



UDC 792.08:821.111-2.09
DOI: 10.63009/noac/2.2025.52

Article's History: Received: 15.07.2025 Revised: 20.11.2025
Accepted 22.12.2025 Published: 29.12.2025

Zoya Zakharchuk*

PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor
Rivne State University of the Humanities
33028, 12 Stepan Bandera Str., Rivne, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9526-9106>

Oksana Tatarchuk

Actress and Director
People's Theater "TEMP"
Central Palace of Culture
58000, 5 Teatralna Sq., Chernivtsi, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2814-3446>

Global experience of stage interpretations of "Macbeth"

Abstract. The specific features of directorial and acting interpretations of well-known theatrical productions of "Macbeth" served as an effective means of enriching artistic experience in the stage realisation of the tragedy by William Shakespeare. The aim of the study was to update materials from specialised literary and artistic sources regarding directorial and acting versions of W. Shakespeare's "Macbeth" and the artistic qualities of these productions. The research identified significant characteristics of stage interpretations of the tragedy. The specificity of marionette versions of "Macbeth" was outlined, particularly in relation to the roles of the witches and Lady Macduff. Attention was given to the directorial solution of the English actor D. Garrick, marked by the psychological depth of "Macbeth" and the grandeur of Lady Macbeth. The study highlighted the directorial techniques of stage interpretation employed by the Royal Theatre actor J.Ph. Kemble, aimed at mitigating Macbeth's guilt and excluding the actor-ghost from scenes involving him. Emphasis was placed on the experimental adaptation by the Royal Theatre actor R. Elliston for the Royal Circus, realised in the form of a pantomimic performance. The influence of a pronounced psychological dimension in the stage images of the characters was established in the production of the London actor W.C. Macready. The contribution of the creators of the most outstanding stage images of "Macbeth" in the mid-19th century – S. Phelps, C. Kean, and H. Irving – was also identified. A gradual shift was outlined from psychological deviance, the defining feature of Shakespearean tragedy productions during the Romantic period of the 19th century, towards the modernist subjectivism of the 20th century. Characteristic features of the modernised "Macbeth" by B. Jackson were specified. The study established the causes of the crisis in Shakespearean interpretation and readings of the tragedy and detailed the positive qualities of the directorial work of G.B. Shaw at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, featuring L. Olivier and V. Leigh. The perspective of a modernised interpretation of the great tragedy by P. Boháč and his experimental theatre company Spirtfire Company was traced. The research also clarified the aims of innovation and the methods of realisation of one of the most enigmatic interpretations of the tragedy by the director of the "Berezil" artistic association, L. Kurbas. The practical significance of the study lies in the acquisition of progressive theatrical experience in staging "Macbeth" by W. Shakespeare, the enrichment of the director's palette of expressive stage means, and the improvement of methodological approaches to the successful adaptation of works within the tragic genre

Keywords: history of theatrical productions; stage adaptation; features of directorial interpretation; stage imagery; acting achievements; expressive means

Suggest Citation:

Zakharchuk, Z., & Tatarchuk, O. (2025). Global experience of stage interpretations of "Macbeth". *Notes on Art Criticism*, 25(2), 52-62. doi: 10.63009/noac/2.2025.52.

*Corresponding author



Copyright © The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Introduction

Directing and acting skills required systematic and continuous development. In this process, studying the history of stage productions was particularly valuable; it not only broadened the understanding of interpretative possibilities for dramaturgical material but also deepened the insight into the relationship between the author's intent and its stage embodiment. A historical-critical analysis of performances allowed for the identification of the evolution of directorial concepts and methods of acting transformation, while opening new horizons in the interpretation of classical texts. It was through the interaction of theoretical reflection and the practical realisation of drama that a holistic vision of modern performing arts was formed. One of the most studied and relevant subjects of theatre analysis remained the work of William Shakespeare, particularly his play "Macbeth", which served as a model of profound dramaturgical complexity and multi-layered meaning. For several centuries, "Macbeth" has not only retained its stage appeal but has been continually revitalised within shifting cultural and social contexts. The production history of "Macbeth" has attracted the attention of numerous researchers, who analyse directorial concepts, interpretative approaches, acting specifics, and the nature of artistic means across various cultural environments (Cerdá *et al.*, n.d.). New research expanded this perspective; for instance, Oxford University professor A. Lidster (2022) demonstrated how book publishers of the early modern era (late 16th – early 17th centuries) influenced the shaping of Shakespearean plays, which helped explain the diversity of stage versions of "Macbeth".

Within Ukrainian theatre studies, a circle of scholars has also addressed the production history of the tragedy "Macbeth", offering conceptual interpretations of the transformation of the play's imagery across different theatrical forms. D. Moskvitina (2017) reconstructed the reception of Shakespeare in the intellectual worldview of Ralph Waldo Emerson, demonstrating that for Emerson Shakespeare's texts functioned not merely as literary sources but as philosophical platforms for reflection on creativity, moral freedom, and universal values. Researcher argued that Emerson read Shakespeare as a genius, whose artistic method and anthropological vision became a model of creative self-affirmation for the American thinker. I. Makaryk (2010) examined the influence of Ukrainian theatre on the reception of Shakespeare within the national cultural context. Research by M. Labinskyi *et al.* (2022) elucidated the theoretical foundations of innovative Ukrainian theatre and the logic of stage interpretation, including the first Ukrainian production of Shakespeare's "Macbeth". In turn, M. Fowler (2025) analysed the formation of the artistic elite and theatrical culture in Soviet Ukraine, which created the conditions for such innovative productions. Within the framework of Ukrainian Shakespearean studies, the contribution of N. Torkut (2023)

has been particularly significant, as the author's scholarly work provided an important theoretical basis for understanding the transformation of the image of "Macbeth" in later historical and theatrical contexts, which proved essential for directorial development. Reviews of contemporary productions – including those by I. Golizdra (2025) and Music-review Ukraine (n.d.) – have documented not only thematic emphases but also formal features of modern interpretations of "Macbeth" on the Ukrainian stage, testifying to a heightened interest in contemporary theatrical readings of Shakespeare's tragedy in Ukraine.

