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# Myths Of The House Theatre Of Chicago (2002-2007): A Dramaturgical Study Of Chicago's "next Big Thing"

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**MYTHS OF THE HOUSE THEATRE OF CHICAGO (2002-2007):  
A DRAMATURGICAL STUDY OF CHICAGO'S "NEXT BIG THING"**

by

**MATT FOSS**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2013

MAJOR: THEATRE

Approved By:

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Advisor

Date

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## DEDICATION

To the Foss and McKinney Family

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee: Dr. Mary Anderson, Dr. Blair Anderson, Dr. Thomas Kohn, Dr. David Magidson, and Dr. James Thomas, for their consistent investment in my learning and imagination.

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Thank you to Nate Allen, Phillip Klapperich and all the good people at The House for their fine plays and generous access to their work.

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And in all seriousness, thank you to the many coffee shops where I worked over the past two years, especially Arnold's Perk and Prairie Chick in Okoboji, IA and Lorry's in Ames, IA. A good space for writing is hard to find and discovering your establishments saved the day.

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## PREFACE

In his book, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, director/scholar Eugenio Barba offers that the context of dramaturgy is less a theoretical one and more a biographical one (8-9). Barba's advice traces how his own dramaturgical impulses engage with the texts he is working with, and how his own personal circumstances have an undeniable impact on any study of any given theatre text (8-9). This advice by Barba proves exceptionally helpful for this study. Barba argues that biography has an indelible impact on a person's dramaturgy, and that most dramaturgies function similarly to the branched and layered systems studied by biologists and ecologists. Here, I am able to find a fortunate entrance point from my own biography, like Barba advises, into the work of studying this particular set of plays.

My first scholarly work was in ecology. Before moving to Chicago to pursue acting, I was studying to be a conservation biologist and was apprenticing as a research assistant in the Yellowstone ecosystem in South-Central Montana. It may seem a stretch to mention a twenty-something's college job researching elk as impactful on a doctoral student now analyzing plays, but the research paradigm that informs much of the scholarly work of conservation biologists has a rigor and method for looking out how living systems function that shares sensibilities with the practice and aim of dramaturgy.

It is beyond the scope of both this study and a preface to try and force connections of conservation biology's sense of place, system dynamics and value-based plans of action to a theatrical context. This brief discussion of ecology is prompted by Barba pointing to it as an aid to examining plays and my experience as a field researcher's impact on my observation and examination of plays. The skill set required and breadth of gaze necessary to observe these

systems at work and to then pull apart their constituent factors serves the dramaturgical analysis of interlaced plots and characters in performance texts exceedingly well.

Fortunately for this study, Barba's advice goes beyond just the suggestion to begin at biography or biology. His writing helps to build methodological bridges between the analytical means for approaching myth and the dramaturgical processes necessary for observing patterns within the plays of The House Theatre of Chicago. The workings of this methodology are described and demonstrated in subsequent chapters, but it is important to seat this study at the outset as dramaturgical in both aim and focus. This study makes no claims to expertise on myth or the structural methodology employed within, but tries to incorporate without misappropriating critical elements of both into a functional dramaturgy for analyzing a particular emergent theatre company's collection of plays. The methodology of this study's efforts to create a working *myth dramaturgy* in no way claims to be proprietary, as it is a response to perceived or potential patterns in The House Theatre's highly successful first work and an effort to discuss those patterns in a rigorous way. The process of creating this methodology equally lays no claim to groundbreaking originality, as it is the familiar, problem-solving kind of observation any theatremaker undertakes in their honest first steps in making a play. Attempting to articulate how observing elusive elements in narrative is similar to tracking elusive elk in Yellowstone Park is anecdotally silly at best and a pretentious waste of time at worst. However, these disparate sources share similar skill sets and the study finds supported connections that support this dramaturgical method as a viable one.

Again, while this study's aim and focus dramaturgical in nature, any result is a move towards clarity rather than hermeneutics or groundbreaking originality of method. Dramaturgy is a humble enterprise that is more concerned with the object of study than calling attention to the



process of studying or the author behind it. In The House's play, *The Sparrow*, the high school biology teacher, Mr. Christopher, tells his class that dissection does not mean to cut up but rather "to expose to view" (Matthews, Minton, and Allen 54). In theatremaking, dramaturgy works in any number of ways to better inform the choices made in production of a text. Here this dramaturgy is closer akin to the above definition of dissection in The House's *Sparrow*—exposing to view elements of myth—rarely concretely identifiable in narrative but rather instinctually present, all in hopes of seeing patterns at work in these plays.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In 2002, The House Theatre of Chicago was labeled “The Next Big Thing” by *Chicago Sun-Times* critic Hedy Weiss. Her high profile showcase piece was the leading story on the *Sun-Times* Arts section. The feature article followed just a few days after the printing of her glowing review of The House’s first, large-scale production in Chicago, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. At the *Chicago Tribune*, Chris Jones now sat at theatre critic’s desk recently vacated by the retiring Chicago Theatrical-Kingmaker, Richard Christiansen<sup>1</sup>. Jones wrote in his review of *Peter Pan* that, “If the 1-year-old House Theatre Company does not quickly become a major force in the off-Loop world, then you can feed my writing hand to a crocodile” (“Tiny House” 29 July 2002).

This enthusiastic reception from critics of The House’s work set off a meteoric rise for the young company. From the very beginning, The House Theatre of Chicago attempted to put themselves at the forefront of the theatre conversation in Chicago. The young House was increasingly presented as a primary example of grassroots success in the growing discussion of

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<sup>1</sup> Christiansen and his reviews championed many of the young artists and institutions that grew into the city’s current theatrical heavy hitters—especially the young group of actors that created Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Chicago playwright Jeffrey Sweet penned a celebration of Richard Christiansen’s retirement in the *Chicago Tribune* that articulated the longtime critic’s importance to the city’s theatre scene: “Almost unique among critics...I think he has had a big share in making Chicago theater. The old saw about somebody needing to be there to hear the tree falling in the forest applies especially to work on the stage. Christiansen has spent the last 40 years going into the forest, finding wonderful work and talented people, and also encouraging readers into that forest. He has helped create an appetite in Chicago for theater on a high level, and where there’s an appetite, there’s an incentive to meet that appetite, which leads to the creation of more new theater...he has been a valued collaborator in generating the Chicago theater renaissance. I seriously doubt that the proliferation on Chicago stages we enjoy today would have happened without him.”

Chicago as a leading American theatre center<sup>2</sup>. Few discussions of the state of Chicago's theatre community failed to include, for better or worse, a mention of The House. The youthful company seemingly fulfilled some aspects of those 2002 predictions made by the city's professional critics with the widespread critical and economic success of their 2006-07 small town super hero story, *The Sparrow*, but these successes proved anything but definitive in the efforts that followed. The narratives of The House—and here I am defining these narratives as the stories The House ensemble members tell about themselves in public fora, the critical reception of their work, and the very plots of their plays—are full of references to myth. Like the word “success”, “myth” is a weighted term that defies simple definition. The House provides a company-specific approach to myth as it pertains to their work, and their essay *The Invisible Foundation* articulates myth's ability to gather community because of its “universality” (Allen 6). This study attempts to examine the House's particular approach to elements of myth by creating a dramaturgical lens for effectively identifying these elements at play in their performance texts. By identifying embedded elements of myth in these performance texts, any recurrent patterns of their use are potentially brought into view. In critical responses to these texts by Chicago's theatre critics, we can further see how responses to the performance texts corroborate or reinforce the myths told by and about The House.

The work of French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, specifically the methodology outlined in his essay “The Structural Study of Myth” (*Structural Anthropology* 206-231), is an effective manner for identifying components of myth and their recurrent patterns. Lévi-Strauss

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<sup>2</sup> In June of 2004, an article by Michael Billington for the British publication, *The Guardian*, claimed Chicago as the current theatre capital of America. The article talks glowingly of the fertile “Off-Loop” theatre scene that gave birth to many of the city's larger theatres, like Steppenwolf and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Charles Isherwood's survey of Chicago theatre for *The New York Times* in 2006 does not go as far as Billington to give Broadway's crown to the Second City. However, he choose to include The House's production of *Valentine Victorious* alongside his reviews of larger scale productions at The Goodman and Steppenwolf, and gives the growing company high marks.

applied his methodology to narratives within his area of ethnographic research to try and discern patterns of relation, and ultimately interpretation and meaning. This hermeneutic focus is at the root of the fundamental claims made by structuralists like Lévi-Strauss, wherein their methods can provide objective and scientific accounts of meaning for their analyzed myths (Clarke 173). This positivist aim and hermeneutical focus makes applying Lévi-Strauss's methods to performance texts problematic, as the semiotics of audience/artist relationships and the diversity of exchanges in the theatre event make the issues of interpretation complex, even untenable. However, Lévi-Strauss scholar Wendy Doniger, in her *Theoretical and Actual Approaches to Myth* (199-204), offers strategies for employing this positivist methodology for a post-positivist study.

In a way, there are two separate areas of thought: *myth* and *dramaturgy*, we must connect before we proceed to examining the *myth dramaturgy* in the plays of The House. I connect these two divergent concepts through their shared theoretical foundations to establish a bridgehead that forms the methodological lens for this study. These connections lead to working definitions of *myth*, *dramaturgy* for this study. Wendy Doniger's methodological strategy helps to bridge our first gap between Lévi-Strauss' positivist research paradigms to a functional contemporary one. Then a second bridge must also be constructed between this adapted myth methodology and the dramaturgical approach to analyzing plays to create a lens for this study's texts.

Thankfully, Lévi-Strauss provides two bridgeheads to make these connections. First, Lévi-Strauss and his structuralist approach to myth in ethnographic narratives share a common theoretical ancestry with the work of the Russian Formalists<sup>3</sup>. Second, Lévi-Strauss uses a

<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to his textbook, *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors and Designers*, Dr. James Thomas traces the theoretical evolution of formalist thought from Aristotle up to the Russian Formalist and New Criticism schools of thought (xx-xxi). Of particular interest to Thomas is the branch on the Russian Formalist tree that informed the practices and dramaturgy of what would become the Moscow Art Theatre, and though their aim was "practical, not

performance text version of a myth—Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, as a baseline example for demonstrating his methodology (*Structural Study of Myth* 217). Though he soon abandons the methodology’s application to literature for use with cultural narratives, it still provides a practical example of the methodology’s efficacy for performance texts. Further, Lévi-Strauss insists on inclusivity in the methodology, in that any analysis of myth should include all its variants (217). Lévi-Strauss makes clear that “not only Sophocles, but Freud himself, should be included” (217) into the analyzed texts, which seemingly opens the door for the inclusion of the critical responses to the work of *The House* by the Chicago press as viable objects of study with this adapted structuralist methodology, as they potentially represent a variant of the myth narratives within *The House*’s performance texts. It also expands the study to viably include personal narrative—experiences from observing these shows first hand—as a legitimate object of study. Though potentially unruly, Barba’s suggestion of biography as an important component to any artist’s dramaturgy allows for the inclusion of both *The House*’s personal reflections and essays as well as my individual experiences at their performances.

An initial review of studies that use Lévi-Strauss or comparable methods for analyzing theatrical or performance texts commonly adopt similar strategies of adaptation of his original model. Most initiate their study with a structuralist effort to identify their object, situate their study within the field and then employ a bevy of subsequent theories and methodologies to show meaning or offer new interpretations. Miriam Chirico’s 1998 study of Eugene O’Neil, T.S. Eliot, and J.P. Sartre’s creation of Orestes myth variants uses Lévi-Strauss to first identify the problem of her study and then employs Northrop Frye, Gerard Genette and a semiotic approach of her

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scholarly” (xxi) their breaking down and understanding plays as “arrangements of action” (xxi) proves a vital piece of developing this study’s methodology. This approach to literature had a profound effect on the development of The Moscow Art Theatre’s pioneering approach to analyzing plays that is still an influential model for western dramaturgy today.

own to create a model that helps explain the process of creating theatrical variants from source myths (*Speaking with the Dead*). In a similar study of a collected body of theatrical texts, John Lutterbie's *A Critical Analysis of the Major Plays of Tom Stoppard* (1983) uses Lévi-Strauss' methodology as a secondary tool for identifying themes of myth within Stoppard's plays before moving on to discussing their meanings.

This move towards interpretation is understandable as these studies are working with more familiar objects of study and an extant body of scholarly works in which to situate an argument. Unfortunately, there is a lack of scholarly material in which to situate any argument about *The House* and *where* it exists within the Chicago theatre community. There is even less material that closely examines *what* *The House* is or does outside of examinations by the press. To date, most observation and analysis of *The House* has occurred either in response to its work by theatre critics or in documents created by the company<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the principal value of this study is its expeditionary nature—focusing on identification rather than interpretation—in order to create a clear field of facts, again, in hopes to reveal any patterns of information that would prove useful to any subsequent studies.

Because of the scarcity of material and the novelty of *The House* as a topic of research, a component of the study must include description and contextualization. Here, in the first chapter, a short history narrative of *The House* follows this introduction to initially acquaint the reader with both the company and their work. After outlining the methodology and the definitions of terms for the study in chapter two, this *House* narrative is expanded and discussed by the inclusion of first person personal narratives to add further depth at the outset of each chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Liza Belby's 2008 MFA Thesis for the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, *A House where Everyone can Feel at Home: Seven Years of the House Theatre of Chicago*, is the only study both *The House* and this author are aware of at the time of this work. It was written to meet the requirements of a performance based Master of Fine Arts and provides a strong accounting of the company's development but is primarily narrative based.



However, the primary object of study will be the actual House performance texts, selected as most representative of their work and development—all selected based on the criteria of their relative critical and box office success: *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* (2002), *Death and Harry Houdini* (2003's remounted version), *The Valentine Trilogy: San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid* (2004), *Curse of the Crying Heart* (2005), *Valentine Victorious* (2006) and *The Sparrow* (2007).

Here, “performance text” is given not only to mean the material text of the written script but also the visual information “read” during the performance itself. The popularity of The House was based on their live performances, not their scripts. The only records of these live events are archival footage of a single or series of performances. This archival footage is analyzed in conversation with the written texts in order to create the performance texts of the six plays discussed in this study. This approach to derived texts takes its cue from Marco de Marinis' definition of text in his *Semiotics of Performance*. Marinis defines performance texts not only as the series of written or oral linguistic statements but also “every unit of discourse” such as nonverbal gesture, images, etc. (47). Marinis argues that this understanding of textuality allows for a performance—in this way the archival recording of live performances of The House's plays—to be considered as text in addition to the written scripts themselves and thus can become the object of textual analysis (47). This inclusive definition of text allows for my consideration of critical responses, supporting essays and company-created documents as objects of study from which potential my themes can be derived.

Further, it allows for the inclusion of personal narrative as a viable factor in discussing these texts—even allowing for their consideration as a part of the text themselves. Anne Brewster's 2005 study, “The Poetics of Memory” explains that the past and memory are a part of

a system at work in texts, where meaning and understanding is achieved “retroactively and repetitively in the process of reading” (397). Brewster employs Lévi-Strauss to help show how allowing for memory and personal narrative to be included in discussion of text shifts the discussion from the teleological to something more akin to the “gestural nature of ritual” (398). Brewster, like Lévi-Strauss, relies on repetition of memory and ritual to better break down the observed object or text into more manageable or constituent parts (398). For Brewster, first person narrative has become a legitimate mode for discussions in a “range of literary, extra-literary and popular contexts” (401). The House participates in all three of these contexts.

### ***The House Theatre of Chicago—An Introductory Narrative<sup>5</sup>***

In the late summer of 2002, the House moved into the Viaduct Theatre near the corner of Belmont and Western in Chicago for their first large scale foray into the city’s theatre scene. The Viaduct is a converted warehouse with thin walls, a quirky bar and a single cramped bathroom shared by both patrons and performers. The space was rough, the rent was affordable and the beer was cold and cheap. The rough infrastructure of the Viaduct Theatre could be considered less than ideal for many theatre companies, but it proved a fertile location for The House. As a space, it was an apt reflection of The House’s idea of a contemporary popular theatre. As a theatre, the large, free format room was well suited the company’s epic sized plays.

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<sup>5</sup> The following narrative is primarily constructed from personal experience and serves more for context than content. In later chapters, the performance texts themselves are collated from print and archived media sources, and are readily cited as such. Detailed accounts of the analyzed performance texts are available in both later chapters and provided in the study’s appendices.

Their first major offering as a company was *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. It was written by Phillip Klapperich—a founding member of The House. Klapperich, artistic director Nathan Allen and a handful of would-be company members had landed in the city almost two years earlier to lay the groundwork for the group’s eventual arrival. Allen and Klapperich were childhood friends from Colorado with the majority of the rest of the ensemble made up from classmates from the theatre program at Southern Methodist University and a few friends Allen met while studying abroad. Chicago was selected not only for the affordability of making theatre but also for the city’s reputation for “grassroots support for the theatre” (Weiss, “The Next Big Thing”). While the majority of the company was finishing college and preparing for the move to Chicago, The House’s leadership core was laying the foundation for their organization. They incorporated and received their tax exempt status. They created a mission statement (Allen Manifesto) and an identity for their theatre through a series of performances rife with credos, manifestos and taglines (see Appendix A). All the while, the small group of The House members in the city began to forge connections with Chicago’s theatre community—receiving help and advice from established artists and theatres in grant writing, production and arts management. Additionally, the company produced a small-scale, expeditionary production of a Houdini bio-play penned by Allen in one of Chicago’s numerous small, storefront theatres. The production was warmly reviewed but limited by a short run and meager budget from garnering much attention.

*Peter Pan* was different. The entire company was assembled for this next effort—not expeditionary at all but a full on invasion. As way of introducing personal narrative as well as an act of disclosure, I was a part of the first group of people who flocked to the Viaduct Theatre in the early days of The House. I cannot accurately recall if it was before or after the heaping praise

in the city’s papers—I do know I was there the first week and I accidentally walked into the theatre through the garage door. It was hot and the large warehouse door remained open throughout the performance. I was new to the city and had arrived two hours early on public transportation, as I didn’t know the way. The cast and ensemble of *The House* quickly welcomed me in that night. It was clear the papers got it right that something was happening at *The House*.

The play opened with a grey-suited Freudian narrator called the Doctor, who gave a small slide presentation on the map of the human mind. A series of slides showed the “mind maps” of a few creatures before ultimately comparing the adult mind (a slide showing a sensible and



Fig. 1.1. The Doctor (House Archives)



Fig. 1.2. Peter, Tink, and The Lost Boys (House Archives)

ordered highway map of Des Moines, IA) with that of a child (a slide showing a map of Neverland). The Doctor used a screen that doubled as the blinds for the window of the Darling family house—which was a large box with a small ramp and a removable window frame (see fig. 1.1). The Darling house would later become Captain Hook’s ship, then the home of the Lost Boys, then the mermaid’s island and finally an ambush point for the play’s climatic battles.

The text was an original adaptation of J.M. Barrie’s original 1904 play by Phillip Klapperich in collaboration with Allen and the actors. Though faithful to many of Barrie’s original elements

and dialogue from the public domain play, *The House* freely layered new ideas and juxtaposed a variety of sources into their version of *Neverland*. The sold-out crowds who braved the smothering heat of the Viaduct in the mad rush to see that summer's hit show quickly learned this was not the Peter Pan they grew up with. This was a Converse All-Star-wearing Peter Pan with a Tinkerbell who swore like a sailor. The Lost boys were a rag-tag group who also doubled as pirates, Indians and a Chinese dragon-style crocodile. Captain Hook was an obvious sufferer of an oversized Napoleon complex (see figure 1.4) and Mr. Smee was a rapist. Peter either rejects or simply fails to pick up on the signals of love thrown his way by Wendy, Tinkerbell and Tiger Lilly, so all three jilted ladies put on red sequin dresses and danced it out while lip-synching to Aretha Franklin's "Chain of Fools" (see fig. 1.3). The audience on opening night knew something different was going on in the Viaduct Theatre.



Fig. 1.3. "Chain of Fools" (House Archives)



Fig. 1.4. Hook's Entrance (House Archives)

The day after *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* opened, the reviews began an outpouring of praise that instantly marked the company as something to watch. The *Tribune's* Chris Jones raved about his experience in the "steamy Viaduct theatre" as the type of show that

makes you want to “shout its glories from high above the rooftop” (“Tiny House Triumphs”). The *Sun-Times*’ Hedy Weiss called the play “brilliantly deconstructed...alternately fierce and gentle, adult and childlike, and tremendously funny” (“Imagination Soars”) and went on to call The House “the next pretender to the Chicago theatre throne” (“The Next Big Thing”). *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* ran to sold out houses for two full months and closed after a very successful five months, playing to over 8,000 people (Weiss, “The Next Big Thing? Maybe”). The artistic directors of two of the largest theatres in town—The Goodman and Steppenwolf—attended shows, as did almost the entire ensemble of the Lookingglass Theatre, a company whose mission and sensibility best matched the young The House and which became an important contact for growing company (“The Next Big Thing? Maybe”).

The House followed the success of *Peter Pan* with a revision and remount of their first play in Chicago, artistic director Nathan Allen’s play, *Death and Harry Houdini*. It opened almost a year later after the opening night of *Peter Pan* with almost the same results. The papers raved and the audience came in droves. *Death and Harry Houdini* could be characterized as a Brechtian verse play. The dialogue is lyrical, frequently including rhyming couplets and sing-song passages that transition across the landscape of Houdini’s life. The play was narrated by a ring master with a megaphone. The company used puppets, projections and Houdini’s own stunts to tell the story of the famous escapist—skillfully performed by company member and professional magician Dennis Watkins. Initially a cabaret style show featuring Watkins’ masterful illusions, it was now a full on pageant with stepped up spectacle. Death was a constant figure in the play—first as a puppet that came to take the life of young Houdini’s father. Later, as Houdini began to learn his tricks, Death—a terrifying figure in a WWI-era gas mask—seemed to

be lurking at every turn, be it in the opium den theatre where Houdini learned his first illusions or in the bottom of a freezing river as he performed an early escape.

Watkins performed all the tricks and escapes, including a thrilling and highly skilled escape from Houdini's famous water torture cell. The tricks were all live, authentic and highly interactive, using the contemporary audience as a stand-in for Houdini's vaudeville admirers. To make sure the locks had not been tampered with, they were given to audience members and held throughout the play. Towards the end, the holders were called to bring the locks to the stage as



Fig. 1.5. The Cast of *Death and Harry Houdini* (House Archives)



Fig. 1.6. The Water Torture Cell (House Archives)

company members pushed out the specially built tank. The tank was a lit rectangle of plate glass, seamed with steel and filled to the brim with water. Watkins was shackled around the ankles and hoisted into the rafters of the Viaduct. While suspended over the tank an original wax recording of Houdini himself setting up the escape was played, the great illusionist's own voice substituting for Watkins' as he donned a vintage set of goggles and was slowly submerged into

the tank. Each night, Watkins would appear on the periphery of the stage after escaping unseen by the audience, still dripping from the watery tank, to wild applause.

The play received equally enthusiastic reviews as *Peter Pan*. Hedy Weiss—already a champion of The House, called the show a “fascinating hybrid of vaudeville and horror, psychology and history, pop entertainment and serious drama” (“House Works Magic”). She described it as a blend of Brecht with elements of silent film, the circus and other performance styles of Houdini’s time—all skillfully employed in conjuring Houdini’s story (“House Works Magic with Houdini” 29 August 2003). Chris Jones extolled the young company’s fearlessness in their “huge, wacky, wonderfully messy show” (“Fearless House Troupe”). But Jones began here to differentiate his zeal for the company from Weiss’ king-making praise. Jones delighted in The House’s kind of theatre—a style that “exhibits a very healthy disregard for all the usual rules of the theatre” that “zapped some much-needed fresh, new life into the alternative theater scene” in Chicago (“Fearless House Troupe”). However, Jones, for the first of what would prove many times, cautioned that there would come a time when the House could not keep this up and would eventually become mired in the confines of success—new buildings, fundraising, subscribers—and when they did, he wrote, “I suspect we’ll all be lamenting the loss of the good old days when they didn’t give a darn about anything but doing the kind of art they wanted to do” (“Fearless House Troupe”). The House continued to gain support from the theatre community. Lookingglass Theatre—the influential physical theatre began by Mary Zimmerman and an ensemble of her Northwestern University students—now offered their “protective wing” (Fairey 66) after then artistic director, Laura Eason, saw *Houdini*. Allen recounted in *CS* magazine that Eason said, “Steppenwolf did it for us when we were young and starting out and we’d like to do the same for you” (66).



The House set out to translate the success of *Peter Pan* and *Houdini* into success on an even larger scale. *The Valentine Trilogy* was an ambitious three-play three-year project. It was a genre-crossing tale of a young hero trying to avenge the murder of his father that closely followed a Joseph Campbell myth model. The first play, *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid*, was a stylized western that had a band of refugee gunfighters pushing a herd of cattle up to Montana. Painted umbrellas substituted for the herd (see fig. 1.8) and the cowpokes rode ten-speeds with hemp rope reins for their horses (see fig. 1.7). The Melancholy Kid was a mask-wearing, guitar-playing young desperado in search of his father's killer, backed by his own alt-country band.



Fig. 1.7. On The Trail (House Archives)



Fig. 1.8. Singing to the Herd (House Archives)

Like *Houdini*, the play featured a great deal of audience interaction throughout. In *San Valentino*, cowboys handed their bike-horses to audience members throughout the play. At one point, a morose gunfighter implored an audience member to end his misery, handing his pistol over and comically begging them to pull the trigger before a last minute change of heart. The company created a live action sing-a-long, complete with lyrics printed on a scrolling piece of paper and a red ball on a stick that bounced along the top of the words for the audience to follow along.

Again, Jones extolled the House's fearlessness in his review of *San Valentino* ("Imaginative *Kid* has No Fear"). He described them as "the most exciting young theater troupe to emerge in this city since Mary Zimmerman and her Lookingglass Theatre cohorts in the early 1990s" and their show as "overenthusiastic, overambitious, a tad chaotic and about 20 minutes too long...[but] I couldn't give a hill of beans" ("Imaginative *Kid* has No Fear"). Jones furthered his praise, saying, "There's more passion, exuberance, wit, imagination and sheer spirit on offer in the first 20 minutes of *The Kid* than some Chicago theaters manage to serve up in an entire season" ("Imaginative *Kid* has No Fear"). As in previous reviews, Jones closed with advice to the young company not to abandon the bicycle horses or their mingling of "myth with mirth" or they will begin to look like everybody else in town; for Jones liked "the House just the way it is now: gloriously messy, willing to try anything, and dedicated to a young audience that does not normally go much to the theater....But in this form, at least, I fear the House won't be around forever" ("Imaginative *Kid* has No Fear").

Weiss echoed Jones in her *Sun-Times Review*, saying that with *San Valentino*, The House "planted yet another memorable stake in the Chicago theatre community" ("San Valentino' a rollicking homage" 22A). She threw a bouquet of praises at the company, calling it "quite simply, one of the most original, playful, stylistically distinctive and altogether goofily wonderful ensembles at work on a local stage" (22a). Weiss marveled at the young and energetic demographic of their audiences and how 70% of their budgeting dangerously relied on ticket sales from their impressive three production run of box office hits (22a). Like Jones, Weiss feared for the loss of The House's "youthful fire, unbounded joy and complete freedom" and hoped that audiences would not miss the young company in this "golden moment" of their beginning (22a).

Part Two of *The Valentine Trilogy*, the *Curse of the Crying Heart*, was slated to open early the next year. That summer, *Chicago Sun-Times* critic Hedy Weiss revisited the article she wrote two years earlier. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004, her article “The Next Big Thing? Maybe” appeared in the *Sun-Times*. She made clear she was still on The House’s side, praising their “boyishly playful, highly physical shows that keep a steady finger on the pop-cultural pulse as they win mostly rave reviews” and its status as the theatre for the under-35 crowd, “a demographic that few other companies seem able to pry away from their date movies and *Friends* reruns” (“The Next Big Thing”). The pressure was on to deliver.

*Curse of the Crying Heart* picked up the story where *The Melancholy Kid* left off—replacing the Comanche-filled plains of West Texas with a war-torn feudal Japan, complete with honor-bound samurai and marauding rogue ninjas. The characters remained the same but were transposed or approximated into the new setting—trading six shooters for samurai swords, for



Fig. 1.9. Wire Fight (House Archives)



Fig. 1.10. Singing Sorrow (House Archives)



Fig. 1.11. The Black Ghost (House Archives)

example. The young hero, dressed in black and still wearing his mask from the first installment, was backed by a high energy punk band. The play's climax included a large-scale kung fu battle that used the wire fighting technology popularized in movies like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (see fig. 1.9). Like in previous reviews, both Jones and Weiss made clear that The House could use an editor (Jones, "Allen casts spell"; Weiss, "Irrepressible House") but both critics continued to praise the company's enthusiasm and growing popularity. Weiss called the cinematic martial arts wire fight at the end of the play as one of "the most thrilling, over-the-top display[s] of daredevil acrobatics in recent Chicago theater history" ("Irrepressible House"). Jones worried while praising artistic director Nathan Allen as the multi-talented core of this production and The House itself, that he would soon be swept out of town by big time producers and entertainment executives ("Allen casts spell").

Curiously, Jones referenced former off-Loop champ, Defiant Theatre, and their *Action Movie* series in his description of the climactic scene ("Allen casts spell"). Using many of the special effect tricks The House now employed, Defiant had made a name for itself in the same theatre space at the Viaduct that The House was now entrenched in. Many of The Defiant ensemble members were working successfully at larger theatres around the city, and so it became increasingly more difficult for the company to mount their distinctive, irreverent brand of theatre. The puckish Defiant Theatre was disbanding as a company just as The House arrived on the scene—leaving a void not only at The Viaduct but also in the community that The House was already beginning to fill.



Fig. 1.12. Valentine and The Black Ghost (House Archives)

The House closed out their trilogy the next January with *Valentine Victorious*, migrating the story to a film-noir, comic book version of Chicago. The honky-tonk band from *The Melancholy Kid* and punk band from *Curse* was expanded to look

like a Glenn Miller era big band—all comprised of House fans who volunteered their skills and time to play the run of the show. Our hero was now the formal super kind—cape and all (see fig. 1.12). Large scale comic book panels made transitions from the bad guys' bar to a local cemetery, and a full-scale nuclear blast occurred on stage with mushroom-clouding umbrellas.

Of note, Charles Isherwood included a response to *Valentine Victorious* in his *New York Times* survey of Chicago Theatre, placing his comments about the small-scale and itinerant The House alongside reviews of the big budget offerings of the large theatres in town. Isherwood described the company's "exuberant theatricality" and "maximalist style" employed in telling the final chapter of their three-year trilogy cycle of plays (4). He commented on the rock and roll atmosphere of the show, where the action of the play was supported by a 15-piece big band and the frequent breaks from the action to "slam out an earnest rock anthem" (Isherwood 4). It was a turning point for the company. In just four short years The House received their first review in *The New York Times*. In *The Chicago Tribune*, Jones recapped the past three years as "hopelessly ambitious, impassioned, esoteric and chaotic all the way to the end" ("House true to form" 1).

Like previous reviews, Jones said the enthusiastic piece had rough edges that, because of its enthusiastic approach, a viewer all but overlooks; but a different tone emerged in his subsequent comments. Jones described the company as “hooked on risk and seduced by unrealized ambition...and those of us who’ve followed this ebullient crowd of talented, defiantly immature theatre kids from their beginnings are well used by now to their hipster tricks” (1). Jones went on



Fig. 1.13. House Audience (House Archives)

to say that The House is no longer a secret, as “no theater audience in Chicago is louder or more ebullient” (1) and that they had become “so adept at shifting and commenting on all the rules, they’ve trained us

to let them get away with almost anything” (4) Despite the amount of fun Jones and The House’s audiences were having at the plays, he wondered aloud if all the enjoyment might be “verging on a Pavlovian response by now” (4). Though it seemed clear in the body of the review as a whole that Jones still held strong support for the company, he made it clear that the idea of what The House is and represents and the experience at their shows may be the leading element of their success rather than The House’s actual theatrical product, where folks attend not only for the play but almost equally to root on their favorite home team (4).

With the lessons learned from their three-year trilogy project, The House began to create a project that was characteristically unique from their previous plays. 2007’s *The Sparrow* was



Fig. 1.14. *The Sparrow* (House Archives)

their attempt to create yet another contemporary myth for their audience, but this time a myth set within their own time and place rather than a fantastical land or time full of cowboys, samurai or comic book detectives. It was a story of a girl in a small town someplace in the cornfields that surround Chicago. This young girl was the only survivor of a tragic bus accident and was returning to town to graduate as the only member of the senior class. In typical The House fashion, she had super powers, and in typical The House fashion, the audiences were a large part of the action.

*The Sparrow* went on to become the House's biggest hit to date—it transferred first to Steppenwolf and then went on to a commercial run to test its potential for a transfer to New York City in one of Broadway in Chicago's smaller spaces to test its potential for a transfer to New York. After five years of near non-stop production as a hip, gun-slinging theatre, The House had developed an established level of financial security and a potent theatrical legitimacy.

### ***Outline to the Study***

In the following pages, the possibility of patterns of myth elements within the stories by and about The House is examined through a structuralist, dramaturgical lens. Chapter Two outlines the methodology of creating this lens by appropriating the work of Lévi-Strauss, Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell and then using this lens to identify patterns of myth and

how they are employed within The House's performance texts. Lévi-Strauss and Propp provide the major mechanics and connection points for the study while Campbell helps articulate the findings.

Each subsequent chapter is comprised of the application of this methodology and the discussion of the findings. Chapter Three consists of the analysis of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and the second, larger production of *Death and Harry Houdini*. These plays best represent the beginning phase of The House. Both *Peter Pan* and *Houdini* had been written before the company had been labeled "The Next Big Thing" by the Chicago press. As described earlier, *Houdini* was the company's first expeditionary show in Chicago and *Peter Pan* was the first hit that launched The House's trajectory. The analysis of these two plays has the potential to show us the very first uses of myth within The House's performance texts and will provide an effective baseline of comparison of the patterns of myth through the other plays.

Chapter Four consists of analysis of *The Valentine Trilogy*, representing the middle phase of the House's work. Here, The House is centering their story on a single hero, which results in the largest text for examination. Chapter Five looks solely at 2007's *The Sparrow*. This performance text represents a peak in The House's theatrical efforts as it was their largest, wide-scale success and propelled them to a new level of financial and critical legitimacy on par with the larger, established theatres in Chicago. In *The Sparrow*, we potentially see the clearest manifestation of The House's particular approach to myth, or more specifically mythic heroes. Chapter Five also serves as a summary chapter, where *The Sparrow* discussed in terms of the previous texts, followed by an epilogue to where The House was at the end of their meteoric first five years and possible projection to where they may go next.



## CHAPTER 2

### Methodology

The methodology for identifying patterns of myth within the performance texts of The House Theatre is dramaturgical in both nature and process. Dramaturgy as a concept is applied in contemporary theatre in such a variety of contexts that a single definition is almost impossible to articulate. Dramaturgy can function like a verb and describe an array of activities: anything from researching historical contexts for theatrical productions to shepherding new or adapted scripts through revision and rehearsal processes. As a verb it can also describe the process of examining the structure and systems at work within a given text. Dramaturgy can also be used as a noun. Dramaturges can be the name of agents in the collaborative process whose work can include any of the tasks above and a great deal more. Additionally, a set of practices and points of view associated with an artist or theatre group can be described as a dramaturgy. Furthermore, dramaturgy as a concept can be employed adjectively or as an adverb. In all cases, it is proving to be a catch-all term for a variety of efforts, objects and processes.

For the purposes of this study, dramaturgy is employed as both verb and noun. The study seeks to create a process for examining the structure of The House's performance texts for elements of myths in hopes of discovering any existing patterns. The discovery of these patterns and the subsequent discussion of this verb-based dramaturgy hopefully takes the first step in articulating a "noun" based one—namely an identifiable point of view and pattern of heroes in The House's performance texts. This process of examining and then subsequently identifying these patterns results in a double faceted *myth dramaturgy* that both describe a practical process and The House's particular point of view.

The principles at work in the dramaturgy of process here are based primarily on Konstantin Stanislavsky's methods that he described as Active Analysis. Stanislavsky was a leading figure in the world theatre and today is primarily known for his systematic approach to the craft of acting. However, Stanislavsky and his cohorts at the Moscow Art Theatre were leading pioneers of the modern approach to script analysis. The approach by Stanislavsky is Aristotelian at its core and mirrors the observations and efforts of Aristotle discussing Greek tragedy, but his methods were influenced by formalism's impact on Russian literary thought at the time (Thomas xx-xxi) and adapted from these formalist principles and methods to his theatrical needs. Stanislavsky's aim was to break dramatic texts down into their most basic constituent actions to better understand both the impact and interaction of these actions during the process of performance. Stanislavsky's particular system of dramaturgy is a logical framework for analyzing myths that exist in theatrical contexts. Not only is Stanislavsky's theatre-specific method of analysis suited for examining performance texts—fundamentally different from other forms of literature in both form and content—but because of its formalist roots, Active Analysis fortunately shares a theoretical *ancestor* with structuralist theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose methods prove most effective for this study for the identification and examination of myths. The foundational similarities between Stanislavsky-based dramaturgy and Lévi-Strauss' structuralist approach to myth allow an organic and logical melding of the two to create a working “myth dramaturgy” for the purposes of this study.

“Myth” and “Dramaturgy” are two terms central to this study's examination of the recurrent patterns of myth within the work of *The House*. Both terms can be characterized as contested terms because of the wide and differing arrays of how they are used and who employs them. “Myth” and “dramaturgy” are terms which have numerous and often contradictory uses.

Marvin Carlson proposes focusing on the generation of meaning in particular contexts rather than synthesizing definitions for universal application. This same strategy is adopted for this study. Northrop Frye, in outlining his critical methods for analyzing myth in literature, argues that defining is near impossible due to the “bewildering variety of contexts” in which the term myth is used (*The Koine of Myth* 3). Frye recommends any attempt towards definition begin by first identifying and clarifying the context in which the term or idea of myth is being used (*The Koine of Myth* 3). In *Theories of Mythology*, Eric Csapo cautions his readers that defining a complex term like myth (and, we could add, dramaturgy) is rarely “the innocent first step in a process of empirical study...it is rather always the final precipitate of an already elaborate theory” (1). Any definition of terms like these, according to Csapo, is most often the end result of a deeply involved and often deductive research process, and Csapo recommends beginning there—at the end—and working backwards since “the safest solution for the problem of definition” is to, like Frye suggests, begin by identifying the context in which the problematic term is being used (2). Nevertheless, it is foundational to this discussion at the outset to at least attempt the creation a working definition of both myth and dramaturgy in the context of *The House*, beginning first with myth and identifying contexts. Adopting this strategy for addressing the problems of definition of these terms means the first step for each is identifying contexts, beginning first with myth.

## MYTH

In the context of *The House*, elements of myth are primarily embedded within their performance texts<sup>6</sup>. The presence of these myth elements is less explicit and rather more

<sup>6</sup> Again, referring to Marco de Marinis’ inclusive definition outlined in chapter one of what constitutes a text.

intuitively<sup>7</sup> felt as a part of the stories The House tells. Myth has also been used as a cursory description of House performances by critics: Doug George's review of *The Sparrow* described the production as a "Midwestern Hero Myth" (*Chicago Tribune* 28 Sep. 2007). Mary Shen Barnidge's review of 2004's *San Valentino* describes The House as having "established a reputation for imaginative spectacle flowering from heroic myth" (*Windy City Times*, 21 January 2004). Barnidge expands that playwright Nathan Allen's claim to "be a disciple of Joseph Campbell comes as a small surprise," as whatever literary ills that may befall the play itself, "its archetypes draw us in immediately" (*Windy City Times*, 21 January 2004). It is important to note here that in these early discussions of myth and The House, the focus is on the archetypes—the hero characters in the story—more than the events and actions they take. The major component of any myth The House seemed to be telling appeared to be the hero.

The comparative myth theorist Joseph Campbell's influence on Allen and The House was no secret to anybody listening to the young company's interviews. Mostly this connection was mentioned in nothing more than passing references until The House included Campbell's theories in discussing for the first time their company's relationship to myth in their work and performance texts. An essay titled *The Invisible Foundation* (the House's 2006 "manifesto on aesthetic and ethics"), was the result of the company attempting to look back and examine—in many ways for the first time since their initial success and subsequent rapid growth—their early

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<sup>7</sup> Though intuition is something we use every day for classification, especially when it comes to identifying and categorizing narratives into genre or type, it seems clear that intuition is a poor tool for a research methodology. In *Morphology of the Folktale* (trans. L. Scott, rev. and ed. L.A. Wagner. Austin, TX: 1968), the early formalist Vladimir Propp describes a certain genre of Russian fairy tale that can, like myth, be immediately identified as a part of a particular genre because it possessed "a quite particular structure which is immediately felt and which determines their category, even though we may not be aware of it" (6). Dissatisfied with this intuitive approach to classification and genre, Propp tried to uncover those governing structures so classification did not have to rely on intuition but rather a more empirical process (Csapo 191). Propp's impulse, as well as his methodology are important to mention here and will be discussed later as foundational to the myth dramaturgy of this study. Similarly to Propp's, this study aims to identify the presence of myth elements in an explicit, deductive way rather than rely on intuitive means of discussion.

claims, mission statements and initial goals for their theatre. This process was aimed at identifying and understanding the inherent patterns in their work over the previous four years (Allen 1). By undertaking this self-examination, the company sought to better equip themselves as they began the next phase of their work together (Allen 1). This document, authored by artistic director Nathan Allen, put into print the discussion occurring between the members of The House as they began the task of creating a new mission statement and explicitly discussed myth in relation to their work.

