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An Analysis of Simon Godwin's 2016 Production of *Hamlet* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Gerald Du Maurier's Performance as Captain Hook in the Initial 1904 Staging of *Peter Pan,* and Emma Rice's 2016 Production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at The Globe Theatre.

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1

The art of Jean-Michel Basquiat heavily influenced Simon Godwin's 2016 production of *Hamlet*, as the titular role was characterised as an iteration of the New York Artist. Basquiat's art style not only permeated the costume and set but was used by Godwin to enhance the source material of the play, augmenting elements of Hamlet's identity already created through the text and performance. Godwin's use of art would have been evocative for audiences regardless of their awareness of Basquiat's influence as, although contextual information may have reinforced interpretations, the visuals alone would have inspired readings of Paapa Essiedu's performance as Hamlet and foregrounded certain aspects of the character present in the original script. In this essay, I will examine how, through his conflation with Jean-Michel Basquiat, Hamlet is able to wield visual language to construct identity and assert power over the court.

Through his characterisation as an artist, Hamlet can control how he is perceived as the text (aided by Essiedu's physical performance) associates the act of painting with identity construction. In Act 3 Scene 1, Hamlet says to Ophelia, 'I have heard of your paintings too […]

God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another'.[1] Whilst delivering this line, Essiedu adds to the paint already covering his face by smearing green over his cheekbones, imitating the application of makeup. Through this action, the audience can view the process of painting as part of Hamlet's performance of identity as he uses the paint to literally make himself another face: a face of insanity. In this production, therefore, art becomes more than indicative of identity but a tool through which it is actively created. It is easy to understand why Godwin would choose to create Hamlet's insanity through Basquiat's visual style. Basquiat's art was renowned for its dynamic visual language, abstract shapes, and vivid colour. While appearing chaotic, it held incredible intention and meaning, described by the curator, Mayer, as 'a calculated incoherence'.[2] This idea of a calculated incoherence translates directly onto Hamlet's identity, as the display of madness he creates in this scene is crucially a *feigned* madness. As Polonius puts it, 'though this be madness […] there is method in't'.[3] This is reflected in Essiedu's physical performance as, much like Basquiat's art, it is dynamic and unpredictable, with sudden extreme outbursts; for example, he picks Ophelia up mid-sentence, runs with her across the stage and then aggressively throws her down. Although seemingly erratic, these actions are also calculated incoherence as he intends to convince Ophelia of his insanity. Hamlet's ability to create an insane identity through painting and action is not limited to his own. In this scene, he forcefully restrains Ophelia and, with the same green, 'smears paint over her face as if she were one of his canvases'. [4] Ophelia later descends into insanity herself. This shows how the process of painting gives him the power to influence the identities of characters around him and change how the audience perceives them.

Hamlet's art not only influences the characters but also influences his surroundings as he uses it to 'set[s] up a world distinct from the real world, […] a world in which the revenger

[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Chicago: Answorth & Company, 1902), p.70.
[2] Marc Mayer, *Basquiat* (New York: Merrell Publishers, 2005), p.49.
[3] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p.50.
[4] Susannah Clapp, 'Hamlet review- a fresh prince makes his mark', *The Observer* (2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/mar/27/hamlet-rsc-stratford-paapa-essiedu-observer-review> [Accessed: 27 December 2023].

directs the action protected by his deceptive mask'.[5] We can evidence this in examining the set design in Act 3 Scene 1. In how Hamlet uses the stage for creation within this scene, it can be presumed to be set in his studio. As Figure 1 shows, the backdrop and floorspace are dominated by his creative work. The canvas Hamlet paints during the scene is later placed at the back of the stage and becomes part of the set design, showing Hamlet to have an active and ongoing role in shaping the environment. Through this, the set begins to function 'not as a representation of the world but as a metaphor for something other'.[6] As a metaphor, the set can hold parallel meanings. While it further presents his madness as a facade created for the benefit of those around him, it also demonstrates Hamlet's power. Even as Claudius instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to take Hamlet to England, he appears more powerless in a setting defined by Hamlet's design. This purposefully constructed setting also influences physical movement and proxemics as the other characters seem reluctant to step on Hamlet's tarpaulin, often choosing to skirt around it. When Claudius and Polonius are seen to argue, it is from across this tarpaulin, distancing them physically and metaphorically, reducing their combined threat to Hamlet. Hamlet's creations set up a world that suits his purpose, allowing him to influence a scene even when not physically present.

