

FIXED AND AMORPHOUS QUEER IDENTITY
AS SEEN IN EMMA RICE'S QUEER SHAKESPEARE PRODUCTIONS

A Report of a Senior Study

by

Calista Jones

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Maryville College

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Date approved _____, by _____

Faculty Supervisor

Date approved _____, by _____

Division Chair

ABSTRACT

This study will explore how queer theory relates to Shakespeare more abstractly, focusing on how queer theory relates to works created before modern queer ideology was widely known. It then will focus on how two Shakespeare works, one less overt with its queer themes, one more overt, can be interpreted with queer theory. One chapter will focus on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the other will focus on *Twelfth Night*. Each chapter focuses on how live production can emphasize a particular interpretive method by examining how Emma Rice's queer-focused 2016 and 2017 productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*, respectively, emphasize the existing queer themes found in the text.

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CHAPTER I

SHAKESPEARE AS A “QUEER THEORIST” AND THEORY EXPRESSED THROUGH DRAMA

Robert Dale Parker defines queer studies in part as coming “from thinking about the way that across history, cultures have understood or repressed queer acts, enacted queer identities, or abused or denied the existence of queer people” (Parker 191). Thinking in this way might include thinking about themes of gender as a performance, the idea that love is not a choice, and that love can defy the gendered rules that society imposes. Therefore, any text, no matter how old, can be looked at with this set of assumptions and analyzed accordingly. Though Shakespeare might not immediately come to mind when one thinks of queer studies, his texts certainly contain many queer themes, overt or not. That coupled with his popularity that seems to transcend time, creates many queer interpretations of his texts and a blossoming bunch of queer productions of his plays.

To think about queer studies, one must first come to understand what “queer” means. For this study, “queer” can be defined as relating to a person who navigates particularly romantic or sexual relationships or gender in a way that subverts the societal norm. This encompasses the LGBTQ+ community as it is usually understood but also

encompasses other relations that might not usually be associated with this community. As the world evolves, what was considered a queer form of desire or sexuality might no longer be, or vice versa.

Shakespeare queer theorist Goran Stanivukovic writes,

[Queer theory] has revealed Shakespeare as a radical at times, as a writer for whom the body and desire, and sex and sexuality, are as important as crowns and wars... Shakespeare [is] acutely curious, observant, and attentive to the nuances of how sexuality and desire shape and affect his world (Stanivukovic 11).

Indeed, with queer theory in mind, one considers how much Shakespeare was concerned with “queerness” as was defined in this study. Almost every play contains a relationship that is shunned by society in some way, with the protagonists fighting to create a life for themselves that includes a fulfilling partnership. This is a queer theme, as queer relationships have this same struggle.

In addition, Shakespeare’s texts had the power to enact change in how society viewed romantic relationships. Because the relationships he presented were contested, yet persevered and thrived by the end of a comedy and tragically went away by the end of a tragedy, audiences grew to change the way they thought about relationships, in some cases making Shakespeare’s presented relationship the new norm. By considering queer relationship dynamics and using his power to enact change in the way society treats these relationships, Shakespeare could be considered a queer theorist of his time. Stanivukovic continues, writing, “The way, for instance, in which Shakespeare represents romantic love as always contested, unsettled, and frequently unromantic; in which courtship is

often bound by ‘homoerotic dimension’; and that sex and sexuality are not identical already deconstructs heterosexual ideology” (Stanivukovic 13). Because of his relationship with gender and sexuality, Shakespeare’s texts could benefit from being produced through a queer lens.

Emma Rice is a director who has done many queer productions of his plays at the Globe Theater. Through various methods, she has presented two very clear queer interpretations through her directorial choices alone. In 2016, she directed a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and the following year, she directed a production of *Twelfth Night*. Though the productions were very different in terms of her choices, the settings, and the queer themes presented, they both make something very clear: queer productions have the power to liberate a Shakespeare text from the bonds of his period and demonstrate morals that could never have been fully presented in his time, but that exist in the text and are important now.

CHAPTER II

“FLOWER’S FORCE” RESTORING “NATURAL TASTE”: QUEER IDENTITY AS A SOLUTION IN EMMA RICE’S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM*

As discussed, queer theory often acts as a lens through which to view a story, whether queerness is an explicit theme in the story or not. Whereas some Shakespeare texts have overt queer themes, texts like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* contain queer themes that are not so overt. Nonetheless, Stanivukovic writes of *Midsummer*, “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is one of many plays in which Shakespeare’s text reveals itself not only as a ‘queer’ but whose ‘queer ability to bond affectively with the past’ represents a meeting point between his time and our modernity “(Stanivukovic 5). Therefore, a queer-influenced production can bring out these themes in a way that is accessible and effective. There are several queer studies interpretations of different dimensions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Emma Rice’s 2016 production of *Midsummer* emphasizes those themes as well as seemingly creating more claims about queer themes in the play. Furthermore, her queer production of the play emphasized general themes of love as well. Rice’s production seems to say that a queer relationship more effectively relays the general themes of love in *Midsummer* because it is not

plagued by the patriarchal power imbalances like a straight relationship can be. One can see this in her deliberate gender change in one of the main couples: Demetrius and Helena, who becomes Helenus in the 2016 production. Rice's production takes the general themes of love in the text and applies them in a way that perhaps makes more sense in the context of this play by applying them to a queer relationship. Given that the general themes of love are also themes common in queer theory, Rice's production prompts one to think of the play through a queer lens and emphasizes the other queer themes throughout.

To understand how Rice's production emphasizes the general themes of love by portraying them in a queer couple, one must first know these themes and understand the scholarly conversation around them. It is also important to note, as a preface, that the text does seem to make some authoritative claims about which types of love are the most virtuous, as most Shakespeare texts concerning love tend to do, making the themes of love likewise more authoritative. The couples that end up together at the end of the play are said to have a love that is lasting and thus worthy of emulation. The couples who end up together are Helena and Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander, Hippolyta and Theseus, and Oberon and Titania (who were already married at the start of the play), meaning that one can look at their routes to love and emulate them. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, though Helena and Demetrius and Hermia and Lysander are all affected by magic, their love in the end is still worthy because they end up together. This point is hammered in more because the two noble couples in the play, Hippolyta and Theseus and Oberon and Titania, explicitly state that these pairings are truly in love, even though they might have been manipulated by magic initially. Hippolyta says at their weddings,

And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images
And grows to something of great constancy;
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

(5.1.24-27)

Later, Oberon says,

So shall all the couples three ever so true in loving be and all the blots of
nature's hand shall not in their issue stand.

(5.1.393-396)

When considering which couples are viewed as the most virtuous, one can consider the general themes of love along with the overall purpose and message of the play, which will later be further emphasized in Rice's production. The text might make even more authoritative claims if one subscribes to the idea that the text itself was created to be performed at a wedding, as *Pyramus and Thisbe* was performed at the ending's triple wedding (Wells 16). A play performed at a wedding would want to end with a feeling of hopefulness and certainty about the nature of marriage and love. If the couples watching *Pyramus and Thisbe* represent virtuous and long-lasting couples, then the couple watching *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would likewise feel as though they were virtuous and long-lasting, which is the assumed goal of the playwright.

It is notable to mention that, even when considering the text alone, the themes of love in the play heavily overlap with queer themes of love (the idea that love is not a choice, not reasonable, etc.). The most prominent theme of love in *Midsummer* seems to be that love is not the product of reason. The play opens with Theseus, the Duke of

Athens, settling a debate between father and daughter, Egeus and Hermia. Hermia wishes to marry Lysander, but her father wants her to marry another, Demetrius, who is in love with her. If people operated on reason alone, then Hermia would simply marry Demetrius, for he is in love with her, and her father wishes that for her. It would cause her less hassle if she were to acquiesce to their wishes. However, relationships do not operate on reason alone, and if they do, they often don't contain true love, according to *Midsummer*. This theme is carried on throughout the text in Hermia and Lysander's relationship, with them eventually hatching a plan to flee Athens and get married secretly.

This theme's being brought up so early in the play gives it a sense of importance, and as will be later discussed, it is emphasized heavily in the queer relationship Rice creates in her production. It continues to be emphasized after Hermia and Helena's conversation about their relationships, notably in Helena's monologue after Hermia leaves, where she says,

Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste,
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.
And therefore is love said to be a child
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

(1.1.234-239)

This speaks, again, to the idea that love is not something that one can rationally choose. By comparing love to a blind child, she acknowledges that it does not look or think

before it acts, as baby Cupid doesn't before he shoots an arrow, highlighting how much of love is based on chance. She also says that Cupid has been "beguiled" or tricked, indicating that he doesn't always choose a love match that has the greatest chance of working out. This speaks to the later point that love is often contested.

