

sphin
theatre
company **X**

VAMPS, VIXENS AND FEMINISTS
THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

OLIVIER THEATRE, THE NATIONAL THEATRE, JUNE
16TH 2009



FOREWORD

Sphinx has a long and successful track record of convening conferences about women in the arts, with the Glass Ceiling conferences beginning in 1991 at the ICA and subsequently for ten years at the National Theatre. The aims of these meetings were to bring public and professional women together to share artistic experiences and to be inspired by leading practitioners. For many they served as an opportunity to touch base with contemporary currents of feminist thinking; an extended think-tank.

The aims of the 2009 conference were firstly to draw attention to the 2007 Gender Equality Duty which seemed to have passed the Arts Community by. Secondly, we consulted colleagues in professional organisations to discover the strength and depth of interest and were delighted that for the first time Equity, the Writer's Guild, the Directors Guild of Great Britain and Women in Film and Television came together to collaborate with us in discussing the issues. These discussions coincided most fortuitously with the flurry of press activity, principally initiated by the Stage in which actors drew attention to the gross inequality in casting across stage and screen and a prevailing ageism mainly directed at women. Our aim was also to set off a wider consultation process across the professions, including educators, trainers, politicians and movers and shakers within established power structures. The dissemination of this report is another step in Sphinx's project, for however we celebrate the successes of our leading women practitioners, the figures are still **35% of actors, 17% of theatre writers, 23% of theatre directors, 9% of film directors, 28% of television writers, are women.**

The National Theatre agreed to host the event, and a morning in the Olivier was cleared in the schedules. Approximately four hundred and fifty people flocked to the South Bank, and owing to the generous sponsorship of the National Theatre and the Diversity Department of the Arts Council of England the entrance was free. The morning could only scratch the surface of many interesting questions, but it established the demand for continuing these complex conversations. Following the conference we have been deluged with appreciation and requests for further action. Many colleagues have also consulted us to inform their own emerging strategies. June 16th seems to have gathered and unleashed a new wave of energy. This feels like some sort of success, which we hope marks a profound turning point for the involvement of women in the performing arts.

Sue Parrish
November 2009

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THE SITUATION

Recent Press Activity: Setting the Context for the Conference

"(Consider) "Mistresses", in which just being a woman is a drama all by itself. In fact, being a woman, in this context entails such an ill-advised and disastrous sex life that there's absolutely no time left over for serious pursuits such as breaking through the glass ceiling (which has anyway turned to concrete following the credit crunch)."

Amy Jenkins in The Observer

"It is intensely frustrating... The longer you live, the more interesting life gets, and yet many of the parts involve carrying trays and putting lamb chops down in front of the leading man."

Juliet Stevenson in The Telegraph

"More than 80% of people feel women over 40 are under-represented in television and theatre dramas according to the results of a survey conducted by The Stage."

Matthew Hemley in The Stage

"I don't understand why a whole generation of women should be excluded from storylines as if they don't exist."

Roger Lloyd Pack in The Stage

"two-thirds of all fictional characters on TV are men."

Amy Jenkins in The Observer

"The Equality and Human Rights Commission recently reported on the snail's pace of women's progress. At the rate we're going, they calculated, it will take 200 years for women to be equally represented in parliament"

Amy Jenkins in The Observer

"On Woman's Hour last week, Kate Harwood, a senior BBC producer thought the balance would be redressed through "evolution"; but the status quo will not change through evolution. Action is needed."

Kate Buffery in The Guardian

"I get very discouraged by the portrayal of women – or the absence of women in dramas at all – and the function that older women play in dramas sometimes. We make up a large percentage of the population and we don't die off when we are 30."

Harriet Walter in The Stage

"If representation of women on screen is slower to improve it is for complex, cultural reasons that have as much to do with the make-up of society as with deep story structure."

Kate Harwood in The Guardian

"Of the 10 Oscar nominees for screenwriting (best screenplay and best adapted screenplay), only one was a woman."

Amy Jenkins in The Observer

Scripts are often rejected or have to be rewritten completely if they feature women who are over 40. Writers have claimed commissioners are only interested in younger female characters who are "slim and attractive".

Matthew Hemley in The Stage

"For every two male roles in a drama there is just one female"

Louise Jury in The Independent

"Margaret Tyzack is the latest female performer to speak out against the types of roles on offer for older actresses, branding them "a load of clichéd bollocks"."

Matthew Hemley in The Stage

TRANSCRIPT

VAMPS, VIXENS AND FEMINISTS: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.

Olivier Theatre, National Theatre, Tuesday June 16th 10 am – 1.45pm



SUE PARRISH (Artistic Director, Sphinx Theatre Company)

Welcome to all of you here today in the Olivier Theatre to join in this series of discussions about women onstage and screen.

This is not the first time that these issues have been discussed here at the National. Sphinx held annual Glass Ceiling conferences in the Cottesloe for ten years, and many of us here have been campaigning for equal representation for women in the performing arts for the best part of thirty years. Sphinx has been working on this conference for the last nine months because the unprecedented opportunities presented by the 2007 Gender Equality Duty seemed to have passed the Arts Community by. For the first time we have brought together all the professional organisations, Equity, The Writers' Guild, The Directors Guild and Women in Film and Television to create this conference with the aim that we can make a real breakthrough today and produce comprehensive ideas to take us forward.

There are several tributes I should like to make; although not officially a collaborator we must count the sterling campaign at The Stage as enormously influential, and we thank them.

Profound thanks are due to the National Theatre and staff for their generous support and strong commitment to hosting this event.

We are also hugely grateful to the Diversity Department at the Arts Council of England for their support and commitment to this event.

Finally, I would like to thank all the speakers who have very generously made time from their busy schedules to come and share their thoughts with us today.

BARONESS PROSSER (Equality and Human Rights Commission)

Baroness Prosser introduces the Equality and Human Rights Commission and explains the 2007 Gender Equality Duty and how it is to be implemented in the workplace

Thank you very much indeed Sue, for your introduction. And thank you too to the Sphinx Theatre Company for asking the Equality and Human Rights Commission to be part of what I think is quite an historic day.



Let me just tell you quickly about the Equality and Human Rights Commission. I'm not sure I can give you a full blown picture within the five minutes of time allotted to me because we are a very big commission with a very wide agenda. We have a mandate which covers gender, race, disability, sexuality, religion and belief, age and of course, human rights. That means that there is not a single person in Great Britain (our mandate does not extend to Northern Ireland, they have their own arrangements) who is not affected in one way or another by the work that we do.

Let me just briefly say what I think our tasks are: firstly, we are here to promote equality, to ensure that the ordinary people out there understand what their rights are, that they know how to go about asserting those rights. We do that through commissioning research, we hold conferences, we produce reports etc and, of course, we're there to influence the government of the day. We're there also to support people, either by way of our grants programme, which provides money to organisations throughout the country who are themselves promoting equality in one way or another, and of course we provide legal support, both to individuals and to organisations so that significant and important legal decisions can be assisted through the courts. And we're there to regulate the law generally, to regulate the behaviour of organisations, and of course to regulate the public sector duties, which is what we're here to discuss today, the Gender Duty.

The Gender Duty falls upon all public sector bodies and indeed those bodies that are funded by the public sector. And the Gender Duty, we must always remember, is not there simply to **prevent** discrimination, but the Gender Duty is there to **promote** equality. It's a very different thing, it's not a tick-box exercise it's about organisations identifying ways in which people can be brought forward; ways in which they can ensure that women in their employ, or women to whom they are providing services are not getting second rate services or are not being ignored in the employment field. We are proposing that organisations should be regulated by their current regulator - so for example, the education service is regulated by Ofsted. It would be impossible for the Equality Commission to regulate every single public service so the idea of doing it through current regulators seems to us to be the most effective and most useful way of doing things. And we must remember that the Gender Duty must not simply be seen as a tick box exercise: yes we have employed x number of women, yes we have got x number of women at this level or that level, it's about promotion, it's about being proactive, identifying ways in which women can be brought forward.

