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CRITIC'S CHOICE

Review: Antaeus' 'Macbeth' reframes a tragedy



Macbeth (Rob Nagle) and Lady Macbeth (Tessa Auberjonois) bury a child in a scene added to Shakespeare's "Macbeth" by director Jessica Kubzansky for the Antaeus Company's double-cast production. (Daniel G. Lam)

By Margaret Gray

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Meet the Macbeths, a charming, upwardly mobile couple grieving over the death of their only child.

Director Jessica Kubzansky's interpretation of Shakespeare's "Macbeth," currently on view in a satisfyingly foggy, bloody production by the Antaeus Company, opens with a funeral. Macbeth (Rob

Nagle in the performance I saw; all the roles are double-cast) and his wife (Tessa Auberjonois) place a tiny shrouded body in a coffin, wordlessly but movingly communicating the couple's grief and mutual love.

Of course a tragedy like that could devastate a marriage. Could it also account for regicide? The tendency to kill friends, then see their corpses at banquets? Compulsive handwashing while sleepwalking?

If Shakespeare intended us to know the story of Macbeth Jr., he was coy about it: Lady Macbeth mentions having "given suck" to a "babe"; Macbeth seethes over the prophecy that Banquo's heirs, rather than his own, will inherit the throne. Scholars puzzle over whether, or why, he has no children.

Kubzansky's bold answer, while not explaining all of the infamous couple's behavior (could anything? -- even Freud threw up his hands), casts them in a surprisingly sympathetic light. In fact, when the weird sisters (Lorna Raver, Jane Carr and Saundra McClain in a daffy "Golden Girls"-esque turn) start plotting to mess with Macbeth's head right after the funeral, it seems in terrible taste even for witches.

But Kubzansky's imposed conceit never really interferes with her clear, vigorous telling of the story. Tom Buderwitz's set establishes a hazy supernatural mood; Jessica Olson's costumes, which could be Catholic schoolgirl uniforms designed by punk rockers, add cerebral flair.

Having enjoyed Nagle (one of Antaeus' new artistic directors) in his camp work with the Troubadour Theater Company, I half-expected him to put on a powdered wig and dance, but eventually his tragic persona convinced me.

From her first appearance, Auberjonois makes a riveting, disconcertingly sympathetic Lady Macbeth. And Shakespeare's capacious, enigmatic tragedy remains thrilling.

"Macbeth," the Antaeus Company, 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood. 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays. Ends Aug. 26. \$30 and \$34. (818) 506-1983 or www.Antaeus.org. Running time: 2 hours, 45 minutes.