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MORGAN LLOYD MALCOLM

EMILIA

EDITED BY ELIZABETH SCHAFER

Emilia

Morgan Lloyd Malcolm is a playwright and screenwriter. Her play *Emilia* (Shakespeare's Globe, 2018) transferred to the West End the following year. Her play *Belongings* premiered at the Hampstead Theatre and Trafalgar Studios (2011) and was shortlisted for the Charles Wintour Most Promising Playwright Award and her play *The Wasp* at Hampstead Theatre also transferred to Trafalgar Studios in 2015. In 2013 she was chosen as a member of the Soho Six (Soho Theatre). She has co-written several acclaimed immersive site-specific plays with Katie Lyons, produced by Look Left Look Right, including *You Once Said Yes*, *Above and Beyond* and *Once Upon a Christmas*. She wrote and performed comedy for several years as part of the comedy group Trippplicate. She was part of the writing team for four of the Lyric Hammersmith's pantomimes from 2009–2012 and wrote (solo) the Bolton Octagon's Christmas plays for 2013 and 2014. She has written two large community plays for the Old Vic New Voices: *Platform* and *Epidemic*. She formed Terrifying Women with Abi Zakarian, Sampira and Amanda Castro in 2021 with an aim to producing more horror in theatre. She is also working in film and television; her film adaptation of her play *The Wasp* is due out in 2023 and her TV adaptation of Josephine Hart's *Damage* is also due out on Netflix in 2023.

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With commentary and notes by
ELIZABETH SCHAFER

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Introduction

Timeline

1569	Emilia Bassano is born and christened on 27 January, at St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate.
1576	Death of Emilia's father Baptiste Bassano, a Venetian born court musician and player of the sackbut (an early modern version of the trombone). He leaves Emilia a dowry of one hundred pounds – equivalent to over £20,000 today – to be paid either when she marries or reaches the age of 21. He also leaves property rental to be shared between Emilia and her older sister, Angela.
	c. 1576 onwards. Between the ages of seven and twelve, Emilia is educated whilst living at the home of the young dowager Countess of Kent, Susan Bertie.
1587	Death of Emilia's mother Margaret Bassano, nee Johnson. The Johnsons were a prominent musical family of the time.
	Emilia meets Henry, Lord Carey, 1st Lord Hunsdon, Elizabeth I's cousin and her Lord Chamberlain. Emilia begins an affair with Carey and he pays her maintenance of £40 a year, equivalent to roughly £8,000 today.
1592	Emilia, pregnant with Carey's child, marries her cousin Alfonso Lanier, a musician. He also served in Elizabeth I's army in Ireland under the Earl of Essex, and in the Azores.
1593	Emilia gives birth to Henry (named after his father Henry Carey).
1596	Henry, Lord Carey, dies.
1597	After a series of miscarriages, Emilia visits the astrologer and physician Dr Simon Forman who writes up case notes about her visit.

1598	Emilia gives birth to a daughter, Odillya, who dies at around 10 months old.
c. 1600	Emilia spends time at Cookham, in Berkshire, with Margaret, Countess of Cumberland and her young daughter, Lady Anne Clifford. This is evoked in Emilia's poem 'The Description of Cookham'.
1603	Death of Elizabeth I. Forman records that Elizabeth 'favoured' Emilia 'much'.
1604	Alphonso Lanier is granted a patent from James I giving him an income from the weighing of hay and grain.
1610	Emilia registers her poems for publication.
1610/11	Emilia publishes her collection of poetry *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (or *Hail, God, King of the Jews*), thereby becoming the first woman known to have published a collection of original poetry in England.
1613	Death of Alfonso Lanier. Emilia and her husband's family engage in a legal dispute over his patent income.
1617–19	Emilia runs a school in St Giles-in-the-Field.
1620	Emilia takes the landlord of her school to court.
1633?	Death of Emilia's son, Henry Lanier, a court musician. Emilia helps to support his widow, Joyce, and her grandchildren, Mary and Henry.
1645	Death of Emilia Lanier aged 76. She is buried at St James's, Clerkenwell, on 3 April.
1973	Maverick and populist historian, A.L. Rowse, in his book, *Shakespeare the Man*, claims Emilia was the 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's Sonnets.
2016	Racism appears to be on the rise in the UK during debates around the Brexit Referendum. England votes to leave the European Union (EU).

2017 Recently appointed Artistic Director at Shakespeare's Globe, Michelle Terry, commissions Morgan Lloyd Malcolm to write a play about Emilia Lanier to be staged at Shakespeare's Globe.

