

# MACBETH



*A GUIDE TO AQUILA THEATRE'S PRODUCTION  
OF THE PLAY BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE*

**AQUILA**  
THEATRE

## SYNOPSIS

Aquila's quintessentially Scottish 'Macbeth' centers on the Highland experience of the 11th century. As conflict surrounding the kingship of Scotland was particularly bloody at this time, our production explores the vicious pursuit of power and at what costs it comes. Aquila's production evokes this time and place by combining an innovative lighting design; modern costumes with Elizabethan influence, Scottish ritualistic movement and music.



Amid storms and thunder, we meet the Three Witches. Soon after, we learn of a battle between Macbeth and the Thane of Cawdor, the treacherous leader of a rebellion against Duncan, King of Scotland. Macbeth and his soldier, Banquo, leave the battlefield and happen upon the Three Witches, who tell Macbeth that he will be the new Thane of Cawdor and "king hereafter." However, they also say that Banquo's descendants, not Macbeth's, will be kings.

Hearing of Macbeth's victory, the King sentences the Thane of Cawdor to death and bestows the title upon Macbeth, confirming part of the witches' prophecy. Macbeth later meets with King Duncan, who announces that his son, Malcolm will be the new Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne. Duncan decides to visit Macbeth at his castle at Inverness, and Macbeth sends word back to his wife, Lady Macbeth.

Back at Inverness Castle, Lady Macbeth reads her husband's letter. When she learns of the King's impending visit, Lady Macbeth resolves to murder him, allowing her husband to usurp the throne. Despite Macbeth's hesitations, she succeeds in convincing him to perform the murderous deed.

Later that night, Macbeth has a vision of a floating bloody dagger on his way to the King's chamber. After carrying out the deed, Macbeth returns, severely distressed and carrying the bloody murder weapons. Lady Macbeth takes them from him and puts them in the hands of the sleeping guards, framing them for the crime.

The next morning, Macduff discovers the King's body and raises the alarm. In the ensuing chaos, Macbeth kills the King's servants framed for the murder. The King's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, sensing a plot, flee the castle, arousing suspicions of their involvement. With no royal heirs left in Scotland, Macbeth is crowned King. Yet still fearing the witches' prophesy, Macbeth sends murderers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. Banquo is killed in an ambush, but Fleance escapes.

Macbeth holds a banquet in his home for his Lords, where he sees Banquo's ghost. Later, Macduff flees Scotland to raise an army, and Macbeth meets again with the witches. The witches summon three spirits: the first is an armed head that warns Macbeth to beware Macduff. The second apparition is a bloody child who prophesies that none of woman born will harm him. The third spirit takes the form of a crowned child with a tree in his hand. The spirit asserts that Macbeth will not be defeated until Birnam Wood moves to fight against him on Dunsinane hill.

Hearing that Macduff has fled to England, Macbeth raids Macduff's castle in Fife and murders his entire family. In England, Macduff and Malcolm meet and decide to lead a rebel army into Scotland. Meanwhile, Lady Macbeth becomes mad with guilt. She sleepwalks, hallucinates blood on her clothes and hands, and unknowingly confesses her guilt.

Malcolm, Macduff and their army march toward Dunsinane to confront Macbeth. They decide to camouflage themselves with branches from the trees in Birnam Wood, fulfilling part of the witches' prophesies. Macbeth arms himself and goes to meet the rebel army. When Macbeth and Macduff confront each other on the battlefield, Macduff reveals that he was not born naturally, but "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb and therefore "not of woman born." He kills Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm the King of Scotland.

# THE CHARACTERS OF

## **MACBETH**

Macbeth is a general in the king's army and the Thane of Glamis until King Duncan makes him Thane of Cawdor. After Duncan's death and the flight of Malcolm and Donalbain, Macbeth reigns as king of Scotland until his death.

## **LADY MACBETH, MACBETH'S WIFE**

What Macbeth lacks in decisiveness, Lady Macbeth makes up for in ambition. Although most famous for her cruelty, the decline of Lady Macbeth is a mysterious and tragic aspect of *Macbeth*.

## **BANQUO, THANE OF LOCHABER**

A general in Duncan's army along with Macbeth. After his murder, his ghost returns to haunt Macbeth.

