

The Variety of Her Infinite Variety
A Praxis-led Examination of a New Historicist/Cultural Materialist Construct

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Abstract

Her Infinite Variety was a theatrical production staged in 2009 as part of a praxis-led investigation into the impact and influence women had on the performance of Shakespeare during the Restoration. The production was positioned within the theoretical notion that, through the adaptations of Shakespeare's works, it was possible to determine the Restoration writers' attempts to create a discourse of femininity. While an analysis of the Restoration texts afforded some insights into this discourse, as did a textual comparison between each 'original' play and its adaptation, these were limited in nature. There were assumptions made prior to the production period of *Her Infinite Variety*, based on detailed readings of the Restoration adaptations, yet the rehearsals and public performances of the script provided more insights than the text alone could possibly have offered. It is these insights that this paper seeks to investigate and to show that, through a praxis-led investigation, it is evident that the Restoration stage was irrevocably altered by the feminine presence.

Key Words: Praxis, new historicism, cultural materialism, performance, Restoration, Shakespeare, feminist analysis

Title Image: "Shakespeare's Restoration makeover" taken by Michael McAllan.

The Variety of Her Infinite Variety

A Praxis-led Examination of a New Historicist/Cultural Materialist Construct

In 2009, while researching a PhD thesis titled *The Actress and Shakespeare*, I wrote and staged the theatrical production *Her Infinite Variety* as a praxis-led investigation specifically designed to determine the impact and influence women had on the performance of Shakespeare during the Restoration (1660 to 1700). During this time, significant changes occurred to the theatrical world, one of the most important being that women were permitted to perform professionally for the first time in England. Additionally, the works of William Shakespeare were routinely adapted by a number of writers throughout the time period. *Her Infinite Variety* was positioned within the theoretical notion that, through these adaptations of Shakespeare's works, it was possible to determine the Restoration writers' attempts to create a discourse of femininity. The idea behind a praxis-led investigation is that the theoretical combines with the artistic to contribute to scholarly knowledge. According to Jenny de Reuck (2011, p. 3) it is a "critical engagement with the text and its co-texts as well as (re)interpretation on the part of the director/devisor."

There is a fascinating dichotomy that exists between a play-text in its written form versus its staging as a theatrical performance. Keir Elam (1978, p. 140) argues that the written theatrical text has long been accepted as a form of literature and subsequently analysed as such, however the performative text has proven to be more problematic; yet, the two are clearly and distinctly different texts and should therefore be subject to separate investigations. While a traditional literary analysis of the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare's works afforded some insights into the writers' discourse of femininity, I felt it was necessary to consider the text in and as performance. Ultimately, the power of the play-text lies in its performance, in the interpretation and/or 're-interpretation' performed by the director, the actors and the audience.

In this fashion, *Her Infinite Variety* was also a cultural materialist construct. Cultural materialism recognises that all literary texts "cannot transcend the material forces and relations of productions" and that "no cultural practice is ever without political significance" (Dollimore & Sinfield 2003, p. vii). This concept works in two ways for *Her Infinite Variety*, first it recognises that each text rewritten during the Restoration and every performance staged, can tell us something about the politics of the era. Second, it acknowledges that *Her*

IM 8:Masculine/Feminine <'Her Infinite Variety'> <M.Merchant>©IM/NASS 2012. ISSN 1833-0533

Infinite Variety is also a political construct, one which used the texts of the Restoration to conduct a clearly feminist investigation into the gender politics of the era.

The use of primary resources, both literary and non-literary, in the devising of *Her Infinite Variety*, established the piece as a new historicist creation. It recognised the concept that no writer writes in a vacuum and that we are all necessarily influenced by the world in which we live. New historicism argues that literature and history are inextricably linked, that we must perceive history as not simply being “accessible through its textual traces alone” because it is “irreducible to a single master narrative” (Ryan 1996, p. xiii).