Now there's a number of initiatives going on in government at the moment which are pretty helpful, particularly to young people coming forward, apprenticeships and diplomas for example. I have received information on my desk in the House of Lords only last week about a new apprenticeship that's being designed for people in the performing arts. Now that's extremely good, we are pleased about that and the opportunity for people to move forward through apprenticeships diplomas is going to be very important for them but we have to ensure that those services themselves are not delivered in a stereotypical way. So we don't get apprenticeships going to boys doing boys' things and girls doing traditional girls' things. So we need to keep right on the back of that.

So there we are. So here's to all of you to have a good day. Here's to ensuring that today leads to a basis for a new approach to the role of girls and women within the performing arts. There's much to be done but there are a lot of women and girls here who are going to do it. So very best wishes for a very good day.

OONA KING (Head of Diversity, Channel 4)

Oona King sets the context: equality of opportunity and quality of opportunity

What is equality in the Arts? I'll start off by saying what it's not. When you look at some of the figures of the performing arts, it's quite extraordinary. At the moment only 17% of women are playwrights onstage. I find this incredible. A Sphinx Survey found that only 38% of roles are for women, on television Equity found only 35.5% of roles are for women, and you just want to go – has anyone noticed that women make up 52% of the population? Did that just pass them by?

What we really need to concentrate on is how we're going to change the situation in the performing arts and as Margaret was saying, the Gender Equality Duty gives us a really good opportunity to do that. That's what we're discussing this morning.



I am just here to do this introduction and will be joining another panel later on but it falls to me to mention one thing about Diversity in the television industry. I'm Head of Diversity for Channel 4 and we chair the Cultural Diversity Network at the moment, it rotates between all the major broadcasters, BBC, Channel 5, Sky, ITV etc, and we're quite excited because the diversity pledge that we've got for the first time ever asks independent producers and all makers of British originated TV to look at their diversity and it has four areas for improvement, all of which relate to women in the performing arts. One is to recruit from a wider base, and more fairly, on screen and off; the second area is to encourage diversity in output, so that we look at portrayal, so that women aren't always in those stereotypical roles; the third is to encourage diversity at senior decision making levels, so that we have senior commissioners, senior members of the board, and chief executives that are both women and from other under-represented groups; and the fourth area is to put on events such as this that do a lot to inspire people and to get action in the area.

And the last point to make it's important that diversity actually contributes to commercial value, and to the bottom line. Yes, you should be interested in it for moral reasons, it's ethical. Any decent human being is a feminist because feminism just means that you treat men and women equally.

PANEL: THE GENDER EQUALITY DUTY

Chair: **Beatrix Campbell** (OBE, Writer and Journalist and member of the Women's Commission)

Jean Rogers (Vice President of Equity)

Kate Kinninmont (Director of Women in Film and TV)

Katherine Rake (The Fawcett Society, campaigning for equality between women and men in the UK)

Jean Rogers and Kate Kinninmont outline their organisations' activities to promote women. Katherine Rake explains how the Gender Equality Duty will be implemented in the industry.

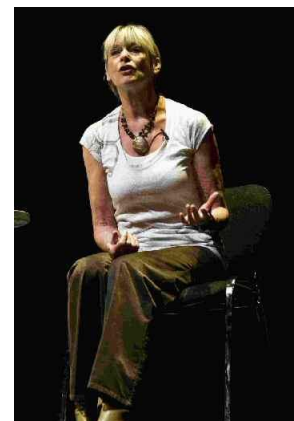
BEATRIX CAMPBELL

I want to say a few words about the context of this conversation and why I think it is really important and clever that Sphinx has organised this somewhat surprising day. And it's for this reason; we are in the midst of some very significant legal, quasi-constitutional changes in the way that women are perceived in our society and globally. Just think about it – when you were born the values of Patriarchy were the law, they had been the law since forever. Now because of the movements associated with us, all of us, and we are monuments to those movements in our very ways of being, the law of the world has shifted. Those patriarchal values and structures are losing their legitimacy. It doesn't mean they have lost their power, they haven't, or their capacity to endanger the lives of women and indeed the planet. However, they are losing their legitimacy and the laws of our society likewise echo the historic shift in the relationship between the genders. The trick for us which is what will be aired in this conversation is how to use those constitutional arrangements so that they do what they are supposed to do. Deliver huge change. Rather than do what most of the time they do which is not deliver huge change. Because all of these constitutions in the end are contingent on political will and that means really they're contingent on us. And I say that as a prelude to our conversation because these gender duties are really important, but they are tricky. And the trick is how we make them work for us, how we find out how we understand what they are in the nooks and crannies that we can move in to make them change. So what I'd like to do is first of all begin this conversation by asking all of you to give us a brief outline of where your work is at and Katherine will give us a brief outline of how to make use and what the Gender Duty does and then we'll have a larger conversation about how to intervene in the best way that we can in this moment.

JEAN ROGERS

For many years the Women's Committee at Equity has asked Equity to do research on Portrayal because of the way in which they felt opportunities were limited for women in our profession, particularly as they got older. And Equity just did not have the money to do it.

However, recently FIA, the Federation of International Artists which Equity helped set up, was awarded European funding to compare male and female performer career paths, and investigate Portrayal. A report has been produced based on a questionnaire which went to a number of European Performer unions. What was quite encouraging was that 46% of respondents to the questionnaire were men and 54% were women. So the answers weren't biased in a female direction. The report was published earlier this year, and it will be no surprise to the actresses here that it reinforced what we've been saying that though women performers, actresses, have the same training and their early experiences in the profession are very positive they get to about forty and their careers start to peter out, which doesn't seem to happen to their male counterparts.



FIA has achieved a second grant from the EU and we are going to continue with a project, Engendering Change. We plan to produce a code of good practice with this report. This can be used by unions and policy makers which will make an important contribution to redressing the balance.



KATE KINNINMONT

What really shocks me is that we've had the Equal Opportunities Legislation for almost forty years and yet today women are still earning 17% less than men. We represent people in front of and behind the camera.

Last year if you look at the 250 top films, 9% were directed by women, when I saw that I thought that's fantastic because last year we were on 6%. But 9% is where we were 10 years ago. It dips up and down but we've never broken double figures. Which means that 91% have been directed by men. Similarly writers.

Women are still earning 17% less than men

Only 4% of the camera people working on the top 250 movies were women. Only 12% of the top 250 movies were written by women which is absolutely shocking to me. There are several aspects today that we are looking at. One is pay and why women are paid 17% less. The other is gender equality – why there are so few women in lots of these key jobs. And I think audits are going to be the only way to do that.

We need a proper audit. Audits will look at pay and work force. As we all know it's only when things become transparent that you get change. There's a sense in which it's not that people *hate* women's writing but I was shocked last year to come to the Olivier Theatre. This theatre was opened on the 26th of October 1976 almost 30 years ago, and last year they had the first new play written by a woman, it was the one about the suffragettes, *Her Naked Skin*.

So what do we do about it? There are several issues including cultural conditions. For example, very few women are applying to the screen-writing course at the National Film and Television School What we're trying to do is called 'positive deviancy'. That's not as exciting as it sounds – it means that we looked at where the successful women are, who are directors of photography, screenwriters, directing and editing etc. and we found groups of them. They are getting intensive questionnaires from us because what we want to find out is how some women have got through. And if we can find that there's any common reason, like good careers advice or being good at sports, or a brother, or whatever. The findings of that are going to Skillset who are doing the research for us. We're going to see how we can involve the results in the training both at schools and later on.

BEATRIX CAMPBELL

Katherine, (Rake) all that being so, how are we to think about the salience of the Gender Equality Duty as is, and the salience of Gender Duties that are going to emerge in the new legislation. That's the first thing.

