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# Theater: In Dallas 'Macbeth' Dwells on Assassins

## Director Senses Guilt in Kennedy's Death

By CLIVE BARNES  
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DALLAS, Nov. 29—It is no accident that Paul Baker's staging of "Macbeth," seen at the Dallas Theater Center last night, seems, for much of the time, to be more concerned with the late President John F. Kennedy than with Macbeth.

In a note in the program Mr. Baker writes: "Ever since that day in Dallas I have had a sense of guilt. Somehow I was also responsible." This production is clearly an attempt to exorcise that painful ghost, and to lessen the traumatic pain inflicted upon Dallas that November just five years ago.

Of course every generation must reinterpret Shakespeare according to its own time. Mr. Baker chooses to concentrate on two themes—the play's emphasis on witchcraft, demonology and prophecy, and second, what Mr. Baker chooses to call "the myth assassins." The play was written expressly for King James I, and, as a consequence, not only twists Scottish history, even introducing the mythical Banquo from whom James's upstart House of Stuart pretended to be descended, but also caters for the King's fascination with witches.

Mr. Baker starts the evening by having members of the audience — presumably plants — reading out their horoscopes for the day, and, after the play has started, even has King James himself come on to declare his special interest. All this is legitimate, if a little clumsy, and undoubtedly one of the production's strongest aspects is the very proper weight it places on the play's supernatural elements.

Unfortunately when we come to "the myth assassins" we are on shakier ground, for here Mr. Baker, in the



Ken Latimer

hope of immediacy, is trying to insert something not intrinsically in the play. He introduces a trio of assassins, Booth, Oswald and the yet unconvicted killer of Robert F. Kennedy, who stalk through the play, with their victims, in an all too literal attempt to link "Macbeth" with the idea of assassination and corporate guilt.

Even if such an interpretation could be read into the play it would perhaps have been better to have let the play speak for itself rather than using such coarsely specific devices. But this is not what "Macbeth" can possibly be about. Macbeth is not a crazed political assassin to be put alongside Booth or Oswald, but a strangely noble man made the victim of his own ambition.

True Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth for that matter, feel the Celtic horror of dark guilt. Yet this cannot be related to any corporate horror that might be felt by a town or nation at the assassination of a leader. Mr. Baker protests that he personally has a "sense of guilt," but Macbeth saw his own

## The Cast

MACBETH, by William Shakespeare. Staged by Paul Baker; setting by Mary Sue Jones; lighting by Randy Moore; projections by John Figmiller; acting coach, James Nelson Harrell; sound by Christopher Hendrie and Fritz Lennon; battle sequences by Perry Lingenstein; stage manager, Frank Schaefer. Presented by Kalita Humphreys Theater, Dallas Theater Center, Paul Baker, managing director. At the Dallas Theater Center.

First Witch	.....	Louise Mosley
Second Witch	.....	Sally Neizel
Third Witch	.....	Betty June Lary
King James I	.....	James Nelson Harrell
First Assassin	.....	John Figmiller
Second Assassin	.....	Paul John Smith
Third Assassin	.....	Steven Mackenroth
Duncan	.....	Campbell Thomas
Malcolm	.....	John Shepherd
Donalbain	.....	Gregory K. Caffy
Lennox	.....	Fritz Lennon
Cailhness	.....	Leonard T. Wagner
Menteth	.....	Harry Porter
Captain	.....	Marshall Oglesby
Ross	.....	Gene Leggett
Angus	.....	Tim Green
Macbeth	.....	Ken Latimer
Banquo	.....	Preston Jones
Lady Macbeth	.....	Mona Pursley
Servant to Macbeth	.....	John Purdy
Macduff	.....	Randy Moore
Fleance	.....	Johnny McBee
Porter	.....	James Nelson Harrell
Old Man	.....	Barneth Shaw
First Murderer	.....	Christopher Hendrie
Second Murderer	.....	Evangelos Voussinas
Third Murderer	.....	John Purdy
Lord	.....	John Fish
Lady Macduff	.....	Robyn Baker Flatt
Son to Macduff	.....	Mike Wheeler
Messenger	.....	John Fish
English Doctor	.....	Keith Rothschild
Scottish Doctor	.....	Arthur Jensen Rogers
Gentlewoman	.....	Roberta Rude
Armorer	.....	Fred Mills
Seton	.....	Marshall Oglesby
Seward	.....	Mike Dendy
Young Seward	.....	Steven Mackenroth

## Ken Latimer Appears in the Title Role

beth who is little more than a beast, denied the very intellectual introspection that makes him a great tragic hero. On the level of a mere assassin, Mr. Latimer plays him with considerable vigor, and his bravery at the end—the one virtue this thug Macbeth is permitted to retain—is given with ferocious energy.

His Lady Macbeth, Mona Pursley, showed strength and spirit, but like her Thane, the conception was a little too exaggerated. The opposition party came on strong. Randy Moore showed a good, thrusting Macduff, John Shepherd's Malcolm was proper without being priggish, Gene Leggett made an unusually good thing out of Ross, while Preston Jones had authority, not least when bloody and shambling, as Banquo.

One last point: Obviously regional companies must do Shakespeare—it is the English-speaking theater's most considerable tradition. It is also perfectly legitimate to adapt the staging to illuminate contemporary circumstances. But it is also surprising, when given with fire and poetry, how illuminating they can be unadapted and yet realized with imagination.

hands running with a king's blood and this was no figure for his speech but a fact for his conscience.

Apart from what I consider the deep misconception of the production's heart there is a lot about the staging to commend it. It takes full advantage of the auditorium's many opportunities for split-level playing. When the three assassins and their gory victims fade into the background during the play's second half, the production rapidly gathers conviction.

It is helped by designs by Mary Sue Jones, which aim at a Dark Ages Scotland slightly modified with such modern trappings as cut-out dresses for the witches' attendants and warrior helmets that look remarkably like motorcycle crash helmets. It is helped perhaps most of all by the pace and clarity of the staging and, within the limits of this strange "assassination myth" conception, the straightforwardness of the acting.

Ken Latimer suffers most by having to present a Mac-