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“Fright the ladies out of their wits”: Gendered passion and the English stage

“Fright the ladies out of their wits”: passion et genre sur la scène anglaise

Yan Brailowsky

- 1 In this paper, I would like to discuss the issue of female spectatorship from within Shakespeare’s plays as performed during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, i.e. a period for which we have scant evidence about female spectatorship in the public theatres, and in which all roles were performed by male actors. As I will try to show, several plays address the issue of female spectatorship, providing comedic and tragic illustrations of how women reacted to theatrical performances, and how playwrights seemed to address the needs of female spectators. I will argue that such needs are highly diverse, subject to contrasted interpretations, as gendered reception is problematized in these plays, challenging popular preconceptions on “hyper-emotive” women and Stoic men. More often than not, it is not the “ladies” but men who are frightened “out of their wits”.

Disclaimer

- 2 When the “rude mechanicals” rehearse the “interlude” (MND 1.2.5)¹ they are to perform for Theseus’s wedding in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, they are prompt to imagine how their audience will react, and what their audience will appreciate, to determine the best way to act:

BOTTOM Let me play the lion too. I will roar that I will do any man’s heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the Duke say, “Let him roar again! Let him roar again!”

QUINCE If you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL That would hang us, every mother’s son.

BOTTOM I grant you, friends, if that you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us. But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove. (MND 1.2.58-68)

3 The scene reveals the characters' anxiety *vis-à-vis* audience expectations – or, at any rate, the audience expected in a court performance, which differed from that in a public theatre which would have included scores of plebeians, such as themselves, standing in the pit. In the case of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the audience the mechanicals expect is further divided into two groups along gendered lines:² "the Duke", on the one hand, the performance's powerful patron, and "the Duchess and the ladies", on the other, his honorable guests. These constitute two audiences with conflicting expectations or with a different "reception pact", or "contract". One part of the audience wants to please, the other to be pleased, in a contract of reciprocity meant, *in fine*, to celebrate the male ruler who has ordered the festivities to celebrate his marriage to the Amazon queen, Hippolyta. The contract, however, seems to be fatally flawed from the start. After some prodding, even Bottom agrees that if the Duke would delight in hearing him "roar again", as befits a victorious soldier who had conquered the Amazon queen whom he "wooed ... with [his] sword" (1.1.16), the same roaring would "fright the ladies out of their wits". This *faux pas* would counteract the Duke's express wish to offer his guests a pleasing entertainment, a "play / To ease the anguish of a torturing hour." (5.1.36-7)

4 The "rude mechanicals'" misgivings about performing before Theseus in Act 1 turn out to be all too justified. When Egeus (F) / Philostrate (Q1) lists the entertainments available in Act 5, Theseus brushes them aside, one by one, mockingly. Following the Duke's example, the Athenian lovers later imitate their ruler, deriding the efforts of the amateur players. Before he starts mocking the company of "rude mechanicals", Theseus initially promised to treat them with dignity, assuring his bride, Hippolyta, who leapt to their defense, that he would be "kinder":

THESEUS I will hear that play.
 For never anything can be amiss
 When simpleness and duty tender it.
 Go, bring them in: and take your places, ladies.
 HIPPOLYTA I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,
 And duty in his service perishing.
 THESEUS Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.
 HIPPOLYTA He says they can do nothing in this kind.
 THESEUS The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
 Our sport shall be to take what they mistake.
 And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
 Takes it in might, not merit. (5.1.81-92)

5 That Hippolyta should defend the hapless actors is telling: not only is she a woman, presumably "kinder" than the Duke's "o'ercharged ... sport", she is a Queen who was defeated before the play begins, and who may even have been paraded before Athens as a prisoner, and is now forced to wed her captor, Theseus, "With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling." (1.1.19) She, in short, is in a situation as perilous and potentially as humiliating as that of the actors risking the Duke's displeasure, a man who has "no more discretion but to hang [them]". The fact that the Duke and Duchess experience the situation in a contrasting manner is pointed at stylistically: Hippolyta uses litotes ("I love not") and hyperbole ("o'ercharged ... perishing") which suggest *desperately* voicing a *mutted* opposition, while Theseus resorts to polyptoton and antanaclasis ("kind

/ kinder", "take / mistake"), which shows that he acknowledges Hippolyta's views, but chooses to interpret the world differently, and jokingly.

