

As I the Shards Examine

chris wind

chriswind3@gmail.com

www.chriswind.net

705-384-7692 EST

Cast:

Restroom attendant - around 50
Ophelia - mid 20s
Lady MacBeth - a 'bag lady'
Regan - anywoman
Portia - executive-typed
Desdemona - anywoman
Kate - anywoman, battered
Isabella - university student
Juliet - high school student, cool, punky
Marina - around 13
Miranda - the restroom cleaning lady

Set:

public restroom

REST ROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

STALL DOOR OPENS, CLOSES.

ATTENDANT: That's Ophelia – Hamlet's girlfriend? The one who went mad and drowned herself? Well, at least according to Shakespeare.

LONG BEAT.

TOILET FLUSHES.

STALL DOOR OPENS, CLOSES.

FAUCET ON.

HAND WASHING.

FAUCET OFF.

OPHELIA: O what a noble mind is here at last uncover'd!
The glass of fashion, the mould of form
Is quite dash'd against the stone;
The shattered pieces lie at my feet.
My thoughts, my feelings,
Once fixed, encased in crystal,
Breathe and blow in the quick'ning wind
Like petals. Once pale, now pulsing,
Rich, and rainbowed, come!
I beseech thee, attend and heed
As I the shards examine.

Laertes, brother, you insult to suggest
Hamlet's love impermanent
For his choice must be queen
As well as wife: Am I not worthy?
Further, you warn caution,
Lest I my 'chaste treasure open':
I am mistress of my self!
And since more than a man, I pay the cost,
Then more, not less, do I take such care.
Lastly, you say 'safety lies in fear':
I have grown weary of being afraid,
Of being made to feel afraid; I yearn
To meet the day and greet the night
Unafraid – as men are wont to do.

And I crave to love with opening arms –
So tell me not to hide my heart
Lest my desire lead him to abandon
Restraint, and madly ravish – would it be so?
(Or do you extend to all of your kind
Knowledge of your self alone?)

Father, your words are as out of tune.
You say I do not understand myself
And see me as still an infant babe,
For by foil you would then appear the more mature:
Is contrast your only proof of wisdom and worth?
(Alas, all cowards and chameleons create their colour
From what is without, not what is within.)
And you instruct me to 'set my entreatments at a higher rate'
As if I am some prize! Do you think me a whore,
That my presence must be paid for?
Then you claim *he* may walk with a larger tether
(As if we were but animals!): Why do you grant him
More freedom than I?
Why does Laertes go to Paris (and not I)
When you know his simple mind so well
You sent another to be guardian?
I pray thee, Father, reconsider –
Is it because your own judgement is faulty
That you do not trust mine?
Hamlet is a fine man, soldier, scholar, courtier,
A prince! And I judge him to be sincere.
Is that not enough?
No, indeed, that is nothing, for lastly
You tell me to forsake him – forever!
For no other reason than your own mistrust
Of him, of me, that I'll become with child
(And thereby make you the greater fool –
You think not what it would make of me.)

To you both, I never sought your advice
Why do you 'press it upon me so?
Perhaps you feel your sex gives the right –
No. I'll give the reason: Projection is all.

Brother, your passions run without rule
So you tell your sister to reign hers.
And Father, you are a fool and master both,
Of fine words and deception's smile
So you counsel your daughter to believe none.

Then, sitting near to see the players,
Did you think yourself a member of the troupe
To be playing thus with me?
Your closeness, your words, taunting me –
For desire's restraint or for its absence?
I was as fever'd as you were cold.
But you could not see at all,
So much it pleased you to be the wronged,
Poor little Hamlet, hard done by
His uncle, his mother, his sweetheart.
There was a line, not unnoticed,
That 'a woman's love is brief':
The brevity of my love is but a measure
Of the weakness of yours.

Pray, what is the source
Of your sudden loss of faith in me?
You think I betrayed you, used you,
Played pawn of the King and Queen:
But they merely sought to learn
The cause of your madness,
A knowledge I too desired –
(Was it your love for me?)
Why did you doubt me so?
Ah – 'your mother, your sweetheart' –
Your mother is unfaithful therefore I must be;
Your mother fickle, therefore I fickle;
Your mother's love brief, mine too.
Hamlet, I am as different from your mother
As I am from you.
Like the child who calls all furry creatures 'dogs'
You think that because we share sex
We share all else as well.
I would as easily say that because my father
Is a cowardly fool, so you are too.
(An opinion not unworthy of consideration, now –
Perhaps it was you who used me –
Your lusty talk not for my ears but for theirs,
So they might conclude your madness unrequited love –
A perfect decoy for your petty plan
Of avenging unrequited hate.)

And then that second time you came to me,
Disturbed and in despair, you burst into my chamber
As I lie in bed still flushed and confused –
That night you come to me, so full of delighted rage,
Your uncle's guilt finally exposed,

To be your Valentine;
But up he rose and donned his clothes
And dugged the chamber door,
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.
Young men will do't, if they come to it
By cock, they are to blame.
And will 'a not come again?

I wander'd thus a while, alas,
They thought me a poor virgin,
Loosed by insanity, mourning for my father;
But they did not know in whose bed
You lie the night before –
For that sanity makes, out of silly songs.

