



Insights

A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespearean Festival



Macbeth

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespearean Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

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Macbeth

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Shakespeare: Words, Words, Words

By S. S. Moorty

“No household in the English-speaking world is properly furnished unless it contains copies of the Holy Bible and of The Works of William Shakespeare. It is not always thought that these books should be read in maturer years, but they must be present as symbols of Religion and Culture” (G.B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare*. Rev. & Exp. [New York: Penguin Books, 1991], 11).

We, the Shakespearean-theater goers and lovers, devotedly and ritualistically watch and read the Bard’s plays not for exciting stories and complex plots. Rather, Shakespeare’s language is a vital source of our supreme pleasure in his plays. Contrary to ill-conceived notions, Shakespeare’s language is not an obstacle to appreciation, though it may prove to be difficult to understand. Instead, it is the communicative and evocative power of Shakespeare’s language that is astonishingly rich in vocabulary—about 29,000 words—strikingly presented through unforgettable characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Rosalind, Viola, Iago, Shylock, etc.

In the high school classroom, students perceive Shakespeare’s language as “Old English.” Actually Shakespeare’s linguistic environment, experience, and exposure was, believe it or not, closer to our own times than to Chaucer’s, two hundred years earlier. Indeed, the history and development of the English language unfolds as follows: Old English, 449–1100; Middle English 1100–1500; and Modern English 1500–present. Shakespeare was firmly in the Modern English period.

At the time Shakespeare wrote, most of the grammatical changes from Old and Middle English had taken place; yet rigid notions about “correctness” had not yet been standardized in grammars. The past five centuries have advanced the cause of standardized positions for words; yet the flexible idiom of Elizabethan English offered abundant opportunities for Shakespeare’s linguistic inventiveness. Ideally it is rewarding to study several facets of Shakespeare’s English: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, wordplay, and imagery. The present overview will, however, be restricted to “vocabulary.”

To Polonius’s inquisitive question “What do you read, my lord?” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.191) Hamlet nonchalantly and intriguingly aptly replies: “Words, words, words” (2.2.192). This many-splendored creation of Shakespeare’s epitomizes the playwright’s own fascination with the dynamic aspect of English language, however troubling it may be to modern audiences and readers. Shakespeare added several thousand words to the language, apart from imparting new meanings to known words. At times Shakespeare could teasingly employ the same word for different shades of thought. Barowne’s single line, “Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile” (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 1.1.77), as Harry Levin in his *General Introduction to The Riverside Shakespeare* (9) explains, “uses ‘light’ in four significations: intellect, seeking wisdom, cheats eyesight out of daylight.”

Another instance: Othello as he enters his bedroom with a light before he smothers his dear, innocent Desdemona soliloquizes: “Put out the light, and then put out the light” (*Othello*, 5.2.7) Here ‘light’ compares the light of Othello’s lamp or torch to Desdemona’s ‘light’ of life.

In both instances, the repeated simple ordinary word carries extraordinary shades of meaning. “Usually such a tendency in a Shakespeare play indicates a more or less conscious thematic intent.” (Paul A. Jorgensen, *Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words* [Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1962], 100).

Living in an age of the “grandiose humanistic confidence in the power of the word” (Levin 9), Shakespeare evidently felt exuberant that he had the license to experiment with the language, further blessed by the fact that “there were no English grammars to lay down rules or dictionaries to restrict word-formation. This was an immeasurable boon for writers” (Levin 10). Surely Shakespeare took full advantage of the unparalleled linguistic freedom to invent, to experiment with, and to indulge in lavishly.

However intriguing, captivating, mind-teasing, beguiling, and euphonious, Shakespeare’s vocabulary can be a stumbling block, especially for readers. “In the theater the speaking actor frequently relies on tone, semantic drive, narrative context, and body language to communicate the sense of utterly unfamiliar terms and phrases, but on the page such words become more noticeable and confusing” (Russ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents* [Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996], 184).

Unlocking the meaning of Shakespeare’s vocabulary can prove to be an interesting challenge. Such words include those which “have dropped from common use like ‘bisson’ (blind) or those that the playwright seems to have created from Latin roots . . . but that did not catch on, such as ‘conspectuities’ (eyesight or vision) or ‘unplausible’ (doubtful or disapproving). Especially confusing are those words that have shifted meaning over the intervening centuries, such as ‘proper’ (handsome), ‘nice’ (squeamish or delicate), ‘silly’ (innocent), or ‘cousin’ (kinsman, that is, not necessarily the child of an aunt or uncle” (McDonald 184). Because of semantic change, when Shakespeare uses ‘conceit,’ he does not mean ‘vanity,’ as we might understand it to be. Strictly following etymology, Shakespeare means a ‘conception’ or ‘notion,’ or possibly the ‘imagination’ itself.

Perhaps several Shakespearean words “would have been strange to Shakespeare’s audience because they were the products of his invention or unique usage. Some words that probably originated with him include: ‘auspicious,’ ‘assassination,’ ‘disgraceful,’ ‘dwindle,’ ‘savagery.’” Certainly a brave soul, he was “ a most audacious inventor of words.” To appreciate and understand Shakespeare’s English in contrast to ours, we ought to suspend our judgment and disbelief and allow respect for the “process of semantic change, which has been continually eroding or encrusting his original meaning” (Levin 8).

Shakespeare’s vocabulary has received greater attention than any other aspect of his language. Perhaps this is because it is the most accessible with no burdensome complications. Whatever the cause, Shakespeare’s language will forever be challenging and captivating.

Not of an Age, but for All Mankind

By Douglas A. Burger

After an enormous expenditure of money and effort, Shakespeare's Globe Theater has risen again, four centuries later, on London's south bank of the Thames. Designed as a faithful reconstruction of the original, it uses the building methods of the time and traditional materials (oak timbers, plaster walls, wooden pegs, water-reeds for thatching the roof). From above, the shape seems circular (actually, it is twenty-six sided) with three covered tiers of seats surrounding a central area which is open to the sky. There the "groundlings" may stand to see the action taking place on the stage, which occupies almost half of the inner space. There are no artificial lights, no conventional sets, no fancy rigging.

Seeing a Shakespeare play in the afternoon sunlight at the new Globe must come very close to the experience of those early-day Londoners, except, of course, that we in the twentieth-century behave better. We don't yell insults at the actors, spit, or toss orange peels on the ground. We also smell better: the seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Dekker, calls the original audience "Stinkards . . . glewed together in crowdes with the Steames of strong breath" (*Shakespeare's Globe: The Guide Book* [London: International Globe Center, 1996], 42). And we are safer. The first Globe burned to the ground. The new theater has more exits, fire-retardant insulation concealed in the walls, and water-sprinklers that poke through the thatch of the roof.

That hard-headed capitalists and officials would be willing, even eager, to invest in the project shows that Shakespeare is good business. The new Globe is just one example. Cedar City's own Utah Shakespearean Festival makes a significant contribution to the economy of southern Utah. A sizable percentage of all the tourist dollars spent in England goes to Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, which would be a sleepy little agricultural town without its favorite son. The situation seems incredible. In our whole history, what other playwright could be called a major economic force? Who else—what single individual—could be listed along with agriculture, mining, and the like as an industry of a region? Why Shakespeare?

The explanation, of course, goes further than an attempt to preserve our cultural traditions. In an almost uncanny way, Shakespeare's perceptions remain valuable for our own understandings of life, and probably no other writer remains so insightful, despite the constantly changing preoccupations of audiences over time.

The people of past centuries, for example, looked to the plays for nuggets of wisdom and quotable quotes, and many of Shakespeare's lines have passed into common parlance. There is an old anecdote about the woman, who on first seeing *Hamlet*, was asked how she liked the play. She replied, "Oh, very nice, my dear, but so full of quotations." She has it backwards of course. Only the King James Bible has lent more "quotations" to English than Shakespeare.

Citizens of the late nineteenth century sought in the plays for an understanding of human nature, valuing Shakespeare's character for traits that they recognized in themselves and in others. The fascination continues to the present day as some of our best-known movie stars attempt to find new dimensions in the great characters: Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh in *Hamlet*, Lawrence Fishburn in *Othello*, Leonardo de Caprio in *Romeo + Juliet*, to name just a few.

Matters of gender, class, and race have preoccupied more recent audiences. Beatrice sounds a rather feminist note in *Much Ado about Nothing* in her advice to her cousin about

choosing a husband: Curtsy to your father, but say “Father, as it please me.” *Coriolanus* presents a recurring dilemma about class relations in its explorations of the rights and wrongs involved in a great man’s attempt to control the masses. Racial attitudes are illuminated in *Othello*, where the European characters always mark the hero by his race, always identify him first as the “Moor,” are always aware of his difference. London’s new/old Globe is thus a potent symbol of the plays’ continuing worth to us. The very building demonstrates the utter accuracy of the lines written so long ago that Shakespeare is not “of an age” but “for all time.”