Thus, the study of the stage history of the tragedy "Macbeth" has become a multifaceted phenomenon, covering a wide range of theoretical, critical and practical aspects of theatrical art. However, despite the large number of studies, the question of the relationship between the director's concept and the actor's embodiment, taking into account the historical stages of theatre development and changes in interpretation paradigms, still remained open and required further consideration. The aim of this article was to analyse the evolution of directorial and acting interpretations of Shakespeare's tragedy "Macbeth" in different historical and cultural contexts, with an emphasis on identifying the main stage innovations that shaped the artistic integrity of the productions. From the point of view of directing and acting, the works of a number of scholars have been valuable for researching the stated topic. The study used an interdisciplinary approach, which included methods such as historical and critical analysis, which allowed to trace the evolution of stage interpretations of "Macbeth" in the context of cultural and historical circumstances; comparative studies provided a comparative analysis of different theatrical versions of the play in national and aesthetic contexts; theatrical hermeneutics contributed to the identification of the semantic layers of the stage text through the interpretation of the director's decisions; elements of practical directing made it possible to use theatrical staging tools for a deeper understanding of the creative strategies used in specific performances.

From the history of stage productions of the tragedy "Macbeth" by William Shakespeare on the stages of England and the Czech Republic

The first review of "Macbeth" during Shakespeare's lifetime was written by the occultist and astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I, Simon Forman, who saw the performance at the "Globe" Theatre on 20 April 1610 (Bloom & Marson, 2008). Shakespeare scholars have noted discrepancies between Forman's account and the play as it later appeared in print. For instance, he makes no mention of the apparition scene, of Hecate, of the man not born of woman, or of Birnam Wood. However, scholars

P. Mason & S. Clark (2015) have observed that Forman's reports were often inaccurate and incomplete, and that his interest lay not in "providing comprehensive accounts of productions" According to P. Tattspough (2003), with the change of the ruling elite in Great Britain in the mid-17th century, changes also took place in the cultural life of the empire. Shakespeare's plays were adapted to the tastes and preferences of the new era. Among the changes in the production of "Macbeth" that could be noticed were the expansion of the role of the witches (Wills, 1996), the introduction of new songs, dances and "flights", as well as the expansion of the role of Lady Macduff as the protagonist of Lady Macbeth. These performances were called puppet versions of "Macbeth".

The puppet version of "Macbeth" remained on the theatre stage for almost a century, and it was not until 1744 that the English actor D. Garrick managed to revive the play. D. Garrick claimed that his production of "Macbeth" was "as written by Shakespeare". In fact, this statement was false: he retained the expanded role of the witches and wrote a long death speech for Macbeth himself, excluding from his production the drunken old guard, the murder of Lady Macduff's son, and Malcolm Macduff's trial (Orgel, 1988). The role of Lady Macbeth, played by his friend and regular stage partner, actress H. Pritchard, was restored to its full grandeur, in keeping with the original source, and no longer depicted irrelevant moral contrasts with Lady Macduff (Gay, 2002). In his production, D. Garrick focused on the inner experiences of a character, who was torn between good and evil. Actor portrayed a man capable of observing himself, as if part of him remained untouched. In D. Garrick's version, Macbeth was a sensitive man, and nothing could turn him into a tyrant and despot (Williams, 2002).

According to S. Williams (2002), the next play was staged in 1778 by Sir J.F. Cambell, an actor at the Royal Theatre. The highlight of J.F. Campbell's production, as described by J. Moody (2002), was the "tall and majestic" actress S. Sidons, who became legendary in the role of Lady Macbeth. Unlike H. Pritchard's wild, demonic portrayal, S. Sidons' Lady Macbeth, although terrifying, was tender, loving and humane in the scenes, where actress expressed her regret and remorse. By portraying her actions as motivated by love for her husband, S. Siddons shifted part of the moral responsibility for all the murders away from him. According to P. Gay (2002), audiences found Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene particularly mesmerising, and theatre critic W. Hazlitt pointed out that "all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical – she glided across the stage and descended from it almost like a ghost". K. McLuskie (2005) described J.F. Cambell's decision to omit the ghost of Banquo, allowing the audience to see Macbeth's reaction as his wife and guests saw it, relying on the fact that the play was so well known that the audience already knew, when the ghost was supposed to appear on stage.

