

Graudating Student Recital
Facets of Femininity in Historical Literature and Music
Cannon McClure, mezzo-soprano
Program Notes, Texts, and Translations

This recital was born out of my love for early English literature. With it, I want to experience characters from Shakespeare and Chaucer from another angle and invite my audience to do so as well. I particularly want to explore the many ways in which femininity is portrayed in this early literature and the many facets and forms that femininity can take. In this recital, we will explore the characters of Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*), the Wife of Bath (*The Canterbury Tales*), Ophelia (*Hamlet*), the Prioress (*The Canterbury Tales*), and Helena and Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). In Lady Macbeth, we see the concepts of revenge and feminine rage, but also the consequences of letting oneself be ruled by those emotions. In the Wife of Bath, we see feminine agency and feminine sexual power. On the other hand, in Ophelia, we see a victim of the patriarchy, a woman who was unwitting collateral damage in men's schemes and later, in her insanity, forced them to reckon with their mistakes. On a lighter note, in the Prioress, we see a vain, vapid woman overly concerned with her appearance without any substance behind her. Finally, in Helena and Hermia, we see a version of feminine friendship, a relationship that contains at times either unwavering support or extreme jealousy and is tested by their respective relationships with the men around them. During the recital, I invite you to take paper and pencil, your phone, or simply notice in your mind similarities between these characters and others that you know, or perhaps people or relationships from your own life.

Lady Macbeth

La vendetta (1651)

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Sarah Kiel, violin
Ambrose Philipek, violin
Guinevere Conner, viola da gamba
Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

What drew me to this piece was the juxtaposition of the violent nature of the text and the flippant air of the setting. While the text of this piece, as is typical of the time period, reflects the rage of a woman scorned, I chose it to represent Lady Macbeth's attitude while she plots to kill King Duncan. Like the speaker in this piece, Lady Macbeth revels in the thought of getting what she deserves (or what she thinks she deserves). Barbara Strozzi's music often deals with gender roles and either their maintenance or subversion. Her adoptive father, Giulio Strozzi, arranged for her to be taught by Francesco Cavalli and brought her before some of Venice's wealthiest and most educated patrons of the arts in his private society, the *Accademia degli Unisoni*. As one of the few, or perhaps the only, woman in her social circles, and as one of the most prolifically published composers of secular music of her time, man or woman, she frequently brings a uniquely sarcastic feminine perspective to her music and the well-trod topics of love and revenge.

La vendetta è un dolce affetto,
il dispetto vuol dispetto,
il rifarsi è un gran diletto.

Revenge is a sweet thing,
one ill turn deserves another,
and getting back is a great delight!

Vane son scuse e ragioni
per placar donna oltraggiata,
non pensar che ti perdoni!
Donna mai non vendicata
pace ha in bocca e guerra in petto.

In vain are excuses and reasons
to try to placate an outraged woman;
don't believe that she will forgive you!
The woman that has never taken revenge
has peace in her mouth and war in her heart.

Non perdona in vendicarsi
all'amante più gradito
che l'adora e vuol rifarsi
quand'il fiero insuperbito
verso lei perd'il rispetto.

When taking revenge, she won't forgive
even the most welcome lover
who adores her and wants to make up
when the fierce and proud fellow
loses respect for her.
Trans. Candace A. Magner

Where shall I fly
from *Hercules* (1744)

G. F. Handel (1685-1759)

Sarah Kiel, violin
Ambrose Philipek, violin
Julian Bernal, viola
Guinevere Conner, bass
Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

In this piece we find Lady Macbeth after the deed has been done and she faces insanity reckoning with the consequences of killing Duncan. In *Hercules*, Dejaniera is wracked with jealousy when her husband Hercules brings home the beautiful, much younger, princess Iole as a prisoner of war. To combat this, she wraps him in a cloak given to her by the dying centaur Nessus with the instruction to put it on Hercules if she ever doubted his fidelity. However, instead of making him faithful, the cloak was coated in poison and subjects him to an agonizing death. In “Where shall I fly,” Dejaniera grapples with the consequences of her jealousy, much the way Lady Macbeth does after killing King Duncan. Much as Lady Macbeth sees the “damned spot” of blood forever tainting her hand, Dejaniera sees the furies coming to whisk her away to the underworld of torment and pain.

