

THE PERFORMANCE OF THE *TALE OF SAWNEY BEANE* AT THE TEXAS  
RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The research presented here explores how authentic performances are created and experienced by performers by answering the following questions: (1) What performance methods are used at renaissance festivals and why are these methods chosen? (2) How do performers use these performance methods to engage themselves with history and develop personal meaning through their performances? (3) How do performers combine historical representation with self-expression? (4) How does the performance of *Sawney Beane* connect to general renaissance festival performance methods and festival culture? (5) How does the performance of *Sawney Beane* allow performers to engage with history and personal meaning? Through participant observation and informal interviews, the research presented here explores the performance methods used at the Texas Renaissance Festival and how these performance methods allow participants to engage authentically with the past, with themselves, and with each other. Comparisons are made between general renaissance performance methods and those used in the performance of *Sawney Beane*, revealing the connections between these performances and the subculture that permeates the festival. By focusing on the performers' own views about their participation in these performances, the methods used here elucidate the personal benefits of participating in the renaissance festival.

The primary performance methods used at renaissance festivals developed out of those used at living history museums and include immersive theater environment,

audience participation, improvisation, and second-person performances. These methods work together to encourage visitors to engage personally with history by becoming physically involved in performances. While second-person performances have a limited use at living history museums, they are very prevalent at renaissance festivals, where visitors are encouraged to wear costumes and portray characters. It is argued here that this prevalence is mainly due to loosened restrictions on historical accuracy that allow participants to create second-person performances that are both personally meaningful and allow for engagement with history and community. Using the concept of embodied memorials, this research concludes that through the use of physical performances, these renaissance festival performers are able to personally engage with history and with each other in ways that allow for self-expression and define their community.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Barbara Parten Massengale and in memory of my father, Randall James Massengale.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

“In 2007, there were only two weekends when a renaissance festival was not scheduled to take place somewhere in America” (Gravois 2007). Renaissance festivals have become increasingly popular and more abundant since the first one, the Renaissance Pleasure Faire, took place in California in the 1960s (Blazer 1976). Despite this, very little research has been conducted to explain the prevalence of renaissance festivals in America. To date, only a handful of scholarly works have been published that focus directly on renaissance festivals (e.g., Kim 2005; Korol-Evans 2010; Moore 1997; Rubin 2012). These works have emphasized tourist or patron experience, levels of participation by performers and patrons, and the countercultural aspects of the festivals. My research attempts a deeper understanding of participants’ sense of how authentic personal engagement and meaning is created through the use of the performance methods encouraged at the festival. Renaissance festivals combine the focus on historical reenactment of living history museums or civil war reenactments with the festival atmosphere of a carnival or fair, creating a space that allows flexibility in historical representations. Most renaissance festivals also portray a mixture of medieval and renaissance themes, based on modern interpretations of both historical knowledge of these periods and their literature and folklore. How does this flexibility encourage participants to create characters and performances that allow them to engage personally with history and their own identities and communities?

Like living history museums, renaissance festivals re-create an historical period through performance; at both living history museums and renaissance festivals, employees wear period costumes, affect period speech, and portray characters from an historical period. They interact with visitors while in character, on a re-created historically accurate immersive stage environment. The combination of methods they use in their performances affects how they present the past to visitors and how visitors interpret the past. Recent scholarship on living history performance has attempted to explain why and how modern people choose to re-create the past in the present. Most of this research has focused on the evolution of performance methods designed to engage visitors more fully with the past in a museum context (Snow 1993; Magelsson 2004; Anderson 1991). Based on the results of a review of this research, Magelssen (2007) has determined that second-person performance methods are the only performances that allow visitors as well as performers to engage authentically with the past.

My preliminary research indicated that second-person performance methods—the active, physical performances of visitors—may be even more prevalent at renaissance festivals than they are at living history museums. In fact, since the 1960s, renaissance festivals have offered visitors an environment of loosened restrictions on historical accuracy that is designed to allow more second-person performances. All of the performance methods used, including immersive theater, improvisation, audience participation, and second-person performance, are designed to personally engage visitors and performers in the history being performed, allowing them both a voice in the

interpretation of history and an opportunity to more fully experience that history in a personal way.

Performers also use these methods to engage themselves with history, personal identity, and the festival culture through both their general festival performances and through performances that are created and performed for themselves and each other. The performance of a particular legend, the *Tale of Sawney Beane*, has this impact for one group of performers at the Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF). The performance of *Sawney Beane* began as practice in these methods but evolved into a personal expression of grief, love, and community through an annual storytelling event. For more than 20 years, these performers have continued a tradition that provides for personal expression, celebrates their community, and expresses the meaning they see in their participation in the renaissance festival.

### Renaissance Festival Culture

As renaissance festivals have grown and changed over the decades since the first one opened, a new subculture has formed. Here I will provide a brief description of some aspects of this culture, without attempting a full ethnography. An understanding of the values and norms of renaissance festival culture will be useful in understanding the analysis in later chapters. The main aspects discussed here are the foundation of renaissance festival culture in the carnivalesque, the shared values and cultural patterns, and the concept of 'faire family.' The unique culture of renaissance festivals developed out of the counterculture movements of the 1960s, and the emphases on accepting

difference and a relaxed enjoyment of life are some of the reasons people are attracted to them.

### The Carnavalesque Festival Environment

The Texas Renaissance Festival is first and foremost a festival, and much of its culture lies in debauchery and humor. Bahktin's (1984[1965]) concept of the carnivalesque, which describes the intensification of decadent behavior in such an environment as a festival, is useful here, as is Turner's description of liminal space as providing license to behave in such ways. The festival becomes a place where people can feel outside of normal society and delve into self-expression without consequence. Patrons participate in exaggerations in costuming and excessive consumption of food and alcoholic beverages. The anonymity of costuming allows participants to behave in ways they likely would not outside of the festival both by providing disguise and by encouraging blame to fall on the character rather than the performer. Although the paid festival performers are at work and cannot participate in some of this during the day, many make up for that at night while staying with other performers in the campgrounds. Because the festival only lasts 8 weekend of the year, celebrating the festival season and seeing old friends are often excuses for indulgent behavior.

The carnivalesque underlies everything at the festival, including performances. Performers are expected to be over the top and raunchy themes proliferate. An example of the carnivalesque discussed in this dissertation is the use of cannibalism as a theme of performances. The participants in this study do not advocate cannibalism in everyday

life, of course; however, they get enjoyment out of pretending to advocate it within the festival setting. It's horrific and taboo nature becomes funnier and more exciting the more shocked reactions it receives. The participants enjoy taking part in performances that challenge modern sensibilities while reaffirming their own identities as rare and divergent individuals.

### Shared Culture

All of the renaissance festivals in the U.S. have a shared history and development that has led to a shared culture. A tradition of circuit workers who travel from faire to faire throughout the year helps to solidify this culture, as does the prevalence of participants traveling to faires in nearby states. There are some regional differences, for example camping creates a unifying atmosphere at TRF since the participants share living space for several days a week each season, but not all faires provide camping space.

Renaissance festival performers learn a shared language, both jargon used among each other and an affected speech taught to them by the festival to be used in their performances. This language is, of course, not the actual language of Medieval or Renaissance England, since festival patrons would not be able to understand them.

Instead, it is a created language designed to sound like Middle English to the casual observer. It creates a sense of the real thing despite shared knowledge that it is pretend.

At the Scarborough Faire renaissance festival near Dallas, Texas, performers are given a CD to help them learn "period speech," that provides suggestions such as "never use one word when five will do." The CD also instructs performers when it is appropriate to use

thee versus thou and words such as milady and milord. Patterns and styles of costuming and dress have developed that can be seen at festivals across the country. Rather than a strict requirement for authentic period clothing, the loosened restrictions at renaissance festivals have led to styles and trends that are unique to renaissance festivals, such as corset styles and wearing fox tails. Of course, the fabrics worn are also modern but tend to be the same throughout the festivals.

One of the most important aspects of a shared culture is a sense of shared values. Among renaissance festival participants, included among these values are nonconformity, self-expression, humor, and unconventional family ties. The carnivalesque nature of the festival attracts those who like to express themselves in ways that might get them in trouble in everyday life. Whatever trait makes a person different can be celebrated at the festival, whether it is an alternative religion, such as Paganism, or an alternative lifestyle, such as transvestitism, or an alternative hobby, such as cosplay, the use of costuming to play characters from science fiction and fantasy genres. Renaissance festivals create a safe space to play with self-expression, and the varieties of expression increase every year. Although some purists may argue that these types of expression decrease the historical accuracy of the festival, most participants seem to accept it as an integral part of the renaissance festival environment. These sorts of self-expression are almost always light-hearted, and the humor of the renaissance festival is essential to creating the entertaining atmosphere that draws in paying customers. The unexpected and outrageous characters and performances have come to define renaissance festivals.

## Faire Family

When I first began to investigate the idea of conducting ethnographic research at the renaissance festival, I was told by one participant that no one would talk to me because I would be considered an outsider. The participants' penchant for nonconformity can make them feel like outsiders in everyday life, and they become protective of their lives and each other. Most people who enter a renaissance festival environment for the first time can sense the depth of possible immersion into the culture of the festival. Those who choose to attempt to immerse themselves in this culture are often confronted with the closeness and closed-off-ness of the community. Often a guide or friend is needed to teach you the ropes, or a job can be obtained on site, which is a common method of coming into the group. I required a guide to introduce me in the campgrounds and on site, and to vouch for me. I found myself reassuring participants that I was not interested in any activities that did not relate to my research and would not use their names if they asked me not to. After several seasons of camping with the performers, they came to trust me and accept me into their group.

The performers generally form smaller groups, those they work closely with or camp with, and often refer to these groups as their "faire family." They live, eat, work, and relax together throughout the faire season. They develop close bonds even though many only see each other during the festival season, and they use the season to celebrate together. The participants in this research study camp together every year. Although they work in different areas of the festival, including as performers, musicians, and bartenders, they relax and eat together, share responsibilities for building and

maintaining their campsite, and organize events for celebrating their involvement in the festival and their connection with each other.

Despite the closeness of smaller groups, there is some rivalry between groups within the renaissance festival community. I witnessed a discussion among a group of participants who argued about the definition of the term “rennie.” While the general public might consider anyone who worked at or regularly attended renaissance festivals to be a rennie, those who do regularly participate see much more defined subsections of participants, though they may not agree on the labels or qualifications for these subsections. Some see all costumed participants as rennies, since they are dedicated enough to design costumes and characters and to spend money and time at the festival. Other argue that paid performers are the rennies, since they show more dedication, however, to others, both of these groups are considered “weekenders,” a word that is used to accentuate their lack of dedication or the temporary nature of their involvement. One participant in this research argued that “real rennies” are those who work the circuit, spending all year traveling to and working at festivals. The perceived dedication of a participant to the renaissance festival culture is judged differently by everyone, but the high value placed on dedication shows that participants are wary of phonies and outsiders and take their participation very seriously. Their participation in renaissance festivals is a large part of their personal identities, and all participants care greatly for their festival experiences and see a lot of meaning in their participation.

## Research Questions

This research takes a broad anthropological, yet interdisciplinary, approach to understanding the cultural phenomenon of renaissance festivals through the experience of one group of performers. In particular, the literature review brings together a tourism studies approach to authenticity, a performance studies approach to performance methods, and a folkloristic approach to understanding festival behavior and the performance of legends. The literature review also provides a history of how renaissance performance methods evolved, while the analysis chapters explore how performers understand and use these methods in their festival performances. Beginning with an examination of the performance methods used at renaissance festivals, the research then focuses on a particular performance of the legend of *Sawney Beane* and how this performance relates to general festival performance and to TRF festival culture.

To gain insight into the participants' use of performance methods, the following research questions are explored:

- (1) What performance methods are used at TRF and why were these methods chosen?
- (2) How do performers use these performance methods to engage themselves with history and develop personal meaning?
- (3) How do performers combine historical representation with self-expression?
- (4) How does the performance of *Sawney Beane* connect to general renaissance festival performance methods and festival culture?
- (5) How does the performance of *Sawney Beane* allow performers to engage with history and personal meaning?

## Outline of the Dissertation

Following this introduction, Chapter II provides a literature review that places renaissance festivals within the context of folklore scholarship on modern festivals and traces the development of historical re-enactment performance methods. The literature review also introduces the legend of *Sawney Beane*, its historical context, and the folklore scholarship that provides modern understandings of the legend. Chapter III outlines the methodological approach taken in this research and the research design. Chapter IV begins the analysis of the performance methods generally used at the Texas Renaissance Festival and explores how performers use these methods to engage patrons and to express their own identities. Chapter V analyzes how these performance methods are used in the performance of *Sawney Beane* and attempts to reveal *Sawney Beane*'s connections to and entrenchment in the general TRF culture. Chapter VI explores the personal engagement of the performers in the performance of *Sawney Beane* and how they use the performance to embody and express their sense of community and grief at the loss of a community member. Chapter VII attempts to connect the analyses in previous three chapters and to provide conclusions to the research questions.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical re-enactment is the performed representation of an historical time period, event, or individual. Historical accuracy is defined as the extent to which representations resemble what is being represented. Bruner (1994) defines this type of authenticity as verisimilitude, or likeness to truth. He argues that modern tourists at living history museums determine their own sense of accuracy and authenticity. Recent tourism literature has also taken a postmodern view of authenticity that reflects Bruner's argument; authenticity is now defined from the point of view of the viewer. Authenticity, then, can be defined as genuine subjective experience of a phenomenon as real, including re-creations and representation. Performance can allow authentic engagement, which is defined here as a personal feeling of understanding and inclusion caused by physical and mental experience. This literature review reveals that renaissance festival performances represent authentic engagement with both history and personal identity.