Elizabeth's England

In his entire career, William Shakespeare never once set a play in Elizabethan England. His characters lived in medieval England (*Richard II*), France (*As You Like It*), Vienna (*Measure for Measure*), fifteenth-century Italy (*Romeo and Juliet*), the England ruled by Elizabeth's father (*Henry VIII*) and elsewhere—anywhere and everywhere, in fact, except Shakespeare's own time and place. But all Shakespeare's plays—even when they were set in ancient Rome—reflected the life of Elizabeth's England (and, after her death in 1603, that of her successor, James I). Thus, certain things about these extraordinary plays will be easier to understand if we know a little more about Elizabethan England.

Elizabeth's reign was an age of exploration—exploration of the world, exploration of man's nature, and exploration of the far reaches of the English language. This renaissance of the arts and sudden flowering of the spoken and written word gave us two great monuments—the King James Bible and the plays of Shakespeare—and many other treasures as well.

Shakespeare made full use of the adventurous Elizabethan attitude toward language. He employed more words than any other writer in history—more than 21,000 different words appear in the plays—and he never hesitated to try a new word, revive an old one, or make one up. Among the words which first appeared in print in his works are such everyday terms as “critic,” “assassinate,” “bump,” “gloomy,” “suspicious,” “and hurry;” and he invented literally dozens of phrases which we use today: such un-Shakespearean expressions as “catching a cold,” “the mind's eye,” “elbow room,” and even “pomp and circumstance.”

Elizabethan England was a time for heroes. The ideal man was a courtier, an adventurer, a fencer with the skill of Tybalt, a poet no doubt better than Orlando, a conversationalist with the wit of Rosalind and the eloquence of Richard II, and a gentleman. In addition to all this, he was expected to take the time, like Brutus, to examine his own nature and the cause of his actions and (perhaps unlike Brutus) to make the right choices. The real heroes of the age did all these things and more.

Despite the greatness of some Elizabethan ideals, others seem small and undignified, to us; marriage, for example, was often arranged to bring wealth or prestige to the family, with little regard for the feelings of the bride. In fact, women were still relatively powerless under the law.

The idea that women were “lower” than men was one small part of a vast concern with order which was extremely important to many Elizabethans. Most people believed that everything, from the lowest grain of sand to the highest angel, had its proper position in the scheme of things. This concept was called “the great chain of being.” When things were in their proper place, harmony was the result; when order was violated, the entire structure was shaken.

This idea turns up again and again in Shakespeare. The rebellion against Richard II brings bloodshed to England for generations; Romeo and Juliet's rebellion against their parents contributes to their tragedy; and the assassination in *Julius Caesar* throws Rome into civil war.

Many Elizabethans also perceived duplications in the chain of order. They believed, for example, that what the sun is to the heavens, the king is to the state. When something went wrong in the heavens, rulers worried: before Julius Caesar and Richard II were overthrown, comets and meteors appeared, the moon turned the color of blood, and other bizarre astronomical phenomena were reported. Richard himself compares his fall to a premature setting of the sun; when he descends from the top of Flint Castle to meet the conquering

Bolingbroke, he likens himself to the driver of the sun's chariot in Greek mythology:
“Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaeton” (3.3.178).

All these ideas find expression in Shakespeare's plays, along with hundreds of others—most of them not as strange to our way of thinking. As dramatized by the greatest playwright in the history of the world, the plays offer us a fascinating glimpse of the thoughts and passions of a brilliant age. Elizabethan England was a brief skyrocket of art, adventure, and ideas which quickly burned out; but Shakespeare's plays keep the best parts of that time alight forever.

(Adapted from “The Shakespeare Plays,” educational materials made possible by Exxon, Metropolitan Life, Morgan Guaranty, and CPB.)

History Is Written by the Victors

From *Insights*, 1994

William Shakespeare wrote ten history plays chronicling English kings from the time of the Magna Carta (*King John*) to the beginning of England's first great civil war, the Wars of the Roses (*Richard II*) to the conclusion of the war and the reuniting of the two factions (*Richard III*), to the reign of Queen Elizabeth's father (*Henry VIII*). Between these plays, even though they were not written in chronological order, is much of the intervening history of England, in the six Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI plays.

In writing these plays, Shakespeare had nothing to help him except the standard history books of his day. The art of the historian was not very advanced in this period, and no serious attempt was made to get at the exact truth about a king and his reign. Instead, the general idea was that any nation that opposed England was wrong, and that any Englishman who opposed the winning side in a civil war was wrong also.

Since Shakespeare had no other sources, the slant that appears in the history books of his time also appears in his plays. Joan of Arc opposed the English and was not admired in Shakespeare's day, so she is portrayed as a comic character who wins her victories through witchcraft. Richard III fought against the first Tudor monarchs and was therefore labeled in the Tudor histories as a vicious usurper, and he duly appears in Shakespeare's plays as a murdering monster.

Shakespeare wrote nine of his history plays under Queen Elizabeth. She did not encourage historical truthfulness, but rather a patriotism, an exultant, intense conviction that England was the best of all possible countries and the home of the most favored of mortals. And this patriotism breathes through all the history plays and binds them together. England's enemy is not so much any individual king as the threat of civil war, and the history plays come to a triumphant conclusion when the threat of civil war is finally averted, and the great queen, Elizabeth, is born.

Shakespeare was a playwright, not a historian, and, even when his sources were correct, he would sometimes juggle his information for the sake of effective stagecraft. He was not interested in historical accuracy; he was interested in swiftly moving action and in people. Shakespeare's bloody and superb king seems more convincing than the real Richard III, merely because Shakespeare wrote so effectively about him. Shakespeare moved in a different world from that of the historical, a world of creation rather than of recorded fact, and it is in this world that he is so supreme a master.

Mr. Shakespeare, I Presume

by Diana Major Spencer From *Insights*, 1994

Could the plays known as Shakespeare's have been written by a rural, semi-literate, uneducated, wife-deserting, two-bit actor who spelled his name differently each of the six times he wrote it down? Could such a man know enough about Roman history, Italian geography, French grammar, and English court habits to create *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry V*? Could he know enough about nobility and its tenuous relationship to royalty to create *King Lear* and *Macbeth*?

Are these questions even worth asking? Some very intelligent people think so. On the other hand, some very intelligent people think not. Never mind quibbles about how a line should be interpreted, or how many plays Shakespeare wrote and which ones, or which of the great tragedies reflected personal tragedies. The question of authorship is "The Shakespeare Controversy."

Since Mr. Cowell, quoting the deceased Dr. Wilmot, cast the first doubt about William of Stratford in an 1805 speech before the Ipswich Philological Society, nominees for the "real author" have included philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, playwright Christopher Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the earls of Derby, Rutland, Essex, and Oxford--among others.

The arguments evoke two premises: first, that the proven facts about the William Shakespeare who was christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564 do not configure a man of sufficient nobility of thought and language to have written the plays; and, second, that the man from Stratford is nowhere concretely identified as the author of the plays. The name "Shakespeare"—in one of its spellings—appears on early quartos, but the man represented by the name may not be the one from Stratford.

One group of objections to the Stratford man follows from the absence of any record that he ever attended school—in Stratford or anywhere else. If he were uneducated, the arguments go, how could his vocabulary be twice as large as the learned Milton's? How could he know so much history, law, or philosophy? If he were a country bumpkin, how could he know so much of hawking, hounding, courtly manners, and daily habits of the nobility? How could he have traveled so much, learning about other nations of Europe in enough detail to make them the settings for his plays?

The assumptions of these arguments are that such rich and noble works as those attributed to a playwright using the name "Shakespeare" could have been written only by someone with certain characteristics, and that those characteristics could be distilled from the "facts" of his life. He would have to be noble; he would have to be well-educated; and so forth. On these grounds the strongest candidate to date is Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford.

A debate that has endured its peaks and valleys, the controversy catapulted to center stage in 1984 with the publication of Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. Ogburn, a former army intelligence officer, builds a strong case for Oxford—if one can hurdle the notions that the author wasn't Will Shakespeare, that literary works should be read autobiographically, and that literary creation is nothing more than reporting the facts of one's own life. "The Controversy" was laid to rest—temporarily, at least—by justices Blackmun, Brennan, and Stevens of the United States Supreme Court who, after hearing evidence from both sides in a mock trial conducted September 25, 1987 at American University in Washington, D.C., found in favor of the Bard of Avon. Hooray for our side!

A Nest of Singing Birds

From *Insights*, 1992

Musical development was part of the intellectual and social movement that influenced all England during the Tudor Age. The same forces that produced writers like Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, and Francis Bacon also produced musicians of corresponding caliber. So numerous and prolific were these talented and imaginative men—men whose reputations were even in their own day firmly established and well founded—that they have been frequently and aptly referred to as a nest of singing birds.

One such figure was Thomas Tallis, whose music has officially accompanied the Anglican service since the days of Elizabeth I; another was his student, William Boyd, whose variety of religious and secular compositions won him international reputation.

Queen Elizabeth I, of course, provided an inspiration for the best efforts of Englishmen, whatever their aims and activities. For music, she was the ideal patroness. She was an accomplished performer on the virginal (forerunner to the piano), and she aided her favorite art immensely in every way possible, bestowing her favors on the singers in chapel and court and on the musicians in public and private theatrical performances. To the great composers of her time, she was particularly gracious and helpful.

