

EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
BÖLCSÉSZETTUDOMÁNYI KAR

THESES
OF THE DISSERTATION

“*WE’LL HEAR A PLAY TOMORROW*”
ASPECTS OF PRE-PERFORMANCE CRITICISM IN
READING SHAKESPEARE’S *HAMLET* AND
MACBETH

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DOKTORI PROGRAM

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BUDAPEST, 2014

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Drama is a Janus-faced rebel in the world of literature. It belongs to several fields, among them eminently to the world of literature in its classical sense, concentrating on the written text and its interpretations; and the world of the theatre, interested in the living performance. These two fields stubbornly claim their (almost) exclusive rights to this volatile wanton called drama and tend to talk about, or work with her disregarding the other disciplines. However, the number of theoretical methodologies interested in drama more as a genre oriented towards, or even attracted by, the living theatre has recently increased. If one takes a bit of the meta-theatre, elaborated by James L. Calderwood, one may see that the plays themselves contain overt or hidden references to the theatrically constructed structural features of their own; they reveal their own disposition towards theatrical performance and sometimes also give the learned reader directorial hints for staging the work. Or one can take the “presence”-theory of Gumbrecht and see that the meaning (in our case, the theoretical analysis of plays) prevails over the physical side of the work of art and that this presence-aspect could be taken into consideration again. From this claim it is only one step to acknowledge the physical presence of the actor in the specific costume, in front of a specific scenery as important factors of meaning. One may take then the idea of presentness discussed by Cavell, which mingles nicely with Gumbrecht’s theory and advertises that the audience share the same time with the actors: every single action is taking place in the extreme form of the present continuous, in the present (and presence) of the spectators. This already provides a possible foundation for a theatrical ontology. Finally, one may consider the phenomenology of action discussed by Rayner and then one may see how drama forms action for the theatre to visualize action on the very stage: while “to act” is determined by the context of action and “to do” is just the deed in itself, “to perform” is the one that really brings the aspect of the theatre into the game. The claim of “to perform” is that via the public nature of the “playhouse” it presupposes that a particular action (speech, gesture, movement etc.) is presented for an audience — this process highlights how meaning turns into presence and thus complements the respective theories of Gumbrecht and Cavell. However, there is performance-criticism, which already concentrates on realized performances. If one looks at the semiotics of the theatre on the basis of Kiss, one will see how the understanding of the four hundred-year-old emblematic meanings is highly relevant for any interpretation. Even further, if one reads into the vast literature of performance criticism, an astonishingly thorough and long catalogue of already existing performances will unfold, discussing performance histories or reviews of specific productions. Weimann and Dessen even observes plays via semiotics based theatrical approaches and contextualize the relation between text and physical performance in the

construction of meaning. Furthermore, it is not only the theoretical field that is winking towards stage-realizations: directors and actors sometimes also tend to consult academics in building up a scene or role.

It seems, therefore, that there are already reaching out towards each other from the two, seemingly opposing competitors for the grace of drama. What my dissertation wishes to provide is an approach which, while reading and studying Shakespeare's two "great tragedies", *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, links these theatre-related fields and creates a bridge between the written text of the plays and their potential representation on the stage. I call this approach *pre-performance criticism* and use it so that it accepts, acknowledges and even respects the fact that the genre of drama belongs to both, yet they should not compete with, but reinforce, each other, leading us to a different understanding of drama. Hence, the focus of this work is twofold: first it provides theoretical interpretations as regards both plays, revealing new layers of meaning by projecting these works on each other, and then it accounts for how these previously established readings can be communicated to a *potential* stage audience in stage realization. This means that as opposed to performance criticism, it is not interested in particular existing performances but rather in potentialities the dramas and their interpretations offer. This reading method does not wish to provide a coherent concept for theatrical productions but deliberately preserves a mosaic-like structure to illustrate how different theoretical interpretations may manifest themselves in several stage representations. In the introductory chapter of the dissertation I outline the foundations of this new approach, discussing the above mentioned theories in detail but the real nature of *pre-performance criticism* unfolds in watching it "in action": in the chapters concentrating on specific aspects of comparison.

