

# UC Santa Cruz

## UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Finding a Voice: An approach to the human voice from the perspective of singing, speaking Shakespeare, and gender studies

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5pm6w5hg>

### Author

Navaille, Grace Maye

### Publication Date

2015

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**FINDING A VOICE:**

**AN APPROACH TO THE HUMAN VOICE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF  
SINGING, SPEAKING SHAKESPEARE, AND GENDER STUDIES**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

**Grace Navaille**

June 2015

The Thesis of Grace Navaille  
is approved:

---

Professor Patricia Gallagher, Chair

---

Professor Edward Warburton

---

Professor Brandin Barón-Nusbaum

---

Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright Grace Navaille © 2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction: The Universal Voice	1
I. The Role of the Human Voice	5
II. My History as a Vocalist	11
III. Speaking Out	17
IV. Blurring the Lines of Gender	22
V. Voice and the Performance of Gender	30
VI. Looking Inward: Gracie & the Dukes	36
VII. Looking Outward: Conclusions	47
Works Cited	51

## **Abstract**

### *Finding a Voice:*

*An approach to the human voice from the perspective of singing,  
speaking Shakespeare, and gender studies*

The basis of this research is in my performance of the characters Duke Senior and Duke Frederick in the 2015 Shakespeare-to-Go production of William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, directed by Professor Patty Gallagher. Using my artistic and technical background in the singing voice, I attempt to bridge the many gaps found in the human voice: the perceived difference between singing and speaking; the disconnect between body, mind, emotion, and voice; the vocal disparity found in the performance of the binary genders (and the power that can be found in femininity, the traditionally weaker gender); and finally, the power Shakespeare's plays have to connect these gaps within ourselves and our culture. Ultimately, I propose a vocal technique for the stage that channels the essential humanity of the actor, which can be found by confronting the primal self and its needs and re-discovering the holistic union of body, mind, and spirit. I also argue that cross-gender casting – and ungendered casting – is a viable casting option; and that, when appropriate, abandoning the performance of the binary genders (which limits our vocal and emotional ranges and stifles our creativity), can lead not only to a more equitable stage when performing classic works, but can also create a more diverse, representative, and essentially human experience onstage.

## **Acknowledgments**

Firstly, I would like to thank my supportive and generous mentors, Professor Paul Whitworth, Professor Patty Gallagher, Professor Edward Warburton, Professor Brandin Barón, Dr. Michael Chemers, Professor Danny Scheie, Professor Kimberly Jannarone, Ms. Patrice Maginnis, Mrs. Sheila Willey-Hannon, Dr. Brian Staufenbiel, Dr. Nicole Paiement, Mr. Michael McGushin, and Mr. Larry Welch for encouraging me to pursue this path in life and pushing me to my fullest potential and then some.

Thank you to the cast and crew of the 2015 Shakes-To-Go, for everything. Thank you, Mrs. Maj-Brit Eagle, for teaching me how to write and how (but not what) to think. And finally, a gigantic “thank you” to my family, friends, and loving partner for inspiring and supporting me through good times and bad.

## **Introduction: The Universal Voice**

The minute we leave the comfort of the womb, we are singing. If a baby is screaming, that means that it's breathing, it's alive, and that it's taking in the world around it. No infant has to be taught to scream – it knows. It takes its first breath, and fills the world with its never-before-heard voice.

The voice, as the first and primary medium through which we express the self, has the intrinsic power to help us discover the essence of our true humanity. Words and language give name to our thoughts and feelings, and help us relate to others through categorizing demographics such as gender, all of which helps us understand our personal identities within a larger sociocultural framework. However, it is only the voice and body that truly connects us to the rest of humankind – past, present, and future – while also preserving our unique individuality. William Shakespeare's plays have long been thought to represent timelessly universal truths about humankind, but when reduced to the text alone, only one dimension of the plays' realities are realized. It has long been agreed that Shakespeare belongs on the stage, not the page: it comes to life only through literal embodiment by actors. However, this embodiment is still restricted through the lens of socially constructed factors when casting – most significantly, gender.

Gender is fluid and changeable in Shakespeare's plays – not only were all of his women played by men or boy actors, but also a surprising amount of his feminine protagonists spend much or most of their time disguised as boys. Some Shakespearean roles, such as Rosalind, the cross-dressing protagonist of *As You Like It*, depend on gender expression for character and plot development; however, many

of his characters' stories do not revolve around gender identity, or do not necessarily need to do so. Shakespeare was writing in a society with firmer patriarchal structures in place. His writing reflects a world in which men were more likely to play important societal roles, and in which men were the only actors available to play those roles on stage. Though the questions Shakespeare asks in his plays are still deeply relevant to our modern existence, they can be used to reinforce patriarchal social structures, especially when marketed as "timeless reflections of our essential human nature," as Sarah Werner writes in her book *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (Werner 28). The multiple layers of gender performance already present in Shakespeare (both in content and historical performance practice) make his plays an ideal platform through which to manifest the idea of gender as a fluid and performed aspect of our identity, not necessarily intertwined with our essential humanity.

As our culture slowly shifts away from deeply ingrained patriarchal structures, the performance of classic works of drama should be done in ways that comment on or shift away from the ingrained patriarchal, heteronormative context of the plays. This continually evolving performance practice can help to re-embody new perspectives on the nature of gender – both in terms of socially mandated gender roles and the nature of gender as a binary of male and female. The essential humanity of a character is rarely rooted in gender, just as our essential human nature is separable from our performed and societally perceived gender identities. In order to reflect a truly "universal" human experience through Shakespeare's texts, the actor must be both vocally free, which involves a deep connection to body, emotion, and impulse,



and the actor must acknowledge the ways in which gender identities (of both character and actor) are shaped by a socially constructed binary that can be altered or even abandoned both in art and quotidian life. Using the full, uncensored human voice in the performance of Shakespeare with cross-gender, gender aware, and even un-gendered casting can redefine the way that these classic works of drama shape our cultural discourse about gender, the individual's role in society, and the true, genderless humanity of the self.

The practical grounding of this thesis lies in my work with Shakespeare-to-Go, the touring Shakespeare company supported by the University of California, Santa Cruz. This year, we are performing a truncated version of *As You Like It* directed by Professor Patty Gallagher, in which I play Duke Frederick and Duke Senior. When I was cast in these roles, I immediately assumed I would be playing the Dukes as men, but early on Professor Gallagher approached me about playing the Dukes as women. After much thought and many approaches to the characters, I decided not to focus on the performance of gender in these roles, but instead to play the humanity of the characters and present them as gender neutral. The Dukes were written as men in a time when, for the most part, only men were seen to have authoritative status and power in the world. Other than this archaic notion, there is no real reason the Dukes need to be played as men. I am not necessarily playing them as women, however, mostly because the idea of a woman as a Duke is no longer as boundary breaking as it once was. As adamant as I am about seeing women represented in powerful roles, I also want to test the ingrained ideas about the gender binary – that there are two genders and they present themselves within certain

guidelines, and that's it. Seeing women in charge is important but no longer radical and paradigm shifting. Seeing a disintegration of gender as a binary split neatly into male and female is.

*As You Like It* pushes the boundaries of the gender binary in more ways than one. Rosalind – who spends nearly four out of five acts disguised as her masculine alter-ego Ganymede – bends the limits of gender-crossing when she, cross-dressed as Ganymede, pretends to be Rosalind in order to test Orlando's love. Rosalind blurs the lines of the gender binary, both drawing upon the most masculine and most feminine qualities she can find in different situations for different audiences, and proving the unimportance of biological sex and the relativity of gender presentation – gender, you could say, is in the eye of the beholder.

My continued practice of both studying and teaching classical singing technique, my performance of Shakespeare's texts, and my exploration of the voice, mind, and body connection will form the basis of my personal research. From there, I will delve into the nature of the voice, the performance of gender, and the potential value of performing classic dramatic works to shape and reshape modern culture.

## **I. The Role of the Human Voice**

If every human being has an innate connection to the voice from birth, why do so many adults have trouble vocally expressing themselves? Why must we spend years training the voice for singing, acting, and public speaking before we can feel ready to share our voices with the world? Kristin Linklater, one of the most widely recognized teachers of voice production for the actor, uses the image of a baby in her teachings. Many clear messages can be heard in a baby's voice despite its lack of language: fear, joy, anger, discomfort, excitement, etc. On top of that, its whole body will participate in the communication; though an adult may engage as few muscles as possible to relay a vocal message, a baby's entire body, in Linklater's words, "swells and deflates, ripples and convulses with the forces of breath, emotion and sound... The 'selfhood' of the baby is undivided instinct-impulse-emotion-breath-voice-body," (Linklater, 3-4).

