

**THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE**

# DIALOGUES

**FEBRUARY 2013, ISSUE No. 1**

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Theatre for a New Audience's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* is sponsored by **Deloitte**.



Theatre for a New Audience's production is part of *Shakespeare for a New Generation*, a national initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

#### Notes to the Essays

References to *Much Ado About Nothing* in "Banter and Bliss" are from Humphreys, A.R., ed. *Much Ado About Nothing*, Arden Second Series (Methuen & Co., 1981). | References to *Much Ado About Nothing* in "Resistance to Marriage" are from Mowat, Barbara A. and Paul Werstine, eds. *Much Ado About Nothing*, The New Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington Square Press, 1995). | "Resistance to Marriage in *Much Ado About Nothing*" was adapted by the author from her essay titled, "*Much Ado About Nothing: A Modern Perspective*" in *Much Ado About Nothing*, The New Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington Square Press, 1995). | Parenthetical notes following quoted text refers to Act.scene.line (e.g. 1.1.57-58).

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## DIALOGUES: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Last season, Theatre for a New Audience introduced the 360° Series, a digital publication intended to provide spectators with information on the play, playwright and production. This season, we are thrilled to premier *Dialogues*, a companion piece produced for each play that includes featured essays written by leading scholars — including members of the Theatre's Council of Scholars — as well as a transcribed conversation between a council member and an artist or artists from the production.

The essays in *Dialogues* engage in a dialogue (if you will) with the play, challenging its assumptions, highlighting its particular genius, arguing with its worldview, allowing audiences to view the play as a literary work as well as a theatrical piece. The conversations are also intended to illuminate the relationship between academics and artists, to consider the play from seemingly divergent circumstances, and ultimately to communicate, scholar to artist, and so to know each other better.

Perhaps it is fitting that we launch *Dialogues* with *Much Ado About Nothing*, a play that director Arin Arbus says "is in part about how language ignites the listener's imagination." Within, you will find an illuminating introduction to the text of *Much Ado*, written by Richard McCoy; an essay written by Gail Kern Paster that offers a provocative perspective on the marriage and misogyny in the play; and a conversation between Tanya Pollard and director Arin Arbus in which they discuss the "existential territory of the play." All three pieces are intended to ignite readers' imaginations, bringing them closer to the text, to the scholar, and to the artist.

—The Editors

## BANTER AND BLISS in *Much Ado About Nothing* RICHARD McCOY

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In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the battle of the sexes is more fraught and volatile than military battle. At the play's beginning, the men return from war with high hearts, exhilarated by victory. Young Claudio is said to have "borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion" (1.1.12-14), and, accordingly, his commander, "Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor" on him (1.1.8-9). The Governor of Messina, Don Leonato, welcomes the officers, and right after Claudio spots the governor's daughter, Hero, he declares her "the sweetest lady that ever I looked on" (1.1.174-175). He considers proposing but tempers his sentiments with practical calculations, asking, "Hath Leonato any son?" (1.1.274). Assured that "she's his only heir" (1.1.275), he declares his love for Hero, proclaiming that since "war-thoughts / Have left their places vacant, in their rooms / Come thronging soft and delicate desires" (1.1.281-283). Claudio is now eager to make love not war, but the deceptive schemes of Don John, villainous brother to Don Pedro, soon throw his "soft and delicate desires" into turmoil. Courtship and love-making prove to be more dangerous than military conflict.

Even before any romantic difficulties erupt in *Much Ado's* "main plot," we hear about a "merry war" (1.1.56) between Beatrice and Benedick, the play's real protagonists. They are a couple with a past, Beatrice acknowledging that she once gave Benedick "a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice" (2.1.262-263). Subsequently "they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them" (1.1.57-58). Their skirmishes are amusing enough to their friends and to us, and we are soon treated to an extended display of insult humor. When Benedick accuses her of fighting dirty and scratching men's faces, she responds "Scratching could not make it worse, and [i.e., if] 'twere such a face as yours" (1.1.126-127). But for all the merriment, words are a potent weapon in Shakespeare's plays. After Beatrice calls him "the Prince's jester" and "a very dull fool" (2.1.127), Benedick complains that, "She speaks

poniards, and every word stabs" (2.1.231-232). The battle of the sexes escalates at the wedding of Hero and Claudio. Duped by Don John, Claudio publicly accuses Hero of unchastity, and his insults seem to have lethal consequences. After she swoons, she is declared "dead, slandered to death by villains" (5.1.88).

