

## Geneva Bible Marginal Notes in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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Reference is made to the place where Jesus was crucified early in *Macbeth*: “Or memorize another Golgotha” (1.2.40). A closer look at the Gospels suggests that Shakespeare may have borrowed language from the 1599 Geneva Bible marginal notes, particularly from those commenting on the last days of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Consider the following quotes from Malcolm and Ross: “Let’s make us medicines of our great revenge / ***To cure this deadly grief***” (4.3.215-216) and “***’Gainst nature*** still” (2.4.27). (Every bolded emphasis is mine). Shortly before his arrest, Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane to pray: “Then went Jesus with them into a place which is called Gethsemane, and said unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go, and pray yonder. And he took unto him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to wax sorrowful, and grievously troubled. Then said Jesus unto them, My soul is very heavy, *even* unto the death: tarry ye here, and watch with me” (Matthew 26: 36-38). The Geneva Bible marginal note from Matthew 26:37 reads: “The word which he useth, signifieth great sorrow, and marvelous and ***deadly grief***: which thing, as it betokeneth the truth of man’s nature, which shunneth death as a thing that entered in ***against nature***, so it showeth that though Christ were void of sin, yet he

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<sup>1</sup> For other biblical allusions in Shakespeare’s plays see “Echoes of John the Baptist in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” (November 2014), “Further Biblical Allusions to John the Baptist in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” (June 2015), and “Allusions to the Passion of Christ in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*” (November 2015) of this journal.

sustained this horrible punishment, because he felt the wrath of God kindled against us for sins, which he revenged and punished in his person.” Also, Lady Macbeth says: “Go get some water / *And wash this filthy witness from your hand*” (2.2.44-45). This recalls the Last Supper passage where Jesus washes his disciples’ feet: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, forasmuch as he loved his own which were in the world, unto the end he loved them” (John 13:1). The marginal note records: “Christ no less certain of the victory, than of the combat which was at hand, using the sign of washing the feet, doth partly thereby give an example of singular modesty, and his great love toward his Apostles in this notable act, being like very shortly to depart from them: *and partly witnesseth unto them, that it is he only which washeth away the filth of his people,* and that by little and little, in their time and season.” These references are not included in Naseeb Shaheen’s *Biblical References in Shakespeare’s Plays*.

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### Works Cited

1599 Geneva Bible. Bible Gateway. biblegateway.com

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