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March 27, 2019

And God Forbid It Should Be So: Solo Performance as a Means of Interrogating Gender Identity
Through Folklore

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Abstract

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This document contains the research chapter, rehearsal journal, script, recording, appendices, and annotated bibliography which act as supplementary materials to the performance of the solo piece *And God Forbid It Should Be So*, a play written and performed by Roz Sullivan-Lovett. The script is an exploration and attempted dismantling of the given gendered narrative of two fairy tales, “The Story of Mr. Fox” and “The Oxford Student.” The ambiguity at play in these stories as well as their nature as folktales remind us that they are fiction, and their fiction offers the reader to escape from either of them, a detachment from the narrative of women’s oppression. Therefore, *And God Forbid It Should Be So* is a project built around questioning the modern individual’s relationship to story and to our own identities in narrative, and more specifically in how bisexual gender-nonconforming women interact with internalized homophobia and misogyny in the construction of the self.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. RESEARCH

1. Introduction.....	1
2. The Fox and the Maiden.....	2
2a. “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Bluebeard’s Wife”.....	4
2b. “The Story of Mister Fox”.....	6
2c. “The Oxford Student”.....	8
3. Feeding the Fox.....	11
4. Leaving the Chamber.....	15
5. So What’s To Be Done?.....	23
CHAPTER 2. ANNOTATED SCRIPT.....	26
CHAPTER 3. REHEARSAL JOURNAL.....	69
CHAPTER 4. SELECTION OF PERFORMANCE RECORDING.....	92
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION.....	96
APPENDICES.....	107
Appendix A.....	107
Appendix B.....	109
Appendix C.....	115
Appendix D.....	116
Appendix E.....	117
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	123

Chapter 1. Research

1. Introduction

The chief conversation at work in this thesis is around gender and its performance. How can the bisexual woman ethically navigate the complexities of gender and sexuality in romantic relationships with men and women? How can such people successfully destroy the incorrect but sometimes internalized idea that in desiring women, one takes part in their oppression? I have grown increasingly aware of the way in which story has influenced my self-image and my approach to both sexuality and identity. In a highly media-dense society, this process of self-imaging via narrative will likely only grow more inescapable, so I've chosen to approach these questions of identity through the lens of the folktale. Folktales carry an uncanny weight as the West moves further and further away from oral tradition. Their association with both femininity and the idealized image of marriage given to children who wish to become Disney princesses make them an ideal tool with which to discuss the received narratives of gender and sexuality, and while we are still telling versions of the stories that this thesis works with, their modern forms are more subtle and veiled in their intentions. The original stories have an immediacy that works to their advantage.

In most fairy tales, only a few characters feature in the plot in any meaningful way, and the stories I have selected especially provide only a violent male, a victimized female, and occasionally a pack of vengeful brothers—a painful narrative that we work to transcend or at least complicate today, but one that pervades our cultural consciousness nonetheless. My research has focused on the meanings of these constructed identities (within story and in reality), and then moved forwards into queer theory and its reevaluation of such roles. Under a truly decolonized female identity and sexuality, we like to think, we can find freedom from the

oppressive structures at work in these stories, whether we are in a relationship with a man or with a woman. But how can the individual successfully bring her self-actualization into a world that will continue along the lines of a set patriarchal and heterosexist narrative?

2. *The Fox and the Maiden*

The chief literary focus of this thesis lies, as I have mentioned, in two fairy tales: “The Story of Mister Fox,”¹ which is a relative of “Bluebeard’s Wife,”² and another called either “The Oxford Student”³ or “The Girl Who Got Up a Tree.”⁴ Both are English stories that began as oral tradition, in the early modern era for “Mister Fox” and most likely the medieval period for “The Oxford Student,” though dates must be approximated. They joined the canon of literary fairy tales sometime in the 16th century, and both feature a man called Mister Fox. He is a figure related to the animal bridegroom of stories like “Beauty and the Beast”, itself a descendent of the Greek “Cupid and Psyche.” Rather than transforming from animal to human and therefore to a suitable sexual partner once engaged to be married,⁵ the fox is never truly an animal, but rather suggestive of one. His fox-like qualities are tongue-in-cheek, if they are mentioned at all. In this way, he is something of a reversal of the animal bridegroom, whose manners and soul are always impeccably noble⁶—whereas Mister Fox initially appears fully human and his habits are revealed to be those of a murderous animal. It follows, then, that Mister Fox is not a creature

¹ Hartland, Edwin Sidney, “The Story of Mister Fox.” In *English Fairy and Other Folk Tales*, (London, Walter Scott, ca. 1890.) 25-27. See Appendix A.

² Perrault, Charles, “Bluebeard,” in Andrew Lang: *The Blue Fairy Book* ed. D. L. Ashilman. (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, ca. 1889), 290-295, <https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault03.html>. See Appendix B.

³ Halliwell-Phillipps, James Orchard. “The Oxford Student.” In *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales: A Sequel to the Nursery Rhymes of England*, (London: John Russell Smith, 1849). 49-50. See Appendix C.

⁴ Halliwell-Phillipps, James Orchard. “The Girl Who Got Up a Tree.” In *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales: A Sequel to the Nursery Rhymes of England* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849). 10-11. See Appendix D.

⁵ Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975.) 263.

⁶ Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006.) 53.

meant to be transformed by a virgin's love and the commitment to the structure of marriage, as the beast is in stories that follow a matriarchal plotline of woman-as-bearer-of-civilization:

[The animal bridegroom is] a wild, roving beast [...], and this condition represents his homelessness and undomesticity. That is, in the eyes of the matriarchal woman, who created a cultivated environment for herself, he has never developed beyond the condition of a predatory animal that roams the woods. He is still covered by fur or feathers, while she wears human clothes which she herself has made. The male condition as human is not yet extant [...] It is up to the woman to bring him salvation by making human clothes for him and accepting him into her house as a domesticated inhabitant.⁷

Instead, Mister Fox is a monster that must be slain by the female protagonist's male friends or, more often, brothers. When exploring the animal bridegroom we might instead take our cues from Bruno Bettelheim, who notes that the animal-groom is freed not just by his virgin bride's love, but her promise to marry him: "Only marriage made sex permissible, changed it from something animal-like into a bond sanctified by the sacrament of marriage."⁸ Therefore, Mister Fox's nonliteral transformation from trustworthy fiancé into an animal works as a reversal of the wait-until-marriage message by revealing him late in the story to be the inappropriate sexual partner—a man that abuses his power as would-be husband and must be outwitted, then punished.

Notably, both Jack Zipes and Bruno Bettelheim, in their respective books on fairy tales and their ambiguities, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (2006) and *Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975), acknowledge that there is a certain sacrificial quality to the traditional animal bridegroom story in the model of "Beauty and the Beast," in that the young woman must sacrifice herself and her sexual potential to an inappropriate partner in order to gain the reward of an appropriate one: she agrees to live with the beast while he is still a beast, kisses the frog while it is still a frog, and so on and so forth.

⁷ Heide Göttner-Abendroth, "Matriachale Mythologie," in *Weiblich-Männlich*, ed. Brigitte Wartmann (Berlin: Ästhetik & Kommunikation, 1980), 224. In Zipes, 49.

⁸ Bettelheim, 283.

Zipes suggests that this mirrors the need for young women to marry much older, unattractive men in the medieval and early modern periods; girls in stories tend to do this in order to save their fathers, which mirrors the advancement of the family name that was often the motivation for marrying young women to older men.⁹ Save your father, save your family, marry the monster. Your reward is a husband whose humanity was hiding in plain sight all along.

2a. “The Robber Bridegroom” and “Bluebeard’s Wife.” Perrault’s version of “Bluebeard,” which is a relative of “The Robber Bridegroom”¹⁰ and therefore also “Mister Fox,” follows many of the structures of “Beauty and the Beast:” a nobleman wishes to marry but is considered ugly by every young lady he meets, in this case due to his unnatural blue beard rather than his beastly form. However, the beauty and manners of his household ultimately charm the youngest daughter of a good family, and she agrees to marry him. But then a new test appears, (aside from the traditional test of marrying an unattractive man for the societal advancement, as Zipes asserts):¹¹ Bluebeard leaves his new wife with the keys to his house and leaves for a time, asking only that she not unlock the door to a particular room. Overcome by curiosity, she does so anyway, and discovers the corpses of Bluebeard’s previous wives. Regretful and terrified, she prays to be forgiven for her sin of curiosity and spared her husband’s wrath. Accordingly, her brothers arrive in time to save her and behead her husband and would-be-murderer.¹²

At first glance, this tale appears subversive to the mores of its time; on first read one might take it to be a warning to girls to not marry men their parents haven’t set them up with, or to distrust nobility, or perhaps even men in general. Yet Perrault’s first stated moral is deeply regressive: “Curiosity, in spite of its appeal, often leads to deep regret. To the displeasure of

⁹ Zipes, 50.

¹⁰ Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm “Der Räuberbräutigam.” In *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales). Trans. D. L. Ashliman. *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, final edition. (Berlin: 1857.), no. 40. See Appendix E.

¹¹ Zipes, 50.

¹² Perrault, “Bluebeard.”

many a maiden, its enjoyment is short lived. Once satisfied, it ceases to exist, and always costs dearly.” A second moral, tacked onto the end, attempts to resolve the misplaced blame of the first:

Apply logic to this grim story, and you will ascertain that it took place many years ago. No husband of our age would be so terrible as to demand the impossible of his wife, nor would he be such a jealous malcontent. For, whatever the color of her husband's beard, the wife of today will let him know who the master is.¹³

The first version of Perrault’s *Bluebeard* was first published in 1697, which goes to show only that we have always thought of our own times as more enlightened than the past. The more troubling issue, of course, is that the first moral blames the bride’s curiosity rather than Bluebeard’s violence, and the next makes the saccharine suggestion that wives of Perrault’s own time could simply never find themselves in such a troubling story. This begs the question of who the story was aimed at—little girls growing into young women, clearly, but also at little boys with the potential to become jealous husbands. What did it have to teach them? Obedience to the moral order of the time, as Bettelheim asserts was often the point of fairy tales, but also a certain leniency. Take care of each other, and don’t ask too much of your spouse—ask your wife to stay in her place as a woman, but don’t test her submission unfairly.

Even in this mode, how can a woman read this and not see a cautionary tale? Your husband may play mind games with you, may set up tasks to test the limits of your obedience—the lesson is that he is wrong to do so, but also that the woman who falls for these games had best have good men in her life who are ready to burst in and save her. Who would wish to live in a marriage that is only safe as long as the bodies in the bloody chamber remain undiscovered? There is a too-real fear to the sense that these marriages could be safe for the protagonists, if they had remained uncurious and not discovered the fate of all the other women in their stories. Then,

¹³ Perrault, “Bluebeard.”

perhaps traditional heterosexual marriage works best when its bleak history is unexamined, or better yet, knowingly avoided.

2b. “The Story of Mr. Fox”. The fox variation on ‘Bluebeard,’ is a shorter but slightly more complex story dating to the early modern period or perhaps slightly before. It features two named characters, the first a young woman usually called Lady Mary. She is about to marry a man named Mister Fox, who is relatively unknown to her community. She is invited to visit her fiancé at his house, and goes there without a chaperone, only to discover, in his beautiful, empty, palatial home, that a room (or sometimes many rooms) is full of the corpses of butchered young women. She hides in the house when she hears Mister Fox arriving home, witnesses him tearing apart another young woman, and flees, taking with her the young woman’s hand as proof of the incident’s truth. She then plays a trick on Mister Fox by telling the story as a dream that she had at their wedding breakfast, then producing the girl’s hand and showing it to him and all her guests. Once this proof is shown, the wedding guests (or sometimes only her brothers, as in “Bluebeard”) immediately draw their swords and slay Mister Fox.

Throughout Lady Mary’s account of the story, the fox disputes her at every turn, saying:

It is not so,
nor it was not so.
And God forbid it should be so.¹⁴

Repeated statements of these sort are a stock tool in fairy tales, and other forms of them appear elsewhere. In this same story the bride sees writing at the fox’s house—over the gate, carved into the floor, over the room where the dead wives lie rotting. These signs say first, “be bold, be bold,” then “be bold, be bold, but not too bold,” then finally, “be bold, be bold, but not too bold, lest that your heart’s blood should run cold.” This line is quoted in book III of Edmund Spenser’s

¹⁴ “The Story of Mr. Fox,” in Hartland.

The Fairy Queene when the lady knight Britomart explores the House of Busirane,¹⁵ but it appears to be original to “the Story of Mr. Fox”, which mostly likely well predates Spenser. The fox’s repeated line is also quoted in *Much Ado About Nothing*, with Benedick’s line in act I, scene i: “Like the old tale, my lord: ‘it is not so, nor ‘twas not so: but indeed, God forbid it should be so!”¹⁶ The “bold” line acts as an active lesson to the listener as well as the bride: be brave, but not so brave as to endanger yourself. The balance between asserting oneself and endangering oneself appears to have been, as in modern day, a womanly concern.

“The Story of Mr. Fox” is an interesting spin on “Bluebeard,” chiefly for its dream-reality switch, but also for Mister Fox’s attempts to brush off Lady Mary’s story. The concept of a young woman standing at her wedding breakfast and accusing her fiancé of murder *and instantly being believed*, despite his attempts to dissuade the witnesses, has interesting and obvious relevance to our modern narratives about women’s testimony. It does share with “Bluebeard,” however, the protagonist’s safety coming about only because she discovers the deaths of the women who came before her, who did not, it seems, have brothers to burst in at the nick of time to save them. This sense of finding corpses down the wrong hallway of a longed-after house suggests a marital structure that is not, perhaps, as safe or worth wanting as it has always seemed. The story depends upon the bride’s survival, which in turn depends upon her discovery of a number of brides who weren’t so lucky. Their deaths, and indeed one of their disembodied hands, produce the happy ending. The protagonist additionally requires enough presense of mind to stay hidden in the Fox’s den, to escape, to bide her time until the perfect moment to reveal the

¹⁵ Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene: Book III., The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Edmund Spenser* (London: Grosart, 1882), www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/queene3.html, ed. R. S. Bear, 1995.

¹⁶ Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado About Nothing*. Folger Shakespeare Library edition. Edited by Barbara A. Moffat and Paul Werdtine (New York: Washington Square Press, a division of Simon and Schuster Books, 2004.) 19.

truth, and, most importantly, she needs brothers who believe her when she tells them her fiancé is dangerous, and who leap to protect her. It is a happy ending which rests fully on near misses, luck, cleverness, and the suffering of other women.

This figure of the lucky female protagonist features in many of our stories of gendered and sexual violence today, wherein the only positive narratives we seem able to tell are about people who escaped danger due to street smarts, luck, or (often male) saviors. We highlight their survival skills, their bravery, their ability to stay calm under pressure, and these stories create a world in which women who do not escape sexual assault and gendered violence only enter the narrative as a tragic body count. They have, for most of history, not been plucky enough to talk about as anything but, perhaps, dead angels, whose innocence reduces them to victims in a story that is actually all about their attacker. They are the nameless women in the bloody chambers of our cultural consciousness, and the lesson this image of them represents to young women drives them further into that role, and the viewer further into the bride's, where she witnesses the dangers of patriarchy, but does not suffer them herself.

2c. "The Oxford Student." My second fox story, alternately called either "The Oxford Student" or "The Girl Who Got Up a Tree" shares quite a lot with the first, though its plot is somewhat simpler, its world smaller: a young woman and her tutor, or perhaps just a student in town, are in love and plan to elope. Perhaps, to complicate matters, she is pregnant, but if she is, it is only suggested, never stated outright. They agree to meet under a tree outside of town, but upon arriving first, the young woman scales the tree, and, unseen, witnesses her lover digging her grave, or sometimes overhears him remarking to a friend that he plans to kill her. She waits in the tree all night until he gives up on waiting for her and leaves. She goes home in the morning, only to see her treacherous lover some days later and recites a poem to him:

The bough did bend,
 The bough did break
 I saw the hole
 The fox did make.

Or, alternatively:

The bough did bend,
 My heart did ache,
 To see the hole
 The fox did make.

At which the fox either realizes that she knows what he planned for her and flees,¹⁷ or stabs her in the heart, which causes “a violent conflict between the tradespeople and the students, the latter taking part with the murderer, and so fierce was the skirmish, that Brewer's Lane, it is said, ran down with blood.”¹⁸ This story obviously shares with “Mister Fox” the drama of an attempted murder of a young woman by her lover, as well as the imagery of the murderous-would-be-bridegroom-as-fox, and, in the Addy version, the ability of the young woman to bide her time and tell her riddle at a moment in which she is safe in broad daylight, surrounded by people.

I first read these stories in a poem by Neil Gaiman entitled “The White Road” in which he includes a kitsune figure of a shapeshifted fox-as-woman as well as the traditional Mister Fox, who is unusually human and likeable. Gaiman’s version bases itself firmly in English class structures, and attempts to do more with the figure of fox-as-trickster than the folktales he uses do—his human-fox is an enigmatic woman sitting in the corner of the tavern where the wedding feast takes place. It is her that supplies “The Girl Who Got Up a Tree” in the night’s storytelling, and it appears to be her magic that frames Mister Fox, who narrates the tale in first person. The fox of “The Story of Mr. Fox,” and “The Girl Who Got Up a Tree” is less clever and more bloodthirsty than the surprisingly wide-spread cultural image of trickster foxes. The Mister Fox of the folktales with which this thesis is concerned is not a man transformed into a beast, nor a

¹⁷ “The Girl Who Got Up a Tree” in Addy.

¹⁸ “The Oxford Student” in Halliwell-Phillipps.

trickster like Coyote in native American myth, or the fox protagonist of the French Reynard cycle, or the Bulgarian Kuma Lisa. He is a monster that hides in human form. In writing an innocent Mister Fox and a duplicitous fox-woman to kill him, Gaiman reverses the stream of violence of the original stories and replaces it with a dark fantasy in which magical beings wait around corners and frame men as predators. Unless he meant to imply a “he-said-she-said situation” tone, Gaiman failed the themes of the original tales, and therefore his adaptation is worthwhile for the strength of its writing and effective adaptation of the folktales told inside the frame of the poem, rather than its commentary on the morals at play in the folktales.

Fairy tales, as Bettelheim and Zipes tell us, were told in order to create a stable moral construct of society and to explain to children what a good person was. In the fox stories we see a construction of the overbearing husband, the overly inquisitive wife, the murderous lover, the clever young woman. These characters serve to show the reader what people are and how they treat each other, and in the fox stories, we see a possibility of a man that lives to prey on women. The parallels between the predatory lover and the fox are drawn in order to express that this is not a civilized man who is welcome in society, but a kind of boogeyman with a fox’s face.

Accordingly, I use him as a shorthand for the phantom of male violence towards women. A lot of my own perturbation with womanhood and gender as a whole have been brought about, I realize now, by stories and how they work. Representation, as the saying goes, does matter, and I have found throughout my childhood that I was so ready to refuse the maiden role in stories that my own sense of real femininity (rather than story-book femininity) is a something of a tangled knot. It is no less tangled due to my bisexuality, which keeps me another inch more distant from the maiden protagonist of these folktales, whose near-death experience comes at her own curiosity inside of the structures of heterosexual love. But in relating, instead, to the male

figure in such a story, or indeed in most stories, one becomes unwittingly connected to a masculinity that is dependent on its oppression of the feminine subject.¹⁹ These questions of identity birthed my thesis's topic, which is how bisexual masculine-of-center womanhood interacts with toxic masculinity both in story and in practice.

3. *Feeding the Fox*

A woman's entire life can mirror "The Story of Mr. Fox", at the risk of making generalizations—culture, race, class, and health do all intersect with sexism, creating a great variety of constructions of female identity, as explored sociologically by Jennifer Wesely in her interviews with strippers and homeless women in her book *Being Female: the Continuum of Sexualization*.²⁰ That said, a given woman can hypothetically live relatively comfortably within the given rules of femininity and heterosexuality, but only if she is lucky enough to avoid gendered violence. She can work to excel at performing femininity and find herself praised for it, though likely treated as frivolous and unimportant outside of particular situations of self-display—dating, clubbing, pageantry, sex. She can decide that feminism is reactive, sexism a thing of the past. She can turn a blind eye to the more pressing issues of civil rights still denied to women worldwide, think of child marriage as a bygone issue, justify the wage gap as a result of women like herself being riskier hires because they might drop everything in favor of raising a family. If she takes care to not unlock Mister Fox's room, she passes the test of submission and keeps her life intact.

She maintains this life via neurosexist ideas that tell her that her brain is specially built for the social role she has been asked to occupy—she believes herself to be more naturally

¹⁹ Calhoun, Cheshire. "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory." *Ethics*, vol. 104, no. 3, 1994, pp. 558–581.

²⁰ Wesely, Jennifer K. *Being Female: The Continuum of Sexualization*. (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2012).

empathetic than men, more nurturing, more given to multitasking and child-rearing.²¹ These concepts allow her a safety in her construction of self that are understandably useful. Should the abuses made easier by these constructs of women's roles remain hidden, she might never bother to question this narrative of womanhood.

Yet, in the United States at least, the average person's access to information is increasing at an astounding rate. The level at which male predation is accepted and fostered has become increasingly clear even for the most comfortable woman, whose experiences with sexism might hypothetically have been blessedly limited to microaggressions from employers or schoolyard bullying. The 2017 accusations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein gave women a sense of a long silence having been suddenly broken; many had hope that abusive behavior would finally be crushed by the outpouring of testimony and the work of the #MeToo movement, founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 and revitalized in the wake of the Weinstein allegations. The #MeToo movement's focus on women's testimony and experiences raised hopes that real change was both possible and coming. Soon after, however, Brett Kavanaugh was confirmed as supreme court justice, despite hearings on the accusation that he had sexually assaulted Dr. Christine Blasey Ford when both he and Dr. Ford were teenagers. The Kavanaugh hearings and confirmation served to highlight how little had actually changed so far as believing women's testimony, or, perhaps more to the point, anyone being willing to disbelieve men. Although it appears that we've abandoned Perrault's first moral cautioning against women's curiosity, we are now solidly in the second, wherein an entire testimony can be abandoned through the idea that "*this* man wouldn't do that," and "this story doesn't happen anymore." Through this

²¹ Fine, Cordelia. *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011). 67.

narrative, the fox lives on, no longer a wealthy country gentleman hiding the bodies in his manor house, but a producer, or an actor, or a supreme court justice.

