

MUSE OF FIRE

A Reading

Lighting Design by Valentine Pesola

Starring Mary Rose Valentine

Conceived by Arushi Grover

Featuring Hazel Giacomucci, Gwendolyn Fry, Miriam Colvin, and Mary Rose Valentine

Pennsylvania State University

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MUSE OF FIRE

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PROLOGUE

A blank stage with a chair, in which the Muse sits. Another stool with a music stand to the side.

During the pre-show, ARUSHI, the emcee, takes her place at the lone stool and sits. At the end of the pre-show the lights dim.

MUSE (*excitedly*)

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

ARUSHI. Hello, and welcome! Thank you so much for coming to see today's reading, *Muse of Fire*. In addition to being your emcee for tonight, I am the dramaturg for Penn State Centre Stage's ongoing production of Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's 2018 play, *Emilia*, which tells the story of Emilia Bassano, a historical figure rumored to be the muse behind Shakespeare's "Dark Lady" sonnets. But, in addition to potentially being a muse, Emilia was a mother, proto-feminist, educator, and writer in her own right. Lloyd Malcolm's play works to restore humanity to a figure that history did not care to remember well, and also to question the stories we tell, the names we remember, the titles we read, the works we produce.

We are here today to celebrate the "Muse of fire"—inspiration. In the play, *Emilia*, the title character is guided by muses—agents of artistic inspiration, death, and time. Joining me today for this companion piece to the mainstage production is my esteemed colleague, Mary Rose Valentine, a fellow theatre artist who will be playing our Muse here today.

As we explore the texts that have inspired *Emilia*, and the works that *Emilia* has inspired and empowers, think with me about the question: what do we remember, and why? What speaks to us? What lasts over time, over centuries, over the turning of pages? And what pages are lost to time? I invite you today as we hear excerpts from the source texts for *Emilia* and from the works that *Emilia* empowers, the writing and works of women and nonbinary artists from our own community.

ACT 1: "O FOR A MUSE OF FIRE" from *HENRY V*

ARUSHI. We begin with the prologue from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, spoken by the Chorus. *Henry V* is a history play that tells the events of King Henry V of England, who goes to battle to fight for him to the French throne. In this prologue, a figure of unity and time, the Chorus, introduces us to the action by setting the scene. This monologue has been used to articulate an early modern approach to theatre. In Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses, there was little scenery, and theatre was less a visual experience, and more an aural one. In an age without stage directors and with short rehearsal times, the impression of theatre that audiences received was less from blocking, and more from text itself. Theatre in Shakespeare's day asked you to listen to how the dialogue illustrated the scene. This prologue asks the audience to supplement what they see on stage with their imaginations: to turn the few actors into armies of hundreds; to turn the thrust stage into the fields of France; to see the costumes and think of the royalty of kings. The Chorus speaks appeals to inspiration...

CHORUS. O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princesses to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars. But pardon, all,
The flat unraisèd spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide on man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history;
Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

ARUSHI. Audience members are a collaborator in the experience of Shakespearean theatre. They are artists as much as those on- and backstage, in that having and exercising imagination means one is an artist. This prologue professes some of the ethos behind Shakespeare's Globe, a world-renowned performing arts venue, cultural attraction, and education centre located on the south bank of the Thames River in London. Shakespeare's Globe is a reconstruction of the early modern playhouse, the Globe Theatre, for which Shakespeare wrote many of his plays. Opening in 1997, the institution began as a radical theatrical experiment shepherded by pioneering American actor and director Sam Wanamaker. Our play, *Emilia*, was born under the leadership of then and current artistic director, Michelle Terry, as a close collaboration between playwright Morgan Lloyd Malcolm and director Nicole Charles. Lloyd Malcolm's play is born of an institution that authorizes the continued production and study of Shakespeare's works, while being a work that questions the hegemony of this mythical figure in the theatrical and literary canons. *Emilia* engages with the Shakespearean corpus, quoting and referencing it, existing in conversation with this body of work.

ACT 2: GENDER & LADY MACBETH

ARUSHI. The play, *Emilia*, is not a historical, biographical narrative; but rather, an alternative history, a work of imagination. The play is premised on the idea that while abused and misremembered by the patriarchal history books and record, women can be liberated in fiction, in imagination. Of the strongest of Shakespeare's women characters is the original girlboss, Lady Macbeth.

Women have historically been defined by men: by the men they marry, the men they are associated with, the men they are compared to. We refer to her as Lady Macbeth, but Macbeth is not the couple's last name. Lloyd Malcolm's play, *Emilia*, makes the rhetorical choice to refer to the poet by her maiden name; she is not Emilia Lanier, but Emilia Bassano. And still, isn't Bassano her father's name?

In *Macbeth*, ambitious Lady Macbeth hears via letter that her husband is hesitant to murder the current king and assume his power. She turns from her letter, anticipating bad omens, but appealing to supernatural beings to say, "Unsex me here." Her words show that she sees her sex, her gender as that which is stopping her from being cold, calculating, and ambitious. She curses her breasts and her ability to reproduce, asking to be filled with the "direst cruelty." She says...

LADY MACBETH. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry "Hold, hold!"

