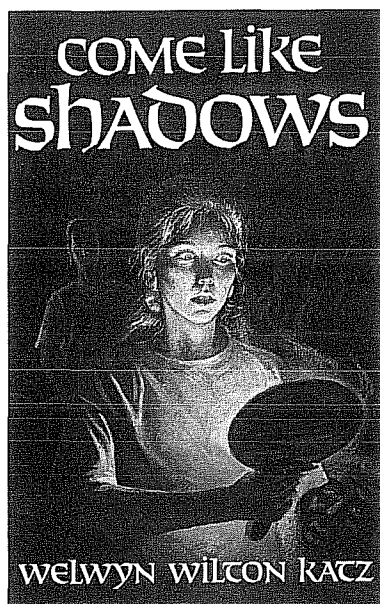


## WILL THE REAL MACBETH PLEASE STEP FORTH?

**Come Like Shadows.** Welwyn Wilton Katz. Penguin Books Canada, 1993. 289 pp., \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-84861-1.



This is a truly remarkable book. Katz's novel examines the many faces of Macbeth over a 900-year period: she presents the historical Scottish king who ruled well for ten years only to be defeated by the English in 1057; she offers reasons (accurate with one exception) for Shakespeare's characterization of him as murderer and tyrant; she creates two protagonists who are intimately involved in a modern Stratford, Ontario production of *Macbeth* which reinterprets and stages the play as a commentary on Quebec/English Canada politics. The novel is an exciting read and accessible to young adults on its own, but it could equally well serve educators as a vehicle for introducing students to the differences between fiction and fact, about the ways in which "facts" are interpreted for political or personal purposes, for illustration of how older literature can reveal truths about the present, for discussions of contemporary and non-traditional productions of the classic plays, even for consideration of what is involved in learning to act a role or direct a performance.

The title quotes the apparition scene in *Macbeth* (IV,1,111) as the Witches conjure visions of eight of Banquo's descendents, the last with a mirror revealing yet more shadowy successors. In Katz' fiction, the originals of Shakespeare's Witches actually existed in Macbeth's time and are responsible both for Shakespeare's view of Macbeth and for the inexplicable misfortunes and accidents which have plagued productions of the play through the ages. Katz's witches' coven consisted of Maiden, Mother, and Hag; because they worshipped and preserved memories of their "Goddess" they were rewarded with near—but *conditional*—immortality (Anne Rice's vampires take note!): each lived hundreds of years, but eventually the eldest (aided by her Sisters) was forced to seduce a young girl into permitting her body to be inhabited by her soul. The exchange of the novel was to take place in a sacred Stone Circle in Scotland; Hag and girl, after reciting the appropriate incantation three times, are to be projected *into* a mirror, their souls exchanged: the girl's soul is then to remain in the mirror while the Hag's emerges in her body. Katz' Macbeth, however, interrupts the ceremony. He had

been tempted by the Witches throughout his career, but he always rejected them. Finally, in hiding and knowing he will be captured the following morning, Macbeth seeks the witches, not for himself, but to prevent the English domination of his country. The witches ignore him, however, because they are in the process of tricking a young girl into permitting the Hag to inhabit her body. Macbeth realizes what they are doing and, to save the child, enters the mirror with the Hag himself. In doing so, he changes the incantation's word "past" to "future": he saves the child, but is trapped in the mirror with the vindictive Hag. The mirror, with them trapped within, disappears into the future; it has the power, however, to attract the Hag's sister witches, and they search for it over the next few hundred years.

The mirror first resurfaces in Renaissance England where the Hag emerges to discover Shakespeare writing his *Macbeth* truthfully: his central character has no faults. The vindictive Hag annotates his *Holinshed* so as to inspire him to depict Macbeth as the murderous tyrant we know; she also gives him an actual incantation to use to attract her sisters to performances of the play. She and the real Macbeth remain imprisoned in the mirror until it makes its way (by chance? by its inherent powers?) into a present day Stratford (Ontario) production of the play.

And here our young protagonists enter the picture. Sixteen-year-old Kinny (an apprentice assisting at rehearsals) purchases the mirror for use as a prop and is shocked to see the witches and the young girl they are tempting in it; she is later tempted by it and apparently granted unasked-for wishes. Twenty-year-old Lucas, by contrast, sees only the actual Macbeth in it, and learns the truth of his character from it. The two realize that somehow the mirror is connected with the disasters which overtake the production—two deaths and a fire—before the climax of the novel in Scotland (the production goes on tour) in the Goddess Circle where it all began 900-odd years earlier.

Katz has, however, created protagonists infinitely more three-dimensional and thematically relevant both to the Macbeth story and to contemporary Canadian politics than my outline of the fantasy plot suggests. Kinny is an English Montrealer who believes that Quebec is justified in its desire to preserve culture no matter at what cost to the nation at a whole. Lucas is from a French Canadian family which migrated to the U.S. before his birth; although he speaks only English and has tried to deny his heritage, he is discriminated against in America. The play's director was formerly a highly-acclaimed actress who has been denied work and grants in Quebec because she was English-speaking; in retaliation, her production of *Macbeth* is set in pre-Confederation Quebec with the villain Macbeth dressed as a foppish Montcalm and Malcolm as General Wolfe. Overriding the entire novel are explicit and implied parallels and contrasts between Macbeth's Scotland (which lost its independence because of his defeat) and Canada.

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