

Macbeth Behind Bars

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Abstract

Macbeth has a long history as the kind of morality fable that has served the age-old Horatian objectives for literature of pleasure and instruction. However, the play also has a stage history of inviting terrifying but highly sympathetic portraits of Macbeth, especially as actors (and the culture at large) became more and more interested in studying inner psychology. The interpretive tradition has sometimes found the tension between straight moral instruction and sympathy for evil difficult to reconcile. This difficulty clearly gets ratcheted up in unpredictable ways when actual inmates who are in prison for violent crimes, including murder, perform the play in prison. My critical review works through some of the issues that surfaced during a Shakespeare Behind Bars production of *Macbeth* at the Luther Luckett Correctional Institution in La Grange, Kentucky.

Backstories

The messenger to the Macduff castle in 4.2 of *Macbeth* plays a role that is not entirely necessary to the story, but is emotionally crucial to the scene. As Lady Macduff's desperation grows during the bantering trade of barbs with her son, the messenger enters to deliver the following (ultimately fruitless) warning:

I doubt some danger does approach you nearly.
If you will take a homely man's advice,
Be not found here; hence with your little ones.
To fright you thus, methinks I am too savage;
To do worse to you were fell cruelty,
Which is too nigh your person. Heaven preserve you! (63-70)¹

Apart from creating dramatic tension, the messenger's intervention serves to underscore Lady Macduff's and the country's vulnerability; this seemingly unwarranted expression of concern proves to be no match for the cruelty of Macbeth's henchmen. In the Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) production of the play by inmates at the Luther Luckett Correctional Institute (14 May

2009), this was one of many very powerful moments. The inmate playing the messenger (George Cohen) was clearly an amateur actor, and yet he brought an emotional urgency to the role that was striking. The messenger's warning seemed to issue clearly from direct knowledge of the "danger" and "cruelty" alluded to, but carried with it a pleading appeal that indicated some unexplained emotional investment in the safety of Lady Macduff and her children. In a talk-back with the inmates after the performance, Cohen explained what was behind the emotional connection he found with the scene: in his family life, he had in fact been a kind of messenger who always brought bad news, namely, that he was in trouble again; this role gave him the chance to do what he wished he could have done for his parents (even though it did not work out as intended in the play) — deliver news that might do some good.

Such personal backstories in fact informed many of the performances in this production, including that of Lady Macduff in the same scene. She was played by a lanky, youngish man (Larry DeClue) who, like many in the cast, was in prison for a violent crime and drew on his experience for the role. During the nine-month long rehearsal process, he said he reflected a great deal on the direct and many indirect victims of his crime, including his own mother, who was in the audience, and who, like Lady Macduff in the scene, was a single mom left with a kid who was "a bit of a smartass." He tried to bring to the role what he imagined to be the hurt and anxiety his mother lived with, as well as the terrifying horror his actual victim experienced at his own hands. And in fact, the emotional rawness of the performance was riveting. In the colloquy with her son, his Lady Macduff was barely able to keep it together, slipping intermittently into teary panic or desperate tenderness; then, as she was attacked by a posse of murderers, she let out a convulsive, blood-curdling shriek that shook the audience.

One might object at this point, as William Worthen has in a different context, that the "biographical invention" that actors of all stripes customarily engage in imposes a false and anachronistic coherence onto the set of "centrifugal energies" that constitutes the character (Worthen 1997, 132). One might also add that obsession with personal history and character (as in the writing of the father of character criticism A. C. Bradley, or in the rehearsal practices of American Method Actors) deflects attention from and displaces the potentially more relevant social history that underlies the play's original discursive field. From a different angle, one might also argue that my account aestheticizes or takes pleasure in the representational fidelity of violence and victimhood. In the case of these inmate actors, however, I would suggest that theatrical character-building is precisely what brings them to understand more fully the social and material character of the play's action and violence. Indeed, a quick examination of the philosophical mission behind the Shakespeare Behind Bars program reveals how essential the practice of "character criticism"

is to not only personal rehabilitation but also social reintegration, though it will also reveal how the program embodies some of the unresolved tensions that have animated discussions about the moral purpose of art from as far back as Plato and Aristotle.

