Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century

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Edited by

Gabrielle Malcolm and Kelli Marshall

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

LOCATING SHAKESPEARE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

GABRIELLE MALCOLM AND KELLI MARSHALL

William Shakespeare has long been a global cultural commodity, but in the twenty-first century, "Shakespeare" is oft positioned as a socio-cultural concept with the man almost forgotten amidst the terminology that surrounds the criticism, tourism, adaptation, and utilization of his plays. Now, the works themselves are as often redrafted, adapted, and subjected to these exercises in transposition as performed wholly in their own right onstage. Moreover, the representation of Shakespeare in new media forms is now a well-established trend providing alternative strands, identities, and locations of "Shakespeare" (e.g., metanarratives, gender-reworkings, inter-cultural adapting, online streaming), and the growth is as widespread and fast as technology, performance, social networking, and cinema will allow. It is this new and exciting approach to "Shakespeare" which this volume, *Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, will explore.

In his stand-up routine from the 1980s, comedian Bobby Slayton joked, perhaps a bit insensitively, about *West Side Story* (1961), Jerome Robbins' and Robert Wise's musical adaptation and modernization of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

> Tony runs through Spanish Harlem shouting "Maria, Maria!"—and only *one* girl comes to the window?

It used to be this easy to locate Shakespeare in popular culture and/or in theatre or cinema performance. For example, the playwright was acquired and adapted for opera and film (Verdi, Bernstein, Cole Porter, Welles, Olivier), abridged and re-formatted for children (*Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*, 1807), and flourished as the epitome of mainstream culture, with the acknowledgment that popularizing him was fine as long as it was

Figure I-1. Second City's Sassy Gay Friend encourages Ophelia to move on.

true to the text or introduced his relevance to young people. In other words, integrity was encouraged and there was very little that was considered liminal or cutting edge about most versions of nineteenth- and (much) twentieth-century Shakespeare. However, now, if we ran, lovesick, through the neighborhood of popular culture at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century calling out the playwright's name, how many "Shakespeares" would come to the window? Probably more than we could count.

Case in point: in March 2010, The Second City, the renowned Chicago- and Toronto-based comedy improv company, released on its *YouTube* network "Sassy Gay Friend: *Hamlet*." The short video, which has received over five million hits to date, mocks Shakespeare's most well known play, specifically the character Ophelia who grows mad and ultimately drowns herself because her lover, Hamlet, has forsaken her. The one-minute video claims that Shakespeare's tragedy would have ended very differently "if Ophelia had a Sassy Gay Friend," someone who would put things in perspective, warn her Hamlet's not worth it, and that she's acting like "a stupid bitch" (Fig. I-1). The following week, The Second City released "Sassy Gay Friend: *Romeo and Juliet*," which ridicules Juliet's naïve decisions and hastiness. "You *love* [Romeo]?" the Sassy Gay Friend asks. "You met him Sunday; it's barely Thursday. Slow down, Crazy, slow down." Then two weeks later, arguably the wittiest of the bunch appeared, "Sassy Gay Friend: *Othello*," which pokes fun at Desdemona's gullibility and pretentiousness. "Some guy ends up with your

handkerchief, so your husband gets to murder you?!" the Sassy Gay Friend screams at Desdemona in horror.

Similarly, released on the Paramount Comedy Central UK and Ireland site in 2006-2009, "Fakespeare," written by and starring comedians Russell Kane and Sadie Hasler, promised to take the "Bard to Bromley." The short films—such as *Oh, Glorious Chariot! The Miasma of Love, I Shall Have Thee!* and *Sharon Andronicus*—convey the everyday stories of Gary and Sharon, a working-class (and for want of a better word) "chav" couple from South London. Kane and Hasler even took the performances to the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) Courtyard Theatre in 2008, continuing to employ what Kane calls the "linguistic pattern" of the plays: writing in iambic pentameter and plundering the Shakespearean lexicon to describe utterly banal and everyday occurrences. The surprise was how much this style seemed to elevate the material. For example, in *I Shall Have Thee!* a stand-off and near brawl outside a kebab shop after the pubs close takes on the proportions of a *Romeo and Juliet* style confrontation. The Capulets and Montagues are transposed to the turn-of-the-century political idea of "broken Britain."

