

Inventing Isabel: Pig Iron Theatre Company

(Re)Imagines *Measure for Measure*

Rebecca Steffy, Villanova University

Isabella. 2007. Assembled by Suli Holum and Dan Rothenberg,

in collaboration with Pig Iron Theatre Company. *Director*

Dan Rothenberg. *Performers* Pig Iron Theatre Company. ICE

BOX Projects Space, Philadelphia. 31 August - 15 September.

Abstract

Pig Iron Theatre Company premiered their original performance work *Isabella* as part of the 2007 Live Arts Festival in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Their adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, featuring a mortician and the small troupe of cadavers under his care, shifts attention away from the issues of governance so central to *Measure for Measure* and towards the moral ambiguities of desire and invention. With additional influences from the Pygmalion myth and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Isabella* performs its ambiguities on and through bodies, tracing the alternating potential for bodies to gain or lose control over particular uses. *Isabella* rifles through the dead to bring something new to life.

As part of the 2007 Live Arts Festival in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Pig Iron Theatre Company premiered *Isabella* at the ICE BOX Project Space, a large concrete-block room inside a recently rehabilitated industrial building in the city's northeast.¹ I left a Sunday evening performance in a daze: *What* had I witnessed? The press release, included in the show's program, billed the debut as a "dance macabre" that gave the Shakespeare script "a few good rips." For me and my theater-going companions, the piece evoked discomfort, intrigue, delight, surprising pleasure, and a few itchy, ethical qualms. I began to think more about *Isabella*'s own varied constitution to make sense of the piece, as well as of our mixed and somewhat mystified responses. Its literary influences include the mythical account of Pygmalion and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, while its primary spur is

Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, one of the purported "problem plays."² Rather than interpret *Measure* as a disturbing social vision of the (im)possibilities of justice and good governance, as some other contemporary productions have done, *Isabella* channels our attention toward the moral ambiguities of desire and artistic invention. In both the literal story it tells and in its adaptive function, *Isabella* rifles through the (ostensibly) dead to bring something new to (precarious) life.

Isabella, like each of its literary spurs, depends on bodies, the uses of bodies, and the implications of possible uses of bodies, either our own or those of others. Exploring the work of imagination inside the enclosed space of a lonely morgue, the play animates bodies in a phenomenological way: As they alternately gain or lose control over particular uses, we see bodies oscillate between subject and object positions and literally embody the potential to act at once from both of these positions. These shifts complicate our sense of the relationship between subjectivity and power and between agencies and activities. The political dimensions of bodies, as we experience them in our social world(s), are not exactly explored onstage, though we may well find ourselves asking some of the same questions raised by the play when we participate in various public discourses about "acceptable" or "unacceptable" treatments of bodies: What is the power of this body? Who is responsible for it? How does its agency move or redirect?

When *Isabella* begins, a mortician is drinking a cup of coffee under an antiseptic blaze of fluorescent lighting. Though stronger and whiter on the set, the lights stay on above the seating area for the duration of the performance, keeping the shapes and faces of audience members in one another's and in the actors' view. Under plain white sheets, we discern the topography of two bodies lying on gurneys. A small desk and trash can line a white wall, positioned diagonally across stage left. Downstage right is a stainless steel sink flanked by ample counters; further upstage on the right side is a door to a walk-in refrigerator. The work space includes a large medical lamp on wheels and a tray with bright assorted tools. It dawns on me that the venue, once a frozen-fish factory, fits all too well with this fictional setting.

We watch the mortician move about his business quietly, in an ordinary manner. The extended near-silence onstage slowly increases suspense as we realize that the mortician finds a female corpse, which he has uncovered and begun to work on, attractive. "Heaven in my mouth," he says as he takes off his latex gloves to touch her skin to skin.³ Quoting from Shakespeare, the mortician invokes *Measure for Measure* in the very moment that he recognizes beauty (or its past traces, or the possibility of its renewal) in a corpse and treats the corpse as a sexualized object. Similarly, Pig Iron's adaptive lens zooms in and settles on *Measure* as its central object. In what Patricia Yaeger might call a "blissful fold" (Yaeger 2007, 438), time pools between Shakespeare