Where shall I fly? Where hide this guilty head?
Oh fatal error of misguided love!
Oh cruel Nessus, how art thou revenged!
Wretched I am! By me Alcides dies!
These impious hands have sent my injured lord
untimely to the shades!
Let me be mad!
Chain me, ye furies, to your iron beds.
And lash my guilty ghosts with whips of
scorpions!

See! See! They come! Alecto with her snakes,
Megaera fell, and black Tisiphone!
See the dreadful sisters rise.
Their baneful presence taints the skies!
See the snaky whips they bear!
What yellings rend my tortured ear!

The Wife of Bath

Judith (1708)

Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729)

Sarah Kiel, violin

Thomas Conrad, viola da gamba

Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

While the parallels between the Wife of Bath and the biblical story of Judith are more oblique, there is still a connection to be made. Throughout her prologue and tale, the Wife of Bath emphasizes the concept of feminine autonomy and sexual freedom, and Judith uses her sexuality to seduce and kill Holofernes and save her people. Additionally, the widowed Judith remains unmarried for the rest of her life, which is an interesting counterexample to the Wife of Bath, who was married five times. While they used opposite means, both used their state of matrimony (or lack thereof) to retain power: the Wife of Bath through accumulating her husbands' wealth, and Judith through retaining her agency by remaining unmarried. Additionally, the way Jacquet de la Guerre exaggerates the irony of a woman, the "weaker" sex, orchestrating the downfall and death of the robust, soldierly Holofernes emphasizes the Wife of Bath's point about feminine power over men. Judith's seduction and triumph over Holofernes after the might of many men had tried and failed to defeat him proves the Wife of Bath's point about the power of feminine sovereignty.

Tandis que de la faim où la guerre la livre,
Bethulie alloit expirer,
Le Cruel qui l'assiege avoit fait preparer
Un superbe festin où Judith doit le suivre.
Sans elle il ne sçauroit plus vivre,
Et déjà son amour ose se déclarer.

Whilst in the hunger to which war brought it
Bethulia was going to perish,
The Cruel One who assailed it prepared
A glorious feast, to which Judith must follow him.
Without her he might no longer live,
And already his love dares declare itself.

La seule victoire
Me rendoit heureux,
Et sans vous la gloire
Eût borné mes vœux.

Victory alone
Used to make me happy,
And without you glory
Would have been the limit of my desires.

Mais la gloire est vaine
Près de vos attraits,
J'aime mieux ma chaîne,
Que tous ses bienfaits.

But glory is futile
Compared to your charms,
I prefer my chain
To all of its blessings.

Enfoncez le trait qui le blesse
Judith, jettez sur luy les regards les plus doux,
Hâtez, hâtez l'yvresse,
Qui doit le livrer à vos coups.

Plunge in the arrow that wounds him
Judith, cast upon him the most caressing glances,
Hasten, hasten the intoxication
That will deliver him to your blows.

Ne le voyez-vous pas charmé de sa conquête,
Qui boit l'amour & le vin à longs traits ?
Mais vainement l'Impie au triomphe s'apprête,
Déjà de ses pavots épais,
Le sommeil a couvert sa tête.

Do you not see him, charmed by his conquest,
Imbibing love and wine in long sips,
But in vain the Infidel prepares to triumph,
Already with its heavy poppies
Slumber has bestrewn his head.

C'en est fait le repos, le silence, la nuit ;
Vous livrent à l'envi cette grande victime,

It is over, now rest, silence, night;
Willingly deliver to you this great victim;

Armez-vous, Armez-vous & d'un bras
magnanime,
Eteignez dans son sang l'amour qui l'a séduit.

Judith implore encor la celeste puissance,
Son bras prêt à fraper demeure suspendu ;
Elle fremit de la vengeance,
Soutenez son cœur éperdu.
O Ciel ! qui l'inspirez, soyez son assurance !

Le coup est achevé,
Quelle gloire éclatante,
Judith est triomphante,
Israël est sauvé !

Pour ce Guerrier trop tendre,
Il n'est plus de reveil,
La mort vient de le prendre
Dans les bras du sommeil.

Courez, courez Judith, que rien ne vous arrête
Un peuple allarmé vous attend ;
Allez sur vos remparts arborer cette tête
Le présage assuré d'un triomphe plus grand.

