

TEXTUAL APPROPRIATION: TOTALITARIAN VIOLENCE
IN SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH* AND
TOM STOPPARD'S *CAHOOT'S MACBETH*

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"Bleed, bleed, poor country!"
W. Shakespeare *Macbeth*

Adaptations and vernacular appropriations on page and stage offer alternative readings of Shakespeare's plays, mediated by heterogeneous forces of race, language and culture. Appropriation can take multiple forms, as each generation attempts to redefine Shakespeare in contemporary terms in an ongoing process of mutation (Marsden 9). In an essay entitled "The Postcolonial/Postmodern Shakespeare", Jyotsna Singh states that the postmodernist tendency to pluralize and decenter all totalizing assumptions of the centre has altered traditional values: "the Shakespearean text is no longer sacrosanct: instead it is invaded by heteroglossia, or multiplicity of styles and forms in the Bakhtinian sense, that disrupt the cultural authority of the official English Shakespeare" (Kerr et alii 39).

To establish a contemporary theoretical basis for reflection and analysis, scholarly studies on performance and adaptation of

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Shakespearian texts have borrowed from several sources, mainly from the anthropological concepts derived from Clifford Geertz, professing strong commitment first to “the principle that any and all ‘meaning’ will be historically determined”, and second to the notion that meaning in itself is less important than the way it operates “as part of the ensemble of meaning-making discourses” by which each different culture “makes sense of the world it creates and inhabits” (Hawkes 9).

According to this perspective, the Brechtian aesthetics of relocating and updating classical texts¹ has become a common practice adopted by contemporary playwrights and stage-directors, since such procedures radically alter the meanings traditionally ascribed to Shakespeare’s plays by a criticism mainly preoccupied with their textual integrity:

It is the cultural, and therefore political authority of Shakespeare which must be challenged—and especially the assumption that because human nature is always the same the plays can be presented as direct sources of wisdom. One way of doing this is to take aspects of the plays and reconstitute them explicitly so that they become the vehicle of other values. Brecht in *Coriolanus*, Edward Bond in *Lear* (1971), Arnold Wesker in *The Merchant* (1976), Tom Stoppard in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) and Charles Marowitz in a series of adaptations have appropriated aspects of the plays for a different politics (not always a progressive politics). (Sinfield 178-79)

The dramatic experiments of these playwrights, who generally take great liberties with the source text, treating it “as ‘material’ to be refashioned” (Marowitz 5), plus operating substantial changes which include deletions, amendments and/or insertions, show the multiple possibilities of political engagement that can be inscribed into the Shakespearian text. The added dimensions provided by such procedures as well as the critical response of the audience and the

subsequent challenge and questioning constitute relevant aspects of the appropriation process.

Cultural materialist critics have insistently argued that Shakespeare's work displays strong political dimensions devised to idealize and/or demystify specific forms of power. Jonathan Dollimore believes that the political perspective

[...] applies especially to tragedy, that genre traditionally thought to be most capable of transcending the historical moment of inception and of representing universal truths. Contemporary formulations of the tragic certainly made reference to universals but they were also resolutely political, especially those which defined it as a representation of tyranny. Such accounts, and of course the plays themselves, were appropriated as both defenses and challenges to authority. (Dollimore 9)

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a dramatization of the successful overthrow of the usurper or tyrant, is one of the best examples of a tragedy with topical references and political implications. Most contemporary offshoots of *Macbeth* satirize political ambition and/or denounce tyranny. In Eastern Europe, the play has become a potent, politically subversive weapon aimed at denouncing corrupt and decadent tyrannies. Among the most important *Macbeth* recyclings, Barbara Garson's *MacBird* (1965), Charles Marowitz's *A Macbeth* (1971), Ionesco's *Macbett* (1972), Heiner Müller's *Macbeth*, the Performance Group *Macbeth*, Group N's *Autopsy of Macbeth*, the triple Action Theatre *Macbeth* and Tom Stoppard's *Cahoot's Macbeth* are worth mentioning.

When Stoppard wrote *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), a Shakespeare adaptation that discloses how the machinery of tyranny operates and maintains itself in power, totalitarian violence, based on terror and dictatorship was one of the main issues discussed by social philosophers, among them Hannah Arendt (1970), who argues that

power and violence, although they usually appear together, are opposite phenomena, since rule by sheer violence comes into question whenever power has been lost: “it is precisely the shrinking power of the Russian government, internally and externally, that became manifest in its ‘solution’ of the Czechoslovak problem—just as it was the shrinking power of European imperialism that became manifest in the alternative between decolonization and massacre” (53). Arendt asserts that “violence can destroy power”, but “it is utterly incapable of creating it” (56); “out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What can never grow out of it is power” (53). It is the loss of power that makes tyrants succumb to the temptation to substitute violence for power and to implement the use of terror to maintain domination:

Terror is not the same as violence: it is, rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control. It has often been noticed that the effectiveness of terror depends almost entirely on the degree of social atomization. Every kind of organized opposition must disappear before the full force of terror can be let loose. This atomization—an outrageously pale academic word for the horror it implies—is maintained and intensified through the ubiquity of the informer (...) No government exclusively based on the means of violence has ever existed. Even the totalitarian ruler, whose chief instrument of rule is torture, needs a power basis—the secret police and its net of informers. (50-55)

It is precisely the Czech secret police and its net of informers that constitute the main target of Stoppard’s irony in *Cahoot’s Macbeth*. Although the play is a mixture of literary parody, political satire, metatheatre and tragic burlesque, this does not mean that it lacks substance; the playwright succeeds in contriving the perfect marriage between seriousness and frivolity, dealing with serious questions in a

witty way. His radical experiment, in which he condenses Shakespeare's text in a new, deliberately subversive collage and inserts it into a frame-play of his own invention is, like Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a reflection upon institutionalized or legitimized violence to enforce the power interests of the state, a denunciation of totalitarianism and dictatorship in general, activating in the audience's minds the cruelty and terror that was current not only in medieval Scotland, Jacobean England and post-Dubcek Czechoslovakia, but also in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia.

