movement.

The second question I asked the actors, "Was there something specific to your process that clicked for you as far as gender swapping is concerned?" provided more insight into Shinas's and Bigham's experience with gender performance through physicality. Shinas found working with adjunct professor Kelley McKinnon incredibly helpful as she "pretended like there was a Kelley in the corner analyzing every detail of my movement." McKinnon, for Shinas, became a sort of earworm, which forced her to be specific about the masculine choices she was making to help separate Hero from Borachio. Bigham also mentioned McKinnon as a guiding voice in helping her differentiate her characters, inspiring her answer to the first question. Bigham mentioned that working to keep the hips squarer "was a good practical tip for Conrade's movement." However, there are some dangers of getting too into your head about what your character needs to do and how it needs to feel in the body. As an observer, I did not notice that internal struggle for Bigham.

The third question I felt was important to ask my actors tapped into their identity as cisgender women. The question was, “As a cis woman, did you find the process challenging? Why or why not?” Shinas revealed her past acting experiences as being socialized by playing masculine characters as a female-identifying actor, though these events occurred out of necessity in some cases. Interestingly, Shinas was part of an all-female Shakespeare troupe in her high school experience, a direct subversion of the “original practice” of the all-male troupes of Shakespeare’s time. This theatre experience forced Shinas to think about “what it meant for [her] to play men” early in her career, providing a foundation while enacting her characters in *Much Ado*. For Bigham, it was more of a challenge as she admitted spending more time with Conrade’s movement than Margaret’s as she leaned into her more regular posture and natural movement style. Bigham circled back to centering weight, and her biggest challenge was that “my movements tend to be dance-y and more graceful/light than his needed to be.” So, the challenge for her was to try to keep Conrade stiffer.

The fourth question I posed to the actors, “Is there something you wish you were more specific about and plan to work as the show tours?” looks to the future and asks the actors to engage with and modify their performance continually. As the question suggests, I am curious how the response will be implemented while the show tours to multiple locations this year. Shinas, playing with character physicality and mannerisms, was interested in finding moments for her as the actor to represent both characters simultaneously. One character is accused of being unfaithful to her lover while the other is the character that schemes against her and creates the reality of Hero’s promiscuity. Shinas informed me that she is interested in continuing to craft “extracting how specifically...social restraint manifests for Borachio versus Hero” and “how the doubling of Hero and Borachio functions” when Borachio confesses to Claudio. Because of the

doubling, and the fact that Claudio's mourning scene was cut, there's an opportunity for a potential "ghosting of Hero" to witness Claudio's genuine regret and remorse. Once again, regarding centering weight, Bigham mentioned wanting to work on a more "equal weight between [her] legs as Conrade, and aiming for more forward-moving energy in Margaret."

The last question given to the actors, "Did the element of performing gender with rapid changes help or hurt your process? Why or why not?" gave me helpful information about quick character changes. Though the Ed Show process did not heavily tap into the extreme doubling that the Small-Scales call for, there was still an impressive turnaround between characters for both actors in the form of quick changes. Shinas and Bigham mentioned this turnaround time as the main tricky business with the costumes themselves. Both also noted that having time to adjust their movement is easier, but neither of them had that luxury all of the time. Each actor discussed their characters' physicality in these moments and the shifts that differentiated them as key elements in their performance of the characters.

This interview benefited my overall process as it revealed that gender performance in quick transition relies less on character mentality and more on character physicality. In rehearsal, understanding how the character thinks and their specific actions aid in the story being told and the actor's understanding of it. However, the clarity with which characters represented by the same actor are different reads better from the outside. I took these responses from Bigham and Shinas with me into the *King Lear* process as the name of the game in Small-Scale performance is rapid character transition. I specifically latched onto their understanding of grounding character physicality in the actor's body rather than just the character's mind.

King Lear

Taking what I learned from Shinas and Bigham, I became interested in how character physicality and emotion could reside within the same body. After all, that is the other name of the game for the Small-Scale genre: telling the story so the audience can understand and feel the power behind it. As someone who identifies as gender-fluid and nonbinary, I was eager to learn what makes these characters tick and how to differentiate them enough in performance. However, for this process to work, I needed to get a better understanding of who these characters were to make choices regarding gender in performance, specifically how these performances fit into *the box*. Bigham and Cece Richardson were at the helm of this show and guided us through a series of *flow* exercises at the start of most, if not all, rehearsals. As explained more thoroughly below, I found that *flow* helps advance transition between characters, not just within the scope of gender performance. Similarly, *flow* aids in the process of understanding who each character is.

To begin this process of reflection, it is important to establish the world of *the box* we built as the specific aesthetic influenced many character choices for my fellow actors and me. This version of Shakespeare's *King Lear* was set in 1930s Appalachia, which established a specific time and place for *the box* and created a lens through which to build character. This aesthetic was particularly close to home for me. I am originally from Rockingham County, a region in Appalachia, which is just North of our grad program and where we performed this show. This immediate attachment to home meant that my characters could live and breathe like real people inspired by members of my own family. I got to bring a piece of myself and my background, which was a first in any show process I've been a part of.

One of our first *flows* was the most essential part of my process. Doreen Bechtol oversaw this *flow*, which began with taking out a paper and answering a series of prompts. To continue,

our early work with Bechtol helped me create specific movement scores for both characters and allowed me to practice the ways both Gloucester and Goneril expressed fear, love, and anger and the ease with which I flowed into each. Interestingly, since this is a reflection after the opening performance of the Small-Scale was completed, I will engage with reflective and constructive criticism. In my thesis journal, giving my sections titles assisted in inspiration and memorization. I titled this prompt section “Fun Facts About _____,” the blank spot reserved for the individual character I was working with at that given time. Each had the same questions: 1) My name is _____. 2) I am ____ years old. 3) My job is _____. 4) My biggest fear is _____. 5) The thing that makes me most angry is _____. 6) What I love most is _____. 7) The part of my body I hide away is _____. And lastly, 8) The part of my body I present is _____.

