Global Performance and Adaptations of *Macbeth*
Sponsored by the European Shakespeare Research Association

Friday, 17 April — 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Hyatt Regency, Denver

Juan F. Cerdá *(Universidad de Murcia, Spain)*
Paul Prescott *(University of Warwick, UK)*

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Pompa Banerjee
(University of Colorado, USA)

Adapting supernatural soliciting: female agency as witchcraft in *Maqbool*

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003), an Indian film adaptation of *Macbeth*, demonstrates the power of adaptations to stretch the interpretations of Shakespearean texts. By remediating Shakespeare through the local, in this case, the Mumbai underworld, *Maqbool* allows a return, via altered pathways, to *Macbeth*'s own otherworld connections to early modern discourses of witchcraft, demonology, and various social expressions of the supernatural. In the film's masculine and hierarchical space of violence, corruption, power, and greed, agency appears to reside with the largely male gangsters, policemen, and politicians. The play's witches are compressed as two corrupt, prognosticating policemen. The witches are reconfigured as masculine and played by actors so famous in India that the early modern understanding of witches as women with malevolent agency, as King James imagined in the case of Agnes Sampson and the North Berwick witches (News from Scotland, 1591), seems to be irrelevant. Yet, as this essay argues, Nimmi, the film's Lady Macbeth, achieves female agency through a form of supernatural solicitation. Nimmi's persuasive rhetoric redirects the powerful agency of early modern witches into words that are fatal and effective, not unlike the curses and spells of witches that apparently had the power to alter the course of human lives. Filtering Shakespeare's early modern culture through the contingencies of the local, the gang wars of Mumbai, *Maqbool* reframes the supernatural and provides an alternative reading of the power and agency of women as witches, resituating the modern adaptation into Shakespeare's early modern culture.

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Anston Bosman
(Amherst College, USA)

"Imperfect Speakers": *Macbeth* and Indigenous Language Reclamation

In February 2020, the Perth Festival will premiere *Hecate*, an adaptation of *Macbeth* performed in the Aboriginal language Noongar. Working for Yirra Yaakin, Australia's leading Aboriginal performing arts organization, the writer/director Kylie Bracknell [Kaarljilba Kaardn] has reshaped Shakespeare's play to place Hecate, Queen of Witches, "at the heart of everything watching as Macbeth strives toward power at any cost." More than a familiar postcolonial "tradaptation," the play's promotional material advertises the years its ensemble devoted to studying Noongar, and therefore explicitly presents the production as a vehicle for decolonial language reclamation. *Hecate* is only the latest in a series of indigenous-language versions of the *Macbeth* conceived and performed in settler-colonial contexts, the best known of these being the Perseverance Theatre of Alaska's partial translation into Tlingit that traveled to the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., in 2007. Its director, Anita Maynard-Losh (now of Arena Stage), writes that *Macbeth* shares with Tlingit culture a world of clan warfare, strong belief in the supernatural, and a protagonist who subverts a norm of "[valuing] the needs of the group over the individual." But what besides setting, plot, and character has popularized this play with Indigenous communities? This paper will explore the play's concern with *language* as a site of trauma and a source of self-determination. Instead of showcasing a static multiculturalism, I use these and other examples to gauge the risks of using a classic to decolonize settler stages, and specifically of aiming to revitalize language by means of a drama in which words repeatedly fail to secure rights, heal psychic rifts, or nest endangered speakers in a tribal or a planetary home.

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Thea Buckley
(Queen's University Belfast, UK)

The Tulu *Paddayi* [*Macbeth*]: Sea of Blood

Near the climax of the 2018 film *Paddayi* ["The West"], its heroine Sugandhi / Lady Macbeth bemoans in faithful translation, 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand' (V. i.57). Yet in Abhaya Simha's wrenching Tulu-language version, this fragrance is materialized, an exotic scent representing escape from poverty, banality, and mortality. Sugandhi (Bindu Raxidi)'s increasingly bloody hallucinations represent the wider relocation of Macbeth's ideological and geographical boundaries, from earth to ocean, pitting traditional sea-life rhythms against transnational ocean trade tensions.

In this South Indian parable of capitalist greed, Sugandhi and Madhava / Macbeth are a simple fisher couple on the modern-day Karnataka coast. The newlyweds soon yearn for a better life, represented by imported Western luxuries such as the desired perfume, literally from the UAE. After a local Yakshagana trance-dancer prophesies Madhava's success as a lucky 'deity of the sea', the couple murder their benefactor Dinesha / Banquo to inherit his fishing fleet. Eventually, as Sugandhi sprays her hands and self repeatedly with the coveted Arabian perfume, she attempts to cover not only her own earthly scent and the stench of fish, but also to ward off the smell of the sea of blood which engulfs her in her madness.