I hear it told a suicide:
A heart twice broken by grief
Over a father's death and a love lost.
Alas, it seems men like to believe
They are the center of the universe
For all members of my sex.
But some of us are made
Of stuff more strong and independent.
My life was affected by you, 'tis true,
But not extinguished because of you.
And so, there arises a new thought:
Despair over a young unmarried pregnancy.
While more flattering than the former,
This, alas, is also untrue –
Hamlet was thirty and I was no Juliet;
And, with a simple sheath, a douche of zinc –

The truth, let it be known,
Is not suicide at all.
To your disadvantage it is
That clowns, idiots, and other asses
Are believed before a woman's word.
Go, heed the Queen
And not the clown: It was an accident.
As I was perched in a tree sorting my mind,
I fell into the water, my dress billowed out,
And heavy as it quickly became,
it weighted me down.
Who would realize but another woman?
Forsooth indeed 'twas the damned dress!
Against the farthingale, several petticoats,
And my kirtle, velvet and voluminous,

I had but little chance.
Struggling with tens of tiny buttons and ties,
I could not get it off in time.

No, I could not free myself soon enough –
For I was the more deceived
To obey, to submit, to accept.
To wear my thoughts like garments
Fitting to the fashions of time and place
But that hinder and hide the self.
'Tis sad we seldom know what we are
And less what we may be.

But I do know now what I think:
Again, projection is all.
Hamlet, you tried to cast off your desire,
That constant source of frustration –
But alas you could not, and so instead
You sought to strip me of mine.
In your diversion with revenge and hatred,
You realized your love for me was brief –
And so you accused me and mine of brevity.
In your heart, loving your mother instead,
You were the unfaithful one –
And so called me fickle.
Incapable of strong belief and trust,
Doubting, vacillating, questioning all –
You take the mirror for glass and see me instead.
Guilty of dissembling and deceiving
With a mockery of madness and *The Mousetrap* –
You call upon my face-painting with disgust.
And last, you punish me for acting
With simple allegiance and obedience
To my duty toward my father –
Yet you have done the very same,
Pursuing to a far ghastlier end
The duty to yours.

Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet –
Everything you are that displeases you,
Everything that you cannot look at in yourself,
You have projected upon me, you see in me.

Well I have cast that glass in splinters upon the floor!
I am more and different than what you want to see.

The mould is broken, no more to be filled
With your frustrated dreams and fearful dreads.

(Soft, I have garlands still of flowers sweet –
No fennel, nor columbine,
The violets have withered,
And the daisies have been plucked.
There is some rue for all,
And for Hamlet, here's rosemary:
I did love you once.
And here is pansies, that's for thoughts.
And for myself,
I have seen what I have seen, to see what I see
A single dogrose, rubied and free.)

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

ATTENDANT: Dogrose. That's just the same as a common wildrose – symbol of pleasure mixed with pain. Also believed to cure the bit of mad dogs.

SHOPPING CART BANGS THROUGH RESTROOM DOOR.

ATTENDANT: Here you go, love. Lots of soap, two towels.

FAUCET ON.

ATTENDANT: (OFF) Surely you recognize Lady MacBeth.

LADY MACBETH: (loudly) I didn't kill myself.

VIGOROUS HAND WASHING.

FAUCET OFF.

LADY MACBETH: I outperformed them in their own play.

RUMMAGING IN SHOPPING CART.

ATTENDANT: Deodorant? Lotion? Toothpaste?

LADY MACBETH: So they removed me (too)
To the realm of insanity
And then
they killed me.

SHOPPING CART BANGS THROUGH RESTROOM DOOR.

BEAT.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSSES.

STALL DOOR OPENS, CLOSSES.

ATTENDANT: You probably know her father – King Lear? That one’s Regan, the middle daughter.

BEAT.

FUTILE FLICKING OF A LIGHTER.

ATTENDANT: No smoking in here. (Beat.) Need a light?

STALL DOOR OPENS, CLOSSES.

SUCCESSFUL FLICKING OF A LIGHTER.

REGAN: What you have to wonder is
 Why our father favoured Cordelia.
 He was a man who needed to be worshipped
 But, as the story goes,
 Cordelia was not one to flatter
 And praise. So why then?
 It is simple – she's young.
 (That is to say, younger.)
 And like most men, our father prefers
 His women to be childish.
 (Or shall I say, children.)

 At first he favoured Goneril;
 Then as soon as I was old enough
 (Eight or nine years),
 He turned his affection to me;
 When Cordelia became 'of age'
 He ignored me and –

STALL DOOR SLAMS AGAINST STALL WALL.

VOMITING.

STALL DOOR BANGS.

ATTENDANT: Towelette?

REGAN: At first it was play,
Tickling games that made me giggle,
Then sometimes it hurt, but he was my father
And he had the right
To reprimand (though I didn't always understand
My transgression); as a daughter
I was bound by a duty
To obey, to honour, to love,
As Cordelia so clearly expressed –
There is that bond
That binds.
But soon it always hurt,
And time after time I would scream until nurse came
To hush up my cries and my bleeding
And lead me limping from the King's chambers.

Like the hymen of my innocence
That bond is now broken.
Cordelia, alas, cannot remember
And thus is still in favour;
I, however, cannot forget.

I hear you protest:
This is not at all suggested in the play!
No. It isn't. Not at all.
But Lear was a man, and a king,
And both are desperate
For power, control, male progeny:
He had three daughters, and no longer a wife,
To provide these services,
He had three daughters;
And we know that one in every six –

But no,
 there is nothing in the play
To suggest any of this.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

BEAT.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

ATTENDANT: (CLOSE) Portia – *The Merchant of Venice*? The three little caskets? The test for her suitors? She has her own law office now, just across the street. With two partners – Viola and Rosalind.