Bottom and Hippolyta, the third couple manipulated by magic, share the idea of love lacking rationality as well. Bottom says in Act 3 Scene 1 in lines 127-131, "... reason and love keep little company together nowadays," with Titania, in love, responding, "Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful." This is intended to be comedic because Bottom is a lower-class and uneducated character being suffocated with love from a lovesick queen, which is not what one would expect. However, the comedy of the situation is heightened by bathos because, though Bottom has so little knowledge, what he says is very wise, especially in the context of the play. *Midsummer* throughout makes a big argument that true love, lasting or not, is not reasonable.

In *Shakespeare on Love and Lust*, Maurice Charney notes that the Fairy world does not operate based on human morality, but rather on more animalistic desires and instincts. Charney seems to agree that in this world, "love is irrational, usually shown in the extreme" (Charney 10). It is worth arguing that although Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius all experience a desire to love whom they want to before they enter the Fairy world, being there helps them actualize it. The theme of love as irrational is carried out in an almost outrageous way in *Midsummer* because of its use of the "love at first sight" trope. Charney writes that when Titania falls in love with Bottom, "This episode represents love at first sight as an irresistible experience. It has nothing to do with credible motivation but deals in phantasms and illusions" (Charney 11). While some

couples last and others don't, love at first sight operates in every relationship that is manipulated by the magic potion. The potion is put on a lover's eye so that as soon as they see their partner, they are destined to love them. Though this is dramatized, it comments on the fact that love in some form must be present as soon as one lays eyes on their lover and therefore acts before reason has even had time to come into play.

The lovers' relationships with the potions make the statement that attraction, at first sight, is valid, but Oberon makes Puck enact a second potion to undo the effects of the first potion. He chooses to undo Titania's love for Bottom and Lysander's love for Helena, but he does not undo Demetrius' love for Helena. This could imply that the love potion, in some cases, has the potential to actualize feelings that were there all along, or that it actualizes feelings that are right for all parties, though perhaps irrational. Rice's production will later expound upon this idea.

Within the idea of love as irrational lies another related theme that is seen throughout the text: "the course of true love never did run smooth," as Lysander says (1.1.134). Because love is not based on reason, true love is often contested, and this can be seen in almost every couple that is influenced by the love potion. As was the other theme, the theme that true love needs to be fought for is another prevalent theme within queer relationships. The element of outside contention in a relationship is a common theme in queer theory. Love as contested is obvious in Lysander and Hermia's fleeing the city and disobeying orders, but it is present in Helena and Demetrius' relationship as well. However, is not contested by other people, but instead by one of the parties in the relationship, Demetrius. This dynamic demonstrates a different aspect of the "love is

often contested” theme and seems to say that sometimes, even a member of the potential relationship can oppose it, even if it is meant to be in the end.

While some relationships are contested by outside parties because the relationship is not seen as reasonable, other relationships are contested by another member of the party for whatever reason. In the original text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is unclear exactly why Demetrius does not want to be with Helena, though Helena attributes it to a lack of beauty. However, because of the love potion, Demetrius ends up enjoying a relationship with Helena and marrying her, assumably being happy forever as Oberon decrees. Though love potions do not exist in real life, some people do grow to love someone they previously contested being with, especially in a queer studies lens. In Rice’s production, Demetrius’ scorn of Helena seems less fueled by superficial things like the way he looks in comparison to Hermia, but by internalized homophobia and/or the need to comply with social norms, as will be later discussed. Though the original text doesn’t contain a specifically queer couple as Rice’s production does, the theme of contention within a relationship leading to a long-lasting one is still a theme in the original text that is also a queer theme of love.

Another heavily repeated theme of love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is that love is paradoxical in many ways. This theme is most potently represented at the beginning of the play in Hermia and Helena’s conversation about Demetrius. Demetrius and Helena both have unrequited love that is only fueled by their lover’s scorn. Hermia says, “The more I hate, the more he follows me,” to which Helena replies, “The more I love, the more he hateth me,” and so on (1.1.198-199). It begins the idea that continues throughout the play that love is often born out of conflicting emotions, not from absolutes. Helena continues this

paradoxical dialogue with Demetrius, saying “Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;/The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind/Makes speed to catch the tiger” (44:00,cf. 2.1.231-4). She is commenting on the role reversal from what usually happens in a love story, especially in the context of the courtly love tradition: the man chases the woman. However, this reversal of roles is the opposite of what one would expect—a paradox. However, this paradox does end up creating a true love that lasts.

The play within the play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, seems to be an interpretive puzzle to many, although it nonetheless seems to make a statement at the wedding and be impactful to the couples who were wed after being under the influence of the love potion, though Theseus is not impressed with the play throughout. The play is introduced by Theseus as being “merry and tragical” and “tedious and brief” and he wonders how they would “find the concord of this discord” (5.1.58-60). However, it seems as though *Pyramus and Thisbe* is a symbol for *Midsummer* as a whole. Even though it is made of paradox, it still ends up making sense at the end in a way that is impactful for those it is relatable to. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* might not resonate with many because of its seeming contradictions, but to many, it does make sense as a doctrine for love. The paradoxical theme is present in the conversation of love in general, but as many other themes of love in *Midsummer* are, the theme of paradox is heavily applicable to queer relationships as well.

Even in a text that was written before queer language was in the cultural zeitgeist, queer themes exist, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is ripe with them. It is no doubt that so many queer adaptations exist of the play to further emphasize these themes, but a great example of a production that emphasizes these themes is Emma Rice’s 2016

production. The main themes of love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are common themes from queer studies discourse. Therefore, any production of the play that is true to the text could be perceived as a queer production. However, in Emma Rice's 2016 production of the play at the Globe Theater, she emphasized these themes even more. Goran Stanivukovic writes of the 2016 production, "Rice's turning of the comedy's heteronormative plot into a production full of new stage identities reveals modalities of desire and erotic meanings that are already in the text and the plot of Shakespeare's comedy but have been contained by history and hidden in time" (Stanivukovic 4). Indeed, there are many ways to explore how Rice's production revealed things that were already within the text. The most obvious new identity in Rice's production is Helenus---textually Helena. Rice does not make Helena a man for the sake of making the production more queer, but by changing Helena's gender, she enhances the themes of love, and therefore the queer themes along with it. He was created, it seems, to make the main couple, himself and Demetrius, seem like their love would have been possible without the potion, making the audience more inclined to emulate them and root for them.

By eliminating the male-female relationship dynamic, the abusive and superficial elements of their relationship suddenly have a better explanation, and the characters are played with a recognition of this deeper dynamic. Additionally, having Helenus be a man makes the relationship with Hermia less about comparing superficial aspects of women, and more about the psychological effects of having to compete for someone's love with a member of the opposite sex, again, deepening the audience's connection with the characters, and the actor's portrayal of the character. Finally, making Helenus a man eliminates the idea of women as currency that is found in the original text, making the

love connections seem more genuine and less about status. Though Rice's production varies little from the text aside from changes to Helenus' name and pronouns, this change alone can bring up queer themes and dynamics that are more subtle in the text alone.

The play, on its own, can be seen as inhibited by the sexual politics that were prevalent at the time Shakespeare wrote. The relations between men and women were so different than they are now that they can create dynamics that are foreign and aversive to current theatergoers (Stanivukovic 5). Therefore, a major setback of Helena and Demetrius' relationship in the play is that Demetrius comes off as overly abusive, and Helena comes off as strangely obsessed. Helenus and Demetrius, on the other hand, present a dynamic that emphasizes the queer themes of the text as well as themes of love and connection in general that the audience is more receptive to receiving because their relationship is not portrayed as a toxic one, but as one stifled by societal norms. Their partnership in the text is introduced in Act 2, Scene 1 as Demetrius enters, boldly saying that he does not love Helenus, and they partake in a paradoxical repartee, like when Demetrius says, "I do not nor I cannot love you..." and Helenus says, "And even for that do I love you the more" (2.1.201-202). The paradoxical nature of their speech, as will be explored, could be interpreted as showing the disconnect between the interaction and their true feelings.

