



J A I C O U R T N E Y

M A C B E T H

DIRECTED BY SIMON PHILLIPS

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY
— EDUCATION PACK —

FROM 5 JUNE 2017

SOUTHBANK THEATRE
THE SUMNER

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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Welcome



My first experience of Shakespeare was also one of my earliest memories. When I was about four, my Dad taught me the line ‘A drum, a drum! Macbeth doth come.’ He was an engineer and not at all a theatre man, but he could quote passages from all of Shakespeare’s major plays, and did so from time to time all his life. That line became my favourite, more so than any nursery rhyme, and I would drive my family crazy by saying it over and over again. It is exciting to be hearing these words again in the MTC rehearsal rooms.

This production of *Macbeth* will be many students’ first experience of a live Shakespeare production, and I hope it inspires a love for his imaginatively brilliant language and storytelling. The first Shakespeare I ever saw performed was Queensland Theatre Company’s *The Taming of the Shrew* at Brisbane’s SGIO Theatre as part of a school excursion. This is yet another reason why I am looking forward to our co-production with Queensland Theatre later this year, *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn. Featuring on the VCE Playlist, this production will also be seen by hundreds of students across Victoria.

Following the great success of Simon Phillips’ recent Shakespeare productions, *Richard III* and *Hamlet*, this fresh and dynamic interpretation of *Macbeth* completes a trilogy of unforgettable Shakespeare productions for MTC. This bold new staging bravely reimagines Shakespeare’s blood-soaked masterpiece, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts on how this play resonates with our contemporary society.

The signature of Brett Sheehy AO, written in a cursive, flowing script.

Brett Sheehy AO
Artistic Director



When you visit Southbank Theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag
#mtcMacbeth and tag **@melbtheatreco**



Like MTC Education on Facebook for behind-the-scenes information about our Education Program
and discover ways for you to get involved with MTC. facebook.com/MTCEdu



Visit the official MTC YouTube channel for behind-the-scenes videos with the actors.

Introduction

Macbeth is Shakespeare's shortest tragedy, brimming with blood and ambition. This bold new production, directed by Simon Phillips, employs stunning theatricality to expose the play's startling relevancy to our contemporary political and social landscape. This Education Pack is designed to complement the existing literature on *Macbeth* and help you go deeper in your analysis of the text by exploring the artistic choices made in the MTC production. This resource includes interviews with the actors who bring the characters to life, as well as the creatives who have envisioned a daring new world on stage. Beyond this resource, the MTC website has many more behind-the-scenes stories for you to explore.



Photo by Earl Carter

Melbourne Theatre Company

MTC is Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of up to 12 plays, an annual Education production and diverse learning program, play readings, and more. MTC is one of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Founded in 1953, MTC is also the oldest professional theatre company in Australia, and currently exists as a semi-autonomous department of the University of Melbourne.

As Australia changed, MTC has changed with it. We like to think that we have frequently been at the forefront of Australian culture, introducing new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives, our society and the world; helping to explain a swiftly evolving landscape as we moved through it. Today, with Southbank Theatre as our performance home and our headquarters in Sturt Street, Southbank, MTC strives to present Melbourne audiences with the best drama from Australia and overseas to the highest standards.

Our Vision: To enrich lives with understanding and empathy through the storytelling power of the finest theatre imaginable.

Our Artistic Purpose: To produce classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre with style, passion and excellence in order to entertain, challenge and enrich audiences.

MTC acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.

Cast and Creatives



Jai Courtney
Macbeth



Geraldine Hakewill
Lady Macbeth



Rodney Afif
Ross



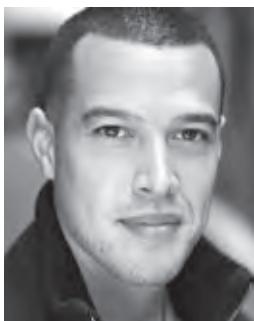
Shareena Clanton
Lady Macduff / Witch 2



Kamil Ellis
Fleance / Witch 3



Tom Hobbs
Malcolm



Kevin Hofbauer
Banquo



Khisraw Jones-Shukoor
Angus



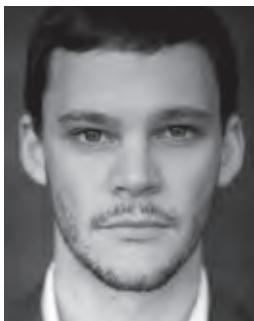
Robert Menzies
Duncan / Porter



Jane Montgomery
Griffiths
Witch 1 / Nurse



Dan Spielman
Macduff



Dylan Watson
Donalbain / Seyton



Lachlan Woods
Lennox



Simon Phillips
Director



Shaun Gurton
Set Designer



Esther Marie Hayes
Costume Designer



Nick Schlieper
Lighting Designer



Ian McDonald
Composer



Leith McPherson
Voice Coach



Dean Bryant
Associate Director

Synopsis

In the aftermath of a bloody battle, amongst the desecrated ruins of war, Macbeth and Banquo meet a group of unearthly witches who predict a tale of unimaginable greatness for them. When the prophesy starts to come true, Macbeth dares to imagine... and thus begins the reign of Shakespeare's most infamous tyrant. Consumed by ambition and drunk with power, Macbeth embarks on a ruthless campaign to murder his king and take the throne for himself. But, in his attempt to cover his tracks and second-guess his rivals, Macbeth sinks deeper and deeper into horror and madness.

Direction



Simon Phillips in rehearsal.

As the Director, Simon Phillips has led the creative team in generating the world of *Macbeth* in this production. ‘One of the hardest things about embracing every element of *Macbeth*,’ says Simon, ‘is that it’s more disparate than a lot of other Shakespeare plays.’ Indeed, summarising what *Macbeth* is about in one phrase is impossible; the text is teeming with many pertinent themes.



Simon Phillips (Director)

‘There is the quite complex psychology of what goes on between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and there are some deeply human elements in many of their scenes together. Then there is this abiding sense of danger and chaos that the witches engender. There’s also the sense of warfare which bookends the play. And so, you’re always trying to create a world that allows the domestic to breathe and live in a real way, but also that responds to the supernatural and all the images of darkness and nature being sent awry that inhabit this play.’



Discuss ‘the domestic’

Discuss Simon’s comments above. While *Macbeth* is often referred to as an epic tragedy, here Simon discusses ‘deeply human elements’ and ‘a world that allows the domestic to breathe’. How might this be evident in his direction? What performance styles and theatrical conventions might you expect to see?

As for where and when to set a production of *Macbeth*, the choices are infinite. Shakespeare's play was originally set in the time it was written (1606), and the audience would have made connections between the story and the society in which they lived. Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 but had no heirs, so the throne was offered to her distant cousin James VI of Scotland. Not everyone was happy with this decision, and conspiracies abounded. In 1605, Catholic dissident Guy Fawkes and his men hatched a plan now known as the Gunpowder Plot: an attempt to blow up Parliament and kill the king. However, their plan was foiled and the conspirators were sentenced to execution. Their deaths were to be a warning to others, denouncing treason and regicide (killing a king). The MTC production, like the original, is set in a contemporary world – one very different, and yet very much the same, as 17th Century England.



Simon Phillips (Director)

'I wanted to create a contemporary world, set right now. But you don't really know where it's set. It's extremely dark. It's unrealistically dark. I wanted furniture that could be from any old house to live inside a world that was black, so you could feel that the supernatural was at work, but within that you could still see people eating their dinner.'



Discuss the contemporary world

Discuss what cues alert you to the fact that this is a contemporary interpretation of *Macbeth*. Why do you think Simon has chosen to leave the location ambiguous? Discuss what Simon might mean by 'unrealistically dark'.



Directing *Macbeth*

Head to the MTC website to read an interview with Simon Phillips: mtc.com.au/backstage



Cast in rehearsal

Characters

Macbeth

Macbeth is a warrior whose language is war. A Scottish general with prowess on the battlefield, Macbeth is valiant and strong. He is also ambitious, and it is this hunger for power that fuels a series of increasingly violent actions, leading him down a path of tyranny and madness. Jai Courtney, who plays Macbeth, describes his character's fatal flaw:



Jai Courtney (Macbeth)

'He's a soldier first and foremost, and I think that side of him is the easiest to relate to on the way in, but we don't get a lot of time to see it. We hear a lot about how handy he is on the battlefield, but that all becomes given circumstance because shortly after we meet him, his ambition is what we get swept up in, and that leads to his unravelling.'



