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BIG-SHOULDERED SHAKESPEARE: THREE SHREWS AT CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

L. MONIQUE PITTMAN

'Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders'

– Carl Sandburg, 'Chicago'¹

'Stories about places are makeshift things.'

– Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Michel de Certeau's assertion that 'Stories about places are makeshift things' derives from his conceptualization of cities as locations where the logic and stability of institutional strategy meets the flux and fragment of everyday human tactic.² For Certeau, 'a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power' (38). In other words, by demarcating and naming places as sites of power, strategies establish and control difference and the governing gaze, whilst tactics reside in the mercurial of time and movement (36). Cities map an 'accepted framework, the imposed order' (107), but human lived movement within that frame exceeds and resists in its multifarious individual trajectories, blind alleys and intersecting networks that 'constructed order' (93, 107). Certeau elaborates: 'The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them' (101). Thus, in cities, the stolid and finite structure meets the fluid and infinite individual walker, an embodiment of absence and lack in a grid of concrete presence that has

been designed to materialize and maintain power (103).

Stories about theatrical performance within cities are also makeshift narratives that echo Certeau's dynamics of urban presence and absence. Theatrical ontology embodies paradox. As an art form that evanesces in its moment of fullest being, theatre survives primarily as a memory individual to each spectator. Often housed in substantial, enduring and costly spaces, any given theatrical production transpires for a few hours' duration only. For most of its elusive afterlife, theatre performance exists as a memory but not a uniform memory. Rather theatre remains as a recollection

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¹ Carl Sandburg, 'Chicago', in *Chicago Poems* (New York, 1916), p. 3.

² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), pp. xix, 107.

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distinct in its scope and precision to each individual who witnessed the production. Acknowledging both the fragility and persistence of memory, Peter Holland characterizes the theatre as a series of forgettings: 'Theatre is a space of memory haunted by its own forgetfulness, by what we cannot remember when we leave the theatre, by the actor's memory that is visible only when it fails to work, by the texts that haunt the stage as unperformed and those that haunt through their performance.'³ Holland's formulation articulates the way in which the ontology of theatre and its infinite generation of memory as well as its insistence on what cannot be recalled produce epistemological uncertainty. This heterogeneous afterlife of the theatre defies monolithic absolutes while the institutional materiality of performance spaces themselves typically represents an elite network of authority that underprops the homogenizing ideology of the dominant class.⁴

The 'Shakespearian' theatre introduces yet another layer of complexity to the makeshift narrative of performance in the city. In 'Shakespearean Performativity', W. B. Worthen articulates an informing relationship between the source text and theatrical production: 'What distinguishes Shakespearean performativity from some other modes of theater today is the premium placed – by performers and audiences, in conventional and experimental productions – on the identity of the verbal text, and the belief that its meanings inform, guide, or are animated by stage performance.'⁵ Worthen's formulation cannily acknowledges shifting agential possibilities in the theatrical transaction (denoted by the active and passive verb structures he employs) – either the text *guides* the interpretive enactment on stage or *is given life by* embodied representation. On the one hand, the text-as-agent determines and, on the other hand, a theatrical subjectivity acts upon the text-as-object to create meaning. The stakes of this mutually constitutive subject/object relationship between Shakespearian text and theatre escalate when performance takes place in a space named for and devoted to the playwright's canon. In the case of a 'Shakespearian Theatre', each production asserts directly or

indirectly an understanding of the poet and oeuvre that gives identity to that space; in other words, the theatre derived from Shakespeare also generates with each staging 'Shakespeare' as an originary source. Peggy Phelan astutely points out that the compulsion to the origin endemic to theatre founders repeatedly on the conditions of theatre performance itself, explaining that realistic theatre, reliant upon 'properties which reproduce the effects of the real', demonstrates a powerful 'desire to experience a first cause, an origin, an authentic beginning which can only fail because the desire is experienced and understood from and through repetition'.⁶ The cultural capital of William Shakespeare intensifies this aspiration for beginnings, but the observable institutional efforts to craft the 'Shakespearian' highlight the self-generative fictionalizing of that endeavour. Because the idea of 'Shakespeare' becomes the mechanism of self-perpetuation, the forms of theatrical representation possible may all too often be limited to performances that justify in their construction of

³ Peter Holland, 'On the Gravy Train: Shakespeare, Memory and Forgetting', in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 207–34, p. 234.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu identifies the artist as the dominated figure within the dominant class, a figure who possesses cultural capital but little economic capital. See his *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York, 1993). The struggle for the right to be classified as an artist or a writer centres on the question of legitimacy, and Bourdieu notes that in the scramble for artistic dominance, members of the dominated classes can be the losers (41). Bourdieu summarizes: 'In short, the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy' (42). He argues that, as dominated members of the dominant class, artists bear a natural affinity with the dominated in society at large but that acts of 'bad faith' may still be possible in the contest over legitimacy (44). In other words, while the artist and the socially marginal experience a similar state of domination by the powerful, the quest for legitimacy on the part of the artist can efface analogies between the two forms of dominated classes.

⁵ W. B. Worthen, 'Shakespearean Performativity', in *Shakespeare and Modern Theatre: The Performance of Modernity*, ed. Michael Bristol, Kathleen McLuskie and Christopher Holmes (New York, 2001), pp. 117–41, p. 119.

⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York, 1993), 126.

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'Shakespeare' the amount of capital expenditure invested in temples to his service.

The Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST) presents one notable American example of this identity transaction, wedding in its title the great Midwestern city to the great English playwright. Through the herculean efforts of founder and Artistic Director Barbara Gaines, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater has forged an identity and a place within the arts and entertainment scene of the Windy City when few thought such a venture viable. After thirteen seasons that began in 1986 with one play performed on a pub terrace, Gaines transformed the status and significance of her theatre with a massive building project during the late 1990s.⁷ Rather than choose a site in close proximity to the established theatre district of the city, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater opted for an amusement park site on the city's waterfront.⁸ At the 1998 groundbreaking for her new facility, Gaines justified her theatre's prominence on the Chicago skyline by a familiar claim about Shakespeare's worth: 'We are here to celebrate the building of a permanent home for the world's greatest humanist.'⁹ As Gaines formulated a new identity for her theatre company, which until the relocation to Navy Pier had gone under the designation 'Shakespeare Repertory Theatre', she crafted a 'Shakespeare' to warrant the city's investment of \$12 million into the project.¹⁰ Calling upon the familiar construction of Shakespeare as benevolent humanist, Gaines elevated her adopted city to a titular position and dropped the British spelling of 'theatre' for the distinctly American 'theater' as part of planting on the Navy Pier amidst its carnival attractions.¹¹ Repeatedly in interviews and in theatre promotional materials, Gaines has lauded Shakespeare's works as manifestations of a humane consciousness, one drawn to the essential human values of equity, social justice and ethical relationships with others.¹²

Gaines's Navy Pier theatre instantiates the tension between institutional strategy and individual tactic characteristic of Certeau's city. A bricks-and-mortar structure built in large part by the city purse, the theatre belongs to totalizing

'socioeconomic and political strategies' (95), but located on Navy Pier amidst carnival topsy-turvy, it exists within the pedestrian's field of individual variance and resistance.¹³ While the amusement

⁷ See Richard Christiansen, 'Shakespeare is Alive in Chicago', *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1987, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com> and Chris Jones, 'The Location is the Thing', *Chicago Tribune*, 1 February 1998, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com>.

⁸ At least one reporter, Rebecca Paller, noted the unspoken similarity between Gaines's location choice and that of another theatre attraction: 'Just as London has its newly constructed Globe theatre overlooking the Thames, Chicago will soon have a sparkling new Shakespeare theatre at the Navy Pier overlooking Lake Michigan.' See her 'Foundation to be Laid in Jan. 1998 for Chicago's Shakespeare Theatre', *Playbill News*, 26 November 1997, www.playbill.com.

⁹ Jonathan Abarbanel, 'Chicago's Shakespeare Bard's Repertory Theatre Breaks Ground', *AllBusiness.com*, 9 October 1998, www.allbusiness.com.

¹⁰ See Jones, 'The Location'.

