TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE BARD

Scenes and Monologues by Williams Shakespeare
Conceived by Brad Myers

NARRATOR:
William Shakespeare: the most produced playwright in the history of the world. His insights into the human condition have resonated with global audiences for over four centuries.

But like most playwrights, Shakespeare’s plays are heavily influenced by the culture of the time in which his plays were written. In this program we explore with liberating some of Shakespeare’s characters from the social restraints of Elizabethan England, and re-imagining characters and circumstances with modern day values. More specifically, we will apply contemporary LGBTQ perspectives and confront gender stereotypes.

Words like “homosexual,” “lesbian,” and “bisexual” did not exist in Elizabethan language. And sexual encounters between same-sex couples was illegal and societally scorned. Yet, some of Shakespeare’s plays, such as As You Like It and Twelfth Night, derive amusement from some such flirtations. And most of Shakespeare’s sonnets are written to his “lovely boy,” It is not a great stretch to imagine a sexual yearning in those sonnets.

SONNET: SONNET 23
(1 Man)

As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;
So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharg'd with burden of mine own love's might.
O let my books be then the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
Who plead for love and look for recompense
More than that tongue that more hath more express'
O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

OR

SONNET: SONNET 20
(1 Man)

A woman’s face with Nature’s own hand painted
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;
A woman’s gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false women’s fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men’s eyes and women’s souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she pricked thee out for women’s pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love’s use their treasure.

NARRATOR:
Perhaps Shakespeare’s strongest description of an intense passion between two women comes from Emilia in THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN as she remembers her friend, Fulvia.

MONOLOGUE: EMILIA -The Two Noble Kinsmen
I was acquainted
Once with a time when I enjoyed a playfellow;
You were at wars when she the grave enriched,
Who made too proud the bed; It was Flavina.
I, and she were things innocent,
Loved for we did, and like the elements
That know not what nor why, yet do effect
Rare issues by their operance, our souls
Did so to one another. What she liked
Was then of me approved, what not, condemned.
The flower that I would pluck
And put between my breasts—O, then but beginning
To swell about the blossom—she would long
Till she had such another, and commit it
To the like innocent cradle, where, Phoenix-like,
They died in perfume.
Her affections—pretty,
Though haply hers careless were—I followed
For my most serious decking. Had mine ear
Stol’n some new air, or at adventure hummed one
From musical coinage, why, it was a note
Whereon her spirits would sojourn—rather, dwell on—
And sing it in her slumbers. This rehearsal—
has this end,
That the true love ’tween maid and maid may be
More than in sex individual.
I shall never—Love any that’s called man.
I am sure I shall not.

NARRATOR:
It is ironic that England’s monarch in Shakespeare’s time was Elizabeth I, yet
women did not have the same status nor legal rights as men. And a husband was
considered to be his wives’ lord and master.

MONOLOGUE SNIPPET: PETRUCHIO (The Taming of the Shrew)
I will be master of what is mine own:
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing.

NARRATOR: Consequently, many of Shakespeare’s strongest women can only gain power through their husbands’ or sons’ accomplishments.

MONOLOGUE: MARGARET (Henry VI, Part 3)
(1 Woman)

Ah, wretched man! would I had died a maid
And never seen thee, never borne thee son,
Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father
Hath thy son deserved to lose his birthright thus?
Hadst thou but loved him half so well as I,
Or felt that pain which I did for him once,
Or nourish'd him as I did with my blood,
Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,
Rather than have that savage duke thine heir
And disinherited thine only son.
Ah, timorous wretch!
Thou hast undone thyself, thy son and me;
To deny thy son and the crown,
What is it, but to make thy sepulchre
And creep into it far before thy time?
Had I been there, which am a silly woman,
The soldiers should have toss'd me on their pikes
Before I would have granted to that act.
But thou preferr'st thy life before thine honour:
And seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself
Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,
Until that act of parliament be repeal'd
Whereby my son is disinherited.
SCENE SNIPPET: LADY MAC & MAC. *The Scottish Play*
(1 Man, 1 Woman)

MAC
We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

LADY M
Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely?

MAC
Prithee, peace:
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

LADY M
What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

MAC
If we should fail?

LADY M
We fail!
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail

NARRATOR:
So let’s return to the 21st century. Men or boys played all the roles, both male and female, in the Elizabethan theatre. So, in this scene we will build on that, and begin with a celebration of the discovery of true love between two young men, through a re-imagining of Shakespeare’s most famous scene, the balcony scene from Romeo & Juliet.

SCENE: ROMEO & JULIET (Romeo and Juliet)  
(2 Men)

ROMEO:
But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.  
O, it is my love!  
O, that he knew he were!  
He speaks yet he says nothing: what of that?  
His eye discourses; I will answer it.  
I am too bold, 'tis not to me he speaks:  
See, how he leans his cheek upon his hand!  
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET
Ay me!