Educating the Heart

As the program's new Artistic Director (and play's director) Matt Wallace indicated in an address before the performance, and as reinforced by the mission statement included in the Program Notes, SBB tries to help with an inmate's "reintegration into society" by using Shakespeare's plays and an extended rehearsal process to "educate the heart" of the participants, most importantly so that they can develop "empathy" and "take responsibility for" their crimes (Shakespeare Behind Bars 2009). In this vision, the "healing power of the arts" consists in part in its capacity to reflect human experience in ways that allow sympathetic understanding of others. At the heart of this process is character analysis. As Curt Tofteland, the founder of the program and previous Artistic Director, writes in an essay jointly coauthored with inmate Hal Cobb, "exploring the imagined life of the character" leads to the "self-reflection" that is necessary for "a metamorphosis of the heart." This inner "transformation" is ultimately what lies at "the heart of character criticism" (Tofteland and Cobb, 2012, 431-32). Hence, studying the possible motivations of even a throwaway character like the messenger can lead to thinking about why one might have failed so often at summoning the goodness in oneself to act kindly and how this failure might have hurt others. It should be noted that since 1995, when the program began, the recidivism rate of the numerous "graduates" of the program who have been released has been zero.

It is still not all so straightforward, of course. The SBB mission statement, and its participants, make frequent reference to the most often-attributed, and perhaps most widely admired, quality of Shakespeare, namely his universality, or his capacity to "reveal. . . our common humanity," (Tofteland and Cobb, 2012, 430) in Tofteland's words. As Dr. Johnson memorably noted, however, a corollary to Shakespeare's universality is the capacity of Shakespeare's art to foster sympathy for characters who are very deeply compromised morally. Thus, as someone who, like others in the eighteenth century, subscribed to the twin Horatian dictum that poetry should, in the words of Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, "teach and delight" (Sidney 1966, 25), Johnson famously found himself lamenting that Shakespeare often seemed "to write without any moral purpose" (Johnson 1958, 271). Johnson's dilemma has also been a common one for those, especially educators, who have tried to define Shakespeare's greatness by means of a moral vocabulary. Indeed, this dilemma is still with us, and is visible in the practices of the SBB program, despite the

fact that the conception of instruction and pleasure went through a marked broadening during the Victorian era and has culminated in a new vocabulary that remains visible in the ethos of SBB.

Arnold vs. Mill

One strand of this moral vocabulary can be seen in the SBB effort to "relate the universal themes of Shakespeare to the lives of other human beings and to society at-large" (Shakespeare Behind Bars 2009). This strand ultimately derives, I believe, from Matthew Arnold, for whom modernity was a form of chaos that needed urgent ordering. If, as he famously wrote in "Dover Beach," we are

as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. (Arnold 1891)

then the visionary guidance of past figures like Sophocles — who, equally famously, "saw life steadily and saw it whole" ("To a friend," Arnold 1891) — could bring us what he called "intellectual deliverance" (Arnold 1960, 19). Faced, that is, with "a copious and complex present" with its "spectacle of a vast multitude of facts awaiting and inviting" comprehension, the modern man could acquire, by studying the classics, "that harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle" that has become "intelligible" (20). Alongside Arnold's most revered hero Sophocles was Shakespeare, whose timeless universality manifested itself in being able to illuminate and center the modern world as it groped about in an increasingly complex and confusing world.

Another, and equally important, strand of the nineteenth-century defense of poetry came from a most unexpected source, John Stuart Mill, who would discover in poetry the answer to a spiritual crisis he endured from following the very utilitarian principles he saw as the basis for human advancement. As told in his *Autobiography*, Mill discovered poetry and the utility of its "pleasure" (especially through Wordsworth) after realizing that his utilitarian "training" had left a profound sense of emptiness that only dedicated attention to "the internal culture of the individual" could cure. For Mill, the primary "ethical" use of poetry lay in its capacity not to teach ethics *per se*, but to "cultivat[e] the feelings" in particular and more generally to "enrich" and develop the self into a more inwardly complete human being: into a being, that is to say, with more than a touch of what has come to be called Romantic subjectivity (Mill 1989, 113). To be sure, there is much overlap in the visions of Mill and Arnold, seen in their praise of Wordsworth and in the following characteristically Arnoldian pronouncement on culture from *Culture and Anarchy*: "Culture . . .

places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper . . . [C]ulture . . . is a study of perfection . . . which consists . . . in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances" (Arnold 2006, 36-37). But it is possible to trace SBB's primary mission to "educate the heart" to Mill's emphasis on the cultivation of feeling itself as the ethical core of reading poetry.

