

A theatrical stage set for the play 'Cymbeline'. The set features a large, dark wooden structure with a forest backdrop. The backdrop is illuminated with a blue and green light, creating a night forest scene. The stage is a wooden platform in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is dark and atmospheric.

# Cymbeline

2021 AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATRE STUDY GUIDE

# Cymbeline

By William Shakespeare

Adapted by Marti Lyons & Sara Becker

From an original adaptation by Henry Woronicz

Welcome to APT's Study Guide, created to accompany Student Matinee performances of William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, adapted by Marti Lyons and Sara Becker from an original adaptation by Henry Woronicz. Use it however you see fit - before or after the performance, or any time in between.

## Multi Media

A selection of videos and podcasts featuring *Cymbeline* artists and experts.

Multi Media

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# Many Thanks!

## **Cymbeline Artistic Staff**

Director: Marti Lyons

Voice & Text Coach: Sara Becker

Costume Design: Raquel Adorno

Scenic Design: Takeshi Kata

Co-Lighting Design: Jason Lynch

Co-Lighting Design: Keith Parham

Co-Lighting Design: Michael A. Peterson

Sound Design & Original Music: Mikhail Fiksel

Fight Director: Jeb Burris

Choreographer: Mollye Maxner

Stage Manager: Evelyn Matten

# Who's Who in Cymbeline



**Imogen (Melisa Pereyra)**  
King Cymbeline's daughter. She marries Posthumus, though her stepmother has promised her to her own son, Cloten. When Posthumus is tricked into questioning her fidelity and plots her murder, she disguises herself as a boy called Fidele.



**Pisanio (Elizabeth Ledo)**  
Posthumus' servant, he refuses to obey his master's order to murder Imogen, and instead leads her to a refuge in the woods.



**The Queen (Gina Daniels)**  
Cymbeline's second wife, she wants her son Cloten to marry Imogen with plans to make him king. When that doesn't work, she plots to poison Imogen.



**Cymbeline (Sarah Day)**  
A pre-Christian King of Britain, he is manipulated by his second wife, and rebels against Rome, causing a conflict between the countries.



**Cloten (Colleen Madden)**  
The oafish and vulgar son of the Queen from an earlier marriage, he is rebuffed by Imogen and decides to take revenge.



**Posthumus Leonatus (Colleen Madden)**  
Cymbeline's adopted son, he is banished for marrying Imogen; when Iachimo falsely claims to have seduced Imogen, Posthumus orders her murder.



**Belarius (Gina Daniels)**  
Unfairly banished from Cymbeline's court 20 years earlier, he retaliated by abducting the king's infant son, Belarius, who he raised as his own child.



**Guidarius (Alys Dickerson)**  
The king's son, abducted as a child by Belarius. He finds he has an instant connection with "Fidele," though he doesn't understand why.



**Cornelius (Lisa Tejero)**  
A physician in King Cymbeline's court, he replaces the poison the Queen requests with a sleeping potion that gives the illusion of death.



**Iachimo (Tracy Michelle Arnold)**  
An Italian "gentleman," he bets Posthumus that he can seduce Imogen. But when Imogen rejects him, he tricks Posthumus into believing that he was successful by presenting him with Imogen's bracelet.

## Who's Who in Cymbeline



Caius Lucius (Lisa Tejero)  
A Roman general and friend of Cymbeline, he is reluctant to start a war, lamenting the fact that he must inform the Emperor of Cymbeline's decision not to pay the tribute owed to Rome.



Jupiter (Melisa Pereyra)  
Jupiter visits Posthumus in a dream, leaving a tablet with a prophecy inscribed on it for Posthumus to find.



Left: A Frenchman played by Alys Dickerson: argues France's respective worth with Iachimo (far right - more on him below).

Center: Philario played by Sarah Day: A friend of Posthumus whom he visits in Rome.