¹¹ In contrast to Gaines's rhetoric, more material concerns motivated the development company responsible for the renewal of Navy Pier, the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority. Navy Pier general manager at the time, John Clay, explained the appeal of a Shakespeare theatre: 'We think that the Shakespeare productions will attract people to the other forms of entertainment on the Pier, especially during our slower times in the winter. We fit together very well' (quoted in Jones, 'The Location'). To the financiers behind the Navy Pier development, Shakespeare meant tapping into a moneyed Gold Coast audience that might not otherwise frequent the pier and enhancing income during the months when the frigid winds off Lake Michigan make fair-going wholly untenable.

¹² Gaines's approach corresponds with the same tendency to associate the poet and his works with 'general or universal human interests... with social and cultural goodness' that Michael Bristol has located in much Shakespeare scholarship: *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (New York, 1990), p. 16. David G. Brailow's study of the Ghost in Gaines's 1996 *Hamlet* notes the ahistorical interpretive impact of the director's 'universalist view of Shakespeare', in "'Tis here. 'Tis gone", The Ghost in the Text', in *Stage Directions in 'Hamlet': New Essays and New Directions*, ed. Hardin L. Aasand (Madison, 2003), pp. 101-14, p. 109. In *Authorizing Shakespeare on Film and Television: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Adaptation* (New York, 2011), I trace a similar construction of the liberal-humanist Shakespeare in Michael Radford's film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (2004).

¹³ Here I posit for the amusement park a familiar carnival ancestry thoroughly articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky

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park Ferris wheel turns slowly outside the theatre and visitors wander in and out of Pier fun houses, Gaines leads the theatre's efforts to fulfil its stated mission 'to bring to life the plays of William Shakespeare, and to present other great performances for audiences from all walks of life and from around the world'.¹⁴ In its final prepositional phrases, the theatre's mission glances at the educational, economic and ethnic differences that the demographics of Navy Pier visitors manifest. However, even as Gaines cites a populist, 'for-the-people' ethos in her understanding of Shakespeare the Humanist, she mystifies the very forces of authority that perpetuate social disequilibrium and injustice. Such a formulation tacitly ignores a well-known history in which Shakespeare has long been appropriated as a means to enforce conformity to hegemonic power structures – colonial, economic, religious and social. So, what happens inside the doors of the theatre? Do the tactical variations of the city walker on the Pier infiltrate the theatre's productions? What happens when a given play text threatens to expose the vulnerability of Gaines's self-justificatory rhetoric? How might the Chicago Shakespeare Theater treat a play that spotlights conflicts over power and hierarchy, a play such as *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593/94) that in so many ways defies ready alignment with Shakespeare the Humanist? *The Taming of the Shrew* certainly resists reconciliation with the marketable image of the liberal-humanist playwright essential to the Shakespeare impresario as Graham Holderness points out in his discussion of the play's performance history: 'Given the specific historical context, it seems to me impossible, despite the sustained efforts of a huge critical and theatrical project of naturalising and domestication, to elicit from the given text of the *Shrew* a body of meanings and values compatible with modern progressive thought or with contemporary feminism.'¹⁵ A play deeply imbricated in systems of hierarchy and oppression, *Shrew* exerts tremendous pressure on the Chicago Shakespeare Theater's assertion of Shakespearian value and authority. When Gaines herself directed *Shrew* in 1993, she insisted, 'But I don't think Shakespeare was capable of writing a

sexist play. He was, of course, a humanist, which transcends feminism, racism or any ism.'¹⁶ Three productions of *Shrew* dating from CST's rise to prominence on the Navy Pier skyline manifest the means by which the theatre aligns production content with its construction of Shakespearian authority even when that 'Great Humanist' label experiences tactical resistance from below.¹⁷

Since its arrival on Navy Pier, CST has staged two full-scale productions of *Shrew*, one led by American David H. Bell (an experienced musical theatre director) that opened the 2003 season¹⁸ and one directed by Josie Rourke (Artistic Director of London's Bush Theatre) that featured purpose-written induction matter by playwright Neil LaBute (2010).¹⁹ As with most productions of *Shrew*, the central interpretive dilemma evident in both Bell's and Rourke's approaches was how to handle a plotting whose origins can be

(Bloomington, 1984). As a choreographed capitalist enterprise, Navy Pier can only dimly echo the practices of 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order . . . the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions' of folk carnival (10). Nonetheless, an analysis of Navy Pier must acknowledge that the amusement park's modes of entertainment trace back to the range of festive disruptions from the lower ranks examined by Bakhtin.

¹⁴ *Shakespeare Lives in Chicago* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater Annual Report, 2007).

¹⁵ Graham Holderness, *The Taming of the Shrew* (New York, 1991), pp. 22–3. CST's production history demonstrates the perennial popularity of a play that nonetheless troubles the humanist label; at Gaines's theatre, only *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rival *Shrew* for total number of full-length or Short Shakespeare! productions. In the twenty-six years of the company, *Shrew* has been mounted six times – three full-scale productions and three Short Shakespeare! offerings.

¹⁶ Quoted in Clifford Terry, 'Shaking up Shakespeare: Barbara Gaines Takes on the Bard', *Chicago Tribune*, 28 November 1993, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com>.

¹⁷ Here I reference obliquely Certeau's assertion that 'The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below" (93) – below, between, and within the proper sites of power, the buildings and skyscrapers and structures that form the city.

¹⁸ The Bell production ran from 5 September to 23 November 2003.

¹⁹ The Rourke production ran from 7 April to 6 June 2010.

found in the troubling shrew-taming *fabliaux*.²⁰ The lavish Bell staging channelled a wistful nostalgia and softened the gender troubles of the play by driving towards images of loving mutuality. Bell's production accepted the stereotypes underlying the Shakespearian text with a wink and a nod to the audience, suggesting in the jokey familiarity of back-slapping misogyny that, political correctness aside, women and men will always battle for supremacy and discover desire in that conflict. In contrast, Rourke's *Shrew*, characterized by an austere cynicism, projected an interrogatory attitude towards Shakespeare's sacral authority, an intervention much more threatening to the theatre's self-image as guardian of Shakespeare the Humanist. During the Summer of 2012, as part of Chicago's fledgling Cultural Plan initiative, the theatre launched a Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks outreach that transferred a Short Shakespeare! production of *Shrew* (directed by Rachel Rockwell, Spring 2012) from the theatre's main stage to parks in neighbourhoods underserved by the city's major arts institutions. In the itinerant parks *Shrew*, elements of institutional strategy met the pedestrian's tactics of resistance, demonstrating just how difficult it can be to extricate high art from its institutional moorings and how vexed the authorizing imprimatur of Shakespeare the Humanist can be in the face of a city's socioeconomic realities.

SINGING OUR TROUBLES AWAY

In 2003, the Bell production deployed modes from a variety of popular culture representational forms to produce an interpretation in keeping with the genial humanity of CST's 'Shakespeare'. Taking inspiration from Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960), the chic, Italian staging reminiscent of the Via Veneto gave a mod accessibility to the dangerously outdated story.²¹ In addition, song and dance numbers so dominated the Bell production that reviewers identified it as akin to a Shakespearian Broadway musical.²² The stereotypical categories of gender endemic to musical theatre went hand-in-glove with the visual coding

of the production. Featuring ironwork balconies, striped awnings, flowers in bloom and climbing the walls, and recessed spaces under soft-pastel lighting gels, the deeply romantic stage design implied the inevitability of an amorous plot outcome. Indeed, how could love not flourish in such an insistent and over-signified environment? In this space, men and women conformed readily to familiar stereotypes – an Italian machismo in the men; a feminine Mob Princess in Bianca; and the put-upon 'Mama' in Katharina. In the 1960s setting, the play's drive towards images of loving mutuality and equality seemed an accommodation designed to preserve the status and popularity of Shakespeare while transforming a fractious text into an anticipation of reassuring heterosexual values. When interviewed, the actors playing Katharina and Petruchio respectively, Kate Fry and Ryan Shively, affirmed this reading of the text. Interviewer Metz summarized: 'both actors agree that the play is, at its core, a true-blue love story'. Shively asserted, 'When they [Katharina and Petruchio] leave at the end of the play, I think they're definitely in love. They're beginning this really exciting relationship, and I think that's the appeal of the play.'²³ Through carefully choreographed representational intertexts, Bell balanced his production between stereotypes generative of laughter and a celebration of compatibility through difference in keeping with CST's construction of Shakespeare.

