

CONVERSATIONS WITH SHAKESPEARE:  
THREE CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATIONS FOR THE STAGE

BY

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

The study of adaptation, the practice of creating and producing literature, performance, music, and art that maintains a sustained engagement with an informing sourcetext or ‘original’ piece of literature, is a way of analyzing cultural, theoretical, and performance trends. This study takes up three distinctive contemporary approaches to Shakespearean adaptation and the way in which they reflect the cultural milieu of contemporary Shakespeare performance.

Through first-hand observation, personal and previously published interviews with the artists, as well as performance reviews, this study constructs a literary and dramaturgical analysis of three contemporary adaptations in order to understand how these artists converse with Shakespeare, as well as how they invite audiences to engage with retellings of his plays. In addition to analyzing contemporary audience engagement with Shakespeare, this examination provides an analysis of the artists’ respective methodologies of adaptation. The ways in which the writers and artists discussed here collaborate with and interrogate Shakespeare is of particular interest, as well as how they invite audiences to respond to and engage with the plays.

The three plays examined in this study, *BOY* by Erik Ehn, *The Feast: an intimate Tempest* by Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri, and *Sleep No More* by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, are thrown into relief with their Shakespearean sourcetexts to explore a question that is threefold: how are these adaptations interacting with Shakespeare? How are the adapters asking audiences to interact with these plays? Finally, if Shakespeare’s works and adaptations are, as Julie Sanders argues, a “cultural barometer for the historically contingent process of adaptation” (21), what can these three distinct styles of adaptation tell us about trends in Shakespearean performance within the context of contemporary American audiences?

*To Casey Thiel*

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## INTRODUCTION

### “That Which is, Hath Been Before”

*As long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays. For almost four hundred years, playwrights have been taking Shakespeare’s works, and remaking them, in an overwhelming variety of ways, for the stage.*

Adaptations of Shakespeare:  
A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present  
*David Fischlin and Mark Fortier*

*As a playwright, actor, and theatrical entrepreneur, Shakespeare understood that there was no final form to any of his creations, and he apparently embraced, rather than resisted, the inherent instability of his medium. There was, as Shakespeare’s distinguished contemporary Ben Jonson grasped, one way at least partially to stabilize playtexts: to use the medium of print to produce definitive, that is, authorially approved, versions of the plays. But though half of his known plays were published in his lifetime, there is no evidence that Shakespeare interested himself directly in this enterprise or that he concerned himself with establishing definitive versions or that he resented alterations or revisions. On the contrary, the multiple states in which several of his plays exist...suggest that Shakespeare and his company felt comfortable making numerous cuts, additions, and other changes perhaps linked to particular performances, playspaces, and time constraints. This comfort-level, registered intimately in the remarkable openness of the plays to reinterpretation and refashioning, has contributed to the startling longevity of Shakespeare’s achievement: the plays lend themselves to continual metamorphosis.*

“Theatrical Mobility”  
in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*  
*Stephen Greenblatt*

The study of adaptation, the practice of creating and producing literature, performance, music, and art that maintains a sustained engagement with an informing sourcetext or ‘original’ piece of literature, is a way of analyzing cultural, theoretical, and performance trends. This study takes up three distinctive contemporary approaches to Shakespearean adaptation and the way in which they reflect the cultural milieu of contemporary Shakespeare performance. The three plays examined in this study, *BOY* by Erik Ehn, *The Feast: an intimate Tempest* by Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri, and *Sleep No More* by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, are thrown into relief with their Shakespearean sourcetexts to explore a question that is threefold: how are these adaptations interacting with Shakespeare? How are the adapters asking audiences to interact with these plays? Finally, if Shakespeare’s works and adaptations serve as a “cultural barometer for

the historically contingent process of adaptation” (Sanders 21), what can these three distinct styles of adaptation tell us about trends in Shakespearean performance within the context of contemporary American audiences?

William Shakespeare’s plays have been adapted and appropriated since the Restoration. “From 1660 onwards playwrights such as Nahum Tate and William Davenant changed plotlines, added characters, and set to music Shakespearean scripts for performance” (Sanders 46). John Fletcher’s “sequel” to *The Taming of the Shrew* and Nahum Tate’s sentimental *History of King Lear* are among the earliest and most famous re-workings of Shakespeare’s popular plays. Increasingly, prominent seasonal Shakespeare festivals (such as the Utah and Oregon Shakespeare Festivals) and dedicated year-round Shakespeare theatres (Chicago Shakespeare or the American Shakespeare Center) stage adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. During the 2012 season alone, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario is presenting *MacHomer*, a hybridization of *Macbeth* and *The Simpsons*, while the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashford is producing *Medea*, *Macbeth*, and *Cinderella* as well as *The Very Merry Wives of Windsor, Iowa*. The Utah Shakespeare Festival will stage *Play Desdemona*, a fictionalization of a Restoration actress training to play Desdemona and Beatrice with only men on whom to model her performance. The Colorado Shakespeare Festival is producing Tina Packer’s *Women of Will* and The Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington D.C. is producing Rodgers and Hart’s *The Boys of Syracuse*. The Chicago Shakespeare Theatre produces at least one adaptation a season. Past stagings include *Funk it Up About Nothin’*, *The Bomb-itty of Errors*, *Kabuki Lady Macbeth*, *The People Vs. Friar Lawrence*, and most recently, *The Feast: an intimate Tempest*. Despite the large number of adaptations produced, these plays and their adapters, receive little scholarly attention.

In her introduction to *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, Christy Desmet opens with a discussion of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, "probably the best-known and most frequently quoted of all Shakespeare parodies" (1). Julie Sanders briefly touches on the same play in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, naming it "one of the most influential 'grafts' of Shakespearean drama," which also intertextualizes *Waiting for Godot* (55-6). These discussions of Stoppard's play inevitably transition into a discussion of Shakespeare's film adapters. Scholarly treatments of postmodern and contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare for the stage often cover Stoppard's 1966 absurdist existential play, and move quickly in to dueling Zeffereilli and Luhrman *Romeo and Juliets*. Meanwhile, "theatrical adaptation has remained a relatively marginalized and under-theorized activity" (Fischlin 4).

Throughout her study, Sanders focuses most of her attention on adaptations making a generic shift (e.g. play to novel), as well as prose and film appropriations with a social or political agenda. In her afterword to *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Sanders notes that the "drive of many of the appropriations studied here go 'after' certain canonical works and question their basis in patriarchal or imperial cultural contexts" (157). Within her focus on the genres of film and narrative prose she leans heavily upon adaptations and appropriations with a theoretical lens directed toward feminist, postcolonial, queer, and postmodern readings. Sanders is particularly interested in exploring appropriations that focus on the "retrieval of lost or repressed voices" (140) and invisible characters made visible. While these trends can certainly be found in contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare for the stage, this study seeks to open a field of Shakespeare adaptation to include modes and methods of adaptation that Sanders neglects in her 2006 volume.



In Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage*, he explores the unique way in which the ghosts of past performances and interpretations haunt the theatre, as opposed to other performance media. The phenomenon that Carlson calls 'ghosting,' will be of particular interest to this study. Each of these adaptations self-consciously ghosts, and is ghosted by, its past in terms of their respective intertextual relationships with Shakespeare, the performance traditions of the artists, as well as the characters that inhabit the sourcetexts. Boy cannot escape the ghosts of his own uncertain past in Erik Ehn's *BOY*, while Prospero conjures ghosts of his former conquests in *The Feast: an intimate Tempest*; the Macbeths dark deeds haunt them until their eventual undoing in *Sleep No More*. Carlson argues that because of the way that memory functions in the theatre, 'ghosting' is one of the fundamentally characteristic features of the live performance art form. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the importance of the inherent theatricality and 'liveness' of these three adaptations.

Sanders, particularly interested in generic and medium shifts, focuses on adaptations of Shakespeare's work that are non-dramatic and outside the medium of live performance. While these generic shifts are important to study in terms of examining the handling of the narrative outside of its 'original' form,<sup>1</sup> it is worthwhile to study adaptations of Shakespeare for the stage, keeping in mind the intended medium for these dramatic texts. Ruby Cohen's extensive *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, a unique documentation, the like of which has not been seen since Cohen's publication in 1976, primarily focuses on Shakespeare adaptations for the stage, almost to exhaustion. This study seeks to examine three different models of adapting Shakespeare for the contemporary stage and as well as the significance of adapting Shakespeare for live performance. While each adaptation in this study is distinctive in its methodology, to

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of this study, Shakespeare will be considered the source (or hypo) text. While an examination of Shakespeare's own work as an appropriator is a valuable, worthwhile venture, the three productions at the center of this study deal heavily with how these collaborative artists dialogue with Shakespeare, specifically.

“understand the process of adaptation” in the case of these three plays, “it is necessary to see it as often largely, sometimes solely, a theatrical practice” (Fischlin and Fortier 7). Therefore, this study will closely examine the theatricality imbedded within the Shakespearean sourcetexts, the resulting theatricality of the adaptations, and the way these three plays ask audiences to engage with them.

*BOY* follows Shakespeare’s form and dramaturgy, working within a Shakespearean architecture for a postmodern audience. *The Feast* utilizes Shakespeare’s language and characters, recontextualizing them in a reimagining of Prospero’s day of vengeance as told through the art of puppetry. *Sleep No More* moves away from both form and language, adapting *Macbeth* into a sensorily immersive promenade dance play. While adaptations are often, if not necessarily, thought of in relation to their sourcetext, each of these plays has a different relationship to its Shakespearean sourcetext(s), sometimes moving far afield of Shakespeare’s ‘intention.’

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon discusses the different ways in which various genres engage audiences. She argues that while performance on stage and screen are both arts of time, and space, “film is usually said to be the most inclusive and synthesizing of performance forms” (35). Throughout *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon discounts the power and impact of theatre to appeal to audiences in the way that other mediums, such as film and prose, do. We find a counterpoint to Hutcheon’s generalization in Susan Bennett’s *Theatre Audiences*. She argues, “in much contemporary theatre the audience becomes a self-conscious co-creator of performance and enjoys a productive role which exceeds anything demanded of the reader or cinema audience” (21). The echoes of contemporary and ancient theatricality in each of these adaptations access a collective, societal memory that film cannot reach.

The live ‘orchestra’ present during *BOY* creates a layer of liveness and embodiment that a movie soundtrack cannot capture while the use of a narrator to read stage directions echoes the chanter in a Kabuki performance. The meta-theatrical use of puppetry in *The Feast* harkens back not only to ancient puppet plays but also invites the audience to engage with the material and actors in a way they never could through a non-live medium. Finally, the white Venetian masks along with the promenade style of *Sleep No More* are reminiscent of *commedia dell’Arte*, medieval pageant plays, and the Bakhtinian carnivalesque as the play ‘remembers’ styles of performance dependent upon spectator-audience interaction.

The three plays considered in this study have received public performances in the United States, between April 2010 and March 2012, in three major cities. Project X and Shakespeare Dallas produced a staged reading of Erik Ehn’s *BOY* in Dallas at the Green Zone, in April of 2010. Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* originally premiered in 2003 at the Beaufoy Building in London. Following that performance, Punchdrunk remounted the production in 2009 at the Old Lincoln School in Brookline, Massachusetts. The performance studied here is from the third mounting of the play in 2011 at the ‘McKittrick Hotel,’ three Chelsea warehouses converted for the event. Finally, Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri’s *The Feast*, commissioned by the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre in collaboration with Redmoon Theater, played in CST’s upstairs black box theatre between January and March of 2012. Through first-hand observation, personal and previously published interviews with the artists, as well as performance reviews, I construct a literary and dramaturgical analysis of these three contemporary adaptations in order to understand how these artists converse with Shakespeare, as well as how they invite audiences to engage with retellings of his plays.

This study does not seek to recount the adaptation history of Shakespeare's plays<sup>2</sup>, nor does it seek to make a case for Shakespeare as 'the original.' Therefore, Hutcheon's preferred term 'sourcetext' will be used over 'original,' as "Shakespeare himself was an adapter, taking existing materials from various sources and crafting them into 'new' artistic creations' (Fischlin and Fortier 1). While an understanding of Shakespeare's own source material is useful to the understanding of the Bard as a master craftsman, and would certainly illuminate any study of Shakespeare's afterlives, they will not be discussed here. For the purposes of this study, Shakespeare's works alone will serve as the studied sourcetext except in the case where sources outside of Shakespeare are directly intertextualized within the world of the play.

Erik Ehn's collage play, *BOY*, appropriates and intertextualizes several Shakespeare plays including *Macbeth*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Hamlet*. Throughout the play he interweaves these plays so fluidly that it becomes difficult to tell where one sourcetext ends and another begins. Contrarily, *The Feast* only adapts *The Tempest*, resisting the influence of other sourcetexts but incapable of disengaging with echoes of the film *Prospero's Books*, a well-known adaptation of Shakespeare's late romance, starring John Gielgud. Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* weaves Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptation of du Maurier's novel together; these two sources are studied in conjunction with the play's primary Shakespearean sourcetext, *Macbeth*.

While this study examines contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare, the three adaptations listed above, *BOY*, *The Feast*, and *Sleep No More*, will be the only case studies analyzed, serving as a synecdoche for the wide range of contemporary Shakespearean adaptations commissioned, written, and performed every year. The ways in which the writers and

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<sup>2</sup> See: Cohn, Ruby. *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976. and Fischlin, Daniel, and Mark Fortier, eds. *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. London: Routledge, 2000.

artists discussed here collaborate with and interrogate Shakespeare is of particular interest, as well as how they invite audience to respond to and engage with the play. In addition to analyzing our contemporary engagement with Shakespeare, this examination provides an analysis of the artists' respective methodologies of adaptation. This study does not seek to be a historiographical reconstruction of the plays. Rather, it is a 'close reading' of each play's key signifiers, and a dramaturgical analysis of their implications within the world of the play as a whole. Finally, this thesis does not argue for the legitimacy of adaptation<sup>3</sup>; it assumes it.

While appropriations of Shakespeare's stories and characters are not a new trend, they do come in varied and multi-faceted forms. In *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders studies a "sustained engagement between texts and their creators" specifically seeking to "theorize an interrelation between texts which is fundamental to [the adaptation's] existence and which at times seems to get to the heart of the literary, and especially the reading experience" (8). Sanders goes on to describe the process of adaptation and appropriation as "circular and intertwining rather than a direct movement from A to B" (38). Each of the adaptations examined in this study maintain this intertextuality through a circuitously collaborative series of 'looking back' to Shakespeare. Each play is a web of echoes, riffs, quotations, and citations, folding in on one another, layer upon layer, resisting a clear linear progression toward or away from the canonical sourcetext. Sanders draws a distinction between adaptation and appropriation, with appropriation making a "more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (26) while frequently adopting "a posture of critique" (4), while adaptation merely "signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original" (26). To communicate

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<sup>3</sup> Julie Sanders (*Adaptation and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 2006.) and Linda Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.) have already done in their studies of adaptation.

clearly the ways in which these writers and artists have conversed and collaborated with Shakespeare, Sanders's vocabulary will, for the most part, be adopted (161-4).

Chapter one will explore Erik Ehn's play *BOY*, a *bricolage* of Shakespearean characters, locations, language, and style. The play begins with Act IV, scene ii of *Macbeth*. Lady Macduff and her son, the Boy, are getting his X-rays taken. Lady Macduff tells her son that his father is dead because he was a traitor. As they philosophize over what it means to be a traitor and how the Boy will "do for a father," *Macbeth*'s mercenaries enter, slaying the Boy and chasing Lady Macduff off-stage to her presumed death. The play then continues with the Boy's rescue and escape to Arden, an island off the coast of Texas. Particular attention will be paid to the way that Ehn plays with a Shakespearean form while employing pop culture references and multi-media in this postmodernist collage.

In chapter two, Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri's co-creation, *The Feast: an intimate Tempest*, will be considered. This adaptation of *The Tempest*, brought to life by three actors and a cast of handcrafted puppets, opens on Caliban and Ariel chained to Prospero's dinner table; throughout the course of the performance, Prospero forces them to recount the story of his arrival on the island. As Caliban and Ariel once again re-live their torment through the telling of Prospero's tyrannous conquest, they subterraneously conspire against their warden. Attention is given to the flexibility these artists find in Shakespeare's text as well as the way that they disengage from the common trope of post-colonial discourse prevalent in many contemporary retellings of Shakespeare's late romance.

Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* is analyzed in chapter three. While Ehn is very deliberate about playing with Shakespearean form, space, and time, and *The Feast* recontextualizes Shakespeare's language in an effort to tell a new story, *Sleep No More* moves completely away

from the text and form of *Macbeth*, into an immersive film-noir promenade performance. The ‘McKittrick Hotel,’ in Chelsea acts as an all-consuming tour through a Hitchcock-esque Inverness. The audience is free to roam and explore the premises, following characters who strike their interest, ignoring those who do not.

This study explores how these three stage adaptations reflect the cultural trends in Shakespearean performance and the way in which these artists assert the theatre itself through adaptation. While anthologies such as Fishlin and Fortier’s, or Barbara Murray’s 2005 *Shakespeare Adaptations from the Restoration* are crucial to our understanding of the lineage of Shakespearean adaptation, very little critical attention has been given to contemporary adaptations and appropriations. Sanders, acknowledging the long lineage of Shakespearean adaptation reaching back to the seventeenth century, observes that because “the Shakespeare canon has served as a test bed over many centuries for the processes of adaptation [it follows that] the history of Shakespearean re-visions provides a cultural barometer for the practice and politics of adaptation and appropriation” (51). With this in mind, it remains crucial to examine past adaptations of Shakespeare, as they help historicize trends within the wider practice of adaptation and appropriation. However, the critical study of contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare enables us to examine shifts in how artists have engaged Shakespeare to critique, represent, and engage society and its performance practices.

Carlson claims, “every play is a memory play” (2); this argument is even more pertinent to adaptations for the stage. Hutcheon argues that one of the reasons writers adapt is because they feel a deeply personal need to re-tell a story from their own point of view, using their own dramaturgical vocabulary. The “temperament and talent of the adapter – and his or her individual intertexts through which are filtered the materials being adapted” affect the medium and tone of

the adaptation (Hutcheon 84). For Julie Sanders, the impulse to adapt comes from a need to pay tribute or as is more likely, a need to challenge. “This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original’ adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized” (Sanders 19). I would argue for a synthesis of these two models. Writers adapt pieces of classic and popular literature because “like the memory of each individual [the repository of cultural memory] is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts” (Carlson 2). The need to adapt Shakespeare comes from the continuing need to recontextualize his stories, characters, and themes based on shifting worldviews. The plays examined in this study represent three very different ways to interpret and adapt Shakespeare for twenty-first century audiences.



## CHAPTER 1

### “We Can Only Do What We’ve Ever Done”: Towards a Shakespearean Architecture in Erik Ehn’s *BOY*

*A reading of Shakespeare by means of theft; gutting the house and sleeping there, building a fire in the living room, falling asleep at two and dreaming the customs of the place. What if, in some kind of cultural emergency, a twelve year old girl were responsible for rewriting all off Shakespeare in a hurry on her cell phone? How does she have them? What, in our current emergency, are we able to remember of the rhythm and sense of – Macbeth, Hamlet and As You Like It, The Winter’s Tale? How do we have them, this minute?*

*Erik Ehn,  
BOY Mission Statement*

Erik Ehn’s *BOY*, commissioned and written for Dallas’s Project X Theatre in 2005, re-imagines the story of Macduff’s slain son, the Boy, from Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Macbeth*. The play opens with Act IV, scene ii of *Macbeth* as Lady Macduff attempts to tell her young son that his father is dead because he has been determined to be a traitor. While the words are the same, and the stage directions state that it is the fourteenth century, the world is not what it seems. Anachronisms and un-realities abound as Lady Macduff takes the Boy’s X-rays (presumably scanning for plague), a beagle whines in the car, and a talking bird gives her life to liberate the canine. Just as in the sourcetext from which Ehn is pulling, Macbeth’s mercenaries enter, slaying the Boy and chasing his mother off-stage, later killing her. The dog, now freed from the car, is unwilling to allow his companion to die. He hauls the Boy off in search of help and from this point onward, Ehn’s play becomes a collage of re-workings and re-imaginings of several of Shakespeare’s most famous plays and characters.

The project that would become *BOY* found its genesis within a long-standing relationship with Dallas director, Raphael Parry. The two have been collaborating since 1992 when Parry was the co-artistic director of the Undermain Theatre in Dallas. In 1993 Parry and Ehn set out on a series of road trips through Hill Country and down into the Texas-Mexico border. The goal was

“to do a series of performance pieces informed by the various regions of (Parry’s) home state” (Svich 124). Over the course of their travels through Texas, Ehn termed the kind of work in which they were immersing themselves ‘geographical commissioning.’ The two men continued their geographical commissioning cycle in 1997 with *Shiner, He Wants Her*, a screenplay, in 2000, and then again in 2002 after Parry founded Project X and became the artistic director for Shakespeare Dallas, the city’s only dedicated Shakespeare company. Thirteen years after their first project, Parry would ask Ehn to complete this cycle of work with another geographical commission; this one would become *BOY*.

The story of *BOY* begins on the East Coast in 2005 when Parry met Ehn in New York: “We met for dinner and I bought him a hamburger and asked for another commission. This time to adapt a Shakespeare play using whatever language and form he wanted. We proposed two trips – one to Dallas to host a writing workshop at my home and the other to travel somewhere in Texas with a group of people.”<sup>4</sup> Later that spring, Ehn flew to Dallas and Parry hosted the writing workshop for six to eight people. “We talked about our favorite Shakespeare play[s] and read a scene from [each of] them with the group,” Parry says. “Erik was staying in my guest room at the time and I had a rescue dog beagle named Lucky. Lucky laid outside Erik’s door all night whining, hence the opening scene was written based on Lucky and his whine.”<sup>5</sup> In winter of 2005, Parry and Ehn would complete the second phase of their commission at a beach house in Galveston, Texas on the Gulf coast. Ehn’s goal was to write a play with its roots in both Shakespeare’s canon and the Gulf coast town. The idea of a ‘geographical commission’ stems from Ehn’s need for every play to be from a specific place and for a specific people (not unlike the way Shakespeare and other early modern playwrights constructed their plays). The place was

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from an e-mail interview, February 9, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

Galveston and the people were the artists who accompanied Parry and Ehn to their beach bungalow, including Bruce Richardson, who wrote the music for the play. Other Project X and Shakespeare Dallas artists who accompanied Ehn and Parry on the trip include Constance Gold, Parry's wife, Sandra Greenway, (then) Executive Director of Shakespeare Dallas, and John S. Davies, who would play the Dutchman in Parry's staging of Ehn's play five years later.

During the first evening of the retreat, a Friday, there was a horrible winter storm. "Literally the house was shaking as the wind and rain came crashing down," says Parry.<sup>6</sup> Ehn was inspired by the Shakespearean tempest as he sketched out some scenes from the play early the next day. At ten o'clock on Saturday morning, the group sent Ehn to his room upstairs with a Complete Works of Shakespeare. At five o'clock, a mere seven hours later, Ehn emerged from "writing in his monk cell upstairs" and dinner was prepared. "We ate then sat around and read the play. We were blown away...The play was ninety-five percent completed, full of typos and other weird things like formatting, but the *BOY* that you read today is virtually unchanged."<sup>7</sup>

Ehn finds a wealth of inspiration in Galveston's fragile estuary ecosystem and its perpetual liminal status. Galveston, a coastal town located on Galveston Island in southeast Texas and enmeshed within the Houston metropolitan area, offers an ocean getaway to many of Houston's city and suburban dwellers. However, the city itself has the second largest population of Galveston County (League City being the first). Because of its precarious geographical position just off the southeast coast of Texas, Galveston is susceptible to hurricane devastation and flood, despite measures that civil engineers have taken to lessen damage caused by natural disasters. Galveston Island acts as a buffer between the violent hurricanes and tropical storms that sweep through the Gulf of Mexico. As storms come through, Galveston Island often takes

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

<sup>7</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

the brunt of the damage, causing anomalous geographical erosion and ecological trauma. The easily transformed region suffers geographically and ecologically damage because of its fragility.