Words fail Claudio and Hero, leaving them vulnerable and helpless. The wicked Don John is not especially voluble either, and he admits, "I am not of many words" (1.1.146). Yet Claudio is still defenseless against this villain's meager and unsubstantiated insinuations. Having allowed Don Pedro to speak on his behalf, Claudio is easily convinced that "the Prince woos for himself" (2.1.162) and accepts defeat, bidding "Farewell" to Hero (2.1.170). Subsequently assured by the Prince "I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won for him" (2.1.280-281), he is urged to "Speak, Count, 'tis your cue" (2.1.287), but he claims "Silence is the perfectest herald of joy" (2.1.288). Beatrice also urges Hero to "Speak, cousin, or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let not him speak neither" (2.1.292-293), but she can only whisper in his ear. The young lovers' speechlessness puts them at a severe disadvantage in a play where witty eloquence is the best defense against emotional injury and sorrow.

By contrast, Beatrice and Benedick are never at a loss for words. Benedick "will still be talking" (1.1.112), according to Beatrice, and she mocks herself by claiming, "I was born to speak all mirth and no matter" (2.1.310-311). Her uncle reports that,

There's little of the melancholy element in her... she is never sad but when she sleeps, and not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say she hath often dreamt of unhappiness and waked herself with laughing (2.1.321-325).

Here she follows the play's first song's advice to "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more, . . . And be you blithe and bonny, / Converting all your sounds of woe / into Hey

nonny, nonny" (2.3.62 and 69). Balthasar, the musician and singer, prefaces his performance by disparaging his music in terms that echo the play's title: "There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting" (2.3.55). For all his modesty, he is apparently enraptured by his own performance. Benedick looks on and listens from his hiding place, musing at others' responses: "Now, divine air! Now is his soul ravished! Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" (2.3.58-60). Yet despite his skepticism, Benedick is also soon snared by his friends' report that Beatrice "loves him with an enraged affection" (2.3.101) and says, "I will be horribly in love with her" (2.3.226-227).

**A**rin Arbus cites Stephen Greenblatt who notes the importance of *sprezzatura* or nonchalance as a crucial tactic in this play. Baldesar Castiglione coined the term in his popular conduct book, *The Book of the Courtier*, published in Italian in 1528 and in English in 1561. The word is a contraction of the verb *disprezzare* or disprizing and discounting one's own accomplishments in order to make them look natural and spontaneous and oneself look modest. Castiglione described it as an art used "to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort." George Puttenham promotes a similar rhetorical tactic in his *Art of English Poesy* (1589) calling it the "artificial well-dissembled." When Balthasar claims that, "There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting" and Beatrice says she speaks "all mirth and no matter," they engage in a similar ploy. Artifice and dissembling in fact pervade *Much Ado About Nothing*, functioning as crucial plot devices for good and ill, duping Beatrice and Benedick into believing that the each pines for the other, and tricking Claudio into believing that Hero is dead.

Does such artifice and duplicity allow for genuine feeling? There are certainly critics who think it does not. Harold Bloom takes the play's title seriously and regards *Much Ado About Nothing* as "the most amiably nihilistic play ever written." He finds the characters' romantic

emotions superficial and only the jokes real, precluding real relationships. A.D. Nuttall concedes that, "it is hard to make complicated jokes and to kiss at the same time," but he still feels Shakespeare's romantic comedies can pull off that difficult balancing act. When Beatrice and Benedick are alone, their declarations that each loves "nothing in the world so well as you" (4.1.266-269) confirm the intensity of their attachment. Yet even here, Beatrice cannot refrain from equivocation, adding, "but believe me not, and yet I lie not, I confess nothing nor I

*Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever:  
One foot on sea, and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.*

deny nothing" (4.1.269-271), thus making *Much Ado* about nothing. As the play nears its end, their banter resumes, and Benedick admits that "so forcible is thy wit" (5.2.53), that Beatrice "will depart un-kissed" (5.2.51). Even so, Benedick lets himself lapse into Petrarchan emotional hyperbole while mocking his avowals with a more pedestrian promise: "I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes; and moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's" (5.2.94-96). In the final scene, each insists that they love "no more than reason" (5.4.74-77), and yet they plunge into marriage. Reason is cast aside, "for man is a giddy thing" (5.4.107). Beatrice is momentarily silenced when Benedick says, "Peace! I will stop your mouth" (5.4.97) and does so with a kiss, but the impact of her eloquence, humor, and impassioned ferocity endure, inspiring heroines from *As You Like It's* Rosalind through Restoration drama, Hollywood screwball comedies, to today's better rom coms. Kisses and jokes can be weapons in the battle of the sexes, but they also reveal and stir up profound, complex, and genuine emotions. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the banter of Beatrice and Benedick becomes bliss for them and for us. ♦

# RESISTANCE TO MARRIAGE in *Much Ado About Nothing* GAIL KERN PASTER

Cuckoldry jokes are in the air in the city of Messina as it welcomes Don Pedro of Aragon and his soldiers home from a victory over his bastard brother, Don John. The governor of Messina, Leonato, snatches a cuckoldry joke out of the air when he jokes to Don Pedro about having to ask his wife repeatedly for reassurance as to his daughter's legitimacy:

PRINCE: I think this is your daughter.  
LEONATO: Her mother hath many times told me so.  
(1.1.102-3)

The soldier Benedick is also suspicious of women as the agents of men's humiliation and defeat. He expresses an almost pathological fear of betrayal in marriage: to be married is to wear the conventional horns of a cuckold, to have one's own military bugle snatched away, to have it sounded in one's own face:

That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks. But that I will have a reheat winded [i.e., a bugle call blown] in my forehead or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none (1.1.232-38).

For Benedick, what unifies all the stages of a man's life is humiliating dependence on women, beginning with the infant's dependence on maternal women for life and nurture—an early dependence seen by him as forerunner to the later sexual humiliations of the adult male. But for Benedick, the cuckold's horns that he envisions as his own future headdress are those of a defeated soldier who has lost his bugle to another soldier. For such men, marriage threatens loss of a valued form of masculine singleness, a loss of control.

Nor is the fear of being associated with the cuckold's horns peculiar to men or resistance to marriage a

symptom of only masculine identity. Though her uncles worry that Beatrice's sharp tongue makes her "too curst" (2.1.20) to get a husband, she jokes that she will thereby avoid making her husband wear horns: "I shall lessen God's sending that way, for it is said 'God sends a curst cow short horns,' but to a cow too curst, he sends none" (2.1.21-24). The horn motif continues to sound in this play even after it has ostensibly been silenced by the exposure of Don John's sexual slander against Hero. Thus Benedick, converted to love in the person of Beatrice, nonetheless urges Don Pedro to join in the march to the altar in the spirit of accepting a universal humiliation: "Get thee a wife, get thee a wife. There is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn" (5.4.126-28). If betrayal is the universal fate of the married, it is no wonder that Beatrice regards marriage as a form of repentance.

**M***uch Ado* is not unusual in its reiterated wordplay on horns, since jokes about the wearing of cuckolds' horns are commonplace throughout the literature of this period. But, in the drama of the period, there is a marked disparity between the frequency of the jokes and the infrequency of wifely infidelity—as the examples of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* alone suggest. Many more wives are falsely accused than are, in fact, guilty. This discrepancy between fears of betrayal and actual guilt suggests that we should focus less on the infidelity itself than on the real source of masculine anxiety—the ruling order's inevitable dependence on (and inability to verify) the chastity of wives and mothers. For only such chastity secured a social structure based on legitimate inheritance of lands, wealth, property, rank, and name.

In *Much Ado*, this patriarchal anxiety gives cuckoldry jokes a particular function. They work to resolve a social contradiction in Elizabethan society, a moment of double bind in the cultural history of marriage in which an authoritarian official tradition collided with an emergent ideal. Sixteenth-century English society

had not yet dispensed with forms of overt misogyny inherited from medieval Catholicism. But it could not readily accommodate these inherited forms of misogyny to the new Protestant celebration of marriage, particularly in its modern form of unions founded in the consent of both partners and upon their long-term fulfillment of a set of mutual obligations—emotional and material. If women’s feelings matter in marriage, then so do feelings about women: medieval misogyny and

For Benedick, what unifies all the stages of a man’s life is humiliating dependence on women, beginning with the infant’s dependence on maternal women for life and nurture—an early dependence seen by him as forerunner to the later sexual humiliations of the adult male.