In October #MeToo trends in the wake of claims that film producer Harvey Weinstein was a sexual predator. He was convicted of criminal sexual assault in 2020.

2018 *Emilia* opens at Shakespeare's Globe in August. Nicole Charles directs and the play runs for 11 performances. The Globe season includes three plays by Shakespeare which include a female character named Emilia, *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The season also includes *Love's Labour's Lost*, which features Rosaline, a 'dark lady', who resists marriage. There is also a Sunday reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

2019 *Emilia* transfers to the Vaudeville Theatre and wins three Laurence Olivier awards.

2020 *Emilia* plays at the Pop Up Globe in Auckland, directed by Miriama McDowell. It closes on 19 March as pandemic measures hit New Zealand.

2022 *Emilia* plays at the Arts Centre, Melbourne, directed by Petra Kalive.

Historical, social and cultural contexts

In 2018, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's fiery, funny and feminist play *Emilia* stormed onto the stage of Shakespeare's Globe, surfing on the energy generated by the #MeToo movement. Focussing on the remarkable, accomplished, ground-breaking historical woman Emilia Lanier (1560–1645), the play urged audiences to listen to Emilia's story, sympathize with her struggles and applaud her determination to succeed. Audiences – predominantly young and female – cheered Emilia, booed the (mostly male) villains and delivered standing ovations.

By celebrating Lanier, someone who defied the odds, who overcame huge obstacles to triumph despite everything the world threw at her, the play *Emilia* calls out the oppression of women in the early modern period and today. But because the play is not offering 'a historical representation. It is a memory, a dream, a feeling' of Emilia (Lloyd Malcolm xxix), *Emilia* is able to reach out far beyond fighting sexism. Emilia is seen to be disadvantaged by sex, but also race, culture and class. Lloyd Malcolm's play invites ***anyone*** in the audience who feels disadvantaged, marginalized or ostracized by the mainstream to 'burn the whole fucking house down' (p. 75) if the house, or the theatre, or society in general will not let them flourish artistically. The play's commitment to a politics of inclusivity beyond sex and gender was particularly clear in the Globe production's visible diversity in terms of casting. In this, *Emilia* connected with the debates around representation and intersectionality – that is, an awareness that many aspects of identity (such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability) interact and overlap to create patterns of disadvantage and privilege that are unique to any one person – that were taking place in 2018, at a time when, in the wake of Brexit, racism appeared to be increasingly visible in the UK. Less visible, but equally important, was the Globe production's inclusivity in terms of theatre-making; the creative team were almost entirely women.

> **MLM** *Emilia* is a play that deals with unheard and ignored voices in history and now, in particular anyone who isn't a white, cis, able-bodied man. The play itself can be used to change the landscape of a theatrical community – in casting, crewing and who makes up the creative team. The content of the play extends to who makes it and who watches it. The inclusivity is woven into the fabric of it and can be used to make real change.

In 2018, revisioning, rewriting and reimagining history had become a box office phenomenon in the theatre, one notable example being the international hit musical *Hamilton* (2015), which unsettles traditional narratives from history, particularly in relation to race and ethnicity. And in 2017 the popular gig/ talent show-style musical *Six* was bringing the six wives of Henry VIII centre stage, whilst the monarch

was kept firmly offstage. *Emilia* also uses a performance vocabulary that is very familiar to the generations that grew up watching *Horrible Histories* (2009–14), the children's sketch show series made up of parodies, songs, remixes of television shows and general absurdity, that was always, no matter how 'Horrible', grounded in 'real' history.

Genre

Emilia is a 'history play' in the sense that is inspired by history but addresses contemporary concerns by means of adapting, transforming and appropriating history. But *Emilia* is also asking questions about cultural memory, who is remembered and who is not, and how theatre makers might remember in an activist way, reviving what has been forgotten, what Emilia 3 describes as muscle memory (p. 74), and revisioning what the dominant culture chooses to remember. In recent years, cultural memory debates have been particularly polarized around statues, who should be commemorated by a statue and who should not, which statues should be erected and which pulled down. The historical Emilia Lanier's achievements need re-membering as, until the end of the twentieth century, they were absent from mainstream cultural memory, and even ignored by literary historians and critics. Unfortunately, Lanier was initially rediscovered when an eccentric historian, A.L. Rowse, claimed in 1973, without plausible evidence, that Lanier was the 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's Sonnets. Lanier then became notorious primarily in relation to a man's love life – something which, in effect, drew attention away from her literary achievements. But Shakespeare scholars, Lanier scholars, and most literary historians agree that there is no evidence to suggest that Lanier was the inspiration for the Dark Lady of the Sonnets. Lanier's biographer, Susanne Woods, puts it this way

> both Shakespeare and Lanyer were acquainted with the old lord chamberlain, though probably at different times, and both Shakespeare and Alfonso Lanyer knew Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. That is the extent of verifiable evidence for a link between the two poets.
>
> Woods, 1999 p. 74

Nevertheless, since A.L. Rowse bestowed the Dark Lady label on Lanier, no amount of logic, research or scholarly argument has been able to dislodge this fantasy in popular culture.

