

Such Stuff podcast
Season 23, Episode 7: Dark Side of the Dream

[Music plays]

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

The summer season is in full swing and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has arrived in the Globe theatre in full technicolour. The irreverent story of lovers, royalty, fairies and actors, crossing paths in a forest outside Athens, is one we come back to again and again, its riotous comedy and lilting poetry bringing midsummer madness to life.

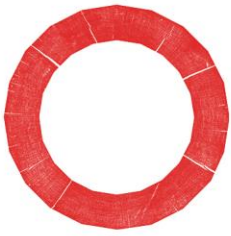
But like all Shakespeare plays, underneath the frothing fun is a dark underbelly: couples turning on each other, marriages forced on unwilling partners, women escaping with real fear for their lives, and woven through it all, the fairy drug that drives them to do things they might not otherwise have done.

There is more than a whiff of misogyny threaded into *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Shakespeare's plays more generally, and with it comes, hand in hand, racism, homophobia, classism and more...

Here's Farah on the problem of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the dark side to that dream...

Farah Karim-Cooper: It's not just misogyny but it's all the other kinds of things like the sort of racial elements of Shakespeare's plays, you know, if we're going to be intersectional that this play in particular talks about changing a dove for a raven and uses racially charged language in the scenes in the forest and what I love about our production is our company have really dealt with that and have confronted that.

So I think, you could say, the misogyny, the racism in Shakespeare is an issue. It's an issue because we in the 21st century want to keep teaching Shakespeare, we want to keep performing



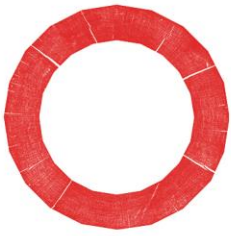
Shakespeare and increasingly audiences, students are saying: why? There's other people we should be studying, right? People that speak to me and to my identity. So actually I think it's important to highlight the misogyny and the racism in Shakespeare as a site upon which to continue discussing Shakespeare and continue performing Shakespeare. That is what will keep Shakespeare alive, is confronting those elements rather than editing them out or trying to make them more palatable so that we can somehow lie to people and say Shakespeare was the perfect God who is universal and appeals to everybody, because he doesn't! And our job is to say to people why we should keep doing Shakespeare and it doesn't have to be because he can teach us how to be good humans [laughs]. It could be because, actually, we can learn how to be good humans if we contest what's in the plays. And you can detest it if you want to. But having an ongoing dialogue and confrontation with the work is actually the best way to engage with the plays.

Directors, often they need to land on some kind of... not necessarily solution, but some kind of attitude. Because if you've got a comedy like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you've gotta make people laugh otherwise the practicalities of theatre, which Shakespeare knew too, being a theatre-man are that you've gotta get bums on seats and you gotta make people have a good time. And you're in the summer, and you're in the Globe and the weather is good and the drinks are being served and there's bunting everywhere and you gotta have a good time. But I think you can achieve that whilst still saying this is tricky.

IG: So this week on the podcast, we'll be asking: what's the dark side to Shakespeare's comedies? Is Shakespeare misogynistic? And as 21st century theatre-goers, what do we make of the misogyny in Shakespeare?

[Music plays]

IG: First up, me and Farah sat down to talk around some of the issues of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and how the women of the play find themselves lured, trapped and silenced.



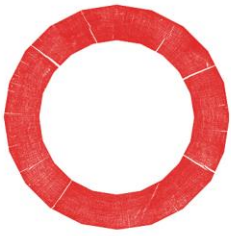
IG: So, to start off... do you think Shakespeare is a misogynist?

FKC: [Laughs] Do I think Shakespeare is a misogynist?

Well I would say sometimes Shakespeare wants you to think he's a misogynist. But I think it's very dangerous to try and take too much of a biographical view because there's such a plurality of opinions expressed in Shakespeare's work that it's really hard to say 'Oh, Shakespeare was a misogynist' because then you could say 'Oh, Shakespeare was a murderer!' [Laughs] Or 'Shakespeare was a racist' or you know. Because there are characters that express every kind of opinion that ever existed. So it's difficult. I think actually, if I was asked, you're gonna lose your life if you don't answer this question, then I'd say probably not. And the reason I would say that is because he writes female characters in a way that is insightful and hopeful or optimistic. So it's almost as though he can imagine a time in which women could lead, or be heard by a collective and so I think it's a live question and I think it would produce a lot of interesting discussion in a classroom or in a rehearsal room because there are things that you can point to in his texts... like if you look at *The Taming of the Shrew*, the sort of stereotypes that were around at the time about women, and certainly around now, about women being too vocal and loud and expressing opinions in a particular way and aggressive and needing to be tamed, as it were. That kind of perception still exists. Yes, you can certainly point to moments in the text where it appears Shakespeare is advocating a misogynistic philosophy but actually what he's doing is he's showing you the reality of human relationships. And the reality of his time and our own is women are viewed by too many to be second-class citizens. And when they try to step out of that mould, it causes trouble.

