

英文文学作品辅导丛书

WORK NOTES ON

MACBETH

麦克白

William Shakespeare



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LITERATURE
GUIDES



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YORK NOTES

General Editors: Professor A.N. Jeffares (University of Stirling) & Professor Suheil Bushrui (American University of Beirut)

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YORK PRESS

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《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

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钱 瑗



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Part 1

Introduction

The life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford upon Avon in 1564. His mother, Mary, came from a family of prosperous farmers and his father, John, variously described as a tanner, glove-maker and dealer in grain and meat, rose in wealth and importance during the earlier years of Shakespeare's life to occupy the most prominent positions in Stratford. As Shakespeare advanced in his fortunes, his father appears to have dropped out of public life.

It is likely that Shakespeare, because he was the eldest son, received a reasonable education in the local school. There are few records available to tell us much about Shakespeare's early adult life or how he made his way into the world of the theatre. He married Ann Hathaway when he was eighteen and, with a family to support, he must have taken some job to earn his living, but the first reference to Shakespeare's involvement in the theatre occurs in 1592 when a rival dramatist, Robert Greene, attacked the actor Shakespeare for daring to write plays. By this time he had collaborated with other authors in writing some plays and his own narrative poems and plays were establishing him as a new figure in the literary life of London. Almost certainly Shakespeare had entered the theatres as an actor in the mid-1580s and over the next twenty years there are references to him as a competent actor at the same time as his fame as a writer was growing. In 1596 the Shakespeare family, in his father's name, but probably on the strength of Shakespeare's success, was granted a coat of arms, an acknowledgement of a rise in society, and in 1597 Shakespeare felt prosperous enough to buy one of the largest houses in his native Stratford.

We know that from 1594 Shakespeare was a member of the theatrical company called the Chamberlain's Men and we know that when the company moved into the Globe Theatre in 1599 Shakespeare was a part-owner of the project. On the accession of James I to the throne, Shakespeare's company renamed itself the King's Men and the company frequently played before the king. By this time, Shakespeare was widely acclaimed as the leading playwright of his age and his popularity and

financial success continued till his death in 1616 when he was fifty-two.

The exact dating of particular plays is not usually possible but a mixture of internal and external evidence helps us to place his thirty-seven plays in a rough chronological order between about 1589 and 1613. In the early years Shakespeare naturally experimented with different subjects and different forms. From about 1594 to 1600 he extended his writing in comedy, history plays and tragedy with particular stress on the first two categories. The period from 1600 to 1608 is dominated by his famous tragedies and in his last phase Shakespeare concentrated on sweet-sad plays in which he attempted to reconcile disappointment and loss with faith.

The facts about Shakespeare's life offered above are all of a public sort; we have virtually no record—apart from his poems and plays—of Shakespeare as a private individual. Many scholars have tried to construct the private Shakespeare from the evidence offered in his work but this attempt has led to as many Shakespeares as there are readers. It has also been doubted that the man called William Shakespeare wrote the plays; surely, say these doubters, the author of such masterpieces could not have been brought up in provincial Stratford, surely he must have been a man of incomparably varied experience, widely travelled, deeply read in the literature of Greece and Rome. We are left, after reading the doubters and speculators, with the works themselves and we must make of them what we can.

Literary and theatrical background

The second half of the sixteenth century was a period of experiment in English literature and by the end of the century a new confidence and versatility were being shown by many writers, not only in drama but in poetry and prose. The movement of ideas commonly called the Renaissance arrived in Britain some time after continental Europe and particularly Italy had felt its effects. By the time the Renaissance reached Britain it had become mingled with the shift in religious thinking of the Reformation. The influx of fresh theories and models added to a strong national consciousness may help to explain why the period from 1570 to 1620 became undoubtedly one of the most prolific and exciting in English literature.

The development of printing processes meant not only that new books could be published and circulated more quickly and widely but, through the translation of famous books from abroad and the compilation of histories based on newly available sources, the past of Europe became accessible to anyone who could read. This most distinguished effort of

translation culminated in 1611 in the Authorised (by King James) Version of the Bible which, alongside the works of Shakespeare, occupies a central position in English literature.