ROMEO
He speaks:  
O, speak again, bright angel!

JULIET
O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.
ROMEO

[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

ROMEO

I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

JULIET

What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO

By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee;
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

JULIET

My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound:
Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

ROMEO
Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

**JULIET**

How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?  
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,  
And the place death, considering who thou art,  
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

**ROMEO**

With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls;  
For stony limits cannot hold love out,  
And what love can do that dares love attempt;  
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

**JULIET**

If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

**ROMEO**

Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye  
Than twenty of their swords: look thou but sweet,  
And I am proof against their enmity.

**JULIET**

I would not for the world they saw thee here.

**ROMEO**

I have night's cloak to hide me from their sight;  
And but thou love me, let them find me here:  
My life were better ended by their hate,  
Than death delayed, wanting of thy love.

**JULIET**

Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay,'  
And I will take thy word: yet if thou swear'st,  
Thou mayst prove false; at lovers' perjuries  
They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,  
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully:  
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,  
I'll frown and be perverse an say thee nay,  
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.
In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond,
And therefore thou mayst think my 'havior light:
But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true
Than those that have more cunning to be strange.
I should have been more strange, I must confess,
But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware,
My true love's passion: therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love.

ROMEO
Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops—

JULIET
O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

ROMEO
What shall I swear by?

JULIET
Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

ROMEO
If my heart's dear love—

JULIET
Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say 'It lightens.' Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!
ROMEO
    O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

JULIET
    What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?

ROMEO
    The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.

JULIET
    I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
    And yet I would it were to give again.

ROMEO
    Wouldst thou withdraw it? for what purpose, love?

JULIET
    But to be frank, and give it thee again.
    And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
    My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
    My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
    The more I have, for both are infinite.

    Nurse calls within

    I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!
    Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.
    Stay but a little, I will come again.

    Exit, above

ROMEO
    O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard.
    Being in night, all this is but a dream,
    Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.

    Re-enter JULIET, above

JULIET
    Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer's voice,
    To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
ROMEO
    It is my soul that calls upon my name:
    How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
    Like softest music to attending ears!

JULIET
    Romeo!

ROMEO
    My dear?

JULIET
    I have forgot why I did call thee back.

ROMEO
    Let me stand here till thou remember it.

JULIET
    I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
    Remembering how I love thy company.

ROMEO
    And I'll still stay, to have thee still forget,
    Forgetting any other home but this.

JULIET
    Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone:
    And yet no further than a wanton's bird;
    Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
    Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
    And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
    So loving-jealous of his liberty.

ROMEO
    I would I were thy bird.

JULIET
    Sweet, so would I:
    Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.
Good night, good night! parting is such
sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

Exit above

ROMEO
Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!
Hence will I to my ghostly father's cell,
His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell.

Exit

NARRATOR:
In *The Tempest*, Marina has grown up on a deserted island, and has no
memory of any human other than her father, Prospero. Due to a shipwreck,
Ferdinand, a young noble woman, has washed upon the shores of the
island. The two young women are immediately smitten with each
other. Ferdinand has been enslaved by Prospero and forced to haul logs.

SCENE: FERDINAND & MIRANDA (*The Tempest*)
(2 Women)

FERDINAND
There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off: some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
And makes my labours pleasures: O, she is
Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed,
And he's composed of harshness. I must remove
Some thousands of these logs and pile them up,
Upon a sore injunction: my sweet mistress
Weeps when she sees me work, and says, such baseness
Had never like executor. I forget:
But these sweet thoughts do even refresh my labours,  
Most busy lest, when I do it.

_Ende MIRANDA_

**MIRANDA**
Alas, now, pray you,  
Work not so hard: I would the lightning had  
Burnt up those logs that you are enjoin'd to pile!  
Pray, set it down and rest you: when this burns,  
'Twill weep for having wearied you. My father  
Is hard at study; pray now, rest yourself;  
He's safe for these three hours.

**FERDINAND**
O most dear mistress,  
The sun will set before I shall discharge  
What I must strive to do.

**MIRANDA**
If you'll sit down,  
I'll bear your logs the while

**FERDINAND**
No, precious creature;  
I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,  
Than you should such dishonour undergo,  
While I sit lazy by.

**MIRANDA**
It would become me  
As well as it does you: and I should do it  
With much more ease; for my good will is to it,  
And yours it is against.

_(FERDINAND sits.)_

**MIRANDA**
You look wearily.
FERDINAND
No, noble mistress; 'tis fresh morning with me
When you are by at night. I do beseech you--
Chiefly that I might set it in my prayers--
What is your name?