Therefore, *Her Infinite Variety* sought to be an interdisciplinary, cultural materialist/new historicist analysis covering theatrical literacy and historical modes, what Phyllis Mack refers to as a “synthesis of sources and disciplinary skills” (Mack 2001, p. 380). The following is an interpretation and analysis of the theatrical piece from the perspective of a PhD researcher who is also a writer, director and performer. The conclusions drawn are my own, based on existing modes of theatrical literacy and knowledge of both the Shakespearean texts and their Restoration adaptations

Her Infinite Variety

In 2009, following extensive research on women in the Restoration which took me from Stratford-Upon-Avon to the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, I created what was ultimately both a theatrical response to the source materials I had found and an exploration of the possibilities Restoration adaptations had in the attempt to recover this particular period of women’s history. This theatrical response, *Her Infinite Variety*, functioned in two distinct, yet not necessarily different, ways. The text aimed to educate its audience and to provide data to inform what would become a PhD thesis. It is this second function that will be investigated in this paper, in that it was praxis-led research which allowed both the original plays and their adaptations to be re-created and studied in a manner that text-based analysis alone could not have afforded. Horst Ruthrof (1997, p. 230), in *Semantics and the Body*, argues for a “semantics able to accommodate two important threads’, these being the literary (or textual) as well as the “tactile, visual, haptic and other non-verbal signs’. *Her Infinite Variety* sought to interpret the literary through its visual and auditory representation on the stage; as Roland Barthes tells us ‘the body is the irreducible difference” (Miklitsch 1983, p. 101).

The script for *Her Infinite Variety* drew on primary sources, such as the Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare's works, as well as contemporary accounts of both the playwrights and of the Restoration actresses. Quotes from plays, prologues, epilogues, letters, diaries and official State documents were used to frame the introduction of the actress. Many of these are not necessarily considered today to be 'literary' sources, however they offered insights into differing perceptions of actresses. In this way, the script sought to investigate the feminine presence on the stage from a new historicist perspective. The introduction of the actress resulted in intense public interest in a group of common women, perhaps for the first time in English history and this marked a shift in focus from the private, or domestic, to the public sphere. This resulted in contemporary accounts of the actresses, making their lives accessible in a way that was previously unheard of. This is not to say that *Her Infinite Variety* sought to fill all of the missing pieces in the history of women during this time; nor was it able to provide a complete snapshot of the position of women during the Restoration. There will naturally be a discrepancy between what was 'real' and what was represented on the stage; much in the same way that movies, television and plays today do not necessarily represent 'real' women. That being said, if we look carefully we can see that within the fiction there may be some truth.

The title of *Her Infinite Variety* references the words of the Roman senator, Enobarbus, when describing Cleopatra in Act Two, Scene Two of Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra*; "Age cannot wither her" the statesman tells us "nor custom stale her infinite variety" (Greenblatt et al. 2008, p. 2663). The character of Cleopatra has been referred to by Harold Bloom (1999, pp. 546-547) as Shakespeare's most "subtle and formidable" woman, and could be seen as a representative of the first professional English actresses. Bloom tells us that Cleopatra, as Shakespeare wrote her, was the "archetype of the star, the world's first celebrity". As mentioned above, the introduction of the Restoration actresses marked a shift in the public's focus. Far from the noble classes, who were largely untouchable in Early Modern England, the public were free to discuss the actresses however they pleased. Additionally, like the first woman of the English stage, Cleopatra's 'infinite variety' was subject to the men controlling her destiny. The 'tiring rooms', what we today would consider to be dressing rooms, of the new actresses were open to those wealthy enough to buy their way in. Diarist, and prolific theatre goer, Samuel Pepys (1896, Vol. VIII, p. 7) writes of numerous visits to various actresses in their rooms, exclaiming of the "many men" who "do hover about them as soon as they come off the stage".

Finally, the Enobarbus quote was chosen because both Cleopatra and the Restoration actresses have been represented as sexualised creatures whose existential purpose was to entice and ensnare powerful men in order to receive protection.