and Pig Iron, gathering the Duke, Angelo, and the mortician into an overlap and repetition of one another. This first line spoken onstage loops us back to Shakespeare's Angelo, who cannot shake Isabella from the invocations of his prayers; her name and body, associated with the holiness to which she aspires, lodge in his imagination and speech: "Heaven in [his] mouth." The phrase also loops us ahead to the end of the play when the mortician's creative fantasy of playing friend and manager reaches its climax with a kiss on Isabella's mouth. The morgue, meanwhile, counters the sensual and ethereal pleasures of this temporal/textual fold with its discomfiting specter of finitude.

The mortician makes a few tentative gestures toward the corpse, then abruptly pulls back in shame. He throws the sheet over her again and tries to continue working on the other body, but cannot concentrate. Finally, he gives in to fantasy and resumes the "heaven in my mouth" speech:

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects.
Heaven hath my empty words
While my invention, hearing not my tongue
Anchors on Isabel. (*Isabella*, Scene 1.2-7)

Hitching his imagination to the contested body of Isabella, at once the coveted virgin novice and an anonymous dead stranger, the mortician initiates his *mise-en-scène* recital of *Measure for Measure*, performed by him and five cadavers under his care. When the mortician asks Isabella to marry him towards the play's end, embracing and kissing her, the life of the corpse ensemble immediately drains away, and their bodies stiffen. Isabella's response to the proposal — that crucial gauge to any *Measure* interpretation — is to become again the object she already was. Playing neither hero nor villain, starring in neither a comedy nor a tragedy, the mortician realizes that his invention has come to naught. The stage directions for this last scene, which contains no scripted language at all, tell the actors: "[The mortician] is not disgusted. He is beaten" (Scene 18, stage directions). The energy of his desire proves only provisional, for other subjects and objects remain outside his control. He moves over to his desk, pulls out a plastic container of leftovers, and begins to eat.

It is with ostensible sympathy that the mortician casts himself in Shakespeare's lead male role, a risky choice given the biting portrayals the Duke has received. Since Peter Brook's watershed production of *Measure for Measure* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1950, many interpretations have deconstructed the supposedly noble motives of the Duke, playing him as the embodiment of corruption, hypocrisy, and exploitation. David Bevington, in a recent overview of *Measure for Measure* in performance, claims that the play "has itself become a vehicle for protest

against sexism and patriarchal abuses of authority" (Bevington 2007, 114). He indicates the work of Robin Phillips, Marius Goring, and Keith Hack, among others, as emphasizing the complicity of the Duke in Vienna's underworld, his own evasion of responsibility (charges leveled at him by Lucio in 3.2 and 4.3 of the Shakespeare script), and the puritanical (and also tyrannical) rule of Angelo.⁴

Pig Iron's mortician, however, appears to be interested in playing his managerial role so as to emerge as a feeling lover rather than an oppressive villain. Early on in the play, he attempts to prepare Isabella for her animation by making a guarantee of his own good intentions: "You're going to see some things you don't like, you're going to have a hard time, but don't worry, in the end it's all going to work out" (Scene 3.1-2), he assures her. Contrast this with the intensely pessimistic social critique offered by Charles Marowitz in his 2000 adaptation, "*Variations on Measure for Measure*," for the Tygres Heart Shakespeare Company in Portland, Oregon (see Marowitz 2000a). Under Marowitz's direction, the play rails against rotten officials, against the attack on chastity from a state-sanctioned church, and against patriarchal injustice towards women. Isabella veers helplessly toward disaster, and it is clear who bears the blame:

Angelo seduces Isabella, and despite their bargain, Claudio is beheaded and his sister left high and dry. . . . The Duke, being politically allied to Angelo and appreciative of the way he has cleaned up his own mess in Vienna, not only does not condemn Angelo, but turns on Isabella as a troublemaker who would further weaken the integrity of his government. (Marowitz 2000b, 8)⁵

In "*Variations*," Marowitz's project is to "derail the original from its wretched, mealy-mouthed 'feel-good' ending" (Marowitz 2000a, 6). While Pig Iron's *Isabella* keeps sentimentality firmly at bay, exactly what damages might be caused by the mortician/Duke and the extent of his culpability are, in this version, far less certain.

