

"The Spectacle of Deterioration: *Macbeth* and the 'Manner' of Tragic Imitation"

Critic: Julian Markels

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Criticism about: *Macbeth*

[(essay date summer 1961) *In the following essay, Markels reads Macbeth as a tragedy of personal degeneration, concentrating on Macbeth as a tragic figure according to the classical, Aristotelian definition and examining his potential to elicit sympathy and find redemption.*]

Nor, on the other hand, should an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves. ... There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not preeminently virtuous and just. ...

Aristotle, *Poetics*.

Macbeth, as a tragic hero, is a man with a capacity, one might almost say a taste, for damnation. This capacity ... is not so very different from a capacity for salvation. *Macbeth* is a terrible play because its business is to give us some notion of what that damnation is which a man embraces when he is, indeed, man enough for it.

Arthur Sewall, *Character and Society in Shakespeare*.

To an age like ours, deeply concerned with the metaphysics of guilt, the disintegration of personality, and the waning relevance of our traditional criteria for civilization, *Macbeth* offers a peculiarly revealing image of human nature and experience. It is one of the few masterpieces in English whose protagonist grows in depravity without diminishing our pity for him, so that even when he stands before us unmistakably as a "butcher", we do not condescend to him, but painfully share his guilt. We are able to apply to Macbeth the murderer that remark which we have usually reserved for the pitiful hero-victims of the drama, like Othello and even George Barnwell and Willy Loman: "There but for the grace of God go I."

So unusual a response immediately raises for the critic one of those crucial and endlessly appetizing problems of technique. How does Shakespeare do it? How does he manage consistently to engage our sympathy on behalf of Macbeth even as he represents Macbeth's growing brutality and witlessness? How does he keep his protagonist from becoming a conventional stage villain, and his play from becoming the more usual and less moving "punitive" drama, in which we feel morally superior to the protagonist, his judges rather than his fellow citizens? Paradoxically, just because our response to the play is so unusual, we are prompted to examine not the moral implications of that response, but the dramatic technique which produces it.

Hence it is not surprising that the two critics who have most convincingly explained *Macbeth's*

"degenerative" quality, Mr. Francis Fergusson¹ and Mr. Wayne Booth,² both should have concerned themselves (though in very different ways) with the structure of the play; and neither should it be surprising that both critics have grounded their arguments on precepts and assumptions set forth in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Mr. Fergusson demonstrates that the Aristotelian action imitated by *Macbeth* is "To outrun the pauser, reason", which is perhaps the best way to embrace damnation. Mr. Booth, more directly concerned with the method of the play, shows that Shakespeare manages to imitate this "degenerative" action largely by his wisdom in knowing which episodes of his story to narrate only, and which to represent directly on the stage; that is, by his adroitness in manipulating what Aristotle calls the "manner" of tragic imitation. It is surely a tribute to Aristotle, and a rebuke to those critics who think *The Poetics* irrelevant to all drama except *Oedipus*, that two critics with a markedly Aristotelian bias may still greatly enhance our understanding of a Shakespearian masterpiece. And our enhanced understanding is evidence itself that *The Poetics* has for us a relevance which is not historically conditioned, that it can help us to understand the work of playwrights who themselves may not have read it, or, if they did, may have understood it differently from the way we do.

Yet if Aristotle's treatise is to retain and perhaps enlarge its relevance, if it is to remain for us a useful and elucidative instrument of criticism, then I think it must be scrutinized in turn as we use it, so that we may be continuously mindful of its limitations as a means of enriching our awareness of its potentialities. I am so thoroughly persuaded especially by Mr. Booth's analysis of *Macbeth* that I want to amplify it here, and particularly to extend its Aristotelian thrust: I suspect *The Poetics* is even more illuminating to *Macbeth* than Mr. Booth's argument has indicated. But my purpose is not so much to add "make-weight" to that argument as it is to test and I hope to clarify the Aristotelian criteria by which such an argument proceeds, to test Aristotle's theory by Shakespeare's practice. I think it is precisely in his discussion of the "manner" of tragic imitation, of that concept which does prove so illuminating to *Macbeth*, that Aristotle is contradictory, and especially unfortunate in his denigration of the visual machinery of the drama which he calls "Spectacle"; and I think that Shakespeare's incredible skill in handling the "manner" of his imitation, and especially its Spectacle, enables us to recognize the limitations in Aristotle's formulation of his concept, and thereby to recognize larger possibilities in that concept than a reading of *The Poetics* would readily suggest. Surely, if poor Shakespeare can be systematically tested by Aristotle, he should be permitted to strike back, as it were, and to provide what I hope to show is some needed light on *The Poetics*.