This paper explores *Paddayi* in the context of other Indian *Macbeth* film and performance adaptations. It examines how these use Shakespeare to represent regional and national concerns and identities. If Vishal Bhardwaj's hit Bollywood film *Maqbool* (2003) turned Birnam Wood into the Indian Ocean for the viewing masses, B. V. Karanth's *Barnam Vana* [*Birnam Wood*] (1980) utilized local Yakshagana theatre, reaffirming Karnataka's regional identity. Simha's niche offering lately won a national Tulu-language award, but it remains to be seen whether its strategic marriage of regionalism and Shakespeare has matched this critical success with a wider popular reception.

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William C. Carroll
(Boston University, USA)

Bertolt Brecht: The Three *Macbeths*

My title refers to one ghost and two extant adaptations by Bertolt Brecht of Shakespeare's play. These texts were written for three different media: radio; theatre; and film. Brecht had a long interest in Shakespeare, producing parodies and appropriations of *Measure for Measure*, *Richard III*, *As You Like It*, and of course *Coriolanus*, among others; he frequently mentioned or discussed Shakespeare in his journals, letters, and lectures. Relatively little attention has been devoted to his work on *Macbeth*, however, in part because the texts are relatively elusive. This paper will bring together the scattered remains of his *Macbeth* adaptations to analyze his interest in and critique of the play, beginning with his *Vorrede zu 'Macbeth'* (1927), written for his radio play (no text survives); then his Hollywood film script, *Lady Macbeth of the Yards* (1945; first known as *All Our Yesterdays*); finally, his *Übungsstücke für Schauspieler* (1951).

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Anna Carleton Forrester
(University of Georgia, USA)

Adapting *Macbeth* in Turkish Culture: Operatic, Martial, and Experimental Stages

In April 2018, Zakir Gul compared the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to Shakespeare's Macbeth, citing his unchecked ambition and self-interest. The comparison came in the wake of governmental decrees imposed by the state of emergency following the 2016 coup attempt: the closure of numerous media outlets; incarceration of thousands of journalists, academics, scientists, and activists; extension of detention periods; and the authorization of torture by police. Artists today do not have the creative freedom to safely make such explicit characterizations publicly on the Turkish stage. But the adaptation of *Macbeth* in Turkish culture has, historically, aligned with other, broader contexts. This paper intends to chart patterns of adapting *Macbeth* in Turkish culture—from its inaugural, operatic performances at the Naum Theater in the nineteenth century; to its militarily-inclined adaptations of the mid-twentieth

century; and, finally, the experimental reaches of contemporary performances. This trajectory will demonstrate that these production phases were congruent with (or responses to) various social, political, and cultural shifts—first, operatic performance and the demand for western art in the multicultural Pera district of the Ottoman empire; second, militarized performance following the 1960 coup d'état; and, finally, experimental performance in the aftermaths of the summer 2013 Gezi protests and more recent July 2016 coup attempt.

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Rosa María García Periago
(Queen's University Belfast, UK)

Sexuality and Evil: Lady Macbeth in *Maqbool* and *Veeram*

An early Indian film adaptation of *Macbeth, Jwala* (dir. Vinayak, 1938) shows a Lady Macbeth that sides with Banquo against Macbeth, as if an evil female character was difficult to conceive in the Indian imagination. In 21st century film adaptations of *Macbeth*, *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003) and *Veera*m (dir. Jayaraj, 2017), the female character is as evil as in the source text. Yet, neither Nimmi (Lady Macbeth in *Maqbool*) nor Kuttimani (Lady Macbeth in *Veeram*) is married to Macbeth at the outset of the film, the implication being an Indian married woman is incapable of such atrocities. In both movies, sexual drive becomes crucial in the course of events. It is the love for Nimmi what makes Maqbool/Macbeth kill the Duncan character, at the same time Chandu/Macbeth is willing to kill Aromal Chekavar (the Duncan counterpart) to be with Kuttumani. Sexuality, evil and power seem to go hand in hand. Curiously enough, their fates are even more terrible than Lady Macbeth's. Nimmi dies a natural death after giving birth, unable to be with her own son for a single moment, whereas Kuttumani performs a terrible suicide with a sword. By analyzing the role of Lady Macbeth in *Maqbool* and *Veeram*, this paper aims to show that these Lady Macbeths are as based on the play as on the role of the vamp (the evil woman) in popular Indian movies, since characters that are sexually driven are always condemned to death. Via the role of Lady Macbeth, these two movies still deal with controversial issues in Indian culture such as sexuality.