MIRANDA
Miranda.--O my father,
I have broke your hest to say so!

FERDINAND
Admired Miranda!
Indeed the top of admiration! worth
What's dearest to the world! Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear: for several virtues
Have I liked several women; never any
With so full soul, but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed
And put it to the foil: but you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature's best!

MIRANDA
I do not know
One of my sex; no woman's face remember,
Save, from my glass, mine own;: how features are abroad,
I am skilless of; but, by my modesty,
The jewel in my dower, I would not wish
Any companion in the world but you,
Nor can imagination form a shape,
Besides yourself, to like of. But I prattle
Something too wildly and my father's precepts
I therein do forget.

FERDINAND
Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service; there resides,
To make me slave to it; and for your sake
Am I this patient log--bearer.

MIRANDA
Do you love me?

FERDINAND
O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound
And crown what I profess with kind event
If I speak true! if hollowly, invert
What best is boded me to mischief! I
Beyond all limit of what else i' the world
Do love, prize, honour you.

MIRANDA
I am a fool
To weep at what I am glad of.

FERDINAND
Wherefore weep you?

MIRANDA
At mine unworthiness that dare not offer
What I desire to give, and much less take
What I shall die to want. But this is trifling;
And all the more it seeks to hide itself,
The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning!
And prompt me, plain and holy innocence!
I am your wife, if you will marry me;
If not, I'll die your maid: to be your fellow
You may deny me; but I'll be your servant,
Whether you will or no.

FERDINAND
My mistress, dearest;
And I thus humble ever.

MIRANDA
My husband, then?
FERDINAND
Ay, with a heart as willing
As bondage e'er of freedom: here's my hand.

MIRANDA
And mine, with my heart in't; and now farewell
Till half an hour hence.

FERDINAND
A thousand thousand!

NARRATOR:
In this monologue, a young trans woman, confesses her love for the duchess’ son.

MONOLOGUE:
HELENA – *All’s Well That Ends Well*

HELENA
Then, I confess,
Here on my knee, before high heaven and you,
That before you, and next unto high heaven,
I love your son.
My friends were poor, but honest; so's my love:
Be not offended; for it hurts not him
That he is loved of me: I follow him not
By any token of presumptuous suit;
Nor would I have him till I do deserve him;
Yet never know how that desert should be.
I know I love in vain, strive against hope;
Yet in this captious and intenible sieve
I still pour in the waters of my love
And lack not to lose still: thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,
But knows of HER no more. My dearest madam,
Let not your hate encounter with my love
For loving where you do: but if yourself,
Whose aged honour cites a virtuous youth,  
Did ever in so true a flame of liking  
Wish chastely and love dearly, that your Dian  
Was both herself and love: O, then, give pity  
To her, whose state is such that cannot choose  
But lend and give where she is sure to lose;  
That seeks not to find that her search implies,  
But riddle-like lives sweetly where she dies!

NARRATOR: Next, we’ll explore current topical issues. LGBTQ youth represent as much as 40% of the homeless youth population. And the majority of these are on the streets because of family rejection. In this scene from Romeo and Juliet, a teenage girl in a secret lesbian relationship, resists her father’s demands to marry the man he has chosen for her.

SCENE: JULIET & LORD CAPULET (Romeo and Juliet)  
(1 man; 1 woman)

CAPULET
How now! a conduit, girl? what, still in tears?  
Evermore showering? In one little body  
Thou counterfeit'st a bark, a sea, a wind;  
For still thy eyes, which I may call the sea,  
Do ebb and flow with tears; the bark thy body is,  
Sailing in this salt flood; the winds, thy sighs;  
Who, raging with thy tears, and they with them,  
Without a sudden calm, will overset  
Thy tempest-tossed body. How now, DAUGHTER!  
Have you NOT RECEIVED OUR DECREE?

JULIET
Ay, sir; but I will none, I give you thanks.

CAPULET
Soft! take me with you, take me with you, DAUGHTER.  
How! will YOU none? DO YOU not give us thanks?  
ARE YOU not proud? DO YOU not count YOU blest,
Unworthy as YOU ARE, that I have wrought
So worthy a gentleman to be YOUR bridegroom?

JULIET
Not proud, you have; but thankful, that you have:
Proud can I never be of what I hate;
But thankful even for hate, that is meant love.

CAPULET
How now, how now, chop-logic! What is this?
'Proud,' and 'I thank you,' and 'I thank you not;'
And yet 'not proud,' mistress minion, you,
Thank me no thankings, nor, proud me no prouds,
But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.
Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!
You tallow-face!

JULIET
Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.