Contamination

The problem, however, is that, as Johnson proleptically intimated — and as Plato, I daresay, feared about the ancient poets — Shakespeare's power can overrun Mill's purposes all too easily. That is to say, the feelings that a play or a particular role can arouse and cultivate are precisely those that can throw an actor, spectator, or reader into the forms of chaos, internal and external, that Arnold sought such urgent deliverance from. More concretely, as Curt Tofteland recognizes, building a character involves "identification" and exploring "parallels" (Tofteland and Cobb, 2012, 431) with the character, which, in the case of *Macbeth*, can mean identifying with a hallucinating murderer given to fits of nihilistic fury and apocalyptic monomania. Indeed, for Harold Bloom, what makes *Macbeth* terrifying is its "power of *contamination*" (Bloom, 524, emphasis in original), a power that derives from a ruthlessly anti-Aristotelian, anti-purgative dramaturgy in which Macbeth "so dominates the play" that we are "unable to resist identifying" with him (517). In fact, a part of what made both the SBB performance of *Macbeth* and the language the actors used to describe their experiences powerful was the conflict between what might be called the moral purpose of the action and the feelings cultivated by the play.

The role of Macbeth is the obvious place to start — with another quotation from Bloom because it captures so well the approach that the actor, Ron Brown, took: "Despite Macbeth's violence, he is much closer to us than are Hamlet and Lear . . . The consciousness of Hamlet is wider than ours, but Macbeth's is not; it seems indeed to have exactly our contours, whoever we are" (Bloom 1998, 534). I should note some things first. Ron Brown is an African American man with a movie star's looks who was, sadly one can only say, incarcerated for murder at the age of nineteen. At the time of the performance, he was also a thirteen-year veteran of the SBB program, and had acquired a knack for voicing the script with naturalistic ease while illuminating its often complex and contorted structure. He was, to put it another way, far beyond a community theater actor who had performed in college productions. This is all to say that Ron Brown is someone who tackles his roles, not only as an inmate in a rehabilitation program, but as an actor who continues to hone his skills, including, of course, the skill of character-building by drawing upon his reservoir of life

experiences. And his Macbeth was very much, and chillingly, an insider job in a way that resembles but surpasses Bloom's sense of uncanny identity.

Brown's Macbeth was first of all a thuggish but cerebral character who was always either trying to work it all out in his head or desperately turning to his meditations as a defense — to convince himself against his gut impulses, to suppress his fear and frightening imagination, to make sense of the chaos, butchery, and the abiding finality of an overwhelming sense of emptiness. His meditations upon first encountering the witches ("This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good" [*Macbeth*, 1.3.131-32]) had the feel of a mind newly incited to criminal possibility working methodically to overcome internal objections and surges of fear with cold calculation and reassurances. The sentence "Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings" (138-39) was spoken to chide himself with the reminder that what he has to fear in actuality now is far less than what he fears in his mind. Hence, the following lines were spoken to express disgust and exasperation with himself, as though almost in the third person:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in surmise,
And nothing is but what is not. (140-43)

The climax of the internal deliberations came in the following aside — "Come what come may, / Time and the hour runs through the roughest day" (148-49) — spoken as if to say, "Whatever horrible things might happen, time will take care of it and I'll be able to laugh about it on the throne."

Similarly, the soliloquy that begins "If it were done when 'tis done" (1.7.1) brought Macbeth back to the state of conflicted deliberation but with a different climax, articulated most clearly to his wife: "We will proceed no further in this business" (32). The ensuing verbal duel, in which Lady Macbeth famously takes Macbeth's manhood to task, had the feel of a familiar spousal battle, though with the highest of stakes. It was a combination of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and a so-called reality television show — something with the intensity of high drama and the open and sometimes degraded rawness, as well as tenderness, of unvarnished marital relations. It was in reference to this scene, in particular, that Ron Brown said he was shocked at how exactly Shakespeare got the way a criminal's mind worked:

