



Lyric

Othello

Education Pack

Written by William Shakespeare
Directed by Jude Christian

This play is an adaptation by Jude Christian of *Othello* and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare and was directed by Jude Christian. It premiered at the Lyric on 04 October 2018.

This Education Pack aims to support teachers in exploring both *Othello* and *Macbeth* before and after the performance, giving practical and written responses to the show. It is set out with three main components DIRECTORS, PERFORMERS and DESIGNERS; the aim is to give specific information for students studying GCSE Drama or A Level Drama and Theatre Studies in response to ‘Live Theatre Review’* but also as a tool to enhance learning of different elements of Theatre and exploration of contemporary adaptations of classical texts.

Written by Marilyn Rice, Producer of Education

**This is in line with Edexcel, AQA, WJEC Eduqas and OCR examination boards*

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Samuel Collings
Iago/Macduff

Caroline Faber
Lady Macbeth

Ery Nzaramba
Othello/Banquo



Kezrena James
Bianca

Grace Cookey-Gam
Lady Macbeth

Paul Courtenay Hyu
Brabantio/Duncan



Kirsten Foster
Desdemona

Sandy Grierson
Cassio/Macbeth

Melissa Johns
Emilia

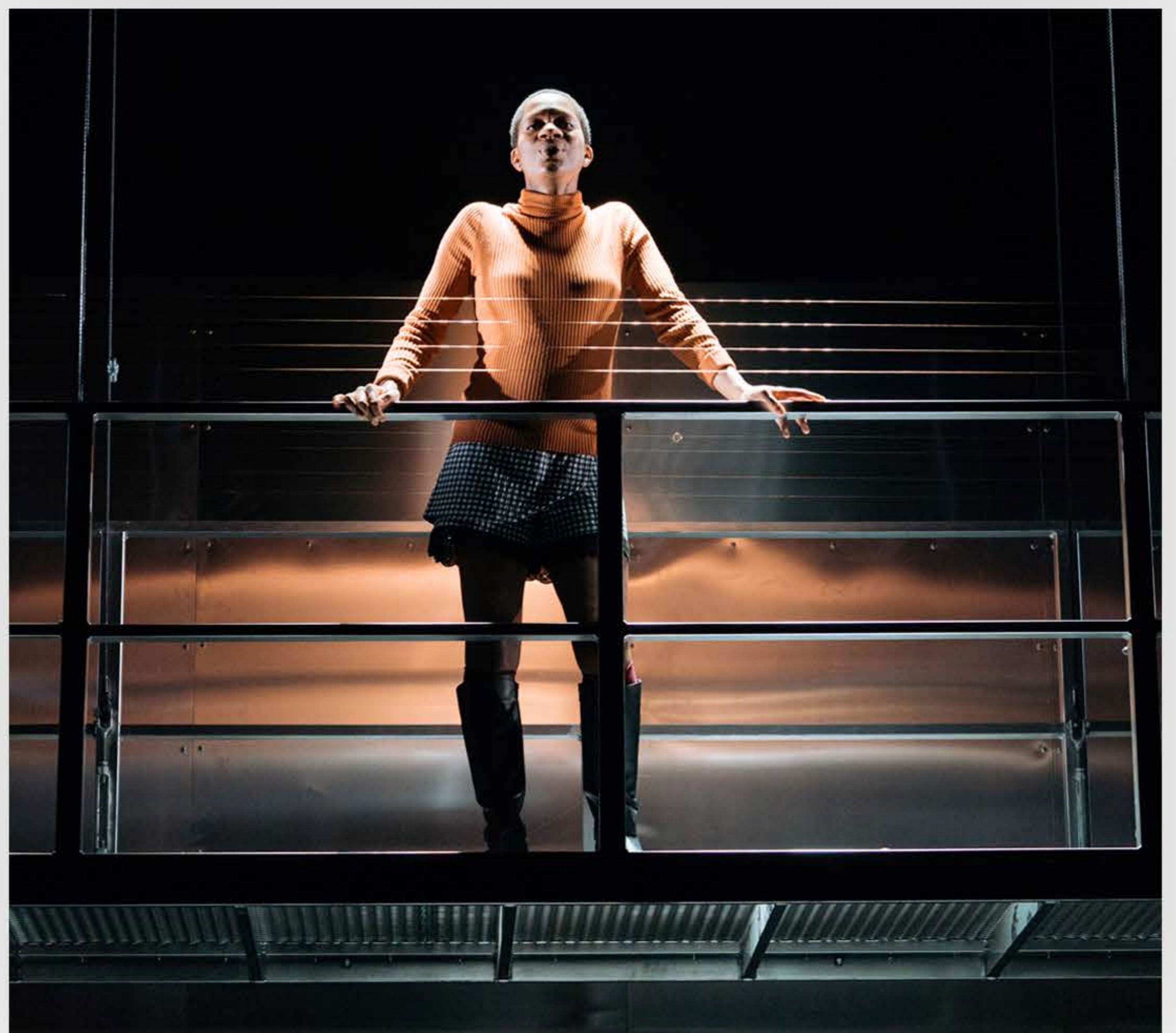
Creatives:

