DRESSED TO KILL: THE COSTUME DESIGN FOR MERRY DEBAUCHERIES AND A DANCE WITH DEATH

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DEDICATION

To those whose morbid curiosity takes them on incredible journeys. May your weirdness be received with open minds and may you continue to be unafraid.

ABSTRACT

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* has been adapted with both metaphorical and literal representations of death as in Mia van Leeuwen's devised adaptation performed at the University of Lethbridge in 2022 for *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022*. In the costume and mask design for Prospero and his court members I endeavoured to contribute to the atmosphere of a strange world where nothing mattered except the amusements of an elite group hiding from the terrors of a real-life threat of plague. I also sought to create a unique representation of death, personified, that is both beautiful and terrifying. In this paper I outline the research into the obscure style of theatre used in this production, its connection to Gothic literature, the historical representations of Death in art, and the costume design for the Emcee character, Prospero and his court, and the Death character.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

> For indeed no one knows whether death happens to be even the greatest of all blessings to man, but men fear it as though they knew well it was the greatest of all evils.
>
> --- Socrates, from Plato's Apology

1:1 BACKGROUND

I have relatively little experience with grief. As a child, I never experienced the death of a family pet; they simply vanished one day, and I was told they went to a "farm." It is not an uncommon practice to conceal this specific truth from children; many of my friends have also heard this euphemism. According to a research survey conducted by Blue Cross, an England-based animal charity, the number one lie parents tell their children is leading them to believe that a dead family pet is actually living happily on a farm. Despite these deaths being hidden from me, I have a lot of experience with the deaths of other animals. Growing up, I spent summers on my grandmother's acreage where among the many chores, one was assisting with butchering chickens. My job was hands-on: I decided which chicken would be next and carried it to the chopping block. After its head was dispatched, the dead chicken would flap its wings and dance around with blood spurting from its neck. When its "dance of death" ceased, I carefully walked through the bloodbath, collected the body, and handed it over to be hung and drained. Next, it was scalded and gutted, and I then plucked the pinfeathers. It was then cut into pieces, and I helped package everything to go to the deepfreeze. It was a lot of work, but in my mind that is all it was. Just work. I never felt a sense of personal loss or grief; these deaths had little impact on me.

Death was never talked about in my household, and as I write this now, I realize that it was my grandmother who was the most open to discussing it and never dismissed

me as being morbid when I wished to have frank and earnest conversations about it. The first time I saw a hearse was with her and when I gushed about what a cool car it was, she said she would only take one ride in a car like that and the conversation moved forward with the topic, openly and honestly.

The first funeral I went to was not until I was twenty-three and it would be many years before I knew another human who died. My voyage into the world of death studies began when I lost my cat, Zoe in 2009. Her death had a profound impact on me because this was my first real experience with grief. As I looked for ways to honour her, I decided it would be a tattoo. I studied various death rituals from around the world, how people mourn, what types of funerals and burial practices they perform, the visual imagery related to these inquiries, and I looked at death-themed art. I discovered and fell in love with the historical practices of *memento mori,* which uses specific images in art like a skull or an hourglass as a reminder that we will all die one day. Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines *memento mori* with its literal translation from Latin, "remember that you must die." I drew inspiration for Zoe's tribute from Hans Holbein the Younger's woodcut series of the *danse macabre* (dance of death), a popular motif in 16th century *memento mori*-themed art. There was something about the happy dancing skeletons, gleefully escorting anyone and everyone to their graves, that made me feel calm with the fact that one day we all will die. This approach to *memento mori* is bold, yet playful, and something I find compelling.

When I was informed that I would be designing costumes for a devised adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* as part of *A Night at the Grand Guignol:2022,* I was delighted. When the premiere "Treehouse of Horror*"* episode of *The Simpsons* aired in 1990, they adapted Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven*, and I have

been a fan of Poe's work ever since. In a conversation with Justin A. Blum, I proposed a series of topics I could use as my thesis research, all relating to my interest in death studies. He suggested I reach out to the production's director, Mia van Leeuwen to talk and invite her to be on my supervisory committee as she also focuses her research on death studies. To say we have a few things in common is an understatement and my role for this degree, at this time, with this director, on this show was fate.

As van Leeuwen outlined her vision and shared her inspirational sources, I was reminded of my own experiences. There would be a bloodbath at the end, though not realistic looking like the bloodbath I trudged through in my childhood chicken butchering adventures. The actors would rise from the dead, don skull masks, join with the character Death, and they would celebrate together in a *danse macabre,* which would demonstrate to the audience, much like the woodcuts of Holbein, that death is universal; we all must die. The image of the headless chickens, flapping their wings, jumping, and dancing towards my grandmother's pristine garden, not knowing they had just lost their heads is burned in my memory forever and came to mind immediately. They danced without a care as I imagined the actors would. It was a truly fascinating scene as a child. I was also reminded of my *danse macabre* tattoo and my collection of Holbein's works where Death dances, plays instruments, and escorts everyone to their graves. To me it seems this job is done with great joy and attentiveness, and I was excited to be part of a process where we would portray a dance of death on stage, but in a less gruesome manner.

In our production of *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022*, an Emcee character hosted the evening and introduced each of the plays in the show. He provided some historical context of the style of theatre we presented, and he delivered some witty remarks to disturb and delight the audience. In our play, *The Masque of the Red Death,*

Prince Prospero attempts to escape a deadly plague and avoid death by taking his court to a remote location where he and his court members engage in a series of events to entertain themselves. At the end of the play, Death reveals themself to be the Emcee. I used historical research to complete the characterizations of Prince Prospero and his court with costumes and masks, the Emcee, and Death. The goal was to produce a design concept that was intriguing and stimulated an emotional response from the audience.

The main focus of my research for this project was in explorations of the historical contexts in which death makes an appearance in the visual and performing arts and examine what he/she/they look like. In my research, I wanted to investigate the representations of death, specifically the personification of death. For clarity, when death is capitalized, I am referring to the character, Death and in cases where Death has been personified. There were several questions on my mind throughout this process that I attempted to answer through my research. Does the appearance of Death in the arts promote an attitude of death-positivity or is their appearance simply a reaction to major world events such as war, famine, or illness?

The Death-Positive Movement of the twenty first century has roots that can be traced back to the 1960s when public discourse about death, dying, grief, and the funeral industry emerged through academic channels. These discussions moved through religious, political, and medical circles over the next decade and continue in all forums today. The movement attempts to raise awareness about death and seeks to promote conversations about death and dying that are non-judgemental, insightful, and empowering. The hope is that difficult conversations about all topics around death, from funeral options to Medical Aid in Dying, become easier when we are open and educated about the process (Incorvaia 5). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' 1969 book *On Death and Dying*

and the idea of hospice care initiated by Dr. Saunders in the same decade are argued to be the main events that pushed the movement into the spotlight (Incorvaia 6) and are the reason we can have important discussions openly about experiencing death. Kübler-Ross' outlined five stages a person goes through when they first receive the unpleasant news that they are terminally ill. Thanks to popular culture, we have come to know these as her model of, or her stages of, grief that many are familiar with: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross ix).

In my investigations, I attempted to focus on times of past plagues, specifically the Black Death because it was a constant threat for centuries. Why are we afraid of death? Do we seek to avoid it? Do we seek to confront it? Do we simply want to understand it so we can have an easier time with grief? Do we need to live better or die better? Does staging death make the topic easier or more comfortable to talk about? How does this particular portrayal of the character of Death relate to our understanding of death in the arts? Why is Death portrayed in a certain way across different cultures? What is Death's gender and why do we often presume Death to be male?

This would be my first official foray into the world of devised adaptation as a designer. Over the past year, during my coursework, I had a few assignments where I was tasked with creating costumes for a devised object-theatre project, creating a pitch for a devised production in a creative collaboration project, and even one where I created and built a cosplay character from unconventional materials (naturally, my cosplay character was a personification of death). These experiences with devised theatre on a smaller scale prepared me for a mainstage production by working collaboratively with others with ideas developed without a script and creating costumes that told a story or supported the storytelling of these ideas.

Devised theatre involves what Radosavljević refers to as a process of theatre making that is not based or dependant on a play, playwrighting, or a script. The storytelling develops from a collective group, not organized as a hierarchical structure. This structure, or collective can be made up of actors, performers, and other theatre practioners, who may develop their own script together where, "actors take on an authorship role" (59). They might conjure an entirely original performance based on nothing but their own ideas centered around a theme. Radosavljević distinguishes non-textual devising as "pure" and notes that some purists have forgone this method in favour of a text-based process, or adaptation (68). In one approach to devising through adaptation, Radosavljević quotes Mike Alfreds, the Artistic Director of a theatre company called Shared Experiences in an interview she conducted with him in 2011:

> Non-dramatic material, perversely forces you to invent ways of working and that can be very exciting and refreshing […] It demands you look at all the possibilities for what would be the best way to make this piece of text work" and taking "literary devices and find[ing] equivalent theatrical forms for them in order to be true to both the spirit and the word of the story. (76)

Hutcheon defines adaptation as, "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging", and "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (8). She also notes that some consider an adaptation successful if it captures the essence or "'spirit' of a work or an artist" (10). The creative team took approaches to adapting Poe's story that transposed elements of the original tale. For example, the seven chambers became intertwined with the seven deadly sins. Poe's essence was not neglected either. Death lurked about throughout the party's sinful events and came for everyone at the end.

A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022 was the first piece of devised theatre I worked on that was meant to be a full-scale production as a university mainstage show

and seen by an audience. I was nervous to take on this task, but confident that the source material would provide excellent references and inspirational sources for the costume design. I was also confident in the collaborative process and trusted the creative team to fulfill the vision together. The following pages describe the research, inspiration, implementation, and selection behind the costume design for the devised adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* portion of *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022*.

1.2 A NIGHT AT THE GRAND GUIGNOL: 2022 SYNOPSIS

This idea for this production was proposed by Mia van Leeuwen in 2019 and it consisted of three plays, with transitions between each featuring an Emcee character. It was staged at the University of Lethbridge on April 22 and April 23, 2022. The title included the current production year to convey the idea that the show we produced was in a contemporary context. In other words, to quote van Leeuwin, "it's a piece about a pandemic, performed during a pandemic." The current year in the title also placed the show in a time where we have the creative freedom to reimagine the way horror is staged, in a manner that supports new interpretations as well as the traditional.

The first play, *The Lighthouse Keepers* was directed by Jay Whitehead. The second play, *The Kiss of Blood* was produced as a staged reading with a demonstration of special effects, directed by Justin A. Blum. Blum was also the translator for both *The Lighthouse Keepers* and *The Kiss of Blood,* and writer for the Emcee character in collaboration with Mia van Leeuwen and Quinn Larder. The last play, *The Masque of the Red Death* was a devised adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, with the storytelling shaped by movement, directed by van Leeuwen. Julia Wasilewski designed costumes for *The Lighthouse Keepers* and designed the set for the entire production. Carla

Simon designed costumes, properties, special effects, and set dressing for *The Kiss of Blood.* I designed the costumes and masks for the Emcee and Death characters, and for Prospero and his court members for *The Masque of the Red Death.* The lighting design for the entire production was by Lee Burckes and the sound design was by Kae Carter and Hannah Stobbe. The actors were Quinn Larder, Andrew Burniston, Bente Hansen, Avery Raine, Danielle Bernardin, Daylin Chase, Tina Martens, Mason Arsenault, Will Thomson, Alex Dodd, Grayden MacKay, Jacquline Paul, Harley Czech, and Mataya Mikuliak.

The show began with a team of medical professionals who wandered through the audience and asked them questions about their health to ensure they were in peak condition to witness the horrors of the evening that were about to unfold. An Emcee character rushed past the audience and onto stage, where he was also assessed by the medical team. He revealed a serious-looking wound and scared the team away. He exposed the wound as fake, and exclaimed, "the magic of the stage, everyone!" (Blum 3). He explained the history of the Grand Guignol and introduced the evening's first play, *The Lighthouse Keepers*, to the audience.

Originally written by Paul Autier and Paul Cloquemin, *The Lighthouse Keepers* takes place in a lighthouse, located somewhere in the North Atlantic. In the original play, Bréhan and Yvon are father and son, but our production needs called for a change to this relationship when the actor cast as the father was no longer available. Since the replacement actor was much younger, we decided they would be brothers. As the play begins, Yvon and Bréhan prepare for a storm and discuss life as a lighthouse keeper. As the night proceeds and the storm advances, Yvon falls ill. He realizes he was bitten by a rabid dog and as his illness progresses, he attacked Bréhan. Forced to defend himself,

Bréhan strangled Yvon to death, and realizes that he forgot to turn the lighthouse light on in the process. He gets to the light in time as a ship approaches perilously close to the shore, then falls to Yvon's side. In our staging, the Emcee placed his hat on Yvon's ghost as he drifted past off stage, and the play ended.

The Emcee continued his history lesson with the audience as the next play was set up behind the curtain. *The Kiss of Blood* by Jean Aragny and Francis Neilson begins in an operating theatre, where an unknown figure undergoes some type of brain surgery and fails to survive. As the surgeon, Doctor Leduc and his assistants discuss the unfortunate results, a man, Joubert, barges in with complaints of a pain in his finger. He insists it be amputated when there is nothing visibly wrong with it. Leduc and his staff fake the operation and when Joubert discovers this, he cuts off his own finger and leaves. At this point in the show, there was an intermission. The Emcee picked up the severed finger and with it, he conducted Georges Bizet's *Les Toreadors* from *Carmen Suite No. 1* as the audience clapped along. Act 2 is set at Joubert's mansion where Leduc and his assistant doctor, Volguine, track Leduc down to find out who he is and to check on his wound. They question Joubert's maid and learn of his wife's passing. Joubert enters and tells them he is okay and is waiting for his dead wife, Hélène, to exact her revenge. In our production, additional characters were added: two ghosts, known as the Spectre Sisters. They slowly crossed the stage, one from each side so they passed each other at the midpoint. Joubert was tormented as Hélène, who was not actually dead, rose from a trap on a lift to accuse him of murder. Joubert, seemingly insane at this point, takes an axe and chops off the rest of his maimed hand and he abruptly expires.

The special effects used throughout *The Kiss of Blood* produced a big mess, and the stagehands needed enough time to clean the large amount of fake blood that was

spilled on the floor when Joubert cut off his arm. The process of devising solved the time issue by keeping three of the characters on stage a little longer. The song, *In Nightmares* by Pins was played while Hélène and the Spectre Sisters performed a lip-sync to the audience. The Emcee joined them on stage at the end. He danced in a manner that induced laughter from the audience. This lip-sync also served to transition the audience into the final play of this production, a devised adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*.

In our devised process, the students developed the ideas behind what would take place in each of the seven chambers featured in the original story. They primarily used physical theatre, or a series of movements to convey the actions taking place. The scripted elements they developed were performed mainly by the actor playing Prospero, though there were some actors who chose to speak a line throughout. For example, Mason Arsenault remarked on Prospero's appearance during a scene where the court members demonstrated a fashion show. Bente Hansen played live piano throughout the entire play, and she was part of the devised process and selected songs with the group that were appropriate for each of the rooms.