This is where a key common feature of the two viral web series emerges: namely, both "Fakespeare" and "Sassy Gay Friend" transpose their characters, material, and settings to different worlds and times, and within different and new media to imagine how that might alter them and/or the topics with which they deal. The same goes for other twenty-first century "Shakespeares" like Such Tweet Sorrow, an RSC Twitter account/performance that allows followers to interact virtually with characters from *Romeo and Juliet* (e.g., @JulietCap16, @Romeo_Mo, @Tybalt_Cap). Likewise, Twitter users may follow @IAM_Shakespeare, who "tweeting from the Grave," offers up the "complete works of William Shakespeare line by all 112,000+ lines," one tweet every ten minutes (Stevens). Further, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust along with Shakespeare scholars Stanley Wells (a brilliant tweeter, by the way) and Paul Edmondson have created *Blogging Shakespeare: Embracing Shakespearean Conversation in a Digital Age.* Updated daily, the blog has also published a free (downloadable) book in response to Roland Emmerich's 2011 film *Anonymous* entitled *Shakespeare Bites Back: Not So Anonymous*. The Trust, it seems, is undeniably embracing Shakespeare in a digital era.

We could continue listing dozens of other twenty-first century examples here such as the viral videos *Epic Rap Battles of History: Dr. Seuss vs. Shakespeare* (25 million hits to date) and celebrity Shakespeare impressions by Jim Meskimen and Kevin Spacey (collectively over five million hits to

date). Or we could spend time on the Nashville-based play *Terminator the Second* (a mash-up of James Cameron's *Terminator* and Shakespeare's words), which, significantly, secured funding from *Kickstarter*, itself a web-based funding platform for creative projects founded only a few years ago in 2008. Finally, we could discuss at length Tumblrs like *Shakespeare Obsessed Sparrow*, a meme blog that continually inserts different silly/witty text over the same image of a sparrow holding a copy of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. But as mentioned above, there are now too many Shakespeares appearing at different windows; we must narrow the field. As a result, we've gathered here several of the most intriguing, unique, creative, and arguably bizarre Shakespeares from the twenty-first century. We have also included some of the more traditional locations of Shakespeare (film and television) since we still—and likely will always—discover the playwright there.

Part I of *Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century* considers Experimental Shakespeare: The Performance Interface Onstage, Onscreen, and Online. In "The Macbeth Dance: Punchdrunk Theatre Company's *Sleep No More* Experience," Zachary Snider examines the 2011 promenade production *Sleep No More* by the Punchdrunk Theatre Company in Manhattan's McKittrick Hotel. What he describes is a Hitchcockian/ Kubrickian "mash-up" that disorientates the audience (with the help of a few strategically placed cocktails) and offers up an adaptation of *Macbeth* of disturbing eroticism and violence depicted by actors and dancers in an entirely non-verbal form. Shakespeare's world of words was dismantled, leaving action and movement. How do you, then, cope as a viewer, auditor, or participant in total immersion Shakespeare, on the trail of Malcolm and Macbeth in an abandoned hotel? One thing it did mean for Snider was a return to see the performance a second time because of the elusive and mercurial nature of the piece. Something is sure working on that front to mutual advantage.

In "A Rouge [sic] or a King?: Locating Shakespeare in the Shakespeare's Globe London Cinema Series," James E. Wermers alights on the Globe Theatre's filmed experience. It is noteworthy from the start that the historically well-known "home" of Shakespeare's plays now has so many global examples (pun intended) that "Shakespeare's Globe London" must be distinguished and located in its own right first of all as the artistic "center" of things. Wermers goes on to chart some of the landmark "filmic Shakespeares" and their negotiation of a place alongside the canon onstage. He comes to the transplanting of the experience of a Globe London groundling to an American multiplex cinema for the audience

members via a consideration of the dual (or multiple) worlds in which Shakespeare dwells as the embodiment of cultural materialism and imperialism but also that of popular culture and folk entertainment. From the use of an atmospheric soundscape that seeks to "transport" the viewer to Shakespeare's London Globe upon entering the cinema environment, the whole trajectory is analyzed by Wermers as one of an immersive experiment for the viewer, not dissimilar to Snider's encounter during *Sleep No More*, but achieved through different technological and performative means.