Written by: William Shakespeare | Adaption by: Jude Christian | Directed by: Jude Christian |
Design by: Basia Bińkowska | Lighting by: Joshua Pharo | Sound by: Nick Gill |
Casting by: Annelie Powell CDG

Starting Points

othellomacbeth is the condensed staging of two of Shakespeare's most brutal and poetic plays, exploring fear, jealousy, power and revenge. Two stories in which powerful men are manipulated into destroying their societies, their households, their loved ones and themselves.

In this dynamic and visceral production, these two iconic plays will be performed together by one exciting company of actors, examining escalating cycles of violence; abuses of power and the role and nature of the "tragic hero".



A contemporary approach to Shakespeare

Shakespeare was and remains an iconic and influential playwright; his work transcended class and position and held a mirror up to the social ecology of the time. Through his portrayal of women, we saw how they could indeed be powerless and male dominance ensued. In roles such as Lady Macbeth, he challenged this archetype and we saw how the influence of a woman could impact a country. These two plays highlight both ends of women from the subservient to the dominant. By combining both texts, we allow a contemporary audience to follow not just the tradition storyline of both plays but to witness and explore the role of the female characters throughout. Although the language remains true to the original the casting sees Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca become the witches within *Macbeth*.

As an audience, we then consider whether these characters gain an opportunity within *Macbeth* to seek revenge and operate from a position of power that influence *Macbeth* and changes the course of the play.

Who is who?

Both of these original plays have an extensive character list, in this production we concentrate on the main characters and see Desdemona, Bianca and Emilia take on a role within Macbeth. Below is a breakdown of all the characters

OTHELLO

OTHELLO: An army general often referred to as 'the moor'. He is well respected but known for his hot headedness and short temper.

DESDEMONA: Daughter of Venetian senator Brabantio. She secretly marries Othello without her father's permission. She is deeply in love with Othello and always remains honest and true despite Iago's accusations.

IAGO: He is envious of Othello and after not receiving a promotion, he seeks revenge on Othello. Iago goes to great lengths to advocate Othello's demise with no thought to who suffers along the way including his wife Emilia.

LUDOVICO: A messenger between Venice and Cyprus.

CASSIO: Othello's lieutenant. A young soldier, whose high position is resented by Iago. Devoted to Othello, Cassio is ashamed after being implicated in a drunken brawl in Cyprus and losing his role as lieutenant and employs Desdemona as his spokesperson to convince Othello to reinstate him.

EMILIA: Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant. She is devoted to Desdemona but also serves Iago by giving him Desdemona's handkerchief

BIANCA: A prostitute in Cyprus. Her favourite customer is Cassio who teases her with promises of marriage.

BRABANZIO: Desdemona's father. He is a Venetian senator who initially does not approve of his daughter marrying Othello.

MACBETH

MACBETH: Scottish general who is enticed by the prophecies of the three witches. His wife leads him into killing in order to gain his status as King.

