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(RE)SOUNDING EVIL:
AURAL INFECTION IN *MACBETH*
Daniel Washelesky

Mentors: Henry Schvey, Jami Ake, and William Whitaker

In the past two decades, Shakespeare scholars have begun creating what Bruce R. Smith calls a “cultural poetics of listening,” focusing on how sound shapes identity in Shakespearean theatre. In 2013, Ying-chiao Lin was the first to apply these theories specifically to *Macbeth*. While Lin acutely calls attention to Macbeth’s soundscape and “desiring ears” as the “core source of the ultimate catastrophe,” she devotes little time to the complicated process of Macbeth’s infection, which is crucial to the emotional journey of the play. In an attempt to better understand the “ambiguous cosmological forces” at work, this paper explores Macbeth’s aural-spiritual penetration in depth, tracing its relations to early modern acoustic anxieties. I begin with a survey of early seventeenth-century acoustic physics, focusing on the liminal power granted to sound/voice and the privileged position of hearing over sight. I look at the ear as a site of both power and danger, and argue that over the course of the play Macbeth goes from extreme aural receptivity to total deafness, while Scotland transforms from a visual to an aural country. I analyze how the witches embody both the Protestant fear of ear-infecting devils and the equivocal figure of Echo as imagined by Classical and early modern writers. In the process, I use this historical context to examine the play’s emotional journey and hamartia, demonstrating how Macbeth’s aural sensibility makes him tragic rather than simply evil.