KATHERINE RAKE

Well, if I can just take the opportunity to link in with a couple of campaigns that Fawcett are running at the moment. I just want to mention two campaigns that might illustrate how the duty might be used. The first is our equal pay campaign. We've been campaigning for equal pay for a very long time. The pay gap is such that for women and men working full time, if you assume men are paid year round, women are effectively working from October 31st to the end of the year for free. That's the scale of the pay gap, for full time workers. Actually, for part-time workers, they are working from about now, June, for free. It is one of the worst pay gaps in Europe, there's no excuse. I would encourage people to come to our web site where it is spelled out.

One of the things we are looking at now is the Equalities Bill which is currently in parliament. We have got a really unique opportunity there to make sure that we have legislation fit for our current labour market and not a 1970's labour market. So next year we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act. It is the equivalent of saying to people, imagine if you had health and safety legislation where you said to people 'ok there is a building site with a huge hole the floor go onto the building site and give us a ring when you fall through the floor.'

Casual misogyny is now acceptable in a way that casual racism isn't.

So we know there's a huge gender pay gap and what we say to people is you're only protected once you're aware you've been discriminated against, and only then if you're psychologically fit enough and rich enough! Only then, after ten or twelve years, that's on average how long it takes, you may see justice. That's what we're doing sending women into the labour market with a great hole under them. That's one of the pieces of work we're doing. We're looking for lots of voices to support that campaign.

And the second most recent piece of work is about lap dancing legislation. The reason I mention that is that there has been a huge growth in lap dancing across the UK. There is now a club in every town centre, that has been happening over the past decade. We've been campaigning for change. There is a legislative loophole to allow lap dance clubs to open just like any café or bar so you don't have to have any additional legislation. We picked up on that issue because we were incredibly concerned that although there have been huge advances in some areas, there is a huge back slide in terms of objectification and in the sexualisation of women: where it is now normal to see women's bodies bought and sold in an open market, and lap dancing clubs is part of that. Clearly here we are talking about the cultural industries where you are the front line of the effects of that. So it has an effect on your industry but also I find it incredibly worrying it has an effect on young women. There's no surprise that there's a huge increase in body image issues and self harm among young women because they are being brought up in a society where pornography is everywhere and where young men they have relationships with are totally immersed in that culture; where they are then having to fit in with that. The way that they respond to that is through self harm and eating disorders etc. and that damages their relationships as well.

So that's two issues of our campaign. What the Duty could do is turn the tables, this is what Margaret was saying so brilliantly earlier. So currently we have an anti-discrimination legislation, which means that you experience serious discrimination first and then you have the right to redress. What the Duty allows us to do is to turn the tables and place an obligation on an organisation to **promote equality** between women and men. The issue is that the Duty is hitting against that culture of complacency of judging equality. Casual misogyny is now acceptable much more so than it was 10 years ago. In a way that casual racism isn't, casual discrimination against people with disabilities isn't, we've seen a backslide against that as well. So you hit against the misogyny problem, a cultural problem, and a

problem which Kate was talking about which is that there are very few women in decision making positions. Those figures are absolutely reproduced across society. So we've got the top 250 films and compare with the top 250 companies in the UK with pretty much the identical numbers, so about 10% of the directors in those top companies are women. The women MPs are incredibly over exposed but there are only 18%. Men are still 82% of our decision makers in Parliament. So it's hitting against that barrier. This 'tool' has a huge amount of potential but I guess the message is that it has to be really pushed. It's not going to happen automatically. So our experience on the ground unfortunately that it has been some tick boxing going on, organisations saying "yeah, yeah, yeah," but it's the employment obligation *only* that they are considering rather than the goods and services industry. So in this industry they've understood the need to sort out the pay gap and the need to sort out promotion, which is fantastic, but they haven't quite got to the point where they've understood they have to sort out representation issues.

So I'll finish with one final comment which is that I had lunch with Mark Thompson where I was speaking about the BBC's obligation, under the Gender Duty. I brought to the table some statistics about children's TV. I've got a four year old so I'm concerned what's on TV and it's a very similar pattern that you see: are there an equal number of male and female characters where you can identify gender? No. Is there an equal disposition of protagonists between male and female characters? Still not. So women and girls are still portrayed as passive and the boys and men are portrayed as active. Shocking. So I took this to him and I said 'you also have a duty to change that' (and in this context it's very interesting to hear Channel 4's example). His response was, 'yes, well I suppose I do, but honestly isn't that just society? Aren't we just reflecting what's going on in society?' So I think there is something there within industries like this where there's a lot of excuses made. One is "it's out there so we're reflecting that," the other is "people just don't come forward." I have to say that's nonsensical - I meet talented women all the time who face these barriers. So I think we've got to get past these excuses and you only get that change ultimately by using the tool and fighting for it.

BEATRIX CAMPBELL

We've run out of time for this session but what I want to suggest is that you hold everything that you've heard in your head and as the morning moves along just be thinking about the resource that you have got as a cultural producer and the institutions that you connect with but also you as a citizen, that you have a right to use these instruments that Katherine has described and let's see if we can use our time together today to capitalise on what you have heard from everybody on this panel. To think about what we are going to do individually, and together to make the kinds of interventions that Katherine has outlined.



PANEL: THE FEMALE STEREOTYPE

Beatrix Campbell (OBE, Writer and Journalist and member of the Women's Commission)
Professor Vivien Gardner (Manchester University)

Vivien Gardner explains the shifting female stereotypes on stage over the last century and the problem of how to control the portrayal of women on screen and stage. Beatrix Campbell and Vivien Gardner discuss the post-feminist femininity culture in young women and how that has evolved, and ask where can this lead?

BEATRIX CAMPBELL

Let me introduce Viv Gardener, a wonderful historian who is going to talk to us about some of the delicious details, some of the questions on our minds about what is it that's being performed, what does femininity mean? How does it change its shape and its dress and have we been here before?

VIVIEN GARDNER

My original task was to talk about the cultural and literary stereotypes of women, and as I said when I arrived here, that is an impossible task. However, it is both central to both my own work, research as a theatre historian, performance historian. I think it is central to the majority of our work whether we are performers, agents, directors, it impacts on all these things. And what has always interested me about theatre, about performance, is the way in which unlike almost any area in society performance can both reinforce what we almost always see as negative stereotypes of women or other groups but it can also re-negotiate those images. So we're actually incredibly powerful.

I work in the late 19th and early 20th century. I look particularly at radical women and radical women's engagements in the theatre, I also look at popular theatre, and at the moment I'm particularly interested in the way in which women's bodies are performed onstage, which is of course something which we are still tussling with. So what I do is use theatre history as a prism to examine the present. And what I hope to do as an academic with my own students male and female is to look at the ways in - to make them ask questions. I think that's my primary function. When people go out into the industry they're there questioning the status quo.



I think it is very important that we understand our own histories. Why we're at where we're at today and see those relationships. One tries not to be too depressed by the illustrations that I'm going to give you today, they are too familiar. As the previous speakers have all said that we would have hoped that we had moved further on from the 1890's and 1900's. But we possibly haven't.

First I want to bring in the question about stereotypes. There is no single stereotype, a stereotype changes. It changes across history, so that something that is an expectation, the norm in the 1890's by the time it comes down to us in the 21st century is reified, hardened into a stereotype. So that things that were an archetype have become solidified into a stereotype which then we have to renegotiate and take on. They also change in terms of cultural context. If I use the term multi-cultural

in my work in this context I don't just mean in terms of race. I think that we have to understand those bigger questions about cultural context. Class presents different cultural contexts. Age presents different cultural contexts. All of those are in some inflected by gender. We've got to look at that very complex matrix that comes together in any moment of performance.

We've all seen shifts; those of us around my age grew up with very passive Disney heroines, we now see that Disney has listened to the feminist movement of the seventies and eighties and now produces a much more feisty heroine. A heroine with a much greater agency than those earlier ones. It isn't without its own problems. There are major problems about the representation of women in popular films and television. But they have shifted. They do listen.