The first analytic chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the scrutiny of the dramaturgical roles of the transcendental creatures in the respective tragedies, namely to Old Hamlet and the Weird Sisters. In discussing the visual representation of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, I relied, as a starting point, on the description provided by the characters. Old Hamlet is reported to appear in full armour, which has its own significance in the context of the other characters. As opposed to Claudius, he is a representative of old chivalric values and methods, relying on face-to-face duels rather than diplomacy or political assassinations. Yet, the use of the armour also means the lack of intimacy with respect to his son: he does not arrive primarily as a father to Hamlet but as a deceased ruler, eager to urge revenge. While possible deviations in the stage representation are also discussed, the use of armour and the corresponding absence of this intimacy is elaborated on, as it may also convey the meaning

that the task assigned to Hamlet is not a shared business of father and son but rather a burden imposed on the Prince of Denmark, which he is obliged to cope with, even if this stands in contradiction with his own personality and vehemence.

It is not just the outward appearance of the Ghost that emphasizes this burden of the task but the way he communicates with his son. Their conversation is a dialogue only on the surface since it disregards Hamlet's emotional comments and turns out to be a long monologue of the Ghost reflecting on three major topics: the description of his torments in Purgatory, the account of his death, and, finally on revenge. None of these is about Hamlet but about the Ghost, the speaker. As opposed to this, the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth* first appear with short, dynamic dialogues as if the initial appearances of the transcendental creatures were also indicative of the speed in which the events unfold. Indeed, the Ghost in his play – where the fulfillment of the murder takes place only at the very end – appears with longish, slow monologues, whereas the witches seducing Macbeth to commit the worst criminal act takes place not long after their prophecies are heard, told with relatively high speed, in short, dynamic sentences. Moreover, they emphatically do not talk about their status but when asked to identify themselves they characterize Macbeth instead, calling him Thane of Glamis and Cawdor and, finally, King. The fact that Macbeth immediately thinks of murder suggests that the Weird Sisters uttered an idea which might have occurred to Macbeth previously and this way they just provide an external reinforcement to an inner thought and, therefore, are much closer to Macbeth's inner desire.

Here I turn to the question how these interpretations might be communicated through the stage and what dramaturgical consequences these potential directorial solutions might have later on in the production. In the case of Old Hamlet's Ghost, the disharmony between the task he represents and its recipient is already emphasized by the use of armour. Moreover, a significantly taller actor impersonating the Ghost can give an impression of a father enforcing something on a visibly smaller child, a task which the son is reluctant to identify with. I discuss the dramaturgical consequences of a particular idea, i.e. that the Ghost may give a dagger to Hamlet as an instrument to do the deed. This way it is not only a constantly present memento of his task but it might represent the father during Hamlet's monologue behind the kneeling Claudius when he is not willing to take the opportunity to take revenge and if he kills Polonius with this dagger in the following scene, the reappearance of the Ghost gains extra meaning, reproaching his son because the instrument was not used according to its intended purpose. Finally, under this interpretation, it is also significant that the actual revenge is not carried out with the weapon from the father but with the poisoned sword, as if

the murdering of Claudius was primarily to satisfy Hamlet himself and only marginally his father.

The motif of the dagger explores further meanings in the correlation with the other tragedy, where Macbeth delivers the dagger-soliloquy before entering Duncan's bedchamber to kill him. Since the Weird Sisters' prophecies stood in harmony with the protagonist's desires, Macbeth does not need a memento to remind him of his "task" but his dagger is already planted in his imagination and all he needs to do is to realize it by drawing a real one to commit regicide. In his case, the appearance of the transcendental creatures is even more frightful: they are withered women with beards, which also has to be taken into consideration for directorial purposes. The scary appearance may symbolize the frightful nature of the news connected to murder. The meaning of the bearded women on the emblematic stage of the Elizabethan age is also to be investigated but the actual use of it in contemporary productions might bring forth different (and comic) effects. Yet, should a production wish to concentrate on the desirable nature of the news and represent the Weird Sisters accordingly, they can appear as attractive, seductive women, or even the prophecies themselves might be heard in Macbeth's and Banquo's own voice.

