

Such Stuff podcast
Season 2, Episode 2: Pride, Then and Now

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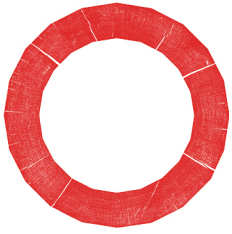
Imogen Greenberg: Hello, and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff, the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

This week on the podcast, we go behind the scenes with *Edward II*, *After Edward* and with the Pride, Then and Now festival to question how we perform sexuality and how sexuality is performed, looking at queer stories from the early modern period, too often overlooked.

The Pride, Then and Now festival will run alongside our production of Marlowe's *Edward II*, and *After Edward*, a new play by Tom Stuart written in response to Marlowe's play. This call and response between Shakespeare and his contemporaries and today's artists is at the heart of the Pride, Then and Now Festival.

So, this week on the podcast, we talk to Tom Stuart about writing *After Edward* and playing Edward II in both productions. We also chat to Globe research fellow and lecturer Dr Will Tosh about queer narratives from the early modern period. And we sat down with Sarah Grange and Wesley Dykes to talk about Moll Frith, the inspiration behind their show *Moll and the Future Kings*, a drag king cabaret by candlelight in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, part of the Pride, Then and Now festival.

And stick with us to hear poetry from early modern poets Richard Barnfield and Katherine Philips.

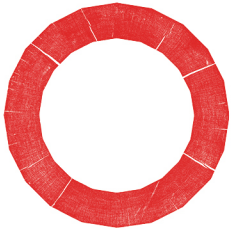


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First up, we spoke to writer and actor Tom Stuart. Tom's new play *After Edward* centres on an actor who has just come off stage playing Edward II, which Tom is also doing in our production of Edward II. We chatted about the relationship between the two productions, and what the conversation across the centuries means.

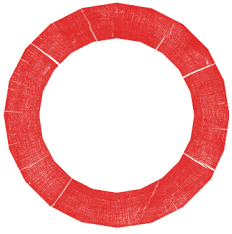
Tom Stuart: So the premise of *After Edward* is that the central character is an actor who has just been playing Edward II, which of course now I am doing. And so, so much of my preparation and so much of my process of writing *After Edward* has fed my understanding of the character of Edward II. As an actor, you have to look at what's your in to a character, what's the thing that's gonna connect you with this fictional person, and I realised my in with Edward II was this sense of shame caused by having grown up gay in a straight man's world, if you like. And what that leaves you with and the legacy of that, and I think it's something that a lot of minority groups can relate to, you know not being part of the norm, in inverted commas. So that's something that I explored in *After Edward*, which of course has completely fed my understanding of Edward II as well, and given me an incredible in with him. Because I think, I see a lot of shame in him too, and a lot of pain of being, particularly for him because the stakes are so much higher, but being a gay man in a very straight environment.

So I chose the characters that Edward encounters in *After Edward* by thinking about, if I was in dire straits, if I was in an extreme situation that had something to do with my experience of being a gay man, who would I call on and who would be the people that I would look back on and look to for strength, and who would I garner strength from? Who are the historical figures that I would want to have a chat with? And they were Gertrude Stein, Quentin Crisp and Harvey Milk. So that was my sort of



basis really, that was my starting point. It was also like that thing of... you know, like you read in the Guardian Magazine or something, or like 'who would you invite to your favourite dinner party?' And I always think that would be a nightmare, because you would have [laughs]... no one would... everyone would talk over each other and you wouldn't get an idea of who they were at all. It would be like the worst party because you wouldn't have time with each one of them, they'd all be competing for each other... for your attention and each other's attention. So that's what happens with the play is that I consciously put them all in a room and let the mayhem sort of ensue and let them compete for the audience's attention and for Edward's attention as well.

