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Filming Metatheatre in Gregory Doran's *Macbeth:* Refracting Theatrical Crises at the Turn of the Century

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This article contends that Gregory Doran's production of *Macbeth* (2001) was, when translated to television, transformed into a metaplay. Although various previous analyses of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* have explored its metatheatricality, this artistic concept has not been tackled with respect to this production in particular. In this work I am examining Doran's laying bare of the film's theatrical apparatus as well as its refractions of the crises occurring at the Royal Shakespeare Company while the film and the stage production were in process. I will address the status of the main characters as players in a theatricalized microcosm, explore the film's backstage-onstage dynamics and discuss how the production's visual meanings illuminate the company's institutional crisis at the turn of the century.

Keywords: Gregory Doran; *Macbeth*; Royal Shakespeare Company; metatheatre; backstage-onstage; *ensemble*

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Filmando metateatro en *Macbeth* de Gregory Doran: refractando crisis teatrales en el cambio de siglo

Este artículo sostiene que la producción de *Macbeth* de Gregory Doran (2001) fue, en su traslado a la televisión, convertida en pieza metateatral. Aunque algunos estudios sobre *Macbeth* de Shakespeare han tratado la metateatralidad del texto, este concepto artístico no ha sido estudiado en esta producción. Mi intención es revisar la puesta en evidencia del aparato teatral y su paralelismo con las crisis que afectaron a la Royal Shakespeare Company mientras la propia puesta en escena y la cinta se producían. Analizaré la condición de los personajes principales como actores en un microcosmos teatralizado. Por

otro lado, estudiaré también las dinámicas entre el espacio escénico y los bastidores en la película para determinar cómo la configuración visual de la producción ilustra la crisis institucional sufrida por la compañía durante el cambio de siglo.

Palabras clave: Gregory Doran; *Macbeth*; Royal Shakespeare Company; metateatro; bastidores-escenario; *ensemble*

1. Introduction

Gregory Doran's production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) at the Swan Theatre (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1999), was adapted for Channel Four in collaboration with Illuminations Media and broadcast on January 1, 2001 (Doran 2001). The film's appeal was based on its faithfulness to the staging at Stratford. Ben Brantley's review for the *New York Times* had already testified to how thrilling the production was: "Without making the obvious bids for topical relevance, the director, Gregory Doran, has shaped Shakespeare's tale [...] into a harrowing and disturbingly funny parable for the dawn of the 21st century" (2000). Although half-way through rehearsal the production changed from Jacobean to modern dress, Doran was adamant that it did not relate to any specific, and in his view, irrelevant, contemporary setting—see interview in Doran (2001). The film was, rather, seeking a sense of "vivid neutrality"—a phrase attributed to Doran (Wyver 2016). In terms of its setting, producer John Wyver indeed stated that neither the director nor the team wanted a "radically different adaptation" of the stage production ([2007] 2015, 282). Nevertheless, he continues, they wanted to depart from the traditional "multiple cameras" approach seen in TV plays since, although "cost- and time-effective," this did not guarantee the "expressive potential of the screen that this process ought to be able to achieve" nor "sufficient control of what you put on the screen" (282; emphasis in the original). They decided instead to film using a single camera at a staging at the London Roundhouse, a site-specific performance in a venue adapted to resemble a warzone without power lines.

The London Roundhouse, built in 1847, was commissioned by Robert Stephenson, chief engineer of the plan to establish the railway line between London and Birmingham, and designed by Robert Dockray. Its function was to store and maintain engines and supplies, and, as such, the one-hundred-and-sixty-foot diameter circular space was divided into twenty-four bays and a turntable at its center enabled movement of the engines so that they could enter each of them. The building was topped by a conical roof supported by twenty-four columns. For many decades after it had fallen into disuse by the railway it was employed as a warehouse for liquor, although its structure was widely admired by architecture and arts students. In 1964, thanks to an initiative by Arnold Wesker, it was turned into "Centre 42," whose function was to harbor the promotion of new artistic works. Wesker's intention as he stated, was to spread the best existing high and popular cultures, to build "[a] cultural hub, which, by its approach and work, [would] destroy the mystique and snobbery associated with the arts [...] where the artist is brought in closer contact with his audience, enabling the public to see that artistic activity is part of their daily lives" (Centre 42 Annual Report 1961-1962; quoted from Roundhouse Trust, n.p.). Over the next twenty years, the Roundhouse's arena hosted music performances from Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Sex Pistols, The Doors, David Bowie, DJ Jeff Dexter, Black Sabbath, Genesis, Marc Almond, Elton John and the Rolling Stones as well as various Sunday night

gigs. It also saw theatrical performances of Tony Richardson's *Hamlet* (1969), spectacles by the Living Theatre, Peter Brook's *Themes on The Tempest* (1968), Steven Berkoff's *Metamorphosis* (1969) and Kenneth Tynan's *Oh! Calcutta!* (1970). In 1983, however, Thelma Holt, the then owner, decided to close it down for lack of sponsorship. After many people showed an interest in taking over the venue, in 1996 the Norman Trust bought the building to put it to use again (Roundhouse Trust, n.p.).

