Macbeth

by William Shakespeare

Copyright Notice

©2011 eNotes.com Inc.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

All or part of the content in these eNotes comes from MAXnotes® for Macbeth, and is copyrighted by Research and Education Association (REA). No part of this content may be reproduced in any form without the permission of REA.

©1998-2002; ©2002 by Gale Cengage. Gale is a division of Cengage Learning. Gale and Gale Cengage are trademarks used herein under license.

For complete copyright information on these eNotes please visit:
http://www.enotes.com/macbeth/copyright

eNotes: Table of Contents

1. Macbeth: Introduction
2. Macbeth: William Shakespeare Biography
3. Macbeth: Summary
4. Macbeth: Reading Shakespeare
5. Macbeth: List of Characters
6. Macbeth: Historical Background
7. Macbeth: Summary and Analysis
    - Act I Summary and Analysis
    - Act II Summary and Analysis
    - Act III Summary and Analysis
    - Act IV Summary and Analysis
    - Act V Summary and Analysis
8. Macbeth: Critical Commentary
    - Act I Commentary
    - Act II Commentary
    - Act III Commentary
    - Act IV Commentary
    - Act V Commentary
9. Macbeth: Quizzes
    - Act I Questions and Answers
    - Act II Questions and Answers
    - Act III Questions and Answers
    - Act IV Questions and Answers

- Act V Questions and Answers

10. Macbeth: Essential Passages
    - Essential Passage by Character: Macbeth
    - Essential Passage by Theme: The Hero
    - Essential Passage by Character: Macbeth
11. Macbeth: Themes
12. Macbeth: Character Analysis
    - Banquo (Character Analysis)
    - Macbeth (Character Analysis)
    - Lady Macbeth (Character Analysis)
    - Macduff (Character Analysis)
    - Malcolm (Character Analysis)
    - Three Witches, The Weird Sisters (Character Analysis)
    - Other Characters (Descriptions)
13. Macbeth: Principal Topics
14. Macbeth: Essays
    - Character Study of Macbeth: From "Brave Macbeth" to "Dead Butcher"
    - Who are the Witches?
    - Why Does Macbeth Change His Mind About Killing Duncan?
    - Character Study of Lady Macbeth
    - Macbeth: On Stage, Screen, and Television
    - Macbeth: Victim of Historians
    - The Theme of Guilt in Macbeth
    - Lady Macbeth: A Liberated Woman?
    - The Guilt of Lady Macbeth
    - The Witches in Macbeth
15. Macbeth: Criticism
    - Overview
    - Evil
    - Supernatural Elements
    - Time
    - Gender and Sex Roles
    - Imagery
    - Macbeth
    - Lady Macbeth
    - Banquo
16. Macbeth: Selected Quotes
17. Macbeth: Suggested Essay Topics
18. Macbeth: Sample Essay Outlines
19. Macbeth: Modern Connections
20. Macbeth: FAQs
    - Was there an actual Macbeth?
    - Why are there three witches?
    - Did the Macbeths have any children?
    - Why does Macbeth forget to take the daggers from the guards?
    - Why does Macbeth slaughter Macduff's family?
    - Why does Malcolm test Macduff?
21. Macbeth: Bibliography and Further Reading
22. Macbeth: Pictures
23. Copyright

Macbeth: Introduction

Probably composed in late 1606 or early 1607, *Macbeth* is the last of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, the others being *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*. It is a relatively short play without a major subplot, and it is considered by many scholars to be Shakespeare's darkest work. *Lear* is an utter tragedy in which the natural world is amorally indifferent toward mankind, but in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare adds a supernatural dimension that purposively conspires against Macbeth and his kingdom. In the tragedy of *Lear*, the distraught king summons the goddess of Chaos, Hecht; in *Macbeth*, Hecate appears as an actual character.

On the level of human evil, Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy is about Macbeth's bloody rise to power, including the murder of the Scottish king, Duncan, and the guilt-ridden pathology of evil deeds generating still more evil deeds. As an integral part of this thematic web is the play's most memorable character, Lady Macbeth. Like her husband, Lady Macbeth's ambition for power leads her into an unnatural, phantasmagoric realm of witchcraft, insomnia and madness. But while Macbeth responds to the prophecies of the play's famous trio of witches, Lady Macbeth goes even further by figuratively transforming herself into an unnatural, desexualized evil spirit. The current trend of critical opinion is toward an upward reevaluation of Lady Macbeth, who is said to be rehumanized by her insanity and her suicide. Much of this reappraisal of Lady Macbeth has taken place in discussions of her ironically strong marriage to Macbeth, a union that rests on loving bonds but undergoes disintegration as the tragedy unfolds.

Macbeth: William Shakespeare Biography

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is generally considered to be the greatest playwright and poet that has ever lived. His appeal is universal and his works have been translated, read, and analyzed throughout the world. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, many poems, and 37 plays which have been grouped into comedies, histories, and tragedies.

Shakespeare’s plays combine natural human conflict with dramatic flair producing entertainment that appeals to the audiences of today as well as the audiences for which they were written. Shakespeare understood human nature, and he created characters that portrayed human tragedy and human comedy. Some of his characters were fantastic and unworldly, yet they brought to the stage the truth that mere mortals could not.

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon, in England. The exact date of his birth is unknown; however, records indicate he was baptized on April 26, 1564, at Holy Trinity Church. Traditionally, a baby was baptized about three days after birth, which would make Shakespeare’s birthday April 23, 1564.

His father, John Shakespeare, was from the yeoman class and his mother, Mary Arden, was from a higher class known as the gentry class. The marriage raised John’s status in town and the Shakespeare family enjoyed prominence and success in Stratford. This is verified through John Shakespeare’s landholding and his status as an alderman.

William was the third child of eight, and it can be assumed he attended the local grammar school in Stratford. School ran for nine hours a day, year-round, and strict discipline was enforced. Shakespeare probably attended school until he was 15, which was customary for the time.

Around this time, Shakespeare’s father was experiencing financial difficulty, and William probably took a job to help the family. His father was a glover and dealer in commodities, and Shakespeare may have assisted his father in his business, but it is presumed Shakespeare worked in a variety of jobs.

At 18, Shakespeare had an affair with Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior. They married, and six months later they had a child. Susanna Shakespeare was born in May of 1583 and in 1585 twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born to the Shakespeares. Little is known of that period except that the twins were christened in February 1585.

Shakespeare's life became public record in 1592 through a pamphlet written by Robert Greene with criticism of Shakespeare's work as an actor as well as a playwright. After Greene's death, the letter appeared again. Almost as quickly as it appeared, Greene's publisher printed an apology to Shakespeare.

From 1592 to 1594 many public theaters were closed due to the plague, and Shakespeare wrote poems and sonnets during this period. In 1594, he became a shareholder in a company of actors known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. From 1594 to 1608 he was completely involved in the theatre.

His time in the years 1608 to 1616 was divided between the theater and his family. Shakespeare's success as a playwright and shareholder afforded him the luxury of owning homes in London and Stratford. His son Hamnet died at the age of 11. Judith had three boys, but all died. His daughter Susanna had one child, Elizabeth, who had no children. The recorded date for Shakespeare's death is April 23, 1616. He is buried inside the Stratford parish church. Shakespeare's last direct descendant, his granddaughter, Elizabeth, died in 1670.

Macbeth: Summary

The play begins on an open stretch of land in medieval Scotland. Three Witches enter and give the prophecy that the civil war will end that day and that at sunset they will meet Macbeth. The Witches are summoned to leave, but they do not leave without stating that what is normally "fair" will be "foul," and what is "foul" will be "fair."

King Duncan learns that Macbeth has been victorious and has defeated Macdonwald. The Thane of Cawdor has betrayed Duncan and is accused of being a traitor. Duncan orders the Thane of Cawdor's execution and announces that Macbeth will receive the title of Thane of Cawdor.

Macbeth and Banquo leave the battlefield and meet the Witches. The Witches state the prophecy that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and king and that Banquo will be the father of kings, but not king himself. Macbeth has been victorious on the battlefield and the war is at an end—to what greatness should he now aspire?

The Witches spark the ambitious nature in Macbeth, as he knows his rise to power would greatly be enhanced by being named Thane of Cawdor. After the Witches vanish, Ross and Angus arrive and announce that Macbeth has been named Thane of Cawdor. Banquo is skeptical of the Witches, but Macbeth, driven by a desire for power, considers killing Duncan to gain the crown. Macbeth is overwhelmed by the image, yet his desire for power is still present, as stated in a letter he sends to Lady Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to act on his thoughts, telling him that she will guide and support his plan to kill King Duncan. While Duncan is visiting Inverness, Macbeth's castle, Macbeth kills Duncan as he sleeps. After the murder is discovered, Macbeth kills the servants, whom he accuses of Duncan's murder. Duncan's sons, fearing for their own lives, flee Scotland. Macbeth is crowned king.

Banquo raises suspicions that Macbeth killed Duncan. Macbeth hires two men to kill Banquo and his son Fleance, whom Macbeth fears will become king, as the Witches foretold. Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

The Witches conjure a spell, and Apparitions reveal to Macbeth three prophecies that will affect his future. He is told to beware of Macduff, that no man born of woman can harm him, and he will not be conquered until the forest at Birnam marches to Dunsinane. Macbeth is also shown a procession of kings with the last king looking in a mirror—the reflection is that of Banquo.

Macbeth orders Macduff's family to be murdered and leaves for England to confront Macduff. When Macduff hears of the massacre of his family, he vows to seek revenge on Macbeth. He joins Malcolm in his quest to depose Macbeth.

The army proceeds in camouflage by carrying a branch from Birnam Wood into battle. Alarmed by this, Macbeth fears the Witches' prophecy will come true. Macbeth is told of Lady Macbeth's death by her own hands, and he laments the nature of his life.

Macbeth fights Macduff, and Macbeth boasts that he cannot be killed by any man born of woman. Macduff informs Macbeth that he was surgically removed from his mother's womb and thus was not born of woman. Macduff kills Macbeth in battle and hails Malcolm as King of Scotland. Malcolm vows to restore Scotland to a peaceful country.

Estimated Reading Time
The time needed to read *Macbeth* depends on the familiarity of the reader with the language of the Elizabethan Era. The notes and glossary of the text being used should serve as a guide to the reader. A recorded version of the play would serve as a source for pronunciation and aid the reader with inflection and intent of the words.

Since Shakespeare wrote in blank verse, a form of unrhymed poetry, there is a rhythm to the reading that becomes easier to follow as the reader moves through the play. The estimated reading time is approximately 12 to 14 hours.

Macbeth: Reading Shakespeare

In this section:

- Shakespeare's Language
- Shakespeare's Sentences
- Shakespeare's Words
- Shakespeare's Wordplay
- Shakespeare's Dramatic Verse
- Implied Stage Action

Shakespeare's Language
Shakespeare's language can create a strong pang of intimidation, even fear, in a large number of modern-day readers. Fortunately, however, this need not be the case. All that is needed to master the art of reading Shakespeare is to practice the techniques of unraveling uncommonly-structured sentences and to become familiar with the poetic use of uncommon words. We must realize that during the 400-year span between Shakespeare's time and our own, both the way we live and speak has changed. Although most of his vocabulary is in use today, some of it is obsolete, and what may be most confusing is that some of his words are used today, but with slightly different or totally different meanings. On the stage, actors readily dissolve these language stumbling blocks. They study Shakespeare's dialogue and express it dramatically in word and in action so that its meaning is graphically enacted. If the reader studies Shakespeare's lines as an actor does, looking up and reflecting upon the meaning of unfamiliar words until real voice is discovered, he or she will

suddenly experience the excitement, the depth and the sheer poetry of what these characters say.

Shakespeare's Sentences

In English, or any other language, the meaning of a sentence greatly depends upon where each word is placed in that sentence. "The child hurt the mother" and "The mother hurt the child" have opposite meanings, even though the words are the same, simply because the words are arranged differently. Because word position is so integral to English, the reader will find unfamiliar word arrangements confusing, even difficult to understand. Since Shakespeare's plays are poetic dramas, he often shifts from average word arrangements to the strikingly unusual so that the line will conform to the desired poetic rhythm. Often, too, Shakespeare employs unusual word order to afford a character his own specific style of speaking.

Today, English sentence structure follows a sequence of subject first, verb second, and an optional object third. Shakespeare, however, often places the verb before the subject, which reads, "Speaks he" rather than "He speaks." Solanio speaks with this inverted structure in *The Merchant of Venice* stating, "I should be still/Plucking the grass to know where sits the wind" (Bevington edition, I, i, ll.17-19), while today's standard English word order would have the clause at the end of this line read, "where the wind sits." "Wind" is the subject of this clause, and "sits" is the verb. Bassanio's words in Act Two also exemplify this inversion: "And in such eyes as ours appear not faults" (II, ii, l. 184). In our normal word order, we would say, "Faults do not appear in eyes such as ours," with "faults" as the subject in both Shakespeare's word order and ours.

Inversions like these are not troublesome, but when Shakes–peare positions the predicate adjective or the object before the subject and verb, we are sometimes surprised. For example, rather than "I saw him," Shakespeare may use a structure such as "Him I saw." Similarly, "Cold the morning is" would be used for our "The morning is cold." Lady Macbeth demonstrates this inversion as she speaks of her husband: "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be/What thou art promised" (Macbeth, I, v, ll. 14-15). In current English word order, this quote would begin, "Thou art Glamis, and Cawdor."

In addition to inversions, Shakespeare purposefully keeps words apart that we generally keep together. To illustrate, consider Bassanio's humble admission in *The Merchant of Venice*: "I owe you much, and, like a wilful youth,/That which I owe is lost" (I, i, ll. 146-147). The phrase, "like a wilful youth," separates the regular sequence of "I owe you much" and "That which I owe is lost." To understand more clearly this type of passage, the reader could rearrange these word groups into our conventional order: I owe you much and I wasted what you gave me because I was young and impulsive. While these rearranged clauses will sound like normal English, and will be simpler to understand, they will no longer have the desired poetic rhythm, and the emphasis will now be on the wrong words.

As we read Shakespeare, we will find words that are separated by long, interruptive statements. Often subjects are separated from verbs, and verbs are separated from objects. These long interruptions can be used to give a character dimension or to add an element of suspense. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* Benvolio describes both Romeo's moodiness and his own sensitive and thoughtful nature:

> I, measuring his affections by my own,
> Which then most sought, where most might not be found,
> Being one too many by my weary self,
> Pursu'd my humour, not pursuing his,
> And gladly shunn'd who gladly fled from me. (I, i, ll. 126-130)

In this passage, the subject "I" is distanced from its verb "Pursu'd." The long interruption serves to provide information which is integral to the plot. Another example, taken from *Hamlet*, is the ghost, Hamlet's father, who describes Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, as

> …that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—
> O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
> So to seduce—won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming virtuous queen. (I, v, ll. 43-47)

From this we learn that Prince Hamlet's mother is the victim of an evil seduction and deception. The delay between the subject, "beast," and the verb, "won," creates a moment of tension filled with the image of a cunning predator waiting for the right moment to spring into attack. This interruptive passage allows the play to unfold crucial information and thus to build the tension necessary to produce a riveting drama.

While at times these long delays are merely for decorative purposes, they are often used to narrate a particular situation or to enhance character development. As *Antony and Cleopatra* opens, an interruptive passage occurs in the first few lines. Although the delay is not lengthy, Philo's words vividly portray Antony's military prowess while they also reveal the immediate concern of the drama. Antony is distracted from his career, and is now focused on Cleopatra:

> …those goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front…. (I, i, ll. 2-6)

Whereas Shakespeare sometimes heaps detail upon detail, his sentences are often elliptical, that is, they omit words we expect in written English sentences. In fact, we often do this in our spoken conversations. For instance, we say, "You see that?" when we really mean, "Did you see that?" Reading poetry or listening to lyrics in music conditions us to supply the omitted words and it makes us more comfortable reading this type of dialogue. Consider one passage in *The Merchant of Venice* where Antonio's friends ask him why he seems so sad and Solanio tells Antonio, "Why, then you are in love" (I, i, l. 46). When Antonio denies this, Solanio responds, "Not in love neither?" (I, i, l. 47). The word "you" is omitted but understood despite the confusing double negative.

In addition to leaving out words, Shakespeare often uses intentionally vague language, a strategy which taxes the reader's attentiveness. In Antony and Cleopatra, Cleopatra, upset that Antony is leaving for Rome after learning that his wife died in battle, convinces him to stay in Egypt:

> Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it:
> Sir you and I have lov'd, but there's not it;
> That you know well, something it is I would—
> O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
> And I am all forgotten. (I, iii, ll. 87-91)

In line 89, "…something it is I would" suggests that there is something that she would want to say, do, or have done. The intentional vagueness leaves us, and certainly Antony, to wonder. Though this sort of writing may appear lackadaisical for all that it leaves out, here the vagueness functions to portray Cleopatra as rhetorically sophisticated. Similarly, when asked what thing a crocodile is (meaning Antony himself who is being compared to a crocodile), Antony slyly evades the question by giving a vague reply:

> It is shap'd, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth.
> It is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs.
> It lives by that which nourisheth it, and, the elements once out of it, it transmigrates. (II, vii,

ll. 43-46)

This kind of evasiveness, or doubletalk, occurs often in Shakespeare's writing and requires extra patience on the part of the reader.