Protestant marriage theory could not coexist. From the tension between them, the double plots of *Much Ado About Nothing* come into being.

The uncomfortable truth is that, in a misogynistic culture like that of early modern England, resistance to marriage is rational, not idiosyncratic, because misogyny gives men and women well-founded reasons to suspect one another. Even though such resistance is what most sets Beatrice and Benedick apart from their friends and kinfolk, it functions in the play as more than idiosyncratic aspects of their personalities. Even if we understand their mutual affection to have “been there all along,” their unwillingness to express it has a rational basis. From this point of view, Beatrice and Benedick wittily enact for our benefit the conventional postures of mutual antagonism so that their eventual

union will seem to ratify the irrational force of desire and to dissolve the larger social tensions exemplified by their mutual mistrust. Even though marriage might appear incompatible with individual peace of mind, it remains the basic form of social organization and thus something that communities and the young people in them want to celebrate. As Benedick grandiosely declares, “The world must be peopled” (2.3.244-45).

So in the end, Beatrice and Benedick relinquish their resistance. But the final entrance of the bridal party, with all the women wearing masks, suggests that the old cultural categories that produce suspicion and slander remain largely untouched by their rapprochement. Perhaps this is why Benedick insists on ending the play not with the weddings themselves but with the stately, regulated movements of a communal dance in which the couples move not singly, but together, and no man is yet wearing horns. ♦

# IN CONVERSATION WITH ARIN ARBUS TANYA POLLARD



Matthew Amendt (Claudio) and Arin Arbus in rehearsal; photographed at New 42nd Street Studios by Nella Vera

**T**his January, while in rehearsals for *Much Ado About Nothing*, Tanya Pollard, Professor of English at Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center, CUNY, and Arin Arbus, the play's director, sat down for a conversation about the play, its characters and the problem of marriage.

**POLLARD:** I wonder if you'd like to start by saying a little about what inspired you to stage *Much Ado About Nothing* this year. Was it something you'd been thinking about for a while, or something that just came to you, or part of a rotation and balance of genres?

**ARBUS:** Thankfully, I don't have to consider a rotation or balance of genres. For me, picking a play to direct is a guttural decision. I have to feel I have a deep, personal insight into some aspect of the territory. What Peter Brook describes as "a hunch." I read an interview with Trevor Nunn, in which he said "I have yet to see a production of *Much Ado* directed with sufficient seriousness." That was inspiring to me and relates to my "hunch" about the play. I guess I find marriage a fraught and often problematic arrangement. I'm in awe of people who get married and people who have been married for a long time. So I'm very interested in Shakespeare's investigations into the topic. Most of the plays by Shakespeare which I've directed have explored this. *Othello* is about two marriages. I think *Macbeth*, which I directed two years ago, is also about a marriage.

**POLLARD:** I agree.

**ARBUS:** Last year, I directed *Taming of the Shrew* which is about life after the wedding.

**POLLARD:** *Much Ado* is about getting to marriage.

**ARBUS:** Yes. I also connect to the sadness in many of the characters in *Much Ado*.

**POLLARD:** I do too. I saw a production this summer, at the RSC, in a Bollywood setting, and I really liked that despite an overall festive atmosphere, Beatrice and Benedick were very sad. Benedick had a somber philosophical tone, and Beatrice was witty, but very serious, and I found that very moving. I think there is something much darker and more shadowy about them than the comic ingénues and suitors that we see in so many of the marriage comedies.

**ARBUS:** I think *Much Ado* asks: What is real? Can I believe my eyes and ears? Is it possible to know another person? How well does anyone know himself? If you can't answer these questions, how is it possible to join with another person for the rest of your life? The territory of the play is really existential to me. The humor and the playfulness, and the wit, is real, but it sits on top of darker feelings of uncertainty.