Much of this thesis subscribes to a materialist perspective on gender and its performance. This is largely due to my use of both *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Delusions of Gender* (2011), respectively by Judith Butler and Cordelia Fine. Butler suggests throughout *Gender Trouble* that there is no such thing as a truly stable gender identity that exists without the performance of the so-called ‘man’ or ‘woman’—rather, these acts of performance are what constitute gender. Under these terms, examining masculinity and its current state becomes driven by the narrative gender performances create to support patriarchal power. I therefore mention the Kavanaugh hearing not only as an illustration of the situations in which the fox is supported by our narratives of innocence of important men, but also as a two-person performance.

Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s language is a masterclass in women’s testimony—she describes her experiences with little subjectivity and few adjectives to foster as objective a sound as possible. She admits to not having every detail before she can be told that she doesn’t have enough of them:

I truly wish I could be more helpful with more detailed answers to all of the questions that have and will be asked about how I got to the party and where it took place and so forth. I don’t have all the answers, and I don’t remember as much as I would like to.

Her eloquence and brevity plays to respectability politics, suggesting constantly that she was not to be attacked on a basis of character. Accordingly, she was afforded a dignity by the defense not often given to women testifying sexual assault, who are regularly treated to character defamation. But Kavanaugh’s part was that of the innocent man, and under this role he was allowed to run completely into righteous anger and hurt. He accused the Democratic party of

“lying in wait” to attack him, cast the opposition as underhanded. He leaned into Ford’s description of the drinking at the party where she was assaulted:

I drank beer with my friends. Almost everyone did. Sometimes I had too many beers. Sometimes others did. I liked beer. I still like beer. But I did not drink beer to the point of blacking out, and I never sexually assaulted anyone. There is a bright line between drinking beer, which I gladly do, and which I fully embrace, and sexually assaulting someone, which is a violent crime. If every American who drinks beer or every American who drank beer in high school is suddenly presumed guilty of sexual assault, it will be an ugly, new place in this country.²²

His repetitive language (“I liked beer. I still like beer.”) is that of the simple, all-American man. He likes beer, is that a crime? His use of slippery slope rhetoric, implying that the main evidence in Ford’s testimony is that he was drinking and not her repeated statement that she knew him and knew that it was he that sexually assaulted her, distracts from the matter at hand and refocuses the proceedings onto a masculine pastime that anyone supporting him in the first place can easily get behind. He relies on that masculinity to bring him through, to tie itself to the connected narrative of the family man, who is unfairly slandered by these false claims and attacked for his harmless habits. He allows himself rage at being disrupted, claiming his family is at risk. In this, his family becomes all families, and all families become collateral damage in a smear campaign on men like himself.

These performances rely on the received notion of two identities. Ford highlights that she is highly educated, responsible, married with children; testifying not because she wants to, but “because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me while Brett Kavanaugh and I were in high school.”²³ She casts herself as the most respectable woman imaginable, and her language must anticipate the tactics that are regularly used to delegitimize women’s

²² “Kavanaugh Hearing: Transcript.” The Washington Post. Transcript courtesy of Bloomberg Government. Accessed November 20, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/09/27/kavanaugh-hearing-transcript/?utm_term=.5dde91cd9070

²³ “Kavanaugh Hearing: Transcript.”

testimony. Kavanaugh's must be guileless and straight-shooting, rational but also emotionally affected where Casey's must be as level as she could manage under the circumstances. I bring this up not to broach the political fallout demonstrated by this hearing, but merely to highlight the parts each side played, recognizable figures at the podium each time. This is how narrative plays its part in the modern devaluing of women's experienced truth. In the end, the considerable believability of Ford's testimony didn't matter—Kavanaugh's identity play was more palpable for his target audience. Nothing, it seems, can convict a man playing his role so well.

4. Leaving the Chamber

Maintaining these narratives about men and women means maintaining a world in which men are consistently trusted over women. Departure from them means abandoning the security of story into a world that has little acknowledged history. Because of the ties between gender and sexual identity, self-actualization for women comes at the cost of unlearning the process of sexualization as detailed in Jennifer Wesely's *Becoming Female*. Wesely's continuum is the process through which girls are taught, from the multiple angles of media, socialization, and experience, that their entire value lies in their bodies, which, they learn, are easily commodified and sold as they mature. This creates a highly sexualized femininity that relates little to girls' own sexuality and more to that of the men in their lives, or to an internalized male observer. "It is not surprising that adolescent girls struggle with what it means to become a sexual being when [the sexual] aspect of their identities is paradoxically emphasized and caricatured while also trivialized and degraded."²⁴ The effects of the continuum, even at its most limited, are depersonalization and a disengagement from the body.

²⁴ Wesely, 30.

This strongly reminds me of the protagonist of Angela Carter's short story "The Bloody Chamber," (1979) a masterful adaptation of 'Bluebeard' that benefits greatly from the bride's first-person perspective and, notably, the addition of her mother, who saves her in the final hour by taking the violent role usually reserved for the protagonist's brothers. The bride of this story is disgusted by her predatory husband, yet also desires him—she has a chilling moment early in their courtship in which she watches him watching her, then catches sight of herself in a mirror and sees herself through his eyes. This happens again later, when he is preparing her to have sex with him for the first time. As Robin Anne Sheets explains in her essay 'Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*,' "he is the purchaser; she, the commodity, the piece of meat, 'bare as a lamb chop.' He examines her through his monocle; she watches in the mirror. 'And, as at the opera, when I had first seen my flesh in his eyes, I was aghast to feel myself stirring.'"²⁵ She spectates her own objectification and is shocked to find herself aroused by it—this is the response of a woman whose model of sexuality is completely based on being wanted. In the adaptations of "Bluebeard's Wife" since the turn of the century, Bluebeard himself has grown more and more desirable, and the role his wives play in his household harder and harder to extricate oneself from. Eudora Welty's *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942) recasts Bluebeard as an outlaw so handsome and likable that it is his lover's job to save him through a relationship rather than herself by getting out of one. In Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* (1899), Bluebeard's former wives are still alive, and after being freed, disturbingly, choose to stay behind with their tormenter. I touched on each of these works only in summary form, and therefore only wish to mention them as examples of the cultural tilt towards a version of the story in which Mister Fox's house is not so easy to escape from as

²⁵ Sheets, Robin Anne, "Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber,'" *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Apr., 1991), 651.

running out the front door. Familiar sexual roles are desirable as much for their safety as their sexuality, and female heterosexual desire is uniquely difficult to disentangle from performance, complicit or otherwise.

The problem, therefore, is how to ethically disengage one's own femininity and desires from this contorted, scrutinized version of sexuality, inextricably mediated through performance and spectatorship. Certainly entering into homosexual relationships means reevaluating the entire process of sexual interaction for bisexual women, and calls into question much of one's gender identity.

As any number of theorists, including and most famously Judith Butler, have observed, gender is a highly performative social structure,²⁶ and one that has been historically dependent upon the devaluing of women's humanity. This has been perpetrated chiefly through the othering of the female identity, creating a concept of woman-as-lacking or woman-as-deformed-man. The Freudian concept of the woman as a castrated vessel, whereas man is the natural state of humanity, is echoed in much of the neurosexism that Fine works to disprove in *Delusions of Gender*, particularly in her chapter "The Fetal Fork," wherein she explores the actual effects of the two surges of testosterone that occur in male fetuses.

Neurosexism appears to be the new frontier of so-called scientifically-backed misogyny, and the last stand of those who wish to nip the interrogation of binary gender in the bud. I remain in the materialist camp of feminist theory, yet wonder if there isn't something lacking in an entirely societal model of gender. Though there is clearly more to gender than the constructed binaries that have so long dictated one's entire life story, an entirely materialist model leaves little room for ideas around queer sexuality and transgender identities, which are often forced to

²⁶ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Abingdon-on Thames, Routledge, 1990.)

rely on essentialist ideas of “men’s souls in women’s bodies” and similar narratives for the sake of explaining the transgender experience to a cisgender listener. I find increasingly that I wish for a middle ground, wherein we might acknowledge that gender (and sex) is constructed, yet realize that there are some aspects to human gender expression that likely do come with our minds in some complexity of neurology, or even the soul.

Where do we draw the line, then, between ridding oneself of a false performance and denying self-acceptance? It is hard to know, for the raised-female gender nonconforming person, what aspects of identity are simply responses to sexism and which are some far deeper need to express masculinity. The self being a mistrusted construct for women, self-examination and self-deception can be difficult to tell apart. Moreover, having always lived in a world with strict structures of gender, how do I abandon them without falling into more traps of performative identity? There are cultural narratives that actually do *feel* essential—the strange joy of masculine presentation is hard to swallow alongside an awareness that masculinity does not exist in any essential form. If it does not, then what does the performance of such roles base itself on? What is masculinity without misogyny? Then again, if a stable gender identity does not exist without performance, perhaps there is no other way in which to have an identity at all. Resistance must therefore take the form of new performances, new stories. This is where my script’s bones truly lie.

To return to the relationship side of the script, and borrowing a phrase from Cormac McCarthy, who carries the fire? Is it woman, dressed in clothes she made for herself and living in the house she manages, soft and gentle and living for others? Or is it man, with a monopoly on education, rationality, and moral righteousness, the provider of the family? These figures exist to support heterosexual marriage as an institution, and their relationship to civilization is dependent

on the other party needing support in order to fully take part in society. There's no reason to insist on pairing off into civilly recognized man-and-woman couples if, by doing so, we don't gain access to an accepted narrative that welcomes us into the greater story of civilization itself. Cheshire Calhoun's *Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory* suggests that lesbians, by abandoning the identifying factor of heterosexuality, actually do not exist under the label of 'woman.' She shares some ideas here with Butler, but goes further in defining womanhood under a sort of class system that serves patriarchal ends—in order for people under the label of 'man' to come out on top, there must be at least one other category that does not. This sex-class system means that simply building a life in the personal sphere that requires no labor in service of a man means disqualification from womanhood. But the personal sphere only takes us so far, for, as Calhoun points out, “women's labor power is also extensively controlled in the public sphere through male bosses, absence of maternity leave, sexual harassment, the job requirement of an 'appropriately' feminine appearance, insufficient availability of daycare, sex segregation of women into lower paid jobs, and so on.”²⁷ And it is not enough besides to say that the only qualifying factor for femininity is relating to men in a heterosexual fashion. The binary thinking of considering one's gender to be confiscated the moment it ceases to interact with another in traditional ways strikes me as regressive in its theoretical uses, though in a practical sense it has more bearing, and does highlight the benefits of heterosexual relationships for women: “Men have patriarchal interests in securing emotional/sexual access to women, and heterosexual women have complicitous interest in securing access to a system of male privileges.”²⁸ In marrying men, women gain access to the structural role of wife, and this allows her safety and

²⁷ Calhoun, Cheshire. “Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory.” *Ethics*, vol. 104, no. 3, 1994, 574.

²⁸ Calhoun, 561.

privileges that a single woman does not have, as well as access, due to her partnership, to some of the economic benefits that her husband has in being a man.

This leads me to another of the thoughts with which I began my research: that of a perceived safety in same-sex relationships. I started this project some time ago under different circumstances than I am now in, and it was therefore born from a number of anxious hypotheticals; namely, were I to approach another woman romantically, would I know how to perform a healthy relationship with her? Having only had serious relationships with men, I recognized that much of my own behavior in sexual contexts was reliant on behaving more traditionally femininely than I might when alone or with friends. I was not pressured by any direct influence that I can track to enact these highly feminine fantasies; I just thought they were what I ought to do. They would make me desirable, I thought, and in being desired, I would feel desire.

Being somewhere in the relatively safe center of Wesley's continuum, I was still performing a sexuality that I had little ownership over, which was perhaps one factor that allowed me to recognize my bisexuality and to question my gender identity. But this led me to an entirely new range of performance opportunities—since I now recognized my attraction to women, I was afloat in a sea of identity concepts. I had spent a good three years of my childhood with an pixie cut and such masculine clothing that strangers regularly misheard my name as “Ross,” and I was more than ready to head down that path again. But somewhere in that joyous realization, I stopped short, and wondered if I was not once again performing an identity that was in some way incorrect. It was not a personal incorrectness in the way that my feminine camp had been, but something that worried me on a far deeper level: did my butching it up push my partners into the same roles of femininity that I had chafed against as a teenager with a

boyfriend? Sue Ellen Case's "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" (1989) claims that, as both butches and femmes are in the subject position of sexuality by virtue of being women, they are not to be considered standalone identities. They exist only together, and strengthen each other, though in Case's argument, only in a playful sense, not due to any compulsion.

The roleplay aspect of Case's model of butch-femme identities ("The point is not to conflict reality with another reality, but to abandon the notion of reality through roles and their seductive atmosphere and to lightly manipulate appearances [...]The female body, the male gaze, and the structures of realism are only sex toys for the butch-femme couple.")²⁹ strikes me as oddly unreachable under modern identity politics, wherein clothes and presentation have more structured meaning than it seems they once did. It is now not a political statement to dress masculinely, but it is a personal statement in the way that it wasn't at the time of Case's writing. I am asked often which pronouns I prefer, I am sir'd with a wink rather than by accident, I am included in masculine flexing for which I don't know the rules. These interactions are not aggressions—quite the opposite! They are kind and informed assumptions that anyone setting themselves apart from femininity in dress must surely be hoping to plunge headfirst into masculinity.

Today's world is more ready to take an expression of gender nonconformity as a serious, binary step than as a playful semi-erotic game of camp born out of adversity. The modern understanding of self-constructed gender, though moving steadily in more complex and accepting directions, does not leave as much room for nonconformity and roleplaying as it seems there once was in these identities, nor as much sense of the in-between or ambiguous.

²⁹ Case, Sue-Ellen. "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic." *Discourse*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1988. 70.

In refusing the accepted sexual narrative of one side or the other, bisexuals find themselves peering behind the curtain into a place that shows what it means to be either in a homosexual or heterosexual relationship: the homosexual relationship may remove us from the societal story about love. Tragically, it is *comforting* to fit into a storytelling tradition. Leaving the grand narrative of heterosexuality behind can create a sense of personal entropy for both lesbian and bisexual women, especially. After all, most stories in Western society do not allow women a future without a man. But they also warn that one only gains a man through brutal self-sacrifice.³⁰ Is that worth it, just to be part of the given world? In the metanarrative realm, the greatest problem that many women, straight or not, run into is that living in a storytelling tradition that insists that meaning only exists in men's lives means that women's stories simply don't feel as interesting. Leaving that grand narrative requires a fortitude to insist that actually, one's relationship and life matters as much as those of a heterosexual woman.

Is this, then, the key behind the strange guilt of masculine presentation? I take great joy in the subversion of my given female role; I love that I am tall enough and androgynous enough to weasel my way into an in-between state of gender. However, I must question the morality of this feeling. Do I think that my life has more essential meaning now because I, in the right clothes, with the right haircut, resemble a young man? In putting on the fox's fine red coat, I do not gain access to his house, with its bloody chamber and its ring of keys; I still lack the socioeconomic clout that a man of my background might have. But it is the responsibility of the masculine-of-center woman to cut and trim her masculinity into a form that never verges into the misogynist, and all too often I suspect that masculinity does not exist without misogyny. The question of what womanhood would look like without the fox is a good one, but more important may be what manhood would look like without him. Can we construct a masculinity that is self-

³⁰ Zipes, 49.

conscious enough to abandon oppressive masculine traits and keeps those that are not? It seems that this positive masculinity lies most often in queer identities; in the conscientious butch, the compassionate transgender man—such people have unique perspectives with which to perform a masculinity that is chosen and considered, rather than being an unquestioned product of their upbringing.

The fox and the predation he represents is as much a construct as any other gendered narrative, born as he is out of the cultural stories we have around men and their impulses, desires, and truthfulness. These stories allow for men to live with an unquestioned idea that their experience of the world is the only true one, and in such a world the worst sort of person leaps to abuse their privilege. This is how Mister Fox comes to be, and the only way to destroy him is to make sure he cannot be fostered in social narratives about men and women.

5. So What's to be Done?

Exploring gender in performance is not a new idea; we've seen it in many forms, from drag shows to Shakespearean comedy. I don't expect to crack open the very foundations of self-expression in writing *And God Forbid It Should Be So*, but I am optimistic as to settling some of my own frustrations with gender expression, and finding some sense of greater narrative by sharing these ideas with others. Looking into feminist performance art before me, I read Karen Finley's *Shock Treatment* and several of Rachel Rosenthal's scripts—this told me more about style than about content, but was still useful research for its level of absurdity and pain; Finley's tone reaches so far into the cruel imagination as to be almost unbearable, and therefore informs the lengths to which I will choose to go. That said, *God Forbid* should be uncomfortable, deeply disquieting, even painful; I intend it to be so.

I also found myself quite incidentally watching Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette*, which gave me a note both on tone and content; Gadsby's highly personal stand-up also hits metatheatrical notes when she explains to her audience how it is that jokes are built in such a routine: by building tension through the setup of the joke and then releasing that tension through the punchline.³¹ She then reorients this in order to illustrate the pain that she experienced growing up closeted in Tasmania, where homosexuality was not decriminalized until 1997. The confessional form that the piece later takes is lessened in its potential for monotony by the fact that the audience's actual introduction to her is as a skilled comedian, rather than a performer intending to share painful truths. Skill and structure, then, are what can keep personal work both bouyant and pressing.

I initially turned to the form of one-woman show for practical reasons; I wanted to write and perform for my final project at Emory, but felt acutely embarrassed at the thought of writing myself a part in a larger production and casting students to act with me. But as I worked towards a first draft of my script, I began to consider how the one-woman show mirrors acts of testimony and belief. The figure I portray in the script when I am not the fox or the maiden is still a character, and could, I suppose, be understood as wholly fictional. Similarly, the maiden generally recounts fairy tales but also tells true stories. Where the truth lies is up to the audience, and their act of drawing conclusions is probably the closest we're going to get to the needed action of reconstructing gender and relationships: it is, for now at least, an individual act of re-evaluation.

The play also acts as an exercise in reshaping narrative. If the story that we are currently telling is one that creates foxes and allows them power and control, then the most active step is to tell a new story about men, women, gender, and marriage. These stories are old, after all, and

³¹ Gadsby, Hannah. "Nanette." Stand Up Comedy. Netflix, June 19, 2018.

it's only when we tell them in the oldest forms we have that we can see how grim and limiting they are. The protagonist of the play therefore creates a happy ending for herself that involves leaving behind the known sphere of female sexuality and models of livelihood—she leaves behind the room that she is meant to sit in and decorate and walks out into an unknown future that does not, as she had always been taught it did, assume the form of a romantic partner.

The future in *And God Forbid It Should Be So* is an exterior door that disrupts the visual fiction of theatrical space and shows a small portion of the evening outside. It is dark, and probably cold, and, in most theatrical spaces, will probably take the form of a back alley or loading dock. The future of its protagonist is similarly obscured, as an imagined future for the young, queer individual often is. But the future of gender theory is also not yet illuminated, nor the ending of the new story about masculinity, femininity, and what these things mean to us. But all we can do is walk out into it.

Chapter 2. *And God Forbid It Should Be So*: Annotated Script

Characters:

HERSELF:³² Something in between.

THE MAIDEN: The protagonist of a large number of fairy tales.

THE FOX: The antagonist of a smaller number of fairy tales. Also the ghost of all gendered violence.

There is a large dining room table covered with a tablecloth. The cloth conceals the fact that set into the table, there is a deep trough, filled with dirt.³³ There are chairs for the audience to sit at the table, but also elsewhere.³⁴

As the audience comes in, HERSELF is sitting in front of an exterior door, watching it. She is wearing a tanktop, men's boxer briefs, and possibly a wedding veil. Pre-show music is made up of murder ballads.³⁵ Perhaps HERSELF can sing them, quietly.

On the floor are THE FOX and THE MAIDEN'S clothes.

THE MAIDEN's clothes are an old-fashioned wedding dress and veil.

THE FOX's are a black groom's suit. In his pockets are a ring of keys and a diamond ring.

There is a binder tucked into his shirt, where it does not show.³⁶

³² May switch pronouns for this character to they/them for the next draft.

³³ The grave is one of the images that I consider absolutely crucial to this piece—early on, before I'd written this opening, I'd hoped to stage the play outside, perhaps in promenade style, and dig multiple graves in actual earth, but was told that this was too complex. The grave in the table occurred to me sometime halfway through the Fall.

³⁴ The chairs' and table's sawed-off legs are a practical conceit of the Burlington Road Building; since the grid is only 8 feet off the ground, standing on an almost 3-foot high table would not work for a 5'9 actor without compromising safety.

³⁵ The Emory production used "Rocks and Water" by Deb Talan (which is not actually a murder ballad, but has relevant lyrics and a folk sound), "Pretty Polly" by Vandaveer, and "The Knoxville Girl" by the Louvin Brothers. Additional songs were planned for, but the preshow ended each night before they were used, at the discretion of the board op and lighting designer Maggie Higginbotham. The final song each night was, however, always "The Knoxville Girl," and this song played after the ending as well, to help the audience understand the play was over sans curtain call.

³⁶ The issue of finding the binder in a complete blackout was solved by placing that prop inside the fox's white shirt—a full suit is easier to find in the dark than a single small garment, and this also means that, if the audience

Note: All sections involving the audience, as this first one does, are semi-improvised to suit their responses.

Songs stop. Everything sits still for some time. It is not clear where to go.

PROLOGUE: THE HOUSE AND THE SELF

HERSELF: My future arrives today.

She gets up, walks around, shakes hands

Hello. I am young, I am clever, I am crushingly naive. Hi, hello. Thank you so much for coming.

Nothing can stop me. Hello.

Tell you a secret? My future's waiting outside that door for me. Ring in hand.

She indicates the stage door, which leads to the outside of the theater.

I don't know who it is.

I don't know what.

For years, I've been scared that someone else would tell me what it looks like, what face it wears, decide for me, but it turns out that's, you know, not actually true.

Now I have options, and that's very frightening.

Pause. She looks embarrassed, lost. Suddenly:

It'll be wonderful, surely. Things go well for people like me. I've done everything I'm supposed to. Look at my legs, they are long. Look at my waist, it is smaller than my shoulders. Look at my breasts, they are...there.

(Doubtfully:) Should make me feel good, all that.

Future comes at you fast. It could be here any minute. Exactly seventy-five minutes, actually. If I had a watch I could time it to the second.

cares to notice, they will realize that Herself procured her flattened chest by splitting open the chest of the male figure on the floor.

