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Macbeth
Problems and Challenges in Staging the Scottish Play

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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* was written at a time of radical political change. James VI of Scotland, in 1603, had succeeded Queen Elizabeth as James I of England thus reuniting two kingdoms under a single monarch. A country that had been almost unknown to English people, was now politically linked with England. Retinue of Scots courtiers had moved with the King in order to find richer lands provoking in the English population feelings of anxiety. A new consciousness of the northern land to which England was now joined arose. As a consequence playwrights had to devote particular attention to the subjects of their works since authors like Ben Jonson faced troubles with the authorities due to some anti–Scottish jokes in their comedies¹. In writing *Macbeth*, Shakespeare was particularly ambiguous. Some scholars have speculated that the tragedy was written as a compliment to King James. James did in fact, descend from the lineage of Banquo, a character who in the play resists the temptation to take the active role in bringing about the prophecies of the Weird Sisters in relation to his own future.² Another possible link with the play is seen in James’s interest in the nature of kinship, an interest

1 George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Marston, had troubles with the authorities due to some anti-Scottish jokes in their 1605 comedy *Eastward Ho*. (Legatt, A., *William Shakespeare’s Macbeth*, Routledge,2006)

2 Shakespeare’s main source for *Macbeth* was Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. In depicting Banquo’s character Shakespeare omitted the fact that the historical Banquo was Macbeth's partner in a conspiracy to kill King Duncan.
showed in his *The True Law of Free Monarchies* and *Basilikon Doron*, in which he argued a theological basis for monarchy. However, if on the one hand the play seems to honour the King, on the other it represents Scotland as a violent, troubled land inhabited by evil powers both human and supernatural.

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* was probably written in 1606 and it was the only play the author set in Scotland. The play seems to have been staged late in that year at the Globe Playhouse, an open-roofed theatre in daylight. A play that constantly invokes darkness and whose crucial scenes take place at night was to be performed in a constantly light space which could not be physically obscured. It was the imagination of the audience triggered by the language that created darkness. In 1608-09 Shakespeare’s company, the *King’s Men* took over the Blackfriars theatre which was located in the former Blackfriars Dominican priory in the City of London. It had been adapted from the hall of the medieval friary and was therefore basically a dark space into which artificial light had to be introduced. *Macbeth* had finally acquired a literal darkness to match the darkness of its language.

In writing the play, Shakespeare took the *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* as his principal source and, since the history of the land to the north was less known to Shakespeare’s audiences than it was the history of England, he could take great liberties in combining events and characters from different reigns into a single story. The fact that Macbeth had been a wise and just ruler “governing the realme for the space of ten years in
equall iustice was completely suppressed making the history of England seem peaceful by comparison.

The first appearance of Macbeth onstage shows him entering with Banquo as they wander in a setting already occupied by the witches. Thunder and lightning dominate the scene along with rebellion, invasion and treason. As soon as peace is restored, Macbeth kills Duncan initiating a line of killings ending with an invasion by Scottish exiles and English troops in which Macbeth himself is killed. This is the reason why Shakespeare’s Macbeth is known as a play of concentrated violence. Supernatural elements appear throughout the story of which two-thirds is set in darkness thus adding further emphasis on the cruelty and unnaturalness of Macbeth’s kingdom.

Because of its violence, few plays were more frequently staged than Macbeth. Its popularity may relate to the fascination played by the unearthly presence of witches and ghosts as well as by set speeches. Furthermore, this Shakespearean tragedy has a curious power as it is regarded as a haunted, unlucky play. Stories of accident and illness abound and it is considered bad


4 As Brett Gamboa points out, “the Royal Shakespeare Company records seventy-two productions, ranking the play ninth among their repertory and second only to Hamlet among tragedies. During the last fifty years (1962 -2012) only Hamlet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream have been staged more. At the Stratford Festival of Canada, Macbeth is the most frequently produced tragedy (ten productions) and ranks four overall. And at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Macbeth ranks fourth among tragedies (after Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Othello) and ninth overall. (Gamboa, B., Macbeth – The State of the Play, Dwelling “in doubtful joy” – Macbeth and the Aesthetics of Disappointment, London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014)
luck for the actors to speak the play’s name so it is usually called “the Scottish play”. It is even worse to quote it in the dressing room though “there are traditional ways of counteracting the curse, including leaving the dressing room, turning around three times, spitting, swearing and knocking to be readmitted.”

However, superstition about Macbeth embodies a truth about the play as there is no work of Shakespeare that evokes such a powerful sense of evil.

Over the years, this tragedy has been widely admired, but on the stage it has not managed to achieve the “iconic” status of many productions of Hamlet and King Lear. Actually, no other play by Shakespeare has so extensively disappointed the audiences. Moving into the 20th century, Macbeth stage history is littered with failure. Despite the play’s bold outline, there are in fact, specific difficulties which any director must confront. The first of these is the role and staging of the supernatural elements of the play, specifically the Witches, the dagger, and Banquo’s ghost. It has proved to be very challenging to find a convincing way to stage the witches for modern audiences without falling into merely comic stereotypes. Another major problem seems to be the close concentration on two central figures, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who need to be unusually well matched. This has proved to be very difficult to achieve. The play is also unusual in its portrait of two people going through a crisis together and in the lack of vivid secondary characters such as Mercutio in Romeo and Juliet or Hamlet’s Ophelia. The focus is so strongly on the two

leading performers that the lives of the other cannot sustain the comparison. There has, however, been considerable interest in the witches who opens the play dramatically.

Success in staging *Macbeth* has lately been the exception rather than the rule; but there have been successes. A rare case of fully satisfying performance is Trevor Nunn’s *Macbeth*. In 1974 he directed Ian McKellen and Judi Dench at *The Other Place* theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon giving to the audience one of the most successful productions of the play. In 1978, the performance was recorded for television and critics proclaimed it the best since the famous Laurence Olivier–Vivien Leigh production at Stratford Upon Avon in 1955. That landmark production survives only through the director’s promptbook, photographs, reviews and reconstructed staging of the story.

The aim of this work is to see how the staging of *Macbeth* has changed in its history to date. The issues raised briefly in this introduction will recur: the features of the Elizabethan period and theatres, *Macbeth* in performance, the importance of adaptation and the audience reception of the play.

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CHAPTER 1

Staging *Macbeth*.
Problems and Challenges Producers have to face.

*Macbeth* is widely admired and few plays have been more frequently staged. Its violence and supernatural elements, together with the powerful presence of Macbeth and his wife, have fascinated audiences around the globe. Nonetheless, no other play by Shakespeare has so extensive a history of disappointing its public. When *Macbeth* is concerned, expectations tend to be high and the play generally falls short. One of the main causes may be attributed to the apparent simplicity of the play itself, resulting in the belief that every production company would be able to stage it. Furthermore there are intrinsic elements of the play that require special attention, such as the supernatural elements that pervade it, or the choice of the actors that are to interpret Macbeth and his wife. This last point has proven to be particularly

7 Carolyn Sale, professor at the University of Alberta, notes how the play fails onstage in her review of Michael Boyd’s 2011 production of *Macbeth*: “I have seen poor productions of Macbeth. We all have. It’s a beguiling play, apparently so simple, that no production company thinks it beyond its ambitions. But no matter how poor the production, I have always walked away from the theatre thinking that the play itself is indestructible…” (Carolyn Sale, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, p. 149, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).
difficult to achieve as one character may tend prevail over the other. When staging Macbeth, and his Lady, one of the key issues and threats to the play is the choice of the performers as it is not so simple to find the right balance between their roles. Macbeth has an incredible concentration of diverse, conflicting, intimate qualities. He is fulfilled of a startling diversity of attributes that render him incongruous. He is a complex and dynamic character that continually changes throughout the play and his qualities congregate and dissolve around his multiple roles. At first the audience knows he is a soldier, a general, a husband but then he shifts and becomes a host, a murderer, a king, a tyrant, a traitor and so forth. Macbeth is a hero and a villain, a victim and a victimizer. Due to this extreme polyphony of roles and characteristics, it is incredibly hard to hold together all Macbeth’s pieces. The actor that is to perform this role, then, has to be particularly sensitive and intense and he has to make all the single pieces to interlock. Another aspect that has been widely varied in theatres and adaptations for the screen is Macbeth’s age. He has been interpreted by young men like Ian McKellen in the Trevor Nunn’s 1974 production, but he has also been interpreted by mature man like Franco Branciaroli in his 2016 production. Shakespeare is not precise about Macbeth’s age, but the advantages of employing young interpreters, is that

8 In her introduction to *Macbeth – The State of Play*, Ann Thompson notes: “John Philip Kemble’s performance as Macbeth was less exceptional than that of his sister Sarah Siddons, as Lady Macbeth. Ellen Terry and Henry Irving should have been more evenly matched, but her performance, although visually striking […], was described as a “white-washing” of the character. Laurence Olivier was unequally matched by Vivien Leigh […].” (Anne Thompson, *Macbeth – The State of Play*, p. 2, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, Great Britain, 2014).
they can be showed as aging throughout the play, bearing the signs of a long
time suffering; furthermore, they evoke sympathy. Conventionally Macbeth is
represented as a brave muscular warrior so that, in appearance he looks more
kingly than king Duncan himself\(^9\), allowing a sort of unconscious justification for
the terrible deed he is to perform. King Duncan is gentle and does not take
part in the battles. He seems not even informed about the course of the events
as he needs to be made aware of the circumstances by his soldiers and
nobles. This is in strong contrast with Macbeth’s attitude, as he is a valiant
warrior and leader. In *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*
we are informed that “Makbeth a valiant gentleman, and one that if he had not
béene somewhat cruell of nature, might haue béene thought more woorthie
the gounernment of the realme. On the other part, Duncane was so soft and
gentle of nature, that the people wished the inclinations and maners of these
two cousins to haue béene so tempered and interchangeable bestowed
betwixt them, that where the one had too much of clemencie, and the other of
crueltie, the meane virtue betwixt these two extremities might haue reigned by
indifferent partition in them both, so should Duncane haue proued a woorthie
king, and Makbeth an excellent capteine.”\(^{10}\) Another aspect to consider while
staging *Macbeth* is the nature of Macbeth’s actions. In fact, productions have

\(^9\) In Justin Kurzel’s *Macbeth* (2015), this contrast is particularly evident. King Duncan
is interpreted by David Thewlis as a corpulent, benevolent king in contrast with the
virile, statuesque Michael Fassbender who interprets Macbeth.

\(^{10}\) Holinshed, R., *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, VOL. 5 –Scotland,
pag. 265, London, Jonson J. 1808
to deal with many possibilities, including staging the main character as wife-compelled, supernaturally-compelled, damned, inwardly driven and so forth. If productions are to consider Macbeth as supernaturally-compelled, we have to suppose that the Weird Sisters may have determined his destiny and that Macbeth is inevitably damned; but, if they are to stage him as inwardly driven, then the responsibility for his actions will inevitably fall on him, changing the audience perception about his deeds or about the whole play.

When productions have to choose the main performers, they also have to consider that Macbeth exists in his relationship with a crucible of lower characters (soldiers, servants, friends, king, murderers etc.) that determine his identity. On the other hand, Lady Macbeth exists mainly in her relationship to him, as his wife and royal partner. She never speaks to Macbeth of her afflictions and she exposes the audience to her distress only once in III.2.4-7. Like Macbeth she is marked by a great polyphony of feelings that characterize her relationship with her husband and the world that surrounds her. She appears as a strong and determined woman who is able to manipulate her partner but she is to be manipulated by him later in the play. She initially seems a guide to him but then she is overruled by him. She keeps questioning Macbeth’s masculinity in order to make him react to his fears yet she is to succumb to her own guilty conscience. Like Macbeth she can speak directly or obliquely in an incredible facet of meanings. She is described as ambitious, brave, calculating, cruel, depressed, devoted, fascinating, mad, selfish and so forth. Critics have also considered whether her attitude is mainly “feminine” or “masculine” and if Macbeth might have remained innocent without her.
Furthermore, it is fundamental to take in account her implication with the supernatural elements. Her entrance in I.5 is striking in a number of ways. This is the first scene to begin with a single character alone on stage, a circumstance that puts a strong focus on her. It is also the first scene to begin with a statement rather than a question and Lady Macbeth enters reading a letter from her husband so that she speaks his words in her voice. Furthermore, in this scene we also have the first hint of the bond between them. After having read her husband letter, Lady Macbeth performs a sort of magic while she tries to summon spirits to whom she expresses the will to change her nature being unsexed and transforming her milk into gall, she lingers in violent and perverse thoughts and, later on, she persuade her husband to use violence to obtain power. When Macbeth enters, the audience sees that he is afraid of the deed he might commit to become king, while his Lady is afraid he might not commit it giving the impression that she has the resolution her husband lacks. Due to these behaviors some critics have suggested that Lady Macbeth may be considered the fourth witch, while, on

11 Dale Townshend notes: “Unrecorded in English lexicography until the publication of The Tragedie of Macbeth, in the first Folio edition of the play in 1623 ‘unsex’, as a transitive verb, appears to have been of Shakespeare’s own coinage.” (Dale Townshend, Unsexing Macbeth 1623-1800, p.172, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, India, 2013).

the other hand, some critics\textsuperscript{13} suggested that Lady Macbeth’s invocation of spirits was little more than irresponsible justification for her morally dubious actions. She seems both autonomous and possessed, part witch, part bewitched. Critics and performers, have explored her polar extremes moving mainly between the Terrible Woman who destroys her husband in order to satisfy her thirst for glory and the Loving Wife who forces herself to be terrible for her husband’s sake underlining the great complexity of the character. Sigmund Freud proposes an interesting analysis of Lady Macbeth’s character: “[…] We may take as an example of a person who collapses on reaching success, after striving for it with single-minded energy, the figure of Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth. Beforehand there is no hesitation, no sign of any internal conflict in her, no endeavor but that of overcoming the scruples of her ambitious and yet tender-minded husband. She is ready to sacrifice even her womanliness to her murderous intention, without reflecting on the decisive part which this womanliness must play when the question afterwards arises of preventing the aim of her ambition, which has been attained through a crime. […] One solitary faint stirring of reluctance comes over her before the deed […] Nevertheless she holds out. […] But at the same time she strives to ‘undo the deed which cannot be undone’. She washes her hands, which are blood-stained and smell of blood, and is conscious of the futility of the attempt. She who had seemed so remorseless seems to have been borne down by

\textsuperscript{13} William Harvey, Two Anatomical Exercitations Concerning the Circulation of the Blood, p.42, London, 1653.
remorse. “This brief analysis shows the complexity and charm of Lady Macbeth’s character. She is a strong, leading woman at first but then she succumbs to her fears and remorse. She has to couple with her husband who at first seems afraid to commit “the deed”, but then turns into a terrible tyrant who murders innocent people in order to obtain power. These two characters evolve slowly throughout the play, and the performers who are to interpret them, have to be particularly sensitive to convey all the nuances of this transformation.

When staging Macbeth, there are many important and sensitive aspects to consider. One of the most delicate, is the audience’s expectation about the Weird Sisters. The Sisters cannot be represented as mere projections of Macbeth’s mind as they are not delusions. On the other hand they are liminal creatures and so they are extremely difficult to delineate. When Banquo sees them he is not able to define their nature and curiously asks Macbeth: “What are these, so withered, and so wild in their attire, that look not like th’inhabitants o’th’earth and yet are on’t?” (I.3. 39-42). Their outward appearance is deceiving as Banquo’s words suggest: “You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so.” (I.3. 45-7). Presentation in theatres usually avoid to be faithful to his words as, nowadays, to see three bearded women would raise hilarity rather than fear. The


15 Macbeth asks the witches “How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags! What is’t you do?” only to receive a vague and mysterious answer: “A deed without a name”. (IV. 1. 62 -64) The mystery is what establishes the witches.
implication, then is that the audience is bound to see that the witches are not what Banquo describes. What is interesting about these creatures is that they call themselves the Weïrd Sisters\textsuperscript{16} and Banquo and Macbeth refers to them as such. The only time the word “witch” is heard by the audience is in I.2. 6\textsuperscript{17} when the First Witch quotes the words of a woman who refused to give her some chestnut. The epithet is perceived as a serious affront to the Sister for which the woman’s husband must be punished. This draws the attention to a fundamental issue which has been widely debated by scholars i.e. if the Sisters are village witches or not. By the mid 16\textsuperscript{th} century witch persecution was at the height of its power in England and many cultured people throughout Europe believed in witchcraft. Even James VI of Scotland, who had succeeded Queen Elizabeth as James I of England, was a firm demonologist.\textsuperscript{18} In his times, witchcraft was perceived at two different levels: people believed in village witches as well as to a form of intellectual magic. Village witches were usually old poor ladies who begged for some food. Villagers would ask their

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16} The word "weird" comes from the Old English term "wyrd," meaning "fate".
\textsuperscript{17} First Witch:
\begin{quote}
“A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap, 
And munched, and munched, and munched. ‘Give me’, quoth I; 
‘Aroynt thee, witch’, the rump-fed ronyon cries. 
Her husband’s to Aleppo gone, master o’th’ Tiger; 
But in a sieve I’ll thither sail, 
And like a rat without a tail, I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do.”.
\end{quote}
\textsuperscript{18} King James I wrote \textit{Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into three Books: By the High and Mighty Prince, James &c.} which was published in 1597. It is a philosophical dissertation on necromancy and black magic. It was a political and theological treaty that aimed to educate the English population on the history, practices and implications of sorcery.
help in everyday life, for instance when they lost something and they wanted the witch to perform a magic ritual to have it back. Nonetheless they wandered in villages and were often treated badly. As a consequence, when populations were victims of diseases and famines, beggars and old ladies were accused of cursing people: they served as scapegoats as they were a means to explain the inexplicable. On the other hand, intellectual magic was performed at more theological and theoretical levels. Kings and queens would ask advice about their health or future life to intellectuals like John Dee\(^\text{19}\), who were commonly perceived as magicians performing white magic and so were welcomed by rulers.

