

COLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

# *Macbeth*

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WITH DETAILED NOTES  
FROM THE WORLD'S  
LEADING CENTER FOR  
SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT  
AND PAUL WERSTINE

FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

*The Tragedy of*

# Macbeth

By

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT  
AND PAUL WERSTINE



WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS

New York London Toronto Sydney

The sale of this book without its cover is unauthorized. If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that it was reported to the publisher as "unsold and destroyed." Neither the author nor the publisher has received payment for the sale of this "stripped book."

A WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS *Original* Publication



Washington Square Press  
1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 1992 by The Folger Shakespeare Library

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information address Washington Square Press, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

ISBN: 0-7434-7710-3

Washington Square Press New Folger Edition August 1992

25 24 23

WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-800-456-6798 or [business@simonandschuster.com](mailto:business@simonandschuster.com).

## **From the Director of the Library**

For over four decades, the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare provided accurate and accessible texts of the plays and poems to students, teachers, and millions of other interested readers. Today, in an age often impatient with the past, the passion for Shakespeare continues to grow. No author speaks more powerfully to the human condition, in all its variety, than this actor/playwright from a minor sixteenth-century English village.

Over the years vast changes have occurred in the way Shakespeare's works are edited, performed, studied, and taught. The New Folger Library Shakespeare replaces the earlier versions, bringing to bear the best and most current thinking concerning both the texts and their interpretation. Here is an edition which makes the plays and poems fully understandable for modern readers using uncompromising scholarship. Professors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine are uniquely qualified to produce this New Folger Shakespeare for a new generation of readers. The Library is grateful for the learning, clarity, and imagination they have brought to this ambitious project.

Werner Gundersheimer,  
Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library  
from 1984 to 2002

## Editors' Preface

In recent years, ways of dealing with Shakespeare's texts and with the interpretation of his plays have been undergoing significant change. This edition, while retaining many of the features that have always made the Folger Shakespeare so attractive to the general reader, at the same time reflects these current ways of thinking about Shakespeare. For example, modern readers, actors, and teachers have become interested in the differences between, on the one hand, the early forms in which Shakespeare's plays were first published and, on the other hand, the forms in which editors through the centuries have presented them. In response to this interest, we have based our edition on what we consider the best early printed version of a particular play (explaining our rationale in a section called "An Introduction to This Text") and have marked our changes in the text—unobtrusively, we hope, but in such a way that the curious reader can be aware that a change has been made and can consult the "Textual Notes" to discover what appeared in the early printed version.

Current ways of looking at the plays are reflected in our brief introductions, in many of the commentary notes, in the annotated lists of "Further Reading," and especially in each play's "Modern Perspective," an essay written by an outstanding scholar who brings to the reader his or her fresh assessment of the play in the light of today's interests and concerns.

As in the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare, which this edition replaces, we include explanatory notes designed to help make Shakespeare's language clearer to a modern reader, and we place the

notes on the page facing the text that they explain. We also follow the earlier edition in including illustrations—of objects, of clothing, of mythological figures—from books and manuscripts in the Folger Library collection. We provide fresh accounts of the life of Shakespeare, of the publishing of his plays, and of the theaters in which his plays were performed, as well as an introduction to the text itself. We also include a section called “Reading Shakespeare’s Language,” in which we try to help readers learn to “break the code” of Elizabethan poetic language.

For each section of each volume, we are indebted to a host of generous experts and fellow scholars. The “Reading Shakespeare’s Language” sections, for example, could not have been written had not Arthur King, of Brigham Young University, and Randal Robinson, author of *Unlocking Shakespeare’s Language*, led the way in untangling Shakespearean language puzzles and shared their insights and methodologies generously with us. “Shakespeare’s Life” profited by the careful reading given it by S. Schoenbaum, “Shakespeare’s Theater” was read and strengthened by Andrew Gurr and John Astington, and “The Publication of Shakespeare’s Plays” is indebted to the comments of Peter W. M. Blayney. We, as editors, take sole responsibility for any errors in our editions.

We are grateful to the authors of the “Modern Perspectives,” to Leeds Barroll and David Bevington for their generous encouragement, to the Huntington and Newberry Libraries for fellowship support, to King’s College for the grants it has provided to Paul Werstine, to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided him with a Research Time Stipend for 1990–91, and to the Folger Institute’s Center for Shakespeare Studies for its fortuitous sponsorship of a workshop on “Shakespeare’s Texts for Students and

Teachers" (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by Richard Knowles of the University of Wisconsin), a workshop from which we learned an enormous amount about what is wanted by college and high-school teachers of Shakespeare today.