Jai Courtney



From the battlefield to the throne

Research world leaders throughout history and search for examples of kings, presidents or prime ministers who have served in the military prior to serving in office. How might their experiences in combat influence their behaviour as leaders?

Jai says it's tough finding the balance between good and evil in the character of Macbeth. Is he a 'good guy who has allowed these horrible things to change the shape of his mental structure', or is he 'someone who we never empathise with, and is just evil?' Jai finds that the former is more interesting: 'To look more into the man who has honour, purpose and morals is tougher territory to play in, but that allows his ambition to overtake the choices he makes.'



Jai Courtney (Macbeth)

'The fact that he's a ruler, we endow him with the status of King, but he's a military King. The shape of this monarchy is different and feels much more akin to dictators that we have ruling parts of the globe in this day and time, so that's interesting to explore.'



Jai Courtney

While audiences may draw parallels between Macbeth and world leaders past and present, this production doesn't seek to equate the protagonist with a specific real-world individual. 'We're only dealing with the text,' says Jai, 'so you can kind of invent as much story around that as you want for yourself.' As part of that invention, Jai suggests that the world of *Macbeth* is 'some sort of fascist regime, which I think is pretty real and current.' Indeed, Kevin Hofbauer (Banquo) echoes this sentiment, describing Macbeth's decision to murder his friend as 'dictator-level crazy.'



Jai Courtney

Much has been written on the topic of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship. Is one controlling the other, or are they both complicit in each other's actions?



Jai Courtney (Macbeth)

'[Macbeth and Lady Macbeth] are very much a partnership, and if you look at their relationship we don't get a lot of time to spend with them in a happy place, but I think they're completely co-dependent. He knows that she is the force behind him. It's like they bring that out in one another. They formulate a plan together; he comes around to the idea and still makes the choice himself to do it. I think she just has a much easier time dealing with those circumstances and what happens afterwards, whereas he lets his fear and the horror of what he committed infest his mind.'



Discuss 'they formulate a plan'

Read the passages from the script where the Macbeths hatch their plan to kill Duncan. Have a class debate about who was the catalyst.



The actors prepare

Head to the MTC website to read more about each actor's approach to finding their character:
mtc.com.au/backstage

Lady Macbeth



Geraldine Hakewill and Jai Courtney

Macbeth's wife initially appears to be more ruthless than her husband. Openly ambitious, Lady Macbeth is integral in plotting Duncan's murder. She wields a substantial level of influence over Macbeth, compelling him to commit terrible and unnatural acts. However, as the story progresses, her grip on reality, and Macbeth, begins to slacken. Geraldine Hakewill, who plays Lady Macbeth, has been exploring where her character's personal ambition comes from. 'You get little clues that Shakespeare has left,' says Geraldine, 'like a breadcrumb trail, but you don't get a lot of detailed history about Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship. It is quite a good one and it's clear that they love each other very much.' Geraldine notes that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship, despite its bloody consequences, is one of the better relationships in Shakespeare's canon.



Geraldine Hakewill (Lady Macbeth)

'In the world that Shakespeare set this play, women don't have a function other than being mothers or wives. It's hard to get away from that even setting the story in a contemporary context because Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff don't do anything other than be wives and mothers. I think that's really interesting in terms of what drives Lady Macbeth. She has ambition, she has intellect, she has passion, and she doesn't have anything to channel this into. She has no profession and no children to invest her ambition in.'



Discuss women's function

Discuss the notion that 'women don't have a function other than being mothers or wives' in the world of this play. How does this lack of agency affect Lady Macbeth?

In building her characterisation of Lady Macbeth, Geraldine has been exploring the pain and the grief of losing a child, and how that would distort her psychology. 'She's really tricky,' says Geraldine, 'and she's really terrifying, but I am enjoying the challenge so much.'



Geraldine Hakewill (Lady Macbeth)

'I've been really interested in this idea that is present in the text that they had a child that is no longer alive. The death of a child is an enormous thing to happen in anyone's life. Lady Macbeth is so reckless with her ambition, it's like she's got nothing to lose. Perhaps she knows that she can't have kids anymore? Perhaps they have tried since the first child passed away and nothing has happened? Perhaps she's decided she doesn't want any more because losing the first was too painful?'



Geraldine Hakewill



Discuss reckless ambition

Discuss the idea that Lady Macbeth has lost a child and has no hope of conceiving another. Why might this make her recklessly ambitious? Relate this quote to the ideas explored above regarding women's role in the world of *Macbeth*.



Geraldine Hakewill

'It's a scary play,' says Geraldine. 'It's been helpful for me to remind myself that we're doing a psychological thriller.' Shakespeare often gets lumped into its own genre, but Geraldine argues that this play is a 'supernatural/psychological thriller, and in some moments 'verging on a horror story'. Many previous interpretations of *Macbeth* have embraced this horror aspect, with copious amounts of blood either on stage or screen. 'The actual frights and scares and physicality can be quite cathartic and fun to play if you really let yourself go into it. It's the psychological stuff that can get draining night after night.' As an actor, Geraldine has to find ways of dealing with the weight of this play.



Geraldine Hakewill (Lady Macbeth)

'I had an acting teacher at drama school who – when we did a production that was dealing with heavy material – made us all carry something on us while we were performing, like a necklace or a letter or some object that we would metaphorically "put" the feelings of the show onto. Once the show finished, we destroyed that object in some way, by burning it or throwing it into the ocean, or in whatever way we wanted. I think I might do this with this show. I also like that this ritual feels like it ties into the superstition of the play.'



Discuss self-care

Discuss the method Geraldine describes above about mentally separating from the anguish of the play. What other techniques might you use, and what other aspects of self-care might the actors in *Macbeth* have to be mindful of?



Geraldine Hakewill and Jai Courtney

Geraldine notes that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have most of the soliloquies in the play, which means the audience are led into their psychology and inner thoughts more so than other characters. ‘I like to think that this means that the audience become partially responsible for what these characters go through,’ says Geraldine. ‘They are the witnesses to their decision making. Hopefully that means they can connect with them even when they do horrific things.’



Geraldine Hakewill (Lady Macbeth)

‘She’s very often described as an evil villain, but I think that’s really limiting when you’re playing a character. If I thought of her in that simplistic, black and white way, there would be no detail in my work and no hooks for an audience to connect to so that they can go on the journey of the play with her. I have to find what makes her human, what corrupted her and made her so lacking in compassion or human decency. What emotional scars does she carry that have created the woman you see walk on stage reading Macbeth’s letter and voicing her desire to make him kill the King?’



Discuss ‘what makes her human’

Discuss your interpretation of Lady Macbeth. How do you do empathise with this character? Can her actions be forgiven or rationalised?



Lady Macbeth costume designs by Esther Marie Hayes



Designing a descent into madness

Examine Esther Marie Hayes’ costume designs for Lady Macbeth. How do the designs represent the character’s journey throughout the play?

The Witches

The cast who play the three witches also play other roles in this production of *Macbeth*. The witches operate as a trio, and they are the first characters we meet in the play. Early on in the script (Act 1, Scene 3) the witches greet Macbeth with a prophecy that he shall be king, setting in motion the events to come. The witches are played by Jane Montgomery Griffiths (Witch 1), Shareena Clanton (Witch 2), and Kamil Ellis (Witch 3).



Shareena Clanton, Jai Courtney, Jane Montgomery Griffiths and Kamil Ellis

As this production is set in a contemporary world, this raises questions about how the witches are to be represented on stage. ‘It’s almost as though we make our own decisions,’ says Jane. ‘There’s not fate, there’s not God, there is a man who is at the height of his power who wants more, and his wife also wants more and they make their own choice. So it actually takes away some of the supernatural to put it in human agency.’ Jane notes that contemporary audiences don’t have the context of James the First of England, and we’re not surrounded by the ‘paranoia of evil and witchery’ that was so current when the play was written. ‘I think for us in this production, which is very contemporary and very violent, it’s really about how people can make wrong choices.’