Like those in its intertextual spurs, the ambiguities of *Isabella* gather on the locus of the body. In this play, the term "bodies" refers simultaneously to three different phenomena: the dead meat of the corpses; the at least partially revived bodies that respond to the mortician's imagination; and the physical bodies of the players who exhibit both meticulous control and astounding grace in performing roles so (un)natural. These multiple kinds of bodies attune us to the alternations in agency that these bodies experience throughout the play. Director Dan Rothenberg comments on this paradoxical multiplicity in an online blog:

I think the conundrum for [Pig Iron Theatre Company] stems from trying to make a piece that, on the one hand, is about the concreteness, and banality, of death, while our materials

— live performers — are decidedly not-dead. "What's real" goes out the window, so we've had to stop using the term. (Rothenberg 2007)

Likewise, the mortician discovers that in the course of treating a female corpse simply as the object of his professional duty, the possibility that her object-body could signify something beyond the fact of its flesh literally inspires a whole new cast of subject-bodies.

Rothenberg's comments are particularly telling in light of Pig Iron's aesthetic philosophy. The company regularly incorporates interdisciplinary elements of dance, clowning, puppetry, and audience interaction into their productions. As advocates and practitioners of a theater that comprises more than a stiffly literary "expression of ideas through text," their artistic vision emphasizes "bodies moving and voicing on the stage" (Rothenberg 2007). The players in *Isabella*, especially the mortician, frequently slur, mumble, or intone their words unevenly, just as we might imagine "real" bodies doing when they are alone, hurried, or trying something new and unknown. Though it may disorient an audience member when a phrase drops from hearing, the finely calibrated tensions and postures in the players' bodies — in the mortician's shoulders as he leans in next to the corpses for example — expertly recuperate any lost verbal clarity. *Isabella* reminds us of a basic lesson in social awareness: Pay attention to body language.

Following his attraction to *Isabella*, the mortician picks the next two handy corpses to play Lucio and Angelo. He physically works to get their bodies, hardened by *rigor mortis*, to take up movement again, and his efforts produce ironic effects. We come to understand that the vivification experienced by the corpses mimics the investiture of power experienced by *Measure's* Angelo and Escalus. When Angelo mumbles, "A power I have, but of what strength and nature / I am not yet instructed" (Scene 1.47-48), he describes his experience as corpse and character. "'Tis so with me," Lucio replies (Scene 1.49), forging a bond between these two newly born subject-bodies. (We could even apply the lines to *Isabella*, still learning its reach.) Lucio's and Angelo's unwieldy movement — proceeding by way of a kind of jerk, flop, and hold sequence — produces comic effects, too, as they appear on this highly charged scene. We laugh partly to release any awkwardness we feel in watching nude people move around onstage, but we also laugh because we are relieved that the tension in the work space can be diffused by the presence of others and that we will be spared a spectacle of sexual violation.

Similarly, Claudio's entrance invokes an experience of double consciousness, but this time with more pathos than humor. Lucio pulls a fourth body from the fridge, and when the mortician unzips the body bag, Claudio tumbles out onto the floor. The mortician tries to cajole him, but Claudio protests: "Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to the world? / Bear me to prison where I

am committed." His lines faithfully follow Claudio's first appearance in *Measure*, when the Provost parades the bad-luck lover through town as evidence of the new government's stringency. Just as he bemoaned that moment of public display, this Claudio does not wish to be appropriated for performance, his vulnerability intensified in *Isabella* by his nakedness. It is humiliating, perhaps even torturous, to Claudio to be exposed as a body marked by the bruise-like pools of blood that collected after his heart stopped pumping and by a long, suggestive scar around the base of his neck. His plea — roughly, "Why the hell are you doing this to me?" — forcefully opposes the mortician's imaginative/judicial adventure and pricks the audience's conscience with the knowledge that we may be complicit in defiling the dead.

