

**IMPOSSIBLE GRIEF:
MOTIVATION AND INTENTION IN MACBETH**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE
YORK UNIVERSITY,
TORONTO, ONTARIO

SEPTEMBER 2013

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Abstract

This paper considers the issues of identification and motivation in Shakespeare's Macbeth. Proceeding from the proposal that the play allows for a remarkable level of audience identification for the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, considering their heinous acts, reasons for this level of identification are explored. Two events referred to in the text of Macbeth, but preceding the time of the play, are identified as potentially significant motivating factors in the couple's actions: Macbeth's recent experience of intense battle, and the couple's apparent past loss of a child. Supporting textual evidence is presented in addition to third party research into the effects of close combat and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the psychological effects on parents of losing a child. Various staging and design implications, opportunities, and ideas that result from these proposals are explored with direct reference to the author's production of Macbeth in Toronto's High Park.

Dedicated to Marilyn Wells, to L.L.M,
and to all the others who have taught me.

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Introduction

In September 2012, shortly after I received confirmation that I would be directing Macbeth in High Park as my thesis production, I had a conversation with former National Arts Centre director Peter Hinton about the play and my developing vision for it. Hinton asked if I had actors in mind to play the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. I told him that while I was considering various possibilities; all I knew for certain was that both actors had to be convincingly middle-aged. I explained that as a forty-eight year old man wrestling with definitions of success and the nature of ambition and the implications of entering the latter half of my life without children, I felt I had acquired a particular insight into Macbeth. Specifically, I suggested that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's actions are explicable and believable as extreme expressions of the midlife crisis of a childless couple. When I told him this, Hinton's responded, "Yes. Macbeth is the most domestic of the tragedies." These words resonated with me at the time and have stuck with me ever since, both as an astute and illuminating description of this play, and as a guide to the themes I want to emphasize when I bring it to the stage.

The Latin root of domestic is *domus*, or house. Thus the most common denotation we have for the adjective "domestic" is "of the house or household." The Macbeths' first crime is the murder of Duncan, which, very significantly, is committed when the old king is a guest in their house. As Macbeth himself says when he is in the throes of deciding whether he can and will commit the crime, and enumerating the many reasons he should *not* do the deed: "...then, as his Host/ who should against his Murderer shut the doore, /

Not beare the knife my selfe” (1.7.17-19). Macbeth’s words here sum up simultaneously both the extraordinary and egregious violation of taboo that his actions constitute, and also the degree to which these actions are domestic, intimate, close to home. The speech is a manifestation of Macbeth’s essence as a man who knows and feels that what he is doing is wrong, and yet does it anyway, and it raises the two questions that I think are central to any successful production of Macbeth. The first: Why does Macbeth (and, to the extent that she is involved in her husband’s crimes, Lady Macbeth) do the terrible things that he does? And the second: Why do we empathize and identify with him as he does these terrible things?

In this paper I will present and support my answers to these two questions, which I will call the issues of motivation and identification. I will make a case that Shakespeare has created characters in both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who, while they may commit “inhuman” acts, do so for arguably very human and decidedly domestic motivations that are more complicated, more interesting, and more worthy of our empathy and understanding than simple self-serving ambition. I will argue that given the priorities, pressures, and expectations of the world in which the Macbeths live, and given what is revealed or implied about their past history and character, the trajectory of their actions is not simply the doomed inevitability of tragic characters, but rather the human inevitability of people unlucky enough to have suffered a certain sequence of unfortunate events. In the case of Macbeth these events concern first his identity as a returning soldier, and then as a grieving father. In Lady Macbeth’s case they are related to her identity as a mother, either past, present or future.

In the course of this paper I will move between discussion of the text of the play and supporting and dissenting critical responses. I will also address the practical staging implications and opportunities that arise for my production in High Park as a result of my interpretation. And finally I will arrive at the premise, the guiding proposition deriving from and informing these ideas as I begin Macbeth rehearsals on May 24th.

Good and/or Evil

The thing that many people think they know about Macbeth, beyond a passing acquaintance with the plot, is that productions of the play carry a curse of bad luck. Certainly one explanation for this supposed jinx is that the play dabbles in or invokes dark magic, in the person of the Witches. And while I do think that Macbeth is the uneasiest of Shakespeare's plays, and thus the one most likely to trigger unease in the audience, I propose that this quality has more to do with the humanity of its main characters than the supernatural powers of its guest stars. Macbeth makes us uneasy because while acts of "direst Cruelty" (Lady Macbeth, 1.5.53) are committed in the play, Shakespeare actually makes minimal distinction between the good and the evil characters. Macbeth is the only human character that we might be tempted to call evil, and he is undeniably the instigator or committer of these evil acts, and yet we are closest to him. Macbeth is our proxy; it is his journey that we follow, indeed, that we take.

Motivation and Identification

Motivation and the associated factor of intention are the touchstone lines of inquiry and pursuit for actors trained in North American Stanislavski-based acting

techniques. For the purposes of this discussion I will confine myself to the broader issues of what drives Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to do what they do, and what they hope to achieve by their actions. I will leave the line-by-line deduction and attribution of specific intentions to the actor(s), but a consideration of the actor's task is a useful departure point if we allow that in order to discern and construct a coherent pattern of intention for an 'evil-doing' character like Macbeth we must find a way of understanding, if not condoning, how he comes to do what he does.

Arguing against the consideration of the Macbeths as human characters to which we might attribute comprehensible psychological motivation, the critic L.C. Knights said of Macbeth simply that it is "a statement of evil" (Knights 32). Henry Irving, the great 19th Century English actor (and as an actor, one might imagine more cognizant of the ambiguities of human compulsion), described Macbeth as a "villain cold-blooded, selfish, remorseless, with a true villain's nerve and callousness when [he is] braced to evil work and [with] the physical heroism of those who are born to kill" (Furness 471). While I will challenge Irving's assessment, it locates well the basic question of the character; that is, what *sort* of evildoer Macbeth actually is; and the central challenge of portraying him: to explain from where his evil impulses arise.

James Calderwood makes a critical distinction between Macbeth and a Shakespearean villain like Iago, who is "explained by the role he plays" (50) and who does the evil he does as a result of what Samuel Taylor Coleridge deemed "motiveless Malignity" (315). Calderwood suggests that while the Elizabethan audience would see the Devil as the ultimate source and motive behind villains like Iago, Macbeth is "neither

a Vice nor a villain; he is a criminal”, and credits Shakespeare with “having chosen the particularly difficult task of casting a criminal in the role of tragic hero” (50). As a result, the paradox arises that “Macbeth the criminal must perform an act of unquestioned evil while Macbeth the tragic hero somehow retains the sympathy of the audience” (Calderwood 48).

Essential to this distinction between the two possible, and possibly coexisting Macbeths, the hero and the criminal, and to any serious speculation about his motivations, is this question: Has Macbeth always been capable of the crimes we see him commit, or does he change? A.C. Bradley suggests that even prior to the events of the play Macbeth “was exceedingly ambitious,” and says that while he “must have been so by temper,” this innate tendency “must have been greatly strengthened by his marriage” (81). In her essay examining gender constructions in Macbeth, Maria L. Howell asserts of the Macbeths: “Unquestionably they are like-minded in their quest for power”(6). The question that arises in the face of such assertions is, if Macbeth is a man so singularly and selfishly driven, how is it that he is also, as Bradley acknowledges elsewhere, “thought ‘honest’, or honourable...(and)...trusted, apparently by everyone,” and that, “Macduff, a man of the highest integrity, ‘loved him well’” (81)? One might answer that Macduff and the many others who seem to trust and think so highly of Macbeth, are simply mistaken; that they have misread and misjudged him over the years, and now, perhaps at the instigation of the witches, he is simply showing his true colours. Closer to the truth, I think, is Walter Curry’s suggestion that Macbeth contains all these aspects, and that:

His qualities must be considered as innumerable and the motives which actuate him as abundant and inextricable. As a living personality acting in his own world,

he is abstruse, complex, and highly problematic. And to attempt confining him within the limits of a scholarly or critical theory is to follow the methods of scientists who would reduce the infinite contingencies of life to a formula (313).

But Curry goes on to acknowledge that even allowing for the contradictions and complexities of human nature, in the case of Macbeth both the man himself “and others surmise that in some sense a profound alteration of something within him takes place during the progress of the action” (314). And in that “profound alteration” - its cause, its nature, and its consequences – lies the rub.

What Bloody Man?

To determine what is the ‘something’ that Curry identifies, this emergent change, and what might be the cause of it, I will begin by examining how and what we first hear about Macbeth. I believe that the first news we have of the man provides critical clues to both his great strength and a source of his fragility, and to the motivations and the real ‘demons’ at the heart of his actions.

The first human words we hear in the world of Macbeth, after a prologue scene in which we are arguably seeing other-than-human characters, occur in the form of Duncan’s question, “What bloody man is that?” (1.2.1). We are on or near a battlefield, where the spilled blood of men is presumably not in short supply, and where it is undoubtedly hard to distinguish one bloody man from another. But this bloody Captain speaks and distinguishes another bloody man from amongst the rest:

For brave Macbeth (well hee deserves that Name)
 Disdayning Fortune, with his brandisht Steele,
 Which smoak'd with bloody execution
 (Like Valours Minion) carv'd out his passage...(1.2.18-21)

So it is that we first meet Macbeth as a man of action, and that action is killing, which he seems to do very effectively, according to the Captaine's continuing account of Macbeth's encounter with Macdonwald:

Till hee fac'd the Slave:
Which nev'r shooke hands, nor bad farwell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the Nave to th'Chops,
And fix'd his Head upon our Battlements. (1.2.22-25)

Harold Bloom says of Macdonwald's demise: "I cannot recall anyone else in Shakespeare who sustains a death wound from the navel all the way up to his jaw, a mode of unseaming that introduces us to Macbeth's quite astonishing ferocity" (Bloom 530).

