

A 'MACBETH' OF VIOLENT CONTRASTS

NO other playwright has treated murder with the sense of horror that Shakespeare did in "Macbeth." Alan Clarke, in his current production for the Questors, has given the play a shock treatment that emphasises the ruthless struggle for power that went on between the Scottish lords.

The violent changes between infernal noises and muted speech and utter darkness and brilliant light are sometimes too extreme, but they give a virility to the action and underline the real meaning of the play.

The production does not open with the three witches and their cauldron. We have the sound effects of the storm in full measure, but the stage is in total darkness. And when the lights go on it is to disclose Duncan and four of his lords standing in black niches to receive the wounded sergeant with his news of battle.

Again when Macbeth and Banquo meet the three witches the creatures stand in the niches and speak in whispers. At the second meeting their voices are so low that we cannot hear what they are saying. This is surely a mistake for however confidential they are meant to appear the audience should be able to follow the words.

WHEN the murder of Duncan is committed, there is such a cacophony of sound that Macbeth's question to his wife, "Didst thou not hear a noise?" seems superfluous.

The niches enable the ghost of Banquo to appear from the darkness behind and to vanish again with the utmost ease. On the other hand little idea is given of a banquet, except that each guest in his niche holds a wine vessel.

The long pauses tend to slow up the action, but they do allow the awfulness of the deeds to sink in. In fact the sudden changes of emphasis, in speech, lighting and sound, give added impact to the drama.

THE characterisation, also, is interesting. With one exception all the kings, princes and lords are clean-shaven, which gives them an extremely youthful appearance. Peter Healy, instead of being the bearded Macbeth of tradition, is a virile young man. His progress from confident ambition to a state of madness is most skilfully developed.

The one bearded character is Malcolm, elder son of the Scottish King Duncan. The part is played by Colin Pronger, making a most auspicious debut with the Questors after leaving Richmond Shakespeare Society, for whom he has played so many of the Bard's creations. He expresses Malcolm's hypocrisy in his climb to power despite his noble sentiments in getting rid of the tyrant.

WITH the men looking so young it is natural that we should have a girlish Lady Macbeth. Helen Blatch does not make such an imposing figure as we usually see, but she is nevertheless a passionate enough Lady Macbeth. In the sleepwalking scene, in particular, she arrests attention.

David Gower is an impressive Banquo and Gerald Petch a noble Duncan, the first victim of Macbeth's insane desire for power. Bill Phillips is the vengeful Macduff, Ruth Lister excites pity as Lady Macduff who, with her child, is so cruelly slain by Macbeth's hired assassins, and Ben Keen distinguishes himself as the

doctor in the sleepwalking scene.

The one moment of comedy is supplied by Philip Wright as the besotted porter getting confused with his keys as he goes to open the gate to Macduff and Lennox after the murder of Duncan.

Neville Bradbury is Lennox. Other lords are played by Ivan Pinfield, John Turner, Michael Langridge, David Lorraine and Nicholas Hunt.

THE play is performed on the forestage with the inevitable result that we often have to watch the back of an actor's head as he speaks. But the production is so adventurous and imaginative that any drawbacks may be forgiven. Alan Clarke was assisted in his direction by Alfred Emmet and Joanna Georgescu.

At some performances the play is being carried through without a break, not a bad idea for maintaining the interest.

The play runs throughout this week and next until November 19th.

THE first performance on Saturday night was preceded by the opening of an exhibition in the Shaw room of French landscapes by Pat Craddock.

The opening ceremony was performed by M. Louis Marin, assistant director of the French Institute. After beginning in English he excused himself and went on in French. He said that with so many pictures of the French countryside on the walls, he felt quite at home. Furthermore the French Institute, like the Questors, put on exhibitions of paintings and theatrical performances.

Some of the pictures are of scenes in England and Wales, but the majority are of the Indre which the artist loves.

QUESTORS STAGE 'MACBETH'

The Questors Theatre Club of Ealing are now mounting an interesting production of "Macbeth" until the 19th.

The absence of an interval preserves the continuity, there being no natural break. It means that everything relies on Shakespeare's words and the effects: even the décor and clothing is neutral. Some of the cuts are to be regretted. The witches have to be content with a few stylised pronouncements; no hell-broth.

But the cuts do give Peter Healy, as Macbeth, a chance to deliver his lines slowly enough for unfamiliar ears to gather their meaning, and as if he were thinking them out.

Helen Blatch makes a convincing Lady Macbeth, not too villainous to be fatally tortured by remorse at the untrammelled consequences of Duncan's murder.

The ear-splitting row used on the first night between some scenes—presumably to indicate turmoil in the realm—demonstrated the great resources of the Questors' technical department, but I found it merely distracting.

The club have also an enviable lighting department, and this was being used with intelligence. For example the episode in which Macbeth sees the apparitions of the future Kings of Scotland while looking straight into a beam shining from the back of the hall, was a complete success.

I. M.

WHATEVER'S HAPPENED TO MACBETH?

EXCELLENT lighting and convincing performances were the highlights of a courageous production of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" by the Questors Theatre on Saturday.

Courageous, because some famous scenes were omitted, and the director, Alan Clarke made a political interpretation of the plot.

This Macbeth is not the man driven by fate but the ruthless political assassin who kills for his own gain. MacDuff is portrayed as a turncoat who kills Macbeth, not as an act of war, but as an act of angry revenge.

OUTSTANDING

Gerald Petch, as Duncan, was the epitomé of kingly bearing. Despite being eliminated in the early stages of the play by the treacherous Macbeths, his performance remained outstanding, and he exploited the role to the full.

Peter Healy must surely rank as one of the best Macbeths ever portrayed on Ealing stages.

The accent was very much on the tyrannical side of the character, and this gave Mr. Healy a lot of scope. He obviously enjoyed the role.

Helen Blatch as Lady Macbeth gave one of the best performances of the evening. Although the part has become stereotyped in its interpreta-

tion, she gave a fresh and exciting performance.

Director Alan Clarke played down the role of the three witches by cutting out several scenes. Surprisingly, this did not detract from the impact of the play. He also cut the comic scene with the door-keeper.

The players exploited the magnificent facilities afforded by the theatre which helped towards an enjoyable—and unorthodox—evening.

LEWISLEY &

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QUESTORS' 'MACBETH'

The Questors Theatre, Ealing, is presenting Shakespeare's "Macbeth" until November 19. Coupled with the production is an exhibition of paintings of the French countryside. This was opened on Saturday evening by the Director of the French Institute, M. Louis Marin.

Because "Macbeth" is being studied for "O" level examinations a number of school parties will be visiting the theatre.