With the turn of the century, the interpretation of "Macbeth" also changed: authors did not deny that "Macbeth" depicted the conflict between "good" and "evil", but at the same time began to find a deeper meaning in the play: one in which confusion and deception became as important as moral truth. The productions were also subject to experimental directorial visions. In 1809, Royal Theatre actor R. Elliston created a popular adaptation of "Macbeth" at the Royal Circus as a pantomime performance, excluding all of Shakespeare's texts and partially retaining only the plot (Moody, 2002). In 1820, at Covent Garden, "Macbeth" by London's most popular actor, W.C. Macready, received mixed reviews from critics. W. Hazlitt noted that the interpretation of the characters was purely psychological: the witches lost all their magical powers, and the protagonist's downfall was caused solely by his personal conflict (Williams, 2002). The most famous Lady Macbeth in Macready's productions was Helen Faucit, who had an unsuccessful debut in the role in her early twenties but later gained recognition by embodying contemporary ideals of femininity (Gay, 2002). The two most outstanding stage images of Macbeth in the mid-19th century were created by S. Phelps and C. King. Both became famous not so much for their interpretation of the characters as for the novelty of their productions. Sir Phelps restored almost all of Shakespeare's original text and added special effects: for example, the witches appeared behind green gauze, which allowed to appear and disappear with the help of stage lighting. A notable feature of C. King's productions was the accuracy of the costumes and sets: he transported his audience to 11th-century Scotland, full of incredible spectacles, including several elaborate royal processions. Literary scholar A. Nicoll (2009) noted that in King's production, "even nature was historically accurate". Macbeth, played by Irving, who was the most successful of the late Victorian actors, failed to win the audience's favour. His pursuit of psychological authenticity diminished certain aspects of the role: he portrayed Macbeth as a brave warrior and moral coward at the same time, without any remorse, who contemplated Duncan's murder even before his encounter with the witches (Williams, 2002).

Audiences of the Romantic era, and later of the 19th century, began to perceive the ethical issues of "Macbeth" more clearly: he was no longer guilty, but only psychologically deviant. However, it was only in the Modern era that interpreters first hinted at the radically problematic nature of Macbeth. In 20th-century productions and readings, "Macbeth" began to question the dualistic foundations of traditional morality, politics and cosmology. Two factors changed the nature of "Macbeth" productions in the 20th century: first, the development of acting skills under the influence of the ideas of K. Stanislavsky and B. Brecht; second, the rise to power of totalitarian regimes characterised by cruelty and repression. This influenced the staging of Shakespeare's "Macbeth", which

took on characteristics of rebellion and freedom. Audiences no longer sympathised with the heroic Macbeth, who was driven to murder by witches and Lady Macbeth, but saw him as inherently evil, and only Macbeth, who was similar to Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and other dictators, was responsible for his actions (Williams, 2002).

Over time, theatrical representations of “Macbeth” increasingly came to express modernist subjectivism. A notable example is “Macbeth” directed by Sir Barry Jackson, which challenged audiences to confront the ideological divide separating modern psychological worldviews from the values of the Renaissance. His characters were dressed in contemporary clothing: khaki military uniforms, elegant cocktail dresses, and soldiers wielded machine guns rather than swords. The modernisation of costumes, props, and stage design had a powerful effect on spectators, bringing Shakespeare’s tragedy closer to contemporary experience (Mullin, 1978). Critics acknowledged the striking visual impact of these choices, although the production did not enjoy widespread popular success. Nevertheless, Jackson’s “Macbeth” did more than any other English production to undermine dualistic assumptions. It exposed the tension between the moral binaries audiences traditionally associated with “Macbeth” and the modern pressures that, in real life, blurred such values. According to Shakespearean performance scholar D. Bartholomeusz (1984), Jackson defamiliarised Macbeth by “erasing the struggle between good and evil” and displacing accepted forms of hedonism. Scientist further suggested that Lady Macbeth represents an amoral realm beyond consciousness, until she herself ultimately descends into a world of shadows and terror. Certain elements of this “terrifying” world – such as Macduff’s invulnerability to gunfire – were utopian in nature, pointing to a subjective distortion of experience shaped by a “primitive” consciousness.

The thematic complexity of “Macbeth” distinguished modern, ostensibly “realistic” dramaturgy from Shakespeare’s fundamentally non-naturalistic theatre. The American scholar Elmer Edgar Stoll argued that Shakespeare’s characters were not created to resemble “real” people, but rather to serve dramatic functions, particularly moral contrast (Moschovakis, 2008). Academic historicism and cultural modernism accelerated a crisis in Shakespearean interpretation, both in reading and staging. Yet this crisis prompted critics and directors to articulate more clearly the dualistic premises they identified within the tragedy. The “original” “Macbeth” was lost to modern audiences beyond the possibility of restoration, and the only viable path for artists was to continue embodying a “modern Macbeth”. In 1956, audiences at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre were able to experience “Macbeth” in a production notable for its internal coherence and artistic integrity, directed by Glen Byam Shaw, with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in the leading roles (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Production of the play “Macbeth” directed by Glen Byam Shaw, 1956, United Kingdom. Scene 1
Note: Macbeth – Laurence Olivier; Lady Macbeth – Vivien Leigh
Source: based on S. Morris (2013)

In an era of total industrialisation, Glen Byam Shaw presented a true tragic hero with a deep and powerful soul (Shvedov, 1975). The talent of the actor Laurence Olivier, performing the role of Macbeth, succeeded in revealing the anti-tyrannical pathos of the tragedy. Macbeth is a majestic individual endowed with valuable qualities; in the world, no rival exists who could defeat him in single combat. The path of tyranny and murder leads Macbeth to total spiritual exhaustion, and ultimately to death. In the role of Macbeth, it is impossible to find a single line that openly and directly demonstrates the struggle between good and evil in the hero’s soul. Olivier was able to show this struggle through a deep penetration not into the text, but into the spirit of Macbeth’s lines – into the significant philosophical subtext with which they are filled.