For Goneril, her facts became: “my name is Goneril; I am 38 years old; my job is to do my duty as a wife and princess; my biggest fear is losing what little power I have; the thing that makes me most angry is watching my father waste away; what I love most is _____; The part of my body I hide away is my legs; and the part of my body I present is my chest.” Reflecting on these answers, I ended up aging her closer to 40 once we got into performance, though there is not much of a change in presentation and performance in two years. Additionally, in *the box* “princess” was never a word thrown around, so though I kept the world of the play in mind, her status functioned differently. I initially kept the “what I love most” portion blank; however, after the process, I think I would say “being in control.” I am still unsure what I meant by her legs being the part of her body that she hides away. Lastly, Goneril presenting her chest wasn't to say that Goneril leads with her boobs, instead she led with her shoulders back; she led from her collar bones.

While in *flow*, I paid attention to my tempo, how I traveled, and how that communicated character. I determined that she is indirect in path but focused in tempo and intensity when trying to get from place to place. Similarly, Goneril holds herself to an incredibly high standard as both the firstborn of Lear's daughters and potentially having to step into the role of mother in *the box* we built. When she was in a state of anger, she often refused eye contact. She feels an underlying pressure to compete with Regan in front of Lear and others; however, she still confides in her. With that, she still shows love for Regan and Cordelia, no matter how soured their relationship becomes by the end of the play. I also noted how Goneril thinks she is more open than she is, at least in her relationship with Albany. She became much more tender in *the box* than most portrayals I've seen. She's often just written off as the evil older sister with not much else to go off of. SSE's devised show "81 Minutes" is where I first began to play with the more tender side of Goneril. We were given a creative writing assignment, and I chose to write about her and Albany's honeymoon and how it meant so much to her. Though, like her sisters, she was given away to him by Lear, Albany showed her kindness and affection. I wanted to carry some of that over into my *flow* work, which turned into beautiful moments where, as the prologue of our play might suggest, Goneril expressed the love that she still had for Lear. This tenderness manifested itself in her interactions with the Fool (played by John Williams both in the devised show and in Small-Scale Lear) and how her frustrations were replaced with feelings of empathy.

Gloucester's facts were very similar and changed based on how the show progressed. His answers were: "my name is Gloucester; I am 55 years old; My job is to attend the king and those he invites into *the box*; my biggest fear is the kingdom ripping itself apart though already divided; the thing that makes me most angry is the potential for my sons to betray me; what I love most is my sons; the part of the body I hide away is my sternum; and the part of the body I

present is my head.” In my reflection, the name of Gloucester is more of his title than an actual name, as that is the region he is Earl of. As far as his age is concerned, initially, I wanted him to be even younger than that. However, the text calls for an older interpretation, so he was more in his 60s. For “what I fear most,” I would change this answer now to “when my position is threatened.” The choice of the sternum being what he hides away was mainly because he developed a slight hunch very early on in the process. With that, I chose to have his head leading as a sign of reverence in my mind. Leading with the head makes sense for Gloucester as he tries to appeal to logic.

While playing with him, I also took note of my movements and how they informed my character. I concluded that Gloucester is a man who is very proud of what he has, regardless of where he sits on the hierarchical ladder of this world. He is fatherly in spirit and functions as the “front of house,” so to speak, for Lear’s kingdom. He sees a lot of himself in his sons, which contributes to his love for them and his extreme reaction to the potential betrayal of his legitimate son. In *flow*, specifically, I was interested in how his love for his sons manifested through the play. True, he does react a little harshly towards Edgar for allegedly plotting to end his life. However, he loves both Edmund and Edgar about as much as he fears losing his status. Moments like these in *flow* made Gloucester’s track so much more tragic for me as the one telling his story. Before touching the eye-gouging scene, Bigham and Richardson put us through a *flow* where we just tracked through the scene's events. I ended up giving more of myself into that *flow* than I initially thought and had a strong emotional reaction to Edmund’s betrayal and his setup of Edgar. Real tears were shed on many occasions in these *flows*, but they never affected my work or mental health.

As far as character traits are concerned, I made each character individual. As mentioned above, I gave my version of Gloucester a slight hunch, with his shoulders caving inwards with a broader stance in his legs. With this, I found that his hands tended to rest together in front of his chest, and he often fidgeted with them, especially as he became more involved in the plot. Goneril was more tightly strung; I wanted to show that in her body. I chose to make her spine more upright, mainly to be different from Gloucester and more straightforward in direction. I pulled my shoulders back, harkening back to the “fun facts,” which forced my chest or collar bones to lead her movement. This choice reflects a bit of both the world *box* and the body *box* as 1930s Appalachia was an impoverished place where everyone would need to pitch in for their family's survival. Goneril didn't need to rely on her boobs being the driving force of her movement; she could rely on her reputation and her strength to have space in the rooms she is in. These similarities made my work of character distinction, other than posture and voice/dialect, controlled by how each character handles their emotions. To continue with my work in *flows*, my process was incredibly grounded and made for an easy character differentiation. Physicality became the most significant element of my character swapping.

