Transcript of "Multi-Cultural Shakespeare" Discussion
Sponsored by Shakespeare America
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Meese Room, Hannon Library
Southern Oregon University
3:00-5:00 PM
Moderator: David McCandless, Director of Shakespeare Studies, SOU

Participants: **Lara Bovilsky**, Professor of English, University of Oregon
Kenneth Lee, Actor, and Member of the Asian American Performers Action Coalition
Tiffany Lopez, Founder, Latina/o Play Project; Director of the School of Film, Theatre, and Dance, Arizona State University
Bill Rauch, Artistic Director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival
Tyrone Wilson, Actor, Oregon Shakespeare Festival

David McCandless:
The questions we're here to ponder, ostensibly, as a starting point: how do we perceive race and ethnicity when a racially and ethnically diverse cast performs Shakespeare? And how do we perceive a Shakespeare play when non-white actors perform roles -- characters -- intended to be performed by white actors? And (I'm so grateful to have a couple actors on the panel) how do actors of color approach and experience, both in rehearsal and performance, the taking on of those roles? And I also want to pose as a possible question to consider: to what extent does multicultural Shakespeare become color-conscious or color-blind? That's a distinction that really is interesting to me, and I hope that we'll have some opportunity to talk about that.

We've assembled a really distinguished panel of guest thinkers and artists to help us ponder these issues. What I want to do is start by introducing Lara Bovilsky who is our historian and will talk about— the title of her lecture actually is, "Shakespeare's Multiculturalism circa. 1601." Before I introduce her, though, I want to give a brief word about the format. So Lara will give her lecture and, after that, I'll just have the members of the panel come up. I'll ask each of them to ponder the main questions I've just put forward for five minutes each. Then we'll segue into a more free-form discussion with them and then at the end, of course, we'll save time for questions from the audience.

Let me get my cheat sheet here and introduce Lara Bovilsky, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the English department at the University of Oregon. Her research focuses on early modern understandings of group and individual

identities. Her first book, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage,* was published in 2008. She is currently writing a new work, *Almost Human: The Limits of Personhood in Early Modern England*. She has won the [University of Oregon's] Martin Luther King, Jr. Award from the Division of Equity and Inclusion as well as a Mellon Fellowship for work promoting cross-racial understanding. Please help me welcome Lara Bovilsky.

Lara Bovilsky:
I'm going to repeat the question that David started us off with, the "brief" of this panel: how do we perceive race and ethnicity when a racially and ethnically diverse cast performs a Shakespeare play? I've been asked to provide some of the deep background to this question, to go over a little bit of how Shakespeare, his fellow acting company members, and their audience might have thought about race and ethnicity and its theatrical representations. If we could travel back in time (just like Shatner could, no doubt) our framing question could be restated a little: how did early modern English theater companies and their audiences perceive race and ethnicity when a racially and ethnically homogenous cast performed a Shakespeare play?

There are lots of ways to begin to answer that question, and my first impulse is to turn it into additional questions that can help us answer it, questions like: how did Shakespeare's theater companies perform racial and ethnic diversity (and I can answer that more when we have more general conversation. I'm not going to actually dwell on that piece of it in these remarks.) But also: *why* did they perform racial and ethnic diversity – something I'll start with. And how did they and their audiences think about racial and ethnic diversity? I want to make sure that we spend most of our time on the larger, present-ist question, which is the center of our presentation. I'm going to answer these questions in brief and then we'll get to the larger conversation.

Why? Why did they perform racial and ethnic diversity? For many years during the 19th century and most of the 20th century as well, scholars assumed that Shakespeare's London afforded little contact with representatives of groups we would now judge produce a multicultural community. That is, groups whose inclusion in a community we now see as diversifying that community. And I'm going to go back to that "now" that I've repeated twice. Scholars were, occasionally, interested in Shakespeare's representation of non-English characters, but assumed that they testified primarily to the power of Shakespeare's imagination, which was often the answer to any question about Shakespeare in those days. In fact, as vast amounts of intervening scholarship have taught us, London in the late 16th and early 17th centuries – that is, Shakespeare's professional lifespan – was a very diverse and, often, cosmopolitan city. Some 4-5% of London's inhabitants (that translates to about 5,000-10,000 human beings) were from

other countries, or their parents were from other countries. In fact, earlier in the 16th century, when London was much smaller, the percentage was as high (we think) as 12-13%. So just a large international sense of that city.

Many were elite, coming to England to pursue trades and professions. Dutch, Levantine, and Venetian traders; Jewish doctors; Jewish musicians; and diplomatic cadres from a variety of countries. But the vast majority were humbler folk coming in search of better economic opportunity, in search of religious freedom, or political opportunity. The largest of these groups were Dutch and French Protestants, but they included Walloons and Flemish; Jewish *conversos*; Greek and Hungarian refugees; and individuals from as far away as modern-day Iran, India and Bengal. Many more diverse groups entered as seamen, participating in England's fishing, cloth, and shipping industries, and others for the pleasure of personal travel, which was now available at scale. In some cases, immigrants from other lands (we should remember) came involuntarily, as slaves or captives. A lot of Africans and some natives from the Americas. However, not all of these were, or remained, slaves and captives. Many came as servants and set up households of their own, as parish records indicate.

[*Pulling up and referring to a slide*]

This is a parish record that shows funeral preparations for an African resident of the parish. There's hundreds of these kinds of records, where a lot of the documentation of the African community in London derives.

And moreover because, importantly, we are talking about a time (and this really has to be stressed) before the rise of plantation-based chattel slavery--a time when slaves were routinely able to buy their own freedom and when slave status could not be passed on to offspring--there was also a sizable population of Africans, former slaves and the children of slaves, living as freed and free people in London. In addition to Native Americans brought in an involuntary way, there were Native Americans who chose to visit out of curiosity and choice as well. One famous one is Pocahontas, here [*referring to slide*] dressed up in high Jacobean regalia. This is 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death.

In addition to these individuals and communities, London attracted slowly growing numbers of members of other ethnic and national groups from the British Isles themselves: Scots, Picts, Welsh, Irish. And these groups were typically seen by the English as belonging to different nations and were often strongly racialized by them at that time in ways that might seem startling to us now.

I want to pause on this long list of different groups for a few reasons: first, to underscore that the question about why so many of Shakespeare's plays feature ethnically, racially, and nationally diverse characters is partly answered just by this demographic record. Diversity onstage both mirrored, and presented reactions to, experiences of domestic diversity. Second, it's worth noting straightaway that English reactions to this diverse and international London scene can't be predicted by the fact of multiculturalism itself. They included both xenophobic and xenophilic elements. In real life, and in plays, we find nativist and hostile reactions to various of these groups, often provoked by times and situations of economic competition and stress, in ways that we can recognize now. In real life and in plays, there were also responses showing the interest and excitement of city-dwellers in a cosmopolitan community – feelings we can recognize to this day that find diversity itself attractive and broadening. Third, it's worth considering this international demography as a whole, because it bears on that last question I just asked about how the English understood race and racial diversity at the most basic level. Thinking about how these groups were understood and represented helps us identify samenesses and differences between early modern English views and our own, that in turn help us think more broadly about theatrical diversity and its meanings in Shakespeare, then and now.

The meanings and impact of these different groups and constituencies, then and now, possess both similarities and differences. The early modern English did not necessarily categorize larger ethnic, racial, and national groups in the same ways that we do. Here in the U.S. in 2016, many of the groups I just mentioned might not seem as though they were different races from the English. We identify natives of the Netherlands, France, or Spain (let alone Ireland and Wales) as white and European. But in Shakespeare's day, concepts of communal, shared racial whiteness were still a very long way off. And the idea of collective, amiable European experience was hinted at only in intellectual networks, which themselves extended beyond European borders. The countries of Europe did not see themselves as part of a collective. Instead, they were continuously steeped in bitter tensions and often-violent struggles over empire and political power, extreme religious strife, and economic competition. England occupied a precarious position in most of these contests. Both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I had been excommunicated by the Pope, and often marginalizing England from political and economic alliances with the "European" countries that thought of themselves as unified by their Catholic faith. Generally, England was resource- and cash-poor, and often unable to compete well in trade. (Far less powerful, for instance, than the Habsburg Empire that linked Spain, the Netherlands, and much of Eastern Europe, as well as a lot of territory in the Americas.)

These geopolitical, economic, and religious factors meant that the English did not identify as part of a continental collective, nor readily perceive themselves as sharing cultural or other forms of identity with these populations of Europe. Instead they saw most of them as bitter political and religious enemies. In fact, precisely because so many of the European nations and empires were actively hostile to England economically, religiously, and politically, with the Catholic countries (an alliance particularly hated, feared, and therefore racialized by the English), the English under Elizabeth regularly pursued economic and military supply alliances with the Muslim world—both with the North African states, especially Morocco, and the Ottoman Empire, with Elizabeth sending raw materials to be used in armaments in exchange for sugar, fine goods, and saltpeter (for manufacturing gunpowder) and gold. [*Referring to slide*] Here's Murad III of the Ottoman Empire during this period. He had extensive relationships with Elizabeth.