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John Joughin
(Independent Scholar, UK)

Nuclear Macbeth: a photo-fiction

The nuclear 'flashboom' or '*pikadon*' transforms visual representation – a flash that darkens rather than illuminates and, in a deadly reversal of media-theatrical conventions, photographs an audience consigned to extinction. As such, as Akira Lippit argues, post-war Japanese cinema

is forced to render 'the radical avisuality of the postatomic world' in addressing 'the materiality of what can and cannot be seen in the radioactive light of the twentieth century' (Akira Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*).

In the seminar I want to focus in part on *Throne of Blood*. And without reducing Kurosawa's film to its determining post-war/post-atomic context, or to assume that in some sense it is about the nuclear, this paper rather extends Lippit's thesis of a radical nuclear avisuality by adopting the stance of François Laruelle's non-standard aesthetics (outlined in texts such as *The Concept of Non-Photography* and *Photo-Fiction a Non-Standard Aesthetics*); where (in contrast to a representationalist metaphysics) it is not a matter of being a photo *of*, but rather it is a matter of 'being-in-photo'. And where, for 'non-photography, the photo is no longer *of an object*, it is its own Reality' (cf. John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal: Laruelle and Non-Human Philosophy*, 108). So that, as Laruelle puts it, being-in-photo stems from the photo's 'non-specular manifestation of Identity' – 'a blinding of the light of logos by the really blind thought of photography' (Laruelle, TCNP 112-13, 57-8); and which in 'being nothing' rather 'seizes thought' as its 'vision force' resides in 'the manner in which this identity itself "thinks" through this presentation'. (Laruelle, 58 and also cf. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, 149).

As such, this paper attends to the non-specular moment of *Throne of Blood* in order to construct a hypothetical fiction, or, a speculative photo-fiction, alongside *Throne of Blood* entitled 'Nuclear Macbeth'. A photo-fiction discovered (or one might say thought or re-invented) by Kurosawa's film. Crucially, *Throne of Blood* film avoids the representational fallacy of the nuclear android (as popularised, by say *Godzilla* or *AstroBoy*). Rather, the film-maker embraces a number of deliberate non-correlational obstructions, including the integration of conventions from traditional Noh drama; as well as the insistence of monochrome and the indeterminate photographic surface fog or mist that accompanies it – a genetic structure cloned and retained within the more recent world of *J-horror* with its 'swarms, fogs and mists'. And finally of course, (and especially for those who would 'chart Macbeth's non-Anglophone reception') alongside the apparatus of Kurosawa's translation and adaptation of *Macbeth*, there is in the realisation of expropriation, the realisation that in being 'the most successful of non-anglophone adaptations of the play' this is successfully *not* Shakespeare.

As such, even before the Cobweb Forest fades into dissolve, some-thing not Shakespeare (a Nuclear Macbeth?) had seized thought and forced it to think according to what *Throne of Blood* unknowingly knew, that Shakespeare's play and its reception is always bound to be insistently, radically (toxically?) non-anglophone. The 'Scottish play' – a palpable non-object that blurs the distinction between *Macbeth* and extra-*Macbeth*, so that between scenes those uttering 'Macbeth' are asked to leave the theatre (imperfect speakers?); as if some charm or apotropaic device could turn us back before coming after the disaster. Yet there is no afterwards, just as no-thing or predicate other can banish the immanent internal identity of the double speaker (which is 'identical through and through'). One might say that *Macbeth* is irreversibly non-anglo – non-anglo to the core. And nothing could halt the necessary mutation of an

imperfect speaker speaking (even Kurosawa). It is merely a nuclear particulate – the matter of *Macbeth*'s immanent realism. The earth hath bubbles...