In building the hero’s exposition, Olivier revealed a combination of internal power and unrestrained ambition, which became Macbeth’s starting point. Macbeth is focused only on the future; he dreams only of the crown and grandeur; as of yet, one cannot trace any negative qualities in this character that would later lead to brutal murders. Olivier’s mastery was defined by the actor’s rejection of a convenient cliché: that Macbeth was a glorious warrior and noble man, who became a criminal only after meeting the witches. The performer chose a more complex path, showing that as Macbeth sinks into a sea of cruelty, the positive aspects of his soul, “once stifled by ambition”, begin to speak louder and louder. However, they can no longer change Macbeth’s fate, as the logic of development drags him through new crimes toward an inevitable catastrophe. “False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (Shakespeare, 1986) –

audiences, who saw how Macbeth decided to commit murder after hesitation now heard the despair of a man, who understood that eternal torment awaited him. The necessity to conceal his thoughts, to lie, and to be hypocritical for the rest of his life caused unbearable spiritual suffering to the brave warrior. Such an interpretation of the final line allowed Olivier to show that even in moments of greatest resolve, a profound struggle occurs within Macbeth's soul – not a mere invention, but a bold discovery by the actor.

After the murder of Duncan, the final stage in the evolution of the main hero began – Macbeth proceeds to new crimes without hesitation, challenging fate, filled not with confidence in victory but only with the desire not to fall into the enemy's hands alive. The role of Duncan in the play became pivotal for launching the entire tragic dynamics of the work. He embodied legitimate power, virtue, and the moral order that existed in Scotland before the arrival of the usurper. The figure of Duncan created a distinct moral contrast with Macbeth: the just king is juxtaposed with the ambitious warrior who succumbs to the temptation of power. It was the murder of Duncan that became the ethical and narrative turning point, destroying the natural and political order and releasing the forces of chaos and moral decay into the world. Duncan's death reflected the loss of harmony in the state and symbolised the beginning of Macbeth's degradation, as he finally crossed the line between intent and action, between humanity and tyranny. The significance of this technique – where resolute words increasingly diverge from the intonation and the external pattern of the role, expressing Macbeth's intensifying spiritual void – grows as the tragedy's resolution approaches. Through intonation and correctly placed accents, Olivier penetrated the internal psychological world of his hero. The use of this technique as the primary means of conveying the hero's internal crisis harmoniously communicated the entire leitmotif of the tragedy, where the hero always encounters "two truths".

The artistic technique that Olivier placed at the heart of his stage interpretation of Macbeth reached particular ideological significance in the tragedy's finale: Macbeth sums up his life after receiving news of his wife's death. In Olivier's eyes – the sadness of a suicide; life has proven to be a tale told by an idiot. The internal turmoil revealed by the actor served as an important expression of the main hero's atmosphere of doom. In creating the image of Lady Macbeth, Vivien Leigh believed that Macbeth's wife should be an elegant woman who combines external attractiveness with strength of character. Leigh makes the leitmotif of her role not a harsh will that suppresses Macbeth, but unconditional love for her husband; she is ready for anything for the sake of his happiness. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is of great importance for highlighting the main hero's spiritual devastation. Lady Macbeth's voice, which initially sounded powerless without sharp intonation, began to tremble more strongly in

her final monologue, through which the actress conveyed the spiritual tragedy of a woman broken under an unbearable burden that she had previously carried with pride (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Production of the play "Macbeth" directed by Glen Byam Shaw, 1956, United Kingdom. Scene 2

Note: Macbeth – Laurence Olivier; Lady Macbeth – Vivien Leigh

Source: based on K. Salome (2019)

Director G. Byam-Shaw, the leading performers, and the entire cast made a concerted effort to depict Macbeth's degeneration, which was most vividly expressed through the senseless cruelty of the usurper. Reviewers responded favourably to Byam-Shaw's direction, while Laurence Olivier's performance in the title role received the highest acclaim. Immediately after the premiere of "Macbeth" in June 1956, the theatre critic J.K. Trewin wrote in the London theatrical bulletin "The World of the Theatre" that "Laurence Olivier was the finest Macbeth of the era" (Darlington, 1968). A new era generates new Macbeths and new readings of Shakespeare's great tragedy. One such interpretation was the production directed by P. Boháč together with his experimental theatre, the Spitfire Company, staged in Prague in 2015. This production, entitled "Vladimir Macbetin", was inspired by William Shakespeare's tragedy. The action was transferred to a future Russia, and the central character was conceived as a prototype of its current president. Responding to a question from journalists of "Radio Liberty" as to why the Russian president had been chosen as the prototype for "Vladimir Macbetin", P. Boháč explained that, at present (the premiere took place in 2015), "there are very few dictators left in Europe, and the search for a contemporary figure comparable to Macbeth led him to Putin" as a striking embodiment of tyranny. Boháč sought to combine in a single image various traits characteristic of dictators – demagoguery,

manipulation, and narcissism – since these qualities are embedded in the context of Shakespeare’s tragedy and in the story of Macbeth itself (Shymov, 2015). The action of the performance unfolded as a retrospective. In an airport, the protagonist Vladimir Macbetin attempts to flee the country after being betrayed by those closest to him: his entourage, advisers, and associates – people who, like himself, had extensive experience in eliminating the unwanted. Everything is already in the past for him: all the most significant events and principal crimes of his life have already occurred, and he is now given the opportunity to reflect upon and assess them. Fate, however, does not “sleep”: at a certain moment he is informed that the plane has been delayed, and this news becomes, in the circumstances, in which he finds himself, the voice of destiny.