To be or not to be

- 6 The life and death situation imagined by the "hard-handed men" (5.1.72) is not only figurative or exaggerated. Not unlike court fools who were licensed to mock but liable to be whipped,³ the success of actors determined the viability of their enterprise. In short: unhappy customers would have meant commercial, even literal death for the players. In show business, slow business means no money, and no money means death by starvation — a fact known to the brunt of Elizabethan actors whose names are now long-forgotten and who lived in and out of debtors' prison. In the public theatre, Paul Menzer notes, acting companies had to learn what their audiences wanted in order to "domesticate the crowd," offering shows which audiences would be attracted to so as to make sure they returned to the theatre, making a playacting company commercially viable.⁴
- 7 In this unforgiving industry, censorship and patronage played a big part in the success of a company, perhaps as much as talent and good fortune. This is a situation the "rude mechanicals" describe in stark terms: to obtain the Duke's patronage, they must censor *themselves*, willingly, downplaying the lion's roar. But if their portrayal of the lion was to be too muted, they also ran the risk of being censured for being bad actors. To avoid this other pitfall, the "rude mechanicals" resort to *captatio benevolentiae* through a series of prologues to explain their intentions to their audience, a common technique of paratextual commentary, here rendered comical by repetition. When Snug enters dressed as a Lion, he directly apostrophizes the ladies:

SNUG [*as Lion*] You ladies, you whose gentle hearts do fear
 The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
 May now, perchance, both quake and tremble here
 When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
 Then know that I as Snug the joiner am
 A lion fell, nor else no lion's dam.
 For if I should as lion come in strife
 Into this place, 'twere pity of my life. (5.1.214-221)
- 8 Snug is cast *against* type: albeit he is to play a fierce lion, as a "joiner", he will turn the "wildest rage" into the merest superficial fiction of a lion, i.e. wearing its skin, a "lion fell". This idea is compounded onomastically, as snugging meant "to lie or nestle closely or comfortably" (OED, v. 1a) – a verb one readily associates rather with a cat than with a wild beast such as a lion. Snug's *shadow* of a lion is therefore potentially as monstrous as the "smallest monstrous mouse" he believes can also terrify the "ladies' ... gentle hearts". Like Bottom, who was "translated" (3.1.105) into an ass, and who had promised to join a fierce lion with a "sucking dove", Snug will turn the king of the jungle into a "monstrous mouse" as he addresses the ladies pleading "pity [for his] life".
- 9 In both Acts 1 and 5, the "rude mechanicals" are particularly obsessed with the reception of the play by the ladies, and in both instances, they employ the familiar trope of feminine weakness – women are liable to be terrified by the fictional representation of a lion and become a spectacle of horror themselves lest they should be frightened "out of their wits", potentially undercutting the mechanicals' efforts at

playacting. In the words of Dymphna Callaghan, the ladies' "hypersensibility" not only "remove them from the privileged category of upper-class male response", i.e. the manly response of men who would be not only unmoved but positively delighted to see a roaring lion onstage,

[these] women of some social standing, far from being merely passive consumers of events portrayed before them, *produce* affect to such an excessive extent that they themselves become spectacles to rival the plays.⁵

- 10 "Frailty, thy name is woman" (Ham 1.2.146), Hamlet famously stated. Here, such frailty could provoke dramatic overreactions, something even Hamlet's mother Gertrude remarks during a different sort of court performance, that of the *Mousetrap*, when she says of the Player Queen: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (3.2.214). The insistence on women's reception and their potential involvement in the performance underscore the role ladies played in the social context of a court performance (as in the case of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but also in *Hamlet*), and the actual *terror* their presence in the audience could provoke for the (male) players on stage or for the male audience. Men, as well as women, could thus be frightened "out of their wits".

"Headstrong women"