These two themes of ‘transformation’ and ‘anomaly’ have deeply informed the world of *BOY*. The constant transformation of time and space consistently mirror the transformations of the characters in the play. Like many of Shakespeare’s plays, such as *A Winter’s Tale*, *Pericles*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the logic of the world within the play does not always line up with the logic of the world outside of it. Scenes shift through time and space seamlessly as the action of the play simultaneously occurs on an island, a battlefield, in a forest, and in a city. Ehn transforms stock characters from Shakespeare’s repertoire, such as Titania, Rosalind, and Orlando into agents of his own invention. The title character, Boy, becomes the embodiment of transformation and anomaly. These characters balance on the precipice between their source texts and Ehn’s imaginative world, allowing them to expand out from the cultural memory as Shakespeare’s characters, gaining agency as they refashion themselves.

Act one begins in Denmark during the fourteenth century. The text is lifted directly from act four, scene two of *Macbeth* and as Shakespeare’s text comes to an end, Ehn picks up where the Bard leaves off, reimagining a new world for the Boy. The dog drags the Boy to safety, swimming from Scotland to Arden. However, this is not quite the Arden that the audience knows. There the Boy will meet Rosalind, who is pining (unrequitedly) after Orlando, as well as the American outlaw, John Dillinger, and a host of cowboy and cowgirl fairies. On the island, the Boy struggles to understand his own past or come to grips with his future when ‘he’ discovers himself to be a ‘she.’ Boy leaves Arden in search of answers and finds herself aboard a pirate ship captained by none other than the sable-clad scholar himself: Hamlet. In true Shakespearean fashion, Boy and Hamlet discover that they are long-lost twins. Unsure of what they have been

searching for, they come to understand that they have spent their entire lives looking for one another: their other half. The play ends as Boy and Hamlet settle into their hermit cave on Arden, content to live out the rest of their days together.

The comprehensiveness of this play surprised all of the other artists at the beach house, including Parry. When asked how he accomplished such a comprehensive piece in such a short period, Ehn says that he tried to “work in a ‘Shakespearean’ mode.”<sup>8</sup> He worked to exceed himself by including the whole world (the way Shakespeare does) but elegantly and spaciouly. Characters and locales from diverse places and times exist simultaneously. Parry notes that he has “always thought of Erik’s plays existing in a time vacuum where one step would send you past centuries...through and between time.”<sup>9</sup> Ehn creates “a kingdom for a stage”<sup>10</sup> while working within textual, character-driven, and spatiotemporal parameters that define his world, carefully built inside of a Shakespearean form.

### **A Shakespearean Architecture**

*BOY*, more than the other two plays considered here, consciously privileges a ‘Shakespearean’ style, with a leaning toward the comedic structure. The play follows a five-act structure, with the first scene of the play acting as a prologue, which allows the audience a chance to become acclimated to Boy’s world. The play opens in chaos; the Boy is attacked, dies, rescued and taken to a green world wherein (s)he revives, heals, and is made whole again. In his essay “The Argument of Comedy,” Northrop Frye argues that in many of Shakespeare’s comedies “there is the same rhythmic movement from normal world to green world and back again” (97). This is certainly true for the comedies on which Ehn leans most heavily: *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Frye goes on to discuss the significance of the femininity of

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from a telephone interview with Erik Ehn on December 22, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

<sup>10</sup> Henry V, William Shakespeare. Act I, scene, i, line 3.

the “dying and reviving character” as her womanhood usually “strengthens the feeling that there is something maternal about the green world” (98), a theme that is solidified at the end of the play when Boy becomes a mother. A diverse ensemble of characters populates this green world, including fairies (including one named I-Pod, after the popular Macintosh device), outlaws, wrestlers, and transvestites. As the play moves forward and the plot laid out, Ehn shifts effortlessly between the green world of Arden and the dystopian realities of life outside of Arden, similar to the unsettling shifts between Shakespeare’s own Arden and the “pompous court” of *As You Like It*.<sup>11</sup>

As Ehn’s heroine finds her past and future wrapped in a single individual, she and Hamlet return to Arden. Just as Shakespeare’s comedies end with a return to stasis and marriage followed by a dance, Ehn’s play resolves in a ‘marriage.’ *BOY* rounds out with a quirky, and perhaps irreverent, reprise of an earlier song and dance. This musical number, devoid of sugary sentiment, is an appropriate ending for Ehn’s contemporary Shakespeare riff.

Through his *bricolage* of Shakespeare’s plays, Ehn invents a distinctive universe. Taking his cue from Shakespeare, but drawing upon the popular culture of his own time, Ehn’s characters exist in an unstable landscape and representational mode. In the second scene of the play, John Dillinger watches a version of *Manhattan Melodrama*. Hearing marching outside, signaling the cross-pollination of Dillinger’s world with Macbeth’s, Dillinger “grabs [the] projector light and carves a boat out of it. He sails the boat into the forest” (Ehn 6). As he sails, the Movie Boys conjure his world from within the film:

MOVIE BOY TWO:	Somewhere south of the Dakotas
MOVIE BOY THREE:	On a North-Texas island called Indiana
MOVIE BOY ONE:	Arden Indiana, a forest there (6)

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<sup>11</sup> *As You Like It*, Act V, scene iv, line 123

The Boy has washed ashore; Rosalind, in men's attire, cares for him. "Boy ages rapidly; goes from 6-16 in front of us" (6). The dog who swam with the Boy from Scotland poured his last breath into him, saving the Boy's life. However, Rosalind has disappointing news for Boy: "You age as a dog ages, now" (7); the Boy will now age seven times the normal human rate. As Rosalind leaves in search of Orlando, the wrestler with whom she is in love, she gives Boy fresh clothes to wear. As Boy changes into Rosalind's dress, he is "revealed to be a woman" (7). Ehn is already playing with the flexibility of not only time and space, but also of identity, specifically gender identity, again taking his cue from the Bard. The multiple layers of Shakespearean influences at work in Ehn's play are clear, only to become more tightly interwoven as the story of the lost Boy moves forward.

Discussing his history of working with Shakespeare, Ehn points out that he first Shakespeare play he encountered was *Macbeth*. As a child, he acted in Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy and struggled with the language. He felt that in order to access it, he "had to dream it."<sup>12</sup> Ehn asserts that he first learned Shakespeare by spying on him. Existing tangent to the play (as opposed to deep within it) allowed him an opportunity to 'spy' not only on the characters, but on Shakespeare himself. As an adapter-dreamer, Ehn felt he was able to watch Shakespeare work without feeling the pressure of being the conduit through which the poet would speak. Through his sleuthing Ehn became increasingly interested in the Boy and his liminal status in the world. He becomes Schrödinger's cat: The Boy is alive and dead; young and old; child and man; male and female. For Ehn, the Boy's liminal status within Shakespeare's Scottish epic allows Ehn to explore Shakespeare not only as a creator of worlds but also as a developer of ambiguity. The Boy becomes Ehn's way to access Shakespeare's corpus.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, December 22, 2011

When he reached graduate school, he decided to finally engage the Bard rather than continue to exist tangentially to him. Ehn made his first attempt at an adaptation when he rewrote *Hamlet* line by line. Since his first dialogue with Shakespeare, Ehn has relied on him as a touchstone for his own work. “Shakespeare has bailed me out when I’ve been lost,” he confesses. “[Shakespeare] makes every mistake a writer can make [by being disorganized and vague, yet] every moment of confusion is an opening – a ventilation of possibility.”<sup>13</sup> The architecture of his plays, according to Ehn, allows the story to open up to every potential. Here Ehn refers to the dramatic structure of Shakespeare’s plays, as well as the ever-shifting temporalities and topographies. Ehn seeks this quality in his own reworking of Shakespeare’s world(s).

In a 2001 interview with Caridad Svich Ehn unpacks his focus on “form over content” (Svich 125). In discussing the importance of myth and ritual to the theatre, Ehn explains his interest in old language and archetypes:

Myth language, being better worn (stronger and more economical), is better suited to action. Present language is necessarily a lot of noise – hasn’t yet grown into the courage needed to name things in a transformational way. Older language...provide real working words; words that name complex states of being (worker, mother, coward, victim – each ambiguously singular) in ways that give us dominion...We can move these words around. We can be bound by them. Contemporary language has onerous responsibilities to inform and explain; a heavy tendency to move towards story. Experienced language is more spatial...The more expressive language is the less informational it is, the fewer connections it makes – the event is a starting place and an ending place; a landscape, not a map. (Svich 122-23)

While this interview predates Ehn’s writing of *BOY* by four years, it no doubt helps to understand the way in which he Ehn approaches Shakespeare’s text. He uses the Bard’s established text as a way of shortcutting story in the same way that an adapter of Greek myth would assume certain cultural understandings of an ancient tale. Ehn is not as interested in

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, December 22, 2011



developing plot as he is diving into the architecture of a story to develop modes of expressivity, as well as characters who are able to navigate those modes.

Ehn has said that his favorite part about writing adaptations is that it gives him an opportunity to get inside of forms and reverse-engineer plays. He will begin with a play like *Macbeth* or *As You Like It*, carefully take it apart to see what it is made of, then put the whole thing back together. Perhaps a few parts are missing or in different places, but once he feels like he understands how the machine works, he can begin putting it back together again in a way that makes sense to him. When Ehn talks about the worlds Shakespeare creates, he describes it as “a soup of imagery.”<sup>14</sup> Because Shakespeare’s stories “don’t work linearly,”<sup>15</sup> the artist who is collaborating with Shakespeare has to carry the entire play in his or her head at any one time. One can see Ehn doing just this by examining the way he employs Shakespeare’s own dramaturgy while interweaving his own twenty-first century formalist point of view.

### **Self-Fashioning and the Re-Invention of Self: Ehn’s Characters in Shakespearean Context**

Falling in line with Shakespeare’s dramaturgy, Ehn creates a cast of characters that pull not only from the Shakespearean canon, but also integrate personalities and allusions to popular culture and myth. By employing characters from *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Hamlet*, and, *Macbeth*, as well as characters from popular culture (John Dillinger and I-Pod) and folk myths (the Dutchman) Ehn’s use of intertextuality is again comparable with Shakespeare. For example, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Shakespeare uses Theseus and Hippolyta from ancient Greek myth, as well as Pyramus and Thisbe for the Rude Mechanicals’ play. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare uses Juno and Hymen, mythical goddesses, to bless the wedding of Miranda and Ferdinand. *Macbeth* utilizes the mythic story of King James’s family history

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<sup>14</sup> Interview, December 22, 2011

<sup>15</sup> Interview, December 22, 2011

detailed in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Including characters from various Shakespeare plays as well as from popular culture and myth allows Ehn to explore cross-pollination between Shakespeare's plays, as well as continue to work within a Shakespearean form. Rosalind and Orlando's love is perhaps not so certain when there are other women that strike Orlando's fancy. When Hamlet enters Boy's world in act five, he learns very quickly that his loquacious pontificating does not work in Macbeth's wasteland; the mercenaries have no patience for him. John Dillinger is an outsider to the mystical and fantastic world of fairies and forests. The fairies give him the *Midsummer*-esque "magic juice" so that he will fall in love with I-Pod, as she has fallen in love with him. The Flying Dutchman, fabled captain of a ghost ship that can never make port but must sail the seas forever, parallels the lives Boy and Hamlet live until their meeting. Caught within their own narratives, the twins are doomed to sail the seas of existence, only to suffer death repeatedly.

As Ehn entered the Galveston beach house bedroom, the only sense of direction that he had was that of Macduff's young son – the Boy – a child who has his fate decided by a tyrant. Ehn sends the Boy to Arden, an island of outlaws and self-fashioning mythmakers, to allow this character, without a proper name, to shape his own destiny and earn a sense of agency. As he began writing *BOY*, Ehn found himself honing in on characters, like Rosalind, who fashion and refashion themselves so as to break free from the text that binds them to a predetermined fate. Greenblatt notes in his introduction to *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, "as a term for the action or process of making, for particular features of appearance, for a distinct style or pattern, the word has been long in use, but it is in the sixteenth century that *fashion* seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of self" (2). By allowing characters, such as

Rosalind and Boy, opportunities to renegotiate their Shakespearean existence, Ehn becomes playful not only with Shakespeare's dramaturgy but also with the early modern cultural milieu.

In Ehn's telling, Rosalind is dressed as a man but readily owns her femininity. Upon seeing her for the first time the Boy, with incredulity, says, "You're not a man." "Who is?" responds Rosalind, flippantly (Ehn 7). Ehn consciously calls attention to the theatricality of a female character disguising herself as male as a hallmark of Shakespearean dramaturgy. Women disguised as men, suddenly transforming into women is a theatrical device Shakespeare employs and from which Ehn takes his cue. Boy's physical transformation into a woman, upon meeting Rosalind, happens on stage in full view of the audience. As she goes from six to sixteen, bypassing puberty, the audience discovers Boy's identity along with her. Ehn has written Boy for a female performer and the audience is aware of that fact. However, they, like her, do not know that the *character* is female. Ehn plays with gender in such a way that spectators realize they cannot trust what established conventions tell them as he seeks, like Shakespeare, to upset old modes of theatricality, replacing them with his own. "Plotting devices – mistaken identities, exchanged genders, and all the stuff of dramatic irony – so exceed[s] what [is] believable in the known world that a pact regarding fabrication rather than truth [binds] the actor and audience" (Davis and Postlewait 15).

Meanwhile, Orlando is Shakespeare's hero and Ehn's wrestling, good-natured meathead. With his re-imagining of Orlando, Ehn puckishly nods at common interpretations of Orlando as dim and undeserving of Rosalind's cleverness. She cannot help but relentlessly pursue him, yet Orlando greets Rosalind with only disappointment and heartbreak. While Rosalind chases Orlando, he continually seeks the fairy I-Pod, fleeing Rosalind's embrace. Ehn becomes whimsical in his nod to the Macintosh Apple mp3 player, while creating a woodland fairy who

sings at the press of a button on her belly; I-Pod is able to straddle both mythical and popular worlds. The mercurial nature of a self-fashioning character such as Hamlet, who defies, yet cannot escape definition both within the world of the play as well as in dramatic criticism, are ideal for Ehn's exploration of the mythmaking that permeates *BOY*. Hamlet, a character who so often takes center stage in both critical discourses and Shakespearean re-imaginings, stands in the shadow of the character of Boy. While working within a distinctly Shakespearean model, Ehn stretches the boundaries of audience expectations by giving us a Hamlet who is not only ineffectual, but also quite shallow.

One character who sticks out in this re-fashioning of Arden is the American outlaw, John Dillinger. Arden, a mythical forest for outlaws, is at once the perfect and the perfectly wrong place for Dillinger. When asked about this misfit, Ehn explained that he feels Dillinger to be a natural character to find in Arden. John Dillinger is a man who shaped and was shaped by his own legend. The myth-making machine that is the media exaggerated his daring bravado throughout his bank-robbing career. The hyperbolized persona of Dillinger and his gang allowed J. Edgar Hoover to use the outlaw's havoc as a platform to launch the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the 1930s. He escaped from jail no less than twice, and was finally taken down outside the Biograph Theater on July 22, 1934. He pulled a weapon as the federal agents moved in to arrest him; in defense, the agents shot and killed Dillinger. Ehn, feeling Dillinger floating around in his psyche, placed him on paper as a shell of the mythologized figure he has become. It was common practice for Shakespeare to use the husk of recent historical figures for dramatic purposes. As he wrote the histories of kings and warriors who existed in the not-too-distant past, he emptied them of their historicity in order to make them work theatrically. In the way that the

Henry's and Richards of Shakespeare's recent history were lightning rods for Shakespeare's imagination, Dillinger serves the same purpose for Ehn.

Following Shakespeare's lead as well as the structure of both *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ehn complicates the tale by developing an Ardenian love quadrangle between John Dillinger, I-Pod, Orlando, and Rosalind. In act two, scene five Dillinger is attempting to woo Rosalind. I-Pod, who is in love with the outlaw, enters and determines they are in love. In her grief I-Pod "presses a button on her belly and plays a tune, a mournful cowboy melody" (13). Orlando rushes in at the sound of her voice and attempts (futilely) to woo her; I-Pod flees. Orlando chases after her with Rosalind trailing behind, closely followed by Dillinger. One can't help but be reminded of the comedic "Why blame you me to love you?" sequence from act five, scene two of *As You Like It* as well as the numerous lovers' quarrels and chase scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Unlike Shakespeare, however, Ehn relegates the romantic conflict to the subplot while Boy's journey retains its position as the primary storyline.

Ehn creates room for formally invisible and silent characters in *BOY*. Titania's votaress in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the only biological mother in Shakespeare's play, dies giving birth to a son. In act four, scene three of *BOY*, Rosalind arrives in India with child, after having seduced Orlando (as Helena does Bertram in *All's Well that Ends Well*). In the final scene of the play Titania makes her way back from India to Arden, surfing a clamshell, evoking the image of a modern Aphrodite. Once there, she opens a smaller clamshell and presents a baby girl to Boy and Hamlet. She instructs them:

TITANIA: I, Titania hight by name, come from eternal midsummer to give you this babe, offspring of my chiefest nun, Rosalind. Love it, raise it as your own. Bring her forth from Rosalind's solitary election, to this island; and from this island to the far circumference of whatever world she discovers this place to center.

Ehn gives us the absent votaress from *Midsummer* and has Titania present the formerly invisible changeling child to Hamlet and Boy. Handing the child over to the twins signifies that they are now a family; Boy and Hamlet become mother and father. In assigning these “complex states of being,” Ehn attempts to give them a new “dominion,” (Svich 122-23) as he attempts to re-write Boy and Hamlet’s mythical narrative, providing an existence outside their respective sourcetexts.

Despite Ehn’s efforts to release them from preconceived ideas and structural or narrative restrictions, Rosalind, Orlando, Titania, and Hamlet cannot help but ghost throughout *BOY* because they exist simultaneously within their ‘source’ worlds as well as in Ehn’s adaptation. An audience familiar with Shakespeare’s canon may initially have a difficult time separating these iconic characters from the re-imaginings Ehn presents because “their end is predetermined in our imagination via prior knowledge of the precursor text” (Sanders 104). However, Carlson argues a “recycled character who has broken free of the cluster of relationships and narrative frameworks that originally accompanied him...can move freely through an almost infinite variety of other relationships and narratives” (Carlson 48). Ehn plays both ends against the middle when he finds an opportunity to allow Shakespeare’s Hamlet to possess Ehn’s Boy during the self-reflexive ‘role play’ in which the two engage.

In act four, scene two. Boy and Hamlet find themselves alone on the deck of the pirate ship. They speak distractedly to one another until Hamlet remarks at their like-mindedness. Boy gets the courage to ask Hamlet about the medal he wears around his neck. He allows Boy to examine it only to find that she wears the same design around her neck; they are long-lost twins.

In a final attempt to save each other’s lives, Boy proposes a plan:

BOY	If I in your place, turn to address the dread state, it may be then that in this displacement we have outplayed the play against us. Live for me and I live. I live or die in your stead and dead I am yet quick in your craft. Brother, Hamlet – trade we now our come-what-may...
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HAMLET      Daughter and son to break the day. (*They trade clothes*)  
(25-6)

The next time the audience sees Boy in act five, scene two, she is in Hamlet's world. Ehn has written a chilling one-woman *Hamlet* that echoes Sarah Bernhardt's 1900 two minute silent film, *Le Duel d'Hamlet*. While the only action in *Le Duel d'Hamlet* is the fencing duel between Hamlet and Laertes (with Sarah Bernhardt playing Hamlet), the end proves to be quite chilling as the court attendants carry Bernhardt's body over their shoulders off-screen in a slow dead march, an image Ehn echoes. Ehn has taken the entirety of *Hamlet* and boiled it down to its component parts. While the script calls for Boy to be taking Hamlet's place, she acts simultaneously as narrator and enactor of the entire plot. Boy is at once herself, Hamlet, Gertrude, Laertes, and every other principle character in *Hamlet* throughout this scene. Because Boy plays all of these parts at one point or another, she is her own presumed audience. Through re-enacting Hamlet's tale in Hamlet's world she hopes to save his life rather than subjecting him to an eternity of his own revenge tragedy; she seeks to save Hamlet from himself. In this way, Ehn's characters strive to defy the inevitability of their own Shakespearean narratives.

### **Implementing Sound: Contemporary Music within an Early Modern Model**

Another compatible aspect of both Ehn and Shakespeare's dramaturgy can be found in the use and function of music in their plays. Music is central to the tone of *BOY* as well as crucial to its Shakespearean nature. "Shakespearean music was in my head [while I wrote *BOY*],"<sup>16</sup> Ehn says; music has been part of this play from the beginning. Ehn's Galveston beach influences are apparent as the Cowboy and Cowgirl fairies, inhabitants of Arden, a North Texas island, enter dancing in a ring and singing:

FAIRIES                      Hopalong  
   Set a pace  
   Fry at will

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, December 22, 2011





composer]. He always knew that the Pirate song was going to be a big gay fantasia. I was dubious when he first described the conceit [but] he killed it with that song, and quite frankly, all of the songs. The melodies that Bruce wrote create great hooks and let the audience feel as if they are ‘in the know’ and ‘get it’. That, to me, is important.”<sup>18</sup>

While the text of *BOY* can be dense and hard to follow at times, the music peppered throughout the play helps the audience to key in to the mood and tone of the scene in a way that it might not be able to without song. Parry’s direction to reprise this song at the end of the play signals to the audience that the play is over. The high-spirited mood of the song signifies to the audience what joy they should be feeling by the end of the play and asks for indulgence as the actors complete their performance. The original ending for the play was much more solemn. As Boy finishes her last speech to the audience, she turns to her brother: “Bliss my brother, dance like this” (Ehn 36). The two siblings would then gently sway as though they were back on the pirate ship, sailing into eternity. However, even by the final dress rehearsal Parry felt that the ending was too solemn and that the play was not coming to a definite end. “We needed a punchy curtain call to undercut the solemn moment of Boy and Hamlet,” says Parry. “We needed to end it with a bang.”<sup>19</sup> The pirate song was a natural choice because the actors and musicians all seemed to be having the most fun with it and it offered an ideal opportunity to bring the rest of the ensemble back on stage.

Another song Ehn has written into the play comes from the fairy I-Pod. It is a “mournful cowboy melody” (Ehn 13-4) she sings when she realizes Dillinger is in love with Rosalind. This song, like the ones that came before it in the play, is a clear reflection of Ehn’s geographical influences. Taking his cue from the stage directions, Richardson composed a country tune. The

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

<sup>19</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

actor playing I-Pod, Marla Jo Kelly, belting the song with a heavy Texas twang, sang of the “Dairy Queen” by the “interstate highway” (14). While Dairy Queens are not exclusive to Texas, this image is particularly evocative to an audience composed of natives of the Lone Star State.

Later in the play, Rosalind arrives round-bellied and weary in India after she “took a wrestler to the ground. A sleeper hold” (26). She seeks asylum with Titania and her nuns while her child is born. In Ehn’s text, Titania’s nuns perform the song in this scene, a simple refrain of “Into the wind I sail, I sail. Into the wind I sail,” (27). However, in Parry’s staging, Rosalind takes the lead on this song, to great effect. Throughout the play, the audience is able to get a clear sense of Rosalind’s character and this heartbreaking song ends her journey as it is the last time she is on stage. With the knowledge that Rosalind is in India with Titania, the audience comes to understand that Rosalind is the Indian votaress who will die giving birth to the changeling child.

