

A Study Guide to  
Hofstra University's  
Department of Drama and Dance  
Production  
of  
**MACBETH**  
by  
**William Shakespeare**

March 1995

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## ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

Because Shakespeare is acknowledged to be the greatest dramatist and poet in the English language, a natural and burning curiosity has fired critics, scholars, and artists from the time of his death to the present day. The complete facts of his life have eluded them all because actors and playwrights of that Age were not held in high esteem, and the writing of letters and the keeping of journals were not common practice.

What can be pieced together of that life has been arrived at by painstaking detective work and educated guesses. The sources of information are scanty at best, mostly drawn from four areas: 1) documents and records of the period, such as birth and marriage certificates, deeds, legal depositions, and account books; 2) traditions, anecdotes, and recollections passed down through the years, some of very dubious validity; 3) literary references by other authors; and finally 4) conclusions that might be drawn from Shakespeare's writings themselves.

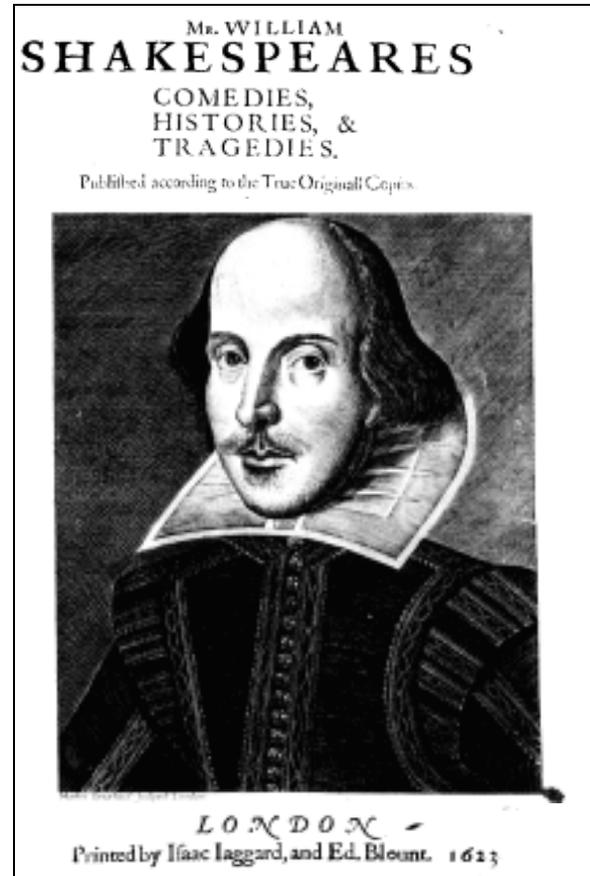
We can be relatively sure that Shakespeare was born about three days before his April 26, 1564, baptism to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden Shakespeare in Stratford-on-Avon, a market town of about 2,000 people in Warwickshire. We know that the playwright was the third child after two daughters died in infancy and that five more children followed. John Shakespeare was a wool dealer and glovemaker in Stratford who became a prominent borough official and civic leader until about 1577, when he experienced financial difficulties and dropped out of public life.

There is no secure information about Shakespeare's schooling—a sore point with many snobbish critics who cannot conceive of a person who has not gone to college writing as elegantly and knowledgeably as Shakespeare did. It is assumed that he went through the Stratford grammar school from the age of six until his sixteenth year. Days were long at school, from five or six o'clock in the morning until five in the evening, six days a week. Latin and Greek were certainly taught, and there Shakespeare must have come into early contact with the Roman plays of Seneca, Plautus, and Terence which found their way into his own works as did the poetry of Ovid, Virgil, and Horace and the histories of Caesar and Livy. By any contemporaneous or modern estimation, Shakespeare must have been an educated man. As Dryden observed, "He was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacle of Books to read Nature; he looked inwards and found her there."

The first real concrete record of Shakespeare's activities does not surface until 1582 when he was 18, at which time a marriage license was issued to him and Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior from a tiny neighboring village. Five months after they were married, their first child Susannah was born, followed in 1585 by the birth of twins, Hamnet who died at the age of eleven, and Judith who died in 1662, eight years before the death of Shakespeare's last descendant.

Seven years after the birth of the twins, Shakespeare's name occurs in connection with the first of his plays produced in London. It is reckoned that he left Stratford around 1587, but what he did in those years is pure conjecture. Some legends say he was a schoolmaster; others claim he got into an altercation with a local squire for

poaching deer and had to flee; still others maintain that he went off to join a touring company of players. We shall never know.



Title page of the First Folio Edition of Shakespeare's plays with the famous Martin Droeshout engraving, 1623.

In 1592, however, in a dying warning to fellow playwrights, Robert Greene attacked Shakespeare as "an upstart crow" and firmly established him as the successful author of the three history plays, *Henry VI, Parts One, Two, and Three*. By then it was assumed that Shakespeare had already also written and had seen productions of *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard III*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the bloody, but popular tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*.

Between 1592 and 1594 the theatres were closed on account of plague, and Shakespeare turned to poetry, composing *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and probably the 154 sonnets.

When the theatres reopened Shakespeare had become a stockholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, so called because it was under the patronage of England's Lord Chamberlain. It was one of London's two major companies. Four years later the theatre moved to the other side of the Thames and opened the Globe, where ultimately most of the great tragedies were presented.

During the period 1594 to 1600, with the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as the two parts of *Henry IV*, among others, the theatre company prospered and Shakespeare became a man of means. He lived in a fine home in London and purchased the largest house in Stratford. He

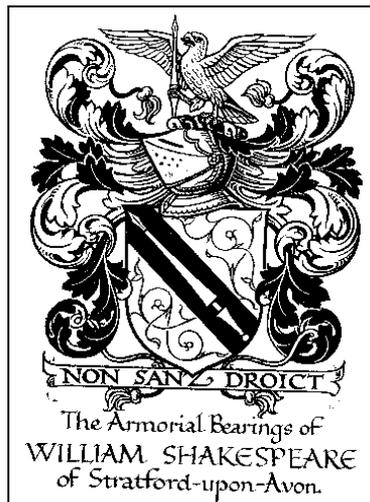
was granted a coat of arms acknowledging him as a “gentleman,” an honor coveted but never achieved by his father because of money problems.

By the turn of the century Shakespeare had written his major romantic comedies: *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Twelfth Night*; and with the accession of James to the English throne after the death of Elizabeth in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were taken under the monarch’s wing, calling themselves thereafter the King’s Men. Many of the plays were then performed at Court, and in 1608 the company was able to open a second theatre, the Blackfriars, indoors and mainly for the upper classes, which allowed Shakespeare to turn to more subtle themes and pastoral romances, including *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare’s reputation as a fashionable writer by then, however, was perhaps beginning to wane, or he lost enthusiasm for the bustle of London life. In 1611 he retired to Stratford returning pen to paper only to compose *Henry VIII*, a pageant, which by stage accident occasioned the burning of the Globe in 1613 at its premiere performance. He is also reputed to have collaborated in the writing of a minor play entitled *Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Apparently he died on his birthday in 1616, some say as the result of contracting a “fever” after drinking with some of his playwright friends. His grave is marked by a stern and ominous warning, supposedly composed by the Bard himself, adding to the mystery surrounding his life but perhaps merely posted to keep his remains from being moved as was often done:

Good frends for Iesus (Jesus’) sake forbear  
To dig the dust enclosed heare!  
Blest be ye (the) man yt (that) spares thes stones,  
And curst be he yt moves my bones.



An elaborate version of Shakespeare’s coat of arms.

The motto means “Not Without Right.”

### SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS

It is generally acknowledged that Shakespeare’s writing for the theatre falls largely into four main periods:

1) The Early Period (about 1590-1595). The plays that fall into this group reflect Shakespeare’s youthful vitality and energy, both in conception and verse. Plays from this period include *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *Richard III*.

2) The Middle Period (about 1595-1600). The plays emanating from this time betray a developing dark attitude about human nature, even cynicism at times. This is characterized by *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Troilus and Cressida*.

3) The Mature Years (about 1600-1607). During this period Shakespeare produced his greatest work: *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and such comedies as *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*.

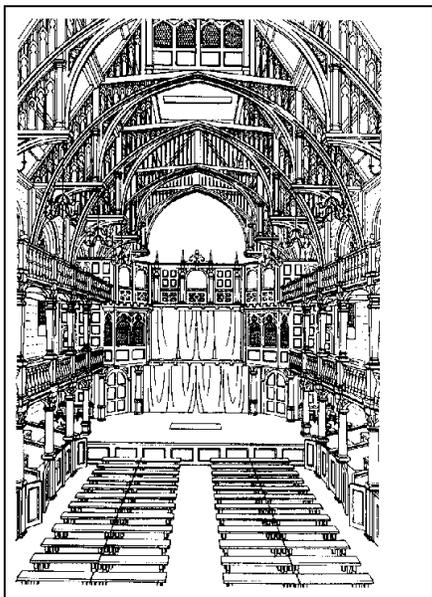
4) The Late Period (about 1608-1613). This era is marked by the playwright’s concern with more mystical matters often set in pastoral surroundings. The difficult plays of this group include *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

According to Shakespearean scholar G.B. Harrison the complete list of the plays with their approximate dates is as follows:

- 1591
  - Henry VI, Parts One, Two, and Three*
  - Richard III*
  - Titus Andronicus*
  - Love’s Labour’s Lost*
  - The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
  - The Comedy of Errors*
  - The Taming of the Shrew*
- 1594
  - Romeo and Juliet*
  - A Midsummer Night’s Dream*
  - Richard II*
  - King John*
  - The Merchant of Venice*
- 1597
  - Henry IV, Parts One and Two*
  - Much Ado About Nothing*
  - Merry Wives of Windsor*
  - As You Like It*
  - Julius Caesar*
  - Henry V*
  - Troilus and Cressida*
- 1601
  - Hamlet*
  - Twelfth Night*
  - Measure for Measure*
  - All’s Well That Ends Well*
  - Othello*
- 1606
  - King Lear*
  - Macbeth*
  - Timon of Athens*
  - Antony and Cleopatra*
  - Coriolanus*
- 1609
  - Pericles*
- 1611
  - Cymbeline*



could be “dug,” or characters descend. One critic suggests that the witches in their first meeting with Macbeth “vanish” through such a trap and the apparitions in Act IV, Scene 1 appear and exit through a trap. Later in the development of the company Shakespeare worked for, an indoor theatre, the Blackfriars, was purchased. This catered to a more elite clientele, permitted performances in all sorts of weather, perhaps allowed some rudimentary lighting effects, but, above all, acoustically gave Shakespeare the opportunity to write more subtle dialogue with more complex imagery and ideas than the direct, open, heroic speeches required by playing out of doors.



The Second Blackfriars theatre as reconstructed by Irwin Smith in *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse: Its History and Design*. (New York: New York University Press, 1964).

The act and scene divisions in the plays were later textual additions, but an audience usually knew when a major section had ended by the rhymed couplet which summarized or rounded out a series of dramatic events. For example, at the end of Act I, Macbeth determines to murder Duncan, takes charge, and concludes the scene with an ironic realization that he is about to betray his better instincts asserting:

I am settled and bend up  
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.  
Away, and mock the time with fairest show.  
False face must hide what false heart doth know.

Shakespeare wrote for the company of actors who made up the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later the King's Men. Heroic roles were fashioned around the talents of their leading actor, Richard Burbage. As he grew older, the roles conceived for him also matured so that early in his career Burbage played Romeo and Hamlet, then later he assayed King Lear, Macbeth, and Othello. Will Kemp played the lower, broader, comic roles like Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*. He apparently broke off with the theatre and was replaced by the more ethereal singer and dancer, Robert Armin. For him Shakespeare conceived a totally different sort of comic role more appropriate to his talents and

temperament. He played Feste in *Twelfth Night*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and the Drunken Porter in *Macbeth*.

The women in Shakespeare's plays were all played by boys, and they must have developed great acting skills to portray such complex personalities as Juliet, Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra. Their careers, however, were short-lived since it would have stretched believability too far to have kept them in such parts after their voices had changed in about their fourteenth year.

Shakespeare himself acted in the company, his most famous role being that of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, but his influence as a shareholder was obviously due to the enormous popularity of the plays he supplied rather than from his distinction as a performer. Tradition holds that Shakespeare played the role of Adam in *As You Like It*. It is thought by some critics that he may have performed the role of Duncan in *Macbeth*.

The demise of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre occurred when violence, sex, and spectacle were substituted for an identifiable humanity in the plays, and sentimentality replaced true feeling. The acting quality no doubt also deteriorated when companies of children became fashionable; and the death knell of the most vital theatre in world history sounded when the Puritans took over the State and closed the theatres in 1642.

#### A SUMMARY OF THE STORY

Three witches meet and agree to reconvene when they can waylay Macbeth at the conclusion of a war of rebellion he is fighting in support of the Scottish ruler, King Duncan. The King receives word of Macbeth's valor in defeating the rebels and resolves to confer on him the title of Thane of Cawdor. On their return to the king, Macbeth and his friend Banquo are confronted by the witches who predict that Macbeth will be made Thane of Cawdor, then become king, and Banquo's heirs will eventually rule. Macbeth immediately receives his new title from the king.

At Macbeth's castle Lady Macbeth, reading a letter from her husband, learns of his honor and the witches' prophecy. A servant announces that King Duncan will stay the night. When Macbeth arrives, Lady Macbeth overcomes his pangs of conscience by inflaming his ambition to be king. Together they plot to assassinate the old ruler. Macbeth carries it out; Duncan's sons are suspected, and they flee.

Macbeth is crowned and seeks to solidify and perpetuate his rule. He has Banquo murdered, but Banquo's son Fleance escapes. Banquo's ghost returns to haunt the new king at a royal banquet. Macbeth consults the witches who reassure him that he can be defeated only when Birnam Wood advances on his castle and that no one "born of woman" can hurt him.

In England, meanwhile, Macduff, a Scottish lord, joins forces with Duncan's son, Malcolm to plot against Macbeth's overthrow. Macbeth, having planted spies everywhere, hears of Macduff's flight and has the defector's wife and son slaughtered.

While the king becomes hardened and embittered, Lady Macbeth's conscience drives her to madness. As his

foes are about to attack, she dies. The opposing troops use branches from Birnam Wood to camouflage their numbers and Macduff, in a final confrontation with Macbeth, divulges that at birth he was torn from his mother's womb. The prophecies fulfilled, Macduff slays Macbeth, and Malcolm is proclaimed King of Scotland.

### THE SOURCES OF THE STORY

Shakespeare's genius did not usually extend to the invention of new material to accompany his rich characterizations and relationships, his clearly devised and exciting plot and structure, and his soaring poetry. He drew his ideas from Roman, Greek, and English history and mythology, other plays, and translations of continental novellas. Often he combined different tales into a new creation.