²⁰ John C. Bean, 'Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, 1983), pp. 65–78, p. 66.

²¹ The promptbook's wardrobe chart stresses the Fellini connection by describing Petruchio's first look as 'Marcello Mastroianni'.

²² *Chicago Tribune* reviewer Michael Phillips observed that the production 'boasts enough onstage music and vocalizing to qualify as a semi-musical, with original score by Henry Marsh as arranged by Alaric Jans': 'Shakespeare's *Shrew* Obscured by Brim Reality', *Chicago Tribune*, 15 September 2003, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com>.

²³ Quoted in Nina Metz, 'A Modern, Possibly PC, Look at *Shrew*', *Chicago Tribune*, 5 September 2003, <http://articles.chicagotribune.com>.

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8. *The Taming of the Shrew*, 3.2. Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Courtyard Theater, 2003, directed by David H. Bell. Petruccio (Ryan Shively) and Katharina (Kate Fry).

The dramaturgical techniques utilized in the Act Four country house sequence illustrate the accommodations made by Bell to soften *Shrew* in ways suited to the theatre. Overlapping performance modes from film, musical theatre and movie-musical tradition gave a romantic gloss to these scenes depicting the emotional and physical abuse of Katharina that constitute her taming and renaming as Kate, 'conformable as other household Kates' (2.1.278).²⁴ Bell translated to stage the split-screen film technique and song montage to wring sentimental romance from the bitterness on the page. Intercutting the abuse strategies of 4.1 with the blooming romance of Lucentio and Bianca in 4.2, Bell implied a basic similitude between the couples despite the observably different power dynamics. Dividing the stage space in half, Bell interpolated extra-textual glimpses of Katharina and Petruccio in bed stage right and then placed

Lucentio and Bianca stage left as they planned their elopement. Brightening and fading spotlights created a visual rhythm carrying the audience back and forth between the two depictions of love's flowering. In 4.1 after throwing away the prepared food, Petruccio stood opposite Katharina across an enormous bed placed prominently on the thrust. Miming a defiant striptease, they each undressed – the shirtless Petruccio shimmied out of jeans while Katharina unzipped her soiled wedding dress and kicked it away, revealing a pink underslip. Spotlights rose on Lucentio and Bianca in 4.2, who kissed and flirted at a café table overlooked by Hortensio and Tranio. Meanwhile, a gently crooning Grumio warbled, 'Mystery is to know what to tell a woman'. At one moment in the song,

²⁴ Quotations from *Shrew* are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974).

a wakeful Katharina rested on an elbow to look longingly at the sleeping Petruchio. Another spotlight shift to Bianca served to parallel the growing desire of each sister for her respective partner. Yet another lighting return to Petruchio emphasized mutuality since he looked at the supine Katharina, touched her hair, kissed it, and inhaled her fragrance. Within this heightened romantic context, Petruchio at last delivered his 'Thus have I politicly begun my reign' (4.1.188-211) but did so in a soft bedroom voice, almost absurd given the claims of the speech itself.

This staging of what amounted to a crosscut song montage employed several techniques to smooth out the rougher edges that might well belie Shakespeare's status as cultivated by Gaines. The alternating striptease and wakefulness of Katharina and Petruchio implied a mutual attraction and desire that would soon trump the posturing for power by both individuals. In addition, Grumio's song suggested that the difficulties between Petruchio and Katharina were not born of a masculine prerogative to dominance but rather from the eternal mystery of womankind; the song included the nonsensical claim typical of such pabulum, 'Even when she's wrong, she's right'. In fact, the song's thematic through-line centred on the difficulty of communicating with a being as impenetrable and changeable as woman and hinted that Petruchio's problem was not a cruel imperiousness but rather genuine befuddlement over how best to speak his feelings to Katharina.

Such a reading of this crucial scene prepared for the couple's exit from the play as equals both in power and in love, allowing viewers to conclude that Shakespeare was not a misogynist nor an advocate of spousal abuse.²⁵ At the conclusion of the 5.2. wager, an emotionally vulnerable Katharina signalled to Petruchio her disappointment in his laddish callousness by briefly clutching the wager money piled on the nearby table and looking pointedly at her husband. During Katharina's submission speech, Petruchio walked to her, touched her gently and seated himself to listen attentively. Punctuating the logical shape of the speech with movement, Katharina appeared almost

to weep by the final lines, prompted by Petruchio's betrayal of her newly offered love. The force of Katharina's words and affective display compelled the sincerely loving Petruchio to kneel down and prevent Katharina from placing her hands beneath her husband's foot. After a long embrace and a scolding look from Katharina, Petruchio threw his ill-gotten gains in the air before the happy couple exited to the tuneful accompaniment of violins and accordion. The harmonious and mutual transformations of each character – Petruchio who abandoned his machismo posturing and Katharina who expressed a desiring and desirous nature at last – thus fulfilled the predestined promise of the romantic visual and aural landscape. A significant discrepancy between the promptbook and the performance further demonstrated the production's subtle commitment to patriarchal authority albeit of the benevolent variety. The promptbook directed Katharina to take up the winnings and toss them in the air. However, in performance, this final task was left to Petruchio, focusing on him as the agent of change one last time.

Bell's accommodation of the play's difficulties managed to preserve the cultural authority of the humanist Shakespeare and to render a fairly conservative construction of gender seemingly progressive. Opting for an escapist reading of the play that avoided the stark inequities of the source text, the theatre company exerted mighty agential rights to conceal the worrisome truth that the venerable poet-playwright might have been complicit with the gender inequities of his time and, sadly, of our own, rather than a trailblazer questioning those practices. In doing so, the theatre manifested Pierre Bourdieu's schema in which the artist's choices underscore the authority of the dominant power; while preserving CST's image of

²⁵ In his various accommodations, Bell followed a well-worn revisionist staging orthodoxy identified by Lynda E. Boose, 'reimagining an ending that will at once liberate Kate from meaning what she says and simultaneously reconstruct the social space into a vision of so-called "mutuality"' (see her 'Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 179-213, p. 180.

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a humane Shakespeare, the production neutered female resistance to constraint and naturalized the gender hierarchies essential to patriarchal culture. The contrivances of the staging presented Shakespeare as advocate of mutuality and equality as they simultaneously resorted to essentialist assumptions about gender identity. That so much window dressing was required reveals, in part, the stakes of the debate over Shakespearian identity. For, in its accommodations, the Bell production validated established gender hierarchies – benevolent though they might seem in a chastened and loving Petruchio – even as it appeared to embrace a resistant ‘from below’ call for equality. Bell’s staging deployed song and dance in ways that echoed the carnivalesque context of Navy Pier but in the service of long-institutionalized hierarchies endemic to the unseen network of power authorizing the theatre itself.

WALKING OUT THE DOOR

The protesting too much of Bell’s representation certainly finds parallels in the long performance history of this play but, in 2010, CST employed two artists, Josie Rourke and Neil LaBute, to launch a direct attack on the Great Humanist status of Shakespeare so strenuously and problematically defended by Bell’s staging. In doing so, the Rourke and LaBute *Shrew* provided theatrical space for the pedestrian’s tactics of resistance to institutionalized strategies, even privileging the act of ‘walking out’ in its dénouement. In contrast to Bell’s cheerful accommodations, the LaBute framing material of the Rourke production functioned as an invitation to interrogate the status of Shakespeare’s play and its steady confinement of the titular shrew.²⁶ According to CST Director of Education, Marilyn Halperin, the fresh framing material, which replaced the Christopher Sly Induction, underwent a series of revisions and negotiations by Rourke, LaBute and the cast in the run-up to the production.²⁷ Both author and director aimed for a more radical frame than ultimately was performed or could be supported by the demographic of the theatre’s typical audience

and, more importantly, its donors.²⁸ Perhaps not since its early years had the financial viability of the theatre been in such great jeopardy as in 2010 in the full force of the Great Recession. Ticket

²⁶ Known for a tendency to misanthropy and accused of misogyny by some critics, LaBute may seem a surprising choice to revisit critically the brutality of Shakespeare’s text: see Pat Jordan, ‘Neil LaBute has a Thing About Beauty’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 29 March 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com>. *Chicago Tribune* theatre critic Chris Jones concurs in his review: ‘And thus, in one of the more unusual theatrical choices of the moment, Chicago Shakespeare decided that the way to alleviate (or explore) the play’s discomforting sexual politics was to hire the politically incendiary playwright Neil LaBute to write an original outer frame. Yet more bizarrely, LaBute, a writer known for his brilliant depictions of mercurial men, came up with a new backstage love plot involving two broadly drawn lesbians’ (Chris Jones, ‘*Taming of the Shrew* at Chicago Shakespeare: LaBute’s Frame Doesn’t Fit Battle of the Sexes’, *Chicago Tribune*, 14 April 2010, <http://leisureblogs.chicagotribune.com>).