## **THE WEIRD SISTERS**

The three witches foresee Macbeth's ascent to power and his defeat, as well as the succession of Banquo's line. Their speeches are full of paradox and equivocation.

## **DUNCAN, KING OF SCOTLAND**

A kind and trusting king, Duncan's unsuspecting nature leaves him open to Macbeth's betrayal.

## **MALCOLM AND DONALBAIN**

Although Malcolm and Donalbain seem to have inherited Duncan's fairness, both display a cunning that far surpasses their father.

## **MACDUFF, THANE OF FIFE**

A Scottish nobleman who questions Macbeth's tyrannical rule and refuses to recognize him as king.

## **LADY MACDUFF, MACDUFF'S WIFE**

A kind and motherly foil for Lady Macbeth's lack of feminine sympathies.

## **A PORTER, IN MACBETH'S SERVICE**

The play's only source of comic relief.

## **FLEANCE**

Banquo's son.

## **ROSS**

Macbeth's cousin, Ross is a Scottish noble who eventually turns on Macbeth.

## **ANGUS, MENTEITH, AND CAITHNESS**

Scottish nobles who join with Malcolm and the English forces in opposing Macbeth.

## **LENNOX**

A Scottish noble who gradually questions Macbeth's tyrannical rule.

## **SIWARD, EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND**

As Duncan's brother, he leads the English army against Macbeth.

## **YOUNG SIWARD**

Siward's son, slain by Macbeth in combat.

## **SEYTON, IN MACBETH'S SERVICE**

## **OTHER CHARACTERS**

Hecate, Three Murderers, Macduff's son, Three Messengers, Three Servants, a Lord, a Soldier, a Captain in Duncan's army, an Old Man, an English Doctor, a Scottish Doctor, A Scottish Gentlewoman



THE WITCHCRAFT AND HORROR OF MACBETH HAS ALWAYS FASCINATED AUDIENCES.  
HERE IS **A TIMELINE OF CRITICAL RESPONSES**  
FROM THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY TO TODAY:

p1745

“The arguments by which Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to commit the murder, afford a proof of Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature. She urges the excellence and dignity of courage, a glittering idea which has dazzled mankind from age to age, and animated sometimes the housebreaker, and sometimes the conqueror.”

**SAMUEL JOHNSON**

1836

“there is an entire absence of comedy, nay, even of irony and philosophic contemplation in *Macbeth*,— the play being wholly and purely tragic. For the same cause, there are no reasonings of equivocal morality, which would have required a more leisurely state and a consequently greater activity of mind”

**SAMUEL  
COLERIDGE**

1839

“*Macbeth* wants no disguise of his natural disposition, for it is not bad; he does not affect more piety than he has: on the contrary, a part of his distress arises from a real sense of religion.”

**THOMAS WHATELY**

1906

“Nothing so terrible has been written since the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, and nothing in dramatic literature--not even the slaying of Agamemnon--is depicted with such awesome intensity as the murder of Duncan.”

**ALFRED BATES**

1960

"wicked intention must in the end produce wicked action unless it is not merely revoked by the protagonist's better feelings, but entirely eradicated by his inmost will, aided by Divine grace."

**G.R. ELLIOT**

1990

“A sense of emotional emptiness permeates the play. Lady Macbeth expresses it explicitly soon after the killing of Duncan when she speaks of attaining desire "without content" and of spending all and having "naught"; and it informs *Macbeth's* actions throughout, in the undercurrent of weariness even in his earlier soliloquies, and in the appalling tedium of feeling and spirit that he exhibits in contemplating his later homicides.”

**ARTHUR KITSCH**

1998

“*Macbeth* is a visionary drama, and difficult as it is for us to accept that strange genre, a visionary tragedy. *Macbeth* himself is an involuntary seer, almost an occult medium, dreadfully open to the spirits of the air and of the night.”