Shareena Clanton, Jane Montgomery Griffiths, Kamil Ellis, Kevin Hofbauer and Jai Courtney



Jane Montgomery Griffiths (Nurse/Witch 1)

‘In approaching the witches I’m interested in levels of pain. I’m interested in how extremes compete with actions, push you to an emotional state which pushes you beyond the normal realm, and that’s actually something that happened to most of the characters, certainly most of the protagonists in the play, they’re pushed to do something that they would never normally do. The witches, whoever they are, whatever their context is, they fulfil the function of highlighting those extreme thresholds, those thresholds where we can make a choice. They live in a liminal threshold-type place where they are neither normal citizens nor abject monsters, they are just something “other”.

Jane notes that ‘we spend a lot of time in our current politics blaming the “other”, demonising the other, whether that be on ethnic, religious or political grounds’. She believes there is a way that the actors can channel the ‘aura and atmosphere’ of the witches. ‘There are different forms of acting,’ says Jane, ‘and one of the most liberating is just playing the text. It’s not inaccessible, it’s our language.’



Discuss the Witches

How do you imagine the witches fit in the world of this production? Do they have magical powers, or are they manipulative mortals?

Shareena thinks that we as humans gravitate to *Macbeth* because it resonates ‘with our own fears, darkness and desires’. In her role as a witch, Shareena’s character embodies many of these elements. She identifies Macbeth’s ambitions as ‘bait for the Witches/forces of darkness to tap into his insatiable and intoxicating appetite for power and control’.



Shareena Clanton (Lady Macduff/Witch 2)

‘In terms of the witches, who are not only part of a cult but who exist in this world of war, their revolution and intentions are far more sinister and malevolent. The witches conjure and deceive their enemy by utilising darker elements from the spirit world, the earth, and of war. Every action is about inflicting further pain into the world, to lure you with temptations and ideas and to plant seeds of uncertainty and doubt that feed on your desires and quest for power/ruling. They represent a bigger ideology and playing field that absolutely believes in chaos, relishes in fear and delights not only in the darkness but in the uprising of natural order. All design concepts are imperative in helping to inhabit these spaces, to represent the world in which we are living in and to reflect its ugliness.’



Discuss ‘sinister and malevolent’

Discuss Shareena’s description of the witches above. How do the witches plant ‘seeds of doubt’? What does Shareena mean by ‘they represent a bigger ideology’? Are there people or things in our real world that parallel the witches?

This production of *Macbeth* is Kamil’s first experience with Shakespeare. ‘For my first Shakespeare, it’s big,’ says Kamil. ‘I’ve been thrown straight into the deep end and I like it.’ Kamil initially found the language challenging: ‘Being a teenager, it’s very different language and vocabulary to what I’m used to.’ However throughout the rehearsal process he has ‘learnt a lot about Shakespeare’.



Kamil Ellis (Fleance/Witch 3)

‘What I’ve grasped is that Macbeth is a very power hungry person. He finds out that he could potentially have all the power that he wants and he decides he wants to get to that. Eventually, it all comes back to bite him in terms of karma.’



Discuss karma

Discuss the idea Kamil suggests about karma. Who is responsible for Macbeth’s actions? Macbeth, the witches, or Lady Macbeth?

Each of the actors playing the witches also play other characters in this production. Kamil notes that Voice and Text Coach Leith McPherson ‘has helped a lot in separating’ the characters.



Discuss doubling

Look through this resource and the show programme to investigate which actors play multiple characters. What stagecraft elements (e.g. costume, make-up, wigs, props) help them to transform, and how do they use their bodies and voices to make each character unique?



Video: the witches

Head to the MTC website to watch video with Jane, Shareena and Kamil about the witches: mtc.com.au/backstage

Macduff

Macduff, played by Dan Spielman, offers a contrast to Macbeth. Where Macbeth is ambitious, Macduff is loyal to Scotland, putting country before family. With his wife, Lady Macduff, he has several children. Macduff encounters death at pivotal moments in the play. First, he discovers King Duncan's body, and grieves openly. Second, he is told of the murder of his family, which spurs him to seek revenge on Macbeth, ultimately killing him. Dan describes his character as 'impulsive':



Dan Spielman (Macduff)

'Equivocation is something that is very present in the language, introduced by the witches and the supernatural – an examination of what state you need to be unsure, ethically or morally, which way to go. Macduff doesn't equivocate, he's impulsive. He also has these thresholds that he's forced through into deeper and deeper places. In the structure of the play, he has to kind of meet the immensity of Macbeth's collapse with another kind of immensity – he's got to go through a series of things to get there – but he doesn't equivocate, he just impulsively acts. The idea of equivocation, of ambivalence – of grey area, of choices being difficult to make – is very present.'



Discuss equivocation

Discuss the notion of equivocation as mentioned by Dan above. Do you agree that Macduff does not equivocate? What evidence is there of Macduff being impulsive in the text?

Lady Macduff

Lady Macduff, played by Shareena Clanton, is Macduff's wife and the mother of several children. In this production, we only see Lady Macduff in one scene, with her children in her home. Lady Macduff speaks with justifiable anger about her husband. Lady Macduff is a contrast to Lady Macbeth, who has no children. While Lady Macbeth coaxes her husband to give in to his ambition, Lady Macduff criticises her husband for putting his affairs with the state ahead of his family. In this production, amidst all the gunshots and blood, it is perhaps Lady Macduff's harrowing scream when her baby is murdered that is the most confronting moment of all.



Shareena Clanton (Lady Macduff/Witch 2)

'The key to any Shakespeare is to honour where it has come from, find out what the language means, what the poetry and imagery is and to let go of any preconceived ideas, notions or expectations as you allow yourself to play and discover the world and characters for yourself and with your ensemble.'



Discuss the partnerships

Compare and contrast the Macbeths with the Macduffs. How are their relationships similar/different? Look closely at the language Lady Macduff uses in Act 4, Scene 2. What does the text tell you about their relationship?



Dan Spielman

Shareena Clanton



Jane Montgomery Griffiths, Shareena Clanton, Jai Courtney and Kamil Ellis

Malcolm

Malcolm, played by Tom Hobbs, is Duncan's eldest son. Once Duncan is murdered, Malcolm flees to England fearing that he may be killed next. This allows Macbeth to frame him as the one who killed Duncan. Suspicious of who he can trust, Malcolm tests Macduff to be certain of his honour. Malcolm rallies an army against Macbeth, and returns to overthrow him.

MALCOLM: This murderous shaft that's shot hath not yet lighted, and our safest way is to avoid the aim.

(Act 2, Scene 3)

In this line, Malcolm decides to leave Scotland following his father's death, so that he may see how events unfold in safety and try to understand what's going on.



Tom Hobbs



Tom Hobbs (Malcolm)

'The threshold for Malcolm is stepping into the role that he's been given, which he would have much rather grown into under his father's watch. Just because he becomes the prince of Cumberland doesn't mean he's the king immediately, so he escapes – he flees. Does he flee because he's not ready? Possibly. Does he flee because he's petrified? Definitely. Does he flee just because he knows his life is at risk? Most certainly. And so where those kinds of things come into play and how he wrestles with them comes out in this England scene, which is really interesting: he comes up with a test to see who are his true friends. He's not sure if Macduff is his ally. That's a threshold: he's had to become the King, potentially the King he didn't think he'd have to become so quickly, and that's a threshold. He could stay run away if he wanted to, but he's braver than that.'



Discuss Malcolm's choice

Discuss reasons why Malcolm chose to flee, and his methods for testing Macduff's loyalty.

Angus

Angus, played by Khisraw Jones-Shukoor, is a Thane who initially delivers good news to the King and to Macbeth. However, when Malcolm invades, Angus deserts Macbeth along with other Thanes.



Khisraw Jones-Shukoor (Angus)

'I see Angus as a noble warrior. And trying to harness this I would train, understand the text, the world, learn drill, visit a shooting range and understand war ... [Macbeth] is about a few things. For me the main thing is a couple's unholy climb to absolute power that eventually destroys everything around them, including themselves'



Khisraw Jones-Shukoor



Discuss a soldier who dislikes war

Discuss Khisraw's description of Angus as a noble warrior. Unpack the concept of nobility. What is Angus' driving force?