I think it's important to have these discussions now. We're in a really sort... as we all know, a really shaky political climate and I think when things are a bit up in the air and a bit scary politically, it's really good to go back and reaffirm the protections we have in place for minorities of all kinds and to reaffirm the importance of those, and celebrate them too. So in a way that's partly what the play's intention is. It's also an attempt to look at how far we've come in terms of LGBTQ rights, and acceptance. And it also raises the question about what else do we need to do, like... cos we're not there yet in terms of full acceptance and... so what else needs to be done so that people are safe, and so that people are you know, can live their lives. So I think it's really important not to get complacent as a society and as a community and I think it's really important to do that at this time. And I also think, during this sort of political climate we're in at the moment, it's really important to honour and celebrate those people that, throughout history, have stuck their heads above the parapet and called out injustices, no matter at what cost it was to them personally, but to be fighting for something bigger than themselves, which all the characters in the play did. And so in a way it's a celebration of them too, and an honouring of them.

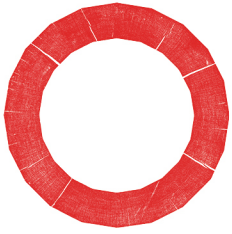


It feels important to see how far we've come since Edward II's circumstances, and also Marlowe's as well. When I think about the play's, I feel like I'm in a direct line, starting with Edward II, the real guy, the real man, and then followed by Marlowe and you know, what he was going through and what it took for him to have the courage to write his play at that... at his time. And then what it is for me as a modern man, actor to be taking the roles on. So I'm aware of that lineage, and that legacy, and everyone that came in between those three.

I was actually in a production... the first time I came across Edward II, I was in a brilliant production of it at the Battersea Arts Centre, where I played Spencer, one of the king's lovers. And it was the first time I'd really come across Marlowe as well, and I just completely fell in love with it, both with Marlowe's writing and with the play itself, and with the story. You know, as a gay man, I was completely bowled over by the courage of Marlowe to write it. And there isn't anything that's sort of sensationalist in it, he really treats the central relationship with such humanity and simplicity, actually. So it's just a really honest, troubled [laughs] love story, relationship between Gaveston and Edward, which had huge resonances for me, both when I was in it before and now, you know its... and there aren't that many plays where, well certainly not many that I know of, many classical plays, that deal with homosexual love affairs. So it's a real... it feels like a really important piece and it's a real privilege to be a part of re-telling that story again.

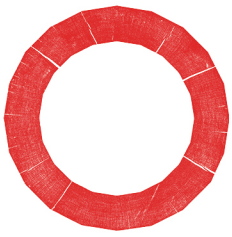
[Music plays]

IG: As Tom says, Marlowe himself is a fascinating figure, so I sat down with Dr Will Tosh, research fellow and lecturer with our research department, to talk about Marlowe and Edward II, and how it's been seen and performed through the years. We also spoke about other writers from the time whose work resonates with queer narratives now.



Dr Will Tosh: So *Edward II*, by Christopher Marlowe, is written probably in the early 1590s and one of the most compelling things, I think the most compelling thing about the play from our point of view, is that it has at its centre a king whose main emotional, affectional, erotic, sexual connection is with his lover, Piers Gaveston. It's the king's relationship with Gaveston that in a way leads to the crumbling of the kingdom and civil war, but what's really interesting about what Marlowe does with the set-up is that it's not the relationship with Gaveston as a man that's the real problem, it's how the king turns his personal passions into the prevailing most important thing in the realm. And in a sense, it doesn't really matter whether the target of those passions is male or female.

The question is the extent to which the early modern audience kind of got what Marlowe was doing, which is of course a really hard question to answer. A slightly easier question to answer is what subsequent audience members and theatre artists and critics thought of that central relationship between Edward and Gaveston. And in the 18th and 19th centuries, *Edward II* doesn't get staged. It doesn't appear on an English stage for more or less 250 years. And I think one of the reasons for that is that central relationship doesn't make sense to people and it also scares people, partly because the period after Marlowe and Shakespeare sees a real change and evolution in the way people understand sexuality and sexual identity, and it's the century or so after the play is written that Western culture, certainly, develops what we would now call a kind of homophobic kind of core. And that of course has held sway for quite a long time, and we're only now in the past thirty or forty years seeing that being dismantled. And in the process of that dismantlement, we're able to see in texts like *Edward II* something that was there before that edifice of kind of oppression and repression got built up. So when *Edward II* comes back on to the stage, in this

