Trinity Repertory's Macbeth is flawed but powerful

By Chris Robege

Shakespeare's Macbeth is as entertaining as it is thrilling, forging a tight chain of greed, corruption, and ambition that binds its tragic hero to a fate from which he can not escape. Trinity Repertory Company's current production of the classic play delivers all of the horrors and delights present in the tale of the celebrated General's descent into murder and deception in his attempts to ascend to positions of power. The cast and crew of the Providence, R.I. theater company do suffer from some missteps, but a more inventive use of the stage would have created a greater impression. The lack of a concrete and definitive setting did focus attention on the actors and the themes they raised, but a more inventive use of the stage would have created a greater impression. The set design, by Eugene Lee, is extremely minimalist, consisting primarily of planks, staircases, and walkways resembling a construction site far from completion. The floor was constructed with several removable sections, which hid a large room used to set many of the play's morbid actions. The audience was cued by the use of a cross and lantern as one of the Sisters to watch for issues of gender and sexuality. In a scene late in the play, Malcolm (Ed Shea) discusses the ambiguity of a leader who may or may not possess with Macbeth in a very vague manner. While Malcolm lists "luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful," he repeatedly thrusts himself upon a nearby pole. But when he belonged to the Sisters, "justice, verity, temp'rance,- stableness," he muses himself with a small dagger between his legs. Malcolm manages to visually argue that Macbeth may not be making the most virtuous decisions, but he is gaining the most pleasure that he can from them.

By developing the links between gender, politics, and the tragic ambition of Macbeth, Richard Jenkins' production raises several interesting points. The setting and costume design do have their weaknesses, but the more apparent strengths make Trinity Repertory's Macbeth gripping entertainment.

In the lead roles, Timothy Crowe and Anne Scurria give gripping performances. Crowe's Macbeth begins a bit too happy and pleasant, and only after his murder abruptly becomes manic and hysterical. After this sudden change, Crowe's acting is filled with intensity and energy, but too often he channels this energy in questionable directions. By the play's end this Macbeth is less of a dangerous psychotic than he is an innocuous nut. As Lady Macbeth, Scurria inhabits the role fully, providing a character who could very believably manipulate her weaker-willed husband. Scurria's Lady Macbeth demands the audience's attention with great ferocity and sensuality.

The acting, set and costume design do not suggest any individual time or place. The presence of Scottish kilts and sweaters, guillotine, and medieval gowns defeats any attempts by the audience to ascribe the play's message to a specific setting and give Macbeth's themes the universality they require. Many of the costume choices simply refer vaguely to war and militarism, but one evokes a very specific association. As Banquo's murderers leap onto their victim, played very well by the black Pitts-Wiley, they wear Klan-like hoods. The very unsettling reference to the list "luxurious, avaricious,-false, deceitful," he repeatedly thrusts himself upon a nearby pole. But when he belonged to the Sisters, "justice, verity, temp'rance,- stableness," he muses himself with a small dagger between his legs. Malcolm manages to visually argue that Macbeth may not be making the most virtuous decisions, but he is gaining the most pleasure that he can from them.