"The National Theatre's 'Live' *Lear*, Theatre As Cinema, Cinema As Theatre" was our attempt at a joint paper for the Shakespeare on Film, TV, and Video Area, chaired by Kelli, at the National PCA Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in 2011—an exercise in international viewership of the digital streaming of National Theatre Live!: *King Lear* at the Donmar Warehouse. Gabrielle was to be in Bath, England, and Kelli in Ann Arbor, Michigan, each of us contributing to a transatlantic commentary via Twitter. However, this possibility was exploded by the fact that the live-streaming would be seen in the UK and a live-recorded version of the performance shown worldwide at various dates and venues thereafter. So, what was to be the simultaneous response to a live event turned into something else altogether. Instead, there emerged a comparative analysis of theatrical and filmic conventions when subjected to the (sometimes frustrating) variables of "liveness," and the different interpretations of the unfolding scene depending upon the different conditions of viewership.[1]

In the final chapter in Part I, "Now You See Me, Now You—Shakespeare in the National Video Archive of Performance at the V&A," Beverely Hart informs readers how the preservation and archiving of Shakespeare performance on film can become an act of experimentation and performance in itself. What once could have provoked the clichéd view of the dusty and academic world of museum cataloguing has, she explains, been transformed in the hands of twenty-first century curatorial approaches into work of intriguing editorial significance and a route into visioning the history of Shakespeare in performance in new and exciting ways. For example, the "liberties" that a spectator can take with an archival film in a museum viewing room are an advantage to be exploited: the minutiae of an individual actor's portrayal of a role can be exposed; the

[1] This is an example of how disparity might build from the concept to the final project. Sometimes, the critique of performance has to be fluid and changeable, as the performance itself is, because the intended goals might be unavoidably corrupted due to unforeseen glitches where new technologies are concerned. It is one of the things that viewership and reception must be prepared for.

linear narrative can be corrupted. Whilst being one part of the "jigsaw of evidence" that the Victoria & Albert Museum in London might have at its disposal, archival film of Shakespeare in performance is a selective, ever-evolving, experimental process that will have a huge impact on how the staging, recording, and dramaturgical conception of the works in performance will be perceived in the future.

Part II considers "Reading and (Re)Writing" Shakespeare for wider demographics, popular tastes, and educative purposes. First, in "*Just Shakespeare!* Adapting *Macbeth* for Children's Literature," Marina Gerzic gives us "Murder, Madness, and Whizz Fizz" when she considers children's author Andy Griffiths' tackling of the difficulties of adapting *Macbeth* for children and young adults. Seemingly akin to UK Comedy Central's "Fakespeare," Griffiths adopts a method that uses his own stock group of characters from his *Just…* series of young-adult (YA) fiction and transplants them into the world of the play to see them uttering the lines in reference to their own adolescent experiences and shattering various contexts and illusions along the way. To add to the texture of this work, Gerzic explores the phases of adaptation from script to YA novel via Griffiths' route of first creating a stage version performed in Melbourne and Sydney, and then at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2008-2010). She focuses on his methodology with language, the retention of the possibilities of linguistic dynamism and wordplay that does not alienate a young audience, and the scope that opens up when presenting the plot within a metafictional context.

In "Shakespeare Gets Graphic: Manga and Graphic Novel Adaptation as Performance in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," Shannon R. Mortimore-Smith takes a personal view of working on Shakespeare as a high school English teacher and combating the prejudice amongst the professional educational community towards graphic novels in the classroom. Mortimore-Smith also questions the very purpose of retaining Shakespeare as a taught course in the twenty-first century, and moves from the confusion students feel over the language, and the habit of teachers for confiscating their comics, to the possibilities of replenishing the enjoyment and understanding of the canon through Manga (i.e., Japanese comics) and the graphic novel. From derision of the form to a new appreciation of how different interpretations of visual culture operate, comic books and Shakespeare in the classroom can help reorient broader pedagogical methods and galvanize new means of opening Shakespeare up to students, while assisting in banishing feelings of inadequacy as to how they cope with the language.