The initial premise for *Her Infinite Variety* was that scenes from ‘original’ Shakespearean plays would be presented and followed by their Restoration counterparts. However, acting two similar scenes proved problematic in terms of its entertainment value for an audience. Given that the piece sought to also be educative in nature, greater creativity was required in the script’s crafting. I opted to weave specifically chosen scenes together in a variety of ways and to use both the Actress and Shakespeare as characters as anchors for the audience. Both became cultural materialist/new historicist constructs in that they were twenty-first century creations drawn from a variety of both literary and non-literary texts of the Early Modern era.



Image 1 – The Actress and Shakespeare

The Actress was designed to be, at first, an enigmatic figure; a feminine presence alone on the stage, surrounded by masculine voices. In this way, her introduction was written to be reflective of the experience of women on the Restoration stage. She was at times feisty, pushy, combative, cheeky and defensive; traits which were often afforded the first English actresses. Jeremy Collier, in 1698, published an anti-theatrical tract which accused actresses of being “silly, and sometimes mad, to enlarge their liberty, and screen their impudence from censure” (p. 10). It was this image that the character of the Actress was designed to present, although she matures throughout the text of *Her Infinite Variety*.

The character was deliberately left nameless, beyond the title of ‘the Actress’, because the identity of the first English actress is unknown. Indeed, this investigation into the Restoration’s discourse of femininity arose from the realisation that the identity of the first English woman to act professionally on the London stage had been lost to history. What we know about the first English actress was perhaps best summarised by Henry Wysham Lanier (1930, p. 14) when he wrote “as with most epochal ameliorations of life, from the discovery of fire to the steamboat, the origin of this novelty of real women on the stage is somewhat clouded”.

The character of Shakespeare in *Her Infinite Variety* was presented as an arrogant misogynist, playing to some of the more damning feminist critiques of his works and his character. Lisa Jardine (1983, pp. 2-4) writes that feminist criticism of Shakespeare follows two schools of thought, those that believe Shakespeare’s “female characters . . . reflect accurately the whole range of specifically female qualities” and those that think that Shakespeare’s work is “out and out sexist, and sets out to uncover his prejudices to the reader”. *Her Infinite Variety* began with the latter version of Shakespeare, as he was created to represent the masculine, or ‘old’ guard, who were resistant to the female intervention on the stage.

The relationship between the Actress and Shakespeare was created to be reminiscent of Beatrice and Benedick from *Much Ado About Nothing*, or Katherine and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Antagonistic to begin with, parrying wits at a rapid rate and ultimately reaching an understanding which would allow them to work together in a mutually beneficial fashion in the future.

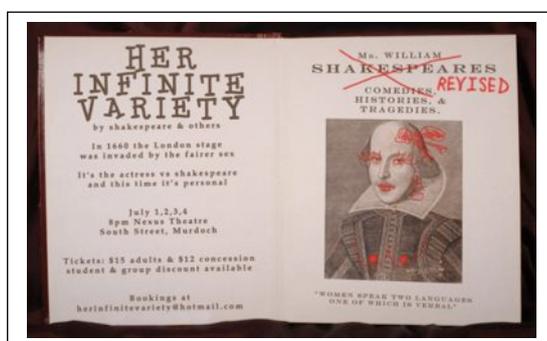


Image 2 – Poster for *Her Infinite Variety*

Click link for footage of the Actress and Shakespeare

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YofAiJbn4&feature=youtu.be>

Ultimately, what these characters provided for the audience was a connection to the Shakespearean and the Restoration stages, as well as allowing the more educative aspects of the script to come through.