PORTIA: If I'm the one with the property
You'd think I'd be the buyer
Not the bought;
A lot of faith my father has in me:
He distrusts my ability to judge, to discriminate –
A decision made by chance,
A decision inevitably and ultimately irrational,
Is preferable to a decision made by me.
But no, you say,
The decision was not to be by chance
But choice, and thus reveal the suitor's character –
That is, he who chose lead would be wise,
To forsake appearance, and realize its irrelevance;
True, but you forget the inscription:
To choose lead, to choose 'to give and hazard all'
Is to my mind *not* wise,
For its foolish risk (all!);
Is it not better to choose silver, and 'get what one deserves'?
It seems to me a mature perspective;
So, to judge by appearance
(And thus forsake appearance)
Or to judge by words
– That is the choice.
Words have meaning,
And unless the words be false or deceiving,
Is it not better to judge according to content,
Than to judge according to form
To substance, rather than pretence?
So if it was to be a test of character,
'Twas thus a poor test,
For who was to guess what my father intended:
The form did contradict the content;
And so choice becomes chance, after all.

That *I* am not allowed to choose
Is in principle, intolerable,
But in practice, just as well –
For there is really not a one worth choosing:
A prince who boasts of his precious Porsche
And can fix it himself;
The County Palatine, who believes

A real man never smiles;
Falconbridge, a pin-up boy
With a mind as two-dimensional;
A Scottish Lord interested in nothing
But a good fight;
An alcoholic (the duke's nephew, yes);
The Prince of Morocco, a blood-thirsty Rambo;
And Bassanio, attracted by wealth and beauty,
Willing in a moment to sacrifice his wife for his friend.
There is not one.

If I so despise men,
Why did I disguise as one?
'Twas not my choice:
Shakespeare (a man) created my costume
(And that of Viola and Rosalind),
And in his cowardice, he refused to challenge the reality
That to be able to interact
Without having to defend against
Sexual or romantic intentions,
One must be male;
That to be taken seriously,
And to be exempt from compliments that essentially trivialize
One must be male;
That to be effective at an endeavour
Of the intellectual arts,
One must be male;
That to be dominant, influential, powerful,
One must be male
In patterns of appearance, behaviour, speech, and thought –
– Patterns of thought?

COIN INTO SLOT ... TAMPON MACHINE.

But didn't I put forward
The feminine concept of mercy over justice?
Didn't care and compassion win over fairness?
No, look again:
The Duke first pleaded for mercy, not I;
My case was won on a technicality,
On the letter of the law.
(Though it is worth mention
That recourse to such a legal loophole
Was my last resort.)
The masculist mode won out;
But this is not surprising in a masculist court.

STALL DOOR OPENS, CLOSES.

LONG BEAT.

TOILET FLUSHES.

PORTIA: Where there is no challenge,
 There can be no change.
 For when the disguise is finally revealed
 It is not recognized
 That to be what I was (what I am)

 One can be female –
 It is recognized only that I *am* female.

STALL DOOR OPENS, CLOSES.

 And their response concerns only themselves –
 Relief, that they won't be cuckolds.

FAUCET ON.

HAND WASHING.

FAUCET OFF.

ATTENDANT: Towel?

PORTIA: Thanks.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

BEAT.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

DESDEMONA: Oh, hey, glad you're here today. Do you happen to have a pair of panty hose to sell?

ATTENDANT: I do!

(CLOSE) Desdemona – Othello's wife.

DESDEMONA: Great, thanks.

RUSTLING OF CLOTHING AS SHE CHANGES HER PANTY HOSE.

DESDEMONA: Accused of *infidelity*:
I pray thee, what is infidelity?
A lack, a lack of 'faithfulness', of 'loyalty'
A lack of 'strict conformity to truth or fact' –
Pray tell, what fact?
Why, the fact of our marriage
Of our marital contract –
You accuse me of a breach of contract, then?
(And for a breach of contract,
You sentence me to death?)

'Tis true, I did make certain agreements –
To *love* you alone?
Or to express love *physically* to you alone?
Aye, to *have sex* with you alone?
You alone
This is important, this singleness, this monogamy
For it enrages you to see me 'for others' use';
Perhaps this ownership is indeed legal –
but is it truth or fact?
(Other's *use*? Think me a *thing*?)
Would you have me agree to love no other?
Then 'tis a cold heart you want.
And am I to please none but you?
Why should I be so unkind?
To find pleasure in none other?
But this is a lie!
(Is it a wound too?)

Perhaps you have the child in mind –
Do you rage, like Hermione's husband,
'I'll not rear another's issue!
But where is the comraderie
You feel with other men – is it false,
That love for your fellow-in-arms?
A child is no more a possession than a woman,
And every child needs nurturance –
So why should you withhold what is yours to give?

Do you think, like Imogen's husband,
That if I am unfaithful, I am worthless?
Then all of my value is in my sex?
Surely you did not marry without regard for other virtues?
Is it because I am of worth only to the extent I am of worth to you?

Come, did I marry one so self-centered?
No. If I am unfaithful 'then all men are bastards'!
Only if you believe legitimacy resides with (legal) paternity,
Only because you believe in *illegitimacy*:
All children are legitimate!
'Tis not my infidelity makes you bastard,
But your belief!
(It also makes you stupid:
Why would you make *your* legitimacy
Depend on *my* faithfulness?
Surely to allow me this power
Confounds your drive for dominance –

Accused of infidelity:
I care for Cassio, 'tis true,
And am therefore affectionate with him –
But must all touch between male and female be sexual?
I think not. I have been accused without cause,
That is, no cause but your jealousy
(Which is your ego which is your fear
– And they say *we* are ruled by emotion)
And the words of your friend.