Isabella drops the questions of governance that figure with such immediacy in *Measure*, while holding on to the problem of responsibility and its complications, which are made manifest in the doubling relationship between the mortician/Duke and Angelo. We still hear the residual implication that the Duke is a leader who has abandoned his post when, for example, the mortician/Duke confides in his deputy: "We have strict statutes and most biting laws / Which we have let slip / And you must now enforce" (Scene 1.50-52); we understand that these lines now also point to the mortician's trespass when he let down his professional guard. In Scene 6, the telephone rings and in response to the caller, the mortician promises that he will indeed fulfill his obligations: "Yes. Yes. I'll have it done by noon tomorrow" (Scene 6.1). After the call, he shoves Isabella aside and adjusts his instruments to get back to work. Claudio and Juliet, however, insist on continuing to enter and exit the stage, and the frustrated mortician/Duke blames Angelo instead of himself for the breach of order: "You're responsible for this. You should be ashamed of yourself" (Scene 6.4). Later, both men try to confront their attraction to Isabella, pressing her into the causal matrix of their seduction. Angelo chastises himself:

What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?
Dost thou desire her foully for those things
That make her good? (Scene 8.13-15)

"I know just how you feel," the mortician responds. "She surprised us both" (Scene 8.27). The professional responsibilities that the mortician/Duke abandons seem somehow less important than the fact of his desire and his merely improvisational ability to manage it. Moreover, the Duke's political experiment, for better or worse, is intimately tied to his Machiavellian insight into the strategic use of display; the grand, public denouement he stages in *Measure*'s act 5 belies his claim that he "love[s] the people, / But do not like to stage me to their eyes" (*Measure*, 1.1.67-68). The mortician, on the other hand, works in solitude. Despite the startling phone call, no supervisor peeks

into the morgue, no families check on the care of their deceased loved ones, and no colleagues show up to challenge the mortician's decisions. Surrounded by cadavers and without a social context in which to perform, *Isabella's* mortician no longer connotes a political realm. Nevertheless, the shadow cast by his Viennese predecessor, as the mortician adopts and adapts that role, "darkens" the ethical edges of his performance.

Paring their script to an ensemble cast, Pig Iron cut all auxiliary characters, including Mistress Overdone, Pompey, Elbow, Master Froth, and Abhorson the executioner. Escalus, Barnardine, and Mariana do not appear onstage as discrete characters, but some of their lines survive, as when, for example, Angelo voices lines that *Measure* assigns to the legal clerk (Scene 1.45-48). The issues presented by these professionals in the sex and justice economies fade from view when the characters do. In Shakespeare's script, Lucio's incessant bawdy jokes and free-wheeling gossip about the sex trade prevent everyone from forgetting the prevalence and threat of venereal disease; as often as he has bought sex at Mistress Overdone's house, he has "purchased as many diseases" (*Measure*, 1.2.46). Lucio's speeches in the Pig Iron version, however, omit any reference to indulgences at Mistress Overdone's house, nor does he implicate the mortician in sexual impropriety. (Lucio does still manage some of the best puns in the play — for example, when he speaks of Angelo as "a man whose blood / Is very snow-broth" [Scene 5.45-46].) As *Isabella* erases the broad tableau of Shakespeare's cast, it removes the play's explicit engagement in matters social and political — matters such as prostitution, its regulation, and the exercise of criminal justice — that so explicitly characterizes *Measure for Measure*.

Pig Iron samples heavily, but not exclusively, from *Measure for Measure*. Folded deeper into the adaptation are reprises of two other textual bodies, Ovid's myth of Pygmalion and *Frankenstein*, that further intensify *Isabella's* turn toward the personal effects of artistic creation. Ovid's account of the Pygmalion myth tells us of a man who, "horrified" by the countless vices of women, "lived celibate and long / Lacked the companionship of married love" (Ovid 1998, 232). His solitude continues until he carves an ivory statue of a beautiful woman. "With marvellous triumphant artistry," Pygmalion invents a lovely figure, and "His masterwork / Fired him with love" (232). On her festival day, Venus favors Pygmalion's supplications and allows his kisses to warm and soften the cold stone of his statue-mistress:

Again he kissed her and with marvelling touch
 Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
 Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing,
 And yielded to his hands, as in the sun
 Wax of Hymettus softens and is shaped

By practiced fingers into many forms,
 And usefulness acquires by being used.
 His heart was torn with wonder and misgiving
 Delight and terror that it was not true! (233-34)

As Pygmalion's hands bring his beloved into being, so the mortician's touch shapes a corpse into Isabella.⁶ Her nudity and stiffness reiterate Pygmalion's materials; the staging of the kiss at the end of the play completes the allusion. While Pygmalion achieves a kind of absolute creation, which arguably extends the misogyny of his former years, the mortician discovers that, in spite of his desire and effort, he creates only a fitful version of an autonomous subject, one that teeters somewhere between life and death.