See, I've been thinking, that maybe I go the old-fashioned route, and I sort out what's in here, where it's safe, so I can *draw in* what's out there, where it's not.³⁷ I'll impress the thing that bursts in through the door in seventy-five minutes, dragging the rest of my life behind it, charm it with my cleanliness, my tidy table, the beauty of this room. The excellence of my family, who do not embarrass me at all in front of my future spouse, just provide context for how *wwwonderful* I am.

So. Wanna play house?

Yes, here, come in, come sit at my table!

She indicates the table and its chairs.

It's not a real table, so we have to pretend.

It is a real table.

They're not real chairs, so we'll have to imagine.

They are real chairs.

Oh, and could I get a father, by any chance? A dad?

Finds an audience member willing to be her father.

Dad, wow! You look great, thank you for being here, etc.

Improv, sits him down at the head of the table, makes him comfortable and happy to be here.

³⁷ “The old-fashioned route” is the one-day-my-prince-will-come model of female sexuality, wherein there is no seeking out a partner, only making the self very appealing in hopes that this will draw in some more active participant. Since Herself exists in a world in which her home is her person, she attempts to dress up the stage. She is, however, fully aware that this is not a real place, nor she a real person, and therefore her presentation of the space/self is knowingly performative.

I need siblings next, thank you, maybe two brothers? You don't have to be boys, but you have to be two. And brothers. You don't have to be strong, but you should be quick, and violent, and wholly devoted to me.³⁸

Finds some brothers. Improvs again, gives them their seats. She asks them to set the table.

And finally, who would like the express pleasure of having mothered someone like me?

Finds a mother. Repeat.

Thank you, thank you. A round of applause for my fake family, please.

Fake forks, fake knives, fake spoons, fake me! I'm not a real person, don't let's ever forget that.

It'll keep things light.³⁹

The table is set.

There. That looks so nice. Thanks for helping.

Are you all comfortable?

Mom, sitting pretty?

Dad, ready to give me away?

Good!

So, okay, what else do you think I need? It's looking pretty good now that you're all here. Oh,

drinks! That'll make it a party, that'll be convincing.

She pulls a full punch bowl out from under the table.

Here, hand me your glasses. And, hey, if you're not at the table, there should be more cups under your chairs...right. Okay, line up if you'd like punch.

³⁸ There were originally three brothers, but I caved under the fear that I wouldn't have enough audience to fill the table. I picture the girls in the stories having least four.

³⁹ Maintaining a cheerful, pleasant tone while guests are present is a facet of femininity that I was not actually raised with, but appears more often amongst my Southern friends, so it continues as a throughline to highlight the breakdown from forced cheeriness to horror.

She doles out the punch, chats with people as they come. If she recognizes them, she greets them by name. The tone is like a rehearsal dinner before a wedding.

Wow. We're really going now, now we've really got something. I think this is an interior someone could really work with. This is a fuckable home.

Looks guiltily at her mother.

Oh—sorry, mom. This home is...um, wifey material.

Pause.

Actually, looking at it? It's a little grim still. Shit, does it look sad to you? Oh, God, am I a fixer-upper?

Speaks through the thought:

No no, it just needs, like...something comforting. A fire! I'll be fine once I have a fire. It's not a house without a hearth.

She crumples paper or programs, building up a fire.

Anyone got a match?

Who brings matches to a theater?

If someone has a lighter, she looks at it as if she does not know what it is. If they explain, she doesn't understand, and can't get it to light. Worst case scenario, she drops it in the punch bowl.⁴⁰

Oh no.

Well. Um. Don't worry about it. We'll just...do something else.

She thinks for a second.

⁴⁰ I took the precaution of asking my house manager to confiscate flammables before the show, which slightly spoils this moment but sets an forbidding tone at the door. I don't think any confiscation ever actually occurred over the run, so this was over-cautious, but still the right call.

What's homier than a hearth?

Pause. Thinks again.

A woman?

Yeah. That sounds right.

She looks around for volunteers. Then at herself.

Ah. Well, needs must, I guess.

She struggles into the dress. It doesn't fit well.⁴¹ Perhaps she asks her mother to zip her up.

Right, okay, so you're the guests, and I'm your...charming young hostess. Yeah. I'll lean into it.

She fluffs the dress, tries and fails to adjust her posture. Maybe smiles unconvincingly.

Let's see. Hostess. I've given you drinks, I've sat you down, but I can't warm up your hands.

Pause. She looks terrified.

I don't know how to fix this.

Please don't leave. Please, I don't want to be alone, when it comes. I'll make it happy in here, I promise.

A desperate idea strikes her.

Oh!

How about a story?

The lights get very unfocused and strange. She puts the veil on her head and straightens up into THE MAIDEN'S posture.

PART ONE: THE FOX'S WEDDING

⁴¹ While the dress I had for this iteration of the show fits well, the zipper does catch easily, meaning there is always a factor of something going badly wrong with Herself's literalized construction of femininity. It is also possible that the zipper will not unzip later, which forces her to tear her way out of the dress.

THE MAIDEN has the fruity tones of a British pantomime character.⁴² She stands at the middle of the table, where Jesus sat in the last supper, or where a bride might sit by her husband's side at a rehearsal dinner.

THE MAIDEN

There once was a young lady who had a fiancé. His name was Mister Fox.

Or maybe he *was* a fox. He was... her lover. A fox. A man with sharp teeth.

Maybe he just had red hair.⁴³

Her father, her brothers, and all of her friends, they liked Mister Fox very much. But no one knew where he'd come from. No one had been to his house.⁴⁴

Regardless, she loved him. She insisted on marrying him.

To an individual audience member:

This is an old story, but listen, things weren't so bad then as everyone always says. Not for girls who weren't princesses. We married men we actually liked all the time.

The day of the wedding, they had a grand breakfast. The girl's father was there, and her five brothers, and her mother—actually, no mother.

Looks at the mother thoughtfully.

You're not in this story.

Why are you up here?

⁴² The Maiden's accent was a late addition, under Jake Krakovsky. Her physicality came first after some study of British Christmas pantomimes. I was, for a time, unwilling to exaggerate her voice for fear of performing a mockingly feminized sound, which felt detrimental to the goals of the piece.

⁴³ Highlights what makes Mister Fox stand out amongst other violent fairy tale monsters. As mentioned in the research chapter, he's not an actual animal bridegroom, but he is sometimes described on animal terms. His human/animal identity has an ambiguity that mirrors the sexual and gender ambiguity throughout the play.

⁴⁴ This line had an unexpected resonance with several audience members who spoke to me afterwards. One of the pains of gendered violence that sticks with us the most, it seems, is the deep betrayal it represents even for the family of the victim. The sense that you should have known, somehow.

Oh, oh, no, don't feel poorly about it. I am nothing if not gracious. But just know. You're not here. Perhaps, be very quiet.⁴⁵

Anyhow. Her brothers, her father and all of her friends. They sat at the grand breakfast table and had grand breakfast food.

But the bride, she was withdrawn. Why so quiet? Asked her betrothed, the fox. And the fox's bride said,

I had a dream last night, a dream that frightened me terribly.⁴⁶

A dream! Well, tell it to us, darling, to while away the hours before we are married, and bound together for life. It won't be so frightening in the day, with me here by your side.

So the girl bowed her head, and began:

I was to go to your house, your fine manor house, the house I will manage for you. But I didn't know the way, for as you know, I've never been. (You are welcome to visit, says Mister Fox, I've told you many times.) So you said, I will slaughter a sow, and ride to my house with it dragged behind my horse, and you can follow the droplets of blood down the road.

How ghastly.

Mister Fox, he chuckles. He says:

It was not so, it is not so,

and God forbid it should be so.

Of course, she says, it was only a dream.

⁴⁵ Fairy tales are full of absentee mothers. My mother told me as a child that the mother was dead in Disney movies because no one's mother would ever let her child have an adventure. The Maiden, like many female characters even in stories we tell today, is the sole woman in her world, though *The Robber Bridegroom* subverts this by including a helpless old woman inside the murder house.

⁴⁶ These transitions between characters were difficult, as I'm not a very precise actor by habit, and prefer some improvisation with blocking. Jake Krakovsky is responsible for the specificity in where the switches occur and where each character places the other. The Maiden puts the Fox in the audience, the Fox puts the Maiden in the chair.

But in my dream I followed the red drops of blood down the white chalk road to your house, I walked down the long pebble drive, and I climbed up the steps to the door and I knocked.

But, my love, you were not home. Your house was empty. But the door was unlocked and...I was curious. So I walked up again, up the stairs, deeper into your house. Your house is beautiful, my love. It is full of dark paintings, rich tapestries⁴⁷, and many doors—many corners and locks. One door was smaller, and plainer than the others, and something drew me towards it.

All at once, I heard your tread on the front steps. How awful, I think, should you discover I've been snooping around your house! A rocky start to our marriage. I ducked away into the nearest room.

Horror of horrors. The room beyond was stained red, the floor covered in bones. Bones of young ladies, I knew, because their hands and feet were strewn about, gnawed on and bloodied.

“It was not so,

It is not so,

And God forbid it should be so!”⁴⁸

Of course. She says. It was only a dream.

And in my dream, I peered out of the keyhole, and I saw you, dragging a young woman up the stairs by her hair. It was her throat that was slit, not a sow's, and on her hand was a diamond ring. You stopped on the stairs, to pull the ring off her finger, but it wouldn't come off, so you took the hand in your mouth—

⁴⁷ This was added after Josh Oberlander completed his mural and rehearsals moved into the space, for the sake of highlighting the set. It also aligns itself slightly with Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* in that it invokes the “artistic” and highly violent pornography that Carter's protagonist finds her Bluebeard to be a connoisseur of. The idea of Mister Fox's house being decorated with medieval images of the story being told is heavy-handed, but suitable, while Herself's house/self being covered in the same story is a little more subtle. I considered implying that she'd drawn the mural herself, but I prefer to leave it up to the audience.

⁴⁸ These repeated lines had to be highlighted, since they give us the title, and because they hold so much narrative weight. Much discussion took place with Jake Krakovsky—should they be identical, an escalation, a breakdown? There is something always a little bit sad to me in Mister Fox's fear in all the versions of this story that I read, despite his complete evil. So how's that for self-destructive sexuality?

(the wedding guests were all silent, now)

And you gnawed her hand clean off.

To take it apart, to clip her finger, to get her lovely, shining ring.⁴⁹

(It was not so,

It is not so

And God forbid—)

Ah, the girl says,

but it was so, and it is so,

and here's the hand I have to show.

And she slams a small bloodied hand onto the table, a dainty lady's hand.

She does so. It is probably her own hand.

So the wedding guests all rose up, and they tore Mister Fox to bits.

The story is over.

Serves him right, of course. You can't just go around eating women. Can you?

She becomes HERSELF again. She is crestfallen.

Wow. Um. Sorry, I thought that would be more, uh, chipper than it turned out. Being her.

She smiles around at her guests with forced gaiety.

More drinks?

Maybe she pours round some more punch.

Funny thing about foxes is, we know this about them. We know they want to eat us.

But still, they get engaged, they get married. All the time.

We don't really like this story. I don't, anyway. And yet. It's all over the place, again and again.

(A real question) What does that mean?

⁴⁹ In most versions he cuts off the hand or finger with his sword, but teeth are more animalistic.

Well, we have the moral, I guess: it was “don’t be curious, it’s not worth it”. Seriously, that’s how the story was told early on. “Don’t get into your husband’s things,”—that is, the dark little room where he keeps all his dead, former wives— “you won’t like what you find”. Later, we get a smug addition from the man who wrote it down:

*In Perrault’s voice:*⁵⁰

“No husband of our age would be so terrible as to demand the impossible of his wife, or be such a jealous malcontent, for the wife of today will let him know who the master is.”

Hm.

How about, don’t marry someone if you’ve never seen his house?

Don’t marry someone if you’re not sure if he’s a guy or a fox?

Don’t marry someone who’s hurt other women, because you will be no exception?⁵¹

But that hardly works. We all think we’re the maiden, by which I mean, that we’re exceptional.

That’s what a protagonist is for. Maybe if you marry the fox, he won’t do it to you.⁵²

And I often catch myself thinking that I’m quite exceptional.

God.

I’d marry him every time.⁵³

She looks at the door.

I don’t like that story.

⁵⁰ Am still uncertain about using Perrault’s voice, since it technically puts another character into the body who does not appear again and who is not part of the story. Because he has a similar bad-English accent to the Maiden, I think of him as Herself imitating a sound, not invoking a person as she does with the other two characters.

⁵¹ Getting the audience to laugh along with these lines and then stop has been one of my small victories in performance.

⁵² Throughout rehearsals this was another weak rhetorical statement, but once I had audience members I could single out a young woman in the audience and tell this to her directly. The ‘you’ becomes specific.

⁵³ This line expresses some of my discomfort with my own read of the fox. In order for the tale to work it seems to me he must be charming, and likable enough that a young woman would very much want to marry him despite never having been to his house. My own fascination with men has always been a fascination with danger and mishaps and funny-trouble and so on. Not violence, but quickness and chaos. There’s no particular reason to associate this energy solely with men, but I find that we do, and I am uncomfortable with how charming I find it.

Let's try another one.

Maybe we'll see his kinder side.

She becomes the maiden again.

PART TWO: THE HOLE THE FOX DID MAKE

The maiden is a little more practical this time.

There's a story bout a fox and it goes like this.

A girl was in love with her tutor.

His name was Mister Fox.

Or maybe— well, you get it.

So the girl, she got pregnant. With a fox-baby, maybe. With red fur. And sharp teeth. I don't know.

And she said to her lover, we ought to get married. I don't care that I'm a well-raised girl, and you're a poor scholar, or maybe a small feral canine that screams in the night. I love you, I want you, I need you. Let's raise our child together.

And he agreed.

We'll meet by the oak out at the edge of town, he said. We'll run away, and get married somewhere where your father and brothers can't find me and bring down their dogs on me.

Meet me in the night. Tomorrow night.

She smiles as if all her dreams have come true.

But maybe, that night, she had a dream, and she began to suspect that something wasn't right.

So she went out in the moonlight in her heavy skirts and her coat, perhaps with a bag all packed of things she would need for her new life as a mother, a wife. And when she got to the tree, he wasn't there yet. And perhaps she shook her head and smiled, because he ran late often, but

mostly, she listened to her dream, and she scaled the tree and waited for him to appear. She lay in wait.

She climbs up onto the table and crouches, looking below.

And sure enough, he arrived, and paced below her, and muttered to himself, and then she did shake her head, and smile, because she loved him, and was silly for suspecting.

But then she saw his flashing blade, his slashes to the air. An embrace, a sharp smile, “how are you, my love?” then—

Mimes the fox’s movements—pretending to embrace a shorter person and stabbing her in the back. It may look like she is stabbing herself.

He looked for her, scanned the hills, but she wasn’t there. She was above him, covering her mouth with one dainty hand.⁵⁴

He cursed her lateness. He shook his head. He smiled.

And the fox began to dig her grave.

The whole night she waited, and so did he, and she did not move a muscle, and he did not look up. So finally, when the sun crested the tops of the trees, he cursed her once more, and went home.

The story goes, her father and her brothers and all of their dogs went looking for her, and, days later, found her still in the tree, half dead from cold and thirst. And when they asked her what had happened, she could only say:

The bough did bend,

The bough did break,

I saw the hole the fox did make.

⁵⁴ Dainty hands are one of my running images and the physical gestures for all three characters reflect this—the clearest tells for the Maiden are her presentational, formal hands, the Fox his relaxed claws, and Herself her active, nervous fingers. Hands are also commonly eroticized amongst bisexual and lesbian women, in my experience.

You will note. Her mother was not there in this one, either.

To the mother:

I'm sorry, dear. I don't make the rules. Maybe bad things don't happen so much, if you're here. Back to it then. Perhaps that's not how the story goes, perhaps instead, in the morning, after he'd left, she slid down the tree and went home, and did not tell anyone what had happened, not even her brothers, or her friends with swords. He saw her in the market, days later, and said with an air of hurt confusion, "Hey what the fuck, how come you didn't show the other night?"

And she said to him:

The bough did bend,

My heart did ache

To see the hole

The fox did make.

Pause. Heart aches.

At any rate, he fled the town and hid away in some hole in the woods, her brothers found him, they tore him all to bits.

Long pause.

Maybe he was only *called* "Fox".⁵⁵

I don't know.

More drinks?

She serves round drinks. She has one, too.

When I was 13, my science teacher told me to stay after class.

⁵⁵ I wrote the monologues and stories first and filled in transitions (like this one) after, and the meaning of this shifted as I rehearsed and pinned down where characters transitioned into each other. It became a moment of uncertainty for the Maiden, the moment all us over-cautious women get at some point, and an acknowledgement of the brutality that she does have access to in the form of her devoted brothers.

Don't worry. This is a fairy tale, it has a happy ending. It wouldn't be one of mine if it didn't. I'll start it again. We'll make it like the other ones.

Sing-song:

There once was a girl who was kept after class. She was only thirteen, but very somber, and too tall to wear children's clothes anymore. She was staying after class to talk over her quiz, which she'd done very poorly on. A C+! Not like her. She was kept after class, to talk to her teacher, who was probably around forty-three.

Was he handsome? I don't know. He was weedy. A runner. Coached long-distance when he wasn't teaching science. When he was teaching, he was often instead telling his class he had a headache and then leaning back in his chair and ignoring them for an hour. Sometimes he played the banjo. Plucked it and stared at the ceiling—this was a real person.

She thinks for a second.

He might have been handsome. But probably not.

He asked her about her quiz—is something going on?

She gave some answer or other—no, everything's fine, I just studied the wrong chapter.

Suddenly, then, he launched into a story called, His Life. How disappointed he was in himself for teaching middle school science, because he'd gone to Brown. How terribly easy it is for grown-ups to be lonely.

She remembered, suddenly, that her friend had told her this teacher was getting a divorce.

Don't worry.

This story has a happy ending.

She didn't have much to say, because she was thirteen, and didn't know how to comfort a grown man. She wept for him, slightly. Teared up, at least—she might have been sad or she might have been scared. I can't remember clearly.

He told her he'd see her tomorrow. She left.

Then she took care never to be alone in a room with him again, because, oh! She told her mother! Yes, yes, here you are, you're in this one! She told her mother about what he'd said! And her mother told her to stay far, far away. And the girl didn't know why, precisely, but she had a sense, down some dark hallway in her mind.

So nothing bad happened.

See?

This is a good ending.

I only ever get the good ending of stories. That's who I am. Nothing ever gets to me. I'm too...delightful. I am clever and charming and young and able and slim and sane and white. And bad things have a way of happening to somebody else.⁵⁶

Until I was ten or so, I took baths. There was no lock on the bathroom door in my house, and so my older brother would often burst into the bathroom while I was naked in the tub. To yell at me, to brush his teeth, to piss in front of me. Anything but use the other bathroom in our parents' house. By the time I was eight I would try to cover my body and flinch away. He once, disgusted, told me to drop the washcloth, as if it was repulsive that I would imply that I had a body that deserved to be hidden, that was not his to see.

Beat. To one of the brothers:

⁵⁶ In the grand scheme of women's experiences, I am on the very functional end of Wesely's continuum of sexualization. My privileges in being a white, upper-middle class woman mean that my perspective on femininity can afford to be critical and even picky in a way that other voices often don't have room to be. But moreover, I do want to highlight what exactly we consider to be good endings and lucky escapes, as even the luckiest of us has incidents like this somewhere in our past, so normalized as to be forgotten.

Will you unzip me?

If the zipper catches, she tears her way out of the dress.

But then I started taking showers, so the shower curtain hid me, and I started locking my bedroom door, because it *did* have a lock.

This is a good ending.

It is, listen: I was resourceful, and clever, and cautious. Like I am in every story.

Maybe she curtseys.

Depending on who you ask, I do have one flaw, which is curiosity. See, if I didn't pick at scabs, or talk to strangers, or open doors, I probably wouldn't realize how lucky and delightful I am. I could carry on slipping away from these things, and never notice the other women on the floor.

Sing-song again:

My first job in college was an acting job— Shakespeare in the park! De-lightful. I was one of the servants at the start of *Romeo and Juliet*, one of the Capulet brawlers. I met my fellow Capulet man, first rehearsal. He was probably...forty-three?

He was not handsome. I remember more clearly, because I was nineteen.

He wanted to run our lines together, so we stood under a tall pine tree and he ran his lines up to the one sex joke he had, and then he grabbed my arm, and yanked me, hard, towards him, so hard my boots left the ground for a second. He pulled me up close to his body, and grinded his crotch into my hip.

And no one saw.

And I told him, “um, don't do that in the scene. ‘Cause it doesn't make sense. For our characters.”

And I did the play and I didn't weep at all until afterwards, when I told the intern coordinator and he told the artistic director and he told the HR director and she told the Capulet man and he wrote me an apology email that said "I've been told I shoved you and it made you uncomfortable".

And I was only ever in one show with him after that.

Good. Ending.

If I was not curious, I would assume that things are okay in this manner for everyone. That the problem stops there, basically.

But there are a thousand girls who the intern coordinator told, "I think you're overreacting".

There are million who the AD told, "If you feel uncomfortable with improv, you shouldn't be in this company".

And maybe those girls did many more shows with the Capulet man, and maybe one day many weeks later he cornered them in the dressing room and they had a very bad ending indeed.

Or maybe not. He probably wouldn't have gone that far, would he?⁵⁷

Pause. She regards the dress on the floor.

There are a billion women lying on the floor of a dark red room going "I guess, if no one believed me, then it wasn't really that important."

She picks the dress up, smooths it, moves it to its former home on the floor. She speaks as she arranges it, kneeling next to it.⁵⁸

"I don't know why I still feel so bad."

⁵⁷ This became my final line as the Maiden after rehearsing with Jake, who felt the "suspect every face of hiding a fox" line seemed overly naïve for Herself and belonged more to the Maiden. I realized that if naïvete is what he drew from the Maiden, her final beat probably ought to live in that hopeful world of, "but surely it wouldn't have gone that far, would it?" Perhaps Herself cannot muster the energy to perform that level of denial after she says it.

⁵⁸ I wanted a moment in the blocking to tend to the dress rather than shedding it, since it stood for the women in the bloody chamber by this point. I liked its ability to transform from a dangerous, magical object that could invoke the maiden, to shower curtain/cage, to a whole other person, lying on the floor. If it was to be another person, it was key that she was looked after and laid out to rest.