**POLLARD:** Absolutely. Feste in *Twelfth Night* says that "anything that's mended is but patched." Things are so conspicuously patched at the end of this play, and that conspicuousness seems to highlight the kind of existential underpinning you talk about. But as you say, they decide to embrace marriage anyway: "the world must be peopled." I really liked your observation that there's an ambivalent balance between acknowledging the artifice behind the decisions, and at the same time embracing them anyway, and moving forward.

**ARBUS:** Right.

**POLLARD:** I read an interview in which you, talked about finding "the essentials" in each play you direct, and I wondered what you would define as "the essentials" of this piece.

**ARBUS:** I feel it's essential to establish the values of

the world. In *Much Ado*, there is a pretty rigid social hierarchy – with different expectations and mores for men and women. Shakespeare’s Messina is mostly an upper-class society.

**POLLARD:** Yes, although you have this wonderful comedy of Dogberry and Verges.

**ARBUS:** Yes, and you also have Margaret, who is not quite of the upper class. Even Beatrice’s position is a precarious one. She’s an orphan, I assume without a dowry. Although I think there’s a great deal of love in Leonato’s house, she’s living off of him. Maggie Siff – who is playing Beatrice – said that she probably makes herself very useful. I can see that. I think she’s also incredibly fun. That’s a way of surviving for her.

**POLLARD:** It’s a pragmatic strategy.

**ARBUS:** Yes, it’s her nature. I don’t think it’s fake, but it’s part of the way she survives in this world.

**POLLARD:** Let’s talk a little bit about masks, and the masked ball scene. It offers so many opportunities to showcase both the play’s festive qualities and its very dark qualities; this is where the scheme gets underway, and there’s a lot of trickery and deception, and it’s not entirely clear who is aware of what. It’s clear that some people aren’t aware of everything, but there are also opportunities for watching and eavesdropping. I wonder if you wanted to say a little bit about what you’re thinking of doing with that scene.

**ARBUS:** I had a big realization about the masks last night. I believe, as written, only the men are masked at the party. But the women see through the masks – they know who they’re speaking to, but are pretending that they don’t. They’re playing a game. I realized that it’s sort of a metaphor for what happens again and again through the play. The people who are masked think that they’re fooling others. But actually the person behind the mask is the one that is being deceived.

**POLLARD:** That’s fascinating because it fits so beautifully with Claudio watching a figure whom he thinks is Hero; he thinks that he is in on a secret while she is oblivious, but in fact, he’s the one who is oblivious. That’s a beautiful analogy.



Maggie Siff (Beatrice); photographed at New 42nd Street Studios by Nella Vera

**ARBUS:** Yes, it happens over and over again in the play.

**POLLARD:** It’s often the case in Shakespeare that watching and listening are dangerous, which raises interesting questions about our roles as audience members. What is this telling us about what it means to be on the receiving end of information? How much are we necessarily getting wrong or missing, or misconstruing?

**ARBUS:** Right, mis-noting. I think the play is about the limits of language. It’s interesting that you have Beatrice and Benedick, who are able to use language in the most sophisticated ways, and yet have great difficulty expressing how they really feel. At the other end of the spectrum, there’s Dogberry, who uses language in a wonderfully crude way, and he is able to discern and express what’s true. In doing so, he “save[s] the foundation” of this little society.

**POLLARD:** It takes him a while, but eventually, he makes it. I like your point about the limits of language,

but I also think the play explores the way we see what we want to see, and hear what we want to hear, regardless of what is shown to us. We see that Beatrice and Benedick are very eager to embrace the idea that they are loved, but we also see that Claudio, who on one hand seems so eager to think the best of Hero, at the same time, is very willing to go along with a set of assumptions about female unreliability and guilt. It's one of many plays in Shakespeare in which we see the people look at the world through their own assumptions; it's not only language that misleads, but images, too.

**ARBUS:** Right, yes. Yes, poor Claudio. But he sees it. He has ocular proof, even more evidence than Othello does, and we feel for Othello.

**POLLARD:** That's true.

**ARBUS:** Back to the party – I think it's a really fun party. There are a lot of dark moments that night but there's also tremendous excitement felt by everyone.

