

QUINTESSENCE

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WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

MACBETH

MARCH 14 - APRIL 21

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OWEN COREY MALCOLM
LEE THOMAS CORTOPASSI MACDUFF/ THIRD WITCH
JAMISON FOREMAN* DONALBAIN/ SECOND WITCH/ LADY MACDUFF UNDERSTUDY
CORNEILUS FRANKLIN* LADY MACDUFF/ FIRST WITCH/ LADY MACBETH UNDERSTUDY
JOSHUA KACHNYCZ LENOX/ ROSS & MACDUFF UNDERSTUDY
VAUGHN MECCOD BANQUO/ DOCTOR
DANIEL CHASE MILLER* MACBETH
RIVER MOORE FLEANCE/ MACDUFF'S SON
CHRISTOPHER PATRICK MULLEN* DUNCAN/ PORTER
SCOTT PARKINSON* LADY MACBETH
KEN SANDBERG* ROSS/ MACBETH UNDERSTUDY
ZACHARY VALDEZ ANGUS/ BLEEDING SERGEANT

ALL OTHER CHARACTERS PLAYED BY MEMBERS OF THE ENSEMBLE.

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KELLY MYERS COSTUME DESIGN
ANTHONY FORCHIELLI LIGHT DESIGN
SEAN BRADLEY* FIGHT DIRECTOR
JESSIE JONES CHOREOGRAPHER
BARBARIC YAWP WORKSHOP MASK MAKERS
SONJA FIELD VOCAL COACH
BESS ROWAN INTIMACY CHOREOGRAPHER
SHANNON KEARNS PROPS DESIGN
GIANNA ZULLI HEAD FABRICATOR
JADE FIGUEROA BLOOD EFFECTS CONSULTANT
JOHN "J.P." POLLARD* AEA STAGE MANAGER
LESLIE ANN BOYDEN* AEA ASST. STAGE MANAGER
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AMANDA GRACE MILLER**



SCOTT PARKINSON*



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ZACHARY VALDEZ

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OWEN COREY MALCOLM

Owen is a Philadelphia based actor. He's performed with Bristol Riverside Theatre (*Clue*), Shakespeare in Clark Park (*Pericles*), Commonwealth Classic Shakespeare (*Measure for Measure*), Lantern Theatre Company (*Romeo and Juliet*) and the Hedgerow Theatre (*Moby Dick*, *Three Sisters*, *Three Musketeers*). He also directs, teaches, coaches, and runs workshops for students and schools throughout the region. He's a graduate of Fairfield University's Theatre program.

LEE THOMAS CORTOPASSI MACDUFF/ THIRD WITCH

Lee is an actor, director, writer & visual artist, currently serving as Creative Manager for Quintessence. This is Lee's 20th production as an actor at Q. Lee was the writer/ director for Quintessence's production of *Aesop's Fables* as well as director of Season X's *The Wizard of Oz*. Lee served as producer for Thornton Wilder's *The Seven Deadly Sins* audio play series for which he directed *The Wreck on the 5:25*. Lee has worked Off Broadway, and at various theaters in NYC and the East Coast. His play, *The Big: A Farce Noir*, played at The PIT, NYC and for a limited run at The Sedgwick.

Lee is a proud graduate of The William Esper 2-year Acting Conservatory. Love to LDB.

JAMISON FOREMAN* DONALBAIN/ SECOND WITCH/ LADY MACDUFF UNDERSTUDY

Jamison is excited to be back at QTG, where he was previously seen in *The Seagull*, *Diary of a Madman*, and *The Wind in the Willows*. With a BFA in Musical Theatre from Philly's own University of the Arts, and an MFA in Classical Acting from the Shakespeare Theatre Company's Academy of Classical Acting at George Washington University, Jamison has performed all over Philadelphia, the East Coast, and internationally. He proudly teaches musical theatre performance, Shakespeare, and dialects at his alma mater UArts, and has also taught at Drexel, George Mason, and West Chester Universities. This performance is dedicated to his grandma, Lenora, who passed away this January.