The music not only offers the director an opportunity to put live musicians on the stage in full view of the audience, which is what Parry did in his reading, but it ties the story together and allows the characters an opportunity to express themselves in the language of music. In *BOY*, it is easy to see echoes of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, which are perhaps Shakespeare’s most musical plays. Most of the songs in these two tales of cross-dressing heroines are sung by one character (Amiens and Feste) due to the fact that Shakespeare’s company often only had one strong singer at a time. Ehn takes his cue from Shakespeare here by implementing music, but allows several of the characters throughout *BOY* an opportunity to emote through musical expression. By allowing his geographical surroundings to influence his song writing, Ehn employs another Shakespearean trend. Shakespeare would often use popular songs in his plays in order to engage his audiences. While Ehn does not write any popular music into the play, his

collaboration with Bruce Richardson allows for the implementation of popular forms with which a contemporary audience may easily engage.

### **Temporal Transformation: Merging Postmodern and Early Modern Anachronisms**

As he began the process of diving into *BOY*, Ehn took time to reflect on the way in which Shakespeare uses time and space. Struck by the rate at which time passes, and the flexibility of the architecture of the world, Ehn plays with a ‘Shakespearean’ spatiotemporality while continuing to implement a post-modern style that appeals to contemporary audiences.

In Shakespeare’s plays, time works at one of two extremes: it moves so rapidly that years fly by in seconds (as in *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale*) or events that should take years occur over the course of two hours (as in *The Tempest*). The blank stage for which the early modernists were writing was infinitely flexible and so a single play could take place in Rome, Egypt and the high seas (*Antony and Cleopatra*); shifts from a medieval English castle to the home of a Renaissance Italian happen within the blink of an eye (*Cymbeline*). While this is not the case for Shakespeare plays exclusively, the way in which Shakespeare manipulates spatiotemporality and, thus, how his characters negotiate their environment is a unique combination. Ehn brings this quality into his own work and *BOY* specifically.

Time folds in on itself in Ehn’s adapted epic. The characters exist at all times and yet they do not exist at all. Their fate is pre-determined and yet, it is uncertain. Ehn’s characters are free agents and yet trapped within the confines of their own story. Rosalind cannot seem to break free of her love for Orlando; Orlando feels nothing for Rosalind. Nevertheless, Rosalind convinces Orlando to “lie down in strangeness” (Ehn 18).

ORLANDO

We can only do what we’ve ever done. There is no new thing. Where would it fit?

ROSALIND

Then I have done this.

(*Kisses him.*)

This.

ORLANDO *(Kisses him.)*  
 I have hurt. And hurt.  
 Well. I don't love you.  
*(Kisses her.)*  
 I don't love you.  
*(Kisses her.)*  
 What are you waiting for?  
 ROSALIND  
 Time is passing. I'm feeling it pass. There is only so  
 much waiting to do.  
*(Embraces him. He holds her, objectively.)*  
 Sometimes – I wake up in my play, and it is this play. In  
 this wilderness. If a wilderness is wild, it is strange even  
 to itself. Lay down in strangeness, love. Ready is the  
 time.  
*(They lie together.)*

(18)

While Ehn grants his characters a certain amount of agency from their source texts, there is a looming sense of pre-determined inevitability for both Orlando and Rosalind.

The Boy's world shifts from the past, to the present, to the future, and back again without pause. Ehn disrupts the logic of time as the play begins in the fourteenth century and moves into the presumed present, which is simultaneously the 1930s. In act three, scene four, Boy attempts to join the navy while explaining to the recruitment officer that she ages at seven times the normal human rate and is "ahead of [their] clock" (Ehn 20). She hands him a letter from the middle of her enlistment so that he knows what will become of her. Without taking time for a scenic shift, the audience dives into the world of the letter, and the stage transforms in to the pirate ship:

"Chapter Head: Stolen by Pirates. Officer, not seven leagues out the weather turned.  
 When surf rose to fan our planks as playing cards, we were on a sudden drawn up to the  
 side of a larger ebon craft, whose monumental rocking overmastered the surf and broke  
 our wreck to splinters when lucky few souls were saved. A pirate ship, yes, but  
 commanded by a black clad scholar of my own age, who has taken me to his heart and  
 adopted me to crew as mate. We plunder with sublime abandon. I have tattooed curse  
 words across my knuckles and will offer you the salute due you should our paths course  
 again. Ahoy, the Boy."

(20)

As the officer begins to read the letter, the Boy disappears, entering his confinement on the pirate ship. The audience, transported to the middle of the Boy's enlistment, witnesses the

Dog (now a ghost, having died saving Boy's life earlier in the play) aboard the pirate ship asking for Boy's release. Hamlet, the captain of the pirate ship, agrees. Without knowing that the Boy is his long-lost twin sister, Hamlet, in answer to the Dog's request, simply says, "Free him. He's worth our time" (Ehn 21). We never see the recruitment officer again because, for now at least, Boy is on board Hamlet's ship. By reading the letter, the officer conjures Hamlet's pirate ship, transforming not only the space but also the timeline of the play. The audience recalls the character conventions Shakespeare uses in many of his plays, such as the Chorus in *Henry V*, Gower in *Pericles*, and Time in *The Winter's Tale*. These characters deliver speeches to the audience to help them 'catch up' when time has shifted so drastically that the audience might need explanation. The lack of stable time Ehn employs mirrors the fluidity of Shakespeare's own dramaturgy.

### **Flexible Stage and Space: Finding Room to Breathe Inside Shakespeare's Architecture**

The space is fluid within the world of *BOY*. In act two, scene four, the characters are at once in medieval Scotland and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicago; the play shifts away from Arden to a Scottish battlefield where Macbeth's mercenaries are recovering from their attacks. Dovetailing the exit of the mercenaries, two federal agents enter with the paper cups filled with coffee. Without a written scene shift, the entire stage suddenly becomes 1930s Chicago as these iconographic film noir 'feds' express their frustration at Dillinger's consistent ability to evade their grasp. The mercenaries seek the Boy while the two feds seek Dillinger. This example shows one of many instances in which Ehn weaves two threads of space, time, character, and text together in his re-working of one of Shakespeare's 'attendant lords in discussion' scenes.

Ehn also allows for fluidity within and between dimensions for his characters. In act three, scene one, Ghost Dog and the Flying Dutchman watch *Manhattan Melodrama*. The three

Orphans (previously the Movie Boys) grow up before the eyes of the audience. One becomes a judge, one becomes a priest, and the third becomes Macbeth. Boy enters the theatre, walks up to the screen, and moves through it. Throughout the play, Ehn's characters are simultaneously on the beach, in the forest, aboard a ship, on a pilgrimage through India, on a revenge mission in Denmark, fighting a war in fourteenth century Scotland, at the Biograph in 1930s Chicago, and inside the film strip of *Manhattan Melodrama*. Time, space, and dimensions of existence become fluid and boundless.

In order to hold all of these spaces the stage space must remain flexible and bare. Ehn has written a play that spans centuries, expansive geographical formations, continents, and dimensions of (un)reality. In short, he has written a play as Shakespeare might today. Ehn strives to work inside of Shakespeare's own architecture while employing his own understanding of Shakespeare's spatiotemporality. In doing so, Ehn appeals to a postmodern audience who is used to engaging with the Stoppards, Brechts, and Becketts of the theatre. However, the membership base of Shakespeare Dallas, along with members of the Dallas theatre community, makes up most of the audience for the staged readings. This membership base, who has a history of being conservative and traditional in its tastes, found it difficult to engage with *BOY*. With a flexible space, such as the one Parry's staged reading had at the Project X Green Zone in Dallas, Ehn's Shakespearean epic incites both the imaginations of the audience and the players on stage, but perhaps goes too far afield from Shakespeare for the audience. Ehn, in exploiting Shakespeare's free play with time, space, historical referents, and source materials, so destabilizes Shakespeare's setting and characters that the audience leaves, both confounded and mystified by Ehn's tale.

### **Production Process and Audience Reception**

While never receiving a fully realized production, *BOY* has received multiple workshops at Project X. At one of these readings, Lisa Schmidt, a Dallas actor, performed the Hamlet/Boy monologue. Parry says it was the “highlight of the selected scene workshop...Lisa’s absolute fearlessness and ability to engage the text was riveting and brought the house down. We ended the selected scenes with that monologue, [which] was a triumph.”<sup>20</sup> Parry goes on to note that however successful Lisa’s reading was, the workshop audience quickly became frustrated by their inability to see the arc of the play in the preceding scenes. This perhaps gives some indication of the way in which each scene is divorced from the next. The play does not possess a logical linear progression and it became difficult for the workshop observers to obtain a grasp on the story the play tries tell.

Shakespeare Dallas and Project X produced a public staged reading of *BOY* in April of 2010; Parry directed. The play’s cast comprised members of the Dallas theatre community, many of whom are regular company members with Shakespeare Dallas during their summer and fall seasons. When asked why he decided it was time to present *BOY* to a public audience, Parry responded that he “wanted the play to gain some traction and have a reason to be.” He presented the play in its entirety because he wanted “everyone to be entertained” by making *BOY* accessible, no matter how dense it can be at times. Through a simple, yet dynamic staging, a charismatic cast, and an exciting playlist performed by a live band, Parry sought to engender a passion and excitement for *BOY* that equaled his own.

As he began working with the cast, Parry devoted a large amount of their short rehearsal time to discussion and table work. Jenny Ledel, who played Boy, remarked that the table work process was very “thorough” and that she spent quite a lot of time “picking out all the references

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<sup>20</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

to Shakespeare and [analyzing] the use of his lines out of context.”<sup>21</sup> Parry has said that, for the first time in a long time, he felt ahead of the curve during table work; he felt comfortable guiding his team through this very dense, often confusing piece. Ledel, who has worked with Parry on several plays at Shakespeare Dallas, describes his process as “organic.” “However,” Ledel continues, “I felt that [Raphael] was [the] driving force at the helm of *BOY* [and] it was the first time...he had very specific images he needed from me. It was unlike all my other experiences with him.” Parry, familiar with Ehn’s writing process and style describes his process of guiding the actors through *BOY*:

As with all of Erik’s work you have to find out all of the potential images and symbols and lay them on the table through conversation and investigation. Then you pack all of that up and put it away and speak the words and find the action. Saying the words over and over they begin to have resonance and gain a sense of meaning to you. Even though they actually don’t make sense you build a confidence in saying them and playing with ferocity that challenges the audience to accept them... I just encouraged the actors to not focus on a cause and effect that we understand in the world that we live in daily, but to accept the terms and universal laws of the play.<sup>22</sup>

Shakespeare Dallas typically presents a two play staged reading series every spring entitled Shakespeare Unplugged. The company uses this series to ‘test’ lesser known Shakespeare plays (and occasional adaptations) to gauge audience interest in seeing a fully staged production in their outdoor amphitheatre at Samuell Grand Park in Dallas during the summer months. Beginning in 2008, Shakespeare Dallas took their first step outside of the Bard’s canon and produced a reading of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The Rivals*, directed by Chris McMurtry. The success of *The Rivals* gave Parry the encouragement he needed to produce not one but three readings outside of Shakespeare’s canon for the 2010 Shakespeare Unplugged season. McMurtry returned to direct Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer*. Parry commissioned a lyrical adaptation of Shakespeare’s epic poem *Venus and Adonis* and announced

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<sup>21</sup> Taken from an e-mail interview, February 7, 2012

<sup>22</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012



that he would premiere a public reading of the highly anticipated *BOY*. The reading was to be performed April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup> of 2010 at the Project X Green Zone. While most of Shakespeare Dallas' staged readings receive two performances, *BOY* received three due to the demand for tickets by the Dallas theatre community. The cast, working on fifty to one-hundred dollar honorariums, depending upon union affiliation, agreed to a third late-night performance on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

While this staged reading, more staged than read, had a suggestion of costume, sound, scenic and lighting design, area critics overlooked the reading as a performance. While the actors were not all fully costumed, Korey Kent, Parry's assistant as well as the costume and props designer for the reading series, ensured that each actor wore a suggestion of the costume they would wear in a fully realized production. Dillinger, in a 1930s-style fitted vest and slacks, chased Rosalind, dressed in long pants and a tunic. I-Pod wore a long white t-shirt on which Kent painted the face of an I-Pod device; Orlando was dressed as a WWF wrestler. The function of the costume in each of these cases was to allow the audience to relax into the storytelling, which would have been difficult, had all of the actors worn neutralizing blacks, as is often the case with staged readings. Allowing characterization through costume helped Parry move the reading toward accessibility for his audience.

Newton Pittman and Justin Locklear, both actors in the reading who played multiple characters including pirates, federal agents, and Movie Boys, also served as musicians in the band with Bruce Richardson. The choice to not only have the musicians on stage but to perform each song in its entirety (with both music and lyrics being fully developed) lent the reading a sense of completeness that is often absent from staged readings. Another element that cued the audience into the comprehensiveness of this staged reading was the function of Anastasia

Muñoz, who played one of the Ardenian cowgirl fairies and doubled as the choreographer and movement specialist for *BOY*. Muñoz found herself charged with the organization of, among other things, the “gay fantasia” of a pirate dance as well as directing the stylized way in which the pirates were to sway in unison, signifying their presence on a moving ship. Clearly, Parry was hoping that his audience would be able to take away a comprehensive understanding of *BOY*'s potential.

The only elements that clued the audience into the fact that this was not a fully realized production were the scripts in all of the actors' hands as well as the use of a narrator to read the stage directions. John S. Davies, who played the Dutchman and Naval Officer, also tripled as Narrator, reading stage directions when necessary for clarification, dramatic effect, or, as was the case several times, the sake of humor. The stage directions, rather than seeming out of place, fit within the world of the play. The narration by the fabled captain of a ship doomed to sail the seas until the end of time seemed a fitting storyteller of Boy's tale. In the way that the Dutchman sits trapped aboard his own ship, Boy and Hamlet fight the narrative determinism of their own stories. By casting John S. Davies as both the Dutchman and Narrator, Parry cleverly created yet another layer of myth and storytelling out of which the audience could derive meaning.

Parry's staging of the reading, simple in its execution yet complex in its significations “acknowledges and strives to overcome its own confinement within the mimetic traditions of performance” (Davis and Postlewait 14). Throughout the short seven-day rehearsal process, Parry and his team developed suggestions of design and staging that would, if fully realized, prove too complex for the reading. “[S]ome of the nascent design choices proved out well,” says Parry, who describes the reading as a process of discovery. For example, “the use of the film

projector as a source of illumination was a delightful discovery.”<sup>23</sup> As Tracy Davis and Tom Postlewait offer in their introduction to *Theatricality*:

Just as theatricality has been used to describe the gap between reality and its representation...it has also been used to describe the ‘heightened’ states when everyday reality is exceeded by its representation. The breakthrough into performance helps to distinguish theatre from other kinds of artistic types or media as well as from the more pervasive utility of role playing...When the spectators role is not to recognize reality but to create an alternative through complicity in the ‘heightening’ of the breakthrough into performance, then both performer and spectator are complicit in the mimesis. (6)

In *BOY*, the use of projections in conjunction with the live bodies on stage forced the audience to reconcile the mixed media, thereby leading to the establishment of an alternative reality by performers and spectators simultaneously. These projections allowed for a step away from mimetic drama that the audience could comprehend and to which they could relate. Through the utilization of projection, Ehn and Parry established a theatrical convention that eludes the medium of film.

The projector and screen were rooted stage right. In several moments throughout the play, the Biograph Theatre was projected as a backdrop for the action on stage. In act two, scene four, two federal agents enter, discussing the problem of catching John Dillinger. Later in act five, scene three, I-Pod and Dillinger are coming out of the Biograph when federal agents surround them. The use of the projected image not only helps to differentiate space and locale within the world of the play, but the Biograph is an iconic image that haunts the cultural memory of the audience, recalling several different associations at once. The Biograph now houses Victory Gardens Theater and while the inside shows evidence of renovation, the outdoor façade remains unchanged. The Biograph is on the National Register of Historic Places and designated as a Chicago Landmark. This one image recalls classic Americana while also standing as a visual synecdoche for the entire myth of John Dillinger.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

The projection screen holds the clips of *Manhattan Melodrama* that play at various times throughout Ehn's play. *Manhattan Melodrama* is perhaps most famous for being the film that Dillinger saw in the Biograph before he was shot outside of the theatre. With this association in mind, the audience might feel a sense of impending doom wash over them, as they know what is coming for the charming outlaw and his "flyweight" of a date (Ehn 8). This feeling of violent cataclysm is compounded by the fact that one of the three orphans in the film grows up before the audience's eyes to be Macbeth, the Boy's eventual murderer.

Parry also uses the screen in ways not called for by the script. After admitting her own love for John Dillinger, Boy posts 'Wanted' posters for him on the forest trees. Orlando, in search of I-Pod, follows suit. The image on the posters appear on the screen as the actors pantomime hanging them on invisible trees. In the following scene, the images of the posters remain on the screen as Rosalind strolls by reading them. She does not read the 'trees' where Boy and Orlando hung their posters, but refers directly to the images on the screen:

ROSALIND	"Wanted: Wounded Fairy."
	"Wanted: John Dillinger: Break my laws my sweet criminal."
	"Fair-a, fair-b, fair-c, fair-d, fair-eee; I will learn the whole alphabet for you."

(12)

The use of the stationary projector and screen at once integrate the live performance with film while throwing it into opposition with the dynamic performances and static images on the screen.

Just left of center stage, Bruce Richardson and his band sit on stage in full view of the audience. The actors doubling as band members bounce in and out of the action of the play, adding costume pieces that signify the various roles they portray throughout the performance. This consistent 'shift in personnel' from members of the band to members of the cast adds to the meta-theatricality of Parry's staging along with the projections and narration.

Far stage left sits a unit of scaffolding, on top of which sits the Dutchman/Narrator. He remains seated on the scaffolding during the performance signaling that he is at once the captain and prisoner of his own ship, as well as the omniscient narrator of the Boy's tale. Throughout the play, other characters join him: the Bird swings from the top of the scaffolding to free the Dog; the Dog, once he is a ghost, takes his rightful place next to the Dutchman.

In act five, scene two, when Boy enters Hamlet's world, he goes to Ophelia's grave. During this tour-de-force performance, the sandbox that has been stored under the scaffolding rolls on stage to become Ophelia's grave, into which Boy/Hamlet leaps.

BOY            There with fantastic garlands did she come.  
*Leaps into the grave*  
Pile your dust on the quick and dead,  
This is I, Hamlet the Dane.  
*Leaps into the grave*  
The devil take thy soul!  
*Grappling with him*

(30)

During the performance, the actor playing Boy, Jenny Ledel, would periodically speak stage directions for clarity and dramatic effect. For example, during the climax of the 'Hamlet monologue' as it has come to be known, Parry and Ledel worked out which stage directions would be voiced, and which would be best left unvoiced:

BOY            Rapier and dagger.  
Judgment.  
A hit.  
Again.  
*Trumpets sound, and cannon shot off within*  
Give him the cup.  
***They play***  
A hit.  
A touch.  
Gertrude, do not drink.  
I will, my lord; pray you, pardon me.  
[Aside] It is the poison'd cup: it is too late.  
*They play*  
Have at you now!  
***LAERTES wounds HAMLET; change rapiers; wounds LAERTES.***  
Part them; they are incensed.  
***GERTRUDE falls***

Look to the queen!  
Dear Hamlet – The drink! I am poison'd.

*Dies*

*Stabs KING CLAUDIUS*

*KING CLAUDIUS dies*

Noble Hamlet: mine and my father's death come not upon thee, nor thine on me.

*Dies*

*March afar off, and shot within*

Tell.

*Dies*

Bodies high on a stage speak to the unknowing world: accidental judgments, casual slaughters.

Four captains bear Hamlet – a soldier to the stage; for his passage, soldiers' music and rites of war speak words, words, words. Go bid the soldiers shoot.

*A dead march. Exeunt. Boy as Hamlet, dead for a ducat dead.*<sup>24</sup>

(30)

The makeshift grave finds another use at the end of this scene when the body count rises. As Ledel falls dead as Boy/Hamlet, she falls into the sandbox that had been Ophelia's grave moments ago. This moment becomes extraordinarily powerful as a moment *of theatre* because, in this moment, "selfhood disappears [and] is remade as the mimetic impulse transforms identity" (Davis and Postlewait 10). Ehn's rendering of *Hamlet* becomes especially significant because:

One of the major reasons [*Hamlet*] is so appealing to us is that it is a compendium of the *theatrum mundi* heritage, as if Shakespeare had pulled together in one complex dramatic action all of the various ideas in Western culture on the symbiotic relation between theatre and human existence (10).

By taking *Hamlet*, a 'compendium of the *theatrum mundi* heritage,' and condensing it to a monologue performed by a single actor playing Boy, playing Hamlet, playing every other character in *Hamlet*, Ehn weaves together an entire world that comprises some of the most complex ideas on the role of theatre in Western literature, all in the span of three minutes. This moment on stage dizzies the audiences with its powerful and multi-layered complexity. To this

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<sup>24</sup> The stage directions in bold italics were spoken; those in plain italics were not.

day Jenny Ledel finds herself ghosted by her haunting performance of the Boy/Hamlet monologue.<sup>25</sup>

Other than the key scenic elements discussed above, the stage is emptied of props between scenes. Parry's staging recalls the early modern theatre's tradition of a bare playing space while Ehn's use of Shakespearean architectural structure pays homage to the Bard without being deferential. By reaching into the recent, distant, and literary past Ehn works as a collaborator with Shakespeare, within a Shakespearean model. The "repetition and circular sweeps" (Sanders 119) that Ehn employs creates an inevitable need to look back to the source text(s), thereby reaffirming Ehn's textual connection to Shakespeare. Similarly, Ehn's 'geographical commissioning' matches forms with Shakespeare who was often writing under commission and so, for a specific time, space, and audience (Stern 74-5).

Just as this particular adapted text cannot be autonomous, in that the ghosts of Shakespeare's own architecture and characters haunt the play, *BOY* becomes difficult to translate and reconcile outside of the intended audience and time for which Parry commissioned it. The artists at Project X and Shakespeare Dallas have helped develop *BOY* and bring it to its current apotheosis, yet audiences seem to have lukewarm reactions. "I know that the actors working on it loved it," says Parry. "They were game and excited and still talk about the work and have now mythologized the ridiculously short run. The audience enjoyed it as well but to a slightly lesser ecstatic degree. I think that they could not see the bigger picture that we had built in our mind about the show."<sup>26</sup> As Shakespeare's collaborator, Ehn "recognized [the] ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural

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<sup>25</sup> Since playing the title role in *BOY*, Ledel has been cast in three roles for Shakespeare Dallas that echo the ambiguously gendered heroine and perhaps this moment in particular: Julia in *Two Gentleman of Verona*, Viola in *Twelfth Night* (both directed by Parry), and Ophelia in *Hamlet*.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, February 9, 2012

position, [by highlighting] troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts” from which he adapts (Sanders 98). *BOY* does all of these things; however, it might be due to the play’s extreme specificity, as opposed to the universality of Shakespeare, that audiences have a difficult time finding a point of entry into the play.



