World

Naked Shakespeare whips up a big storm

Will Pavia

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The sun was sinking behind the tower blocks of the Upper West Side on Thursday when a young woman came over the brow of the highest hill in Central Park. Marissa Roper wore black army boots and her blonde hair was tied back with strands of red, green and purple cloth. A tangle of cords and bracelets covered each wrist. Otherwise she was naked.

She seemed to be in some distress, clutching her head and talking of a storm and a shipwreck in which all were lost. "Oh, the cry did knock against my very heart," she wailed.

Below, in the lee of the hill, 500 people sat on benches and mats staring up at her.

This was Shakespeare in the Park, but not as we know it: the cast were all women, and nearly all of them were naked.

The show had been organised by members of a female book club that meets, topless, in city parks to discuss fiction and to uphold an oft-forgotten ruling from 1993 in which a state judge acknowledged that women have just as much right as men to be topless in public. They hope to "de-sexualise" the female torso; to "free the nipple", as another topless activist once said. They thought a naked performance of *The Tempest* might advance their cause.

New York state law says that restrictions on public nudity should not apply to breastfeeding mothers, or to actors performing in a play. "Nothing could be clearer," said Alethea Andrews, 29, an office worker and photographer, who played one of Prospero's band of spirits. "We are hoping to make it better known through our performance."

The authorities were initially dubious. Actors had in the past taken off their clothes in the park's theatre — "but they had never done it out in the open", said Charles Ardai, a writer of mystery novels and supporter of the topless book club, who bankrolled and produced the show. "They were worried about passersby being disturbed. We explained that the drama in this case was entirely non-sexual."

Another person who had concerns about the performance was Janice Roper, Marissa's mother. "I tried to talk her out of it," she said. "I know about pictures on the internet — what if she wants to go for a job that's not acting?"

Marissa, who played the part of Miranda, told her mother that Shakespeare was the highest form of art. Any photograph, she said, "wouldn't be a sexual picture. People will sexualise you if you wear a tight shirt or a bathing suit."

Her mother, who runs a small PR firm in Maryland, still looked troubled. "She's only 19," she said.

The family had fretted for Marissa when she left for New York, straight out of school, to try to make it as an actor. Now here she was standing naked on top of a hill in Central Park.

The cast had held a topless rehearsal in the park a day earlier. "There were two guys who I guess really didn't get it — they were harassing us," Ms Roper said. "We were being objectified. I was like, 'This is not the point of what we are doing'."

On Thursday evening, however, the handful of walkers who happened along the path barely broke their stride as they passed women sitting naked in the low branches of a tree, and blithe spirits in bodypaint dancing on the grass.

As for the audience, many said that they steadily forgot that the actors were naked as the plot thickened. There were some, however, who would admit that they had been attracted by the thought of seeing a lot of naked women.

"I probably wouldn't have gone to an all-male performance of *The Tempest*," said Ozlo Gadleski, 53, who came straight from his shift as a doctor's assistant in a nearby hospital.

It reminded him of things that he had seen at the Burning Man festival in California. "The nudity was actually just a way to keep my interest," he said. "I had a hard time grasping a lot of the story, but I loved it."

Parents in well-to-do parts of New York are complaining of a new cost they now feel obliged to meet for the sake of their children. Private tutors, once regarded as optional, are becoming de rigueur. "They charge $350 an hour," a mother of three complained to me. "But then everyone else does it so you feel you have to."

Some parents are prepared to take an even bolder step, cutting out the child altogether by hiring a college graduate to complete their little darling's homework. A financier from Lower Manhattan told the *New York Post* that his daughter was "incredibly stressed out and stretched thin" by a multitude of extra-curricular engagements.

"We all have assistants, right?" he said. "I explained to my daughter it was the same thing."

PS Donald Trump's derogatory statements about "flat-chested" women would offend female voters. So said Ed Rendell, former governor of Pennsylvania and a staunch Hillary Clinton supporter. If only he had stopped there. Instead he kept talking, revealing ingrained sexism to be a problem for both parties. "There are probably more ugly women in America than attractive women," he said. "People take that stuff personally."

White police chief ousted after killing

Boer Deng Washington

The white police chief of San Francisco has been replaced by his black deputy after a series of shootings of ethnic minorities by officers.

Greg Suhr was forced to resign by the mayor, Ed Lee, hours after a black woman was killed by a white officer in the impoverished Bayview neighbourhood. It was the third shooting of a black or Latino San Franciscan since December.