ATTENDANT: Wait! Are you sure you want to do that? It's your wedding ring!

DESDEMONA: Oh, I'm sure.

TOILET FLUSHES.

DESDEMONA: We too have words, Emilia and I and all of the others,
We also speak:
But either you don't believe us
And so we are killed,
Or you do believe us
– and so we are killed.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSSES.

ATTENDANT: (CLOSE) That bit about Hermione – she's from *The Winter's Tale* – her newborn was taken from her and killed because her husband refused to raise someone else's child. And *she's* imprisoned. For treason. And incontinence.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSSES.

ATTENDANT: (CLOSE) Don't know this one ... All wrapped up as she is ...

KATE:

With great disturbance, I hear it said
My story doth much to entertain,
'Tis light and with a happy end,
In short, 'tis thought a comedy!

Dost thou laugh to see a shrew?
Indeed, I pray thee, what is a shrew?
What am I that I be so named?
'Tis said I am froward and I vow 'tis true –
But for a man to be so bold is not a fault.
And some doth complain o' my scolding tongue –
Then I am wisely critical, not content
With any and all. Others bewail
I am wilful, with strong spirits –
But I see a woman may be made a fool
If she hath not a spirit to resist,
And surely in a man this is much applauded.
Further, 'tis said, I am bitter and bad-tempered –
I pray thee, what is the standard of measure?
'Tis true I am not mild, but neither is my father
Yet none doth therefore curse *his* name.
I am more strained than pleasant, I confess
But methinks perchance you would be too:
To be auctioned off as a piece of chattel,
To know the suitors who come
Court your father's wealth –
'Tis not my mind to smile at greed;
And to know that my father will give his money
To a man who is a stranger
'Fore he will give it to his own daughter –
How shall I be sweet under that offense?
I ask again, then, what is a shrew?
Observe and see that any man
Not favoured by a certain woman
Will fall to insult and slander anon.
Witness Hortensio, who once called her jewel,
Doth declare Bianca a disdainful haggard
As soon as she prefers another.
Thus, all I have done to gain this name
Is fail to praise and stroke men's pride.

Perhaps thou dost laugh to see me tamed?
I think it sad to make all alike,
To force the spirited to be subdued.
Do you find it amusing to see me starved
Of food and sleep 'till I am giddy,

Weak of mind and body? To see me subject
To Petruchio's emotional whips and whims:
He presents a feast then throws it out
Or allows instead another to eat.
He gives me a beautiful cap and gown
Then rips it to shreds before my eyes.
He offers me everything then takes it away.
Back and forth, up and down – to be sure it overcomes,
This confusion, fear, and exhaustion.

To see me tamed.
Only a man blinded by some grand fantasy
Would call me tamed. Any woman is suspect.
My final speech is odd, unexpected.
One can see neither reason nor cause
For this absolute and sudden change.
'Tis true. One sees it not.
For it lies in an unwritten scene.
Heed not that speech of obedience and submission –
'Twas made with Petruchio near
And therefore under unspoken threat.
Did ye not notice Act Four?
In scene one, my arrival, he begins his plan,
Depriving me of food and sleep.
By scene three, my body is weak and begging,
Though my spirit still resists.

He toys with me, dismisses the tailor,
And announces anon we are to travel
To my father's house. On the road
In scene five, it is a mere eleven lines
'Till I submit and agree with his every word.
Did you not wonder what happened between,
While the men bought and sold my sister?
I was beaten.

And I mean not to speak in metaphor.
You know well that Petruchio strikes
His other servants, doth it surprise thee then
That he struck me? over and again –
He locked the room, 'trusted Grumio as guard –
And therefore, on the road, to my father's house,
You see, that was my escape:
I could not have left alone,
His servants in league, under similar fear,
And even if I got away, perchance along –

– At least Petruchio was only one.

ATTENDANT: Oh love, that's a bad one. I've got some concealer here somewhere ...
Or maybe just some Tylenol?

KATE: But what then to do? Whither should I go?
If I confess to father, would he believe me?
He cannot, for he has given the dowry –
It and I belong to Petruchio,
And he has not the money to sell me to another
(Even if that be possible).
I cannot live at home forever,
(Would that he take me back) –
He'd be the laughing stock of the town,
A married then unmarried shrew.
I cannot go out on my own –
I have no money, and it is only to be made
As strumpet.
No, that marriage had to be, whatever the price.
And, I'd already enough humiliation:
To go and then come back would be worse
Far worse than it was not going,
No one else would have me,
And I shall not dance barefoot,
Nor shall Bianca be made to wait again.
Is't not then the answer
To submit while he is near and pretend to be his
So at all other times, I can truly be mine own?
Having house and food is much –
And anon, I trust, he will travel oft away –
'Twas a bargain: prisoner to him
For freedom from the rest.
Lip service was all – usually –
And if a word spoken against my will
Can stop a blow against my body –
Well, you heard the speech.

Yet soft, 'twas not all false:
Carefully I say women are simple
To offer war when they are bound to serve,
Love and obey. And they *are* bound.
But not by God or nature, no –
By commerce and social custom alone
Is thy husband thy lord, thy life, thy keeper.
Remember that, I pray thee.

