

Transcript of Events from
“Much Ado about Shakespeare in Contemporary America”

1. Panel Discussion on Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s production of *Much Ado About Nothing*
2. Lecture, “Hollywood’s Debt to Shakespeare”
3. Summing up Session
4. Concluding Remarks

Sponsored by Shakespeare America

May 2, 2015

Meese Auditorium

Southern Oregon University

9:00-5:00 PM

1. Panel Discussion on Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s production of *Much Ado About Nothing* (dir. Lileana Blain-Cruz)

Moderator: David McCandless, Director of Shakespeare Studies, SOU

Participants:

Leah Anderson, Actor (Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*), Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Evelyn Gajowski, Professor of English, University of Nevada

Lydia Garcia, Literary Associate, Oregon Shakespeare Festival (production dramaturg, *Much Ado About Nothing*)

Lydia Garcia:

Hi, everybody! First of all: welcome. Thank you for sacrificing a gorgeous Saturday afternoon to sit in here and talk about Shakespeare, of all things! Who are you people? So, absolutely: what is American about our production of *Much Ado About Nothing*? I think it cannot help but be American, just in the fact that we are doing it in the United States and we have a cast of actors who are predominantly American, who speak English not as Shakespeare’s society spoke it, but the way that we do -- I think it’s in the cadences of our language. It’s certainly in our choice to set it in a contemporary setting. We never come out and say that we are in America, but I think -- for those of you who saw the production -- from the way that the characters are costumed, the way that the

soldiers are dressed when they first come in (very much an American silhouette) to what kind of music that you hear in our world in *Much Ado* – I think it's pretty clear that we are in our own society. This is actually my second time dramaturging *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. My very first season here (2009), I dramaturged the production that was outdoors in the Elizabethan theater. Did any of you have a chance to see that production? [*Audience hands raise*] Fantastic. That was a very different take on *Much Ado*. For that one, the director (Kate Buckley) was interested in setting it not in our time, but in a time in the past. So that production was set in Sicily, 1945. As such, the choices that we made for that production was[sic] about setting it in that time and in that place.

I think for this production Lileana and I, in our conversations, she and I, we weren't interested so much about finding a one-to-one equivalent for whatever the civil war is and Don Pedro and his men are coming back from, but about setting this story in our time, in our place right now and seeing what is still the same, what has changed -- and it was interesting that as we worked on the piece to discover, disgustingly, how much is still the same. I think the presentation you just saw in this very youthful adaptation helped to bring that to the forefront. I think that's kind of what we were doing.

David McCandless:

In mentioning -- I'm aware that I don't have a mic. In mentioning the presentation -- [*Garcia offers him a mic*] No, that's fine --

Audience:

[*Various requests that he use the mic*]

McCandless:

"Please use it" -- wow. What a commentary on my poor elocution and projection!

Talking about the last presentation and thinking about this morning-- I know many of you were there this morning and we talked about -- among other things -- the fact that taking this play and setting it in a very contemporary time and place, that some of the issues that for Shakespeare's audience might have been relatively unprovocative suddenly become extremely problematic and have contemporary resonances that are very painful and unpleasant. With that in mind, and having just seen a recontextualizing of the story through youth transmedia culture and the phenomenon of slut shaming, I want to ask Leah [Anderson]: taking on Hero in a very contemporary production to what extent you were encouraged to explore the contemporary nature of that time and place -- did you feel that you were hamstrung by the role as originally

written or did you feel like you had freedom to give us a very contemporary version of the character that might not be quite so limiting?

Leah Anderson:

It's interesting because I feel that this production is actually quite true to the way Hero was written, because she doesn't actually have a lot of text. For example: when she's speaking of Claudio, she -- first of all -- never once said that she loves him. Not once. The closest she gets is that she calls him "my dear Claudio" in the (*inaudible*) scene. And then at the end, after she has been falsely accused in the wedding scene, and after the Friar and her father concoct this plan on their own, she doesn't say anything to this plan (to have her pretend that she's dead and then come out masked at the end). When she is revealed, she again does not say that she loves Claudio. She does not say that she forgives Claudio. She has four lines. She says, "And when I lived, I was your other wife, and when you loved, you were my other husband" and she says "one Hero died defiled, but I do live, and surely as I live, I am a maid." I wasn't that familiar with this play before working on it--I'd never seen it. I had only read it. And the fact that you should play this momentous occasion of forgiveness and that everything goes back to normal seems to me just a matter of tradition, and not really a matter of what's in the text. It's most difficult, I think, for people who have to respond to Hero's situation, rather than for me. Because for me, the ending in our production is so true and so understandable on my part. I think it's especially hard for our Beatrice, because she has no text to deal with the fact that Hero would not be happy, and that Hero may not have come to a place of immediate forgiveness where everything's gone back to normal. It was very difficult for her to be in her place of celebration, and her love has ended successfully, and to have to deal with this person she loves very much maybe not being in a safe space. But for me, it wasn't really difficult at all, not difficult at all.

Evelyn Gajowski:

I have a question for both of you. I was surprised by--

Audience Member:

Lean into the mic, please.

Gajowski:

Can you hear me?

Audience:

Yes.

Gajowski:

I was surprised by the ending -- by Claudio and Hero last night going their separate ways. I looked down for something, to get a drink of water, and they weren't dancing together [*drowned out by audience laughter*] like everybody else and I thought, "Whoa!" This, of course, analogs in contemporary criticism and contemporary productions to Isabella at the end of *Measure for Measure* who does not happily (necessarily) accept the Duke's marital advances and prepares to skip off merrily to the wedding altar. Also, in another of the many true-woman-falsely-accused plays that were written in Shakespeare's time, and four or five or six of them by Shakespeare, *Much Ado* just being one -- *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*--those are the big four but you can throw *Merry Wives* in there, and you can even throw *Troilus and Cressida* in there. And in Shakespeare's case, every time the women—they are true and falsely accused, which raises very interesting questions. At the end of *The Winter's Tale*, one of those true-women-falsely-accused plays (I guess the last one that Shakespeare wrote), there's also been that kind of silence, or a lack of forgiveness, perhaps, on the part of Hermione for Leontes at the end in recent criticism and in recent productions. That certainly was not a nominative interpretation in most of the four hundred years when Shakespeare finished production of the text and our consumption of the text in the early twenty-first century.

The question I had for the two of you is: that was just one of many striking aspects about the production last night, I was wondering whose decision that was. Was it yours [Anderson]? Was it yours [Garcia]? Was it the director's? Was it collaborative in nature? The decision to have Claudio and Hero dancing in markedly more formal physical terms as compared to Beatrice and Benedick, and then they take their separate paths to separate points downstage. I was very struck by that, as I'm sure many audience members were. I'd like to know how that decision got marked out, if possible.

Anderson:

You probably know more about the decision from the director's point of view.

Garcia:

I can talk a little bit about-- The way a dramaturg works, the work for a dramaturg to perform, is that the dramaturg's job is to ask the right question in the right moment. The conversations that Lileana and I had almost two years before we even started rehearsals for *Much Ado* were centered very much on the text itself. I worked on a production of *Much Ado* before. I have loved this play since I was in high school. I was the kid at Blockbuster video checking out the Kenneth Branagh/Emma Thompson film every weekend. Eventually, the clerk said, "Just buy it, just buy it, stop coming by every weekend." And she [Lileana Blain-Cruz] had directed *Much Ado* back at Princeton just recently. For her, and for me of course, the questions of text versus performance, of text

versus artistic choice and interpretation were very vivid. I think for theatre artists, silence is very provocative. The places where we don't have text, especially in Shakespeare's work, is often a place of incredible potential for a director, for a dramaturg, for an actor to make choices as to where that character is emotionally in his or her journey. Evelyn pointed out one of my favorite examples, which is Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. For those of you that might have seen the OSF production that Bill Rauch did in 2011, that production ends with the end of text. We go all the way through the final line of the final speech, but the final image that we had was Isabella going up to a podium, opening her mouth to speak at a mic, and then the lights cut out. We never actually got to hear whatever Isabella's answer was going to be to the Duke's proposal. In that production, the Duke was aware of how hasty his proposal was and was rushing to work past the awkwardness in a really interesting way.