Taking into account the Weïrd Sisters, scholars have noted how they bear some resemblance with village witches, as they can appear at their will, they confine their interference to prediction and they curse people. They are ambiguous and whether they are supernatural or merely strange old women is still an argument. However the Weïrd Sisters are generally considered more decisively supernatural. It is not so easy to define their nature as Marvin Rosenberg notes: “[…] the mystery and hint of chaos they carry will pervade

\(^{19}\) John Dee (13 July 1527 – 1608) was a mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, occultist and adviser to Queen Elizabeth I. He devoted much of his life to the study of alchemy, divination and Hermetic philosophy. John Aubrey (1626 – 1697 English antiquary, natural philosopher and writer) described John Dee as “one of the ornaments of his Age”. Although Dee was a major intellectual force in Elizabethan England many of his contemporaries branded him a conjurer. Opinions about John Dee varied during his own lifetime. Many of the erudite scholars on the Continent and in England respected him as a learned man and as an important source of information. In court circle he was well known and respected. The common people though feared him as a sorcerer or a black magician. (Peter French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus*, pp. 1-7, Routledge, New York, 2002).
the action. If we are not to inhabit them, as well as respond to them, we must wonder how they look, what forces –natural and supernatural- they may represent.”.  

As a consequence of their liminality, *Macbeth*’s witches have been performed in many different ways leading to an important shift in the implications about Macbeth choices. If we are to consider the Sisters as simple old women pretending to be possessed with magic, then Macbeth is mainly responsible for his acts and his crimes fall undoubtedly on him. But, if we are to consider them as Fates, then there is nothing Macbeth can do to escape his destiny. In his production of *Macbeth* (England, 1955) Glen Byam Shaw imagined the witches as instruments of Darkness. He observed that the Sisters’s first appearance was in a descending movement from air to earth, the second appearance was on earth and the third underground i.e. from hell. As Satanic Agents the Sisters were given by Shaw a particular charm as he believed that: “anything evil is always fascinating and wonderful in some way”. On the other hand, Shaw noted that the Sisters had limited powers as they were “servants of hell” which implied they also were condemned souls. What is interesting to note, is that in Shakespeare’s time, the servants of Satan were expected to be almost exclusively women. This was a result of treatises such as Heinrich Krämer’s *Malleus Maleficarum* also known as *Hammer of the Witches*

21 Glen Byan Shaw directed the Laurence Olivier – Vivian Leigh *Macbeth* in 1955.
(published in Germany in 1486) which at the time was a bestseller second only to the Bible. This treaty offered a detailed description of the witches and their practices and prescribed the right conduct that the secular courts had to follow in order to extirpate witchcraft. Krämer argued that Lucifer had a particular power over women since they were commonly thought to be the weaker vessels. 

Krämer affirmed that due to their weakness women accepted to enter a pact with the Devil which implied having sexual relations with him. This pact gave them the power of flight, the ability to practice maleficent magic including the slaughter of babies and the power to summon spirits. However, in *Macbeth* there is no evidence that the Sisters have made a pact with the devil and as Marvin Rosenberg notes “Macbeth offers no confirmation or explanation, or rationalization of any demonological scheme”.

As I mentioned before, a delicate argument to consider when staging *Macbeth* is whether Lady Macbeth is to be considered the fourth witch or not. In I.5.39

23 “[...] [Lucifer] attacks through these heresies at that time in particular, when the evening of the world declines towards its setting and the evil of men swells up, since he knows in great anger, as John bears witness in the Book of Apocalypse [12:12], that he has little time remaining. Hence, he has also caused a certain unusual heretical perversity to grow up in the land of the Lord – a Heresy, I say, of Sorceresses, since it is to be designated by the particular gender over which he is known to have power.”(Mackay, Christopher, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* volume 1, p.69, Cambridge University Press, 2009).


she actually performs a sort of invocation to spirits. Furthermore she expresses the will to be unsexed and to have her milk taken for gall which implies making her nature almost masculine and as liminal as that of the Weird Sisters. After this first summoning, however, Lady Macbeth makes no other move toward spirits. There have been many considerations regarding her nature and whether she is possessed by the witches or not. She is called a “fiend-like queen” (V.7.99) once, but with no supernatural implications. It is important to note that throughout the play Lady Macbeth is not seen by the other characters do anything unladylike except possibly in her behaviour in the banquet scene. Nevertheless, even in this scene she is usually staged as master of the situation while, nearly overwhelmed by anxiety, she manages to

26 “The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
under my battlements. Come you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,
Stop up th’access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visiting of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th’effect and it. Come to my woman’s breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murd’ring ministers,
Wherever, in your sightless substances,
You wait on nature’s mischief. 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”.

27 A clever representation of Lady Macbeth’s liminality is to be found in Akira Kurosawa’s adaptation of Macbeth, the acclaimed Throne of Blood. In his filmed version of the tragedy, the Lady, whose name is Asaji is suspiciously similar to the witch who predicts Macbeth’s future. Her long white costume and her ethereal appearance make her look more like a spirit than a real woman.
maintain a façade to cover her husband compromising behaviour. Only the audience, then is allowed to participate to her most intimate secrets. The choice of how to interpret Lady Macbeth’s conduct, when it is not suggested by the theatre company, is then left to the public. Marvin Rosenberg notes that “the distinctions are delicate between possession and signs like it – trance, obsession, raptness, the blankness of despair, the slavery of somnambulism- and madness. Actresses have ranged among these nuances, some more in spirit with the witches than other”\textsuperscript{28}. As for Macbeth, the fact that his Lady is possessed by the witches or not is very relevant in the way she is perceived by the audience.

Another challenge, the productions have to face is the staging of the “dagger scene”. In II.1, Macbeth is left alone on stage, he faces the actuality of murder and rouses at a weird sight. In this scene, the audience cannot, at first, tell what Macbeth is seeing. Usually he is staged looking before himself, staring at Duncan’s chamber or over the heads of the audience. The public wonders if he is seeing something real or not. Macbeth’s words usually come slowly while the performer is concentrated. Some actors also make a clutching gesture before they say a word\textsuperscript{29}, and the audience wonders what he is trying to hold. Only Macbeth’s words reveals the identity of the vision: “Is this a dagger, which I see before me?”.

\textsuperscript{28} Marvin Rosenberg, \textit{The Masks of Macbeth}, p.201, Newark: University of Delaware Press, United States of America, 1978

\textsuperscript{29} Reinardt’s Macbeth and Nunn’s Macbeth tried to grab the imaginary dagger before them.
Some directors, tried to drain the supernatural from the play in rationalizing the image Macbeth sees. But Shakespeare’s text stipulates a vision Macbeth can see but not touch, i.e. an imaginary dagger. To use a real dagger, would diminish the sense of strangeness and raptness of Macbeth’s mind. Roman Polanski, in his Macbeth’s film, produced a spectral dagger that destroyed the grandeur of Macbeth’s imagination. The dagger may also be projected onto a screen or wall as a projection of Macbeth’s mind, but the power of the hallucination must depend on the ability of the actor to react to the vision that his heated brain produced. A similar situation is offered by the apparition of Banquo’s ghost in the famous “Banquet Scene” (III.4). The scene opens with a court scene, an opulent banquet meant to glorify the new king and his queen. Macbeth and his wife are usually shown as they sit in their thrones and welcome their guests. The nobles will arrange themselves according to their elevation in the hierarchy. The noble that sits at Macbeth’s table are those who named him king and they are there to do him honor. In Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* we are told that Macbeth had been a wise and just ruler “governing the realme for the space of ten years in equall justice”, a circumstance completely omitted by Shakespeare. However, to this moment, Macbeth has done no evil thing as far as the thanes know, to outrage them. The atmosphere is joyous and the audience has the impression that the thanes are willingly participating to an intimate ritual of hospitality. This

30 Macbeth states: “You know your degrees, sit down”. (III.4)

scene has been represented on stage in many different ways, ranging from the highly symbolic representation to the historically accurate ones. Nonetheless, both these extremes usually present some elements such as the food and the rich garments that are to adorn the tables. These elements pose a practical problem: the diners have limited time to eat and they cannot simply mime chewing as that would destroy the illusion. In some cases, real food was brought on stage. Suddenly the ceremonial is interrupted when a man whose face is marked with blood enters the scene. Macbeth tries to occupy his guests urging them “Be large in mirth, anon we’ll drink a measure The table round” (III.4.16-17). In some productions Macbeth calls for a goblet, drinks from it, and hands it to the nearest thane to start around the table. Macbeth will then move to have long dialogue with the murder while the banquet will go on as background. Of the whole company besides the king and the queen only two guests have speeches, so, the rest of the company is there to fill the design. As Macbeth talks to the murderer, on the background the serving, the eating, the drinking and mute non-text conversation will go on. In some productions,

32 “Symbolism has sometimes framed the staging of the banquet. Bergman, in 1944, set his table brightly illuminated, under an arch, and suggested an effect of Holy Supper, with Macbeth central. At the other extreme, a later Swedish banquet (1967) proceeded in what seemed a slaughterhouse, with four huge, skinned, bright red carcasses hanging on a wall that ripped blood. More subtly Robert Edmond Jones, for the Lionel Barrymore Macbeth, frankly haunted the feast with distorted and discordant background screens, and great candles. Skewed and wizened, that burned with thin flames, and died as the scene ended. More often the banquet is realistic as the text asks, with great trays of food and drink, to convey the true sense of proud, hospitable royalty, hopeful of loyal support”. (Marvin Rosenberg, The Mask of Macbeth, pp.429-30, Newark: University of Delaware Press, United States of America, 1978)

33 Scofield and Nunn among others.
even music or troubadours are introduced to suggest a happy atmosphere, indeed “large in mirth”. In Trevor Nunn’s production, the scene is suspiciously quiet, the voices are subdued and the minimal scene is oppressed by a strange solemnity. His Lady is nervous and anxious, she smiles and greets the guests but at the same time she glances at her husband giving the audience the impression that something is about to happen. The murderer introduces an element of tension in the scene, Macbeth moves toward him and tries to hide the bloody face from the guests as they start talking apart. The news that is brought by the murderer is shocking: Banquo has been killed but Fleance has escaped. The shock is fearful but Macbeth has to contain with great effort the passions within. Performers usually suggest the overwhelming fear trembling, rubbing their hands, or even staging an epileptic fit. Macbeth is going through a sudden changing of emotions that he cannot easily control. Fleance survival proves that the Sister’s prophecy has not been controverted and that Macbeth’s dynasty is in danger. The banquet has proceeded in the background and now Lady Macbeth’s awareness of her husband isolation becomes apparent; she will do her best to distract the guests, talking to them and moving around the tables. She is then to approach Macbeth and call him back to his duties. Suddenly Banquo’s ghost appears, Macbeth is invited to sit. He may look around the table at first and not seeing an empty seat he will go on with his cheer. Banquo’s ghost may be present on stage as Macbeth pronounces his words

34 “Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth’s place”. (III.4)
Here had we now our country’s honour, roof’d,
Where the grac’d person of our Banquo present:
Who, may I rather challenge for unkindness,
Than pity for mischance. (III.4.52-55)

or Banquo may wait to appear at the end of his welcome path. Again Macbeth is invited to join the nobles, but he replies “The table’s full” (III.4.59) as he sees the ghost and loses his control. His reason yields. Before this scene Macbeth experienced the confusion between the real and unreal that pervade the play all by himself. He was never seen confused by someone else. He was alone when he saw the dagger, and the only occasions in which he might have puzzled the other characters were those in which he escaped into an intense raptness. In this scene he is the only character who sees a ghost. To represent the ghost invisibility Banquo may be made to walk between the unseeing Lady and the guests. The problems posed by this apparition are multiple as the audience may wonder whether the ghost is “real”, whether it is an apparition from the dead or whether it is produced by Macbeth’s imagination. Lady Macbeth suggests that the ghost is certainly a hallucination as she does not believe it to be real. In this case Shakespeare is ambiguous about the ghost’s nature as he does not force the audience to examine his reality as he did with other ghosts.\footnote{With Hamlet’s Father Shakespeare stated his ghost had come for revenge.} The ghost is real to Macbeth but it is unimaginable for others. Some staging have tried to emphasize the subjectivity of the ghost by banishing it, so that his presence was suggested by the convulsions of fright that shook Macbeth. On the other hand, when the ghost can be seen by the

audience, it saves Macbeth from giving the impression of outright madness. It seems on the edge of it, but as long as he recovers with the disappearance of the ghost, his clutch on sanity is acceptable. The ghost may be represented as covered in blood to convey the brutality of the murder and to shock the audience. Macbeth’s first reaction to the ghost is carefully modulated in comparison with the later one that is so violent as to alarms the nobles. Ross invites the “gentlemen” to rise and he may rise first. Lady Macbeth has a long speech through which her husband is silent, he only breaks into it briefly and is silent again until his last lines before Banquo’s ghost disappears. In this scene, Macbeth is moved by multiple impulses: the fear of the inexplicable, the dread of losing his reason, the warrior’s rage, the guilt of the murderer, the kingly will to seem imperturbable and so forth. On the other hand, Lady Macbeth’s uses a simple, monosyllabic language to try to protect her husband dignity in front of the thanes. She identifies Macbeth with a childish disease and she drives the lord’s gaze away from Macbeth insisting that they not look at him, but feed. She questions again his manhood and she shames him as a child his shamed. In this scene, the Lady is divided between the two roles she must assume, hostess and wife, so she moves from the noble hospitality with the thanes to quick anger to her husband. Macbeth is desperately hysterical and cries ironically

*If charnel houses, and our graves must send*
*Those that we bury, back; our monuments*
*Shall be the maws of kites.* (III.4.89-91)
This image of the refusal of the dead to stay dead, will be continued later in Macbeth’s speech. His manner will reach such a high pitch that his Lady again questions his manhood:

What? quite unmann’d in folly. (III.4.92)

After these speeches Banquo exits from the scene. To obtain this effects, productions often employs a trap in order to make the ghost disappear as if he was sinking into the earth. The magical disappearance leaves Macbeth unsettled by the implication that the ghost was perhaps an illusion.
CHAPTER 2

Early Plays.

1. Attending the Playhouse

In the 1570s in Southwark, on the south bank of the river Thames, there was a burst of play-house building activity. Here, the Rose playhouse (1587) was joined by the Swan (1595) and the Globe (1599) to form a theatre district. The swift expansion of outdoor fixed playhouses shows both the great popularity of playgoing and London’s fast-growing population. The playhouses were located outside the borders of the city but they depended upon it and they were inevitably linked to it. Playbills were displayed in the streets of London along with the title-pages of the new books, including the plays that had been published. Audiences could only reach the playhouse crossing the river by boat or bridge. The playhouses stood in entertainment districts with other activities which were excluded from the city, such as brothels and bear-baiting pits. The playhouses of the period were divided into two headings: indoor and outdoor. Outdoors theatres were all unroofed and mostly circular apart from a roof that covered the stage in most of the later playhouses. The circular shape was probably inspired by classical tradition. To enter a

36 The Globe, was actually a relocation of the Theatre as Shakespeare’s playing company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, fell into dispute with the landlord and as a consequence decided to dismantle the playhouse and transport its timbers across the river to Bankside to build the new Globe.
playhouse cost only a penny to gain a standing-place in the yard, but to sit higher in the galleries in more comfort it was necessary to pay more. The parts of the galleries nearest to the stage were the lords’ rooms; they cost sixpence and from its seats the occupants could make ostentatious display of their wealth. The stage was wide, it measured approximately forty feet across and it extended into the yard. Behind the stage was the tiring-house - also called dressing room - from which the actors made their entrance through two or three doors onto the stage. On the stage there was also a trapdoor that led to an under-stage area known as “hell” from which the characters could emerge or into which they could vanish. To complement this, there was a canopy over the stage that permitted the descent of characters. It was known as the “heavens”, and it was painted in celestial bodies. A gallery in the tiring house façade above the stage could be used for balcony scenes while above the tiring-house and heavens was the area where machinery could be employed to raise or lower characters and create special effects. At the summit of the playhouse there was also a platform from which a trumpeter could announce the beginning of the performance and from which a flag fluttered while the play was in progress.

The experience of attending a playhouse was much different from it is today, with the audience composed of many differing social classes loudly expressing either pleasure or disdain\(^37\). When the audiences were dissatisfied, oranges, …

\(^{37}\) “On busy days, particularly the common holidays when working people were at liberty to go to the playhouses for an afternoon performance, standing in the yard or even sitting in the galleries might involve some discomfort in the form of being rather too closely jammed up against other people’s bodies, […] and thus encountering the
stones, apples, nuts and other objects flew on the stage. The playhouse experience could assault all the senses, in fact, as Jonathan G. Harris notes in his essay “The Smell of Macbeth”, stages and audiences often stank due to the lack of hygiene in the audience as well as a consequence of the special effects that were used at the time, such as two kind of particularly stinking fireworks. Harris also suggests that Shakespeare’s use of the smell of gunpowder was meant to produce “other experiences of eschatological time. [...] Macbeth’s explosions retain a connection to Satan; after all, the odor of sulfur in Shakespeare’s time [...] was a stinking sign of diabolical activity”. At the time, European myth attributed the gunpowder invention to the devil and then, after the Reformation, to an apocryphal evil German friar named Bartold Schwarz who supposedly served Satan. The association between bad smell of those bodies [...] The democratically mixed, large, jostling crowd at the outdoor playhouse is evoked in some contemporary satirical verses by Sir John Davies, comparing the confused thoughts of “Cosmus” to the rush for the exits at the end of the show [...]” (John H. Astington, Moving Shakespeare Indoor, pp.15-16, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2014).