So where do we look, what do we look at, where are these stereotypes generated? Now one of the obvious places for us to look, as feminist historians, is at the fact that a lot of stereotypes are created to control radical challenges to society. And that's very obvious in the work that I'm doing. The feminist of the 1890's was this wonderful figure that became known as the New Woman. The term is first used in the public arena in 1894. Like that, (snaps fingers) Sidney Grundy has written a play called *The New Woman*. And it's a very hostile attack on everything that the feminists of the 1890's stood for. So, it's very funny, it was very popular. It played at the Comedy Theatre in the West End. So it attacks, it ridicules women's attempts to write scientific pieces. There's a doctor who is writing about gender in a ludicrous way. The women try to smoke cigarettes but they put the wrong end in their mouths. So they're caricatured. The whole of this worked extremely well in 1894. By the time you get to 1900, many of the things the New Woman stood for, and in particular their own agency, their ownership of the latchkey, becomes very important.

How do we control the image of women on stage?

To be able to have the independence to have the key to your own house is something that we find quite difficult but there is it being made fun of in Grundy's play. Women had achieved a degree of freedom. You then begin to see the way in which, particularly popular culture begins to appropriate those ideas, and I think, shift them into some new types of stereotypes. Less aggressive, but subtly misogynistic.

There's a very interesting performance which is called 'The Dairy Maids'. In 'The Dairy Maids', there is a gymnasium scene, a women's gymnasium, they're all there in their gym gear. Well, even in the 1890's women generally wore more clothes in public. So this exposure of women's bodies let alone doing sweaty things which made clothes cling to them, is obviously inviting a certain type of gaze. They sing a song which could have been written in the 21st century, because it says: "if you want to get thin girls then go to the gym girls". The whole point of the health and fitness, the exercise which the New Woman had been advocating in the 1890's had been twisted into the pursuit of slimness which has now become the fashion. So that sort of manipulation and presentation what we might call body fascism is there in the early 1900's.

My question is: it's not only that men are going to this performance but they were enormously popular, like all musical comedies of the time, with women. So, what are the women seeing on stage, on television? Do we identify with a working woman, somebody who's made it, somebody who's successful, in a world which is still predicated against successful women?

Are we also though, looking at their bodies, and thinking "ooh, lovely, slim, I wish I'd got a body like that?" Or are they identifying with the struggle to get that body? There's something very complicated going on there which I think informs the way we construct stereotypes and attitudes towards the image that women present onstage or on screen. Control for me is a very important question. It remains a question.

What are the women seeing on stage, on television?

There's another case, in 1907, with the great music hall performer of the day, called Gertie Miller. A postcard manufacturer superimposed her head on a picture of the body of a scantily clad woman. She sued him and she lost the case. She lost the case because she was an actress and she therefore didn't have ownership of herself and her image. She was a celebrity and therefore she

didn't own who she was. And the judge, Lord Justice Darling said "it would have been a different matter if she had been a vicar's wife, but because she's an actress, she might have worn these clothes." The fact that she didn't, in fact she was a very respectable woman, meant that she was tarred with that image of the actress of being available. She was what she played, which was the other sort of complication. So that's historically what we're looking at, a whole range of problems.

How do we control the image of women on the stage? A lot of popular material will tend to reinforce stereotypes. The "new women" plays that challenged the stereotypes weren't playing in the West End, they were playing on the equivalent of our Fringe stages. And I think that is still true. It is very difficult for those serious women writers to make their way onto those main stages. (There were feminist male writers, who emerged like Shaw and Galsworthy.) How do we negotiate Performance so that something that is as liberating as a session in the gym, as having pleasure in our own bodies, and to display our own bodies, isn't then appropriated and used in a sexualised fashion? How do you as performers and people who produce the poster, the photographs, etc, how do we retain control over the way in which actor's images are presented? And I think it comes down to what other people have been talking about, it's partly about awareness, it's about being aware of the way in which these things happen, about how we work in the world, about taking responsibility and actively engaging with that negotiation of and challenge to stereotypes.

BEATRIX CAMPBELL

I wanted to just ask you this, and there will be a sense in which we're all probably aware that we are living in a time when there is a performance on the streets, never mind the things that we see on stage or on screen, that there's a kind of performance of a ferocious femininity, laddish, raunchy, capable of anything, not being an astronaut, but getting drunk, and this represents a kind of post feminist femininity.

I'm just wondering about the things which are concealed and revealed by these women very often wearing few clothes. Very often quite deliberately performing a kind of whorish, full on, come-and-shag-me-now, femininity. And I'm just wondering what is concealed by it in terms of its relationship to the other thing, which is of course, masculinity. What shape has masculinity got in relation to it? And what you've been very clear about is the work that's invested in the creation of this body.

Is there also something being revealed in what in the end is its compromise. Where, certainly in terms of power, does this spectacular femininity get? Have you any thoughts to share about that?

VIVIEN GARDNER

I think it is very difficult. I think just as women at the end of the 19th century fought very hard to have a public presence it wasn't *undressed*, but it was masculinised. But women were going onto the streets whether it was in terms of suffrage, or just conducting their ordinary lives, wanting to make a public statement about their feminism through dress. In a sense, this is what this generation is doing, is wanting to reclaim its sexuality, it wants to reclaim that notion of whore for itself. I wouldn't want to take that away from that reclamation, its what feminist historians and feminists have done for a very long time, reclaim the naming. We use the term 'vamps' we want to call ourselves 'vamps' and in a sense that is sartorially what those young women are doing.

However, it's obviously just as that performance in *The Dairy Maids*, it is a statement about women's ownership of skills. It's deeply problematic. My feeling is that the more that we discuss this, the more that we will make people aware of the problematics of that. I don't feel that I should go out there and dictate or determine, particularly a totally different generation than mine, their actions. However, I do think we could initiate debates. This is where performance, where young women and men are engaged through forms of performance, can alert them. We can set up those discussions and debates, and make them aware of those.

PANEL: ROLES FOR WOMEN

Chair: **Oona King** (Head of Diversity, Channel 4)

Hilary Salmon (BBC Executive Producer)

Laura Mackie (Head of Drama at ITV)

Giles Croft (Artistic Director of Nottingham Playhouse)

Kate Buffery (Actress)

Kate Buffery outlines the problems that she believes exist in the portrayal of women on television. Hilary Salmon and Laura Mackie defend the portrayal of women on BBC and ITV programmes. Giles Croft discusses the problems that theatres face in tackling classic work and commissioning new work in a diminishing economy.

Context:

- **38% of stage roles were for women** (Sphinx Survey: 2006)
- **35.5% of television roles are for women** (Equity Survey: 2009)

KATE BUFFERY

I've been an actor for over thirty years and I'm asking for an end to discrimination in our industry.

When we watch TV drama we see half as many women as men and very few older women. So what can we do about this? The first problem is that none of us are really dying to see many more of those often rather shallow women, or even the older women who are so rarely seen (the gossips, prudes, curtain twitchers), that are already on our screens. We're not dying for more, we feel that a diet of these diminished characters alone leaves us un nourished.

Yet men can portray similarly diminished characters – the inept husband, the office idiot, the buffoon. Why are these not as depressing? The truth is that these male portrayals are balanced by the most enormous quantity of drama led by men in an area from which women are largely excluded. The portrayal of what I would very loosely describe as heroes who usually arrive complete with anti-heroes - usually male. Heroes who are usually disguised at present as superficially flawed detectives, or policemen, or lawyers or doctors.... Character after character, week after week, making an offering in what is one of the most popular forms of drama. It doesn't just reflect reality, it inspires us.

