PlayNotes

Season | 47 Issue | 3

Or,

by Liz Duffy Adams

PS
PORTLAND STAGE

Discussion Series

Due to Covid-19 our regularly scheduled discussions are moving online. Head to portlandstage.org/show/or/ to view our discussion schedule and Zoom links.

Curtain Call
These discussions offer a rare opportunity for audience members to talk about the production with the performers. Through this forum, the audience and cast explore topics that range from the process of rehearsing and producing the text to character development to issues raised by the work.

The Artistic Perspective
Hosted by Artistic Director Anita Stewart, is an opportunity for audience members to delve deeper into the themes of the show through conversation with special guests. A different scholar, visiting artist, playwright, or other expert will join the discussion each time.

All discussions are free and open to the public. Show attendance is not required.

Interested in addtional discussions?

Portland Stage strives to be a forum for our community. While we can't currently gather in the same ways we're used to, we are adding some exciting new opportunities to connect to our community near and far. Stay tuned to portlandstage.org for more info, and if your group would like to discuss plays at Portland Stage feel free to email literary@portlandstage.org and we'll see what we can work out.

A talkback with the playwright, director, and cast of Marianas Trench *by Scott C. Sickles as part of the 2020 Digital Little Festival of the Unexpected.*

Or,
by Lizz Duffy Adams

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Portland Stage Company Educational Programs, like *PlayNotes*, are generously supported through the annual donations of hundreds of individuals and businesses, as well as special funding from:

Maine Arts Commission

George & Cheryl Higgins
Susie Konkel
The Onion Foundation
The Virginia Hodgkins Somers Foundation

Table of Contents

Focus Questions

by Sophia B. Diaz & Jordan Wells

1. What are your ambitions? Has anyone ever made you question your ambitions?

2. Why do you think Adams switched between verse/rhyming couplets and prose? What was the significance of this switch?

3. Liz Duffy Adams says that while *Or,* is set in the late 1660s, it "plays off the echoes between the late 1660s, the late 1960s, and the present." What are some reasons a playwright may include influences from the present in a play that is set in the past?

4. What other stories can you think of with concealed or mistaken identity?

The Greek Goddess Astrea.

Pre-Show Activities

by Sophia B. Diaz & Jordan Wells

1. In the play, Aphra sometimes speaks in rhyming couplets. Couplets are two lines of poetry that have the same meter. For example, Aphra says:

   To nag and scold my own adoréd king
   Believe me, pains me more than anything.

   In pairs, see if you can carry a conversation in rhyming couplets.
   a. Reflect - how did it feel? Was it difficult?

2. The events of this story take place in London from 1666-1670 (read *What was it like living in the 1600s?* on pg 22). In groups, answer the following questions:
   a. What do you know about the Restoration period?
   b. How were female playwrights viewed during this time?

3. This play covers the theme of debt. Write about a time you felt like you owed something to someone, or when someone owed something to you.

4. *Or,* primarily features historical figures. Make a list of 3-5 historical figures that you would be interested in seeing or writing a play about.

5. While working as a spy, Aphra Behn used the name Astrea. In Greek mythology, Astrea is the goddess of purity and innocence. Come up with 3-5 code names that you would use if you were a spy and share their significance with a partner.

Thoughts from the Editors:
Who's Your Favorite Overlooked Writer?

Margaret Atwood is best known for her dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, but few people know that she also has a beautiful collection of poetry. Her poem "Half-Hanged Mary" is one of my favorite poems of all time. Based on true events, it tells the story of Mary Webster, a young colonial girl from Massachusetts, as she is accused of witchcraft and hanged for her crimes. The townspeople let her hang all night, and when they came to take her body down the next morning, she was miraculously still alive. After that night, she lived 14 more years because the townspeople were too terrified to hang her again. Atwood seamlessly combines horror, cynicism, and wit into this poem, and I think it is a must-read!

-Zach Elton, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern

My favorite overlooked writer, broadly speaking, is the writer of cartoons that I grew up watching on TV. One of these writers is Craig McCraken, creator of *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* and *The Powerpuff Girls*. While the writing of *Foster's* has a number of reasons to be celebrated, the Powerpuff Girls—Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup—had a special impact and significant influence on me as a young girl. Seeing these tiny powerhouses beat up bad guys, challenge the patriarchy and gender stereotypes, and deal with everyday problems in their own unique and relatable ways supplied me with imagination and motivation in my everyday life. As a kid, I didn't think about the effort that goes into creating these animated series, but as an adult, I recognize and appreciate the thoughtful world-building, character creation, and dialogue-writing that these writers bring into every silly cartoon that brings us nostalgia.

-Sophia B. Diaz, Education Intern

My favorite overlooked playwright is Danai Gurira. I appreciate Gurira's work because she tells compelling stories about women without shying away from the hardships and tragedy that they face. Although her play *Eclipsed* was nominated for a Tony Award in 2016, I feel that most people are unaware of her talent as a playwright, instead recognizing her only for her acting credits. It is my hope that one day Danai Gurira's name is as well linked with her works, such as *In the Continuum*, as it is with her television and film roles in *The Walking Dead* and *Black Panther*.

-Jordan Wells, Education Intern

María Irene Fornés is a playwright whose work is often left out of conversations about classic American artists who shaped today's theater landscape. Despite writing countless award-winning plays at the same time as widely celebrated contemporaries such as Lanford Wilson or Arthur Miller, I rarely hear Fornés mentioned as of their same caliber in the American theater canon. Yet, she paved the way for experimental, boundary-pushing theater with plays like *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977), which divides the audience and leads them in groups to different parts of the theater as four scenes are performed simultaneously. My favorite play by Fornés is one of her later plays, *Letters from Cuba* (2000), which uses dance and letter-writing to tell the autobiographical story of Fornés and her brother who lived in Havana. While she has received more attention in recent years, especially since her death in 2018, discussions of Fornés's work often leave out the influence of her identity as a queer and Cuban-American immigrant. I'm hopeful that theater educators and artists will celebrate both her work and the doors she opened for queer, female, immigrant, and Latinx theater artists working today.

-Macey Downs, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern

One of my favorite playwrights is Clare Barron, who has yet to really break into the public consciousness. She centers her plays on the experiences of young women and doesn't shy away from addressing subject matter that can be viewed as controversial or difficult by the general population. My favorite play of hers is *Dance Nation* (2018), which follows a pre-teen dance troupe during their quest to win the coveted Boogie Down Grand Prix. In the script, Barron confronts the roller coaster of emotions that can be felt during puberty, and doesn't shy away from conversations about gender and sexuality. The young characters in this play are encouraged to be cast from a diverse group of female-identifying actors of all ages. Productions have cast women in their 70s alongside women in their 20s to play the characters who range in age from 11-15. Barron has described *Dance Nation* as a "ghost play," meaning that the girls are haunted by older versions of themselves. I admire her for leaning into spectacle, theatricality, and moments of absurdism, while still succeeding in presenting the very real struggles that her characters experience.

-Meredith G. Healy, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern

About the Play

by Macey Downs

"We all embody opposites within
Or else we're frankly far too dull to live
And this our wilding world cannot be hemmed
Within a made-up symmetry of sense."

The character of Aphra Behn—based on the very real 17th-century poet, spy, and playwright—opens *Or,* by calling on audience members to recognize the universe of opposites within themselves. In doing so, she prepares them for what they are about to see: one night in Aphra Behn's life in which she embraces the chaos around and within her, encountering both old and new lovers as she pens them all into a play for an exclusive London theater company. Underscored by the plague-ridden 1660s, *Or,* tells the story of many people who cannot be boxed into being just one thing, and recognizes that the sum of all the roles we play is what makes us human.

While set during England's Restoration, *Or,* explores a web of themes that speak to contemporary America, including thriving (or surviving) as a woman in a patriarchal society, fluidity in sexuality, and stratified class relations. It takes funding from a king to catapult Aphra from being penniless in a debtors' prison to an acclaimed writer, and maintaining her newfound success requires warding off ghosts from her past who are hungry to see a woman fall from fame.

Critics have praised the play's balancing of history, poetry, imperfectly endearing characters, and comedy—a feat that is suggested by the title of the play itself. As Robert Hurwitt of the *San Francisco Chronicle* writes, "*Or,*—the comma is part of the title for several good reasons—is a historical play, not only about historical figures but also written as a Restoration comedy, crossed with a door-slamming farce....Hope prevails, in great waves of laughter. The darker strains beyond Behn's writing chamber only reinforce the dedication to change."

Or, premiered off-Broadway at the WP Theater in New York City in 2009, and has since had over 70 productions. Notable productions include its West Coast premiere at the Magic Theater in San Francisco in 2010, a 2011 production at Seattle Rep, and its outdoor production at Winnipesaukee Playhouse in Meredith, NH, this past September. Portland Stage's audiences will be seeing the Winnipesaukee version of *Or,* reconstructed to fit an indoor proscenium space.

Or, *Winnipesaukee Playhouse, 2020. Photo by Leslie Pankhurst.*

About the Playwright: Liz Duffy Adams

by Macey Downs

Liz Duffy Adams.

Liz Duffy Adams is originally from Ipswich, Massachusetts, and has dual American and Irish citizenship. She earned her BFA from NYU's Experimental Theater Wing; in her 30s she went on to write her first play and subsequently earn her MFA in Playwriting from the Yale School of Drama.