Because there is a cold open in their relationship, textually, Helena and Demetrius' relationship does not make much sense. Demetrius has no established reason to hate Helena, and likewise, the audience is unsure why Helena loves Demetrius even though he hates her. The audience is left to guess what happened and left to wonder why this pairing doesn't work until the spell changes Demetrius' feelings. However, Rice's

changes make the implied context much more overt and sensible. In her production, the pair enters as if they were in the middle of an emotional discussion, as Demetrius walks away from Helenus with an air of sadness more than of anger (Rice, *MND* 42:15). From this mood and the 2016 world that Rice sets the play in, it can be assumed that feelings for each other were shared in some way, but Demetrius pushes back against it because of fear, asserting his feelings for Hermia, who is a convenient target of his fake desire because her father wishes them to be wed. Additionally, throughout the argument between Helenus and Demetrius, there is intimate physical contact that Demetrius doesn't immediately resist, as though he wants to give in to his true desire but believes that he must push against it by fighting instead (42:50). These two things make the implied context plausible and sets a framework for the relationship that not only makes sense but also gives the audience empathy with and emotional stakes in the pairing.

This context also clarifies certain lines of their initial interaction. For instance, when Demetrius says, "I cannot love you," it is implied in the production that though Demetrius might love Helenus, he is pushing back against it out of fear, not sheer hate, which is why he "cannot love" (2.1.201). Another instance in the first altercation that is brought to light in the gender-bent production is when Helenus says,

The story shall be changed:

...

The mild hind

Makes speed to catch the tiger: bootless speed

When cowardice pursues and valor flies

(43:00, cf. 2.1.230-234).

Again, the paradoxical nature highlights the unaligned feelings and actions, but the mention of cowardice and valor applies to the nature of a queer relationship in a way that makes much more sense than it would in a straight relationship. Though Helenus is afraid of what could happen in the relationship, he prevails, and though Demetrius seems confident, he is fleeing from what he wants. As Helenus is saying these lines, the audience can see Demetrius is struggling with wanting to give into feelings of love for Helenus, but soberly resisting, which emphasizes this point. This fear yet persistence and the opposite confidence in fleeing from desires are two common reactions to coming out.

The gender change also makes the themes more credible by way of making the coupling not seem abusive. In the text, Helena says,

I am your spaniel, and...

The more you beat me I will fawn on you

...spurn me, strike me,

Neglect me, lose me— only give me leave

...to follow you.

(2.1.203-207)

Later, Demetrius says that he will “do mischief” on Helena in the woods,” to which Helena says, “I’ll follow thee and make a heaven of hell/ to die upon the hand that I love so well” (2.1.237-44). This is concerning because in the text, it is implied only that Demetrius would be harming Helena, which, when paired with her obsessive nature, would lead audiences to believe that their partnership is an incredibly toxic one. Some would argue that the violence could be read as a way Helena seeks to fulfill a sexual desire, but this reading is not textually implied, nor does it come without its own set of

issues (Sanchez 494). However, the queer interpretation has Demetrius and Helenus physically fighting throughout the verbal fight, though never doing anything to give the other real harm. The fighting comes off, then, as a way for them to maintain physical contact while preserving the appearance of a heterosexual male relationship, which is later dissipated once the potion makes them actualize their true feelings. The change in staging makes the couple appear less abusive and more confused about how to navigate their feelings.

To touch back on the textual theme of potions actualizing real desire, but the reversal potion not being enacted on Demetrius, Rice emphasizes this theme in the way she presents Demetrius and Helenus' first interaction. This production highlights the idea that the feelings between Demetrius and Helenus were always there, but were illuminated by the potion, hence Demetrius' lines from Act 4,

The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helen[us]. To [him], my lord,
Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia;
But like a sickness did I loathe this food.
But, as in health come to my natural taste,
Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,
And will for evermore be true to it.

(4.1.168-176).

To make the love potion theme applicable under a queer studies lens of *Midsummer*, one must find some way to rationalize Helenus and Demetrius' love as one that is not just a product of magic, but instead as one of true substance. To imply that their love was there

all along gives reason as to why Oberon feels no need to reverse the potion---it is because Puck didn't need to employ the potion on them in the first place.

Production-wise, the gender switch appealing to queer themes and general themes was obviously in mind throughout the process. Ankur Bahl, who plays Helenus in Rice's production, states on performing the scenes with Helenus and Demetrius, "We both have goosebumps and silent tears at the tragedy and hope of this love. It's accurate to the coming out stories of so many of the people we hold dear" ("Celebrating Queerness"). The hope that Helenus holds and the fear that Demetrius holds at the beginning of the play become real when the cast is gender-bent. It makes the audience believe that they can find love together, and when they do, the audience can believe that it could have happened, in an unprejudiced world, without the use of the love potion. This helps to bring out the themes of love found in the text and make them seem more credible.

Throughout the 2016 production, this feeling of coming to terms with feelings and becoming free to express them is potent. It uses the love potion as a medium to have characters actualize feelings and desires that they might otherwise repress. Therefore, it is important to touch on the theme of gendered love, which is brought out via the potion. Throughout *Midsummer*, all types of love and desire are validated, even if they are short-lived because they are seen as a manifestation of one's inner desire. No matter how intense love is, it is still love at first sight, so it might not always be substantive, but it always has the potential to be. The capacity for a man to have feelings for another man while ultimately ending up with a woman he loves is therefore validated through the potion causing Lysander to actualize his attraction to Helenus. Though Lysander falling in love with Helenus could be played as humorous, Rice directs Edmund Derrington to

play him as believably sincere in his feelings (Rice 1:28:37). Though he ultimately ends up with Hermia, whom he truly loves, it could be argued that Lysander has the capacity, even without the potion, to be attracted to men. In this way, Rice's production validates bisexual identities.

The rivalry between Lysander and Demetrius over both Hermia and Helena in the text could be read as them viewing women as tokens to transact for social gain. There is not much direction in the text as to how the actors should act out the scenes where they are fighting over Hermia and Helena. The 2016 production makes a clearer distinction. As Demetrius vies for Hermia, he lacks the passion that is later seen in his interactions with Helenus, both before and after the potion. His movements seem unnatural, as if he is performing the role of heterosexuality that Lysander performs more naturally (Rice 10:56). Lysander, contrastingly, shows a truer passion and care for being with Hermia. As Demetrius has come to understand the world that the play is set in, he knows that being with a woman comes with social goods he would like to reap. In addition, it is what is expected of him by Hermia's father. However, Lysander does not seem to view her in this way. In their fight over Hermia, then, they do not both view her as a token; only Demetrius does, as this is presumably how he was socialized. As they fight over Helenus, though, they are both almost animalistically fighting for his love, showing their pure desire for him (Rice 1:30:16). They do not want him for whatever social goods he would gain them, but at that moment, they want him because it is their intrinsic desire.

In the original text, it is unclear why Demetrius loves Hermia so much but does not love Helena at the top of the play. One can assume that it is in part due to possible financial rewards for Demetrius because of the wedding, and it could also be assumed

that he feels he should be with Hermia because she is beautiful (he references Hermia as “fair Hermia” [2.1.189]). The idea of beauty adds a complicated dynamic later when Hermia and Helena fight. Their altercation reads as a reduction of the women to being prizes to be won, and their feelings as petty and unimportant. However, as stated before, with Helena’s gender change in Rice’s production, the audience can assume that Demetrius wants to be with Hermia because it is an easy route for him to deflect his feelings toward the same sex. His reasoning is not dependent on looks or money alone, which makes the audience consider his feelings as more genuine. This change puts more focus on the heart of a queer issue: the frustrations that can arise when being compared to a love interest of a different gender. The change thus highlights real issues in queer relationships and makes the stakes of the characters seem more important and less petty. With this as the context, the production can visually highlight the gendered differences between Helenus and Hermia, an emphasis which perhaps better aligns with the text.

In the text, Hermia and Helena fight because Helena believes that Hermia arranged for Demetrius and Lysander to feign feelings for her. It is unbelievable that they should love her, conceivably, because Hermia is much more beautiful. Hermia, in turn, is mad at Helena for “stealing” Lysander. They resort to insults on each other’s appearance, notably about their difference in size. For instance, Hermia says about Helena, “and with her personage, her tall personage,/ her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with him” (3.2.292-3). Helena later says about Hermia, “Though she be but little, she is fierce,” which provokes the two men to add insults about her stature and appearance (3.2.325). Though this could be played up for comedy, it lessens the credibility of the story and decreases likelihood that the audience will learn from its themes. Rice’s production

changes this because of the gender change. Hermia and Helenus begin fighting because Helenus believes she has arranged a cruel trick on her, as is in the text. However, because Helenus is queer, it makes the trick that Helenus perceives even more insulting, making the fight more realistic. The attack on their physical differences, then, takes a different context because they are not attacking the other's womanhood, but rather calling out gendered differences between them. Though this makes the fight more insulting, it matches the heightened start of the argument. Hermia and Helenus, in the 2016 production, do not come across as petty pawns of transaction between men, but rather as two people who are aware and self-conscious about their gendered differences.