Through his use of Basquiat's visual language to express his madness, Hamlet gains agency as he wields it 'to confuse, toy with, and test the court'.[7] In Act 2 Scene 2, we see Hamlet for the first time since discovering his uncle's betrayal, a pivotal moment in his arc after which he begins to act mad, determined to take revenge. He enters this scene having swapped the black mourning suit for a white paint-spattered suit adorned with Basquiat's recurring symbols of the crown and well-known skeletal graphics. In this costume, he is more powerful and unrestrained as he then defaces the state portrait of Claudius and his mother by spray-

[5] Susan Harris Smith, 'Ironic Distance and the Theatre of Feigned Madness', *Theatre Journal*, 39 (1987), 51-64 (56).
[6] Arnold Aronson, 'Postmodern Design', *Theatre Journal*, 43 (1991), 1-13 (5).
[7] Smith, *Theatre Journal*, p.56.

painting the Basquiat crown over it and signing it with an 'H', in a blatant act of graffiti. Like Basquiat, Hamlet uses this visual language to 'challenge the political establishment through an art that is public'.[8] This production, with a majority black cast and set in a translocated African state, purposefully set out to explore broader themes of black identity and colonisation. In conflating Hamlet with Basquiat, reviewers have argued that Godwin 'helps us make sense of Hamlet's position within the complex cultural backdrop of this production'.[9] When Hamlet disrupts the court with his art, he can also be seen to disrupt the colonial powers that Claudius enacts. The more typically Western symbols of Claudius' court (the state portrait and the suits) are defaced by a culturally black art style. Through art, Hamlet is given back the agency robbed from him by colonial powers.

In conclusion, the paralleling of Hamlet and Basquiat allowed Godwin to build upon the themes of power and identity within the source text and present them visually and evocatively. It also allows more modern themes of colonisation and cultural identity to be explored in conjunction with a more traditional interpretation, resulting in a dynamic and engaging performance.

[8] Sujata Iyengar, 'Hamlet (RSC, 2016) and representations of diasporic blackness', *Cahiers Élisabethains*, 99 (2019), 147-160 (154).
[9] John Livesy, 'RSC Hamlet Review', *Cherwell* (2018) <https://www.cherwell.org/2018/03/16/rsc-hamlet-review-this-is-simultaneous-creativity-and-destruction-to-be-or-not-to-be/> [Accessed 23 December 2023].

Figure 1: Hamlet in his studio (2016) (01:17:40)

Hamlet, dir. by Simon Godwin (Digital Theatre Plus, 2016).

2

By the time J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* was first staged in 1904, actor and manager Gerald Du Maurier already had a well-established working relationship with the playwright. Although he played many roles throughout his career, Gerald's daughter Daphne made it apparent that she considered her father's best performances to be those in the theatrical works of Barrie, saying, 'he was made for these parts […] he brought a delicate, pristine quality into his interpretation of those characters so peculiarly and lovably original'.[10] In this essay, I will examine how Du Maurier contributed to the play's initial success and how his casting shaped

[10] Daphne Du Maurier, *Gerald: A Portrait* (London: The Camelot Press Ltd., 1934), p.143.

the character of Captain Hook and impacted contemporary performances and readings of *Peter Pan*.