Telling yourself that you'll be able to make a clean break once you just kill this one guy. That you can make different choices later when it's all done and over with. And then having your mind and heart race with fear about the consequences, while still not understanding how far those consequences reach until you've lived through it all. And always having the

chance to say "No" and put a stop to it before it happens, but always finding a convenient way to avoid responsibility, saying, She put me up to it, I wouldn't have done it if she hadn't been such a bitch, or he hadn't pressured me, or if someone or other hadn't put it in my mind in the first place. All of which means you have to keep up the bluster, especially if a woman challenges your manhood. You get caught up and keep making bad choices, doing all manner of horrible things to people, because someone said you weren't a man. (Brown 2009)

I provide this rough paraphrase, first to convey how intimately Brown inhabited the role, as though indeed the contours of Macbeth's mind were his, and second, to indicate some of the "lessons" that Brown felt one could learn from this play. The continuing bloodshed was for Brown a symbol not only of how difficult it is to leave the life of crime once the dominos are set in motion, but also of how many people suffer directly and indirectly from one man's crimes. For Brown, becoming a man while he was in prison had much to do with owning up to his own responsibility for causing so much suffering. It also meant acknowledging things in himself that had not fit in with his younger ideas about manhood, such as fear. In this context, Brown pointed to what was a key line for him, which occurs directly after Macbeth murders Duncan and encounters his wife while lamenting his inability to say "Amen": "I am afraid to think what I have done" (2.2.55). Brown noted that the folio punctuation for the entire set of lines is as follows:

I'll go no more:

I am afraid, to think what I have done:

Look on' t again, I dare not. (Shakespeare 1623, spelling normalized)

Brown took the comma after "I am afraid" as an indication that the simple declaration could stand alone, as the first external acknowledgment of fear; "to think what I have done" was thus spoken as if to say, "O my God, what have I done?" Hence, for Brown, even after the much more fundamental choice of murder, other choices remained for Macbeth, such as whether or not to follow the dictates of the more "feminine" part of himself that acknowledged fear. This insight guided Brown's choice to use the great speeches of 2.2 ("Amen," "Sleep no more") as the first moments in which Macbeth outwardly displayed the fullness of the emotional eruptions inside. These eruptions were the true demons from which he was running. Indeed, Brown played Macbeth in subsequent scenes as someone who would fall into the bravado and criminality of a coward ("We are men, my liege" — "Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men" [3.1.92-93]; and "What man dare, I dare" [3.4.100]) or would try to convince himself that he had overcome all forms of weakness. So much of the play, for

Brown, was about what it truly means to be a man, and how horrific the consequences of pursuing a screwed-up notion of manhood can be.

Unhallowed Splendor

Such insights into mistaken notions of manhood certainly reinforce sound ethical principles, and I do not wish in any way to diminish their force, but it would also be true to say that, in performance, some of the most powerful and striking moments came after Macbeth had plunged fully into bloodshed and the stage felt overtaken by the phantasmagoria of his mind. The vacillation, the efforts at self-reassurance and the surface eruptions of fear and horror in Macbeth never stopped, but the chilling, sometimes desperate and sometimes maniacal, ways in which he embraced violence, his solitude, and his nihilistic visions showed Macbeth at his most sublime. Again, I would adduce Bloom to highlight how the most mesmerizing moments tend to be those in which Shakespeare's "purposiveness without [moral] purpose" (Kant 2012, 46-47; cited in Bloom 1998, 518) seems most visible:

Come seeling night,
 Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
 And with thy bloody and invisible hand
 Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
 Which keeps me pale! Light thickens,
 And the crow makes wing to th' rooky wood. (3.2.49-54)

I am in blood
 Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
 Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
 Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
 Which must be acted ere they may be scanned. (3.4.137-41)

I have supped full with horrors;
 Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
 Cannot once start me. (5.5.12-14)

I 'gin to weary of the sun,
 And wish th' estate o' the world were now undone.
 Ring the alarum bell! Blow wind, come wrack,
 At least we'll die with harness on our back. (5.5.49-52)

I choose these lines not only because of their power, but also because they were memorable in Ron Brown's performance. In these lines, the hesitation and veneer of bravado were replaced most of all by the terrifying look of someone who had attained a kind of ferocious sublimity from having crossed over to a different world.