The placement of this notably and vividly violent scene at the very beginning of the play suggests that it is important information; it tells us that the world we are entering is one in which, as Jan Kott observes, "Everyone...is steeped in blood" (86). It tells us that Macbeth is a man of effective violent action, and that he is recognized as such. Furthermore, this and the subsequent scenes in which Macbeth is rewarded with more praise and with promotion establish that this identity as a violent man and a killer is, in this society, a successful and approved one.

Violent Identity

Shortly after my discussion with Peter Hinton and well before casting for Macbeth in High Park officially began, I approached an actor named Hugh Thompson about playing the role of Macbeth. I was interested in Thompson because in addition to being a fine actor he brings other strands of experience, presence, and character that are

essential to my imagining of the role. In his twenties Thompson was a nationally ranked middleweight boxer, and at fifty he still has a boxer's physique. He has a particular combination of proletarian charm and physical threat that I find unusual in theatre actors. I wanted an actor who knew what fighting entails, someone who had an understanding of the cost, to the body and the mind, of real combat. Of course the boxing ring is a far cry from the battlefield described by the Bloody Captaine, but it is, like the battlefield, the site of socially condoned violence. This distinction is critical given that Macbeth's crime is not simply that he commits violent acts, but rather that he commits those acts in a way that is not condoned by his society. If we accept that violence is an essential part of both Macbeth's identity and the identity of his society, then we must ask to what degree the man's violent actions later in the play are the inevitable culmination of the way he has been conditioned and (implicitly and explicitly) cultivated by his society.

In his lecture on Macbeth, W.H. Auden begins by considering the question of how Macbeth's evisceration of Macdonwald, and the execution of the treacherous Thane of Cawdor, are morally distinct from Macbeth's murder of Duncan: "A war killing is not murder in that the killer and the killed do not have a personal relationship: each sees in the other a representative of the enemy force" (208). While one might quibble that there is no more deeply personal act than the taking of a life (more on this in a moment), if we insert the word 'pre-existing' before 'relationship' in Auden's sentence, perhaps we can accept this distinction, while recognizing that Macbeth embodies a profound tension between diametrically opposed social expectations and responsibilities. As the late philosopher and former soldier Glenn Gray explained, "The basic aim of a nation at war

is...to distinguish as sharply as possible the act of killing from the act of murder” (Grossman 195). Macbeth’s survival and success as a soldier depend upon his ability to kill effectively, unquestioningly, and without compassion in the service of his king and country. But if he turns those abilities to serve his own personal ends, his identity transforms instantly from hero to villain.

While I do not intend to attribute a subliminal (or otherwise) anti-war moral message to the author of Macbeth, I offer the distinction that James Calderwood makes when he says, “instead of claiming that Shakespeare’s political unconscious is voicing counter-cultural sentiments in Macbeth, I would argue that his artistic conscience is subverting his own more orthodox convictions” (xii). Furthermore, I suggest that, as much as Shakespeare’s artistic conscience, it is his profound understanding of human nature that we should consider as we attempt to look into Macbeth’s heart and mind. If we are seeking an explanation for an apparently sudden and drastic change in the behaviour of a man, behaviour which, as Ted Hughes notes, “suddenly appears from nowhere, against his known character” (240), and that man is recently returned from a fierce and life-threatening battle, we would do well to consider what connection there might be between the two events.

On Killing

In his book On Killing, The Psychological Cost of learning to Kill in War and Society, the psychologist and soldier Lt. Col. Dave Grossman explores “the specific nature of the act of killing: the intimacy and psychological impact of the act...the social

and psychological implications and repercussions of the act, and the resultant disorders (including impotence and obsession)” (xvi). Grossman investigates at length, and throughout human history, the ‘demonstrable fact’, apparently widely known among soldiers and psychologists that, “...there is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it” (4).

Much of Grossman’s book focuses on warfare in the 20th century, but in a chapter entitled “Killing at Edged Weapons Range” he reveals that historically it has been accepted that the most difficult killing to perform, the one to which the human soldier has the deepest natural resistance, is the “close range piercing blow” (121), stating that even the commanders of the notoriously fearsome and effective Roman legions noted serious problem with convincing their soldiers to use such blows (121). Grossman elsewhere explains that to deliver such a blow while face to face with the victim is the apparently most difficult option (127), and that the “intimate brutality” of such an attack “gives every indication of being a circumstance with tremendous potential for psychological trauma” (124). With this in mind I return to Shakespeare’s description of Macbeth’s encounter with Macdonwald: “...hee fac'd the Slave:/ Which nev'r shooke hands, nor bad farwell to him, / Till he unseam'd him from the Nave to th'Chops” (1.2.22-25). Intimate brutality indeed.

The inherent complication and even contradiction in all discussions of the trauma and horror of battle is, of course, the fact that men (primarily) have been drawn to do it as long as we have walked this planet. Aside from the horror is the fact that, as Hugh

Thompson said to me in conversation, “fighting to protect yourself is exciting”. And watching fighting is also exciting. My own training in physical theatre was predicated on the understanding that we respond kinesthetically as an audience when we are watching real physical effort. Here I make the distinction between conventional stage fighting, which often involves simulated effort and faked action, and stage physicality that is created in a way that requires sustained physical effort and real action.

I intend to begin the play in the park with a physical prologue, which will serve as a simulacrum of battle – not with staged fights, but with the real pounding feet and falling bodies of a medieval battlefield. The prologue will begin with the eleven actors walking onto the stage one by one, as if in the moments before a charge into battle. On a pre-arranged signal they will begin to run on the spot, pounding their booted feet on the stage. I have proposed to the production team that the High Park stage be wired with contact microphones that will amplify the sounds of the actors’ boots on the stage. I know from using such effects in the past that the effect on the audience can be electrifying; the first silent moments of any performance have a pregnant suspension, and the sudden amplified report of booted feet is startling and then thrilling, both because of the noise and because full-out running on the spot requires effort, and the audience feels this effort. As the running continues the actors will drop to the floor one by one, as if falling in battle, until only the actors playing Macbeth and Banquo are standing. Once it is established that they are the last men standing, these two will exit in silence. The first text scene of the play will begin from this physical prologue, with the witches manifesting as bodies arising from the battlefield.

The intent of this prologue is to suggest something of the intensity of the battle that has preceded the first scenes of the play, but also to create an experience which draws the audience into a physical identification with the actors even before they speak, and before we begin to see the consequences of that experience for the actors – in this case Macbeth and Banquo.

PTSD

The term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was first coined in the 1970's, and while Grossman asserts that this affliction “has always been with us, but...the erratic nature of its occurrence has made us like the ancient Celts who did not understand the link between sex and pregnancy” (284-85), I am cognizant of the perils of retrospectively assigning past contemporary psychological constructions and motivations to characters created in a social context radically different than our own. But as the psychiatrist and author Jonathan Shay has argued (165-66), Shakespeare himself seems to have had more than a passing understanding of the syndrome, as evidenced by Lady Percy's speech to her warrior husband Hotspur in Henry IV Part 1:

Tell me, sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee
 Thy stomach, pleasure and thy golden sleep?
 Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth,
 And start so often when thou sit'st alone?
 Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks;
 And given my treasures and my rights of thee
 To thick-eyed musing and cursed melancholy?
 In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watch'd,
 And heard thee murmur tales of iron wars;
 (...)
 Of prisoners' ransom and of soldiers slain,
 And all the currents of a heady fight.

Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war
 And thus hath so bestirr'd thee in thy sleep,
 That beads of sweat have stood upon thy brow
 Like bubbles in a late-disturbed stream;
 (...) O, what portents are these?
 Some heavy business hath my lord in hand... (2.3.899-922.)

Compare Hotspur's symptoms to Grossman's description of the effects of PTSD:

"Recurrent and intrusive dreams and recollections of the experience, emotional blunting, social withdrawal, exceptional difficulty or reluctance in...maintaining intimate relationships, and sleep disturbances" (285), and we have one piece of a plausible explanation for why Macbeth's behaviour in the play seems to stray, as Ted Hughes observes, from "his known character" (240). In his comprehensive assessment of Macbeth's contradictions, and the challenges he presents to any easy classification as a classic tragic hero, Robert Heilman describes the remarkable sympathetic tension that Shakespeare achieves in Macbeth's character, and our response to it. Heilman writes, "Our murderer is a man who suffers too much, as it were, really to be a murderer; he agonizes more than he antagonizes" (138). But the fact remains that Macbeth, for all his agonizing, does ultimately act, and when he does his actions are profoundly transgressive, and apparently in contradiction to his own prior character and morality. Is the trauma of battle enough to explain the extremity of Macbeth's departure from his own nature, and from the otherwise civilized norms of his society into the violation of several of its deepest taboos? Conveniently, Shakespeare provides us with a contrasting example in the person of Banquo, who passes through the same battle experience as Macbeth and is similarly tempted by the Witches, but does not subsequently follow the same transgressive path. In the terminology of the scientific method Banquo serves as a control

group; his character and circumstances seem to mirror Macbeth's in essential ways, but significantly his actions do not. So what distinguishes Macbeth; if his preexisting character and experience of battle do not explain his actions, what other possible motivations does the play offer us?