LADY MACBETH: Macbeth's wife. A deeply ambitious woman who yearns for a powerful position. Ruthless and strong at the beginning of the play but as the bloodshed begins, she falls victim to guilt and is driven to madness and she eventually commits suicide.

THE THREE WITCHES: Three witches who plot mischief against Macbeth using charms, spells and prophecies. Their identity never becomes clear, aside that they are servants of Hecate.

BANQUO: A brave general. The witches predict that his children will inherit the Scottish throne. He represents the path Macbeth chose not to take- a path that does not lead to betrayal and murder. His ghost haunts Macbeth.

DUNCAN: King of Scotland who is murdered by Macbeth.

MACDUFF: A Scottish nobleman hostile to Macbeth's kinship from the start. He becomes leader of the crusade to unseat Macbeth. He desires vengeance for murder of his wife and young son.

LENNOX: Traditionally a male but played by a female in this version. They are a **thane** (chief of a clan and land holder) who attends the King.

Othello: Plot Summary

In the beginning of the play, we learn that Desdemona has married Othello, an African general. Iago is disgruntled that Cassio has been promoted to lieutenant and not himself. He goes to Brabantio, Desdemona's father and tells him of their wedding news. Iago flees the scene as Othello is accused of stealing Brabantio's daughter. Othello has been summoned by the Duke where Brabantio also follows to consult him on the matter. Othello is given the chance to speak, explains that Desdemona chose to marry him, and is indeed in love with him, Desdemona herself then reiterates this. The Duke orders Othello to Cyprus and Desdemona insists on going with him.

Iago who has been counselling Roderigo into how to woo Desdemona and explains how he should get Cassio drunk and provoke a fight. In a fit of drunken rage, Cassio chases Roderigo but is stopped by Governor Montano and stabs him. As the alarm is rung, Othello is called to the scene, preventing him from consummating his marriage. Much to Iago's delight Cassio is stripped of his title. Cassio asks Desdemona to help him seek Othello's forgiveness. As Cassio leaves the scene Othello appears and asks Iago if that was Cassio, Iago starts to plant the seed that Desdemona is being unfaithful with Cassio - otherwise why would he flee that place?



Othello: Plot Summary

Desdemona tries to persuade Othello to reinstate Cassio but this causes even more suspicion. She then drops her handkerchief on the way to dinner and Emilia picks it up, remembering that Iago has wanted her to steal it. Iago plants the handkerchief in Cassio's room and lets Othello know that he has seen Cassio with the handkerchief that Othello had given to her. Othello asks Desdemona to see the handkerchief that evening and she explains that she does not have it but asks again about Cassio that enrages Othello further. An angry Bianca then greets Cassio; in a bid to placate her, he tries to give Bianca the handkerchief.

Othello becomes consumed by jealousy which is fueled further as Iago asks Othello to overhear a conversation between himself and Cassio discussing Desdemona (although really they are discussing Bianca)

That night Othello accuses Desdemona of being a whore and instructs her to stay in her room and dismiss Emilia. Iago explains to Roderigo that he must kill Cassio (Othello wishes Iago to carry out the killing but Iago passes it on) but that fails and Cassio instead ends up wounding Roderigo.

Othello attempts to kill Desdemona despite her plea of innocence. Emilia enters and announces that Roderigo is dead. Othello asks if Cassio is dead but is devastated to hear that, he is not. As Desdemona is crying out that she is being murdered she changes her story to say she has committed suicide as one final act of love for Othello. When questioned Othello reveals that it was he who killed her due to her infidelities.

As Iago enters, he attempts to silence Emilia who realises what Iago has done but she stands up to him and tells the truth. Iago kills Emilia and attempts to run away but is caught. The wounded Cassio is brought in and Othello realises Desdemona's innocence. He is told that he must be tried in Venice but instead kills himself. Iago is ordered to be executed.

Macbeth: Plot Summary

The play begins with Macbeth being confronted by three witches who tell him of his fate. Macbeth and Banquo make their way to the King, for defeating two armies he rewards them and makes Macbeth 'Thane of Cawdor' and the witches prophecy starts to come true.

