

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS*

Sónia Baptista, *I Call Her Will* Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon, 6 April 2019

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Sónia Baptista's performance lecture took place within a wider Shakespeare cycle at the Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon entitled *For Goodness Sake* that also included a performance of *Timon of Athens* by Teatro Praga, a series of public lectures on the plays by Maria Sequeira Mendes and three days of musical performances. The title of the performance lecture punned on the name Will as Shakespeare himself did in the *Sonnets* but also called attention to the central concern of the performance, which was to give back a sense of agency both to female characters in Shakespeare and to contemporary women performers who create works based on Shakespeare. Baptista repeated the phrase "Women in Shakespeare—it's complicated" at several different moments of the performance and at the beginning she posed the question of whether she actually liked Shakespeare or not, rather than assuming that Shakespeare's supposed universality rendered such questions irrelevant.

The performance lecture format is appealing to performers as a way of bringing together diverse materials, whether theoretical, poetic, visual or anecdotal. The staging for the lecture consisted of three simple lecterns on the stage with a screen behind the performer.

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The setting established and then deconstructed the notion of an educational lecture in order to emphasize the fact that Shakespearean materials circulate widely within popular and elite culture and are not concentrated exclusively within educational or theatrical settings. This was immediately apparent from the beginning of the performance when Baptista danced to *Shakespeare's Sister* by the Smiths and a song by the '80's pop group Shakespeare's Sister before reading from Virginia Woolf's writings on the tragic fate of Shakespeare's sister and the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's own rewriting of Woolf's narrative.

The structure for this hour-long performance lecture was provided by a personal narrative around an illustrated edition of three of Shakespeare's works given to Baptista as a child. The three plays were *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* and the focus here on Juliet, Ophelia and Miranda enabled Baptista to reflect on these female characters from a contemporary viewpoint. For the section on Juliet, Baptista came to recognize her sexual agency in re-reading the play and recast her suicide as a freely assumed attempt to control what happened to her rather than be subject to the dictates of her family. As Baptista narrated this section, popular cultural references to the play, from text messages to Shakespearean memes were projected on the screen behind her in a loop. This emphasized the continuing circulation and transformation of the play in the public sphere, although the examples chosen illustrated also how new media do not necessarily transform gender ideologies. Among these references was a video of a '60's North-American television show with a Romeo and Juliet dance. The men enacted Romeo's steps while the line of women opposite them danced Juliet. Baptista repeated the dance steps with a female volunteer from the audience, cutting across the gender fixity of the original programme.

The section on Ophelia gave an opportunity for Baptista to create her own poetic text, apologising to the character for not doing what she could to save her earlier in her life and wanting to be Hamlet instead. This was a timely reminder that not all women who read the plays necessarily identify with the female characters, an interesting queer twist on the notion of heteronormative female identification. The section on Miranda was perhaps the most successful of the three. Baptista posed the question of whether Miranda inherited her father's library and created a vision of a contemporary Miranda with a passion

for reading and an open sexuality. She developed parallels with contemporary Mirandas like Miranda Hobbes in *Sex and the City* and the writer and film-maker Miranda July. Beyond the reflection on these three characters, Baptista also introduced moments of humour by taking the audience through the online quiz about which Shakespeare character they might be (which I'm sure many Shakespeareans have done themselves!).

Baptista is something of an anglophile and she referenced during the performance such conventional notions of Englishness as tea drinking, crumpets and the British Museum as well as her own visits to London. She was more concerned with exploring questions of gender here (despite her quip about whether her reading from Judith Butler might be considered too feminist) than those of nation, although her references were taken from a variety of cultural settings, emphasising the global reach of Shakespeare. In some senses, this was less a performance lecture than a performance in the making, which could in the future develop Baptista's own richly poetic writing. It was an innovative and important piece of work on Shakespeare from a gender perspective that is not often addressed in Portugal by performers. Hopefully, the performance lecture might travel more widely and encourage other women to engage critically with the female role models proposed in the Shakespeare plays.

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