38 “Did the Shakespearean stage stink? The Jonsonian stage certainly did. In the prologue of Bartholomew Fair, the Scrivener complains that the Hope Theatre, where Jonson’s play was first performed in 1614, is “as dirty as Smithfield, and stinking every wit”. [...] While Jonson refers here to the space of the theatre as a whole, he also knew something of the bad odors that could be produced specifically on the stage. Among the early modern theatre’s most dazzling special effects were two fireworks [...] “rosin-lightning flash” and “Squibs”. [...] Because of their visual and acoustic impact, it is easy to overlook how both effects also stank- especially the squib, which became a virtual synonym for bad odor. [...] Even in the open-air Globe, the smell would have been strong; if the play was performed indoors at court for King James, the odor would have been stifling.” (Jonathan Gil Harris, The Smell of Macbeth, pp. 465-466, Shakespeare Quaterly, 2011).

and hell had been exploited on the English stage since the Corpus Christi
drama\textsuperscript{40}. At the beginning of \textit{Macbeth}, when rosin-lightning flash and squibs
were employed, they would have made the public remember the Gunpowder
Plot, but also a tradition of representing the demonic that was deeply rooted in
popular Catholic entertainments. Visual spectacle was very important too; not
only explosions and storm scenes could be created on stage to impress the
audience, but also the costumes worn by the actors were incredibly
sumptuous\textsuperscript{41}. As Janette Dillon notes in her \textit{Cambridge Introduction to Early
English Theatre}, “Few Early English plays offer full description of costume, but
where they do it is evident that costume could be central to both meaning and
spectacular effect. The stage direction that opens the play of \textit{Wisdom} [...],
shows the importance of costume at levels both of functionality and display.
Wisdom’s costume strikes the viewer simultaneously with its richness, its
visual appeal and its symbolic meaning, purple, ermine and cloth of gold
combining with crown, orb and scepter to communicate that this figure is a
great king. Clothes in society as well as in theatre, were much more expensive
in relation to other costs than they are now. Costumes for plays performed in
Cambridge colleges were so valuable that they were stored in chests in the
Master’s living quarters or kept locked in the college tower with the silver”. This

\textsuperscript{40} “This plays were performed on the feast day of Corpus Christi, the first Thursday
after Trinity Sunday. They are also known as mystery plays. (Helen Hackett, \textit{English

\textsuperscript{41} As Helen Hackett notes, costumes were often “the most valuable property of the
playing companies and their colors and styles spoke a visual language: black for a
melancholic, scarlet gowns for doctors and cardinals, blue coats for serving men, and
contributed in giving a great charm to the plays, even if, at the time there were no stage sets of the kind that are used in modern theatres to evoke a particular setting or a particular time. In fact, it was the imaginary force of the players that combined with that of the audience, could turn the stage into a temporarily specific time and place. In *Macbeth* the constant lyrical references to nighttime, thunder and rain made the audience believe that they were in a wild nocturnal place, even though they were in daylight, since the playhouse performances usually began at 2pm. The fact that players and spectators shared the same daylight and the audience closely surrounded the stage on three sides contributed in creating the imaginary world of the play. In fact, in the Renaissance play-house, everyone shared the same space, making the spectators more aware of each other’s responses to the play and also enabling actors to engage in various kinds of dialogue with the audience. This, allowed a communal experience of the play.

2. Representation of Macbeth from Simon Forman eyewitness account to Trevor Nunn’s 1974 production.

*Macbeth*, Shakespeare’s only Scottish play, was probably first acted in 1606, and it was written at the time when England’s Scottish King came to the throne. In fact, James VI of Scotland became James I of England in 1603 and his first act was to take Shakespeare’s company, the Lord’s Chamberlain Men, under his patronage giving them the new title of the King’s Men. *Macbeth* is a play about a political assassination as everything before the assassination of Duncan leads up to it while everything after the murder follows as a
consequence of it. However, *Macbeth* is a private drama as in it there is not
the presence of public orations or turbulent crowds and even Duncan’s murder
takes place off stage and not publicly. The most important moments are
marked by soliloquies or dialogues between two people, especially Macbeth
and his wife. The focus attention is mostly on the state of minds and the
feelings of the main characters and on the influence on character has on the
mind of the other. All these intimate passages are intermingled with more
spectacular passages such as the discover of Duncan’s body, the appearance
of Banquo’s ghost or the sleepwalking scene. In his introduction to *Macbeth*,
John Wilder suggests that “the intimate tone of the play may suggest that it
was firstly designed not to be performed at the Globe, a large auditorium which
held several thousand spectators, and where Shakespeare’s company
regularly acted, but in a smaller, more private setting. It would be ideally suited
for the Blackfriars, a small indoor theatre, but *Macbeth*, by general consent,
was probably written late in 1606 and the company did not begin to use the
Blackfriars until three years later. It is possible that it was not performed first in
a public theatre but at the court because, as a result of the increasing
numbers of death from the plague, public performances were prohibited
between June 1606 and early that following year.” *Macbeth* is one of
Shakespeare’s more frequently performed plays since 1660 in England and
later it has often been revised, adapted and reimagined to other medias. 42
Although it is difficult to give a precise account of how Jacobeans presented

Kingdom, 1999
Macbeth, there is a contemporary report of this representation in Shakespeare’s time and it comes from Simon Forman. This eyewitness account of Macbeth performed at the Globe in 1610 or 1611, is to be found in some notes arranged for a projected book on plays “for Common Policy”, i.e. public morals. As Marvin Rosenberg notes, however, this notes are not completely trustworthy, as Forman himself was “a very doubtful dealer in ‘magic’, a charlatan astrologer-physician. His comments were presumably ‘found’ by an equally doubtful character, the scholar-rascal J. P. Collier, fondly remembered for his clumsy, condescending forgeries of other ‘found’ historical-literary material”\(^43\). Forman says that he had seen a performance of Macbeth on Saturday, April 20, 1610, but his report seems to rely more on Holinshed’s Chronicles than on Shakespeare.\(^44\) The first two scenes of the play are not mentioned, even if the presence of the witches might have been particularly captivating for him since he was interested in witchcraft. He begins with the description of Banquo and Macbeth riding through a wood when three women feiries or Nymphes, appear before them. The description seems borrowed from Holinshed’s Chronicles: “[...] they went sporting by the waie togethther without other companie, saue themselues, passing thorough the woods and fields, when suddenlie in the middest of a laund, there met them thrie women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of the elder

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44 As Rosenberg points out, April 20 fell on a Friday that year. (Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth*, pag. 10 , Newark: University of Delaware Press, United States of America, 1978)
world”; Holinshed’s note also specify that the prophecy belongs to “[...] thrée women supposing to be the weird sisters or feiries”. In any case, though Forman is fairly detailed in the early part of the play, he recalls very little after 3.4 with the exception of the sleepwalking scene.

At the time, theatres particularly depended on illusion, but Macbeth was a special case since about two thirds of the play written for the daylight is set in darkness. In this sense, Macbeth is exceptional in affirming the contradiction of the natural conditions, that is to say, the transformation of daylight into darkness. In 1608-09, however, Shakespeare’s company, the King’s Men, took over the Blackfriars Theatre. As a consequence, the technique of illusion on which Macbeth depended probably became an embarrassment at the Blackfriars for it was a naturally dark place. The play needed a revision in order to compensate for what it lost and to take full advantage of the opportunities offered. It seems that some scenes have been added or revised, namely the Hecate scenes, 3.5 and 4.1, spectacular shows that involved dancing, singing and a goddess who ascended into the heavens with her attendant spirits. The operatic material added in these two scenes has probably helped to enhance the climax of the witches’ scenes and it could have been performed in the Blackfriars as well as at the Globe. Later on, probably after the Commonwealth, another musical scene was added for the witches after Act 2. In December 1660, new theatres were licensed and Macbeth was listed among the plays allocated to the Duke of Yorks’s

company. The company was run by William Davenant who had worked with the King’s Men in the 1630s. Davenant, who liked to claim that he was Shakespeare’s illegitimate son, was a leading playwright and theatre manager in the years following the Restoration of Charles II (1660). When he returned from France in the 1650s, he experimented with opera as public entertainment. The form which he develops was a spoken verse drama with important musical interludes involving at least some of the main characters. His adaptation of *Macbeth*, which was first performed in 1664, is known for its singing and dancing witches. However, Davenant did more than that as he built up the roles of Macduff and is Lady into a domestic drama full of pathos. Davenant also created a relationship between Lady Macbeth and lady Macduff of which the original play gives only one hint in the sleepwalking scene.  

Shakespeare’s I.5 begins with Lady Macbeth reading her husband’s letter on stage alone. The first words she is to pronounce are not hers, but her husband’s words. Davenant’s provides a change in this scene as it opens with Lady Macbeth consoling Lady Macduff for her husband absence in war. This scene gives Lady Macbeth what Shakespeare denies her, i.e. a scene with another woman. Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth is a lonely character whose only relationship is with her husband. Davenant did not merely add operatic interludes, as he recasts the play in several important respects; his changes were meant to ameliorate the original play, softening the moments that Shakespeare left abrupt. He created an ordered drama making the witches more entertaining by turning them into a musical act and he turned

46 “The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now?” (V.1. 41-42)
Shakespeare’s difficult writing into clearer, more logical speech. The language was modified to suit the demand for a plainer diction. The play had in fact to conform to the norms expected by society in the London season. Davenant’s attention, however, was not only to taste, but to greater issues of political and social significance. In fact, his major structural alterations, were aimed to balance the forces of good and evil by developing Macduff as a central hero and giving his wife a “correct” feminine role in order to contrast directly with Lady Macbeth. In his version, the diabolism of the original text loses almost all its force: the witches appears to the Macduffs willing to support them as they are to destroy Macbeth, the supernatural is reduced to exciting theatrical effects and Hell is scarcely mentioned. When Davenant died in 1668, his company was continued under his widow and later his son. They built a new theatre in Dorset Gardens which opened in November 1671, and revived Macbeth there early in 1672. In 1706, John Downes, who had worked for Davenant as prompter, shortly after his retirement, wrote his memoirs. He mentions Macbeth for the first time in 1672 suggesting it was a production of existing material:

“The tragedy of Macbeth altered by Sir William Davenant; being dressed in all its finery, as new clothes, new scenes, machines as flyings for the witches; with all the singing and dancing in it: the first composed by Mr. Lock, the other by Mr. Channell and Mr. Joseph Preist; it begin all excellently performed, begin
in the nature of an opera, it recompensed double the expense; it proves still a lasting play.\footnote{37}

Even though Downes’s memory was rich in details, it was not always reliable. In fact, if on one hand he was right that machines, scenery and costumes had been newly designed, on the other it is not clear whether Locke’s music was new then or had been composed in Davenant’s lifetime. Locke’s name continued to be associated with the music employed in the theatre though it seems that it was actually composed by Richard Leveridge for a revival at Drury lane in 1702\footnote{48}. Davenant’s version of \textit{Macbeth}, was so successful that it held the stage until the middle of the eighteenth century when the operatic additions remained, but the dramatic adaptation largely disappeared, and the text was restored to something closer to the original. Macduff shrank back to his former dimensions and the heroic idea lost conviction. A new historical interest in Elizabethan language encouraged a return towards the Folio Edition. Samuel Johnson was particularly fond of the original play and he defended Shakespeare with a learned essay on Jacobean credulity, when the Enlightenment period found the witches too improbable for serious drama. Johnson also claimed that Lady Macbeth was detested by the public, while Macbeth, preserved some esteem due to his courage, even though the public


\footnote{48} In his introduction to \textit{The Tragedy of Macbeth}, Nicholas Brooke notes: “Leveridge was a bass singer who played Hecate himself on and off until the 1750s, and seems to have been content to see his work later attributed to his more illustrious predecessor”. (Nicholas Brooke ed., \textit{The Tragedy of Macbeth}, pag. 38, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008).
rejoiced at his fall. Jonson’s pupil, David Garrick aligned himself with the audience’s judgement as in 1744 he offered the public a text closer to the Folio, and he provided himself with a lengthy speech, at once penitent and self-damning.49

In that period, the audience, lost interest in the political and social aspects of the play, so actors focused more on the conflict of the protagonists, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Garrick was a great actor, through his talent and adroit self-promotion, he made himself a star not only in the theatre but also among some of the most famous people of his time – Samuel Johnson, David Hume, Joshua Reynolds- who praised him for the naturalism of his acting.50

Nonetheless, it was Mrs Pritchard, who interpreted Lady Macbeth, that dominated him on stage making a more lasting impression.51 Hannah Pritchard (1711-1768) joined David Garrick's Drury Lane company in 1747 and played opposite Garrick for the next twenty years. She was acclaimed the best Lady Macbeth of her day and David Garrick effectively abandoned the rôle after her retirement.

49 “Tis done! the scene of life will quickly close.
Ambition's vain, delusive dreams are fled,
And now I wake to darkness, guilt and horror;
I cannot bear it! let me shake it off-
'Two' not be: my soul is clogg'd with blood -
I cannot rise! I dare not ask for mercy -
It is too late, hell drags me down; I sink,
I sink - Oh! - my soul is lost for ever!
Oh!”

50 Albert Braunmuller ed., Macbeth, p. 63, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1999

John Philip Kemble, eighteenth-century other memorable Macbeth was a distinguished actor-manager like Garrick, and exactly like him he was rejoiced by a superb Lady Macbeth (Sarah Siddons who was his sister). Like Garrick, Kemble had a reputation of cultivating the “true” Shakespearean text as opposed to the revised or adapted precedent editions. Contemporary accounts show that his performances kept much of Davenant’s adaptation and reduced the material which neo-classic taste found unacceptable. The later eighteen century was in fact more interested in psychology so, at the end of the century

52 Albert Braunmuller ed., *Macbeth*, p. 64, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1999
John Philip Kemble decided to develop more this aspect by avoiding the presence of Banquo’s Ghost transforming it into a consequence of Macbeth’s psychic disturbance. Kemble’s performance also increased the spectacle: Shakespeare’s three witches were treated seriously but they were accompanied by fifty or more singing, dancing, comic witches. Kemble added further changes, making Lady Macduff and her son almost vanish and only reporting their deaths. He also omitted the Porter scene. Kemble’s Macbeth complemented Sarah’ Siddon’s famous Lady Macbeth and to some extent she overshadowed him. Sarah Siddon found more nuances in her role than Johnson had allowed becoming one of the most celebrated actors, at once psychologically subtle and intensely moving.

As Albert Braunmuller notes in his introduction to Macbeth the critical and theatrical story of the play often reflects changing social attitudes towards women and towards the relation between men and women. David Garrick removed from the play some of Davenant’s crowds of dancing and singing witches, but still, they were treated primarily as comic rather than ominous evil creatures. As a consequence it was Lady Macbeth who emerged as the real evil instigator and promoter of regicide and violence. For more than 150 years after the Restoration, performances tended to represent Lady Macbeth as a violent virago driving her noble, heroic husband towards violent acts. Anna Pritchard and Sarah Siddons adopted this characterization. It is only around the 1830s and 1840s that the possibility of considering Lady Macbeth as a tender, passionate wife willing to help her husband’s career, arose. Mid-nineteenth century Lady Macbeths found themselves circumscribed by a
concept of femininity which included a concept of subservience. It was Helen Faucet that impersonated those qualities in her Lady Macbeth. She was praised as “essentially feminine, too exclusively gifted with the art of expressing all that is most graceful and beautiful in womanhood, to succeed in inspiring anything like awe or terror.” Even the perception of the witches gradually changed in concert with Faucit’s new “feminine” Lady Macbeth, while Macbeth himself, started to be seen as a hypocrite, a coward and a victim of superstitious fears.

Kemble was followed by Edmund Kean, a tragic actor who was an unsurpassable Richard III but a weak Macbeth. After his brief career, Kean was followed by Macready who was criticized by the newspaper for not being as good as Kemble. He compromised between the “old” heroic, strong Macbeth and the “new” weak but criminal Macbeth. He played opposite Faucit’s new Lady Macbeth (whom he criticized), but he was also partner to one of his era’s most violent Lady Macbeths, the American Charlotte Cushman whom he liked more then Faucit. James Edward Murdoch gives a description of Charlotte Cushman in his book *The Stage: Or, Recollections of Actors and acting from an Experience of Fifty Years*: “[Cushman] style of acting, while it lacked imagination, possessed in a remarkable degree the elements of force […] she was intensely prosaic, definitely practical, and hence her perfect

54 Macready was one of the few to criticize Helen Faucit: “whom I do not like; she wants heart”. William Toynbee ed., *The Diaries of W. C. Macready, 1833-1851*, 2 vols., 1 June 1836
identity with [...] the materialism of Lady Macbeth [...] [Cushman exhibited] the coarse features and harsh voice of the heroine of a melodrama [...]. Thus is one of Shakespeare’s grandest dramatic conceptions dragged down to the lowest level of a mere sensational exhibition”.

In 1857, Adelaide Ristori, at the time the greatest Italian tragedienne, travelled to London with *Macbetto*, an Italian verse-adaptation by Giulio Carcano which Verdi used as a basis for his opera, *Macbeth*. Ristori gave a traditional Siddons-like performance, but she impressed the critics and the public with her postural acting and her facial expressions: “Madame Ristory conceives *Lady Macbeth* as a woman who pens up her emotions, who is watchful, self-contained, who fights against compunctious visitings of nature without letting a stir be seen [...] [In Act I, Scene 6], there is [...] a false expression playing faintly now and then across her face [...] When at the close [of Act I, Scene 7] he [Macbeth], for the first time, speaks as an accomplice, her face brightens with exultation [...] and [...] she repeats the [...] exit [of Act I, Scene 5]”.

Putting the emphasis upon Lady Macbeth and reducing as a consequence her husband’s part, the Ristori’s version echoes the greatest adaptation of *Macbeth* i.e. Giuseppe Verdi’s *Macbeth* which is the first Italian opera to make a real attempt to be Shakespearean. Verdi produced his *Macbeth* in the 1840s, basing it on the stage versions current in the London theatre. In Verdi’s opera


along with the intensification of Lady Macbeth, there were a controversial
treatment of the witches and of the other supernatural elements.

After Macready, only two other Victorians actors contributed significantly to
views of Macbeth: Sir Henry Irving and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Irving was
a young actor instructed by Charlotte Cushman and in 1875 he offered a
controversial anti-Cushman interpretation when Kate Bateman was an
undistinguished Lady Macbeth. Irving’s Macbeth was accused of being a
cowardly, remorseless villain from the very beginning. In 1888 Irving played
Macbeth again, in a new interpretation with Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth.
Critical views changed probably due to the shift from Bateman to Terry who
had a reputation of being “gentle” and “feminine”. After Macready, the
nineteenth century theatre saw increasingly “feminine”, “wifely”, Lady
Macbeths and increasingly “violent”, “criminal” Macbeths, the witches were
shifted from mechanic, comical ones to witches who had supernatural,
demonic mystery. If some critics complained about Irving’s cowardly Macbeth
or Terry’s too tenderly beautiful Lady Macbeth, critics agreed on the power of
the witches in their performances: “they are always enveloped in awe-inspiring
gloom […] or by […] ruddy glow […] even the nil admirari materialist spectators
of today is more inclined to shudder than to sneer”.  