In our conversations starting with *Much Ado*, we talked at length about the way that tragedy and comedy are so intermingled in this play -- how without the shadows, we cannot play up the light and without the light, we can get lost in the shadows of this story. About how killing Claudio can take us down an entirely different road, if not for the comic heroism of Dogberry and his men. How could we be true to the play and to both the light places where it dances, but also to the dark places where it gets lost for a little bit. How can we, as a contemporary ensemble, acknowledge that some of the things that happen to these characters are just problematic? Could we be open to the option of giving Hero and Claudio as happy an ending as Benedick and Beatrice seem to get? Are we comfortable with possibly not going to that place of happiness that, I think, traditionally productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* tend to go? And our answer to that one was "Yes." We didn't want to make that decision until we actually had the actors in the room, because we were blessed with having an incredible ensemble of actors, all of whom brought their own life experience, all of whom brought their own points of view on this play. One of the things that excites me about theatre practice is the collaboration that happens in rehearsal rooms when we make choices together. Honestly, I didn't know that Hero and Claudio were going to have that ending until we had Leah and Carlo together in the room and we worked through it together.

Anderson:

I would agree. When we started rehearsal, there was this question in the air that maybe things don't come together neatly in the end. But what does that look like? For me, having read the play and not spoken with Lileana before I came to rehearsal, I also was leaning in that direction, just from a personal standpoint. Our ideas aligned in a really wonderful way. I think we probably pushed more in that direction than we would if there had been a different actor or a different director. It just happened that our ideas aligned. Another thing, I think, even more of a tragedy – not to say that Hero and

Claudio will never find forgiveness and that this is the end of--that there's no hope for them – but for me another tragic element of the story is Hero's relationship with her father. Because that scene-- hat wedding scene--as terrible as it is with Claudio, and it's really awful – what Leonato says to his daughter is terrifying and it's heartbreaking and it's so well-written. It is so well-written. The use of repetition, and the imagery that he uses: it's heart-breaking. It's a very difficult scene to perform. That's the relationship, also, that we wanted to find some—because she never speaks to her father again in the rest of the show. She says nothing to her father for the rest of the show. To find, to negotiate that relationship where then he has this idea, and then he's like, "No, they're going to pretend you're dead and then you're going to come in with a mask on." It's like: what are you doing? What is that, and how do I negotiate that? We have this moment in the production where he says "You all go in and come hither masked," and he hands me this bouquet of flowers that Claudio has left at my feet. It's a small moment, but it's so important to me that we have--there's no immediate forgiveness there, either. That relationship has not completely mended either. That is also going to be a long road.

McCandless:

I was intrigued by a comment Leah, you made a little while ago about the fact that you believe it's attributable to tradition that the play has been considered a comedy or that a happy ending has been forecast from the get-go. Am I quoting you correctly on that, that we mostly owe it to tradition that that's the case?

Anderson:

I don't know. I don't have very much-- I don't have a lot of experience with the play, although I've always heard of it that way. I've always heard of it everything coming together that way, and that forgiveness being immediate. When I told people that I was playing Hero, everyone was like, "Oh, sorry." [*Audience laughter*] Because it's like, "Oh, and then you have to forgive him and that's uncomfortable." Not having experience with it and just looking at the text and what Hero says and what Hero experiences, I don't really know where all the happiness has come from on her part, in the past. Not to say that I couldn't have made that choice and made it work, but I don't know where it's textually supported for her.

McCandless:

It's intriguing – Lydia made an allusion to the—I feel like I'm [*gesturing with head, indicating difficulty working with the microphone*] Lydia made an allusion a while ago to the text-performance relationship, but I guess the implication in your remark that intrigued me the most was the idea that the play could actually be something quite different from what we thought it was. I'm reminded of something the iconoclastic and

clever theater director, film director too, TV director, Jonathan Miller (also a surgeon!) – some of you may have heard of him. He said that, as far as he was concerned, that the sky was the limit in terms of directorial intervention and invention. But the one thing he said that he believed should limit him in his directorial creativity was genre. That if he was doing a comedy, a romantic comedy, then of course it had to end happily. Now the road to getting there might be full of all sorts of interesting twists and turns, and dark pits in which people might temporarily plunge, but that ultimately there was that controlling factor of the genre's conventions. What's interesting to me, and I guess what I'd like the three of you to comment on if you could, is that idea that well, perhaps at one time it was considered a comedy, or maybe when it was first advertised at Shakespeare's theater is was: "Come see this hilarious comedy." But can we, in fact, transcend tradition -- transcend genre -- and the controls that presumably that imposes, if we feel that in our contemporary context the play speaks differently and means something different.

Gajowski:

I think Shakespeare is deliberately pushing the envelope of genre. There's grave subject matter in so many of his so-called "romantic comedies," although they do most often conclude with a couple or two or three or four marching off like Noah's ark to the wedding altar. That's supposed to symbolize -- as traditional criticism would have it and as traditional theater practice would have it -- that's supposed to symbolize social harmony and the procreation of the species (not to be terribly anthropological about it): as opposed to death, life continues.

Look at *The Merchant of Venice*. We don't have to wait until we get to the romances (that genre of plays that Shakespeare writes at the end of his career that are sometimes called late plays, last plays, tragicomedies) we don't have to wait until we get there for the action to veer from comic to tragic as in *The Winter's Tale*, for example, and then back again. We've got some pretty grave, serious, disturbing subject matter in a whole bunch of the romantic comedies. I would put *Much Ado* up there right with *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, depending whether you want to look at gender conflicts or religious/ethnic/racial conflicts. In our day, as opposed to the 19th century when we had productions of *The Merchant of Venice* that represented Shylock as a tragic protagonist and then there was a reaction against that 100 years ago in the early part of the last century -- there's a reaction against that as "too sentimental." I'm talking about some criticism, but mostly I'm talking about theatre representation, stage representation. Until we get to the very caricatured anti-Semitic representations of Shylock in the 1920s and 1930s -- and not just in Nazi Germany, but in this country -- the hooked nose, the red hair. But who, in this day and age, in a post-Holocaust environment, would represent an anti-Semitic -- would give us an anti-Semitic

production (by which I mean, one which manipulates the reader or the audience members to applaud about the forced conversion of this so-called "villain" at the end of the big trial scene between Shylock and Portia).

That gets immensely complicated because we are constituted by the moment in which we exist, by the time and place in which we exist, and we can't help that. We're born and we're giving-- we're reading Shakespeare, we're trying to understand him, we're doing productions of Shakespeare in a post-Holocaust world, so we have all kinds of interesting new meanings emerging out of productions that are a far cry from what I was taught as an undergraduate, which has been justice versus mercy, Old Testament versus New Testament, all that business. And, of course, the Christian wins out over the so-called Judaic value system. That's a very Christian, conveniently enough, interpretation. Something similar is true with *The Taming of the Shrew*. I think that's where we have more resonances with this play, *Much Ado About Nothing*, in terms of the women's liberation movement being similar to World War II and the Holocaust in terms of this seismic shift that has occurred socially, politically, economically such that it's kind of hard to put on a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* today in which Katherina is simply kind of beaten into submission like an animal by food deprivation, sleep deprivation, and clothes deprivation, aside from all the humiliations of having her husband show up drunk at the wedding and so on and so forth.

In a post-Women's Liberation environment, we do have politics and social issues obviously feeding into, and shaping and influencing our productions and criticism. I would put *Much Ado* on a par with those other plays in terms of constantly evolving meanings over the past four hundred years, depending upon where we want to locate ourselves in time and place. I just happened to see-- one tiny final note is: I was participating in a conference at Stratford-upon-Avon that's held every other August at the Shakespeare Institute in 2010 and other odd[sic] number years, but in 2012 that's when the Olympics were. There's this emphasis on world Shakespeare, global Shakespeare, Shakespeare from the point of view of different nationalities. The *Much Ado* that was done at the RSC in Stratford during that week of this conference while the Olympics was going on was basically a Bollywood version that didn't emphasize these same disturbing elements. You could imagine how the disturbing elements of this play might translate into contemporary Indian culture. That was emphasized on the one hand, but it was sacrificed in the end to the Bollywood Shakespearean conclusion -- the happiness and the forgiveness and all that good stuff. That's how it resolved.

It gets really complicated when we consider cultural difference as well as temporal difference in terms of theater professionals and critics and scholars like myself attempting to come to grips with these very complex texts. I don't believe, in other

words – in case you can't tell from what I just said! – I don't believe there's one absolute correct meaning that lies there and my job as a teacher is to give my students all the pieces to the puzzle and hold back one and say "if you're good, I'll give it to you." I don't believe that. I believe that meaning is constructed collaboratively and that they are determined by where we are located culturally and where we are located temporally. That's maybe a sort of larger framework for the issue that we're talking—the gender issues that we're interested in the conclusion of the Claudio and Hero relationship in this particular text.

