

Meredith Slifkin
Dr. Wilson
Expos 20: Why Shakespeare?
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Response Paper 3.2,

Part A

Primary Sources

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Barrett, Felix, and Maxine Doyle. *Sleep No More*. New York, NY: McKittrick Hotel, 2011.

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Part B: Annotations

Gordon, C. "Pedestrian Shakespeare and Punchdrunk's Immersive Theatre." *Cahiers Elisabethains*; Cah.Elisabethains.82 (2012): 43-50. Print.

Colette Gordon, a scholar of Shakespeare, critiques Punchdrunk's portrayal of Shakespeare's Macbeth in their popular production, *Sleep No More*. She notes that while the show is difficult to review given its format, the plethora of reviews that simply try to track the action call for a closer look at how the production uses Macbeth. Looking at several different aspects of the show and how they come together, Gordon comes to the conclusion that, although certain moments stand out, *Sleep No More* is "[a]t its worst . . . just a haunted house party." According to Gordon, though the idea of the show is based on interesting concepts that could prove successful, it repeatedly loses focus and ends up stripping Shakespeare's text of its argument and interest. Gordon gives the example of Macbeth's conversation with Lady Macbeth, here portrayed without dialogue and reduced to a sexualized struggle, which is a theme repeated in several scenes. The choreography, costumes, and even location point to the show as a commercial venture that has little to do with Macbeth and uses "culture" as a haunted house for adults. Gordon suggests that the show renders the audience completely passive, going against both Shakespeare's script and Punchdrunk's own intentions.

Purcell, Stephen. "Immersion and Embodiment." *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.

Stephen Purcell, a specialist in performance of Shakespeare on the modern stage and screen, surveys various examples of immersive adaptations of Shakespeare plays and critical responses to these productions. Though he references his personal experiences with some of the

productions, Purcell mostly offers observations made by other critics rather than furthering his own opinion. Ultimately, however, he argues that immersive theater does make for a more engaged spectator, as it claims, though not necessarily in an intellectual way. Purcell's argument first defines immersive theater as one which requires physical activity and decision-making from the audience, through several examples. He focuses on the example of Punchdrunk to discuss how specific choices, such as masking the audience, affect audience responses, and how these choices differ from one production to another. He argues that though the audience members may not have agency in these shows, as many have pointed out, the shows clearly have a visceral effect, as discussed by critics like Worthen and Machon. This visceral effect is seen in Shakespeare's original text as well and is heightened through immersion.

Shaughnessy, Robert. "Immersive Performance, Shakespeare's Globe and the "Emancipated Spectator"." Hare 1.1 (2015). Print.

Robert Shaughnessy, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, discusses the new style of immersive theater and how it differs from or is similar to conventional deliveries of texts. Rather than focusing on how Shakespeare's texts are used in these immersive performances, Shaughnessy likens the general ideas and goals of immersive theater as a whole, whether inspired by Shakespeare or not, to those of Shakespeare's theater. He argues that, though immersive theater claims to reject the "passive obedience" expected of audiences and appears to be an entirely new art form, more traditional performances of Shakespeare at the Globe can in fact be seen as immersive and share the same core values, "in particular, the idea that participation is enabling, empowering, democratic, and even transformative." Shaughnessy begins by exploring the meaning of what is called immersive, interactive, or participatory

theater, citing several examples that demonstrate the scope of the category, all of which place an emphasis on site-specificity and the audience as co-creator rather than consumer. He places Jacques Rancière's "emancipated spectator" at the heart of all of these productions. Shifting over to modern Globe productions that try to re-create Shakespeare's shows as faithfully as possible, he discusses the site-specificity and audience interaction involved there as well. The visibility of the audience creates a sense of shared discovery between actor and audience in a shared space that Shakespeare specifically intended his plays to be performed in. In both types of performance, the surroundings play a crucial role. This suggests that immersive theater is a natural evolution from Shakespeare's plays, as opposed to a radical break from tradition.

Vaughan, Alden T. "American Shakespeare Today." Shakespeare in America. Ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

Alden T. Vaughan, a scholar of British American history, discusses Shakespeare's role in American culture today. He introduces and immediately rejects Lawrence Levin's identification of a recent split between high-brow and low-brow Shakespeare, rather noting that Shakespeare has always been prevalent in American culture and continues to be today. Movie versions set in the present, graphic novels, and clips on YouTube have all been hugely popular, indicating that Shakespeare still appeals to a wide range of people. Vaughn identifies several trends in American history that still apply today: that Shakespeare is viewed as "good for you," that American approaches to Shakespeare are widely varied given decentralization, that Shakespeare has an impressive commercial as well as cultural value, and that Americans like to "have fun" with him with different appropriations. He cites *The Donkey Show* as an example of the latter trend, which resembles a rock concert more than a Shakespeare play, but nevertheless drew in a

younger audience of people who love the idea of Shakespeare. Vaughan also identifies a recent fascination with the man himself, more than just his writings. The prevalence of Shakespeare in several aspects of American culture today indicate that he will continue to be popular in and out of academic settings for the foreseeable future.

Worthen, William B. Shakespeare Performance Studies. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Print.

William Worthen, a scholar of dramatic literature and performance theory, analyzes Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* and how it uses and responds to the original text of *Macbeth*. Worthen notes that many have said that *Sleep No More* has little to do with *Macbeth* and is not the place to look for insights into Shakespeare. Simultaneously explaining his personal experiences with the show and analyzing its major components, Worthen argues that "*Sleep No More* palpably replays the language of character, often in ways that are resonant with a century's worth of character criticism, the notion that Shakespeare has written the gestural dimension of the role into the text." Worthen describes the space and analyzes the spatialization of literary character, explaining how imagery from the text of *Macbeth* appears in the space of the McKittrick Hotel, equating the space of performance to the printed space of the book. He then analyzes the choreography, criticizing it for its depersonalized quality but still recognizing its effective portrayal of the characters' inner states, and the use of masks, especially the intimacy that comes with removing the masks. According to Worthen, *Sleep No More* evokes a sense of Shakespeare as theatrical auteur, still very much influential despite loosening of the plot.