

# "Now 'mongst this flock of drunkards": Drunk Shakespeare's Polytemporal Theater

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## Abstract

Drunk Shakespeare is a current off-Broadway production that combines a performance of *Macbeth* with outrageous improvisation, frequent audience participation, and, as the show's title unapologetically promises, drunken revelry. Despite the production's playful irreverence, this essay argues that The Drunk Shakespeare Society's *Macbeth* adapts a consistent Shakespearean trope — specifically, the capacity of alcoholic consumption to alter temporal landscapes and loosen time restraints — into a shared theatrical experience. Building off recent work in both Shakespearean polytemporalities and immersive performance, this essay explores the means by which Drunk Shakespeare wields communal carousal as an immersive strategy that invites audiences not only to witness, but to inhabit the surreal, polychronic worlds of *Macbeth*. As I argue here, the convergence of time, drink, and theatrics that informs Drunk Shakespeare theatricalizes a consistent Shakespearean probe into the temporal release that drink affords. Thus, convivial consumption becomes not only a gimmick, but one of a number of immersive strategies that this production employs in order to create an experiential *Macbeth*, one in which audiences, in the manner of Lady Macbeth, may "feel now / The future in the instant" (1.5.65-66).

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## Introduction

*In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world, and you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. Mankind, that word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interest. Perhaps it's fate that today is the 4th of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom. Not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution, but from annihilation. We're fighting for our right to live, to exist, and should we win the day, the 4th of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day when the world declared in one voice, "We will not go quietly into the night! We will not vanish without a fight! We're going to live on, we're going to survive." Today we celebrate our independence day! (Independence Day 1996)*

Fans of popular cinema hardly need to be prompted as to the origin of this rousing speech, the rallying cry to arms delivered by President Thomas J. Whitmore on the eve of the aerial assault that unites humankind in a shared victory over intergalactic tyrants in Roland Emmerich's 1996 *Independence Day*. Set amidst a swelling score, the dim light of dawn, and rolling waves of mist, this speech has taken on a life of its own over the past two decades: the speech, whether Bill Pullman's original performance or various others' recitations, features prominently on YouTube, often accompanied by comments like "best speech ever!" In 2012, *Forbes*, citing this speech in particular, ranked Pullman's Whitmore as America's best fictional president (Pomerantz 2012).<sup>1</sup>

As YouTube demonstrates, this speech surfaces in numerous, unexpected places — in wedding toasts, flash mobs, and Internet parodies, for instance — and in the summer of 2014 at New York City's Quinn's Bar, it provided the conclusion to The Drunk Shakespeare Society's adaptation of *Macbeth*. As Malcolm stood over the lifeless bodies of the Macbeths, the heir to the Scottish throne announced the end of the Macbeths' tyrannical rule and the dawn of a new era, courtesy of President Whitmore. The concluding speech from *Independence Day* elicited enthusiastic applause and squeals from the small audience in attendance and provided a fitting conclusion to Drunk Shakespeare's particular brand of performance: that is, an exuberant mash-up of Shakespeare, pop culture references, and booze that playfully effaces the boundaries between past and present, performer and playgoer, adaptation and appropriation, and scripted performance and improvisation.

The Drunk Shakespeare Society, which bills itself as "a company of professional drinkers with a serious Shakespeare problem," began its limited run of Drunk Shakespeare in March of 2014; in 2015, the production moved to a larger venue, The Lounge, and has gradually increased its run to at least, by the time of this writing, September of 2018.<sup>2</sup> The five-actor ensemble initiates the performance each evening by calling their meeting to order and explaining the format: one of the revolving cast of professional actors will down five shots of liquor before the company proceeds to perform *Macbeth*, surrounded on all sides by tables of audience members who are likewise drinking and free to continue ordering drinks from the cast/staff along the way. Cast members may interrupt the performance to call a "point of order," which generally involves a careful explanation of a key moment or commentary on the performance, while the drunk actor of the evening may call a "drunk point of order," and alter or re-interpret moments of the play. They justify their approach with a handful of Shakespeare quotations — "Good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used" (*Othello*, 2.3.328-39), for example — and explain their contention that alcohol likely played a part in the original stagings, if not the crafting, of Shakespeare's work.

While drinking was certainly a commonplace of the early modern theater, the implication that Shakespeare was a drinker remains debatable. Anecdotally, the Reverend John Ward of Stratford recorded in his diary that Shakespeare died of a fever he caught after a night of heavy drinking with Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton (Ward 1839, 61); seventeenth-century biographer John Aubrey, on the other hand, wrote that Shakespeare "wouldnt be debauched" (cited in Chambers 1930, 252).<sup>3</sup> Despite the unapologetic frivolity of the performance's premise, the *Macbeth* that follows, while condensed, is often thoughtful, at times surprisingly earnest, if riotous and wildly irreverent. As Tom Teodorczuk observed in his review for *The Daily Beast*, "the show has been wildly entertaining both devotees of Shakespeare and those whose idea of a horrible night out is a four-hour Hamlet. It's as though Mark Rylance has stumbled onto the set of TV show TMZ" (Teodorczuk 2014).

It is perhaps fitting that the production chooses the iconic *Independence Day* speech as its finale, as the insertion of one iconic conclusion into another seems to highlight the thematic principles that inform the entire production. If drunkenness functions as a gimmick in this production, it also operates as an immersive strategy and a distortive lens through which a drama that is already obsessed with issues of disjointed time ruptures into a kind of meta-*Macbeth*, self-consciously aware of its own distortions of time, its history, the conditions of its present staging, and its dialogic relationship to contemporary pop culture. Drunk Shakespeare operates through what Hamlet might call "time . . . out of joint" (1.5.210), and offers, through the drunken antics shared by actor and audience alike, the opportunity to inhabit multiple temporalities at once, much as Lady Macbeth muses that she "feel[s] now / The future in the instant" (1.5.65-66). Occupying a space somewhere between traditional performance and the experiential Shakespeare offered in *Sleep No More*, the audience is encouraged to drink along with the cast and participate in the performance, creating a shared theatrical experience that dispatches with time and eases boundaries in a spirit of revelry. That the concluding monologue is one so definitively marked by a specific calendar date that corresponds neither to present staging nor to Shakespeare's play provides an audaciously misaligned moment of intertextuality that asserts the radical temporalities at play.

Such nonlinear strategies of adaptation, though playfully wielded, remain in line with recent trends in temporal explorations of Shakespeare generally and *Macbeth* specifically. What Donald W. Foster deems "Macbeth's War on Time" has spurred a vast body of criticism from numerous angles into the complex treatment of time in *Macbeth* (Foster 1986, 319-42); as Luisa Guj notes, "In *Macbeth* . . . time is under scrutiny in its tripartite sequence of past, present, and future" (Guj 1986, 176).<sup>4</sup> Recently, the study of time in Shakespeare has turned toward what Jonathan Gil Harris,

in *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, calls "palimpsested time," in which "time" refers not to measurable, sequential, or discreet units but to "an understanding of the temporal relations among past, present, and future" (Harris 2009, 3). According to Harris, "Time in Shakespeare's plays is sometimes a progressive line that follows the arc of the sun, but it is also counterintuitively a plane in which the future is behind and the past ahead, and a preposterous folded cloth in which before and after are coeval" (4).