As with most of his historical plays, centered in the British Isles, Shakespeare found his inspiration for *Macbeth* and drew his material from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* first published in 1577. The essential details of the story were dramatized from Holinshed's account with several interesting exceptions. In the interest of brevity and to focus the plot, Shakespeare omits the details of Macbeth's victories against the Danes, successes that elevate him to being named Thane of Cawdor. Also a description of Macbeth's "governing the realm for the space of ten years in equal justice" is omitted. Furthermore, Shakespeare takes elements of another event in Holinshed, the murder of King Duffe (Lady Macbeth's great-grandfather) to enhance the tragedy. These include the drugging of the grooms, the unnatural storm, and the strange portents that accompany the murder. The voice that cries "Sleep no more" and the healing power of Edward the Confessor come from yet other parts of the *Chronicles*.

Most significant is the manner in which Shakespeare alters Holinshed's version in order to sharpen the dramatic impact and moral weight of the play. He makes Duncan older and holier, not the feeble ruler of the *Chronicles*, who has given Macbeth cause for resentment. He removes the complicity of Banquo in Duncan's assassination. He makes Macbeth himself, and not hired killers, the murderer of Duncan. He scales down the murder of Lady Macduff and her son to an individualized brutal act, not the siege of Macduff's castle as in Holinshed. He ennobles Banquo, adds the banquet scene attended by Banquo's ghost, interjects the sleepwalking scene and Lady Macbeth's death, and provides *Macbeth* with psychological progression and the title role with a powerful and active conscience. Thus he transforms a legendary historical event into a resonant, personal confrontation with ambition and inevitable resulting accountability for immoral behavior.

In addition to Holinshed's *Chronicles*, other sources have been cited, but no clear evidence exists that Shakespeare used them. Obviously the theme of temptation by supernatural forces is a basic myth in Western literature and thought. One sees it in the fall of Adam, Greek tragedy, the corruption of Faust, and the unsuccessful temptation of Jesus. Other, more direct attributions include references

made by Will Kemp, an actor in Shakespeare's company, to "A Ballad of Macdobeth" which presumably told the same story. Also George Buchanan, King James I's tutor, published a history of Scotland in 1587 and, although it was not available in England until after Shakespeare's death, many critics see striking similarities between Buchanan's account of the story and Shakespeare's play.

Most interesting was the contrast between the Macbeth of legend and the historical Macbeth who ruled Scotland for seventeen years from 1040 until 1057. His reign was characterized by a period of order and prosperity. He was referred to by one chronicler as "the liberal king." But as Hume Brown in his *History of Scotland* has observed, "With the Scottish historians who followed the War of Independence it was a prime concern to produce an unbroken line of Scottish kings stretching to the fathers of the human race. As an interloper in this series Macbeth was a monster whose origin and whose action must alike have been contrary to nature." With James I, a Scottish Stewart monarch, on the throne of England, Shakespeare would hardly write a revisionist account of Macbeth's kingship, nor would such an account be dramatically interesting or attractive to a London audience. The same fate befell Richard III, whose vilification was immortalized by Shakespeare in the interest of honoring Elizabeth I and the reign of the Tudors.

### THE DATE OF COMPOSITION

Shakespeare's plays were written to be produced. Their publication, often in pirated editions, occurred much later. Therefore, dates of composition can only be deduced and never firmly established from, as one critic put it, "extrinsic"—that is, dates of publication and references to the plays by others—and "intrinsic" evidence—clues in the text itself, perhaps surreptitious references to contemporary events or a comparison of other plays regarding style, structure, form, psychological insight, and even punctuation.

From extrinsic evidence it is assumed *Macbeth* was written between 1603 and 1606. The first direct evidence of a performance of the play is reported by Dr. Simon Forman, who wrote about it in April of 1610 or 1611. Allusions to Banquo's ghost appear in the 1607 *The Puritan* or *The Widow of Watling Street*. A second edition of *Warner Albion's England* added *A History of Macbeth*, no doubt due to the play's success, and John Marston's play *Sophonisba*, printed in 1606, appears to contain a number of parallels to Shakespeare's tragedy.

Intrinsic evidence suggests 1603 as the earliest possible composition date because that was the year James I acceded to the throne of England. The subject matter and King James's interest in witchcraft point to Shakespeare's attempt to please this monarch upon his crowning.

The most interesting contention is that the play contains references to the aborted assassination attempt on James I, the notorious Gunpowder Plot, discovered on November 5, 1605. One of the conspirators, Henry Garnet, refused to incriminate himself while on trial and used "equivocation" or hedging as a means of defense. This word

circulated through London and is a centerpiece of the Drunken Porter's speech. The controversy about Shakespeare's use of the Gunpowder Plot still lives. Garry Wills, the political author, has just published a book on the subject (*Witches and Jesuits*, Oxford).

Other references in the Drunken Porter's speech, such as the "farmer who hanged himself on th' expectation of plenty" and "the English tailor," have been cited as contemporaneous references, but other critics suggest that the Drunken Porter's speech is a later addition to the play altogether. Therefore, this evidence cannot be considered as conclusive.

Unlike many of Shakespeare's other plays, *Macbeth* was not published within the playwright's lifetime. Its first appearance in print was as part of the famous First Folio of 1623, the anthology of Shakespeare's works published seven years after his death, following *Julius Caesar* and preceding *Hamlet*. Scholars assume from alleged copying errors that the text was printed from a prompt copy, a transcript of such a prompt copy, or a transcript of the author's manuscript "written to dictation." *Macbeth* is, in fact, one of Shakespeare's shortest and most compact plays, leading some critics to assume it had been cut. On the other hand, other critics see the Drunken Porter and Hecate scenes as interpolations added by another playwright.

The irregularity of the diction, punctuation, verse structure and the telescoping of action have prompted critics since the late 17th century to correct the "errors" of the First Folio. One scholar, Richard Flatter, however, suggests that this particular text is not only the most direct and purest of versions, "the only one" showing "no traces of 'editorial' interference," but that much can be learned from it about how *Macbeth* was performed if one heeds the peculiarities of grammar, punctuation, and versification. He writes in *Shakespeare's Producing Hand*, "most of those 'irregularities' in Shakespeare's diction are due to his art as actor or, to use modern parlance, his art as producer . . . those 'irregularities' amount to stage directions wrought into the text itself."

## ABOUT THE PLAY

### "Fair is foul, and foul is fair": The Paradoxes of *Macbeth*

As epitomized by the Weird Sisters' famous incantation, *Macbeth* is full of paradoxes. Though it is Shakespeare's shortest tragedy (2,113 lines to *Hamlet's* 3,776), it is one of his densest. Its poetry is rich in imagery—of borrowed robes, naked babes, walking shadows, and murdered sleep. Its dialogue can dazzle us in one line with the Latinate "multitudinous seas incarnadine," then pull us up sharply in the next with the directness of its Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: "making the green one red." Its soliloquies can harbor tongue-twisting obscurity:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly: if th' assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence and catch  
With his surcease, success . . .

or tender simplicity: "She should have died hereafter;/ There would have been a time for such a word." The Weird Sisters speak in riddles that come true: Banquo will be "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater./ Not so happy, yet much happier." Lady Macbeth makes assertions that prove catastrophically untrue: "A little water clears us of this deed."

The paradoxes extend to the play's action. On one hand it is a political play about warriors and killing, tyranny, and dynasty; on the other it is a family drama about husbands and wives, fathers and sons. Its scenes of violence, murder, and revenge are counterpoised against poignant moments that cleave the heart: the abandoned and helpless Lady Macduff and her son, Macduff's stunned silence when he hears of their murders, Siward's soldierly reaction to young Siward's death in maiden battle. Its preternatural apparitions—witches, ghost, armed head, bloody child—are set against the realistic human struggle between ambition and conscience, and the appalling consequences, both physical and mental, of tragic decisions.