Du Maurier's performance in the initial run of *Peter Pan* was a fundamental contributor to its overwhelmingly positive reception. As Hook is the principal adult character on stage for much of the play, 'Du Maurier's performance was integral to making *Peter Pan* engaging for cross-generational audiences'.[11] Daphne believed that 'his rendering of Barrie's genius was unequalled for depth', making him able to successfully encapsulate the themes of mortality and adulthood apparent in Barrie's writing.[12] This resulted in the portrayal of a complex and layered character that was 'so true, so natural, so touching that it brought the audience to the writer's feet'.[13] The evocation of these more recognisably adult themes appealed to older audiences as they could either identify with Hook or abhor him. We can evidence Du Maurier's success in generating cross-generational appeal as a young member of the opening night's audience recalled of her and her parents how 'we loved the play … Hook had become one of us, the Jolly Roger had cast its spell'.[14] His rendering of Hook was also crucial in the creation of an entertaining and compelling villain in the narrative for the audience to hate (as much as they were to love Peter). Much of this was achieved through the voice and gesture of his performance on stage as 'he was hated, with his flourish, his poses, his dreadful diabolical style, […] the sardonic laugh, the maniacal scream'.[15] These performances were not ones of understated impact but were so convincing and powerful that 'when Hook first paced his quarter-deck […] children were carried screaming from the stalls'.[16] When Peter defeated the pirate at the end of the play, it was all the more gratifying for Du Maurier having made the audience loathe him. It was this early success of the play (attributed to the performances of

[11] Lucie Sutherland, J*. M. Barrie's Peter Pan* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), p.39.
[12] Du Maurier, *Gerald*, p.144.
[13] The Daily Telegraph, Quoted in: Andrew Birkin, *J.M. Barrie & the Lost Boys* (London: Constable Print, 1979), p.117.
[14] Andrew Birkin, *J.M. Barrie & the Lost Boys* (London: Constable Print, 1979), p.118.
[15] Du Maurier, *Gerald*, p.104.
[16] Ibid, p.104.

the first cast) that allowed it to continue to be staged and revived both on the British and American stage.

The effective characterisation of Hook as a villain was not solely one of Barrie's creation but emerged as a result of a collaborative process between Du Maurier and Barrie as 'the casting of Gerald Du Maurier in the role [also] contributed to the development of Hook as a character'.[17] This is because, as rehearsals continued, Barrie kept revising the play informed by the creative choices and input of the cast meaning that 'many elements of Peter Pan that we now consider fixed and immutable were originally the result of theatrical contingency'.[18] Through this process of revision, 'in Gerald's hands, the somewhat one-dimensional character of the scripted Hook began to expand in all directions', and the character gained increasing importance in the narrative. [19] Much of Hook's identity is rooted in the personal life and identity of Du Maurier himself, with Daphne explicitly stating that 'Gerald *was* Hook'.[20] Du Maurier's upper-middle class status and years of private school education at Harrow was evinced in the pirate. In uttering Eton's school motto, 'Floreat Etona', as his final line of the play, the audience can presume that Hook also attended private school himself.[21] Hook's inferred upper-class background was supported by Du Maurier's physicality on stage as he became analogous with 'the appalling courtesy of his gestures'.[22] Where conventions of the character of Peter Pan can be attributed to multiple actresses over the course of its run, the conventions of Hook remain firmly on the shoulders of Du Maurier. Du Maurier's casting and performance associated the character with a particular class that defined his villainous identity of a 'tragic

[17] Kirsten Stirling, *Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary Imagination* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), p.41.
[18] Ibid, p.41.
[19] Birkin, *J.M. Barrie*, p.109.
[20] Du Maurier, *Gerald*, p.105.
[21] James Matthew Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, ed. by Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 146.
[22] Du Maurier, *Gerald*, p.104.

and sinister royalist living in painful exile', imbued with gentlemanly mannerisms and eloquence.[23]