# Cymbeline Synopsis



Above: Posthumus, Philario, a Frenchman and Iachimo in a tense discussion about Imogen's faithfulness

The cast relates King Cymbeline's family history, and the disappearance of his son 20 years before. During this preamble, the audience discovers that Posthumus Leonatus has secretly wed Cymbeline's daughter Imogen, and has been banished because he is not thought worthy to be her husband. The Queen, Imogen's stepmother, professes to help them, but actually works to ensure Posthumus' removal from court. The Queen wishes for her son, Cloten, to marry Imogen and become King. Cloten, a laughing-stock among the lords, attempts to woo Imogen but she rejects him. The Queen asks a doctor, Cornelius, for a poison, intending to kill Imogen. She gives it to Pisanio to take to Imogen, telling him it is a rejuvenating cordial, and suggests that she should drink it if she feels ill. Unbeknownst to the Queen, the doctor distrusting her, has substituted a potion that instills only a harmless temporary death-like state.

Posthumus arrives in Rome, where he meets Iachimo, who challenges Posthumus' claim that Imogen is the most faithful woman in the world. They make a wager, Iachimo betting he can seduce Imogen.



Iachimo travels to Cymbeline's court to attempt to seduce Imogen.

When Iachimo arrives at Cymbeline's court, he presses his affection on Imogen, but she rejects him. He then explains that this was only a stratagem to confirm her reputed worthiness, and she forgives him. She agrees to give safe keeping to a large trunk of Iachimo's valuables that night. Iachimo hides inside the trunk, and while she is asleep he emerges

from it to note details of her room and her body, and steals her bracelet. Back in Rome, this evidence convinces Posthumus that Imogen has been unfaithful, and he gives Iachimo Imogen's ring, condemning her and all women.

Caius Lucius arrives at court from Rome demanding the British tribute, but leaves without success. Posthumus writes to his servant, Pisanio, telling him of Imogen's unfaithfulness, and that he must murder her. Imogen also receives a letter from Posthumus, telling her he will meet her in Wales—actually only providing Pisanio an opportunity to kill her. Imogen insists on going there.



Pisanio knows Posthumus has been misled, and that Imogen is innocent, so when they arrive in Wales he shows his master's letter to her. He convinces her to disguise herself as a man, and find service with Lucius, also now in Wales, so that she may be near Posthumus. He gives Imogen the Queen's potion, still thinking it to be a rejuvenating cordial. Pisanio returns to England, and Cloten forces from him Imogen's whereabouts; then, dressed in Posthumus' clothes, Cloten follows her to Wales.

In the Welsh mountains, Belarius sends Guiderius out hunting, reflecting on his true origin as son of Cymbeline, and on his own former position in

court, from where he stole the boy in revenge for his unjust banishment. Imogen gets lost, and takes refuge in their cave. Guiderius meets her, and immediately forms a strong attachment to her. She feels unwell, and while the men are out she takes Pisanio's potion, falling into a death-like sleep. Guiderius meets Cloten; they quarrel, fight, and Guiderius beheads Cloten, whom Belarius later recognizes.



They return to the cave, and find Imogen. Thinking her dead, they lay her on the ground in a burial ceremony, and place Cloten's headless body beside her. When she wakes, she sees Posthumus' garments and assumes it is him. She faints across the body, and is found there by Lucius, who takes her into his service as a page. She calls herself Fidele.

The Roman army advances, and Guidarius persuades Belarius to let him fight. Posthumus has come as part of the Roman forces, but decides to fight for Britain, in reparation for what he has done to Imogen. Iachimo is also in the Roman army, regretting what he has done. In the battle,

Cymbeline is taken but rescued by Belarius, Guidarius and Posthumus, and the British emerge as victors. Posthumus puts on his Roman clothes and is captured; imprisoned, he looks forward to death. While sleeping, he is visited by the spirits of his dead family and by Jupiter, who leaves him a tablet containing a prophesy.