ARUSHI. Tragically, Lady Macbeth is convinced she has to sacrifice her gender, her womanhood and her femininity, to claim power. And still, in this play, she proves absolutely ruthless. Virginia Woolf anticipated the feminist function of *Emilia* in the "Shakespeare's Sister" passage from her 1929 extended essay *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf argued that a hypothetical sister of William Shakespeare, one Judith Shakespeare who possessed the same writing talent, would face so many

psychological and societal impediments that her genius would never see the light of day. By contrast, Woolf drew attention to the heroines of Shakespeare's plays, as representations of women. Think of the sexual agency of Cleopatra, the ruthless ambition of Lady Macbeth, the gender-nonconformity of Rosalind. Women have been allowed to exist more authentically in Shakespearean fiction than in reality.

ACT 3: THE CROSS-DRESSING HEROINES

ARUSHI. In Shakespeare's day, only men graced the stage as actors, playing both men and women's parts. *Emilia* reverses this; our production is acted by a diverse group of women and nonbinary people. For all the moments of compulsive heterosexuality necessitated by the text and time, queerness is inherent in the history of Shakespeare's play, where male bodies played romantic couples. This is compounded by the fact that in many of Shakespeare's plays, there are women cross-dressing as men. Today, we bring to you a non-male person playing a role originated by a man who is dressing as a woman who is dressing as a man...

Part 1: Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*

ARUSHI. ...starting with Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*. Their men having gone off to a court trial, the lady, Portia, explains to her waiting-woman, Nerissa, how the two women will dress up and act as men so that their soon-husbands won't recognize them. Portia addresses Nerissa...

PORTIA. Come on, Nerissa, I have work in hand
That you yet know not of. We'll see our husbands
Before they think of us.

NERISSA. Shall they see us?

PORTIA. They shall, Nerissa, but in such a habit
That they shall think we are accomplished
With that we lack. I'll hold thee any wager,
When we are both accoutered like young men,
I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
And speak between the change of man and boy
With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
Into a manly stride, and speak of frays
Like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint lies
How honorable ladies sought my love,
Which I denying, they fell sick and died—
I could not do withal!—then I'll repent,
And wish, for all that, that I had not killed them.
And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell,
That men shall swear I have discontinued school
Above a twelvemonth. I have within my mind
A thousand raw tricks of these bragging jacks
Which I will practice.

NERISSA. Why, shall we turn to men?

PORTIA. Fie, what a question's that!

ARUSHI. This swagger, arrogance, and foolishness is how Portia professes to embody, to perform as a man. We may contend with men's depiction of women in drama of the past. *Emilia* doesn't move to correct, to portray women and men as they are, but to deliver the same treatment in reverse. In our production, women and nonbinary people perform a caricature, our own perception of men posturing. It's petty, it's not fair, but it is just. Within this, we question what is the essential nature of different genders.

Part 2: Viola from *Twelfth Night*

ARUSHI. In Shakespeare's comedy, *Twelfth Night*, the duke, Orsino, maintains that women cannot feel love as much as he does for the lady, Olivia. He says this to a woman, Viola, cross-dressing as a man, serving this lord while pining for him. Orsino declares...

ORSINO. There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much; they lack retention.
Alas, their love may be called appetite,
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia.

VIOLA. (*as Cesario*) Ay, but I know—

ORSINO. What dost thou know?

VIOLA. (*as Cesario*) Too well what love women to men may owe.
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter loved a man
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your Lordship.

ORSINO. And what's her history?

VIOLA. (*as Cesario*) A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more, but indeed
Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
Much in our vows but little in our love.

ORSINO. But died thy sister of her love, my boy?

VIOLA. (*as Cesario*) I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers, too.

ARUSHI. Shakespeare's works suggest and dramatize what later scholars would state—that gender is performance, and that gender in practice is much more fluid than it is rigid.

Part 3: Rosalind from *As You Like It*

ARUSHI. Shakespeare heightens his play with gender and sexuality in *As You Like It*, another comedy with a woman, Rosalind (*Mary Rose waves*), cross-dressing as a man, Ganymede, who falls in love with one Orlando (*Arushi waves*), who pines for his Rosalind. They meet outside of court, in the forest, while Rosalind is disguised as Ganymede, and she explains that she can cure Orlando of his love-sickness for Rosalind by pretending to be her so that he can woo Ganymede.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede, to Orlando*) Come, woo me, woo me, for now I am in a holiday humor, and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now an I were your very, very Rosalind?

ORLANDO. I would kiss before I spoke.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Nay, you were better speak first, and when you were gravelled for lack of matter, you might take occasion to kiss.

ORLANDO. How if the kiss be denied?

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Then she puts you to entreaty, and there begins new matter.

ORLANDO. Who could be out, being before his beloved mistress?

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Marry, that should you if I were your mistress, or I should think my honesty ranker than my wit.

ORLANDO. What, of my suit?

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Not out of your apparel, and yet out of your suit. Am not I your Rosalind?

ORLANDO. I take some joy to say you are because I would be talking of her.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Well, in her person I say I will not have you.

ORLANDO. Then, in mine own person I die.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) No, faith. The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person in a love cause. Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

ORLANDO. I would not have my right Rosalind of this mind, for I protest her frown might kill me.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) By this hand, it will not kill a fly. But come; now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition, and ask me what you will, I will grant it.