McCandless:

Is your hand still up out there?

Audience Member 1:

It is. Thank you. So first of all, you were talking about silences and text and I have to say the silence at the end, and not just you two going to separate sides of the stage, but the look was probably the most powerful part of the entire production. Because that look said a thousand words. We talked this morning about them coming from a very elite, high-echelon culture. I saw in all that was happening with Hero, in your production of it, not just being betrayed by her father and by her fiancée, but also almost by the world. Because she clearly is very protected and it's this sort of "Oh, wow, I guess I can really only depend on myself." Because her dad absolutely-- he threw—they all threw her to the fire except for Beatrice and Benedick and the Priest. Was there discussion about—do you see that part of it too, not just the betrayal but also the changed worldview—grow[ing] up in a heartbeat.

Anderson:

Yes, so, a couple of things: firstly, both the director and I were very interested in the fact that Hero goes on a journey through this play, and starts as a young woman who's very much protected and also one who--

[editing cut]

--society has asked of her. So, absolutely: how quickly people turn and what that does to her worldview. When this is a woman who has done everything her father's asked of her--

Audience Member 1:

Probably including marrying Claudio. *[crosstalk]*

Anderson:

Right! Because in the scene before the big party where she gets engaged to Claudio, he says "If the prince asks you, you know what your response is." So, it is a matter of

status. If the prince had asked Hero to marry him, she would have said “yes” because that is her duty. It turns out that she married Claudio or got engaged to Claudio instead. But do I believe that she would have said “yes” if the prince had asked her? Absolutely. For me, what is so beautiful about this production (from the inside), is it’s true, after that wedding scene, the whole world shifts. Her whole world shifts. This was her safety – her virginity and her following what her father wanted, that was her safety. That was her role in this world. When that falls apart there’s this— there’s nothing to hold onto. Which is why I would challenge the idea that just because this play does not end comedically does not mean it does not end happily, especially for Hero.

Audience Member 1:

I saw it as a big question mark. I certainly saw it as: she understands they’re not going to have the happily ever after, perhaps, that she thought they were going to have. That doesn’t mean they don’t get to some reconciliation, but she gets the fairytale is over.

Anderson:

The fairytale is over. And to me, that moment when they’re dancing and she steps away from him is really the first time in the play that she has any autonomy or makes a decision for herself, and is most certainly the most powerful I feel in that play. That moment.

Gajowski:

Freed of conventions at last. Because it seems to me, as you [Anderson] were saying, how utterly conventional she’s been – she’s been “the good girl” to no avail.

Audience Member 1:

And look where that got her. Now it’s time to take matters into your own hands.

Garcia:

Exactly. One of the conversations that we had very early on in the process—I feel like it might’ve been day two -- was about the word “honor,” which comes up 18 times in this text. One of the things that I enjoy -- if you’re going to approach any Shakespeare play that I work on -- is to look at the language and see what keeps coming up as a clue to what I should be looking for. The fact that honor comes up so often led us to— actually, I brought out the Oxford English Dictionary into rehearsal one day and read out loud all the definitions which took up two and a half pages of tiny, tiny little cramped writing. That led us to talk about, absolutely, codes of behavior and expectations that affect every single one of these characters—Hero being, I think, by far the most visible and hence the most vulnerable in terms of what is expected of her and in turn, what she expects of the world, in terms of “If I’ve done everything right, what is my reward for

conducting myself appropriately?" We talked a great deal about the codes of honor as they refer to the men. Which is interesting: this didn't come up the last time I worked on *Much Ado*. Every single production is different, which is why there is no one stable interpretation of these texts, which is why we keep coming back to them: because they are a chance to try again to reach at whatever we think the meaning is.

But for this production, the fact that Don Pedro and his men are soldiers -- they needn't have been soldiers--in *Love's Labor's Lost*, we see another band of young men invade--or no, actually it's the other way--women invade the territory of another band of young men. Those young men are not soldiers, so those relationships are guided by different codes. The fact that in *Much Ado* it is a company of soldiers coming into a community that is predominantly female. What happens when you introduce battlefield relationships, when friendship and comradeship--and actually, it's two different things in the world of *Much Ado*: you can hate a man's guts, but if he's got your back on the battlefield, you're going to take his word above anything else, because you need him to keep you safe. So suddenly, the kinds of conversations that we were having in the room about honor, about Hero, about what are the pressures on Claudio, about what are the pressures on Don Pedro and Benedick and Beatrice, and how that might give us a clue as to why they do the things that they do, knowing that human beings are highly irrational creatures. Even though we believe that, in a moment of crisis, we will do the right thing and be heroic and act with integrity, when push comes to shove and that moment comes, we don't know what's going to happen. We don't know what's going to come out of our mouths. How could we embrace the social strictures while still holding on to the characters' humanity, and following them on those journeys was something that we were very interested in.

Audience Member 2:

The men in this play are fascinating to me. The social stratification that is cleared up right in the beginning when Lance* says "Oh my gosh, am I going to be okay in your sight" and Don Pedro really solidifies that. But Hero is definitely on the social stratification just under, and so it gives her father, in my estimation, a little bit more that I can sympathize with because boy, there went his chance. She was going to marry up, and he was going to be set--Messina would not be invaded by his [Don Pedro's] armies. He goes ballistic. And Benedick being of such low self-esteem that he has to know Beatrice is in love with him before he capitulates. They're wonderful characters.

Audience Member 3:

Yeah, I would like to say it seems to me in this play Beatrice is the strongest character and the smartest and wisest and the deepest. The next person that comes close to her is Benedick. Obviously, Shakespeare has created a play here focusing on the two strongest

characters. Also, the big thing here is honor and purity. Between the two strongest characters, you don't see any consideration about honor and purity. It's all about—let's say as [*inaudible*] did earlier, it's all about purity. Nowadays, it's all about assent. To me, a play about assent. . . . Benedick has to do a little assent himself too. The relationship between these two characters is a very strong relationship, and it's pretty close to equality when you get right down to it. When I look through this play, or watch it, Shakespeare is putting this dilemma in the context of this purity code or this honor code; he (*audible*) takes your attention over to that but then he's (*inaudible*) to this dialogue between these two strong characters and that's where the action really happens [*inaudible*].

Garcia:

You probably kind of hit the nail on the head about-- Every production of this play needs to tackle the question of "Whose story is this?" Are we following the story of Beatrice and Benedick, who I think after four hundred years have largely run away with this play? Or is the story of Hero and Claudio, whose relationship provides the framework of every single scene in the play? So that's always the question that any director and group of artists and actors has to decide. Directors have gone in every kind of direction that you could possibly imagine. Probably, I imagine, that having an incredible actor playing Beatrice would make you believe that it's Beatrice's play. Having an incredible actor playing Hero would tell you, "This is Hero's story." The question of: Whose story is this? Is it Benedick and Beatrice that we're supposed to be—that we're meant to follow?

The only thing that I would add, really, because for you this play is about Beatrice and Benedick (and you're right): I think it could be about Hero and Claudio--you would still be right. The fact that Shakespeare often gives us contrasting storylines and contrasting couples, especially--he sets up one couple as a comment on the other. So even though Hero and Claudio's plight is what guides us through the story, at every single point in the play we are always referencing back to what did Hero do, what is Claudio doing, what really happened between them -- Benedick and Beatrice are giving us a contrasting view of: What does it mean to be pure? What does it mean to be honorable?

One of the things that we think about a great deal as theatre practitioners dealing with Shakespeare is that we're dealing with multiple historical contexts. We're dealing with the timing when Shakespeare wrote the play and the context of his society – I cannot echo Evelyn enough about saying theatres and theatre artists are talking about the time in which they are living in. We cannot escape that. We have that lens: in this case, London 1598. What is happening in that society? We have whatever historical lens that

Shakespeare imposes on his own story. For example, in the case of *Cymbeline*, we're reaching back to ancient English history from the viewpoint of the 16th century. But then fast forward to what year are we producing this play – in this case, 2015. And on top of that you add: what setting have we chosen for this production? We're dealing with four different historical lenses.

In our production, when we set out to talk about honor and about purity—I can talk at length about what it meant to be “pure” for female bodies in 1598. The ideal was to be silent, was for the body to be closed. A closed mouth meant a closed body that was free from being violated, that was free from sexual impurity. In which case, Hero is the consummate daughter. She is the absolute female ideal in society in her silence. Beatrice suffers from logorrhea – she's words, words, words, words, but she's never accused of being impure. In fact, Beatrice's honor does come up. I forget who says it, but someone says, “She is virtuous in all that I know of her.” It might be in Benedick (*inaudible*).