- 11 Female spectatorship in Elizabethan theatres has long been attested, and often criticized. As noted by Jean Howard, the polemicist Stephen Gosson even dedicated his concluding epistle of his *Schoole of Abuse* (1579), a violent tract against theatre, to "the Gentlewomen, Citizens of London". In addition to repeating the well-worn arguments against theatre where women risked sullyng their reputations by mingling with whores and strangers,⁶ Howard suggests "Gosson's prescriptive rhetoric may be a response, not only to a fear *for* woman, but also to a fear *of* woman" in theatres, a marginal space in Elizabethan London, not unlike the marginal space reserved for women in a patriarchal culture.⁷
- 12 If Snug believed the "smallest monstrous mouse" could terrify ladies, clearly it could also terrify men. This is portrayed in *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which Katherine embodies exactly such a "monstrous mouse", i.e. a "shrew", a veritable "fiend of hell" (Shrew 1.1.88) who, like Snug's lion, must be "tamed" to become socially acceptable. After a quick introduction, Petruccio thus proceeds to "tame" Katherine. At the end of the play, he makes a wager to determine who has "the veriest shrew of all" (5.2.64): Katherine, the Widow, or Katherine's sister Bianca. Surprisingly, it is Katherine who berates the latter two in a lengthy, ornate speech defending patriarchy by the book, calling a husband "thy lord, thy king, thy governor" (5.1.138) along with many similar formulae.
- 13 The inordinate length and calculated style of the speech suggest it is a *mise en abyme*, a performance within a performance, more specifically, a performance of acceptable femininity for the audience in the theater *and* onstage, particularly the two other female characters, who although initially pliant in the play, reveal themselves to be "headstrong women" (5.1.130), hence, shameful (Katherine erupts, saying it "Confounds thy fame", 140; and they ought to be "ashamed", 161), i.e. worthy of hiding, rather than showing off.⁸ Coming as the conclusion of a play in which Katherine valiantly fought with Petruccio scene after scene, her speech is meant to shock, as it does, the audience onstage and off, who can hardly believe her transformation – the

characters speak repeatedly of "wonder" (106-7, 189), just as Bottom's transformation was a "rare vision" and a "dream" (MND 4.1.202). But Katherine's transformation is also a collective endeavor, as her change generates a process of self-reflection which affects the audience at large. According to Lynda Boose,

[...] it is a textual moment in which, in Althusserian terms, the play quite overtly "interpellates," or hails, its women viewers into an imaginary relationship with the ideology of the discourse being played out onstage by their counterparts.⁹

14 Katherine's speech is also a performance within a performance in another sense: her speech must be considered as a play-within-the-play-within-the-play, i.e. as the concluding performance of "a pleasant comedy" (Shrew, Ind. 2.125) which was announced in the Induction and which announced its comedic nature by foregrounding the performance of gender. In the play's opening scene, Sly, a Drunkard, was to be presented with a "boy [who] will well usurp the grace, / Voice, gate, and action of a gentlewoman" (Ind. 1.127-8) and pretend to be his "wife", while players are called upon to perform a play for them – a *mise en abyme* of the theatrical convention obtaining at the time on the English stage, in which female roles were played by male actors, while playgoers in the public theatre watched on more or less soberly.

15 It is the play performed for Sly (and for us) which will show characters such as Petruccio use "extravagant language (and later excesses) [...] framed as deliberative performances".¹⁰ In other words, Katherine's performance of a woman for other women in *The Taming of the Shrew* is only different in quality, but not in essence, from the performance of womanhood by Flute playing Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The former is performed by a boy playing a gentlewoman representing a figure of femininity before an audience of one, a drunkard whom other characters pretend to treat like an English lord, while the latter is an epic figure of femininity (Thisbe) performed by a craftsman for characters who are presented as Athenian lords. In both cases, these performances-within-the-play have a second, larger audience: the paying spectators in the theater. Both cases are also, *in fine*, tongue-in-cheek representations of feminine behavior and feminine reception, neither of which can be taken at face value. As suggested by other plays in the period, the patriarchal norm and the depiction of female subservience was not a truth universally acknowledged: plays which showed shrews taming their husbands could be even more popular than Shakespeare's comedy. As Sarah Werner recalls:

The possibility that Renaissance viewers preferred [John] Fletcher's inversion of Shakespeare's taming story [in *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*, c. 1611] suggests that early modern attitudes towards *Shrew* were not as monolithic as some of the play's later readers would like to believe.¹¹

Nothing

16 The example of two Jacobean tragedies suggests there was more to female characters than the clichéd image of "hypersensibility" of "frightened ladies", or with the stock examples of extreme shrewishness or abject subservience portrayed in the plays I have mentioned. Audiences, and no doubt female audience-members, also appreciated female characters who attempted to assert their agency, putting the patriarchal norm to the test.