**HAROLD BLOOM**



# Shakespearean Vocabulary

**Acheron:** *Hell; one of the rivers in Hades.*

**Apparition:** *A ghost or ghostlike image of a person or animal.*

**Augur:** *To foresee or predict the future.*

**Bodements:** *Omens; a herald.*

**Compunction:** *Feeling of guilt or moral scruple that follows a crime or sin.*

**Dichotomy:** *A division or contrast between two things that have polar or opposite qualities (e.g. good and bad, fair and foul).*

**Dudgeon:** *Ill humor; a deep resentment; a state of intense indignation.*

**Equivocation:** *To say one thing while meaning something different; to use ambiguous language so as to conceal the truth or to avoid categorical statements.*

**Extemporize:** *To improvise; to perform or produce something such as a speech or piece of music on the spot.*

**foison:** *Strength or power;*

**Golgotha:** *The site outside Jerusalem at which Jesus was crucified.*

**husbandry:** *Thriftiness of the conservation of resources. Also the cultivation and breeding of crops and animals.*



John Singer Sargent. *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*. 1889.

**Hyrcan:** *Of or pertaining to Hyrcania, an ancient province of Asia southeast of the Caspian Sea.*

**Incarnadine:** *Crimson or pinkish-red color.*

**Minion:** *Underling or servant of an important person.*

**Multitudinous:** *Very numerous.*

**Rancour:** *Bitter, especially longstanding resentfulness.*

**Regicide:** *The killing of a king.*

**Shoal:** *A shallow area in a body of water, often posing a navigational hazard. Also a large number of fish.*

**Sundry:** *Of various kinds, usually not important enough to be enumerated.*

## The Scottish Play: Theatre Superstitions

In the theatre world, it's considered bad luck for anyone to say the title of *Macbeth* out loud inside a theatre. Instead, actors and directors commonly refer to the Bard's tragedy as "The Scottish Play," for fear of bringing about bad luck, such as weird accidents or even death! In actuality, the origin of this superstition dates back to the beginnings of stock theatre companies. These companies often struggled to remain in business, and if, near the end of their season, they had yet to break even, they would announce a production of *Macbeth*, as it was a crowd favorite and would then, hopefully boost ticket sales. However, many times *Macbeth* would not be enough to save the company and it would end up being their final show before the end of the company. Thus, the fear of *Macbeth* was instilled.

## Ingredients Glossary:

**Adder's Fork:** Forked tongue of an adder, a poisonous snake.

**Blindworm:** Legless lizard common in Great Britain. When fully grown, it is usually about a foot long.

**Eye of Newt:** Eye of a type of salamander (an amphibian with a tail) that lives both in water and on land. In mythological tales, the salamander was a creature that was said to be able to live in fire.

**Fillet of Fenny:** Slice of a snake that inhabits swamps.

**Gall of Goat:** Gallbladder of a goat.

**Maw and Gulf of Ravined Salt-Sea Shark:** Stomach of hungry ('ravined') shark.

**Owlet's Wing:** Wing of a baby owl.

**Scale of Dragon:** Scales of a dragon.

**Tiger's Chaudron:** Tiger's intestines.

## What is Iambic Pentameter?

Iambic Pentameter has:

- Ten syllables in each line
- Five pairs of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables

The rhythm in each line sounds like:

**ba-BUM / ba-BUM / ba-BUM / ba-BUM / ba-BUM**

Most of Shakespeare's famous quotations fit into this rhythm. For example:

**Is this a dagger I see before me?**

**Is THIS / a DAG- / -ger I / see BE- / fore ME?**

Each pair of syllables is called an iambus. You'll notice that each iambus is made up of one unstressed and one stressed beat (ba-BUM).



Alexandre-Marie Colin. *The Three Witches from "Macbeth,"* 1827.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

*Macbeth* says (about the witches), "Infected be the air wheron they ride, And damned all those that trust them!" What is *Macbeth*, in effect, saying about himself?

Compare Shakespeare's presentation of ambition in *Macbeth* versus in *Julius Caesar* or *Richard III*?

*Macbeth* says:

"... I am in blood  
Stepped in so far that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

What does he mean? Does he contradict himself in saying so?

Are there any historic or modern comparisons that can be drawn between Lady *Macbeth* and other notable female figures?