IG: So let's talk briefly about *Dream*, which is currently showing. You know, *Dream* is so often performed as like the big summer play, it's bright and it's frothy and there's loads going on...

FKC: [Laughs]

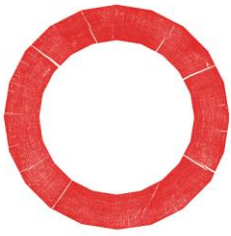


IG: ... but it's also really dark. What are the elements of Dream that really trouble you?

FKC: I guess the elements of Dream that trouble me are... one main element, which is if you think about Dream from the perspective of the women in the play... I remember attending a lecture, years ago by an eminent Shakespeare scholar who was saying that Dream has such a high aesthetic quality, that it's a beautiful play to listen to and to watch and to experience and I remember thinking, well not if you're Hermia or if you're Titania when she wakes up. So it feels as though that play has a sort of underbelly of experience, which is predominantly the female experience.

So Hermia is told at the beginning that she cannot choose her life, she can't be with the man that she loves. If she goes the way her father says she's not allowed to, then she either has to join a convent or she will be killed. So the law, the patriarchal law is if you don't listen to your father and do as he's told you will suffer the worst consequence. And so she has to run away and when she's in the woods, she becomes disconnected and disorientated from the reasons she went into the woods. She experiences a nightmare, she wakes up from a nightmare and finds that her lover is missing. And so that experience is one of fear and the woods in Shakespeare's time was not just a place that, you know, As You Like It would have it, which is a place for community and rural play. It is also a very frightening world, so let's think about the woods in Titus Andronicus, is where the worst rape and mutilation in Shakespeare's work occurs. And so Shakespeare is alluding to all of these different meanings of the woods and it can be a very scary place for a woman.

Helena's situation is she finds herself rejected and in a position she shouldn't be rejected because she represents the ideal of beauty that's been dictated by society for generations and so she cannot understand why she's not appealing. And so she finds herself in pursuit of love and that she feels degraded by that, she feels



shamed by that but she can't stop herself. And then when there's a sense that both of these lovers are in love with her, she becomes... her self loathing goes into high gear and she doesn't believe them for a second.

So Shakespeare gives you women who are afraid because of the circumstances that they're in, he gives you women who express that gut level self-loathing that is innate to the female condition because society has created a world where you have to feel inadequate and to know your place.

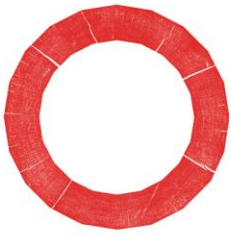
If you think about Titania for example, she is the fairy queen, right? She has power, she has authority and that is immediately taken away from her because of this flower, this drug. So Oberon goes to really uncomfortable levels in order to get what he wants, you know he dominates her, he tames her, he's another Petruchio in many ways.

And then when the play opens it opens with Theseus and Hippolyta and if you know this story, the classic story of Theseus and Hippolyta, she was Queen of the Amazons and she was dominated by Theseus, she was conquered and there's all kinds of narratives around her being raped by him and kidnapped by him and Shakespeare starts the play with that myth as a kind of ghost haunting the world of the play and so he wants you to think about how women are subjugated by men and how power in women can be so easily taken away.

So that world is happening in the underbelly of the play and it's deeply, deeply unsettling.

IG: When we take that ending of the play and the three marriages and everyone coming back together... is that an uncomfortable silencing of women? Is that some sort of community between the women in their shared experience?

FKC: Well if you think about Hermia and Helena, they get what they want, don't they? But if I was Helena, I would be wondering hmmm



when's that juice gonna wear off? You know, it's a little bit destabilizing. And I think Shakespeare does that deliberately. At the end of most of his comedies, when you end with triple or double marriages, it's always, Shakespeare's always asking you to think about why people get married and what the purpose of marriage is and I think we are meant to feel slightly uncomfortable with that final arrangement.

And certainly with Hippolyta and Theseus, and it very much depends upon how Hippolyta is played. Some actresses play Hippolyta as deeply in love with Theseus and really there and present in the nuptials and some play her as having to be wooed again or as being scornful or feeling as though she is actually in a... I suppose, tyrannical situation in which she does not want to be there, but she has to be.

