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INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE

There is an aura of unreality about the plays of Shakespeare, and students feel this although they may not be able to express their reactions precisely. They may say that Shakespeare's language is "too flowery" or that people in real life don't talk the way these characters do. And this is true. The people one meets in real life are not nearly as articulate as the characters in Shakespeare. Probably, it would be unbearable if the people one met at the bank and the supermarket, in school or during meetings spoke unrelievedly as great poets.

The characters of Shakespeare lack the reality of foggy-mindedness found in everyday life; they are concentrated and fully in command of their verbal resources. Shakespeare's is a world in which the brain and the heart and the tongue are directly connected, without the usual intervening fuzziness. It's perhaps a world that doesn't exist, but what an interesting world it is, one in which people have fully realized their potential—for good and for evil. To have imagined such a world and to have put it on paper is Shakespeare's achievement. And it is a major reason he is read and performed today.

To make that world accessible to students is the reason for this edition of *Macbeth*, a facing-pages translation with the original text on the left-hand side and a translation into contemporary English on the right. The translation of *Macbeth* is not meant to take the place of the original. After all, a translation is by its very nature a shadow of the original. The plays remain, and their substance is unaltered. This translation is an alternative to the notes usually included in modern editions. In many cases these notes interfere with the reading of the play. Whether alongside or below the original text, they break the rhythm of reading and frequently force the reader to turn back to an earlier page or jump ahead to a later one. Having a translation that runs parallel to the original, line for line, allows the reader to move easily from Elizabethan to contemporary English and back again. It's simply a better way to introduce Shakespeare.

Also, this translation is suitable for performance, where no notes are available to the audience. Admittedly, a well-directed and well-acted production can do much to clarify Shakespeare's language. And yet, there will be numerous references and lines whose meanings are not accessible on a first hearing. What, for instance, does Banquo mean when he says that he will keep his "bosom franchised"?

ABOUT THIS TRANSLATION

Since 1807, when Charles and Mary Lamb published *Tales from Shakespeare*, prose adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have attempted, more or less successfully, to broaden the audience for these plays—or perhaps, to restore to Shakespeare the full audience he had known in the seventeenth century. These days, prose paraphrases of the original are offered to students. Insofar as they succeed, these paraphrases offer a kind of literal rendering of the original, largely stripped of metaphor and poetry. To read them by themselves, without reference to the original, would make you wonder why Shakespeare is still popular.

The translation in this edition aims to retain the feel and the rhythm of the original, but at the same time to be immediately comprehensible to modern audiences and readers, so that they can experience Shakespeare in much the same way the Elizabethans did. That means preserving the sound and the spirit of the original.

Here, for example is a passage taken from the last act of *Macbeth*. His world has become unhinged. One of the officers in the opposing army describes Macbeth's situation:

Now does he feel
 His secret murders sticking on his hands;
 Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach;
 Those he commands move only in command,
 Nothing in love. Now does he feel his title
 Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
 Upon a dwarfish thief.

The first two lines are as colorful and clear to a modern audience as they were four hundred years ago to the Elizabethans. The trouble begins in line 3. *Minutely* no longer means “every minute” but “in a small quantity.” A modern reader might readily interpret this line as, “a small quantity of revolts upbraid his faith-breach.” And the phrase “upbraid his faith-breach” is not current idiom, thus compounding the problem. Line 4 might be interpreted to mean that his troops are obedient, which is not what an Elizabethan audience understood. “Nothing in love” in line 5, which to Elizabethans meant “not from love” remains opaque to many modern English-speakers.

To be effective and authentic, a translation into contemporary English should not only be immediately clear, but retain the ring of Shakespeare. The original and the modified parts should meld so seamlessly that, if you did not have the original at hand, you might think you were reading it.

Now does he feel
 His secret murders sticking on his hands;

was in turn killed by the son of the king he had dispossessed. The 1587 edition of this work served as the source of the plot for Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare, however, did not feel bound to follow Holinshed in depicting either the events or the personalities of the people described in the *Chronicles*. In Holinshed, King Duncan is described as a weak and cowardly ruler, and he is killed in open combat, not in his sleep. (The assassination by stealth was taken from a different story in Holinshed, the murder of King Duff.) Banquo is Macbeth's accomplice. Lady Macbeth is mentioned only once by Holinshed. Macbeth is promised the throne by the "weird sisters," but the ambiguous prophecies on which Macbeth relies as the play progresses are made by "certain wizards" and a witch.