Adams is an alumna of New Dramatists (2001-2008), which is an organization that supports working playwrights, and she has received multiple awards for her work, including the Women of Achievement Award from the WP Theater, where *Or,* premiered. Her other plays include *Dog Act*; *The Salonnières*; *Dear Alien*; *Wonders of the Invisible World*; *Buccaneers*; *Wet or, Isabella the Pirate Queen Enters the Horse Latitude*; *The Listener*; *The Reckless Ruthless Brutal Charge of It or, The Train Play*; and *One Big Lie*. Two of these plays were workshopped and performed at Portland Stage for the Little Festival of the Unexpected: *Dog Act* in 2000 and *Wet or, Isabella the Pirate Queen Enters the Horse Latitude* in 2005.

Adams has self-described their plays on Twitter as often including events such as "Reinvention of civilization post-catastrophe (sometimes micro); Girl jumps out a window at the end (not to die, to adventure); Somebody notices a bird." Critics often praise her writing for its language, provocativeness, and animated characters. Jean Schiffman of *American Theatre* magazine writes, "To Adams, we're all endangered and slightly mad; the world's a quasi-menacing, topsy-turvy place; and the mysteries of the future—and the past—beckon. Her plays [are] vibrantly theatrical, textually thick, compact and comical, teeming with oddball characters bravely flailing in an unpredictable universe."

Adams now splits their time between New York City and western Massachusetts, and will premiere their new play *Born with Teeth* at the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas, when COVID-19 permits. You can check out their website here, or follow them on Twitter @lizduffyadams.

Dog Act, *Flux Ensemble Theater*, 2011.
Photo by Isaiah Tanenbaum

An Interview with the Director: Aileen Wen McGroddy

Edited for Length and Clarity by Macey Downs

Directing and Dramaturgy Intern Macey Downs spoke with Aileen Wen McGroddy, the director of *Or,* at both Winnipesaukee Playhouse and Portland Stage, about her relationship to directing, this play, and creating theater during a pandemic.

Aileen Wen McGroddy.

Macey Downs (MD): *Tell me a bit about your experience directing* Or, *this summer at Winnipesaukee.*

Aileen Wen McGroddy (AWM): Directing *Or,* this summer felt like one impossibly good luck thing after another. As the pandemic started to assert itself in the US, it seemed less and less possible that any theater was going to happen at all. So when we all finally arrived at the Winnipesaukee Playhouse, it was the first time any of us had done a project in person with COVID restrictions in place. It felt like a miracle to even do it at all. The joy of being able to gather together and make theater really took hold. As we were working, we did some clown training exercises, a lot of really fun physical comedy moments, all of these things to learn: what makes this event worth coming to? What makes theater worth making and attending at a higher risk now? If you're gonna do it, it should be great! So that applied both in the sense of really digging in and making the most of every moment in the play, like: let's not miss any jokes, let's not miss any opportunities to tell a story together onstage. As well as being able to be really intentional with how we made the play.

We worked really intensely inside of the intimacy choreography based on *Staging Sex* by Chelsea Pace, and incorporating the principles that (in the before-times) would surround intimate touch with the actors—now all touch is intimate. Even navigating a hug, that's a big deal these days! So, as we went into a really physical play with a lot of sexual contact in it, I worked really hard to create a really robust culture of consent. Oddly, in intimacy work, things get really vague really fast. Which is just a reflection of our society: people are like, "That's a kiss and I don't want to talk about it anymore than that because it makes me feel uncomfortable!" So the process had a lot of care, which led to making space for a lot of joy and play.

MD: *What has it been like to transfer this piece from one space to another, from outdoors to indoors?*

AWM: There's really gorgeous language in the play about the natural world; there's this monologue that Aphra has about a "mythical Arcadia." In the outdoor space, it was so wonderful to look out from your spot on stage and just see, oh here it is! Outdoors, we performed the show in the afternoon in the daytime, so it also meant that the audience and the actors could see each other very well. Often in an indoor space, typically in a proscenium, the actors can't see the audience, and it reinforces that idea of a fourth wall (which somebody invented in Europe and we haven't been able to get rid of ever since). Outside, the actors got to really meet each audience at each performance, and they were really talking to those specific people that were there. They'd find the masked faces, and the eyes, that they'd be really talking to in this play.

Outside, there was nothing that we had to pretend didn't exist. We didn't have to pretend like there wasn't an exit sign, or lighting and sound instruments coming from the ceiling.

We were really able to say "yes" to the entire environment and share that with the audience. I believe that the less time we spend asking audience members to spend their brain cells pretending that something doesn't exist, we get more brain cells to pretend that things do exist. Many indoor theaters are designed to help us know what to pretend doesn't exist. We paint certain things black, we hang curtains in front of something, we have a clear line to indicate where the acting starts and where it stops. There are very clear architectural signals, even before you put a set inside, that tell an audience what is part of the play and what is not part of it. So in moving this play to an indoor theater, how do we still create a space that feels full of story, that the audience and the actors can use as a bridge rather than a fourth wall? I'm hoping to maintain that active relationship between audience members and actors, that rapport that runs through the entire show in the indoor space, but it'll have to function in a different way.

MD: ***What excites you most about this play?***

AWM: What's feeling most alive to me right now is this central argument in the play: what is the difference between surviving and living? And why is it that we make art? Like, I direct plays, which is the least essential thing that a human being can do. I can't even do my job unless other people show up! But on a personal level, it's something that I love doing, it makes me feel like I'm using my humanity to its greatest extent. It's a thing I can do to contribute to the project of humanity. There's a lot of arguments against doing theater—it's inconvenient, too expensive—and yet we're like, "This is the best thing in the world. This is what I want to do." And I'm always like: why!?

There's a scene where William and Aphra have a big argument. And even William—who's a seedier character the audience doesn't easily side with—has this compelling point that's like: the world is cruel and I'm just doing what I can to survive; in this world that hasn't treated me well, why not get mine? And in the pandemic, that's just like: oh, I bought all of the hand sanitizer in my city, why not get mine? Of course, we can see that doesn't lead to being able to live together in a society, being able to be a good citizen. And to Aphra, William is like: why are you writing these silly plays that don't matter when you have the opportunity with me to secure your survival? In the play, Aphra continually has to make the choice of: no, it is important that I write. It's not only important for her on a personal level, but it's important for everyone that she's writing. It's important for everyone that—in order to create a better world—people make choices beyond survival. That the project of humanity is more important sometimes than the project of securing survival. Which is a pretty controversial argument to make! And that artistic endeavor is not the same thing

Or, *Winnipesaukee Playhouse, 2020. Photo by Leslie Pankhurst.*

as leisure—it's not the decoration that you put on the edges of life, it is how one actively engages in living.

MD: ***Can you tell me about your journey as a director?***

AWM: I played a lot of pretend when I was a kid. There's a part of me that never was ready to give that up. When I was a teenager I was really interested in acting, so I did the school plays and acting training things. When I was in college there was this student group that needed a director. They didn't really know who I was and I had never directed before, but they needed someone, so I was like, "Great, I'll do it!" As soon as I directed my first play, I realized that you can play pretend on such a large scale as a director. As an actor, you're one piece of this puzzle, but as a director you can build the puzzle. And that is so fun! I just kept wanting to do it. I had found something that I like to do more than anything else. It scratched a lot of itches for me in my personality, of problem solving, teamwork, imagination, reading, and moving furniture around a room. And making something that wasn't there before, and the delight in doing that.

Now I view the director as someone who is the leader of a microculture of the show. Every rehearsal room has its rituals, hierarchies, rules that are spoken and unspoken. Every show has its rules that are spoken and unspoken, and you get to invite an audience into this bubble of a cultural space that is in relationship to but distinctly separate from the world that you walk in from outside. As I started to understand that, then it felt more important to me to be as good of a cultural leader as I could be. So that meant bending as many arcs toward justice as I could, or making decisions that both created environments for my collaborators that would allow them to do their best work, and that would give an audience an experience that might leave a little impression on them. And by that I mean like: oh, you got to use your imagination tonight—that's pretty cool, remember that. Or: you got a chance to imagine that two things that you thought weren't connected were connected. That's cool!

There's this question of: oh, do you think theater can change the world? There are certainly lots of theatrical endeavors that are extremely oriented toward social justice and are deeply rooted in the work of changing society. But someone smart once told me: "Theater can't change the world, but theater can change people, and people change the world." That sentiment feels really bright to me. And in that way I think that all theater is theater for social change, just the degree of change and what directions the change is pushing for is different every time.

MD: ***Do you have any advice for young directors?***

AWM: My advice is to make stuff. Before I came to graduate school at Brown, I lived in Chicago. Chicago has a wonderful DIY theater community. The way that that city fosters creative work is really remarkable. The first plays I directed after graduating college were like: I have a friend who is a playwright and we knew somebody who could do sound design, and I knew some people who liked to act. We'd find a festival we could submit to and just do a little play.

But also just the muscle of making something is something that you have to use. So that—ideally once you get jobs that pay you more than nothing—you'll have those muscles like ready to go. And in creating opportunities for yourself, you're also releasing yourself from the idea that you need permission to make art. Because you don't. So seek some community that wants to make something with you.

