

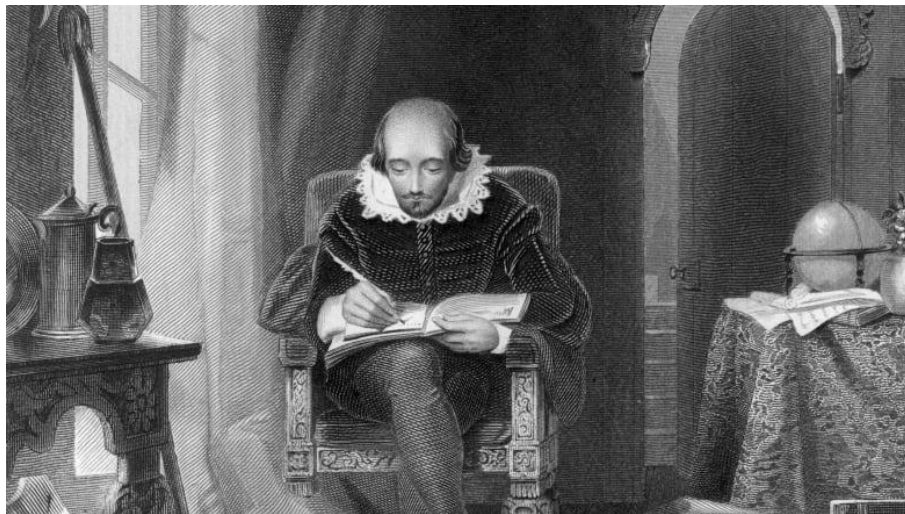
Podcast link <https://youtu.be/dNhxFiaolGM>



## 'Liberate your mind': Exploring sex and gender in Shakespeare

English professor suggests embracing the Bard's 'open-endedness to ambiguity' in his plays

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Be it love and lust or sex and gender, Shakespeare's plays are fraught with blurred lines, confusion, and deceit. Actors, directors and scholars agree that such ambiguity is part of what makes his work so resonant in our own times. (Edward Gooch Collection/Getty Images )

**Ideas Podcast - From Page to Stage: Exploring sex and gender in Shakespeare's work** 53:59

<https://youtu.be/dNhxFiaolGM>



*This episode was produced by Philip Coulter.*

From the script on page to the theater production, a good play can leave the audience with divergent interpretations — and rarely is anyone ever entirely right or wrong.

And if the playwright is William Shakespeare, a play can mean a never-ending discussion that continues centuries after he wrote.

Take Shakespeare's use of the double entendre in *Twelfth Night* — Viola in disguise as a man, and mourning her supposedly dead brother, saying "I am all the daughters of my father's house, and all the brothers too" — a technique that scholar Alexa Alice Joubin says prompts an ambiguity that compels people to think.

"I would say we can — and should — embrace more of that open-endedness to ambiguity rather than pinning down the surface of the text," said Joubin.

"The beauty of imaginative literature, especially Shakespeare, is a lesson in ambiguity. Unfortunately, people embrace that less and less, and I've often told my students that's a huge problem, especially when you approach imaginative literature with literal mindedness — you're not willing or able to liberate your mind."

From the Stratford Festival, *IDEAS* producer Philip Coulter moderates a discussion about the slippery process of interpreting Shakespeare, specifically about the minefields of sex and gender. Panelists Jyotsna Singh, Alexa Alice Joubin and actors Maev Beaty and Graham Abbey, along with director Jonathan Goad, explore three Shakespeare plays: *Twelfth Night*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.



From left to right, Rex Reid plays Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Mina Tarkamova portrays Maria and Leslie French is Feste in a 1942 International Opera production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. (Tunbridge/Tunbridge-Sedgwick Pictorial Press/Getty Images )

## Guests in this episode:

**[Maev Beaty](#)** is an actor, writer, creator and voice-over artist. At Stratford, she's played Goneril in *King Lear*; Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Kate in *The Last Wife* by Kate Hennig, and Gertrude in *Hamlet*.

**Graham Abbey** has been a leading actor and director at the Stratford Festival for 25 seasons. He plays Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Mark Meddle in *London Assurance* this year. He is also the founder and artistic director of the Groundling Theatre Company based in Toronto.

**[Jyotsna Singh](#)** is a professor and researcher of early modern literature and culture, including Shakespeare, at Michigan State University.

**[Alexa Alice Joubin](#)** is a writer and is a professor of English, theatre, international affairs, and East Asian languages and cultures at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

**Jonathan Goad** is a director and actor who has played the roles of Henry VIII, Atticus Finch, Brutus and Hamlet at the Stratford Festival.