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 Dennis Bartholomeusz  
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## CHAPTER I

## MACBETH AT THE GLOBE

In the first years of the seventeenth century, when Shakespeare and Jonson were writing for the theatre, the English actor was a serious craftsman. In his Preface to *Speculum Aestheticum*, dated 1613, the German writer Johannes Rhenanus reports that English actors believed in constant rehearsal—they were ‘instructed daily’. To Rhenanus this approach to the actor’s craft gave ‘life’ to well-written plays, and made English players the best in Europe. The players had a rare advantage. According to Rhenanus, even the most eminent actors allowed themselves to be ‘instructed’ by the playwright.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Flecknoe confirms this in ‘A Short Discourse of the English Stage’ (1664). Talking about Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Flecknoe tells us that they ‘instructed’—the word today would be ‘directed’—their own actors. The best of these actors, players like Nathan Field and Burbage, appear to have been both ‘docile and excellent’.<sup>2</sup> John Downes, who attended the rehearsals of Sir William Davenant’s company after the Restoration, observed that the part of Henry VIII was ‘rightly and justly done by Mr Betterton, he being instructed in it by Sir William, who had it from Old Mr Lowen, that had his instructions from Mr Shakespeare himself’. The instructions seem to have been remembered long after Shakespeare’s death: surviving the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in David Klein, ‘Did Shakespeare Produce his own Plays?’, *MLR*, LVII (1962), 556: ‘Was aber die actores antrifft, werden solche (wie ich in England in acht genommen) gleichsam in einer schule täglich instituiret, dass auch die vornembsten actores deren orter sich von den Poeten müssen underwaysson lassen, welches dann einer walgeschriebenen Comoedien das leben vnd zierde gibt vnd bringet. Dass also kein wunder ist, warum die Englandische *Comoedianten* (Ich rede von geübten) andern vorgehen vnd den Vorzug haben’—‘So far as actors are concerned, they, as I noticed in England, are daily instructed, as it were in a school so that even the most eminent actors have to allow themselves to be instructed by the Dramatists, which arrangement gives life and ornament to a well-written play, so that it is no wonder that the English players (I speak of the skilled ones) surpass and have the advantage of others.’ Translation by J. Isaacs. See ‘Shakespeare as a Man of the Theatre’, in *Shakespeare Criticism*, 1919–35, ed. Anne Bradby (1936), p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> See *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. J. E. Spingarn (3 vols. 1908), II, 94–5.

## MACBETH AND THE PLAYERS

vicissitudes of the Civil War, they seem to have passed down from Lowin to Davenant, and from Davenant to Betterton. They must have had extraordinary vitality, rightness and sustaining power to survive in this way. When Betterton played Hamlet, Downes tells us that ‘Sir William (having seen Mr Taylor of the Black-Fryars Company Act it, who being Instructed by the author Mr Shakespeare) taught Mr Betterton in every particle of it’.<sup>1</sup> As Professor Armstrong has remarked, Shakespeare apparently made it his business to establish in detail the lines along which his leading roles were to be interpreted.<sup>2</sup>

The Folio text of *Macbeth* (1623) certainly suggests that Shakespeare was interested in details of interpretation. As an actor, he seems to have appreciated the importance of stage business. During the arming of Macbeth in v. iii. of the play, the stage business becomes relevant and dramatic—an actor’s fumbling serves a definite purpose; the business on-stage becomes as it were the objective correlative of Macbeth’s insecurity. When the news of the arrival of Malcolm’s army is confirmed, Macbeth calls for his armour, though Seyton does not think that there is an immediate need for it. Macbeth repeats his request for armour three times, and the poetry helps us to visualise the stage business when Seyton with some reluctance brings his armour on. Macbeth speaks alternately to the Doctor and Seyton as he dons his armour:

Throw Physicke to the Dogs, Ile none of it.  
 Come, put mine Armour on; give me my Staffe:  
 Seyton, send out: Doctor, the Thanes flye from me:  
 Come sir, dispatch. If thou could’st Doctor, cast  
 The Water of my Land, finde her Disease,  
 And purge it to a sound and pristine Health,  
 I would applaud thee to the very Eccho,  
 That should applaud again. Pull’t off I say,  
 What Rhubarb, Cyme or what purgative drugges  
 Would scowre these English hence? Hear’st thou of them?<sup>3</sup>

‘Pull’t off I say’ seems to be addressed to Seyton, ‘who while busily untying some band or other is commanded to break it off instead’.<sup>4</sup> ‘Pull’t off I say’ has no meaning in isolation. Business

<sup>1</sup> *Roscicus Anglicanus* (1708), pp. 21, 24.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Actors and Theatres’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 17 (1964), p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> First Folio, Actus Quintus, Scena Tertia, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> See *Macbeth*, ed. H. H. Furness (1963), p. 323, n. 65.