CAPULET
Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;
My fingers itch. BY JOVE, I scarce thought ME blest
That God had lent ME but this only child;
But now I see this one is one too much,
And that I have a curse in having YOU.
Out on YOU, hilding!

JULIET
You are too hot.

CAPULET
God's bread! it makes me mad:
Day, night, hour, tide, time, work, play,
Alone, in company, still my care hath been
To have her match'd: and having now provided
A gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly train'd,
Stuff'd, as they say, with honourable parts,
Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man;
And then to have a wretched puling fool,
A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,
To answer 'I'll not wed; I cannot love,
I am too young; I pray you, pardon me.'
But, as you will not wed, I'll pardon you:
Graze where you will you shall not house with me:
Look to't, think on't, I do not use to jest.
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn.

Exit

JULIET
Is there no pity sitting in the clouds,
That sees into the bottom of my grief?
O, sweet my FATHER, cast me not away!
Delay this marriage for a month, a week;
Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies.

NARRATOR:
More than half of gay homeless teens are reported to have attempted suicide because of family rejection. Other gay teens cannot bear the bullying that they undergo either in school or online.

MONOLOGUE: HAMLET – Hamlet
(1 man, 1 woman)
**ACTOR 1:**
To be, or not to be, that is the question:

**ACTOR 2:**
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them.
To die—to sleep, No more;

**ACTOR 1:**
And by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;

**ACTOR 2:**
To sleep, perchance to dream—

**ACTOR 1:**
Ay, there's the rub:
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause—there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.

**ACTOR 2:**
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

**ACTOR 1:**
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,

**ACTOR 2:**
The pangs of dispriz'd love,

**ACTOR 1:**
the law's delay,
ACTOR 2:
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin?

ACTOR 1:
Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,

ACTOR 2:
The undiscovere'd country,

ACTOR 1:
from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?

ACTOR 2:
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,

ACTOR1:
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

ACTOR 2:
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry

1 & 2:
And lose the name of action.

NARRATOR:
Human sex trafficking has reached epidemic proportions and a significant portion of the victims are young men. In Pericles, a noble teenage boy, Marina, has been captured by sex-traffickers and sold to a brothel. In this scene, LYSIMACHUS, an influential politician has come to the brothel to purchase a sexual encounter with a virgin boy.

SCENE: MARINA & LYSIMACHUS (Pericles)  
(Two men; or one man, one woman)

LYSIMACHUS
Now, pretty one, how long have you been at this trade?

MARINA
What trade, SIR/MA’AM?

LYSIMACHUS
Why, I cannot name't but I shall offend.

MARINA
I cannot be offended with my trade. Please you to name it.

LYSIMACHUS
How long have you been of this profession?

MARINA:
E'er since I can remember.

LYSIMACHUS
Did you go to 't so young? Were you a gamester at five or at seven?

MARINA
Earlier too, sir, if now I be one.

LYSIMACHUS
Why, the house you dwell in proclaims you to be a creature of sale.

MARINA
Do you know this house to be a place of such resort, and will come into 't? I hear say you are of honourable parts, and are the governor of this place.

LYSIMACHUS
Why, hath your employer made known unto you who I am?

MARINA
Who is my employer?

LYSIMACHUS
Why, your PURVEYOR. THE ONE that sets seeds and roots of shame and iniquity. O, you have heard something of my power, and so stand aloof for more serious wooing. But I protest to thee, pretty one, my authority shall not see thee, or else look friendly upon thee. Come.

MARINA
If you were born to honour, show it now;
If put upon you, make the judgment good
That thought you worthy of it.

LYSIMACHUS
How's this? how's this? Some more; be sage.

MARINA
For me, That am ONE PURE, though most ungentle fortune
Have placed me in this sty, where, since I came,
Diseases have been sold dearer than physic,
O, that the gods
Would set me free from this unhallow'd place,
Though they did change me to the meanest bird
That flies i' the purer air!

LYSIMACHUS
I did not think
Thou couldst have spoke so well; ne'er dream'd thou couldst.
Had I brought hither a corrupted mind,
Thy speech had alter'd it. Hold, here's gold for thee:
Persever in that clear way thou goest,
And the gods strengthen thee!

MARINA
The good gods preserve you!

LYSIMACHUS
For me, be you thoughten
That I came with no ill intent; for to me
The very doors and windows savour vilely.
Fare thee well. Thou art a piece of virtue, and
I doubt not but thy training hath been noble.
Hold, here's more gold for thee.
A curse upon HER/HIM, die SHE/HIM like a thief,
That robs thee of thy goodness! If thou dost
Hear from me, it shall be for thy good.