It is interesting to note that when describing why he titled his essay “The Invisible Foundation,” Allen points to what he believes to be a deep, unconscious structure beneath the surface of their work, an insight that proves theoretically crucial for understanding and identifying myth in this study. In the essay, Allen reflects at how “deeply and subconsciously” they had laid the foundations of their company in their work and how they went about making it, and how their efforts had formed an *invisible foundation* just beneath the surface of their efforts which they only needed to recognize “in order to employ its strength” (1).

The document is only twelve pages long, serving more as a prompt for the future work of the company rather than a comprehensive outline of their aesthetic. Though this is the most explicit written discussion by The House in regards to myth, in only occurs in the space of little over a page—and it is of importance to see how The House wrestled with the role of myth in their first phase of work. Allen articulates a tension of how myth works in the stories they tell. It serves as an important unifier of audience and performer—a central tenet of The House’s work—because of myth’s “universality”, particularly as explained in the work of Joseph Campbell and his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Allen, “The Invisible Foundation” 5). However, Allen asks the question whether in their thirteen odd productions there is a possibility of a

preferred type of story The House gravitates to—some “unknown parameters” that govern which stories The House tells (5). Allen writes that the discussion of “story” was not only the “youngest focus of our work together,” but states that, after four years of experimenting in style and form, the discussion of story was fast becoming “the most important” (4). This renewed focus on the stories The House was telling stemmed from these fears of any de-facto set of “unknown parameters” developed from their early successes that now exerted an unwanted limit to what kind of stories The House should or should not tell—some preferred genre of play that particularly suited The House, audience and artist alike (5). In other words, the creative liberty they enjoyed in their first years was now comprised or restricted by their successes. Allen rejected the presence of some unknown criteria or mysterious genre of story The House must subscribe to but acknowledged a pattern in many of their plays when he asked, “Why are so many of our stories about heroes?” (5).

Allen articulates a clear tension in how the company understands their work in regards to myth. He states that myth and heroes hold a “powerful presence” (5) in all aspects of their work but warns that as a company, they “cannot be limited to the specific symbols, themselves” (5). Though “The Invisible Foundation” tries to outline myth’s universality in their work, Allen outlines their true focus in his question about heroes. A working definition of myth for The House tries to reconcile their desire for community and universality (the very aim from which they derive their name) with their persistent telling and re-telling of a particular set of hero stories.

In 2001, The House printed what they called “The House Credo,” on the back of the programs to *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*:

*In this space the Giant is slain;  
the Princess awakens;  
and the Hero is crowned King.  
In this space The House is slain;*

*The House awakens;  
and The House is crowned King.*

Allen decoded this credo in his discussion of myths for The House in “The Invisible Foundation” by using elements of the definition given by Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to give a clearer picture of how the book truly influenced the theatre the company was making (5). For The House, their understanding of their first credo is aided by the definitions of “hero” in Campbell’s work. In the first part of the credo, the “Giant” existed as a symbol of evil or hate, the “princess” as love, and the “hero” as everything good (5). The second portion of that credo substitutes in “The House” for all three—identifying the actors and audience both as all four: Good, Evil, Love and Hate (5). Again, The House seems to discuss itself in regards to myth here, but the real story is in Allen’s question about the centrality of hero characters to their plays.

This idea of hero for both The House and Campbell has a specific set of characteristics. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes a hero as a “personage of exceptional gifts that is frequently harangued, frequently unrecognized or disdained” (37) in a world that “suffers from a symbolic deficiency” (37). This hero has “been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations” (19) by following a standard path or plot of adventure (30). This underdog hero that overcomes adversity is not only a recognizable element of many of The House shows, but also in how The House framed themselves early on in the Chicago theatre community.

The House took their name from the term they used “to describe the body created when audience and actors are joined in the event of live-theatre” (“Bold Language” 1). This relationship was characterized by their desire to “...forge a union between audience and actor...” and a claim that “...the audience was always right” (“Bold Language” 1), a sentiment that allies The House with what can be described as the popular theatre.

The popular theatre, as a concept, is not a core term for this study, as it speaks relatively little to the dramaturgical work at hand. However, a brief discussion towards definition more readily situates, or at least bridges how The House, as characterized as young, upstart theatrical heroes for Chicago by the press, mirrored many of the heroes in the plays they were creating. This concept of popular theatre is exceptionally helpful in terms of linking The House as a character in the story of Chicago Theatre to the characters in their own performance texts, particularly in light of The House's, and Joseph Campbell's, definition of a myth hero.

The popular theatre is most likely a better description of a theatrical ethic than a specific aesthetic quality. Though most popular theatre still draws from the traditions and practice of what can be called the legitimate theatre, it possesses few of the "artistic and intellectual pretensions common to the regular stage" (McNamara 16). It is, by its nature, "anti-authoritarian, anti-traditional, anti-pomp, [and] anti-pretense" (Brook 68). In the popular theatre, "subtlety and conventional good taste are usually secondary to action, fantasy and physicality" (McNamara 16). This is reflected in the popular theatre's attitude towards spectacle in that places an emphasis on fantasy rather than verisimilitude and consistency, providing "vital and imaginative solutions to problems of space and design" (McNamara 12-3).

Initially, the House described themselves as a popular theatre because they identified "more with the 'general public' than with the 'specialists or intellectuals'" in their field (Allen, "The Invisible Foundation" 8). Their labeling of themselves as popular was an attempt to distance their work from the traditional or what would be considered more legitimate styles of theatre (Allen, "The Invisible Foundation" 8). By casting themselves as the illegitimate underdog, The House not only tapped into their root ideas of hero and myth, but were also able to stake a claim to the fertile space that being a popular theatre affords. Popular theatre's



classification as “illegitimate” is its saving grace, and according to Peter Schumann, the innovative founder and director of Vermont’s *Bread & Puppet Theatre*, as it affords it an exemption from seriousness that allows the art to grow (Schumann 7). This exemption from seriousness happened quickly for The House and proved their saving grace as well. With each early success, theatre professionals sometimes dismissed the House’s work in the press. One detractor described the experience at the House as a gathering of “...20 something’s looking for an unsubtle night out” (Adams 2). The youthful enthusiasm and rough edges that detractors lashed out at were some of the very things the critics from the major papers were extolling.

Despite the attention by the press and any efforts by The House and Chicago’s theatre critics to emphasize the mythological proportions of the company itself, the company was consistently creating plays about protagonists that reflected Campbell’s hero definition: gifted persons undergoing hardships while following a series of events and actions that are readily recognizable from frequent contact with them in the form of stories, fairy tales, films and folk tales (*Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 19-37).

In “The Invisible Foundation,” Allen emphasizes Campbell’s understanding of myth as possessing an inclusive universality that seems to persist throughout the world’s hero stories (5). Allen sees this inclusivity of myth and the breadth of accessibility it provides as a powerful community-building tool for joining performer and audience into their popular theatre’s theoretical “House” (5). However, when discussing perceived patterns of myth in their work, Allen stops short of any further analysis of their older performance texts. As The House was focused on generating texts for upcoming seasons, their discussion was centered on new characters and events, heroes and actions, rather than examining their past work.

For this type of examination of The House's first, influential performance texts, Campbell's methods of analysis unfortunately fall short. Campbell's influence on The House is primarily as a source of understanding, as well as a catalyst for creating their performance texts. Though Campbell's work proves helpful for The House's artists when they are creating stories, a brief discussion of his theories, here, demonstrates how many of his claims prove less suitable for identifying patterns of myth in the stories The House have told. Fortunately, as this brief discussion points away from Campbell as a workable methodology for the creation of a myth dramaturgy in this study, it points us towards shared, theoretical ground with the theories and methods that will.

Late in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, when discussing mythological figures and heroes, Campbell makes what might accurately represent his definition of myth—and it proves an expansive one. Campbell states that these mythical characters (and it is fair to include myth at large in the definition) are not only products of a psychological unconscious, but also the result of “spiritual principles which have remained constant throughout the course of history as the form and nervous structure of the human psyche itself” (257). At the core of these myths, Campbell believes, lies some seed of an original, historic source, or “Ur-Myth” from which all myths share a genetic link and from which have been subsequently derived (4).

Campbell may be correct in his claim, but in one paragraph he employs a structuralist sensibility, couples it with a myriad of ritualist and spiritual understandings of myth, and then ties it to literary and psychological theory—with an exposition stressing the importance of the psychological theories of Freud and Jung. He gathers an amalgam of myth theories under his comparativist umbrella—attempting to tie all these myths to some historical source myth, producing what resembles a theoretical Gordian knot. At its core, Campbell's theory privileges

Jung and Freud in its understanding of myth, calling their psycho-analytical approaches to myth as “indispensable to the student of mythology” because of their efforts to demonstrate that myth’s “logic, heroes and deeds survive into modern times” (*Thousand Faces* 4). Campbell’s focus on this logic of myth, or the principles and structure of myth, are most helpful here, as they connect his theory with the majority of contemporary myth scholarship.

Campbell’s research aims and paradigms are more closely related to early myth theorists who attempted to explain the similarity of form and content of myth narratives from disparate cultures by discovering narrative genetic links between these stories and some historical Ur-myth. Like Campbell, most 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century myth theory takes its cue from Freud’s assumption that myth is functioning on two levels—an apparent surface context and a concealed, deeper structure (Csapo 189). Campbell’s work is of most analytical value for this study in his creation of archetypal descriptions of heroes and plot structures in the abstract, as they can be readily, and helpfully, incorporated into the myth dramaturgy being an integral part of the context of *The House*. However, Campbell’s effort to create these standard definitions of heroes and heroes’ paths in the abstract in hopes of connecting it to a, or more accurately, *the* specific Ur-myth is not only less helpful, but represents a by-gone approach to myth when compared to most contemporary myth theory. Campbell’s focus on the historical Ur-myth makes him in a way a last holdout of comparative myth theory, which, after its heyday (1850-1920), began to hold less influence in scholarly thought because it was considered too reliant on imperialist thought and the belief in European culture’s civilized versus savage superiority (Csapo 13). Campbell alone may help us identify heroes but fails to help us compare the actions and events that make up myth narratives.

However, Campbell's theories are of value for contextualization and for the bridgeheads they provide to workable methodologies—and later as a source of important language for describing any identified mytheme patterns in the performance texts. This not only will help this study describe myth's presence in the performance texts of *The House* in the terminology they themselves use, but opens the door to the methods and theory that will be of greater value—Stanislavsky's formalist based dramaturgy and Claude Lévi-Strauss' theories of myth structuralism. The description of both can begin with Vladimir Propp, as he provides a theoretical linkage between theatre practice and the structuralist theory of myth.

Propp was a member of Russia's formalist intellectual movement—most active between 1915 and 1930 (Csapo 190). The Russian formalists were among the first scholars to apply the structuralist principles of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure to literature in an attempt to discover the systems that govern how different narratives and genres communicate (Csapo 190). Saussure is considered the father of modern linguistics and initiated a way of studying complex human institutions—in this case language—by isolating the language as an autonomous entity and then abstracting it so it could be studied scientifically (Clarke 119). Most important to Propp, and subsequently Lévi-Strauss, was Saussure's designation of the actual sounds made by speakers as “surface structure” and the rule of grammar that gave these sounds meaning described as “deep structures”—one of the earliest appearances of these helpful distinctions (Csapo 189).

Propp, as an early pioneer in what would later develop into structuralism, worked to deductively and scientifically account for the deep structure that he felt was intuitively inherent in a special kind of Russian folktale, called “Wondertales” (Csapo 190). Propp's research interest was exclusively focused on identification and classification of these folktales rather than interpreting them (Csapo 190). Propp focused on devising “a very simple method of analyzing

wondertales in accordance with the character’s actions—regardless of their concrete form” (Propp *Morphology*, 70). Through a close and deductive process of examining his subject texts, Propp realized there was “a quite particular structure which is immediately felt” which intuitively identified the stories he was studying as wondertales—and he set out to create methods that attempted to provide a rigorous and scientifically objective process of identification and classification for these narratives (Propp *Morphology*, 6). Propp argued that the intuitive classification literary theorists relied on when discussing genre were unconsciously referencing these inherent structures, or subconscious sets of rules, and saw identifying these deep structures as the chance to develop a more empirical method of classification (Csapo 191).

First, Propp attempted to divide his texts into deep structural and surface structural levels—identifying the actual narrative as the surface structure and then attempting to derive a general or abstract form of that narrative as a unit of comparison to try and discover a systematic deeper structure (Csapo 191). For Propp, the variance of details in the narratives at the surface structure (differences in characters, settings, etc.), which Propp referred to as “paradigmatic substitutions,” was considered insignificant if they bore no impact on the deep structure (Csapo 191). By breaking down narratives into constituent parts, Propp experimented with transferring, altering and substituting these parts in an attempt to monitor their impact on the narrative. Those elements that significantly changed the narrative (a change in task or action rather than a change in name or description) were seen as having some relationship with the actual deep structure of the narrative (Csapo 192).

Therefore, Propp sought to find those constituent parts of these folktales whose substitution would significantly change the tale as a whole, using these constituent units as identifiers of the deeper structure and the basis for his analysis. They had to be large enough or

significant enough that their removal or addition into the narrative would have a significant impact in changing the “character of the narrative as a whole” (Csapo 191)—all the while being small enough that other equivalent or similar units could be interchanged without any significant change in the narrative’s deep structure (Csapo 192). It is similar to Campbell’s effort to create standard hero stories in the abstract in that they both wanted to demonstrate that in terms of myth, giving a hero a horse is the same as giving a hero a magic ring is the same as sending the hero away with a magic spell.

Propp, armed with his trial and error methods and his ability to theoretically view his narratives in the abstract, could begin to map out these constituent units to discover their patterns across the breadth of the stories he was studying (Csapo 193). It is important to clarify that Propp did not feel it necessary to explain or interpret these units of the deep structure or their patterns—he would sometimes hint at “both historical and psychological explanations but was content with his demonstration of the structuralist assumption that a limited set of generative rules, or a grammar” could be discovered for a specific genre of literature (Csapo 194). Through reducing the folktales he was studying into “action patterns” (Csapo 201), he avoided laying out a set of formal rules for explaining myths and instead created an abstract story that is similar to Campbell’s Ur-myth or Freud and Jung’s psychoanalytical archetypes (Csapo 201-2). However, Propp did so without the burden of the comparative and psychological aim of trying to link the narratives of Campbell to some illusive mythic ancestor or ideal interpretation (Csapo 203). Propp’s aim was morphological in nature: interested in comparing abstract structural systems to observe similarities between texts “without referring to origins or purpose” (Csapo 203). The mechanics of Propp’s action patterns, in conjunction with Campbell’s model of the hero journey, will prove the connecting point for discussing Lévi-Strauss and labeling our subsets of

mythemes, as will be outlined later in this chapter; but to avoid the often premature move towards hermeneutics, it is important here to outline how formalist myth theory relates to the practice of dramaturgy in order to lay the groundwork for this study's adapted Lévi-Strauss/Stanslavsky methodology for identification rather than interpretation.

In practice, this methodology is two-pronged to meet this problematic initial working definition of myth for The House. The House is torn between, on the one hand, focusing on myth's potential universality of narrative, and, on the other, privileging the agents in these narratives, the heroes. That said, the preceding pages show a number of potential definitions and approaches for defining myth. Allen might have already articulated The House's very definition of myth in *The Invisible Foundation*: in this context, myth could be defined in their terms as simply a story about a hero.

## DRAMATURGY

Dramaturgy is old in practice but relatively new as an identifiable area of study. As we said previously, it is an expansive term that is now used to describe anything from an individual artist participating in the collaborative creation of theatre, to a task or function in reading and studying plays, to a descriptor of the tendencies of different theatre artists like playwrights and directors. Like "myth", "dramaturgy" is used in such a wide variety of ways it proves difficult to define. For our purposes, we are using "dramaturgy" to describe first the process of observing and analyzing plays and then to describe the particular practice and point of view of The House discovered through this analysis.

In his book, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, director/scholar Eugenio Barba offers that his practical experience with dramaturgy seemed to reveal that performance texts were comprised of

“a blend of elements held together by an invisible and multilayered structure” (9). Like Csapo’s strategy for addressing the problem of definition of myth, Eugenio Barba instructs us to begin by identifying contexts in which it is used, and for Barba, the context of dramaturgy is less a theoretical one and more a biographical one (8-9).

Barba’s advice for a biographical approach, described in the preface, is helpful for beginning a study. In this step, Barba focuses on the presence of layers of theatre like a biologist’s dissection of anatomy or morphology, looking at both the individual parts of a text specifically and the overall system at work in general to create a stronger model of understanding (9). For Barba, artist/directors must be an expert in what he calls “theatre’s sub-atomic reality” discovered through these processes (*xvii*).

Barba’s idea of dramaturgy not only points to a morphological view of plays similar to that Propp held on myth, but also provides a strategy of incorporating dramaturgical practices with theoretical approaches to myth to form this study’s myth dramaturgy.<sup>8</sup> Theoretically, Barba is sharing a similar aim with Propp. His dramaturgy and the resistance to working towards meaning or hermeneutics is an effort, through close and rigorous deductive investigations into the content and form of plays to create a deeper and more creatively fertile understanding of the work. It is not an attempt to create an objective or platonically ideal interpretation of a given play—not only arguably impossible for art or theatre but also seemingly counter-intuitive to the creative act. The effort intends to create a rigorous relationship between the play and the artists

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<sup>8</sup> Anecdotally, Barba’s use of ecological and biological terms to describe his dramaturgy and “the layered nature of the theatre” as it functions and relates on both horizontal and vertical dimensions (1) points to the my own biography of dramaturgy. My first scholarly work was in ecology, which still has an impact on my work as a theatre artist and scholar. However, the true value of Barba’s reference to science lies beyond anecdotal coincidence and rather in how he uses scientific terms to describe the process of viewing performance texts in a kind of abstract form so he could better observe them “independently from performance’s meanings” (9).



involved. This relationship can only be described as subjective, but a subjective one of a higher quality with a more viable artistic potential.

Just as Barba shares a morphological approach to dramaturgy with Propp's approach to myth, they both share similar foundations with the active analysis dramaturgy of Konstantin Stanislavsky. Again, anecdotally, as Barba recommends beginning with biography, the dramaturgy of Stanislavsky is at the core of much of my creative and scholarly work in the theatre. However, Stanislavsky's writings share a stronger connection to the foundational similarities between Barba and Propp than anecdote. Stanislavsky's lessons on approaches to plays and dramaturgy, as outlined in the post-Soviet translations of his writing (*An Actor's Work* and *An Actor's Work on a Role*) echo Barba's belief in layers of structure in plays and morphological approach to observing them, and shares a theoretical link with Propp as both were heavily influenced by the Russian formalism permeating the critical thought of their time. Here, let us reference the thoughts by Stanislavsky, as it not only helps continue to make the connections necessary for constructing a myth dramaturgy, but provides practical components that will be incorporated into the mechanics of the methodology of this study.

Stanislavsky, or more accurately his fictional proxy, Torstov, surveys his students' experiences reading *Othello* for their studio work at the beginning of their third year. He quickly discovers that few students actually read the play, and those who did relied on incomplete readings or peripheral critical essays and interpretations rather than reading the play itself, leading to grossly incomplete understandings of the whole, while promoting creatively unhealthy "preconceptions that will work against [their] creative work" (*An Actor's Work on a Role* 8). For Stanislavsky "cerebral intellectualizing" distracts from the creative experiencing of a play (8-9). It is not an anti-intellectual stance by Stanislavsky, but rather one that requires a manner of

reading that seeks an understanding that Stanislavsky identified as “the essence of the work and its artistic shape” (9), in a word, its morphology. This way of reading, according to Stanislavsky, is an effort to dig at “the essence of the structure” of plays (11) and creates a large and more fertile space for the work of theatre artists (9).

Like Barba, Stanislavsky employs biology for describing his dramaturgy: “Every play, as a living organism, has a skeleton and limbs” (11). He goes on to say that the dramaturgy of an artist should resemble the efforts of an anatomist as they dissect out the individual parts to better understand their structure—leading to “new and original approaches to a play” (11) and aiding in the discovery of hidden story beneath the surface narrative, only revealed through probing the play’s “secret depths” (13). Stanislavsky laments that literary specialists have a ready set of tools for their examinations (11) but actors and directors have no scientific definitions of a systematic grammar outside of practical experience and methods; so he proposes the adoption of the methodology of what was the emergent literary thought of the day—formalism—for the purposes of the theatre (13).

This systematic grammar in the case of mythic narratives, rather than theatre, was the aim of Propp and subsequently Lévi-Strauss. Propp’s methods are important both in practice and in how they theoretically provide the link between Stanislavsky and Lévi-Strauss. However, like Campbell, Propp’s endgame proves less helpful in analyzing any patterns of myth in the context of *The House*. Propp’s use of what he calls “facts” or concrete details of the plot (*Morphology* 6), minimized characters importance in the action and privileged plot as the true carrier of meaning (Liskas 102). Propp’s actions and plots create an abstract story that is similar in appearance to Campbell’s constructed “Ur” or “Monomyth” but remains an abstract story for use as a mechanism for comparison rather than a common ancestor to which all previous narratives

are linked genetically or in history (Csapo 201-3). Propp's belief that action is representative of the deep structure of the Wondertales and that characters are simply historical remnants or obsolete cultural components excludes a great deal and is problematic when discussing theatre, where both plot and character are identifiably vital components (Csapo 204-5).

The same tension between action and character in Propp's discussion of myth is present in Aristotle's discussion of plot and character in *Poetics*—the seminal dramaturgy text in Western Theatre. S.H. Butcher takes to task what he sees as the common misconception that Aristotle, like Propp, privileges action over character (348). Aristotle describes this tension in Book VI, lines 5-6, saying that action “implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought...and it is through character from which action springs.” Butcher makes the claim that for Aristotle action is not a purely external act but an expression of an inward process inherent in the character (334). Additionally, Butcher clarifies that in the *Poetics* plot is the external framework to illustrate character, and action is expressed, defined and interpreted by character (348). This proves important common ground for adapting these methods for dramaturgical purposes, especially since Lévi-Strauss attempts to reconcile the tension between plot and character in the same way as Aristotle.

Lévi-Strauss argues that Propp's formalism opposed form to content when form has no content, but rather *is* the content, captured in its logical organization (Csapo 204). Lévi-Strauss was able to show that action, and ultimately plot, is meaningless without character (Csapo 235). This distinction creates many of the same problems encountered by early linguistic and myth structuralists; but Lévi-Strauss' analysis was able to pull out meaning that may be less helpful or problematic for empirical study but maybe ideal and extremely illuminative for the artist (Clarke 184). This meaning is a product of the analysis but, in the structuralist paradigm, the meaning

does not necessarily exist independent of that analysis, but represents instead an interpretation of the myth and intra- and inter-relationally (Clarke 175).

Lévi-Strauss' methodology is similar to Propp's and Campbell's in that he tries to isolate component, functional parts of the narrative. He calls these sections *mythemes* and they include both action and character (Clarke 186). These mythemes are both derived and analyzed in a deceptively simple way. The myth is broken down into its basic component parts, represented by distillations of the story and characters into the shortest possible sentences that can still represent the myth in actuality without resulting in a narrative breakdown so they can be arranged through a deductive mode of comparison (Doniger 197; Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 211). Each sentence, or mytheme, is registered on a small index card and then arranged on both an x and y-axis according to similarity—based on either their role in the structure of the narrative or the content (type of events, actions and heroes) (Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* 211). The actual cards, recording these potential mythemes, are arranged left to right, with the x-axis preserving the chronology of the original narrative. Where potential mythemes possess some shared similarity to other cards, they are arranged on the y-axis—all the while preserving the original chronology on the x. As they are arranged according to similarity they visually begin to create bundles of relationships to create a mechanism of comparison and understanding of the myth (211). Each card, or mytheme, with its individual sentence represents a relationship between a character and an action and bundles of cards begin to show units of similar mythemes both within a narrative and between narratives (Csapo 221).

Lévi-Strauss gives the following example to demonstrate how this breaking down into component parts and arrangement results in new information. When confronted with the following numerical sequence (with numbers serving as placeholders for the component parts of

the myth, or mythemes, as in 1 is a threshold event, 2, a trial, 8, a dragon battle, etc.)—1,2,4,7,8,2,3,4,6,8,1,4,5,7,8,1,2,5,7,3,4,5,6,8—we can begin to arrange our identified mythemes according to a degree of relation or similarity (*Structural Anthropology* 213). In practice, this results in the following new arrangement of the sequence:

Figure 2.1

1	2		4		7	8
	2	3	4		6	8
1			4	5		7
1	2			5		7
		3	4	5	6	8

If we take the above sequence and consider it as narrative, and we understand the numbers as mythemes, where 1 represents a Hero's threshold event, 2 represents some trial, 8, a dragon battle, then we can see how the analysis allows for the identification of recurrent patterns of particular mythemes and how they relate, be it inter- or intra-specifically.

Lévi-Strauss' original example demonstrates this process with the Oedipus myth. A more Campbellian hero journey, one the members of The House grew up fanatically watching might serve as a better example for us in this context: George Lucas' *Star Wars*. A brief and incomplete overview for example could generate this potential list of mythemes: *Luke meets Obi Wan, Luke leaves Tatoinne, Luke Rescues Princess, Luke vs. Death Star*. If we expand the sample text to the entire trilogy, this truncated list of potential mythemes can expand to include: *Luke receives vision to go to Dagobah, Luke trains with Yoda, Luke vs. Vader, Luke loses his hand, Luke returns to Yoda, Luke vs. Vader II, Luke is rescued by Vader*.

Any fan of the films quickly sees the above list as dangerously reductive, but for the purpose of example let's proceed to sort them according to Lévi-Strauss' methodology.

Figure 2.2

<i>Luke meets Obi Wan</i>	<i>Luke leaves Tatoinne</i>	<i>Luke Rescues Princess</i>	<i>Luke vs. Death Star</i>			
<i>Luke receives vision to go to Dagobah</i>		<i>Luke trains with Yoda</i>	<i>Luke vs. Vader</i>	<i>Luke loses his hand</i>		
					<i>Luke returns to Yoda</i>	
			<i>Luke vs. Vader II</i>			<i>Luke is Rescued by Vader</i>

We can see in the example above, allowing for gaps in the comparative matrix preserves the original chronology of the Star Wars trilogy. The result is a number of columns that have a perceivable similarity in their events or the characters or archetypes involved. The next step would be to label these columns with some descriptor of the kind of myth function or event they all resemble—descriptors we will derive from the work of Propp and Campbell. By applying this method to the performance texts and company documents created by The House in addition to journalistic responses to both The House and their rapid development, a similar identification of the recurrent patterns in the myths of The House can occur. However, Lévi-Strauss departs from identification and moves towards explanation—which proves less helpful, at least at this step in the discussion of The House. Here, Wendy Doniger’s approach to Lévi-Strauss’ methodology suggests a helpful departure from a total and comprehensive adherence to Lévi-Strauss’ methods for analyzing myths—especially the move towards interpretation and creation of “scientifically objective meaning” in favor of a more modified approach.

Doniger asserts that Lévi-Strauss’ “The Structural Study of Myth” is a great method of sorting out the distinctive pieces or feature of myth—again, isolating the myth’s component parts in order to say *what is present* within the myth first before defining *what it is about* (199). The problem with Lévi-Strauss’ methodology, according to Doniger, is in its endgame and its attempt to create a canonical formula of myth. The move towards any positivist formula for myth results

in a breakdown for contemporary readers. A quick glance of his essay, “The Structural Study of Myth,” shows a clear shift near its midpoint. The first half explains and demonstrates the workings of Lévi-Strauss’ analytical method through a demonstration with the Oedipus myth. The second half of the essay applies this method to a set of myths gathered through anthropologically focused field research in an attempt to create a canonical model of myth that is concerned with definition and interpretation (228). Doniger claims that these summary models Lévi-Strauss provides at the end of this and subsequent essays are anti-climactic and often “bleeds the myth of all its meaning” (200). Doniger states that Lévi-Strauss reveals more about the myth in his analysis than he ever does in his conclusion (200). Doniger recommends that the “trick” to actually using Lévi-Strauss is to jettison his methodology right before that final analysis—likening it to jumping off Lévi-Strauss’ bus one stop before he does (200). The strength of the analysis, particularly for a contemporary application of the methodology, lies in the discussion of the stories to be analyzed, their distillation into component parts and the identification of the patterns of relation within and between the texts of study (200). Doniger surmises that once we have jumped off the structuralist “bus” one stop before Lévi-Strauss, subsequent scholars with expertise in the prerequisite fields for interpretation will finish the “journey” using another “bus” (i.e. a political, theological, phenomenology, psychological, etc. bus that best suits the needs of their study or research) or several “buses,” claiming the mythic journey requires a lot of transfers (200). “At the beginning stage of analysis, it is enough to identify certain unifying structures,” (200) says Doniger; it is later when the analysis begins to search for meaning of these structures that the study must incorporate and rely on the methods and expertise of other theorists (200). Doniger makes clear that a true application of Lévi-Strauss’ methodology results in a structure that is not neutral or purely objective, but one that is

transparent in its analysis as to remain open for subsequent analysis by other methodologies once the structural method is used to isolate, identify and lay bare the structure of the myth (200). This type of use of structuralism makes clear that it is not hermeneutical in nature in that it tries to get at any meaning or provide a new interpretation, but rather tries to determine and identify the workings underlying the object of study (Culler 31). As this study is just a first step in identifying the foundation of myth for *The House*, Doniger's adapted methodology not only provides a functional way of beginning to identify *what* is occurring within the work of the House but lays the groundwork for subsequent questions of *why*.

In practice, the methodology follows this sequence of steps in analyzing the selected performance texts of *The House Theatre*. The written scripts and archived recordings of the plays in performance are used to create a synthesis performance text, from which a resulting summary narrative of all the characters and events is derived. Trustworthiness protocols employed by participant observers in qualitative research studies are followed where possible to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of these summary narratives as an accurate account of the performance text<sup>9</sup>. Though my recollections and anecdotal experiences with *The House* “mythologize” them in the same ways as the critics, the hope is that transparent inclusion of this information proves helpful rather than distracting.

These summary narratives are the texts to which the Lévi-Strauss method of deriving and sorting mythemes are applied—generating a large list of potential mythemes that are distilled and reduced until they make up a series of mythemes that include all the major actions of each

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<sup>9</sup> In their 1985 *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba outline how rigorous research can be achieved in the so-called “softer” sciences (7). This research paradigm offers an alternative to positivist modes of investigation while providing a means to collect and analyze information with the same rigor of scientific studies. The strategies they lay out deal with establishing degrees of trustworthiness, rather than external validity (291), achieved through many of the practices embedded in the methodology of this study—strong paper trails of facts, repetition, close reading, etc.—the majority of which are outlined in their chapter 11, and in our chapter 2 here.



play into their most basic constituent parts. These mythemes are subsequently sorted by shared commonality, producing rows of mythemes that preserve the chronology of the plot while providing a glimpse into patterns of mythemes within the action vertically as in figure 2.1.

In the analysis of each performance text, and after the Lévi-Strauss sorting, these resulting columns of shared commonality in the matrix are labeled only with Roman numerals. However, when comparing larger groups of analyzed performance texts, it is important to be able to label similar patterns, events and mythemes shared across The House's plays according to their narrative content. Rather than arbitrarily constructing labels, we are fortunately provided with existing and defined labels of mythemes in the work of Propp and Campbell that are easily adapted for the purposes here.

Vladimir Propp's list of narrative "functions"—his term for the foundational narrative units which Lévi-Strauss labeled mythemes—was accompanied by a lexicon of special symbols and letters which he used to annotate his studied texts (Csapo 193). Propp's functions consisted a heading with a short sentence defining the major action of that component (Csapo 193). Propp made clear that, though not every function must be or was present in each of his analyzed tales, whatever functions were present always reflected a consistent chronology, always occurring in the same order, which he preserved in the comprehensive list of thirty-one functions he found in his Russian wondertales (Csapo 193).

The first seven functions, as described by Propp, were preparatory in nature and made up the beginning portion of his tales and are paraphrased as follows<sup>10</sup> (193-4):

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<sup>10</sup> Function labels are Propp's with descriptions adapted or clarified from his original after Eric Csapo's list found in *Theories of Mythology*, pages 193-4.

1. *Absentation*—one member of a family absents themselves from the home, by choice or by force. This can include characters like Hansel and Gretel slipping away from home or Jack running away, or the kind of war or hero journeys found in Greek epics. It can also include absentations like banishment or kidnappings.
2. *Interdiction*—the hero is prohibited or forbidden from something they want—anything from a law or rule imposed by a villain or a natural barrier keeping the hero from an object of want or desire.
3. *Violation*—the hero or another violates this interdiction in some way.
4. *Reconnaissance*—the villain makes an attempt to gather information on the hero. A strong example of this would be the evil Queen’s search for information about rival beauties from her magic mirror in the Snow White stories.
5. *Delivery*—the villain receives information about their intended victim—again, Snow white serves as example with the Queen hearing of Snow White’s beauty from the mirror.
6. *Trickery*—the villain attempts to deceive hero in order to take possession of them or what belongs to them—The Queen’s poisoned apple.
7. *Complicity*—the victim submits to the deception or unwittingly helps their enemy.

This first grouping of functions, which Propp labeled as “The Preparatory Part of the Tale” (Csapo 193), does not have to be present in the narrative; but, according to Propp, if any of these functions are there, they will reflect and persist in the order above (Csapo 193). It is a particular kind of tale that uses a large number of these functions in their exposition—Snow White is a strong example with a large expositional plot. Most tales employ one or two of Propp’s functions and then move on to the next grouping of narrative functions, which he labels

as the “Initiation of Actual Movement of the Tale” (Csapo 193). These actions not only represent a number of manners in which the wondertales are set in motion, but the combinations of each function help show how variation is achieved in surface narratives while still pointing to a deeper perceived similarity within the stories. Propp does not provide a third and concluding group of functions, but rather charts the course of action from these initiating events to their end of the narrative, as follows:

8. *Villainy*—the villain causes harm or injury to the hero or a member of their family—or—
- 8a<sup>11</sup>. *Lack*—the hero or member of a family lacks something of need or desire.
9. *Mediation or Connective Incident*—misfortune or lack is made known and the hero decides or is dispatched with a command to correct it.
10. *Beginning Counteraction*—The hero agrees to or decides on a counteraction to the villainy or lacking in their community.
11. *Departure*—the hero leaves their home or community.
12. *First Function of the Donor*—here the hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the hero for receiving either a magical object or helper for their journey.
13. *Hero’s Reaction to the First Function of the Donor*—an intermediary step important to Russian wondertales but less crucial to other narratives.
14. *Provision or Receipt of Magical Agent*—the hero receives a supernatural helper or object for the rest of the journey.

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<sup>11</sup> The similarity of these two functions as catalysts of action leads Propp to identify them as subsets of the same function for catalyzing the action rather than two separate functions that could exist independent of each other—for Propp it is either a villain causing harm or a lack of something that sets the hero on a journey (Csapo 193).

15. *Guidance*—the hero is transferred to a new place or travels with the aid of the magical agent.
16. *Struggle*—first combat between hero and villain.
17. *Branding*—the hero is branded or marked by the villain during their struggle.
18. *Victory*—the villain is defeated.
19. *Lack Liquidated*—the initial lack or misfortune is remedied or resolved.
20. *Return*—the hero starts to return to their home.
21. *Pursuit/Chase*—the hero is pursued on their journey.
22. *Rescue*—the hero is rescued from the pursuit.
23. *Unrecognized arrival*—the hero arrives home unrecognized by their family or community.
24. *Unfounded Claims*—a false hero presents unfounded claims of victory, etc., in place of the actual hero.
25. *Difficult Task*—the actual hero accomplishes some task or feat.
26. *Recognition*—the actual hero is recognized by home, family or community.
27. *Exposure*—the false hero is exposed.
28. *Transfiguration*—the hero is given a new appearance, identity or self.
29. *Punishment*—the villain or false hero is punished.
30. *Wedding*—the hero is married or ascends to a throne of leadership.

Despite Propp's lack of a third or "Concluding Group of Functions," we can see a natural break happening around functions number sixteen, seventeen and eighteen, where the action starts working towards resolution. Again, Propp does not demand these individual functions to all be present in every tale. Rather his wondertales reflect a selection of any number of these

functions, constructed in relation to the chronology above. These constituent parts and how they function as narrative building blocks, readily identifiable in Propp's model list, is similar to Joseph Campbell's monomyth model.

Like Propp, Campbell makes clear that the elements in his monomyth model do not all have to be present, but most likely will reflect an inherent order. Campbell states "many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements" of his monomyth cycle, but that it is also possible to "string a number of independent cycles" together, like in the story of the *Odyssey* (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 246). In addition to allowing more flexibility in his model than Propp, Campbell points out the possibility of different archetypal characters or events fusing into a single hybridized one or individual elements reduplicating themselves and reappearing with the same deep structure but a different superficial appearance (246). This allowance of hybridization of archetypes and mythemes will prove crucial to the discussion of The House's performance texts, particularly as they mature and increase in complexity.

Campbell outlines the story elements of his monomyth model—again, comparable to Propp's functions and how this study employs mythemes—in a numbered list form, but also produces a circle graph to demonstrate how, for Campbell, these narratives have strong cyclical patterns. Like Propp, the first phase of Campbell's monomyth is preparatory in nature. There is a beginning stasis for the tale in which the main character, or hero, is living in an ordinary world that is somehow disrupted by either some kind of *blunder* into a new awareness or a *herald* with a task, quest, plea or announcing some lack or need (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 51). These three components make up what Campbell labels as the narrative's *Call to Adventure* (49), and for our purposes it can be listed as following:

#### 0. Ordinary Time

1. *Call to Adventure*:

- a. *Blunder*—an accident reveals an unsuspected world (51).
- b. *Herald*—summons or call to adventure awakens or makes hero aware of a new idea of self, some personal or community lack, or a major problem.

Here, Campbell offers a secondary cycle, or a fork, in his narrative road, where the hero is allowed to refuse this call, resulting in a negative form of his monomyth, where the events follow his model but with a different impetus all together (59). The hero's journey is catalyzed in a different way but will quite quickly begin to resemble the journey of the hero who accepts the call. The hero's reticence or refusal, even if briefly, constitutes for Campbell enough of an element to be included in his model as either a unit of action before the hero sets out for a more standard journey or else the hero is pursued by or flees from their task (59). Here, this second step does not have to be included in the narrative, but when present it has a particular impact on the story and is important to include for our analysis here:

2. *Refusal of the Call*—the hero resists or refuses the call to adventure (59).

A hero who does not refuse the call is often offered help by some supernatural means, be it in the form of a character helper or some object that is able to aid in the journey (69). Heroes who have refused the call to adventure rarely receive such help (69). Heroes who accept the call often encounter some protective figure that guides the hero or provides some amulet or tool to help protect them against the dragon or villain or opposing force they are about to face (69). This helper, be it a character or some supernatural object, constitutes Campbell's third component to his monomyth, and the last event in the preparatory or expositional part of his narrative model:

3. *Helper*—some supernatural aid is given to the hero (69).

Here, the hero enters into what Campbell considers the middle action of the story as they cross the threshold of adventure (77). This crossing is achieved by a number of particular events, in the same way the *Call to Adventure* is broken in two separate forms:

4. *Crossing the Threshold of Adventure*—the hero's journey is initiated by one or more of the following events:
  - a. *Crossing*—some barrier between the hero's land and the land of adventure is surmounted, breached or crossed (245)
  - b. *Brother Battle*—knowingly or unknowingly, the hero must face a friend or family member to start their journey (245)
  - c. *Dragon/Guardian Battle*—the hero must face some strong evil or villain (245)
  - d. *Dismemberment*—the hero is injured, maimed or marked (245)
  - e. *Crucifixion*—the hero goes through a trial of sacrifice and death (245)
  - f. *Night Sea Journey*—the hero takes a secret journey infiltrating the land of adventure (245)
  - g. *Wonder Journey*—the hero employs magic to cross the threshold (245)
  - h. *Whale's Belly*—this passage is metaphorical in nature, where the hero is reborn or re-emerges on the other side of the threshold after being swallowed or descending into the unknown, appearing to have died but proving to be resurrected or reborn with new information or in a new form (90).

The outcome of *crossing the threshold of adventure* impacts the subsequent events in the same manner as the hero receives the *call to adventure* affects what follows. Here, the first three

sub-events: *Crossing*, *Brother Battle* and *Dragon/Guardian Battle* allow for the hero to proceed victoriously or continue on in defeat. The remaining events (*Dismemberment*, etc.) all employ an initial defeat for the hero. Whether victorious or not in this encounter or event, the hero proceeds beyond this threshold of adventure, undergoing a new set of trials. This *Road of Trials* is what Campbell calls “the favorite phase of the myth adventure” (97). It consists of a series of miraculous tests and ordeals where the hero may be aided by the helper met before crossing the threshold or finds new skills and powers that help them on their way (97). These trials and tests deepen the problem discovered in the beginning of the tale and first encountered when crossing into the middle action and the question of the hero’s success is still unanswered (109). What Campbell calls the *Road of Trials* is often a replication of the events or battles encountered by the hero when they originally crossed into the adventure. The first *Crossing the Threshold of Adventure* often initiates any number of subsequent threshold events—multiple battles, barriers, dragons to be faced again, again and again that reveal more and more of the ultimate reward or destination to the hero as they progress (109). The hero may encounter new helpers or have old ones return to aid them during these trials (246). This similarity and repetition of events give rise to Campbell’s logic that these narratives often work cyclically. Actions, events and characters that are identical in their deep structure may appear quite different in the surface narrative, repeating multiple times throughout a story without resulting in a breakdown but rather informing a more resonant narrative as the conflict and characters are deepened and further explored. This initiation phase of the action consists of one or a series of the following:

5. *Road of Trials*—the hero faces ordeals, tests and events similar to those encounters in the first threshold crossing (97, 109).



