

David Erskine Baker, *Biographia dramatica, or, A companion to the playhouse*, 2nd ed., rev. Isaac Reed (London, 1782), vol. 2, pp. 211--12.

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2. MACBETH. Trag. by W. Shakspeare, Fol. 1623. This play is extremely irregular, every one of the rules of the *Drama* being entirely and repeatedly broken in upon. Yet, notwithstanding, it contains an infinity of beauties, both with respect to language, character, passion, and incident. The incantations of the witches

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are equal, if not superior, to the *Canidia* of Horace. The use this author has made of Banquo's ghost towards the heightening the already heated imagination of Macbeth, is inimitably fine. Lady Macbeth, discovering her own crimes in her sleep, is perfectly original and admirably conducted. Macbeth's soliloquies, both before and after the murder, are master-pieces of unmatchable writing; while his readiness of being deluded at first by the witches, and his despera-

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tion on the discovery of the fatal ambiguity and loss of all hope from supernatural predictions, produce a catastrophe truly just, and formed with the utmost judgment. In a word, notwithstanding all its irregularities, it is **certainly** one of the best pieces of the very best master in this kind of writing that the world ever produced. The plot is founded on the Scottish history, and may be traced in

the writings of Hector Boethius, Buchanan, Holingshed, &c. in Heywood's *Hierarchy of Angels*, and in the first book of Heylin's *Cosmography*. The entire story at large, however, collected from them all, is to be seen in a work in three volumes, 12mo. intituled *Shakspeare illustrated*, vol. i. The scene in the end of the fourth act lies in England. Through all the rest of the play it is in Scotland, and chiefly at Macbeth's castle at Inverness.

"This play, says Dr. Johnson, is deservedly celebrated for the propriety of its fictions, and solemnity, grandeur, and variety of its action, but it has no nice discriminations of character; the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions, and the course of the action necessarily determines the conduct of the agents.

"The danger of ambition is well described; and I know not whether it may not be said, in defence of some parts which now seem improbable, that in Shakspeare's time it was necessary to warn credulity against vain and illusive predictions.

"The passions are directed to their true end. Lady Macbeth is merely detested; and though the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem, yet every reader rejoices at his fall."

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3. MACBETH. Trag. with all the alterations, amendments, additions, and new songs. Acted at the Duke's Theatre, 4to. 1674. This alteration was made by Sir William Davenant.

Downes the prompter says, that Nat Lee the Poet having an inclination to turn actor, had the part of Duncan assigned to him on this revival, but did not succeed in it. His name, however, stands against the character in the printed copy. It was performed with great splendour. The music by Mr. Lock.

4. MACBETH, the Historical Tragedy of, (written originally by Shakspeare). Newly adapted to the stage, with alterations, by J. Lee, as performed at the Theatre in Edinburgh, 8vo. 1753. Language is not strong enough to express our contempt of Mr. Lee's performance. If sense, spirit, and versification, were ever discoverable in Shakspeare's play, so sure has our reformer laid them all in ruins. Criticism disdains to point out each particular mischief of this monkey hand; but yet, gentle reader, accept the following specimen of its attempt to improve the well-known incantation with which the fourth act begins:

1. Witch.
No milk-maid yet hath been bedew'd.
2. Witch.
But thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.
3. Witch.
Twice and once the hedge-pig whin'd,
Shutting his eyes against the wind.
1. Witch.
Up hollow oaks now emmets climb.
2. Witch.
And Hecate cries, 'tis time, 'tis time.
3. Witch.
Then round about the cauldron go,
And poison'd entrails in it throw.
1. Witch.
Toad (that under mossy stone,
Nights and days has, thirty one,
Swelter'd venom sleeping got)
Boil first in the enchanted pot, &c. &c.