In our version of the story, Prospero and his court were locked away in a remote abbey to evade the disease that was destroying the country, the Red Death. Prospero hosted a masque, and led his guests through seven chambers, each corresponded to a colour as in Poe's tale, and also to one of the seven deadly sins. As they moved from room to room, they engaged in various activities including an injection of Botox (blue/vanity), they performed a sexually suggestive dance intended to represent an orgy (purple/lust), they overindulged in drink (green/gluttony), they gambled (orange/greed), they ingested a mystery pill that induced the court into a dreamlike trance (white/sloth),

and had a fashion show (violet/envy). Throughout these rooms, one guest mysteriously and inconspicuously made intermittent appearances; if you only paid attention to the events at the party, then you likely missed them. As the party entered the last room, the black/scarlet room (wrath), they engaged in animalistic behaviour. One court member appeared to be killing another and they were interrupted by a strange sound mixed with a tolling bell. Attention was drawn to the top of the staircase, where the mystery guest, revealed to be Death, loomed. Death descended the stairs, removed their cloak, and each court member died, one by one, until only Prospero was left. As they were dying, they removed their party masks and set them downstage. A series of red silk shrouds flew in to represent a bloodbath and each actor's death shroud, and the court members retrieved them and covered themselves. Prospero confronted (D)/death with a recital of Annie Martin's poem, *O Death*. Prospero succumbed, and Death covered him with their cloak. The shrouds were collected by stagehands, skull masks flew in, and everyone resurrected and donned the masks. They engaged in a *danse macabre,* and Death removed their mask to reveal they were the Emcee.

CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH

In a conversation with director Mia van Leeuwen, she said that in her undergraduate studies, Grand Guignol was not mentioned in any theatre history courses so when she attended a production at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival approximately ten years ago that featured this style, she was intrigued. Her experience as an audience member left an impression that inspired her. She thought the show was both hilarious and gross and she appreciated the combination of joy and terror. She is naturally drawn to works featuring a macabre theme such as the art of Frido Kahlo or the illustrations of Edward Gorey, and these have an influence on her work today, along with her experiences of her first viewing of a Grand Guignol show. She is interested in the representations of the complexity of the human condition.

My experience in this genre was also limited. I remembered it being mentioned in a theatre history course, but not much else was said about it. My notes from that particular class actually read, "Grand Royale, puppets" as though I either misheard what the professor was saying or was frantically trying to write everything down and missed the point. Until now, I never looked any further into it, but to my professor's credit, at least it was mentioned. In my research, I learned a lot about this elusive category of theatre, and its connections to Gothic literature, of which I am familiar with the spooky classics that made their way into popular culture such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and of course the many short stories of Edgar Allan Poe.

The following is a brief recounting of the history of the Grand Guignol and how it relates to Gothic fiction. Death was a central character to the portion of the show I

designed for, so I examined the ways in which Death has been personified and represented, also outlined in the following pages.

2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRAND GUIGNOL

The Théâtre du Grand Guignol, also known as the *Theatre of Fear and Horror* (Gordon), or as Hand & Wilson cleverly label it, "slice of death" (72) theatre was in practice from 1887 to 1962 in Paris, but saw little success across the rest of Europe, or in North America. Grand Guignol became known as both the physical space it occupied and a genre. These experts all agree that Grand Guignol remains a mystery to theatre students because scholars have overlooked its significance, despite its international reputation for the disturbing subject matter and staging techniques it presented.

Fortunately, these particular scholars provide an in-depth look into the obscure world of this genre and the theatre it was named for. Hand and Wilson outline its history and present their theories on why it was so successful in their book *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror*. Its roots are centred with two key figures: André Antoine and his colleague Oscar Méténier who opened Théâtre Libre in 1887. Antoine was inspired by Emile Zola's ideas on Naturalism and followed the opinion Zola had, "that theatre must become naturalist or nothing at all" (Gordon 12). In their preface, Hand and Wilson note that experimentation with Naturalism in 19th century Paris is what made the Grand Guignol what it was (x). In other words, being in the right time and place with the right ideas in mind contributed to not only the theatre's success but also opened the minds of Parisians to the idea of Naturalism (Gordon 12). Méténier, whose creative writing was fueled by crimes committed by Paris' lower class, based many productions on these stories. As a former police secretary, he had ample sources of inspiration to draw from (Hand and Wilson 3). In 1893, Méténier and Antoine parted ways. In 1897, Méténier

adopted the same naturalistic standard as Théâtre Libre and opened the Théâtre du Grand Guignol (Hand and Wilson 4). Two years later, Max Maurey would take over and he transformed the theatre with a new concept: the hot and cold shower effect (Gordon 21). Méténier's plays were still produced, but Maurey's recipe of presenting two comedies with four dramas (these plays were in the horror category) is what made this effect successful. According to Gordon, "laughter was the dark and hidden ingredient of the Grand Guignol" (7).

New team members were added when Maurey took over: André de Lorde, an established playwright, and Paul Ratineau, who was not only an actor and stage manager, but also an expert in special effects. A lot of de Lorde's work featured disturbing themes and centred on adaptation, an example of this is a script based on Edgar Allan Poe's *The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether* (Hand and Wilson 9). Ratineau's talents for creating props and materials that would simulate human body parts and fluids would shock and delight audience members (Gordon 55). There have been claims that many people would faint each night, but there is less documented evidence of those claims (Quigley 2). What is more likely is that these claims, along with the house doctor Maurey employed were a marketing tactic to increase publicity (Hand and Wilson 12). Maurey would be influenced by the popular genre of melodrama and combined it with naturalism, though melodrama would take over as we moved into the next century (Hand and Wilson 9).

Camille Choisy took over operations in 1915. Under his management, emerged two of the theatre's most well-known and admired performers, Paula Maxa and L. Paulais (Hand and Wilson 18). Over the years, the theatre would change hands several more times. Eddy Ghilain would be the theatre's last leader from 1956 on and its demise in 1962 is speculated to ultimately be the result of being overshadowed by other forms of

entertainment, namely the cinema and specifically Hammer horror films (Hand and Wilson, 21). Gordon notes that each successive owner or theatre director had talents for attracting new audiences, and that is why the theatre remained operational for three quarters of a century (5-6).

2.2 GOTHIC FICTION'S CONNECTION TO GRAND GUIGNOL

One of the obvious connections between Grand Guignol theatre and the literary genre of Gothic fiction is the work of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). Poe is one of many recognized Gothic fiction writers and his poems and short stories have been adapted in various forms over the past century, including stage, film, television, and even video games. In one of the film adaptations directed by Corman in 1964, *The Masque of the Red Death,* Vincent Price portrays both Prince Prospero and the Red Death. Price is known for his roles in horror films and has starred in several film adaptations of Poe's work. Coincidentally, in a blog post about Corman's adaptation, author JDP reports that Price has been nicknamed "The King of the Grand Guignol." No explanations for this label are provided, but as Grand Guignol is synonymous with horror, and as Price is known for his roles in horror films, the nickname makes sense. It could also be a reference to the adaptations of Poe's work in the Grand Guignol since many of Price's roles involved the same.

The previously mentioned experts Hand and Wilson (9), and Gordon (82) reference playwright André de Lorde's stage adaptation of Poe's *System of Dr. Tarr and Prof Fether* for the Grand Guignol stage. In this play, an insane asylum is taken over by the patients who then impersonate the medical staff when they are visited by journalists, who are there to report on a new method of curing insanity (Gordon 82). Mia van

Leeuwen's recent stage adaption of Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* for *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022* will be far from the last.

Furthermore, the work of Poe was clearly influential on Grand Guignol not just in adaptation, but by way of his horrifying themes. We see the themes of mutilation, torture, insanity, and being buried alive that are found in Poe's tales echoed in the plots of Grand Guignol plays. To name just one of many examples of eye-gouging in the Grand Guignol repertoire, in André de Lorde and Alfred Binet's 1925 play *A Crime in the Madhouse,* a self-proclaimed cured patient, Louise, is attacked, and her eyes are gouged out with a knitting needle (Gordon 85). Similarly, Pluto the cat suffers the mutilation of having one of his eyes gouged out with a pen knife by the narrator of *The Black Cat* (Poe 260). In *Under the Red Light* (Gordon 136), referenced as *In the Darkroom* by Hand and Wilson (155) written by Maurice Level and Etienne Rey, a woman who was immediately buried after she died of influenza is discovered to actually be alive when her lover develops the post-mortem photo he took of her, showing her eyes open (Gordon 136). The buried-alive theme is found in several of Poe's short stories including *The Black Cat*, where Pluto's replacement, referred to only as a beast, was inadvertently buried with the narrator's dead wife behind his cellar wall (Poe 267). Other examples of being buried alive in Poe's short stories include *Bernice, The Premature Burial*, and *The Cask of Amontillado*.

Poe's inspiration is noted and celebrated in André de Lorde's essay *Fear in Literature* where he critiques Gothic fiction in general for being "feeble" (Gordon 144), but praises Poe's talent and creativity as unparalleled. He explains that:

> …his work brings together all the seeds of terror that can blossom in the human soul: physical horrors, moral anxieties, painful apprehensions of the other world, and even this sensation previously unrecorded in literature, *the fear of being afraid*… (145)

Based on his review, it is not surprising de Lorde has been compared to Poe and even earned the nickname "Prince of Terror" (Gordon 26) because of the dark subject matter his plays presented. Poe's influence on Grand Guignol playwrights does not end with André de Lorde. Gordon briefly mentions playwright Auguste Linert's admiration for Poe's ability to mix irony with terror (14).

Poe's work notwithstanding, Gothic fiction's connection to the Grand Guignol is evident in terms of atmosphere. Atmosphere, discussed here, will refer to the overall moods that are created by Gothic fiction stories and how they relate to a Grand Guignol play. I also compared the atmosphere of a story to the physical space of the Grand Guignol theatre itself. In the Introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction,* Jerrold E. Hogle discusses a spectrum of Gothic literature, which spans from terror Gothic to horror Gothic. Both are present in a Gothic fiction story and there is a tendency of an author to lean towards one end or another. He connects the terror Gothic to psychological effects and horror Gothic to the physical ones. The space between psychological suffering and physical torment is what either defines or blurs the boundaries of what is real and what is otherworldly. He states that on the psychological end of the spectrum, the reader is in anticipation of the horror because it is hidden or only hinted at. They are scared, but do not know what they are scared of (3). This calls to mind de Lorde's assessment of Poe's ability to keep the reader in fear of fear. Much the same can be said for many of the plots of the Grand Guignol plays, especially those of André de Lorde. Gordon describes the Prince of Terror's work in similar language:

> As a playwright, he mastered two principles vital to effective terror: creating plots where the suspense continues to grow until the gruesome finale unfolds; and the very opposite trick, preparing the audience for an inevitable conclusion they have already guessed. Either way, anticipation of horror was key—otherwise the

> terrifying and sickening conclusions would merely draw simple surprise or even laughter. (27)

In de Lorde's work we witness both the psychological and the physical, but his talent for building suspense and tension with the threat of imminent violence is what contributed to such horrific reactions, and ultimately what helped create the atmosphere of a Grand Guignol play, much like the combination of terror Gothic and horror Gothic in a fictional story or novel.

In Gothic fiction, atmosphere is created not just by the events taking place in the story that create a mood filled with tension, but by the setting. Hogle provides an extensive list of locations where a Gothic story's action could take place. These include, but are not limited to a castle, a graveyard or crypt, a church, a theatre, a prison cell, or a laboratory. Whatever the place, we can be sure that it is very old, likely dilapidated because of its age, and definitely haunted whether by a ghost, a monster, or some other past secret that provides the psychological terror of what might happen or what physical harm may happen (2). If we look at a Grand Guignol performance, the atmospheric gloom was established well before an audience member took their seat in the theatre. Hand and Wilson recount one spectator's journey from the Métro to the theatre as a "theatrical experience" (27) of its own. The journey began with a walk through an area most would think twice before venturing, the Pigalle district which, though brightly lit, had a reputation for being dangerous. The outdoor journey ended with the arrival at the Théâtre du Grand Guignol at the dead end of a dark one-hundred-foot cobblestone alley called rue Chaptal, which would have felt isolating and threatening, not knowing what could be lurking in the shadows.

In an episode of *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror,* which features the Grand Guignol, two narrators describe the atmosphere inside the theatre. It was initially built and used as a chapel, and much of its original character inside remained. Peche, an audience member, describes the smell that permeated the building as possibly being incense or wax leftover from the days of being a church. She compares the atmosphere to being inside a tomb. The claustrophobic feeling is not unlike what we might experience reading one of Poe's buried alive-themed stories or any other Gothic fiction story set in a crypt, prison cell, or other similarly cramped or dark space. The state of the building is also worth noting. Like the various settings in a Gothic tale, it was old and dilapidated. The second narrator of the episode, Robert Hossein, who served as a director for the theatre, comments on the audience reaction when it rained. Since so much fake blood was spilled at a night at the Grand Guignol, the audience was inclined to believe they were feeling blood when the roof leaked on them.

The last comparison I will make between Grand Guignol and Gothic fiction is the "hot and cold shower effect" the theatre employed. A similar device is also found in Gothic fiction, specifically in Gothic drama in the form of a combination of comedy with tragedy. Though he was criticized for it, Shakespeare was known to combine comedy and tragedy in a single play and Gothic plays, which came many years later, followed suit. Cox notes that for Gothic drama enthusiasts, it was a "mixed form of the drama that offended those who liked their dramatic forms 'pure'" (128). Arguments supporting the use of comedy mixed with tragedy are found in the earliest source of Gothic fiction, Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto.* Many scholars on Gothic fiction credit Walpole as the creator of the genre (Hogle 1). Published in 1764 under a pseudonym, it was first referred to in a subtitle as "a story." Walpole published a second edition only

months later, adding a second preface where he takes credit for the writing and adds the word “Gothic” to the subtitle (Marnieri 44). It is in this second preface we find evidence suggesting the use of comedy and tragedy is not that offensive. Clery comments on Walpole’s second preface, stating that it was “a ringing defense of one aspect of Shakespeare’s practice that remained controversial even in Britain: the inclusion of comic scenes in the tragedies” (30). Offensive or not, combining comedy with tragedy in a single play, like Shakespeare or other playwrights in the Gothic realm, recalls the hot and cold shower effect you would expect at night out at the Grand Guignol.

2.3 REVIEW OF DEATH IN THE ARTS

There is no database of archival photographs for a multitude of staged performances with the specific parameters I needed in order to analyze what Death looks like as a character, so I chose to study the representations of Death in the visual and performing arts by reviewing fine art and film/television, respectively. With such a broad scope of possibilities for how to style this character, I took a historical approach and started with Death’s appearance in Antiquity. Amongst its many incarnations, the Grim Reaper is the most recognized personification of death and is typically male. In order to expand my imagination and to avoid presenting something predictable, I discovered numerous examples of Death as female. Death also appeared in human forms and some with non-human features. They had Grim Reaper-like characteristics, namely the role they played in a person’s death or journey to the afterlife. The following pages survey the representations of death, specifically the personification of death throughout history and across cultures in an effort to understand what they could look like and how they could inspire a new image of Death (see Appendix A for images of Death in the arts).

2.3.1 DEATH IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Antiquity

The practice of personifying death dates back to antiquity. Ancient Egyptians personified death with Osiris, who was also a god of land fertility. Mark explains his appearance depends on which role he is playing. If he is acting as Judge of the Dead, he will be depicted as partially mummified, and has been described as terrifying on rare occasions. If he is acting as a living god he appears in a human form, but with black or green skin, which is said to represent the fertile soil he uses to help keep the crops abundant. He is shown representing royalty by carrying a crook and flail and by wearing a white crown adorned with ostrich feathers and is said to be attractive. We can find these depictions dating from 2300 BCE in painted reliefs, funerary papyruses, painted limestone slabs, painted walls of tombs, statues of gold, copper, and marble, and in jewelry.