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Natalia Khomenko
(York University, Canada)

"The Man Who Dared to Desire Happiness": Macbeth's Ambition in Early Soviet Conversations

Scholarly discussion of Shakespeare's political drama in Soviet Russia has tended to focus on *Hamlet*, the play that supposedly made Stalin himself anxious. However, the first Shakespearean tragedy to be framed as a political argument on the Soviet stage was *Macbeth*. A 1922 adaptation of the play staged at the Central Theatre of Enlightenment in Moscow (directed by V.V. Tikhonovich, with Sergei Eisenstein as one of the stage designers) was intended as a critique of "authoritarian power in isolation from the masses" and sought to "re-evaluate" the characters traditionally viewed as positive, such as Duncan and Macduff. Macbeth was interpreted as "a strong individual" who "could not bear the task he had taken upon himself," and positioned as a flawed hero of an early doomed attempt at revolution.[1] Accompanied by a series of talks and an exhibit, this production encouraged the proletarian audience to identify with Macbeth's desire for power and his willingness to murder for it. Indeed, in an essay also published in 1922, a prominent Marxist critic and administrator asserted that any condemnation of Macbeth's ambition demonstrated an underlying sympathy for the old, pre-revolutionary world and hostility toward the proletariat's new position of cultural power.[2] But this reading of the protagonist inevitably produced further questions about the ethics of the October revolution. The Soviet literary scholar Ivan Aksenov even suggested, in frustration, that the glorification of Macbeth's murder of Duncan reduced the idea of revolution to an equivalent of a Latin American *coup d'état*.[3] Tracing early Soviet debates about *Macbeth*'s usefulness in delivering political messages to proletarian audiences, my paper explores the protagonist's potential as a revolutionary hero and interrogates the limits of presentist reading.

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Francesca Rayner
(Universidade do Minho, Portugal)

Moving the Audience: Christiane Jatahy's *The Walking Forest*

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[1] "Moskva: po teatram: prosvetitel'nyi teatr." *Ekran* 13 (December 9, 1921): 11.

[2] Valer'ian Polianskii (P.I. Lebedev), "Gershenzon i Zamiatin (Sovremennye literaturnye nastroeniia)," in *Na literaturnom fronte: sbornik statei* ("Novaia Moskva", 1924), 164-172, originally published in 1922.

[3] Ivan Aksenov, "Gamlet, prints datskii," in *Gamlet i drugie opyty* (Federatsiia, 1930), 75-139, based on lectured delivered in 1927 and 1929.

Brazilian director Christiane Jatahy's *The Walking Forest* travelled extensively to various Brazilian cities and also to Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Portugal. The Portuguese performances were staged at the Dona Maria II National Theatre in Lisbon as part of Jatahy's year as Artist of the City in 2018. Moreover, in each location, Jatahy and her crew filmed new testimony about global inequalities and injustices that became part of later performances.

The Walking Forest took its title from Act 5 Scene 5 in *Macbeth* when a startled Messenger informs Macbeth "As I did stand my watch upon the hill/I looked toward Birnam and anon methought/The wood began to move" (5.5 32-34). This moment is a crucial turning point in the play as Macbeth senses the loss of his assumed infallibility and Jatahy used this pivotal moment to examine the possibility of collective resistance to more contemporary forms of tyranny.

However, rather than simply witnessing Jatahy's politicized take on *Macbeth* from their seats, the audience for *The Walking Forest* in Lisbon were immersed in *Macbeth* as they occupied a stage with four video installations on one side and a bar on the other. Within this setting, the audience made a series of decisions about forms of interaction as well as participating in micro-performances around the bar. As such, rather than presenting the audience with questions around complicity versus resistance or local versus global forms of protest, Jatahy's performance compelled decision making in the moment. This paper will analyse the performance's mobilization of the physical and emotional power of moving the audience and work towards a notion of audience participation that links physical action, emotional reaction and critical perception.

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Holger Syme
(University of Toronto, Canada)

"Dull Rationalism," "Totally Devoid of Tradition": Leo Reuss's Failed *Macbeth*, 1928

Macbeth does not hold a prominent place in the history of Berlin's theatre. Not only has the play been staged less frequently than some of Shakespeare's other works (around a dozen times since 1900), most of those shows confirm Brett Gamboa's contention that "*Macbeth* is built to fail."[4] In my contribution to our seminar, I will discuss what may have been the most complete failure of all the modern *Macbeth*s of Berlin: Leo Reuss's production at the Volksbühne in November 1928. The show, which starred Heinrich George as Macbeth and Agnes Straub (as famous at the time as George) as Lady Macbeth, seemed designed to appeal to avantgarde sensibilities. It reduced and reshuffled the text more radically than any of the Shakespeares staged by Leopold Jessner, who had succeeded Max Reinhardt as Berlin's leading director after 1918; it drew on a cutting-edge aesthetic arsenal, with battle sequences that echoed the traumatized armies of Brecht's *Edward II* and with liberal use of the rotating stage, reminiscent of the in-stage conveyor