What qualities are needed in these lead characters? Characters that take us beyond the domestic. They're driven by a moral imperative; their morality is backed by substance, by action, by effectiveness. However their power isn't necessarily physical – most are in their late forties fifties or sixties, some in their seventies even. Their power comes from a muscularity of thought – from courage – these characters take an active responsibility for the worst of what's really going on in their world and challenge it. But they are fictional creations. They don't have partners, they don't have domestic lives and most men of those ages who are successful, happy and moving forward in life, do. Do these qualities only describe the male potential? Not in my experience.

The potential of women to serve story structure is not limited

And as for the anti-heroes, can women be extraordinarily corrupt, destructive? Of course. And yet this wealth of substantial characters good and bad is not shared with women to balance our largely shallow representation on TV.

We do get the odd nod; look at Helen Mirren in *Prime Suspect*. She was no stereotype, but a character evolving through experience. But they're rare - Why?

Recently a TV producer responsible for commissioning drama commented, in defence of the current status quo, that one aspect of what she described as this 'complex' area of gender inequality was the

fact that ‘innate story structure favours men’. This is clearly not true. The potential of women to serve story structure is not limited; this sort of thinking is.

The same producer also quoted ‘developed male archetypes’ as a problem. Developed archetypes can be owned by both men and women. They were developed by male dominated societies, as ours is a male dominated society, but societies that were of course influenced by female thinking as our male dominated society is. Does doing justice to women mean celebrating only qualities that we very clearly do not share with men? We will always be different to men, essentially and superficially in the way that we deal with life. But the fact is on some levels, on the levels that are most important to drama, the levels that discuss intelligence, courage, substance or malevolence we share an awful lot with men. The fact is that we already can and do embody most developed archetypes without a second thought – the teacher, the thinker, the fool, the thief etc. The archetypes we rarely embody are: the hero and anti-hero – most powerful because they evolve, they explore not human facets but human potential. Are we really being kept away from the idea of exploring human potential because there’s a worry that these archetypes were developed by men?

When we do get equality in this area, in real numbers, the diminished stereotypes elsewhere will not only become less irritating, they will also start to evolve. And because experience is often an asset to the effective hero or anti-hero, the full contribution of women over forty and beyond, can also be explored. I suggest this should be a very obvious, very effective place to start.



HILARY SALMON

I couldn’t come here from the BBC and not say that there are reasons to be cheerful about the gender balance in our working environment. I’ve worked as an executive producer at the BBC for twenty years. When I started twenty years ago every head of drama departments up and down the country were male, the two channel controllers were male. In those days we didn’t have drama commissioners or executive producers. Take the snapshot now: my department head, Kate Harwood is a woman, her predecessors Laura Mackie and Jane Tranter were women; the department has been run by women for ten years. Jane went on to be first drama commissioner for the BBC. Tessa Ross is drama commissioner at Channel 4, Laura Mackie at ITV. All women. At my level there are eight or nine other executive producers, only one is a man. This might seem like an exaggeration but women of my generation have felt a big shift in the opportunity to do the sort of work we want to do, certainly in drama, but to a certain extent across the media. And if there are not roles for women, and if those roles are stereotypes then frankly it is our fault. Which is a worry.

When I saw the Equity statistics in the briefing document, which was a snapshot taken in 2008 of a week in drama across all the channels in all the networks and it says that a third of roles in those dramas are for women, I was surprised by that. I’ve done my own audit and I hope you will forgive me if I just run through quickly, what is being made in-house at the BBC just this week. We are making a film about Gracie Fields, starring Jane Horrocks; we are making a second series of *Criminal Justice* with a female protagonist this time, played by Maxine Peak and she has her own all female legal team; we are making a daytime series

If there are not roles for women and if those roles are stereotypes then frankly it is our fault.

about land girls during the second world war; our second series of *Five Days* has two female protagonists, a forty two year old female detective constable and a young Muslim woman; *Survivors* the second series led by Julie Graham; a film about Doctor Florey which is all about men so there is one there; *Cranford* coming back with its gorgeous dames; *Larkrise* has nine regular female characters and only five men; and we are also making a new version of *Emma* starring Romola Garai. I looked at the soaps as well: *Eastenders* has twenty three regular female parts and twenty one men, *Doctors* has seven women, five men, *Casualty* is the only one where the statistics go the other way with nine men and seven women; *Holby* has fifteen women and ten men. So I don't think we should be gloomy about the prospects for actresses in our dramas, there are plenty of roles. It is a subjective thing whether these roles are stereotypes or not. If they are it is our fault. I would argue that my generation has that responsibility to make sure those roles are not stereotypical, that they are fully rounded and that they are the protagonists in those dramas, which they are in many of these that I have mentioned.

LAURA MACKIE

I would say, like Hilary, there are reasons to be cheerful but we can't stick our heads in the sand, there is still a lot of work to do. However, as previously mentioned the bulk of the audience for drama is female; they have control of the remote. If we provide dramas that exclude the broad female audience we won't get the kind of audience we want for ITV1. I want as many hours of drama as possible and I can only achieve that if the quality of the drama is really good and attracts a big percentage of the viewing public; that means women. Women want to see strong, complex, interesting characters and I don't think we always get it right but I just want to pull out some titles from last year.



We do have to be careful about crime, we have a lot of crime drama and I am desperate for some non crime. Happily, Kay Mellor's new series that she is developing with us is called *Women of a Certain Age*, and has three fantastic roles for women in their fifties. *Place of Execution* had a fantastic role played by Juliet Stevenson; *Lost in Austen* had a female protagonist played by Jemima Roper, a young actress who is not a household name; *Unforgiven* written by Sally Wainwright, had a complex central role for Suranne Jones and the other female parts in that drama were equally well drawn. But we need more. I would love to get more scripts on my desk that didn't have a flashing blue light in them. We need more scripts with really strong varied roles that reflect women's lives, every facet of their lives. But I tell you the stumbling block for me as a commissioner. We can get some scripts with good characters and a scenario for an episode but I have to project five or six episodes, and will that audience come back? Has the series got legs, sustainable stories?

It is vital to commission developing stories that have progression and that are interesting to follow because we don't live in a world where the audience will give you the benefit of the doubt for very long. We have to acknowledge viewing habits and they need good stories, it is not enough to have just good characters so that's what I'm looking for.

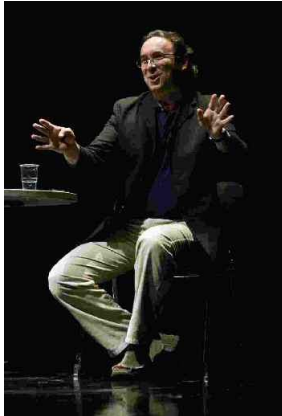
GILES CROFT

I work in the theatre. And the truth is that in the theatre one tends to deal much more with classic work than new work. In that case, how does one treat those already existing characters alongside the new work that one might be creating?

So I just want to talk about the new work that we create for now. I did a bit of research into what we have been commissioning. Over the past eighteen months the gender balance is heavily weighted towards men as far as actors are concerned, as far as writers are concerned it is about equal and as far as creative teams are concerned the balance is, excluding sound and lighting designers, about

fifty-fifty. What is interesting is that in the region that I work, all the theatres bar one have chief executives that are women.

The landscape in which artistic directors work now is very different to ten or fifteen years ago – theatres now have chief executives and often these are women – so now artistic directors work differently. The artistic director's choices are influenced in ways they weren't before. The complication is that it is quite hard to single out particular areas for priority because actually we have so many areas that are priorities. We constantly have pressure to fulfil priorities of the arts council, regional council etc.



I think that the representation of women is changing to some degree within the theatre partly because the structures of theatres have changed and partly because the pressures on theatres have changed from outside. But the greatest danger of all is that for all the increased representation and number of voices there are diminishing opportunities for that work to be seen. Theatres now can't produce as much and have less control over what is on their stages and are closing all over the place. One of the major factors undermining progress is a diminishing economy and therefore a decreasing set of opportunities. If we could go back even five years and have the number of theatres we had then I believe the work that has been going on for so many years would have a much stronger place. Don't just put pressure on the theatres, put pressure on the funders. That is a really important part of this because they are the people that can allow the work to continue.

QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

The picture about commissioning drama sounds quite rosy – so why are we all here? How does that development and stories that have legs happen? Are we just passing the buck to writers? How do we get involved and nurture that change and development?

Laura Mackie: *Lay the pipeline in a better way. Part of the battle is time – we run out of time to work on a script, it has to go into production. The worst thing in the world is to be prescriptive, to tick all these boxes. What we actually want is to be surprised; sometimes as commissioners we sound prescriptive so I think we have to think about the language we use to stimulate writers and to bring new writers through. The key thing is to give them time so they have time for the scripts to be heard. Writers should affiliate themselves with editors and developers so that before the script lands on my desk it has the best chance of being commissioned.*

Does it make any difference with executives that are women – they aren't there to promote women, they have the executive job for other reasons. I'd just like to question the assumption that because there are more women executives there will be more women's parts and women writers.

Kate Buffery: *What makes a difference is how honed the ideas are. Men and women both have a responsibility to make sure that we get honed proper representation of women.*

Hilary Salmon: *I don't think it can be a bad thing that women are making more decisions in television drama. I agree that a woman is not necessarily going to be more sensitive to women's parts than men but it is more likely. Is that controversial?*

Giles Croft: *I guess that having women executives doesn't necessarily make a difference but if it doesn't then it should. The two most recent plays we've produced have been substantially rewritten as a result of observations about the female characters in the play.*

Women feel as they get older there are less parts for them – have the media appropriated that? Are women themselves losing confidence as they get older? Are you aware of the age range of the parts being cast in those BBC series – does that allow for a more mature woman?

Hilary Salmon: *I don't have facts and figures but Larkrise has an older demographic in the audience and in the cast. Both dramas I'm working on have women over forty in the cast.*

Are women colluding with media – the decision makers etc. are you colluding with the status quo? Do you automatically accept anything that is given to you without considering whether it is appropriate or not? If you vote for a male dominated society that's what you are going to get.



OONA KING

All of you here know how difficult it is to get a good role and I think we should also spare a thought for the black, Asian women, women who have a disability, older women... So it is really incumbent upon all of us to challenge this but there is also a power relationship which you can't get away from. But we have to find the way we can challenge things in our sphere of influence and that is for us to determine.

PANEL: WRITING FOR WOMEN

Chair: **David Edgar** (President of the Writer's Guild, Playwright)

Tracy Brabin (Writer and Actress)

Tanika Gupta (Writer)

Colin Teevan (Writer)

Colin Teevan and Tanika Gupta discuss the practice of writing roles for women, although neither writes from a 'gender' perspective. Tanika Gupta and Tracy Brabin identify that the problem with stereotypical female roles is worse in television than theatre. Tracy Brabin suggests that there is an inherent problem with women's confidence in the workplace.

Context:

- Out of **48** new writing productions **8** were written by women (**17%**) with **10** collaborations (**21%**)
- Out of **9** new adaptations/translations, **5** were by men, **0** by women with **4** collaborations
- In **1983** **7%** of playwrights were women whilst in **2006** **17%** of playwrights are women
- Out of **179** television programmes **50** were written by women (**28%**)
- Out of **49** radio programmes **12** were written by women (**24%**)
- Only **26%** of women writers write for film
- Women screenwriters are credited on **less than 15%** of films between **1999 – 2003**
- Films written by women screenwriters are **as likely** to gain a release as those written by men
- The Box Office return for British films with a female screenwriter is **\$1.25** per **£1** budget, compared with **\$1.16** for films with all-male writers

DAVID EDGAR

This session starts from a presumption: that the quality and quantity of women's parts is dependent on the number of women writing the plays. Historically that is clearly true. But I want us to discuss whether that presumption is indeed true. It is worth remembering in 1980 there were only two writing, nationally known women playwrights in this country: Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems. A decade later there were two to three dozen; The Royal Court goes up from 8% women writers up until 1980 to 30% and that has appeared to go in reverse. That is a crucial reality we have dealt with and to address; if the figure of 17% of commissions are now women then there has been a significant reversal. Here to confront that is Tanika Gupta, Colin Teevan and Tracy Brabin.

Can men write for women?

COLIN TEEVAN

Yes. I think that both men and women playwrights are capable of stereotypes, both of the opposite gender and of their own gender. There is good writing and bad writing; it behoves the writer to create truthful characters. I think stereotypes are going to be created from a set of cultural assumptions rather than from observations of the world we live in.

I've had the good fortune to write three plays for two great actresses. One of them is Clare Higgins and the other, Kathryn Hunter. I think Kathryn is an extraordinary character in that she didn't take the lack of lead roles for women as a sign of defeat, she went out to play the big male roles. In those three plays I wrote for her, *The Bee*, *The Diver* and *Kafka's Monkey* she played a Japanese salary man, a Japanese office lady and a monkey. What was interesting was that when I did the last one, *Kafka's Monkey* I was being interviewed and I was asked 'did it make a difference writing it for a woman?' And my answer was: 'I was writing it for a monkey.'

What I say to young writers and emerging writers is, 'be bold'. Women should write for men in the same way that men write for women. It is hard to write a play from a gender equality perspective.

Women should write for men in the same way that men write for women.

What I have found though in two recent commissions – *Basra* and *Kabul*, was that in both instances I was asked to write about intrinsically male issues in that the invasion of Iraq and the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan are I think incontrovertibly the result of male folly. What I found interesting was that in both instances, unconsciously, my protagonists became female; that wasn't in any attempt at gender equality. That was because the representation of men behaving badly

was something that I did not find interesting. I think that one of the great joys of writing for the stage is to explore what you are not. I know that you are told 'write about what you know', 'write about what's true' but to write, you have to explore what you are not or else I would be writing plays about Irish men, Tanika would be writing about British Asian women and the world would be a far less rich place.

DAVID EDGAR

Speaking of which, as an Asian woman writer, Tanika, how irritated are you with questions that start 'As an Asian woman writer...'?

TANIKA GUPTA

I think it was in *The Times* once, I was actually described as 'A British born, Asian, Hindu, bilingual, Bengali, woman playwright' and I thought, why not just call me a playwright?

I think it is all about fighting against labels; always trying to write about things that interest me: stories, characters; never thinking, I am going to write a woman's play, a man's play. The last play I did at the Soho, *White Boy*, I remember going into the meeting and the artistic director saying that he wanted me to write a play about identity and I thought, 'he wants me to write about hijab-wearing women living in East London'. I looked out of the window at a shop that said 'dirty white boy' and I turned to him and said 'I want to write a play about white boys'. And that became the play. But of course, I went home and thought, 'I don't know any dirty white boys' I'm going to have to go out and research this.



I wrote a play at the Royal Court called *Sugar Mummies* which was about the sex tourism industry in Jamaica. About older women, particularly British, that go to places like Jamaica to have sex with young black men. In my research I went out to Jamaica and I met the women and the men and it was very different to what I expected. It was about mutual exploitation; it was about black sexuality and how people saw them etc. etc. So I came back and the play was put on, Linda Bellingham was in the role, and she's now about sixty. It was then commissioned for Channel 4 and the first thing they said to me was can you make the women characters younger, can you make them twenty-nine to thirty. And I said 'no' because that would totally defeat the whole object of what the play is about. It is about these women who feel invisible, so invisible that they go out to these places.

DAVID EDGAR

Throughout the day there has been a debate about whether or not in television writing the roles for women are stereotypical? Whether there are women's plots, male plots, whether story structure is inherently gendered or not. What is your experience of that?

TRACY BRABIN

I am on the Writer's Guild television committee and we were working with Equity on this initiative about looking at statistics and so on, the consensus being that it is the playwrights and the writers to blame because they are not writing for women. And the difficulty of course is that we are all writing this stuff and it is really hard getting through the commissioners, the gatekeepers, and getting them to accept that there are stories and plots to be had that are really sexy and exciting about women over thirty. I've certainly been in that situation; 'can you make these characters younger and sexier?' Coming from a *Hollyoaks* background, a lot of my interviews are about younger projects.