This version of Hook, inspired and partially created by Du Maurier, became the official version of the final text, informing contemporary readings and performances of the character. In Barrie's published version, Hook is described as 'never more sinister than when he is most polite, and the elegance of his diction, the distinction of his demeanour, show him one of a different class from his crew' in the 'dandiacal' dress 'associated with Charles II'.[24] This description requires of later actors a certain gentleman-like physical and spoken performance, mirroring that of Du Maurier's. Du Maurier introduced specific actions that became standardised for the portrayal of Hook, such as the offering of his arm to Wendy. As Nico Davis stated, 'Barrie always said that this was the test of a Captain Hook, […] the best arm offered her was Gerald Du Maurier's'.[25] The practice of having Mr. Darling and Hook played by the same actor was also introduced and conventionalised by Du Maurier and can be seen in many subsequent adaptations. This greatly impacts modern readings of the play as audiences are encouraged to make links between the characters, revealing themes of fatherhood and aging.

In conclusion, Du Maurier's casting in the initial staging of *Peter Pan* contributed to the play's success, with the positive reception it received allowing it to become cemented in popular culture. It also moulded the character of Captain Hook that endures in the staging and adaptions we see today, influencing the ways in which the texts may be interpreted. In short, one of the most recognisable villains of our time will forever be imbued with the physicality and identity that Du Maurier brought to the stage in his performance in 1904.

[23] Patrick B. Tuite, "Shadow of a Girl', An Examination of Peter Pan in Performance', in *Second Star to the Right: Peter Pan in the Popular Imagination*, ed. By Allison B. Kavey and Lester D. Friedman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), pp.105-131 (p.110).
[24] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, p.108.
[25] Nico Davis, Quoted in: Lucie Sutherland, J*. M. Barrie's Peter Pan* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), p.40.

3

In 2016, director Emma Rice staged a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at The Globe Theatre as part of the *Shakespeare Lives Festival* hosted by the BBC. Describing the festival as 'an international online Shakespeare festival' that allowed remote audiences to experience 'the creative range of the Bard's work', the BBC made this production available through live broadcast on the 11th of September with Ian Russel as broadcast director.[26] Since then, this original broadcast has remained accessible to the public through iPlayer. In this essay, I will explore how the broadcast created a sense of liveness and location for the original online audience and how the camera work and framing aided and emphasised the comedy within the production.

The way an audience may generate meaning in theatre is not only governed by on-stage action but is informed by other contextual elements such as 'the entire theatre, its audience arrangements, its other public spaces, its physical appearance' and 'even its location within a city'.[27] Because of this, theatre broadcasters often try to create a sense of location, 'frequently includ[ing] extra material before the start of a transmission that helps contextualize the theatrical space'.[28] Although no longer included in the iPlayer version, the original streaming opened with an introduction from actress Meera Syal, appearing in the yard with a crowd of spectators visible behind her, as she situates the production geographically and historically, reminding the broadcast audience of the when and where. The performance then begins with the character 'Rita' Quince posing as a member of The Globe crew. After welcoming the audience to Shakespeare's Globe, she reminds them of the familiar theatre-viewing regulations asking them to 'turn your mobile phones off', not to sit on the floor and,

[26] *About Shakespeare Lives*, *BBC* (2016) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1N0y70KJVt5f2ccfvSqZF2c/about-shakespeare-lives> [accessed 19 December 2023].
[27] Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.2.
[28] Erin Sullivan, '"The Form of Things Unknown" Shakespeare and the Rise of the Live Broadcast', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 35 (2017), 627-662 (634).

ironically, 'no filming'.[29] During this material, many wide shots from various angles are used, allowing at-home viewers to gage a sense of the spatial dynamics of the staging and proxemics. In the opening shot, the sky above the roof is also visible, situating the production not just in a theatre but specifically in *The Globe Theatre*, which is famously open-air. This material before the 'official' start of the production worked to create a sense of location for an at-home audience that would otherwise be established in the act of traveling to the theatre.