And the penalty but one;
The arm of the law reaches only for the man
And thus doth imply that only he
Is expected, allowed, to take the initiative.
And thus the blame.
Though let me assure,
'Tis only in the eyes of the law I speak.
But the law is made by men –
Why do they decree sole responsibility for the act?
Because they desire sole right to the result!
Men, you must know, cannot accept death –
'Tis a blow to their ego, their delusion of divinity;
And so they invented Heaven and Hell
And Patrilineage.
For a son who inherits his father's body,
Will also receive his father's estate,
And is expected as well, to inherit his ambitions –
Thus can a man live forever!
Therefore you can see 'tis of utmost importance
To know which are one's sons.
This can be done by controlling the women –
That is to say, their sexual behaviour;
So they invented also the Marital Contract.
Which makes premarital sex a crime.
Against the male ego.
(In more ways than one:
It allows women to compare
And perchance find men lacking!)

TOILET FLUSHES.

I do not subscribe to such a denial
Of the autonomy of children –
They are not means to another's end,
They have ambitions of their own;
Or of the power of women –
'Tis said if you are neither maid,
Nor widow, nor wife,
You are nothing;
'Tis a vain thought:
Our sexuality exists independent
Of our relationships to men,
And we may choose to express it or not
Equally independently.

STALL DOOR OPENS.

And so, I will choose yes:
'Tis no crime to me –
Just because men's honour hangs between their legs,
Doesn't mean a woman's resides there as well.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

BEAT.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

JULIET: Romeo, Romeo,
 Where the fuck art thou?

 Have you stopped along the way
 To play at your stupid battle games?

 Or have you changed your mind,
 And decided not to come
 Thinking me too 'easy' and thus insincere:
 What perversion of thought is this?
 Because I say what it is I want,
 Direct and forthright,
 You judge my desire false?
 While the one who dallies,
 Says no to mean yes,
 You deem true and take her
 Seriously?

 Or perhaps you think to be 'easy' is to be unchaste:
 If so, you misjudge
 Yourself!
 Because I want you (I want you)
 Does in no way mean
 I am a woman who wants every man.
 Do you think of yourself so poorly?
 Can you not accept that it is you who –
 That one look of yours makes me wet
 One touch sends a fire through every nerve
 That it is you, standing there
 In your tights so tight
 And your shirt
 Carelessly open,
 Your chest –

Continuously.

For room and board.

RUSTLING IN HER BAG.

STALL DOOR BANGS OPEN.

SYRINGE DROPS ONTO THE FLOOR.

(CLOSE) Shit. (LONG BEAT.) (SIGH.)

The Mayor would come often
Seeking a cure for his syphilis.
'How much for a dozen virgins?'
He would laugh and grin broadly.
I would suffice, no virgin,
But still a year under twelve.

In time, my sores were open, bleeding,
My eyes reddened, the fever came,
I could not eat for days,
– I did become insane.

And shortly thereafter,
I died.

(No music. No dance.)

LONG BEAT.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

HUMMING.

SCREAM.

MIRANDA: (OFF) I need an ambulance. An overdose, I think. The mall. At King and Third.

RESTROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, CLOSES.

ATTENDANT: Hey, Miran— Oh no, no, no ...

VERY LONG BEAT.

MIRANDA: Why has she no mother?
Why have I no mother?
Nor Ophelia, Portia, Kate, Cordelia, Hermia,
Indeed, none but Juliet?

I'll tell thee:

'Tis an obsession with the male.

Consider Prospero, my good father,
'The male as authority' –
For 'tis to you, father, I must direct my questions
There being none other to answer,
'Cept Caliban who though half beast
Is also (perchance moreso) male.
(And when there arrive a multitude of others,
Strangers to the island from the ship come asunder,
They are too, alack, every one of them male.)
You doth also seem to be 'the male as power' –
You are parent and thus hold the natural virtue of veto
Further, you are conjurer, with unnatural force as well.
Lastly you are 'the male as protector' –
For from you comes my safety from hazard and harm
(Though it seems needed only against others of your kind.)

Next consider Ferdinand,
It is you I am to see as my saviour,
You have knowledge of the other world,
You will release me from the power and authority
Of my father. You are my only alternative.
But since you are a man, you are not an alternative
At all.

'Tis odd this single stress on male –
The island is a reversal, not a reflection:
For 'tis women who are responsible for the young,
'Tis they who manage their education,
Their care and survival – not men.
This disregard of what is true
Can only issue from a mind depriv'd
And clouded over by sickness –
I fear 'tis envy of the womb:

Bereft of female affect, denied female influence,
I am totally fashioned, created by man –
'Tis a dream perchance of many a small boy
Playing with his penis one day

And crying out the next that he has no breasts.
(Yet 'tis not so simple: this jealousy
Of the ultimate power, the power of creation,
Raises the woman to great importance
And yet at the same time there seems to be
A preoccupation with self that
Excludes the woman to insignificance.)

Forsooth, 'tis a dream indeed
For I am not a vessel to be filled with your desires;
That you think me so is plain:
Ferdinand, it is clear you are interested
Only in my ability to reproduce,
For only if a virgin would you make me queen.
(Queer logic this – if it's progeny you want,
Better to choose one proven to be fertile
Than one untried and perhaps unable.)
You are no better than Caliban
Who in arrogance sought to people the isle
With copies of himself, and Stephano
The would-be king desiring also to propagate.
Father, you too are of the same,
For when giving, selling me to Ferdinand

You paraded as my greatest value
My virgin-knot.
Moreover, not only into my body but into my soul too
Would you thrust your desires:
Seeking purity and goodness but failing to attain
These qualities yourself, you hoist them upon me;
Aghast at the pain and responsibility of knowledge,
You would have me remain ignorant;

And guilty with experience, you declare me innocent;
Despising your own ugliness, you demand beauty in me;
And humiliated by the ravages of time passing,
You wish me to be forever young.