The final chapter of Part II, Ryan McCarthy’s "Remixing Richard," on

the other hand, moves squarely away from the tactile and tangible dealings with printed artifacts to the virtual online representation of Shakespeare in the form of scanned and digitized manuscripts. McCarthy explores the electronic text and hypertext versions of the Quarto editions of the works on the website of the British Library, specifically *Richard III*. There is more to explore on a single webpage than the representation of a document. McCarthy probes the cultural prospects and issues of reception and notation surrounding this new format of the historical artifacts associated with Shakespeare and his editors over the centuries. He also looks at the strain this accessibility puts upon copywriting and attribution. Online protocols connected to the "cultural continuum" of "Read/Write" and "Read/Only" files come into the equation in this locating of *Richard III* on the page—that is the manuscript page within a webpage. He suggests that we need to utilize different metaphorical devices to think about how we can manage this, such as those associated with sampling and "re-mixing" from the music industry. In addition, there are the economic, the capital, and the commercial considerations linked to how the text is used. For example, McCarthy notes the differentiation to be made between Shakespeare's Quarto text as an image file on a website (that is static and non-responsive or unwritable) in much the same way as a logo or piece of graphic art exists, and the pages as hypertext (HTML) files (that is "live" and potentially writable) with active links. These distinctions make for very different artifacts and their (virtual) "handling" needs to recognize this.

In Part III of *Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, we locate various Shakespeares on (British and Canadian) television—that contested, immediate, essential situation of culture, for which, as is so often stated, Shakespeare would likely be writing were he alive today. First, in "The Fictional Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century," Emily Saidel boldly dispenses with the historical and the literary Shakespeares and deals instead with that unique invention of the televisual age: the fictional Shakespeare. This is the "what if?" Shakespeare from curious writers of such forms as time-travelling fiction. As well as references to films *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998) and *Anonymous*, Saidel considers Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series of graphic novels and how a surrealist construction of multi-layered, supernatural happenings might have instigated the composition of one of Shakespeare's most mysterious plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Along with this, she looks at the charming and ironic wit of the BBC *Doctor Who* series and the passion in the plots for re-inventing relationships with historical figures. In both contexts there is a strongly iconoclastic streak but one that is distinctly at

pains to interrogate our understanding of the "man" Shakespeare and his "mythic" personae. Finally, Saidel examines how issues such as familial relationships (Shakespeare with his own son), lust and sexuality (Shakespeare actually "did it"), and race and gender (Shakespeare's reaction to Dr. Who's assistant) are dealt with as fictional responses to what we know (or think we know) of the man and his work.

Next, Daragh Downes ruthlessly and shamelessly dismantles the efforts of the BBC script-writers and editors in "If You'll Excuse My Shakespeare: BBC's *ShakespeaRE-Told* Series" and their "normalizing" and "softening" of the very matter that makes Shakespeare so successful. He wittily takes on the series' clumsy appropriation of the plots for Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and compares them to the more grounded, resolved, and complete realization of *Macbeth*. As the only tragedy to be taken on and adapted for the series, the latter appears to have been the location for a more politically and dramatically astute revision, in comparison to the difficulties encountered with the comedies. In contrast to the cringing social and sexual politics reconfigured for *Much Ado*, *The Dream*, and *The Shrew*, Downes welcomes the excoriating treatment of the social divisiveness caused by the ideology lingering after Thatcherism. He transfers it to the kitchens of a successful chef, which becomes the Macbeths' slaughterhouse where betrayal and blood mingle with an avoidance of cliché and a clear and exciting transposition of metaphor and character.

Another battleground that television (and film) can conquer well is explored in Peter E. S. Babiak's "Variations On Familiar Themes: Metadrama in *Slings and Arrows* and *Hamlet 2*." This time around it is the turn of actors (their producers, agents, etc.) to fight it out in the backstage drama. The "meta" world that frames the onstage world or provides the sequel to *Hamlet*, is discussed and agonized over by the performers and considered in relation to "real life." This is the territory of egos and reputations and the question of where Shakespeare ends and the actor in the role begins. Who is actually in receipt of the accolades and applause at any one moment? And how do you handle the huge cultural legacy of what you are performing night after night? Babiak examines how this creates humorous (often hilarious) dramatic strategies around the performing of a play and how the tension of this is manifest onscreen, in the form of supernatural visitations, nervous breakdowns, and the crossing of boundaries—of taste, artistic integrity, and political correctness. Transgression, rebellion, parody, and borderline blasphemy are characterized in some of this work, to perhaps a necessary cathartic climax.