ORLANDO. Then love me, Rosalind.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Yes, faith, will I, Fridays and Saturdays and all.

ORLANDO. And wilt thou have me?

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Ay, and twenty such.

ORLANDO. What sayest thou?

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Are you not good?

ORLANDO. I hope so.

ROSALIND. (*as Ganymede*) Why then, can one desire too much of a good thing?

ARUSHI. Does Orlando see this figure he converses with as the woman she essentially is or as the man she presents as? Or effectively, is Rosalind or Ganymede both, or something in between, or neither?

Part 4: Phillida from *Galatea*

ARUSHI. And in honor of the muses, let us honor one of Shakespeare's own inspirations, John Lyly's play, *Galatea*. If *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* are about women who dress as men and fall in love with men while cross-dressing, *Galatea* doubles this scenario. There are two women who run into the woods, dressed as men (to escape becoming virgin sacrifices—don't worry about it), and both women, Galatea and Phillida, fall in love with the other thinking they're a man. But it crosses Phillida's mind that perhaps this other individual is, like her, also not as perceived, a man...

PHILLIDA. Poor Phillida, what shouldst thou think of thyself, that lovest one that, I fear me, is as thyself is? And may it not be that her father practiced the same deceit with her that my father hath with me, and, knowing her to be fair, feared she should be unfortunate? If it be so, Phillida, how desperate is thy case! If it be not, how doubtful! For if she be a maiden, there is no hope of my love; if a boy, a hazard. I will after him or her, and lead a melancholy life, that look for a miserable death.

ARUSHI. "I will after him or her."

ACT 4: ROMANTIC FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN

ARUSHI. Shakespeare's texts borrow from this essentially sapphic scenario time and time again. Heterosexual marriage, in Shakespeare's works, can be understood fundamentally as homosocial bonds, often between a father and his soon-to-be son-in-law. But friendship may be understood as romantic, sometimes even sexual in connotation, between women.

Part 1: Olivia & Viola in *Twelfth Night*

ARUSHI. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola, a woman cross-dressing as a man, is sent by her master to woo the lady, Olivia, on his behalf. Olivia—seeing what she perceives to be a youth, a young man—falls in love with the messenger and begs him to not go, but stay.

VIOLA. You'll nothing, madam, to my lord by me?

OLIVIA. Stay. I prithee, tell me what thou think'st of me.

VIOLA. That you do think you are not what you are.

OLIVIA. If I think so, I think the same of you.

VIOLA. Then think you right. I am not what I am.

OLIVIA. I would you were as I would have you be.

VIOLA. Would it be better, madam, than I am?

I wish it might, for now I am your fool.

OLIVIA (*aside*). O, what a deal of scorn looks beautiful

In the contempt and anger of his lip!

A murd'rous guilt shows not itself more soon

Than love that would seem hid. Love's night is

noon.—

(*to Viola*) Cesario, by the roses of the spring,

By maidhood, honor, truth, and everything,

I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,

Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.

Do not extort thy reasons from this clause,

For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause;

But rather reason thus with reason fetter:

Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.

Part 2: Titania & Her Votaress in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

ARUSHI. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the queen of fairyland, Titania, quarrels with the king of fairyland, Oberon, the two of them arguing over the custody of a child, a “changeling boy”. This boy was the child of her votaress, a dedicated female follower of the queen. Titania tells Oberon of her

past with the now late, then pregnant votaress and their a homosocial relationship that bears the possibility queer pregnancy, intimacy between women, and pleasure.

TITANIA.

Set your heart at rest:

The Fairyland buys not the child of me.
His mother was a vot'ress of my order,
And in the spicèd Indian air by night
Full often hath she gossiped by my side
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking th' embarkèd traders on the flood,
When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait,
Following (her womb then rich with my young squire),
Would imitate and sail upon the land
To fetch me trifles and return again,
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die,
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.

ARUSHI. “For her sake”, Titania repeats, expressing her bond with her votaress that she wishes to continue by taking care of her child.

Part 3: Paulina & Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*

ARUSHI. Bonds that blur the line of service, friendship, and shared parenthood abound in the conclusion of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, too. In the tragicomedy, the king of Sicilia accuses his pregnant queen, Hermione, of infidelity. Paulina, a noblewoman, becomes the most staunch supporter of the queen. After all, she says...

PAULINA. I say I come
From your good queen.

LEONTES. Good queen?

PAULINA. Good queen, my lord, good queen, I say “good queen.”

ARUSHI. The king and queen's daughter is born in the image of her father. Still, the king doesn't believe the truth about Hermione's loyalty and she is banished. Karmically, their young son dies when the king refuses this truth, and Hermione dies from grief. The king realizes his mistake and wishes he could repent, but sixteen years pass while he dwells in the loss of his family. With this gap

of time comes redemption in the new generation; his daughter is found and reunites with her father. And the lost princess? Two gentlemen discuss how there exists a supposed statue of Hermione that Paulina visits regularly...

THIRD GENTLEMAN. The Princess, hearing of her mother's statue, which is in the keeping of Paulina—a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape; he so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer. Thither with all greediness of affection are they gone.