But I am not a ship at sea
To be directed by your hand at the helm:
I have my own course,
And will not be what you wanted to be
And could not become.

'Tis said *The Tempest* is a fitting summation
Of all the rest; if that be true
Then by rule of logic, all the rest

Is unrealistic and unbalanced:
For there are two sexes in the world,
Of equal representation in quality and quantity.
'Tis said I am the ultimate conception of Woman:
Young, beautiful, innocent, pure –
Is this what you want?

Then 'tis no flesh and blood you want,
For flesh ages as the years pass;
And it is not always, not often, beautiful.
And 'tis not mind, heart, and soul you want,
For the mind thinks, the heart feels,
And the soul moves by its own stars.
What you seem to want is something insubstantial,

Something of the air perchance.
Alas, look again, for I am a person

And not such stuff as dreams are made on.

THE END

Notes and References

DESDEMONA (*Othello*):

Othello chooses Cassio to be his lieutenant instead of Iago. This makes Iago angry, so he begins to suggest to Othello that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful to him, with Cassio – who is a friend to both Othello and Desdemona. Iago also asks his own wife, Emilia, to steal a certain handkerchief from Desdemona (one given to her by Othello); Desdemona drops the handkerchief one day, Emilia picks it up, and gives it to Iago. After a few other lies, Iago shows the handkerchief to Othello, telling him that he saw Cassio wipe his head with it. Othello becomes increasingly harsh toward Desdemona, and then begins to strike her; a bit later, convinced of her infidelity and refusing to believe her insistence to the contrary, he kills her. Emilia then tells Othello the truth about the handkerchief; seeing that Othello believes her, Iago kills her.

Hermione (*The Winter's Tale*) is another victim of jealousy and suspicion: her newborn baby is taken from her to be killed (because her husband refuses to raise someone else's child) and she is imprisoned for treason and incontinence.

Imogen (*Cymbeline*) was the subject of a wager made by her husband (Posthumus) and a friend (Iachimo) – the bet was whether the latter could seduce Imogen (or whether she would prove faithful to the former). Posthumus said that if Iachimo won, they'd still be friends because then she'd not be worth fighting about. And it was Posthumus who proposed that if women were unfaithful, then all men were bastards (and for this reason, he resented needing women to procreate).

ISABELLA (*Measure for Measure*):

Angelo is a deputy left in charge while the Duke of Vienna goes on a journey (actually he stays, disguised as a friar). At once, Angelo closes the brothels and brings back a law whereby any man who impregnates a woman (who presumably is not his wife) is to be put to death. Claudio commits this offense (with his fiancée, Juliet). His sister, Isabella, about to become a nun, goes to plead for his life. She is told by Angelo that Claudio will be freed if she'll have sex with him (lose her virginity, lose her honour). She is appalled (and refuses), and tells Claudio, assuming he would rather die than have her go through with it.

(Unfortunately that's not how Claudio feels; Mariana – previously engaged to Angelo – pretends to be Isabella and 'meets' his terms; Angelo doesn't keep his end of the bargain and orders Claudio to be executed anyway, but another prisoner's head (already decapitated) is presented instead; the Duke 'returns'; Isabella tells him what has happened; Angelo says Isabella is mad, but the Duke has seen it all and sentences Angelo to death; Isabella now pleads for Angelo's life;

Angelo is pardoned and marries Mariana, Claudio marries Juliet, and the Duke asks Isabella to marry him.)

JULIET (Romeo and Juliet):

This is a love story between two young people (Romeo and Juliet) who belong to rival families (the Montagues and the Capulets). They meet at a masquerade party, and fall in love at first sight, before they know who the other is (i.e., to what family they belong). In the famous balcony scene ("Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" II:ii, l.33), Juliet pours out her longing for Romeo in to the night. Romeo, who has come to catch a glimpse of Juliet, or perhaps to pledge his love, or perhaps to 'steal a kiss', listens for a while, then makes his presence known. Delighted to discover a reciprocal intensity, they exchange passionate words and Juliet bids Romeo go ("Oh, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?/What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?" II:ii, l.125-126); he is to send word to her tomorrow if he intends marriage.

They are married by a friar, in secret, and arrange the night to consummate. The second balcony scene has Juliet eagerly waiting for Romeo's arrive ("Come, night, come, Romeo, come, thou day in night..." III:ii, l.17...). But complications arise: Romeo, a Montague, gets involved in a gang fight and accidentally kills Tybalt, a Capulet; he is therefore banished. Distraught, Romeo goes to the Friar, speaking of suicide as preferable to banishment and separation from Juliet. Encouraged by the Friar and Juliet's nurse (who arrives to find him and tell him how distraught Juliet is, waiting for a Romeo who will not, can not, show), Romeo goes to Juliet – they spend what's left of the night together, and Romeo leaves at dawn, as he must.

The Friar tries to reunite them, but the fake death of Juliet (brought on by a strong sleeping potion) is believed by Romeo (who didn't get the letter explaining otherwise); he kills himself, unable to live without Juliet; she awakens, sees Romeo dead, feels the same way, and commits suicide as well.