The aim of this essay is to examine the dialogue established between Stoppard's play, his source text and the Eastern European context into which he inserts the Shakespearean classic. His play is unequivocally called *Cahoot's Macbeth* to emphasize the double appropriation, namely Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the particular events that motivated the dramatic invention of Pavel Kohout's seventy-five minute Living-Room *Macbeth*. The historical and cultural contexts as well as the particular circumstances of production and reception of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Kohout's adaptation are particularly relevant for a proper understanding of Stoppard's new creation, which must be read against the political background of general instability that characterized Eastern Europe under communist domination.

In Shakespeare's time, despite the fact that the theatre was closely monitored by the State and that both companies and plays had to be licensed, its institutional position remained complex:

On the one hand, [theatre] was sometimes summoned to perform at Court and as such may seem a direct extension of royal power; on the other hand, it was the mode of cultural production in which market forces were strongest, and as such it was especially exposed to the influence of subordinate and emergent classes. We should not, therefore, expect any straightforward relationship between plays and ideology: on the contrary, it is even likely that the topics that engaged writers and audiences alike were those where ideology was under strain. (Drakakis 211)²

It is known that Shakespeare always blends drama with social commentary, and that although he sets his plays in distant and exotic places or in remote times, he is always concerned with the here and now of his own native country. He reflects upon the past to illuminate the present, a strategy reduplicated by modern playwrights and stage directors, who borrow Shakespeare's plays to examine their own historical moment. In his introductory essay to *Political Shakespeare*, entitled "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism", Jonathan Dollimore reports that the theatre was not only a place for social gatherings, but also a political institution and that the stage constituted an arena where established values were challenged. There were two main opposed views as concerns the effectiveness of the theatre as a cultural authority:

The one view stressed its capacity to instruct the populace—often, and quite explicitly, to keep them obedient. Thus, Heywood, in an *Apology for Actors*, claimed that plays were written and performed to teach "subjects obedience to their king" by showing them "the untimely end of such as have moved tumults, commotions and insurrections". The other view claimed virtually the opposite, stressing the theatre's power to demystify authority and even to subvert it. (Dollimore 7-8)

The idea that the theatre serves as an aid to shaping the perceptions of a specific culture through the images it projects has also been discussed by contemporary theatre theoreticians. Marvin Carlson argues that in theatrical performance, "performers and audience alike accept that a primary function of this activity is precisely cultural and social meta-commentary, the exploration of self and other, of the world as experienced, and of alternative possibilities". The arena of the theatre is a "laboratory for cultural negotiations, a function of paramount importance in the plurivocal and rapidly changing contemporary world" (196-97).

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was probably written in 1605 or 1606, a short time after James VI of Scotland ascended the throne of England as James I. When the play was first performed at the Great Hall of Hampton Court, on August 7th, 1606 by the King's Men, Shakespeare exhibited the genealogical tree of the Stuart family on the stage, according to the historico-mythical notion cultivated by James I who, after having sought for inspiration in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, claimed to be a descendant of Banquo. Famously, in the first scene of Act IV, when the second encounter of Macbeth with the witches takes place, a procession of eight phantasmal kings is conjured up by them in answer to Macbeth's question about Banquo's offspring, a show akin to the Jacobean masque. The last king holds up a mirror in which the line of Banquo is reflected, and Shakespeare, very cunningly, made it a longer line still to reflect the image of James I, seated on his throne on the elevated platform strategically displayed during the performances of plays at court. This symbolic scene suggests that the line of descendants of Banquo, ergo James I, would stretch out *ad infinitum* into the future as kings.

Seen from this particular perspective, *Macbeth* can be read as a demonstration of the legitimate right of succession of James I and as a compliment to the king. However, such traditional reading is only one side of the coin. The play can also be read as a criticism against the Scottish monarch; or as an exposure of a particular uncivilized part of the country, namely the backward and barbaric Scotland; or in terms of comparison and contrast, the question being whether Shakespeare stresses the similarities between England and Scotland or opens up the differences between them; or even as a questioning on what the difference is between Macbeth's rule and that of contemporary Absolutist European monarchs, among them James I.

Although Shakespeare's company was the King's favorite (The King's Men), he knew that besides pleasing the monarch, he also had to keep close contact with the great bulk of people who constituted his audiences of the public and private theatres, since the profits of his company depended on them. But as he held the patronage of the king, he may have chosen to reinforce the moral of Absolutism and the

“Elizabethan world picture” as outlined by Tylliard overtly, but simultaneously, in a veiled fashion and with great cunning, he introduced elements into his text that subverted the very order he seemed to ratify, because he knew that “Tylliard’s world picture, to the extent that it did still exist, was not shared by all; it was an ideological legitimization of an existing social order, one rendered the more necessary by the apparent instability, actual and imagined, of that order” (Dollimore 5).