The simulated realism of the film was embedded in a theatrical microcosm with a main stage—the Roundhouse's arena—and the lower galleries, cellars, upper galleries, rooms, wings and other spaces being used as architectural as well as symbolic backdrops in this self-contained world. Anthony Davies has stated that in the theatre we are too aware of the artificially illuminated space and that performers are waiting in the wings ([1988] 1991, 5). This principle is, in fact, deployed—rather than hidden—in the film, and the film's postmodernist features (Greenhalgh 2003), its globalization-infused values (Burnett 2007, 50) and its *vérité* language (Hindle [2007] 2015, 263-264; Wyver [2007] 2015, 282-283) have all been analyzed by scholars. That said, the film's reflexivity has not been studied yet.

I argue here that the film transforms this *Macbeth* into an embedded metaplay which negotiates issues connected to the theatre as an art form and as an institution. According to Pedro J. Pardo García, metatheatre turns the theatrical medium into its object of representation, its *representamen* into its *representandum* (2017, 409). For metatheatre scholars, theatre does not merely represent the world but rather stresses the world's theatricality. Additionally, characters in metatheatrical plays become aware of their own condition as performers (Abel 2003, vi; Freese Witt 2014, 14). In Doran's film, metatheatre blurs the distinction between the story told and the embedded performance and it is through its performance that the story comes to a resolution. However, Pardo García also says that, strictly speaking, this conceit is only metatheatrical if the work is seen in the theatre (2017, 11). I, however, subscribe to Lionel Abel's more expansive definition—which includes novels within the metatheatrical project (2003, 23)—and with Freese Witt's view that we should not focus so much on defining metatheatre as on observing what it does (2014, 9). Metatheatre does not operate as an abstract metaphor here. Instead it should be viewed as a starting point from which to deal with the "negotiation, refraction, conversation and intervention" which, as Ramona Wray and Mark T. Burnett suggest, affect the relation between the text and "its moment of production" (2005, 85). The interrelation between what is shown on screen and the external and internal conflicts and ideological shifts taking place at the RSC when both the performance and the film were produced will be explored as tenors of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor.

The theoretical background of this article are drawn from the fields of Shakespeare on screen, metatheatre and performance theory, materialist criticism and studies of the history of the RSC. I will explore the treatment of the leading characters as performers in this theatrical world and tackle the film's metatheatricality through its spatial

articulation. Finally, I will deal with the film's refraction of the crisis through which the RSC was going at the time of production. This structure will attempt to explain metatheatre in the film, taking the characters-as-actors' *peripeteia* in this microcosm as a departure point, and then opening the scope of the commentary up to larger themes, resituating metatheatricality as a peephole through which to explore the context, reception and production circumstances of the film.[1]

2. *Macbeth* and Metatheatre

Scholars have written about the theatrical imagery in the playtext. To Caroline F. Spurgeon's analysis of clothing imagery ([1935] 2005, 324-329), Cleanth Brooks added the focus on the hero's theatrical skills: Macbeth "loathes playing the part of the hypocrite—and actually does not play it too well" ([1947] 1960, 32). Decades later, James L. Calderwood analyzed the hero's conception of the world as a restricted path where, in murdering Duncan, he simply acts "in accordance with his part" (1986, 38). Macbeth's inability to stop the consequences of his murders bounds this inconclusive tragedy to re-enactment and supplementation in the hero's mind. Recently, performance and materialist critics have pointed out the shifts between fiction and reality in the play (Wells 2013) and Macbeth's double function as "character" and "actor" (Fox 2013). From the materialist field, Richard Wilson (2013) relates the esthetic metaphor in the playtext to the ideological contentions of the Jacobean period. While, at first sight, the first performances of *Macbeth* might have seemed to confirm the New Historicist notion that Shakespeare was paying homage to the power of King James I (1566-1625), Wilson's Foucauldian reading of the mirror used in act four, scene one points at the potential mediating subversiveness with which the scene seemingly challenged the King's authority (2013, 272-274). This irrecoverable material context of production shows that the esthetic metaphor is a contingent but transferrable conceit. The original production of *Macbeth* by Shakespeare's company was staged at a transition period, for they had recently become the King's Men. Similarly, Doran's *Macbeth* was filmed at another period of transition, months before the RSC initiated a series of radical reforms.

The production's metatheatricality has been suggested previously. Doran argued that the claustrophobic atmosphere at the Swan Theatre made audiences complicit with Duncan's murder: "The space itself remind[ed] you that you [were] part of a theatre metaphor" (Doran 2002). This effect was multiplied in the film since Doran and Ernie Vincze (director of photography) explored the backstage-stage relations within the microcosm of the Roundhouse, which resulted in a politically loaded performative contest. Susan Greenhalgh points out this effect in her analysis of Antony Sher's delivery of Macbeth's "[t]omorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" speech (Shakespeare

[1] This article does not suggest that the RSC's crisis of 2001-2002 constitutes a direct reflection of the Scottish play. Insofar as we might think of Shakespeare's tragedy as a metaplay, this production's stylistics points to aspects of the context of production of the film.

[1623] 2008, 5.5.8-27).[2] When the hero speaks to the camera, he shows "the mixed cynicism and bravado of a contestant about to be voted off the show" and opens a fire door "letting a shocking burst of natural light and traffic noise into what [has] become, despite its initially realist feel, an artificial world" (2003, 107-108). Nevertheless, this comparison between the film and a competitive performance is not developed further. This is precisely the territory I intend to explore.