“Why can’t I get over it?”

And I could’ve lived with them undiscovered behind some door all my life.

Although, I don’t know many people who’ve managed to not open that door.

Many women, anyway.

I’ve guess I’ve known some men that just didn’t have the keys to open a door like that, and a fair number more who do, but don’t care.

And a few, I’ve known a few, who’ve wandered in and out of that room so much that their shoes track blood, and pretty much anyone who meets them can smell it. A desperate, worrying smell.

You just know, sometimes, right?

Until we don’t.

But look, it’s just not feasible to suspect every face of hiding a fox. We’d never get anything done, or go anywhere, and that would steal from us all sorts of stories, and I do want stories so badly.⁵⁹

Just. Not these.

But hey. It’s not like I’m in these stories, is it?

She removes the veil.

—I think we’ve figured out by now that I’m not a super convincing maiden.

Hey, maybe he won’t recognize me.

A realization.

What was I aiming for? To be a part of this story? *This story?*

What was I thinking?

We should be purging ourselves from this story, surgically slicing *us* out of it.

⁵⁹ Because of Jake’s comments around this line I addressed it to the father in each performance. Sometimes women find themselves performing moderation around male loved ones.

I would do anything, really.

No, no. Yes. I won't be seen out in her clothes.⁶⁰

First step:

PART 3. RITUAL FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE BREASTS

*HERSELF prepares a ritual. It includes powders and blessings and complex hand movements, but is entirely original to her.*⁶¹

A friend of mine told me once that she realized she'd hit puberty because she started to look like a Greek statue.

She was putting her hair up after a shower, and saw the curve of her breast beneath her arm, saw that there was enough of a breast for there to be a curve at all. And it looked like a statue she had seen, of Aphrodite I think, that line beneath the raised arm.⁶²

When she was telling me this story, (it was late, in someone's half-lit dorm room), she put her arms up, like this, and turned her head, like this, as if looking in a mirror.

And she went

Looking at herself in the imaginary mirror as if in mild surprise.

“Oh.”

⁶⁰ Dress has been a huge aspect of my own sense of being able to step out of the things that scare and constrict me in womanhood. They're only clothes; but on the other hand, they're really not.

⁶¹ The ritual steps, as devised over two solo rehearsals: 1. Pouring out punch as blessing/offering each corner of the stage: originally I was going to have an off-white floor which might have resembled the white chalk road of the first story, so I thought I'd get some red on there to resemble the 'sow' blood. Pouring out libations is still an appropriate first step on its own. 2. Two loud claps, as if to get the attention of something or someone (this is mostly to get the audience's attention and provide a bump in the volume of the piece, which at this point has been at a neutral volume for some time.) 3. The middle fingers of each hand touch the center of each palm; I have a nervous tic in which I press the nails of my middle fingers into my palms. This has produced two calluses that I did not know the source of until recently. This gesture is an acknowledgment of fear. If you are going to invoke spirits or fairy tale characters and welcome them into your body or ask them to remove your breasts, it seems wise to not pretend you are braver than you are. 4. Throwing that fear away over the shoulder, dodging the head away from the hand that holds it. 5. Drawing something out from the chest—a sacrifice of breath or heart. 6. The silverware also becomes a sacrifice, downstage. This also, handily, clears the table for lying down on, and creates bones for the Fox to reference in his monologue later. 7. The powder: since the table becomes an operating table, the powder is anesthetic. I wanted very much for it to be red, but couldn't find any in time, so it's actually baby powder.

⁶² My thanks to Julia Byrne, who told me this story back when we first met. It's very her.

“Huh.”

Puts her arms back down.

Like, “Guess I’m becoming a woman.”

“Guess that’s that.”

Which is a beautiful story, honestly. I think it’s very, uh, gentle. Very her.

But it got me thinking, of course, about when *I* noticed I was becoming a woman, and I realized I don’t remember at all. Got nothin’. No revelation of the tit.

My mother, my real mother, she’s this skinny blond dancer type. Quite flat-chested, most of her life. She made sure I was given dolls of Barbie’s teenybopper sister Skipper instead of actual Barbies because she didn’t want to get my hopes up. Didn’t want me disappointed by my inevitable nothing-under-the-shirt.

Joke’s on her, I went and grew double-D’s.

Laughs a little as a better punchline occurs to her:

And joke’s on me, ‘cause I hate them.

I’ve told her I might get a reduction, but uh, I actually want to be flat as a board, most days. I’m not sure I even want to keep the nipples.⁶³ I hear that costs extra? I’ve been told nipples aren’t covered by insurance.⁶⁴

Pause. She is busy crushing powder into a bowl.

Not that I’m doing this the insurance way.

Hey. Could I have your help, here at the table? Could you hum with me? Just pick a note, it’s okay if it’s discordant. We can start when I clap my hands, and stop when I do it again.

⁶³ Another revelation once the audience arrived; telling this directly to the stage-mother places the scene in the present in a way that was unexpectedly effective. Most of them nodded along as I told them as if they were in fact my mother, hearing this news for the first time.

⁶⁴ Thanks to Drew Mindell for telling me this.

She claps. They hum. She claps again.

That's perfect. Can I get that note, whenever I clap? We'll keep it like that. On and off. This will finish the ritual, you see.

I'm sorry to involve you, but it's nothing you did. If it helps, it's been like this since I was small and languishing in the horrors of the flesh. I used to sit and pull at my legs, imagine chopping off whatever fat I thought I had; not liposuction but a clean cut. So this just the natural progression. Not that this'll be an actual chop. I suppose. (*Hopefully*) I wonder if I could make it a chop?

She claps, then slowly draws a dinner knife out to her breast.

Hm. Probably not.

*She claps again.*⁶⁵

This one time, my girlfriend, she was lying in my bed watching me get dressed and she said to me, very tenderly, "you look like a Greek statue."

And what I said was, "aw, stop it."

But what I thought was, "don't we all?"

Pace increasing.

Which is *horrific*, since one, she was being nice and I couldn't even take the compliment, and two, no, of course we don't! I get to take them for granted, those women on their stands in every single museum. Most women don't! Because they look like me, I imagine they look like everyone. How **ridiculous**! How spoiled! To complain about them! And God, that's only the start; I've *resented* them, for looking like me.

Or rather, myself for looking like them.

She wrenches at, respectively, her hips, her arms, her hair, and her own face as

⁶⁵ Did not use the clapping here in performance, as I realized the next beat about the girlfriend required a more thoughtful stare at the body—it's a moment of "wait, someone in my life finds this beautiful" brought on by the act of wishing to cut into it, change it, tear it away.

she describes the Baroques:

I resent the Baroques, too, all those bloated nude women lounging on their beds or in their linens.

The fleshy curves, the pale skin, the wavy hair, the chinless face.⁶⁶ I was **embarrassed** to think how much I might look like them, if I slipped up, ate too much, suffered too little.

But silly me, I thought if I ran enough or starved enough, I would look like this... muscled, wiry *thing* I secretly think I am; my face would look like mine, but it **DOESN'T, IT NEVER DOES.**

I have never seen the woman I want to look like.

Shouldn't I have seen her somewhere?

She is standing now. She takes all the silverware off the table, throws it into a pile downstage and circles it with chalk.

Maybe that's a spoiled expectation— people like me are all over the place, after all, in ads and movies and photos and tv shows and billboards and instagram and whatever the fuck else— I can see faces like mine everywhere I go.

Except in mirrors.

She claps. The family hums and the lights go out.

The face I have when I stand alone in the dark round room of my skull is different from the face that looks at me out of other people's windows. The body's different too; it moves like a cartoon.

In marches in perpetual parades. The me in my head plays the trumpet! It is joyous! It is some kind of morbid puppet with no flesh on its bones!

Does that mean something?

Pause. She claps. The family stops humming. The lights come back on.

⁶⁶ We talk about the shifting of beauty standards in (Western) art history by citing the Baroques oddly often, particularly in terms of telling young women that, had they only been born then, their mushiness would have been considered attractive. What kind of practice is that?

Guess I'm ungrateful. They're not ugly statues. And I have nice boobs. Bet some other girl would really like to have 'em.

She is ready now. She removes her shirt, perhaps draws the required surgical cuts for top surgery onto her breasts in red marker. Quite sincerely for a second:

Do you think I could...give them to some other girl?

Stares at the audience for a moment.

Well. I'll put 'em in a jar or something. A to-go box. Someone will have a use for them, I'm sure.

She lies back on the table, reaches for the nearest family member's hand to briefly squeeze.

Thanks for being here, guys. It means a lot.

She claps, then whistles a high note over the humming for a moment. Then she blows the powder up into the air, and claps the sound off. The lights do something horrible, then go out.

When they come back on, she is simply wearing a binder.

She picks at it, turning this way and that.

It's not as good as I thought it would be.

Well. It's not magic.⁶⁷

But it's a start, I guess. So that's me set.

Just me.

⁶⁷ I realized too late that I had assumed too much that one of the main points of the section was clear, this being that it's a ritual because those of us with some sense of body dysphoria that might be helped by surgery often wish (I believe, I have heard it expressed by folks other than me) that it could all just be magic, just be fixed. Hopefully this line gives the audience a moment of insight into why they've just seen what they've seen.

Maybe if I was someone different I wouldn't mind that, be satisfied with existing somewhere far away from foxes and maidens, but you know, I keep thinking about other women.

Which means a couple things.

Here's one:

There once was a girl who wanted other girls. Wanted them so badly she burned up inside some days. Saw strangers in skirts at the bus stop and turned away, stood in a paranoid sweat at church, avoided eye contact in locker rooms.

She read up about girls like her, but they all talked like children, spoke about pure romance where the most intimacy available is a sweet, soft kiss, because someone might be watching. If not a man around the corner, than some man in your head.⁶⁸

And the girl wondered, what about sex?

Is it bad that I dream about sex?

The girl wondered if she was a girl at all, at this point, and not something else wearing a girl-mask.

She puts on the groom's shirt.

The girl decided maybe she didn't like women so much after all, or that she just *wouldn't*, if she was doomed to do it wrong.

But other girls had this way of finding her.

Something in how she looked, or moved, or talked.

⁶⁸ Like many people of my generation, much of my sense of sexuality was built up online via social media, and the unfortunate trend in lesbian discourse when I was a teenager was this sanitized version of sexuality. None of the teenagers I was sharing these platforms with seemed to want to admit to having such a thing as lust—this may have been due to the juvenile notion that admitting to an actual sexuality would be the same as the objectification we had received at the hands of our male peers. Therefore, the image of lesbian relationships I gained as a teenager was fairly undesirable because it was simply so *lacking* in desire. Mainstream media is no better—we appear to have few happy mediums between a pornographic straight male gaze and a bored and uncomfortable straight female gaze, as far as depictions of lesbians in film go. Several audience members my own age have told me they related highly to this segment. It's an internalized homophobia that was stoked by our own community and age group.

Which should be magical, actually, should be wonderful, except it never rains but it pours and sometimes some beautiful young woman decides she's learned the joys of sappho explicitly because you touched her arm, and when she asks you out you genuinely can't believe that she is telling you the truth.⁶⁹

You cancel on her at the last minute because you swear to God you can hear hunting horns— she's pretty and kind and listens to pop singers you don't know and maybe she's got a pack of brothers lying in wait for you around some corner, waiting to kick your teeth in and break your ribs and tear you all to bits.

She puts on the trousers.

Worse, what if it all goes well? She comes home with you? What if you get all the way to your bedroom and then she sees disembodied hands all over the floor? There would be no hands but hers, if we follow the metaphor, but what if she sees something you don't?

What if she's afraid of you?

She puts on the jacket.

Why can't you assume she knows what she wants?

And why do you assume she really wants a fox?

Well. Brush it off. You threw that match, slugger. Think of someone else, now.

And GOD you DO and you start to DATE and you are in LOVE her friends tell you DON'T YOU DARE HURT HER

And it's a *joke* and you are *laughing* and then one night her parents are in town but that's *alright* because they *love her* no matter *what* and they *think you're—okay*.

And she tells you that night in your bedroom, where there are no hands but hers and yours:

“I told my mom I was staying over here and she told me

⁶⁹ Another facet of internalized homophobia: doubting the validity of other women's intentions towards you.

‘Be careful’”

And she goes

Hahahahahahaha

So it is a joke.

So you go haha

Suddenly very much in the moment of whispering to a girlfriend in bed late at night:

.....What?

Be careful of what?⁷⁰

She stands up, in the full suit. A pause.

Hey dad. Remember when you took the whole family to see *A Hard Day’s Night*? I can’t have been older than five or so. It’s the first movie I can remember seeing in a theater. We sat in the balcony of that weird old place in Southeast Portland, and I wanted to be called Paul for like, the next three months, remember?

I don’t think I even particularly liked Paul, the Beatle. Just his name.

Thank you.

She leads her father back to his seat.

Hey, mom? Remember that pixie cut I had in first grade? I masqueraded happily as a little boy for like two years. And you let me, and only insisted I wear girl’s clothes twice. Once for Rachel Germundson’s birthday party, and once for a family photo to put in the church directory. I wore the same shirt both times—pink with a little blue hummingbird. It was really cute. Well, might’ve clashed with my hair a little. Pink on redheads, you know.

⁷⁰ Externalized homophobia that serves to back up what one always feared was true. It is peculiar to realize that your relationship may not be viewed as a homosexual one, but rather one in which you have been unwittingly assigned the male role.

But mostly, I wore what I wanted.

Thank you.

She leads her mother back to her seat. She turns to her brothers:

Hey, boys. You're split into two tonight. Safety in numbers. You're actually only one.

Remember that time we ran into each other at that burger place by school? You were a Junior in high school, with your friends, and I was in seventh grade, with my advisory. We ignored each other, like we usually did, except then, just before I left, I saw you come up to me. Your friends were all laughing, and you said, "give me a hug, Roz". And I wouldn't, because we didn't do that, and you had never tried to hug me even once. You'd always told me to go away when you had friends around, because you were embarrassed to be seen with me. It got so that I was embarrassed to be seen with me, too.

That day, though, you grabbed me, and tried to hug me, and I pushed you off and carried on my merry way.

And you were so, so mad at me, that evening. You yelled at me all the way home, and I cried, and you told me I was crying to manipulate you and it wouldn't work, and finally you said, "People are going to think we don't like each other."

And I said, "I don't like you."

And that was the only time I ever actually shocked you into silence.

Later that afternoon I was hiding in my room as I tended to, and you knocked on my door—actually knocked! And you gave me a jolly rancher, because mom had told you to.

That was your "sorry".

And I should've been sorry, too.

I didn't know I could hurt you.

And I didn't know you didn't hate me.

I'm sorry.

She embraces each brother, one after the other, and takes them back to their chairs. Pause. She stands in front of the table, addresses the audience.

No matter what I am, I will always have had a girlhood.

So. I am not the fox for being dressed like this.

And I am not the fox for wanting women.

None of this means that my teeth are sharp, or that my hair is red.

Beat.

Though it is, a little, depending on the light.

And

sometimes I do look at all the stories that I've gotten to collect, and hear and even tell—broad shouldered, tall, *ambiguous* me—

and I think,

I can't seem to care as much about the ones about women.

Not even my own story.

Hey.

Watch this.

She pulls the cloth off the table in one quick movement, revealing the grave.⁷¹

**PART 4. NO ONE KNOWS QUITE WHO HE IS, BUT EVERYBODY LIKES HIM
VERY MUCH**

⁷¹ I had originally pictured this more like the old magic trick, with the cups and silverware staying on the table, but that would take skill I don't have, so I reimagined it with everything falling off noisily, then finally resigned myself to a safe and reasonable way of doing theater. That is, clearing the table before this moment.

The FOX arrives. He is a good-looking young man, disarmingly charming and very confident. Like the MAIDEN, he is played by HERSELF.

THE FOX

Hello, it's me. Hello, hiya. It's me, the fox. Hello.

He walks around the audience, shakes hands.

I imagine you've been waiting for me.

(Hi, how're you doing tonight?)

Imagine the room's gone brighter, just since I've come in. (Good to see you, hi.)

Been a bit boring in here, huh? Lotta chit-chat. Women, huh?

Always...talking.⁷²

But I love 'em, of course—gotta love a pretty girl, right? Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em, as the old folks say.

Oh, but who am I to call anybody old? I've been around the block a bit myself. You wouldn't think it, though, would you?

He indicates his face.

I do look *aw-ful-ly* good for my age. Go on, admit it. You gotta. Yeah, I'm going on...well, around the age of human history, I figure. What can I say, I look after myself. What, you think I'm kidding? I'm old as anything—old as stories. Man, lemme tell you—the stories I've seen? The tales I could tell?

There was this time I was a scholar.

There was this time I was a country lord.

There was this time I was a Supreme Court Justice.

⁷² The Fox's willingness to suck up to the entire audience at once was surprisingly effective—the audience was happy to laugh along each night, despite everything they'd heard about him.

Beat.

There was this time I was a fox.

THE FOX grins. He has a lot of teeth.

I kid, of course. I'm always that.

He pulls a shovel up from under the table, climbs onto the table, and begins to dig.⁷³

It's my upbringing, I'd say. My nature. I'm one of the old guard, as it were—can't help it, at my age. See, when *I* was a boy (and I am many boys, even as we speak) when I was a boy, we were told, you know, there's us and there's them. Men and women. And you aren't a man if you don't have a woman.

And to not be a man would be the very worst thing you could be.

He looks a bit hunted for a second.⁷⁴

I'll admit, it's not as fun as it used to be. Used to be, you could have just about any girl you wanted, provided you weren't stupid about it. God, the fun I had then. What games, what lawks.

I used to play this game with my wife, when we were newly married.

He personifies the shovel as his wife.

I would snuggle up to her, hold her close in my arms, and I'd say to her, here, darling, I want you to have this. It's the ring of all the keys to all the doors in my house.

With great tenderness and vulnerability:

⁷³ This image is at the heart of this show. There is something deeply haunting about the image of a black-suited man digging a hole. Perhaps it's that he has a shovel, that he's ready, how premeditated and workmanlike it all is.

⁷⁴ I never really used this beat, but include it in the script for a sort of backup reminder that Mister Fox is, of course, not a man—he's a fox. While this play is, in many ways, a critique of masculinity and gender overall, the Fox does not stand in for all manhood, only the predatory sort. Of course, we need to ask ourselves whether manhood really exists without misogyny, without power over another gender. What is masculinity defined by if not the accumulation of property and power?

Everything about me is on this ring, every detail of my life behind this house's many doors. And I'm entrusting it all to you, while I'm away on business. Don't trouble yourself with the details, the important thing is that I'll miss you so terribly my heart might break. But I know it will be safe with you. My heart, these keys. Please, look after them.

He lets the shovel fall into the dirt.

And then I'd leave.

He hops off the table or perhaps actually exits, then pops his head back round a curtain.

And then—wait for it, this is where it gets good—I'd pop my head back round the door and say, oh, wait. Wait a second, sorry dearest, but there's just one thing—don't use that smallest key, would you please? It's to, well, it's to *my* room, you know? My man cave. My...den. I trust you wouldn't encroach on a man's privacy. It-it's nothing important, just a little space to myself.

And *then* I'd leave. For like, a day, tops. Head out to the woods to hunt, maybe, or down to the strip joint. Long enough for her, overcome with curiosity, to go and take a peek. Into my man cave. My den.

Ever seen a fox den?

Strewn with bones, they are. God's truth.

Don't know why; we're just like that, I guess. Can't kill anything without leaving it lying on the floor to rot.

A joke occurs to him:

Men, am I right?

*He laughs.*⁷⁵

Anyway, then, of course, I come riding back, and she is stricken with horror at the sights within the bloody chamber or the red room or the fox's den, and she panics and races around my house like a rat in a cage, and I'm coming up the drive, she can hear the hoofbeats, et cetera et cetera, and then

well

depending on which girl it is

He screams the next line, frothing at the mouth.

I CATCH HER BY HER HAIR AND SCREAM "YOU BETRAYED ME, YOU WHORE,
YOU BETRAYED MY TRUST

I WANTED ONE THING THAT YOU WEREN'T PART OF AND YOU HAD TO HAVE IT
YOU HAD TO OWN EVERY BIT OF ME YOU GREEDY CUNT."

And then I tear her all to bits, and she joins her sisters in the red room.

And I get a **new** wife within the month!

He does a little vaudeville flourish. Perhaps there is a snare drum sound, or a trombone. Whomp-whomp-waaaaa. Beat.

And that's the punchline.

Beat.

Yup. It's a good one.

We, uh, we don't need to bother with the other one.

Beat. To a young female audience member:

Could I borrow you for a moment?

⁷⁵ This is where the Fox's aesthetic of vaudeville or the early 20th-century music hall kicks in visually via a spotlight. It doubles as a cue towards the Fox's showbiz kitsch and a way to focus and narrow the space in his moments of animalistic fury and lust.

Brings her onstage. Tries to hand her the shovel, or the dress:

Could you hold this?

Shifts the tarp around, perfect the grave. Circles around back to her.

Oh, where are my manners? Please, sit down.

As she sits he kneels in front of her, pulls a diamond ring out of his pocket.

Will you marry me?

Pause. We'll see if she says yes or no. Either works. All responses are semi-improvised based on how she reacts.⁷⁶

Can I kill you and eat you?

If she says no:

But you already took my hand. You carried my things for me, you sat in my house. We agreed to be married.

You already married the fox.

Did you think it would be different this time, from all the other times? Did you think you were different? Or me?

Fine. Then you've got to tear me all to shreds, and never mention me again. These are the only options, here, you know. Call up your dogs.

Someone's got to be eaten, otherwise how do we know it's love?

I can't believe you did this. Alright then. Go ahead and leave, and I'll head on down the road and try this again in some other town.

If she says yes:

⁷⁶ Another choice-spot. I was surprised that, in my final dress, an audience member actually said yes to all of it and did in fact lie down in the grave. The aspect that makes it all work and causes such indecisiveness in the audience volunteer is that she is unsure whether she is meant to say yes to everything because of the nature of the medium or whether she actually has a choice. The point being that one usually has a choice, and yet we make the choice we often suspect to be wrong because we feel like we're supposed to say yes, or because we're trying to be a good sport, or because we can't tell what the right answer is.

Thank you. After all, why not? You already married the fox. You knew what would happen, no different from all the other times.