The director focused on the emotions of a man, who until recently possessed immense power, as Macbeth once did, and who suddenly finds himself with nothing left. The loneliness of the tyrant is the central theme of the production. P. Boháč emphasised moments of crisis, showing how they affect a person and how such experiences are endured. The figure of Lady Macbeth was also presented, and, as in Shakespeare, she becomes the driving force of events. Manipulation operates on political and propagandistic levels, as well as on personal and sexual ones. For the contemporary audience, the director also introduced manipulation on an advertising level: people influence and manipulate one another, while rulers themselves turn out to be under influence, captive to the context in which they exist, and in particular to their own fears (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Rehearsal of the performance “Vladimir Macbetin”

Source: based on Ya. Shymov (2015)

The voices of the witches from “Macbeth” in “Vladimir Macbetin’s” production were heard through advertising commercials, demonstrating invisible manipulation of people. The director combined two levels of reality – what the main character and Lady Macbeth saw, and what the audience saw: the boundary between

consciousness and subconsciousness. The fact that Macbeth did not feel guilty about anything did not mean that the “witches” of fate did not pursue him. He was destroyed by the conflict between consciousness and subconsciousness, leading him to a certain form of madness. The actualisation of “Macbeth” is a reminder of the eternal, which has allowed this tragedy to survive for many centuries. The transfer of the events of the play to Russia is very important in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, because it was through art that Europeans came to understand the modern world, which changed not only Central Europe but the whole world.

Macbeth in Ukraine. Landmark performances

Shakespeare’s tragedy remains relevant in Ukraine – an important phenomenon on the theatrical stage was the first and one of the best interpretations of Shakespeare’s works, the production of “Macbeth” by the director of the “Berezil” art association, L. Kurbas, in April 1924. This performance remains the most enigmatic until 2025. It is worth noting that it already contains elements of sharp, expressive characteristics directed against the romanticisation of Shakespeare’s characters. The performance was a storming of the heights that attracted the attention of many theatre artists of the 1920s. In L. Kurbas’s production, the spiritual impoverishment of the ambitious was embodied in the deliberately unspectacular poverty of the costumes (Fig. 4). L. Kurbas did not want the audience to be emotionally involved in what was happening on stage and to empathise with the characters. By destroying the audience’s ability to empathise, the director taught the actors to step out of their roles while on stage, revealing to himself and the actors the secret of “alienation” as an effective form of theatre for sharp publicistic thought (Fowler, 2025).



Figure 4. Scene with witches. “Macbeth” by L. Kurbas
Note: I. Maryanenko – Macbeth; G. Babiivna, O. Steshenko, and V. Panchenko – witches

Source: Les Kurbas Centre (2020)

The director’s innovations were aimed at freeing the “soul of the play” from all the usual layers and making

its idea as contemporary as possible. The essence of the performance was the idea of the misery of a man, who devotes his energy to the struggle for power and the crown, the mundanity and repetitiveness of crimes in this struggle. The director denied the greatness of the ambitious men of the 20th century, and Macbeth appeared before the audience as a harsh man of elementary motivations, dominated by straightforward cruelty. He did not appear either majestic or significant; doubts and the torments of a troubled conscience were manifestations of fear in the tyrant, and deep feelings remained beyond his reach. Lady Macbeth appeared even more severe than her husband – all the ambition that women usually expressed through displays of beauty, wealth, and happiness was channelled into Lady Macbeth's lust for power. She had no feelings left even for her husband, who only irritated her with his cowardice. Tall, unattractive, with sharp features and expressive gestures, she loved herself and power for herself (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Scene before the murder of King Duncan.
"Macbeth" directed by Les Kurbas

Note: Macbeth – I. Marianenko; Lady Macbeth – L. Hakkebush
Source: Open Kurbas (n.d.)

The paths opened by Kurbas in "Macbeth" proved to be highly promising for the theatre of the mid-20th century. The most significant among them were the possibility of reading the play as a generalised history, almost as a parable, and the technique of stepping out of character, the actor's "distancing", as a means of sharpening the conceptual framework of the production and establishing new relationships between actor and spectator (Zaitsev, 2024). The same aim underpinned the use of pantomimes and intermedia in Kurbas's production, as well as the casting of a single actor in diametrically opposed roles. Contradictory in its very nature, Kurbas's Macbeth became an effective catalyst for the development of Ukrainian theatre in the early 20th century,

while the director's artistic discoveries and innovations in this production were clearly addressed to the future. The staging was not only political in character, but also profoundly aesthetic. Kurbas's "Macbeth" did not merely challenge established notions of world theatrical classics within 20th-century Ukraine; through a chain of endless betrayals, the director succeeded in revealing a brutal, power-hungry world strikingly similar to that of the audience seated in the auditorium. Les Kurbas was among the first figures in European art to combine film and live actors on stage, integrating cinema organically into theatrical art (Makaryk, 2010).

