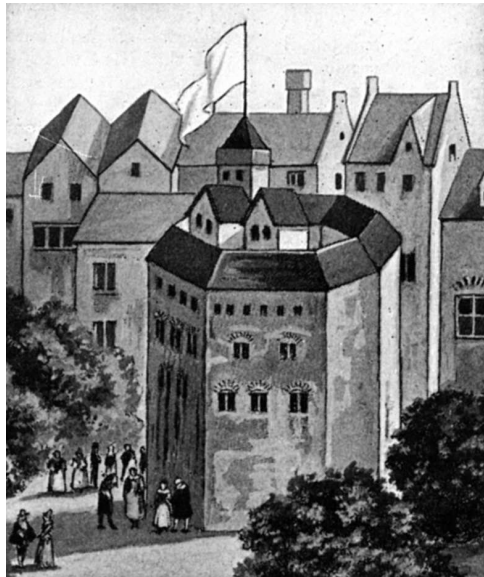


# Macbeth

## a Playgoer's Guide

King Malcolm II ... reigned from 1005 to 1034 and was the last king in the direct male line to descend from Kenneth MacAlpine, who united the Scots and Picts in 843 A.D. and is considered the founder of Scotland. One of Malcolm's three daughters, Bethoc, married Crinan, the secular hereditary Abbot of Dunkeld. Through her, the Abbot's son [Duncan] was installed by Malcolm as the King of Cumbria in 1018. After Malcolm II's murder by his nobles at Glamis, Duncan killed his opponents and seized the throne as King Duncan I. His first cousins, Macbeth (of Shakespearian fame) and Thorfinn the Raven Feeder, Norwegian Earl of Orkney, united to advance Macbeth's claim to the throne through his mother, another daughter of Malcolm II. Duncan reigned from 1034 until he was defeated in battle by their combined armies and killed by Macbeth in August 1040 at Elgin. Scotland was then ruled by Thorfinn in the northern districts and Macbeth in the southern districts. -- James E. Fargo, FSA Scot., *Clan Donnachaidh History*.



The Globe Theatre  
in Shakespeare's Time

## The curse of "The Scottish Play"

The theatre is cluttered with superstitions, ranging from the taboo against whistling backstage to uttering the epithet 'break a leg' for good luck. But there is one superstition that sends shivers up the spine of even the most hardened theatre practitioner, the curse of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" - Patrick Finelli

*Macbeth* is rarely referred to by its own name when it is put on by any theatre group, and is instead called "The Scottish Play." The reason behind all this is that the play has a particularly awful history of being bad luck to its performers. As a precaution, many believe that by never using its name, they can ward off the bad luck that it brings.

Some of the bad luck in it has been attributed to the fact that the play deals with witchcraft; old superstitions about dealing with evil.

Disregarding the old ideas, there have still been a number of events that have happened to people putting on the play, contributing further to its reputation. In a presentation in New York during 1849, there was a riot in the audience that killed 31 of the people there, as well as injuring an additional 150. In a 1937 production, a stage weight fell on the chair of one of the actors just after he had gotten out of it.

Parick Finelli, a professor of theatre history, himself had a few run-ins with the bad luck of the play in one of his modern productions. "An actor fell off the stage during the curtain call on opening night and suffered a broken shoulder. On another occasion, a fire started in our prop room, and our stage manager was beaten and robbed. Since then, I have been even more vigilant in guarding my speech when discussing the play at or near a theatre."

Those who do not believe in the play's bad luck often attribute the things that happen to the atmosphere that the play has to put on. Dark settings, fog, and low lighting are all important parts of the way it looks, and these things could easily cause many accidents if people are not careful. Still, for many, the Scottish Play is the only name that is to be used.

## What about Witches?

The Weird Sisters serve as foreshadowers in the play. Macbeth follows their advice which often comes in the form of strange prophecies. These prophecies provide Macbeth with comfort as well, yet they are often misinterpreted. His reliance on their advice and his increasing belief in their magic abilities, is a sign of Macbeth's mental state, and how he is becoming increasingly evil. Hecate is Goddess of the witches. She understands that the witches are interfering with the mortals. Shakespeare also emphasizes the witch's lines. He does this by giving them rhyming speeches.

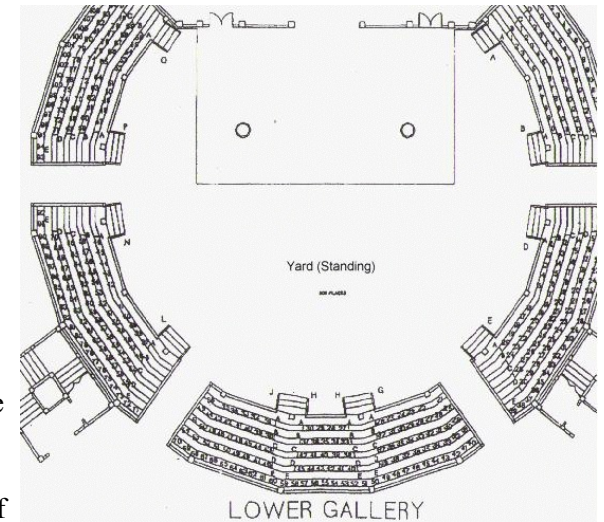
The witches were (like many aspects of the play) made part of the play to gain the interests of King James of England and Scotland. James was a firm believer in "Black magic" and was known for his witch hunts. It was also a firm belief that demons and witches often meddled in the lives of people of Earth. The idea of witches was taken very seriously by Elizabethan audiences. In many versions of this play, such as the film version directed by Roman Polanski (1971), the witches are portrayed as old women. Other supernatural characters include spirits, Hecate's servants and her talking cat. These are minor characters, but add to many popular beliefs held by the Elizabethan audience.

## Politics too

The online Encyclopedia Britannica says, further, that "Macbeth was intended to stir the interest of the new king, James I. The play's focus on regicide, a supreme crime in Shakespeare's day, addressed the feelings that had been stirred by the Gunpowder Plot (November 1605)." It is also true that Banquo, who is hailed in the play as "father to a line of kings," and who comes off rather better in Shakespeare's version than in history, was believed to be James' ancestor.

## Diagram of the Globe

When Shakespeare originally staged his plays, the playing area projected into the audience. This diagram of the seating in the Globe Theatre (from the ticket agency that sells seats in the replica of his theatre now in London), shows where the audience at the lower level would have been. Two sets of galleries circle the stage above the seats shown here. The cheapest seats were -- and are -- standing room, indicated in "the yard."



this guide was produced by the

### **Macbeth Task Force**

St. Thomas University English 2223:

### **From the Page to the Stage**

Angela Carpenter      Colin Dennis  
Joel Couture      Christopher Pinnock  
Trent Robichaud      Russ Hunt

Visit the course Web site, at

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