Singing has been an integral part of English life for as long as we have any knowledge. Long before the music was written down, the timeless folk songs were a part of our Anglo-Saxon heritage. The madrigals and airs that are enjoyed each summer at the Utah Shakespearean Festival evolved from these traditions.

It was noted by Bishop Jewel in 1560 that sometimes at Paul's Cross there would be 6,000 people singing together, and before the sermon, the whole congregation always sang a psalm, together with the choir and organ. When that thundering unity of congregational chorus came in, "I was so transported there was no room left in my whole body, mind, or spirit for anything below divine and heavenly raptures."

Religious expression was likely the dominant musical motif of the Elizabethan period; however, the period also saw development of English stage music, with Morley, John Wilson, and Robert Johnson setting much of their music to the plays of Shakespeare. The masque, a semi-musical entertainment, reached a high degree of perfection at the court of James I, where the courtiers themselves were sometimes participants. An educated person of the time was expected to perform music more than just fairly well, and an inability in this area might elicit whispered comments regarding lack of genteel upbringing, not only in the ability to take one's part in a madrigal, but also in knowing the niceties of musical theory. Henry Peacham wrote in *The Compleat Gentleman* in 1662 that one of the fundamental qualities of a gentleman was to be able to "sing your part sure, and...to play the same upon your viol."

Outside the walls of court could be heard street songs, lighthearted catches, and ballads, all of which indicates that music was not confined to the cathedrals or court. We still have extant literally hundreds of ballads, street songs, and vendors' cries that were sung or hummed on the street and played with all their complicated variations on all levels of Elizabethan society.

Instruments of the period were as varied as the music and peoples, and the instrument and songbooks which remain in existence today are indicative of the high level of excellence enjoyed by the Elizabethans. Songbooks, mainly of part-songs for three, four, five, and six

voices exist today, as do books of dance music: corrantos, pavans, and galliards. Records from one wealthy family indicate the family owned forty musical instruments, including twelve viols, seven recorders, four lutes, five virginals, various brasses and woodwinds, and two “great organs.” To have use for such a great number of instruments implies a fairly large group of players resident with the family or staying with them as invited guests, and the players of the most popular instruments (lutes, virginals, and viols) would be playing from long tradition, at least back to King Henry VIII. In short, music was as necessary to the public and private existence of a Renaissance Englishman as any of the basic elements of life.

The Utah Shakespearean Festival musicians perform each summer on authentic replicas of many of these Renaissance instruments. The music they perform is authentic from the Elizabethan period, and the instruments are made available for audience inspection and learning.

Actors in Shakespeare's Day

By Stephanie Chidester From *Insights*, 1994

The status of the actor in society has never been entirely stable but has fluctuated from the beginnings of the theatre to the present day. The ancient Greeks often considered actors as servants of Dionysus, and their performances were a sort of religious rite. Roman actors, often slaves, were seen as the scraps of society, only one step above gladiators. In medieval Europe, both the theatre and the actor, suppressed by the Catholic Church, were almost non-existent but gradually re-emerged in the form of the liturgy and, later, the Mystery plays. The actors of Shakespeare's age also saw fluctuations in reputation; actors were alternately classified as "vagabonds and sturdy beggars," as an act of Parliament in 1572 defined them, and as servants of noblemen.

As early as 1482, noblemen such as Richard, duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), the earl of Essex, and Lord Arundel kept acting companies among their retainers. But other than these select groups protected by nobles, actors lived lives of danger and instability because when they abandoned their respectable trades, they also left behind the comfort and protection of the trade guilds.

However, life soon became much more difficult for both of these classes of actors. In 1572, Parliament passed two acts which damaged thespians' social status. In the first one, the Queen forbade "the unlawful retaining of multitudes of unordinary servants by liveries, badges, and other signs and tokens (contrary to the good and ancient statutes and laws of this realm)" in order to "curb the power of local grandees" (Dennis Kay, *Shakespeare: His Life, Work, and Era* [New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992], 88). One result of this was that some of the actors, now considered superfluous, were turned away.

To make matters even worse, these actors faced yet another impediment: the "Acte for the punishment of Vagabondes" (Kay, 88), in which actors were declared "vagabonds and masterless men and hence were subject to arrest and imprisonment" (Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, *A Short View of Elizabethan Drama* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943], 46).

However, there were still nobles, such as the earl of Leicester and the earl of Sussex, who endorsed players; the protector would usually seek royal permission for these actors to perform in London or, less frequently, some other less prestigious town. Thus the actors were able to venture forth without fear of arrest. It is through these circumstances that Shakespeare ends up an actor in London.

There are many theories—guesses really—of how Shakespeare got into the theatre. He may have joined a group of strolling players, performed around the countryside, and eventually made it to London, the theatrical hub of Britain. Another theory suggests that he began as a schoolmaster, wrote a play (possibly *The Comedy of Errors*) and then decided to take it to London; or, alternately, he could have simply gone directly to that great city, with or without a play in hand, to try his luck.

An interesting speculation is that while he was young, Shakespeare might have participated in one of the cycles of Mystery plays in Stratford: "On one occasion the Stratford corporation laid out money for an entertainment at Pentecost. In 1583 they paid 13s 4d 'to Davi Jones and his company for his pastime at Whitsuntide.' Davi Jones had been married to Elizabeth, the daughter of Adrian Quiney, and after her death in 1579 he took as his wife a Hathaway, Frances. Was Shakespeare one of the youths who trimmed themselves for the Whitsun pastime?" (S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* [New York: New American Library, 1977], 111).

But however he got into the theatre and to London, he had made a very definite impression on his competitors by 1592, when playwright Robert Greene attacked Shakespeare as both actor and author: “There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger’s heart wrapt in a Player’s hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and . . . is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country” (G. B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare* [New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1947], 1).

We don’t often think of Shakespeare as primarily an actor, perhaps because most of what we know of him comes from the plays he wrote rather than the parts he played. Nevertheless, he made much of his money as an actor and sharer in his company: “At least to start with, his status, his security derived more from his acting skill and his eye for business than from his pen” (Kay, 95). Had he been only a playwright, he would likely have died a poor man, as did Robert Greene: “In the autumn of 1592, Robert Greene, the most popular author of his generation, lay penniless and dying. . . . The players had grown rich on the products of his brain, and now he was deserted and alone” (Harrison, 1).

While Shakespeare made a career of acting, there are critics who might dispute his acting talent. For instance, almost a century after Shakespeare’s death, “an anonymous enthusiast of the stage . . . remarked . . . that ‘Shakespear . . . was a much better poet, than player’” (Schoenbaum, 201). However, Shakespeare could have been quite a good actor, and this statement would still be true. One sign of his skill as an actor is that he is mentioned in the same breath with Burbage and Kemp: “The accounts of the royal household for Mar 15 [1595] record payments to ‘William Kempe William Shakespeare & Richarde Burbage seruantes to the Lord Chamberlain’” (Kay, 174).

Another significant indication of his talent is the very fact that he played in London rather than touring other less lucrative towns. If players were to be legally retained by noblemen, they had to prove they could act, and one means of demonstrating their legitimacy was playing at court for Queen Elizabeth. The more skilled companies obtained the queen’s favor and were granted permission to remain in London.

Not all companies, however, were so fortunate: “Sussex’s men may not have been quite up to the transition from rural inn-yards to the more demanding circumstances of court performance. Just before the Christmas season of 1574, for example, they were inspected (‘perused’) by officials of the Revels Office, with a view to being permitted to perform before the queen; but they did not perform” (Kay, 90). Shakespeare and his company, on the other hand, performed successfully in London from the early 1590s until 1611. It would be a mistake to classify William Shakespeare as only a playwright, even the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world; he was also “an actor, a sharer, a member of a company” (Kay, 95), obligations that were extremely relevant to his plays. As a man of the theatre writing for a company, he knew what would work on stage and what would not and was able to make his plays practical as well as brilliant. And perhaps more importantly, his theatrical experience must have taught him much about the human experience, about everyday lives and roles, just as his plays show us that “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.149–50).

Shakespeare's Audience: A Very Motley Crowd

From *Insights*, 1992

When Shakespeare peeped through the curtain at the audience gathered to hear his first play, he looked upon a very motley crowd. The pit was filled with men and boys. The galleries contained a fair proportion of women, some not too respectable. In the boxes were a few gentlemen from the royal courts, and in the lords' box or perhaps sitting on the stage was a group of extravagantly dressed gentlemen of fashion. Vendors of nuts and fruits moved about through the crowd. The gallants were smoking; the apprentices in the pit were exchanging rude witticisms with the painted ladies.

When Shakespeare addressed his audience directly, he did so in terms of gentle courtesy or pleasant raillery. In *Hamlet*, however, he does let fall the opinion that the groundlings (those on the ground, the cheapest seats) were "for the most part capable of nothing but dumb shows and noise." His recollections of the pit of the Globe may have added vigor to his ridicule of the Roman mob in *Julius Caesar*.