Ron Brown, along with many others, spoke passionately and eloquently about how playing his role had the eerie effect of reaffirming his humanity, because he felt the role illuminated the humanity within even a murderer. In part these sentiments reflected the credo of SBB that "innate goodness still lives deep within" even "incarcerated men" who "have committed heinous crimes" (Tofteland and Cobb 2012, 430). But I have to confess that in my impression, in the totality of the actorly experience that reaffirmed his humanity, the element of the sublime as I have been trying to describe it assumed a crucial role. In some ways, that is to say, Brown may have experienced his humanity at its most intense in the thrilling sublimity of having transgressed human law and limitation, as well as in the horrific intoxication of experiencing violent chaos in its absolute form. These are dangerous feelings better left uncultivated, perhaps. And yet — and here is the paradox — without this amoral intensity and decidedly "unhallowed" (*Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.956) splendor, ethical insights might never have really registered. If Ron Brown had become more capable of seeing his life steadily and seeing it whole as the result of his nine-month journey with the role, at least some of it may have been because the most morally disturbing moments made the character worth knowing, and thus the "lessons" from the character's journey through the play worth knowing.

Something similar could be said of the performance of Lady Macbeth by Hal Cobb (the inmate whose story and performance of Prospero were featured in the *Shakespeare Behind Bars* documentary film, 2005). Hal Cobb is unusual among inmates in having theatrical training and experience, though, as he hints in the documentary film and the essay jointly written with Tofteland, playing a role was something he had done throughout his life, largely to hide his homosexuality and eventually, until he surrendered to the authorities, the crime of murdering his first wife. (He had dropped a hairdryer into the tub while his wife was taking a bath and had made it look like an accident.) The following is what Cobb says in reference to both his acting classes and what had been his customary behavior in life from his earliest days in a bible belt family: "I learned to skate across the surface of emotion, and with just the slightest emotional connection manufacture the imagined pretense needed to act" (Tofteland and Cobb, 2012, 435). It was not simply that he pretended to feel certain emotions; it was as though, in true actorly fashion, he set out to manufacture the motive and cue for passion as well. The largest consequence of all this performing was not necessarily inauthenticity, but habitual "repression" (435) and a vicious circle

in which repression led to horrific behavior as darker emotions "erupt[ed] into [his] life and the lives of others" (435), which then induced more repression. The following journal entry points not only to the effect of his crime on Cobb himself, but also to that crime as the cause of more violent eruptions:

I didn't know how to wrap my mind, heart and soul around the whole concept, my responsibility for it, the pain I had caused others, the horror of the cover up and daily denial among extended family and the church family of which I was "a leader." I blocked the truth out. I couldn't deal with the reality of it, or the notion that I could kill anyone, let alone the one person I'd felt had really loved me. (435)

But this was not just in the past; Cobb remains painfully aware in his essay of how stubbornly his habit of repression persists. Hence, confronting his crime truthfully and taking "personal responsibility" (Tofteland and Cobb 2012, 443) for it has continued to involve struggling to learn "how to feel" as well as "how to deal with what" he is "feeling" (441). Crucially, this has entailed (through programs like the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program) emotionally understanding the wide and terrible impact that his crime has had on his victim and the lives of those connected to the victim. It has also required learning to forgive those against whom he holds a "grievance story" (438) — those whom he blames for his predicament — as a condition for seeking "redemption and forgiveness" (431). It is in this broad context, then, that cultivating the feelings is, for Cobb, a form of expanding his moral "awareness" and retrieving his "humanity" (432). And for Cobb, far more than the chapel services offered by prison, it is Shakespeare who offers the means: "Shakespeare is *my* church. Shakespeare *is* my church" (Scott-Douglass 2007, 20).

Taste of Power

From the above account of Hal Cobb's narrative, one might expect that his Lady Macbeth was a study in repression, with moments suggesting an underlying fragility beneath the murderous intentions and ruthless rhetoric. Certainly this was a part of the portrayal, and it did endow Lady Macbeth with a certain humanity. However, what was most remarkable about Cobb's performance was the way in which he humanized ruthlessness itself. The performance was not, that is to say, simply an instance of an actor complicating his character by displaying cracks in a façade that later crumbles entirely. This Lady Macbeth poured herself into her ambitions with relentless determination, neither as a posture nor as the proverbial embodiment of evil, but as a volatile but deeply reflective and shrewd woman overtaken in extreme form by a single-minded purpose. She meant every word, with detailed precision, when she called upon the spirits:

Make thick my blood,
 Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 Th' effect and it. (1.5.43)