Interest in nonlinear time in Shakespeare has propelled a number of recent inquiries into various polytemporalities, including anachronism, presentism, and queer temporalities, and as, perhaps, Shakespeare's most overt meditation on time, *Macbeth* factors prominently in many such studies.<sup>5</sup> In her queer analysis, Heather Love explores "the collapse of past, present, and future into a single moment" (Love 2011, 201), particularly in Lady Macbeth's "longing for an outcome located in the future — but as a constant enjoyment of the future in and as the present" (204); similarly, Howard Marchitello re-examines the frequently discussed notion of speed in *Macbeth*, in terms of both the brisk pace of the drama and Macbeth's own obsession with acceleration, as Macbeth's "desire to be and act before . . . to have defeated time by anticipating its passage and flow and to have obliterated both by conflating present and future into an atemporal space of a new 'now'" (Marchitello 2013, 448).

It is precisely this new, atemporal now to which The Drunk Shakespeare Society grants access, as its unorthodox *Macbeth* transforms the pervasive thematic exploration of Shakespearean polytemporality into a shared theatrical experience. In an innovative convergence of theatrics and analysis, Drunk Shakespeare immerses its participants in the idiosyncratic terrain of *Macbeth*'s polytemporal world, inviting both actor and audience to inhabit a space where past, present, and future collapse in the instant, where various histories collide and dissipate and every day is *Independence Day*. As theater historian David Carlyon argues, theatrical performance is a form of "applied criticism" (Carlyon 2011, 131); Drunk Shakespeare offers what we might instead label an act of immersive criticism in which, as Josephine Machon explains of immersive traditions, "the audience-participant is actually there, physically inhabiting the fantasy world [and] responding within an imaginative, sensual environment" (Machon 2013, 61). Through its porous theatrical boundaries, participatory ethos, unanticipable spontaneity, and, indeed, communal spirit of drunkenness, this unique *Macbeth* facilitates an empathic excursion into the twisted temporalities that recent scholarship has critically engaged. In Drunk Shakespeare, as Machon argues of immersive theater as a whole, "temporality itself becomes experiential" (96).

As the show's primary calling card, the drunkenness at the heart of Drunk Shakespeare offers more than a quirky theatrical transgression; communal carousal here becomes an immersive strategy that both highlights and exploits the capacity of consumption to alter the temporal landscape of its inhabitants, while simultaneously engendering a shared spirit of spontaneous communitas that playfully dismantles traditional theatrical structures. As I will explore in this essay, drunkenness offers a particularly apt means of immersion in this theatrical experience of *Macbeth's* polytemporalities, as the intersection of time and drink that informs Drunk Shakespeare engagingly adapts a recurrent Shakespearean trope into the temporal release that drink affords. Before turning to the production's specific performance strategies, this essay will first contextualize this company of drunk Shakespeareans amongst similarly time-bending Shakespearean drunks, revealing the means by which the production's primary strategy of immersion is itself an appropriation of a consistent Shakespearean trope. As I will further explore, boozy excess likewise propels the temporal distortions of *Macbeth*; Drunk Shakespeare thereby wields drunkenness as an immersive theatrical strategy that opens *Macbeth's* wine-soaked polytemporal fantasy to participatory engagement.

"Give me some wine, and let me speak" (*Antony  
and Cleopatra*, 4.15.49): Drink and the Theater

Upon ascending the staircase at Quinn's Bar to the private, second-floor barroom that housed Drunk Shakespeare, patrons, on the evening I attended, were greeted by the sound of Postmodern Jukebox's ragtime rendition of Robin Thicke's 2013 hit "Blurred Lines." The song, a ubiquitous piece of contemporary dance-pop rendered almost unrecognizable in this early-twentieth-century-styled incarnation, provided an effective welcome to the blurring of genre and chronology that the evening delivered; so too did the acting ensemble, mingling with attendees while dressed in quasi-1920s garb and sipping beer and wine. Of course, tavern theater, while something of a rarity today, is not without precedent in the staging of early modern drama. In *Better a Shrew than a Sheep*, Pamela Allen Brown discusses how "the early modern alehouse became a prime place for the cross-fertilization of everyday jesting and theater. Many forms of popular performance, such as sports, games, morris dancing, jigging and ballad singing, took place in the alehouse" (Brown 2003, 71). Shakespeare certainly evokes the relationship between the playhouse and the alehouse in his dramas as well, with taverns often serving as decidedly theatrical spaces: Eastcheap's Boar's Head Tavern, for example, hosts Falstaff and Prince Hal's improvised role-playing in *1 Henry IV*; in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Master Ford performs the part of abject pursuer Brooke at the Garter Inn.

The worlds of the tavern and the theater intersected in very material ways as well, as ale and other beverages seem to have been fixtures of the early modern playhouse: "Peddlars of food . . . and ale there certainly were," notes Andrew Gurr (Gurr 2004, 98-99). Gabriel Egan has convincingly argued that King's Man John Heminges operated a tap-house adjoining the Globe (Egan 2001), and the availability of ale at the theater plays a vital role in Sir Henry Wotton's 1613 letter detailing the burning of the Globe: "only one man had his Breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broyled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with bottle Ale" (Wotton 1672, 426). Though the sale of ale in the theater was likely a necessity due to a polluted urban water supply (McBride 2004, 182), playhouse indulgence certainly fueled derision: the comically condemnatory ballad "A Sonnett upon the Pittifull Burneing of the Globe playhowse in London" details the manner by which "reprobates, thoughe druncke on Munday" stream out of the theater along with panicked players (printed in Halliwell-Phillipps 1887, 311), and antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson rails against excessive playhouse "quaffing" in *The School of Abuse* (Gosson 1579, 17).

Contemporary episodes of playhouse drunkenness by both actors and audiences have likewise provoked unsavory public displays and justifiable criticism. In 2014, The Oregonian theater critic David Greenwald pleaded to his readership, "you have to stop being drunk schmucks at theater shows" (Greenwald 2014), and a handful of national news stories have illustrated the disruptive potential of drunk playgoing: police escorted actor Shia LaBeouf out of a Broadway theater in 2014 for drunkenly yelling slurs at performers; in 2015, an admittedly drunk theatergoer at the Broadway production of *Hand to God* marched on stage to charge his cell phone at an on-set (and non-functioning) electrical outlet.<sup>6</sup>

And while Drunk Shakespeare has enjoyed nearly unanimous praise from critics in *The Daily Beast*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, *Yelp* contains a handful of disgruntled reviews from disappointed attendees, some of whom, like user Julie G., lay blame on the audience: "there were two really loud and progressively drunk people who interrupted the show literally every 4 minutes" (Julie G. 2014).<sup>7</sup> Others simply find the show's premise unamusing and sophomoric: "Awesome . . . if you just want to re-enact your drunk dorm days," writes another user (Enchanted W. 2015).