## CHAPTER 2

“You Demi-Puppets”:

Redmoon and Chicago Shakespeare Theatre Recontextualize *The Tempest*

*With his axe as a magic staff and his sketches in a magic book, our Prospero has carved a whole world of his own out of wood. He longs to hear the story of his life the way it should have been, and it unfolds out of this wooden world over which he has complete control. He is not quite alone. He needs his actors to perform the story. Ariel and Caliban, now bound to his command, are his performers and puppeteers.*

*Director’s Program Note, The Feast, an intimate Tempest*

*Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri*

A pin light rises on Prospero, seated alone at his dinner table. He holds a small model ship that he dusts, keens, and primes for a voyage. “Twelve years,” he says, as he proceeds to produce a clipped version of the story of his arrival on the island; it is a condensed version of the tale he tells to his daughter, Miranda, in act one, scene two of Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*. This is not *The Tempest*, but *The Feast*, a co-production between Chicago Shakespeare Theatre and Redmoon Theatre. Co-created and co-directed by Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri, *The Feast* tells the story of a lone Prospero, master to both Ariel and Caliban. Prospero compels and commands his slaves each day to tell and re-tell his own story, enacting not only themselves but also the entire cast of characters present on the island during Prospero’s day of vengeance. Prospero (John Judd), Ariel (Samuel Taylor), and Caliban (Adrian Danzig) are the only characters embodied by actors in the play. Ariel and Caliban portray the remaining *dramatis personae* using hand-carved wooden puppets. By using Shakespeare’s language from *The Tempest* and implementing the meta-theatrical construct of the play-within-the-play, Thebus and Maugeri create a world of spectacle while recontextualizing Shakespeare’s language and characters, with the intent to tell a new story.

*The Feast* tells the story of Prospero, a man possessing despotic mystical powers, and his two slaves, Ariel and Caliban. Prospero compels his slaves, each day, to perform the story of his reclamation of the Milanian dukedom. He calls out titles of scenes he has directed, taking great

delight in watching the reenactment of his revenge and eventual success. Throughout *The Feast*, we see scenes lifted directly from *The Tempest*, enacted by the onstage trio. Puppets of Prospero's invention and creation represent the remaining characters from *The Tempest* (i.e. Miranda, Ferdinand, Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, Trinculo, and Stephano); Ariel and Caliban's performances bring them to life. *The Feast* opens on a rehearsal, moving quickly into a full performance of Prospero's play. Throughout the play-within-the-play, Ariel and Caliban conspire against their captor, colluding on an assassination plot. However, rather than participating in the plot laid by Caliban, Ariel defects and convinces Prospero to release his slaves of their endless servitude, relinquishing the island back to its native inhabitants. The story of *The Feast* therefore, is not only one of rebellion, but of the power of forgiveness and freedom of release. Between the play and the play-within-the-play, the story arc of *The Tempest* is rearranged, recontextualized, and performed in its entirety.

*The Feast*, Thebus and Maugeri's second collaboration, is a fitting project for these two artists as they are no strangers to adaptations of text interwoven with spectacle. In 2002, Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri co-created and co-directed *Salao: the worst kind of unlucky*, an adaptation of Hemingway's novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*. Redmoon Theater produced the "demi-musical" (Phillips), and performed it in the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre upstairs black box. Redmoon rented the space and presented a successful, critically lauded run. The most notable feature of *Salao*, indicative of the theatrical languages with which the adapters converse with their source material, is a life-size Bunraku puppet named Santiago, the "Old Man" of Hemingway's classic story. The puppet sits in a fishing boat that hangs from the ceiling of the theatre while "[d]esigners [Jesse Mooney-]Bullock and Lisa Barcy bring to life birds of various scale, a splendid turtle and, later, a boat-length marlin followed, as Hemingway's story dictates,

by a trio of arm-puppet sharks” (Phillips). While six shantymen evoke “19th Century sea shanties as well as Afro-Cuban-inflected rhythms” (Phillips), the play tells the story of Santiago’s eighty-fifth day at sea. *Salao* allows audiences to recognize the puppet as the protagonist of the play, inviting them to engage with the puppet’s vulnerability as well as the stylized, spectacle-driven play. The puppet, “capable of many graceful and expressive wonders,” (Phillips) is simultaneously human and not human. Audiences were enthralled with the story and astounded by the ingenuity of the puppeteers on stage.

After their success with *Salao*, Jessica Thebus met with Barbara Gaines, the Artistic Director for Chicago Shakespeare, to discuss the possibility of a collaboration project between Redmoon and the Shakespeare Theatre. The only directive for the co-production was that the play should be classical, in keeping with the mission of CST. Thebus and Maugeri would seek to replicate the multi-layered theatricality of *Salao* with *The Feast*. This time, the actors on stage would self-consciously perform, using puppets to make visible those who are invisible.

Jessica Thebus, a faculty member in the MFA Directing program at Northwestern University and one of Redmoon’s founding members,<sup>27</sup> is one of Chicago’s busiest directors. In addition to mounting two productions at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre in conjunction with Redmoon, Thebus has directed productions at Steppenwolf, The Goodman, Lookingglass Theatre, and Victory Gardens as well as numerous regional theatres including Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Kansas City Repertory. Her work, both well known and well respected, marks her as a favorite of the Chicago theatre community. Kristin Leahey calls her young-adult production of *Lady Madeline*, an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Fall of the House of Usher* presented in the Downstairs Theatre at Steppenwolf in 2006, a “skillfully directed production [that] entranced the student audience with sounds, sights, and scares” (Leahey 136). Leahey goes

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<sup>27</sup> Taken from a telephone interview with Jessica Thebus, February 16, 2012

on to describe Thebus's implementation of live music and a choral quartet which created a "vivid and foreboding soundscape" (136), illustrating Thebus's need to engage her audiences sensorially. Thebus's production affected the audience viscerally, creating "an engaging and accessible adaptation...of Poe's macabre tale and ghoulish characters" (137).

John Lahr, writing for the *New Yorker* in 2011, reviewed Thebus's "crisply directed" production of Sarah Ruhl's *Stage Kiss*, calling it "a ghost play in which both the play-within-the-play and the rebarbative lovers keep the past present." The Goodman commissioned and produced the world premiere of *Stage Kiss*, Ruhl's reworking of Noël Coward's 1930 play *Private Lives*. Todd Rosenthal's "confining but elaborate set within a set" proved a "marvel of transformation," (Hieggelke) reflecting Thebus's mercurial use of space. Thebus, accustomed to directing works that are not only visually spectacular but also inherently intertextual, found herself well equipped for the creation and direction of *The Feast*.

Frank Maugeri, co-artistic director for Redmoon (along with Jim Lasko) and instructor in the Theater Department of Columbia College, is a self-professed "public artist, spectacle maker and designer."<sup>28</sup> Most of his work with Redmoon is in conceiving, directing, and designing outdoor spectacles, public events, and installations. He describes himself as someone who "doesn't like theatre" as he finds himself troubled by the way language dominates the traditional theatre-going event.<sup>29</sup> Maugeri's strengths are in visual storytelling. In an interview with *American Theatre Magazine* in 2009, Maugeri discussed his art direction for *The Last of My Species: The Fearless Songs of Laarna Cortaan*, an outdoor "adventure in unexpected theatre in an unexpected place" (40): "My task was to accomplish an aesthetic assault," Maugeri said of the piece (41). These two individuals, one charged with the literary role of adapter and the other

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<sup>28</sup> *The Feast: an intimate Tempest* playbill biography

<sup>29</sup> Taken from a telephone interview with Frank Maugeri, February 16, 2012

with that of creating the physical world, are an ideal team to adapt and recreate a classic work for Chicago Shakespeare, as they are both drawn to striking physical spaces and unique modes of (re)telling stories.

Thebus, excited by the idea of working on a classical text, knew she wanted to work with Maugeri on another visual, puppet-based piece. For her, *The Tempest* came to mind very quickly. “It’s not so much a story as it is a poem,” says Thebus. “[I knew it was] appropriate for the visual language we wanted to use.”<sup>30</sup> Maugeri, not coming from a background in theatre, was unfamiliar with *The Tempest*. He had his first encounter with the play when he and Thebus saw a production of the play in 2009 at Steppenwolf, directed by Tina Landau. He finally understood why Thebus recommended the play to him: “Jessica brought up *The Tempest* because of its scale. I like to take huge things and make them tiny,” says Maugeri.<sup>31</sup> While Landau’s spectacular rendering of the play struck Maugeri as impressive, he immediately became more interested in stripping the story down to its essentials. Finding himself most intrigued by Frank Galati’s performance as the island’s despotic magician, Maugeri suggested that they “strip it down and tell a story focused on Prospero.”<sup>32</sup>

Thebus and Maugeri wanted to pare the play down, putting pressure on Shakespeare to see what he could give up. The two collaborators, determined to tell the story with only three actors on stage, decided the play would focus on Prospero’s journey while Ariel and Caliban, his captives, would fulfill the trinity. In adapting the piece, Thebus sought to boil the plot down to key scenes (e.g. the storm, the harpy, the marriage) as well as language essential to the narrative (e.g. “Our revels now are ended,” “This island’s mine,” “Oh brave new world”). We really

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<sup>30</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>31</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>32</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

“focused it down,” says Thebus, “[so that] every line of text contains an action.”<sup>33</sup> While Thebus was interested in keeping the essential plot points and relationships of the play in tact, she described the process of adapting *The Tempest* into *The Feast* as an “excavation” and a “carving away” to reveal the truest essence of the story.<sup>34</sup> Maugeri has described his main interest in *The Feast* as “rendering text into image so there is as little text as possible, [as] word is one minor tool in a big, big machine that needs to be repaired constantly.”<sup>35</sup>

Both artists admit to challenges they faced in developing *The Feast*. Thebus noted the challenges of adapting *The Tempest* in particular, and Shakespeare’s work in general: “Adapting Shakespeare is challenging because it’s so well known. ‘Shakespeare people’ have a particular attachment to the words. They are hesitant to give up Shakespeare even when it’s being translated into a different form.”<sup>36</sup> When asked about the difference between developing *Old Man and the Sea* and Shakespeare’s romance, Maugeri admitted that Hemingway’s novella is not as complicated. “The power was in the puppetry. It was easier. [*The Tempest*] was a killer...you’re up against a million different things” including audience expectations about how the storytelling should unfold in the play.<sup>37</sup> Maugeri expressed that his other major challenge came in “discover[ing] a new mode of storytelling. [He] generally creates pieces that are cinematic”<sup>38</sup> with very few words. For Maugeri, *The Feast* was a process of abandoning the cinema experience in a way he never does because this adaptation depends on language. While he found that the actors continuously wanted to tell the story verbally, he continued to put pressure on that idea, insisting words are only “one way to tell the story.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>34</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>35</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>36</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>37</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>38</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>39</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

*The Feast: an intimate Tempest* remains ‘true’ to Shakespeare’s language in that it implements verse and prose lifted directly from *The Tempest* while recontextualizing it with the intent of telling a new story. While Thebus and Maugeri used no other sources in constructing the language of *The Feast*, they did find it necessary to use language outside the text to keep the plot moving forward. Thebus has added language, but only where she found it necessary in order to clarify and contextualize the action on stage. For example, throughout *The Feast*, Prospero cues scenes by using titles, such as “the storm” and instructs Caliban and Ariel using modern language not found in *The Tempest*. As Ehn worked within a Shakespearean architecture, renovating and rebuilding the structure of his sourcetexts, Thebus rebuilt Shakespeare’s *Tempest* by reconstructing language and meaning. In doing so, she implicitly reconstructs the way the characters function within the world of the play and interact with one another.

### **Workshops, Rehearsal, and Production**

While the choice to adapt *The Tempest* for Redmoon’s co-production with Chicago Shakespeare happened very quickly, the process of adapting, designing, workshopping, and rehearsing the play took about three and a half years. “[It was] a couple of years talking with Barbara, a couple of years of Jessica writing an adaptation” says Maugeri, while his focus was on developing images.<sup>40</sup> Thebus and Maugeri finally reached a point when it became necessary to put their work on its feet and the language of the play in the mouths of actors. They brought in three actors who, while not part of the final product, “served as authors”<sup>41</sup> during the course of the play’s development. Throughout the workshops for *The Feast*, there were many incarnations of the story, puppets and overall design, creating an opportunity for Thebus and Maugeri to create and re-create *The Feast*. While they knew the general outline of the story, the workshops

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<sup>40</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>41</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

allowed them to sort out the context of the play, while allowing nuances to emerge. For example, in the workshops they discovered the need for a puppet-mask for Caliban that represents the way in which Prospero sees him. The moment wherein Prospero forces Caliban to wear the mask allows a more complex relationship to develop between the two. Prospero asserts not only his dominance over Caliban but forces him to perform the brutishness for which Prospero despises him.

Thebus, as the adaptor of the piece, knew it would be difficult for the puppets to sustain as much text as is in *The Tempest* so they “pared down the text severely [and] started with as little as possible.”<sup>42</sup> Thebus performed her ‘excavation’ before actors came in to the picture but the workshops helped her to see that it would be necessary to add language that she previously cut. During the workshops and rehearsal period, Thebus and Maugeri realized that despite their desire to keep the play’s text to a minimum, “[there were] events that needed to happen to make the story clear,” which, they felt, often needed to come from Shakespeare’s text. Throughout the brief three and a half week rehearsal process, the production team created around twelve different incarnations of *The Feast* and the show even changed radically through previews.<sup>43</sup> “You can workshop all you want,” says Thebus, “but until it’s really together...you just don’t know.”<sup>44</sup>

As the story of *The Feast* changed and developed throughout the rehearsal process, Maugeri leaned heavily on his fellow designers and puppeteers, including Art Director/2D and Silhouette Puppet Designer, Andrea Everman, as well as 3D Puppet Designer, Jesse Mooney-Bullock. “My designers become far more essential than most designers ever become,” says Maugeri. “My designers establish the logic of a universe, and then create obstacles and

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<sup>42</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>43</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>44</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012



opportunities for the actors.” Maugeri’s puppeteers continued to generate ideas and possibilities until they were exhausted, contributing to the constant development of the play. “In the work I make, everyone is an author,” says Maugeri. Because *The Feast* is such a collaborative piece, the “secret arc” of the variation in puppet functions emerged during its development; similarly, the logic of Prospero’s world unfolds throughout the play. “The whole while you’re seeing it, the design is developing. Good design evolves as a story [develops].”<sup>45</sup>

The fact that the play opens at a table is significant in and of itself. A banquet table can be a place for communion but a conference table is a place for negotiation. The beginning of *The Feast* is both. Prospero feeds Ariel and Caliban morsels from the table as though they were dogs waiting for scraps, and yet, both slaves attempt to barter for their freedom. However, once the play-within-the-play begins, the table ceases to be merely that: it becomes a stage. The central structure of the play remains both a table and a stage throughout the rest of the play.

As the story progresses and Prospero transforms from avenger to forgiver, he not only releases Caliban and Ariel from their bondage but he releases the puppets, which represent the ghosts of his own past. The audience comes to understand that Prospero is finally letting the dead rest in peace. As he recites what is perhaps his most famous speech in *The Tempest*, Prospero releases his ‘demi-puppets’ out to sea:

PROSPERO                      Our revels now are ended. These our actors  
As I foretold you were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air,  
And like the baseless fabric of this vision  
...  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

(Act IV, scene i, lines 131-41)

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<sup>45</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

Prospero sits on the table with his puppet menagerie. One by one he sets them in the ‘water’ that now surrounds the table. A blue light emanates from under the table and the puppeteer stationed underneath invisibly takes them from Prospero’s hands; the puppet-mask ‘floats’ away in a masterfully created illusion. The central structural element of the production, first a table, then a stage, has now become a wharf.

Finally, as the play ends and Prospero relinquishes the island back to Ariel and Caliban, the natural weathered planks atop the table/stage/wharf flip to a stark, white, ship’s deck. Ariel promises “calm seas”<sup>46</sup> to Prospero as he sails from the island over which he has held dominion, and closes *The Feast* with a plea for forgiveness from the audience:

PROSPERO	Now my charms are all o’erthrown And what strength I have’s mine own, Which is most is most faint. ... Now I want Spirits to enforce, art to enchant, And my ending is despair, Unless I be reliev’d by prayer, Which pierces so, that it assaults, Mercy itself, and frees all faults. As you from crimes would pardon’d be, Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue)
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The wharf that was once a stage, that was once a table, is now a ship’s deck as Prospero sails away. In this way, the design of *The Feast* evolves with the progression of the story.

The aforementioned puppeteer who sits underneath the set executes Prospero’s ‘magic’ in several instances. During the course of the play, Andrea Everman’s two-dimensional props pop up from between the wooden slats that cover the top of the table-stage. The first time we see these props is during the storm when Prospero’s small model ship glides across the table as tiny waves pop up, miniaturizing the scene that is often the grandest piece of spectacle in *The*

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<sup>46</sup> *The Tempest*, Act V, scene i, line 302

*Tempest*. These two-dimensional representational image-props appear several times throughout the play, helping to signal the world of illusion, puppetry and shadow play Prospero has painstakingly developed.

This device is used again during Miranda and Ferdinand's first meeting. As the two come closer to one another, finally reaching out their oaken hands to touch for the first time, a single rose pops up from between the table slats signaling the blooming of their love. Next, When Prospero calls for "The Feast," he signals that he wishes to see the moment wherein he entices the famished courtiers with a fantastic, enchanted banquet, only to have it disappear as they attempt to 'feast.' Ariel, now disguised as the fearsome harpy, accuses the men of their wrongdoing. Excepting the good and innocent Gonzalo, Ariel formidably addresses Sebastian, King Alonso, and Prospero's own treacherous brother, Antonio:

ARIEL

You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,  
That hath to instrument this lower world  
And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea  
Hath caus'd to belch up you; and on this isalnd  
Where man doth not inhabit – you 'mongst men  
Being most unfit to live.

(Act III, scene iii, lines 53-8)

In *The Feast* this moment serves as the climax to Prospero's tale as he takes his revenge through Ariel's harpy. As the courtiers reach for food pictured on the two-dimensional props that have popped up from between the slats of the table, the images fall away to reveal that the food is withered, rotten, and decomposed. The music intensifies in this moment and the sound of flies buzzing over the spoiled food fills the air. Ariel menacingly leaps on to the table wearing a half-skeleton mask while his wings, two giant skeletal fans, flap behind him as he pronounces judgment upon the "three men of sin." Caliban plays all three masks simultaneously under a red pin light, holding one in each hand, and the third in his mouth. Danzig's body becomes nearly invisible and these three rough-hewn vizards seem to float, as if caught in a vortex of the harpy's

own invention. Rather than making the feast disappear all together as it does in *The Tempest*, Thebus and Maugeri chose to replace the bounteous meal with images of decomposed fruit, vegetables, and meat. The very presence of the soured food along with the sound of the swarming flies creates an air of rot and decay, reflecting the nature of the treachery these men have committed. Ariel's harpy and Caliban's manipulation of the courtier puppets elicits a visceral response of fear from the audience, as death and pestilence fill the air, tormenting Prospero's would-be murderers.

The final time these two-dimensional props are used is during Miranda and Ferdinand's wedding scene. Bouquets of pink roses emerge from the table (as the single rose did earlier in the play) as well as a candelabrum that Prospero magically lights with his breath. It is all very 'sweet,' echoing a Disney princess marriage, drawing a stark comparison to the previous scene; death and pestilence versus growth and fertility. This moment cues the audience into just how deeply Prospero's illusion runs. The staging and re-staging of his daughter's marriage, rather than enchanting the audience as it does Prospero, forces the spectator's to pity Prospero as a kind of broken, delusional Lear.

### **Character: the Unhuman, the Inhuman, and the Inhumane**<sup>47</sup>

During the play-within-the-play in *The Feast*, Ariel and Caliban enact the other characters in Prospero's play. If one were to doubt whether Ariel remained Prospero's favorite in *The Feast* as he is in *The Tempest*, it would only be necessary to look at the casting of parts, which tells a story in itself. As a puppeteer, Ariel enacts all of Prospero's favorite characters in the play. He is the puppeteer for beloved Miranda, good Gonzalo, and both clowns, Trinculo and Stephano. The only conspirator Ariel plays is the ineffectual Sebastian, King Alonso's younger

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<sup>47</sup> Concept taken from pre-performance talk given by Regina Bucola, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, February 26, 2012

brother. Caliban plays Alonso and Antonio, the two men who had the strongest hand in deposing Prospero. He also plays Ferdinand, thereby embodying in one figure the two threats to Miranda's chastity, one by rape and the other by marriage.<sup>48</sup> Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Caliban plays a monstrous version of himself.

As Tracy Davis and Tom Postlewait discuss in their introduction to *Theatricality*, a book of collected articles on the origin and cultural implications of theatricality, Edward Gordon Craig's über-marionette "does what it is manipulated to do, and there can be nothing between its persona and its effect: as such, it escapes the role-playing of false mimesis" (11). Craig-like in his distrust of his actors ability to accurately portray Miranda, Antonio, and the rest of the characters in his play, Prospero makes the actors in to puppeteers, casting himself as their master. Ariel and Caliban simply operate the mechanism while adhering to Prospero's side-coaching as they rehearse and perform. Prospero barks orders at his puppeteers until he feels as though Ariel and Caliban are "performing in a condition beyond sincerity and hypocrisy" (11). Unfortunately for Prospero, the master puppeteer, his über-marionettes are not content to simply 'pull the strings,' and attempt to rebel during what they are determined will be their final performance. His tyrannical quest for verisimilitude and a life-like re-creation of his day of vengeance reflect Prospero's torments, "equally metaphysical as those of Strindberg, [which commit] him to an impossible mission to purify the theatre of its falseness, of its theatricality" (11). However, his insistence on perfection during the rehearsal that opens *The Feast*, is itself an inherently theatrical moment that defies Prospero's rampant anti-theatricalism.

Each of the puppets is made of a wooden face with a built-in mechanism for a specific mode of articulation. For Miranda, Maugeri "choose the most powerful element of a

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<sup>48</sup> Bucola pre-performance talk, February 26, 2012

woman...and exercise[d] that.”<sup>49</sup> Miranda’s eyes are the only part of her face that moves. Her eyelids move softly up and down, masterfully handled by Samuel Taylor, reflecting both the gaze of Ferdinand and the way in which Prospero remembers her. Similarly, Ferdinand’s movement reflects the way Prospero chooses to remember him; his eyes shift only left and right, highlighting Prospero’s initial distrust of his daughter’s suitor. The other element of the Miranda and Ferdinand puppets include fully articulated hands (one per puppet), used throughout the play in order to physically connect the two young lovers.

Alonso and the courtiers needed “a new trick,” Maugeri felt. In the workshops, he realized that because they were “chattering little creatures,”<sup>50</sup> their mouths should be their mode of expression. Rather than the soft, youthful look of Miranda and Ferdinand, Alonso and the courtiers are wrinkled, scarred, weathered, and rough-hewn. As Ariel and Caliban begin to tell the story of the courtiers’ arrival on the island, they pull the four mask-like puppets out of a sandbox built into the downstage end of the table. As Ariel and Caliban excavate the courtiers from the beach, Ariel and Caliban force the characters to ‘cough,’ dumping sand out of their mouths. This action simultaneously signifies the characters’ beached predicament as well as their excavation from Prospero’s memory. Sand pours out of the mouths of Prospero’s would-be murderers in the way settled, caked-on dust wafts into the air when disturbed.

Caliban’s puppet-mask, a product of the many workshops the play went through, rests on top of the actor’s head. In order for the audience to see the puppet-mask, the actor playing Caliban contorts his head in such a way that forces him to configure his body in an ape-like position; wearing the mask forces Caliban to transform his body into a monstrous spectacle. The puppet-mask is out of proportion with the actor’s body, causing Caliban to look not only

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<sup>49</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>50</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

monstrous, but also grotesque. The mask is built and operates in such a way that when Adrian Danzig, the actor playing Caliban, opens his mouth, the Caliban puppet-mask opens its mouth as well. The simultaneity and misdirection of the mask's mouth and actor's voice has a chilling effect. The mask allows the audience to simultaneously see the face of Caliban as well as the face of the monster Prospero 'knows' him to be. The grotesque image that Prospero forces upon Caliban and the reluctance with which Caliban dons the mask allows the audience to sympathize with him in a way Prospero cannot.

