

GRADUATE SCHOOL REVIEW COMPETITION

**(Re)Interpreted: A Review of De Oscuro's
*Macbeth****Macbeth*, De Oscuro, Linbury Studio, November 13, 2013

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Radical adaptations of Shakespeare are routine nowadays. Location, era, and gender have been transfigured and repurposed countless times, productions often held together solely by the scaffolding of Shakespeare's enduring words. Welsh performance company De Oscuro's revision of *Macbeth*, in a weeklong residence at the Royal Opera Houses' Linbury Studio performance space, applies just such a drastic treatment. A cast of five – Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and three male witches who also fill auxiliary roles as needed – dance, stride, and writhe across a minimalist stage adorned by three large black wedges (adjusted for various utilities), three stationary drapes, and backlit by a stark continuous digital projection. While undeniably original, the production is not entirely successful: too many stationary monologues to be the dance performance it is billed as, and despite a heavy abridgement, a first half that chronically lags. The piece was well-played, but poorly structured. Conor Linehan's highly evocative, beautifully disturbing original score, performed live by string quartet at the side of the stage, shines through despite the performance's technical flaws.

The subversion of language both separates and rescues De Oscuro's *Macbeth*. The reworked script translates roughly half of all

the dialogue into Welsh, destabilizing the normative glue for any Shakespearean construction: the words themselves. Neither a distraction nor a concurrent rendering for the English language being used on stage, Welsh stands alone.

While the definitive monologues remain in English, the players scheme, comfort, curse, and panic in Welsh. They switch languages in mid-sentence, depending on context and content. Here, English is the language of recognizable dialogue, royal proclamations, and official business; Welsh is the language of deep personal interaction, introspection, and fear. One of the greatest works in the English literary canon now privileges Welsh in the lives of its characters.

The effect, which begins as novelty but grows in obvious magnitude as the show progresses, is compelling. Traditionally, Macbeth is Shakespeare's ultimate opportunist: the privileged Thane of Glames, lacking for naught, willing to murder solely to gain superfluous power and to climb the aristocratic hierarchy. His wife is the consummate catalyst for greed, an avaricious master of puppets.

Removing the Macbeths linguistically from their peers effectively removes them socially as well. They are alienated from the domain they inhabit. This is not a couple striving for internal promotion anymore: on the contrary, these are outsiders trying to break in. We see the masks they must wear in public, and the

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very real insecurities hidden underneath, *expressed* underneath. A mixture of empathy and pity supplants the fatalistic antagonism towards Macbeth that the audience typically feels. In this production, *Macbeth* truly earns the title of "Tragedy."

De Oscuro's linguistic subversion makes up for the performance's shortcomings. Their Macbeth comes not from a place of

power, hungry for more: he's desperate, trying to lay claim in a world that, literally, does not understand him.

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