#### Folk Festivals

Renaissance festivals function as both historical re-enactments and modern festivals. Stoeltje (1983) defines folk festivals as community events that express meaningful traditions for the group and are conducted by and for members of the community. Most modern American festivals are commercial ventures, including music festivals, arts and crafts festivals, and cultural festivals. Although renaissance festivals

are attempts to re-create a medieval or renaissance era festival, they function as modern festivals in modern society. Several authors discuss the differences between traditional festivals and those of modern, industrialized societies (Turner 1974; Abrahams 1982). Abrahams (1982) discusses modern festivals and the new meanings they have taken on since industrialization. He argues that it is necessary to understand how contemporary festivals have emerged from older traditions in order to understand festival behavior. Turner (1974) describes these differences and argues for the use of the term “liminoid” to refer to the metaphorical liminality in the festivals of industrialized societies. Festivals provide a liminoid space outside of regular society in which visitors are given social license to behave in ways that may not be appropriate in everyday life. Within this liminoid space, festival participants contribute to the carnivalesque atmosphere of the festival through socially deviant behavior, inversion and intensification. Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as the use of humor and chaos to subvert the dominance of societal rules (Bakhtin 1965). Babcock argues that inversion allows people to escape the normative, ordered world, but also allows them to define its limits and recognize its arbitrary nature (Babcock 1978). Turner has argued that inversion can play a role in creating *communitas*, a feeling of community spirit and solidarity, by allowing people to explore parts of their identities that are not considered normal in the “real world.” Intensification of ordinary behaviors often leads to social deviancy. The festival creates an environment in which people are encouraged to begin drinking alcohol as early as 9:00am, wear outrageous clothing, and eat high-calorie, fatty foods such as turkey legs and fried food on a stick. By letting people blow off some of the stress of keeping these

aspects of themselves secret or understated, festivals are seen as spaces that reinforce society by allowing people to escape it temporarily (Turner 1978). Abrahams and Bauman argue that this steam-valve theory cannot fully explain people's desire to invert social norms, since disorder and social license also occur in normal society. They argue that those people who participate in inversion in everyday life will intensify their normal social deviancy during a festival. However, renaissance festivals are wide-spread, well-attended events during which large numbers of people behave in ways that would be considered outside the norm, and not all of these people are social deviants. As a modern festival, the Texas Renaissance Festival provides a space for liminoid behavior, including inversion, intensification, allowing participants to explore both history and their personal identities, often under the guise of character performance. These performances can create a sense of *communitas* among regular festival participants, many of whom see the festival as their real home and haven away from daily life.

### Re-creating History

Why do we feel the need to re-create the past? Lowenthal (1985) discusses the goals people have for wanting to visit the past. Some hope to gain knowledge that will help them interpret and explain the past; these people might be history buffs or people wanting a better understanding of their own heritage. Western culture views time and history as linear, with everything that has happened through history having an accumulative effect on the present, on our own identities and views of our heritage. Often, a quest for the past is in reality a quest to understand the present. The second goal

of visiting the past listed by Lowenthal is to find a time that was better than present conditions, a purer, and simpler, past. These people usually focus on the changes that have occurred in society and the environment since the Industrial Revolution, and see these changes as detrimental to human life and society. Another group of people see this progress as positive and inevitable; their desire to visit the past is motivated by a need to reinforce the idea that in comparison to their own lives, people in the past had a hard existence. The final goal Lowenthal states for people wanting to visit the past is a desire to change the past. Although they cannot literally change past events, as Bruner (1994) states in his article on the New Salem living history museum, visitors contribute to the interpretation of historic sites, and these interpretations can affect official versions of history. These sites have to draw in visitors to continue functioning or to earn a profit, and these economic motives can cause them to portray history in ways that attract the most visitors.

In his well-cited book on nostalgia, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, Davis (1979) discusses how this word developed its modern meaning around the turn of the 20th century. Especially in America, nostalgia has come to mean a romantic feeling of the past when compared with the present. Davis argues that nostalgia can only be felt for the lived past, that one cannot be nostalgic for an historic time period in which one did not live; however, he states that the word may change over time to include “antiquarian feeling,” and later authors have explored the idea of historical nostalgia. In fact, his definition and descriptions of nostalgic feeling can easily be applied to those who desire to re-create or re-enact an historical past. These people see

something in the past worth longing for; they see something better, more beautiful, or more satisfying in the past when compared with a bleak, grim view of modern post-industrial life. Boym (2007) argues that the meaning of nostalgia has changed from a longing for a place (e.g. home) to a longing for a previous time period. Nostalgic views of the past often have more to do with dissatisfaction with the present or fear of the future than with the actual conditions of the past; in both cases (personal and historical) nostalgia presents a distorted view of the past. In our memories of our lived past, as well as in our imaginings of the historical past, we idealize the conditions and remove the negative aspects.

Lowenthal, Davis, and Boym provide many reasons for feeling nostalgic for a time period we never actually experienced. The next question, then, is why feel nostalgic for the Medieval and Renaissance periods? In her master's thesis on the Michigan Renaissance Festival, Moore (1997) argues that this period provides a romantic myth that is common for many groups of Americans. American students learn about the English literary tradition through reading the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, and take courses in European history. This period of European history can be seen as our last link to our European heritages, since it was during this time that America was discovered and colonized by Europeans. Because a large percentage of Americans are so familiar with the literature and culture of the time period, we are able to adapt it into entertainment with mass appeal. Indeed, "the Renaissance, especially in England, holds as the furthest common historical point which can retain an exotic atmosphere and still allow us to recognize aspects of ourselves" (Moore 1997). This is

the period of history that spurred the development of modern Western culture. The middle classes were rising due to the burgeoning market economy, creating a society very similar to our own, yet still containing many of the elements we consider lost in our own time, such as romantic chivalry and faerie lore.

We cannot, however, re-create an accurate portrayal of the Medieval and Renaissance periods, and most people prefer a reconstructed idealized version of the past. Literary scholars have attempted to describe medieval culture through analyses of the literature of the period. Medievalism is the study of what is done with the Middle Ages after the Middle Ages; it is the re-invention of the Medieval mindset in the minds of modern people (Matthews 2006). Since scholars cannot ever really know what life was like during the medieval period, and the descriptions they create are always affected by their own, modern worldviews, the past only exists within the context of the present. Medieval Studies, as a field of literary studies, focuses on current interpretations of life and thought in the Medieval Period, and how these are affected by current ideologies. Cultural Studies, another field of literary analysis, is “a field expressly invented to deal with the mass media and information technology,” and how these media express cultural beliefs and behaviors (Partner 2007). Medievalist Cultural Studies often look at movies or novels in order to determine how modern people view the medieval period and what aspects of that period are still interesting and useful in modern life. For example, many studies have been conducted on the Robin Hood legend and the changing ways in which this legend is portrayed in popular movies (Hahn 2001). At renaissance festivals, many performers develop their ideas of what the medieval period was like and their portrayals

of that period through these literary and pop culture sources. Characters from Medieval and Renaissance literature and folklore are portrayed, including Robin Hood and his Merry Men. These literary and legendary sources usually depict idealizations of the medieval and renaissance periods, not actual daily life; however, these idealizations are based on the expectations of patrons, who are informed by literature and media sources.

### Performing the Past: Historical Re-enactment

Early renaissance festivals often billed themselves as “living history environments” (Blazer 1976). Because very little research has been done on renaissance festivals, comparison with the goals and methods of living history museums is helpful. Although most renaissance festivals now see themselves as primarily entertainment based, not educational, visitors attend to experience what life was like in the medieval and renaissance periods. The key to this experience of “bringing the past alive” is performance. At both living history museums and renaissance festivals, employees wear period costumes, affect period speech, and portray characters from the time period. They interact with visitors while in character, on a re-created historical stage. The methods they use in their performances affect how they present the past to visitors, and how the visitors interpret the past.

Living history museums, such as Plimoth Plantation in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Lincoln’s New Salem in Petersburg, Illinois, focus on historical accuracy in their performances and in the staging of their historical environments. Snow (1993) describes how the actors at Plimoth Plantation are trained in period dress, speech, and customs,

which are gleaned from historical documents, archaeological investigations, and historical research. He describes the development of Plimoth Plantation as a progression toward better interpretations of the past. This progression is seen as an application of better research to the methods of performance at living history museums. Traditionally, living history environments represented key periods of American history and were interpreted for visitors by third-person “guides and hostesses,” who answered visitors’ questions while remaining fully in the present. During the 1960s, however, historical research was beginning to critique the myths of the Pilgrims, the founding fathers, and the impact of European colonization of the Americas. Plimoth Plantation began to refocus its attention on historical detail, changing the look of the site from a picturesque portrayal of the colony to a more realistic one. The guides and hostesses became “interpreters,” as they became more engaged with the visitors; instead of merely telling visitors about the lives of the Pilgrims, they began to show them through performing the tasks and chores the Pilgrims would have done. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, living history museums continued to add historically accurate details and included the voices of more people in their interpretation of the colony. Throughout all of the changes that occurred at living history museums during these decades, the employees continued to interpret the past through third-person performance. There were, however, developments toward first-person interpretation. During the 1970s, Snow reports, employees at Plimoth Plantation began to experiment with portraying the major historical figures who lived in the colony. This role-playing started as amusement, but

soon became the dominant method of performance at living history museums across the country (Snow 1993; Anderson 1991).

First-person interpretation allows performers to develop their characters fully through ethnohistorical research. They become able to provide details of an historical person's life, to bring feeling and a human quality to history, and to answer visitor questions as if they are colonists, not merely interpreters. Although this type of performance allows for in-depth interpretation of particular characters, and a more engaged audience, it also removes the unpopular stories and characters from the recreation since people are less likely to want to portray or interact with characters that represent unsavory or depressing aspects of the time period. Magelssen (2007) critiques both first-person and third-person interpretations in his review of living history research. He argues that these types of performance require an audience-spectator division that prevents visitors from becoming immersed in the living history environment. Visitors do not engage with history in these settings; they merely gaze at the staging and listen to interpreters perform rehearsed descriptions of the colony. Although visitors can ask questions, which requires the performers to be able to perform off-script, this type of interaction does not bring the visitor into direct contact with the past. Magelssen argues that there is a need for more types of performances, for a way to play with the concept of theater that allows for more engagement of the audience with history. For example, he asks what would happen if a character playing the role of an elite, wealthy colonist was to show disdain for visitors, to laugh at their strange clothing. He asserts that this type of experience would cause the visitor to think about the lives of people in the past, to have

an authentic experience of what it might have been like to live in the past. Magelssen proposes the incorporation of second-person performance at living history museums. In this type of performance, visitors would be encouraged to portray characters themselves; they would be encouraged to wear costumes and participate in events in the re-created colony. Visitors would then become part of the colony, rather than just visitors, which would allow them to explore history in a different way.

At renaissance festivals, costumed performers use first-person performance in their interpretations of the medieval and renaissance periods. Characters are taken from literary and folklore sources, as well as historical documents and research. Visitors are encouraged to wear costumes, and even to create and perform their own characters. There are, in fact, at least three levels of engagement represented by groups of visitors at TRF: patrons, “playtrons,” and “rennies” (Korol-Evans 2010). Festival participants fall into one of these basic groups based on how engaged they are with the festival environment. Patrons include those who are attending the festival as paying customers; they do not wear costumes and usually view the festival as a one-day experience. They are often referred to as “tourists” or “marks” by more engaged participants. “Playtrons” are repeat visitors who wear costumes and enact characters. They “play” within the environment of the festival and attend anywhere from once per season to every weekend of the festival. Visitors are, therefore, able to choose their level of involvement, and this lends itself well to second-person performance. It creates an environment in which people are able to choose their own level of engagement in which to explore the festival, history, and their own heritage. “Rennies” are usually performers or shop owners; they

might work at one festival, or travel the circuit spending all year at various festivals around the country.

### Postmodern Tourism and Authentic Experience

In comparing living history museums and renaissance festivals, there are obvious similarities and differences in their goals, methods, and visitor experiences. Their different approaches to historical accuracy and authenticity reflect their different goals; living history museums are designed to be educational and as accurate as possible in order to retain historical authority, while renaissance festivals are entertainment and visitor-satisfaction based economic enterprises. In studies on living history museums and historical re-enactments, the word authenticity is often used to refer to historical accuracy as judged by historical authorities. In his article on New Salem, Bruner defines four types of authenticity, each of which describes whether something is historically accurate (Bruner 1994). The first, verisimilitude, means that something is historically accurate if it seems that way to the average modern person. This means that if a person walks around a living history site, the environment will seem like a direct copy of the historical time period represented. In his second definition, Bruner defines authenticity as genuineness, which means that if a person from the historical period somehow came to the re-created site, he or she would not be able to tell that they were in another time period. This is, of course, unlikely, since our re-creations often contain modern conveniences such as electric light. In his third definition, Bruner discusses authenticity as referring to the original, not a copy; in this sense, living history sites could never be

authentic since they are, by definition, re-creations. Finally, Bruner discusses authenticity in the sense of authority; when an expert says something is historically accurate, it is. This is often the stance taken by living history museums, which cite their extensive historical research as proof of their authenticity. Bruner goes on to show that despite the museums' attempts to provide an official, authoritative, interpretation of New Salem, visitors construct their own interpretations and determine whether the site is authentic.

In tourism studies the word authenticity is often used to describe whether the visitor felt the experience was authentic, in the sense of real or true, and implies engagement with the world. MacCannell (1999) argues that people feel alienated from their own society, and that they travel to other places to find an authentic experience, although what they are actually experiencing is often "staged authenticity." His work has led to a number of attempts to define authenticity in tourist experiences. An authentic experience will be different for each person, just as their interpretation of the historical accuracy and meaning of a site will be different, and authenticity is determined by their point of view and expectations for the experience. Living history museums advertise a chance to experience history, but is this experience authentic? Magelssen (2007) has shown that the performance methods used at living history museums only induce a cursory amount of engagement in visitors and argues for second-person performance to engage visitors more fully with history and create an authentic experience of history. Further tourism research has shown that tourists no longer expect to have an authentic experience when they visit a site (Urry 1988). Visitors realize that they are witnessing a

performance, and that the historical characters they encounter are actors. Some visitors take this a step further, finding enjoyment in pointing out flaws in historical accuracy and actors' performances. This can be seen at living history museums in the phenomenon "Pilgrim-baiting," in which visitors point out that they know the characters they are interacting with are not real and attempt to get the actors to break character (Magelssen 2007). These visitors create their own experiences by determining the framework of their participation.