There is apparent in *The Poetics* a certain ambivalence of conception, in which Aristotle sometimes thinks of Tragedy as an object in nature whose form is "immanent", and sometimes as a made object whose form is truly wrought and whose intention is more emphatically what we today call "affective" than simply imitative. This general ambivalence informs the discussion of the "manner" of imitation, where Aristotle characteristically equates "manner" with Spectacle and describes it quantitatively, as merely the visual trappings in which the tragedy is decked out, but where occasionally he describes it as a truly functional element, whereby the poet manipulates the audience's feelings by his choice of which episodes of the tragic action to narrate only, and which to represent visibly on the stage. This emphasis on Spectacle conceived merely as accidental stage machinery obscures the functional importance of "manner" in producing the tragic emotions and catharsis; and it obscures the importance of that element of visual apprehension which is common to both meanings of "manner". This prevents him from anticipating that in a play like *Macbeth*, even the gross visual trappings of the imitation may indeed be indispensable to produce the desired tragic catharsis.

In the fundamental analogy of *The Poetics*, Aristotle compares Tragedy to a natural object:

Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only

present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude. *Beauty is a matter of size and order*, and therefore impossible either (1) in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or (2) in a creature of vast size--one, say, 1000 miles long--as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder. Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, but of a size to be taken in by the eye, so a story or Plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory.³

He is speaking here of the Plot only, but the Plot is after all the "life and soul, so to speak of Tragedy", the part wherein "unity and wholeness" must originate. As with the object in nature, so with the imitation, we are invited to perceive the relation of the parts to each other and to the whole: while an elephant and a Tragedy represent different principles of arrangement, each is admired as it manifests the arrangement proper to its kind. Several times in *The Poetics* Aristotle speaks about Tragedy's "natural form", and he frequently reminds us not to expect of Tragedy "every kind of pleasure ... but only its own proper pleasure." We discover finally that the proper pleasure to be had from Tragedy in its natural form is a catharsis of pity and fear, produced by an arrangement of episodes which shows a good man "passing by a series of probable or necessary stages ... from happiness to misfortune."

This conception of Tragedy as a natural object implies a highly indirect relationship between the poet and his audience, in which the poet simply constructs a kind of machine (the Plot) whose end is in itself, whose automatic result is the arousal and catharsis of the tragic emotions, and in which the audience must discover the meaning of the play, and thereby achieve for itself the tragic catharsis, through a strenuous contemplation of the episodes of the Plot in their relation to each other. The audience is invited not so much to a communion with the poet as to the exhibition of an artifact.

Only in this light is it clear why Aristotle is concerned mainly with the "objects" of imitation, and devotes hardly more than passing attention to those parts of Tragedy by which the poet affects his audience in some direct fashion. Of the two "means" of imitation, Diction and Melody, he discusses at length only Diction, and even here he is more concerned with the syntactical than the poetic functions of language. Spectacle, the only part arising from the "manner" of imitation, he seems often to regard as an accidental and even regrettable constituent.

In the famous opening definition of Tragedy, Aristotle lists Spectacle among its six qualitative parts (Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody), implying that Spectacle is indeed a functional element, the "manner" of imitation distinctive of Tragedy. Yet from this point on, Aristotle consistently uses the term pejoratively, and treats Spectacle merely as visual embellishment or stage décor. He insists that the tragic catharsis may be achieved without an actual performance of the play, but merely by a recounting of its action, and suggests that Spectacle is more properly the concern of the costume-maker than of the poet. He implies that the need to consider visual effects often proves a burden to the poet, leading him to twist the episodes of the action and thereby to deform the Plot. He advises the poet to visualize his scenes, but only so that he "will devise what is appropriate, and be least likely to overlook incongruities". And one of the few advantages which he claims for Epic over Tragedy is that Epic is not limited only to those episodes that make a convincing Spectacle.

