Review of Shakespeare Survey 57: Macbeth and Its Afterlife

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As usual Shakespeare Survey presents an impressively wide-ranging collection of essays from international scholars focussing on a specific aspect of Shakespeare studies and here concentrating on Macbeth, both the text and the play in performance. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the latter dominates and there is a distinct international flavour to the volume with Ruth Morse’s "Monsieur Macbeth: From Jarry to Ionesco", Natasha Distiller’s "'The Zulu Macbeth: The Value of an 'African Shakespeare", and Ruru Li’s "'A drum, a drum -- Macbeth doth come': When Birnam Wood Moved to China”. Performance history is considered by Simon Williams ("Taking Macbeth out of Himself: Davenant, Garrick, Schiller and Verdi") and Paul Prescott (“Doing all That Becomes a Man: The Reception and Afterlife of the Macbeth Actor, 1744-1889”) and in one of the volume’s most absorbing pieces Deanne Williams gives a perceptive and thoroughly readable analysis of Roman Polanski’s under-rated film version of the play ("Mick Jagger Macbeth"). Although the volume’s theme is Macbeth the book also contains essays on Love’s Labour’s Lost and Henry IV Part I. E. A. J. Honigmann’s "Shakespeare, Sir Thomas More and Asylum Seekers" is a welcome contribution to the debate surrounding the play’s various hands and although his argument that the play was planned by Christopher Marlowe is not entirely convincing, Honigmann provides a sensitive and persuasive reading of Shakespeare’s contribution (known as ‘Hand D’), entirely demolishing Paul Werstine’s rejection of the attribution. The volume also provides an entertaining survey of Shakespeare performances in England during 2003 by Michael Dobson and a useful list of professional Shakespeare productions in Britain during 2002 by James Shaw. At £60 this book is by no means cheap but scholars will find it an invaluable source of reference and it should also prove of interest to intelligent theatre-goers.