Holinshed, moreover, provides Macbeth with some legitimate claim to the throne. According to Scottish law, the throne passed to the next in blood to the king if the king died before his eldest son came of age. By naming Malcolm the Prince of Cumberland, Duncan was in effect depriving Macbeth of his right to succession. Shakespeare ignores this circumstance in creating his play.

According to Holinshed, the first ten years of Macbeth's rule were wise and just, in which Macbeth "set his whole intention to maintain justice and to punish all enormities and abuses." Only later, brooding on the fact that he has no heirs and that Banquo's line would succeed to the throne, does Macbeth turn into a tyrant.

In transforming his source, Shakespeare has produced his most original tragedy, telescoping time and concentrating the dramatic effects—producing a play with a tightly woven pattern.

SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

No one knows exactly when William Shakespeare was born. What is known is that he was baptized on April 26, 1564, in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford-upon-Avon, a small town less than a hundred miles from London. He was the third child of John and Mary Shakespeare. He probably attended, beginning at age four or five, the King's New School in Stratford. The school was one of the so-called grammar schools established to teach young men to read and write and, after two years, to study Latin grammar and literature. Since the records of the school have not survived, it cannot be proven that Shakespeare was actually enrolled there. There is a record, however, in 1582 of Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway. He was eighteen at the time and she was twenty-six. Their first child, Susanna, was born in 1583, and twins, Judith and Hamnet, were born two years later.

Between then and 1592 Shakespeare left Stratford and established himself in the world of London theatre. In that year the playwright Robert Greene published

Macbeth suddenly says, “There are two roomed together.” Her line is jarring and seems to make no sense. But when you remember Macbeth’s earlier question about the other room and Lady Macbeth’s attempt to rescue her husband from obsessive thoughts, the line makes sense. You then become aware how adroit Shakespeare is at conveying the workings of his characters’ minds. The lesson here for your students is to trust Shakespeare. If a line seems at first irrelevant, don’t dismiss it. Think about previous lines and see how it might fit in.

SOLO SPEECHES

There is another difference between the plays of Shakespeare and most modern ones—the solo speeches. These are the asides and the soliloquies in which a character reveals what is on his or her mind. Contemporary dramatists seem to feel that the solo speech is artificial and unrealistic. Oddly enough, modern novelists frequently use a variety of the solo speech. Some critics feel that this convention has given the novel extra power and depth, allowing writers to probe deeply into the motives of their characters. One thing is certain—Shakespeare’s plays would not be as powerful as they are without the solo speeches.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

There are several ways in which this edition of *Macbeth* can be used with students, but perhaps the most effective is to assign a long scene or several short scenes in the translation for reading as homework. Then, in going over this material in class, use the original. This way much valuable time can be saved. Students no longer have to struggle with understanding the basic story, and you can devote your time to providing insights and in-depth appreciation of the play.

For some students, of course, the original text will still represent a formidable obstacle. In those cases, you may want to use the translation as the basis of classroom presentation with carefully selected passages from the original to illustrate the points you are making. The great advantage of this edition is its flexibility in a variety of teaching situations.

ADDITIONAL TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Because this is a play rather than a novel or a short story with descriptive passages to provide exposition, you will probably want to discuss with your students the motivations of the various characters, their relationships with each other, and even the effects of time and place.

SUMMARIES OF ACTS AND SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene 1

This brief scene sets the tone for the play. Three witches (the Weird Sisters, as they call themselves) on a remote part of a battlefield in eleventh-century Scotland plan to meet Macbeth, a Scottish commander, when the battle is finished. (In Shakespeare's time, they would enter on a bare stage, probably through the trap door. The "fog and filthy air" would be simulated by smoke from burning resin.) The dialog of the witches suggests a world of topsy-turvy moral values in which "fair is foul and foul is fair."

Scene 2

The scene opens with a battle call on a trumpet, played off stage. A captain, bleeding from wounds he received in battle, enters the camp of King Duncan. In somewhat inflated language, he tells the king how his loyal commander Macbeth killed the rebel Macdonwald, then joined with Banquo, the other loyal commander, to fight off an attack by King Sweno of Norway. The captain is led off to have his wounds treated, and the Thane of Ross appears to continue the report. He tells how Macbeth and Banquo fought the combined troops of the Norwegian king and the traitorous Thane of Cawdor, forcing the Norwegian king to sue for a truce and pay an indemnity. Duncan directs Ross to order the execution of the Thane of Cawdor and greet Macbeth with his title.