Regarding the transcendental elements, two further scenes are also discussed, which do not directly involve the ghost or the witches, yet they turn out to be closely related to them and both take place in the middle of the respective dramas: the Mousetrap-scene in *Hamlet* and the appearance of Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*. With respect to the performance of the *Mousetrap*, I establish the interpretation that the non-verbal part might refer to the death of Old Hamlet, while the "sounding" one is about the possible future of Hamlet taking revenge on Claudius. This way, the performance is the translation of the Ghost's words into stage images: the first part presenting Old Hamlet's monologue about his death, the second about the task of revenge. Moreover, Hamlet and the *Mousetrap* will have a similar impact on Claudius to the one Old Hamlet and his story had on Hamlet. In *Macbeth*, the appearance of Banquo's ghost is, similarly, a public event, the sight of which the king is unable to bear. Banquo's relation with the Weird Sisters is discussed in much detail and the conclusion is that he has a remarkably inherent connection with the sisters and therefore some parallels can be drawn between the first encounter with the witches and the entrance of Banquo's ghost. In the respective subchapters, certain possible solutions are offered to emphasize further possible connections between these scenes and the transcendental creatures in terms of staging, lighting and also playacting.

The second chapter concentrates on the major motif of the two tragedies, i.e. the deed of murder and the protagonists' respective attitudes towards it. In both plays I concentrate on one specific soliloquy, where I find Hamlet's and Macbeth's attitude towards the action and the accompanying contemplation typical and revealing. I claim that in *Hamlet* this is the "To be or not to be"-speech, which I observe in its immediate dramaturgical context and thus interpret it as a continuation of the preceding *Hecuba*-soliloquy; in the latter, the idea of staging *The Mousetrap*-performance is formulated. *The Mousetrap*-performance is, in itself, a special field where action and thought may combine and is, therefore, an optimal solution for Hamlet, who wishes to initiate action but is afraid of it at the same time. Yet, there is an apparent time discrepancy in the *Hecuba*-soliloquy, since by the time Hamlet comes up with the idea of staging the murder for his uncle, he has already asked the players to prepare for the *Murder of Gonzago* for the following night. However, this might suggest that the two plays are not the same: the Prince first wishes to have a private performance for himself, observing and experimenting with the murder he is expected to execute without serious consequences and only later does he turn to the idea of using it as a trap for Claudius and go public with it. His decision marks the point where the originally intended *Murder of Gonzago* turns into a different play, *The Mousetrap*.

Since *The Mousetrap* is about the execution of the murder, either or both (depending on one's interpretation) parts deal(s) with the past (i.e. how Claudius killed Old Hamlet) and/or with the future (how Hamlet will kill Claudius). The *Gonzago/Mousetrap* scene is absolutely central to the play and thus Hamlet's attitude towards it is going to be similar to his attitude towards the whole play called *Hamlet*, of which he is expected to be the protagonist. Therefore, it is no longer surprising that the two speeches he delivers in relation to the performance are similar and this way highly general: both the "To be or not to be" and his instructions to the players ("Speak the speech I pray you...") lack any kind of specific reference to the play-within-the-play, although their immediate dramaturgical context would desire otherwise. This phenomenon might indicate that Hamlet wants to approach his own story and, consequently, *The Mousetrap* from the outside, remaining on the universal level, distancing it from himself, as he wants to deal with the problems theoretically, remaining in the framework of his mind. Therefore, I would claim in accounting for possible staging solutions that productions having Hamlet play the murderer Lucianus in the play-within-the-play goes against this attitude of the Prince, who desperately wants to relate to the story externally and tries to avoid involvement as much as he can. Yet, it turns out for him that he cannot remain a total outsider: just as in the course of *The Mousetrap*-performance, he is more

and more involved via his comments on the action, he cannot escape his own tragedy, either, as the outsider's position is already occupied by the Ghost, and Hamlet is thus pushed onto his own stage with the duty of impersonating the avenger.

