

by John J. Miller

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The real reason for my visit to Staunton yesterday was to see a play at the American Shakespeare Center. Washington, D.C. is home to some of the best Shakespeare in the world, but my favorite company is based in the improbable location of little Staunton, which isn't near much of anything but is home to the Blackfriars Playhouse, a reproduction of an indoor theater that Shakespeare himself would have recognized.

I took my 13-year-old son to see *Macbeth*. School has exposed him to a little bit of Shakespeare, but he hadn't seen a full production by professionals. Also, *Macbeth* is the perfect first play for boys: The story is easy to follow, it's short, and it's really violent. *Macbeth* and Lady *Macbeth* have a thing for each other, but this is no star-crossed-lovers nonsense. That's for girls. If you want boys to like Shakespeare, skip the teen romance and bring on the witches, swords, and gore.

To my delight, this production featured one of the most creative textual adaptations I've ever seen on stage. I'm not going to spoil it, except to say that it occurs in Act 4, Scene 2—the one in which Macduff's family is murdered. Right before Macduff's young son is stabbed to death, he yells: "He has killed me, mother/Run away, I pray you." The black humorist in my always has found this line funny, especially the tense. "He has killed me"? Really? About 20 years ago, my wife and I saw a production of *Macbeth* on stage in Stratford, Ontario—and the apparent absurdity of this line has been one of the longest running jokes of our marriage.

Well. The folks in Staunton have a brilliant interpretation of it. They don't drop or alter the line, as I would be tempted to do as a director. Instead, they embrace it. I remember thinking: "Oh here it comes, that silly line." Then it came and my jaw dropped.

In one sense, what they did was a small thing that hardly makes or breaks the production. I would have enjoyed yesterday's *Macbeth* without it. But what they did was sheer genius—the type of thing that shows why one staging of a great play is never enough.

No, I won't say what they did. The play is on tour until the summer. If you have a chance, check it out.