This was not just a general invocation to evil spirits but a methodical blueprint for the absolute internal control Lady Macbeth needed to realize her fell purpose. Blocking the passage to feelings was a brutally efficient tool that she took up not only naturally but with a certain triumphant sweep. Cobb talks of how his "heart constricts and [his] chest tightens in an attempt to shut down access" (Tofteland and Cobb 2012, 436-37) when he tries to delve into his feelings, suggesting that he has to fight constantly against what has become his body's most natural reaction. His Lady Macbeth was not so conflicted. Shutting down the visitings of nature was an exercise of power befitting the taste of power she seemed so clearly to imagine.

And yet, Cobb's Lady Macbeth never came across simply as a cold-blooded, inhuman killer. If she was derisively impatient with her husband, she was impassioned about their objective in ways that resonated with her husband on the level of shared human desire; she remained his "dearest partner of greatness" (1.5.12). Likewise, her cover-up strategy of framing the chamberlains for the murder came across as a deliberate attempt to go into it together with her husband:

What cannot *you and I* perform upon
 Th' unguarded Duncan, what not put upon
 His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
 Of our great quell? (1.7.69-72; emphasis added)

But it still was not primarily the connection she established — or tried to establish — with her husband that humanized Lady Macbeth. Though it is still not entirely clear to me how it was that Cobb managed to invest Lady Macbeth with pathos from so early on in the play, somehow, ineffably, her very ruthlessness came across as the product of her humanity. One of SBB's mantras goes, "We don't choose the roles — the roles choose us" (Tofteland and Cobb 2012, 434). The role seems clearly to have chosen Hal Cobb, and certainly gave him the opportunity to explore the dangers and consequences of stopping up access to deep human feelings.

Cobb's performance was most striking for what felt like the freedom that Lady Macbeth achieves — unhinged as it may have been at times — in her state of going beyond the compunctious visitings of nature. That is to say, what erupted in Lady Macbeth in her state of repression were

feelings that lie perhaps far more deeply in the human heart. Cobb managed to wrap his mind, heart, and soul around the reality of a being who is capable of horrific acts and who — at least for a time — relishes the power of that capacity. But paradoxically, it was in this state of savoring her power, rather than in later scenes, when doubt crept in visibly, that Lady Macbeth's ruthlessness acquired pathos. To be sure, my awareness of Hal Cobb's backstory must have contributed to my response to those early scenes (disclosure: I had read early drafts of what would become the essay referenced above and had a hand in editing it with Curt Tofteland). Somewhere, I could sense the pathos of Cobb's own recognition of what wreckage lay ahead for Lady Macbeth. But I believe it went beyond that. Inseparable from this recognition was, I felt, a more dangerous and complicated recognition. Identifying parallels (to return to Tofteland's phrasing regarding character analysis) in Cobb's case would have risked experiencing what Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* called "the pathos of distance" (Nietzsche 1966, 201) — the pain involved (in part) in recognizing the distance between the ordinary and the sublime. Cobb inhabited the role of Lady Macbeth with the kind of intimacy that comes from deep identification, but Lady Macbeth also embodies (at least early in the play) the transcendent state of dispassion he never quite reached — mercifully. Educating the heart through *Macbeth* surely risks the "contamination" that comes with terrifying identification; and yet that identification may be the most morally purposive action that an actor — or reader — can perform.

Coda

I attended this performance of *Macbeth* at the invitation of Curt Tofteland, and so, as the inmates were mingling with friends and family in the audience after the talk-back, Curt came over to confirm dinner plans. As we were talking, the thought occurred to me for a split second to invite Hal to join us, and in that instant the reality of prison life hit me with a new force. We could leave, but the actors could not, because they were prisoners. Of course one must remember the victims of the crimes that these men committed and recognize the damage that the victims and their loved ones continue to suffer. But after watching the inmates perform and talk, it was difficult to avoid thinking of what a colossal and tragic waste of human potential it was for these men to be locked up for so many years. It was then, however, that maybe the most obvious point behind the Shakespeare Behind Bars program hit home: even inside, the men have to keep living, sometimes with no hope of parole or release. In the end, Shakespeare Behind Bars offers one way to give that life the moral dignity of a purpose.

Notes

1. Quotations from the works of Shakespeare come from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, third edition (1997).

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