Shakespeare's Words

As we read Shakespeare's plays, we will encounter uncommon words. Many of these words are not in use today. As *Romeo and Juliet* opens, we notice words like "shrift" (confession) and "holidame" (a holy relic). Words like these should be explained in notes to the text. Shakespeare also employs words which we still use, though with different meaning. For example, in *The Merchant of Venice* "caskets" refer to small, decorative chests for holding jewels. However, modern readers may think of a large cask instead of the smaller, diminutive casket.

Another trouble modern readers will have with Shakespeare's English is with words that are still in use today, but which mean something different in Elizabethan use. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare uses the word "straight" (as in "straight away") where we would say "immediately." Here, the modern reader is unlikely to carry away the wrong message, however, since the modern meaning will simply make no sense. In this case, textual notes will clarify a phrase's meaning. To cite another example, in Romeo and Juliet, after Mercutio dies, Romeo states that the "black fate on moe days doth depend" (emphasis added). In this case, "depend" really means "impend."

Shakespeare's Wordplay

All of Shakespeare's works exhibit his mastery of playing with language and with such variety that many people have authored entire books on this subject alone. Shakespeare's most frequently used types of wordplay are common: metaphors, similes, synecdoche and metonymy, personification, allusion, and puns. It is when Shakespeare violates the normal use of these devices, or rhetorical figures, that the language becomes confusing.

A metaphor is a comparison in which an object or idea is replaced by another object or idea with common attributes. For example, in Macbeth a murderer tells Macbeth that Banquo has been murdered, as directed, but that his son, Fleance, escaped, having witnessed his father's murder. Fleance, now a threat to *Macbeth*, is described as a serpent:

> There the grown serpent lies, the worm that's fled
> Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
> No teeth for the present. (III, iv, ll. 29-31)

Similes, on the other hand, compare objects or ideas while using the words "like" or "as." In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo tells Juliet that "Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books" (II, ii, l. 156). Such similes often give way to more involved comparisons, "extended similes." For example, Juliet tells Romeo:

> 'Tis almost morning,
> I would have thee gone,
> And yet no farther than a wonton's bird,
> That lets it hop a little from his hand
> Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
> And with silken thread plucks it back again,
> So loving-jealous of his liberty. (II, ii, ll. 176-181)

An epic simile, a device borrowed from heroic poetry, is an extended simile that builds into an even more elaborate comparison. In *Macbeth*, Macbeth describes King Duncan's virtues with an angelic, celestial simile

and then drives immediately into another simile that redirects us into a vision of warfare and destruction:

> …Besides this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind…. (I, vii, ll. 16-25)

Shakespeare employs other devices, like synecdoche and metonymy, to achieve "verbal economy," or using one or two words to express more than one thought. Synecdoche is a figure of speech using a part for the whole. An example of synecdoche is using the word boards to imply a stage. Boards are only a small part of the materials that make up a stage, however, the term boards has become a colloquial synonym for stage. Metonymy is a figure of speech using the name of one thing for that of another which it is associated. An example of metonymy is using crown to mean the king (as used in the sentence "These lands belong to the crown"). Since a crown is associated with or an attribute of the king, the word crown has become a metonymy for the king. It is important to understand that every metonymy is a synecdoche, but not every synecdoche is a metonymy. This is rule is true because a metonymy must not only be a part of the root word, making a synecdoche, but also be a unique attribute of or associated with the root word.

Synecdoche and metonymy in Shakespeare's works is often very confusing to a new student because he creates uses for words that they usually do not perform. This technique is often complicated and yet very subtle, which makes it difficult of a new student to dissect and understand. An example of these devices in one of Shakespeare's plays can be found in *The Merchant of Venice* . In warning his daughter, Jessica, to ignore the Christian revelries in the streets below, Shylock says:

> Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum
> And the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,
> Clamber not you up to the casements then… (I, v, ll. 30-32)

The phrase of importance in this quote is "the wry-necked fife." When a reader examines this phrase it does not seem to make sense; a fife is a cylinder-shaped instrument, there is no part of it that can be called a neck. The phrase then must be taken to refer to the fife-player, who has to twist his or her neck to play the fife. Fife, therefore, is a synecdoche for fife-player, much as boards is for stage. The trouble with understanding this phrase is that "vile squealing" logically refers to the sound of the fife, not the fife-player, and the reader might be led to take fife as the instrument because of the parallel reference to "drum" in the previous line. The best solution to this quandary is that Shakespeare uses the word fife to refer to both the instrument and the player. Both the player and the instrument are needed to complete the wordplay in this phrase, which, though difficult to understand to new readers, cannot be seen as a flaw since Shakespeare manages to convey two meanings with one word. This remarkable example of synecdoche illuminates Shakespeare's mastery of "verbal economy."

Shakespeare also uses vivid and imagistic wordplay through personification, in which human capacities and behaviors are attributed to inanimate objects. Bassanio, in *The Merchant of Venice*, almost speechless when Portia promises to marry him and share all her worldly wealth, states "my blood speaks to you in my veins…" (III, ii, l. 176). How deeply he must feel since even his blood can speak. Similarly, Portia, learning of the penalty that Antonio must pay for defaulting on his debt, tells Salerio, "There are some shrewd contents in

yond same paper/That steals the color from Bassanio's cheek" (III, ii, ll. 243-244).

Another important facet of Shakespeare's rhetorical repertoire is his use of allusion. An allusion is a reference to another author or to an historical figure or event. Very often Shakespeare alludes to the heroes and heroines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. For example, in Cymbeline an entire room is decorated with images illustrating the stories from this classical work, and the heroine, Imogen, has been reading from this text. Similarly, in *Titus Andronicus* characters not only read directly from the *Metamorphoses*, but a subplot re-enacts one of the Metamorphoses's most famous stories, the rape and mutilation of Philomel. Another way Shakespeare uses allusion is to drop names of mythological, historical and literary figures. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, Petruchio compares Katharina, the woman whom he is courting, to Diana (II, i, l. 55), the virgin goddess, in order to suggest that Katharina is a man-hater. At times, Shakespeare will allude to well-known figures without so much as mentioning their names. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, though the Duke and Valentine are ostensibly interested in Olivia, a rich countess, Shakespeare asks his audience to compare the Duke's emotional turmoil to the plight of Acteon, whom the goddess Diana transforms into a deer to be hunted and killed by Acteon's own dogs:

> Duke:
> That instant was I turn'd into a hart,
> And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
> E'er since pursue me. […]
>
> Valentine:
> But like a cloistress she will veiled walk,
> And water once a day her chamber round…. (I, i, l. 20 ff.)

Shakespeare's use of puns spotlights his exceptional wit. His comedies in particular are loaded with puns, usually of a sexual nature. Puns work through the ambiguity that results when multiple senses of a word are evoked; homophones often cause this sort of ambiguity. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Enobarbus believes "there is mettle in death" (I, ii, l. 146), meaning that there is "courage" in death; at the same time, mettle suggests the homophone metal, referring to swords made of metal causing death. In early editions of Shakespeare's work there was no distinction made between the two words. Antony puns on the word "earing," (I, ii, ll. 112-114) meaning both plowing (as in rooting out weeds) and hearing: he angrily sends away a messenger, not wishing to hear the message from his wife, Fulvia: "…O then we bring forth weeds,/when our quick minds lie still, and our ills told us/Is as our earing." If ill-natured news is planted in one's "hearing," it will render an "earing" (harvest) of ill-natured thoughts. A particularly clever pun, also in *Antony and Cleopatra*, stands out after Antony's troops have fought Octavius's men in Egypt: "We have beat him to his camp. Run one before,/And let the queen know of our gests" (IV, viii, ll. 1-2). Here "gests" means deeds (in this case, deeds of battle); it is also a pun on "guests," as though Octavius' slain soldiers were to be guests when buried in Egypt.

One should note that Elizabethan pronunciation was in several cases different from our own. Thus, modern readers, especially Americans, will miss out on the many puns based on homophones. The textual notes will point up many of these "lost" puns, however.

Shakespeare's sexual innuendoes can be either clever or tedious depending upon the speaker and situation. The modern reader should recall that sexuality in Shakespeare's time was far more complex than in ours and that characters may refer to such things as masturbation and homosexual activity. Textual notes in some editions will point out these puns but rarely explain them. An example of a sexual pun or innuendo can be found in *The Merchant of Venice* when Portia and Nerissa are discussing Portia's past suitors using innuendo to tell of their sexual prowess:

Portia:
I pray thee, overname them, and as thou namest them, I will describe them, and according to my description level at my affection.

Nerrisa:
First, there is the Neapolitan prince.

Portia:
Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. I am much afeard my lady his mother played false with the smith. (I, ii, ll. 35-45)

The "Neapolitan prince" is given a grade of an inexperienced youth when Portia describes him as a "colt." The prince is thought to be inexperienced because he did nothing but "talk of his horse" (a pun for his penis) and his other great attributes. Portia goes on to say that the prince boasted that he could "shoe him [his horse] himself," a possible pun meaning that the prince was very proud that he could masturbate. Finally, Portia makes an attack upon the prince's mother, saying that "my lady his mother played false with the smith," a pun to say his mother must have committed adultery with a blacksmith to give birth to such a vulgar man having an obsession with "shoeing his horse."

It is worth mentioning that Shakespeare gives the reader hints when his characters might be using puns and innuendoes. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's lines are given in prose when she is joking, or engaged in bawdy conversations. Later on the reader will notice that Portia's lines are rhymed in poetry, such as when she is talking in court or to Bassanio. This is Shakespeare's way of letting the reader know when Portia is jesting and when she is serious.

Shakespeare's Dramatic Verse

Finally, the reader will notice that some lines are actually rhymed verse while others are in verse without rhyme; and much of Shakespeare's drama is in prose. Shakespeare usually has his lovers speak in the language of love poetry which uses rhymed couplets. The archetypal example of this comes, of course, from *Romeo and Juliet*:

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
Check'ring the eastern clouds with streaks of light,
And fleckled darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels.
(II, iii, ll. 1-4)

Here it is ironic that Friar Lawrence should speak these lines since he is not the one in love. He, therefore, appears buffoonish and out of touch with reality. Shakespeare often has his characters speak in rhymed verse to let the reader know that the character is acting in jest, and vice-versa.

Perhaps the majority of Shakespeare's lines are in blank verse, a form of poetry which does not use rhyme (hence the name blank) but still employs a rhythm native to the English language, iambic pentameter, where every second syllable in a line of ten syllables receives stress. Consider the following verses from *Hamlet*, and note the accents and the lack of end-rhyme:

The síngle ánd pecúliar lífe is bóund
With áll the stréngth and ármor óf the mínd (III, iii, ll. 12-13)

The final syllable of these verses receives stress and is said to have a hard, or “strong,” ending. A soft ending, also said to be “weak,” receives no stress. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare uses a soft ending to shape a verse that demonstrates through both sound (meter) and sense the capacity of the feminine to propagate:

> and thén I lóv’d thee
> And shów’d thee áll the quálitíes o’ th’ ísle,
> The frésh spríngs, bríne-pits, bárren pláce and fértile. (I, ii, ll. 338-40)

The first and third of these lines here have soft endings.

In general, Shakespeare saves blank verse for his characters of noble birth. Therefore, it is significant when his lofty characters speak in prose. Prose holds a special place in Shakespeare’s dialogues; he uses it to represent the speech habits of the common people. Not only do lowly servants and common citizens speak in prose, but important, lower class figures also use this fun, at times ribald variety of speech. Though Shakespeare crafts some very ornate lines in verse, his prose can be equally daunting, for some of his characters may speechify and break into doubletalk in their attempts to show sophistication. A clever instance of this comes when the Third Citizen in Coriolanus refers to the people’s paradoxical lack of power when they must elect Coriolanus as their new leader once Coriolanus has orated how he has courageously fought for them in battle:

> We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do; for if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them; so, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous, and for the multitude to be ingrateful were to make a monster of the multitude, of the which we, being members, should bring ourselves to be monstrous members. (II, ii, ll. 3-13)

Notice that this passage contains as many metaphors, hideous though they be, as any other passage in Shakespeare’s dramatic verse.

When reading Shakespeare, paying attention to characters who suddenly break into rhymed verse, or who slip into prose after speaking in blank verse, will heighten your awareness of a character’s mood and personal development. For instance, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the famous military leader Marcus Antony usually speaks in blank verse, but also speaks in fits of prose (II, iii, ll. 43-46) once his masculinity and authority have been questioned. Similarly, in *Timon of Athens*, after the wealthy lord Timon abandons the city of Athens to live in a cave, he harangues anyone whom he encounters in prose (IV, iii, l. 331 ff.). In contrast, the reader should wonder why the bestial Caliban in *The Tempest* speaks in blank verse rather than in prose.

Implied Stage Action

When we read a Shakespearean play, we are reading a performance text. Actors interact through dialogue, but at the same time these actors cry, gesticulate, throw tantrums, pick up daggers, and compulsively wash murderous “blood” from their hands. Some of the action that takes place on stage is explicitly stated in stage directions. However, some of the stage activity is couched within the dialogue itself. Attentiveness to these cues is important as one conceives how to visualize the action. When Iago in *Othello* feigns concern for Cassio whom he himself has stabbed, he calls to the surrounding men, “Come, come:/Lend me a light” (V, i, ll. 86-87). It is almost sure that one of the actors involved will bring him a torch or lantern. In the same play, Emilia, Desdemona’s maidservant, asks if she should fetch her lady’s nightgown and Desdemona replies, “No, unpin me here” (IV, iii, l. 37). In Macbeth, after killing Duncan, Macbeth brings the murder weapon back with him. When he tells his wife that he cannot return to the scene and place the daggers to suggest that the king’s guards murdered Duncan, she castigates him: “Infirm of purpose/Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures” (II, ii, ll. 50-52). As she exits, it is easy to visualize Lady Macbeth

grabbing the daggers from her husband.

For 400 years, readers have found it greatly satisfying to work with all aspects of Shakespeare's language—the implied stage action, word choice, sentence structure, and wordplay—until all aspects come to life. Just as seeing a fine performance of a Shakespearean play is exciting, staging the play in one's own mind's eye, and revisiting lines to enrich the sense of the action, will enhance one's appreciation of Shakespeare's extraordinary literary and dramatic achievements.

Macbeth: List of Characters

Three Witches—Evil prophets that guide Macbeth's destiny with incomplete information regarding his future

Macbeth—Thane of Glamis, later King of Scotland

Lady Macbeth—Macbeth's wife and supporter of her husband's quest for power

Duncan—King of Scotland

Malcolm—Duncan's older son

Donalbain—Duncan's younger son

Banquo—General in the Scottish Army and Macbeth's friend

Fleance—Banquo's son who is seen as a threat by Macbeth

Macduff—Nobleman of Scotland and rival of Macbeth

Lady Macduff—Macduff's wife

Son—Macduff's son

Lennox and Ross—Noblemen of Scotland that support Malcolm's fight against Macbeth

Angus—Nobleman of Scotland and supporter against Macbeth

Menteith and Caithness—Noblemen of Scotland in Malcolm's English Army

Porter—servant at Macbeth's castle

Murderers—Macbeth's hired killers

Hecate—Goddess of the Witches

Apparitions—Visions conjured up by the Witches to inform Macbeth of what he should fear for the future

Doctor and Gentlewoman—Servants that witness Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking

Seyton—An Officer in Macbeth's Army

Siward—General in the English army fighting with Malcolm

Young Siward—Siward's son in the English army with Malcolm

Captain—Soldier in Duncan's military that reports on Macbeth's success in the battle against Macdonwald

Macbeth: Historical Background

Shakespeare drew from many sources when he wrote—*the Holingshed Chronicles of England* was one of these. From this source he drew much of his historical knowledge, as Holingshed was the definitive historical source of that time. The story of Macbeth comes from this source. However, Shakespeare changed several characters to meet the theatrical purpose of the play. In Holing¬shed's account Macbeth is older than Duncan, but Shakespeare reverses their ages and Duncan is portrayed as the older of the two.

Macbeth was written especially for James I and was performed in 1606. James I was King of Scotland when he came to the English throne; his descendants can be traced back to Banquo. In Shakespeare's Macbeth, often referred to in theater circles as "The Scottish Play," Banquo is portrayed as an honorable man who promotes goodness and fairness. In this way, Shakespeare was keenly aware of his audience and his political responsibilities. His plays reflect not only timeless conflicts and resolutions, but a view of the Elizabethan society.

The society in which Shakespeare lived was reflected in the characters he wrote about. London was a crowded city teaming with aristocrats, working class people, and indigents—it was a hub of activity. By today's standards the sanitation was very poor, and there were frequent epidemics of the plague. The city was infested with rats, and the fleas on the rats caused the Bubonic plague. There were no sewers, only open drains in the middle of the street. The conditions were difficult; however, the spirit of the people prevailed. It was in this society that Shakespeare wrote and created his characters.
Shakespearean Theatre

The support of theatre in England varied depending on who was the reigning monarch. Queen Elizabeth I (1533 - 1603) was the monarch when Shakespeare came into the public eye. Elizabeth supported the theater and the company performed at the castle on a regular basis. She reigned until her death in 1603 when James I became ruler.

James I was also an avid supporter of the theatre. Shakespeare's company, "Lord Chamberlain's Men," came under royal patronage and were subsequently known as "the King's Men." However, the local London government felt that actors and theater were improper. Therefore, no theaters were allowed to be built within the city limits. These restrictions did not keep the London people from the theaters, however, and by 1600 there were more theaters than ever built on the outskirts of London.