Moving on to *Shameless* and I also wrote for *Tracy Beaker* so I have worked my way around the schedule clock!

Afternoons, children's drama: loads of women, all gorgeous; it is fantastic to work in children's drama. It is encouraging, nurturing and supportive and creative and amazing.

Then you get to Soap and you look around the table and probably about a third of them are women writers and you know that as you look round the table the guys go home and they write whereas the women go home and they shop and do the laundry and then they get to their writing. There's a squeeze on their time so it is their achievement to even get to the table where they are continually having to assert themselves over the booming male writers. A friend of mine is on the core writing team at *Eastenders* and there are seven writers: two women and five men. *Hollyoaks* is the same.

Further round the schedule at 9 o'clock it is skewed more towards guys, it becomes more muscular in the way of working. One thing that I would say that is slightly contentious, the sense that women are actually brought up and programmed to be peacemakers, who try to facilitate the best of people, to be team players actually goes against the core of what drama is which is conflict. Men are brought up to encourage and enjoy conflict and be at the front line. We are more about working collectively and certainly in shows that are deadline driven and have huge audiences to make and financial imperatives for a network, there is no time for that. So I would say, be more assertive, have more confidence, be true to your story and be angry – if you think you are being pissed about – be angry.

We need to be feistier about our abilities and our talent



In *The Observer* on Sunday there was an article about teams and Diablo Cody who wrote *Juno*, one of the biggest independent breakthrough films a few years ago. She works with three other female screenwriters and they've grouped together and they produce each other and direct each other, they are working as a team. And Diablo's mate said 'it's so hilarious because Diablo will get a phone call from Steven Spielberg and she won't answer it because she's afraid that she's going to get sacked'. When of course he is just calling to tell her he loved the rushes! And at *that* level she is suffering from a lack of confidence so we need to change that and be feistier about our abilities and our talent if we are going to change the way that we are seen.

QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

Why is it that you get a character breakdown at the top of a script and you will get something like 'Susan is feisty, sexy, beautiful so and so...' or 'Jemima, she is black' and then you'll get a man and it'll say 'he's brooding, intelligent...'. Why is it that what you look like determines your character if you are a woman?

Tracy Brabin: *That is absolutely phenomenally lazy writing. It is outrageous. One area I am interested in is the geek. There has been this new rise of the geek which is seen as really cool: the slacker meets the achiever and they fall in love. The woman can see beyond his physical appearance and her whole role is to help him grow up. Whereas the woman is always perceived by how she looks, not about her intelligence. So I am desperate to write a series about women geeks.*

Tanika Gupta: *That's just lazy writing.*

There has been a media backlash against women in drama, Michael Burke got half an hour on prime time TV and said women had taken over TV and emasculated men. Patrick Moore wrote a frankly vile piece in the *Radio Times* saying women had taken over TV and ruined it. I have spoken to female executives who are almost apologising, who share that perception who say 'no it has gone too far; there are too many women; men are being marginalised.' Does this perception still exist and cloud our judgement despite the statistics recently raised by Equity which clearly demonstrate that women aren't even equal, let alone taking over?

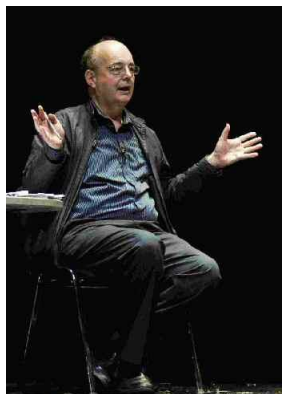
Tracy Brabin: *Out of one hundred and seventy nine programmes in the Radio Times, one hundred and twenty nine were written by men and fifty by women and it is even worse in radio.*

Colin Teevan: *Television takes its lead from advertising, from the imperative to sell advertising space, but the visual iconography that advertising develops we also see reflected in television. Theatre doesn't have that pressure that there is in television. There's no sense that women have taken over theatre. Outside of London several major houses now have women artistic directors, within London there is only Lisa Goldman, so there is a difference between inside and outside London.*

Tanika Gupta: *Generally in terms of the world of theatre, until there are more artistic directors who are women or at least women-loving male artistic directors then it is not going to change and unfortunately it still remains an old boys' network and that is what it is throughout television and throughout theatre.*

DAVID EDGAR

Final question: would the position be improved if more theatres did fewer plays by dead people?



PANEL: DIRECTING WOMEN

Chair: **Lucy Pitman-Wallace** (Director)

Giles Croft (Artistic Director of Nottingham Playhouse)

Janet Suzman (Director and Actor)

Giles Croft illustrates the essential problem for women in the performing arts: that the men don't think there is a problem. Janet Suzman discusses how to bring classical female roles out of the aesthetic and to give them depth.

Context:

- In 1983 approximately **12%** of directors were women.
In 2006 **23%** of directors were women (out of **140** productions only **32** were directed by women)

LUCY PW

So, in terms of women I thought it might be useful to talk about our own practice in the rehearsal room, or film studio. I wanted the panellists to take the premise that the parts available to women, particularly in the classical repertory, tend to be stereotyped, small and constrained, and wanted them to talk about how they deal with those issues in terms of their own practice. Do you agree with that premise, and what do you do about it?

GILES CROFT

I've never really thought about it and I don't know that I do think about it.

The choices one makes about programming are important because there are all sorts of plays that drop out of the repertoire because of changes in society, the way we view the author, the subject, the character etc. Politics change.



JANET SUZMAN

I'm escaping your question. We said the word media this morning, but a lot comes down to the critics. It is a very male club if you extract Lyn Gardner out of it. They are all boys. They look to women characters on stage always for the spark of sex that is going to make the evening less tedious.

Someone said earlier, 'I blame Shakespeare', sure, blame him if you like, but he did write the one unassailably brilliant part for a woman. (Cleopatra). I have noticed that the interpretation, the 'look' of it, over the years, is entirely defined by Elizabeth Taylor's take on it, which was cleavage. That was it. So we have an uphill battle. Because actually Shakespeare was writing about something much more interesting which was his own Queen, Elizabeth I, and we do know collectively that she was the most interesting person on the entire stage of England's history. But you might never know that, because of the cleavage. So I think that we have a problem with the critics because they do tend to push the

public to think of things. The word sexy now stands for interesting, exciting, titillating... but still we use the word sexy so we are always boiling it down to cleavage.



In the rehearsal room you have to be nicer to the men. Because they take umbrage more. They don't really like being directed by a woman. Not really. And so you have to treat them a little more carefully. You have to do this woman thing, smiling a lot and being adorable.

LUCY PW

Do women work differently in a rehearsal room to men?

JANET SUZMAN

Not entirely, directors are directors – they are always looking for different ways of putting something true together.

It is a psychological hornet's nest, a rehearsal room, people's antennae are very sensitive – you have to be very careful.

GILES CROFT

The issue of how one talks to actors and actresses is quite an interesting one. I think of myself as being exactly the same with an actor or an actress but the truth is that's not the case. I will change my approach depending on gender, I am sure. I can't believe I don't. Clearly one has to change one's way of working because of personality, it is not just a gender issue.

LUCY PW

Any thoughts about the way forward? If you were talking to a young director going into the rehearsal room who was dealing with these issues, is there anything from your own practice that has been useful to you in terms of allowing actresses to explore those complex roles?

The word sexy now stands for interesting, exciting, titillating...

JANET SUZMAN

In the 'sacred monster' plays, the classics, both performing and directing - you need to give them extra space to find in the character something intensely valuable as a human being – Desdemona for example, who I think is the most extraordinary, wonderful character, but it took some finding. To allow the young woman playing Desdemona to find her strength and autonomy is worth doing. Or Ophelia or Gertrude, I did a Hamlet recently and spent an awful lot of time on Gertrude and Ophelia, the only two lost, lost women in that vast panoply of Elsinor. I found myself instinctively spending more time with them and allowing them time to develop their characters much more vividly than is usually given. They usually disappear a bit.