KATE (The Taming of the Shrew):

This play is often considered one of Shakespeare's comedies. In it, an elder sister, Kate, considered unattractive with a personality to match, is betrothed against her will to a man named Petruchio (who like the rest of Kate's suitors, wanted her father's money). Because custom demanded that an elder sister be married before a younger, this pleases many people – for Bianca, the younger, considered beautiful and gentle-tempered, has many suitors and has been waiting a long time to be able to marry one of them. (One of these is named Hortensio – when Bianca chooses Lucentio instead, he quickly changes his tune from adoration to insult.)

The dowry is paid, the ceremony is performed (after Kate is kept waiting and humiliated by a late and scruffily-dressed Petruchio), and Petruchio takes Kate away before any of the celebrations. Back at his house, Petruchio, determined to 'tame' Kate, treats her much like an animal: she is locked up, starved of food and sleep, and subjected to various emotional cruelties (for instance, the cap and gown incident cited in "Kate").

After a while (the battering scene described in "Kate", supposed to happen during this 'while', is pure conjecture), they visit her father. On the way Petruchio threatens to turn around and go back home every time she hesitates to obey or agree with him; she is acquiescent, no matter how ridiculous the command or comment. Once at the house, Petruchio proposes a wager to Lucentio and Hortensio (since married to Bianca and 'the widow', respectively): "Let's each one send unto his wife,/And he whose wife is most obedient/Shall win the wager which we shall propose" (V:ii, l.66-69). Petruchio wins, and Kate delivers a very subservient-sounding speech: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,/Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee" (V:ii, l.146-147); "I am ashamed that women are so simple/To offer war where they should kneel for peace,/Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,/When they are bound to serve, love, and obey" (V:ii, l.161-164).

Often forgotten about *The Taming of the Shrew* is the Induction which precedes Act I. In it, a joke is played on a drunkard (Sly) who has fallen asleep in an alehouse: a lord instructs the drunk to be taken to one of his chambers, "wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,/a most delicious banquet by his bed,/And brave attendants near him when he wakes" (Induction:i, l.38-40). When he awakens, the charade is maintained to such a length that a page dresses up as a woman and acts like the man's wife, "overjoyed to see her noble lord restored to health, who for this seven years hath esteemed him no better than a poor and loathsome beggar (Induction:i, l.120-123). He believes it, players appear, and he commands 'his' messenger to let them play "a kind of history" (Induction:ii, l.144). What they perform is *The Taming of the Shrew* – thus it is a play within a play.

Unfortunately, the version that is most popular omits the final scene in which Sly, again having drunk until he passed out, is carried back into the alehouse and left to come to; he does, finds himself no longer a lord, decides he must've been dreaming, and staggers home.

Of interest – long after this had been written, I read Charles Marowitz's *Shrew* - excellent!

LADY MACBETH (*MacBeth*):

Lady MacBeth and her husband plan to murder the King of Scotland (Duncan), believing that if he were dead, MacBeth would be crowned King. Lady MacBeth provides most of the will and the strategy, and MacBeth performs the act: their ambition is realized, MacBeth is named King.

Plagued by guilt, MacBeth begins to hallucinate; more murders are planned and executed in order to keep the throne and its lineage. Also guilt-ridden, Lady MacBeth begins to sleepwalk and eventually kills herself. (MacBeth is killed shortly after, and Malcolm, Duncan's son, is crowned King.)

MARINA (*Pericles*):

Marina, born at sea during a storm, is left by her father (her mother had died during the childbirth) with a woman, Dionyza, to be raised as one of her own. Dionyza, however, becomes jealous as Marina outshines her own daughter – so she plans to have Marina murdered. Her plan is interrupted by pirates who capture Marina, try unsuccessfully to seduce her, then sell her to a brothel.

The Bawd (the woman in charge of the brothel) is pleased to have Marina, because her other three "with continual action are even as good as rotten" (IV:ii, 1.8-9). She has her cried in the marketplace for her virginity – "He that will give most shall have her first" (IV:ii, 1.63-64) – and she instructs her to 'do it' with fear and tears because then out of pity the customer would pay more. However, much to the Bawd's anger, Marina talks with her customers, and prays: not only do they leave without getting what they came for, they don't come back – reformed from 'rutting' forever. Eventually the mayor, who frequents the brothel in disguise, comes for "a dozen of virginities" (IV:vi, 1.22) "that a man may deal withal, and defy the surgeon" (IV:vi, 1.28-29) – it was believed that intercourse with a virgin would cure syphilis; Marina speaks with him, exposing his hypocrisy, and he too goes away, 'unserved'. Obviously displeased, the Bawd encourages her servant to rape Marina, assuming that that would successfully initiate her into service; Marina offers to make just as much money for them by singing, weaving, sewing, and dancing – and she is thus 'saved'.

MIRANDA (*The Tempest*):

Said to be a summation of Shakespeare's work (it is the last comedy he wrote), *The Tempest* tells the story of Prospero (a Duke) and his daughter, Miranda, living in exile on an island. Caliban, "a freckled whelp hag-born – not honoured with a human shape" (I:ii, 1.283-284), is the only other 'person' on the island (there is also Ariel, but he is a magical spirit); and he has attempted, at least once, to rape Miranda and thus 'people the isle with Calibans' (I:ii, 1.350-351).

Prospero commands a passing ship to wreck (he can do this), and all of its passengers survive, cast upon the shores of the island: Alonso and Sebastian (King of Naples and his brother), Ferdinand (the King's son and therefore a prince), Antonio (Prospero's brother, unjustly Duke of Milan), Stephano (a drunken butler, who once on the island and hearing about Miranda from Caliban, plans to take over by killing Prospero and making Miranda queen), and a few others.