Our biggest debt is to the Folger Shakespeare Library: to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Library, who has made possible our edition; to Jean Miller, the Library's Art Curator, who combed the Library holdings for illustrations, and to Julie Ainsworth, Head of the Photography Department, who carefully photographed them; to Peggy O'Brien, Director of Education, who gave us expert advice about the needs being expressed by Shakespeare teachers and students (and to Martha Christian and other "master teachers" who used our texts in manuscript in their classrooms); to the staff of the Academic Programs Division, especially Paul Menzer (who drafted "Further Reading" material), Mary Tonkinson, Lena Cowen Orlin, Molly Haws, and Jessica Hymowitz; and, finally, to the staff of the Library Reading Room, whose patience and support have been invaluable.

Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine



**A Scottish king and his court.**  
**From Raphael Holinshed, *The historie of Scotland* (1577).**



## Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

In 1603, at about the middle of Shakespeare's career as a playwright, a new monarch ascended the throne of England. He was James VI of Scotland, who then also became James I of England. Immediately, Shakespeare's London was alive with an interest in things Scottish. Many Scots followed their king to London and attended the theaters there. Shakespeare's company, which became the King's Men under James's patronage, now sometimes staged their plays for the new monarch's entertainment, just as they had for Queen Elizabeth before him. It was probably within this context that Shakespeare turned to Raphael Holinshed's history of Scotland for material for a tragedy.

In Scottish history of the eleventh century, Shakespeare found a spectacle of violence—the slaughter of whole armies and of innocent families, the assassination of kings, the ambush of nobles by murderers, the brutal execution of rebels. He also came upon stories of witches and wizards providing advice to traitors. Such accounts could feed the new Scottish King James's belief in a connection between treason and witchcraft. James had already himself executed women as witches. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* supplied its audience with a sensational view of witches and supernatural apparitions and equally sensational accounts of bloody battles in which, for example, a rebel was “unseamed . . . from the nave [navel] to th' chops [jaws].”

It is possible, then, that in writing *Macbeth* Shakespeare was mainly intent upon appealing to the new interests in London brought about by James's kingship. What he created, though, is a play that has fascinated generations of readers and audiences that care little

about Scottish history. In its depiction of a man who murders his king and kinsman in order to gain the crown, only to lose all that humans seem to need in order to be happy—sleep, nourishment, friends, love—*Macbeth* teases us with huge questions. Why do people do evil knowing that it is evil? Does Macbeth represent someone who murders because fate tempts him? Because his wife pushes him into it? Because he is overly ambitious? Having killed Duncan, why does Macbeth fall apart, unable to sleep, seeing ghosts, putting spies in everyone's home, killing his friends and innocent women and children? Why does the success of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—prophesied by the witches, promising the couple power and riches and "peace to all their nights and days to come"—turn so quickly to ashes, destroying the Macbeths' relationship, their world, and, finally, both of them?

In earlier centuries, Macbeth's story was seen as a powerful study of a heroic individual who commits an evil act and pays an enormous price as his conscience—and the natural forces for good in the universe—destroy him. More recently, his story has been applied to nations that overreach themselves, his speeches of despair quoted to show that Shakespeare shared late-twentieth-century feelings of alienation. Today, as Professor Susan Snyder describes in her "Modern Perspective" on the play (found at the back of this book), the line between Macbeth's evil and the supposed good of those who oppose him is being blurred, new attitudes about witches and witchcraft are being expressed, new questions raised about the ways that maleness and femaleness are portrayed in the play. As with so many of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* speaks to each generation with a new voice.

After you have read the play, we invite you to read "*Macbeth: A Modern Perspective*" by Professor Susan Snyder of Swarthmore College.

# Reading Shakespeare's Language

For many people today, reading Shakespeare's language can be a problem—but it is a problem that can be solved. Those who have studied Latin (or even French or German or Spanish) and those who are used to reading poetry will have little difficulty understanding the language of Shakespeare's poetic drama. Others, however, need to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures and of recognizing and understanding poetic compressions, omissions, and wordplay. And even those skilled in reading unusual sentence structures may have occasional trouble with Shakespeare's words. Four hundred years of "static"—caused by changes in language and in life—intervene between his speaking and our hearing. Most of his immense vocabulary is still in use, but a few of his words are not, and, worse, some of his words now have meanings quite different from those they had in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the theater, most of these difficulties are solved for us by actors who study the language and articulate it for us so that the essential meaning is heard—or, when combined with stage action, is at least *felt*. When reading on one's own, one must do what each actor does: go over the lines (often with a dictionary close at hand) until the puzzles are solved and the lines yield up their poetry and the characters speak in words and phrases that are, suddenly, rewarding and wonderfully memorable.