Contemporary critical responses to Kurbas's "Macbeth" were ambivalent, yet none of the commentators remained indifferent. The director and artistic director of the Stalin Drama Theatre, V. Vasylo (1969), recalled "Macbeth" as an "ascetic, austere, grey and cold performance that did not enjoy success with audiences". A review of the production was also written by the director H. Khotkevych, whose worldview was grounded in the belief that, following the end of the era of the theatrical "coryphaei", Ukrainian theatre had entered a period of decline. His review was published in *Literature. Science. Art*, a supplement to the *News of the AUCEC* (the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee), on 1 June 1924. For Khotkevych, the production represented a "failure": he failed to comprehend Kurbas's new vision of the tragedy, rejected most of the innovative directing techniques, and did not sense that within these forms and rhythms a new theatre of the twentieth century was being born (Kovalchuk, 2012). The scholar L. Kovalchuk (2012) likewise concluded that the response to Kurbas's work "absorbed the views of all supporters of a more moderate, traditional art, who perceived new radical artistic forms with scepticism". It was precisely such "negative" responses that provided the necessary contrasting background essential to any thorough scholarly investigation, against which the true contours of outstanding artistic phenomena emerge with even greater clarity – among them, Kurbas's "Macbeth".

Taking into account professional stages, various amateur scenes, and projects, "111 stage versions of Shakespeare have appeared in Ukraine from spring 2014 to spring 2025" (Ukrinform, 2025). A landmark event was "Macbeth" directed by I. Uryvskiy at the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre in Kyiv, which premiered on 27-28 February and 1 March 2025 (Fig. 6). Commenting on this directing interpretation, I. Golizdra (2025) wrote in her review: "This is an interpretation that resonates with the contemporary world, where information often functions as a powerful tool of control and manipulation... Indeed, the classical tragedy has been transformed into a "synthetic interactive performance" through the use of the latest theatrical means: lighting design, video projections, sound, and even direct contact with the audience".



Figure 6. Scene before Duncan's murder.
"Macbeth" by I. Uryvskiy

Note: Lady Macbeth – T. Mikhina; Macbeth – A. Hurezov.
Photo: Yu. Weber

Source: based on I. Golizdra (2025)

The performance impressed the audience with its use of mirrors on screens facing the auditorium (representing those, who are manipulated nowadays), effects and projections controlled by the actors (rebodying those who manipulate), a sandy area on the stage (a symbol of decline), the stylistics of black costumes that blurred the boundaries between the past and the present, and, in general, the powerful multimediaisation of the stage space. Lady Macbeth gained weight in the play, transforming from a seductress into a dangerous strategist in the political game, a flexible manipulator. M. Khachatryan and T. Mikhina managed to convey Lady Macbeth's inner state (Fig. 7). "The physical plasticity of the actresses and their interaction with the space are among the most interesting aspects of the production. The contrast between the outward restraint and inner tension of their heroine creates an effect of tension that is felt throughout the performance" (Golizdra, 2025). Music-review Ukraine (n.d.) named T. Mikhina (Lady Macbeth) and A. Timoshenko (King Duncan) as the favourites of the performance for their most organic acting on stage.

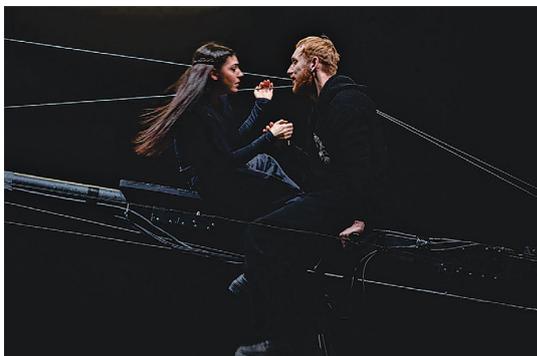


Figure 7. Scene of Macbeth's meeting with his wife.
"Macbeth" by I. Uryvskiy

Note: Lady Macbeth – M. Khachatryan; Macbeth – O. Rudinsky.
Photo: Yulia Weber

Source: based on I. Golizdra (2025)

Despite the fact that the production did not escape criticism, such as the unconvincing abrupt transition from the noble hero to the criminal Macbeth-Gurezov and the final downfall; the dominance of the form of the production over the depth of human feelings. Music-review Ukraine (n.d.) stated: "Uryvskiy is a director who works with a feel for the material... He managed to interpret "Macbeth" through a modern prism, using new theatrical means, but preserving the magic of the original". The production was also called "one of the most daring and visually rich attempts to reinterpret Shakespeare on the Ukrainian stage" (Music-review Ukraine, n.d.). In contemporary Shakespeare studies, several approaches to analysing the stage history of "Macbeth" have emerged. P. Tatspaugh (2003) analysed the peculiarities of the stage transformation of Macbeth's image depending on the socio-cultural context, while S. Orgel (1988) emphasised the symbolic significance of the visual elements of the production, including lighting, costumes and set design. In the studies by P. Gay (2002) and S. Williams (2002), attention was focused on the psychological nature of acting and the embodiment of the characters' internal conflicts through the means of contemporary stage language. E. Smith (2020) analysed the key themes, dramaturgical techniques and cultural context of Shakespeare's works, which provided a better understanding of the universal approaches to productions of "Macbeth" in different historical and national traditions. Ukrainian interpretations of "Macbeth" – from L. Kurbas' innovative, ahead-of-its-time production to I. Uryvskiy – have consistently demonstrated the ability of Ukrainian theatre to interpret Shakespeare's tragedy through the prism of social upheavals, political transformations and changes in aesthetic thinking.