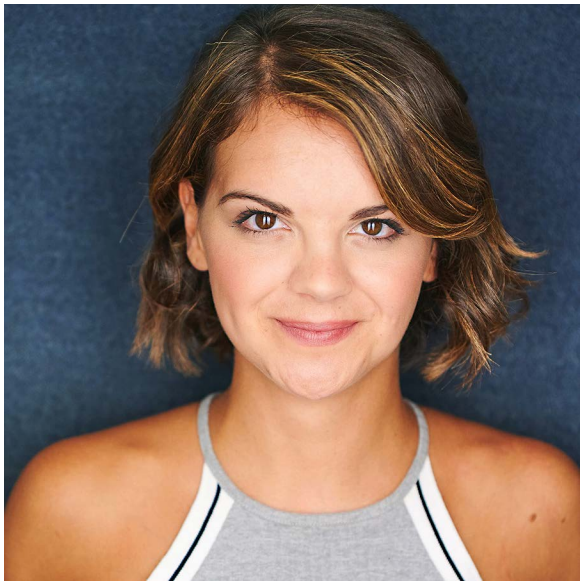
MD: ***Is there anything else you want to add?***

AWM: I want to say that I feel such gratitude towards everyone that's been involved in this project. There is more inertia to making theater right now, and for the people who have chosen to act, design, stage-manage, produce, do front of house—making the choice to do that is a big deal. I feel really lucky to be involved with a group of people that are making that choice.

About the Cast & Characters

by Macey Downs

Name: Rebecca Tucker
Character: *Aphra Behn*. A spy-turned-poetess with enough tenacity to have it all.



Name: Haley Jones
Characters:
Nell Gwynne. An actress who finds amusement and empowerment in exploring gender expression and sexuality.
Lady Davenant. The aristocratic manager of the Duke's Company, she enters every room like a whirlwind.
Maria. Aphra's loyal and underappreciated servant.

Name: Nicholas Wilder
Characters:
Jailer. Exhaustedly holding Aphra in debtors' prison.
Charles II. The enlightened King of England with an appreciation for both Aphra and the arts.
William Scot. An undercover spy with an appetite for revenge.

Post Show Activities

by Sophia B. Diaz & Jordan Wells

1. Re-read the prologue and discuss how it foreshadows the events of the play.

2. The description of the TIME of the play states that it "is set in the Restoration period, but plays off the echoes between the late 1660s, the late 1960s, and today." How do you see this manifest in the play?
    a. In what ways did this play seem timely, or relevant to current events?
    b. What moments (if any) felt solely historical?

3. In the play, Nell declares, "We can love who we want, girls or boys; we can wear any clothes we want —" Were you surprised by an openly queer love story in this historical context?

4. Research one of the characters from the play. Compare what you learn about them to the way they were portrayed in the play.

5. Lady Davenant says, "I won't have one of those 'or' titles, you know what I mean…" Why do you think Liz Duffy Adams chose to name the play *Or,*? In pairs, discuss the significance of the title.

London in the 1600s.

Glossary

by Macey Downs

Antwerp: a city in Belgium with a large trading industry; the economic center for a lot of European industries, which later also became an artistic center of Europe.

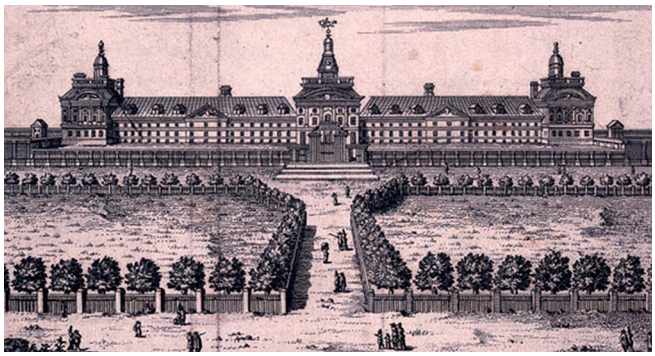
Arcadia: a mountainous, landlocked region of Greece, often written about in poetry to describe naive and ideal innocence that is often unaffected by the passions of the larger world.

ARCADIA.

Aristos: colloquial reference to aristocrats, who are the people who rule in an oligarchy—a form of government in which the exercise of power is restricted to a few people or families.

Bear garden: in London, an entertainment venue used for the baiting of bears and other animals, and for sports such as boxing.

Bedlam: a mental asylum in London.



BEDLAM.

Breeches part: an acting role in which men's clothes are worn by a female actor in a male role.

Cadre: a group of people having some unifying relationship.

Cavaliers: people loyal to King Charles I during the English Civil War (1642-1651).

Celadon: a term used for pottery denoting both wares glazed in the jade green celadon color (also known as greenware) and a type of transparent glaze, often with small cracks, that was first used on greenware.

Cromwellians: supporters of Oliver Cromwell, who became Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England in 1653.

Debtors' prison: a prison for people who are unable to pay a debt.

Decanting: pouring a drink, like wine, from the ordinary bottle in which it is kept into a decanter, which is a clear bottle from which glasses are filled at the table.

DECANTERS.

Duke's Company: a theater owned by William Davenant which was one of two theater companies in London that received patents from King Charles II to produce theater.

Florimell: a character in Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene*.

The Flight of Florimell by Washington Allston, 1819.

Flotsam: part of the wreckage of a ship or its cargo that is found floating on the surface of the sea.

Guttersnipe: someone brought up "in the gutter;" one of the lowest class.

Hackney: stale or tired through indiscriminate use; overused.

Holborn: a borough in London.

An illustration of a street in Holborn.

Insouciance: carelessness, indifference, unconcern.

King's Company: a theater owned by Thomas Killigrew which was one of two theater companies in London that received patents from King Charles II to produce theater.

Knave: a dishonest, unprincipled man; a villain; often contrasted with fool.

Medway: a region in Southeast England that was raided in 1667 by the Dutch.

An illustration of the Raid on Medway.

Mitigate: to alleviate or give relief from (an illness or symptom, pain, suffering, sorrow, etc.).

Monarch: a sole and absolute ruler of a state, often bearing the title of king, queen, emperor, empress, or the equivalent of one of these.

Mumchance: silent, mute; tongue-tied.

Odd's fish: a favorite exclamation of Charles II. It was a corruption of "God's Flesh," or the Body of Christ.

Puritans: a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries, who sought to remove any elements of church practice (such as ceremonies, church ornaments, the use of musical instruments, and in some cases episcopal authority) that they considered corrupt.

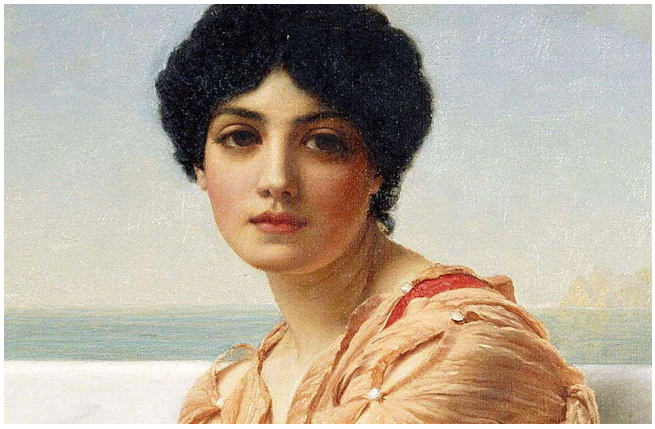
Prosaic: of language or writing: having the character, style, or diction of prose as opposed to poetry; plainly or simply worded; lacking in poetic expression, feeling, or imagination.

Pseudonym: a false or fictitious name, especially one assumed by an author.

Regicide: the action of killing of a king.

Roundheads: those loyal to the Puritan-influenced Parliament during the English Civil War (1642-1651); named after their round haircuts.

Sappho: a woman born around 615 BCE to an aristocratic family on the Greek island of Lesbos; she spent most of her adult life in the city of Mytilene on Lesbos where she ran an academy for unmarried young women and wrote poetry about love between women.



Sappho.

Slattern: an untidy woman; a woman who is habitually careless, lazy, or negligent with regard to appearance, household cleanliness, etc.

Shadwell: a district in East London.

St. James's Park: the oldest Royal Park in London, surrounded by three landmarks: Westminster Abbey, St James's Palace, and Buckingham Palace.

St. James's Park.

Subterfuge: a strategy used to escape the force of an argument, to avoid blame, or to justify one's conduct; a deceptive or evasive statement, action, etc.

Surinam: a Dutch colony on the northern Atlantic coast of South America that was ceded to the Netherlands in exchange for New Amsterdam (now New York City); the setting of Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko*.

Swain: a male servant, attendant, or follower

Terschelling and the Great Bonfire: an event during the Holmes's Bonfire raid where the English burnt down the town of West-Terschelling in the Dutch Republic and destroyed a Dutch fleet of ships.

Thames: the river that runs through London.

Tower: a famous prison in London often used for brutal executions of criminals.

Wastrel: a good-for-nothing, disreputable person.

Who were the Historical Figures in the Play?

by Meredith G. Healy

Aphra Behn (1640-1689): Aphra Behn was the first Englishwoman known to earn a living by writing. Not much is known about her early life and her childhood. As a young woman, she was employed by King Charles II as a spy. After a brief imprisonment due to debt, she began writing to support herself. She is best known for her novel *Oroonoko*, which discusses slavery, gender, and race. Behn is also known for her plays, which she wrote for both the King's Company and the Duke's Company. Her greatest commercial success was a two-part comedy, *The Rover*. During her life, Behn wrote under the pseudonym Astrea. *In A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf credits Behn for having "earned [women] the right to speak their minds."

Charles II (1630-1685): Charles II was the King of England, Scotland, and Ireland during the Restoration in the mid- to late 1600s. As a child, Charles II was exiled to France due to the civil war between Parliament and Charles I over the king's claim to Divine Rule. After Charles I's execution, Charles II remained in exile until the Parliament-led government collapsed after the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658. Charles II assumed the throne and became known as the "Merry Monarch" due to his self-indulgent tendencies. Though Charles II had 14 illegitimate children, he did not produce an heir to the throne before his death.

There are no known portraits of William Scot, but he might have looked like this.