Envoys and diplomats from the Islamic world regularly visited London to facilitate these relationships. Elizabeth and her Muslim counterparts cultivated a sense of shared religious values, particularly dwelling on their mutual hatred of idolatry, icons, and priestly mediation with God. If England was, in some ways, allied with the Islamic world, however, there were other tensions between those state partners at the local level. Notably, members of English fishing and shipping communities were routinely kidnapped and enslaved by North American pirates in the thousands. So many that in 1601 the word "slave" in England would've connoted English captives rather than members of African or other groups as I think modern American audiences would likely assume. Weekly collections were taken at church for the enfranchisement of captive English folk. Similarly, there were tensions between state policies that encouraged immigration for its economic benefits and modernize [sic] the English cloth industry, which was the mainstay of the economy. But there were often tensions between those policies and the city level, where members of guilds were competing with these new immigrants and often wanted them shut out. So we can see tensions around immigration and economics that I think have a lot of resonance with issues we see today, abundantly.

In talking geopolitics as I've been doing, even as we develop a more precise sense of the full range of human beings that Shakespeare and his audience would have had a real chance of trading with, living nearby, catching a glimpse of, or thinking about, as directly tied to English national interests, we're getting away from our framing perceptual questions about how these same people thought about race and ethnicity, and how those categories figured and were figured on Shakespeare's stage.

I've chosen today the year 1601 as an especially rich year, it's a little bit of a fix there, to which to turn our attention. *The Merchant of Venice*, first performed between 1596 and 1598, was first published in quarto in 1600. Here's a little picture of it:

[*Slide*]

Othello was possibly being written as early as 1601. This was a later publication, but it was being written and performed sometime before 1604. These two plays are, of course, the best-known Shakespearean meditations on the identity of racial and ethnic minorities, partly because they treat major characters whose identities, Jewish and Moorish, remain key in thinking about multiculturalism today. As we will see, they don't reflect on those characters in isolation. Race in Shakespeare is always represented in the context of this international and ethnic diversity, with relations and analogies between individuals and groups key in generating and pressuring theatrical treatments of race and other currents and issues that are presented in these plays.

Working from *Othello* and *Merchant* as example texts, we'll think very briefly about some features of the representation of race in Shakespeare. Then, as now, race does not, and I would suggest that it cannot, figure in a straightforwardly "realistic" manner. I'll trace some of the ways in which race works in these narratives, from just a couple simple to one less-obvious axiom. Because I can't do so exhaustively, I'm picking premises that I hope will easily translate to ways that we can adapt this conversation to the question of modern Shakespeare adaptations and transition into the meat of today's conversation.

First: theatrical race can draw on, refer to, or take a charge from specific topical matters, even if those are not directly figured in a play. In the case of *Othello*, we can note that the showy and months-long presence in London in 1600 of the Moroccan ambassador Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud, and his retinue, who were working to refine the trade alliance between England (Elizabeth) and Morocco. Messaoud brought Moroccan English captives with him and released them during his visit as a sign of good will. One need not argue, as has inevitably been argued, that Messaoud inspired, or was the basis of the character Othello, to see how the resonances and meanings of a fictive Moorish character could draw part of their force, and take on new meanings, from audiences' recent encounters with Moroccans, particularly a glamorous and powerful – and I think like all glamorous and powerful figures, a little bit threatening – a figure promising national benefit (or possibly withholding such national benefit) to/from the English.

Similarly, the 1594 prosecution and execution of Roderigo Lopez, the Portuguese doctor convicted of attempting to poison his patient, Queen Elizabeth, has long been thought

to figure into representations of Shylock's malice in *The Merchant of Venice* (although Shylock is not a poisoner or a doctor). Lopez, once Jewish, had converted to Catholicism in his native Portugal and to the English who gleefully gathered to see him brutally executed, he figured at the same time the anti-English plots of Iberian Catholicism, and the deceptive nature of crypto-Jews in England. At the same time, he can figure two different racialized and feared groups in different ways that work together.

In early productions of *Merchant* or *Othello*, any number of rhetorical cues, dialogue elements, or costume elements might have signaled reference to these and other, topical historical events. Casting and other choices of modern productions can likewise resonate with current topical issues in these plays, whether those issues relate to Jewishness and black identity, or, for instance, the balance between a perceived external Muslim threat such as the one that prompts the big opening military voyage to Cyprus in *Othello* when the play reveals that the real threats to state order and to the main characters result from the deceptions of a nominal ally and friend – malice from within. While some of those meanings suggested in modern productions might not be ones that Shakespeare would directly recognize, the technique of enriching performances and adaptations with such topical reference will be identical in the two periods.

Two: theatrical race draws on, and improvises on, larger histories real and textual associated with different groups. So again, Othello's Moorishness is ceaselessly discussed and constructed in *Othello* and its meanings are rich and inconsistent. Yet Shakespeare's representations of Moorishness draw on its associations with real-life North African military power. In particular, the power to help the English against their potent enemy (and again not the Muslims in this case, but Spain). Yet Shakespeare also draws on the mixtures of truth and fancy found in travel narratives depicting magic and human monsters in Africa.

[*Slide*]

When Othello talks about "men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders," that image is enriched by ideas of the kinds of strange creatures to be found in Africa, here illustrated in an earlier publication.

In *Merchant*, Shylock and his daughter, Jessica, draw on a host of prior Jewish intertexts, and associations, from Christopher Marlowe's wildly successful predecessor play *The Jew of Malta* (run and read it if you haven't), which also features a Jewish father who loses his daughter to Christian suitors and Christian conversion, to associations of Jews with mercantilism, usury, and the literalistic and bloody values of the Hebrew Bible, as it was understood in Christian London. Such intertextual and accumulative signifiers of

race are among the easiest for modern literary critics to decipher and reflect on when we think about early productions of plays involving race and ethnicity. It's harder, sometimes, for us to do that with references that may since have changed, or that may have had radically different meanings in their own times. We're trained to not do this, but we can easily unknowingly presume that racial meanings now were racial meanings then. One of the things we want to do is try to keep an open mind and learn from these texts and from the intertexts and contexts possible differences and radical differences between racial organization then and now. But conversely, the most legible of such references (and others as well) can become the basis for modern productions to dwell on and restage and rethink in ways that we may talk about today.

Third (last): a larger context of racial diversity and multiculturalism, both in real life and in a play, allows for the representations of different groups and individuals to draw on each other's significations and offer mutual fluid representations and racial analogies figuring the fluidity of meaning that is a foundational component of all racial signification. It's no accident that these two example plays do not consider Moorishness or Jewishness in isolation—a single character. But, rather, are set in non-English locales and feature their own rich multicultural contexts. The settings of Venice, Cyprus, and Belmont give us Turks and Italians, Aragonese and Moroccan suitors, Scots, Frenchman and Germans alongside the two plays' most racially marked Jewish and Moorish characters. Again, as with the demographic and geopolitical review with which I began, the relationships among, and the meanings of, these groups in Shakespeare do not always track with modern expectations. In *Merchant,* Portia mocks her English suitor, who is not presented as ethnically neutral and normative as we might expect, but as a cultural other in the play. However much *The Merchant of Venice* works to idealize its careless Venetian romantic leads, their casual cruelty--like Portia's pointedly racist dismissals of her non-Italian suitors (brilliantly shown in the recent OSF production)--are shown as part and parcel of an enthusiasm for the values of Venetian gentility that insist on excluding all others. And here again, our American racial geography can find itself unexpectedly disoriented when Portia ridicules the Lord of Spanish Aragon, as fully as, and in parallel to, the way she does the Prince of Morocco. Similarly, Othello's comparisons of himself at the end of his play to faithless Indians [*referring to slide*] (I don't have a pointer, but you've got Indians in line two) and Turks (four lines from the bottom) and his sudden references to Arabian and Syrian locales reveal the migratory power circa 1601 of racial associations, which can easily transfer from one group to another as they also can today. Here, they allow Othello to fleetingly move among and embody numerous different racial and ethnic profiles. A theatrical multicultural context seems to possess cumulative possibility for and in Shakespeare, precisely by employing fluid racial associations and shifting racial reference.

Again, modern race-conscious casting can activate such fluid associations in ways that might be particular to modernity but can animate authentic energies in Shakespearean practice and text, as I'm suggesting. These energies insist on a diverse signifying universe figuring individual and community, race and ethnicity, in which, as here in Othello's speech, character self-definition--in part racial--is built through the ability to identify with and against a range of other identities. These draw on real-world histories but are not fully circumscribed by those histories. Rather, they generate new meanings and possibilities through the energy of performance and text.

One chief difference of modern companies from early modern ones is, of course, that we are no longer limited to presenting these roles exclusively via white male bodies, as in Shakespeare's time. At this point I'm going to stop and turn to our panelists who can talk more fully about that difference and its larger significance and we'll move the conversation forward. Thank you.

[*Applause*]

McCandless:
Do you guys all just want to come up, and I'll introduce you once you're here? I don't want to put you too much in the spotlight by giving individual introduction. So let me just introduce-- I'll start down there with Tyrone Wilson, a key member of the OSF acting ensemble for 21 years, tackling a multitude of Shakespearean roles including Mercutio in *The Merchant of Venice,* Caliban in *The Tempest.* He has also performed in such contemporary work as *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy,* and *Ruined.* He played the Reverend Ralph Abernathy in both *All the Way* and *The Great Society.* This season you might have seen him as Bushy in *Richard II* or Lucianus in *Hamlet.* Tyrone holds a B.A. from Middlebury College and an M.F.A. in Acting from the Yale School of Drama.