3. Theoretical Framework

The RSC's work has been received with applause, ambivalence and, sometimes, hostility. Some critics have denounced the company's concessions to the entertainment industry (Coursen 2002, 10). The RSC's hinting at discovering immanent meanings in Shakespeare's works has also been challenged (McCullough 1988; Bulman 1996). Materialist scholars have questioned the company's political agenda, which, according to them, has proved to be, at best, apolitical and at worst, adhering to the "establishment" and absorbing of marginal cultures (Sinfield [1985] 2003). The 1995-2002 period was crucial for the company since flexibilization, realignment, shifts in the company's style and a transition to commercialism marked their development. Media assaults and external and internal criticism gave way to intense debate and a corpus of studies trying to offer critical as well as positive, or at least balanced, narratives on the company's history and their new determination to confront the economic reality of the twenty-first century—see Adler (2001), Chambers ([2004] 2005) and Trowbridge (2013).

Since cultural analyses often privilege radical appropriations of Shakespearean texts, this film might be regarded as another attempt to reconstruct a "faithful" Shakespeare at a time in which post-textual, digital, spectral, media-inflected, new wave and global Shakespeare productions seem more representative of the culture that we inhabit, one with a "less voluminous, or at least less obvious, corpus of screen 'Shakespeares' [although] his works continue to reverberate; and the plays persist as repositories of lore and tradition even as they are reworked as salient signifiers of meaning and knowledge" (Wray and Burnett 2006, 1). Nevertheless, the film under study here takes one aspect of the play—metatheatre—and explicitly reconstitutes it in order to transform it into a vehicle for the ideological dispute reverberating within the material circumstances of its production—see Sinfield ([1985] 2003, 203). In addition, this essay shares its agenda with the resistance of Stephen O'Neill to "claims around Shakespeare's immanence, sovereignty and universalism" in favor of the consideration of "Shakespeare as contingent on historically situated media and users" (2018, 22).

[2] All quotations from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are taken from the The New Cambridge Shakespeare Edition, edited by A.R. Braunmuller (Shakespeare [1623] 2008).

In the 1980s, cultural materialism advocated a focus on contexts of articulation, production and reception of theatre plays (Dollimore [1985] 2003, 4; Bulman 1996, 1). At present, it is taken for granted that Renaissance studies should tackle the specificities of context to carry out solid analyses. At the heart of the RSC's crisis at the turn of the century lied the concept of "ensemble." Referring to the collective work carried by RSC performers, it has been repeatedly used to also define the company's spirit. Yet, the company's history has been marked by its struggles to complement its Arts Council funding with external sponsorship, to challenge official censorship, and to keep its ensemble spirit alive. Internal rivalries, changes in acting as a profession and struggles to meet market demands have tested the company's capacity to live up to its own standards. The company's financial difficulties in the 1990s forced Adrian Noble, artistic director, to carry out radical reforms including embracing a more market-friendly policy which worried a great many. Public attacks on Noble, and RSC membership resignations following his changes in 2001 ensued. Discontent amongst the theatrical profession and the company's staff came out as a consequence of the RSC's management and Noble's project to reform the company led to backstage personnel redundancies, which understandably caused discontent, strikes and upheaval. While the media challenged Noble's decisions, some practitioners defended Project Fleet, Noble's personal and controversial reform project—see Gilbert (2002). Doran supported the project and played a significant part in the Jacobean season at Stratford-upon-Avon when the crisis was at its height (2002). When Noble resigned, Michael Boyd, artistic director between 2003 and 2012, needed to boost the deteriorated company's morale. Institutional efforts were made in this respect, according to the report by Robert Hewison, John Holden and Samuel Jones (2010).

As Robert Stam suggests, narratives emphasizing the creative process "have the virtue of reminding [us] that [...] texts are products, created by individuals or groups and mediated by a complex commercial and cultural apparati" (1992, 71). The RSC's crisis affected a theatrical institution and that crisis is refracted in this film. This anchors Doran's metatheatrical allegory in its production context since the film envisages the Scottish world as theatrically determined. Pardo García defines "metatheatrical allegory" as one which sees life as theatre "since in life we undertake certain roles or patterns of conduct [...] in agreement with certain received guidelines or we impose a script upon ourselves" (2017, 411). These patterns configure Doran's production at the Roundhouse arena, where characters have no choice but to partake in a performance at the heart of which esthetic and ideological struggles are negotiated. Nevertheless, this theatrical world is a spectral one: a ruined theatre without spectators or backstage personnel. Our film's world is an anticipation of what will eventually be for the RSC the need for a new beginning.[3]

[3] Further and more thorough explanations on the RSC's crisis in 2000-2002 can be found in Gilbert (2002), Chambers ([2004] 2005), Hewison, Holden and Jones (2010) and Trowbridge (2013). Additional press sources can help analyze the film within this context (see section 6).