The Globe theater was built by Cuthbert Burbage in 1599 for the Lord Chamberlain's Men. When Burbage could not obtain a lease for the original theater, it was moved to a new site in Southwark, on the south side of the Thames River. The construction of the Globe was a joint venture between the Burbage brothers and the actors of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

The Globe was a three-story structure with at least five sides and no roof over the stage. The roof extended around the gallery that encircled the theatre. Each floor had seats that encircled a stage that was built in the center. Behind the stage were dressing rooms and space to store scenery and props. There were no curtains used to conceal the stage, only a curtain to separate the backstage area from the stage. Very few props were used. In the front center portion of the stage was a trap door used to enable a person to vanish (or to allow a

ghost to appear.)

A flag was flown from the front portion of the roof to announce when a play was to be presented. When patrons saw the flag, they knew there would be a performance that day; there were no performances at night, as there was no artificial lighting at the Globe. The theater was small—approximately 30 feet in height, 86 feet in diameter, 56 feet for the open courtyard, and about 40 feet for the stage itself. The patrons either stood in the courtyard and watched the play, or paid more and sat in the gallery.

The actors were flexible and dedicated to the craft of acting. They actors had a major responsibility to convey the purpose of the drama to the audience. The actors supported the written word through their portrayal of the characters. The dialogue and the language supported the setting of the scene within the play, as scenery was very limited. Shakespeare's language provided the scenery for the play. When the scene was changed to an evening scene, the actor would carry a torch in to indicate that it was night. The audience of the time was accustomed to this type of staging.

The theater was a much more intimate setting than the theaters of today. The patrons would voice their opinions during a production of a play; some even threw vegetables at the actors on the stage. The theater gained a reputation for rowdy behavior and aristocratic society did not consider theater a respectable part of Elizabethan society.

The Globe burned down in a fire in 1613, when a cannon was fired during a performance and the thatched roof over the gallery caught on fire. It was rebuilt that year, but in 1644 the structure was torn down when theatres were closed due to the government ban on theatres.

Macbeth: Summary and Analysis

Act I Summary and Analysis

New Characters
Three Witches: evil prophets; also known as the Weird Sisters

Duncan: King of Scotland

Malcolm: Duncan's son

Captain: a wounded Scottish-soldier

Lennox: nobleman of Scotland

Ross: nobleman of Scotland

Macbeth: Duncan's cousin and General in the military

Banquo: soldier and Macbeth's friend

Angus: nobleman of Scotland

Lady Macbeth: Macbeth's wife

Summary

Scene 1
The play opens on a bleak and lonely stretch of land in Scotland. Three Witches report that the battle Macbeth is fighting will be over by sunset; they plan to meet with Macbeth on the barren battlefield, or "heath," at that time. The setting is enhanced by an approaching thunder storm and three Witches foretelling of the evil they foresee for the future: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," what is good will be bad and what is bad will be good.

Scene 2
The king of Scotland, Duncan, learns of the events of the battle from the wounded Captain that has just returned from the battlefield. The Captain informs Duncan that Macbeth has defeated Macdonwald, the Norwegian army, and the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is reported to be brave and fearless. The Captain states the conflict was resolved by Macbeth. The King orders the immediate execution of the traitorous Thane of Cawdor and names Macbeth as the new Thane of Cawdor. Duncan sends Ross to announce this to Macbeth on the battlefield.

Scene 3
The Witches are on the battlefield discussing the evil and disruptive deeds they have been doing. The First Witch had a disagreement with a sailor's wife because the wife would not give her any of the chestnuts she was eating. This angers the Witches and they decide to torture the woman's husband by creating a windstorm that will blow his ship to all points on the compass. The storm will be so intense he will not be able to rest. The first Witch says, "I'll drain him dry as hay." She then brags about the "pilot's thumb," or small bone, she has as a charm. The Witches hear a drum and the approach of Macbeth.

Macbeth and Banquo enter and are unaware of the Witches at first. Macbeth's first line in the play, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," alludes to the initial prophecy of the Three Witches. Banquo then spies the Witches, but he is unable to determine if they are men or women: "You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so." The Witches then greet Macbeth with his current title, Thane of Glamis, and two titles he is yet to have, Thane of Cawdor and King. Macbeth is perplexed by their greeting because he knows that both the Thane of Cawdor and King are still alive.

Banquo, hearing such a good fortune for this friend, inquires as to his own fate. He is told that he will be lesser and greater than Macbeth; even though he will never be king, his sons will. The Witches then dissolve into the air, leaving Banquo to wonder if they were real or just an hallucination.

Ross and Angus greet them with the news that Macbeth has been named Thane of Cawdor by Duncan. Banquo and Macbeth are surprised and contemplate the evil nature of the Witches. Macbeth is eager for power; however, Banquo warns him of the evil nature of the Witches and that the outcome of his actions could be disastrous to him.

Scene 4
Duncan inquires if the Thane of Cawdor has been executed and expresses regret as to giving the order to have him killed. Macbeth enters and they exchange accolades. Duncan names his own son, Malcolm to succeed him as king. This creates a conflict for Macbeth as Malcolm is another obstacle to overcome toward his goal to succeed Duncan as king.

> The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
> On which I must fall down or else o'erleap
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
> Let no light see my black and deep desires.

Duncan plans to visit Inverness, Macbeth's castle, and the scene ends with Macbeth leaving to prepare for Duncan's visit.

Scene 5
Lady Macbeth has received a letter from Macbeth stating that he has been named Thane of Cawdor. The letter reveals his ambition to be king and the prophecy given by the Witches. Lady Macbeth discloses her ambitious nature and vows to help Macbeth succeed in his ambition to be crowned King. She receives word that King Duncan will be arriving soon and is perplexed because Macbeth has not informed her himself. Macbeth arrives and they concur that by any means he should be crowned King:

> Come, you spririts
> Thast tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
> And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood...

Lady Macbeth tells him he should be a gracious host and they will speak on the matter later that evening.

Scene 6
Duncan arrives with his entourage and Lady Macbeth welcomes him upon his arrival. Duncan is eager to meet with Macbeth as he and Lady Macbeth exchange greetings.

Scene 7
Macbeth gives a dinner for Duncan and his guests that evening. During the dinner, Macbeth leaves and begins to contemplate the plan he and Lady Macbeth have discussed. He struggles with his conscience and the fear of eternal damnation if he murders Duncan. This internal conflict is reinforced because Macbeth is Duncan's cousin, he is a beloved king, and Duncan is a guest in his home:

> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself.

Lady Macbeth calls Macbeth a coward and implies that he is less than a man for faltering in his plan to murder Duncan. Her resolute desire and quest for power sway Macbeth to agree with her and he decides to go through with the plan.

Analysis
Introducing the play with the Witches in the first scene creates an evil tone and mysterious setting; something sinister is about to happen. Witches were traditionally thought of in Elizabethan times as evil and connected to devil's work. The supernatural was feared and respected. The Witches statement, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair", clearly depicts that the events in the play will be evil and destructive. The thunderstorm and filthy air reinforce the evil prediction of the Witches and clearly indicates to the audience that a conflict between man and nature/good and evil exists within the world of the play. Scene 1 creates the atmosphere of evil that will continue throughout the play.

Duncan is portrayed as a concerned and interested ruler. The Captain reports the events in the battle and he characterizes Macbeth as a worthy and loyal subject to Duncan. The King is filled with gratitude and respect for Macbeth and the Captain. Duncan's compassion, however, is limited to his loyal subjects, as he orders the Thane of Cawdor's execution immediately upon hearing of him being a traitor.

Macbeth's actions in battle, by contrast, are barbaric and aggressive. He not only killed the enemy, but he cut him from his navel to his mouth, and cut off the victims head and placed it on the "battlements." This scene reveals the historical data needed for the introduction of the conflicts Macbeth creates and faces in his struggle for power. At this point Macbeth is viewed as a noble, loyal subject fighting battles victoriously for the King

and Scotland. However, his actions on the battlefield reveal him to be a ruthless killer.

The Witches begin Scene 3 exhibiting the powers they possess; however, they are limited in these powers. They can create situations that will cause destruction (such as the storm), but they lack the power to actually sink the sailor's ship. The audience can infer that Macbeth will create his own havoc because the prophecy made by the Witches comes true. The Witches guide Macbeth's fate through their statements. Macbeth states, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," echoing the Witches' lines in the first scene of the play. This repetition links Macbeth to the Witches. The audience makes a logical connection that Macbeth will be linked to the evil conflict in the world of the play.

Macbeth and Banquo meet the Witches on the field, and the Witches greet Macbeth with three titles. As noted through Banquo's dialogue, Macbeth is clearly startled. Banquo is equally interested in what the future will hold for him. He learns that his sons will be kings, but for him—nothing.

When Duncan's men give Macbeth the news that he is to be the new Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth considers what the Witches have said and becomes concerned about their evil nature. He states his desire to be King, but he ponders over the cost. Banquo questions the evil nature of the Witches' and warns Macbeth to look closer at the Witches predictions before he acts on them.

Duncan feels he may have acted in haste in ordering the death of the first Thane of Cawdor. This demonstrates the king's compassionate character and conscience. Macbeth greets his cousin Duncan with respect and friendship knowing full well he is plotting to take control. When Duncan announces that his son Malcolm will succeed him as king, Macbeth outwardly supports Duncan's decision. However, he is disappointed and knows he must eliminate Duncan and his son Malcolm to become king. Macbeth now struggles with this conflict and ponders what fate may bring.

Out of love for her husband, Lady Macbeth hardens her heart in order to aid him in mudering Duncan. Unlike Macbeth, she pushes aside her conscience when she makes her decision: "Nor heaven peep through the blanket of dark / To cry "Hold, hold!" She also uses the love they share to lend courage when Macbeth falters. Macbeth's success, and therefore her own fate, lies in Macbeth carrying out his homicidal plot.

When Duncan arrives at Inverness his gentle and loving nature is reinforced. He is again seen as a caring King interested in his subjects. This creates empathy for the innocent Duncan, and the image of Macbeth as a loyal trustworthy friend to Duncan begins to change. Macbeth reveals that he has a conscience as he questions his motives for killing Duncan. However, Lady Macbeth questions his manhood, calls him a coward, and coaxes Macbeth to follow through with the plan. She knows Macbeth's weak points and uses them to bolster his convinction. Her desire for Macbeth to be king overcomes her basic human compassion and greed seduces her morality. Macbeth becomes victim to his selfish desire for power.

Act II Summary and Analysis

New Characters
Fleance: Banquo's son

Porter: doorman for Macbeth

Macduff: nobleman of Scotland

Donalbain: Duncan's younger son

Summary

Scene 1

There is something in the air that disturbs Banquo and Fleance and they cannot sleep. As they discuss the reasons for their inability to sleep, Macbeth joins them. Banquo confesses that he has been dreaming about the prophecy the Witches told them and he is concerned about the evil nature of the Witches. Macbeth responds by saying, “I think not of them.” Both agree to discuss the matter at a later date. Banquo and Fleance retire to their chambers to sleep.

As Macbeth, alone in the hall, contemplates the murder he is about to commit, a bloody dagger appears before him:

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come let me clutch thee.
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still...
> And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood.

Macbeth is still hesitant about killing Duncan. Once he hears Lady Macbeth’s signal, though, the ringing of the bell, he no longer delays and proceeds to Duncan’s room.

Scene 2

Lady Macbeth is filled with anticipation for Macbeth’s safe return and the completion of Duncan’s murder. Her fears surface when she is startled by a noise that turns out to be nothing more than an owl screeching. She is concerned that the plot may not be completed and that Macbeth will be discovered before Duncan is murdered.

Lady Macbeth reveals in a soliloquy that when she placed the daggers in Duncan’s chamber she considered killing Duncan herself. However, Duncan looked too much like her father and she could not commit the act herself: “Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done’t.”

When Macbeth returns he is distraught and regrets the murder he has committed. Macbeth reports to Lady Macbeth that as he stepped past Duncan’s guards, he heard a voice cry, “Sleep no more! Macbeth hath murdered sleep.” In his tormented state, Macbeth leaves the murder scene carrying the bloody daggers.

Lady Macbeth urges him to return the daggers and place them by the slain Duncan, but Macbeth refuses to return to the chamber. Lady Macbeth returns the daggers and stains her hands with Duncan’s blood. They hear a knock and retire to their sleeping quarters before the Porter arrives at the door.

Scene 3

Macduff and Lennox have arrived at Macbeth’s castle at Inverness at daybreak. The Porter jokes and carries on with Macduff about his drinking and lack of success with women the night before as Macbeth joins them. Macduff leaves Lennox and Macbeth to discuss the violent storm they had the night before.

Macduff rushes back to the courtyard with the news that the king had been murdered. Macbeth and Lennox rush to the chamber and Macduff sounds the alarm. Macbeth confesses when he saw the slain Duncan he was filled with rage and murdered Duncan’s guards. He felt they were the murderers because they were smeared with blood and had the daggers in their hands. Confusion and shock ensues and Lady Macbeth faints. Donalbain and Malcolm fear foul play has been committed by someone close to them: “Where we are, / There’s daggers in men’s smiles; the nea’er in blood, / The nearer bloody.”

Donalbain says he will go to Ireland, while Malcolm agrees to go to England. They flee the castle in fear of their own lives while Macduff, Macbeth, and the others agree to meet to discuss the catastrophe.

Scene 4
The following day Ross and an old man discuss the strange events that have taken place. Ross says that Duncan's horses became enraged, broke out of their stalls, and ate each other. Other unnatural events are going on with the birds and the weather. They fear all of this has to do with Duncan's murder.

Macduff joins the discussion and it is revealed that Duncan's body has been taken to the family plot at Colmekill and Macbeth has been named to succeed Duncan as King. The coronation will take place at Scone. Ross plans to go to Scone and Macduff leaves for Fife, of which he is Thane. Macduff fears the worst is yet to come.

Analysis
The second act opens with Banquo and his son, Fleance, walking the halls at Inverness, unable to sleep. Banquo has been plagued by dreams of the Witches. As he walks with Fleance, he hands him the sword and dagger he is wearing. Shakespeare uses this scene to foreshadow Fleance's eventual assumption of his father's role. Symbolically, the torch is being passed from father to son.

Macbeth enters and is confronted by Banquo, who was unable to distinguish him in the dim light. Macbeth greets Banquo as "a friend." This is ironic because in the next act, Macbeth proves to be much less than a friend. They discuss the prophecies of the Witches, Banquo saying he has dreamed of them, while Macbeth says he has not thought at all about them. Yet, they are all Macbeth has thought about. Macbeth has planned the murder of the King because of the prophecies.

After Banquo and his son have departed, Macbeth sends his servant to tell his wife to strike the bell when his drink is ready. This is his signal to enter Ducan's chamber and kill him. As he waits, a vision of a dagger appears floating before him. He reaches for it, but is unable to grasp it. He thinks the dagger is a product of his "heat-oppressed brain." The dagger beckons Macbeth toward Duncan's room and it becomes covered in blood as Macbeth approaches the chamber of the sleeping King. Macbeth's conscience creates the vision of the dagger, either to halt his plans by revealing the horror of the act or, as Macbeth believes, to beckon him forward. But, if Macbeth's will were about to falter, Lady Macbeth's signal, the ringing of the bell, provides him with the courage to finish what he has started.

Lady Macbeth greatly anticipates the return of Macbeth from the murderous act. While she waits, she gathers strength from the knowledge that she has drugged the drinks of Duncan's servants. "That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;/ What hath quenched them hath given me fire!" Because the servants will be unable to stop Macbeth, Lady Macbeth knows that their plot to eliminate the king will be unimpeded. Yet, the act of murder and a guilty conscience cause her to jump at the screeching of an owl. She then refers to the "fatal bellman," a man that rang a bell outside a condemned man's cell encouraging him to confess his sins. She is inferring that Duncan is a condemned man and should repent his sins. Also, she could be referring to Macbeth, as he will be a condemned man if he is caught committing the murder. Even if he is not caught, the murder of Duncan is a sin that condemns Macbeth's soul.

Lady Macbeth asked to be "unsexed" in an earlier scene so that she may have the necessary strength to support Macbeth in his quest for the throne. However, when she placed the daggers by the sleeping Duncan, she was unable to kill him because he looked too much like her father. Her conscience surfaced and she deferred to Macbeth to complete the evil plan.

Having killed Duncan, Macbeth returns to his wife's side in a dazed and confused state. He then tells his wife that as he approached Duncan, one of the servants cried out "Murder" in his sleep. This woke both the

servants up. One then said “God bless us!” and the other “Amen!” He is concerned that he could not say “amen” in return. He wanted to, but he found the words stuck in his throat. Macbeth is unable to receive the blessing he desires because of the sin he is about to commit.

After he has killed Duncan, his conscience begins to project voices that he thinks the entire castle can hear. “Still it cried ‘Sleep no more!’ to all the house;/ ‘Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more.’” Macbeth feels so guilty for the act that his mind projects voices that condemn him. He will no longer have the peace of mind that he had before the murder.

Lady Macbeth counsels her husband to ignore the voices that he thinks he has heard because dwelling upon them and the act he has just committed could drive him mad. She also tells him to return the bloody daggers to Duncan’s room. Macbeth is unable to face his crime again. so Lady Macbeth takes the daggers back. She returns with her hands now covered with blood like her husband. By having Lady Macbeth handle the daggers and get blood on her hands, Shakespeare is showing that even though she never commits an act of murder, her participation in planning makes her just as guilty.

