The Tragedy of Macbeth

William Shakespeare

May 2014
Unit Goals

- Improve skills in close reading.
  - One short close-reading analysis due.

- Understand the importance and nuance of plays as literature to be performed.
  - Use three different films alongside the play.

- Improve our abilities to read and understand Shakespearean (early Modern English) texts.
  - Reading aloud, using Shakesperience, film, and librivox.
Agree or Disagree?

Behind every great man is a great woman (every great man is supported, guided, helped and even pushed by a great woman).
Agree or Disagree?

Witches, demons, evil spirits, ghosts, or other supernatural beings actually exist.
Agree or Disagree?

Sometimes it is necessary to do something wrong to get what you want.
Agree or Disagree?

What goes around comes around (karma).
Agree or Disagree?

Human beings are easily tempted by things they want, even if it’s wrong.
Agree or Disagree?

If someone feels that the ruler/s of his/her country is destroying the country, that person should try to overthrow the ruler/s.
Agree or Disagree?

There are circumstances or events that justify murdering someone.
Agree or Disagree?

Success is worth any price you have to pay.
Agree or Disagree?

Destiny and fate are real.
Macbeth as Tragedy

- **Classical tragedy** (Greeks like Aristotle or Sophocles and Romans like Seneca): A protagonist who falls from prosperity to misery as a result of a “tragic flaw” or moral weakness. The protagonist is basically a good person. Tragedy evokes pity and fear in the audience.

- **Medieval tragedy**: A person falls from high to low estate as fortune spins her wheel. Remember the superstitious quality of the Middle Ages?

- **Renaissance tragedy**: More similar to Classical tragedy than Medieval. The protagonist has a **tragic flaw** or moral weakness that leads to his/her downfall.
  - Shakespeare’s tragedies are considered universal and timeless.
  - Macbeth is too evil of a character for Aristotle to have considered him a tragic hero.
Themes and Motifs to Track

Themes
- Things are not always what they seem.
- Blind ambition and the desire for power cause corruption.
- The meaning of masculinity and the male identity.
- Good vs. evil

Motifs
- Birds
- Water
- Blood
- Weather
- Clothing
- Sleep
Closing

- This week’s homework is devoted to completing your final essays on *1984*. 

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**Macbeth**
Tuesday, May 6th

• Today’s Goals:
  • Read Act I, focusing on the plot’s premise and the setting.

• DO NOW:
  • Record the following Macbeth theory in your notes:
    • “For contemporary audiences, Macbeth is inseparable from the motifs and themes of the Gothic novel and its various mass-media reincarnations, many of which may be traceable to Shakespeare’s play. Midnight horrors at an isolated castle, a primal crime that plagues its perpetrator and leads to a series of follow-up crimes, mysterious supernatural events that may or may not be hallucinatory, equivocal prophesies and ironic twists of inescapable fate, an increasing confusion between physical settings and the psychological landscape of the guilty mind—all are recurrent elements of popular Gothic literature that have made their direct or indirect origins, or at least strong analogues, in Macbeth.”

This excerpt is from “Macbeth and the Gothic,” on p. 126 of The Shakesperience version of Macbeth.
Act I

Scene i: The three witches set the spooky mood and establish things are not what they seem: “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (I.i.12). They plan a “meet with Macbeth” (I.i.8).

Scene ii: A sergeant tells of the heroic deeds of Macbeth. King Duncan announces that Macbeth will be given the title of Thane of Cawdor.

Scene iii: The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be king, and Banquo will be father of kings. Ross and Angus tell Macbeth he has been given the title of Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth muses on the possibility of killing the king in order to be king.

Scene iv: King Duncan is told of the execution of the rebel Thane of Cawdor, thanks Macbeth for his heroic service, and announces that Malcolm (his son) is heir to the throne.

Scene v: Lady Macbeth reads Macbeth’s letter about what the Weird Sisters said and decides to encourage him to murder. When Macbeth arrives, she tells him to follow her lead.

Scene vi: King Duncan arrives at Macbeth’s castle.

Scene vii: Macbeth almost talks himself out of murdering the king, but Lady Macbeth admonishes him for second guessing their plan.
Agree or Disagree?

“For contemporary audiences, *Macbeth* is inseparable from the motifs and themes of the Gothic novel and its various mass-media reincarnations, many of which may be traceable to Shakespeare’s play. Midnight horrors at an isolated castle, a primal crime that plagues its perpetrator and leads to a series of follow-up crimes, mysterious supernatural events that may or may not be hallucinatory, equivocal prophesies and ironic twists of inescapable fate, an increasing confusion between physical settings and the psychological landscape of the guilty mind—all are recurrent elements of popular Gothic literature that have made their direct or indirect origins, or at least strong analogues, in *Macbeth*. ”
Closing

- This week’s homework is devoted to completing your final essays on *1984*.
Wednesday, May 7th

- Today’s Goals:
  - Understand how performance can influence an audience’s interpretation of a play.

- DO NOW:
  - Create a Venn Diagram or T-Chart in Notability.
  - Title one side “Throne of Blood” and the other side “Polanski’s Macbeth.”
## Compare the Directors

### Akira Kurosawa
- 1910-1998
- Japanese
- Won an Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1990
- Has made other Japanese version of Shakespeare plays, such as King Lear.
- Directed other famous films, such as Seven Samurai.
- His version of Macbeth is ambitious in that it takes the very English work and puts it into a Japanese (samurai) context. The acting draws heavily on the stylized techniques of Noh theater.

### Roman Polanski
- Born 1933
- Polish and, since 1976, naturalized-French
- Survived the Holocaust, saw his parents taken away to concentration camps, where his mother died.
- Directed other films such as *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Chinatown*.
- His version of *Macbeth* has been labeled as graphic due to violence, but he has said that he wanted to be true to the nature of the original.
Closing

- This week’s homework is devoted to completing your final essays on *1984*. 
Thursday, May 8th

Today’s Goals:
- Read on in Macbeth!
- Discuss the issue of historical [in]accuracy.

DO NOW:
- Take out Notability!
Historical [In]Accuracy

- Shakespeare used Holinshed’s *Chronicles* to an extent

- **11th century:**
  - The characters are based on real people, but very loosely.
    - Macbeth was king and succeeded Duncan, but Duncan was killed nobly by Macbeth in battle
    - Malcolm was a child
    - Duncan was young and wild; Macbeth known as being cruel

- **13th century battle between Norwegians and Scots?**

- How do we get a Medieval feel for the setting?
King James I...

- Was Shakespeare’s patron
- Had an interest in witches—even wrote a book entitled *Daemonologie*.
- Would have been interested in Macbeth’s sense of conscience. KJ was very interested in the human conscience. He wrote:
  - “Conscience...it is nothing else but the light of knowledge that God hath planted in man.”
- King James was said to be Banquo’s direct descendent, so he is portrayed as good and noble throughout the play.
Closing

- This week’s homework is devoted to completing your final essays on *1984*.
- Those who have turned essays in have no homework.