SECOND GENTLEMAN. I thought she had some great matter there in hand, for Paulina hath privately twice or thrice a day, ever since the death of Hermione, visited that removed house.

MUSE. And eventually, it is revealed that this supposed statue of Hermione is the woman herself, having been in hiding all these years until her lost daughter was found.

ARUSHI. Mhm. So. You're telling me that Paulina and Hermione have been living together these sixteen years, away from the sight and company of men. Alright. Cheers to their union and to the return of the princess.

MUSE & ARUSHI. To the princess!

ARUSHI. *Emilia* is a feminist work that argues for the hearing, listening, publishing, and producing the voices of women. And still, it is premised on a man's voice—it's based off of the Shakespearean corpus. We might forget that Shakespeare is a man; the name recalls more a mythical figure, the epitome of genius, a god of writing. But what is the purpose of producing these older works? I'd argue that it's comforting to see oneself reflected in aged pages—it lets you know that your experience is canonized, that someone out there is listening, that someone out there in the past once understood, or that the survival of those works till now means that centuries of people understood. It's dangerous to think of something as universal; that erases difference, smooths over divergence. But Shakespeare is rife with ambiguities and paradoxes, and is that not true to life, or open to interpretation? So, we change the status quo, not by burning the house down, but from working within it, using what power already exists for our own purposes. We appropriate it. In the words of the youth, let us use Shakespeare's name, and the centuries of knowledge that this name has produced, as clout to further our own agenda.

ACT 5: EPISTOLARY SONNETS

ARUSHI. And so, in that vein, we move to listen to the voices of our own community. The next act of this evening expands on this notion of romantic friendship between women with our first excerpt of writing from artists in our own community. Authored by Mary Rose and I, ourselves, we present to you a series of ten epistolary sonnets, written from the perspective of two women who communicate via letter during the 1603 plague in London. Having met at a performance of *As You Like It*, Wynn and Ivy “bend their womanhood”, their expression and desires, as they get closer at a distance. From Wynn...

Sonnet 1: Wynn to Ivy

WYNN.

Dear Ivy,

I tried to tuck my hair into a cap,
Which, stolen from my brother, barely fit.
I thought of Rosalind, and hoped, mayhap
I may now match her looks, though ne'er her wit.

I knew not what I hoped my glass would show,
Though I was truly happy with the sight.
With boy-like hair but girlish face, I know
That sometimes I confuse the day and night.

For what are these two things? Not opposites!
What's night without a day? Push with no pull?
For day is dark when sun and moon eclipse,
And night turns sunny when my lady's full.

When next we meet, our womanhood we bend.
Much more than that begins when childhood ends.

Yours ever,
Wynnifred

Sonnet 2: Ivy to Wynn

MUSE. Ivy replies speaking from a moment of tumultuous change in what was Elizabethan and is now Jacobean society, echoing our own society in the past couple years. She references the character of Phoebe in *As You Like It*, a shepherdess who falls in love with Rosalind who is disguised as a man.

IVY.

Dear Wynnifred,

Our Mary's azure robes now fade to inky cloaks,
And sovereign's crown now dusted off to shine,
It seems the world we've grown to see and known
Has chang'd so quickly in so short a time!

While power passed with ease to sure relief,
We're now confrontèd with a mortal foe.
Man posing danger, sword or as disease,
I butter bread to ward the plague from home.

But soft! Remember I when we first met,
When gazing at a stage as wide as world,
For I recall one Phoebe's love was left,
While I grew wonderstruck at this new girl.

So write I swift with ardor's memory,
With hope to see you when we both can leave.

Avec amitié,
Ivy

Sonnet 3: Wynn to Ivy

WYNN.

Dearest Ivy,

Oh, change comes on like thunderstorms which we
Can see from miles away as they approach.
Yet none, when it arrives, can ready be
For rain, and lightning's violent encroach.

We must be strong in face of mortal threats!
When your letters arrive, my hope ignites.
I look to th'future, back turned on regrets.
With stages closed, we are our own playwrights.

The "new girl," as you say, captured my thought.
Can she be "new," after this double life?
Orlando's love made Phoebe yearn for naught.
How could our Rosalind be man and wife?

Your choice of word, that "wonderstruck," is fit.
This play, its audience... I'm in love with it.

Yours,
Wynn

Sonnet 4: Ivy to Wynn

WYNN.

My Wynn,

I'm captivated by the London scent,
That washes up with waters from the Thames.
For sickness lies in weeds and men who're spent,
So work I with a flame to clean and cleanse.

For now I'm burning juniper and sage,
And lavender and rosemary in tow'rs
Of smoke that gently move, caress my face,
With mem'ries of your own in bloom, like flow'rs.

Imagine offering your hand to vines,
That creep upon your form, a promised oath.
Imagine, tendrils wrapping, to be thine,
And being buried in those branches, close.

My betrothèd calls me once again,
And so I say "adieu" to you, my friend.

Thinking of you,
Ivy

Sonnet 5: Wynn to Ivy

WYNN.

Ivy,

Well, thy betrothèd I would like to maim.
My hand, though offered, thou couldst never take,
For he prevents—I'd think it not a shame
If he vanish'd, or died by some mistake.

But I will not keep plotting his demise.
I turn my thoughts to living, lively things.
If I could leave my home and see the skies,
I'd take to th'air and fly to thee on wings.