On the other hand, the theatre was a popular institution, and the audience was representative of all classes of London life. Admission to standing room in the pit was a penny, and an additional penny or two secured a seat in the galleries. For seats in the boxes or for stools on the stage, still more was charged, up to sixpence or half a crown.

Attendance at the theatres was astonishingly large. There were often five or six theatres giving daily performances, which would mean that out of a city of one hundred thousand inhabitants, thirty thousand or more spectators each week attended the theatre. When we remember that a large class of the population disapproved of the theatre, and that women of respectability were not frequent patrons of the public playhouses, this attendance is remarkable.

Arrangements for the comfort of the spectators were meager, and spectators were often disorderly. Playbills seem to have been posted all about town and in the theatre, and the title of the piece was announced on the stage. These bills contained no lists of actors, and there were no programs, ushers, or tickets. There was usually one door for the audience, where the admission fee was deposited in a box carefully watched by the money taker, and additional sums were required at entrance to the galleries or boxes. When the three o'clock trumpets announced the beginning of a performance, the assembled audience had been amusing itself by eating, drinking, smoking, and playing cards, and they sometimes continued these occupations during a performance. Pickpockets were frequent, and, if caught, were tied to a post on the stage. Disturbances were not infrequent, sometimes resulting in general rioting.

The Elizabethan audience was fond of unusual spectacle and brutal physical suffering. They liked battles and murders, processions and fireworks, ghosts and insanity. They expected comedy to abound in beatings, and tragedy in deaths. While the audience at the Globe expected some of these sensations and physical horrors, they did not come primarily for these. (Real blood and torture were available nearby at the bear baitings, and public executions were not uncommon.) Actually, there were very few public entertainments offering as little brutality as did the theatre.

Elizabethans attended the public playhouses for learning. They attended for romance, imagination, idealism, and art; the audience was not without refinement, and those looking for food for the imagination had nowhere to go but to the playhouse. There were no newspapers, no

magazines, almost no novels, and only a few cheap books; theatre filled the desire for story discussion among people lacking other educational and cultural opportunities.

The most remarkable case of Shakespeare's theatre filling an educational need is probably that of English history. The growth of national patriotism culminating in the English victory over the Spanish Armada gave dramatists a chance to use the historical material, and for the fifteen years from the Armada to the death of Elizabeth, the stage was deluged with plays based on the events of English chronicles, and familiarity with English history became a cultural asset of the London crowd,

Law was a second area where the Elizabethan public seems to have been fairly well informed, and successful dramatists realized the influence that the great development of civil law in the sixteenth century exercised upon the daily life of the London citizen. In this area, as in others, the dramatists did not hesitate to cultivate the cultural background of their audience whenever opportunity offered, and the ignorance of the multitude did not prevent it from taking an interest in new information and from offering a receptive hearing to the accumulated lore of lawyers, historians, humanists, and playwrights.

The audience was used to the spoken word, and soon became trained in blank verse, delighting in monologues, debates, puns, metaphors, stump speakers, and sonorous declamation. The public was accustomed to the acting of the old religious dramas, and the new acting in which the spoken words were listened to caught on rapidly. The new poetry and the great actors who recited it found a sensitive audience. There were many moments during a play when spectacle, brutality, and action were all forgotten, and the audience fed only on the words. Shakespeare and his contemporaries may be deemed fortunate in having an audience essentially attentive, eager for the newly unlocked storehouse of secular story, and possessing the sophistication and interest to be fed richly by the excitements and levities on the stage.

Shakespearean Snapshots

From *Insights*, 2002

By Ace G. Pilkington

It is hard to get from the facts of Shakespeare's life to any sense of what it must have been like to have lived it. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon and died there in 1616. The day of his birth is not certain, but it may have been the same as the day of his death—April 23—if he was baptized, as was usual at the time, three days after he was born. He married Anne Hathaway in the winter of 1582–83, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-six. He became the father of three children. The first was Susannah, who was born around May 23, close enough to the date of the wedding to suggest that the marriage was not entirely voluntary. Shakespeare's twins, Hamnet and Judith, were baptized on February 2, 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes (at least unknown by us at this distance in time) in 1596. Shakespeare's career as actor, theatre owner, manager, and, of course, playwright began in the vicinity of 1590 and continued for the rest of his life, though there are clear indications that he spent more and more time in Stratford and less and less in London from 1611 on. His work in the theatre made him wealthy, and his extraordinary plays brought him a measure of fame, though nothing like what he deserved or would posthumously receive.

It's hard to get even the briefest sense of what Shakespeare's life was like from such information. It is probably impossible ever to know what Shakespeare thought or felt, but maybe we can get closer to what he saw and heard and even smelled. Perhaps some snapshots—little close-ups—might help to bring us nearer to the world in which Shakespeare lived if not quite to the life he lived in that world. In Shakespeare's youth, chimneys were a new thing. Before that, smoke was left to find its way out through a hole in the roof, often a thatched roof, and there were even some who maintained that this smoky atmosphere was better than the newfangled fresh air that chimneys made possible—along with a greater division of rooms and more privacy.

In the year of Shakespeare's birth, Stratford had more trees than houses—"upwards of 400 houses as well as 1,000 elms and forty ashes" (Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 1). Peter Levi says, "The town was so full of elm trees that it must have looked and sounded like a woodland settlement. For example, Mr. Gibbs's house on Rothermarket had twelve elms in the garden and six in front of the door. Thomas Attford on Ely Street had another twelve. The town boundaries were marked by elms or groups of elms (*The Life and Times of William Shakespeare* [New York: Wings Books, 1988], 7). Shakespeare's "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" becomes a far more majestic image with the picture of Stratford's elms in mind. And the birds themselves had a sound which modern ears no longer have a chance to enjoy. "We must realize that it was ordinary for . . . Shakespeare to hear a dawn chorus of many hundreds of birds at once. . . . as a young man thirty years ago I have heard a deafening dawn chorus in the wooded Chilterns, on Shakespeare's road to London" (Levi 10).

Exactly what Shakespeare's road to London may have been or at least how he first made his way there and became an actor is much debated. He might have been a schoolmaster or fifty other things, but he may well have started out as he ended up—as a player. We can then, in John Southworth's words, "Picture a sixteen-year-old lad on a cart, growing year by year into manhood, journeying out of the Arden of his childhood into ever more unfamiliar, distant regions, travelling ill-made roads in all weathers, sleeping in inns, hearing and memorising strange new dialects and forms of speech, meeting with every possible type and character of person; learning, most of all perhaps, from the audiences to which he played in guildhalls and inns" (*Shakespeare the Player: A Life in the Theatre* [Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000], 30). At some time in his life—in fact, many times—Shakespeare must have known theatrical tours very like that.

In London itself, the new Globe, the best theatre in (or rather just outside of) the city, was in an area with a large number of prisons and an unpleasant smell. “Garbage had preceded actors on the marshy land where the new playhouse was erected: ‘flanked with a ditch and forced out of a marsh’, according to Ben Jonson. Its cost . . . included the provision of heavy piles for the foundation, and a whole network of ditches in which the water rose and fell with the tidal Thames” (Garry O’Connor, *William Shakespeare: A Popular Life* [New York: Applause Books, 2000], 161). The playgoers came by water, and the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan “drew 3,000 or 4,000 people in boats across the Thames every day” (161). Peter Levi says of Shakespeare’s London, “The noise, the crowds, the animals and their droppings, the glimpses of grandeur and the amazing squalor of the poor, were beyond modern imagination” (49).

England was a place of fear and glory. Public executions were public entertainments. Severed heads decayed on city walls. Francis Bacon, whom Will Durant calls “the most powerful and influential intellect of his time” (*Heroes of History: A Brief History of Civilization from Ancient Times to the Dawn of the Modern Age* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001], 327), had been “one of the persons commissioned to question prisoners under torture” in the 1580s (Levi 4). The opportune moment when Shakespeare became the most successful of playwrights was the destruction of Thomas Kyd, “who broke under torture and was never the same again,” and the death of Christopher Marlowe in a tavern brawl which was the result of plot and counterplot—a struggle, very probably, between Lord Burghley and Walter Raleigh (Levi 48). Shakespeare, who must have known the rumors and may have known the truth, cannot have helped shuddering at such monstrous good fortune. Still, all of the sights, smells, and terrors, from the birdsongs to the screams of torture, from the muddy tides to the ties of blood, became not only the textures and tonalities of Shakespeare’s life, but also the information and inspiration behind his plays.

Ghosts, Witches, and Shakespeare

By Howard Waters

From *Insights*, 2006

Some time in the mid 1580s, young Will Shakespeare, for reasons not entirely clear to us, left his home, his wife, and his family in Stratford and set off for London. It was a time when Elizabeth, “la plus fine femme du monde,” as Henry III of France called her, had occupied the throne of England for over twenty-five years. The tragedy of Mary Stuart was past; the ordeal of Essex was in the future. Sir Francis Drake’s neutralization of the Spanish Armada was pending and rumors of war or invasion blew in from all the great ports.