²⁷ Marilyn Halperin, Personal Interview, 29 September 2011. By re-voicing the Sly Induction’s theatricalized context, the Rourke and LaBute production thus capitalized on a resistance inherent in the text and followed a more recent *Shrew* performance trend identified by Barbara Hodgdon: ‘*Shrew*’s frame has come into focus as the key to re-viewing as well as re-staging the scene of taming and as a site for its critique’: ‘Katharina Bound, or Play(K)ating the Strictures of Everyday Life’ in *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, ed. Dana E. Aspinall (New York, 2002), pp. 351–87, p. 372. Leah S. Marcus similarly notes that a recent performance tendency to import from the quarto *A Shrew* text (1594) the concluding Sly material ‘is gaining increasing popularity’ because ‘it softens some of the brutality of the taming scenes . . . [and] distances late twentieth-century audiences from some of the most unacceptable implications of Kate’s pronouncements on male sovereignty’ (*Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (New York, 1996), p. 104).

²⁸ Just a few months after the play’s run, the *Financial Times* published an op-ed piece by Alan Davey, chief executive of Arts Council England, regarding the forms of arts funding. Davey cites the Chicago *Shrew* as an example of the pressures that private funding can exert over artistic integrity and freedom. Davey writes: ‘A reliance on the goodwill of wealthy donors can provoke self-censorship, too. In Chicago this year, a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, by exceptional British director Josie Rourke, ran into difficulties due to apprehension over a benefactor’s response to a scene portraying gay characters. This fear was misplaced and ultimately no donor withdrew – but the willingness to self-censor was real’ (‘Arts Cannot be Funded by Big Donors Alone’, *Financial Times*, 5 August 2010, www.ft.com).

sales fell precipitously between 2007 and 2008 from \$7.5 million to \$6.3 million and bottomed out in 2010 at \$5.6 million, a decline of 25.1 per cent over a four-year period.²⁹ The promptbooks for the 2003 and 2010 productions tell a similar story of declining resources: the Bell promptbook enumerates a total cast and crew of 74 personnel while the 2010 production lists 61. The difference in cast numbers is particularly striking, 30 in 2003 and 22 in 2010, numbers that may reflect the opposing aesthetics of the two directors as well as the shrinking production budget in 2010. With investments trending down with the market and public support and private donations remaining flat or decreasing slightly, *Shrew's* director, writer and cast worked in this fragile financial context to arrive at a frame script true to the resistant stance of the production and acceptable to theatre subscribers and walk-in ticket purchasers.³⁰ As it was, the content of the frame, which included idiomatic slang and contemporary expletives as well as dramatizations of non-heteronormative relationships, prompted a warning letter from the theatre to schools bringing students to the production. The theatre marked its concern about the content of the frame by offering a no-questions-asked refund to any school group rendered uncomfortable by the adult nature of the production.³¹

In contrast to Bell, Rourke's set designed by Lucy Osborne exposed the theatrical means by which shrew-taming becomes entertaining and acceptable to an audience. Rourke's staging featured a fixed Italianate backdrop that changed little over the course of the performance. While Bell's stage included wings extending on the sides and utilized the deep recesses of backstage to create a generous expanse for action, Rourke's flat concealed the backstage and left much of the playing on a shallow main stage and the thrust. The shrunken world of Rourke's production constricted its human subjects to a narrower space than the fantasy experienced by the characters of Bell's run. The familiar backstage trope of LaBute's framing shone a light on the constructed nature of the world under scrutiny. A centrally positioned door on the backstage flat had not been fully installed

and leaned against the back wall flanked by bright yellow 'Caution' tape. The unfinished state of the stage was heightened by actors who would stamp their feet to mime knocking whenever 'entering' through the absent door. A similar exposure of theatrical mechanics occurred when stagehands rushed to secure in place a missing *Venus de Milo* statue with cordless DeWalt drills. While typical of the harried backstage genre, such obvious disruption to the theatrical spectacle also stressed the constructedness of the performative world outside the frame, CST's own season of productions on Navy Pier. Furthermore, the brokenness of the stage suited the riven and imperfect play text being performed.

In fact, much of the LaBute frame material articulated the impossibility of salvaging the gender dynamics of this 1590s comedy. Set during a technical rehearsal and preview performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the frame centred on a director and actor duo with a long history of domestic and artistic partnership, a relationship that had survived despite the actor's tendency to dalliance. LaBute's frame created a parallel between the taming endeavoured by Petruchio (Ian Bedford) and the strident efforts of the Director (Mary Beth Fisher) to control her lover and star whom she called by her stage name throughout, 'Kate' (Bianca Amato). Battles between the two women punctuated the technical and dress rehearsals of *Shrew* in which the two argued over the actor's habits of

²⁹ For accessing the *GuideStar* database and providing detailed financial analysis of CST's IRS Form 990 Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax, I am indebted to my beloved partner, Paul D. Smith, Jr., CPA, MSA. *GuideStar*, 2012.

³⁰ Long-term investments declined from \$10.5 million in 2007 to \$8.5 million in 2010.

³¹ The production homepage on the CST website included a parental advisory icon and short explanation of the frame content, closing with this directive: 'If you attend the theater with a young person, please consider their sensitivity to coarse language and sexual themes. While our twenty-first century ears may not pick up on the many bawdy references in Shakespeare's *Shrew*, contemporary language and situations are more vivid' (*The Taming of the Shrew: A Note to Our Audience*).

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infidelity, the social roles of women, and the merits of long-term relationships.

DIRECTOR. I want you. Maybe kids. I want stability and a woman I can trust and that's not asking too much. Is it?

KATE. Why? Why do you want the same junk that your mother had? Look at her – she's so unhappy! So was mine before she died – died without ever doing one thing she wanted to for herself.

DIRECTOR. That's completely different...

KATE. No, it's not! (BEAT) Look at this goddam play we're doing – the way that women are treated. Right? And now look just how far we've come...

DIRECTOR. Not very.

KATE. People always bitch about it not being far enough and maybe that's so, but I'll take it. You know? I'm glad I'm here right now and can kiss and hug and love anybody I want... (LaBute)

In the frame material, Kate's emphatic reference to 'this goddam play' as contrastive evidence of the twenty-first century's radical improvements in women's social and political status strongly diverged from the Bell production in which such a reading of the early modern text as deeply flawed was not even countenanced. LaBute chose to spotlight the play's strategies of shrew-taming by echoing them in the actions of the Director who continually humiliated her star as punishment for a failure to meet her ideals of loving fidelity. Most notably, the Director repeatedly tested lighting and blocking choices that objectified and disempowered her lover so unfeelingly that the viewer might well have suspected that, instead of one shrew, this production had delivered two.³²

Much of the 'talking back' at Shakespeare took place in scenes where the Director and 'Kate' debated the merits of staging what 'Kate' described as this 'stupid excuse for a play'. In many ways, the fictional Director mouthed a familiar line of defence when questioned about the play's relevance and ethical worth; however, so much of the frame revealed her own dubious motivations to circumscribe her errant partner through the act of performance that she became an unredeemably compromised instrument defending the choice to stage *Shrew* yet again. LaBute's Director explained

the goals of the approach to her lover and star: 'I think we're going to have a show that's really special, one that is unafraid to tackle the problems of a text that's outdated by looking them squarely in the eye... You're not just this really fun and engaging "Kate" but you're giving us a new reading of a difficult role.' In an interview, Rourke echoed LaBute's Director as she articulated her own perspective on *Shrew*:

I think this play has many fascinating things to say about relationships, about control, about marriage, about gender. However, because of when it was written, it is a play in which a series of unacceptably repressive acts are committed against a woman. In putting a contemporary frame around Shakespeare's play, one of the things I am trying to do is to acknowledge the difficulties that *Shrew* presents to us in the twenty-first century in a way that is funny, raw and engaging.³³

While the publicity interviews and tone of the 2003 *Taming* allowed very little room for such a candid acknowledgement, here Rourke pinpointed the failings of the text. However, she did so in ways that preserved the status of Shakespeare for the theatre. Although steering much closer to the 'sexist' label, Rourke stopped short of attributing the play's problematics to the poet. By placing the drama's title rather than 'Shakespeare' in the subject

³² The portrayal of a lesbian relationship raised critical comment: 'Judging the play as a whole using Rourke's own wish that it be "raw, funny and engaging", I say here that it failed utterly, unless "lesbians can be misogynist, just like men" counts as an urgent new insight. This was Shakespeare by way of Joe Eszterhas, and I found the play's depiction of homosexuality cartoonish and crude' (Andrea Stevens, review of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28 (2010), 491–5, p. 492). The critical response to the new induction material was not surprising, given LaBute's reputation for misanthropy; in an earlier profile of the playwright at the time of a New York production of his *Reasons to be Pretty*, Pat Jordan wrote: 'LaBute's plays are, in fact, so provocative that some past audience members have walked out midplay or screamed out "kill the playwright" or slapped an actor's face after a performance.'