CORNEILUS FRANKLIN* LADY MACDUFF/ FIRST WITCH/ LADY M. UNDERSTUDY

Corneilus is an alumnus of UC San Diego (MFA) and NYU Tisch (BFA). The South Carolinian started his artistry as a cellist at the SC Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities before switching to acting in undergrad. Regional/Off-Broadway: *The Royale* (Capital Stage Company), *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* (Chautauqua Theater Company), *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare Academy at Stratford), *The Tempest* (Shakespeare Academy), *No One Asked Me* (Soho Playhouse), *You Don't Matter* (NY Fringe Festival). Educational Theater: *Put Your House in Order* (US- La Jolla Playhouse), *Ironbound* (UCSD Wagner Theater), *Balm in Gilead* (UCSD Wagner Weiss Theater), *Everybody Black* (UCSD Potiker Theater), *The Gradient* (UCSD Shank Theater) *Secret Bonds* (NYU Experimental Theater Wing), *The NYU Reality Show* (Beacon Theater/Radio City Music Hall) *Sweeney Todd* (NYU New Studio on Broadway), *Out Cry* (NYU Tisch), *Spring Awakening* (NYU Tisch Mainstage).

JOSHUA KACHNYCZ LENOX/ ROSS & MACDUFF UNDERSTUDY

Josh is thrilled to be returning to Quintessence after playing Nathaniel Wheatley in the world premiere of *Written By Phillis* last spring. He is a Philly-based actor who has performed with the Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre (PST), the Philadelphia Artists' Collective (PAC), Tribe of Fools, and Mauckingbird Theatre Co. Josh is also a fight and stunt director. He most recently staged violence for *Entertaining Mr Sloane* at the Gene Frankel Theatre, and oversaw combat and stunt performances at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire from 2018 - 2023. He has also choreographed for PST, Act II Playhouse, and Mauckingbird Theatre Co. To the moon and back, Elise.

VAUGHN MECCOD* BANQUO/ DOCTOR

Vaughn is thrilled to be making his Quintessence Theatre debut! Vaughn was last seen as Mr. Hawkins at The Media Theatre's production of *The Prom*. Past Credits: Donkey in *Shrek The Musical* (Great Plains Theatre) Ralph Sheldrake in *White Christmas The Musical* (Little Theatre On The Square) Manager in *Elf The Musical* (Broadway Palm). Film: *Paulie Go!* (Amazon Prime) Vaughn is also a regular Print Model for QVC. Education: BFA in Musical Theatre at Valdosta State University. Instagram: @vaughnmeccod. Thank you to my loving wife Jamie for all of her support!

DANIEL CHASE MILLER* MACBETH

Daniel is absolutely thrilled to be back at Quintessence with this tragic tale. Quintessence: *Mary Poppins*, *The Playboy of The Western World*, *The Synge Triptych*, *Oliver!*, *The Broken Heart*, *Love Labor's Lost*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Other select acting credits include - Regional: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Rocky, The Musical* (Walnut Street Theatre); *Jersey Boys* (Mason Street Warehouse); *Chicago* (Arizona Broadway Theatre); *A Chorus Line* (The Palace Theatre); *West Side Story* (Ivoryton Playhouse); *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline* (Texas Shakespeare Festival). International: *Jersey Boys* (NCL); *Legally Blonde The Musical* (China Tour). Huge thanks to my family, friends, The Roster, and Alex for their continued love and support. @danielmillerny

RIVER MOORE FLEANCE/ MACDUFF'S SON

River is excited about his first acting roll with Quintessence Theatre. In addition to his position as Quintessence Theatre mascot, he is a third grader at Miquon School, and attends circus class at Philadelphia School of Circus Arts.