William Scot: William Scot was the son of Thomas Scot, an English politician who was executed due to his involvement with the death of King Charles I. Aphra Behn was sent to the Netherlands by King Charles II with the mission of turning William Scot into a double agent who would report any assasination plots of Charles II to the Crown. It is believed that Scot betrayed Behn and turned her in to the Dutch, prompting her flight from the Netherlands and subsequent imprisonment in debtors' prison.

Nell Gwynne (1650-1687): Nell Gwynne was born and raised in the slums of London. In her teenage years, she worked as an orange seller for the King's Theatre. It was in this role that she caught the attention of the actor Charles Hart, who began casting her in plays. One of the earliest female actors during the Restoration, Gwynne was the leading female actor for the King's Company from 1666-1669, despite never having learned to read or write. Her acting career ended in 1669 when she became a mistress to Charles II, with whom she had two sons. Unlike Charles II's other mistresses, she was well-liked by the public, likely due to her charm onstage and in social settings.

Plague Precedents and Theater Closures in London

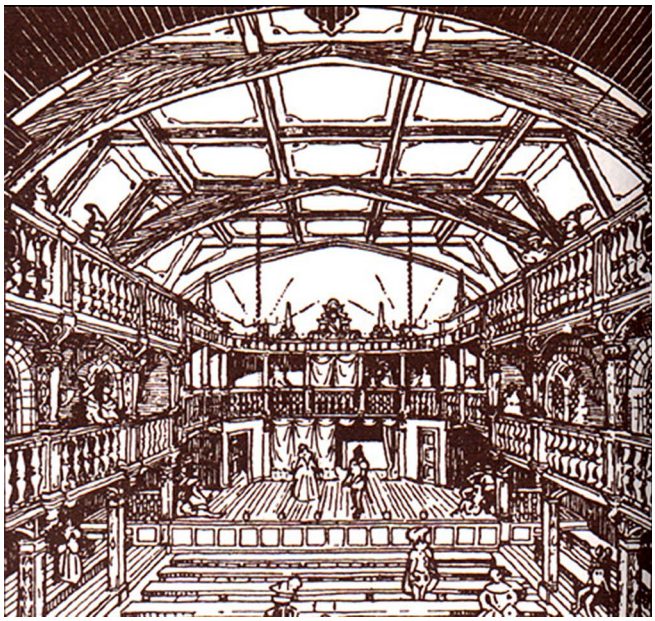
by Macey Downs

"Rome's fall no more melancholy looked
When once barbaric hoards had gone their way
Than this our plagued and battered city shows
Unnat'ral in its hushed and barren waste."
- Aphra Behn, Or,

Underneath the fast-paced action of *Or,* lies a new and uncertain societal terrain. At the time of the play, mid-17th-century England was literally "plagued and battered" as Aphra Behn describes—recovering from a civil war, multiple transfers of power, and the highly feared yet poorly understood bubonic plague itself. Despite having arrived in Europe 300 years prior from fleas that came from rats, the plague continued to ravage and shape social life in London during Behn's lifetime.

The plague would frequently rear its head during the 17th century, always leaving death, destruction, and changes to the social order in its wake. In 1603, the bubonic plague—named for its symptom of swollen lymph nodes or "bubos"—killed over 30,000 Londoners as thousands of others fled the city. Theater closures during this time marked an early effort at social distancing tactics. Performances mainly took place outside during the summer months, which was when the spread and symptoms of the plague were felt most severely. London theaters were required to close whenever the death toll flared up—which was standardized at 30 or more people dying within a week—in hopes of reducing the plague's spread. Theaters in London were closed for a total of 78 months following the 1603 outbreak. However, in spite of these closures, some theater companies adapted to remain in business. Shakespeare's theater company chose to tour to provinces outside of London where the plague was felt less severely.

The plague struck London again various times between 1625 and 1636, killing around 45,000 people in the city alone. Entire villages disappeared from starvation, illness, and



Blackfriars Theater.

abandonment. Wealthy Londoners were able to flee the city and avoid the plague, leaving the poor to fall ill and die, as they often had to live in close quarters and could not afford to relocate. Theater followed the wealthy's suit. Most notably, in 1608, Shakespeare's company moved into the Blackfriars, a theater just outside London's city limits, and therefore just outside the reach of London's orders for plague closures. The theater—once an outdoor gathering space for the poor as well as the rich—had now moved inside, and with this move came higher ticket prices and smaller, more elite audiences.

However, the longest theater closure during this century would not be due to the plague, but due to changes in English leadership and the English Civil War (1642-1651). The first half of the 17th century was guided by kings James I and his son Charles I, who firmly believed in absolutism, or that the king had absolute power over his country. Wealthy aristocrats supported absolutism, whereas the lower classes in England wanted their elected officials in Parliament to have more power. This divide

caused the Civil War to break out, which eventually led to the execution of Charles I and Parliament's seizing of power. In 1642, this Puritan-influenced Parliament ordered that all theaters be closed, claiming that theater rituals led to the worshipping of many ancient gods, as they did in ancient Greece and Rome. They also saw the frivolity and sexual expression in theater as sinful, and feared the theater as a space where poor and rich classes alike could gather together and develop anti-Parliamentary sentiments. Theaters remained closed until 1660, when Charles II ended Parliament's rule and took the English throne.

In 1665—one year before the opening of *Or,* is set—as London was finally recovering from the end of the English Civil War and adjusting to the start of Charles II's reign, the plague struck London yet again. This would be the last large-scale outbreak of the plague in England, with likely 100,000 people dying with its resurgence. Theaters would remain closed for a total of 16 months, but would quickly reopen with the assistance of Charles II. Charles II was a great patron of the arts. He funded theater companies that in turn became spaces of entertainment for the king and very wealthy aristocrats. Future kings would follow Charles II's lead and continue to endow the arts, but this patronage would make inaccessible an art form that had previously been enjoyed by lower and upper classes alike.

In many ways, our responses to the coronavirus pandemic today echo those of 17th century England, with wealthy people fleeing metropolitan areas and those infected with the plague quarantining in their houses. Just as many theaters across the country have closed indefinitely to protect audiences from COVID-19, the mid-17th-century theater closures point to a historical understanding that theater is not a necessity; it is often the first to close and last to open during pandemics. Yet art, entertainment, and sharing a live experience in a room with other human beings are among the things that we miss the most as we stay home and wear masks to keep our communities safe. While we do not need theater, we continue to choose theater, and theater continues to adapt as it always has.

What was it like living in the 1600s?

by Meredith G. Healy

London in the 1600s.

Or, takes place in London from 1666-1670, which is part of what is known as the Restoration in England. Life for the characters in the play, as well as for the people who lived during the same era, is very different from the world in which we live today. This time period saw a country emerging from a plague, and, as a result, ushered in societal changes. What was it like to live in England during this time?

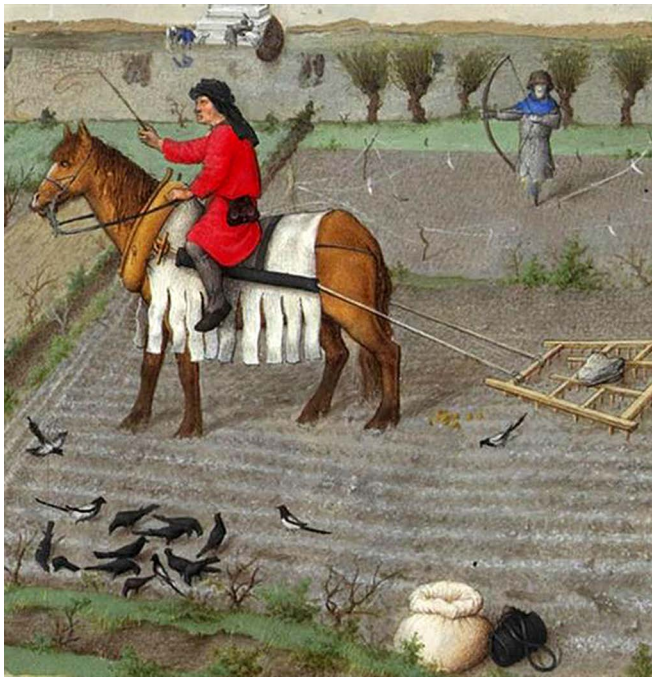
In the 1600s, England had a very pronounced class structure. At the top of the hierarchy was the nobility, who had titles including dukes, earls, or barons, and were members of the House of Lords, which is part of Great Britain's Legislature. The next class was the gentry, who were gentlemen with lesser titles who typically owned estates. In the 17th century, the nobility and the gentry owned more than 75% of the land. Then were the yeomen, who farmed alongside their indentured men, but owned their own land. The lower class was comprised of laborers, tenant farmers, and craftsmen. The jobs that people in this class held were related to whether they lived in a city, a town, or the countryside. In cities, they peddled wares, which could include food or other goods. In towns, there was more tradework; one might work as a carpenter, cobbler, tailor, or blacksmith. In the countryside, the lowest class provided the manual labor needed on farms. The agricultural revolution did not come until the 1800s, so work such as sowing and cultivating were all done without the assistance of machinery.

During this period, the majority of the population resided in agricultural villages. Towns and cities were crowded, and disease, including the flu outbreak of 1665, spread quickly within those communities. London was already divided by class; the wealthy lived in the west end, and the poor lived in the east end. The population also boomed: at the beginning of the century, 4 million people resided in England and Wales; by the end of the century, the count was 5.5 million.