Chantons, Chantons la gloire,
Du seul maitre des Rois,
Non, ce n'est qu'à ses Loix
Qu'obeit la victoire.

Son pouvoir souverain
Triomphe des obstacles ;
Et la plus foible main
Suffit pour ses miracles.

Arm yourself, arm yourself, and with a generous
hand
Extinguish in his blood the love that seduced him.

Judith implores again the celestial powers,
Her arm, ready to strike, remains upraised;
She shudders with vengeance,
Uphold her distraught heart.
O Heaven that inspires her, sustain her!

The blow is dealt,
What dazzling glory,
Judith is triumphant,
Israel is saved!

For this too-tender Warrior
There is no more waking,
Death has taken him
Into the arms of slumber.

Run, run, Judith, may nothing deter you
An alarmed people expects you;
Go display this head on your ramparts
A certain harbinger of a greater triumph.

Sing we, sing we the glory
Of the sole ruler of Kings;
No, it is but his Law
For victory to obey.

His sovereign power
Triumphs over obstacles;
And the weakest hand
Suffices for his miracles.

Trans. Veronika Anissimova

The Prioress

La sol fa mi re do (1651)

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Kevin Lubin, harpsichord
Guinevere Conner, viola da gamba

The wordplay on solfege syllables is what initially drew me to this piece. After so much sadness and madness, the recital needed a few moments of levity. There are so many layers to this piece: the surface level being the speaker deciphering the singer's solfege-speak and double entendre. The speaker repeats the solfege syllables verbatim then, upon repeating them, deciphers their double meaning. The deeper layer, however is Strozzi's commentary on the perception of female singers (and some say Strozzi herself) at the time. She interrogates of how much (or little) that perception is a result of the actions of the women themselves and how much is a result of men and their feelings of entitlement towards female singers, their talent, and their performances. There is an argument to be made that the Prioress' obsession with the way others perceive her (especially to the detriment of the substance of her character) is a result of that same male entitlement because, after all, who established the standards of beauty and decorum to which the Prioress so desperately aspires?

La mia donna perché canta
non vuol dir né sì, né no,
ma parlar sempre si vanta
con la sol fa mi re do.
S'io le chieggo ch'al mio cor
voglia dar mercede un dì
pria che spiri nel dolor,
mi risponde don fa mi.

My lady, since she sings,
does not wish to say yes or no;
but continually boasts of speaking
with "la sol fa me re do."
If I ask her if she plans
to grant mercy to my heart one day
before I expire from grief,
she answers "don fa mi [give me a gift]".

Mai non canta s'io non conto
né la voce trova il tuon,
né a sonar lo stile ha pronto
se non sente d'oro il suon.
Insegnando ognor mi va
che s'a due cantar vorrò
acciò ch'ella venga al fa
intonar conviemmi il do.

She never sings without my paying up
nor is in good voice;
nor is ready to pluck her strings
if she does not hear the sound of gold.
She instructs me continually
that if I wish to sing "duets" with her
before she arrives at "fa" [the deed]
I'd better give her "do" [a gift].

Di strascini ognora ornato
vuol mirarsi il vago pie'
ed in canto figurato
sempre intona il mi fa re.
Per mostrar quant'ella sa
passegiando fa così,
suol tenersi con do la
ed andare in do re mi.

She wishes to show off her lovely feet
in elegant dance steps;
and in ornamented song
always intones "mi fa- re" [do it for me].
Thus to show what she knows
she goes about (sings passage-work) like this:
she usually sustains "con- do- la" [to comfort her]
and moves "in- do- re- mi" [cover me with gold].

Io credeva ch'il suo canto
fosse fatto per mi sol,
ma suoi vendersi all'incanto
a colui che spender vuol,
tanto che tra noi dirò
ch'ognun canta quel che sa:

I believed that her song
was made for "mi sol" [me alone],
but she sells them at auction
to the highest bidder;
so that among us we say
that everyone sings what he knows:

io de' gonzi il mi sol do
lei de' cucchi il re mi fa.

I, that of a fool are "mi sol- do" [my wages];
she, of cuckolds the "Re mi fa" [the king makes
me]

Trans. Pamela Dellal

I must complain (1603)

John Dowland (1562-1626)

Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

Similarly, this piece also lampoons man's jealousy. In it, the speaker laments that this beautiful woman "hath more beauty than becomes the chaste." This mirrors the Prioress's obsession with appearances rather than prioritizing her piety and moral character. However, as the speaker in this particular piece acknowledges, the root of their problems comes not just from the lady's beauty, but also from their own jealousy and, they acknowledge, if they were to "wish she were less fair, that were repugnant to [their] own desires," acknowledging their own superficiality.