As the process developed, similarities began to emerge between the two characters with specific textual references that enhanced the doubling. After Gloucester gets his eyes plucked out and runs into mad Lear with unbeknownst Edgar, Lear cries, “Ha! Goneril with a white beard” (4.6.96, 334). Though this exclamation emerges from a troubled mind, it makes the double more nuanced as both characters have similar positions of status and proximity to Lear. Secondly, they share similarities in their language. Both flip between verse and prose, although Gloucester more so than Goneril. However, in verse, they both tend to add eleventh syllables, creating unstressed, or uncertain, endings to their iambic lines. Though this made memorization tricky at the start,

character-wise, it meant that both characters frequently had more to say than could be nicely squeezed into their lines. Thirdly, they are characters that have similar allusions in their speech. Both refer to celestial entities to further their arguments or viewpoints. Gloucester specifically tells Edmund, “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us” (1.2.103-4, 185). Though not explicitly naming the sun or moon, Goneril tells Oswald, “By day and night he wrongs me” (1.3.4, 190). Granted, the Arden 3 will tell you that Goneril’s use just means “all the time,” whereas Gloucester’s talks about a specific time in the calendar year, but I still think there is a deeper connection between the two uses even though there are no other allusions in the larger text. The similarities in language might also contribute to Lear’s exclamation, making Lear aware of the textual similarities. Arden editor R. A. Foakes claims that this moment “is to press the text very hard” and seems to be aligning Gloucester “with Goneril and flattery” (334). Whatever the case, both characters seem to share the need to maintain their status and power. When their status is threatened, they go to extreme lengths to keep it intact.

I found appreciation and enjoyment in getting to be with these characters. As an actor, I believe that plays are personal histories: stories told by many individuals. With that in mind, the challenge of telling these two different but similar stories I was both excited for and ready to embrace. Thankfully, because of the scaffolding our directors and stage management team provided, I walked into the *Lear* process less stressed than I was prepared for. From the beginning, there was immediate attention to a care-filled process as the play's plot struck a personal chord within our company. Similarly, as mentioned above, I got to bring a bit of myself and my heritage to my role, a unique experience I will never forget. All these aspects of *the box* we built came together to create a space where everyone involved wanted to be there and wanted to do the work necessary to make this Shakespearean tragedy come to life.

From this research, I have concluded that multiple factors are involved in gender performance. For the Small-Scale genre specifically, you need a strong foundation of physicality for the characters to live in the actor's body and mentality to help the character live in *the box*. With that, creating *the box* in the close-knit and intimate setting of Small-Scale meant that we were constantly reacting to and learning from each other as we built the world together. As I mentioned previously, grounding the world in a clear concept and location made character choices that are much more specific, reflecting a real community of real people and hardships. Something interesting about the process is that Gloucester required more specific work in my character building. Not only did he end up using a regional dialect for the world we built (though a dialect I am very familiar with), but I also had to pitch my voice lower than my natural register, as I have a higher voice than most people assigned male at birth. Goneril, in contrast, sat perfectly in my natural register, other than some moments of general frustration or heightened emotion. Growing up, and even now, people who just hear my voice without seeing my face assume that I am female. With that, Goneril affirmed my comfort in my femininity, and I was able to use that to aid my performance and find more variation between the characters.

Lamplighter Staged Reading Series

The space between Small-Scales and the beginning of the Blackfriars show was a time for SSE's Lamplighter's Staged Reading series to begin. As I did not get to act in all four show genres, I felt it necessary to include my experience in SSE's staged reading series as they provided interesting research on creating gender performance under the fast-paced parameters of staged readings. Another interesting element inherent to staged readings is their relationship with completeness and incompleteness and, therefore, the specificity needed for a gendered performance to be perceived. Traditional staged readings have the actors playing each character

in front of a music stand, allowing the words of the play to be heard without any actual staging. My selected reflections, Margaret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo*, Jess Snelling's *In Fair Verona*, and Ella Jo Nguyen's *One and the Same*, all had elements of simple staging and blocking that added a layer of performative storytelling though scripts were visibly in hand. In addition, Snellings' and Nguyen's plays were both new works with elements of Shakespearean adaptation (with *In Fair Verona* having moments of adapted text from *Romeo and Juliet* and *One and the Same* being a complete adaptation of *Twelfth Night*). As these processes were short, the prose below offers a quick, informal look into the selected staged readings and the choices made in support of gender performance.

Bell in Campo

I was so honored to participate in this frivolous little closet drama for two main reasons: 1) I was in *The Convent of Pleasure* staged reading by the same playwright last year, and 2) this specific play had a lot of traction in our MFA May Term season conversations. The beautiful thing about this play, and the massive cuts made to it, is that a lot of the character work begins with the character's name. I played the role of Madam (sometimes Lady) Passionate, who I immediately clocked as someone who lives in a constant state of heightened emotion. This quality of her character meant that she leaned a little more in the gender performance category of caricature and almost drag. Not only were her emotions big, but they were also quick to change. I tried to channel a bit of the performance's heightened, almost drag-like nature as the directors, Anna Taylor and Kelley McKinnon, encouraged me to go crazy and have fun with her. I also had permission from Taylor to do what I wanted with my make-up, which ended up leaning more into the drag aesthetic but not entirely distinguishable as a drag queen role. Lastly, I got to feel pretty and expensive in my costume, as it was a lovely deep pink Victorian gown, which

heightened my performance of the character. Though contained, the incompleteness allowed for a release or expansion of this character beyond the page.