- a. *Helpers*—supernatural aids, new or familiar, appear to help the hero during these tests.

The narrative builds through a series or cycle of these trials and ordeals until the hero reaches the conflict, task or problem at its highest state. Campbell labels this event as the “Meeting with the Goddess” (109), a term derived from the particulars of his sociological work. A more helpful description of this event is found in Campbell’s definition, in which he describes the “Meeting with the Goddess” as the “ultimate adventure” (109) where the hero encounters the “supreme ordeal or gains his reward” (246). This *Ultimate Adventure* is the climax of this middle action of the narrative, and like *Call to Adventure* and *Crossing the Threshold to Adventure* prior, it has a subset of actions in how this climax can occur:

6. *The Ultimate Adventure*—the supreme ordeal, test or battle in which the hero accomplishes their task or receives their reward, achieved in one of three ways:
  - a. *Sacred Marriage*—the hero is actually married to some supreme being or awakened to some unknown knowledge or power (109, 116, 246).
  - b. *Father Atonement*—the hero is reunited or recognized by their estranged parent or family member (127, 246).
  - c. *Apotheosis*—the hero is deified or given special powers (151, 246).
  - d. *Elixir Theft*—the hero encounters an unfriendly climax, where the trial results of a theft by the hero (be it a bride, princess, magic token or object, treasure or even a power, like fire) and an escape towards home (122, 246).

After this climax of the middle action, the hero sets out on the third and final phase of the journey—or at least the third phase of this cycle before the narrative resets. Campbell’s view that

myths work cyclically requires the hero in his monomyth to create a “full round” and return to the ordinary with their new knowledge, trophy, boon, princess, etc. in order to rescue or repair the hero’s home (193). Like before, the hero is able to make a choice, setting of the next chain of events:

7. *Return*—the hero is forced to return to the ordinary where they started, bringing the gifts of their achievements with them (193).
  - a. *Refusal Action of Return*—Campbell sees this as a positive, where the hero elects to stay in the dream state of their highest achievement rather than come down from the mountain—figuratively or otherwise (196). Campbell places an almost ontological importance on the hero’s time spent here and focuses is much less on any negative impact on the hero’s delay in returning to their lacking community (196).
  - b. *Magic Flight*—the hero returns home with supernatural aid either with the blessing of those he has recently encountered (196) or without from those he has recently defeated (197).

As the hero journeys out of the realm of adventure, they once again have to cross a threshold of adventure. This crossing sets off the transition from the journey to the return to ordinary time (217):

8. *Return Crossing the Threshold of Adventure*—the return from the realm of adventure to the ordinary (217).
  - a. *Return*—the hero crosses with little effort and little fanfare, possibly even unrecognized (246).

- b. *Resurrection*—the hero is reborn or reemerges from their dismemberment, crucifixion or night/whale journey (246).
- c. *Rescue*—the hero is rescued and helped across the threshold to the original (246).
- d. *Struggle*—the hero faces one last battle or task, similar to the events found in the original threshold crossing earlier in the narrative (246).

Upon this return, the hero takes some action to restore or renew their community, which Campbell labels:

- 9. *Elixir*—the trophy, object, gift or information the hero has worked to acquire that meets the need or lack of their home in the ordinary (246).

With the cycle making a full and complete round, Campbell's monomyth is free to begin again with the hero receiving another *Call to Adventure*. Campbell demonstrates this by first creating a list like the one recorded above, and then puts these narrative elements into graphic form to show how such a cycle potentially functions (fig. 2.3).



Fig. 2.3. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 246

In process, the descriptions provided by Propp and Campbell above will serve in articulating the shared commonality between the mythemes of the analyzed performance texts of *The House*. These distinct narrative elements identified by Propp and Campbell are apt descriptions of the parallel events and characters found within *The House's* plays. Additionally, the chronological ordering by Propp in conjunction with the flexibility of Campbell's allowing for cyclical relationships of actions within a narrative will effectively help discuss these mythemes within the narratives, as well as how mythemes and their patterns are being potentially repeated across *The House's* early performance texts.

In the following chapter, extra time is taken with the first example of the study's analysis for purposes of demonstration and orientation. *Peter Pan* is the first performance text to be distilled into these *mythemes* for analysis, so a large summary narrative is included to better demonstrate the process of breaking down these narratives into their constituent *mythemes*. The subsequent performances texts in the chapters that follow will similarly have summary narratives, but for expediency sake after this initial example, these are made available within an appendix section at the study's conclusion.

After the initial analysis of *Peter Pan* is concluded, the performance text of *Death and Harry Houdini* will be rendered to produce a working set of potential mythemes. This performance text's mythemes, like *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*, will be sorted and analyzed individually first. The next step will be to compare the two resultant Lévi-Strauss comparative matrices, employing the Propp/Campbell labels above as descriptors for these mythemes, with the use of these descriptors being formalized sequentially through the following chapters. After this introductory approach in Chapter Three, the remaining chapters will introduce the performance texts with a brief contextual narrative and then present the lists of

mythemes and comparative matrices early in the chapter, moving towards discussion of findings rather than repetitious demonstration of methodology.

At times, the nature of the methodology must allow for review and reexamination, as initial findings are inconclusive or suspect. The inclusion of personal narrative to help create a transparent context of the investigation is often included at moments of stalled analysis. Because both Propp and Campbell privilege plot over character in their myth models, the most helpful adaptive methodological step is the inclusion of a dossier of characters in the discussion of each performance text. Both Propp and Campbell privilege plot over character in their myth models. However, unlike Propp, Campbell allows for a discussion of archetypes as the hero-agents in his narratives. Thankfully, Lévi-Strauss' inclusivity makes comparison of both plot and character possible.

That said, it is worth an additional pause here to try and gather the strands of the preceding methodology before proceeding to analysis. The task at hand is to take two contested terms: *myth* and *dramaturgy*, and form them into an even more problematic new term: *myth dramaturgy*. The working definitions of *myth* for this study are based on the way that The House defines it in their essay *The Invisible Foundation*. This is problematic, as the definition points to a function or desired aim of employing myth as a gathering and universal force for bringing their audience and their stories together. While The House articulates what they hope *myth* does, they only leave this question to explain what they actually think *myth* is when they ask why so many of their stories are about heroes. For our purposes here, a working definition of myth for The House is “a story about a hero”.

Though this statement may prove accurate to what The House is trying to do, it proves problematic in terms of myth theory. Luckily, our second contested term: *dramaturgy* has the

type of flexibility needed to reconcile this problem. Our working definition of *dramaturgy* is in two parts. Part one addresses dramaturgy as a process, and for the purposes of this study it can be defined as “the particular effort and methodology employed to identify the elements of myth and the potential patterns in how they occur within The House’s plays”. Part two is the discussion of findings, labeling any recognizable patterns within these plays as characteristic of the company’s work, that is as The House’s dramaturgy. Together, this creates a functional *myth dramaturgy* of the study: a process for identifying elements and patterns of myth within The House’s performance texts in hopes of articulating how these patterns have persisted throughout the first stage of The House’s work.

### CHAPTER 3

#### *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan and The Death of Harry Houdini*

This chapter begins with an extended account of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. This narrative is an early step in identifying mythemes in performance texts and is included here as a demonstration of this study's methodology. The discussion of the remaining performance texts will begin with brief, contextualizing description of the play, with the mythemes themselves serving as an effective summary outline of both the plot and characters. This early methodological step included here and their resulting summary narratives for the remaining performance texts have been included in the proceeding appendices.

#### *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*

*The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* was the first House production at the Viaduct Theatre. This converted industrial space would not be the obvious first choice for most upstart theatre companies, but it is now hard to imagine a better place for The House's invasion-like arrival on the Chicago theatre scene that summer.

The summer of 2002 was sweltering in Chicago. This made the rent cheap for the small converted warehouse without air conditioning tucked in next to the Western Avenue viaduct that gave the theatre its name. Patrons and performers shared the same cramped bathrooms. The only parking was on the street or under the viaduct out front. But it had a bar.

I went by myself on the play during the opening week of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. I arrived early, walking up to the theatre through the alley. I saw people I recognized from the paper's "Next Big Thing" articles, smoking and talking at an open garage door. This large door served as a stage door and an improvised air conditioner for the theatre—large industrial

fans blew fresh air in before the show and during intermission. During the hottest nights, it was left open during performance and sometimes people wandered in for free.

The theatre lobby was packed: young hipsters from Lakeview drinking iced coffee, Logan Square anti-hipsters in their heat defying hooded sweatshirts, glowering in the corner, folks from the suburbs with their kids, and people who looked like they worked at local NPR affiliates. Every once in a while, somebody in costume walked out of the theatre to use the one and only set of restrooms, mingle with the audience, or grab a beer.

When they opened the door, the party just moved inside. Performers and audiences mingled freely. Cast members greeted friends, helped folks find their seats, stretched on the periphery and checked props in plain sight. Some grabbed a last cigarette by the open door. Others were just arriving from their day jobs, rushing to get into costume. The audience was sweating but was also buzzing. The anticipation of what this might be—what it could be—seemed to make everybody there resilient to the heat.

We were seated around three sides of a large wooden deck raised a few inches off the floor. A large white sheet hung at the far edge. The actors orbited around and behind the seats to reach props and set pieces—primarily a rolling platform that served for pirate ship, Marooner rock, the Darling windowsill and everything in between, with a few large planks to make up the rest. Nothing was hidden—everything happened in plain sight.

As the doors closed, a young man took the stage and welcomed us all to “The House.” The person now making the pre-show announcement had earlier sold the tickets and tee shirts, and was running props for the show. He was also the artistic director of the young company, Nathan Allen, covering many of the production needs with the handful of company members that were not in the show. He asked cell phones to be silenced and for us to make as much noise as



we wanted. I remember there was a lot of crowing—lots of spontaneous crowing. Allen would sprint of the stage after a final celebratory “Welcome to The House” and the play would begin.

In dashed The Doctor—a grey-suited Freudian analyst with a slide show that compared and contrasted the makeup of the human mind with freely associated visual aids<sup>12</sup>. When showing the mind of a dog, The Doctor projected a slide of a meat grinder. For a porpoise he projected a bathtub plug and drain. A Da Vinci sketch of a flying wing psychoanalytically represented an ostrich’s mind. The adult mind of a human was the equivalent of a road atlas map of Des Moines, Iowa.

For The Doctor, these haphazard associations served to point out how the human mind is an “extraordinarily ordered and intricate system, easily mapped and analyzed” (Klapperich, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* 4). The Doctor demonstrated the territories of the adult human mind, explaining that the hopes and fears of the adult mind are “easily discernible from the rumor and superstition” (4). As he plotted their locations in various subdivisions and suburbs on and around the map of Des Moines, he showed how the Midwest city’s intersecting highways gave a clear example of how “dreams are relegated to a very specific and harmless coordinate, far from areas of duty and responsibility,” (4). He made clear that in the adult mind, “regions never overlap and rarely interfere with each other” (4).

To make a mind as ordered as a map of Des Moines, The Doctor argues the first line of defense is the relationship between a mother and her child (4). The Doctor displays the child’s mind—an image of subatomic particles moving through a bubble tank used as the album cover of the recent Strokes release—vaguely like that of the adult’s. The Doctor extols the audience

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<sup>12</sup> In discussions of plays, any moment or dialogue present in the written texts supplied by The House of their plays is cited. Visual moments, recorded from archival footage and cited in general are included in the studie’s works cited.

that with “due diligence, a nearly perfect specimen can be achieved without ever requiring the intervention of psychological professionals” (5). For example, The Doctor welcomes a case study to the stage, Mrs. Darling, mother to one Wendy Moira Angela Darling.

Mrs. Darling carries onstage a large box with an oversized tag marked, “Wendy’s Mind.” Mrs. Darling plunges into the box, contorting her body making “Wendy’s Mind” seem much deeper than it first appears. She rummages through her daughter’s mind in an attempt to re-order it, placing the nicest thoughts close to the surface—a bouquet of violets and a nice clean blanket—and burying the less pleasant items, like a bowling pin and a dead frog, near the bottom. As she does, she confesses that, in her attempt to keep her children safe from “unhappiness and strife,” she sometimes encounters the strange, unfriendly things that somehow seep in. As if to prove her point, she produces from the box a sex toy it seems Wendy has been hiding away (6). Mrs. Darling, aghast, throws the toy away, lamenting that despite her efforts, knowledge that she herself may not even possess has crept into her children’s “fragile minds and threatens everything [she’s] worked for” (6).

Last but not least, Mrs. Darling stumbles upon a shadow—a shadow of a little boy—and turns to see Peter Pan looking at her through the window. “I’d forgotten about you” she says just as she is interrupted by the tuxedoed Mr. Darling erupting into the room, screaming in frustration over his bowtie and the possibility of being late to some important event. As Mrs. Darling puts away the box, Mr. Darling screams that if they are late their lives will fall apart; but he is quickly pacified by Mrs. Darling fastening his bow tie, and they leave arm-in- arm for their gathering.

The room is dark, and at the window a small light appears, attached to a small set of wings that are perched on a headdress worn by an actress is a green leotard made complete by a small tutu. She cartwheels around the space, whipping off gymnastic tumbling runs and strings

of curse words with equal ease; this foul-mouthed Tinkerbell scouts out the room for Peter's lost shadow.

She is followed by the recognizably green-suited Peter Pan, but sporting Converse hi-tops rather than pointed leather shoes. Peter and Tink try to stick his shadow back on, but are interrupted by Wendy, who recognizes the famous young boy from the stories her mother told her, letting slip she has hoped Peter would someday arrive at her window. Wendy sees that Peter has been frustrated in his attempts to attach his shadow, so she fetches a needle and sews the lost shadow to the soles of Peter's feet, accidentally calling Peter her "little man" (6) in the process—sending Peter into a tirade. She calms him down and continues with her sewing. Wendy is offended when Peter celebrates his cleverness and fails to thank her for her help. There is an impotent exchange where Wendy asks for a kiss and the couple ends up trading thimbles instead. Wendy then asks Peter how old he is, to which he responds he does not know—he ran away the day he was born because he never wanted to grow up and be a man, and subsequently ended up with the Lost Boys in the Neverland.

Wendy inquires about the Neverland, asking how the Lost Boys came to be there and about the fairies. Peter informs her about how fairies are born from children's laughs and killed when the children lose belief in their existence. Peter also explains that the Lost Boys arrive in the Neverland because when children fall out of their cradles and are not claimed after seven days, "they are sent far away to the Neverland to defray expenses" (15). Peter proclaims that he is their captain, to which Wendy counters that being a captain must be like being a father to them as well. Peter is taken aback by the possibility that his role is to care for them and raise them to be "fine gentlemen" and makes it clear to Wendy that they have no one to care for them and they come and go as they please. In describing their carefree lifestyle, Peter comes to a realization that

despite it being a marvelous existence, he and the Lost Boys are lonely on account of having no female companionship.

Wendy asks why no girls are in the Neverland, and Peter replies that girls “are too clever to fall out of their strollers” (16). Charmed by Peter, Wendy offers him a kiss—this time calling it a “thimble”. She kisses him and Peter offers to give her a “thimble” as well. As Peter does, a jealous Tink intercedes, pulling Wendy’s hair and swearing a blue streak, saying she’ll keep doing it “every time that little whore [Wendy] tries to ‘thimble’ you” (17).

Despite the interruption, Wendy is obviously taken with the young Peter Pan and asks if he comes to her window often. Peter says he does, but not to see her. He comes to listen to Mrs. Darling’s stories since there are no stories in the Neverland. Wendy tells Peter that she knows a great deal of stories and he starts to pull her out the window to take her back to the Neverland. Wendy resists and tries to reason with Peter that she cannot fly, but Peter tempts her with the adventure of seeing mermaids, adding how important she would be to all the Lost Boys, and how they would respect her and appreciate her tucking them in at night and darning their clothes and making pockets since they’ve never been tucked in or had darned clothes or pockets in their life. Wendy decides she can be the mother and declares Peter could be the father, but Peter changes the subject quickly and starts to teach Wendy to fly. To fly to the Neverland, you have to think lovely thoughts, and as Wendy begins to hover at the window, Peter asks her what she is thinking of that is so lovely. Wendy answers, “I’m thinking of you, Peter Pan” (21), and without registering Wendy’s true intent, they fly off.

The Doctor and Tinkerbell both introduce us to the Neverland. First, The Doctor explains for the audience that the “fully formed adult mind” finds it difficult “to comprehend the scope and complexity of the raw mind of a child” (22). It is a place of “unsubstantiated fears while at

the same time there is an occurrence of unbelievable courage and pluck” (22). The Doctor names imagination as the culprit, in that it allows the child to imagine that they are superhuman, able to fly or possess superhuman strength—and if left unchecked, this problematic imagination “will integrate seamlessly with the superego making a differentiation between real and imaginary impossible” (22). This imagined reality, says The Doctor, leads to “advanced schizophrenic outburst, [that] without the proper guidance find the manifestation of such mythical creatures fairies, mermaids, brutal savages, Pirates and wild beasts” (22). Tinkerbell caps off The Doctor’s psychoanalytical explanation of the Neverland with a quick rundown of the mechanics of how daily life goes on about on the island. When Peter is away, she explains, the Neverland takes a break. But when news of Peter’s return reaches the Neverland, the island hums with life. Tink explains that The Lost Boys are searching the island for Peter and that the Pirates are out looking for The Lost Boys. The Pirates, in turn, are pursued by the Indians, who themselves are being tracked by the wild beasts. Despite all parties being out for blood and sworn enemies, they never meet as they are going round and round the island at the identical rate. However, this status quo is about to be upset by Tinkerbell’s jealousy of the soon to arrive Wendy.

The pirates enter while Smee lyrically introduces the crew and sets the stage for Captain Hook’s big entrance—at first a huge, backlit shadow approaches from behind the large muslin drop and shrinks to what can be described as an almost Napoleonic caricature of the pirate leader. He is a very dainty pirate and decides upon arrival to kill one of his crew to demonstrate to the audience his true villainy. An unlucky volunteer is selected from the crew and promptly disemboweled. Hook pulls out a big cigar from his pocket and moves on, leaving the dying pirate.

As the pirates exit, Tiger Lilly and the rest of the Indians are fast on their heels and find the pirate, who has not yet completely perished. Tiger Lilly quickly scalps him and, with the other Indians, runs in pursuit of the rest of the crew, leaving the now seriously wounded pirate to fend for himself. Soon, actors playing a wolf, a snake, a flock of ravens and a bear attack the dying pirate and finish him off—only to be chased off by the approaching sound of the ticking clock that resides in the belly of the gigantic crocodile that ate Captain Hook’s now eponymous missing hand.

The stage is empty as Tinkerbell reenters with the Lost Boy, Tootles, in tow. He has a small bow and arrow and Tink gives him instructions, supposedly from Peter, to shoot this big, ugly bird flying over Neverland while moaning like a child and calling out “Poor Wendy” (27). Tootles asks if the Wendybird is dangerous and Tinkerbell assures him that it is very dangerous indeed. Tink makes clear how proud Peter will be if Tootles is able to kill the Wendy, so he agrees, takes aim, and shoots the approaching Wendy out of the sky. Wendy crashes to the stage, holding an arrow to her breast and the Lost Boys enter, crowding around her body to see what Tootles had done.

Peter arrives just a few moments later and the Boys move to hide their presumed Wendybird to surprise him. Peter announces that he has brought them a mother, and while describing this new mother to the Boys, they quickly realize that Peter’s mother closely resembles the Wendybird they have shot out of the sky. They reveal their mistake to Peter, confessing they did not know that what they shot was their mother; but luckily, Tootles’ arrow struck the thimble and has caused no permanent damage. Peter decides the best remedy for Wendy’s injury is to build her a house, so the Boys and Peter build a makeshift shelter—in this

case a magic trick that suspends Wendy parallel with the floor supported by nothing but a thin pole.

The Doctor enters, enquiring about Peter's mother as Wendy floats motionless behind him. Peter begins to remember thoughts from his life before coming to the Neverland: a walk through the park, his mother's sweet smell, his tall father who is taller than the mast of a pirate ship, "taller than the stars" (33). As Peter speaks to The Doctor, Captain Hook enters, taking the floating Wendy's hand. As Peter describes a conversation between his mother and father, Hook and Wendy say the words: "He will grow up to be a great man...a man of wealth and influence," and that he will grow into "a man of power and responsibility...and handsome, we'll have to watch out for the ladies, they will surely take him away from me, from us" (34). The memory fades and Peter cannot see his mother any more—Wendy exits the stage. Peter explains he can no longer see his mother in this memory, only men—all smoking cigars and drinking, all trying to teach him to be powerful and rich, but Peter refuses to learn and grow up. Peter and The Doctor leave.

Captain Hook enters with Smee, spying on the Lost Boys and their new mother. Smee's interest in the new mother is markedly sexual, Hook's more of a novel curiosity and a desire to take what Peter Pan seems to value. They concoct a plan to kidnap Wendy and make her their own mother. The celebration over their devious plan is cut short by the tick tocking of the clock in the belly of the giant crocodile Hook fears so much. Hook explains that the croc is coming for him because since the croc has tasted his flesh when it ate his hand, hunting the pirate ever since their fateful meeting—with the clock as the only warning, a warning he fears is growing closer all the time.

Hook and Smee escape to work on their plan as the Lost Boys come out to explain their lives before arriving in Neverland. Most do not remember anything. Some have hazy memories of their old mothers, but all the Boys make clear their lives have improved since the arrival of their new mother, Wendy.

All together, as a family, the Boys, Peter and Wendy celebrate their newfound happiness in the lagoon, sunning on Marooner's rock. However, their holiday is interrupted by Smee and the Pirates rowing out to the rock with Tiger Lilly, bound in ropes. Peter, Wendy and the Boys hide as the pirates unload their prisoner and figure out a way to execute her. In hopes of saving Tiger Lilly, Peter impersonates Captain Hook, telling the pirates to set her free. Confused but compliant, they do so. When the actual Captain Hook arrives to discover his prisoner has been set free, Peter and the Lost Boys ambush the pirates. Hook and Peter begin to fight. Hook falls off the rock, and when Peter, in good form, reaches to help his opponent to regain his footing, Hook slashes Peter with his metal claw. The Doctor rushes on to the stage to ask Peter why he tried to help his adversary. "Because it was fair," replies Peter (50). The Doctor tries to reason with Peter about the folly of his actions—that in mortal combat such fairness should not come into account, that Peter froze when Hook failed to play by the rules, that life is not fair—but Peter shrugs it off, saying it simply was not fair and leaving it at that. The Doctor cautions that such thinking could get the young man killed, to which Peter responds, "To die will be an awfully big adventure" (51). The Doctor leaves Peter, who then joins Wendy and the Boys at the Indian village, celebrating Tiger Lilly's rescue and safe return.

As the tribe dances, Tiger Lilly pulls Peter away, much to the concern of both Tinkerbell and Wendy. Tiger Lilly thanks her rescuer, calling him "The Great White Father" (53). Peter makes clear no thanks are needed, but Tiger Lilly insists, telling him that "there must be some



way I can show the great Peter Pan the depths of my appreciation” and getting down on her knees before him (53). Tiger Lilly offers herself to Peter, asking to be his wife—a term and concept unfamiliar to Peter. He asks Tiger Lilly if a wife is like a mother, because if a wife is like a mother, he is out of the market for one as he has “recently acquired one of those” (54). Tiger Lilly makes clear she wants to be his lover and grabs the front of his pants. Peter’s body responds enthusiastically and Peter is horrified by his first ever erection, pulling away and shouting at his crotch that he will not be a man, ever. Peter tries to fly away, but cannot and is carried off stage by the Tiger Lilly and the tribe.

The Doctor enters, lecturing the audience on the importance of children making a clean break from their mother early or an unhealthy attachment will form near impossible to break later in life—causing severe problems—especially sexual ones. These individuals will search our relationships that mirror this original “mothering” companion (55) and make it near impossible for a healthy relationship with the opposite sex.

Back at their home, Wendy, Peter and the Lost Boys sit down for supper. They are guarded by the grateful but rebuffed Tiger Lilly, and the tension between the Indian princess, Wendy and Tinker Bell is high. Wendy and Peter preside over the dinner, and then with the prompting and subsequent serenading from the Lost Boys, begin to dance, playing the part of an old married couple. When it gets too real for Peter, he pulls away, asking Wendy to be sure the game is still make believe.

Wendy is frustrated and asks Peter to define his “exact feelings” for her and Peter answers that his feelings towards her are “those of a devoted son” (60). Dejected, Wendy stops the dance and goes to sit alone. Peter is confused by Wendy’s reaction, as it is the same

frustration Tiger Lilly has been expressing. Before an argument can grow out of hand, Wendy puts the Lost Boys to bed with a story of her parents and begins to grow homesick.

The story of Wendy's home and her family bothers Peter a great deal and he makes a confession to The Doctor. Peter confesses that when he ran away, he always thought his mother would leave the window open for him—but when he eventually returned, “the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed” (64). The Doctor asks Peter to tell him about his Mother, and he tells the story of his abandonment (64). Wendy, feeling rejected by Peter asks to be returned home and Peter quietly agrees despite the protestations of The Lost Boys (65).

Peter tells Wendy that the Indians will guide her through the wood and that Tink will fly her back to London (66). Peter allows the Lost Boys to accompany Wendy, sending them out of the house and on their way (67-8). Unbeknownst to Peter, Tiger Lilly has been murdered by Hook and his crew who now lie in ambush outside Peter and Wendy's house, giving a false “all clear” signal that lures Wendy and the Boys into the open, where they are promptly captured while Tink looks on (70-3). Hook sneaks into the house and finds a sleeping Peter (73). He poisons the medicine Wendy has left out for Peter as she left, all the while soliloquizing how it is bad form, but necessary and leaves Peter to his demise (73).

Tink, having watched everything, seizes her opportunity to have Peter all to herself now, waking Peter gently while lying next to him and reminding him how everything has returned to normal now that the “Wendybird” is gone (74). Peter, seeing the empty house, remembers to take the medicine that Wendy left for him, only to be stopped by a Tink (75). He comments on how strange she is acting, not knowing of Hook's deception. As Tink struggles to stop him, she embraces and kisses Peter, imploring him to tell her that he loves her, which like in the cases of

Tiger Lilly and Wendy before her, Peter refuses (75). Tink lets Peter know that Wendy is captured by Hook and what has befallen the Lost Boys (75) and tries to convince Peter of Hook's deception in poisoning his medicine (76). Peter rejects this as impossible—Hook could never have tricked him, he explains to her (76). Tink continues to protest as Peter goes to drink the poisoned medicine, making Peter so angry he shouts that he does not believe in fairies (76). Resolutely, Tink tells Peter that she still loves him and then commits suicide by drinking the poison. No amount of hand clapping could bring her back in this version of *Peter Pan* (77).

With Tink and Tiger Lilly now dead, and Wendy captured and held prisoner aboard Hook's ship, Peter is left alone on stage. Once again, The Doctor enters and asks Peter to tell him about his mother (78). This time, Peter begins to tell what he remembers—how beautiful she was but laments how much he has forgotten: all the pirates killed, all the Lost Boys who have died, friends he has lost (78). He vows not to forget Tiger Lilly or Tink, Wendy or the Boys, and comes to a kind of reckoning with The Doctor, vowing to no longer forget and to save the friends he has left from Tink and Tiger Lilly's fate (78). Peter hears the ticking of the crocodile's clock in the distance, and faces both his fear of growing up and the crocodile (78-9). The monster croc appears and fights with Peter, who is eventually swallowed whole (79). The crocodile is only victorious for a few moments however, as Peter slices his way out of the beast's midsection, drenched in blood and holding up the ringing alarm clock. Raising it high above his head, Peter sets off in search of Hook (79).

As Peter races off to confront Hook, his three rejected would-be loves take the stage. Tinker Bell, Tiger Lilly and Wendy all enter, decked out in matching red sequined dresses, and begin to lip synch to Aretha Franklin's, "Chain of Fools" (80). Looking like an old Motown

performance, the ladies each take a verse that serves as a lament for how they were treated at the hands of Peter and how they will not be added to his “chain of fools” any longer (80).

After the song, Hook enters lamenting as well. He stands alone on the deck of his ship with his conscience unsettled for poisoning Peter and growing more and more angry as he realizes how children everywhere love Peter and even pirates like Smee more than they love him, despite all of Hook’s potentially positive qualities (81). Angry at being unloved, Hook hatches a plan to win the affections of the hostage Lost Boys by offering them positions on his crew (82). The Lost Boys, wrapped in chains, consider Hook’s offer and are tempted by promises of new pirate names and ranks (83); but with a vow to their new mother and shouts of “God Bless America,” the Boys ultimately refuse and are ushered towards the plank for a watery execution (84).

Suddenly, the ticking of Hook’s crocodile is heard, causing panic on board and allowing Peter, with the alarm clock in tow, to rescue the Boys and Wendy (85). Hearing Peter’s familiar crow, Hook realizes the trick and jumps into the fight. Smee pursues Wendy, asking her to be his Mother, and after catching her, knocks her to the ground and attempts to rape her (86). The unconscious Wendy is rescued by Tootles, The Lost Boy, who kills Smee (86).

All the while, Peter and Hook have been engaged in a running fight and burst onto the stage slashing at each other with their swords. They fight brutally and Hook realizes this is a different foe; Peter has changed (87). He disarms Hook, knocking his hat and flowing wig from his head and drives his sword through Hook’s back, running him clear through (88).

Peter takes Hook’s large pirate hat and wig and puts it on his own head assuming command of the ship, and returns Wendy and the Lost Boys home. As Peter takes Hook’s place at the wheel, The Doctor comes out and discusses the process of boys growing into men and their

relationships with their mothers and fathers (89). Peter begins to ask questions of his unseen mother and father, with Hook, Wendy, Tiger Lilly and Tinker Bell answering his questions, saying that Peter will grow into a great and influential man, a lover and a husband, a father (89-90). Peter confesses to being afraid he is growing into a pirate, as all the voices leave Peter and The Doctor on stage alone (92-3). The Doctor asks again for Peter to tell him about his mother, and now, shaken from the experience of growing up, even ever so slightly, Peter regresses, simply responding to each question, “I forgot” (94). The Doctor gives his final diagnosis of Peter as unable to ever fully integrate into adult society because of his lack of proper socialization, keeping him from the more ordered and less obvious adventure of the adult mind (94-5).

The preceding narrative is not an exhaustive summary of the performance text of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. Rather it represents, for demonstration and contextualization purposes, a preliminary step in this study’s methodology, a step not included in the body of subsequent chapters but available in the appendices, yet vital to the entire study’s process. It is an assessment of the main actions in the plot which lays the groundwork for the breaking down of the performance text into potential mythemes. This process of reducing a performance text, comprised of both literary and mediated visual components, progresses through a series of steps whose mechanics are deceptively simple in their methods, but credible and effective in the patterns they bring to the surface.

We can now apply Lévi-Strauss’ index card technique for discovering patterns of mythemes and his sorting methodology to the preceding narrative, helping to organize it for distillation down into mythemes. The example narrative of *Peter Pan* in this chapter is a record of this step, in which the major events of the play, large or small, were noted on individual cards. The criteria for notation is extremely inclusive at the outset—allowing for everything from large

scenes, references to set pieces to individual lines or small, specific moments of dramatic action to be noted. The same way Lévi-Strauss describes breaking down the Oedipus myth into a pattern of mythemes, as referenced in chapter two and demonstrated with the *Star Wars* text, was used here to try and derive what mythemes may be present in *Peter Pan*. By sorting and arranging according to similarity and sequence, these disparate narrative components, as notated on their individual cards, begin to form aggregate dramatic units<sup>13</sup>. Through the sorting process, the narrative is distilled down from a series of many separate actions and characters into larger groupings of similar events, approaching what constitutes, for our purposes, a mytheme.

The application of this process to The House's *Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* produced thirty-two potential mythemes for analysis. These mythemes were then recorded on index cards in the same way Lévi-Strauss isolated the mytheme components of his Oedipus example, in order to sort them into groupings of shared similarity. This sorting created a matrix that helped to reveal any patterns in the narrative. The potential mythemes<sup>14</sup> of *Peter Pan* for this first attempt at analysis are as follows:

1. The Doctor outlines the difference between adult and child minds.
2. Mr. and Mrs. Darling do not understand their daughter, Wendy's mind.
3. Wendy reattaches Peter's lost shadow, earning her an invitation to Neverland to be Peter and the Lost Boy's mother.

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<sup>13</sup> I am intentionally referring to these as aggregate dramatic units in this early step of the analysis rather than use the familiar dramaturgical terms of "beats", "units" or "French scenes" as these groupings are defined by their potential myth structures rather than their role in the dramatic action of the performance text.

<sup>14</sup> This first list of potential mythemes can initially be unruly because they are rife with compound actions. Lévi-Strauss' charge of inclusivity sometimes creates awkward "mythemes" at the outset, where certain events are categorized together not because of shared similarity but because of their dissimilarity to the preceding or following groupings. Subsequent sortings of these cards form a deductive criteria for the most fundamental actions and events of the plot, and thusly help to identify the strongest list of potential mythemes. Diagnostically, these early unruly potential mythemes prove helpful as they will most often be culled from the final analysis.

4. The Doctor shows how a child's mind uses fantasy to face danger.
5. Tinker Bell lies to Tootles and he shoots the "Wendybird."
6. The Neverland's safe balance is disrupted, setting off a chain of new violence.
7. Wendy is saved by Peter's thimble "kiss."
8. The Doctor asks Peter about his mother.
9. Hook and Wendy speak as Peter's parents, terrifying him so much he recommits his vow to never grow up.
10. Hook and Smee, jealous of the new mother in Neverland, create a plan to kidnap her for themselves.
11. Hook captures Tiger Lilly and plans to execute her.
12. Peter rescues Tiger Lilly and battles the pirates.
13. Hook displays bad form by slashing Peter's helping hand during the fight.
14. The Doctor interviews Peter about Hook's deception and Peter is unable to process it.
15. Tiger Lilly offers herself to Peter as a lover, which he rejects.
16. Tiger Lilly vows to protect Peter, despite the rejection.
17. The Doctor explains the lack of sexual development for boys with mother issues.
18. Wendy offers herself as to be the mother if Peter plays the father, which he rejects.
19. Wendy prepares Peter his medicine but asks to be returned home.
20. Tiger Lilly is murdered while keeping watch over Peter.
21. Hook tricks Wendy as she tries to depart for home with the Lost Boys and captures them all.

22. Hook sneaks into Peter's secret house and poisons his medicine.
23. Tinker Bell offers herself as wife and partner to Peter, which he rejects.
24. Tinker Bell commits suicide/saves Peter by drinking poisoned medicine when Peter says he does not believe in fairies.
25. Peter and The Doctor come to a reckoning as Peter begins to remember his mother.
26. Peter fights the crocodile, is swallowed and emerges from its belly with the clock.
27. Hook's jealousy of children's love of Peter and Smee leads him to try and win over the Lost Boys.
28. The Lost Boys remain faithful to their new mother and vow to die like men.
29. Peter attempts to rescue Wendy and the Boys.
30. Smee is killed by Tootles as he attempts to rape Wendy.
31. Peter kills Hook and puts on his wig and hat and takes Hook's place at the helm.
32. Doctor interviews Peter about his parents again.

These thirty-two potential mythemes are now sorted on two axes: chronologically in the order in which they occur within the plot on the horizontal x-axis, and by shared similarity on the vertical y-axis. This sorting creates a matrix where columns of similar mythemes form while the progress of the plot throughout the comparison is preserved. Large gaps sometimes occur within the comparison matrix when a potential mytheme is sorted on the y-axis, but must begin a new horizontal row to preserve chronological order of the mythemes within the narrative. Where the columns on the y-axis point to groupings of mythemes that share some key aspect, the groupings of mythemes in the horizontal rows are helpful in showing units of dramatic action and how the mythemes are at work within the plot or narrative. The following table (3.1) represents an initial,



and for the purposes of demonstration and discussion of the methodology in this first analytical chapter, only a preliminary identification of the potential mythemes. Here, any problems of comparison can be noted, and a second, more refined matrix (3.2) can be created to better illuminate the patterns of myth in this text for comparison with the subsequent texts. The mythemes were sorted based on shared similarity with the initial sorting demonstrated below. Potential and provisional headings from the Propp/Campbell descriptors are included where they apply here to help track the decisions made in this early step in the process.

Table 3.1

<b>I</b>	<b>II (Helper?)</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV (Call to Adventure? Reverse Call to Adventure?)</b>	<b>V (Violation)</b>	<b>VI (Villainy?)</b>	<b>VII (Sacred Marriage?)</b>	<b>VIII (Refusal? Or Sacred Marriage II)</b>	<b>IX</b>	<b>X (Whale Belly)</b>
	The Doctor outlines the difference between adult and child minds.	Mr. and Mrs. Darling don't understand Wendy's mind.	Wendy reattaches Peter's shadow—he invites her to Neverland to be Mother						
	The Doctor shows how a child's mind faces danger with fantasy			Tink lies to Tootles, shoots the "Wendy-Bird"	Neverland's balance upset, sets of chain of violence. First Cycle of Violence	Wendy saved by Peter's thimble "Kiss"			

	The Doctor asks Peter about his mother	Hook and Wendy speak as Peter's parents terrifying him so he swears never to grow up.	Hook and Smee devise a plan to kidnap the new mother.		Hook captures Tiger Lilly and plans to execute her. Second Cycle of Violence.	Peter rescues Tiger Lilly and battles the Pirates.			
<b>I</b>	<b>II (Helper?)</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV (Call to Adventure? Reverse Call to Adventure?)</b>	<b>V (Violation)</b>	<b>VI (Villainy?)</b>	<b>VII (Sacred Marriage?)</b>	<b>VIII (Refusal? Or Sacred Marriage II)</b>	<b>IX</b>	<b>X (Whale Belly)</b>
					Hook displays bad form by slashing Peter's helping hand.				
	The Doctor interviews a shocked Peter.						Tiger Lilly offers herself to Peter as a lover—he rejects.	Tiger Lilly vows to protect Peter.	
	The Doctor explains the lack of sexual development for boys with mother issues.						Wendy offers herself as a Mother to Peter's Father—he rejects	Wendy prepares medicine for Peter and asks to return home.	
					Tiger Lilly is murdered. Third Cycle of Violence?				
				Hook tricks the Lost Boys and Wendy to capture	Hook sneaks into the house and poisons Peter's		Tink offers herself as wife to Peter—he	Tink commits suicide/saves Peter.	

				them.	medicine.		rejects.		
Peter comes to the reckoning with the Doctor.									Peter fights the croc, to retrieve the clock.
<b>I</b>	<b>II (Helper?)</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV (Call to Adventure? Reverse Call to Adventure?)</b>	<b>V (Violation)</b>	<b>VI (Villainy?)</b>	<b>VII (Sacred Marriage?)</b>	<b>VIII (Refusal? Or Sacred Marriage II)</b>	<b>IX</b>	<b>X (Whale Belly)</b>
							Tink, Wendy and Tiger Lilly dance and sing to "Chain of Fools"		
			Hook tries to win over the Lost Boys.						
Lost Boys remain faithful to new mother.						Peter comes to rescue Wendy and the Boys.			Smee is killed by Tootles as he tries to rape Wendy.
									Peter kills Hook.
		Peter dresses as Hook							
	The Doctor interviews a lost Peter.								

If we look at the comparative matrix in table 3.1, we can see the first major grouping of similar mythemes is primarily composed of the psycho-analytical Doctor's interjections into the play. These feel imperfect as mythemes, as they often do not contain a character engaging in some strong action<sup>15</sup>—usually The Doctor is found discussing, describing or interviewing, a passive action for an archetypal character. This proves out when there is not a true descriptor available from Propp or Campbell to articulate the archetype or event The Doctor is fulfilling in the narrative. However, Lévi-Strauss' Oedipus example allows for the inclusion of more descriptive mythemes rather than the more obvious narrative/action based forms in the comparison. We can see through including The Doctor's actions as potential mythemes, that his work in the play is deeply influenced by popular interpretations of Freudian psychology. The Doctor begins the play lecturing on child psychological and sexual development, and through the course of action begins to apply his research to interviewing his test-subject, Peter Pan, who has a clear set of mother/father and sexual issues.

A quick scan of the figure shows these mother/father issues persist throughout the play. There is a small grouping of mythemes that include the clueless Darling parents, lamenting their daughter's growing up, Peter's fearful description of his parents' wishes for his future, and possibly Peter's assuming the role of Hook –and his father – when he takes the helm of the Jolly Roger. There is another grouping that is similar but warrants a separate examination—that is the mother specific issues of Neverland. Peter recruits Wendy to be his and the Lost Boys' new mom. Hook and Smee's jealousy of this new mother spur them on to create a plan to get her for their own, setting off the major events of the play. Tink's jealousy to the new mother and her lie

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<sup>15</sup> See footnote 14.

to Tootles sets off a series of groupings on both the horizontal (or plot/chronological) and vertical (shared similarity) axis.

To demonstrate, vertically, we can see a group of similar mythemes marked “Violation”. These are instances of a character lying or some violation of Neverland’s rules, described as a kind of “bad form”. These instances of *violation* lead to resultant group of *villainy* mythemes, where some form of disruptive violence occurs. We can see Tink’s lie to Tootles results in not only the near death of Wendy, but also a disruption of the careful balance of Neverland and subsequent clashes between Pirates, Indians and the wild animals. This is a similar mytheme to Hook’s consistent bad form through the play, be it tricking Wendy and the Lost Boys as they leave the home, or poisoning Peter’s medicine.

