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CALENDAR-LATE
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Macbeth' Parody

on Kennedys and Johnson

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Q NEW YORK—A biting, 56-page parody of "Macbeth," which puts Lyndon Johnson in the role of assassin and Robert F. Kennedy as unscrupulous avenger, has become a runaway best seller here.

The tract, entitled "Macbird," is the work of 25-year-old Barbara Garson, a graduate of UC Berkeley and a leader of the Free Speech Movement during the student demonstrations there last year.

Published in pamphlet form by Mrs. Garson and her husband, Marvin, "Macbird's" first printing of 20,000 copies is selling out in bookstores and through mail orders as fast as they can be delivered. "It is our biggest paperback title right now," said Sy Rubin, president of the five Bookmasters' Stores.

A second printing of 20,000 is planned in December, with distribution around the country. An off-Broadway production of the play has won \$30,000 in backing and is casting now for an opening around the end of the year.

National interest in "Macbird" is expected to quicken with publication of excerpts in the December edition of Ramparts magazine and a long review by Dwight MacDonald in the latest issue of the New York Review of Books.

Lust for Power

The run on "Macbird," which began as a joke, evolved to an "underground" pamphlet and now seems headed for national notoriety, is based largely on its outrageous proposition that the so-called Kennedy-Johnson rivalry has parallels in Shakespeare's classic tragedy about the lust for power.

Mrs. Garson exploits these possibilities with clever irony, casting Lyndon Johnson in the Macbeth role, John F. Kennedy as the Duncan figure and Robert Kennedy in the Macduff characterization.

Mrs. Garson has a gift for rapier-like

caricature, and she uses it to demolish most of America's political leadership with ridicule. Mr. Johnson is painted as a crude bumpkin, Robert Kennedy as a duplicitous conniver, Ted Kennedy as an idiot. Earl Warren, Wayne Morse, Robert McNamara and the late Adlai Stevenson also come in for their lumps.

But the play's most explosive passage comes in the first act, where, in keeping with the original plot, Macbird (Johnson-Macbeth) arranges for the assassination of Ken O'Dunc (John Kennedy-Duncan). This implication already has created difficulties for the Garsons.

At least one off-Broadway theater refused to house the play, largely because of the assassination section.

Ramparts magazine, a left-oriented journal which this month published an article raising questions as to the true assassin of the late President, at first turned down "Macbird." Later it reversed itself in another national publica-

tion, but insisted that the assassin be changed. The Garsons refused.

Mrs. Garson, a petite brunet in glasses and dungarees who now lives in Brooklyn with her husband, is unsurprised but a little impatient with the attention being paid to this aspect of her play.

It was included, she said, only to keep the parody as faithful as possible to the original. Her basic aim in "Macbird," she added was to expose the hypocrisy of the nation's political leaders, not to imply involvement of President Johnson in the Kennedy tragedy.

"Most commentators irk me by only taking up the criticism of Johnson," she said, "while they fail to notice that the main villain—Bobby Kennedy—takes up the second half of the play."

The Robert Kennedy character conspires to destroy Macbird and seize power. After Macbird's death (from a heart attack as Robert is about to plunge in the sword) the Kennedy character makes this closing address to the populace:

*A tragic twist of fateful sorrow,
friends,
Makes me your President this
fearful day.
And though I never sought it,
history
Assigned to me her most
demanding task . . .
So choked with grief, I pledge my
solemn word
To lift aloft the banner of Macbird.*

Mrs. Garson became what she is today—a "libertarian Socialist"—after spending her honeymoon in Cuba in 1960, where "everything wasn't perfect, but it was quite exciting. We got back and were so overwhelmed by the fantastic distortions in the papers that

we started working with groups trying to propagandize for Cuba."

From there it was a short jump to Berkeley (for a history degree) and involvement in the Free Speech Movement, where she helped found and publish the Free Speech Newsletter and put on political puppet shows in front of Sprout Hall. She was one of the 800 arrested during the sit-ins.

She also joined Students for a Democratic Society and became an active militant against the Vietnam war. Their activities — like circulating anti-war leaflets on military bases—have landed both her and her husband in jail from time to time.

It was while haranguing an audience of Berkeleyites in August, 1965, about a projected peace march on Washington that Mrs. Garson made a slip of the tongue, calling Lady Bird Johnson "Lady Macbird."

Afterward, she was struck by the ease with which present-day political realities fit the pattern of the Shakespearean saga. She was especially excited by what she considered to be the similarity of the moral issues: guilt and retribution, lust for power, the disparity between what is said and what is thought.

At first, she planned to write an entertainment for the international day of protest on Oct. 15, 1965. But the day came and went and the play kept extending itself.

"Every day I woke up and read in the paper something that made it truer and truer." After four months of work, "Macbird" was ready.

The Garsons printed 5,000 copies of an "underground" edition, circulated it at Berkeley and sold it out in a matter of a few weeks. Encouraged by the response both at Berkeley and from friends in New York, they tried to find a paperback publisher that would agree

to a general distribution, but the publishers either demanded unreasonable options or wouldn't touch it at all.

So the Garsons moved to New York, set up their own firm—Grassy Knoll Press—and put out 5,000 additional copies of "Macbird" in October, contracting with a local distributor to circulate them in New York bookstores. They went like hotcakes. When another printing of 10,000 came out two weeks ago, stores put up signs saying, "Macbird is back." These copies, too, are almost gone.

The play opens at the Democratic National Convention, with Ken O'Dune and Robert debating about whether to offer the vice presidency to Macbird.

"But Jack, you know it isn't merely scruples," protests Robert.

"He has a fat, yet hungry look.

Such men are dangerous."

The action moves through Macbird's

confrontation with the three witches (a beatnik demonstrator, a Black Muslim and an old leftist), the shooting of Ken O'Dune (while riding in a parade arranged by Macbird and Lady Macbird), and the coronation of his successor.

"Our highest goal is peace," Macbird says in his inaugural.

But in its quest

We shall not fear to use our righteous might.

In short, we seek that Poz Americana

That all the freedom-loving world desires.

The unity of all as contents us

We plan to guide this planet by consensus.

But Macbird's troubles begin to multiply—a revolution in Viet Land, the growing conspiracy of Bobby from his exile in New York and the increasing distractedness of Lady Macbird:

Flower by the roadside . . .

Plant these flowers . . .

Let all the land be lined with living blooms.

Yet all the petals of a summer's roses

Can never sweeten this accursed land.

Macbird, reassured by the witches, is convinced that "no man with beating heart or human blood" can harm him.

But as Robert closes in, he informs Macbird that his father, to "temper us for roles of world authority," replaced his sons' hearts with steel and plastic tubing and their blood with "a tepid antiseptic brine."

And so Macbird, that very man you fear

Your heartless, bloodless foe now lifts his spear.

But too late. Macbird, crying "Thus cracks a noble heart!" expires.

Barbara Garson is aiming her spear at new targets. Living off a \$5,000 grant from the Yale drama school (a direct consequence of "Macbird"), she is writing a second play based on the Book of Job. In it, Job is a liberal Democrat, God is the Democratic Party and the devil is the GOP.

But a play itself can't change the realities of politics, she admits. "It's interesting for me. But the hard work of organizing people into a movement that can use its numbers to affect politics is what has to be done."

You leave her at the door of the Brooklyn flat, intense, committed, still talking. You go down the stairs, and in the dim ancient hallway, her words still echoing, you forget for a minute and it's almost like the 1930s again.

Then you're out on Flatbush Ave., with the television aerials and a new Thunderbird speeding by, and it's 1968.

The year of the Macbird. **END**