In Fair Verona

As a production dramaturg, I didn't do much other than being available to provide some expertise on the location this new work is set in, Verona, VA. However, I got roped into the cast of the reading as well. I played the role of Ian, who, as the director informed, could be played by a male-presenting or nonbinary actor. With that in mind, I imagined Ian as a relatively heterosexual person who uses he/they pronouns. From there, my character performance, similar to and different from Madam Passionate's, was grounded in moments of realism and caricatured performance. Ian sat slightly lower than my natural speaking register, and the costume I chose for him was a rugged small necklace, black pants, a black tank top, Converse, and a flannel tied around his waist: sort of a nature boy aesthetic. In moments where the characters in the play are filming their version of *Romeo and Juliet* for COVID-19 times, I made Ian choose to portray Mercutio as the dudey-est of dude bros possible (or, at the very least, that's my take on it). This kind of extreme gender performance was quite fun for me as it is not something that I exude at all in my daily life. Therefore, falling into that kind of characterization is both startling and hilarious. To add on, the character choice here is heightened by the fact that my name is Kyle which tends to evoke an image of a drywall punching, energy drinking, sports playing, frat boy douchebag. So, the inherent juxtaposition of my name and personality is fun enough on its own, and by channeling that kind of character, I got to have as much fun as I wanted to. Something that also came up in my portrayal of the character was that Ian played Mercutio and Capulet in the self-produced film project the characters were working on. I wanted to make the two different enough to stand out as individual characters being put on. Although their voices were

placed in a similar spot, their postures differed. As “dude bro,” the Mercutio character led with his pelvis, whereas Capulet stood more straight up and down.

One and the Same

Shinas, the director of this reading, reached out to me before the interest forms and offers went out. This play is a queer retelling of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* which presents Sebastian altering his gender presentation rather than Viola, and Viola falling in love with Olivia instead of Orsino. She offered me the role of Sebastian, later called Juno, because Sebastian chose this name for themselves and informed the audience in an aside, “O, to this fiction I could get accustomed” (Nguyen 28). Since Sebastian/Juno functioned as a textually trans character, I was excited to showcase myself in interpreting this play and *the box* for them. In portraying this character, I allowed myself to discover in real time who Juno was for themselves and experience her moments of euphoria with this text’s Orsino mistaking her for Viola. The play text does not make clear what pronouns Juno wishes to use as they are frequently referred to as Sebastian and given masculine pronouns. Interestingly, as a part of the play’s inversion of its base text, Viola corrects herself after calling them her brother and instead chooses “my other.” In his review, Dr. Peter Kirwan pointed out that the performance by Matthias Bolon (Antonio) and I “did important work to establish the transition, with Nguyen’s writing stressing that Juno was always Juno.” Additionally, Juno’s identity became their own to control as the shipwreck allowed this transition and the realization of being *One and the Same*; sisters, or at least each other’s “other.”

Kirwan also claimed that this play “suggested that our identities can be in continual flux and growth.” This statement is abundantly true and not solely the experience of trans people. We, as people in general, change every single day. Cisgender, heterosexual people grow and change and shape their identities in real time; trans people oftentimes are aware they are “different” at a

very young age, but also are daily discovering themselves. Everyone experiences gender euphoria, meaning “the psychological state of bliss and comfort that happens when our gender expression is aligned with our identity,” and dysphoria, meaning “psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity” (Taylor) in their own way. We, cisgender and transgender people alike, have the freedom (FPA) to share those experiences that represent every aspect of who we are as people. The beautiful part of this specific *box* for me was that I got to align myself with Juno’s experience as discovering myself has been a long journey. With that, Nguyen approached me after the show and said my take on the character was the closest to her original imagining of the character. It was a joy to play this character, and I hope this play goes far and wide.

Staged Reading Findings

Coming out of the Small-Scale process into these staged readings, I knew one of the most important things for character development is making a choice and sticking with it. Many of those choices can be found in the text. Like the other characters in *Bell in Campo*, Madam Passionate's characterization began with her name, which required a caricatured and heightened performance. Ian’s function in *In Fair Verona* contained a play-within-a-play, which required an additional stylized layer of performance. *One and the Same* also had similar in-text material that heavily influenced my character choices in performance and got to experience Sebastian/Juno finding themselves in real time. Something different from a regular, full production is that staged readings do not allow enough time to incorporate a character's physicality and mentality. A lot of that has to do with the fact that scripts are still in hand; therefore, character building and gender performance needed to be specific in order to survive the ephemerality of these *boxes*. Though for these processes, some of the character/gender choices came through costuming, other

specificities include attention to the character's stance, vocal register, and subtle but targeted gestures.

Bartholomew Fair

As an Actor

Going into the *Bartholomew Fair* process was interesting, to say the least. To begin with, I felt the need to educate myself on *The Muppet Show* as that was the general aesthetic McDermott guest director Raphael Massie was going for. I knew of the Muppets – I mean, who doesn't? – but I had never watched an episode of the original variety show. As the roles of this show shook out, I played four different characters. Coming out of the Small-Scale process with a heavy expectation of doubling, I was initially disappointed, but I was ready for the challenge of playing these roles. These characters were the Scrivener (who is only present for the induction), Mooncalf (a tapster in Ursula's tavern), Haggis (a member of the Watch), and Sharkwell (a bouncer, for lack of a better word, for the puppet show). Because of the time I took “researching,” I was able to center a lot of my characters in the realm of more exaggerated performances: a living cartoon. As I mentioned in my introduction, I am not excluding caricature or stereotyped gender performance from this thesis as the *Bartholomew Fair* process relied on the Muppet-ness of it all. In some ways, this kind of exaggerated gender performance is reflective of seventies and eighties pop culture. This research also helped me understand the show in general, as the play itself is not the easiest to follow, and the whole company was giving a larger-than-life performance.

The Scrivener and Sharkwell did not have much stage presence, which limited opportunities for gender performance. However, as one of the costume designers, I did have

Sharkwell wearing a muscle tank to match the bouncer aesthetic, which leaned more into a masculine presentation. Haggis was an all-denim-wearing member of the watch, so I, in my performance, didn't necessarily prescribe any specifically gendered performatives to him. You could argue, however, that Haggis's arresting Waspe in a show of physical strength by carrying him off stage lent itself to a more masculine view of the character. However, more than Sharkwell, Haggis lived in a world of exaggerated performance as he had large reactions to everything happening around him.