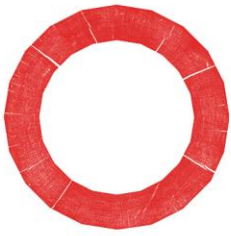
So much of that nuance that's in the ending is something that can be determined by a director and her company of actors as it were. I guess the play is trying to give you a sense of community at the end and certainly when they're watching a play within a play, Shakespeare says 'Nothing unites people as well as theatre does'. But yeah, I think we are meant to feel a little unsettled at that ending.

[Music plays]

IG: Next up, I sat down with Jocelyn Jee Esien and Nadine Higgin – who play Bottom and Peter Quince in our production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – to talk about misogyny and racism in Shakespeare, why now is the moment for women of colour to take on these roles... and whether Shakespeare was actually ahead of his time.

IG: Do you think *Dream* is a misogynistic play?

Jocelyn Jee Esien: [Laughs] Straight in there.



Nadine Higgin: Yeah. There's definitely elements. I think it's definitely heavily male populated, a lot of the time in scenes females are quiet and silenced with decisions being made about them and for them around them, with them not really having a say. Bar Hermia.

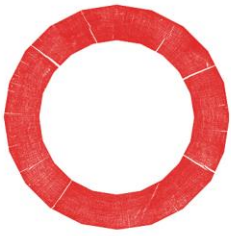
JJE: It's definitely of a time, isn't it? And I think it's even more prevalent... I just wanted to say that word. Who knows what it means, but let's just put it in. [Laughter] It's more prevalent or as the French say... prevalent... [Laughter]... of the time now where like you know, I suppose in the script it has moments of saying, you know, marry this guy or you die. Either die or a join a nunnery. And there's lots of those lines in Shakespeare, so a lot of Shakespeare is actually quite misogynistic [Laughs]. But these days, now, there's sort of like a tongue in cheek about it, I think is the way we're getting around it. But so much of Shakespeare is... there's so much of the man coming to save the women and...

NH: But something that I... and this might be just looking at it from the other side which I do a lot... something I sometimes wonder is... I feel like Shakespeare was aware of what he was doing and was almost doing it so obviously to point the finger at society. And there's obviously... I mean, I wish I could be like 'Hey, mate, Shakespeare, tell me your views'. But totally guessing and looking at it, there is a part of me that feels or maybe just wants to think that...

JJE: You're hoping that that's true.

NH: Yeah, that he was actually... 'cause I think he's really ahead of his time and it would be really nice to think that he was being so openly obvious about the settings that it was more of a 'this is what you guys are doing' as opposed to 'this is how I feel'. That might just be me.

JJE: Or Shakespeare's just a sexist, racist, homophobe and we don't wanna think that...



NH: That is very, very possible.

[Laughter]

JJE: 'Cause there's lots of stuff in the play as well about race as well so...

NH: It is definitely a direct reflection of the times that he was working on, I just would like to think as a creative mind he was aware of this and used his platform to spread awareness...

JJE: Let's go with that, let's go with that.

NH: Is that me being too hopeful?

JJE: No, let's because... people just don't wanna think that of Shakespeare and like I say, we don't know, but in a way maybe he was that person because when you look at some of his sonnets as well, there are... I mean I suppose I'm going back to race and stuff. When you look at the both of those, there's sort of like a juxtaposition... you know, I'm liking these words, d'you know what I mean? Who knows what they mean? [Laughter] You know? Let's just try and get it in, come on. I might even put in a bit of discombobulation.

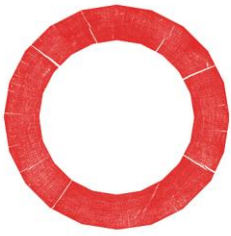
NH: Right? [Laughs]

JJE: You know! I mean come on now. Come on! What does it mean? [Laughs]

NH: This is literally what it's like working with her every day [Laughs]

JJE: But like beauty was seen as like fair, light etc. Even just, not just dark skin but dark hair, dark eyes was evil, was...

NH: Yeah generally like darkness was always the bad.



JJE: It is. But then Shakespeare has these sonnets to the dark lady, saying they're like someone that he... which was definitely a black woman that he was writing this sonnet to. You know so it's... maybe he's just...

NH: Gwarn Shakespeare...

JJE: ... he's just ahead of his time...

NH: Get in William.