To question the *status quo*, Shakespeare manipulated the historical narrative he encountered in Holinshed, dealing freely with his source text and introducing a series of changes which constitute a rich subtext, permitting different readings of the play that make the audience sensitive to certain parallels that can be traced between the time in which the play is set—medieval Scotland—and the time in which it is written—Renaissance England. In “Speculations: *Macbeth* and Source”, Jonathan Goldberg (92-107) argues that although Shakespeare purposively draws a clear-cut picture of a saintly king (Duncan) and a villainous murderer (Macbeth), he also lets the audience envisage a series of ambiguities in the fabric of the narrative. He made Duncan old and venerable, instead of a young, weak-willed man and poor administrator as described in the backgrounded text. Despite the fact that he drew a composite picture of Macbeth in order to blacken his character, moving freely in Holinshed and amalgamating episodes from different narratives, it becomes obvious, since the very beginning of the play, that the bloody picture of the violent hierarchy in Scotland³ is presented to show that chaos and violence were current there long before the tyrant’s intervention. Furthermore, historical details such as the lack of clarity concerning the laws of succession are omitted (the crown was not hereditary, but semi-elective). This information would have made the audience alert to the fact that Macbeth had a claim for the throne. Being older than Malcolm, he was next in the line of succession, which explains his revolt when Duncan nominated his son as his successor. The ten years of Macbeth’s straightforward and just rule are also omitted. And in order to flatter James I, who claimed to be a

descendant of Walter Stuart,⁴ he constructs Banquo as a flawless, incorruptible character (although in some speeches, in a very subtle way, he suggests Banquo's inclination to temptation), contradicting Holinshed, who reports the participation of the latter in the assassination plot. The dialogue of Shakespeare's play with its sources lays bare several unresolved contradictions in the text, encourages critical questioning and problematizes a series of issues, among them the debate concerning James's legitimacy.

In an essay entitled "Macbeth: History, Ideology and Intellectuals", published in *Critical Quarterly* in 1986, Alan Sinfield suggests that when reading a play, "we must envisage diverse original audiences, activating diverse implications in the text" (73), which will result in conservative and liberal positions. Sinfield offers convincing arguments that *Macbeth* sustains two contradictory readings: one which ratifies the unconditional authority of the lawful monarch in the Absolutist state, as well as the opposite view that takes for granted the lawfulness of the action of deposed and usurpers in case of tyrannical rule. He mentions some theoretical treatises of the Jacobean period which offer contradictory views of sovereignty, such as *Basilikon Doron* (1599) by James I and *History of Scotland* (1582) and *De Jure Regni* by George Buchanan. In the former, King James sought to protect the Absolutist state by making a clear distinction between a "lawful good king" and a "usurping tyrant". The King rejects the possibility of tyranny when the ruler is lawful, and claims that even if he commits violence, it will be legitimate, since the means and ends for using force will be different from those of the usurping tyrant. In order to reinforce the moral of Absolutism, Sinfield reminds us, James argued that "any disturbance of the current structure of power relations is against God and the people, and consequently any violence in the interest of the status-quo is acceptable" (66), a favorite axiom used by totalitarian rulers to justify state violence.

To illustrate the issue of legitimization of violence, devised to uphold authority in the Absolutist state, i.e., the distinction made between violence the state considers legitimate and that which it does

not, Sinfield discusses two violent actions ascribed to Macbeth: when he kills Duncan, he is considered a dreadful murderer; however, after killing Macdonwald, a rebel, he is praised for his bravery and courage by Duncan. According to Sinfield, the logical conclusion is that

Violence is good, in this view, when it is in the service of the prevailing dispositions of power; when it disrupts them it is evil. A claim to a monopoly of legitimate violence is fundamental in the development of the modern state; when that claim is successful, most citizens learn to regard State violence as qualitatively different from other violence and perhaps they don't think of State violence as violence at all (consider the actions of police, army and judiciary as opposed to those of pickets, protesters, criminals and terrorists). *Macbeth* focuses major strategies by which the state asserted its claim at one conjuncture. (63)

It has been pointed out that reasons for a Jamesian reading abound in *Macbeth*—so much so that it has been regarded as necessary on historical grounds, as if other views of state ideology were inexistent in Shakespeare's time. Sinfield, however, presents evidence that “this was far from being so: there was a well-developed theory allowing for resistance by the nobility, and the Gunpowder Plotters were manifestly unconvinced by the King's arguments” (68). It is known their “attempted violence against the State followed upon many years of State violence against the Roman Catholics: the Absolutist State sought to draw religious institutions entirely within its control, and Catholics who actively refused, were subjected to fines, imprisonment and torture” (65).

Sinfield's arguments show that *Macbeth* can be read “for” and “against” the presumably well-ordered state. In Shakespeare's time the play had possibly also been interpreted as a gesture of resistance against the establishment by one part of the audience not satisfied with the Absolutist rule exerted by James I, who dissolved the Parliament and pursued Catholics and Puritans with an iron hand.

The several issues related to *Macbeth*, discussed by cultural materialist scholars, shall serve as a theoretical basis for comparison and contrast to investigate the political anxieties of the historical period under scrutiny in Stoppard's *Cahoot's Macbeth*. Evidence shall be provided that there is a close parallel between the Absolutist rule in Britain and the imposed Communist system of government in Czechoslovakia.

In his article "Shakespeare and the Czech Resistance", Martin Prochazka (44-69) provides an account of a series of theatrical events that can be considered key issues in the process of Shakespeare's appropriation by Czech culture. He reports that despite the fact that the bard's plays have always been related to an ideal value system, "the acts of affirmation have always included or implied gestures of resistance against foreign rule, cultural domination, or political hegemony", and that the "use of Shakespeare by various Czech resistance movements (from the late 18th century 'National Revival' to 'Charter 77')" cannot be truly evaluated, unless the "tension between universalist human ideals and contemporary political issues" is taken into account (44). In his historical review of Czech Shakespeareanism, Prochazka mentions four important theatrical events that shared the basic function of restating politically subversive ideals in general ethical and aesthetic terms: *Macbeth* at the Patriotic Theatre in 1786, the Shakespeare Festival of 1916, *Hamlet* at the Labour Theatre in 1937 and *Macbeth* in the Living-Room Theatre of Czech dissidents (1976), the latter resulting from "resistance to the general demoralization and destruction of cultural life after the invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies in 1968" (45).