### The Legend of *Sawney Beane*

At the Texas Renaissance Festival, a group of seasoned renaissance festival performers performs their version of the legend of *Sawney Beane* every year on the Saturday closest to Halloween. They began this performance over twenty years ago as a way to engage each other, rather than visitors, in renaissance festival performance methods. They use the performance to teach these methods to new performers and to celebrate their participation in the festival. They believe the legend to be medieval and Scottish; however, research has shown that it likely began as an English narrative used to disparage the Scottish during the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century. The legend describes how Sawney, who was too lazy to follow his father into the hedging and ditching business, ran away from home with a girl of similar inclination. The two set up house in a hidden cave on the coast of Galloway and made their living by attacking travelers on a nearby road, robbing them of their belongings, and eating their flesh. They had many children and grandchildren, begotten through incest, who survived through cannibalism for 25

years. The Beane clan was finally caught when a prospective victim managed to get away and report the manner in which the clan had killed, disemboweled, and drank the blood of his wife. The Beane clan was rounded up and taken to Edinburgh, where it was determined that such crimes made them enemies of humankind, and the men were executed through dismemberment and the women and children were burnt at the stake.

Exactly when or where the tale began to be told is unknown, but it is likely that it was told for many years before it was written down. The first known publications of the *Sawney Beane* legend are on undated broadsheets, which are known to have focused on grisly and sensational stories. Many of these tabloid-style publications depicted tales of infamous highwaymen, robbers, and murderers. The broadsheets containing the *Sawney Beane* legend were published in England beginning around the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Several dated publications are also still in existence, the first of which is dated 1734 (Johnson 1734). All of the published versions of the legend are nearly identical to each other in their descriptions of the events that were said to have occurred. It has been suggested that each of these published accounts were copied almost entirely from an early publication of the tale, which was not unusual during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Holmes 1975). In 1843, the Sawney Bean legend was printed in a collection entitled, “Historical and Traditional Tales connected with the South of Scotland” (Nicholsen 1843). This version updated the language used in the story, and contained one major change: *Sawney Beane* was now said to have been born during the reign of James I of Scotland, 200 years prior to the time referred to in the earlier versions. It is possible that this change was made by Nicholsen when he placed the legend within the context of Scottish

folklore; Holmes suggests that the only reason for the change would have been if Nicholzen possessed some localized, traditional knowledge of legend that the English publishers did not have. The English publishers may have been confused by the existence of two kings named James from Scotland, who both could be given the label of “the first.” Since their only motivation was to make money off of the legend, these publishers may not have looked too closely at the details. Hobbs and Cornwall disagree with Holmes regarding whether Nicholzen had special knowledge about the origins of the legend, and argue that the change in date by Nicholzen was either an accident or intended to give the English story Scottish roots (1997).

In the 300 years since the legend was first published, many new versions and adaptations have appeared. Several novels have been written that have used the events as part of their storyline or as a basis for imaginative retellings of the legend (Morse 1979; Gates 2008). The legend has also been retold in play form several times, including a performance in 1969 in Edinburgh, the city in which the Beane family is said to have been taken to when they were finally caught (Nye 1970). Numerous ballads and songs have been composed that detail the events of the legend (Walsh 1974; Real McKenzies 1995; Cannibal Tudors 2008). Recently, Watt-Evans used the legend in his analysis of a group of cannibalistic space travelers in the television show “Firefly” (Watt-Evans 2005). Since 1991, Texas Renaissance Festival performers have gathered to enact the legend, which has since become part of the festival culture. This version of the legend contains several new elements that were likely added to the story by the storyteller who originated the performance at TRF. The performance methods used in

the legend's performance mirror the methods used in general renaissance festival performances, providing a way to explore how the participants perceive and use these methods to create authentic engagement with history.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Questions

As discussed in the introduction, this research seeks answers to the following questions: How do renaissance festivals allow participants to feel as though they are engaging authentically with the past? How are their modern identities involved in the process of re-creating and performing the past? Do particular performance methods, such as audience participation and second-person performance, allow for authentic engagement? Does the performance of *Sawney Beane* relate to general festival performance and further the goal of authentic engagement?

#### Gaining Access to the Community

The Rennie community is fairly closed and suspicious of outside intrusion. For most of the twentieth century, renaissance festivals were small and fairly invisible to the general public. In twenty-first century popular culture, Rennies, and renaissance festivals in general, have become more well known, but are often the subject of humor and derision. Perhaps in response to this history and current trend, the Rennie community is a very tight community that looks out for its members, who are considered part of a family. In order to conduct research in the community, it was necessary to gain the trust of some members and have them vouch for me. I was unsure in the beginning stages of my research whether I would be able to accomplish my goal of being allowed to

participate in and observe behind the scenes events and elicit meaningful and honest discussions about the community.

My first step was to contact an acquaintance, Mr. Larry Boozer, whom I knew had performed at the festival for many years. Throughout the seasons I spent at the festival, Mr. Boozer and I became close friends as he showed me around the festival, introducing me to as many people as possible. In particular, Mr. Boozer introduced me to his “faire family,” the group of performers who were his closest friends and with whom he camped each festival weekend. This group welcomed me into their camp and allowed me to observe and participate in their daily activities as well as their festival performances.

In order to camp with the participants, I entered through the back gate each weekend, presenting my festival tickets or passes to the security guard. The participants’ campground is a large grassy parking lot, with a mixture of cars, RVs, and tents. Some of the participants erect easily disassembled structures covered in tarps or very large tents to serve as community areas, with smaller tents arranged around these areas. I was often struck by how homey these areas could be made to be. Mr. Boozer and his friends shared a community area referred to as “the Gooch,” which they rebuilt every year out of PVC pipes covered in tarps. The area contained a large circle of camp chairs for socializing, a few lanterns hung from the pipes for light, wood chips scattered on the ground for a floor, and a few tables set up as a camp kitchen. The Gooch was often decorated for holidays, especially Halloween. By camping in this area and spending time

in the Gooch, I was able to observe preparations for performances, daily activities such as meal preparation and socializing, and discussions about the festival and faire life.

My initial research plan was a more generalized study of how the performers researched and incorporated literary, historical, and folkloric sources into their performances. During my first season at the festival, I was invited to attend the performance of the *Tale of Sawney Beane*. I decided to focus my research on this event because it held so much obvious meaning for the participants, and it fit well with my interest in studying the use of folkloric sources. As I probed further into the reasons for why the legend continued to be performed each year, I discovered the event held much more value and meaning for the performers than I initially expected. I hope that my analysis here will do justice to the meaning this event holds for them by providing an emic, or insider, perspective that will allow others to understand how such a performance can express personal emotion and group identity.

I spent a total of four festival seasons camping at the Gooch and getting to know its diverse inhabitants, from 20-year festival veterans to friends and family of participants, some attending the festival for the first time. The more time I spent at the festival and in the campground, the more people seemed to forget why I was there. I became part of the group, another “Goocher” there to enjoy the festival and visit with people who saw each other only during this time of year. Once I was part of the group, once my dedication to being there despite having to sleep outside in the cold after long days in the mud and rain, once I had proven that I cared about the festival, that I loved

being there as much as they did, the Goochers allowed me to see inside their world and to understand the meaning the renaissance festival holds for them.

### Research Design

In order to answer the above questions, this research has been designed to elucidate the meanings behind the *Sawney Beane* performance through a methodology based in cultural anthropology. Authentic engagement and identity are personal and require deep understandings on the personal level. The anthropological methods of participant-observation and interviews help in the search for deeper meanings that go beyond those gleaned from superficial observation. Participant-observation is a defining method within cultural anthropology and is used to understand both the explicit and tacit meanings of human behavior by assisting with both the collection of good quality data and with the interpretation of that data (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). By spending an extended period of time immersed in the renaissance festival environment, I was able to participate and observe daily activities as well as reactions to unusual events. Daily activities such as adorning costumes and make-up, dealing with camp activities, e.g. preparing food and setting up tents, and evening leisure activities allowed me to get a feel for what life is like for performers at a renaissance festival. I was able to listen to participants' thoughts and reactions to daily events and to experience those events firsthand. Participation in the performance of *Sawney Beane*, in particular, allowed me to experience performing with a group using the performance methods common to renaissance festivals. These observations provided a context for data gained through

interviews, both informal and formal. Informal interviews are a major part of participant-observation and consist of everyday conversation with participants that are recorded through field notes. Interviews allow researchers to prompt participants to discuss specific topics in more detail than causal conversations. This research used a combination of formal and informal interviews to elicit varied responses from a large number of participants. A detailed discussion of these methods can be found below. Because I was able to participate in many of the events discussed in the interviews, I gained a deeper perspective with which to analyze interviewees' explanations and insights.

### Participant Observation

Observations and experiences were recorded using field notes. Participation included attending and participating in festival performances, portraying a character in costume at the festival, participating in audiences of performances, and camping with the performers. I observed and participated in both stage and street performances.

### *Performing*

I attended each weekend in costume and interacted with performers throughout the festival. Costuming, character interaction and second-person performances were an integral part of participating in the renaissance festival. I also attended and participated in the *Sawney Beane* performance each year, for a total of four performances.

### *Audience Participation*

I attended both street and stage performances, taking notes on performance methods and styles. Audience participation is one of the most common performance methods used at renaissance festivals, and being a part of audiences allowed me both to participate and observe the participation of other audience members.

### *Camping*

Since camping is a large part of the performers' renaissance festival experience, I camped in the performers' campground each weekend of the festival (Friday-Sunday) with the permission of the festival administration. Camping with performers allowed me access to backstage events and the daily lives of the performers, as well as

### *The Performance of Sawney Beane*

I attended and recorded each performance of *Sawney Beane* for the years 2008-2012. Prior to each performance, I attended the informal planning sessions and discussed aspects of the planning with various performers. Before and after each performance, I engaged in informal interviews with audience members and participants. During each performance, I observed and participated in the performances. The Prologue chapter contains an account of one such participation based on my field notes. I compared the TRF version to a traditional account of the legend as reported in Johnson (1734).

### *Interviews*

During pilot studies, I made several contacts with festival performers, including a group that allowed me to stay in their camps at the Texas Renaissance Festival. Along

with this group, my key participant, Mr. Larry Boozer, introduced me to other festival performers and members of the festival administration. Snowball sampling, in which potential participants are referred by existing participants, was utilized due to the need for inside members to vouch for my reputation, allowing me further access into the community and increased validity with participants (Bernard 2006). Although this type of sampling did not allow me to create a random sample representative of all renaissance festival performers, it did allow me to focus on participants in the *Sawney Beane* performance. Fortunately, a random sample was not needed, since the number of participants in the event is relatively small, and I could conceivably speak to nearly everyone involved. This method of sampling allowed me to continually locate new participants throughout my research period and to continually refine my interview questions. Two types of interviews were used to attain the data used in this research: formal interviews and informal interviews.

#### *Formal Interviews*

I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten performers who were directly involved in the organization of the *Sawney Beane* performance. Formal interviews were based on a predetermined set of interview questions but were designed to be flexible enough to allow for specific inquiries into participants' answers to questions about festival behavior. I asked interviewees experience-based questions about their participation in the festival and their preferences regarding specific aspects of festival performance that were designed to elicit descriptive, lengthy responses (Spradley 1979). I was specifically interested in participants' motivations for participation in the

renaissance festival and in the *Sawney Beane* performance and beliefs about the goals and usefulness of renaissance festival performance methods.

### *Informal Interviews*

Informal interviews allowed me to have casual conversations with as many participants and patrons of the festival and *Sawney Beane* performance as possible. Because my goal was to get viewpoints from a myriad of participants, I used convenience sampling to identify possible interviewees; I generally tried to speak with as many people who were willing to speak with me as possible before and after each event. During these interviews, I asked casual questions that were not predetermined but were instead based on immediate context, and I recorded responses in my field notebook. The ephemeral nature of these discussions made it difficult to determine exactly how many took place, and no names or identifying information were recorded.

### Research Site

The Texas Renaissance Festival opened in 1974 and is located on 53 acres in Grimes County, Texas, 50 miles northwest of Houston (2010 Media Fact Sheet). Currently the largest renaissance festival in the United States, TRF attracts 250,000-450,000 people per year. The festival takes place over 8 weekends in October and November plus Thanksgiving Friday, for a total of 17 festival days. The site also includes two large campgrounds, one for patrons and one for participants (performers). Visitors to the festival interact with thousands of roaming costumed characters, 350 unique artisan, craft, and food retailers, and more than 200 daily stage performances.

The festival is set in the 16th century and is divided into sections representing different countries, including England, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, and Greece, each with its own royalty, nobility, clergy and peasants. Research was conducted both on site at the festival and in the adjoining campgrounds. Some interviews were conducted at the homes of research participants or in agreed upon neutral spaces at the request of participants or due to time constraints.

### Data Analysis

Interpretive textual data analysis was accomplished based on interview and performance transcripts and field notes related to participant-observation and informal interviews. Data was analyzed along two major themes: general renaissance festival performance, the performance of *Sawney Beane*, and authentic engagement through both performances. Within the major theme of general renaissance festival performance, I focused on the three major types of performance identified in my initial research: audience participation, impromptu performance, and second-person performance. Within the major theme of the *Sawney Beane* performance, I drew connections to each of the above performance methods and then related these to the minor themes of practice, initiation, and embodied memorial. Finally, to investigate authentic engagement in renaissance festival performance, I drew connections between second-person performance and embodied memorial to learn how these types of performance allow for personal engagement with history and identity.

The following chapters contain analysis divided into three major topics. Chapter IV provides a description and analysis of the major performance methods used at renaissance festivals, using data gained from participant observation and interviews with TRF performers. Chapter V analyzes how these performance methods are used in the performance of *Sawney Beane* and attempts to reveal *Sawney Beane*'s connections to and entrenchment in the general TRF culture. Chapter VI explores the personal engagement of the performers in the performance of *Sawney Beane* and how they use the performance to embody and express their sense of community and grief at the loss of a community member. Chapter VII attempts to connect the analyses in the previous three chapters and to provide conclusions to the research questions.