Conclusions

The study analysed the development of stage interpretations of Shakespeare's tragedy "Macbeth" in the context of cultural, historical and aesthetic transformations of different eras. The image of "Macbeth" has undergone a significant evolution: from the classic tragic hero of the 17th-18th centuries to a symbol of tyrannical power in contemporary productions, reflecting the specific political and philosophical paradigms of the time. During the 19th century, the emphasis in stage versions increasingly shifted to the psychological depth of the characters, which corresponded to the artistic tastes and cultural orientations of the time. In the 20th century, particularly in G. Byam Shaw's production, Macbeth's intense internal struggle was revealed, while contemporary interpretations, such as P. Bohach's play "Vladimir Macbetin", highlighted the tragedy through the prism of political criticism, demonstrating tyranny as a personal and social catastrophe. In 1924, Ukrainian director L. Kurbas attempted to reinterpret "Macbeth" in the aesthetics of expressionism on the stage of the "Berezil" Theatre, focusing on the mechanisms of power as a factor of

dehumanisation. Contemporary director I. Uryvskiy used multimedia to enhance symbolism and psychological tension. All of the above examples illustrate the development of the image of Macbeth in general, allowing to appreciate the universality of the tragedy and the multifaceted nature of the directorial and acting decisions. A study of the characteristics of experimental theatrical productions of "Macbeth" by Ukrainian directors during the 2010s and 2020s could prove fruitful. V. Troitsky's production of "Prologue to Macbeth" at the Kyiv Theatre Studio "DAKH" could be a valuable example of combining the expressive means of classical, folk and avant-garde art. Prospects for further research lie in studying the

influence of digital technologies, the political context, and the psychological and philosophical analysis of the image of Macbeth, which opens up new opportunities for understanding and staging the classic tragedy.

● Acknowledgements

None.

● Funding

None.

● Conflict of Interest

None.

● References

- [1] Bartholomeusz, D. (1984). *Macbeth and the players*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Bloom, H., & Marson, J. (Eds.). (2008). *Macbeth (Bloom's Shakespeare through the ages)*. New York: Checkmark Books.
- [3] Cerdá, J.F., Prescott, P., & Burnett, M.T. (n.d.). *Macbeth in modern European culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- [4] Darlington, W.A. (1968). *Laurence Olivier*. London: Morgan Grampian Books Ltd.
- [5] Földváry, K. (2020). 'Sad stories of the death of kings': The hollow crown and the Shakespearean history play on screen. In R. Jackson (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare on screen* (pp. 105-118). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108367479.010.
- [6] Fowler, M. (2025). *Beau Monde on empire's edge: State and stage in Soviet Ukraine* (Translated by Ya. Strikha). Kyiv: Rodovid.
- [7] Gay, P. (2002). Women and Shakespearean performance. In S. Wells & S. Stanton (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare on stage* (pp. 155-173). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CCOL0521792959.009.
- [8] Golizdra, I. (2025). Who dominates "Macbeth": Technology vs. actors. *Ukrainian Theatre*. Retrieved from <https://theatermag.com.ua/publication/114>.
- [9] Kovalchuk, L. (2012). *On the occasion of one production (review by Hnat Hotkevych of Les Kurbas's production of "Macbeth")*. *Kurbas Readings*, 7, 160-168.
- [10] Labinskyi, M., Moskalenko, M., & Labinska, D. (2022). *Les Kurbas "Philosophy of theatre"*. Kharkiv-Kyiv: Oleksandr Savchuk Publisher; Osnovy Publishing.
- [11] Les Kurbas Centre. (2020). I. Steshenko. Memories of Les Kurbas. Excerpts. *Facebook*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3428573850510642&id=196818417019551&set=a.199116633456396>.
- [12] Lesser, Z. (2021). *Ghosts, holes, rips and scrapes: Shakespeare in 1619, bibliography in the longue durée*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- [13] Lidster, A. (2022). *Publishing the history play in the time of Shakespeare: Stationers shaping a genre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781009043656.
- [14] Makaryk, I. (2010). *Shakespeare's transformations*. Kyiv: Nika-Center.
- [15] Mason, P., & Clark, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Macbeth*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [16] McLuskie, K. (2005). Shakespeare goes slumming: Harlem '37 and Birmingham '97. In B. Hodgdon & W.B. Worthen (Eds.), *A companion to Shakespeare and performance* (pp. 249-266). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. doi: 10.1002/9780470996706.ch14.
- [17] Moody, J. (2002). Romantic Shakespeare. In S. Wells & S. Stanton (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare on stage* (pp. 37-57). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CCOL0521792959.003.
- [18] Morris, S. (2013). Laurence Olivier's Macbeth film project rises from the dead 50 years on English lecturer stumbles across 'nonexistent' screenplay in British Library for film scuppered by financial problems. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jan/25/laurence-olivier-macbeth-film-project>.
- [19] Moschovakis, N. (2008). *Macbeth. New critical essays*. London: Routledge.
- [20] Moskvitina, D. (2017). "He is incomprehensibly genius...": W. Shakespeare in the reception of R.W. Emerson. *Renaissance Studies*, 27-28, 50-61.