Tyrone Wilson:
Thank you. [*Applause*] Sounds all so reduced!

McCandless:
Yes, these bios are very much trimmed and don't begin to do full justice to our very distinguished panel here, I'm sorry. We'd go on and on if we really recounted all their accomplishments.

Wilson:
Oh please!

[*Laughter*]

McCandless:
Tiffany Lopez, Ph.D. is the director of the School of Film, Dance and Theater at Arizona State University. She has over 20 years of experience working as a community-engaged teacher and dramaturg devoted to developing theater artists. She is a founding artistic director of Latina/o Play Project at the Culver Center for the Arts in Riverside, California. She is a teaching artist for the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and a guest dramaturg for Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Her many awards include a Fulbright Fellowship and grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ford Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation. Welcome, Tiffany.

[*Applause*]

McCandless:
Bill Rauch, Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival since 2007, where he's directed 23 productions, including this season's *Roe* and *Richard II (*both great productions.) Previously, he served for 20 years as co-founder and Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater Company. He directed *All the Way* on Broadway, which won the Tony Award for Best Play in 2014, and has mounted productions at virtually every major regional theater in America. His many awards include a Ford Fellowship, the Fichandler, TCG's Visionary Leadership Award and the Margo Jones Medal. Thank you, Bill.

[*Applause*]

McCandless:
Kenneth Lee is a New York City-based actor and one of the founding members of the Asian American Performing Arts Coalition, which investigates Asian underrepresentation on American stages. In 2012, he took part in a panel discussion at La Jolla playhouse when their production of *The Nightingale (*which is set in China) drew criticism for featuring only two Asian-American actors in a cast of twelve. Kenneth holds an M.F.A. in acting from American Conservatory Theater and has performed professionally in a wide range of material. He has been in nine productions of *Hamlet,* and has played every age- and gender-appropriate role in the play except the lead. Welcome, Kenneth.

[*Applause*]

McCandless:
I told the panelists that more than anything else, I was just very interested in how they wanted to address this question in any way, shape, or form, so the questions that I posed earlier are sort of optional. But I do think that maybe each of you should have an opportunity to speak briefly as individuals, five minutes or so. I'd like to start with Bill, and—

[*Audience laughter in response to a facial expression by Bill Rauch*]

McCandless:
– you didn't know it was coming, did you? – And again, if you want to work with that basic question that I posed (how do we perceive race and diversity in a multicultural Shakespeare production, how do we perceive Shakespeare in the same) and that distinction between color-conscious and color-blind I do think is really fascinating, but whatever you want, whatever you want!

Bill Rauch:
But I do have to go first?

[*Audience laughter*]

Rauch:
Good afternoon, everybody. It's so great to be here—do I need this? No? [*The microphone*] Hello? Hello? Is that better? It's great to be here with old and new friends on this panel, and I can't wait to hear from everybody else. But I will share a couple thoughts to kick us off. To me, color-blind – although it was a commonly used phrase for a while – I think is problematic. It's a phrase that we try to not use at OSF [Oregon Shakespeare Festival] in our casting process because, to me, color-blind assumes that race and ethnicity don't matter. That's, in fact, not the world that we live in. I think that August Wilson, a long time ago now, wrote very famously about actors of color in Shakespeare essentially being asked to check their racial and ethnic identity at the door and essentially to play white people, and how problematic that was.

I think when you're creating a world onstage -- you are creating a world, right, as a group of artists -- you can choose to create a world in which race and ethnicity don't matter, but that's a choice, and that's a very particular world that you're creating. It can be a world where you're really investing in our shared humanity above all else, and I think that can be very powerful but I don't think it's appropriate for every work of art. I don't think it's appropriate for every Shakespeare play. I do think there's very slippery terrain in terms of, essentially, asking people of color to not bring who they are to bear

with color-blind. The phrase that we tend to use at OSF is color-conscious, which means that you want to be thoughtful on a production-by-production basis and a role-by-role basis. It's about the play itself and the playwright's vision (as much as you can determine it), the director's vision, the dramaturg's vision, and the actor's insights that you want to figure out how race and ethnicity come into play and are represented in a given production.

We've certainly, over the last several years (maybe Tyrone you'll talk a little bit about *Comedy of Errors*, or *Measure*)-- We've certainly experimented with culturally specific productions of Shakespeare. For instance, this season we have a production of *The Winter's Tale* that is performing on our outdoor stage with a large number of Asian-American company members-- the majority of the cast is Asian-American. That's a culturally specific approach. In the same way, when I directed *Measure for Measure* in 2011 that Ty[rone] was in, the starting premise of that production was every actor was bringing their racial and ethnic identity forward in some way in terms of the character. Isabella was played by a Latina actress and she was a Latina character, and her brother Claudio was a Latino man and Tony Heald playing the Duke was a white man. Race and ethnic identity and gender were given with the characters, which may not sound radical, but really starting with that was a strong place to start for that particular production.

I could talk a lot about other OSF productions, and I'm happy to talk more. I want to pause here and share the platform but, again, color consciousness is the phrase that we tend to use, knowing that every production and, ultimately, every role, there's going to be a different interplay between the reality of the actor's life and the character.

Wilson:
I can jump on that for a sec, because I remember our conversation about *Measure for Measure* – I think we ran into each other in the street – and Bill said, "Well, I want him to come from a place"— You talked about it being some place where— That this black man, this African-American man, me, would make sense, would be right in that world. But I didn't have to confine myself to this country. I remember the only question— I said, "Well, Bill, can we take him out of Nigeria because I've been in Africa for two seasons."

[*Audience laughter*]

Wilson:
I remember we went back and forth and we settled on Jamaica, and that this character —Elbow -- would be from Jamaica. What was fascinating, working on it (and I don't

know how many times this has happened), but in studying the dialect— There was a woman in the company who was from Jamaica. I had several conversations with her about, particularly, where this character would exist in terms of the class, being a police officer. Looking at the Shakespeare lines and Elbow's Shakespeare lines and what class he was in, she was reminded of her uncles, who had the same sort of ideals about life, the same sort of points of view. She said, "You know, this is kind of a perfect match of dialect and this particular character, this set of character's thoughts and feelings about the world."

Rauch:
Just as Shakespeare intended.

Wilson:
Exactly. As we know, there were probably some Jamaicans hanging out in England [*adopting Jamaican accent*] at the time, man.

I always thought it was so wonderful. Even when we were doing this speech stuff, the dialect stuff, some of the language kind of leant itself to the kind of language that we would expect from the character of Elbow. I just thought it was fascinating the way those worlds came together. That's not the first time that that's happened. When we were doing *Comedy of Errors* we set the play in Harlem Renaissance, 1920s Harlem; we changed very few words in that except for locations (we were in Louisiana and Upstate New York, sometimes) but, other than that, we just did the Shakespeare. I like to say we did it with a flavor of being in Harlem in 1920s. It was amazing to hear that language coming out of each other's mouths, looking at each other going "We are in the Harlem Renaissance." But we were speaking words that were written over 400 years ago. We didn't have any problems putting that together, believing in that fully.

I love when it comes together like that, and for the most part I think it does. I did actually answer two of the questions and I think they actually tie in, and one of them is "How does an audience perceive a Shakespeare play" it's interesting. When I go to see a play, many times I hardly think about— That there's this actor playing this and there's this actor of color playing this, unless the production wants me to think about it, if they want me to think about it. When a production wants me to think about it – If you cast an African-American actor, for example, in the role of Caliban, and you are consciously crafting the concept to make a statement about an African-American being in that particular relationship to this guy who's taken the island away from him, then I'm going to think about the fact that that's an African-American actor playing that role, because you wanted me to. Roles like Caliban, because of who Caliban is, even if you don't make that the point if you cast a black actor, I'm going to think about it anyway.

Because here it is, a guy who's a servant. Given our past relationship with that, with master and servant, with oppressor and oppressed, if I see a black actor who's playing Caliban, and a white actor who's playing Prospero, that's where I'm going to go. I'm going to think about that. It's just natural. I think that the more time that passes between when the play is originally written and the present time, I think audiences get less stuck with that. But I think we're at that time where we're stuck sometimes.

"How do actors of color approach these roles and experience performance?" I had a friend of mine named Reg E. Cathey; when I first got out of grad school, I ran into him in New York. He was already auditioning in New York. He had auditioned for a big film with John Landis. He goes in – he had just gotten out of Yale Drama School – he goes in and he does a general audition, and he auditions with Shakespeare. John Landis says, "Oh yes, very nice," and you know John Landis is a big film director. Then he auditions with a Chekhov piece. John Landis says, "Do you have anything black?" And Reg E. Cathey looked at him and said, "Everything I do is black." Now, I think about that sentence and that story about every three or four months. Every three or four months. I bring to the role my life experiences. Those experiences are shaped by many factors. One of those variables includes being an African-American who was born in North Carolina, grew up in New York City, went to Middlebury College in Vermont, and Yale Drama School, who lives in Southern Oregon with two biracial children, one whose mother is Hawaiian and other woman's who's white and comes from a pioneer family who was here for 200 years. I play golf, I climb mountains – my approach to the role is all of those experiences. Every role I do is black, because that's how I define myself. My moment-to-moment experience onstage is my character reacting to the circumstances of that play being developed during the rehearsal process. For the most part, in a Shakespeare play, that experience is a result of crafting those moments with a director and my fellow actors.