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 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## MACBETH AT THE GLOBE

must accompany it if its meaning is to be grasped at all. The stage business is of the kind that a good actor or director discovers spontaneously during rehearsal. It is realistic and seems entirely right. But naturalistic though it is on one level, on another it is symbolic. One recalls the comment made by Caithness about Macbeth in the previous scene:

He cannot buckle his distempered cause  
 Within the belt of Rule.<sup>1</sup>

There is a visual commentary on this remark in the ‘Pull’t off’ business. The stage business in the arming of Macbeth does not veil Shakespeare’s words but gives them greater immediacy and power.

It seems very likely that Shakespeare had instructed the actors in *Macbeth* when Simon Forman saw them playing in a production at the Globe on April 20, 1611. While we have no record of Shakespeare’s ‘instructions’ in *Macbeth*, Forman’s account gives us glimpses of what possibly was the result of creative collaboration between actor and playwright. Forman left a record of his impressions, brief but significant, to be found in his *Booke of Plaies* (1611), a manuscript in the Bodleian Library.<sup>2</sup> The evidence he provides is slender, but rich in implication. It sheds some light on the ways in which the Elizabethan actor interpreted Macbeth and Lady Macbeth at the Globe. Forman’s comments on the first entrance of Macbeth, the murder of Duncan, the second appearance of Banquo’s ghost, and the sleep-walking scene are revealing.

Describing the entrance of Macbeth, Forman may have recorded stage business at the Globe in 1611:

In Mackbeth at the Glob, 1610 [1611],<sup>3</sup> the 20 of Aprill [Saturday], ther was to be obserued, firste, howe Mackbeth and Bancko, 2 noble

<sup>1</sup> First Folio, Actus Quintus, Scena Secunda, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Bodl. Ashm. MS. 208, fos. 200–13. The note on *Macbeth* occupies 207 and 207 v. See ‘Authenticity of Simon Forman’s *Booke of Plaies*’, in *RES*, xxiii (July 1947), by John Dover Wilson and R. W. Hunt. Professor Wilson and Dr R. W. Hunt, Keeper of the Western MSS. at the Bodleian, after considering the evidence, conclude that the *Booke of Plaies* is genuine; not a forgery as Dr Samuel A. Tannenbaum thought.

<sup>3</sup> Saturday fell on April 20 in 1611, not in 1610. Forman seems to have mistakenly written 1610. See E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare* (2 vols. 1930), II, 337.

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[More information](#)

#### MACBETH AND THE PLAYERS

men of Scotland, Ridinge thorowe a wod, the[r] stode before them 3  
 women feiries or Nimphes, And saluted Mackbeth, sayinge, 3 tymes  
 vnto him, haille Mackbeth, king of Codon. . .

The observation made by Forman is, if true, slightly startling in its implications. The actor playing Macbeth may have made his first entrance at the Globe on horseback.

It was possible for actors to enter riding, on the large open stages in London in Shakespeare's day. At the Fortune Theatre, the open stage was 43 ft. wide by 27½ ft. deep, and the Fortune was built by Peter Street on much the same lines as those on which he built the Globe.<sup>1</sup> The open stage was 'adapted to large and mobile casts, often grouped in opposing factions or massed in scenes of pageantry'.<sup>2</sup> Besides, there was a long tradition of entrances on horseback, which began with the mystery plays of the Middle Ages and continued through Tudor and Stuart times.<sup>3</sup> In June 1522, the Spanish ambassador saw a French play at court in which a horse was imaginatively used to suggest changes of mood, from wild ferocity to quiet obedience. As the ambassador described the scene:

A man came on the stage with a great horse, very wild and ferocious. Friendship, Prudence and Might asked him what he wanted. He answered that that horse belonged to him, but that it was so wild and untamable that he could not make any use of him. Friendship said. . . they knew how to manage an unruly horse. . . They made a bridle, and bridled the horse with it. That done, they asked the master of the horse to mount him. At first the master was afraid, but when he mounted the horse he found he was quiet and obedient, although he raised his head very high. Friendship said they would make him lower his head. A curb (Barbado) was attached to the horse, which directly lowered his head. Without being led, the horse followed his master wherever he went.<sup>4</sup>

The horse is a symbol of passion. At first wild and uncontrollable, disciplined by Prudence, Friendship and Might, he lowers his head in quiet obedience.