³³ Josie Rourke, 'A 21st Century Lens', interview by Marilyn Halperin, in Playbill for *The Taming of the Shrew* (April 2010), p. 9.

position of a sentence naming the text's irresolvable gender trouble, Rourke maintained a useful gap between the revered playwright and the vexed artwork, one essential if her production was not set to undermine entirely the grounding principles of the theatre's self-construction. Nonetheless, that Rourke's assessment matched in many ways the argument attributed to the frame's compromised Director left open, perhaps unintentionally, the question of whether or not this perspective on *Shrew* was authoritative.

Such ambiguous cross-currents ebbed during the production's final scene. LaBute's and Rourke's most direct confrontation of the playwright occurred at the end of Katharina's submission speech in Act 5. Just as Petruchio extended a hand towards her and repeated twice, 'Now there's a wench', the actress stood, declared, 'No, no, no', and began to remove the skirting of her costume. With a grandness of movement, her hands reached upwards to punctuate a definitive, 'Fuck this. We are done here.' Clapping her hands, she marched in leggings and top down the centre aisle of the theatre to laughter and audience applause and thrust upward a valedictory hand gesture.³⁴ In her review, Caitlin Montanye Parrish wrote, 'By all means, see this glorious ensemble's work. But don't look for meaning in the contemporary scaffolding. "Fuck this!" is neither a thesis nor a revelation. It's a weak response to the joke played on women for ages: Their tragedy is men's comedy.'³⁵

Whether or not 'Fuck this' constitutes a thoughtful or satisfying thesis, the defiance of LaBute's dénouement emphatically shaped a very different rhetorical position vis-à-vis Shakespeare's authority and the meaning of *Shrew* than the earlier Bell staging. Less than ten years later, the theatre that had once encouraged its audience to laugh away any discomfort with the play's content now schooled its patrons in a more combative stance towards Shakespeare's cultural capital. That CST would risk committing what Paul Yachnin has labelled 'bardicide' within the costly and secular-sacred of a 'Shakespeare Theatre' in Middle America, that it would 'kill' the thing that gives it being and identity might well surprise during the year

2010 when financial capital proved in such dangerously short supply.³⁶ Taking a significant financial risk, the production endeavoured to face up to the troubling dynamics of a play inconsistent with the theatre's Great Humanist image of Shakespeare. While some viewers might object to the mouthpieces chosen for this interrogative approach – cartoonish stereotypes of feminist lesbians – the production's final moment did manifest the individual tactic of resistance possible in Certeau's city. Quite literally, LaBute and Rourke's Katharina enacted the prerogative of Certeau's pedestrian to choose an alternate route through the city's

³⁴ LaBute-Rourke's 'Kate' ruptured what James C. Scott has called the 'public transcript', 'the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate' (2), by voicing the 'hidden transcript', the 'offstage' discourse of resistance carefully guarded by the oppressed: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990, pp. 4–5). Scott describes explosions such as Kate's as 'a declaration that breaches the etiquette of power relations, that breaks an apparently calm surface of silence and consent, [and] carries the force of a symbolic declaration of war' (8). I am grateful to Ante Jeronic for pointing out the relevance of Scott's work to this discussion.

³⁵ Caitlin Montanye Parrish, review of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Time Out Chicago*, 18 April 2010, <http://timeoutchicago.com>. Similarly, the reviewers for *Early Modern Literary Studies* observe that previous interpolations designed to reimagine the partnership of Petruchio and Katharina have traditionally been one dramatic method of solving the misogyny of the play's end. Suggesting that such interpolations might be an equivalent of the LaBute-Rourke aborted ending, the reviewers refine the comparison: 'However, the undeniable difference between the two is that interpolations do not avoid the final scene, but rather they interpret it. There is little interpretation in omission' (M. G. Aune, Desiree Helterbran and Brandon Zebrowski, review of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 15:2 (2010–11), <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/15-2/revcts.htm>).

³⁶ Yachnin explains that 'the revisionist artist prosecutes a brief against Shakespeare, who emerges as an author of and for the social elite or, more often, as an apologist for patriarchal or imperialist violence. In each case, the revisionist's implicit claim to value is founded on an artistic revolution against the politico-moral authority of Shakespeare – the poet-kingpin of the Western tradition' (Paul Yachnin, "'To kill a king": The Modern Politics of Bardicide', in *Shakespeare and Modern Theatre: The Performance of Modernity*, ed. Michael Bristol, Kathleen McLuskie, and Christopher Holmes (New York, 2001), pp. 6–54, p. 33).

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9. *The Taming of the Shrew*, 2.1. Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Courtyard Theater, 2010, directed by Josie Rourke. Katharina (Bianca Amato) and Petruchio (Ian Bedford).

institutionally delineated concrete, glass and steel, walking off the set and out the doors of the theatre.

Furthermore, unsatisfying and reductionistic as some elements of the frame may have been, LaBute did trouble a familiar trope of Shakespeare performance, the 'Shakespop sub-genre' that narrates 'the backstage struggles of a company to mount a Shakespeare show'.³⁷ Douglas Lanier explains that this trope often celebrates a communal regeneration prompted by the great author's work and manifested by the interactions of a theatre company (159). However, LaBute thwarted this self-justifying metatheatrical narrative in his truncated ending; even when in desperation the Director called out to halt 'Kate' and addressed her at last by her right name, 'Angela', this concession to the actor's identity came too late. By daring to rename Shakespeare as something less than the Great Humanist, the LaBute-Rourke production questioned, albeit briefly, the founding and self-constituting assumptions of the Chicago Shakespeare Theater.³⁸ Such inversion may well constitute carnival topsy-turvy as surely as the Ferris wheel and rides just outside the theatre's Navy Pier doors and approximate something like the individual tactic of resistance from below articulated by Certeau.

TAKING SHAKESPEARE TO THE PARKS

The LaBute-Rourke *Shrew* closed with its Katharina walking out the door and refusing to participate in the act of institutionalized oppression embodied by Shakespeare's play and its life on the stage. Two years later, the rest of the company walked out as well but with a difference – opting to bring Shakespeare along with them. The summer Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks initiative packed its bags and stowed its set, sound system and costumes on a tractor-trailer truck to move through the city and its neighbourhoods, abandoning the concrete and glass Navy Pier house for the open air. These parks productions in which audience members came and went with a casual ease not afforded by theatre architecture allowed CST

to acknowledge some of the sociocultural barriers that prevent proselytizing a broader demographic into the church of the fine arts. Essentially, the movement to the parks constituted a tacit admission that even planting in the context of Navy Pier does not eliminate the classist associations that limit access to and interest in the fine arts. In an endeavour to operationalize more fully its stated mission – 'to bring to life the plays of William Shakespeare, and to present other great performances for audiences from all walks of life and from around the world' – CST joined forces with the Chicago Park District to launch 'Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks' in the summer of 2012. Made possible by a Boeing Company grant and other corporate sponsorships, this mobile, 75-minute production aimed to bring Shakespeare to a wider Chicago demographic than typically served by the Navy Pier location despite its populist aspirations. Gaines and Criss Henderson (CST Executive Director) summarized the goals of the project in an emailed letter to patrons: 'As Chicago's home for Shakespeare, we now look forward to bringing our work into the diverse neighborhoods of our great city and uniting the community through the timeless and universal themes expressed by one of the world's greatest playwrights.'³⁹ Once again, the theatre's promotional materials, which burnished Shakespeare's credentials as a trans-historically relevant tool for civic union, were anchored in the Great Humanist construct. The universalizing instinct of the promotion downplayed the cultural and material particularities of Shakespeare and his oeuvre

³⁷ Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (New York, 2002), p. 157.