We were doing—Bill directed *Richard II* -- and we had a moment in the play (I don't know if you [Bill] even knew this conversation was going on, if you were part of the conversation) we had the jousting scene. So of course, we're on the side going, "How are we going to have jousting in a play where most of us are in modern costumes? But these guys are going to come on in armor! How do we reconcile that?" So, Jeff King and I, who are Star Trek fans, were having a conversation. I said, "Remember, Jeff, in 'Amok Time', when Spock goes back to Vulcan, and he has to fight using these ancient instruments, and then they settle their differences and then they go back on the ship? It's kind of like that." We both went home and watched 'Amok Time' that night and came back the next day and we said, "Now we're reconciled. We can see people coming onstage with modern costumes and with armor, because we know this is 'Amok Time.'" You see? There are black Vulcans, okay? So, to me, it's what you decide it is going to be.

That's how you define yourself, that's how you define who you are in a production, because you can create it because it's theatre. You can use your imagination and you're hoping that every audience member is doing the same thing.

Tiffany Lopez:
Thank you. Thank you so much for that. There's so much to say. One of the things that I think is really incredible about the environment here, in Ashland, and through OSF, is that they are thinking about building the work from what their engagement with their audience, with their community stakeholders, with what the actors have to say about the season, with what the person in the box office has to say, with all the various relationships. For the last couple years, I've been very privileged to be trusted to be a kind of fly on the wall in some very deep conversations around arts equity, a lot of closed-door conversations, really being able to talk about some of the impact of the work on people of color and on the ground and building the work. I've also been able to see from the position of being a guest dramaturg, writing for *Illuminations* and, this year, working with *Mojada* and a team building Luis Alfaro's play for the season, to be privy to these really incredible conversations where people are thinking about the impact of the work, they're thinking about questions about identity. They're also thinking about excellence, and the storytelling, and how we convey the storytelling. In the academic world, in the world of higher education, I'm in the pipeline of the creative process here and helping to train young actors and dramaturgs where the questions that are being asked here at OSF are not-- they are lightyears ahead of how they're talking about race here than what I even see in higher education.

I think I want to share a couple of stories to kind of put a face on, "Well, what happens when you don't ask these questions?" Or "We're not empowering the next generation of artists to ask these questions." We know right now diversity matters because our population is becoming increasingly diverse. We might be in a room with who appears to be all white retirees and assume that they don't care about race and diversity, but actually that's so wrong because those are their grandkids. Their family photos look like the casting in the world of the Shakespeare plays at OSF. These are snapshots of how our family photos have evolved. When I've done conversations here it's been incredible to see where audiences want to go and talking about diversity in casting. It's been very curious to me within the institution of higher education, training M.F.A. students, training young undergraduates, doing work at institutions that are Hispanic-serving, and that ability to talk about-- how do we talk about race, how do we talk about diversity? We did a play called *Detained in the Desert* by the playwright Josefina López, and it's about immigration and detention, and the young Latina actress who was rehearsing the role started to cry during rehearsal. And somebody asked her, "Oh, are you just overwhelmed by the storytelling, about immigration, and about detention?"

and she said, “No. I’ve been a Latina actor training through high school, through junior high, here I am in college…this is the first time I’ve ever had the opportunity to play somebody from my own culture and I have no idea how to go about it. I feel alienated from my own culture.” Because none of these conversations had ever been part of her training as a young actor coming into play.

Another story I want to share is about a young actor. His name is Cesar Ortega. He did some work for Cornerstone and now he’s an independent theater artist. He was a student in my class. He is from Mexico. He immigrated during high school. He has a very thick accent. He is one of the most amazing actors, theater-makers, community-engaged artists that I had seen in my twenty years of teaching at the University of California. We were doing a table read of *Short Eyes,* and I asked him to come up and play a character in *Short Eyes*. He said, “Profe, Profe, I don’t know if I can do this because of my accent.” I said, “No, this is going to be brilliant. You’re bringing something to this that – trust me – everybody in the room is going to go deeper into the play because of you and what you’re bringing to the role.” He read the role of Paco—“Cupcakes”--and that day completely changed his life. He said, “I realized I’ve been living and not sharing my art and not speaking because I felt ashamed. I believed that I couldn’t be an actor, I couldn’t be a theater artist to maximum potential, because of my accent and now I see that, no, it brings something really powerful to what I’m going to do.” He went on to graduate and do really incredible things.

These are examples of what happens for young people when they’re not in a world where the conversations that we’re having in this room are part of their education. How does that play out in the pipeline to what is going to happen 10, 20 years later with our artistry in this country? That’s a way to share about why this is so important why these questions-- I think the last thing I want to put on the table for us to think about is there can be a huge distance between intention and impact. I’ve also seen several productions where guest directors will come in and they’ll have a concept about setting a work in Mexico, for example. Well, what happens when the cast is not cast with Latino actors? What happens to that concept? It ends up becoming very offensive. It ends up that race and culture are a prop. It ends up that everything goes awry that you can think of. And then what happens when there’s no way to talk about it, to shape it, to change it?

Something I’m doing working with young artists at Arizona State University is-- I was just at a table reading for a new script where three white males wrote the script. It’s a border story. They talked about the intent with the work. The script was so problematic. I felt socked in the gut at the end of the reading. It was a moment where the impact had gone so awry from what they intended. They didn’t realize the history of stereotypes and offense that they were actually engaging with with their characters. At that point

there's two things that I and the other collaborators on the dramaturgical team can do: we can either voice the problem with it, and we all leave the room, or we sit and talk and make a commitment to "Well, now what?" What has come out of that is that we're developing an incubation laboratory where we're fostering young artists who really want to be ethical storytellers, to get things right, to talk about race and culture that they can have a safe space where they can risk failing. They can risk offense. But we can put these questions on the table so that we can really foster the next generation of storytellers that want to get these things right. Not just for the actors of color that are onstage but for the storytellers who may not be from those communities, but realize that they live in this incredibly diverse world, and need to be responsible to the world they live in and know how to get things right and how they're portraying diversity/race in different communities.

I just want to share some of those anecdotes with you and to say how important this conversation is and how privileged we are to have access to a space like OSF where what we see onstage is evolving out of some really ground-breaking, forward-thinking, exemplary conversations about race and diversity in casting. Thank you.

Kenneth Lee:
Wow, everybody's covered everything I want to say (and so eloquently, too.) I just wanted to piggy-back on your [Lopez's] point about the three white writers who wrote about the Latino experience. I think one of the tendencies that we have as a society is to find a fix for that. It seems now that the conversation goes (for instance, in Hollywood) "Yeah, well, we'll find a Latino person to write the script next time." That's the extent of our conversation. I like that you [Lopez] mentioned— Let's develop a whole process, let's develop the dialogue, let's actually get to the core. Because it's kind of like what you were talking about: the Latina actress who seemed so disconnected from her experience. Just because somebody is a person of color they should not then be expected to carry the burden of all the knowledge and the background and the culture of that race or that ethnicity. We cannot skip that process. That's the primer.

So: thanks for having me. I wanted to say thanks, also, to Bill and your work at OSF. I was able to see *The Winter's Tale*. I wanted to share a story about how seeing an Asian lead in a Shakespeare play moved me tremendously. It made me feel like, "Oh, *that's* what I've been missing." I thought, "Wow. We've got to do better by our younger kids of color, because it's really, really, really important for young people who are in the process of developing who they are to see reflections of themselves." I don't remember— It was Mary Shelly, maybe, who said something like, "You want to turn somebody into a monster? Deny them a reflection of themselves." I think, as artists, all of us on the panel and consumers of art-- I think we have a responsibility to transcend

that and to, as it were, in *Hamlet,* everybody has a connection to *Hamlet* here, "hold a mirror up to life" and show people who they are. To that extent, what you talked about, Tyrone, I really enjoyed as well, about "I am me. I don't know any other than me. What I bring to the stage is me." So, when somebody says, "Can you be more Asian?" or "more black?" I kind of don't know what that means. But I can give you an example that may help us flip the page a little bit.

There's a theater company in New York that, because of this diversity initiative, has decided to curate a season of plays that is interesting. One of them is—I think it's a Brecht, and it's set in the Congo, so it's an all-black cast. And then there's another play called *Pacific Overtures* and it's an all-Asian play (I think it's a musical.) And it's an entirely Asian cast. I think there's another one by Goldoni, I'm not sure. The fourth one was *Dead Poet's Society.* They just released the cast list and it was an all-white cast. In the context of this, I thought it was very interesting to have that dialogue. Because not only are we sort of segregating them but also because if the Brecht was a commentary on Congo and blackness and *Pacific Overtures* was a commentary on Asians, then *Dead Poet's Society* would be a commentary on whiteness, right? So, what is that saying about whiteness? That's how I watch plays. Why is this cast all white? Why did it have to be all white?

To your point, Bill, what you said was so spot-on about consciousness and being aware. That is a choice. That everything is a choice. That if you have a production of *12 Angry Men* or in the context of what we're talking about, Shakespeare, an all-white production of *The Tempest* or *Cymbeline*, or whatever, you are making a commentary. And what that is-- we should hold you to account as consumers of artists. Why? Why this choice? Every single element—and directors can speak to that—every single element that is put onstage from the *mise-en-scene* to the props to the language to the dialects to the costumes: everything is a choice. Which -- kind of what Tyrone talked about—which, if I were the director, is what I want you to see. The cast is a choice. That goes to the color-conscious casting, I think, and with that, I guess, I'm done.