Day becomes night. Illusory daggers appear real. Ghosts and sleepers walk. Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. To these classic paradoxes, recent criticism has added less obvious ones. Duncan is an example of the good king, yet his reign is plagued by rebellion, and he lacks the crucial ability to see "the mind's construction in the face" of either the traitorous Thane of Cawdor or his successor, Macbeth. Malcolm is Scotland's rightful heir, but he accuses himself so convincingly of sins of lust and avarice that the unsuspecting playgoer may think them true, and inadvertently recall them when he seizes power at play's end. Macduff is the cause of Malcolm's return to Scotland, but his wife accuses him—rightly—of having abandoned his family into the hands of murderers, and the play offers no ready explanation of why he has done so. Macduff rids Scotland of the tyrant "butcher and his fiend-like Queen," but he is the one who comes onstage bearing Macbeth's bloody severed head.

However the greatest paradox remains the one at the play's center: the relationship between Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and murder. On hearing of the Weird Sisters' prediction that her husband will be king, Lady Macbeth's mind races immediately to murder. Her greatest fear is that "the milk of human kindness" flows too strongly in Macbeth's veins to permit him to do the deed. His tortured doubts and indecision before he murders Duncan ("We will proceed no further in this business.") and his anguished guilt after he has done so ("Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more;/ Macbeth does murder sleep'") contrast sharply, some would say monstrously, with her steely determination before and sangfroid after. Where she worries that Macbeth's milk of human kindness makes him less than a man, she prays the "murdering ministers" to "take her milk for gall" as part of some ritual sex change, and in her most monstrous image compares her mettle with his:

I have given suck, and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done.

(Here is yet another of the play's many paradoxes: Lady Macbeth claims to have nursed a child, and Macbeth kills Banquo and attempts to kill his son Fleance to prevent Banquo's heirs from succeeding him, yet no child of the Macbeths appears in the play.)

The initial image the playgoer gets of Macbeth, however, is not of a gentle soul but of a fierce warrior. The play's first mention of him reports his butchering of the traitorous Macdonwald:

For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—  
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel  
Which smoked with bloody execution,  
Like Valour's minion, carved out his passage  
Till he faced the slave—

.....  
unseamed him from the nave to the chops;  
And fixed his head upon our battlements.

And when Macbeth does appear onstage to be greeted by the Weird Sisters, he is far readier than Banquo to dwell on the bloody implications of their predictions. Where Banquo warns against "The instruments of darkness" that "tell us truths . . . to betray's/ In deepest consequence," Macbeth is already thinking murder:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not.

What is not, after the murder of Duncan, of course, is the easy cleansing of their hands Lady Macbeth had predicted. Her breasts do not fill entirely with gall, as she had prayed, nor do Macbeth's veins suffer from a surfeit of human kindness, as she had feared. Instead the "dearest partner[s] in greatness" exhibit a paradoxical exchange of language and personality. Before Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth, fearing any feminine response, prays to be unsexed, and in Macbeth's absence, calls on the cover of night to protect her own phallic weapon:

Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark  
To cry, "Hold, hold."

When Macbeth enters, she takes control, urging him to "look like th'innocent flower" and to put "This night's great business into my dispatch." Before Banquo's murder, however, Macbeth seizes control, urging her to "Be innocent of the knowledge...Till thou applaud the deed." This time he calls on night to enable his plan and destroy any qualms his masculine heart may harbor:

Come, seeling night,  
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,  
And with thy bloody and invisible hand  
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond  
Which keeps me pale.

The exchange of personality traits is not so sudden as this exchange of language might indicate, but it is ultimately complete. When Banquo's ghost appears, Macbeth is clearly in need of Lady Macbeth's protection ("Sit, worthy friends, my lord is often thus") and chiding ("What, quite

unmanned in folly?"). And he is the one, she says, who lacks "the season of all natures, sleep." But after Macbeth's second visit to the Weird Sisters, when he sees the apparition of Banquo's royal heirs, his milk of human kindness does indeed turn to gall, and he orders the murder of Macduff's family. In contrast, the next (and last) time Lady Macbeth appears onstage, she is sleepwalking, desperately trying to wash from her hands the blood of Duncan, Banquo, and Lady Macduff. Her death, according to Malcolm in the play's closing lines, results from suicide. Macbeth, on the other hand, has little time to grieve her death ("Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow") before he must turn his attention to the encroachment of Birnam Wood and the attack of the man who is not of woman born. "Cowed," that is, feminized, for the moment at the incredible truth of the two paradoxes on which he had set his hope, Macbeth nevertheless ultimately refuses to yield and must be cut down in a final confrontation with Macduff.

At this point, as at so many points in the course of the play, we find ourselves torn between the desire for justice and compassion for Macbeth. Macbeth must die so that Scotland can live, yet "nothing in his life/ Became him like the leaving it." Like Oedipus and Faustus, he has been both hero and villain. Like Lady Macbeth, he has exhibited traits that are both female and male. Like us, he is both sinner and sufferer. That of course is the ultimate paradox of tragedy: it allows us to satisfy our moral sense by being appalled at the overreaching of our fellow human beings, while at the same time it permits us to be awestruck at the unbending nature of the human spirit. Thus tragedy enables us both to celebrate and to sublimate our own vaulting will. Perhaps it is because of, rather than in spite of, *Macbeth's* many paradoxes that it remains one of Shakespeare's most popular plays.

**Maureen Connolly McFeely**

Adjunct Assistant Professor of English  
Dramaturg, *Macbeth*

### A FEW CRITICAL COMMENTS

"Lady Macbeth, like all in Shakespeare, is a class individualized: — of high rank, left much alone, and feeding herself with daydreams of ambition, she mistakes the courage of fantasy for the power of bearing the consequences of the realities of guilt. Hers is the mock fortitude of a mind deluded by ambition; she shames her husband with a superhuman audacity of fancy which she cannot support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony."

—S.T. Coleridge

"*Macbeth* is very much shorter than the other three tragedies, but our experience in traversing it is so crowded and intense that it leaves an impression not of brevity but of speed. It is the most vehement, the most concentrated, perhaps we may say the most tremendous, of the tragedies."

—A.C. Bradley

"In a final judgement the whole play may be writ down as a wrestling of destruction with creation: with sickening shock the phantasmagoria of death and evil are violently loosed on earth, and for a while the agony endures, destructive; there is a wrenching of new birth, itself disorderly and unnatural in this disordered world, and then crea-

tion's more firm-set sequent concord replaces chaos. The baby-peace is crowned."

—G. Wilson Knight

"The imagery in *Macbeth* appears to me to be more rich and varied, more highly imaginative, more unapproachable by any other writer, than that of any other single play. It is particularly so, I think, in the continuous use made of the simplest, humblest, everyday things, drawn from the daily life in a small house, as a vehicle for sublime poetry. But that is beside our point here.

"The ideas in the imagery are in themselves more imaginative, more subtle and complex than in other plays, and there are a greater number of them, interwoven the one with the other, recurring and repeating. There are at least four of these main ideas, and many subsidiary ones.

"One is the picture of *Macbeth* himself.

"Few simple things—harmless in themselves—have such a curiously humiliating and degrading effect as the spectacle of a notably small man enveloped in a coat far too big for him. Comic actors know this well—Charlie Chaplin, for instance—and it is by means of this homely picture that Shakespeare shows us his imaginative view of the hero, and expresses the fact that the honours for which the murders were committed are, after all, of very little worth to him.