Macbeth is intrigued by the possibility that the remainder of the witches' prophecy - that he will be crowned king might be true. He arranges for the King to dine at his castle that night and writes to tell his wife.

Lady Macbeth desires her husband to become King and decides that Macbeth should murder Duncan. When Macbeth arrives, she convinces him of her plan; they will get the two officers who guard the King drunk so they black out, the next morning they will frame them for the murder. Macbeth carries out the murder on the King and when Duncan is found the next morning Macbeth then kills the two guards, this is to show to the castle his false rage at the killing of the king.



Macbeth: Plot Summary

Duncan's sons escape to England and Ireland in fear that they will be the next target. Fearful of the witches' prophecy that Banquo's heirs will seize the throne, Macbeth hires a group of murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance.

They are unsuccessful in killing his son and he escapes that night. Macbeth rages knowing that with Fleance alive he will not be able to fulfil the prophecy. That night Banquo's ghost visits him, he is visibly shaken and his guests witness this.

Macbeth revisits the witches and they tell him he must beware of Macduff who is incapable of being harmed by any man 'born of woman' and he will be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth is not fearful, as he knows that all men are born of women and that forests cannot move. Macduff flees to England and Macbeth orders that Macduff's castle be seized and that Lady Macduff and her children be murdered.

On hearing, the news of his family Macduff joins Duncan's son and they invade Scotland. Lady Macbeth has become unstable and unwell as she talks of the blood on her hands; her insanity leads her to eventually kill herself.

Macbeth prepares for the invasion in Dunsinane. He then learns that the army advance with boughs cut from Birnam Wood and thus the prophecy will be fulfilled. On the battlefield, Macbeth meets Macduff, who declares that he was not "of woman born" but was instead "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb (delivered by cesarean section). Macduff kills and beheads him Macbeth. Malcolm, now the King of Scotland, declares intentions for the country and invites all to see him crowned at Scone.

Themes and Symbols

Dominance versus submissive

Othello explores a male dominance as is shown through Othello's relationship with Desdemona; the female characters have little or no power throughout the play. They are not only submissive in their relationships but in their roles where we see females as wives, servants or prostitutes. There is a shift in *Macbeth*; the witches' prophecies define the trajectory of the play. We see Lady Macbeth as an influencer and ambitious and she convinces her husband to kill the King. Although she demonstrates power and dominance over her husband, it is still the male character that is central and carries out the actions.

Mental Health

Othello enters a state of psychosis through his rage and jealousy of Desdemona's suspected affair with Cassio. We see once the seed is planted regarding Desdemona's infidelities he is continually anxious and suspicious, it affects his manner and ability to make rational decisions. This is also mirrored by that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth whose actions haunt them, to such an extent for Lady Macbeth that she commits suicide. Both plays show individuals that are in their own heads, they do not express themselves or share these feelings but internalise them to an extent that it takes their lives.

Discussion points

The play centralises around the idea of 'status' and 'power', how relevant are these themes today and where are those prevalent in society?

How do you think women are portrayed throughout the play?

Is this still how women are portrayed today - has anything changed?

Power is a main theme within the play. Who do you think is the most powerful character?

Does it change during the play?

Try this...

One-minute story

As a group go through each story with your students (you may do this as a version of 'whoosh') they can also be given the brief plot overviews. In two groups give one *Othello* and one *Macbeth* they must decide what are the key facts and come up with a one minute version of the story to show back. You may want them to list key five main facts of the story if they need more guidance. They can then present back and students to feedback on whether they have remembered all of the key elements.

Outcome: Students gain a basic overview of the plot of both plays and have an understanding of key moments in each.

Exploring characters

In pairs ask your students to choose a character from either play to focus upon (you may also want to give them specific ones), draw an outline of a gingerbread man on a large piece of paper. Ask the students to contribute words and phrases that help describe the characters physical appearance, personality and role within the story. Get the pairs to join up with another pair and then asks each other more questions provoking answers to write, creating an in-depth character profile. They can then present these back, as this production challenges the stereotype make sure they consider fully rounded versions e.g. Desdemona not just being weak but maybe having strength as she defied her father and married Othello.