Conceived simply as a matter of stage fitness, then, Spectacle would appear to be mainly a source of obstacles and incongruities in the making of Plots, and at best only a visual ornament. And if Spectacle is the

one and only part arising from the "manner" of imitation, then its "manner" is no longer functional in Tragedy, but accidental and even irrelevant, without work of its own to do. But as I have suggested, Aristotle does not consistently regard Tragedy as a natural object whose form is directly "affective". He frequently recognizes that to produce his catharsis the poet needs a more direct approach than the Plot alone affords him, that in fact the poet must be rather a busybody in manipulating the emotions of his audience. He is much concerned, for example, with the kinds of tragic deed and the kinds of discovery which will intensify the tragic emotions: the tragic deed must have not only its proper place and its probable connection with the other episodes of the action, it must also be horrible enough to arouse fear. Aristotle worries also about probability. He explains that tragedians often give their characters historical names in order to achieve greater credibility, and he insists that "A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility."

Such remarks throughout *The Poetics* provide a context in which it is possible to conceive of Spectacle as a truly functional element. One way, certainly, to make an "impossibility" seem likely is to actualize it on the stage, to present it visually as a *fait accompli*. The episode of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, for example, might well be unlikely if we did not see it with our own eyes: though the plot of *Macbeth* makes the sleepwalking abstractly conceivable, we are convinced of the probability of this outcome only by the language and by the sight of Lady Macbeth distraught. Her extremity would seem incredible if simply reported by a messenger; nor would our pity and fear for her husband be nearly so intense as they are once we have seen her sleepwalking. No doubt the sleepwalking scene is highly melodramatic, grossly spectacular in Aristotle's pejorative sense of the term; but its main significance lies in the fact that the sleepwalking is apprehended in the dramatic present rather than recounted from the past, imitated rather than narrated. It is perceived in that mode for which Henry James, talking about the novel, had to invent the term "rendered". Here Spectacle is a functional element, in that the sense of probability and the arousal of the tragic emotions depend upon the poet's choice of episodes to represent directly rather than to narrate.

On the one occasion when Aristotle speaks directly of the "manner" of imitation rather than Spectacle, it is precisely with this meaning. At the beginning of *The Poetics*, in distinguishing the various arts of imitation, he says:

A third difference in these arts is in the manner in which each kind of object is represented. Given both the same means and the same kind of object for imitation, one may either (1) speak at one moment in narrative and another in an assumed character, as Homer does; or (2) one may remain the same throughout, without any such change; or (3) the imitators may represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described.⁴

Here he has clearly in mind that there *are* functional differences between narrating and representing, though he later forgets this in treating Spectacle merely as visual embellishment. But there is a certain pedantic oversimplification in this passage, which I think is the source of that general ambivalence of conception in *The Poetics* which I have been describing.

One can hardly think of a novel or epic in which the narrator "remains the same *throughout, without any such change*", or of a play in which "the imitators ... represent the *whole* story dramatically." Even the "dear reader" novelists must resort to rendering in dialogue sometimes, while even the later Henry James must sometimes step out of his "centers of consciousness" and describe Merton Densher ironically as "our hero". Similarly, it is hard to remember even a play of Ibsen's or Arthur Miller's in which *no* episodes are narrated rather than rendered. In fact, neither of the last two "manners" of imitation listed by Aristotle is really pure, and one might even place *Gorboduc* in the second category (narrative), and *The Ambassadors* in the third

(dramatic).

When Aristotle equates Spectacle with "manner" he assumes that the choice whether to narrate or to represent the *entire action* is made irrevocably when the poet decides which *genre* to practice: narration is proper to Epic (though he perceives that sometimes Epic employs a mixed mode), representation to Tragedy. He does not anticipate that the tragic poet, having already chosen which episodes to put into his Plot, is not obliged to put every one of them onto the stage, but still must choose which to narrate and which to render. Tragedy may also employ a mixed mode, so that when the poet chooses whether to narrate or render a particular episode, his purpose is not merely visual ornamentation, but to reveal Thought, Character, and Action, to arouse the tragic emotions, and to work up the sense of probability. And just because such purposes may be well served by the poet's choice of what his audience should *see*, it seems entirely possible that even the visual fireworks of which Aristotle is contemptuous may be important to Tragedy. Since both meanings of "manner", as the art of rendering and the art of stage ornamentation, have a common visual basis, both might have a truly functional significance. To test and establish the significance of both, I now turn to *Macbeth*.

