

Review

with BRAD REALME

Macbeth reigns in Stratford

By BRAD REALME

Macbeth at the Stratford Festival May 28 to November 11. Brian Bedford as Macbeth, Nicholas Pennell as Banquo, Goldie Semple as Lady Macbeth and Scott Westworth as Macduff. Directed by David William and Robert Beard. Tickets available by phone (519) 273-1800 and range from \$16.50 to \$39.50 depending on day, time, and seating area.

It's Shakespeare, in a Stratford June, and the pale lounge serves various modern forms of meat. You just gotta like it.

That Macbeth is one easily influenced guy. His wife says jump, he asks who, and with how big a knife. There's a lotta blood in this one; guys dropping left and right, murdered kings, friends, families and children.

But, hey, what's a Shakespearean tragedy without a little violence. You have to break a few eggs, right? Remember that woman? A whole bunch of Montagues or Capulets standing around after the curtain came down on those crazy kids, Romeo and Juliet.

A couple of things are a little tough to follow in Macbeth. First, why is Lady Macbeth so determined to kill Duncan? The king? I'm afraid social climbing isn't provocation enough. Second, why not introduce Macduff a little earlier? It's like Shakespeare ran out of people to kill off, so he introduced another noble or two to serve the purpose.

Another little thing that gets me about Shakespeare is his penchant for things Italian. Banquo: eye, now that's a real Scottish name 'n' ye. What, the guy leaped off the last ship from Bologna?

Actually, who am I to question Shakespeare? I just found it a little disconcerting. Let's face it, the Bard of Avon is usually pretty good at this sort of thing.

Bedford was great as Macbeth. He was regal, cowardly, guilty and molare in the perfect balance. Goldie Semple made Lady Macbeth believable despite a lack of discernible provocation provided her by the script.

Of course Bedford garnered the longest and loudest applause for the title role. Some in the audience were moved enough to rise for the standing O. Despite the strength of the performance I was glad the majority of the audience refused to be pulled to their feet by some zealous admirer.

Macbeth was an historical character and king of Scotland from 1040-1057, according to the throne after murdering his predecessor Duncan I. In reality he reigned for 17 years; in the play it's a matter of months and in the theatre, scarcely three hours.

But reign he does in the theatre. With the actors' traditions about "the Scottish play" so strong it is expected that strong performances would ensue. Bad things are supposed to happen during productions of Macbeth and all actors are warned from speaking the name of the play outside of its text. There are some real superstitions at work, in addition to those put in place by Shakespeare, during production of Macbeth.

Lies did murder. Like the lie, which must be constantly remembered and embellished in order to keep current, murder in Macbeth must be extended in ever widening circles to keep the secret and secure the throne.

Despite this, every character is whole, rather than a two-dimensional portrait of an emotion or cause.

According to director David William, "... that ... is what is unique about Shakespeare: the fact that his vision of human experience was so enormous, so inclusive, that there are no more villains, there's something redeemable about everybody."

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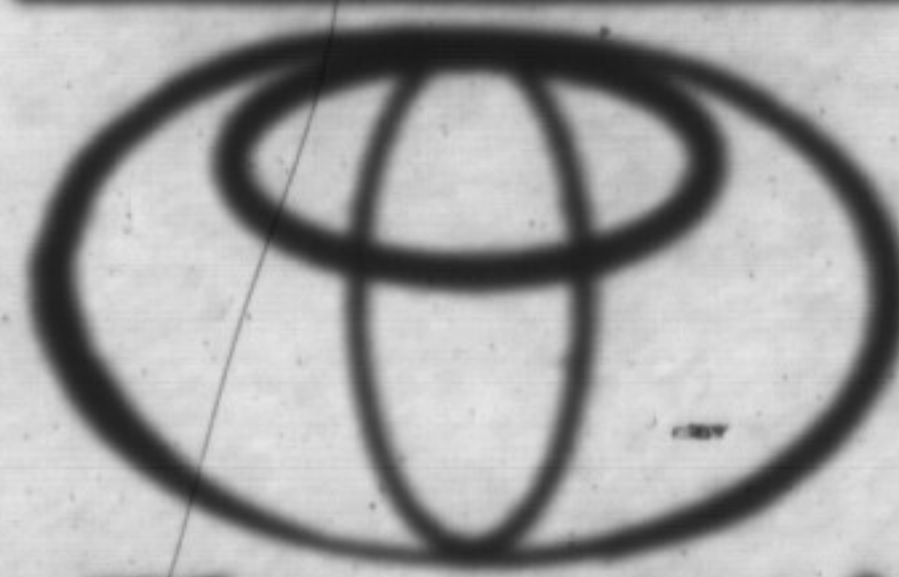
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