**POLLARD:** I'm wondering what you do with the music, the dance, the costumes? There are so many different elements on the stage than with reading; any thoughts about how you're using those different senses, and those different elements?

**ARBUS:** Well, we'll see because I'm not there yet, but we're setting the play in Sicily, in Messina, in pre-World War I, and Michael Friedman, the composer, has found a lot of really great sort of rough Sicilian folk songs and Tarantellas.

**POLLARD:** How do you think the audience should feel during the masked ball? Do you think we should be enjoying it? Is some anxiety, some tension?

**ARBUS:** Well, there are a lot of low points during the party, a lot of moments of humiliation. I think Don Pedro wooing Hero is a touch odd. Claudio is tricked by Don John into thinking that Don Pedro has stolen Hero. Benedick rubs Claudio's nose in it.

**POLLARD:** Not to mention the barbs between Beatrice and Benedick; he doesn't think she knows who he is, and although she's snubbing him on purpose, she seems to be also a bit taken aback at the effect that it has.

**ARBUS:** He is so outraged.

**POLLARD:** He's very angry.

**ARBUS:** He's deeply wounded by being called "the Prince's jester."

**POLLARD:** I agree. And on one hand, she's trying to get to him, but at the same time, she doesn't seem to realize it will have quite such an impact. I think it's a little more than she intended.

**ARBUS:** Right, and later Don Pedro asks Beatrice



Jonathan Cake (Benedick); photographed at New 42nd Street Studios by Nella Vera

to marry him. Her refusal is devastating for him. It's possibly the most humiliating moment of his entire life to date.

**POLLARD:** Yes, and socially dangerous for her. Here she is, an unmarried woman, as you say, living on her uncle's estate. Everyone wants her to marry, and here she has the offer of a lifetime thrust at her, and she's tossing it aside. It's pretty risky.

**ARBUS:** Yes. Even Hero's journey throughout the party is a hard to follow. She has been told that the prince is going to propose to her, and she's been instructed by her father and her uncle to say yes. Everything that Beatrice says after supper, before the party, about wooing, wedding and repentance, and "leading apes into hell" is light and witty, but I think she's aiming a lot of that at poor Hero, who finds herself in an extremely difficult position.

**POLLARD:** Yes, there are a lot of variables, and we really don't know just how docile that Hero is prepared to be. Luckily it never comes to that question, as far as we can tell, but there are a lot of interesting questions, if you're inhabiting that role, about what you're stealing yourself for as you're going into this party.

**ARBUS:** It's a big day in her life.

**POLLARD:** Absolutely. Could you say more about espionage and spying? That leads into the play's viewings and eavesdropping. I really like your ideas about the military aspects of the spying and information gathering, and the way that all of these things backfire because everyone who thinks that they are secretly gathering information ends up being tricked. How have you incorporated these issues into the play's setting?

**ARBUS:** Yes, we're setting it before World War I, and these men have just returned from a victorious military campaign.

**POLLARD:** It's interesting to set it before a larger war, when it's also post-war; it suggests anticipating an even bigger threat on the horizon.

**ARBUS:** The war they've just fought is an odd one because not many people have died – "few of any



Michelle Beck (Hero), Matthew Amendt (Claudio) and John Keating (Father Francis) rehearse Act 4, scene 1; photographed at New 42nd Street Studios by Nella Vera

sort and none of name." It feels like a world that is somehow innocent, that becomes aware of dangers within the society that were hitherto unimaginable. One doesn't get the sense that these men are experiencing PTSD. They arrive in Messina feeling good, hungry for love, sex and fun. They're ready for the next phase of their lives, whatever that is. Don John and Don Pedro's plots are like military strategies. That desire to control, manipulate, camouflage, which is very useful in a war, becomes bizarre and dangerous in peace time life.

**POLLARD:** That really is bizarre. How will the military backdrop show up in the staging? Will they come back in uniform as they turn up at first?

**ARBUS:** They wear uniforms during the entire show.

**POLLARD:** So that will be a pretty conspicuous reminder of war.

**ARBUS:** Yes.

**POLLARD:** And will you be using wartime ideas and metaphors in other explicit ways with the play's schemes and strategies?

**ARBUS:** I don't know. There is a great deal of espionage in *Much Ado* – spying, surveillance, reconnaissance, sabotage, secret missions, conspiracies, plots of manipulation and destruction abound.