The conception of Macbeth as a genuine tragic hero rather than a conventional villain is perhaps nowhere more justified than by an examination of Shakespeare's choice of episodes to render rather than narrate, and of the sequence in which to render them. Mr. Booth's argument demonstrates how Shakespeare's great tact in this matter consistently prevents the alienation of our sympathies from Macbeth: in none of the play's three great acts of violence is Macbeth himself seen committing the crime, the effect of which is to forestall our indignation, though certainly not to absolve him of guilt. What we do see following each murder is the almost unbearable suffering of Macbeth and his wife, which in Macbeth's case at least is intensified by explicit recognition of his guilt: after Duncan's murder, Macbeth's furtive pacing in the hall and his anguished speeches; after Banquo's murder, Macbeth's engagement with the ghost at the shattered ritual of the banquet; and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking following the murder of Lady Macduff. In each case, by the choice and sequence of scenes rendered, Shakespeare draws our attention from the crime's effect on its victim to its effect on its perpetrator.⁵

In all of these scenes, of course, the language is important: in the sleepwalking scene we must hear "Out, damned spot!" in order to apprehend fully Lady Macbeth's agitation. But even without the words we see her agitation, and it makes all the difference that now we see *her* agitation when we did not see Duncan's. When we look over Macbeth's cringing shoulder at the ghost of Banquo, we hardly need the words at all.

The witches are the most spectacular figures in the play, and, in both Aristotelian senses of "Spectacle", they offer the most striking visual evidence against regarding Macbeth as a villain. They appear only four times during the play, but twice in the first three scenes. In the play's first scene they are given the impressive place of the prologue, but not for the sake of the dozen lines which they speak among themselves. Their action is spectacular in Aristotle's pejorative sense of visual embellishment, in that it is almost wholly choreographic and dazzling to our sight. But it is also spectacular in the functional sense, in that the episode is dramatically rendered, and rendered *before* the episode in which Macbeth himself meets the witches. Merely to see the witches is to recognize in them an enormous power, a power not to determine a man's fate, but to stir his imagination, to influence choices for which he himself must finally be held responsible. And Shakespeare offers the audience its own visual transaction with the witches at the beginning precisely so that later we may view Macbeth's response to them with first-hand knowledge. In putting the witches directly before us, he informs us that even right-thinking men, even we ourselves, are susceptible to their influence. He deprives us not of the moral grounds, but of the smug conviction out of which we might otherwise be willing to condemn Macbeth for believing in them. We learn "fear for one like ourselves", and how extraordinarily difficult it

would be for even a good man to turn to the witches a deaf ear.

In performing the prologue, the witches play a role comparable to that of the chorus in classical drama, which represents a traditional moral community whose health is at stake in the career of the protagonist. Even an audience inexperienced in classical drama recognizes in the first scene of *Macbeth* that it is the community of Satan whose continuance is here to be challenged, and readily infers that any community represented by the witches is threatened not by men in whom crime is habitual, but only by good men who might prove incorruptible. For the witches to play for the soul of a villain would be merely to exhibit their impotence.

If Macbeth is not a villain, still he is but imperfectly exalted. Though Shakespeare deftly manipulates his rendering in order to emphasize Macbeth's suffering and to mask his depravity, he carefully distinguishes between Macbeth's suffering and his virtue, and at the beginning he chooses to narrate rather than render episodes which would make us strongly aware of Macbeth's manliness and courage. Instead of beginning with a battle scene in which Macbeth distinguishes himself before our eyes, he puts the report of Macbeth's heroism into the mouth of the bleeding sergeant. He desires that we shall not think Macbeth "preeminently noble" in any case, but especially that as we see Macbeth's deterioration we shall not be embarrassed by a highly deferential attitude toward him. For the same reason, in I.iii, Macbeth is named Thane of Cawdor privately by the messengers Ross and Angus rather than in the public ceremony of the very next scene, where the King names Malcolm heir to the throne. On that occasion Macbeth stands to one side, having first been thanked by Duncan, to make way for the larger state business at hand. We learn just enough of Macbeth's bravery and status to make his coming deterioration significant, but nothing which would make improbable the fall of too noble a man or wholly alienate us from Macbeth when he launches upon violence.