"The idea constantly recurs that *Macbeth's* new honours sit ill upon him, like a loose and badly fitting garment, belonging to someone else. *Macbeth* himself first expresses it, quite early in the play, when, immediately following the first appearance of the witches and their prophecies, Ross arrives from the king, and greets him as thane of Cawdor, to which *Macbeth* quickly replies,

The thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me  
In borrow'd robes?"

—Caroline Spurgeon

"The Porter scene has been less thoroughly studied as a variation on the play's main action. But it is, in fact, a farcical and terrible version of "outrunning reason," a witty and very concentrated epitome of this absurd movement of spirit. The Porter first teases the knockers at the gate with a set of paradoxes, all of which present attempts to outrun reason; and he sees them all as ways into Hell. . . . When the Porter has admitted the knockers he ironically offers them lewd physical analogies for outrunning reason: drink as tempting lechery into a hopeless action; himself as wrestling with drink. The relation of the Porter to the knockers is like that of the Witches to *Macbeth*—he tempts them into Hell with ambiguities. And the inebriation of drink and lust, lewd and laughable as it is, is closely analogous to the more terrible and spiritual intoxication of the *Macbeths*."

—Francis Fergusson

"The special reason why the text of *Macbeth* shows more four-foot lines than any of the other plays seems to lie in the fact that the Witches have influenced not only *Macbeth's* actions but also his language, both of which, after all, originate from the same mind.

"That drop of poison that enters *Macbeth's* mind is so potent that throughout the play he continually tries to

regain his equilibrium, all the time wavering between "foul and fair", between "ill and good", between "lost and won". Whenever he ponders he weighs up the one against the other, balancing the two scales of wishing it "highly" and wishing it "holily".

In fact, the language of the whole play seems to be infected by that drop of poison. Like a tuning-fork sounded, there is a continuous trembling between Yes and No. The word "double" runs through the whole composition like a figured bass: "double trust"—"double sense"—"double sure". The word is not only actually spoken, but also implied in numerous phrases."

—Richard Flatter

"Critics have noticed that *Lady Macbeth* re-enacts the Fall of Eve, as *Macbeth* does that of Adam."

—W.A. Murray

"From end to end, *Macbeth* is packed with these Delphic effects as is no other work of Shakespeare's: words, acts, and situations which may be interpreted or taken in two ways at the peril of the chooser and which in the aggregate produce an overwhelming conviction that behind the visible world lies another world, immeasurably wider and deeper, on its relation to which human destiny turns. As a face now reveals and now conceals the life behind it, so the visible world now hides this other world as does a wall, now opens on it as does a door. In either case it is there—there not as a matter of philosophical speculation or of theological tradition or hypothesis, but there as a matter of psychic fact.

Scholars who dismiss the supernatural element in *Macbeth* as stage convention or condescension to popular superstition stamp themselves as hopelessly insensitive not merely to poetry but to sincerity. Not only the plot and characters of the play, which are up to a certain point the author's inventions, but its music, imagery, and atmosphere—effects only partly under his conscious control—unite in giving the impression of mighty and inscrutable forces behind human life. Only one convinced of the reality of these forces could conceivably have imparted such an overwhelming sense of their presence."

—Harold C. Goddard

"This world, which is at once without and within *Macbeth*, can be most easily described as "strange." The world, like the witches, is always somewhere doing its work. Even in the battle which precedes the play the thane of Glamis has made "strange images of death" (I, iii, 97), and when he comes home to his lady his face is "as a book where men may read strange matters" (I, v, 63-4). Duncan's horses after his murder turn wild in nature and devour each other—"a thing most strange and certain" (n, iv, 14). Nothing is as it should be in such a world. "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" There is a drift of disorder in all events, and the air is murky with unwelcome miracles.

"It is a dark world too, inhabited from the beginning by witches who meet on a blasted heath in thunder and lightning, and who hover through fog and filthy air as they leave on unspeakable errands."

—Mark Van Doren

“The riot of imagination . . . is almost a weakness in him (Macbeth), considering the fact that he is after all a warrior, a soldier, who might be expected to give small compunction to the business of killing. But he does, and that’s the point about Macbeth. When he stops to think, he starts to imagine; and this in a way is his undoing. It weakens him, undermines his personality. The symbol of a Lady Macbeth going mad illustrates another breakdown of the personality because of imagination, another example of how imagination as a ‘muscle’ reaches out to extinguish her.”

—Morris Carnovsky

“Macbeth, the multiple murderer, steeped in blood, could not accept the world in which murder existed. In this, perhaps, consists the gloomy greatness of this character and the true tragedy of Macbeth’s history. For a long time Macbeth did not want to accept the reality and irrevocability of nightmare, and could not reconcile himself to his part, as if it were somebody else’s. Now he knows everything. He knows that there is no escape from nightmare, which is the human fate and condition, or—in a more modern language—the human situation.”

—Jan Kott

“What is emphatically to be noticed is that the weyward sisters do not suggest Duncan’s murder; they simply make a prediction, and Macbeth himself takes the matter from there. The prediction they make, moreover, is entirely congenial to the situation, requires no special insight. Having made himself in this last battle more than ever the great warrior-hero of the kingdom and its chief defender, what more natural than that the ambitious man should be moved in the flush of victory to look ahead, hope, imagine? Hence, while recognizing the objectivity of the sisters as diabolical agents, we may also look on them as representing the potentialities for evil that lurk in every success, agents of a nemesis that seems to attend always on the more extreme dilations of the human ego.”

—Maynard Mack

“At the conclusion of this tragedy, we accept without demur the judgment that Macbeth is a butcher. In fact, however, he is no more a butcher at the end than he is at the beginning. Macbeth lives in a culture that values butchery. Throughout the play manhood is equated with the ability to kill. Power is the highest value in Scotland, and in Scottish culture. Power is military prowess. Macbeth’s crime is not that he is a murderer: he is praised and rewarded for being a murderer. His crime is a failure to make the distinction his culture expects among the objects of his slaughter.”

—Marilyn French

“More so than *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* is a play whose imaginative bearings are defined by its asides, soliloquies and set pieces, such as the *To-morrow, and to-morrow* speech, or Lady Macbeth’s death. But whereas Hamlet’s soliloquies follow a formula barely developed from Richard III’s public addresses

and allow for a measure of disembodiment of speaker from discourse, Macbeth’s tortured soliloquies home in relentlessly on the implications of his deeds for his soul, without giving any quarter to the audience. There is no provision in this play for the jaunty enjoyment of ill-doing of Richard III, or the enduring courtly sophistication and philosophical aphorisms of *Hamlet*. Macbeth’s soliloquies are raw, sensory, visual and profoundly irrational. They constitute Shakespeare’s supreme achievement in self-expression, and it is for this reason perhaps that Macbeth is the last of the plays to use soliloquy extensively. In the great ‘see-saw’ lines, commencing

*If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly*

(I.vii.1-2)

uttered in extremis before the decision to murder Duncan is finally made irreversible the turmoil of Macbeth’s mind is perfectly established. What at first appears like a pragmatic proposition has within 28 lines been exposed as the heinous breach of nature that it is, not through ratiocination but by the impressive impact of images unconsciously arising from the outer reaches of Macbeth’s better self.”

—Levi Fox

#### ABOUT THE PLAY ON THE STAGE

A production of a play as popular as *Macbeth* may say more about the era in which it is presented than it may reveal about the play itself. How the text is changed, the interpretation of the major characters, the director’s “concept,” the designers’ visualizations all give us glimpses into the morals, fashions, tastes, and taboos of an age, its *zeitgeist*, or the spirit of the times.