Queen of Hell

One convenient response to the quest for Macbeth's motivation has commonly been to locate the source of evil impulses in the female characters, to lay the blame with the Witches and Lady Macbeth. In that line of reasoning the Witches plant the idea for his actions and then Lady Macbeth drives him *into* action, where his violent inclination – what Henry Irving refers to as Macbeth's "Celtic fervour" (Furness 471) - will take over. As Hughes summarizes this explanation, Macbeth is "possessed by...[Lady Macbeth's]... demonic will, and his own savage inclination..." (240), and while he goes on to question this line of thinking, Hughes insists that "in fact from the very first moment the Witches and Lady Macbeth...appear as the Queen of Hell in blatant, unmistakable form" (242). Hughes makes an erudite argument for this reading, and Gary Wills similarly argues that the Witches represent a truly "diabolic element," without which, he argues, "the story is reduced to that of a murderer getting his just penalty, in place of the struggle for the soul of a nation" (148). I defer to Wills' scholarship and his convincing argument that the element of witchcraft in Macbeth is strongly rooted in the contemporaneous political turmoil – most notably the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 - and the resultant social preoccupations and even panic of which Shakespeare was clearly well

aware. I suggest, however, that we are at least as likely to be drawn in and to identify with the struggle for the soul of a man, as for that of a nation. And whereas I accept that Shakespeare leaves the door open for the Witches and even Lady Macbeth to be seen as malign and corrupting forces, he does not lead us through that door. Moreover, he leaves open other doors to other equally compelling and supportable explanations for the actions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

The Barren Sceptre

I referred earlier to my conviction that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth should be played by actors in middle age. The actors I cast are fifty and forty-eight respectively, and both are vital and fit performers. The intent behind this choice is an attempt to make manifest for a contemporary audience an aspect of the Macbeths' situation that could bear significant weight as a motivating factor for both characters. I refer to the fact that they are a couple apparently without children in a place and time in which having a viable heir was of paramount importance, and at a physical age where producing an heir would very unlikely.

The preoccupation with lineal succession in Macbeth is one of the factors that may be difficult for contemporary North American audiences to fully grasp. The Macbeths' society, and perhaps more importantly, Shakespeare's own, were ones in which, to use Michel Foucault words, "the system of alliance, the political form of the sovereign...and value of descent lines were predominant; a society in which famine epidemics and violence made death imminent, (and) blood constituted one of the

fundamental values” (147). In our own time, at least in Western society, the issue of lineage as both a personal and a broader cultural preoccupation has diminished in importance. That decline may be part of the reason, along with declining infant and maternal in-birth mortality rates, for the widely recognized and closely observed social phenomenon that couples and single women are waiting until later in life to have children. An attendant phenomenon is that of women approaching middle-age and, having delayed pregnancy due to career or other factors, experiencing a certain panic or despair as their biological clocks wind down, and pregnancy becomes more and more difficult to achieve for physiological reasons. Given these realities, and without dismissing the importance of considering the playwright’s original intent, I believe that vital middle-aged actors in the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth can summon effective and appropriate emotional and intellectual association for the audience.

To Have Given Sucke

If we accept that in both the world of the play and of its author the critical importance of lineage and succession is an established and accepted part of the social fabric, we must consider how the Macbeths appear within that fabric. Margaret Omberg points out that “the structure of the play shows Macbeth constantly coming up against one father/son combination after another” (40) and that “all the notable male characters – with the exception of Macbeth himself – are fathers with sons who take an active part in the play” (39). Julie Barmazel observes more pointedly that, “among a cast of principals who appear as parents or children or both...the Macbeths stand alone as childless and

un(re)productive” (120). But are the Macbeths childless? And if they are, have they always been so? Any consideration of the couple’s family status revolves inevitably and eternally around the significance of Lady Macbeth’s declaration to her husband following his insistence in Act 1, Scene 7 that “We will proceed no further in this Businessse” (1.7.39). At what is arguably the peak of her exhortation to him, she declares “I have given sucke, and know/ How tender ‘tis to love the Babe that milkes me”(1.7.71-72). The potency of this statement is undeniable; the pivotal question is whether we take it as proof of Lady Macbeth’s callousness and over-weaning ambition (and thus proof that, as the 19th Century critic William Hazlitt stated, “She is a great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate” (68)), or whether we read it as a moment of profound and revealing vulnerability. I will argue for the latter. I will also acknowledge that attempting to deduce precisely what Lady Macbeth, or more to the point, Shakespeare, is revealing about either her emotional state or the existence of a living or dead child, is exactly the sort of speculation that the critic L.C. Knights was denouncing in his sardonically titled 1933 essay, How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? According to Knights, “a Shakespeare play is a dramatic poem...To stress in the conventional way character or plot or any of the other abstractions that can be made is to impoverish the total response” (18-19). Knights’ words are a proscription that may serve when one is reading the play, but as soon as live actors must speak the words and take the action described, the issues of motivation and intention rise quickly to the surface for both actor and audience. E. A. J. Honigmann has argued that while “The action of the play is the only reality” (6), we must assume that statements about the past that occur within the play

are intended to be part of that reality, and that to “refuse to take account of what is inside the play seems...irresponsible” (6). By the same token, it would seem to me irresponsible as a director to deny an actor, and by extension, an audience, some room for curiosity and even speculation as to the fate of the child to whom Lady Macbeth quite clearly seems to refer.

The critic Marvin Rosenberg makes the clearest and most definitive leap from Lady Macbeth’s apparent assertion that she has had at least one baby, proposing in an “imaginative speculation” (671) that the Macbeths have a living child, and that “all Macbeth’s violence is in the service of a son of his own” (672). But this seems to me a less psychologically, and thus dramatically, fruitful reading of the Macbeths’ status, than the possibility that they have indeed had a child, but have lost it. Alice Fox has written an illuminating and exhaustively researched exploration of the Macbeths’ possible procreative status, and of Shakespeare’s probable intent in suggesting the past or present existence of a Young Macbeth. Fox’s clinically entitled essay “Obstetrics and Gynecology in Macbeth,” presents ample textual and historical evidence supporting a reading in which the Macbeths have lost a child. Fox states that “the infant mortality rate in Jacobean England was enormously high,” that “Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have known the phenomenon of infant mortality intimately,” and that the audience for whom Macbeth was originally written “would have been alert to mere suggestions of a couple’s frustrated attempts to have living issue” (127-128).

What is gained theatrically from the supposition that Lady Macbeth refers to a deceased child? In an attempt to address this question, I return to the early scenes of the

play. The speed of the action in Macbeth has been frequently commented on, and nowhere is that speed more in evidence than in the first act, where the pace at which events transpire and information is transmitted seems to suggest an almost telepathic connection between people in widely removed physical locales. This is especially the case in the first appearance of Lady Macbeth, when she enters bearing the letter from her husband informing her of his encounter with the Weird Sisters and their prophecies to him. There are various ways we can explain the apparent alacrity with which Lady Macbeth seems to divine her husband's dark intentions regarding Duncan, following on the Sisters' prognostications. Certainly one explanation is that she has long-held, though perhaps until now concealed, ambitions to be Queen, and that this is simply the long-awaited opportunity to fulfill those aspirations. And yet she makes no mention, even here in the privacy of a soliloquy, of her own hopes or of the position she herself would attain. Rather she speaks only of her husband, and of her hopes and concerns for him, saying initially, "Glamys thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be/ What thou art promis'd" (1.5. 16-17). She continues with, "yet doe I feare thy Nature/ It is too full o'th'Milke of humane kindnesse/ To catch the neerest way" (1.5. 17-19).

Many critics, in the attempt to maintain a picture of Macbeth in keeping with Irving's assessment of him as a "villain cold-blooded, selfish, remorseless," have accounted for Lady Macbeth's assessment of her husband here through explanations which seem to me both convoluted and unconvincing, and an evident attempt to avoid the possibility that she is actually attributing a significant degree of compassion to Macbeth. R.G Moulton, quoted at length in a commentary on these lines in the Variorum Macbeth,

culminates his argument with the conclusion that “the details do amount to the sense for which I am contending, [namely] that Macbeth’s character is a type of commonplace morality, the shallow unthinking man’s lifelong hesitation between God and Mammon” (71). Less damning than Irving’s assessment, perhaps, but hardly the characterization of a tragic hero.

Suspending for a moment the attempt to derive from these lines a definitive reading on Macbeth’s character or morality, and keeping in mind that ‘th’Milke of humane kindnesse’ has become a familiar phrase, even a cliché to modern ears, I propose that we imagine ourselves hearing these words for the first time, without foreknowledge of the play or the events to come. If we do so, what image does the phrase most readily invoke, with its two nouns, ‘milke’ and ‘kindnesse,’ joined by the adjective “humane”? A nursing infant, I would suggest.

This apparently incongruous (in the context of the letter she has just read) mention of nursing a child is followed by Lady Macbeth’s reference to her husband as “not without Ambition, but without/ The illnesse should attend it” (1.5. 21-22) - not exactly the “true villain’s nerve and callousness” that Irving described – and four lines later, by the statement, “Thould'st have, great Glamys, that which cryes” (1.5.26). The following lines - “Thus thou must doe, if thou have it” (1.5.27) - certainly modify this strange construction to some degree, but what we are nonetheless initially left with is the information that Macbeth would like to have “that which cryes.”

These are my own examples of a phenomenon noted by many critics and readers: that of the ubiquity of baby and birth imagery in Macbeth. Citing many other examples,

Alice Fox argues that the recurrent use by both Macbeth and his Lady of this vocabulary of “obstetrics and gynecology” in “contexts unrelated to procreation” suggests that images of infants children are “permeating their very mode of thought and discourse” (128), which she in turn posits is “the natural legacy of a history of frustrated attempts at having living issue” (129). While some of Fox’s examples may require a specialized historical or medical knowledge that most audiences cannot be expected to possess in order to be fully grasped or even registered, there are numerous images and references in the play that transcend their specific and historical and cultural context. I will detail here a few more of my own that I think shed light on Lady Macbeth, and push open the door to a substantially richer and more complex view of her persona and motivations.

I return to Lady Macbeth as she utters what are perhaps, after her imprecations to the imagined bloodstains on her hands in Act 5, her most famous, or infamous, words.