What shined through for me in this process of gender performance was my take on Mooncalf. Adam Overdo, a clerk who disguises himself to track the enormities of the fair, comes across Ursula, the pig woman's booth. Trying to get Mooncalf's attention, he says, "Dost thou hear boy?" (2.3.24, 49) and "Child of the bottles" (2.4.21, 52). This read to me as Mooncalf potentially being an actual child. I leaned heavily into this idea during our first frolic through, where the Assistant Directors (Bell, Taylor, and Bigham) had us pick different characters to *flow* with. I played with Mooncalf in this "fair *flow*", moving quickly but taking small steps. This tempo added to the character's excitement, which was expressed in their short time on stage, which inevitably fit their childlike nature.

The tempo also fed into the Muppet antics of it all, as Mooncalf was running across the stage a couple of times. They were just so excited to be there and to see people in the fair, but they were prone to do things that weren't entirely up to their Mistress Ursula's bar, which they faced her wrath for a few times. I chose to keep Mooncalf in a higher vocal register than my regular speaking voice. This choice accomplished a few things: 1) It separated me as an actor from Mooncalf as the character, which 2) aided in their excitement and curious confusion, and 3) allowed Mooncalf to be read as much younger than everyone else, both in rehearsal and

performance. Though they were not on stage for a significant amount of time, I still got a lot of joy out of the ways the character interacted with the world around them. *The box* for Mooncalf, like the sentiments of Miranda in *The Tempest*, was a great big world with such lovely people in it. They wanted to do their best job, even if that meant messing up here and there.

For this section, I used gender-neutral they/them pronouns for Mooncalf. In the early modern period, children, specifically boys, were identified as a different and third gender category. Scholars Stephen Orgel and Harry R. McCarthy touch on the importance of the boys' "role" in the early modern period and offer insights into performing "childhood." Firstly, as Orgel points out, "Elizabethan children of both sexes were dressed in skirts until the age of seven or so; the "breeching" of boys was the formal move out of the common gender of childhood," going from a world "largely controlled by women, into the world of the men" (15). However, Mooncalf works for Ursula, the seeming matron of the fair who runs the pig booth (which is also a brothel). In an early modern understanding, Mooncalf does not go through the traditional and educational process of "breeching" and does not grow up. Whether Jonson imagined Mooncalf as a boy or not, I argue they remain in a world "controlled by women" and have a childlike spirit of excitement. McCarthy states that "It is important to bear in mind the remarkable flexibility with which terms such as 'child' and 'boy' were applied to [boy actors]," therefore "'childhood' can be performed in much the same way as gender, irrespective of supposedly stable visual markers of maturity" (11). In my first public performance of *Bartholomew Fair*, I chose to be clean-shaven on my face and torso to eliminate my physical "visual markers of maturity". With this, as texts from the period on boyhood "frequently centered on the active, moving body" (50), I wanted Mooncalf to have a lot of energy in everything they did and a curiosity in the new customers.

As a Co-Designer

For this show, I chose to be a Co-Costume Designer, one of the direct builders of *the box*. This was a learning experience for me and the other designer, Sommer, as we had never been costume designers for any show before. The most daunting part is that *Bartholomew Fair*, though cut in half for our production, calls for around 37 characters (named or otherwise). As an actor in the play alone, I had four characters that needed their costume aesthetic. In our first production meeting, Massie wanted to lean into a timeless aesthetic grounded by the 70s and 80s. This period, the era when *The Muppet Show* was airing, was a time in which fashion was filled with bright colors, bold patterns, and a new wave of gender expression. Sommer and I were excited to dive into the grandness of the period and were initially inspired by the disco aesthetic.

While trying to style each of the named characters in this play, we drew some inspiration from seventies and eighties-era drag artists like RuPaul and pop-rock artists like David Bowie and Elton John to provide a lens through which to build *this box*. Drawing inspiration from these icons of the era brought the concept of gender into the picture, as these icons were some of many who constantly pushed gender boundaries in their performances. Though the inspiration was there, Sommer and I initially jumped the gun with our first design concept, as Massie wanted these characters to be inspired by the out-of-this-world but grounded more in the characters as real working and upper-middle-class people. Granted, only a few designs were entirely altered, so we were at least close! Otherwise, our designs were drawn from the script itself with references to Trouble-All (played by Gofred Ogoe) wearing a cap and gown and Win Littlewit or Bartholomew Cokes (played by Lydia Christensen and Bolon) either wearing or buying a hat. With that, the text surrounding Ursula has the remains of a plus-sized character that Sommer (who played the character) and I wanted to honor but adjust to fit Sommer's body type. We chose

to make Ursula's costume "as booby as we [could] make it" (Sommer) as the character design became inspired by Dolly Parton.

Our design concept favored femininity, not only in our inspiration but in our execution as well. For starters, we had a few actors who identify as women who played masculine characters, such as Richardson as Winwife. Though this was a masculine character, Sommer suggested that Richardson wear her hair half up to honor the actor's wishes regarding hair. This choice helped the character read as masculine while acknowledging the actor playing the role. The conversation of Taylor as both Nightingale and Dame Purecraft is different because that was a process of quick-changing in and out of a specific jacket. However, we wanted Dame Purecraft to read as a rich woman who wears the pants. Sommer was inspired by the costume design of Jamie Lee Curtis' character in the 2019 movie *Knives Out*: "rich bitch" vibes, if you will. Grace Wellborn, played by Bigham, became an excellent antithesis of character versus costume as Massie wanted to pair Bigham's dry humor with the character's function in the play. This resulted in a woman wearing a flowing pink floral dress, though unafraid of smoking in public spaces. Ursula, who I touched on earlier, exuded the "body of the fair" and was as booby as Sommer was comfortable with presenting on the Blackfriars stage. Furthermore, it uplifted queer representation with Bolon stating his costume made him feel so gay as a transmasculine person embodying the role. Mooncalf also uplifted the queerness of the era, as the costume chosen for them leaned into a "flower child" hippie aesthetic. Massie's concept and the play's absurdity came together to build a *box* that showcased our company's wacky nature and highlighted the general queerness of the 70s and 80s.