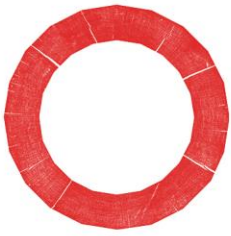
JJE: The original male Kardashian, [Laughter] loving a bit of chocolate, innit, Shakespeare, eh? Maybe his middle name was Kardashian.

NH: [Laughs] I love that, I love that!

IG: So you both play characters in the play who are traditionally played by men and it's never really mentioned...

NH: When I first got the role, I was thinking that we'd have to be so aware of calling each other she instead of he. It's not in the script you know? Apart from people saying Peter Quince when they first come up and you know, we're assuming that the name Peter is male. Other than that, it's never been an issue. It's never been- it's not referred to within the text, because we've not cut it out, it's just not been there. So I don't actually think it makes a difference at all.

The only one that I think actually makes an obvious visual difference is playing Egeus. You know, she's spoken about or he's spoken about as the father, and obviously what we were talking about before with the women being put on trial and silenced, I do sometimes feel like there's that weird tilt of the scale because actually I am playing a man but I am physically there a woman who has got a very big voice in that scene. As a woman playing the role I found a weird, crazy level of strength and power? Now I don't know what that means or what that says, but I had this funny thing of when I was first trying to find who Egeus was, and then I started



literally leading... with my dick. [Laughs] Literally, when I was walking... do you remember that day?

JJE: Yeah, yeah.

NH: And I was just a bit like 'How would he walk?' And I just... Yeah like it was a weird, sort of pelvis power that came when I realised that I was allowed... and that came when I realised that I was a man, and what does that say about me, everything I stand for?

JJE: That there's something you wanna tell us...

NH: [Laughs]

JJE: But it does, it just works, it just works and we don't even think about it, like playing Quince and Bottom, because I mean we're like flirting with men, we're flirting with women in the audience.

NH: Yeah, we're just free.

JJE: We're all up in the bizzle.

NH: I would say that we're definitely females but we're just free.

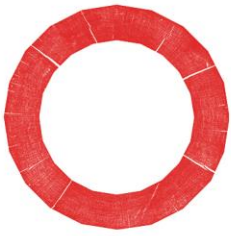
JJE: I think the audience see us as females but we're not really just playing females, we're sort of just playing...

NH: We're just the characters...

JJE: ... the part

NH: I think it's the best way that it came in as well, and there was never a moment where we thought 'Oooh hang on a minute, I'm a bloke'.

JJE: Now, people just want to see this on stage with no explanation, no apology, just this is it and they all accept it.



NH: The seamless way that it goes as well, it makes you realise that if you're just telling the truth and telling the story, it doesn't matter what's going on and I think that is what, no matter what we've done and how crazy we've gone, we're always telling the truth and telling the story.

JJE: Yeah... connect with them, make them understand, make them laugh, make them feel something, that's all they want.

NH: [Laughs] And when that fails just pretend to roar...

JJE: Yes, yes [laughs]

NH: And crawl up a pillar [laughs]

JJE: Or snog! Snog the nearest person next to you, they love a snog don't they. They're just cheering for the snogs. [Laughter] I mean, what is this at the Globe? Just snogs!

NH: Just snogs!

[Kissing sounds]

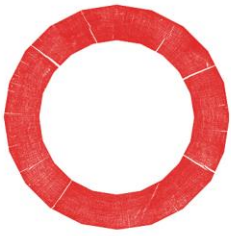
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IG: I wanted to ask a bit about comedy... it's such a funny show, like it's such an old and bad cliché that women aren't funny and that women can't play funny roles. And cross-gender casting is like everywhere, but you don't see it as much in funny roles.

NH: Yeah, you're right. Again, just bigging up man like Sean, Sean Holmes, director... he just doesn't...

JJE: Please employ us again.

NH: Please employ us again. [Coughs] Soon. He doesn't actually see any of that- does he? He just. He's one of those rare gems in this world that just sees people, who they are, what their talent is,



what he thinks they can do and will just put them in a role. Like I would never have seen myself in Quince and the fact that we went into that rehearsal room and he was just like 'no, because it's you, it's what you've already given me' which then gave me the freedom to then just be... It didn't have any restraint or restrictions. And I think it's that thing of... if there's representation, if it's seen, people will dig it. It's the fear of the unknown at the end of the day. Once it's done, people don't question.

JJE: Yeah. See I'm the opposite. I didn't know how much I really wanted to play Bottom until I was given the opportunity. It's the best role I've ever played in my life!

NH: Mmmhmmm.