McCandless:
So many interesting issues have come up. I do want the audience to have a chance to ask questions, and we don't have a lot of time, so I wonder, Bill, could I have you, as a follow-up to the distinction you drew between color-conscious and color-blind-- would you be willing to talk a little bit more about specific productions, yours or other OSF artists' that you felt were—you talked about *Measure for Measure*, you and Tyrone. I thought that was a great example. Are there others where you think we could really see that clear difference between color-conscious and color-blind?

Rauch:
Well, I have a story—first of all, I was thinking of your [Lee's] comments there that an all-white cast is a choice, too. I think it's the mistake we make when people think white is neutral. White is neutral and then actors of color are not neutral. That's a supremely white supremacist way of looking at the world. White is not neutral. White is another identity and another way of moving through the world. I was just thinking about that a lot, in what you [Lee] were saying.

Well, this is a really long-ago story but I think it's a valuable story. I was directing Cornerstone (my former theater, that Tiffany referenced). I was directing a production of *Three Sisters*. It was a community-based adaptation in a coal-mining community in West Virginia. The play was called *Three Sisters from West Virginia,* and the three sisters were played by a white woman who was, in real life, a coal miner's daughter whose dad had died of black lung. She wrote a song about her dad that we worked into the play. And then a member of my company who was also white who was playing the middle sister, and then the youngest sister was played by a local college student who was African-American. We never-- Because hopefully we grow as artists over the years, so at that time in my development as an artist we didn't discuss the fact that two sisters were white and one was black. We didn't talk about it. Finally, somebody said, "Okay, I got a question: how come—" You know, it was her, it was Trina, who was playing the younger sister, and she said, "My friends are all giving me a hard time at school, because I'm black and the play's called *Three Sisters*, and my sisters are white, and they've made jokes like 'Are you the black sheep of the family?' and I don't know what to say to them." I took a deep breath and I did really one of the most eloquent speeches I had ever made in my life about race being an artificial social construct (which is true) and shared humanity and I really sweated and worked through this whole speech and felt really good. Then Wanda, who was playing the older sister, went, "Oh, well, Amy Jo, Doc Childers, the character who's playing the doctor, he's black, and he's always talking about how much you remind him of our mama, and how much you look like her, so I thought it was really obvious that Mom and Dad had us and then Mama had an affair with the Doc, and that's where you come from, and we don't ever talk about it in the family, but we understand, you're our real sister even though biologically you're our half-sister." Amy, who was playing the young sister, looked at me with complete contempt and said, "That's an answer."

But here's the messed-up thing: I had cast Doc Childers with that backstory in mind. But I didn't feel safe talking about it as my twenty-three-year-old self. I felt like somehow talking about that was, you know—I'm embarrassed to admit that. That was a huge moment of education in terms of color-blind versus color-conscious in that particular production. I think really what that actor was saying was, "Within the world

of Chekhov's play as adapted, and being about us West Virginians, it is not a neutral fact that I am black. Don't ask me to pretend that that's some neutral fact that doesn't have any impact on my relationship with the other characters onstage." It was a big moment.

Lopez:
I love that story because we are sitting here and get to know the distance between-- The journey of your career, the moment you were, as a young director and who you are today. Look how powerful it is that you've taken the way you thought then, and externalized it and made it part of the choices, the conversations about choices. Rather than, when you don't talk about it, it's unspeakable. Oh, it's unspeakable, we're not supposed to talk about race. It's unspeakable. For, I think, people of color, that unspeakableness becomes part of the other range of unspeakable things we deal with, which is—it becomes traumatic. The stories I told about my students—it's traumatic to carry that around, that you can't talk about it.

Last year I was working with this student who was auditioning for the URTAS to get into M.F.A. programs in acting -- he was putting together his portfolio of work -- to talk about what he should do. He loved doing Shakespeare and my advice to him thinking strategically about, "Okay, we're not yet *there*, yet, about how people are going to read him (he's Afro-Latino)," I said, "You're going to have to create two pieces: one that they clearly see you doing, 'Oh yeah, we see him doing that role,' and one that completely blows them away in stretching their imagination. But you're going to stretch their imagination by getting them to legibly see you as an actor." So, his audition was to do the rehab counselor played by Chris Rock in *Motherfucker with a Hat*, and so he did that role but then he did a piece from Shakespeare. He did *Motherfucker with a Hat* first, and then he did the other role and everyone was completely blown away.

Rauch:
That's good advice.

Lopez:
Thank you! But he had to strategically think about "How do I get seen as an actor and strategically create those roles?" I think the whole notion—and that's him thinking about his participation in making choices. But then what do you do with the next step about the other choices and how do we stretch audiences and theaters which is something I'm really thinking about. As audiences, how do we come into the room? When I was working on the *Illuminations* guide for *River Bride* last year, one of the challenges we had was talking about magical realism. Magical realism—that play has nothing to do with magical realism. Not all Latino writers their work is magical realist,

no, no, no. But the feedback was saying, "People are going to see these certain magical fairy tale qualities and, because it's a Latino writer, they're going to think it's magical realism." But that became a really great opportunity for us to talk about—it's not, and why it's not, and what it means that every Latino writer/playwright is struggling with this burden that if they do something fantastical everybody just thinks it's part of a magical realism Latin-American lineage. There's so much for us to be grappling with, but I think that whole notion of choice I'm really— That's such a potent part of this conversation. I really appreciate your raising that.

McCandless:
Tyrone and Kenneth, as trained actors, I wonder: looking back on your own experience being trained as actors, and hearing Tiffany talk about her work with actors, do you have anything to say about how it was for you, in terms of whether multicultural classic acting was even addressed? Was there any conversation about color-consciousness in your training, or was it just—you were treated like everybody else? I'm just curious about that in terms of what Tiffany's bringing up.

Wilson:
There was definitely no difference in treatment in terms of my training. I wasn't taken to the special room. "The African-American actors go to *this* room to study Shakespeare." Nothing of that nature, or even suggested that you were going to have a different route. I can only remember my own story. I got into theater because in high school, I just did a lot of— I was a goofy kid! Like everybody else, some goofy kid and they said, "You ought to be on stage." They didn't say, "You could be the next black comedian," or anything like that, they just said, "You wear a funny hat, and I bet you would be great onstage." My first show was *Godspell.* The story is very similar. When I got to actually training as an actor, when I started really doing theatre in college…my first show in college was Brecht, was *Threepenny Opera.* Then we did *The Tempest*. We did *Raisin in the Sun* my junior year, really, because I was the only one at Middlebury College who could play the role of Walter Lee. We just barely got enough people together to do the family! I directed a production of *Colored Girls* and literally had like two or three colored girls drop out because they weren't actors, they were English majors (not that you couldn't be an actor and be an English major.) I was acting in the moment of what's available, and my training was about the fact that I was there and that I was available to receiving. What I was receiving in the moment was these experiences of doing Brecht. I didn't really start doing African-American plays by African-American playwrights until, again, *A Raisin in the Sun*, but after I graduated from college, when I got to grad school -- and then, certainly, professionally -- until after I got out.

The training really was about training me to be an actor. That's what it was. It was about being an actor, and always being reminded to just bring what you had, your personalization, to the role. There are roles that I have taken where I certainly brought being black into the role, and some would never even know that that's what the source was. There's a little moment in *Richard II,* actually, that's become very special to me (but everybody onstage knows.) But the other day I did this moment and I walked offstage and said to Jonathan Toppo – "I think I was doing Joe Pesci just then." It varies: it's Joe Pesci or it's Sam Jackson. It just depends on what I need for that moment. For me, again, it's about -- going back to the first thing I said -- it's about what I need in that particular moment. I was doing *Two Trains Running,* and it's a black character written by a black playwright (August Wilson), but there was a lot of that role which was about observation of people that I met when I worked in a mental hospital who were white. I was being sourced by crazy white behavior. I know what you mean by the question of "was there any difference"— It's not what you mean, but really, it's what's available, it's what's useful and it's up to others to define what that is. I'm going to define it as being useful for me in the moment. I, myself, can't even tell you whether or not I'm sourcing from something that's being primarily influenced by the fact that I'm a black American. I don't know, in all its details, whether or not that's true. I only know that it's truthful for me in that moment to source that.

Lee:
My first semester of grad school, the artistic director sat me down and she said, "Okay, we're going to give you a scene written by David Henry Hwang to practice on because we know that moving forward, with a class of other people of color and white people, that we're probably not going to be able to cast you in your specific ethnicity." So that was the accommodation, specifically, that she gave me. But instead of an accommodation I found that an exciting challenge, like an opportunity. I get to learn so much more than my white classmates, because I have to transcend myself and dig deeper into what it means for me to be human. Over and over and over again with every different show and with every different character. That meant stretching a lot more than I was used to. My third semester I did *The Beaux Stratagem*--you know, what's that? I thought that was part and parcel of my education.