The victim was a 27-year-old woman suspected of stealing a car. In December a black man carrying a knife was shot by police in the same neighbourhood, where three quarters of residents are from ethnic minorities.

Mr Suhr was said to have been spearheading "meaningful" reforms in the beleaguered police department, which is under federal investigation for racial bias. He will be replaced in the interim by his deputy, Toney Chaplin.

Rev Amos C Brown, head of the local chapter of the country's largest black civil rights group, said that Mr Suhr had been made a scapegoat.

Calls for Mr Suhr's removal had increased after racist text messages sent by officers were made public last month. He is the third police chief of a major US city to be forced out over poor race relations in the past year, after similar tensions in Baltimore and Chicago.

Clinton's right-hand woman handles her own sex scandal

Will Pavia

Fraught and seemingly private conversations between a disgraced politician and his wife were shown in cinemas across New York last night, in a new documentary that could yet help shape this year's presidential race.

The politician on screen was Anthony Weiner, the former congressman and New York mayoral candidate famous for sending nude photographs to women he had never met. Yet there was perhaps even more interest in his wife, Huma Abedin, who is now vice-chairwoman of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

Mr Weiner's penchant for sexting first emerged in 2011 after he inadvertently sent a lewd picture of himself to his many Twitter followers.

He resigned from Congress in the summer of 2011. Two summers later, he mounted what was meant to be his comeback, a run for City Hall. Surging in the polls, his prospects were abruptly wrecked when it emerged that he had sent more inappropriate messages to a number of women, after he resigned from Congress, under the pseudonym Carlos Danger.

Throughout both scandals, Ms Abedin remained a dignified and perfectly coiffed enigma at his side. At the time, observers wondered if she was suffering from Stockholm syndrome. In

Huma Abedin was advised to stop appearing at events with her husband

Weiner, however, Mr Weiner suggests that she was part of the reason that he returned to politics, two years after his resignation from Congress. "She was very eager to get back the life I took from her," he says. The film suggests that staff were eager to work for Mr Weiner, in part because they believed that his wife would be running Ms Clinton's election campaign.

When the Carlos Danger scandal broke, Mr Weiner is seen asking his aides for privacy. Surprisingly, however, the film-maker is allowed to keep shooting. Mr Weiner turns to his wife. Did she happen to remember "the timing" of his second flurry of sexual exchanges with other women? he asks.

"It's when you and I were talking about getting separated," she replies.

The film shows a meeting he held at his home to allow staff to vent their frustration. Afterwards, as his tearful press officer, Barbara Morgan, prepares to leave, Ms Abedin asks her to put on a brave face. "Those photographers are still outside," she says. "So, you will look happy." Away from the campaign staff, however, Ms Abedin quietly says her life has become "a nightmare".

The film also makes clear what many had suspected: that other members of Ms Clinton's would-be campaign team felt uneasy at Ms Abedin appearing at events alongside her husband, because of the parallels some might draw to Mrs Clinton's own choice to stand by her husband after his own sex scandals.

Though Ms Abedin initially put herself in front of the cameras, reading a statement in support of her husband, the film suggests that she is advised by Philippe Reines, a Clinton aide, to stop appearing at his campaign events. She declines to accompany him on polling day, in spite of his plea that this would probably be the last political campaign of his life. Instead we see him taking their son Jordan, who is not quite two, into the scrum of reporters. As Mr Weiner casts his vote and smiles for the cameras, Jordan begins to wail.

Chechen hard man in appeal for his lost cat

Russia

Tom Parfitt Moscow

He is a pitiless strongman who rules his Russian republic with an iron fist. Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of Chechnya, is known for his menagerie and likes to exude machismo by tussling with the larger of his beasts.

Now the 39-year-old autocrat has issued a softer message — pleading for help to find his lost pussycat. "Our cat has disappeared without trace," he wrote on his popular Instagram account. "Guests always said that it looks a lot like a little tiger cub."

The post was accompanied by a picture of Mr Kadyrov cradling the animal in his arms. "It disappeared about ten days ago," he said, adding: "Now we [have] started to get seriously worried. Maybe it's with someone not far away. A person might not know how to contact the owners. I'm sure no one needs someone else's cat. We'd be grateful for information. Thanks in advance."

It is not the first time that an animal has appeared on the Chechen leader's account. He has been pictured with his pet crocodile and one of his racehorses. Three years ago, he posted images of himself with the actress Elizabeth Hurley clutching a white kitten.

Mr Kadyrov's militia have been accused of numerous human rights abuses, including torture and kidnapping.