Peter T. Harrison, author of *The Human Nature of the Singing Voice* and internationally recognized Master Teacher of singing, writes that "understanding and working with the human voice has as much to do with its natural context as with its artistic employment" (Harrison xi). As a baby takes its first breath and releases its first vocal expression, there is very little context. No social conditioning, cultural demands, or psychological repression have yet been pressed upon this child; apart from hearing the muffled sounds of its mother's voice and a limited range of other voices, the baby has no notion of how the voice is supposed to be used. Instead, it responds to what its body instinctively knows, and thus it breathes, cries, and welcomes the world. Harrison aptly describes why the human voice is such an

expressive instrument: its “natural carrying power and its roots in emotional utterance” make the voice both more powerful than written language and more nuanced (Harrison 11). What’s interesting about these two fundamental vocal qualities – volume and emotional expressivity – is that they are both clearly evident in the voices of children, but often disappear with age (ibid).

Linklater maintains that “the adult voice is the product of other people’s voices—‘that’s bad,’ ‘it’s weak to cry,’ ‘you’ll frighten men away with that big voice,’ ‘never use that tone of voice with me’” (Linklater: 5). Voice must be approached holistically because it is not an instrument one picks up at age nine never having used it before. The use of voice is structured, censored, and even silenced at a very young age. Not long after the infant’s first cry is celebrated, the journey toward civilizing the voice has begun. What is lost in this process of civilization is the instinctual, the impulsive, and the innate. The power and expressiveness found in a young child’s voice – so admired by stage actors – is precisely what society frowns upon. The suppression of the child’s voice, and her innate ability to express herself through voice, also leads to the suppression of her emotional impulses.

Alec Rubin, founder of Theatre Within and writer on Primal Theatre, explains how this process comes about. Children are told from a very early age not to cry, yell, talk back, whine, shout, or scream – all means of expressing thoughts and feelings through impulse and voice (Rubin 56). Rubin writes:

Part of what the child gives up in this process is his right to have and to give expression to his feelings. The child’s feelings are not valued; they are ignored, passed over, and trampled on... The child learns not to have emotions that are unacceptable to his parents. He becomes civilized, acculturated, *good*. (ibid, emphasis in original)

The denial of this right to express emotionally is absolutely related to the suppression of emotions that so often plagues our modern life. Cicely Berry writes, “we live at a time when people are less articulate about their feelings” (Berry 1992: 48). Patsy Rodenburg agrees: “we’re often frightened of committing to any powerful idea or passionate feeling” (Rodenburg 9). According to Primal Therapy, the work of Dr. Arthur Janov from which Rubin draws heavily, we bury the many experiences and feelings that give us pain, protecting ourselves from the primal fear of abandonment, and in the process, isolating us from the freedom to feel (Rubin 56). The continual silencing of these human emotions and primal impulses suppresses them within the adult body and psyche, where they either escape as nervous ticks and unhealthy addictions, or they root themselves so deeply that a person becomes emotionally closed off, unable to express herself (Rubin 56). Rediscovering the ability to feel passionately helps us use our voices to express those feelings; the ability to use the voice freely helps us to find the emotional truths of the self and the characters we may play on stage. The two – voice and feeling – are inseparable, both suppressed in our modern age, and they absolutely inform one another. Rediscovering access to one often leads to the discovery of the other in the process, in what Harrison calls voice as a “self-revealing system” (Harrison 24).

If a connection to the emotional self is necessary for a free and active voice, then a connection to the body is just as important. As Rodenburg maintains, Shakespeare lived in a culture more physically active than our own, in which most of us allow our bodies to sit in stasis from the commute to work to the desk at the office, to the commute back to the couch at home. “In Shakespeare’s time people not only

walked vast distances, but did so on rough ground which automatically centres the body and keeps you alert,” she writes (Rodenburg 16). Vocal pedagogy for singers is also in agreement with this full-body approach to voice. Though we do often think of the voice as taking place only in the neck and mouth, the primary and most basic element of voice is the breath, which fills the torso down to the belly. According to Richard Miller, professor of singing and pioneer of vocal pedagogy, the “degree of physical freedom” is the best factor in determining the reliability of tone production, which includes much more than the larynx or “voice box” itself (Miller xx).

Miller ascertains the four major elements of singing are these: (1) breath, the “energizing system” that serves as the power source for all vocal sound, often referred to as breath support or just “support”; (2) phonation, the actual source of primary vibration beginning at the larynx; (3) resonance, the system by which the primary vibration is amplified and enhanced in the resonating chambers of the nose, mouth, sinuses, and chest; and (4) articulation, in which the lips, tongue, teeth, and mouth shape the sounds into vowels, consonants, and ultimately, meaning (ibid). Only one of these takes place in the throat, which is phonation; the rest require an active, open torso, a free and nimble mouth and tongue, and the ability to “place” sound in all the resonating chambers, or resonators, of the head and chest, all necessitated by a lack of tension in the neck, jaw, and torso.

The voice cannot truly be approached without the emotional awareness we have discussed; nor can it be truly emotionally present without a somatic connection to the body. These three elements – voice, emotion, and body – form the pillars of human expression. It is the union of the three that offers us a potential outlet not only

for personal psychological benefits or for artistic expression, but also for inciting social change. We often ignore the oppression, injustice, and inequality we see in the world because it is too painful to process regularly. However, when the anger and hurt we keep under the surface emerge from within us, having the ability to express what we feel – not just in words but with the body and the emotional voice – helps us understand those feelings and express them to a world that often seems not to be listening.

This is especially relevant for those people whose voices (both literally and figuratively) have been marginalized. An epidemic of silenced and stigmatized women's voices pervades even more than 50 years after the birth of the Women's Lib movement. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones write in the introduction to their book *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, "the female voice, whether it is celebrated, eroticized, demonized, ridiculed or denigrated, is always stigmatized, ideologically 'marked,' and construed as a 'problem' for the (male) social critic/auditor" (Dunn 9). Women are more likely to be interrupted in conversations than men, even by other women (Hancock 56). Women are less likely to contribute in group discussions, from elementary school classrooms to administrative meetings (AAUW Report 2; Karpowitz 1). The linguistic patterns associated with girls and women – such as "vocal fry," in which the speaker sits in the low, gravelly "creaky voice" register below the chest voice (Anderson 1) – are stigmatized, seen as immature and unintelligent (Quenqua 1). These feminine vocal traits are considered "less authoritative" and apparently rob women of their validity, even though no linguistic connection exists between unintelligence or

underconfidence and gendered linguistic patterns (Seitz-Brown). Though this paper primarily focuses on gender, this same concept extends to race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, age, and other factors – it is ultimately the bias against certain demographics of speakers that influences society’s opinion on the way they speak. Ultimately, the privilege not afforded to women in an institutionalized patriarchy means that the things women have to say are not always given the respect and validity they deserve.

Regardless of the contexts in which we have learned to use our voices, we have the power to re-examine the way we use our voices in order to re-discover the essential truths of our humanity and what connects us to those around us, those who came before, and those who will come after. The voice is our primary means of self-expression from the moment of birth, and because the discovery of voice can reveal suppressed emotional truths and a connection to the greater world around us, the voice is more than just a tool or an instrument for artistic or quotidian use: the voice is the self.



## **II. My History as a Vocalist**

My history as a vocalist is integral to my interest in the voice onstage. I started singing and role-playing from an early age, and began performing musical theater around age eight (coincidentally, in the very auditorium in which our second performance of *As You Like It* took place). My undergraduate work was mostly centered around my musical education and my training as a singer. Now as I work on my Masters in Theater Arts with an emphasis in acting, I am able to merge the two, bringing my knowledge of singing technique and applying it to the acting voice. I am facing the weaknesses I have, whether they are emotional repressions or artistic blocks, to examine and improve myself as a performer and person through the medium of the voice.

My training as a classical singer has allowed me insight into the physiological complexities of the human voice as an instrument, and has also enabled me to experiment with the techniques that best translate for me from singing to speaking on stage. Interestingly, most of these techniques are not actually all that “technical”. The two biggest breakthroughs I have had as a singer were my discovery of sinus resonance, the classical singer’s “microphone,” and the low, active, diaphragmal support that ensures an even, reliable tone construction. I was able to access the first of these two, sinus resonance, by imitating the Wicked Witch of the West’s piercingly bright timbre (Margaret Hamilton’s “I’ll get you my pretty!” is a surprisingly resonant way of speaking). The second, my breath support, I discovered via the “primal moan,” simply by releasing a full-body moan of pleasure. The primal moan relies on the body’s instinctive understanding of the human voice: when an impulse

to communicate vocally is emotionally informed and physically engaged, the body's natural breath support system lines up and produces a naturally supported vocal expression – a moan. The intercostal muscles (those between the ribs), the diaphragm, and the rest of the torso line up with each other, creating the ideal breath support system, engaged and active yet without causing unhelpful tension.