³⁸ Kim Solga's recent study of director Peter Hinton's work at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival examines dynamics quite similar to those at Chicago Shakespeare. She notes a marked risk-aversion at the festival where administrators must balance profitability and concern for return patrons against artistic license and a more robust creative exploration ('Realism and the Ethics of Risk at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28 (2010), 417–42, p. 422).

³⁹ Barbara Gaines and Criss Henderson, 'Introducing Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks', email to CST patrons, 15 June 2012.

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in the service of a vaguely idealized civic unity. Such well-meaning cultural evangelism neatly side-stepped the reality that unity of the many often comes at the expense of the few and, in this case, given the play selected, indeed would come at the expense of a portion of the target demographic – women. The creative team behind the parks project selected an abridgement of *The Taming of the Shrew* as its cultural ambassador to the city of Chicago.

The Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks initiative grew out of a city-wide drive to extend the reach of fine arts institutions to its highly diverse and highly segregated population.⁴⁰ According to Halperin, the impetus came from a 2006 University of Chicago cultural mapping that indicated significant urban population swaths were not participating in the city's largest cultural institutions.⁴¹ With funding supplied in part by the Joyce Foundation, the Cultural Policy Center and the Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies joined forces to produce *Mapping Cultural Participation in Chicago*, a study that charted participation data from Chicago-area arts outlets onto maps of the city's neighbourhoods and overlaid ethnic identity, socioeconomic status and household structure data from the US 2000 Census.⁴² The study's executive summary articulates the ethnic divide present: 'We find that participation in Chicago's largest arts and cultural organizations is highest in predominantly white, high-income areas of the metropolitan area' (9). However, while the gap in arts participation between Caucasian neighbourhoods and African-American and Latino neighbourhoods appears wide, the study also notes significant under-utilization in white neighbourhoods and concludes that rather than ethnicity, 'The socioeconomic attributes of a neighborhood are the most important predictors of the density of arts participation' (9). Because the extent and quality of data from the city's largest cultural institutions exceeded that from smaller, underfunded entities, the study's 'core data are those from the twelve largest not-for-profit cultural institutions in Chicago, supplemented by a sample of forty-nine smaller institutions' (9).⁴³ The study's conclusion diagnoses a failing of larger cultural institutions in

the city that appears a direct mandate for initiatives such as Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks:

Currently, however, Chicago's large arts organizations are not successfully engaging households in areas with poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Both predominantly minority and predominantly white areas with relatively low household incomes, low levels of educational attainment, and large households participate in the city's large arts organizations at relatively low rates. This finding suggests that to engage such households, these organizations may have to reconsider how they deliver their services, their pricing structure, and the times they make their services available to this audience. (51)

In addition to the University of Chicago study, Mayor Rahm Emanuel's draft cultural plan fuelled the summer 2012 CST walk in the parks.⁴⁴ For the first time since 1986, the Windy City would have a working cultural plan, and during the summer months of 2012, the draft plan was under debate at town hall meetings throughout the city.⁴⁵ In the foreword to the draft version of the *City of Chicago Cultural Plan 2012*, Mayor Emanuel weds the interests of culture and economics: 'This plan matters. Financially, Chicago has the third largest

⁴⁰ Recent census studies have shown that 'Chicago remains the most segregated big city in America' despite having made significant strides in reducing segregation. In fact, 'Of the 10 largest cities, Chicago has seen the second-largest declines in segregation between 2000 and 2010' (Stefano Esposito, 'Chicago Tops Nation for Segregation, but Sees 2nd-largest Decline in U.S.', *Chicago Sun Times*, 31 January 2012, www.suntimes.com).

⁴¹ Marilyn Halperin, Personal interview, 2 July 2012.

⁴² Robert LaLonde *et al.*, *Mapping Cultural Participation in Chicago* (Chicago, 2006), p. 11.

⁴³ Those twelve largest institutions central to the study are The Art Institute of Chicago, Auditorium Theatre Council, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Theater Group, Inc. (The Goodman Theatre), The Field Museum, Joffrey Ballet of Chicago, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Science and Industry and Steppenwolf Theatre Company (all defined as 'large' by virtue of 'annual revenue in excess of \$8 million') (LaLonde, *Mapping Cultural Participation*, pp. 11, 53).

⁴⁴ Halperin, Interview, 2 July 2012.

⁴⁵ *City of Chicago Cultural Plan 2012*, draft (Lord Cultural Resources, 2012) www.chicagoculturalplan2012.com, p. 18.



10. *The Taming of the Shrew*, 3.2. Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Chicago Park District, 2012, directed by Rachel Rockwell. Petruccio (Matt Mueller) and Katharina (Ericka Ratcliff).

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creative economy in the U.S., with 24,000 arts enterprises, including nearly 650 non-profit arts organizations, generating more than \$2 billion annually and employing 150,000 people. Chicago's creative vibrancy creates jobs, attracts new businesses and tourists, and improves neighborhood vitality and quality of life.' He adds in a final rhetorical flourish: 'The Chicago Cultural Plan 2012 will chart a roadmap for Chicago's cultural and economic growth and become the centerpiece for building Chicago's reputation as a global destination for creativity, innovation and excellence in the arts.' Imagined with a life span of 10–15 years, the document articulates the need for and purpose of a cultural plan: 'A cultural plan translates the cultural needs and identity of a community into a tool for implementing recommendations. These recommendations seek to: address gaps in cultural service delivery; expand participation; broaden the impact of culture on the wider community; identify new opportunities for a city's future audience; and stake out a city's identity through cultural expression' (16). The Fact Sheet summarizes plan initiatives including a specific focus on arts rooted in the distinct neighbourhoods of the city (10). Heartily welcomed by arts advocates such as Halperin at CST, the cultural plan (finalized in October 2012) argues for the civic and financial value of the arts as well as establishing an agenda for supporting and sustaining institutional arts enterprises.

Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks was a good-faith if vexed effort to jump-start this renewed commitment to the city's arts outlets.⁴⁶ Halperin explained that when a Boeing grant came through to fund a summer Shakespeare programme the theatre had to act quickly to prepare a run. A Short Shakespeare! *Shrew* had just been staged successfully (25 February to 7 April 2012) and, it was assumed, could transition most readily to the planned outdoor venues.⁴⁷ Performing during July and August at eleven area parks from the south to the north side of the city, the CST production, adapted and directed by Rachel Rockwell, starred Ericka Ratcliff as Katharina and Matt Mueller as Petruchio. The press release announcing the

performances articulated the assumptions underlying the open-air productions: 'The wildly spirited Kate and the machismo-driven Petruchio will scream, fight and woo their way into one another's heart in Shakespeare's verse and Elizabethan dress, underscored with original rock-inspired music to connect contemporary audiences with the characters' journeys.'⁴⁸ Perhaps in an attempt to suit its casting to the multicultural landscape of the Chicago Park District, the summer *Shrew* featured an inter-ethnic pairing, a Katharina of African descent and a Caucasian Petruchio, and included a Latino Grumio who also served as 'host' of the productions I attended.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Both Ric Knowles and Michael McKinnie have recently examined urban cultural policies and plans in relationship to performance practices in Toronto and London respectively; they raise crucial questions about how underlying ethnic biases and global capital colour funding patterns and promotional rhetoric; see Ric Knowles, 'Multicultural Text, Intercultural Performance: The Performance Ecology of Contemporary Toronto', in *Performance and the City*, ed. D. J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr and Kim Solga (New York, 2011), pp. 73–91; Michael McKinnie, 'Performing the Civic Transnational: Cultural Production, Governance, and Citizenship in Contemporary London', in *Performance and the City*, pp. 110–27. Similarly, Kate Rumbold charts the influence of British governmental cultural policy on audience development and outreach by major Shakespeare institutions in the United Kingdom (Kate Rumbold, 'From "Access" to "Creativity": Shakespeare Institutions, New Media, and the Language of Cultural Value', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 61 (2010), 313–36). These critical approaches drive the current project's investigation into Chicago's incipient cultural planning and experiment with the Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks initiative.