Rowse's main source of evidence on Lanier's life is the astrologer, Simon Forman (1552–1611), someone whom Lanier consulted from 1597 onwards, after she suffered several miscarriages or, as he put it, 'false conceptions'. Forman made notes on his clients and often attempted to prey sexually on vulnerable women, who were consulting him in the hope that he would predict that their lives would improve. Forman records that he attempted to initiate sex with Lanier but she rebuffed him. When in Rowse's writing, the real, historical woman and writer, Emilia Lanier, is accessed by means of the words, attitudes and politics of the disappointed Forman, the resulting view of Lanier is inevitably desperately partial.

Lloyd Malcolm's vision of Lanier is, of course, also partial and, indeed, partisan:

> Our Emilia was fiercely intelligent, a writer, a survivor, a fighter, a mother and an educator
>
> p. 84

While in reality, not much is definitely known about Lanier, Lloyd Malcolm fills in some of the gaps and tells her version of Emilia's story with gusto. So, while, for example, it has been suggested that Lanier's father, Baptista Bassano, who was Venetian, may have had Jewish heritage, this is a contested idea in scholarship. Lloyd Malcolm chooses to have Emilia sing a Sephardic, that is, Spanish Jewish, song, and so adds to the intersectionality of *Emilia*. Discussions concerning the Bassano family's race and cultural heritage are also reframed by the decision to make Emilia a woman of colour. The historical Emilia Lanier was not black; she was half Italian and half English. However, the three women of colour who at the Globe performed the three Emilias, at three different stages of Lanier's life, helped to raise important questions about history, as well as contributing to debates about representation in the arts in England in 2018. And, when rewriting history to make Lanier's husband, Alfonso, gay, Lloyd Malcolm is more interested in intersectionality than in documented fact.

While *Emilia* offers more of a political manifesto, or a call to arms, than a history lesson, Lloyd Malcolm also has a lot of fun with history. *Emilia* is full of comic anachronisms, juxtaposing the contemporary – such as high fives (p. 15) – with the early modern, creating an entertaining cocktail of then and now. The larky anachronisms sometimes create laugh out loud humour: so, for example, in a spectacular departure from history, Mary Sidney, the most well known woman poet of the Elizabethan period, translator of the psalms, literary patron, and Countess of Pembroke becomes a predatory lesbian who uses blokeish language to respond to Emilia's (p. 17) 'exotic' physicality (compare Man 2's 'pretty little Moor' (p. 66)). When thwarted in her pursuit of Emilia, Sidney describes Margaret Clifford as 'the most dreadful box blocker' (p. 17); this punctures any sense of 'history' by the use of twenty-first-century slang.

Posing questions about the writing of history, about the voices that mainstream history ignores, is something *Emilia* engages with from the play's opening moments. As the Emilias state, 'We are only as powerful as the stories we tell. We have not always been able to tell them. Time to listen!' (p. 3). Like Brecht, who used historicization, hijacking the Thirty Years War in *Mother Courage*, or scientific history in *The Life of Galileo*, to make a contemporary political point, Lloyd Malcolm commandeers history for her cause, occasionally veering in the direction of agitprop – agitational propaganda. The priority is the challenge, the message, and the denunciation of oppression. *Emilia*'s use of historization is only one of the play's many Brechtian elements. *Emilia* is didactic, it includes overt politics. Its structuring is epic, with a reliance on episodic scenes. The play involves distanciation: that is to say, it includes direct address, a presentational style that acknowledges the audience, choric or narrator figures, and music; these all encourage the audience to remain critically aware. Character psychology is subordinated to the political message, and acting is often in quotation marks: the text invites very self-aware and exaggerated physicality in the comic impersonations of stereotypical, swaggering men behaving badly. The male characters are often caricatures but even the Emilias are not best served by a realistic, Stanislavskian style approach, which values three-dimensional, coherent characterization.

Indeed, on one level, Emilia 3 is the only actual character in the play; all the others are in her memoryscape, presented by 'muses', and 'the embodiment of Emilia's will'. Lloyd Malcolm adds, 'It is up to you how you show this' (p. 2) giving anyone working with the play the chance to explore, take risks and challenge the norm.