Horses continued to appear on the stage in the last quarter of

<sup>1</sup> See J. P. Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry* (3 vols. 1831), III, 297; and contract for building the Fortune Theatre, quoted in J. Dover Wilson, *Life in Shakespeare's England* (1944), pp. 208–10.

<sup>2</sup> Harbage, *Theatre for Shakespeare*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Louis B. Wright, 'Animal Actors on the English Stage before 1642', *PMLA*, XLII (1927), 656.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 658–9.

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 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

#### MACBETH AT THE GLOBE

the sixteenth century, in the first half of the seventeenth century and during the Restoration. A horse was used in the anonymous pre-Shakespearean tragedy *Woodstock*, which was staged around the year 1597. Thomas Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, a plainly dressed Duke, is mistaken for a groom by a 'Spruce Courtier on horseback' and instructed to walk his horse. Without disclosing his identity Thomas Woodstock accepts the task, and talks to the horse as he leads him over the stage:

... you're a very indifferent beast, you'll follow any man that will lead you...<sup>1</sup>

In 1633, *Late Lancashire Witches*<sup>2</sup> was staged at the Globe and Act IV has a direction beginning: 'Enter drum (beating before) a Skimmington and his wife on a horse'. The two are pulled off the horse at once and beaten. The tradition went on into the Restoration. On Saturday, July 11, 1668, Pepys went to the Theatre Royal 'to see an old play of Shirley's called Hide Parke; the first day acted where horses are brought upon the stage'. These instances of the presence of horses on the stage in Tudor and Stuart times indicate that Macbeth could have made his first entrance in this way.

Of course one may protest that there is no supporting stage direction in the Folio text for the stage business observed by Simon Forman. But stage business in the theatre frequently goes unrecorded because it is often the result of creative, spontaneous discoveries made during rehearsals. While there is no explicit stage direction in the Folio, it is possible to argue that the rhythm of the scene and the imagery of the play justify an entrance on horseback, that it is theatrically arresting and is dramatically right.

Horses play an important role in the rhythm and imagery of the play. They are restless, move fast, suggest nightmare and chaos and mirror Macbeth's state of mind. Dr Caroline Spurgeon observed the 'rapid riding' which 'emphasises a certain sense of rushing, relentless and goaded motion', the swift journey of the messenger on horseback who arrives 'almost dead for breath',<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> III. ii. 162; ed. A. P. Rossiter (1946). III. ii. has a stage direction: 'Enter a Spruce Courtier on horseback.'

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome (1634).

<sup>3</sup> See 'Leading Motives in the Imagery of Shakespeare's Tragedies', in *Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. Bradby, p. 42.

## MACBETH AND THE PLAYERS

ahead of Macbeth. Macbeth himself outrides Duncan. The king remarks with unconscious irony,

... but he rides well,  
 And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp him  
 To his home before us. (I. vi. 22–4)

Images of riding crowd into Macbeth's brain: the new-born babe

Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin hors'd  
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air... (I. vii. 22–3)

Macbeth, speaking of his 'intent', thinks of a horse lacking sufficient spur to action, and the image then dissolves into a picture of a horse that 'o'er-leaps itself', and falls on the farther side. As rehearsals progressed and the players at the Globe began to sense the movement of the play, it is possible, though not certain, that Macbeth made his first entrance on horseback.

But the horse could well have performed another function. Actors know how an object can assist in the interpretation of character, in the definition of feeling, the communication of a state of mind. The 'nice conduct of a clouded cane' can reveal and define character on the stage. Actors are careful about the objects they choose because objects possess connotations which can assist them in living their parts.

The horse used by the actor at the Globe could have helped him to make several points about the character. It could have helped to define Macbeth's class and station—Forman noted that Macbeth was 'noble'—and fleetingly to suggest the soldier married to war, 'Bellona's bridegroom' as Ross describes him, the man interested in power.