Both Shakespeare's plays and the translation of the Bible share an eloquence, range and that mixture of inevitability and surprise of language which many critics would agree is the mark of poetic genius. How did this language come about? Shakespeare did not invent it; the Bible was translated by what amounted to a committee. In the rapid growth in English society in the sixteenth century the language, while holding on to the vocabulary of particular trades, professions and local activities, imported or created a vast new vocabulary to deal with the material entering the culture of England. In political theory, scientific experiment, theology, new words were needed for new ideas.

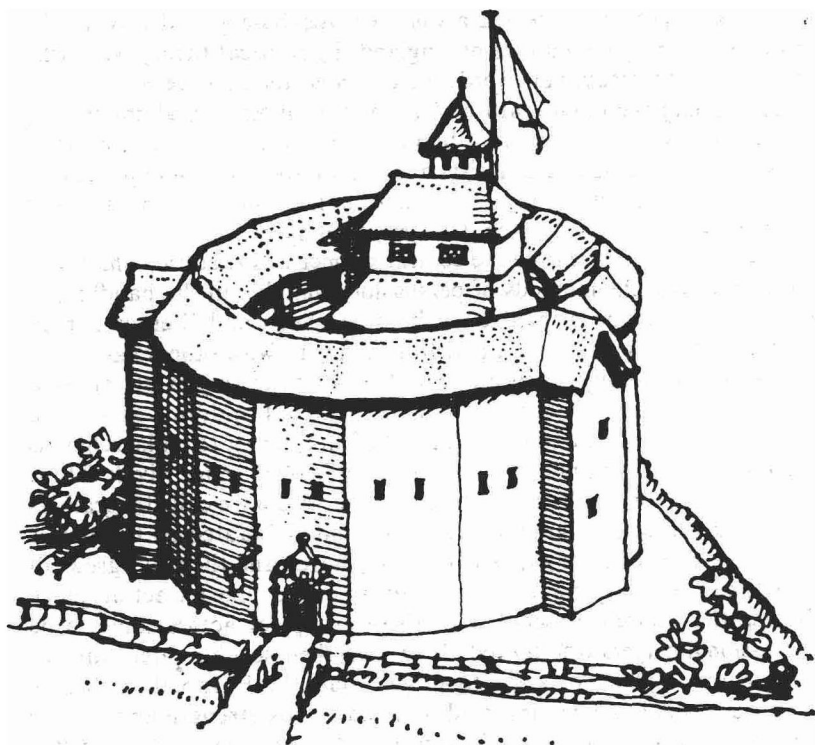
The development in literature which had the most crucial importance in drama was the refinement of blank verse as the verse form of plays. This refinement helped dramatists to break up speeches, to individualise them and to present the give and take, the interruptions, the dialogue of characters and not just the delivery of set speeches.

In the schools of the time the central subject was rhetoric, which was concerned with the methods of persuasion available in the handling of language. Until the printed book became cheap and literacy spread throughout the population, a person's authority with others had much to do with his ability to speak well. The prime examples of this skill were exhibited in the Court and church pulpits. The drama as an area of literature developed, in the main, out of an attempt to make religious stories and the struggle between good and evil more vivid. These religious plays originally based on biblical stories were called moralities and when the authors gradually adapted and elaborated on the stories with more freedom, the gap between the Church and the plays grew till it became necessary for the groups of actors to find an acting place outside the Church. It seems that these groups of actors came to be professional players who toured about with their secular entertainment from place to place, or stage to stage. Thus, the Elizabethan theatre had deep roots in a long oral tradition and it took strength and vitality from this shared experience of the people. *Macbeth* with all its artistry and complex structure dealt with themes of contemporary immediacy in a language and style readily accessible to its audience.