Sarah Hatchuel presents instances of the dialectics between metatheatre and film language in screen Shakespeares which are mainly articulated through characters playing directorial figures, films-within-the-film or characters as performers (2008, 95). Many *fin-de-siècle* Shakespeare films follow the conventions of backstage drama and metaplays where much of the action is developed in the wings and comes to a resolution in a performance (Burnett 2007). This trope is applied for political, nostalgic, romantic, comic and subversive effects. Michael Ingham describes examples of "embedded plays" as "site[s] of ideological and aesthetic conflict" in cinema (2017, 133). As Burnett shows, the global age's "filmic representations whose narratives prioritize theatrical shows and stagings of Shakespearean texts" proliferate (2007, 7). Douglas Lanier analyzes Kenneth Branagh's *In the Bleak Midwinter* (1995), in which "Shakespeare serves as a point of emotional identification between otherwise isolated individuals, a means of articulating their loss of communal feeling and their desire for its re-establishment" through the invocation of amateur theatre ([2002] 2012, 159). Philippa Sheppard associates this metatheatrical proliferation with "prestige" and the "director's longing to be involved with an artistic work that is lasting" (2017, 151). In the essay "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia," Andreas Huyssen points out that these productions' use of the "forms of communion" of theatre opposes the inconstancy of the global marketplace with "memory practices" that challenge "the myths of cyber-capitalism and globalization's denial of time and place" with a "temporal anchoring" in reality (2000, 37; quoted in Burnett 2007, 8). Nevertheless, despite the evidence of Doran's interest in upholding this spirit of communion in his stage and his rehearsal work, Burnett mentions the film's emphasis on allusions to "a world with no clear dividing-lines or sharp edges," which gives "no clue [as] to its imagined geographical anchorage" and favors "only the narrative essentials." He continues that "each major player is, literally, cut from the same cloth" (2007, 50), which might reinforce Pardo García's thesis of the metatheatrical allegory as a world curtailing individuality. What remains to be seen is whether, following Pardo García (2017, 146), the film's reflexivity suffices to provoke transgressive *metalepsis*, and if it is possible to add to Burnett's arguments—on both this film and other metatheatrical screen Shakespeares—and find grounds to resituate this film's metatheatricality as a site of dispute in its context of articulation and reception.

4. Characters and Performers

The film enhances the characters' performativity since it circumscribes them within the backstage areas and presents them as trying to dominate the Roundhouse's arena. Several critics have spoken about the difficulties of playing Macbeth's part convincingly in the theatre, due in large part to existing preconceptions of how it should be played. One reviewer of the film said: "The performances tend to overacting as in the porter's speech about equivocation and with Sher's performance, where in the memorable 'tomorrow' speech he is uninvolved and its meaning is discarded" (IMDb 1990-2018, n.p.). As Sher

suggests, Doran and Patsy Rodenburg also had their ideas, justified or not, about how the hero's part needed to be played ([2001] 2009, 346). Sher's admitted anxieties on the subject may also have been related to the prestige of Trevor Nunn's RSC production in 1979 (334). However, Sher says that the part is an "overlap between the character and the actor" (346), which proves that he has detected the character's self-consciousness about his alleged performative inadequacy. This explanation progressively shifts to a focus on Macbeth as an actor who ends up trapped in "a scene by Beckett or Jarry [...] half-führer, half tramp" (344-345). Sher's solution to his block was to embrace Macbeth's performative difficulties.

Sher does not mention having read Calderwood's analysis of the play, but his performance resonates with this text. Calderwood describes Macbeth as a performer willing to be "cabined, cribbed" (Shakespeare [1623] 2008, 3.4.24) within a restricted field so he devises a "diabolical scene [...] in which regicide is not only plausible but obligatory" (1986, 38). The "dagger soliloquy" shows a "self-protective consciousness as it projects inner impulses outward to create a behaviorist world to whose stimuli then it can react" (38). In the film, Macbeth tries to grasp the imaginary dagger. When he fantasizes about the preamble to assassination, the recording mode changes to slow motion, showing Sher's determined walk to Duncan's chamber (2.1.49-56). The lens then returns to the *vérité* mode (2.1.56) and Sher gathers the courage to ascend the stairs to kill the King. This momentary *mise en abyme* inside Macbeth's mind shows a murderer belonging to a fictional world. Sher stresses this as he roleplays his upcoming murders. When he meets Banquo and Fleance at the Roundhouse's arena (2.1. 10-30), he grabs Fleance and playfully acts as though he were strangling him. As king, he repeats the strangling-in-jest, but the effect is the opposite of what he intended: to amuse his small audience of courtiers. After a moment of tension, a laughing Macbeth points at the pale-faced Banquo. Yet, was he really joking? Is not Macbeth's smiling mask revealing his true murderous self? Macbeth is exposed at his crowning ceremony.

Michael David Fox says that Shakespearean metadrama often directs "attention toward the concrete presence of the performing actors [...] by enabling [them] to distance themselves momentarily from the fiction and the role and stand before the spectators in their own concrete bodily and psychic presence" (2013, 214). In performance, as already mentioned, Sher revealed himself as an actor during the "Tomorrow" soliloquy and abandoned the theatre, breaking down the barrier of illusion. Sher says: "Shakespeare deliberately brings Macbeth and the actor face to face at the end of [the soliloquy]. Shakespeare then turns the spotlight on himself, the inadequate playwright" ([2001] 2009, 347). Overthought as Sher's reading of Shakespeare's intentions might have been, Sher's Macbeth perceives himself to be part of an uncanny performance. In this Pirandellian moment on screen, Sher opens the Roundhouse's backdoor and leaves. This confirms our suspicions that this allegorical world was indeed part of a livelier outside world. Macbeth discovers that he has been a puppet reciting lines and acquiring postures he was not comfortable with.