Neither of these involves any active muscling in the throat or even the mouth area, which I had been doing for years in an attempt to control my sound. Because the neck area houses delicate cartilage, ligaments, and exceptionally thin pieces of muscle and tissue, repetitive tension in the throat, jaw, and neck is dangerous to the longevity of the voice, especially for young people and for light, high voice types like mine. By engaging the diaphragm and intercostal muscles, which can withstand far more pressure than the smaller muscles of the neck, both long- and short-term damage is avoided. This engagement in the torso also helps the speaking vocalist (the actor) feel more present in the body, and also allows for the chest to resonate freely and lend the actor a broader range of colors and overtones in his sound. Essentially, the primal moan does two things: (1) ensures that there is some kind of emotionally-informed intention to communicate, a primal impulse to speak, and (2) connects the vocal expression to the full body, ensuring the source of power in the voice comes from the breath, the core, the emotional center of the body, rather than from tension in the jaw and throat.

As a singer, I far preferred using the chest voice (the lower register of the female voice) to the head voice (the higher). This was both because of the singing role models I had, who mostly sang in their chest voices, and the power I felt I lacked

while in my head voice. As a slight, small young woman, I neither claimed the privilege of masculinity nor possessed the traditionally valued qualities of femininity such as the hourglass figure, petite stature, heart-shaped face or long blonde curls. Singing was one of the few things I saw myself praised for in my preteen years, and so I could not sacrifice any of the power I felt I gained from my singing, and the power I felt was in my lower, more masculine chest voice.

For this reason, I very much avoided the feminine use of voice for most of my early singing years. My loud, rambunctious nature felt at odds with playing distinctly feminine roles, where so often the inclination to act small, timid, and sweet felt wrong in my gangly adolescent body. I rarely felt like I fit the mold of the ideal, traditional performance of femininity expected of me, even when I tried. According to the work of noted feminist theorists Judith Butler, Sandra Lee Bartky, and Simone de Beauvoir, femininity is a socially constructed performance expectation externally imposed on girls and women (Lockford 5-6). When girls and women fail to achieve perfection in their mandatory performance of femininity, their sense of self-worth can dramatically plummet (ibid 7). The more I grew into myself as a person, an actor, and later as a feminist, the more I resisted femininity for fear I would not be taken seriously. Lesa Lockford, author of *Performing Femininity: Rewriting Gender Identity*, asserts that this is another product of patriarchal expectations of women, in which the resistance of femininity (perceived as less-than when compared with masculinity) becomes another gender performance feminists must enact in order to have authority and validity (ibid).

However, as I began studying the classical voice under Patrice Maginnis at the UC Santa Cruz Music Department, I discovered that though I felt more power singing in low registers, my voice type was not the low and sultry mezzo-soprano that I wanted. Rather the very high, light, and fluttery voice type known as the coloratura soprano – the epitome of the feminine voice. While I can still belt my heart out in my chest voice, I have a surprisingly high upper register and can perform quick, agile, melismatic vocal motion, even above Soprano High C. I learned to master my higher registers over the slow course of my undergraduate career, and took from it the knowledge that the high, light, and feminine still has power in it. It is flexible, expressive, and beautiful, and can be astonishingly intense, ranging from tear jerking to terrifying, to outrageously funny. Though my instinct as both an actor and singer was to lower my voice, and exclusively use my chest register to claim space on stage, a large part of that “instinct” is socially conditioned, a symptom of the internalized misogyny I had that urged me to avoid the classically feminine. Embracing all parts of my vocal range – not just the ones I had previously deemed “strong,” helped me to find the power in my voice and body without manufacturing a masculine sound.

As I continued studying the singing voice, I would jump on any chance to perform music from opera and musical theater – anything that told a story. The performative qualities of such music, and the idea of playing a character and taking an emotional journey, inspired me much more than most art song and choral music. However, my teacher would very rarely be happy with me after I gave what I felt were heartfelt performances in classes. As much as I would “act” when singing, Ms. Maginnis would be left unmoved – and unimpressed with my sound. Part of this has

to do with the fact she is blind – no matter how much my face was working, it made no difference to her. But mostly, my singing – the audible part of it – did not always express the emotional arc of the song in the way I wanted it to. “You’re a fantastic actor, Gracie,” she’d scold me, “but you can’t act just with your face and body. You have to act *through* your voice, not on top of it.” As much as I was living in the circumstance of the song, and as much as I was attempting to express my emotional journey, a disconnect between all this and my use of voice prevented my singing from being truly emotionally informed.

One day in a voice lesson, something clicked. For the first time in years, I unlocked my upper abdomen around my solar plexus, releasing tension that was held there on a daily basis. A wave of emotions pulsed through my body and I wanted both to laugh and to cry – and did – for reasons unknown to me. Ms. Maginnis assured me this was not uncommon, and now, having taught a number of students a similar technique, I see why. Tense muscles around the complex nerve network of the solar plexus hold us in emotionally. Releasing this tension can release unbidden emotions, but it also allows for the emotional freedom required of expressive singing and speaking. An emotional memory can live in the body, as I discovered in my vocal lessons with Patrice Maginnis, and continue to discover in my yoga practice and singing practice with my current voice teacher Sheila Willey-Hannon. When closed off and defensively tense around this emotional center of the body, how can the vocalist expect her voice to be emotionally free?

Peter T. Harrison asserts that only when emotions are really experienced and “allowed to well up” can “the source of feeling and the source of sound make a more

complete, effective partnership” (Harrison 23). A freed emotional state necessary for a free and expressive voice – but the study voice can also play a significant part in releasing the emotional tensions that block it. The primal moan does more than access the built-in breath support and resonance systems that allow the free and natural voice: it allows profound emotional energies to come welling up unbidden, and a union of emotion, breath, and voice to come pouring out of the body. A return to the primal self can allow the modern human being to reconnect body, mind, spirit, and voice in a way that our modern body/mind disconnect prevents, and can allow the union of this “source of sound” and “source of feeling” to spill forth.

### III. Speaking Out

A thought, or a statement, begins with inspiration. Our word for this process comes from the Old French *inspiracion*, meaning “inhaling, breathing in, inspiration” and the Latin *inspirare*, meaning to “inspire, inflame, blow into” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). Though its use in English has ceased to mean the literal act of inhaling, the verb “to inspire” has roots deeply intertwined with the concept of breath. Cicely Berry asserts that the human breath is “the physical life of the thought” and maintains that “how we breathe is how we think; or rather, in acting terms, how the character breathes is how the character thinks” (Berry 1992: 26). Catherine Fitzmaurice similarly places breath above all other elements of vocal production, writing, “breath occupies the most active place in human vocal production: it is the energy impulse that excites the vibration in the vocal folds and the resulting resonance in the body—starting, continuing, and stopping it” (Fitzmaurice 1).

Shakespeare’s texts allow – and even *demand* – actors to engage with their voices and bodies in a holistic expression of breath, thought, emotion, and self. Shakespeare guides the actor’s breath through the meter of the verse, the punctuation, and the length of sentences. Patsy Rodenburg writes, “The iambic, the word, the line, the thought structure urge you to move forward physically, emotionally and intellectually,” (Rodenburg: 17).

This ability of Shakespeare to express the full human experience – the emotional, intellectual, and philosophical – stands in stark contrast to the modern disconnect between, body, mind, emotion, and voice. Peter T. Harrison maintains that modern life includes “an inability to express our emotions vocally” (Harrison

23). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States has a vastly non-vocal culture when compared with Elizabethan England, and our decreasing use of voice is partly to blame for the emotional and vocal block that Harrison describes. Linklater writes, “the industrial revolution, the technological revolution, the rapid growth in literacy and the influence of print have diminished the need for the human voice over the past one hundred and fifty years” (Linklater 4). Today even more of our communication takes place non-vocally than at the time she first published these words in 1992. The past fifteen years may well have seen more change in the way humans communicate than in the “one hundred fifty” Linklater references – technological advances are increasing at an exponential rate, and for the first time, it has become simpler to send or receive written information on a regular basis than it is to speak to another human being. The boom of the internet and the smartphone means that we can continuously communicate without speaking aloud for hours, if not days, at a time.

Elizabethan England – Shakespeare’s time – was a vocal culture, far less literate than our own, which demanded the use of voice for most any transfer of information. Imagine buying a pound of beef in the marketplace – you’d have to haggle with the butcher, arguing for the best cut of meat for your price, over the sounds of other merchants shouting advertisement and town criers calling out news. Today, in contrast, we can find everything on supermarket shelves and scan groceries ourselves in the self-checkout line – all without ever having to speak to a soul.

Yet humans have a need to speak. Imagine a person describing something about which they’re passionate, that they care for and feel a need to communicate to others. When a person has an emotionally informed impulse to communicate, like the



impulse the baby follows when it make its first cry, the voice becomes fully engaged. Just as in the primal, instinctual uses of the voice – moaning and screaming, laughing and crying – the impulse to communicate overpowers the desire to control the voice, and the body takes over, allowing the diaphragm, lungs, ribcage, throat, and mouth to work together toward a common goal. It’s no wonder that after a good long cry or a hearty laugh, the abdomen and intercostals can actually be sore! Whether it’s a “primal moan” or a rant about Shakespeare, everything in the body lines up, and they fill the room with their sound – not in a forced, throaty, shouting manner, but in a resonant, supported way.