In his review of the Boston production of the similarly styled Scottish import, *Shit-faced Shakespeare*, *Boston Globe* critic Don Aucoin registers a more startling concern:

You don't have to be a teetotaler or a killjoy to feel queasy sitting amid a throng of spectators who are roaring with laughter while someone reels about the stage for an hour or so, virtually out of control. Onstage as in life, drunks are more depressing than funny. Further

curdling the laughs for anyone who lives in this university-packed region is an awareness of the epidemic of binge drinking on college campuses. (Aucoin 2015)

Aucoin's pointed criticism rings especially troublesome considering producer Lewis Ironside's apparent disregard for the dangerous climate of college binge-drinking on American campuses; in fact, he claims to have chosen Boston for the company's U.S. debut precisely because of "the mixture of heavy-drinking antics and well-educated refinement" that the area's universities provide (Hoover 2015). For its part, Drunk Shakespeare seems much more attentive to the valid concerns that inebriated performance may elicit; the company maintains a strict 21-and-over attendance policy and monitors the drunk actor via breathalyzer, and both the evening's emcee and the company's website offer the following disclaimer: "We do not condone excessive drinking. Our drunk actors are on a regular rotation and are carefully monitored at all times. Drinking in moderation can be fun. Drinking to excess can ruin your life. We promote healthy drinking" (Drunk Shakespeare Society 2015).

The company's disclaimer further highlights, as do Shakespeare's plays, the wildly disparate effects of intoxication. In *Shakespeare and Alcohol*, Buckner B. Trawick found that each of Shakespeare's plays contains at least one allusion to alcohol, and he tallied 360 references to "a drink, a drinker, or drunkenness" in the complete works (Trawick 1978, 7, n.1). Such references serve myriad different ends; in *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt observes that while the plays at times "registered disgust" with drunkenness, they also indulged in "the delicious foolishness, the exuberant cracking of jests, the amiable nonsense, the indifference to decorum, the flashes of insight, the magical erasure of the cares of the world" that intoxication can provoke (Greenblatt 2004, 67). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the very elements that Greenblatt cites as characteristic of Shakespearean drunkenness are the same phenomena that attract many to the theater.

Drunkenness in Shakespeare, whether depicted as light-hearted revelry or the pernicious breeding ground of malice, remains, above all, highly theatrical; like the theater, the state of drunkenness is an inherently unstable and unpredictable space that induces illusions and alters perception, whether to amusing or distressing ends. As Puck reminds us in the Epilogue to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the "shadows" and "visions" of the stage are no more yielding than the dream state that ensnared the play's characters in the forest (5.1.1, 4); it is as if we have all ingested that intoxicating "liquor" of "a little western flower" that fuels the dream-like escapades of the theater (2.1.185, 172).

"My teeming date drunk up with time" (*Richard II*, 5.2.100): Time and Drink in Shakespeare

One of the parallels between drunkenness and the theater that Shakespeare's dramas repeatedly exploit is the capacity of each to manipulate and distort the human perception of time. As Matthew Wagner notes in *Shakespeare, Theatre, and Time*, in the theater, "fictive time meets 'real' time; past meets present meets future; the time of the play is carved out of, and radically different from, the time of the remainder of the day" (Wagner 2012, 2). Similarly, in Shakespeare, the drunkard, too, gains license to bend or stand outside of time altogether. In Shakespeare, as in *Drunk Shakespeare*, the state of intoxication alters temporal environments to the extent that fixed, timely referents and standard units of temporal measurement dissolve in extended scenes of drunken polytemporality. In fact, the convergence of time, drink, and theatrics that informs The Drunk Shakespeare Society's performance reifies a fairly consistent Shakespearean trope across genres, as some of Shakespeare's most notable drunks, including Hal and Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*, and *Measure for Measure's* Barnardine, profitably indulge in drunkenness's reprieve from orderly time. Each of these notoriously bibulous characters inhabits a polytemporal world to which their sober counterparts are not privy, and it is precisely this world to which *Drunk Shakespeare* grants entry, as the company's immersive strategies theatricalize the boozy temporalities that these plays thematize.

In *Shakespeare After All*, Marjorie Garber notes that of the many parallels drawn between the playhouse and the alehouse in *1 Henry IV*, Hal directs attention specifically to timelessness. As Garber argues, when Hal delivers his celebrated monologue in act one, his declaration that, "I know you all, and will awhile uphold / The unyoked humor of your idleness" (1.2.202-203), he speaks not only to his Eastcheap gang of miscreants, but to the theatrical audience at large, as he mirrors "the 'idleness' of playgoers [to] the idleness of tavern-dwellers" (Garber 2004, 330). This idleness, he explains, is not mere inactivity, but an eternal state of "playing holidays" (1.2.211), and as Garber argues, Hal's eventual transformation into the English hero celebrated by history necessitates his disavowal of "playing" and drinking in the Boar's Head and his surrender to the sobering state "of time and timeliness" on the battlefield (Garber 2004, 330). But the Boar's Head, not unlike *Drunk Shakespeare's* Quinn's Bar, provides a perpetual play space that shelters its inhabitants from the linear chronologies unfolding outside its doors, and here Hal intends to "drive away the time" (2.4.29) — not only to pass the time in idle consumption, but to forcibly expel temporal concerns and forestall his inevitable future.

With his inescapable "reformation" always looming (1.2.220), Hal understands his linear lease of obligation to a history yet to unfold, but until his date with that predetermined future arrives, he bristles at any attempt to disrupt his extended, timeless holiday. Early in *1 Henry IV*, for example, a presumably drunken Falstaff innocuously asks, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" (1.2.1).



The seemingly benign question incites a disproportionately lengthy and contemptuous response from the prince:

Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which though wouldst truly know. What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta. I see no reason why thou shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time of the day.  
(1.2.2-13)

By asking for the time, Falstaff, arguably Shakespeare's most celebrated tippler, unearths a well of disdain as he taps into the prince's anxieties regarding his inevitable succession. According to Hal, the drunkard's privilege is to measure life not in minutes or hours, but in wine, chickens, and whores. Lawrence Danson labels this alternate temporality "Falstaffian time": "Falstaff eats time and screws the instruments of its measurement. Unlike the King's linear time, Falstaff's time is a flexible medium" (Danson 2000, 99). Libation, here, is liberation from the unrelenting demands of time.

For Hal, the simple inquiry is, quite literally, sobering, as it threatens to impose the kind of rigid adherence to time that drink promises to absolve — an adherence that the prince has thus far successfully eschewed, but which his father aptly demonstrates in the previous scene. In contrast, King Henry's opening monologue ripples with precise timely considerations: in a rush to take advantage of this hard-won "time for frightened peace" (1.1.2), the king plans to finally embark upon his "twelve month old" plan to reclaim the holy land for his savior (1.1.28), who was there crucified "fourteen hundred year ago" (1.1.26). With other timely and pressing matters to contend with, however, the king must once again postpone his crusading dream, as he reconvenes his counsellors for "Wednesday next" (1.1.102). But fixed schedules and timely operations are part of "the debt [Hal] never promised" (1.2.216): the weighty, structured, and inflexible antithesis to the drunken escape of Eastcheap. Only when he is summoned by the King and shamed into submission does Hal finally accede to his father's sense of time and order, declaring,

. . . for the time will come  
That I shall make this northern youth exchange  
His glorious deeds for my indignities. (3.2.149-51)

His vow to unseat the valiant Hotspur is rooted in a sense of linear time, as Hal must acknowledge that "the time" that he has thus far successfully averted "will come." Hal, removed from the Boar's Head's temporal liberation, now operates on his father's schedule.