Othello

The reason the excerpts in *Her Infinite Variety* began with a scene from *Othello* was because this was the play in which the first professional English actress made her debut. While the name of the actress may not be known, the production she performed in was. On December 8th, 1660 at the Vere Street Theatre an actress played the role of Desdemona in what was most likely a performance by the King's Men. In honour of the event, the poet Thomas Jordan (1664, p. 24) wrote "A Prologue to introduce the first woman that came to act on the Stage in the Tragedy call'd the Moor of Venice" in which he states:

I come, unknown to any of the rest,
To tell you news, I saw the lady dressed.
The woman plays to day, mistake me not;
No man in gown, or page in petty-coat;
A woman to my knowledge . . .

We have intents to civilise the stage.
Our women are defective, and so siz'd,
You'd think they were some of the guard disguiz'd;
For (to speak truth) men act, that are between
Forty and fifty, wenches of fifteen;
With bone so large, and nerve so incompilant,
When you call Desdemona, enter giant.

With this prologue, Jordan is presenting to the audience a convincing argument for allowing women to perform professionally. The argument would only have been necessary if this was indeed the first time such a thing had been allowed. Additionally, Andrew Newport, in a letter written to a friend on December 15th 1660 corroborates that this was indeed the first professional actress, stating "Upon our stages we have women actors, as beyond seas" (Wilson 1953, p. 3). This suggests that the actresses were still enough of a novelty for him to

comment upon them. The ongoing presence of the actress was made possible because of a patent issued by Charles II. During the English Civil Wars, and beyond, the theatres were closed by order of the Parliament and it was not until Charles was restored to the throne that they re-opened. The returning king allowed two men to operate theatres in London, Sir William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew, and instructed that from that time forward women were to play women's parts. Prior to this, boys were trained as apprentices in the theatre from a young age and would play the female roles.

In *Her Infinite Variety*, the first excerpt scene opened with Othello looming over a sleeping Desdemona. For the purpose of the production, she was designed to represent the ultimate in Early Modern purity and piety. The character of Desdemona is a fascinating study, particularly when coupled with the knowledge that *Othello* was the only Shakespearean play known to have been consistently performed throughout the Restoration without adaptation. This could be because the text already contained the three feminine character types valued by Restoration playwrights: the 'ideal' woman, the 'gay' woman and the 'whore'. The 'ideal' woman represented what women should aspire to, she was honourable and devout. The 'gay' woman represented what Restoration writers believed women actually were; vainglorious gossips who were also spendthrifts and nags. The whore was the 'fallen' woman, and did not necessarily have to be a prostitute to qualify for the term. Any female who traded her wiles could be worthy of the whore title, and this often included the actresses of the Restoration. Desdemona was the perfect 'ideal' woman, her devotion to Othello remained until her death at his hands. Her maid, Emilia, was the 'gay' woman as she was more adventurous than her mistress Desdemona and prone to salacious comments. A third female character, Bianca, was the whore; in this instance the literal sort. Therefore, it could be argued that the reason the Restoration writers did not adapt *Othello* was because the three archetypes of femininity were already apparent within the text.

In *Her Infinite Variety*, Desdemona was initially played by a male actor, which would have been truthful to the Renaissance performances as well as the earliest performances of the Restoration. Desdemona being played by a male actor, representative of the last of the 'boy' players, reminded the audience of the Renaissance's cross-dressing tradition and that Shakespeare had been writing for a masculine presence, rather than a feminine one.

Additionally, for at least the first few years of the Restoration, males continued to play some of the female roles. In Volume One, Part Two of his *Diary*, Pepys (1892, p. 297), wrote of boy player Edward Kynaston, referring to him as “clearly the prettiest woman in the whole house”.



Image 3 – the last of the boy players and Othello
Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXvmKkmk9yE>

The first draft of the *Her Infinite Variety* script did not contain the same level of humour which appeared in the final production between the last boy player and the Actress. A modern reading made it difficult for the scene to play out without comedy. It became clear during rehearsals that a man playing a woman is a problematic notion in the twenty-first century. This was the inverse of the experience of Restoration audiences, who had expectations of a masculine body inhabiting a feminine character. Was their reaction to the change similar to what we experienced having a male play Desdemona? This was an interesting point of investigation which was only revealed through the rehearsal and performance processes.