JJE: But you know, you just, you just need someone like Sean who like you say, who just sees, actually this role is like that 'blah blah blah' and it could be a man or woman, black or white, short, tall whatever. But like, having that opportunity, oh it's like I never thought that I really wanted to play Bottom until I played Bottom. You know of the role because it's iconic, it's like one of the most iconic comedic Shakespeare roles but never seen myself in it until I had this opportunity. It's like this is the role that I've been dying to play but I didn't know it.

NH: It makes so much sense. It's so you.

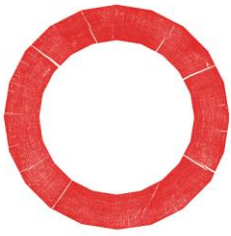
JJE: And now I'm here playing it.

NH: It's so you. Day one in rehearsals, it just made sense.

JJE: Until you get these opportunities and you know, this is the time.

NH: It is the time.

JJE: In a way I just feel like where else can you go? I think enough men have played this role so it's like, it's time to... where d'you...?



NH: It's boring.

JJE: Yeah, where d'you go?

NH: Move on, move forward.

JJE: And it's women of colour as well...

NH: Yeah it's so many different levels.

JJE: There's loads of us on stage. And it's what he's written. It's like for years we've always seen the female lovers, like you know whether it's Hermia, Helena, Juliet, Miranda, you know, they're always these weak characters.

NH: All dainty!

JJE: But Shakespeare doesn't write weak characters. But for years, for centuries, it's always been... no one wants to play those roles unless you're like...

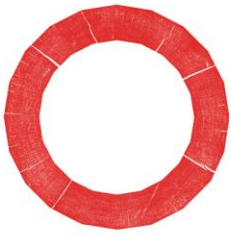
NH: Look at Hermia and Helena's text, it's fighting text! And I'd never actually noticed that or paid attention to that until I heard Amanda and Faith say it.

JJE: People are coming in going 'Hermia's my idol', 'cause she's this feisty... she's never usually this feisty, but what Faith is doing with her, little girls are going I wanna be Hermia. That's just, it's so, it's just touching.

NH: It's way touching.

JJE: [laughs]

IG: So having done the show for a while, and having had this conversation, do you still think Shakespeare is misogynistic? If so, does it matter?



JJE: It's down to interpretation. Also I think maybe a lot of the directors have been misogynistic, maybe that's what it's about, or some of the actors have been because if you get certain actors who are used to it being played in a certain way and you always get those actors in those roles, nothing changes and it just takes one director or different kind of cast to come and give another angle.

NH: I think if you look at, which you shouldn't do with anything in my opinion, but if you look at it very black and white, surface level, that's how it reads and that's how it seems. But again I do think that he has put his hidden under layers in there, and it just takes someone to actually break through that to realise, oh you know, the women in it- it's fighting talk from those girls, fighting talk, the whole way through. You can't ignore sometimes what's been written and how it's written, I just feel like there's a deeper level and meaning to it all than sometimes people have hit.

JJE: But it's of a time as well, isn't it? Whenever you're doing it, we have this duty to make it relatable to now.

NH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JJE: Even moments in the play, you go if we just skim over that, the audience are going to be really frustrated with us.

NH: And actually things are still so relevant.

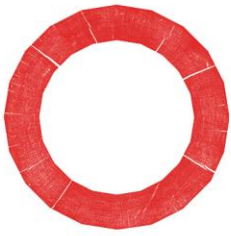
JJE: Yeah. Shakespeare was a black, gay, woman. That's my statement.

NH: [Laughs].

JJE: And I stand by it, right? [Laughter] And if anyone's got a problem with that, that's fine...

NH: [Laughs]

JJE: I take it back and say I didn't mean it like that. All right?



NH: [Laughs] That's a strong statement, just take it back, just take it back.

NH: I see what you mean though, I think he was definitely a champion, I think he was a secret champion and I think if he lived in a different time, he would have probably voiced things more openly. At the end of the day, he still had to put on his plays...

JJE: Yeah yeah, without getting killed, yeah.

NH: ...and do his job and make some dollar so we have to give him a, you know, but I definitely think he was a champion of work. I feel like he was- he is very outspoken for what we're used to of the time.

JJE: I mean obviously black people were there. Because people used to think that black people just arrived in the 70s on skates.

NH: Oh my god!

JJE: But [laughs] black people were there, it's just that we never... what role did they play? Were they in the theatre, did they play any roles? Because every time it's mentioned you think, well if he keeps mentioned dark this and black that and the moor! I mean you look at Othello, thinking where did he get all of that from?

NH: Yeah there had to be a point of reference.