The Living-Room Theatre, idealized by Pavel Kohout, consisted of a small group of people staging private performances of *Macbeth* in the apartment of the actress Vlasta Chramostova and also in the homes and country houses of other dissidents, because theatrical activities were forbidden by the Communist authorities. Although the scope and aims of the group's action were private, "its meaning became inherently public and political, because the system and especially the secret police,

generally understood all meaningful activities as at least potentially subversive" (Prochazka 60).

In fact, in the Living-Room Theatre in Prague, deep transformations tended to operate that included restatements of identity, which were to be undergone by the actors as well as the spectators. As Prochazka has aptly put it

In this way a community can be formed, giving new social meaning to the performed text. Therefore, theatre performance is compared to 'self-manifesting Being', which ceases to be a logocentric concept and is recreated in the form of an individual as well as a collective experience of identity. (61-2)

From the beginnings in 1976, the shows took place under close scrutiny, becoming almost impossible by the early 1980s due to the constant harassment and pressure of the authorities. "Some of them were even gate-crashed by the police, and actors as well as their audiences were detained, interrogated, or just brought in cars to deserted places some fifty miles from Prague and left there" (60).

What was important for Pavel Kohout was the ritual presentation of *Macbeth*, creating a *social bond* by means of the collective effort of the actors and the public in order to reflect on the existential present, the "here and now" or time in which the play is performed. The focus of enactment was the part of Malcolm, who in the shortened version of Kohout

lacked the "green" nature of Shakespeare's hero. Instead he was stylized as the innocent victim of the tyrant's cruelty, a "dissident" forced to emigrate and seek foreign help to overthrow the regime. His victory over Macbeth, therefore, was not interpreted as the re-establishment of the old authority of sacred kingship and the reenactment of the traditional ceremony of giving and *mancipatio*. It was the utopian gesture, reversing the ceremony of the gift: the closing lines of Malcolm's last speech were sung as a chorus

of the new community formed in the course of the performance. (Prochazka 63)

This new community differed from the situation of the beginning of the play, since Malcolm is able to rearticulate his relationship to the whole group, which is also suggested by the cutting of the scene where he promises to confer new titles and privileges. Kohout's play is closely linked to three main themes; the fear of Macbeth's spies, the suffering of the country under the tyrant, and the contrast between Macbeth and Malcolm, the latter impersonating "the power of the powerless" (Prochazka 64) wielded by the dissident community.

Although Stoppard did not use any part of Kohout's shortened version of *Macbeth* as his source text, he borrowed the whole context of the Czech playwright's theatrical event to construct the outer frame of his new creation, since *Cahoot's Macbeth* is based on the actual experience of the Czech playwright Pavel Kohout, whose Living-Room Production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was considered protest by the police authorities. Stoppard wrote the play to pay homage not only to Shakespeare, but also to Pavel Kohout. The choice of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as the source-play by both playwrights, Kohout and Stoppard, is entirely appropriate if we consider that the fundamental issue that preoccupied both of them was the totalitarian violation of human rights, since their lives and careers are linked by a number of coincidences: both were born in Czechoslovakia, and both have adapted Shakespearean tragedy⁵ for community theatre groups.

Cahoot's Macbeth is one of Stoppard's political plays, together with *Professional Foul*, *Every Boy Deserves Favour* and *Night and Day*. It is a tragic burlesque, in which the farcical elements together with parody and travesty serve to magnify the corruption of an unnamed totalitarian state, where the public performance of classics is forbidden and the leading performers are forced to work at menial jobs as floor cleaners, newspaper sellers, among others. Although the action is unlocalized, we are informed in the preface of the play that Stoppard is concerned with the Communist repression of intellectual and artistic

freedom in Czechoslovakia. He offers to the Western audience a glimpse of the terrifying situation of their human fellows on the Eastern side during the period of normalization in Czechoslovakia

Being Czech by birth, Stoppard left his native country as a child, returning to Prague for the first time in 1977, when he met several intellectuals, among them Vaclav Havel, Pavel Kohout and Jan Patočka, who were considered dissidents by the authorities of the Communist regime, because of their involvement in the dissemination of ideas of freedom. On his return, a year later, Stoppard received a letter from Pavel Kohout, in which the Czech playwright reported his recent activities. In the Preface of Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), there is a transcription of this letter, followed by the playwright's confession that the second playlet, *Cahoot's Macbeth*, was inspired by the events communicated in the letter:

As you know, many Czech theatre-people are not allowed to work in the theatre during the last years. As one of them who cannot live without theatre I was searching for the possibility to do theatre in spite of the circumstances. Now I am glad to tell you that in a few days, after eight weeks rehearsals—a Living-Room Theatre is opening, with nothing smaller than *Macbeth*. What is LRT? A call-group. Everybody who wants to have *Macbeth* at home with two great forbidden Czech actors, Pavel Landovsky and Vlasta Chramostova, can invite his friends and call us. Five people will come with a suitcase. (Stoppard 8)⁶

He makes plain, however, that Cahoot is not Kohout, and that his own over-truncated adaptation of *Macbeth* "is not supposed to be a fair representation of Kohout's elegant seventy-five minute version" (9).