What I found interesting, though, was when I was in school there was no question about color-conscious or color-blind casting. We did *Blue Window,* we did Chekhov, the family members were all of different colors. When I graduated suddenly for some—I can't explain what--reason, I'm not considered for any family members in any Shakespeare play. If there were family relations, I can just about forget playing Sebastian, unless Viola was Asian. Well, that's a good reason, because they're twins. [*Audience laughs*] Bad example. That's something that I found different in the industry

that is a disparity from my education. I think that goes to imagination. I think we underestimate the imagination of our audiences. As artists, it's our job to push people to imagine further, and much, much more.

Rauch:
I just wanted to say something as we talk about OSF and progress: this year, 60% of the acting company are actors of color. Next year, I think it's 63%--

Wilson:
--first time in history--

Rauch:
--to have the majority of actors be actors of color. But this is something that's been built over decades. The first actors of color at OSF appeared decades and decades ago, many decades ago.

Wilson:
And had to hide. They had to kind of be hidden within the company.
They couldn't walk around by themselves in town, that's how long ago it was.

Rauch:
Yes. Right. So many previous artistic directors and artistic staffs-- Just my predecessor alone, Libby Apple, and Tim Bond, as her associate artistic director, and then Penny Metropulos, the work that they did-- We all stand, in all of our efforts, stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us who have done extraordinary things to make progress possible. So: I wanted to say that.

And I wanted to say: one of the things we sweat the most at the casting table-- there are five, six of us who cast any given season-- casting the plays is one thing and is very, very challenging, as you can imagine. But then where the discussion has become more heated and more energized in the last couple years is understudy casting. Because it's one thing if it's—again, not a fan of the phrase, but for the sake of argument—color-blind and everybody's just everything and it's all cool, then anybody can understudy anything. But when you start building productions-- If you've got a new play where it's written into the fabric of the play the race of the character, that's one thing. If you build a Shakespeare play, where you start building a production that's based on racial identity or ethnic identity, then you have to start having the understudies correspond. We have enormous, heated debates about when it is appropriate or not appropriate to have that racial consonance or any number of– Does the understudy need to match the age, the skill set, the gender, the race? In a musical, the understudies need to sing, that's

straightforward. But there's so many really tightrope-walk decisions, and decisions that we absolutely regret making from over the years, where it felt like, "That would be fine" and then, like "Oh this is not fine at all, at all." Anyway, I just want to name that as a particular challenge at OSF with the rep company.

Lopez:
I think of a play—I think about *Sweat* by Carlo Alban.* His role in *Sweat*-- even though he doesn't speak a lot in that play line-wise, he's speaking volumes in his physical character on that play. You have to look at that, and his identity and who he is in the context of the play. It's in the fabric of the work, whether it's explicit in the text or not. Would that be a key example of what you're talking about, in thinking about an understudy for that role?

Rauch:
Sure, but let's say Carlo is in a Shakespeare play: how much does his identity as a young Latino man become part of the fabric of his role in the Shakespeare play? Do we have a moral imperative or an artistic imperative-- Do we owe it to the audience, do we owe it to him, do we owe it to the fellow actors, that the actor understudying him is also Latino? We kind of take it on a case-by-case basis. But we're making judgment calls, and sometimes those judgment calls are-- everybody lives with and then sometimes they're really questioned.

Wilson:
Well, we had the case in *Comedy of Errors* when one of the twins-- the twins were African-American twins (had to be) -- and then the understudy question of: do you understudy them with a white actor?

Rauch:
For the body double.

Wilson:
For the body double.

Rauch:
Well, in fairness to that one (that was a train wreck), and in fairness it's because there were no body doubles, when we cast it originally. We cast a young white man who was understudying a role that—I forget exactly how [*crosstalk*] it worked, but then they became body doubles and we, late in the process, were like, "Wait a minute, we got a white guy doing the body double—this is a nightmare! This is a nightmare!" And we had to fix it fast. That's also the way that works of art evolve, and productions

(especially of classics) evolve over the course of the rehearsal process. You may intend one thing at the casting table, and then end up with a really different situation. Thank you [Wilson] for the little PTSD there…

Wilson:
It's close to my heart.

McCandless:
Tyrone, could I ask you about playing Caliban? Caliban is described in the *dramatis personae* as "a savage and deformed slave." I think you were actually talking about it as a spectator, when you're seeing an African-American playing Caliban, you expect that to be integral to the characterization. What about your own performance, and how do you deal with the fact that, as scripted, his trajectory is, perhaps, really disappointing if we want to see him as a rebel who's trying to reclaim his territory.
Wilson:

Well, Prospero leaves! I say that in a joking way -- I get something. But if I'm going to play the role, I'm going to find some sort of positive trajectory for myself. Something about it that I'm going to get by the end of it, even though Shakespeare may not be giving it to me, entirely. Or it may not be what the audience wants, especially today. A fellow African-American actor friend of mine said that there should be a moratorium on black people playing Caliban for at least 10 years, until we can figure out another way of doing the noble savage. I played it twenty-some years ago; it was one of my first roles here, and I played it in college. I know what's written about it, I know what he's being called by other characters, but I can't concern myself with that. In the moment-to-moment playing of it, it's a human being. I'm playing out human moments, and I understand those human moments, and I understand those struggles moment-to-moment. The bigger questions, watching from an audience point of view, is only my concern if I can't reconcile myself to playing that role. If I make a decision and I'm going to play that role, then I'm going to commit myself to it fully. I'm going to bring as much heart to it as possible. I don't need to convince myself. I don't need to go, "Oh my gosh, I've got to go play Caliban again, I've got to debase myself, I've got to be slavish." I don't go through that. I make the decision. If it's up on the docket, I'm going to play that role. I'm going to sign that contract. I'm going to play that role and I'm going to find – I don't even need to find a way, all I've got to do is read the part and know that I'm in it, and it's me. Then I'm going to work with a director to see what their point of view, their vision is, and I'm going to fit myself into that or help to guide them to a smarter version that I have, but we're going to work it out. I'm going to leave the arguments to those who need to argue about it.

McCandless:
Kenneth, I have a feeling that some of us would be intrigued to hear more about your organization's having called out La Jolla playhouse and your having gotten involved with the panel. What was the outcome of that? How did the conversation go?

Lee:
The outcome of that, in short, is that La Jolla playhouse this year has a runaway hit called *Tiger Style,* which is all Asian, so: kudos to La Jolla playhouse. This was what I meant by the discourse. We can't skip that process step. We can't say, "Well let's just program an Asian play or some token play" and then call it a day. We had a process. We had a conversation.

I just wanted to talk a little bit to what you were talking about, the moratorium on Caliban. I don't remember the website right now, but there is actually a website that speaks of characters in Shakespeare's canon that people of color can play and then there are those that they can't play. Ceilings are still being shattered. Like Titania and Oberon can be played by black people, too. Caliban can be played by black people. But there are other characters that just can't. They haven't been shattered. It was a jokey anecdote, but it's true: I have never been auditioned for Hamlet. So, that's the implicit thing. The final thing I wanted to say was about dramaturgical rigor.

To your point about La Jolla playhouse and *The Nightingale*: it was a cast of twelve. There were two Asian actors. There were five white men in the cast. One of the white men played the emperor of China. That's just dramaturgically problematic. I'm so glad Lara presented a wonderful presentation because it gave us some context of the landscape of what was going on. But it also made us reckon with contextual analysis right now. The fact right now is that Asian-Americans are underrepresented on stages. Comedians usually say you never punch down, you always punch up. You can always challenge authority but you don't punch down to the people that are disaffected. I think there's some practical application to this. We are an underrepresented community, and the optic of a white male king of China is damaging. It just is, no matter how you slice it. They said it was a mythic China. In an ideal world, let's be fair, in an ideal world where everything was already fair and on par, then great, have at it, let talent win. But we all know that meritocracy is a myth, and the sooner we reckon with that, the quicker we can get to the better parts of the diversity discourse.

Lopez:
I also want to thank Lara for providing us with that context because in a lot of ways that's what we're doing in our day and age is getting more in touch with how context matters. It's not just talking about race and diversity for the sake of race and diversity. I

think it’s really about an enhanced conversation about the context of the world we live in.

I was reading a blog essay – I cannot remember the name of the scholar who wrote it – but she’s from New Zealand. She was talking about how in 2013 on the cusp of the global celebration of Shakespeare in which 37 countries were doing 37 different productions of Shakespeare and coming together to showcase the work (I believe in the UK) that at that same moment New Zealand’s education board decided they were no longer going to teach Shakespeare in the high schools because it wasn’t really relevant to the lives of young people -- that they didn’t really directly connect with it. Her essay is a marvelous argument for how actually it’s more relevant to our students now than ever before, looking at the context of immigration; looking at class struggles; looking at gender dynamics; looking at how families are changing; looking at perceptions of what a community should be; and what a community actually is in practice; looking at historical legacies and personal legacies of trauma. All of these things are in Shakespeare. Kenneth, when we were talking earlier, he gave this example of (I believe) grade schoolers being given Hamlet and a young female student sitting down and immediately not only picking up the discourse and gleefully embracing it but coming into awareness as she did her cold read about what the story was actually about and becoming really moved.

Lee:
It was called *The Hobart Shakespeareans,* PBS.

Rauch:
They come to OSF every year. The kids come, and they perform on the Green Show Stage often.

Lee:
On PBS!

Lopez:
So context is everything.