When she is informed of her husband’s imminent arrival, she begins:

Come you Spirits,
That tend on mortall thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the Crowne to the Toe, top-full
Of direst Crueltie: make thick my blood,
Stop up th'accesses, and passage to Remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keepe peace betweene
Th'effect, and it. (1.5.50-57)

How do we account for the speed with which we have moved from Macbeth’s apparently exuberant account of the Weyward Sisters’ prophecy and his loving declaration of devotion, “My dearest partner in Greatnesse” (1.5.11-12), to Lady Macbeth’s dire and disturbingly protracted and detailed oath? As I’ve made clear, the idea that her oath is proof of some preexisting or imminent demonic affiliation seems to

me the most sensational and superficial reading of these lines. What other explanation is there for the extremity of the imagery and apparent emotional tenor of Lady Macbeth's speech? It could be accounted for simply as a dramatic compression, a concession to the same requirement that allows Shakespeare to condense historical events of several years into what feels like a span of months at most. But keeping in mind Alice Fox's assertion that it is "indicative of a habitual association that Lady Macbeth employs gynecological language when not explicitly discussing procreation" (128), I prefer to speculate on how and why it is that Lady Macbeth is so ready to make this appeal to the spirits; and to consider where her thoughts and preoccupations might have been of late.

"Make thick my blood," and "That my keene knife see not the wound it makes," with its invocation of the woman's 'invisible wound,' are visceral evocations of both menstruation, the very symptom and manifestation of a woman's fertility that Lady Macbeth is here seeking to abjure, but also of menopause, the natural cessation of that fertility and all its associated potential. I imagine a Lady Macbeth who is within sight of menopause, who has had and lost at least one child and has been confronting and contemplating for some time the possibility that she and the husband she loves, and with whom she lives in a society that highly values lineage, will remain childless to the end of their days. In this woman's mouth words that evoke the image of her thickened blood and stopped-up access acquire an even deeper resonance.

Is it contradictory or perverse to suggest that a woman who has lost a child and/or remains desperate to have a child should now be calling on higher powers to take away her fertility? Why not fall to her knees and pray to brighter gods for an heir? In response I

ask that we consider contemporary studies of bereaved parents, particularly those who have lost infant children, which suggest that “it is not uncommon for a mother to be particularly angry with her own body for betraying her” (Miller 3). Furthermore, Alice Fox argues compellingly that the “language and imagery used by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are predominantly derived from the phenomenon of miscarriage,” and that “were Lady Macbeth to have miscarried, as their childlessness could imply, she and Macbeth would reasonably fear a recurrence in any subsequent pregnancy, for a woman’s previous obstetric experience was considered a reliable predictor of the future” (130). But even without this specialized information, if we simply accept that the question of the Macbeth’s child or children is a “relevant issue in the development of the plot and the destiny of the main characters” (Omberg 39), and that Lady Macbeth’s mention of her nursing child strongly suggests that a deceased child lies buried somewhere in this couple’s past, then we can proceed to ask how such a history might affect the destiny and disposition of these characters.

The Impossible Grief

The loss of a child is for obvious reasons one of the most traumatic events that can befall a human couple. Researchers in the social sciences assert that the death of a child, sometimes referred to as “the impossible grief” (Miller 1), may be the “greatest tragedy that a parent will ever have to face”, that “this loss is unlike any other” and that “the grief experienced by parents following the loss of a child is reported to be particularly intense, complicated and long lasting,” in part because, beyond the

substantial grief of losing another loved one, “losing a child is not congruent with the natural order of death” (Miller 2).

In a play replete with references to violations of natural order, presenting a world where “faire is foule, and foule is faire” (1.1.10), we are presented with a couple as central characters and given suggestions that they have suffered their own traumatic experience with a profound upheaval of natural order – the loss of a child. If we trust that human psychology exhibits any historical continuity, and our continued response to Shakespeare’s work suggest that it does, we can assume that the Macbeths, like a contemporary couple in a similar situation, are experiencing immense and confusing despair. Imagine the husband and mourning father of this pair, until now a celebrated soldier and highly respected nobleman. He is not a man of great intellect or introspection, but he has been a powerful, vital and decisive man, who is now experiencing “a great sense of isolation... hopelessness... and loss of control” (Miller 3), at an age when men are, by nature, already frequently prone to questioning their purpose and destiny. And lest we dismiss the mid-life crisis as an exclusive phenomenon of modern affluence and excessive psychological introspection, we can turn to Dante, writing almost three hundred years before Shakespeare, and the first lines of The Inferno, where the author and narrator describes his state at midlife:

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear. (Canto 1, 1-6)

I imagine Macbeth, struggling inarticulately with these burdens through his own particular dark forest, becoming remote and incommunicative with his wife, perhaps even sleeping separately. Now he is called to battle, going off to fight at a time when battle was unavoidably an “intimately brutal” affair, leaving his wife alone at a time when communication would be slow or nonexistent. She would be left to wonder if he would ever return, or if in the throes of his despair at the loss of their child, he might be content to suicide by battle. Perhaps she spends days or weeks alone, awaiting word from or about him, and replaying endlessly the recent and tragic events of their lives, the long silences that ensued after the burial of their child. She is a highly competent and resourceful woman, but she is confronting an intensified version of a situation that many middle aged women face; struggling with a sense that while her energy and abilities are at a peak, her husband and lover is receding into a remote and hopeless withdrawal leaving her feeling helpless to plan or move forward.

And then she receives a letter. A letter which tells her not only that her husband is blessedly alive, but also that the powerful, vital, and exciting version of the man she married seems to have returned. In his letter he speaks of the future with a tangible excitement and he calls her his “dearest partner in Greatnesse.” She is overjoyed. And then almost simultaneously she is terrified. She knows now, especially after the terrible loss they have suffered together, how fragile life is, and how fragile *he* is, this man she has devoted her life to. She can no longer hope for a child to restore and sustain them; she must seize this plan, the plan that he has intimated subtly but clearly in his letter, and she must make this *plan their child*. And as a mark of her faith in that plan, and in her man,

and in their love and future life together, she knows blindingly and instantly, with the clarity we only experience a few times in our lives, that she must make a sacrifice.

Come you Spirits

The sacrifice that Lady Macbeth makes, calling upon forces she has never before countenanced or even consciously considered, is to let go of the hope of a future child, in the hopes that she and her husband will be granted a present.

Come to my Woman's Brests,
And take my Milke for Gall, you murth'ring Ministers,
Where-ever, in your sightlesse substances,
You wait on Natures Mischiefe.

Come thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoake of Hell,
That my keene Knife see not the Wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peepe through the Blanket of the darke,
To cry, hold, hold. (1.5.58-66)

The true nature of Lady Macbeth's terrible bargain is tangible in her words, rendering it explicitly clear what she is giving up. If we fail to "recognize that what she is summoning up represents to her the most horrendous of acts" (Fox 138), then the human cost of this scene, with its deep undercurrent of pathos, is lost and we are left instead with a horror movie, a 'simple' demonic invocation. When she says "take my Milke for Gall," Lady Macbeth is making, in the most Old Testament, Abrahamic sense, a sacrifice: "That my keene knife see not the wound it makes." In the final words of her oath we see, vanishing in the distance like Eurydice receding before Orpheus's anguished gaze, the baby she will now never hear or hold: "Nor Heaven peepe through the Blanket of the darke, / To cry, hold, hold." Again, if we remove these nouns from their context and utter

Do's unmake you. (1.7.64-70)

I intend to stage this scene so that this accusation seems about to drive Macbeth from the stage, until Lady Macbeth's summoning of the image of her nursing child stops him in his tracks. Macbeth must be shaken that she has mentioned their child, even before she proceeds to the culmination of the image; his reaction to Lady Macbeth's words is as important and revealing as her delivery of them. The dialogue leading to this moment should proceed with a building urgency and momentum, which will be interrupted by her invocation of their great loss. This is a moment of profound vulnerability and revelation for both characters and Lady Macbeth's physical action will be deliberate and recognizable –the slow bringing of an infant to her breast. As she continues, "I would, while it was smiling in my Face/ Have pluckt my nipple from his bonelesse Gummess/ And dasht the Braines out, had I so sworne/ As you have to this" (1.7.73-76), we must see and feel what these words cost her, and what they reveal of her calculated desperation to save her husband and their life together. Her continuation of the physical action will be executed in fierce slow motion as she is describing the terrible act. Macbeth's action in response must be of a similar gravity, attempting to stop her hands from committing this action and falling to his knees in the attempt.

This scene is a turning point for Macbeth. Although he continues to agonize about his actions, this is when he moves into the mode of action and increasing certainty in which he will continue to operate for the rest of the play. It is here that he decides to step fully into the river of blood, and he does so from the ground zero of this moment of truth with his wife, a moment of shared acknowledgment of their loss. When he says, "Bring

forth Men-Children only” the physical tableau will be one of collapse, even submission. Significantly, this is the point in the play when the Macbeths are at their closest and most complicit –from this moment on the distance between them grows with each of Macbeth’s progressively more extreme acts.

I mention the specific nature and composition of the physical actions in this scene because they will echo and recur elsewhere in the play. In the attack on Lady Macduff and her children in Act 4 Macbeth himself will appear as one of the murderers, and when he takes Lady Macduff baby from her arms, he will replicate his wife’s action as described above. As Lady Macduff attempts to stop Macbeth and take back her infant she will replicate Macbeth’s action and position as he attempted to stay his wife’s hands in the earlier scene. The location and orientation of these scenes on the stage will be identical. This example approaches the bolder level of imagery and staging on which the lost child theme will occur in the production, and much of this will emerge in the three Witches’ scenes, as they are the characters that connect most directly to Macbeth’s loss.