At the end of the play Shakespeare's choice of episodes to render is calculated to have just the reverse effect. Having witnessed the full course of degeneration, now the audience needs to be rescued from too strong a revulsion from Macbeth the murderer. Now Shakespeare puts before our eyes Macbeth's courage in facing overwhelming military odds. In a group of short scenes in the fifth act he shows the matching of forces with extraordinary sensitivity to the visual effects of representation. In one series of scenes (V.ii, V.iv, and V.vi) we see the enemy army first small and stationary, then marching and swelled by the addition of the English force, and finally marching camouflaged by the boughs gathered from Birnam Wood. In the alternate scenes (V.iii and V.v) we see first Macbeth putting on his armor *alone*, as if to do battle single-handedly, and then joined by soldiers, but in a defensive stance within the castle. The sense of Macbeth's disadvantage is overpowering, and the moral imagination is superseded by the visual: when we see Macbeth finally as the underdog we do not excuse his crimes, but we sympathize with him in spite of them.

This redemption of Macbeth continues in the battle scenes which follow. Careful as he was *not* to represent directly Macbeth's valor in the first act, Shakespeare trails him around the battlefield in the last act. Now that Birnam Wood and Macduff have fulfilled the witches' prophecies, Macbeth has good reason to cease fighting and in effect commit suicide. Yet he does not flinch, and still commands enough strength and cunning to kill a valiant younger man, Siward's son. We last see him joined with Macduff in a struggle the adverse outcome of which we have good reason to believe occurs offstage.⁶ If that is true, then nothing in these final scenes more clearly shows Macbeth's heroism and even glory than Macbeth's killing Young Siward on the stage and Macduff's killing Macbeth offstage. The visible evidence of Macbeth's bravery in the face of a great disadvantage has been so impressive that now to see his physical humiliation would inopportunistically outrage us against his enemies. Always Shakespeare's choice of episodes to render maintains a double attitude toward Macbeth: in the first act "noble Macbeth" is not advertised to our sight, so that later we may accept his brutality; and in the last act the valor of "this dead butcher" is put visibly before us, so that we will not be

alienated from him.

Shakespeare is even more concerned with the problem of representation in his attempt to show a process of deterioration in the sequence of murders for which Macbeth is responsible. Actually the murder of Duncan is the most reprehensible of the three, but nevertheless it must come first. Again Shakespeare must maintain a double attitude and make the last of the three murders more wanton though less culpable than the killing of one's king, kinsman, and guest. He accomplishes this brilliantly, though not entirely by the visual effects of representation. Coming directly after Macbeth's first meeting with the witches and the revelation of his wife's pernicious influence upon him, the murder of Duncan is strongly if not justly motivated. But the murder of Lady Macduff and her son is gratuitous. It signifies nothing even to Macbeth. Part of a king's burden, after all, is the risk of assassination, and an audience needs little sophistication momentarily to withhold its outrage from the murderer of a king. But even the cynic might be shocked at the senseless murder of women and children.

Mr. Booth points out that the presentation of Duncan's murder, which occurs offstage to a man who has never been seen in a domestic relation like Lady Macduff's with her son, is designed to impress us abstractly with the severity of the crime, but not to evoke our sympathy for its victim.⁷ Furthermore, the scenes which precede and follow Duncan's murder also emphasize only the ethical implications of the crime. In I. vi, Shakespeare devotes a separate scene to Lady Macbeth's welcoming Duncan to Inverness, in which we are shown not an intimate personal relationship, but the ritual of hospitality, a visual embodiment of the obligation which Macbeth is to violate. Similarly, the appearance of the drunken porter immediately after the murder is a visual and ghoulish result of Macbeth's severing the great chain of being. Again it is the seriousness of the crime and not the character of its victim which is emphasized.