Even though she is full of words, and she speaks unbidden, and she inserts herself in situations where another girl might not, her purity is never in question. Are we meant to ask ourselves: How rigid are these codes, really? Are the women supposed to behave the way the men tell them they're supposed to behave? Because Shakespeare is always complicating that. If the entire play is about Hero, about her supposed indiscretion-- there's a song that tells us “Sigh no more, ladies / men were deceivers ever,” warning the ladies against the men's capacity for deception and for being inconstant. Do we hear that song as an audience? Do the characters in the story hear that song? I don't know that they do. Do they learn the lesson at the end? [*Skeptical sound*]

These texts are endlessly fascinating as to what building blocks are in there and how as scholars, as theatre practitioners, how we interpret that to reach for a larger meaning artistically or sociologically, if that makes any sense.

Gajowski:

I, too, agree with your sentiments about Beatrice and Benedick. I think they are utterly unconventional. They are the most intelligent characters in this dramatic world. Hero and Claudio have traditionally been dismissed as being utterly conventional. No one's as smart as Beatrice and Benedick, which is why we love them so much. We also love them so much because, as you pointed out, and as I tell my students, it's as good as it gets when we analyze heterosexual relationships in Shakespeare in terms of mutuality, in terms of reciprocity. In that way, they are descendants of Katherina in terms of the verbal sparring and the conflict, the so-called “battle of the sexes.” But we don't have all the problems that that text (*The Taming of the Shrew*) gives us – with male oppression of females within the institution of marriage--in the Beatrice and Benedick relationship.

I would go so far as to say that Beatrice is so important that she constitutes a hermeneutic shift, if you will, an epistemological shift in this dramatic world of *Much Ado About Nothing* when she says "Kill Claudio." It doesn't need to be yelled from the rooftops, it can be [quietly] "Kill Claudio." We've had so many productions we're trying to juggle, the adaptation that we just saw, the Joss Whedon that we saw this morning, last night's production, or I guess the afternoon's production for some of us. But when she says, "Kill Claudio," she disrupts that male narrative of female infidelity and produces a counter-narrative. It's something that Kenneth Branagh picks up on. It's something that is there in the text all along in the "Sigh No More" that you [Garcia] were just—the song that Balthazar simply sings around the duping of Benedick in Act 2, Scene 3. But Branagh makes a big deal out of it, fetishizes the lyrics, and I myself never paid attention to the lyrics until Branagh put them in big white letters on a black screen. I was almost looking for the bouncing ball in there – "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more / men were deceivers ever / one foot in sea and one on shore / to one thing constant never." And then the next stanza, which I can't repeat—I don't know by heart, but it's all about-- it talks about male fraud, so we have male inconstancy, male deception, male fraud. Furthermore, he begins, Kenneth Branagh, he begins that cinematic text—Now I don't want to get too far away from where we are here today, contemporary productions here in Ashland that we're devoted to—But with the...I just lost my train of thought.

Regardless of whether Kenneth Branagh fetishizes those lyrics or not, in Branagh's cinematic text, Beatrice is kind of plugging into that when she turns the tables on the male narrative of female infidelity. I've always been very disturbed by people who say, "Well, audiences laugh at that scene and at that line" and they did yesterday in the production. I don't know if it's just nervousness, or--

Anderson:

It's always fascinating.

Gajowski:

[Edit cut]

She's damaged goods on the marriage market, that's why she swoons – that's why she faints. In every one of these true-woman-falsely-accused-plays you have a woman swoon, and the news is circulated that she's dead. Of course, it's Friar Francis's idea here. Why? Why do we need to circulate that lie? To change slander to remorse. We get to *The Winter's Tale*--it doesn't just take a few days or a few weeks: he has to undergo remorse for sixteen years before he gets to have his lost daughter and his lost wife restored to him in the spectacular concluding scene of that play. I just wanted to

endorse your sense of the importance of Beatrice and Benedick, and particularly Beatrice in this counter-narrative that she creates with those two words, "Kill Claudio." Because he's so utterly romantic, and he's very much like a Petrarchan lover: "Come, let me do anything for thee." And she says, "Okay." And he goes, "Oh, I didn't mean *that*." When she has those two speeches right afterwards: "Oh, that I were a man," and she's outraged, obviously, and justifiably at the public humiliation and repudiation of her cousin Hero by Claudio. She's also outraged by--she's also obviously disturbed by the disparity between Benedick's words. And so many male's words in Shakespeare's worlds, if I could be permitted to generalize dangerously--the gap that is present on the part of so many male characters between actual feelings and words. There's a huge gap there, and it's exactly what she's interrogating when she's saying "Well, enough with the words already: go take action if you really care about this offense that has been done to women to the extent that you have metaphorically--she's been metaphorically killed." And of course, certain characters in the play believe she's been really killed.

Anyway, in short, I agree with your point.

Anderson:

One thing about that line--I think it's the line that we get the greatest variety of responses in the different houses, because in rehearsal, when she delivered that line, no one laughed, not even one time. It was not funny.

Gajowski:

It's not funny.

Anderson:

It was not funny. In the houses, sometimes we get quite a laugh, sometimes only a few people chuckle. Generally, there is always a little bit of laughter, though. Actually, I've noticed that I think--and I don't know if this is completely accurate--but it seems to me that when there are a lot of students in the audience who don't have exposure to the play, they actually don't laugh. They're very serious about it. They think it's a good idea. They think it's very serious. It's interesting. I don't know. It varies wildly from night to night.

Garcia:

Laughter is among the most fascinating and the most mysterious responses that we can elicit in a theater. Because to put a finger on what laughter means is incredibly difficult. Some of you might be familiar with Henri Bergson's famous, famous essay on laughter, about his exploration as to why we laugh. We laugh because we agree; we laugh because we disagree; we laugh because we are uncomfortable; we laugh because we

recognize ourselves; we laugh because otherwise we would cry. In the moments of--when we catch ourselves, either by surprise or in recognition, and we laugh: what does it mean? Do we then feel complicit in our laughter? Do we feel shocked by our own laughter? Because certainly for anyone who doesn't know *Much Ado About Nothing*, to laugh at "Kill Claudio" might be because, "Wow, Beatrice is really taking this to the extreme" and then to realize that Benedick's taking her seriously might make us wonder, "Well, why would I laugh? What does that say about me? What does it say about me in this moment?" And turns the lens on ourselves as an audience. It think it's fascinating. But the first time that I saw *Much Ado* in performance—I had also, in reading the play, always taken "Kill Claudio" as: This is our *Romeo and Juliet* moment, this is Mercutio about to get stabbed, and this whole story is about to go downhill. To me, it's deadly serious. Beatrice means every word that she says, and then the first time I heard an audience laugh I came into the literary office the next day and I marched up to Lue Douthit (who many of you know, my boss) and I said, "They laughed. How dare they?" She had to pull me back from the brink and say, "No. Let's talk about laughter." Earlier we were talking about comedy as a genre, and my definition of comedy is any play that doesn't end with a pile of bodies onstage. Comedy comes in all kinds of different flavors, and in this case with a lot of ickiness attached to it.

Audience Member 4:

On that point--"Kill Claudio"-- in the context of 17th century Mediterranean society (like Sicily), the honor of the entire clan, the entire extended family, one of the pressures points of honor is the chastity of their women. She was absolutely serious because this was one of the most deadly affronts you could do to the entire family. It also explains Leonato's reaction. He may have loved his daughter, but she had just devastated not him, but an entire extended family, and that could last an entire generation. His response would seem so extreme to us, but in the context of Sicily, 17th century, it would simply be understandable.

Gajowski:

After all, Titus does murder his own daughter, Lavinia, because she has been raped. One could talk forever as to why, after what's been done to her--raped, silenced, mutilated, her tongue cut out, her arm cut off, and raped--why does she need that on top of it all? Well, it could be—one very plausible answer of many is to try to right the wrong, the shame, brought to the whole Andronici clan, if you will.

Garcia:

We don't even have to reach back to Sicily, 17th century. It's happening today. It's happening on our own soil. We can talk about how--why societies choose to deal with women in the way that we see happen in *Much Ado*--about trying to control female

sexuality, which, I think in the United States, we can tell ourselves that women have made incredible progress, but we are living in a world where perhaps the law doesn't crack down on women for being promiscuous, but certainly society shames women into following certain norms of behavior. It might not come to the point of honor killing, but is someone losing face really any worse, or any less terrible, than what happens to Hero?