The Goblins

When it came time to vote on our season in the May Term MFA room, I pushed hard for this show. Another cohort member informed me about it, and I became interested in the potential of reading a character from the early modern period as textually nonbinary. Reginella, one of the play's ingenues, is the child of Tamoren, the Goblin King. Though the goblins are more of a ragtag group of thieves than actual goblins, they attempt to make the people they capture feel like they were taken to Hell as a way to gain information from them.. Reginella has known nothing outside of this goblin world and, to some extent, might not be aware that the goblins are actual people. When Orsabin, the main protagonist of the play, gets captured by the goblins and meets Reginella, he asks, "Are you a woman too?" to which she replies, "I know not what I am, for like myself I never yet saw any" (Richardson & Mestres, 39). I wanted the chance to 1) play an ingenue who gets to have a happy ending love story and 2) might not fully understand the concept of gender for themselves. However, due to what my acting concentration needed and the fact that Reginella was more of a supporting character in the plot, I was cast as Peridor, the goblin king's hand and the play's primary antagonist. Though I did not get cast the way I wanted to initially, Peridor allowed me to explore androgyny in performance rather than adhering to one side or the other of the gender spectrum.

This process was my first time working in a Renaissance-style production (a week's worth of rehearsal with no director and cue scripts). I have only worked with cue scripts in a classroom setting, so I was excited and terrified about getting this show process underway. For the uninitiated reader, a cue script is given to each actor containing only their lines and their character's specific stage directions, with three or four words from the prior speaker given to cue what your character is supposed to be doing. Traditionally, the Ren Show process is a show that

is not well known, and it is customary for people not to read the play (unless they want to) before hopping into the week-long rehearsal. So, in prepping for this show, I came into it with only the context of what Peridor says. In addition, it is customary for everyone to go into the first Ren Show rehearsal as close to off-book as possible. Though John Suckling has the strangest syntax in his writing that I have come across thus far in early modern and restoration drama, the play itself was easy to follow with all the pieces. The hard part was not having those pieces while trying to memorize all your lines and cues.

Creating the Ren Show *box* is entirely actor-driven. No directors guide the process or make choices for you. Building this *box* was a rapid collective effort, similar to the staged reading *boxes* mentioned above. Though we had the autonomy of choices for ourselves, it was rather daunting. The difference between staged reading and Ren Show was again the relationship of completeness and incompleteness. Once we got into the process and understood everyone's lines and actions in *the box*, my character's motivation became much more straightforward. Therefore, I could make more precise choices that aided in telling the story. Admittedly, I am still in a little bit of shock from putting the pieces of *the box* together so rapidly. I have never had to make so many character choices so quickly, and there were some that I am not sure I could honestly answer. One is that I have no idea how old my Peridor was. It is clear from the text that he was around and helped lead a charge in the war that forced the "goblins" into hiding. However, it seems that Reginella was very young, perhaps even recently born, when the war happened. That means that Peridor, in the play's action, is at least in his late 30s or 40s. I bring up Reginella's age in this conversation because Peridor does attempt to court her, and when Orsabrín gets in the way, he takes several matters into his own hands to try to force Reginella to be with him. We love to see a gross early modern age gap.

Though Peridor is textually masculine, as previously stated, I wanted to inject some androgyny into his performance. The first layer was acting like he was a real goblin and that the goblin's lair was Hell. Early in the rehearsal process, I requested time in "goblin *flow*" for all the actors playing goblins to experiment with moving through the space as more creature-like characters. I love getting the chance to be a little creature and am not afraid of doing something physical if the opportunity reveals itself, so I was not afraid of this part of the character. However, I do not think I could have maintained all the squatting and scurrying that Peridor did without physical training with the company back in August led by Company Manager Doreen Bechtol. In addition to a more creature-like presence, I found a lot of power in his performance. As the "minister of darkness," so to speak, I wanted the victims we captured to think they were dragged down to Hell. Throughout my work this year, I have become much more comfortable with vocal intensity, especially after *King Lear*. With that in mind, I used a slightly lower voice in my register but imbued it with an intensity that filled the Blackfriars Playhouse. Power and presence are not gender specific traits, so though my vocal register was lower, I would not necessarily say it leaned into any specific gendered presentation. This understanding of presence and power allowed all goblins to exist as just entities in *the box* as each actor playing goblins fed into the creature-like quality and, therefore, a genderless presentation.

The main androgyny in this performance relied heavily on my choice of costuming, hair, and makeup. In the Ren Show process, it is customary for each actor to decide what their costume looks like. From the beginning of the process, I knew I wanted to showcase a bit of the body I have worked hard on, as I have never been more confident in my appearance. We as a company also discussed the general production aesthetic and agreed that we wanted the show to live in two worlds: Rob Reiner's *The Princess Bride* and Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*; *the box*

becoming fantasy Renaissance coded. The goblins, then, had an additional Muppet aesthetic to them. With that in mind, I wanted something sleeveless to show off my arms, which are toned. Similarly, I wanted to wear a corset for a few reasons: 1) I am comfortable wearing one in my daily life here and there, and 2) I wanted to add some gender confusion to the outfit. The “gender confusion” referenced here relies heavily on silhouette and the illusion specific garments provide for the body of the person wearing them. Interestingly, the costume pieces I chose both leaned into the goblin aesthetic but, in some ways, highlighted Peridor’s humanness. The corset, for instance, made my silhouette reflect an hourglass figure (a body type viewed as feminine and a beauty standard that women have been forced to aspire to for decades), which forced Peridor to have a straight, supported posture. In a way, this fed into his past as a war general. I paired the corset with chunky-heeled boots to add to the gender confusion, as the boots allowed me to stand almost as tall as Tamoren. Though the 2nd in command, Peridor calls most of the shots in this play. Similarly, the height the boots gave me and my ability to stomp in them if needed added to my earlier notion of presence and power. Peridor was, almost literally, above everyone else. Lastly, I added two layers of flowy, cape-like garments on top. The cape pieces added to the goblin nature for the character and added to some of the gender of it all as flowy garments are often read as feminine. Furthermore, these costume pieces allowed me to stand apart from the rest of the goblin ensemble to help inform the audience of the character’s importance to the plot.