Within the text of *Midsummer*, and in most Shakespeare comedies that end with different pairs coupling up, there is a certain hierarchy of couples that emerges at the end, especially because the play ends with a triple wedding, which almost begs comparison. The couple at the top is usually assumed to be the most virtuous, and thus more favorable to emulate, and the ones at the bottom to be the least. Rice's production's casting makes this a little more interesting. She casts the same actor as both Oberon and Theseus and the same actress as both Titania and Hippolyta. Therefore, the casting implores the audience to make comparisons between the couples. The comparisons already exist within the text, as they are both couples who rule over their respective nations and, in some way, rule over the main couples' love lives. However, having them played by the same actors suggests even more comparisons between the virtues of the two couples. Furthermore, one could argue that, in Rice's production, Oberon and Titania provide a sort of glimpse into the future for the budding marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. When the triple

wedding is staged, then, the audience has Oberon and Titania in mind even though they are not a part of the triple wedding.

Of the couples getting married, it seems that, though all couples are virtuous in their own ways, Demetrius and Helenus come out on top, with Lysander and Hermia second and Theseus and Hippolyta third. Theseus and Hippolyta have some virtue and much power, but we don't see the struggle to be together that the other couples possess. Their connection to Oberon and Titania in the 2016 production also suggests that their love might not be as constantly lasting as the other couples' because Oberon and Titania's wavers at points. Lysander and Hermia are very much in love, but the production could be interpreted as playing their relationship as relying heavily on sexual chemistry, but less heavily on other points of connection (Rice 52:29). This is exaggerated because the potion causes the two to fall out of love, implying that their love is fickle. The only couple that shows signs of deep chemistry throughout the production and falls deeper into love because of the potion is Demetrius and Helenus. The yearning during their beginning altercation and the freedom to express feelings after the potion makes Rice's 2016 production put this couple on top of the virtue hierarchy. This is important because it proposes that a queer relationship should be venerated. There are points in Shakespeare's plays where queer relationships are made laughing stocks or reasons for shame, like in *Richard II*. However, Rice's production suggests that queer relationships can have real value, meaning, and love, even more so than a heterosexual relationship sometimes.

Pyramus and Thisbe, or the play-within-the-play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, seems to not contribute much to the plot when seen at face value. However, under a queer

lens, and especially through Rice's interpretation, this play-within-the-play takes form in a way that makes much more sense. In the context of the play, *Pyramus and Thisbe* was created to be performed at the characters' triple wedding at the end of *Midsummer*. While it, like *Midsummer*, is meant to show venerable themes of love, it also serves as the real play's comedic relief, and thus satirizes laughable aspects of Shakespeare's society. Kirk Quinsland argues that *Pyramus and Thisbe* is meant to comment on the pushback Shakespeare was getting from certain members of society about the performers having to cross-dress to play women (Quinsland 70). Theseus and his court, in this case, symbolize the critics, and the other characters come to the play's defense. As Quinsland writes, "Antitheatrical writing consistently befores the distinction between gender and sexual practices in a way that may indicate that this body of work thinks about sexuality as identity as opposed to being merely a set of practices." He continues by saying that theatrical critics of Shakespeare's time "would criticize this change of gender because of the assumption that it linked to the sexual practice of sodomy, which is a sin according to their values" (Quinsland 74). Quinsland further argues that the Mechanicals "function to lay bare the homophobic logic that excludes based on perceptions of difference" (Quinsland 77-78).

In Rice's production specifically, this criticism seems to be even more emphasized. Theseus and Hippolyta, who are at the bottom of the proposed marriage hierarchy, who originally were for Demetrius marrying Hermia, and who are characterized as being stuffily upper class, make many interjections about how ridiculous the play is throughout its production. In the text, different characters fire back at him in defense of the play, but Rice attributes most of these lines solely to Demetrius. Having

the lines devoted mainly to this openly queer character makes more emphasized the idea that the court is wrongly opposed to queer forms of expression. In addition to this, Demetrius and Helenus are also shown watching the play delightedly (except for when Snug accidentally says “gaydies” instead of ladies and Helenus drunkenly gets upset). This, with Quinsland’s interpretation, could comment on the fact that they understand the unimportance of gender, unlike the court, which views it with hostility. It could perhaps make the argument that a love built on the understanding that gender played no role in their match could produce a more virtuous love.

This interpretation makes other aspects of *Midsummer* make more sense. For example, Flute is avidly against dressing up as a woman in the text, and the knowledge that the court would be against the play puts this opposition into a context that makes even more sense. In Rice’s production, Flute’s opposition to crossdressing is complicated because Flute is played by a female actress who dresses masculinely. Her opposition to dressing as a woman, then, makes the statement that some people do not want to dress according to their sex-assigned societal roles. However, she does for the performance. In this way, *Pyramus and Thisbe* perpetuates the idea that the roles and expectations assigned to one by their sex are meaningless because one can change identity so easily. This contributes to the overall theme that love can pervade no matter the gender, and that gender and other social roles are nothing beyond performances. In the production, the gender changes make the words on the page make a lot more sense and make the story more accessible to modern audiences.

In addition to some minor changes in the script, Rice’s production also has the liberty to include whatever songs it needs because the musical numbers are not specified

in the text. Because of this, at the end of the production, Titania and Oberon share a song to conclude the queer production of *Midsummer* with finality, singing,

“Jack shall have Jill

Jill shall have Jack

Naught shall go ill

No looking back

...

no one will need

an aphrodisiac”

(Rice 2:34:04).

Though this song is comical in nature, it also adds to the message of the play. Love matches in accordance to society’s standards will produce a match where nothing goes wrong, but true passion might lie in one that is not per these standards.

After this couple finishes their song, Puck emerges one more time to deliver the final monologue, which is the same as in the script, but offers a slightly different message under the different context of Rice’s production. He says,

If we shadows have offended,

Think but this, and all is mended:

That you have but slumbered here

While these visions did appear.

And this weak and idle theme,

No more yielding than a dream

(5.1.409-414).

This ending in the context of Helena's gender change suggests that some might be offended not only by the contents of the play but by this choice as well. Puck offers a solution to this discomfort: just as a dream ends, so will this production, and whether the audience chooses to be impacted by what they've seen is up to them. It also re-emphasizes the point made by *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which is that gender is a performance as much as acting in general is. What gender someone performs is not substantial or lasting, so its impact can go away like a dream can. Ending on this note provides a lighthearted, yet effectively cinching conclusion to Rice's production.

The already present, though not overt, queer themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are emphasized incredibly effectively by Rice's directorial choices. In addition, by changing Helena to Helenus, Rice was able to create queer themes that emphasized the general themes of love within the text. The 2016 production of *Midsummer* is a great example of how a production can emphasize an already existing interpretation and create new items of discourse around a work that has been around for over 400 years. By emphasizing the queer themes already existing in the text, Rice's 2016 *Midsummer Night's Dream* makes the argument that viewing some situations through a homosexual relationship heightens certain situations because it removes barriers of sexual inequality and reveals the core of what the author might have wanted to present given the context of the play. Furthermore, whether or not Shakespeare wanted to present what Rice did, her production arguably elevated the base text as a result of changing the main relationship to a homosexual one. Using Rice's example, one can potentially use queer theory to liberate certain words from the bonds of their time period and create something completely new.

CHAPTER III

“FOR SUCH AS I AM, ALL TRUE LOVERS” ARE NOT: AMORPHOUS QUEER IDENTITY IN EMMA RICE’S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

As well as with *Midsummer*, *Twelfth Night*, textually, has many themes that overlap with queer themes. For instance, the theme of gender as a performance is extremely relevant in the context of *Twelfth Night*. While every Shakespeare play could be argued to have this as a theme because every actor working for Shakespeare was a man, and therefore every person playing a woman was performing a different gender, *Twelfth Night* has this theme to an even higher degree because Viola’s gender-bent disguise drives the whole plot of the show. In Shakespeare’s time, the actor playing Viola would have dressed up as a woman, then dressed up as a woman pretending to be a man. This brings up the idea that gender is not something that is fixed, but rather something that is performed, not just on a stage, but anywhere.

However, there is often still the conception of gender essentialism along with that. In Act 2 Scene 2, Viola has a soliloquy in which she addresses the messy situation that her disguise has created. At one point, she says of Olivia,

Poor lady, she were better love a dream
Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness

.....