The columns and rows of comparison here are far from perfect, and the groupings feel at best strained, and at worst forced. Equally, most of the provisional headings fit awkwardly or fail to encapsulate all the mythemes in their columns adequately. Though the aim of this methodology of comparison is not outlining cause and effect relations between elements of the narrative, we can see how Tink’s lie sets off a cycle of violence. We can also see how Hook’s deceptions result in the same. Albeit similar in content to Tink’s lie and the violent results, the form of Hook’s deceptions is not a clear cognate in regards to form. We can see both on the vertical and horizontal modes of comparison that the Tink lie or *violation*, the resultant violence or *villainy* and Peter’s subsequent rescue or response follows in a tight grouping of both action and similarity. If we look at Hook’s “bad form” *violation* moments, they do not always fit nicely into the same column as Tink’s deception. Neither does the resultant *villainy* of Hook’s bad form: both seem to jump from row to row in their sequence while not seeming quite congruent with other mythemes in the columns where they sit. These mythemes instinctually feel similar

but prove problematic upon closer examination. This is most likely because either they need to be separated out into new columns, as they are different enough from other mythemes to warrant their own grouping, or do not actually constitute a viable mytheme individually and need to be further condensed into a larger narrative unit.

It is interesting to note here that later critiques of House performances, particularly those authored by the *Tribune's* Chris Jones<sup>16</sup>, usually mention some need for editing of the texts. However, the enthusiastic responses to *Peter Pan* fail to include any such critique. Though it is speculative, it could still prove helpful here and in analyzing the subsequent texts to see where breakdowns in the action pattern, represented by gaps and spaces in the mytheme matrix's rows and columns can show potential weaknesses in narrative, or places where the text is not contributing to the forward action of the text. For this study, it is clear that these gaps point to less strong groupings of similarity, resulting in a less specific pattern in the elements of myth at work within the text.

If we condense table 3.1, which results in a comprehensive sorting of potential mythemes, into a more selective list representative of the strongest groupings, the result may be a less comprehensive but potentially more clear picture of any patterns within the text. Additionally, it may clear up problems with the column descriptors employed in the previous table. Provisional headings remain in parentheses while columns that appear to have a strong correlation to the Propp or Campbell mythemes are labeled in bold.

Below is a condensed and revised matrix, produced by a second application of the methodology and using the repetition steps outlined in the introduction. It is an attempt to cull

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<sup>16</sup> These comments begin with the reviews of *Harry Houdini* and most conspicuously in the Valentine Trilogy, and will be included in the discussion of those texts both in this and following chapters. Jones' comments rarely include specifics on what parts should be cut or edited, but these problematic columns that have no clear impact on the narrative seem to point to strong candidates for exclusion in performance.

out characters and actions that prove less foundational to the plot, and thus less likely to contain elements of archetype or myth. Columns have been numbered for identification but application of a Campbell or Propp descriptor is held off until comparisons with the next texts can be made.

Table 3.2.

<b>I (Helper?)</b>	<b>II VIOLATION</b>	<b>III VILLIANY</b>	<b>IV (Sacred Marriage?)</b>	<b>V REFUSAL</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>VII WHALE BELLY</b>	<b>VIII FATHER ATONEMENT</b>
The Doctor outlines Adult/Child minds and Child's use of fantasy when faced with danger.	Tink lies to Lost Boys about the arriving Wendy.	First Cycle of Violence. (Murders and Deaths)	Wendy is saved by Peter's "kiss."				
The Doctor asks about Peter's mother.	Hook plans to kidnap Wendy.	Second Cycle of Violence. (Kidnappings and Deceptions)	Peter saves Tiger Lilly.				
The Doctor interviews a shocked Peter.				Peter rejects Tiger Lilly's offer to be his lover.	Tiger Lilly vows to protect Peter.		
The Doctor outlines sexual development in boys with mother issues.				Peter rejects Wendy's offer to be the mother of their family.	Wendy asks to return home.		
		Tiger Lilly is					

		murdered.					
	Hook tricks Peter, Wendy and Lost Boys.	Hook kidnaps Wendy and boys, poisons Peter's medicine.		Peter rejects Tink's offer to be his wife.	Tink commits suicide / saves Peter		
<b>I (Helper?)</b>	<b>II VIOLATION</b>	<b>III VILLIANY</b>	<b>IV (Sacred Marriage?)</b>	<b>V REFUSAL</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>VII WHALE BELLY</b>	<b>VIII FATHER ATONEMENT</b>
Peter comes to reckoning with The Doctor.						Peter goes into belly of the Croc to get Hook's clock.	
			Peter rescues Wendy and Boys.				Peter kills Hook, takes his Captain's hat.
The Doctor interviews a lost Peter, who is now dressed as Hook.				Peter stays in Neverland.			

This is an incomplete representation of the narrative. Some sequences, particularly the violence that follows the catalyzing moment of “bad form”—be it a lie or deception or violation of Neverland’s rules—have been condensed for comparison. The first column deals primarily with The Doctor, who does not intervene into the action as much as he contextualizes it with the psychological underpinnings going on in Peter. Though not clearly impacting the plot, these interjections occur with such consistent regularity, they must be included. The Doctor fails to prove a plot-based mytheme, but his role as a Helper or Storyteller is a clear mythic archetype. This column is provisionally labeled as a *helper* mytheme. This points to the tension in The



House's definition of myth. They might truly be stories about heroes, or character driven adventures rather than the plot-privileged narratives preferred by Propp, Campbell and Lévi-Strauss.

The second major column of similar mythemes deals with the deceptions or “bad form” *violation* moments that set off the *villainy* cycles of violence in the narrative. Tink's initial lie to Tootle not only results in Wendy narrowly escaping death, but upsets some balance in Neverland. The Indians, Pirates and Beasts all begin to collide with deadly results. The second “bad form” moment begins with Hook's plan to kidnap Wendy. This mytheme's inclusion in this column is more subjective in nature than those of other mythemes, but seems to be the clearest jumping off point for the following cycle of violence: Tiger Lilly's capture and Hook's poor form when dueling with Peter. These columns continue to prove problematic, as Tiger Lilly's murder proves an outlier by comparison and Hook's kidnapping and attempted poisoning of Peter feel different enough to resist inclusion here, but not distinct enough in their action to necessitate a column of comparison all their own. However, Peter's ordeal with the crocodile and his killing of Hook are of a clearly different nature than his earlier rescues and fights, especially coming after the reckoning he seems to come to with The Doctor. It is clear there is a change occurring for Peter here, some form of accountability or maturation that makes these actions different from the ones before; but the concluding interview with The Doctor seems to show that Peter fails to capitalize on any lessons learned and regresses back to an earlier state, forgetting any memory of his mother, father, or discoveries during Wendy's time in Neverland.

There are some character and action events that are cognates to Joseph Campbell or Vladimir Propp myth structures—moments like Peter's descending into the depths of the belly of the crocodile is comparable to Campbell's description of heroes needing to descend into the

world navel or the belly of the beast before they can face their final test (Campbell 90). However, before assigning these actions terms from the Campbell and Propp models of hero journeys, short descriptions of characters in each performance text will aid in discussion. This is particularly helpful as The House's narratives and approach to myth already appear to privilege heroes and character over plot. What follows is a list of characters with a description of their strongest archetypal characteristics. This will be compared to similar lists for the subsequent performance texts:

**PETER PAN:** Peter is offered as a prime example of all The Doctor's Freudian diagnoses—failure to grow up with mother issues, which is common in airline pilots and those fascinated with flight. Peter seems authentically afraid of both growing up and also of his parents, with that fear being the major motivating factor in his escape from Hyde Park in London, and in his journeys with the fairies and exile into Neverland. There is a coldness to Peter, who still takes risks to rescue his friends, but more for honor than anything approaching affection. There is only a brief moment of mourning for Tiger Lilly or Tink. Peter seems resolved to do the right thing by Wendy and the Lost Boys; however, it seems to still to be more about adventure than responsibility for Peter. This Peter Pan is recognizable to those familiar with the story and other variations of the original J.M. Barrie play. The House's particular version of Peter is a stunted boy, with the petulance and sexual dysfunction turned up and the empathy and kindness muted.

**CAPTAIN HOOK:** Hook is played by a cigar-chomping actor of short stature who carries a big sword, making him not only a tongue-in-cheek object lesson about Freudian compensation, but a kind of miniature monster when we see the Captain's true dark heart—his murders, lies and plans that set Neverland into its cycle of violence. Hook's actions follows Barrie's original characterization, but with the Doctor's interjection and a few intentional moments in the staging, it is clear that Hook is a menacing manifestation of Peter's absent father—nowhere more clearly than at the end of the play when upon killing Hook, Peter dons his would-be father's hat and assumes the captaincy of Hook's ship.

**WENDY DARLING:** Wendy is a young lady from London who is taken to Neverland by Peter to be mother to the Lost Boys. Jealous, Hook and Smee make plans to kidnap her. Mrs. Darling, a bumbling version of parents everywhere, discovers the emerging sexuality in her daughter while rummaging through a box of Wendy's thoughts—a holdover from the Barrie—and finding a vibrator. Wendy has maternal impulses towards Peter but also wants to enter into some kind of sexual union, playing the mothering partner to Peter's father-like role to the Lost Boys.

**TIGER LILLY:** After being saved by Peter from her Pirate kidnappers, Tiger Lilly throws Peter a feast and offers herself to Peter as his lover, going down on her knees before him and fumbling with his trousers. This shocks Peter and he flees, leaving Tiger Lilly to vow to protect him. Where Wendy approaches Peter

from a maternal love, Tiger Lilly comes at him in a sexually aggressive, sensual way, seeking Peter as her Lover.

**TINK:** This foul-mouthed version of Tinkerbell, Peter's oldest friend, is jealous of the attention Peter gets from the other women. Lying about Hook's plan and hoping Wendy's kidnapping will leave Peter all to herself, she ultimately takes Peter's poisoned medicine to both save him and end her life. No clapping saves Tink in this version, but she gets a refrain with Wendy and Tiger Lilly as they lip synch out their pain to Aretha Franklin's "Chain of Fools." She wants to be a similar kind of partner to Peter as Wendy, but makes a clear distinction between Wendy's mothering impulses and Tiger Lilly's sexual advances. Tink's desire lives in a middle ground between those of Wendy and Tiger Lilly, where she wants to be a partner and lover to Peter but wants him all for herself.

**SMEE:** Hook laments how children love Smee; however, this pirate lieutenant is not the lovable, bumbling lackey from earlier versions, but rather a deadly swordsman who tries to rape Wendy and murders Tiger Lilly.

**LOST BOYS:** Of note, Tootles shoots Wendy as she arrives on the island, thinking she is a monster bird after Tink lies to him. He is the same boy who rescues Wendy as she is attacked by Smee, stabbing the pirate in the back. The Boys all make a plan to die as gentlemen on the decks of Hook's ship and resolve to return to London with Wendy at the play's conclusion.

**THE DOCTOR:** As mentioned above, The Doctor is a narrator with a psychologist's bent, who intercedes, explains and interviews throughout the action of the play.

In viewing, few if any of these characters feel minor—as opposed to the number of unnamed pirates or Indians— as the show's enthusiasm and ensemble nature makes them all likable and seeming central to the experience. However, when plumbing the characters for archetypes and using a myth dramaturgical lens to view the text (the same way the plot was distilled for potential mythemes) the effort results in a different perspective.

It is clear that the myth dramaturgy of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* is organized around Peter, who could, at first glance, be identified as the play's hero or protagonist. However, Peter does not function as a classic tragic hero, but potentially as a version of The House's idea of hero. Peter undergoes no traditional recognition or reversal. If there is one, it occurs offstage, if at all, so his defining characteristic may not be in his actions but in Peter's sensibilities. Hook is a clearer example of a Campbellian villain: an evil father-figure with a monstrous deformity. The Doctor, as a character, functions differently in the story than Peter or Captain Hook. Moreover, The Doctor, as an archetype, functions quite differently from the examples laid out in the models of Joseph Campbell.

The play is not the tragedy of the title, but still more than a riff on Freudian overtones and Peter's refused sexuality. This riff on Freudian themes possibly leads to a discounting of the form and structure of tragedy and focuses the majority of the dramatic work in the text on the nature of the characters. That said, the characters of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* are not

deeply archetypal in nature. As stated earlier, the two most likely candidates for Campbellian heroes or anti-heroes would be Pan and Hook, who participate in actions and events that have the clearest parallels in the Propp/Campbell myth models but come to very un-myth like, or even cynical ends. Wendy, Tink and Tiger Lilly fulfill the role of some of Campbell's female archetypes aggregately. The Doctor appears to have some semblance of a helper archetype, but the similarity exists much more in his form than how he functions in the text.

The remaining dramatis personae, while still interesting in performance, fail to have much independent life of their own as they orbit around Peter, as seeming facets of his central question—a Hamlet-like “to grow up or not to grow up.” When Peter fails to engage the question, an even more passive action occurs. Rather than answering in the affirmative or negative of what he will do next, Peter simply says he does not know or does not remember. The play not only departs from the hero journey cycle of events, but also fails to reach an effective Aristotelian agnorsis.

This is not to say the play is a failure, or that the performance text contains no elements identifiable as myth, but rather to point to *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* as representative of an early, at times unwieldy, but enthusiastic draft of the particular myth/hero journey narrative The House was setting out to explore and would revisit in their first five years. This potential evolution, with *Peter Pan* representing their auspicious beginning, is reflected in the observations by the critics of Chicago's major newspapers of how The House's early plays sometimes seemed to be too long or unruly—all forgivable because of the characters' and young company's immense likability. There is a consistent pattern in Peter's reaction and rejection of the advances of the adult women in his life and each of these women taking a drastic, albeit different, course of action in response. However, the analysis brings more to light when it grows

to include The House's second play, *Death and Harry Houdini*, where The House's chosen hero takes a similar path and succumbs to similar stumbles in his interactions with women.

### *Death and Harry Houdini*

*Houdini* had actually been the first play The House produced in Chicago—a 2001 production on even more of a shoestring budget than *Peter Pan*, created with just a handful of the would-be ensemble in the city to rehearse and perform it. This *Houdini* remount opened almost a year to the day *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* had opened to such acclaim. Close to 8,000 Chicago theatre patrons braved the “steamy Viaduct Theater” to see the show (Jones, “After Messing with Peter Pan”).

In an article leading up to The House's next offering, the *Tribune's* Chris Jones recapped the young company's successes and posed a few questions going into their second year of existence. Jones looked passed the “over-exuberance” of The House, calling their previous offering the “best low-budget Chicago show of the Year” and making comparisons between the young The House and England's Theatre de Complicite (Jones, “After Messing with Peter Pan”). Jones then asked: If The House would prove to be more than a one hit wonder? Would the time it took off between *Peter Pan* and the upcoming *Houdini* (to create some organizational infrastructure) pay off? Would they make enough profit on *Houdini* to be able to produce their remaining shows of their season, part one of their Valentine Trilogy, titled *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid*, and an adaptation of a Ray Bradbury tale called *The Rocket Man* (Jones, “After Messing with Peter Pan”)?

Like *Peter Pan*, audiences and critics alike embraced *Death and Harry Houdini*. In the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Hedy Weiss echoed the *Tribune's* Chris Jones' fear The House might be

just “a flash in the pan...or did the company have a long-term vision, and the skill to keep both the level of creativity and the administrative momentum turned to high?” (“House Theatre works Magic”). Weiss asserted that *Death and Harry Houdini* made the answer clear—“The House is the real thing” (“House Theatre works Magic”). Chris Jones’ review in the *Tribune* continued the praise. Jones started out with claims that, despite their “palpable lack of discipline, aesthetic unity and (most important) sufficient narrative clarity,” The House had “...zapped some much-needed fresh, new life into the alternative theatre scene” in Chicago (“Fearless House Troupe breaks all the Rules with ‘Houdini’”). Again, Jones advocated for editing, saying Allen’s texts are sometimes “far longer on grand theatrical tableaux than on cohesive character development and explication of theme”, failing, however, to give any examples or suggestions of what he believed should be excised from the text. Nevertheless, Jones still championed The House’s “usual disregard for rules of the theater—even the rules of theaters that like to think they have no rules” (“Fearless House”).

Both Jones and Weiss spent close to half of their responses to the show with recaps, advice-giving and king-making, with only a portion of the review devoted to summary and response. However, Jones’ remarks that in *Death and Harry Houdini*, Harry’s fear of death “does not go deep enough” and that the high energy and showmanship drowns out the personal and marital problems, which for Jones, are the real core of the play (“Fearless House”). Jones says this kind of deeper dramaturgy, substance rather than style, will come when the “House gets sick of running itself ragged for little or no money” (“Fearless House”).

A more complete summary narrative can be found in the appendix; but before we outline potential mythemes in the performance text of *Death and Harry Houdini*, it is worthwhile to again give context to the performance event. The play explored the actual biography of Houdini,



using many of the great magician's actual tricks and escapes in telling the story—all expertly performed by The House's Dennis Watkins. A dilapidated vaudeville theatre framed one end of a long, rectangular runway stage, with audience members packed tight on two sides on chairs, pillows and every available space. The play consisted of large, rhyming sections of narration carried out by a menacing Ringmaster, accompanied by a chorus of circus freaks who additionally populated the stage as characters from Houdini's life. It was not uncommon for these players to break out into ukulele solos or barbershop quartets, or for major storytelling moments to be achieved with a magic trick, a dance and even a silent film. Watkins' performance of Houdini's famous Water Torture Cell Escape received the lion's share of attention from the press and the audience alike. Anecdotally, it is easy to say why. Watching *Death and Harry Houdini* early in its run in August of 2003, I can still recall a sincere terror watching the trick<sup>17</sup>. Equally memorable was Death's appearance in a ghostly gas mask and his ultimate triumph as he wheeled the dying Houdini off stage beneath a shower of playing cards.

I attended the play the same night it was recorded for The House's archive producing the filmed performance used in this study. In the recording, you can see the heterogeneous nature of those early House audiences—a combination of students from an inner city high school mixing their rowdiness with the twenty something's fringing the stage, peppered with dressed-up theatregoers trying to see what all the buzz was about and taking a break from their subscription series at one of the city's larger theatres. There was little concern with convention, and little encouragement was needed for the audience, particularly in the first few rows, to shout, gasp, laugh and jeer during the play. As Harry performed his tricks, and with each successive

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<sup>17</sup> The 2003 *Death and Harry Houdini* was revised and remounted by The House in 2012, to even more acclaim than the original. Though beyond the scope of the time frame of this study, some of the revisions of this remount prove helpful in discussion of mythemes later. It is worth noting that, almost nine years later, the water torture cell was still one of the scariest events I have ever seen inside the theatre, and my usually iron stomach was sick the entire day anticipating that night's performance.

appearance of Death, the rowdy crowd did not grow subdued, but perceptively moved forward in terror and anticipation of Harry's showdown with the gas-masked Grim Reaper. It was an exciting place to be and an incredible night in the theatre.

Following the methodology outlined in chapter two, *Death and Harry Houdini* can be distilled into a list of potential mythemes that give an interesting insight into the play and a pattern of relationships between characters when compared alongside the mythemes of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. In *Houdini*, Harry faces Death, a giant specter wearing a gas mask, early in his life when it takes the young boy's Father. This sets off a cycle of confrontations between Harry and Death, the Breather of Last Breaths. The first two meetings result in Harry losing his Father and his magic mentor, Dr. Lynne. Each time, the dying man's last words to Harry charge him to a specific task—master his craft, protect his family, become a rich man and, above all, protect his mother. Each death and the subsequent charge set Harry off on more preparation, trials and training for the next confrontation with Death.

The application of this study's myth dramaturgy to the performance text of *Death and Harry Houdini* produces the following list of potential mythemes:

1. Harry is born, in essence performing his first escape from a watery cell.
2. Young Harry grows in strength and skill as an athlete and swimmer.
3. Harry's Father is taken by Death, the Breather of Last Breaths.
4. His Father charges Harry to master his craft, be a rich man and, above all, protect his Mother.
5. Harry seeks out a magic teacher and apprentices himself to Dr. Lynne.
6. Harry meets a young lady named Bess.

7. Harry invites Bess into his stage act and they marry, putting a strain on the collaboration between him and his brother, Theo.
8. Dr. Lynne is taken by Death.
9. Dr. Lynne charges Harry to be a great magician.
10. Harry makes Theo and Bess sign a contract of loyalty and secrecy, and together they set out to create a famous and successful act.
11. Harry and Bess are signed to a vaudeville circuit contract by the Fat Man, making Harry rich.
12. Harry's showering of attention and money on his Mother strains his marriage with Bess.
13. Harry and Theo begin to train and prepare for his River escape.
14. Harry and Theo's relationship is strained by disagreements about the work and risks.
15. Harry jumps, handcuffed, into the Detroit River, challenging Death to show his face.
16. Harry is almost taken by Death and must be rescued by Theo.
17. As Harry recovers, his Father warns him Death is coming for his Mother and reinforces the charge to protect her above all costs.
18. Harry, Bess and Theo argue about Harry's risk taking.
19. Harry vows to create a machine that will tempt Death and then trap him—allowing Harry to protect his Mother.
20. Harry continues to grow rich and famous. He crowns his Mother, not Bess as queen of his life.

21. Bess leaves Harry.
22. Harry performs The Water Torture Cell.
23. Death takes Harry's Mother while he is escaping from the cell.
24. Harry ages, his hair turns grey and his act becomes habitual and joyless.
25. Harry is killed by a feat of strength gone wrong and is taken by Death.

There is a subset of narrative events and potential mythemes that I have selectively excluded from this list here. As Harry sets out to plan his water torture cell escape, a sub-plot is introduced when he receives a telegram from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The great author tries to recruit Houdini into investigating the growing fad of spiritualism and mediums communicating with the dead. Harry dismisses Doyle's telegram until after the death of his Mother, when he agrees to investigate one such medium. Harry proves the spiritualist's claims to be communicating with Harry's Mother, a fraud that not only disappoints Doyle, but also dashes the small hope Harry still has of protecting his Mother. This portion of the play appears, at first glance, to be in line with the other themes, narratives and events pertaining to Harry's fight with Death and need to protect his Mother throughout the play. Though it reinforces these themes dramaturgically, it does so redundantly in regards to plot, and contains no characters or events of enough substance to be considered archetypal heroes or mytheme-like events outside of Harry. Thus, I have not so much excluded this sequence of events from analysis, but rather analysis has demonstrated it to be a self-contained sequence of events with little characterizing it as a potential set of mythemes. Further, its removal from the central plot of *Death and Harry Houdini* results in no major change to the narrative<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that the 2012 remount of the play, the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle sub-plot had been cut, but not until late in the rehearsal process as the characters were still present in the dramatis personae in the program, as

Taking all of this into account, the potential mythemes can be sorted as follows, with Propp/Campbell descriptors provisionally applied as column headings for shared similarity:

Table 3.3

<b>I WHALE BELLY</b>	<b>II ROAD OF TRIALS</b>	<b>III ABSENTATION</b>	<b>IV CALL ADVENTURE</b>	<b>TO V?</b>	<b>VI?</b>
Harry's first water escape: His Birth.	Young Harry grows in skill and strength as an athlete and swimmer.	Harry's Father is taken by Death, the Breather of Last Breaths.	Harry's Father gives Harry charge to master his craft, be a rich man and protect his Mother.		
	Harry begins to train with Dr. Lynne in Magic and Escape			Harry meets Bess.	Harry and Theo's act is strained.
		Dr. Lynne is taken by Death, the Breather of Last Breaths.	Dr. Lynne gives Harry the charge to be a great magician.		.
	Harry makes Bess and Theo sign a contract of loyalty and secrecy—they refine and build a new act.			Harry receives a major contract from the Fat Man.	Harry's devotion to Mother strains his and Bess' marriage.
	Harry and Theo prepare and train for Detroit River Escape.				Harry and Theo's collaboration strained.

well as publicity photos featuring one of the ensemble dressed in Sherlock-like garb. The play and performance demonstrated a refinement of the earlier script, and the séances and spiritualists were a major victim of the editing critic Chris Jones advocated for nine years previous.

I WHALE BELLY	II ROAD OF TRIALS	III ABSENTATION	IV CALL TO ADVENTURE	V?	VI?
Harry jumps into the Detroit River—challenges Death.		Harry is nearly taken by Death and must be rescued from the river by Theo.	As Harry recovers, his Father warns him Death's coming for Mother, charges him again.		Harry, Bess and Theo argue about Harry's risk taking.
	Harry vows to create a trick that tempts Death near in order to trap him.			Height of Success and Fame—Harry crowns Mother queen.	Bess leaves Harry.
The Water Torture Cell.		Death, the Breather of Last Breaths, takes Mother while Harry performs the escape.			Harry's hair turns grey.
		Harry is killed by a feat gone wrong and taken by Death.			

Like *Peter Pan*, there are a number of columns that have strong parallels with a mytheme in Propp or Campbell's models. These columns are marked with their potential mytheme descriptor, while those with weaker correlations are left blank. The first event of the play—Harry's first escape and birth—heads a column of similar escapes (I): Harry's river stunt and the Water Torture Cell. Though only three events make up this grouping, in myth dramaturgical terms they are potentially two of the play's three major climaxes—one for the beginning, middle and ending sections of the play. Though the following is primarily Stanislavsky-based dramaturgy, dealing with this issue here is necessary for continuing to build the bridge between

the anthropological methodology of dealing with myth and the dramaturgical language of analyzing plays.

Harry's birth is the very first event of the play—it is described in the opening moments in the very first speech. Though important, structurally it does not work or make sense to claim it as a viable first major climax of the play. The river stunt is where Harry first confronts Death and the seed is planted for his efforts to build a machine that will eventually trap the Breather of Last Breaths, and is a much more convincing candidate for the first, or beginning climax of the play. The Water Torture Cell is the result of Harry's planning and training to protect his family, and while it is probably his most successful trick, it is also his greatest failure as Death does not take the bait but rather takes his Mother. This makes for a strong climax of any kind, but structurally this is only the second, or the conflict at its highest degree during the middle of the story. There is a substantial amount of play left for resolving action, and a potential third major climax is the strongman feat gone wrong that leads to Harry's death. However, given the atmosphere of the last events of Harry's life and the tone in which the last moments of the play occur, the action seems to be falling off post-Water Torture Cell rather than rising to the next and highest climax of the play. This points to the Water Torture Cell being the third and major climax of the play, with the Detroit River escape serving as the second, or middle climax, leaving the play without a strong candidate for the most effective first or beginning climax to help organize the dramatic action around<sup>19</sup>. These three moments are the strongest dramaturgical moments of the play, and consequently, the clearest mythemes for the *Death and Harry Houdini* text. Additionally, the vestigial column of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle mythemes excluded from the matrix seem to

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<sup>19</sup> Again, dramaturgical hindsight is 20/20, but the 2012 remount and revision of *Death and Harry Houdini* remedies this issue as well, creating a climax in the training with and death of Dr. Lynne, making Harry's magic school and the death of his teacher the play's first major climax, allowing for the action to build much more effectively towards the Water Torture Cell.

have very little to do with elements of myth in the play, and prove to have minimal effect on driving the action forward as well. Here, the methodological sorting of mythemes also has helpful dramaturgical implications as it points to some of the structural and editing issues Chris Jones pointed to in his early reviews of *The House*'s texts.

Returning to the discussion of mythemes, we can see Column I shares a commonality in action of watery escapes that are in conflict with Death, indirectly in the first and much more directly in the second two. Column II consists of mythemes that are preparatory in nature: Harry is training on his own or working with a teacher or helper to ready for a next feat or trial. Column III is made up of triumphs by Death—taking Harry's Father, magic teacher, Mother, and after repeated brushes, ultimately Harry himself. Column IV only has three mythemes, but each is a charge—two from Harry's father and one from the magic teacher, Dr. Lynne—that identifies the tasks ahead for Harry. Columns V and VI are looser groupings of mythemes, which share more commonality in their function in the plot than in their form, and are included here as they are potentially comparable to similar mythemes in *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. Similarly to *Peter Pan*, the majority of problematic *mythemes* in *Death and Harry Houdini* are Harry's issues with his wife, Bess, his preoccupation with his mother, and the strained relationship he has with his brother, Theo, issues which can be further clarified in the following character dossier step of the methodology:

**HARRY HOUDINI:** Using the real events of Houdini's biography, *The House* crafts a secret undercurrent to his rise as a great magician—a quest to make good on his Father's charge to protect his Mother and defeat Death. The issues in Houdini's family are condensed in the two-hour play, but prove consistent with



the historical Harry while providing a fertile context and motivation for his fictional showdowns with Death. Harry is a formally dressed, skilled practitioner of his craft whose devotion to his Mother is second only to his devotion to his pursuit of defying Death.

**DEATH:** Though a silent character throughout the play, wearing a large gas mask that covers any features or expression, Death's consistent arrival in the minor and major climaxes makes it clear he is the major antagonist to Harry's story. Death confronts Harry in the depths of his major escapes, and takes Harry's father, teacher and mother before taking the magician himself.

**MOTHER:** Harry's mother is crowned queen in an odd ceremony orchestrated by her doting son. She refuses to speak anything but German, is consistently at odds with Bess—Harry's well-meaning wife—and clearly favors her magician son over the industrious Theo.

**BESS:** Harry meets this beautiful young woman and quickly invites her to join his act, replacing his brother, Theo. They are married, but each time they seem close to taking the relationship to its next step, for example falling truly in love or having a child, Harry's quest or mother interfere. She is a simple woman, talks sweetly and struggles quietly with Harry's aloof attention.

**THEO:** Described in the play's narrating songs as a less talented younger brother, but with a particular skill with numbers, Theo becomes Harry's business manager and the engineer who builds his escapes and tricks. Theo comforts Bess when they are both on the outside looking in, alienated by Harry's singular focus on defeating Death and protecting his Mother. He is often abused by his brother, but steadfast and loyal in creating the props and mechanics of Harry's escapes.

As in *Peter Pan*, mother-father-son issues seem to be central to *Death and Harry Houdini*. Though family problems and women issues make up a large part of myth narratives—think the House of Atreus or Phaedra and Hippolytus—it was not until Freud that these narratives and their inherent mythemes were employed to explain psychological conditions or states. The House made this relationship explicit by putting a psychoanalyst on stage in *Peter Pan*. However, the psychology of myths is not a new territory of thought, and The House is not a vanguard of that effort. The House has neither changed the very character of myth nor introduced a whole subgenre of cynical myths. The House has not out-Freuded Freud, but rather crafted in these first two narratives characters with considerable family issues. The above analysis helps us see how the mythemes embedded in The House's performance texts tie it into a larger body of similar narratives while exposing problematic elements not effectively identified by the study's myth dramaturgy.

To create a clearer understanding of the mythemes present and their patterns of occurrence in *Peter Pan* and *Houdini*, a comparison can be achieved by revisiting the comparative matrices in Figure 3.2 and 3.3, and applying the descriptors used by Propp and

Campbell in their analysis of narratives and myths (discussed in chapter two). Beginning with the *Peter Pan* matrix, we can clarify the Propp/Campbell labels to better describe the shared commonality of the mythemes in these columns. Column I, dealing primarily with The Doctor's interactions with Peter, does not have a clear parallel in Propp's function or Campbell's monomyth, which follows as The Doctor functions as a kind of narrative interloper or filter that adds a psychological contextualization to Peter's action more than catalyzing or spurring much forward action. The closest descriptor for a workable label of these mythemes, albeit unfortunately an unwieldy one in this first application of the methodology, would be to label Column I as *Helper?*, with the question mark serving as an editorial reminder of the inherent problems of this label. As problematic as this label seems, the unease with its application here stems more from these series of events, though important to the performance text, proving it less likely viable as a potential mytheme. Like the problematic mythemes from *Houdini*, an argument could be made for its deletion from analysis, but it seems The Doctor is serving as some kind of character based role particular to The House's definition of myth<sup>20</sup>.

By comparison, Column II much more readily finds a match in the Propp/Campbell descriptors, where Tink's lie and Hook's deceptions and tricks can be accurately labeled as Propp's *Violation* function, which he describes as an act that violates some rule or law (Csapo 193). In this case, Tink and Hook are violating a specific code of behavior that had, up to that point, kept the Neverland working in a relative sort of peace. If Column II can be described as a

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<sup>20</sup> Again, it could be said that Propp and Campbell are interested primarily in the structure of a story, and not in how it is presented to an audience. In trying to develop an effective dramaturgy for applying their aims to plays, which by definition includes an element of performance it must wrestle with both content and delivery method, like light is both wave and particle.

*Violation*, then the cycles of violence these violations set in motion fit Propp's *Villainy* function, where harm is caused to a member of the family or community (Csapo 193).

Despite faltering out of the gate with the somewhat unsatisfactory description of The Doctor as a potential *Helper* set of mythemes, the following two columns of *Violation* and *Villainy* help demonstrate how application of these descriptors better articulates the shared commonality of the mythemes on the *paradigmatic* y-axis, and helps to show how these mythemes are working in cycles or patterns on the *systematic* x-axis—where a series of *Violations* trigger a series of acts of *Villainy*.

The next column, the fourth, can be described as a hybrid of the *Rescue* and *Sacred Marriage* set of mythemes. *Rescue* is one of Propp's functions and clear in what kind of narrative event it describes: a hero being rescued from some form of pursuit or their saving of a companion. *Sacred Marriage* is Campbell's term for one of the potential actions within his climactic *Ultimate Adventure*, where the hero comes into contact with a woman, goddess or knowledge (109). Of note, the actions of the two females rescued by Peter (Wendy and Tiger Lilly) and the woman who rescues him (Tink), do not occur in as tight of a chronology as the preceding *Violation/Villainy* sections. However they do show similar chains of potential causality. Each *Rescue* by Peter results in a woman's offering (*Sacred Marriage*) which in turn leads to a clear *Refusal* by Peter: a *Refusal* by Peter to be Tiger Lilly's lover, and to be a father/partner with Wendy. Tink's rescue of Peter from Hook's poisoning of the medicine is a reaction to Peter's *Refusal*, so occurs in a different sequence than the earlier events, but still sorts out as similar in content and form to the previous *Rescue/Sacred Marriage* mythemes. Tink's rescue of Peter is a kind of double event—it mirrors the *Rescue/Sacred Marriage* events between

Peter and Wendy and Peter and Tiger Lilly, while being similar to the events in column VI as her actions are a reaction to Peter's refusals of the offers made to him by each of the women.

There is not a clear descriptor for these potential mythemes in column VI—the women's reactions or response to Peter's *Refusal*. In performance, there is an interlude immediately following Peter's descent into the crocodile's belly. This event has a clear correlation to Campbell's *Whale's Belly* event, where the hero is reborn or re-emerges after being swallowed or descends into some unknown and reappears from those depths with some new information or new form (Campbell 90). In this interlude, Wendy, Tink and Tiger Lilly don red sequined dresses and lip sync to Aretha Franklin's *Chain of Fools*, declaring their refusal to be another link in Peter's chain of dejected women. This event was described in the summary narrative; but after analysis for identifying elements of myth, it was excluded from the list of potential mythemes. The *Chain of Fools* lip-sync is a memorable moment from the perspective of the audience, but dramaturgically, or more specifically, *myth-dramaturgically*, it is problematic.

This interlude, in addition to the women's reactions to Peter's refusal of their offers is comparable to the problems encountered with the issues discussed earlier with the spiritualist sub-plot of *Houdini*. There, the spiritualist tangent initiated by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was an interesting nod to biography and at first glance would seem important to the narrative. In this analysis, this sub-plot was selectively omitted from consideration as a group of potential mythemes by the methodology's distillation process. As previously noted, The House edited out this sub-plot in rehearsal in their 2012 remount of the play. The issue here is primarily a dramaturgical one as it was selected out before even entering into the identification of elements of myth in the text. The spiritualist scenes of the play intuitively feel important, but not until application of this study's myth dramaturgy did their tangential nature become clear—with little

dramaturgical impact on the plot and even less evidence of any contributing component to the myth structure of the performance text.

The women's reaction to Peter's refusal may similarly be a seductive element of the play that intuitively feels important but ultimately proves problematic. Their reaction to Peter's refusal made the first cut while the lip-synching interlude did not. However, at this second step of trying to describe the mythemes sorted out by shared commonality, these mythemes do not have a clear parallel in the myth structures outlined by Propp or Campbell. This issue could serve as an indictment of this study's methodology as fickle or arbitrary; but instead it points to the difficulty of creating a working myth dramaturgy and the need for the prolonged discussion and demonstration of it here in this initial analytical chapter. It also resonates with Chris Jones' consistent comments in his reviews that The House's plays, in all the exuberance, could use an editor.

This issue of selectivity and the resulting problematic identifications are worth discussing, as it will occur frequently going ahead. The initial exclusion of a sub-plot like the spiritualist one in *Houdini* is fundamentally dramaturgical in nature—the actions and characters in that portion of the narrative fail to substantively drive the action and events of the play further. The removal of the spiritualist sub-plot does not change or result in a breakdown in the narrative of *Death and Harry Houdini*, but only mirrors the central plot of Harry fighting Death and protecting his Mother. The initial inclusion of the women characters' response to Peter's refusals for analysis as potential mythemes was due to the seemingly repetitive pattern of these character/action events. Despite their questionable dramaturgical importance, they shared key characteristics with what Propp, Campbell and Lévi-Strauss describe as components of their myth structures. The lip synching interlude of the rejected women would likely fit within this

column of commonality as well, but it did not persist in the analysis as it proves a kind of dramaturgically isolated event that interprets action rather than drives it forward, functioning much like *The Doctor*.

In *Houdini*, the analysis functioned diagnostically, showing a non-contributing or problematic component to the narrative, with very little impact or implication of the presence of any elements of myth there. The problems encountered in analysis of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and this particular subset of mythemes is less diagnostic in regards to issues of myth dramaturgical structure of the text, but potentially more diagnostic in identifying what is particular or problematic to The House's contributions to the existing *Peter Pan* narrative. The House's knowledge of Joseph Campbell's myth structure is demonstrated in their articulation of it in discussions of their work<sup>21</sup> and their appropriation of his myth structures into their texts<sup>22</sup>. It is readily identifiable where they follow the cues from Campbell's monomyth. It is equally identifiable when The House employs an element in their narratives that, while still possessing some myth-like characteristics, departs from what Campbell describes (i.e. the events outlined in Column VI). Rather than dismiss these as dramaturgically flawed, like the events mentioned in *Houdini*, or exclude them for being outside of the Campbell model, these problematic mythemes should persist in the analysis as they can potentially point to the idiosyncratic ways The House is employing, arranging or even contributing to Campbell's monomyth. Column VI fails to find a satisfactory descriptor in the Propp/Campbell models. A more apt descriptor might be found when compared with the remaining performance texts, as The House, rather than an outside myth model, might best define these mythemes with a shared similarity.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter one and two include examples of interviews, documents and reviews in which Campbell's influence on The House is explained.

<sup>22</sup> Currently, the *Whale's Belly* moment has been a primary example of this, but elements of Campbell and their importance to The House will become demonstrably clear in the following pages.

Rather than create a forced reconciliation of these apparent discrepancies, they prove a diagnostic cue to reapply the methodology's lens, where the first gaze is dramaturgical, the second is mythological in nature. This third re-application to examine these problematic areas might prove the best means to bring to view what is idiosyncratically pertaining to *The House*. This results in an additional, adaptive step in the methodology. After the initial summary narrative and the first comparative matrix are produced, the study must allow for the discovery of subsequent or deeper patterns not initially identifiable. Problematic mythemes that do not fit within the existing Propp or Campbell model trigger a review of facts and mythemes where previously excluded elements might be reintroduced as potentially viable or important. It is hoped that consistent reviewing and resorting of the performance texts for all relevant mythemes or their occurring patterns rather than dismissing these problems helps address the inherent subjectivity of dealing with something as intuitively present as myth or patterns of myth in these narratives. The resulting comparative narrative therefore includes the lip-synching *Chain of Fools* interlude in Column VI and delays assigning this column any label until the matrix can be compared with those of other texts.

The remaining column contains a single but distinct event—Peter's defeat and killing of Captain Hook—that aggregately fits Campbell's description of "father atonement" in the climactic *Ultimate Adventure* (127). With help from The Doctor's comments, we see Peter meet a father-like approximate in Hook, defeat him and then assume his mantle by putting on Hook's wig and captain hat and taking command of the Jolly Roger. The last event of the play is a *Refusal* in that Peter, despite the knowledge and gifts earned by his defeat of Hook and the opportunities from Wendy's invitation to return to the real and grown world, chooses to stay in the Neverland and begins to immediately forget all that he knew or learned.



There is a potential cycle of events, triggered by some *Villainy* that results in the *Rescue* and ultimately some form of *Refusal* by Peter, with interstitial contributions made by The Doctor as a kind of passive and explanatory *Helper*. If we include these findings with a similarly revised *Houdini* discussion, a pattern of elements of myth in these two performances may begin to emerge.

The first five columns of the initial *Houdini* matrix have clear descriptors in the Propp and Campbell models. The deaths of Dr. Lynne and Harry's Father can now be separated out as different mythemes from Harry's near death experiences and ultimate demise as the application of the descriptors point out how characteristically different these events are. The death of these two men function more in the *Ordinary* time for Harry, potentially serving as precursors to Harry's *Call to Adventure* and spurring some form of *Crossing of the Threshold of Adventure*. There are some problems here, as this crossing and inciting action would seem to be happening relatively late in the narrative. Thinking back to Campbell's graph, the threshold happens within the first quarter of his circle—or more helpful for our purposes—usually in the beginning of a narrative as it shifts from exposition to the rising action of the middle of the story.