## Shakespeare's Words

As you begin to read the opening scenes of a play by Shakespeare, you may notice occasional unfamiliar

words. Some are unfamiliar simply because we no longer use them. In the opening scenes of *Macbeth*, for example, you will find the words *aroint thee* (begone), *runnion* (a slatternly woman), *coign* (corner), *anon* (right away), *alarum* (a call to arms), *sewer* (a servant who oversees the serving of food), and *hautboy* (a very loud wind instrument designed for outdoor ceremonials, the forerunner of the orchestral oboe). Words of this kind are explained in notes to the text and will become familiar the more of Shakespeare's plays you read.

Some words are strange not because of the "static" introduced by changes in language over the past centuries but because these are words that Shakespeare is using to build a dramatic world that has its own geography and history and story. *Macbeth*, for example, builds, in its opening scenes, a location, a past history, and a background mythology by references to "the Western Isles," to "valor's minion," to "Bellona's bridegroom," to "thanes," "Sincl," "Glamis," and "Cawdor," to "kerns and gallowglasses," to "the Weïrd Sisters," to "Norweyan ranks," to "Inverness" and "Saint Colme's Inch." These "local" references build the Scotland that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth inhabit and will become increasingly familiar to you as you get further into the play.

In *Macbeth*, as in all of Shakespeare's writing, the most problematic words are those that we still use but that we use with different meanings. In the second scene of *Macbeth* we find the words *composition* (meaning "terms of peace") and *present* (meaning "immediate"); in the third scene, *choppy* is used where we would use "chapped" or "wrinkled," *addition* where we would use "title"; in the seventh scene, *receipt* is used to mean "receptacle." Again, such words will be explained in the notes to this text, but they, too, will become familiar as you continue to read Shakespeare's language.

## Shakespeare's Sentences

In an English sentence, meaning is quite dependent on the place given each word. "The dog bit the boy" and "The boy bit the dog" mean very different things, even though the individual words are the same. Because English places such importance on the positions of words in sentences, on the way words are arranged, unusual arrangements can puzzle a reader. Shakespeare frequently shifts his sentences away from "normal" English arrangements—often in order to create the rhythm he seeks, sometimes to use a line's poetic rhythm to emphasize a particular word, sometimes to give a character his or her own speech patterns or to allow the character to speak in a special way. Again, when we attend a good performance of the play, the actors will have worked out the sentence structures and will articulate the sentences so that the meaning is clear. In reading for yourself, do as the actor does. That is, when you are puzzled by a character's speech, check to see if the words are being presented in an unusual sequence.

Look first for the placement of subject and verb. Shakespeare often places the verb before the subject (e.g., instead of "He goes," we find "Goes he"). In the opening scenes of *Macbeth*, when Ross says (1.3.101-2) "As thick as tale / Came post with post," and when the witch says (1.3.24) "Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine," they are using constructions that place the subject and verb in unusual positions. Such inversions rarely cause much confusion. More problematic is Shakespeare's frequent placing of the object before the subject and verb (e.g., instead of "I hit him," we might find "Him I hit"). Banquo's statement to the Weïrd Sisters at 1.3.57-58, "My noble partner / You greet with present grace

and great prediction," is an example of such an inversion. (The normal order would be "You greet my noble partner with present grace and great prediction.") Lady Macbeth opens her soliloquy in 1.5 with such an inverted structure: "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor" (an inversion that increases the emphasis on the names "Glamis" and "Cawdor"); she uses another such inverted structure in 1.7.73-74 when she says to Macbeth, "his two chamberlains / Will I with wine and wassail . . . convince" (where the "normal" structure would be "I will convince [i.e., overcome] his two chamberlains with wine and wassail").

In some plays Shakespeare makes systematic use of inversions (*Julius Caesar* is one such play). In *Macbeth*, he more often uses sentence structures that depend instead on the separation of words that would normally appear together. (Again, this is often done to create a particular rhythm or to stress a particular word.) Malcolm's "This is the sergeant / Who, like a good and hardy soldier, fought / 'Gainst my captivity" (1.2.4-6) separates the subject and verb ("who fought"); the Captain's "No sooner justice had, with valor armed, / Compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels" (1.2.32-33) interrupts the two parts of the verb "had compelled" (at the same time that it inverts the subject and verb; the normal order would be "No sooner had justice compelled . . ."); a few lines later, the Captain's "the Norweyan lord, surveying vantage, / With furbished arms and new supplies of men, / Began a fresh assault" (1.2.34-36) separates the subject and verb ("lord began"). In order to create for yourself sentences that seem more like the English of everyday speech, you may wish to rearrange the words, putting together the word clusters and placing the remaining words in their more familiar order. You will usually find that the sentences will gain in clarity but will lose their rhythm or shift

their emphases. You can then see for yourself why Shakespeare chose his unusual arrangement.