In order to understand the need and importance of the counter-government activity of this marginalized theatre company, a short account of the situation of their native country during the post-Dubcek period is indispensable.⁷ In 1948, when the communist regime took

over Czechoslovakia, a period of hardship and repression followed. In 1968, Alexander Dubcek carried out libertarian reforms which became known as "Prague Spring" or "Socialism with a Human Face". On August 21st, 1968 the Soviet Union, alarmed by the experiment in free socialism that was beginning to thrive, invaded Czechoslovakia by sending in tanks to enforce conformity and to impose a new-Stalinist regime. One of the first acts of the new government was to prohibit intellectual and artistic activities. A great many intellectuals were prevented from carrying out their professions and were forced to do menial work to survive, as Kohout had reported in his letter to Stoppard.

After the fall of Dubcek in April 1969, the Husak regime undertook the so-called process of "normalization", a period of history in which the population was denied freedom of speech and worship, and rights to privacy and due process. They were constantly harassed, persecuted and denied work and education if they tried to claim their human rights. The general indignation of the Czech people was expressed in a manifesto that became known as "Charter 77", which was apprehended by the security police on January 5th, 1977. Many intellectuals who had been the spokesmen of the document, among them Vaclav Havel, Jiri Hajek and Jan Patocka, were charged with subversion and heavy penalties were inflicted on them.

The government held the belief that anarchy would threaten the communist state, unless people were subjected to severe regulations. Therefore, even theatrical events were forbidden, because of the fear that certain plays might contain subversive ideas. Kohout's presentation in private flats was considered an ostensive attempt to use theatrical performance to subvert authority, since a parallel could be drawn between the blind exercise of power by the tyrant Macbeth and the irrational action of the secret police in Czechoslovakia. The authorities became worried with the repeatability of the representation and the resulting multiplication of witnesses participating in the event. They were eager to repress any kind of performance that might function as a meta-commentary on society and culture, which might invite the audience to question the *status-quo*.

Stoppard's parodic transcontextualization of *Macbeth*, a metaplay with complex ironic intentionality, aims at showing the unconventional activities of this marginal theatre group considered subversive. The target of his critique is not Shakespeare, but the secret police who repeatedly used to put an end to those clandestine theatre productions. The outer frame or host play is the product of Stoppard's invention, which mirrors the action of the theatre intellectuals in Prague. He recreates the tense living room atmosphere of a flat, where there are actors, playing the players of Kohout's Troupe, enacting *Macbeth* to an audience within the play, in a country governed by a totalitarian regime. A shortened version of Shakespeare's tragedy constitutes the intertext or the play-within-the-play, which is twice interrupted by the secret police to emphasize the ironic parallel of the abuse of power in Scotland, Renaissance England and Czechoslovakia.

Cahoot's Macbeth is the second part of Stoppard's dyptch entitled *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979), which the playwright wrote for Ed Berman (whose pseudonym is Professor Dogg), creator of the community theatre group Dogg's Troupe, and one of the most remarkable producers working with alternative theatre spaces in Britain. As the title acknowledges, it is a juxtaposition of two distinct but related plays. The first is a conflation of two earlier short pieces, *Dogg's Our Pet*, commissioned for the opening of the Inter-Action Almost Free Theatre in Rupert Street, which premiered there in December 1971, and the fifteen-minute version of *Hamlet*, written for presentation on a touring double-decker, Ed Berman's Fun Art Bus, but first performed as a platform presentation at the National Theatre in 1976. In May 1979, this conflated play, with *Cahoot's Macbeth* newly added, was also first staged by Ed Berman and his British American Repertory Company, featuring actors and actresses of both nationalities, at the University of Warwick Arts Centre in Coventry. Short runs at other British theatres followed, including a brief season at the Collegiate Theatre in London, before the play was taken to the United States in a rare example of cooperation between actor's unions on both sides of the Atlantic (Brassel 234-35).

Stoppard acknowledges Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as the source of his idea for *Dogg's Our Pet*. Another influence is René Magritte, who was made notorious by his assumption that no object is so attached to its name that another cannot be found to suit it better. Two languages are used in *Dogg's Our Pet*: one is English and the other is composed mostly of English words that signify something else than the meaning assigned to them by English speakers. Stoppard in a sense teaches the audience a new language during the very performance of the play, because it is possible to infer what the words must mean, in the new language called Dogg, from the accompanying actions, expressions and gestures.

In *Dogg's Hamlet*, the schoolboys Charlie, Abel and Baker are all fluent in the Dogg language. They and their headmaster Dogg are preparing for a performance of a schoolplay in its original language, English, which is a foreign language to them. They rehearse random lines from *Hamlet* in English. A load of blocks and planks is delivered by Easy, an English speaking truck-driver, who helps the boys to construct their stage. From this point on the action is similar to *Dogg's Our Pet*; in the process of helping the boys, Easy learns the Dogg language. Then the boys race through the highlights of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in thirteen minutes, followed by an encore—a two minute condensation of it, which reprises the whole in thirty-eight lines. In this play, Stoppard makes a point analogous to that of Wittgenstein himself—that meaning depends on a particular frame of reference (Brassel 238-41). Although both plays of the diptych are distinct, it is impossible to perform the second independently, because Easy, the truck-driver, who has learnt fluent Dogg in the first play, enters inadvertently in the second to deliver blocks and slabs, being the source of farcical confusion.