The Witches

Macbeth’s real tragedy consists in the meaning of all he has lost...For him there can be no more communion with his human kind at banquets. He will lose the one person he truly loves...he has lost the innocent sleep which he murdered and the solace of labour used for the King. More terrible are the spiritual losses...and above all the pain of loss, carrying with it the death of renown and grace, and ultimately, of human feeling. (Jorgenson 214-215)

The Witches in my staging of Macbeth are born of loss. They are an embodiment of the great hole that battle and the loss of a child have left in Macbeth. In the edited text

I will be using for the park production, the lines spoken by the Witches will be significantly reduced, and at least some of the lines that they do have will be spoken by the recorded voices of children. In their first appearance they will arise from the battlefield prologue scene described earlier, from the very bodies that have fallen in battle, but their physical actions will be based on the actions of women in delivery, nursing mothers, and midwives. To this end I will be asking the actors in these roles to find images of such women, and to create action scores from those images. This is an effective technique I have often used to create an original movement vocabulary. In the case of the Witches there is ample opportunity to employ such a vocabulary in an evocative and disturbing choreography; unified at times and individually distinct at others. Given the familiarity of many of the Witches' lines, such particular and specific action can also be an effective way of allowing us to hear their words anew.

The Witches' costumes have been designed in such a way that each of them can gather the fabric at the front of their cloaks into a bundle resembling an infant-in-arms. Thus, when Macbeth and Banquo first encounter them in Act 1 the Witches will appear to be three women with baby at breast, but when Macbeth hails them with "Speake if you can: what are you?" (1.3.51), their bundles will fall away. Their subsequent gestures will then anticipate Lady Macbeth's action when she declares, "I have given sucke..." a few scenes later. In addition, the actors playing the Witches will wear half masks, concealing their eyes and the upper portion of their faces, but leaving their mouths visible. Their words are important, but their identities are not.

When Macbeth returns to the Witches in Act 4 Scene 1, they will in fact come to him, appearing in his dining hall. In my edit of the text the final scenes of Act 3 and the first scenes of Act 4 have been reordered such that immediately following the banquet scene the Witches will appear in the debris of the interrupted party. Moments after Macbeth and Lady Macbeth exit, the Witches will rise up from the stage trapdoor beneath the banquet table. They will bear with them a wooden cradle, which will serve as the cauldron for their conjuring. Macbeth will re-enter the hall and call upon them, and from the cradle will arise a child puppet, a frail and waif-like little creature, operated by the witches themselves. This puppet child, animated by its witch midwives, will then perform the apparitions and prophecies that proceed to transfix, reassure and terrify Macbeth. The same cradle will then remain on stage for use in the home of Lady Macduff. In the course of the scene between her and Young Macduff, Lady Macduff will lift an infant bundle from the cradle, and when the murderers enter, she will be bearing it in her arms. As described above, Macbeth himself will appear in this scene and the infant child will die at his hand.

Macbeth's replication of his wife's actions from Act 1 serves to confirm that both parents have now sacrificed their memory and hope of a child. Lady Macbeth's action is symbolic and Macbeth's is concrete but for both of them the action represents a murder of hope, (much as Macbeth says he has murdered sleep in Act 2, Scene 2) and with that act they each sacrifice an essential part of their humanity. The recognition of that sacrifice affects them differently; Lady Macbeth is unable to live with it, while Macbeth

recognizes that although he lives, he is fundamentally and forever separated from the rest of humanity. As he states in Act 5:

Seyton, I am sick at hart,
 (...)I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
 Is falne into the Seare, the yellow Leafe,
 And that which should accompany Old-Age,
 As Honor, Love, Obedience, Troopes of Friends,
 I must not looke to have... (5.3.27-34)

Macbeth's recognition of his separateness is not news to us, and his apparently resigned, even relieved acceptance of his state suggests that this is not a recent realization for him. Indeed, from his first soliloquy, when he clearly recognizes that killing Duncan will be a violation of his own fundamental duties as the King's subject and his kinsman, he seems to anticipate his path leading him away from the natural catalogue and file of men (as he describes to it in his Act 3, Scene 1 speech to the murderers). His Act 5 acknowledgment that he cannot expect to age as other men do, and his strange, almost poignant assertion that he has lived "long enough" simply confirms what has been suggested in many different ways by his own and other voices since the first scene of the play. From the Witches' declaration that "faire is foule, and foule is faire," (1.1.10), to Lennox' description of "lamentings heard i'th' Ayre" (2.3.70) and the "feverous" earth (2.3.76), to the Old Man and Rosse's list of strange natural phenomena in Act 2, Scene 4, we are given ample and vivid evidence that this is a world out of balance. Certainly Macbeth's commission of regicide is the tipping point in this imbalance, the great rupture in the social fabric, but I propose that the tremors that led to that rupture began earlier, and on a more intimate, domestic level. Thus the premise I have arrived at for this production posits a specific and very personal origin for those tremors: "The death of a

child disrupts the balance of nature.” “Nature” here refers to both the natural order of things, but also to the nature of this man, Macbeth.

Conclusion

As is the case with any interpretation, I make certain assumptions and even presumptions in support of this reading of what motivates Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, but I do so with great respect for the text and in pursuit of a structure, a matrix of cause and effect and human motivation that seems both convincing and playable. While I may diverge to some degree from Shakespeare’s original intent (inasmuch as that can ever be determined), I maintain that this approach is fully supported by the play’s text, and allows for a staging of the play which is at once coherent, nuanced, and contemporarily relevant. It is also one which allows us to identify with the Macbeths, to see them as flawed and tragic, but human. Alice Fox cites the words of the English actor and director Glen Byam Shaw, who directed Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the 1955 Stratford-upon-Avon production of Macbeth, which Fox calls “the most successful of all modern productions” (127). In his notebook Shaw describes his own imaginative speculation, in which he “capitalized on a presumed past for which he cheerfully admitted he had little evidence” (Fox 127), upon which he based his understanding of Macbeth: “Apart from his burning ambition I feel he has a deep sorrow that gnaws at his heart, and I think it is due to the fact that his only son died soon after it was born. He never speaks of it, & we only know about it through what his wife says in the terrible scene they have together before the murder” (Shaw 74).

In my initial discussions with the set designer for the upcoming production, the words I used to describe the physical world I was imagining for the play were austere and barren. Harold Bloom writes, “Macbeth seems less set in Scotland than in the Kenoma, the cosmological emptiness of our world as described by the ancient Gnostic heretics” (Bloom 518). For the Gnostic thinkers the Kenoma was our world re-perceived as a void, at once masked and defined by the material but transitory phenomena that surround and preoccupy us. This concept suggests the order of barrenness I was envisioning for the *Macbeth* set. With the set designer I have chosen a few essential objects – stools, a bell, a spare banquet table - which serve as masks for the underlying emptiness, much as the Witches’ masks conceal their identity as manifestations of loss. Of course the true emptiness lies within the Macbeths; an encroaching emptiness that is the result not of their place of habitation, but of the defining loss of their lives –the death of their child. By delving into their suggested pasts, and attempting to identify the true nature of their choices, and the motivation behind those choices, I believe we can see this couple not as striving monsters who have always inhabited a barren and loveless landscape, but as human creatures who inhabit a world which we know is reachable from our own.

This is the brilliance of *Macbeth* as a work of art, and the source of its uneasy magic, which is at once deeply strange and strangely familiar. Peter Hinton’s observation of the play’s domestic nature alludes to this familiarity, which is akin to the experience of a dream in which you are in a place which seems quite unfamiliar and then, when you turn a corner or simply turn your head, suddenly is revealed to be your childhood home. Through the paradox of this strange familiarity Shakespeare leads us not to the distancing

question “How could a man act this way?” but instead leads us to ask of ourselves, “In similar circumstances, might not I act in this way?”

Journal Entries

These are excerpts from the directing journal I kept between September 2012 and July 4th, 2013, the day after the opening of Macbeth. Some entries are complete for the date indicated and others are partial. Partial entries are indicated with an ellipsis (...). These entries have been edited, but not substantially altered, for clarity, concision, and relevance.

Tuesday September 25, 2012

Peter Hinton's observation about Macbeth being the "most domestic of the tragedies" makes so much sense to me. This is why it so affects us – there is a remarkable intimacy about it – the bald exuberance and uncertainty that one expresses in the privacy of home, the sense that they are all in their pajamas and nightshirt when Duncan is murdered.

There is no other couple like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare – the intimacy, the sense of a history together, the attraction and the loss – the child they had that died (?) the feeling that this is their only chance. Bonnie and Clyde if they had lived...

Monday October 1, 2012

Act 4, scene 1, Macbeth's meeting with the witches – there is a change here in his relationship with them: a familiarity and a compulsion to return. It's like someone with an intense new addiction – an illicit affair or crack or porn or power – the temptation, the need to return for another fix. Like reading your lover's email – the feeling of advantage and secret knowledge is irresistible, even as you know it is consuming you (...) The

shocking sight. Primal, and this translates into the energy of the shouting, so that it is not sober – it's slightly crazed, a cathartic release of tension...

Very few words at the end. What if the final words we hear are "Haile King of Scotland," shouted by the bloody Macduff and echoed by the others, and repeated and repeated and repeated? Has he become Malcolm's bulldog or has he lost his mind?...

Tuesday October 16, 2012

Watching Bergman's film The Magician. In the scene where the dying actor is talking to Max Von Sydow (the Magician), shortly before he (the actor) dies:

"One goes step by step by step by step into the darkness. The movement itself is the only truth." Is this what Macbeth comes to believe? There is a kind of nihilistic Buddhism to his conviction, his relentless, ruthless faith in the present.

Thursday November 29, 2012

From an email to Renee, Lindsay and Victoria, the lighting, set, and costume designers:

Working on my edit of Macbeth, and thinking more about the idea of these doors. I think their potential power and importance is huge - they are a symbolic reminder of the Macbeth's first great crime; his killing of Duncan, and the way in which that murder is a violation of the natural order, of the ancient code of hospitality - Macbeth kills Duncan within the doors of his own house after having received him under his protection as host. As Macbeth himself says in Act 1, Scene 7:

He's here in double trust;
 First, as I am his Kinsman, and his Subject,
 Strong both against the Deed: Then, as his Host,
 Who should against his Murderer shut the door,
 Not bear the knife my self.