And when I landed, feet upon the ground,
There I would stay 'til rooted to the place,
And listen to the rustling, lovely sound
Of growing vines, leaves kissing my face.

But I could never garden well this bed,
And so pray I for happiness when you wed.

Bittersweetly,
Wynn

Sonnet 6: Ivy to Wynn

IVY.

Wynn,

My betrothèd's eyes are like the sun,
That calmly watch and pierce the morning air,
And patiently, expectantly, for some,
Observe, infer, they will, with stone-cold stare.

My lover's eyes, a tempest, cavernous,
Voraciously consuming, raging down,
Do bathe me, lost in showers ravenous,
And think I that I might just sink and drown!

My own eyes wake t'auroras in the sky,
That, doting on the past do reminisce,
And I, a tossing raft, on waves do fly,
With dreams of reaching for that perfect kiss.

So float I gasping f'air after the storm,
And wait I patiently for more and more.

Breathless,
Ivy

Sonnet 7: Wynn to Ivy

WYNN.

Ivy,

Were I a rope, could I extend a hand,
I'd surely pull thee up from raging seas
I'd drag, with all my strength, thy raft to land
And stay there 'til the end, with thee, with ease.

Returning to the play, and 'perfect kiss,'
A question grows—it crosses every line.
But on this isle with thee, no lines exist.
So, what if Phoebe said she did not mind?

If she loved Ganymede and Rosalind,
Could be devoted to a girl or boy?
This play took what I know, tossed't to the wind,
But I know surely that thou bringst me joy.

A match for Phoebe, perhaps now am I.
On thee is where I wish to rest my eye.

Hoping,
Wynn

Sonnet 8: Ivy to Wynn

IVY.

Wynn,

If you are Phoebe, would I were the grass
A shepherdess might lie on to relax.
I would I were the gales that blow right past
Her hair, the ones that carry her bright laugh.

Imagine past'ral hands begin to creep
Upon the base of valley's verdant sheath.
I feel a fervent force within the breeze,
And dream your own breath joining them with ease.

Or was it mine that sighs within the gale?
Th'elated roar within, it begs to tell
Of pining wishes quietly that spell
A hand-by-hand and distanced letters' tale.

And for the song the lusty wind has sung,
Consider how my heart is winn'd; it's won.

Yours,
Ivy

Sonnet 9: Wynn to Ivy

WYNN.

My Ivy,

They letters make it quite impossible
To lie down and relax; I feel restless.
Thy words spin through my head, and I feel full
Of love and passion. I quite lost my breath.

The wind that whistles through the valleys blows,
From my bosom, and when its confines swell
It is for thee. I pray for thee to know
I am not falling; I already fell.

I wish that we could run away together;
I yearn to run, pursue what I desire,
I'd leave my life behind to go and get her.
She loves me, and my love she doth inspire.

Tell me where to meet and I will be there.
Thou art the only thing for which I care.

Thine eternally,
Wynn

Sonnet 10: Ivy to Wynn

IVY.

Wynn,

Then meet me 'tween the Globe and River Thames,
That fateful ground where side-by-side we met.
I'll see you soon at dawn and we'll commence
Our journey to a verdant country's rest.

Like vines upon a stonèd cottage wall,
I'll wrap myself around your form and sleep,
For thine I'll be forever, and all
Will flourish as the years pass peacefully.

One hand holds my pen; the other, you.
The hills will know my words now of my muse.

MUSE. End of sonnet sequence.

ARUSHI. These are the sonnets that tell of a Shakespeare-era romance, building on how these works can have value for people today. Thank you Mary Rose for spearheading this project.

ACT 6: RAIN, FLOODS, AND PUDDLES

Part 1: “Floods to Puddles” by Hazel Giacomucci

ARUSHI. With these sonnets comes the reminder that women and nonbinary people want and ache and desire so very strongly. Those desires are sometimes suppressed, but in moments like these, they come tumbling out in verse. This next poem uses aquatic imagery to symbolize passion, ardor, want, and memory. We present to you, from our own Hazel Giacomucci, “Floods to Puddles”...

MUSE. It feels so weird on days like these
Hungry but don't know what for
angry but no ache and no sore
To cry makes sense, but it turns out,
the corners of my eyes are made of sand

I want to feel your hand
I don't want to hold it, I just want to
run my fingers over your palm
climb over the edges— a canyon with a sunrise
You were a cracked desert.

I want to feel your hand on my neck,
feel your fingers in my hair,
they feel different when they're moving

They felt warm,
you felt sweet—
But then you made me blank, you left me on
and now I'm static- Televisions
humming in the dark.

I just want to feel your hand
can I please just do that again?
I wish I could do it one more time,
I wish I did it more.

A dream of knuckles and a cold limb
I hope a river flows through that canyon,
so we can let go of our clothes and take a swim.

Or, at least, I just hope you let it flood

and rush,
even though I know those swimmers will never be us

Maybe I should just go home
and sleep in a bed that's sunken down;
because people keep looking at my face and moving their lips

All I can see is you, in the puddles beneath my feet.