Like *Peter Pan*'s matrix, there are columns of commonality that do not have a clear parallel in Propp's or Campbell's models. In what was formerly Column VII there is a potential *Brother Battle*—one of Campbell's modes of *Crossing the Threshold of Adventure*—but it is ultimately a weak and unsatisfactory candidate for the inciting incident that sets off the entire trajectory of action in *Death and Harry Houdini*<sup>23</sup>. The lack of adequate descriptors for columns VI and VII, and the fact that these mythemes themselves do not comfortably fit within their

<sup>23</sup> Again, beyond the scope of this study and only anecdotally relevant, this structural issue was clarified in the 2012 remount of *Death and Harry Houdini* with the timeline of Bess and Harry meeting, Harry and Theo's struggles and the death of Dr. Lynne clarified, centralizing the climax of the beginning action of the play around magic school and Death's taking of Harry's magic teacher.

groupings, is problematic. An argument could be made that many of these potential mythemes could constitute their own columns—resulting in a series of scattered mythemes at the periphery of the matrix. Though these mythemes passed the first protocols for inclusion for analysis, in comparison they prove an issue to be dealt with in comparison against *Peter Pan*, after a quick discussion of cycles of actions and the patterns of the mythemes within *Houdini*.

The core sequence of mythemes is a struggle with Death, which leaves Harry with a charge to be great and protect his Mother. These charges lead Harry into a series of trials and preparations, each ultimately resulting in Harry descending into some depth to struggle with Death. Death takes Harry's Father, so he trains at Dr. Lynne's magic school (there is an escape from a pine box here that functions similarly to the Detroit River and Water Torture escapes, but in the performance text of the 2003 production did not pass the initial rendering to exist as a stand-alone mytheme<sup>24</sup>). These charges by *Heralds*, the resulting *Road of Trials*, *Helpers* and *Whale's Belly* escapes performed by Harry build to his *Ultimate Adventure* and showdown with Death in trying to trap the gas masked villain in the Water Torture Cell. Harry's Mother is taken during the escape, so despite achieving a special degree of skill or knowledge, Harry fails—a kind of Campbellian *Apotheosis* with a negative underpinning. The action slowly resolves after Harry ages almost before our eyes—a potential Propp *Branding* function—and Harry waits for Death almost morosely when the two fans come seeking autographs, leading to Death's ultimate victory when Harry's strength stunt goes wrong.

This cycle of events seems to present a kind of pattern of mythemes, especially by examining the problematic unlabeled potential mythemes in Columns VI and VII. The story structure of *Death and Harry Houdini* and *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* does not share a

<sup>24</sup> This escape and the magic trick is one of the elements expanded and clarified in the 2012 remount. If this study were to include this performance text, it is a fair assumption that the analysis would prove what was intuitively felt by the audience, that this event was amplified to now function as the first sequence's *Whale Belly* mytheme.

great deal of common ground in how they order their mythemes. However, if we look at their misfit mythemes, suddenly something much more consistent between the two comes to light—especially if we continue the practice of reviewing the summary narratives when encountering these problematic comparisons.

This last step, dealing with these problematic mythemes and seemingly points to the idiosyncratic patterns in these House performance texts. The problematic findings of the analysis is sometimes due to dramaturgical issues inherent in performance; but if we observe them a second time rather than dismiss them, we can see that some of these unruly results of analysis do not point to deficiency in the plot structure of The House’s performance text or a deviation from a classic myth structure. These problematic elements prove to be character-based mythemes, or more accurately a kind of archetypal character, that The House seems to employ frequently. If we revisit the summary narratives to derive these character-based mythemes, and add them to the comparative matrices produced from analysis of the action of the performance texts, we can see that the hero characters of The House’s *Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and *Death and Harry Houdini* share a similar pattern of complicated relationships with women, conflicts with parents, and a difficulty in transitioning to adulthood.

The Doctor in the performance text of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* begins the play with an explanation of the development of the juvenile mind into the “well-adjusted and fully functional adult human” (4). The Doctor goes on to say that this ordered mind is the result of a healthy relationship between “mother and child” (4). The first examples of parents we are presented by The House and introduced to by The Doctor are the naïve Mrs. Darling and the bumbling Mr. Darling. The Darlings fail to appear again in the text, but serve as a kind of proxy example of the type of adult figures Peter is avoiding. The Doctor also introduces the audience to

the psychology of the Neverland, a place the adult mind would find difficult to comprehend as it represents the “complexity of the raw mind of a child” (22). It is a result of the child’s reaction to danger, where the child imagines him/herself capable of superhuman skills and abilities. Left unchecked, the problematic imagination will integrate “seamlessly with the superego making a differentiation between the real and imaginary impossible” (22).

The Doctor’s words seem to speak to both Peter Pan and Harry Houdini, in that their individual skills and powers are more a result of stunted maturity and a complicated lack of parental figures than any gift from the gods, rendering them childlike heroes struggling in a very adult world. Peter’s struggles with parents are primarily centered with Wendy and Hook—Hook as a kind of paternal specter haunting Peter and Wendy echoing back to Peter’s actual mother while at the same time wishing to be his adoptive one in the Neverland. Harry loses his Father in the first moments of the play and forms an unnatural attachment to his Mother. Both Peter and Harry struggle with women—Peter refusing any offer of any kind from the female characters in *Peter Pan*, and Harry failing to live up to his role of husband to Bess while overvaluing his relationship with his mother, becoming his both his parent’s protector and partner at the cost of his own marriage. The Doctor in *Peter Pan* explains to the audience after Peter’s first *Refusal*—his rejection of Tiger Lilly’s offering to be his lover—that children must make a clean break from their mother early on or an unhealthy attachment will form, a bond almost impossible to break, causing severe problems for the child in their adult life, especially in regards to sex (Klaperich, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* 55).

Both plays feature a hero with shared characteristics—an absent parent or parents, severe mother and women issues, and a marked lack of full maturity. If we compare the two matrices of the mythemes, we find not a great deal of similarities, except that both employ recognizable

myth events and structures. The strongest similarities are in the make-up of their heroes: both heroes reject the offers of love, sex and/or companionship from their would-be partners; both possess a special set of skills or powers; and both of their ultimate adventures come down in the negative—Peter’s refusal to grow up and leave the Neverland and Harry’s failure to capture Death and protect his mother.

This makeup of the protagonist heroes will prove important moving forward as we continue to track patterns of mythemes in these performance texts, with this archetypal or character-based mytheme a trailing component to this study’s methodology. If The House’s performance texts persist in focusing on heroes rather than the heroes’ journeys, then the methodology for sorting mythic events will diminish in its efficacy and the ability to identify and discuss archetypal heroes become increasingly important.

## CHAPTER 4

### *The Valentine Trilogy: San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid, Curse of the Crying Heart & Valentine Victorious*

The House Theatre's three year *Valentine Trilogy* began just over a year after the closing of their inaugural hit, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*, with *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid* in early January 2004. The project in its inception had its roots in those heady early days of The House, when their budget survived on the critical acclaim and continued sold-out audiences. Up to *San Valentino*, The House had only created two plays—*Peter Pan* and the two *Death and Harry Houdini* productions. By the time the trilogy culminated in January of 2006, The House would have nine original plays to their credit. They continued to garner consistent praise from critics and box office support from their patrons, but The House began to receive their first negative notices. Scant as they were, even a mildly positive review often seemed negative after the critical bouquets thrown their way out of the gate.

Of the seven plays premiered by The House after *Peter Pan* and *Houdini*, the three *Valentine* plays proved to be on the level of critical and the box office success as those first two breakout hits. Their adaptation of the Wizard of Oz story—*The Great and Terrible Oz* (Fall 2005) — and an original science fiction drama titled *Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe* (Spring 2005) were successful, but moderately so compared to the popularity of The House's major hits. *The Rocket Man* (Spring 2004) received mix reviews with a largely negative one by Chris Jones. *Cave with Man* (Fall 2004) was the first House show to receive largely negative responses from the press. It is worth mentioning these mixed and negative reviews here before beginning the

discussion of *The Valentine Trilogy*'s successes and patterns of myth, as this middle period of The House's development proved to be a mostly successful but at times awkward adolescence.

*The Rocket Man* was the last play of what is considered The House's first season in 2003-2004 (The first *Houdini* and *Peter Pan*, 2001-2, make up Season Zero for The House). It was an adaptation of Ray Bradbury stories, created with the great science fiction writer's blessing and permission—a true coup for the company. It featured a 3-D movie and an onstage DJ who mixed beats to which the actors fought laser battles. The play centered around a son trying to rescue his imprisoned father on Mars—a familiar theme to House audiences as most plays up to that time featured children dealing with some parental issues.

The reviews were mixed—mostly positive—but again, in comparison to early successes, even a modest hit at times seemed a failure to the boom or bust observers of The House. “Next Big Thing” critic, the *Sun-Times*' Hedy Weiss's review was primarily positive. She wrote that while watching *Rocket Man*, she saw The House working to unleash what she called “the collective unconscious of boyhood” (“Rocket Man' launches” 49). In *The Chicago Tribune*'s Chris Jones' review, “Rocket Man' needs Propulsion,” was quite different (1). Jones wrote that the fervent fans of The House might find their new science fiction play “a particular drag” (1) and feared that if The House was going to build a reputation beyond their ardent followers, they had to find a way to revisit familiar genres and stories without “making the results seem like a sporadically interesting jaunt to the recycling plant” (5).

The House followed up *Rocket Man* and their first season with *Cave with Man*—the opening production of Season Two (2004-5). *Cave with Man* was primarily a non-verbal play, where the young House was experimenting with how to tell a story about the development of language within a neo-lithic cave-dwelling family of early humans. The major critics in Chicago

poorly received the play but the box office returns averted major disaster. In the *Sun-Times* follow up feature, “The Next Big Thing?’ Maybe,” artistic director Nathan Allen wrote of the experience that the negative press was both “a good wake-up call” and a nice badge of honor as the black eye from the bad reviews helped their “street cred” in the city (Nance 43). Allen described the young company as “going through puberty” (Nance 41). Artistic directors from some of the city’s top theatres chimed in about The House’s growth and recent rough patch. Jim Lasko, the artistic director of Chicago’s pioneering physical/spectacle Redmoon Theatre, attended those early shows and lent his support to the company, saying that the early praise of The House being the next big thing was “exactly right—they were young and completely engaged and enthusiastic and, within their youth, incredibly virtuosic” (Nance 41). Sean Graney—the founding artistic director of The Hypocrites, labeled by the article as another of Chicago’s “young” theatres (Nance 43)—described the pressure on The House and their young leader: “It’s a frightening thing to feel like you’ve kind of let people down...Nate is definitely afraid of that, but I think he’s also realistic about it—he knows they’re not always going to live up to the potential, that they’re not always going to have a ‘Peter Pan’” (Nance 43).

Despite these plays being considered critical missteps, it seems they provided an important education for The House, and those lessons were put to use in full in their creation of *The Valentine Trilogy*. The first installment, the western *San Valentino and The Melancholy Kid*<sup>25</sup>, opened in early winter of 2004. In a preview feature for *the Sun-Times*, Nathan Allen introduced the project as a “three-part exploration of American pop mythologies” (Houlihan 21). The young artistic director “really obsessed” with the mix of Americana, storytelling and rock

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<sup>25</sup> A full summary narrative of this and all the performance texts making up *The Valentine Trilogy* are included in the appendix at the end of this study.



'n' roll in the project, and made it clear that they were setting out to create a Joseph Campbell-inspired "trilogy of the hero myth" (21).

Hedy Weiss's review did not discuss the narrative roots The House tried to explore, but focused again on their enthusiastic imaginations and readjusted the crown she placed on their heads with *Peter Pan*—slightly askew after the apparent missteps of *Rocket Man* and *Cave with Man*. Weiss reasserted that The House was "quite simply one of the most original, playful, stylistically distinctive and altogether goofily wonderful ensembles at work on a local stage" ("San Valentino' a rollicking homage" 22a). Weiss picked up on Jones' motif of The House needing a trim of its text; but with all the energy and ideas at play, she found it easily forgivable (22a).

Chris Jones' opening salvo included his plea for The House to cut twenty minutes off the show, but again said the fun happening in the Viaduct Theatre during *San Valentino* canceled out any lag in the script ("Imaginative 'Kid' has no fear"). Jones stated, "There's more passion, exuberance, wit, imagination and sheer spirit on offer in the first 20 minutes of 'The Kid' than some Chicago theaters manage to serve up in an entire season," and that the company effectively mingled "myth with mirth" ("Imaginative 'Kid' has no fear").

*San Valentino and The Melancholy Kid* tells the story of a young son, dressed in black, riding a stolen horse and on a mission to avenge the murder of his father shortly after the Civil War. He joins up with a group of misfit cowboys and outlaws looking for a second chance, eventually finding the man he is looking for on the cattle drive trail. Periodically, the action of the story is interrupted as the young cowboy belts out earnest alt-country and rockabilly tunes or poems about cattle brands or a high energy juggling act outlining the recipe for trail-made beef stroganoff.

*Curse of the Crying Heart* opened a year later, continuing the story of the fallout from Elliot Dodge’s avenging the murder of his father—now unfolding in feudal Japan with samurais replacing the West Texas cowboys. Hedy Weiss sang the praises of the new show in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, saying that the concluding wire fight, complete with flying ninjas battling the evil Black Ghost, was “simply the most thrilling, over-the-top display of daredevil acrobatics in recent Chicago theater history” (“Irrepressible House Theatre”). Again, we hear the now consistent chorus of critics calling for The House to edit their plays. Weiss said in her review of *Curse* “as with almost every House script to date, the show needs editing” (“Irrepressible House” 23). She had first made this comment in reference to the previous year’s *San Valentino*, but here, apparently, retroactively applied it to The House’s entire body of work.

Chris Jones of the *Tribune* seemed to try and hammer this point in every review, but he appeared to distance himself even further from Weiss with his review of *Curse*—his accolades were always tempered with advice and warnings while hers usually glowed, refraining from any kind of rain on The House’s parade. Jones’ reviews outlined the danger of The House losing artistic director Allen to outside forces waiting to snap up the talented young man “who runs Chicago’s most exciting young theatre company” (“Allen casts spell” 1). Jones said that *Curse* “skillfully delivers theatre, a rock concert, parody, fantasy and—probably more than any other piece of theatre in town—the unmistakable whiff of a hip event” (5). But like his predecessor, Richard Christiansen, Jones seated The House in the Chicago theatre community in a similar position as the once upstart Steppenwolf and their growing pains while developing from the next big thing to an actual force in the Chicago theatre community. Jones pointed out that Allen’s forays into directing at other companies (a 2004 production of Brecht’s *Puntilla and his Man* at the off-Loop, non-equity Strawdog Theatre Company) proved the special mix Allen had created

with *The House*, and claimed that *The House* was more successful with Allen writing, directing, performing, or all three in the case of *The Valentine Trilogy* (5). Jones pointed to the danger of Allen's centralized role in the company as a kind of "postmodern matinee idol" (5), the same way as Steppenwolf stars like Gary Sinese and John Malkovich's rise to fame had threatened the still growing company by leaving it behind. Jones further pointed to how the fight sequences at *The House* harkened back to the recently defunct Defiant Theatre's long running *Action Movie* plays (5), echoing how *The House* might have filled the void after another store-front, ensemble theatre dissolved as their members grew older and more established and could no longer afford the energy, time or resources to keep the fly-by-night theatre going. Jones continued with his refrain that the play and Allen's writing, "needs an editor and some maturity," but added that *The House* had another hit on their hands (5).

*The House* produced two shows between the close of *Curse of the Crying Heart* and the opening of the final installment of *The Valentine Trilogy*, a Chicago comic-book noir styled ending to the three-part story titled *Valentine Victorious*. Like before, *The House* produced original plays created or authored by company members. Thus far, plays penned by Nathan Allen had been the most successful (*Houdini*, *San Valentino* and *Curse*), with Phillip Klapperich's initial hit *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and the moderately reviewed *The Rocket Man* a close second. The Company members Chris Matthews and Jake Minton authored the previously mentioned *Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe*, which opened immediately after *Curse of the Crying Heart*. *DaVinci*<sup>26</sup> would prove an important play—it was well reviewed and received—but marked the first non-Allen or Klapperich play to garner success. Matthews and Minton

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<sup>26</sup> This play also has an important role in the story of *The House* in its 2009 remount and revision and is discussed in the epilogue to this study.

would go on write *The House*'s most successful play to date with Allen after this first success—2007's *The Sparrow*.

Klapperich's follow-up revision of a children's story, *The Great and Terrible Wizard of Oz*, opened in the fall of 2005 to warm reviews and set the stage for *Valentine Victorious*, which would open in the early winter of 2006. The national attention to part three of the trilogy dominated local coverage—*American Theatre* magazine previewed the play in a summary of the entire play cycle. In the article, Nathan Allen explained that the project was built as a “rite of passage thing, the Joseph Campbell/Lord of the Rings/making of a hero quest...marrying our surreal, physical-theatre style with the mechanics of plot and storytelling” (O'Quinn).

*New York Times*' critic, Charles Isherwood, in a 2005 survey of Chicago theatre included *The House* in his comments, situating them alongside the city's heavy hitting *Steppenwolf* and *Goodman Theatres* in the venerable Sunday section of the *Times*' art section (Isherwood). The article also tied in the trilogy with the structures at work in *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*; Isherwood said, the “limp script and stock characterizations” is forgiven because of the play's “exuberant theatricality” (Isherwood). Hometown critic, Chris Jones, said something to the same effect in his review in the *Tribune*.

Jones' review was written after the last preview in the show—a messy performance in which he said, “*The House* came as close as [he] ever [has] seen them to crashing and burning” (“*House* true to form”). Jones said this was not *The House*'s best show and not even the best of the trilogy; but the audience was as rowdy as ever and the event still proved a great night out (“*House* true to form”). Jones did wonder if all this fun happening in the audience “might be verging on a Pavlovian response by now...the victim never knows” (“*House* true to form”).

The sprawling three year project follows the Campbell mono-myth outlined in Chapter Two, but because of its genre hopping, characters can become confused as they sometimes morph into different forms—a cowboy shifts to samurai into comic book hero and a myriad of other transformations. A dossier that serves as a comprehensive dramatis personae for the entire cycle is helpful to insert here before moving on to discuss the myth patterns in the plot on how they compare with the narratives of *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and *Death and Harry Houdini*. If Isherwood is correct that the cycle has a “limp script and stock characterizations” (Isherwood), then character is the strongest place to begin the analysis.

### **ELLIOT DODGE<sup>27</sup>:**

Also known as The Melancholy Kid (*San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid—SVMK*), Sorrow the Masked Samurai, (*Curse of the Crying Heart—CCH*) and Valentine (*Valentine Victorious—VV*). Elliot’s absent father was murdered leaving him alone to take care of his suffering mother. He steals his father’s old horse and joins up with an outlaw band, who are all seeking redemption—the Bleeding Heart Brigade in *SVMK* and Crying Hearts in *CCH*<sup>28</sup>—which is led by the very man who killed his father because the Captain of the Bleeding Hearts found Elliot’s father sleeping with his wife. Before he avenges his father, Elliot is given a powerful weapon (see under Black Skull) by one of the outlaws. Elliot

<sup>27</sup> Throughout the discussion of *The Valentine Trilogy*, a few conventions are adopted to help aid in discussion. Since characters often change names as the plays hop from genre to genre, either the name they are first introduced into the narrative with is employed to identify them, or the name they identified by during their primary actions in the narrative is adopted for the entire discussion.

<sup>28</sup> In the closing moments of *SVMK*, the Bleeding Heart Brigade members, except Elliot and Cap, are killed by the Black Skull. They all share the same, heart shaped brand scarred into their chest—the same scar Cap gives Elliot at the end of *SVMK*. In *CCH*, they are a distant threat co-opted by Elliot’s enemies to disguise their true motives in taking over Japan. By *VV*, Elliot is all alone and has adopted the bleeding heart symbol as his personal moniker: “Valentine”.

asks for forgiveness from the man who killed his father before he takes his revenge; but both Cap's forgiveness and Elliot's revenge are not enough and the young man takes to wearing his mask as he continues his outlaw ways and masters the new powers that come from acquiring the special weapon. The remaining two plays chart Elliot's journey to find forgiveness and redemption for himself—first from the love of his life, Angela, and secondly from the city and people he has sworn to protect.

### **BLACK SKULL:**

The son of the Devil, he is named Mormon Black in *SVMK* and described as having a smell of sulfur about him as he walks. He is the Black Ghost in *CCH*, and in all three plays he is in pursuit of the only weapon that could defeat him—a weapon forged in hell itself. In *SVMK*, it is a gun that never misses that he gave to a fading gunfighter named Ollie Pendergrass. In *CCH*, the magical gun is a katana sword carried by Elliot that renders him invincible. The sword is destroyed when Elliot tries to kill himself after accidentally killing the woman he loves, Angeline, in *CCH*. He survives and the sword transfers its power to him. In *VV*, the devil's weapon is an atomic bomb, and the shards of the bomb are brought together to make a new bomb that the Black Skull is preparing to use to destroy all of Chicago, using Elliot as the power source to detonate it.

**OLLIE PENDERGRASS:**

The King of the Quick Draw in *SVMK*, he goes by the name of Mattaku Hito in *CCH*. He was the only survivor of the Captain's Bleeding Heart Brigade in the Civil War and is looking for redemption for selling his soul for the Black Skull's weapon. In *SVMK*, Ollie gives the devil's gun to Elliot Dodge and when confronted by the Black Skull, who offers the old cowboy his soul back in return for the magic gun, Ollie pulls out an old revolver and shoots himself in the chest. As a prologue to *CCH*, the scene is recreated, but now with a samurai kimono replacing the dusty trail clothes and the Black Skull decked in terrifying armor<sup>29</sup>. Mattaku Hito falls on his sword, piercing the scar of the Bleeding/Crying heart across his chest. It is Ollie who takes Elliot along to the brothel in Ogallala, Nebraska where he first meets Angeline.

**CAP:**

The Captain of the Bleeding Hearts Brigade only appears in *SVMK*. He is gathering cattle with a crew of wanted men and criminals in hopes of finding a fresh start in Wyoming. His crew consists of his old comrade in arms: Ollie Pendergrass, a knife fighter from Utah named Bill Rowe, and a poetical former schoolteacher named Sal. Cap initially refuses the Melancholy Kid's request to join him and his crew. However, during the night, the ghost of his wife, Celeste

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<sup>29</sup> Each installment of the trilogy opened almost exactly a year apart. Part two and part three began with recreations of one of the last major scenes from the previous year's play but now in the world of the new genre. *CCH* recreated Ollie's death, but now the cowboy was dressed as a samurai, with a new name and takes his life by falling on his sword rather than firing a gun into his chest. *VV* recreates Elliot's weeping over Angela's dead body and Ed Reed, or Lord Goroda's discovery of the couple and blaming Dodge for her death. In *CCH*, this scene took place in the palace of Kyoto. A year later, in *VV*, Angela was wearing a blood stained wedding dress and lay in a back alley of a film noir-Chicago.

visits the Captain. She asks him to help the boy and take him along. We learn during their journey on the trail that the Captain killed Celeste. When the Captain finally made it home, he found Celeste , who thought he had been killed in the war, in bed with another man—a pony express rider and Elliot’s father—and gunned them both down. Elliot confronts the Captain, and before the young outlaw shoots his father’s murderer, he asks the Captain to brand him, leaving the Bleeding/Crying heart scar on Elliot’s chest. With the Captain dead, Elliot takes up a mask and roams the west for a year before making his way back to Angeline.

#### **ANGELINE:**

Also known as Angela Reed in *VV*, and Sakurako, in *CCH*, she starts the play as the lost daughter of a powerful family. Between the action of *SVMK* and *CCH*, she is discovered by agents of her family working in a brothel where she meets Elliot and returned to her family’s rightful seat in Kyoto’s Imperial Palace. In *SVMK*, the family owns a wealthy plantation attacked by marauding Texans. She is the last of the imperial line in Kyoto’s ruling class in *CCH*, and a favorite daughter and socialite of Chicago in *VV*. She falls in love with Elliot when she meets him in the brothel in Shut Eye, Texas in *SVMK*; but after Elliot avenges his father’s murder, he fails to return to her or even respond to her letters for a year. In that time, she is rescued by a noble, Lord Goroda (later, George Reed in *VV*) and returned to her father’s court and learns her duty to her city may be more important than her love of the masked bandit. When Elliot returns to her, winning a contest to earn the chance to be her bodyguard, they are reunited, but only



briefly. Angeline still marries Lord Goroda in an attempt to save Japan and do her duty, but is accidentally killed by Elliot when he tries to rescue her from the Black Ghost. Like the Captain's wife in *SVMK*, she appears to Elliot during *VV*, urging him to reconcile with her husband, Lord Goroda/Ed Reed to save the city.

### **ED REED:**

Known as Lord Goroda in *CCH*, he is a loyal advisor in the Emperor's court in Kyoto, who discovers the kidnapped Angeline and brings her back to the palace. He marries her in hopes it will serve as an alliance to help save Japan. When she is killed during Elliot's botched rescue, he is left to try and put the pieces together as Kyoto burns. In the comic book *Chicago of VV*, he is a crusading police lieutenant, dumped in the night shift as the city sinks beneath its own corruption. When Elliot reveals himself to Reed, seeking reconciliation as per Angeline's request, they form an uneasy alliance to take on the Black Skull.

### **THE CRANES:**

Husband and wife, the two Dr. Cranes are a special guardian couple that has lived an extraordinary long time. In *CCH*, they are embedded in the Imperial court, masquerading as a feuding and senile old couple, the adoptive uncle (Tsuki) and aunt (Mikako) to the princess. They have waited together in the Imperial court for ninety-two years for the bearer of the devil's cursed weapon to return it to its master. When they find the unfortunate soul, their mission is to bestow on him a special device—in *CCH* a red origami crane, in *VV* a blinking green science

fiction-like talisman. Tsuki gives the crane device to Elliot Dodge in *CCH* when he identifies him as the bearer of the weapon, leaving Mikako to explain the prophecy of the weapon, foretelling the Black Skull's return and the battle to defeat him. When the princess, Angeline, is kidnapped and ransomed for the weapon, the Cranes plead with both Elliot and Ed Reed to let her go as she is already dead and to prepare to fulfill the prophecy by defeating Black Skull. When Elliot fails to rescue her and breaks the weapon while trying to use it to commit suicide, the old couple's true nature is revealed. They fight Black Skull in an epic flying wire kung fu battle, and Mikako—known as Dr. Margaret Crane in *VV*—escapes with the shards of the weapon while her Tsuki sacrifices himself while fighting Skull.

Dr. Margaret Crane finds the despondent Elliot in *VV*, bails him out of jail and explains to him the importance of the Crane device and the role Elliot has to play if the Black Skull is to be defeated. We learn that Margaret has been helping other refugees from Angela's death—both Ed Reed and Eleanor Bane (see below)—and unites them all to defeat the son of the devil. The Black Skull comes to Dr. Crane's laboratory looking for the shards. She gives him a fight, revealing she and her husband used technology to help them survive this long, rendering her a robotic kind of fighting machine. But the Skull is able to overcome her and take the broken weapon. She dies in Elliot's arms, giving him instructions on how the Crane Device will protect him and how he must shield the heart shaped scar on his chest as it is his only place of vulnerability. She gives him a heart-shaped shield for protection as she passes away.

**ELEANOR BANE:**

In *CCH*, Eleanor is known as Koibito. She is described as a busu—meaning earlier in her life, through a secret process of mixing deadly poison and lifesaving antidotes in her body, the Emperor made her skin fatally poisonous to any that touched her. This made her a valuable assassin for the Emperor, and she became a concubine who would dispatch enemies of the state with a single, stolen kiss. Black Skull offers to find Eleanor, known as The Black Widow for her deadly powers, a cure if she will kill the masked warrior recently arrived in the city. Eleanor loves the captain of the city guard, a samurai named Kobushi (in *VV*, Detective Liam Connolly), and is unable to requite it until she is healed. Eleanor tries to kiss Elliot and make good on her deal with the Black Skull, but she is interrupted by Kobushi/Liam, who grows instantly jealous. Ultimately, it is Eleanor who delivers the shards of the broken sword to Black Skull at the end of *CCH*, hoping that will earn her cure. She is left in the ashes of the city to fend for herself, thinking Liam dead in the fire. She finds a job in Julian Sabatino's club as a singer, trying to get close enough to revenge her lost love as it was Sabatino who infiltrated the palace in *CCH* and now runs the criminal underground in Chicago—all at the Black Skull's bidding.

**LIAM CONNOLLY:**

In *CCH*, Liam is known as Kobushi and serves Lord Goroda (later Ed Reed) as captain of the palace guards. In *VV*, he is presumed dead—a loyal police

detective who died when Julian Sabatino attacked the city during the royal wedding in *CCH*. He is distrustful of Elliot Dodge from the beginning and desperately in love with Eleanor. Sabatino's fire does not kill Liam, but rather grossly disfigures him, scarring his face and welding his swords into the bones of his hand. At the beginning of *VV*, a quack surgeon tries to reconstruct his face and hands, but leaves him in an even worse state and possessing a massive steel fist at the end of his right arm. Going by the name the Detroit Fist after he kills a group of factory workers who attack him, he makes the same deal with Black Skull as Eleanor: do his bidding and she will be cured. He returns to Chicago to protect his enemy, Sabatino, and must kill his old friend, George Reed. At Reed's apartment, he reunites with Eleanor, who pleads with him not to trust Skull and to stop his hit on their friend. Liam refuses, but misses Reed's heart, injuring him but leaving him alive. While Eleanor pleads, Reed is able to get a shot off with a holdout gun and kills Liam. A despondent Eleanor breaks her cover as the cabaret singer, seduces Sabatino and gives him a deadly kiss, killing the man who maimed her love.

### **JULIAN SABATINO:**

Known as Moriohoto in *CCH*, he is the mastermind behind the assassination of the Emperor of Japan and the attempts on the princess Angeline's life. Masquerading as his brother, who he also murdered, he infiltrates the royal wedding and sets Kyoto on fire. By the time the events of *VV* begin, Sabatino is

taking over all the underground criminal activities in the city, all at the command of Black Skull, who needs the money and resources to rebuild his weapon.

There are a number of remaining characters that, despite their interesting storylines and subplots, that do not contribute to the foundational storyline important to the analysis herein. However, it is worth mentioning Elliot's mother, who appears briefly in *SVMK*, in all seriousness as a talking cow. Elliot is sent off to find a maverick cow from the herd—an actress dressed in a frontier dress and bonnet—who starts to talk to her would-be son. The talking cow is sweet at first, but we learn from Elliot that his father's frequent disappearances and eventual murder drove her insane and she has only recently died. Elliot returns her to the herd and the other cowboys force Elliot to brand her. After he places the red-hot iron to her flank, the talking cow begins to curse him, saying Elliot was the result of a rape and not a union of love. We do not ever learn the whole truth, as she is later tangled in a barbed wire fence. When Elliot cannot put her down and ease her misery, the Cap pulls his gun and kills her—in a way responsible for the deaths of both his parents.

Moving directly to the analytical step of distilling down the narrative for comparison, we first sort the potential mythemes from the entire *Valentine Trilogy*, using Propp and Campbell descriptors as the identifier of any shared commonality. Then, a brief comparison of character dossiers between *Valentine* and the previous two plays to sort out and account for any commonality or presence of archetypes is made before moving on to merging the comparison matrices of all the performance texts analyzed to this point.

First, the methodology helps to sort out the events that feature the major characters from the above dossier that have the greatest impact on the plot with greatest potential to have some

mytheme-like characteristics. Like *Peter Pan* and *Houdini*, there are seemingly major characters that contain very little archetypal or mythic potential. Characters like Eleanor Bane’s “Black Widow” or the wounded soldier who becomes “The Detroit Fist” hold the attention of my memory even now but are ancillary to the major work of the plot, as is Julian Sabatino who is more of a function of the Black Skull’s action than an archetypal character. The list of potential mythemes is quickly distilled down into the central events of Elliot Dodge and the Black Skull, complimented by the small group of characters that act as helpers and gift givers to Elliot on his hero journey (The Cranes, Cap and briefly, Ollie).

Table 4.1

I ORDINARY TIME/ CALL TO ADVENTURE	II HELPERS	III ROAD OF TRIALS	IV SACRED MARRIAGE	V BOON/ ELIXER THEFT	VI DRAGON/ GUARDIAN BATTLE	VII CRUCIFIXION/ RESURRECTION	VIII ATONEMENT/ BRANDING	IX REFUSAL OF THE CALL
<i>SVMK</i> : Elliot steals his father’s horse to avenge his murder and to be a hero.	Cap allows Elliot to go on the trail after ghost of his wife asks him to help the boy.	Cap teaches Elliot about forgiveness; Elliot fights Rowe and loses, and learns about love from Ollie.	Elliot falls in love with Angeline, promises to return.	Ollie gives the Black Skull’s secret weapon to Elliot to keep.				
	Ghost of his wife urges Cap to seek forgiveness from Elliot.				Mormon Black/ Black Skull attacks, seeking his weapon.	Ollie Takes his life, protecting Elliot and the weapon from Black Skull.	Cap brands Elliot with the Bleeding/ Crying Heart. Cap forgives Elliot moments before he is shot.	Elliot receives letter from Angeline, puts on mask and wanders the west in shame.

I ORDINARY TIME/ CALL TO ADVEN- TURE	II HELP- ERS	III ROAD OF TRIALS	IV SACRED MARR- IAGE	V BOON/ ELIXER THEFT	VI DRAGON/ GUARDIAN BATTLE	VII CRUCIFIC- TION/ RESURR- ECTION	VIII ATONE- MENT/ BRAND- ING	IX REF- USAL OF THE CALL
						<i>CCH begins:</i> Ollie/ Mitako takes life, protecting Elliot and the weapon from Black Skull		
Angeline , rescued and returned to her home, is attacked —a contest is announc- ed to bring warriors to the city to be her body guard. Elliot journeys to the contest.	Cranes reveal them- selves to Angeline as ancient protect- tors of the city, urging her to do her duty, marry Goroda and that she will save them all.	Elliot fights in the contest, unrecog- nized, and wins, allowing him to be Angeline’s bodyguard.		Tsuki/Dr. Crane gives Elliot the Crane Device and prophesies Elliot will die in three days.				
			Elliot and Angeline reunite, but she refuses to leave with him and abandon the city.					

I ORDINARY TIME/ CALL TO ADVEN- TURE	II HELP- ERS	III ROAD OF TRIALS	IV SACRED MARR- IAGE	V BOON/ ELIXER THEFT	VI DRAGON/ GUARDIAN BATTLE	VII CRUCIFIC- TION/ RESURR- ECTION	VIII ATONE- MENT/ BRAND- ING	IX REF- USAL OF THE CALL
	Dr. Crane explains the Device, his destiny and the Black Skull to Elliot—cautioning him to not choose the selfish path.				Black Skull attacks the wedding, kidnapping Angeline and ransoming her for the weapon.			Elliot fights Black Skull—he kills Angeline in the process—Goroda/ Ed Reed curses him—decides to kill himself.
						Elliot kills himself with the weapon. He is saved by the crane device and the weapon breaks.		
	The Crane's fight the Black Skull for the broken weapon, hiding them in the city.							



I ORDINARY TIME/ CALL TO ADVEN- -TURE	II HELP- ERS	III ROAD OF TRIALS	IV SACRED MARR- IAGE	V BOON/ ELIXER THEFT	VI DRAGON/ GUARDIAN BATTLE	VII CRUCIFIC- TION/ RESURR- ECTION	VIII ATONE- MENT/ BRAND- ING	IX REF- USAL OF THE CALL
Elliot takes up his mask and a new name—Valentine.						<i>VV begins:</i> Elliot tries to kill himself with the weapon. He is saved by the crane device and the weapon breaks.		
		Elliot brawls with criminals and lowlifes, trying to die or at least feel something. Eleanor Bane recognizes him and Elliot flees.						
	Angeline's ghost appears to Elliot, urging him to seek forgiveness from George Reed.			Dr. Crane rescues Elliot from his fighting, tells him of the device and her plan.	Black Skull attacks Dr. Crane's lab—takes the shards. Before Dr. Crane dies, she gives Elliot a shield.		Elliot pleads for Reed's forgiveness. Their shaky alliance moves forward as they move to take down Black Skull and the corrupt underground.	

I ORDINARY TIME/ CALL TO ADVEN- -TURE	II HELP- ERS	III ROAD OF TRIALS	IV SACRED MARR- IAGE	V BOON/ ELIXER THEFT	VI DRAGON/ GUARDIAN BATTLE	VII CRUCIFIC- TION/ RESURR- ECTION	VIII ATONE- MENT/ BRAND- ING	IX REF- USAL OF THE CALL
		Reed is almost killed, leaving Elliot to fight Black Skull alone.			Elliot fights Black Skull	Defeats Black Skull by sacrificing himself.		
Elliot left to pick up pieces with those who survived and is now the defender of the city.								

Looking at the column headings, we can see how the overall narrative, in addition to the cycles within the constituent parts of *The Valentine Trilogy*, aligns with the circular Campbell model of a hero's journey below:



Figure 4.2



It is no surprise as The House ensemble members identified this model's importance to the texts in the reviews mentioned earlier. The model works on a cycle that describes the *Trilogy* as a whole, but also the sequence of events in each part of the telling.

*San Valentino* starts off with a call to adventure made explicit in the opening song when Elliot asks to be a hero before setting off with the misfit cowboy crew. Same for *Curse of the Crying Heart*, where the announcement of the Ronin contest once again calls Elliot back to Angeline after refusing that call for over a year. There is a less clear call starting off *Valentine Victorious*, as the beginning of that installment focuses on Elliot's persistent refusal and avoidance of any hero's call.

However, each part of *The Valentine Trilogy* initiates the action with a call—accepted or refused—that sets up a series of trials, the introduction of helpers, the receiving of special gifts or boons, following the Campbell model closely. The most striking columns of shared commonality show the importance of the giving and receiving of boons or magical items—the Black Skull's weapon and the Crane Device—and the crucifixion/resurrection events in the texts. These two mythemes serve as a kind of one-two punch setting up the climax of each performance text as well as the trilogy as a whole. In *SVMK*, Ollie gives the gun that does not miss to Elliot and kills himself when Black Skull comes calling for it. Ollie's gift mirrors the giving of the lifesaving Crane Device to Elliot in *CCH* and the role it plays in setting up the climax of both that play (Elliot's failed suicide attempt and the breaking of the weapon) and *Valentine Victorious* (Elliot's using the Crane Device to destroy Black Skull while protecting himself and the city.)

In a way, Ollie's suicide at the feet of Black Skull echoes Elliot's later actions, but the real action *mythemical* action corresponding to what Campbell would describe as Elliot's

crucifixion and resurrection would be the closing sequence with Cap. On the surface, Elliot having the Captain brand him and then Elliot killing the Captain does not at first appear to share much with the death and resurrection of Elliot at the end of *CCH* (and shown again at the outset of *VV*). In fact, initially that action sequence might be more accurately described as a Campbellian *Apotheosis*. However, a closer look at the branding and revenge killing of *SVMK* paints a different picture. As Elliot draws the weapon to kill his father's murderer, he pleads for forgiveness. Similarly in *CCH*, Elliot's suicide is preempted by his accidental killing of the woman he loved, Angeline, and his survival or resurrection leaves him despondent, seeking pain and death in the underground of the city in the opening scenes of *VV*. Elliot's sacrifice at the end of *VV* has much less to do with his godlike strength and invincibility and much more to do with the atonement he sought from the Cap in *SVMK*, flees from in *CCH*, and at the request of Angeline's ghost, seeks out in *VV*. Despite being a superhero tale, the story seems to center around this act and need for forgiveness, first for the killer of Elliot's family and then for Elliot himself.

This might be the most marked difference from the mytheme patterns in the earlier House performance texts. Both Peter in *Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and Harry in *Death and Harry Houdini* pursue plots more singular—even selfish—in nature. Elliot's path in *CCH* is selfish to be sure, but sets off a very unselfish trajectory in *VV*. The end of both *Peter Pan* and *Houdini* find their protagonists in a lost and even failed state. After Peter refuses to return to London with Wendy and the surviving Lost Boys, he is only able to answer The Doctor's questions with a dazed "I forgot" (*Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* 94). Houdini dies feebly shuffling cards after a botched trick and a punch from a teenager—failing to make good on the charge of his father to protect his mother and defeat death.

Despite Elliot accidentally killing his would-be love, the male-female relationships in *Valentine Trilogy* prove healthier, or more mature than those in *Houdini* or *Peter Pan*. True, Elliot leaves Angeline for a year after a one night stand and ends up killing her with a weapon forged in hell; but there is a maturity in Elliot's male-female relationships when compared to Peter's pre-pubescent fumbblings with Wendy, Tink and Tiger Lilly and Houdini's Freudian preoccupation with his mother. There is an echo to these earlier relationships but it occurs more in the character dossier of *The Valentine Trilogy* than in the actions and mythemes found in the matrix above. Elliot's interactions with Annabelle—the talking cow and allegorical mother—is, in all seriousness, are important links to the patterns in The House's earlier performance texts. *The Valentine Trilogy* points to a kind of middle maturity in The House's plots and narrative structure—despite the critics' continuing call for an editor. However, after five plays—*Peter Pan*, *Houdini* and the three plays of *The Valentine Trilogy*, the heroes central to the stories of The House seem to be children, struggling to grow up on a journey initiated by some form of parental strife.

Elliot is an orphan, his father murdered and his mother senile is seemingly shot in her cow form by the same cowboy who gunned down his father. Peter is the same, whether by his own choice or by accident, and revels in his lack of parents. Houdini loses his father to the Breather of Last Breaths and eventually fails to protect his mother from the same fate. Like Houdini, Elliot sets out on a quest that is parental in nature. Peter is different in that most of his efforts are fleeing his father than fighting for him; but the Freudian overtones persist so that he eventually comes to a parental reckoning the same way Harry and Elliot do, when he dons Hook's hat and assumes the captainship of the Jolly Roger after murdering the pirate captain.