Rauch:
I just want to say something about Shakespeare for a minute. I have directed a lot of Shakespeare plays. I’ve been very lucky, very blessed, that I’ve gotten to direct so many. I love—I always say I would direct anything written by William Shakespeare any time and I mean it. Every time-- I was so scared to direct Richard II, as Tyrone knows -- I

confessed in my playbill notes, as director, and I had an incredible experience. I love, love, love, love the writing.

But I have flashes of real issues with this guy. I've got to say. Whether it's about class and that all the noble characters get to speak in elevated verse but anybody who's working class has to speak in prose, because working class people couldn't possibly speak in verse. I struggle with that sometimes. I struggle with "Well, we can have all this gender play and we can have a woman flirting with a woman, but once everything is exposed, everyone is going to go back to a very heterosexual world." I struggle with-- Although I defended many times Shakespeare's not anti-Semitic and Shylock, that character is a study in the corrosive effects of anti-Semitism in society, Shakespeare was not racist: I do think his humanity-- He sees humanity in every character he created. But then there are— We have 2:1 male-to-female actors, still, in our company in 2016. Why? Because William Shakespeare wrote so freaking many male characters and so few female characters. I understand that was the fact that the companies were all male, and I get it, I get it, but—

Bovilsky:
But it's not true. Other playwrights wrote more female characters.

Rauch:
Than Shakespeare did.

Bovilsky:
Shakespeare can't be performed after the theaters are reopened in 1660 when Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher can be, and Webster, because there's female actors on the stage now and everyone wants to see them and Shakespeare doesn't have the parts. He could only be performed when they started adding in female parts. So it really is something about him, and not the time period, which I think— Sorry to cut you off, as you were saying important things.

Rauch:
No, no, I'm grateful. My ultimate point is I love the work of William Shakespeare, and I'm happy Shakespeare is our middle name, and also we have real challenges to create true equity, diversity and inclusion in terms of gender identity and gender and sexuality and race and ethnicity and all sorts of things, because of challenges that are inherent in the text. We have to be able to say that, too, even in our love of the playwright.

[*Brief silence*, *followed some applause*]

Rauch:
That was tepid applause, guys, that was tepid! That was, that was: "I don't know if I accept that point," that's what that was, "But it seemed like a place for applause"--

Wilson:
Maybe somebody should have had an affair, like the story with—well, he had an affair, so that's how [*crosstalk*].

Rauch:
Oh, I see, I see, that's the ending. *Three Sisters.*

McCandless:
Well, it's interesting, because my next question, Bill, was actually going to be: Can you look in the future and think about how you'll continue to be the standard-bearer, as you already are, can you go even further with this commitment to diversity and multicultural Shakespeare? You've kind of commented on it a little bit. Is there anything else you want to say? I don't want to put you on the spot too much, but…

Rauch:
I hope as long as I'm lucky to be a temporary caretaker of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and its 82-year history, I want to keep hiring artists as directors, as dramaturgs, as actors, who are going to keep challenging the limits of my vision, and have people say, "Yes, but— " It's really interesting we talked so much about Caliban, because I'll cop to this right now, the last time we did *The Tempest,* you'll remember Wayne Carr played Caliban. He played it beautifully. But I fought, at the casting table, I fought for two reasons to have Wayne play the role. One was Tony Taccone (the director) had a vision about the character being played by a black actor. The last two (maybe three) times, white actors had played Caliban, partly because of the trap. Dan Donohue played it, John Pribyl played it and maybe you [Wilson] were the one before that.

Wilson:
I was the one before that.

Rauch:
So, two times it had been a white actor. The director had a vision for it being a black character and the actor, Wayne himself, came into my office and said, "Playing Caliban is a reason for me to come back next season." I was moved by both those things. But I had really smart colleagues who were like, "I don't want to do it, I don't want to do it, I do not want to have a black Caliban, I do not want to reinforce the slave as black man, the noble savage." They fought against it, and we debated and we debated and in the

end, we went for it. I have to say with huge respect to the production and to Wayne's beautiful performance, by the end of the season, I had more ambivalence about the casting choice than I did when I made it. I really did. I will be honest. One of Tyrone's esteemed colleagues did not want to-- refused to understudy the role. A black actor in the company would not take on the assignment of understudying the role. I think that I was—and I'm not saying—I'm a big believer in never saying "never again" about anything. But I don't think we followed through on the promised opportunity of casting a black actor in that role quite as effectively as I hoped we would when we cast it. That was a painful one. Wayne playing Pericles the next year was a joy, because what you're [Kenneth Lee] talking about, right? Pericles might be one of those roles where you wouldn't have an actor of color, necessarily (because it's the title role, yada yada ya), in the tradition in American theater. Wayne was so brilliant in that role. That was just an interesting contrasting experiences [sic]."

McCandless:
Cool. Well, I think we should entertain some questions from the audience. I'm sure there must be a lot.

Audience member 1:
I'm thinking about this from the point of view of the audience. How you educate the audience to understand the color-conscious casting (what it means) including when you cast a white person that is color-conscious. How do you educate us? In town, let's face it, like in this room, is mostly old white farts like me.

Lopez:
One of the things I think is powerful about theater is it teaches us to become comfortable with our discomfort. I think one of the most important things for an audience to be in touch with is their own discomfort. What is your discomfort about? Is your discomfort when you see something about: "This is completely turning upside down what I expect the characters in this world to be"? Why are you uncomfortable with it? Is it because you've always been expecting that it's going to be cast a certain way? Or is it really touching something personal that you need to get in touch with? When audiences ask, "Well, what can we do?" I think it's to be really in touch with "What is your discomfort about and why?" What is the source of your discomfort, why are you having that discomfort? Right there, that helps us to go to another level.

Rauch:
When Libby Appel, my predecessor, directed *King Lear* in one of her early seasons, King Lear's three daughters were played by a black woman, a white woman, and a South Asian woman. Libby had enormous pushback from the audience about actors of color

in Shakespeare, and especially families that were not biologically possible or not realistic. Now, I say this as the white father of two children of color, but: huge pushback. When I started as Artistic Director, not a peep about actors of color in Shakespeare, at all. Huge pushback about actors of color in American classics. How could Marian the librarian in River City, Iowa be black? How could Marian—and Mrs. Paroo is white. Well, actually Demetra Pittman was not white, she was actually a woman of color, including part African-American. Or *Our Town*, there was huge pushback about actors of color in *Our Town.* How can Emily Webb be South Asian, how can her mom be black, how can her dad be white? It was interesting that the location of the resistance had shifted. That it wasn't about Shakespeare anymore, that people expected to see actors of color in Shakespeare: it was about an American classic. That was where there was both a sense of ownership and a sense of limitations. It's interesting to think: what is fifty years ahead? Will there be multi-racial productions of August Wilson? That's hard for us to imagine, it's hard for me to imagine, but that may be the dialogue that the community will be having with itself fifty years from now. It's interesting to me to think about it as a continuum.

Wilson:
I have a quick story (it's very quick.) I was doing—actually, with Libby Appel—I was doing a production of *A Raisin in the Sun* in Indiana, and the woman who was playing Ruth (my wife) was injured and couldn't do the production -- she had a concussion. They had not had time to get an understudy. We had a student matinee – she was going to miss one show. The only person who knew the part was the assistant director, who was Japanese. She put on a wig, she got the script, and she played my wife in *Raisin in the Sun*. We had a discussion afterwards with the students; not one of them asked. Not one. We were all prepared to go "Okay, we're going to explain, it's an understudy, this would not have happened in South Side Chicago, it's the fifties, written by Lorraine Hansberry…" Not one question. They just accepted that that's what the case was. This was more than twenty years ago. So who knows what will happen with August in fifty years?

Lee:
I think that shift in tension is actually very, very interesting. That was what you [Bovilsky] were talking about with that society at that time, what I got from your wonderful presentation. There's so much complexity, and the questions they were asking then kept shifting by the decades.

[*Announcement through overhead speakers*]

Rauch:
So hurry up!

Wilson:
The music will start playing…

Lee:
I'm getting played out and I'm not even at the Oscars.

Wilson:
Wow!

Lee:
Just one real quick anecdote as well, to your question: I think that's what the responsibility of the arts institutions (that are terribly underfunded in this country)-- that's what we're tasked to do, to encourage people to look at the world differently. I just wanted to give shout-out: how many of you have seen *Vietgone?* One of the wonderful conceits of that playwright was that he turned the language on its head, just to give audiences an idea of what it feels like to be othered. That is the Asian-American experience: to be othered in your own country. When he's talking gibberish, it's kind of funny but—and that gave you an insight. I think we shift the conversation subtly that way through art. Kudos to OSF for that.

Audience member 2:
First of all, I just wanted to say I came to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival when I was in high school and I saw a production of *King Lear* – this was back in 1985. The actor playing Edmund—his name was Carlos Castellanos.** I still remember his name. It was such a big influence to me. All these years I've seen interracial casting. However, when it comes to the English history plays of Shakespeare, I've never seen an actor of color play Richard III, Richard II, Henry V, Henry IV-- do you think that the history-- the idea that this is actual history-- Does that pose an obstacle in casting in the leads? I've seen African-Americans play Hotspur, other roles in those plays but never the actual title character.

Rauch:
Come see Prince Hal next year.

Wilson:
And Hotspur!

Audience member 3:
Finally a woman?