When they hear the knock at the door, both adjourn to their sleeping quarters to establish an alibi if someone should come looking for them. Macbeth again expresses his regret at killing Duncan when he says, “Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou/ couldst!”

In order to give the audience a moment to recuperate from the heavy drama of the last scene, scene 3 opens with the comic banter of the porter at the door. He talks with Macduff about the effects of drinking on the body. But besides a bit of comedy, the scene also serves to establish a diabolical atmosphere around Macbeth’s castle. The porter curses in the “name of Beelzebub.” He does not call to God, instead he calls forth the name of the devil. He then hypothesizes as to who is knocking at the door. He names three people who would knock at the gates of Hell; a farmer that hanged himself, an equivocator that commits treason, and a tailor who steals cloth. He even talks about the people who walk the way to the “everlasting bonfire.”

These references to Hell serve to show the audience that Macbeth is creating a Hell within Scotland.

Macbeth then enters and Macduff goes to wake the king. While he is gone, Lennox–who arrived with Macduff–tells Macbeth of the turbulent night. The woeful weather outside mimics the horrible events inside Macbeth’s castle. Macduff then returns with the news of the king’s murder. Macbeth, faking astonishment, rushes off with Lennox to see the body. He later claims to have slain the servants, whom he had implicated in the murder, in a fit of rage over their heinous deed. Lady Macbeth continues her charade by fainting at the news.

Duncan’s sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, fear that the real killers were not the servants, but someone closer to them. They fear that whoever is ambitious enough to kill the king will come after them as well. “This murderous shaft that’s shot/Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way/Is to avoid the aim.” Malcolm flees to England and Donalbain to Ireland. Once they have fled Scotland, they are considered guilty in their own father’s murder.

There is a time lapse between the last two scenes of the second act. The Old Man and Ross discuss the events that have transpired over the last few days. They talk of strange portents and how ambition is the ruin of men. The audience can infer that Macbeth’s ambition will ruin him. This last scene also shows how Macbeth is still unable to look upon the body of Duncan. He goes to Scone to be crowned instead of Colmekill for the funeral.

Act III Summary and Analysis

New Characters
Murderers: hired killers

Hecate: a Witch

Summary

Scene 1
Banquo says that the prophecy has come true for Macbeth. He would like the prophecy the Witches made about his sons to come true also. Banquo feels that he must appear loyal to Macbeth, yet he does not trust him.

Macbeth questions Banquo as to his schedule for the day and says to Banquo to be sure and join them at the banquet that evening. Banquo and his son plan to go out riding for the day. Macbeth is worried that the prophecy of Banquo's sons being kings will come true. His reign will be barren if his sons do not succeed him. Macbeth hires two men to murder Banquo and Fleance.

Scene 2
Lady Macbeth questions Macbeth as to his plans, but he does not inform her of the plan to kill Banquo and Fleance. She encourages Macbeth not to think about Banquo or the events that have taken place. Macbeth tells her not to worry.

Scene 3
A third murderer joins the two Macbeth had hired in the previous scene. They wait along the path that Banquo and his son travel. As they approach, walking their horses, the murderers jump out. Banquo is killed, but Fleance is able to escape.

Scene 4
At the banquet, Macbeth learns that the murderers have not been entirely successful. They killed Banquo, but Fleance was able to escape. Macbeth takes joy in learning that Banquo is dead, because he cannot produce any more sons. He says he will deal with the matter of Fleance later.

As Macbeth is seated at the banquet table, the ghost of Banquo appears. This startles Macbeth and he responds to the vision. No one but Macbeth can see the ghost. Lady Macbeth assures her guests that Macbeth has had these attacks since he was a child and it will soon pass. She urges Macbeth to resume his role as host. As quickly as he offers his apology to his guest, the ghost appears again. Macbeth loses control and Lady Macbeth fears he will confess to the murder of Duncan. She asks her guest to leave quickly. The ghost disappears and Macbeth questions why Macduff did not attend the banquet. Macbeth feels he must consult with the Witches again to gain information about the future.

Scene 5
Hecate is another Witch that Shakespeare introduces to the audience. Hecate is upset because the other Witches did not consul her before they spoke to Macbeth. Hecate assures them she will conjure a spell that will lead Macbeth to a disastrous fate. She sends them to cast the spell and prepare the charm, as Macbeth plans to visit them soon.

Scene 6
Lennox says to a Lord that he feels it is a pity that Banquo was killed. He goes on to imply that Macbeth is responsible for both Duncan's and Banquo's deaths; even though the general consensus is that Fleance killed

his own father, as did Malcolm and Donalbain. Lennox does not believe either had anything to do with the deaths of their fathers. Macbeth has stolen Malcolm's birthright to be king and Malcolm is in England trying to secure an army to gain his birthright back. Macduff has gone to join in his effort. Lennox and the Lord hope that Malcolm will be successful in restoring peace to Scotland.

Analysis

Banquo says Macbeth has attained all the Witches said he would and at great cost to everyone; he feels his own prophecy should come true as well. The friendship between Banquo and Macbeth has been dissolved. Banquo no longer trusts his friend and must be cautious in his presence. Macbeth knows that all the Witches have said has come true and fears Banquo's prophecy will also come true.

Macbeth feels his own sons should succeed him, not Banquo's. Macbeth states his fears and concerns, yet, he does not inform Lady Macbeth of what he has planned. Macbeth feels he must resolve this conflict and he hires murderers to kill Banquo and his son. He feels this will guarantee that his heirs will succeed him. Macbeth does not express remorse or concern over the planning of Banquo and Fleance's murder, as he did with Duncan's murder. By now, he is so blinded with ambition and power and will stop at nothing to secure his powerful position.

Lady Macbeth and Macbeth discuss the problems they are having even though they have achieved what they wanted. Macbeth feels he has the Banquo situation in hand and assures Lady Macbeth not to worry about it. They both agree that they must continue to hide their true feelings at the banquet. Macbeth says that evil deeds are made stronger through additional evil deeds.

The murderers leave open the possibility of the prophecy being fulfilled because they are unsuccessful with the ambush on Banquo and his son. Banquo is killed, but his son Fleance escapes. Macbeth must still face the fact that Fleance is alive, yet he is delighted that the source has been killed. He does not have to worry about additional sons, only Fleance himself.

This scene also introduces a third murderer. He says he was sent by Macbeth, yet there is no other mention of him in the play. There is much speculation as to the identity of the third murderer. When Macbeth is performed on stage, the third murderer is sometimes hooded so that his features cannot be seen.

At the feast, Macbeth's fears and guilt overpower him and he loses control over his inner thoughts. He sees Banquo's ghost. The vision is horrible and he speaks openly to the ghost. Lady Macbeth is unable to control Macbeth, yet she urges him to reign in his fears and remember his guests. Her attempts are futile and she fears he will confess to the murder of Duncan to all the guests. This is the first time Macbeth gives way to a public expression of his inner conflicts; which marks a turning point in the drama. Macbeth continues to manifest his guilt through the vision of the ghost he can only see, and Lady Macbeth asks the guests to leave quickly as Macbeth seems to be getting worse. She has completely lost control of Macbeth.

Almost as quickly as the guests leave, Macbeth's fears surface concerning Macduff's not attending the banquet. Macbeth is fearful that, "Blood, they say: blood will have blood." He is paranoid about everyone and what their behavior means. He must control the situation even if that means killing someone to secure his position and remain in power. Macbeth feels his only recourse is to consult with the Witches as to his fate as they seem to see into the future.

Hecate, the Mistress of the Witches, is agitated that she was not informed as to the events concerning Macbeth. She plans to contribute to his fate by creating a situation that will enable Macbeth to create his own demise. This creates drama and reinforces the power the Witches have in the play.

(The scene with Hecate is not thought to have been in the original text. This has led to speculation that Shakespeare did not write the scene.)

Act IV Summary and Analysis

New Characters
Apparitions: visions created by the Witches

Lady Macduff: Macduff's distraught wife

Son: Macduff's child

Summary

Scene 1
The Witches are preparing a magic potion and casting a spell. They chant incantations three times to make sure the charm's power will be strong. Macbeth greets the Witches and demands that they give him information about the future. The Witches call upon Apparitions to inform Macbeth of his future.

The first Apparition is that of an armed head saying he should beware of Macduff. The second Apparition is that of a bloody child and it states that no man born of woman will harm Macbeth. The third Apparition is that of a crowned child holding a tree. This Apparition says, "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him."

Macbeth urges the Witches to give him additional information about the future. The Witches show him a procession of kings and the last holding a mirror with the reflection of Banquo. The Witches disappear and Macbeth asks Lennox if he saw the Witches as he entered the room. Lennox said he did not. Lennox then informs Macbeth that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth says he plans to kill Macduff's family.

Scene 2
Lady Macduff is angered and enraged that her husband, Macduff, has left for England without telling her. She does not know what they are to do now. Ross tries to console her, but she feels her husband is a traitor and a coward. Macduff's son questions his mother about the father's disappearance. She tells him his father is dead; he does not believe her . A messenger arrives and warns Lady Macduff that her life is in danger and she must leave immediately. The Murderers arrive and kill Lady Macduff and her son.

Scene 3
Malcolm and Macduff are in England. Malcolm questions Macduff's motives and wants to make sure that he has not been sent by Macbeth. Malcolm goes on to confess that he has many vices that may make him a far worse King than Macbeth. Macduff's response is that Malcolm is the rightful heir to the throne and Macbeth must be unseated at all cost. Malcolm is convinced that Macduff is sincere and says that the things he said about himself were not true. Malcolm says he is sincere and pure and seeks only good for Scotland.

Ross enters and informs Malcolm and Macduff that Scotland is in a terrible condition. At first Ross hesitates, but then informs Macduff that his family has been brutally murdered. Macduff is shocked and vows to revenge the murder of his family.

Analysis
Hecate knows that Macbeth will not question information given to him but will act upon it. Macbeth is given information that he feels will give him immortality. He is ready to believe only what he feels will benefit him,

but he is unable to distinguish the “good” from the “bad”. The “Fair is foul and the foul is fair” statement made by the Witches and by Macbeth in this drama has been reinforced in this Act.

Macbeth is no longer capable of making rational judgments or distinguishing good from evil. Obsessed with this knowledge, Macbeth feels he must take quick action to preserve his future. Macbeth feels he must seek Macduff and kill him and his family to insure that the blood line is stopped.

Macbeth is out of control and reacts without thought to his actions. He feels he must spill blood to remain in control and powerful. Once again Macbeth has innocent blood on his hands, and again, he feels no remorse. He is driven by his lust to control the situation and flex his power. The fact that Shakespeare allows the act of the murder to be witnessed as it occurs, rather than have it reported, gives the audience a first-hand impression of the evil nature of Macbeth. The senseless murder of Lady Macduff and her son contribute to Macbeth’s demise and reinforces the flaws in his character.

Malcolm confesses to Macduff that his own character is far worse than Macbeth. He says he has committed crimes worse than Macbeth. Macduff states that he feels Malcolm has the birthright to be the king of Scotland and he knows that he is worthy. Malcolm says that he was only testing Macduff’s sincerity. Shakespeare uses this ploy to show that Malcolm is a good man and should be the king. The audience supports Malcolm’s efforts to restore Scotland.

The murder of Macduff’s family is unnecessary and the act of a tyrant. When Macduff learns that his family has been murdered, he is even more determined to seek revenge on Macbeth. Macbeth is seen as a barbaric killer and Malcolm’s cause is reinforced by Macbeth’s actions. The murder is the last event that Malcolm and Macduff can allow; they vow to overthrow Macbeth and reclaim Scotland for the people.

Act V Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Gentlewoman: a woman attending Lady Macbeth

Doctor: the physician in the castle

Carthness and Menteith: nobleman of Scotland in Malcolm’s English Army

Seyton: an Officer in Macbeth’s army

Siward: general in the English army fighting with Malcolm

Young Siward: Siward’s son in the English army with Malcolm

Summary

Scene 1
The Gentlewoman reports to the Doctor that Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking and her behavior is very strange. The Gentlewoman says that Lady Macbeth gets out of bed, puts on a nightgown, unlocks her closet, writes on a piece of paper, seals the letter and returns to bed.

Lady Macbeth says things that the Gentlewoman refuses to repeat because she fears she will be charged with treason. She urges the Doctor to hear them for himself. The doctor watches Lady Macbeth and concludes that he cannot treat her illness as she needs the assistance of God. He is very concerned about Lady Macbeth’s

safety and tells the Gentlewoman to watch her closely.

Scene 2
Menteith, Angus, Lennox and Caithness discuss the battle plans of Malcolm. They plan to meet near Birnam Wood with the others. Macbeth has secured Dunsinane, but his forces are not loyal subjects. Each vow to fight to the death to regain control of Scotland and overthrow Macbeth.

Scene 3
Macbeth is secure in his castle at Dunsinane. He feels confident because the Witches told him that he cannot be harmed unless the prophecies come to pass. He believes the Witches and has no fear. Macbeth dresses for battle as the Doctor reveals Lady Macbeth's condition to him. He ask the Doctor to find a cure for his wife. Macbeth leaves for the battle.

Scene 4
Malcolm, Menteith, and Siward are near Birnam Wood. Malcolm tells them they should each cut a branch from a tree from Birnam Wood and use it as camouflage. They prepare to march on to Dunsinane.

Scene 5
Macbeth feels confident that he will overthrow Malcolm in battle. Macbeth hears a cry and discovers that Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth responds by saying that life is very short. A messenger arrives to inform Macbeth that the wood of Birnam seems to be moving toward Dunsinane. Macbeth sounds the alarm and prepares to fight.

Scenes 6–8
Malcolm, Siward, and Macduff arrive at Dunsinane and enter Macbeth's castle. Macbeth and Young Siward have a fight and Young Siward is killed. Macduff comes face to face with Macbeth. Macbeth urges Macduff to leave, as Macbeth feels he has enough of Macduff's blood on his hands. Macbeth tells Macduff that he cannot be harmed and cannot be killed by any man born from a woman. Macduff informs Macbeth that he was not born of woman, but was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb. Macbeth says that what the Witches said had a double meaning and he did not realize in time the meaning of their prophecy. Macduff calls Macbeth a coward and coerces Macbeth into fighting him. The two exit and continue their sword fight.

Siward is informed that his son has died valiantly in battle. Macduff returns with the severed head of Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm as the rightful heir to the throne. Malcolm assures the people that Scotland will be restored to a peaceful place when he is King. Malcolm vows to honor the Thanes and kinsmen that helped in the fight against Macbeth with the title of Earl. The drama ends with Malcolm inviting the victors to his coronation at Scone.

Analysis
Lady Macbeth's behavior has been very peculiar, according to the Gentlewoman, and the Doctor is summoned to witness the behavior for himself. Lady Macbeth is responding to her guilty feelings. She is trying to rid herself of her guilt, which takes the form of the blood she is unable to wash from her hands. She confesses to encouraging Macbeth to kill Duncan and refers to Banquo's death as well. She is obsessed with the blood on her hands and she is unable to wash it off. She exclaims, "Out damn spot" as she unsuccessfully tries to remove the blood from her hands. This shows the demise of Lady Macbeth. Her actions and the actions of Macbeth have caused her to loose her mind. The guilt she feels can no longer be controlled; she has lost control of herself.

Macbeth feels confident that he will be safe in battle because of the Witches' prophecy. Macbeth is so self-absorbed with the impending battle that when the Doctor informs him that he cannot help Lady Macbeth, Macbeth simply becomes angry and insists that the Doctor find a cure for her. He then dismisses the doctor

and dresses for battle. Macbeth is detached from reality and unaware of the severe condition of his wife. He is so consumed with rage and lust for power that his own wife is no longer important to him. The Witches are the only other source besides himself that Macbeth can trust. He must remain in control at all costs; even if he must spill more blood.

Malcolm and his men ready themselves for battle by using branches from Birnam Wood to shield themselves while approaching Dunsinane. In this way, the Witches' prophecy is fulfilled. Macbeth is informed that Lady Macbeth is dead; he does not even ask how she died. He is only concerned about himself and guarding his power. When the Messenger informs Macbeth that trees seem to be moving toward the castle, Macbeth is angered with him. However, he soon realizes that the Witches' prophecy is coming to pass. His response is to face the battle even if it means his death.

Macbeth has false hopes in his battle with Young Siward because he feels he cannot be harmed by any woman born of man. After Macbeth kills Young Siward, he feels even more confident that he is immortal. He feels he cannot be harmed and will remain in power because of his prophecy.

Macduff faces Macbeth filled with rage and vengeance. When he tells Macbeth that he was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb, Macbeth realizes that the Witches gave him information that had a double meaning. Macbeth at that moment realizes that his fate has been sealed and he is not immortal.

Macbeth and Macduff fight. They disappear offstage, then return still fighting. Macbeth is then slain and Macduff carries his body offstage. By having the fight momentarily disapear offstage, the drama builds as the audience anticipates the outcome. Since Shakespeare did not have the benefits of modern moviemaking, Macbeth's body had to be taken offstage in order for Macduff to return with the severed head.

The play concludes with Malcom being restored to his rightful place on the throne.