On the other hand, the staging of Lady Macduff's murder evokes overwhelming sympathy for the victims themselves. The helpless child is killed onstage, after a domestic episode which aroused our pity for him, and the scene ends with Lady Macduff running from her murderer. The visual details show the crime not in its abstract relation to a code, but as the despicable act of a depraved man. Yet in the delicate balancing of visual details, Macbeth does not commit this murder personally, so that we may fully witness his deterioration without experiencing a revulsion from him.⁸ The evidence of deterioration is in the visual contrast between Duncan's murder and Lady Macduff's.

I have been speaking of "manner" in *Macbeth* conceived as the art of rendering. But even in the use of visual trappings and machinery, to which Aristotle pejoratively applies the term "Spectacle", *Macbeth* is Shakespeare's most flamboyant play. Again and again in the rich visual surface of the play--witches replete with cauldron and apparitions, the ghost of Banquo, Birnam Wood moving, Macbeth's head on a pike--Shakespeare uses Spectacle in precisely that manner of which Aristotle is contemptuous.

Yet this machinery seems indispensable to show Macbeth's degeneration. It was a fashion of nineteenth-century criticism to suppose that the witches objectify Macbeth's inner state, and especially the base motives for his action. In the contrast between Macbeth's and Banquo's first responses to the witches, for example, it is clear that Macbeth already had contemplated the career which the witches suggest to him. But many of the spectacular devices--the moving of Birnam Wood, for example--are not directly related to Macbeth's inner state, and most of them come late in the play, after he has fully expressed his motives. Beginning with the banquet scene, the play becomes nakedly spectacular in order to exhibit not Macbeth's motives or responses, but the irrational and hallucinatory world which his earlier conduct now forces him to inhabit, a world in which Lady Macduff's murder is not exceptional. Banquo's ghost, the apparitions, the moving wood, and the

severed head are all a measure of Macbeth's fall. They show his membership in a community which is inexpressible in words, the Satanic community of the prologue to the play.

The final predominance of this dark atmosphere completes a pattern of Spectacle which has been developed throughout the play, a pattern which exhibits the collapse of rationality both in the external world and in the character of Macbeth. We know how completely the Elizabethans identified the fall of princes with the collapse of communities, and that almost invariably the imitation of such an action employed stock devices like the Machiavel. A set of court scenes and funeral processions could be seen almost daily in some London theater, so that long before *Macbeth* such episodes ceased to be merely diverting. The playgoers had seen them in other plays, and many were watching the present play for the second or third time. What they now wished to achieve for themselves is what Mr. Fergusson has elsewhere called the "mimetic perception of action".

For such an audience the significance of the court scenes in *Macbeth* would lie in what they have in common with dozens of court scenes from other plays: to suggest in ritual form that the destiny of a community, and by analogy of all mankind, is here at stake. The first court scene, I.iv, begins with an assembling, and throughout the scene Duncan is surrounded by his court. The action moves swiftly to its climax in the gesture by which Duncan names Malcolm heir, while Macbeth stands aside. Perhaps we cannot know without words precisely what honor Duncan confers upon Malcolm. But we are aware, from the processional atmosphere, from the awe and approval which the assembly displays, that Duncan's gesture is a ceremonial proclamation of health and order. Here as in the opening of *King Lear*, we are invited to celebrate a rational order, the oneness of the kingdom and of all mankind.

In the second court scene, III.i, all this reassuring ceremony is missing. The scene opens with a *disbanding* of the court. Macbeth as king, stripped of his ceremonial dignity, paces the floor talking to himself. The climax is reached in the conspiratorial huddle where he engages Banquo's assassins, an unceremonious action of which the court-chorus must be kept ignorant. The royal gesture which was public and awesome in the first scene is here private and sinister. We see at once the deterioration in Macbeth and in the royal office.

This deterioration is completed in the banquet scene, III.iv. Here the miming shows not simply that the rituals of hospitality and kingship have been fragmented, but that rational discourse is no longer possible. We see three simultaneous conversations, in each of which the principal interlocutors are oblivious to the presence of others. Macbeth is transfixed by the ghost, and the others indicate that they are unaware of the ghost's presence and cannot participate in Macbeth's experience. We see Lady Macbeth pull her husband aside and speak to him out of the others' hearing. Finally Lady Macbeth speaks to the company even while Macbeth is speaking to the ghost. The visual effect is surrealistic, with everybody speaking not to but past one another. We see the failure of even the most essential domestic ritual, with Macbeth finally outside the company of men.