CHRISTOPHER PATRICK MULLEN* DUNCAN/ PORTER

Quintessence debut! Credits include: *A Christmas Carol Comedy* (Hedgerow Theatre); *West Side Story* (1st National Tour); *The Runner Stumbles* (Off- Broadway); *Sexual Misconduct of the Middle Classes*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *ChipandGus* (Bridge Street Theatre); *Birds of North America* (Chester Theatre); *Hapgood* (Lantern Theatre); *Assassins*, *Cabaret*, *Metamorphoses*, *Macbeth*, *A Little Night Music*, *Candide* (Arden Theatre); *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Noises Off*, *Rumors*, *Leading Ladies*, *ChipandGus* (Arts Center of Coastal Carolina); Productions with the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival since 1992 include: *The Tempest*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Henry iv Parts One & Two*, *Irma Vep*, *Shakespeare In Love*, *Richard II*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Pericles*, *Henry VIII*, *Charley's Aunt*, *Hamlet*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Macbeth*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Orlando Shakespeare Theatre). TV: *Law & Order*, *FBI*; Training: DeSales University. His play "ChipandGus" has been produced at Baltimore Center Stage, Proctors Theatre, Centenary Stage, The New York Fringe Festival (Best of Fringe Award), and SoHo Playhouse. CPM is a People's Light veteran of thirty productions over 30 years (from 1989 to 2020). He is an acting teacher and audition coach: www.christopherpatrickmullen.com

SCOTT PARKINSON* LADY MACBETH

Scott is an award-winning performer who has appeared in many of literature's most celebrated works, both on and off Broadway and around the country. Roles include Hamlet, Aguecheek, Cassius, Richard II, Richard III, Iago, Mercutio, Angelo, Puck, Prior Walter, Tom Wingfield, Judge Brack, Treplev, Bernard Nightingale, Reverend Hale, Queen Margaret, and the Stage Manager in David Cromer's landmark off-Broadway production of *Our Town*. Theatre credits include Lincoln Center, Chicago Shakespeare, the Goodman, Shakespeare Theatre, The Old Globe, La Jolla Playhouse, Studio Theatre, Writers Theatre, Hartford Stage, Seattle Repertory, Cincinnati Playhouse, Mark Taper Forum, and the national tour of *The 39 Steps*. Scott was interviewed for the books *The World Only Spins Forward* and *North American Players of Shakespeare*, and is a writer, director, and audition coach who has taught Shakespearean acting. Scott currently manages the ISHTA Yoga studio in New York City

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KEN SANDBERG* ROSS/ MACBETH UNDERSTUDY

Ken is delighted to return to the Sedgwick stage after nearly a decade away. Last seen here in 2015's *The Three Musketeers*, more recent credits include *Elvis: A Musical Revolution* (Walnut Street Theatre), *Million Dollar Quartet* (The Media Theatre), *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (South Camden Theatre), and *Pride and Prejudice* (Greenbrier Valley Theatre). He has also been performing his solo show *The Death of...* at various venues across the country. Ken co-hosts the weekly podcast *Campfire Classics* with his fiancée, Heather Michele Lawler, and is a proud member of AEA. @ken.sandberg

ZACHARY VALDEZ ANGUS/ BLEEDING SEARGENT

Zach is wicked excited to be making his debut with Quintessence! Zach has played at theatres such as Delaware Shakespeare, Lantern Theatre Company, Theater Exile and Shakespeare Dallas. Much love to J and Amanda, for without them I'd still be in Texas. And always, a million besos to Mom and Dad!

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ALEX BURNS* DIRECTOR/ SET & SOUND DESIGN

This is Alex's 46th production at Q. REGIONAL: *Romeo & Juliet* (Trinity Shakespeare Festival), *Hamlet* (Shakespeare Theatre Company DC @ Carter Barron), *Henri Gabbler*, *Diabolique*, *The Maids* (Exigent Theatre). PHILADELPHIA: *Macbeth* (Arden Theatre). Alex was a Directing Fellow at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, DC. Training: Northwestern University, LCT Director's Lab, the Jack O'Brien Directors Lab.