Yet most of the time, we allow ourselves to stifle these primal impulses to communicate. Imagine sitting in a lecture and disagreeing with the professor so strongly and immediately that you feel the need to say something. If the situation is not appropriate for you to immediately speak up, you may have to stifle the impulse to speak and wait, or raise your hand instead. However, the first part of this “need-to-speak impulse chain” will have already begun – you will take in a quick, sharp breath, the throat and mouth will open, and the tongue may begin to form the first consonant or vowel sound of the sentence that you must now censor. Of course, this only occurs when there is a strong impulse to speak – when there is an emotional connection with the subject or the situation and you feel the need to defend your point of view. But the continual stifling of these strong impulses makes the impulse reactions that are less immediate almost completely disappear.

When such expressions are stifled, our impulse to speak becomes stifled as well. This is destructive for us as humans, and for our primal connection to our

voices and bodies – especially when we are on the stage. If we continually stop ourselves from speaking when we have an impulse to do so, then when we *do* decide we should speak up – onstage or otherwise – we trip over our words, either shouting or mumbling, mouths full of tension or lacking the dexterity to articulate clearly. Rodenburg explains this process: “We either fight the world vocally, pushing aggressively at it, or avoid committing ourselves to speech, underusing our voices” (Rodenburg 41). So does Harrison: “Having learned not to be vocally expressive, timid attempts at being so may sound mumbled or feeble. If we are emotionally vocal at all, we betray a *struggle* to express ourselves” (Harrison 23-24, emphasis in original). What he calls the “self-blocking” that most of us have in place can physically manifest itself in the body, blocking the expression of such emotions via voice (26).

Harrison addresses this emotional and vocal block by suggesting vocalists “pluck up courage and rediscover the hurt parts of our being and take care of them” (Harrison 26). Only by acknowledging the inner fears that prevent us from becoming vulnerable can the voice become both “emotionally sensitive and spontaneously creative” (ibid 24). Alec Rubin proposes a similar approach that extends beyond just the vocal implications, tying in the Primal Therapy of Dr. Arthur Janov, psychologist and author of *The Primal Scream*. The confrontation of childhood fears allows the actor to address his latent needs and his primal self, and “he is freed from the need to shut himself off. He becomes more open and aware, less defensive and afraid, more fully human, more able to laugh and cry and be spontaneous” (Rubin 56). By becoming present in the body and finding a means of expressing the true self, the

actor can channel his full humanness, and more truthfully portray a character. Rubin, too, stresses the importance of body involvement in primal therapy, that while the mind may revert to habitual shutting-off, the body will remember this release of tension – this somatic human experience of “body memory” that “by-passes all censoring” (ibid).

Rubin further maintains that theatre is concerned with “the discovery that we have a need for humanness that we have forgotten, which lives inside of us and cries out for expression” (Rubin 57). Rather than “attempt[ing] to reproduce on stage the behavior of people in life,” the profundity of the theatre comes from “the real self, [expressing] onstage what very rarely occurs in life, what we usually hide, what we are afraid to do” (ibid). In order to live these deeply human experiences on the stage, a pathway to our whole selves – including our primal selves – must be accessible. For these human truths to live onstage, the actor must be able to access the whole of their personal humanness, and the whole self, body, mind, and voice in connection and harmony.

## V. Blurring the Lines of Gender

Before we enter the strange world of gender and crossing gender, it is important I make a few things clear. By “crossing” gender, I mean the deliberate, theatrical performance of a gender other than the one with which the performer identifies. I will use the terminology “playing masculinity” and “playing femininity” rather than playing “men” or “women” – a character is a collection of words, not a physical person, and is only brought to life by the actor that embodies the character. I am playing two characters in *As You Like It* – Duke Frederick and Duke Senior – whose pronouns are he/him, and who are called father, brother, uncle, and Duke. However, I am not playing men.

I will be operating on the given idea that gender is a socially constructed binary, primarily comprised of two genders – “male” and “female” – into which not all people fit neatly. Judith Butler, pioneer of the feminist theory of “gender as performance,” writes,

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (Butler, 1990: 6)

Butler frees gender from its imperfect ties to biological sex – but even the idea of the “female body” and the “male body” creates another binary into which not all people perfectly fall. Biological “sex” can be determined by many factors, including genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, and marking features such as body hair or breasts, all of which can seem at odds with one another (*Planned Parenthood*, “What is Biological Sex?”). About 1 in 2,000 babies born in the United states do not fit into

the biological sex binary because of intersex genitals, hormone levels, or non-standard chromosome combinations such as XXY or XC (ibid). Even more individuals are transgender, and do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth (the doctor's decision of which is almost always based solely on external genitalia, nothing more). Trans people can transition to another gender or to a non-binary gender such as "genderqueer" or "genderfluid" by changing names, pronouns, and gender performance/presentation, with surgery and/or supplementary hormones, or simply by choosing to identify as a gender other than the one assigned at birth without changing their "performance" of gender at all (*Planned Parenthood*, "Trans Gender Identification").

Conversations about the gender binary tend to be exclusionary of trans and intersex people, centering around the more culturally familiar cisgender experience (identifying with the gender assigned at birth). Having a discourse about gender without acknowledging the many people who do not fit neatly in the cisgender narrative is problematic and leads to the erasure of trans people and their experiences, minimizing both their contributions to society and the magnitude of the oppression they face. In no way do I wish to exclude the experiences of trans and intersex individuals. However, because most of the writings available surrounding gender and the voice, or gender on stage, are cis-centric, some of my discourse may not acknowledge or explore the nature of trans and intersex bodies, voices, and identities on the stage.

When I use the terms "man" and "woman," I include any and everyone to whom the term applies, including trans people who may or may not have transitioned

with hormonal therapy or surgery. Some discussions may arise into which trans and intersex people may have trouble fitting in – for example, when I talk about cross-gender roles onstage, I will discuss how the differences in vocal ranges of men and women can add a slew of complications to cross-gender performance. Of course, a trans woman may or may not have a vocal range different than that of a cisgender woman, depending on her hormones, the size of her body, and the range in which she normally chooses to speak. Also keep in mind that a trans man, for example, playing femininity on stage can be just as much – or more – of a challenge as it is for a cisgender man, and vice versa, for the gender assigned at birth and the biological sex of the person have little to do with the actual presentation/performance of gender. Above all, remember that cross-gender performances on stage – whether on the Elizabethan stage, in a drag performance, or in any contemporary theater setting – are very different than the daily performances of gender we all enact. Crossing genders onstage for a role is unrelated to transitioning genders for life and the two, though sometimes comparable, should never be confused.

It is well known that in the height of Shakespeare's theater, feminine characters would have been played by men or adolescent boys. Actresses were outlawed from acting onstage, so every one of Shakespeare's women – from Kate to Cleopatra to Mistress Quickly – would have been played by men or boys. These male performers were successful in cross-gender performance, most of the time “passing” as believably female, or enough so that their cross-gender performance was not comical (not most of the time, at least). Today in the United States, no laws prevent the appearance of women on the stage, and the cross-gender performance that so

saturated the theater of Shakespeare's time has fallen by the wayside. However, the potential for crossing genders on the stage still exists – it's just under-utilized. Cross-gender casting tends to be reserved for middle school drama, fringe festivals, or historical recreations of Shakespeare with all-male casts. A few all-female productions of Shakespeare's plays have found great success, including one at the Globe, but for the most part, our representation of gender on the professional stage (and certainly the screen) remains firmly in the binary, and cross-gender casting is often only used out of necessity on the amateur stage, or as a tribute to the customs of a theater of the past (Drouin 26).

Jennifer Drouin, in her essay "Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy," categorizes cross-gender performance into three different types: cross-dressing, the portrayal of another gender onstage; drag, the portrayal of another gender which highlights the artificiality of it, and parodies the other gender or the construct of gender itself; and passing, the successful subversion of gender roles that convinces either the audience, the other characters onstage, or both that the actor or character undoubtedly is the presented gender. Drouin maintains that the "high culture" gender performance of Elizabethan boy actors plays a very different cultural role than that of "drag," which almost always has elements of the parodic and the comical and is also probably the most common cross-gender performance we see on the stage and the screen (Drouin 26-27). Drouin writes that drag queens and kings highlight the artificiality of their gender expression: the hyper-femininity of a drag queen means that no one is likely to mistake her for a woman, so when she flaunts her femininity it is both subversively crossing the gender binary and openly mocking the

feminine identity. In their artificiality, however, drag performers can highlight the fallacy of daily gender performance, “since there is no real gender identity at all beyond its performance” (27).