Banquo

Banquo, played by Kevin Hofbauer, is a Macbeth's co-general in war, and also one of his closest friends. Banquo is present when the witches deliver their prophecies to Macbeth, but he is more wary of them. Banquo's son is Fleance. Macbeth has Banquo murdered, and Banquo's ghost then haunts Macbeth. Kevin believes that Banquo is very loyal to the King, and that this is his defining trait. 'When he first hears about the premonitions,' says Kevin, 'he's sort of like a person who has dabbled in reading the horoscopes but doesn't take them too seriously. Whereas Macbeth has got more to gain from it, so he takes it more seriously.'



Kevin Hofbauer (Banquo)

'The main characteristic for Banquo is loyalty, and I can reach from that. In my family and culture, loyalty and family play an extremely important role. For Banquo, his family having the lineage of royal blood, it seems quite fitting. The embodiment of it has just been about being that listening best friend of Macbeth – that's one of the main tasks. It's sort of like when you see a good friend of yours go down a path that they probably shouldn't, but you don't know where to draw the line; when it's appropriate for you to speak up and say something, and when you think that they'll be able to get out of it themselves without you interjecting. Unfortunately, it's the latter in *Macbeth* – Banquo doesn't get the chance to step in, and Macbeth drew up Banquo's fate.'



Discuss friendship

Discuss the friendship between Banquo and Macbeth. Why does Macbeth turn on his friend so swiftly?



Following Banquo's murder, Kevin has the unique challenge of playing Banquo's ghost. 'Being a ghost is fine,' says Kevin, 'because all my focus is going on Macbeth. It's like "you killed me, you've got to live with this image, and I'm going to let you stare into my eyes and I'm going to hit you right back with it. I'm going to give you all the guilt and destroy you mentally."'



Kevin Hofbauer (Banquo)

'One of the lines later on in the play is '*Some say he's mad, others who lesser hate him do call it valiant fury*'. So it is this thing where some people are saying this, and others are on his side. I think that's what's happening today, even with the Trump administration, and in North Korea he's taking out people from his family – if you're not on his side, you're of no use.'



Discuss 'valiant fury'

Discuss the line Kevin mentions above. How does this line relate to media coverage of world leaders today?

Duncan

It could be suggested that Duncan's primary purpose in the play is to be killed. Duncan's is the first death in Macbeth's rampage, and signals a shift in his psyche. Macbeth hesitates before killing Duncan, and his murder is a turning point for Macbeth. Robert Menzies, who plays Duncan and doubles as several other characters, has performed in many Shakespeare productions before:



Robert Menzies (Duncan)

'This is my fourth production of this play, so it's kind of great sitting back and watching a scene open up in ways you never expected, in ways you've never experienced before.'



Robert Menzies

Kamil Ellis

Fleance

Fleance, played by Kamil Ellis, is Banquo's son. Fleance escapes death when the murderers come to kill his father. News of Fleance surviving the attack angers Macbeth and fuels his rage. In this production, Kamil also plays Macduff's son, as well as Witch 3.



Kamil Ellis (Fleance/Witch 3)

'In terms of costume, I like that it's all stuff I'd wear in real life. I think that's cool because then I can add little traits of myself to the character. It's sort of coming towards me as opposed to me being a completely different person. I think it will be easier to play Fleance because of this.'



Discuss 'thou shalt get kings'

According to the witches prophecies, Banquo '*shalt get kings, though thou be none*'. Why then does Malcolm become king rather than Fleance? Does this mean the prophecy was false?

Ross

Rodney Afif describes his character, Ross, as 'a messenger ... constantly delivering news about what's going on throughout the show'. Ross is a Thane who brings Duncan news of the Norwegian invasion and the fact that Cawdor is complicit in it. Ross is also present the morning after Duncan is murdered, and predicts Macbeth's accession to the throne. In fact, Ross is present at many pivotal moments: he attends Macbeth's coronation, is the first to notice the King's odd behaviour at the banquet, and is the one who delivers the news to Macduff of his family's murder. 'He's pivotal in alerting Malcolm when to strike in retaliation,' says Rodney.



Rodney Afif (Ross)

'I think Ross really symbolises the change in public opinion. There's a key scene where Macduff, after the murder of Duncan, makes his decision not to go to the coronation of Macbeth. Ross decides to stay with Macbeth in his court as one of his lords, and then there is a turning point where he decides to leave and bat for the other side. That's his function in the play – to indicate the change in mood and public opinion.'

During rehearsals, Rodney has noticed that the current global political landscape seems uncannily familiar to the script. 'As I was coming into rehearsals, there was a story about the latest White House crisis ... the reporter said the Republicans were looking for a crisis-free day, and someone else mentioned, "Actually, they're looking for a crisis-free hour", so it's happening thick and fast.' Rodney found this notion of a regime plagued with crises resonated with this line from the play:

MALCOLM: What's the newest grief?

ROSS: That of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker.
Each minute teems a new one.

As King, Macbeth's rule is punctuated by scandals: murder; treason; and rumours of insanity. In the script excerpt above, Ross is saying that even news from an hour ago is old news. Other world leaders' initial days in office have been similarly fraught, most recently the current President of the United States, Donald Trump. The oft-described 'media circus' surrounding his presidency has reported on a number of divisive executive orders (such as the travel ban many accused as being a 'Muslim ban'), the firing of key staff (notably FBI director, James Comey), and rumours of reviving controversial torture tactics (such as waterboarding). For a text that many describe as 'timeless', *Macbeth* certainly seems familiar in 2017.



Rodney Afif and Shareena Clanton



What's the newest grief?

Go online and read the Politics section of global newspapers such as The New York Times or Der Spiegel International, or local news outlets. Can you find headlines that echo the events in *Macbeth*? Compare and contrast the behaviour of world leaders with that of *Macbeth*.

From Rodney's perspective, *Macbeth* is about 'a flawed character who plays out his personal tragedy. It's about ambition that goes awry'. Rodney believes the play is a cautionary tale about overstepping your lot and going beyond what's reasonable in achieving your ambitions. He notes that other film interpretations of the script often depict Ross as a shady figure, one of Macbeth's conspirators who worked to continue the tyranny and kill Lady Macduff. However, Rodney says 'we haven't gone for that reading and I think it's right not to.'

Seyton

When Macbeth's thanes abandon him, Seyton is his chief servant. Dylan Watson describes his character as 'Mabeth's right-hand man when he needs dirty deeds done'



Dylan Watson (Seyton/Donalbain)

'I see Seyton as a man with absolutely no judgement, a man who believes wholeheartedly in his job and what he has to do in protecting the King, who is his captain. He's been with Macbeth for quite some time and he's now playing a larger role. I think he wholeheartedly believes he's doing the right thing. Everything he does is for the greater good of his country. He doesn't set out to be a baby-killer, but if that's what he's got to do for the stability of his country, then he's willing to get his hands dirty for the greater cause.'



Dylan Watson

Dylan can see a comparison between the script and the current state of the American political system, 'political bodies start to pile up, and people unexpectedly lose their jobs'. Dylan also draws parallels between Shakespeare's text and the wider political landscape. 'With war being an ever-present factor of this play, that is really quite a contemporary theme for us,' says Dylan. 'We're quite deaf about what's happening in places like Syria and all over the Middle East. Even in places like Papua New Guinea where there is systematic slaughter and it's a part of everyday life – that's sort of how it feels in *Macbeth*. We know that there is tension and there is war, but here we all are trying to have a banquet and celebrate.'

Donalbain



Dylan Watson

Donalbain is Duncan's second son, the younger brother to Malcolm. After his father is murdered, Donalbain fears that he may be killed too. He suggests that they flee to separate countries for safety, so Donalbain escapes to Ireland. As this character is only seen briefly on stage, this role is also played by Dylan Watson.

DONALBAIN: There's daggers in men's smiles.
The near in blood, The nearer bloody.

(Act 2, Scene 3)

This line is said by Donalbain to Malcolm after Duncan's murder. He suspects that someone closely related to them has committed the crime, and warns that smiles may mask more sinister behaviour.



Discuss 'daggers in men's smiles'

Discuss the use of symbolism and repetition in this line. Imagine a smile where teeth are replaced by daggers. Why might Shakespeare specifically use the word 'daggers' rather than 'knives'?