The ghostly presence of *Frankenstein* also complicates the play's concept of invention, which threatens to spin out of control and produce unintended consequences. Almost as soon as the mortician animates his corpses, he struggles to keep them on task, and though he has assigned them parts, they do not stick automatically to the script. In Scene 5, when Lucio approaches Isabella to inform her of her brother's imprisonment and to relate Claudio's plea for her intercession, Lucio pulls the sheet off of Isabella's body and starts to walk away, rather than engage in the necessary conversation. The mortician must whisper his instructions quickly in order to refocus Lucio: "No, you have to come back here and talk to her. 'Hail virgin . . .'" (Scene 5.6-7). In the midst of the mortician's frustration after the telephone call that interrupts his play, the corpses foil his attempt to shut the production down. As mentioned above, he mutters that he needs to get back to work and dismisses Claudio's efforts to follow, or to catch up to, Juliet entering and exiting the stage: "And you'll never see her ever again" (Scene 6.3), he says. Yet Claudio and Juliet continue to cycle on and off the stage, heedless of the mortician's waffling imagination as he tries momentarily to suppress it.

The corpses continue to work against the invention of the mortician, and their resistance gains momentum as they go along. By Scene 12, on the cusp of the bed-trick, Lucio manages to maneuver the mortician onto a gurney and shove him into the fridge. The bodies onstage perform a courtly dance, bobbing and nodding to one another in a circle. Twice the mortician peeps his head out of the fridge, trying to escape so that he can at least watch what he has set in motion, if not intervene, and twice he is pushed back in. Soon after, the shadow of potentially monstrous offspring looms over the mortician as he (playing Barnardine) lies on a gurney beneath Juliet and Lucio, who "menac[e] [him] with forceps, clamps, and scalpel" (Scene 15, stage directions between 15-16). In this oblique allusion to the dangers of artistic *and* scientific invention that cannot fully

comprehend its outcomes via the Frankenstein archetype (a good reminder of a way in which disciplines overlap), the audience realizes that while the mortician initially asserted his control by inventing the scene before us, he is also susceptible to the desires of the invented. The mortician realizes the same and signals his awareness shortly before the ensemble begins to dance by taking off his clothes and joining the corpses in their nudity and vulnerability. Our (mis)understanding of bodies as subjects and/or objects is further confounded by a Romantic insistence on spiritual immanence in physical entities that are introduced by the Frankenstein association. The mortician, like Mary Shelley's narrator, cannot see neither what he is getting himself into (nor whom) when he pillages the dead for creative raw materials.

Isabella's ambivalence towards invention, which can prove both magical and menacing, retains the moral ambiguities of *Measure for Measure* while translating them from the social to the artistic realm. This begs an obvious, if simplistic, question: If we interpret the Duke as an irresponsible governor, an argument I usually find persuasive, do we also consider the mortician an irresponsible inventor? Certainly the pathos, if not the torment, shared amongst the ensemble could not be more evident than in their double consciousness. When Juliet appears in Scene 3, she stumbles across the stage, steps into the trash can, and pulls a long string of cotton out of her mouth. We see, in a blur, the stitches running down her belly and wonder how she was hurt and how repaired. Through the costume of scars and her compulsive choreography, Juliet's body suggests a story that cannot otherwise be articulated. In Scene 6, called "Ships in the Night," Juliet repeats these steps (she enters, steps into the trash can, and pulls out the cotton) three times. In each repetition, she just misses Claudio's body as she trips from down stage right towards the trash can on the opposite side. Their physical awkwardness represents the ill-fitting situations in which they find themselves: pregnant and unmarried, dead and beckoned into life, lovers reaching for an embrace that will be censured. The paradox of living-death registers again when Isabella declares: "I am / At war 'twixt will and will not" (Scene 7.33-34); we wonder, yet again, whether the pleasure of Isabella's resurrection balances its discomforts against the punishment of its anticipated loss, when she, inhabiting Claudio's words, cries out after the energetic, "warm motion" of the dance:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
'Tis too horrible! (Scene 13.50-56)