I must complain, yet do enjoy, enjoy my love,
She is too fair, too rich in beauty's parts
Thence is my grief for nature while she strove
With all her graces and divinest arts,
To form her too, too beautiful of hue
She had no leisure, she had no leisure,
no leisure left to make her true.

Should I aggrieved wish she were less, she were less fair,
that were repugnant to my own desires,
She is admired, new suitors still repair,
That kindles daily love's forgetful fires,
Rest jealous thoughts, and thus resolve at last,
She hath more beauty, she hath more beauty,
more beauty than becomes the chaste.

Ophelia

Che t'ho fatt'io (1618)

Francesca Caccini (1587-1641)

Guinevere Conner, viola da gamba
Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

This piece represents Ophelia's confusion at Hamlet's treatment of her throughout the play. Hamlet projects his insecurity and distrust of others around him onto Ophelia, rejecting and berating her when she, in reality, knows little of what is going on politically behind the scenes. Because of this, he rejects her affections without explanation, driving her to madness. The text of this piece describes (presumably a man's) unrequited love, a typical topic of this period, but it's easy to imagine Ophelia saying this to Hamlet as he rejects her. Francesca Caccini was similarly prolific to Strozzi, and had a similar upbringing. Caccini was trained by her father, Giulio Caccini, also a famous composer, and later became court composer, voice teacher, and singer to the Medici. Her status as a prominent female composer supported and was supported by Tuscany's regent, Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine, and the growing culture of women in positions of power in that region at that time.

Che t'ho fatt'io
che tanto brami
la morte mia perché io non t'ami
non sai ch'io vivo sol del tuo splendore?
Ahi, duro core, ohimé, piega'l desio
Che t'ho fatt'io?

What have I done to you
That you so desire
My death, in order that I may not love you?
Do you not know that I live only by your radiance?
Ah, cruel heart, alas, give up your desire;
What have I done to you?

Che vanto avrai
ch'io mi consume
al chiaro sol de tuoi bei lumi?
Deh volgi al mio dolor pietoso il guardo,
ch'io moro ed ardo ahi se morir mi fai
Che vanto avrai?

What satisfaction can it give you
That I waste away
Under the clear sun of your lovely eyes?
Come, turn your merciful gaze upon my suffering,
For I die, and burn; alas, if you cause my death,
What satisfaction will it give you?

D'un alma altera
che crudeltate
pregio non sia d'alta beltate,
ma di fedele amor, di pura fede
empia mercede, ahi, cor di cruda fera
D'un alma altera.

Let a haughty soul's
Evil cruelty
Not be the pride of great beauty
But for constant love and pure faith
The cruel payment (alas, of a cruel heart),
From a haughty soul.

Sprezzi amore,
ingrate seno,
già non voler ch'io venga meno,
gradisci almen ch'io t'ami, e quel tormento
ch'io per te sento, ahi dispietato core
se sprezzi amore.

If you disdain love,
Ungrateful heart,
Do not wish my death;
Enjoy at least my love, and that torment
That I feel for you (alas, pitiless heart),
If you disdain love.

Trans. Ronald James Alexander and Richard Savino

Bess of Bedlam (1683)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Guinevere Conner, viola da gamba
Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

This piece mirrors Ophelia's descent into madness. In it, Bess returns to her lover's grave but is driven mad with grief, flitting in and out of reality. In her madness, Bess talks to animals and imagines herself surrounded by fairies and furies, but in the end still experiences flashes of lucidity in which she is able to comment insightfully on the state of the world. Purcell uses dramatic shifts in tempo, meter, and affect to illustrate Bess's fractured mind and the instability of her thoughts. This mirrors Ophelia's madness by the end of *Hamlet*, in which she is found wandering the castle singing nonsensical songs about nature and love, much like this piece.