Of course, Hal's eventual submission to his father's rigid chronology is a predetermined fate that both the audience and Hal have presciently understood all along as unavoidable. As a character in a history, Hal's attempts to "drive away the time" at the Boar's Head can only amount to a temporary reprieve, and moments of drunkenness and idle tavern-dwelling punctuate an otherwise linear arc with moments of polytemporal escape. As Steven Earnshaw notes, in *1 Henry IV*, "the tavern, thus being without time, might be said to transcend time" (Earnshaw 2000, 48), and Adam Smyth likewise observes that in early modern treatments of tavern life, "time is threatened" as drunkenness itself is figured as "an inversion of time" (Smyth 2004, 201).

Demonstrating the transcendence of tavern time, Hal informs the clueless drawer Francis, "I am now of all humors that have showed themselves humors since the old days of Goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight" (2.4.95-98). Hal's "now" is the split-second convergence of all that has ever transpired — the past in the instant — with none of the future that drunkenness allows him to defer. When Hal follows his time-bending declaration with the timely question, "What o'clock, Francis?" (2.4.99), Francis's reply of "Anon, anon, sir" only further defers that future (2.4.100); as Garber notes, Francis's reply "underscores the central theme of time itself" (Garber 2004, 335). The tavern thus provides a sheltering cocoon for its intoxicated inhabitants from the inevitable linear timeline that ceaselessly marches on, like troops to the battlefield, outside its walls.

Released from the predetermined chronology of history, the comedies are free to explore the transcendent nature of drunken temporality to more enduring ends. In *1 Henry IV*, Hal's extended holiday must eventually give way to the sobering responsibilities of both the kingship and historical chronicle, but in *Measure for Measure*, the drunkard Barnardine, a convicted murderer who has been awaiting execution for nine years, effectively bypasses time's hold altogether. Unlike Hal and Falstaff, whose drunken antics are depicted as good-natured revelry, Barnardine embodies a more sinister strain of drunken temperament; he is a surly and unrepentant murderer. Like Hal, Barnardine scowls at time; the Provost explains that this prisoner is not only "drunk many times a day, if not many days entirely" (4.2.161-62), but also "careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present, or to come" (4.2.155-56). In an era when death sentences were exacted almost immediately, Barnardine has avoided execution, first, through his friends' intercessions and some doubt as to guilt, but now, purely through his near-constant inebriation.

Though physically imprisoned and awaiting his sentence, as opposed to Hal's more figurative form of imprisonment by history, Barnardine is said to have "had the liberty of the prison" (4.2.159-60), enjoying a freedom within his cell that Hal could never quite realize. In fact, the Provost notes that Barnardine craves no more freedom than that which he already enjoys: "Give him leave to escape hence, he would not" (4.2.160-61), the Provost informs the Duke. It is as if, through perpetual intoxication, Barnardine has discovered a form of unconditional liberation, in which neither looming threats nor iron bars may detain a free and drunken spirit. With neither remorse, nor present care, nor anxiety for what's to come, Barnardine maintains a contented, drunken existence free from the burdens of past, present, or future.

When Pompey and Abhorson attempt to carry out his sentence, a drunk and sullen Barnardine replies, "I have been drinking all night. I am not fitted for't" (4.3.45-46). When the Duke, disguised as a friar, attempts to prepare the prisoner for his eventual end, Barnardine continues his adamant refusal:

DUKE. Sir, induced by my charity, and hearing how hastily you are to depart, I am come to advise you, comfort you, and pray with you.

BARNARDINE. Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

DUKE. O sir, you must; and therefore, I beseech you look forward on the journey you shall go.

BARNARDINE. I swear I will not die today, for any man's persuasion.

DUKE. But hear you—

BARNARDINE. Not a word. If you have anything to say to me, come to my ward, for thence will not I today. (4.3.52-67)

Shielded only by his drunken defiance, Barnardine's mantra-like disavowal of his death sentence effectively upends the Duke's linear timeline.

Though the Duke intends to move "hastily" toward a seemingly predetermined future, Barnardine's reiterative "not . . . this day" and "not . . . today" defy both time and authority, and time's authority specifically, as he assuredly negates an unfolding chronology in an act of perpetual deferment. By play's end, Barnardine has unpredictably and illogically received a full pardon, despite bearing no signs of remorse, repentance, or even the desire to be released; the compassionate Duke cannot bear to execute a drunk man, "a creature unprepared, unmeet for death" (4.3.71), and as Musa Gurnis notes, this final-act pardon amounts to "an extended deferral to the ultimate

Judge" (Gurnis 2014, 161). While Hal's drunken, polytemporal escapes are always mitigated by the adjacency of a predetermined chronology, Barnardine's incessant drinking affords him a permanent release, on this plane, at least, as he inhabits a world where the actions of the past need not determine the future in linear subsequence.

Though Barnardine speaks only seven times in the entire play, his audacious defiance of both authoritative and timely structures has spawned a great deal of critical interest and popular appeal, beginning, perhaps, with the Romantic William Hazlitt, who found Barnardine "one of the finest [characters] in all of Shakespear" (Hazlitt 1818, 283); Greenblatt, too, finds Barnardine "theatrically compelling" (Greenblatt 2010, 13), and while Gurnis deems Barnardine "a disturbing character," she also acknowledges that he is "extremely funny": "Barnardine, the man too drunk to die, is a likely favorite with pleasure-seeking theatergoers" (Gurnis 2014, 161). That a remorseless murderer emerges as a purveyor of pleasure speaks to the theatrical potency of staged drunkenness; unlike Hal or even Falstaff, Barnardine is a man of no redeeming virtue, yet he offers a seductive glimpse into a timeless, transgressive fantasy world free of obligation, concern, or consequence.

With no care as to what is past, present, or future, Barnardine's drunken antics transcend even that ultimate human fear, as he remains "insensible of mortality" (4.2.156-57). Shakespeare's similarly transgressive drunks have long been crowd favorites, evidenced as early as 1598 when the quarto edition of *The History of Henrie the Fourth* included "With the humorous conceites of Sir John Falstalffe" on its advertorial title page. At least part of the pleasure that these bibulous figures provide, I would argue, stems from the momentary access they provide to a carnivalesque temporal economy in which time holds no authority. It is this same kind of pleasure that Drunk Shakespeare offers, as the production presents not only a flash encounter with a fantasy of timelessness, but an opportunity to inhabit the polytemporal worlds enjoyed by the drunkenly untroubled. Through its self-consciously drunken theatrics and thoroughly interactive strategies, The Drunk Shakespeare Society's *Macbeth* invites participants to inhabit the worlds enjoyed by Shakespeare's most notorious drunks, where past, present, and future converge in the instant.

"Wine and wassail so convince that memory" (*Macbeth*,

1.7.74-75): Macbeth's Drunken Equivocations

The first word uttered in *Macbeth*, quite fittingly, is "When." Especially as used here, as the precursor to a question, "when" is a word that probes time, and the play that follows consistently interrogates the nature, order, and perceptual variances of time. Generally dated to 1606, *Macbeth* is a play that peers into the world of a ruthless eleventh-century Scottish monarch who can, through the witches' presentation of Banquo's successors, return the spectator's gaze and look back upon

a future generation that is watching him. *Macbeth* provides a particularly apt vehicle for Drunk Shakespeare's time-bending, immersive theatrics, as the play does not so much open a portal into the past as it offers a surreal expression of the multidimensional, multidirectional relationship among past, present, and future. As Ross declares upon the assassination of Duncan, "By th' clock 'tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp" (2.4.8-9); time has become unraveled, as day and night no longer precede or follow each other but co-exist simultaneously.