Lennox

Lennox is a Thane attending on Duncan. Following Duncan's murder, Lennox joins Macbeth's court and quickly becomes suspicious of him. Slowly and cautiously, Lennox shares his misgivings with other lords. Lachlan Woods, who plays Lennox, believes his character is a 'nationalist, not loyal to a specific leader but to an ideology and the nation state of Scotland above all else'.



Lachlan Woods (Lennox)

'Lennox is an interesting example of someone who from the beginning of the play is loyal to his country, but it takes a critical event (attending the banquet where Macbeth sees Banquo's Ghost) to realise Scotland is no longer in safe hands. At that banquet, he sees Macbeth is unhinged and unfit to govern. In this production, when he tries to communicate to someone on the outside, someone who could facilitate change, he's persecuted and killed.'



Discuss loyalty

Discuss the methods through which Lennox tries to do what he believes is right. Do you think he made the best choices? What other options might he have had?

As Lachlan explains, the banquet scene where Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost is a pivotal moment in Lennox's story too. This is when Lennox begins to suspect that Macbeth is unfit to be King, and that he may be responsible for Duncan's death. In the MTC production, the audience will see Banquo's ghost (played by Kevin Hofbauer). Lachlan describes what it's like to be on stage with a 'ghost':



Lachlan Woods (Lennox)

'In some ways it doesn't matter what the scene is, there's always rules. In this situation [when the ghost of Banquo is on stage], it's just another rule: don't look at Banquo. Don't acknowledge that Banquo's in the corner! Lennox is much more interested in the fact that Macbeth is going off the rails. His focus is on Macbeth.'



Lachlan Woods



The ghost of Banquo

Act out this scene in your class with Macbeth, Lennox, Banquo and other guests at the banquet. Rotate roles and practice directing your focus, using your performance skills to play 'the rules' of the scene. As an actor, how does this feel when you are Lennox/Banquo/Macbeth?



Lachlan Woods (Lennox)

'The thing for me that particularly resonates is that just before we started rehearsal I watched a *Four Corners* episode on the disappeared people of Syria – people who are deemed by the state to be political dissenters – and the systematised killing of these dissenters. I've thought about these disappeared people a lot in relation to my own character Lennox and the trajectory we've created for him in this production.'



Political dissenters

Research examples of political dissenters and whistle-blowers in recent news. What has happened to these individuals? Have they changed the course of history?

Set Design



Shaun Gurton has worked with Simon Phillips many times before, including several Shakespeare productions. Their collaboration on MTC's *Hamlet* in 2011 explored the theme of surveillance through a set with transparent walls and furniture. For this production of *Macbeth*, Shaun has designed a theatrical landscape that could exist in our world in 2017 – there are echoes of fashion, furniture and architecture design elements that we recognise – however this production exists in a world of its own. The design is exceptionally dark, in some ways paralleling the dark abyss of Macbeth's psyche, with red being the dominant colour amidst a monochrome palette, evoking blood and death.



Shaun Gurton (Set Designer)

'A key theme in *Macbeth* is the military. Many of these characters are soldiers, not politicians – they know about war. Therefore, the play has been situated in a contemporary warzone.'



Discuss the military

Discuss Shaun's comments above about the military and soldiers. How does this quote connect with other quotes from the actors earlier in this resource?

To create this contemporary warzone, Shaun has included set elements such as a burnt-out car, a graffitied bus shelter, rubble and debris. These are contrasted with stylish furniture in domestic locales, such as bedrooms and kitchens.



Shaun Gurton (Set Designer)

'The set design reflects the dualities of internal/external, public/private, epic/intimate. We are contrasting grand stage images against refined domestic scenes. I'm interested in exploring the evilness that come out of a domestic world, and the carnage that war leaves in its wake.'

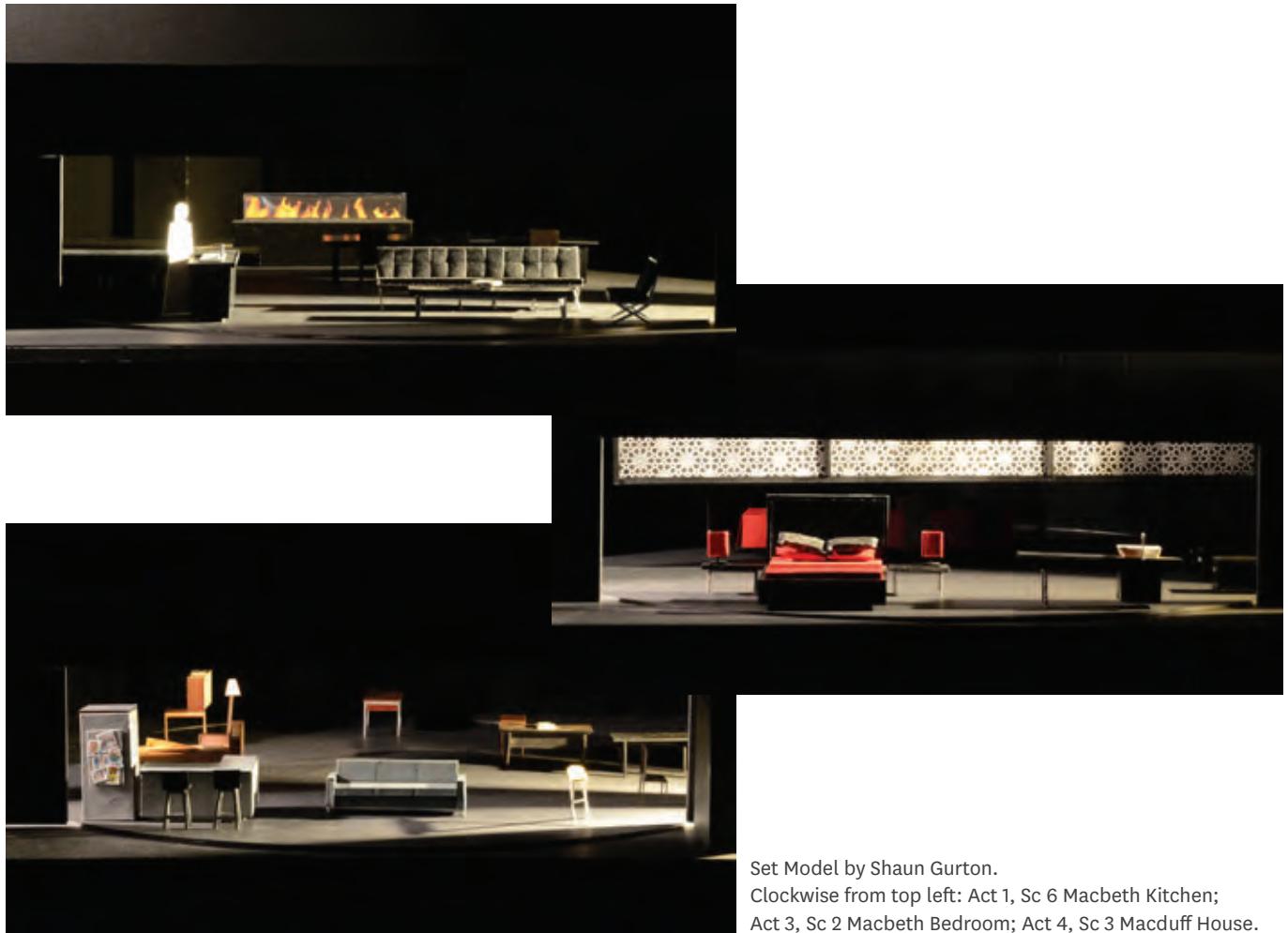


Discuss dualities

Think about the dualities Shaun mentions above: internal/external, public/private, epic/intimate. How are these represented in the text, and in Shaun's designs?

To support these ideas, the set has the capacity to quickly expand and retract in scale. By using trackable borders and flying scenic elements, Shaun is able to close down the stage from an epic battleground to an intimate bedroom in seconds.

Elements of the set evoke the German Bauhaus style (functionality through the simplified, geometrical forms, minimal embellishment), as well as geometric patterns seen in Islamic art found in the Middle East and North Africa that traditionally express unity within diversity, and the harmony that governs all things. Much of the palace furniture is modern and functionalist. Most notably, Mies van der Rohe's iconic Barcelona chair is a reference, with the design being extended into a 3.5m lounge. Similar to Mies van der Rohe's 'less is more' approach, Shaun's set is low, linear and dramatic, with very select pieces of minimal furniture.