Macbeth is a tragic hero because he has the potential for greatness, but it is undercut by his greed and lust for power. The prophecies of the Witches provide the spark by which Macbeth's soul is set on fire. Once he is presented with the chance to further his own ambition, he lets nothing and no one get in his way. Loyalty becomes treachery and friends become enemies. Even Lady Macbeth's death is naught but a nuisance. Macbeth tells Seyton that she should have waited until tomorrow to die because then he could have spent time mourning for her.

Shakespeare knew how to interpret the complex forces which drive men. On one level, Macbeth is about the fight between good and evil. Yet, it is told from the perspective of one man, Macbeth. Even within his own mind, Macbeth is torn between what is right (supporting Duncan) and what is wrong (following his own ambition). Macbeth is not a one dimensional character. He is not wholly evil, there are patches of goodness and regret within him. It is this intricate portrait of Macbeth's personality which adds realism to a play with such supernatural overtones.

Macbeth's road to ruin is twisted and branching. He is offered chances to reverse his course and save himself, but he sticks to the path of personal ambition. Each murderous act leads to another, more horrific than the last. The Witches are often blamed for Macbeth's downfall because he would not have killed the King if he had not heard tales of the future. But, Macbeth does not begin to plan the murder of Duncan until after Malcolm has been named successor. Until that point, Macbeth would have been proclaimed King had Duncan died according to Scottish law. Duncan's announcement usurps that law and Macbeth begins his bloody quest.

In the end, the play has come full circle. At the beginning, Macbeth defends the King against those who would overthrow the crown. In the end Macbeth, who has taken the crown by blood and deceit, is overthrown and rightful rule is restored.

Macbeth: Critical Commentary

Act I Commentary

Scene i: In what is perhaps the most attention-grabbing opening scene of all of Shakespeare's plays, we are introduced to the Weird Sisters. The witches (as they are known) would have been considered by the Elizabethans to be human representatives of supernatural or dark forces. The thunder and lightening used to mark their entrance emphasises their "other worldliness." Graymalkin, a cat, and Paddock, a toad, are mentioned as their special accomplices, as would be dogs, rats, and spiders. This association of animals and insects with horror and evil is still evident in our Halloween decorations and scary movies.

The stage direction gives no indication of where the scene takes place, and the first word, "When," indicates that time rather than place will be a major motif of the play. Although the events in Shakespeare's original source for the play, Holinshed's Chronicles, cover a ten year period, the play compresses the action so that events quickly follow each other.

The sing-song meter of the lines adds to the witches' mystery and underlines the effect that this opening "spell" will cast over the play. With all this "hurly burly," it is easy to miss a crucial piece of information: the witches will meet Macbeth on the heath at sunset. Why? What do they want with him?

Prophecies are used in Shakespeare's plays for two reasons: (1) to alert the audience to what will definitely happen, and (2) to alert the audience to what may or may not happen. Either way, this playwriting technique sets up the debate of whether characters are fated to meet to their ends or whether they have free choice. Here, however, the audience is only aware that the witches will meet Macbeth. The atmosphere of thunder, lightening, "fog and filthy air" imply that it will not be a good meeting.

As if all this were not enough, this opening scene has thirteen lines!

Scene ii: As predicted by the witches, a battle opens this scene. The king, Duncan, and his son, Malcolm, receive a report on the battle with the rebel, Macdonald, from the Captain. The King's language, however, is deceptively simple. He judges from the blood on the Captain that the man "can report/…of the revolt/ the newest state" (1.2.1-3). Duncan is thus established as a man who draws his conclusions from appearances. Malcolm, on the other hand, seems to put his trust in loyalty and tradition: "This is the sergeant/who like a good and hardy soldier fought/'Gainst my captivity" (1.2.3-5). When the bleeding Captain is questioned by Duncan about Macbeth and Banquo, two of his thanes (lords), he says that the two men "doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe" (1.2.38).

The Thane of Ross (known simply as Ross) and his companion, Angus, enter the scene to confirm the report of the Captain, adding that the Thane of Cawdor (another rebel) is defeated. Since a thane received his lands from the king and owed his loyalty directly to the king, the actions of the Thane of Cawdor is a serious offence punishable by death. Duncan not only orders this punishment immediately, but also awards the title, Thane of Cawdor, to Macbeth for his services to the crown.

Thus, the witches' vague prediction, "when the battle's lost and won", is enacted before the audience who now knows about Macbeth's promotion before he does. This knowledge will be especially important for the scene that follows. Here and now, however, it seems a very normal thing for a king to reward "noble" (1.2.66) Macbeth's military service with a promotion. Yet, nagging in the back of the mind is the fact that the meeting of the witches with Macbeth is close at hand. What do they want with him? What will happen next?.

Scene iii: Like scene 1, this scene opens with a peal of thunder and the appearance of the Three Witches. Here the audience receives an explanation of what the 'unnatural hags' have been up to since last saw them. The Second Witch has been 'killing swine' (1.3.2), while the First Witch is plotting revenge against a sailor's wife who had refused to share her chestnuts. While the three give many details about just what it is they plan to do to the sailor, Shakespeare is cleverly hinting at the limits of their power. The witches plan to torment the man with buffeting winds, sleeplessness, starvation, and a faulty compass. All these misfortunes are natural events and do not directly cause death. The limit to the witches' power is stated clearly: 'his bark cannot be lost' (1.3.24). Although the witches can inflict malice, it is the sailor's choices in dealing with them that will determine whether his ship sinks.

Immediately following is Macbeth's and Banquo's entrance. We only know the meeting is on the heath in the fog from Act One, scene one. The placement of the entrance here emphasises the limits of the witches' power over Macbeth and Banquo. The veracity f the prophecies that follow depend on two factors: (1) Macbeth is already Thane of Glamis and does not know that Duncan has made him Thane of Cawdor; (2) Macbeth alone can choose the means to make the leap from 'Thane of Cawdor' to 'King hereafter' (1.3.48, 49).

Banquo reinforces this free will to choose in his lines 'If you can look into the seeds of time,/ And say which grain will grow and which will not' (1.3.58-59). The prophecy for Banquo, 'Lesser than Macbeth, and greater./ Not so happy, yet much happier./ Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none' (1.3.6567) does not mention titles for Banquo, but rather intangible aspirations such as greatness and happiness which can be achieved by any man. The audience, however, knows that Macbeth's prophecy will soon be confirmed.

The witches disappear without further explanation, but they have made a deep impression on Macbeth, one that shows his initial belief in the prophecies: 'Would they had stayed' (1.3.82), followed by his realisation that Banquo's children will be kings. We will learn later that while Macbeth is childless, Banquo does have a son, so that while Macbeth will be king, he will not be able to pass on his regency.

Ross and Angus enter at this point to confirm that Macbeth is now Thane of Cawdor. At first he does not believe the two messengers, but once the events, 'treasons capital, confessed and proved' (1.3.115), are logically explained, Macbeth accepts that it is all in fulfilment of the prophecy. The one sticking point is the prophecy for Banquo. Banquo, however, tells Macbeth that such a vague pronouncement though containing an element of truth, will be harmful in the long run. Macbeth is lost in thought, debating with himself about whether the prophecies are bad or good. Realising that he can only be King by murdering Duncan, Macbeth decides that 'chance may crown me,/ Without my stir' (1.3.143-144). Technically, murder is the only choice that Macbeth can make to fulfil his prophecy, but he relinquishes an active role, blaming chance for any such treasonous thoughts. The scene ends with Banquo's agreeing to discuss the witches with Macbeth when they have both had time to think about it.

Such a discussion, however, will be unnecessary for Macbeth. Being made Thane of Cawdor has been sufficient proof for Macbeth that he will indeed be King whatever action he decides to take. Furthermore, Macbeth says that the witches have told him 'Two truths' (1.3.127) when in reality, he has heard only one. Clearly, on a subconscious level, Macbeth had already though about killing Duncan and now has made the decision, despite pangs of conscience.

Scene iv: This scene opens with a second-hand report of Cawdor's death, which serves to confirm once more Macbeth's promotion. Duncan then offers a profound statement:

> There's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face:
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust. (1.4.11-14)

Duncan, whom we have seen makes judgements from appearances, apparently acknowledges his fault. However, is he speaking about Cawdor or Macbeth? Even though the King realises he failed to identify Cawdor as a traitor, he will also fail to see the treachery in his new favourite. And at this point, as Macbeth enters, this short-sightedness is all too visible in his telling Macbeth that the King owes him more than he can pay.

Curiously, Duncan uses this moment to declare his eldest son, Malcolm, Prince of Cumberland and heir to the throne. After inviting the King to stay at his castle, Macbeth makes another treacherous choice: if he is to be king, 'the Prince of Cumberland... is a step/ On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,/ For in my way it lies' (1.4.48-50). After Macbeth, Duncan praises Banquo as 'true, worthy' and 'valiant' (1.4.54).

Though the scene is only 58 lines long, structurally it is a brilliant sketch of the play. It opens with the old order (Duncan), continues with what will become the new order (Macbeth), and ends with the future of Scotland (Banquo). In addition, the scene shows the weakness of Duncan, the determination of Macbeth, and the quiet fealty of Banquo as interdependent links to each other and the prophecies. Psychologically, the scene also sets the stage for the entrance of the first woman in the play, Lady Macbeth. What will her reaction be to the royal visit?

Scene v: Arguably the most popular Shakespeare role for an actress, Lady Macbeth is introduced in this scene. Ironically, her first words are hers, but her husband's, contained in a letter which she begins with 'They' (1.5.1). Is Macbeth telling her about Ross and Angus, the soldiers in the battle, the King and his court, or someone else? It all becomes clear very quickly, when he writes 'they made themselves into air' (1.5.5). Not only has Macbeth devoted the main part of his letter to a discussion of the witches, but it is also that part which has captured Lady Macbeth's attention.

But there are many other things going on here. Macbeth quotes the prophecy, 'All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter' (1.3.49-50) as 'Hail, King that shall be'. Such a misquote not only alters the words that the witches had used, but also alters their significance. To Macbeth, he was addressed as 'King' and is determined to be so. He also states that 'This I thought good to deliver thee', indicating (1) that he has decided that the prophecies are good; and (2) whatever happens, Lady Macbeth will also profit from it.

By addressing his wife as 'my dearest partner of greatness' (1.5.11-12), Macbeth opens a window on his marriage. At an historical time when women were more prized for the political and financial advantage they brought to a marriage, these two are clearly equals. As such, they would present a unified front in the quest for the crown. However, Lady Macbeth betrays this unity in her next lines. She reveals that she thinks her husband is too weak to follow through on what is required to obtain 'the golden round' (1.5.29). Lady Macbeth has no problem believing the prophecy which she has heard second-hand and which is misquoted. She is determined to convince her husband that 'fate and metaphysical aid' (1.5.30) are the true ways to the murder of Duncan and the crown.

When her reverie is interrupted by news of the King's imminent arrival, she cannot believe her luck. Now she can effect her plan for her husband's further promotion. She calls on the dark powers to 'unsex' (1.5.42) her and kill any feminine feelings of compassion and remorse in her. Her speech is littered with references to evil: 'murd'rng monsters' (49); 'thick night' (51); 'dunnest smoke of hell' (52).

Contrary to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth has already formulated the means of Duncan's death. She further greets her husband with 'Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!/ Greater than both' (1.5.55-56), demonstrating that in her mind, she sees him as King. Assuring her husband that she has the situation in hand, Lady Macbeth advise Macbeth that he must be careful of how he appears to the King, showing us that she too knows he judges from appearances.

The scene ends with Macbeth wanting to discuss her plan further and with Lady Macbeth already in motion. Is Macbeth re-thinking the prophecies or is he truly weak as his wife has described him? There seems to be an element of hope that Macbeth, the great soldier, may have had time on the trip home to re-consider his course of action more carefully. Yet, his wife too has considered hers.

Scene vi: Duncan, his son Malcolm, and the court arrive at Inverness, Macbeth's castle. As we have come to expect, the King senses no danger and comments on how good it is to arrive at such a sweet-smelling place, far away from the gun-powder smoke and blood-soaked soil of battlefields. As if to agree with Lady Macbeth's advice to Macbeth in the preceding scene ['Look the innocent flower, But be the serpent under't' (1.5.66-67)], the castle dons the appearance of a safe haven, an image furthered by unaware Banquo.

The preliminaries continue between the unwary King and the future murderess. Although it may seem unnecessary, the scene carefully establishes Duncan as a guest of a than from whom he should expect not only duty and loyalty, but also thoughtfulness and consideration under the rules of hospitality. These rules, dating back as far as ancient Greece, dictated that a guest was entitled to the full graciousness of his host, paramount of which was safety and good rest. Duncan will get neither of theses from the Macbeths.

Scene vii: During the feasting of his guest, Macbeth leaves the table and takes a moment to consider the consequences of his proposed murder of Duncan. He ponders the effects of assassination, realising that if regicide were the end result, all would be well; however, assassination creates a precedent for his own assassination and makes a martyr out of the one assassinated. Macbeth knows without a doubt the two considerations shown in 1.5, that he is a thane and Duncan is a guest in his house. Even with these cautions, he concedes that his 'vaulting ambition' (1.7.27) drives him on.

Lady Macbeth comes to find her husband when Duncan asks for him and Macbeth tells her he will not kill the King. As she had predicted, she finds him weakened in his resolve. She chides him sternly and repeats her plan to stab Duncan and blame his guards, covering every eventuality. Macbeth, convinced once more, praises his wife's 'undaunted mettle' (1.7.73), and the scene and the Act end.

With clear explanation of the murder plot, the audience now has all the information it needs to understand the rest of the play: the personalities of Duncan, Macbeth, Banquo, Lady Macbeth, and the Witches; the motif of fate versus free-will; the politics of good and evil. It remains to be seen how Macbeth will be as a King and how Banquo will become the father of kings. Also to be revealed is what will happen to Malcolm, the Witches, and Lady Macbeth.

In seven scenes (also a magical number), we have watched Macbeth rise from Thane of Glamis to Thane of Cawdor, with the promise of kingship in his future. We have learned that given a moral choice, he will choose that which is most advantageous to him and his ambition, a true Machiavellian. Can such a man gain and retain political power?

Act II Commentary

Scene i: By now the audience is anxious to find out how the Macbeths' murder plan will work, but Shakespeare continues to build the suspense. In this scene we meet Fleance (Flay-ahns), Banquo'' young son. Both father and son are restless and Macbeth too cannot sleep. The time is carefully noted as after 'twelve' (2.1.3), midnight, the witching hour. Banquo delivers a diamond from the King to Macbeth for his wife to thank her for being a 'most kind hostess' (2.1.16)

Now might Banquo and Macbeth have the discussion promised in 1.3. Banquo tells Macbeth that he 'dreamt last night of the three weird sisters' (2.1.20), and that they apparently spoke the truth to Macbeth. Macbeth,

however, lies to Banquo: 'I think not of them' (2.1.21), the response completing Banquo's line that ends in the word 'truth' (2.1.21). Macbeth also tells Banquo that now is not the time for their proposed discussion and goes one step further, telling Banquo that when the time comes, he shall gain honour if he sides with Macbeth. Banquo agrees, on the condition that the affair will not compromise his conscience. Banquo and Fleance go off to bed, leaving Macbeth alone.

Macbeth imagines that he sees a dagger before him and questions whether it is a real thing or 'a dagger of the mind' (2.1.28). The remainder of his soliloquy contains many references to witchcraft, as had Lady Macbeth's in 1.5: 'gouts of blood' (46); 'wicked dreams' (50); 'witchcraft' (51); 'Hecate' (52); 'wolf' (53); 'ghost' (56); 'horror' (59). The scene serves a dual purpose. In the first place, it poses Macbeth without a child against Banquo and Fleance, reinforcing the prophecy for Banquo. Secondly, it shows the inner workings of Macbeth's mind. It is a rule for Shakespeare that any time a character is speaking in an aside or to the audience, the character is telling the truth. Macbeth is no longer plagued by any doubt whatsoever, and his instruction to the servant to have Lady Macbeth ring a bell reminds us of her complicity. When the bell does ring, Macbeth describes it as a death knell. On one level it is, but on another, it is the audio signal of the instigation of Lady Macbeth's plan and the herald of her entrance for scene 2.

Scene ii: In the middle of a restless, moonlit night (which we would recognise as the beginning of a horror movie), an owl shrieks and a King is killed. The act that we have waited happens off-stage, while Lady Macbeth describes how she drugged the wine of Duncan's guards and left the doors open, the daggers ready for her husband's use. Curiously, Lady Macbeth explains that she herself would have killed Duncan 'had he not resembled/ My father as he slept' (2.2.12-13). Apparently, her moral code includes regicide but draws the line at patricide. The point that murder is murder and is wrong is lost on her.

What follows is even more curious. The two conspirators have an exchange about the sound of voices. Two of the court guests have awakened, but then prayed themselves back to sleep. Macbeth could not say 'Amen' and this weakness upsets him. His wife's advice is most patronising: 'Consider it not so deeply' (2.2.29). Macbeth, however, continues to ramble, accusing himself of murdering sleep. Lady Macbeth chides him to get a hold of himself and wash the blood from his hands. She then notices that he has the daggers with him. Angrily she tells him to go back and put the daggers by the guards and to smear the guards with Duncan's blood. When Macbeth refuses, she goes herself. In her absence, Macbeth tries to wash his hands but they will not come clean. When Lady Macbeth returns, she is covered in royal blood and believes 'a little water clears us of this deed' (2.2.66). As someone knocks at the gate, they go to bed, Macbeth obviously shocked at what he has done.