From silent shades, and the Elysian groves,
Where sad departed spirits mourn their loves;
From crystal streams, and from that country where
Jove crowns the fields with flowers all the year,
Poor senseless Bess, cloth'd in her rags and folly,
Is come to cure her lovesick melancholy.
Bright Cynthia kept her revels late,
While Mab, the Fairy Queen, did dance,
And Oberon did sit in state
When Mars at Venus ran his lance.
In yonder cowslip lies my dear,
Entomb'd in liquid gems of dew;
Each day I'll water it with a tear,
Its fading blossom to renew.
For since my love is dead and all my joys are gone,
Poor Bess for his sake,
A garland will make,
My music shall be a groan.
I'll lay me down and die
Within some hollow tree,
The rav'n and cat,
The owl and bat,
Shall warble forth my elegy.

Did you not see my love as he pass'd by you?
His two flaming eyes, if he come nigh you,
They will scorch up your hearts?
Ladies, beware ye,
Lest he should dart a glance that may ensnare ye.
Hark! I hear old Charon bawl,
His boat he will no longer stay;
The Furies lash their whips and call,
'Come, come away.'
Poor Bess will return to the place whence she
came,
Since the world is so mad she can hope for no
cure;
For love's grown a bubble, a shadow, a name,
Which fools do admire and wise men endure.
Cold and hungry am I grown,
Ambrosia will I feed upon,
Drink nectar still and sing.
Who is content
Does all sorrow prevent,
And Bess in her straw,
Whilst free from the law,
In her thoughts is as great as a King.

Helena and Hermia

Fiera lite (1636)

Nicolò Fontei (d. ~1647)

Katja Pennypacker, soprano
Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

With this piece, I wanted to imagine how Helena and Hermia might have complained to each other about their individual struggles with love. Additionally, it's interesting to imagine how *A Midsummer Night's Dream* could have played out differently had Helena and Hermia stuck together and forsworn Demetrius and Lysander entirely. Also notable is that Fontei, like the Strozzi family, was a member of the *Accademia degli Unisoni*, and wrote this piece (and others) explicitly for Barbara to sing.

Fiera lite hoggi è tra noi.
Ciascun narra i danni suoi,
ciascun piange il ben perduto;
l'hà però questi goduto,
io non hebbi mai tal sorte.
A chi peggio di noi fece la morte?
Amor giudice non sà
dir di noi chi peggio stà.
Ambedue son pene eguali,
ambedue son due gran mali.
S'il gioire e'l non gioire
egualmente è gran martire,
è meglio non amar alcuna.
Se l'amar è cosa dura,
esser vogl'io nell' amorse imprese
Soldato di ventura,
Cavalier di fortuna.
Sì, sì, ch'è meglio non amar alcuna.

We have a fierce dispute between us today.
Each tells of his sufferings,
each laments his lost good;
he for having enjoyed these things,
I, for never having such a fate.
What worse things could death do to us?
Love, as judge, cannot say
which of us has it the worst.
Both are equal suffering,
both are two great evils.
If to enjoy and not to enjoy
are equally great torments,
it is better not to love anyone.
If to love is a hard thing,
I wish to be, in the enterprise of Love,
a soldier of fortune,
a mercenary.
Yes, yes, it's better not to love anyone.

Trans. Pamela Dellal

No, resistance is but vain
from *The Maid's Last Prayer* (1693)

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Katja Pennypacker, soprano
Kevin Lubin, harpsichord

To me, the melodrama of this piece reminds me of the endings of Shakespeare's comedies, when the characters give in to love and "all's well that ends well." It's also an interesting bookend when juxtaposed against "La vendetta," which dealt with anger with a cheerful melody, while this piece deals with love with a melancholy affect. The play for which this piece was composed as incidental music, *The Maid's Last Prayer*, depicts a variety of women using their feminine wiles to manipulate the men around them into doing their bidding, for good or for ill. The contrast between the total control those women have over their respective men and the alternating moments of power and helplessness that Helena and Hermia experience in the face of the fairies' (and the men's) trickery is an interesting one, and a fitting one for this recital.

No, no, no, no, Resistance is but vain,
And only adds new weight to Cupid's Chain:
A Thousand Ways, a Thousand Arts,
The Tyrant knows to Captivate our Hearts:
Sometimes he Sighs imploys, and sometimes tries
The Universal Language of the Eyes:
The Fierce, with Fierceness he destroys:
The Weak with Tenderness decoys.
He kills the Strong with Joy, the Weak with Pain:
No, no, no, no, Resistance is but vain.