**POLLARD:** Yes, it makes sense. There's also a lot of violence in the play's references to food and eating, including imagery of cannibalism; Beatrice says she's promised to eat all that Benedick kills. Do you have any thoughts on the imagery of eating, and what happens with it on the stage?

**ARBUS:** Jonathan Cake, who is playing Benedick, is convinced by all of the references in the text to food and to Benedick's stomach, that it was originally played by a chubby guy.

**POLLARD:** That's interesting. Does he think – and do you think – that Beatrice is mocking him with the constant references to food?

**ARBUS:** I don't know.

**POLLARD:** When you talk about how they're coming back from war and they're ready for women, for love, we might add that people in this play are really hungry, at very many different levels. And they can't stop themselves from using the language of food and meals, and wondering when they'll be fed. There's a classic convention that at the end of a comedy not only does everyone get married, but typically, everyone gets to eat: a banquet goes hand-in-hand with the wedding. That sense of teasing and holding out of consumption in the play is really fascinating.

**ARBUS:** Yes, yes, I love that, that's great.

**POLLARD:** You've just staged *Taming of the Shrew*, which also features offering and withholding food. It's interesting to wonder what this does to an audience, to have food always being offered and retracted. In some ways as an audience, we have to fall in love with the characters and want them to come together. But I also think that we have to share their hunger, and crave its consummation as well. Inducing hunger can be a very primal way to convey this sense of lack, induce a kind of appetite, both on the stage and in the audience. We have to want something, a lot.

**ARBUS:** I love that.

**POLLARD:** How about Hero's return? This is a fascinating moment. It's one of the primary motifs of

tragicomedy to have a woman die and come back to life, going back to Euripides' *Alcestis*. With Hero, she hasn't died, and many of the characters know she hasn't died, but her reappearance is still a very dramatic moment. And we're told this is a cousin, so there's an implication that it could be Beatrice, which Claudio is prepared to accept even though it must be intolerable, given their emotional constitutions.

**ARBUS:** Beatrice and Claudio would be a terrible match.

**POLLARD:** Absolutely, so he's being remarkably docile to agree, just as Hero is docile when she's told that when the prince asks for her hand, she knows what her answer is. And then we have this unveiling. I'm curious what you make of this. On one hand, we have this resurrection, this revivification; we finally have a marriage. But can Hero feel uncomplicatedly happy at her first contact with the person who has publicly shamed her and struck her?

**ARBUS:** I think it's very complicated when she is unveiled in the final scene. At the same time, I must say, I actually think they're in a better position than they were in Act 2.

**POLLARD:** They're not quite as starry-eyed and naïve.

**ARBUS:** Yes, they decided to get married before knowing each other.

**POLLARD:** He doesn't even woo her. Someone else has to do this for him.

**ARBUS:** Yes, they're not Romeo and Juliet, who fall in love with each other's minds. If Hero and Claudio were to marry at the first wedding, they would be total strangers. It's a marriage based on images and romantic ideals, which is such a contrast to Beatrice and Benedick, who I think deeply know each other. I feel that Hero and Claudio have a shot at something by the end of the play because they have survived a terrible trauma together. The romantic ideal is shattered, which I believe is a step forward, towards something real.

**POLLARD:** So there's a kind of intimacy that has developed indirectly?

**ARBUS:** Yes, they know something of each other by the end.

**POLLARD:** What about Beatrice and Benedick? Theirs is the less ambivalent wedding; everyone is waiting for that culminating moment when they acknowledge that they'll take each other, even if they were set up, even if it was just because he was told she was dying of the ague. They're still going to make that leap. Do you have thoughts on how you'll stage that moment, or more generally on the balance between the toughness and the vulnerability of these characters?