Herbert Beerbohm Tree, is usually remembered for his elaborate and highly
detailed illusionistic productions, in which he raised ‘illustrative’ Shakespeare to
new heights. The sets for Tree’s 1911 Macbeth were originally designed by

57 Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 5 January 1889, quoted in Albert
Braunmuller ed., Macbeth, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1999
Edward Gordon Craig, Ellen Terry’s son, who played Malcolm in Irving’s tours in 1890s and was himself an innovative actor. Those designs never reached the stage, but they deeply influenced the production. Tree’s revival in 1911 was characteristically spectacular, but since the First World War the play has almost been given in the severely simplified form assumed for its original production. After Irving and Tree, there are no enduringly important English-language stagings of *Macbeth* until Glen Byam Shaw’s 1955 production at Stratford and Trevor Nunn’s 1974-6 productions at Stratford in London. Byam Shaw’s production starred Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh is commonly known as one of the best productions and Olivier is remembered chiefly for his resemblance to Edmund Kean in dynamic presence and blazing eyes, together with is characteristically eccentric locutions.

In 1974, Trevor Nunn directed it at Stratford with the house lights on for much of the play puzzling both the critics and the audience and giving no explanation in the programme. Two years later, Nunn directed it again in the small studio theatre at Stratford, The Other Place, with great success. In this space the audience is lit by the light, so they have to accept the illusion in the same way as audiences at the Globe. Ian McKellen and Judi Dench gave fine performances making the protagonists simultaneously guilty agents and victims. But, as Nicholas Brook points out in his introduction to *Macbeth* it is not their performance that made the play so memorable: “audiences, even though many must have known the play since suffering it at school, found themselves leaning forward to know what happened next. […] it was the narrative, not the characters of the protagonist that prevailed, with
extraordinary tension. The narrative that emerged does not deal primarily in
events as facts, but more in the form of illusion that create the facts, above all,
that create a tyrant and destroy both him and his victims. At all points ‘what is’
becomes alarmingly ambiguous, and ‘what is not’ dominates the event. […]
We need to have more than one version of the play for the same reason as
Shakespeare’s company did, to serve two very different kinds of theatre.

(Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth. John Singer Sargent 1889. Tate Gallery)

58 Nicholas Brook, ed., *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, pp.47 and 49, Oxford university
Press, United Kingdom, 2008
CHAPTER 3

Carmelo Bene’s *Macbeth Horror Suite*.

1. 1996: Macbeth Horror Suite

“The sun rises through veils of mist”\(^{59}\), the stage is shrouded in darkness, a black bed lies in the middle, two black doors frame it. Thunders and lightning fill the scene while Duncan lies on the empty bed. He is dressed in white, his head covered with apparently pristine bandages that are carefully removed revealing disturbing spots of blood on them\(^{60}\). He wakes up listening to the cockcrow. He listens carefully, he cries, he looks surprised and then he repeats the sounds that fill the air: bellows, bleating, barks, twitters, roars etc.

*Macbeth Horror Suite* immediately strikes the viewer with its crucible of disjointed sounds. The actor, expresses himself with noises and faces using his body as a vector of meaning. Carmelo Bene states that his *Macbeth* “marks the end of the *mise-en-scène* and initiates the *acting machine* [...].

From the verbal librettistic performance of the Shakespearean version, to the theatrical performance, the voracious protagonist is the *automatic actoriality* of


\(^{60}\) Carmelo Bene explained that only when the actor understands that “wounded was the bandage and not the wound” he can start to interpret Macbeth. This is because only when the actor is finally able to reproduce within himself the wound that doesn’t heal, he can finally understand the tragic hero Macbeth. Video on Youtube: *Carmelo Bene il Macbeth o della lattanza dell’Io*. 
the physiologic body [...]. This interior of the (human) body is made of noise (salivation, flatulence, belch, gurgling, etc.), which is amplified by the remains of the word-sound which is chewed and vomited, smudged on one side of the mouth.\(^{61}\) Carmelo Bene’s version of *Macbeth* is considerably marked by the employment of electronic component. The constantly changing voice, the music, the noises, the skilful use of the phonic equipment are employed to dismantle the traditional theatrical mechanisms. Gianfranco Bartalotta in his *Carmelo Bene e Shakespeare* notes how the body of the actor “becomes a sounding board with no organs where everything echoes just to be vomited in the biggest cavity of the stage”.\(^{62}\)

*(Winds, bleat, bellowing, barks, cockcrow)*

*(lip-synch of animal sounds in the background)*

**STREGHE** *(Winds and amplified noises. Metallic diction)*

Spersa l’orgia l’orgia spersa
La battaglia vinta e persa
cri cri cri cra cra cra cra

**DUNCAN** *(Intermittent laughter)*

Ah, Ah, Ah, Hi, ih ih ih ih ih ih
Ha ha ah ah ah
What bloody man is that
*(Ma che Sangue è questo)*

---

\(^{61}\) *Macbeth* “segna la fine della *scrittura scenica* e spalanca l’avvento della *macchina attoriale* […]. Dallo spettacolo orale librettistico della versione shakespeariana all’esecuzione teatrale, protagonista onnivora è, come mai in precedenza, l’*attorialità automatica* del *corpo fisiologicamente* inteso […]. Questo *interno del corpo* è fragorìo (salivazione, peto, rutto, gorgoglìo, etc.) amplificato dai resti della parola-suono masticata e vomitata, sbavata all’orlo della bocca”. Carmelo Bene, *Opere con l’Autografia di un ritratto*, p. 1203, Bompiani, Milano, 1995.

He starts unrolling a white bandage on his arm but suddenly stops. The bandage reveals blood spots. (Whispered) Chi è quest'uomo insanguinato? (Winds, strong bellowing, backing sounds, laughter, yips)

The beginning of the play is marked by a strong presence of noises, words, animal’s sounds that mingle. An impetuous wind blows while loud sounds and bright lights invade the stage from the doors on its sides. Each time the doors open, the dark space is enlighten by flashing lights, while gusts of wind agitates spectral sheets onto the stage. Few objects decorate the scene, a bed covered with black sheets and the pieces of an armor. The setting and the atmosphere are faithful representations of the hurlyburly mentioned by the witches at the beginning of the Shakespearean play.

(Carmelo Bene as Macbeth. Photo: Piero Tauro, 1996)
The chaos is rendered through the use of noises and the exacerbated sonority. It is interesting to point out that in this *mise en scène* all the characters are interpreted by Carmelo Bene with the exception of lady Macbeth who is interpreted by Silvia Pasello. As far as the witches are concerned, they do not appear onstage as they do not have a body, their presence is perceived only through their voices that resonate from the two lateral doors.

When the voice of the witches is finally extinguished, the captain comes onstage to report the news from the battlefield:

**CAPITANO** *(struggling to speak)*  
I incerta mischia  
Come due che a nuoto sfiniti si avvinghiano  
E s’impacciano Macdonwald il ribelle  
- a lui congenita per sua natura scempiata-  
ha per rinforzo dall’isole occidenti  
e cavalieri e fanti come al seguito  
Puttana la Fortuna Ma troppo poco è  
valso Macbeth della gloria favorito  
stretto il ferro fumante sanguinosa strage  
a fendenti inventa un varco a trovarsi al  
vigliacco faccia a faccia fin che te lo squarcia  
dall’ombelico alle ganasce e trapianta la  
testa sui nostri spalti  
[...] Tranne che non volessero bagnarsi  
in ferite fumanti o eternare un altro Golgota  
non so più dire Le mie ferite gridano soccorso.

The captain words are pronounced with great difficulty, the dialogue almost vanishes. The phonic elements are used to disperse the communicative function. The subsequent speech is thus accompanied by Verdi’s music giving great emphasis to the scene.
After Duncan confers Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor, the witches, through disarticulated sounds, predicts Macbeth that he will sleep no more. The language here used is disjointed, sounds are amplified and disrupted in a suggestion of chaos. The weird sisters are a brutal manifestation of confusion and violence. The air is filled with primeval sounds that reminds the beastly instinct that permeates them. The rhythm, the alliterations, the grating sounds help to reconstruct the gloomy atmosphere in which they reign, and the conglomeration of sounds is more eloquent than a proper discourse. The voice of the witches is whispered and then fades into the wind blowing. It is fundamental to underline that the witches are never shown onstage, their presence is perceived only through the sound of their voices. This expedient makes it possible for the director to avoid the problem of giving them a particular identity or appearance. In fact, one of the major problems in staging Macbeth resides in the fact that the witches’ appearance may fail modern audience when they are treated like classical hexes or witches. Carmelo Bene’s weird sisters do not have a particular shape, they do not have a body, they are only voices in the wind being thus ominous and disturbing presences that haunts the protagonist. In this way, the audience is willing to accept their existence as it is not clear whether they are real or not, whether they are concrete or just a projection of Macbeth’s mind.

After his encounter with the witches, Macbeth seems rapt, he wears his armor and drags a white blanket while he moves towards the audience. Rosse greets him calling him “Thane of Cawdor” borrowing the witches’s voice. Macbeth responds using the same tone echoing the metric irregularities of the
weird sisters. This may suggests that the witches are taking over Macbeth’s mind. Macbeth speaks their voice, the thoughts that fill his mind are suggested by the weird sisters. He is possessed, ambition binds him. In many different occasions, Carmelo Bene makes his protagonist speak in the witches’ voice thus associating him with them. It is difficult then to tell whether Macbeth is possessed by them or not, whether they control his mind or he is capable of controlling his actions and free will.

After his encounter with the weird sisters, Macbeth leans on the table wild-eyed and starts whispering. When he ends his line, immediately music from Verdi starts to play loudly and Carmelo Bene starts to sing in full voice while he playfully wave a lace veil in his hand and covers his head. As far as these musical interludes are concerned, during an interview with Antonio Gnoli, Franco Branciaroli, who had the chance to collaborate with Bene, revealed that Carmelo Bene dreamt to be an opera singer but his voice was not suited for the purpose. That is why he decide to explore the many ways in which he could use his voice in order to convey a meaning onstage. He thus started to express himself through the unconventional use of his voice and singing.63

After the music stops, Macbeth finally moves towards the audience, stopping in the middle of the stage dragging the veil behind himself. He moves towards the right door and opens it. He disappears behind it, leaving a piece of the white blanket behind. The sheet is seen slipping disturbingly under the door. The stage is now completely dark. Silvia Pasello who interprets Lady Macbeth

63 Antonio Gnoli, Franco Branciaroli:"l’attore è uno strumento, la sua volontà è marginale, la Repubblica, 21 maggio 2017.
appears. She is sitting at her desk. Her breathing is uneven. As far as her appearance is concerned, Bene’s Lady Macbeth, is dressed in a long white dress that looks like a night gown. Her hair are short, and her appearance is rather androgynous.

LADY MACBETH  (Whispering)
Mi sono apparse nel giorno del successo
E quindi ho meglio verificato ch’esse posseggono conoscenze sovraumane Ma proprio quando ardevo al desiderio di rivolgere loro altre domande fatte d’aria nell’aria svanirono Ho ritenuto confidarti questo A te cara compagna di grandezza perché tu non perdessi la tua parte di gioia ignorando il grandioso avvenire che t’è promesso Chiudili nel tuo cuore E Addio

Silvia Pasello’s Lady Macbeth is rather disturbing as she lifts a blanket covered in bloody spots and covers herself with it. As soon as she is wrapped in it she starts to cough loudly, then she sings a melancholy melody showing the audience a bloody handkerchief. From her very first appearance onstage, Bene’s Lady Macbeth shows a strong passion and an overwhelming sexuality. She always seems in a dreamlike condition, never really conscious of what is happening around her. In the first half of the play, she always seems longing to be loved by her husband, always waiting for the moment they will be reunited and they will make love. For Carmelo Bene sexuality was a fundamental aspect of the play, and he wanted his Lady Macbeth in a constant orgasmic state.64

64 Gianfranco Bartalotta, Carmelo Bene e Shakespeare, p.141 Bulzone Editore, Roma, 2000
While Lady Macbeth is lifting the blankets Macbeth rushes onto the stage and looks at her who is now sitting on the bed, covered with a white nightgown. Suddenly she moves towards him and helps him to wear a silver robe. The entire scene is pervaded by Lady Macbeth’s excitement. She is in a sort of pre-orgasmic state. Lady Macbeth repeatedly mimics the act of having an orgasm but it is important to point out that she will never be satisfied by her husband. Their sexuality is frustrated as Macbeth and his Lady will be able to enjoy it to a limited degree. In fact, in this scene, Lady Macbeth helps her husband to wear a heavy armor decorated with sharp hedges and finally she prepares herself to agree to a sexual intercourse. She lies half naked on the bed but the act is made impossible by Macbeth’s outfit so she is left unsatisfied. Macbeth leaves the stage disappearing behind the right door, his Lady is left alone. Bene repeatedly knocks on the stage with a cane simulating the knocking on the door. The sound is repeated using an two-shot sound effect that provokes a great terror in the main character. Macbeth sees the dagger which actually is an iron club. It is interesting to note that the clothes and items employed onstage are not attributable to any particular time or space, thus avoiding a precise collocation of the story in any particular context. Furthermore, as in this case, even the set and the tools employed, are not linked to any classical way of representing Macbeth. In this scene, it is stunning to see Bene holding the iron club while he speaks of a dagger. In this manner, Bene solves another classical problem of the mise en scène. In fact, in many productions, the directors wonders whether it is necessary to show a real dagger in front of Macbeth, or to treat it as a projection of his mind.
Carmelo Bene, completely warps and distorts the protagonist’s reality disconnecting his speaking from his actions and from the reality that surrounds him. The audience may be puzzled by the view of the Macbeth talking of something that is not actually happening to him.

As I mentioned before, the sexuality of the main characters is strongly perceived by the audience. Macbeth and his lady show their will to satisfy each other but they are not able to reach an orgasm together. This may suggest that the protagonists are in a constant search for something they cannot have, as their lust coincides with their desire for power. In this scene, in fact, the peak is reached when finally Macbeth and his Lady have a simultaneous orgasm that coincides with the murder of Duncan. Bene is hidden inside the wardrobe while his Lady is in front of the audience. They produce loud sensual groans that are extinguished when the deed is accomplished and Macbeth finally comes back onto the stage. Macbeth and his Lady are unable to feel pleasure when they are together, the only way they have to reach an orgasm is through masturbation. What is interesting is that even in that moment the couple needs to be separated, Macbeth into a hidden room and his wife all alone on the stage. This situation cleverly devised by Carmelo Bene, seems to suggest that the couple is longing for the same purpose but is not able to unite in order to obtain it. In this way, this *mise en scène* poses the problem of the incommunicability between the protagonists offering his audience a different reading of the play. Macbeth and his Lady, in fact, are usually shown as a loving couple that gets separated after the terrible deed. Here, the viewers have the uncomfortable feeling that the two are unable to be together even
before they commit the murder. In Carmelo Bene’s *mise en scène*, there is a clear change in the attitude of the protagonists towards one another. In fact, if the first part of the play is marked by their strong passion and desire whose peak is reached with the orgasm that symbolizes Duncan’s death, in the second half of the play, they appear clearly separated one from the other. It seems that their lustful attitude symbolically represents their desire for power. Their excitement is extinguished when they obtain what they had been looking for, i.e. the crown and the reign.

As far as Carmelo Bene’s Lady Macbeth is concerned, it is interesting to point out that she is a fascinating, androgynous character, a willowy young woman who wander around the stage almost sleepwalking all the time. She undresses and dresses herself and her husband and she is tormented by a strong desire that disappears after Duncan’s death.

When Duncan is finally dead, Macbeth comes back onto the stage and makes the audience aware of the murder peremptorily stating:

MACBETH: *(Shaking his hand as if he was trying to remove the blood from it)*

   Fatto!

Macbeth and his lady remove a black blanket from the bed and then start to lift a series of sheets showing them to the audience. Initially they are white and spotless but soon red patches start to appear in their middle becoming bigger as the progression of blankets continues. Verdi’s music emphasizes the sequence that ends with a pure sheet which is removed triumphantly by Bene
who moves towards the audience holding it. As the music stops the stage becomes dark.

Thunder and lightning appear. Macbeth and his Lady are laying on the bed, she is half-naked while music starts to play. Bene starts to rumble and burp, he laughs and coughs while is Lady is still. He slides at the foot of the bed and onto the floor covering his head with a bloody blanket.

(Silvia Pasello as Lady Macbeth. Photo: Piero Tauro, 1996)
Now his Lady is awake, she is holding two crowns. They sit together as they wear the crowns, a loud music starts to play while flashing lights come out of the side doors: the prophecy has come true. Carmelo Bene’s *Macbeth* is powerful and strikes the audience through the clever use of sounds and of visual elements. The body of the actors becomes an instrument to convey profound meanings through movement and faces. While Macbeth and his Lady sit still staring at the camera with their apathetic faces, a feeling of despair and powerlessness embrace the audience. The deed is accomplished, there is no way to turn back. What is done is done. Carmelo Bene and Silvia Pasello look almost like two soulless puppets in this as they bend making the crown fall to the ground as whispers announce:

**MACBETH:** Essere questo è nulla Essere questo senza una certezza

**LADY MACBETH:** Meglio essere quanto s’è distrutto che inseguir rovinando il venir meno della felicità

**MACBETH:** Meglio stare coi morti che per trovare pace abbiamo reso alla pace

**LADY MACBETH:** *(In a brusque tone)*
ORA BASTA

Macbeth is left alone on stage, he laughs and plays with the crowns throwing them towards the audience. He then wears his armor getting ready to eliminate Banquo and Fleance.
The banquet scene is opened by Macbeth who moves toward the audience. Macbeth raises a lamp and moves towards the left corner of the stage to talk with the murderers. He is satisfied at the news of Banquo’s death but he shouts in anger when he learns that Fleance has managed to escape. The music starts to play and Macbeth starts to sing. Macbeth is frightened by Banquo’s ghost. He waves a lace blanket in front of his face and glances at an empty seat so his Lady scolds him. Macbeth is now alone, his Lady has left the stage. Macbeth is haunted by his lack of sleep. As his Lady reminds him: “Tu manchi della tregua di ogni essenza: il sonno”. Macbeth is so overshadowed by his lack of sleep that he cannot think properly and he is completely absorbed by his desire for blood. He starts to look for the witches and he starts to use their language. Bene expresses perfectly the ambivalent feeling that Macbeth experiences after talking to the witches: he is relieved by the prophecy of the Birnam Wood but at the same time he is deeply disappointed by the view of Banquo’s line of kings.