Early Middle Ages/Late Antiquity (476 CE-1000 CE)

The next point I looked at on the historical timeline is Ancient Greece (c. 500 BCE- c. 600 CE). In an encyclopaedia article on Greek mythology's personification of death, *Thanatos*, L.M. describes his appearance as varying between a bearded old man and a beautiful, winged youth, depending on the time period. The closer we are to the Common Era the more youthful Thanatos looks. The author explains that this is a result of the changing attitudes towards death with the younger version of him correlating to an understanding that "the Greeks regarded death as part of life, the natural end of living." An uncredited article on pantheon.org, "*Thanatos*," provides an alternate explanation for the younger version of Death. Greek dramatist Euripides described Thanatos as wearing a

dark robe with a sword and other poets of the time suggested he was a foreboding figure. Artists of the time avoided such imagery and subverted the common descriptions in order to appease their audiences. In various artworks from Ancient Greece ranging from vases to tablets to reliefs we see a naked, winged Thanatos with any combination of a sword, an inverted torch, a wreath, or a butterfly. If he is clothed, he appears as though he is equipped for battle with a helmet and protective armor. His twin brother, Hypnos, is often with him.

Thanatos was not the sole personification of death in Ancient Greece. He had a sister, Atropos who was considered the goddess of death. The Fates, also known as the Moirai, consisted of three personifications of various stages of a person's destiny. In the cycle of a life, a thread would be spun, measured, and cut, each representing birth, life, and death respectively. Atropos represents the final stage. The Fates have been described as old and ugly. Atropos is shown with a scroll, a tablet made from wax, a sundial, a set of scales, and a pair of shears (Atmsa). Reliefs show her dressed in a Greek peplos and she has long hair. In some examples of art on vessels or reliefs, she appears to be young and attractive, though distinguishing features from the original works are hard to discern.

Around the same time in history, approximately 6th century CE, another female personification appears in Sanskrit culture in the Hindu goddess, Kali (Doninger). Most commonly, her striking appearance is filled with violent imagery and though she inspires fear, her sexuality radiates. In early paintings she is wearing a full skirt and beautiful jewels, a more benevolent image, but the frightening image prevails. In clay figures, lithographs, and paintings she is shown with anywhere from two to ten arms. Cartwright notes she sometimes displays a traditional gesture of reassurance with one hand and a gesture of mercy with another. She is seen wearing only a necklace made of skulls and a

skirt made of severed arms. She carries a severed head with one hand and various weapons in others. Her tongue dangles from her mouth and her skin is usually blue, though sometimes black.

In Japanese culture there is more than one personification of death. In the Shinto religion's creation myth, which was recorded from oral tradition between 708 and 720 CE, the deities Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female) were sent to the earth to organize and make sense of it as it was in a state of chaos. They represent both creation and death respectively. We see them in Japanese art as an attractive couple, standing on a well-known sandbar called Amanohashidate. They are shown stirring the ocean with a bejewelled spear, which is what they did when they created Japan (Cartwright). The other personification of death will be discussed further in the timeline, below.

High Middle Ages (1000 CE-1220 CE)

Next, I looked at personifications of death in Norse Mythology of the Viking Age (c. 800- c. 1050 CE), called Valkyries. In this example, we see another female personification of death. Mark describes them as riding a horse, wolf, or bear and represents a soldier on the battlefield, there to collect the fallen and escort them to Valhalla, the part of the underworld reserved for those slain on the field of war. They look as though they were, "epitomizing both feminine beauty and masculine strength and martial skill." Mark further explains that women were considered mostly equal to men and served as shieldmaidens, which simply means they fought with the men in battle while others were trained to protect their lands and property when everyone else was at war. Other interpretations show them with feathers or ravens as they were associated with birds. Freyja, who is also a goddess of fertility and one of the most famous Valkyries is

depicted as a young and beautiful and rides in a chariot drawn by cats wearing a cape of falcon feathers (Groeneveld).

Late Middle Ages (1250 CE-1450 CE)

As the Middle Ages progress, we see an interesting change in the representations of Death. We still see versions of Death in human form, but in the 13th century, the skeleton incarnation, still prevalent today, makes its appearance and dominates. Death in skeleton form presents itself in several different motifs. In his book, *The Gender of Death a Cultural History of Art and Literature*, Karl S. Guthke provides an extensive examination of the personifications of death in Europe from the Middle Ages to Post Modernity. He makes a concerted effort to focus on female manifestations in all images. In the following descriptions of the skeletal death personifications, I summarize Guthke's findings, and I use neutral pronouns in cases where we see both male and female versions. Where specific descriptions only apply to one or the other, the gender pronouns will be specified.

In the late Middle Ages throughout Europe, death is still personified in human form as a young man or as a bearded old man and is portrayed as crouching or cowering. Guthke notes that the point of this imagery is to convey that Death is powerless and should not be feared or respected. He states that when we see Death personified this way, we can "assume that Death's archetype is none other than Adam who brought death into the world" (47). This human form ranges from youth to elderly and the body is seen in various states of decomposition.

As religious views shifted, so too did the image of Death. Death as a skeleton made their appearance in the 13th century and is often depicted with a crown to indicate royalty or other adornments to indicate his nobility. He is named, "King Death" and his

presence is largely associated with the Black Death. Unrelated to Guthke's review, but equally noteworthy, death is personified in the King James version of the Bible as "king of terrors" (Job 18:4). In a shift from the previous Adamic depictions, this Death is authoritative and commands respect with his noble or royal image. He is also depicted in woodcuts as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, Death, and appears as a knight. He may have a bow and arrow, a knife, or a sickle (Guthke 49).

Early Modern Era (1450 CE-1750 CE)

The King Death images persist into the 15th century when we see the emergence of the Dance of Death theme. This motif presents a competing terrifying image of Death. Here we have images with a dichotomy of good versus evil. In paintings and woodcuts, we see Death as a skeleton, with some flesh still attached and mummified, or just plain bones (Guthke 56). Death is shown escorting people from every station in life to their grave, and though they are meant to be terrifying, can be perceived as playful and happy. Sometimes they have candles or an hourglass. When they are gendered as female, we see her with long sagging breasts or with flowing hair. She may carry a dagger or sword.

The next skeletal incarnation of Death is in the motif of Triumph of Death. This particular theme is shown as either a gentle peacemaker or a chariot-riding force, and if female, with her hair flowing behind her as she tramples over the dead. She is sometimes seen with animal features like claws or wings. It is noted that she was inspired by the events of the Black Death. She may have her origins in classical imagery, namely the Furies (Guthke 59), who acting on behalf of the Fates, were sent to torment the dying on the battlefield or bring disease (Atsma).

Returning to Norse mythology, we see a personification of death that emerged specifically in response to the Black Death. The editors of the *My Norwegian Roots*

website describe her as an old woman with a pale face wearing a red or blue skirt. She carries either a broom or a rake, depending on what task she needs to carry out. If she used her rake, there would be survivors. Her broom meant certain death for anyone who crossed her path. Her name is Pesta, which is a Norwegian word for the disease. In paintings she is seen wearing a hooded cloak and is either lurking or directly attacking her victims.

In 15th and 16th century Europe, Death and the Maiden becomes a popular theme in art and features an Angel of Death, both male and female. There is an erotic quality to this Death. They are seen as a seducer and that shifts to lover. This continues into the 17th century. Death is winged and can be a beautiful youth or a disgusting corpse or skeleton and they almost always have an hourglass. We also see a return of the apocalyptic horseman, and Dance of Death themes (Guthke 84). Death by sickness was still common and "the Renaissance and Baroque periods are in fact a time of increased preoccupation with death" […and] "the traditional confrontation of humans with death become so widespread in the arts that death paradoxically runs the risk of becoming trivialized" because this was also a time in history when people were flourishing with the pleasures of being alive (Guthke 85).

Haitian Voodoo traditions, which began around the 16th century, have their own personification of death, Maman Brigitte. She is the partner of Baron Samedi, the ruler of the dead. She is the *loa* or *lwa,* which means spirit, of death and cemeteries, and also of healing. If an illness is incurable, she will escort you to the afterlife and watch over your final resting place (Wigington). The editors of the New York Latin Culture Magazine website trace her origins to Saint Brigid of Kildare, a Catholic saint from Ireland. They also note that her origins could go back to Celtic Pagan traditions, where she may have

been the goddess of spring. A black rooster is a symbol associated with her. Wigington refers to the Celtic goddess as well, and notes that Maman Brigitte is the only Caucasian lwa. Barrett describes her depictions in art as red-haired, fair-skinned, and dressed provocatively. Contemporary art images show her wearing black and purple, or green, and sometimes accompanied by a black rooster.

Modern Era (1750 CE-Present)

The Romantic Period, which Guthke defines as the middle of the 18th century and ends around 1820 is the next time period reviewed here (129). In this period Death is now everyone's friend and is titled as such in many artworks as "Freund Hein." Death appears in both human and skeletal forms in these scenes, and like Thanatos, can be seen with a downturned torch. As a skeleton they are either bareboned or clothed and lean on a scythe. In this period Death is more commonly personified as male, but there are rare cases of female representations. For example, Félicien Rops depicts her in dancing shoes and a flirty dress as though she is befriending an unsuspecting partner to ultimately become more than friends. This friendship eventually develops into a courtship and Death becomes a bridegroom (Guthke 95). Death and love become almost indistinguishable, and as Death is seen to be in a partnership with their target, a sexual relationship is evident in the art. This paves the way for Death as a bride in the next century (Guthke 172).

The second personification of death in Japanese culture is Shinigami, which did not arrive in their culture until the 18th or 19th century. Their appearance is not consistent across art and in their descriptions. They could be any age, any gender, and in human, or skeleton form. What is known is that they are generally not threatening because like the ancient Greeks, they believed death was part of the journey of life. There was one point in

history where they were depicted as evil tricksters. One image by Shunsensai Takehara shows a Shinigami with a grotesque and monstrous face (History Defined).

Moving into the 19th century, Death is still predominantly male, but we see a female version of the courting Death in the previous period. She is often in disguise and lures her intended by pretending to be human. What we see in the art images is hints of her skeletal form like a bony foot or a reflection of a skull in the mirror that her object of desire cannot see. The male counterpart to the coquettish skeleton in disguise is Death at a masked ball. This Death is still a skeleton, but he wears dinner jackets, bowties, and a mask (Guthke 183, 186, 187).

The final skeletal form of Death I will outline is Santa Muerta, which translates to Saint or Holy Death. Gershon traces her history to 1797 when she accompanied Spanish colonizers to new land and is now based in Mexico. In the last twenty years, she has gained a massive surge in popularity. She has become a pop culture icon, with magazines devoted to her. In recent works of art in the form of digital renderings, paintings, illustrations for merchandise, statues, and figurines, she is seen wearing a dress, a veil, and a crown. The dresses and veils vary in colour from blue to red to white. Her crown is sometimes made of flowers or made to look like radiating light. She may carry a scythe, a rosary, scales, a globe, and may have a lantern or an owl with her. Her representation is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. In an interview with Santa Muerta scholar Andrew Chesnut, Brogan details his recent findings on her influence during the Covid-19 pandemic and has nicknamed Santa Muerta “the newest plague saint” as evidenced by new colour candle that emerged specifically for Coronavirus.

2.3.2 DEATH IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

In terms of portrayals of Death in the performing arts, I looked at both film and television series with Death as a character. As we are in the Contemporary Period (1945-present) in the Modern Era, I chose to outline the representations according to chronological type or motif rather than the chronological release date of each piece. In this survey we will see film and/or television equivalents to Thanatos, the apocalyptic horseman, the Dance of Death theme, the classic Grim Reaper, and the Death and the Maiden motif.

The first motif is the human-like personification. In the film *Meet Joe Black*, directed by Brest, Death is played by Brad Pitt. He is always impeccably dressed in a suit and is very handsome. This alludes to the renditions of the Greek Thanatos where he is depicted as young, beautiful, and unthreatening.

We see Death take the form of royalty like the images previously discussed in the visual arts, but as a human instead of a skeleton in *Death Takes a Holiday* (Leisen). Fredric March plays Death and like Brad Pitt's portrayal, he is dressed stylishly and elegantly, and is also handsome. Disguised as a prince, we see him in a royal sash and other adornments reserved for a royalty.

In a modern reimagining of one of the four horseman of the apocalypse, *Good Omens*, director Douglas Mackinnon portrays Death dressed in all black leather, riding a motorcycle decorated as a human skeleton. He wears a helmet, but when the visor is lifted, we see his skeleton face. Death transforms into the classic Grim Reaper figure as he dismounts, and we see him again as a winged Angel of Death figure.

In Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*, set during the Black Death, Death appears in human form, but he is dressed like the classic Grim Reaper. He displays the Dance of

Death motif in the final scene. He wears a tightly fitted black hood, exposing his face fully, and a black cloak. At the end of the film, he is seen on the horizon performing a dance of death with the classic implements of this character: a scythe and an hourglass. The scythe and hourglass are difficult to see, but the dialogue between the characters watching the dance confirm this.

The more traditional skeletal Grim Reaper representation is seen in *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* when Death intrudes on a dinner party. He is dressed in a distressed and tattered black robe, which is sheer in the chest area, revealing his bony ribcage. His hood covers his face, but we do catch a very quick glimpse of the skull in a scene cut. Like the traditional Grim Reaper, he carries a scythe (Jones and Gilliam).

Gilliam presents yet another death-in-art-motif in *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. Set in the 18th century, Death is shown as a terrifying figure, dressed in black with black lace gloves over their skeleton hands. The rest of their body is also skeletal, and they have long hair flowing from their skull. They have wings mimicking the Angel of Death from the Death and the Maiden motif.

In the short-lived television series *Dead Like Me*, directed by Fuller, the Grim Reaper is played by multiple people of different appearances, suggesting that Death really can be anyone. This is similar to the Japanese Shinigami, who share the same concept. Both *Dead Like Me* reapers and the Shinigami present as gentle and not terrifying.

Lastly, in the recently produced Netflix series, *The Sandman*, Death is played by Kirby Howell-Baptiste, a young British actress. She wears a tight-fitting black tank top, tight black pants, black boots, and a silver Egyptian Ankh necklace (Almas et al.). We could interpret her presence as welcoming as the Ankh is the symbol for eternal life. She is not scary and represents a more nurturing and caring Death like Maman Brigitte.

CHAPTER 3 PROCESS, MATERIALS, AND METHODS

The process for the costume design required on-going collaboration with the director, creative team, actors, and support staff. I arrived at decisions through several conversations with the director which began in March of 2021. These conversations took place in person, on the phone, through text message, and through email. We decided early on that the costumes for Prospero and his court would be introduced in the first week of rehearsals. The reason for this decision was to give the actors the most time possible to get used to how the individual pieces would help to not only inform their characterizations, but also to help them develop their characters through movement and masks. We were not working with a traditional script where information about the characters' traits, personalities, and development in relation to the storytelling is gleaned from a written text. The actors would be developing the characters through costume, mask, and movement.

To ensure the practical and aesthetic design choices I made were successful in the staging of this production, I attended several rehearsals to see how the costuming worked with the actor's movements. The intention was for the actor's movements be informed by the costume. For example, if they were costumed in pants made from a stretch-knit fabric, they could move more freely or if a cape was draped over a shoulder, it could be used like a prop and flung around to suit the personality of the character they developed. Attending rehearsals allowed me to see if the overall look was in line with the design concept. It also furthered my understanding of the movements that actors were performing and how those movements would in turn, affect the costume. In one instance, an actor was able to dip low and spin around in a belt with multiple pieces of fabric hanging from it, but the length of each piece needed to be adjusted to prevent tripping and interference from other actors.

I attended production and designer/director meetings and had daily check-ins with the costume shop in order to respond to questions, comments, and concerns from the actors, director, and support staff regarding my design choices. My goal was to ensure the performers' needs were met, in terms of comfort and the ability to execute certain movements safely, while supporting the storytelling and the overall production concept. I designed thirteen looks for *The Masque of the Red Death*, encompassing Prince Prospero and his court as well as a look for the Emcee and Death, portrayed by one actor.