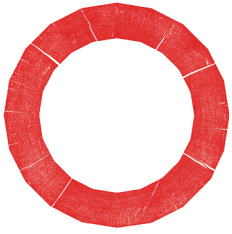


country, really after the Second World War, it kind of tallies with the emergence of gay civil rights. So you see notable performances of the play in the 70s and the 80s which make it clear that that relationship between Edward and Gaveston is what we would understand as a gay male relationship. Edward and Gaveston and Marlowe wouldn't have used the term homosexual or gay, those terms didn't exist. I think the modern sort of staging of Edward and Gaveston's relationship as parallel or equivalent to a modern gay male relationship is the right thing to do, and it's the right thing to do for now.

[Music plays]

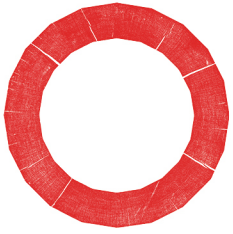
WT: So Christopher Marlowe is completely fascinating. We know a certain amount about Marlowe, so he's born same sort of time as Shakespeare, he's born in Canterbury in Kent. He goes to Cambridge, where he studies for his BA, we know he starts his MA which... but doesn't finish it, and we know he doesn't finish it because there's a letter that's sent to the college from someone very high up in government saying 'Please don't come down on Christopher Marlowe like a ton of bricks because he hasn't been around, because he's been doing important things for us elsewhere'. So he's also kind of working as what we might now call a spy or an intelligencer and he's getting involved in all sorts of interesting and shady things.

Primarily because of *Edward II*, but also because of his verse and his poetry, because of Marlowe's work and because of things that were said about Marlowe by his enemies, such as that he made claims about people who didn't love tobacco and boys being fools, and apparently Marlowe claims that John the Baptist and Christ were bedfellows and sodomites together... Because of all of that, Marlowe is a kind of irresistible subject to as it were, reveal or uncover as someone who's gay. That's



obviously really hard from a distance of 400 years to say yes or no. In a sense it kind of doesn't really matter because clearly Marlowe is engaging with that in his work, clearly he's unphased by it, whether or not he himself was or wasn't what we would now call gay is kind of... he wouldn't use the term but in a sort of off the record non-scholarly way, I think he clearly was! But I also think it doesn't really matter, so if it's possible to kind of have both views at the same time, that's sort of where I'd come down.

He's not alone as a writer who engages with what we would now identify as queer themes. Doesn't necessarily mean they were gay themselves, but they're certainly interested in that part of human psychology, and Shakespeare is an obvious example in the sonnets that he writes, lots of them more or less the same time as *Edward II*, are clearly engaging with same sex intimacy and the majority of the sonnets that get published in 1609, some years later, are sonnets written from a male speaker to a male recipient, and they're deeply, deeply loving, many of them are highly eroticised. I don't that particularly means Shakespeare was gay, but it means he knows what same sex obsession and intimacy and eroticism are, and he sees them as valid topics to explore in art. And in fact, the 1590s, 1580s, 1600s, is kind of a sort of flourishing time for art, poetic art particularly, but also elsewhere visual art that really kind of engages with same sex eroticism. There's a wonderful poet called Richard Barnfield who's writing and publishing in the mid 1590s, who evidently is also in the circle of Marlowe and Shakespeare, although he isn't a dramatist, who writes the most overtly homoerotic verse that's published in English until the 20th century and it's not a question of kind of like carefully reading between the lines and finding a sort of queer... it is outright homoerotically 100% queer. And he's publishing that verse, and he's not publishing it with a kind of apology or caution, he's completely kind of out there with it and I think we slightly have to recalibrate what we think the past was when it comes to art and verse and poetry and literature that



engages with profoundly and kind of arousingly homoerotic themes.

[Poetry Reading]

Matthew Petrucelli:

Scarce had the morning star hid from the light
Heaven's crimson canopy with stars bespangled,
But I began to rue th'unhappy sight
Of that fair boy that had my hard entangled;

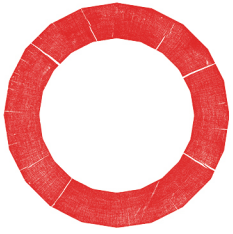
Cursing the time, the place, the sense, the sin;

I came, I saw, I viewed, I slipped in.