Audience Member 5:

Part of what I'm going to say would be dependent upon how much intimate knowledge Shakespeare had. He has a lot more intimate knowledge than he's often given credit for having. How much had Shakespeare actually understood the political conditions in Sicily with the Spaniards running Italy, with the Italians, or the descendants of the Viking and Italian nobility running Sicily, and the leader of the expedition is Spanish, his brother is Spanish--but Claudio, the simp Claudio, the worm Claudio, is Italian--he's from Florence. But the people really running the show are from Spain. So that's one factor which might lead to further complexification of what's really going on. The Duke of Messina really is, possibly, most interested in keeping the Spanish very happy and not causing problems for whatever power he has retained. In the realm of the history of killing lovers who have acted badly, there's a great scene in *The Nibelungen*, in the Fritz Lang film, where Brunhilda says to Attila*: "Kill Siegfried." That's all she'll say to him. "Kill Siegfried." Brunhilda has surrendered to an arch-Barbarian whom the Nibelungen themselves consider absolutely inferior to them in order to get revenge on Siegfried. There's one other reference I'll just throw out--this is not as (*inaudible*). There's a marvelous scene in John Barton's play, *Tantalus*. Has anybody seen this play? Sixteen hours long. Performed over two days or over four days -- I've seen it twice. There's an amazing scene where Ulysses has captured Cassandra. Cassandra is about to be turned over to Agamemnon, which really means, about to be turned over to Clytemnestra--although nobody knows the (*inaudible*) conclusion of the story, which isn't great for anybody. They have a very interesting discussion of the definition of honor. It is Cassandra's opinion that honor is what men do to women. And someday this company should just do this play, because it has the resources to do it. Do it as a two-night play, outdoors -- it's a great, great play and I was lucky enough to see it in Denver. It was produced by the RSC in the Denver Center and I was lucky enough to see it, and it was an amazing way to spend part of a winter in Denver, in the indoors--

Gajowski:

I think it is immensely complicated work trying to negotiate, as I mentioned earlier, among the time and place of the production, the time and place of the dramatic-- of Shakespeare's England when the play was produced by him and by his company and the dramatic world of the play, which is what you're getting at. We don't have

evidence, as far as I know, that he had any books about Messina or Messinian honor codes in front of him, the way that we know he had Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* open in front of him when he wrote Enobarbus's speech about Cleopatra on her barge, because it's almost word-for-word, taken from the English prose translation and turned into blank verse: "Purple were the sails and perfumed were the waters" and so on. So we do have evidence, at points, of his source material. But we don't have to go to Messina to look for honor codes. In Shakespeare's own Elizabethan and Jacobean England, we know, as was being referred to earlier, that women were constantly preached at to be chaste, silent, and obedient, and enclosed within doors. Those all were homologous, or constituting, of one another. If a woman looked into a man's eyes, her chastity was in question. If she went outside of doors, into public, her chastity was questioned. If she spoke, her chastity was in question. One open orifice indicated or suggested the availability of other open orifices, if you will, to be gross about it.

So we have those kinds of--many, many, documents circulating in marriage sermons and in household manuals and conduct books that were extremely prescriptive of female behavior. I can't help but ask the question: What is the--What part are these plays, such as *Much Ado About Nothing*, the other true-woman-falsely-accused plays -- what part are they playing in this debate that is occurring in Shakespeare's society about the nature of women? We have these very conservative prescriptions for female behavior on the one hand, and then we also have a debate that goes on throughout the 1500s and the early 1600s: Woman Good, she's the descendent of the Virgin Mary symbolically, [or] Woman Bad, she's the descendent of Eve symbolically. Back and forth, back and forth, decade after decade. When you look at the lines of Iago (I mean, not Don John, because he's a pretty close-mouthed villain), but when you look at some of Iachamo's lines in *Cymbeline* or Iago's lines in *Othello*, some of those villain's lines that are making the accusation, the false accusation of the woman's infidelity--they're just taken part and parcel out of these pamphlets. The very same kind of arguments, rhetorical strategies, and prejudices and so on. That's a whole other fascinating area, and I think it goes to--as I was saying to some people over lunch--it goes to the larger question that so many of us are absorbed with, and that is: What is the relationship between art and society in Shakespeare's time and in our own time?

Audience Member 5:

Is it possible that one of the things that Beatrice is doing, when she orders Benedick to kill Claudio, is the same thing that Brunhilda is doing when she orders Attila to kill Siegfried? Is she utilizing the impending sexual relationship or impending sexual power she already has over Benedick -- to compel him to do absolutely what she wants to do? I mean, I'm all for the killing of Claudio. (*Inaudible*) I'm displeased that Benedick tries to worm his way out of it. I'd like to see Claudio fall for Hero. That's just me. (*Inaudible*)

McCandless:

Thank you. We do have to stop. This has been such a great discussion, and we've managed not to stay within our time frame. Thanks so much to our panelists for a wonderful [*words drowned out by applause*].

[*Editing break*]

2. Lecture, "Hollywood's Debt to Shakespeare," Steve Vineberg, Distinguished Professor of Arts and Humanities at the College of the Holy Cross

Vineberg:

--wonderful moment to me in the scene in *Much Ado*, where the Prince comes up with the idea of setting Beatrice and Benedick up together is that when he originally says it, of course, the response, Claudio's response is "This is going to be a disaster!" But the Prince knows better. In fact, what everybody really knows is that Beatrice and Benedick are a perfect match. That that banter is an indication of what a great match they are, and we see it at the end, when they're bantering once again, and the only thing that can stop their bantering is a kiss. Where banter actually is very sexy, there's a direct correlation between the banter and that kiss. So that line "I will stop your mouth" had that kind of driving force.

In these movies that I'm talking about, like *It Happened One Night*, that's the one I bet—how many of you know that one? [*Audience hands raise*] Oh, great. That's the best example. Very briefly, in *It Happened One Night*, a reporter, played by Clark Gable, who is trying to get his job back, discovers that the heiress played by Claudette Colbert who has run away from her father with John Kerr (the man she thinks she loves and wants to marry—is, in fact, only marrying as a [*audio cuts out*] against her father) is right there next to him at this bus station. He thinks, if he goes along on a trip with her, then he will get this great story. (It's really the same set-up as a later romantic comedy, the really marvelous *Roman Holiday*, with Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck--same idea.) But those two characters in *Roman Holiday* are much nicer to each other than those in *It Happened One Night*, who really don't like each other at the beginning and get closer and closer as the movie goes on.

The idea of courtship as a series of tests is, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, clearly, I think, there are two kinds of tests. One is the Claudio test, that the panelists talked about. That's the key serious test. But really, there's a test, a comic test, much before that: what are Beatrice and Benedick going to do when their friends make them overhear this made-up story about how each has love for the other? The fact that Benedick's response

is, "If I do not love her, I am a fool;" the fact that Beatrice's response is, "I need to accept his love" (I'm not able to remember quite what the quote is) tells us, in fact, they've already passed the first test. That the prince was right, and their friends were right.

In *It Happened One Night*, there's a series of tests, and they take a number of different forms. But one of the tests, -- and this is often the case in romantic comedies -- is that if the difference between the characters (and this is not true of *Much Ado*, certainly) but if the distance between the two characters that has to be traversed in the course of the movie in order for them to earn each other, that is that process of compromise and moving toward each other, requires one of the characters to learn not to judge the other so fast, and the other to loosen up and be more spontaneous and less snobbish, less entitled, then very often the tests take the form of some kind of situation that requires them to think on their feet. Here's an example in which Ellie (played by Claudette Colbert) has to think on her feet. It takes place in an autocamp.

[Clip, not shown in video]

Now I want to talk about the convention about the lack of sex. In *It Happened One Night* -- which is really the best example of most of these conventions, which is why I tend to teach it so often in my American film class, when I teach by genre--in *It Happened One Night* -- generally, if your problem is that you want to create a very sexy romantic comedy in which the hero and heroine do not get to bed, then what better idea than to choose than Shakespeare's from *Much Ado*--where the hero and heroine spend so much time arguing with each other, in tension with each other, that it would never occur to them to go to bed together. Of course, as we all know, and it certainly happens in *Much Ado*, the tension between them, caused by their supposed dislike of each other, is actually sexual tension that is caused by the fact that they're really attracted to each other, and that they're both such strong characters that they can't--that they're constantly knocking heads.