From 1675 until 1744 *Macbeth* was only to be seen in a version prepared by William D’Avenant. The Restoration period in England (approx. 1660-1700) brought theories of the drama from France along with Voltaire’s opinion that Shakespeare was a barbarian. Therefore, the verse in the play was formalized; the excessive violence and bad language were expunged. Scenes were also added, and the witches were given a decidedly operatic or musical comedy flair to cater to theatrical tastes of the time. It is little wonder that Samuel Pepys found the play excellent, “especially in divertisement.”

David Garrick, the most noted Shakespearean actor of the early 18th century, claimed to have restored the text and “given *Macbeth* as written by Shakespeare.” He, however, kept the operatic witches and saw fit to provide himself with a death speech as Macbeth. He performed in the full regalia of a noble of the court of George II, powdered wig and all. Thirty years later the actor Charles Macklin assayed the role in tartan plaid and a kilt, but audiences were not yet prepared for such regional realism, and he abandoned this innovation.



David Garrick



Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth



Mrs. Pritchard as Lady Macbeth and David Garrick as Macbeth



Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth, holding the bloody daggers, and John Philip Kemble as Macbeth

At the end of the century, as Georgian propriety gave way to Romantic fervor, actors' interpretations and passions, rather than spectacle and effects, began to dominate the play. During this period Edmund Kean was said to be "heart-rending" in the title role, but the most impressive production opened in 1794 with John Philip Kemble as Macbeth and Mrs. Sarah Siddons, one of England's greatest actresses, as Lady Macbeth. Consistent with Romantic sensibilities, Banquo's ghost was, for the first time, a creature of Macbeth's imagination not visible to the audiences. It was reported that Mrs. Siddons saw her role as "a delicate blonde who ruled by her intellect and subdued by her beauty," but "the heroine of the most tragic of tragedies."



Samuel Phelps

During the middle of the 19th century, concurrent with the rise of capitalism, *Macbeth* became a vehicle for the commercial success and acclaim of the individual performers who gathered pickup companies to support their histrionics. It was the beginning of the star system. The settings became more realistic and more excessively ostentatious consistent with such an age of acquisition. In the United States Edwin

Booth filled the role with “majesty and martial heroism.” In 1844 Samuel Phelps starred in and presented a *Macbeth* that restored much of the original text. Tommaso Salvini, the great Italian actor, performed Macbeth in the 1870s portraying him as “a barbaric chief living among barbarians.” In 1849 *Macbeth* provided the occasion for one of the most disastrous events in the history of the theatre, the notorious Astor Place Riot. As befits this period of cutthroat competition, William Charles Macready, an English actor visiting the United States, dared to present the play in New York where the renowned American actor Edwin Forrest was also performing it. It was taken as an affront to Forrest’s reputation and an incursion into his territory. By the time the riot, instigated by his supporters, was contained, twenty-two had lost their lives and another hundred were wounded.



William Charles Macready



Edwin Forrest



Mrs. D.P. Bowers as Lady Macbeth. She was described as one of Edwin Booth’s “favorite leading ladies.”



Tommaso Salvini

Toward the end of the 19th century, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry performed the play with limited success. The opulence of the production, as can be seen in John Singer Sargent’s famous portrait of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth crowning herself, celebrated the glories of the British Empire. Irving’s assessment of the title role as “a poet with his brain and a villain with his heart” suggested the coming century’s obsession with Freud and psychological realism.



Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, Lyceum, 1875



Henry Irving as Macbeth, Lyceum, 1875



John Gielgud and Gwen Frangcon-Davies, Old Vic, 1940.



Laurence Olivier as Macbeth, 1955

Our own century began with the 1909 William Poel production in England. Poel devoted himself to clearing out the extraneous Victorian claptrap from Shakespeare's plays. He attempted to reconstruct the productions as they might have been presented in Shakespeare's day. He reintroduced the murder of Lady MacDuff, which had been cut from almost all previous productions, prompting George Bernard Shaw to a new understanding of the events of the tragedy, namely "that Macbeth was a doomed man if he ever let Macduff catch him."

In 1921 on Broadway, a production which starred Lionel Barrymore featured settings by the groundbreaking designer Robert Edmond Jones. His concept pictured the inner turmoil of the characters by symbolizing the witches as masks overhead, ethereal forces that dominate the characters' behavior.



Robert Edmond Jones' set design for the banquet scene



A very young Laurence Olivier as Malcolm. Birmingham Rep at the Royal Court, 1928.



Margaret Leighton and Ralph Richardson in *Macbeth*, 1952.

In our own day most of the great British actors and actresses have interpreted the principal roles: John Gielgud with Gwen Frangcon-Davies in 1942 and with Margaret Leighton in 1954, Laurence Olivier with Judith Anderson in 1937 and with Vivien Leigh in 1955 (Both Gielgud and director Jonathan Miller assert that Olivier's second production was the finest *Macbeth* they had ever seen.), Sir Michael Redgrave with Flora Robson in 1947, Sir Ralph Richardson with Margaret Leighton again in 1952, Sir Alec Guinness and Simone Signoret in 1966, Anthony Hopkins and Diana Rigg in 1972, Ian McKellan and Judi Dench in 1976, Jonathan Pryce and Sinead Cusack in 1986. In the United States Jason Robards, Jr., and Raul Julia have played the title role. Christopher Plummer and Glenda Jackson performed it on Broadway in 1988, and a production has just closed off Broadway directed by and starring Jack Stehlin.



Ian McKellan as Macbeth tempted by the witches, RSC, 1976

Among theatre people a legend has grown up that the play is jinxed and that difficulties and disasters are associated with every production of it. In superstitious theatre circles it is referred to not by title but as "the Scottish play," and if by chance *Macbeth's* name is spoken, an elaborate ritual must be performed to ward off evil spirits. Perhaps productions are accident prone because it is such a short, fast moving, violent drama, much of it taking place in the dark. Also perhaps when accidents occur in other plays, they are passed over; but when they occur in *Macbeth*, they are blamed on the curse.

The stage history of *Macbeth* reinforces Hamlet's observation that players "are the abstract and brief chronicle of the time" and "show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."



Sinead Cusack and Jonathan Pryce, RSC

### FAMOUS LINES

#### FIRST WITCH

When shall we three meet again?  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

#### SECOND WITCH

When the hurlyburly's done,  
When the battle's lost and won. (1.1.1-4)

Fair is foul, and foul is fair,  
Hover through the fog and filthy air. (WITCHES 1.1.12-13)

So foul and fair a day I have not seen. (MACBETH 1.3.39)

... oftentimes to win us to our harm  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's  
In deepest consequence. (BANQUO 1.3.135-138)

Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme. (MACBETH 1.3.140-142)

This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. (MACBETH 1.3.143-144)

Nothing in his life  
Became him like the leaving it. (MALCOLM 1.4.8-9)

Yet do I fear thy nature;  
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way. (LADY MACBETH 1.5.16-18)

Thou wouldst be great,  
Art not without ambition, but without  
The illness should attend it. (LADY MACBETH 1.5.18-20)

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. (LADY MACBETH 1.5.45-47)

Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, (MACBETH 3.2.15)  
 And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
 Of direst cruelty. (LADY MACBETH 1.5.47-50)

Look like th' innocent flower,  
 But be the serpent under 't.  
 (LADY MACBETH—1.5.76-78)

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
 It were done quickly. (MACBETH 1.7.1-2)

. . . that but this blow  
 Might be the be-all and the end-all here.  
 (MACBETH 1.7.4-5)

Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"  
 Like the poor cat i' th' adage?  
 (LADY MACBETH 1.7.48-49)

We fail?  
 But screw your courage to the sticking place  
 And we'll not fail. (LADY MACBETH 1.7.70-71)

Bring forth men-children only!  
 (MACBETH 1.7.83)

False face must hide what the false heart doth know.  
 (MACBETH 1.7.95)

Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
 The handle toward my hand? (MACBETH 2.1.44-45)

The bell invites me.  
 Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell  
 That summons thee to heaven or to hell.  
 (MACBETH 2.1.75-77)

Had he not resembled  
 My father as he slept, I had done 't.  
 (LADY MACBETH 2.2.16-17)

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!  
 Macbeth does murder sleep"—the innocent sleep,  
 Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care . . .  
 (MACBETH 2.2.47-49)

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
 Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
 The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
 Making the green one red. (MACBETH  
 2.2.78-81)

Naught's had, all's spent,  
 Where our desire is got without content.  
 (LADY MACBETH 3.2.6-7)

What's done is done. (LADY MACBETH 3.2.14)

We have scorched the snake, not killed it.