Rather than being the wooden mask-like puppets that represent all of the other central characters in the story, two Punch and Judy style puppets represent Stephano and Trinculo, the play's two clowns. Each puppet has two faces, one happy and one sad, layered one over the other. With a flick of Ariel's wrist, the clowns shift from one extreme emotion to the other. While they are Prospero's (and the audience's) comic relief, the puppets faces are contorted into grotesquely exaggerated expressions, which become disconcerting considering the rapidity with which their faces flip back and forth. The two clowns also possess a kind of darkness in the hands of Ariel while he colludes with Caliban on Prospero's assassination.

Within this triad, the audience is able to explore the unhuman in Ariel, the inhuman in Caliban, and the inhumane in Prospero, leaving them to question what it means to be human and how one earns humanity. During the course of the play, all three characters earn their humanity. Ariel and Caliban are finally able to earn their own humanity by portraying those who were once human. Playing these characters allows Prospero to see Ariel and Caliban as agents of free will, as they borrow a sense of humanity from the puppets themselves. Unlike Craig's cold "soulless" (Davis and Postlewait 11) puppet-object, Maugeri and Thebus present wooden masks implicitly endowed with humanity, thereby transferring that sense of humanity upon their puppeteers.

Through the process of puppeteering, performing, and re-performing Prospero's tale of vengeance, Ariel and Caliban earn their humanity. Finally recognizing the agency and humanity of his two slaves, Prospero relinquishes his control over the two of them as well as the island. In doing so, Prospero becomes human(e) once again.

Throughout the course of *The Feast*, Prospero must learn to not only reconcile with the ghosts of his past as represented by the play's puppets, but he must come to accept, forgive, and release them from his endless cycle of reenactment. In doing so he, too, earns his humanity.

### **Making Meaning through Language and Embodied Performance**

Many scholars and theatre practitioners like to draw an analogous relationship between Prospero and William Shakespeare, citing *The Tempest* as the Bard's final play of lone authorship. The drowning of Prospero's book and breaking of his staff represents the laying down of Shakespeare's quill. This interpretation of Prospero as a retiring playwright/director/designer reverberates throughout *The Feast*. At the beginning of the play, Prospero calls a rehearsal. He gives direction and provides criticism to his actors until he is satisfied with their performances. When he feels that Ariel's Miranda is becoming too forward with Caliban's Ferdinand, he abruptly stops the action, points his axe (Thebus and Maugeri's analog to the staff) menacingly at Ariel and bellows, "No! She's a virgin." Ariel promptly adjusts his performance.

Not only does Prospero act as a dictatorial director, he is also playwright, stage manager, and designer. He is the author of this play in the sense that it is his own story; it is the story of his life. At his stage managerial post, Prospero consistently refers to his promptbook, inside which he has painstakingly recorded the story. As the pages turn, the scenes shift and Prospero marks the beginning of scenes by calling out their title: "The Storm," "Miranda," "The Wedding," and



“The Feast.” As the scenes end, or when he becomes too overwhelmed by the scenes that he needs them to end, he rings a large ship’s bell, turns the page of his promptbook, and cues the next scene to begin.

Prospero also calls for lighting and sound cues he has designed. A chandelier hangs in the upstage right corner of the stage and there are three rustic gramophones on-stage. During the stormy opening scene of the play, the bulbs of the chandelier flash like lightning, giving Prospero his desired lighting effect. During “The Shipwreck” (a scene distinct from “The Storm”), Stephano and Trinculo appear for the first time. Prospero enjoys these two characters for they offer a sense of comic relief for him. As he calls out the scene title, he signals to Ariel for music. Ariel quickly cues up the far stage left gramophone, which begins playing a haunting, circus-like tune; the diegetic sound comes directly from the gramophones. The music underscores the scenes Prospero has so carefully designed, but it comes to the audiences in fragments and half-forgotten remnants. After cueing the music, Ariel bounds stage right and quickly puts on his Trinculo and Stephano hand puppets. The shipwreck is ready to begin.

Not only is Prospero interested in depictions of the characters in his play that reflect a certain level of verisimilitude, he requires an immersive mood and atmosphere to enjoy his play. In this way, Prospero acts as a kind of theatrical *auteur*, piecing together a performance out of fragments of memory. Prospero’s eerily reconstructed pieces of memory tell the audience “the thing they [are] experiencing is a ghost story.”<sup>51</sup> Throughout the play Prospero speaks with ghosts of his past; all that he has left of Miranda, Ferdinand, Gonzalo, Antonio, Alonso, Sebastian, and even Caliban, are fragments of memory. Miranda and Ferdinand are literally in pieces. Totally disembodied, Alonso and the courtiers chatter away malevolently. Stephano and

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<sup>51</sup> Maueri interview, February 16, 2012

Trinculo are merely devices for comedic relief; meanwhile, Caliban becomes the worst possible version of himself.

Throughout *The Feast*, each character plays a version of himself. Ariel demurely kowtows to Prospero, playing the obedient servant in hopes of earning his favor, and thus, his freedom. However, Caliban resists playing the role of the monster; Prospero forces him in to it through the threat of physical violence. Upon donning the monstrous mask, Prospero forces Caliban into a kind of minstrelsy. He leaps and bounds on all fours, athletically throwing himself on, off, and around the table, making a monstrous spectacle of himself to Prospero's delight. Prospero also becomes excited when he has an opportunity to play himself during Miranda and Prospero's meeting. He plays the role of the stern, protective father, seeming to be displeased with Miranda and Ferdinand's courtship. While the action of this scene and Prospero's attitude remain the same as in *The Tempest*, *The Feast* re-contextualizes the language and action of the scene, adding a layer of self-conscious performance. Rather than a father who is plotting his daughter's marriage, we have an old despot who entertains himself by performing his own manufactured memories.

By the end of *The Feast*, Prospero finds that he is unable to hold on to his 'demi-puppets.' When he realizes that Caliban means to assassinate him, Prospero attacks him with the first item on which he lays his hand: Gonzalo's mask. In his blind rage, Prospero severely beats Caliban with the representation of Gonzalo, who is the epitome of mercy. Prospero is horrified when he looks down and sees Gonzalo's face staring up at him, covered Caliban's blood. Ariel, who has managed to stop Prospero from killing Caliban, takes the Gonzalo mask and relays the reality of the courtiers' suffering to Prospero:

PROSPERO  
ARIEL

How fares the King an's followers?  
Confin'd together  
In the same fashion as you gave in charge

...

They cannot budge till your release. The King,  
 His brother, and yours, abide all three distracted,  
 And the remainder mourning over them,  
 Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly  
 Him that you term'd sir, "the good old Lord Gonzalo,"  
 His tears run down his beard like winter's drops  
 From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em  
 That if you now beheld them, your affections  
 Would become tender.

PROSPERO Dost thou think so, spirit?  
 ARIEL Mine would sir, were I human.

(Act V.i, lines 5-20)

During this moment of reversal, Ariel communicates through Gonzalo, down whose oak-hewn visage stream tears 'like winter's drops from eaves of reeds.' As he speaks through Gonzalo, Ariel draws a parallel between the courtiers' suffering, and his and Caliban's own miserable enslavement. This moment signals Prospero's transformation from an animalistic hunger for vengeance to a need for forgiveness and release. It is as though Prospero has been rehearsing Ariel and Caliban against their will for years, only to finally see the result of his cruelty through his slaves' tortured performances. Upon seeing the suffering his theatrical despotism has caused, Prospero is ready to relinquish his tyrannical powers, release his prisoners, and drown his promptbook.

Throughout the workshops and rehearsal process, the actors began to "accumulate double meanings of the words."<sup>52</sup> For example, during "The Shipwreck," Prospero, desirous of drink and comedic relief, calls on Ariel to perform Trinculo and Stephano's shipwreck and subsequent arrival on shore, while Caliban serves wine. As Prospero falls asleep, drunk with wine, Caliban begins to conspire with Ariel in an assassination plot. Ariel, fearful that Prospero will wake to discover the conspiracy, refuses to engage Caliban except through the Trinculo and Stephano puppets. Here Thebus reconstructs act two, scene two from *The Tempest* wherein drunken a

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<sup>52</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

Caliban convinces an even more drunken Stephano to murder Prospero in exchange for rule over the island. While, in this rendition, Ariel is Caliban's co-conspirator, he communicates with Caliban by way of Trinculo and Stephano's 'script,' thereby employing a kind of double-speak.

Ariel and Caliban speak in this 'coded' language while performing Prospero's play two other times, cementing their agreement to assassinate their captor. The second moment of subterranean conspiracy comes as Miranda and Ferdinand agree to marry. Ariel, who plays Miranda, and Caliban, who plays Ferdinand, speak the lines as scripted, but there is another layer to the language that Prospero neglects to see. Both Caliban and Ariel hold their respective masks in front of their faces as they stand in profile to the audience and Prospero, who sits upstage at the head of the table. Caliban, with a sleight of hand, moves Miranda's mask to Ariel's left and Ferdinand's to his right so that he and Ariel are looking into one another's faces. Because of his placement upstage, Prospero cannot see that as Miranda and Ferdinand take their oath, Ariel and Ferdinand take another:

MIRANDA/ARIEL	My husband, then?
FERDINAND/CALIBAN	Ay, with a heart as willing As bondage e'er of freedom. Here's my hand.
MIRANDA/ARIEL	And mine, with my heart in't.

(Act III, scene i, lines 87-90)

The fact that the audience can see Ariel and Caliban look into one another's faces but Prospero cannot signals to the audience that the language the two captives speak is a multi-layered one of collusion.

This double-speak continues to run through *The Feast* as the event for which the play is named approaches. The four courtiers enter the stage space complaining of hunger and fatigue after their day's strange adventures. Prospero has arranged, through his "so potent art,"<sup>53</sup> for a tantalizing feast to appear before the four men, only to disappear the moment they reach for

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<sup>53</sup> *The Tempest*, Act V, scene 1, line 50.

sustenance. Shortly before the disappearing feast, Sebastian and Prospero's usurping brother, Antonio, speak aside from their travel companions:

ANTONIO/CALIBAN	Do not for one repulse forgo the purpose That you resolv'd t' effect.
SEBASTIAN/ARIEL	The next advantage
	Will we take throughly.
ANTONIO/CALIBAN	Let it be tonight.

(Act III, scene iii, lines 12-14)

Here Caliban and Ariel keep their backs to Prospero while maintaining eye contact with one another. While these moments are not crucial to one's understanding of the plot, the audience members who observe these subtle and quick moments of conspiracy become agents of *The Feast's* perpetual meaning making. "We believed we could use the text of *The Tempest*," says Maugeri, "and put that in the mouths of Caliban and Ariel [which] leads them to a decision to murder Prospero that night. It was a crazy idea...That's what made the adaptation difficult...I think it works, it sometimes works."<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the use of wooden puppets to embody the characters of Prospero's story and double-speak to drive the assassination plot forward, projected animated shadow puppets are employed to embody Prospero's psychology, as well as make sense of how Prospero's 'magic' works on a practical level. At moments of Prospero's great passion or overwhelming emotion, shadow puppet animations appear on the upstage left wall. While the images are comprehensive, they are never whole because four segmented parts comprise the whole of the projection screen. When asked about the origin of the projections, Thebus says they have been with the piece from its inception.<sup>55</sup> When she and Maugeri asked themselves what Prospero's magic actually *is* and how they put it on stage, they felt that a visual representation would be the most effective way to reflect the level of Prospero's power, which is primarily psychic and illusionary rather than what

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<sup>54</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

<sup>55</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012

one might traditionally think of as ‘magic.’ These animations directly connect to Prospero’s own mind. The projections also make apparent the chaos latent within Prospero’s mind. The images are not only fragmented but they are, almost without exception, violent. Early in *The Feast*, after the rehearsal, Ariel asks for his freedom as Prospero insists upon a full performance of his play:

ARIEL	Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains, Let me remember thee what thou has’t promis’d, Which is not yet perform’d me.	
PROSPERO	What is’t thou canst demand?	How now? Moody?
ARIEL		My liberty.
PROSPERO	Before the time be out? No more!	
ARIEL		I prithee, Remember I have done thee worthy service, Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, serv’d Without or grudge or grumblings. Thou did promise To bate me a full year.
PROSPERO		Dost thou forget From what a torment I did free thee? (Act I, scene 2, lines 242-51)

It is at this moment that the shadowed figure of a fragile Ariel appears on the screens. The evil witch, Sycorax shoves him into a cloven pine. Prospero recounts the story of Ariel’s freedom from the tree, which he owes to Prospero. As he reminds Ariel of his good fortune, of how lucky he is to be serving rather than languishing inside of an arbor prison, Prospero conjures these images on to the screen. At the moment of his conjuring, Ariel reacts in physical and emotional pain, as if Prospero’s recalling of his suffering invades Ariel’s mind. Prospero not only reminds Ariel of his pain, but forces Ariel to re-live it through Prospero’s psychic tyranny.

This happens again later in the play when Prospero forces Caliban to wear the grotesque puppet-mask. Voicing his unwillingness to participate in Prospero’s sick need for a minstrelled performance of monstrosity, Caliban, like Ariel, reminds Prospero of the services he has performed:

CALIBAN	This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother, Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first,
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Thou strok'st me and made much of me,  
...  
and then I lov'd thee  
And show'd thee all the qualities o'th'isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.  
(Act 1, scene 2, lines 332-39)

Prospero not only reminds Caliban of the torment that can be inflicted upon him for disobedience, but he makes good on his threat.

PROSPERO                      If thou neglec'st, or dost unwillingly  
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,  
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar  
That beast shall tremble at thy din.  
(Act 1, scene 2, lines 369-72)

Rather than thirty lines of text separating these two moments as they do in *The Tempest*, Thebus places these moments more closely in *The Feast* to heighten the dramatic tension. Without laying a finger on him, Prospero throws Caliban into such a fit of pain that he falls down on the table. Prospero stands over him malevolently as he perpetrates this violence upon him. On the screen directly behind Prospero, the audience sees a black screen with a white skeleton. The skeleton is Caliban's and as it writhes in pain, Caliban mirrors its movements. Without touching him, Prospero is able to put Caliban in such pain that he has no choice but to perform the monster minstrel show for the despot. The fact that the audience can see a physical representation of Prospero's mind makes his emotional and psychic terrorism that much more viscerally immediate, causing the audience to sympathize with Ariel and Caliban rather than the 'protagonist' of *The Feast*.

The only moment in the play when Prospero's mind is totally at ease is during the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand. This scene is quite the opposite of the raucous, musical masque of harvest and fertility, complete with Greek and Roman goddesses, that takes place in *The Tempest*. In *The Feast*, the wedding celebration is, appropriately, intimate. The only characters on stage are Prospero, Miranda (Ariel), and Ferdinand (Caliban). The projections

during this scene are of blue skies, a tall, strong, blossoming tree, and birds joyfully swooping back and forth. It is at this moment that the audience finally sees Prospero at total peace. However, it is an ephemeral and artificial peace as “these actors...were all spirits, and/Are melted into air, into thin air.”<sup>56</sup> Here Thebus and Maugeri keep the audience from becoming too engrossed in Prospero’s joy. Not only are Ariel and Caliban in full view of the audience as the ‘marriage’ commences, but Prospero stages the entire event. The theatricality of the scene overwhelms the audience’s inclination to emotionally invest. Rather than indulging in Prospero’s joy, the audience watches with pity as Prospero immerses himself within his own illusion. This moment works against the interpretation of Prospero as a tyrannical despot that Thebus and Maugeri set up earlier in the play. The re-staging of Miranda and Ferdinand’s marriage pushes the audience toward a sympathetic reading of Prospero, which resist an engagement with the post-colonial discourse surrounding *The Tempest* and its adaptations.

### **Critical and Audience Reception**

Adaptations of classic literature inevitably raise questions of fidelity and inclusion: “Does it ‘stick’ to the story?” or “Do I have to be familiar with the original?”; *The Feast* is no different. Thebus, pulling text directly from *The Tempest*, “encourages audiences to compose varying versions of the same story, leading them to pay closer attention to how the story is told and less to the story itself. Thus, in a kind of paradox, the author uses a familiar story to emphasize the originality of [her] contribution” (Carlson 27). The power in *The Feast* is not in the story, but in the storytelling.

Even though *The Feast* lifts most of its script directly from *The Tempest*, Thebus claims that in order to enjoy *The Feast*, “you don’t have to know *The Tempest* at all.”<sup>57</sup> Many reviewers

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<sup>56</sup> *The Tempest*, Act IV, scene iv, lines 131-33.

<sup>57</sup> Thebus interview, February 16, 2012



have noted otherwise, including Chris Jones of the *Chicago Tribune* who says that it is actually quite difficult to engage with the rich and multi-layered theatricality of the play without having a “deep knowledge” of *The Tempest*, which he calls “unnecessarily exclusionary.” J. Scott Hill, writing for *Chicago Stage Review* also asserts that Thebus and Maugeri expect their audience to be familiar with *The Tempest* while Dan Zeff from *Stage and Cinema* agrees that “viewers who don’t know the story will struggle to figure out what’s happening.” Hedy Weiss for the *Chicago Sun Times*, remarking on the relationship between spectacle and story, notes that while Prospero “oversees a sensory feast, the audience is starved for a nourishing script.” Here Weiss seems to get closer to the problem than the other reviewers do; she recognizes *The Feast*’s need for *more* story, rather than less. By sticking so closely to Shakespeare’s text, only adding external text where necessary in order to keep the plot moving forward, Thebus has perhaps erred on the side of conservatism of language, leaving the audience “starved” for a story that expands out of *The Tempest* rather than receding into it.

While some reviewers criticize *The Feast* for privileging its source text too strongly, other reviewers, such as Lauren Whalen writing for *Chicago Theatre Beat*, argue that “stellar production design – a signature of Redmoon...is all well and good, but not when the real story falls by the wayside.” Whalen’s criticism assumes a need for slavish Bardolatry on the part of Shakespeare’s interpreters, adapters, collaborators, and audience members that is nothing if not problematic. The idea of the ‘real story’ is troubling as “the inherent intertextuality of literature encourages the ongoing, evolving production of meaning and an ever-expanding network of textual relations” (Sanders 3). As with many criticisms of Shakespeare adaptations, Whalen’s own sense of Bardolatry comes to the fore. Adaptations and appropriations, often thought of in the negative, ask what has been lost and sacrificed rather than what has been gained or

illuminated. Whalen's distinction between *The Tempest*, the 'real story,' and *The Feast* draws an archaic hierarchy between Shakespeare and his adapters wherein Shakespeare is authoritative and all re-imaginings merely derivative. The treatment of Shakespeare's story as gospel, and questions of textual fidelity "is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense" (Leitch 161). Tiffany Stern notes, "revision to a text did not stop with the death of an author. Plays that were...regularly reshaped during an author's life were, for the same reasons, regularly reshaped after his death" (60). Therefore, the idea of a "real" story or of an adherence to an "authoritative" text becomes futile to discuss, as *The Feast* is an adaptation of *The Tempest*, not a staging of the play itself; *The Feast*, therefore, has its own 'real' story. "Perhaps a useful way to think about adaptation is as a form of collaboration across time and sometimes across culture of language...Shakespeare would have perhaps expected to be adapted by future writers and future ages" (Sanders 47-8).

There seems to be some confusion among critics as to whether *The Feast* follows Shakespeare's play too closely, thereby alienating audience members without an intimate knowledge of *The Tempest*, or whether the production abandons the storyline of the source text, putting a stronger "emphasis on eye candy [causing] the script to fall flat" (Whalen). Perhaps the trouble for *The Feast* is somewhere in the middle. "Some writers," Sanders notes, "have a celebrated honorific approach to Shakespeare as a source. Others are seen to be more iconoclastic in intention, rewriting or 'talking back' to Shakespeare as an embodiment of the conservative politics, imperialism, and patriarchalism of a previous age" (46). Perhaps the confusion over *The Feast* lies in the fact that Thebus does not have a 'celebrated honorific

approach' to the Bard's romance, nor does she rewrite or 'talk back' to Shakespeare's tale of a colonial empiricist.

One must also take into account the fact that while *The Feast* is the result of a collaboration between Redmoon and Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, it is a play commissioned by CST, produced by CST, and marketed to Chicago Shakespeare patrons. On the Chicago Shakespeare website, one of the central missions of the theatre is that of "preserving the integrity of Shakespeare's language, while at the same time making the work clear and understandable to a modern American audience." It is clear that *The Feast* is striving to do both of these things. Before she and Maugeri even began working on their adaptation, Thebus met with Barbara Gaines to discuss what kind of story she and Maugeri were interested in telling, as well as what they could not stand to lose from the telling of Prospero's story. While Thebus and Maugeri set their own parameters for the play with Gaines's full support to "shatter convention,"<sup>58</sup> they had to take the audience, subscriber, and donor expectations in to account. They simultaneously strove to do that while remaining true to the mission of Redmoon Theatre, by pulling from "contemporary art and ancient theatrical forms, [to create] accessible public theater events that manifest the interests and vitality of diverse communities in exciting and innovative ways" (Redmoon Theater website).

Thebus and Maugeri seek to deconstruct *The Tempest* in order to tell a story intimately tied with the psyche of Prospero, while also giving a voice to his under-privileged servants, Ariel and Caliban. However, does this particular reconstellation of *The Tempest*'s language and characters speak to a contemporary audience in the way they want it to? On the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre website for *The Feast* there is a section marked 'Learning.' Within that section there is an essay by the renowned Shakespearean postcolonialist scholar, Ania Loomba,

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<sup>58</sup> Maugeri interview, February 16, 2012

entitled “This Island’s Mine.”<sup>59</sup> Loomba’s essay lays out historical context regarding European colonization and Shakespeare’s play in conjunction with emerging travel narratives of the time including documents written by Sir Walter Raleigh and Michel de Montaigne’s essay “Of the Cannibals” (also echoed in *Othello*). Loomba contextualizes the complexities latent within *The Tempest* in light of decolonization. She also remarks on what was perhaps Shakespeare’s ‘prescience,’ in *The Tempest*, as he indicates “so many of the historical complexities that were to unfold for the next four-hundred years” (Loomba). The presence of this essay on the website and in the playbill gives potential audience members a false sense of the nature of the play. One audience member noted after the performance that, in light of the audience enrichment materials available, the play “painted Prospero in a much more sympathetic light” than he would have imagined.<sup>60</sup> Rather than turning a critical eye on Prospero, as many postcolonial adaptations of Shakespeare’s romance have done,<sup>61</sup> Thebus and Maugeri have created a Prospero-centric production that, rather than criticizing Prospero’s despotic behavior, finds ways to justify it.

Instead of moving toward a deprivileging of Prospero such as Ernest Renan did in his 1878 *Caliban: Suite de “La Tempête,”* Thebus and Maugeri re-established Prospero’s position as the hero of the tale. In *Caliban: Suite de “La Tempête,”* Prospero returns to Milan with his two servants, Ariel and Caliban. While there, Caliban raises a rebellion against Prospero, instigating the proletariat to seize and burn his books, thereby deposing him. Caliban is declared “‘Man of the People’ and dispatched to Milan as its new ruler, only to decide, ten hours later, that he should imitate Prospero” (Zabus 12). *The Feast* does not engage in this sort of active criticism of Prospero, nor does it engage in a postpatriarchal discourse as Marina Warner’s 1992 novel, *Indigo, or Mapping the Waters*, does. Warner “retrieve[s] the woman’s story from a male-

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<sup>59</sup> This essay is also published in the production’s souvenir program.