Set Model by Shaun Gurton.
Clockwise from top left: Act 1, Sc 6 Macbeth Kitchen;
Act 3, Sc 2 Macbeth Bedroom; Act 4, Sc 3 Macduff House.

With the many locations in the play, Shaun has incorporated a revolve into his design. In addition to allowing a smooth transition between scenes, the revolve supports the overall rhythm of the production:



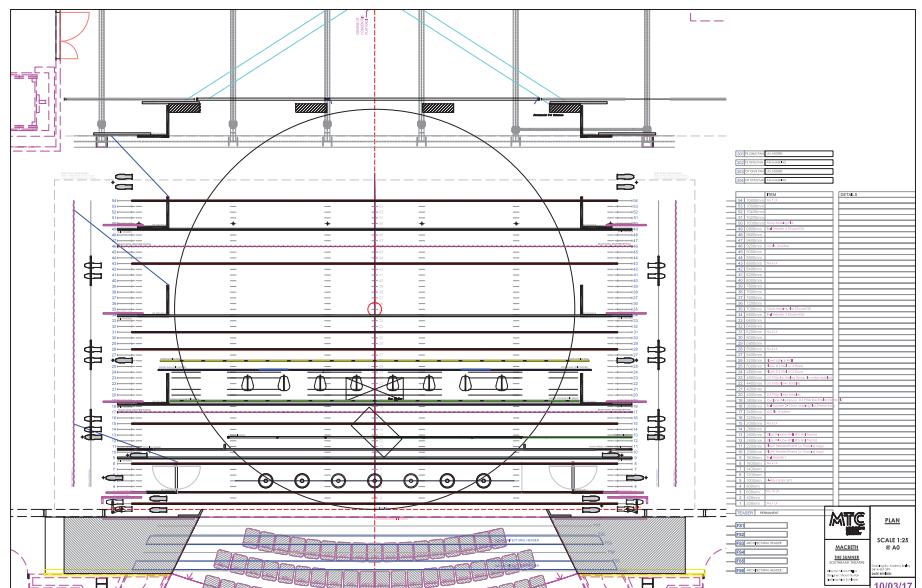
Shaun Gurton (Set Designer)

‘By utilising a revolve, and upstage masking to disguise scene changes, we’ve created a dark, mysterious and fluid world of eternal coming, going and movement.’



Scene changes

Think about the quote from Shaun above, where he describes how upstage masking helps to ‘disguise scene changes’. Look at the ground plan (right) and try to map out how scenes were changed during the performance.



Ground plan of *Macbeth* set design

Costume Design



For this production of *Macbeth*, costume designer Esther Marie Hayes has created approximately 50 unique costume designs. Among her designs there are references to a military state (e.g. camouflage and uniforms), and Esther has drawn on the aesthetic of armed forces worldwide. For example, a key design influence was the blue-and-grey “blueberry” camouflage of the US Navy. While the real-life uniform was criticised for only disguising sailors who fell overboard, the cool, dark colour palette helps the actors blend in with the set. Similarly, the dark camouflaged uniforms of Mexico’s federal police force (Policía Federal) informed the design, particularly the military berets and combat patches. Elements from fatigues, or ‘battle dress’ uniforms, from other parts of the world also informed the design. For scenes in the stables or referencing the horses, the riding uniforms are based on the Italian Police Cavalry, both in colour and shape, particularly the jodhpurs (riding trousers).

As Macbeth rises to power, his clothing becomes more regal. The king of Jordan’s ceremonial garb was a key design reference for Macbeth when he ascends to the throne. Before being crowned as monarch, King Abdullah II was a Major General in charge of Jordanian Special Forces. The black, gold and burgundy uniform looks very regal, but is also a nod to his military past and ambition.

The Murderers have been reimagined as neo-Nazis, with a “homemade” uniform look. Their designs are a hybrid of Scandinavian, Middle Eastern and Sci-Fi elements. The Canadian television series *Orphan Black* partly inspired these designs.

The Witches incorporate elements of haute couture fashion in dark tones (such as those seen at the Dior Homme Winter 2017/2018 collection).



Esther Marie Hayes (Costume Designer)

‘We wanted [the witches] to look similar, but with individuality as well. We were looking at black fabrics, and layering to create those silhouettes. And we looked at how fashion has been interpreted by military dress, as well as that kilt look with the heavy boots ... It’s hard when we’ve created a world that’s very modern, to then also create that unearthly, spiritual image, which the witches represent.’



Discuss costume design

Discuss Esther’s comments about integrating the ‘unearthly, spiritual’ witches into the modern design of this production. Do you think the witches have supernatural powers, or are they mere mortals?

As the plot progresses, the design moves away from the military look and toward civilian attire. The costumes in British television serial *The Night Manager* helped to inform these designs. When Lady Macbeth is Queen, her costumes are much more opulent, showing more skin and incorporating lavish red and gold.



Mood board

Create a mood board for *Macbeth* by researching some of the sources of inspiration referred to above.



Macbeth



Jai Courtney



Macbeth



Jai Courtney



Nurse



Jane Montgomery Griffiths



Lady Macbeth



Geraldine Hakewill



Macduff's Son



Kamil Ellis

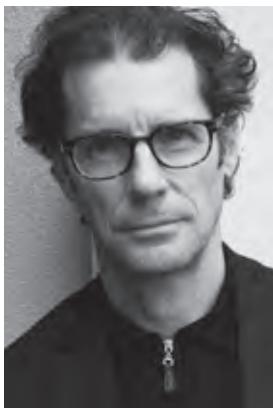


Lady Macbeth



Geraldine Hakewill and Jai Courtney

Composition and Sound Design



Composer Ian McDonald believes *Macbeth* is a very exciting script. Ian likes the various layers that the text works on: ‘the supernatural, the war, the power – it’s all mixed.’ He describes the language of the play as ‘very earthy and dark, but it has an urgency because the journey Macbeth is on progresses very quickly.’ These observations have shaped Ian’s approach to finding and creating sounds and music for this production:



Ian McDonald (Composer)

‘I’m looking for dark, earthy sounds, but also I’m keen to keep a more traditional orchestral quality in the air because although it’s a contemporary setting, I feel that gives it a weight. It throws it back into something more traditional as well. Shakespeare’s language is kind of formal, so I’ve opted for that as opposed to more electronic sounds.’



Discuss ‘language’

Discuss Ian’s comments about creating a musical language that reflect Shakespeare’s language. What kind of music do you associate with *Macbeth*?

In preparation for *Macbeth*, Ian listened widely to many examples of ‘big orchestral music’. Ian identifies the music of classical composer Shostakovich as a major influence, as well as some twentieth century orchestral composers, and contemporary percussive music.



Ian McDonald (Composer)

‘Brass and percussion feature pretty heavily in this composition. Particularly the lower orchestral strings for dark, ominous tides of music. You may know that Simon likes to work in a filmic style, so the score works like a film score and there is a fairly constant presence in the background. Once the revolve in the theatre starts moving, you really do need a sound that goes with it. I feel that the bigger darker orchestral sounds give it a weight and a presence. Then there are more contemporary percussive sounds, particularly for the witches. They have a more contemporary, distorted sound.’



Listen to Shostakovich

Research the music of Dmitri Shostakovich. How does the music make you feel? Can you identify similarities between Shostakovich’s music and Ian’s compositions?



In addition to the music Ian has created for *Macbeth*, there's also lots of Foley (in film terms that's naturalistic sounds in the background), e.g. doors, horses, dogs etc. In particular, the weather is talked about a lot in this play: thunder, a sense of distant lightning. Ian observes that war is a constant presence in the play, so battle sounds can also be heard in his design:



Ian McDonald (Composer)

'At the beginning, there is a battle, so there are realistic battle sounds, but contemporary: helicopters, explosions, guns – and of course at the end it's all about a war on a big scale. So that is set in the background, and puts a context for the two fighters, Macduff and Macbeth, so as they fight it out you have to understand that that's happening in the context of a larger battle, they're just the generals. There is a world beyond them, and they represent that whole world. In order to do that, where music becomes really important, is to set them as a kind of emblem of a bigger struggle.'