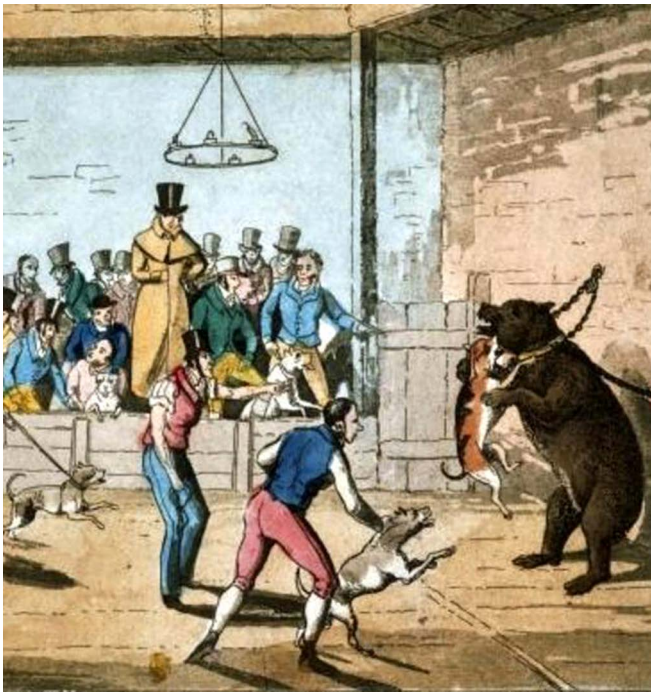
The societal and gender roles during this period were patriarchal and well defined for men and women. Women were subservient to the men in their lives, which could include their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. There was, however, a path for women to take work as ladies' maids or wet nurses that did not result in marriage. Even so, in this role, women were bound to serve their employers.

Unsurprisingly, there was also a disparity between the schooling of boys and girls. Upper-class children were more likely to receive an education. Both boys and girls could attend school as young children, but fewer girls were given the opportunity to continue their studies as they got older. There were some boarding schools for upper-class girls during this time that taught life skills such as writing, music, and needlework. Tutors were also common for children in the higher classes.

For leisure and recreation, people were fond of playing games, some of which are familiar to our modern audience and some of which are not. Around the home, families played card and board games like backgammon and chess. When they ventured out, they attended live music programs. People also sought entertainment by attending more violent events. These included public executions,



FARMING IN THE 1600S.



BEAR BAITING.

cock fighting, and bear baiting. During the mid-1600s, theater was banned due to Puritan values, but in 1660 after Charles II ascended the throne, it was reintroduced to society. One major change to theatrical performance was the introduction of female actors portraying female characters. This opened the door for female actors, such as Nell Gwynne whom we meet in *Or,*.

Life during the 1600s was admittedly very different from what we experience today. It is important to note the prominent roles that gender and class differences played in the lives of people living in 17th-century England. In fact, in the modern-day US, we still experience these social divisions and hierarchies to some extent. With this additional insight into how people lived in the 1600s, we can better understand the relationships and dynamics that we see between the characters in *Or,* and we can draw parallels to the society in which we participate today.

History of the Restoration

by Zach Elton

"All our time abroad, O, how I longed
To sail for London, our beloved town...
But now that I at last have come to roost
What do I find but grandeur's sad decay
And my own state much like in disarray
Languishing unransomed and alone
Abandoned by the great who late I served."
- Aphra Behn, Or,

With these words, Aphra Behn bemoans what has happened to the great city of London during her lifetime. She has lived through the English Civil War, and, in time, she has watched the King get overthrown. Over a decade later, the echoes of war still haunt the city, people are starving and dying, and she is trapped in a debtors' prison. This is not the city she once loved. She remembers her life under King Charles I's reign, and longs for the rightful king, Charles II, to take the throne. Little does Aphra Behn know at the beginning of the play that Charles II is about to become king.

The period known as the Restoration began with the coronation of Charles II in 1660, officially restoring the Stuart monarchy to the English throne. When Charles II took power, he ushered in a new age of political, social, and artistic advancements; however, to fully understand the importance of the Stuarts returning to power, we must first understand the English Renaissance.

Most historians would say that the English Renaissance began in 1485 when the War of the Roses ended and Henry VII took the throne, beginning the Tudor dynasty. Britain flourished under the reign of the Tudors for over 100 years. The height of the Renaissance was said to be during Queen Elizabeth's reign from 1558 to 1603, when the country was producing an incredible amount of literature, music, and theater. This time period produced playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and, most famous of all, William Shakespeare.

When Queen Elizabeth died childless, she was succeeded by James I, the child of her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. James I's coronation officially ushered in the Stuart dynasty. During James I's time on the throne, the country dealt with financial trouble and the constant

Oliver Cromwell.

threat of war. When he died in 1625, his son, Charles I, ascended to the throne, but Charles I's time in power was even more tumultuous than his father's. There were tensions among England, Ireland, and Scotland that resulted in the First Civil War; Charles I ordered two failed expeditions into France; and he had continuous conflicts with Parliament over his excessive spending. He even went so far as to dissolve multiple Parliaments and ruled without one for many years. There was also a growing division among Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, so when Charles I married a Roman Catholic woman even though he was a practicing Anglican, there was widespread unrest. This political and religious division led to the Second Civil War in 1648 where Oliver Cromwell, one of Charles's opponents in Parliament, overthrew him. After Charles I was captured, he was put on trial for high treason against the realm of England and was soon beheaded outside of the Banqueting House in Whitehall, London. His sons, Charles II and James II, fled the country.

Following Charles I's death, there was an 11-year period called the Interregnum, or the period between two kings, where different government factions ruled, headed by Oliver Cromwell. During this time, the Puritans took control of Parliament and enforced strict rules on the rest of the country. They advocated against the lavish lifestyle that Charles I had led, and encouraged people to be more reserved. They banned gambling and theatrical events because they saw these to be immoral, and they even banned Christmas and Easter

celebrations because they were perceived to be too extravagant.

The Interregnum ended with the ascension of Charles II, the son of Charles I. Charles II was only eight years old when the Second Civil War broke out, and he escaped into exile. As a teenager he spent time in France and Scotland before being called home to take the throne. With the return of Charles II, the Restoration Period began. The time period covers the reigns of Charles II and his younger brother James II. After Charles II took the throne, he passed the Indemnity and Oblivion Act on August 29, 1660, which pardoned all past treasons against the king, but it specifically excluded those involved in the trial and execution of his father. Thirty-one of the 59 judges who signed the death warrant against Charles I were still alive; these men were hunted down and put on trial for their crimes except for a lucky few who escaped to America. Charles II also passed the Clarendon Code and the Act of Uniformity in 1662, officially restoring the Anglican Church as the national Church of England. This ushered in the return of traditional holidays and festivities, such as Christmas and Easter services.

While strict minimalism was the style during the Interregnum, the return of the Stuart monarchy brought a return to the lavish lifestyles that were experienced in Charles I's reign. Much like his father, Charles II spared no expense on clothes, art, parties, and entertainment. Within months of his coronation he reopened theaters and commissioned two new theaters to be built for him. They were named the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane and the Dorset Garden Theatre, and many of the best plays of the time were produced there. One of the first female playwrights, Aphra Behn, wrote during this time period, as did William Wycherley and William Congreve. In strict contrast to the former Puritian way of life, the plays had an emphasis on gender and sexual expression that was rarely seen on English stages before this time. The infidelities happening in King Charles II's court were well known throughout England. He had multiple affairs with women such as Nell Gwynne and Barbara Villiers, and the playwrights of the time did not shy away from jokes about his love life.

Though his sexual escapades were well known, by the time he died, Charles II had no legitimate Protestant heir to the throne. After his death, his brother James II became king. When James II was living in France, he had converted to Roman Catholicism and maintained his religion when he took the throne. Many of the primarily Protestant English people were wary. When James'swife, who was also Roman Catholic, gave birth, the people feared that a Roman Catholic dynasty was going to be established. This led to the Glorious Revolution, where William of Orange, a distant relative of James II, invaded with the support of the Protestants in Britain. James II was overthrown in the coup and was forced into exile in France, where he died in 1701.

The exile of James II in 1688 is seen by many as the end of the Restoration Period; however, some historians say the time period lasted through the death of Queen Anne in 1714. While this time period was brief, it was certainly tumultuous. Aphra Behn responded to the chaotic world around her through her writing. Though she was on good terms with King Charles II, she didn't shy away from commenting on the issues plaguing England under his reign. Hidden behind her beautiful poetry, her plays contained a commentary on politics, religion, class, gender, and sexuality.

The Court of King Charles II.

About Aphra Behn

Curated by Timothy L'Ecuyer of Winnipesaukee Playhouse
Edited for Length and Clarity by Macey Downs

Aphra Behn.

Spy and playwright, traveler and wit, Aphra Behn was England's first professional woman writer. In an age when many women of letters were intellectual aristocrats like Anne Finch, countess of Winchilsea, and Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle—wealthy ladies who claimed to write only for pleasure and "fame" among their friends—Behn was a middle-class widow who frankly wrote for money and public acclaim. Of uncertain parentage, she seems in around 1663 to have traveled with a foster family to Surinam in the West Indies, where her adventures are said by some biographers to have included an involvement in a slave rebellion and a visit to a tribe of Indians who had never before seen Europeans. Returning to England in 1664, she was briefly married to a Mr. Behn, about whom little is known except that he was a London merchant of Dutch ancestry, who very likely died in the terrible plague of 1665.