If it be sin to love a sweet-faced boy,
(Whose amber locks trussed up in golden trammels
Dangle adown his lovely cheeks with joy,
When pearl and flowers his fair hair enamels).

If it be sin to love a lovely lad,

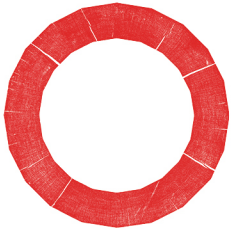
Oh then sin I, for whom my soul is sad.



His ivory-white and alabaster skin
Is stained throughout with rare vermillion red,
Whose twinkling starry lights do never blin
To shine on lovely Venus (beauty's bed),
But as the lily and the blushing rose,
So white and red no him in order grows.

Oh, would she would forsake my Ganymede,
Whose sugared love is full of sweet delight,
Upon whose forehead you may plainly read
Love's pleasure 'graved in ivory tables bright;
In whose fair eyeballs you may clearly see
Base love still stained with foul dignity.

Oh, would to God he would but pity me,
That love him more than any mortal wight;
Then he and I with love would soon agree,



That no cannot abide his suitor's sight.

Oh, would to God (so I might have my fee)

My lips were honey, and thy mouth a bee.

Then shouldst thou suck my sweet and my fair flower

That now is ripe, and full of honey-berries;

Then would I lead thee to my pleasant bower

Filled full of grapes, of mulberries, and cherries;

Then shouldst thou be my wasp or else my bee,

I would thy hive, and thou my honey be.

I would put amber bracelets on thy wrists,

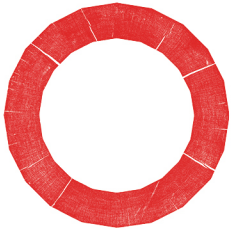
Crownets of pearl about thy naked arms;

And when thou sitt'st at swilling Bacchus' feasts,

My lips with charms should save thee from all harms;

And when in sleep thou tookst thy chiefst pleasure,

Mind eyes should gaze upon thine eyelids'
treasure.



IG: That was 'The Tears of an Affectionate Shepherd Sick for Love, or The Complaint of Daphnis for the Love of Ganymede', by Richard Barnfield, which was published in 1594. It was performed by Matthew Petrucelli.

Seeking out other writing from the early modern period that speaks to these themes, we wanted to bring you a poem by Katherine Philips, a poet who flourished in the 1650s and 60s, who is famous for her poems celebrating love and passionate friendship between women.

[Poetry Reading]

Hadar Busia-Singleton:

'Tis now since I began to die

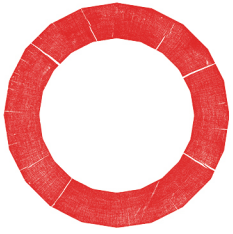
Four months, yet still I gasping live;

Wrapp'd up in sorrow do I lie,

Hoping, yet doubting a reprieve.

Adam from Paradise expell'd

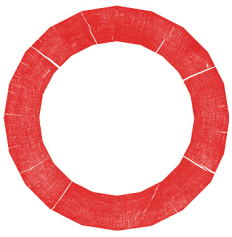
Just such a wretched being held.



'Tis not thy love I fear to lose,
That will in spite of absence hold;
But 'tis the benefit and use
Is lost, as in imprison'd gold:
Which though the sum be ne'er so great,
Enriches nothing but conceit.

What angry star then governs me
That I must feel a double smart,
Prisoner to fate as well as thee;
Kept from thy face, link'd to thy heart?
Because my love all love excels,
Must my grief have no parallels?

Sapless and dead as Winter here
I now remain, and all I see
Copies of my wild state appear,
But I am their epitome.



Love me no more, for I am grown

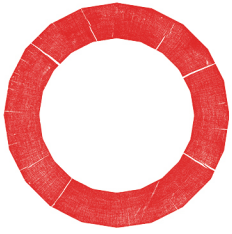
Too dead and dull for thee to own.