I communicated the designs with a combination of digital collaged image mixed with digital rendering, and digital sketches. The first semester of my studies in fall 2020, I investigated various designers' methods of rendering costume design including water colour, gouache, art markers, pencil crayons, pastels, and charcoal. For communicating the designs in this production, I chose to use a digital software program to create the rough sketches and final renderings because it was a method I had not previously explored. Students I graded sketchbook and design assignments for in the course *Introduction to Design* were using this software proficiently and produced interesting results. If I were going to continue to grade assignments submitted in this manner, I wanted to understand how it worked. I purchased an iPad and the software in the summer of 2021 and used it for the rest of my assignments in the following semester. I found it efficient when rendering rough sketches and it was also very easy to create digital collages which is another effective way of communicating designs. In creative conversations with the director, I discovered her interest in collage, and I believed she would respond well to designs that were communicated in this manner.

The following pages describe each choice I made, and the process in detail of how I arrived at those decisions in the costume design for *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022*

3.1 COSTUME DESIGN: EMCEE

My introduction to the Emcee character, whose role was to guide the audience through a journey into the world of the Grand Guignol, was on through image van Leeuwen sent to me in early March of 2021. Their role was described as being the entertainer who is there to educate, amuse, and disturb the audience. They would also introduce each play within the show and would be revealed at the end as the Death character. The script had yet to be developed, but my mind's eye saw this character as cheeky and full of one-liners, much like the Crypt Keeper from *Tales from the Crypt*. I thought this persona was fitting since it was also noted that Death should be the classic skeleton figure. An image of Joel Grey as Emcee from the 1972 movie *Cabaret* was on the slide to accompany this information. His overly accentuated cupid's bow lip, white face, and tuxedo instantly reminded me of Klaus Nomi and along with the Crypt Keeper, those were the images I relayed to van Leeuwen in response. In an email conversation later that month, it was revealed that a "dirty clown" makeup look would serve this character well and a video of a theatrical dance piece called *Betroffenheit* by Crystal Pite was provided as a reference to this look. An overall image of what this character might look like was starting to develop in my head. In numerous conversations over the spring and summer of 2021, it was noted several times that there should be some sort of physical transformation for this character. It was yet to be determined if this transformation would take place on or off stage and what this transformation would and should entail.

3.1.1 INSPIRATION

In late May 2021 I was listening to Alice Cooper and when the song *Hello Hooray* began to play, I recognized how much the lyrics reminded me of our Emcee. As this character was on my mind that moment, I interpreted the lyrics as the Emcee speaking

about the horror show about to take place: *A Night at the Grand Guignol:2022.* From the song:

> Hello! Hooray! let the show begin
> I've been ready
> Hello! Hooray! Let the lights grow dim
> I've been ready
> Ready as this audience that's coming here to dream
> Loving every second, every moment, every scream
> I've been waiting so long to sing my song
> And I've been waiting so long for this thing to come (Cooper).

The show, lighting, and audience refers to this particular production. The scream is the reaction we could expect at a Grand Guignol performance. The last two lines cited could be in reference to the Emcee's excitement of taking our audience on this journey, and from a metaphorical standpoint, could be a hint that the Emcee as Death has been waiting for opportunities in each of the three plays we would be presenting to take life. For example, the "thing" in *The Lighthouse Keepers* is Yvon's descent into insanity that results in his murder and in *The Masque of the Red Death* it could refer to the illness that kills Prince Prospero and his court.

From what I know of Alice Cooper and the shows he performs, I realized how many parallels there are between his style of performing his concerts and the show we were producing. I remembered a 2014 documentary I saw called *Super Duper Alice Cooper* that detailed his life story, showing clips from many of the concerts he performed. In true Grand Guignol theatrical fashion, false limbs were chopped off on stage (albeit from a doll and not simulated to be an actual person), copious amounts of blood spilled, and there were dancing skeletons. Legendary horror actor Vincent Price performed with him as well (coincidentally, this actor also portrayed Prince Prospero in the 1964 film adaptation of *The Masque of the Red Death*).

Script Developer Justin A. Blum made references in the Emcee's monologue to the many stage deaths of Mademoiselle Maxa, a well-known star for the Grand Guignol:

> she estimated she died on the stage of the Grand Guignol at least 10,000 times in at least 60 ways, including: being shot, boiled in a cauldron, disembowelled, whipped to death, guillotined, hanged, quartered, crucified, burned alive, dissected with surgical tools, stung to death by scorpions, poisoned with arsenic, eaten onstage by a puma, and cut into 83 pieces by an invisible Spanish dagger. (19)

Likewise, Alice Cooper was hanged, decapitated, and shocked to death in an electric chair. In a world tour, Alice Cooper might die on stage hundreds of times. To me, it seemed all of these similarities, parallels, and coincidences made Alice Cooper the perfect inspiration for this character's overall look.

I had plenty of inspirational sources for this Emcee, but I had also hoped to develop something conceptual to speak not only to thematic references in the story, but the director's notes on the plan for a physical transformation. As the weeks went by, I studied the source material and the inspirational imagery. One of the images on the initial presentation was of a clock and the notion of time ticking away. The clock is used as a motif in Poe's story to symbolize our approach to death and the passing of time. Seen on tombstones in cemeteries, and in *memento mori* art from the Renaissance period, an hourglass is used to indicate the passing of time and the imminent reminder that death is coming for all. As designers, we often think in terms of metaphor, and I wondered how I could demonstrate this theme in the costuming. One thought I had was to methodically reveal the Emcee as Death with subtle changes to their makeup and costume, that ended with an old and decayed look at the end to show this passing of time and this "classic skeleton figure." Through collaborative conversations with the other designers, we thought we would achieve this with specialty makeup treatments that the Emcee would reveal by wiping away layers with a handkerchief to slowly reveal their decay and that

they are Death. The costuming would follow a similar pattern; each time the Emcee appeared, their costume would be subtly aged with breakdown techniques, for instance: rips, tears, and/or making it appear dirty.

3.1.2 SELECTION

I now had inspiration and a concept for this character, but I had yet to determine exactly what they would be wearing and why. At the end of June 2021, I presented my idea with Alice Cooper as an additional inspirational source, and van Leeuwen was excited about the concept. We also discussed that this character could be male or female, with a preference leaning toward a female role, but that would depend on who auditioned. There would also need to be a wound on either the neck or the chest that could be removed quickly and easily.

In August 2021, during a conversation with Justin A. Blum, the dialogue continued about the development of this character and which direction would best suit their costuming. We talked about the time period of the Grand Guignol and the importance of the historical layering in costuming for both the Emcee and for the masquerade scene. He brought up Baz Lurhmann's *Moulin Rouge* as being of the same era as our Emcee and the same geographical area of the Grand Guignol, and how the portrayal of Harold Zidler as the Emcee could serve as an additional source for inspiration. All of these sources were pointing towards a costume that featured a tailcoat and top hat. That same month, van Leeuwen and I talked about a possible colour palette for the Emcee, and we agreed that if there was going to be any red, it would only be accent colours, as we wanted red to be used mainly for Death and in the "bloodbath" scene in *The Masque of the Red Death*.

One of the phrases van Leeuwen used in almost all of our conversations about the design was, “the weirder the better.” In the case of the Emcee, I interpreted this a traditional with a twist. The twist would be in ensuring there is something unexpected about the costume; a feature or aesthetic detail that would not normally be worn by an Emcee. I kept this in mind, and I considered a tailcoat with three-dimensional geometric tails or protruding tails. The final tailcoat was designed to have an extremely exaggerated shoulder. This created a unique silhouette reminiscent of Klaus Nomi, who most certainly has an Avant Garde or “weird” aesthetic. The preliminary designs for this character were communicated with a collage of found images and digital rendering.

At the beginning of September 2021, Blum, van Leeuwen, and myself had one final conversation about this character. We were at a point where we had yet to decide if the revelation that the Emcee was also Death was going to be a surprise. According to Blum, from a dramaturgical standpoint, the element of surprise made more sense, and solving the issues of how the Emcee would appear each time with the various costumes in their different states of decay was proving to be challenging. How many times would they have to appear to achieve the effect? Would the changes to makeup and costume take place on or off stage? How would this affect the Death character in the end? Would there be a connection with these two characters if our Death character was going to be more on the beautiful side? With so many other wonderful things happening in the show, do we need to complicate the Emcee with multiple costume looks and stage makeup? We decided, that while this concept of passing time to slowly reveal Death was interesting, the simplest idea would be best. We agreed that with the world around the Emcee being changed constantly, and shifted into broken realities, it would be a welcome relief to have one constant throughout the show, an unchanging Emcee character.

3.1.3 IMPLEMENTATION

After the first script reading in July of 2021, the creative team discussed ideas further, and lighting designer Lee Burckes liked the idea of sequins because they play well with lighting and the Emcee would likely be in spotlight for all of their appearances. I would keep this in mind when creating the final look.

The final decisions on the colouring were a black tailcoat with red sequin trim on the lapels, black pants with red sequin pinstriping, black shoes with white spats, a black top hat with a red sequin band, a black bowtie, a white tuxedo shirt, white suspenders, and a red lamé cummerbund. The overall look of a tuxedo with a tailcoat and top hat was a direct reference to the inspirational sources: Joel Grey's character in *Cabaret,* Alice Cooper, and Harold Zidler. I chose this look because it speaks to the formality of the relationship between this character and the audience. They are the authority figure who is all-knowing, and as Death is also a powerful character, formal wear makes the connection between these two characters strong. Circus ringmasters, who are also known as Emcees, are often seen in this "uniform" as well, and their role is similar to the aforementioned characters.

I chose the red accents not only to add visual interest with colour (in conjunction with a reference to the inspirational sources), but to show the connection this character would have to the red Death. We knew that Death would be wearing red by this point in the creative discussions. In my research, I discovered the black, white, and red colour palette is the standard for the traditional Emcee character we see in Harold Zidler, Alice Cooper, and circus ringmasters. The pinstripe detail on the pants is another reflection of this uniform, seen on Cooper and Zidler in their Emcee roles. I chose sequins not only to play with Burckes' lighting, but as another way to connect this character to Death. Death

would have bejewelled accents that played with the lighting in the same way. I selected a white tuxedo shirt because there would be a bloodied version of this shirt for the wound scene, and I wanted the blood to be seen. A high contrast between white and red was the best way to accomplish this. The pants were built from a stretch knit fabric, at the suggestion of the costume shop manager, to facilitate movement. We were sure that the actor would be moving in ways that demanded a comfortable fit and stretch fabric would be ideal, and we were right.

The wound represented a slash in the skin and was made from gelatin, glycerine, and water. I painted blood accents in acrylic and used more gelatin for blood droplets around the slash. To start the construction of the special effect, I sculpted the wound from modelling clay and cast it in Plaster of Paris to make a mould. I cast three wounds in the gelatin medium so there would be extras in case they were damaged in rehearsal. I experimented with other mediums such as latex and foam art clay, but I found the gelatin wound held its shape the best and was the easiest for me to work with. It was not known how forceful the actor would remove the wound in rehearsal or during performances, so a durable material was needed. I learned about using gelatin as a special effect material when I had to find natural alternatives in the fall 2021 semester when I took a Stage Makeup course. My skin reacted badly to a mystery ingredient in Spirit Gum Remover, an adhesive dissolver, and I discovered how easily gelatin created similar effects without adversely affecting sensitive skin.

The Emcee's makeup look was achieved by using all of the inspirational sources provided by myself, van Leeuwen, and Blum. The result was a "dirty clown" look van Leeuwen requested with a white face (Joel Grey), rosy cheeks (Joel Grey and Harold

Zidler), dark eyes and accents on laugh lines (Alice Cooper), and a dark lip with accentuated cupid's bow (Joel Grey and Klaus Nomi).

3.2 COSTUME DESIGN: PRINCE PROSPERO AND HIS COURT

To execute the costume design for *The Masque of the Red Death*, preliminary conversations with the director took place over the spring and summer of 2021 to make decisions on the conceptual approach to the design. The director and I talked about identifying these characters in a historical period that is of the time Edgar Allan Poe set the story in, which is not actually specified in the tale. References in the story point to it possibly being set in the 15th century, but it is not explicit. We used this ambiguity to our advantage. Which time period(s) could we use? We decided the goal was to place them in a time and place that is not necessarily historically accurate but is inspired by the past. They should appear as though they belong in a world with no rules and look as strange as possible. The following pages detail the inspirational sources for Prospero and his court and how the decisions on the design were selected and implemented.

3.2.1 INSPIRATION

In initial conversations with the director, key priorities the overall look should present were noted. There would be no one specific historical period we could place these characters; they would hint to various periods. These periods would ideally have some connection to a past plague. There was discussion about possibly giving a nod to our current pandemic through either projection or some other way if this production ended up being performed online. One phrase van Leeuwen used often in our conversations was, "the weirder the better," and she stressed the importance of these characters being bizarre, and not traditional in the way they are presented. They could be seen as having a certain role, like they do in Poe's story, but they could also be something else from one moment

to another. For instance, one may be a buffoon or ballet dancer in one moment and simply a party guest in the next.

The director suggested that the way we tease out the bizarre would be "collage as design," meaning we would create looks by mixing various textures, patterns, and silhouettes, all from different eras. They were the elite entertaining the elite and they would be collaged together both in costume and at the party. This mashup of eras and costume pieces would create an overall look that functions as a living collage piece in both costume and the way their movements would be put together on stage. She referred to the story being a series of collaged *tableaux vivants* or living pictures. We decided that Prospero would be the only character that would be distinct from the rest. We would be in a world where nothing is as it seems, there are no rules, and we are all in disguise. We decided we would accomplish a bizarre twist of the historic yet not-historic look in two ways: by mixing and subverting gender-conforming garments and changing the way in which pieces were worn. We would not assign costume pieces that are conventionally gender-specific to the corresponding gender identity of the actor wearing them. To address changing the way something is worn, we thought pieces could be worn backwards and we could use underwear items as outerwear.

In the initial presentation, it was noted that the entire production design was inspired by Edward Gorey and Grand Guignol poster art. Along with the other components requested for the overall look, these were additional sources of inspiration I found helpful. As I looked through these images, a few notable characteristics stood out. I found the Gorey images disturbing yet playful. There was a sense of unease; that something terrible could happen at any moment. A strange character lurked in the background. Black, white, and red were standing out as a main colour palette in Grand

Guignol poster art. In early conversations with van Leeuwen, texture and patterns in fabric were welcomed. In these initial discussions, we also talked about a limited colour-palette in both costume and set, so in order to make the characters stand out from their environment the use of patterns and abstract costume pieces would address any challenges of the actors fading into the background.

With these considerations in mind I, contemplated which periods I would use to connect the story of *The Masque of the Red Death* to the costume design. Though Poe did not specify exactly when this tale was set, it is likely it took place between the 14th century when the Black Death ravaged Europe, and the 17th century at a time when not only did London experience a Great Plague, but when court masques were widely popular. The background work involved costume history research of these historical eras, including the Medieval, Elizabethan, and Restoration periods. The purpose of this research was to determine which of the silhouettes, fabrics, textures, and aesthetic details of specific garments would provide insight into the world of the play. I remembered a conversation from the summer of 2021 with Justin A. Blum about costuming this show and he stressed the importance of the historical layering and that there were many different time periods to consider for this show. We talked about more periods to draw inspiration from, and I added the 19th century when Grand Guignol was created and when Poe wrote this tale as this was also a time when outbreaks of bubonic plague continued in Europe and when we saw countless cholera outbreaks across Europe (Victorian era). A nod to these eras in the aesthetic details of the costumes would provide the needed insight into the world along with silhouette, fabric choice, and texture. I began to collect imagery of garments and architectural elements from these periods, focusing on Gothic architecture. I chose this style of architecture because I find it visually appealing with the

juxtaposition of an open floorplan made from tons and tons of heavy stone. The stained-glass windows and their motifs of the cycle of life also reminded me of the coloured chambers in Poe's story. I mixed in some modern avant-garde fashion as well to tie into our current pandemic experience with Covid-19.