This long-anticipated scene is somewhat disappointing in that we do not see the murder, but we do see is even more terrifying: murder from the point of view of the murderers. The blood on Macbeth's hands is not nearly so shocking as his simple comment on the taking of a human life, 'I have done the deed' (2.2.24). There is no description of the stabbing — Macbeth is totally focused on himself. There is no indication of remorse, only worry about whether he will ever sleep again. This is unlikely, since, if he becomes king, he must be watchful that he is not assassinated. As for his wife, she shares his fear of discovery.

These are cold-blooded killers, assassins not for political change, but solely for personal gain. Such amorality and disregard for human life alienates the audience from any sympathy they may have had for these two, and quickly aligns the Macbeths with the evil that had bee depicted by the witches. The witches are ugly on the outside, the Macbeths within. Another difference is that the Macbeths have consciously, logically, and intentionally chosen to murder their anointed King. The witches may harass, but they will not murder people. As in a classic modern murder mystery, we know who the murderers are. What remains now is how they are found out and how they are punished.

Scene iii: Picking up on the knocking at the door from the previous scene, Shakespeare apparently decides to relieve the tension with the comic entrance of the Porter. The Porter is justifiably annoyed by the knocking on the door that has roused him before sunrise. Like most of us, he curses whoever it is that seeks entrance to the Castle. But why would Shakespeare pick this moment for a comedy routine?

Actually, if the language is analysed closely, we can see that we probably interpret this bit as comic because of the repetition of what we recognise as a 'knock-knock' joke: 'Knock, knock. Who's there?' (2.3.3, 7, 12-13). The Porter, however, paints the Castle as Hell and sees himself admitting grave sinners: a greedy farmer who committed suicide; an 'equivocator' (or Jesuit priest) who allegedly preached for God using treasonous words; a thieving English tailor. The Porter also mentions Satan (Beelzebub: made famous by Queen in 'Bohemian Rhapsody'), another devil, and hell as well as noting the heat and fires of hell. He ends by asking: 'I pray you, remember the porter' (2.3.21).

Far from being only comic, the Porter is the bridge between the actual murder and its consequences. All those involved will soon be in a kind of hell. The Porter also reminds us of the supernatural side of the story before us and how it is a story of kings and politics, not everyday people with their everyday concerns, like a farmer, a priest, or a tailor.

We learn that it is Macduff and Lennox who have been knocking so earnestly. These men, members of Duncan's entourage, have been silent in the play so far. Macduff especially now takes on a critical role in the action. he and the Porter share a few quips about lying, foreshadowing the discovery about to be made. Macbeth shows Macduff to Duncan's room, and Lennox comments that in the night, he had heard 'strange screams of death' (2.3.58). Macbeth answers ironically ''Twas a rough night' (2.3.64). Macduff returns screaming at what he has found, Duncan's brutally bloody body, and Macbeth goes to the crime scene.

When he returns, he admits to killing the two innocent guards, excusing the act as irrational behaviour out of rage at the guards being drenched in royal blood. Lady Macbeth swoons and while she is tended to, Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan's sons, realise they are suspects. The two men decide to meet again after getting dressed to decide what to do. Malcolm, the named heir of Duncan, decides to go to England, and Donalbain to Ireland, knowing that 'our separated fortune/Shall keep us both safer' (2.3.140-141). They acknowledge that as Duncan's heirs, they could be next for the assassin's blade.

As the Porter had predicted, the lies in this scene compound on each other and they all issue from the mouth of Macbeth. Where he had stood firm in the face of discovery, his wife has literally faded away in a faint. With the death of his father, Malcolm should be King. His choice to flee creates a power vacuum which Macbeth will gladly fill. Structurally, we are still in the early part of the play, but the suspense of the question, 'What will happen next/' is unrelenting. Duncan's death is just the beginning.

Scene iv: This scene begins with an Old Man commenting that in seventy years that he remembers well, he cannot remember a worse night than the one that has just past. Ross addresses the Old Man as father, and instantly, we can see the comparison between this father and son, and the father and sons we have just left.

Ross tells the Old Man that he agrees with him, that the clock says it is daytime, but it is as dark as night. Duncan's horses are behaving wildly, and Ross and the Old Man note that the horses are so crazed that 'they eat each other' (2.3.28). As we know about the witches' ability to influence nature, it is logical that these comments point to the association of Macbeth's murder and the witches. Duncan's murder will affect every aspect of life.

When Macduff enters, he offers a quick summary of 2.2 and, most importantly, informs us that he is not going to Scone to Macbeth's coronation. The Old Man closes the scene with a blessing:

> God's benison go with you, and with those
> That would make good of bad, and friends of foes.
> (2.4.40-41)

The blessing is a counterpoint to the evils related at the beginning of the scene. It will not, however, be sufficient to neutralise the damage that Macbeth has done.

Furthermore, Macduff's choice not to go to the coronation will arouse Macbeth's rage and suspicion toward him even more. The scene clearly puts Macduff in direct, though not yet open, opposition to Macbeth the murderer.

Act III Commentary

Scene i: Structurally, Act III is the mid-point or centre of the five act play. Here we find Banquo thinking that the prophecies of the witches concerning Macbeth have all come true. He wonders if their prophecy concerning him may also be true. Banquo, however, suspects that to make the prophecies come to pass, Macbeth has 'play'dst most foully for't' (3.1.3).

Macbeth invites Banquo to a feast and asks if he can meet with him. Banquo informs the King that he plans to send the afternoon riding with his son, Fleance. Macbeth tells the unsuspecting Banquo 'Fail not our feast' (3.1.27). He also mentions that he learned that Malcolm and Donalbain are in England and Ireland. It is obvious that Macbeth is intent on keeping Banquo and Fleance close to him and under observation, as well as knowing the whereabouts of any others that can challenge his claim to the throne.

When Macbeth dismisses the court until 7 PM, his murderous bent becomes all too apparent. He sends his servant to bring in two men who are waiting to see him. While he waits Macbeth reveals that to be King is nothing unless he can be sure that Banquo will not be 'father to a line of kings' (3.1.60). To secure his crown and defeat the witches' prophecy, Macbeth must kill Banquo and Fleance.

When the two men enter, we learn that this is Macbeth's second meeting with them. He has planted the seeds of doubt in their minds concerning Banquo, and asks them now to wreak their revenge on him. Macbeth uses the same psychology as Lady Macbeth had used on him, accusing them of not being men. Resolved, the murderers pledge their lives to Macbeth and agree to kill both Banquo and Fleance.

Significantly, the men are anonymous, as are the witches, a playwriting device that identifies them more as forces and catalysts for the action of the play rather than developed characters. This scene makes us aware of time on two opposing levels. On one level, it seems to take lace soon after Macbeth's coronation. However, some time must have elapsed for Macbeth to have established his court and to have had a previous meeting with the murderers. We also know that Macbeth plans for Banquo and Fleance to be murdered before 7 PM that night. The emphasis on time underscores the urgency that political stability has for Macbeth, a stability that is not predicated on the needs of the ruled but on the personal needs of the ruler. The specificity of time also heightens the suspense for the audience. While we are privy to the details of Macbeth's plan, we are helpless to interfere with or prevent the bloodshed. In turn, this realisation of our impotence underscores the horror of the evil before our eyes. In comparison to Macbeth, the witches seem almost benign.

Scene ii: Continuing the emphasis on time, this scene finds Lady Macbeth asking to see her husband, a radical change from the scene in which she was her husband's partner in murder. As she was before, Lady Macbeth is concerned about her husband's keeping to himself and the thoughts he may be harbouring.

Although he shares with her that 'terrible dreams/ … shakes us nightly (3.2.18-19) and calls her 'love' (29), 'dear wife' (36), and 'dearest chuck' (44), we notice that he refers to himself in the 'royal we', as he might speak to someone with whom he did not have a close, intimate relationship. He also withholds from her his murderous plot against Banquo and Fleance. He only urges her to focus her attention on the father and son at the forthcoming feast. Perhaps sensing his intent, Lady Macbeth implores him to leave such deep, dark thoughts and reminds him that Banquo and Fleance cannot live forever. With the murder plot in place, Macbeth finds 'comfort' (39) in his wife's comment: 'they are assailable' (39). He tells her that 'there shall be done/ A deed of dreadful note (43-44) before the night is over, leaving to guess what that deed will be.

Macbeth refuses to tell her more, but indicates that she will 'applaud' (46) his device. She is amazed by what he says, possibly because his language emphasises black, night, evil, and death. For Lady Macbeth the death of Duncan has had immediate and palpable rewards with which she is satisfied. She is apparently content to let events unfold in light of the regicide. Macbeth, on the other hand, is intent on securing the future by controlling the resent. This control means eliminating all real and all possible challenges to his authority. Thus, the scene marks the beginning of a rift in the Macbeth marriage.

Scene iii: Within the structure of Macbeth, this scene and 3.4 are the heart of the play. One of the shortest scenes (23 lines), it has far-reaching effects. We enter the company of the two murderers while they have been discussing the arrival of a third man. This man will make this band of killers equal the number of witches and establishes a real parallel to the unreal or ghostly witches. Since the third man knows the details of Macbeth's orders, the other two decide to let him join them while they wait in ambush for Banquo and Fleance. The three men attack and murder Banquo, but Fleance escapes. Crucially, although they could probably easily overtake and murder the boy, the murderers, while acknowledging that they 'have lost the best half of our affair' (21), decide not to pursue him and return to Macbeth instead.

This tiny detail is of paramount importance not only to Macbeth, but also to us. We know that, even though he is dead, Banquo can still be the father of kings through Fleance. It now becomes clear to us that this event fulfils part of the witches' prophecy for Banquo, and that the rest of the prophecy, 'Lesser than Macbeth, and greater/ Not so happy, yet much happier' (1.3.6566) remains open. If Banquo is dead, how can he be 'greater' and 'much happier' than Macbeth?

Scene iv: This banquet scene is perhaps the most famous of Shakespeare's banquet scenes and very different from others such as the conclusion of The Taming of the Shrew, or the magical feast in The Tempest. From this point forward, the events of the play will spiral rapidly toward the play's conclusion.

As the Macbeths welcomes the lords to dinner, two things happen: Macbeth underlines his wife's secondary role, and the murderers return. The arrival of the courtiers and the murderers almost simultaneously shows clearly the duality of Macbeth as King/murderer. The news of Banquo's throat being cut and his being stabbed twenty times and left in a ditch earns praise for the murderer from a pleased Macbeth. Fleance's escape, however, plunges Macbeth back into insecurity. Macbeth consoles himself that it will be some time before Fleance will return to seek revenge.

When Lady Macbeth reproaches her husband for not giving his guests suitable welcome, Banquo's Ghost, apparently in response to Macbeth's request to 'fail not our feast' (3.1.27), sits in Macbeth's place. Lennox asks Macbeth to sit, and Macbeth, knowing full well the whereabouts of Banquo, comments that the murdered man is missing. Ross, echoing Lennox, asks Macbeth again to sit, noting that Banquo has broken his promise to be present. Macbeth responds that 'the table's full' (47). Lennox contradicts the King, saying his place is reserved. At this point, Macbeth realises that the Ghost of Banquo sits in his place and reacts in horror. As Ross urges the nobles to leave, Lady Macbeth urges them to stay, that they should ignore this fit of Macbeth's, that it will pass. Lady Macbeth upbraids her husband for his comments, referring to the invisible dagger he had seen before Duncan's murder (2.1.33). She tells him to control himself, that 'you look but on a stool' (69).

Exasperated, she once more accuses him of unmanly behaviour. Suddenly, Lady Macbeth reminds him that the room is full of people and with the Ghost now gone, Macbeth attempts to return to his guests. He sits in the now empty place and asks for a full glass of wine, with which he toasts Banquo. The Ghost appears again, and Macbeth screams at it to be gone since he knows 'thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold' (95). The Ghost leaves, and once again, Macbeth tries to pick up the feast where he left off. His wife, however, says he has 'displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting' (110). Macbeth turns on her and the guests, inquiring how they can be calm in the face of such a horrific apparition. Lady Macbeth, perhaps fearing that her husband will say more than he should, dismisses the guests.

Curiously, Macbeth asks his wife the time. When she responds that it is almost morning, Macbeth questions why Macduff was not at the banquet. He tells her that his spies will inform him and that he intends to see the Weird Sisters again. He also tells Lady Macbeth that he is 'in blood/ Steeped in so far that' (137-138) it is too late to turn back. Lady Macbeth leads him to bed.

As noted previously, it is here that the downward spiral picks up pace. Macbeth, having reaped the benefits of his regicide, is beginning to see the down side of his actions. He is seen publicly as a madman, a fact reinforced by his wife's comments that the fit witnessed has been an illness of long standing. Macbeth also makes referral to 'tomorrow' (32, 133), indicating to the audience that there is more reckoning to come.

It may seem strange that, in this scene, Lady Macbeth leads her husband to bed to sleep after his admission of nightmares. As we will see later, this is the last time that the Queen has any control over her husband in the domestic arena. It is she who tries to keep the gathering together and seems to be the more rational of the two. But she has already lost access to his political decisions, and this was, effectively, a political meeting. Even this last bit of influence will be undermined in the Queen's next appearance.

As a co-conspirator, she cannot and will not escape retribution. Though she had tried to displace the guilt of the regicide to the grooms, that guilt will return to haunt her as Banquo's Ghost now haunts Macbeth. It now becomes apparent that the couple, once so close, is at opposite ends: Lady Macbeth in the past, Macbeth in the future.

The only connection between the two will be the blood spilled in the many murders. Lady Macbeth remains as she was when she plotted Duncan's murder - that one murder solved all her problems. Macbeth, however, has changed from the man who carefully considered Duncan's virtues before killing him to a man who must kill without pity to preserve himself.

Scene v: Literally out of nowhere, Shakespeare returns us to the world of the Three Witches; only here, they are meeting with their boss, Hecate. The Elizabethans would have easily recognised Hecate as the Head Witch. Indeed, she scolds the three witches for not consulting her about the Macbeth situation, telling them:

> … all you have done
> Hath been but for a wayward son,
> Spiteful and wrathful; who, as others do,
> Loves for his own ends, not for you. (10-13)

While it may seem a frivolous and gratuitous insertion, the scene reminds the audience of the limited power of the Weird Sisters. In addition, it emphasises Macbeth's own ability to choose evil without any intervention from witchcraft.

Notwithstanding, Hecate informs her wayward employees that she herself will raise 'artificial sprites' (26) that will make Macbeth's overconfidence his 'chiefest enemy' (33) and lead to his ruin.

In this way, Shakespeare acknowledges that, though Hecate will reinforce the Three Witches, Macbeth can still choose not to do evil. The witches, knowing human nature, are more than equal to the challenge of his continued downfall. It is difficult for us to understand what motivates the witches against Macbeth. If we consider, however, that they represent evil, it is clear that in a world where evil is the diametric opposite of good, they would want damnation for Macbeth not as a punishment, but as a reward.

The placement of this scene after Macbeth's intent to consult the Weird Sisters again 'to know/ By the worst means the worst' (3.4.135-136) signifies the strengthening of the witches' scheme in proportion to Macbeth's strengthening of purpose. They share with audience a hint at the play's outcome:

> He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
> This hope 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear. (30-31)

For the Protestant Elizabethans who believed that a man's fate was determined before his birth, there is no hope for him. For Roman Catholics and others who believed that trusting in God's forgiveness could redeem even the worst sinner, Macbeth appears to throwing his redemption away.
The question now is 'How will all this happen?'

Scene vi: Act III ends with yet more threat to Macbeth. In a conversation between Lennox and another Lord, the conditions outside the court are revealed: there is no meat to eat, many restless nights, no freedom or respect for the thanes, Macbeth is preparing for war with England. Macbeth, for the time, is labelled 'tyrant' (22, 25).

Lennox, however, cannot overlook that Malcolm and Donalbain fled following Duncan's assassination, just as Fleance had fled after Banquo's. Surely these flights from justice are an indication of guilty involvement. Lennox asks the Lord to confirm that Macduff is living in disgrace because he defied the King's order to attend the feast.

In his response, the Lord reveals that Malcolm, deprived of his birthright of succession to Duncan who had named him successor before his death, has found refuge at the English court of Edward the Confessor who acknowledges Malcolm as the rightful heir to the throne of Scotland. It is to Edward's court that Macduff has gone to seek military assistance to restore peace to Scotland.

Lennox advises the Lord to get a message to Macduff that Macbeth is furious with him and that Scotland looks to Macduff for deliverance from Macbeth's 'hand accursed' (49).

The scene serves as a link to the earlier events of Act II and fills in the background on what has happened outside Macbeth's court. Until now, though we know Macbeth to be a murdering fiend, we have been unaware of his effect on the country he rules. The relentless concentration on Macbeth and his emotional state seems to focus our attention solely on the domestic tragedy. Just as in Hamlet when 'something's rotten in the state of Denmark', the actions of the king have far reaching effect. Shakespeare reminds us that the domestic tragedies of life, especially of a king, can ripple through society.