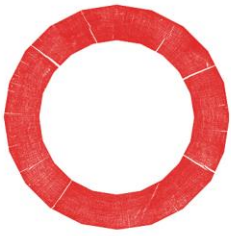
JJE: He must have seen a black person! [laughs]

NH: Oh 100%, 100%

JJE: D'you know what I mean?

NH: Yeah yeah yeah. I think that...

JJE: And the best role in Othello is Iago.



NH: I feel like the characters... [laughs]

JJE: Sorry, just put that in, d'you know what I mean? So you need a black actor. [Laughter] We'll know it's equality when the black actor whites up and plays Iago.

NH: [Laughs]

Um, I definitely feel like the characters existed when it comes to the misogyny.

JJE: I mean I like to think Shakespeare was writing specifically about particular people, whether it was race... but it's just that we've never seen them. So I'm thinking like Hermia, it's definitely in the text that she's dark. But I think over time they just thought just make her brunette, he's talking about her hair, isn't he?

NH: 'Cause 'You Ethiopie' is a very... a very strong statement. It's not 'you semi-tanned person that's possibly from Spain'. It is 'You Ethiopie'. That is full on dark, African...

JJE: So was it then played by a black man? [Laughs]

NH: I mean I'd love that but I doubt it highly.

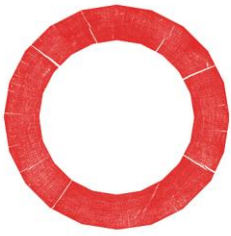
JJE: An ancestor of Lenny Henry...

NH: [Laughs]

JJE: ... was playing Hermia [Laughs].

NH: It could have just been Lenny Henry himself. He's been around forever! [Laughs]

JJE: Yeah he never dies. Lenny? Did you play Hermia back in the 15th century, babes?



[Laughter]

JJE: Here's Lenny!

NH: Lenny would be like 'Yup, yup, I did, yeah!'

JJE: I don't know, yeah, I mean there is this gap, isn't there- there is this gap where you go there must have been! Let's just assume Shakespeare knew but then his work has been crushed and redefined and origami-ed.

NH: But I do feel that that has happened!

JJE: Yeah yeah yeah.

NH: I do feel that's happened anyway!

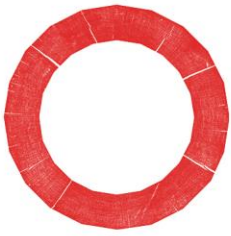
JJE: Isn't it a shame if you go, he was writing about us and then as time's gone on, we were all erased. So let's just live in hope and say, he was intentionally writing for women and writing about women...

NH: He was an activist.

JJE: ... and different races and yeah.

[Music plays]

IG: Finally, I caught up with Isabel Marr, assistant director for this summer's Globe Tour. The tour ensemble is taking *Pericles*, *Twelfth Night* and *A Comedy of Errors* on the road, and each night, it's up to the audience to decide which one they want to see. As they head back home for a glorious return to the Globe theatre, I chatted to Isabel about how you deal with these really knotty, problematic turns in Shakespeare as a director, and in particular the extra pressure on young, female directors when it comes to the unsolvable problem of misogyny in Shakespeare...



IG: So, not to put you on the spot but to jump in the deep end...

Isabel Marr: Yeah

IG: ...Do you think Shakespeare's a misogynist

IM: Ooh- obviously in the context of our modern society he's a massive misogynist. I think, what's the statistic, something like 16% of his characters are women and all the rest are men. You know most of his strong female characters either only really get taken seriously either when they're dressed up as men and as soon as they come out their disguise they kind of go silent and are ignored again, or they end up killing themselves, or they get married off to someone they don't necessarily feel anything towards or let alone love. But obviously, we need to think about him in the context of when he was writing, I think, for his time he was actually compared to a lot of his contemporaries incredibly ahead of his time. If you look at some of his characters I think he definitely was quite radical in sort of subverting that idea that women should just stay at home and shouldn't sort of think for themselves and certainly shouldn't do anything that men do.

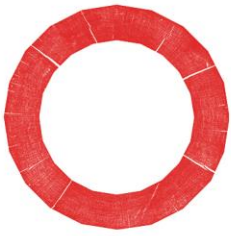
IG: Particularly the Comedies are often seen as like these sort of frothy light summer shows...

IM: Yeah

IG: ...And they're really dark sometimes

IM: Yeah

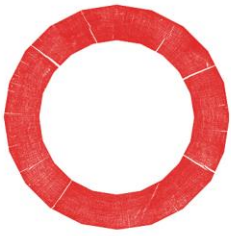
IG: As a director what do you do with some of those sort of really knotty problematic things in Shakespeare plays especially shows where you're literally telling people that they're going into a comedy.