ARUSHI. From Hazel Giacomucci, *everyone*. [*Applause.*]

Part 2: "Gentle be the Rain" by Gwendolyn Fry

ARUSHI. Hazel's aquatic imagery is echoed in this next piece. Nature and the sky are coded feminine, a giving, birthing, productive entity, in contrast with the deceit and manipulation of man. This poet sends up the poor treatment of women, without whom humanity would not exist with the imagery of the duality of rain—a precipitation that can drizzle lightly or rains that can pound and waves that can drown. She speaks to the mutability of women, our shapeshifting or metamorphoses. Here is "Gentle be the Rain" by Gwendolyn Fry.

MUSE. The waves are rough,
As rough can be:
So is the nature of the sea;
A wily mad old man is he
With his spear and staff.

The rain is soft
And gently rapping:
A finger on a table, tapping:
A woman on a bird's wings, flapping
Up to lofty clouds.

Oh, is she so?
For I have seen,
Above the foam and violent green,
The rains paint out a wicked scene
Of death, so loudly flashing.

Damn her temper,
Damn her pride;
Where else should man's sights reside

But under her abundant skies?
It's him she should consider.

Forget the drowned
Forget the dead
Who lie asleep in Neptune's bed,
Who silently inside their heads
Surely curse her name.

Yes, waves are rough
As rough can be:
This is the nature of the sea;
So is all the sea can be
And gentle be the rain.

ARUSHI. The speaker of this piece sternly acknowledges that the mistreatment of women is just how the world is—"this is the nature of the sea". The sea is violence, but the water can change form and presentation. The rain exemplifies beauty, and "gentle be the rain." From Gwendolyn Fry, everyone. [*Applause.*]

ACT 7: WOMEN'S TONGUES

Part 1: "Speaking on Tongues" by Miriam Colvin

ARUSHI. And yet, with the precipitation that threatens to subdue, there still is a fire that burns within us. Words that will make themselves be heard, voices that will rise. This next piece of writing draws upon classical imagery. I present to you, "Speaking on Tongues" by Miriam Colvin.

WOMAN.

This is the story of how I lost my tongue.

Or, how I would've said it before:

(talking as though she has no tongue)

This is the story of how I lost my tongue.

Thank God for tongue transplants.

It all started in elementary school. Catholic school. We'd learn about "holy women" and the women that aided Jesus over the course of his crucifixion. Veronica wiping the sweat off his forehead. The virgin Mary crying at his death sentence. Mary Magdalene, crying out at his burial, and bearing witness to his resurrection.. And I'd sit there thinking, how can I be one of these sacred "holy women" too? The sisters would explain a list of rules so we could hopefully reach this goal one day.

Obey and follow the word of the Lord.

Be humble, and kind.

Put your teeth gently together and bite your tongue, so not to speak out of line, in an unfiltered manner.

That night at dinner, my father urged my mother to cook something "different" for once. My mother urged me to stop wearing shorts for my school uniform. I was going to urge my brother to start wearing skirts for his, but before I did, instinct set in. As I was about to release the words from my mouth- I bit my tongue softly, and nothing came out. Phew. Blocked by my front canines. And I folded my skirt that night to wear in the morning.

One day I was walking to school and the large nearby intersection was bumper to bumper traffic. A school bus moved toward the traffic light inch by inch. As I walked closer to it, the sounds of schoolboy laughter became louder. It might've been the bus my best friend Katherine rode. Before I could scan who was in each window, a teenage boy stuck his gluteus maximus out the window, pulled down his khaki shorts, and gave me a full-moon. Utter shock, my jaw wide open, and they took photos of my expression. Letters began to form in my mouth: including F, U, C, and K, and a variety of S, H, I's and T's. But before I let the letters combine into words, I bit down on my tongue firmly. The back molars really putting in the work. I concealed my

expression. Put all of my strength into not saying anything, let their giggles echo on, and kept Walking.

After so much filtration with what I said to boys and men, and women, I wondered if I had some sort of condition. Some sort of serial tongue-biting illness. And by the time I got to college my tongue was covered back to front in marks! Red and sore with weakening taste buds. And it became my constant.

I interviewed with my Professor for a TA position for Organic Chemistry. He looked at my exemplary resume, but was concerned about my knowledge of the material after a B minus my first year.

Bite.

Alexander, my lab partner, does all of my math work again, just to double check if I'm correct.

Bite.

My grandmother at my graduation ceremony can't seem to fathom how I have a degree in science and mathematics.

Bite.

My coworker asks if he can buy me a drink after work. He's into the whole "sexy business casual" look.

Bite.

At this point I'm about 24 and my tongue hurt. It weighed down my jaw, with tension. And all of the words that I had pushed down in my throat, and sealed closed with my mouth, began to bubble up to the surface. I could feel it. I could feel some sort of fire, wanting to be released. Like a dragon. But I couldn't because I was supposed to be dating for marriage then.

I went on a blind date to an Italian restaurant, with this buff bearded man who looks like a lumberjack. We begin the conversation about him, ... and his beard. "So how long have you been growing that out?"

"Oh, this only takes like a week," he says.

I tell him that I just cut my hair short after years of growing it long. "What did you do that for?" he says. I tell him I thought it would look cool. He says it's not his "personal preference" that he would prefer me with longer hair and less makeup. I ask what other personal preferences he has. He says, "Is working out important to you? I need a girl who cares about her fitness, and I haven't heard you bring it up once."