Cymbeline knights Belarius and Guidarius. He learns that the Queen is dead and has confessed her wrong-doing. Lucius commends 'Fidele' to Cymbeline, who grants her any request. She asks for the ring she sees Iachimo wearing, and he confesses his villainy. Posthumus then reveals himself, and Fidele reveals herself to be Imogen. The disappearance of Cloten is explained, and Cymbeline reluctantly condemns Guiderius, but he is pardoned when Belarius reveals the true status of his son. Iachimo is forgiven, the prophesy is explained, and Cymbeline makes peace with Rome.



A photograph of two women in period costumes on a stage. The woman on the left has reddish-brown hair and is wearing a dark blue or black dress. The woman on the right has dark hair styled in an updo and is wearing a light blue or lavender dress with intricate gold lace detailing on the sleeves. They are facing each other in profile, looking at one another with a slight smile. The background is a dark blue stage backdrop.

# Women in Shakespeare

SEX & GENDER ON STAGE

# APT's *Cymbeline*, and Women's Roles in Shakespeare

You may have noticed that in APT's 2021 production of *Cymbeline*, all of the roles are played by women. There are many reasons that the artistic staff made this very deliberate casting choice in a play about love and forgiveness, that's also deeply steeped in misogyny. Below you'll find a bit of insight from APT's Artistic Director Brenda DeVita, and *Cymbeline* Director Marti Lyons.

## Artistic Director Brenda DeVita

"This is a play APT has only produced once before, and this adaptation by Director Marti Lyons and our Director of Voice and Text, Sara Becker, featuring an incredible cast of women – it truly opens up new facets of the play. The story very much feels like a fairy tale, and it's so much fun to play with those tropes and kind of turn them upside down, and inspect what's relevant and true and exciting about this often-overlooked Shakespeare play.

And it shouldn't be overlooked. Because ultimately, it's a play about forgiveness. Who deserves it? Is anything truly unforgiveable? How do you hold people accountable for their misdeeds, whether they're trivial or dangerous? Those are questions we, as a society, are asking every day, and it could not feel more timely. I can't wait for the audience to see it and dig into those questions."

## Director Marti Lyons, in an excerpt from her program notes

"...the job of an adaptor/ director is to determine not just what is true, but what is relevant. My (and my collaborator's) interpretation of this text is not authoritative; we determine relevance by choosing what to keep, and what to cut. Meaning can first be made from how I've adapted the work, done in collaboration with dramaturg Sara Becker, based on an original adaptation by Henry Woronicz, in collaboration with the acting ensemble and the design team. Meaning is imbued by each collaborator as we, together, shape the text to tell our version of this story. Meaning can also be made from the choice to cast all women in a play that centers around a misogynistic calumny plot, or the decision to tackle a dystopian fairytale set in ancient Britain with a multiracial cast in contemporary America. This is a production of Cymbeline, as much as any production of Cymbeline.

The meaning of our production is made by the artists who create it, and, ultimately, by those who interpret it; you."

# Shakespeare and gender: the 'woman's part'

*In Shakespeare's day, female parts were played by male actors, while more recently, actresses have taken on some of his most famous male roles such as Hamlet and Julius Caesar. Clare McManus explores gender in the history of Shakespeare performance below in her article Shakespeare and gender: the 'woman's part'*

Shakespearean performance is an arena for exploring desire, sexuality and gender roles and for challenging audience expectations, especially when it comes to the female performer. Actresses have long claimed their right to Olympian roles like Hamlet: Sarah Bernhardt's 1899 performance sits in a long tradition, most recently added to by Maxine Peake in her performance at Manchester's Royal Exchange in 2014. Bernhardt's performance divided audiences: this was certainly at least partly to do with the crossing of gender boundaries, with one early London reviewer revealing

how polarised ideas of gender could be when he complained that 'A woman is positively no more capable of beating out the music of Hamlet than is a man of expressing the plaintive and half-accomplished surrender of Ophelia'.<sup>[1]</sup> That said, it had become increasingly common by the turn of the 20th century for star actresses to take male parts, often called 'breeches' roles, and it is possible that one difficulty for London audiences lay in the fact that Bernhardt's Hamlet was not Shakespeare's text but a prose translation. Over a century later, Maxine Peake's interpretation was widely praised, though reviewers still focussed on the presence of a female actor in the role, contextualising it against the rich history of female Hamlets and interrogating the opportunities open to women in theatre in the early 21st century.<sup>[2]</sup>