Prospero's costume was intended to be distinct from the rest, as he was the only fully established character, so I used an additional inspirational source for him. In my research into past plagues, I discovered the similarities of the Great Plague of London (1665-1666) to the Red Death in Poe's story. Both illnesses have similar symptoms. A likeness between the historical and fictional leaders is also evident. Charles II was the King of England during this plague, and like Prince Prospero he retreated from his home as death tolls continued to rise. The Black Death that decimated Europe centuries earlier never truly went away. Retaining an endemic status in England, the plague remained there, causing a small number of deaths approximately every year, with a larger number of cases occurring every few decades. The 1665 outbreak would upgrade to an epidemic when the records reflected 100 plague-related deaths in a single week. These records, known as the Bills of Mortality, were kept by parish clerks. On June 13th, 1665, the Bills of Mortality reported 112 plague fatalities and by the end of July, when the weekly death toll reached 1,843, King Charles II had left the capital with his court (Rideal 43). Reaching their destination in Oxford, the court settled there until February 1666 to wait out the disease, gaining an unfavourable reputation during their stay. Fraser summarizes the opinions about the King around this time:

> …The honeymoon of the King and his people was, as has been noted, fast approaching its conclusion. A sick people, who are also at war, are hardly likely to love their monarch the more for such disasters. Nor had the events of the Great Plague increased the popularity of the Court, as may be imagined, particularly as

> these merry debaucheries and *dolce far niente* way of life was already beginning to spread downwards. (239)

The "merry debaucheries" took place both during and before the plague, even before Charles' restoration and it did not go unnoticed that the King seemed to have more interest in an unrestrained lifestyle than dealing with more important issues like the plague or the war taking place at the same time. It has been documented by Falkus that prior to the 1660 Restoration, when Charles II was in exile, he enjoyed a "round of balls, masques, and plays which comprised so much of the exiles' routine," (31). Past behaviour and interests continued, and the King and his court likely enjoyed the same distractions during their avoidance of the Great Plague in Oxford. Rideal describes their stay, quoting a Sir Robert Harley's servant, "there is no other plague here but the infection of love; no other discourse but of ballets, danse and fine clouse [clothes]; no other emulation but who shall look the handsomere [sic]" (84). It is also known that actors and playwrights were with the court in 1665 (Rideal 40). I imagined Prince Prospero's masque to be much like these "merry debaucheries." In Poe's tale, Prospero supplies his court not just with necessaries of life, but with all the delights they would need to have a good time, and perhaps get into some trouble, as "his plans were bold and fiery, his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre," and "not a little of that which might have excited disgust" (239). The devised nature of van Leeuwen's adaptation of *The Masque of the Red Death* resulted in Prospero leading his guests through the seven chambers, each one themed after one of the seven deadly sins. The masked members of Prospero's court danced, indulged in sex, drugs, and alcohol, and even participated in an "act like animals" scene at Prospero's command. This perfectly describes a merry debauchery, which further supported this inspirational source as an appropriate fit.

3.2.2 SELECTION

My initial offering was a mix or collage of Elizabethan and Victorian-style garments with a modern twist. Silhouettes and fabrics were degendered. I offered a mix of male or female-presenting or identifying actors wearing corsets or lace blouses or suits, dresses, and skirts. I selected rich luxury fabrics including velvet, silk, and satin that spoke to the court members' wealth and status. To address the non-traditional aspects, we would select undergarments that could be worn as outerwear and pieces that would normally be worn one way worn another including backwards or a bottom worn as a top.

I chose a black, white, and red colour palette, inspired not only by the poster art of the Grand Guignol and the artwork of Edward Gorey, but also because colour theory seemed to be an important component to the director as it was referenced in her initial presentation. According to colour theory, because monochromatic schemes use one colour in multiple tones, shades, and tints, there is more harmony in the scheme (van Braam). Black and white would function as a monochromatic scheme, reflecting the unity amongst Prospero and his court and also as a subtle nod to the current Covid-19 pandemic where the phrase, "we are in this together" was being used constantly in the media. Examining colour psychology in relation to colour theory, van Braam lists the many attributes of black, white, and red, their associations, and how they can make one feel. In terms of the white I hoped to use, the qualities she lists that resonated with my thoughts on Poe's tale were hope, safety, faith, and elegance. Prospero and the members of his court believed and hoped they could survive the Red Death; they had faith in their safety, and elegance is often associated wealth. She presents black as multipurpose, having opposing meanings, depending on the interpretation. One of the positive qualities of black, like white, is elegance because it is often used in formal wear. This formality can

also suggest strength, power, and authority, other terms van Braam used to describe the psychology of black. These terms often describe people who are wealthy, like Prospero and his court members. Contrastingly, black can have negative associations applicable to our storytelling. Death, depression, evil, mystery, and even a reference to the Black Death were cited as common meanings to black, all befitting of a Grand Guignol-style interpretation of Poe's tale. I thought the simplicity of the black and white colour palette would be comforting to the audience since the subject matter of this story was so tense and suspenseful and would provide a basic backdrop for the red I hoped to use. I planned to use red in the costuming to represent a disruptive force to this unity, much like the Red Death disrupts, as Prospero commented in van Leeuwen's adaptation, as "ruining the party!" According to van Braam, red symbolizes a warning to danger, and blood in terms of both life and death. I felt this would work for the court members because they are trying to evade death by a bloody end and red's presence in their costuming would remind us that the threat is there.

My thought process for black and red as court member colour choices moved beyond colour theory. These colours held significance in the fashions of the Elizabethan era. Cartwright states that the production of black and red dyes was expensive and thus, an "indication of wealth and status" if one were seen in these colours.

This offering was well-received, but the time between this initial proposal and the time our preliminary designs were presented, wants and needs would change. Over the summer of 2021 many modifications to the design concept were requested. The first alteration was removing any colour. We decided on a black and white only colour palette so that the only character with colour, specifically red, would be the Emcee and Death. This did not change the concept of the design in terms of colour, rather we simply shifted

the palette around some. I agreed that a monochromatic scheme for the court would be best because the plan for lighting was the use of a lot of colours. The seven different coloured chambers mentioned in the story would be revealed through the lighting, and a white set with black and white costuming would facilitate this best.

The next requested change was in removing any decorative details like buttons, bows, ruffles, embroidery, or any other elements that were not considered basic. We also removed texture and pattern. The ideal fabric for this new concept would be muslin or broadcloth, something that was flat. That would leave silhouette as the main element of the overall aesthetic. In a creative/collaborative conversation with the rest of the design team, the discussion around simplifying the designs centered around creating a world where the focus would be on the movement and not the costumes and that stripping away any semblance of a real garment would foster an even more unrealistic/abstract environment. This concept would allow me to continue to use my original sources of inspiration but to be more expressive with silhouette. For example, I could create a look based on a singular component of Gothic architecture like a Gothic window to function as a skirt or sleeve, or on an Elizabethan ruff and either stretch it out or enlarge it to an unrecognizable scale to create abstract silhouettes.

I created several rough sketches that aligned with the new design parameters and presented them to the director in a preliminary design package. The director responded well to the designs that featured large, sculptural, geometric silhouettes. Rather than entirely collaging clothing pieces together from different eras, I was collaging singular shapes together to create new and interesting silhouettes to accompany the historically inspired looks. These preliminary designs were presented to support staff September 16th, 2021. We received an unenthusiastic response as tensions were continuing to rise due to

the stress and impact the Covid-19 pandemic was having on everyone. This was a big show, that would be demanding on everyone's time and attention, and there were already two shows that were being worked on and one more to follow before this one.

The first budget was released the following day and numerous cuts to time and money had to be made. I, my supervisor, Julia Wasilewski, and fellow costume design student Carla Simon had several meetings with the costume shop manager between September 17th and October 18th, 2021, when the fourth and final version of the budget was approved, with many compromises implemented. In order to resolve the costume shop's concerns over time and money, I had to alter the designs quickly, and so drastically that most were almost unrecognizable. At this point I began to lose confidence and doubted I would be happy with the end result. The newest designs had actors with one featured element from a historical reference. For example, a Victorian sleeve would be worn over a basic body suit or a simple yoga pant and T-shirt or tank top combination. The newest designs were far removed from my original ideas, and as a result I was beginning to emotionally disconnect from show. Furthermore, the director was not fully on board with the latest version of designs, so compromises needed to be made again to satisfy the director, the support staff, and myself with my designs.

The director and my supervisor suggested we look at pulling costume pieces we could possibly alter. The support staff agreed. We also agreed that only a select few pieces were to be built. The rest of the costume elements were pieced together from "partlets," which were deconstructed costumes or pieces of garments. For instance, sleeves, bodices, and collars that were available in stock could be reconstructed and assembled in new and interesting ways. As a result, we had to compromise on the new plain design concept and add texture, pattern, and details back into the mix. I was given a

rack to pull pieces from stock and storage. I selected any garments that had a historical feel from the eras I was interested in or that could be interpreted to be from one of those eras. I adhered to the monochromatic colour scheme of black and white and did not set limits to the variety of texture or pattern. I filled up the rack and I was also given several bins of partlets to work with. The result was a rack with fabrics comprising of leather, lace, organza, cotton, brocade, rayon, stretch knits, velvet, and wool. There were sheer pieces, heavily textured pieces, and plain basics. There were more than enough bodices, sleeves, corsets, collars, cravats, jabots, pants, shorts, blouses, coats, vests, skirts, etc. to costume the entire cast without spending any money or constructing a single piece.

Auditions were held early October 2021 and having a cast list gave me the information I needed to begin piecing together their costumes, keeping in mind van Leeuwen's affinity to and suggestion of collage as design, and her voice in the back of my head constantly reminding me, "the weirder the better." I began the process by selecting dress forms that matched the actors' measurements and labelled them with their names. Starting with the court members, I went through the rack and the bins and selected items, first based on the preliminary images I presented. I selected pieces that, if not an exact representation of the garment or element rendered, would bear a close resemblance. Without exact measurements for the cast, there was some guesswork on what might potentially fit them. I placed these items on the forms until I had at least one item on each one. From there I was able to take a step back and analyze what was missing. I continued to piece together looks that met the design objectives and crossed off things that were on both mine and the director's wish lists. There were underpinnings and lingerie items placed with the intention of being outerwear pieces. Other items were placed on the forms backwards. For example, a bodice could be worn as a jacket or a jacket worn backwards

as a top, and a back brace worn like a corset. I juxtaposed solid fabrics with sheers, textured fabrics with plain, masculine pieces with feminine, ensuring I was not specifically gendering these looks, and historical with modern to craft this collage design. The overall look was coming together, and I was having fun with this new process. Fittings would take place beginning November 17, 2021.

One feature I noticed was that many of the dressed forms had something around their neck, or a high-necked top or coat. I looked at this as an opportunity to create one of my favourite design elements: visual metaphor. I ensured each court member had a tight-fitting piece or accessory around their neck to act as a symbol for their submission to Prospero and his wills, and as a constraint to act as a metaphor for being trapped with Death and that there is no escape. This visual reminded me of Medieval prison shackles and stocks, where the neck was restrained. It also reminded me that the neck is a vulnerable body part and having each actor have this piece around it could also be interpreted as them attempting to protecting themselves.

I modelled Prospero's look after Charles II and the preliminary design featured him with a doublet, lace leggings with full balloon-shaped breeches, a cape worn off one shoulder, a long curled wig, and a plague mask. I communicated this image with collage and digital rendering. There was one item on the rack that stood out as something truly distinctive from the rest of the pieces, an Elizabethan bodice/stomacher with attached sleeves. The cuffs were small white ruffs, the sleeves were black and white patterned brocade and bombasted, and the stomacher and sleeves were detailed with decorative white trim and red bejewelled accents. With the decision to have no colour except for the Emcee and Death, I asked the costume shop staff if we could remove the jewels for this show. They said no alterations could be made to this piece so I wondered if we could

keep the red jewels. It made sense in terms of depicting his status as the highest in the court and would be one more element that made him stand out from the rest. I found a pair of black lace dhoti pants that resembled the leggings and breeches and a black half cape. I felt Prospero's look was not only reflective of the design objectives, but also related to Poe's story as he was described as having "eccentric yet august taste," (Poe 237).

3.2.3 IMPLEMENTATION

With Prospero and his court fully dressed on the forms, I invited the director to review the group and provide feedback. She was happy with the results, and she was on board with the red jewels on Prospero's costume too as they helped to establish a connection between him and Death. She noted that there may be too much white in the mix and I should focus on more black pieces and make as many of the complete looks as possible asymmetrical. Only three members of the court ended up with symmetrical looks. From *The Kiss of Blood* portion of the show, Hélène would be at the party as herself and the Spectre Sisters would be there as well with only a few pieces added to make them fit in with the court as their costumes were white. The set was also completely white, so it made sense to use more black pieces as there would be more of a mix with contrast.

Fittings for the court members began November 17, 2021. I was terrified and excited at the same time. I worried nothing would fit and I would have to redesign again. To my delight, everything went well. On November 21, we added another actor to the cast. This allowed me an opportunity to use some pieces on the rack that I was not able to before and to potentially bring back some pieces that were eliminated in other fittings. There were only four actors I needed to see a second time to provide alternative costumes.

All second fittings were complete the first week of January. To adhere to the time and money budget the only pieces that we determined would be built were a doublet, a pair of breeches, and one pair of sculptural pants.

Prospero's first fitting was not until December 10, 2021, because the actor was in the mainstage show that was happening through November. When the actor was fully dressed, he transformed into character before our eyes, and he was thrilled. There was nothing I wanted or needed to change.

Due to scheduling conflicts, the director was unable to attend fittings. I took photos on my phone and showed them to her when I saw her in passing or when we had a quick meeting. She was eager to see them in person, and that would happen the first week of rehearsal. The costumes were revealed in person at rehearsal on January 26, 2022. I was the last person to enter the rehearsal hall and the costumed actors were lined up against the back wall waiting for me. When I came in, they faced me and exploded into applause. The director was overjoyed, and this was the moment I felt like I had my confidence back and had a positive connection to the designs.

I attended rehearsals once per week between January 26, 2022, and February 10, 2022, when the faculty at the University of Lethbridge went on strike. I went to only the rehearsals where costumes were in use. When the semester resumed at the end of March 2022, I continued to be part of the rehearsal process. This was an important part of the process because the portrayal of each character was determined, in part, by the way the actors moved. I needed to make sure attention was paid to garment choices for fit by observing and having conversations with each actor as questions or issues arose. It was critical to select pieces that the actors did not feel uncomfortable in when developing the character and that was valuable to the storytelling, even though the objective was to have

the costumes inform the movement. They still needed to have a level of comfort so they could perform at their best. For example, period-specific pieces like corsets had some of the boning removed because it was poking through the fabric and flowing garments were gathered up to prevent tripping hazards.

3.3 COSTUME DESIGN: DEATH

As mentioned in the Introduction, when referring to the personification of death, capitalization (D) will be used to indicate them as a character. The following pages outline the inspiration, implementation, and selection for the costume design for Death (please see Appendix A for images of Death in the arts and Appendix B for renderings).

3.3.1 INSPIRATION

In early conversations over the spring of 2021, van Leeuwen and I evaluated the options of what Death could look like. My initial response to her request for a "classic skeletal figure" was a Grim Reaper character similar to the image that ostensibly dominates not only in centuries-old art, but in pop culture references found today. With this in mind, I was able to eliminate several inspirational sources from my historical research and narrowed the focus to the Dance of Death motif from the Early Modern Era. His image could be terrifying. I was inspired by the descriptions of Death's skeleton having some skin still attached to the bones. He is also commonly cloaked. My thought process was that if I featured this character in a black hooded cloak, they could move in and out of the party like an unseen shadow. I wanted to avoid Death wearing any red because I had hoped to use red in the costuming for Prospero and the court members and thought it may be too much. I also wanted to avoid anything too literal. I kept previous design concepts in mind and ensured the costuming would follow the objective of being

from a period pointing to some era of the past, but not identifying the exact time period, with Death's costume.