Macbeth is now facing his fate. He has no future and he has wasted his life. The witches are showing him that all he has done is to help Banquo’s heirs to gain the throne. Music by Verdi starts to play in the background while Bene lies down on the stage. This is a moment of great lyricism:

**CORO:**

Ahimè povera patria spaventata d’esserci
Non più madre ma nostro cimitero Terra
dove nessuno può sorridere che non sia cieco
[...] Dove il dolore anche più atroce
sembra un sentire comune E le campane
suonano a morte senza che si chieda per
Macduff appears on stage mourning for the loss of his family. This is a brief but intense passage that leads to the crucial scene of Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking which scene is pervaded by the lack of sense or chronological order in the Lady’s thoughts and discourses. The actress looks at herself in the mirror, like she was staring at a phantom. The last sentence she is to pronounce is emphasized by the music:

LADY MACBETH: A letto A letto… Non si disfa cosa fatta… Batte alcuno! … andiam Macbeth Non t’accusi il tuo pallor

After this scene, Lady Macbeth goes offstage for the last time. Her speech gives substance to the whole play, unifying every act that composes it, from the accomplishment of the deed to the final scene. The play is going to end, Macbeth calmly wears his armor and articulates a speech that highlights the main aspects of the drama:

MACBETH: L’armatura voglio metterla
Come sta la tua ammalata dottore
E non sai tu guardarla […]
E allora getta ai cani la tua scienza
L’armatura la lancia Una sortita Seyton
Dottore tutti quanti mi abbandonano […]
(wispering)
Che sono queste grida
La regina è morta
Più in là avrebbe dovuto morire
o avrei potuto saperlo dopo

Macbeth moves towards the audience uttering clearly the ending lines of the drama.
Macbeth throws away the bench with his last strengths. This act symbolizes the end of his life and it coincides with the end of the play. Carmelo Bene’s *Macbeth Horror Suite* is an unconventional play that aims to explore the many possibilities in the use of the body as a vector of meaning. The actor becomes an instrument who aims to express himself through the use of sounds and gestures. Bene’s *mise en scène* avoids the classical problems posed by the representation of *Macbeth* as there are only two actors onstage (Bene and Pasello) who interpret the tragedy through a clever restatement that does not focus primarily on the story itself but rather on the way of expressing it through the arousal of emotions in the audience whether they be positive or negative.
Macbeth is difficult to stage. Few plays are more frequently staged than Macbeth nonetheless most productions tend to disappoint their audience. The demanding Shakespearean poetic verse drama, the stress on the historical context and the insistence on the supernatural are elements that each director has to face. It is especially due to the supernatural elements that productions often tend to depend excessively on special effects or they tend reduce the tragedy to an horror show being thus unsatisfactory.

Trevor Nunn’s Macbeth is an exception to this as it was proclaimed the best Macbeth since the famous Vivien Leigh – Laurence Olivier production at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1955.

In 1974 Director Trevor Nunn directed Macbeth at Stratford with the theatre lights on for much of the play. Two years later he produced a Macbeth onstage and for television (1978) that has been proclaimed the greatest success after the famous Laurence Olivier – Vivien Leigh production. Part of its fame has been attributed to the leading actors Ian McKellen and Judi Dench whose acting is nowadays considered iconic. It opened in Stratford-upon-Avon in The Other Place, the RSC’s small studio theatre on 4 August 1976. After the 1976 production the play was moved at first to the Gulbenkian Theatre in Newcastle-
on-Tyne and then was transferred to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon Avon. It has been claimed that the key for its success may reside in the confined space of the small theatres in which Nunn’s production was played. The intimacy and close proximity of the audience, the confined space, the tiny stage and the simplicity of the production itself, in fact, played a fundamental role in its favorable outcome. One of the peculiarity of this production is the bare stage which was transformed into different location exclusively by the actors who were enacting the story. Ian McKellen, when interviewed by Julian Curry, explains how the designer John Napier dealt with this aspect of the production: “The look of the production was something that was devised during rehearsal. I can remember quite clearly, John didn’t know what the set was going to look like, although he knew there probably wasn’t going to be one. And such as there was kept getting more and more minimal, as suited a tin hut where the audience were looking at each other across the stage on three sides.”

The audience, in fact, surrounded the stage on three sides and joined the play as it was a concrete part of it. This closeness of the audience contributed in rendering the acting extremely realistic. As Michael Mullin explains: “In The Other Place, a corrugated metal structure that once housed the RSC wardrobe, the audience of about 200 surrounded the bare stage on three sides, sitting only three-deep on ground level seat and two-deep on the balcony. […] the action took place within a chalk circle twenty feet (six meters) across.”

65 Julian Curry, Ian McKellen on Macbeth Taken from Shakespeare on Stage – Thirteen Leading Actors on Thirteen Key Roles, Nick Hern Books, London

confined space, in fact, did not require the large gestures and high voice generally used in Shakespearean plays. As Ian McKellen reveals: “It was enormously helpful that our production was first put on in The Other Place, which only seated a hundred people. I’d seen King Lear done there very successfully […]. It’s riveting to be so close to the actors when they’re not having to project their performance, either vocally or emotionally. Or indeed to select from it what they want the audience to receive. […] If you are working in a big theatre you can’t let them know everything, and they’re not close enough to glimpse it for themselves”.

Furthermore, due to the proximity to the stage, the viewers were inevitably lit by the lights and thus were forced to accept the illusions as if they were at the former Globe.

Moreover, the clever choice of the costumes and makeup gave the audience an iconic Macbeth (Ian Mckellen), who appeared as a virile warrior with his hair slicked back with brilliantine, and Lady Macbeth who (Judi Dench) was presented as a sensual woman, completely dressed in black, her hair covered by a black scarf, who used her power to push her husband towards Duncan’s murder. Marvin Rosenberg who had the chance to see two preview performances of Nunn’s Macbeth points out how he was impressed by the simplicity of the production and costumes: “The staging was as stark and simple as the bare walls. Just £250 was allotted to the show, Ian McKellen (Macbeth) told us. The single gorgeous ornament was a royal robe for the three kings, beginning with a saintly Duncan; the garment and the Duncan

67 Julian Curry, Ian McKellen on Macbeth Taken from Shakespeare on Stage – Thirteen Leading Actors on Thirteen Key Roles, Nick Hern Books, London
characterization were holdovers from an elaborate *Macbeth* Nunn had staged the year before, and both could easily have been dispensed with. The other costumes were of the simplest: the men mainly wore dark, functional uniforms, vaguely suggestive of the American Civil War. Lady Macbeth was dressed throughout in unornamented black. Lady Macduff wore white. The furniture consisted of boxes, including a few placed before the first rows of spectators, and there the actors sometimes sat before entering the round, lighted acting area.

The choice of the costumes was also made in order to avoid a precise definition of time and space, Nunn’s production in fact employed costumes that refused any accurate chronological categorization. Duncan was dressed as a saintly medieval king, Macbeth wore a long leather trenchcoat, Lady Macbeth wore a black dress and head scarf while Malcolm was dressed in a knitted white sweater. The tools employed on the stage were chosen following this principle too. The daggers and swords were typically medieval while other touches were less datable. The costumes were chosen in tones of black and white with the exception of few golden or silver jewels and ornaments.

As far as the importance of avoiding a precise time and space in representing *Macbeth* is concerned, Ian McKellen explains his point of view in his interview with Julian Curry: “Scotland is the least interesting feature of Macbeth, I think […]. In John Napier’s design for our production there was no sense of Scotland. We were actors on a stage, and the play began with us coming and sitting on fruit boxes, round a rough

white circle painted on the floor of the stage. We could be seen doing the sounds effects. At one point I was in charge of the thunder machine. You could see Macbeth and Lady Macbeth putting the blood on their hands in the wings. [...] This is just a group of people telling a story, and it’ll be just as riveting and frightening and exciting as if it were in large theatre trying to convince you that we were in medieval Scotland, which is no help whatsoever.

(Centre: Roger Rees as Malcolm, Griffith Jones as Duncan and Ian McKellen as Macbeth, kneeling. Photo: Joe Cocks Studio Collection)

69 Julian Curry, Ian McKellen on Macbeth Taken from Shakespeare on Stage – Thirteen Leading Actors on Thirteen Key Roles, Nick Hern Books, London
Ian McKellen also attempts to give another explanation for the wide success of Nunn’s production. In fact he points out that a great achievement in the realization of Nunn’s *Macbeth* is the way in which the supernatural elements are treated. In fact, the apparitions, such as the line of kings, happen inside Macbeth’s mind. For most of the play, the audience is told what Macbeth sees in his thoughts and actually is not really happening. Furthermore, during the famous scene in which the witches show Macbeth his future, the actor seems drugged and tells the audience what he think is happening to him, even though those things are not happening onstage. According to Ian McKellen, this is the best way to make things plausible in the twentieth century. Even the witches were treated as common people, each with her individuality. As Michael Mullin points out: “the First Witch (Marie Kean) seemed to preside, the Second Witch (Susan Dury) abetted her, and the Third Witch (Judith Harte), a crazed, demented young woman, seemed to possess second sight; her trancelike statements guided the others”\(^70\). The rituals they perform are realistic, they usually happen in candlelight and they disturbingly look like black masses.

McKellen explains that the witches had a relationship that Nunn worked out between the grandmother, the daughter and her daughter making them a little family of people in touch with things beyond themselves while Hecate was cut in order to solve the magic.

If magic has somehow been mitigated, rituality has a fundamental role in Nunn’s production. The first time we see Duncan onstage he is dressed in a long white robe like a saintly king with few touches of gold in the jewels he wears. He is murmuring “mea culpa” hitting his chest while an organ plays

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loudly in the background. His features are gentle his hair long and white, is old age and manners arouse feelings of respect in the characters around him and in the viewers.

Even the witches are seen performing a sort of ritual as they first appear. if Duncan seems to celebrate a Christian mass, the witches acting immediately evokes a black mass as they are on their knees performing a ritual involving a voodoo doll. The gloomy atmosphere is very similar to that in which Lady Macbeth will conjure the spirits. In fact just like the witches, Judi Dench will be set in an almost completely dark setting in which she will kneel and place her hands before herself to conjure the evil entities.

After the 1976 opening, the production was refined and moved from one theatre to the other. In 1978 it finally came to Thames Television’s Studio Two. It was filmed in the order of the play and what is remarkable is that it was not adapted for television since the director’s aim was to recreate the experience of the theatre. This is probably what determined its great success and the special interest of the audience and the critics. The video opens with the actors disposed around the circle casting their shadows which altogether create the shape of a star. The effect is provoked by a bright light over them. What immediately strikes the viewer is the complete absence of the background and of any kind of objects in the scene. This puts the actors in the limelight, while they move inside and outside of the scene when they are not expected, giving the audience a sense of bewilderment. The camera moves in close as it is not placed outside the circle, giving the audience the feeling of being part of the

71 The director of the 1978 Macbeth production for television was Philip Casson.
action. The feeling of being onstage is also obtained through the direct address to the viewers in the soliloquies. Macbeth often confides his fears looking straight into the lens making the spectator feeling like a character himself. The feeling of intimacy evoked is so strong that sometimes the viewer may feel like an intruder spying on the main characters. This impression is particularly strong in the scenes involving Macbeth and his wife. This is due to the strong passion evoked by the main actors Ian McKellen and Judi Dench. When we first see them together on stage, they appear as an affectionate couple. They kiss each other while Macbeth passionately embraces his wife. The sense of intimacy is so pervasive that the viewer feels almost like a voyeur. The same attitude can be found after Duncan’s murder when Macbeth walks in carrying the daggers and showing the first signs of mental frailties. His hands tremble so hard that we can hear the rattling sound of the daggers they are holding. While his wife tries to muster his courage the viewer feels uncomfortable as if he/she joined the couple involved in the horrid deed.

As far as the relationship between the two main characters is concerned, the leading actors put a strong focus on it underlining the strong passion that characterize it. When asked about the relation between Macbeth and his wife, Ian McKellen explains: “As far as possible we were never out of each other’s arms. Certainly what she can give him, which nobody else in the world can, is her love and her passion and sex. I always felt that I was a husband coming back to my beloved, to my wife, to my sweetheart, the only woman that I cared
about in the world, coming back from the long, desperate life elsewhere and hardship with the men.\textsuperscript{72}

(Judi Dench as Lady Macbeth and Ian Mckellen as Macbeth. Photo: Donald Cooper 1976)

\textsuperscript{72} Julian Curry, Ian McKellen on Macbeth Taken from Shakespeare on Stage – Thirteen Leading Actors on Thirteen Key Roles, Nick Hern Books, London
Their relationship will change in the course of the play as they will become more and more isolated one from the other. Ian McKellen suggests this may be caused by Lady Macbeth’s attitude towards her husband. In fact she keeps diminishing his manhood in order to challenge him. Macbeth is very proud so this can seem the best way to encourage him, but McKellen suggests that this keeps them separated as she is not able to deeply understand her husband’s problems.

Furthermore he suggests that this is the reason why, as the play goes on, Macbeth will not include his wife. According to him, this is the reason why he is on his own and fails. Furthermore, after Duncan’s assassination, Macbeth starts to lose his mind. This is another reason why he and his wife cannot get along. This is clear in the scene when Macbeth is holding the bloody daggers but it is even more evident during the banquet scene. Here, in fact, we clearly see how Macbeth is victim of paranoia. In fact, Trevor Nunn, cleverly decides to make Banquo’s ghost a projection of Macbeth’s mind. Thus McKellen, stares at the camera and starts to make faces and shouting looking at what Macbeth thinks is the ghost of the friend he murdered. Judi Dench’s Lady Macbeth, tries to make the banquet’s guests comfortable telling them about her husband’s mysterious illness. Meanwhile she also tries to stop her husband’s unreasonable behavior. The scene ends with the worried guests leaving the room while a frustrated Lady looking sad reproaches her husband for his terrible outburst. Here the audience has an unpleasant feeling of an impending breakup. McKellen suggests that the reasons for Macbeth’s distress and paranoia may resides in the fact that he is not an assassin. In fact he is a
professional soldier, an athletic man, a warrior and when he kills someone it is because he needs to do that in order to make him out of the way. What is remarkable is that in this Shakespearean tragedy, we know that Macbeth is a valorous soldier but actually we never see him in the battlefield. What we know, instead, is that he kills an old man in his sleep. This is probably the easiest death he accomplished in his life, but also, the worst thing he could have ever done, even if it is probably the easiest death he has ever accomplished. This is why he immediately loses his mind, but his wife will not be able to understand his distress. Furthermore, McKellen suggests that what strikes Macbeth, is the fact that he had never killed someone in that way before and from this moment on, the relationship with his wife will be over. When Macbeth will finally be king, he will not have time to spare with his wife and he will not share some secrets with her, for example he will not share the decision to kill Banquo and Fleance. Rather than depend on his wife for help, he will seek the help of two murderers. When Macbeth decides to talk to the murderers he is demeaning himself to their level. He cannot share this secret with his wife as she is convinced that they have reached a higher prestige becoming a royal couple but actually he feels comfortable among the scum of the earth.

Thanks to the clever choices of the director and producer, Trevor Nunn’s Macbeth was successful both on stage and on television. The problems that caused the failure of many productions, were here dealt cleverly. The tiny space of the stage, for instance, favored the positive outcome of the production and created a close-up production style that perfectly suited the
television medium. The recurrence of ceremonials on stage suited both the theatre and television as it appealed to the audience emotions transforming the supernatural into something realistic and plausible. The success of the television production was helped by the clever use of the camera that made the spectators feel like an onstage character. The production in this sense was purposely made for television. Furthermore, no special effects were employed thus giving the impression that the play was actually on a theatre stage.

This *Macbeth* is important for many reasons. First of all it taught that Shakespearean plays may work well in small studios as the emotional aspects are thus put into the limelight. Furthermore it underlined how a bare stage and simple production setting may enhance the acting and the conduct of the play. It also showed that Shakespeare can work on TV thus serving not only as theatre history but also as art. As Marvin Rosenberg says: “the production demonstrated once again that Shakespeare's drama does not need elaborate setting, lavish costuming, complicated lighting plans. In that austere room, the play, left to itself, worked: the play was the thing.”

CHAPTER 5

Eimuntas Nekrosius’s *Makbetas*.

The productions of the Lithuanian director Eimuntas Nekrosius have repeatedly been acclaimed by international audiences and critics. While performing in the Lithuanian language Nekrosius’ productions have successfully toured around the world combining verbal and physical elements in order to create a progressive mainstream theatre that mingles different cultures. Nekrosius’ hallmark resides in his taste for dramatic surprise and the departure from realistic characterization as well as in the presence of mythology and Lithuanian folklore.

As Ludvika Apinyte points out in her thesis *The mises en scene of Lithuanian director Eimuntas Nekrosius* the presence of Lithuanian cultural icons is not an attempt to celebrate nationalist themes, but rather an incorporation of Nekrosius’ childhood memories and experiences in a rural district of northern Lithuania.  

In his approach to the text, Nekrosius is not afraid to change some lines or even add some scenes which are not present in the original play thus showing a great degree of inventiveness and a strong personality as a *metteur en scène*. This way of expressing his personality has caught the attention of

European critics who now acclaim him as one of the most important directors worldwide.

On the other hand, Nekrosius’s way of approaching the texts, has also provoked negative responses from literary purists and traditional practitioners who claim that his works are not recognizable as his interpretation of the classics is too free.

Nevertheless, his ability in re-writing the classics, the delineation of the characters and the highly symbolic components of his plays have become the distinguishing features of Nekrosius’ productions. Following these principles, Nekrosius and Meno Fortas brought their Makbetas on stage in 1999. On March 2006 the play was filmed in Zvejai Culture House in Klaipeda.