KELLY MYERS COSTUME DESIGN

Costume Design work: *The Chairs*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Quintessence Theater Group), *Travesties*, *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *The last Match* (Lantern Theater Co), *The Mountaintop*, *The Butterfingers Angel* (Uptown! Knauer PAC), *Matilda the Musical* (Summerstage), *A little Night Music* (Pittsburgh Opera Theatre), *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Saving the World* (Throughline Theatre Co), *Deepchurch Hollow* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe). Other costume work: Asst Costume Designer (American Players Theatre), Costume Supervisor (Lantern Theater Co), Crafts Artisan (Opera Theatre of St. Louis), Draper (Walnut Street Theatre). Training: MFA in Costume Design at Ohio University, BA in Theatre at Slippery Rock University.

ANTHONY FORCHIELLI LIGHT DESIGN

Anthony is a lighting designer for theatre, dance, opera, and events. While every piece is unique, his work is often rooted in essentialism, and explores the intersection of movement and shadow. Anthony's work has been seen across the country including 'Windy City Playhouse', 'Milagro Theatre', 'The Wagon Wheel Theatre', 'Wilmette Starlight Theatre', 'Allentown Shakespeare in the Park', and The Bienen School of Music. Anthony holds an MFA from Northwestern University and was a Gilbert Hemsley Lighting Internship recipient.

SEAN BRADLEY* FIGHT DIRECTOR

Sean is delighted to be back at The Sedgwick! Quintessence: *Mother Courage*. Philly Region: Delaware Theater Co.'s *Saint Joan*, The Arden's *Water by the Spoonful*, Revolution Shakespeare's *Five King's*, *Macbeth*. NYC: The Drama League's DirectorFest; *FOB*, *Storm Still*, *Disco Pigs*, *Pork Kidneys to Soothe Despair*, *Bondage*, *Grief*, *New Shoes*. Leviathan Lab's *Trigger*. dell'Arte Opera Ensemble's *Don Giovanni*. In addition to Fight Choreography, Sean works as an Actor and Stunt Performer based in NYC. www.seanmichaelbradley.com

JESSE JONES* CHOREOGRAPHER

Jesse is a Philadelphia native who has performed and taught around the US and Internationally. He is a Helen Hayes Award winner. Former projects include Broadway, Tours, Cruise Lines, Theme Parks, Operas, Music Videos and TV. He is honored to make his choreography debut at Quintessence.

BESS ROWAN INTIMACY CHOREOGRAPHER

Bess is an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Villanova University. She has trained in intimacy choreography with Theatrical Intimacy Education, and taught workshops at University of Pennsylvania and Intimacy Directors & Choreographers. Recent past productions include *Chrysalis* (dir. by Ed Sobel) and *Sometimes the Rain, Sometimes the Sea* (dir. by James James) at Villanova University. She is thrilled to be working with Quintessence Theatre again this season following her work on *Major Barbara & No Exit!*

JOHN "JP" POLLARD* AEA STAGE MANAGER

Previously at QTG: *Waiting for Lefty, The Tempest and Written By Phillis, Major Barbara and No Exit*. Other credits: *An Act of God*, starring Sean Hayes (LA/SF), *The Search for Signs...* starring Lily Tomlin (SF), *Carrie: The Musical Experience* (LA), *Jersey Boys - 2nd National Tour*, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, starring Sally Struthers, and *Anything Goes* starring Sally Struthers and Andrea McArdle, both at the Ogunquit Playhouse. Previous resident positions: Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, NJ, Barter Theatre in Abingdon, VA, Pioneer Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, UT, Gateway Playhouse in Bellport, NY, and *Grease - Das Musical* which toured Germany and Switzerland. In a previous lifetime, JP served as personal assistant to Sarah Jessica Parker. Proud Equity member since 1983!

LESLIE ANN BOYDEN* AEA ASST. STAGE MANAGER

Leslie is a Philadelphia-based stage manager, having previously worked with the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, Theatre Horizon, Philadelphia Theatre Company, The Wilma Theater, Pig Iron Theatre Company, Azuka Theatre, Simpatico Theatre, Shakespeare in Clark Park, Act II Playhouse, Arden Theatre Company, Millbrook Playhouse, and Hedgerow Theatre. She graduated from Indiana University Bloomington in 2014 with a B.A. in Theatre and Drama.