Now the shattered ritual of the state is replaced by the choreography of the weird sisters, and Macbeth is drawn swiftly into a maelstrom filled with fenny snake fillets, armed hands, bloody children, and Birnam Wood moving. Almost literally Macbeth and the witches dance their way through the last two acts. Witless motion must now supersede speech and rational action, since the extent of Macbeth's degeneration is now beyond words and expressible only in the highly spectacular devices of the end of the play. Our feelings of fear especially are aroused by the sight of Macbeth now putting himself irrevocably into the witches' grip, until nothing less spectacular than the parading about of Macbeth's head can provide a sufficient catharsis.

Only by this heavy reliance on visual trappings at the end of the play does Shakespeare exhibit in detail the

degeneration of a hero with whom he means us to be consistently sympathetic. Yet where patterns of ritual and dance define rather than ornament the action, as they do at the end of *Macbeth*, Spectacle really usurps the function of Plot, and shows what Aristotle considers the worse and not the better poet. And for just a minute before we accuse Aristotle of a pedantic neglect of visual embellishment, we must recognize that there is something irregular in the spectacular ending of *Macbeth*. The psychological intensity of the first part of the play is not sustained after the banquet scene, precisely when the stage becomes crowded with visual devices. The ending seems too fully determined beforehand, and our attention is shifted from the hero's mind to the external events of his waning life.

To recognize this, however, is not to concede a lapse in Shakespeare's technique, for the shift in focus is essential to his purpose. The Spectacle of the end of the play keeps us outside the mind of Macbeth, denies us any glimpse of that final dignity and repose which make the deaths of Othello and Lear so richly satisfying, because to a mind destroyed such dignity and repose are impossible. Othello collapses, Lear goes mad, but the tragic experience makes them whole. In *Macbeth* we bear painful witness to a whole shattered, and while he never lets us forget what he *was*, his essential action is to "rend and deracinate", until he has left us hardly more of himself than is *visible*. The "tomorrow" speech is great poetry partly because it exhibits a ruined spirit, whose characteristic quality is found earlier, in the speeches which precede and follow the murder of Duncan. When one reaches the mindless state reflected by that speech, there is nothing left of life but the witches' dance.

Hence we are justified in wishing Aristotle more inclusive, and in suggesting that "manner" in both its senses may truly be one of the determinative constituents of Tragedy. For we recognize that at least in a tragedy like *Macbeth*, both the choice of episodes to render and the visual machinery which is intrinsic to the rendering are indispensable to show the full extent of deterioration and to arouse the feelings of pity and fear which result from that perception. We do not finally think of Macbeth as a villain whom we are well rid of, but neither do we feel the effect of the play diminished when Spectacle carries the burden of Plot. We recognize that this usurpation is necessary, that the degenerative tragedy must end in a wild spectacle that signifies merely nothing.

Notes

1. "*Macbeth as the Imitation of an Action*", *English Institute Essays, 1951* (New York, 1952), 31-43.
2. "*Macbeth as Tragic Hero*", *Journal of General Education*, VI (October, 1951), 17-25.
3. *Poetics*, Ch. 7, trans. Ingram Bywater, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), 1462-463. My emphasis.
4. *Poetics*, Ch. 3, 1456-457.
5. Booth, pp. 21-23. An exception, of course, is the murder of Lady Macduff's child, which I try to account for later. It should also be remarked that if from the Aristotelian point of view the choice of episodes to render is part of the Spectacle, the choice of a sequence in which to render them is strictly speaking a function of the Plot.
6. The stage direction in the Folio has Macbeth and Macduff leave the stage fighting, but come back onstage for the killing of Macbeth. Many editors correct the Folio, on the grounds that it would be terribly awkward to have Macbeth killed onstage and then dragged off to be beheaded in the midst of the ongoing action. My

interpretation here might be offered as additional grounds for this correction.

7. Booth, pp. 21-22.

8. Booth, pp. 22-23.

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