In 1666, widowed and casting about for some means of support, Mrs. Behn entered the intelligence service of King Charles II, though as she later acknowledged, such "public toils of state affairs" were "unusual with my sex, or in my years." Assigned to work as a spy in Antwerp, she carried out her mission "remarkably well," according to Angeline Goreau, the author of a recent biography, but the king's agents never paid her properly for her labors, so she ended up spending some time in 1668 in a London debtors' prison. Apparently it was the trauma from this last experience that decided her upon what was, for a woman, an unprecedented step: writing for money.

From 1670 on, Behn's groundbreaking literary career was characterized by remarkable productivity. She had always been a literary young woman, a fluent diarist, and an enthusiastic reader of French romances. Now, as she became a professional playwright, she moved from writing somewhat derivative tragicomedies to producing farces in the style of such contemporaries as the comic dramatist William Wycherley. Behn was composing and publishing a series of briskly witty verses, some marked by an erotic honesty that scandalized some of her readers. Although the Restoration circles in which she traveled permitted extraordinary license to male artists like Behn's libertine friend and patron, the poet John Wilmot, earl of Rochester, the same circles expected women to remain decently silent about their own desires.

A Brief History of Women Spies

by Meredith G. Healy

When we first meet *Or,*'s Aphra Behn, she is in a debtors' prison. She went into debt after working as a spy for the Royalists during the English Civil War. Throughout history, women have made good spies due to their supposed unassuming natures and diminished social status. Additionally, throughout history, many men who work in intelligence agencies have expressed a belief that women can more easily charm or seduce information out of men, particularly during wartime. Who were these women who risked their lives to further their causes? How did they gather intelligence?

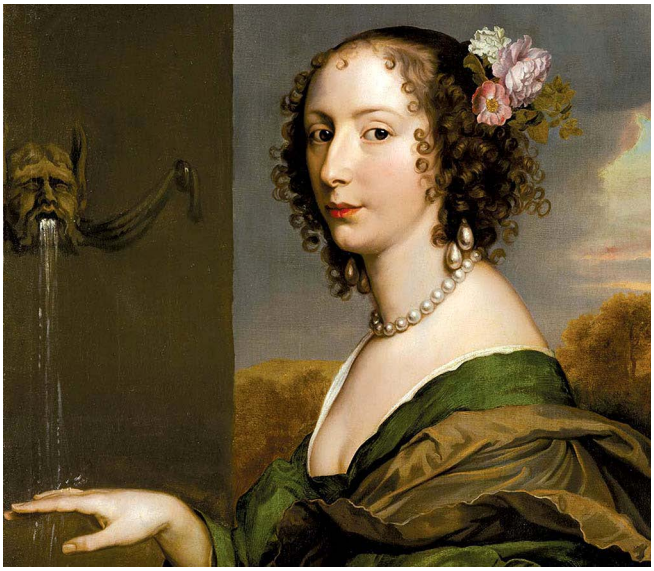
16th century Kunoichi.

Early Spies

Spies have existed for many centuries. Moses sent spies to Canaan in the Old Testament, and in *The Art of War* (5th century BCE) the Chinese general Sun Tzu described five different types of spies in great detail. Ancient Egyptians were amongst the first to call spies by a specific name, referring to them as "the eyes of the Pharaoh." In 12th-century Georgia, King David IV established a network of spies called *mstovaris* who kept him informed of plots and conspiracies against him. In Europe during medieval times, many spies were priests and monks, as people in these positions had knowledge of languages. As the profession progressed, however, people of lower status who were more unobtrusive and invisible were thought to be more effective spies. Sir Francis Walsingham, who worked as the secretary for Queen Elizabeth I from 1573-1590, is remembered for the intelligence network he created that protected Elizabeth from being overthrown by Roman Catholic plotters. An early example of women spies can be found beginning in 16th-century Japan. Female ninjas, known as *kunoichi*, were often employed as ladies' maids who secretly gathered intelligence and carried out stealthy assassinations.

English Civil War (1642-1651)

Women in every class, from nobles to commoners, worked as spies during the English Civil War in the mid-1600s. Both Parliamentarians and Royalists used women, as they were more likely to avoid suspicion and were treated more leniently if caught. When Charles I was imprisoned, men were not allowed to visit, but women were because guards did not think women capable of espionage. The king relied on women to share and distribute information, and several were involved with his various escape plots. Jane Whorwood was one of the best known Royalist spies. She primarily acted as a courier and was also a mistress to Charles I. The Parliamentarians were less likely to employ



Jane Whorwood.

women spies, but they still utilized a select few to assist with receiving and delivering payments between party members. After the Civil War, women continued to work as underground agents for secret Royalist groups like the Sealed Knot and the Great Trust.

American Revolutionary War (1765-1783)
The American Revolutionary War saw female spies working for the British and the Americans. They often carried letters and passed information across lines. Women working as spies for the Americans welcomed British officers into their homes and listened to their conversations; the British officers did not suspect the women of relaying the information to their enemies. One of the American spies, Anna Smith Strong, used her laundry line and strategically placed handkerchiefs to direct soldiers passing through to messages. The placement of the handkerchief corresponded with the message's location.

Harriet Tubman.

American Civil War (1861-1865)
Throughout the American Civil War, there were spies on both the Union and the Confederate sides. The women who worked as spies during this time used their charms to gather information from unsuspecting soldiers and then passed along their accounts to officers. Elizabeth Van Lew initially brought food to Union soldiers imprisoned by the Confederate Army, but before long she started gathering information from the prisoners about details that they had overheard during their captivity. She also devised a code to safely distribute the information and established a group of couriers to assist her in her work. Harriet Tubman, the American abolitionist best known for her involvement with the Underground Railroad, was also a spy during the Civil War. She worked with former slaves to gather information about Confederate troops, including their camp locations and movements.

Mata Hari.

World War I (1914-1918)
During World War I (WWI), there was an increased presence of women working on the war efforts. Many were nurses tending to wounded soldiers. This role presented a familiar opportunity to listen and collect intelligence from those for whom they were caring. Edith Cavell was an English nurse working in Belgium. She housed refugees in the nursing school in which she worked, and helped British, French, and Belgian soldiers cross over German lines to rejoin their units. One of the most notorious female spies was most active during WWI. Mata Hari worked as a double agent, spying initially for the Germans and then for the French. She is remembered for using her charm and seduction to coax information out of soldiers.

World War II (1939-1945)
In 1940, Winston Churchill established the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which secretly worked to build a resistance against Nazi Germany throughout Europe. Agents came from many different nations, including America, New Zealand, Poland, and the Netherlands. Of the 470 SOE Agents stationed in France, 39 were women. Women carried

messages during the war and were rarely stopped at checkpoints during their missions. These women were trained to pick locks and maintain a cover story. They were each given code names and all spoke French fluently, which was critical as they tried to avoid detection. Among them was Virginia Hall, an American who lost her leg in a hunting accident and then tried to apply to work for the US State Department. When she was turned away, she began to build a resistance in Lyon, where she passed information to British pilots and assisted French women by providing safe passage out of Nazi-occupied regions. Nancy Wake was another member of the SOE. She worked in Marseilles and helped political prisoners escape to England and Spain. Wake was known as the "White Mouse," and at one point had a five million franc reward placed on her head.

Virginia Hall.

Cold War (1947-1991)

During the Cold War, there were certainly active spies assisting the Soviet Union, but there was also a core group of American women working to identify those distributing the classified information across enemy lines. These women were part of Verona, a secret group attempting to decipher Soviet spy communications. Like most female spies, they were unassuming and seemingly ordinary. They blended in with how women presented themselves during the 1960s, and were fiercely loyal to each other. Most of them were single. When asked about this, Angie Nanni, a member of Verona, responded, "We were afraid to meet other people because, at that time, we didn't know who we were going to meet." At the height of the Cold War, there were certainly fears that people were Soviet spies.

Angie Nanni.

"Lisa," a present-day British female Secret Intelligence Service officer, has a good idea of why women have traditionally made such good spies: "We are quite good at multitasking. We are quite good at tapping into different emotional resources." Tamir Padro, the head of Mossad, Israel's National Intelligence Agency, elaborated on this point. "Women are gifted at deciphering situations. Contrary to stereotypes, you see that women's abilities are superior to men in terms of understanding the territory, reading situations, spatial awareness. When they're good, they're very good." History has long underestimated the abilities of women, and for the women who work in intelligence agencies across the globe, this miscalculation plays right into their hands. Upon our first introduction to Aphra, we can tell that she is savvy and sharp, traits that undoubtedly were useful in her work as a spy, and that we will see her employ as she navigates her complex interpersonal relationships in *Or,*.

Restoration Comedy in Opposition to Puritanism

by Zach Elton

"I have greater ambitions...greater even than to be queen. I will have undying honor. I will know a godlike eternal fame. I will be a playwright....I'll earn my bread or go hungry."
- Aphra Behn, Or,

During the Interregnum (1649-1660), or the time in between King Charles I's and King Charles II's reigns, Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans had firm control over the British government. With their power, they banned everything that was considered lavish, excessive, or sinful. The theaters were one of the first places Cromwell closed down. However, when Charles II ascended to power, he reopened the theaters within three months and gave Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant exclusive rights to establish two theaters in his name. They created the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane and the Dorset Garden Theatre where many of the best Restoration comedies were soon produced.

Restoration comedy is a genre of plays that were written in England from 1660-1700, primarily under the rule of King Charles II and King James II. While as many as 500 Restoration comedies exist today, very few are still performed; however, there are some that are still regularly studied and produced by theaters, such as *The Way of the World* by William Congreve, *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley, and *The Rover* by Aphra Behn—the protagonist of *Or,*.