⁴⁷ Halperin, Interview, 2 July 2012. The Short Shakespeare! production of *Shrew* ran on Saturday mornings throughout the spring of 2012. Halperin described it as one of the most successful 'abridgements' staged by CST, one that played well in the Courtyard Theater to a widely varying audience.

⁴⁸ Chicago Shakespeare Theater, 'Cultural, Civic and Corporate Partnership Launches Bold Initiative: Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Chicago Park District and the Boeing Company present Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks' (12 June 2012, Press Release).

⁴⁹ The Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks *Shrew* visited eleven neighbourhoods but produced a total of seventeen performances with repeats at four parks (Gateway Park at Navy Pier, Welles Park, Humboldt Park and Frank J. Wilson Park). The rest of the parks (South Shore Cultural Center, Tuley

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Much about the Parks initiative was well-intended. Residents of the Tuley and Dvorak park districts genuinely appreciated the effort made by the city of Chicago and the theatre to bring Shakespeare to the neighbourhoods. In fact, even at a location that is more tourist attraction than 'neighbourhood' park, Gateway Park at Navy Pier, Halperin's pre-show welcome, which referenced the 2012 Cultural Plan's focus on arts in the neighbourhoods, drew rousing applause. After the Tuley Park performance, a number of attendees approached CST employees and thanked them for the production, only gently scolding CST for a failure to better publicize the event. While the series of email announcements sent to subscribers and previous ticket-purchasers made theatre regulars aware of the productions, such a strategy would, of course, not work with the underserved populations targeted by the initiative and highlighted in the University of Chicago cultural mapping.

The CST production relied on several methods throughout the run to mitigate the inevitably patronizing dynamic of a well-endowed and powerful arts company condescending to set up shop for one day only in the city's neighbourhoods. In an example of mutually beneficial collaboration, the neighbourhood productions began with a green show that typically featured children and adolescents involved in the parks' summer activity programmes.⁵⁰ Ward aldermen or their representatives introduced the performances and welcomed the theatre cast and crew to the neighbourhood. The Dvorak Park Advisory Council capitalized on the presence of additional park visitors to run a fund-raising concession stand and to promote their upcoming march on City Hall to request additional fiscal support. With tents providing only a very limited backstage space, cast members typically entered the playing area at the start of productions by walking through the crowd from temporary dressing rooms within the parks' main structures. Their exposed entrance thus disrupted the show's mimetic illusion before it had even begun and placed the performative act in close proximity to spectatorship, even blurring the difference as cast members stood or lounged on the

grass, watching and applauding during the green shows. Such prolegomenon management briefly levelled the distinction between 'us' and 'them' freighted on a high arts production that has travelled to an underserved community. Cast members similarly and very deliberately appeared to mingle with the audience after *Shrew*, soliciting feedback and thanking patrons for joining the occasion. At Tuley Park, a significant number of attendees crowded round the cast members post-performance with the largest cluster circling Ratcliff and seeking her autograph on the Shakespeare fans (cut-outs of Droeshout's Shakespeare) distributed to keep patrons cool in the heat wave temperatures and unmerciful sun.

In its approach to introducing the productions, CST attempted to wed its Great Humanist Shakespeare to the multicultural landscape of the city. Jose Antonio Garcia who played Grumio introduced the production and made the familiar appeal to turn off cell phones and focus attention on the performances. He also offered a bit of audience coaching by urging listeners to allow time for the ear to adjust to the music of Shakespeare's language. At each performance, his introduction concluded with a reminder that Shakespeare 'was writing about us', an appeal that echoed the Great Humanist construct of the theatre's self-image. This commitment to the Great Humanist Shakespeare, however, once again meant that the production blithely insisted on a cheerful and universal relevance by means of humorous stage business,

Park, Dvorak Park, Austin Town Hall Park, Douglas Park, Garfield Park Conservatory and Ridge Park) hosted single performances. I observed stagings at three locations: the largely African-American Tuley Park (30 July), the multicultural but predominantly Hispanic Dvorak Park (31 July), and Gateway Park located at the west end of Navy Pier and attracting a mixed audience of Gold Coast inhabitants and tourists (8 August).

⁵⁰ Perhaps because the production start time at Gateway Park was 6:30 pm rather than the 3:30 pm and 4:00 pm respectively of Tuley and Dvorak, no green show featuring children took place at the 8 August performance. More of a tourist destination than a local service, Gateway Park may not offer the full range of summer programming that could populate a green show.

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11. *The Taming of the Shrew*, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Garfield Park Conservatory, 2012, directed by Rachel Rockwell. Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the cast of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

preventing direct confrontation of material that should be troubling to a modern and diverse audience.

In the extra-performance components, the Chicago Shakespeare cast, crew and staff members appeared to achieve considerable good will. However, the actual production remained disappointingly riddled with abuses of Katharina rendered decidedly uncomfortable by the colour difference between Katharina and Petruchio. Cuts necessitated by the 75-minute running time further stripped nuance and complexity from a text already characterized by a paucity of such and, thanks to the 'colour-blind' casting, made the now ethnically coded sexual and power dynamics between the leads more starkly problematic. While an integrated cast affirms the many voices with which Shakespeare can and should speak, in the context of Chicago's segregated neighbourhoods,

this piece of casting did not appear 'blind' unless 'blind' is taken to mean casting without an eye to unintended interpretive consequences, namely the visual implications of a Caucasian man imposing his will on an African-American woman. Ayanna Thompson has thoroughly troubled the concept of colour-blind casting by pointing out that because audiences still perceive colour, directors may inadvertently underscore ethnic stereotypes or set in motion unintended interpretive trajectories in their efforts to integrate a cast.⁵¹ As Thompson notes, thoughtful colour-blind casting can provoke an important if painful dialogue about race (17),

⁵¹ Ayanna Thompson, 'Practicing a Theory/Theorizing a Practice: An Introduction to Shakespearean Colorblind Casting', in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York, 2006), pp. 1-24, p. 11.

but the CST parks production fell short of this ambition. First, it did little to code the performative nature of identity that even a play as restrictive as *Shrew* allows. By eliminating the theatrical framing of Christopher Sly's gulling, the production succeeded in creating a performance the requisite length for the exigencies of a parks staging. However, that decision dismissed a component of the text that could have signalled a more distanced and interrogatory spectatorship to the unfolding taming. In some ways, the choice to situate actors in the audience during the green show functioned as a replacement of the metatheatrical Sly frame; unfortunately, positioning actors as observers for a ten-minute pre-show proved too weak a gesture to combat and undermine the still-potent fantasy of the fictive taming.

Furthermore, the light-rock-infused underscoring composed by Kevin O'Donnell that played between scenes implied a unified complacency with the plot's action and provoked an upbeat geniality that urged laughing acceptance of the dynamics between Katharina and Petruchio rather than an interrogation of gender and, now, ethnic inequities. In a short online video, director Rockwell explained the juxtaposition of rock score against Elizabethan costuming as central to the production's aesthetic and a crucial means of rendering relevant the emotional content of the play: 'This whole thing for me is about contrast... We're putting it in an Elizabethan setting where the music that we're going to use for the show is a lot of really hardcore rock music.'⁵² For Rockwell, while the audience members might not follow the language of Shakespeare, they would find emotional resonance in the 'crazy rock score underneath' the performance. The parks playbill quoted composer O'Donnell stressing the purpose of his scoring: 'Music offers an opportunity to help lift the story into the same time and space as the audience. Any good story must have some aspect of timelessness in it, in my opinion. So even if we see characters in period costumes speaking Shakespearean English, we should be able to see how the relationships are the same as our own. Right?'⁵³ However, the scoring did not quite match the edginess promised

and much more consistently captured the cheerful tunefulness and frequent insipidity of romantic comedy film idiom. Such an essentially harmonious aural landscape actually normalized dramatic content rather than highlighted dissonance in what could have been provoking ways.