All three of these cross-gender performances can be found in our production of *As You Like It* – Sunee Kiernan as Touchstone is cross-dressing as male; Rosalind as Ganymede is successfully “passing” as male to those she meets in the Forest of Arden; Rosalind (as Ganymede) as “Rosalind,” in the wooing scenes of Acts IV and V, is in drag, presenting a gender expression that is neither the masculinity of Ganymede nor the femininity of Rosalind, but instead a parody of femininity that could never be mistaken for a woman, except for the fact we know all along that she is, indeed, a woman. If Rosalind can successfully parody her own gender, what does that say about the gender binary in which this play firmly takes place? And if we can accept, as Butler and Drouin suggest, that gender is merely a performed aspect of our identities, then shouldn’t crossing gender on stage be just as easily performed on stage as playing our own genders in daily life? Shouldn’t it be just as willingly accepted as reality by audiences as the many other things for which we ask our audiences to suspend their disbelief?

If Sunee as Touchstone is cross-dressing, Rosalind as Ganymede is passing, and Ganymede as “Rosalind” is drag, where do I, as the Dukes, fit? I could have chosen to cross-dress, playing the Dukes with masculine characteristics because they are written as male characters and I am a woman. I could also have chosen to “gender-bend” them, playing them as mothers, sisters, aunts, and Duchesses, and performing numerous traits associated with the feminine – a suggestion I received



from the director early on in the rehearsal process. Instead, I am attempting to play the Dukes without gender expression – gender neutral, if you will. Instead of channeling my energy toward presenting masculinity to an audience that will see me as female, thus necessitating that I work unrelentingly to pass as male, I’m focusing on their humanity and ignoring their gender expression. When actors are given a cross-gender role, performing gender too often takes the forefront of the acting experience. The actor can become fixated on whether they will “pass” as this other gender, rather than on the experience of the character – which is often not related to the character’s gender identity. For many characters in Shakespeare and elsewhere, gender expression is not central to the character’s evolution or their relationship with the world.

For some characters, gender is inseparable from the story they tell, such as with Rosalind. Rosalind’s cross-dressing as the masculine Ganymede only works as a plot device and character journey in contrast to her earlier femininity. However, the Dukes represent the very human qualities of two very different people, and their genders are not central to their stories. Especially in the context of the patriarchy, where society sees “maleness as neutral universal,” and the conditions under which Shakespeare wrote, having access only to male actors, it makes sense that many of the characters Shakespeare wrote as male do not depend on their gender identity to communicate their stories. I am attempting to leave behind the need to perform one side of the gender binary or the other, and instead play the humanness alone: I am choosing to avoid playing gender altogether.

Because I identify as female and the world sees me as such, some of my innate femininity will be present every time I walk onstage. When presented with the image of a clearly female body, especially one that is not overtly playing masculinity, most people will read the person as feminine, even without the presentational cues that mark the performance of femininity (think long hair, makeup, gendered clothes, etc.). For that reason, when an audience first sees me, “woman” or “girl” is the first identifying marker they place on me. I am probably inadvertently performing some masculine traits as well, partly because I learned the roles thinking of them as men, and partly because I am playing powerful characters, and the ingrained notion that masculinity equates with power is hard to overcome. However, I am not performing femininity the way I do when onstage playing a feminine character, or even the way I perform femininity while living my personal life (and I certainly perform both femininity and masculinity at different times – depending on how I feel that day). Neither am I performing masculinity the way I would were I thinking of the Dukes “as men;” instead the audience sees an androgynous character onstage accepted as masculine by those around her, but clearly feminine as well.

Essentially, it doesn’t matter whether the Dukes “pass” to the audience as masculine or not. Their gender(s) are of little to no consequence to the plot or to their character development. In the world of *As You Like It*, the text necessitates that Rosalind “pass” as Ganymede, even in the constant presence of Celia and Touchstone, who know her true identity. However, the text also suggests that Ganymede as “Rosalind” does not pass – Drouin notes how Orlando refers to Rosalind in third person and in the conditional tense when engaging with Ganymede

as “Rosalind” (Drouin 47). It is Orlando’s knowledge that Ganymede is a boy that prevents him (most of the time) from willingly suspending disbelief. In the same way, the audience will never believe that Ganymede is a boy because they know his true identity as Rosalind – thus, gender believability onstage is less dependent on a convincing performance as it is on the frame of reference and who knows what about the character’s true identity. For an actress playing a masculine character – Sunee as Touchstone and myself as the textually male Dukes – we need only focus on signifying masculinity, and when the audience sees that the characters within the world of the play accept us as masculine, they will do so too, or at least suspend their disbelief.

## V. Voice and the Performance of Gender

There is also the question of the role of voice when crossing the gender binary, when a woman plays masculinity or vice versa. The trouble with this is that actors often avoid using their own full vocal range for fear of presenting too much like their own gender and not the one as which they wish to pass. In their book about the female vocality, Dunn and Jones write:

recent work by feminist anthropologists and socio-linguists has determined that there is no single satisfactory explanation – biological, psychological, or social – for the differences between the male and female voices. Rather, vocal gendering appears to be the product of a complex interplay between anatomical differences, socialization into culturally prescribed gender roles, and ‘the contrasting possibilities for expression for men and women within a given society.’ (Dunn, 2 – quoting Gal, “Between Speech and Silence,” 175)

Scientific differences (or lack thereof) aside, the socio-cultural influence of gender on the voice is highly observable. Young boys are more-often-than-not socialized to assert dominance and strength while avoiding signs of weakness and femininity – even when going through puberty and the voice change, boys are shamed for anything in their sound that may come across as feminine. High voices, crying, and talking about feelings are all associated with the feminine, and therefore weakness, so as boys grow into men they can have difficulty expressing emotion and a stunted vocal range.

Girls, in contrast, are conditioned either to perform their femininity flawlessly, in high, breathy voices without asserting themselves (think Marilyn Monroe, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ideal of femininity), or to avoid the feminine by lowering the voice to sound more “authoritative” and masculine (Quenqua 4). These two paths offered to girls and young women are related to two interesting vocal phenomena: “uptalk,” or high-

rise intonation in which pitch is raised near the end of a sentence even when not asking a question; and “vocal fry” or “creaky voice,” where the voice falls to the low, unpitched register below the chest voice. Within both of these vocal options for girls, we are taught not to be direct in our word choice, spattering “likes” and “I don’t knows” and other signifiers of uncertainty across our conversations. Though these vocal habits are most associated with the white, blonde, California “Valley Girl,” they can be seen across nationalities, ethnicities, and genders – found in speakers as diverse as Nicki Minaj, George W. Bush, and of course, Kim Kardashian. A recent University of California study, focused on university aged speakers from Southern California, showed that both men and women use uptalk, regardless of race, socio-economic status, and bilingualism – though the study notably failed to include any speakers of African descent (Ritchart 3).

Recent studies have suggested that vocal fry and uptalk, though employed by a diverse range of speakers, can inhibit a woman’s ability to succeed in the job market (Anderson 1). Coincidentally, one reason why vocal fry may have taken on such popularity among young women is that the lower the voice, the more authority the listener perceives (6). The connection between vocal fry and the desire to use a low, masculine tone of voice to signify power cannot go ignored. However, though the origins of vocal fry may have been to imitate the masculine, the more vocal fry has become associated with young women the less masculine it is perceived to be. Marybeth Seitz-Brown, writer for *Slate* magazine, believes the suggestion that women avoid vocal fry when on the job hunt is

misogynistic. It implies that if women just spoke like men, our ideas would be valuable. If women just spoke like men, sexist listeners

would magically understand us, and we would be taken seriously. But the problem is not with feminized qualities, of speech or otherwise, the problem is that our culture pathologizes feminine traits as something to be ashamed of or apologize for (Seitz-Brown).

Interestingly, young women have been shown repeatedly to be the pioneers of linguistic innovation, adopting slang and other linguistic phenomena as a means of forming social relationships or communicating subtleties of meaning – these trends are not at all related to unintelligence of any kind (Quenqua 2). Young women are the most likely demographic to forge the way for linguistic change, which means that the widespread dislike of their voices could come from the fact that the rest of the world is still simply left catching up to them.

It has been suggested, notably by Lake Bell in her 2013 film *In A World...*, that young women quit ending their sentences as though they were questions (as in uptalk), and instead “make a statement” (Bell: 2013). Lake Bell implies that unless we speak like men we will continue to be ignored; however, as seen in the transformed opinion of vocal fry from one of authority to one of insecurity, it is what is used by women that becomes subjectively weak sounding: instead, we must demand a cultural shift in which the validity of young women is recognized, regardless of vocal habits.

When it comes to women performing masculinity onstage, both socio-cultural influences and anatomical differences must be acknowledged. The speaking range of the male voice tends to sit completely in the chest register, the comfortable range of speech in which the speaker experiences “sympathetic subglottic resonance” in the bronchi and trachea – essentially, a secondary vibration of the chest caused by the primary vibration of the larynx (Miller 115). This sympathetic resonance creates

warmth and color in the speaker's sound, and can be easily felt by placing a hand upon the speaker's chest and feeling for a "rumbling" (ibid). This same occurrence is observable in women's voices, though to a lesser extent for two reasons: (1) women commonly speak in the head voice as well as or instead of the chest voice; and (2) the female larynx tends to be observably smaller, as is the chest cavity, meaning secondary vibrations will be smaller as well (Miller 132-33). Because male speakers tend to talk in the lower third of their full vocal range, exclusively in the comfortable part of the chest register, there is rarely any way for female voices to accurately mimic the range in which the male voice speaks.