Duncan is in his grave.  
 After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.  
 (MACBETH—3.2.25-26)

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,  
 Till thou applaud the deed. (MACBETH 3.2.51-52)

Come, seeling night,  
 Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day.  
 (MACBETH 3.2.52-53)

. . . I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in  
 To saucy doubts and fears. (MACBETH  
 3.4.26-27)

It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood.  
 Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak.  
 (MACBETH 3.4.151-152)

Double, double, toil and trouble;  
 Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. (WITCHES 4.1.10-11)

Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
 Wool of bat and tongue of dog . . .  
 (SECOND WITCH 4.1.14-15)

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags?  
 (MACBETH 4.1.48)

Be bloody, bold, and resolute. Laugh to scorn  
 The power of man, for none of woman born  
 Shall harm Macbeth.  
 (SECOND APPARITION 4.1.90-92)

. . . I'll make assurance double sure  
 (MACBETH—4.1.94)

Macbeth shall never vanquished be until  
 Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill  
 Shall come against him.  
 (THIRD APPARITION 4.1.105-108)

Saw you the Weird Sisters? (MACBETH 4.1.153)

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.  
 (MALCOLM 4.3.27)

What, all my pretty chickens and their dam  
 At one fell swoop? (MACDUFF 4.3.257-258)

Out, damned spot, out, I say! (LADY MACBETH 5.1.37)

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.  
 (LADY MACBETH 5.1.53-54)

What's done cannot be undone.  
 (LADY MACBETH 5.1.71)

Thou lily-livered boy. (MACBETH 5.3.18)

I have lived long enough. My way of life

Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf.  
(MACBETH 5.3.26-27)

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased . . .  
(MACBETH 5.3.50)

Therein the patient  
Must minister to himself. (DOCTOR 5.3.56-57)

I have supped full with horrors.  
(MACBETH 5.5.15)

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
(MACBETH 5.5.20-21)

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing. (MACBETH 5.5.22-31)

I 'gin to be aweary of the sun . . . (MACBETH—5.5.55)

Lay on, Macduff  
And damned be him that first cries "Hold! Enough!"  
(MACBETH 5.8.38-39)

The time is free. (MACDUFF 5.8.66)

### ABOUT THE PLAY IN OTHER FORMS

The works of Shakespeare have inspired numerous other artistic creations including other plays, ballets, musicals, operas, and films. *Romeo and Juliet* exists as a memorable ballet, as do *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, among others. *The Boys From Syracuse*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, *West Side Story*, and *Catch My Soul (Othello)* have been successful musical theatre adaptations from Shakespeare. Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette*; Verdi's *Macbeth*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*; Giannini's *Taming of the Shrew*; Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; Thomas' *Hamlet*, and Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* are just a representative few of the hundreds of operas inspired by Shakespeare's plays. From a 1908 silent version of *The Taming of the Shrew* to Franco Zeffirelli's wide-screen versions of it, as well as his *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*; many of Shakespeare's plays have been given film treatment, though often in too literal or stiff a fashion for the big screen.

The story of *Macbeth* has attracted artists from many media. "It's a rattling good melodrama!" Hollywood screenwriter and director John Emerson enthused in 1916. He

was about to shoot the second silent film version of the play with classical actor Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. It had already been filmed in 1913 with Violet Vanbrugh. The later version was well received for its brooding effects but, without the dialogue, it was certainly not the play that Shakespeare penned.



Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Violet Vanbrugh, 1911

Four later film adaptations met with greater success, although none of them could be deemed entirely faithful to the text. In 1948 Orson Welles directed and starred in a version produced by Republic Pictures which had until then been known primarily for its "B" westerns. Welles' production was fraught with his chronic money problems and had the look of a low budget movie. His performance, replete with a heavy Scottish dialect, was often incomprehensible, although his genius was evident in some startling cinematic effects and camera angles.





Orson Welles as Macbeth in two scenes from his 1948 film.



Toshiro Mifune as the Japanese Macbeth in the climactic moment of Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*

In 1957, the brilliant Japanese director Akira Kurosawa adapted the play to the Samurai period. Calling it *Throne of Blood* he translated the story into a spectacle of primordial passions and fierce violence. Despite its departure from the Shakespeare text, it is one of the landmarks of world cinema.



Jon Finch as Macbeth and Stephen Chase as Malcolm in Roman Polanski's film adaptation.

Roman Polanski in 1971, shortly after the murder of his wife Sharon Tate by Charles Manson's followers, conceived a bloody, nihilistic reading of the play. He cast very young actors in the major roles. This emphasized a more callow, irresponsible interpretation of their ambition. The film was a powerful, unified view of the play but not a commercial success. With it the film company had hoped to capitalize on the extraordinary popularity of Franco

Zeffereilli's youthful, exuberant *Romeo and Juliet*, but its cool reception only succeeded in setting back major filming of Shakespeare projects almost twenty years until Kenneth Branagh's *Henry IV* in 1989.

In 1991 John Turturro and Rod Steiger appeared in a modernization of the Macbeth story. Called *Men of Respect*, it transposed the Scottish milieu to the streets of contemporary New York with the Thanes becoming Mafia chieftains. It received limited distribution and moderate success.

Three notable *Macbeths* have appeared on television. In the early '50s, the Hallmark Hall of Fame, dedicated to spreading culture through the new medium, sponsored Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson in the major roles but these actors, more accustomed to the fullness of stage work, tended to give overblown rhetorical performances.



Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson, 1941

The BBC Shakespeare series produced the play in 1979 with Nicol Williamson and Jane Lapotaire. Although costumed in medieval garb, the actors and the production had a mechanical, generic feel, so that the play never came to life.

On the other hand, the Royal Shakespeare Company production taped in 1988 did full justice to the tragedy and to the medium. This lucid, astounding treatment starred Ian McKellan and Judi Dench, repeating their stage performances under the direction of Trevor Nunn. This *Macbeth* used a very small company, no setting, and employed extensive use of close-ups to bring the viewer into the hearts and souls of the characters. It managed to prove on the screen how effective the bare stage of the Globe theatre in Shakespeare's day must have been.