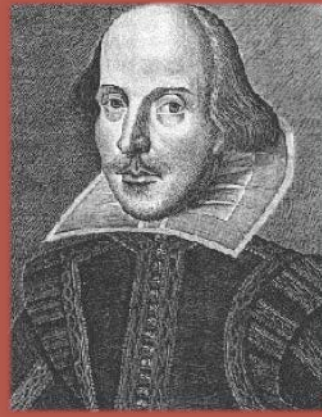
Betrayal and revenge are two recurring themes in *Macbeth*. Choose two relationships in the play to compare and contrast. How do these relationships change throughout the play? What moral, if any, is Shakespeare trying to communicate through these characters? Why do you think he included them in his play? Use text from the play to support your argument.

*Macbeth* is believed to have been written between 1606 and 1607. What was going on in England during this time? Around the world? Create a timeline of major events and important figures and discuss how they might have influenced Shakespeare's writing.

Write a review of Aquila's *Macbeth*. Describe what it was like to watch the play, but be sure to write about more than just the story told by the play. Think about how the play tells its story. Make the experience of watching the play come alive for your reader by writing about several of the play's elements, including costumes, lights, props, and music, as well as how the actors performed in their roles. Let the audience decide for themselves if the play is worth seeing.

*Blood Relations*: The significance of blood in *Macbeth* is huge. Diagram the use and evolution of the word throughout the play.

## a Shakespeare timeline



- 1564 Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, the eldest son of John and Mary Arden Shakespeare.
- 1578 Completes seven years of education at local grammar school.
- 1582 Marries Anne Hathaway.
- 1583 Daughter Susanna born.
- 1585 Twins, a boy, Hamnet, and a girl, Judith, born.
- 1592 Moves to London. Writes Henry VI, Part 1, his first play.
- 1595 The Lord Chamberlain's Men, his acting company, has great artistic and financial success.
- 1596 Hamnet dies at age 11.
- 1597 Buys New Place, the grandest house in Stratford.
- 1599 The open-air Globe Theater, the home of many of Shakespeare's plays, opens in London.
- 1603 Queen Elizabeth 1 dies. King James I is crowned. The Chamberlain's Men becomes The King's Men, playing about 12 performances each year at court.
- 1606 Writes Macbeth
- 1609 The King's Men begins performing indoors at Blackfriars Theater.
- 1610 Retires and moves to Stratford.

*William Shakespeare is considered one of the greatest writers of all time and the greatest of all English dramatists. Scholars and readers alike have marveled that one man could have such a comprehensive understanding of the human psyche. He understood lovers, tyrants, kings and queens, servants, clowns, the lucky, the jealous, and the powerful. He wrote 38 plays, including tragedies, comedies, romances, and histories in addition to 154 sonnets and other poetry. He created a pantheon of unforgettable, timeless and complex characters.*

*Shakespeare set his plays all over the world. Yet, it appears that he never traveled out of his native England nor had a terribly eventful life. He culled and conjured his characters, his plots and his settings in part from books and common lore but most of all from his inspired imagination.*

*Often, genius goes hand in hand with a colorful, and sometimes tortured life. However, it appears from the few remaining relevant documents that this giant among dramatists lived a rather prosaic, unromantic life. Shakespeare did not possess a vivid personality; his friends found him genteel, even self-effacing. He was also extremely practical, a sober man of business. Perhaps, his genius had not time to waste in the real world, so William Shakespeare put all his passion and drama into his work, both as an actor and a playwright. The Romantic poet and critic Samuel Coleridge called him "myriad-minded." He had a gift of insight unsurpassed and the ability to get inside the hearts and minds of all manner of men and women.*



Although Shakespeare's plays were performed at other venues during the playwright's career, the Globe Theatre in the Southwark district of London was the venue at which the Bard's best-known stage works were first produced. The Globe was built during Shakespeare's early period in 1599 by one of his long-standing associates, Cuthbert Burbage.

The original Theatre stood until June 29, 1613, when its thatched roof was set ablaze by a cannon fired in a performance of *Henry VIII* and the Globe burned to the ground. The Globe was reconstructed in 1614, with tiles replacing flammable straw on its partial roof. In 1642, however, a quarter-century after Shakespeare's death, a new, Puritanical and decidedly anti-theater regime assumed power in England and closed down all of the country's theaters. Two years later, the site was leveled

## Shakespeare's Company

We have the names of 26 "Principal Actors" of Shakespeare's company at the Globe, including Richard Burbage, brother to Cuthbert, who was the foremost tragedian of the Elizabethan stage. His roles included *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Richard the III*.