What could have been more exciting for a young man from the country, one who was already more than half in love with words, than to be headed for London!

It was an exciting and frightening time, when the seven gates of London led to a maze of streets, narrow and dirty, crowded with tradesmen, carts, coaches, and all manner of humanity. Young Will would have seen the moated Tower of London, looking almost like an island apart. There was London Bridge crowded with tenements and at the southern end a cluster of traitors’ heads impaled on poles. At Tyburn thieves and murderers dangled, at Limehouse pirates were trussed up at low tide and left to wait for the water to rise over them. At Tower Hill the headsman’s axe flashed regularly, while for the vagabonds there were the whipping posts, and for the beggars there were the stocks. Such was the London of the workaday world, and young Will was undoubtedly mentally filing away details of what he saw, heard, and smelled.

Elizabethan people in general were an emotional lot and the ferocity of their entertainment reflected that fact. Bear-baiting, for example, was a highly popular spectator sport, and the structure where they were generally held was not unlike the theatres of the day. A bear was chained to a stake in the center of the pit, and a pack of large dogs was turned loose to bait, or fight, him. The bear eventually tired (fortunately for the remaining dogs!), and, well, you can figure the rest out for yourself. Then there were the public hangings, whippings, or drawing and quarterings for an afternoon’s entertainment. So, the violence in some of Shakespeare’s plays was clearly directed at an audience that reveled in it. Imagine the effect of having an actor pretend to bite off his own tongue and spit a chunk of raw liver that he had carefully packed in his jaw into the faces of the groundlings!

Despite the progressing enlightenment of the Renaissance, superstition was still rampant among Elizabethan Londoners, and a belief in such things as astrology was common (Ralph P. Boas and Barbara M. Hahna, “The Age of Shakespeare,” *Social Backgrounds of English Literature*, [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1931] 93). Through the position of stars many Elizabethans believed that coming events could be foretold even to the extent of mapping out a person’s entire life.

Where witches and ghosts were concerned, it was commonly accepted that they existed and the person who scoffed at them was considered foolish, or even likely to be cursed. Consider the fact that Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* was supposedly cursed due to the playwright’s having given away a few more of the secrets of witchcraft than the weird sisters may have approved of. For a time, productions experienced an uncanny assortment of mishaps and injuries. Even today, it is often considered bad luck for members of the cast and crew to mention the name of the production, simply referred to as the Scottish Play. In preaching a sermon, Bishop Jewel warned the Queen: “It may please your Grace to understand that witches and sorcerers within these last few years are marvelously increased. Your Grace’s

subjects pine away, even unto death; their color fadeth; their flesh rotteth; their speech is benumbed; their senses bereft” (Walter Bromberg, “Witchcraft and Psychotherapy”, *The Mind of Man* [New York: Harper Torchbooks 1954], 54).

Ghosts were recognized by the Elizabethans in three basic varieties: the vision or purely subjective ghost, the authentic ghost who has died without opportunity of repentance, and the false ghost which is capable of many types of manifestations (Boas and Hahn). When a ghost was confronted, either in reality or in a Shakespearean play, some obvious discrimination was called for (and still is). Critics still do not always agree on which of these three types haunts the pages of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, or *Hamlet*, or, in some cases, why they are necessary to the plot at all. After all, Shakespeare’s ghosts are a capricious lot, making themselves visible or invisible as they please. In *Richard III* there are no fewer than eleven ghosts on the stage who are visible only to Richard and Richmond. In *Macbeth* the ghost of Banquo repeatedly appears to Macbeth in crowded rooms but is visible only to him. In *Hamlet*, the ghost appears to several people on the castle battlements but only to Hamlet in his mother’s bedchamber. In the words of E.H. Seymour: “If we judge by sheer reason, no doubt we must banish ghosts from the stage altogether, but if we regulate our fancy by the laws of superstition, we shall find that spectres are privileged to be visible to whom they will (E.H. Seymour “Remarks, Critical, Conjectural, and Explanatory on Shakespeare” in *Macbeth A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* [New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1963] 211).

Shakespeare’s audiences, and his plays, were the products of their culture. Since the validity of any literary work can best be judged by its public acceptance, not to mention its lasting power, it seems that Shakespeare’s ghosts and witches were, and are, enormously popular. If modern audiences and critics find themselves a bit skeptical, then they might consider bringing along a supply of Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” Elizabethans simply had no need of it.

Shakespeare's Day: What They Wore

The clothing which actors wear to perform a play is called a costume, to distinguish it from everyday clothing. In Shakespeare's time, acting companies spent almost as much on costumes as television series do today.

The costumes for shows in England were so expensive that visitors from France were a little envious. Kings and queens on the stage were almost as well dressed as kings and queens in real life.

Where did the acting companies get their clothes? Literally, "off the rack" and from used clothing sellers. Wealthy middle class people would often give their servants old clothes that they didn't want to wear any more, or would leave their clothes to the servants when they died. Since clothing was very expensive, people wore it as long as possible and passed it on from one person to another without being ashamed of wearing hand-me-downs. However, since servants were of a lower class than their employers, they weren't allowed to wear rich fabrics, and would sell these clothes to acting companies, who were allowed to wear what they wanted in performance.

A rich nobleman like Count Paris or a wealthy young man like Romeo would wear a doublet, possibly of velvet, and it might have gold embroidery. Juliet and Lady Capulet would have worn taffeta, silk, gold, or satin gowns, and everybody would have had hats, gloves, ruffs (an elaborate collar), gloves, stockings, and shoes equally elaborate.

For a play like *Romeo and Juliet*, which was set in a European country at about the same time Shakespeare wrote it, Elizabethan everyday clothes would have been fine—the audience would have been happy, and they would have been authentic for the play. However, since there were no costume shops who could make clothing suitable for, say, medieval Denmark for *Hamlet*, or ancient Rome for *Julius Caesar*, or Oberon and Titania's forest for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, these productions often looked slightly strange—can you imagine fairies in full Elizabethan collars and skirts? How would they move?

Today's audiences want costumes to be authentic, so that they can believe in the world of the play. However, *Romeo and Juliet* was recently set on Verona Beach, with very up-to-date clothes indeed; and about thirty years ago, *West Side Story*, an updated musical version of the *Romeo and Juliet* tale, was set in the Puerto Rican section of New York City.

Activity: Discuss what the affect of wearing "special" clothes is—to church, or to a party. Do you feel different? Do you act different? How many kinds of wardrobes do you have? School, play, best? Juliet and Romeo would have had only one type of clothing each, no matter how nice it was.

Activity: Perform a scene from the play in your everyday clothes, and then in more formal clothes. Ask the participants and the spectators to describe the differences between the two performances.

Synopsis: *Macbeth*

On a barren Scottish heath, three witches await the coming of Macbeth and Banquo, Scottish generals on their way home after a victorious battle. At the same time, on a battlefield not far away, a wounded soldier tells Duncan, king of Scotland, of Macbeth's great courage in battle, then the thane of Ross arrives to inform the king of the traitorous actions of the thane of Cawdor. The king immediately sentences the thane of Cawdor to death and confers that title upon Macbeth, sending Ross to tell Macbeth of the new honor.

When Macbeth and Banquo arrive at the eerie site of the witches, the three prophesy that Macbeth (still uninformed of his new title) shall become the thane of Cawdor and later on shall be king, while Banquo shall be the father of kings although not one himself. When the thane of Ross arrives and addresses Macbeth with the new title, the witches' prophecies already seem to be coming true, and Macbeth begins to wonder if the kingship could really be within his reach. However, when he reports to King Duncan, the king announces two intentions: first, of visiting Macbeth's castle in gratitude of his valor and, second, of making his son Malcolm heir to his throne.

The scene switches to Macbeth's castle, where his wife, Lady Macbeth, is reading a letter from her husband detailing the witches' prophecies and their accuracy thus far. She sets her sights on becoming queen and plans to murder the king when he visits her home; she calls on the power of evil to help her stifle feminine weakness and spur Macbeth to action.

That evening, while the king sleeps in his home, Macbeth, with his wife's urging and assistance, carries out the act, murdering King Duncan in his bed. The king's sons flee the country in terror, and Macbeth is crowned king of Scotland. But he is haunted by the prediction that Banquo's children are to inherit the throne and fearful that Macduff, a noble suspicious of Macbeth's quick rise to power, will take matters into his own hands. Therefore, Macbeth brutally arranges for the murder of Banquo and his only son, Fleance; however, Fleance escapes the attack and flees the country. Macbeth gives a great dinner for the court and is about to take his seat when he sees the ghost of Banquo (invisible to the guests), and his frenzied and incriminating remarks break up the feast and raise Macduff's suspicions even more.

Macbeth goes now to consult the witches. They warn him to beware of Macduff. However, they also assure, much to his comfort, him that no man born of a woman can harm him and that he cannot be defeated until Birnam Wood, a medieval forest, comes to Dunsinane, the site of Macbeth's castle. After this he is greeted with the news that Macduff has fled to England, whereupon Macbeth, in increasing paranoia orders the murder of Lady Macduff and her children.