Nevertheless, rather than abandon the theatre, Sher, metaphorically speaking, accepts the lines he feels that someone has written for him. He returns to the theatre. The character's initial subversion is eventually revealed as a necessary step before his final subjection. Inside the Roundhouse's cellar, when he hears the news of the Forest of Birnam approaching, he collects his props—his staff, sword and crown—and escapes before the trees reach him. Later on, when he fights Macduff at the Roundhouse's arena, his death becomes a self-conscious finale. He is momentarily hypnotized by the flashes of light from Macduff's blade. In a final *coup de théâtre*, he tries, with a stylized gesture, to grab his knife before dying.

Harriet Walter's explanation of the performative status of Lady Macbeth is, I think, so apt that it deserves brief reply. Walter says that although Lady Macbeth remains off-stage for a significant length of time, she is assumed to be part of a "partnership that motors" the play's action (2002, 1). She goes on to say that "[a] lot of the rationale I [used] to explain [Lady Macbeth's] behavior was rooted in her remoteness from power" (26). Her backstage position renders thus Walter's work metatheatrically significant. A frequent offstage witness, the actress recalls several moments when she builds up her character by observing *Macbeth*'s soliloquizing on stage. Lady Macbeth's collaboration with her husband's unspoken desire to be king ultimately means her having a chance to have "a role" (33). Yet, her hopes of "perform[ing]" (Shakespeare [1623] 2008, 1.7.69) with her husband are ultimately dashed by Macbeth's decisions to improvise a text over which she has no control (Walter 2002, 39). Their separation takes place as soon as she perceives that her role as co-conspirator "seems to have been written out" (Walter 2002, 46). Lady Macbeth stage-manages, observes and is eventually removed from Macbeth's performance. A much similar patriarchy was predominant at the RSC before Boyd's take-over. Critics talk about the company's family environment, where dissident opinions were often unwelcome and where patriarchalism and testosterone—rather than efficiency—prevailed (Chambers [2004] 2005, 187; Beauman 1982, 338).

5. Offstage and Onstage

Doran lays bare the film's artifice, showing the ruined wings and the arena where power is disputed and performative anxieties are negotiated. The Macbeths' ultimate weakness is their inability to keep acting their parts in front of the thanes or to belong to the ensemble of Duncan's retinue. The "stage fright" experienced by the Macbeths—referred to by Sher ([2001] 2009, 346)—is stressed as the characters remain in both a physical and a symbolic offstage.

Ingham says that the visible offstage space reconfigured in films with embedded plays appears "to subvert the very dimensions of theatricality" (2017, 130). In Doran's *Macbeth*, the fly-on-the-wall approach configures a realistic war scenario. Power lines are gone and semi-ruined buildings harbor witches, savagely treated by soldiers, running

through corridors closely followed by the cameraman. In the wings, the Sisters, who inhabit the backwaters as scapegoats of this male-dominated context (Doran 2006, 12), prepare amulets and crucified voodoo figures for Macbeth's arrival. This progressively shows that this simulacrum is encapsulated in a theatrical world. This theatricality is perceived on the scene where Duncan is restored to power. Once this happens, we see the arena as a fully-fledged stage. This ceremony portrays the King as a divine monarch passing through an illuminated gate into a celestial anteroom. Duncan stands on a catwalk while a choir sings *Te Deum* and his captains grovel before him. When the camera pulls back, following Macbeth, the portal to the other world is shown for what it is: a piece of backlit scenography.

Performative duties in this film generate anxieties which are, in turn, articulated by the iteration of backstage psychological and physical spaces. For William Egginton, drawing from baroque drama and neo-baroque theory, what is true onstage is true in life, namely that people dedicate every speech act and action to a "disembodied gaze" which captures the individual's desires and motivations. Whenever expectations are not met, depression, disappointment and feelings of worthlessness force the individual to negotiate with that gaze (2003, 19). In this film, the Macbeths fail to meet these performative demands. The stark world that they inhabit, with its inadequate facilities and bare walls, depicts this world's classism, which the Macbeths resent. After all, if we regard the characters in this imagined world as actors in a play, the rules of the ensemble would dictate that main characters would frequently play minor characters and understudies in different plays, a premise which, for many different reasons, was always contested at the RSC (Beauman 1982, 302). This is not how this theatrical world in Doran's film operates since here characters occupying the center stage need to be expelled by those waiting and plotting in the wings. As soon as Lady Macbeth reads Macbeth's letter, she runs into their bedroom, opens a big trunk and prepares Macbeth's military suit for performance as she now perceives that it will be his turn to play the lead. Afterwards, she runs into the theatre's upper gallery and looks down on the arena where, minutes previously, we saw Duncan's ceremony. She simulates her own crowning by passing her hands through her hair. When her husband arrives, she washes him and tells him how to act in front of Duncan.

Despite their preparations, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fall into the state of anxiety that Andrew Filmer situates backstage: Performers "need to physically negotiate the dangers of this marginal zone" (2006, 168). Yet Doran multiplies the Macbeths' stage fright through the iteration of the backstage space. When Macbeth dresses for the dinner in Duncan's honor (Shakespeare [1623] 2008, 1.7.1-12), he looks at himself in a mirror, which marks the endless *mise en abyme* that the film will be turned into. At the dinner table, he steps out of character and abandons the room rushing into the corridors, i.e., he moves into the backstage of the backstage, since the dinner was taking place in a little room in the wings of the venue. This iterative displacement to the backstage continues at the coronation banquet scene when

Macbeth leaves the little room to meet Banquo's murderer at this backstage of the backstage (3.4.13-32). Another iteration takes place when, after this second banquet, the Witches appear under the table (4.1.1-43) and Macbeth follows them through the backstage corridors to one of the darkest rooms where the Witches show him a reproduction of Duncan's backlit gates to heaven. This time, Banquo and Fleance emerge from the illuminated gate through which Duncan previously entered. In Doran's production, Macbeth constantly seeks refuge in the wings. This movement to the backstage is repeated until, as previously suggested, he decides to accept being part of this theatrical game.

