

**A report from the front lines by a fellow adventurer,
offering a unique glimpse into the ongoing process of Makbet**

Last night I took part in Dzieci's *Makbet* rehearsal. We were working on the special choral singing the group uses to explore the change from one scene to another in their improvisations on Shakespeare's tragedy. I am cast in the double role of privileged observer and clumsy participant; as an observer I am witness to the birth of the most searching renditions of speeches I have read and heard all my life; as a participant I am continually faced with the emptiness of my contributions. I sing and say some lines when I'm prompted but I'm terribly clumsy. Each player knows the script by heart; I know a handful of chestnuts. Each can take up any part on the spur of the moment and fill it out freshly. I don't know the lines. I don't know the drill. I don't know how to speak or sing a note. Though I throw myself into a scene with every last ounce of my energy, the sounds and gestures I make are empty. Something other than shouting and muscular effort is called for, and I can't find what that is.

For example, one Dzieci player says some lines and another corrects him: "Never, ever, say your lines with your hands hanging down. Put yourself off balance and see what happens." We all begin singing again and the actor starts to tip and stumble around the inside of the circle we make. He says a line, almost falls, catches himself and says a second line, as he veers off precipitously in a new direction. The effect is stunning. I am hanging on his words, falling with him, and catching myself up. When one of the Dziecis starts, "Is this a dagger...?" she has entered a dream space so compelling that I hold

myself hushed for fear of breaking the spell. Another player does, “Come seeling night,” and, “She should have died hereafter...” with a concentrated fury that is in perfect counterpoint to the accompanying voices. A little magic is occurring; I can hear the transcendent sound of Shakespeare’s music.

Hours later I wake in the night from a dream of magic: A Dzieci player instructs me. He has come with gifts, his arms overflowing with an alphabet of gestures. He hands me a huge A, a B, a C; “Make these perfectly empty before you attempt to use them.” When I go back to sleep, I dream of emptiness, the spaces between the letters, the hollow in my ear, the void that separates my hands. Emptiness, it seems, forgives (to paraphrase Auden) everyone by whom it lives.

There is emptiness and emptiness. One’s clumsy-empty because it’s full; the other emptiness is pregnant, because it’s been skillfully hatched, like an egg.

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