GILES CROFT

It is about craft. As a director you have to allow the performer to develop their craft and allow the art to develop, rather than think of yourself as an artist.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

The audience need to change things – why are we choosing to watch women in stereotypical ways? If Laura Mackie is looking at her audience figures every day then why aren't we showing her, in our response, the kinds of things that we want to be on television?

We keep seeing the same women on TV all the time. How accessible is the casting process? You used to be able to write, or ring up the BBC and get roles that way.



If you are a difficult, visionary, uncompromising male writer you are seen differently from a female one.

Can we have mentoring schemes so that anyone that needs advice or guidance has a space to get that advice?



How do we make titillating, captivating characters without making them sexy?

Drama schools now often have government funding – people only pay £3000 per year to go – are men and women equally represented? I know of some where there are twenty students in a year, sixteen men and four women. Organisations such as drama schools and the National Youth Theatre should make sure that men and women are equally represented.



I would have loved to ask the commissioners from ITV and BBC how much the women are being paid in comparison to the men in their series.

OONA KING

The two issues we need to remember:

The visible nature of portrayal of women's bodies on screen which is juxtaposed against the invisibility of women as they get older.

How women are cast aside and written out of scripts thoughtlessly, actually without thought. People have not actually thought about it. When people do think about it, often, the men that are taking those positions are willing to change.

For example, my black colleague went to the editor and said "have you noticed the contestants on *Deal or No Deal* are all white?" The editor hadn't noticed and hadn't thought about it. Now *Deal or No Deal* is one of the most diverse programmes on television.

It is us that are going to have to do it for ourselves!

Thank you very much.

The End

PRESS RESPONSE

Conference hears of battle against ageism and sexism

Hundreds of women, from actors to directors to writers, gathered at the National Theatre to hear depressing statistics reeled off: 17% of playwrights are women; 38% of stage roles are for women; 35% of TV roles are for women; of the top 250 films last year only 9% were directed by women.

THE GUARDIAN

Speaking at Sphinx Theatre Company's conference into the portrayal of women in theatre and television, Mackie admitted there was still "a lot of work to do", and said that a strong drama slate on ITV depended on attracting female audiences.

THE STAGE

Leading ladies kept out of the limelight

Female actors, especially those over 40, are still under-represented on TV, film and in theatre and when they do get a break it is often in a stereotypical role, a conference on the subject heard today.

THE GUARDIAN

The actor and director Janet Suzman rounded on the predominantly male critics who hold so much power in theatre. "It's a very, very male club. On the whole it's boys," she said. "And they look up at women characters on the stage for the spark of sex that's going to make their evening less tedious for them."

THE GUARDIAN

The BBC has been accused of being stuck in a '1950s mindset' and portraying women in passive or 'fluffy pink' roles.

THE DAILY MAIL

Speaker after speaker accused commissioners of either not considering older female actors for parts, or when they did, the parts were stereotypes of what a woman over 40 was thought to be.

THE GUARDIAN

BBC is stuck in the 1950s with its 'fluffy females', say campaigners

Under Gender Equality Duty, public bodies have to promote equal opportunities in areas such as policy making, 'service provision' and policy matters.

Critics say service provision should include the BBC's programmes. Katherine Rake of the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for sexual equality, was reported saying she had met BBC director general Mark Thompson but his attitude to gender duty was 'grudging'.

Her comments were backed up by Sphinx Theatre Company artistic director Sue Parrish who hosted a conference about Gender Equality Duty. She said the corporation should apply the duty to its TV output and criticised it for having a '50s mindset'.

THE DAILY MAIL

Award-winning playwright Tanika Gupta has criticised the "old boys' network" that controls the UK's theatre industry and has called on more women to be employed as artistic directors around the country. Called Vamps, Vixens and Feminists: The Elephant in the Room, the event was organised by Sphinx Theatre Company, with Gupta sitting on a panel addressing roles for women in television and theatre and how the portrayal of women on stage is often not representative of real life.

THE STAGE

The conference, called Vamps, Vixens and Feminists: The Elephant in the Room, was organised by the Sphinx Theatre Company, which was set up in 1973 as a professional feminist ensemble company, originally called Women's Theatre Group. Its artistic director, Sue Parrish, said she had been among those "pushing this stone uphill for 30 years". She added: "The opportunities presented by the 2007 equality legislation seem to have passed the arts community by."

THE GUARDIAN

INTRODUCTION TO THE GENDER EQUALITY DUTY

The Legal Background

The Gender Equality Duty is expected to signify the biggest change in sex equality legislation since the Equal Pay Act (EPA) 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) 1975 (as amended in 1999 and 2003).

The SDA made discrimination unlawful on the grounds of sex, marital status and gender reassignment. Protection under the SDA begins from day one of employment and also applies to vocational training, promotion and other terms and conditions of work.

The EPA also regulates discrimination by implying an equality clause into contracts of employment.

The General and Specific Duties

The Gender Equality Duty means that public sector bodies will legally have to take into account, within their policies, practices and services:

- The need to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment, including against transsexual people
- The need to promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

Most public authorities are covered by the **general duty** (as laid out above) which came into force on 06 April 2007. This includes any organisations which exercise some functions of a public nature.

INDUSTRY STUDIES

Sphinx Theatre 2006: Women in Theatre Survey

- In 1983 **20** out of **620 (3.2%)** of plays were written by women excluding Agatha Christie
In 2006 out of **140** productions **13** written by women (**9%**) with **22** collaborations (**16%**)
- Out of **48** new writing productions **8** were written by women (**17%**) with **10** collaborations (**21%**)
- Out of **9** new adaptations/translations, **5** were by men, **0** by women with **4** collaborations
- In 1983 **7%** of playwrights were women whilst in 2006 **17%** of playwrights are women
- In 1983 approximately **12%** of directors were women.
In 2006 **23%** of directors were women (out of **140** productions **32** were directed by women)
- **38%** of stage roles were for women (Sphinx Survey: 2006)
- **35.5%** of television roles are for women (Equity Survey: 2009)

Writer's Guild TV Committee

- Out of **179** television programmes **50** were written by women (**28%**)
- Out of **49** radio programmes **12** were written by women (**24%**)

According to Radio Times Listings

UK Film Council Report

- **26% of women writers** write for film
- Women screenwriters are credited on less than **15%** of films between **1999 – 2003**
- The Box Office return for British films with a female screenwriter is **\$1.25** per **£1** budget, compared with **\$1.16** for films with all-male writers

Equity Petition: Equal Representation of Women in TV/Film Drama

- Over half the viewing public is female, yet in TV drama for every female character, there are two male characters - (**35.3%** female roles to **63.5%** male roles).
- Whilst leading parts are frequently played by male actors over 45, women in this age group start to disappear from our screens.

The petition currently has over **4,000** signatures. These include:

Tim Piggot Smith, Simon Callow, Charles Dance, Maxine Peake, Roger Lloyd Pack, David Soul, Richard Curtis, Zoe Wanamaker, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Imelda Staunton, Penelope Wilton

FIA: Changing Gender Portrayal: Promoting Employment Opportunities for Women in the Performing Arts

- There is a greater proportion of women in the lowest income group and a smaller proportion in the highest income group.
- Ethnicity and gender are interrelated in affecting both advantage and disadvantage in employment as a performer. Principally, minority ethnic women performers perceive a triple burden (ethnicity, gender, ageing) in relation to employment issues.
- Women saw their gender as disadvantageous to them along every dimension (number and variety of roles, pay, ageing, 'type' most often cast as).
- There was a large difference in perception of lack of employment opportunity as mainly due to gender: women 57%; men 6%.



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