In London there were various sites favoured by the acting groups but it was not till 1576 that a permanent theatre building was erected on the edge of London. By the 1590s there were three such theatres in London and the pattern of the buildings was set for some years to come. The shape derived from the courtyards where plays had been acted and

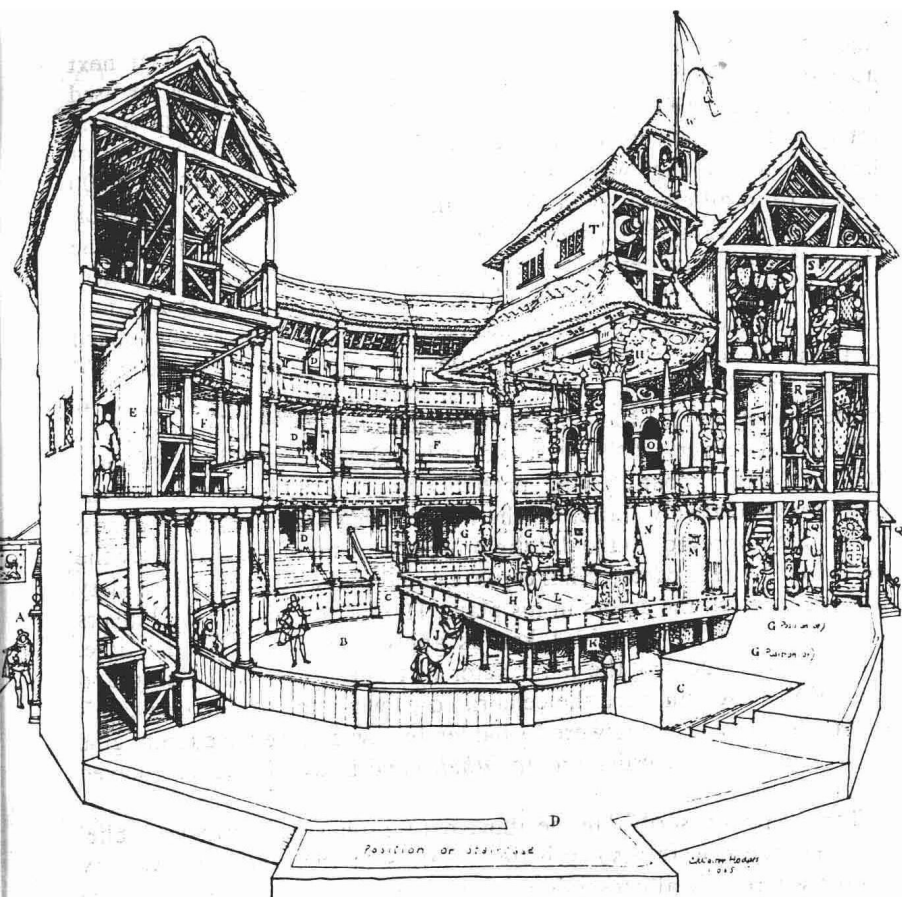
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the basic plan of a stage, about fourteen metres wide by nine metres deep, projecting into the audience, was common to them all. At the back of the stage was a projecting balcony which could be used in scenes requiring differences in heights such as the battlements of a castle or the upper windows of a house. In the centre of the stage was a trap door through which characters could make sudden entrances or exits. A character could arrive on stage by swinging down from the balcony, emerging from below or coming through the doors at the back of the stage. Across the space under the balcony a curtain was hung



THE GLOBE PLAYHOUSE

The theatre, originally built by James Burbage in 1576, was made of wood (Burbage had been trained as a carpenter). It was situated to the north of the River Thames on Shoreditch in Finsbury Fields. There was trouble with the lease of the land, and so the theatre was dismantled in 1598, and reconstructed 'in an other forme' on the south side of the Thames as the Globe. Its sign is thought to have been a figure of the Greek hero Hercules carrying the globe. It was built in six months, its galleries being roofed with thatch. This caught fire in 1613 when some smouldering wadding, from a cannon used in a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, lodged in it. The theatre was burnt down, and when it was rebuilt again on the old foundations, the galleries were roofed with tiles.



A CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERIOR OF THE GLOBE PLAYHOUSE

- | | |
|--|---|
| AA Main entrance | N Curtained 'place behind the stage' |
| B The Yard | O Gallery above the stage, used as required |
| CC Entrances to lowest gallery | sometimes by musicians, sometimes by spec- |
| D Entrance to staircase and upper galleries | tators, and often as part of the play |
| E Corridor serving the different sections of the | P Back-stage area (the tiring-house) |
| middle gallery | Q Tiring-house door |
| F Middle gallery ('Twopenny Rooms') | R Dressing-rooms |
| G 'Gentlemen's Rooms' or Lords' Rooms' | S Wardrobe and storage |
| H The stage | T The hut housing the machine for lowering |
| J The hanging being put up round the stage | enthroned gods, etc., to the stage |
| K The 'Hell' under the stage | U The 'Heavens' |
| L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell | W Hoisting the playhouse flag |
| MM Stage doors | |

and there actors could change their costumes or wait for their next appearance. There is some evidence that this space could also be used as part of the acting area, particularly useful for scenes of surprise and intrigue. Sound effects and music could come also from both above or below. The audience were never far from the action and about 2,500 people from all classes of society could sit in tiers or stand in the pit (the ground) around the stage. These public theatres were open to the sky and if the weather was wet the performance would be postponed. No artificial light was needed and the scenery was simple; explanations about the time of day, location and period of the play were announced to the audience or written into the opening of scenes. Costume could be elaborate but was not in any way strictly in period according to our modern knowledge. Much emphasis must have been put on a clear and enunciated delivery of the lines and, although there is evidence of some spectacularly acrobatic acting, probably by present day conventions the acting was relatively static. As the theatres developed, as the standard of writing improved, so too did the professionalism of the actors. By the end of his writing career, Shakespeare could make demands of subtlety and restraint on the actors in his plays. Hamlet's advice to the Players (see *Hamlet* III.2) can be taken as applying to actors of the time. Richard Burbage was the main actor of tragic roles; Will Kemp and later Robert Armin were the celebrated clown-actors in Shakespeare's company. Female actors were forbidden by law and we have to imagine such characters as Desdemona in *Othello* and Lady Macbeth as played by boys.

The theatres described in the above paragraph were known as 'public' theatres; there were also 'private' theatres in the houses of wealthy people where official censorship, political or moral, could not easily be applied. In these indoor theatres lighting was by candles and it is an interesting possibility that *Macbeth* with its emphasis on darkness may have been devised for such a theatre.

Relevant ideas

Each society has some idea of order and is frightened of certain forces which seem, to that society, to threaten this order. In Shakespeare's England the order came to be seen as very precarious; almost every aspect of society was confronted with new and often frightening questions. Up till Shakespeare's lifetime and embodied in the strong personality of Queen Elizabeth the central and God-given position of the monarch was generally accepted. With the rise of radical Protestant thinking which had already usurped the power of the Pope, the for-

mulation of new unscrupulous political theories particularly associated with Machiavelli, and the shift in real power from aristocratic titles and names to monetary capital in the hands of a merchant class, the framework of social order became open to the possibility of drastic change. A new spirit of experimental science was about which asked people to read the Bible for themselves, test laws on their own consciences, examine the evidence, not accept simply because a king or a priest stated some doctrine.

From medieval times European theology, philosophical and what we should now call social theory, had been concerned to construct a system which would show people how God, the Christian God, had arranged the world of His creation. In this perfect arrangement there could be no gaps, omissions or oddities. God had given men reason to allow them to see how His scheme operated. The whole of the created world came to be considered as a series of related categories or the links in a Great Chain of Being with God at the top and inanimate matter at the bottom. Man, possessed of both spirit and body, occupied a crucial link in this chain. In a similar way, the basis of all creation rested on the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, each with its characteristic quality, or humour, (melancholy, sanguine, choleric and phlegmatic, respectively) and each man was a balance or imbalance of these elements.

This order of creation was present also in man's social world and similar gradations were traced in society from the monarch down to the least of his subjects. Furthermore, the interrelationship between the macrocosm (big world) of the universe and the microcosm (little world) of man was there for the individual person to witness. The circuits of the stars and planets, the changes in the natural world around him, were in no way irrelevant to man's behaviour but were in close sympathetic *rapport* with human actions. (See *Macbeth*, II.3.51–8 and III.4.121–5 for examples of the importance of this relationship between the macrocosm and microcosm). The law of Nature was given to all by God and conscience is the faculty by which individual man acknowledges this law. The crime of murder was a crime against this law of Nature and regicide (the murder of a king) was the murder of God's appointed leader.

