"HOBOYES" AND MACBETH: A NOTE ON MACBETH I. vi.

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Macbeth I. vi, in which Duncan first enters Macbeth's castle, is largely accepted by critics, including a critic so far removed as Sir Joshua Reynolds, as a scene that gives "that repose so necessary to the mind after the tumultuous bustle of the preceding scenes, and perfectly contrasts the scene of horror that immediately succeeds." Elizabeth Cole promotes the happy circumstances of the scene in her 1938 commentary on Macbeth, while other commentators have viewed the scene as having "an air of love and trust, health and peace, indeed a temple-haunting 'holiness'" and as providing "a brief spell of delight" in the horror of the play. J. S. Knowles suggests, however, that while Duncan and Banquo would naturally view Macbeth's castle happily, "that the audience should partake of this view is . . . preposterous." "So far," Knowles continues, ". . . from there being any relaxing of interest here, there is an absolute straining of it." "There is," Knowles says, "no relief—no repose here."

When criticism and commentary present such divergent views of a work, an analysis of the pieces which make the work becomes necessary. In Macbeth I. vi, despite the overlay of Duncan's comments and the presence of the symbolic "martlets," the "hoboyes" called for in the stage directions to the scene introduce the action and must be considered as indicators of the basic mood intended for the scene.
John H. Long, in *Shakespeare's Use of Music*, suggests that the oboes called for in the opening stage directions are "a part of the general air of harmony and sweetness" mentioned in Duncan's reflections. F. W. Sternfeld, in his comprehensive discussion of "Instrumental Interludes and Oboes" in *Music in Shakespearean Tragedy*, mentions but does not analyze Macbeth I. vi in relation to the symbolic importance of oboes to Shakespeare's drama; but, Sternfeld asserts, that the squealing of oboes was held to be an ill omen "is borne out by many stage directions in Elizabethan plays." The absence of more substantial commentary or criticism and the lack of agreement concerning the "hoboyes" of Macbeth I. vi suggests that critics either have ignored the "hoboyes," are ignorant of their manifest symbolisms, or are confounded by the juxtaposition of the "hoboyes" of Macbeth, I. vi.osd, with Duncan's reflections on the "pleasant seat" and the sweet air of Macbeth's castle. That such pleasant expectations as those of Duncan and Banquo are heralded by the sound of an instrument, the symbolic designation of which is so full of evil implications, appears confounding, to say the least, but Shakespeare's use of oboes, throughout the canon, is consistent with long-established dramatic convention, and the context of Macbeth I. vi (not to mention the play's atmosphere of pervasive evil) demands that the oboes required in the stage directions of the scene be interpreted as premonitory in nature and as ironic elements in Shakespeare's design.

The presence of groups of instruments in the dumb shows of Gorbuduc (1562) has been suggested as establishing the standard for symbolic values of instruments or groups of instruments in this period. In the "Domme Shew Before the Fourth Act" of Gorbuduc, "First the musick of the howboyes began to plaie . . . . Hereby was signified the unnatural murders to follow." After Gorbuduc there are few such specific directions. However, the historical significance of Gorbuduc, its influence on the development of English drama, and its popularity, especially at court, would have made the convention established by its dumb shows and their music a model to be emulated. The influence of the convention was possibly such that whenever