The idea really excites me that we use these doors then as a fulcrum for much of what happens scenically as possible. In the transition between Act 1, Scenes 4 and 5, we move from a field or heath somewhere to Macbeth's castle and Lady M. enters reading a letter from him. This would ostensibly be where the doors first appear - I imagine Lady M. walking on slowly with letter in hand as the doors are swung into a closed position behind her....

Sunday December 9, 2012

The opening scene I am imagining: The Taiko drum playing a heartbeat, very softly to begin. One actor walks onto the stage and begins to step/march, and the others join into a formation. It builds in volume – by the end it should be thunderous, and then they all drop to the floor, as if stricken...

Saturday January 12, 2013

From an email to the designers:

I spent Wednesday and Thursday with Peter Hinton working through the text. It really helped in clarifying some of my ideas, including those for design, though more costume than anything else.

But just so you know what I'm thinking:

Do you know the paintings of Odd Nerdrum? You can see them here:

http://www.nerdruminstitute.com/on_paintings.php

Particularly those of the 80's and 90's (you can view them there by decade).

Nerdrum's paintings seem to have elements of Breughel and Renaissance painting mixed with something contemporary.

And, in one word: Kilts. Really. I don't mean authentic Scottish tartan kilts, but some version of our own. Kilts and boots. Maybe the kilts are leather or dark fabric. Or maybe some version of tartan that we like...

But I love the nod to the source of the play. And they'd be great in the summer.

And they can be sexy. I guess we'd need to decide what's underneath them...

Tuesday February 5, 2013

Callbacks for Lady Macbeth and Macbeth: Hugh Thompson and Ryan Hollyman for him, and Pippa and Jane for Lady Macbeth. The strongest and clearest moment was between Hugh and Pippa – instant electricity. Ted and I both saw it, and Kim said afterwards “Okay I see what you mean about his presence.”

I am sure about Pippa. I know Hugh will be a challenge but I see no choice. Ryan’s reading for Macduff was so much more what I imagined than was his Macbeth. He seems like an actor to me, not a warrior...

Wednesday May 22, 2013

Ted’s Shrew rehearsals started yesterday, but mine don’t begin till Friday, so this week I am having some secondary rehearsals before I have had a read through. Pippa is so ready to do this – a live wire with an amazing emotional connection to the role. She’s vibrating inside it. Hugh’s more of a challenge – does not have her technique, and is sometimes defensive. He’s afraid and proud – afraid he can’t do this, and aware that I had to fight for him – and also believes that he has a particular understanding of this part as a former fighter. He’s physically so powerful but with very little grace – or rather, very little confidence in his grace.

No question he understands the text, but can be general...

Friday May 24, 2013

First day went well, I think. The read-through was weird – fine but inevitably anticlimactic, and strange to have actually worked on some scenes already, on their feet, and then to hear them pop up in the middle of the very raw first pass at other scenes...

Concerned with Hugh's somewhat erratic reading – he goes to a shout which is ungrounded, the sudden volume which I always distrust when I think it's a choice made by an actor who is listening to himself and thinks it will be a surprising and 'interesting' choice, but it is unconnected to what precedes it.

From my notes for the talk with which we began the day:

Any performance of a play credited to Shakespeare is a confrontation with an extraordinary axis of expectation and knowledge ranging from those who know nothing of the play and perhaps find it difficult to follow the language, to those who know (or think they know) **Everything** about the play and have very definite expectations of how it should be done.

Emphasize the singularity of the thing, the experience we are creating. This text we are using is seriously edited – there is no fat on the play to begin with, so what is left is beyond lean. And it has never been done before, seen before, heard before, by any ears. Ours today will be the first.

The audience, as readers of our performance, have only the action and sound manifest before them – there is no past or future, there is only the instant. We must excite and engage them so that they feel, to elaborate on Lady Macbeth's words, both the past and the future in the instant.

We are in the instant.

The park is a uniquely challenging theatrical situation in this city, and it is theatre in a very pure and ancient form. Because it's outside in a public place. And because it is free. Free: Show up with your blanket and you get to watch and listen. Participate. And it is also the most deeply **social** theatrical context in the city, with the possible exception of the cabaret at Buddies.

And it is, because of all that, curiously and perhaps inadvertently but inherently political.

At a time when the distance between rich and poor is getting wider this is a place where anyone can come and all must arrive on foot, and where no one is dressed up, and all must sit in contact with the earth, undivided from each other by income or the neighbourhood or size of house in which they live or the car they drive, and watch this story unfold in the company of their fellow citizens.

So this seems to me an appropriate place to tell this story that I think and hope will provoke us not to say “How could this man do these terrible things”, but rather to ask ourselves “under what circumstances might I do such a thing?”

Saturday May 25, 2013

First day on our feet. We began with the prologue scene – the same shape as at York with the actors walking on as if to gather ‘round the campfires – the campfires I imagine to be the red witches costumes arranged in piles – and then the silence in which they anticipate an attack. It was a great way to start – they have to gallop in place, full out, for several minutes and it seemed to get everyone jazzed and excited, me included.

However, I am struck by their varying levels of understanding of physical engagement and concerned at Hugh/Macbeth’s physical behaviour here. He doesn’t use his knees naturally, which I assumed as a former boxer he would, and similarly his eyes – sometimes he’s acting as if he’s seeing but not seeing...

Monday May 27, 2013

Tommie is getting Rosse’s slipperiness, but overplaying it right now. I have to be patient with this - they are all struggling to find what I am suggesting – to find a way to connect it to something they understand of course. The trick is making that leap and then allowing the understanding to follow...

So much of their talk of psychology and motivation and back story and “why do I do this?” seems to me both reductive – with regards to how it purports to represent the way we are motivated and take action (or don’t) as human beings - and all too often limiting in terms of what it allows them to actually do. I think it can actually block spontaneity and impulse because they are attempting to restrict themselves to choices that they understand. Why do we do what we do, and inasmuch as we may think we know why we did what we did, how often are we deluded, in denial, completely clueless as to our own motivations?...

Sound: Excited about early discussions with Lyon Smith, the sound designer. I gave him the railway spikes and stones I used for sound score at York and he is keen to play with them. Also played him the Serbian folk song I played at the read through – he’s into it.

Wednesday May 29, 2013

It’s so fast, the way I’m pushing them. I want to get the whole play sketched out and blocked (I hate that word – the very word suggests it is blocking us) by Monday the 6th or Tuesday the 7th. This means me making a lot of decisions for them without a great deal of exploration and discussion. They seem game, but they are also struggling to make choices of their own.

So many aspects of this shortened process militate against the actors taking possession of the work. They are disempowered at every turn – their props do not belong to them, nor do their costumes, nor does their time. I can’t help contrasting this with the

extraordinary sense of ownership and empowerment I felt in Primus – building my own stilts, making and finding my costume, driving the tour truck. It is a different system/world entirely and one must assume they are in it because they chose it. But this question of agency is critical. And I see it everywhere, in the bigger world the encouragement to apathy or passive acceptance, the assurance that those in charge have things well in hand. And this is a job for them, of course.

Friday May 31, 2013

My birthday and a great evening at the Taiko drumming studio. Lyon and Wes (assistant Sound designer) and Jacquie (assistant director) drove out to Scarborough to record taiko drumming with Akemi Akachi. This was one of my first instincts for the show – that I wanted taiko drumming and indeed an actual taiko drummer to be part of the sound score, especially for the battle scenes. Akemi was great – we recorded a whole bunch of sounds – the smaller *shime* drums and the bigger drums as well, in addition to *atarigane* – the little brass bowl/chime, and the claves. The drumming is right – exactly as I remembered from my taiko drumming classes in Winnipeg and San Francisco – it hits you in the gut, and the particular smack of the taiko sticks on the cowhide feels distinctly visceral – it's not musical, it's deeper than that, or less....considered or artful than that.

Monday June 3, 2013

Our first day back in primaries and it's feeling okay, BUT after watching the early scenes in Act 1 – the Prologue and the following scenes, especially between Banquo and

Macbeth, I can now articulate an uneasy feeling I've been having about the PTSD angle on Macbeth. Whenever we emphasize this it seems to me that that two things happen: 1. Hugh becomes paralyzed. That is, he becomes a man incapable of action, and of course Macbeth must not be that. 2. (Maybe this is the same thing) We get stuck in the past; that is we see a man preoccupied and traumatized with something we have not seen and cannot know, and that feels deadly. If the events he is responding to were part of the play it might be different, but they're not.

The prologue is the ostensibly the battle, and yet this scene is triumphant and thrilling, and Macbeth and Banquo survive and emerge victorious, and perhaps if the circumstances were different we could have the best of both worlds – have the scene be both triumphant and traumatizing - but I begin to realize that this sort of subtlety is not really possible on that stage. As we work it feels right that those initial scenes between Banquo and Macbeth be defined by their ease and camaraderie together, NOT by Macbeth's struggle with inner demons. Furthermore if he has these inner demons at the beginning of the play they risk taking the space that is needed for the demon of the imagined murder.

It is enough that Macbeth has buried within him the trauma of the loss of their child waiting like an unexploded grenade. The meeting with the witches and the spectre of becoming King – but a king without an heir – is what pulls the pin on that grenade.

Saturday June 15, 2013

Last day in the hall before we move to the park, and we did a run through, up till mid-Act 5. A talk with Hugh before we started about using the audience, making eye contact and avoiding the 'eyes over our heads' state that he sometimes tends to. In the run, when he did this the effect was immediate and heartening, his presence became immediately more tangible and words became more specific.

Matthew [Jocelyn, Artistic Director of Canadian Stage] was present, as he has been more and more, and afterwards talked with me about replacing Hugh as Macbeth. On the one hand this seems like madness, on the other I must consider his suggestion because he is who he (Matthew) is in this situation . I understand his concerns about Hugh's vocal tightness, and his challenges in making the text active, his tendency towards interiority. But none of M's solutions seem practical to me – that I step in, or that I trade Kevin and Hugh, or Ryan and Hugh – nor do they seem preferable. Neither Kevin or Ryan have the physical ability or the ability with text to do what I really want to a degree that would justify the immense trauma of making such a change at this late date. Ego aside, I could do it technically, because I have the physical ability and the ability with text, but I can't do it and direct myself at the same time, and again the effect on company morale would likely be mortal.