Anger deep within. I feel the words rising. I swallow.

I change the subject. I tell him I'm very interested in outer space, that I'd go to Mars if offered. We connect when I bring up black holes. I'm listening to this patchy-bearded man go on and on about how black holes work. But the thing is I already know how they work. I've already said

that I know how they work, that I've learned about them in physics classes since high school. That I have a degree. But there he goes, on and on. Gravitational pull. Bite. Compression. Bite. The possibility of time travel. And explaining it all wrong. I correct him, he tells me I'm wrong. I have a degree in this! Bite.

(More frantic)

I try to bite harder, but words begin to slip out. I can't do anything about it! They form into sentences and before I can stop it, the words are flying right into him.

“THAT’S NOT WHAT A FUCKING VORTEX IS YOU IDIOT AND IT DOESN’T GO AROUND SUCKING THINGS UP IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM IT STAYS IN PLACE WITH THE FORCE OF GRAVITY. SO SHUT YOUR DUMB, UGLY, BEARDED, MOUTHOW! OW!”

She clutches her mouth in pain.

And that's when it happened. Instinct kicked in and I bit so hard, my tongue fell right off and plopped on top of his spaghetti. He looked down at it, then back at me, screamed and backed away. My mouth was dripping in blood. I looked down at my tongue, stared at it intensely. I just expelled that thing from my own body. Then, I started to cry. And then, laugh. Really hard. Cackling. Laughing harder than I ever have before.

Bearded man looked at me, with a face of utter shock and fear. His face made me laugh even more. He glanced over at the exit, and made a run for it. And I called out after him:

(talking as though she has no tongue)

“Wait!!! Do you wanna keep it?!”

She laughs.

And I never saw that man again. I never saw that tongue again either. I'm not sure where it went. Hopefully, buried somewhere in peace by the wait staff. Or picked up by the coroner for a proper funeral.

But now, I have a new one that works really well. And my mouth allows it to do its job. I don't hurt it anymore, if you were wondering. I actually let myself speak, unfiltered, and rich with feeling. Whether that's anger, or despair, or frustration, or love. Most definitely to those that condescend and make me feel less than. For them: they get the full verbal destruction. And I think it's doing pretty well.

Yeah.

And I'm not gonna bite my tongue off again.

ARUSHI. "Speaking on Tongues" from Miriam Colvin.

Part 2: Philomela in *Metamorphoses*

ARUSHI. Miriam's piece alludes to the classical source that *Emilia*, the play, *Metamorphoses*. From the narrative poem that recounts many myths, this passage specifically recounts the myth of Philomela.

In this myth, Tereus, a tyrant, saves Athens from barbarians. For his efforts, the king of Athens, Pandion, "gives his child, / Procne, in marriage". The two had a son. Five years later, Procne implores Tereus to go abroad to bring back her sister, Philomela.

MUSE. Procne coaxed her husband, "If my love
Finds any favour, give me leave to visit
My sister, or invite my sister here.

 ...To see her once again
Will be a gift most precious." So her husband
Had his ship launched, and reached shore.

ARUSHI. Then, when King Pandion gave him audience, Tereus saw his wife's sister, Philomena.
And...

MUSE. The sight of her set Tereus' heart ablaze
As stubble leaps to flame when set on fire.

ARUSHI. King Pandion gave Philomela over to Tereus, and the two embarked on a voyage back to Procne. Reaching the shore...

MUSE. The king drags off Pandion's daughter
Up to a cabin in the woods, remote
And hidden away among dark ancient trees,
And there pale, trembling, fearing everything,
Weeping and asking where her sister was,
He locked her, and revealed his own black heart
And ravished her, a virgin, all alone.

ARUSHI. And Philomena spoke to Tereus, vowing...

MUSE. “You’ll pay my score one day. I’ll shed my shame
And shout what you have done. If I’ve the chance,
I’ll walk among the crowds: or, if I’m held
Locked in the woods, my voice shall fill the woods
And move the rocks to pity. This bright sky
Shall hear, and any god that dwells on high!”

ARUSHI. In anger and fear, Tereus seized Procne by the hair and, using his brutal sword, cut out her tongue. Tereus told Procne that her sister died. Philomela was locked in the cabin, and what did she do?

MUSE. On a clumsy native loom
She wove a clever fabric, working words
In red on a white ground to tell the tale
Of wickedness and, when it was complete,
Entrusted it to a woman and by signs
Asked her to take it to the queen.

ARUSHI. Procne “unrolled the cloth and read the tragic tale”.

MUSE. Her tongue could find no speech to match
Her outraged anger; no room here for tears.

ARUSHI. She stormed into the night, and Thracian women were celebrating Bacchus’s festival.

MUSE. Wild with her troop of women through the woods
She rushed, a sight of terror, frenzied by
The grief that maddened her, the image of
A real Bacchanal. At last she reached
The lonely hut and, screaming Bacchic cries,
Broke down the door, burst in and seized her sister.