Though there is a demonstrable difference in the plots and consequently the ordering and pattern of the mythemes present in the first five The House performance texts analyzed, there is a consistency in the type of characters participating and present in these plays which fits with The House's definition of myth as a story about hero. *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*, *Death and Harry Houdini* and the plays of *The Valentine Trilogy* all center on a young, male hero, on the cusp of maturity, with severe parent and relationship issues. Peter refuses to grow up, remember his parents or accept Wendy, Tink or Tiger Lilly as a partner. Harry spends his life in search of his father's dying request and alienates his wife because he never severs his attachment to his mother. Elliot barely knows his father, has a senile mother who appears as a talking cow and accidentally kills the only woman he has ever loved—and that after hiding from her for over a year. Unlike Harry and Peter, Elliot goes through some kind of maturation, or even what could be described as a kind of Aristotelian reversal, when he transitions from his selfish motivations in *Curse of the Crying Heart* and becomes the crusading hero of Chicago at the end of *Valentine Victorious*. However, despite the difference in where they end up, these three boy heroes seem to start in the same place—troubles with mom and dad and facing the big question of how or if they will go forward. The similarities of these performance texts are less in the actions and events that congruously across narratives in the models provided by Propp and Campbell, and more in the type of heroes The House is choosing to tell stories about.

## CHAPTER 5

### *The Sparrow*

*The Sparrow* opened at the Viaduct Theatre on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007. It would be the start of The House's most successful show in their short history, playing for close to a year, transferring from The Viaduct to the Garage Theatre at Chicago's famous Steppenwolf Theatre and was picked up by Broadway in Chicago for a commercial run at their Apollo Theatre venue. It was a tale of a young woman, returning home to finish her senior year of high school eight years after she had left—the only survivor of a terrible bus accident that wiped out the rest of what would have been her graduating class. Through a course of events, we realize she has telekinetic powers, and rises as the small town's version of superhero—going by the moniker “The Sparrow” until the actions of her past are revealed, sending her into exile once again.

Again, the reviews by Chris Jones most clearly chronicled *The Sparrow*'s journey from off-loop phenomenon to what he calls a turning point for the young company (“House needs to take risks”). *Spring Awakening* had just stopped in Chicago during its first national tour, and its opening coincided with The House's *Sparrow*. Jones compared what many in New York were calling the hip new show to what was happening down at the Viaduct, saying, “You can smell and taste something new, something passionate, something original, something strong, something fresh, something true and, above all, something young” (“‘The Sparrow’ by House Theatre”). Jones stated that while *Spring Awakening* failed to capture the attention of Chicago audiences like it did in New York, this “stirring, heart-wrenching original tale of a small-town Illinois teenager with telekinetic powers and gaping emotional wounds will (“‘The Sparrow’ by House Theatre”). Jones sums up his point with crowning *The Sparrow* as among “the very best

original theatre pieces [he's] ever seen in this town...and far and away the best show the House has produced to date...and it has taken until now for everything to come together quite like this" ("The Sparrow' by House Theatre").

A few days later, in the same vein as Hedy Weiss' "Next Big Thing" follow up to *Peter Pan*, Jones penned a missive to The House about their next step titled "House Needs to Take Risks Beyond Chicago Home." Jones paralleled The House's *Sparrow* with the production of Sam Shepard's *True West* in 1982 that Gary Sinise controversially took to New York despite protestations from the company's ensemble members. Jones asserted that, like *True West* signaling a turning point for Steppenwolf, *The Sparrow* presents a "similarly crucial moment" for The House ("House Needs to Take Risks"). The article was one of the most comprehensive and concise in naming, in some cases for the first time in the press, many of the forces at work in the rise of The House. Jones pointed out that The House arrived on the scene at a time when the young audiences in Chicago were demonstrably "rejecting stolid, text-based theatre for more eclectic performance styles" ("House Needs to Take Risks"). For Jones, *The Sparrow* represented The House's moment and was the show that could make the next step happen, because like their original and inaugural hit, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*, this play dealt with issues of the heart in more ways than the work since ("House Needs to Take Risks"). Jones allowed for some of the jealousy of the city's older theatre companies that often "looked askance at the sometimes-messy work and the collective lack of experience," but made it clear that The House was not "over-hyped" but finally making good on the promise it showed in 2002 ("House Needs to Take Risks"). Jones wrote that The House kids, now reaching their early thirties, "have figured out it's time to put away the toys, turn to adult concerns and raise the stakes" ("House needs to Take Risks"). He believed the sky was the limit and despite the problems of not being



stars, the largess of the cast and how much their work broke the rules commercial producers are comfortable with, The House's *Sparrow* "mustn't end here" ("House Needs to Take Risks").

It is the first review by Jones that excluded any mention of the text needing an edit, or being too long. One moment received special attention—how the show's plot turned on a discovery that Emily Book, the protagonist, was the cause of the tragic bus accident that has so scarred the small town ("The Sparrow' by House"). Jones mentioned that the trigger for this discovery was insufficiently clear, but assured this "snafu will be fixed by the time you see the show" ("The Sparrow' by House") and in performance, it quickly was.

Here, Jones' claim that this was The House's "best show to date" ("The Sparrow' by House") and the absence of calls for editing and trimming is reflected in the analysis for potential mythemes and any existing patterns within the performance text of *The Sparrow* itself and in regards to the previous texts studied. The first step in this discussion is the creation of *The Sparrow*'s character dossier.

**EMILY BOOK:** the only survivor of a tragic bus accident that killed her entire fourth grade class. Emily grew up near a set of railroad tracks but on the wrong side. She was raised by her grandmother, but after the accident was sent away to a church school that seems to take problem cases. To get her diploma, Emily has to take her senior year at an accredited school; so the PTA of Spring Farm High School vote to bring Emily home, giving her a room with a host family—the McGukins—and an advisor—Mr. Christopher—since she will be the only graduating senior that year. Emily returns with a mysterious charge from a kind guardian from the church school to tell the families of her deceased classmates

what she has done and make amends, and the awkward and shy young girl is quickly thrown into the mix of the still-grieving town. When a classmate is in trouble, Emily uses hidden telekinetic powers to save her, appropriating an old cheerleading uniform for a costume, and is given the casual super hero name, “The Sparrow.” Emily’s rise in popularity comes at a cost, as it outs her infatuation with her kind teacher, Mr. Christopher, and alienates her first friend, the former popular girl, Jenny, who unravels that it was Emily who caused the bus accident. The townsfolk, who had blamed Mr. Christopher’s wife—the driver of the bus—for the accident for the past eight years, go to find Emily and investigate, but she flees. In the pursuit, Jenny grabs a police officer’s gun and Mr. Christopher is shot. Emily uses her powers to save her teacher and leaves Spring Farm for Chicago, but not before trying to make some kind of amends by lifting all the citizens up into a soaring flight through the sky together.

**JENNY McGRATH:** Jenny is the popular girl enlisted by Mr. Christopher to help with Emily’s transition into Spring Farm High. Head of the cheerleaders and top grade student, it is Jenny who starts the dodge ball game where Emily’s powers first appear to her classmates. Jenny’s attempt to pull down the banner of their rival team during the homecoming basketball game outs Emily completely when she flies to the top of the gym to pluck Jenny from the rafters. Jenny grows jealous as Emily quickly replaces her as the popular girl in school, and Jenny fumes when Emily begins to receive attention from Mr. Christopher, even though he is being puppeteered into a song and dance by her powers. When Emily finds a

dejected Jenny being comforted and then kissed by Mr. Christopher, The Sparrow explodes a nearby overhead projector, leaving a gash in Jenny's face. When Mr. Christopher runs after Emily, Jenny walks to Emily's old house near the train tracks and the site of the accident. There she connects the dots between Emily's power and the strange events of the accident, realizing it was Emily who pushed the bus in front of the train after she escaped from her teasing classmates. Jenny asks Emily if she was responsible for the tragedy the next day in school, and when Emily runs away, the news spreads through the town. All of Spring Farm quickly storms through the town to find Emily, cornering her near the train station. As the sheriff tries to talk Emily down, Jenny impatiently grabs the gun, points it at Emily, and then shoots Mr. Christopher. Emily takes the gun, heals Mr. Christopher and Jenny's face, and leaves Spring Farm as Jenny and the rest fly through the sky.

**MR. CHRISTOPHER:** The popular biology teacher volunteers to advise Emily through her schoolwork as the high school's only senior. Like the rest of the town, he lost someone in the bus accident—not a child, but his wife—and he struggles still, eight years later, with the thought his wife might have been to blame. He is the first to accept and welcome Emily, and the first to celebrate her unique abilities when she saves Jenny. He makes a clear boundary after he and Emily almost kiss in biology class the day following the dance; but in a weak and lonely moment, seeing the resemblance of his dead wife in Jenny, he kisses his student while Emily accidentally looks on from the door. He plans to resign his position

and move to Chicago, but instead gives Emily the ticket. After Emily resurrects him, he stays and flies about the town with the rest of the citizens.

There are a number of other characters in this play, with most actors playing more than one role throughout. The McGukins—Emily’s host family—are of some importance. They let Emily into their house, and their lost daughter puts a personal and specific face to those lost in the tragedy. The sheriff, principal, coach, etc., are all viable and interesting characters but do not have the form or action to be considered obvious archetypes or major characters in myth narratives. Further, although Mr. Christopher functions as a helper and Jenny carries most of the counter action of the play, they do not seem to bear the full weight of an archetypal character. This leaves Emily as the best and only candidate for being a Campbellian archetype. The formalist nature of the study’s dramaturgy only allows for the action that takes place on stage to be considered as potential mythemes for possible study. However, Emily’s backstory that is alluded to throughout the play supports her being a hero in Campbell’s or Propp’s mold—she is teased by her classmates (villainy), uses her powers to cause the bus accident (unrecognized arrival), is sent to the special school (flight) and then she returns after a long exile—what could be considered a whale’s belly or night journey. These actions in her back-story set up the small set of actions in the play. Her story in the actual plot of the play separates out into the following potential mythemes:

Table 5.1:

<i>CALL TO ADVENTURE</i>	<i>UNRECOGNIZED ARRIVAL</i>	<i>VILLIANY</i>		<i>RECOGNITION</i>	<i>SACRED MARRIAGE</i>	<i>FLIGHT</i>
The Spring Farm PTA agrees to bring Emily back to graduate/Emily's teachers from current school charge her to tell the community what she has done.	Emily's foster brother-Charlie-tries to shoot Emily with a sling shot—she stops it without looking but covers up her powers.	Emily is ganged up on by her classmates during a dodge ball game at school				
	Emily blows out the lights and stops all the balls midflight but covers up her powers.		Emily joins her classmates in detention, reconciling her to the group.			
			Emily tells her foster mother, Joyce, about what her daughter was wearing the day of the accident, reconciling the girls.			
		Jenny and the other cheerleaders lock Emily in a locker when she overhears their plan to rip down the rival banner.		Emily blows open the locker and flies into the rafter to save Jenny when she fails to pull down the banner.		

<b>CALL TO ADVENTURE</b>	<b>UNRECOGNIZED ARRIVAL</b>	<b>VILLIANY</b>		<b>RECOGNITION</b>	<b>SACRED MARRIAGE</b>	<b>FLIGHT</b>
			Emily is celebrated at school as The Sparrow.		Emily uses her powers to dance with Mr. Christopher and nearly kisses him.	
					Emily explodes an overhead projector when she discovers Mr. Christopher kissing Jenny, cutting Jenny's face.	
						Emily flees but is caught by Mr. Christopher and the town.
		Jenny shoots Mr. Christopher.		Emily saves Mr. Christopher by restarting his heart and pulling out the bullet with her powers.		Emily leaves for Chicago.

At first glance, thus matrix looks much like the previous matrices of analyzed performance texts of The House. However, the unruliness of the matrix points to a reapplication of the methodological steps allowing for a compression of these events into a singular series of *mythemes*—and not just *mythemes* that adhere to the Campbell/Propp descriptors but a storytelling sequence that seems to build on the previous texts in a clear and succinct way.

Emily's *Call to Adventure* is a return from exile and holds some resemblance to a *Refusal of the Call*. Emily is reluctant when arriving in Spring Farm and delays her confession to the point of failure before Jenny ultimately reveals it. It is a more complex initiating *mytheme* than those found in *Death and Harry Houdini* and *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid*—where the call or herald comes explicitly in the form of a Harry's dying father in *Houdini* and a rock song and a visit from a ghost in *San Valentino*. Emily's call is a more awkward beginning than Elliot's or Harry's. The driver of the car that drops her off in her old town says to her her caregivers at the school are pushing her out of the nest now so she can fly. Despite Emily being the most truly magical hero—no special weapons or tricks—she has the most human beginning to her story.

The middle of Emily's story climaxes with the revelation of her powers and the rift this causes between her and Jenny. There is a small sub-category here—potentially a stand-alone event where Emily tries to keep her powers hidden. However, the repetition and reapplication of the myth dramaturgy to find the narrative's largest, foundational parts, make a stronger argument for this subset of events being intermediate to the larger revelation of Emily's power than a grouping of its own.

The climax of the play—the confrontation of Emily with the community and her resurrection of Mr. Christopher—is a dense event that has motifs or elements of any number of those described by Campbell and Propp. However, most of these descriptors are problematic, as Emily's actions don't fit cleanly within any of their definitions. There is a death and resurrection, but Mr. Christopher is the object in those actions. Emily's resurrection of Mr. Christopher is a major action, but in myth models, in these climatic moments, it is usually the hero returning from the dead rather the person aiding in the crossing. Emily causes the

townspeople to fly, but there is little explanation, reconciliation or discussion of forgiveness, so there is no clear atonement or reunion within the community.

We can see that Emily, as the play's protagonist and the clear *The House* kind of hero of the play, shares the most with the protagonists of the previous performance texts. Like Peter, Harry and Elliot Dodge, she comes from a broken home. Peter is a de-facto or self-determined orphan with potential Freudian issues. Harry loses his father and has definite Freudian issues with his mother. Elliot's issues with his mother are complicated, Freudian or otherwise, but he loses his parents as well and starts on his revenge journey an orphan. Like the three boys, Emily has lost her parents and her guardian grandmother is the one who sends her to the special school. There is a shared archetypal foundation to all four of these characters, but it is not solely Emily's gender that set her apart from other *House* heroes in the minds of audiences and critics. Her story is open; we know little about her life in the school, the loss of her parents or grandmother or how she received these powers. She is a similar hero to other *House* protagonists, but more time is devoted in *The Sparrow*'s performance text to what she is doing than describing what she has done or has been done to her.

As mentioned in the conclusion of *The Valentine Trilogy* discussion, Elliot was the first character in the examined texts to approach what would be considered to undergo some form of Aristotelian reversal or recognition. Peter closes *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* in an amnesiac stupor. Harry dies at the end of *Death and Harry Houdini* failing to achieve his father's last request and, for all intents and purposes, alone. Elliot saves the day and learns some lessons; and though fighting the son of the Devil to save Chicago from a nuclear blast is noble work, there is a quiet search for forgiveness that started with the killing of Cap in *SVMK*, continued with Angeline in *CCH*, and came to a head with George Reed in *VV*. Reed is the human core of



the story that at times lived on the periphery of the action driven plot. In his article “House Needs to Take Risks Beyond Chicago Home,” Chris Jones remarked on how *The Valentine Trilogy* was for him, a “detour into the world of the theatrical cartoon”; still “great fun—and by no means lacking in artistry or skill,” but one that made “The House more easily dismissed as a group of exuberant kids not yet ready for the big adult table...the cartoon westerns downplayed the troop’s greatest strength—its gaping heart.” That gaping heart—glimpsed in moments of *The Valentine Trilogy*—is on full display with Emily as she returns to Spring Farm to confess what she has done, with no promise of redemption, reconciliation or atonement.

Emily is not so much a different character than the previous three, but rather a maturation of the hero archetype The House started to riff with in *Peter Pan*. She is complicated, as are the boys, and she does not meet a rosy conclusion that would have endeared her to the young crowd streaming into the Viaduct to see her story. Ultimately, Emily’s mistake is revealed by another member of the community, and after saving the life of her teacher in the fallout, she still has to go into another exile. It is not clear if the town forgives her as they fly in the air, and it is not clear what Emily will do next as we see her riding the train into the heart of Chicago’s loop. It is that lack of clarity, or more accurately the openness of what is next, that might lend to the empathy Chicago audiences had for this The House hero. A messy ending with accountability without condemnation might prove a much more palatable form of narrative for a contemporary audience—especially a younger demographic in contemporary theatre. Be this an issue of post-modern or after-modern sensibilities is beyond the scope of the study and my ability here, as is making claim that going forward, myths need a certain sense of irony or cynicism or devalorization. It is mentioned here to show that all the performance texts end in what could be a failure by the hero: Peter has lost his Lost Boys, his island friends and Wendy, along with his

memories. Harry has lost his wife, his mother and his duel with Death. Elliot has saved the city and is now working as a vigilante superhero in partnership with Reed, but has lost his love. There is a small stepping stone to Emily here in that as the dust settles from the fight with Black Skull, we see Elliot talking with Eleanor—the Black Widow—who also lost her love. They share a kiss and there seems to be a glimmer of hope that both may recover from the events of the previous three plays. However, none of the endings approach the same Aristotelian reversal and recognition of *The Sparrow*. It may be impossible for contemporary plays to fit into Aristotle's formalistic definition of tragedy—Emily is just a school girl superhero, and not some king—and her reversal is leaving a town she has only lived in for a short time to a more familiar state of exile; but Emily's journey to Chicago is the closest resolution of a hero's journey to date—she departs accountable and wounded from her task, but with a new and changed life.

Jones may be right that *The Sparrow* was The House's best work to that date, but it also may represent a maturation of the telling of myths. Allowing for The House's definition of myth to guide the discuss of potential mythemes shows that *The Sparrow* is definitely the tightest in regards to structure, and the most enigmatic in regards to the type of hero they sent on their journey.

However, where *The Sparrow* represents that tightest performance text to date, it also reveals something important about The House's myths. Like the other hero stories, there are story moments that correlate with the models provided by Propp and Campbell, but the application of Lévi-Strauss' methodology shows the major correlation between the performance texts of The House are not the stories, but the heroes.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Epilogue*

The climax of *The Sparrow* fits uneasily into the available myth models, but it proved to be the most popular exploration of myth by The House to date. Suppositions that a hero who fails is more palatable to the cynicism of contemporary imaginations are problematic since, it is not clear if Emily failed at all. Maybe it is the very lack of resolution that proved more palatable to the audience members of *The Sparrow*. However, it is beyond the scope of the discussion here to say The House has entered into the discussion of how to achieve a contemporary catharsis in audiences.

What is within the scope here is to discuss how this structuring of myth with The House's *Sparrow* may point to an evolution of their ideas of hero and myth that they first explored in *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. That first play has an effectively orphaned hero who flies through the sky but ultimately refuses not only to grow up, but to change, rendering him lost at the play's end. In *Death and Harry Houdini*, the parent issues in the hero continue and the ending is equally unresolved. However, where Peter is left as a non-functioning amnesiac in an almost passive last moment, Harry spends his last breaths after confronting his failure feebly still trying to achieve his fool's journey. Elliot's failures in the climaxes of *San Valentino* and *Curse of the Crying Heart* parallel these earlier explorations of failure climaxes for House heroes. Elliot pleads for forgiveness as he trains his gun on Cap and fails to receive it as he pulls the trigger in *SVMK*, and cannot even successfully commit suicide after accidentally killing Angeline in *CCH*. Though the victor in *Valentine Victorious*, the last minutes after Elliot's clear victory over Black Skull and saving of the city show a certain sadness and loss—winning the day does not guarantee much in terms of happiness in the days to come. There is a little glimmer of hope when the

indestructible Valentine shares a poisonous kiss with the Black Widow. However, this juxtaposition of a mytheme-based climax with the dispossessed feeling of the hero afterwards is perceived in *Valentine Victorious*, but truly achieved in *The Sparrow*. Emily saves the day but nothing is fixed or visibly better. We watch her ride the train to Chicago, and hope that somehow there will be some peace for her.

After the success, critical, financial and dramaturgical, of *The Sparrow*, there were great hopes and expectations of what The House would do next. The company devoted their resources and expanded coffers from their breakout hit into remounting their science fiction tale, *Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe*. Due to a complicated relationship with their landlords at The Viaduct however, The House had to find a new home. *The Sparrow* had been the focus of The House for almost two years. As they prepared for the remount of *DaVinci*, The House hoped this play would find the same audiences and success.

It did not.

Reviews were mixed. Some critics missed the old atmosphere of the Viaduct or preferred the previous version of the script. Others still had *The Sparrow* fresh in their minds and were unable to get past that *DaVinci* was something different. Most reviews referenced The House's hit show in everything they wrote about the company that following year.

The play featured a different type of hero than Peter Pan, Houdini, Elliot or Emily Book. The hero of *Dave DaVinci* was a father who fails to use his time traveling invention to keep his daughter from killing herself. It was a parent hero rather than The House's familiar heroic orphans. The play may have been a maturation of style but it didn't prove a fit at the box office for audiences and critics hungry for *The Sparrow*. The House poured their money into *Dave DaVinci* and almost lost it all—causing them to cancel the remainder of the season and regroup.

The regrouping continues. The House survived, but all the critical and financial momentum gained from *The Sparrow* was lost, which might prove fortunate for the now not-so-young company. If *The Sparrow* demonstrated a matured evolution of that first myth explored by The House, then that tale is told. Those stories of disaffected heroes attracted the young company and in turn attracted younger audiences as it reflected their experiences starting their lives in the city. Now, the core company members of The House are having very different experiences. Many are married and starting families, possibly explaining the shift to a parent-hero in *Dave DaVinci*.

Despite this change in their adult lives, there has not been a great deal of change in the hero stories The House has told since the close of *The Sparrow* in 2007. Their biggest subsequent hit was the aforementioned spring 2012 remount of *Death and Harry Houdini*. Even with some new dramaturgical restructuring, the observations in Chapter 3 about the myth structure and, most importantly, the archetypal characteristics of Harry still hold true ten years later.

The House produced the first part of another three-year play cycle in the fall of 2012: *The Iron Stag King*, a Tolkien-esque journey of an orphaned young hero trying to claim a magical weapon and become the leader of a war-torn world. All indications point to this being another visitation of a typical The House hero following a Campbell like journey.

For the past few years, The House has remounted a holiday show. Reworking the original short story that gave rise to the ballet, The House created their own text for E.T.A. Hoffman's short story *The Nutcracker*. The House's *Nutcracker* centers on Clara, a young woman whose family is struggling after the death of her soldier brother. Though not an orphan, she is an

addition to the stable of The House heroes trying to save the day while under the weight of severe parental problems.

There have been other forays into other kinds of plays: Orwellian political dramas, a horror story about a creature beneath the stairs, and a number of plays about genius teenagers on some kind of adventure. However, The House's box office and critical triumphs seem to be tied to their particular brand of parentally challenged heroes. Why audiences choose to revisit these characters, at it seems clear from the analysis of this study that the *hero* is the privileged part of The House's *hero stories*, is an open question, as is the question if audiences will someday ask The House for a different kind of hero and subsequently different kinds of stories. It does seem The House has rebounded from the financial fallout following *The Sparrow*. They are currently transitioning from a non-equity theatre to a union company, moving them up the ranks of so-called legitimacy in Chicago's theatre community, like Jones predicted in his earliest reviews. Now, ten years removed from *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*, it remains to be seen how growing up will impact The House and their heroes.

## APPENDIX A: SUMMARY NARRATIVES OF PERFORMANCE TEXTS

### *Death and Harry Houdini*

The Viaduct performance space for The House's *Death and Harry Houdini* was arranged much like the stage for *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*. The audience surrounded a rectangular playing space on three sides, but now the cracked and chipped floor of the Viaduct's East Theatre serving as the stage surface, with the far end framed by a dilapidated plaster proscenium, harkening back to a Vaudeville theatre that has fallen on hard times.

Like in *Peter Pan*, artistic director Nathan Allen ran onstage before the show began, invoking a certain rowdiness while covering the standard pre-show announcements. He also had some particular work to do—namely having the audience inspect and watch over a set of padlocks that will be used at the show's climatic escape. This moment is not scripted or present in the printed text, but in performance and in archival footage of the play it gives a clear picture of the type of environment and audience relationship The House was fostering in those early shows. In the archival footage, the audience is made up of the typical mix of seasoned theatre patrons alongside curious new comers who recently read in the paper about this hot ticket in town. However, there is a group of Chicago Public School students sitting on pillows, skirting the stage, whose enthusiastic and unfiltered comments during this pre-show speech and throughout the play achieve the kind of rowdiness Allen seems to ask.

Before the audience can settle in, a black-suited man, part ringmaster, part carnival barker, rushes in with a megaphone and gives a rhyming, rhythmic prologue backed by a menagerie of instrument playing carnies and sideshow freaks. The Ringmaster warns the audience they are about to meet a “dangerous band of ragamuffin misfits/ Whose sole purpose is to beguile your wits and silly your senses!” (*Death and Harry Houdini* 3) As The Ringmaster

introduces the story, he compares the story of Houdini to “a Tragedy unrivalled since Macbeth!/ A Herculean fight against a cold and silent Death!” (3)

The Ringmaster and the menagerie of freaks continue the exposition of the story with a narrative song and dance, beginning with Houdini’s first escape—the watery cell of his Mother’s womb—an escape he would spend the rest of his life attempting to repeat (3). The freak chorus tells the story of the young Houdini’s growing up, his athletic skill and penchant for troublemaking, as well as the birth of his awkward, average brother with a skillset perfect for supporting the elder Houdini’s future career.

The song concludes with the chorus telling the story of how Harry’s father is now dying from cancer and that death is fast approaching. The young Houdini brothers kneel before a projected shadow animation of a gasping caricature of their father, charging the young Harry to make up for his failures, protect his mother and to “do the things for which I never had the courage. Master your trade. Protect your family. Be a rich man...Above all, you must take care of your Mother!” (9) Harry’s father sees Death—a light puppet of a gas masked specter created by shining a stage light on a stenciled mirror—fast approaching, and shouts for Harry to follow his charge, and for his younger brother, Theo, to not get hurt and mind his brother. Harry’s father breathes his last breath as the light puppet dives down the throat of the animated man and he dies.

Harry turns and finds himself watching a Chinese magician doing a series of magic tricks. The young Houdini impresses the old master with figuring out how he achieves the illusions and finally convinces Dr. Lynne to train him as an apprentice magician. Dr. Lynne gives his new apprentice a gift—a small key—and helps him perform his first escape. Harry and Theo start translating this new knowledge into an act, but before it can get far off the ground,



Harry falls in love with a young woman he meets on a streetcar—Bess—who is quickly integrated into the act. Houdini asks Bess to marry him during their first date, but he keeps the good news from his mother.

Harry continues his magic training with Dr. Lynn while he, Theo and Bess perform at the carnival. While working to escape from a packing crate during one of Dr. Lynn's lessons, Harry hears the scrapping breath of Death approaching. Harry's magic teacher has overdosed on a mix of opium and heroin and now the gas-masked grim reaper is coming for him. Dr. Lynn tells him not to fear, that he has trained Harry well, to use what he has learned and to not forget (26). Harry, still trapped from his lesson, has to escape on his own, and with his last breath, Dr. Lynn tells Harry he is already a great magician (26).

With his teacher's death, Harry makes Theo and Bess swear loyalty and secrecy as he sets out to start his own act (28). Very quickly, a Vaudeville circuit producer—the actor playing the Ringmaster now in an overstuffed fat suit, chomping on a cigar and carrying large sacks of gold—picks up the young act and makes the troupe rich (29). Harry promptly celebrates by pouring magic coins out of newspapers, empty sacks and pulling them from behind ears (31). Unfortunately, the Ringmaster notices Harry is celebrating with one member of his family and troupe more than the others, remarking: “A wonderful thing/ When Passion brings profit; / The Fates seem to smile/ On this lucky young man; / Not to mention the love/ Of an Honest woman./ But this man has a mind/ To murder a myth,/ Making merry tonight's melodrama,/ and the marital magic/ Is mere misdirection,/ This boy's too enmeshed with his mamma!” (31)

As Harry et al. settle into the routine of being celebrity circuit performers, he and his mother spend more time speaking in German, sipping tea, while Bess waits on them hand and foot, excluding her from their conversation while she works (31-2). Harry smoothes things over

with Bess with a few sweet love words (34) but leaves the two women competing for his attention in a lurch to find Theo and continue working on a handcuff escape Houdini hopes to perform after jumping from a bridge into the Detroit River (35). Theo is worried Harry cannot survive long enough as the escape artist is already breaking the world record for holding one's breath (35) but Harry continues to train, plunging again and again into a large claw-footed tub till he is able to go without breathing for four and a half minutes (36).

The day of the trick, Harry stands over a frozen Detroit River with Theo and Bess protesting severely (36). Theo pleads the preparations didn't take into account the cold, the ice and the effect it will have on Harry at the bottom of the river, but Harry starts to hear the heavy breathing of the same gas-masked character who took his teacher, Dr. Lynne, and his father before that (36). Harry refuses to listen to Bess and Theo and defiantly plunges into the river, challenging "The Breather of Last Breaths" that he plans on keeping his life (37). Harry mocks Death as a coward, challenging him to "Show himself" (38). As Theo and Bess panic on the bridge, watching the seconds tick away on the amount of time Harry's air supply has left, Harry shouts at the gas-masked specter drifting in the current that he has now found Death's weakness—that through his escapes he can draw Death near to him so he can destroy him (38). Before Harry can get to close this time, Theo jumps into the river and rescues his brother much to his dismay (39).

While Harry recovers from the successful face off with Death but the failure of the escape, a black and white silent film is projected out over the audience (39). In the film, Houdini is visited by the ghost of his father, warning him that Death is now after his beloved mother (39). Harry's father charges him with protecting her other once again, just as he did in his last words to his son (39). Harry comes up with a plan to create a "Death Trap Machine" (39). It will be an

escape that will tempt Death so close that Harry can trap it inside while he—the master of handcuffs and locks—can escape (40). Harry sets off on a number of feats, each one more daring in a series of montages of tricks (40). However, the silent film starts to break down on the screen when the captions can't keep up with the arguments of Theo, Bess and Harry (40). We start to hear their words from behind the screen and suddenly all three pour out on stage, arguing about Theo's reluctance to build Harry's next trick: The Water Torture Cell (41). Theo is left resigned to building the machine for Harry, and Bess increasingly frustrated that she is not a good wife (43).

Harry ignores both Theo and Bess as his celebrity and skill as an escapist grows. Theo pours over his designs as Bess's tension with Harry's mother comes to a head (44). Harry is gone on tour, so Bess cares for Mother, despite the language barrier (44). Harry returns to both of them having a row over some spilled tea (45). He tries to make a tenuous peace, greeting both and then pulling Bess aside to show her what he has brought with him from his travels—namely a dress created for Queen Victoria herself (46). Bess is beside herself with excitement about Harry's kindness, and Harry doesn't realize until too late that Bess believes the dress is for her (46). Harry has to confess he has purchased the dress for his Mother (47) and he plans to throw her a European style coronation—crowning her queen of his life (48). Bess, crumpled from this last straw, says that it is “a wonderful idea” (48) but then pulls out a police revolver and shoots Harry (48). Luckily it proves to be a kind of sub-textual magic trick, explained away by the Ringmaster (48). Harry's minimal efforts to comfort his wife prove empty and she leaves dejected (48).

There is an interlude in the action here when Harry receives a telegram from the famous author of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, asking him to join a team investigating and

exploring the new craze of spiritualism sweeping the upper circles of society and help weed out the frauds from any true spirit medium (49). Bess is excited about the possibility, but Harry quickly dismisses the search for a way to communicate with the dead as “bunk” (50). Bess starts to argue with him and Harry quickly admonishes her, clearly hurting her feelings (51). Harry tries to make it up to her and as they reconcile they begin to kiss, growing to a climax where Bess exclaims, “I want to make a baby” (53). This stops Harry cold to where he can’t continue and he leaves Bess wrapped in the sheets of their bed to return to his work, apologizing to her as she turns away to sleep (53).

Theo wakes him with a start, measuring him from head to toe for the Water Torture cell (56). Theo is worried that the stretch of Harry’s spine from hanging upside down will make him grow by a degree sufficient to put him in danger—a worry Harry angrily dismisses until Theo finally makes him see that he is still trying to help after all his concerns and reservations (58). The brothers have a reserved reconciliation and share a moment of concern over their ailing mother; Theo realizes that Harry’s connection to their Mother is coming at the cost of any remaining affection for Bess (59). Harry races off to prepare the night’s coronation for their Mother as Theo is left to help console the abandoned Bess (59). It is clear when both come to the coronation, that Harry’s devotion to his Mother is growing increasingly exclusive, to the cost of his business and his marriage (61).

Back on the road, Harry begins to out imposters cashing in on his name, outing a French would be Houdini by locking him in handcuffs on stage and imploring him to demonstrate his skill (62). Houdini’s zeal in revealing imposters is clear as he marches towards his greatest escape and confrontation with Death. Yet it comes to a screeching halt when Bess interrupts his attack on the French imposter (65). Bess tells Harry that she is leaving him (66), to which is only

reply is, “You signed a contract” (67). Bess leaves Harry as he makes his final preparations for the Water Torture Cell (67).

Appropriating Houdini’s actual historical pre-escape pater, our Harry strips to a vintage swimsuit and shackles himself to the top of the tank, slowly being winched into the rafters of the theatre (68). The actual Water Torture Cell is performed in its entirety, culminating in a climax in which a phone begins to ring manically and a dripping wet Houdini appears far away from the tank to answer it, receiving the news that while he was trying to confront and trap Death, Death was elsewhere and taking his Mother (69).

Harry then joins forces with Sir Doyle, searching out for somebody to help him reconnect with his mother beyond the grave. However, Harry’s initial opinion of the search to communicate with the dead is confirmed as he finds nothing but illusion and lies as they out imposters and con-artists in their study of séances and the like.

A barbershop quartet sings a small lament asking for the audience’s pity and forgiveness of Harry as he returns to the stage in a tuxedo, looking weak, old and gray with Bess (70). It is Halloween, and Theo knocks on the door of Harry’s dressing room asking his dejected looking brother if he is willing to meet some fans (70). One of the fans brings up a stunt Harry used to perform, where he would take a punch from a strong man without flinching (70). Harry tells the story of the stunt to which the fan asks if the great magician thinks he could take his punch (70). Harry agrees but without warning, the fan punches Harry before he can prepare. Harry crumples to the grown, the internal damage considerable and he begins to hear the breathing of the foe he has confronted throughout the play (72). Death circles Houdini as the magician tries to shuffle his deck of trick cards, but as Houdini breaths his last breath and is taken by Death amidst a shower of playing cards (75).

### *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid*

The play opens with The Melancholy Kid, dressed in a black hat, black boots, black chaps and a flashy black shirt—a wardrobe that causes The Kid to receive grief from some of the play’s rougher cowboys. The Kid sings, “They say the good Lord is forgiving/ I don’t know/ This seems the work of a vengeful God./ You ask me why I am a melancholy kid/ The sins of the father are visited so.../ Grab your horse and saddle/ Pull your rope tight in your hand/ Ride into battle/ Put a murder in your plan” (4). The chorus at the conclusion of the song makes a plea that “We caballeros could be heroes tonight...Please be heroes tonight” (4).

As The Kid finishes his song, the wall behind him opens up onto a saloon, where a crew of cowboys sits drinking and playing cards. Sal, the smallest cowboy in the gang who is described as having “a ten-gallon hat and an eleven-ounce moustache” (3), carries an order of drinks for his friends. Sal is a school teacher who often frames events in the play with his own particular brand of cowboy poetry. Ollie, a fast talking gunslinger who is known as the “King of the Quick Draw” is winning at cards like usual. It is rumored Ollie sold his soul to the Devil for the gun on his hip—a gun that is never supposed to miss. Bill Rowe sits at the table, wanted across the frontier, famous for his knife work and for killing a large amount of men and hanging them from trees in front of their homes, allegedly in honor of a woman. There is a quiet, aging man who still has a Confederate cavalry hat on—The Captain, or Cap, who says little while the boys play and drink.

The Kid slinks in the corner, listening to their conversation about the rumors that Mormon Black has been looking for them. They say he smells of sulfur (4), can track a fish through water, can dodge bullets and has black eyes (5). Cap warns the men that Black seems a bit “embellished” (5) and reasons if Mormon Black was really around it would be hard to miss

them on account of their large cattle herd they are about to drive out of San Valentino and north to Wyoming.

Suddenly, a short Mexican Vaquero named Chava bursts through the door and starts throwing insults at the men for stealing his cattle and ferreting them across the Rio Grande into Texas—a somewhat legal form of thievery because of a lack of international property laws. Chava accuses the former Confederate heroes of having fallen to nothing but “common cattle thie[ves]” (6). Chava isn’t long for this world as Ollie, being the quick draw that he is, beats him to the pull and shoots him dead (8).

While Chava lies bleeding on the floor, Sal introduces The Kid to Cap and the crew. They tease him for his name, “The Melancholy Kid” and find out that he is on a search for the man who murdered his father and that he really never knew his mother, making him “an orphan o’ sorts” (6). The Kid asks if the Captain would let him help drive the cattle north to help him get through the worse of Comanche territory, offering to sing to the cattle to help. The Captain calls him “a liability and a fool” and sends the men to get their supplies and herd ready to move out (11). Rowe sticks around and interviews The Kid further after the rest have left. Rowe assures himself The Kid isn’t a bounty hunter trying to sneak up on him and leaves The Kid with a cryptic goodbye—spitting on his boots but saying, “See you in San Valentino” (13).

The Captain is meanwhile alone, readying his kit, when the ghost of a woman he loved, Celeste, appears to him. Their meeting is uncomfortable, but she asks Cap to please help the young man dressed in black, telling him that she thinks that the Captain and The Kid “can help each other” (15) and that she hopes he will find some peace in Wyoming (16). The Captain and Celeste bid each other goodbye just as Ollie enters wanting to play cards.

Ollie's conscience is troubling him. Chava's death is just one of many caused by Ollie and the Devil's can't-miss-gun, but Ollie wants it to be his last, saying he's "too old for all this bandit crap!" and throwing the gun away (17). It only lies on the ground for a few seconds before Ollie quickly returns it back to its familiar place on his hip. Cap and Ollie start up the card game again, during which Cap tells his old friend he's decided to let The Kid "ride along" (17). Ollie offers only token resistance to the idea and the crew bursts into a song, complete with a bouncing ball sing along as the herd and cowboys start down the Goodnight-Loving Trail with ten speeds for horses and puppet cattle on umbrellas for their cattle drive.

The song is interrupted when Cap comes in with news of a maverick cow that has left the herd. The Kid races off on his old horse—an old nag with sentimental value we learn because it was his father's pony express horse before he was murdered.

The Kid finds the rogue cow but is taken aback when it warns him away from trying to rope her. The cow tells the Kid that he "ain't really a cowboy," to which The Kid responds that the talking cow "ain't really his mother" (22). As the cow grazes on grass on all fours but still wearing a sackcloth dress and prairie bonnet, she and The Kid reminisce about her husband and his father and their life together before he was murdered. The Kid's remembers his father more fondly than his mother does and he vows to her that he is going to revenge the murder. The cow tells The Kid she doesn't believe that he "is a killer" (24). His only response is "I don't believe you're a cow," and he lassos the talking cow and pulls her off to rejoin the herd.

When The Kid brings back the talking cow, Sal gives a prologue before they brand her in form of a poetical ode to cattle brands. As The Kid gets the cow closer to the branding fire, she begins to kick and hiss. Sal tells The Kid that branding tradition dictates that you must name the first cow you brand. Before pressing the red hot brand on the cow's rump, The Kid christens her



“Annabelle,” after his mother (27). The cow screams in agony and then flings a series of curses at The Kid, telling him that he is not only an orphan but that his father raped her and that he is the product of a “loveless, godless fucking” and that she never wanted him (27). The Kid and crew are shocked and he is forced to come clean to them about his family history. Before they finish with the branding, The Kid asks Cap what their crew’s brand is. The Cap holds up the iron, a heart bisected with two bars—“A Bleedin’ Heart,” he says (29).

Cubby breaks the tension with a circus juggling act explaining how to cook Russian stroganoff, complete with twirling vodka bottles and juggled cooking pots and ingredients. The men, full and sleepy, head off to catch some rest and leave The Kid and Cap alone by the fire. Cap asks The Kid where he learned to rope so well. The Kid tells him it was his father, who was a patient man that “made him a good teacher” (33). The Cap proceeds to give The Kid a lesson of his own—a kind of theological explanation of lariats and roping and gravity. He explains that there are opposing forces in a lariat’s loop—the force pushing it out and gravity pulling it shut, “preserving the constancy of the circle regardless of how hard you fight it” (34). The Captain says the art lies in the balance between the two opposing forces—you can’t fight the rope but rather “surrender to it” (34) and concludes his talk to the confused Kid by telling him that he’d “make a better cowboy than a killer” (34). The Kid resists the old man’s advice, despite the Captain telling him that killing won’t make all their pain right. The Kid makes clear that he is not about forgiving his father’s killer. The Captain makes clear that “forgiveness is for the forgiver” and warns The Kid that once you have killed you “won’t sleep again ever” (35). The Kid reasons that he “don’t sleep now” (35), to which the Captain retreats, saying that gives The Kid more time to think on it and leaves him be.

Alone, The Kid lights up a cigarette as he ponders Cap's talk. Rowe quickly enters and uses a bullwhip to crack the smoke out of The Kid's mouth, telling him he "shouldn't smoke upwind o' cattle" (35). Rowe administers his own lesson for affronted Kid who challenges the hulking murders to a fight. The Kid quickly loses a tooth and is bloodied to submission. Rowe tells The Kid that the important thing about revenge is to make sure you "do it all the way"—you have to kill the family so nobody comes looking for you after (38) and it always helps to destroy the body and all evidence (39). The reality of the logistics of The Kid's quest hit him hard and Rowe regrets the physical punishment and leaves The Kid alone to sing a sad love song about a distant town, Shut Eye, to the milling herd.