## CHAPTER IV

### RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE

As discussed in the literature review (see Chapter II), renaissance festival performance methods grew out of methods used for portraying the past at living history museums. During my fieldwork, I made note of the various methods used by performers, including an immersive theater environment, audience participation, improvisation, and second-person performances, and how those methods compare to those used at living history museums. As new renaissance festivals have opened across the country, they have all adopted very similar ways of performing. There is a sense of universal agreement that these methods achieve the right atmosphere and support the development of community among performers. This chapter will analyze how these methods are applied at the Texas Renaissance Festival and how they work to re-create the past and to engage performers and visitors in creating meaningful performances.

The combination of the performance methods listed above was designed with the goal of “bringing history alive.” Participants at renaissance festivals interpret and re-create history in the present. Rokem, in his book *Performing History*, argues that performing history reinvigorates it through the bodies of the actors (2000). Rather than preserving history, performances revive and refresh it, bringing the past to life by making it something new. Through performing history, actors and audiences are able to see historical figures as real people like themselves, rather than legendary characters. Rokem writes that these performances, particularly those of well-known historical

figures and narratives, allow us to experience our collective identities in a physical way, creating new understandings and interpretations. New representations can change our beliefs about history and the present, by allowing us to experience them in a non-academic, flexible and sometimes ephemeral way. Performers of history create their own interpretations that can feel more real to both the actors and the audience. Determining whether these representations are “real” becomes less important when they are viewed as interpretations and when one considers that all historical narratives or historiographies, even those written by historians, are interpretations. The true past cannot be brought into the present.

Despite the need for flexibility, performers try to create versions of the past that their audiences will recognize as authentic. Festival management, including the director of the Entertainment Company, sets rules for costuming and behavior that performers are expected to follow. For example, all employed performers must wear approved costuming, including shoes and hats, they must hide any non-period devices, such as cell phones, and they must not smoke or drink alcohol while on site. During the long rehearsal process, which takes place over six weekends prior to the start of the festival each year, performers are trained in performance methods, including what the management considers period speech. They have the opportunity to present themselves as performance groups with a planned act or to be assigned a position within one of the regular performance groups, such as the member of a royal court, a particular historical character, or a member of the Church. Performers must obtain costumes, either by purchasing them on their own or by borrowing from the festival’s costume closet.

Festival management sets the narrative for each year's festival, determining the year portrayed and who the king and queen will be, usually Henry VIII and one of his wives. They set a schedule of performances, choose acts for the stages and select the themed weekends. They create a background narrative that supports the performances occurring within the main narrative. TRF's Entertainment Company puts on many of the performances, but outside acts are also invited to perform, including dramatic, comedic and musical groups. At TRF, the Entertainment Company consists of hundreds of performers led by an Entertainment Director. Most members of the Entertainment Company portray members of royal courts or wander the festival interacting with patrons. Many are assigned roles and performances, such as teaching patrons traditional dances or conducting events such as costume contests.

The current performance methods used at renaissance festivals are based in the theatrical and political climate of the period in which renaissance festivals began. The 1960s saw a surge in methods that opened performances up to the inclusion of many voices, especially those that had previously been excluded or marginalized. One such excluded voice was the audience. Audiences typically sat silently through traditional performances, but were now expected to contribute. All of the performance methods discussed in this chapter relate to audience participation in some way, to engaging the audience as part of the performance. This breaking down of the fourth wall allows for the development of new relationships between audiences and performers and between audiences and the theater environment. By inviting the audience to participate, these new

relationships invite audience members to become performers themselves and to engage with performances in meaningful ways.

### Audience Participation

Although audience participation is a theatrical device that has actually been widely used for millennia and is often a part of many people's daily lives, such as during church services or cheering at football games, it seemed new when it gained popularity in modern theater during the 1960s and 70s, as playwrights and performers began to seek out new ways to create meaningful experiences for both themselves and audiences. Schechner (1971) describes how the use of participation was previously limited in American culture due to the expectations for a performance, particularly in drama and theater, to be a finished, complete package with predictable phases and procedures that might be disrupted by unpredictable events. Unpredictability made audience participation seem unprofessional and messy; it made audiences and performers uncomfortable. This ability to unnerve people became the primary appeal of audience participation during a time when performances were designed to shake people up, to make people aware of their biases and hang-ups, to create a space of inclusion rather than separation. Schechner argues that encouraging participation affects the social system by challenging authority, including more voices, and not attempting to force a specific point of view or meaning. The performers do not have any more knowledge about what will happen than the audience does, which opens up opportunities to create

meaning. Audience participation became a new way to create authentic, meaningful experiences for both performers and audience members.

Audience participation changes the relationship between audience and performers, although different styles of performance can do so in different ways and to different extents. At TRF, the location of a performance can affect the performers' ability to engage the audience. Some performances occur on traditional stages, which create a sense of separation between performer and audience, the fourth wall. In these locations, performers must work harder to make the audience feel like part of the performance, to participate and engage with the performance. Techniques such as assigning roles to sections of the audience with simple lines or noises to make, requesting ideas to be incorporated into the performance, pulling volunteers on stage, talking directly to audience members, and physically moving throughout the audience help breakdown this separation. Many performers use a combination of these techniques during stage performances. One group of stage performers, *Sound and Fury*, which performs adaptations of mainly Shakespearean plays, uses many of these techniques in their act. Before the performance begins, they stand on the benches where the audience sits, telling jokes to the audience and warning them of the mature nature of the show. They speak directly to each other and to the audience members. During the show, they assign parts to the audience, consisting of yelling, pounding their feet or smacking their thighs, they insert modern jokes and asides to the audience, and they move out among the audience several times. These techniques bring the action off the stage into the audience's space and engage the audience more than passive watching. At the end of the

show, the performance group solicits ideas for a short epilogue, which, like requesting volunteers, brings the audience onstage.

Street performers, referred to as “path performers” at TRF, are often surrounded by their audience, which provides more opportunities to include audience members in the performance and to bring them in further. They can move around the festival site, choosing spaces that work for both themselves and the audience. Street performers can select more audience members for participation and can more easily bring them physically into the performance space or bring the performance space into the audience. Although some street performances, such as those of musicians, provide less opportunity for interaction, most path performers, such as jugglers, acrobats, and magicians, can include nearly constant interaction with the audience during their performances. The path performers I spoke to felt that performing on the paths gave them unique opportunities to engage patrons in their performances and preferred this style of performance to traditional stage performance.

Some members of the Entertainment Company, as well as playtrons (See Chapter II), move about the festival site throughout the day, interacting with patrons. These performances create the highest level of audience participation because no stage is defined and performers interact directly with audience members, often one-on-one. While performing their characters, performers often answer questions in character and encourage patrons to become part of the act by affecting period speech and engaging in short physical performances. One performer whom I followed made it a point to seek out patrons as he walked the faire grounds. Dressed as a monk, he accosted patrons who

were behaving in a particularly festive manner and either berated their bad behavior or praised their drinking of beer as an act of penance. He would begin with a scripted opening line to gain their attention, and then he would improvise as he pulled the patron into the performance. He would perform similar acts many times throughout the day, engaging as many people as possible, often using the weekend's theme to determine the scripted lines to engage visitors. For example, he used the Barbarian Invasion weekend theme to beg barbarians to "martyr him," which often incited patrons to not only vocally interact with him, but to physically perform by pretending to attack and kill him. For this performer, creating these mini-performances is his ultimate goal at the festival; it is what make the performance fun and exciting for him, and he believes these types of interactions are what patrons are looking for when they attend the festival. Indeed, the renaissance festival would not be the same without them.

### Immersive Theater

An immersive theater environment allows the audience to be inside and surrounded by the stage or theatrical environment. This type of theater uses "installations and expansive environments, which have mobile audiences and which invite audience participation" (White 2012:221). So, immersive theater requires audiences to move through both the setting and the characters, to see both from multiple perspectives, and to come into the action in order to develop a deeper understanding of the performance's meaning. Immersive theater provides an opportunity for audiences to engage with both the environment and the performers. The audience members become part of the

performance, sometimes as mobile observers and sometimes by taking roles within the performance. Mystery dinner theaters are an example of immersive theater in which audience members can take either an observational or active role in a performance. Having this choice gives them agency in determining their own experience, which helps make the experience feel more authentic to each participant.

In an immersive theater environment, the performers and audience move throughout the performance space, interacting with both the environment and each other. Audience members can touch props and sets, gain a new perspective by standing in the spaces in which performances occur, and actively choose how they will experience a performance. They choose what and whom they want to interact or engage with and how to make that interaction meaningful for themselves. At TRF, patrons can engage performers directly without first being selected by a performer. Patrons wander the site freely, choosing how they will experience the festival. The site itself provides many options for viewing or participating in performances. All the festival is a stage, but it is a stage made up of smaller stages. Seventeen constructed stages set up around the site provide more traditional theater experiences, where seated audiences gaze upon performers juggling, acting, or playing music. Throughout the festival, the street or “path” performers create their own stage spaces by setting up on the side of paths or in open spaces and can move quickly to other areas. These performers usually create a theater-in-the-round, where the audience circles them with open space in the center for the performance. Finally, many performers create a stage wherever they are; each actor can be a mobile performance site as they walk around the festival and interact with

patrons. While walking the paths at the festival, patrons also come across shop workers who stand outside the shops attempting to lure in customers. Although not part of the Entertainment Company, these costumed workers interact with patrons constantly throughout the day, and their creative performances are often some of the most memorable for patrons.

Because performances take place within different levels of stages on the festival grounds, patrons can determine their level of immersion into the environment and the extent of their interaction with performers. Although performers do accost patrons, as described above, the patrons' reactions will determine the duration and depth of the interaction. A patron might come across the French court having a loud argument in an open area and then be pulled into that argument by one of the performers. At this point, they could choose to play along or to simply walk on—though they will likely be loudly berated for doing so. In immersive theater, deeper encounters make audience members feel like they are more fully inside the action. Some patrons attend the festival once or once per year, while others choose to return more often, as much as every weekend each season. Those who choose to become more engaged in the festival environment often search out performer interactions that allow them to feel engaged or included in the action. Like the monk described above, patrons can walk also around searching out situations in which to insert themselves. Often, a simple request for a photograph could lead to a performance. When asked for a photograph, the monk would pose the patrons as a scene from renaissance painting, throwing himself down on the ground in front of them as if he was witnessing the appearance of an angel or saint. For some patrons, the

search for performer interaction is induced through a desire to pilgrim-bait performers into breaking character. As discussed in the literature review, Pilgrim-baiting is a term coined at living history museums to describe attempts to bait performers into breaking character, usually through derision or trickery. Although it is not the type of performance that the actors are hoping to engage patrons in, it is still a way in which patrons can choose to become engaged in the festival.

Patrons can choose to immerse themselves further into the festival environment by becoming playtrons, who create their own characters and performances. I talked with an older couple who had once been members of the Entertainment Company and who now returned to the festival once or twice per year to wear their old costumes and play their old characters, just for fun. I also met young people who enjoyed the festival so much that they were beginning to create costumes and characters, one article of clothing or idea at a time. Patrons are not restricted by any rules, other than those of common decency and requiring any weapons to be peace-tied, and can choose to be more outlandish with their costumes.

### Improvisation

In order to engage audience members, a performance has to have enough flexibility to adapt to new ideas and influences. Audience members will not feel as though they are participating in the creation of a performance if they have no impact on the performance. The lack of a pre-set script allows the audience to become involved and creates flexibility for the performer to respond to different situations. Performances

can be personalized to the audience-participant, and each participant can add to the performance, creating something new that holds meaning for them and allows them to engage more fully in an organic experience. Of course, performers with the benefit of experience are better able to handle this type of flexibility.

The ability to improvise a dramatic performance can be seen as similar to performing improvisation in jazz music: a basic foundation is needed that can be played with or riffed on. Davies (2011) describes two definitions of improvisation. The traditional definition requires *spontaneity*; an improvised performance is unrehearsed. However, the second definition argues that a rehearsed change to an original can also be improvisation, such as musical performance or theatrical parody, so the foundation of improvisation is *fluency* in the art form being improvised. Both spontaneity and fluency require a stable *foundation* in the performance style before a performer can create something new in that genre. They also require a deep knowledge of the *culture* in which the performance is taking place, in order to have material from which to draw the improvised performance. Therefore, elements of improvisation include spontaneity, fluency, foundation or framework with which to start, and a stock of useable ideas from culture.

At the Texas Renaissance Festival, improvisation in performance follows these same lines. The most basic foundation for performances is the medieval or renaissance theme. Performers are expected to design performances that could have been seen during the time period the festival portrays. Some license is allowed, although it is expected to be limited and to conform to general renaissance festival culture. The culture of

renaissance festivals, as described in the Introduction chapter, provides plenty of material for performances. Certain types of performances have become expected, such as a mud show or falconry, and have themselves become part of the festival culture. One group of musicians, The Cannibal Tudors, writes songs that parody and poke fun at the culture of the festival. They call their genre of music RenPunk and write songs such as “Fie to the Kingsman,” which describes their opposition to festival authority, and “Men in Skirts,” which ridicules festival attendees who portray Scotsmen and wear kilts.

Next, performers create basic scripts from which to improvise. Some of these improvisations are pre-written and used as introductions or prepared for instances that are likely to occur. Experienced performers have faced many different situations that have taught them what to expect from patrons, and many expressed to me that they are very rarely surprised. When a patron does manage to surprise a performer with a reaction to or participation in a performance, the new situation usually creates an opportunity for a new improvisation. Some of these off-the-cuff performances later become part of the main script, when they work. It may take years of testing lines and improvising new ones to build a character, and characters can constantly evolve as the performer grows in ability and discovers new interests.