How easy is it for the proper false

In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!

Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,

For such as we are made of, such we be

(2.2.26-31).

This quote is interesting because she discusses how women's frailty is intrinsic to them; however, she speaks of it as though she is outside of it because she is dressed as a man. Then, throughout the course of this act, she shadows Orsino and can see how women are viewed from a man's perspective. Perhaps this is what makes her realize that there are not any intrinsic differences between women like herself and men, though there might be differences due to differences in socialization. This is demonstrated when she later goes against this idea, saying to Orsino as Cesario, "In faith, [women] are of true of heart as we/... I am all the daughters of my father's house, and all the brothers too" (2.5.117;132-3). Viola's arc in the relationship with her own gender is a good demonstration of the fact that gender is in many aspects performed because of the way one is socialized, and anyone can act in any gendered way without its aligning with their sex, as Shakespeare must have intimately known because of the actors he worked with.

With a text that already has such a long history of queer interpretation, Rice seems to take more liberties to emphasize its themes in an even more extreme way. This starts with the liberties she took with the script. While she barely touched the script of *Midsummer*, many things in her 2017 *Twelfth Night* are cut, re-arranged, or redone; however, all these changes can be argued to embellish the world she has created and

contribute to a more engaging theater experience. The main instance of her re-arranging the script deals with the iconic opening lines. Orsino's famous mantra, "If music be the food of love, play on," does not actually open Rice's production. It starts instead with a fun-filled 70s cruise-ship-themed dance sequence with Viola and Sebastian immediately followed by their shipwreck in Act 1 Scene 2. Act 1 Scene 1 does not begin until Orsino is introduced to Viola in line 28 of Act 1 Scene 2, and it is heavily abridged. Though this is not what one expects at the top of *Twelfth Night*, it works a lot better with Rice's production because it centers the story around Viola and Sebastian, who are the main agents of action in the play. It also creates an even more engaging and more fitting entrance for Orsino.

This leads to the larger addition that Rice makes throughout *Twelfth Night*: the heavy presence of song and dance as a powerful story-telling agent. Though song and dance have always been used in Shakespeare's plays, it seems that Rice's use of it is much more extensive and intentional than usual. The song and dance at the beginning construct the atmosphere that Viola and Sebastian start with: one full of fun, lightheartedness, and togetherness, with the ensemble singing the hit pop song, "We Are Family." It then abruptly changes to dark and foreboding music as the ship crashes and the twins are separated. This stark musical contrast, along with the actors' powerful performance upon thinking their sibling has died, situates Viola and Sebastian in a place of true vulnerability and hopelessness. From the shadows of Viola's despair, Orsino emerges as he is introduced, singing with his theme music interspersed with the foreboding music already playing and an Elvis-like persona, "If music be the food of love play on" (Rice 9:24). The music creates suspense, intrigue, and is cohesive with the score

up to that point, creating a feeling that Orsino is Viola's saving grace and that he can provide a taste of Viola's fun past. Orsino's macho Casanova persona is also established through the way he sings and moves throughout the stage as he enters. Though this moment is only about a minute long, the audience gets a comprehensive view of who Orsino presents himself to be, who he is to Viola, and why she can have the capacity to fall in love with him, which will only be built on as the story continues. With these characteristics, it also makes sense why his long monologue at the top of the show is moved and abridged; Rice's Orsino is suave, to the point, and slightly silly, which would make it strange if he opened the show with a long monologue.

Dance continues to be a story-telling agent with Orsino throughout the play. As mentioned, he has a suave Elvis-like way of moving throughout the stage when he first presents himself as well as when he interacts with Olivia, the original object of his desires, whom he, as is implied in this production, didn't ever really know or love. We can gather this because Orsino tends to move in this way with people he doesn't know, but as he grows closer to Viola, Orsino loses this suave dance for a comedic and balletic petit allegro that he does many times with his court. It is primarily comedic, as he doesn't lose his cool facial expression, which creates a contrast between his upper and lower body. Secondly, however, it demonstrates the openness he now feels with Viola, which is proven when they have their deep conversation directly following his ballet dance. With Orsino's character, song and dance add to how the audience perceives him and create a character everyone can fall in love with.

Song and dance play a big role with Feste as well, who, as will be developed later, is played by a drag queen. Feste is the fool, and in-text mainly provides comedic relief.

However, in Rice's production, Feste is at the center of the story, narrating the events through song. He is portrayed as a character both funny and knowledgeable, both silly and glamorous. His characterization attests to the multiplicity of queer identities but emphasizes the knowledgeable and glamorous because much of his silly dialogue is cut entirely from this production. He begins the show singing "We Are Family," then stands solemnly as the ensemble sings a sad air about being lost and later being found, as Viola and Sebastian are separated. Even when he is not singing, when he is onstage, his presence suggests that he is in control of the narrative.

Furthermore, Feste often sings songs in the script, but the text of these songs was re-written in Rice's production in favor of songs that speak more to the mood and theme of the text. For example, in the text of Act 2 Scene 3, Sir Andrew requests that Feste sing a song of love, and he sings, "O mistress mine, where are you roaming?/ O stay and hear! Your true love's coming,/ That can sing both high and low (2.3.40-42). He continues with a song that doesn't really apply to the story, except that both the song and the story involve love. However, in the production, Feste has just stood behind Viola as she delivers a monologue about the misfortune of her situation involving Olivia, and as Viola departs, Feste sadly looks on as though he understands her predicament. Then, as he is asked to sing a song, he sings an up-tempo ballad, "The Ocean's Full of Tears" (48:33). Feste's identity as a queer character is established from the beginning because of his drag performance, so perhaps this understanding look and the following song speak to some universal queer experience. It is not unlikely that Rice directed Feste's understanding with the assumption that he, as a queer character, would know what it is like to have to ignore certain feelings in exchange for others that are more socially acceptable.

Therefore, his song establishes this understanding. Though the music is happy in tone, the lyrics are a bit more somber, speaking to Viola and Olivia's situation and reinforcing the ideas to the audience. In this case, the music creates fun while also deepening comprehension, making it a useful tool for furthering the story.

While Rice added many song and dance elements to the show, she cut much of the show as well. As the love stories between Viola and Orsino and Viola/Sebastian and Olivia are developing, the text describes the plot of Olivia's servants and Feste against the persnickety and agitating Malvolio. Not much of the text dealing with Viola, Orsino, Olivia, and Sebastian is cut, but much of the B-plot with Olivia's servants is cut as well as almost all of Feste's original lines. It works to keep the story focused on arguably the most important part of a queer comedy: the queer relationships. As will be later discussed, Malvolio, Andrew, and Feste all demonstrate some aspect of queer identity that is important and that Rice does develop, but because there is less overall development in-text, she doesn't focus as much on them compared to how she treats the main four characters. Some might argue that these omissions take some of the comedic heart out of the show, but Rice adds in humor with her characterizations of Olivia's servants and the added song and dance numbers for them. For instance, in the text, there is dialogue amongst the group after they've seen that their plan to trick Malvolio worked, but in Rice's production Maria instead breaks out in a funky and danceable tune reinforcing the themes from the previous scene, backed up by her fellow servants (Rice 1:11:28). In a way, dance and song takes the place of the more time-consuming and unimportant dialogue that the characters in the B-plot engage in.

Adding musical elements to theater is obviously not a new phenomenon. In fact, Eric Salzman writes that “virtually all cultures who have institutionalized their culture past the point of common participation have evolved some type of performance art that melds language and physical movement with rhythmic sound (Salzman 230). Shakespeare’s plays almost certainly had at least one piece of music in each original production (Springfels). However, they likely didn’t have music and dance elements to the extent that Rice incorporates them in this 2017 production, especially with Olivia’s servants. Rice’s additions for them might cater towards what modern audiences are used to, as musical theater is often a gateway to straight plays because of its ability to engage a wide range of people.

Though these changes don’t necessarily make the production “queerer,” it does make the audience more receptive to a queer production. The changes and additions make the audience more invested in the show, and thus, the love stories, which, for some, might be harder to invest in because of their queer nature. Nevertheless, the story is not needlessly queer, and similarly to Rice’s *Midusmmer*, the queer nature emphasizes aspects of the play and contributes to the meaning Shakespeare might have desired. Therefore, these changes to the script ultimately set up a great framework on which Rice built a beautiful and fun queer story.