A PLAY FIT FOR A KING

To celebrate the newly crowned Scottish King James I, who recently inherited the English throne from Elizabeth I, Shakespeare wrote one of his most terse and haunting tales on human ambition. So potent are the spirits, and spells cast in this play written over 400 years ago, that if you say *Macbeth* in the theatre today, you must participate in a cleansing ritual (leave the theatre, turn three times, spit over you left shoulder, then curse... or, say "Macbeth" three times.) Superstition aside, there are few plays which have captured the imagination, in all of its complexity and darkness, like *Macbeth*.

In returning to *Macbeth*, I have been acutely aware of a global feeling that we are in an age of chaos... tottering towards collapse or conflict; feelings of division, anger, distrust and fear ruling the day. And as in *Macbeth*, nature and the environment seem to be echoing humanity's havoc and confusion. "My young remembrance cannot parallel a fellow to it."

This is a history play. MacBeth was King of Scotland for seventeen years (1040 - 57.) An ambitious Queen (her first husband murdered by Duncan) takes a celebrated war hero as her second husband. They kill the gentle but ineffectual reigning King, and bring security, peace and prosperity to their kingdom and its borders for almost 17 years. That is until their fear and self-doubt over succession consumes and destroys them. At this time Scotland was a tanistry, a system of governance in which the strongest and wisest man is appointed as heir or successor.



Shakespeare made some changes to the history so as to make it more relatable to 16th century England, and so not to offend his new patron, as King James was a descendant of Banquo (hence Banquo's innocence in the murder of Duncan, and the elaborate presentation of the line of King's by the witches.) While King James is most known for his bible, the first publication of the bible in English, he also wrote and published *Deamonologie*, a study of witchcraft, in an effort to prove the existence of witches and dark magic through religious texts. When studying *Macbeth* in school, teachers enjoy pointing out how different the witches are from the rest of the play, that many believe Shakespeare's contemporary and sometime collaborator Thomas Middleton wrote much of text for the witches, especially the songs and the grand high witch Hecate. In an effort to enhance the humor and joy in the play, I have expanded the witches and borrowed additional text from Middleton's play "The Witch" which comments on the events of *Macbeth*.

My first real foray into Shakespeare was an all-male production of *Macbeth* in 1993. I was 12 and it was my first quarter at Highgate School for Boys in London. I had only just arrived in England, and one of my classmate's got mono, so I was invited to step in as Menteith. Speaking Shakespeare's words, covered in blood as I brandished a broadsword, was the most in my body, and the most powerful I had ever felt.

That year I attended Cheek By Jowl's all-male production of *As You Like It* directed by Declan Donnellan, with a young Adrian Lester as Rosalind. I can still close my eyes and find myself sitting in the balcony in the Wyndham Theatre on Charing Cross Road, laughing so hard that I was crying, and feeling my mind and body aroused beyond comprehension by the theatre of Shakespeare. I saw the production four times, each time trying to understand the source of the magic being unleashed on stage. Since that evening in the theatre, it has been one of my life's goals to be able to create that magic on stage, and in that effort, I founded Quintessence.

Over the last thirty years I have made a concerted effort to experience as much single-sex Shakespeare as possible; from Cheek by Jowl, to Ed Hall's Propeller, to Mark Rylance's all-male and Kathryn Hunter's all-female Shakespeare at the Globe, to Phyllida Lloyd and Harriet Walter's all-female trilogy at the Donmar Warehouse, to Ed Iskandar's all-male *Taming of the Shrew*, to Brenna Geffers' all-female *Troilus and Cressida*, to Erica Schmidt's all-female *Mac Beth*. This lens on Shakespeare has resulted in some of my most favorite and powerful evenings at the theatre, and it has been at the center of my exploration on the contemporary performance of Shakespeare in America, the need to move away from method acting and realism, and to focus on heightened language, theatrical artifice, and the performance of gender. This action is not to minimize or negate the realities of gender, nor the essential fight for gender equality in our society and on our stages, but to explore the construct of gender and gender expression through the power of theatre and Shakespeare.