In Scotland, the conditions have escalated to a point of civil unrest bordering on revolution. This extreme discontent is especially clear in Lennox whom we have just seen at the banquet table. In contrast to his concern over Macbeth's place at the table, here Lennox reveals his concern for his 'suffering country' (48). In a sense Lennox becomes a symbol of those who wonder about a leader's suitability to lead but will not act on his suspicions alone, a situation not unknown in present day politics.

The exchange between Lennox and the Lord further casts Macduff in the role of adversary to Macbeth. But should Macbeth fear him?

Act IV Commentary

Scene i: According to Hecate's wishes, the Three Witches have gathered the ingredients for the spell. Here we see them blend them together to the famous chant:

> Double, double, toil and trouble,
> Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. (10-11)

Hecate approves of their efforts and promises them a 'share i'th'gains' (40). Macbeth has questions and asks for answers, not from the Weird Sisters, but from what he thinks are their more powerful masters. The answers take the form of three apparitions: an 'Armed Head', 'a Bloody Child', and 'a Child Crowned, with a tree in his hand' (Act IV, stage directions).
The Armed Head tells Macbeth to 'Beware Macduff' (71). The Bloody Child offers some hope: 'none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth' (80-81). The third apparition is even more enlightening:

> Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
> Great Birnam Wood to high Dusinane Hill
> Shall come against him. (92-94)

Given the prognostications of these visions, Macbeth resolves to neutralise the threat of Macduff by murdering him. He knows, too, that all people are born 'of woman' and that woods do not walk. As Hecate had foretold, he has indeed put 'His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear' (3.5.31). He therefore feels safe. Yet, despite the witches' warning to 'Seek to know no more' (103), Macbeth pushes his luck with his ultimate concern: "Shall Banquo's issue ever/ Reign in this kingdom?' (103-104). The answer is another vision of 'eight Kings and Banquo' (sds), with the last King holding a mirror in his hand. Macbeth is horrified. There are eight apparitions and 'many more' (120) in the mirror. The ghostly appearance of Banquo 'smiles upon' (123) Macbeth and 'points at them (the kings) for his' (124).
The scene may seem straight forward, but its simplicity betrays its complexity. Up to this point, Macbeth has acted out the end of the original prophecies given to him on the heath as he thought they had promised, and with the help of his wife. Here, without Lady Macbeth's assistance, he actively pursues answers, not prophecies, that will confirm the actions he has already taken and will take.

In addition, unlike his reaction to the first prophecies, Macbeth takes what appears before him as a true picture of the immediate and distant future, and accepts the witches' confirmation without question. He also does not allow for any other interpretation of the apparitions other than his own.Lennox enters to announce that Macduff has fled to England. To ensure the efficacy of the visions, Macbeth becomes 'bloody, bold, and resolute' (79), planning to attack Macduff's castle at Fife and kill all found there. The man who had been urged to 'screw your courage to the sticking place' (1.7.60) now proclaims 'This deed I'll do before this purpose cool' (134).

Not only are we reminded of the evil in Macbeth, but we are also shown that is almost beyond redemption. Aligning himself with the witches by choice, Macbeth can only go deeper and faster into his descent to Hell. Nonetheless, we feel sorry for him, knowing that, in the comfort of our seats in the theatre, we would never be so foolhardy.

Noticeable by her absence is Lady Macbeth, but we hardly notice since Macbeth himself had marginalised her in the events of Act III. Realising the scope of Macbeth's determination to eliminate all threats to his crown, we are more concerned with Macduff's '…wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls/ That trace him in his line' (152-153).

Scene ii: This scene opens with a conversation between Ross and Lady Macduff, who are debating why Macduff has fled to England. Ross tries to comfort his 'pretty cousin' (25), assuring her that her husband has acted for the best. Ross takes his leave of her and her young son. What follows is a touching and tender scene between mother and son that seems almost an oasis in the mayhem of the play.

The two discuss Macduff's absence in a tone that is rather playful, using the child's understanding of how birds live, not only to illustrate the points, but also to underscore the child's immaturity and limited grasp of the political furore. But is it limited?

The conversation switches tone when the child asks his mother 'Was my father a traitor, mother?' (44). Lady Macduff tells him that he was and that a traitor is 'one that swears and lies' (47) 'and must be hanged' (49). The child tells her that 'there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them' (50-51). The audience is aware that they are not only discussing Macduff, but also Macbeth.

A messenger enters to warn Lady Macduff to leave with her children immediately. Lady Macduff, however, does not leave, either because she believes in her innocence or she does not have time, since the murderers enter almost right away. The boy is stabbed and dies in front of his helpless mother who tries to flee. We know she cannot escape the bloodbath.

The scene is one of, if not the bloodiest, in the play, made all the most terrifying because it unflinchingly depicts the murder of an innocent child. Now we are certain beyond any doubt that Macbeth has crossed the line of all sense and morality.

Contrasts abound in this scene. Lady Macduff, the loving, caring mother, is a stark contrast to Lady Macbeth who would have 'dashed the brains' (1.7.58) of her own child. The bigger difference of the Macduffs as a happy family unit from the disjointed Macbeths is glaring. Furthermore, Macduff the good is counterpointed to Macbeth the villain and traitor, even though both are absent from the scene.

Within the play, the scene is placed between Macbeth's resolution to murder Macduff and the reappearance of Macduff, clearly establishing a personal motivation to Macduff's political agenda. There can be no question now that the murderous Macbeth must go, not only for the political survival of Scotland, but also for the peace and safety of her people.

Scene iii: The geography of the play changes from Scotland to England. Malcolm and Macduff are contemplating their course of action against Macbeth. Malcolm wants to mourn his exile, while Macduff wants to fight to free the country, prophetically noting that

> Each new morn
> New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
> Strike heaven on the face. (4-6)

Interestingly, Malcolm, who has not been in Scotland since his father's demise, lists Macbeth's faults:

> bloody,
> Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
> Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
> That has a name. (57-60)

Reluctantly, we must agree. Surprisingly, however, Malcolm turns the focus to his faults, saying he has a lustful nature. Macduff defends this admission by saying that Malcolm may indulge his lust with willing women and keep the knowledge from the people, in essence, a victimless crime. Malcolm further confesses to

avarice, and Macduff reassures him again that, as King, Malcolm will have more than enough to satisfy him. For a third time, Malcolm says that he has none of

> the king-becoming graces,
> As justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness,
> Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
> Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude. (91-94)

Macduff can stand no more. He bewails the fact that the rightful king, son of a sainted father and mother, should 'blaspheme his breed' (109). Malcolm, touched by Macduff's 'good truth and honor' (117), retracts his confessions as he is really still a virgin, has never broken a promise, and 'delight[s]/ No less in truth than life' (128-129). He tells Macduff that he will indeed fight for his people and his country. Shocked by the denial coming on the heels of the admissions, Macduff cannot answer Malcolm. But this is only one shock.

After the Doctor enters to comment on Edward the Confessor's healing power, Ross enters to tell Macduff of the events at his castle in Fife. With the deaths of his entire family, Macduff is doubly motivated to overthrow Macbeth. Malcolm decides that the time is right to accept Edward's offer of help.

This scene raises many questions: Why does Malcolm admit to sins he has not committed? Why does a Doctor enter and offer comments on Edward the Confessor? Why has Malcolm waited to depose Macbeth? We have already seen the evil perpetuated by a man who unlawfully usurped the throne. By admitting to sins of the flesh and spirit, Malcolm still seems a viable choice for King. In our political world, lust and avarice are forgivable sins in the sense that they do not threaten individual liberty. When Malcolm admits to some of the same sins of which Macbeth is guilty, however, he seems to be testing Macduff's loyalty to him. If Macduff would overthrow Macbeth, it is likely that he would overthrow a king with similar tendencies. We recall that at the beginning of the play, Macbeth had had the same concern. With the last admission and Macduff's reaction, to abandon Scotland since all hope for peace is dead, Macduff proves his loyalty to Malcolm who can then recant and assume his rightful place.

The introduction of the Doctor at this point is a commentary on the goodness and saintliness of both the English king and the Scottish heir, as well as commentary on the state of the people under such a king. If they are sick, the King miraculously cures them, clearly illustrating that such a King rules with God's favour. As he can cure physical ills, the King can also cure political, social, and economic ills. If Malcolm is crowned, the same outcome is promised for Scotland.

The extension of the metaphor from England to Scotland also reflects the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne of Elizabeth I in 1603. As Elizabeth had guided England through its most prosperous and influential period, James, now James I of England, brings unity and continued peace.

With Malcolm's assurance that Macduff is firmly in his camp, the future King knows that now is the time to his launch his attack. If he had acted sooner, Malcolm may have been perceived to be responsible for his father's death. The time spent in England has given him the opportunity to prove his innocence to Edward and to work on establishing vital alliances. With these questions answered, only one remains: what about the apparitions?

Act V Commentary

Scene i: Having set us up for the invasion of Scotland by its rightful king, Shakespeare returns us to the domestic tragedy and another famous scene. When we last saw Lady Macbeth, she was leading her husband to bed to sleep. This scene opens, ironically, with another Doctor and a Gentlewoman discussing a female

sleep-walker. When the Doctor asks the Gentlewoman to repeat what she heard the sleep-walker say, she steadfastly refuses, since there were no witnesses.

Here enters Lady Macbeth with a lit taper which she has ordered to be constantly by her side. In her sleep, Lady Macbeth relates details of Duncan's murder and her husband's part in it, the murder of Banquo, and the holocaust at Fife. The Doctor tells the Gentlewoman that the Queen is beyond his help and, like the Gentlewoman, the Doctor will 'dare not speak' (83).

What we witness is the descent of Lady Macbeth into a distinctly female Hell. Without her husband's support, there is no one to whom she can unburden her guilt. This guilt is so intense that it manifests itself in her sleep-walking. Although we cannot determine whether or not she is mad, the Doctor hints at her probable end by warning the Gentlewoman to

> Remove from her the means of annoyance
> And still keep eyes upon her. (80-81)

If we are expected to feel sympathy for Lady Macbeth, the expectation is defeated by her recounting the murders to which we have been witness. We can only pity her so far before concluding that she has indeed earned her punishment.

Scene ii: The scene now returns to the revolution about to be launched. We are updated on the military preparations which have gone according to plan. We learn that Donalbain, Malcolm's brother and not mentioned since the assassination of Duncan, is not with his brother. We assume that he remains in Ireland. It does not matter where Donalbain is. The army is on its way to Birnam Wood. The name strikes a chord in the audience, since now we realise that Macbeth's visions are about to come to fruition.

Scene iii: Macbeth, who has been absent from the play since his last meeting with the witches, appears now, contemplating his lack of fear in the face of the marching army. He is confident he is safe 'Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane' (2). He also recalls that the thanes leading the army were all born of woman.

The Doctor reports that Lady Macbeth is sick of mind and that he cannot help her. Macbeth orders him to cure her and sets off in his armour to wage battle.

This scene points to Macbeth's ultimate fall and the hopelessness of his and his wife's situation. Though he maintains his brave stance toward the imminent battle, clearly Macbeth has lost a more important battle, self-deception. He has lost all perspective on his ability to postpone retribution for his evil deeds.

Scene iv: Short but essential, this scene solves the mystery of how a forest can move. In order to conceal the numbers of his men, Malcolm orders every soldier to cut down a tree bough and carry it in front of him. With his allies, Siward and Macduff, Malcolm moves toward Dunsinane.

Macbeth's defeat is only a matter of time. Had he not been so ego-centric, Macbeth would have worked out the witches' riddle. What else has he neglected?

Scene v: Thinking himself safe behind strong castle walls, Macbeth receives the news of his wife's death. He takes a moment to comment on her passing without questioning how she died. His emphasis on 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' reveals he is still thinking about the future, but not as confidently as before. He is interrupted by a messenger, and his news is not good: Birnam Wood seems to be moving.

Macbeth now knows that the witches spoke the truth, but not the truth he had heard. Yet, he is determined to die fighting. There is, however, hope that he has interpreted the remaining visions correctly.

Scene vi: This ten-line scene elaborates the battle plan for Malcolm's troops. Macduff and Siward are sent forward to charge the castle. But what about Macbeth? (Jump to the text of Act V, Scene vi)

Scene vii: Young Siward meets Macbeth and they duel. Young Siward is slain and Macbeth's confidence is bolstered when he realises, as we do, that the youth, Siward's son, was born of woman.

Macduff is on the hunt for Macbeth, while Siward leads Malcolm into the castle, signalling the end of the battle. Will the visions be fulfilled? Or will Macbeth be finally dethroned?

Scene viii: Here Macbeth finally confronts Macduff and admits that he has been avoiding the Thane of Fife. Foolishly, he urges him to get back since Macbeth has already shed enough of his blood, as if Macduff really needed to be reminded of his enormous loss. Almost ridiculously, Macbeth tells the man that he leads a 'charm-ed life which must not yield/ To one of woman born' (12-13). Macduff tells him that he 'was from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripped' (15-16). Suddenly, Macbeth realises that he has failed to recognise the witches' double meaning and blames them for his failure. He then refuses to fight, Macduff asks him to surrender and face execution. Macbeth refuses and they fight, Macbeth falling on Macduff's sword.

Siward is informed of his son's death, but refuses to mourn him since he died a hero's death. Macduff enters with Macbeth's head and all proclaim Malcolm King of Scotland. Malcolm makes the thanes earls, the first in Scotland, and promises to recall exiled friends and mete out justice to Macbeth's supporters. The play ends with an invitation to attend Malcolm's coronation at Scone.

Or does it end? What about Macbeth's final vision and Banquo's prophecy? Elizabethans would have known the story of Macbeth's treachery and demise from Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1587) by Raphael Holinshed, Shakespeare's source for the play. They would have also known, as we do not, that James VI of Scotland, now James I of England, could trace his ancestry back to Banquo. According to a family tree printed in 1578 by John Leslie entitled De Originiae Regiae … Scotorum, James VI was the sixth king of that name to rule Scotland and was descended from Banquo, Thane of Lochaber, who lived in the eleventh century under King Macbeth. Holinshed confirms Leslie's genealogy by interrupting his story with a similar genealogy of 'the orginall line of those kings, which have descended from …Banquho', in all about sixteen kings, ending with James VI. It would seem then that Banquo, not Malcolm, has the last word.

Macbeth: Quizzes

Act I Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What atmosphere is established in Scene 1?

2. How does Banquo describe the Witches when he first sees them upon the heath?

3. Macbeth is reported to be a valiant soldier in Act I. The line, "Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chops And fixed his head upon our battlements", paints a different Macbeth. What can you infer from that line?

4. In Scene 1 the Witches say, "Foul is fair and fair is foul." Which characters do you consider fair or foul?

5. Why do you think Shakespeare opened Scene 3 with the Witches discussing an evil deed they have committed?

6. What prophesies do the Witches make for Macbeth and Banquo?

7. What does Lady Macbeth mean when she says of Macbeth, “Yet do I fear thy nature. It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness To catch the nearest way”?

8. Macbeth is having second thoughts about killing Duncan. What are the reasons he gives? Based on these reasons what does he decide?

9. What does Lady Macbeth mean when she says, “Was hope drunk Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since? And wakes it now to look so green and pale”?

10. What decision does Macbeth make at the end of Act I? What has Lady Macbeth said to influence his decision?

Answers
1. The scene is filled with Witches, thunder and lightning, which creates a dark and sinister atmosphere.

2. He calls them “withered” and “wild” in their attire; “That they look not like the inhabitants o’ the’ earth;” and that they “should be women...yet [their] beards forbid [him] to interpret that [they] are so.”

3. Macbeth is a cold-blooded killer on the battlefield.

4. The Witches are foul because they are evil. Macbeth and Banquo seem to be fair because of their loyalty and bravery. However, Macbeth reveals his plan to murder Duncan and his character is viewed differently. Lady Macbeth is foul. Macdonwald is foul because he is a traitor. The Captain and Duncan are fair because the Captain fought bravely and the King supports him and is compassionate regarding the Captain’s injury.

5. The Witches are capable of creating situations that are evil and destructive. However, their powers are limited as they cannot destroy, but they have the power to create an atmosphere where destruction can easily occur.

6. The Witches state that Macbeth will be Thane of Cawdor and King. They go on to tell Banquo that his son’s will be kings.

7. Lady Macbeth feels that Macbeth is kind and he may not be able to overcome his fears to kill Duncan. She fears his conscience will override his ambition to be King.

8. Macbeth is torn between his ambition and his conscience. He gives several reasons why he should not kill Duncan: 1) Duncan is his cousin; 2) He is a loyal subject to the King; 3) Duncan is his friend; 4) Duncan has never abused his royal power; and 5) Duncan is a guest in his home. Based on these reasons, Macbeth decides not to follow through with the murder of Duncan.

9. Lady Macbeth is questioning Macbeth why he has changed his mind about killing Duncan. She is asking him what has happened to his ambition.

10. Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to follow through with the plan to murder Duncan. She calls him a coward and less than a man, prodding Macbeth to follow her plan. Macbeth agrees to murder Duncan that night.

Act II Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What are Banquo's concerns about the Witches prophecy? What is Macbeth's response?

2. What does Macbeth see when Banquo and Fleance leave and what does he say about it?

3. What was Lady Macbeth unable to do in Duncan's chamber? Why?

4. What was Macbeth's reaction when he returned from Duncan's chamber? What did he say?

5. Who was sleeping in the second chamber? Why did Shakes¬peare include that information in the play?

6. Macbeth is unable to return to Duncan's chamber with the bloody daggers. Why do you think he fears going back?

7. What does Lennox say to Macbeth about the previous night?

8. Who discovers that Duncan has been murdered?

9. Why does Macbeth say he has murdered the guards?

10. Why do Donalbain and Malcolm leave? Where do they say they are going?

Answers
1. He has had bad dreams about the Witches and part of what they said has come true. Macbeth says he has not thought about them. Banquo would like to discuss the matter with Macbeth.