Following the introduction of women to the stage, the cross-dressing convention began to act in a different way. Over the past four hundred years, audiences have come to a conclusion that a man playing a woman is meant to be laughed at; for example, the dame in British pantomime. This is not to say that such a convention cannot work today, performance troupes like the United Kingdom’s Propeller have successfully staged all male productions of Shakespeare’s plays. However, spectators attend one of their shows with the expectation of gender reversal and are therefore mentally prepared for it. With *Her Infinite Variety* spectators would not have been anticipating a male Desdemona and, with mere minutes in

which to establish the convention, playing the initial scene too seriously seemed as if it was not working. During rehearsals, the lines became comedic naturally and the decision was made to play with this notion. By adding deliberate comedy, the audience was given permission to laugh; however, when the Actress took over, the scene became more intense and the danger was meant to feel real. In performance *Othello* showed that, while a male actor can portray the emotions, there was a depth which came from the gender.

Her Infinite Variety then played with the notion of the feminine interruption of the masculine domination of the theatrical stage and it did this in a literal fashion. The Actress was drawn to the scene playing out between Othello and Desdemona, she was at first captivated by it and then compelled to join in.



Image 4 – Enter the Actress
Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7cMlfFj0JQ&feature=youtu.be>

What was discovered through the rehearsal and performance stage, beyond the humour derived by today's audiences at cross-dressing, was that the violence of the piece was harder to watch when the Actress was in the role. This led to the hypothesis that when Shakespeare wrote his female characters, certain actions were permissible with males playing the roles. Once women came to the stage, these parameters shifted and we were left with adaptations featuring female characters of a different calibre.

Measure for Measure and The Law Against Lovers

The first of Shakespeare's works to be adapted during the Restoration was *Measure for Measure*, which Sir William Davenant turned into *The Law Against Lovers*. This alteration combined the basic plot from *Measure for Measure* with the Beatrice and Benedick

love story from *Much Ado About Nothing*. This need to add the ‘gay’ couple from a completely separate play could be considered to have derived from the earlier mentioned desire to provide distinct categories of women in Restoration texts. *Measure for Measure* featured the virtuous Isabella, a woman who was due to take a nun’s vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In this way, she was the ‘ideal’ woman and was thus a “harmless delight” as well as a “useful and instructive representation of humane life”, something which had been commanded by Charles II in his Letters Patent to Davenant and Killigrew in 1662 (Cibber 1888, p. lxi). Isabella’s brother had been condemned to death for impregnating Juliet, however he believed her to be in his wife in the eyes of God. Juliet was pregnant with Claudio’s child and likely represents the fallen woman, if not necessarily the whore. This left a clear absence of the ‘gay’ woman, a hole Davenant opted to fill with Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing*.

An in-depth textual analysis of *Measure for Measure* and *The Law Against Lovers* showed some of the character changes which were the result of Davenant’s alterations to the original, however many others were only revealed during the rehearsal and performance periods. An example of this is the scene where Isabella, upon hearing of Claudio’s fate, begged Angelo, the man who sentenced him to death, to let her brother live. Angelo promised to do this, if Isabella would forego her vow of chastity and sleep with him. Isabella, horrified, went to the gaol to inform Claudio that he must die as her virtue is worth far more than his life. This occurs in both *Measure for Measure* and *The Law Against Lovers*, what differs between the two is Claudio’s response.



Image 5 – the siblings square off
Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZuQSJxdgfc&feature=youtu.be>

The excerpt above consists of two versions of the one scene. The first was Shakespeare’s Claudio, a man desperate to save his life and his fear of death was palpable. The second was Davenant’s Claudio, and this was a man who was willing to go to his death

rather than risk his sister's chastity. What the performance revealed was not so much the changes made to Isabella's character, but rather the alteration the presence the actress had on her brother's. Davenant's Claudio seems to have lost his fire and he can be seen a weaker character as a result. The praxis component showed a previously unconsidered consequence the feminine presence had on the stage which was the changes made to the masculine characters.