Shakespeare's play has also been adapted in a very free fashion to serve both the urge for innovation and the heat of political outrage. In 1936, as part of the W.P.A. Federal Theatre Project, Orson Welles and John Houseman presented an all black version at a theatre in Harlem. Called the 'Voodoo' *Macbeth*, its venue was moved to the Caribbean and made use of traditional music and dance to

explode the events of the play into a colorful and fast-moving spectacle. In 1971 Charles Marowitz experimented with the text producing what he called *A Macbeth*. For both experimental and political purposes, Alfred Jarry, one of the founders of the Dadaist Movement in art, in 1896 conceived a frenetic, scandalous version of the play and called it *Ubu Roi*. The French-Rumanian playwright Eugene Ionesco satirized dictatorship with his 1971 *Macbett* as did Tom Stoppard with his *Cahoot's Macbeth* in 1979. In America Barbara Garson attracted much attention with her 1967 *MacBird*. Starring Stacy Keach, this heavy-handed, often hilarious satire alleged Lyndon Johnson's complicity in the assassination of John F. Kennedy and criticized the Vietnam War policies of the Johnson administration.



**UBU ROI**  
ALFRED JARRY



William Devane and Stacy Keach in *MacBird!*



Costume design for Welles' "Voodoo" *Macbeth*

Musically, *Macbeth* has inspired various composers. One of Giuseppe Verdi's early operas (1847) is based on it. Several others made attempts at operas but only an effort of 1910 by Ernest Bloch is considered "unjustly neglected." Sir Arthur Sullivan and Sir William Walton both put their hands to the composition of incidental music to productions of the play, and it is thought that Henry Purcell may have set the witches' scenes to music for the 17th-century William D'Avenant version. Richard Strauss used the play as inspiration for the first of his many tone poems—"a character study of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth."

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### Before Seeing the Play

1. Do you think Macbeth's behavior was predestined, or was he in control of his actions, a creature of free will? Why do you think Banquo did not act the way Macbeth did?
2. At what point does Macbeth take over and dominate the action instead of Lady Macbeth? Why does she weaken? What prompts her to push her husband to kill the king?
3. Who are the witches? Why do they pick Macbeth? Do you think they tricked him?
4. Do you see Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as young and ambitious, or do you see them as older, more mature people. The roles have been cast both ways.
5. Why do you believe this play is considered to be one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies?
6. Why does Shakespeare give a character like Macbeth, who does so many evil things, such powerfully, beautiful poetic speech?
7. Is Macbeth a coward? A villain? Why did Shakespeare report him to be such a brave, loyal soldier at the beginning?
8. Why did Shakespeare put the Drunken Porter in the play? Is he funny?
9. Was Macduff right to leave his wife in Scotland while traveling to England to join a rebellion against Macbeth?
10. What do you think of Shakespeare's characterization of the women in the play: Lady Macbeth, Hecate, and the Witches, Lady MacDuff, and the Gentlewoman? Are they as believable and well-rounded as the men in the play?

### After Seeing the Play

1. Did the actors portray the characters on the stage the way you imagined them when you read the play? How were they similar? How different?
2. With whom did your sympathies lie? Did those sympathies change?
3. At what point were you most involved? At what point were you least involved? Why do you think this was so?
4. Do you see any circumstances in which you might behave the way Macbeth and Lady Macbeth did? How were these characters like you? How were they different from you?
5. What did you find new or revealing in the play after seeing the production that you did not get from a reading of the text?

6. How do you see the play in terms of what you see on TV? A mystery? A horror story? A fantasy? An adventure tale? A psychological drama?

7. Did you get a sense of the various locations in which the story takes place? If so, how did the actors, the set, costumes and lighting suggest those changes of location?

8. If you were to present *Macbeth* on TV or as a film, what would you have to change? What can be done on the stage that cannot be done on TV?

9. Is the violence in the play different from the violence you see in films or on TV? Does it serve a different purpose? If you feel it is different, how so? If you feel it is no different, why do you believe *Macbeth* is considered more meaningful than a Steven Seagall film or a horror film such as *Nightmare on Elm Street*?

### A SELECTED READING LIST

#### About Shakespeare and His Plays

Chute, Marchette. *Shakespeare of London*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949.

An easy-to-read absorbing biography.

Ribner, Irving. *William Shakespeare: An Introduction to His Life, Times, and Theatre*. Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1969.

An overview of Shakespeare. Very readable.

Schoenbaum, Samuel. *Shakespeare, the Globe and the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

A richly illustrated look at Shakespeare's times and his plays taken from the Folger Shakespeare Library traveling exhibit.

#### About Shakespeare's Theatre

Beckerman, Bernard. *Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.

An informative account of the staging of Shakespeare's plays in his time.

Hodges, Walter C. *The Globe Restored*. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1954.

A well illustrated and readable attempt to reconstruct the Globe Theatre.

#### **About *Macbeth***

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Major Literary Characters: Macbeth*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991.

A collection of recent essays from a variety of perspectives.

Rosenberg, Marvin. *The Masks of Macbeth*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978.

An exhaustive examination of the play, with significant commentary on various past performance and production choices.

#### **From a production point of view.**

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*.

(The Oxford Shakespeare, edited by Nicholas Brooke). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Fine introductory material, excellent topic and line notes. Paperback edition.

Van Doren, Mark. *Shakespeare*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1953.

Brief but illuminating essays on all the plays.

Webster, Margaret. *Shakespeare Without Tears*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1942.

A lively look at all the plays from a stage director's point of view.

# 46 Years of Shakespeare 1950-1995

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1950	Julius Caesar	1973	Measure for Measure
1951	Henry IV, Part I	1974	A Midsummer Night's Dream
1952	Twelfth Night	1975	Love's Labour's Lost
1953	Macbeth	1976	Much Ado About Nothing
1954	Much Ado About Nothing	1977	Romeo and Juliet
1955	Othello	1978	The Two Gentlemen of Verona
1956	Richard III	1979	The Winter's Tale
1957	As You Like It	1980	Twelfth Night
1958	Hamlet	1981	Macbeth
1959	The Merry Wives of Windsor	1982	The Taming of the Shrew
1960	Romeo and Juliet	1983	As You Like It
1961	Love's Labour's Lost	1984	A Midsummer Night's Dream
1962	The Tempest	1985	The Tempest
1963	A Midsummer Night's Dream	1986	Romeo and Juliet
1964	Julius Caesar	1987	The Comedy of Errors
1965	The Taming of the Shrew	1988	Twelfth Night
1966	Twelfth Night	1989	The Merchant of Venice
1967	Romeo and Juliet	1990	Othello
1968	As You Like It	1991	Hamlet
1969	The Comedy of Errors and The Boys from Syracuse	1992	The Merry Wives of Windsor
1970	Hamlet	1993	Measure for Measure
1971	The Merry Wives of Windsor	1994	As You Like It
1972	Richard III	1995	Macbeth

**HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY'S  
46th ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL**

Hofstra University's Annual Shakespeare Festival began in 1950 with a production of *Julius Caesar*. Over its 46-year history, the Festival has presented a varied selection of the plays of Shakespeare, lesser-known short plays from the period, musicales, and scenes from Shakespeare's plays performed by high school groups. In 1995, for the third time, *Macbeth* will be offered, representing one of **twenty** plays of the Shakespearean canon presented at the Festival. *Macbeth* was previously performed in 1953 and 1981.

Since 1951, the second year of the Festival, plays have been performed regularly on a 5/6 life-size replica of the Globe stage as reconstructed by John Cranford Adams, later assisted by Irwin Smith. Dr. Adams was President of Hofstra University from 1944 to 1964. The replica was built under the supervision of Donald H. Swinney, designer and technical director in the Department of Drama. The Globe was erected each spring in the Calkins Gymnasium where the Festival was presented in its early years. Since 1958 the Festival has been held in the John Cranford Adams Playhouse. In most years the replica of the Globe has been used as the setting for the Shakespeare Festival. On a number of occasions a different setting has been used, and that will be the case with this year's production of *Macbeth*.

**HOFSTRA/DRAMA**  
Hofstra University  
Department of Drama and Dance