Would you like to lie down? It's safe, I promise.

She lies down in the grave, presumably.

Wait. Take this first.

Hand her the shovel. She has the tools to her own demise.

There. Now you're all set. If you'd just— well, you get it. You can finish the job.

'Bye then. I've loved you. Good bye.

That's my favorite kinda gal.

She'll have to stay there until she figures out she can leave. Don't know if she will, it's up to her.

If she demurrs:

Well, you can't be both alive and dead. I wish you'd said this earlier. We're just going to have to part ways then, I guess. You run away home, I go the next town over and try this on some other girl. Go on. Fuck off.

Once this segment is over, likely ending with the audience member refusing to be killed, or even to marry the fox:

I see. I get your game. You think you're that girl—you all know the one.

The sitch with the other girl? You know.

The situation with the other girl is. My in-laws arrive, just as I'm reaching out for her.

and with their swords they

tear *me*

all

to bits.

The same punchline sound cue. He looks blankly at the wall for a moment.

Perhaps he touches his neck. Then he snaps out of it.

It's all great fun!

Really, I don't mind.

He remembers every death vividly. It hurts. He summons some bravado:

I don't at all mind those times I get caught, because mostly.

I don't.

His smile widens.

Mostly, I don't.

I do these things for years. For my whole life, for millions of lives. And no one says a thing.

Although lately, they ask questions.

What kind of monster are you? They ask. Why do you keep doing this? And well, it's simple.

With deep sincerity and a certain sweethearted self-deprecation:

I fall in love real easily. Show me a pretty face and I'm head over heels.

Women.

Each descriptor being a different woman:

Dark eyes light eyes slim legs thick legs curled short straight blonde long black hair, heavy small

pointed weighty barely-there breasts—the curve of her back—the line between her brows when

she reads—the catch in her breath when I touch her—her smell, her voice, her stride, her hands.⁷⁷

Intoxicating. Infuriating.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ The pornographic terminology here occasionally breaks into something sweeter, as on “the line between her brows when she reads”. This passage is meant to bring up the cultural lie of the man who is made a victim of his own lust for women. But this particular false narrative also has an unfortunate overlap with some aspects of queer childhood, wherein one's own desires are often frightening, damning, or overwhelming due to being heavily repressed. Hence, that moment of romantic detail, which also, now that I look at it, harkens back to the passage concerning sexless lesbian narratives.

I love every last one of them. In my...frivolous way, I guess.

Chuckles.

Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em.

As my father used to say.

As I will say to my son, one day, and as I will say again when I am my son. When I am myself.

Hi, hello. It's me.

He now regards the audience with some malevolence. He starts to move more like an animal, pacing or perhaps crouching.

What, you're going to pretend like you don't know me, now? Pretend we've never met?⁷⁹

Come on. You know me well. Shit, you ought to greet me as your **son**⁸⁰, take me into your homes and your arms, and feed me at your table, or at least from a dish by the back door. You already have, you know. Just not under this face.

But instead, I'd guess you're coming up with **questions**.

"Where is all this coming from? Why are things so scary now?"

"How did such a crrea-ature come to be?"

He is very alone on the stage.

I don't know.

You'd have to tell me.

He leaves.

EPILOGUE. THE DOOR IN THE SELF

HERSELF wriggles out of the coat and drops it like a scorpion.

⁷⁸ This section was simpler initially, and was adjusted late for greater risk in acting choices. I pressed the animal side, which is an obvious choice, but not if it's fully committed to.

⁷⁹ Our lighting grid was limited in such a way that I'd often be in darkness if I strayed too close to the audience. If I left the Fox's spotlight I became an extremely shadowy figure, which could exacerbate both the unpleasant proximity I had to the audience here and the animalistic slink up and down the rows.

⁸⁰ This is my favorite line.

Pause.

It's impossible for me to actually be this thing, of course.

What I am in this suit is just sort of, for me. I guess. It hasn't got teeth or anything. It doesn't own a house, or carry a shovel. It comes and it goes.

If I can stay so sure of that, why not have it? Perfect it, in fact—cherry-pick the bits of men I like so much, put them into my own arms and legs.⁸¹

See, I have made a study of the Fox. I've been watching it my whole life, hardly by choice.

I know how it sounds and

How it smells.

I've seen it take my friends by the hands and lead them into half-lit dorm rooms, late at night.

It's seized me by the arm in public and humped my leg like a dog.

It's crept into the very highest offices in our countries,

Or rather

Has always been there

And

I would probably still make excuses for it, if I thought it was my friend.

Because stories live inside us, and I've spent too much time with them. With men's stories.

How do you exorcise a ghost that lives under your skin?

Facing the door:

How do you keep it out of your future?

Almost an accusation:

And how on earth do you live in any place that lets this thing prosper?

⁸¹ We are speaking here, then, of butch masculinity, or of a considered gender performance rather than an unknowing one. The conscientious masc.

Well!

You make sure it can't hurt anyone anymore. You take away its voice, all of its money, its job, its high-blown reputation. You tear down its house, its billboards, its stables. You tear up the ground it grew from!

YOU BURN IT DOWN, YOU BURN IT.

She makes her bonfire again. It is bigger this time, almost all of the set.

Perhaps she enlists audience members to help. She remembers that there are no matches in here.

Who has a match?

Who's got one?

Please.

Please, surely someone does.

We can't start this if we don't have a match.

Pause.

No?

No.

Well.

She gets up. She dusts off her knees, looks around at the ruined set.

Shit.

Real mess in here now, huh.

Sorry. I didn't. Um.

I'm not a destructive person. I promise.

I am probably not a woman, and I don't know that I'm a man, but, whatever it is I am, it's not.
Something that ruins things.

There is a knock at the door. She freezes.

Oh no.

Oh fuck.

I thought we had more time, don't we still have more time?

Shit. Oh my god.

She seizes first the fox's shirt, then, indecisive, the maiden's dress, drops both.

Tries to fix up the room. There is dirt all over the floor.

Shit, it doesn't look good in here at all. What's she going to think of me?

It was supposed to be alright by now, we were—here—

She produces a broom from under the table and hands it to an audience

member, then tries to scoop the dirt back into the grave. It looks worse. She gives up.

You know what? Know what? It's no good, we need to consider alternatives. Hide me. Hide me, please. It's no good, I can't do it, it won't work out, I'll die, I've spent too much time with the keys.

Please, please hide me.

Please.

She hides.

It doesn't even matter if it's him or her. He'll be in there, whoever it is, in her if not in me.

Though, I can't help thinking, more probably in me.

Everyone just—be very, very quiet.

Maybe it'll go away.

She attempts to hide in the grave,⁸² or the audience. Beat. At a whisper:

We'll just stay here forever.

Long pause.

Oh my God, did I lock it?

She looks around to the audience, who cannot say whether or not she did. Slowly, she tiptoes over to the door, and haltingly presses an ear to it. She then slowly steps back, taps an audience member on the shoulder.

What's it supposed to sound like?

(An answer)

Okay. It was quieter than that.⁸³

She chews her fingernails for a beat.

Then, bracing herself, she walks to the door and opens it.

There is no one there.

Hello?

Beat.

Okay.

She closes the door.

I—

She opens the door again.

Beat.

⁸² I would need to spend a lot more time digging as the Fox to have enough room in the grave to hide, so I only ever hid in the audience.

⁸³ It did not occur to me until the first night that I could take an audience member up to the door with me—it was an entirely organic moment in which I *was* scared to go to the door, and would therefore very much like an audience member to come with me. It worked well, so I kept this up the other nights.

Well.

She paces around the dinner table.

Well, I guess I should. Wait, then.

She sits at the table. Pause.

Anyone got a story?

Actually, wait, let's...let's not. With the stories.

She gets up again, walks to the door. Leans out, sniffs the air.⁸⁴

She walks back to the table, regards the room. Then, slowly, she picks up the fox's clothes and puts them in the grave. The maiden's dress goes in as well.

She buries them.

Beat. She regards the audience.

Don't mention this to anyone, alright?

It's been nice having you here. You've all been very nice.

But

God forbid I stay in here my whole life, right?⁸⁵

So

I think I'll be going, now.

⁸⁴ Did not do this, as it created too many beats. Wish I had found a way to fit it in to create that bleed-over between characters which I mention in my rehearsal notes. That sense that we do carry both the fox and the maiden with us, no matter what we make ourselves into.

⁸⁵ The personal aspects of gender performance weighed on me throughout this process; I knew from the start that I probably wouldn't truly exorcise anyone's cultural ghosts through this, but I found myself despairing ever reaching a resolution anyway. So the only ending I came to was: I can't spend my life doing this—sitting alone with my books and my theory and my stories and my fear. I began writing this having never had a positive romantic relationship; I have now been with my girlfriend for a year. I began this terrified of my own potential for masculine cruelty but increasingly incapable of performing femininity truthfully; I now feel far more comfortable in both areas. I have these comforts not because I spent this time alone in my head; the time I spent there has, if anything, made those fears worse. I have them because I left the house or the red room or the fox's den, and met new people and tried new costumes and voices and told stories.

I am glad, therefore, to have spent enough time in that room to have come back with something to tell other people. So I think the ending works pretty well, all things considered.

'Bye.

I love you.

She leaves, out the door, into the night. There is no curtain call.

END

Chapter 3: Rehearsal Journal: Selections

Note: the full rehearsal journal includes one entry per day from January twenty-first until closing night on March seventh. These entries have been selected for relevance and edited.

1/21

Came into Rich 205 because it was empty and tried to read through some of the script, just using props I found in the cabinets. It's a rough start; needs something different to the opening, more familiar and intimate. It feels more like a one-sided conversation right now than a show or a monologue, but this fixes itself once the story-telling starts. May have to rewrite the first two pages or so.

1/22

Added audience as family members today, which I really like. Will probably add wedding guests, too, or at least inform the rest of the audience that they are my wedding guests. Guests of honor sit at the table, but everyone gets punch, which should make clear to them that they are also present in the space and may be spoken to or singled out. In looking over the whole thing, I think its linguistic games might be tiring for the audience, but its themes are approachable enough even for someone unfamiliar with the subject matter. For all that this is a senior thesis, it needs to be comprehensible as a theatrical piece, and not a long list of my sources.

1/24

Met with Michael and Brent to schedule performance dates and am now set for the 6th and 7th of March. The fact that I simply have no idea how to put together a production is making this feel more difficult than it is and I want all the time I can muster. Though I'm told one-person shows are not complicated by nature.

Met with Michael to discuss rehearsal process. My notes from that:

Thursdays are to be entirely focused on this project, since I don't have class, as I'd previously decided.

- We're to check in weekly on Tuesdays, during which I'll set five goals per week as an organizational task—perhaps they won't all get done, but they will be written down.
- “Regularity of habit is your only defense”.
- Additionally, since this piece has strong visuals, the script can be more spare in its final draft. I agree but I'm also wary of stripping down too much—I'm a dense writer, I know this. I like a dense script. The uncomfortable formality is part of my world-building, and if it goes I don't think I'll get my tone across as strongly as I want to.
- So my steps toward blocking need to anchor themselves in the visual—I may pick three points per page and create a stage picture that I want to bring to fruition. That sounds like a solid way to formalize my process.
- Michael pointed out to me that I've got a thing happening wherein the Maiden's relationship to the audience has now become a need to have them there to support her in the form of family members, while the Fox requires a volunteer who he can eat. Solid. Love it when things show up that I haven't noticed I've done. This also tells me why performing the Fox is so fun and the Maiden is so hard—the Fox is much more active and participatory, while the Maiden is telling stories about things happening, first to other people, then to her. And I wrote this! I did this to me! This is how I get so tired with female-driven stories; we even write *ourselves* into spectator roles. In our own lives.

Did a run-through, still holding my laptop since the script isn't firm enough to get off book yet. It was exhausting—I never understood just how long the phrases I write are until now. I couldn't

catch my breath, especially with all the on-and-off-the-table jumping and miming props. But I have some anchoring points—the Maiden’s arrival at the table at the beginning is helping, and lying down as if for surgery during Ritual, and of course digging the grave. I can build scenes around getting myself to these spots on the stage. But I feel as if I’m wandering in between, and the last thing I want is for this to feel under rehearsed. Also got shaky and teary by the end, which doesn’t surprise me but is another thing to think about—will that go away? Should it stay? What is the place of true emotional pain in this piece? I’ve spent so much time playing with the language that I didn’t really plan for emotional realism while writing.

Do want to put the fox’s attempt to marry a volunteer back in there somewhere, but can’t decide where. He’s so menacing by the end of his monologue that it makes him toothless to put it in at the end, since surely no audience member is actually going to trust him enough to lie down in the grave.

1/28

Writing tonight about a peculiar thing that I hadn’t quite noticed till now—when I began my current relationship, a mutual friend of me and my girlfriend messaged me to first express her delight that we were dating, and then, interestingly, to do the don’t-you-dare-hurt-her routine. Which was, I thought at the time, a joke. Because I was friends with the girl who sent the message, so surely she was doing a bit, where I was some shady boyfriend she hardly knew. But I definitely only decided it was a joke because it only made sense to me for it to be a joke; there was nothing in the way she expressed it to imply she was kidding, looking back on it.

There was another time in which my girlfriend’s mother warned her to be careful before staying over at my house, which she told to me like a joke, and did not understand why I was troubled by it. I guess the joke to her was, her mother thought of me as a man, and said what she

would say to her daughter on her inaugural flight into the bed of some boy from college. Be careful. “Use protection,” forgetting that there’s no risk of pregnancy? Or “be careful,” because she is a girl and I am somehow not, and boys are just dangerous, even when they love you?

So, the thing I’m writing about, with these as examples, is that I’m realizing that people do not always actually think of our relationship as a homosexual one, they just assign the male role to me, and treat me accordingly.

1/31

Met with Michael because we missed the chance on Tuesday, wrote up a task list, below:

- Get into the BRB to measure ceilings and determine limits of space.
- Get volunteer to run sound and lights.
- Talk to Aaron Mayer about table logistics.
- Find tables on Craigslist. They might even be free.
- Need to talk to the CCA people about the grant, because so far my receipts aren’t being processed.

Two runs today, timed the second one. 55:20. Definitely looking at over an hour once I’ve got all my blocking more set. Michael’s description of Phillip Glass text usage sounds very much like the way I think about text, to be honest. The way it sort of trips along over the surface of the emotional action occurring, but still retains meaning that you can hear if you like. I guess that is a little unfair to an audience, depending on what you’re looking to do. I don’t want them to feel robbed of information if they don’t catch everything I say. They won’t be, hopefully. But I guess not if I’m wandering around the stage. I need someone to consult about blocking.

I’m thinking about maybe having a sort of walking track around the table that appears in the first story, the blood on the chalk road (which I believe is a Gaiman concoction as I haven’t

seen it in the original versions yet, and I can't seem to find where he got it from). For some reason I'm not as willing to borrow images from the more modern adaptations of the tales, despite the fact that Carter and Gaiman are at least as important to me in this as the original stories, if not more.

2/1

Need more structure and to expand the family's role. I'm thinking of adding memories to it, asking them if they remember various things that we've actually experienced together. Would that add to the closeness, or take away from it? I worry that I'm going in to the audience participation parts wrong, somehow.

Solved the problem of how to dig without spraying audience members at the table with dirt. I'll escort them away from the table via the aforementioned memories—gives them a chance to connect very personally and also allows me to talk about girlhood and how it sets one apart from toxic manhood. The narrative I have come of age in holds that women have no access to misogyny because they do not have access to the privileges of masculinity. Which is I think quite true in the grander sense, but in the personal sphere many of us have great pools of internalized misogyny lying in wait in our personalities somewhere, and you regularly meet women who are ready to tear you to shreds for being a bad woman, and you run off to lick your wounds and hate them recreationally and some voice inside of you goes “fuck her for being such a good woman, fuck her for being such a *woman*, if she is a good woman then a woman is not something worth being.” Which is different, of course, from men's misogyny, but is still a hatred and a deep discomfort with femininity, isn't it? And it has a great crossover with homophobia, actually. Surely my womanhood would not be so distasteful to those Good Women if it was a straight womanhood.

2/3

Found two *beautiful* tables on Craigslist, both for under \$200, today, contacted both sellers but haven't heard back yet.

2/4

Heard back from the cheaper and better table seller. Whole table and six chairs for \$100; outstanding. She's in Scottsdale and available for the pickup this evening, which is a relief since I have rehearsals and shows every other evening this week. The table's now in the house after much help from roommates. I have no idea how I'm gonna cut a hole in the thing, have consulted Malina Rodriguez who may have a moment to help me make a plan.

Spoke to Lydia Fort today and will meet with her on Thursday, see if I can consult with her on at least a few rehearsals so that I'm not self directing entirely. It's weird, I technically do have actions and blocking for all of the monologues, but it still doesn't feel like enough. Perhaps this is only because I have made these decisions myself and not run them past a director. I'm not used to this amount of control.

Ran the fox stories to try to separate the maiden's voice from Herself. Isn't quite there yet; I struggle to do a melodramatic read of anything. Non-realistic acting styles are not my forté.

2/5

Met with Michael today, upon recounting what I've gotten done this week I felt better about everything. This week's goals:

- Talk to Sara Culpepper re: dirt and the table
- Talk to Lydia re: direction. Could she meet with me a couple times?
- Devise the ritual

- Find some more static blocking points; that is, parts where I know where I am onstage so that I can fill in improvised movement around them.
- Continue to memorize.
 - “Set a traffic pattern”
 - Get someone else in the room
 - Make a list of action images, things I want my body to do. Then mix them into the text. Maybe do a pantomime run. Though that might not be good for this week. Or for me, honestly; I’m not a super good physical actor.

One non-rehearsal related incident that I’d like to note is that two men tried to physically bust in on rehearsals for *Pillowman* in the WMRE studio—they apparently have a sports podcast and didn’t go to the meeting or check the email informing them that we had the studio in that time slot for the week. Our director (a student) went to talk to them and they began cussing him out, yelling, and trying to physically push their way into the studio. It was the most ridiculous thing; I couldn’t write someone behaving like this. What sort of person goes through life like that? Anyway, I say this because as they were shouting at my director, we were continuing our run. It felt odd to be performing aggressive masculinity as the real thing went on about eight feet away from me. I’m sure I’ll have bigger thought on it in the morning.

I’m still thinking about the fox and those boys, and how ridiculous and horrible they were. Their violence was vulgar, embarrassing. Why would you want to be a thing like that? We’ve romanticized male anger. Righteous fury. On the other hand, if you were allowed to always overreact, throw tantrums, would it not be tempting to do so? Of course men want to be the fox. He is charming and successful and unafraid. Of course we hang on to a masculinity that is actually disgusting; the idea that anyone could live so cruelly has been romanticized to the

point of absurdity, so that boys like that think that they're somehow doing something acceptable in throwing their heavy weight around, spilling threats over nothing. They think all of their anger looks good, because they've been shown anger that does, and they can't tell the difference between spoiled, childish behavior, and the man who punches a wall on a TV show because he's lost his job. Even the job-loser, in real life, without his soundtrack and his writers, is a mortifying creature. He is something that is briefly reduced to violence due to pain and failure. We pity him and also hate him for making us flinch. He is the bad father that haunts us all with his shouting, his huge bulk, his slamming cabinets. He is repulsive. But men have given him music, and writing, and focus, and art. Why have we allowed him all of these things? Where were we?

So now we're back to desiring male *absurdity*. My favorite maleness tries to pull off the hyper-masculine coolness of, I don't know, a Raymond Chandler character, and falls harmlessly short. The man himself falls victim to a natural anxiety or weakness, and becomes the punchline. Do I think masculinity is a particularly delightful clown show?

2/6

Talked to Malina about the table today. She seemed doubtful on a number of factors, which was both worrying and embarrassing (must I always feel unprepared in front of people I admire?) but having gotten home and taken another look at the table I think things should still work. I might not be able to lie down in the grave, because it'll have to be so narrow, but I can surely stand in it.

Found a way to sidestep the problem of wanting to have a full family unit onstage with a mother and all by telling the mother repeatedly that she's not in this story, sorry. Until I get to the stories that are actually true, when she is.

I am formally freezing the script as of now.

2/7

I had some sort of gender revelation mid-run today but now I can't remember it.

Ah, here it is—I'd long speculated that the focus on specifically trans women's stories over trans men's was embedded with a transphobic and misogynistic idea that of course someone born into femininity would want to be part of masculinity, whereas someone born into the privilege of masculinity puzzles an audience—why would you want to be *that*? But at the screening of his film *Man Made* T Cooper voiced another idea, saying that because these stories are considered through a transphobic lens as not those of men and women, but rather women and men, if you see what I mean—that is, ignoring the legitimacy of the transition—then an audience would be seeing a trans woman as a man and favoring her stories because they consider it the masculine plotline.

My own doubts then, are those of a woman wondering if I do in fact just want in on masculinity. Or rather, the fear that I am just a woman wanting in. Is that actually an on-brand transmasculine worry? We are more interested in drag queens, in men performing femininity, than we are in women performing masculinity because gender performance via appearance is the one place in which passivity is considered masculine. *Not* wearing makeup, *not* dressing uncomfortably, *not* showing the body. Someone online (completely anonymously but with hundreds of thousands of notes, of course) once said that womanhood is non-consensual performance art. You must perform to a very high level to be considered an acceptable woman. You do far fewer things to be a man. A lack of self-control is considered manly.

The more I see of men, the less I want any part of it. I just find that I wish I was shaped like them—wiry and spare and flat-chested. It's hard to define what is normal female body image issues and what is something I have to actually explore with a serious mind, but I'm having more

and more trouble justifying this to myself without admitting that I've probably never been a woman.

2/8

Little work today. Looked up objects for rituals, found out that powders are pretty easy to find. Thinking about floor markings or something for the rest of it, gestures in the air. I have an exercise I learned at Bryn Mawr that could generate some good gestural stuff, so I'll be trying that as soon as I can find where I wrote down the steps for it.

Met with Josh to talk about the set—he wants to saw around six inches off the legs of the table and chairs, which would solve our height problem and also give an unsettling fairy-tale vibe to the thing. We're not sure about the structural integrity of this, though.

2/10

A quote for today from “What the Well-Dressed Dyke Will Wear” in *Dyke: A Quarterly* no. 1, Winter 1975: “We are experimenting with new ways of presenting ourselves to each other. The farther we get from a patriarchal way of thinking, the uglier and uglier we will be to ‘them’ and the more and more beautiful we will be to ourselves.”