Stoppard's collage of the Macbeth narrative in *Cahoot's Macbeth* is an experiment in pastiche and intertextuality. It begins with Macbeth's encounter with the three witches and proceeds rapidly through the highlights of Shakespeare's text to the second scene of Act III. After the murder of Duncan, as soon as Macbeth re-enters with the blood-stained daggers, professing having done the deed, a police siren

is heard approaching the flat. The insistent rapping at the gate turns out to be the Police Inspector's knock at the door of the apartment, and the part which follows can be seen as a parodic equation of Shakespeare's porter scene in *Macbeth*. The Inspector, a small cog in the machinery of tyranny and himself a victim and perpetrator of the oppressive system, is a grotesquely comic figure in Stoppard's narrative. He enters interrupting the performance and making ironic comments to the onstage audience and actors, who then become spectators of the action in the frame-play. He accuses them of disrespecting the law with their counter-government initiative, as they know that theatrical activities are forbidden. In the dialogue that follows there are also some direct allusions to the retaliations suffered by the signatories of Charter 77 as, for example, the ironic reply the Inspector gets when he asks the actress playing Lady Macbeth for an autograph for his daughter: "I'd rather not—the last time I signed something I didn't work for three years" (55). This infuriates the Inspector who then directs a sarcastic speech to the audience in order to ridicule the actors. Mockingly, he assumes the part of the stage-manager: "(*To audience.*) Don't move. I mean, it gives one pause, doesn't it? 'Tonight Macbeth will be played by Mr. Landovsky who last season scored a personal success in a newspaper kiosk at the tram terminus and has recently been seen washing the floors in number three boiler factory. The role of Lady Macbeth is in the capable hands of Vera from *The Dirty Spoon*' ...It sounds like a rough night" (55).

The words "rough night" are the cue for the entrance of the actor playing Macduff, who comes in and pronounces the famous Shakespearean lines: "O horror, horror, horror! Confusion now hath made his masterpiece" (55), which are taken in the literal sense by the Inspector: "What's *your* problem, sunshine? Don't tell me you've found a corpse—I come here to be taken out of myself, not to be shown a reflection of the banality of my life. Why don't you go out and come in again. I'll get out of the way. Is this seat taken?" (55-56).

The Inspector, whose interference always occurs at climactic moments, then sits down to watch the play, but he lets the actors and audience know that he is aware that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* can be

played “for” or “against” the establishment, and forewarns them not to offend the *status-quo*, because in an one-party system only one single ideology is acceptable. He addresses the actor playing Macbeth:

Now listen, you stupid bastard, you’d better get rid of the idea that there’s a special *Macbeth* which you do when I am not around, and some other *Macbeth* for when I *am* around which isn’t worth doing. You’ve only got one *Macbeth*. Because I’m giving this party and there ain’t no other. It’s what we call a one-party system. I’m the cream in your coffee, the sugar in your tank, and the breeze blowing down your neck. So let’s have a little of the old trouper spirit, because if I walk out of this show I take it with me. (56)

Later, the preposterous Inspector goes on citing articles from the penal code, insisting on the premise that any act that implies hostility against the state will be considered subversion, and that the slightest transgression will result in “jobs lost, children failing exams, letters undelivered, driving licenses withdrawn, passports indefinitely postponed” (60). These threats are reminiscent of the despotic State violence against Roman Catholics under James’s Absolutist rule (Sinfield “History, Ideology” 65), discussed in the first part of the essay.

There is a scene in Stoppard’s play when the tyrant Macbeth crowns himself standing above the screen. The Inspector applauds enthusiastically and in a sarcastic manner comments that, for a change, it is so nice having a play with a happy ending. His observation suggests that in a totalitarian state the victory of tyranny is the rule.⁸ Another outrageous scene deals with the Inspector advancing menacingly among the audience, pointing his torch at different people in order to verify who is in there that night in accordance to his secret list:

Now let’s see who we’ve got here. (*Looking at the list.*) Three stokers, two laborers, a van-driver’s mate, janitors, street cleaners, a jobbing gardener, painter and decorator,

chambermaid, two waiters, farmhand... You seem to have cracked the problem of the working-class audience. If there isn't a catch I'll put you up as a heroine of the revolution. I mean, the counter-revolution. No, I tell a lie, I mean the normalization – Yes, I know. Who is that horny-handed son of the soil? (59)

This mirrors the atmosphere of terror in several other periods of history—the action of the German Gestapo, the Spanish Inquisition, the MacCarthist Witch Hunts, among others. This part of the dialogue ends with a reference to the Communist repression of the Prague Spring libertarian ideals in 1968; the Inspector makes an open threat, reminding them that “a column of tanks is a great leveler” (60). After a fit of rage, he calls Cahoot a “parasite and slanderer of the state” (61), and makes an impressive speech declaring that Shakespeare is not well-liked among the leaders of the communist state. It becomes evident that artistic expression is feared, because it is a language the authorities do not share and thus cannot control. The Inspector argues that he and his superiors would much prefer that the actors protested their lack of freedom unequivocally, and he warns them that if they continue to claim they are only speaking as Macbeth, Banquo or Macduff, the State will put them in an asylum for insane people and they will be treated the same way as those “who say they are Napoleon” (61):

[...] I'm really glad I caught you before you closed. If I can make just one tiny criticism... Shakespeare—or the Old Bill, as we call him in the force—is not a popular choice with my chief, owing to his popularity with the public, or, as we call it in the force, the filth. The fact is, when you get a universal and timeless writer like Shakespeare, there's a strong feeling that he could be spitting in the eyes of the beholder when he should be keeping his mind on Verona – hanging around the 'gents'. You know what I mean? Unwittingly, of course. He didn't know he was doing it, at least you couldn't prove he

did, which is what makes the chief so prejudiced against him. The chief says he'd rather you stood up and said, 'There's no freedom in this country', then there's nothing underhand and we all know where we stand. You get your lads together and we get our lads together and when it's all over, one of us is in power and you're in gaol. That's freedom in action. But what we don't like is a lot of people being cheeky and saying they are only Julius Caesar or Coriolanus or Macbeth. Otherwise we are going to start treating them the same as the ones who say they are Napoleon. Got it? (60-61)

Here the Inspector refers to the subtext and linguistic ambiguity of the Shakespearean classic, which seems extremely dangerous to the authorities. It can be assumed that repressive societies fear the bard, because within a particular context Shakespeare's words take on new meanings.