Discuss sounds

Discuss the sounds that Ian mentions above. What specific sounds can you recall hearing? How would you source these sounds if you were creating a sound design for *Macbeth*?

Over the years, Ian has built up a library of sounds that he can draw on. 'Sometimes I'll think back to the shows that we've done previously to use those naturalistic sounds,' says Ian. 'For example, *Richard III* had a strong war presence at the end – but with the music I feel I always need to set that afresh for each new show.' While Ian might recycle Foley sounds, he prefers not to draw on music he's done before, because 'the language is slightly different'.

Ian notes that Simon Phillips (Director) is very active in rehearsals with movement and likes to work out the sound and the beats that will articulate that movement in real time. 'I'm working in the room with him and the actors,' says Ian.



Kevin Hofbauer and Jai Courtney



Ian McDonald (Composer)

'If they've got a scene to work on where there's no specific music, I'll work in the background on headphones, but when I'm required to have music in the scene then I'll feed that in and pretty well make it up on the spot. I'll throw in some beats and some orchestral stuff that I have on file, and we look at how that works. It's a combination of working immediately, working live, and I see what he's looking for so I go and prepare another ten seconds of music.'



Discuss the rehearsal process

Discuss the way Simon and Ian worked in tandem in rehearsal. How might this process influence the production? What does this tell you about creative collaboration?



Composition and Sound Design Interview

Head to our blog to read the full interview with Ian McDonald (Composer) about his work on *Macbeth*:
mtc.com.au/backstage

Lighting Design



As the lighting designer, Nick Schlieper has created a mysterious, tense world on stage using a variety of lighting equipment and techniques.



Nick Schlieper (Lighting Designer)

'The world of this particular *Macbeth* is a pretty unpleasant-feeling place. It's predominantly cold, harsh and intense. It uses a lot of unsettling high contrast and chiaroscuro, to underline the shifting ground beneath the people's feet and to keep the dramatic tension pitched at a high level.'



Discuss chiaroscuro

What does Nick mean by 'chiaroscuro'? How does high contrast lighting keep the dramatic tension high?

For this production of *Macbeth*, Nick is also experimenting with some special effects. For the apparitions scene in the fourth act, Nick and the MTC team have found a way to project images onto smoke. There are a number of variables involved, and this stage magic is difficult to achieve. Nick works closely with the rest of the creative team to ensure his designs are integrated into the overall vision for the production. Nick finds inspiration for his lighting design in paintings:



Nick Schlieper (Lighting Designer)

'In particular, the great chiaroscuroists like Caravaggio and De La Tour. Their paintings might depict people and situations from a very different time to this, but the way these works are "lit" is timeless'



Caravaggio and De La Tour

Research paintings by Caravaggio and De La Tour and investigate how these artists use light in their artwork. Can you see how the 'chiaroscuro' in these paintings is mimicked in Nick's lighting designs for *Macbeth*?

Nick has also worked on several of Simon's previous interpretations of Shakespeare. He says that *Macbeth* is in some ways 'inevitably similar, simply because we've approached it with the same set of collective tastes and experiences', but that each of Shakespeare's plays remain 'firmly its own animal'.



Nick Schlieper (Lighting Designer)

'*Macbeth* would have to be one of the darkest texts of all and this self-immersion in unalleviated evil naturally shifts ones thinking. We canvassed a range of approaches to this production, but as ever, you can really only arrive at it by starting with the text and looking for the most meaningful way to render it for a given audience.'



Lighting Design Interview

Head to our blog to read the full interview with Nick Schlieper (Lighting Designer) about his work on *Macbeth*: mtc.com.au/backstage



Jai Courtney

Themes

There are many themes to be explored in *Macbeth*, and through different periods in history, different themes have resonated more strongly with society. In our contemporary political and social landscape, there are many parallels to be drawn between the text and the world around us.



Jai Courtney (Macbeth)

'It's a contemporary world that we're in, which gives us a really easy in-road to relate to the piece. It's not that it's set anywhere in particular, but I think what Shaun, Esther and Simon are going for is something that feels like the world around us at the moment. It's territory I've played in a little bit before with film, I've done military films, so it's interesting to have that as a backdrop to this really classic story and be working with this text in that realm. It is so adaptable in that sense. You can transplant Shakespeare and put it in any kind of space and time and it'll work because the themes are universal.'



Tom Hobbs (Malcolm)

'It's about grief, power, death, and life ... and potentially everything else. It's a pretty full piece, which is wonderful, and why it's one of the most famous of Shakespeare's plays. It's complex, but it's also not hard to see.'



Discuss universal themes

Before you read further, what are some themes you can identify in *Macbeth*?
Do you agree that the themes are universal?



Jai Courtney and Kevin Hofbauer

Ambition

MACBETH: I have no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition,
which o'erleaps itself and falls on th' other.

(Act 1, Scene 7)

In this line, Macbeth is describing his lack of motivation, and the fact that the only thing driving him at present is ambition. He recognises at this point in the play that ambition can make people rush and make mistakes, so he is almost pre-empting the disasters to come. A little-known psychiatrist, Elvin Semrad, once said: "You can achieve whatever you want, as long as you are willing to pay the price."



Stepped in blood

Read the play and track the number of deaths that occur. How were these deaths presented on stage?



Discuss 'willing to pay the price'

What does Macbeth want, and what is the cost of his ambition? What kind of preparation might the actors have undertaken for the realistic fight scenes?



Geraldine Hakewill (Lady Macbeth)

'I think *Macbeth* is about human ambition, and what happens when power becomes corrupted. It examines what happens when ambition is used for personal gain rather than for the greater good. It's a parable exploring the darker parts of human beings, and a warning for an audience to be wary of those parts of themselves. All the characters are very human and very fallible in this play; even the good characters have their flaws. There's a strong message to be careful with how your ambition manifests.'



Discuss 'how your ambition manifests'

Discuss the quote above from Geraldine. In what ways is *Macbeth* a parable? Do all human beings have darker parts of themselves? Would Macduff have acted the same if the witches had delivered Macbeth's prophecy to him instead?



The darker parts of human beings

Investigate the Stanford Prison Experiment. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo was interested in whether the violence reported in American prisons was the result of sadistic guards, or if it was situational: i.e. could everyday people commit unspeakable acts when given the role of 'prison guard'?

Guilt

Feelings of shame, regret and blame manifest themselves in various characters throughout the play. One example from the play is when Macbeth proclaims '*O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!*' (Act 3, Scene 2), an evocative metaphor for his inner turmoil. Guilt is seen most notably in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene, where she unwittingly reveals the truth about Duncan's murder to the medical staff attending her.

LADY MACBETH: Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

(Act 5, Scene 1)



Discuss 'the smell of the blood'

In this line, a traumatised Lady Macbeth is racked with guilt. How has she ended up here, so far from the imperturbable composure she demonstrated in the wake of Duncan's murder? What does Lady Macbeth feel guilty about? Compare this line to what Lady Macbeth said to Macbeth immediately after he killed Duncan.

Geraldine Hakewill



Loyalty

Loyalty is demonstrated throughout the play by different characters to different things, but also by its opposite. Recall the real-world events that were happening when Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* (e.g. the Gunpowder Plot), and how he explored the consequences of treason in this play as a warning.



Lachlan Woods (Lennox)

'I think, one of the significant themes of *Macbeth* is loyalty – loyalty to friends, to family, to a personal ideology, to a nation. There are significant conflicts for many characters about what it means to remain loyal to their nation or personal ideology and at the same time betraying something else important to them. *Macbeth* contains parallels to what is happening in American politics right now; Donald Trump is firing people like FBI director, James Comey, who are loyal to the organs of government and democracy, and not to him. We also see politicians who didn't like Trump as a candidate, re-align their loyalty to him as it serves their agenda. Many of those who Macbeth seeks to eliminate, Lennox in my instance, are loyal to Scotland and not Macbeth.'



Discuss loyalty

Discuss which characters are loyal to their leader, which are loyal to their country, and which are loyal to their family. What other differences are there between these characters?

War and the Military

Macbeth reflects our present-day world, particularly in regards to the omnipresence of war. There are many ongoing armed conflicts worldwide, with the Syrian Civil War being the most violent in 2017 with over 12,000 deaths since January.