With there already being queer themes in the original text, Rice does a great job of keeping those while also creating more. For example, repression or redirection of queer feelings is a common way that men handle their attraction to other men, and there are many such moments with Orsino when he believes Viola is Cesario. It begins in their first interaction after Viola has been taken in as Orsino’s servant. He implores her to

wrestle with him, moving through exceedingly intimate positions. Though he follows this with instructions about how Cesario should help him woo Olivia, the added wrestling element helps establish from the beginning a plausible motivation for Orsino being in love with Viola by the end of the play. By having this, Rice posits Orsino's attraction to Viola as Cesario as something Orsino wishes to redirect or ignore, though it was always potent.

This continues throughout the play, appearing notably again in Act 2 Scene 4. Textually, this scene already has much evidence of chemistry between Orsino and Viola whom he believes to be Cesario. Orsino begins their conversation by saying, "If ever thou shalt love,/ In the sweet pangs of it remember me,/ For such as I am, all true lovers are" (2.4.17-19). When asked the type of woman she loves, Viola, as Cesario, explains that she is "Of [Orsino's] complexion" and "about [his] years," to which Orsino replies, "She is not worth thee, then..." (2.4.30-32). Orsino then goes on to explain that a man should be with someone younger than he is, as Viola is. This scene, textually, introduces their chemistry in a larger way, but because Rice has already done so with her staging, she amplifies this scene to make Orsino seem even more interested in Cesario. Instead of the long interaction Orsino is supposed to have with Feste, Rice exchanges it for a peaceful song that Feste sings as Viola looks longingly and nervously into the distance, obviously apprehensive about having to interact with Orsino (Rice 57:17). This makes the scene more dialed in on the two so that their story is more streamlined.

As this song continues, Rice also adds a short moment where Orsino teaches Viola how to fish, where Orsino shoos away one of his men who attempts to help her so that he can grab her arms from behind to correct her form (Rice 58:06). This interaction

prompts him to say that line, “If ever thou shalt love...” as he continues to keep physical contact. This staging makes it seem like being in close contact with Cesario reminded Orsino of love, which works to establish connection before they even discuss the types of people they love and find that it overlaps. As they have this conversation, Viola is cheekily grins because she knows she is describing Orsino.

However, the smile drops as Orsino begins to discuss his requests for Viola to talk to Olivia for him. She continues to frown as Orsino asserts his opinion that a woman’s heart cannot hold as much love as a man’s, and in response, she yells the line, “In faith, they are as true of heart as we” (Rice 59:25, 2.4.105). Though Viola could, in her act, pretend to align with Orsino’s opinions to make it easier, she obviously feels connected and/or cares about the potential future of their relationship enough with him to let her true opinions out. As she continues to speak, Orsino listens with solemnity as she begins to get emotional, saying, “I am all the daughters of my father’s house,/ And all the brothers too, and yet I know not” (Rice 1:02:02, 2.4.119-200). This line is already thematically important through a gender-focused lens because it asserts that there are not essential differences between men and women, and that therefore they have the capacities to relate to one another though they were socialized differently. It also reinforces that it doesn’t matter what gender one is in love with because personality and capacity for love transcend gender. Therefore, the added emotion speaks to this and also furthers Orsino and Viola’s relationship, especially after Orsino’s response.

He appears to feel remorse for his sentiments about women after his talk with Viola and also seems to have gained some respect and admiration for her, which contribute to the feelings he has already been demonstrated to have. After he directs her

to go to Olivia, he gives her a ring on a chain and fastens it around her neck, at which point, they almost kiss. Orsino abruptly shoves himself away and sends Viola out, and then snaps back into his theme song, continuing what would have been the opening monologue of the play, “O spirit of love, how quick and fresh are thou...” (Rice 1:02:20). This song speaks thematically to what is happening, as the spirit of love was quick and fresh in the proceeding interaction; however, it also demonstrates how he uses his performance of masculinity to mask his homosexual feelings. Many share the belief that being gay and being masculine are mutually exclusive, seemingly including Orsino. Therefore, his song can be seen as a symbol of masculinity performed when trying to appear straight. Though Viola is a woman, Orsino believes she is a man throughout this scene, showing that he is not exclusively attracted to people presenting as women.

Furthermore, the elements added to Act 5 Scene 1 emphasize the relationship between Orsino and Cesario as well. In this scene Orsino learns that Olivia is in love with Cesario and that she and the one whom she believes to be Cesario (Sebastian) are married. It is his first scene with Olivia where he shows genuine affection, but it is clear that he is not upset because he is truly in love with Olivia, but because he is in love with Cesario (Rice 2:05:15). The emphasis is heightened when Viola confesses her love for Orsino as Cesario. Orsino seems scared but also intrigued at the prospect of this, and starts to lead him out when Olivia reveals that she is married to the one who she thinks is Cesario. Again, Orsino’s actor is clear to differentiate that he is not upset that Olivia is married, but rather that Cesario is. When saying, “Well farewell, take her” to Cesario, his voice even seems to crack as though he were about to cry (Rice 2:07:45). Because of his

mood and the direction of all lines to Cesario, Rice reinforces that Cesario, and thus Viola, is who he truly cares for.

These feelings are perhaps why, upon learning that Viola is, in fact, a woman, Orsino briefly confronts her about her lie, but then, overjoyed, passionately kisses her (Rice 2:13:45). With the timing the actor took, it seemed almost as if he was holding himself back from doing so for the whole play until he had confirmation that it would be acceptable. Up to that point at the end of the play, the audience has seen Orsino building romantic tension, and even almost kissing Viola, so when he finally does, that tension is released with a great feeling of relief. In terms of queer themes, it calls to mind the fact that queer people often are not able to act upon their feelings in the way that straight people do because of uncertainty. In Orsino's case, he was uncertain of how Cesario would react as well as how the people he ruled over would react, so he couldn't act as freely with his feelings as he could with Olivia, even though his feelings for her were probably not true. The theme that feelings of queer love are often held back until they are validated is not overtly in the original text, but Rice's production adds that theme because of the way she directed Orsino's actor.

Speaking of new themes, in the case of Orsino and Cesario/Viola, another new theme is added because of her added musical elements. As mentioned, Orsino enters with a musical theme and rockstar bravado that is repeated throughout the play. From his entrance and throughout the play, he often seems to be giving a masculine and sexually charged musical performance, which introduces right off the bat that his masculinity is a performance. As previously mentioned, Orsino's masculine way of moving is dropped

for a more feminine and balletic way of movement as he settles in with Cesario, revealing that he truly was performing some aspects of his masculinity.

This is emphasized as a theme even more because of the way that Viola imitates Orsino's performed masculinity when she pretends to be Cesario. In Rice's *Twelfth Night*, it is extremely emphasized that Viola sees Orsino as the blueprint for male gender performance, and because gender performance is necessary in her case, she freely imitates him when she begins to converse with Olivia. In fact, she imitates him so freely that she brings a tape recorder of Orsino's "If music be the food of love..." theme when she doesn't know what to say (Rice 29:50). When directing this scene, Rice added many things that raised the tension, like Olivia's servants threatening Viola as they leave the room, one of whom even rips the head off of a teddy bear. This creates a tense environment that makes the audience wonder how the situation will resolve itself. The tense environment only becomes tenser as the audience sees Viola act unlike herself in imitation of Orsino, not only by playing his song, but by imitating his way of speaking and movement.

It becomes clear as their conversation continues that she is imitating Orsino's way of courting through her poetic choices. At the start of their private interaction, Viola says that the text that has informed her speech lies in "Orsino's bosom" in the chapter of his heart, to which Olivia says, "I have read it; it is heresy." Though the audience doesn't see much of how Orsino has attempted to court Olivia, one can assume that the way Cesario talks to her in act one is in imitation of Orsino because of Olivia's annoyed and knowing reactions to it. Even without this assumption, as Jami Ake mentions, if only one is partaking in the act of courting through Petrarchan verse, it is not "wooing as a true erotic

exchange,” but rather a self-indulgent performance (Ake 376, 378). As Cesario, Viola speaks through male-dominated Petrarchan poetry traditions, beginning with describing Olivia’s outward appearance in what might have been an *effictio*, with Olivia quickly interjecting to make fun of that way of speaking by taking “inventory” of her traits the way Viola might have (“two lips indifferent red”) (1.5.238-246). Viola even begins to imitate Orsino’s manly bravado, as she lowers her voice and thrusts her hips to say that Orsino loves her with “adorations and fertile tears” (Rice 35:00) It is exceedingly clear that Olivia is not charmed by speech that men traditionally used to woo ladies.