While this is all happening, Lady Macbeth, who before the king's murder appeared to be stronger than her husband, becomes completely overcome by remorse and guilt and, with unsettled mind, dies, probably by her own hand.

Macduff, gathering forces with the escaped Malcolm in England, is in complete revolt now and leads an army against Macbeth's castle at Dunsinane, the soldiers covering their advance with branches cut from the trees of Birnam Wood, making it appear that Birnam Wood is coming to Dunsinane. Macbeth's nerves are shaken as he recalls the witches prophecies, but he still clings to their saying that he cannot be harmed by any man born of woman. However, the castle is attacked and during his final hand-to-hand conflict with Macduff, Macbeth learns that his opponent was prematurely ripped from his mother's womb, a Caesarean birth. Macbeth realizes he is doomed but, rather than being captured alive, fights to his death. Macduff kills him, cuts off his head, and announces Scotland's freedom from tyranny.

Characters: *Macbeth*

Duncan, king of Scotland: The father of Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan was a good king under whom the kingdom apparently flourished; however, his life was cut short by the murderous Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Malcolm: The eldest son of King Duncan and brother of Donalbain, Malcolm is named heir to the throne by his father (a definite stumbling block for Macbeth's new-found ambitions). Thinking his life in danger, he flees Scotland after his father's murder, placing suspicion initially upon himself, rather than Macbeth.

Donalbain: The son of King Duncan and brother of Malcolm, Donalbain flees with his brother after the murder.

Macbeth: The husband of Lady Macbeth, a general in the army, and later the king of Scotland, Macbeth is courageous and respected. He holds the title of thane of Glamis before the play begins and is named thane of Cawdor for his valor on the battlefield. However, he is also ambitious and becomes murderous when he sees his way (helped by his wife) to fulfill the witches' prophecies and become king.

Banquo: The father of Fleance and a faithful general in the Scottish army, Banquo initially is a good friend of Macbeth, but becomes an object of Macbeth's wrath when it appears he or his children could interfere with Macbeth's tenuous grasp on the throne. He is murdered by command of Macbeth because the witches prophesy his children will be kings.

Macduff: A Scottish nobleman, Macduff becomes increasingly suspicious of Macbeth, eventually mounting an uprising against the new king. In the end, it is Macduff that kills Macbeth in battle.

Lennox: A Scottish nobleman

Ross: A Scottish nobleman faithful to Duncan and Macduff, Ross is the first to address Macbeth by his new title, thane of Cawdor, fanning the spark of ambition that quickly turns murderous.

Menteith: A Scottish nobleman.

Angus: A Scottish nobleman.

Caithness: A Scottish nobleman.

Fleance: Son of Banquo, Fleance escapes Macbeth's murderous rampage and flees to England where he helps Macduff mount the insurrection that unthrones Macbeth.

Siwald, earl of Northumberland: General of the English forces, Siwald teams up with Malcolm, Macduff, and Fleance in their fight against Macbeth.

Young Siwald: The son of Siwald.

Seyton: An officer attending on Macbeth

Lady Macbeth: In contrast to her husband who initially resists his murderous impulses, Lady Macbeth seems to embrace them immediately, calling upon evil to fill her "from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty!" However, guilt and remorse eventually emotionally unhinge her and she dies, probably by her own hand.

Lady Macduff: The wife of Macduff, she and all her children are killed by the now-ruthless Macbeth.

Three Witches: Referred to as the "weird sisters," witches, and sometimes old hags, these three mysterious beings plant the seeds of murder and ambition in Macbeth, when they prophesy that he will become king. Some critics claim that they represent fate and that they truly prophecy, leaving Macbeth no choice in his actions. Others say that they are simply a catalyst for the brutality to come.

Fair Is Foul and Foul Is Fair

By Michael Flachmann
From *Midsummer Magazine*, 1996

Written early in the reign of James I (1603-1625), Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a typical "Jacobean" tragedy in many important respects. Referred to superstitiously by actors as "the Scottish play," the script commemorates James's national heritage by depicting events during the years 1040 to 1057 in his native Scotland. The play also celebrates the ruler's intense interest in witchcraft and magic, which was recorded in a book he wrote in 1597 entitled *Demonology*. Further topical allusions to the king include all the passages in the script mentioning sleeplessness, which are relevant since James was a well-known insomniac.

The most memorable references to Jacobean England in the play, however, are those which chronicle events of the notorious Gunpowder Plot—a conspiracy by Catholic sympathizers to blow up the Parliament building and all the heads of state on November 5, 1605, approximately one year before Shakespeare's play was written. On that date, Guy Fawkes and his band of Jesuit-sponsored papists smuggled an immense amount of gunpowder into a vault under the Parliament, which would have killed everyone in the building in a fiery cataclysm had the king not detected the explosives prior to their detonation. According to a recent book by Garry Wills, *Witches and Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), James claimed to have discovered the plan by "inspiration" from God, who wished to save England from Rome's "Popish plot." Through popular mythology following the event, Jesuits were branded as "equivocators" who had tried to attack both England and the Reformation through a perverse use not only of gunpowder ("the devil's invention"), but also of the very nature of language, which they employed in double and triple entendre to hide from the king and his court their fiendish intentions.

Not surprisingly, Shakespeare's play reflects these topical Jacobean events through its word choice, plot, and themes in an intriguing blend of Scottish history, contemporary political events, and authorial creativity. The language of the play, for example, includes a litany of references to the Gunpowder Plot that would have been familiar to all the king's loyal subjects in 1605. Such terms as "vault," "mine," "blow," "devils," "fuse," "powder," "confusion," "corpses," "spirits," and "combustion" set up a linguistic landscape through which Macbeth and the witches kill a king and take over his throne in a mirror image of the aborted Popish plot during James's reign. Similarly, the play's riddling prophesies mimic the ease with which Jesuits equivocated between truth and falsehood, good and evil. If fair is foul and foul is fair, the deaths of King James and his entire Parliament would have seemed "fair" indeed to the Romish conspirators, though "foul" to anyone in the English nation.

In this summer's Utah Shakespearean Festival production of the play, director Robert Cohen has sought to capitalize on the Jacobean origins of *Macbeth* by placing its action in the early seventeenth century. Scenic Designer Dan Robinson's elegant, refined set dominated by the open timbers, painted ceilings, and grotesque Tarot images of affluent Scottish castles has created a sophisticated dramatic universe in which the evil of *Macbeth* stands in stark contrast to its opulent, polished surroundings. By focusing their production upon the time the play was written rather than upon the chronology of its eleventh-century source material, the director and his designers have created a world not unlike our own where we are more susceptible to moral depravity because it lurks innocently behind the thin veneer of civilization. *Macbeth* and his lady are not barbarians living within a primitive, medieval era; instead, they

are refined, successful aristocrats whose degenerate ambition seems savagely out of place in this modern Jacobean milieu.

Set within its updated seventeenth-century context, many of the play's principal themes take on fresh clarity within this sophisticated environment. The tragedy's powerful oxymorons, for example, attain renewed emphasis through the marked distinction between Macbeth's brutality and the polished, cultured society which has nurtured it. In a world which is both "fair" and "foul" at the same time, a number of other important opposites stand out in stark contrast to each other—including dark/light, sin/grace, salvation/damnation, discord/concord, desire/performance, good/evil, angel/devil, and heaven/hell—all of which help to characterize a play which was itself suspended precariously between the extremes of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Similarly, Dean Mogle's exquisite early Jacobean costume designs—including ruffs, high collars, and a slightly looser silhouette than previous Elizabethan styles—delineate a society in which sumptuous and colorful courtly clothing masks the depravity within many of the principal characters. "Mock the time with fairest show," Macbeth warns his wife prior to the killing of Duncan; "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (1.7.82-83). A further important clothing motif can be seen in all the ill-fitting garment images in the play. Usurping a great king's throne, Macbeth has literally and figuratively stepped into clothes that are too big for him. As Angus says toward the end of the play, Macbeth feels his title "Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief" (5.2.21-22). These and other prominent clothing images in the script take on a new emphasis in the Utah production's seventeenth-century costuming that would not have been so apparent in a more traditional medieval setting for the play.

Other important themes likewise find renewed definition within this production's more modern world. The sexual inversion, for instance, in which Macbeth gradually takes on more "womanly" characteristics while his wife assumes the dominant male role, seems somehow more appropriate in this post-medieval, pre-feminist updated society, while all the references to fathers and sons telescope reality from the eleventh century to the Jacobean era through the witches' pageant of successive kings. This same time travel is also evident in Macbeth's oft-stated desire to see into the future so that he can control his own fate. In addition to his reliance upon the witches' prophecies, Macbeth has a number of other moments in the play during which he looks forward in time. Having been named thane of Cawdor in act 1 scene 3, he exclaims in an aside about the kingship that "the greatest is behind" (117); and later, in act 5 scene 5, informed by Seyton that his wife is dead, he replies that "She should have died hereafter" (17). In fact, his entire "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech which follows is an ironic realization that all his attempts to forecast and control the future have been in vain. Similar references to sickness and medicine, the divine right of kings, sexual energy, pregnancy, blood, death, omens, beast imagery, innocence, the corruptions of power, the loss of faith, and knowing one's "place" in society all likewise gain renewed strength through director Robert Cohen's decision to update his production to Jacobean Scotland.