Shareena Clanton (Lady Macduff/Witch 2)

'This is a modern-day interpretation of the play and therefore, it's connected to the current landscape of our times. The realms and parameters of war are endless. In terms of our design concepts, it's very dark, it's very relevant, and it's very now. This play and multilayered elements from various design teams taps into this depth, darkness and a totalitarian society that's very much about "I'm right, you're wrong. I fight for good, you fight for evil," and offers a voice of truth to our times.'



Discuss 'totalitarian society'

Discuss the totalitarian society Shareena mentions above. Which characters in the play hold these views?

MACBETH: Better be with the dead, whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace, than on the torture of the mind to lie in restless ecstasy.

(Act 3, Scene 2)

In this line, Macbeth says he would rather be dead than endure the mental torment and anguish he is suffering. For a play bookended by battles and with an omnipresent climate of war, it is to be expected that such conflict will wear down some of the characters in this play. Investigate PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), a form of anxiety disorder that is often exhibited in soldiers returning from war.



Discuss PTSD

Which characters in *Macbeth* might be suffering from PTSD, and how might this be shown in their characterisations?



Shareena Clanton, Kamil Ellis, Jane Montgomery Griffiths, Kevin Hofbauer and Jai Courtney

Choices and Desire



Robert Menzies (Duncan)

'I have, for quite a long time, thought that the play was about thresholds; about doorways, about the moral transition, the hesitating, and then passing through into an action, which you can't retreat from. Many characters in this play hesitate in their own ways.'



Dan Spielman (Macduff)

'We've talked a lot about thresholds, and how when we're presented with circumstances or a choice, the psychological component of the play opens up, and in relation to Macbeth particularly we see someone struggling with the threshold between where things stand now, and where they might stand after a given action. And that's true of many characters in the play. There's a state of the world that worsens, or an event which changes the outlook of any given person, and they have to make a choice, and it's sort of by a thousand cuts that these things happen, that's how it's human rather than only supernatural... You can see how someone might make these choices to further themselves, and find themselves on a slippery slope.'



Discuss thresholds

Discuss the notion of thresholds described above. What are some examples of such thresholds in the play?

MACBETH: To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.

(Act 2, Scene 2)

In this line Macbeth is grappling with cognitive dissonance: he has just willingly murdered Duncan, but expresses disbelief in his actions. He is shocked by his behaviour, wishing he could be oblivious to the facts.



Shareena Clanton (Lady Macduff/Witch 2)

'I think the reason we gravitate towards plays like *Macbeth* is because they resonate with our own fears, darkness and desires and help bring to light questions of our own morality and mortality. We see Macbeth become an embodiment of dangerous desires having access to reach their full potential and the consequences that evolve as a result. We are asked to question our own humanity, our own chaos, our own confusions and the gravitational pull towards darkness. We are challenged and made accountable by what our definitions of goodness is, and the decisions we choose to make via various decision-making processes and methodologies. Let us not forget about the spiritual realms and forces that exist which help to influence what he believes in, what we hope for and what we love.'



Discuss goodness

How do you define 'goodness'? Discuss the notion of a 'gravitational pull towards darkness'. Are humans inherently good or bad?



Discuss dangerous desire

What other examples are there in literature or the media of people whose 'dangerous desires' have snowballed into disastrous events?

Violence

MACBETH: From this moment the very firstlings of my heart shall be the firstlings of my hand. And even now, to crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done: The castle of Macduff I will surprise, seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword his wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls that trace him in his line.

(Act 4, Scene 2)

In this line, Macbeth resolves to act more quickly on his thoughts and spend less time considering the consequences. Macbeth commits some unspeakable acts in the play, including the murder of Duncan, and condemning Lady Macduff and her children to death. Simon Phillips (Director) believes that ‘the play is predicated on an acceptance that people are violent.’ Sadly, there are many real-world examples of leaders committing atrocities on their own people. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been denounced for the chemical bombing on his own people that killed dozens, including children.



Kevin Hofbauer and Lachlan Woods



Simon Phillips (Director)

‘Violence doesn’t make them good or bad per se. In fact, one could argue that what makes the play a tragedy is that it’s about a great soldier, who makes a terrible leader. I think what the play examines is what makes people commit a crime against humanity and the ramifications of that crime.’



Violence against their own

Have a discussion about how the violent events in the script could be presented on stage. As the play is set in 2017, what kind of weapons did you see on stage?

In MTC’s production of *Macbeth*, there is a scene with action resembling a torture technique known as waterboarding. This action is part of a larger sequence of stage action showing Macbeth’s tyrannical rule of Scotland. While moment is impactful, it is clear that the torture is not ‘real’ and the actor is not in physical danger. Sadly, some Australians have experienced torture and trauma in other countries before coming to Australia. There are support organisations and health practitioners available to help survivors of torture and trauma. In Victoria, these include Victorian Refugee Health Network, Foundation House, and the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT).

The American Government’s approval of waterboarding in CIA interrogations prompted public debate around the world, including Australia. Consequently, there is considerable material available online about the legality, ethics and impact of waterboarding.



Research torture

When researching controversial topics such as waterboarding, it’s important to use only trustworthy sources. Research the support organisations listed above, and read Mark Colvin’s article *Let’s Talk About Torture* from **ABC News**. You may also be interested in Laura King’s article *What is waterboarding, and who believes it works?* from the **Los Angeles Times**. Teachers may find Amnesty International’s lesson plans unpacking Torture useful, available from tes.com.

Power and Corruption

Dylan Watson (Seyton/Donalbain) believes *Macbeth* is about ‘ambition and how ambition plays into man’s will – what he chooses to do with it and how he chooses to use his power and corruption’. As the saying goes, ‘Absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ Dylan describes the text as being about man’s relationship with fate, and about man’s desire to take fate into his own hands. Similarly, Lachlan Woods (Lennox) suggests that ‘the play also reminds me that at any given moment we are only one fateful action away from falling under tyranny.’



Lachlan Woods (Lennox)

‘The democratic institutions that we have in place that stop tyranny, are only as good as the people that administer those institutions. If those people are corrupted, killed or effectively disrupted, then tyranny can re-emerge easily. We’re always on the precipice of things being turned completely upside down. We don’t know how many times a day the world almost ends.’



Discuss power and tyranny

Discuss the phrase Dylan mentions, ‘Absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ What does this mean to you? How does this phrase relate to Macbeth’s downfall?

Discuss Lachlan’s idea that the democratic institutions we have in place to stop tyranny are susceptible to human weakness.



Cast on stage

Production Information

Cast

Macbeth Jai Courtney
Lady Macbeth Geraldine Hakewill
Witch/Nurse Jane Montgomery Griffiths
Witch/Lady Macduff Shareena Clanton
Witch/Fleance/Macduff's son Kamil Ellis
King Duncan/Porter/Doctor Robert Menzies
Malcolm/Murderer Tom Hobbs
Donalbain/Seyton Dylan Watson
Lennox Lachlan Woods
Ross Rodney Afif
Angus Khisraw Jones-Shukoor
Banquo Kevin Hofbauer
Macduff/Murderer Dan Spielman
Soldier/Thane Guy Talon
Soldier/Thane Blake Testro
Other roles played by the company.

Creative Team

Director Simon Phillips
Set Designer Shaun Gurton
Costume Designer Esther Marie Hayes
Lighting Designer Nick Schlieper
Composer Ian McDonald
Voice & Text Coach Leith McPherson
Associate Director Dean Bryant
Stage Manager (Rehearsals) Jess Burns
Stage Manager (Performance Season) Julia Smith
Deputy Stage Manager Whitney McNamara
Assistant Stage Manager Jess Keepence
Fight Choreographer Lyndall Grant
Composition Secondment Connor Ross
Video Director of Photography Josh Burns
Armourer Len Steel
Rehearsal Photographer Deryk McAlpin
Production Photographer Jeff Busby

Attendance Information

This production contains graphic violence, replica weapons, gunfire and smoke and haze effects.

Duration

Approximately 1 hour and 55 minutes,
with no interval.

Bookings

Email schools@mtc.com.au
or phone 03 8688 0963

Enquiries

Email education@mtc.com.au or
contact our Education Coordinator
03 8688 0974

Programme

Download the programme for
Macbeth at mtc.com.au/backstage