In *The Law Against Lovers*, Davenant chose to have Juliet, Claudio's pregnant lover, to plead for his life instead. The dialogue in the adaptation was stilted and lacked the poetry of the original, a common complaint of the Restoration. However, while this was suspected when initially analysing the texts, it took the performance for it to be proven conclusively

Macbeth

Davenant was also responsible for the 1664 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which replaced the original on the stage from its first performance until the mid-eighteenth century. Hazelton Spencer (1927, p. 172) tells us that:

The Davenant *Macbeth* delighted the public, and remained a stock piece with Betterton throughout the remainder of his career. Not, in fact, till Shakespeare's play was revived by David Garrick in 1744 did Davenant's version relinquish its usurped place in the repertory.

The most significant change Davenant made to the text was to increase the role of Lady Macduff. Instead of a single scene where Lady Macduff went to her death railing against her husband, we were given a simpering example of the 'ideal' woman; most likely to act as a counter against the wickedness of Lady Macbeth. In Shakespeare's original, Lady Macduff only appeared in Act Four, Scene Two and she spoke a total of forty lines. In Davenant's adaptation, the character appeared in five scenes and had a total of one hundred and twenty four lines. Allardyce Nicoll (1967, p. 176), albeit somewhat unkindly, recognised that the introduction of the actress was the motivating factor in this particular change; he writes "Lady Macduff's part is enormously lengthened, purely for the sake, apparently, of giving to some rising actress of the Duke's Theatre". What he did not consider was that the character in this adaptation functioned as a counter balance to the wicked Lady Macbeth.

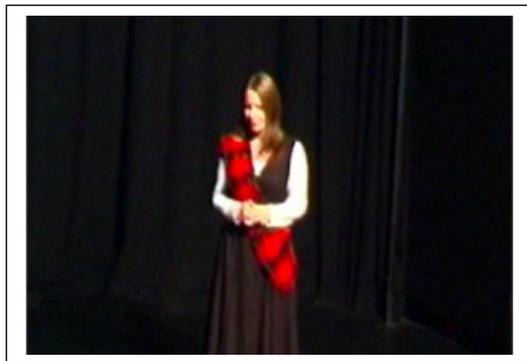


Image 6 – Lady Macduff
Click link for excerpt

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MdTEy_MiA&feature=youtu.be

The excerpt shows the two different versions, Davenant's first and then Shakespeare's. The actress in this scene was not instructed to play the two scenes differently and yet, she found that it happened naturally. What the performance in *Her Infinite Variety* showed was that in Davenant's *Macbeth* the death scene without the presence of Lady Macduff's son dramatically altered the character. In this adaptation, Lady Macduff died as she lived, quietly and with no fuss. In contrast, Shakespeare's version showed her death to be violent, fraught with tension and fear. Her anger at Macduff's desertion showed through her interaction with the son and without the son, her anger was missing. The necessity of the son's presence was discovered during the rehearsal period, and proved to be another example of a praxis-led revelation.

King Lear

Shakespeare's *King Lear* was performed at least twice during the Restoration in its original form and in 1681 was adapted and published by Nahum Tate (n.p.), who claimed that it was "a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished". Tate's method of polishing these unstrung jewels was to create a love story between Cordelia and Edgar and to give the play a happy ending. According to Spencer (1927, p. 251), the Tate script remained the preferred version for one hundred and fifty years and that "Even Dr. Johnson defended his changes, on the ground that the original tragedy is too terrible and that innocence is better rewarded on the stage than afflicted". Tate's changes to *King Lear* were apparent both on the page and on the stage. His Cordelia's choice to respond to her father's request for filial piety with the single word 'nothing' was motivated by her love for Edgar.