- [21] Mullin, M. (1978). "Macbeth" in modern dress: Royal Court Theatre, 1928. *Educational Theatre Journal*, 30(2), 176-185. doi: [10.2307/3206291](https://doi.org/10.2307/3206291).
- [22] Music-review Ukraine. (n.d.). "Macbeth" as an interactive performance: An ambitious play with Shakespeare at the Ivan Franko National Theatre. Retrieved from <https://surl.li/keebof>.
- [23] Nicoll, A. (2009). *A history of English drama 1660-1900* (Vol. 5). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [24] Open Kurbas. (n.d.). "Macbeth". Retrieved from <https://openkurbas.org/collection/makbet-ivan-maryanenko-ledi-makbet/>.
- [25] Orgel, S. (1988). The authentic Shakespeare. *Representations*, 21, 1-25. doi: [10.2307/2928375](https://doi.org/10.2307/2928375).
- [26] Salome, K. (2019). Vivien Leigh as Lady Macbeth, 1955. Facebook. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/kasbahsalome/posts/vivien-leigh-as-lady-macbeth-1955/2522473834477100>.
- [27] Shakespeare, W. (1986). *Works in six volumes* (Vol. 5, translated by B. Ten, B. Humeniuk, D. Pavlychko, I. Steshenko, Ye. Hrebinka, & M. Rylskyy). Kyiv: Dnipro.
- [28] Shvedov, Yu. (1975). *Evolution of Shakespearean tragedy*. M: Art.
- [29] Shymov, Ya. (2015). I want to show the horror and loneliness of people in power – the author of the play about putin-Macbeth. *Radio Svoboda*. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27282031.html>.
- [30] Smith, E. (2020). *This is Shakespeare: How to read the world's greatest playwright*. Gretna: Pelican.
- [31] Tatspaugh, P. (2003). Performance history: Shakespeare on the stage 1660-2001. In S. Wells & L.C. Orlin (Eds.), *Shakespeare* (pp. 525-549). Oxford: Oxford Academic. doi: [10.1093/oso/9780199245222.003.0035](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199245222.003.0035).
- [32] Torkut, N. (2023). Ukrainian theatrical Shakespearean studies in the scholarly research, life, and creative projects of Maia Harbuziuk: The scale of a personality in the context of time. *Renaissance Studies*, 37-38, 4-22. doi: [10.32782/2225-479X-2023-36-37-1](https://doi.org/10.32782/2225-479X-2023-36-37-1).
- [33] Ukrinform. (2025). "Shakespeare BOOM of the Ukrainian wartime theatre". Part one. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-culture/3986455-sekspirobum-ukrainskogo-teatru-voennogo-casu-castina-persa.html>.
- [34] Vasylo, V. (Ed.). (1969). *Les Kurbas: Memories of contemporaries*. Kyiv: Mystetstvo.
- [35] Williams, S. (2002). The tragic actor and Shakespeare. In S. Wells & S. Stanton (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Shakespeare on stage* (pp. 118-136). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: [10.1017/CCOL0521792959.007](https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521792959.007).
- [36] Wills, G. (1996). *Witches and jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [37] Zaitsev, O. (2024). Stage costume in the cultural space of Transcarpathia in the 20th and first quarter of the 21st century. *Culture and Contemporaneity*, 26(2), 39-47. doi: [10.63009/cac/2.2024.39](https://doi.org/10.63009/cac/2.2024.39).

Зоя Захарчук

Кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент
Рівненський державний гуманітарний університет
33028, вул. Степана Бандери 12, м. Рівне, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9526-9106>

Оксана Татарчук

Акторка та режисер
Народний театр «ТЕМП»
Центральний палац культури
58000, площа Театральна, 5, м. Чернівці, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2814-3446>

Світовий досвід сценічних втілень «Макбета»

■ **Анотація.** Особливості режисерсько-акторських трактувань відомих театральних постановок «Макбета» стають дієвим засобом поповнення мистецького досвіду сценічного втілення трагедії В. Шекспіра. Метою дослідження було актуалізувати матеріали спеціальних літературно-мистецьких джерел про постановочні режисерсько-акторські версії «Макбета» В. Шекспіра, якості постановок. У дослідженні було визначено суттєві особливості постановок трагедії. Окреслено специфіку маріонеткових версій «Макбета», яка стосувалася ролі відьом та леді Макдуф. Простежено режисерське вирішення англійського актора Д. Герріка, позначене психологізацією Макбета та величию леді Макбет. Відзначено режисерські прийоми сценічної інтерпретації трагедії актора Королівського театру Д. Кембла, спрямовані на зменшення вини Макбета та відсутність актора-привида в сценах із ним. Акцентовано на експериментальній адаптації постановки актора Королівського театру Р. Еллістона для Королівського цирку в формі пантомімічного перформенсу. Встановлено вплив вираженого психологічного аспекту сценічних образів персонажів трагедії в постановці лондонського актора В. Макріді. Також, було з'ясовано внесок творців найвидатніших сценічних образів Макбета середини ХІХ століття: С. Фелпса, Ч. Кінга, Г. Ірвінга. Окреслено поступову зміну психологічного девіантизму – основної прикмети постановок шекспірівської трагедії епохи Романтизму ХІХ ст. модерністським суб'єктивізмом ХХ ст., конкретизовано характерні штрихи осучасненого «Макбета» Б. Джексона. У роботі було встановлено причини кризи шекспірівської інтерпретації та прочитання трагедії та деталізовано позитивні якості режисерської роботи Г. Байєма-Шоу в Шекспірівському меморіальному театрі за участю Л. Олів'є та В. Лі. Простежено ракурс осучасненого прочитання величної трагедії П. Богача та його експериментального театру Spirtfire Company. Було з'ясовано мету нововведень та прийом реалізації однієї з найзагадковішої інтерпретації трагедії режисера мистецького об'єднання «Березіль» Леся Курбаса. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в надбанні прогресивного театрального досвіду сценічних втілень трагедії Вільяма Шекспіра «Макбет», поповненні палітри виражальних сценічних засобів постановника, удосконаленні методичних підходів успішної адаптації творів трагедійного жанру

■ **Ключові слова:** історія театральних постановок; сценічна адаптація; особливості режисерської інтерпретації; сценічні образи; акторські досягнення; виражальні засоби