### Second-person Performance

As discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter II), the purpose of renaissance festival performance methods is to allow for performers and patrons’ authentic engagement with the festival, with history, and with their own identities. All of the

performance methods described above, immersive theater, audience participation, and improvisation, create an environment that encourages second-person performances, which allow patrons or visitors to create their own performances and contribute to the interpretation of history presented at the festival. Magelssen (2006, 2007) provides an excellent argument for the use of second-person performances at living history museums to teach visitors about history in a way that does not exclude voices or institutionalize any one version of history. Magelssen argues that living history sites need to use second-person performance more fully than they currently do; most sites allow visitors to churn butter or use a loom, but do not allow visitors to wear costumes, portray characters or participate in interpreting history. Unlike most living history museums, patrons at renaissance festivals are encouraged to wear costumes and to create their own characters. Even those patrons who do not wear costumes participate in performances throughout their visit to the festival. They interact with performers who view them as part of the festival, not as visitors from the future. They can also participate in feast activities, volunteer at performances, and learn period dances.

Second-person performance creates a physical, visceral experience that brings history alive in a way that passive gazing cannot. Many performers and patrons choose to camp at the festival, which, despite some modern conveniences such as flushing toilets, creates a sense of being outside of the modern world and brings participants a little closer to the difficulties people faced in the past. Creating their own performances engages visitors with history and with the festival itself. This engagement is different for every participant because everyone is able to choose their level of immersion into the

fantasy of the festival, whether as passive observer or fully developed character. Patrons can research and develop their characters, practice speech patterns and other behaviors, and script lines that reveal the character to those with whom they interact. As they move throughout the festival, they join their voices and interpretations with others to create a shared experience of history, which may or may not be “accurate.”

Because all participants are included in creating the narrative of history presented at the renaissance festival, a trade-off exists between historical accuracy and the flexible interpretation that leads to authentic experience. In the world of historical re-enactment, renaissance festivals are not typically considered serious re-enactment, but as what Gapps refers to as “relaxation and fellowship” re-enactment, due to the loosed restriction on historical accuracy (2009:397). All re-enactments require this balance, since the past can never be fully re-presented, it must be interpreted in some way. In contrast to living history museums, the lack of an authority to determine historical accuracy in second-person performances allows for performances outside of traditional history, which allows for expressions of identity, such as performing as a fairy or other mythical creature, as a character from science fiction who has time traveled to the past, or as a person of a different biological sex, race, or ethnicity.

Second-person performances represent the most extreme breakdown of the audience-spectator division. Audience members become performers. Should there be a dichotomy between “real” performers and second-person performers? Where is the line drawn? Patrons and playtrons do not have to follow the same rules as members of the Entertainment Company, so playtrons have more flexibility in designing characters that

allow them to express their identity. However, paid performers do have some flexibility and can often choose what characters they portray and plan their own performances. A visitor to the festival might not be able to tell the difference between a performer and a playtron, despite the badges employees wear. Indeed, second-person performance has become so prevalent at renaissance festivals that there are likely more unpaid “performers” at the festival than paid ones on any given day. Renaissance festival performance has taken on a life of its own, and its interpretation of history is fluid, dynamic, and engaging.

### Conclusion

Both living history museums and renaissance festivals hope to use performance to engage their audiences with history. Audience participation is the foundation of all the methods described here, which combine to create performances that do not teach only one interpretation of history, but which allow for new interpretations. Audience participation, improvisation, and an immersive theater environment encourage second-person performances to occur, which allow for personal engagement with history and physical performances of identity. At the Texas Renaissance Festival, “[i]nclusion and participation are not metaphors; they are concrete physical acts of the body.” (Schechner 1971:73) Second-person performance physically engages those who might have passively gazed, pulling them out of their modern lives and identities to experience something new. It allows for marginalized voices to be brought into the conversation, for a crowd-sourced interpretation of history. Although renaissance festivals have been

portrayed in modern pop culture as a pastime for geeks and the purview of mainly the white middle class, attendance at festivals continues to grow every year and new ones continue to open across the country. The participation of Black, Middle Eastern, and Asian performers seems to increase every year as well. The flexibility of renaissance festival performance allows them to create characters that are not relegated to servants or slaves, despite the historical period and location the festival portrays. It could be argued that such loosened restrictions on historical accuracy take the history out of the festival, making it pure entertainment and fantasy with no practical value. However, the flexibility draws people in who might have otherwise not been interested in history, whether it's the little kids pulled in by knights and fairies or the stereotypical frat boys dressed as monks drinking beer. Many patrons come for a carnivalesque festival and end up doing their own historical research into historical costuming and characters. All interpretations of history are flawed in some way, so why not use that space open to interpretation as an opportunity to create something meaningful in the present? In the following two chapters, I hope to show how one group of performers has used renaissance performance methods and the flexibility in historical accuracy to construct an experience that allows them to physically enact their amusement, grief, and love.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PERFORMANCE OF *SAWNEY BEANE*

Gather 'round! Gather 'round! And hear the story! A tale of love! A tale of justice! A tale of lust! A tale of incest! A tale of unspeakable horror...and wholesome family values! Gather round and hear the *Tale of Sawney Beane*, the infamous madman of Scotland!

-Excerpt from transcript, *Sawney Beane* Performance 2010

The *Tale of Sawney Beane* first began to be told at the Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF) as a campfire story during the late 1980s and continues to be performed every year. At the end of a long day on their feet, entertaining crowds that number into the tens of thousands, the cannon goes off, signifying the end of the festival day, and the performers slouch back to camp, change out of their medieval garb and into layers of warm clothes. In the old days, a fire was lit, dinner was shared, and everyone settled into camp chairs, passing around a bottle of whiskey like hobos trying to keep warm. And then Bill would tell one of his stories. Bill was not an ordinary storyteller; he was a story-leader. According to Jay Lee, a former member of the TRF performance group Men of Substance, Bill began telling the legend of *Sawney Beane* as part of a repertoire of stories that he would tell to groups of other performers during evenings at the campground. He was known for a storytelling style in which he persuaded his audience

to take on the roles of characters in the story; the audience/actors sometimes added their own lines or gestures, introducing new elements into the story that might then be included in future retellings as other participants mimicked or parodied previous performances. This is the way the *Tale of Sawney Beane* began to be told at TRF and how it developed into the version performed today. Lee (2006) reports first hearing Bill tell *Sawney Beane* in 1988, and it was first performed for an audience in 1991. Oral transmission, improvisation, and interaction between narrator and audience shaped the performance into its current state.

In 1991, the story left the campfire and moved to a small stage on the festival grounds, as an after-hours Halloween celebration for the festival performers. An audience of fellow performers was invited through word-of-mouth, and those who were familiar with the Tale were given speaking roles. The audience was asked to fill in other parts as needed as the story progressed. The group carried on the method of storytelling that they had used in the campsite; Bill led the performance like a conductor while the other actors, some of whom had never even heard the story before, improvised their parts from his narration and whispered stage directions. For the next 11 years, the performance continued to evolve.

When Bill died in 2003, the group chose to continue this tradition in his memory and have done so for another 11 years. Their goal was to keep his memory alive by continuing to tell his story the way he wanted it to be told, using the performance methods he taught them. To date, the *Tale of Sawney Beane* has been performed every year near Halloween for 22 years, despite weather or other setbacks. This chapter

explores the performers' choice of performance methods and how the performance relates to their more general participation in the renaissance festival. The following chapter will more deeply explore the performance as a memorial for Bill and the meaning it holds as an expression of group identity.

### Setting the Stage

[The performance always occurs late at night on the Saturday closest to Halloween on the festival grounds, which this year was the night before Halloween, Saturday, October 30, 2010.] *People began to gather in the campgrounds soon after the cannon went off [signifying the end of the festival day] for the annual chili cook-off that takes place at the campsite before the performance. Larry, Craig, Brooke, Britt and Shawn got together off to the side to do a rough run through of the story, the main events, and which lines to hit [to emphasize]. By 9:30pm, a crowd had gathered for a group procession to the performance site. Larry called out for everyone to head out onto site. The procession included people in various types of dress, including renaissance costumes, Halloween costumes, and plain clothes, carrying jack-o-lanterns, candles, and lanterns. The walk felt magical as we came out into the empty New Market Village, which seemed eerie at night without the usual daytime crowds. We paraded toward the chosen site, which, since Bill's death, is a grassy area near a small tree that was planted in his memory. As we arrived, we discovered that even more people were waiting at the site. I tried to count the crowd, but the event was beginning, and there were too many people. My rough count was about 75, but I think there were more. Larry*

*and Shawn began yelling for everyone to move back and sit down. Eventually, they got everyone to settle down and clear an area to be the stage. [...] The stage is located on a lawn in front of Bill's tree, between the Mud Pit and the English Garden. The audience faces toward the tree, filling the lawn area all the way back to the wall of the English Garden. The audience sits on the ground in a semicircle facing the tree or stands against the back wall.*<sup>1</sup>

The procession to the site serves as a re-creation of the first performance of *Sawney Beane* at TRF, which has become part of the folklore surrounding the event. The story goes that the original organizers of the event, a handful of festival performers who worked together in a performance group called the Men of Substance, had devised the idea for the performance and invited a large number of people through word of mouth. When the appointed time arrived, no one had yet shown up, and the organizers were worried that the performance would not happen. It turned out that a pumpkin-carving contest was in progress in another area of the festival site, and a large group arrived together, carrying their newly carved jack-o-lanterns. They paraded in to hear the story, and their jack-o-lanterns were arranged around the edge of the stage to be used as stage lights. This has since become tradition; audience members are encouraged to bring jack-o-lanterns and candles to be used as lighting for the performance, and the parade onto the festival site is one of the highlights of the event.

The location has moved several times over the nearly 20 years that *Sawney Beane* has been performed from a small corner stage to larger stages, and then to its

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<sup>1</sup> Italics indicate entries from field notebook: October 30, 2010. Brackets indicate notes added later.

present site, but most participants see the current location as ideal since it memorializes Bill the storyteller and “allows him to watch.” The tree was planted during a memorial given by TRF and functions as a monument to his memory. Festival performers who knew Bill often stop at the site of his tree to speak to him, occasionally pouring their drinks, usually water, on the ground in his honor. The tree also became the new site of the performance that same year. This marked the beginning of the *Sawney Beane* event functioning as a memorial; the performance could easily have ended with Bill's death since he organized and narrated the event every year. Instead, Bill's tree is a visual reminder of the memory of Bill, while it, in turn, watches over the performance and performers. This year, some participants suggested that a larger site would more easily hold the number of people who attend and that perhaps the performance could be moved to an actual stage. Larry and others argued against this idea, stating that the event is becoming too large anyway and that honoring Bill was of more importance than entertaining a large group.

The performance begins with a unique Prologue, which involves Larry, the narrator, at least one volunteer from the crowd, and a couple of the veteran performers, portraying the making of the traditional Scottish dish, haggis. The joke is that Sawney, who in traditional versions of the legend becomes a cannibal because he is too lazy to go into his father's hedging and ditching business, is smart enough to realize that human flesh is easier to cook, and tastes better, than haggis, and, therefore, decides to become a cannibal. The Scots are one of the most well represented groups at the festival and are the subject of a large volume of jokes about haggis, men in kilts, and sheep fornication.

These jokes are light-hearted, but pervasive, and likely contributed to the choice of *Sawney Beane* as appropriate story material for the festival performers. The method of performance is also appropriate for the renaissance festival; right at the beginning of the performance, the first actors are volunteers from the audience, setting the stage for the participatory and interactive nature of the event. The entire audience provides sound effects, and Larry keeps the story going through his narration.

### *The Tale of Sawney Beane*

*Larry told me beforehand that he was going to try to pull me into the performance, but it ended up being Craig since he was closest to me. He reached for my hand, pulling me out of the front row of the crowd and to my feet. My first task was to be a traveler on the road who is attacked by the Beanes. Me and two other girls were the first victims of the night. Craig quickly whispered to me where to stand and what to do. As Larry narrated, we followed his cues, and fell to the ground as the Beanes [at this point, just Sawney and his wife] attacked and ate us. We lay on the ground, dead, for several moments, starrng up at the starry sky. I could see Larry above me describing our gruesome deaths, feel other bodies tangled with mine, and feel the grass under me; I couldn't stop laughing with the audience at what we were doing...*

*Next, we were shuffled out of the way as the story continued. Sawney and his wife set up in a cave by the coast and, eventually, had children. Brooke, playing Mrs. Beane, was lifted up with her legs extended by two of the guys, and those of us who had been murdered took turns crawling through her legs. We were now Beane children, part of*

*the Beane family! We participated in the next attacks after more and more people were pulled from the audience. Eventually, there were 15-20 Beane children, and we were told to stand to the side of the stage area so that we weren't in the way.*

After the Prologue, the story proper begins with a description of Sawney as a lazy young man in love with his landlord's equally lazy daughter. The landlord doesn't approve of their relationship, so Sawney kills him and presents his heart to his love. Together, they eat the heart and then run away together. Since they are both lazy, they don't want to work and turn to robbing and killing people on the road and eating their bodies. This is acted out by having several audience members pretend to ride horses through the stage area, where the participants portraying the Beanes playfully attack and consume them. The Beanes move into a cave on the coast of Galloway, where the high tide covers the entrance, preventing the discovery of their home. Over the years, the Beanes have many children and later grandchildren through incestuous relationships. As the clan grows to 42 members, they require more victims to feed the family and rumors about monsters living on the coast of Galloway begin to circulate Scotland. More audience members are chosen to participate as victims, and after they pretend to die, they are born again as Beanes to increase the clan's numbers. After each round of deaths, an elaborate birthing scene is staged to bring the new participants into the Beane family. The participant portraying Mrs. Beane is lifted up by two other participants, legs splayed, as the new Beane children crawl under her as though she is giving birth to them. Being reborn as a Beane signifies membership in the group of performers. Although this membership is unofficial and nonbinding, those who attend the *Sawney Beane*

performance every year or who participate in the group's regular festival life often refer to themselves as Beanes or use the name as part of their character names.