This powerful production strikes the viewer with his wide stage and a series of clever special effects. The set is almost dark throughout the whole play while the colors mainly employed are black, white and red.

In Nekrosius’ Makbetas music is pervasive as it sounds in the background for most of the play emphasizing the action. The use of sounds effects, is in fact a major feature from the very beginning of the mise en scène. The production, opens with the three witches surrounded by an extensive set of sounds and whistles that give the impression of the great Hurly Burly mentioned in the tragedy. Furthermore, music is employed when the most dramatic events take place in order to convey the mood of the actors. In many scenes noises are amplified taking on the leading role, as, for example, when rocks and stones are thrown onstage producing a deafening noise that surrounds Macbeth.
As far as the sound features are concerned it is important to point out what professor Margaret Rose noted. That is to say that even if the whole play is recited in Lithuanian language, the audience is charmed from the very beginning and does not perceive the boundary of language as an impediment to his understanding of the story.\textsuperscript{75} This is due to the great emphasis posed on the use of sounds that accompany the actor’s facial coding and body gestures as well as thanks to the selection of precise passages in the text made by Eimuntas Nekrosius. In fact, Nekrosius’s \textit{mise en scène} originates from an accurate study of the text which is then analyzed and adapted in order to match it with the actions, gestures and mimic of the actors. This makes the audience comfortable in following a play that lasts almost three hours and give them the impression of understanding all that is said onstage even if the language spoken is different from theirs. Furthermore, when interviewed by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, Nekrosius explained that he had to decide which themes of the play he wanted to develop as it was impossible for him to focus on all of them. This allowed him to be more concise and clear about the topics he was treating making thus the production easier to follow. “There are many themes in Shakespeare’s play that I don’t address and develop, the struggle for power is not the only one, there are many other themes as well. It’s more than enough to develop those themes that I have chosen. If I expanded even

\textsuperscript{75} Margaret Rose, L’universalità di Shakespeare oltre le barriere linguistiche e culturali, Inserto Le Muse, febbraio 2002, p.4
more, I wouldn’t be able to control the show, to retain the logic. There are so many themes and I’m helpless to connect this polyphony into one.”

To understand why Nekrosius’s *Makbetas* has been appreciated by the critics and the public, it is important to analyze how the typical problems I mentioned in the previous chapters (namely the presence of the witches and the supernatural elements, Banquo’s ghost and Macbeth’s visions) have been dealt with.

As far as the weird sisters are concerned, in this production, they are not old women, neither classical or ugly witches. They are instead three young and attractive girls. Nekrosius explained that for him, the presence of the three witches, is fundamental in the play, not merely as an element of chaos, but rather as a playful presence. For this purpose he chose three young and beautiful women as he wanted to demonstrate that even the most beautiful things can hide something devilish. Furthermore, he detached himself from the Shakespearean idea of the weird sisters, as he imagined them not only as agents of chaos and fate but also as a company for Lady Macbeth. In fact, the three women, follow the lady almost like three maids, cuddling her and supporting her throughout the play. They also follow Macbeth and they often

76 Interview by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, *Makbetas*, dvd filmed in Zvejai Culture House in Klapeida, March 31, 2006

77 “Perhaps I went the other way round, even as a kind of joke... Beauty is also enchanting, dangerous and attractive. For this reason I only chose these actresses and we built this scene so that they would feel good while acting. Why should we disfigure beautiful girls, or make them pretend to be unattractive? It produces some effect – beauty is also attractive and deceptive.” Interview by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, *Makbetas*, dvd filmed in Zvejai Culture House in Klapeida, March 31, 2006
try to comfort him, kissing and embracing him. Nekrosius explains that he strongly believes in fate and predestination, so he imagined that his three witches know everything in advance, they know how the whole story is going to end and their role is that of softening the tragedy. They are not frightening presences onstage, they are young, beautiful, playful women that have to lighten the mood of the mise en scène. In this way, they make this tragedy not only a macabre and bloody story as they render it bearable with their cheerful presence. It is interesting how Viktorija Koudytė who interprets Laumè, one of the witches, explains the director choice about their role: “[…] for more than a month and a half we were rehearsing in complete ignorance, because Nekrosius told us – you have absolute freedom here. I only tell you that the witches must symbolize Fate. – And all of us […] decided the same thing, that they (the witches) had to be three terrible old hags, witches or hexes, whatever, but they had to be horrible, old, repulsive, frightening, scary. During this month and a half we did a lot of different sketches […] till one day Nekrosius told us […] – what do you think, being so young and beautiful, why do you want to disfigure yourselves so terribly, to look so repulsive?- […] I thought that he knew that they had to be young, attractive and feminine, spontaneous. First of all they had to reflect the good sides of a person, which attract others, and only then the bad ones. First of all [they had to be] all that can attract or intrigue a person.”

78 Emanuela Rossini, Makbetas di Eimuntas Nekrosius, Inserto Le Muse, febbraio 2002, p.1

79 Interview by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, Makbetas, dvd filmed in Zvejai Culture House in Klapeida, March 31, 2006
As far as the appearance of the actors is concerned, the clothes they wore were simple, like those worn by peasants in rural countries. Macbeth, does not look like a classic warrior in his white blouse, simple trousers and woolen gloves. Lady Macbeth is dressed in a simple black suite that will be substituted by a white nightgown in the sleepwalking scene. A peculiarity in Nekrosius’s production is the fact that the royal couple will not show a clear change in status after the murder, as their appearance will remain the same throughout the whole play while in other performances the passage was manifested through the use of jewelry or crowns. Even Duncan, wears a basic black gown that is far from the common view of the rich and lavish king.

As in Nunn’s production, here the clothes contribute to avoid to locate the story in a precise time and place. As Ian McKellen explained in his interview with Julian Curry, many productions tend to be too precise in reconstructing a Scottish scenery onstage, resulting rather dull. It has proven to be successful to avoid this maniacal historical reconstruction, as it is of no use to the story. In Nekrosius’s production, the whole cast wear simple peasant clothes without any particular features that could represent the context of Scotland making it impossible to locate the play in a precise place. It is also important to note that while in most productions, the weapons employed on stage are medieval daggers and swords, in Nekrosius’s Makbetas, the main actor uses a dagger only in Macbeth’s famous monologue, while all the murders are perpetrated with axes. In fact, even king Duncan is killed with an axe and throughout the
play the spectators will see his ghost wandering around with a disturbing axe lodged in his back.

Nekrosius explains that the simple clothes worn by the actors are justified by the fact that he imagined his Macbeth in a rural context. This feature also explains why in the play stones and rocks are a constant presence onstage. The fact that axes and wood are widely employed onstage also helps to reconstruct an image of a rural country where these tools are typically employed in farm works. Furthermore, when Macbeth and Banquo make their first appearance onstage they carry two trees on their backs as for Nekrosius that is another element that helps to create the rural context. The two warriors in fact are bringing a rare and precious tree to their king as a present for him. Nekrosius decided to make the tree appear at the beginning to create a common thread that will guide the spectator throughout the whole play. The image of the tree, will be present from Macbeth’s first appearance up to his way out of the play, when the Great Birnam Wood will move toward his castle.

It is also important to take into account the relationship between Macbeth and his wife. For Nekrosius it was fundamental in the development of the story. This is why, unlike most of the other productions, in this *mise en scène* the couple seems reunited throughout the whole play. When interviewed by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, Dalia Storyk, who interpreted Lady Macbeth, explained: There is a lot of blood, killings and death but though the characters are people of my generation, no longer young, there is also love. They must be like Romeo and Juliet, they love each other and only because she loves this man, she wants him to have the title, the throne, honor and money. She is full
of love. The director said – if you don’t love each other, the whole play will lose its foundation. “

On the other hand, Kostas Smoriginas, who interprets Macbeth, also explains that this kind of love is destructive: “It is punch love as someone said. He is a true soldier, it is also reflected in my manner of acting. He doesn’t know how to caress, his hands are not built for breasts, his hands are built for a sword and

80 Interview by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, Makbetas, dvd filmed in Zvejai Culture House in Klaipėda, March 31, 2006
that’s why he caresses her with his fists. It is love. And her love -either for stillborn, unborn or imaginary child who doesn’t exist- is passed onto him. But you see what is born of this love, what creature. Here one of the greatest themes is love, but love is so destructive”. Furthermore, Nekrosius perceives love as an unpredictable, aggressive feeling with an uncontrollable side. In his view love doesn’t yield to logic and has a destructive power. In Macbeth, he says, love is ominous rather than lyrical and, for Nekrosius it is the fundamental theme in the play.

The director explains that he had to chose which themes he wanted to focus on, as it was impossible for him to develop all the themes that Shakespeare treated in his tragedy. Love, was for him a preponderant aspect of the play as well as the theme of repentance. For Nekrosius, in fact, Macbeth is loved by the public because despite being an evil character, he repents during the tragedy. He also attempts to give an explanation for Macbeth’s behavior saying that perhaps he has been influenced by witches whose thoughts are unwillingly implanted into his mind predestining him. Only after he accomplishes his fate killing all those people, he is finally able to see the truth and so he repents. Furthermore, Eimuntas Nekrosius points out how the planning of the murder, the desires for power and the killing of the king proportionally takes a fairly short time, while the theme of repentance is well developed throughout the whole play. Eimuntas Nekrosius’ Makbetas is characterized by a strong presence of fate that is perceived throughout the whole play and is often manifested trough the use of Mirrors. Mirrors, in fact are an important presence in the mise en scène and they are often used as
foretelling features. In the famous dagger scene, Macbeth holds a little mirror in his hand and pronounces his monologue while he contemplates his reflection. At his back, a series of mirrors show a disturbing black figure crawling on the stage that only at on a closer inspection appears to be king Duncan. In this case, the mirrors seems to reflect Macbeth’s future and the visions that haunt his thoughts. As Eimuntas Nekrosius explained, in the play there is a “distinct theme of predicted fate”. In the mise en scène, even Even Lady Macbeth is governed by her fate that will guide her from the very beginning until the final scenes when death finally free her from her condition. She comes to her senses only at the end of the performance when she is trying to find the right balance between reality, disease, recovery and death. Throughout the play she is always accompanied by the presence of the weird sisters that follow her as a reminder of her predetermined destiny.

This sense of predestination is emphasized also through the presence of the ghosts that haunt the stage after Banquo’s murder. In fact, In this production, the audience will see not only Banquo’s ghost but also It is also important to take in account the relationship between Macbeth and is wife. For Nekrosius it was fundamental in the development of the story. This is why, unlike most of the other productions, in this mise en scène the couple seems united throughout the whole play. When interviewed by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, Dalia Storyk, who interpreted Lady Macbeth, explained: “There is a lot of blood, killings and death but though the characters are people of my generation, no longer young, there is also love. They

81 Interview by Ramunė Marcinkevičiūtė, Makbetas, dvd filmed in Zvejai Culture House in Klapeida, March 31, 2006
must be like Romeo and Juliet, they love each other and only because she loves this man, she wants him to have the title, the throne, honor and

(Kostas Smoriginas as Maktetas. Photo: Stanislovo Kairio, 1999)
Duncan’s one who will playfully wander on stage with an axe lodged in his back. During the banquet scene, the two spirits, walk among Macbeth and his wife and Duncan’s ghost will embrace Banquo’s as if welcoming him in the world of the dead. The problem posed by their presence is here solved by the fact that these spirits does not seem real but rather a projection of Macbeth’s mind. In many scenes the audience also sees Macbeth taking out of his pockets some mysterious herbs that are inhaled by the witches. This may suggest that the protagonist was in an altered mental status due to the use of drugs that may have caused him to see things that were not real.

The dreamlike atmosphere that pervades Nekrosius’ *mise en scène* and the recurrence to these expedients makes it possible for the audience to accept the presence of the supernatural elements thus contributing in the success of the production.

Eimuntas Nekrosius’ *Makbetas* was successful for many reasons. On the one hand, it combined the clever employment of the theatrical devices such as the sound system and the special effects, with an exceptional study of the Shakespearean text which was then revised and enriched with elements typical of the Lithuanian folklore. On the other hand, the attentive study of the expressions and movements of the actors and of the choreographies that have been employed onstage made the audience comfortable in following the representation even though it was held in Lithuanian language. All these elements, combined with the remarkable quality of the acting granted the success of this *mise en scène*. 
CHAPTER 6

Franco Branciaroli’s Macbeth.

In 2016 and 2017 Franco Branciaroli toured Italy with his fascinating Macbeth, where not only he took upon himself the role of director, but also that of the leading character. With Valentina Violo as a cruel and obscure Lady Macbeth, Giovanni Battista Storti as king Duncan, Alfonso Veneroso as Banquo and others, he produced an interesting play that can be claimed innovative under different points of views.

On the 24th of November 2016, I went to the mise en scène at Teatro Verdi in Padua after I had the opportunity to interview Franco Branciaroli.

During the interview with Franco Branciaroli, I immediately perceived that all that was onstage, had been carefully imagined by him through an accurate study of the text and of the historical background of the Scottish play. I was proven right when I asked him how he managed to represent Macbeth. In fact, he explained that for him, it is important to carefully study the context of the play in order to deeply understand the psychology of the characters. When it comes to Macbeth’s behavior, for example, he carefully analyzed the historical background of Scotland. Macbeth was a warrior used to killing people, and as he stopped the revolt that was menacing king Duncan’s reign, he expected the crown as a rightful consequence for him. King Duncan decided instead to give
it to his young son who had not the right to claim it as in those days it was common practice to give it to the bravest and most loyal man in the court, namely Macbeth. For Branciaroli, this justifies Macbeth’s behavior, when it comes to the killing of the king. Furthermore, Branciaroli, focuses his attention on the fact, that for him, Macbeth should not be considered an evil person as he must be pushed towards Duncan’s murder by his wife. Lady Macbeth, has a strong power on him and is able to seduce him and convince him to accomplish the deed. Branciaroli, states that his Lady can do that because she is not aware of what she is doing as she is possessed by the evil spirits that she has summoned. For Branciaroli she is not a completely evil character, but rather, she is the fourth witch. He decided to emphasize this by making her prepare a potion that she drinks while evoking the bad spirits. Through this potion, the spirits possess her and make her lose her mind, giving her a strong will and desire for power, as well as the faculty of provoking her husband to push him towards the terrible crimes he will commit. Branciaroli also wants to focus the attention on the fact that Macbeth keeps thinking about the honors that Duncan gave him thus revealing his doubts about the murder his wife desires. It is Lady Macbeth, then that takes the resolution to kill the king and manages to do it through her strong ability in persuading her husband. Branciaroli stated that he sees his Lady as a man: “[...] she kills the king, so she is no more herself, she is a man. A man that slowly gives a second birth to Macbeth as she pushes him towards the deed that she cannot commit due to the similarity (of Duncan) with her father. So Macbeth, in this
sense, is born from a woman that is a mother, a wife and a man to him. So he is the one who is not born from a woman!²

Through his careful analysis of the text, Branciaroli decided to put a strong focus on the psychology of the characters. This is why for example, he accepts Lady Macbeth’s assertion of Macbeth’s mental illness during the banquet scene as a fact. Branciaroli explained that for him Macbeth suffers from some kind of mental disease that makes him uncomfortable among the people. Quoting Bonnefoy, he states that Macbeth probably suffers to some extent, from autism and just like Romeo, he drags all the people around him to death.³ So, instead of being a strong, evil tyrant as in most productions, Branciaroli’s Macbeth, appears as a weak man suffering from mental illness that makes him uncomfortable among the people and makes him obey to his wife’s darkest desires for power.

Branciaroli’s faithfulness to the Shakespearean text also made him consider the possibility that Macbeth lost his capacity to sleep after Duncan’s murder. In fact, he thinks that this possibility would partly explain why Macbeth sees

² “Lei “ammazza” il re quindi non è più lei, è un maschio. Un maschio che peraltro ripartorisce Macbeth man mano, perché lo rifà, lo riesce a portare a fare quello che lei non potrà fare per via della somiglianza con il padre. Quindi Macbeth, in un certo senso viene ri-partorito da una donna madre, amante, maschio quindi il “non nato da donna” è lui!”. Appendix

³ […]Secondo Bonnefoy , Macbeth è […]un malinconico, cioè un depresso, ovvero una persona come tante che non sta bene nel mondo. […] Dunque, deduco io, la tesi di Bonnefoy, è che lui è uno di quegli esseri che già quando iniziano d avere sei o sette anni non stanno bene. Lui, poi, procede verso l’autismo, sono creature che non stanno bene nel mondo e da grandi diventano depressi. Ed è […] la stessa malattia che ha Romeo. Romeo è uguale, è gente che trascina alla morte un sacco di persone.”. Appendix
strange visions like the ghost in the banquet scene. Furthermore, Branciaroli thinks that the fact that Macbeth is made vulnerable by the lack of sleep makes the audience more sympathetic towards him. In this way he is no more a strong villain willing to kill all the people around him to satisfy his thirst for power. In fact he becomes a weak man who needs to rest and is pushed towards his crimes by his unfavorable physical and psychical conditions.

When the curtains were raised at Teatro Verdi, the stage appeared rather wide and almost bare with the exception of few trap doors and a simple scenery. The colors mainly employed were black and red. As the play begins, the presence of the weird sisters immediately strikes the audience as they are not classical witches. In fact, Franco Branciaroli decided to dress his actors with long black gowns and to cover their faces with disturbing white and red masks. Their faces are also half covered with long red bloody-like beards while huge dead birds tower over their heads. Not only is the weird sisters’ appearance disturbing, but so is their way of expressing themselves. In fact, Franco Branciaroli decided to maintain their parts in the original language thus avoiding to translate them. When asked about this choice he explained that he decided to maintain them in English because: “[…] he (Macbeth) says that they speak an imperfect language. So, playing on this fact, for those who do not speak English, English becomes the imperfect language […]. Then, there is the fact that this expedient allows us to hear the language in which it
(Macbeth) was written, because, to be honest, Macbeth [...] works only because [...] Shakespeare gave it that kind of music.\textsuperscript{84}

It is interesting to point out that in Branciaroli’s mise en scène even Lady Macbeth speaks English. This associate her with the weird sisters justifying the director’s choice in considering her the fourth witch. As Branciaroli explains, for him, Lady Macbeth is the fourth witch as she has the power to summon the spirits. She is also able to prepare a concoction that will make the spirits penetrate her body and possess her. Furthermore, he also puts a strong focus on the fact that Lady Macbeth asks the spirits to be deprived of her sex and of her milk thus asking of being transformed into a man. From that moment on, she will become the iconographic Lady Macbeth, an evil strong woman that is ready to kill in order to obtain what she wants. In the end, when the spirits will live her body as her fate along with that of her husband will be accomplished, she will return to her normal psychical condition, that is to say, that of a common woman. Branciaroli points out that for him, Macbeth and his wife are good people who are influenced by the evil power of the spirits and of the witches. Lady Macbeth loses her mind when the spirits leave her body, because she is finally aware of what she has done and all the killings perpetrated for the thirst for power are unbearable to her.