A connection could also be made to Shakespeare's history plays, which always meditated on contemporary crises by retelling historical narratives. So, for example, in the 1590s, as it became clear Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was too old to have a child and produce an heir, Shakespeare began writing history plays which obsess over the problem of an unclear succession. Shakespeare even wrote one history play, *Henry V*, that is proto-'Brechtian' in its use of a Chorus that interrupts, punctures and sometimes even contradicts, the action that is being played out on stage.

Remembering the history, the cultural restrictions the historical Lanier faced, and how often she has been misremembered, generates anger, something which is often imaged in *Emilia* in terms of fire; as the play closes with a rabble-rousing call to arms, Emilia 3, blazing with anger, exhorts the audience: 'If they try to burn you, may your fire be stronger than theirs so you can burn the whole fucking house down' (p. 75). The white-hot anger of this speech is palpable. A historical twist to this incandescent anger is that the house, Shakespeare's 'gaff' (p. 73), the original Globe playhouse did, in fact, burn down in 1613, during a performance of a history play by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *Henry VIII*. So when, in *Emilia* at the Globe, Eve was burnt as a witch, on a pyre made up of books, there was a ghosting of the fire that destroyed Shakespeare's 'gaff'. Meanwhile the burning of books invokes state censorship, as well as internalized self-censorship and the many, tiny ways of silencing dissent, of cancelling. The pyre that kills Eve offers a multi-layered image that is memorable, and this is more important than the historical 'fact' that in England witches were hanged not burnt. In yet another twist of history, Clare Perkins, who played Emilia 3, recorded a performance of this incendiary speech in 2020 – during the COVID lockdown in the UK – in response to the murder of George Floyd. This enabled *Emilia* to join in the enraged, lockdown-defying protests proclaiming that Black Lives Matter.

Another thematic concern in *Emilia* is the sense of belonging. After the death of her mother, the newly orphaned Emilia asks 'Where is home now?' (p. 13) and the play is very much 'about place' – in terms of geography, culture, class and gender – and the challenge of finding, or stepping out of, your place in society, your home (Rycroft 704). Mary Sidney objectifies Emilia as 'exotic' (literally 'from somewhere else'), and when Emilia is asked 'Where are you from?' her answer 'London' is not believed (p. 9). Questions about community, home and identity are raised when Emilia finds a seedpod while she is in deep grief for the death of her daughter Odilya. The seedpod is 'exotic', out of its natural place, it has travelled across the sea and up the river and is not native to the Bankside. However, the seedpod still has the potential for growth dormant within it, the possibility of new life. It looks to the future, and although Emilia is on an emotional precipice here, and nearly drowns, this is the point at which she begins to re-grow, once the washerwomen rescue her. Emilia settles into the washerwomen's community and the cluster of ideas around the lost daughter Odilya, the seed that must be buried but will grow metaphorically in the future, is vital in bringing Emilia back to life after the trauma of bereavement. The play particularly physicalizes the idea of painful new growth after profound loss, in the way that the transitions from Emilia 1 to 2 and Emilia 2 to 3 take place after bereavement: the first transition takes place when Odilya dies and the second happens after the death of Alphonso Lanier.

Dramatic techniques

Given that *Emilia* was commissioned for the Globe, it is not surprising that the play's dramaturgy responds to the particular staging challenges and opportunities offered by the stage layout in that theatre. At Shakespeare's Globe, performers and audiences share the same light and are visible to each other, and the thrust stage has two large, red, painted pillars onstage. It is hard to deploy much realistic scenery on the stage platform because of the sight lines; the audience are on three sides of the stage, so large scenic

pieces will risk blocking the view of one section of the audience or another.

> **MLM** *Emilia* was written as a bespoke piece of theatre for the Globe space and this massively influenced how I wrote it. For example, the open roof and proximity to the river meant that I was able to reference the elements and the weather, the performers were able to speak directly to the heavens at times. The space demands that you include the audience, they are the missing part of the play when you read it. The direct address actively invites them in and encourages them to be vocal and feel part of the action. Also in terms of the subject matter we are talking about someone who potentially could have had her work performed on the Globe stage when Shakespeare was predominant – we were literally reclaiming it for Emilia and her words. The space was intrinsic to how the play developed.

The Globe stage configuration encourages a presentational, anti-illusionistic style, which suits the exuberant anti-realism of *Emilia*. Other opportunities and challenges associated with 'Shakespeare's Globe' include the fact that a large part of the audience are exposed to the weather, which is unpredictable, and that this will affect the audience's mood. For the *Emilia* run, during late summer, warmth and sunshine could be expected but when it pours with rain, some groundlings will leave and go home. Meanwhile, planes can be heard overhead, as can boats on the Thames, and if a pigeon lands on the stage that is fine during a rambunctious comedy sequence; it would be less easy to accommodate during, for example, the burning of Eve.