In contrast, because the male voice can usually extend much higher than the typical male speaking range, men can often reach the higher range of notes in which female voices comfortably speak. When imitating the female range of speaking, the voice may sound strangely thin or strained, or farcically unlike the voices of actual women (even though the most recognized definition of falsetto is "the imitative female sound... [made] on pitches that lie above the normal male speaking range") (Miller 120-21). Yet historical accounts suggest that the boy actors of Shakespeare's theatres played femininity exceedingly well, inciting a fair amount of homoerotic sensuality; Dunn and Jones write, "The seductive hybridity of the boy actors' artfully feigned feminine voices, which was denounced by Puritan moralists and exploited by dramatists, suggests a specific sexual dynamic of listening" (Dunn 9). However, while some men can realistically speak in a feminine voice, and most men can reach the female range of notes, the female voice cannot so easily mimic the range of the

male voice. Most women's voices are simply incapable of extending beneath their low, speaking registers to hit the notes in the range of the male speaking voice.

So what can women do to convincingly play masculine gender traits in terms of vocality? It is common for female actors playing masculine characters to lower their voices in an attempt to hit the note range of the male speaking voice. This is not only a vocally strenuous practice, but it also fails to produce a truly masculine sound, the same way the high, squeaky falsetto of men impersonating women rarely sounds like a woman. What's missing when women use the very bottom of their speaking voices is the secondary resonators of the chest cavity, which produce the under- and over-tones that give each human voice color and fullness, not to mention volume. Harrison says of the speaking voice, "To be healthy and colourful (musical) it must have its mean pitch from which it can range and inflect widely" (Harrison 141). A man speaking in the most resonant part of his range (around the "mean pitch" Harrison mentions) produces a very different sound than a woman speaking at the lower extremity of her range – even if the notes they hit are identical.

The tone quality will be thin, squashed, and will fail to produce any warmth or color, because she has a smaller larynx, chest cavity, mouth, and skull than most males. Her voice certainly can produce a resonant, rich, and even dark, "masculine" sound, but only around her "mean pitch," which will be about an octave higher than most men's. If she speaks in a synthetically low range, her chest will fail to resonate and her sinus cavities will not ring with enough volume to fill a large theater or outdoor space. You can see that the problem with this approach to performing masculinity – mimicking the range of notes found in the male voice by dropping the



female voice as low as possible – is this: though the desired range of pitches can sometimes be achieved, the actress will be robbing herself of the wide range of colors, timbres, dynamic volumes, and range of pitches that make her voice sound full, captivating, and human.

What she can do instead is emulate the quality of voice men use in speaking. When she speaks closer to the resonant mean pitch of her own body, where it is natural and easy for her to speak, she can create a rich, dark tone that is easily recognized as masculine. It will sound more interesting, truthful, dynamic, and human than a falsely lowered voice. Most likely, the audience will not question the range in which the actress is speaking, but will instead notice the richness of tone, the flexibility of the voice to express a variety of colors, and the humanity in her voice. Rather than playing extreme masculinity, which she only feels the need to do in order to make up for her body's femininity, she is playing the human nature of the character, and the socialized qualities of the masculine voice rather than an imitation of the biological male voice. Most likely, the gender expression of a male-written character has very little to do with his story at all; it is, instead, the humanity of the character, which the actress can now fully explore.

## **VI. Looking Inward: Gracie and the Dukes**

When I began my graduate studies in acting, I knew I wanted my thesis research to be grounded in voice for the actor. Because the UC Santa Cruz Theater Arts Department lacks a faculty member who specializes in the acting voice, I turned to Professor Paul Whitworth for guidance, telling him I was hesitant to approach the subject purely with texts and no practice. He offered to work with me himself in an independent study on voice and text, and we started meeting weekly for about two hours at a time. He had personally trained with Cicely Berry for a number of years while at the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, and though he assured me he was not a certified voice teacher, he offered to help guide me in any way he could.

With Professor Whitworth, I began memorizing poems and monologues in which he saw pedagogical value. One of the most influential was “Come Down, O Maid” by English poet Alfred Tennyson. I memorized the poem from a text-based perspective, doing my best to get across clarity of language and well-scanned meter. Professor Whitworth urged me out of my head and into my body, into the visceral realities of the pastoral poem. He asked me to stand like a “country bumpkin,” and forced me to keep my feet planted firmly on the ground, fully aware the ground beneath me, and of my full weight (“I want you to weigh exactly as much as Gracie Navaille weighs, no more and no less”). Because I was wearing heels and had been seated most of the day, I opted to remove my shoes to ground myself more fully. Hyper aware of my feet and my body’s weight on the ground, I noticed how badly my instinct was to float, to bounce, to adjust my physical relationship to the earth beneath me. I forced my feet to stay planted, and for the rest of my body to settle, unmoving,

a little closer to the floor of Paul's office. I breathed, and just let my body be. I don't remember about what Paul talked to me as I did this, but when I went to respond to him, there were tears in my eyes. Something about my acknowledging my full weight and my presence in my body had unleashed repressed emotions that were now allowed to well up, and flow out through my voice. I left his office feeling like a different person, more fully myself for the first time in a while.

Professor Whitworth also urged me out of my head and into my body in terms of the voice – “I can hear you have a lot of head resonance,” he said to me, to which I responded, “Yes, that's a coloratura's only way to make sure she's heard.” He stopped me there: “I can sometimes hear, though, a richer, fuller sound, that I think only comes out of you when you stop thinking so hard.” He patted his chest, belly, and lower back, and explained to me that the resonance that can be found in the torso is just as important as that of the mask. Volume is important, but volume alone is limiting, unmoving. What he explained to me is just in line with Berry's theories, and makes perfect sense considering my background in opera as a coloratura, fighting to be heard over bigger voices and an orchestra in the pit. Berry explains the difference between the resonance needed for singing and that needed for acting:

For singing you convey your meanings through the particular disciplines of sound – the sound is the message – so that the energy is the resonance... For the actor, ultimately the word must impinge... it is therefore in the word that his energy must lie... This is why an overbalance of head tone does not communicate to an audience – it does not reinforce the word (Berry 1973, 16).

I relied upon what Berry calls “head tone” because that is what got me through an opera performance. I was transferring what worked for me in classical singing to

what I considered an exercise in “voice,” but that was just it – all I was working with was voice. It was time to incorporate the body and the spirit.

That afternoon I tried to feel my voice vibrating down through my belly and even to my pelvis, and succeeded some of the time. In order to do so, however, I needed to relinquish some of the control I wanted to have over exactly what my tone would sound like. I had to let the “calling” nature of the poem, the image-rich writing, and the sexuality of fertile valley engage my senses, imagination, and body in a less intellectual way. Professor Whitworth had me shout the poem in his small office as if across a vast canyon, had me connect to the rustic nature of it by doing it in a generic Southern accent, and even had me improvise a melody, singing the complete text of the poem to find its musicality. Though I didn’t make the connection at the time, these approaches elicited a similar mind-body connection as the primal moan I had first learned so many years ago in singing lessons. They got me out of my head (in all senses of the phrase) and connected me to the text in a way I had never done before.

By the end of fall quarter, I had auditioned and was cast in Shakespeare-to-Go’s *As You Like It*, directed by Professor Patty Gallagher. Given the roles of both Duke Frederick and Duke Senior, my first thought was on how to bring the text to life with my voice. The director, Professor Gallagher, once again encouraged me to get out of my head and into my body. She urged me to fill the stage effortlessly each time I entered, for both Dukes command the stage whenever they are present (though in different ways). A renowned expert on physicality, her physical approach offered a great balance to my voice-based one.

My idea for a gender neutral Duke came in part from Professor Gallagher's suggestion of making the word "Duke" gender neutral itself – like "actor." As we continued rehearsals, I slowly let go of my masculine approach to the characters that I had used in my first few table readings of the script. However, even as I let my own innate femininity into the characters, I didn't feel like further feminizing them was useful or necessary. And as the cast quickly jumped on our memorization of the script, no attempt was made to change the Dukes' pronouns or signifying descriptors, such as "uncle," "father," and "brother" to their feminine counterparts.

With all that in mind, my first task was differentiating the two Dukes. Duke Frederick was the hardest, as he has very few redeeming qualities evident in the text. In fact, except for one speech to Celia, most of his text is centered around whom he hates, whether it be Orlando's father, an old "enemy," or Rosalind, whom he banishes because he "trust[s her] not" (I.ii.216; I.iii.53). Though he is not the most empathetic of characters, the power in his anger and hatred is real, and playable. I found that, though I am playing both brothers, their relationship to each other is potentially more interesting than their relationships to their respective daughters, or to any other characters in the play.