Sunday June 16, 2013

Agonizing over MJ's suggestion and I cannot do it for so many reasons but most of all because it would be such a betrayal of the process, of Hugh, of my own instincts, I think.

Hugh is not perfect, but he is Macbeth in this iteration and I need to respect that. If I replace him it will be an unmooring- we will lose what roots we have established when we have so few days left. I've told Matthew that I want to keep him, and that I have asked Cathy Mackinnon to come in and work with Hugh on text. She's at Stratford till the end of the week, but can come in here and there, so she's going to work with Hugh tomorrow morning.

Hugh and I met this morning and did a couple of hours of work. I did some exercises with him that normally I would do with any cast before starting work on a piece. The stick game, in which, standing just out of range with 3 foot bamboo sticks we swing at each other's head with our sticks, and duck as if to avoid getting hit. This is a good one for the focus on paying attention, for the essential dynamic of action and reaction. He is so game, and his presence is fierce but God is he hard on himself. Then we worked on some of his soliloquies. Again I am reminded of his intelligence and passion and the challenge of knowing it all, but knowing it all at once. The sheep knows one thing but the wolf knows many things...

Tuesday June 18, 2013

First day on the park stage. On the plus side - what a relief to be here finally. A relief to be in the space where we are going to be doing this, and even today a relief to see that it feels...okay. They look more or less like they belong up there and the size feels right. On the down side, a rising concern about the schedule, especially the days we have been allowed for tech. Ted and I get two 10 out of 12 days each, and it is simply not enough,

especially because on each of those days we will have only 3 hours of real darkness for setting light cues. So Laird will be flying blind. What is the lesson here? The production team – the Production Manager and Coordinator, Jasmine and Peter, and Peter is doing two jobs, or rather they are doing three jobs between the two of them – are both new to the park so they are doing this for the first time. Because of the turnover in production staff at Canadian Stage since last summer there is no institutional memory of the many, many peculiarities and specificities of the park.

Wednesday June 19, 2013

The continuing struggle with the Malcolm/Macduff scene, and getting Greg and Ryan to trust the version of their respective characters I've pushed them towards. Greg sometimes still wants to play the nobility of Malcolm and then he's instantly boring. Ryan wants to play Macduff's tragedy and pathos as quickly as possible, and then he's boring. It's asking each of them to stop thinking about the effect they're having, or rather not to stop thinking of it, but to stop playing it. Greg wants us to like Malcolm, but I want us to find him interesting. The villain is the man who knows the most and cares the least. Malcolm knows more than Macbeth does, or rather he understands more.

Ryan's tendency from the first read has been to cry almost at the first mention of his wife and children. And then he has nowhere to go, and we simply have to watch him cry. There is, of course a whole demographic of theatre makers and watchers who see this as the ultimate test of an actor – can he cry? I have told him that he must delay this till the very last moments. His questions to Rosse must be real questions – “My wife killed too?”

“My children too?” etc. are ways of delaying the real acceptance of the news – this should be our discomfort, at seeing Macduff holding off the inevitable moment of acceptance.

From an interview with Declan Donnellan which I sent to the actors:

Q: How should an actor deal with emotion?

A: The important thing is that the actor remembers that a human being has never expressed emotion. You can't express emotion... You can no more express emotion than you can shit through your ear – the tubes don't connect, that's all. You can squeeze and squeeze all you like – it still won't come out. Emotion gets expressed through suppression. So, when you watch someone really being emotional... what you're watching is someone trying to control their tears, never watching someone trying to show their tears. As soon as an emotion is shown it is false.

The actor must make a distinction between concentration and attention. People think that they can concentrate on things and pay attention to them at the same time - they can't. Concentration destroys attention. (Donnellan)

Ryan has difficulty with the physical specificity I ask him for; because his focus is on what he is feeling, I think my fixation on what he is doing seems to him like obsessive micromanaging. He tries to listen and do, but his attention is on what he is feeling.

Thursday June 20, 2103

So much of what I understand, or what I can understand in a way that I can communicate usefully to the actors is in the form of actions.

In Malcolm's entrance in Act 1, Scene 4, when he enters with the news for Duncan that Cawdor has been executed, we've struggled and struggled with this, and finally when I told him to come in eating something it gave an active focus and

expression for his disrespect for his father. The fight is again to get him to commit to it and trust it, and leap, rather than doing it tentatively to see if it works (it won't work tentatively).

Similarly in Act 1, scene 1, when he enters with Donalbain in a headlock, and in Act 1 scene 6 when he doesn't bow to Lady Macbeth when his father commands it. These actions were such clues to me – more than clues, revelations of his character, and of his characters intent and yes, feeling, in those moments. And his larger character.

Thinking of T.S. Eliot's assertion about the Objective Correlative:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. (Eliot 7)

My challenge with these actors has been to speak to them in a language they understand, though much of the time I feel like I making up an explanation for what I want, what I think I want. Then again, sometimes the exercise has been, like writing a grant application, a good demand to articulate my instincts.

Wednesday June 26, 2013

Matthew was there all afternoon. He gives me many, many notes. And my response was initially defensive. I have always struggled with this - taking criticism personally - but this evening he and I went for dinner and he was giving me his notes and midway through I understood something so clearly; that whatever else is operating, he is trying to make this better, and he respects my vision, and suddenly I was able to listen without

getting my back up. It's the same issue with the actors of course; when the basic trust is established, the understanding, the faith that you are trying to help them do better, look good, they will follow you into hell. This realization came when Matthew was giving me a note about Greg at the end – he was saying something to the effect of: "If this is what you want to suggest, then push it all the way," and in that moment I understood that he was listening to and watching what I was doing and trying to make it work. Other notes I can hear, or think I hear, as more an expression of his own vision, and some of those I can take, but the relief is not to feel under attack.

Thursday July 4, 2013

Morning after opening, on the plane to Vancouver for the job interview at SFU and trying to process last night. A rather surreal experience. The show went well and the response clearly good. Lots of compliments and congratulations, which I think I received graciously. Openings are almost always anticlimactic, and this in some ways felt more so. Hugh told me once the words that his boxing coach used to say to him as he was heading into the ring: "Something will happen." Which is a great acknowledgement of the only thing that we can be sure of, that our plans are at the mercy of the wind and the rain and accident and how hard and often we get hit.

So, yes, something happened last night. It is not finished – of course it's not because it never is until it meets the audience and vice versa – but it is really not finished and I see the loose ends all over the place. What would I like a chance to finish?

- The Lady Macduff scene. Sophie is layering on a character for Lady Macduff, an idea of a relationship between a mother and a child, and she can do much less. Jenn too,

playing more of a child than I think she needs to. The text in this scene is so effective even in its reduced form, the questions they both ask, as in the following scene when Macduff learns of their deaths, are real questions. Is there a scene in the play with more questions?

- Malcolm. He's made such great steps. I asked Greg to try taking out a piece of gum in the scene with Macduff and he nailed it last night – took it out not when I would have suggested, but it was even more effective. But at the end he still feels to me like he becomes less interesting – he's rushing through the lines in the final scene and I think more can happen there.

- Work more with Kevin/Banquo and develop/tune the relationship and scenes between him and Macbeth, and sow in the suggestion of the affection between him and Lady Macbeth.

- The ending is a sketch. We need two more passes at it to make those stripped down exchanges have any weight, to find the secrets buried in there. The Old Seyward/Young Seyward stuff is clumsy and unstructured.

Epilogue

My premise for this production of Macbeth was “The death of a child disrupts the balance of nature.” On balance I believe that my exploration of this premise, of the theme of the deceased child as a critical motivator for Macbeth and Lady’s Macbeth’s actions and behaviour, was successful. The production has also been favourably received by audiences and reviewers, and seems to be considered a success in this respect. However, judging the production as an artistic whole, I have some reservations, and would say that on at least one significant level, it fails. I will begin by touching on the ways I think it succeeded, and then explain the nature of the failure.

I explored and developed the baby/child motif in most of the ways I proposed in my rehearsal plan, and some others that occurred to me in the course of rehearsal. The most obvious and concrete manifestation of this idea was a macabre child puppet birthed and operated by the Witches in Act 3, Scene 5. This puppet disclosed to Macbeth the prophecies concerning Macduff, Birnham Wood, and Banquo’s descendants as the eventual rulers of Scotland. The puppet proved so effective a presence that I decided it should reappear as the messenger who brings Macbeth news of the approaching English soldiers in Act 5, Scene 3, and then of the apparent approach of Birnham Wood in Act 5, Scene 5.

The baby motif also manifested audibly as an element in the score created by sound designer Lyon Smith. In an early meeting I asked Smith to attempt to incorporate baby cry sound cues in various scenes in the play. In Act 2, Scene 2, for instance, when Lady Macbeth thinks she hears an owl, Smith created a cue in which the cry of a baby

morphs into that of an owl. A version of the same baby cry also occurs in the first appearance of the Witches, and again during the birth of the child puppet.

The development of another manifestation of Macbeth's (and the play's) baby fixation exemplifies one way in which my plan for the production had to change in response to the realities I encountered in the rehearsal hall. Earlier in this paper I detailed my plan to have Macbeth appear as one of the murderers of Lady and Young Macduff, and I explained how I intended to have Macbeth repeat a physical action performed by Lady Macbeth in an earlier scene. The first appearance of this action would be Act 1, Scene 7, as Macbeth attempts to stop Lady Macbeth from demonstrating how she would dash out her own infant's brains had she sworn to do so. The recurrence of the action would occur as Macbeth holds Lady Macduff's baby and she attempts to retrieve and protect it. In the production this recurrence of the same action did occur, but the action itself, and its repetition, were both less precise than I had hoped for.