In this light, I interpret the "To be or not to be"-soliloquy as contrasting action and thought. Taking action, of course, involves the possibility of death, which gives rise to the middle part of the speech discussing the nature of death but the soliloquy itself eventually returns to the main predicament of Hamlet. For him thinking kills action, and indeed: whenever the Prince has an opportunity to think an act over beforehand, he fails to carry it out (cf. not stabbing the seemingly praying Claudius), yet when he does not consider something carefully, he acts (cf. the murder of Polonius). This seems to be different with Claudius and Macbeth: Claudius's speeches are usually performatives, actions themselves, while Macbeth seems to need thinking in order to initiate action. Hamlet's desire to occupy a quasi-outsider position in his story might be represented by bringing him off-stage during the "To be or not to be"-soliloquy, the dramaturgical prerequisites and consequences of which are discussed in the chapter. This way, it will be even more apparent how the temporary opportunity of contemplation is ended by Ophelia's entrance, which drags Hamlet back to the expected area of action (i.e. the stage), and the frustration resulting from this might also explain his attitude towards the girl.

Macbeth proceeds in the opposite direction: he is not put into an outsider position by the transcendental creatures. He is drawn into the Weird Sisters' magic circle, which he will not be able to leave any more. I find his speech corresponding to Hamlet's "To be or not to be"-soliloquy, i.e. dissecting the relation between action and thought is functionally similar to the "Two truths are told"-soliloquy in Act I, Scene 3. Yet, unlike the Danish Prince, who elevates the problem onto a philosophical level, Macbeth focuses on the very deed, naming it as "murder". The basic difference in the respective protagonists' attitude also reflects the contrast in the dramaturgy of the two tragedies. Hamlet is a student from Wittenberg, a scholar, and his attention usually lacks focus and, therefore, it considers the other characters and concentrates on problems to a great extent, whereas Macbeth is a soldier, who is focused on one action at a time, and executes it.

As we have projected the two above mentioned soliloquies onto each other, we might find some correlation between the two events these speeches refer to in this interpretation and noteworthy connections seem to emerge between *The Mousetrap* and the murdering of Duncan. Hamlet's performance is fictionalized reality, i.e. it transforms reality (the murder) into fiction, evolving on the stage where the victim can eventually rise after the show is over.

For Hamlet, this is the optimal borderline between contemplation and action. Macbeth's deed is, on the contrary, realized fiction as he takes the elusive prophecies of the Weird Sisters and realizes them in the actual gory corpse of King Duncan. As it turns out during the course of the plays, both methods are "mousetraps" for the creators: it drags Hamlet into the whirlpool of events, including murder and never lets Macbeth escape from the blood on his hands and its consequences.

As opposed to Hamlet, who wants to solve everything in his mind and for whom contemplation kills action, Macbeth desperately wants to erase contemplation with action proper. As the "Two truths are told"-soliloquy also suggests, he tries to get rid of the "horrid images" planted in his head via the seductive words of the Weird Sisters by realizing them in action. While Hamlet constantly aims at internalizing problems, Macbeth always externalizes them, just as the soliloquy shows how the thoughts in his head immediately produce "real", physical symptoms, actions in his body.

Finally, it is worth considering how two important actions, i.e. *The Mousetrap* and the murder of Banquo are executed by "nameless" professionals: the Players and the Murderers. By hiring these murderers, Macbeth tries to gain an external position for himself as well but it turns out to be impossible by the appearance of Banquo's ghost, indicating that he cannot escape the consequences of his bloodshed, just as he cannot escape the magic circle. Pre-performance criticism here accounts for staging possibilities for emphasizing this effect and also accounts for the dramaturgical results of having the same actors (actresses) play the Weird Sisters and the Murderers: this might strengthen Macbeth's entrapment in the magic circle. By the same token, the effect of Old Hamlet playing the Player king is also taken into consideration.