They made it sound so wonderfully straightforward back then, didn't they?

2/11

Heard back from Melissa Foulger, she says she's interested in the script but too busy. So I'm back to sending emails into the void. I'm a little bit frustrated with how this aspect has panned out; I'm running out of time. David Crowe helped when I got in contact with him, and Patricia Henritze at least listened to a reading and gave me some advice before telling me she wasn't interested. Was it something I said? But I was told during the proposal process I would

get help from the theater department on finding a professional director since they so wanted me to work with one, and I've gotten no help thus far beyond being told to email strangers.

This is not a productive entry, but this is where my rehearsal process is. I have nothing to offer and it's not getting better—my capacity to create in a vacuum is reaching its upper limit. The project feels childish and pointless. Why say any of this? If I've learned anything in the past year, it's that I am alone in myself, alone in my body problems, alone in my gender problems, alone in my sex anxieties. What's the point of saying these things if no one else recognizes them? Am I just creating some curiosity for a straight cis audience?

If no one recognizes this, if no one recognizes me, I can't help feeling like there's nowhere else to go. I have long thought that the act of having an audience that listens to you holds some power, but I don't know if I want them to look at me, actually, now. I don't know that I want their attention. I don't want them to be allowed to look at me.

2/12

Met with Michael, talked about the concerns in the previous entry, had a very good conversation which boils down to, don't think of this as confessional. It has a theatrical imagination behind it and around it. I can shield myself in metaphor and image. And actually, I shouldn't place my goals on anyone recognizing it as something they know to be true that they've never heard said. There are, as Michael points out, people whose experience with their own gender and sexuality is entirely comfortable. Causing them to question that isn't a side effect, it's an important aspect of this.

He also offered his help in finding a director, which I am really thankful for. Maybe it's not too late, and this is salvageable.

Quite a lot of rehearsing today, actually feel like I got somewhere, particularly with the maiden, who is getting more precise and bigger with each run. Josh watched it and gave notes, Julia just watched; we agreed she ought to have more of a British Pantomime tone that gradually lessens as her stories become more true. Did some research then, in to British panto and how that looks. It verges into 18th century theater, with straight-backed posture and exaggerated hand gestures.

2/13

Did a full run in the Schwartz theater lab with Maggie sitting for the mother. Felt good—I'm not off book but I'm almost there, and it's getting into my bones a little more.

I also had a brain wave on the burying-the-girl bit—if I do that part after the fox's first outburst where he describes killing his wife, than he has a more natural moment in which to tell the story of the-girl-who-gets-away after it, in order to illustrate who that woman who declines to be buried thinks she is. I will be in trouble if an audience member does allow herself to be put in the grave, but somehow I doubt that anyone will. Although I do need to plan for all eventualities.

Pleasant surprises: Maggie laughed quite a bit, which gave me the sense that the piece has enough levity to keep the audience from getting lost in their discomfort. That said, she told me it was unsettling.

2/14

Mostly a prop day.

I have gotten better at accepting that a lot of the things I get into in this script are ugly. They're ugly to say, and I don't need to try to make the audience feel alright about them. It's not a comfortable play.

Took the table into the shop today! Malina has saved my life. I have also gained from TE storage:

- A shovel
- A tub for the grave
- Three silver platters
- Three pewter plates
- Silverware (but it is mismatched and there aren't enough knives)

Also, confirmed to meet with Jake Krakovsky tomorrow for an outside eye/consultant, if not actual direction. Hoping he can help me with Mister Fox's voice in the Maiden's stories, and with those character shifts in general. He is a very skilled clown.

2/15

Met with Jake Krakovsky today, who Michael kindly contacted for me. He was incredibly helpful at pinning down the character shifts between the maiden and fox and also shocked I've worked this long without a director. The whole thing is sharper and bigger now, which serves it well, I think. Added a plummy Julie Andrews accent to the Maiden to set her apart from Herself, added physicality to the fox and placed each character in the space for when they're talking to each other.

2/17

Costuming today; found a dress, it's perfect and in my budget. Also a looser white shirt and men's boxer briefs for Herself, because I realized I am too much of a coward to actually wear a tanktop onstage with no bra—somehow the penny finally dropped that if I want a female body on this stage it has to be *my* female body, I *am* going to be making people look at it, and this combined with the fact that I don't really *like* people to look at my body to hit me like a ton

of bricks. Is this related to Wesley's concept of womanhood in practice having an aspect of divorcing oneself from one's body? The female body is a visual symbol, and you detach it from your actual self until you have to reattach it.

Feeling utterly terrified that I only have about two and a half weeks left on this. I am so not where I want to be. Actually, I have no idea where I am on this, I genuinely can't tell without someone else in the room.

2/20

To my deep shame I have rewritten a little bit of the ending—barely any change at all, I'll say, just slightly better wording. It actually feels good to say now: "Because stories live inside of us, and I've spent too much time with them. With men's stories."

2/21

Met with Robert to go over the requirements and lock-up procedures for the BRB. I'm realizing that I should have put together a team for this, if not with a student director than at least a student props manager. I've spent so much of my time tracking down props.

Met with Lydia! Did a run. Here are some of the notes I took (from her notes):

- It ought to be a realization that I am allowed to leave the room. Does leaving out the door that the future is meant to enter through work, if I am leaving the structures of marriage/gender altogether?
- The audience will assign a "she" to the host. I think this is also fine, and interesting. They should have to notice that and sit on it.
- Is the audience *invited*, or have I found them there and already know them? I think they have to be party guests from the start. If I've invited them to help me decide to know what to do, then I can turn to them for real hope.

- Why do we need the family to occupy these seats? They're there for so long. Once I've included them, she says they need constant care and attention.
 - Maybe they can participate in the ritual! And I can get them to help me down from the table in the Oxford Student. They are sort of up the creek during the true stories, though. Except for asking the brothers to unzip the dress, which I didn't do when I performed it for her, because I had to mime their presence.
 - Practice the *shifts* between the characters, I need to clearly be able to turn them on or off so there's no doubt who's who. Find a gesture that always defines the fox. His little cigarette-hand? He stands at an angle at all times, can I exaggerate the shift into that?
- **Shut down the rest of the brain while acting—don't be writing or directing while performing!**
- Destroying the setting—what does it mean that no one actually eats?
 - Destroying the room is a sacrifice, so make it sacrificial. The rehearsal dinner isn't going to happen, now, because I've used our knives and forks to cut my breasts off. Maybe I can line them up on the floor or something.
- Salt over the shoulder on the ritual look. Can I pour out a drink? I'm okay with people projecting their own ideas onto what the ritual motions are. I want them to make their own meaning out of it.
- The stories all start with the same gesture and the same line. Should they be in the same space or all in different ones? Can I highlight the breakdown with that?

- She doesn't like my deadpan, felt I was throwing away all the jokes. "The script is funny, but you didn't make it funny."

I get so anxious performing this that the beginning becomes weak. Reading over the first two pages, there's definitely enough information to infer that there's a spouse behind the door, but I rushed it so much that it wasn't clear.

Did another run with Julia Byrne, felt much better. Julia is a helpful spectator for this because she is, as she put it, "at the infantile stages of these same questions". From now on I'm going to try to avoid doing any run alone. This was a hell of a day. I rehearsed from 2-6:30, then 8:40-10. I guess, looking at it, that's pretty ordinary. Most TE and student theater rehearsals are 6pm to 10 or 11 pm. Though for one actor, with constant action, and no 10 minute breaks or time offstage for someone else's scene, this is more than I'm used to.

2/22

Went through the remaining scenes that Jake Krakovsky hadn't seen and he seemed optimistic about it. Notes:

- Cleaned up the true stories so that it's now about Herself hoisting herself back into the maiden role when she can and slowly slipping out of it when she can't. We try to put a happier narrative on our own lives, but even conforming perfectly to femininity doesn't save us. There's no safe way to be a woman.
- The other characters have almost no smiling which includes teeth, Jake said, but the Fox is very toothy. Not quite accurate, since Herself has a nervous smile tic and the maiden tends to smile beatifically, but I can make it so.
 - Physicality overall has become clearer to me: for the Maiden I use my modern-dance-almost-ballet feet and pantomime arms with shoulders back

and an almost swaybacked spine. The fox, as Jake said, stands in italics—his limbs are loose, he walks pelvis-first and talks with his hands. Herself has my hunched shoulders but straight hips, along with nervous hands which pluck at clothes and at themselves and takes up little space but does have the comfort of a natural storyteller.

- In rehearsing the different scenarios that can play out with Mister Fox's volunteer-wife, we discovered that he could ask the audience member to put on the maiden's dress. It was both entirely perfect and so awful that I don't want to do it to an unknowing audience member. Seems like a rather violating thing to do to a participant who can't consent to even being asked that. I think someone else might say that, well, she can say no, but having been in her shoes in my own life, I generally find myself uncomfortable and violated by even having been asked to do things like this. It implies such a predatory gaze that you just *know* you've already been eaten up by someone else's eyes.

Rehearsing with Jake reminds me that a lot of this script is based as much in my contemporary sense of queer/genderfluid experience from my own life and the constant connection to other queer young people via the internet as it is in my studies. The scholars I've read grew up in a different era from me simply by virtue of being old enough to count as scholars, and to write things I could read in published books and journals. But Jake is only a few years older than me, and recognizes these arguments and thoughts, but tells me he has never seen them onstage before. It's a nice thought, that I might be in my own time enough to say something new onstage. Or that I might be able to share these new thoughts with an audience that

recognizes the older, more secure ideas of second-wave feminism, riffed on and questioned by the next generation.

To me, it comes down to culpability—older readings tend to put such revolutionary grace on the lesbian that it seems she can do no wrong. (If Case is right, this welcoming of lesbians into the second-wave feminist fold was a strange interaction that came at a great cost to lesbian subcultures and countercultures. A deeply uneasy relationship according to Calhoun, too, actually.) These days the cultural narrative places her in a more defensive, embattled position, perhaps because we are not so binary in our communities anymore. We question each other, perform goodness for our own sakes rather than each other.

Social acceptance earns us the need to do better for each other and be better in ourselves. It is not enough to simply be, because being a lesbian is no longer radicalized in the common narrative. The dominant idea that I grew up with was that sexuality had nothing to do with choice, and a statement that is not a choice is not a statement, it is just a state of being, which we must never politicize. This is surely more comfortable in terms of day-to-day living, but means that one has to consider the theoretics of living more carefully. Well, you don't *have* to. But one should, I think.

2/23

I spent almost six hours in the shop building the table today. Malina instructed me and I made the cuts. Why did I not ask for student volunteers to do props and set things for me? On the other hand, the self-sufficiency of building this thing myself is nice. I've never made anything on this scale before. I might say this of the entire play.

2/24

Can't sleep anymore for nerves. Another rehearsal with Lydia this afternoon. I need audience members to show her what I'm meant to be doing, but everyone I've asked is too busy.

Lydia asked me what the transition from the end of ritual into the lights coming back up meant—I failed to explain it and she wants it to be visible. The whole idea behind that passage is that I and (I suspect) most people with body dysphoria wish for a magical cure that can just grant you the change that you want. That's why it's a ritual and not, like, top surgery. It's how you wish it could be. That's why there's a blackout at the end and in the passage describing the body in my mind—disembodiment literalized. But instead of being able to express this I wept through the scene. Then Lydia told me that's the direction I should take it, that it made her care about what I was saying.

It bothers me to be told that this is the version in which the audience will care, and that they won't otherwise. I think perhaps I have failed to communicate the style I'm aiming for. This much emotional spin on it would be distracting, get the audience lost in sympathy or disgust, make them lose track of the greater picture. It's not *meant* to be emotional realism, and I'm not looking to stand and cry in front of an audience and hope that they feel sad; that's not the kind of theater I'm interested in making. I'm interested in digging holes and burning things, and doing so in order for the audience to feel that they too have dug and burned, or at least lent their energies to the burning. But then, if the piece doesn't have the energy it needs, doesn't breathe like it should, then I will be dead in the water. So shouldn't I be looking for any way to keep it moving?

2/25

Decided that the huge metal tub I got from TE storage is truly unusable. This means I have to go buy a stock tub and somehow transport it to the BRB. I don't know how to do this. If I develop a stress ulcer, as Michael tells me he did during his thesis, I will be unsurprised.

Thursday, 2/28

Ran through the maiden stories today before Michael got here, set up the space. The maiden sounds better the more polished she gets—leaves room to chatter with the audience. She's like a very friendly housecat, I think, some pleasant and amicable little mammal. Herself is a hare.

Notes on the run from Michael:

- It gets monotonous.
- The acting choices aren't big enough; it's too safe.
- Surprise yourself with discoveries more often; if it's roleplay that gets out of hand then we need more of the moments where Herself realizes it's gotten out of hand.

After Michael left I put the fox through his paces again, specifying his voice and verbal tics more and trying to find more moments to animalize him. The list of women's attributes was a good spot to go far with, particularly since it is, purposefully, a dizzyingly long list and therefore has lots of space for physical changes. Spent an hour or so running that part and finding opportunities to get off my feet and, crouching, salivate onto the floor. I'm surprised by how easy it is to make oneself literally froth at the mouth. This passage should get worse, actually, should be more horrible than it is. But I don't know if the fiction sticks enough to get there. A person dripping at the jowls is a great image if you've already bought in to the narrative. But what if the audience doesn't? This would be the "risky" part of "risky choices".

Herself is becoming a weak link at this rate. Perhaps that's because she is languishing in naturalism where the other characters get to occupy a more metaphorical space. I think initially I characterized her by her nervousness alongside her ambiguity or ability to knowingly stand outside of things, but once I had to pull the maiden further away from her I think I lost her

cynicism, too, or the weird knowingness that I wrote her with initially. Maybe the problem is that I can't decide how much she knows and how much she doesn't. If she has an edge of the demonic, she has opportunities, as I put in my earlier drafts, for an unsurprised "oh no". But it's better to see a character discover things, so she can't really know anything, which is leaving her dead in the water. She isn't an innocent, she's exhausted—she's spent her whole life peddling over these ideas alone in her head, in this room. So maybe she has to have more of a creative sense to her, a dreaminess and a willingness to work through the idea? Maybe her roleplay needs to be more joyful. Until it's not. Then that offers her the chance to work more desperately to find happy endings in the stories, then happy endings in herself.

Got home, discouraged, around 7. My script is solid enough, but I don't seem to have the skills or precision to make it work. Amanda offered me all of her notes from Tim McDonagh's developing a role class, which I accepted. Do I have the technique necessary to develop a show at all?

3/3

Tech! Maggie Higginbotham has saved my life with the lighting, which is startling and lovely. I'm so glad I have her help on this. Hoping for some good visuals, that some of the imagery I imagined when writing this will come through.

Realized on running the opening by myself that I've been going the opposite direction that I should have with Herself. It's better to allow her her cynicism, her exhaustion—these are things that define womanhood and one's understanding of it. What happens is, you get tired, and then one day you realize you are not allowed to exist without the energy to perform, and that's when you start to understand how much of a trap it all is. I can't believe I've been putting Herself in the same nervous-energy pit that I have lately been trying to shrug off in myself. She's

been the performance of femininity that I do whenever I am trying to make myself so low that I am not worth being cruel to—whenever I feel I’ve messed up, I pitch my voice up purposefully (perhaps half-purposefully) and stumble over my words. I talk like a teenage girl, in hopes that the person I’m speaking to will take pity on me for it, and let my mistake slide by without comment. If I am writing a manifestation of the questions I’ve been asking, then that manifestation ought to ask them with weight and with dread! This sad, over-eager person is not going to pull in the audience. Leave naivety to the Maiden, it’s much more hers.

Amanda Camp sat in on rehearsal—she said she saw a lot of her own life in it. She also had interesting things to say about characterization: she thought the characters were very clear and the transitions between them were sharp. She therefore *wanted* to see bleed and overlap between them, since the point she took in them was not roleplay, but that all of these people exist in one person, in any person, and therefore she wanted to see moments in which she *was* confused on whether Herself was speaking or perhaps one of the other characters was *pretending to be* Herself, which I thought was very exciting concept. If I ask an audience member to pick something up and walk with me in Herself’s voice more than the Fox’s, they will trust me enough to do so, and may even agree to marry me because they’re not sure whether they’re being a good sport or being asked to do something terrible.

As an example Amanda used the hands—she’d noticed the right hand I do for the Fox, which is, though I never mention it, him holding an ever-present invisible cigarette, (I may have based this entire man around the concept of a sardonic 1920s vaudeville performer) and suggested that there might be moments in which the Maiden’s 18th-century-theater hands relax on one side into the Fox’s hand while we’re not looking. Like they’re all under the surface all the time and we have to watch to catch them.

I love this, but I have been told so many times by so many other people that I need to delineate my characters more clearly and outline precisely where one switches into the other, and I don't know if I have the skill to make it clear that an overlap like this is on purpose.

I repeatedly find that after the Fox's monologue, the audience no longer trusts me. Saying "It is impossible for me to be this thing, of course" doesn't cover it when they've *just seen me be that thing*. Surprised I never considered that might happen.

3/4

Final dress today. Had three audience members, it changed the energy a lot. Angela said yes to every fox volunteer question, which really shocked me, but I eventually managed to get back on track with the lines. Having audience members was really useful, but I need to remember to stay slow. There is space in the script to pour everyone punch; there's no need to rush. Somehow, even though the lines are very malleable, they still feel so static that my timing gets screwed up by the new factor of audience. I'm actually sort of glad now that I've allowed myself to be so lackadaisical with wording; it means I don't have to hit marks and can create enough space to get my blocking done, hopefully. Herself keeps getting better with audience. She's still a little uneven to start but she warms up pretty effectively.

Performances

Tuesday, 3/5, Open rehearsal: The whole thing feels so much better with people in the room. The audience was incredibly responsive, wanted to get up onstage, and interacted just when they needed to. Felt so warm with them that I had the organic moments of connection that I'd hoped for—hugged my brothers before they sat down and was hugged tightly back, was yes and'd by my father when I asked him if he remembered the Beatles movie; the audience learned to ask for more drinks slowly, but then suddenly became bold and behaved like actual guests.

They got genuinely distraught over not having a match at the end. That's one of my proudest moments. And for surprises—I realized as I was asking Cassie Gonzales about how your future waiting behind a door is supposed to sound that I wanted someone to come with me, for security. Once the audience is that close to you, you want to ask more of them. So I took her hand and we went to the door together. She hid behind the wall while I opened the door, as if ready to beat the thing over the head if it came in. Will try not to destroy that moment by attempting to make it happen again, but we'll see if it does.

Talked to a friend about it later while laundering Herself's clothes and the tablecloth at the house (I'm going to let the dirt on the fox and maiden build, partially because I think it's visually interesting and partially because the dress has no tags, so I don't know if it's machine-washable or dryable)—the imagery really stuck with her and suited her; the build of objects, the obvious but clean-cut symbolism. She said she was pleasantly surprised simply because she doesn't think of that as my area, which I really appreciated, since she's right—I'm the most language-driven performer alive. But I love theater for its imagery far more than for its words, and if I learned anything in my time at Bryn Mawr it was the importance of aesthetics.

I find that actresses particularly often have very little to do on stage; they don't really touch the ground, just wander around looking like women. I guess it's back to that old idiom, "men act, women are". It is important to me, then, that I build things onstage, clean things onstage, tear things apart. I realize on reflection that this may mean that I could maybe consider myself to have a style. How thrilling.

3/6, Opening: Not as good tonight. Lost some of the intimacy with the audience, some of the energy. It felt safer, for whatever reason, perhaps because I sat back on my heels after last night and the emotional movement faded out. Still had some good moments with the brothers,

who were very engaged, but managed to get worried about the audience, which tonight included some people I wanted badly to impress.

3/7, Closing: Closing had great energy. Around 40 people, I think, and very responsive. A lot of young women who sat in the front row and leaned in, and listened. Plus three men for my father and brothers. It was more dangerous this time, I'm told. Things that happened:

- One of my brothers refused to unzip my dress. The other did unzip it though, though, probably because it was Josh Oberlander, who'd read the script in its early form and knows that if I ask for something to happen with the costuming I genuinely need help, but the zipper got stuck, so I told him to rip it. Tore my way out of the dress.
 - The confusion about the balance between good audience member and actual-character-in-the-story is one of my favorite things about this show. I am very proud of that part. You have to make your choice, but you can't tell whether you are performing or just making a choice for yourself. Just like life.
- Ran out of plastic cups for the audience and therefore had to use the last of the glass punch glasses. The only audience member to come up for punch that had a real glass was a boy at the very end of the line. Asked him if he was a distant cousin or something—he asked if he should sit at the table then, and I got to tell him no. It was a fun bit, not meaningful, but got the audience excited and energetic. They like to laugh at each other.
- While crouching on the floor through what I think of as the Fox's Salvation Passage, I looked up briefly and saw a young woman physically recoil from my gaze. My fear of that choice paid off.

- My final volunteer, for the opening of the door, seemed so with it that I tried leaving her onstage with me for the end, asked her for a story directly. She sat in the mother's chair and waited with me for a while. It really worked.
- In each night, I didn't really have the audience fully until the red room hit in the first fox story, and the fox says his second rhyme. That's when they start to really lean in. It makes sense, I guess. The rest is meant to be bright and fast and fun, only really an introduction to being active participants, with the more unpleasant meaning there in the lines but purposefully glossed over.
- I would very much like to move on with this. Take it somewhere.

Part 4. Selections of Performance Recording

This following is a ten-minute clip of the full show recorded by George Nikas on March 5th and edited by Akil Brooks; it consists of the Maiden's first story and the Fox's entrance up to his first wife's death and punchline. This is also included in supplemental files on the Electronic Thesis and Dissertations library copy.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1EHTZsjvKU1tgFF4KE9YqkunkeV4o9iU6>

Part 5. Conclusion

1. *Endings and Answers*

I did not enter the process of creating this play certain that I could answer every question that I posed in my abstract. Many of them, after all, were very open ended, and the one that I focused on, that of whether it is possible to enter into a lesbian relationship as a bisexual, masculine-of-center person and live without falling back on patriarchal models of romance, was a question I was just desperately hoping to answer with a straightforward ‘yes, and here’s how’. My understanding of gender and its narratives continues to be far too nebulous for such a clear answer, and, having spent this year studying and reflecting on its intricacies I can’t help but conclude that ambiguity might just be the nature of gender as a construct.