In *It Happened One Night*, as a lot of you clearly know, Capra and the screenwriter (Robert Riskin) create a wonderful metaphor for this sexual abstention: the walls of Jericho. So the scene I want to show you now is the walls of Jericho.

[Clip]

When Clark Gable took his shirt off in 1934 and wasn't wearing an undershirt, the undershirt industry took a huge plunge. No man in America wanted to wear an undershirt if Clark Gable wasn't wearing one. You know, of course, how -- many of you do -- how Capra ends this movie by having -- when they finally get the marriage license,

when her marriage to the other man is annulled, then they get a trumpet and they're in a tourist camp and the manager of the tourist camp hears the trumpet blowing, and the walls of Jericho come down. So it's this symbolic move.

Now we get to the convention about how we know the characters belong together: clearly, because of their wit, their banter. But, also, because they have fun together--and, in many other ways, I think, are just an obvious match. The reason that Beatrice and Benedick's friends realize they belong together: because who else would end up with either of them? Who else could match the other one in wit and adventure?

In screwball comedies, this takes a number of forms. The having fun together is a big one. How many of you know *Annie Hall*, for example? Think of the lobster scene in *Annie Hall*. You get it twice, right? There's the first time, when the scene is between Alvy and Annie, and he's trying to catch the lobster. It's ridiculous, and the two of them have a wonderful time trying to catch this lobster. Then later, after he and Annie have broken up, he tries it with another woman, and she doesn't get the joke at all. And we watch the scene and think, "What a terrible thing that these two broke up, because he's never going to find anyone who gets him the way Annie gets him."

I want to show you a scene from *His Girl Friday*--just a little bit of a scene. Rosalind Russell and Cary Grant play a couple who were formerly married, and also work together for a newspaper. He's the editor, and she's his best newspaper reporter. She's about to go off and marry Ralph Bellamy (which we know is never going to happen). There's a scene where Walter, played by Cary Grant, takes them out to lunch to show there are no hard feelings. I want to show the beginning of the scene, but look at all the ways in which the director (Howard Hawks) is telling us who the match is, sitting at the table. Whether it's Rosalind Russell's Hildy and Cary Grant's Walter, or Hildy and the Ralph Bellamy character, whose name eludes me at the moment.

[Clip]

Look at that! Their posture is the same, they're both smoking, they ordered the same thing, they have all this banter going. Romantic comedies tell us that in a million ways, it seems to me.

Now we'll talk about one more convention, which is the earned happy ending. The filmmaker Robert Zemeckis once put it this way: what happens at the end of a romantic comedy is that the characters have changed, but their hearts have stayed the same. Another way to put it, I think, is that their hearts have stayed the same even if they didn't know what their hearts were -- we knew it. Everybody in the audience knows it.

There really has to be--that happy ending has to be earned, just as it's earned by Beatrice and Benedick. It's earned in a number of ways in different romantic comedies. That happy ending--though it is predestined, in a way--that's not the word I want. It's not predestined, because it's earned. But we certainly anticipate it. We have to see the characters get to it.

I want to show you one more scene. It's the final scene of my favorite romantic comedy, Ernst Lubitsch's *The Shop Around the Corner* (from 1940, same year as *Girl Friday*). The protagonists are played by Jimmy Stewart and Margaret Sullivan. The set-up needs a little explanation. The set-up is that they both work at this department store in Budapest (during the Depression), and they do not like each other at all. From the moment she comes in to get a job, they don't get along. Except, in fact, they're in love with each other, but they don't know it. I mean that literally. They have been correspondents. You may know this plot because it's also the plot of the musical *She Loves Me* and *You've Got Mail*. But the idea is that they've been corresponding with each other under the name "Dear Friend" and revealing themselves to each other. They're already in love, and everything that's going on that's wrong between them is really just superficial--just as the disdain of Beatrice and Benedick for each other (perhaps) is superficial. Finally, in the middle of the movie (this is the linchpin of the movie dramatically) the Jimmy Stewart character discovers who the Margaret Sullivan character is. For the rest of the movie, he sets out to win her, because he realizes that, in fact, this is the woman he's meant to be with, and that he has been misjudging her all this time. Then, of course, the tests are in her court, because he has to convince her that he is not the person she thought he was, but the person she really knows he is from his letters -- it's very complicated.

Anyway, at the very end of the movie, she thinks that she is going to finally to meet "Dear Friend" and that it's someone else, and he knows who it is, he's seen him---that's what he's persuaded her. This is the end of the movie.

Audience Member:

Could you tell us what the pulling up his trousers means?

Vineberg:

In an earlier scene in the movie, when she's so angry at him and he's trying to get her to like him, he shows up at a café because he has a date with her as Dear Friend, and he gets there and realizes that it's Klara. So he goes in and tries to talk to her, doesn't tell her who he is, but he tries to talk to her, and she's furious at him for being there, because she's expecting someone else (him!) At one point she calls him bow-legged. He

says, "I'm not bow-legged!" She says, "Really? I don't believe you!" And he says, "Do you want me to go in the street and pull up my trousers?"

Of course, inevitably, for those of us who love *Much Ado About Nothing*, the whole idea at the end of the letters which tell the truth about them makes us think of Benedick's great line: "Here's a miracle – What a miracle, here is our hands against our hearts." That's what that, in fact, is.

The last thing I want to say, just to bring us to a close, is that what's so great about romantic comedies, whether it's Shakespeare's or the great romantic comedies of Hollywood, is that the set-up, this arc of discovery and self-discovery that has to move against the initial adversarial position in which the hero and heroine find each other, is a brilliant metaphor for what happens when we fall in love. That, in fact, even if we don't begin in an adversarial position with the person we end up with (though that sometimes happens)--but even if it doesn't happen that way, the fact is that the process of falling in love is a process of compromise, passing tests -- earning the happy ending. That's why romantic comedy, I think, is so enchanting for us--because it does that. Any questions?

Audience Member:

As you were talking, I was thinking, *Lady and the Tramp*.

Vineberg:

Yes! A lovely romantic comedy. [*Pausing for questions*]

Well, thank you very much!

[*Applause*]

3. Summing Up Session

Participants: Evelyn Gajowski, David McCandless, Steve Vineberg

David McCandless:

So here we are. I hope this little wrap-up session we're undertaking is welcome, that you're not thinking, "Gosh, yet another session? Get me out of here." I hope you're not thinking that. It seemed to us, in planning this, it might be useful to say a few things, given the diversity of events that we've offered today and the multiple perspective that have come up.

A couple things occur to me--I'll just throw them out there, and you guys can run with them, and then maybe ask for some audience participation. Thinking about Steve's lecture, and then thinking about the panel discussion, and also the presentation that we made earlier, I feel torn in terms of which direction to go in choosing a topic to comment on, at least, initially. But thinking about Steve's lecture, and about the ways in which, indeed, you could really make the case (as Steve implicitly and sometimes explicitly was) that the Beatrice-Benedick story in *Much Ado About Nothing* really provides the template for what is, arguably, one of the (or maybe not arguably, at all) one of the top kinds of Hollywood films--

When we talk about romantic comedies, we're talking about a genre that is prolific in Hollywood. Every season brings lots of them. I remember Bill Maher writing something once upon a time saying, "I'm getting tired of people complaining about violence in movies. You want to know what's really violent and really awful? The romantic comedy!" Because it generates all these fantasies about romantic fulfillment that are bound to lead to titanic disappointment and psychic damage, even, for the people who subscribe to them. Thinking about the Beatrice-Benedick plot as providing a template for that particular kind of form, which is so popular now -- but so rarely (and I think Steve would agree with this, he's fairly persnickety), so rarely totally satisfying. It tends to be a genre that disappoints more often than it satisfies. That's an interesting thing to talk about is the way that Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* really, in a way, is in a class by itself. Evelyn pointed out you could compare it profitably to *Taming of the Shrew*, and I certainly buy that--that it's a more sophisticated version of that. But, in fact, if you think about the other Shakespearean romantic comedies, you don't really (I don't think) see--in quite the same way--a couple like Beatrice and Benedick who profess to hate each other and actually are deeply in love, and that's certainly one kind of romantic comedy. That's one thing that intrigues me.