Chapter three investigates the role of the female characters and concentrates on their relations towards the main male characters. Gertrude's main predicament is that she tries to reconcile two roles, i.e. the mother of Hamlet and the new wife of Claudius, which turn out to be irreconcilable in Hamlet's eyes. In the "Sullied flesh"-soliloquy Hamlet applies the method of generalization, so characteristic of him, and arrives at the conclusion "Frailty, thy name is woman". Thus, by the time Ophelia first appears and speaks on the stage, her verdict has already been uttered. I elaborate both on the possible loci of her first entrance, as well as potential interpretations of her obedience towards her father, yet the outcome in the play is the same: she cannot represent a private shelter Hamlet can withdraw into but these are overshadowed by Polonius's and Laertes's pieces of "good advice". As a result, the letters

between her and the Prince, supposed to symbolize the privacy of a relationship, are exposed to the public scrutiny of first Polonius and then of the royal couple as well.

This privacy of a letter is emphatically preserved in the Macbeth-Lady Macbeth relationship, where the Lady does not only read it in her solitude but she enters the stage for the first time, uttering her husband's words. After having done so, the author of the message appears himself, so the audience can see the couple together. The letter is supposed to inform the Lady about the encounter with the witches but it is more than that. On subtle layers, Macbeth's message contains the tones of deep and affectionate love. It is also noteworthy that after reading the letter, Lady Macbeth provides a detailed and accurate analysis of her husband's character, as opposed to Gertrude, who seems to be constantly misinterpreting Hamlet's behaviour. So does the confused Ophelia, who understands Hamlet even less after their encounter in Act III, Scene 1 (as opposed to the eavesdropping Claudius). In line with the aims of pre-performance criticism, possible interpretations for the Lady's character, in connection with the actress portraying her, are also provided.

The private sphere untouched by the public eye is preserved by the Lady, even when their castle becomes the home for a public event, i.e. the arrival of King Duncan. This reflects one of the most significant features of the play's dramatic representation, which I call "background dramaturgy". This means that the audience can primarily see the Macbeths when they are alone, or when they exit a public event, like the feast of Duncan. Contrastingly, *Hamlet* exhibits a "foreground dramaturgy", where the Prince cannot find a private shelter with the women he is involved with. We mostly see them when they are in the company of others: Gertrude disappears from sight when she exits the inauguration ceremony at the beginning, and Ophelia's main encounter with Hamlet is spied upon as well. A potential stage realization for the emphasis of the "background dramaturgy" of *Macbeth* is offered in situating the scene of Macbeth's escape from Duncan's feast and the "If it were done"-soliloquy together with the following dialogue with the Lady into a bathroom. However, it is important to note that this strong privacy of the Macbeth couple can only prevail until the murder of Duncan: from that moment on it starts gradually dissolving just as first the knocking on the gate indicates how the outside, public world wants to penetrate into their private shelter.

The roles of the female characters can also be illuminated by their indirect relationship with the transcendental elements. As a considerable part of Old Hamlet's accusing account is centered around the Queen, it distances Hamlet even further from his mother. After encountering the ghost or the witches, both protagonists approach their "lovers" first, but with

different intentions. Macbeth tells the news to his wife and is happy to gain her support. Hamlet, on the other hand, cuts himself away from Ophelia, who will not be a supporting but a hindering factor in his career.