Part IV of this volume looks at cinematic Shakespeares, both from familiar and perhaps not so familiar sources. No examination of this kind would be complete without an up-to-date critical consideration of the career of Kenneth Branagh, whose adaptations and their fidelity to the text(s) have come to mean so much to educators, students, academics, and filmgoers. However, in "Don't Call it a Comeback: Kenneth Branagh's *As You Like It*," Jessica M. Maerz considers the more low-key production and reception of the director's *As You Like It*, a 2007 HBO film adaptation of Shakespeare's play. The commercial aspects are looked at as well as his chosen aesthetic, the casting, format (the speedy release of the DVD after broadcast), and the "awkward position" this film occupies in the Branagh canon, for many a body of work synonymous with their contemporary understanding of Shakespeare. Maerz also examines how *As You Like It* compares to the Oscar-winning triumphs of Branagh's previous adaptations and specifically the problematic reception (or dismissal?) of his *Love's Labour's Lost* (2000).

One would not immediately credit Shakespeare with locating or representing Jewish masculinity in a positive way. But, suggests Andrew Marzoni in "The Villainy You Teach Me, I Will Execute: Vengeance and Imitation in Shakespeare, Marlowe, and the Jewish Revenge Film," it is precisely the ambiguity, prejudice, stereotyping, and liminal positioning that has been forced upon European Jews over the centuries that has enabled the articulation of revenge in modern Jewish and Israeli cinema. The notion of the Renaissance Jew as "counterfeiter" as portrayed by Shakespeare and Marlowe has been reclaimed and renegotiated in post-Holocaust culture so that various versions of the Jewish male hero are now extant. Where Shylock and Barabas failed to exact revenge against those that wronged them, Jonathan Kesselman's *The Hebrew Hammer* (2003) ("what if Shaft had been Jewish?") and Quentin Tarantino's *The Inglourious Basterds* (2009) succeed.

Finally, cinema is a medium through which many oppressed and formerly colonized or enslaved peoples can represent and reinforce their independent cultural position. This standpoint is explored in the Indian and Madagascan films covered in "Multi-Cultural Shakespeares" by Vanessa Gerhards. Both films, *Maqbool* (Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003) and *Makibefo* (Alexander Abela, 2001), illustrate how cultural acquisition and transposition can work on Shakespeare's plot for *Macbeth*. The equivalents for so much of what the political tragedy explores can be found in both a large, multi-cultural Indian metropolis and a smaller island-based culture. The distance that Shakespeare can travel and become an associative, linking force for different people and points of view is persuasively

discussed. Religious, ritualistic, and linguistic perspectives and customs find a channel in these films. Gerhards also reveals surprising similarities between the Early Modern society of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and the Madagascan society of the early twenty-first century, for example.

That an English playwright from that period is so firmly positioned within global cultures in the early twenty-first century tests the limits of critical hyperbole. The achievement is almost incomprehensible on some levels and yet perfectly explicable when considering the language, structure and plots of the plays. They were designed to be beautifully flexible commodities in the first place, combining some of the most exciting features of popular folk drama with some of the most elevated sentiments of classical theatre. So often, in encounters with popular culture the blending together of forms, the development of a hybrid artifact is the secret and it is that which explains their appeal. The quality of Shakespeare's source material, his handling of the different textures and dimensions of the verse and meter, and the ability to condense thought into memorable phrases means that the works still communicate across the centuries, and across cultures. As new ways of representation are developed, new material does not need to always be sought. Adaptations are always welcome, but likewise excellent composition and invention take place around the framework that Shakespeare offers.

This project of "locating" Shakespeare has been one of identification and recording as well as pinpointing and critiquing what is found at any particular location. One of our discoveries has been the immense reach of the works, which involves the conspicuous attempts by creators/directors to see the piece penetrate, inform, and infuse different cultures and ways of representation. We have moved from Bath to New York, Ann Arbor to Chicago, the depths of the Victoria and Albert Museum's archive in London to Madagascar and Mumbai. As well as geographical reach, there is the linguistic, virtual, and performative reach. Non-verbal performance is set beside filmed versions, graphic novels report from a meta and surrealistic world, and websites and new media/writing for international arts festivals fragment and reconstruct Shakespeare for an ever widening and more tech-savvy audience.