Why?

As rehearsals progressed I realized that the abilities of the actors to capably perform and feel comfortable with any degree of specific and not completely naturalistic action varied considerably, and that the majority of them were not capable of the physical precision I hoped for. Moreover they tended to be confused by requests that were not immediately explicable through a straightforward and primarily psychological motivation or intention on the part of their character. I have encountered these challenges many times in the past with students, but based on this experience I would suggest that mature professional actors, unless they have significant experience working outside of traditional

text-based naturalistic theatre, tend to lose some of the availability that student actors have simply as a function of their youth and inexperience. It's also my experience that student actors are less likely to balk at doing things they don't immediately understand.

Another contributing factor in this situation is time. We were all deeply aware of the limited rehearsal time available to us, and such an awareness understandably tends to breed a certain survival mentality. One is far less likely to take a significant risk, to move any distance from what is familiar and within one's tested and proven abilities when the time for risking and possibly failing is very short. As a result the physical score of the production ended up somewhat more conventional in substance and appearance than I might otherwise have attempted and achieved.

Notwithstanding the above qualification, the two most visible and substantial manifestations of non-naturalistic physicality I had planned to employ were both effectively achieved. The first of these was the prologue battle scene. As planned, I was able to develop this from the early version I created with the student actors at York University, and it was greatly enhanced by the addition of a musical cue created by Lyon Smith, in which he combined Japanese Taiko drumming with a Serbian folk song. Both the Taiko and the Serbian song were elements that I had proposed to Smith in our first meeting; the song being the only conventional musical cue I wanted to use, and the Taiko drumming was an element I had hoped, in the earliest days of my preparation, to create with a live drummer. The live drummer proved to be beyond our financial means, but early in rehearsal we were able to conduct a recording session with Taiko drummer Akemi Akachi, and it was Smith's inspired leap to combine these elements in a single

cue. The layering of this cue, with its driving Taiko rhythm and the attenuated harmonies of the Serbian singing underscoring the galloping and falling of the actors, achieved the feeling of adrenalinized and ritualized action I was hoping for.

Smith also included a subtle third element in the beginning and ending moments of the cue, based on a request I had made in our first meeting to incorporate bird songs (such as the owl cry mentioned above) in the sound score. In this cue, in the critical establishing moments of the show, he incorporated the calling of crows as a frame for the battle, at once establishing these birds as thematically linked to Macbeth, and tying the entire cue into the larger sound palette for the production. In a similar fashion I think this prologue, coming as it did before a word of text was spoken, served to introduce the idea of non-naturalistic action to the audience. It established that the physical action of the performers had its own autonomous narrative thread beyond being merely illustrative or supportive of the text.

The other consistent instance of non-naturalistic action I employed was a slow-motion motif, used most frequently in instances where Macbeth spoke in soliloquy or asides to the audience. In these cases a sound cue would trigger and indicate a change of state, and as the other characters moved in a very engaged but slowed-down mode, Macbeth, moving at a normal speed, addressed the audience. This private aside mode did not require the pretence that the other characters could not hear or see him; the clearly differing states of being served to establish the suspended reality of the moment.

The same slow-motion technique served to facilitate the progression of the brief scenes and rapid transitions of Act 5. In our edited version of the text these already short

scenes and frequent transitions became even briefer and faster, and as the action moved alternately from inside to outside Castle Macbeth and back again the actors were able to create the illusion that time slowed as our attention cut back and forth from different locations and then returned us to the scene in progress. This device spared us the necessity of repeated exits and entrances, and accentuated the sense of momentum and unchecked action that so defines the final events of the play.

Less successful was my idea of Macbeth as a soldier suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. Although Hugh Thompson, the actor playing Macbeth, was game to explore this avenue, in rehearsal I quickly became convinced that presenting Macbeth as psychologically damaged in the earliest scenes of the play was an untenable proposal, particularly in the context of the park production. Playing or even imagining this factor as an element in Macbeth's makeup was creating a feeling of inertia in Thompson, of a traumatized man incapable of action. I decided that while this premise of Macbeth as a man unbalanced by the effects of battle might be an interesting and playable approach under different and more intimate circumstances, the High Park stage was not the right place to explore what threatened to become an introspective and even moralistic version of the play.

In retrospect I see this particular issue, of a man suspended between thought and action, as emblematic of many of the challenges I faced in this process, and of what most notably succeeds and fails in the production. Macbeth's character is continually preoccupied with the relationship and the distance between the idea and the execution. A recurring challenge with the actors stemmed from my requests that they perform an

action before knowing or understanding the thought behind it – either on my part or on the part of their character. My argument to them was that as people we often act before we know why we are doing what we are doing, and that understanding the motivation for the actor can legitimately and interestingly come retrospectively, emerging from the action like blood from a wound.

While it is perhaps appropriate to be facing these questions in the context of a play about a man of action who is questioning and analyzing his impulse to act, the larger question is one of where and how the story of the piece is carried. Within a largely harmonious relationship with the cast, my primary struggle was to get the actors to pay the same specific attention to their action that they did to their words.

This quest to reach a point where the word and the action are afforded equal attention and tension was neatly distilled in the slow-motion motif I employed in the production, with one or more actors in slowed-down action as another spoke *about* action and its genesis and its consequence. When these moments succeed they contain the pure essence of our work, the ringing harmonic tension between the two intimately connected and interdependent modes of human expression – speech and action. When they fail, when either speech or action lacks the clarity and intention to sustain that tension, then no resonance occurs and no overtone of meaning and allusion is evoked.

I see the final scene of this Macbeth as a revealing distillation of both the production's successes and its failures. Shortly after the final battle, in which Macduff has apparently mortally wounded Macbeth and disappeared from view in the upper stage, and Malcolm and his supporters have arrived in Castle Macbeth, Malcolm begins to

address the assembled troops. Just then Macduff reenters on the balcony carrying Macbeth's severed head and he interrupts Malcolm in mid-speech, shouting harshly and somewhat unsteadily "Hail King, for so thou art." And then, holding Macbeth's head aloft: "The time is free!" There is no response. Macduff repeats the cry, louder and more distraught, and the soldiers echo his words uncertainly. Malcolm again begins to speak, and Macduff again interrupts the heir apparent, shouting "Hail, King of Scotland." The soldiers dutifully repeat Macduff's words, and Malcolm attempts once more to speak, but Macduff continues shouting his exhortation, aggressively drowning out the words of the man who is his new monarch, and creating an intentional ambiguity as to whether he is saluting Malcolm, or himself, or Macbeth's head as King of Scotland. Then, as Macduff is about to shout once more, a baby cry is heard from within the castle. Silenced, Macduff turns and looks back. Another baby cry is heard and Macduff slowly begins to make his way back to where the cry seems to be coming from. Did Macbeth save the Macduff baby and bring it back to his home? If he did so, did he act out of compassion for the helpless infant, or a selfish desire to acquire an heir by whatever means were necessary? Did he offer the purloined infant to Lady Macbeth in a misguided attempt at introducing a new life into a marriage and a kingdom increasingly defined by death? Or is Macduff, deranged with grief and having committed and completed the only act that gave his life purpose, now hallucinating the cries of his dead child?

However one reads this final moment, and aside from its dramaturgical effectiveness, the fact that the production ends with a baby cry is singularly appropriate. The baby's cry is at once both human voice and action in their purest and earliest form. It

is the first thing we do as we enter the world, and in order to do it we must breathe and let the world enter us. The baby's cry induces an instant and deeply felt response; for a moment we are all mothers. It defies interpretation, and yet it makes an implicit and wordless assertion of the tension between words and action. It is presumably an expression of fear, exultation, and relief, but in what proportion we can never be sure.

The idea to use this final cry occurred to me early in rehearsal, and as a moment, like many other moments in the production, I think it is successful. But it also symbolizes a larger and more significant failure in the production. In the final week of rehearsal in the park, our first run of the entire show with full tech, including this final baby cry, occurred on the night of the first public preview. I knew that the ending, with our drastically cut, reordered and altered version of the original text, and a very dense succession of moments involving loaded imagery, would require at least as much rehearsal and attention as the scenes leading up to it. But the reality was that our already very limited rehearsal schedule had been further attenuated by bad weather, to which we had lost two of our rehearsal days on the park stage. And so it was that the ship of the play sailed forth into the world unfinished, and not unfinished in the way that all performances are unfinished until they have been fired in the crucible of the meeting with the live audience, but in an unsatisfying way that will never be fully resolved, and leaves me with a feeling of anticlimactic incompleteness.

Where does the responsibility lie for this apparent failure, this incompleteness - with me as director, or with the system within which I was working? The mainstream subscription theatre is a system in which the virtues of risk are frequently praised, but in

which the mechanism that should allow for genuine risk (and for the failure that is inevitably part of genuine risk) is wound ever tighter and thus made ever more impermeable to the pauses, diversions and tangents of the spontaneous and the unplanned. But this is the system within which I knew I was working, so perhaps the fault is mine for failing to bring the ship to the water in a more finished state, even though I cannot see how a ship worth sailing could be finished in less time.

Every production of theatre is a test; a test of the abilities and preparedness of the director and the actors and the production team, a test of the script in those situations in which a script exists. In these days it is also increasingly a test of the theatre itself and its ability to draw and hold an audience, a test of its relevance and thus its potential for cultural survival. As my thesis project this production of Macbeth has been a test of my abilities and vision as a director, and also of the degree to which I have learned and applied working techniques for a particular model for producing theatre, a model which I have spent much of my professional life deliberately avoiding. Perhaps it is also a test of my expectations and of the degree to which I have adjusted them to this new circumstance.

And perhaps there is no failure, just the inevitable perception of failure which, paradoxically, keeps us going:

No artist is pleased. There is no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer, divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive...(de Mille 264)

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