As Harris argues, "*Macbeth* is a play that repeatedly smudges the boundaries dividing the present 'moment' from other times" (Harris 2009, 123), but in *Macbeth*, even the notion of a present time remains a decidedly shaky foundation upon which to build ideas about the past or future. From the onset of the play, the present, through the witches' prophecies, is one predicated on a future that the audience understands as history. The porter's scene of 2.3, which most likely alludes to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and the eighth king's mirror in the witches' parade of apparitions in 4.1, through which Macbeth beholds the image of James I, pierce an already unstable sense of the eleventh-century present with glimpses into another present. These present spaces, like day and night in Ross's observation, inhabit one polytemporal arena simultaneously. As Lady Macbeth explains, Macbeth's letter relaying the witches' prophecies transport her "beyond / This ignorant present" (1.5.64-65). Not only does she claim to experience the "future in the instant," but she deems her present reality "ignorant," which, according to the *OED*, renders her present as either unconscious or, in a now obsolete definition, uninformative in its concealment of the truth (*OED* s.v. "ignorant," 3b); the present, for Lady Macbeth as in the play at large, mystifies and equivocates.

It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that a play that so overtly shuffles temporalities would likewise feature drink so prominently, given Shakespeare's frequent explorations of alcohol's time-altering capacities. According to Joan Fitzpatrick in *Food in Shakespeare*, one of the play's most iconic moments, that of the witches' song and dance around their cauldron before they deliver the prophecies that portend Macbeth's downfall, aligns the weird sisters with early modern brewing practices: "'Double double toil and trouble' [is] an apparent allusion to double-double beer and the demonized female brewer" (Fitzpatrick 2007, 128), she writes. Double-double beer, Fitzpatrick explains, was a more potent version of double beer, which was boiled twice (49); double-double beer carried a "reputation for causing social disorder" (51), and thus, with their instigating prophecies and onstage brewing, the witches may likely have conjured images of women brewers and their corruptive capacities.

Furthermore, Fitzpatrick notes that the witches wield their greatest power at the moment they gather at their cauldron (7). Just as significantly, the cauldron remains onstage during their ensuing prophecies, providing a stark material reminder of their repetitious references to the intoxicating

"double double" brew that seems the source of their grand, visual illusions, one of which — the king that bears the "twofold balls and treble scepters" (4.1.136) — opens a window to the present of the play's original staging. If the witches can indeed, as Banquo says, "look into the seeds of time" (1.3.61), then their time-travelling capacities are strongly linked to the intoxicating brew that seems to fuel their most potent prophecies.

If the witches' cauldron figuratively points to the power of intoxicating drink to bend time and alter reality, the drunken carousal of Inverness provides a much more literal representation. As the central defining moment of the Macbeths' narrative arc, Duncan's murder is saturated in boozy excess, as is revealed by the Porter's drunkenly delayed response to a knocking at the door, before he offers a lengthy treatise on the effects of over-imbibing as he greets the guest. "We were carousing till the second cock," he explains, "and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things" (2.3.24-26):

Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes. It provokes the desire but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery. It makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him and disheartens him; makes him stand to and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep and, giving him the lie, leaves him. (2.3.29-38)

Drunkness, according to the Porter, equivocates; it clouds the potency of desire for future outcomes with the impotence of present inaction, and as Christoph Clausen notes in *Macbeth Multiplied*, the Porter's remarks echo Lady Macbeth's sexual taunting of Macbeth in the moments leading up to Duncan's murder: "Lady Macbeth quickly moves from figuring her husband's ambitions as inebriation to figuring them as a test of his virility" (Clausen 2005, 100).<sup>8</sup> As Lady Macbeth asks, "Was the hope drunk / Wherein you dressed yourself?" (1.7.39-40), she parallels the Porter's sentiments that while Macbeth's spirit was once willing, his flesh is now weak, his ambition dulled as if drunk.

As a great equivocator, drunkness lays a mystifying shroud over the brutal actions within Macbeth's castle. Alcohol plays a central role in the Macbeths' murder plot; as Lady Macbeth explains,

. . . his two chamberlains  
Will I with wine and wassail so convince  
That memory, the warder of the brain,  
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep  
Their drenchèd natures lies as in a death,

What cannot you and I perform upon  
Th'unguarded Duncan? (1.7.73-80)

As the key to both carrying out the murder and avoiding detection, Lady Macbeth drugs Duncan's guards' wine, which she understands will so confuse the guards' powers of perception as to render them unconscious and, in keeping with the Porter's assessment, impotent. As she draws the parallel between the chamberlains' position in Duncan's quarters and the memory's function as the watchman of the mind, she asserts wine's capacity to perplex and immobilize both. Likening the body to a distillery, the brain, that "receipt of reason," absorbs the intoxicating vapors of a drunken belly to the point of disorientation.

Lady Macbeth, for her part, is not so much disoriented as re-oriented after having imbibed, as she declares, "That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold, / What quenched them hath given me fire" (2.2.1-3). "Spirits," as she had earlier commanded, may indeed have unsexed her and filled her full "Of direst cruelty" (1.5.47, 50), as wine emboldens her to collaborate in the murderous plot, even if she cannot bring herself to kill a king who "resembled / [Her] father as he slept" (2.2.16-17). Macbeth, however, asks to be notified "when my drink is ready" (2.1.42), then immediately launches into a polytemporal hallucination in which his future unfolds before his eyes: "the bloody business" he has yet to undertake "informs / Thus to [his] eyes" (2.1.60-61), and with a "stealthy pace" shuffles him forward "towards his design" (2.1.66, 67); the initially spotless dagger he sees before him drips with blood "Which was not so before" (2.1.59), as he inhabits his future in the instant. If Macbeth aimed to defy the order of time through regicide, he realizes his goal almost immediately, as upon committing the murder, he finds that he has likewise "murder[ed] sleep," which he notes is "The death of each day's life" (2.2.48, 50); his future is now one long, undying day, unpunctuated by sleep's reprieve.

To stress Macbeth's new and endless day, the following scene provides a comically exaggerated interval of slow time, as the Porter drunkenly and unhurriedly shuffles to answer an elongated series of eight knocks at the door. In his dilatory response, the Porter seems to open the door not only to the seventeenth-century theatrical audience's present, but to the early modern theater's dramatic forebears as well. In a moment that Harris labels "a polychronic palimpsest," the Porter adopts the role of the medieval mystery plays' stock "porter of Hell-gate" and asks (Harris 2009, 128), "Who's there, in th'other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven" (2.3.7-11). Aside from further attesting to the mystifying effects of too much drink, his conjecture of a treasonous equivocator at his gate is a likely reference to the Gunpowder Plot's co-

conspirator Henry Garnet, whose *A Treatise of Equivocation* helped to convict him. The Porter scene, then, like the witches' apparitions of future kings, forges a time-bending bridge between the murder and attempted murder of two Scottish monarchs a half-millennium apart, all while infusing the present theatrical moment with decidedly dated dramatic practice. The Porter taps into a future that is his initial audience's present, reinvigorates outmoded stagecraft on the present stage, and presents a past uncannily connected to a seventeenth-century audience's current moment, as drink, again, equivocates in matters of time.