In literary discourse in general, there is a conversation surrounding the difference between male and female poetic voices, and whether a difference even actually exists. This discourse possibly stems from conversations about the “male gaze” and the “female gaze” after Lacan’s work about the gaze became a psychoanalytic tool in literary criticism. Lacan’s “gaze” describes his belief that humans are in pursuit of finding unity between themselves and the world, creating desire, so they project these desires onto other people in an attempt at unity. Robert Dale Parker, in his chapter on psychoanalysis in *How to Interpret Literature*,” defines the gaze as “the way that looking itself is steeped in the erotic” (Parker 145). Some argue that males and females desire differently, and therefore have different erotic desires. Historically, as Genese Grill writes about, there is an assumption that “women [do] not really like to look at bodies” and conversely that a man’s gaze is “appropriative, predatory, and objectifying” (Grill 363). Though these assumptions are extreme, they had to have originated from somewhere, dating back to the time Shakespeare was writing.

Shakespeare's audience was likely familiar with the work of the poet John Donne. Rebecca Ann Bach recognizes how Donne helped establish the poetic standard of expressing male desire in modern English, and also writes of how scholars use Donne's poetry as an example when looking at poetic patterns of expressing male sexuality (Bach 261). Donne's poetry, in many cases, is extremely objectifying, and mainly focuses on the woman's body as opposed to her personality. For example, many of his poems employ an *effictio* to describe a woman in a sexual context as opposed to descriptors about anything other than the physical. With this as a framework for male heterosexual desire, people became familiar with this model, and perhaps even frustrated with it as Olivia is in *Twelfth Night*. Though Donne is an extreme example, he is one that shaped the English conception of love poetry nonetheless. While this was the model for expressing male desire, it really was the model to discuss desire in general because there was not a model for expressing female heterosexual desire in Petrarchan love poetry of the late sixteenth century, let alone to express female homosexual desire, until Shakespeare began writing.

Petrarchan love poetry in the English tradition up to the point when Shakespeare wrote was relatively uniform in terms of its thematic content. While the uniformity in some cases laid a framework that could be manipulated by two lovers engaged in dialogue, as Shakespeare does with the titular characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is substantially limiting when used sincerely because of its cliché and trite character even at the time Shakespeare was writing. However, this is exclusively how Orsino speaks when courting Olivia, even though he doesn't seem to be aware that his language is part of the reason that Olivia cannot love him (Ake 378). Viola, however, does realize this, and the

realization makes her engage in a manipulation of the Petrarchan poetic form similarly to how it is manipulated in *Romeo and Juliet*, with some distinct differences. This marks the moment when Olivia begins to fall in love with Viola as Cesario. At this moment, she begins speaking more genuinely, in a way reflecting a feminine, specifically lesbian, poetic voice.

As Ake writes, “Viola’s exchange with Olivia dramatizes the inability of Orsino’s Petrarchan language on its own to engender erotic relationships and the need for a new kind of poetic performance in order to do so” (Ake 378). Indeed, textually, Viola begins to speak in a way that playfully subverts the male Petrarchan standard, but she does so in a way slightly different than how it is done in others of Shakespeare’s works because it is a feminine voice catering to a feminine ear speaking from a place of truth. As she breaks out of Orsino’s Petrarchan voice, Viola says,

Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house,
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night,
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills
and make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out “Olivia!”

(1.5.271-77).

Though she is still using symbols to represent some aspects of Olivia, the difference is that she is using symbols to express how she feels and not to express how Olivia looks. The Petrarchan framework is so easily employed by Orsino because all he has to do is

look at Olivia in order to create his verse, but the part of the reason Viola's poetry means so much more to Olivia is presumably because she had to exert effort to find words to express how she felt. Presumably, neither has ever partaken in this kind of interaction, especially with another woman, so this type of breakthrough, when looking at the text through a queer lens, should be emphasized. Rice makes this shift in poetic voice and subsequent reactions from both parties very clear through her directorial choices.

The exact moment when Olivia begins to fall for Viola is clear because of a musical cue. As Olivia's line, "Why, what would you?" in this production and in text marks the point when Olivia begins to become infatuated with Viola's Cesario, and after this line, a "steel drum lullaby" (as the subtitles reference) begins to play (Rice 35:45; *TN* 1.5.270). This music continues through Viola's female-lens poetry and ends when Olivia speaks again, this time with an emotional look of love followed by an embarrassed and awkward delivery of the line "What is your parentage?" that she later expresses embarrassment about after Viola leaves (1.5.281). The musical element during Viola's speech emphasizes that this demonstration of her true voice is important in the development of their relationship, and the subsequent drop of the music makes Olivia's embarrassment that much more palpable. These additions help the audience see Rice's vision for this pairing. Poetically, the way that Viola speaks when she arrives and the way she speaks right before she leaves are very different from each other, but a modern audience might not catch these differences because the characters are speaking English from the early modern period. The musical cues in these instances highlight a very important change that might be lost on a modern audience.

Rice also seems to make a point to not have Olivia be attracted to Viola as Cesario until she begins speaking from her heart. This makes some statement about the undefined nature of sexuality, and how it could depend on many factors. For instance, it seems in this production that physicality is not as important to Olivia as the way someone communicates is. Though gender essentialism might not be true, socialized gender norms have been in place for centuries, including when *Twelfth Night* was written. Therefore, it could be argued that Olivia, in Rice's production, is attracted to a more feminine way of communicating. This still makes it plausible that she is happy ending in a heterosexual relationship because of Sebastian's verbal similarities with Viola. Though he doesn't speak much in the play, when he does, he is often describing his own feelings toward things in great detail. For example, after he meets Olivia and understands that she must be mistaking his identity, he says, "For though my soul disputes well with my sense/ That this may be some error, but no madness..." (4.3.9-10). Every time he speaks, he speaks with an emotional connection that is traditionally more feminine in a poetic sense, which speaks to how Olivia can still want to be with him after she learns he is not Cesario. A more traditionally feminine way of expressing one's feelings can transcend someone's gender, therefore attraction can be based on this as well, as in the case of Rice's Olivia.

Perhaps the reason that Olivia cannot bring herself to love Orsino is because of her inability to be attracted to male-dominated forms of language. Nonetheless, she clearly states that she "cannot" love Orsino (1.5.264). As mentioned, textually, this is clear evidence to support the theme that love is not a choice, and Rice's direction for Olivia at this point emphasizes the theme even more. As she lists the reasons why Orsino would be a good suitor, she seems annoyed not only with Cesario, but also with herself

(Rice 35:10). It is almost as if she knows she is missing out on a good opportunity, yet cannot bring herself to take it. This highlights the theme even more than it is highlighted in the text alone. Though Olivia and Viola do not end up together, their time on screen together enforces that love can take root in different ways, and that love is not always dependent on sex alone, but perhaps sometimes on gendered societal conventions, like the way someone courts another.

Though queer identity is sometimes highlighted through queer relationships, solitary queer identity is equally important. On this front, Rice also seems to have made a great effort, as there are many characters whose identities are overtly queer, even though they are not so in the text. These additions made the picture of the queer story she is painting richer and more inclusive of different manifestations of queer identity. Firstly, and most obviously, as previously mentioned, Feste, listed in the character list as “fool” and “Olivia’s Jester,” is played by an elegant and knowledgeable drag queen, Le Gateau Chocolat, in Rice’s production (Shakespeare 3). This addition is incredibly important and is arguably Rice’s most important contribution to the production from a queer studies standpoint because of how many things it does to promote queer art forms and identities.

The Human Rights Campaign defines drag as “a performance art that uses costumes, makeup, and other tools to present exaggerated forms of gender expression to critique gender inequalities and imagine a transformational future where people are truly free in how they express themselves” (“Understanding”). Including drag in the production emphasizes the theme of gender as performance because performing gender is intrinsic to the art form. In addition to drag’s ability to emphasize the other themes of gender as a performance already in the play, it also is important because it is an

intrinsically queer form of storytelling. While drag has been present for almost all dramatic history because men have almost always played women in plays, drag in the twentieth century was claimed as a decidedly queer art form, and it has been used to support the queer community ever since (“Understanding”). Including queer art forms is important because theatre in general is not associated specifically with queer people. Therefore, because queer theater is trying to tell a story through a queer lens, it would be improved if drag or other specifically queer-associated art forms were included to tell the full story. Whether or not this was intentional on Rice’s part, it nonetheless works to facilitate seeing the story through a queer lens, especially because Feste acts as the narrator.