NARRATOR:
In this re-imagined scene from Measure for Measure, a young man attending seminary has a brother, Claudio, who has been found guilty of impregnating his girlfriend outside of wedlock. Because of an archaic law, Claudio has been sentenced to death by Angelo, a theocratic leader. The young seminarian has begged Angelo, to alter Claudio’s sentence. In this scene, Angelo informs the seminarian of the price he must pay for Claudio’s life.

SCENE: ANGELO & ISABELLA (Measure for Measure)
(Two Men)

ANGELO:
How now, fair ONE?

ISABELLA
I am come to know your pleasure.
ANGELO
    That you might know it would much better please me
    Than to demand what 'tis. Your brother cannot live.

ISABELLA
    Even so. Heaven keep your Honor.

ANGELO
    Yet may he live a while. And it may be
    As long as you or I. Yet he must die.

ISABELLA
    Under your sentence?

ANGELO
    Yea.

ISABELLA
    When, I beseech you? That in his reprieve,
    Longer or shorter, he may be so fitted
    That his soul sicken not.

ANGELO
    Ha! Fie, these filthy vices! It were as good
    To pardon him that hath from nature stolen
    A man already made, as to FORGIVE
    Their saucy sweetness that do coin God’s image
    In stamps that are forbid. ’Tis all as easy
    Falsely to take away a life true made
    As to EMPLOY FORBIDDEN means
    To make a false one.

ISABELLA
    ’Tis set down so in heaven, but not in Earth.

ANGELO
    Say you so? Then I shall pose you quickly:
    Which had you rather, that the most just law
    Now took your brother’s life, or, to redeem him,
Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness
As she that he hath stained?

ISABELLA
Sir, believe this:
I had rather give my body than my soul.

ANGELO
I talk not of your soul.

ISABELLA
How say you?

ANGELO
Answer to this:
I, now the voice of the recorded law,
Pronounce a sentence on your brother’s life.
Might there not be a charity in sin
To save this brother’s life?

ISABELLA
Please you to do ’t,
I’ll take it as a peril to my soul,
It is no sin at all, but charity.

ANGELO
Pleased you to do ’t, at peril of your soul,
Were equal poise of sin and charity.

ISABELLA
That I do beg his life, if it be sin
Heaven let me bear it. You granting of my suit,
If that be sin, I’ll make it my morn prayer
To have it added to the faults of mine
And nothing of your answer.

ANGELO
Nay, but hear me.
Your sense pursues not mine. Either you are ignorant,
Or seem so, crafty, and that’s not good.
But mark me.
To be receivèd plain, I’ll speak more gross:
Your brother is to die.

ISABELLA
So.

ANGELO
Admit no other way to save his life—
But, that you, his sister,
Finding yourself desired of such a person
Whose credit with the judge, or own great place,
Could fetch your brother from the manacles
Of the all-binding law, and that there were
No earthly mean to save him but that either
You must lay down the treasures of your body
To this supposed, or else to let him suffer,
What would you do?

ISABELLA
As much for my poor brother as myself.
That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th’ impression of sharp whips I’d wear as rubies
And lash myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I’d yield
My body up to shame.

ANGELO
Then must your brother die.

ISABELLA
And ’twere the cheaper way.
Better it were a brother died at once
Than that this brother, by redeeming him,
Should die forever.

ANGELO
Were not you then as cruel as the sentence
That you have slandered so?
ISABELLA
  Lawful mercy
  Is nothing kin to foul redemption.

ANGELO
  You seemed of late to make the law a tyrant,
  And rather proved the sliding of your brother
  A merriment than a vice.

ISABELLA
  O, pardon me, my lord. It oft falls out,
  To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean.
  I something do excuse the thing I hate
  For his advantage that I dearly love.

ANGELO
  We are all frail.  **AND THEREFORE**, let me be bold.
  I do arrest your words.

ANGELO
  Plainly conceive I love you.

ISABELLA
  My brother did love Juliet,
  And you tell me that he shall die for ’t.

ANGELO
  He shall not, Isabel, if you give me love.

ISABELLA
  I know your virtue hath a license in ’t
  Which seems a little fouler than it is
  To pluck on others.

ANGELO
  Believe me, on mine honor,
  My words express my purpose.

ISABELLA
Ha! Little honor to be much believed,
And most pernicious purpose. Seeming, seeming!
I will proclaim thee, Angelo, look for ’t.
Sign me a present pardon for my brother
Or with an outstretched throat I’ll tell the world
aloud What man thou art.

ANGELO

Who will believe thee?
My unsoiled name, th’ austereness of my life,
My vouch against you, and my place i’ th’ state
Will so your accusation overweigh
That you shall stifle in your own report
And smell of calumny. I have begun,
And now I give my sensual race the rein.
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite;
Lay by all nicety and MOST TIRESOME blushes
That banish what they sue for. Redeem thy brother
By yielding up thy body to my will,
Or else he must not only die the death,
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
To ling’ring sufferance. Answer me tomorrow,
Or by the affection that now guides me most,
I’ll prove a tyrant to him. As for you,
Say what you can, my false o’erweighs your true.