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[4] "Dwelling 'in doubtful joy': *Macbeth* and the Aesthetics of Disappointment," Macbeth*: The State of Play*, ed. Ann Thompson (London: Arden Shakespeare/Bloomsbury, 2014), 31-57, 33.

belts employed a few months earlier by Erwin Piscator; and it adopted the sober-minded, anti-transcendent attitude of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (the "new objectivity") in not having Banquo's ghost appear and in removing the weird sisters from the play altogether, turning their lines into a battle-crazed soldier's ravings, a choral drinking song, and the voice-over soundtrack to a literal nightmare. And yet critics were unimpressed: conservatives thought the production deflated the play, progressives thought its use of avantgarde forms arbitrary and unhelpfully overdetermined. Even critics who were certain that the theatre needed to find new ways of directing the "classics" concluded that this *Macbeth* "was not the way."[5]

My paper will investigate what this apparent failure can tell us about the challenging relationship between the theatrical avantgarde and the classical canon in high modernism; drawing on a wide range of hitherto ignored archival materials, including original set designs, notebooks, prompt books, and letters, I will also reconstruct Brecht's involvement in the production (and his subsequent disavowal of that involvement), and situate Reuss's staging in the extraordinarily fractious struggle between political moderates and radicals in the Volksbühne's leadership and membership in the late 1920s.

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Robert N. Watson
(University of California, USA)

New Thoughts on *Throne of Blood/Spider Web Castle*, and a New Ways of Presenting Them

One will be drawn from my draft of a foreword that Bloomsbury has requested for a new edition of my book on Kurosawa's film adaptation of *Macbeth*, *Kumonosu-jō* (known misleadingly in the U.S. as *Throne of Blood*). The foreword will likely explore perspectives on the film published in recent years, expand consideration of its environmental implications, and track the ways gender issues in the film reflect gender issues in post-WWII Japan.

The other will be a demonstration of a program I developed in conjunction with that book: it consists of a free XML file that instantly launches any of over 120 sequences from the film with my commentary text underneath. It was originally functional only on iPads, but is now available in both iOS and Windows versions, for use with the free ClipNotes app or software.

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Sandra Young
(University of Cape Town, South Africa)

Decolonizing Shakespeare? *Macbeth* reimagined in contemporary Africa

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[5] Hans von Zwehl, "Volksbühne – Zeittheater," *Die Junge Volksbühne – Kampfblatt für proletarisches Theater* 1.6 (August 1929): 1-2, 1.

Playwrights and filmmakers concerned to tell their stories of colonialism's legacy in Africa have invoked *Macbeth* in particular ways and with varied effects. Some have appropriated the Scottish play to craft a tale of colonial dispossession; others have used sought to infuse *Macbeth* with ritual practices unfamiliar to Stratford audiences. Others explore the contours of dictatorial abuse across a range of political histories in recent memory, drawing attention to regimes that are characterized by seemingly "traditional" hierarchies as well as regimes that gain power from their access to the excesses of global capital. My seminar paper will examine some adaptations of *Macbeth* on international stages over the period of a few decades, and reflect on the ways Africa is racialized in these imaginative renderings, and the impact of these appropriations for the projects of decolonization and anti-racism in contemporary Africa.

The productions under discussion vary in form and in register; each conjures a version of what viewers might recognize as "Africa," but their respective relationships to coloniality and to racialization differ in significant ways. Welcome Msomi's touring production, *uMabatha, the Zulu Macbeth* (1970) generated controversy and appreciation in equal measure, as it offered international audiences a performance of supposedly "authentic" Zulu cultural rituals. While Msomi's spectacle differed markedly from a much earlier production of a putatively "African" *Macbeth*, the so-called "Voodoo Macbeth" directed by Orson Welles for the Federal Theatre Project (New York, 1936), the contrast between the two sheds light on the problem of representations of African cultural traditions in the aftermath of colonial paternalism. More recently, the Malagasi film, *Makibefo*, by Alexander Abela (2010) produces a self-reflexive and self-contained representation of indigenous Malagasi existence without casting it within an ahistorical timeframe. Brett Bailey's adaptation of Verdi's opera imagines Macbeth as an increasingly bloodthirsty dictator within contemporary Africa (Third World Bunfight Productions, 2013), inviting audiences to reflect on neocolonial excesses. Most recently, *In iRedu* (2013), Abiola Sobo's tale of the Nigerian general, General Ogagun, loosely inspired by *Macbeth*, invokes aspects of Shakespeare's play, explicitly, to craft a narrative about colonial dispossession in the early period of European expansionism.