17 One example is afforded by contrasting Lear's three daughters in Act 1 of Shakespeare's tragedy: the loquacious Regan and Goneril, Lear's elder daughters, who as more

experienced courtiers master "the topic of inexpressibility"¹² expected in epideictic speeches effectively to laud their father according to his request, and Cordelia, Lear's youngest child, whose refusal to deploy any rhetorical skills suggests *she* is not an actor, nor a courtier – which, in the context of this play, seem to be the same thing.

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less. (KL 1.2.89-91)¹³

- 18 Her role, she claims, was assigned at birth: she is Lear's daughter, whose love is determined by her natural "bond, no more nor less". She "cannot heave her heart into her mouth", as actors do to depict heightened emotion, expressed here aurally with the recurring glottal sound [h] imitating a heaving, unhappy heart. Hers is a refusal to "mouth" words of praise, "that glib and oily art / To speak and purpose not" (222-223). By refusing to partake in a ritual by which Lear meant to assert his waning power, she refuses to be cast in a play-within-the-play performing the role of the court flatterer. Unable to act, as silent as an actress who has lost her lines, she is banished from the court, which here refers both to the royal entourage and the physical space in which the play is being performed.
- 19 The self-referential nature of Cordelia's anti-demonstrative behavior, one which avoids feminine "hysterics" and resorts to the Stoic tradition which Shakespeare had also visited with characters such as Portia or Calphurnia in *Julius Caesar*, can also be found in other tragedies of the Jacobean era.¹⁴ In John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), the titular character claims that she does not want to play the part of the widow, and decides to marry against the wishes of her two brothers. By hiding her marriage from her family for several acts, ironically, she actually plays the part she had publicly refused to act by pretending to still be a widow. Once the lie is exposed, her brother Ferdinand begins to punish his sister. At first, he literally "discovers" (a fake image of) her husband's corpse alongside that of her slaughtered son, as noted in an explicit stage direction (DM 4.1.54SD).¹⁵ Moments later, no longer willing to play along, the Duchess asks that the play come to an end, addressing the following words to the play's commentator-in-chief, Bosola:
- [...] Who must dispatch me?
I account this world a tedious theatre,
For I do play a part in 't 'gainst my will. (4.1.80-2)
- 20 These lines could have been uttered by Snug the joiner, by Hippolyta, by Katherine, or by Cordelia – as if the performance of womanhood was always a part one was reluctant to play.
- 21 By refusing to play along, the Duchess is, in the words of her brother Ferdinand, "plagued in art" (109). One scene later, Bosola informs her that her "brother hath intended [her] some sport [...] With several sorts of madmen" (4.2.37, 40). In what appears to be another instance of a play-within-the-play, up to eight madmen appear, speak and dance "with music answerable thereunto" (4.2.113SD), as noted in another stage direction. Throughout the scene, rather than succumbing to the madness exhibited onstage, the Duchess remains impassible. When Bosola returns in disguise to have her strangled, she stoically welcomes her death, contributing to convincing Bosola to avenge her *postmortem*.
- 22 Cordelia and the Duchess are thus examples of heroic fortitude which contrast with Lear and Ferdinand, two Alpha males who become mad, acting out extravagantly for

the remainder of each play, proving that "hypersensibility" is not a gendered construct.

- 23 These examples do not suggest that the generic difference between comedies and tragedies map different levels of feminine emotivity. There are countless examples of supposedly "hysterical" women in tragedies, and of "hypersensitive" men in comedies. What the examples studied here show is that the performance of gender works in a specular fashion: the plays offered a self-reflective mirror showing what female spectators experienced in the theater, and what they expected, but the plays also offered a *deformed* mirror, providing a spectacular version of this experience of spectatorship, not only because of the excessive nature of the spectacle portrayed, but also because it was all a fiction, as Juliet Dusinberre, wittily noted:

But what of the woman? Well, we don't need to mention her because women are always fools. And in any case there weren't any women on Shakespeare's stage. Ay, there's the rub. Were they there or not? Of course, physically they were not there. But to assert that is, in my view, to say nothing. Because none of the shadows on Shakespeare's stage are there. There are no kings, queens, murderers, monsters, fairies, politicians, wise counselors, or even fools. There are only actors.¹⁶