The other thing that intrigues me (and then I really will [*gestures to Gajowski and Vineberg on stage with him*], there's lots to say) is whereas, indeed, we like to talk about, as I now am, Beatrice and Benedick, and I think Steve is certainly correct in saying that they, and as an audience member said earlier, they're the star attraction of the play, that we have spent a lot of time today talking about Hero and Claudio. I will say myself that, whereas I celebrate the singularity of Beatrice and Benedick, and appreciate that Shakespeare created a character in Beatrice who really is a shrew, and yet we never think of her that way. She's called that. I think Lydia alluded to Beatrice's verbal incontinence, and Evelyn pointed out that verbal incontinence really was a signifier of unchastity, and yet that's not how Shakespeare presents her at all. That's not how we receive her. That really is (you might even go so far as to say) revolutionary. And yet, speaking for myself and maybe for others, considering this subject has come up a lot today, Hero and Claudio, I think, now are in a way--for a lot of us--in a way are assuming more of the center of interest in the play. We can sort of take Beatrice and Benedick for granted, almost because we've seen these romantic comedies--"Oh yeah, there they are: the hostile couple whose hostility masks a deep and abiding attraction! I've seen that before!" But to confront the story of Claudio and Hero today is to confront something that's disturbing in a way that we commented on throughout the day, and that the students were clearly exercised by, and put that at the forefront of the presentation.

Thinking about today, myself, and what we might focus on, just briefly, before we break camp today, that's what's hitting me, so what do you guys [*Gajowski and Vineberg*] think?

Steve Vineberg:

Well, let me address the first thing mentioned.

Evelyn Gajowski:

And I'll address the second!

Vineberg:

David, I think you're right in saying that there are few memorable romantic comedies. I think actually Hollywood has forgotten how to make them. It's very rare. It used to be that every season there was one decent romantic comedy. The end of the last millennium there were a whole bunch of them. Some of those ones with Julia Roberts were good: *My Best Friend's Wedding* and *Notting Hill* and *Runaway Bride* and there were a whole bunch of others. And now very often you get instead movies in which two people hook up--

[Editing cut]

And that seems to be a crucial problem--a reality check problem, in a way. And there are many of these, it seems to me. These movies that begin with a false premise, or begin with the idea that two people are somehow fated--that's why I changed my terminology when I said that--that they're somehow fated to be together. In fact, we know that's not how it works. It doesn't work that way in real life, and when it works that way in a movie, we think it's phony. I think we're kind of losing those conventions which seem to be such a great metaphor.

Gajowski:

I would go a little further than that, though I haven't seen that particular film. I think there might actually be an active deconstruction of the romantic premise going on. Like, "We're going to play with you--we know what your expectations are, audience members, and we're going to lead you up to point A, B, or C in two-and-a-half hours or an hour and a half, and then we're going to twist it on you. We're not going to grant you that conventional ending." I think that's what's been (to my mind)--that's what's being played with in a variety of ways.

Vineberg:

These movies usually have happy endings.

Gajowski:

They do?

Vineberg:

They do. *Knocked Up* does. And that one with Drew Barrymore and Justin Long. I forget what's it called. *Going the Distance*? It's really bad. My students know it. But it's the same kind of idea, where they have a one-night stand and the next day they discover they both like the same bad movie, and that somehow becomes a basis for a relationship. So it's the happy endings--the idea of deconstructing, I like this a lot: that's what *Annie Hall* is! *Annie Hall* turns it completely on its head by telling you in the first two minutes of the movie that the hero and heroine do not end up together, and then showing you why. That's brilliant, I think. I like that a lot.

Gajowski:

It becomes a conflict between two value systems: the L.A. value system which she buys into and the Manhattan, New York value system which, of course, Woody Allen always has wanted to...

Do you want me to do the second and then we'll open things up? Is that all right? I had a learning process here today. I wanted to— And I don't know quite what to make of it, but I'll just share it with everyone.

When I watched the movie -- the Joss Whedon film this morning for the first time, and during the discussion that Steve and David had afterwards--I was struck by issues of contemporaneity, and the difficulty that we have dealing with some of these problems that we've been discussing all day long--trying to figure out what the impact would have been on an audience back then versus the impact that they're having on us today. I felt, by the time we got to the end of the film, and the end of the discussion, that the point was well taken about male homosocial bonds-- you [*McCandless*] even quoted that wonderful essay by Montaigne in which he makes the point that male friendship is superior to any kind of heterosexual relations--heterosexual relations are contaminated by this fiery flame of desire. And, of course, male friendship is uncontaminated by that. That seems to characterize so much late medieval and early modern literature as well as a whole bunch of Shakespeare's plays. Mercutio and Romeo versus Julia--one could just go right down the list and point out so many of the plays in which that conflict is at stake somewhere in the subtext.

But another point from early Modern English culture that I think needs to be made is something that we referred to on the panel just a bit ago, and that is the constructions of women--as I mentioned chaste, silent, obedient, and--as was also mentioned--and enclosed within doors. The notion that female sexuality was so out-of-control, so threatening to the status quo, to the patriarchal order, that first the father had to have complete control over it, whether it be Brabantio of Desdemona, Capulet of Julia--by no means is a young woman allowed to go choose her own mate. The premise is that we need to follow the whole system of arranged marriage that mysteriously, somehow, in *Romeo and Juliet* between Act One and Act Three becomes an enforcement or a threat -- I mean he's shoving it down our throat. We see it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Hermia's father---forcing Lysander down her throat when she wants--excuse me, forcing Demetrius down her throat when she chooses Lysander. We see it even--we see the patriarch's, the father's will being exercised from the grave, if you will, even in a play with as powerful a female protagonist as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*. She has to end up married to the guy that chooses the right casket, right? She doesn't say, "Screw you, Dad, I'm not going to play this game." She plays the game. Many think she might be giving Bassanio some hints in terms of choosing the correct casket--the lead casket. So that's such a predominant issue.

I was thinking that that notion of female sexuality that's so out-of-control or threatening to the patriarchal order and first the father and then the husband, or else sometimes it's

the brother in Early Modern Renaissance drama— *The Duchess of Malfi* is all about the brother's controlling the Duchess's sexuality and punishing her, torturing her, and murdering her when she has the nerve to choose her own mate, Antonio, for example. I was thinking we might have difficulty understanding that in 2015—that was my conclusion, I thought, in terms of contemporaneity, whether it's Joss Whedon or Kenneth Branagh, or whether it's the OSF production that I saw yesterday afternoon with a very contemporary American stamp. I was thinking that's part of the subject matter that might not translate easily, given all those assumptions, those discourses, those practices, those beliefs back then, in that time and place, as opposed to now.

Then I saw the student production, which capitalized on the slut-shaming phenomenon in contemporary culture. I had to undergo another radical shift in my thinking and, looking at what they had done—they had gone right to the essence of the Hero-Claudio relationship, and they had foregrounded it in their appropriation or spin-off or (call it what you will) their version. So, this has been a learning process for me, too. I don't have any grand conclusion to offer, I'm afraid, except that I, too, am a student of Shakespeare and I, too, learn from everyone else around me, including my own students.

McCandless:

[Pointing to an audience member with their hand up] Yes?

Audience Member 6:

You said that romantic comedy was on the way out. It's biggest ever if you watch television – sit-coms. I'm thinking *Rules of Engagement*, *Love Boat*, *Cheers*, *M.A.S.H.*, *Friends*, *Modern Family*, *Love American Style*. It might move from the two-hour movie to the hour or half-hour show, but virtually almost any sit-com on TV from Dick Van Dyke on.

Vineberg:

I don't think it's on the way out at all, I just think it's become bad. I think that Hollywood has stopped knowing how to make them. Some of the TV shows you mentioned predate some of the good romantic comedies I was alluding to, as well. I certainly don't think it's finished. It's very frustrating to go to these movies. I've just about given up on going to romantic comedies because they're mostly so dopey.

Audience Member 6:

Every year I go down to the Silent Film Festival which is at the end of this month at the Castro theater, and there's twenty films this year. But there are a great many romantic comedies from the 1910s and the 1920s, before *It Happened One Night*.

Vineberg:

Yes. They don't necessarily have that narrative arc that was invented by *It Happened One Night*. There certainly are movies you could call romantic comedies that predate them, but the screwball comedies I'm thinking of are peculiar to that era.

Audience Member 6:

[Inaudible]

Audience Member 7:

We've talked a lot about women's roles, men's roles, expectations--I would love to hear you address (quickly) Margaret's role. Because Margaret behaves mischievously, and then in the moment at the wedding, Margaret could stop it. But she's at the wedding--she's always at the wedding. She could say, "Oh, no, that was me!" But instead, she chooses to be complicit. What's that say about women and gender and the way we operate against ourselves--I don't know, I just always find that fascinating. You guys are brilliant, and I'd love to hear what you have to say.