One can accept in its literal sense Forman's statement that Macbeth entered riding. But one cannot afford to take literally his remark that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth could not, after the murder of Duncan, wash the blood off their hands 'by any means': 'And when Mack Beth had muredred the kinge, the blod on his handes could not be washed of by Any meanes, nor from his wiues handes, which handled the bloddi daggers in hiding them, By which means they became both moch amazed and Affronted.' Commentators from Collier onwards have argued that Forman's account of Duncan's murder points to a scene which the Folio omits, because they have taken his statement that the blood

## MACBETH AT THE GLOBE

could not be washed off by any means in its literal sense. If we accept their view, then on April 20, 1611, Shakespeare and his actors were using spectacle of an unbelievably sensational kind.

We don't, however, have to accept the literal view. J. M. Nosworthy, who is not happy with Collier's interpretation and writes that Forman's description of the scene may only suggest 'a bowl of water and a towel' or 'ablutions accompanying the dialogue',<sup>1</sup> does not himself escape a disturbing literalness. Forman appears to have been thinking and writing metaphorically and his remarks need not imply properties or business so obvious and so literal. Simon Forman could not have read the play before he saw the production of *Macbeth* at the Globe, but the actors seem to have communicated one of Shakespeare's themes to him: the sensitiveness of the murderers to the evil in which they are caught. This, one suspects, is the real significance of his remark that the blood could not be washed off their hands by any means. Forman understood that Lady Macbeth's Pilate-like desire

A little water clears us of this deed (II. ii. 67)

could not be achieved. The sense of terrible violations appears to have come through.

Forman's description of the third episode he remembered, the second appearance of Banquo's ghost, throws some light again on the depth and range of the actor's art in Shakespeare's day:

The next night, beinge at supper with his noble men whom he had bid to a feaste to the which also Banco should haue com, he began to speake of Noble Banco, and to wish that he wer ther. And as he thus did, standing vp to drincke a Carouse to him, the ghoste of Banco came and sate down in his cheier behind him. And he turninge About to sit down Again sawe the goste of Banco, which fronted him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury. . .

Forman registers the shock as Macbeth drinks to Banquo, turns to sit down and finds the ghost behind him seated in his own chair. The audience at the Globe saw Banquo's ghost before Macbeth saw him, and possibly appreciated the ironic contrast between the figure of the ghost of Banquo, with his blood-soaked hair and eyes without 'speculation' in them, and Macbeth unaware, drinking a 'carouse' to him. Once again this must have

<sup>1</sup> 'Macbeth at the Globe', *The Library*, II (1947-8), 113.

## MACBETH AND THE PLAYERS

been business worked out during rehearsals, for the written text does not tell us where the ghost entered or what he did. All the Folio text has is a brief stage direction: 'Enter Ghost', as Macbeth fills his cup and drinks 'to the general joy o' th' whole table', and 'our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss'.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare and his actors must have worked out Banquo's movements in detail as they rehearsed.

Forman described the way in which the Elizabethan actor interpreted the character of Macbeth when he turned round and discovered the ghost. Forman remembered that Macbeth 'fell into a great passion of fear and fury'. The reactions observed, fear, the impulse to retreat, and fury, the impulse to attack, indicate that the Elizabethan actor was bringing complex feelings to the surface.

What seems like a possible reference to *Macbeth* in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a contemporary play by Beaumont, completes the picture we have in this scene, of the complexity and range of the art involved in the Elizabethan actor's interpretation of the character of Macbeth:

When thou art at thy table with thy friends,  
 Merry in heart, and filled with swelling wine,  
 I'll come in midst of all thy pride and mirth,  
 Invisible to all men but thy self,  
 And whisper such a sad tale in thine ear  
 Shall make thee let the cup fall from thy hand,  
 And stand as mute and pale as death itself.<sup>2</sup>

Both J. Q. Adams<sup>3</sup> and C. B. Young suggest that this is an 'obvious' reference to the second appearance of Banquo's ghost. C. B. Young writes:

These lines, spoken by Jasper 'with his face mealed', were clearly intended to recall the apparition of Banquo on the stage, and suggest that the stage business of dropping the cup, mentioned by Garrick, and used by Charles Kemble and many others, goes back to the original staging at the Globe.<sup>4</sup>

The line

And stand as mute and pale as death itself

<sup>1</sup> III. iv. 88–9.