\textsuperscript{84}“[..] lui (Macbeth) sostiene che le streghe parlano un linguaggio imperfetto. Allora, giocando su questo, per chi ovviamente non parla l’inglese, l’inglese diventa un linguaggio imperfetto[..]. Poi c’è il fatto che si possa sentire anche la lingua con cui è stato scritto perché, dicendolo brutalmente, il Macbeth [...] si regge solo perché [...] Shakespeare ha dato quella musica.”. Appendix
Lady Macbeth’s attitude in the play is emphasized by her clothes. In fact, she wears a long red dress covered by a long crimson cloak while her head is shrouded in a leather cap that completely hides her hair, depriving her from any sign of femininity. Furthermore, her cap frames her face emphasizing it and rendering her expressions stronger and clearer.

(Valentina Violo as Lady Macbeth. Photo: Umberto Favretto, 2016)

As far as the clothes are concerned it is important to point out that they all are red, white or black and rather lavish. Franco Branciaroli is impressive in his
long cloak and golden crown, while the Lady, is disturbingly emotionless in her covering red dress. Due to their incredible apparel, the witches have been transformed into weird creatures from a different world, neither women, nor men, looking more like corpses than living beings. Their appearance is fascinating and the favorable outcome is enhanced by the fact that they speak in English giving the impression that they speak a strange language that is different from that of Macbeth and of the audience.

(Franco Branciaroli as Macbeth with the three witches. Photo: Umberto Favretto, 2016)
Franco Branciaroli was perfectly aware of the difficulties posed by the *mise en scène* of Macbeth and he cleverly managed to solve them in a very personal way.

One of the main problems, is the fact that in this play there are many soliloquies. In fact, he states that in many of the *mise en scènes* he had seen, Macbeth suddenly started to look at the roof and started to recite resulting dull and not believable. To avoid this solution, Branciaroli decided to give Macbeth a partner during his soliloquies. In fact, as he recites them, an actor completely covered in a black suite follows him around the stage and interacts with him giving the impression that the soliloquies are actually sort of dialogues. Furthermore, this allows him to use a different voice tone which is far more concrete and direct as it is meant to interact with the black shadow, while soliloquies are usually recited with a dreamlike tone which is rather detached from reality and difficult to follow. The black shadow that follows Macbeth onstage usually appears from the trapdoors and may be thought as the embodiment of his inner, dark thoughts.

Another problem that Branciaroli dealt with in a very distinctive way is that of Banquo’s ghost. In this *mise en scène*, in fact, the ghost is effectively on stage and haunts Macbeth moving his harms like those of a puppet. Macbeth looks possessed and out of his mind, his voice comes out with great difficulty while he is victim of the ghost’s whims. His Lady is perplexed and frustrated by his behavior as she is not able to see what causes it. In this case, the ghost’s presence onstage is concrete and the audience wonders if it is a real ghost or
only a projection of Macbeth’s mind. It is rather difficult, in fact, to understand whether the protagonist’s behavior is the result of his unfavorable psychical condition or whether it is the product of the presence of a real ghost.

As far as the innovative aspects of Branciaroli’s mise en scène are concerned, in the sleepwalking scene, not only his Lady does reveal her crimes through her monologue, but also she wanders around the stage writing key words such as “murder” or “blood” on the walls using a chalk. This expedient gives a powerful visual impact to the scene as it seems to make Lady Macbeth’s guilt even clearer. When her admission of guilt is written on the walls, it seems impossible to be washed away and clearly displayed for people to see it. When Lady Macbeth dies, Macbeth is left alone and finally prepares himself to die. Here, Franco Branciaroli was particularly proud of an expedient he came up with. In fact, as I mentioned before, for him it was fundamental to point out that from the very beginning of the play, after Duncan’s murder, Macbeth lost the faculty to sleep. As Macbeth needed to rest, Branciaroli decided to make his last monologue a cry for help where he is finally welcoming his fate, i.e. death as a friend and he sees death as his chance to get the rest he needs. As the director points out, in this scene Macbeth’s attitude is usually rendered as that of a violent, evil tyrant who wants to fight until the end and who is not willing to die. Franco Branciaroli’s Macbeth, instead, walks onstage holding a pillow, preparing himself to sleep making the audience sympathetic with him.

Another interesting topic is that of the language. In fact when I asked him if he drew inspiration from any particular play, he told me that it was impossible for
him due to the linguistic boundaries that separate a play in Italian language from those in the Shakespearean verse. On the one hand, he said, it is difficult to find a well made production of Macbeth from which a director may draw inspiration, on the other, a Macbeth recited in Shakespearean verse is far more easy to produce than one in the Italian language. In fact, he says, when you have to act in the Italian language, you have to be more careful to the intonation and you have to give a particular shape to the words as you pronounce them. Branciaroli, argues that the English language is far more musical than the Italian one, but the fact that he had to act in a different language allowed him to interpret the text giving it a different shape that probably favoured a positive outcome of the production.

Franco Branciaroli’s Macbeth, is a powerful mise en scène, where the text has been deeply analyzed and carefully interpreted in order to give an original and innovative onstage interpretation of the Scottish Play. The clever expedients employed make this representation original and captivating while Branciaroli’s powerful voice and gesture along with those of Valentina Violo fascinates the audience. The compelling outcome is also favoured by the beautiful clothes as well as by the extensive experience of Franco Branciaroli as an actor and director.
CONCLUSION

Despite its status as one of the four mature Shakespearean tragedies (along with *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*) William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* has never been considered the greatest among them, as that title has usually been attributed to *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. *Macbeth* has often been regarded as the least important among these tragedies.

However, despite not being in line for the title, *Macbeth* has always been popular onstage and it has been represented by some of the greatest directors of all time. Famous actors like David Garrick and Peter O’Toole, have interpreted this tragedy but productions have somehow not managed to achieve the iconic status of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

This is due to some aspects that the play presents to those who approach it.

As I have explained in my study on the problems of representing *Macbeth*, it is often difficult to find two performers for the leading roles of Macbeth and his Lady as they have to be perfectly well matched. As Ann Thompson explains in her introduction to “*Macbeth, the state of the play*”, there are few examples of *mises en scène* in which the leading roles were so “heavenly” matched that they are still regarded as examples for modern representations of *Macbeth*. Among them the famous Vivien Leigh-Laurence Olivier production as well as
Trevor Nunn’s *mise en scène* in which Judi Dench and Ian McKellen gave a rare example of fully satisfying performance.

Not only are the leading roles a major problem in staging *Macbeth*, but also the representation of some of the elements that are fundamental in the story, namely the supernatural elements. In fact, some of the most difficult components to deal with when staging the *Scottish Play* are the presence of the witches, ghosts and visions onstage. Many directors have failed in representing them as they have exceeded in the use of special effects resulting not convincing for a modern audience. As Franco Branciaroli explained, many directors transformed the play in a Horror Show *manqué*, a *Grand Guignol* resulting rather ridiculous.⁸⁵

As far as the weird sisters are concerned, Ann Thompson explains that they “cannot be reduced to projections of Macbeth’s mind, they are not mere delusions; though just what Macbeth and Banquo see is very questionable. [...] We are bound to see that they are not what Banquo says; but is more likely that this descriptions influences our perception than that we conclude that his sight is different from ours.”⁸⁶ In the productions I analyzed this aspect is particularly evident as the witches do not correspond to Banquo’s description. In fact, some directors have decided to transform the Shakespearean *weïrd sisters* into disembodied voices (Carmelo Bene), common women (Trevor Nunn), beautiful young girls (Eimuntas Nekrosius) or disturbing creatures with

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⁸⁵ Appendix

undefined sexuality and identity (Franco Branciaroli) proving that the witches’ most important characteristic is their liminality, an aspect that makes it is possible to give them many different shapes. Furthermore, to represent the witches as Banquo described them, that is to say women with beards, nowadays would provoke hilarity rather than fear, so these director demonstrated that to change completely the witches’ appearance is probably the best choice.

As far as the visions are concerned, the solution which has more often been adopted is that of making Macbeth and his Lady take some drugs or potions in order to justify their mental condition. In fact, the audience seems more willing to accept the presence of ghosts, witches and visions if they are perceived as a projection of the disturbed mind of the protagonists. Trevor Nunn made his Macbeth take some drugs, Eimuntas Nekrosius made his protagonist show some undefined ingredients that were inhaled by the witches, Franco Branciaroli made his Lady drink a strange potion. Another way in which this problems can be dealt, has been shown by Carmelo Bene who directed an unconventional Macbeth in which the main instruments to convey the story were the body and voice of the two actors on stage (Carmelo Bene and Silvia Pasello). In this case, the witches were represented through the use of voice-over, while the visions and the presence of the ghosts were perceived through the disarticulated descriptions of the actors and their facial expressions.

The faithful reconstruction of the setting has also proven to be a possible problem when staging the Scottish Play, as Ian McKellen explains in his interview with Julian Curry. In fact, one common ground for all the successful
representations I have analyzed is the lack of a precise time or space in which to locate the play. The audience is usually aware of the fact that Macbeth should be set in Scotland, but when productions try to be too precise in reconstructing a faithful setting, they tend to result rather dull. Carmelo Bene solved the problem presenting a unchanging set, in which he and Silvia Pasello wore clothes which were not datable and rather innovative. Trevor Nunn presented a bare stage and dressed his actors with rather modern clothes while Eimuntas Nekrosius decided to set the tragedy in an indefinite rural context. Franco Branciaroli decided to use stunning, modern clothes that conveyed the personality of the main actors rather than emphasize the setting or the historical period.

Among the many problems that Macbeth presents, Brett Gamboa\textsuperscript{87} notes how the play’s second half regularly falls off in pace and clarity after strong starts due to the complexity of the play in which the most important events—such as Duncan’s murder or Macbeth’s death—usually take place offstage, while the events that most concerns the audience, are those they do not see. The play thus bars the audience from the events in which it is most concerned and allows it a privileged position for events that are comparatively insignificant. Furthermore, in the first half of the play, the actors who are to interpret Macbeth tend to give all they can to the character while he is viable as after Duncan’s death their role will not allow them to be large or complex in it. Macbeth’s actor sees the problems of the play fall on him after Duncan’s

\textsuperscript{87} Brett Gamboa, Dwelling “in Doubtful Joy”: Macbeth and the Aesthetics of Disappointment, pp. 35-40
murder as the audience would expect him to gain power and prestige after the killing. Instead he delivers a sense of inefficacy and impotence as his actions are meaningless since they are directed by the weird sisters. From the very beginning, the play works to sideline him as his success in war is reported in detail but is not seen by the audience and when he meets the witches on the road to Forres it is Banquo who speaks to them while he is silent. Furthermore, it is his Lady who takes the resolution to kill the king and Macbeth will ask three murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance. Macbeth cannot be trusted by his audience as he pretends loyalty to a king that he will murder and he pretends friendship to Banquo that he will lead to an ambush. As far as the *mises en scène* I analyzed are concerned, all of them solved these problems cleverly. In Carmelo Bene’s representation they are not perceived by the audience as the main focus of the representation is not the story itself. In fact, Carmelo Bene and Silvia Pasello are more interested in experimenting with their voices and bodies in order to convey the feelings and meanings of the tragedy. Thus the use of their physicality functions as a common thread that will lead the audience throughout this complex *mise en scène*. As far as Trevor Nunn’s production is concerned, the great performance of the two main characters interpreted by Judi Dench and Ian McKellen grants the production a favorable outcome. Eimuntas Nekrosius solved these problems giving his *mise en scène* a dreamlike atmosphere that makes the audience more willing to accept what is happening onstage. Nekrosius’s Macbeth seems a tormented man whose mind is inhabited by weird images and dreams that may be induced by the witches. Franco Branciaroli’s *Macbeth* works even in the second half because
he decided to make the leading character a weak man whose main problem is the lack of sleep. The necessity to rest will lead him towards his killing that he will accept as his chance to sleep.

As far as Lady Macbeth is concerned, as Marvin Rosenberg points out in his *The Masks of Macbeth*, she is marked by a great polyphony of feelings that characterize her relationship with her husband and the world that surrounds her. She appears as a strong and determined woman who is able to manipulate her partner but she is to be manipulated by him later in the play. She initially seems a guide to him but then she is overruled by him. She keeps questioning Macbeth’s masculinity in order to make him react to his fears yet she is to succumb to her own guilty conscience. Like Macbeth she can speak directly or obliquely in an incredible facet of meanings. She is described as ambitious, brave, calculating, cruel, depressed, devoted, fascinating, mad, selfish and so forth. Critics have also considered whether her attitude is mainly “feminine” or “masculine” and if Macbeth might have remained innocent without her. This incredible polyphony as proven to be a problem when it comes to staging *Macbeth* as in many productions the Lady tended to be represented as fulfilled with too much kindness or cruelty thus losing her incredible complexity. In the productions I have analyzed, the directors found some clever expedients to avoid this problem making their *mise en scène* work. In Carmelo Bene’s representation Silvia Pasello is incredibly androgynous and sensual and her character evolves throughout the play. In Nunn’s production, Judi Dench’s performance is incredibly powerful and shows the many faces of her character. She is strong and full of passion at the
beginning of the play and she becomes weaker as the time goes by. Franco Branciaroli’s lady evokes Dench’s performance being thus satisfactory too even if not so original. Eimuntas Nekrosius’s lady is an androgynous woman always accompanied by the presence of the witches. She is presented as a delicate woman who has to be cheered up by the weird sisters who cuddle her throughout the play.

To conclude, a major role in the success of these productions has been played not only by the choice of the actors which were to interpret the leading roles, but also by the clever and sometimes brave choices made by the directors. In fact, these *mises en scène* are to some extent, unconventional and they did not follow the path of the classical representations of *Macbeth*. The way in which these directors decided to brake the barriers of the classical *mises en scène* may have seemed risky, but it has proved them right as these *Macbeths* can be considered innovative and they may mark the path for future representations.
1. Perché ha deciso di mantenere in lingua originale i dialoghi delle Weird Sisters e della Lady?

In sostanza perché lui (Macbeth) non “accusa” ma sostiene che le streghe parlano un linguaggio imperfetto. Allora giocando su questo, per chi ovviamente non conosce l’inglese, l’inglese diventa un linguaggio imperfetto che si capisce fino ad un certo punto, ma non si capisce a meno che tu non conosca perfettamente l’inglese. Questo è il primo motivo. In più, come corollario c’è il fatto che si possa sentire anche la lingua con cui è stato scritto, perché di fatto, dicendolo brutalmente, il Macbeth senza la lingua è un Grand Guignol. Si regge solo perché ha quella musica, perché Shakespeare ha dato quella musica. Se tu togli quella musica, cioè come lo fai in italiano, chiunque lo faccia e comunque lo si faccia è un Grand Guignol. Poi, tu puoi farlo elegante, l’attore può daragli qualcosa di suo, anche le parole se uno è bravo, qualche cosa di psicologico, però di fatto senza quella lingua è una storiaccia, una fiaba, le streghe, questo che va a domandare “datemi le risposte”. In poche parole, come entra in gioco il soprannaturale, scatta la lingua inglese, è anche un trucco che fa sì che lo spettatore s’accorge anche ad orecchio dell’abisso.
2. Così facendo lei associa la sua Lady alle streghe?