Because so much of what we think about ourselves is born out of how we understand gender, and gender is so much a creation of narrative, its realities (as I found in reading *Delusions of Gender*), are actually paper-thin. Yet it is simultaneously so deeply embedded in our communal social consciousness and the world’s economic and social structures that it becomes a Schrödinger’s construct—it seems both not to exist and to exist as one of the most important factors in how one lives one’s life. There are no easy answers in this area of study, no way to completely opt out of a binary so important in our world, or to completely shake off the stories we tell about ourselves and each other.

My thesis research started to hurt not long after I began it in earnest. There was something both cathartic and uniquely difficult in reading the thoughts that I’d had since I was a teenager written out and examined by respected theorists in peer-reviewed journals and books. Throughout it all I had the sense that I should have been reacting differently; that I should have

been able to put more space between experience and theory, or that I should have found one answer to my questions of ethics in lesbian relationships and stuck by it. But I couldn't, because there are so many different ways to approach gender and sexuality, and because the things that made sense in theory seemed to ring false to actual lived experience. Being told that there is no wrong way to be a woman or even to not be a woman sounds extremely freeing, but it is rarely true in practice in a world with social pressure, and its open ended-ness can actually produce a sort of personal entropy. Sexuality has the same issue; with fewer received narratives about committed relationships or growing old, one has to strike out into a frightening dark.

I took for granted too quickly that there was no right answer to my questions. Far from allowing me room to explore the various differing approaches of my sources, this let me sink further into the misanthropic sense that there simply was no way to live as a gender nonconforming person that did not either ignore one's culpability in interacting with binary gender constructs or else rely irresponsibly on them. It took me far too long to simply accept that I, like anyone else, have internalized misogyny and internalized homophobia that I am still coming to terms with. It is not just inevitable to have these internalizations but also deeply important to examine them. *God Forbid's* lack of easy answers is not a failing, but perhaps a necessary first step. We have to understand ourselves before we can fix ourselves.

That said, the process of writing and performing this play required that I create a resolution to these fears. I didn't recognize, when I wrote it, that I'd written a play about a person searching for a happy ending to their own story. It was not until I had feedback from friends and advisors that I was told that this was actually what the play was about—not just storytelling, but story-fixing. While writing I only knew that it was too dark a story to not end on a hopeful note, and that the LGBT narratives we tell today end sadly far too often; it would be tasteless and

narratively static to have a grim ending to a grim story. In a metatheatrical sense, because the play is about stories, its own plot became a literalization of that struggle to construct a future that, for LGBT people, is often hard to visualize. If the only stories you know are ones that you would rather die than repeat, then you need to learn how to create. So this hard-won happy ending has unexpectedly given me an answer to one of my most desperate early questions, and it is this: yes, it is possible to live and love well as a queer person in a world in which these old stories exist—but only if we take the time to tell new ones. If the most painful part of going forward as a queer person in the world is abandoning one’s place in the stories one’s been told, then the key is to build up a narrative that has variety, and color, and difference, so that we can imagine a happy ending for ourselves no matter who we are.

The creative side of the work has therefore interacted ideally with my research. I posed and finessed my question via study, and then answered it through the act of storytelling. I couldn’t have planned that, really.

2. *Writing for a Viewer*

My next concern in creating this piece was whether anyone wanted to listen. It is key in a script this interactive that the audience be highly engaged, and I didn’t know what else to do in a solo show other than interact with the audience and throw interesting images at them. It is one thing to be confident in one’s skills as a writer and another to assert that one’s ideas are worth listening closely to, particularly with a script so peculiar and personal as *God Forbid*. It didn’t begin as a personal piece, of course—in its earliest form it consisted of just the Maiden’s stories (one of which the Fox delivered), and the Fox’s marriage proposal to an audience member. I intended to write the rest as a dialogue between the Fox and the Maiden; it took until October to start trying out personal stories, starting with “Ritual For the Removal of the Breasts,” which

originally ended before the powder went up into the air, followed by “No One Knows Quite Who He Is...” and ending with the Maiden’s true stories, all of which I submitted as monologues in my creative writing workshop before reworking them to suit the final script. The oppositional pull between the acts of true personal testimony and the high-camp fiction of the Maiden’s fairy tales became key to the script, and made it all start to breathe. We form our truth out of stories, so the picturization I utilized in introducing the Maiden, her tales, and her world became my main tools in communicating the script’s themes of attempting dismantle stories that you unfortunately live inside.

That said, writing this play was an unusually stop-and-start process for me as I pushed against the unique challenges posed by working independently: namely, the specificity of imagery that the script required. In any other play, the visual world of the script could be relatively bare—good playwrights leave room for directors and designers in their writing, something I have to remind myself of quite often. But in this case, the only structure I had came from my own visual imagination, and that meant writing out my thoughts in new ways. I am used to rich verbal landscapes in playwriting; language and monologue are where I’m most comfortable. But I also had to remember that when I first began writing plays, I had to cut down my stage directions and was repeatedly told to stop trying to over-explain how the stage or characters should look. In a way, this project allowed me to go back to my bad habits and write however much I wanted into the stage directions, to pin everything, in fact, on those heavy visual metaphors and symbolic, dreamlike images. I was beholden to no one but myself.

I have spoken here about picturization, and I want to come back to it, as the visual is the strongest place in which we can subvert expected happenings—nowhere else can we so quickly undercut an idea as in the familiar image. The young woman in a fluffy white dress, the dinner

party, the father at the head of the table. The Greek statue, the veiled bride, the grave-digger. These are symbols that we have in our heads, but seeing them actually performed by a living person in physical proximity to oneself would make for a strange sensation, I was confident. I had shadowy, strange images of this play in my mind from the start, thoughts about projection screens and branches, dancing and dirt, long, warren-like hallways down which the audience would walk in a single winding line, holding hands. Many of these early thoughts relied heavily on my own ability to pull off effective Fox-and-Maiden-drag, something I still can't quite believe I had the confidence to write myself into. I can't help but feel that many of the more conceptual aspects of the script came through better once I recognized that the perfect stage-picture I had in my head wasn't always feasible in my body or the space, and had to reinvent and simplify. The rehearsal process very nearly fixed the writing process for me, because it was only once I was on my feet saying my own words and digging my own holes that I realized what was sharp and what wasn't. The looseness of the language was also a lesson for me—I was particular with certain passages and utterly improvised on others, and so much of the shift from writing into rehearsing was about understanding where I was letting myself down by not leaving more space to talk with audience members, or where I was letting the poetry down by not being specific and polished enough.

Eventually, many of my shadowy, half-imagined little physical images carried through to the performances. Others stayed behind in my head, perhaps to be explored in some later draft, or in some later play.

3. Acting for No One

The solitary nature of rehearsing a one-person show created a lot of room for doubt over the course of my six-week work period, as my rehearsal journal chronicles day by day. Much of

this process had to be constructed as I went, since I had never rehearsed a solo person show before, nor even seen one rehearsed, nor performed anything I had written. One would think that when a playwright sets out to write for herself, she might play to her strengths as an actor, and one would be wrong. The strength I played to in the script was solely my love of doing things onstage, that is, of manipulating objects, building things, taking them down, tearing them apart. That's what I enjoy in theater, and I did have confidence that I could make those moments interesting and believable—I am capable of subtlety and believability, onstage, if nothing else. But, as I have mentioned, I am not precise actor; I rail against even mildly prescriptive blocking, yet I'd written a script that moved fast, a script that required precision, quick shifts, big, expressive character choices, gestural cues as informational shorthand, and stylized, non-naturalistic acting. In other words, it required a polished physical score, or the audience would be lost. It looked, on the page, too reliant on these technique-heavy elements to leave any room for the improvisational moments I had also written. My choose-your-own adventure fox proposal moment, for example, seemed in danger of collapsing, and spent nearly a month cut from the script.

In the end, it only took time, really, and consultations with friends, and Jake Krakovsky. It also, oddly, took some small amount bravery in myself. I realized as I rehearsed in an empty rehearsal room, talking to the walls, and more noticeably when I did finally have a friend or two watching, that I fall back on realistic acting choices because they are safe—they make sense for the character or scene and do not disrupt anything. Moreover, I know I can do them well. But *God Forbid* is not a safe play; it's not even a safe script. I never performed it without dancing round the sound booth for fifteen minutes or more beforehand, shaking and nauseous and talking my board op's ear off. I couldn't even bring those three monologues into workshop without

writing backups for the week in case I lost my nerve at the last minute. It's meant to be surprising, and disruptive, and disturbing. Staying safe as an actor would have been a disservice to my work as a writer.

So I set about building bigger characters. I researched performances to take physical and vocal cues from—I watched far more British pantomime than anyone should ever have to, to start. The leading ladies of British pantomime *are* actually fairy tale protagonists: Snow White and Cinderella and whatever the company wanted to do that year. They are simpler than the Maiden, and talk far less, but I stole their turned-out feet, their ringing voices, their doll-like posture and their clear, bright facial expressions that present only one emotion at a time. I pulled from 18th-century theater gestures, or rather an approximation of them, for her hands and arms, to give a single, obvious physical cue of each time Herself was putting the Maiden back into her body.

For the Fox, I rolled around in every image of ratty-cool-guy masculinity I'd ever been enchanted by as a teenager; a swaggering walk led by the pelvis, expressive shoulders, a lolling head, a constant shit-eating grin. It was a matter of pinpointing what type I could embody and expect any small, momentary suspension of disbelief—I know myself well enough to recognize that, androgynous face aside, the most I can manage in recognizably masculine energies is a sort of over-confident, rascally charm, and so I wrote and performed with that in mind. He therefore took less research than the Maiden because I knew where to place his voice and body from the start, it was only a matter of highlighting and refining what I already had. I became so confident in his Vaudeville sound (someone so entitled he is certain you are listening, turns every conversation into stand up, turns the world into his own personal show), that I actually lost sight of his animal tones until the week before opening, when I suddenly remembered he needed to be

a fox, too. So I practiced animal physicalizations, transforming slowly into a snarling creature on the floor, then jolting quickly back into a man, then breaking it down into beats, then adding lines, then adding drooling and frothing at the mouth. I ran it until it scared me, then left it alone and hoped it would do the same for the audience.

I did not research anything in particular for Herself, but rather let myself lean a little on where my skills as an actor actually lie, in the sound of a nearly-real person talking. Initially I added a tremor to her, let my own nerves become a character choice, but ultimately I discarded that in favor of a more focused urgency. This naturalism Herself provided offered more of that sense of oppositional pull that I describe in the writing paragraph—knowing that a single body contains this realistic person, but also these stylized creatures, and watching the realistic person tell you cheerfully that they themselves are not real, actually, and you must never forget that—now that’s a good time. That’s a person pulled in several directions at once.

I have never worked so hard on physical specificity for a single character in my life, let alone three, and I often despaired in ever getting them properly delineated from each other without a director. A self-driven rehearsal process was markedly different from my previous acting experience, most of which was ensemble-heavy. What kept my skewed and often pessimistic perspective at least slightly in line was any moment in which I could share the play while rehearsing, particularly with young women. I was buoyed by the understanding that I could see on their faces as they watched.

Tolstoy, in his essay *On Art*, speaks about the basis of art being a matter of seeing something in the world and saying to the person beside you, “I see this. Do you see it?” And if they do not, in working to perfect that communication until the idea is so clear that it can be seen, and it is, in both an aesthetic and moral sense, beautiful. I hold this to be the entire point of

art, or at least theater—the process of recognition. The knowledge, as an audience member, that another person has thought of a given concept, and indeed thought of it long enough to express it through art, is a victory like no other. It is the furthest thing from loneliness, the furthest thing from the solitary creation that produced the art in question. Being able to work on the other side of that connection, to present an idea that my audience recognized but perhaps had never heard expressed out loud in an artistic context, meant that the performance succeeded.

It is perhaps important, then, to speak specifically for a moment about the format of the audience interaction in this play. I knew intellectually that the piece was incomplete until an audience was present, knew that it would never have the correct energy with only one or two people watching, but the difference with even a small audience surprised me regardless. The growing understanding in audience members who were given choices was fascinating—in each of these moments, the audience member genuinely can say yes or no; the script includes either written contingencies for both options, or built in room to improvise. But, due to the nature of the form, most audience members struggled with what was the ‘right’ answer. We want to be helpful onstage, and saying yes is the first rule of improv. The fox’s marriage proposal was originally written with the goal of simply unsettling the audience and illustrating cyclical predation on women, but I realized after a rehearsal with a friend in early February that the volunteer was actually experiencing a microcosm of compulsory heterosexuality—you want to say no, but you have some strange social obligation to say yes. Additionally, there may be some confusion as to whether the actor is asking the audience member to interact as Mister Fox or merely as Herself, or even as an actor who just needs a volunteer. Every audience member I had during the run said no to the marriage proposal, but two of them said no, then yes, then no again. All of them smiled nervously, or frowned, unsure, or looked around to the other audience members for some cue on

what to do. None took the sequence past the marriage proposal, but at the final dress the volunteer said yes to everything, and ended up in the grave.

I went into performances thinking of this as my only real choice-spot, but soon realized that there were more, that the family members actually have choices to make each time I ask for their help or advice. These moments began to take high priority in my mind while performing. One brother, on closing night, refused to unzip my dress. The brothers of previous nights had merely thought of themselves as audience members, but this man had put himself enough into the narrative as my brother that he judged that taking my dress off me would be wrong. And he not only created a lovely and complex theatrical beat in doing this, but he also showed me something about the story that I hadn't thought of—I did, of course, ask the brothers to unzip the dress because that story was about my brother's habitual violation of my privacy when we were children, but it had not occurred to me that an audience member might decide to change the ending of that story with the active role that he had been given. This action was of a young man actively not allowing his masculinity to be a negative force in the story.

The performances also spawned a number of conversations with people I hardly know who seem to want to share their thoughts on the play and their personal experiences with me. I am honored that I'm now someone who they trust enough to be this open with. Hearing these people, particularly other LGBT people, say that they have had the same doubts and the same questions as were expressed in the show and being able to sit and talk through our differing thoughts is a huge step towards dispelling the solitude that can be ubiquitous to queer experiences. We can't actually burn down or destroy the things that hurt us, but we can build up something else.

4. What Next?

I intend to seek out more opportunities to perform this piece in the near future. The opportunities this piece creates to both disrupt and connect with audiences and discover new moments in the material felt like a significant leap in my own understanding of what theater can and should do. I would love to continue to develop that aspect of the play, and to incorporate similar audience-performer relationships in my work going forward. This requires me, then, to apply for fringe festivals and grants. I intend to do more research on how to get a solo show produced; my current experiences have relied heavily on being able to submit the script as a play meant to be cast, rather than a full project with a script so specific as to be unusable for another actor. That said, I have also spoken to a friend about the possibility of developing a version of the show with other actors into something that brings the performer's own experiences into the narrative while still using the folktales and metaphoric hinge of the fox. The idea of bringing more collaboration into a new iteration of this piece is interesting and daunting at once, which indicates to me that it may be exactly what ought to happen next.

Though the process of creating this play was imperfect, exhausting, and occasionally broke my heart, my growth as an artist has far surpassed what I had hoped. In proposing this project I had no idea how to actually create a full production, knew nothing about solo rehearsal, non-naturalistic acting styles, or fostering honest interaction between audience and performer. I now know myself to be a capable artist in each of these areas, and look forward to refining the skills I have gained in on this long, winding, and utterly unlit path.

Appendices*Appendix A: "The Story of Mister Fox"*

Once upon a time there was a young lady called Lady Mary, who had two brothers. One summer they all three went to a country seat of theirs, which they had not before visited. Among the other gentry in the neighborhood who came to see them was a Mr. Fox, a bachelor, with whom they, particularly the young lady, were much pleased. He used often to dine with them, and frequently invited Lady Mary to come and see his house. One day that her brothers were absent elsewhere, and she had nothing better to do, she determined to go thither, and accordingly set out unattended. When she arrived at the house and knocked at the door, no one answered.

At length she opened it and went in; over the portal of the door was written: "Be bold, be bold, but not too bold." She advanced; over the staircase was the same inscription. She went up; over the entrance of a gallery, the same again. Still she went on, and over the door of a chamber found written:

Be bold, be bold, but not too bold,
Lest that your heart's blood should run cold!

She opened it; it was full of skeletons and tubs of blood. She retreated in haste, and, coming downstairs, saw from a window Mr. Fox advancing towards the house with a drawn sword in one hand, while with the other he dragged along a young lady by her hair. Lady Mary had just time to slip down and hide herself under the stairs before Mr. Fox and his victim arrived at the foot of them. As he pulled the young lady upstairs, she caught hold of one of the banisters with her hand, on which was a rich bracelet. Mr. Fox cut it off with his sword. The hand and bracelet fell into Lady Mary's lap, who then contrived to escape unobserved, and got safe home to her brothers' house.

A few days afterwards Mr. Fox came to dine with them as usual. After dinner the guests began to amuse each other with extraordinary anecdotes, and Lady Mary said she would relate to them a remarkable dream she had lately had.

"I dreamt," said she, "that as you, Mr. Fox, had often invited me to your house, I would go there one morning. When I came to the house I knocked at the door, but no one answered. When I opened the door, over the hall I saw written, 'Be bold, be bold, but not too bold.' But," said she, turning to Mr. Fox, and smiling, "It is not so, nor it was not so."

Then she pursued the rest of the story, concluding at every turn with, "It is not so, nor it was not so," until she came to the room full of skeletons, when Mr. Fox took up the burden of the tale, and said:

It is not so, nor it was not so,

And God forbid it should be so!

which he continued to repeat at every subsequent turn of the dreadful story, until she came to the circumstance of his cutting off the young lady's hand, when, upon his saying, as usual:

It is not so, nor it was not so,

And God forbid it should be so!

Lady Mary retorts by saying:

But it is so, and it was so,

And here the hand I have to show!

at the same moment producing the hand and bracelet from her lap, whereupon the guests drew their swords, and instantly cut Mr. Fox into a thousand pieces.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ "The Story of Mr. Fox" in Hartland.

Appendix B: "Bluebeard," by Charles Perrault

There was once a man who had fine houses, both in town and country, a deal of silver and gold plate, embroidered furniture, and coaches gilded all over with gold. But this man was so unlucky as to have a blue beard, which made him so frightfully ugly that all the women and girls ran away from him.

One of his neighbors, a lady of quality, had two daughters who were perfect beauties. He desired of her one of them in marriage, leaving to her choice which of the two she would bestow on him. Neither of them would have him, and they sent him backwards and forwards from one to the other, not being able to bear the thoughts of marrying a man who had a blue beard. Adding to their disgust and aversion was the fact that he already had been married to several wives, and nobody knew what had become of them.

Blue Beard, to engage their affection, took them, with their mother and three or four ladies of their acquaintance, with other young people of the neighborhood, to one of his country houses, where they stayed a whole week.

The time was filled with parties, hunting, fishing, dancing, mirth, and feasting. Nobody went to bed, but all passed the night in rallying and joking with each other. In short, everything succeeded so well that the youngest daughter began to think that the man's beard was not so very blue after all, and that he was a mighty civil gentleman.

As soon as they returned home, the marriage was concluded. About a month afterwards, Blue Beard told his wife that he was obliged to take a country journey for six weeks at least, about affairs of very great consequence. He desired her to divert herself in his absence, to send for her friends and acquaintances, to take them into the country, if she pleased, and to make good cheer wherever she was.

"Here," said he, "are the keys to the two great wardrobes, wherein I have my best furniture. These are to my silver and gold plate, which is not everyday in use. These open my strongboxes, which hold my money, both gold and silver; these my caskets of jewels. And this is the master key to all my apartments. But as for this little one here, it is the key to the closet at the end of the great hall on the ground floor. Open them all; go into each and every one of them, except that little closet, which I forbid you, and forbid it in such a manner that, if you happen to open it, you may expect my just anger and resentment."

She promised to observe, very exactly, whatever he had ordered. Then he, after having embraced her, got into his coach and proceeded on his journey.

Her neighbors and good friends did not wait to be sent for by the newly married lady. They were impatient to see all the rich furniture of her house, and had not dared to come while her husband was there, because of his blue beard, which frightened them. They ran through all the rooms, closets, and wardrobes, which were all so fine and rich that they seemed to surpass one another.

After that, they went up into the two great rooms, which contained the best and richest furniture. They could not sufficiently admire the number and beauty of the tapestry, beds, couches, cabinets, stands, tables, and looking glasses, in which you might see yourself from head to foot; some of them were framed with glass, others with silver, plain and gilded, the finest and most magnificent that they had ever seen.

They ceased not to extol and envy the happiness of their friend, who in the meantime in no way diverted herself in looking upon all these rich things, because of the impatience she had to go and open the closet on the ground floor. She was so much pressed by her curiosity that,

without considering that it was very uncivil for her to leave her company, she went down a little back staircase, and with such excessive haste that she nearly fell and broke her neck.

Having come to the closet door, she made a stop for some time, thinking about her husband's orders, and considering what unhappiness might attend her if she was disobedient; but the temptation was so strong that she could not overcome it. She then took the little key, and opened it, trembling. At first she could not see anything plainly, because the windows were shut. After some moments she began to perceive that the floor was all covered over with clotted blood, on which lay the bodies of several dead women, ranged against the walls. (These were all the wives whom Blue Beard had married and murdered, one after another.) She thought she should have died for fear, and the key, which she, pulled out of the lock, fell out of her hand.

After having somewhat recovered her surprise, she picked up the key, locked the door, and went upstairs into her chamber to recover; but she could not, so much was she frightened. Having observed that the key to the closet was stained with blood, she tried two or three times to wipe it off; but the blood would not come out; in vain did she wash it, and even rub it with soap and sand. The blood still remained, for the key was magical and she could never make it quite clean; when the blood was gone off from one side, it came again on the other.

Blue Beard returned from his journey the same evening, saying that he had received letters upon the road, informing him that the affair he went about had concluded to his advantage. His wife did all she could to convince him that she was extremely happy about his speedy return.

The next morning he asked her for the keys, which she gave him, but with such a trembling hand that he easily guessed what had happened.

"What!" said he, "is not the key of my closet among the rest?"

"I must," said she, "have left it upstairs upon the table."

"Fail not," said Blue Beard, "to bring it to me at once."

After several goings backwards and forwards, she was forced to bring him the key. Blue Beard, having very attentively considered it, said to his wife, "Why is there blood on the key?"