Once the clan has grown sufficiently large, the story moves on to set up the event that leads to their eventual downfall. Sawney gives his children a set of rules to follow when attacking people on the road. The first rule is to only venture out at night, the second is never to light fires by the road, the third rule is to leave no trace of your activities behind, and the fourth is to leave no one alive who could lead others back to the cave. After these rules are explained, the oldest Beane child decides to go on a hunt with a few of his siblings. They attack a man and his wife on the road near the cave, devouring the wife immediately as the husband flees. They then leave the wife's remains on the road and return to the cave, having broken several of their father's rules. The husband runs to Edinburgh, where he tells the King's Men what he saw. The King's Men decide to investigate, and the husband leads them to the spot where his wife's body lies. While investigating the surrounding area, their bloodhounds (usually played by any children in the audience) discover the entrance to the cave.

The last act of the performance portrays the Beane's capture and subsequent execution. They are brought to Edinburgh, where the king decides that their crimes make them inhuman and unfit for trial. They are sentenced to immediate execution; as groups of Beanes are brought to center stage, the narrator asks the audience how they should be killed. Audience members yell out execution methods. "Hang 'em!" "burn them at the stake!" and "draw and quarter them!" are the most common. The narrator chooses a method for each group, who enact their deaths and fall to the grass. Finally, only Sawney

and Mrs. Beane remain. Their deaths are particularly gruesome; after having watched all of his children slain before him, Sawney watches his wife burn at the stake and is then drawn and quartered. The performance ends with the narrator providing the moral of the tale: always obey your father. The joke is that a tale of such horror is actually about family values.

Each year, the group attempts to incorporate music into the event. Two TRF musical acts have written songs based on the group's version of the *Sawney Beane* tale: The Cannibal Tudors, whose characters are Beanes, and Master Bones Jangle, who portrays a cannibal pirate at the festival. Sometimes one group performs after the Prologue and the other performs after the Tale is finished, although in some years only one song was performed. See the Prologue to this dissertation for the lyrics to the Cannibal Tudors version, which follows the TRF performers' version of the legend fairly closely. After the event has ended, the organizers remind everyone to take anything they brought with them and to pick up any trash they see, and participants drift off in different directions. Many end up back at the campsite where the procession began, to unwind and celebrate another successful performance of the legend.

### Renaissance Festival Culture and Folklore Performance

At its foundations, the culture of renaissance festivals is bawdy, carnivalesque, and unrepentant about not conforming to societal rules. Although the participants are as varied as those of any culture, shared values, mutual interests and occupations and a sense of belonging to a faire family tie them together as a community whose shared

culture (see Introduction chapter) has developed over several decades. An American subculture that sees itself as part of the counterculture, renaissance festival culture is expressed through performance, which allows participants to express these values while maintaining their normal societal roles outside of the festival. They can be both outrageous nonconformists and compliant suburban conformists without having these two parts of themselves collide. The liminoid space created by the festival environment allows for a loosening of normal restrictions on behavior and a place to play with identity and personal expression. As with other festival environments, inverting and intensifying behavior, clothing, and personalities is used to break norms and express unconventional ideals and values. Excessive alcohol and food consumption, cross-dressing and shocking costuming, and flamboyant dancing or singing are some examples of the intensification of behavior at the festival. A myriad of trends in costuming and cosplaying—using costuming to play at performing characters from literature, television and movies—have been developed at renaissance festivals or have been performed within their liminoid spaces. Costuming from science fiction and fantasy genres, the Furry and Brony movements (dressing as stuffed animals and My Little Pony characters), and the newer Steam Punk fashion has all been expressed at renaissance festivals. Within this safe space, people form strong bonds with others who feel a similar need to express themselves, which has created the sense of *faire* family that is pervasive at the festival. This sense of family is strengthened by feelings of not fitting in outside the festival and by a belief shared by some participants that nonparticipants do not understand them and even mock their participation in renaissance festivals.

The *Tale of Sawney Beane* is a folk drama that is rooted in renaissance festival culture. As defined by Green, “folk drama is a scripted performance which incorporates mimesis and role-distribution among two or more players and which adheres to the traditional aesthetic and communicative models of the performing community” (1981:428). *Sawney Beane* is a semi-scripted performance that certainly involves mimesis and role-distribution; however, it is the second half of the definition that puts the folk in the folk drama. By using the regular renaissance festival performance methods, the participants are drawing on the “communicative models” of the renaissance festival community. The subject matter of the Tale—cannibalism among an unconventional family—fits well within the festival aesthetic because it describes an intensification of the participants’ own experiences as outsiders or nonconformists. As discussed below and in the following chapter, the performance of *Sawney Beane* ties a subgroup together and with the larger subculture of which they are a part. The participants pull a legend from another time and place (England in the 1700s, as described in the Literature Review chapter) and adapt it to their own cultural context and functional use.

Oral transmission is a crucial part of the production and continuation of folklore in any culture. The *Sawney Beane* folk drama has been passed on to a new generation, who, in turn, are hoping to pass it along to the next. Although the following chapter provides further detail on this passing of the torch to a new generation, it is important to show how this transmission has affected the nature of the performance and allowed for the creation of a community created around the performance. The participants identify

themselves as part of a more than 20-year old tradition that reveals the values of their community through humor and the practice of their occupations as performers. The legend has become a common bond and spawned inside jokes, character names, and songs. Two musical groups, The Cannibal Tudors and Master “Bones” Jangle, have written ballads based on their community’s version of the legend. The members of both of these musical groups also portray cannibal characters during the festival to signify their connection to the community; these cannibal characters are further extensions of the community’s value of nonconformity beyond that of the performance of the Tale itself. The group’s version of *Sawney Beane* is framed as a story of “Family Values,” through which the group articulates its values of nonconformity, humor, and unconventional family ties. The participants in *Sawney Beane* see each other as a family united by the performance of the legend and the shared values reflected in this central piece of their folklore. In an extension of the concept of “faire family,” a few participants have even taken on the Beane surname for their festival characters. The family constructed around the performance of the Tale can be seen as a smaller, more tightly knit family within the larger festival clan.

Furthermore, the performance acts as an initiation for new members into both renaissance festival performance methods and metaphorically into the Beane clan. Of course, not all members of the Entertainment Company participate, comparatively very few, and some who participate are not members of the performance company, but might work in shops or food service. Some are merely friends or family of employees, although all are linked by an affection for and participation in the festival. For those who

are new performers, or those who are still learning, the experience reinforces what they are taught at official rehearsals. At the beginning of the performance, the organizers ask anyone who has never seen a performance to sit up front, so they can “see better.” This allows the performers to pull them into the action more easily. It is fun for the performers to surprise newcomers in this way, but it also allows anyone who hasn’t participated to have a chance to do so and brings more new ideas and new people into the group, allowing the tradition to continue. By using renaissance festival performance methods, they are strengthening the link between the Tale’s performance and their participation in renaissance festival culture.

#### Performance Methods

The participants in the *Sawney Beane* performance have chosen to apply the methods used during regular festival performances, in particular those described in the previous chapter—immersion, improvisation, audience participation, and second-person performance. Because the performance grew out of the renaissance festival and was designed by renaissance festival performers, this is not surprising. Use of the same methods provides space to practice them, especially for new performers who are not used to improvisation. Also, because everyone involved uses these methods during the festival day, they all have a strong background to play with them during the *Sawney Beane* performance. Participation in the *Tale of Sawney Beane* can strengthen their performance abilities both through practice and by watching each other’s performances.

It also provides a connection to the history of the festival and performers who came before them.

### Immersive Theater Environment

As described above, the setting for *Sawney Beane* is an open grassy area on the festival site. The audience creates a semi-circle around the performance space, but no stage or strict boundaries separate them from the action. By creating a theater-in-the-round, the performers create a sense of inclusion. Although performances can draw as many as 75 people, having the audience sit in the grass together and almost completely surround the stage makes the group feel smaller and closer. Audience members can choose to join the action at any time, though they may or may not be successful depending on whether their contributions are deemed appropriate by the group. The stage design allows the audience a choice in whether to participate and to what extent. As with other types of immersive performances, the audience can choose to stand back and observe, to participate in group roles, or to take on a character.

There is some separation between audience and stage, though it is not as clearly defined as it would be with a traditional stage performance. This keeps the performance from becoming a messy and confusing experience. Sometimes lights are used, both to allow the audience to see and to mark the edge of the stage area. The surrounding darkness pulls people together and into the metaphorical darkness of the story. Performing the Tale on the festival site further connects it to regular festival performance. Although there have been years when the Tale was performed in the campgrounds, the participants

prefer to perform on site because the festival site holds meaning for them, provides more space, and is considered more fun than the usual campsite after festival hours.

### Audience Participation

Throughout the performance, the narrator encourages audience participation by speaking directly to the audience, asking for particular sounds or responses from the group, and encouraging audience members to participate by taking on roles within the performance. The narrator acts as a storyteller, telling the story to the audience seated at his feet like children. When he describes the Beane clan's cave, the narrator has the audience fill in sound effects as a group, such as the roaring of the sea. Whenever a new character appears in the drama, an audience member is asked to take the role. At the end of the performance, the narrator asks the audience how each Beane should be executed, and the performers enact the suggested deaths. This gives the audience members some control over how the story plays out, and they enjoy seeing their suggestions play out on stage.

Unfortunately, hecklers have at times taken advantage of the participatory aspect of the performance. Often, they are inebriated and do not realize that their contributions are inappropriate or unwanted since audience participation is generally encouraged. They shout insensitive jokes or ridicule participants' performances, causing disruption or interfering with the progress of the Tale. Usually, the group reacts to these interruptions with attempts to quiet or remove the interloper, although sometimes the reactions to the hecklers can cause further disruption. In recent years, steps have been taken to warn the

audience that although they are encouraged to participate, they need to do so in a respectful manner. An example of this type of disturbance and how it was handled is discussed in the next chapter.

The interaction between the narrator and audience is one of the most essential aspects of the performance. The narrator leads the performance and provides some structure on which the group can improvise the performance. The interplay between this structure and the chaos of audience participation creates the flexibility and excitement that attract people to the performance. The balance between these can be delicate, but that is part of the fun. When it goes really well, something new is created. If it goes badly, it can be shrugged off with the knowledge that next time will be completely different. Failures can be fun too.

### Improvisation

Although the main storylines are pre-determined, the performance often includes a great deal of on-the-spot invention. The general story of *Sawney Beane* serves as a background framework, and the details are then improvised based on memory and audience participation. Prior to each year's performance, the group that organizes the even has a brief run-through of the story line and which lines or jokes they want to remember to include. Because there is no rehearsal and the narrator tells the tale from memory, natural variations occur in each performance. Audience interaction increases improvisation as the narrator and actors react to the crowd. Audience participation and narrator improvisation cause every performance to be unique. The actors who play the

key roles change every year, and roles are almost never played by the same person twice. The characters of Sawney and his wife are the exceptions to this, since they are usually played by veterans of the performance who know roughly what they need to do to keep the story moving; however, attempts are made to rotate who plays these parts to give other participants a chance to take on these roles. Even those who have played the same character several times often improvise and change how they portray the characters each year. Participation by new comers can create the most improvisation since they often do not have expectations of what the performance should be like. They bring fresh interpretations and ideas to the parts that help keep the performance interesting over the years.

#### Second-person Performance

Second-person performance often requires participants to create their own characters, but can occur anytime the audience takes on their own roles within a performance. Although participants do not usually create new characters, they portray the characters any way they want to. Many of the characters, such as the Beanes' victims and children, are open to interpretation by the performers. Even the main characters, such as Sawney and his wife, can be interpreted by the performers to a point. They must follow the general character traits and story line, being cannibals, having lots of children, teaching their children the Rules, but otherwise the performers determine personality traits and improvise their own lines. For example, one performer may portray Mrs. Beane as a willing accomplice to her husband, while another may show her to be

coerced into the life of cannibalism. Often the performers' own personality traits influence their choice of how they perform their characters.

Additionally, many of the performers, particularly those who organize the performance, use the performance as a way to express their feelings about the loss of one of their own—the storyteller and fellow performer who began telling the Tale at the festival. The following chapter discusses this aspect of the performance in depth. Physical performance is a way to release built up emotions and to share that catharsis with other people who are experiencing similar feelings. By becoming part of the performance rather than just watching it, each participant, even those who never knew the original storyteller, contributes to the group's purging of grief and sharing of joy and memory.

### Conclusion

The performance of the *Tale of Sawney Beane* has a long history at TRF and is a unique folk drama performance that expresses the values of the faire community through the use of the community's distinctive performance methods. By taking advantage of the performance methods they are taught at the festival, the *Sawney Beane* participants are able to practice these methods to enhance their abilities and share their knowledge with each other. Using these methods also increases the effectiveness of audience participation since the audience is made up of performers who already are familiar with them. The performance of the Tale helps to solidify the participants as a family and community that is already strong due to their shared occupation, interests and values. The performance's function as an initiation into this performing community highlights

the importance of the performance methods used as well as the significance family and community hold for the participants.

The performance methods described above have allowed the performance to evolve over time and to continue to adapt to the needs and desires of the group. Although the general story stays the same, suggestions from the audience and improvisations by performers can stick and be used in the next year's performance, changing it slightly, but building up over time. Far from being stagnant, the performance changes as new people join the group over the years through folkloric oral transmission. This is partly why the performance continues to be vivid and exciting for participants and why it has continued to be popular for more than 20 years. The balance between structure and chaos that these performance methods maintain mirrors regular festival performance interplay between historical accuracy and flexibility. By providing a place to bend the rules and play with expectations, both the renaissance festival and the performance of *Sawney Beane* create a space in which to explore one's own identity as well as that of the group. The performance of *Sawney Beane* does this to its fullest extent in its function as a memorial for the storyteller who first began telling the Tale at TRF, as described in the following chapter. The performance has continued to carry a great deal of meaning for those who participate and is one of the highlights of each renaissance festival season.