In addition to music, the production deployed a range of anachronistic details to enliven the play content and heighten relevancy to the contemporary audience: Bianca's pink feather fan and fur handcuffs, the Kanye West shades worn by Lucentio and Tranio, the fraternity house and hot pepper boxers and zebra suspenders revealed when Lucentio and Tranio exchanged clothing, and the fast food hamburger used to torture Katharina during the country house scenes. The multicultural casting (Garcia as Grumio, Ratcliff as Katharina, and Tiffany Yvonne Cox as Bianca) likewise deliberately attempted to cross the high arts ethnic divide made evident in the University of Chicago cultural mapping project. While Garcia's Grumio enjoyed elevated status as the 'host' of the production and Ratcliff's Katharina as the titular lead, the three actors of colour still played figures significantly lower on the social scale than many members of the *dramatis personae* – a servant and daughters circumscribed by their father and husbands.

While Ratcliff delivered a spirited performance designed to preserve Katharina's personal agency, the spectre of American slavery and the sexual exploitation of slave women by their Caucasian masters still shadowed this production. Perhaps the worst example of this was when during his rough wooing (2.1) Petruchio disabled Katharina by sitting on her while she was face-down on the stage; in that position, Petruchio appeared to 'ride' the entirely dominated Katharina. A close second for tone-deaf awkwardness was the blocking of their wedding, when Petruchio finally hoisted a

⁵² Rachel Rockwell, 'Director Rachel Rockwell on *The Taming of the Shrew* for Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks', *YouTube*, 12 June 2012.

⁵³ 'Meet the Composer', Programme Notes for *The Taming of the Shrew*, Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks, Chicago, Summer 2012.

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recalcitrant Katharina like a piece of meat over his shoulder and marched her unwillingly out of Padua.⁵⁴ In the performances I witnessed, these scenes received the most disapproving audience reactions at Tuley Park.⁵⁵ A small gathering of approximately 150 attendees composed primarily of African-American women in their 50s exchanged knowing glances and raised eyebrows throughout these scenes, and they further evidenced their ire in a series of verbalized 'humphs' during Katharina's submission speech highlighting 'love, honour, and *obey*', the final word in the trinity prompting vocal, good-natured, yet resistant responses. However, at the other two parks, Dvorak and Gateway, the blocking appeared to achieve its desired aim of laughter at the expense of the uppity shrew. Such blocking choices presented as amusing entertainment the violent logic of patriarchal power – that assumed physical superiority grants rights of dominance to the male sex.

At the same time, the costume design that placed Katharina in a gown referencing Elizabeth I's iconography strove against such disempowering staging choices. At her wedding, Ratcliff's Katharina emerged in a Ditchley Portrait-inspired white gown featuring high pleated ruff, cascading pearls and a substantial farthingale. Thus, the production staged a woman of colour wearing her hair in a natural, short-cut afro in a costume associated with an icon of Caucasian female power, Shakespeare's own monarch. Since the newspaper-style playbill featured a cartoon drawing of Elizabeth that merged elements of the Ditchley and the Rainbow portraits, the alignment of Ratcliff's Katharina with imagery of Elizabeth I could not be missed. Thus, even though the production made vexing choices that either blindly mimed social disequilibriums or merrily glossed those problems with contemporary trimmings, it did pause to imagine an African-American woman as an embodiment of historical power and precedence, and that should not be ignored, even when, only moments later, that embodiment of Elizabeth I was hoisted aloft by Petruchio and carted off to domestic servitude.

With such multivalent iconography as subject matter, assessing the parks Shakespeare in

relationship to Certeau's dynamic of institutional strategy and individual tactic necessarily means negotiating contradiction. As part of a citywide cultural initiative prompted by Mayor Emanuel's office and funded by the substantial resources of Chicago commerce, how could the parks productions be anything but another institutional strategy, one quite cynically designed to extend the soft power of the arts into potentially resistant neighbourhoods? I would contend, however, that the individual freedom to select another route and to move within and around the stolidity of the powerful is inherent in the very nature of dramatic performance, where theatrical practitioners *and* the audience together create the artwork. Baz Kershaw insists that 'Theatrical performance is the most public of all the arts because it cannot be constituted without the direct participation of a public.'⁵⁶ He has persuasively argued that the public's capacity to deliver a critique of drama has been steadily diminished by the transformation of theatre audiences into 'customers' who must applaud performance as a validation of their own capital investment in the ticket purchase (141). To restore the radical sociopolitical potential of theatre, Kershaw calls for a return of the 'unruly' audience, and in a very modest way that audience could be found at the Chicago Shakespeare in

⁵⁴ Interestingly, the LaBute-Rourke *Shrew* choreographed this exact blocking move with the same lines in the same scene, Petruchio's defiant, 'She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house, / My household stuff, my field, my barn, / My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing' (3.2.230-2). Whereas the 2010 production spotlighted this combination of words and demeaning blocking (inherited from the long performance history of the play) by breaking the dramatic action as Katharina scrambled down from Petruchio's shoulders in protest, the parks Shakespeare resorted to this familiar assertion of masculine rule predicated upon physical supremacy without irony or question.

⁵⁵ At Tuley Park, my four undergraduate research assistants (Theron Calkins, Arianna Lashley, Samantha Snively and Lydia Weiso) were invaluable in scanning the audience during the performance and ensuring the accuracy of recorded observations.

⁵⁶ Baz Kershaw, 'Oh for Unruly Audiences! Or, Patterns of Participation in Twentieth-Century Theatre', *Modern Drama*, 42 (2001), 133-54, p. 151.

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the Parks productions. Characteristic of all the parks performances was a freedom of audience movement atypical of indoor theatrical venues. Such movement quietly assessed the value of the performance and elevated other personal priorities over the demands of a singular focus on the enacted narrative. With great frequency, audience members opted to slip away to concession stands and return laden with nachos and beverages, while others stayed for a time, then folded up their chairs and departed. Some audience members arrived late and appeared, on occasion, to be coming from work, joining a friend or partner, and settling down to enjoy only a fragment of the performance. Not only in the audience reaction can the disruptions of the individual tactic be seen but also in the very makeshift quality of the parks productions themselves. Plagued by occasional long pauses between last lines and scene exits, too few microphones and speakers for listening ease and a noticeable lack of ensemble chemistry early in the run, Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks made manifest the means of production itself. Thus, although the Short Shakespeare! production deleted *Shrew's* Sly frame, it nonetheless displayed the mechanics of fiction-making, a tactic that threatens the hermetic inviolability of institutional narrative as surely as does an audience member's choice to walk away.

JOURNEY'S END

This story about *Shrew* in Chicago is a makeshift thing. Like Certeau's pedestrian, I have taken some routes and not others, wandered across terrain others might have ignored, and missed landmarks of significance to another's peregrinations. Performance, like the infinite possibilities of movement through the urban landscape, will always necessitate caveat and qualification. The story that emerges

from these distinct movements illustrates that institutional Shakespeare must more seriously scrutinize the self-justifying constructs that perpetuate and market the playwright's authority at the expense of those on the social margins. Writing about performance means residing in the space of memory, the place of uncertainty, the location of ambiguity, the very liminal space so wonderfully disruptive of institutional strategy. By examining performance, even as we acknowledge its complicity with power, we pursue a form whose infinite and shifting echoes whisper the impossibility of monoliths. As the LaBute-Rourke and Rockwell *Shrews* demonstrate, we can always walk away. And in that walking can be found the defiant resistance of Carl Sandburg's big-shouldered and labouring Chicagoan who knows that while institutions may strategize, the individual persists, and 'under his wrist is the pulse, / and under his ribs the heart of the people'. In contrast to the earlier Bell staging, the most recent Chicago *Shrews* embodied in their fissures, gaps, failings and stereotyped misdirections, an effort to de-situate Shakespeare from the hegemonic centre and unmoor the Bard from his high culture marina along Lakeshore Drive. That very imperfection showed a kind of bravery – to appear as the less-than-perfect manifestation of the mighty Navy Pier edifice. Back on the pier where ticket prices and capital investment must be justified by perceived 'quality', the Chicago Shakespeare Theater may always resort to a defensive position behind the palisade of Shakespeare the Great Humanist, a position which blinds the theatre to the ethical problematics inherent in the poet's work. But its more recent productions and its walk through the parks brave places of discomfort on the frontlines and admit even tacitly the limits of the 'Shakespeare' that defines and authorizes the Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

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Shakespeare's Collaborative Work

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