Miranda and Ferdinand see each other and fall in love (Miranda has been on the island since she was a baby, so this is the first man she's seen besides her father). Since she is a virgin ("Oh, if a virgin...I'll make you Queen of Naples" I:ii, l.448), they are engaged ("Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition, worthily purchased, take my daughter. But if thou dost break her virgin knot before all sanctimonious ceremonies may with full and holy rite be ministered..." IV:i, l.13-17); Ferdinand promises to be honourable, as he hopes "for quiet days, fair issue, and long life" (IV:i, l.24).

OPHELIA (*Hamlet*):

At the opening of the play, Ophelia and Hamlet are romantically interested in each other. Ophelia's brother, Laertes, and her father, Polonius (also counsel to the King and Queen, Hamlet's new step-father and mother) discourage her, giving various reasons (the ones I discuss in "Ophelia"); her father orders her not to speak or write to Hamlet again – she vows to obey. In the meantime, Hamlet's dead father appears to him and tells him that Claudius, the new step-father and King, had killed him – Hamlet swears to avenge.

Shortly after, Hamlet bursts into Ophelia's room, rather crazed; under oath to her father, she says/does nothing. Later, also acting in accordance with her father's wishes, she returns Hamlet's letters. Later still, at the performance of a play, *The Mousetrap*, written to expose Claudius, Hamlet chooses to sit near Ophelia – they 'talk'.

The play does indeed expose Claudius, Hamlet confronts his mother, the Queen, and then kills Polonius by mistake. Claudius quickly sends Hamlet to England, to be murdered on the way. (Thus the *second* time Hamlet comes to Ophelia in her room, which I refer to in "Ophelia", is a complete fabrication. But the lines I have her speak after that scene are from the play – they are the nonsense songs referred to below.)

After a few appearances of questionable sanity (she sings nonsense songs and scatters flowers), Ophelia is found floating in the river, believed to have committed suicide. This view is voiced by clowns (V:i, l.1-3); the Queen, however, describes the death (IV:vii, l.166-183) as I have.

(The word 'nunnery' can also mean a brothel. A kirtle is an outer skirt; a farthingale is a large roll of padding worn to make the kirtle stand out. The flowers have symbolic significance: fennel – flattery, columbine – cuckoldry, violets – unfaithfulness, daisies – dissembly, rue – sorrow and repentance, rosemary – remembrance, dogrose (common wildrose) – pleasure mixed with pain, and also believed by the ancient greeks to cure the bite of mad dogs.)

PORTIA (*The Merchant of Venice*):

Portia's father, now deceased, left explicit instructions in his will regarding her marriage. Only a suitor who passed the test of choosing 'correctly' among three caskets (of gold, silver, and lead) was to be accepted by Portia as her husband. Fortunately, the ones Portia would reject fail the test (my list is fairly true to Shakespeare's), and the one she would choose, Bassanio, succeeds.

However, before the test and marriage, Bassanio had asked a friend of his, Antonio, to sign a loan for him, from Shylock – Antonio's own flesh would be collateral (the loan was needed to woo and impress Portia, who, Bassanio was well aware, was "richly left" – I:ii, l.161). Antonio generously agrees to do so, but unfortunately all of his vessels are shipwrecked and he is unable to repay the loan – Shylock demands his flesh. Portia (now wife of Bassanio) offers to pay the loan, but Shylock remains firm in his claim. Bassanio leaves Portia to see what he can do for Antonio.

Believing Antonio to be as good a man as Bassanio (for they are friends), Portia disguises herself as a lawyer and appears at the court to plead for Antonio. Her lady, Nerissa (recently married to Gratiano, Bassanio's man) accompanies her, disguised as a clerk. The trial proceeds, Portia speaking for Bassanio's friend (in spite of Bassanio's claim that he would give up his wife to save Antonio – IV:i, l.282-287), and delivering the famous speech about mercy ("The quality of mercy is not strained..." – IV:i, l.184...). The Duke judges in Antonio's favour. Portia begins to leave, but Bassanio insists the lawyer name some payment. She names the wedding ring he wears (given to him by her with the words "when you part from, lose, or give away, let it presage the ruin of your love" – III:ii, l.174-175); he is reluctant, but upon Antonio's pleading ("Let his deservings and my love withal, be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" – IV:i, l.450-451), he gives it. Nerissa, as clerk, also acquires the ring she gave to Gratiano. They part.

When all have returned, Portia presents the ring to Bassanio, telling him that she obtained it when she slept with the lawyer. Nerissa claims to have slept with the clerk, and she too presents her ring. For a moment, there is concern about being cuckolded, but Portia quickly tells the whole story, thus relieving the men.

Viola (*Twelfth Night*) and Rosalind (*As you Like It*) are two other characters who temporarily disguise themselves as men in order to more freely, more effectively, interact in the world.

REGAN (*King Lear*):

Nearing death, King Lear calls his three daughters to him, intending to divide his land among them, the largest portion to go to the one who loves him the most. Goneril (the eldest) and Regan (the middle) speak as expected: "I love you more than words can wield" (I:i, 1.56), "I profess myself an enemy to all other joys..." (I:i, 1.74-75); but the words of Cordelia (the youngest) are disappointing: "I love your Majesty according to my bond, nor more nor less" (I:i, 1.125) – and her 'bland' response angers him so much that he disinherits her altogether, much to the surprise of all in attendance. (As in other cases, there is more to the play, but as it's irrelevant to the soliloquy, it is omitted from the synopsis.)

The phrase "one in every six" refers to the number of women incestuously assaulted.

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