"Hath our intelligence been drunk?" (*King John*,

#### 4.2.116): Drunk Shakespeare as Polytemporal Immersion

On the night that I attended *Drunk Shakespeare*, cast member Poppy Liu, who played the parts of a witch and Macduff, was singled out as the evening's drunk Shakespearean. Presented with five murky brown shots of liquor, she asked for an audience member to come forward and imbibe one of the shots with her. The move was part audience participation, part magician's gimmick; she aimed to demonstrate that the liquor and, hence, her ensuing drunkenness were indeed real and that *Drunk Shakespeare* delivers its promise authentically and collaboratively. As she selected one of the several enthusiastic volunteers to join her, this initiating moment signaled the drunken revelry to follow and invited the audience to participate; it also telegraphed a certain degree of anxious anticipation. Liu was visibly drunk, and though she told the audience not to worry as she has a high tolerance, her drunken grin and wildly oscillating volume provided an air of instability and spontaneity, even danger, to the evening's entertainment. As I soon discovered, actual on-stage drunkenness, and not the comically exaggerated performance of drunkenness fans of Shakespeare are accustomed to in their Falstaffs or Toby Belches, can provide an unsettling theatrical experience.

As performance theorist Herbert Blau argues in *The Dubious Spectacle*,

the primary architectural space of the theater is and always has been the body of the actor, subject as it is to the dematerializing power of the gaze that dissolves all space into itself. It is, of course, a transient architecture with a breathing skin, subject at any instant to the corrosions of time, the future in the instant. (Blau 2002, 50).

Riffing on *Lady Macbeth*, Blau argues that human mortality and the ceaseless flow of time are always on display in the theater through the live, corporeal bodies of its actors "literally dying in front of your eyes" (51). Actor and spectator "breathe each other" (50), he says, bonded in their mutual mortality, both aware of their shared time and space in their present environment



and the relentless progression of time toward an uncertain future. On-stage drunkenness, I would argue, only heightens this theatrical effect as it alerts the audience to the shared vulnerabilities of everybody, with the passage of time revealing, and revealed by, the inevitably intoxicating consequences of consumption. Immediately after downing her liquor, Liu assured the audience, "Don't worry, my body just absorbs alcohol," to which her cast-mate Lucas Calhoun corrected, "Um, all our bodies absorb alcohol." It was a funny exchange, but it also reminded the audience that Liu remained subject to the same debilitating effects of excess indulgence to which we all are, and that her position on the stage did not shelter her vulnerable, human body from inebriation.

If Drunk Shakespeare promises a drunken performance, it cannot do so without actually and chemically compromising the body and mind of its intoxicated actor, and this slow process of gradual and easily perceptible inebriation acutely signals both her mortality and what Blau calls the "corrosion of time." The evening's entertainment then persistently threatened, or perhaps promised, the potential for startling reminders of human frailty as Liu further devolved into drunkenness: Would she stumble, slur, forget her lines, or, in a more ghastly turn, vomit? But it is precisely this kind of unsettling apprehension that grounds this particular theatrical event in a highly conscious sense of the present, with a foreboding sense of an unanticipatable future always looming. On-stage drunkenness commands vigilant attention to the immediacy of the theatrical event through its sheer unpredictability.

The Drunk Shakespeare Society is hardly the first ensemble to perform Shakespeare while intoxicated, nor is Drunk Shakespeare the first Shakespearean production to place at its forefront what other performers may have concealed through character and, in a quasi-Brechtian turn, assert the presence of the (drunken) actor behind the role. Producer Scott Griffin acknowledges that a performance of the Scottish Shit-faced Shakespeare in Edinburgh inspired Drunk Shakespeare (Teodorczuk 2014), and the Scottish company has recently brought their production stateside for the limited 2015 run in Boston that provoked the *Boston Globe* reviewer's concerns. Despite the similarities of inebriated and partially improvised performance, however, Drunk Shakespeare remains a vastly different experience from its inspirational predecessor; performed on a stage in a traditional theatrical auditorium, Shit-faced Shakespeare invites its audience to witness the idiosyncrasies of drunken Shakespeare, without the complicity or spatial fluidity of this participatory tavern environment. Free of divisive barriers, Drunk Shakespeare can then wield drunkenness as something beyond spectacle, as convivial consumption becomes an immersive strategy that facilitates a sense of shared lability and collaborative enterprise.

As Machon argues, the hyper-present awareness engendered by Drunk Shakespeare is characteristic of immersive performance, which she notes, "accentuates the 'presentness' of

human sensory experience" (Machon 2013, 44), produces a "felt sense of time-play" (96), and invites participants into an unspoken "contract into which you are entering [an] exclusive and ludic society" (96). Fittingly, the performance references itself not as a show, but a "meeting" of The Drunk Shakespeare Society. As emcee Phil Gillen called the meeting to order, it became clear that we were all drunk Shakespeareans for the evening, with Liu only serving as a particularly legible demonstration of the communal, theatricalized revels in which we all participated.

Inclusive imbibing provides not only a means of immersing attendees in the alcohol-fueled polytemporalities of *Macbeth*, but a device to facilitate a sense of spontaneous *communitas* amongst all participants. *Communitas*, the unstructured state of mutual, egalitarian affiliation that emerges through shared experience, involves a liminal experience that Victor Turner deems "a moment in and out of time" (Turner 1969, 96): "Communitas is of the now" (113), he writes, and arises free of the structural burdens of linear timelines. What he specifically refers to as "spontaneous *communitas*" is an extemporal, unrepeatable moment through which divisional hierarchies dissolve in a communal, though fleeting, spirit of chaos (140). Theater and performance studies frequently engage Turner's model of *communitas*, especially in regard to experimental and immersive forms that suspend traditional barriers between spectacle and spectator; as Richard Schechner states in *Performance Theory*, "The goal of [participatory] performances is to entertain, to have fun, and to create what Victor Turner calls 'spontaneous *communitas*,' the dissolution of boundaries shutting people off from each other. The resulting experience is of collective celebration" (Schechner 1988, 128). Indeed, despite the somber tone of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, this meeting of The Drunk Shakespeare Society maintained a celebratory atmosphere more indebted to the humorously transgressive antics of Falstaff or Barnardine than to the weighty machinations of the *Macbeths*, as participants shared not only drinks and laughter, but the same theatrical space, text, and alternating roles of performer and spectator.

In a compelling subversion of the traditional boundaries between locus and platea, a bride-to-be named Lisa, there celebrating her bachelorette party, fulfilled the role of Duncan, or rather, Queen Lisa, from her seat on a red velvet throne in the center of the play-space. As Robert Weimann theorized in his highly influential *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, early modern and subsequent stages traditionally operate through a divide between two distinct theatrical spaces: the scaffolded, upstage locus, reserved for thrones and stationary set structures; and the "neutral" platea, a liminal play space that facilitates performer-playgoer interaction (Weimann 1978, 74-76). As Queen Lisa's position on the only fixed set-piece demonstrates, Drunk Shakespeare operates entirely in platea, as the neutral space of performer-playgoer interactivity encompasses the entire barroom, from the central royal throne to the outermost patrons' tables.