[*Laughter*]

Lee:
I just want to say a quick thing, too: Trevor Nunn actually got in the news two years ago about his War of the Roses. He said "Well, I chose"—he chose, so, you know, great -- an all-white cast, and basically defended that choice by saying that, "Well, you know, historically, there were no people of color at the time." They were trying to investigate, sort of, historically, what it was like during Shakespeare's time. Except, Shakespeare wasn't writing—he was writing "historical" for that time. But, also, that women were not allowed on that stage so what era of faithfulness are we talking about? And that's what I'm talking about when we want to contextualize things. How far back can we go to be faithful? Do we need groundlings? Do we give tickets to people standing? Do we have a caste system? Do we have to replicate that? What exactly are we trying to contextualize with each and every production? What do we say? What are the choices that we're making? I think that goes to your [Bill Rauch's] point about consciousness as well.

Rauch:
I will say that Henry VI was played by Cris Jean, an Asian-American company member. But you are definitely right that Henry IV, Henry V, a lot of the histories-- probably Richard II, and Richard III…yep, yeah, absolutely. Every time we can—given that we've been around, at OSF, for eighty-two years, every time we can knock down one of those barriers or crash through one of those glass ceilings in terms of who gets to play what—there's still tons of work to do. I agree.

Audience member 4:
I want to give a shout-out to Professor Bovilsky, because I've never gotten to thank you for your play and the folio of it in Eugene, the play was fantastic, remember? It was wonderful.

Bovilsky:
Well, this collaboration between us and OSF was so exciting and meaningful last year. Sorry, I know for many of you it was a three-hour drive, but just an incredible set of opportunities.

Audience member 4:
[*sound cuts out*]
--weren't there to see that some of our actors showing the different ways—which language are you going to use? Which version are you going to use? What would be wonderful would be if there are conversations like that to be had around here in our community about whether there are things in the language that inform diversity choices. I don't know what the right word is to use because the populace that you [Bovilsky] were describing in London at the time had national diversity, but not much racial diversity. Whatever that is, if language ever comes up in Shakespeare, in terms of which language to choose, based on diversity-type issues or enabling diversity, it would be an educational thing for all of us, I think.

Bovilsky:
Well, it's a really interesting comment. I'm not going to talk forever, but—Because concepts of race were different and yet the language of race was both different and similar-- It's so hard for us to remember, even if you look at the U.S. census over the last few decades, that what counts as a race and which things are a different race-- Like that there's eight Asian races on the American census, but no Latino races. Things that have been on have been moved off. Only multi-racial now, you can check, for a few iterations of the census. These make massive differences to what we think race is. The intertwined histories-- In the U.S. race is shaped by the trauma of enslavement and its racial legacies and, in England, where it's a sort of a mixture of slavery and colonialism that have shaped that. The way they've used the word "black" is actually different from the way we do. They use it to refer to people of Arab and Asian and South Asian descent as well as Afro-British. This is, for them-- You grow up and you learn the racial language of your time and place. It seems objective to you. It seems descriptive to you when it isn't. But in England, they will look at people, and they will see them as black people. That would not happen in the U.S. Actually, if you go back into the language of Shakespeare, you'll see those same changes and overlaps and blurrings and shifts happening in ways that I think it would actually potentially be very interesting in race-conscious casting and might speak to this question of the histories. What you have are these different tribes that are racializing each other in language that includes black, savage, all the loaded and hateful terms that characterize race--in some sense trans-historically--and that is there in those history plays that would make a really complex set of casting decisions possible and productive, and would help educate an audience. But that's only one way— There's many ways to do these things. I really appreciate that question and some of the ideas it raises.

Rauch:
Much less interesting point than that, but I'm going to make it real fast: when we're working on a Shakespeare script at OSF and I'm directing, because I tend to personally lean toward modern-dress productions of Shakespeare (you may have noticed). When I direct, if there's a line in a quarto version and a line in a folio version and one sounds more contemporary—they're both by Shakespeare, but one is just more direct, I'll go with the more direct one, because I want that more contemporary sound. I think it helps give more access. That's my own bias when I'm making those choices.

Audience Member 5:
I had a quick question about— You talk a lot about races being represented and people who identify as multi-cultural and how somebody who may not look like the role that they could be playing. For myself: I'm African-American, Native American and Filipino but I know for myself I'm probably never going to be cast in a Native American role, because I don't portray the look of that individual. Where is that with Shakespeare and multiculturalism and representing stuff like that? (If that makes sense.)

Rauch:
I have a response to that. I will say that I hope as our casting team and our acting company-- As these discussions get more sophisticated and deeper, we rely more and more on artist self-identity and not on legibility. "That person looks"—We have had white actors in the company who are like, "C'mon, I look Latino! Why can't I play a Latino role? I look Latino!" From a Hollywood point of view, you could be cast as a Latino, but in terms of what we're trying to do, in terms of creating equity in the world and in the field? Not cool. If you self-identify as Native American then that, I would hope, would be something that we would cherish and that you would be able to express that part of your identity in a play. I think more and more and more, to become more responsible, our institutions and people with the power to make decisions, should rely more on artist self-identification.

Lopez:
I think that's really a super critical point, because we're now in a time where the story about the work is as important as the work itself. When you don't have actors who represent and identify and connect with the communities that they're playing onstage, that's really doing an act of violence to people from those communities, saying, "I know all of these actors from my community and you're telling me you don't have someone onstage who connects with my community?" It feels like—It's a form of representational violence, a form of exclusion not to be really giving it a lot of thought in that way about the representational connection with your community. It's a part of the choice, the spectrum of choice that we make when we engage in casting.

Audience Member 6:
Is it acceptable for a director to disregard race [*inaudible*] when casting for a play or a movie or a story in which race and ethnicity have no real say to the story itself? For instance, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—I don't really know the play super well, I'm not an expert on it, to say whether race or ethnicity have a say in the story, but because it's quite a fantastic world. Is it okay for the director to completely disregard race when actors come in and cast anybody for any role, basically?

Wilson:
I don't cast.

[*Laughter*]

Rauch:
Yes, I would hope that a director—I think it's hard, when you say "disregard race"-- I think your general point, which is can anybody play any role, in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as conceived by a director, absolutely. Of course, so. "Disregard" to me means, "I don't see race." I think there's just a danger in "I don't see who you are," you know what I mean? Well-meaning--not always, but usually--white people say with pride, "I don't see race," as if that's a great gift. In fact, those of us who move through the world as white people have the privilege of saying we don't see race, while many of us who are not don't have that privilege. I'm just struggling with your framing. I think *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is probably higher on people's resumes (actors of color) having been in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because it's very often interpreted multi-racially, and for good reason. I don't know. I feel like I'm spiraling. I'm going to stop.

Wilson:
The interesting thing is: I think someone (I think it was Tim Bond) said a couple of years ago, being asked a similar question-- and it was along the lines being asked if white people can do August Wilson. I remember going to Tim Bond and I said, "How are you answering these kind of questions?" and he said, "Well, what's the issue of the play?" I said, "Well, the issue of his plays is about black people's struggle in this country." He said, "Well then it should be cast, at this moment, as black, because that's what the struggle is." That's the issue of the play. The issue of the play, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, doesn't have to do with a racial struggle. I've used that as a kind of guide, and I've don't use it as a complete rule, but I use it as a guide. That when I look at a play and somebody asks, "Well, why can't they be--" I say "Because the issue of that play is something we're dealing with right now and it has to be dealt with with those particular actors."

[*Inaudible, from a speaker system in room*]

Wilson:
No! I'm not going! Didn't we talk to the bell system, people? This is from working in schools a lot.

McCandless:
Please, we want you to have the final word, not the robotic voice, so go ahead, keep going.

Lopez:
All of this makes me think about *Hamilton* and *In the Heights.* With *In the Heights* the music is so incredible, students love that play, they really want to audition for it. When it came to—when I was at UC Riverside (which is a Hispanic-serving institution) there was one or two Latino students cast in the production. It completely changed the meaning of the play. It turned it into—it was a beautiful play, the students were so passionate. They worked so hard. It was the first musical that the department had done in—nobody could remember and so it was very heartfelt. But it wasn't the play—

Rauch:
Was it mostly white people?

Lopez:
It was mostly students of color, it was very multi-racial. But it became a story about children from immigrant families, first-generation students from working class families and really the drama of going to college and being in your community and the fragmentation between those going to college and those who are in a community that's undergoing a lot of transition. Part of the story became more universal and relevant but really it became something different from what the original story was by the way that they cast it. It'll be very interesting what happens five years from now when *Hamilton* starts to go into our high schools.

Lee:
I just have a quick add-on. I would actually go further, because your question was: if race or ethnicity was not relevant to the plotline, right? I would actually go further. I take the example of *Steel Magnolias.* It's about women in the South. Now if I were a director, I have every right to say "I want to investigate what it feels like—what it is to be a woman," by casting an all-male cast. Right? I can totally do that. But then we have to take into account, contextually, the fact that women are underrepresented on stages.

You've got to take into context everything, and be a conscious— Again, I keep coming back to this word about consciousness, which Bill talked about, and awareness. Be aware that you're doing that. That's all anybody can ask.

McCandless:
Well, thank you very much. We're out of time.

[*End of panel*]

*Sweat *was written by Lynn Nottage, which Tiffany Lopez almost certainly knew. This was most likely a slip of the tongue*.

***The actor's name was actually John David Castellanos, and the character he played that year was not Edgar in* King Lear *but another bastard, Philip, in* King John.