Gajowski:

[McCandless and Vineberg point their microphones at Gajowski] I get the sense that they've picked me. [Audience laughter]

Audience Member 7:

I always wonder this! People don't really talk about Margaret.

Gajowski:

I don't know what to make of Margaret. It's something akin (I suppose) to Emilia (Iago's wife) getting the handkerchief that he requests. I believe that she doesn't know what he wants to do with it. That's why she's shocked--she spills the beans at the end of *Othello*. Despite, or because of, the shock of learning that her husband is responsible for all this pain that has been caused by Iago to Desdemona and Othello and the fact that they're both dead. She pays for her life at her husband's hand just as Desdemona dies by her husband's hand. It's kind of akin to that unless you believe that Emilia really does understand. What does she say? "I'm out to complete this fantasy" That's the most reason she gives us for picking up the handkerchief that Desdemona drops and giving it to Iago. There's a very interesting circuit that the handkerchief takes before the dramatic action of the play begins, and then during the dramatic action of the play. The handkerchief has different connotations going all the way back to the sybil who wove it and gave it to an Egyptian woman or an Egyptian woman gave it to the sybil--and then that's how Othello's mother got it, and so on and so forth. It's the ocular proof that Othello asks Iago for, and Iago happily supplies it. I'm going off and talking about

another play, but they are similar kinds of questions about other females and their complicity. I don't have a clue as to what to make of Margaret. Does anybody else?

I wish we had our actor who was here earlier, because she was involved in--we have our dramaturg here.

Garcia:

Margaret is a fascinating character—*[Moves to the stage to use the microphone]* I'm interloping.

McCandless:

No, please! Please.

Garcia:

Every production has to answer that question. Who is Margaret? What motivates her to act? What keeps her from acting when she needs to, or when we think she should, to turn the tide of events. I've worked with productions that have taken very different tacks with Margaret. For example--I believe in the character description in the play as written--she's described as being Hero's waiting gentlewoman. She's in a servant position. A production might say she could be Hero's peer, but depending on how noble Hero is, she might be of a lesser rank. Does class play a role in not feeling safe to speak in the moment where clearly the nobility and the governor are caught in some kind of death spiral of accusation. Does she not feel safe enough to speak in that moment?

In our particular production, because it's a contemporary production, and we're dealing very much with modern conceptions of female sexuality where we are simultaneously encouraged to take control of our sexuality and use that to express ourselves as women, and simultaneously condemned for actually taking up an invitation and acting upon it. In the students' wonderful adaptation, we saw it in the form of Twitter, for example, or social media shaming, where Hero has done nothing wrong or Margaret has done nothing wrong. In our production, we talked about these things. I wish that Allison Buck was here, who plays Margaret. I've never actually asked her the question: what is going through your mind when you're far upstage? We can all see you reacting. There are a couple moments where she tries to take a step forward to say something. But what strikes me in that scene is that the men are talking to each other. The men are talking to each other so exclusively that once we get past the interrogation of Hero, no one's actually interested in what the women have to say, whether it's Hero, or Beatrice (who also tries to insert herself, but for once is struck dumb, and is not able to have words). So I think for this time, this is what we came up with.

Gajowski:

I'd just like to point out that all this is complicated by the directorial decision that's made by Kenneth Branagh in his film, because he has a close-up of the actor playing Margaret and a look of recognition and horror on her face during the wedding ceremony, and yet she still says nothing. That further complicates the issue that you raise, although it doesn't resolve it. I don't know a resolution.

Vineberg:

What you initially brought up, though, was her promiscuity. That it's not a big deal that she sleeps with Borachio—though it's clearly a big deal if Hero does. I think it probably does have to do with class.

Garcia:

Hero is an heiress, and as such, the passing of property. She's Leonato's only heir, and as such, his property depends upon a clear, unobstructed, unambiguous line of inheritance, so her virginity is crucial.

McCandless:

Just a final word here (because I think we need to move on): I can't resist saying, for those of us who saw the film this morning, that I thought there was a really lovely moment when Benedick was interacting with her and she said, "Would you write a love sonnet to me?" and he says "You're worthy of it" and I thought there was a really compelling poignant sadness in Margaret at that particular moment, that registered the kinds of limits placed on her because of her class, because a choice was made early in the film that she was a serving person.

I think we're a little behind our time here, so I'll hand it back over to David and Paul. Thanks very much.

- 4.
- 5.

6. Concluding Remarks – David Humphrey, Paul Nicholson

David Humphrey:

When Paul gets done hugging the ladies, he'll come over and speak. You can go first.

Paul Nicholson:

This seems to have been a longish sort of day, I think, with a lot of focus. I hope you've learned some interesting things and new insights into the world of Shakespeare and particularly the relevance of Shakespeare today. One of the things that struck me--and I just sort of this [*indicating with fingers*] deep in it---we're talking in terms of *Much Ado About Nothing* being the forerunner of the screwball comedies. I'm also thinking about: what about some of the other Shakespeares in terms of their being the forerunners. Take *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the obvious one--okay, it was the forerunner of *West Side Story*. But there are some other contemporary movies, I think, that--there was one recently that I saw, *The Fault in Our Stars*, or something like that, about the young couple with cancer. I thought: Oh, that's sort of heading in the--they're fated and they're---one of them, maybe both of them, are going to die from this. But of course I'm sort of wondering, I wonder if we can see traces of Shakespeare plays in some of the other more contemporary movies or plays that we see today, without actually being an adaptation of it, which I think is the--

Audience Member:

What about Webster? *White Devil* versus *Fatal Attraction*, as *White Devil 2*.

Nicholson:

There you go. My role right now is to talk for a moment about where we think we're going to go with this, again, as I said in my remarks at the beginning, the inaugural work of Shakespeare America. We all hope that this is not the final work of Shakespeare America. We do have a pretty clearly laid-out plan in terms of where we think this might go in the future. One of the things that we know is going to happen in the short-term is that all of the sessions and discussions that happened today will be digitized, will be recorded, and we'll find a digital platform, and they can be made available to other people--scholars, students, and the general public in due course. That very clearly will be happening.

The other thing that, of course---what happens in the medium term, like in 2016, what might a similar symposium look like. I'm going to say, at this stage, we don't have a clue. But what we do know is this is the launching pad for something that is more significant. What we do believe is that there will be another symposium or series of

symposiums. We're looking at several other elements of Shakespeare America where we can start really collaborating with other organizations. The obvious collaboration is between SOU and OSF. That's going to be one we'll have to work our way through fairly carefully, because one of the things that became clear to me as I began working with both organizations is that everybody in both organizations is already working really hard. Where's the bandwidth to make it possible to have somebody else coming on? Ultimately, what we do believe is that this Shakespeare America could be a real player, and that's what the vision is: that it is a real player when it comes to looking at the relevance to Shakespeare both from an academic point of view and from a performance point of view as I talked [about] very early--this bridging of the gap, finding ways that we can bring academics into the rehearsal hall, and we can bring actors into the academic representation on Shakespeare so that both hands are washing each other in a (hopefully) interesting and provocative way. I deliberately use the word provocative. One of the things that we don't want Shakespeare America to be is run-of-the-mill, just churning over the same old stuff. We really want to be out there being provocative, on the edge, be finding out new things about Shakespeare, new ways of looking at performance, and new ways of sharing that with the world in some sort of very strong and powerful digital media. Who knows? Stay online. Watch this space, and you will see. Thank you, again, for being here.

Humphrey:

My job is to thank everyone. I want to particularly thank our committee, and that is David McCandless and Liz Eckhart, who are here right now--thank you for all your good work, and Liz, particularly, working with the students and getting them to express what their thoughts are. I want to thank Tom Knapp who did all the technical, and Kelvin Doo who is over here helping him. Also, I want to thank Paul, who led us to where we are today. It's been an interesting road. A lot of people had a lot to say, and that's what it's all about: to try to synthesize all of that and try to come up with something that was useful and informative. And finally--well, not finally--but I want to thank the Oregon Community Foundation for allowing us to do all this planning and to create this event. Without their support, this would not have ever happened. I want to thank the Oregon Shakespeare Festival for providing the help and support and the artists and administration. And, of course, Southern Oregon University for providing space and assistance and everything that goes with that. And finally, I want to say all the world's a stage and we are merely players, and I want to thank you for being players in this symposium--the inaugural symposium. And with that note, the session is done.

*There is no character of that name in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

**The name of Siegfried's killer in the *Nibelungen* is actually "Hagen."