With neither social nor physical boundaries to divide the performance from its audience, there is no safe space in Drunk Shakespeare; attendees can find no shelter from the pervasive — and certainly to some, invasive — scope of the performance, as one *Yelp* reviewer lamented after "a random actor [came] up to us and without saying a word [drank] some of my beer" (Ricardo A. 2015). In turn, no part of the play-space or even the play-text is specifically off-limits to playgoers, as an audience member occupies the throne, and all references to Duncan in the text were substituted with "Lisa."

As attendees corporeally and rhetorically entered both the play-space and the play, the actors, too, at times assumed the role of spectator, as during unscripted moments, members of the five-actor ensemble retreated amidst the patrons' tables and often partook of a drink while watching their fellow participants' performances. It soon became evident that the atmosphere of unpredictable spontaneity that gripped the audience extended to the principal players as well; neither audience nor actor could foresee the often drunken improvisations that would unfold from either cast members or attendees. In one apparently unscripted excursion, Gillen asked Liu, mid-production and further progressed in her intoxication, to spontaneously perform a scene from *Henry VI*. She consented, then paused to ask, "Wait, which one?" Gillen repeated "*Henry VI*," and Liu dropped to her knees and delivered one of Queen Katherine's courtroom monologues from *Henry VIII*. Like the audience, the actors responded to this mistaken monologue as they did to many of her drunken improvisations, with visceral displays of startled whispering and hearty laughter.

Before the performance of *Macbeth* began, Liu, after having downed her shots and with a rather rambling delivery style, proceeded to explain that *Macbeth* is an old story that has known many incarnations, and that when she was a child, her parents often told her a somewhat sanitized version in the form of a fairy tale. "It went like this," she said, before speaking the story in Mandarin, punctuated occasionally by the familiar names of "Macbeth" and "Macduff." Her storytelling, like most of her drunken antics, elicited a great deal of laughter from all participants, but it also established a sort of precedent: that the story about to unfold belongs to no singular time or place, that it is an ongoing narrative that has been reimagined, transported, and translated for centuries. As the evening's drunk Shakespearean, she provided an apt vehicle for the delivery of this particular message regarding the unfixed fluidity of the story, and she reiterated this narrative instability almost immediately when she interrupted the second scene with her first "drunk point of order" to command that every time Gillen, as Ross, enter the action, he do so as a different powerful woman from history. This apparently improvised emendation provided an early signal of the dramatic license the company assumes and allowed various histories to collide in a spirit of good humor, so with a faux-Columbian accent and gyrating pelvis, Gillen delivered a Shakira-inspired message that Duncan had named Macbeth Thane of Cawdor, before proclaiming, "And my hips don't lie."

Despite frequent improvisations and multiple interruptions, The Drunk Shakespeare Society performs a great deal of the play, though as the performance progressed and the participants became further intoxicated, it sometimes seemed that Shakespeare was, in fact, interrupting an improv session rather than the other way around. In his work on Shakespeare and the performance of histories, Brian Walsh argues that "it is the present that animates the past" (Walsh 2009, Kindle loc. 10%); in their discussion of memory, cognition, and the early modern theater, Evelyn B. Tribble and John Sutton conversely argue that "the past animates the present" as both conscious and unconscious memories spur present practices (Tribble and Sutton 2012, 589).

Drunk Shakespeare demonstrates a matrix of reciprocating temporal causalities that, I would argue, encompass both perspectives simultaneously. Multiple pasts are on display in Drunk Shakespeare, including the history of the eleventh-century monarch, the cast's 1920s-inspired costuming, and Liu's childhood memories. As Walsh argues, each of these various histories comes alive through the words and bodies of the actors present. But multiple presents exist as well, from the conditions and persons of the present staging to the frequent pop cultural references that direct attention to the present outside the tavern walls. In keeping with Tribble and Sutton's model, it is Shakespeare's distinctly seventeenth-century verse that provides a springboard for the company's stories, jokes, and commentary; throughout the performance, passages from the play launched various cast members to reflect upon topics ranging from contemporary film to the New York City subways. The language of the play animated their present-minded joviality, and the friction between the dated iambic pentameter and the cast's casual, contemporary commentary highlighted the historical gap between the two. If the production is marked, through both drunken spontaneity and pop cultural references, by an overriding sense of the present, as well as a looming, inevitable future, both seem to spring from, and co-exist with, an insuppressible past rendered rhetorically by the present actors. Drunk Shakespeare, then, provides a shared experience thematized in *Macbeth*: one in which past, present, and future occur in the instant.

As the inescapable progression of drunkenness gradually enveloped all participants, the gap that seemed to express Shakespeare's language as a sort of playfully wielded historical artifact gradually shrunk: radical breaks from the text seemed less audacious, but rather, somewhat expected and therefore more fluid; an emboldened audience grew louder and participated more substantially in the performance, becoming ever more complicit in the experience. Throughout the performance, audience participation was encouraged, at times demanded.

Attendees filled in the parts of the murderers in 3.1 and 3.4. As Great Birnham Wood ascended to Dunsinane Hill, Kate Gunther's Malcolm led a group of playgoers, all dangling pine tree air fresheners before them, toward Macbeth's waiting forces. Furthermore, spontaneous outbursts,

if not invited, generally met positive response and, indeed, became a central part of the show. When, for example, Lindsey Hope Pearlman entered as Lady Macbeth, she delighted an audience member by handing him her prophetic letter. The recipient of the letter later, upon Lady Macbeth's declaration that, "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (1.7.62-63), shouted back, "Oh, I've given suck, too, honey!"

The exchange demonstrates a pattern in *Drunk Shakespeare*, as early on, audience members were initially welcomed into the show by means of gesture, question, and comment, which then signaled license to participate freely. As the play progressed, audience interruptions occurred nearly as frequently as Liu's interruptions; as director David Hudson stated to *The New York Times*, "The audience is the sixth character in the play" (Sloan 2014).

It has become something of a given in critical discussions of early modern theater to discuss the audience as part of the playhouse spectacle. In *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama*, Jeremy Lopez argues that early modern audiences "enjoyed going to the theater for reasons other than seeing the play — to see and be seen by others . . . to show off new clothes" and took a great deal of enjoyment in "responding visibly, audibly, and physically" (Lopez 2002, 34). Andrew Gurr, Ian Munroe, and Nova Myhill, along with such early modern commentators as Thomas Dekker and Thomas Nashe, have all written on the complex relationship between audience and on-stage action, asserting, as does Lopez, that in the early modern theater, the audience, too, is on display and, indeed, part of the show.<sup>9</sup> While I have generally accepted such arguments in theory, I have rarely experienced contemporary theater in this way, given today's general inclination toward darkened auditoriums and mostly obeisant audiences. Even in reconstructed theaters, such as London's Globe or the Blackfriars in Staunton, Virginia, with their universal lighting and on-stage seating, the air of bardolatry permeates so severely and, indeed, seems embedded within the very timbers, that it is hard to imagine a truly irreverent or disruptive audience. But in *Drunk Shakespeare*, audience irreverence and unpredictability, undoubtedly spurred on by the beverages consumed, played an increasingly significant part in the spectacle and added to an already tension-laden environment, further destabilizing the performance with the potential for boundary-crossing disruption.