In a vivid gesture of empathy, Claudio echoes his sister's feelings before congealing back into an unfeeling body:

The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death. (Scene 17.22-25)

These speeches ask us to consider what balance we are willing to strike between the pleasures of sensual experience and their eventual, unavoidable loss. More to the point, those who invoke a story and shape a body must consider the extent to which their inventions acquire and lose lives of their own, and the toll that ins- and ex-piration takes on inventors and inventions that circulate through their subjectivity and objectivity. We must consider these tolls *especially* when our inventions are other people.

In my description of what happens in the course of the *Pig Iron* production in both a concrete, visceral way and in a more critical way, I have prioritized *Isabella's* turn toward the ethics of aesthetic creation and of imagining the lives of others, others who may find modes of resisting even our dreams. Characterizing this as a turn away from the political depends on using interpretations of *Measure*, such as that by Marowitz, as the foil, instead of other more comedic — or simply less indicting — versions. This is not to say, however, that our inventions do not acquire political dimensions. Indeed, once I started to think seriously about this play's treatment of bodies, I wondered whether I was not making a mistake in not writing a more explicitly feminist critique. Between the legend of Pygmalion and *Isabella* hovers a long aesthetic tradition of conventionally male desire turned towards the fabricated, cold, statuesque bodies of beloveds who are gendered female. While the mortician invents several male characters from the materials available to him, it is, after all, his desire to create a woman that initiates the fantastic adventure. When Lucio approaches Isabella to tell the news of her brother's imprisonment and the crime for which he stands to be executed, she thinks that Lucio must be lying and objects: "Sir, make me not your story" (Scene 5.21). Isabella's protest is also appropriate, if inadvertently, in response to her usage in the morgue. When the mortician projects an identity onto the supposedly blank screen of a female corpse and ignores the history it already possesses (as in Juliet's unintelligible cotton-mouth), does this not recapitulate the gendered violence perpetrated by *Measure's* Duke while also alluding generally to political imperialisms that erase histories out of self-interest? Under what circumstances might use of a body as an object actually destroy its ability to (re)move itself into

various subject positions? Does the turn towards the work of the imagination paradoxically turn back to the polemic of other contemporary *Measure* interpretations?

I share these questions in order to illustrate my suggestion that the Pig Iron play relates to politics by way of contiguous removes. On the level of real-time, audience-member reception and in the construction of the script, I maintain the thread of this review: *Isabella* raises mostly phenomenological questions about invention and the desires and risks it entails. As reception spins out into our political and social lives, however, we may tease out these questions from *Isabella* and apply them to other areas of public discourse — in relation, for example, to problems of gendered and raced bodies, and those defined as political aliens or enemy bodies, in which case issues of responsibility and power may appear differently.

Discussing *Measure for Measure*, Mary Ellen Lamb suggests that the play's performativity allows its characters to learn empathy by forcing them to inhabit roles they would not assume for themselves, while evacuating stable identities and concrete consequences from their performances. Its ambivalence toward "theatrics" pushes us to the realization that *Measure* "has created for us the hermeneutical uncertainty that is experienced by the characters themselves" (Lamb 1998, 142). In a similarly ambivalent manner, the Pig Iron play closes with the mortician sitting down to eat his leftovers, after which he will apparently return to work as usual. But *Isabella*'s constitutional patchwork presses the issue, figuring the corpses' hard-to-define status and my own mystified, mixed reaction: What has been made to happen? What are these bodies? How should I respond?