IG: That was 'To Mrs M. A., upon absence', by Katherine Philips, published in 1667. It was performed by Hadar Busia-Singleton.

[Music plays]

Also part of the Pride, Then and Now festival is Moll and the Future Kings, a drag king improv cabaret by candlelight, in our very own Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. I sat down with its curator Sarah Grange and drag king Wesley Dykes to chat about Moll Frith, the extraordinary 17th century woman who inspired Moll and the Future Kings. We also chatted about the dialogue around gender then and now and what to expect from an unplugged drag king improv cabaret... other than the unexpected, of course... Here's Sarah to introduce it properly...

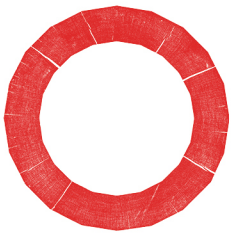
Sarah Grange: It's an hour-long drag king and impro cabaret gig that's happening on the set of *After Edward*, after *After Edward* on the 30th March, and it's like the first stage, for me anyway in thinking about a bigger project which is about the life of Mary Frith, also known as Moll Frith, Moll Cutpurse, Mary Marcombe... what other aliases did she have? Quite a lot! Anyway, so Mary Frith was a cross-dressing criminal and performer who was knocking around in the 17th century, and two guys called Middleton and Dekker wrote a play about her called *The Roaring Girl*, which is a fictionalisation of her life and then at the end of her life, about a year after she died, a kind of biography was published about her which was also kind of a fictionalisation of her life. So she only exists in basically fictions written by men about her, so this is like an attempt to get back to meeting her more on her own terms. So this particular gig is kind of... we're



not gonna try telling her story at this point, because we've only got an hour and it's quite a long story, so it's more like trying to get at the spirit of it by smooshing together some impro and some drag in the kind of spirit of Moll, who might make an appearance if we can kind of resurrect her.

I've been carrying this show round in my head for like 15 years and it just feels like now is the right time for it. It's like really evolved as conversations around gender, performance of gender and all of that have kind of bubbled up for me personally, as well as in the world, so it's kind of been shifting around over those fifteen years, and it just felt like now was the right time, and as luck would have it... I have been working on another thing called Through the Door which is a series of workshops created by Angela Clerkin which are about trying to... I think if you're a woman or a non-binary person, it's quite hard to get space on stage to kind of be there and tell your story. I think particularly from Ange's experience in the impro scene, it's quite hard to like elbow your way through and take up the space and then because you don't get to do it very often, when you do get there, you don't always kind of know what to do with it because you haven't had enough practice. So Ange wanted to run this series of workshops for woman and non-binary people who might just need that bit more confidence or some tools to kind of take up space and tell their stories. So we've been running that so we were like well this goes really well together, so if we run our next kind of term of these workshops, we've already got our team ready to put on stage in March and do like an hour of trying out the stuff that they've been exploring.

And I think what excites me about impro is that it's so much about kind of listening to what's emergent and I think sometimes, if you agree with me... [WD agrees] there are moments when you're kind of in the flow and it does feel like you're just channelling something else, right? [WD agrees] And I think that idea that the ghosts are all present and we're inviting them to

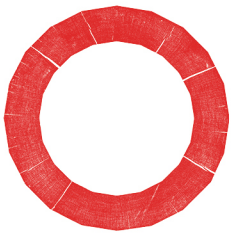


sort of step in and we'll be the medium for it... [WD agrees]... and it allows you, I think especially with the group that we've got who are really diverse in terms of age, performance experience, background, cultural identity and that kind of stuff, gender identity and all of that, means that you've kind of got this really... It's like really fertile and it's really easy for the ghosts to find a space [Wesley agrees], like we're letting them through the door.