The Globe also provides a particular context for *Emilia* being 'written to be performed by an all-female cast of diverse women' (p. xxix). Lloyd Malcolm asks in 'A note on the text' that if 'it is impossible to adhere to' the all-female casting approach 'then please cast against the "usual type". Be bold'. In advocating for an all-female cast, Lloyd Malcolm writes back to, even argues with, the playhouse practises of Shakespeare's day when all roles were played by men and boys. In the past, 'Shakespeare's Globe' has staged 'original practises' productions of Shakespeare's plays, which seek deliberately to evoke what is known about early modern theatre practises, including all-male casting. Since Phyllida Lloyd directed

an all-female *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Globe in 2003, the theatre has also staged several all-female productions of Shakespeare's plays. The current artistic director, Michelle Terry, works with 50/50 gender split. While such approaches counterpoint and critique the 'original practises', they also allow for metatheatrical games, that draw attention to the actuality of theatrical production, to be played. So, in *Emilia*, Lloyd Malcolm creates a moment of dizzying metatheatre, whereby the willow scene (4.3) from *Othello* is staged with women performers playing boy actors, who are playing Shakespeare's women characters; these 'boy actors' then denounce a woman, the enraged Emilia, for erupting onstage. This comically overloaded metatheatre also looks back to moments in Shakespeare's plays when boy actors, who would have played the young women characters (Viola, Rosalind, Portia) then have to dress up as young men (Cesario, Ganymede, Balthasar).

Shakespeare's Globe also provided a particularly resonant setting for the moment when Lloyd Malcolm's character Shakespeare identifies the theatre as his 'gaff' (p. 73). The theatre where *Emilia* premiered is indeed branded as 'Shakespeare's Globe', the 'gaff' where Shakespeare dominates, and in this theatre some of the lines that Lloyd Malcolm gives to her characters Emilia and Shakespeare, lines that are taken from Shakespeare's plays, would have been spoken many times before, whenever plays such as *Othello* or *The Taming of the Shrew* were being performed. While not everyone in the audience will spot the moment when *Emilia* begins (p. 36) collaging phrases from Shakespeare's bleak story of domestic violence, racism and envy, *Othello*, anyone who has studied *Othello* for A-level may well realize what is happening. Once *Emilia* transferred to the Vaudeville Theatre in the West End, the performance venue was less securely Shakespeare's 'gaff', but the ghostly presence of half remembered, half buried quotations from Shakespeare will still haunt the performance.

Production history

Because *Emilia* was commissioned for a very specific venue, with very specific spectator/performer relations, it is not surprising that

the play had to change when it was restaged at the Vaudeville, which is a proscenium arch theatre. Designer Joanna Scotcher retained thematic elements such as the emphasis on books, emblematic of the learning Emilia, unlike most early modern women, was able to access. However, the wooden O of the original Globe stage was evoked, not recreated, by strategies such as entries through, and interaction with, the end-on audience, and playing some action in the audience boxes on the side of the stage. Lloyd Malcolm revised the play text for the transfer, slimming it down and reducing the running time by around half an hour.

> **MLM** When the director, Nicole Charles, and I revised the script for performance in the West End we had to take into account the space would be very different – a proscenium arch. We still wanted the audience to feel included so we still staged moments in their space but we also had lighting and recorded sound to play with. I also was able to cut thirty minutes from the run time which I would have done in the original run but due to the limited rehearsal and preview times (and limited run of only 11 shows) we didn't have the time to do these cuts. I was very grateful to have the opportunity to do this for the West End transfer.

The next major revival of the play, at the Pop-Up Globe in Auckland, in 2020, offered similar staging opportunities to Shakespeare's Globe in London. The production, directed by Miriama McDowell, opened with a very large book – A.L. Rowse's book on Simon Forman – centre stage. This flipped open to reveal Emilia, ready to tell her story once she had slammed Rowse's book shut. Catherine Grealish's design featured large books throughout, while costume designer, Chantelle Gerrard, has the Emilias dressed in a shade of red that evoked *The Handmaid's Tale*'s – both the novel and the TV series – and its dissection of gender oppression. Unfortunately, the production, the last at the Pop-Up Globe, closed early because of the COVID pandemic, but reviews were positive, suggesting the production could have done good business.

Lloyd Malcolm's commitment to diversity in writing *Emilia* was stretched further in this production as Māori identity politics were added to the play's discussion of lost histories, suppressed voices