## CHAPTER VI

### PERFORMANCE AS EMBODIED MEMORIAL

As discussed in Chapter V, the *Tale of Sawney Beane* began as a story told in the evenings among a few friends led by fellow performer, Bill Sanders. As Bill told the story, he engaged those attending as part of the performance of the story. Bill was a mentor to many of the performers who now carry on the tradition. Every person I spoke to about *Sawney Beane* expressed their love and admiration for Bill. After he died in 2003, they carried on the performance of *Sawney Beane* in his memory. Although it has continued to be a fun event, it now carries a deeper meaning. The status of memorial leads to a strong desire to adhere to tradition and resist change. Nevertheless, as they have attempted to carry on Bill's memory, they have intensified the performance methods Bill had taught them, in particular improvisation and audience interaction, and changes have naturally occurred. As a group endeavor without a clear leader, some participants feel the performance has deteriorated and threatens to no longer function as the memorial they intend it to be.

Many of the changes to the performance, as well as attempts to avoid change, are due to the nature of the performance as a memorial and the need to replace Bill as the Tale's narrator. The first half of this chapter looks at the process of surrogation, finding a replacement for a lost group member, and how this process affects both the performance and the performers. The second half of this chapter discusses how the performers use this performance to deal with personal loss through the use of the performance methods

they share through their participation in the renaissance festival. The connections between memory and performance create a space for the participants to express grief, thereby strengthening the community.

### Surrogation: Intensification and Diffusion

Whenever a member of a group leaves, such as through retirement or death, a space is created where they once were, both physically and in the sense that their work must be taken up by others. When a coworker retires from their career, their supervisor and other coworkers must decide how to divide up the official and unofficial roles they performed. Joseph Roach (1996) describes the process of attempting to fill someone else's shoes as *surrogation*. He argues that an attempt is always made to fill this space, by one or more people and not always by the person hired to replace the one who left; replacing a previous member of a group is often not a straight-forward process. Roach describes three steps in the surrogation process: attempts to fill the space, a sort of crisis that occurs when the fit is not exact, and a public forgetting of how the space was once filled to allow those left to move on. Renaissance festivals are themselves surrogates for the past. They re-create our collective memory of what the medieval and renaissance periods were putatively like. They are re-creations, which by definition are not authentic originals. They are incomplete, a continuous process of interpretation and representation. They re-create the past as we imagine it to be and with the addition of modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing and electric lights. They allow us to remember only what we want to remember and to forget the disagreeable or tragic elements.

In order to continue the performance of *Sawney Beane*, the performance group had to fill the space left by Bill's death. Bill had served as a director, controlling and structuring the performance through his narration and direction. In the years after his death, several veterans of the performance acted as narrator, and since 2007, this role has been filled by Larry Boozer. Larry is a former member of a TRF performance troupe, the Men of Substance, a comedy group of three male performers that was led by Bill. The Men of Substance often told the *Sawney Beane* tale to festival patrons, asking them to help act out the story, just as they did with fellow performers during the Halloween event. Larry is well versed in the *Sawney Beane* legend, having participated in almost every performance since 1991 and is considered by the group to be the best person to fill Bill's role as narrator. He is a seasoned TRF performer, an excellent narrator, and an impressive, almost impish, character in front of a crowd, in his black derby hat, grinning at everyone through his gray beard.

Although Larry fills the role of narrator well, he cannot fully replace Bill, who also organized the performance every year and mentored younger performers. Since his death, a group of performers has gotten together to take on his organizing and planning roles. Planning typically consists of conducting a quick rehearsal on the day of the performance in which they go over the main plot of the story to be sure nothing is left out, choosing the date and time of the performance, and determining who should play the main roles of Sawney and his wife and whether any extras will be included, such as musical performances. The diffusion of decision-making allows more voices to contribute to how the performance will be conducted, new ideas to be included, and

more participants to express their grief through participating in a memorial to their friend. It can cause some issues with leadership and authority, however, as no one has the final word and all decisions are group decisions.

Roach argues that surrogation is never complete and is always a continuous process. The replacement is never a perfect one, which can lead to a sort of crisis within the group as attempts to return to the status quo fail. The group has intensified the performance methods taught to them by Bill Sanders. They have increased their improvisation, increased audience participation, and added new elements to the performance event, such as including musical performances. An example of the intensification of performance methods is the initiation aspect of the performance. Prior to Bill's death, audience members were chosen to participate in the performance by Bill or other actors playing key roles during the performance. Often, audience members were chosen because the actors on stage did not recognize them; the performance was more fun when the actors did not know the story. According to one participant, the year after Bill's death was the first year the selection of audience members became focused on first-year performers. These performers had not known Bill, but by including them in the performance, the veteran actors were able to pass on the performance methods taught by Bill, as he had passed these methods on to them. They were able to pass on his knowledge and mirror his role as mentor. New performers further increased improvisation and creativity since they did not have previous performances to use as a guide, giving them practice in these techniques that they could use during their festival performances. The initiation of first-year performers brings them into the performance

community. They become “Beanes” as they are tested on renaissance festival performance methods, taught the folklore of the group, and taught the history of the performance community of which they are now a part through the memory of Bill Sanders. On one hand, these changes have allowed them all to participate more fully in the event, to add personal and creative elements and to diffuse leadership among many people so that everyone who wants to can participate in memorializing Bill. On the other hand, it has changed the performance, and not everyone is happy about that.

As a generation of new organizers have taken over the event, the changes that have taken place do not always meet the desires of the older generation of performers. Roach contends that to create a new status quo, a public forgetting of the previous state must take place. The changes must become less obvious through a process of selective memory in which the group chooses to look past the changes and to appreciate new additions. One way the performers have done this is by focusing on the meaning the event holds for them rather than the details of the performance. The following section discusses how the process of public forgetting has taken place for the participants in the *Sawney Beane* performance by exploring how the group reacted to criticisms of the changes they had made.

#### Selective Memory and Public Forgetting: Voice of Dissent and the “Amorphous Mess”

*We participated in the next attacks after more and more people were pulled from the audience. Eventually, there were 15-20 Beane children, and we were told to stand to the side of the stage area so that we weren't in the way. As we stood there, those people*

*who really hadn't seen the performance before kept whispering questions about what to do next. Some guy in the back of the crowd kept yelling obscenities and heckling Larry. The disturbances were distracting for everyone, and we were becoming confused about what to do next. No one could hear Larry over the noise of everyone talking at once—looking for directions, heckling, and yelling at the hecklers.*<sup>2</sup>

As the core group copes with the loss of Bill, they attempt to fill his space by intensifying the improvised, interactive aspects of the performance and by sharing responsibility for organizing and performing the *Sawney Beane* tale. This diffusion of power is meant to allow everyone to be involved in memorializing Bill, to allow everyone to engage with Bill's memory, just as TRF diffuses control over representations of the past through second-person performance techniques that allow everyone to engage with the past. However, the culture of the renaissance festival is not known for solemnity and restraint. Conducting a typical memorial in this setting would be difficult, and even though the participants do not expect the performance to be viewed in silence, they do want it to be respected. The 2010 performance of the Tale brought these issues to forefront as the group was confronted with dissent and antagonism.

As that year's performance of *Sawney Beane* grew closer, Larry sent out an invitation to the event on a social networking site, inviting hundreds of people to hear the *Tale of Sawney Beane*. In response to the invitation, a close friend of Bill's who had participated in many performances of *Sawney Beane* in the early years and who had attended the previous year's performance, referred to here as Sara, commented asking,

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<sup>2</sup> Italics indicate excerpt from field notebook: October 30, 2010

“Are you running it or are those people from last year in charge?” Although this comment was directed at Larry, it was another participant, Brooke, who answered stating that Larry was in charge as he has been for years, and that those people from last year were her and her husband’s TRF musical group, the Cannibal Tudors, who had been participating in the performance since its early years. She stated that Bill had served as a mentor to many of these younger performers in the years before he died, and they were working to continue his memory and mentorship for the new generations of performers.

This voice of dissent called attention to the fact that not everyone was happy with the way Bill was being memorialized through the *Sawney Beane* performance. Sara stated that she was disappointed with last year’s performance because everyone “talked over Larry and generally sucked.” This comment led to a slew of responses that became heated and antagonistic. The crux of the argument was that Sara did not understand and/or did not approve of the changes that had been made to the performance since that last time she had attended it, before the death of Bill Sanders. Although some audience participation and improvisation had always been a part of the performance, these aspects had been intensified since Bill's death, leading to instances of confusion.

Richard Schechner (1971) describes the ways in which audience participation can go wrong, including the creation of what he terms a free-for-all, or an “amorphous mess.” In attempting to carry on the tradition the way they felt would best memorialize Bill, the performers have inadvertently let the performance get out of control. The surrogation process has led to a situation where no one is really in charge and everyone is contributing to the story without much direction and structure. New performers are

less aware of the memorial nature of the event, and often show up intoxicated, leading to inappropriate heckling and disturbances during the performance, intensified by the carnivalesque nature of the festival. Those who did know Bill find this disrespectful, and the organizers of the event are currently searching for a way to integrate the improvised, interactive performance methods with the more solemn nature of a memorial.

Forgetting is often deemed a negative, destructive action. It can destroy truth, hide blame, and lead to repetition of mistakes. Public forgetting is often considered to be harmful on an even grander scale, since it can be used to delude and trick the masses into believing the propaganda of a malevolent government. Vivian (2010) argues that this perception of forgetting disregards the positive consequences that can occur from selective forgetting. For example, we often forget the negative characteristics of a person we care about after they have passed, allowing us to celebrate their memory without restraint or hypocrisy. Lowenthal (1985) also argues that forgetting the past is necessary to adapt to the needs of the present. Furthermore, each person's memory is different and inconsistent, so if a re-creation is to occur, there must be a consensus of memory on which to base it. Since we cannot all remember a person or event in exactly the same way, we must be selective about what we remember and choose that which is the most important to our conceptions of our personal and group identities. The concept of collective memory refers to the physical manifestation or voice of the personal memories of a community. Lowenthal points out that memories are deeply personal and contribute greatly to how we define ourselves. They also contribute to how we define our communities, and we need public memory to support and validate our own memories.

When a public memory seems to challenge our memory, we can respond aggressively or dismissively. Public memory also supplies information for times and events of which we do not have firsthand memories. Our conception of our community's identity is largely made up of what we have been told about it by those who came before us.

The process of surrogation that has occurred since Bill's death has led to a need for a balance between memory and forgetting. Although the purpose of the event is to remember and memorialize, too exact of a focus on things remaining the same can lead to an inability to perform this memory satisfactorily. Even the act of using the performance as a memorial is a change to the performance; therefore, if the group chooses to continue the performance, they will have to accept change. By accepting the necessity of change through a collective forgetting, the group can express their grief and community in more personally satisfying ways that allow more people to participate. Public forgetting requires the group to collectively select how they want to remember previous performances. This process is messy and will not make everyone happy. The confluence of interactive performance techniques, memory, memorialization, and forgetting have allowed the creation of a unique experience that has a palpable impact on people's real lives.

## Embodied Memorial and Second-person Performance

*Everyone was congratulating Larry and saying, "Bill would have liked it!"*

The argument online also brought out why this group continues to perform the *Sawney Beane* tale. Participants wrote lengthy comments describing why they continue to participate and what the event means to them. One participant, Britt, eloquently described her involvement in the performance:

one of the things i remember about Bill's version is that it was a listening event. a storytelling. since Bill has shuffled off his mortal coil, i guess those who remain are left to keep the tradition alive. yes, things evolve. i think it's lovely that there are so many who want to take part in the presentation of the Tale. it will never be what it once was. it can only be what we make of it...let's try to remember why we still continue this tradition. for me, i still participate in the name of love, community, and the desire to pay homage to our friend who first beckoned us to hear the Tale.

In performing *Sawney Beane*, the participants act as embodied memorials. Stephen Gapps (2010) refers to this process when he discusses the serious re-enactment of historical figures as “mobile monuments.” He argues that when performers enact their characters in a way that both presents them accurately and serves to honor their memory, they become the embodiment of a memorial to the person they represent. In large groups, such as at Civil War re-enactments or renaissance festivals, collective representation can lead to the embodied memorialization of entire events or time periods.

Gapps argues that because re-enactments are live performances, they do not have the fixed, ordered nature of standard monuments. Instead, they offer flexible, open representations that can respond to present needs and desires. Embodied memorials allow people to express their memory, nostalgia or grief physically, and sometimes even offer chances to intervene in that memory. Although Gapps asserts that mobile monuments require strict attention to historical accuracy, I argue that loosened restrictions can facilitate a more personal expression in the memorial. The ability to be flexible is necessary in the enactment of personal emotions within a group, since each person's needs and expression will be different.

Just as the performance methods employed at renaissance festivals allow for embodied engagement with history, the same methods allow participants in the *Sawney Beane* performance to embody the memorialization of Bill Sanders. For Larry, this embodied memorial is very literal, as he fills the shoes of his mentor as narrator, speaking Bill's words the way he remembers them and mirroring his inflections and gestures. For others, the bodily re-enactment of Bill's story allows them to express physically their memory and grief through performance. This is accomplished through both the enactment of his story and through the use of the performance methods he advocated and taught through his storytelling. The interactive nature of the performance and participation by the audience allow participants to add their own words and movement to the performance of Bill's memory. By performing in front of a tree planted in Bill's memory (a physical, immobile memorial), the group feels as though Bill is watching them and that they are performing for him. Each performance begins and ends

with a nod to Bill's memory, sometimes including a moment of silence or a toast. Since the disruption discussed above, each performance also contains a reminder that the performance is a memorial to limit disrupting behavior.

The creation of the musical group the Cannibal Tudors and their involvement in the continuation of the performance represent an extension of second-person performance outside of the *Sawney Beane* event. The Cannibal Tudors have participated in the expansion and continuance of Bill's impact on the traditions of the group, by adopting the legend for the characters they portray at the festival. These characters are based on the idea that some of the Beanes may have escaped execution and produced descendants; some of these descendants are Septimus, Spud, and Kidney Beane, who under the forced direction of Lord Kaiser, now perform as a minstrel group. The way in which this group takes on these character roles is similar to Lindhal's description of ostensive play; the performers take on "the roles of legend villains and victims as they both recreate the storied events and simultaneously expand the tale by adding their experiences to the core narrative" (Lindhal 2005). When not performing music, the Cannibal Tudors wander the festival site, pretending to consume a prop severed hand and foot, which they offer to festival patrons, especially children, and pretend to hide from nobles and the king's men. By extending their use of the *Sawney Beane* tale, they have extended their memorial of Bill outside of the performance event and into their regular festival lives.