Something I did not initially plan to do with the costume was being shirtless under the corset. Granted, I was still somewhat clothed with cape-like garments over the corset. However, something clicked for me when I saw the outfit come together. For some extra flare, I added some jewelry elements. I wore a rainbow chakra bracelet; I had a golden necklace with three parts to it that came with a fake quartz crystal and a few crescent moons; I also had one pearl

stud earring in my right ear with one long dangly earring made out of an antique chandelier in my left ear. The specific choices of jewelry helped elevate the costume not only to pay homage to my queer/gay identity, but to add to the goblin nature of these items potentially being things that I stole. The goblins are just thieves after all.

Lastly, though I wore a hilarious cloth mask for most of the show, I chose to do a glittery smokey-eye look. This look added to the creature vibes I was going for with a greenish black smokey eye with a golden glitter highlight in the center of my eyelid and thin black eyeliner; there was something almost snaky about it, or at least that was what I was going for. Assistant Stage Manager Emily Basset also pointed out that the look gave “guy-liner,” which added to the androgynous presentation. My hair also became an essential factor in the androgynous illusion. Currently, I sport hair that falls between my shoulder blades with an undercut. I asked Julia Sommer if she was willing to French braid it for performance for this role. I wanted this specific hairstyle mainly because I could not do it myself, and I enjoy how a braid looks on my head. Furthermore, the braid with the undercut created a look that leaned into an androgynous rogue aesthetic, which helped Peridor come alive.

Once I had the complete costume and character game together, I experienced something I can only describe as gender euphoria. Not only was I comfortable and confident in what I was wearing, but I was also able to have more fun with the character, which aided in the intensity I wanted Peridor to have. Similarly, the silhouette of the body in the trans and drag community is essential for passing as the gender you wish to be publicly perceived as. Oftentimes, the chest is an area of significant dysphoria, with most transfemme people wanting a fuller chest and most transmasculine people wanting a flatter chest to align more with their gender identity. For nonbinary people, this becomes a case-by-case situation, as the trans-nonbinary experience, like transness,

is uniquely individual. As a nonbinary person who considers themselves to be gender-fluid, I oftentimes fluctuate between liking my flatter/toned chest to wishing it was a little fuller. However, the combination of my chest and arms being visible with the shape the corset gave my body let my gender expression shine through. During one of our last rehearsals, I was chatting about my euphoria with our journey folk, castmates outside of the immediate company, and Bolon (a trans man who has undergone top surgery). Both confirmed that something about being “chest out” is uniquely an experience of trans joy, and there’s nothing wrong with feeling that way. I cannot say what the audience perceived from my performance, but everything came together exactly how I wanted it to, and I felt confident in Peridor’s androgyny.

Conclusion

This year and this thesis have been significant to me as I have never focused on my own transness inside of my work as an actor before. My previous theses discussed gender as performance (BA) and early modern gender subversion (MLitt). However, neither reflected me as an actor or an individual as much as this one has. The theoretical framework of *the box*, both in terms of the world of the play and the body of the actor, provided me with a driving interest and specificity in everything I was doing. Was I always successful in performing gender? That’s for audiences who saw each play to decide. However, from my understanding of physicality versus mentality from *Much Ado*; from developing movement scores through *flow* and the aesthetic of *the box* in *King Lear*; from the ephemeral, fast paced decision making required for staged readings; from bringing an early modern idea of boyhood and favoring femininity in design in *Bartholomew Fair*; and from euphoria driving my character choices in *The Goblins*, I have the *First-Person Authority* to claim that I was successful for the purposes of being true to myself and my identity. From all my findings, my main argument is that perceived gender in the

theatre setting is understood by an audience through gestural work and embodied performance rather than specifically male or female-coded thinking.

As mentioned in my introduction, *flow* is an excellent exercise to use in rehearsal spaces. It allows actors to play and experiment with their characters in real time to discover elements of the world of the play *box*, and the performance read onto the body of the actor *box*. Furthermore, *flow* helps advance the transition between characters, not just within the scope of gender performance. It aids in the process of understanding who each character is for the actor playing them. True, as shown in my research, some of the gendered performance comes from costume design choices. However, character development and gender performance also need to be grounded in the play. Some of the choices you are making come straight from the texts you are working with, and some rely on the production aesthetic. Giving characters the freedom of authenticity in their environment produces a specific performance of gender. Additionally, it allows me, as a nonbinary actor, to be authentically myself in each show process. I hope this stage in my story will make actors think consciously about their own gendered performances and that my experiences will be heard rather than erased.

Appendix #1: *Much Ado About Nothing* Interview

1. What was your process for character differentiation during rehearsal, and how did it manifest itself in performance?

Katy: Hero and Borachio are such different characters, so character differentiation felt really straightforward. I imagine Hero as someone very constrained by social norms, largely because she's a woman, but I think her high social status also comes with really particular expectations. This manifested a lot in her physicality and how reserved she was around other characters. I was really interested in how this restraint manifested differently when she was in public surrounded by men and when she was in private, woman-only spaces. Borachio, due to gender and status, had a lot more freedom with how he conducted himself, and I tried to articulate that with movement and voice. He has a lot less to lose by being more libertine. I did find that when he realized the gravity of what he'd done and how those actions might affect the woman he loved, his physicality became a lot more similar to Hero's. At this point, the costume, voice, and posture helped a lot with making sure they were different.