The discussion continued throughout the summer, and we talked more about moving away from the typical Grim Reaper character, concluding it was too predictable. The hope was to create something more beautiful and the gruesome corpse images I initially presented were not conducive to this concept. At this point, I looked beyond the standard image of Death we see in popular culture and went back to the research for what constituted beauty or attractiveness in Death's descriptions. The answer pointed to human features that were not skeletal, but we were set on a skeleton. We then talked about subverting this popular culture image completely so that nothing about their look would be predictable. Instead of a male representation, as the Grim Reaper is most often depicted, we would present Death as female. We questioned how we could make our Death look female and I was reminded of some of the images from the Triumph of Death motif from the Early Modern Era where her hair flowed behind her as her chariot crushed anyone in her path. I considered adding hair as an option.

3.3.2 SELECTION

Instead of a black cloak, we opted for white. I reflected that since the set was white, Death made more sense in a white cloak, and they could be more easily camouflaged. It was important to the director to have Death in something red, and as decisions on the court members were finalized without the use of colour, this made sense to me, and I agreed. Using red would firmly establish that not only are they dangerous, but that they represent the plague, the Red Death, that kills everyone. The word "matronly" was used as a descriptor. I was shown and loaned me a book written by Koudounaris, that coincidentally, but not surprisingly has been on my wish list for some

time, *Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures and Spectacular Saints from the Catacombs*, that shows images of corpses adorned with jewels, gold, other decorations as a reference point to the beauty van Leeuwen wished to invoke. Since we were presenting this character with unexpected features, I proposed a dramatic reveal of Death's costume under the cloak.

As conversations continued over the fall, we talked more about the needs of the production and ideas about how we could potentially accomplish them through costuming. In particular, we questioned how the death shrouds would be delivered to Prospero and court. Could Death have a long train composed of the shrouds or hidden pockets where they could be stored? We also wondered how Death would collect the party masks and possibly also deliver the skull masks. If the answers were to be found in the costuming, then I would need to think about possible accessories and costume props Death could use in the collection and delivery. I explored the possibility of Death carrying a staff outfitted with hooks or magnets for the masks to hang from. We also joked about Death hauling a wagon of sorts but decided Death's movements should be effortless. Next, we considered the idea of pockets on the cloak's lining for masks and shrouds. This presented a few challenges. First, there was too much fabric in one shroud to successfully hide in an inconspicuous pocket and we had eleven to work with. Second, the extra weight would be cumbersome for the actor portraying Death. Lastly, this would also require a lot of coordination and memorization of who's mask is in which pocket and might be awkward in the staging. I thought perhaps the shrouds could be fashioned into a detachable bustle on Death's dress, but the thought was that it would take too much time and effort for Death to deliver them, and not as visually appealing for them to be pulling fabric behind. There was too much fabric to fashion into a shawl or a veil as well. The

most successful solution was the one we arrived at: the decision was that the actors simply placed their party mask on the floor downstage and death masks and shrouds were flown in. This allowed the actor playing Death to move more freely and the design to be unobscured by extra material.

3.3.3 IMPLEMENTATION

With these ideas and images, I went to work on the design for Death's costume. I decided on a full coverage cloak with a large hood to conceal what was beneath it. I chose red fabric for the cloak's lining so that when the hood was removed and the cloak brushed off the shoulder, it would fall behind and appear as though it were a part of the dress as a bustle and train. When selecting fabrics, I arranged to meet with the production's lighting designer, Lee Burckes. I brought her some samples and asked for her expert analysis on how these samples would respond to the lighting. We took the fabric into a room equipped with stage lighting and tried different combinations of colours with each piece of fabric. Red satin reflected the light and provided a lot of highlight and shadow. I chose this for the lining for these qualities as it would provide contrast to a sheer material intended for the dress. White satin behaved much the same way. White taffeta picked up and reflected the light even more because of its iridescence, which also gave it a ghostly feeling. I thought this worked best for a character who was otherworldly. Taffeta is also known for making a distinctive swishing noise when it moves, and as we had yet to discover what sounds or silences would be employed, I was intrigued by the thought that the sound of the cloak swishing could provoke an eery feeling and add to the atmosphere. We would hear Death, but not see them. I selected taffeta for the cloak's shell for these details.

My interpretation of "matronly" was mature and modest and I would demonstrate this quality with Death's dress. I presented two sketches of Victorian-inspired dresses, each with long sleeves, full floor-length skirts, and high-necked bodices. The sleeves and the neck details differentiated the two. The first dress featured a leg of mutton sleeve which balloons from the shoulder to the elbow and is then fitted to the wrist. The bodice gathered vertically into a ruffled neckline. The second dress had a bishop-style sleeve which is full throughout the arm, with the most fullness at the wrist where it is gathered into a cuff. The bodice gathered asymmetrically to one shoulder. The director was excited about the first dress and no changes to the design were requested. Inspired by the images of bejeweled corpses in the book, I chose to finish the look with a cage corset, a purely decorative accessory with strips of boned fabric connected to a center structure in the front, worn around the waist. Connected to this corset was a vertical column extending to the neckline. Both the corset and the column were designed to represent the bones of the ribcage and spinal column and were embellished with black, white, red, and gold gemstones. Underneath the dress would be a red body suit with painted bones to resemble a skeleton so a sheer fabric would be needed for the dress. There were two options I considered: organza and tulle. I took samples of each to my meeting with Lee and we looked at those under stage lighting. The organza behaved in much the same way as the white taffeta. It picked up and reflected light in a way that gave it a spectral quality. The tulle did not pick up or reflect any light. Its sheerness would still give it the same ghost-like properties, but it would send a different message, depending on what way we wanted Death to command attention. The reflectiveness was more visually appealing, and added a beautiful quality, which was part of the design objectives. Conversely, using fabric that was not as reflective was still visually appealing, but could be interpreted as more

ominous. I conferred with the director, and we decided to focus on the beauty of Death as a more luminous presence, so organza was the preferred choice. To ensure the exact time period was obscured, the dress silhouette was Victorian, fabric and accessories modern, and jeweled decorations from perhaps the Elizabethan or other early-modern period.

The dramatic reveal I had hoped for, where Death would remove the cloak and it would become part of their costume was not working according to plan. The costume shop staff and I brainstormed several ideas and performed trial runs with spare fabric, but we discovered the only way to achieve this successfully was if there were an inside belt attached to the cloak. This would not only have compromised the silhouette, but it would have also interfered with the cage corset. We decided to eliminate this particular dramatic reveal of the costume and simply left the cloak as a stand-alone garment. This resulted in a more successful choice in the end with Death using their cloak to cover Prospero as part of the death-shroud-bloodbath scene.

CHAPTER 4 MASK DESIGN

Initial conversations with the director on mask design took place at the same time as the costume design, in March of 2021. There would be two masks for each actor: one party mask and one skull mask. The party masks were worn only during the scenes when the actors were alive and well; the masks were removed as they were nearing death, and the skull masks were donned when they rose from the dead to perform their final *danse macabre*. The intention of the party masks was to represent life and the skull masks to represent death.

4.1 PARTY MASKS

One question we wanted to address were how we would achieve characterizations through mask design in combination with movement as characterization. We decided that character development would be accomplished in part by the individualism with masks and they should not impede vision or movement. No two masks would be the same, but some masks would have similar features. For example, mouths would be exposed on some masks but not all. This mouth exposure would allow for a potential lip-sync if the devised process took the performance in that direction. It would also allow for more flexibility with facial expressions on the lower half of the face and for the actors to be heard more clearly if they were to vocalize. In the process of devising, some actors chose to vocalize and they were heard clearly, without the obstruction of a mouth covering. For example, one of the few scripted lines developed in the devising process was when Mason Arsenault was heard loud and clear during the performance when he said, “Prospero you’re a masterpiece of a man!”

Creative problems that may arise were also considered. For example, what materials would be used to make the masks so they would be lightweight, comfortable, and durable. The actors needed to be able to see and move freely in a mask that did not interfere with other costume elements and a mask that could also withstand a fall to the floor and last the life of the production. The production was originally planned to be approximately one month of rehearsals and five performances.

Other issues we needed to address were the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions in place as a result. I required options, should personal protective equipment (PPE) mask restrictions not be lifted in time for the performance. The mask design and creation techniques would need to facilitate quick alterations such as adding a piece of clear plastic, or perhaps incorporating a stylistic approach to the design wherein the nose and mouth covering would be part of the design or would complement an industry-acceptable PPE mask.

4.1.1 INSPIRATION

With the parameters of functionality set, we needed to address the aesthetic choices in the mask design. Again, van Leeuwen stressed the importance of "the weirder the better," and synonyms for weird were mentioned and examined including bizarre, grotesque, unusual, and peculiar. All of these words not only reflected direct references to Poe's story, but the "eccentric taste" of Prince Prospero (237) reminded me of another strange masquerade ball scene from my favourite movie, one I have seen countless times since childhood, Henson's *Labyrinth*. The main character, Sarah, finds herself in a poison-induced dream sequence where dancers waltz in pastel-coloured Georgian-inspired costumes and grotesquely sculpted masks. The masks have always reminded me of the aptly named *grotesques* from Gothic architecture. When I studied fashion design in

2014, we were taught to look to architecture as an inspirational source as design ideas are often mirrored in other disciplines. I used Gothic architecture to draw inspiration for the design, and it was an effective choice because the features of these decorative characters are undeniably weird looking with exaggerated eyebrow shapes and distorted mouths and cheeks. In other words, they are grotesque (see Appendix B for images of mask inspiration).

I sent van Leeuwen a collection of images I took from stills of the movie to serve as a reference point from which the mask design would be inspired. She was on board with this aesthetic choice, and she included them in her presentation slides to show the rest of the team at a future date.

4.1.2 SELECTION

Investigation into mask design and mask-creation techniques by exploring various mediums and stylistic approaches took place over the summer of 2021. I experimented with an assortment of materials and methods including papier mâché, fabric mâché with organza and J-cloth, and Instamorph, a thermoplastic medium that is heated up to soften and sculpt, and it cools to a hard and durable end result. I made samples of masks from each material, and I found that paper was not only the easiest to work with, but it was also the most accessible material and the most cost-effective. It produced the results I wanted: lightweight, durable, and should I need to add features with paint or sculpting clay, the weight and working surface was preferable to fabric or the hard plastic. Since we all have faces of different shapes and sizes, and since the masks should properly fit each actor's face not only for comfort, but for safety, my supervisor and I decided that the mask designs would be sculpted on a plaster cast of the actor's face. The papier mâché method would be employed to build the masks on these sculpted templates.

In a collaborative discussion with the creative team, it was suggested I purchase Play Doh to make miniature samples, or *maquettes*, of what the masks could potentially look like. This step in the process was also recommended in one of the books I used in my research, *Mask: Making, Using and Performing* by Chase. This gave the director, the creative team, and the support staff a three-dimensional representation of the designs to better visualize the end result and provided a model to work from. It also allowed me to experiment and alter the designs to be more abstract, which better suited the storytelling. I made several Play Doh maquette grotesques in August of 2021. The feedback I received was to ensure that not all masks be symmetrical.

4.1.3 IMPLEMENTATION

Preliminary designs were presented September 16th, 2021, and the show's budget was released the following day. Several meetings to address time and money concerns took place between September 19th and October 18th, 2021, and when the fourth and final budget was approved, the issues were finally resolved. The numerous discussions surrounding the budget issues saw the costume designs change so drastically that the creative team was not fully satisfied with the results, and the mask designs were heading in that direction as well. Though compromises were expected in response to the budget, the end result might have seen masks produced that were not as thought-out in terms of design and thus would not support the storytelling. In order to avoid a mask design consisting of pre-made templates with glued on feathers and gemstones, suggested by support staff, I agreed to build all of the party masks myself. The support staff agreed to make casts of the actor's faces, and this work was scheduled for November 2021.

In late-October, anticipating how much work was going to be involved, the director suggested that I host a mask-making workshop with the actors as part of the

process. This would give me fourteen extra sets of hands for sculpting, and it would give them an opportunity for team building, experience in mask creation, and would establish a connection between the actors and the personas they would embody during the masque. This was an exciting opportunity for me because in my background research on mask-making, I discovered Chase's method of connecting the four temperaments with mask-making. The four temperaments are based on a theory of understanding human health and behaviour, a concept I was familiar with. I knew I could incorporate this method into the workshop.

The four temperaments are not a modern conceptual approach to explaining the human condition or to creating characterizations in stories. When I was in the process of completing my undergraduate studies in 2002, I took a medieval literature class, where humoral theory was introduced as a common trope, found in well-known stories like Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. In their introduction to the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, Gray, Boffey, and Trapp comment on how Chaucer drew from beliefs of his time to create his characters, explaining that, "the bodily fluids, or humors of which he was composed—blood, phlegm, choler (bile), and melancholy (black bile)—with their 'qualities' of hot, cold, dry, and moist, according to their mixture in him, would determine character and behaviour" (124).

Chase recounts the history of this practice, tracing it back to the ancient Greeks. He notes that Empedocles (c. 492-432 BCE), a Greek philosopher, determined that any physical substance can be categorized into one of, or a combination of the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water (9). We see this reflected in astrology, sharing similar methods in explaining personality types, by designating traits into the same four elements and is

still in practice today. Chase uses the temperaments to determine potential facial features and to help the mask maker understand the self.

This convention of determining personality continues today in various forms whether it be four colours, animals, or whatever designation the author or researcher decides. When I was a supervisor in a call centre, corporate culture dictated we all develop better ways of understanding each other and thus interacting with each other, and ultimately become more successful leaders. To assess our "styles of communication" (temperament), we participated in a workshop that employed a questionnaire based on the Merrill-Reid social styles. David Merrill and Roger Reid are two psychologists who asserted that all humans behave based on two factors: assertiveness and responsiveness. They developed a model that further divided traits and behaviours into four social styles: driver, analytical, amiable, and expressive (Janse). The results of our workshop categorized everyone into one of those four social styles and when examining the traits of each, they also correspond to the four temperaments. I thought we could use a similar questionnaire for our mask-making workshop.

Our workshop took place on January 8, 2022. I discussed the idea of using the temperaments with the director, and we decided that we would frame this as "persona building" since there were not specific characters to this portion of the production. I found that a lot of the online sources of assessing social styles or personality types required going through a sequence of questions then paying for the results. Others were time-consuming with many multiple choice, situational-based questions. To simplify the process, I found a document online that had a simple list of traits for each temperament. I instructed the group to put a mark beside the characteristics that described them absolutely. In other words, if the trait only sometimes applied, they were to leave it blank.

They added up each column and determined their temperament by the column with the most marks.

Using grotesques from architecture as an inspirational source, I drew several rough sketches that embodied traits of each of the four temperaments, creating five sketches for each temperament. Chase describes the melancholic features using words like “bony,” “hard,” “pain,” “skeleton,” and “death,” (50) as this temperament is connected to the earth element. I imagined what one of these faces would look like if it were strained by carrying a heavy weight, as he suggests as an exercise for the mask maker. The results were a series of grotesques with features that made them look stressed or tense. Conversely, the sketches for the phlegmatic temperament featured a more calming or relaxed feel as this temperament is related to the water element and water is loose, flowy, and tranquil. The sanguine temperament is the element of air and words like spirited or happy came to mind. The resulting sketches were more playful than the others. Finally, the choleric temperament, or fire element, focused on ideas that were bolder in the expressions with edgier, angrier, and stronger features. I ensured there was at least one feature that was not symmetrical in each drawing.