There is another critical speech by the Inspector in which he clearly states that their theatrical activity is considered protest and that he shall be entitled to use violence to repress the slightest transgression. His discourse, which ironically echoes the statements made by James I in his treatise *Basilikon Doron*, in which the king propagates the ideology of Absolutism, insisting on the "divine right of the monarch",⁹ reveals he firmly believes that state violence is legitimate and necessary to uphold the established order, and that the ends justify the means, axioms also emphasized by King James:

If you think you can drive a horse and a cart through the law of slander by quoting blank verse at me, Cahoot, you're going to run up against what we call poetic justice: which means we get you into line if we have to chop one of your feet off. You know as well as I do that this performance of yours goes right against the spirit of normalization. When you clean the stables, Cahoot, the muck is supposed to go into the gutter, not find its way back into the stalls. (*To ALL generally.*) I blame

sport and religion for all this, you know. An Olympic games here, a papal visit there, and suddenly you think you can take liberties with your freedom...amateur theatricals, organized groups, committees of all kinds—listen, I've arrested more committees (*to 'BANQUO'*) than you have had dog's dinners. I arrested the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Persecuted for saying I unjustly persecuted the Committee for Free Expression, which I arrested for saying there wasn't any—so I find that this is a benefit for the Canine Defence League you're going to feel my hand on your collar and I don't care if Moscow Dynamo is at home to the Vatican in the European Cup. (*'BANQUO' grows.*) (62)

This sarcastic speech reveals the capriciousness of the Inspector's will, the ever-changing winds of arbitrariness in the unstable world of tyranny and the abuse of power and lack of restraint displayed in order to bring the masses into total submission. State violence is ironically undermined by the illogical and arbitrary way the Inspector exercises authority, denoting political vulnerability and the precariousness of the established order, which needs constant enforcement to survive. As Hannah Arendt has aptly put it, "the head-on clash between Russian tanks and the entirely nonviolent resistance of the Czechoslovak people is a textbook case of a confrontation between violence and power in their pure states" (52-53). In the long run, the nonviolent power of the Czech people triumphed over the occupying invader, whose domination was established by violence.

The play then turns into farcical zaniness with the entrance of Easy, who is the play's link with *Dogg's Hamlet*. While he tries to find someone to receive his consignment, he is unwittingly cast into the role of the third murderer and then appears as Banquo's ghost. He pops in and out of view coincidentally with Macbeth's visions, a parodic rendering of Shakespeare's banquet scene and Stoppard's most brilliant invention. After much confusion, Easy gets the group's attention, and with the help of his phrase book, makes it clear that he has a load of

wooden blocks, slabs and cubes to deliver. Finally, communication becomes possible when the actors and audience pick up Dogg's language. Stoppard makes the point that, despite language barriers, people can understand each other when they have a common interest.

Meanwhile, the Inspector had left the apartment, but had warned them to stop the presentation, for if they didn't, he would put them into jail on his return. However, after the actors all catch Dogg, they decide to defy his authority and continue the performance in the new language.

When his second entrance takes place, at another climactic moment, the outrage expressed by the actor playing Macduff through the words "Bleed, bleed, poor country!" and "O Scotland, Scotland! O nation miserable!" (72) can be read as another ironic equation of past and present: Czechoslovakia is also miserable and bleeds under oppressive conditions. When confronted with the strange music of a language he cannot understand, the Inspector panics because he thinks that their incomprehensible babble might be a dangerous code, but as he cannot prove it, he cannot realize his intent of arresting the actors by using force. Refusing to admit defeat, he and his subalterns start using Easy's slabs to build a wall across the front of the performing area, to cut the actors off the audience, but before they have time to finish it, Macbeth is slain and Malcolm is crowned. Although the actors then disappear behind the wall, a defiant fanfare is heard in a triumphant theatrical finale from which Stoppard's message loudly reverberates—that however hard the authorities might combat resistance and dissent, they can never obliterate the desire of freedom from the human spirit. Stoppard's ingenious creative fusion is particularly dense and layered, suggesting throughout that the past and present realities alluded to are not distinct. Like Shakespeare, the playwright also places historical periods far removed in time and place in ironic juxtaposition: he uses *Macbeth* as his source text, because it contains themes that speak directly of contemporary issues.

The comparative analysis of both, Shakespeare's and Stoppard's texts, puts the issue of totalitarian violence in historical perspective and lays bare the ironic equation that Stoppard has probably intended to

convey: in the same way as the instabilities of the Absolutist Period in Renaissance England culminated in the Civil War and the overthrow of monarchy, the atmosphere of nervous tension, terror and unrest in the Communist imposed system of government in Czechoslovakia ended with the collapse of the totalitarian regime and the election of the playwright Vaclav Havel, the principal spokesman of Charter 77 and leader of the Civic Forum, as the first, non-communist president in 1985. Havel was elected unanimously by 323 members of Parliament. As the Czech revolution had been conducted since its inception mainly by theatre intellectuals, the political events in Prague have been denominated as the Revolution of the Theatre.

