

Essay on *Mendoza*

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The English Renaissance, the Elizabethan era, and humanism are subjects which have always interested me. New ideas and conceptions were generated which created the philosophical point of view of the period. William Shakespeare, an author of that time, featured in his plays, such as *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, the Elizabethan view on politics, dark magic, treason, and ambition. Due to these universal themes, the plays can be understood and represented around the world. However, what happens when *Macbeth* is adapted into a Mexican version?

In this essay, I'm going to talk about *Mendoza*, which was inspired by Shakespeare's well-known play *Macbeth* and mixed with Mexican culture and tradition, focusing on the characteristics of the Elizabethan vision mentioned above: 1) dark magic, 2) politics, and 3) ambition and treason. *Mendoza* was written by Antonio Zúñiga and directed by Juan Carrillo in 2016. They took it as a pretext to enlighten the political situation of the modern Mexican society by setting the play during the [Mexican Revolution](#) (1910-1920) of the early 1900s. The play follows almost the same written structure of *Macbeth* but adapts Mexican names and ways of speaking. Six chairs, a metal table, a white fabric, two buckets, red paint, and an ice axe were the only props used by the actors and the director to symbolize the precariousness and drought of the Mexican Revolution.

Dark magic was a very consistent theme in Shakespeare's plays and for other authors of the era too, due to the prominence of occult philosophy. It is used as a technical element to incite action, unleash tragedy, and signal a turning point. Zúñiga and Carrillo use dark magic conservatively in the play, having one witch instead of three and portraying her with the characteristics of a "curandera" (Mexican word for a female folk healer or medicine woman). Even though, Mexico has been proclaimed as a country with 85% Catholic believers, it does not mean that Mexicans don't believe in witches or that Catholicism in Mexico isn't mixed with dark magic (a heritage of Mesoamerican cultures, nowadays, known as indigenous people).

On stage, it was decided that the witch would wear a mask and a white fabric, accompanied by a live black hen (the animal that represents “chamanes” or witchcraft in Mexico). Another important detail is that the actress who portrayed the witch, also portrayed Lady Macbeth. This decision was made because Lady Macbeth is seen as a witch who represents darkness and provokes Macbeth to commit murder. This is exemplified in her monologue, where in order to have the strength to encourage Macbeth to kill, she begs the evil spirits to help her do it. In Mexican history, dark magic has had an important role in political decisions. Some claim that during the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari from 1988 to 1994, he decided what to do in the country by consulting his witch known as “la paka” and it was she who ruled the country in reality.

Macbeth is a political play. The Mexican director and writer capitalized on the opportunity to address Mexican political issues. Despite the fact that *Mendoza* is set during the Mexican Revolution, by giving positions of military levels during that time, recent political rhetoric and events are depicted in the play, matching them with Macbeth’s story. Nevertheless, the most relevant political action was in the transition from Act IV to V. Actors in their character roles started cleaning the murder scene of Macduff’s family. Suddenly, one of the actors began to count and the other actors joined in the counting from 1 to 43. This number in Mexico represents [the death of 43 young students of Ayotzinapa](#) who were kidnapped by the military forces. To this day, nobody knows where they or their remains are, and the crime is still unsolved.

“But cruel are the times, when we are traitors

And do not know ourselves”

- *Macbeth* Act IV, Scene ii

This quote by Ross to Lady Macduff represents how people can change with ambition. *Macbeth* is centered around this human condition. At the beginning of the play, Mendoza (Macbeth) is portrayed as the most loyal of the military. However, after the witch tells him, he will become a lieutenant, his life changes completely. This action is related to the Elizabethan cosmogony of external patterns where the natural order of things turns to chaos, including the mind. An example of this is the dinner scene where

Macbeth hallucinates seeing Banquo although he has already killed him, and everybody starts wondering about his connection to the murder. In the Mexican adaptation, this happened similarly, but the scene included people from the audience wearing masks to act as part of the dinner guests. Here, the masks represent the hidden, the opposite, the thing that you are not allowed to see but it's there. Having the audience be part of the scene is a very theatrical resolution.

Finally, ambition and power are familiar themes to the whole world. Every single country has dealt with the crime of treason during a power struggle. In the Mexican Revolution, parallel stories converged. Revolutionary men who were against the government and re-election, killed their peers in battle once they reached the presidency. For example, [Álvaro Obregón](#) (a general in the Mexican Revolution who later became president) assassinated Venustiano Carranza (one of the main leaders of the revolution) and Francisco "Pancho" Villa. However, similar to Mendoza's story, Álvaro Obregón was also killed, and none of the revolutionary men enjoyed the benefits of the insurrection.

I chose this play because Shakespeare is one of my favorite authors. In addition, I was thoroughly impressed with *Mendoza*, both the written play and the stage performance. Zúñiga and Carrillo retained the essential parts of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in their adaptation, which on first impression could sound ridiculous and pretentious. However, they took a risk relating Macbeth's story to Mexico and its political history. Traditional theatre experts may agree that Shakespeare's plays should be performed as they were written, but *Mendoza* shows that by focusing on universal themes and using clear direction and structure, theatre can do the unimaginable, creatively and originally, for any subject. What I enjoyed the most was the creation of a new idea based on a well-known play and making it unique.

And isn't that what theatre is always striving for?