Notes

1. *Isabella* is an original performance work, created and developed by Pig Iron Theatre Company. Suli Holum and Dan Rothenberg assembled the script. Many thanks to Quinn Bauriedel, Co-Artistic Director, and Sarah Chandler, Production Manager, for their friendly responses to my inquiries and especially for granting me access to the script.
2. Director Dan Rothenberg expresses online his early preference for the title *Isabella Pygmalion Frankenstein* in "Notes on the Making of *Isabella*" (Rotherberg 2007). This cue helped me fully register *Isabella*'s implicit relationship to these other texts. Regarding the designation "problem play" for generically troublesome scripts, David Bevington offers this brief enumeration:

The plays to which [Shakespeare] next turned [in the years around 1600-1604] have generally been grouped together by modern scholars (since the late nineteenth century) as the "problem plays." The list of such plays varies to an extent, sometimes including *Hamlet*, especially since it was written about the same time. The plays most commonly

regarded as problem plays are *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. (Bevington 2007, 105)

3. The quotation is from *Measure for Measure*, 4.1.4 (Shakespeare 1998). Pig Iron's script begins with "Scene 0," in which the mortician speaks this and one other line: "No sir. No sir. Can't have this." Establishing the *Measure for Measure* *mise-en-scène* is literally the play's ground zero, the necessary starting point on which the rest depends. *Isabella* is not divided into acts; it continues straight through without intermission from Scene 0 to 18.
4. Bevington catalogues the performances that he deems representative of production trends (113-17). For a more comprehensive listing, see S. Nagarajan's "*Measure for Measure* on Stage and Screen," in *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare 1998), 180-211).
5. In the September 20 entry of "The *Measure* Log," Marowitz indicates that he followed George Whetstone's 1578 *Promos and Cassandra* (also Shakespeare's primary source play), which includes actual intercourse between Angelo and Isabella (Marowitz 2000b, 6).
6. I was able to make this connection after reading Susan Stewart's chapter, "Facing, Touch, and Vertigo," in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002). Stewart briefly recalls Pygmalion's story in order to emphasize the role of touch in what she interprets as a mutual transformation: "Pygmalion must touch in order to be touched, must move in order to be moved" (Stewart 2002, 170).

Online Resources

Interview with Pig Iron Theatre Company. 2007. Radio Times with Mary Moss-Coane. 30 August. Available online at: <http://www.podcastdirectory.com/podshows/1845995> [cited 16 April 2009].

Pig Iron Theatre Company Website. Available online at <http://www.pigiron.org/productions/isabella> [cited 16 April 2009].

Permissions

Charles Conwell as Mortician/Duke. Photo credit J. J. Tiziou / www.jjtiziou.net.

Scene 18. Photo credit copyright 2007 Pig Iron Theatre Company.

Angelo and Claudio. Photo credit copyright 2007 Pig Iron Theatre Company.

References

- Bevington, David. 2007. *This Wide and Universal Theater: Shakespeare in Performance Then and Now*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Isabella*. 2007. Assembled by Suli Holum and Dan Rothenberg, in collaboration with Pig Iron Theatre Company. Director Dan Rothenberg. Performers Pig Iron Theatre Company. ICE BOX Projects Space, Philadelphia. 31 August - 15 September.
- Lamb, Mary Ellen. 1988. "Shakespeare's 'Theatrics': Ambivalence toward Theater in *Measure for Measure*." *Shakespeare Studies* 20: 129-46.
- Marowitz, Charles. 2000a. "The *Measure Log*." *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship* 18.4 (Fall): 5-7.
- Marowitz, Charles. 2000b. "The Making of Variations on *Measure for Measure*." *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship* 18.2 (Spring): 5-8.
- Ovid. 1998. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by A. D. Melville. Edited by E. J. Kenney. 1986; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rothenberg, Dan. 2007. "Notes on the Making of *Isabella*." Blog posting. August. Available online at: <http://blogs.phillynews.com/inquirer/pigiron/> [cited 16 April 2009].
- Shakespeare, William. 1998. *Measure for Measure*. Edited by S. Nagarajan. New York: Signet Classic.
- Stewart, Susan. 2002. *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yaeger, Patricia. 2007. "Editor's Column: The Polyphony Issue." *PMLA* 122.2 (March): 433-48.