Outcome: students gain a deeper knowledge on key characters within the plays and they interrelate.

The Chair of Power

Place a chair in the middle of the room and ask the students to form an audience in front of it. Ask a volunteer to place themselves on/around/next to the chair; however, they choose in a freeze frame. Then ask a second volunteer to come in and freeze in a position of higher power. Take it in turns to tap the volunteers out of the frame, always making sure the person entering the space holds the highest power. You then start to discuss who these characters may be and what the freeze frame could represent. After you have tried just having two actors in the space try having three positions of power and one with lower status, this can then explore the sense of the three witches and the power of the female collective within *Macbeth*.

Outcome: students start to explore how through proxemics and physicality we can communicate status between characters

Extension: Ask your students to create three freeze frames that track the relationships of Othello and Desdemona and Lady Macbeth and Macbeth through the play. Does the power shift within the plays?

Directors Interpretation

Jude Christian talks about her vision and process for *othellomacbeth*



Shakespeare was a master at taking pre-existing stories (both true and fiction) and retelling them for the audience of his day. And theatre as an art form demands that we do likewise – a theatre production is not historical re-enactment; when we stage a historical text we work out how to give an audience an insight into the world for which was written, as well as allowing them to connect with the ideas, images and experiences which feel as relevant and true now as they did then.

Shakespeare was writing in a society dominated by white men. His characters might question or even bemoan the status quo, but the majority of words spoken in his plays are spoken by men. Women are transacted, silenced, punished, judged, or killed. They seldom appear without a husband or love interest; they seldom have a job.

We want to tell the stories of *Othello* and *Macbeth* for the audience of our time. A time in which the story of Othello, a man revered for his powerful physical prowess who murders his wife Desdemona in a fit of toxic masculine rage, feels potently reminiscent of the murders of Nicole Simpson Brown and Reeva Steenkamp, or of the statement given by the unnamed victim of Brock Turner, where she describes reading about her rape in an article which also listed his swimming times.

In a moment where multiple professions, including theatre, are finally acknowledging the widespread, endemic, systematic and violent sexual abuse and abuses of power perpetrated by mostly men at the present moment and stretching far back into the past, it feels vital to examine and confront longstanding cultural monoliths, and the way they are presented. By making Emilia, Desdemona and Bianca the witches in *Macbeth*, we are able to present the stories and ideas of both plays with their full depth, force, and poetry, while also asking an audience to question the gender politics at play. By weaving the plays together, and putting well-known words in the mouths of unexpected characters, we are celebrating the greatness of Shakespeare's artistic legacy without unquestioningly reliving the societal values of several centuries ago.

The process of making *othellomacbeth* has been a collaborative one. Despite the large cast, all the actors have a say in how the play works. With this production, the concept we have been exploring is how much text is given to female characters. In this adaptation, men and women have equal speaking parts, and there is a focus on the beauty of Shakespeare's poetry in both of these plays.

Performers

In this production, we see the characters of Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca taking on the roles of the witches. We know that in the original text both Desdemona and Emilia are killed but yet in this production, they resurface and their voice is heard through the guise of the witches.



Try this...

Female shifts in power

Ask your students in groups of threes to create a short scene playing Desdemona, Bianca and Emilia - this should comprise of what they think their grievances would be. The scene should convey how they feel about themselves and how the male characters perceive them. It should be set as if this is half way through the play. Ask the students to perform these back, discuss what are the overarching issues that these characters have raised. In the same groups ask them to now create a scene as the three witches at the beginning of *Macbeth*; they must consider, what do the witches want? Revenge, justice or power? They can then perform these scenes back, discuss the transition and difference in their states of mind as the play has progressed.*

Outcome:

Students start to explore the role of the female and how it progresses and changes from *Othello* into *Macbeth*

**Please note that the supporting online workshop and resource pack contains a full workshop plan exploring the role of gender in this production.*

Design Elements

Set design by Basia Bińkowska

Basia Binkowska, winner of the 2017 Linbury Prize, the UK's most prestigious award for stage design, and nominated for best designer at The Stage Debut Awards has designed the set for *Othello* and *Macbeth*. As a starting point Basia defined what the play was about; human condition, the power of the patriarchy, and how the men kill the most important women in their lives.