All designs included rounded eyes, some circular, some oblong. The roundness of their eyes spoke to their innocence; I imagined them at their masquerade party as having child-like ways of playing, dancing, and having no care in the world while the red death ravaged the outside world. The eyes are also the most human feature on a grotesque, blurring the lines between what is real and what is illusion, making us question what sort of creature we are looking at, and are portrayed with roundness. The goal was to make the actors’ looks as bizarre as possible and this was achieved through these abstract creatures.

Prince Prospero's mask was not based on Gothic architecture, rather it was based on a traditional plague doctor's mask (see Appendix B for inspiration image). The idea that he would wear this style of mask came from creative conversations between the director and myself. Since Prince Prospero was to be the only established character of his court, design choices for him could be more deliberate to support it. The director had the idea that he was hosting a "plague party," and as host he would wear the one mask that would distinguish him as unique and the one mask that gave a direct reference to an historical era where a significant plague happened, per our conceptual approach. From my historical research, I discovered that in 17th century Europe, Charles de Lorme (1584-1678) served as primary physician to Kings Henry IV, Louis XIII, and Louis XIV. He is credited as the inventor of the widely recognized plague doctor costume when the idea for the uniform came as a result of the 1619 plague of France (Paranque). In the case of the design for Prospero's mask, there were only four rough sketches for the actor to choose from, each corresponding to the four temperaments.

The actors selected a sketch they either liked or felt they could work with from the five provided for their determined temperament. The sketches were intentionally simple line drawings with no highlights or shading. I wanted the actors to interpret the drawings in their own way according to their own instincts. For example, if there was a circle, they could interpret this as either a three-dimensional spherical shape, or a concave feature; that choice was up to the individual. The reason for this was to allow them to explore their own creativity and make the connection to their masks stronger since it was not just their hands doing the sculpting, it was their thoughts and interpretations going into them as well. This also allowed for diversity in the designs. They began the process with

building a Play Doh maquette to work from, echoing the process I used in my initial explorations.

The group then sculpted their chosen mask design on a plaster cast or 3D-printed copy of their own face with modelling clay (see Chapter 4.2 for more information). To facilitate a collaborative effort in the creations, and to ensure a cohesive design was carried out, I made minor adjustments to the actor's sculpted pieces. In some cases, I made corrections that were needed in order for the papier mâché method to work and in others I distorted parts of the faces to maintain the sense of abstraction and asymmetry. Chase notes that, "a grossly asymmetrical mask will portray different expressions at different angles. This greatly complicates character portrayal, limiting the actor and confusing the audience" (32). Though Chase's argument is that a mask should be symmetrical, our goals for this performance were different. Character portrayal was not important because there were not "characters" per se. Confusing the audience would not necessarily be a detriment since we were in the world of the unknown, bizarre, and we were culminating in a very uncomfortable outcome.

Once the sculpted pieces were complete, the papier mâché work began with the help of a student assistant in the week following the workshop. When papier mâché work was finished, mask fittings took place with each actor to check for visibility and fit on the elastic closure. The masks were ready for rehearsal on January 26, 2022, though there was still some finishing work to be done. At this point we had not made final decisions on what colour the masks would be painted.

The masks were used in rehearsals with costumes once per week; in the remaining rehearsals they used plain, full coverage matte white plastic masks that were in stock, originally purchased from a party supply store. During this process, the director and the

actors developed an affinity to the matte white masks as they added to the "weirdness" of the scenography and characterizations they developed. They found the imagery visually appealing, and I had no objections to painting their party masks plain white. In early conversations in the summer of 2021, we talked about the masks possibly being grey or silver, but determinations on how that supported the storytelling were not yet made. The plain white masks completed the look with costuming, were complimented by the white set, and would be seen more clearly in the colourful lighting that was planned.

While requirements to wear PPE masks for Covid protection remained in place for the general public on the University of Lethbridge campus, the actors were not required to wear them during their performance for *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022*. This announcement was made in February 2022, and no alterations were needed for the masks that were built for the show.

4.2 SKULL MASKS

In an email conversation in March 2021, the director requested that the cast have "death skeleton" masks to perform their final dance of death. She attached an image of a Hallowe'en mask as an option with the suggestion we purchase them. We discussed the option of making these with the papier mâché method, but as time and money concerns with the budget were becoming major issues, the plan changed to source these masks online and to look in stores closer to Hallowe'en to find enough for the cast.

We had not yet determined how the actors would don their death masks. We questioned whether they would be found on stage, stored in a costume pocket, or potentially flown in. If they were to be stored in their costume's pockets, then we would need to consider a flexible material that could be folded or potentially stepped on or otherwise squished under a body yet retain its shape.

In a meeting with van Leeuwen that took place in June 2021, an inspirational source was provided to me as a guide for what she wanted these skull masks to achieve in their aesthetic. This source was an image from *The Dance of Reality,* a 2013 film directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky. The image was from a scene where a funeral procession makes its way down a street and the camera briefly pans to a group of onlookers, clad in what appears to be papier mâché skull masks. Looking at all of them together, we see a similar overall look, but when each one is examined individually, there are discernible differences in the depths of the cheekbones, teeth placement, jawline, etc. For our purchased masks, I would make minor aesthetic modifications with paint, highlighting and contouring different parts of the skull so there would be distinctions between them. The goal was to have a uniform look, but with some individuality so they were not all completely identical, much like this inspirational source.

In September 2021, I approved the purchase of Hallowe'en skull masks. They were made from flexible foam latex, which was the best material for storing the masks in a costume pocket. However, there were only seven masks purchased and we needed fourteen. To make up the difference, I would continue to look for the rest in stores and online. Unfortunately, this was proving to be challenging. There was only one source that had the same masks, and they would not ship to Lethbridge. They were located in British Columbia, so driving there was not an option. I checked party supply stores in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge, but there were not enough masks for the rest of the cast that were suitable in both style and in budget. The masks I was able to source were either over budget or designed to be expressive, scary Hallowe'en skulls and that was not the appearance we envisioned. Even with my plans for painting, I was not confident they

would read as anything but a Hallowe'en mask. They were also made of hard plastic and would not fold to fit into a pocket. It was time to think of other solutions.

We decided to revisit the original plan of all papier mâché. This would provide a cohesive unit of masks to support the storytelling as they would all be made from the same material. With the party masks having such a personal touch with the actors' hands doing the work, I wanted to put that same personalization into the death masks. It had become important to me to create each actor's death persona as part of my research process; to actively participate in a *memento mori* practice, contemplating our mortality as I did when I studied the representations of death in art. I employed the same methods that were used for the party masks: sculpting a skull mask onto a plaster cast of each actor's face, then building the mask with papier mâché. They were painted to resemble a realistic skull with natural bone shades and then highlighted and contoured to set apart the various features and allow them to be seen on stage. To solve the challenge of how the actors would don these masks, the creative team decided that the masks would be hung from a pipe with fishing line and magnets, then flown into a predetermined position for the actors to easily retrieve and put on.

4.3 DEATH'S MASK

In one of our conversations about Death's appearance, we talked about playing with proportion to give an otherworldly effect and I decided to incorporate this as part of the mask design. The mask for Death was inspired by both the *Heavenly Bodies* book and the image from *The Dance of Realty* supplied to me as inspiration for the skull masks. I chose not to sculpt this skull on the actor's face for two reasons. First, because I was altering the proportions of Death's skull, I needed the face itself to be bigger, and the actor's cast was unfortunately too shallow for even a life-sized face. This would have

required significant alterations to the cast before I could begin sculpting. Second, even though I was making it with a slightly exaggerated proportion, I still wanted to maintain a realistic overall look to it. The skull masks for Prospero and his court most certainly looked like skulls, but Death was special and had to look exactly like an actual skull, so the features had to be just right. When I approved the purchase for the foam latex Hallowe'en masks, a hard plastic skull mask with an articulated jaw was purchased with them. In terms of proportion and topography, this mask was perfect. To maintain consistency and because it was somewhat heavy as it was, I chose to make it with papier mâché and paint the features with the same bone shades, highlight and shadow as the other skull masks. I planned to make this as a full-head mask to cover the actor's hair because this character was not previously a specific person who died; they are the personification of death, itself. Distinguishing human features like the actor's hair would not effectively tell this story. With this thought in mind, I chose to forego adding hair to the mask as a reference to the Triumph of Death motif so that it would not be confused as the actor's hair. I also imagined not everyone would know that particular reference, and again wanted to turn against the rotting corpse image. Instead, I completed the design with a red satin padded headband, which I bejewelled with the same gemstones as the corset and column, to give it a feminine look, as this representation was meant to be female, and the headband is a modern accessory, which addresses the historical layering concept in the initial design objectives. I constructed a skull cap from lightweight cotton and soaked it in Flexbond to give it a flexible stiffness so it could be removed easily yet retain its shape.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND REFLECTION

It can be challenging to create a story-enhancing visual representation of a character without a script to work from. This document provides their motivations, emotions, personality traits, likes, dislikes, and any other given circumstances that are important pieces of the storytelling. In the case of devised theatre, there is not necessarily a script as a starting point with which to gather this information. It could begin with a painting or a poem, or even an object or an article of clothing. Through collective and collaborative discoveries, what we do get is a theme or an idea for a story with which we can build on. In the case of our production of *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022*, the devised portion of the show started with a popular Gothic fiction story by Edgar Allan Poe with a renowned character and an equally ubiquitous theme: D/death. We represented death on stage, both as an act of (d) and as a personification of (D). Through a series of various devising techniques including collage, physical theatre, and musical improvisation, we retold the story of *The Masque of the Red Death* in a reimagined way (see 1.2 Synopsis for details) and arguably captured the spirit of Poe's work through our choices. In terms of Radosavljević's quotation of Mike Alfred's interview, we found the "equivalent theatrical forms" of Poe's literary devices. To name a couple of examples, the imagery for blood was reimagined with luxurious red silks, which presents the idea that there is beauty in horror. The allegory of the seven rooms representing stages of life was retold as the seven deadly sins as its own allegory for life and being alive. The following is a reflection on the design choices I made, the production in general, and how they both fit with the research I conducted.

Overall, the collaborative and collective efforts of the production and creative team led to a successful outcome. The director communicated early on that she wanted

this to be “theatre performed by ghosts.” This characteristic alludes to a Gothic atmosphere and that was most certainly achieved through costuming. We were left to question whether the Emcee was a spectral figure like we would find in an old Gothic tale, supported through the choice of stage makeup, and further demonstrated through the revelation that he was also Death. Death was otherworldly with their many ghostly features like their silhouette when cloaked in white, and with the visuals of their bones seen through the dress. Prospero’s court, dressed mostly in black, gave a claustrophobic feeling with their darkness. The strangeness of the arrangement, or collage of costume pieces and masks also created a sense of unease as we could not really tell if we were in reality or fantasy.

The historical approach allowed me to delve deep into other times, places, and cultures. This afforded me the opportunity to learn how things were done in the past and in other cultures in order to be clear in the choices I made. It further strengthened those choices as well because I produced designs that were well thought out and intentional. It made them more interesting and visually appealing, and also allowed the audience to emotionally connect with the story.

The historical research on the representations of Death was beneficial because in looking at how Death has been portrayed over time, I was able to address whether those characterizations are appropriate today, for this piece of theatre. The information ultimately gave me what I needed to best create them as a character. The goal was to create a simultaneously frightening and beautiful Death. The design I produced hints at several of the personifications and inspirational sources I presented in this paper, and upon reflection some of those were coincidental. For example, when van Leeuwen saw the final renderings for Death, she commented on how they reminded her of Frida

Kahlo's *The Broken Column* and reminded me that Kahlo is an inspiration for her. I then looked this image up and the subject is also wearing a cage-style corset with a column revealed in her torn torso, like the column on Death's dress was there to represent the vertebrae. Another coincidence is also regarding the cage corset. My intention was to represent ribs and we can see the Grim Reaper's ribs through his sheer cloak at the dinner party in *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life.* The first moment van Leeuwen saw Death's costume was on stage during a dress rehearsal. When they removed their cloak, her reaction was all I needed to confirm how effective the choices I made were. I attended both performances and on opening night members of the audience were heard gasping when Death removed their cloak. A friend sent me a text message and commented on Death's costume and reveal being "opulent and expensive. Loved it! That mask was beautiful, and I could see all the details from my seat. So great!!!"

Depicting Death as female in this production offered an alternative presentation that was relatable to today's audience since remakes of movies with a more diverse character range are becoming popular. For example, the reversed gender roles in Greenberg's *Overboard* and Addison's *The Hustle*, (a reimagining of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, directed by Oz). This is another good reason for the current year to be in the title of the show because it demonstrates what we accomplished for a contemporary audience. Death does not have to be your typical Grim Reaper.

Researching the background on Gothic fiction was also valuable. Hogle notes that, "Gothic exaggerates its own extreme fictionality" (14), which perfectly describes the world Prospero and his court live in. The abstract set, in combination with costume pieces that were not representative of traditional garments or worn to represent them that way contributed to this "extreme fictionality." The world of our play fits so well with Gothic

fiction, apart from it being an Edgar Allan Poe story. The goal was to create costumes for this elite group in a world where nothing is as it seems, and nothing mattered except their own eccentric tastes and ignorance to what was happening in the outside world. The outside world is being ravaged by a devasting disease and they are happily invested in living as though there was nothing on the outside that could harm them. The costumes choices were so successful, they became part of the story when they showed off their attire in their fashion show during their envious phase, and truly fit in this Gothic world. Jay Whitehead told me, "The pants on Mataya alone are worth the price of admission" which gave me the confidence that I created a successful outcome; they really were "dressed to kill".

Richard Hand and Michael Wilson's expertise on Grand Guignol theatre provides excellent insight into what a series of plays within a single performance should accomplish. They state:

> The contrast between styles exaggerated both the horror and the comedy and an evening was structured so that the increase and subsequent release of suspense was repeated, climaxing in the main horror at the end of the evening. In this sense, all the plays within an evening's programme should not simply be seen as a series of individual plays, but rather as equally important and interdependent components of the entire evening." (11)

By this definition of an what an evening ideally entails, *A Night at the Grand Guignol: 2022* failed to disappoint. The confinement of the lighthouse and the anticipation of violence, the ghostly appearances of Hélène and the Spectre Sisters and their lip-sync performance, the melodramatic nature of the performances in *The Kiss of Blood,* the death of everyone at the masque at the horrifying climax, and the intermittent appearances of the Emcee with his comedic commentary not only matches this description perfectly, but also qualifies this show to be in the world of Gothic fiction.

The hot and cold shower effect we would expect was also accomplished in terms of the selection and arrangement of the plays. *The Lighthouse Keepers* was naturalistic, and serious. Mason Arsenault, who played Yvon was so convincing that one audience member really thought he was ill when he foamed at the mouth. She left the theatre in tears and her mother had to calm her down in the lobby. The mood changed with the next play, *The Kiss of Blood*. It was melodramatic and some of the choices the actors made in how they delivered lines was so over-the-top, audience members laughed. Act 2 was a little more serious, but the comedic relief came with the Emcee's creative dance moves to the lip-sync performance and his use of the severed finger as a conductor's baton. We were heated up again during the emotional ride of *The Masque of the Red Death,* and the death scene had audience members crying. The ending dance of/with Death cooled everyone off. It was uplifting and felt like a celebration of life.

