

The Shorter Shakespeare

Macbeth



A shortened version,
in the original language,
with links by modern
narrators



Patrick Stewart (as Macbeth), Chichester Festival Theatre. Photo: Richard Termine

Act 1 Scene 3

A desolate place near Forres

The three witches enter talking to each other. There is a roll of thunder which changes into the beat of drum

Third Witch: A drum! A drum!
Macbeth doth come.

Three Witches: The weird sisters hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about,
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! The charm's wound up.

Macbeth and Banquo come in

Macbeth: So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

Banquo: How far is't called to Forres? What are these,
So withered, and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth
And yet are on't? Live you, or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips.

Macbeth: *(To the Witches)* Speak, if you can. What are you?

First Witch: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis.

Second Witch: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor.

Third Witch: All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!

Banquo: *(To Macbeth)* Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?

(To the Witches) I' th' name of truth,
Are ye fantastical or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt¹ withal. To me you speak not.

¹ totally absorbed



Liam Brennan as Macbeth with the weird sisters, Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh. Photo: Douglas McBride

If you can look into the seeds of time
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

First Witch: Hail!

Second Witch: Hail!

Third Witch: Hail!

First Witch: Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

Second Witch: Not so happy, yet much happier.

Third Witch: Thou shalt get¹ kings, though thou be none.
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

First Witch: Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

Macbeth: Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more.
By Sinel's² death I know I am Thane of Glamis,
But how of Cawdor? The Thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman, and to be king
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence, or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting. Speak, I charge you.

The Witches vanish

Banquo: The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?

Macbeth: Into the air, and what seemed corporal³ melted,
As breath into the wind. Would they had stayed.

Banquo: Were such things here as we do speak about,
Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?

Macbeth: Your children shall be kings.

Banquo: You shall be king.

Macbeth: And Thane of Cawdor too. Went it not so?

¹ be the father of

² Macbeth's father

³ physical

Banquo: To th' self-same tune and words. Who's here?

Ross and another Lord enter

Ross: The King hath happily received, Macbeth,
The news of thy success. As thick as hail
Came post with post, and every one did bear
Thy praises in his kingdom's great defence.
And, for an earnest of a greater honour,
He bade me from him call thee Thane of Cawdor,
In which addition, hail, most worthy thane,
For it is thine.

Banquo: What, can the devil speak true?

Macbeth: The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me
In borrowed robes?

Ross: Who was the thane lives yet,
But under heavy judgement bears that life
Which he deserves to lose.

Macbeth: *(To himself)* Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor. The
greatest is behind.

(To Banquo) Do you not hope your children shall be kings
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

Banquo: That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange,
And oftentimes to win us to our harm
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles to betray 's
In deepest consequence.
(To Ross) Cousin, a word, I pray you.

Macbeth: *(To himself)* Two truths are told
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. – I thank you gentlemen –
This supernatural soliciting¹
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success

¹ persuasion

Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature?

Banquo: (*To Ross*) Look how our partner's rapt.

Macbeth: If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.

Banquo: New honours come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould
But with the aid of use.

Macbeth: (*To himself*) Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

Banquo: Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

Macbeth: Give me your favour. My dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten. Let us toward the King.

He draws Banquo aside to speak to him.

Think upon what hath chanced, and at more time,
The interim having weighed it, let us speak
Our free hearts each to other.

Banquo: Very gladly.

Macbeth: Till then, enough. Come, friends.

They go out.

Act 1 Scene 4

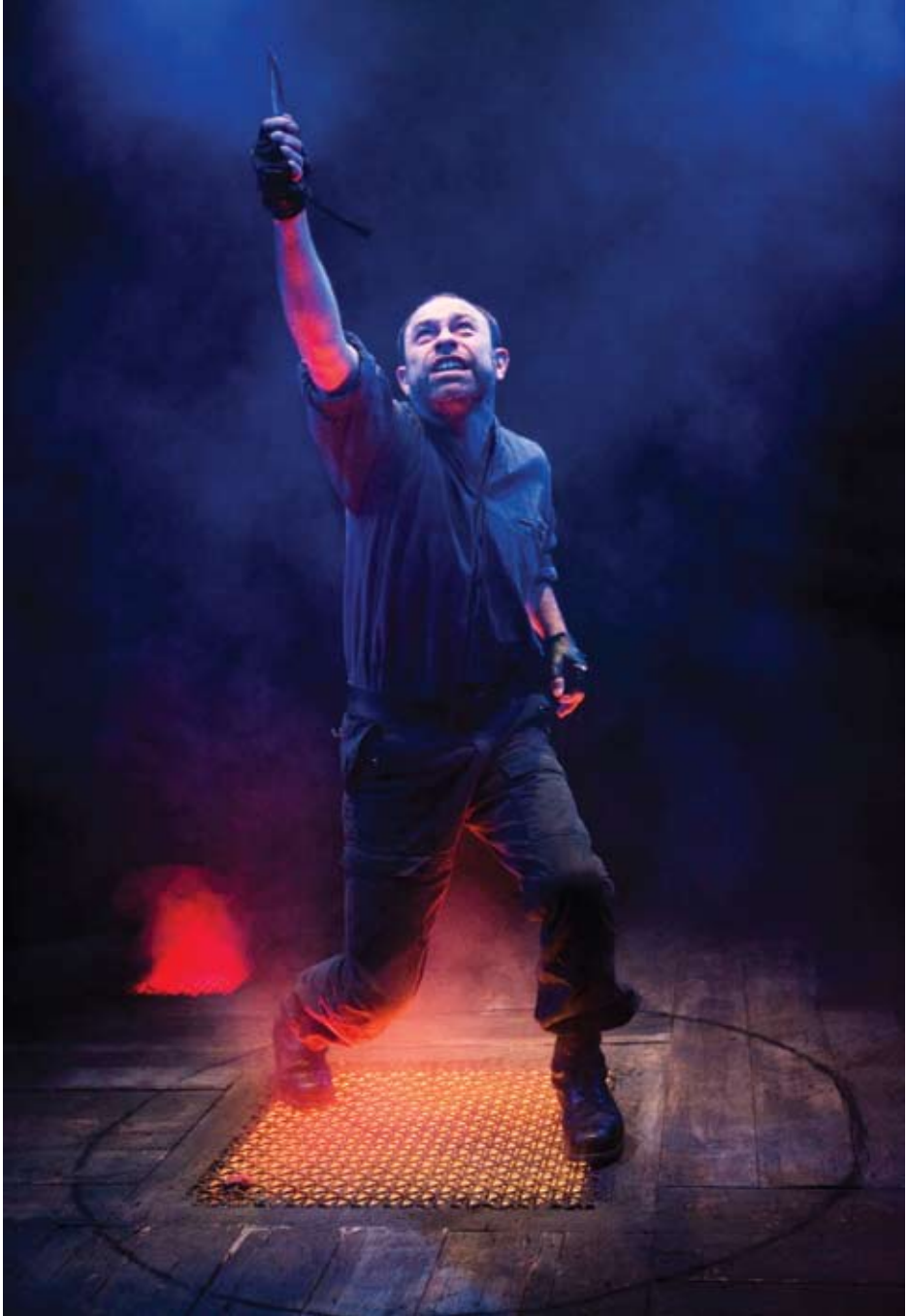
King Duncan's palace at Forres

The two Narrators come in.

Narrator 2: The witches have promised an awful lot to Macbeth. Do you think he should believe them?

Narrator 1: Well, the first promise has come true. Macbeth is Thane of Cawdor.

Narrator 2: Oh, yes. The previous Thane of Cawdor has just been executed.



Hull Truck Theatre. Photo: Louise Buckby