As we head into one of America's most complex election cycles, I find Shakespeare's *Macbeth* a fascinating context in which to question our heroism, honor, morality, and perception of leadership. When is ambition praise worthy? Why are certain acts of violence sanctioned, while others are criminal? How is one man's profiteering and monopoly protected and rewarded, while another's is illegal and immoral? And in the tempest of today's moral void, in what context do we think someone is a good leader, let alone allowing space for a fallible human being to become a hero?

I feel very powerfully that the witches are dancing among us, tempting each of us towards excellence and our better genius, while also leading us towards self-destruction. They are having a wonderful time. Shall we dance with them?

ALEX BURNS



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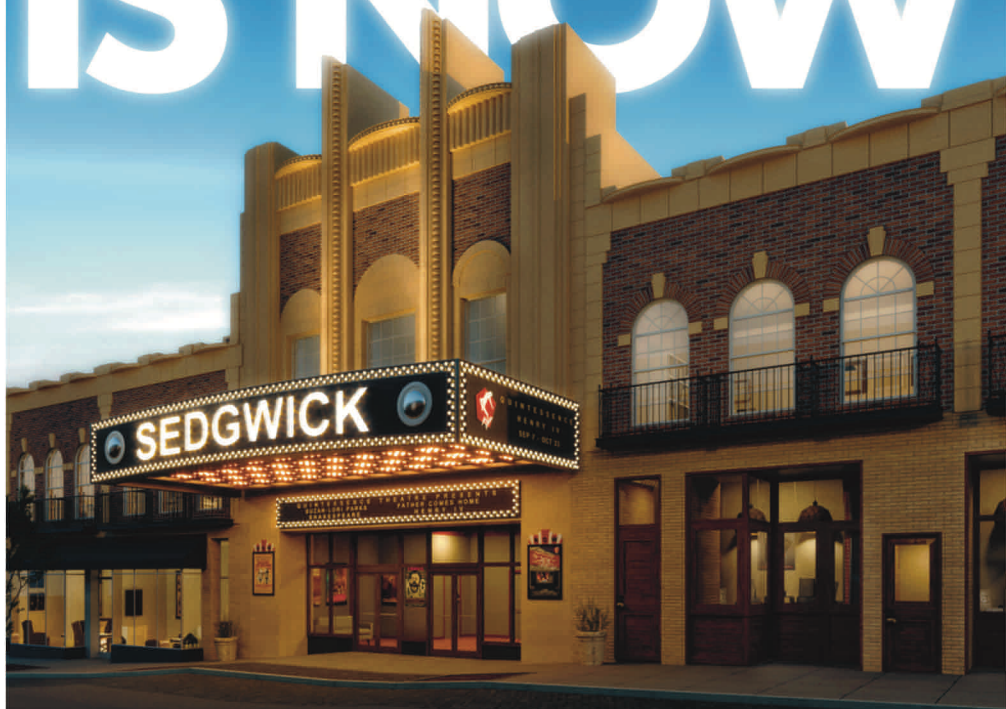
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BY ADAM PELTA-PAULS, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

If you were in search of entertainment in London in 1606, the city offered you no shortage of options. You could go the cheap and cheerful route: a bear-baiting. London's seedier districts housed many a "bear garden," wherein an imported bear would be chained to a post while a pack of street dogs was released on it. Viewers could make bets about how long the dogs, or indeed the bear, might last. These were immensely popular and, in fact, many of the bears became celebrities in their own right after surviving multiple bouts. Or perhaps you were lucky enough to receive an exclusive invitation to one of Queen Anne's extravagant masques: sumptuous scripted parties thrown by the super-rich, where they played both host and all the main roles. Most likely, though, you'd find yourself in one of the city's many playhouses, like Shakespeare's Globe, taking in a decidedly darker play than you might have been used to a few years before.