ANGELO exits.

ISABELLA

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,
Who would believe me? I’ll to my brother.
Though he hath fall’n by URGES of the blood,
Yet hath he in him such a mind of honor
That, had he twenty heads to tender down
On twenty bloody blocks, he’d yield them up
Before his BROTHER should HIS body stoop
To such abhorred pollution.
Then, Isabel, live chaste, and, brother, die.
More than our brother is our chastity.
I'll tell him yet of Angelo’s request,
And fit his mind to death, for his soul’s rest.

ISABELLA exits.

NARRATOR:
Next we explore with gender reversal in two scenes from *Julius Caesar*. In our first scene, Brutus is powerful political leader who is struggling with whether she should join the plot to assassinate Caesar. Her fragile husband is begging to know what is troubling his wife.

SCENE: PORTIA & BRUTUS  *(Julius Caesar)*
(1 man, 1 woman)

*Enter PORTIA*

PORTIA
Brutus, my *WIFE*!

BRUTUS
Portia, what mean you? wherefore rise you now?
It is not for your health thus to commit
Your weak condition to the raw cold morning.

PORTIA
Nor for yours neither. You've ungently, Brutus,
Stole from my bed: and yesternight, at supper,
You suddenly arose, and walk'd about,
Musing and sighing, with your arms across,
And when I ask'd you what the matter was,
You stared upon me with ungentle looks;
I urged you further; then you scratch'd your head,
And too impatiently stamp'd with your foot;
Yet I insisted, yet you answer'd not,
But, with an angry wafture of your hand,
Gave sign for me to leave you: so I did;
Fearing to strengthen that impatience
Which seem'd too much enkindled, and withal
Hoping it was but an effect of humour,
Which sometime hath his hour with every PERSON. It will not let you eat, nor talk, nor sleep, And could it work so much upon your shape As it hath much prevail'd on your condition, I should not know you, Brutus. Dear EST LOVE, Make me acquainted with your cause of grief.

BRUTUS
I am not well in health, and that is all.

PORTIA
Brutus is wise, and, were She not in health, SHe would embrace the means to come by it.

BRUTUS
Why, so I do. Good HUSBAND, go to bed.

PORTIA
Is Brutus sick? and is it physical To walk unbraced and suck up the humours Of the dank morning? What, is Brutus sick, And will She steal out of HER wholesome bed, To dare the vile contagion of the night And tempt the rheumy and unpurged air To add unto HER sickness? No, my Brutus; You have some sick offence within your mind, Which, by the right and virtue of my place, I ought to know of: and, upon my knees, I charm you, by my once-commended beauty, By all your vows of love and that great vow Which did incorporate and make us one, That you unfold to me, yourself, your half, Why you are heavy, and what WOMEN to-night Have had to resort to you: for here have been Some six or seven, who did hide their faces Even from darkness.

BRUTUS
Kneel not, gentle Portia.
PORTIA
I should not need, if you were gentle Brutus.
Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted I should know no secrets
That appertain to you? Am I yourself
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I but in the suburbs
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not HER HUSBAND.

BRUTUS
You are my true and honourable SPOUSE,
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart

PORTIA
If this were true, then should I know this secret.
Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose 'em:
I have made strong proof of my constancy,
Giving myself a voluntary wound
Here, in the thigh: can I bear that with patience.
And not my DEAR WIFE’S secrets?

BRUTUS
O ye gods,
Render me worthy of this noble MAN!

Knocking within
Hark, hark! one knocks: Portia, go in awhile;
And by and by
All my engagements I will construe to thee,
All the charactery of my sad brows:
Leave me with haste.

Exit PORTIA

NARRATOR:
In our second scene, Caesar is preparing to go to the Senate. Her wife, Calphurnia has had foreboding dream, warning of great danger should Caesar go.

**SCENE:** CAESAR, CALPHURNIA, DECIUS & SERVANT (*Julius Caesar*)
(4 women)

*(Thunder.)*

**CAESAR.**
Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight.
Thrice hath Calpurnia in her sleep cried out,
"Help, ho! They murthere Caesar!" Who's within?

*(Enter a Servant.)*

**SERVANT:**
My LADY?

**CAESAR.**
Go bid the priests do present sacrifice,
And bring me their opinions of success.

**SERVANT.**
I will, my LADY.

*(Exit Servant.)*

*(Enter Calpurnia.)*

**CALPURNIA.**
What mean you, Caesar? Think you to walk forth?
You shall not stir out of your house today.

**CAESAR.**
Caesar shall forth: the things that threaten'd me
Ne'er look'd but on my back; when they shall see
The face of Caesar, they are vanished.

