Walking Through Dark Night, Toward Tomorrow — *Macbeth Does a Ritual*

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Performance: Macbeth Does a Ritual (祭典‧馬克白) 10/26/2025 15:00

The “Shakespeare Solo Series,” (莎士比亞單人表演系列) previously directed by Wang Mo-Lin (王墨林) and performed by Cheng Yin-Chen (鄭尹眞) and Yang Chi-Yin (楊奇殷), tests how an actor can accommodate social critique in their own body, revealing the abstract shadows of power. It also proves how performance can still carry a concrete, abundant political language [1]. This year, the return of the series is marked by Baek Dae-Hyun’s (백대현) *Macbeth Does a Ritual*. It not only continues the trial to the actor, but raises a sharper question: compared to earlier works in the series, what new concerns and what new indictments of power does this performance bring forth?

Power has two figures: one arrogant and manic, the other calm and silent. We often separate these two faces, imagining that a ruler embodies only one of them—or that only one of them counts as the ruler. As though good and evil, male and female, tyranny and democracy must always stand in opposition, so as though Macbeth and Lady Macbeth must always be divided.

In the play, the shapeshifting witches whisper their prophecy: Macbeth shall be king. Onstage, Macbeth rises from a metal basin like a baptized child, rattling a pellet drum as he asks himself again and again whether the promise of kingship is truly meant for him: “I could be,” “I will be,” “I already am,” the more certain the prophecy becomes, the more terror grows inside him.

When this terror gnaws at his chest, Lady Macbeth takes over and narrates, which is her one and only appearance in the performance. We will wonder that are Macbeths a marriage of ambition, or two halves sharing the same body. However, what we do know is this: power wants its own bloodline to sustain, so as an usurped one. But here, with an icy finality, Lady Macbeth strikes a gong and declares, that children and tenderness must be erased. Power exists to preserve itself; its ultimate form of “preservation” is to cut down one’s own heirs, to end all inheritance, to make only itself the last generation to wield dominion. Extinction and immortality become privileges—whichever one arrives, it belongs only to the one who holds power.

Power collapses easily because ruin lies at its core. It must grind every rival into dust, and yet it marches arrogantly toward its own downfall. The one who holds power must stand outside all things, must provoke even the idea of existence. Baek walks this tightrope with remarkable precision, shifting tone and posture with ease, folding together opposites in a single body, challenging the absurd truth that power must exist by pretending not to exist. Through his sudden madness and sudden composure, we recognize the borderless territory that power creates—two faces, two moods, two silhouettes, all belonging to the same giant beast.

The weight of the crown makes Macbeth tremble long before it ever touches his head. Whether from ecstasy or dread, everything he sees becomes stained in bloody red; even his murmurs distill

into a single word, “Blood.” The instinct to kill pushes him to conquer and to harvest. The blood bursting forth from every rotting fruit is the implosion of desire inside his skull, and at the same time the slaughter of the countless lives beneath him. He seems to dissolve into the people, yet destroying the people becomes his substitute for destroying himself. In this delirium, power does not need to be seen to be everywhere, and eyelids become useless. Those who hold power, living beneath a sword of Damocles, forfeits the right to sleep.

But eyelids are also the border between reality and fiction. In an instant, the imagined palace vanishes. A shallow puddle transforms into a thirsty desert. Others have walked this path before—prophets, Palestinians’ exodus from Gaza, Gwangju people standing against the police on Geumnam-ro. The juxtaposition is puzzling, though—not only because Macbeth’s political satire and real-world violence collide, but because Gwangju and Palestine sit within vastly different historical and social-political structures, and yet the performance sets them side by side. Still, one cannot deny that both are landscapes of suffering. In these places, history and reality are both nightfall. Without the faint beam of a flashlight or the ripples on a puddle, the presence of the people would remain unseen, light enough to be erased by dust and wind.

After the coronation, Macbeth masks his face behind a torn gong dangled from the ceiling, stealing every tomorrow for himself. Baek reassures us, however: despair is not the ending. Performance may briefly turn illusion into truth, but theatre always carries an expiration. The crown is plastic, the gong is broken, and the most important, those in power cannot truly immortalize. At last, he sheds his performance and slips into a space that is neither performance nor reality. Stripped away all identities, then, he becoming the blank figure who walks on and on, the “actor” who continues the ritual simply by moving forward.

Both Yang Chi-Yin’s *A Prince, Hamlet* (王子‧哈姆雷特) and Cheng Yin-Chen’s *A Mother, King Lear* (母親‧李爾王) once brushed against this state of deterritorialization. But each crossed a different threshold, speaking to different subjects of power. Cheng walked through roles in *King Lear* one by one—the daughter, the king, and the absent mother—within a small square of tatami, gathering and releasing the women’s hidden history, finding the layered “selfs” across generations. Yang held on a steel cable dragged across a wasteland, wrestling gravity while forcing out a voice. The mad prince seemed moments away from falling from the world into hell; the relationships in *Hamlet* fell apart, exposing a moral inversion that critiqued the pride of resistance itself. In short: *A Mother, King Lear* summons the silenced; *Prince, Hamlet* questions the protestor; as to *Macbeth Does a Ritual*, points straight at the one who powers.

Western theatre traces its roots to the rituals honoring Dionysus. The “actor” who lays down both role and self, as reviewer Hsieh Chen-Yi (謝鎮逸) in another review writes, offers up their own body as sacrifice to withstand a loneliness akin to exile [2]. This “actor” becomes the offering on the stage, a flame clearing a path through the night. Yet their sacrifice is not decreed by the polis, nor ordained by a sovereign; it is an act carried by the blessings of the crew and audience alike, driven by his/her own conscience. Through the endure act of continuing to walk, continuing to

perform, he confronts the persistence of power. In the witness of all present, the long pilgrimage inside the black box, can eventually move toward a farther tomorrow.

[1] Chang, Zong-Kun, 2021/05/07, "*Annihilation and Reinvention of Political Critics: A Mother, King Lear and A Prince, Hamlet.*" (政治語言的湮滅與重鑄《母親．李爾王》、《王子‧哈姆雷特》)

[2] Hsieh, Chen-Yi, 2025/11/06, "*A Flesh-Bound Offering to Modern War: The Lonely Exile of Macbeth Does a Ritual.*" (以血肉獻祭的當代戰爭：《祭典．馬克白》單人表演的孤獨流放)