In the final analysis, this movement forward in time brings the play several steps closer to our own world, which makes Shakespeare's early seventeenth-century script of an eleventh-century historical story more accessible and meaningful than other more traditional productions of the play. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are like us in their ambition, love of power, and desire to manipulate their own future. Consequently, the "newness" of the set and costumes invites us into a world very like our own, where evil is seductive and believable, yet reprehensible nonetheless.

What Has Gotten into You?

By Diana Major Spencer

My grandmother used to say, “Di-AN-a! WHAT’S gotten INto you!” Could she have known something I didn’t? Could my behavior have been caused by some mysterious outside force that invaded my spirit and made me a “naughty girl”? I didn’t know it at the time, but Grandma Emma’s locution has a long history in the English language, long enough, in fact, that our understanding of and sympathy for Macbeth, for example, can be enriched by asking the same question of him: “Really, Macbeth, what HAS gotten into you?”

Shakespeare uses four words in the course of *Macbeth* which, interpreted in sixteenth century terms, reveal a man of nobility waylaid by conjurers: noble, charm, weird, and wicked. For maximum tragic effect, Macbeth must be noble (in a sixteenth-century sense); he must also be charmed and wicked (in a sixteenth-century sense) by the Weird (in the sixteenth-century sense) Sisters. In contrast, many productions minimize the weird and wicked and aim the early scenes in the direction of unfettered ambition and bloody cruelty, culminating in mad scenes for both Macbeth and his lady. If the mad scenes are mad enough, the entire motivation of the play lies in the insanity of its two primary characters—not very tragic.

If, however, *Macbeth* is a noble man (not merely a nobleman) caught up in something beyond his control, he is a sympathetic, tragic figure. Noble implies a code of behavior as well as rank of birth. A person earns the respect paid to Macbeth in act 1, scene 2: “brave Macbeth . . . Valor’s minion” (The Riverside Shakespeare [Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1974], 16-20); “O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!” (24); and “What [the former Thane of Cawdor] hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won” (67). Even Lady Macbeth “fear[s his] nature, / [as] too full o’ the milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way” (1.5.15-17). Macbeth begins as a brave and noble warrior who counts kindness and gentility among his virtues. He is noble by birth and noble of character.

In the first scene, however, the Weird Sisters agree to meet Macbeth, whom they have singled out for their attention. Act 1, scene 3 enumerates the miseries they will unleash upon him as they cast this magical spell: “The weird sisters, hand in hand, / Posters of the sea and land, / Thus do go, about, about, / Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, / And thrice again, to make up nine. / Peace, the charm’s wound up” (1.3.32-37).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the original meaning of charm was “to sing [magic] into,” as in two other French versions of the Latin, in-cant-tation and en-chant-ment: “chanting or recitation of a verse supposed to possess magic power or occult influence” (The Compact Edition [New York: Oxford UP, 1971], 1.383). Prospero in *The Tempest*, ends his magical career with “My charms I’ll break, [my captives’] senses I’ll restore” (5.1.31). Romeo and Juliet are “alike bewitched by the charm of looks (2.Prologue.6). Magic, witchcraft, and spells are consistently associated with charms. By extension, to say someone is charming, enchanting, or bewitching as metaphors for attractive, or that one is spellbound by a person’s charms, implies something metaphorically magical, though not usually occult. Macbeth later says he leads a “charmed life” (5.8.12), meaning that he is “rendered invulnerable by a spell or charm” (OED 1:383).

The OED’s primary meaning of weird, moreover, is “the principle, power, or agency by which events are pre-determined” (2:3731). The Weird Sisters correspond to the Three Fates, who spin, weave, and cut the thread of life. Like the oracle in *Oedipus Rex*, they bring confusion to the issue of responsibility: How can Oedipus be responsible for his actions when they have already been determined by the gods or the Fates? How can Macbeth? Is the Fates’ power absolute? Or

do they merely have the power of prophecy? Maybe foreknowledge is the same as causality. When Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, weird characters were deemed capable of prophecy. Macbeth makes the association when he asks why the sisters “stop our way / With such prophetic greeting?” (1.3.76-78). We moderns, though, hear the modern denotation of weird, which, incidentally, dates from its use to describe these bearded ladies who vanish into the air. Formerly, weird ladies—i.e., those endowed with prophetic powers—were presumed to have magical powers as well; now, ladies who think they have magical powers are presumed to be weird—i.e., strange, peculiar.

If we are to enjoy a tragic sympathy for Macbeth, he must be good without being quite perfect and he must contribute to his own downfall. Banquo notices that the sisters have deeply affected his companion: “Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?” (1.3.51-52). Macbeth’s aside confirms his own misgivings: “If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs, / Against the use of nature [i.e., against the normal habit of my nature]?” (1.3.134-37). What in his character makes him vulnerable to the Weird Sisters? Ambition, perhaps; but Shakespeare has not established unreasonable ambition as Macbeth’s normal state.

Instead Macbeth is wicked (“By the pricking of my thumbs / Something wicked this way comes” [4.1.45-46]). We do not understand the sentence, Macbeth was wicked by the weird sisters; yet the adjective wicked derives from the passive of a dialect variant of (be)witched. To say something was wicked meant literally to Shakespeare’s audience that it was under the spell of a witch (*wicca*). Something “had gotten into” Macbeth--the inner disturbance induced by whatever has the power to witch, bewitch, or charm: the Weird Sisters. Interpretations of the disturbance range all the way from total infestation by supernatural powers to the mere catalyzing of Macbeth’s latent seed of ambition. Nevertheless, the witches have done something to Macbeth.

For catharsis, the ultimate goal of tragedy, the tragic hero must recognize his role in his own downfall. As wickedly as Macbeth behaves, he never completely loses his traces of his nobility. Two crucial speeches suggest sorrow and futility rather than satisfaction with his bloody actions. In his sleep-deprived “in blood stepped in so far” (3.4.136-7), he is so clearly guilty of crimes he’s worse off trying to make amends than trying to complete the task, futile as it may be. Hence, he is resolved to bloodier actions. In “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” (5.5.19), he acknowledges that he and Lady Macbeth have spent “all [their] yesterdays . . . light[ing] fools [i.e., themselves] the way to dusty death” (5.5.22-23).

Macbeth makes for exciting drama even as a bloodbath prompted by a fourth witch—Lady Macbeth. But the play has the potential to engage the emotions at a deeper and more universal level. Macbeth needs to undergo crisis and change during the course of the play, which can best be achieved, I believe, by playing the Weird Sisters at face value as other-world powers that seduce the hero from his truest nature.

Macbeth and the Nature of Evil

By Elaine Pilkington

From *Insights*, 2004

Macbeth examines the nature of evil and the corruption of the human soul. In *Macbeth* evil is the opposite of humanity, the deviation from that which is natural for humankind, yet evil originates in the human heart. Supernatural and unnatural forces are the agents of human beings, not their instigators. The witches' words do not seduce Macbeth. He is compelled by his own ambition and his wife's ruthlessness. Similarly, spirits do not solicit Lady Macbeth, rather she invokes their aid for her purposes.

The character Macbeth, like the play itself, is a collection of contradictions. His wife believes that his "nature / . . . is too full o'th' milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way" (1.5.15-17, all references are to Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988]). At the beginning of the play, he seems the epitome of a loyal subject, valiantly fighting the rebel forces to protect the king and preserve his power. Described as an almost superhuman warrior on the field of battle, brave Macbeth "carv'd out his passage" (1.2.20) through the enemy till he reached the traitor Macdonald, "unseamed him from the nave to th' chops, / And fix'd his head upon ... [the] battlements" (1.2.22-23).

When we actually meet Macbeth and Banquo, however, we see interesting contrasts that belie the great hero. His first words, "So fair and foul a day I have not seen" (1.3.36) echo the "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.10) of three witches in scene one and immediately link him to them. Upon his bidding, the witches speak, greeting him with three titles: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and king hereafter (1.3.46-48). Macbeth hears their words not with the detached skepticism of Banquo but with a kind of fear. For him, this is not a revelation of the future but an invasion of his private, hidden thoughts. His first reaction is like one who has been discovered. Banquo asks him, "Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (1.3.49-50).

After Ross and Angus inform him that Duncan has bestowed upon him the title of the thane of Cawdor, validating the witches' second title, Macbeth analyzes their words: "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill, / Why hath it given me earnest of success / Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor. / If good, why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use of nature?" (1.3.129-36). The witches' words were neutral. It is Macbeth that puts a moral value to them, concluding that he must perform an unnatural act to acquire the title of king.