Towards the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign in England (she ruled from 1558 to 1603) there were many rumours of rebellion and intrigue. Although Elizabeth had a stronger, more centralist government than any English ruler before her, this position was established at a considerable expense in the freedom of her subjects. The state-approved religion of Protestantism was constantly in danger of attack from inside and outside England, from both extremist Protestants, the Presbyteri-

ans, and Roman Catholics who manoeuvred in secret to have Elizabeth deposed and a brand of religion more favourable to them imposed. In 1587, Mary Queen of Scots, the main Roman Catholic contender for the throne, was executed by Elizabeth and in the following year the Spanish Armada, sent to depose Protestantism, was defeated by a mixture of luck and heroism. Every year men were arrested, executed, new plots were suspected, intrigues with foreign governments were detected and the rule of Elizabeth came to its end with the problems of political and religious stability still unresolved. The Tudor line was at an end and Elizabeth's will alone could not prevent the throne from passing to the Stuarts.

The easiest way to attack a political rival was to accuse him of treachery and the easiest way to prove his treachery was to link him with one of the proscribed religious groups. In 1605 James dealt with some troublesome rivals by claiming to have detected a Catholic plot to blow up the Parliament. In Scotland, even more than in England at the time, political troublemakers were accused of witchcraft and heresy. James himself was an authority on witchcraft and the London edition of his *Daemonology* was published in 1603, the year of his accession to the throne of Great Britain. Certainly most people believed in the existence and power of witches, devils and ghosts and the religiously orthodox stressed that the Devil could take many shapes. According to the teaching of the Church, Heaven and Hell were actual places and the central teaching of Christianity was the sinful (fallen) nature of man and the necessity of a sense of guilt to bring the sinner to accept the salvation from sinfulness offered by Christ. The reason of man was not foolproof and the Church urged the faithful to be on their guard against any suggestion of communication with the Devil. At the opening of *Hamlet* genuine doubts concerning the authenticity of Hamlet's father's ghost are apparent and in Act I, Scene 3 of *Macbeth* similar fears are expressed by Banquo (the ancestor, according to legend, of King James) concerning the Witches:

*Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?*

(lines 82–84)

and

*And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence*

(lines 122–125)

Mutability

In medieval writings one of the predominant concerns was with mutability or change, the fickleness and frailty of human life, the body always weakened by time, the vanity of human achievement. During the Renaissance increasing prestige came to be attached to individual prowess, to the attempt of one man to challenge mutability, to assert his human quality against change and adversity. It mattered little whether the effort took a religious way or a scholarly turn, like Erasmus, or an artistic direction, like Michelangelo (who died in the year of Shakespeare's birth), or a military mould, or a mixture of them all like Lorenzo (the Magnificent) de Medici—what mattered was the daring, the ambition of the effort. As the focus of scientific enquiry sharpened during the sixteenth century the immutability of absolute values and even the heavens, the macrocosm, came into question. The exploration of the New World, starting with the discovery of America in 1492 by Columbus, and of the shores of Africa, the degree of culture and learning revealed in the world of Islam from the time of the Crusades, the newly published knowledge of Greek and Roman civilisation, suggested that Western Europe was rather parochial and that there might be other ways of seeing the world and how it operated. In the same year as Shakespeare, Galileo Galilei was born and his scientific experiments, even if they were condemned by the Catholic Church, added to the growing weight of evidence that the medieval cosmology could not be maintained for much longer. If the earth was no longer the centre of the universe, if stars beyond stars had their own galaxies, if the biblical statement that the sun goes round the earth was wrong, where did this shift in conception leave man? If even the stars moved and died—and new stars appeared and disappeared thrice in Shakespeare's lifetime—if plague, war, rebellion, cruelty were the other face of Nature, what could man rely on? What was not subject to mutability? Shakespeare in his *Sonnets* asserts the value of human love and the durability of his art against the corrosion of time, but part of the charm and poignancy of these poems lies in our awareness of how fragile such an assertion is.

A note on the text

Macbeth was first published in 1623 in what is known as the First Folio, a collection of all but one (*Pericles*) of Shakespeare's plays made by John Heminges and Henry Condell who had known and acted with Shakespeare for twenty years. The text of *Macbeth* in the First Folio