

FOUL WHISPERINGS, STRANGE MATTERS

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Shakespeare's Macbeth in Second Life

FOUL WHISPERINGS, STRANGE MATTERS brings Shakespeare's world renowned and extraordinarily influential play Macbeth into a virtual worlds environment. This is an appropriate, timely use of pop culture as an adaptive bridge between classic texts and new media technology. The poetic use of metaphor, image and symbol that permeate Shakespeare's language is brought to 3D life using the online world as a discursive design space where visitors experience the motivations and emotional journey of character, and explore and make personal sense of the universal themes of Shakespeare. In *Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters* a prelude at the arrival grove sets the tone for the visitors' exploration of seven scenes depicting Macbeth's journey. Visitors engage with the participatory potential of Second Life to remake, co-create and mash-up Shakespeare. *Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters'* inworld roleplay studios enable visitors to take part in group play and workshops that are exploratory, spontaneous and performative. A virtual world is a flexible, living, real time environment where things can change, appear and disappear and visitors can interact with real agency. *Foul Whisperings* is a fabulous cutting edge example of the potential of online media to breath life into old texts, taking classic narratives to new realms of possibility with diverse, unexpected and educational outcomes - off the page onto the virtual stage!

A collaboration by Kate Richards, Kerreen Ely Harper & Angela Thomas.

SLURL: <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Macbeth/43/50/54/>

WIKI: <http://virtualmacbeth.wikispaces.com/>

Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters is

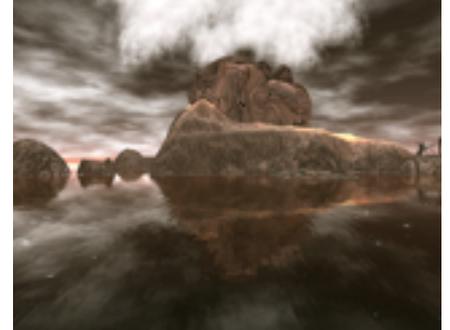
- created in Second Life 2008
- for young and old audiences
- rigorous enough to appeal to thespians and Shakespeare buffs
- freeform and guided exploration
- participatory activities such as directed role play, machinima production, user generated content
- suitable for tertiary education markets
- an excellent companion piece for cross-platform projects
- accompanied by an educationally orientated wiki



The Witches' islet



The Maze



The island

Island description

Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters is a "mind walk" through the character of Macbeth's. The main structure of the Second Life island is a huge 3D head lying on it's side, so that the visitor is 'inside Macbeth's head' - the interior comprises an Escher-esque Throne Room (Macbeth's will-to-power); a cross roads guarded by one of the best known Macbeth characters the Porter, representing Macbeth's fundamental choice and moral/spiritual dilemma; a Path of Enlightenment, seemingly unappetising but leading ultimately to a space of knowledge; a Path of Temptation, gorgeous and attractive at its outset, but degenerating into a visceral, haunted and horror-filled journey to the abyss. The head also contains a Chamber of Blood, where visitors lose control of their avatar (SL digital puppet) and in a frenzy of blood lust, have no choice but to relentlessly slash away at ever-reconstituted ghosts. There is a maze of tree-like columns

(The Woods of Dunsinane), representing Macbeth's intellectual and emotional confusion and impending doom, where visitors must negotiate their way to escape. The Cube of Nothingness is a non-cartesian space; visitors lose their head in a final experience akin to Macbeth's death and most abject moments. Other spatial elements are a rocky headland, with an animated wormhole where the witches are heard; a landing grove of ruins, teleports to the main scenes and introduction and help functions; an exhilarating ride on a raven; an islet with many interactive objects that enable visitors to connect our narrative treatment with the original text, analysis, ideas about Shakespeare's creative processes and a series of tasks, calls to action and frameworks for understanding and engaging with adaptation; and 3 floating 'stages' with moveable, pictorial backdrops, lighting presets, audience seating and mobile stages that can easily be dressed and added too.