The challenge of designing the set is that it not only combines both plays but also needs to be a set that can work in both HOME, Manchester and at the Lyric Hammersmith.

These theatres have very different dimensions so the set needs to change slightly. At HOME, you have these two massive theatre towers on either side of the stage, but at the Lyric, the set needs to sit within the 19th-century proscenium, so the design works slightly differently.

Othello's stage feels stuffy, claustrophobic even, but the staging for *Macbeth*, in the second half, is much more open. *Othello*'s set is the oven, because the tension is extremely high and suffocating, and *Macbeth* is the freezer. It should transfer you to a chilling place where conditions are inhumane. To counterbalance the complexity of the play, the set creates a simple space, relatively prop-free, and one stark enough to complement the bleak narrative of both stories.

These plays are essentially about femicide and in the rehearsal room; they have drawn influences from OJ Simpson, Oscar Pistorius – contemporary men who have been accused of killing their partners.

When audience members enter the auditorium, the first thing they see is a huge metal wall. The actors have around two meters' depth of space at the front of the piece of staging – it has designed to be extremely shallow and claustrophobic. The audience is also slightly reflected in the sheet of aluminum at the front of the stage.

Design Elements

Sound Design by Nick Gill

The texture and sound of materials are also extremely important, each time the actors hit the metal wall, and an enhanced pre-recorded sound is heard. The set is very much part of the sound. The metal bridge that runs across the top of the stage is attached to a long string instrument.

The boundaries between sound and music were never more blurred than in the design of this production: musical instruments make unmusical sounds, musical sounds are made from recordings of windswept mountains, drums are made by hitting bones with lump hammers, and an instrument spanning the width of the stage screeches and wails as a way of influencing the characters.

Jude Christian had a very strong central conceit and an existing set design, and the role of sound was to support and clarify those ideas. The world should resist becoming musical: even the most musical moments are underscored by atonal sounds.

The Long String Instrument (built into the bridge and played by the witches) is a much more overt means of influencing *Macbeth*: the instrument is, in effect, the witches' cauldron. It's the means by which they weave their spells, and bring about their revenge on the male characters from the first half.



Design Elements

Transitions between scenes were also treated quite differently - *Othello* has quick, almost filmic cuts between scenes in both lighting and sound, reflecting the passage of time between scenes and the act of cutting text from the script. *Macbeth* has a much more blurred, gradual feel to the changes of time and location, feeling more like something supernatural happening onstage. The sound world of *Macbeth* is much more present than that of *Othello*.

The two plays are tied together while highlighting their differences; one method was to change the quality of the constant sound that runs throughout the production. *Othello* has five distinct sound locations (though the physical set remains constant), which were made by mixing field recordings from different, real places - this means that each has a realistic (though actually unreal and impossible) atmosphere. *Macbeth*, on the other hand, has an electronic, almost musical atmosphere throughout, made by processing the field recordings used in the first half.

Try this...

Sampling Sound

Here are some sound samplers from the show, play these for your students after they have seen they play and ask them in small groups to work out which sound is from which play and justify these choices

- 1- 0:00 - 0:36 Coronation theme (*Macbeth*)
- 2- 0:36 - 1:25 Location 5 atmosphere (*Othello*)
- 3- 1:25 - 1:55 Atmosphere (*Macbeth*)
- 4- 1:55 - 2:00 Scene transition (*Othello*)

Click here to play:

Ask them then to come up with two different samples for each play and present back, they must again justify these within the context of each play and the themes they are trying to communicate.

Objective: Students begin to use sound to support a given theme or concept around the two texts.

Design Elements

Costume Design by Basia Bińkowska

The costumes in the show are mostly contemporary and simplistic, this is firstly because they need to convey both plays and because the emphasis is on the set and sounds to depict the themes and tone of each play.

With Emilia, Bianca and Desdemona we see them keeping their same costume form *Othello* into *Macbeth* with the addition of a military jacket. This moment on stage initiates, the forming of the witches but so that the audience still responds that these are the former characters seeking revenge.