Prior to the Globe's opening in 1599, Will Kemp was the leading comic actor of the Chamberlain's Men. He played the servant Peter in *Romeo & Juliet*, (probably) Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and (possibly) Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays. Later, Robert Armin joined the Chamberlain's Men and became legendary through his wordplay in the roles of Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night* and the Fool in *King Lear*. Shakespeare's name also appears in cast lists, and although there is no indication of the roles that he played, tradition ascribes him two parts: the Ghost of Hamlet's Father and Adam, the loyal, aged servant in *As You Like It*. It seems that Shakespeare's acting was subordinate to his work as a both a playwright and producer.



Prominent Portrayals of Macbeth: William Charles Macready, Orson Welles, Sir Ian McKellen



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## SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE

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...rich and poor alike rubbed elbows in this “microcosm or little world of man”

...capacity between 2000 and 3000 spectators

...most performances happened during the day because there was no artificial lighting

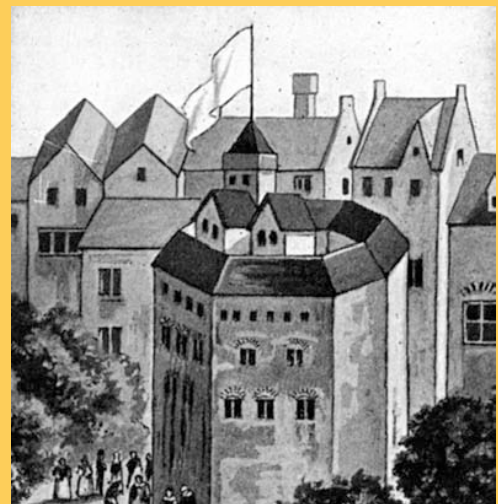
...actors had to shout their lines because the stage was “open-air”

...no background scenery, although costumes and props were utilized

...no curtains and no stagehands besides the actors themselves

...surrounded by a pit where “one-penny” spectators stood and a gallery with seating for “two-penny” goers

...adjacent “tiring” house where costume changes were made



About

# AQUILA THEATRE

Aquila has performed Shakespeare in over 47 states, including off-Broadway in New York City and at international festivals.

The Aquila Theatre Company was founded in London in 1991 by Peter Meineck and has been based in New York City since 1999. Aquila presents a regular season of plays in New York, at international festivals and tours to approximately seventy American towns and cities a year. The name "Aquila" means "eagle" in Latin.

Aquila has a very particular mission to make classical theatre accessible and relevant to everyone. Peter Meineck manages to modernize plays while keeping true to the spirit of the original text.

Encounters with works of art can change people, causing them to view the artwork and the world in a new way. In addition, artworks do not immediately reveal all that is there to be seen. Perception of artworks can be compared to peeling the layers of an onion - they can be seen on many levels and from many perspectives.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
THE SUPREME COURT  
FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY, WASHINGTON DC  
LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL/LA  
NYU SKIRBALL CENTER  
LUCILLE LORTEL THEATRE  
BARUCH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER  
NEW VICTORY THEATER  
EAST 13TH STREET THEATRE  
CLURMAN THEATRE, THEATRE ROW  
45 BLEECKER  
MANHATTAN ENSEMBLE THEATRE  
CLARK STUDIO THEATRE AT LINCOLN CENTER  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL IN GLOBE NEUSS, GERMANY  
EDINBURGH FESTIVAL, UK  
FESTIVAL OF THE AEGEAN, GREECE  
THE BERMUDA FESTIVAL  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL, GYULA, HUNGARY  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL IN GDANSK, POLAND

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM 2010-2011	HAMLET 2005-2006
AS YOU LIKE IT 2009-2010	TWELFTH NIGHT 2005
COMEDY OF ERRORS 2008-2009	OTHELLO 2004
JULIUS CAESAR 2007-2008	THE TEMPEST 2001-2002
ROMEO & JULIET 2006-2007	KING LEAR 1999-2000
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 2006	CORIOLANUS 1994-1995
	MACBETH 1996



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