Duke Frederick's presence on stage is always marked by a commandment, a reminder to the audience and to the court that he is the one in charge. In his first scene, commandments are scattered all over – "Come on," "Speak to him ladies," "No more, no more," "Bear him away," (I.ii.141, 152, 207, 211). He even says Orlando should have "descended from another house," in order to "better please" him, a demand Orlando has no way to fulfill (I.ii.217-18). Frederick's repeated

displays of authority seem to stem from an inferiority complex, a perceived inability to live up to Duke Senior's legacy. In a notable parallel to Oliver's jealousy toward his more likeable brother Orlando, Duke Frederick's insecurities seem to come from his relationship to Duke Senior, right down to his hatred of Orlando's father Sir Rowland de Boys, whom we later discover Senior loved. Perhaps Frederick's boyhood friendship with de Boys was usurped by Senior at some point, turning Frederick away from them both and planting the seed of jealousy in him. While Oliver acknowledges that his hatred for Orlando is unjustifiable ("my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he," I.i.157), Frederick never explains why he hates his own brother. The closest he comes to a justification is when Rosalind, about to be banished, tells him "Yet your mistrust cannot make me a traitor," to which Frederick replies, "Thou art thy father's daughter, there's enough" (I.iii.54, 56).

There may also be a parallel in the Dukes' relationship to one another found in the Celia/Rosalind bond, and it may offer insight into the Dukes' fraternal relationship. Duke Frederick's most tender moment in the play comes in Act I, scene iii, in which he gives this small speech to Celia as he banishes Rosalind:

*She is too subtle for the; and her smoothness,  
Her very silence and her patience  
Speak to the people, and they pity her.  
Thou art a fool. She robs thee of thy name,  
And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous  
When she is gone. (I.iii.75-80)*

In this speech, Frederick's motivation for banishing Rosalind is revealed – to protect Celia from what he believes will be an eventual betrayal from her close friend and cousin, Rosalind. Here Frederick fears that Celia's name and status – only recently won by Frederick from Senior – will be usurped ("she robs thee of thy name), and

because Rosalind is so likeable, pitied by the people of the court, Frederick will not be able to stop it. This again hints at the idea that Frederick's past may have involved a close friendship, like the one between the girls – most likely with Senior, de Boys, or both – but that at some point, the relationship was torn apart, whether for status and rank or more personal reasons, and Frederick was left looking the fool.

Duke Senior, in contrast, pays little to no mind to Duke Frederick, at least until the end when Jaques de Boys brings news of Frederick's conversion. Given a poor lot in life after a lavish one, Senior never once curses Frederick for his usurpation, or considers winning his dukedom back. I don't see this as ambivalence toward the situation or an uncaring attitude toward his younger brother. Instead, his decision to remain peacefully in the forest can be seen as the decision to give Frederick the space he needs.

Unlike Frederick, who chooses to brood on who his enemies are and how to maintain his status and power, Senior actively chooses happiness even though he is banished in the forest of Arden. His Act II, scene i speech exemplifies this choice.

Here I look at our cut version, which I perform on tour:

*Now my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet  
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court?  
...Even [when] I shrink with cold, I smile and say  
"This is no flattery; these are counselors  
That feelingly persuade me what I am."  
Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
...And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.  
[I would not change it.]]<sup>1</sup> (II.i.1-18)*

---

<sup>1</sup> Usually attributed to Amiens.

The speech plays the kind of role that the director likened to *Henry V*'s St. Crispin's Day speech – to keep up the spirits of the banished brotherhood, turning their attention away from their hardships and toward the beauty surrounding them. The first time I read the speech aloud, in callback auditions, I delivered it like a quirky old man, rebellious to society's expectations, and naively amorous for forest living. However, Professor Gallagher's direction – that this speech is necessary to uplift the Duke's companions, that all in the forest is not as well as he suggests, and that the Duke is actively convincing himself even as he convinces his men – helped me breathe life into this monologue. Like the biting cold winds that “feelingly persuade me what I am,” Duke Senior has to be “feelingly” – physically – persuaded with a fullness of breath and body. The urgency, the generosity, and the crescendo needed to convince himself of the joy in their hardships are intense and passionate, and fully in the body, and when I finally understood that, the passion overflowed in me.

And the convincing succeeds – in Act V, scene iv, Senior's reaction to Frederick's religious conversion is to celebrate that he now has a dukedom to bestow upon Orlando and Rosalind, rather than to keep for himself (V.iv.167-68). Having truly discovered the joys of the rustic forest life, he can gladly give away his worldly riches to Orlando and Rosalind, and “share the good of our returned fortune” among the lords and friends with whom he found brotherhood in the forest (V.iv.173). He has fully accepted his life free from material wealth, and his generosity to his daughter and son-in-law comes forth honestly and naturally.

Duke Senior's “St. Crispin's Day” speech aptly highlights the antithesis of court and country, society and nature, mind and body. Where Frederick is court,



society, and the mind, Senior is country, nature, and body – they occupy two extremes of life, both of which are integral to human existence. This recalls the Freudian dichotomy within ourselves, between the Id, the primal urges and animal instincts so often suppressed, and the Superego, the necessity for structure, civilization, and rules that let us cooperate in an increasingly social world. Duke Frederick falls prey to an overbalance of Superego, while Senior could be said to let the Id take too much weight from time to time. Though the two Dukes may represent two sides of a binary, their opposition can be broken down. Duke Frederick is not painted solely as the representation of evil in the play – he is eventually “converted/ Both from his enterprise and from the world” by a religious hermit in the forest (V.iv.160-61). Instead of limiting them to the binary of good and evil, connection and isolation, body and mind, Shakespeare writes both Dukes with human flaws and human tenderness, difficulties and strengths, and they exist not as opposites but as two people finding their places somewhere along the spectrum of human experience.

My vocal approach to the two Dukes came from a combination of psychological analysis and an exploration of physicality. The first vocal approach I used when reading the Dukes’ lines was to lower my voice in an attempt to portray both masculinity and power. After the director suggested I play the Dukes as feminine, I found that breaking this habit of forcing masculinity was harder than I had anticipated. I felt the need to lower my voice in order to hold power on the stage, whether from an internalized belief that the feminine is not powerful, or from bad vocal habits of shouting from my throat. Professor Gallagher encouraged me to “take the stage” with poise and grace, and that regardless of the Dukes’ genders I would not

have to fight for authority when onstage, as long as my energy extended beyond myself to fill the room. I eventually found the commanding presence and power in my own voice and body, by following Professor Whitworth's advice and "weighing exactly as much as Gracie Navaille weighs."

I take a different vocal approach to each of the two Dukes, because they are such very different people. Duke Senior, as an inhabitant of the forest, has a much more keen physical presence than Duke Frederick, who is confined to the court. As Senior's speech suggests, life in the forest – including the biting winds that "feelingly persuade" him of his humanity – have given him a greater awareness of his connection to his body. Performing this speech helps me find a somatic sense of self that ensures that my vocal approach will be coming from the lower portion of my ribcage and my belly – or even as low as my pelvis – when playing Duke Senior. A similar physical alertness is necessary during Act II, scene vii, when Orlando threatens Duke Senior and his company – in order to defend his people, Duke Senior has to be ready on his feet with a low center of gravity, prepared to fend off a much larger man. Having a high level of physical readiness influences where the voice comes from – deep within the body rather than in the head and neck.

This continues to the later part of the scene where I sing "Blow, blow thou winter wind." The song, which requires a fairly wide range of my voice, must be fully supported by my diaphragm and ribcage, not my jaw, throat, and upper chest. Duke Senior also has a natural grace, an ease of authority that ensures all those onstage defer to him without his ever having to assert dominance in a scene. For this

reason, as Senior I try never to shout or lower the pitch of my voice; instead I do my best to find a warm, full tone that fills the room with a natural presence.

Duke Frederick, on the other hand, is fighting constantly to maintain status and power in every one of his scenes. In order to do this, I use that overabundance of head resonance Professor Whitworth discouraged me from using in “Come Down O Maid.” He disliked it because it uses what Richard Miller calls an “unnecessary thinning of the timbre and an increase in upper partials,” robbing the voice of its natural range in colors and warmth (Miller 61). However, Duke Frederick does not have the same kind of primal connection to his body and emotions that Senior has, and therefore he shouldn’t have the rich, bodily warmth in his voice that I use for Senior. The head resonance helps me find a loud vocal presence that cuts through to the back of the theater, without adding lower partials from the chest cavity that creates warmth of tone. In truth, it is a less commanding tone than that of Duke Senior, whose full-body vocality creates a much more dynamic and captivating sound. Instead, Frederick is cut off from his body – which makes perfect sense, since his character spends so much of his time at court, the realm of the mind and head, instead of the forest and its physicality.