<sup>60</sup> Taken from a personal interview with audience member Casey Thiel, February 26, 2012

<sup>61</sup> See: Sanders, 50-52.

centered text” (Sanders 50) by interweaving two times. Miranda appears in the twentieth century while Sycorax exists in the early modern period. *Indigo* problematizes the stability of a simplistic linear historical account by “subjecting history to...patterns of storytelling and multiple textualities...[enabling] a feminist viewpoint to be articulated” (50-1).

Chantal Zabus’s *Tempests After Shakespeare* (2002), an account of adaptations, appropriations, re-imaginings, and re-writings of *The Tempest* from 1960-2000, discusses three major types of *Tempestual* adaptation. Zabus’s study asks how “Caliban, Miranda/Sycorax/Ariel, and Prospero come to augur, respectively, postcoloniality, postpatriarchy, and postmodernism” (1). While *The Feast* does not engage with these postcolonial or postpatriarchal discourses, it does engage with the postmodern need for “intervention rather than the reproduction of the existing order” (Zabus 7). Like many of the postmodern subjects in Zabus’s study, *The Feast* tells the story of “Prospero’s own parodic and nostalgic quest for the past [which] is enacted within the deconstruction of his claims to lordship and in future oriented forms” (7). In F. McLeod Wilcox’s 1956 film, *The Forbidden Planet*, *The Tempest* is transformed into Planet Altair IV in 2200 A.D. Prospero is figured into Dr. Morbius and Miranda becomes Altaira (also known as Alta). They are the sole survivors of an exploration mission. Morbius, unaware that he has tapped a source of power once belonging to a now extinct species “unleashe[s] the power of his own Id” (183) upon the United Planets team who is there searching for survivors from the failed mission. Morbius ultimately dies fighting the ‘monster’ he has unleashed, leaving Alta to abandon the planet with Commander Adams of the United Planets team, the film’s Ferdinand analog. In this re-telling, Ariel is made into Prospero/Morbius’s house robot, Robby, who also acts as Miranda’s nurse. Wilcox paints Caliban as Prospero’s “subconscious hate and lust for destruction” (186). The ‘monster’ takes various physical shapes including a demon and a beast.

This Freudian Prospero-centric film evokes apocalyptic visions for Prospero's world but ultimately results in his valorization when he sacrifices himself to free Altair IV of his 'monster.' His sacrifice leads to the gained autonomy of both Robby and Alta, not unlike *The Feast*.

In Phyllis Gotlieb's 1976 novel, *O Master Caliban!*, the author imagines a world in which the plot against Prospero was successfully carried out by Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano. Robots perpetrate the coup and Dahlgran, (Prospero's analog) who has "no clear intentions of giving up his magic" (Zabus 194), is a prisoner of the machine Erg-Queen, "a sci-fi Sycorax of sorts" (195). The Queen deploys Erg-Dahlgren to learn Dahlgren's psyche and replace him once he has recovered a sufficient amount of information from the human sorcerer. The Queen's Erg-Dahlgren, a kind of hybrid Caliban/Ariel analog, is a 'monster' whose "demand for more autonomy" causes him to experience "the existential angst that flesh is heir to" (196). Once the Queen is safely deposed, it would seem, considering the novel's title, that the Caliban analog would then overthrow Dahlgren/Prospero; however, by the end of Gotlieb's story, "Prospero is alive and well" (197). The fact that Prospero, a human captive, retains his dominion over the machines reinforces the sci-fi trope of organic life's superiority over synthetic as well as the postmodern tendency to (re)privilege Prospero. In both adaptations Prospero maintains his status of the hero of the tale; however unlike *The Feast*, Prospero retains his control over the island/planet in *O Master Caliban!*

Perhaps one of the most critically discussed adaptations of *The Tempest* is Peter Greenaway's 1991 film, *Prospero's Books* starring John Gielgud as the deposed Duke of Milan. *The Feast* echoes this film, more than any other postmodern adaptation or appropriation of *The Tempest*. Unlike Derek Jarman's *Tempest* (1979), which seeks to destabilize Prospero's authority, Greenaway "has elevated Prospero to his full role as supreme scribe of a visually

overripe ‘masque’ of ephemera and as God-like creator of all the film’s possible meanings” (Zabus 256). Like *The Feast*, the story of *Prospero’s Books* uses and re-contextualizes the entirety of Shakespeare’s play while letting the story unfold through the turning of the page. In *Prospero’s Books* most of the language that comes from other characters filters through Prospero’s own psyche. While the actors on screen do not move their mouths, the audience hears their lines in a dubbed voice-over simultaneously with Prospero’s voice; he remembers their words while simultaneously reciting them. This convention carries through the entire film until the forgiveness scene between Prospero and the courtiers. One gets the sense that Prospero is feeding the language into the other characters of his story, acting as a kind of master puppeteer. Many times throughout the film, Gielgud writes the words the audience is hearing, which allows Prospero to be the *auteur* of the *Tempest* tale as he is in *The Feast*. The major difference between these two adaptations, aside from the medium, is the scale. *Prospero’s Books* is an example of the kind of scale against which Thebus and Maugeri work. Greenaway’s film casts “Prospero-the-playwright [as] a da-Vinci-like humanist who is mounting a pageant that is being cast, directed” and performed before our very eyes (256-7). Thebus and Maugeri’s Prospero is not so grand in his aesthetic ambitions, as he merely seeks to intimately re-create his own story over and again. Also echoing Greenaway’s film, Prospero frees Ariel (and, by default, Caliban), drowning his array of books at the film’s close. While in both adaptations Ariel is the one who convinces Prospero to abjure his magic and rule over the island, there is no collusion between Ariel and Caliban in *Prospero’s Books*. This single element leads one to believe that *The Feast* may be best interpreted through a postcolonial lens. However, *The Feast*, valorizing Prospero at the end of the play, seems to fall more in line with the Zabus’s category of “postmodern” over

“postcolonial” rewrites, making the presence of Loomba’s article on the website and in the program misleading to audiences.

In light of the myriad of adaptations and re-interpretations that criticize Prospero for his colonial imperialism, *The Feast*, which takes a step back and allows the audience to view Prospero more objectively, is a palette-cleansing re-telling of Prospero’s dominion over Ariel and Caliban. Julie Sanders notes in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, “what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer’s, director’s, or performer’s decision to re-interpret a sourcetext” (Sanders 2). With their adaptation, Thebus and Maugeri chose not to re-interpret *The Tempest* through a political lens, but rather left Prospero to his honorific show of transformational mercy. Rather than “offering commentary on a sourcetext,” as adaptation frequently does, by providing “a revised point of view from the ‘original,’ adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized” (18-19), Thebus and Maugeri have condensed Shakespeare’s late romance, ultimately valorizing Prospero, focusing instead on his emotional and psychological journey.

This re-imagining of *The Tempest* as an intimate *Feast* zeroes in on the psychic world of illusion in which Prospero has immersed himself, as well as the implications of his transformation at the end of the play. This project, born out of a collaboration between not only Redmoon and Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, but also with Shakespeare himself, minimizes the scope of *The Tempest* in order to focus on the play’s central character. The size of the upstairs space at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, as well as the minimized world Thebus and Maugeri have created, offers audiences a unique opportunity to engage intimately with Shakespeare’s characters and their afterlives. While *The Feast* perhaps does not accomplish everything Thebus



and Maugeri initially set out to do, it is nevertheless a unique Shakespearean adaptation model and sensory-driven theatre-going experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### “I Heard a Voice Cry”:

#### Renegotiating the Boundaries of Performance in Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More*

*I am the last person left on the elevator with the hotel bellhop. He stares at me menacingly as we reach our destination. He opens the door and giggles to himself as I exit. I am alone. I start moving into a room with a lush pillow pallet and canopy laid out with no one around to enjoy it. I think about lying down to see what happens; I resist the urge and keep moving. I find myself in a bedroom full of dusty books, antique relics, and am, again, alone. I tentatively sit on a chair, waiting for a stagehand to come and ask me not to sit on the furniture; nobody does. I fondle the knick-knacks on the shelf, picking them up, inspecting them, and carefully returning them to their original position. There is a glass of what appears to be scotch sitting on the mantle. I pick it up, smell it, and notice a lipstick print on the rim. I am tempted to take a sip to see if that will bring the stagehands out, telling me I have gone too far when suddenly I hear a waltz playing. I move toward the sound and exit the room, moving further and further away from the elevator. “What if I can’t find my way back?” I worry. I discover that I am actually above the music as I look down at a ballroom floor. A man and woman are dancing; he is older and in tails and she, much younger, is dressed as a housekeeper. Who are they? Why are they dancing together? Out of the corner of my eye, I see other masked figures, like me: audience members! I realize there is a way to get closer. I exit back through the bedroom, past the pillow pallet and I see there is a flight of stairs. I run down it, hoping I have not missed the action. I come out on the same level as the mysterious dancers. They are just finishing their dance and there seems to be a conflict between them. He tries to kiss her; she breaks from him and runs away. The man slowly walks in the opposite direction. I follow her.*<sup>62</sup>

In the spring of 2011, Punchdrunk, in conjunction with Emursive, transformed three warehouses on 27<sup>th</sup> Street in Chelsea, Manhattan into a “1930s Pleasure Palace called the McKittrick [Hotel]”<sup>63</sup> (Brantley). The neighborhood is devoid of storefronts or restaurants. There is an elementary school a few blocks east and many residential buildings but that part of the island is largely barren and certainly not the kind of place one would expect to find a unique theatre-going experience such as this. *Sleep No More*, directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, also designed by Barrett and choreographed by Doyle, is “a voyeur’s delight” (Brantley) that invites audiences to discover the dark history of The McKittrick Hotel. This enormously successful production was set to run in New York from February to May 2011. The run has been

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<sup>62</sup> Since its London premiere in 2003, *Sleep No More* was remounted in Brookline, Massachusetts in 2009 and finally in New York in 2011. This analysis is taken from an attendance of the New York re-mount in June 2011. Like Frances Babbage’s “Heavy Bodies, Fragile Texts: Stage Adaptations and the Problem of Presence,” this analysis “never quite parts company with experience and opinion that is intuitive, unverifiable, and possibly fanciful” (12). Many thanks to Jason Zednick for sharing impressions from the four performances of *Sleep No More* he attended between March 2011 and February 2012.

<sup>63</sup> An allusion to Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*.

extended several times, preparing now to close in May 2012. The public's overwhelmingly enthusiastic response to Punchdrunk's unique way of engaging audiences, by utilizing stories from classic Western literature filtered through the lens of film noir, resulting in an immersive physical theatre, reflects the need for a new way of interfacing with our art and stories. W.B. Worthen recently called the play, "A meditation on *Macbeth* and a response to the function of Shakespeare in contemporary performance culture [that] complicates the fatigued distinction between 'text-based theatre' and 'performance.'" (82).

Dedicated to the idea of audience as the epicentre of the theatre-going experience, Felix Barrett founded Punchdrunk in 2000. As he prepared to graduate from the Drama department at Exeter, Barrett began wondering how he could respond to "the failure of theatre to provide an exchange between performer and audience" (White 219). Disdainful of the traditional audience-spectator relationship, Barrett founded Punchdrunk with the intention of empowering his audience:

When you're sat in an auditorium, the primary thing that is accessed is your mind and you respond cerebrally. Punchdrunk resists that by allowing the body to become empowered because the audience have to make physical decisions and choices, and in doing that they make some sort of pact with the piece. (Machon 89)

Audience members are forced to not only make interpretive decisions about the story they see, but also the kind of totalizing sensory experience they have, which allows each individual audience member to take ownership of his or her performance experience. Punchdrunk seeks to recreate "a flexible actor-audience relationship and a participatory spectator/actor" (Bennett 19). With this mission in mind, Felix Barrett began the company by adapting classic texts into site-specific explorations, but it was not until Maxine Doyle joined Punchdrunk that the company began producing the kind of work for which it has now become famous.

Maxine Doyle, the co-director and choreographer for *Sleep No More* joined Punchdrunk in 2003 to collaborate with Barrett. Coming from a background in dance, Doyle's "big frustrations with dance within an auditorium...is that it can feel really distant and...cold so you can't *feel* the dancing...in Punchdrunk work you *feel* the dancing, you feel the breath and you have a visceral response to it" (Machon 89-90). Doyle's background as a dancer and Barrett's background in theatre encouraged the two to fuse their styles together in such a way that allowed them to focus on storytelling through gesture and physical expression, free from the bounds of language.

Both Barrett and Doyle come to their work with Punchdrunk harboring frustrations toward performance 'norms' in their respective disciplines. Barrett, unfulfilled by the typical spectator-performer relationship wherein the spectator sits by passively observing, and Doyle, left cold by the great chasm of emptiness left between dancers and audience, work toward audience empowerment and performer proximity to bring a unique experience to actors and spectators alike. Barrett and Doyle seek to fulfill the mission of Punchdrunk by forcing the audience to participate in the storytelling of *Sleep No More*, actively engaging them in ways that theatre and dance do not normally employ. Working in complementary capacities, Barrett focuses on the audience and their experience while Doyle focuses on the narrative journey of the performers; this split attention allows Punchdrunk to focus "as much on the audience and the performance space as on the performers and narrative." Punchdrunk's "infectious format rejects the passive obedience usually expected of audience members" so that lines between spectator and performer are constantly in flux (Punchdrunk website).

*Sleep No More*, Barrett and Doyle's first collaboration in 2003 was Punchdrunk's first attempt to remove text altogether and replace it with a movement language. Rather than adapting

Shakespeare for intellectual access, Doyle and Barrett have adapted the Bard to be experienced viscerally, in concert with an anti-textual style. They do so by creating a world of illusion that disorients the audience within a labyrinthine installation and welcomes each spectator to be part of the meaning-making process regardless of his or her respective spectatorial style.

Although it seems counterintuitive to adapt rich literary and performance texts only to cut the text from the performance, Barrett asserts, “the audience need a hook because the conventions take some getting used to. In order to empower the audience they need to feel that it is a puzzle, a conundrum that they can grasp” (Machon 2007). Punchdrunk uses canonical texts imbedded within the collective cultural memory as the source for their plays; using a sourcetext such as Shakespeare provides an immediate point of access for their audience. Because of the unique and unusual style of Punchdrunk performances, the use of well-known stories and motifs allows the audience to turn their attention toward understanding their own function as meaning-makers and discoverers within the world of the play.

### **The Sourcetexts: Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca***

*I follow her to a dining room. She meets a physically distraught pregnant woman there and pours her a cup of what looks like milk. The pregnant woman refuses the drink (or is the housekeeper refusing to give it to her?) and the two women get in to a dance-like altercation. The pregnant woman loses her will to fight and drinks from the cup. The housekeeper seems pleased and makes her way to the balcony from where I first saw her. There are hollow explosions of sound coming from below. Taking my cue from the woman, I look over the balcony. A young man in a tuxedo, undone at the collar and untucked from his trousers, enters the space below. He looks up, sees the woman, and scales the wall immediately. He lifts himself over the balcony and they fight; only, it is not a fight, it is another kind of dance. He is accusing her of something but I am not sure what. She escapes him and as I try to follow her, she shuts the door in my face. I have lost her.*

Thomas Leitch, enumerating twelve fallacies in contemporary adaptation theory, problematizes the idea that “adaptations are adapting exactly one text apiece” (164). Leitch argues that “each individual adaptation invokes many precursor texts...[and that] no intertextual model, however careful, can be adequate to the study of adaptation if it limits each intertext to a

single precursor” (164-5). Leitch finds support for his claim in a group like Punchdrunk who interweave multiple sourcetexts to create a new storytelling experience. “*Sleep No More* is text-based in a surprisingly imaginative yet literal way,” (Worthen 87) as it is an adaptation of both *Rebecca*, a classic text in Gothic literature, and *Macbeth*, a classic text in Jacobean drama; this immersive piece interweaves two sources, each with a rich textual and performance history of their own.

*Rebecca* is Daphne du Maurier’s reworking of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Since its initial publication in 1938 the novel has undergone many adaptations and re-workings of its own, including du Maurier’s own adaptation of the novel into a play in 1940, and Hitchcock’s Academy Award winning 1940 film. Hitchcock’s adaptation, along with the music of Bernard Herrmann (who composed music for many Hitchcock films, although not *Rebecca*) inspired the environment, atmosphere, and design for *Sleep No More*. “[H]ere we can see the way in which one text generates another, without the need for complete fidelity” (D’Monté 163).

*Macbeth* is Shakespeare’s dramatization of Raphael Holinshed’s accounts of Kings Macbeth, Duncan, and Macduff in *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. From Shakespeare’s tragedy, Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle pull the majority of *Sleep No More*’s plot, characters, and relationships. These two artists weave these texts and their precursors together in such a way that *Sleep No More* becomes a “permutation of texts” (Kristeva 37). Barrett and Doyle have found moments of intersection between *Macbeth*’s tragic plot and *Rebecca*’s gothic atmosphere; these intersections contain echoes of familiarity on to which the audience can grasp as they move through the haunted space.

*Sleep No More* employs the entirety of *Macbeth*’s plot along with the play’s characters to engage audiences in an immersive theatre-going experience. Omitting the use of Shakespeare’s

language, this movement-based performance engages *Macbeth*'s mood, tone, and themes in order to build an immersive environment out of which the audience must attempt to piece together the mystery of the McKittrick Hotel. Audiences are free to roam the 'hotel' as they please, whether it is alone or in a pack, choosing the kind of story they wish to see. This model of adaptation and performance refuses to allow the spectator to act as a mere observer to the performance, and instead insists on the participation of the spectator in the construction of the story. By asking spectators to engage physically with the performance by choosing what actors to follow, and even sometimes interacting with the performers, the play puts the quality and depth of the storytelling into the hands of the audience. *Sleep No More*, a 'choose your own adventure' promenade performance, places the audience at the center of the experience, ensuring that no two individuals see the same story. Every branch of the story is, by design, fragmented so that each member of the audience may choose his or her own mode of spectating. Not only does every audience member choose the kind of spectator she wants to be, she is able to choose what sort of performance she wants to see. Every experience is subjective and unique.

Audiences can become further oriented to the event through the souvenir program which they may purchase on-line before the play or after the performance experience. In the program, the synopsis for *Sleep No More* is almost the same as the synopsis for *Macbeth*, with a slight transposition of scenes.<sup>64</sup> While the synopsis moves through the central plot line of the play, it does not contain the myriad of subplots that make up the rest of the story, keeping *Sleep No More* the mysterious, subjective, exploratory experience Barrett and Doyle intend it to be. Events that audience members may discover include one-on-one interactions between individual audience members and performers. At selected moments throughout the play, performers select a

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<sup>64</sup> In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth becomes witness to the witches' prophecy of the eight kings foretelling the Banquo line's future rule over Scotland after Macbeth has Banquo murdered. In *Sleep No More*, Macbeth does not kill Banquo until after he sees this apparition.

nearby spectator for a private performance by pulling them in to a closed-off space, taking off their mask (which marks them as an audience member), and sharing their own story. Jason Zednick, a four-time audience member of *Sleep No More*, has had several of these types of encounters, the most notable being his run-in with Mr. Bargarran, the taxidermist:

I'm in the taxidermy room on the third floor, minding my own business, and in the hallway just outside is a small room where one of the actors is sitting. There are some other people watching him and so I watch for a minute, but he's not really doing anything, so I head back into the taxidermy room. After a minute or so, he comes into the room and walks to the counter with his back turned to the room. I take a step in to try and see what he's doing. He doesn't move and I'm clearly too close. For personal space, I take a step back and just watch for a minute. All of a sudden, he turns around, gets super close to me, and grabs my hand. He pulls me back into the hallway, takes out a key, and puts it into a door (that I couldn't even see, a dark hallway with a black door made it practically invisible). He pulls me in and shuts the door behind him. It is pitch black. When he hits the light switch, I see we're in a very small bathroom. There's a sink, a mirror, and one stall with walls and a door. He turns me around by the shoulders, then reaches up, and takes my mask off. Then, silently, he guides me into the toilet stall where there is a small table with a lamp and a stool in the corner. He sits me on the stool and then walks away. When he returns he sits on the toilet across from me and pulls the table between us. He flips on the lamp and has a tray that he sets on the table. On the tray are two small white [objects]. Then he produces a pouch containing a vial of something and a big needle. Inserting the needle into the vial, he withdraws its green contents and hovers it over one of the 'things' and injects it. He puts down the needle, grabs my hand and stares at me. Slowly he takes my hand and places it over the now green blob and releases. Then, still staring, he reaches down and grabs the other one. I realize that I'm supposed to do the same. I pick mine up and then we both eat! It was gummy, kind of like a gummy worm.<sup>65</sup>

These events, these almost non-sequiturs, reinforce the core theme of discovery behind *Sleep No More* as a production, and Punchdrunk as a company.

The 1930s setting of the play suits *Macbeth* because it allows Barrett and Doyle to access cultural and historical memories at once. On a cultural level, audiences imagine themselves as Hitchcock-esque film noir private investigators in a gritty crime drama as they strive to solve the mystery of the McKittrick Hotel. The historical frame of the bloody, gruesome trauma of World War II looms over the events of the play, especially in the hauntingly empty hospital ward. It is as though the dead have awoken from their beds and gone for a stroll about the hotel. By

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<sup>65</sup> Taken from an e-mail interview with Jason Zednick, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012.



engaging Shakespeare's story and characters in this immersive mode, *Punchdrunk* is not only inviting audiences to engage in a unique theatre-going experience, but they are challenging audiences to discover and re-discover Shakespeare through the recontextualization of his popular tragedy.

The second source text Barrett and Doyle employ for *Sleep No More* is Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. While the plot for the play is adapted primarily from *Macbeth*, *Rebecca* provides the frame for the location of the performance as well as the gothic film noir motif present in the design elements. In du Maurier's novel, she tells the story of a young, paranoid neurotic who marries a wealthy widower, Maxim de Winter, some considerable years her senior. He takes her to live at his famed estate in the English countryside, Manderley. The house is famous not only for the extravagant balls thrown there but also for its former mistress, the late Mrs. Rebecca de Winter who drowned the previous year during a sailing accident. The narrator finds not only the house but also her very self haunted by Rebecca and her memory. All of her things have remained in their place throughout the house including her stationary and desk at which the second Mrs. de Winter makes her own correspondence. Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca's former personal maid and now the head housekeeper at Manderley, was devoted to her late mistress and even keeps Rebecca's old bedroom immaculate as if she is expecting her to return from the bottom of the ocean at any moment. Unsurprisingly displeased by the presence of the new blushing bride, Mrs. Danvers does everything within her power to ensure that Mrs. de Winter never feels quite comfortable or at home at Manderley, feeding the insecurity and neuroses that plagues her. *Rebecca*, as a reworking of *Jane Eyre*, embodies the kind of gothic atmosphere Barrett and Doyle sought for the environment of *Sleep No More*.

Rebecca's presence haunts Manderley and those within it. Throughout the novel the narrator is haunted not only by Rebecca's memory as manifested by the physical possessions she left behind in her wake but also by those who knew Rebecca well, including the house staff and Maxim's family. Rebecca, whose name is peppered throughout the house and trapped within the walls of Manderley, haunts the narrator, who is never given a name of her own. Several times throughout du Maurier's novel, Rebecca's memory invades the living world. The narrator begins to lose her own identity within the ghost of Rebecca. During dinner one evening, she begins fantasizing over what it would be like to see Rebecca sitting in her own place again: how she would talk with or glance at Maxim; how her face might look if the butler came in announcing a phone call for her. Without her knowledge, the narrator shifts from seeing these things from a third person perspective to embodying all of these actions herself. Maxim, shaking her loose of the daydream asks, "What the devil are you thinking about?" When she is too embarrassed to admit the truth, Maxim continues: "You looked older suddenly, deceitful. It was rather unpleasant...You had a twist to your mouth and a flash of knowledge in your eyes. Not the right sort of knowledge" (240-1). For a brief moment, the narrator loses her sense of self, consumed by the malevolent spirit of Rebecca.