While additional material created a sense of location, deliberate framing and camera angles were used to create a sense of co-presence and liveness. The assertion that 'the live and collective aspects of the theatrical experience remain essential for audiences' was particularly salient in this performance as much of the action took place on tables placed within the crowd of standing spectators with frequent audience participation.[30] The often-wide framing and camera angles aided a sense of shared engagement and viewership with the in-house audience for the people watching at home. Although there are some closely cropped shots of the actors' bodies on stage, the frame of vision consistently cuts back to a wider shot of the house in which 'vast sections of the audience remained in sight', often even dominating the frame.[31] This meant that 'the theatrical context of the performance was always present for remote viewers.'[32] The shared natural lighting and staging meant that even more tightly framed shots of the actors often included audience members. In this way, in-house audience members entered the action, their reactions and interactions with the cast becoming part of the drama. When Puck gets an audience member to eat a banana he had just licked, 'the disgusting hilarity of the situation was increased by the shock and delighted facial expression of the bystanders included in the frame'.[33] During these moments of audience interaction, the

[29] *A Midsummer Night's Dream from Shakespeare's Globe*, dir. by Ian Russel (BBC iPlayer, 2016).
[30] *Beyond Live: Digital Innovation in the Performing Arts* (2010), Nesta <https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/beyond_live.pdf> [accessed 18 December 2023].
[31] Sullivan, *"The Form of Things Unknown"*, p.640.
[32] Ibid, p.640.
[33] Pascale Aebischer, 'South Bank Shakespeare Goes Global: Broadcasting from Shakespeare's Global and the National Theatre', in *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 113-132 (127).

camera angles frequently placed the at-home viewers within the in-house crowd. For example, when 'Rita' Quince says, 'for those of you in the yard, hello little groundlings' we cut from a front on view of her to a lower angle looking up at the actors on stage from below, simulating the view the 'groundlings' she is addressing would have.[34] This aims to give an at-home audience the feeling that they, too, are being addressed in real-time by the actors, sharing the same space and point of view as their in-house counterparts.

The camera work and framing also emphasised moments of physical or visual comedy, sometimes providing the broadcast audience with comedic moments that the in-house audience would not have had. While some scholars argue that more closely cropped frames 'can split the stage into a series of visually disconnected zones that can be difficult for remote audiences to imagine back together', in this production, not having some of the stage visible in the broadcast allowed moments of slapstick to have greater effect.[35] For example, when Bottom leaves and re-enters the stage in a new and humorous costume, the reveal is delayed for the streaming audience. While the live audience would have been able to see Bottom enter and walk to the front of the stage where he delivers his next line, the broadcast audience do not see him until a closely framed shot of Rita and Snug talking (Figure 2) suddenly cuts, when he 'roars', to a wider one in which his full outfit can be seen (Figure 3). Selective framing is also used to emphasise the unpredictability of Puck's physical performance. When he surprises the fairy at the start of Act 1 by running up to her and poking her from behind as she bows to the audience, the framing is closely cropped to centre the fairy. This means the streaming audience would not have seen him approach and would have only seen him at the last possible second as he enters the frame just before the poke. These examples of delayed reveals for an online audience through selective framing increase the effect of surprise, which in turn increases its comedic nature.

[34] *A Midsummer Night's Dream from Shakespeare's Globe*, dir. by Ian Russel (BBC iPlayer, 2016).
[35] Sullivan, *"The Form of Things Unknown"*, p.641.

In conclusion, the broadcast adeptly used additional opening material, camera angles and framing to enhance the sense of liveness, location and comedic impact for an at-home audience, resulting in an inclusive and engaging adaptation that can be returned to and enjoyed even when it is no longer 'live'.

Figure 2: *'Rita' and Snug conversing (2016) (00:24:12)*

A Midsummer Night's Dream from Shakespeare's Globe, dir. by Ian Russel (BBC iPlayer, 2016).

Figure 3: *Bottom in his new costume (2016) (00:24:13)*

A Midsummer Night's Dream from Shakespeare's Globe, dir. by Ian Russel (BBC iPlayer, 2016).

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