IM: Haha, yeah. I mean, I, it's just a matter of personal taste but I personally don't really believe in sort of changing or editing them too much to avoid these things. I think not just with regards to misogyny, but also you know in terms of, racism, homophobia and classism and all sorts. I think if you edit that ugly stuff out of Shakespeare and you shy away from it then you've literally got nothing left, so I think, and particularly you know with misogyny there's so much of it embedded in all the plays, as you say especially some of the comedies, that if you take that out why are we telling these stories at all.

IG: So if you, if you were asked to do a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, would you do it?

IM: Yeah, yeah, I think the whole, I the whole point is to sort of shine a light upon these plays and these issues. I don't think it's our job to tell the audience, you know, this is what you should think of this play. I think it's up to the audience to take what they will from it. I mean the whole Me Too movement came about right from people speaking up and telling these stories so surely by editing these plays you're not doing the ones that are really problematic or not really helping the situation because you know these same kind of things are still going on today, these like, these plays, these stories are so prevalent that if you just kind of say 'oh no that makes me feel too uncomfortable' or 'that's too tricky', it doesn't really help anyone. I think a massive thing is casting, I'm a big believer in sort of cross-gender casting... not always just every woman playing a man and every man playing a woman... and not just doing it for the sake of doing it sort of as a gimmick. But I think, for a certain characters it can be incredibly helpful in terms of when you've got the really thorny problematic speeches and lines, like we're doing *Twelfth Night* on the tour at the minute certain lines that both Viola and Orsino have 'Our frailty is the cause, not we, for such are we made of such we be' there's something about seeing someone of the opposite gender saying those words that sort of creates a distance between like the actor and the character and it sort of jars, so the audience don't necessarily take it as read, and I don't think you need to edit it and I don't think you don't even need to say in a



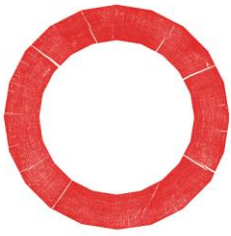
particularly kind of jokey or sarcastic way, or don't need to kind of force your own message or agenda on it but I think just by having someone of the opposite gender say some of those really tricky things can be enough.

IG: What do you think is the worst instance of misogyny in Shakespeare? I mean the Shrew's an obvious one...

IM: ...I mean yeah Shrew is an obvious one.

IG: What's the one that really gets you?

IM: Oh God that's so difficult. I mean, Measure's [Measure for Measure] an obvious one as well. I think Shrew and Measure are the two most problematic ones, but I think pretty much every play has something very problematic. I think sometimes when it really bothers me is when it seems to be doing quite well, and it seems to be a kind of, relatively, compared to his other plays, relatively feminist play, like you know just in terms of the ones I'm doing at the minute like in Twelfth Night we actually have Viola being played by a man... but as a female character you think oh she's incredibly sort of complex and nuanced and quite progressive and she's a, she's dressed up as a man and she's been stranded in this land where she doesn't know anyone and she's of a very high status but she's having to dress up as a servant for survival and she's fallen in love with for the first time, and, and yet she's not able to tell the man she loves because she needs to- she needs to survive, and she's this quite sort of powerful women who we are all rooting for and who is this incredible survivor. And then eh, right at the end before she is revealed to be a woman and she tells Orsino and Orsino says- oh marvelous I love you to, let's get married, hooray, it's marvelous- she suddenly just goes silent she sort of doesn't speak for the last few pages of the play. So I think it's also instances like that where you think oh we were doing so well and then it's kind of like right at the end as soon as there we get to the point where we think this could have a really sort of promising positive feminist outlook everything's kind of tied up in a nice sort like neat misogynistic bow at the end and there kind of like put back in their place, as like oh



well you're a woman now so you'll have to just be married off and be the wife and the mother again.

IG: Do you think that's like a, it's, it's incredibly irritating as an audience member, but do you think there's part of that that's a bit of a like wink wink nudge nudge from Shakespeare as a writer?