Not long after her brief 'possession' at the dinner table, the narrator dresses as one of Maxim's ancestors portraitized in the gallery for the annual Manderley fancy dress ball; she does so under the advice of Mrs. Danvers. What the narrator does not know is that Rebecca dressed as the same woman for the ball just before her death. Maxim, furious at what he assumes to be a cruel joke, demands that his wife change clothes immediately; she runs to her room in tears, catching a glimpse of the triumphant Mrs. Danvers on her way. Maxim's sister, Beatrice, explains the situation: "Why the dress, you poor dear, the picture you copied of the girl in the

gallery. It was what Rebecca did at the last fancy dress ball at Manderley. Identical. The same picture, the same dress. You stood there on the stairs and for one ghastly moment I thought [you were Rebecca]” (259). The narrator slowly unravels, losing her sense of identity within Rebecca’s. She is not only being haunted but possessed.

The beginning of the novel, wherein the narrator dreams she has returned to Manderley, is temporally and spatially fluid. The reader is at once in a hotel room telling the story, at Manderley in her dream, and in Monte Carlo where her story begins; she is in the present, in a fantasy, and in the past. The reader begins *Rebecca* in a liminal state between memory and reality. Du Maurier uses this same device at the end of the novel as Maxim and the narrator race back to Manderley in Maxim’s car. As Mrs. de Winter attempts to sleep in the back seat she is haunted by the events of the story. In her nightmares Rebecca possesses her; she becomes Rebecca:

I got up and went to the looking-glass. A face stared back at me that was not my own. It was very pale, very lovely, framed in a cloud of dark hair...The face in the glass stared back at me and laughed. And I saw then that she was sitting on a chair before the dressing-table in her bedroom, and Maxim was brushing her hair. He held her hair in his hands, and as he brushed it he would twist it slowly into a thick long rope. It twisted like a snake, and he took hold of it with both hands and smiled at Rebecca and put it round his neck. (456)

Dreams, daydreams, and nightmares are the ways in which Rebecca accesses the world of the living; she haunts through the subconscious. Just as in *Rebecca*, *Sleep No More* explores “[p]athological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, daydreams, dreams, and death, [which] become part of the narrative” (Kristeva 83) through an immersive adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*.

The end of du Maurier’s story comes without resolution. Mrs. Danvers, possessed by rage and hatred on behalf of Rebecca, burns Manderley to the ground as the de Winter’s watch their beloved home go up in flames. The reader now understands why the narrator dreams of returning to Manderley; it is no more. The circuitousness of du Maurier’s storytelling is echoed in the way

that *Sleep No More* loops back on itself, repeating three times over the course of the evening. Each new piece of information the spectator can glean illuminates another part of the mystery, just as in *Rebecca*. It is for the audience to put the pieces of the puzzle together, just as du Maurier's heroine and reader do.

### **Punchdrunk's Developmental Process**

*Two hours have passed since I lost the housekeeper. I find myself watching a slow motion banquet and I realize it is the banquet wherein Banquo haunts Macbeth. I spot the young man who fought with the housekeeper and I keep my eye on him. Who is he? What role does he play in all of this? As soon as the banquet ends, he tears away from the table. I am hot on his heels, chasing him down corridors to an unknown destination. I am the only one following him. We come upon the body of a woman – she is pregnant! He bends down, holds her, and cries over her body. It is here that I realize that he is Macduff and the pregnant woman is Lady Macduff; all of his “pretty ones” have been killed in “one fell swoop.” He stands and bolts down a hallway as if he knows who has done this horrible thing. I chase him down several flights of stairs. He jumps the last few steps of each flight, hitting each landing with a hollow thud. He runs out in to large open space and this suddenly feels very familiar. He looks up and I follow his gaze: the housekeeper! I have already seen this moment happen from an alternate perspective. It is at this moment that I realize this performance is not continuous but, rather, set on loop. Empowered with the knowledge of what is about to happen, refusing to lose her again, I run to the room into which she is about to escape.*

The process of play development, production, and performance is not fundamentally different for Punchdrunk than for any other theatre company. They research and plan the production, devise and rehearse in the studio, transfer it to the performance venue and adjust to a live audience through previews (Eglinton 52). However, one thing that makes Punchdrunk unique is the way in which the transfer to the performance venue and adjustments to a live audience shape and re-shape the world of the play. While their initial approaches differ greatly, both Barrett and Doyle count on the performance space to be the key that unlocks the entire play.

“Prior to rehearsals, Barrett and Doyle...conduct research around a chosen text, studying its characters, imagery, locations and other relevant thematic information” (Eglinton 52); they also devise maps that plot out each character's dramatic trajectory throughout the story, which they use during the four-week devising and rehearsal process. Barrett refrains from developing any concrete ideas for the piece's narrative or aesthetics before getting to know the playing

space, aware that what he sees there will completely change “the sense, the feeling, [and] the narrative implications” of the design (Machon 92-3). His work as a director and designer is dependent upon the performance space. Doyle, on the other hand, performs copious amounts of research on the narrative and expressive gestures necessary to the communication of that narrative while thinking about it in relation to the space. “What the building gives me is framings,” says Doyle, “so I start to see things in relation to [those]” (92). For Barrett, the space is the catalyst to the development of the piece and for Doyle it is the ultimate solution.

Punchdrunk works with classic texts from the Western canon but no other author has dominated their repertoire as heavily as Shakespeare has. Other adaptations include *The Tempest* (2003), and *The Firebird Ball*, a fusion of *Romeo and Juliet* and the myth of the firebird (2005). Barrett, explaining the company’s attraction to Shakespeare’s plays, notes, “there’s so much in there, so many moments, installations are described within the text; it’s just a matter of unpicking. It’s almost like a logic puzzle in itself” (Machon 96).

These artists are particularly drawn to mythical landscapes in which magic and evil invade the world and overwhelm the senses. Sourcetexts that implement magical and mystical realms, such as Marlowe’s *Faust* and Poe’s *Fall of the House of Usher*, permeate Barrett and Doyle’s aesthetic. These sources, saturated with allusions to the occult, tell stories of men and women who desperately seek power, wealth, or knowledge. This insatiable hunger falls prey to corruption, embodied here in *Sleep No More* by Lady Macbeth’s influence and the world of the supernatural: Hecate, the witches, and their demonic prowess. This gothic occult mood and aesthetic, while frightening in literature, film, and even traditional stage performance, becomes purely terrifying when experienced in a Punchdrunk performance. Opening the text to this mode of interpretation and implementation through site-specific performance reflects Barrett and

Doyle's desire for an aesthetically cohesive and viscerally effective immersion experience, cementing the 'trademarked' Punchdrunk aesthetic.

Within the texts with which they work, Barrett and Doyle seek out descriptive and narrative passages to inform the design process and installation, as well as the most effective physical expression of narrative. Barrett describes this as a dissection wherein he and Doyle seek out "the atmosphere that lies within the text." Barrett goes on to explain that he and Doyle "try and flush [the language] out...[We] deconstruct and scatter that across the building...making that atmosphere three-dimensional" (Machon 96). Rather than working from original, modern, or postmodern texts, Punchdrunk works from texts with complex language and rigid structure because "it's there to be opened up," as opposed to many postmodern texts, which are opened up from the start (96). Barrett and Doyle translate the sourcetext(s) into physical expression, while also translating them in to scenic, lighting, and sound design, creating a more deeply immersive experience for the audience.

While *Macbeth* is the primary sourcetext in terms of narrative and character for *Sleep No More*, Barrett and Doyle have also used the language of Shakespeare's tragedy to inform the physical action of the play and design of the installation as well. Act four, scene one of *Macbeth* is adapted into the oft-discussed witch rave scene. The creators have taken Macbeth's interaction between Hecate and the witches to create the haunting narrative and gritty design for this scene, wherein apparitions appear to Macbeth, revealing the future of Scotland. Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, sits to the side while the witches cast their spell: "Double double, toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble" (IV.i.35-6). Hecate, praises them:

O well done! I commend your pains,  
And every one shall share i'the' gains.  
And now about the cauldron sing,  
Like elves and fairies in a ring,  
Enchanting all that you put in.

(IV.i.39-43)

Rather than speaking the words to this spell, while circling cauldrons deep in the forest and casting animal offal into their bubbling stew, the witches cast their spell physically, sexually, and demonically in a prophecy-casting rave. Even though the performers do not speak the text, it is, nevertheless, present. Barrett and Doyle use the language of *Macbeth* and transform it so that it is both immediate and visceral. “The movement alludes to something then it shifts and it melts so you can go anywhere with it but also you can pull out direct narrative. A whole passage of Shakespeare can be condensed to one word through that movement” (Machon 97). While these collaborators have utilized dialogue as well as descriptions of place and physical activity from *Macbeth*, they have pulled the majority of the environmental design from du Maurier’s *Rebecca* and Hitchcock’s film adaptation of the novel.

Toward the beginning of the narrator’s relationship with Maxim de Winter, she finds a book of poems in the passenger door of his car. He gives her the book and upon inspection, she finds that it was originally a gift from Rebecca. The book naturally falls open to a poem, as if read hundreds of times:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
    Up vistaed slopes I sped  
    And shot precipitated  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,  
From those strong feet that followed, followed after. (38)

This haunting poem, read in concert with the tone, mood, and aesthetics of *Sleep No More*, allows one to see how Barrett and Doyle use text and language to find their way in to architecture, lighting, and sound; Hitchcock’s film noir adaptation of *Rebecca* also deeply informs the world of *Sleep No More*. Like in film noir, the lighting design is not about what is lit,

but rather that which is in shadow. The stark shadows that pervade Maxim de Winter's prized English estate cut the softness of Manderley's lush decor. The deliberately placed shadows and silhouettes create disorienting, obstructed views that Barrett and his co-lighting designers Euan Maybank and Austin R. Smith have tapped in to throughout the McKittrick Hotel.

Hitchcock infantilizes the narrator throughout the film adaptation of *Rebecca*. For the majority of the film the audience sees Manderley through her eyes and the world seems large and out of proportion. Through her posture, dress, and even how childlike she looks against the doors that have knobs two feet higher than the standard position, Hitchcock uses a kind of forced perspective to keep his audience in a position where they continue to identify with the story's heroine, seeing the world as she does. Barrett and Doyle have employed this method of forced perspective to keep the audience feeling, like du Maurier's heroine, that they don't quite belong, while also encouraging her brand of insatiable exploratory curiosity.

In both the novel and the film, the reader experiences the same cold distance from Maxim that Mrs. de Winter feels. Paranoid that Maxim is always thinking about, missing, and loving Rebecca, the narrator loses herself within her own neuroses. What she does not know is that Maxim's callousness is not a lack of affection for his second wife, but a fear that Rebecca is returning to haunt him. Eventually the narrator and reader learn that Rebecca did not die in a sailing accident but at the hands of her husband. Maxim de Winter shot Rebecca and disposed of her body out of revenge for the indiscretions she committed against him. Here it becomes evident that Barrett and Doyle employ *Rebecca*, not only environmentally, but that these characters have found their way in to *Sleep No More* by becoming interwoven with the characters from Shakespeare's tragedy; one can see influences of du Maurier's murderous hero and antagonistic mistress in the Macbeths. Like Macbeth, Maxim has committed murder and been haunted by the



deed ever since. Also like Macbeth, this homicide leads to Maxim's ultimate undoing. Rebecca, in her devilish and manipulative way is very much like Lady Macbeth.

At the moment of her death, Rebecca waits for Jack Favell, her first cousin and lover, at her beach cottage. Maxim, weary of playing Rebecca's game of lies and deceit for the sake of public image, goes to confront her and Favell. Rebecca, alone, begins to allude to Maxim that she is pregnant and that, if she did have a child, nobody could prove that it was not Maxim's. She continues to taunt Maxim with the idea of another man's child becoming heir to Manderley. Maxim, finally driven into a blind rage, shoots Rebecca who dies with a sick, satisfied smile on her lips. This scene finds its echo in the bedroom confrontation between the Macbeths. Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to murder King Duncan so that Macbeth may be crowned king. The erotically and emotionally charged confrontation builds to a climactic tension until Macbeth finally relents. He leaves the room to murder Duncan and while Lady Macbeth nervously waits for his return, she begins to come unhinged; nevertheless, she basks in the victory of what she has accomplished. When Macbeth returns covered in blood, Lady Macbeth strips him, placing him in the bathtub conspicuously placed in the middle of their bedroom. As she washes the blood from his body, Lady Macbeth maintains the same sick satisfaction the reader imagines on Rebecca's face when she is murdered. In both *Rebecca* and *Macbeth*, the villainous heroines reach the point of no return; Rebecca through death and Lady Macbeth through murder.

Once Barrett and Doyle work through the process of researching and planning the general narrative and aesthetic of the piece, Doyle's choreographic and directorial process begins by working with the performers to create a movement language in a neutral rehearsal studio space. This process helps her to learn where language from the sourcetext(s) will be located in the physical world of the performance. The performers work from the character maps to build

character relationships, and movement styles; “[g]radually, the ensemble constructs a type of ‘storyboard,’ and it’s at this stage that they begin to develop timed loops” (Eglinton 52). The artists spend their in-studio rehearsal time searching for the most effective and immediate movement language for the piece as “the choreography, deeply influenced by contact improvisation, has a 360-degree feel to it” (Kourlas). Doyle gives an example of this kind of work process:

We looked at some of the duet language between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. We looked very clearly in detail at the text. Take for example the couple’s first meeting after Macbeth has been to see the Witches and Lady Macbeth has read the letter. What is the essence of that first meeting? We broke it down to one word, and that word became ‘persuasion.’ So in the studio, we spent a lot of time improvising with power, status and gesture to create a sense of persuasion, but always questioning it as an audience, asking what could you read from this relationship? Could you read sexual dominance, violence, aggression, addiction, and obsession? We created the semiotics of that, applying choreographic depth in terms of different kinds of tension in the body, different pushes, and different pulls [...] so when we arrive in the building, the Macbeths already had a body of choreography which existed only in the context of an empty space. (52-3).

Doyle’s process, not unlike that of another director working remotely from the performance space, becomes unique when she and Barrett finally put their respective processes together; “Felix and I do work really differently until we get on site and that’s when everything is fused” (Machon 93).

Barrett begins his own devising process by thinking through the music and sounds that inhabit the space. For *Sleep No More* he knew he wanted to fuse *Macbeth* and Hitchcock inside of a large disused building. Because “[c]inema references play an important role in the company’s design aesthetics” (Eglinton 52), *Sleep No More* quickly developed into a film noir adaptation of *Macbeth*. For Barrett, “[i]t was an easy leap from film noir to *Macbeth*, as Shakespeare’s play has all the classic noir motifs: passion, a femme fatale, and a paranoid power-obsessed man who’ll do anything to get what he desires” (interview, *Sleep No More* production program, 23). “As with most of our work,” Barrett says, “*Sleep No More* started with

the score. Bernard Herrmann's Hitchcock scores began inspiring Barrett's initial conception of *Sleep No More* (23) when he came across a recording of a film noir soundtrack. Finding it evocative of an "epic theatrical world," (23) Barrett started exploring other similar sounds with Stephen Dobbie, *Sleep No More's* sound designer. The film noir motif is weaved into the narrative as well as the visual and aural aesthetics of this play. As crucial as sound design is for the mood, tone, and practical function<sup>66</sup> of *Sleep No More*, the dances and physical expressions of narrative are often unscored throughout the play. While underscoring through stillness is almost constant, only the natural sounds of the body's contact with other bodies, or the surrounding environment, accompany the dances and physical conflicts in the play; bodies create their own sounds in space.

After the initial planning and devising stages, Barrett and Doyle spend another three to four weeks in the performance space. "During that time, lighting sound, and set are assembled and the cast starts to perfect the material" (Eglinton 53). Doyle describes this installation process as a fusion of texts, design, light, sound and bodies working within a set of boundaries. "Felix [Barrett] sets them and I push them," says Doyle. "There's a sense of the homogenous with Punchdrunk shows. It might be interdisciplinary with lots of different elements but there's a sense of it all working together" (Machon 95). Here Doyle points to the seamless intermingling of the entire installation and performance, as no one element of the play overshadows any other.

Barrett refers to Punchdrunk's work as both site-specific as well as site-sympathetic. The distinction comes in the fact that the company's work is not only intended for performance in a specific location, but it is also sympathetic in that each performance is inherently tied into, or sympathetic toward, that particular space. "I'm a firm believer that every space you go into is

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<sup>66</sup> The variant sounds piped in to each room of the 'Hotel' help cue the actors so that they can keep accurate time for each 'loopback' of the performance. For example, when Macbeth kills Duncan, a tolling bell can be heard throughout the performance.

saying something,” says Barrett. “There are echoes in the walls. All we do as a company is draw those out” (Machon 2007). Because each space is saying something different, each performance, even if it is of the same play, will attempt to ‘draw out’ something new. Due to the ‘sympathetic’ nature of Punchdrunk’s work, each play depends upon the physical space to complete the totalizing narrative of the piece. While *Sleep No More* has been performed in three cities, every mounting of the performance is necessarily unique, because the three spaces in which the piece is performed drastically vary. The *Sleep No More* seen by Londoners is not, therefore, the *Sleep No More* seen by New Yorkers. “You can’t replicate,” Doyle clarifies. “I think we can transfer and develop but you can never replicate” (Machon 93).

The transfer from the studio to the performance space is unlike other stage productions wherein actors work on a taped floor plan that allows for a smooth transition to the space; the Punchdrunk performers walk in to the space completely blind. “The cast are not allowed to see the building until we’re quite heavily into rehearsals...the actual space they experience as an audience member would. They play for three hours...explor[ing] it...leav[ing] their traces as they go. In doing that all get a sense of the bubble in which we’re working and that helps to shape the whole piece” (Machon 98). The performers come to understand the way in which a spectator may experience the strange space, allowing them to tailor a more intuitive experience for the audience.

Barrett looks for what he calls the crescendo of the building for every performance, wherein the entire audience funnels to a single location. This inevitably becomes the final moment and, hence, the climax of the play. In *Faust*, it was the basement, which served as their ideal Hell. In *Masque of the Red Death*, it was a grand ballroom that remained closed off until the moment of crescendo. The way in which the crescendo functions is unique to every

performance and performance space. “[I]n *Faust* the crescendo happens organically without us having to manipulate the audience at all and the space is much more metaphorical [while] *Red Death* is more representational. There are no metaphors in the space in that final sequence, the space is what it is” (Machon 94). The large central room of the warehouse, wherein the ball, Birnam Wood, and banquet are staged, acts as the crescendo for *Sleep No More*. This transformative space, used throughout the performance, holds the entire audience as they are herded there during the final loop of the banquet scene to behold the execution of Macbeth. However, while the audience is ‘herded, the crescendo of *Sleep No More*, like that of *Faust*, happens organically. Audience members trickle in slowly throughout the course of the final banquet, unsure of why they have come and now unable to leave.

Babbage, discussing stage and film adaptations that do not invite audiences to engage in dialogue with the sourcetext, argues, “participatory site-specific performance, here exemplified by Punchdrunk, is a form that might provocatively adapt texts and textuality in ways that delicately circumvent the excess of presence that too often overburdens adaptations for the stage” (Babbage 20). *Sleep No More* invites numerous interpretive opportunities through what Wolfgang Iser calls ‘blanks,’ which “represent what is concealed in a text, the drawing-in of the reader where he or she has left to make connections” (168). The audience, invited into the world of the play, interprets these blanks to “bring a story to life, to assign meaning” (Bennett 44); Susan Bennett notes that the implementation of these blanks “can bring commercial success” (44).

While Iser uses Dickens’s serialized novels and movie teasers as examples of effective blanks and Bennett pragmatically addresses the commercial viability of play intermissions with respect to the theatre bar and gift shop, *Sleep No More*’s blanks are located within the very

nature of the performance. Because the play happens everywhere at every moment, each audience member leaves the play with blanks to fill. Even if a spectator is in a room with a performer, he or she can then take another spectator apart from the crowd for a one-on-one experience, leaving the other audience members behind. There is no way for an audience member to fill in all of the blanks and grasp the nuances of every scene in one three-hour performance, thereby leading to many repeat ticket buyers. The intrigue is too much for some so, if they can, many audience members attend *Sleep No More* multiple times, bringing guests from out of town or friends who have not yet been. However, because each experience is unique and the performance is constantly evolving, there are always blanks for the spectator to fill.

Because “cultural training produces an inescapable desire to make meaning” (Bennett 47), audience members participate in the meaning-making process of the play by interpretively filling in these blanks. Punchdrunk believes that “in the theatre every reader is involved in the making of the play” (21), and so, purposefully creates these blanks within the performance. The company seeks to move away from the passive spectator, from the audience that merely receives information, and move toward empowering spectators to be active producers of meaning. In this way, the play cannot be complete until it has a live audience to experience it, because “the audience becomes a self-conscious co-creator of performance and enjoys a productive role” (21).

### **Audience as Epicentre**

*I sit on a trunk and patiently wait for her to enter. I am back in the first room I explored at the beginning of the performance: dusty books, antique relics, and a large bed I somehow missed before. I hear the doorknob turn. She enters and I see white ghost-like mask-wearers that she shuts out from the room, looking as disappointed as I had two hours earlier. She prepares the room by fluffing the pillows, straightening the duvet, and laying out a pair of soft pajamas. With the knowledge that she is the one who poisoned Lady Macduff, I deduce that she is preparing the King’s bed for him, knowing it to be his deathbed. I realize then that I have not even caught a glimpse of the Macbeths; I set off in search for them.*

Discussing site-specific performances, Marvin Carlson asserts that theatricalized spaces are haunted, not by past productions and their associations as traditional performances spaces, but rather by historical associations, which have the potential to access a wholly different level of cultural memory (13). For example, *Sleep No More* takes place inside three disused warehouses in Chelsea, converted into a 1930s Hitchcock-esque mansion-hotel. Each room carries with it its own set of signifiers, imparting a different ghosting effect upon the audience. The bloodied sheets of the Macduff family home leave the audience with the uneasy feeling of being witnesses to a horrific infanticide in a film-noir murder mystery. The lively atmosphere and free-flowing liquor of the ball is reminiscent of a gathering in West Egg. One feels not unlike Nick Carraway of *The Great Gatsby* – a voyeur, an outsider looking in at the events unfolding before him. Hecate’s rave-like prophecy session with the witches calls to mind the history of the abandoned warehouses in Chelsea. As W.B. Worthen points out, the warehouses that Punchdrunk has converted “have been the occasional home to the Chelsea clubs,” (80) many of which the police shut down, condemning them as a “Wild West of drug dealing” (Chen). Video-gamers have drawn comparisons between the experience of *Sleep No More* and similarly structured role-playing games such as Nintendo’s *Shadowgate* (Lamar) or 2K Games’s *Bioshock*, an immersive first-person shooter game inspired by Ayn Rand’s Objectivist philosophy. The historical associations of the warehouses, as well as the cultural associations of *Sleep No More*’s aesthetic, echoes within the cultural memory of the audience as they attempt to untangle the web of the McKittrick’s history. “In any production-reception contract, therefore, the audience’s response will be shaped by the general system of cultural relations” (Bennett 33).

In the way that Manderley, in du Maurier’s novel, was a character all its own, the physical space of the McKittrick seems to be alive, holding the memories of the terrible events

that occurred there. The characters all have a ghost-like quality to them, giving the spectator the feeling of being an intruder of this private haunted world. The immersion of the experience begins before the audience even arrives at the theatre. The homepage for the performance website is a 1930s hotel directory. One of the pages listed on the directory, 'Hotel History,' reads:

Completed in 1939, the McKittrick Hotel was intended to be New York City's finest and most decadent luxury hotel of its time. Six weeks before opening, and two days after the outbreak of World War II, the legendary hotel was condemned and left locked, permanently sealed from the public. Until now...