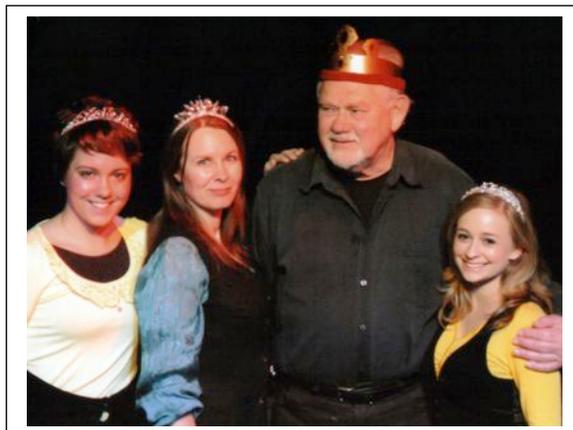


Image 7 – The Lear family

Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-bqjaoP1eA&feature=youtu.be>

The above excerpt shows Cordelia's response to her father's questioning of her love, first in Shakespeare's version and then in Tate's. We can see that in Tate's *King Lear* the character was a simpering love-struck girl, another example of the 'ideal' woman. The honour and decency, strength and integrity Shakespeare bestowed on his Cordelia made her a memorable character. His Cordelia stated her love of her father to the audience, while Tate's did not. There was a power Shakespeare derived from the simplicity of the word "nothing"; it showed Cordelia's strength of character and was an honest statement of fact. She did not, however, display those traits which Restoration writers seemed to have considered necessary for a woman in the late seventeenth century.

The rehearsal period for *Her Infinite Variety* showed that the addition of a love story between Cordelia and Edgar did not, as argued by Tate in his Epistle Dedicatory, give a clearer rationalisation for her choice to say nothing to her father. If anything, this love story trivialised the character of Cordelia to the point of making her almost irrelevant. In Shakespeare's text, Lear's youngest, his 'joy', was an enigma; she forced her father to reject her not out of love, but because of her own deeply held beliefs. Cordelia was then absent for most of the play but at the end she was the prodigal son, returning with an army to try and save the father who had cast her out. Tate can be considered to have created a discourse in which women are relegated to the role of love interest, incapable of being motivated by something beyond romantic love.

Romeo and Juliet* and *The History and Fall of Caius Marius

Romeo and Juliet, arguably one of Shakespeare's best known plays, was adapted by Thomas Otway in 1680 and became *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*. Otway moved the action of the text from Verona to Ancient Rome. He also removed all references of Romeo's, or rather Marius', love for Rosaline making the character seem less fickle. There were ten recorded performances of *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* and it appears that this adaptation remained popular throughout the 1700s.



Image 8 – The balcony scene

Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5N-pgLyWsc&feature=youtu.be>

The excerpt included here shows the start of each balcony scene, the first from *Romeo and Juliet* and second from *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*. These demonstrated the contrast between the ages and experiences of Romeo/Juliet and Marius/Lavinia. Otway made his 'star crossed' lovers slightly older and, without being explicitly told this fact, the actors playing the roles picked up on the change in maturity. There was a solemnity between Lavinia and Marius that became apparent during the rehearsals. Their courtship felt more serious and therefore less juvenile than that of Juliet and Romeo. This could be because the adaptation was reflecting the changing mood of the Restoration as, in 1680, Charles was no longer considered to be the "Merry Monarch"; religious divisions and plots against succession had created a darker mood.



Image 9 – Romeo/Marius and his Juliet/Lavinia

Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGnz2jmYUh4&feature=youtu.be>

The end of the *Romeo and Juliet/Caius Marius* scene brought both texts together, with the Shakespearean version repeatedly interrupting the Restoration and vice versa. This blending allowed the changes in the characters to become much clearer. The actor, who played both Romeo and Caius Marius, found variations in the two versions. This was as a result of the different ways the roles of Juliet and Lavinia were played by the two actresses. Juliet was delicate and petite and the actress' reading of the text was a combination of youthful naivety and adolescent sexual awakening. Consequently, her Romeo was younger and his voice and actions reflected those of a younger man. When Lavinia entered, her character seemed older, more experienced and less flighty. As a result, when the actor became Marius his voice dropped an octave, his chest became more solid and he appeared to be more of a man. This feeling of maturity evolved from the rehearsals and into the performances of *Her Infinite Variety* and, while the scene was amusing, it served to highlight the fact that the discourse being created by the Restoration writers was evolving throughout the time period.

