TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

General Editor: Michael Scott

The series is designed to introduce sixth-form and undergraduate students to the themes, continuing vitality and performance of major dramatic works. The attention given to production aspects is an element of special importance, responding to the invigoration given to literary study by the work of leading contemporary critics.

The prime aim is to present each play as a vital experience in the mind of the reader – achieved by analysis of the text in relation to its themes and theatricality. Emphasis is accordingly placed on the relevance of the work to the modern reader and the world of today. At the same time, traditional views are presented and appraised, forming the basis from which a creative response to the text can develop.

In each volume, Part One: *Text* discusses certain key themes or problems, the reader being encouraged to gain a stronger perception both of the inherent character of the work and also of variations in interpreting it. Part Two: *Performance* examines the ways in which these themes or problems have been handled in modern productions, and the approaches and techniques employed to enhance the play's accessibility to modern audiences.

A synopsis of the play is given and an outline of its major sources, and a concluding Reading List offers guidance to the student's independent study of the work.

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MACBETH

Text and Performance

GORDON WILLIAMS

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Illustrations appear in Part Two.

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Source details for the illustrations are given with the relevant captions to the plates.

TO ROSE

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

For many years a mutual suspicion existed between the theatre director and the literary critic of drama. Although in the first half of the century there were important exceptions, such was the rule. A radical change of attitude, however, has taken place over the last thirty years. Critics and directors now increasingly recognise the significance of each other's work and acknowledge their growing awareness of interdependence. Both interpret the same text, but do so according to their different situations and functions. Without the director, the designer and the actor, a play's existence is only partial. They revitalise the text with action, enabling the drama to live fully at each performance. The academic critic investigates the script to elucidate its textual problems, understand its conventions and discover how it operates. He may also propose his view of the work, expounding what he considers to be its significance.

Dramatic texts belong therefore to theatre and to literature. The aim of the 'Text and Performance' series is to achieve a fuller recognition of how both enhance our enjoyment of the play. Each volume follows the same basic pattern. Part One provides a critical introduction to the play under discussion, using the techniques and criteria of the literary critic in examining the manner in which the work operates through language, imagery and action. Part Two takes the enquiry further into the play's theatricality by focusing on selected productions of recent times so as to illustrate points of contrast and comparison in the interpretation of different directors and actors, and to demonstrate how the drama has worked on the modern stage. In this way the series seeks to provide a lively and informative introduction to major plays in their text and performance.

MICHAEL SCOTT

PLOT SYNOPSIS AND SOURCES

The play begins with thunder and lightning, and three Witches. Next, Duncan, King of Scotland, receives news that Macbeth has led the royal forces to victory. The captains Banquo and Macbeth stumble upon the Witches who announce that Macbeth shall be king thereafter. Macbeth is disgruntled to hear Duncan proclaim his son, Malcolm, next King of Scotland. Lady Macbeth receives his letter giving news of the prophecy, and she resolves that he shall be king. Macbeth returns and she begins working on him. During the feast in Duncan's honour, Macbeth ponders murder. His troubled conscience is eased by Lady Macbeth. After a brief meeting with Banquo, Macbeth imagines a dagger pointing the way to Duncan's chamber. He leaves to commit murder while Lady Macbeth waits in an agony of impatience. He returns shocked and bloodstained, and Lady Macbeth has to take the initiative. She leads him off while a knocking sounds at the gate and Macduff is admitted to rouse the king. The alarm is sounded, but Macbeth's attempts to divert suspicion are not altogether successful and the king's sons flee. Banquo voices suspicions of the new king and Macbeth determines to be rid of him. Banquo is slain, and Macbeth hears of it during a banquet. Banquo's ghost appears to him and the banquet is disrupted. He repairs to the Witches again and hears further prophecies. He has Macduff's family killed because Macduff has joined with Duncan's son, Malcolm. They gather an army together in England and prepare to march on Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's loss of reason is shown in a scene of sleepwalking. Macbeth's followers desert to the enemy, and he is troubled by his wife's sickness. She dies, and the advancing army appears bearing boughs cut from Birnam Wood in fulfilment of one of the Witches' prophecies. The remaining prophecy, that Macbeth is invulnerable to any born of woman, betrays him when Macduff reveals that he was untimely ripped from his mother's womb. Macbeth is slain and Malcolm hailed as the new king.

SOURCES

The only incontrovertible source is Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (2nd edition, 1587), though a few touches are borrowed from Seneca's *Medea*, Deloney's *Thomas of Reading* (1600), and Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606).