The feminist principle that skilled female actors should have equality of access to meaty theatrical parts lay behind the all-female production of Julius Caesar directed by Phyllida Lloyd at the Donmar Warehouse in 2012, in which Frances Barber took the title role and Cush Jumbo played Mark Antony opposite Harriet Walter's Brutus. This production deliberately offered its performers a far greater range and number of roles than the standard repertory usually allows. This is partly so because modern repertory stands in the long shadow of Shakespearean casting conditions. The stages of the earlier 17th-century commercial theatres were all-male preserves: women were part of the play-going audience and worked in the theatre buildings but they did not act

on the commercial stages.[3] So when Hamlet was first staged in 1600–01 and Julius Caesar in 1599, female roles were taken by a small cohort of highly trained boys. The small number of female roles in each play (usually no more than three or four roles that could be described as more than walk-on parts), have shaped and constrained opportunities for actresses on the modern stage. This kind of Shakespearean casting has been explored by productions such as the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre's Twelfth Night in 2002. In having the parts of Olivia and Viola taken by Mark Rylance and Eddie Redmayne, respectively, the Globe production partially recovered the casting practices of Shakespeare's own time and, in asking audiences to focus on the actor's skill rather than gender, examined both contemporary gender roles and their relationship to performance itself.

## Women and Shakespeare in the early 20th century

Shakespearean theatre's habit of exploring gender's multiple possibilities, and indeed women's central involvement in this exploration, is not a recent phenomenon. During World War I, in a hut in Bloomsbury built to offer respite for soldiers on leave from the front, a group of pro-suffrage women called on a heady mix of Shakespeare and patriotism to authorise their performances.[4] Ellen Terry, one of the most famous

actresses of her day and herself a performer at the Shakespeare Hut, wrote that a debt was owed to Shakespeare 'for his vindication of women in [his] fearless, high-spirited, resolute and intelligent heroines'. [5] Inside the Hut, actresses performed Shakespearean pageants for the troops: on one occasion Terry herself played the cross-dressing Portia of *The Merchant of Venice* while younger actresses performed scenes from *Henry V*. [6] This echoed earlier suffragist work that had appropriated carefully chosen female characters such as Portia or the charismatic Cleopatra (*Antony and Cleopatra*), using Shakespeare to both inspire and legitimise political action. [7]

At times, though, Shakespeare has become an authority figure for writers to kick against in despair. In 1929, several years after the Bloomsbury Shakespeare pageants, Virginia Woolf gave a very different picture of Shakespeare's relationship to women's lived experience. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf writes, 'Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say'. [8] Famously, Woolf then laments Judith's short, frustrated life: denied education and theatrical training, having fled her Stratford home for London, she commits suicide when she finds herself pregnant. It is a moving, deeply thoughtful account. And yet it is not the whole story. Almost 100 years later, new facts have emerged about women's relationship to theatre in the 17th century and, while it's true that were we to reimagine Judith Shakespeare now she would still

not be able to act on the commercial stage, she would have been aware of women who did have access to education and who were actually required to train in the performing arts of dance, eloquence and music. This is a new history of women and early theatre, and for it we have to look back to the 17th century, first to the Restoration, then to Shakespeare's own time.

