

Macbeth

SYNOPSIS

The Tragedy of Macbeth

Macbeth and Banquo, generals in the service of King Duncan of Scotland, are returning from victorious battles against the rebels Macdonald and Cawdor and invaders from Norway when they are spoken to by three witches (the weird sisters), who call Macbeth Thane of Glamis (which he is), and say that he will be Thane of Cawdor and then King of Scotland. They also say that Banquo's descendants will be kings, though he will not. They then disappear.

The first part of the prophecy is immediately fulfilled when the King rewards Macbeth by making him Thane of Cawdor. Encouraged by this, Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to murder Duncan when he visits their castle. Although Macbeth carries out the murder, he seems to be paralysed by it, leaving his wife to conceal what they have done. Loud knocking on the door leads to a comic interlude when the drunken porter imagines people trying to get into hell. Macduff has arrived to wake the King for an early start and discovers the murder. Suspicion immediately falls on the King's sons Malcolm and Donalbain, who have run away. Macbeth is crowned, in spite of the suspicions of Banquo and Macduff.

To secure his position, Macbeth arranges for Banquo and his son to be murdered before a banquet. The murderers bring news that Banquo is dead but that his son has escaped. During the banquet, Macbeth believes he sees Banquo in his place, and the gathering breaks up in disorder.

Macbeth returns to the witches, who warn him to beware of Macduff, but assure him that he need not fear until Burnham Wood comes to Dunsinane, and that he cannot be harmed by any man born of a woman.

Reassured by this, Macbeth has Macduff's wife and children murdered while Macduff is away in England persuading Malcolm to return. Malcolm tests his loyalty before agreeing to raise an army with the help of the English.

Meanwhile Macbeth is increasingly isolated, and his wife walks in her sleep, continually washing her hands. When Malcolm's army approaches they cut down branches in Burnham Wood to hide their numbers, so that their army looks like a wood moving. Macbeth receives the news that his wife has died, but is still confident when he faces Macduff, who has broken into the castle, until Macduff tells him that he was born by caesarean after the death of his mother. Nevertheless, Macbeth fights bravely, but is defeated and beheaded by Macduff. Malcolm is crowned King of Scotland (while the audience is aware that King James I, for whom the play was performed, claimed descent from Banquo).

Media:

DVD:

Macbeth (1948), dir. Orson Welles

Throne of Blood (1957), dir. Akira Kurosawa (an adaptation of the story to a Japanese Samurai setting)

Macbeth (1971), dir. Roman Polanski

William Shakespeare's Macbeth (1978), dir. Mike Hall, with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench

Macbeth (BBC TV Shakespeare 1985), dir. Jack Gold

Macbeth by Verdi (1987), dir. Claude d'Anna (Italian opera based on *Macbeth*)

Men of Respect (1990), dir. William Reilly (a thriller inspired by *Macbeth* set in New York)

Macbeth (1997), dir. Jeremy Freeston

Macbeth (RSC 2001), dir. Greg Doran

Scotland PA (2002), dir. Billy Morisette (adaptation to a Pennsylvania fast food restaurant)

Macbeth (2003), dir. Michael Bogdanov (in a 2-disc set with *Twelfth Night*)

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk by Shostakovich (2005), dir. Toni Bargalló (Russian opera based on *Macbeth*)

Shakespeare Retold: *Macbeth* (2005), dir. Mark Brozel (witty adaptation when Joe Macbeth plans to take over Duncan's gourmet restaurant)

Macbeth (2006), dir. Geoffrey Wright (action movie set in Australian drug-dealing underworld)

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 1 (2007) *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Macbeth*

Macbeth by Verdi (2009), dir. Adrian Noble (Italian opera based on *Macbeth*)

Macbeth (2011), dir. Rupert Goold

The Tragedy of Macbeth (2012), dir. Daniel Coll (set in 11th century Scotland but using contemporary ideas of celebrity)

Currently unavailable:

Joe Macbeth (1955), dir. Ken Hughes (the *Macbeth* story in a gangster milieu)

Macbeth on the Estate (1997), dir. Penny Woodcock (Shakespeare's words, but with setting and accents from a run-down area of Birmingham - scenes on YouTube)

Maqbool (2003), dir. Vishal Bhardwaj (the story transposed to Mumbai gangland)

CD Audio:

Macbeth (Naxos), with Stephen Dillane

Macbeth (BBC), with Ken Stott

Macbeth (Harper), with Anthony Quayle

Macbeth (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare), with Hugh Ross

[Michael Mitchell]