The next morning, Ollie takes The Kid into Shut Eye, where former flame runs a saloon and sporting house. After a few fights and a reunion slap from Camilla—Ollie's old girlfriend—the two retreat into a back room, leaving The Kid alone with a pretty young whore who has on a white dress and plays the violin. Angelina, the young whore rebuffs The Kid's advances until he impresses her with an honest and sincere apology and telling her his real name—"Elliot Dodge" (47).

Angelina spies The Kid's gun and tell him that she doesn't like violence, and he assures her he doesn't "really know how to use it" (49). They steel their courage with a few shots of whiskey and Angelina decides to get down to business—but her attitude changes when The Kid changes the dollar he was going to pay for a trick into a flower with a magic trick, prompting a sultry Flamenco dance that ends with their first kiss.

Back at the herd, Sal and Rowe talk near the campfire. Sal confesses he was a schoolteacher but was fired. He doesn't volunteer the reason. Sal asks about the men Rowe killed for a woman's honor. Rowe confesses to Sal that "it weren't no woman" that he was defending

(52). Sal's surprise quickly turns to empathy as Rowe tells the story of his fear of Mormon Black and how his friend was murdered in the street in Utah. Rowe tells Sal that he was in love, and Sal laments that he's never been in love—or at least “not the kind of love [he'd] kill for” (53). Rowe tells Sal he'd be too scared to kill for love because he's a coward, but Sal says he's not but that he's just never “met someone [he] felt was that important” (53). Rowe challenges Sal that his fear keeps him incapable of ever loving and Sal, unable to say what he is feeling, leaves to go get some coffee.

Back in Shut Eye, Ollie tries to convince Camilla to spend some amorous moments alone with him, which she rigorously refuses. Ollie levels with her, telling him that he's in “a bad way” and needs to make a change after all the things he's seen and done, and hopes that Camilla would consider forgiving him (56). Camilla breaks the news that she is married. They share a few silent, a few tender and a few sad moments before Ollie leaves with his hat in hand.

While Ollie and Camilla are ending their long love, Angeline and The Kid are just beginning theirs. They are having a conversation about the future, wrapped up together in Angeline's upstairs bedroom. The Kid promises the return after he's carried out his revenge. Angeline tells The Kid the story of how her family was killed by Texans who took their land, and it becomes clear to The Kid that Angeline is not just a whore but the daughter of wealthy and powerful hacienda owners who has landed in an unlikely place. Angeline tries to convince The Kid to stay which he refuses as gently as he can. While they embrace, we see all the lonely members of the crew trying to make their own peace—a drunk Ollie, a crying Sal, Rowe sharpening his knife and Cap ripping open his shirt to reveal the bleeding heart brand burned into his chest. In the distance, the whistling of Mormon Black is heard and his shadow is seen on the horizon.

The Kid sings a love song the next morning as he leaves Angeline and Shut Eye to rejoin the herd and the cow herd. Ollie and Cap play cards and Ollie lies about the success of his sporting expedition into Shut Eye to see Camilla. Ollie then asks why they are heading to Wyoming. The Captain says it is for a new start, because even though “there’s no one left who can forgive us...that doesn’t mean we’re damned” (68). The Kid interrupts their argument with a Spanish love song and the crew joins in together in three part harmony.

The fun is interrupted when Annabelle the cow is discovered tangled in a mess of barbed wire. The cow is equally cursing The Kid and pleading with him to kill her because of the pain. The Kid tries to untangle her but hurts her more. Finally, Cap pulls out his revolver and offers it to The Kid to end her suffering. He can’t, so Cap shoots Annabelle. The crew drags off her off leaving The Kid and Sal, who sets in interviewing The Kid about his newfound love and if it is possible that somebody “who couldn’t kill could ever fall in love” (75). The Kid doesn’t know. Sal awkwardly and unexpectedly confesses that he is gay and that he doesn’t think he could kill somebody to be happy or to be in love. The Kid says little, which seems to be the right thing and Sal leaves him to sing a lament about revenge and blood that sounds more like a prayer—“Shut my eyes, if I should wake after I die, I pray the Lord my soul to take” (77).

Ollie listens closely to the song and tells The Kid he should wear a mask to go along with his name, “The Melancholy Kid” (77). The Kid says he doesn’t want to hide his face, which Ollie says is silly on account he already hides his name. Ollie gives The Kid a lesson about shooting a man—how the quick draw doesn’t matter if you can’t hit what you are aiming. Ollie confessed he’s fast but can’t hit anything without his special gun and then gives it to The Kid, asking him to keep his gift “a secret” (79). They sit and share a drink and Ollie tells The Kid how Cap used to be a preacher but was drafted into the Confederate Army and led a brave charge in

Chancellorsville with a group of men who became known as “The Bleedin’ Heart Brigade” who were slaughtered by Sherman’s men near the end of the war. Ollie and Cap were the only survivors but hid out amongst the corpses to escape. The Army sent a letter to Cap’s wife, Celeste, that he was dead. When Hank came home, apparently rising from the dead, Ollie tells The Kid that he must have discovered something he didn’t like and killed his wife. Before offering much more, Ollie tells The Kid to go hide the gun before anybody finds out and they both slip off to bed down for the night.

Meanwhile, Celeste once again appears to the Captain as he walks amongst the cattle. Cap asks her who The Kid is and as they speak, it becomes clear to him what he has to do. She implores him to ask The Kid for forgiveness for what he has done. The Captain is resistant. Celeste doesn’t pressure him, but rather tells him that she forgives him and apologizes for forgetting about him when she thought he was dead. A storm begins to rise as Cap and Celeste both make their peace, saying they love each other.

Then all hell breaks loose: Ollie insults Rowe and Sal, and Sal knocks Ollie flat for his insinuations when Cap pulls his gun—spotting two Comanche crawling through the herd. Cubby enters with a passel of arrows stuck fast in his back as the attack explodes on the crew. The crew fights bravely but the Comanche successfully stampede the herd, causing chaos.

In the midst of the cloud of dust and blood, The Kid gets the drop on Cap and confronts him, asking why it was when he returned home to San Valentino after the war that he killed his wife. The Cap tells him that he “found her with another man...a pony expressman” and that he shot them both, confessing that he killed The Kid’s father (87). The immediate needs of stopping the stampede cuts of any possibility of The Kid taking his revenge then and there and they jump on their ten speed horses to turn the herd before it rushes into the Pecos River and drowns.

Unfortunately, they are too late and they lose the entire herd. The Kid sings about how now he has the gun, he can see what he now has to do.

The Captain and the crew return to bury Cubby and try to regroup. They sing a prayer over his body. As they gather what's left of their things, Mormon Black appears in the camp—a man dressed in black and appearing otherworldly and evil. Rowe tries to attack, throwing his knife at Black, who supernaturally catches it and throws it back at Rowe. Sal saves Rowe by jumping in front of it, dying for who he loves. Rowe, furious, empties Sal's revolver in Black's direction, who easily dodges all the bullets. Black tells Rowe that he is the “Devil's Debt Collector and Patron Saint of the Damned” (96) and has been sent to collect Rowe and his friends and fires a double-barreled shotgun into Rowe's chest.

Black then turns to Ollie, asking for the return of the special gun. Ollie tells him he bought it fair and square and it is not for sale if Black is interested in buying back—and even if he was interested in selling, Ollie couldn't as the gun is no longer in his possession. Ollie refuses to give the name to Black of who has the gun now. Black tries to bribe Ollie with offering to return to him his soul. Ollie tells the devilish Black that he “don't want it” and shoots himself in the chest with Sal's gun lying at the dying Rowe's side. Black departs in frustration to search for his gun.

Nearby, The Kid has his gun pulled on The Cap. Without saying a word, an agreement is reached, where The Kid bears his chest to Cap, who in turn brands him with the same bleeding heart mark both he and Ollie wear. The Kid collapses in pain and Cap helps him as he recovers. When the pain subsides, The Kid stands and points the gun that never misses at the Cap, telling him “I forgive you” before he shoots (99). As the Captain dies, The Kid begs him for forgiveness, but Cap says nothing. The Kid stands, puts on a mask and goes to leave, but is

stopped by a messenger—who it seems to be riding a flying horse and turns out to be an angel. The messenger angel has a letter from Angeline. The Kid reads the letter and breaks into a song about how he's heading to go find the woman he loves.

### ***Curse of the Crying Heart***

Part two of *The Valentine Trilogy* opens with a scene from *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid* translated from the plains of West Texas to feudal Japan. The King of the Quick Draw, Ollie Pendergrass, now named Mattaku Hito and trading his spurs and six shooter for a Samurai sword, faces down the son of the Devil—The Black Ghost—who has returned for the cursed sword the warrior was given in exchange for his soul. The scene is repeated, word for word, complete with the two bodies of Rowe and Sal still on stage as they were in the staging during *San Valentino*, but rather than Ollie shooting himself in his Bleeding Heart scar on his chest, in *Curse*, Mattaku dies by piercing the Crying Heart brand on his chest with his sword, leaving the Black Ghost to search for the bearer of his lost sword. It was a pivotal scene in part one of the trilogy, presented almost a year to the day part two opened, and it was an exciting and effective way to share how the world had changed—the genre was now different but the people inside the narrative were not. There were subtle and comic references in *Curse* to the bike horses, melancholy music and cowboy motif from *San Valentino*, but this scene helped set the shift from Texas to Kyoto from the beginning.

After Ollie/Mattaku kills himself, leaving the Black Ghost still searching for the sword that cannot miss, there is a fabric crawl—muslin sheets printed with text that function like a low-tech version of the prologue of the *Star Wars* films. We learn that the Emperor has been assassinated and Japan is close to civil war but that his daughter was spared and kidnapped,

being sold into slavery as a prostitute (*Curse of the Crying Heart* 4). This is an expansion of the story we hear briefly from Angeline in *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid*. In the year since The Kid and Angeline spent their night together in the brothel in Shut Eye, Angeline, now Sakurako, has been found and returned home to marry one of her father's noblemen in hopes that a "royal son might rise to save Japan" (5).

The story opens with the found Princess being tended to by one of her ladies in waiting. She serves the Princess but we find out later that she served the emperor before as his assassin concubine. By poisoning her body in a special way, the Emperor's physicians have made contact with any part of the concubine's skin deadly—allowing her to be an amorous killer with any diplomat or general the Emperor needed dispatched. The Concubine's history is unknown to the Princess, who treats her as a friend and confidant—confessing she does not love the Noble she is about to marry, but is only marrying him out of her duty and love of Japan (6). The Concubine asks the Princess if she had ever been in love, and she shares a story from her captivity in Shutei (formerly Shut Eye, Texas), where she spent a night under "Western stars" with a poor warrior trying to right his family's wrongs (6). She loved him truly but he never returned her letters (7).

Before the Princess can finish the story, she and the Concubine are attacked by a group of ninjas, infiltrating the palace to assassinate the Princess just like they had her father. The Captain of the Palace Guards—a strong and deadly swordsman named Kobushi rushes into the room, sounding the alarm and kills all the assassins (7). When the Noble the Princess is to marry, Lord Goroda, rushes into the room, the Captain begs to be allowed to commit a ritual Samurai suicide for his failure to protect the princess (7). The Noble refuses the request, thanking the Captain for saving the life of his soon-to-be bride.



Two extremely old courtiers shuffle into the room, checking to see if the Princess is all right. They claim to be her aunt and uncle and have served the Imperial Court of Japan for close to a century, despite their apparent senility (8). While they tend to the shaken Princess, the Royal Advisor, Obaekuro, discovers tattoo versions of the scarred heart brands the Captain, Ollie and the Kid had burned into their chests in *San Valentino* (9). In Texas, the Bleeding Hearts were a brutal fighting force led by the Captain during the American Civil War, all wiped out by Sherman's forces. In feudal Japan, the Crying Hearts are a long dead order of Samurai and feared across the country (9). To see these simple assassins taking up their mantle deeply worries the Noble and his court, so the Royal Advisor suggests holding a contest, inviting all of Japan's warriors to fight to the death for the honor of the survivor serving as the Princess's body guard (10). The Princess objects, not wishing for more to die on her account, but both the Noble and the Advisor agrees that it is the only way to find the best Samurai in Japan to protect her (10).

While they leave to make preparations, The Melancholy Kid enters to sing a rock ballad as he makes his way to Kyoto to find the Princess. Now called Sorrow, he carries the bike seat from his long dead horse—the old nag that used to belong to his father which he stole back from the Pony Express station before the action of part one. Despite his efforts to stay inconspicuous the mask draws attention and a group of samurai attack him at an inn in an attempt to collect the bounty on Sorrow's head (12). Sorrow tries to warn them off, but they persist. The moment Sorrow unsheathes his sword its power takes over, killing them all quickly (14). The terrified innkeeper begs for mercy and tells Sorrow that with a sword like that he should enter the Ronin contest in Kyoto so he could protect the Princess (14). This is the first Sorrow has heard of the contest, and as the innkeeper fills Sorrow in on the rest of the news he has missed since being on the frontier, Sorrow finds out that the Princess, is also getting married in Kyoto (14). Sorrow

steals a new horse and races to Kyoto, seeing the contest as a chance to get close to the Princess while he figures out his next step in winning back her love (15).

Back at the palace, the Princess has a private conversation with her Aunt and Uncle about love, duty and the destiny of Japan (15). We learn that despite their feeble appearance, the old pair are samurai themselves, committed to saving Japan, and prophesy that the Princess is destined to save the country (17). Her would-be husband, the Noble Lord Goroda, interrupt their conference to take the Princess to the Ronin contest, and she reluctantly follows. She announces to the assembled warriors that if anybody is there to die for her, with her name on their lips, that they should rather die for Japan (20). Sorrow looks on, singing, “Nobody has died for love this century” (19) and vows to die for love during the battle to find the Princess’s bodyguard (20).

With the power of the Black Ghost’s sword, Sorrow quickly dispatches all his opponents on the contest grounds (20). Exhausted, he is brought before the Noble and the Princess, but when they ask his name he refuses (20). The Captain of the Guard threatens to kill Sorrow when he refuses, but Sorrow says that his silence is the only way to honor the Princess but finally gives in to the Captain’s threats, confessing he is Sorrow, the masked bandit samurai (21). The Noble calms the Captain, telling Sorrow that his reputation as a western outlaw with a penchant for melancholy music proceeds him, and that he is glad Sorrow’s tune seems to be changing to a more honorable one (21). The Captain implores the Noble to send Sorrow away, as a man in a mask cannot be trusted (22). Sorrow refuses to remove it, claiming an outlaw “does not wear a mask to hide his sin from others...he wears it to protect his goodness” (22). The Noble agrees to allow Sorrow to keep his mask if he swears loyalty to the Princess, something Sorrow is more than willing to do, and Sorrow is taken by the Concubine to be cleaned and prepped for his new royal duty (22).

All of the court, saving the old Uncle, leaves Sorrow to prepare. The old samurai looks the young Sorrow up and down and compliments him on his fighting style and then after some deliberation, pulls a red origami crane from his tunic, giving it to the young man (24). The old Uncle tells Sorrow that it is destiny, and then prophesies that Sorrow will die in three nights (24). Nonplussed, the old Uncle shuffles off in search of some soup, leaving a confused Sorrow in his wake (24).

Next, the Concubine is seen preparing the royal bathhouse for Sorrow. She is visited by the Black Ghost, who reveals for the first time her secret and poisonous past (25), but offers to cure her if she kills Sorrow and returns the Black Ghost's sword to him (26). Desperate to have her body back so she can love the Captain of the Guard, the Concubine agrees (26).

Meanwhile, the Captain, the Noble and the Royal Advisor are working in their map room, charting the enemy forces around the island of Japan (26). Zatumoro, a military general with designs on being Japan's Shogun is marshaling troops around Japan, and it is thought he and his brother, Morihoto, were the masterminds behind the Emperor's assassination in their grab for power (27-8). Outnumbered, the Royal Advisor recommends the only way to protect Kyoto, Japan and the Princess from the enemies at the gates would be to invite one of the brothers, Morihoto, to the wedding, despite the role he played in the Princess's father's death (27). The Noble, Lord Goroda, reluctantly agrees that despite how distasteful the notion is, it is the only way to save Japan (30).

In the bathhouses, the Concubine feeds and bathes Sorrow and quickly presses her task, asking Sorrow if he will sleep with her (31). Sorrow promptly refuses, confessing his love and fidelity to another, and claims despite the Concubine's loveliness, he loves only this mystery woman (31). The Concubine is intrigued by Sorrow's romanticism but vows to keep trying

despite his refusal (32). They are interrupted by the Captain of the Guard, who calls the Concubine to the Princess (33). Sorrow quickly realizes how much the Captain loves the Concubine just from their brief interaction as she leaves, and apologizes for any dishonor and clarifies his intentions towards her (33). Before they can discuss anything further, the Concubine rushes in, saying the Princess has gone missing (33). Both warriors rush out to find her (33).

Sorrow is the first to find the Princess, walking alone in the cherry orchard (34). Sorrow confronts the Princess about walking here at night, waiting for her lost love, pulling out her letter from his tunic (34). Sorrow claims he faced the man on the battlefield and with his last breath he gave Sorrow her letter (35). Sorrow pushes the Princess on not having honor, that if she still loves this lost one, how could she marry the Noble, and the Princess finally cuts through the subterfuge telling Sorrow that she loves him (35-6). Confused how she knew it was him, the Princess dismisses Sorrow's mask as a poor disguise that doesn't even cover his eyebrows, saying she knew it was him the moment he arrived (36). They embrace and kiss, and Sorrow confesses that he is a liar, thief and now a killer, and apologizes for leaving her in Shutei and for being gone so long (37). They fall into each other's arms, and the Concubine catches them kissing but quickly exits, unnoticed (37). Their reunion is short-lived as the Noble comes searching for the missing Princess—entering to find Sorrow claiming to have found her and returns the Princess to him (38). As she exits, Sorrow sings his apology (38).

After the song, the Noble apologizes for needing to keep Sorrow so close to the Princess and she waves it away, as his presence is difficult for other reasons than protection (41). After a pause, the Noble broaches the subject of inviting the suspected murder of the Princess's father to the wedding for political purposes (41). The Princess resists, shouting Morihoto destroyed her family, but the Noble implores her to do it for Kyoto (42). The Princess acquiesces and the

Noble leaves her to continue preparing for the wedding, leaving Sorrow and the Princess alone. She collapses into her arms and while he holds her, Sorrow asks the Princess to marry him (43). She avoids the proposal but still tells him that she needs him (43) and they make plans to meet at midnight and leave together (44).

Sorrow stands vigil outside the Princess's door as she goes inside, waiting for their midnight rendezvous. Late that night, the Concubine, dressed as the Princess and hiding her face with fans, tries to seduce Sorrow to his death with a sensuous fan dance (44). Sorrow realizes this is not the Princess before the Concubine can poison him with a kiss and draws his sword—almost killing the Concubine if not for the Captain of the Guard rushing in to save her (45). The Concubine pleads for one kiss, confusing Sorrow and shaming the Captain as he drags her away from the chamber (46). Left alone, the Princess emerges from her room and pulls Sorrow inside to her bedroom (46). While Sorrow and the Princess spend the night together, we see a montage of the Captain chasing a crying Concubine, the old Aunt and Uncle tottering around the palace, the Noble of Kyoto musing over a military map, and the untrusted Morihoto making his way to the wedding—all the while the Black Ghost watches and whistles as the palace falls into night (46).

The next morning, Sorrow sings about his love for the Princess, believing their love is back on track after a year of struggle (47). The Captain is not so lucky as he is finally able to stop the Concubine and confront her about the advances she has made on Sorrow (48). She confesses to him her poisonous nature and her past (49). She tells the Captain how a man she thinks is a wizard has promised to heal her if she kills Sorrow, but the Captain is skeptical and fears she has been tricked by a con-artist (50). The Captain threatens to reports this and the Concubine stops

him with a declaration that she wants to give her healed body to him and kisses him on the lips through a silk cloth and the Captain relents (51).

Meanwhile, Morihoto has arrived for the wedding, much to the displeasure of the distrusting Kyoto court (51). Morihoto is fuming, telling the court to escape his warring brother he had to disguise himself as a woman to make it through the mountain passes (52). He greets all the members of the court and gives his condolences to the Princess—which she receives coldly as he was most likely the agent of their deaths (52). He is invited to walk in the procession in hopes that if there is an attack, both he and the contingent of men he has brought will be forced to fight to protect the Princess from the coming threat (53). The Noble goes to follow Morihoto, leaving the Princess alone with her bodyguard, Sorrow (54).

Sorrow implores the Princess to leave with him so she can't be hurt by the Noble's politics (54). They argue, he asking her to follow her heart and she countering with her honor and duty to Japan (55). Ultimately, we see that the Princess believes that when the Noble rescued her from the brothel in Shutei, their paths diverged, and now they have different destinies, and that hers lies in something bigger than their love and with Japan (55). Sorrow says his destiny only concerns her, and without her love he doesn't know who he is (55). The Princess tells him to stop being a liar, thief and killer and now to be a hero for Japan (55). She implores him to stay and protect her while she marries the Noble, and Sorrow agrees to try (56).

The old Aunt and Uncle race in, finding a morose Sorrow and a determined Princess alone in the courtyard (56). They argue in front of the two lovers until the old Aunt catches a glimpse of the red origami crane peaking from Sorrow's kimono (58). Shocked her husband has given the young samurai the crane, she asks the Princess to escort the old Uncle away so she can talk with Sorrow (58). When they both leave, the old Aunt asks Sorrow if he is the man known

as the “King of the Quick Draw” (59). Sorrow confesses he isn’t, and that the man known by that name killed himself, but that he gave the sword to him before he died (60). He confesses he was not sent here, but rather was following his heart to find the Princess after the chaos of the events a year prior (60). The old Aunt tells him to sit as she resolves to tell Sorrow a worrisome tale about the origins and nature of the weapon he carries (60). She explains that the Black Ghost is the last son of the Devil, a demon from Hell, and that Satan forged the sword in Sorrow’s possession for his offspring, and it is the only weapon that can truly kill the Black Ghost (60-1). The King of the Quick Draw was marked as a great killer by the Devil, and as he reached the season where his skills began to fade, the Devil offered his son’s sword in exchange for the King’s soul (60). The foolish warrior agreed, and somehow, the cursed sword from that bargain made its way to Sorrow (61). She tells Sorrow the only reason he was able to win the Ronin contest was that he fought with a cursed sword and that he must be careful as the Black Ghost is searching for the sword and calling it back to himself to collect it (61). The Aunt confesses that she and her husband have waited for ninety-two years to intercept the blade when it is called in hopes of protecting the world from its power, vowing to give the Crane—a supernatural protector—to the unfortunate bearer of the blade (61). Sorrow laments the prophesy is a bit vague on what he is to do next (61) and the old Aunt cautions him that his destiny no longer belongs to him, but he must give up his personal desires and serve a nobler purpose—forget his love and devote himself to the sword and destroying the Black Ghost (61). Sorrow asks what will happen if he refuses, and the old Aunt confesses the sword will seduce him and destroy him (62). Sorrow counters that the Princess will destroy him first and leaves to go find her (62).

Sorrow finds the Noble instead, nervously dressing for the wedding (62). The Noble asks Sorrow’s opinion about his wedding attire and to listen to a song he has written for the

Princess—a sweet, honest song that seems to change Sorrow’s opinion of the Noble (64). The Captain of the Guard interrupts them to talk security before they all gather for the procession through the orchard to the temple (65). The only people who have been admitted to the city were Moriohoto and his men, but they still fear an attack when they pass through the open areas between the cherry trees (65). Sorrow takes his place near the Princess, leading the procession, followed closely by the Captain with Moriohoto taking up the rear (66). They slowly progress towards the temple, keeping a wary eye for threats when suddenly a dart flies through the air, nearly killing the Royal Advisor (66). Under attack, the wedding party decides to fight their way to the temple to be married, despite the oncoming enemies (67). As the wedding party enters the temple to complete the ceremony, Sorrow and the Captain fight before its doors, killing all the attacking assassins (68).

The wedding party emerges, the ceremony complete and the Princess now married to the Noble, Lord Goroda, to find Sorrow and the Captain of the Guard harried but alive (69). The Royal Advisor checks the dead ninjas and reveals their tattooed crying hearts on their chests (69). Seeing the false marks of his former friends on these brigands’ chests, Sorrow realizes this must be a part of the Black Ghost’s deception in calling the sword (69). He reveals to the court that these attempts on the Princess’s life have been faked, that these are false Crying Heart warriors and that it is all a ruse to call the sword to Kyoto and to the Black Ghost (69). When pressured to provide evidence, Sorrow opens the folds of his tunic to show the true brand of a Crying Heart warrior, shocking the Noble, the Princess and enraging the Captain (69). They all try to attack Sorrow but he holds them at bay, trying to find out who called the Ronin contest, as it would prove the person putting the Black Ghost’s plan into motion (70). While the Captain



presses Sorrow and the Noble tries to negotiate the chaos, Sorrow is told that the Royal Advisor initiated the Ronin contest (70) and Sorrow immediately goes to attack him (71).

The Royal Advisor begins to laugh, halting Sorrow's attack with a magical transformation into his true form—the ghastly armor of the Black Ghost, capturing the Princess in the process (71). The Black Ghost gives an ultimatum that unless the sword is brought to him that night, the Princess will die (72). The Noble quickly mobilizes, sending the Captain of the Guard to attack the demon (72). Sorrow stops them, telling them the Black Ghost cannot be touched by any weapon but the one he carries, so the Noble commands Sorrow to surrender the weapon to ransom back the Princess (72). The old Aunt and Uncle enter, forbidding the Noble to do that, telling him the Princess is already lost and they all must prepare for war—the Black Ghost's defeat is the priority to save the nation as the Princess will be killed regardless (72-3). They plead with the Noble to save Japan, but Sorrow believes he can save both the country and the Princess (73). The Aunt admonishes him for such a selfish desire, and despite the Aunt and Uncle's pleas, the Noble commands Sorrow to ransom back the Princess (73)—a command he ignores, vowing to save her while killing the Black Ghost, all to the dismay of the two ancient protectors (74). Sorrow grabs his guitar and sings a song about how he wants to be good, wants to be a hero and take his mask off for good (75).

The Captain of the Guard goes to prepare for the oncoming war and tries to shore up Moriohoto and his men for the protection of Kyoto (76). The Captain encounters the ill-trusted wedding guest holding a flaming lantern outside the palace, and quickly discovers that this isn't Moriohoto at all, but his treacherous brother, the would-be shogun, who has murdered his brother just like he murdered the Emperor, to infiltrate the palace and take the city (76-7). The traitor attacks the Captain of the Guard, who only has his hands to repel the attack (77). The

sword embeds itself into the Captain's hand as they fight (77). The Noble runs in, discovering that Zatumoro has deceived them all and has been an agent of the Black Ghost all along (78). The Noble refuses to bow to a shogun, so Zatumoro throws his lantern, setting the city on fire and burning the Captain in the process (79).

In the chaos, Sorrow has found the Black Ghost in the smoldering ruins of the temple (79). Sorrow bears the sword, rapped in cloth, and tosses it to the son of the Devil in exchange for the Princess (79). Gleefully, the Black Ghost tosses the girl to Sorrow as he unwraps his sword and quickly discovers it as a fake, as Sorrow draws the true sword with the Princess safe at his side (81). Sorrow presses his advantage, despite the pleas of the Princess and as he attacks, the Black Ghost magically throws the Princess in the path of the cursed sword, killing her instantly (82). The Black Ghost flees from the dangerous weapon, but vows he will see Sorrow again (82). The Noble runs in and discovers his bride's lifeless body in Sorrow's arms, cursing Sorrow for killing his love (82). Sorrow tries to apologize, but the Noble refuses to forgive him, racing off to try and keep the city from burning (83). Sorrow lays the Princess down and picks up his sword, carefully placing it against his heart and pushes the blade through (83). He collapses to the ground, but rather than dying, a flurry of red origami cranes fly around him, bringing him back to life and rendering him invincible while breaking the sword into pieces (83). Dazed from his transformation, Sorrow flees, leaving the broken weapon behind him (83).

The Concubine sneaks in, picking up the weapon, hoping that even in its broken state it will appease the Black Ghost (83). She finds him amidst the ruins, but he refuses to honor their deal with the sword in its current condition (83). He leaves her crying, only to be discovered by the severely burned Captain, emerging from the wreckage (84). He is scarred and the sword he stopped with his bare palm is now welded from the heat of the fire into his hand (85). The

Concubine tries to help him, but he rages, his mind nearly lost, and she runs from him, abandoning the Captain (85).

Meanwhile, the old Aunt and Uncle intercept the fleeing Black Ghost (85). They reveal themselves and their power to the demon as the hidden protectors of the weapon that will destroy the last son of Satan (86). The Black Ghost mocks them, saying they can't possibly defeat him, to which they reply they don't plan on killing him, but only to gather the shards and re-forge the weapon to return to Sorrow so he can fulfill his destiny (86).

A magical battle ensues, where the old Aunt and Uncle fly through the air, attacking the Black Ghost (87). Eventually, the old Aunt is able to win the shards away (87). The old Uncle says goodbye, telling her Sorrow is now ready and sending her to find and help him as he stays to delay the demon, sacrificing himself (87). They lovingly bid farewell, and the old Uncle turns to fight the Black Ghost, ultimately dying on his counterfeit sword (87).

Sorrow enters the wreckage, crushed from his failures and seeking some form of redemption (88). He realizes his attempt at suicide has made him invincible when all he wants to do is die (88). In the closing moments, Sorrow takes a new name—Valentine—and decides he has only begun to fight (88). A large sheet with the words “To Be Continued” printed across it drops on the stage.

### ***Valentine Victorious***

Like *Curse of the Crying Heart*, part three of the *Valentine Trilogy* flashes back to an earlier scene. Rather than the bamboo floor of the Japanese Imperial Palace, we see the young hero Elliot Dodge—now called Valentine instead of Sorrow or The Melancholy Kid—holding the lifeless body of his lover, the Princess (Allen, *Valentine Victorious* 1). Angela, who began

the play as a Spanish Lord's daughter sold into servitude in a Texas brothel in *San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid*, is rescued and returned to her family's seat of power as the Princesses of Japan in the time of samurais and shoguns in *Curse of the Crying Heart*, is now a favorite daughter and social elite in a comic-book version of Prohibition-era Chicago in *Valentine Victorious*. Angela is no longer in her hot-pink kimono but a white wedding dress (1). Valentine now wears a simple black suit—the kind superheroes wear in comic books—with his heart brand visible through an opening at the chest (1). The former Noble, Lord Goroda, is now identified as Ed Reed—the only good cop in a corrupt Chicago on the take (1). Reed enters, still in his wedding tuxedo, to find Valentine holding his dead bride (1). Reed accuses Valentine of killing her, dooms them all and gathers Angela's body as Valentine fruitlessly apologizes (1).

Alone, Valentine picks up the cursed weapon—no longer the Black Ghost's samurai sword but now, the Black Skull's nuclear bomb—and holds it to his chest (1). There is a small, green, blinking device clipped to Valentine's suit, replacing the red origami crane from *Curse* (1). Valentine detonates the bomb in an attempt to end his life, but the crane device given to him by the old Uncle samurai in the prior installment takes the power of the bomb into Valentine himself, rendering his body invincible (1). Frustrated by not dying, Valentine shuffles off stage as a golden era radio announcer addresses the prologue (1).

The announcer helps complete the transition from samurais to comic book Chicago, where Valentine was hired to help usher in a new era of peace for Chicago (1) and was asked to sacrifice his own heart to defend the city's favorite daughter, but he failed and the city was burned (2). The would be shogun, Moriohoto, is now a crime lord named Sabatino, who is running and racketeering the city, milking it dry in the service of the Black Skull (2). Valentine has forsaken his mask since Angela's death, allowing the city to “rot with corruption while a

Dark Evil returns to claims its greatest prize” (2). The coda of the prologue is a song about suicide, where we see Valentine planning to throw himself off a building for seemingly the hundredth time in an effort to find some relief from his guilt (3). Valentine says that he sees “Satan fall like lightning across the sky/ Can you see me follow close behind? / ...What good are all these second chances/ Under such hopeless circumstances” (3). He laments that the sidewalk below is “a soft answer/ but it’s hard enough for me” (3). Valentine finishes the song by jumping from the ledge (3).

As the music fades, two city drunks find Valentine’s body on the sidewalk (4). While they crack jokes, they inspect his body for valuables but their search is cut short when Valentine, now dressed as a civilian and using his given name, Elliot Dodge, wakes up (4). The bums leave him be as he enters The Emerald Room Bar—the underworld nerve center for Sabantino’s crime syndicate in Chicago (5). He orders a bottle of whiskey, and then invites anybody interested in a fight to meet him in the alley (5).

A woman dressed in black follows him out (6). Dodge looks at her like he recognizes her and the woman introduces herself as Eleanor Bane (6). Dodge pretends not to remember who she is and Eleanor quickly counters that he must—she tried to kill him with a kiss and instead he killed her best friend (7). Eleanor tells him his Valentine mask only works in comic books, and she doesn’t read comic books (7). She asks what Dodge has been up to since he’s stopped patrolling the city as the vigilante Valentine and he confesses he has been looking for a “slow painful death” (7) but he can’t seem to make it happen (8). We find out that Eleanor has been working at The Emerald Room and Dodge accuses her of trying to get close to Sabbatino to avenge the man she loved—the Captain of the Guard in *Curse* who was severely burned and now missing since the attack during the wedding (8). When Eleanor presses Dodge if he is a

detective, he claims he is only a “recovering hero” (8). She tries to help him, saying she knows Dodge didn’t mean to kill Angela, but their reunion is cut short when two drunk fighters come into the alley, taking Dodge up on his offer of a scrape (9). Eleanor leaves him to the brawl, which is eventually broken up by the cops, who drag Dodge off to police headquarters (10).

Inside The Emerald Room, we see Sabatino shaking down one of his underlings—a bookie and girl runner named Jasper Patrick (11). They talk long on negotiations, and it comes out the Jasper wants to have the good cop, Ed Reed, murdered, after Reed was tipped off to Jasper’s operation and shut it down (12). Sabatino forbids Reed’s assassination, and eventually lets it out that he is the one that tipped Reed to Jasper’s racket because he intends to take it over as a part of his expanding empire (13). Jasper is dragged out of the club to an untimely end at the hands of Sabatino’s gangsters (14).

The scene transitions to a dark room and the office of a doctor of ill repute in the back alleys of Detroit. A bespectacled and lisping doctor is attending a large, hulk of a man covered in bandages (15). We quickly learn this is the Captain of the Guard from *Curse of the Crying Heart*, now a police detective, who is trying to have his burns and the metal fused into his hand from the fire repaired. The doctor’s efforts prove unsatisfactory and he punches the lisping doctor with the large metal hand she has shaped for him from his injuries, killing her instantly (17). He limps away, dragging the huge hand that will give rise to his new moniker—The Detroit Fist (17).

Back in Chicago, the two cops who have gathered the brawling Valentine bring him into the station to be booked by Reed (18). It is clear that the major reason Valentine was brought in wasn’t because he refused to give his name, but refused to pay a bribe to the two cops (19). When the two beat cops offer Reed his cut of the payoff, Reed refuses (19), and the two cops warn Reed that his refusal to be on the take makes them all nervous he’d turn rat (20). Reed

brushes them off, saying that Chicago is so crooked “there’s no one to rat to anyway” (20). The cops throw Valentine into his cell as Reed settles in for the night shift—his punishment it seems since the fire and the death of Angela for trying to clean up the city (20).

Valentine begins to sing a song, surrounded by the ghosts of all who have died during the short time since he set out to avenge his father (21). As he finishes, Angela, still in her wedding dress, appears to Valentine (23). She chastises him to stop trying to kill himself and to start acting like that hero they used to write about in the papers (23). Valentine tells her that the city wants justice for his killing of her—accident or not (23). Angela tells him that his death won’t make the city right, but only forgiveness will, and that he needs to stop pretending he is alone and work with the few people left in the city trying to do good (24). Angela leaves as Reed wakes up, telling Valentine he better be careful or Reed will think he is crazy and talking to himself (24).

Reed makes fun of Valentine’s singing as he unlocks the cell, still not recognizing Valentine and the man who killed his bride (25). Reed tells Valentine that he’s made bail—his benefactor the old Aunt from *Curse of the Crying Heart*, now named Margaret Crane (25). She is a scientist now rather than a samurai, carrying on her husband’s work after he sacrificed himself fighting the Black Skull. Crane tells Reed he needs Valentine to water her garden and ferries the fallen superhero out quickly, despite Reed’s protestations (26). Valentine recognizes the old woman who spoke so many prophecies to him before Angela’s death and dutifully follows her to her home (27).

Back in the Motor City, the Detroit Fist finds a welding mask to cover his burned face as he stumbles through the industrial ruins of the city (28). A group of workers approach him and attempt to rough him up (28). The Detroit Fist resists fighting back, but finally they push him

past a breaking point and he starts to swing his oversized metal fist into each of their chests, killing them with one hit each and fleeing the scene (30).

In Chicago, Dr. Crane has brought Valentine into her home. Valentine is shocked when he sees Eleanor Bane watering Dr. Crane's flowers (31). Dr. Crane has been trying to find a cure for the poisons in Eleanor's body—quickly outing Eleanor to Valentine as The Widow, the notorious assassin (31). Dr. Crane explains she was only hired by Black Skull in an attempt to get the bomb from Valentine and quickly sits the young man down to try and understand Valentine's invincibility and his role going forward in facing Black Skull (31-2). Valentine has made a mess, and together, he and Dr. Crane are going to work to clean it up (33).

Dr. Crane admonishes him again that he was selfish to go after Angela the way he did during the events of *Curse of the Crying Heart*, echoing her warnings there (33). Confused, Valentine asks how he was transformed instead of dying when he tried to kill himself after Angela's death (33). Dr. Crane explains that the small device her late husband gave him—earlier a red origami crane, now a blinking, beeping transmitter—was a special gift (33). Her husband's life work was creating that device to protect the bearer from the Black Skull in hopes of recovering the bomb and destroying him forever (33). Though Dr. Crane didn't agree with her husband, he gave the device to Valentine, marking him as the one to defeat the evil Black Skull (34). Now, Dr. Crane is committed to help Valentine finish what he has started, despite the disastrous missteps he made when trying to save the city and Angela, losing both (34). Dr. Crane explains to Valentine that the Crane device created a force field around Valentine when he detonated it in an attempt to kill himself, and the force field forced the explosion back on its center in such a way that the power of the bomb fused with Valentine's body, giving him great strength and making him invincible (34). The device protects living flesh from the bomb, making



machines, demons, anything else at risk when it detonates (34). Dr. Crane explains the need for a bearer of the device because both she and her late husband have required certain augmentations to their bodies due to their advanced age—biomechanical advancements to help them finish their work but kept them from using the device themselves as they were more machine than human now (35).

Valentine sits stunned, asking how the plan can go forward when the bomb has already been used and Black Skull is still very much alive (35). Dr. Crane produces the shards of the first bomb, which begin to hum with activity when they get close to Valentine's body (35). Dr. Crane explains that Valentine now has the power of the bomb in him, and thus the ability to destroy Black Skull forever (36). Before they can proceed, she makes Valentine take off his shirt so she can measure his scar (36). Dr. Crane doesn't explain this, but makes it clear to Valentine that Skull will return, and that he was chosen by her husband to stop him (36). Valentine counters that Dr. Crane's husband made a mistake in naming him the hero to defeat Black Skull (36), to which Dr. Crane replies that mistake or not, Valentine now has extraordinary power and "it is a sin to waste it" (37). Valentine asks what he is to do, and she tells him to first seek forgiveness from George Reed, as they will need his help (37).

We next see Reed speaking with his boss, the Commissioner of Police, about Sabatino's rise for power and how little evidence they have to build any type of case against him—from the fire to the recent string of murders (38). The Commissioner says Reed has his office's support, but there is very little left he can do to help, and that maybe Reed returned to work too quickly after Angela's death (39). Reed pleads for the Commissioner's help, but realizes quickly his boss will be no help when Sabatino himself shows up for an afternoon meeting, making it clear that Reed is on his own to clean up the city (40). The Commissioner tries to reason with Reed that

they have threatened his family and that is why he started taking the bribes, but Reed has none of it and leaves the Commissioner with his new criminal friends (41).

In Detroit, the Black Skull has tracked down the Detroit Fist in a steam filled back alley (42). When the Skull asks the Fist if he remembers him, the Fist tries to attack with his powerful steel hand—which the Black Skull easily catches and then shocks the deformed former cop with a bolt of electricity (42). The Black Skull offers to help the Detroit Fist if he will return to Chicago and help clean it up (42). The Black Skull has a hard time convincing the Fist until he produces the cure to the poisons in Eleanor’s body (42). Despite the fire and the effect it has had on his appearance and sanity, the Fist still loves the former assassin desperately, and agrees to protect Sabatino—the man who burned and maimed him—as long as the Black Skull needs in return for Eleanor’s cure (44). Together, they head back to Chicago (44).

Reed meets with Eleanor, cautioning her against the undercover work she is doing to infiltrate Sabatino’s Emerald Room (45). Eleanor pleads with Reed to let her help as she is privy to all kinds of information being on the inside, showing him pictures of the Commissioner fraternizing with some of Sabby’s ladies (45). Eleanor is desperate—thinking the man she loved (now the Detroit Fist) perished in Sabatino’s fire—and is going to find her justice with or without the good cop’s help (46). She confesses the pain from losing the man she loved might be too much (47), and Reed confesses he has few answers on how to deal with the pain from losing someone you love, leaving them both lost and alone as the city seems to move closer and closer to disaster (48).

