



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2024 Study Guide



Female Characters in Shakespeare's Plays

There are many exciting and important female roles in Shakespeare's plays, but there are fewer of these roles than their male counterparts. There are 7 times as many male roles in Shakespeare plays as there are female roles.

Shakespeare's female characters typically have half the number of lines as male characters do. For example, Rosalind, the lead female character in *As You Like It*, has the most lines of any female character in Shakespeare's plays, but has only half as many lines as Hamlet does, the largest male role.

How familiar are you with Shakespeare's female roles and the plays they are in?

Match each character to their Shakespeare play.

Rosalind;	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
Viola:	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
Cordelia:	<i>Hamlet</i>
Portia:	<i>As You Like It</i>
Desdemona:	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
Ophelia:	<i>Twelfth Night</i>
Katherina:	<i>Othello</i>
Beatrice:	<i>King Lear</i>

Robin Goodrin Nordli as Emilia in *Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Virgins to Villains

by Robin Goodrin Nordli



Robin Goodrin Nordli

Robin Goodrin Nordli

- Robin performed in plays throughout elementary school, junior high, and high school.
- When she was 10 years old, she borrowed her sister's *The Sound of Music* album and wrote and performed the whole play based on the synopsis on the album's jacket cover. She had not seen the show.
- Robin has previously performed and written a solo show at OSF, *Bard Babes*, which she staged in 2013 in the Angus Bowmer Theatre.
- This year is her 27th season at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. In that time she has performed 79 roles in 61 productions. Some of the roles she has performed include Lady Macbeth, Margaret (see section on Margaret of Anjou), and Rosalind from *As You Like It*.



Repertory Theatre

A repertory theatre has two or more plays being performed during a week, typically using a resident company.

The Oregon Shakespeare is a repertory theater and produces up to 11 plays a season.

More information about repertory theatre can be found here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repertory_theatre

OSF Elizabethan Theatre 6/7/06

Photo: T Charles Erickson

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, 2012.

Robin Goodrin Nordli, stepsister in

Medea Macbeth Cinderella. Photo: Jenny Graham

Margaret of Anjou

Margaret of Anjou was a real Queen of England that Shakespeare included in his history plays *Henry VI, Parts One, Two, and Three*, and *Richard III*. She begins these plays as a young, innocent woman, and by the last play she is seen as a villain seeking revenge on the men who tried to take her husband's throne.

More on Margaret of Anjou can be found here and elsewhere:
https://www.englishmonarchs.co.uk/plantagenet_26.html



Before the Play

Dame Judith Anderson

In high school, Robin's mother bought her a ticket to see *Hamlet* in a downtown Chicago theatre. The role of Hamlet was played by an Australian actress named Dame Judith Anderson.

Dame Judith Anderson was born in 1897 in Adelaide, South Australia, and passed away in Santa Barbara, California, in 1992.



She first performed on stage at the Theatre Royal in Sydney when she was 17 years old. She made her American Broadway debut at 25 when she performed in *Up the Stairs* in 1922.

She was also a film actor. One of her more notable roles was as Mrs. Danvers in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca*.

Beginning in 1970, at the age of 73, she played Hamlet with a production that toured throughout the United States.

After the Play

1. Which female roles in Shakespeare's plays would you consider virginal? Villainous? What attributes do these characters have that would make them seem virginal or villainous?
2. What is appealing about playing the role of Hamlet? Why does Robin find the role of Hamlet so appealing? What might be revealed about a character when it is played by a person of the opposite gender than it is written?
3. What does Robin learn in her journey with Shakespeare's women?

Marguerite d'Anjou,
reine d'Angleterre
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Robin Goodrin Nordli
as the White Queen,
in *Alice in Wonderland*.
Photo by Jenny Graham.



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