There are a few characteristics that define Restoration comedy. First and foremost, Restoration comedies were known to be bawdy and immoral. In a response to the Puritans' strict rules from the previous decade, these plays emphasized sexuality and gender expression. Before the Restoration, female roles were usually played by adolescent boys dressed up as women. Although women had been allowed on stage in France and Italy for many years, they had never been allowed to perform on public stages in England. Now, for the first time, women were playing female roles. Nell Gwynne—who is portrayed in *Or,*—was one of the first acclaimed English actresses.

A second characteristic of Restoration comedies was that these plays combined lowbrow humor, such as farce and burlesque, with impeccable wit, which was considered highbrow humor. In her article "An Introduction to Restoration Comedy," Diane Maybank claims, "In the 17th century, wit meant more than the ability to make people laugh. Wit was governed by a serious playfulness with words and ideas, where language was used in an intellectually stimulating and surprising way. Such language was elegant, structured, and subtle. The style in which an original thought was expressed was as worthy of attention as the idea itself. Playwrights would sacrifice pace to allow time for displays of wit between rivals aiming to cut each other down to size, or, more popular still, for the sparring, flirtatious wit between would-be lovers." These characters would employ literary devices such as puns, antithesis, repartee, irony, conceit, and double entendre to trip up the other character and prove their superiority.

The Dorset Garden Theatre.

The Rover. *The Royal Shakespeare Company, 2016. Photo by Ellie Kurttz.*

Due to the combination of low- and high brow humor, the demographics of the audience began to shift as well during Charles II's reign. More people from the middle and lower classes began to buy tickets to the theater, leading to a price gap between different seating areas. The aristocrats would primarily sit in the box seats and higher rows of the theater, while the lower classes would sit on the ground level. Many actors liked this division because they could play to different areas of the house at different moments. There were no illusions of the fourth wall, so actors had the freedom to talk directly to the audience. When an actor was in the middle of a battle of wits, they may have played to the aristocrats in the boxes; when the same actor had a bawdy line or was in a farcical situation, they may have played to the lower classes on the ground.

The comedy of manners was one of the most popular subgenres of Restoration comedies. These plays were satires of the upper class's manners and behaviors. The tone of these plays were cynical, condemning, and highly sexually. The high-class characters were often driven by either lust or greed, and many of the plots were extremely intricate, leading to an atmosphere of deceit and moral confusion. While Puritans still stayed away from the theater, Puritan characters were a staple in these comedies. They would often be portrayed as the hypocritical villains of the show. While operating within the status quo, the playwrights actively made a social commentary on class, religion, and gender inequality.

By the time Charles II and James II had died, there was widespread unrest in Britain. William and Mary, the new royals, were not interested in theater, and soon there were multiple pieces of legislation that impeded playwrights' freedom to write without backlash. Playwrights could be charged with "offending public decency," and soon the Lord Chamberlain had the right to censor plays before they were performed for the public. Religious leaders began to condemn Restoration comedy outright, and the public's opinion about the plays began to shift. People were no longer interested or impressed by Restoration comedy. When William Congreve's play *The Way of the World* premiered, it was greeted with indifference and even hostility, and, although the play is now seen as a masterpiece of Restoration comedy, it was out of step with the new age and the new royal family.

While Restoration comedies were only written and produced for a few decades, a tremendous amount of plays came from this time period. Perhaps more impressively, over 300 years later, we are still studying these playwrights and their works. Aphra Behn is still legendary for being the first female playwright to earn her living through her writing, and her play *The Rover* is still one of the most produced Restoration comedies today.

Gender and Sexuality in the Time Period

by Zach Elton

"The world is changing. A woman can be an actress, a playwright, a poet, a libertine, a spy."
- Nell Gwynne, Or,

With these words, Nell Gwynne excitedly reflects on the changing times. Charles II has just been crowned King of England, and she is optimistic about her prospects as an actress and a woman in this new age. In response to the strict Puritian rules of the decade before, the Restoration under the rule of Charles II saw an explosive movement of sexuality and gender expression, especially in the theater. For one of the first times in England, women were allowed to write plays and perform on stage. Aphra Behn, *Or,*'s protagonist, was one of the first women playwrights and was the first to earn her living as one.

There was a certain duality that came along with women gaining the right to write plays and perform on stage. On the one hand, it meant playwrights such as Aphra Behn could give more agency to her female characters. In fact, she would often create strong female leads who were unafraid to have their voices heard. These characters were intellectually equal to their male counterparts, and did not back down from quarreling with them. On the other hand, male playwrights began incorporating more scenes of sexual harassment and sexual violence into their works. While scholars today condemn these scenes for their violence against women, the male audience during the time found these scenes titillating. These sequences often did not further the plot; instead they were used as a way to entice the audience and comment on the sexual happenings in Charles II's court.

King Charles II's sexual escapades were well known throughout England. The seductions and infidelites that happened among the members of Charles's court was common knowledge, as were his affairs with women such as Barbara Villiers and Nell Gwynne. Restoration comedies did not shy away from satirizing his sex life. The comedies were full of jokes about impotence, overly sexual men, and sexually frustrated wives.

The Court of King Charles II.

The rake was a stock character who symbolized overly sexual men, often from the upper class, in these plays. According to Diane Maybank in "An Introduction to Restoration Comedy," the rake was "seductive, witty and arrogant; he represented a flattering type of male prowess and drive, much admired in court circles." He was a character who was sexually explicit and bawdy. Through him, the playwright could discuss and explore sexuality in a way that largely wasn't talked about in everyday life, at least not in the lower and middle classes.

Another common trope in Restoration comedies was the "gay couple." This was a man and a woman who were equally witty and independent. They spent their time teasing their partner to see if they were a viable candidate to marry. The man was usually headstrong and seductive, while the woman was flirtatious and independent. The women in these relationships had equal, if not superior, wit to their male counterparts, and, at least on stage, they had the freedom to outshine their partner. They could express their intelligence, and sexual freedom throughout the play, but they also always ended up married by the end. Though the playwrights could probe and discuss a woman's place in society within the confines of the play, they also had to resolve their plots in marriage to bolster the social norms and reassert the patriarchy.

This period introduced the trope of "trouser roles," also known as "breeches roles." These parts were written as the male hero of the show, but the part was performed by a woman; if a trouser role were in an opera, the woman would be a soprano. Because the female performers were in pants, these roles were seen as highly erotic; this is mainly due to the women's exposed legs and slightly revealing shirt. Nell comments in *Or*, on how the male audience members are obsessed with looking at her body, saying, "They love me in the breeches parts so they can all look at my legs."

There are primarily two types of trouser roles. The first type is a female actor who plays a male character for the entire performance. In this type of role, the audience is supposed to fall under the illusion that this is a man, and the true gender of the actress is never revealed during the context of the performance. The second type of trouser role is a female actor playing a female character who, during the course of the show, takes on the persona of a man. By the end, though,

A woman prepares for a breeches role.

it is revealed that the character is female. In both cases, the audience knows that the true gender of the actress is female; however, when wearing a man's disguise, the women were able to adopt the privilege, power, and influence of a male character.

These roles were not accepted by everyone. Puritans condemned the roles for promoting sexual immorality because the men in the audience could see a woman's leg. The roles were also condemned for promoting homosexuality because many of the trouser roles characters had young female love interests. In addition, because these women were wielding the power of men, some critics of the time thought it gave women an unrealistic and immoral idea of a woman's place in society—which at the time was completely submissive to their male counterparts. Though women could express their freedom and wit on stage, when the play ended, they had to assume their submissive place in the patriarchy once more.

Though there was an explosive movement of gender and sexual expression during the Restoration, it would be a few hundred years before the fight for equality really began. However, women in this time period, such as Aphra Behn and Nell Gwynne, paved the way for future playwrights, actresses, and women to fight for their rights.

Community Connections: An Interview with Callie Kimball

by Meredith G. Healy

Callie Kimball.

Directing and Dramaturgy Intern Meredith G. Healy spoke with Callie Kimball, a Portland-based playwright, about her journey as a playwright, her experience dramatizing historical events, and her favorite female dramatists.

Meredith G. Healy (MGH): ***What has your path been like as a playwright?***

Callie Kimball (CK): I started as an actor in Washington, DC. Then I heard about a short play competition. I entered it and my play was selected! I remember sitting in the audience of a small black box theater, sort of hidden off to the side because the event was sold out. I remember listening to the audience laugh at what I had written, and it was amazing! It was so encouraging and meaningful. Then I went back into acting for a few years, but I started to get frustrated with acting because you rely on people picking you. Do you look right? How do you sound? You are the product. And I remembered that feeling of being in the black box. I was invisible, and my work was what was being judged. So, I wrote another short piece for a company in DC, and the artistic director of that theater, Bridget O'Leary, said she thought I should write a full-length play based on it. So I did, and she produced it. That play was called *Lulu Fabulous* and it was 15 years ago. And because I didn't think I would ever be able to go to graduate school I created my own graduate school, where for the next three years I wrote three plays a year. It was a mix of self-produced work and work produced by small, scrappy storefront theaters. I was learning very quickly from my mistakes.

I then moved to New York City, because I realized that in Washington, DC, even though the bigger theaters were supportive and aware of my work, they weren't going to commission me. So, I moved to New York right when the economy tanked, during the 2008 financial collapse. I got a job at NBC, where I worked for seven years, and during that time, Hunter College started their MFA program led by Tina Howe. So, from 2010-2012, I was able to work full-time and simultaneously earn my graduate degree. Once I got my degree I moved to Maine, which is where my mom's side of the family is from, and I've been here ever since. Maine has been a wonderful community. I didn't know what to expect. There is a thriving community of artists here in every discipline.