**CALPURNIA.**
Caesar, I I stood on ceremonies,
Yet now they fright me. There is one within,
Besides the things that we have heard and seen,
Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch.
A lioness hath whelped in the streets;
And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds,
In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;
The noise of battle hurtled in the air,
Horses did neigh and dying men did groan,
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.
O Caesar! These things are beyond all use,
And I do fear them.

CAESAR.
What can be avoided
Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?
Yet Caesar shall go forth, for these predictions
Are to the world in general as to Caesar.

CALPURNIA.
When beggars die, there are no comets seen;
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.

CAESAR.
Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

(Re-enter Servant.)

What say the PROPHETS?

SERVANT.
They would not have you to stir forth today.
Plucking the entrails of an offering forth,
They could not find a heart within the beast.

CAESAR.

The gods do this in shame of cowardice.
Caesar should be a beast without a heart
If she should stay at home today for fear.
No, Caesar shall not. Caesar shall go forth.

CALPURNIA.

Alas, my wife,
Your wisdom is consumed in confidence.
Do not go forth today. Call it my fear
That keeps you in the house and not your own.
We'll send Mark Antony to the Senate House,
And he shall say you are not well today.
Let me, upon my knee, prevail in this.

CAESAR.

Mark Antony shall say I am not well,
And, for thy humor, I will stay at home.
(Enter Decius.)
Here's Decius Brutus, she shall tell them so.

DECIUS.

Caesar, all hail! Good morrow, worthy Caesar!
I come to fetch you to the Senate House.

CAESAR

And you are come in very happy time
To bear my greeting to the senators
And tell them that I will not come today.
Cannot, is false, and that I dare not, falser:
I will not come today. Tell them so, Decius.

CALPURNIA.
Say She is sick.

CAESAR

Shall Caesar send a lie?
Have I in conquest stretch'd mine arm so far
To be afeard to tell greybeards the truth?
Decius, go tell them Caesar will not come.

DECIUS.

Most mighty Caesar, let me know some cause,
Lest I be laugh'd at when I tell them so.

CAESAR.

The cause is in my will: I will not come,
That is enough to satisfy the Senate.
But, for your private satisfaction,
Because I love you, I will let you know.
Calpurnia here, my wife, stays me at home;
She dreamt tonight she saw my statue,
Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,
Did run pure blood, and many lusty Romans
Came smiling and did bathe their hands in it.
And these does she apply for warnings and portents
And evils imminent, and on her knee
Hath begg'd that I will stay at home today.

DECIUS.

This dream is all amiss interpreted;
It was a vision fair and fortunate.
Your statue spouting blood in many pipes,
In which so many smiling Romans bathed,
Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck
Reviving blood, and that great men shall press
For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance.
This by Calpurnia's dream is signified.

CAESAR.
And this way have you well expounded it.

DECIUS.
I have, when you have heard what I can say.
And know it now, the Senate have concluded
To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar.
If you shall send them word you will not come,
Their minds may change. Besides, it were a mock
Apt to be render'd, for someone to say
"Break up the Senate till another time,
When Caesar's wife shall meet with better dreams."
If Caesar hide himself, shall they not whisper
"Lo, Caesar is afraid"?
Pardon me, Caesar, for my dear dear love
To your ADVANCEMENT bids me tell you this,
And reason to my love is liable.

CAESAR.
How foolish do your fears seem now, Calpurnia!
I am ashamed I did yield to them.
Give me my robe, for I will go.

NARRATOR:
Perhaps Shakespeare’s most regal and volcanic character is Cleopatra. In this scene, Cleopatra is played as a non-binary character who is passionately in love with the valiant Mark Antony. Cleopatra has just received word that Mark

SCENE: ANTONY & CLEOPATRA (Antony & Cleopatra)
(1 man; 1 non-binary actor; 2 women, men or non-binary)

CLEOPATRA
Where is he?

CHARMIAN
I did not see him since.
CLEOPATRA
See where he is, who's with him, what he does:
I did not send you: if you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick: quick, and return.

Exit ALEXAS

CHARMIAN
Madam, methinks, if you did love him dearly,
You do not hold the method to enforce
The like from him.

CLEOPATRA
What should I do, I do not?

CHARMIAN
In each thing give him way, cross him nothing.

CLEOPATRA
Thou teachest like a fool; the way to lose him.

CHARMIAN
Tempt him not so too far; I wish, forbear:
In time we hate that which we often fear.
But here comes Antony.