## The first English actress?

On 8 December 1660 something remarkable happened. That day, a woman, probably Anne Marshall (later Quin, or Guin), took to the stage of London's Vere Street Theatre to play Desdemona in a production of Othello: Marshall is the first recorded professional actress to take a Shakespearean role and she would go on to have a long, albeit patchy career in the London theatre.[9] Her performance has an air of backstreet mystery and, in a prologue written especially for it, Thomas Jordan excites his audience with a provocative backstage glimpse of the actress:

*I saw the Lady drest;*

*The Woman playes to day,  
mistake me not,*

*No Man in Gown, or Page in  
Petty-Coat;*

*A Woman to my knowledge.[10]*

Just as Shakespeare's Othello will demand 'ocular proof' about his wife's character and behaviour (3.3.360), the English Restoration theatre audience seem to need to have the presence of the woman on stage 'proved' to them by the implicit revelation of her body to their gaze. As is clear from the frontispiece of Othello in Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition, this voyeuristic impulse characterises much of Restoration theatre.

## Boy actors and the 'all-male stage'

As we know, and as Thomas Jordan's prologue makes very clear, prior to Marshall, women did not play Shakespearean roles. Instead, the practice of casting boy actors in female parts meant that the playful exploration of gender was written into these plays from the start. Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre used cosmetics and cross-dressing to exploit audiences' awareness that they were watching a boy playing a female character and to tease them with that knowledge. So, to return to Twelfth Night (1600–01), its early

audiences saw a boy actor playing the part of Viola, who then disguises herself as a boy called Cesario.

Shakespeare's theatre layered gender roles to tantalise audiences, drawing on the virtuosic skill of the highly trained young men (aged between 12 and 21 years old) who played these complex female characters.[11] Not that the boy-as-woman was universally accepted: those opposed to the theatre feared that cross-dressing would corrupt its audience and destroy the distinction between the sexes. Much of this fear and much of the energy of Shakespeare's cross-dressed dramas depends on desire. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, Viola/Cesario quickly falls in love with her new master, Orsino, and he himself seems to desire his new page, hinting at his pleasure in the layering of male and female as he describes Cesario:

*they shall yet belie thy happy  
years,*

*That say thou art a man.  
Diana's lip*

*Is not more smooth and  
rubicous; thy small pipe*

*Is as the maiden's organ, shrill  
and sound,*

*And all is semblative a woman's  
part. (1.4.30–34)*

What's perhaps most striking here is that there is no attempt to hide the presence of the boy playing the female role; in fact, attention is drawn to it because the 'woman's part' refers both to the absent female body and the theatrical 'part' of Viola that the boy performs. Such moments revel in the layering of gender identity and disguise.

## **Women and Shakespearean theatre: a new history**

Pivotal as it was, Anne Marshall's star turn as Desdemona did not change English theatre overnight. For one thing, boy actors performed female roles well into the Restoration. In 1660 Pepys famously called Edward Kynaston, one of the last of these boys, 'the loveliest lady that ever I saw in my life, only her voice not very good'. What's more, Marshall may have been a pioneer but, as she stepped out onto the Vere Street stage, she took her place in a long line of theatrical

Englishwomen who, though absent from the early 17th-century playhouse stages, did in fact perform in a range of other venues and ways. Two extreme examples offer a glimpse into this alternative history of women and Shakespearean theatre.

The first theatrical woman is a notorious London underworld figure: the cross-dressing fence Mary Frith, aka Moll Cutpurse (c. 1584–1659). In late April or early May 1611, an astonishing spectacle unfolded at the Fortune playhouse. At a performance of Middleton and Dekker's *Roaring Girl*, a sanitised version of Frith's life, Moll Cutpurse herself watched from the side of the stage as a boy acted her part. Once the play was over, Frith took up a lute, played, sang and taunted the crowd that many of them were of opinion that she was a man, but if any of them would come to her lodging they should finde that she is a woman.[12] Close to the stage yet not truly on it, the cross-dressed Frith offers a glimpse into the ways costume and gender roles could be exploited both on and off stage.

The second theatrical woman emphatically takes centre stage. Queen Anna of Denmark (1574–1619), wife of King James VI and I, commissioned and performed in the lavish theatricals of the Jacobean court masque. Luxurious one-off events that employed the court's full resources, the masque had elite performance at its heart and, in the first years of the 17th century, women were the masque's main performers. On the court stage, Anna

and her women took silent, symbolic roles, creating meaning through the display and movement of their bodies. In fact, court masques often exposed the female body, giving the invited audience visible proof of the difference between the noblewomen and the cross-dressed boys who acted alongside them and took the speaking roles that the silent women were denied. This is at an extreme in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*, performed at court in 1609. In it, Anna and her ladies danced as exalted queens of history, banishing grotesque witches played by male performers in female dress.