MGH: ***What types of stories inspire you? What subjects do you like to address in the scripts that you write?***

CK: It's funny, I'm not as inspired by written stories as much as I am by visual art. I feel like we have a choice as artists to either be consuming content or creating it. I generally limit my consumption, and I limit it to genres that are outside of my field. So music, visual arts, paintings, sculptures, installations. These are the things that really stimulate my curiosity, and give me a sense of something larger than myself. When I write, I'm always asking myself if this is just an idea or if it is a play. Does the thought really warrant being fleshed out into a full-length play? A lot of my ideas don't pass that test. I'll make notes, and then I'll set the work aside and revisit it six months later and

ask if the subject still interests me. If it does, I'll keep working on it. Much of the time when I actually start to write I've often sat with the idea for a few years.

The things that interest me generally are giving voices to the marginalized people of everyday life. Whether they are marginalized by class, race, gender, gender identity. I tend to want to put front and center characters that we normally don't get a long look at in our daily life. I have focused a lot of my plays on working women. At the end of my bio it says, "Some have described [my] plays as feminist, which is lovely, but really [I] just write plays where the main characters have jobs and goals and happen to be women." For a while I was writing about parasitic relationships, because that just fascinated me. Really dark and weird, like *Things That Are Round*, which Portland Stage did a workshop of a few years ago. So, a dysfunctional relationship that is made functional by the people in it. That sort of relationship interests me. I've entered into a new phase of my writing and I'm still learning what it's going to be about, but always in those dark plays there was a moment of hope and a gesture of love that was transformative. That is what I'm going to carry forward. I'm not sure if I'm going to write more solo shows or prose or narrative non-fiction, but I'm playing with the form and subject matter because of COVID.

MGH: *Given that* Or*, includes historical characters including Aphra Behn, one of the earliest female playwrights, can you talk to me a little bit about your play* Sofonisba*? How did you weave historical events and characters into your story?*

CK: *Sofonisba* is based on the life of Sofonisba Anguissola, an Italian Renaissance painter who went to the court of Philip [II] in Spain to be court painter. There are a few fragments of her biography, including letters, but at the time I was writing the play in 2008 there wasn't a lot known about her. So I researched as much as I could and I made a giant spreadsheet of every character in the play with significant dates and ages. The ages were significant because Isabel, Philip's queen, was fourteen years old when they met. Both Isabel and Sofonisba, who was 28 when they met, arrived at the Spanish court at the same time. So the idea of these two women, one from France and one from Italy, together in the Spanish court was interesting to me. I researched historical events, what wars were going on, how the Catholic Church was operating, what religion meant to the country and the royal family. Isabel also had lots of miscarriages. I kept uncovering these dates and realizing how young she was and how young she died. Sofonisba, on the other hand, didn't marry until she was almost 40 and never had children. Yet, she was incredibly prolific and very well respected. Not a whiff of scandal ever. Sometimes a woman artist was mistreated or not taken seriously, and Sofonisba was very self-possessed. In her 90s she was visited by the young artist Anthony van Dyck who sought her counsel. So, she was very highly esteemed by her peers, though nobody knows about her today. The story kind of wrote itself! At this time I had never written a historical drama, so I was terrified. I wrote the first act and it was read at the Kennedy Center in 2008, and the audience loved it and wanted more, so I wrote the play!

MGH: *What is the most challenging part about writing plays set in specific eras that are not our own?*

CK: It is actually much easier for me to write historical plays! I love history, and ever since I was a child I've enjoyed reading about history. After *Sofonisba*, I wrote another play called *Rush* (which was set during the Yukon Gold Rush in 1899). I started to learn that, when one is writing a play set in another time and place, it is useful as a lens through which to think about and engage with things that are going on right now.

MGH: *What female playwrights inspire you?*

CK: I love Migdalia Cruz. She is wildly inventive and highly theatrical. I tend to write linear plays, so I really love plays that break the things that I can't seem to break in my own plays and do it well. I also love Dominique Morisseau. I remember watching a New York reading at the Public Theater, where she was in the Emerging Writers [Group], of *Detroit '67*. I think this was either in 2010 or 2011, and I knew I was in the presence of something special, so it has been really exciting to track her journey. Catherine Trieschmann wrote a great play called *How the World Began*, and her work explores questions of faith, belief, and class. Laura Wade is a British playwright who is a beautiful writer. Of course Tina Howe, my teacher. I also would say Ellen McLaughlin because of her work with the Greek plays.

Recommended Resources

by Editors

Books:
Paradise Lost by John Milton
Restoration London: Everyday Life in the 1660s by Liza Picard
The Diary of Samuel Pepys by Samuel Pepys

Plays:
The Rover by Aphra Behn
The Mystery of Irma Vep by Charles Ludlam
The Way of the World by William Congreve
The Country Wife by William Wycherley

Works by Liz Duffy Adams:
Dog Act
The Salonnières
Wonders of the Invisible World
Buccaneers
Wet or, Isabella the Pirate Queen Enters the Horse Latitude
The Listener
The Reckless Ruthless Brutal Charge of It or, The Train Play
One Big Lie.

TV/Film:
Shakespeare in Love
Witchfinder General

Gwyneth Paltrow and Joseph Fiennes in Shakespeare in Love.

Portland Stage Company
Education and Outreach

Join Portland Stage as we discuss, debate, and explore the plays on our stage and in the classroom! Portland Stage is dedicated to bringing exciting theater, inspiring conversation, interactive experiences, and thought-provoking literature to a wide audience of youth and adult learners. Whether you take part in a discussion, subscribe to PlayNotes, take a class in our Theater for Kids space, or bring a group of students to see a performance, there is something here for everyone. How would you like to participate?

Student Matinee Series
The Portland Stage Student Matinee Program annually provides more than 7,000 middle and high school students from Maine and New Hampshire with discounted tickets for student matinees. This season, we are offering this program digitally. Portland Stage can send you the video in a way that works best for your group. We would be happy to do a workshop with you too!

Play Me a Story
Experience the Fun & Magic of Theater on Saturday Mornings at 10:30am with Play Me a Stor: in your living room! All ages can enjoy a free performance of children's stories on Facebook live. Ages 4-10 are welcome to participate in an interactive workshop over zoom for $5. Build literacy, encourage creativity and spark dramatic dreams!

After School Classes
After school classes at Portland Stage produce a safe environment for young people to find a higher sense of play, stretch their imaginations, and gain valuable social skills such as listening, risk-taking, ensemble building, public speaking, and leadership through storytelling. These classes are wildly fun, creative, spontaneous, and begin to build skills for the young actor or non-actor's voice, body, and imagination. Visit our website for this year's offerings!

Vacation and Summer Camps
Our theater camps are fun, challenging, and enriching. We use stories of all kinds to fuel these active, educational and lively, process-based week-long school vacation and summer programs for youth. Theater for Kids works with professional actors, directors, artisans, and composers. Students are invited to think, speak, and act, and even sing imaginatively, critically, and creatively in an environment of inclusivity and safe play.

Virtual Portland Stage PLAY
An interactive dramatic reading and acting workshop for elementary school students in grades K – 5. Professional teaching artists perform children's literature and classic poetry for the entire school, and then work with select classrooms in workshops based on the stories. Actors actively engage students in small groups/workshops using their bodies, voices, and imaginations to build understanding of the text while bringing the stories and characters to life. PLAY helps develop literacy and reading fluency, character recall, understanding of themes, social emotional skills, physical storytelling, and vocal characterization. The program also comes with a comprehensive Resource Guide filled with information and activities based on the books and poems.

Virtual Directors Lab
Schools get access to a 50 minute filmed production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* performed by professional actors/teaching artists. After the performance, students engage directly with the text in an interactive virtual workshop with the actors and creative team. In these workshops, students practice effective communication, creative collaboration, rhetoric, and critical analysis. The program also comes with a comprehensive Resource Guide filled with information and resources about the play we are focusing on. Directors Lab puts Shakespeare's language into the hands and mouths of the students, empowering them to be the artists, directors, and ensemble with the power to interpret the text and produce meaning.

Portland Stage Company
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Meg Anderson *Props Master*
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Daniel Brodhead *Production Manager, Lighting & Sound Supervisor*
Hannah Cordes *Education Director*
Doane Dorchester *General Manager*
Ted Gallant *Technical Director*
Myles C. Hatch *Stage Manager*
Julianne Shea *Education Administrator*
Susan Thomas *Costume Shop Manager*

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Peter Brown
Daniel Burson
Maureen Butler
Ian Carlsen
Hannah Cordes
Moira Driscoll
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Callie Kimball
Daniel Noel
Ed Reichert
Hans Indigo Spencer
Dustin Tucker
Bess Welden
Monica Wood
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Paul Ainsworth *Business Manager*
Cody Brackett *Marketing Associate*
Chris DeFilipp *House Manager*
Nolan Ellsworth *Front of House Associate*
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Beth Given *Development Director*
Mical Hutson *Marketing Director*
Jennifer London *Company Manager*
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Lauren Stockless *Development Assistant*
Nathan Sylvester *Front of House Associate*
Adam Thibodeau *House Manager*
Shannon Wade *Front of House Associate*

Intern Company

Sophia B. Diaz *Education*
Macey Downs *Directing & Dramaturgy*
Zach Elton *Directing & Dramaturgy*
Whitney Edmonds *Costumes*
Meredith G. Healy *Directing & Dramaturgy*
Audrey Kastner *Electrics*
Beth Koehler *Stage Management*
Mollie Lipkowitz *Costumes*
Lizzie Lotterer *Company Management*
Courtney Prentiss *Stage Management*
Jordan Wells *Education*