Scene 3

The witches appear again, with thunder rolling in the background. They are plotting revenge against a sailor whose wife insulted one of them and refused to give her chestnuts. A drum announces the arrival of Macbeth, and the witches complete their spell. Macbeth and Banquo enter, Macbeth's opening line echoing a line of the witches from the first scene, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." The witches greet Macbeth by three titles—Thane of Glamis (his present title), Thane of Cawdor (his soon-to-be title), and King. Macbeth is stunned and cannot conceal his shock from Banquo, who asks the witches to predict his future, too. They tell him that he shall father kings, although not be one himself. When Macbeth tries to question the witches further, they vanish. Ross and Angus arrive and greet Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor. Both Banquo and Macbeth are awed by how quickly one of the witches' predictions has come true. Banquo is skeptical of their motives, believing they may be an evil force. In an aside,

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

ACT ONE

1. Why doesn't Duncan participate in the battle?

COMMENT: Some students will say that because Duncan is king, he has others do his fighting for him. This idea can neither be proved nor disproved from the immediate context. But later on, when he is king, Macbeth participates in battle. And in other plays by Shakespeare, kings regularly fight in battles. Probably Duncan does not fight here because he is too old. Later on in the play, Lady Macbeth refers to Duncan as "the old man." But why is it important for students to have some idea of Duncan's age? Because it means that succession to the throne of Scotland is fairly imminent and that Macbeth must act soon if he is to realize his ambition.

2. In Scene 3 the witches plot revenge on the husband of a woman who has insulted one of them. The husband, a ship's captain, will have his vessel beset with storms, "though his ship cannot be lost," says the first witch. Why do you think she says this? Why can't his ship be lost?

COMMENT: It is likely that here Shakespeare is setting a limit on the powers of the witches. They may cause a great deal of harm, but they can go only so far. If the witches had free-rein to do whatever they could, Macbeth would only be a pawn, robbed of the responsibility for his decisions, and this clearly is not what Shakespeare wants. Macbeth is not forced by the witches to kill Duncan; he is tempted.

3. Duncan waits until after the battle to announce his succession to the throne. Do you think Duncan is being shrewd? Would Macbeth and the others have fought as hard if they had known Malcolm was to be named the next king?

COMMENT: Probably, Duncan is being shrewd, hoping to enlist the strongest support of Macbeth and Banquo. It is doubtful, however, that he is dangling the prospect of the crown before his generals. It's simply that they fight better to preserve a known present than an unknown future. What is more, he has good reason not to announce the succession of Malcolm before the battle is fought. If Duncan's forces lost, that would make Malcolm the target of the invaders. As for Macbeth and the others, they probably fought harder for Duncan than they would have for Malcolm. Their first loyalties, after all, were to Duncan.

4. We learn about characters in a play from what others say about them. We don't meet Macbeth until Scene 3. What kind of impression of him do we form before he first appears?

**APPENDIX I: A GUIDE TO PRONOUNCING PROPER NAMES
IN *MACBETH***

Acheron	ǺK-ǔ-rōn
Aleppo	ǔ-LĒP-ō
Angus	ǺNG-gūs
Banquo	BǺN-kwō
Beelzebub	bē-ĒL-zē-bǔb
Birnam	BĒR-nǔm
Caithness	KĀTH-nēs
Colmekill	KŌM-kil
Duncan	DŪNG-kǔn
Dunsinane	DŪN-sē-NĀN
Fife	fīf
Fleance	FLĒ-ǔns
Glamis	GLĀM-īs
Golgotha	ǦOL-go-thǔ
Gorgon	GÖR-gōn
Hecate	HĒK-ǔ-tē <i>or</i> HĒK-Ǻt
Hyrcaan	HĒR-kǔn
Inverness	ǔn-ver-NĒSS
Lennox	LĒN-ǔks

APPENDIX III: SONGS USED IN *MACBETH*

Come away, come away,

Hecate, Hecate, come away!

HECATE I come, I come, I come, I come,

With all the speed I may

With all the speed I may,

Where's Stadlin? (Act Three, scene 5, after line 33)

HECATE Black spirits and white, red spirits and gray,

Mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may!

Titty, Tiffin,

Keep it stiff in;

Firedrake, Puckey,

Make it lucky;

Laird, Robin.

You must bob in.

Round, around, around, about, about!

All ill come running in, all good keep out! (Act Four, scene 1, after line 43)

(The Folger Concert plays *Shakespeare's Music*, including the two witches' dances of Macbeth; available from Delos Records, 2210 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 664, Santa Monica, CA 90403.)