As mentioned, Feste narrates the plot of this *Twelfth Night* in ways that aren’t originally in the script. Though Feste is textually described as a fool and a clown, Rice makes a point to make drag queen Feste elegant and almost omniscient, as if he is in control of the narrative. Though he has moments of comedic relief, like when he pretends to be a priestess to Malvolio, he generally presents a whole new view of the “clown” role, showing a clown’s capacity for depth and glamor (Rice 1:51:31). Assigning Feste as the teller of the story also puts queer storytelling at the forefront, acknowledging ways in which queer art forms can emphasize a queer view better than other artforms.

In addition to this more concrete form of queer identity in Rice’s *Twelfth Night*, there are also some less defined but nonetheless present representations of queer identity shown through Sir Andrew and Malvolio. The queer nature of these characters, in contrast to the other characters, does not affect the plot of the story, nor is it commented on at all, but this perhaps makes them even more powerful. Because they work more

discreetly, they work to make queer identities commonplace and not require commentary. Sir Andrew is the less discreet of the two, though his identity still seems decidedly queer. In the text, Sir Andrew has no large characteristics besides being sometimes ignorant, but Rice's production adds a feminine flair to his character that is associated often with gay men.

Sir Andrew, in Rice's production, is queer. We see his attraction to Feste when he stares at him after requesting a song, discreetly showing an aspect of his queer identity (Rice 48:20). However, he seems to desire to present as a heterosexual male similarly to the way Viola does when she is trying to disguise her gender. Throughout the play, Andrew is trying to be like Toby, the manly and extremely heterosexual kinsman of Olivia. However, he always falls a little bit short because of his undeniable femininity. For example, when Sir Andrew comes to duel Viola, he is described as the "most skillful, bloody, and fatal opposite that [she] could possibly have found in any part of Illyria" (3.4.276-78). However, he comes out wearing a mini skirt and his signature pink and yellow sweater vest (Rice 1:39:40). It is comical because the extremely feminine outfit was created, presumably, out of the desire to imitate Toby's manliness. His skirt resembles the kilt that Toby is also wearing, but it is shorter, making him appear more like a schoolgirl than a Scotsman. This scene is only a taste of Andrew's attempted masculinity, which presents itself throughout the entire play.

This performance, like Viola's, manifests in the way he courts women as well. Though he is extremely effeminate and overtly attracted to men, he insists that he is interested in Olivia, though this is not necessarily demonstrated. Instead of talking to her or showing his feelings in any verbal way, he attempts to show his love in the

aforementioned duel with Viola appearing as Cesario. He complains that Olivia does not love him and threatens to leave in Act 3 Scene 2 while delivering the lines in the most feminine and removed way possible, making his complaints seem like they are more a result of the missing attention rather than because of missing love. This plays into the idea that queer people can often see heterosexual relationships objectively to achieve social gain and participate in them for that reason as opposed to doing so out of love. Though Sir Andrew's queerness doesn't affect the plot, it is an important vessel to show an aspect of queer experience and identity, as well as affirm men who exist outside of traditional masculinity.

Malvolio's character is similar to Sir Andrew, though more extreme in some ways. While Andrew seems interested in Olivia because of a compulsory desire to enter a heterosexual relationship for social, political, financial, etc. gains, Malvolio is actually in love with Olivia—so much so that his fellow servants use it against him in their scheming. However, it still appears that he is performing gender in similar ways because his character is played by a female actress. This element adds a lot to a performance that is already so centered around performing gender. Because Malvolio is the only character played by someone who doesn't usually present as that gender (excluding Feste), it is reminiscent of the way that Shakespeare's plays were originally produced, with every woman character played by a man. The audience must do a similar suspension of disbelief that Shakespeare's audience must have when watching Malvolio's actress work.

It is also interesting because the performance of gender in Malvolio's case is on an almost different plane than that of the other characters. Within the play, performing

gender is a major aspect of the plot; therefore, Viola's crossdressing only emphasizes the parts of her that are almost unchangingly feminine. In the case of Feste, his performance of femininity is meant to be loud and obvious because that is the point of drag. However, within the world of the play, Malvolio is assumably male, meaning that the characters in the play do not notice that he is played by a woman; only the audience does. This opens an interesting contact point for the audience to meet the story. They can see gender as a performance on different planes and see how it acts under different constructs. Though this addition also doesn't affect the plot, it is something that makes this production beautifully queer. It gives the audience something to think about and discuss in the context of the play and in the context of their own lives, which is what makes theater such a powerful art form.

Overall, Rice's *Twelfth Night* seems to propose the idea that romantic preferences can be dependent on a myriad of things apart from or along with someone's sex. The way a person interacts with gender in this production is extremely fluid and takes multiple forms. From Orsino's interaction with fabricated masculinity, to Viola's imitation of this performance of masculinity, to Feste's performance of femininity as an art form, to Malvolio's performance of masculinity outside of the play's world, gender as a performance takes many forms. As the center of almost all these characters' worlds, Olivia interacts very differently with each as well, showing that her attraction doesn't hinge solely on sex at birth, but rather on different aspects of gender performance. Other people's attractions, like perhaps Sir Andrew's, *do* hinge on someone's sex at birth, as he is attracted to male people including Feste even though Feste is a drag queen, and thus is performing femininity. Her production highlights the idea that multiple iterations of

queerness exist and are valid, and it does so supposedly because of her freedom to change things to magnify these different queer identities.

CHAPTER IV

RECONCILING RICE'S DIFFERENT CONCLUSIONS

When looked at concurrently, these two productions have much overlap but also some fundamental differences. They both hit on major themes that queer studies interpretations focus on, most obviously on gender as a performance, but also on the validity of different queer identities, on love's not being solely dependent on sex or gender, and on love's not being a choice. However, they do differ greatly in ways. Namely, Rice's *Midsummer* seems to argue that homosexual relationships present a more favorable way to view certain situations, while *Twelfth Night* argues that love transcends gender, even if the protagonists end up in heterosexual relationships, leaving some to wonder if Rice's views changed between producing the two productions, if her philosophies are inconsistent, or if Shakespeare's relationship with queerness led him to present different queer themes in the texts of the two plays.

One reason for the philosophical difference in the two works might be simply because the two base texts need different things to become overtly queer in production. The original text of *Twelfth Night* includes cross-dressing lesbian snafus as a major driver of the plot, so to change the gender of Viola or Olivia as she did with Helena would not work. It also wouldn't comment as much on masculinity and the performance of gender if

Orsino's gender was changed to create a lesbian relationship between him and Viola at the end. The only queer gender change that might make sense is Sebastian's, but that would just be changing gender for the sake of changing the gender, and not a meaningful change like she did in *Midsummer*. By changing Helena's gender, she was able to comment on how limiting a patriarchal relationship can be because of how freed up the relationship was when the lovers were both men. However, she can do the same thing in *Twelfth Night* by the way Viola interacts with the masculinity presented by Orsino, and how Orsino changes throughout the story. Therefore, Rice's philosophy might have appeared to change in this sense, but she is doing something similar on this front in both. More obviously, the differences in what Rice changed between the two productions could have resulted in her increased freedom as she gained experience. She didn't change much about the script of *Midsummer* in 2016, but she changed a lot of *Twelfth Night* in 2017, probably because she felt more comfortable doing so.

Furthermore, both main ideas presented by Rice's two works can exist concurrently. For certain stories, like *Midsummer*, it did work better with the original material, especially their original confrontation, that Helena and Demetrius were *Helenus* and Demetrius instead. Some materials just do work better when the couple is not fighting against constructed yet incredibly real gender barriers. In general, it is also true that love can be based on many different things and queerness can present itself on many different planes, as Rice seems to argue with her *Twelfth Night*. These are two valid claims that one can make and not contradict oneself, as Rice can be argued to do with these two productions.

Instead of looking at the two works as part of Rice's coherent personal philosophy on queerness, it is perhaps more beneficial to look at the works as separate entities where Rice used her creative powers to emphasize what she saw in the text at the differing times of their production. It is impossible to know certainly that Rice's opinions changed or not, and it doesn't matter much, either, because both texts competently and effectively demonstrate the queer themes that exist in the text while also creating new ones that emphasize these themes. Though they might differ slightly, they were not meant to exist together. What matters is that they both present valid ideas in queer theory that audiences can choose to adopt or not.

Though done in different ways, Rice's productions demonstrate how effective theater can be as an interpretive tool. After first reading each play, one can see a clear queer interpretation within each of her productions, and through her use of music, dance, some manipulation of gender presentation, dialogue changes, etc, one can gain access to queer themes that might not have been evident had they only read the text. By using her productions as models, many future interpreters have a wonderful framework by which to share their interpretations of their texts.

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