*(Sleep No More website)*

This brief, tantalizing historical account of the hotel teases prospective audience members, piquing their curiosity as they prepare for their adventure, while also providing an historical framework for the performance. The website sets spectators up to expect a bloody, disastrous, film-noir mystery backgrounded by World War II, creating echoes of political strife and massacre.

After tickets are ordered, the patron finds mysterious e-mails in her inbox from the McKittrick. The hotel delivers these e-mails under the auspices of telegrams, formal letters, or party invitations. Several of the telegrams and invitations are from Maximilian Martel, no doubt an echo of Maxim de Winter. Other individuals who send letters and invitations for special events and after-parties are the (new) Thane of Cawdor who threw a New Year's Eve bash and Hecate, who sent out Valentine's Day party invitations to former guests of the hotel:

To kiss immortal flesh will bring a heat  
That shall blaze till as lovers we can meet.  
On the 14<sup>th</sup> I celebrate St. Valentine's Feast  
At the McKittrick Hotel; we'll rut like goats upon the heath.  
Come or I shall vex thee.

XX Hecate

*(Sleep No More website)*



The Valentine concludes with a blood-red imprint of Hecate's kiss. All of these mysterious items of correspondence have a certain air of exclusivity. For example, 'Maximilian' sent a telegram invite out for an April Fool's Day performance of the play. The telegram reads:

DEAR ESTEEMED GUEST OF THE MCKITTRICK HOTEL –(STOP)-  
WE CORDIALLY REQUEST YOUR COMPANY ON 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL –(STOP)-  
A NIGHT WHEN TABLES WILL TURN AND FOOLS WILL BE SUFFERED  
GLADLY –(STOP)- NOTE THIS INVITATION IS ONLY FOR RETURNING  
GUESTS –(STOP)-NO FIRST TIME VISITORS PERMITTED-(STOP)-

SINCERELY MAXIMILIAN MARTEL

The 'turning of the tables' refers to the performance as a 'remix;' the sound piped in to every room throughout the performance was remixed on a turntable. Barrett and Doyle adapted *Macbeth* and *Rebecca* in to *Sleep No More*, which they then riffed on to create a house remix. First time guests were forbidden from the performance because 'Maxim' believed "you had to know the show to be able to appreciate the 'joke.' If you've never seen the show you might not understand why something is funny,"<sup>67</sup> or be able to fully indulge in the joy of the riff. *Sleep No More* veterans were able to rediscover the performance all over again. The e-mail went out on March 16, 2012 and the performance was sold-out within days. The experience of the mysterious e-mails and website helps to prepare audiences for the challenge to discover the McKittrick.

Approaching the McKittrick Hotel, one might miss the entire performance if not for the line down the block outside of an abandoned warehouse. There are no markers aside from a small two-by-two brass plaque posted by the main entrance identifying the building, which cannot be seen from the street. Patrons pull up curbside in their cabs, looking bewildered, wondering if they have the correct address. Upon check-in, the front desk clerk hands over the 'room key,' a playing card from a standard deck. The clerk gives the patron instructions to go up a small flight of stairs, which leads to a pitch-black hallway. Audience members bump into one

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<sup>67</sup> Taken from an e-mail interview with Benjamin Thys on April 9, 2012.

another as they head for the walls desperate for some kind of grounding. The hallway seems to go on for miles, twisting and turning, intentionally disorienting the audience, forcing them to lose all sense of direction. Eventually, a soft jazz tune floats somewhere in the distance. Suddenly a shock of red comes in to view through a pair of split curtains. Once the audience is on the other side of those curtains, the world transforms in to a 1930s speakeasy; this is the McKittrick Hotel bar.

As they find their way to the bar, audience members are welcome to purchase an old-fashioned drink (mostly gin-based) and enjoy the ‘pre-show entertainment.’ “We always establish an entrance point to the world we create,” says Barrett. “[It] is like entering a decompression chamber, to acclimatize to the world before being set free in it” (Machon 90-1). The McKittrick Hotel bar acts as this area for *Sleep No More*. The audience becomes accustomed to the environment of the bar, creating a smoother transition into the world of the performance.

After a few minutes the jazz singer and band members take a break from their set as a tall man in a tuxedo approaches the microphone; he is the emcee. He calls for everyone with an ace playing card to enter the hotel. Audience members holding those ‘keys’ go through a hidden door in the corner of the bar and this process continues throughout the rest of the evening. Every ten or fifteen minutes the emcee calls for the twos, threes, and so forth, until all audience members have entered the performance space.

Once through the door and inside an antechamber, audience members each receive a white plastic Venetian-style mask and are instructed to wear it throughout the duration of their stay at the McKittrick. In his article “Odd Anonymized Needs: Punchdrunk’s Masked Spectator,” Gareth White cites instructions given in the program for Punchdrunk’s performance of *Faust*:

The audience is invited to rediscover the childlike excitement and anticipation of exploring the unknown, to experience a natural sense of adventure. You are free to roam the production in your own time, follow any theme, storyline or performer you wish, or simply to soak up the atmosphere of magical, fleeting worlds. (220)

While these ‘instructions’ apply to *Sleep No More* as well, they were not given in a program, but by a hotel bellhop.<sup>68</sup> The group waits for an elevator to arrive and when it does a tall, lanky bellhop welcomes the group into the large industrial lift. As the elevator begins to move he informs the group of the ‘house rules’: no talking and no removing of the mask. Other than that, each spectator is free to explore the space in whatever way she chooses. This mode of instruction extends the experience of the “decompression chamber” and allows the audience to warm up to the kind of immersive audience empowerment for which Barrett strives.

However, Barrett and Doyle can only do so much of the legwork. The spectator has to take ownership of his or her experience and “choose tactics for discovering the performance – following characters as they make their journeys attempting to follow the action of the play, if it is familiar, or staying in one spot to see what will develop there” (White 221). In the same way that actors must make choices regarding their characters’ inner and outer lives, finding tactics for obtaining objectives, audiences must make choices in order to participate in the world Barrett and Doyle have designed.

The white Venetian mask that every spectator wears throughout the performance has a two-fold purpose: it allows each individual spectator to see the other spectators not as individuals but as part of the ghostly, macabre installation. “The blank masks...when seen on figures moving with us in the dark and surrounding action, are not legible as other audience members and if we don’t identify with them in a crowd-like way, we may...come to believe in our own blankness and kind of invisibility” (White 225). This sense of invisibility vanishes when a performer

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<sup>68</sup> The audience does not receive programs until they are exiting the building. It is one sheet of paper, folded in half with the names of the creative and production teams.

suddenly makes eye contact with a spectator, verifying that she is, in fact, completely visible and that her presence in the room does affect others. Occasionally performers will make physical contact with spectators, speak directly to them, and, as previously discussed, whisk them off for a private encounter, thereby furthering the subjectivity of each individual experience.

The mask, like in the carnival, also allows the spectator to become uninhibited and more eager to become part of the action. “Masking in carnival is supposed to stimulate licentiousness, both because of the learnt associations of holiday time and because of the practical benefits of anonymity” (White 221). Because of this sense of invisible anonymity, spectators are not afraid to get close to performers or even be alone with them in the room for a one-on-one performance. Tori Sparks, who plays Lady Macbeth, likes it when “the audience gets really close, [and when] they want to see if you have tears in your eyes or want to feel your breath” (Kourlas).

However, the masks ultimately perform a “transformative function...that is at once internal and external...[o]ne could say that the audience experience [for *Sleep No More*] is a ‘liminal’ experience, an oscillation between distance and proximity with the environment between roles of performer and spectator, and between states of consciousness and unconsciousness” (Eglinton 51-2). While “[t]here can be a sense of the audience really relinquishing inhibitions and losing themselves in the world and in the play,” because the immersive experience is new for most spectators, those who are “less confident...can be overwhelmed...by it” (Machon 90). By distributing masks to audience members, Barrett hopes to retain some distance between spectator and performers, “while allowing proximity of a controlled kind” (White 228). The mask allows the spectator to retain some level of aesthetic distance, acting as a kind of failsafe against overwhelming both the audience and the performer, while also encouraging the spectator to thoroughly, yet anonymously, inspect the world and

characters of the play. However, during the intimate one-on-one encounters, the quality of the experience is dependent upon willingness on the part of the spectator to be vulnerable and open to the experience. Actors often strip audience members of their masks during these moments, thereby ridding them of the anonymity to which they have grown accustomed, and removing the safety of aesthetic distance. When choosing participants, Benjamin Thys, who began playing Malcolm in *Sleep No More* in November of 2011, tries to “read people and see who’s open.”<sup>69</sup>

He goes on to say:

As a performer I want to maintain control of the situation. The audience is asked to be vulnerable and let go, and when they can't or won't I have to lead them out. It's very rare but I've had men throw me on the wall because they couldn't handle the loss of control. Honestly, men usually have a hard time letting go. [For example], I lead my one-on-one person to a closed curtain, and ninety-nine percent of men open the curtain before I invite them to (and I never invite them to, I do it myself). Only about five percent of women open the curtain. These one-on-ones are very interesting because you get a lot of information about that person very quickly. You feel who's resistant, who's enjoying it, who's enjoying it perhaps a little too much! You really learn a lot about them; it's fascinating really.<sup>70</sup>

As Thys notes, the performer has a desire to keep control, whether it is a one-on-one encounter or otherwise. While *Sleep No More* is immersive, in that audience members can, and do, become part of the action, it is not technically ‘interactive.’ “The show happens around you...don’t try and steal the scene,” says Sparks (Kourlas). The mask, even upon its removal, separates spectator from performer. While *Punchdrunk* strives to give the audience member the agency to play and discover, they do not give so much agency as to allow the audience to change the events of the play. The use of the mask allows for this distinction.

Once inside the performance space, the spectator is “emancipated” and encouraged to be “productive” (Bennett 5) by exploring the installation and seeking out the story. While the audience is given no explicit instructions or narrative to follow, Barrett and Doyle have designed

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<sup>69</sup> Interview, April 9, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, April 9, 2012

the space with “signifiers in place to lead the audience...where actions is going to happen...using all the conventions you find in theatre but using them to give the audience clues...to help them crack the puzzle” (Machon 91). Rather than relying on intellectual clues, the ‘flow’ of *Sleep No More* relies entirely on music and lighting changes along with the physical movement of the actors through space. Spectators use these cues to navigate the space and ‘crack the puzzle’; in this way, the story unfolds uniquely for each individual.

The ultimate goal of Punchdrunk is to empower the spectator to take charge of her theatre-going experience (though not the performance itself). Audiences are able to open a drawer, read a letter that sits inside, examine the handwriting, smell the ink on the page, and inspect the pen that wrote the letter. Throughout the performance space, performers can be seen rooting around in trunks and suitcases; they look over actors’ shoulders to see what they are writing or reading; they pick up drinks that have been left out to examine the color of the lipstick left on the glass. “[T]hose sensual details give the audience the chance to really become part of it...and it has a greater impact” (Machon 2007), empowering them to continually explore the immersive world of the play. While audience members are not agents of change, they are agents of story. Spectators explore the hotel, discovering bits of story where they can, but they do not change or affect the events of the play. There is a clear distinction between who is observing, exploring, and discovering the story and who is telling, revealing, and changing it.

The audience and performers make up two separate communities who attempt to learn about each other throughout the course of the performance. While the audience attempts to put the puzzle of *Sleep No More* together, the cast of the play negotiates the ever-changing architecture of their performance, dictated by the fluctuation in quantity and curiosity of the audience. Imbedded within the cast of *Sleep No More* are several communities of characters that

make up “a wordless environmental performance...hew[ing] to a conventional conception of Shakespeare’s character-driven drama” (Worthen 88). King Duncan and his son Malcolm head the Court, which also includes Macbeth, Macduff, their wives, and Banquo. Hecate, the Speakeasy Bartender who is Hecate’s familiar, and the three witches comprise the realm of the supernatural. The townspeople of Gallow Green include Mr. Bargarran, the taxidermist, J. Fulton, the tailor, and Agnes Naismith a mysterious woman who has come to Gallow Green to search for her sister. Among the community of the King James Sanitorium one will find Nurse Christian Shaw who was once a patient of the sanitorium, the orderly who works under her, and the Matron of the hospital. Finally, the McKittrick Hotel staff includes Catherine Campbell, the housekeeper, as well as the Porter and the Bellhop. The multiplicity of these communities welcomes the audience to discover the worlds within the “sprawling wilderness” (Machon 91) of *Sleep No More*.<sup>71</sup>

Because the events of the play are on loop, with each repetition growing more and more frantic, one gets the sense that ‘ghosts’ of the McKittrick are trapped not only in the space, but also locked in to perpetually performing and experiencing of a cycle of trauma. In *Sleep No More* the characters’ fates cannot be avoided, yet they continue to rail against the determinism that guides their fortune. Every repetition of the story becomes more frenzied as the story of the short-tenured King of Scotland comes to its grizzly conclusion. As the audience funnels in to what they discover to be the final repetition of the banquet scene, they watch the events play out in tense slow motion. Suddenly, something new occurs: Macbeth stands on the banquet table and

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<sup>71</sup> Over time the cast and characters have fluctuated. The original performance of *Sleep No More* had fourteen cast members (<http://www.punchdrunk.org.uk/>) while the New York production as well over thirty-two, including swing actors (*Sleep No More* commemorative production program). Also, the dramatis personae has changed since the London and Massachusetts performances. For example, Ben Brantley notes in his *New York Times* article that “a character named Mrs. Danvers...was in an earlier and slightly less spectacular incarnation...in Brookline, Massachusetts.” While Mrs. Danvers does not exist in the New York *Sleep No More* one can see echoes of her character in Catherine Campbell.

a noose slips around his neck. The music swells and Macbeth hangs for his crimes while the rest of the characters disperse themselves; the lights come on. There is a sense of retribution, catharsis, and completion that pervades the banquet hall as Macbeth continues to swing from the rafters. Awe-struck spectators look around, wide-eyed; one by one, they take off their masks and begin to leave. There is no applause; only wonder at the surprise they feel at witnessing this inevitable conclusion.

The performance itself ends abruptly, creating a jarring transition back to order from chaos. Punchdrunk attempts to soften this by “provid[ing] a staged exit from the event, with spaces that allow participants to be part-in and part-out of the environment and to cool off before leaving the building” (White 228). The McKittrick Hotel bar acts as this ‘staged exit’ in the same way that it acted as the introduction to the world of *Sleep No More*. However, while the bar is a necessary stop on the way in to the performance, it is not on the way out, which can leave the audience member slightly disoriented when she suddenly finds herself back on 27<sup>th</sup> Street looking for the nearest train stop.

### **Reception in Light of Renegotiated Boundaries**

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon discusses the act of adaptation in relation to what she defines as the three major ways of engaging stories: telling, showing, and interacting (xiv). Novels and other forms of prose narrative fall under the ‘telling’ category, the ‘showing’ mode includes all performance media, and the ‘interactive’ mode of engagement happens through events such as video games and theme park rides. While Hutcheon admits that her categories are a simplification as “all three modes of engagement ‘immerse’ their audiences in their stories” she insists that “only one mode is actually called ‘interactive’ – the one that demands physical participation (usually called ‘user input’) in the story” (Hutcheon xv). While,



by Hutcheon's definitions, *Sleep No More* would fall under the 'showing' mode of engagement, an interactive, immersive theatre-going experience, like the work produced by Punchdrunk, points to the reductive over-simplification of Hutcheon's definitions.

Because Barrett founded Punchdrunk with "a dissatisfaction with the dominant proscenium configuration of theatre, characterized by the spatial separation of audience and performer, physical stasis in the auditorium, and a sensory experience of theatre largely confined to sight and sound," (Eglinton 48) his company's sensorily immersive form of performance simultaneously implements Hutcheon's three modes of engaging stories. Punchdrunk has taken *Macbeth* and *Rebecca*, two sourcetexts with a "linear structure" and "transmuted [them] into that of a flexible game model" (Hutcheon 14). The performers simultaneously 'tell' and 'show' a story to the audience over the course of the three-hour looped performance. The audience must physically participate in the telling and showing of the story by following performers and exploring the performance space, putting the pieces of the story together like a jigsaw puzzle. Hence, the 'telling' and 'showing' of the performance is dependent upon what Hutcheon refers to as 'user input,' thereby problematizing her three categories of engagement.

Critics of *Sleep No More*, both positive and negative, are at a loss for a definition for Punchdrunk's work. "[C]ritics circumvent... judgment by categorizing the piece as something 'other' than theatre... [it is] theatre and non-theatre, play and non-play, Shakespeare and non-Shakespeare" (Eglinton 48). The performance echoes the components to which critics are accustomed; it is both familiar yet strange and, therefore, difficult to criticize. While Punchdrunk does not market *Sleep No More* as an adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy,<sup>72</sup> critics cannot seem to help themselves from saturating their reviews with Shakespeare allusions. For example, Ben

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<sup>72</sup> *Sleep No More* is, in fact, hardly marketed at all as it leans heavily upon word-of-mouth depending, as the entire performance does, upon the act of discovery.

Brantley's glowing review is titled 'Shakespeare Slept Here, Albeit Fitfully,' and Charles Isherwood jests at a character, whom he *thinks* might be Macduff, pounding the keys of a typewriter: "Dear Lady MacD: Gotta run. Long story. Best to the kids! XXoo" (Isherwood). While Punchdrunk resists capitalizing on the Bard's name for the sake of publicity, critics are more than happy to do it for them, at a loss for how else to discuss the performance. However, "*Sleep No More* dramatizes the ongoing implication of a literary Shakespeare in the work of contemporary experimental performance, while at the same time locating the familiar locution of performance as an 'interpretation' of 'the play' as irrelevant to the conduct of our immediate performance as spectators" (Worthen 96-7).

Frances Babbage, observing common contemporary stage practices notes, "given this trend in contemporary stage adaptation to cast off ever more decisively the 'trappings' of realistic representation, it is intriguing that Punchdrunk should adapt the opposite approach" (15). Here Babbage points to the filmic naturalism to which the Punchdrunk designers proscribe. Every drawer can be opened, every letter can be read, and closets can even be inspected for their contents; the audience is encouraged to physically manipulate the installation. Babbage goes on to suggest that the realistic, illusionistic approach to Punchdrunk's 'immersive' performance "is not fully achieved...[because] part of the pleasure in participation derives from recognition of the marriage of features already present in the building with the dressings imposed upon it, a union in which it becomes difficult to judge 'real' from 'fake'" (15). Babbage claims that the installation is so good that the audience cannot see where it ends and reality begins, thus diluting the effect of the illusion.<sup>73</sup> What Babbage neglects to recognize here is that it is not only the physical

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<sup>73</sup> While Babbage is discussing *Masque of the Red Death* (also a Barret-Doyle collaboration) rather than *Sleep No More* here, she is nevertheless addressing the same aesthetic to which Punchdrunk ascribes.

environment that draws the audience members to the world of the play, but the desire to piece the story together.

“Virally marketed, tech-forward and resolutely hip,” (Worthen 96) *Sleep No More* appeals to a young audience. It is one raised on interactive and immersive video and live action role-playing games, in which the choices one makes affect the attributes of one’s character as well as the outcome of the story (e.g. *Dungeons and Dragons*, the *Mass Effect* trilogy, *Heavy Rain*). Like in these games with their myriad of choices and consequences, the wonder comes at the thoroughness of the installation, but not necessarily in juxtaposition to reality. The story becomes a central area of focus while audience members are scattered around the McKittrick Hotel, attempting to put the pieces together, becoming excited when they have made a discovery. However, as Babbage points out, “the invitation to linger in and dwell upon the event is fundamentally bound to one’s relationship with the extraordinary created space” (15). The playing space and the mystery of the story work in concert with one another, creating a cognitively and physically immersive experience that is no less successful because of its thorough installation.

Andrew Eglinton argues in “Decade of Theatre” that Punchdrunk is the next logical step in the theatre-going experience because of the way that this target audience interacts with the world:

[T]hrough its persistent blurring of boundaries between theatre and non-theatre and its emphasis on first-person experiences, Punchdrunk has captured something of a ‘coming of age’ in general perception of British theatre in a twenty-first century digital age: that is, the recognition that the theatre contributes to a society driven by networked digital technology and real time media, marked by the myriad ‘social gestures’ and ‘sites of gesture’ that its communication devices induce. From smart phones and GPS devices to cloud computing and augmented reality interfaces, new ‘frames’ of performance continue to emerge in the public domain, rendering discourses of theatre reliant on the proscenium structure even less stable. (48-9)

While Eglinton makes a valid argument for the evolution of the theatre-going experience, it is also important to point out that in spite of its digital age reconstitution, *Sleep No More* “reproduces a range of familiar attitudes toward the cultural functions of Shakespeare and the legitimating role of writing in performance,” (Worthen 96) allowing audiences a transitional experience into theatre-going for the information age.

A contemporary audience’s interest in Punchdrunk’s work is a reflection of our need for a new kind of way to interact with our art and interface with one another. While Michael Billington, writing for *The Guardian* has criticized Punchdrunk for robbing the theatre of its collective experience, placing emphasis on the individual journey (Eglinton 54), what Billington fails to note is that the communal experience, if absent during the performance, takes place once the show has concluded. Audience members head home or convene in the bar to piece their experience together, learning what they missed and sharing what they discovered. Those who attend the performance alone inevitably find themselves on their cell phones afterward, calling and text messaging friends who have been to the show, or perhaps even those who have not. Admittedly, inside the McKittrick Hotel the focus is on the individual experience; however, the experience of the collective is also present but merely re-located to occur outside of the performance space, indicative of a changing mode of audience engagement.

*Sleep No More*, a “much-heralded and terrifically popular production” (Isherwood) is such because it not only appeals to individuals on multiple sensory levels, but it is accessible to a wide range of audience demographics. One need not be familiar with the source texts *Sleep No More* echoes nor with the performance tradition of these artists. As Doyle has observed in her interview with Jospehine Machon, “[y]ou don’t have to be an experimental theatregoer to play the game, it might be that you’re a crazy clubber...[or an] avid filmgoer...[whether] you’re a

visual artist” or a gamer, this immersive experience appeals to all individual spectators in all different ways (92).<sup>74</sup>

In his *New York Times* review on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Ben Brantley asserted that *Sleep No More* “is not the place to look for insights into Shakespeare.” While Brantley is correct in the sense that *Sleep No More* is not the kind of performance that will offer any historical insights into the original Elizabethan stage practices or Shakespeare’s fabled ‘intentions,’ the play does offer an insight into the way that we, as a contemporary audience, desire to engage the Bard’s plays. The commercial and critical success of Punchdrunk’s *Macbeth* adaptation, first performed in London in 2003, and re-mounted twice in the United States, receiving a year’s worth of extended performances in New York, reflects the way in which contemporary audiences not only *can* converse with Shakespeare, but a way in which they *want* to. The empowerment of the audience, when met with a classically popular story of ambition, passion, mysticism, and betrayal acts as Sanders’s “cultural barometer” (51), providing Brantley’s absent ‘insights into Shakespeare.’ Enacting a “complex duplicity of practice, at once underscoring its conventional formality (masks, choreography) and simultaneously claiming the transparency of practices associated with modern realistic theatricality” (Worthen 96), *Sleep No More* finds its success with an audience in need of new and accessible ways to engage with Shakespeare and live performance.

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<sup>74</sup> It is telling that Doyle does not speak a word about Shakespeare or his literary status. For Punchdrunk, it truly is about experiencing the space and the performance physically and viscerally rather than intellectually or logically.

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