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PART I:

EXPERIMENTAL SHAKESPEARE: THE PERFORMANCE INTERFACE ONSTAGE, ONSCREEN, AND ONLINE

CHAPTER ONE

THE MACBETH DANCE: PUNCHDRUNK THEATRE COMPANY'S *SLEEP NO MORE* EXPERIENCE

ZACHARY SNIDER

> Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
> Macbeth does murder sleep," — the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the raveled sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life […] Macbeth, *Macbeth* (2.2)

Critics' and news media reviews for the Punchdrunk Theatre Company's show *Sleep No More* at Manhattan's 100,000-square foot McKittrick Hotel suggest that the interactive performance is a postmodernist "mash-up" of Hitchcockian tones, 1930s film noir, and, predominantly, Shakespeare's political tragedy *Macbeth*. In their publicity statements, though, Punchdrunk merely calls *SNM* an "indoor promenade performance," citing no inspiration or attempted recreation of Shakespeare's shortest tragedy. Prior to the New York City opening, *SNM*'s director, Felix Barrett, said of the show's plot and purpose: "If you know *Macbeth* really well, it will be obvious. You'll know exactly what's going on […] But, even if you don't know *Macbeth*, you will find a story. The language is all there; it's just expressed physically" ("Shakespeare Exploded"). Indeed, the show is nonverbal, featuring a genre buffet of music, from jazz to classical to techno, and 20 actors who portray 25 characters throughout the evening on a seemingly infinite loop of *Macbeth*-inspired scenes.

The initial experience of *SNM* is aesthetically similar to the climactic eerie party scene of Stanley Kubrick's final film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), which is another comparison that critics have referenced. Other critics cite the films of David Lynch as inspiration for the hotel's nightmarish atmosphere, presumably the vast spaces in dreamscape narratives like *Twin Peaks* (1990-1992) or *Lost Highway* (1997). It is this intertextual pastiche of genres, styles, time periods, and influences from other narratives

Figure 1-1. Masked participants surround player Matthew Oaks.

that, although centrally inspired by *Macbeth*, truly makes *SNM* theatre for the twenty-first century.

Upon entry to the *SNM* "theatre," each guest is handed a white plastic mask with sharply raised eyebrows, angular cheeks, and a long pointed chin (Fig. 1-1). These Victorian-esque masks create conformity, with every viewer of *SNM* appearing as though s/he is an extra in the film *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006) or a participant in the creepiest year of Venice's annual Carnival celebration. After passing through a festive 1930s-styled jazz bar, in which I quickly tossed back a few cocktails to heighten my immersive theatre experience (as reviews suggest to do, perhaps somewhat jokingly), we participants are loaded onto an elevator with an operator who shoves us out randomly onto one of the four floors of the hotel. Many guests were perturbed to be separated from their companions, but this individual experience is actually what Punchdrunk prefers; guests, each of us now anonymous with our conformist masks, are advised to wander the hotel alone for the next two-and-a-half hours, opening doors, cabinets, drawers, and suitcases, and snooping around as much as possible. We are encouraged to get into trouble.

> No two patrons will see the exact same show. In that way, the experience of *Sleep No More* is not unlike playing a videogame such as Myst or Doom, where you carve out a highly individual series of sensations and encounters from a too-rich trove of available offerings. You choose your own adventure. (Grier)

While I would not liken my personal *SNM* experience to videogames, as this critic has done, the show is undoubtedly a "choose your own adventure" experience, albeit one that's equivalent to accidentally—and literally—walking into a Shakespearean drama. *Macbeth* characters passed by me on the stairs or in hallways, and, more often, I walked into a room in which a *Macbeth*-inspired scene unfolded before me. All scenes are highly personal between characters, some of them involving heightened sexual tension, baths, births, nudity, blood splatter, witch curses, or choreographed violence. In other words, I was *in Macbeth*. Barrett, the show's director, stated: "The audience can't be passive. They have to go out there and find the action for themselves […] they become ghosts, haunting the space and the story" ("Shakespeare Exploded"). It is immensely voyeuristic and rather uncomfortable in each of the meticulously designed and decorated disparate 93 rooms of the hotel. Critics unanimously suggest that if a character passes you, then you should by all means follow him/her. At one point I sprinted up three flights of stairs, chasing after Malcolm (Adam Scher), who was fleeing to investigate something in his detective shop (yes, you read that right). While other guests and I thought this occasionally lightning-speed interaction added to the excitement and environment of the overall theatrical experience, some critics found this necessity of following *Macbeth*'s plot points rather daunting: "This sometimes results in the frustrating feeling—as you enter a room and see fellow attendees dispersing—that you've missed a key moment. Some attendees choose to stalk the actors like cats underfoot (I quickly found that trying to keep up with Macbeth proved exhausting)" (Kelsch).