**ARBUS:** Well, I don't know. I mean I think they're both extremely vulnerable people, really sensitive folks.

I hope that we'll see that aspect of them. Right now, my favorite scene between them is 5.2, when they've already declared their love, she knows that he has challenged Claudio, and for a moment they let their guard down and are able relax together. They're both thinking about death – about Hero's fake death and about the possibility of Benedick's death – but they're still making jokes. It's there where you get to see the kind of marriage they will have together. ♦



Maggie Siff (Beatrice) and Jonathan Cake (Benedick) rehearse the end of Act 4, scene 1; photographed at New 42nd Street Studios by Nella Vera

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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### **RICHARD McCOY**

is Professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center, CUNY. He is the author of four books – *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia* (Rutgers, 1979), *The Rites of Knighthood: The Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (California, 1989), *Alterations of State: Sacred Kingship in the English Reformation* (Columbia, 2002), and the forthcoming *Faith In Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2014) – as well as many articles on Shakespeare’s plays. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Council for Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and The Huntington Library. He has also served as a speaker and consultant for Shakespeare performances for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Canada’s Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Classic Stage Company, Target Margin, The Public Theater, and The Shakespeare Society as well as Theatre for a New Audience.



### **GAIL KERN PASTER**

retired in July 2011 as Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library and editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, the leading scholarly journal devoted to Shakespeare. She came to the directorship from George Washington University, where she was a Professor of English. She earned a B.A., magna cum laude, at Smith College, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and a Ph.D. at Yale University. She has won many national fellowships and awards, including fellowships from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, National Endowment from the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the Mellon Foundation. She was named to the Queen’s Honours List as a Commander of the British Empire in May 2011. She has published widely—including three books (*The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* [1986]; *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* [1993]; and *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* [2004]). She continues to pursue her scholarly interests in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.



### **TANYA POLLARD**

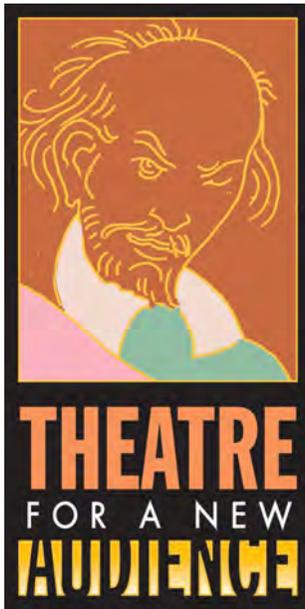
is Professor of English at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, CUNY. Her publications include *Shakespeare’s Theater: A Sourcebook* (Blackwell, 2004), *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), and a co-edited volume, *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, forthcoming 2013), as well as numerous essays on early modern theater in journals and edited volumes. A former Rhodes scholar, she served on a national advisory counsel to the U. S. Secretary of Education from 1994-2000, has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, and the Whiting Foundation, and was interviewed by Ethan Hawke in a BBC/PBS documentary on *Macbeth*. She is currently writing a book about the reception of Greek plays in sixteenth-century Europe, and their impact on the development of popular dramatic genres in early modern England.



### **JAMES SHAPIRO (SERIES EDITOR)**

is the author of *Rival Playwrights* (1991), *Shakespeare and the Jews* (1996), *Oberammergau* (2000), *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (2005), and most recently, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare* (2010). He is currently at work on *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606* and a Library of America volume, *Shakespeare in America*. His journalism has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *The London Review of Books*, the *TLS*, and the *Financial Times*. He has been awarded fellowships from the NEH, the Guggenheim Foundation, and The New York Public Library Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers. He serves on the Board of Governors of the Folger Shakespeare Library as well as the Advisory Council for the Authors Guild and was recently elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. He is currently Larry Miller Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, where he has taught since 1985.

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Founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, the mission of Theatre for a New Audience is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. Theatre for a New Audience produces for audiences Off-Broadway and has also toured nationally, internationally and to Broadway. We are guided in our work by five core values: a reverence for language, a spirit of adventure, a commitment to diversity, a dedication to learning, and a spirit of service. These values inform what we do with artists, how we interact with audiences, and how we manage our organization.

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Theatre for a New Audience is an award winning company recognized for artistic excellence. Our education programs introduce students to Shakespeare and other classics with the same artistic integrity that we apply to our productions. Through our unique and exciting methodology, students engage in hands-on learning that involves all aspects of literacy set in the context of theatre education. Our residencies are structured to address City and State Learning Standards both in English Language Arts and the Arts, the New York City DOE's Curriculum Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, and the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts. Begun in 1984, our programs have served over 124,000 students, ages 9 through 18, in New York City Public Schools city-wide.

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