- 24 Dusinberre then makes a persuasive argument for the *bad* acting of some of the leading female characters who cross-dress in Shakespeare's comedies, notably Rosalind in *As You Like It*. Where we now expect famous, capable actresses in this role, Dusinberre argues that the cross-dressing suggested the original actors could be more believable as themselves, i.e. boys visibly pretending to play women, rather than the more convincing boy actors who could play female characters such as Celia or Phoebe with a straight face. In other words, the reception of these plays by female spectators may well have been determined more by the quality of the acting and the material that was staged, than by any cultural and historical considerations.
- 25 Then again, it is difficult to pry oneself away from such historical considerations. Katherine's submissiveness in *The Shrew* is a case in point. After the Restoration, and particularly in the nineteenth century, efforts to produce "realistic" Shakespeare plays meant female roles were now played by actresses. This meant that certain scenes formerly performed by men perhaps no longer worked well with women taking up the part. The outlawing of same-sex casting in 1660 necessarily affected the performance of gender; this in turn put pressure on actors and directors to make the playtext more amenable to actresses, and women in general. In her chapter on "The Ladies' Shakespeare", Juliet Fleming thus recalls one early twentieth-century attempt to offer an edition of Shakespeare's works *designed to comfort* female readers, even presenting Katherine in a positive, proto-feminist light through a cunning use of editorial stage directions which sought to explain what seemed otherwise inexplicable. Such interventions are now often derided or criticized for being politically motivated, and more or less ham-fisted. For Fleming,
- If woman-centered readings are often made to function as the scapegoat for the tendency to read Shakespeare's plays as political commentaries on present moments, that is in part because the articulation of women's concerns is only too readily understood as the special pleading of a "minority" interest.¹⁷
- 26 The "minority" in question were women, however, hardly a minority from a demographic viewpoint, albeit legally and culturally still a minority until well into the twentieth century. In Elizabethan and Jacobean professional theatrical practice, women were institutionally negated. To see women on stage was a scandal, one which

explained the success of a play such as *The Roaring Girl* (1611) by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, which was inspired by Mary Frith who once actually performed onstage and was arrested for it.¹⁸ The minority status of women – including from a legal standpoint, as married women were under the coverture of their husbands – may also explain the relative paucity of information regarding female spectators. It is as if female spectators did not *really* count. Or as if Theseus's efforts to acknowledge and please the female spectators to his wedding were just a courtly *act*, a lame performance as artificial and shallow as that of the "rude mechanicals", royal posturing the aim of which was to reassert his paternal authority and effectively efface women's agency, presence, and significance. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as in most plays of this era, female spectatorship is – at best – constructed or reconstructed. In the words of Andrew Gurr,

Women playgoers provide the hardest evidence of the social composition of Shakespearean playgoers. [...] [L]ittle of any assertion beyond the bare fact that women were present can be trusted. Hardly any statement on such an emotive question as the morals of women playgoers tells as much about audiences as it does about the man making the statement.¹⁹

- 27 Given this situation, what do my previous remarks on female spectatorship say about me? Or about us? Certainly, contemporary concerns and performances of the plays I examined can foreground some of the issues mentioned. All-male casts of *The Shrew*, for instance, can bring to light the almost unbearable violence through which Kate is effectively 'tamed';²⁰ a wistful and resentful look from Hippolyta can be caught on camera in a film adaptation's close-up shot when Theseus jokingly speaks about love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*;²¹ gender-aware audiences and performers can choose to recognize, reject or challenge gendered stereotypes. Historically, however, there was no such degree of awareness. Which begs the question: if Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights attempted to write – at least partly – *for* the "ladies", and to perform *for* them, what happened when the plays started to be performed *by* the ladies after the Restoration? And, if one pursues this line of reasoning, what happens in the twenty-first century, when performers openly refuse to conform to binary gender identities, confusing or even shocking more conservative or traditionalist audience members who cry foul at such "a-historical" approaches? This is ground partly covered in this issue by other contributors who examine the complex afterlives of female spectatorship.²²

NOTES

1. All quotes from William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt *et al.* (eds), 3rd ed., New York / London, W. W. Norton, 2016. When needed, I will distinguish the Folio (F) from the First Quarto (Q1) version of the play.

2. In her comments on the line "take your places, ladies" (5.1.84), Dympna Callaghan notes that "The lines incorporate a stage direction [...] that may even suggest that this small audience [...] is gender segregated." "What is an audience?" in *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*, London & New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 146.