The projection of the two plays onto each other gives us new perspectives for the discussion of the dramaturgical role of Gertrude, Ophelia and Lady Macbeth. When Hamlet's visit in Ophelia's chamber with his pretended madness is juxtaposed to the murder of Duncan, similarities occur. Both take place in enclosed, private scenes, unseen and only reported to the audience, and both are causally related to the transcendental visits. Yet, while it provides a milestone for Hamlet's alienation from Ophelia, it marks the unity between the Scottish couple, also in a sexual context. However, the fact that they enter Duncan's bedchamber separately, foreshadows their slow alienation as well, which will gradually unfold after the murder. Also further parallels can be witnessed in the careers of the heroines: while Gertrude is constantly sent away from Hamlet's presence, Ophelia is always forced to be present against her will. Hamlet repeatedly tries to deconstruct the potentials of procreation (e.g. sending Ophelia to a nunnery), while Macbeth urges the Lady to "bring forth manchildren".

The two major public events in the middle of the respective tragedies already discussed, *The Mousetrap*-performance and the Banquet-scene, are also revealing in terms of the female characters. While observing the production of the players, Hamlet talks to both women, indicating that not just the performance is important but another level of the dramatic events. With his remarks, the Prince tries to tie the women to his play as well, and thus he cannot remain outside of *The Mosuetrap*, either, but becomes part of it. During the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the banquet, the narration is provided by the Lady, who tries to save the situation of her husband's scandalous behaviour and this is already a sign of the couple's tragic alienation: since Macbeth decided to plot the attempt on Banquo alone, he himself has to face the apparition alone, while the Lady is outside of the circle and she is only mediating between him and the on-stage audience, the lords. But the borderline of this "acting area" separates Macbeth from the Lady, just as it separates Hamlet, who, by his commentaries, became part of his show, and is thus alienated from the female characters. And importantly enough, these respective scenes are the last ones when Hamlet and Ophelia plus Macbeth and the Lady are seen together on stage.

If one observes the soliloquies of the heroines, it is revealing that those of Ophelia and the Lady are very much reliant on the male protagonists who constitute the major themes of these speeches. Therefore, it seems that the respective personalities of these two women are very much reliant on Hamlet and Macbeth, respectively, which might explain why they both

fall into madness when the main characters disappear from their lives. Both Ophelia's madness and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking occur when their loved ones are absent both physically and emotionally; moreover, both mad scenes make an attempt to bring the males back: Ophelia metaphorically refers to her relationship with the Prince, while the Lady is constantly talking to her husband in her sleep. Their madness is also indicative of their overall relation to privacy: Lady Macbeth is alone and is tenderly witnessed but not disturbed by supporting characters; moreover, she remains in the private realm of sleep, while Ophelia is always talking to others and, eventually, she produces a singing performance with them. Gertrude's heart is "cleft in twain", therefore Hamlet's disappearance does not affect her to the extent that she would be chased into madness or suicide (unless we interpret her drinking from the poisoned cup otherwise). Finally, Hamlet's farewell from Ophelia and Gertrude are shown in public scenes, while Macbeth reacts to the Lady's departure in one of the most powerful speeches of his play, the *Tomorrow*-soliloquy.

Chapter Four is primarily a case study of the two monarchs, who seized the throne via regicide: Claudius and Macbeth. I pursue this character analysis primarily via the meta-theatrical reading of the plays by observing the pattern how the respective tragedies reveal anything about their own working mechanisms as plays. Claudius's plight is first and foremost characterized as a conflict from the outside, since his major opponent is Hamlet. Their "duel", I claim, proceeds on two levels: one is the traditional plot of a revenge tragedy, while the other is a meta-dramatic combat for the favours of the audience. The most significant way of establishing this relationship is with soliloquies, yet whereas Hamlet is given many of them throughout the play, Claudius has only two long speeches, the first one of which, i.e. his inaugural speech is not a soliloquy but a monologue, thus he can only address his real audience indirectly, via talking to his on-stage audience, the Danish court. Macbeth, on the other hand, does not need to compete with anyone for stage dominance, since the source of his conflict is not coming from an external person but originates internally, and his problem is exactly his overwhelming stage-dominance: after the murder, he can never put down the role, the costumes of the "murderer". In a way, he is too good an actor, identifying with his role perfectly and thus this role will devour him eventually, leading to his final fall.