Anna: I didn't think too hard about the genders of the characters, honestly! I approached both of them a lot more from a perspective of practicality and movement, thinking about Margaret as being a lighter mover, with weight further forward in her feet, and Conrade as a heavier mover with the weight in his heels. It had a lot more to do with the energy of the characters than with their gender, I think, or at least that's how I identified differences.

2. Was there something specific to your process that clicked for you as far as gender swapping is concerned?

Katy: I think working with Kelley really helped highlight mannerisms that I carried across characters. She called out every time I sat, leaned, or intoned "like a woman". Getting an outside eye on the little subconscious things I do that contribute to gender performance definitely helped me keep all the little details of physicality in mind. I just pretended like there was a Kelley in the corner analyzing every little detail of my movements.

Anna: The weight differences helped me a lot, but the biggest thing that clicked for me was some advice that Kelley gave Katy and I about moving our legs differently - she advised us never to put the weight in only one leg, and to keep our hips more square, and that was a good practical tip for Conrade's movement.

3. As a cis woman, did you find the process challenging? Why or why not?

Katy: I didn't find the process exceptionally challenging as a cis woman. Like I mentioned earlier, I had little mannerisms that I wanted to be aware of, but I spent a lot of time playing across gender in high school and college. It was definitely high-school-girl-in-theatre syndrome where there were way more folks who identified as women than folks who identified with men, so that was just always something I was socialized with. I was also in an all-woman Shakespeare troupe in high school, which pretty much required me to figure out what it meant for me to play men. I've always felt insecure about my ability to play masculine, so I tended to feel more confident in my ability to play women simply because I felt like the audience had to do less work. I remember playing Macbeth in a scene in high school, and a huge auditorium burst out laughing when I came out with my five-foot-tall frame and little braid, and I spent a while being afraid something like that would happen again. But so far it hasn't, and I think I've by and large

been able to overcome this fear simply by growing into my craft and learning my own physicality.

Anna: I will say that I spent more time on Conrade's movement than Margaret's, because hers was second nature to me and I used my own natural movement style more for her. For Conrade, the biggest challenge was that my movements tend to be dance-y and more graceful/light than his needed to be, so I practiced stiffer movement.

4. Is there something you wish you were more specific about and plan to work as the show tours?

Katy: I think I'd like to dig more into the scene where Borachio confesses to Don Pedro and Claudio. Like I said earlier, this is a scene where I think the reckless abandon with which Borachio goes through life goes away a bit, and he has to grapple with the kind of restraint Hero has to on an everyday basis. I'm interested in extracting how specifically this kind of social restraint manifests for Borachio versus Hero, but I'm also really interested in how the doubling of Hero and Borachio functions in this scene. Because we've cut Claudio's mourning scene, I feel like this is an interesting moment when Hero's body if not her character gets to witness Claudio's very genuine remorse. I want to ensure that the characters are distinct, but I'm interested to see if I can find some sort of ghosting for Hero to witness this scene.

Anna: Remembering how to maintain more equal weight between my legs as Conrade, and aiming for more forward-moving energy in Margaret.

5. Did the element of performing gender with extremely quick changes help or hurt your process? Why or why not?

Katy: The extremely quick changes were definitely tricky, and I think regardless of gendered dimensions, it felt really strange at first that the characters had little to no room to breathe once I got offstage. I think there were only two transitions between my scenes where I didn't have to change into my other character, and there was only one scene change where I didn't have to change costume at all. I think having to radically change my appearance and physicality was helpful with these changes. The turnaround was so quick that I wouldn't usually have a second to get myself into a new headspace before going out, so having a few key shifts I could lock into immediately helped a lot.

Anna: The main challenge with the quick changes is honestly just the costumes - the physicality is pretty easy to fall into once in costume. It's easier when I have a moment to adjust my movement, but I'm pretty much never thinking about gender when I'm going through the backstage track, except for the practical stance reminders I mentioned.

Appendix #2: SSE *Much Ado About Nothing* Dramaturgy Note

“World War I brought into sharp focus divides in American society - gender (the men who fought in the war and the women who fought for equal rights at home); age (the older generation, conservative and patriotic, and the younger, who saw the horrors of war and sought change); and socioeconomic (the poor worked harder, and the rich got richer). *Much Ado About Nothing*, however, deals with reconciliation - so Streetlight’s production, set immediately after the War, highlights the elements of the play that challenge the War’s rigid dichotomies. For instance, our music combines the “old” and the “new”. The preshow consists of two contemporary songs adapted to music genres of the period: instrumentation includes euphonium, clarinet, and piano (among others) as a nod to popular genres of the period like ragtime, jazz, and marches. Beatrice and Benedick, more than dramaturgy note 8 anyone, challenge the divide of gender. Although Beatrice claims she cannot seek revenge for her wronged cousin because she is a woman, she breaks away from other gender-based expectations of the period - she wears trousers that contrast with the other female characters’ dresses and skirts, she openly speaks her mind at the risk of societal disapproval, and she rejects the idea of marriage for marriage’s sake. Benedick parallels her when he steps out of his assigned role as a man’s man and stands up for the women of the play, even risking his own life in a duel for a woman’s honor. In a way, their willingness to cross lines makes them perfect for each other! In *Much Ado*, division and reconciliation walk hand-in-hand. Our production revels especially in breaks from tradition and the uncertain hope of change.” - Austen Bell & Jess Snellings.

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