Filmer describes strategies performers may use to deal with stage fright. For Filmer, "[t]he wings are a space where anxiety, superstition, and playfulness reach their heights and where joking, play, and sexually risqué behaviour that elsewhere is unacceptable somehow becomes acceptable" (2006, 178). Superstition in this film is seen when games, such as those between Macbeth and Fleance, are played. Sexual games are also mentioned by Filmer as resources to combat stage fright (192-193). When Lady Macbeth meets Macbeth in the corridor, after she persuades her husband to murder Duncan, he emphasizes nasal sounds with the intention of sexually arousing her—"Bri*n*g forth *m*e*n* childre*n* only / For thy u*n*dau*n*ted *m*etal should co*m*pose / *N*othing but *m*ales" (Shakespeare [1623] 2008, 1.7.72-74; emphasis made by the actor in the film)—and, for the first time in Doran's film, the couple show signs of their sexual complicity backstage. On their way back to the banquet table, they sing: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (1.7.82). Turning this final couplet into a song helps the two character-performers encourage each other prior to their performance before Duncan and their friends.

As Filmer says, many actors feel more at home on stage (2006, 170). This is not the case with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Walter indicates that Lady Macbeth ends up spoiling their performance of bonhomie in front of the guests at the banquet scene (2002, 52). Besides, Macbeth disregards courtly protocols. He does not adhere to the King's passing of the crown to the Priest, which Duncan scrupulously respected, and he replaces the Royal Choir with a recording—perhaps an uncanny refraction of the RSC's future "rightsizing" Duncan's rituals may strike the viewer as too full of pomp, but they seem to be accepted and needed by his nobles. There is no doubt that Duncan performs his part well even though the ceremony does not hide its theatricality. Prince Malcom takes these ceremonies equally seriously and, upon his return, fills the stage with trees to visually reinforce his theatrical power. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are removed from the performative contest since they have not followed the royal family's rules. Some of the ideological problems that the RSC were going through are alluded to since, as Chambers says, "the off-stage problems [during Noble's directorship] overshadowed achievements on stage" ([2004] 2005, 107). In the RSC, autocratic management, lack of transparency and low salaries incited many company members to leave or rebel.

6. Company and Metadrama

Metadrama is an overarching concept which may allude to the context of production of an artwork. Much of the understanding of this film lies in having knowledge of the context in a theatrical world that was having to start competing with many other forms of entertainment. When Adrian Noble took over direction at the RSC in 1991, he initiated a series of radical reforms to transform the company "into a different animal altogether" (Chambers [2004] 2005, 96).

The RSC's problems were connected to their difficulties in recruiting actors, raising profits and attracting younger audiences. Many of Noble's decisions, in an attempt to be fresh and innovative, were, as Chambers continues, in fact regressive (98). Project Fleet involved demolishing and reforming the Royal Shakespeare Theatre; abandoning the Barbican Theatre in London to lease other venues; fragmenting the company into smaller casts performing independently of each other. Noble wanted to turn Stratford-upon-Avon into a "theatre village" (*The Guardian*, 25 November 2001, n.p.). However, the RSC Board Members were not consulted and the project's strategy seemed unclear to many people. Theatre critic Charles Spencer said: "One of Adrian Noble's closest associates recently told me that Noble was great when it came to the big picture, but far less impressive when it came to the detailed nitty gritty of turning the big picture into reality" (2002, n.p.). Several of the RSC's prestigious figures—including Edward Hall, Sir John Mortimer and Terry Hands—resigned. Strikes by technical staff, backed by the actors, ensued when they found out that there would be redundancies. Nevertheless, Project Fleet continued. Miriam Gilbert pointed out how careless the economic planning had been regarding venues and transferability of productions (2002, 517). Some critical voices demanded Noble's resignation.

Scenes backstage in the film show what occurs at the locus of performance, but these are also places where violence is engendered, where social inequalities and patriarchalism are confirmed. It is significant that, after being seen sheltered in this space, Duncan recovers his star status in this symbolic and physical theatrical world. In most of the corridor events in this production, characters reveal their desire to overthrow the King, state assassination is commissioned, or the overthrowing of tyranny is planned. In other words, corridors are places where power is organized. Such corridor scenes echo the RSC personnel's allusions to the company's "corridor[s] of power" (Hewison, Holden and Jones 2010, 33), where decisions used to be made by the management before Boyd's decision to recompose the company's ensemble. Surely, as a semi-private theatre company, the RSC is entitled to let managers make final decisions. However, when words like "family," "ensemble," "company" and other terms appealing to human bonhomie are deployed when involuntary career events are in progress, workers were probably right to be suspicious. On 25 November 2001, as *The Guardian* said, "facing a threat of backstage strikes and with grandees resigning from senior posts, [Noble had] had the worst week of his career" (n.p.). Dominic Cavendish's opinion in *The Telegraph* was that, "[t]he off-stage antics have come to overshadow the productions themselves.