Women, then, were far more involved in Shakespearean theatre than either Woolf's lament for Judith Shakespeare's lost talent or Anne Marshall's starring moment in December 1660 might suggest. History has changed, bringing to light a long and energetic tradition of women's involvement in Shakespearean theatre against which we can judge the interventions of our own day.

## Footnotes

[1] *The Athenaeum*, 17 June 1899.

[2] See, for instance, Susannah Clapp, 'Hamlet review – Maxine Peake is a delicately ferocious Prince of

Denmark', *The Guardian* 21 September 2014; and Michael Billington, 'Hamlet review – Maxine Peake stresses character with a caustic, spry prince', *The Guardian* 17 September 2014.

[3] See Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[4] Ailsa Grant Ferguson, 'Lady Forbes-Robertson's War Work: Gertrude Elliott and the Shakespeare Hut Performances, 1916–19', in *Women Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception and Performance*, ed. by Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen Orlin and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 233–42 (p. 240).

[5] Ellen Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare* (London: Martin Hopkinson Ltd, 1932), p. 81.

[6] Ferguson, p. 240.

[7] Katherine E. Kelly, 'The After Voice of Ellen Terry', in Katharine Cockin (ed.), *Ellen Terry, Spheres of Influence* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), pp. 65–76 (p. 70).

[8] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, ed. by Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 42.

[9] J. Milling, 'Quin [née Marshall], Anne (fl. 1660-1682), actress', ODNB. See also Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 19.

[10] Thomas Jordan, *A Royal Arbor of Loyal Poesie* (London, 1664), p. 21.

[11] David Kathman, 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?', *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), 220–46 (p. 220).

[12] Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *The Roaring Girl*, ed. by Paul A. Mulholland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, *Revels Plays*, 1987), p. 262.

Written by Clare McManus

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Other all-female productions and companies

\*Smooth Faced Gentlemen are a theatre company with one purpose: to create fast, fun, fresh and faithful productions of Shakespeare using an entirely female cast.

\*Josie Rourke, artistic director of London's Donmar Warehouse, produced Phyllida Lloyd's all-female version of Julius Caesar in 2012. "People would just scoff at it. And scoffing did two things: it trivialised it, and it made it look experimental." But for Rourke and her partner at the Donmar, executive producer Kate Pakenham, Julius Caesar was a serious statement of intent about addressing the lack of representation of women in theatre.

\*In 2003, women's cross-gender performances of Shakespeare entered a new phase with the announcement of the Globe Theatre's summer season:

the then artistic director Mark Rylance unveiled his plans for a brand new all-female company to complement the theater's long-standing all-male company. The Women's Company, composed of fifteen actresses, performed *Richard III*, with Kathryn Hunter in the title role, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, with Janet McTeer as Petruchio. This experiment was successful enough that Rylance repeated it the following year, staging an all-female *Much Ado About Nothing*, with Josie Lawrence as Benedick, this time without an accompanying all-male production. Yet the all-female companies proved controversial enough that the artistic staff at the Globe decided to justify their decision to the press and to their audiences. Both Rylance and director Phyllida Lloyd defended the casting by championing equal opportunity. As Rylance told Benedict Nightingale in the *Times* (February 4, 2003), "it's unjust that men should get many more opportunities than women to show their strengths in classic roles.... 'Isn't there an enormous waste when women achieve [Ian] McKellen's or [Michael] Gambon's ability yet haven't a *King Lear* to play?" Lloyd included a prologue to her production of *Shrew* that emphasized the prodigious "female talents" of the cast, and offered a hope that the use of "vice-versa" casting would help to "redress the balance" by giving women the chance to wear the codpiece.