Macbeth represents a case study of the murderer blending the respective evolutions of Hamlet and Claudius. While the audience cannot see either Claudius before committing the murder, or the Prince after it (disregarding his few lines before his own death), Macbeth displays the murderer preparing for the deed and later trying to cope with it. Yet, as opposed to the Danish king, he cannot do this successfully. Claudius handles the political matters with

efficient diplomacy during the feast after his coronation, yet, Macbeth is unable to enjoy the crown, since the ghost of Banquo, whom he wanted to keep distant by hiring murderers to kill him, pays his visit and represents those nightmares Claudius never had with respect to his brother. Claudius does not see the Ghost of Old Hamlet, he is not tormented by conscience of guilt; yet he has his own private ghost: Hamlet, presenting him the performance of *The Mousetrap*, bringing the story of the (or a) murder to light. Macbeth, contrastingly, does not need another character to punish him: his demon is coming from himself, letting in the ghost of the victim.

Importantly enough, after the two central events of *The Mousetrap* and the Banquet-scene with Banquo's ghost, both rulers seek the guidance of transcendental powers: Claudius turns to heavenly forces in his prayer, while Macbeth visits demonic forces in the characters of the Weird Sisters. Claudius's soliloquy is hardly a prayer proper, since he establishes his inability of doing so, and expresses his lack of remorse. What he wants, rather, is to negotiate a position for himself so that after his death he would not burn in hell. The language of the speech is not indicative of a man tormented by his conscience but exhibits traces of business language. As opposed to Macbeth, who approaches his sin emotionally and aesthetically, I argue that Claudius discusses his deed rather rationally. Yet, the painful conclusion for him is that in the lack of repentance he would certainly commit the murder again and thus he is unable to transfer his earthly welfare to the realms of afterlife. Similarly to Hamlet in his "To be or not to be"-soliloquy, the Dane discusses the nature of afterlife but, as opposed to the Prince, who did so with the inventory of a philosopher and thus employed general terms, Claudius does so as a businessman, concentrating on specific matters. Macbeth, on the other hand, exhibits the vehemence of a soldier and does not choose the one-sided communication of a prayer but has a dialogue with the Weird Sisters, demanding immediate answers. What he wants is exactly what Claudius wishes to lose: lack of remorse. He knows he has sacrificed everything by murdering Duncan, therefore heaven is excluded in his view, so he turns to the demonic forces in a desperate need of gaining external orientation. Yet, it turns out he himself has to interpret the prophecies but he goes fatally wrong, causing his own downfall.

The endings of the respective tragedies are characteristic of their overall predicament: Claudius is defeated by Hamlet, another character in the play, while Macbeth's loss is generated by the wrong interpretations of the prophecies and his own sense of guilt, coming from the inside. There is nothing necessary in Claudius's fall, whereas Macbeth is already lost in the very moment he stabs the sleeping Duncan. Meta-dramatically, Claudius fights for stage-dominance and is beaten by Hamlet, while this stage-dominance for Macbeth is a

nightmarish burden he wants to get rid of but he cannot step off his encompassing stage, since even sleep is unavailable for him as a means of leaving the world, in which he is expected to act as a tragic character, behind. He becomes one with his role, never letting him escape.

In this last chapter, pre-performance criticism primarily functions not via actual theatrical elaborations of dramatic scenes but concentrates on character exploration, while it pays homage to its most immediate theoretical predecessor, the meta-theatrical reading of the plays. Meta-theatre explores the patterns hiding in the plays, which reflect on the very nature of the theatrical context these tragedies may function in, both on the Elizabethan stage, or in contemporary theatres. However, the preceding three chapters demonstrate how the actual reading method of *pre-performance* criticism functions, by translating the theoretical findings into stage metaphors, movements, costumes or scenery, by translating meaning into presence. I started the dissertation with the title: “We’ll hear a play tomorrow” (II; 2; 530) and through preparations, elaborations, and virtual rehearsals, we have hopefully arrived at the present tense of our dramatic presence: “There is a play tonight before the King” (III; 2; 68).