Macbeth himself doesn't appear in our adaptation. Instead, the visitor's navigation through the island is itself a metaphoric exploration of Macbeth's consciousness, enhanced by interacting with many objects, experiencing the emotional impact, and engaging with a visual and vocal cast of spirits, characters and animals from the play. Lady Macbeth is explored through a wunderkammer of her favourite objects, enabling us to convey several backstory elements. Our adaptation includes layered use of the original text. Animated text from the play appears in several scenes; actors perform sections of the text; interactive 'book' icons dotted around the island lead visitors to sections of the play, to the whole play, and to analytic exercises to engage with the text on a deeper level. We paid particular attention to the in-world sound design, pushing many SL boundaries in the process and creating a rich, interactive and memorable soundscape, including voice overs by professional actors.

Aspects that are particularly appropriate for education

There are numerous interactive and design elements of the island that are appropriate for educationalists.

The free floating stages

These 3 stages that float above the island, are fully equipped for work and play.

They have rotatable sets (each one is slightly different) that can be dressed or modified as needed. They have pre-installed lighting presets that can be modified by designers - the presets are accessed via a lighting control panel behind the set. The backdrops can be fully retracted or used to surround the stage, and these can be replaced with pictorial backdrops. There is raked seating, video screens and props boxes on each stage.

Macbeth 'book' icons

Scattered around the island, these book icons open up to text boxes that we have populated with scene analysis, 'calls to action' and hyperlinks to the www. The content and position of the books are easily changed, so that they can be used - in workshops or performance - to provide another layer of meaning or prompts for improvisation or points for discussion.

3d models and world lighting

The Macbeth island - like all Second Life - can be remodelled and redressed so that designers and directors can play with various moods, interpretations and 'look and feel'. The island can easily be lighted for various times of day/night - again providing a very versatile environment for performance or shooting of machinimas (which are edited as per standard video).

User-generated content

We have created several opportunities in the world for visitors/performers/designers to add their own content, eg adding props, adding images to the Throne Room, adopting wardrobe. This facility can be used in workshops, in performance and during design to modify the island and facilitate interactivity.

Animated texts

Throughout the island there are animated texts in the form of miasma, snaking vines and smoke. These act as provocations for actors and visitors, and connect the 3d world to the original text.

Sound design

The sound design is very sophisticated, with characters and ghosts voiced by professional actors. The complex sound design comprises atmospheric, musical and vocal components. Sounds are triggered by 'time', by the proximity of avatars and randomly. But this is only a start - and discrete parts of the sound design can be muted as required for workshops and performances. New sound (actors voice, effects and voice-as-text) can be added as required and to explore the potentials of sound/text in virtual world performance.

wiki

As part of the project we have created a 'wiki' - an editable, online space where Bell participants can add comments, production notes, stills and machinimas. Parts of the wiki are open to the public (there are hundreds of photos uploaded by visitors to the island already) and others are password protected, ensuring that it is a safe and confidential resource for specific projects. The wiki is a great place to brainstorm and capture ideas, link to other resources and keep people informed.



The island



The island showing the 'head' structure



The island, the head with throne room



The Arrival Grove



The Arrival Grove



The Arrival Grove with winged visitor



The Arrival Grove showing text



The Arrival Grove at dusk



The Throne Room



The Throne Room



The ghosts in the Throne Room



Lady Macbeth's wunderkammer with animation



Animated blood in the Throne Room



The porter and the Path of Temptation



Path of Temptation with animated text



Path of Temptation



Killing lust in the Chamber of Blood



Ghosts and past atrocities



The Maze



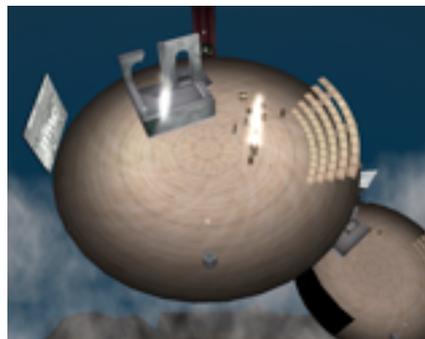
The Maze



Non cartesian space and the 'object' in the Cube of Nothingness



The stages: mobile sets that can be dressed. The backdrop is mobile and can be replaced with an image



There are lighting presets, raked seating and video screens



Flight of the Raven

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A collaboration by Kate Richards, Kerreen Ely-Harper and Angela Thomas from an original idea by Kerreen Ely-Harper.

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This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Initial stages of this project were mentored and developed through the Laboratory for Advanced Media Production (LAMP) at Australian Film TV and Radio School (AFTRS).

This project has been funded and built by the New Media Consortium

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