<sup>2</sup> (1613), Actus Quintus, Scena Prima.

<sup>3</sup> *Macbeth*, ed. J. Q. Adams (1931), p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> See *Macbeth*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (1947), p. lxix.



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 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

## MACBETH AT THE GLOBE

certainly does recall Macbeth's remark to his wife after the ghost leaves:

You make me strange  
 Even to the disposition that I owe,  
 When now I think you can behold such sights  
 And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,  
 When mine is blanch'd with fear. (III. iv. 112-16)

If Adams and Young are right, then Beaumont had seen *Macbeth* and observed the swift transition of feeling from 'mirth' to paralysed fear as the cup clattered down, the fear revealed in the face of the actor, 'as pale as death itself.'

Forman leaves us with the impression that he had seen a skilled actor play Macbeth; and if we accept the reference in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* as well, the impression of an actor who attempted to achieve a complete identity with the character is unavoidable. It is more than probable that Forman has afforded us glimpses of Richard Burbage—Burbage who allowed himself to be 'possessed' by Shakespeare's great tragic figures, as all the surviving evidence about him suggests.

Burbage was known for his concentration and his 'action'. Richard Flecknoe wrote that Burbage had the capacity for 'so wholly transforming himself into his Part, and putting off himself with his Cloathes, as he never (not so much as in the Tying-house) assum'd himself again until the Play was done'.<sup>1</sup> Flecknoe tells us that Burbage could 'transform himself into what shape he would' and praises him for his 'action':

we may say  
 'Twas only he who gave life unto a play  
 Which was but dead, as twas by the author writ,  
 Till he by action animated it.<sup>2</sup>

Cicero defined action, and this sense of the word was understood in Shakespeare's day as the 'language and the eloquence of the body'.<sup>3</sup> The body of the actor playing Macbeth would have been eloquent when he grew 'as pale as death itself'. We could say of him that his 'body thought'.

<sup>1</sup> *Critical Essays*, ed. Spingarn, II, 95.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Praises of Richard Burbage', in Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors* (1929), p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> See *Actors on Acting*, ed. T. Cole and H. K. Chinoy (1949), p. 26.

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 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

MACBETH AND THE PLAYERS

Action could and did include pronunciation, the eloquence of the voice, as well as of the eyes or hands: Burbage had the capacity to speak expressively and could change tone successfully, one of the most important means of dramatic effect in the theatre. Flecknoe writes that Burbage could ‘artfully vary and modulate his Voice, even to know how much breath he is to give to every syllable...animating his words with speaking, and Speech with Action’.<sup>1</sup>

Burbage allowed himself to be so possessed with his characters that members of his audience sometimes found it difficult to disentangle the actor from the characters he played. Richard Corbet, Bishop of Oxford, tells the story of ‘mine host...full of ale and history’, for whom the figure of Richard III gradually transformed itself as he spoke of ‘the inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell’, into that of Richard Burbage:

... he mistooke a player for a King  
 For when he would have sayd, King Richard dyed  
 And call’d—A horse—he, Burbidge cry’d.<sup>2</sup>

When Burbage died in March 1618, the writer of *A Funerall Elegye on ye Death of the famous Actor Richard Burbedg* believed that Shakespeare’s tragic heroes had died with him. The writer of the elegy felt that neither ‘young Hamlet’, nor ‘ould Heiroymoe’ and ‘moe beside’ would be played satisfactorily again:

No more young Hamlet, ould Heiroymoe  
 King Lear, the Greued Moore, and moe beside,  
 That lived in him; have now forever dy’d.<sup>3</sup>

Around 1611, however, when Forman saw *Macbeth*, Burbage was still very much alive and at the height of his powers, as surviving actors’ lists tell us, and playing the principal tragic roles at the Globe. In 1610, on May 31, Burbage took part in a city pageant with the boy-actor John Rice. Burbage played ‘Amphion, the Father of harmonie or Music, a grave and iudicious Prophet-like personage, attyred in his apte habits, every way answerable to his state and profession’.<sup>4</sup> During the first half of the year

<sup>1</sup> *Critical Essays*, II, 95.

<sup>2</sup> See Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Athenaeum* (May 19, 1888), p. 641.