"I do not know," cried the poor woman, paler than death.

"You do not know!" replied Blue Beard. "I very well know. You went into the closet, did you not? Very well, madam; you shall go back, and take your place among the ladies you saw there."

Upon this she threw herself at her husband's feet, and begged his pardon with all the signs of a true repentance, vowing that she would never more be disobedient. She would have melted a rock, so beautiful and sorrowful was she; but Blue Beard had a heart harder than any rock!

"You must die, madam," said he, "at once."

"Since I must die," answered she (looking upon him with her eyes all bathed in tears), "give me some little time to say my prayers."

"I give you," replied Blue Beard, "half a quarter of an hour, but not one moment more."

When she was alone she called out to her sister, and said to her, "Sister Anne" (for that was her name), "go up, I beg you, to the top of the tower, and look if my brothers are not coming. They promised me that they would come today, and if you see them, give them a sign to make haste."

Her sister Anne went up to the top of the tower, and the poor afflicted wife cried out from time to time, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?"

And sister Anne said, "I see nothing but a cloud of dust in the sun, and the green grass."

In the meanwhile Blue Beard, holding a great saber in his hand, cried out as loud as he could bawl to his wife, "Come down instantly, or I shall come up to you."

"One moment longer, if you please," said his wife; and then she cried out very softly, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?"

And sister Anne answered, "I see nothing but a cloud of dust in the sun, and the green grass."

"Come down quickly," cried Blue Beard, "or I will come up to you."

"I am coming," answered his wife; and then she cried, "Anne, sister Anne, do you not see anyone coming?"

"I see," replied sister Anne, "a great cloud of dust approaching us."

"Are they my brothers?"

"Alas, no my dear sister, I see a flock of sheep."

"Will you not come down?" cried Blue Beard.

"One moment longer," said his wife, and then she cried out, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see nobody coming?"

"I see," said she, "two horsemen, but they are still a great way off."

"God be praised," replied the poor wife joyfully. "They are my brothers. I will make them a sign, as well as I can for them to make haste."

Then Blue Beard bawled out so loud that he made the whole house tremble. The distressed wife came down, and threw herself at his feet, all in tears, with her hair about her shoulders.

"This means nothing," said Blue Beard. "You must die!" Then, taking hold of her hair with one hand, and lifting up the sword with the other, he prepared to strike off her head. The

poor lady, turning about to him, and looking at him with dying eyes, desired him to afford her one little moment to recollect herself.

"No, no," said he, "commend yourself to God," and was just ready to strike.

At this very instant there was such a loud knocking at the gate that Blue Beard made a sudden stop. The gate was opened, and two horsemen entered. Drawing their swords, they ran directly to Blue Beard. He knew them to be his wife's brothers, one a dragoon, the other a musketeer; so that he ran away immediately to save himself; but the two brothers pursued and overtook him before he could get to the steps of the porch. Then they ran their swords through his body and left him dead. The poor wife was almost as dead as her husband, and had not strength enough to rise and welcome her brothers.

Blue Beard had no heirs, and so his wife became mistress of all his estate. She made use of one part of it to marry her sister Anne to a young gentleman who had loved her a long while; another part to buy captains' commissions for her brothers, and the rest to marry herself to a very worthy gentleman, who made her forget the ill time she had passed with Blue Beard.

Moral: Curiosity, in spite of its appeal, often leads to deep regret. To the displeasure of many a maiden, its enjoyment is short lived. Once satisfied, it ceases to exist, and always costs dearly.

Another moral: Apply logic to this grim story, and you will ascertain that it took place many years ago. No husband of our age would be so terrible as to demand the impossible of his wife, nor would he be such a jealous malcontent. For, whatever the color of her husband's beard, the wife of today will let him know who the master is.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Perrault, "Bluebeard."

Appendix C: "The Oxford Student"

Many years ago there lived at the University of Oxford a young student, who, having seduced the daughter of a tradesman, sought to conceal his crime by committing the more heinous one of murder. With this view, he made an appointment to meet her one evening in a secluded field.

She was at the rendezvous considerably before the time agreed upon for their meeting, and hid herself in a tree. The student arrived on the spot shortly afterwards, but what was the astonishment of the girl to observe that he commenced digging a grave. Her fears and suspicions were aroused, and she did not leave her place of concealment till the student, despairing of her arrival, returned to his college.

The next day, when she was at the door of her father's house, he passed and saluted her as usual.

She returned his greeting by repeating the following lines:

One moonshiny night, as I sat high,
Waiting for one to come by,
The boughs did bend; my heart did ache
To see what hole the fox did make.

Astounded by her unexpected knowledge of his base design, in a moment of fury he stabbed her to the heart.

This murder occasioned a violent conflict between the tradespeople and the students, the latter taking part with the murderer, and so fierce was the skirmish, that Brewer's Lane, it is said, ran down with blood. The place of appointment was adjoining the Divinity Walk, which was in

time past far more secluded than at the present day, and she is said to have been buried in the grave made for her by her paramour.

According to another version of the tale, the name of the student was Fox, and a fellow student went with him to assist in digging the grave. The verses in this account differ somewhat from the above:

As I went out in a moonlight night,
 I set my back against the moon,
 I looked for one, and saw two come.
 The boughs did bend, the leaves did shake,
 I saw the hole the Fox did make.⁸⁸

Appendix D: "The Girl Who Got Up a Tree"

A girl who was leaving her master's service at a farm in the country told her sweetheart that she would meet him near a stile where they had met many times before. This stile was overhung by a tree. The girl got there before him and found a hole dug underneath the tree, and a pickaxe and spade lying by the side of the hole. She was much frightened at what she saw, and got up the tree. After she had been up the tree awhile her sweetheart came, and another man with him.

Thinking that the girl had not yet come, the two men began to talk, and the girl heard her sweetheart say, "She will not come tonight. We'll go home now, and come back and kill her tomorrow night."

As soon as they had gone the girl came down the tree and ran home to her father. When she had told him what she had seen, the father pondered awhile and then said to his daughter,

⁸⁸ "The Oxford Student" in Halliwell-Phillipps,

"We will have a feast and ask our friends, and we will ask thy sweetheart to come and the man that came with him to the tree."

So the two men came along with the other guests. In the evening they began to ask riddles of each other, but the girl who had got up the tree was the last to ask hers. She said:

I'll rede you a riddle, I'll rede it you right,

Where was I last Saturday night?

The wind did blow, the leaves did shake,

When I saw the hole the fox did make.

When the two men who had intended to murder the girl heard this they ran out of the house.⁸⁹

Appendix E: "The Robber Bridegroom"

Once upon a time there was a miller who had a beautiful daughter. When she came of age he wished that she was provided for and well married. He thought, "If a respectable suitor comes and asks for her hand in marriage, I will give her to him."

Not long afterward a suitor came who appeared to be very rich, and because the miller could find no fault with him, he promised his daughter to him.

The girl, however, did not like him as much as a bride should like her bridegroom. She did not trust him, and whenever she saw him or thought about him, she felt within her heart a sense of horror.

One time he said to her, "You are engaged to marry me, but you have never once paid me a visit."

The girl replied, "I don't know where your house is."

Then the bridegroom said, "My house is out in the dark woods."

⁸⁹ "The Girl Who Got Up a Tree" in Addy

Looking for an excuse, she said that she would not be able to find the way there.

The bridegroom said, "Next Sunday you must come out to me. I have already invited guests. I will make a trail of ashes, so that you can find your way through the woods."

When Sunday came, and it was time for the girl to start on her way, she became frightened, although she herself did not know exactly why. In order to mark the path, she filled both her pockets full of peas and lentils. At the entrance of the forest there was a trail of ashes, which she followed, but at every step she threw a couple of peas to the ground, to the right and to the left. She walked almost the whole day until she came to the middle of the woods, where it was the darkest, and there stood a solitary house. She did not like it, because it looked so dark and sinister. She went inside, but no one was there. It was totally quiet.

Suddenly a voice called out:

Turn back, turn back, you young bride.
You are in a murderer's house.

The girl looked up and saw that the voice came from a bird, which was hanging in a cage on the wall. It cried out again:

Turn back, turn back, you young bride.
You are in a murderer's house.

Then the beautiful bride went from one room to another, walking through the whole house, but it was entirely empty, and not a human soul was to be found. Finally she came to the cellar. A very old woman was sitting there shaking her head.

"Could you tell me," said the girl, "if my bridegroom lives here?"

"Oh, you poor child," replied the old woman, "where did you come from? You are in a murderer's den. You think you are a bride soon to be married, but it is death that you will be

marrying. Look, they made me put a large kettle of water on the fire. When they have captured you, they will chop you to pieces without mercy, cook you, and eat you, for they are cannibals. If I do not show you compassion and save you, you are doomed."

With this the old woman led her behind a large barrel where she could not be seen.

"Be quiet as a mouse." she said. "Do not make a sound or move, or all will be over with you. Tonight when the robbers are asleep we will escape. I have long waited for an opportunity."

This had scarcely happened when the godless band came home. They were dragging with them another maiden. They were drunk and paid no attention to her screams and sobs.

They gave her wine to drink, three glasses full, one glass of white, one glass of red, and one glass of yellow, which caused her heart to break. Then they ripped off her fine clothes, laid her on a table, chopped her beautiful body in pieces and sprinkled salt on it. The poor bride behind the barrel trembled and shook, for she saw well what fate the robbers had planned for her.

One of them noticed a gold ring on the murdered girl's little finger. Because it did not come off easily, he took an ax and chopped the finger off, but it flew into the air and over the barrel, falling right into the bride's lap. The robber took a light and looked for it, but could not find it.

Then another one said, "Did you look behind the large barrel?"

But the old woman cried out, "Come and eat. You can continue looking in the morning. That finger won't run away from you."

Then the robbers said, "The old woman is right." They gave up their search and sat down to eat. The old woman poured a sleeping-potion into their wine, so that they soon lay down in the cellar and fell asleep, snoring.

When the bride heard them snoring she came out from behind the barrel, and had to step over the sleepers, for they lay all in rows on the ground. She was afraid that she might awaken one of them, but God helped her, and she got through safely.

The old woman went upstairs with her, opened the door, and they hurried out of the murderer's den as fast as they could.

The wind had blown away the trail of ashes, but the peas and lentils had sprouted and grown up, and showed them the way in the moonlight. They walked all night, arriving at the mill the next morning. Then the girl told her father everything, just as it had happened.

When the wedding day came, the bridegroom appeared. The miller had invited all his relatives and acquaintances. As they sat at the table, each one was asked to tell something. The bride sat still and said nothing.

Then the bridegroom said to the bride, "Come, sweetheart, don't you know anything? Tell us something, like the others have done."

She answered:

Then I will tell about a dream. I was walking alone through the woods, when finally I came to a house. Inside there was not a single human soul, but on the wall there was a bird in a cage. It cried out:

Turn back, turn back, you young bride.

You are in a murderer's house.

Then it cried out the same thing again. Darling, it was only a dream. Then I went through all the rooms. They were all empty, and there was something so eerie in there. Finally I went down into the cellar, and there sat a very old woman, shaking her head. I asked her, "Does my bridegroom live in this house?"

She answered, "Alas poor child, you have gotten into a murderer's den. Your bridegroom does live here, but he intends to chop you to pieces and kill you, and then he intends to cook you and eat you."

Darling, it was only a dream. After that the old woman hid me behind a large barrel. I had scarcely hidden myself there when the robbers came home, dragging a girl with them. They gave her three kinds of wine to drink: white, red, and yellow, which caused her heart to stop beating. Darling, it was only a dream. After that they took off her fine clothes, and chopped her beautiful body to pieces on a table, then sprinkled salt on it. Darling, it was only a dream. Then one of the robbers saw that there was still a ring on her ring finger. Because it was hard to get the ring off, he took an ax and chopped off the finger. The finger flew through the air behind the large barrel, and fell into my lap. And here is the finger with the ring.

With these words she pulled out the finger and showed it to everyone who was there.

The robber, who had during this story become as white as chalk, jumped up and tried to escape, but the guests held him fast, and turned him over to the courts. Then he and his whole band were executed for their shameful deeds.⁹⁰

Appendix F: The Program Note

Both of the fairy tales featured in this piece are from the English oral tradition, "The Story of Mr. Fox" being an English variation on the French "Bluebeard," which also appears in this play. "Bluebeard" was first published by Perrault in 1697 but obviously existed many years before that, "The Story of Mr. Fox's" exact date is hard to pin down, though the line "Like the old tale, my Lord: it is not so, nor 'twas not so; but indeed, God forbid it should be so!" appears in Shakespeare, so it certainly far predates the 17th century. "The Girl Who Got Up a Tree" is

⁹⁰ "Der Räuberbräutigam" in Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm.

more nebulous and is sometimes called “The Oxford Student,” but is likely just as old, if not older.

I am, if not fond of, than at least deeply interested in these stories, and, in fact, most traditional fairy tales, not for their grimness but rather their slight crookedness: a girl sets out to marry someone who may or may not be a literal fox, she may or may not have a dream that sets her alarm bells ringing, she may or may not confront him herself. Their ambiguity reminds us they are fiction and their fiction offers us a handy escape from each of them; we can shiver and enjoy them and say to ourselves, ah, but what a relief that this is not so. What a good thing that we are real, and these people are not. What a good thing that stories like this don't *actually* happen, and that if they did, we ourselves would have no part in it. God forbid, right?

The work of this thesis is, mostly, to question that easy out.

Annotated Bibliography

Addy, Sidney Oldall. "The Girl Who Got Up a Tree," in *Household Tales with other Traditional Remains: Collected in the Counties of York, Lincoln, Derby, and Nottingham*. 10-11. London: David Nutt, 1895.

A late Victorian printing of 'The Girl Who Got Up a Tree'. This version features two men rather than just the girl's lover and a version of the maiden's rhyme that ends "the wind did blow, the leaves did quake, I saw the hole the fox did make." Interestingly, in this version the girl tells her father what she has seen only for him to propose hosting a feast, at which the girl recounts her rhyme in the form of a riddle, which mirrors Lady Mary's recounting of her dream at her own wedding breakfast in 'Mister Fox.' The version of this story used in the script is a mixture of the two versions, using the singular lover and the riddle in the marketplace, but abandoning the stabbing, which was apparently a real historical incident in the Medieval period, recorded due to its impact on Oxford University.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

Uses of Enchantment contains analysis of gender and sex in fairy tales, particularly towards the end of creating moral guides for children and maintaining social structures in marriage and elsewhere. Bettelheim asserts that the animal bridegroom represents an improper sexual partner, but uses Freudian psychology to describe the substitution of husband for a father in the sacrifice of the young woman to a bestial partner.

Bonney, Jo. *Extreme Exposure: an Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2008.

Utilized as something of a style guide towards solo performance.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Butler's groundbreaking book argues from a materialist perspective of gender and highlights its performative aspects. Distancing herself from the classic concept of gender as constructed but sex as essential, Butler attempts to dismantle the idea of a stable male or female identity. This source was not used extensively.

Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

A novella adapting 'Bluebeard' to the setting of 1920s France. Carter's work highlights the relationship between violent pornography and violent action, as well as substituting a mother in for the traditional brothers at the end of the story and providing another suitable sexual option for the bride in the form of a piano-tuner.

Case, Sue-Ellen. "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic." *Discourse*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1988, 55-73.

Though no longer perhaps quite relevant to the identity politics at play in the current era, Case's descriptions of butch-femme identities in the context of roleplaying and camp are a useful take on quasi-gendered dynamics in lesbian relationships.

Calhoun, Cheshire. "Denaturalizing and Desexualizing Lesbian and Gay Identity." *Virginia Law Review*, vol. 79, no. 7, 1993, 1859-1875.

Calhoun's theory is highly political and based in concepts of heterosexual structures of gender as

class and sexual orientation as being not only same-sex attraction, but breaking of heterosexual law. She argues here that to limit the history of the homosexual category to the history of same-sex attraction is to lose an important political dimension. Her willingness to cross between essentialist and materialist frames of thinking provides a useful flexibility.

Calhoun, Cheshire. "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory." *Ethics*, vol. 104, no. 3, 1994, 558–581.

Another piece by Calhoun, this one arguing that lesbian concerns are too often overwhelmed in discourse by implicitly straight, white, feminist concerns. She expresses the difference between lesbian and heterosexual women's relationships to patriarchal structures and the need for separate conversations. Most interestingly, she asserts that, if gender is a class system structured around manhood, lesbians are not women under such a definition, as they do not perform sexual, emotional, or household labor for men.

Perrault, Charles, "Bluebeard," in Andrew Lang: *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, ca. 1889), pp. 290-295, <https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault03.html>, ed. D. L. Ashilman.

Perrault's 'Bluebeard' is a related story type to 'Mister Fox', and includes the moral condemning curiosity and the one grounding the story in a bygone era, both of which mentioned and paraphrased in the script.

Chaudhuri, Una, editor. *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal Performance Texts*. Continuum: New York, 2001.

Rachel Rosenthal was an excellent guide to tone in solo performance; her use of monologue and story-telling informed the formal but welcoming sound used by the Maiden and sometimes Herself, while a build of strangeness occurs through physical action at odds with words.

Hartland, Edwin Sidney. "The Story of Mr. Fox." In *English Fairy and Other Folk Tales*. 25-27. London: Walter Scott, ca. 1890.

This late Victorian printing of the early modern folktale gives the maiden a name, calling her Lady Mary. I chose not to name her in the script, since the use of names in folktales is often a sort of stock name, much like the endless Jacks of British fairy tales.

Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*, 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.

Fine's book is a deconstruction of the myth of the 'female mind.' Neurosexism ranges from pop psychology books to employment discrimination to self-loathing, and interacts interestingly with the build of gender narrative that this project examines—whenever neurology and gender are placed in a sentence together, they have an odd way of rehashing ancient sexist narratives, instead of taking into account the malleability of the brain and how little we truly know about feotal development.

Finley, Karen. *Shock Treatment*. San Francisco: City Lights, 1993.

Karen Finley's work served as another example of feminist performance art and monologue with no stage direction. Its topics and brutality of image allowed for some understanding of where the line ought to be drawn, and where action suits better than language.

Gaiman, Neil. *Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions*. New York: William Morrow, 2007.

The book in which Gaiman's poem "The White Road" appears, and both "Mister Fox" and "The Oxford Student" are adapted. Gaiman's versions of both stories are far more detailed and violent than the originals, with the girl of "The Oxford Student" responding to her lover's betrayal by

wandering the woods, maddened and chanting her rhyme, instead of walking home as she does in both traditional versions of the story. Most notably, Gaiman's Mister Fox is the protagonist of the poem and actually innocent. Through some magic the stories seem to create a truth for the enraged listeners, and they respond to Mister Fox's fiancée pulling a fox's bloody paw from her dress as if it were a human hand, beating the innocent Fox to death.

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm "Der Räuberbräutigam," *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales). Trans. D. L. Ashliman. *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, final edition. Berlin: 1857.

"The Robber Bridegroom," sourced from the brothers Grimm for purposes of understanding the other tales of its type, such as "Mister Fox" and "The Oxford Student." Its differences are chiefly in the delivery of the warnings, which are expressed by exterior characters rather than written on the floor, the presence of an old woman who lives in the robbers' den, and the detail with which the tale is recounted.

Halliwell-Phillipps, James Orchard. "The Oxford Student." In *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales: A Sequel to the Nursery Rhymes of England* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849).

Interestingly, in this version of "The Girl Who Got Up A Tree," the student is not referred to by the name Fox in this story until the final passage, which recounts "another version of the tale." In both, though, the girl's rhyme refers to a fox, even when the man is not explicitly named Fox. This is the version in which the girl is stabbed by her lover in broad daylight upon telling him her riddle, which is perhaps at least an improvement on being stabbed in the middle of the night in the woods.

"Kavanaugh Hearing: Transcript". The Washington Post. Transcript courtesy of Bloomberg Government. September 27, 2018.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2018/09/27/kavanaugh-hearing-transcript/?utm_term=.5dde91cd9070

A source now blocked by a subscription wall, this transcription of the Kavanaugh hearing was used for direct quotation and a closer reading of what was said than was possible via watching footage.

Merja Makinen, "Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber and the Decolonization of Feminine Sexuality," *Feminist Review* 42, no. 1 November 1992: 2–15.

Commentary on Carter, centering around the argument that readings of Carter too often miss the subversion of sexism at play in fairy tales which is key to her work, effectively declawing the complex female sexuality at the core of many of her stories.

Sheets, Robin Anne. *Pornography, Fairy Tales, and Feminism: Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"*. Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Apr., 1991), 633-657. University of Texas, 1991.

Sheets analyzes the relationship between the anti-pornography debate of the 1970s and Angela Carter's Bluebeard/Gilles de Rais with his historical BDSM. Her scholarship verges into a depersonalization close to that described by Wesely, one that allows women to find sexual pleasure in their own objectification.

Warner, Marina. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996.

Warner's book explores fairy tales through nearly all of its female stock characters, starting with the enchantress and moving onto the gossip, the old wives, and finally the maidens. Its wide-angle lens on women in fairy tales allowed for a break from the single narrative of the maiden.

Fintan Walsh, *Male Trouble: Masculinity and the Performance of Crisis*. Houndmills, Basingstoke ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Male Trouble describes the weight given to masculine performances of grief and suffering, and the ways in which this interacts with modern masculinity and the narrative that traditional manhood is under fire.

Wesely, Jennifer K. *Being Female: The Continuum of Sexualization*. Boulder: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 2012.

Wesely's exhaustively collected interviews span over years and track the experiences of exotic dancers and homeless women with their sexuality and bodies. Notably Wesely introduces a continuum of sexualization of young girls, at one end of which lies relatively personal, un-meddled-with sexuality, and at the other end of which is an unhealthy sexuality often completely detached from the woman who owns it. Her subject's descriptions of their sense of a personhood they can turn on and off were both disturbing and unsettlingly close to home, and informed my read of *The Bloody Chamber* and blocking of some parts of the performance.

Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Zipes argues for fairy tales as conservative tools meant to allow children to understand and support a newly 'civilized' medieval world. This motive means that most of the morals are actually about warning women to show self-discipline, the greatest key to making themselves into the ideal wife and thefore participant in civilized society. He also claims the animal bridegroom might be a way to raise daughters to anticipate being married to a potentially unattractive man who will better their family name, providing an interesting context to 'Mister Fox,' wherein lady Mary has chosen the Fox herself, out of a number of other suitors.