3. In *King Lear*, the Fool complains: "They'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipped for lying, and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace." (KL 1.4.152-4)
4. Paul Menzer, "Crowd control" in Jennifer A. Low and Nova Myhill (eds), *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558-1642*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 19-36.
5. Callaghan, "What is an audience?," art. cit., p. 142.
6. Jean Marsden discusses this fact in this issue when she speaks of the fashion of vizarded women in the audience, whose use of a mask allowed them to witness a performance *incognito*.
7. Jean E. Howard, "Women as Spectators, Spectacles, and Paying Customers", in David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (eds), *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, London and New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 72.
8. On gender as performance, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, Routledge, 1990.
9. Lynda E. Boose, "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 2 (42), 1991, p. 180; quoted by Sarah Werner, "The Taming of the Shrew: A case study in performance criticism", in *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 76.
10. Kate Aughterson and Ailsa Grant Ferguson, *Shakespeare and Gender: Sex and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Drama*, London, The Arden Shakespeare, 2020, p. 78.
11. Werner, "Shrew: A case study," art. cit., p. 72.
12. Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000, p. 185.
13. I am quoting from the Folio version, unless noted otherwise.
14. In fact, in *King Lear*, it is Lear who is affected by "hysterica passio" (KL 2.2.237). See also Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 103-129.
15. All quotations from John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, Leah S. Marcus (ed.), London, Bloomsbury, 2009.
16. Juliet Dusinberre, "Women and Boys Playing Shakespeare", in Dympna Callaghan (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Malden, Mass., John Wiley & Sons, 2001, p. 269.
17. Juliet Fleming, "The Ladies' Shakespeare", in Dympna Callaghan (ed.), *Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Malden, Mass., John Wiley & Sons, 2001, p. 27.
18. Yan Brailowsky, "Mulier monstrosa, ou la femme scandale", François Lecerle and Clotilde Thouret (eds), *Théâtre et scandale (II): scandales d'hier, scandales d'aujourd'hui, Fabula / Les colloques*, 2020, <https://www.fabula.org:443/colloques/document6661.php>.
19. Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 57-58; quoted by Callaghan, "What is an audience?," art. cit., p. 161.
20. Farah Karim-Cooper, "Re-creating Katherine: *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare's Globe", in Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen Orlin and Virginia Mason Vaughan (eds), *Women Making Shakespeare*, London; New York, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2013, p. 305; on other contemporary performances, see Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 86-119.
21. Michael Hoffman, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, s.l., Fox Searchlight Pictures, New Regency Productions, Taurus Film, 1999 (Sophie Marceau, a Frenchwoman, i.e. a foreign actress, played Hippolyta to David Strathairn's Theseus).
22. See Line Cottagnies' essay on the pastoral, or Rebecca Yearling's discussion of a late Caroline play, among others.

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article aborde la question des spectatrices à partir de pièces de Shakespeare telles qu'elles ont été jouées de son vivant. Plusieurs pièces, comme *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*, *Hamlet* ou *Le Roi Lear*, illustrent de manière comique ou tragique la façon dont les femmes réagissent aux représentations théâtrales et comment les dramaturges semblent répondre aux attentes de celles-ci. L'interprétation de la manière dont les spectatrices pouvaient réagir est compliquée par le manque de témoignages de spectatrices réelles de l'époque, ce qui pose le problème de la façon dont cette présence et ces émotions sexuées pouvaient être interprétées par les publics élisabéthains et jacobéens. Cet article montre que les constructions sexuées de spectateurs et spectatrices suivaient rarement les normes établies, et que les hommes étaient aussi susceptibles que les femmes d'être effrayés « à en perdre tous leurs moyens ». Les pièces sont aussi fictives que les différences de genre entre spectateurs féminins et masculins.

This essay discusses female spectatorship from within Shakespeare's plays as performed in his lifetime. Several plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet* or *King Lear* address the issue of female spectatorship, providing comedic and tragic illustrations of how women reacted to theatrical performances, and how playwrights seemed to address the needs of female spectators. Interpretation of female spectatorship is rendered difficult by the scant evidence pertaining to actual women spectators at the time, pointing to the problem of interpreting how such spectatorship and gendered emotions could be performed and received by Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. The essay shows that gendered constructs of spectatorship rarely followed accepted norms, and that men were as likely as women to be frightened "out of their wits". The plays are as fictional as the gendered differences between female and male spectators.

INDEX

Mots-clés : spectateurs, genre, femmes, Shakespeare William, *Songe d'une nuit d'été* (Le), *Hamlet*, *Roi Lear* (Le)

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