But the clear knowledge that killing a king, a kinsman, and a guest in his house is against all social propriety, natural order, and human or humane behavior puts Macbeth at war with himself. As he says, he dares to "do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (1.7.46-47). It is impossible to murder Duncan, a man of great virtue and sound leadership, and remain human. His desire for the crown and his revulsion at the means he must use to obtain it cause him to vacillate. At Lady Macbeth's urging, he agrees, "I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat" (1.7.79-80), putting aside his earlier refusal, "We will proceed no further in this business" (1.7.31).

Having performed the act, he is immediately filled with remorse. His bloody hands are a "sorry sight" (2.2.19). He cannot voice an amen to an overheard prayer, "I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' / Stuck in my throat" (2.2.30-31), having made himself no longer a man, no longer worthy of blessing. He imagines a voice crying, "'Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep'" (2.2.33-34). He is incapable of returning to Duncan's chamber to put the bloody dag-

gers with the grooms. Hearing the knocking at the gate, he says, “Wake Duncan with thy knocking. I would thou couldst” (2.2.72).

Despite his profound remorse, he does nothing to right the wrong. His fear of earthly justice compels him to make more inhuman choices. He proceeds with the plan to place the blame upon the grooms and kills them before they can establish their innocence. He believes Banquo suspects him and attempts to have Banquo and Fleance killed, succeeding only with Banquo’s death and Fleance’s escape. Murder becomes his primary tool of leadership. Having missed the opportunity to kill Macduff, he resolves to kill Lady Macduff, her children, “and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line” (4.1.168-69). By the end of the play, Macbeth is a bloody tyrant, disappointed in all aspects of his life—his reign, his marriage, a family for a potential dynasty—and damned for eternity in his death.

Lady Macbeth’s decline mirrors her husband’s. Denying her humanity, she too turns against human nature. To contemplate such horror and steel Macbeth to kill Duncan she calls upon spirits “that tend on mortal thoughts [to] unsex . . . [her] / And fill . . . [her] from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty” (1.5.40-42), turning her into an unnatural creature like the witches, who are neither male nor female. Her denial of her essential nature is unsuccessful. She cannot bring herself to murder Duncan for the human reason that he resembled her father as he slept. Despite her assurance that “A little water clears us of this deed” (2.2.65), she cannot forget her actions. The innocent dead haunt her dreams as she walks through the castle in her sleep, washing her hands, trying to remove the stain of her inhuman acts. But no water can clear the blood from her hands; no power can free her from her guilt. “What’s done cannot be undone” (5.1.65).

The evil of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is so great that ultimately it destroys both of them. The human soul cannot endure such evil. One way or another evil destroys the soul. Knowing he is doomed to lose, Macbeth still battles against Macduff, the representative of virtue and the redresser of the play. Lady Macbeth is defeated by madness and death. Evil is incompatible with humanity.

What's a Thane to Do? A Story of a Thane to Placate a King

By Amanda Caraway

William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is unique in both story and presentation. Shakespeare was a great entertainer who knew his audience, and the primary audience member for *Macbeth* was King James I. This young and energetic King of Scotland took the English throne in 1603, and Shakespeare's company was renamed the King's Men that year in honor of James.

Throughout *Macbeth*, Shakespeare pays tribute to the king's homeland, his people, and his beliefs. Some of the characters in the play are thought to be direct relatives of the king, and a number of situations in the play mirror the king's own life experiences. *Macbeth* is also a product of its setting as Shakespeare wrote the play in a frightening political climate.

Macbeth is set in Scotland during the reigns of Duncan and Macbeth, who were kings of Scotland between 1037 and 57 C.E. Shakespeare alters the historical accounts in order to write a story that will flatter King James. The *Chronicles* of Holinshed, Shakespeare's primary source for *Macbeth*, links Banquo to the Stuart line of Kings, from which James I is descended (Evans, G. Blakemore, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edition [Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997], 1356). In the play Shakespeare glorifies Banquo and his son Fleance, founder of the Stuart line.

While Macbeth and his lady are barren, much is made of Banquo's seed, and his lines are filled with images of fertility. In act one, scene three, Banquo addresses the witches with "If you can look into the seeds of time, / And say which grain will grow, and which will not, / Speak then to me" (1.3.58–60). The witches respond that Banquo's sons will be kings, an idea that haunts Macbeth and prompts him to murder Banquo. When Banquo converses with King Duncan, who calls him "noble" and "valiant," their language is filled with the imagery of healthy growth. The king speaks of his wish to enfold Banquo to his heart and Banquo replies with "There if I grow, / The harvest is your own" (1.3.32–33). By contrast Macbeth wears a "fruitless crown" and holds a "barren scepter" (3.1.60–61).

In the play, Fleance escapes Macbeth's clutches, and is able to avenge his father by siring a long line of kings. The Show of Kings in act four, scene one represents the posterity of the Stuart line, which stretched to King James. In the scene, the eighth king enters holding a glass, which was thought to reflect the image of James seated in the audience: "and yet the eight appears, who bears a glass / Which shows me many more" (4.1.119–120).

In addition to the identifiable characters from Scottish history, *Macbeth's* story of ambitious and murderous Scottish lords was relatable for James I. Ruthless nobles repeatedly threatened the king's mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and his father, Lord Darnley. When his mother was six-months pregnant with James, her secretary was murdered by Scottish nobles in the queen's presence in her own apartments (Fraser, Antonia, *Mary, Queen of Scots* [New York: Delacorte Press, 1969], 252–253). Within a year after James's birth, Scottish earls murdered his father and the king's house at Kirk o'Field was destroyed with gunpowder (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, 302–303). Shortly after, Mary was abducted and raped by one of her noblemen (*Mary, Queen of Scots*, 315–316). Scottish lords imprisoned her until she was able to flee to England, never seeing her son again.

The play also centers on many of the king's beliefs and interests. James thought of himself as a fighter of evil and a true man of God with the Divine Right to Rule. He is remembered for order-

ing a new translation of the Bible, known as the King James Version of the Bible. He considered himself to be a “scholar of witches and witchcraft,” (Garber, Marjorie B, *Shakespeare After All*, 1st ed. [New York: Pantheon Books, 2004], 697), and he authored the book *Daemonologie*, which was driven by his concern to explain evil phenomena. James had Parliament replace the 1563 act against “Conjururacions, Inchantments, and Witchcraft” with harsher laws (Lee, Christopher, *1603: The Death of Queen Elizabeth I, the Return of the Black Plague, the Rise of Shakespeare, Piracy, Witchcraft and the Birth of the Stuart Era*, 1st Edition [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004], 247). Under the new law, people accused of witchcraft faced execution rather than imprisonment, and simple intent to use sorcery was punished as well. During James’s rule, hundreds of men and women were put to death for witchcraft.

In addition to curing the land of witchcraft, King James also thought he could cure disease. He believed he could cure scrofula, also known as “the king’s evil,” by touching the victim (*Shakespeare After All*, 718). Edward the Confessor, the English King in *Macbeth*, was the first to practice this “cure.” In *Macbeth*, the Doctor says heaven has given King Edward’s hand “sanctity” (4.3.144), and Malcolm tells Macduff that there is “miraculous work in this good king” that has a “heavenly gift of prophecy” and is “full of grace” (4.3.141–159). King Edward is a strong foil to King Macbeth who is described as a tyrant unfit to rule.

Although Shakespeare was prohibited from writing about modern politics and religion, *Macbeth* is filled with concealed political and religious concerns of the time. Take for example the language of equivocation that fills the script. The word was a “technical term used to describe mental reservations of Jesuits who could tell untruths or partial truths under interrogation without breaking their word to God” (*Shakespeare After All*, 699). Throughout the play the language of the three witches, who speak in charms and riddles, is dominated by equivocation. It is seen in the famous phrase “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.11), and in their prophecies to Banquo: Lesser than Macbeth, and greater / Not so happy, yet much happier / Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none (1.3.65–68).

The Porter talks much of equivocation in his monologue in act two, scene three, and Macbeth speaks of equivocation when he finally recognizes the deceit of the witches and his eminent doom: “th’ equivocation of the fiend, / That lies like truth” (5.5.42–43).

The issue of equivocation in England came to a head in 1606 with the famous Gunpowder Plot. The English Roman Catholics planned to blow up Parliament as well as the king’s family on Nov. 5, 1605 to protest the King’s stance on religion (*Shakespeare After All*, 699). The plot was uncovered in time, and those involved were tortured and executed. Lennox’s speech in act three, scene four talks of a court in turmoil just like James’s court at the time the play was written. Lennox prays that a swift blessing will come from the court of England to help their “suffering country” (3.4.45–49). This speech also serves to link England and Scotland as a compliment to James who was king of both.

Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in the wake of a recent conspiracy knowing that it would be presented to a suspicious king who feared treason. By writing a play meant to flatter the king, Shakespeare was able to show his allegiance to the court and gain favor for himself and the King’s Men. Shakespeare also knew that *Macbeth* would be presented by candlelight at Hampton Court. This gave Shakespeare the perfect setting for a spooky tale filled with witchcraft and murder, intended to enthrall a superstitious king.