The use of second-person performance techniques aids in allowing everyone to participate, rather than just observe, the memorial performance. Whether taking on a

character or just participating as part of the crowd, everyone contributes to the memorial in the way they choose. Even those who never met Bill are contributing to the memorial by taking part in the performance and allowing those who did know him to share their memory and mentorship. As the group constructs a collective memory of Bill and of the *Sawney Beane* performances, they are creating a new narrative that describes the origins of their community and defines who they are. That narrative is evolving into a new folklore as it is repeated and continues to function to bind the community and as an outlet for self-expression (Georges and Jones 1995). The second-person performance techniques allow a consensus of memory to be reached that will aid in creating an agreed upon ethos of the community. These performance techniques remove any authority over the nature of the performance and the development of the community around it.

### Conclusion

Unfortunately, the interactive performance methods employed at the renaissance festival produce some difficulties when used in the context of a memorial. Memorials typically demand solemn and respectful behavior, and audience participation often leads to disintegration and chaos. The organizers of the *Sawney Beane* performance are currently struggling with finding a way to frame the event so that the memorial nature of the performance is understood by everyone while still allowing for creativity and entertainment. One method that has been suggested is framing the performance with the concept of Family Values. Bill invented four rules that Sawney teaches his children to provide a moral for his story; the Beane children's breaking of the rules, described by

Bill as a breakdown in family values, leads to the downfall of the Beane family. This downfall is mirrored in the current issue of disruptions in the *Sawney Beane* performance, which might perhaps be solved by a return to family values through setting out rules for the participants to follow during the event. The organizers of the event are considering the best way to frame the memorial, and, due to the improvised nature of the event, likely will decide how to proceed before each year's performance, perhaps even just minutes beforehand.

The performance of *Sawney Beane* reveals how performance can aid in memorialization. Using the renaissance festival performance methods shared by the group to create an embodied memorial has allowed these performers to engage with their memory of Bill in an authentic way, just as the interactive second-person techniques have allowed renaissance festival visitors to have meaningful experiences as they engage with the past. If the memorial and participatory aspects of the performance can be successfully integrated, the *Sawney Beane* event is likely to continue for many years. The process of public forgetting will provide a means by which this can be accomplished while also solidifying the group as a community.

The use of second-person performance methods to memorialize allows Gapp's concept of mobile monuments to connect with Roach's process of surrogation, and a new understanding emerges of how performance can aid in expressions of memory and grief. Surrogation reveals how a balance between memory and forgetting can create a space where people can deal with and express their emotions. Because this memory is performed with the body, participants become physical representations of their grief and

can use their movements and voices to purge their pain and grief together as a community. Flexibility and balance between historical accuracy and authentic engagement with memory through performance creates meaning that would not exist in a conservative push for accuracy over anything else. This can be seen both in the general performances of history at the renaissance festival and in the performance of the *Tale of Sawney Beane*. Both cases provide examples of how loosening restrictions and allowing for personal expression can create real positive change in people's lives. Engaging authentically with memory, identity, and our communities allows us to more fully express ourselves and cooperate to create meaningful experiences.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

Performance defines the Texas Renaissance Festival; without it, the festival would not exist. The methods used by performers comprise the manner in which history is brought alive, but they can have a deeper meaning and more personal function in the lives of the performers. The participants in the performance of the *Tale of Sawney Beane* are able to use their performances to create an event in which they can physically express their feelings of grief and their personal and group identities. This conclusion chapter attempts to make connections between the themes discussed throughout this dissertation, including the balance between historical accuracy and authenticity, the use of performance in personal expression and binding a community, and the relationship between renaissance festival culture and folklore. This chapter also provides answers to the research questions posed in the Introduction chapter:

- (1) What performance methods are used at TRF and why were these methods chosen?
- (2) How do performers use these performance methods to engage themselves with history and develop personal meaning?
- (3) How do performers combine historical representation with self-expression?
- (4) How does the performance of *Sawney Beane* connect to general renaissance festival performance methods and festival culture?
- (5) How does the performance of *Sawney Beane* allow performers to engage with history and personal meaning?

## Performance Methods

The history of renaissance festival performance methods is tied to the history of living history museums, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter. The goal of performing the past in the present requires interpretation and representation of history. Over the last century, the methods used have evolved as people tried to get better at interpreting and teaching history to visitors. The performance methods used at TRF include an immersive theater environment, audience participation, improvisation, and second-person performances. Audience participation is the foundation of all the methods, which combine to create performances that aim to not teach only one interpretation of history, but instead allow for new interpretations. Audience participation, improvisation, and an immersive theater environment encourage second-person performances to occur, which allow for personal engagement with history and physical performances of identity. Current calls for increases in second-person performances aim to bring the audience even further into the action by allowing them to do some of the interpreting themselves. Renaissance festivals are able to achieve second-person performance on a larger scale than living history museums. By loosening their restrictions on historical accuracy and their authority over interpretations, they allow diverse people to play with interpreting history and identity in new ways. The methods they have chosen allow for the personally authentic experiences for performers and visitors. Second-person performance physically engages those who might have passively gazed, pulling them out of their modern lives and identities to experience something new. It allows for marginalized voices to be brought into the conversation, for a crowd-

sourced interpretation of history. It could be argued that such loosened restrictions on historical accuracy take the history out of the festival, making it pure entertainment and fantasy with no practical value. All interpretations of history are flawed in some way, so why not use that space open to interpretation as an opportunity to create something meaningful in the present?

### Historical Accuracy versus Authenticity

Some more staunch re-enactors believe that allowing flexibility in historical accuracy cheapens the value of renaissance festivals for teaching history. They do not consider renaissance festivals to be involved in serious re-enactment, which requires extreme attention to detail and a vast knowledge of historical scholarship. Based on my research, most renaissance festival performers do care a great deal about the accuracy of their costuming and characters. They spend a significant amount of time engaged in research and discussions about history, literature, music, and folklore. Many became involved because of their interest in history, historical costuming, or traditional music and instruments. They attempt to bring their knowledge of these things into their performances, albeit less directly than one might see at a living history museum or civil war re-enactment where the intent of the performance is more overtly education. They use history as a foundation from which to improvise something new—a place where anyone can express themselves through performance.

Because the goals of a renaissance festival are less focused on education and more focused on frivolity, there is less pressure to make sure the history presented is

perfect. Most festivals do attempt to be accurate when they can, but they recognize that the comfort and enjoyment of visitors is their primary goal. Since it is impossible to perfectly re-create the past in the present, there are always some allowances, which visitors likely understand. They are looking for the experience, rather than the facts. As Bruner (1994) argues, authenticity is in the eye of the beholder. It is a personal interaction with the site and performances, and everyone has different expectations and resulting experiences. Balancing historical representation with self-expression allows individuals more agency in interpreting the past, as well as in creating their own meaning from their experiences. Self-expression takes on many forms—from costuming and character creation to types and styles of performances. The festival’s liminal space also removes many restrictions of society, allowing self-expression to be more than superficial.

Each visitor is able to choose their level of engagement and to create their own authentic experience. The festival also creates an environment of fellowship that can be felt by anyone who visits repeatedly. As patrons decide to become more engaged, they choose the type of character they will represent at the festival, developing costumes and exploring different personalities. The ability to engage more visitors and create authentic experiences comes at the cost of decreased historical accuracy. However, this creates a large number of available sources from which to draw, allowing visitors to develop characters that embody their own perceived identities. Because of this flexibility in historical accuracy, festival patrons are free to explore medieval folklore and literature as well as real historical figures, without being wary that authorities will judge their

performances as unacceptable. The festival is able to encourage a vast range of character types, including elves and faeries, pirates and wenches, and nobility and churchmen, which appeal to a much larger range of visitors than more delimited rules would allow. Performers take elements of their own identities, blending them with the available sources, to create characters that allow them to engage with history and with themselves.

### Embodied Memorial

In comparison to traditional memorials, such as a memorial service or stationary statue, embodied memorials create a visceral experience that can more actively engage participants and create deeper meaning than passive gazing. However, as seen with the *Tale of Sawney Beane*, interactive performance methods can lead to disintegration and chaos, which can cause some problems when used in the context of a memorial, which are often considered solemn occasions. Despite this, the performance of *Sawney Beane* reveals how performance can also aid in memorialization, by bringing the personal into the performance in a physical manifestation of grief and community. The group of *Sawney Beane* participants was able to create an embodied memorial that has allowed them to engage with their memory of Bill in an authentic way, just as the interactive second-person techniques have allowed renaissance festival visitors to have meaningful experiences as they engage with the past. If the memorial and participatory aspects of the performance can be successfully integrated, the *Sawney Beane* event is likely to

continue for many years. The process of public forgetting will provide a means by which this can be accomplished while also solidifying the group as a community.

The performance methods described here have also allowed the performance to evolve over time and to continue to adapt to the needs and desires of the group. The performance of *Sawney Beane* is connected to the general renaissance festival performances through its use of the same methods, and as these methods continue to evolve, changes to the *Sawney Beane* performance will likely mirror those changes. This connection between the performance of *Sawney Beane*, an event that is not authorized by the festival but is allowed to continue on the festival site, and the official performances at the festival allows for both the creation of a memorial and the celebration of the community and culture of which the participants are a part. The performance of the *Tale of Sawney Beane* is unique to its environment without which it could not exist.

#### TRF Culture and Folklore

The Texas Renaissance Festival and renaissance festivals in general have created their own truly unique American subculture that is based on a shared love of history, performance, and countercultural ideals. Participation in this subculture is for the most part voluntary, although generations of children have been raised as rennies and continue to participate. People have chosen to devote much of their time, and in the case of circuit performers much of their lives, to participating in and supporting this culture. The meaning it holds for them is profound and powerful. It is not simply a hobby or pastime, it is a significant part of their identities. The community that has developed over the

more than 50 years since the first renaissance festival opened has evolved through the decades by attracting new members through its celebration of difference and divergence from societal norms.

The performance of the *Tale of Sawney Beane* has a long history at TRF and is a unique folk drama performance that expresses the values of the faire community through the use of the community's distinctive performance methods. By taking advantage of the performance methods they are taught at the festival, the *Sawney Beane* participants are able to practice these methods to enhance their abilities and share their knowledge with each other. Using these methods also increases the effectiveness of audience participation since the audience is made up of performers who are already familiar with them. The performance of the *Tale* helps to solidify the participants as a family and community that is already strong due to their shared occupation, interests, and values. The performance's function as an initiation into this performing community highlights the importance of the performance methods used as well as the significance family and community hold for the participants.

The participants in *Sawney Beane* have taken a legend from another time and place (1700s England—See Literature Review) and adapted it to their own cultural context and functional use. They have created a more than 20-year tradition that continues to provide a space for the expression of grief for their lost group member and love for their community. The *Tale of Sawney Beane* has taken on a life of its own at TRF and has become part of the subculture's folklore. The performance will likely continue for many years, perhaps even beyond the memory of the storyteller who

adapted it to TRF culture and first performed it at the festival. Through word of mouth, new participants are brought into the performance every year to learn a piece of the history and folklore of their performance community.

### Future Research

Renaissance festivals are ripe for further research from diverse paradigms and scholarly traditions. Researchers in tourism studies could look more closely at the motivations of patrons and playtrons who attend the festivals frequently. Scholars in performance studies could investigate the separate functions of each of the performance methods described here and continue to evaluate their usefulness in engaging visitors with history. The use of performance as a method to create memorials also has potential for further research. There are many distinct performances at renaissance festivals across the country that could provide opportunities for researchers to learn more about the function of performance in people's lives. Ethnographic studies of renaissance festival culture could provide insight into how membership in this subculture affects people's daily lives, as well as how it relates to more general American culture. Finally, a deeper look at how much history is learned when restrictions are loosened might clear up the controversy over historical accuracy and personal authenticity. If there is deeper meaning to be found in loosening these restrictions, as there seems to be at the Texas Renaissance Festival, perhaps more people can come to celebrate their differences in the spaces they provide.

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APPENDIX: "THE TALE OF SAWNEY BEANE"

Lyrics by The Cannibal Tudors

I shall tell thee a tale of a loving clan, the clan of Sawney Beane  
Who lived his life with a hungered wife in a cave by the sea  
At early age her furious father tried to drive them apart  
In answer to his indignation, they feasted upon his heart

If blame were laid upon their heads the feast would be no more  
They laid their plans to expand the clan on Scotland's rocky shore  
The love they hath shared over time made a clan of 42  
Human flesh at supertime hath filled the clan's menu

Into the night the clan did hunt, on travelers they did prey  
Hiding evidence of their meals in a cave by day  
The clan did love the taste of man and murder hath its charm  
So Sawney made a set of rules to protect his clan from harm

The first request is to sleep by day and venture out at night  
The second to take all the spoils of their conquest out of sight  
The third hath warned against building fires by the road  
The fourth warned of survivors who might speak of their abode

The clan survived through the years in bloody harmony  
For pickled flesh and what remained was cast into the sea  
Quickly tales of murderous monsters became the local lore  
Horrific finds of pickled limbs were washed upon the shore

As Sawney aged, upon his clan the rules of hunt were passed  
The golden rule of secrecy to ensure his clan would last  
Before long his unruly spawn start to hunt by day  
Cooking victims by the road and letting the spoils lay

A Scotsman and his bonnie bride were attacked by the light of day  
Although the bride had lost her life the Scotsman got away  
He then rode to the nearest town to speak of what he hath seen  
It seems the death of family values is the death of Sawney Beane

The clan of Beane was put on trial for consuming human meat  
The women burned upon the stake, the men lost their hands and feet  
In the end if they had honored their father all along  
We would not have this terrible tale to tell the in this song  
Perhaps ye think that Sawney Beane and his clan are dirty sinners  
But we all think tis better to be the diner than the dinner!