Shattering Shakespeare: *SNM*'s Narrative Fragmentation

Sleep No More is an amalgamation of quirky postmodern theatre qualities: the actors' recurrent breaking of the fourth wall; the production's attempts to combine realism with experimentalism to tell Macbeth's story; the narrative's fragmented hodgepodge of events during which it is nearly impossible to see every plot twist; the actors' dual roles (in *SNM*, gender is sometimes irrelevant for characterization); the substitution of space, dance, rhythm, and movement for verbal language; the combination of visual art and Shakespearean themes. While *SNM* has garnered universally positive reviews, many critics and participants still express frustration about the show's fragmented narrative, which makes it both postmodern and a stylish diegetic experiment on Shakespeare's original play.

In fact, one reason I saw the show more than once was in attempts to

piece together the much-interpreted scenes of *Macbeth*. Like many other theatregoers there, my companion and I had separated for the evening and had thus experienced two entirely different storylines; discussing the show afterwards still disallowed us from assembling an entirely coherent narrative based on our co-recounting. With this severe fragmentation, the scenes play out even more exaggeratedly, as there is less understanding for viewers of what narrative point occurred before, or what will happen next. Some of the action uses non-verbal dance and also relies heavily upon intensified physical acting that borders on mime, creating a sense of melodrama.

Moreover, even dashing after a performer does not guarantee narrative continuity because often, performers will temporarily disappear and then re-emerge as an entirely different *Macbeth* character, or they will return to another section of the hotel where they have been choreographed to re-enact a scene that might have already occurred during the narrative loop of the play. Postmodern theatre scholar Kerstin Schmidt suggests that "[Fragmentation] allows postmodern theater to go beyond the action performed onstage and dramatize the metadramatic" (*Theatre* 47), which in this case references the fact that the communication of the action in *SNM* is mainly through dance. The metadrama here also refers to the notion that *SNM* is not a *direct* or *exact* telling of *Macbeth*, but rather, that it is a story within a story: the characters of *SNM* are *affected* by the story of *Macbeth* but are perhaps engaged in their own new and extended version of it (à la Hitchcockian or Kubrickian undertones and influences), and thus the plot has become another narrative altogether. Schmidt further clarifies, "The fragmentation at issue here, however, is a decomposition that excludes the possibility of reassembling the parts into a complete whole. A consecutive synthesis of the fragments is impossible and the sense of original unity cannot be recovered" (47), suggesting that there is never a "correct" way to experience the show in its entirety. This means that participants are meant to have a unique, private experience rather than deciphering a literal meaning or a collective conclusion of the plot with other audience members. The narrative of *SNM* is a solitary endeavor, as is every viewer's varied experience with the unpredictable performers.

That said, the communal aspect of theatre still exists in *Sleep No More*, at least for the most part. For example, whenever a *Macbeth* scene on a larger scale of drama occurs (e.g., a fight between younger generation noblemen Malcolm, Donalbain, and Fleance, or Lady Macbeth's prolonged urging of her husband to commit regicide), a crowd habitually gathers to watch. The cast of *SNM* can deceptively rely on their audience to act obediently, like cattle, herding themselves together so as not to miss

something. Occasionally, however, I, like other spectators, found myself alone in a smaller room with one character, which encouraged independent voyeurism to occur. In these uncomfortable moments with just one *Macbeth* character, a metanarrative between audience member and actor begins, albeit temporarily. This means that miniature plot twists unexpectedly happen all over the hotel—impromptu variations that change the entire storyline of *Macbeth* for viewers lucky enough to experience private interaction with a character. When not en masse for large-scale scenes, *we* become *Macbeth* characters who disrupt the original story and the choreography in which the dancer-actors have been directed to engage.

The lavish set is a theatrical experience within itself, although its appearance and aura suggest nothing of the Elizabethan Age. "More than 200 unpaid volunteer artists spent about four months hand-writing letters, coloring wallpaper and building furniture. A spokesman for the show declined to say how much the production cost, other than the budget was 'in the millions of dollars'" (Piepenburg). At almost 100 unique rooms, guests can walk through a dim graveyard filled with crooked tombstones, a claustrophobia-inducing labyrinth of a forest, a barren ballroom with only a grandiose chandelier and a stage up front, assorted living areas and sitting rooms with antique furniture, a children's dormitory with single beds and disturbingly placed medical supplies, a large bathroom featuring a collection of empty claw-foot bathtubs, a few merchant storefronts with sales countertops, and some bar areas speckled with used beverage glasses and playing cards. Further, they can roam among dozens of other small rooms with anything from dusty knick-knacks to decapitated doll bodies, to handwritten letters from various characters or even from Macbeth himself.