This occasionally gives Frederick a squashed, pinched, almost nasal tone, but it works well for the character. It makes me sound like I’m struggling for volume, just the way Frederick is so often struggling for power. At times I catch myself shouting Duke Frederick’s most anger-ridden lines from my throat, in a way that is sometimes slightly painful. It is in these moments, when Frederick’s anger flares over his inability to find Celia, Rosalind, and Touchstone, that I find it most helpful to

engage my body for Frederick. The anger that comes from the low body has a kind of terrifying presence that really does command the stage in a way that anger from the head does not. The full-bodied, primal voice comes out in me for both the Dukes but in different ways – Senior's comes from a physical awareness and a sense of great generosity and love; Frederick's comes from a deep place of burning anger, jealousy, and the primal instinct to protect Celia.

## **Looking Outward: Conclusions**

In a world where gender equality and racial diversity in the social and artistic spheres are slowly becoming more accepted, the classic works of drama – so many of which have so few roles for women and people of color – may become obsolete if they do not actively evolve with the shifting social dynamics of 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture. The classic dramatic cannon was born of a social order in which white, straight men were the neutral human identity, and women, people of color, and queer and trans people occupied the role of “other”. If we have any hope of moving past this oppressive social structure into a culture accepting of its own diversity, we cannot allow the traditional performance of the dramatic cannon to keep us rooted in the hegemony.

The future of Shakespeare – and other classic dramas of the Western world – lies in performance that does not adhere to a racially or sexually “accurate” casting. Cross-gender casting allows opportunities for actors – female actors, in particular – to grow in an emotional, vocal, and physical range that they otherwise would not have. Gender “bending” also provides fascinating outlets for creating new interpretations of Shakespeare’s works. What can we learn from a lesbian Romeo and Juliet, a male Lady Macbeth, or a female Henry V? And “genderblind” casting – the idea that a character like Duke Senior can be played without the performance of gender -

Because the social construct of gender has very real and very tangible effects on many, many people, art will always exist that tackles the nature of gender identity and in which “genderblind” or “genderbent” casting may not be appropriate. Here a connection can be drawn to the acute difference between racially colorblind casting

that provides multi-racial diversity in works that have nothing to do with race (such as the 1997 made-for-TV film of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*), and the "colorblind" casting that takes roles away from people of color in stories that do address the experiences of marginalized ethnicities (such as the casting of Johnny Depp as Tonto in the 2013 action movie *The Lone Ranger*). Though almost none of Shakespeare's characters are racially specific, they have been played as white-by-default for far too long. Those whose storylines are specific to racial or ethnic identity – such as Othello and Shylock – should of course be cast with appropriate actors, especially so as to serve as a representation of the experiences of marginalized identities. However, as we have seen in many theaters and films, Shakespeare is absolutely unlimited in terms of racially specific casting. Unless the character's story is dependent upon race or ethnicity, colorblind casting is a perfectly viable means of producing Shakespeare – and can and should continue and grow in use.

"Genderblind" casting – disregarding the all-male casts of the Elizabethan stage – has been used occasionally in Shakespeare's plays since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, most often to provide a platform for female stage stars like Sarah Bernhardt to play iconic male roles such as Hamlet. In more recent years, Shakespearean theater companies have seen successful all-female productions, and radical theaters such as Mabou Mines have produced influential reversed-gender productions (Drouin 26). However, we do not see "genderblind" casting as often as we could. Many of Shakespeare's characters are gendered in a certain way simply because of outdated notions about who should play which roles in society, and because of the actors Shakespeare had (or did not have) at his disposal. I argue that many or most of his

roles can be played by any gender, as any gender, especially when inclusive of potentially homosexual plotlines. Not only are genderblind and colorblind casting a viable option for staging Shakespeare in a contemporary world – whether or not they introduce new narrative interpretations to the texts – it is endlessly important to do so as we approach a cultural future on the brink of accepting diversity and equality.

Art has the power to shape culture; therefore, artists have the responsibility to produce the art that will shift the cultural consciousness toward a future they want to see: hopefully one that is more accepting, diverse, and equal. The slow progress toward social equality and civil rights does not happen overnight, nor is it usually instigated by those with the existing power. We are on the road to change, but we cannot choose to accept things as they are simply because they are better than they were. Nor can we sit back and produce the “masterpieces” of the past if they reinforce problematic social structures of racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, and other forms of oppression. In order to keep Shakespeare’s works relevant and inspiring elements of our culture, we must continue to question and re-interpret them as the context in which we produce his plays evolves.

Our voices have to reveal the humanity within us all. In a culture of so many different peoples – whether it be race, religion, socio-economic background, gender expression, age, or ability – we tend to lose sight of what we have in common. The power of theater – and the voice in theater – is this: to highlight how the individual experiences we all may undergo can be unifying points of reference. For the youth who see our production of *As You Like It*, it may not only be the first time they experience Shakespeare, or theater – it may also be the first time they see a girl dress

up as a boy and not be ridiculed, multi-racial family portrayed onstage, a woman accepted as a Duke by all around her, two female-bodied persons kiss onstage, a grown man with a beard express his tender feelings of budding love, a cruel person turned to love by a chance encounter in the woods, a strong and independent woman outright reject a man whom she does not love, and ten young adults – only a few years older than themselves – express themselves fully with voice and body, heart and soul, acting silly then serious, experiencing a full range of human emotions – and being okay with it. Loving it. Loving each other, loving their audience, and loving what they do. And that in itself is invaluable.



## Works Cited

- Anderson, Rindy C., Casey A. Klostad, William J. Mayew, and Mohan Venkatachalam. "Vocal Fry May Undermine the Success of Young Women in the Labor Market." *PLOS ONE* 9.5 (2014): 1-8. *Plosone.org*. Web.
- Bell, Lake. *In A World...* Sony Pictures, 2013. Film.
- Berry, Cicely. *The Actor and the Text*. New and Rev. ed. New York: Applause, 1992. Print.
- Berry, Cicely. *Voice and the Actor*. New York: Macmillan, 1973. Print.
- Butler, Judith. "Bodies That Matter." *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- DiOrio, Christopher W. "Narrativizing Success: Attitudes Toward African American Vernacular English in the Composition Classroom." Theses, Dissertations, and Capstones (2011). Marshall University. Web. 13 May 2015.
- Drouin, Jennifer. "Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy" *Shakespeare Re-dressed: Cross-gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*. Ed. James C. Bulman. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2008. Print.
- Dunn, Leslie C., and Nancy A. Jones. *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.
- "Etymology of 'Inspiration'" *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, 2001. Web. 17 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.etymonline.com>>.
- Fitzmaurice, Catherine. "Breathing Is Meaning." (1996). *Fitzmaurice Voicework: Writings by Catherine Fitzmaurice*. Catherine Fitzmaurice. Web.
- Hancock, Adrienne B., and Benjamin A. Rubin. "Influence of Communication Partner's Gender on Language." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 34.1 (2015): 46-64. Sage. Sage Publications. Web. <[jls.sagepub.com](http://jls.sagepub.com)>.
- Harrison, Peter T. *The Human Nature of the Singing Voice Exploring a Holistic Basis for Sound Teaching and Learning*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic, 2006. Print.

- How Schools Shortchange Girls, the AAUW Report: Executive Summary.*  
Washington, DC: American Association of University Women, Educational Foundation, 1992. Print.
- Karpowitz, Christopher F., and Tali Mendelberg. *The Silent Sex: Gender, Deliberation, and Institutions.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014. Print.
- Linklater, Kristin. *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice: The Actor's Guide to Talking the Text.* New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 1992. Print.
- Lockford, Lesa. *Performing Femininity: Rewriting Gender Identity.* Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004. Print.
- Miller, Richard. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique.* New York: Schirmer; 1986. Print.
- Quenqua, Douglas. "They're, Like, Way Ahead of the Linguistic Curve." *The New York Times* 27 Feb. 2012. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.
- Ritchart, Amanda, and Amalia Arvaniti. "Do We All Speak Like Valley Girls?: Uptalk in Southern Californian English." *ASA Lay Language Papers* (2013). Acoustics.org. Web. 14 May 2015.
- Rodenburg, Patsy. *Speaking Shakespeare.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Rubin, Alec. "Primal Theatre." *The Drama Review: TDR* 20.1 (1976): 55-63. *JSTOR*. MIT Press. Web. 3 May 2015. <[www.jstor.org/stable/1145038](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145038)>.
- Seitz-Brown, Marybeth. "Young Women Shouldn't Have to Talk Like Men to Be Taken Seriously." *Lexicon Valley*. Slate.com, 16 Dec. 2014. Web.
- Shakespeare, William, and David Bevington. *As You Like It: The Complete Works of Shakespeare.* Third Ed. Glenview, IL: University of Chicago, 1980. 361-392.
- "Trans Gender Identification | Learn about Gender Identity." *Planned Parenthood*. Web. 13 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/trans-identities>>.
- Werner, Sarah. *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage.* London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- "What Is Biological Sex? | Female, Male and Intersex." *Planned Parenthood*. Web. 13 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/female-male-intersex>>.