Given the high degree of audience interaction, *Drunk Shakespeare* can feel, at times, less like a performance and more like a Shakespeare-themed funhouse, and the cast acknowledged as much. When, in the aftermath of Lisa's murder, Macbeth (Calhoun) uttered his "sleep no more" lament, Gillen called a point of order to ask if anyone had been to *Sleep No More*. Many in attendance responded that they had, before Gillen added, "I've seen *Sleep No More* fifteen times, and my

favorite part is when the big hairy guy takes you in the dark closet and teaches you how to be a man." The cast, with impeccable comic timing, paused to stare at their cohort in stunned disbelief as the audience roared; the joke, later enhanced when Gillen emerged in the signature *Sleep No More* mask, ties the performance to what is perhaps its closest counterpart: another *Macbeth*-themed theatrical experience that likewise invites its audience to inhabit its world. To be certain, Drunk Shakespeare is much more closely aligned to the play-text than is *Sleep No More*, and the comedic production is punctuated with moments of surprisingly earnest performance. Calhoun, in one such instance, delivered a powerfully evocative "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech that, for a brief moment, brought the generally unruly crowd to silence.

But the spontaneous improvisations and drunken antics of the participants are the main attractions here. Throughout the performance, Liu, despite playing a role with less stage time than Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, provided an omnipresent reminder of the show's central premise. She interrupted with several drunk points of order; before the massacre at Macduff's castle, for example, she drunkenly reiterated, in the impassioned, repetitious manner to which drunks are prone, how disturbing she found the murder of children in this play, and then commanded that the entire assault be relayed only through interpretive dance. She could be seen at times drinking with playgoers during her unscripted moments, and once emerged to announce her intention to play "Fortyhands," which I had to ask a tablemate to explain. Fortyhands, a riff on Edward Scissorhands, is a drinking game that involves duct-taping a forty-ounce bottle of malt liquor to one's hand, which cannot be removed until it is fully consumed. I needn't have asked, as Liu promptly demonstrated, and then could be seen flitting between tables, pouring portions of her bottle into eager attendees' mouths.

Liu provided an exaggerated mirror of the drunken spiral consuming all of Drunk Shakespeare's participants. As the barroom gradually became enveloped by the encroaching spirit of genuine debauchery, so, too, the play devolved into a barely recognizable pastiche of Shakespeare, inebriation, and pop culture, until its culmination in the *Independence Day* speech. By the time the matter of Scottish succession was determined by a dance-off between Macduff and Lady Macbeth, which Macduff handily won by performing an impressive split, any sense of intertwined, competing narratives and temporalities had already ruptured into an open-ended free-for-all.

Drunk Shakespeare resists easy categorization; like the "tragical mirth" offered by the rude mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.61), The Drunk Shakespeare Society's *Macbeth* is a comical presentation of a tragedy. It presents a tavern theater experience that seems at once rooted in a distant past, but given the cameo appearances of Shakira, Beyonce, and Marlon Brando that peppered the performance, remains strikingly contemporary. It is both a drunken night out

at the pub and an off-Broadway play. It combines sometimes clever, sometimes downright silly improvisation with adherence, even, at times, reverence to Shakespeare's script. It blurs distinctions between audience and performer.

Despite its resistance to easy definition, however, Drunk Shakespeare seems persistently aware of exactly what it is. Before the performance of *Macbeth* began, Gillen asked the crowd about their own Shakespearean theatergoing experiences; several in attendance responded that they had seen Mark Rylance's celebrated productions of *Richard III* and *Twelfth Night* or Ethan Hawke's recent turn as *Macbeth* on Broadway. The Drunk Shakespeare Society understands that its audiences have their own histories with Shakespeare and that Shakespeare is as much a part of popular culture as Shakira and *Independence Day*. They opt then to force those various histories — Shakespeare's, their own, their audience's — into collision with an unfolding present, to simultaneously perform and disrupt, then stand outside the wreckage as watchful commentators. The audience, in turn, is invited, coaxed even, to collaboratively participate in the gradual dissolution of conventional theatrical and temporal boundaries — "to drive away the time," as Hal says in the Boar's Head — not only to observe, but to empathically inhabit the chaotic, polytemporal worlds of *Macbeth*.

### Notes

1. The words in my title are Iago's (*Othello* 2.3.61-62). All Shakespeare quotations come from the Folger Digital Texts (Shakespeare 2017). I would like to thank the editors of *Borrowers of Lenders*, as well the anonymous readers, for their astute and generous feedback. I am indebted to their thoughtful and productive guidance, which I found to be of great assistance in revising this essay for publication.
2. All descriptions of Drunk Shakespeare reference the original Quinn's Bar performances of 2014. Since 2014, the production has evolved and twice changed venues, and thus, certain performance practices and spatial dynamics discussed here have likewise evolved.
3. For more speculation as to Shakespeare's personal and perhaps complicated relationship with alcohol, see Greenblatt 2004, 66-71.
4. See also Burnham 2002; Kállay 2003; Macdonald 2010; and McLuskie 2009.
5. For an overview of recent explorations into diverse Shakespearean temporalities, see L. Munro 2011. Munro divides such critical discussions into five categories: "studies of the interrelations between the medieval and early modern periods; approaches focusing on the workings of memory and trauma; materialist approaches; approaches that seek to interrogate or 'queer' notions about temporality; and 'presentist' approaches, which seek to understand the past primarily in terms of its impact on the present day" (105).

6. Both events were covered in multiple media outlets. For details of LaBeouf's arrest, see Oldham 2014; for details of the cell phone offense at *Hand of God*, see Cox 2015.
7. See Teodorczuk 2014; Sloan 2014; and Catton 2014.
8. Clausen offers further parallels between the Porter's comments and Lady Macbeth's sexual taunting, along with an analysis of how Verdi's opera adapts these relationships, in Chapter 2 of *Macbeth Multiplied* (Clausen 2005).
9. In *The Shakespearean Stage*, Gurr notes the animated responses of early modern playgoers and logs thirty-four dramatist complaints regarding audience behavior (Gurr 1992, 222-29). Ian Munro's *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London* provides an in-depth exploration of the relationship between audience, theatrical spectacle, and the city outside the theater walls (I. Munro 2005). Nashe provides contemporary accounts of early modern theater patrons and their visceral reactions to plays and performers, including an instance when a justice beat several audience members for daring to laugh at Queen's Man Richard Tarlton (Nashe 1592, Sigs. E3-E3v). Dekker famously lampoons audiences' obnoxious behavior in Chapter 6 of *The Guls Horne-book* (Dekker 1609, 27-32).

### Permissions

Figure 1. Drunk Shakespeare logo. Scott Griffin.

Figure 2. Drunk Shakespeare actors. Still from promotional Drunk Shakespeare video. Producer Scott Griffin.

Figure 3. The Witches of Drunk Shakespeare. Photograph by Jenny Anderson.

Figure 4. Drunk Shakespeare cast 2014. Photography by Jenny Anderson.

Figure 5. Drunk Shakespeare attendee holds Macbeth's letter. Photograph by Jennifer Holl.

Figure 6. Poppy Liu as a witch. Photograph by Jenny Anderson.



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