You feel that you need a plot synopsis just to keep up with this wild sideshow, which combines elements of farce, tragedy and state-of-the-nation epic" (2002, n.p.).

When Duncan's followers walk toward Macbeth's house from the arena to the backstage entrance, Banquo speaks of the "temple-haunting martlet" (Shakespeare [1623] 2008, 1.6.4), although the viewer only perceives the roof of an abandoned theatre. We could read this as simple convention or as metonym for the many references to buildings in relation to the RSC's crisis. Most of the reforms, transitions and shifts in power at the company have been related to the refurbishing of buildings, and the expansion, leasing out, demolishing and abandonment of premises. Much of the protest carried out by HOOT (Hands Off Our Theatre) and the Henry Moore Institute revealed anxieties about maintaining heritage buildings. Some of Noble's attempts to find other buildings and to refurbish the old company's buildings were applauded: "theatre has to acknowledge—and quickly—that [this art] is not some form of architectural preservation society. Without destroying the past, we need to recognize that the magic only happens when the space fits the play. Theatre is a living, breathing organism and the message to our property owners and artistic directors is stark and simple: adapt or die" (Billington 2001, n.p.). Noble defended his initiative against attacks from some actors: "A lot of people who have acted on that stage in the past have nostalgic memories of it, but if you ask people who are stuck on the balconies during performances what they think, it is a B-grade experience" (Morrison 2002, n.p.). Critic Matt Wolf points at the "British tendency to blame buildings for theatrical ills [...] but [...] it is not so much the space itself that is the problem, as the tendency for artistic directors to get bogged down in their administration" (BBC News, 30 May 2001). Is Doran's reflection of this bad state of the building a reflection of inefficient administration? The RSC's decisions on buildings affected the workers' morale since they included redundancies. What is worse, the RSC's abandonment of the Barbican Theatre in order to rent other venues like the National Haymarket or the Roundhouse proved difficult to swallow too since these buildings did not guarantee cheaper ticket prices or better access to the venue or better audience attendance—see also Gilbert (2002, 517).

Chambers remarked that "the crisis under [Noble] inevitably fed nostalgia about the old days, burying memories of the bad productions" ([2004] 2005, 182). Commercial fiascos, although already noted in the company's history, were particularly resented at that period and a mythical view of the RSC's better past was constructed by veteran artists and critics alike. Performances with empty houses produced more anxiety during this critical period than in the past. Indeed, Doran's setting reads as a refraction of this anxiety about empty venues. Furthermore, Doran's production might be termed as critical with nostalgia for several reasons. It restores a legitimate monarchy in an apparently literal reading of the social order as reflected in the play and as shown in the screen version of Nunn's stage production of Trevor Nunn's *Macbeth* (Philip Casson 1979). Yet this order appears under threat when, after

Malcom is restored, Fleance enters carrying Banquo's amulet signifying the Witches' prophecy with regard to his offspring becoming monarchs. Secondly, the choice of the Roundhouse, where many RSC performances were staged, brings us back to a theatrical past when the "Centre 42" encouraged the utopian celebration of both the high and the popular arts. Thirdly, it invokes the spirit of a prestigious predecessor: Trevor Nunn's *Macbeth* (1979). Agreement exists about an indebtedness to past Shakespearean screen productions, which, as Wray and Burnett suggest, affects many Shakespeare films, which "range from those which look forward to *fin-de-siècle* debates to those which are full participants in that ongoing discussion, [and] glance to the future as much as they look back" (2000, 4). Fourthly, Malcom's return and the spirit of community invoked by the small circle of praying friends (5.9.27-42) conjures up the ancient narrative of community, which, in real life, would become necessary for Doran months afterwards, when director Edward Hall—Peter Hall's son—resigned and Doran needed to take on organizing several shows for the Jacobean season in Stratford.

At that time, the RSC felt the urge to call upon the ancient spirit of "ensemble," which had defined the company's work from its very origins. Doran faced the press saying: "So the RSC is chucking out the idea of ensemble, abandoning the principles defined by Peter Hall and Co when they set up the Company in the early 1960s? Nonsense!" (2002). Doran's attempt to restore confidence is refracted as *prolepsis* in the film's invocation of the RSC's past as a small company of players in venues such as The Other Place, the Roundhouse and the Barbican working as a family under the leaderships of Peter Hall, Peter Brook, Michael St. Denis and Trevor Nunn. Nonetheless, this company's grassroots origin was discredited by Alan Sinfield's analysis of their detachment from radical theatre long before the 1990s ([1985] 2003). Financial problems, an ambiguous relationship with the public and the private, hierarchical verticality, patriarchal sexism and overwork did not help the RSC live up to its utopian ideals. Although other accounts of the RSC's history, such as Beauman's, are, doubtless, more optimistic, they also acknowledge that the company had become part of the Establishment as early as the seventies (1982, 310). Doran portrays Duncan's monarchy in similar fashion: hierarchical, patriarchal and theocratic. Men grovel before Duncan and subjects are not consulted about Malcom's election—as the camera reveals by focusing on their surprised faces. Duncan's thanes show deep respect for him at dinner in Macbeth's house, where the King is the main orator, upstaging everyone else. The thanes in this "corridor of power" celebrate bonhomie. As Chambers says, Noble's management often hid behind a disguise of company spirit but left many members excluded ([2004] 2005, 100-102).