Schmidt also notes that "[P]ostmodern theater in general presents landscapes and turns into what could be called an environmental theater. Borrowed from the visual arts, postmodern drama's emphasis on the 'environment' remains ephemeral and is mostly designed for physical experience" ("Theatrical" 428). While the physical environment of *Sleep No More* might be a temporary experience, as Schmidt suggests, its psychoanalytic result (which is thus effectively Hitchcockian) is anything but ephemeral. As a matter of fact, I had nightmares about the show, as did other critics who confessed the same in their reviews. Getting lost is easy in this postmodernist physical juxtaposition of Shakespeare and Hitchcock, and it is also far more disturbing to be lost *alone* someplace in the set of *SNM* than it is to watch the plot happen and thus attempt to figure out which scenes are meant to parallel those of Shakespeare's original text.

Dancing (Writhing and Nursing) in Iambic Pentameter

Soon after the elevator operator pushed me onto the fourth floor of the McKittrick Hotel, I walked into a scene featuring a female character in lingerie who writhed atop a lavish bed (and against the walls even). I'd stumbled upon the beginning of the performance and realized quickly that this character was Lady Macbeth (Tori Sparks). Just as Act 1, scene 5, of *Macbeth* opens with Lady Macbeth anxiously reading a letter from her husband in solitude, in *Sleep No More* Lady Macbeth is just as exasperated by her husband. She knows it is she who must instigate Macbeth's plot to become king: "Yet do I fear thy nature / It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great / Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it" (14-18).

In *SNM*, Lady Macbeth gropes her body forcefully, most often her chest and pelvis, with movements that are sexualized but not crude. These sexually charged gyrations unquestionably coincide with one of Lady Macbeth's more famous speeches: "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here / And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty!" (1.5.38-41) and "Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers / Wherever in your sightless substances / You wait on nature's mischief!" (1.5.44-48). While Shakespeare's text intended for this speech to suggest that Lady Macbeth was defeminizing herself—i.e., "unsexing" herself in order to act more commanding rather than supportive and wifely—here Lady Macbeth is far more sexualized. Rather than desexualizing Lady Macbeth in this scene, the sexual tension between husband and wife is heightened more than anywhere else in the show. When Macbeth (Eric Jackson Bradley) enters this large royal bedroom in *SNM*, he chases his wife around the room, with their bodies intertwined nonstop in simultaneous sexual energy and combat. It is clear that Lady Macbeth has control of all the movement within this scene, just as she does in this scene of the original play. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth begins the process of convincing her husband to kill Duncan the King, but also tells him to leave all the plotting to her. This impassioned urging of Lady Macbeth for her husband to murder Duncan soon grows stronger:

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valor
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life

Figure 1-2. In the background, an audience member watches the Macbeths' sexual combat.

> And live a coward in thine own esteem
> Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would"
> Like the poor cat […] (1.7.38-45).

In the *SNM* version, the Macbeths continue their sexualized combat dance—literally *up* the walls of the bedroom, and occasionally knocking into audience members—until they collapse in exhaustion (Fig. 1-2). In postmodern theatre, unlike in Elizabethan drama, female characters are *allowed* to be feminine *and* in charge; perhaps this is why *SNM*'s producers sexualized this scene so greatly, rather than simply stripping Lady Macbeth of her femininity in order to emasculate her husband. This interpretation of the Macbeths' marital spat and regicidal plotting requires the performers of *SNM* to capture the psychological war for spousal control in the original text, here via extreme physicality and sexuality.

While I was lucky to catch this catalyst scene that helps to spawn further rising actions of *Macbeth*'s plot, the fragmentation of the *SNM* experience does not lend such narrative continuity. After I watched the Macbeths dash off from their bedroom, I wandered about the hotel for quite some time, until I found myself alone in a sitting room with an extremely nervous pregnant character (Lucy York). I surmised that this