

Notes on the 2022 Revised Edition

A Note on Casting for the Revised Edition

I AM MY OWN WIFE requires a performer of enormous vocal and physical dexterity, who can play not only Charlotte von Mahlsdorf but over thirty additional characters with clarity and nuance. It is incredibly impactful—and true to Charlotte’s enduring ethos—if theaters are able to cast an actor who is LGBTQ+, and—more specifically—trans or nonbinary. This will inform the text in profound, even political ways, giving it added depth and relevance. Sometimes, however, it may not be possible, due to the local talent pool or the region where the play is in production. (In Eastern Europe, for example, where the play is frequently performed, it is both impractical and unsafe.) Over the course of the play’s long history, many cis-male performers have brought Charlotte’s story vividly to life, especially in places it might not otherwise be told. Nevertheless, I urge all theaters considering a production of the play (certainly those in the United States) to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding casting with leaders in their local trans communities.

A Note on Charlotte’s Nomenclature in the Revised Edition

Charlotte von Mahlsdorf evolved her ideas about gender, gender expression, sexuality, and sexual preference in the early half of the 20th Century. The German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld was a profound influence upon her, and many of her notions were drawn from his seismic 1910 work *Die Transvestiten*, or *The Transvestites*. As a result, her vocabulary around these issues differs markedly from our own. In fact, she frequently said, “Ich bin nicht transexual; ich bin Transvestite.” (In English: “I am not transexual; I am a transvestite.”) Now, both of those words have fallen out of favor. But Charlotte was very clear: she was happy inhabiting her body, which was biologically male. And yet—often, especially in her later years when it became constant—she presented as feminine. In contemporary parlance, she qualifies as “trans” according to its current definition.

A Note on the Revised 2022 Text

I Am My Own Wife is very much a period piece: in it, a character from the early 1990’s (Doug) records the memories and impressions of a trans individual (Charlotte) who came of age during World War II. As a result, some of Doug’s text is naïve or even misguided by contemporary standards, and some of Charlotte’s may seem outmoded or inconsistent with our notions of identity today. That said, I have only made a few small revisions, in those moments when the anachronisms are jarring enough to pull a twenty-first century audience out of the story. I would like to thank Mason Alexander Park, Rebecca Martínez, Ianne Fields Stewart, Jeff Schneider, Andrew Solomon, Christopher Ashley, Morgan Jeness, John Marks, and Wash Westmoreland for assisting me in the preparation of this revised edition.

Changes for the 2022 Revised Edition

Page 6: Revised note on THE CAST

A single performer enacts all of the roles in the play. Distinctions between characters are made by changes in the tonal qualities and pitch of the actor's voice; through their stance, posture, and repository of gestures. They glide fluidly from one personality to the next. Often, their transformations are accomplished with lightning speed and minimal suggestion; a raised eyebrow or an unexpected smile.

Page 6: Revised note on THE COSTUME

The basic costume is deceptively simple; the performer wears a black skirt, rimmed with peasant piping at the hem. A black blouse with short sleeves. A black kerchief for the head. Sensible, black walking shoes with scuffed toes. A delicate string of pearls. No make-up. This clothing is constant throughout most of the piece; the performer rarely uses other costume pieces to represent fellow characters. This is the primary uniform. Every character in I AM MY OWN WIFE wears a dress by default; cross-dressing is the norm.

[The rest of the note on THE COSTUME is unchanged from the Acting Edition.]

Page 9, 2nd line of initial stage direction: Cut **“in fact, a man”**

Page 10, 5th line: Change **“the voices of men”** to **“the lower voices”**

Page 10, 6th line: Change **“the voices of the female”** to **“the higher voices”**

Page 11, 3rd line: Cut **“(And believe me, I use the term “she” loosely.)”**

Page 14, 6th line: Change **“You shouldn't even exist.”** to **“How do you even exist?”**

Page 14, 5th line from the bottom: Change **“her given name”** to **“her name”** and cut **“Her legal name?”**

Page 14, 4th line from the bottom: Change **“Geburtsname”** to **“richtiger Name”**

Page 14, last line: After Doug's **“Yeah, yeah. I got that.”** insert the following lines of dialogue:

CHARLOTTE. *Mein wahrer Name ist Charlotte Von Mahlsdorf.*

DOUG. Thank you.

Then continue with Doug's line that begins **“And next, could you ask her when she knew...”**

Page 16, 3rd line under SUPERTITLE: THE GIVE-AWAY: Cut **“I'm afraid she'll think I've only come to gawk.”**

Page 16, 6th line under SUPERTITLE: THE GIVE-AWAY: Cut **“Doesn't look like drag queen *at all.*”**

Page 16, 15th line under SUPERTITLE: THE GIVE-AWAY: Change “**Definitely a man’s hands.**” to “**Definitely strong hands.**”

Page 18, 2nd line **above** SUPERTITLE: VATERLAND: Change “**boyhood**” to “**childhood**”

Page 25, 6th line **above** SUPERTITLE: BERLIN FROM BEHIND: Change “**Ah! He or she is able to work, ja.**” to “**Ah! This person is able to work, ja.**”

Page 25, 4th line **above** SUPERTITLE: BERLIN FROM BEHIND: Change “**An elderly man, in a skirt and a string of pearls.**” to “**Charlotte standing onstage in a skirt and a string of pearls.**”

Page 26, 7th line: Change “**a young boy**” to “**a young man**”

Page 39, 3rd line under SUPERTITLE: CELEBRITY: Change “**Germany’s most controversial transvestite**” to “**Germany’s most controversial figure**”

Page 40, 14th line from the bottom: Change “**Brown plague**” to “**Brown coats**”

Page 40, 10th line from the bottom: Change “**The Neo-Nazis knew I was a homosexual.**” to “**The Neo-Nazis knew who I was.**”

Page 44, 11th line under SUPERTITLE: ON CURATING: Change “**little boy**” to “**little kid**” and “**his mother’s house-coat**” to “**her mother’s house-coat**”

Page 44, 12th line under SUPERTITLE: ON CURATING: Change “**Lothar Berfelde**” to “**Charlotte von Mahlsdorf**”

Page 45: line **above** SUPERTITLE: BETWEEN TWO LIONS: Change “**A boy.**” to “**A boy; not yet her true self.**”