Associo l’inglese al soprannaturale perché Lady Macbeth è una quarta strega. Lei non è così di carattere, lei lo diventa perché chiama gli spiriti, gli spiriti la invadono. Qui, questo è anche sottolineato bene facendole bere una cosa perché lei ha un’affinità lontanissima con Medea, non a caso il fatto del bambino che lei massacrerebbe e come Medea è una che prepara bevande e droghe. Lei lo dice, “a quelli che dormono io li stendo subito”, ecco, per cui io gli spiriti li ho accentuati facendole preparare una bevanda che, bevuta la quale, gli spiriti arrivano. Ma è lo stesso, lei li chiama, ha il potere di evocarli e già questo … però cosa chiede agli spiriti? Chiede di fatto di diventare un maschio, “toglimi il latte, la riproduzione, la vagina”. Quindi lei diventa un maschio ed è quando è così che diventa la Lady Macbeth che noi conosciamo, che è iconografica. Ma quando questi spiriti se ne andranno e anche prima di evocarli, lei è esattamente come il Macbeth: sono due più o meno brave persone, normali. Macbeth è un assassino ma di guerra, non è un assassino civile. È ben diverso. Non è vero che è crudele, nel Medioevo era normale ammazzare della gente in guerra così come ammazzare il re era normalissimo. Non era questo catastrofico omicidio. Lei pure è così, lo fa per aiutarlo perché probabilmente loro hanno parlato prima, come succede, “però, se lo ammazzassimo, diventeremmo noi …” questo magari anni prima o tre mesi fa. Adesso scatta questa faccenda, non tanto delle streghe, ma quanto di un sopruso che lui ha subito, perché nella Scozia l’eredità della corona non avveniva per sangue ma veniva data al congiunto più vicino e più valoroso. Quindi meglio di Macbeth non c’era nessuno perché aveva sedato la rivolta.
Questo vuol dire però che questo re, non aveva una legittimazione forte, se c’è addirittura una rivolta dei suoi baroni vuol dire che non c’è un re solido. Ecco, questa rivolta gliela doma Macbeth che è suo cugino. Quindi Macbeth si aspetta di essere non l’erede domani ma di essere nominato l’erede futuro e invece questo re, in maniera subdola gettando anche una luce su questo cosiddetto “re buono”, questo subito elegge il figlio che è un ragazzino. In più, poi, rinforzato dalla profezia delle streghe, ne esce un risentimento, lui scrive alla moglie, la moglie che conosceva i desideri di Macbeth, ma ripeto, detti non so, magari mangiando, dice “vabbè, tanto so che non ce la farai e allora ci penso io” perché lui è una persona abbastanza retta, lei invece ha questo potere di evocare gli spiriti, è una strega di fatto. Lo diventa, la quarta strega. Quindi, di fatto, il soprannaturale e quindi l’inglese, va a cadere la dove c’è qualcosa di non corretto. Come per esempio, nel sonno, lei era sonnambula, lei è pazza, non è normale. Ma perché è pazza? Perché gli spiriti se ne sono andati, lei è tornata normale, è tornata sé stessa ed ha visto quello che era successo e diventa pazza. E quindi ricade in un altro status non normale con l’invocazione “a letto, a letto”, in quel letto in cui forse è dal un bel po’ che loro non ci vanno più. Perché nei due avviene una scissione a metà spettacolo, una scissione dovuta al fatto che lui, Macbeth, all’inizio tituba ancora, nonostante ci sia il piano di lei, lui dice “ma no, perché in fondo Duncan mi ha riempito di onori”. Una cosa che nessuno si ricorda mai perché del Macbeth tutti hanno un’idea per sentito dire, la cosa sconvolgente è che lo fa lei! E lei che prende l’iniziativa, a lui chiede solo di fare una faccia serena per non lasciare intendere il piano. Questo è enorme. Quindi fino a metà spettacolo il
signor Macbeth è un signore che ha una moglie piuttosto strana, che si occuperà di procurargli la corona. Lei “ammazza” il re quindi non è più lei, è un maschio. Un maschio che peraltro ri-partorisce Macbeth man mano, perché lo rifà, lo riesce a portare a fare quello che lei non potrà fare per via della somiglianza con il padre. Quindi Macbeth, in un certo senso viene ri-partorito da una donna madre, amante, maschio quindi il “non nato da donna” è lui! Dopo di che, vista l’impossibilità, lo fa lui ma come lo compie, succede anche per lui un disastro, cioè perde il sonno. Altra cosa di cui nessuno tiene conto: non è un modo di dire, lui perde davvero il sonno. Lui uccide il re e in Shakespeare credo sia la prima volta che un re viene ammazzato in quinta e non in scena, quindi alla greca. Questo forse perchè Shakespeare vedeva in questo re, che tra l’altro è un re anche femminile, viene chiamato Gorgone, forse ci vedeva una rappresentanza divina e dunque non lo fa ammazzare davanti al pubblico. Quando lui esce dalla stanza in cui si è compiuto l’assassinio, lui è sconvolto, c’è uno stacco strano e lei lo accusa di impotenza papale, papale “non sai più andare a fondo”, e lui racconta di aver udito delle voci che dicono “tu non dormi più” e di fatto non dorme più. Dopo aver messo la corona, Macbeth per forza cambia atteggiamento, perché è dentro al gioco. C’è un episodio su cui non si è riflettuto abbastanza, perché Macbeth non dice a lei che c’era anche Banquo? Lei non lo sa … Probabilmente se lei avesse saputo che c’era anche Banquo come testimone di quella profezia, non avrebbe fatto nulla. Perché è chiaro, che se c’è un testimone della profezia, e poi il re è a casa tua ed è ucciso, non ci vuole un genio per svelare la trama. Questo è molto strano, Macbeth non glielo ha detto. Però lui sa che l’altro sa e
dunque deve ucciderlo. Per questo, con la corona, prende un tono apparentemente più volitivo, più feroce, perché sempre meno dorme. Attenzione: sempre, meno, dorme. Altro che vedere i boschi che camminano! Pensa uno che non dorme da quindici giorni o comunque dorme male. Il sonno non lo acchiappa mentre invece acchiappa lei. Lei dorme e muore di sonno, lui muore di veglia. Dopo di che la storia è molto semplice, lui ammazza tutti, e alla fine della fiera, diciamocela tutta, non vede l’ora che McDuff lo uccida. Non ne può più, non vede l’ora che lo mandi a dormire. La storia finale è: “per favore, fatemi dormire! Uccidetemi, fatemi dormire!”. Quindi, la parte più interessante è la prima. Però cosa accade nella seconda parte, una volta che lui ha ucciso tutti e come dice “essere così è niente se non si è in sicurezza”, il potere non è saldo e quindi devo ammazzare Banquo, Fleance, devo ammazzare tutti? Adesso, lui ha tutto, e cosa succede? Nelle battute di Shakespeare avviene veramente una cosa modernissima, ovvero, Macbeth si chiede che senso abbia tutto questo: la moglie non ce l’ha più, il potere ce l’ha tutto, e si scontra, credo, con il senso dell’esistenza, perché stranamente, lui tende a distruggere tutto. Per esempio, nel famoso monologo in cui dice “la vita […] che non significa niente”, io glielo faccio pronunciare con gioia, perché non è detto che debba essere triste. Perché è come se dicesse (recitato) “e così, non vuol dire niente, non c’è niente, ed io vorrei, che la struttura del mondo si sgretolasse, voglio naufragio …”. Più chiaro di così! Non solo, quando va dalle streghe, dice una cosa terribile: “per me, voi potete distruggere le chiese, distruggere il grano, distruggere gli alberi, distruggere i castelli, distruggere le piramidi, e i germi della natura mischiarli e confonderli,
fino a nausea di sazietà la distruzione, non mi importa, basta che rispondiate alla mia domanda.” Quindi, lui è un uomo che vede davanti a sé il nulla. È affascinato dal nulla, mira a distruggere il creato. Perché questo? E qui viene in soccorso Bonnefoy che ha scritto due paginette, perché, secondo Bonnefoy, Macbeth è un malinconico nel senso rinascimentale. Un malinconico, cioè un depresso ovvero una persona come tante che non sta bene nel mondo. Ma non sta bene da molto. Lui dice una frase che viene anche questa trascurata, dice “io dall’infanzia soffro di un male”. È al banchetto, lei, noi crediamo, sta cercando di aggiustare la situazione, ma in realtà lei dice “non ci badate, soffre di un male che lui ha”. Noi siamo abituati ai “gialli” pertanto crediamo che lei lo dica come scusa, ma non è detto. Dunque, deduco io, la tesi di Bonnefoy, è che lui è uno di quegli esseri che già quando iniziano ad avere 6 o 7 anni, non stanno bene. Lui poi procede verso l’autismo, sono creature che non stanno bene nel mondo e da grandi diventano depressi. Ed è, dice una cosa bellissima Bonnefoy, la stessa malattia che ha Romeo. Romeo è uguale, è gente che trascina alla morte un sacco di persone. E come spesso accade a questi malinconici, Macbeth all’inizio dice “io so già che prevarrà la mia immaginazione”, perché i malinconici sono prolettici, l’immaginazione precede l’azione. Infatti il suo cruccio si rivela quando dice “basta, devo fare precedere l’atto all’immaginazione!” ma soprattutto dice “basta con le visioni! Da questo momento i nati del cuore saranno i nati della mano” perché lui sa di essere così. Ma lo dice proprio all’inizio quando sono sotto i gradini con la sua “anima nera” dice questa cosa può essere “cattiva e buona, però se è cattiva, perché

88 Branciaroli ha impiegato un interessante expediente: i soliloqui di Macbeth sono
mi ha dato un pegno di successione con una verità?” cioè, è vero che è barone di Cawdor, ma se è buona, perché lui pensa ad una cosa tremenda? Lui ha paura. È una paura immaginaria ma è peggio di quelle reali perché l’assassinio in lui è ancora soltanto fantastico, però scuote la sua singolarità umana ad un punto tale che lui sa già che ogni azione sarà soffocata dall’immaginazione. È questo il suo male. Questa immaginazione lo porta a quel che succede e lui poi dice “ora basta! Devo troncare con la mia immaginazione” e troncare con l’immaginazione, vuol dire distruggere tutto. Il personaggio ha la fama di portare male, non le streghhe, ma lui perché non viene mai, fallisce sempre. Una cosa strana di questo spettacolo è che in genere fallisce il secondo tempo, invece qui, il secondo tempo è più potente del primo. Non si sa perché. Sono curioso di vedere, quando lo vedrà Masolino D’Amico, perché lui li ha visti tutti in Inghilterra, come svelerà questo mistero. Perché in genere nel primo tempo è aiutante e nel secondo “plof”. Qui ne esce il contrario. Laurence Olivier, che lo fece due volte, la prima volta fu un disastro come al solito, la seconda fu furbo, fece il primo tempo un po’ scialbo, bofonchiando e poi nel secondo tempo ci dava dentro. Ma in realtà io so perché funziona nel secondo tempo, perché l’attore, cioè io, ha giocato la moneta non del rosso e il nero, ma del ventuno secco alla roulette, facendo il sonno. Perché è là che casca Macbeth. Quando leggi il testo ti figuri uno che esce urlando (recitato) “AVANTI! ALLE ARMI! DATEMI L’ARMATURA!” e accompagnati da un uomo privo di volto interamente vestito di nero che ascolta le riflessioni del protagonista e talvolta le accompagna con movenze lente ed inquietanti. Pare appunto l’immagine della sua coscienza, della sua anima resa corporea che prende vita all’infuori di Macbeth quando lui si crogiola in pensieri oscuri.
invece qui esce uno con il cuscino (recitato) “e andiamo …”. Ha sonno, non dorme più. Questa cosa, lo fa diventare enorme perché umano: enormemente umano. Ad un certo punto si butta proprio a terra sul cuscino e bofonchia e lì viene benissimo quella battuta perché quando lui si sdraia sul cuscino la battuta è (recitato) “ho vissuto abbastanza, la mia vita è arrivata alla foglia gialla”. Ed è quello che è incredibile è bellissimo. Ecco il trucco, ecco perché funziona, perché il finale, è quello che crolla, è una cosa alla Riccardo III, una cosa inconcepibile. Qui, invece, vedi uno col cuscino, che va a dormire, non va a combattere, va a dormire e credo che sia questa la cosa più importante di questo spettacolo. E l’attore riesce a non soccombere, perché avendo quel finale li, in genere si casca nella trappola del (recitato ad alta voce) “AVANTI! …”. Io li ho visti ed è terrificante perché non capisci più che cos’è, se i tre moschettieri, se è il Riccardo III … ma neanche perché il Riccardo III almeno ha la battuta “il mio regno …”. Molti dicono anche che non l’ha nemmeno scritto Shakespeare il “finalissimo” con queste battute assurde.

3. Com’è passare dal ruolo di attore principale del Macbeth, al ruolo di regista e attore principale?

Naturalmente è un azzardo, non si dovrebbe fare. Molti lo hanno fatto ma è veramente un azzardo, mi è andata di culo. Mi è andata di culo, prima perché io lo avevo già fatto da giovane, che è molto importante, quindi sulla recitazione, non avevo dubbi e se tu reggi la recitazione, già è importante, poi

89 Macbeth si presenta effettivamente in scena abbracciando un cuscino. Il passo pesante e strascicato, la voce impastata quasi inaudibile già alle prime file.
perché ho trovato una Lady Macbeth brava, che parlando l’inglese benissimo lo poteva fare. E già, se metti i due, sei a metà dell’opera. La regia l’ho fatta io perché di registi grandi, non ce n’è più. Senza polemiche, non ce n’è più. Ce ne sono di bravini, ma soprattutto abbiamo registi che fanno cose, boh, non so … un testo scritto da Luigi Uncarelli, ma quando vanno ad inchiodarsi sui testi, crollano tutti. Sono crollati tutti. Perfino Bob Wilson sui testi è crollato. La dama del mar di Wilson, io me la ricordo. Ma quindi, a chi lo affido? E poi, una volta che lo affidi, non è che puoi litigare tutti i giorni, no? Io ho lavorato con i più grandi registi, e non è la prima regia che faccio, sono già quattro o cinque spettacoli che faccio tutto io, e mi son detto “tu, hai lavorato con i più grandi registi del mondo e non sai fare una messa in scena?”. E poi, non è che io voglio fare la regia con lui omosessuale, lei lesbica, o con quelli che arrivano in moto, io volevo appunto tirare fuori il più possibile queste cose che ti ho detto. E mi son detto “con tutto quello che hai fatto, non sei capace? E allora sei un miserabile!”. Tutto questo, però, è una cosa che non si dovrebbe fare, perché porta una tensione tale, e poi non ci sono soldi, qui non c’è niente. Magari stesse in piedi per le parole di Shakespeare, ma qui è tutta parola italiana che è parola orrenda, non è di Shakespeare. Allora sta in piedi perché c’è un minimo di bravura nella recitazione di tutta la compagnia. E anche se è in italiano … beh, certo, se fosse in inglese … Ecco, una cosa così, fosse fatta in inglese, sarebbe un gioiello, perché in fondo, è fatta alla Elisabettiana, gira e

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90 Nel suo spettacolo
rigira è fatta come la faceva lui\textsuperscript{91}, uno fa tre parti. Però, è faticosissimo e crea un’angoscia terribile perché io ho vissuto, appunto con il fatto davanti che l’opera fallisce, il fatto di sentire che fallisce. Per esempio Ruggero Ruggeri, uno dei più grandi attori italiani degli anni trenta o quaranta, scrisse nel diario “l’unico spettacolo che ho fallito, l’ho fatto solo per otto repliche, è il Macbeth, perché non lo sentivo”. Questa frase, che gli attori capiscono, io per parecchi giorni l’ho provata, io il Macbeth non lo sentivo, non lo senti. È una strana cosa, non lo capisci mai. Perché è grande? Poi, piano, piano, quando lo fai, ce ne ho messo di tempo, piano, piano si assesta. Una invenzione che è stata molto utile, è quell’affare nero\textsuperscript{92}, perché Macbeth vive di soliloquio, ed il soliloquio è un controsenso, perché se è un soliloquio io non lo devo dire. Un monologo è una cosa, ma un soliloquio ... Una delle fregature del Macbeth, purtroppo è che si trova li e comincia a parlare, e questa cosa qui, detta al pubblico, è veramente stucchevole. Primo perché, un conto è fare (guarda un punto imprecisato del soffitto. Recitato in tono assorto e trasognato) “se fosse fatto, una volta fatto, sarebbe bene che fosse fatto presto” e un conto è (si rivolge a me. Recitato in tono vigile e assertivo) “se fosse fatto, una volta fatto, sarebbe bene che fosse fatto presto”. Sente la differenza? Mettendo li questa persona ho permesso una recitazione parlata, e questo è un atro ausilio. Però, se ci fossero dei bravi registi, io non la farei la regia.

\textsuperscript{91} Tutti gli interpreti ad eccezione della Lady, sono uomini. Nella famosa scena di sonnambulismo, la dama di Lady Macbeth è interpretata da un ragazzo.

\textsuperscript{92} L’interprete che rappresenta “l’anima nera” di Macbeth.
4. Come si è preparato a questo ruolo? Ha tratto ispirazione da qualche fonte in particolare?

Li ho visti tutti su youtube. Non mi sono ispirato a nessuno perché anche quelli inglesi sono brutti.

5. Ha visto il Macbeth di Trevor Nunn con Ian Mckellen e Judi Dench?

Si, ma grazie, quello ha un trucco. Prima di tutto quello è fatto così: ha una pianta circolare, gli spettatori saranno cento, è piccolissimo. Quello è un trucco, perché è chiaro che se è piccolissimo e ti vedo da qui a lì, in inglese, è un’altra cosa. Però se tu lo vedi non fa nulla, poi quello che hai visto tu, oltretutto è filmato. Però quelli che sono fatti veramente in film, sono orrendi, gente che cammina sui tavoli, gente in divisa militare, ne ho visto uno dove le tre streghe sono infermiere, succede di tutto, di tutto! Quello di Peter O’Toole che tutti hanno stroncato a me è parso il migliore, tra l’altro. Tutti lo hanno stroncato, in Inghilterra riempivano il teatro per andare a ridere, e invece a me è parso il meno peggio. Se ti capita, guardalo, però la fattura è orrenda. Le regie sono mostruose, il sangue, il pomodoro, terribili. Questo\(^{93}\), diciamo, è un po’ come quello di Judi Dench, però hai a che fare con ottanta metri di pubblico. È un po’ così, nero e rosso, però non ti puoi ispirare proprio perché la recitazione in Inglese è un’altra cosa, è tutto comodo. Loro non è che devono

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93 Branciaroli si riferisce alla sua messa in scena del Macbeth. Il soliloquio in lingua originale di Lady Macbeth è, a mio personale giudizio, fortemente ispirato a quello inscenato da Judi Dench nel 1978.
fare come me, raddrizzare la banana. Facciamo un esempio, questa battuta “Se fosse fatto, una volta fatto, sarebbe bene che fosse fatto presto”, fa schifo! Il verbo “fare” è il verbo dell’analfabeta, non ha termini. In inglese è “done” ora, “done” è il suono della campana, infatti si chiama il re “Dun-can”, perché lui fa tutto uno scampanio, che è la campana a morto, un inglese fa “done, were done …”: è fatta. Tu, invece, italiano, devi raddrizzare la banana (recitato) “Se fosse fatto, una volta fatto, sarebbe bene che fosse fatto presto”, devi colorarlo. Lì, no. Però, una volta John Gielgud disse agli italiani “guardate che voi credete di essere i peggiori: non è mica vero. Perché in realtà io ho visto Zeffirelli e noi inglesi, facciamo impressione perché non conoscete l’inglese, come le canzoni rock, vi piacciono perché non capite na’mazza. Al momento in cui voi capite, sentite come quando voi fate Dante, cioè una rottura di palle infinita perché noi siamo prigionieri del verso, non possiamo scappare. Tranne i pezzi in prosa, mentre voi, invece dovendovi arrampicare sugli specchi vengono fuori a volte delle cose che noi non sapremmo neanche lontanamente fare”.
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**VIDEO**

