

Yet More Shakespeare off The Page: *Macbeth*

When William Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*, sometime in 1606, he was at the height of his poetic and dramatic powers. It is his shortest tragedy: nothing extra, nothing not related to character or theme. It takes us in a whirlwind from nightmare to nightmare, plunging us into subtle and profound explorations of what naked ambition wreaks upon the human mind and soul. Here is a play where we see the mature Shakespeare evoking the "scorpions" of the mind that possess Macbeth, and drive his Lady to walk in her sleep to relive endlessly the horrific deed that she thought "a little water would clear" them of. It is a play of blood, haunting, and enveloping darkness. From the moment the three weird sisters ask, "When shall we three meet again," we are swept up into a maelstrom that will not let us go until "the time is free" at its end.

James I (James the VI of Scotland) had just ascended the English throne in 1603. His main goal was to unify Scotland and England. He was as well known for his explorations into witchcraft and demonology as he was for his Bible. He'd written a book on witchcraft, and for four years after he ascended, *Macbeth* was forbidden to be played, possibly because the witches' spells came "too close" to actual ritual. (This may have something to do with the theatrical superstition of not reciting "the Scottish play" backstage in a theater.)

Macbeth is a play about "equivocation", which we'll talk a lot about, a term which grew out of the Gunpowder Conspiracy, (1605). As Macbeth calls it, "lies like truth", and in the end realizes that fiends "palter with us in a double sense." Scotland under Macbeth is a "nightmare world where words belie intentions and honest exchange is no longer possible." (James Shapiro) Sound familiar?

This is a play that just keeps on giving; for example are the Macbeths a "butcher" and "his fiendlike queen", or has Shakespeare imbued them with genuine humanity? Let's find out as we take a journey into Shakespeare's medieval Scotland and into the very souls of the Macbeths and of the others who make up their world.

Please note that this is not a sit-down "lit crit." course. We aim to get out of our seats, get the gorgeous words in our mouths, and see what the playwright tells us to do as we try to recreate as best we can the conditions of the Globe Theater. No memorization or acting experience necessary; just a desire to see what is in the play from the inside, not the outside.

Text: the Folger Library Mass Paperback book: newest ed: ISBN 13-978-145-1694-727 about \$9.95. Available on Amazon or at Labyrinth Books, Nassau St. (Mention my name and the course.)

Please have read Act I, Scenes 1 through 3, for the first class.

Leader: Barbara Herzberg has an extensive theatre background, has taught English and drama, and directed plays for many years. She has been a course leader for Evergreen since its inception.

Wednesdays: 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., 8-10 weeks: Beginning March 13

Location: Monument Hall