Stoppard's political satire can be applied to any totalitarian regime. It makes us, the ideal audience, realize the extent to which artistic expression can be a political act and a courageous one. Through Stoppard's play we realize that the initiative of the Czech intellectuals, mainly playwrights, philosophers and actors, was a daring enterprise meant to instruct people about their situation, making them aware of the full weight of tyranny that oppressed them and warning them against political conformism. *Cahoot's Macbeth* was Stoppard's response to contemporary critics and fellow playwrights, who had accused him of being politically non-committed. In our time, the issue of institutionalized violence has again occupied the forefront of contemporary debates,¹⁰ which indicates the contemporaneity of Shakespeare, Kohout and Stoppard, who have provided metaphors for totalitarian violence. Stoppard's parable, besides the issues discussed, also defines artistic genius in general: despite the fact that artists might be physically walled in under a totalitarian regime, their thoughts and creative imaginations will always find a new form of expression—a new language—if necessary.

Notes

1. The strategy of transgressive rewriting and/or performance of classical texts has been the object of extensive discussion by theatre theorists, among them Anne

Ubersfeld in her article "Le jeu des classiques: réécriture ou musée?" (Jacquot, 1988, 172-92).

2. See "History and Ideology: the instance of Henry V", written by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, in which they discuss the theatre's function during the Renaissance period, defining it as an arena where the warring ideologies of the time were exposed and negotiated.
3. In an essay entitled "Macbeth and Masculine Values", Marilyn French describes what she calls the "culture of violence" in Scotland, a world of blood and brutality. She claims that "At the end of the tragedy, we accept without demur the judgment that Macbeth is a butcher. In fact, however, he is no more a butcher at the end than he is at the beginning. Macbeth lives in a culture that values butchery. Throughout the play manhood is equated with the ability to kill. Power is the highest value in Scotland, and in Scottish culture, power is military prowess" (Sinfield, 1992, 15).
4. It was only much later that the descendants of Banquo constituted a hereditary dynasty in Scotland. According to some reports, Banquo's son, Fleance fled to Wales, where he got married to a daughter of the Prince of Wales. A male son, named Walter, was born out of this union, went to Scotland, where he occupied the office of Lord Steward of Scotland, a kind of royal administrator. This was the time when the name Stuart originated. Eight descendants of Walter Stuart reigned in Scotland from 1370 to 1625, including James I, who was very proud of his descent from an unbroken line of eight monarchs, springing from the marriage of Walter Stewart or Stuart to Marjorie, daughter of Robert the Bruce and a descendant of Duncan. In Jacobean England, people believed that the Stuarts would reign till Doomsday. Also see Stoll's "Source and Motive in Macbeth and Othello" (Dean, 1967, 317-28); Bradbrock's "The Sources of *Macbeth*" (Muir & Edwards, 1977, 12-24); Introduction to *Macbeth* (Elloway, 1972, 07-10).
5. In 1971, Pavel Kohout also wrote *Poor Murderer*, a parody of *Hamlet*, which was forbidden in his native country, having been first produced on Broadway in 1976.
6. All references from Stoppard's *Cahoot's Macbeth* will be quoted from this edition and hereafter indicated only by page-numbers.
7. For a comprehensive account of the situation of the intellectuals in Czechoslovakia during the normalization period under the communist regime, see Tom Stoppard's report "Prague: the story of the Chartists", in the *New York Review of Books* (1977, 11-15) and Kenneth Tynan's biography of Tom Stoppard in the *The New Yorker* (1977, 41-109).

8. This solution appealed to the Brazilian director Antunes Filho, who revealed in an interview that during the process of his adaptation of *Macbeth*, entitled *Throne of Blood* (1992), he first thought of ending the performance at the exact point when the coronation of the tyrant takes place, because the second part of the narrative, which deals with the death punishment of the usurper, never happens in the Third World. But later he changed his mind and decided to stage the death of the tyrant, however, like Polanski, he introduced a circular pattern into the play—after the ending the same story starts again. See Nelson de Sá's report entitled "*Macbeth* será à brasileira" (It will be a Brazilian *Macbeth*). In: *Folha de São Paulo*, Ilustra 5, 23.11.1992. 3
9. Alan Sinfield states that James I fought relentlessly to suppress rebels. Through the exercise of State violence against such dissidents he hoped to achieve a greater degree of legitimization. "The reason why the state needed violence and propaganda was that the system was subject to persistent structural difficulties. *Macbeth*, like very many plays of the period, handles anxieties about the violence exercised under the aegis of Absolutist ideology" (Sinfield, 1986, 64).
10. The issue of abuse of power through institutionalized violence continues to be a seminal preoccupation in our time, having been the object of study of several conferences and symposia around the globe, among them the International Forum on Intolerance in France in 1997. In an essay entitled "Institutionalized Intolerance", Italo Mereu argues that the politics of intolerance is responsible for Fascism, Communism, Nazism and other totalitarian "isms" of the twentieth century. He asserts that *just violence* can be defined as the violence employed by those who belong to dominant institutions or power structures that do not tolerate opposition. Such violence is dignified and dignifying, sanctifying and meriting applause. The most important theoretician of this kind of violence is Saint Augustine. *Unjust violence*, on the other hand, is a procedure employed by heretics who question a religious institution or rebels who fight against a power structure. It is considered monstrous, horrific and sacrilegious and must be punished with death or other kinds of severe chastisement. Furthermore, *legal violence* is represented by institutionalized intolerance. The Inquisition, for instance, institutionalized repression of thought through a series of laws sanctioned by the authority of the Pope. (Barret-Ducrocq, 2000, 42-3).

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