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth appears in a bright blue dress, when she first appears briefly in *Othello* this colour allows her to stand out from the other characters and mutes their power and presence. The original dress was high necked and lace but this was felt that it does not fit in with the contemporary style and was then modernised.



Design Elements

The only time that it deviates from a contemporary perspective is when we see Macbeth and Macduff dressed in armour. This sword fight is performed in period costume using the breast and back plate, this 'metal clashing with metal' enhances and supports the sounds and atmosphere of *Macbeth*.



Cassio/Macbeth

The actor plays both roles but does not change his costume, the shift is depicted by the set and moment of staging that implies the transition into Macbeth. Although the original costume ideas saw the actor wearing a full suit this was changed to a t-shirt so it did not imply a superior ranking to Othello.



Design Elements

Lighting Design by Josh Pharo

The lighting for *othellomacbeth* is working with the idea that the space is an industrial space that plays with harsh materials such as bare metal and gloss black. For *Othello* we experience the tension build and drop between Othello and Desdemona, through reflected light in sheet metal - creating a heightened harsh light in the background of the performers.

For *Macbeth* the space takes on depth, with a grid of strip lights. A layer of light, as if its natural light piercing into the roof- is used to communicate the world of the witches / female energy - that eventually combines to create a very stark bright light for the final fight to take place between the male characters.

Try this...

Creating a Set

The biggest challenge for *othellomacbeth* is combining both plays. In small groups ask your students to come up with ideas of how they would combine TWO sets into one production; they will need to decide on:

- An overall vision/concept for the play (if this is too broad they can work with the theme explore in this production of male power and the role of females)
- Is it set in a time specific period or is it a symbolic or thematic interpretation?
- What type of staging will it use and how does this enhance their concept?

Once they have a clear ideas they can produce either drawings or 3D model boxes that demonstrate these ideas. Students in their group would present back their concepts and answer questions from their class.

Outcome: Explores their understanding of both plays and developing key design elements in creating a show. They should be encouraged to use a theatrical vocabulary when describing and referring to each point.



The Lyric is pleased to offer a variety of packages and ticket offers for schools and colleges across London.

TICKETS

We offer tickets at £15 per student with one free teacher ticket for every ten students for main house shows*. For more information please call the Box Office on **020 8741 6850** or email **schools@lyric.co.uk**

*Subject to availability

BACKSTAGE TOURS

Our backstage tour offers a unique insight into the workings of one London's leading producing theatres. Tours offer the opportunity to explore non-performance routes into Theatre and gain a deeper understanding of all of the backstage roles. These are tailored to the age, study requirements and the interests of your students.

WORKSHOPS

We offer workshops around our main house programme to enhance your students' knowledge and understanding of the show. We also deliver bespoke workshops around Theatre styles, techniques and practitioners.

These are all delivered by our Lyric directors and creatives. For Primary Schools we offer curriculum based workshops and enrichment days at Key Stage 1 & 2.

TEACHER SUPPORT

Every main house show is accompanied by an Education pack which is available online before your visit. Join our Teachers' Network to receive emails about CPD workshops, teacher networking events and special offers for your students.

SEND SCHOOLS

We are committed to ensuring the Lyric is accessible for all young people. Our facilities include a state of the art sensory space, fully accessible building and relaxed performances to accommodate all students' needs.

For any more information or to book any of the above please contact **marilyn.rice@lyric.co.uk**

Young Lyric

Young Lyric is the home for all young people here at the Lyric. We are committed to working with exciting artists and young people to create innovative and exceptional performances and projects. Over the past decade the Lyric has established a national and international reputation for its work with children and young people.

We are profoundly committed to giving young people from all backgrounds access to the arts in order to develop their creative, social, personal and economic potential. In particular we recognise the power of bringing young people into the Lyric to create work in a professional theatre alongside professional artists.

Young Lyric encompasses all of our projects and activities, including classes, performance opportunities, apprenticeships, work experience, supporting emerging artists, schools activity and targeted work supporting vulnerable young people.

[Click here to find out more.](#)