Enter MARK ANTONY

CLEOPATRA
I am sick and sullen.

MARK ANTONY
I am sorry to give UTTERANCE to my purpose,--

CLEOPATRA
I shall fall:
It cannot be thus long, the sides of nature
Will not sustain it.
MARK ANTONY
   Now, my dearest queen,--

CLEOPATRA
   Pray you, stand further from me.

MARK ANTONY
   What's the matter?

CLEOPATRA
   I know, by that same eye, there's some good news.
   What says the married woman? You may go:
   Would she had never given you leave to come!
   Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here:
   I have no power upon you; hers you are.

MARK ANTONY
   The gods best know,--

CLEOPATRA
   O, never was there queen
   So mightily betray'd! yet at the first
   I saw the treasons planted.

MARK ANTONY
   Cleopatra,--

CLEOPATRA
   Why should I think you can be mine and true,
   Though you in swearing shake the throned gods,
   Who have been false to Fulvia? Riotous madness,
   To be entangled with those mouth-made vows,
   Which break themselves in swearing!

MARK ANTONY
   Most sweet queen,--

CLEOPATRA
   Nay, pray you, seek no PRETEXT for your going,
   But bid farewell, and go: when you sued staying,
Then was the time for words: no going then;
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,
But was a race of heaven: they are so still,
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turn'd the greatest liar.

MARK ANTONY
Hear me, queen:
The strong necessity of time commands
MY services awhile;
And that which most with you should safe my going,
Is Fulvia's death.

CLEOPATRA
Though age from folly could not give me freedom,
It does from childishness: HAS FULVIA Died?

MARK ANTONY
She's dead, my queen:

CLEOPATRA
O most false love!
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,
In Fulvia's death, how mine shall be received.

MARK ANTONY
Quarrel no more, but be prepared to know
The purposes I bear; which are, or cease,
As you shall give the advice. By the fire
That quickens THE NILE’S FLOW, I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant; making peace or war
As thou affect'st.

CLEOPATRA
I am quickly ill, and well,
LIKE ANTONY’S loves.

MARK ANTONY
My precious queen, forbear;  
And give true evidence to MY love, which stands  
An honourable trial.

**CLEOPATRA**  
So Fulvia told me.  
I prithee, turn aside and weep for her,  
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears  
Belong to Egypt: good now, play one scene  
Of excellent dissembling; and let it look  
Life perfect honour.

**MARK ANTONY**  
You'll heat my blood: no more.

**CLEOPATRA**  
How this Herculean Roman does become  
The carriage of his **RAGE**.

**MARK ANTONY**  
I'll leave you, lady.

**CLEOPATRA**  
Courteous lord, one word.  
Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it:  
Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it;  
That you know well: something it is I would,  
O, my oblivion is a very Antony,  
And I am all forgotten.

**MARK ANTONY**  
But that your royalty  
Holds **FOOLISHNESS** your subject, I should take you  
For **FOOLISHNESS** itself.

**CLEOPATRA**  
'Tis sweating labour  
To bear such **FOOLISHNESS** so near the heart  
As Cleopatra this. But, sir, forgive me;  
Since my **ATTRIBUTES** kill me, when they do not
APPEAR well to you: your honour calls you hence;  
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly.  
And all the gods go with you! upon your sword  
Sit laurel victory! and smooth success  
Be strew'd before your feet!

MARK ANTONY  
Let us go. Come;  
Our separation so abides, and flies,  
That thou, residing here, go'st yet with me,  
And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee. Away!  

Exeunt

NARRATOR:  
The modern LGBTQ civil right movement was catalyzed by the Stonewall Inn Riots that erupted in the summer of 1969. Police raided a gay bar in New York’s Greenwich Village prompting a resistance by patrons who could no longer tolerate the oppression.

MONOLOGUE: SHYLOCK *(The Merchant of Venice)*  
*(Full Company)*

VOICE 1:  
YOU have disgraced me and hindered me; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my people, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—and what’s reason? I am a Jew.

VOICE 2:  
Lesbian.

VOICE 3:  
Gay.

VOICE 4:  
Bi-sexual.

VOICE 5:  
Transexual.
VOICE 6:
Queer.

VOICES (progressively adding in)
Hath not a I/we eyes? Hath not I/we hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as all men are? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. The villainy you teach us we will execute—and it shall go hard but we will better the instruction.

MONOLOGUE SNIPPET: HAMLET (Polonius)
(Full Company)

ALL VOICES:
This above all—to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, s the night the day,
Thou canst no then e false to any man.
Farewell. OUR blessing season this in thee!

VOICE 1:
To think own self be true.

VOICE 2:
To think own self be true.

VOICE 3:
To think own self be true.

ALL VOICES:
To thine own self be true.