The set and lighting also played a role in the hot and cold effect by the mood or atmosphere they created. The ingenious set design consisted of one main design that could be transformed and moved around to serve different functions and aesthetics. There was a staircase and seven separate Gorey-inspired pieces with a wall and platform that could be fastened together as one big piece or used as individual components. *In The Lighthouse Keepers,* the staircase was featured and it took up almost the entire stage. Stagehands moved the wall around the staircase with the pieces connected together and they encircled the staircase upstage. The lighting was mostly dark, as there was a storm right on top of them. The anticipation of the storm and the feeling of unease and claustrophobia was enhanced by the large, intrusive set piece and dark lighting. In *The Kiss of Blood*, the set and lighting enhanced the cold effect by being transformed into a completely different environment. In this play, only the wall pieces were used and the

stage was brightly and coldly lit to suggest a hyper-realistic and sterile environment of an operating theatre. The semi-circle arrangement of the wall pieces made it feel open and comfortable. In the final play, *The Masque of the Red Death*, all set components were used and again, in a very different way. Combined with colourful lighting, they were in motion, navigated by the performers and stagehands to reflect a changing and unrealistic world; each of the seven rooms featured a different configuration of one or more wall pieces until all were off stage for the final *danse macabre.*

In terms of the research questions about death I attempted to answer, I found that not all of the questions need to be or can be answered. I think having unanswered questions inspires future research and forces us to continually look for answers or discuss possibilities. I came out of this with more questions. For example, if you were to Google what the top art subjects are in fine art, death does not appear on that list. My question is why? It is because it truly is, but no one wants to admit it or talk about it? Or is it really that uncommon? Is their perception of death as a subject one that would also categorize it into portraiture when it features a personification or with landscapes if they are on a battlefield?

My personal, professional, and academic interests into researching death studies were fulfilled with this project and that was a win. I hope I helped to alleviate the tensions of a culture used to attitudes that are centered on being afraid to discuss death openly. Perhaps the images I helped to produced will lead into conversations about death with ease, much like my first time seeing a hearse did. I was afforded an opportunity to take a deeper look into death and theatre, which is something I have not explored, and this project supported my creative endeavour by allowing me to stage Death and add to a

catalogue of art featuring the personification of death. I hope to inspire others with my work.

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APPENDIX A

Death in Art Images

Figure A1: el Bahari, D, (1580-1085 BCE). *Pharaoh Incensing Osiris.* https://jstor.org/stable/community.13581950

Figure A2: *Statue of Osiris (feet and base)*. (664-525 BCE). [Greywacke]. https://jstor.org/stable/community.16010019

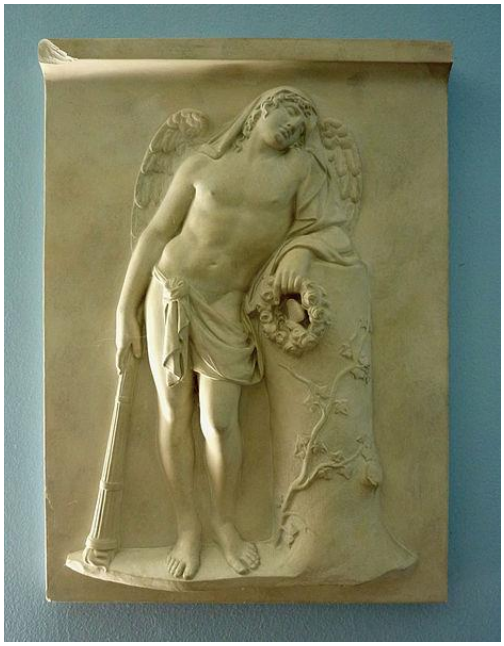

Figure A3: *Thanatos* (1788-1789). Gottfried Schadow, J.
Distributed under a CC by GNU Free Documentation license.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schadow_Grabmal_Alexander_6.jpg

Figure A4: Vico, E & Salviati, F. (n.d.). *Life (The Three Fates)*. New York (MMA). https://jstor.org/stable/community.12347739

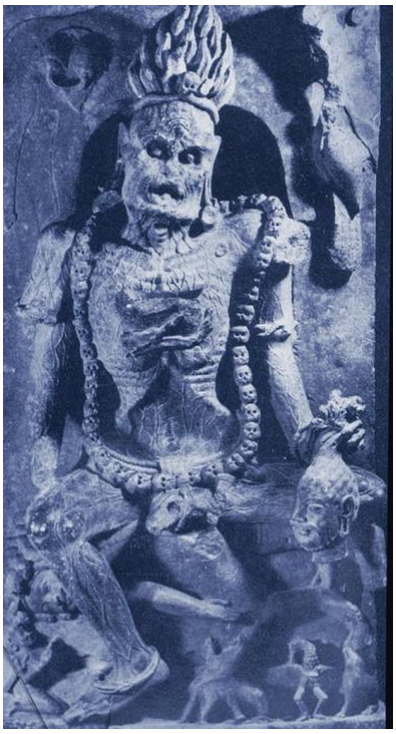

Figure A5: *Kali: Black earth-mother goddess.* (c.8th C. CE). https://jstor.org/stable/community.13880584

Figure A6: *Kali standing triumphantly over Shiva. Chromolithograph.* (C. 1800-1899). https://wellcomecollection.org/">Wellcome Collection. https://jstor.org/stable/community.24898514

Figure A7: Nishikawa, S. (n.d.). *The God Izanagi and Goddess Izanami* [Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper]. https://www.metmuseum.org/">The Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://jstor.org/stable/community.18634259

Figure A8: Alexander, M. (1865). *The goddess Freyja, riding in her cat-pulled wagon*. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Freyja_riding_with_her_cats_(1874).jpg

Figure A9: *Death as king holding a scythe. Etching.* (n.d.). [Etching;]. Wellcome Collection. https://jstor.org/stable/community.24888290

Figure A10: German School, 16th century. (n.d.). *Dance of Death* [Pen and brown ink, brush and brown ink, watercolor, and gouache, with touches of gold]. https://www.metmuseum.org/">The Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://jstor.org/stable/community.15999308

Figure A11: de Modena, N. (n.d.).
Triumph of Death https://jstor.org/stable/community.12393741

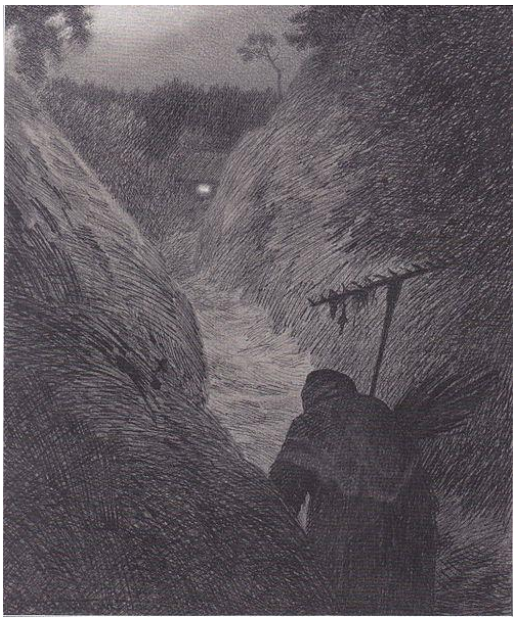

Figure A12: Kittelsen, T. (1896). *Die Pest* kommt The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kittelsen_-_Die_Pest_kommt_-_1896.jpeg

Figure A13: Baldung, Hans, d. 1545. (1517). *Death and the Maiden*. https://jstor.org/stable/community.13594212

Figure A14: *Saint Bridget of Ireland. Colour lithograph.* (n.d.). Wellcome Collection. https://jstor.org/stable/community.24865502

Figure A15: B. Beham & Sebald Beham, H (1548). *Death and the Sleeping Woman*. Paris. https://jstor.org/stable/community.12386020

Figure A16: Rops, Félicien (Belgian, b. 1833, Namur, Belgium-d. 1898 Essonnes, France). (n.d.). *Untitled (Death in Dancing Shoes)* [Etching]. Davis Museum at Wellesley College; Anonymous. https://jstor.org/stable/community.10589904

APPENDIX B

Design Inspiration

Figure B1: Arvesen, R. (2015). *Alice Cooper performing at the Majestic Theatre in San Antonio, Texas in 2015*. https://www.flickr.com/photos/rarvesen/15924132783/ Distributed under a CC 2.0 license

Figure B2: Halfin, R. (2011). *American Artist Alice Cooper in 2011*. http://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/pressroom/liseberg/image/view/alice-cooper-paa-liseberg-i-sommar-110662 Distributed under a CC BY-3.0 license

Figure B3: Barrère, A. (1928). *Théatre du Grand Guignol de Paris. L'homme qui a tué la mort*. Gallica Digital Library. Retrieved from https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en?mode=desktop.

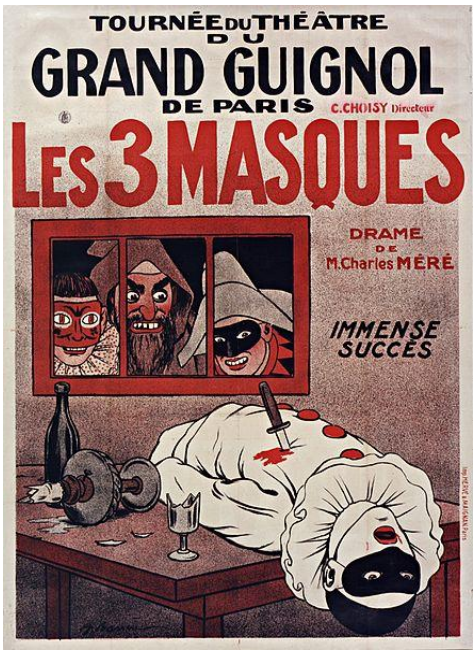

Figure B4: Barrère, A. (1920). *Tournée du Théâtre du Grand-Guignol de Paris - Les 3 Masques - drame de M. Charles Méré*. Gallica Digital Library. Retrieved from https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en?mode=desktop.

Figure B5**:** Lely, Peter, Sir (British, 1618-1680). (n.d.). *Charles II* [Oil on canvas]. https://jstor.org/stable/community.15729246

Figure B6**:** Historical Collage (2020). Author's collection

Figure B7: Trompette, Joseph (ca. 1865-ca.1895 (photograph). Collection of Grotesques, France [Albumen prints]. http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMA03090.html. https://jstor.org/stable/community.3875150

Figure B8: *Plague doctor*. (n.d.). Wellcome Collection. https://jstor.org/stable/community.24742177

APPENDIX C

Design Renderings and In-Process Works

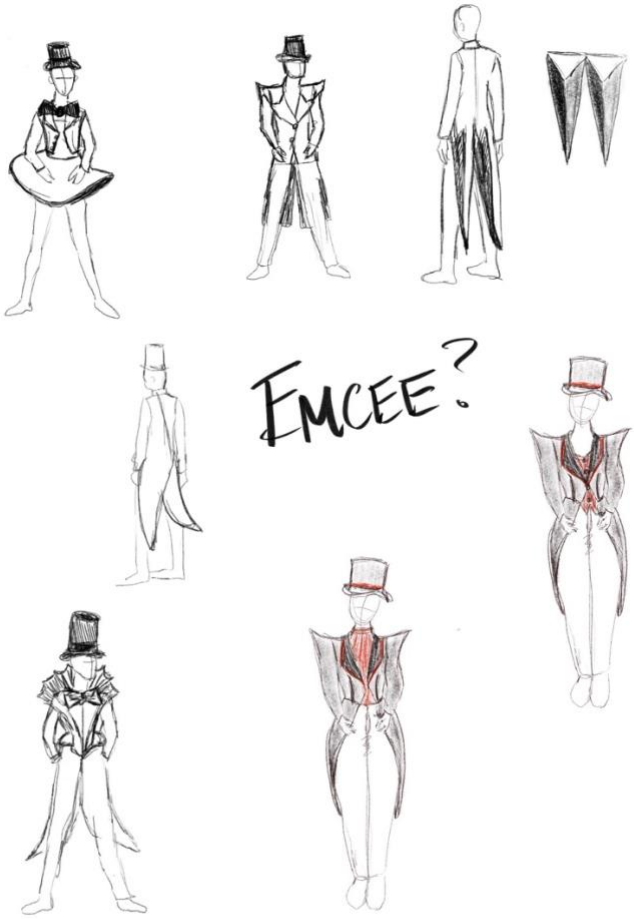

Figure C1: Author's collection (2021) Preliminary Emcee Roughs

Figure C2: Author’s collection (2021) Preliminary Emcee Collage

Figure C3: Author's collection (2021) Final Emcee Collage

Figure C4: Author's collection (2021) Emcee Makeup Schematic

Figure C5: Author’s collection (2021) Preliminary Prospero Digital Collage

Figure C6: Author’s collection (2021) Court Member Roughs

Figure C7: Author’s collection (2021) Court Member Roughs

Figure C8: Author’s collection (2021) Court Member Digital Collage

Figure C9: Author's collection (2021) Preliminary Death Sketches

Figure C10: Author's collection (2021) Preliminary Death Sketches Bishop Sleeve vs Mutton Sleeve

Figure C11: Author's collection (2021) Final Death Sketches

Figure C12: Author's collection (2021) Final Death Sketches with Body Suit

Figure C13: Author's collection (2021) Play Doh Mask Maquettes

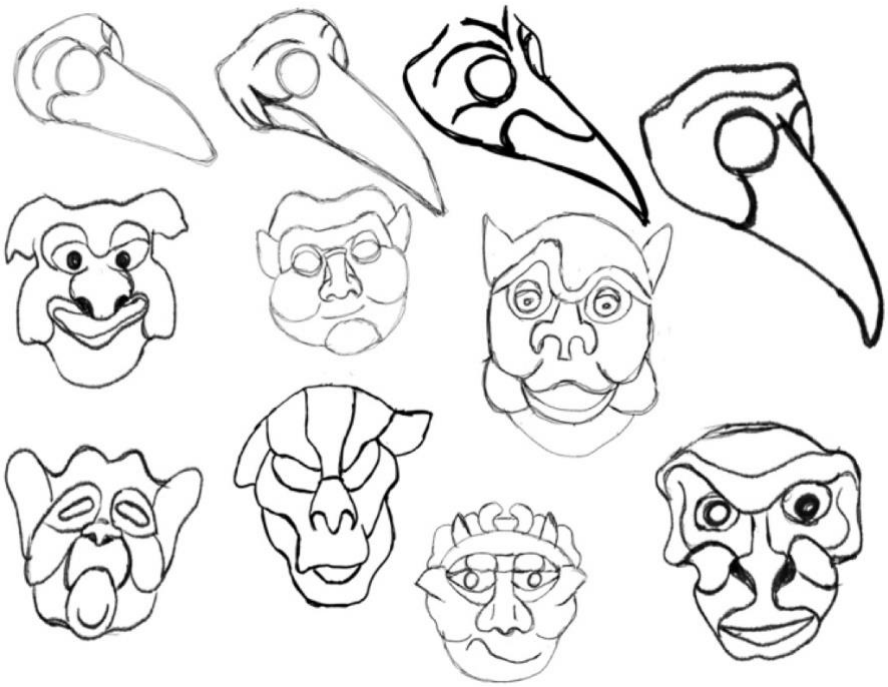

Figure C14: Author's collection (2021) Mask Sketches

Figure C15: Author's collection (2021) Latex and Art Foam Wound Samples Compared with Gelatin pictured at top

Figure C16 Author's collection (2021) Gelatin Show Wounds

APPENDIX D

Costume and Mask Photos

Figure D1: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D2: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D3: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D4: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D5: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D6: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D7: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D8: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D9: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D10: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D11: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D12: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D13: Photo credit: Julia Wasilewski (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D14: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D15: Photo credit: Author's collection (2022) Final Party Masks

Figure D16: Photo credit: Author's collection (2022) Final Skull Masks

Figure D17: Photo credit: Author's Collection (2022) Skull Masks Hanging

Figure D18: Photo credit: Author's collection (2022) Death's Mask

Figure D19: Photo credit: Angeline Simon (2022) Archival Photo

Figure D20: Photo credit: Author's Collection (2022) Death's Cloak