ARUSHI. Procne took her sister to the palace and in uncontrolled anger said:

MUSE. “This is no time for tears,
But for the sword...or what may be
Mightier than the sword. For any crime
I’m ready, Philomel! I’ll set on fire
These royal roofs and bury in the blaze
That scheming fiend. I’ll gouge his wicked eyes!
I’ll pluck his tongue out, cut away those parts

That stole your honour, through a thousand wounds
I'll sluce his guilty soul! Some mighty deed
I'll dare, I'll do, though what that deed shall be,
Is still unsure."

ARUSHI. As Procne spoke, her son, appeared, and she realized:

MUSE. "You're...so like your father!"

ARUSHI. "And she planned / In silent rage a deed of tragedy." Procne struck her son with a knife, carved him up, and cooked him. Procne called her husband to a banquet where he dined alone.

MUSE. King Tereus dines and, dining, swallows down
Flesh of his flesh, and calls, so dark the night
That blinds him, "Bring [my son] here to me!"
Oh joy! She cannot hide her cruel joy,
And, bursting to announce her deed of doom,
"You have him here", she cries, "inside!" and he
Looks round, asks where he is, and, as he asks
And calls again, in rushes Philomel,
Just as she is, that frantic butchery
Still spattered in her hair, and throws the head
Of [the son], bleeding, in his father's face.
She never wanted more her tongue to express
Her joy in words that matched her happiness!

ARUSHI. Tereus wept and wept, and then pursued the sisters with a "naked sword." And....

MUSE. As they flee,
You'd think they float on wings. Yes, sure enough,
They float on wings! One daughter seeks the woods,
One rises to the roof; and even now
The marks of murder show upon a breast
And feathers carry still the stamp of blood.
And he, grief-spurred, swift-swooping for revenge.
Is changed into a bird that bears a crest,
With, for a sword, a long fantastic bill—
A hoopoe, every inch a fighter still.

ARUSHI. This feminine rage, a moment of solidarity between sisters, burns in a blaze of speech and violence, before metamorphosing into peace.

ACT 8: EMILIA BASSANO'S WORDS

ARUSHI. Which brings us to the namesake for Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's play: Emilia. Aemilia Lanier, née Bassano, was the first woman to publish a substantial printed volume of poetry designed to attract patronage. Her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* retells the story of the crucifixion of Christ from a woman's perspective. Women's voices were censored, but as women were allowed free to write on religion, Aemilia used her rewriting as a platform to assert proto-feminist thought. In the work, she speaks of the virtues of women unapologetically and assuredly. The collection of poetry addresses a community of women in its numerous dedications; it was conventional for poets to move to seek a patron, but wholly unconventional that all these noble persons were women. Through these dedications, Aemilia establishes who she seeks as her audience—women, women and entirely, with or without men.

Part 1: "To All Vertuous Ladies in Generall"

ARUSHI. In a passage titled, "To all Vertuous Ladies in Generall", she encourages...

MUSE. Let the Muses your companions be,
Those sacreds sister that on Pallas wait;
Whose virtues with the purest minds agree,
Whose godly labours do auoyd the baite
Of worldly pleasures, liuing alwaies free
From sword, from violence, and from ill report
To those nine Worthies all fair mindes resort.

ARUSHI. "Let the Muses your companions be." Aemilia encourages women to take inspiration from and share in the company of your sisters that wait on nature, who are good and right and virtuous, who avoid doing what feels good to do instead what is right.

Part 2: "To the Doubtfull Reader"

ARUSHI. And finally, I offer a rewrite of Aemilia's address, "To the Doubtfull Reader", where she addresses why she gave the title, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, to her work. If appropriation is political, Mary Rose, will you voice my appropriation of Aemilia's words from centuries ago?

MUSE. Gentle Reader, if thou desire to be resolued, why I giue this Title, [Muse of Fire], know for certain, that it was deliuered vnto me in sleepe many years before I had any intent to write in this maner, and was quote out of my memory vntill I had ~~written the Passion of Christ~~ [been invited to dramaturg *Emilia*], when immediately it came into my remembrance, what I had dreamed long before; and thinking it was a significant token, that I was appointed to perform that Worke, I gaue the very same words I receiued in sleep as the fittest Title I could devise for this Booke.

EPILOGUE

ARUSHI. We turn on the last page of this evening. I empower you all to let your words be heard. Keep speaking. Keep writing. Keep sharing your thoughts and words. Put pen to paper, and let your voice sound. And most importantly, keep listening. We are only as great as our community, and isn't it so lovely to be a part of a community. Listen to the muses that live in your head, listen to the muses of the past, and please listen to the muses with whom we share this earth for a moment in time.

Thank you to the people who made this night possible. Thank you to, from the School of Theatre, Ronda Craig and Carri Love. Thank you to my dramaturgy mentor, Jeanmarie Higgins. Thank you to director of *Emilia*, Jenny Lamb, for this opportunity, for your support, and your beautiful artistic vision in this show. Thank you to today's writers: Gwendolyn Fry, Hazel Giacomucci, Miriam Colvin, and Mary Rose Valentine. Thank you to our lighting designer, Valentine Pesola. Thank you to Mary Rose, for playing our muse today. And thank you to you. Thank you for hearing our—my—musings. And with that I leave you with a short song.

The final chord will be strummed. ARUSHI & MARY ROSE stand up and take a bow. One more bow. They gesture to VALENTINE. The lights dim.

END OF READING