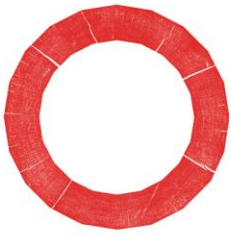
IM: It's, it's really hard to know I think it's definitely sometimes played like that and, and I sometimes like to- like to sort of direct it a bit like that as well. But it's, it's kind of really hard to know the times when I think yeah he must, I mean even in Shrew that final speech so many people think it, it is a bit, it's sort of said ironically but at the same time there's so much to sort of casual sexism littered throughout these plays as well that it's, that then I think ooh I don't know how he can write that and at the same time be. I mean I think, I think, he honestly, he, he was incredibly ahead of his time and he was quite feminist for his time, I'm not sure that he was that far ahead that he was doing the wink wink nudge nudge, I really like to think that he was. But I think it's fine that we do sometimes impose that on these plays, I don't think that's a bad thing. I think sometimes even if we don't impose them on the plays I think sometimes the audience will just interpret them to be that way, to have wink wink nudge nudge and I think that's fine because as I've said it's all about what, what the audience want, how the audience want to interpret it really.

IG: Podcast listeners Issy just went to me [gestures]

IM: Ha wink wink nudge nudge

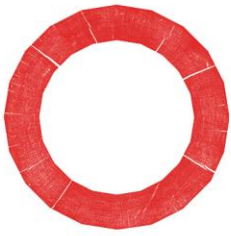
IG: Do you feel like as a, as a sort of younger woman working in the industry there is a sort of a pressure on you in a way that there isn't to older, or more established men to sort of solve these elements of the play and to sort of bring a feminist version of something which is in its essence not born of that movement?

IM: Yeah, definitely, I do. I don't personally feel the need to solve them, there definitely is a pressure as a young female director



within the industry nowadays to do that. But I don't think we need to solve these plays as such but what I think we need to do is recognise the many different levels of misogyny within both the plays and the reflection of the society in which the play was written, but also in terms of our society today and also the theatre industry today and sort of try and subvert some of those sort of power structures, in a way. First you by having more women involved in these plays in terms of all the creatives and in terms of having more, having more female actors, and secondly just, I don't, I think there's, there's ways you can highlight some of the thornier issues in the play without actually having to edit them. So for example in Pericles, we're doing Pericles on the tour at the minute, Marina Pericles' daughter has an incredibly tough time she's separated from her parents at birth, her mother dies during child birth, she's sort of adopted by another couple who try to murder her and then she gets kidnapped by pirates and gets sold for prostitution. But she's actually sort of incredibly powerful, she's a survivor, she manages to escape this brothel that she's been sold into, so she's a character we're sort of really rooting for. And right at the end of the play she's reunited with Pericles, and they have this wonderful emotional scene, then she's reunited with her mother and again incredibly sort of lovely and emotional and then everything's sort of tied in a nice bow. And then it's just announced that she's gonna be married off to this man who she met when he came into the brothel and she was working as a prostitute and he had, he was trying to have sex with her in exchange for money, and she doesn't have any lines after that happens and obviously any director, like, can recognise the misogyny in something like *The Taming of the Shrew*, the like really obvious things that people are still talking about but smaller moments like that I think sometimes might just be brushed over. And so I don't think you need to add in another lines or sort of edit it, but I think just by virtue of having a- a strong powerful female women play that part which we do she can literally just sort of give a look to the audience and react in a certain way that can just sort of shine a light on those moments that might sometimes be brushed over.

IG: You mentioned Me Too, do you feel like the conversation



around classical texts and Shakespeare and misogyny has moved on since all of that's happened?

IM: What, moved on in the sense of...

IG: Firstly, is it being spoken about more? Is it more like explicitly acknowledged? And also, like you were saying, it's also about like not just taking a text as it is there's years of performance history and theatre history that goes behind each play as well. Do you feel like those conversations are being had more? And do you feel more able to have those conversations?

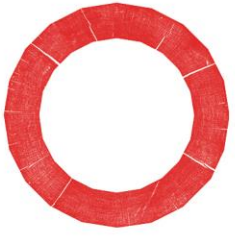
IM: Yeah, definitely. For me I feel like the biggest thing it's done is shown sort of, I mean it's obviously shown how far we have to go and so in terms of my approach, which as I said is not necessarily solving the play myself but letting the audience sort of take- take what they will from it, I think it's more changed the audience and how they receive the play. I think before Me Too obviously not so much with women but some of the male audience members perhaps might have seen these societies that are being depicted as more distant from our own than they now do, so I think it kind of makes these plays feel a little bit closer to home.

[Music plays]

IG: That's it from us but you can catch A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Globe Theatre until 13th October. Audience Choice will be back in the Globe Theatre from 17th to 24th of August for five performances only, when it will be up to you the audience to vote on which play you'd like to see- Pericles, Twelfth Night or The Comedy of Errors.

You've been listening to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg, and Dr Farah Karim-Cooper.

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