A newsboy races by, shilling a headline about a massacre in Detroit caused by a big-fisted brute, and Reed fishes the kid for the underground, black market news (49). Reed finds out that Sabatino’s empire is growing because of his desperate need for cash—but nothing else that

points to the need for Sabatino's cash grab (50). In the corner, Reed sees Valentine reading a paper, recognizing him as the singing brawler who cooled it in his drunk tank a few nights back and not the former friend and bodyguard who killed his wife (50). Valentine goes to apologize to Reed, but as he struggles to say the words (51), an explosion tears into him and Reed (52). A pair of bank robbers pours from the hole in the adjacent brick wall to see Valentine—his coat in tatters but still on his feet—with a bloody outline of a heart on his chest from where the blast opened up his old scar (52). The robbers start to shoot at Valentine and he only flinches when the bullets find their mark (52). One desperate criminal grabs a sobbing female hostage, but Valentine quickly rescues her and protects her from the hail of gunfire now coming his way (53). Valentine grabs a gun, turning it on his assailants, and Reed comes to, pulling his revolver on the robbers as well (53). Reed first thinks Valentine is a robber as well, but then sees him helping the woman, pointing his gun at the criminals, and the heart shaped stain on his chest and mumbles “Valentine?” in disbelief (54). Reed turns his gun on the fallen hero, Valentine runs, and the Reed lets the robbers go to give pursuit (54).

At Union Station, Sabatino welcomes the Black Skull back to Chicago and we quickly learn the reasoning for Sabatino's takeover of the city's crime—he's working and raising money for the son of the devil (55). Though his efforts at expansion have been on behalf of Black Skull, Sabatino quickly complains to his boss the pinch he is feeling and wants a bigger cut of the funds he's raising (55). Black Skull brushes it away by quickly agreeing, and then introduces Sabatino's new bodyguard, the masked Detroit Fist (56). It is clear Black Skull is worried there is a rising threat, but Sabatino is resistant to any added help (56). Black Skull reveals the Detroit Fist is none other than the very man he burned and maimed, terrifying Sabatino to see the man appear as if he's risen from the grave, shouting “I thought you died in the fire” (57). The Fist

tells Sabby that he didn't burn, but was simply "tempered" (57). Skull assures Sabatino that The Fist is on the up and up and will protect him, so he need not fear any deception (57) and leaves the two old foes to an uneasy alliance (58).

The Black Skull travels to Dr. Crane's home and laboratory, but is unable to take the wise old woman unawares (59). He attempts to interrogate Dr. Crane about Valentine and she confirms the rumors are true; he survived the blast and is more powerful than ever (59). The Skull seems unworried about Valentine and Dr. Crane cautions him not to underestimate the young hero (59). The Black Skull confesses he does not estimate Valentine "at all" (60) and tells the old woman mortals should not meddle in the affairs of "gods" (60). Dr. Crane tells the demon he is no god, and that she is not an ordinary mortal, revealing the machines and gadgets covering her body that have kept her alive for so long and making her a strong warrior still (60). Dr. Crane and Black Skull fight, but Dr. Crane's outdated machinery is no match for the Black Skull's weapons, and he electrocutes her just as Valentine races into Dr. Crane's laboratory (60).

Black Skull stands over the defeated Dr. Crane dying at his feet, and asks Valentine to join him and help rebuild the weapon and destroy the evil city, sending all the guilty souls to his father in hell (61). Valentine resists, but Skull claims they are more similar than he thinks—they both fight crime in their way, try to collect the damned and sentence them for their sins, and they both seek a brand of justice for Chicago (61). Valentine refuses Skull's temptation, so the demon attacks him, but when Valentine fends off the advance, Skull is shocked that Valentine's parry caused him pain (62). Valentine vows to destroy Black Skull, but the Skull flees with the shards of the bomb before the fight can go any further, fearful of Valentine's new power (62).

Valentine rushes to Dr. Crane, who in her last breath hands Valentine the heart shield she has made for him—as the scar is the only non-living flesh on Valentine, the scar is his one point

of vulnerability (62). Dr. Crane dies in Valentine's arms just as Reed enters, making Valentine flee as Reed finds a friend dead for the second time in the man's arms (62). Valentine grabs a microphone as Reed weeps, singing a song of forgiveness and confession, praying that he can be the hero he needs to be for the fight ahead (63). As he sings, we see Eleanor dressing in her stockings and dress and transforming into The Widow, The Detroit Fist guarding Sabatino and The Black Skull musing over the bomb shards as he begins rebuilding the bomb (65). The last image as the song concludes is of Valentine, back in his former suit and mask, now with a steel heart shield over his chest, becoming his hero self once again as he sings the audience out to intermission (65).

The first song of the second act continues the contrition of the last, as Valentine is confessing that Reed was always the better man and Valentine seeks reconciliation (65-6). As he finishes the melody, Reed emerges with an all-points bulletin and wanted poster featuring Valentine's unmasked mug shot from before (68). The cops are nervous at Valentine's rumored special abilities, but Reed tries to squelch the whispers and sends the beat cops out to search (69). While Reed settles in to finish the paper work on his desk, a letter looking a lot like a Valentine is delivered to him by his secretary (70). It has a clue that leads Reed to Chicago's Graceland Cemetery, and to the headstone of the founder of the city's famous Pinkerton detectives (70). Nearby is the grave of Angela, where Reed finds Valentine waiting (70). Reed raises his gun and refuses to lower it as Valentine makes his case that he and Reed to work together (70). Valentine tells the story of Dr. Crane's murder, Black Ghost's infiltration of the city and the lean he is putting on Sabatino (70-4). Reed fruitlessly shoots Valentine—probably the best he can muster, short of forgiveness but at least understanding what he and Valentine are now facing (74). Valentine tries to apologize again but Reed cuts him off—wrestling what to do

next (75). Reed seems to refuse to help, but drags a confused Valentine to his car anyway and they drive to the Emerald Room to confront Sabatino about Black Skull (75). During their drive, Reed teaches Valentine about police work, and how to get the truth from a liar like Sabatino is not through punches (78). When that doesn't work, Reed tells Valentine you still have your gun—and tonight, Valentine is going to be Reed's gun (78).

Inside, Sabatino and his men feel the pressure with Valentine's reappearance (79). Sabatino says he knows the man is dead, but his henchmen don't buy it (81). Sabby is proven wrong when Valentine immediately walks through the door with Reed in tow, and Sabatino tries to save face by wise cracking to the pair at their expense (81). Reed brushes them off and pushes Sabatino on the rumors of the pressure Black Skull is pushing on him to raise the funds to finish rebuilding the bomb (82). Sabatino feigns ignorance, mockingly confessing he must rent a room in the basement to this demon, right under where all the judges and attorneys and cops cavort every night in his club (85). Reed produces the photos of these pillars of society doing just that and puts Sabatino on the ropes with his blackmail material of the Commissioner (85). Nonplussed, Sabatino calls the Commissioner in from the party room adjacent, and shoots him dead on the spot, evening the equation and taking Reed's ace in the hole out of play (86). At an impasse, the Detroit Fist escorts Reed and Valentine out and Sabatino is left to clean up the mess (88).

In the street, the Fist can't bring himself to reveal his true identity to his former friend, Reed and leaves them be without any rough treatment (88). Reed vomits in the gutter from the stress, telling Valentine he can't do this anymore (88). Valentine implores him not to give up, but Reed tells him he is resigned to losing, and that the hero should give up hope too as he shuffles off to drink himself to sleep at home (89).

Inside the club, The Widow comes to the backroom where Sabatino sits alone, pretending to want the short criminal (90). She says she wants a promotion and is willing to do what it takes, seducing Sabatino closer and closer, until finally succumbing to her wiles and allowing himself to be kissed (92). Instantly, he starts to get dizzy, and as he staggers about the room, Eleanor lets him know she has killed him for murdering the man she loved and he was just kissed by The Widow (93). As Sabatino dies, the Detroit Fist runs in and Eleanor trains a pistol on him (94). In the standoff, The Fist takes off his mask, recognizing Eleanor (95). She sees his face through the scars and their reunion is interrupted by the realization that just like before, Eleanor's chance at being cured has been ruined—this time by Eleanor's killing of the man The Fist has sworn to protect (96-7). Black Skull appears as they try to sort out what to do next and tells The Fist if he still wants his reward and Eleanor's cure, he has to kill George Reed, and despite Eleanor's protestations, The Fist agrees (99). The Black Skull leaves them and Eleanor is unable to stop The Fist from killing their friend, leaving her in the club, and she has to fight her way out, poisoning the henchmen with scratches to try and catch up (102).

In his apartment, Reed is sadly listening to violin music played by Angela when his phone rings (103). When he picks it up, nobody replies (103). Suspicious, Reed moves into the shadows, arming himself with a shotgun (103). The Detroit Fist slams into the room, but Reed moves to get the drop on him (103). A squeaky floorboard gives Reed away, and the Fist turns, apologizes, and raises his fist to pummel his friend, hitting him square in the chest (103). Eleanor arrives and screams out and as The Fist turns, Reed fires from his back his holdout gun into The Fist's chest (104). The Fist dies in Eleanor's arms (105).

A nurse brings out a sheet to cover Reed as Valentine looks on (106). She stops short of covering his head, and a shocked Valentine asks why (106). The nurse tells the grieving hero that

whoever hurt Reed didn't want him dead—seemed like they were just trying to send a warning and that Reed has a chance of making it (106). Valentine comes into the room to see the injured Reed, and Reed catches him up on what he has learned—that The Fist was their former friend (107), that Eleanor knows because she watched him die (107) and that she most likely killed Sabatino and is now on the run back in her guise as The Widow (108). Valentine frustrates Reed when he can't connect the dots so Reed spells it out for him: Sabatino was telling the truth in his own way and that The Black Skull truly is hiding out in the basement of the Emerald Room (108). As Valentine thanks the good cop, Reed calls him by his real name—Elliot Dodge (109). Reed has done his homework, ran the masked man's prints when he first was brought into the jail, and now has his whole story; including the stolen horse in Missouri (109). He gives the file to Valentine, tells him to burn it, and to go get Skull (110). A thankful Valentine does just that.

Valentine sings a reprise of the cowboy's prayer from *San Valentine*, praying that his heart makes him a brave man while he stares down the Devil (115) and that he sees Satan falling like lighting and the time is now to make that true (116). As Valentine enters the basement of The Emerald Room, he discovers the bomb surrounded by a number of strange machines (117). Black Skull enters from the shadows and tells Valentine he is glad he's finally arrived because he needs him to finish the bomb (118). He has a plan to kill millions, bring justice, and return home to hell with horde of souls for his father and both he and Skull start their showdown, pummeling each other with punches (119). During the exchange of punches and words, Black Skull preaches his brand of justice and Valentine counters that only forgiveness brings peace (120). Just as Valentine seems close to beating Black Skull, the Black Skull is able to subdue him with some sorcerous attack, driving Valentine towards his machine to transfer his power into the bomb (121). Before Black Skull can finish starting the machine, Valentine reveals he has attached the



Crane device to the Skull's long coat during the melee (121). Black Skull detonates the bomb, unconcerned with the blinking machine clipped to his chest, and the funnel cloud focuses on the device, disintegrating Black Skull but harming nothing else (121). The machine breaks, and the freed Valentine collapses to the ground—the city safe (121).

Slowly, Valentine stands up and dons his old trench coat (123). Eleanor enters and they sit together on a park bench, incognito from their superhero alter egos (123). They comfort each other and Valentine gives his condolences for Eleanor's loss of the man she loved and a hope she can start over (123). Eleanor says she wants a good ending, not a new beginning (123). Valentine watches her, and kisses her (124). The surprised Eleanor lets him, and then kisses him back—Valentine's invincibility making him safe from her poison (124). They smile, but they are interrupted by a buzzing from Dick Tracy style wrist watch—with Reed calling Valentine to some crime (124). Valentine stands, wishes Eleanor a Happy Valentine's Day, and goes to help his friend (125).

### ***The Sparrow***

The play opens on a meeting of the Spring Farm High School's PTA, stuck in the middle of an awkward silence. The Principal stands fumbling with his glasses at a microphone podium, shuffling some papers, while the small collection of citizens and parents, clutching photos of young children to their breast, look on (*The Sparrow* 2). The debate is about whether or not to allow a former student, Emily Book, to return to Spring Farm High for her senior year after attending a far off catholic school for orphans and children in need (2). The school where she currently is can't accommodate the classes she needs to graduate (3).

The reticence by the community to bring Emily back to Spring Farm is not because she is a poor student—the teacher who volunteers to advise her, Mr. Christopher points to her file and test scores to show how bright she is (3). The issue is that Emily will be the school’s only senior student. She was the only survivor of a bus accident eight years ago—wiping out the entire fourth grade class. The families on stage still carry photos of the children they lost in the crash. One of the mothers ask where Emily will live since her grandmother is passed and the Principal announces he hopes they can find a host family from the group present (3). After another long silence, Joyce McGuckin offers her and her husband, Albert’s, home (3). The Principal lets the formality of the meeting drop for a moment, asking if all the families there, all suffering a loss of a child in the bus accident, are okay going forward (4). They agree and decide to “bring her home” (4).

A balletic song begins to play as we see Emily enter—clad all in grays and black—carrying a battered suitcase and a chair (5). There is a Driver, walking with a noticeable limp, who enters carrying a chair and a cane (5). Using the chair and a series of landscape photos and paintings, we see Emily traveling through the farms and country roads “somewhere in Illinois” (5) on their way to Spring Farm. Their car stops in front of the high school, where the whole congregation from the PTA meeting wait, the photos of their lost children still clutched to their breasts (5). Emily tells the Driver she wants to return to the school and her home for the last ten years, saying, “Take me back, please...I can’t...tell them...I can’t be back here” (5). The Driver tells Emily that he and the people at the school have done everything they can for her and that she has to be here so she can tell the people of Spring Farm what she did so long ago (5). Emily sits silently in the car, and the Driver turns to her, taking her hand and tells the young girl, “You’re carrying more weight than anyone should ever have to carry” (5). Emily counters she

doesn't know how to let go of it, to which the Driver assures her there is no letting go of it, but that it is hers to carry (5). The Driver says it is now time to push her out of the nest, because he knows she can fly—she'll "just have to do it while you carry the weight" (6). Emily gathers her things, and before she can step from the car, the Driver tell her that he and the people at the school are very proud of her (6).

There is silence as Emily stands before the two-chair car and in front of the on-looking crowd of people waiting to get a glance of her. Suddenly the group erupts in applause and cheers for Emily and showers her with welcomes, gifts and small talk (7). She is saved from the throng by Joyce and Albert McGuckin, who introduce themselves as Emily's new host family (7). Emily reaches out to shake Joyce's hand and Joyce puts aside the picture of the child she lost in the bus accident and embraces Emily fiercely (7). The McGukin's young son, Charlie, looks on in disgust as the McGukins show Emily to their home—achieved by the two-chair car now becoming part of a dining room set, sans table, and a chandelier dropping from the ceiling (8).

They engage in some sparse small talk around the pretend dinner table as Emily and the McGukin's try to grow acquainted until Charlie rudely announces that he hopes Emily will be leaving soon, breaking up the meal (8). Joyce makes quick plans for Albert to take Emily to school in the morning for her first day and shows Emily to her upstairs room, carrying a doll house as she gives her the tour, ultimately pulling out a small pink bedroom from the toy home when they reach what will be Emily's room—the room of the McGukin's deceased daughter, unchanged since she was killed in the accident (8-10). Joyce remarks how grown up Emily looks and how she now has glasses (11). Emily tells her she has always had glasses, and as Joyce tries to cover up the slip, Emily stops her to tell her that she is not the daughter she lost—leaving Joyce to run out of the room embarrassed and confused (12). Emily picks up the small doll house

room and as she goes to sleep, her dream is projected on the wall—children throwing things and singing a mocking song—until Emily steps off the bus and we see the flashing lights of a railroad crossing and the sound of an oncoming train (13).

Emily's dream is interrupted by the Principal's morning announcement and Emily is thrust into her first day of school at Spring Farm High (14). There is a movement sequence of high school students—friends, cliques, jocks, nerds, A/V assistants bustling around Emily as she looks on lost, finally stumbling into Mr. Christopher's class where he is giving a biology lecture on the cardiovascular system and the heart (15). Not all of the students are able to answer Mr. Christopher's lecture questions, but it is clear he is a popular teacher. One student, a perky blonde cheerleader named Jenny McGrath, is the first to raise her hand on most of the questions (15).

Mr. Christopher tries to integrate Emily, hiding in the corner, into the class by asking her some questions (16). She answers them with a more complete and complex reply than Mr. Christopher expected with his simple question, impressing him (16). He dismisses the class, asking Emily and Jenny to stay after, asking the popular girl to look after the new one (16-7). Jenny enthusiastically agrees and leaves Mr. Christopher and Emily to talk about her schedule and the plan for finishing her senior year, alone as the High School's only twelfth grader (18). He surveys the books she's read and quickly finds few books she doesn't know by heart (19). He ends up giving her a copy of Walt Whitman—one she hasn't read (20)—and when Emily reads the inscription and asks her teacher who wrote it, Mr. Christopher's hand goes quickly to his own heart (22). The book was his wife's, but he tells Emily he'd like her to borrow it, sending her on her way to the next class (22).

As Emily walks home after school, she hears the whispers and questions of all the neighbors watching from their windows—some glad of her return, others resentful she was the only survivor of the accident and her grandmother’s panic after it, sending Emily away to the special school (23). She runs into Jenny and realizes she’s walked to her old house and not the McGukin’s. Jenny is standing by the railroad tracks, waiting for a train to blow past and invites Emily over, recruiting her to help with homecoming and the basketball team and all the goings on at the school (25). Emily agrees, thanking Jenny for being nice to her as they let the train race past them (27).

As Emily makes her way home, she is intercepted by her foster brother, Charlie, bedecked in an Indian headdress and wielding a sling shot, hailing Emily to “Halt, Squaw! You trespass!” (28). Emily tries to make nice, giving Charlie a small, shiny marble she found on her walk (28). Charlie refuses it but Emily plays along, calling him a big chief and tries to appease him until Charlie reluctantly takes the gift (28). As Emily turns, Charlie shouts that “This isn’t your house” and Emily agrees (28). She tells Charlie he can visit the room of the sister he lost anytime he wants, and in a rage, Charlie unleashes the marble Emily gave him from his sling shot at the back of her head (29). Without looking and with super human speed and agility, Emily catches it (29). Charlie asks how she did that, and quickly escaping to her room, Emily says, “I didn’t...I found it” and Charlie races away afraid (29).

The scene transitions to the next day at school, where Emily is waiting for PE class to start. The head basketball coach calls roll (30). When he reaches Emily, he looks up concernedly as she has no safety strap for her glasses, embarrassing Emily deeply (31). The basketball coach runs off to find some unfortunate thing to strap to Emily’s head, and while he is gone, Jenny runs off to the supply closet and brings back a couple bags of dodge balls, to play a quick game—

outlawed by the school district in seeming effort to protect the kids they have after losing so many in the accident (31).

A stylized game starts, where the balls fly back and forth as the students dance (31). Emily catches a ball and saves her team and the other team circles around her ready to pummel her with rubber balls (32). Before they can release their throws at Emily, now huddled near the gym floor shielding her face, there is an electrical explosion, time stops and all the balls stop in midflight as the gym plunges in darkness (32). When the lights come on, the students are standing in shock as the balls bounce feebly on the floor and the basketball coach runs in to see what the noise was (32). He finds Emily still on the ground and gives the entire class detention (32). Jenny tries to apologize for starting the game, but the coach cuts her off and sends them all off to the detention hall (33).

Mr. Christopher is watching over the full detention hall when Emily walks in—much to his and the class' surprise (34). She tells him she was playing dodge ball too, and takes her place with the class (34). Impressing them, they all turn and start to talk with her, apologizing (34). A few kids try to make jokes and Emily starts to send them right back and Emily is quickly warming to the group as they are welcoming her in (35).

The students protest to Mr. Christopher about receiving detention for playing dodge ball and Mr. Christopher tries to explain that he and the other teachers are trying to protect them (36). A student jokes, "From what...passing trains?" (36) and suddenly the whole class is turned upside down in their desks as the memory of the bus accident takes center stage (36). Mr. Christopher is clearly upset, trying to tell the students he is sorry and it is terrible that they are paying for somebody else's mistake—who he believes that somebody is he leaves unclear, but he grabs his heart and quiets the class (36).

When Emily comes home from school, she finds Joyce, her foster mother, asleep in room, holding the small dollhouse furniture in her hands (38). Emily shakes her out of her day dream and after a moment, Joyce tries to make amends for the awkwardness the other night, apologizing for the confusing Emily with her deceased daughter (39). Joyce then asks what happened the day of the accident, taking Emily aback (39). Emily is unable to answer much, and when Joyce confesses she can't even remember what her daughter was wearing, Emily tells her she was wearing a yellow dress (39). The two make some kind of accord and reconciliation, and agree to meet downstairs in a bit and put together care packages for the upcoming Homecoming basketball game (40).

The cheerleaders enter singing the school song about Spring Farm and their soaring Sparrow mascots—doing a dance across the basketball floor (41). As they break into a high energy dance, a green banner for the rival Greenview Hornets unfurls—as a part of the sports contests between the schools, whoever wins gets to put their banner in the losing school's gym as a reminder of the defeat (42). The two teams take the court—both played by the same actors that turn their reversible jerseys from the Sparrows' white and red jerseys to the Hornets green as they play a four person—four on four—basketball game (42). Emily passes on joining Jenny as a cheerleader, but patrols the sidelines as a towel girl, running back and forth as the coach barks orders (42). He barks they are running out of towels and sends Emily scrambling into the locker room to get more (43).

As Emily searches for towels, the cheerleaders enter, taking a break from the court and finding a quiet place where they can hammer out their plan to throw Jenny up with a gymnastic stunt so she can grab the Hornet's banner and tear it down (44). When they discover that Emily, unseen, has overheard, they strip her of her clothes and pen her up in a locker so she can't tell the

adults (46). The cheerleaders run out to execute their plan after halftime as the basketball players come in for their break (46). As the coach starts in on his halftime speech, he hears Emily shouting from the locker (46). The door is jammed, so they can't get her out, but she warns them of Jenny and the cheerleaders' plans and they rush out to stop them, leaving Emily alone (47).

In the gym, Jenny is leading the cheer as her teammates build a pyramid to throw her high enough to grab onto the banner (48). She flies high, grabs on the banner, but it doesn't rip from the ceiling, leaving her stuck high above the crowd (48). As the crowd shouts, we see Emily still in her locker room (48). Just like at the dodge ball game, there is a shock of electrical energy as the door is wrenched from its hinges (49). Only in her underclothes, Emily searches for something to wear and pulls out an old cheerleading uniform from the wreckage of the locker, throwing it on as she races to save Jenny (49).

Mr. Christopher is meanwhile trying to reach Jenny from atop a rickety ladder, when Emily enters in her new uniform (50). She climbs up next to him, gives her teacher her glasses, and then flies to Jenny, doing a balletic pass across the floor for her flight, pulling down her new friend to the group (50). They embrace when they are safely on the ground, but their moment is interrupted when the crowd, silent during Emily's first flight, erupts, pushing the former center of the school's attention, Jenny, to the periphery (50). As they close in, Emily makes a run for it (50) but is intercepted before she can leave the school by Mr. Christopher (51). He stops her, celebrates her power, names her a superhero, and Emily almost kisses him for his reaction—accepting her and not rejecting her (51)—but runs away, flying into the night, both escaping and elated (52).

The next day at school, a sequence similar to Emily's first day of school repeats—this time with Emily the center of attention, Jenny replacing her as the awkward observer of all the



students showering attention on their new, hometown superhero (53). In his biology class, Mr. Christopher tries to help the students return to some sort of normalcy by diving into their assignment—dissecting fetal pigs (54). He calls on Emily to help demonstrate, calling her “Sparrow,” to show how to cut open their specimens (54). As he leans over her, his hand gently helping her to dissect, Emily’s fetal pig’s heart begins to beat (55). Shocked, Mr. Christopher pulls back, but then quickly asks Emily if she is doing that (55). She nods, sheepishly and he jumps on the opportunity to show his class how these hearts work—and ecstatic by what’s happening, Mr. Christopher asks Emily what else she can do (55). There is a shriek of sound and suddenly Frank Sinatra’s “I Got the World on a String” starts to play as Emily telekinetically puppeteers the teacher she is enamored with around the stage, ultimately dancing with him herself and almost kissing at the end of their supernatural duet (55). Mr. Christopher sends the class away, shocked as Jenny looks on angrily (55). He asks Emily to stay (56).

Emily hides her face, embarrassed and Mr. Christopher tries to help and Emily starts to confide her fears, confusions and tells Mr. Christopher how he helps her to feel normal and not some freak superhero (57-8). Mr. Christopher tries to defuse the intense feelings Emily is having, but it is a struggle as he seems to have some confused emotions of his own, and he sends Emily off to class with an awkward high five and a charge to enjoy the Homecoming dance that night, leaving both of them feeling strange and unresolved (59).

Back at the McGukin’s house, Mr. McGukin knocks on Emily’s door (60). He’s brought her a corsage for the dance (60). This is the first time they have talked and they fumble through it until Albert blurts out that he is glad she is there and that Emily makes the house feel like home again (61). He convinces her to go to the dance and offers to give her a ride, and after a moment, Emily agrees, giving the shy man a deep hug (62).

The dance is in full swing when Emily arrives, and she is quickly brought into the center, dancing with all her new friends (63). Mr. Christopher, the chaperone, retreats back to his room and Jenny follows as the highschoolers break off into pairs for a slow dance (63). Jenny finds Mr. Christopher looking at the picture he's held to his heart throughout the play, and as she enters his room, he notices how much the woman in the photo resembles the young girl before him (64). It is clear Jenny is bothered by Emily's ascension to being "The Sparrow" so Mr. Christopher tries to comfort her, like he did with Emily (64). As he does, Jenny reminds him more and more of the woman in the photograph, and without thinking, he asks his student to dance (66). Jenny asks the man if he misses the woman in the photograph, and as he answers that tonight he is feeling okay, the teenager kisses him—just as Emily enters the classroom to share her joy from dancing with her friends (66). In her anger, she explodes the overhead projector, glass flying everywhere and cutting a deep gash across Jenny's face (66). Emily runs off and Mr. Christopher follows right behind, leaving Jenny trying to stop the bleeding from her cheek (66).

Emily races through the night, hearing the voices of all the neighbors whispering like before—rather than gossiping about the bus accident and Emily's return they are now grateful and believe she was spared for this very reason (67). As Emily reaches her front door, Charlie emerges from the bushes and shoots the marble once again with his slingshot (68). Distracted, Emily doesn't sense it coming and it strikes her in the back of the head (68). The whispers begin to grow as Emily makes all her books fly around the room like sparrows (72). While the books are flying, Jenny investigates Emily's old home next to the train tracks and the dreams that have been haunting Emily are projected on the stage while Jenny connects Emily's powers to the unexplained events surrounding the bus being pushed in front of the oncoming train, and we see

the woman in Mr. Christopher's picture—his wife—was the woman driving the bus and blamed by the community for the accident (73-4).

The next morning, the principal gives Mr. Christopher's biology class their exam, explaining the popular teacher tendered his resignation earlier that morning (75). Jenny stands and shoots an accusing glare at Emily, who pleads with her former friend that she "didn't say anything" (75). The class starts to argue and complain about Mr. Christopher's departure, and Jenny silences them when she asks Emily point blank if she killed the senior class (75). The class is shocked, so she asks again if when Mrs. Christopher dropped her off that day, if she pushed the bus and all the classmates who had been teasing her in front of the train (76). Emily stands in front of a paralyzed class, and unable to answer, she flees (76). The whispers follow her home, telephoning ahead to the McGukin's home (77).

Joyce is waiting in Emily's bedroom and gives a crying Emily a warm hug (78). With her arms around Emily, Joyce asks Emily if she killed her daughter, to which Emily replies "I didn't mean to" (78). Joyce's hand strikes out, slapping Emily hard, and Joyce screams at Emily, calling her a liar (78) and then as she breaks down, asks Emily if she can use her powers to bring her daughter back (79). Unable to answer no, Joyce leaves as Emily flashes back to her Grandmother giving her to the Driver from the school (80). Both the Grandmother and the Driver know what Emily has done, and that she didn't mean to, and he gently takes her away (80). Emily packs her bag and escapes just as the sheriff and rest of the town comes to the house looking for Emily (81-4). Finding her gone, the town spreads out to search for her (84).

Mr. Christopher, carrying a suitcase and a train ticket, finds Emily first (85). He asks her if it is true and she nods (85). The kind teacher gives Emily his ticket to Chicago, tells her to leave and never come back and Emily reaches out, pleading for forgiveness by saying that Mr.

Christopher's wife was always nice to her (85). Before they both can leave, unnoticed, the crowd circles them, blocking the exits (85). Emily unleashes her powers to keep them at bay but the Sheriff pleads they are not there to hurt her (86). When she stops, Jenny grabs the policeman's gun and trains it on Emily—and when Mr. Christopher tries to intervene, Jenny shoots him instead (86).

Emily looks on as Mr. Christopher struggles to breathe, his lungs filling with blood from the gunshot and the crowd fights to keep him alive (87). As it begins to look bleak, the crowd looks to Emily, who silently makes her way to Mr. Christopher's near lifeless body (87). Emily puts her hands on his chest, magically raising the bullet from his chest and starting his heart again, making him gasp awake (87). She quietly stands and walks away, using her power as she goes to lift the town folks in a flight, which according to the script is “neither healing nor forgiveness nor resolve.” The citizens float over the town as Emily rides the train into Chicago (88).

**APPENDIX B:****ANNOTATED PRODUCTION HISTORY OF THE HOUSE THEATRE OF CHICAGO:****SEASON ZERO*****Death and Harry Houdini (1.0)*****October 30<sup>th</sup> – December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001 at the Live Bait Theatre**

This first production in Chicago by The House featured a small group from the ensemble who had just moved to the city. Allen wrote, directed and acted in the production that featured a handful of Houdini's tricks and escape. Because The House's budget existed on a show-by-show basis at this point, they refer to these first two projects as season zero and refer to their first full slate of productions as their actual first season of existence.

***The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*****July 24<sup>th</sup> – December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002 at the Viaduct Theatre**

*Peter Pan* was the production that introduced the young House to the theatre community in force and garnered them their "Next Big Thing" label from the Chicago press.

**SEASON ONE*****Death and Harry Houdini (2.0)*****August 27<sup>th</sup> – October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 at the Viaduct Theatre**

This production of *Houdini* featured a larger cast and more ensemble members with a fleshed out text and more spectacular tricks—including the highly praised recreation of Houdini's famous Water Torture Cell escape.

***San Valentino and the Melancholy Kid (part one of The Valentine Trilogy)*****January 14<sup>th</sup> – March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the Viaduct Theatre**

Artistic Director Nathan Allen, wrote the play, composed the music and starred in all three installments of the House's multi-year project.

***The Rocket Man*****May 7<sup>th</sup> – June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the Viaduct Theatre**

Ray Bradbury gave permission to adapt some of his famous short stories to House ensemble member Phillip Klapperich. The play featured a DJ on stage playing techno music throughout the performance.

**SEASON TWO*****Cave with Man*****August 27<sup>th</sup> – October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the Viaduct Theatre**

The first House play to be authored by somebody other than Allen or Klapperich, the story centered on a pre-historic society's development of language.

***Curse of the Crying Heart (part two of *The Valentine Trilogy*)*****January 14<sup>th</sup> – March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the Viaduct Theatre**

The story of Elliot Dodge transferred to feudal Japan and the highflying wire fight at the end of the play as the highlight of most critical reviews.

***Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe (1.0)*****May 13<sup>th</sup> – July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the Viaduct Theatre**

A time travel play in which an inventor tries to create a device to journey to the past to prevent the suicide of his talented but troubled daughter. The play was written by ensemble members Jake Minton and Chris Matthews and proved the first financial and critical success not penned by Allen or Klapperich.

**SEASON THREE*****The Great and Terrible Wizard of Oz*****September 8<sup>th</sup> – November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the Viaduct Theatre**

Like *Peter Pan*, Klapperich revisits a classic children's tale and spins it in a contemporary direction. Of note, the play featured a number of actors from outside The House's core ensemble who would go on to play important roles in future House plays, leading to the first expansion of The House's roster of ensemble members.

***Valentine Victorious (part three of *The Valentine Trilogy*)*****January 16<sup>th</sup> – March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at the Viaduct Theatre**

*Valentine Victorious* was set in a comic book, film noir version of Chicago and concluded the three year long play cycle.

***Ellen Under Glass*****March 26<sup>th</sup> – April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at the DCA Storefront Theatre**

Performed in a theatre owned and operated by the city and the League of Chicago Theatres, *Ellen Under Glass* was a show not considered a part of The House's actual theatre season and is included in their production history as an outside production.

***The Boy Detective Fails*****May 13<sup>th</sup> – July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 at the Viaduct Theatre**

The first House collaboration with an outside playwright, *The Boy Detective* was written by author Joe Meno, who adapted his short novel by the same name for the theatre.

**SEASON FOUR*****Hatfield & McCoy*****September 16<sup>th</sup> – November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at the Viaduct Theatre**

This retelling of the classic American feud was written by ensemble member Shawn Pfautsch and directed by ensemble member Matt Hawkins—both of their first writing and directing projects for the company.

***The Sparrow*****January 12<sup>th</sup> – March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Viaduct Theatre****March 15<sup>th</sup> – April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007 at the Steppenwolf Garage Theatre**

Written by Allen, Minton and Matthews, *The Sparrow* opened early in 2007 and played for close to 12 months, including three different theatres in Chicago and a short transfer to Miami.

***Hope Springs Infernal*****May 11<sup>th</sup> – June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 at the Viaduct Theatre**

This play was poorly attended and reviewed as most of Chicago's audiences and critics were focused on *The Sparrow*'s continued success.

**SEASON FIVE*****The Magnificents (1.0)*****September 14<sup>th</sup> – November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 at the Viaduct Theatre**

Another magic centered play written by House ensemble member and resident magician, Dennis Watkins, it was loosely based on his experiences learning magic from his grandfather.

*The Sparrow*

**October 2<sup>nd</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007 at Broadway in Chicago's Apollo Theatre the Adrienne Arst Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County (FL)**

After a brief hiatus, *The Sparrow* returned for a commercial run managed by the producers at Broadway in Chicago.

*The Nutcracker (1.0)*

**November 16<sup>th</sup> – December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at Steppenwolf's Upstairs Theatre**

With *The Sparrow* in full swing, the ensemble's efforts were divided as one group worked to keep the commercial run of *Sparrow* going while the rest tried to mount Klapperich's retelling of *The Nutcracker* in Steppenwolf's large, upstairs theatre.

*The Attempters*

**March 5<sup>th</sup> – April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the Viaduct Theatre**

This play about a young wonder-kid met moderate success, and due to the severing of the relationship between The House and the owner/operators of the Viaduct theatre, the last play by The House in what had become their home in Chicago.

**SEASON SIX***Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe (2.0)*

**September 17<sup>th</sup> – November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the Chopin Theatre**

Hoping the momentum from *The Sparrow* would carry over to The House's next show in their new home at the Chopin, Minton and Matthews re-worked their 2005 play. The company hoped for an extended and lucrative run of this new production of their earlier hit and poured in the profits from *The Sparrow*. The reviews were luke-warm and the economic down turn that fall proved a deadly combination and The House had to cancel a portion of their upcoming season.

*Rose and the Rime*

**February 18<sup>th</sup> – May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at the Chopin Theatre**

Rallying together what resources they could, The House produced a play Allen had created in residency at Hope College in Holland, MI. The original, student version of *Rose and the Rime* was invited to perform at the Kennedy Center as a part of the institution's American College Theatre Festival. The Chicago production featured a few cast members from the Hope College production, a revised script and stripped down set to fit within the smaller Chopin Theatre.



**SEASON SEVEN*****All the Fame of Lofty Deeds*****November 11<sup>th</sup> – December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at the Chopin Theatre**

A new country musical based on the paintings, poetry and music of Chicago's John Langford and his band the Waco Brothers.

***Wilson Wants it All*****February 4<sup>th</sup> – March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the Chopin Theatre**

An Orwellian like play about politics in the near future, *Wilson* received mixed reviews while The House continued to search for a fix to their post-*Sparrow* financial and critical slump.

***Girls vs. Boys*****April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the Chopin Theatre**

A rock musical created the previous year at Northwestern University, this play featured MTV like song and dance numbers, pill popping teenagers and a mosh pit where audience members mingled with the actors.

**SEASON EIGHT*****Thieves Like Us*****September 9<sup>th</sup> – October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the Chopin Theatre**

*Thieves Like Us* was a depression-era gangster story directed by one of Chicago's up and coming professional directors, Kimberly Senior—a first for the young company.

***The Nutcracker (2.0)*****November 11<sup>th</sup> – December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the Chopin Theatre**

Working with part of *The Sparrow* writing team, Klapperich and Minton reworked their 2007 text with new music, characters and a streamlined story. This new version of *The Nutcracker* became a holiday hit for The House and they have remounted it every Christmas season since, including a production in both Chicago and Miami in 2012.

***Odradek*****January 8<sup>th</sup> – March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Chopin Theatre**

*Odradek* was written by playwright Brett Nevue and directed by Dexter Bullard—both Chicago theatre artists with considerable national and international reputations. Despite the recent struggles, The House began to collaborate more and more with high profile playwrights and directors outside their ensemble.

***Star Witness*****March 27<sup>th</sup> – May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Chopin Theatre**

Another Joe Meno script, *Star Witness* was directed by Chicago's Sean Graney. Graney is a main stay in the Off Loop theatre scene and founding artistic director of the influential theatre company, The Hypocrites.

**SEASON TEN*****Cyrano*****August 25<sup>th</sup> – October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Chopin Theatre**

A new version of the Rostand play penned, directed and choreographed by ensemble member Matt Hawkins that proved the first major critical success since *The Sparrow*.

***The Nutcracker (2.0)*****November 3<sup>rd</sup> – December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Chopin Theatre**

The second remount of *Nutcracker*, proving so successful it became an annual offering in each House's season going forward.

***Death and Harry Houdini (3.0)*****January 21<sup>st</sup> – August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Chopin Theatre and the Adrienne Arstth Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County (FL)**

This third version of The House's inaugural play matched, if not eclipsed the success of the earlier versions of the text. With an additional remount announced for the summer of 2013, it potentially passes *The Sparrow* as The House's most successful production to date.

**SEASON ELEVEN*****The Iron Stage King (part one)*****September 2<sup>nd</sup> – October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 at the Chopin Theatre**

*The Iron Stag King* is part one of The House's next three-year trilogy project. The first installment points to a hero journey that will seem familiar to House audience members.

***The Nutcracker (2.0)*****November 9<sup>th</sup> – December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012 at the Chopin Theatre and the Adrienne Arsth Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County (FL)**

Two productions were remounted with separate casts simultaneously as The House expanded their Christmas programming.

***The Magnificents (2.0)*****January 18<sup>th</sup> – March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Chopin Theatre**

A remount and revision of the 2007 text that just opened at the time of this writing.

***Ploughed Under: An American Song Book*****April 19<sup>th</sup> – June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Chopin Theatre**

At the time of this writing, The House was in the early stages of rehearsal for this new musical.

***Death and Harry Houdini (3.0)*****June 21<sup>st</sup> – August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Chopin Theatre**

A summer commercial run of the hit show was recently announced.

***The Magic Parlour*****Open Run at The Palmer House Hilton Hotel**

In the fall of 2012, House ensemble member and resident magician, Dennis Watkins began a residency in one of Chicago's luxury hotels, performing a cabaret style magic show every Friday in the heart of the Loop.

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**ABSTRACT****MYTHS OF THE HOUSE THEATRE OF CHICAGO (2002-2007): A  
DRAMATURGICAL STUDY OF CHICAGO'S "NEXT BIG THING"**

by

**MATTHEW FOSS****May 2013****Advisor:** Mary Elizabeth Anderson**Major:** Theatre**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

In 2002, Chicago's theatre critics targeted The House as the next big story in the city's theatre community. The House's first play, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* was a critical and financial hit for the young company. *Peter Pan* began a five-year period of nearly unprecedented success for The House. During this time, many discussions about The House dealt with a perceived mythical quality to the type of plays the young company was creating. This study examines this question of myth in The House's plays by creating a dramaturgy that incorporates the myth theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell to identify and analyze the presence of elements of myth and the patterns in which they occur. These patterns can be potentially identified by examining five of The House's most significant performance texts: *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan*, *Death and Harry Houdini*, the three plays of *The Valentine Trilogy* and *The Sparrow*, this study aims to identify what elements are at work in The House's hero stories.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Matt Foss teaches Acting and Theatre History at Iowa State. He received a MFA in Acting from Roosevelt University in Chicago and is near completion of a PhD in Theatre Studies and Directing from Wayne State University in Detroit. Recent theatrical credits include Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, American Theatre Company, The Jewish Ensemble Theatre and Tipping Point Theatre. He also performed and trained in Russia as a part of the American Studio of The Moscow Art Theatre School.

In 2012, the ISU production of *Six Characters* received the Kennedy Center's American College Theatre Festival National Award for Outstanding Production of a Play and Outstanding Director of a Play. The student ensemble was recognized for Outstanding Lighting Design, three Distinguished Performance by an Actor awards, and citation for outstanding collaboration by a performance and production ensemble.

Matt recently was named the KC/ACTF Region V Respondent of the Year and received the inaugural ATHE/KCACTF Prize for Innovative Teaching.