A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Fairy Queen

The final segment of *Her Infinite Variety* was taken from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its adaptation, *The Fairy Queen*, and was initially included because the original text is one which audiences today are likely to be familiar with. That being said, the excerpt presented showed that even the smallest changes to a text could translate to greater changes on the stage. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was known to have been performed at least once before its adaptation in 1692. The production was mentioned by Pepys (1892, p. 326) in Volume Two, Part Two of his *Diary* in an entry on September 29th 1662:

To the King's Theatre, where we saw "Midsummer's Night's Dream," which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life.

While there is no way of knowing if Pepys' opinion was shared by his contemporaries, this is the only record of the play being produced unaltered. On May 2nd, 1692 an adaptation titled *The Fairy Queen* premiered on the Dorset Garden stage. Frank Clyde Brown (1910, p. 77) attributes the text to Elkanah Settle in his book *Elkanah Settle: His Life and Works*. Other historians have given the author as Dryden, although there is no evidence proving that this to be true.



Image 10 – ‘Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war’

Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ScusfLNzpQ&feature=youtu.be>

The beginning of this section, as shown in the excerpt, featured the Shakespearean and Restoration Helenas squaring off over a shared monologue. This final comparison in *Her Infinite Variety* served to prove that, although nuanced, there were differences in the characterisations of the adaptation and its Shakespearean original. Shakespeare's lovers, with their stylised movements, played the scene to its upmost comedic effect. However, as can be seen in the excerpt below, in the hands of the Restoration lovers the scene appeared lascivious and even more sexualised. This is a criticism often levelled against the era and, while it was not intended, the sexuality of the time was apparent in the text and therefore the performance.



Image 11 – The lovers

Click link for excerpt

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-14YhL7WwQ&feature=youtu.be>

By simplifying the language, the author of *The Fairy Queen* made the meaning behind the lines much clearer. The intentions of Lysander and Demetrius towards Helena were more clearly understood by the actors and subsequently the audience. What we seemed to lose, however, was the sense of fun that existed in Shakespeare's text. The practical nature of this investigation demonstrated how even subtle changes to a text can alter characterisation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, while it may have been possible to have completed my PhD thesis using a purely text-based analysis and comparison of Shakespeare's works and their Restoration adaptations, the praxis-led research provided material which was simply not apparent in the printed texts alone. The creative piece, *Her Infinite Variety*, was borne out of extensive explorations of primary materials sourced from libraries and other collections around the globe. Each segment in the script was carefully chosen for educational, entertainment and research purposes. As Michael Best (2002) tells us "it is the nature of performance to make choices about the text" and it was in these choices that many important elements were revealed. Throughout the rehearsal and performance periods, the variances in the different versions became more apparent. It was found that, in some cases these changes altered the character completely, such as Claudio in *Measure for Measure*. In others, the changes were more subtle, for example the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As with any investigation, I went into the project with the anticipation of a variety of potential outcomes.

I had certain theories as to what the results of each section would be, based on the textual analysis conducted earlier. In some instances these theories were proven to be true; for example, I theorised that the introduction of a love story between Cordelia and Edgar in *King Lear* would diminish the character of Cordelia and this was proven to be the case during the performances. However, there were a number of surprises which had not been anticipated during the devising stage and it was these that made the process so valuable to the finished thesis. Inevitably, what *Her Infinite Variety* helped to prove through praxis-led research, was that the feminine presence on what had been a traditionally male sphere irrevocably changed the very nature of the way in which plays were staged.

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