For me, I think when you look back at that early modern period, they had this completely different idea of gender, they had a really different relationship to gender and I think, it's not that we're imposing our ideas on gender on the early modern, it's sort of almost like the early modern period... people there have been waiting for us to catch up and come up with the right words [WD agrees] to kind of talk about those experiences so gender for them was a lot more fluid. They had this relationship with clothes as well where they took them very literally, so things like sumptuary laws were that you would literally display what class of person you are by what clothes you wear, and it was the same around gendered clothing, so their clothing is so gendered that they're kind of almost wearing their genitals on the outside, so when you think about cod pieces and what all of that is doing, they've got these very structured clothes, that are really displaying your gender? So if you put on the other gender's clothing, it's almost like having a sex change, like they took it really seriously. So I just think there's a really interesting link with where we're at now in terms of how we're starting to think about gender and where the early modern guys were at, thinking about it and performing it in this very explicit way with their clothing, so there's just loads of fun to be had when you kind of smooch our two...

Wesley Dykes: Things together?

SG: yeah.



WD: Yeah. Of all the contexts under which I thought I would be like revisiting Shakespeare's Globe, this is not quite one I'd every thought of, like being a drag king, putting on a candlelit cabaret show. [Laughs]. But it made me, it made me just feel like there's a lot to play with. Because immediately it just took me back to the last time I was even thinking about Shakespeare which was in secondary school and reading about Othello and like the story of Othello and the characters in it, and how much we delved into it, and also how much we didn't delve into Othello, realistically and like now that I'm older I'm like there's so much more chat to be had on Othello that wasn't had when I was younger? And it just reminded me of like the access points of the Globe, the access points of Shakespeare's work, the access points of English and the limitations of English and where conversations can stop when you like only hear about something through one channel. So it made me quite excited, I would say, that like this is how it's come back around. [Laughs]

SG: For a drag performer, as a space, it's a bit nuts, isn't it? [WD agrees] Cos a lot of the stuff that I think people think when they think of drag, a lot of like lip syncing and stuff like that, and there isn't a sound system...

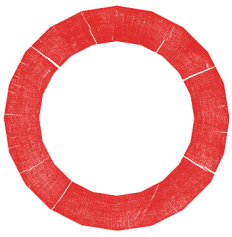
WD: Yeah, exactly.

SG: ... and all of that, so it kind of I guess becomes like a conversation between the space and you, as the king of it.

WD: Yeah [laughs].

SG: The joy of impro is literally anything could happen.

WD: Literally.



SG: Yeah. Are you inventing a new persona for it or are you gonna be Wesley?

WD: I will still be Wesley, but I think Wesley is also like very much exploring how far his persona reaches at the moment. He has this like 'friendly neighbourhood fuckboy' personality, but he also has this like storytelling personality, and so the story personality is coming out with writing a lot more live music and spoken word for him, so I think you're probably going to get storytelling Wesley due to the environment?

SG: Cool.

WD: It's gonna be fun!

SG: Yeah.

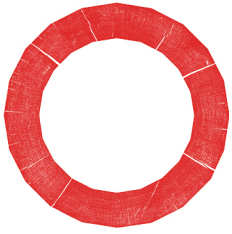
WD: It's gonna be fun. If you have no interest in cabaret, but like theatre, you should still come. You just don't know what you're gonna get!

[Laughs]

[Music plays]

IG: That's it from this week on Such Stuff, but we'll be back soon with more stories from behind the scenes at Shakespeare's Globe.

Edward II runs in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse from 7 February to 20 April. *After Edward* will run from 21 March to 6 April. You can catch *Moll and the Future Kings* in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse on Saturday 30 March at 9 30 pm.



Pride, Then and Now, is part of our series Voices in the Dark, which looks at Shakespeare's transformative impact on the world through an ongoing dialogue, a call and response, between today's artists and Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Look out for more festivals in the Voices in the Dark series coming soon.

The two actors you heard reading poetry by Richard Barnfield and Katherine Philips were Matthew Petrucelli and Hadar Busia-Singleton, two students of Rutgers Conservatory at Shakespeare's Globe. Every year, acting majors from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, come to the Globe for a six-month intensive training programme. They are now in the last week of their course, which culminates in their final shows on the Globe stage next week on Friday 15 and Saturday 16 February at 6:30 pm. They'll be performing two different takes on Measure for Measure – one played by an all-female company and the other cast according to the gender of the original text. To secure your free tickets to one or both of these performances, please email higher.education@shakespearesglobe.com.

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