An Englishman in 1606 had a lot on his mind: Three years ago, a great sense of unease had swept the country after James I ascended to the throne. Elizabeth I died without naming an heir, and only secret negotiations and Elizabeth's desire to return Scotland to the English fold resulted in James' claim being upheld. But to the common folk, James was an imported king. Scotland was as foreign a country as any at the time, and Scottish Presbyterians like James would have been considered just as exotic as European Catholics; indeed, James' mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was both Catholic and a legendary English traitor!

This was bad enough, but if you were at all literate, you would have been able to read the king's thoughts about his new job in his own words! His pamphlet - *The True Law of Free Monarchies* - rejected outright the idea that there was any sort of social contract between a ruler and his subjects. Instead, kings received their mandates directly from God, and though they might not always be just, by dint of their kingship, they were always right.

No sooner had England begun to wrap its head around its new reality than that reality was shaken anew by the revelation of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. The failed regicide was revealed to be a plot by Catholic English nobles to topple the government and install a puppet monarch - James' young daughter Elizabeth. This would have struck at the hearts of all Englishmen at the time; at that point the Church of England was barely half a century old, but had coalesced into a particular identity for the island, distinct from the constant burble of inter-Christian tensions across the Channel in Continental Europe, tensions that would eventually unravel completely into the Thirty Years War.

Out of this tumult comes the Gunpowder Play, a form of play that became popular in England immediately following the Gunpowder Plot. These contained several common elements, including necromancy, regicide, equivocation, a test of loyalty, & a scheme that eventually ensnares the schemers, as well as vocabulary that directly referenced the Plot itself, using words like "blow" and "vault".

Based on these factors, as well as its assumed first performance date in 1606, *Macbeth* fits the bill of a Gunpowder Play perfectly. What sets it apart from other plays in the trend is Shakespeare's relationship with James himself. Shortly after his coronation (and likely with some influence from his wife, noted patron of the arts Queen Anne of Denmark), James awarded Shakespeare's company a royal charter, becoming their patron and renaming the company, "The King's Men."

It's easy to infer a relationship between these two men, and perhaps Shakespeare took it upon himself to send a message to James with this play. A message about the cost of political ambition and a warning to any regent who considered themselves above judgment, divine or otherwise. Though the play paints a flattering picture of James' ancestor, Banquo, it is also a clear indictment of the principles James laid out in his writings. *Macbeth*, as king, is neither just nor right, and the text argues no amount of magic, holy or unholy, can keep a king on his throne. Indeed, James himself served at the leisure of the English Parliament, not any *deus ex machina*. We are, all of us, human, subject to each other and all our human fallibility. As *Macbeth* says himself:

**“LIFE’S BUT A WALKING SHADOW, A POOR PLAYER,
THAT STRUTS AND FRETS HIS HOUR UPON THE STAGE,
AND THEN IS HEARD NO MORE. IT IS A TALE
TOLD BY AN IDIOT, FULL OF SOUND AND FURY,
SIGNIFYING NOTHING.”**

Now, in fairness, these are lofty thoughts for a lowly playwright to be hurling across the theater at his monarch. We don’t know how this message, if it was a message at all, was received by James. What we do know is that the play was popular in its time, as elements of its story are widely referenced in contemporaneous literature. We can also examine the rest of James’ reign for some clues, and while James himself wrote that he preferred tyranny to rebellion, his reign was largely devoid of both.

Instead, his legacy is a complicated one. His subjects enjoyed peace and low tax rates, though his court was often strapped for cash and embroiled in scandal, and James himself generally preferred hunting to governance. His colonial projects laid the groundwork for America in the New World and The Troubles in Ireland. Most telling for us, though, is that his son, Charles I, inherited his father’s fanatical belief in the divine right of kings, a belief that would lead directly to the English Civil War, Charles’ own execution, the abolition of the monarchy, and, in 1642, the closing of all theaters in London by the Puritans.

What lessons remain for us to learn from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*? Modern audiences will probably miss the Gunpowder Plot references, but the bloody moral remains pertinent: absolute power corrupts absolutely. Seek it at your peril.

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