Locating and, if necessary, rearranging words that "belong together" is especially necessary in passages that separate subjects from verbs and verbs from objects by long delaying or expanding interruptions—a structure that is used frequently in *Macbeth*. For example, when the Captain, at 1.2.11–25, tells the story of Macbeth's fight against the rebel Macdonwald, he uses a series of such interrupted constructions:

*The merciless Macdonwald*

(Worthy to be a rebel, for to that  
The multiplying villainies of nature  
Do swarm upon him) from the Western Isles  
Of kerns and gallowglasses *is supplied*;

But all's too weak;  
For *brave Macbeth* (well he deserves that name),  
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,  
Which smoked with bloody execution,  
Like valor's minion, *carved out his passage* . . .

Here the interruptions provide details that catch the audience up in the Captain's story. The separation of the basic sentence elements "the merciless Macdonwald is supplied" forces the audience to attend to supporting details (of why he is worthy to be a villain, of how he has been supplied with soldiers from the Western Isles) while waiting for the basic sentence elements to come together. A similar effect is created when "brave Macbeth carved out his passage" is interrupted by a clause commenting on the word "brave" ("well he deserves that name"), by a phrase that describes Macbeth's mood ("Disdaining Fortune"), and by two further phrases, one

of them the complex "with his brandished steel / Which smoked with bloody execution," and one of them a simple description, "Like valor's minion."

Occasionally, rather than separating basic sentence elements, Shakespeare simply holds them back, delaying them until much subordinate material has already been given. Lady Macbeth uses this kind of delaying structure when she says, at 1.6.22-24, "For those of old, / And the late dignities heaped up to them, / We rest your hermits" (where a "normally" constructed English sentence would have begun with the basic sentence elements "We rest your hermits"); Macbeth, in his famous soliloquy at 1.7.1-28, uses a delayed construction when he says (lines 2-7), "If th' assassination / Could trammel up the consequence and catch / With his surcease success, that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all here, / But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, / We'd jump the life to come" (where the basic sentence elements "We'd jump the life to come" are delayed to the end of the very long sentence).

Shakespeare's sentences are sometimes complicated not because of unusual structures or interruptions or delays but because he omits words and parts of words that English sentences normally require. (In conversation, we, too, often omit words. We say, "Heard from him yet?" and our hearer supplies the missing "Have you." Frequent reading of Shakespeare—and of other poets—trains us to supply such missing words.) In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses omissions to great dramatic effect. At 1.3.105-8, Angus says to Macbeth, "We are sent / To give thee from our royal master thanks, / [We are sent] Only to herald thee into his sight, / Not [to] pay thee" (the omitted words, shown in brackets, add clarity but slow the speech). At 1.4.48-49, Duncan's cryptic "From hence to Inverness / And bind us further to you" would read, if the missing words were supplied, "Let us



go from hence to Inverness, and may this visit bind us further to you." Lady Macbeth's soliloquy, at 1.5.15-33, would read, with the omitted subjects and verbs in place, "Thou wouldst be great, / [Thou] Art not without ambition, but [thou art] without / The illness [that] should attend it." Later in the soliloquy, at 1.5.51-54, she again omits words in saying, "Stop up th' access and passage to remorse, / [So] That no compunctious visitings of nature / [Will] Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between / Th' effect and it," and again at 1.7.80-82, where she asks Macbeth, "What [can]not [you and I] put upon / His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt / Of our great quell?" In reading *Macbeth* one should stay alert for omitted words, since Shakespeare so often uses this device to build compression and speed in the language of this play.

## Shakespearean Wordplay

Shakespeare plays with language so often and so variously that books are written on the topic. Here we will mention only two kinds of wordplay, puns and metaphors. A pun is a play on words that sound the same but have different meanings. In many plays (*Romeo and Juliet* is a good example) Shakespeare uses puns frequently; in *Macbeth* they are rarely found (except in such serious "punning" as Macbeth's "If it were done when 'tis done . . ."). Perhaps the play's most famous (and the most shocking) pun is Lady Macbeth's "If he do bleed, / I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal, / For it must seem their guilt" (2.2.71-73), where she seems to be playing with the double meaning of guilt/gilt. Such wordplay is rare in *Macbeth*.

A metaphor is a play on words in which one object or idea is expressed as if it were something else, something