Pamela Mason argues that Doran follows the light-and-dark contrasts in the playtext too literally (2013, 347-348). Nevertheless, this type of Manichean lighting does not necessarily represent the director's personal worldview. It rather implies a connection with Philip Casson's filming of Nunn's stage production. While Nunn's

theatrical sets "heightened the sense that one was watching a theatrical performance" (Beauman 1982, 333), when his production was transferred to television the effect was sacrificed for a predominance of close-ups and mid-shots which only allowed the viewer to distinguish the production's meta-theatricality in the first scene. Both films endorse this dark-versus-light worldview, but Doran's clearly exposes its theatrical apparatus whereas Nunn's does not do it sufficiently. Doran's setting is also the site where Tony Richardson's *Hamlet* was performed and filmed. As Hindle says, "[w]hereas Tony Richardson's [film] was filmed in close-up and medium-shot in the enormous open arena of the venue, Doran used every available space" ([2007] 2015, 264), which presents an additional point of departure from past recorded Shakespeares. This opening-up of the film's spatial possibilities reads as irony as much as nostalgia. Such nostalgia was paramount when journalists, critics and actors attacked the RSC's new business discourse in 1996 when Chris Foy and Lord Alexander, the latter a former chairman of National Westminster Bank, became board members and their business "jargon" in new contracts transformed the RSC's dream of a Leavisite "cottage industry" into a "multinational conglomerate" (Trowbridge 2013, 134). As such, Fleance's arrival also signifies nostalgia in terms of the RSC's yearning for their pristine origins in a market-dominated world. On stage, Doran had Banquo's ghost emerging from the circle of Malcom's friends and facing the young *arriviste*. While in the Swan this indicated that subversion would come from within as well as outside the kingdom, in the film, Banquo's child stands for the RSC's renewed focus on attracting younger audiences and making the shows more marketable. Neil Sinyard's analysis of Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1996) leads to the question: Does the film "take Shakespeare in new directions as we enter a new century?" (Sinyard 2000, 69). This question could be reformulated for Doran's *Macbeth*: Does Doran's film indicate the new direction taken by Shakespeare at the RSC for the new millenium? Doran's discourse eighteen months later reflects this:

> We've assembled a group of 28 actors, led by Antony Sher and David Rintoul, to present this Swan [Jacobean] season. There are company regulars, familiar faces, well-established actors and youngsters making their RSC debuts. Are they an ensemble?
>
> Well, perhaps the true answer is that they are not an ensemble—yet. That will come as their knowledge of each other grows in rehearsal and, with that, mutual confidence and strength. (2002, n.p.)

Many months after the film was recorded, the company had gone through hard times and the "ensemble" had clearly suffered. So, this inter-generational crusade will bring the ensemble back. Arguably, the RSC needs evolution but not at the ensemble's expense. As Trowbridge remarks:

> [T]he Jacobean season at the Swan was acclaimed [...] a personal success for Gregory Doran, who formed a crack ensemble of young actors to perform five works [...] Doran asked his

> actors and fellow directors to create a production after only three weeks of rehearsal. Born under the vitriolic criticism of the reforms and threatened in its first weeks of rehearsal by the illness of one director and the last minute resignation of another, Doran's vibrant project defied all expectations. (2013, 138)

After the film was shot, Doran did what was sensible: he kept calm and carried on when the edifice's foundations were shaking. Even so, before this Jacobean season started, a few BECTU members—the UK's Media and Entertainment Union—had accepted redundancy packages. Chris Foy's justification of the redundancies as being based on the need to "remain fresh and relevant to a new generation of theatregoers" was quoted by BBC News (18 September 2001). The RSC had good reason to keep its stiff upper lip and *ipso facto* turn the page. Eventually, the company publicly admitted that Noble's policies had been disastrous (Jury 2003).

7. Conclusion

This essay has explored the *theatrum mundi* metaphor in Doran's *Macbeth* as an example of how this conceit depends on artistic decisions and cannot be separated from its social, political and ideological production context. The film explores the meanings of the play by engaging with a series of dialogues, conversations and interactions with the crisis that the RSC faced during the 1990s that culminated in the early 2000s. The choosing of a half-refurbished building as a site for filming parallels the constant reconstruction of a kingdom always at war. Examining the Macbeths shows their double function as both characters and actors engaged in a performative competition, in contrast to the spirit of ensemble that has actors collectively working together over a period of time (Hewison, Holden and Jones 2010, 17). Duncan's divine rule displays a conservative façade with a rigid hierarchy and strict codes of behavior. Performance anxieties are also the anxieties of surviving that affect underpaid actors and artists living under the stress of instability and the insecurity experienced in institutions where power negotiations take place in the corridors rather than in open meetings. Duncan's conservative rule strains and undermines the familial and positive ambience presented in his court, which contrasts with an architectural and psychological shortage of resources backstage. This engenders subversion, paranoia and discontent, which threatens stability. The social order needs to renew its positive image with theatrical displays and renewed codes of interaction. While the film elicits nostalgia for the company's past, the laying bare of the past's theatricality is embedded in a ruined theatre. After their period of disruption, the RSC needed to restore their public image and to build a positive collective autobiography. What they could not avoid was, rightly or wrongly, becoming more entrenched in the global marketplace in order to be able to expand.

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