2. He sees a bloody dagger floating before him. He says that it is only a dream.

3. She was unable to kill Duncan because he looked like her father.

4. He was upset and feeling guilt. He said that "it was a sorry sight." He also stated that he had murdered sleep and he could not say amen when he needed to.

5. Donalbain was sleeping. This puts suspicion on him.

6. He cannot face the murder that he has committed. He feels too much guilt.

7. Lennox said that there was a bad storm and he has never seen one this fierce in his life.

8. Macduff discovers Duncan's slain body.

9. Macbeth says he murdered the guards because felt they killed Duncan. He was so angry and grief stricken he could not control his rage.

10. Donalbain and Malcolm because they fear for their own lives. Donalbain goes to Ireland and Malcolm goes to England.

Act III Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. As Act III begins Banquo is reflecting on what has happened to Macbeth. What three events does he state and what does he hope for himself?

2. What reason does Macbeth give the Murderers for wanting Banquo killed? What reason does he give for not doing it himself?

3. Why do you think Macbeth does not tell Lady Macbeth about his plan to murder Banquo and Fleance?

4. When Banquo's ghost enters the banquet what is Macbeth's reaction?

5. What does Lady Macbeth say to the guest is the reason for his behavior?

6. Does Macbeth recognize the ghost? How do you know he does?

7. What does Hecate say she is going to do to Macbeth? Why does she think he will respond to her?

8. What does Lennox say about Malcolm, Donalbain, and Fleance?

9. Where has Macduff gone and why?

10. What does Lennox hope for?

Answers
1. Banquo says that Macbeth was made King, Thane of Cawdor and Thane of Glamis. He hopes his sons will be Kings.

2. Macbeth fears for his own life if Banquo lives. Macbeth says that he and Banquo have the same friends and Macbeth would not be able to remain friends with them if he killed Banquo himself.

3. Macbeth either feels that Lady Macbeth may try to talk him out the plot, or he wants to have full control and exclude her from this matter.

4. Macbeth questions who has brought Banquo to the feast and he is very upset.

5. Lady Macbeth tells them that he has suffered from this affliction his entire life and to ignore his behavior.

6. Macbeth recognizes Banquo and says to the ghost that he should not blame him for the murder, "Thou canst not say I did it: never shake Thy gory locks at me."

7. Hecate is going to create a situation that will allow Macbeth to ruin himself. The Witches will make a magic potion that will guide Macbeth's fate by telling him the future. Hecate says mortal men cannot resist knowing the future.

8. Lennox says they have been unjustly accused of murder.

9. Macduff has gone to England to join Malcolm's forces to overthrow Macbeth.

10. Lennox hopes that Scotland will be peaceful again.

Act IV Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What are the Witches doing at the beginning of Act IV?

2. What are the three statements made by the Apparitions?

3. What is the significance of the Witches having the Apparitions give the information to Macbeth?

4. What does Macbeth decide to do with the information the Witches have given him?

5. What does Lady Macduff say is the reason for her husband leaving?

6. What does Lady Macduff tell her son about his father? How does he respond to her?

7. What happens to Lady Macduff and her son?

8. Why does Malcolm question Macduff?

9. What is Malcolm's reaction to the news? What is Macduff's?

10. What do Malcolm and Macduff plan to do?

Answers
1. The Witches are standing over a cauldron preparing a spell for Macbeth.

2. The Apparitions say: 1) That Macbeth should beware of Macduff, 2) That no man born of a woman can harm Mac¬beth, and 3) Macbeth will not be harmed unless Great Birnam Wood comes to high Dunsinane.

3. The Apparitions are dressed in such a way to give insight to Macbeth. He is blinded by his quest for power and does not recognize the significance of the appearance.

4. He plans on going to England to kill Macduff.

5. Lady Macduff feels her husband is scared and is a traitor.

6. Lady Macduff tells her son his father is dead. Her son does not believe her.

7. Lady Macduff and her son are murdered.

8. Malcolm wants to know if Macduff is sincere and that he has not been sent by Macbeth.

9. Malcolm is enraged by the news of Lady Macduff's death. Macduff is in shock at first then he vows to seek revenge against Macbeth.

10. Malcolm and Macduff plan on killing Macbeth and restoring the peace in Scotland.

Act V Questions and Answers

Study Questions
1. What does the Doctor say to Macbeth about Lady Macbeth's condition? What is Macbeth's reaction?

2. What is the Doctor referring to when he says, "Therein the patient Must minister to himself?"

3. What does the Messenger tell Macbeth he sees coming toward Dunsinane? How does Macbeth respond?

4. What does Macduff vow to do to Macbeth and why? Cite an example from Act V.

5. What difference can you cite between Macbeth's army and Malcolm's army?

6. Whom does Macbeth kill in Act V? Do you feel that is important? State your reasons.

7. What does Macbeth say to Macduff about his mortality? What is Macduff's response? How does Macbeth react?

8. What does Ross tell Siward about Siward's son?

9. What does Malcolm say about Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?

10. What title has never been used before in Scotland that Malcolm plans to use on his Thanes and kinsman?

Answers
1. The Doctor says Lady Macbeth is very ill and he cannot cure her himself. Macbeth is angry and does not want to be bothered with this information.

2. The Doctor is saying that Macbeth is trying to tell the doctor how to cure his patient, Lady Macbeth. When in fact Macbeth is the patient himself.

3. The Messenger tells Macbeth that trees are moving toward the castle. Macbeth does not believe him at first; then, sounds the alarm for battle.

4. Macduff vows to have revenge on Macbeth because of the death of his family.

5. Malcolm's army if committed to the cause of saving Scotland. Macbeth's army is fighting for him out of fear they will be killed themselves.

6. Macbeth kills Young Siward. Answers may vary on the response to the second part of the question. The importance of the murder is seen in Macbeth's response after the murder. He states he cannot be killed by a man born of woman. He feels he cannot be harmed.

7. Macbeth tells Macduff that he cannot be harmed by man born of woman. Macduff tells Macbeth that he was ripped from his mother's womb. Macbeth realizes that the Witches have tricked him.

8. Ross tells Siward that his son was killed in battle.

9. Malcolm says that Macbeth is a "butcher" and Lady Macbeth was a "fiend-like queen". He also says that Lady Macbeth took her own life.

10. Malcolm plans to make the Thanes and kinsman Earls.

Macbeth: Essential Passages

Essential Passage by Character: Macbeth

> **MACBETH:**
> *[Aside.]* This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.
>
> **BANQUO:**
> Look, how our partner's rapt.
>
> **MACBETH:**
> *[Aside.]* If chance will have me king, why, chance
> may crown me
> Without my stir.
>
> **BANQUO:**
> New honors come upon him,
> Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould
> But with the aid of use.
>
> **MACBETH:**
> *[Aside.]* Come what come may,
> Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.
>
> *Act 1, Scene 3, Lines 141-162*

Summary
Macbeth, along with Banquo, has been visited by three witches who prophesy that Macbeth, now Thane of Glamis, will become Thane of Cawdor and then King of Scotland. Almost immediately, Ross and Angus, two Scottish nobles, arrive to inform Macbeth that the previous Thane of Cawdor has been captured and has forfeited his position through rebellion against King Duncan. The title thus falls to Macbeth as a reward for his services to the crown. Although Banquo initially has some doubts as to the validity of a prophecy from witches, the fulfillment is convincing. He is concerned, however, that it may be an instance of the powers of evil telling the truth in order to recruit a susceptible person to the side of darkness. Macbeth can see only that the witches speak truth, that the three-part prophecy is two-thirds of the way fulfilled.

As Banquo speaks privately to Ross and Angus, Macbeth in the passage above ponders the meaning of the prophecy. He is unsure about the nature of the words of the witches ("This supernatural soliciting/Cannot be ill, cannot be good") and is thus in a completely gray area. If it is evil, why is he given assured success, verified by truth? He can see only one way that the remainder of the prophecy (i.e., his succeeding to the throne of Scotland) will come true, and that is through the death of King Duncan. That death, in Macbeth's mind, can be accomplished by only one manner to assure that Macbeth is his heir: murder. Macbeth trembles at the thought that he must commit this murder. He momentarily sees that, if fate is willing for him to be king, then fate will handle the details without his stirring. However, if the opportunity presents itself through the machinations of fate, he would be wrong not to accept that opportunity.

Analysis

With the use of the aside in this passage, Shakespeare allows Macbeth to have a type of soliloquy, even with others present. The soliloquy presents the path of thought of the character, revealing his inner struggle with the choices that are presented to him. Soliloquies usually present a tipping point for the character. It is the decision that he makes that will decide the course of his life and thus whether the play becomes a tragedy (where the hero is defeated through a fatal flaw) or a comedy (where the hero achieves his goals or overcomes an obstacle to gain an even more honorable position).

Macbeth is at the threshold, the choice of whether to choose good or to choose evil. As the tragic hero, he has achieved through his own efforts great renown and acclaim. He has been honored by his country and his king. To rise to the level of the Thane of Cawdor gives him power, wealth, and respect. The fact that Macbeth rose to this level through the way of honor reflects strongly and positively on his character.

Yet he has now been presented with promise of more. The three witches simply tell him that he will be king. They do not tell him by what route he will arrive at the throne. The implication is that it is already decided, without any concentrated effort by Macbeth. Yet Macbeth is not willing to sit back and do nothing. He received the thaneship of Cawdor through his valor. He cannot contemplate receiving the throne through any other measure.

Although up until now Macbeth is presented as an honorable man, the revelation of his thinking process at this point reveals his fatal flaw. Through pride, through hubris, Macbeth cannot imagine that fate has more power than he. In a complete rejection of God or fate, Macbeth places himself on the throne of God, in the place of fate, and assumes control. He will reach his goal through the quickest, though not the most honorable, route: murder. Through this choice, Macbeth's destruction is assured. In the very first act, then, the audience knows how the play will end.

So quickly does Macbeth fall that instead of just contemplating one murder, he is willing to commit more. King Duncan has named his oldest son, Malcolm, as his heir and successor to the throne. Macbeth knows that, in order to bring the prophecy to pass, Malcolm as well as Duncan must die. Malcolm must die in the same manner as his father—by the hand of Macbeth. Macbeth quickly accepts the desirability of this. Though unmentioned, Macbeth will also have to kill Donalbain, Duncan's younger son and presumably the heir after Malcolm.

Macbeth demonstrates that once the line dividing good and evil has been crossed, it is quite easy to proceed deeper into evil. What would have horrified him before he was promised the throne now appears easy.

Macbeth's religious views seem more pagan than Christian. His concept of "Divine Will" is closer to the ancient belief in "Wyd," which means "Fate" or "Destiny." This is an impersonal force that cannot be appealed to through prayer or sacrifice. It is simply what *is*. It is the Will of the Universe rather than the Will of God. In this light, Macbeth has no fear of divine retribution or punishment. His view is that he must carry out the will of Fate, by "fair means or foul." To do less would be to displease Fate, leading to unimagined

consequences. In this belief, the end justifies the means, a philosophy that, in the archetypal concept of the hero quest, leads swiftly to the destruction of the hero.

Such will be the fate of Macbeth, as well as those who come into contact with him. In the tale of the tragic hero, mere association will involve a person in defeat or destruction. The good and the bad, the innocent and the guilty, men and women and even children will die due to Macbeth's decision to follow the road of evil.

Essential Passage by Theme: The Hero

MACBETH:
If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgement here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which being taught return
To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking-off,
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other—

Act 1, Scene 7, Lines 1-28

Summary
King Duncan has triumphed over the attacks of the Norwegian troops, aided by the rebel Scots who are led by the previous Thane of Cawdor, Macdonwald. In celebration of his victory, as well as of the accession of Macbeth as the new Thane of Cawdor, Duncan proposes to honor Macbeth with a visit to his castle in Glamis. Macbeth goes ahead to prepare a feast, sending a letter to his wife of the coming company. Macbeth also relates to his wife the full extent of the three witches' prophecy. Immediately she has jumped ahead of her husband and is more than willing to aid in the murder of the king so that Macbeth can take the throne. More corrupt that her husband, Lady Macbeth has completely sold her soul to evil without regret.

The same cannot now be said of Macbeth himself. He begins to have doubts, becoming somewhat shaky in his resolve. In the soliloquy quoted above, Macbeth contemplates the full extent of his actions. He hesitates, but he knows that if the murder is to be done, it would be best to do it quickly and get it over with. He believes that if Duncan's assassination would result in complete success, without any consequences, he would be satisfied. But Macbeth now fears that to do so will put his eternal soul at risk, and he realizes that there are likely to be earthly consequences to Duncan's assassination as well. Though Duncan is dead, Macbeth understands that not everyone will be happy that he, Macbeth, is now king. There may be other battles to fight.

Macbeth contemplates the many reasons why this deed is dishonorable. It is not a "simple" murder. First, Duncan is his kinsman, a near relation. It will be one step short of fratricide. Second, Duncan is his king, and Macbeth will thus be guilty of regicide. But more importantly, Duncan is his guest. Macbeth is bound to protect Duncan, not to murder him.

Macbeth admits that Duncan has been a most worthy king, has "borne his faculties so meek, hath been/So clear in his great office." Duncan is not a tyrant (such as Macbeth will become) whose death will bring relief to the land. Because Duncan is so honorable, his death will bring great grief to the country and thus turn the popular opinion against Macbeth as his murderer. Macbeth admits that the only justification he has to commit this assassination is his own "vaulting ambition," knowing that he may jump too far and suffer undesirable consequences.

Analysis

In the archetypal hero tale, the hero is presented with two opportunities, two thresholds, to choose good over evil. In the first one, the hero typically refuses evil, choosing to remain true to his honor. Macbeth did not quite turn away at his first opportunity following the encounter with the three witches. In this scene, he is handed by fate another chance to turn back. Macbeth has a much clearer view of the consequences of his actions than he manifested at his first threshold. Rather than living in a delusion, Macbeth clearly and logically analyzes the full ramifications of the assassination. He knows the consequences, both in terms of his soul and in terms of his status as king. He is not acting in ignorance. He is fully aware of the price he will pay to take fate in his own hands to fulfill what has been presented to him as his destiny.

Macbeth presents himself as a rather weak hero. His bravery is high when he is in the company of other warriors, yet he begins to weaken in the presence, and under the domination, of his wife. It is she who has the stronger resolve, though it be for evil. It is she who must hold up her husband, pushing him to commit the deed that, in his own weakness, he now has difficulty contemplating. It is only through her despising this shakiness that he garners the strength enough to kill Duncan. Yet, as events will show, it breaks him mentally, much sooner than it does his wife.

The characterization of Macbeth in connection with his spiritual views is a bit inconsistent at this point. Rather than believe in fate, he begins to see that actions have consequences, both in the temporal and eternal realm. He finally reflects on the status of his soul and asks himself, "Is becoming king worth eternal damnation?" The inconsistency of his view of spirituality makes this question difficult for him to answer. As with all tragic heroes, Macbeth struggles with the concept presented by Lucifer in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Unsure of what the afterlife brings, Macbeth leans more toward holding earthly glory as of greater worth than whatever comes after death.

Macbeth would be willing to risk eternal damnation if he could "do the deed" without further earthly consequences. He knows that he will be king, but he also realizes that, through this act, he would be an unpopular king. Duncan was greatly loved, ruling nobly. To kill such a beloved ruler would bring the condemnation not only of God but of the country as well. Macbeth's willingness to face this unpopularity shows exactly what kind of power he desires. His definition of power is not a power to do good to others, but

only to himself. The concept of “noblesse oblige” is foreign to him. His only spur is “vaulting ambition,” an allusion to horseback riding. This horse, this power invested in the throne, will carry him far but is also liable to “o’erleap” itself, throwing its “rider” (Macbeth) off. Macbeth knows he will pay dearly to achieve and maintain the throne. His decision as a hero is whether or not it is worth the price.

Essential Passage by Character: Macbeth

> **SEYTON:**
> The Queen, my lord, is dead.
>
> **MACBETH:**
> She should have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word.
> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.
>
> *Act 5, Scene 5, Lines 18-30*

Summary
Macbeth is battling desperately for his throne and his kingdom. Lady Macbeth, succumbing at last to madness, has committed suicide, the stain of sin having eaten away at her mind. In a sleepwalking episode, she has effectively confessed to her and her husband’s crime. She who had been his strength and prod to seek his evil ambition is gone. Macbeth now is almost completely alone, isolated from all manner of support. He is facing a rebellion, brought on by his own tyranny.

Macbeth at this point is also still clinging to the additional prophecies of the three witches: that none born of woman shall harm him, and that he shall not be conquered until “Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him.” Neither is likely to happen, thinks Macbeth, so he is confident of victory despite the overwhelming odds. Yet his sanity is shaky in the quoted passage, and he numbly accepts the news that his wife is dead.

“She should have died hereafter,” is all he says about his wife, completely emotionless. But with her death, he feels the full weight of the world that he has brought upon himself. The passage of time drags, one day after the other until the end. His past victories and successes have done little but “light the way of fools to dusty death.” He wishes life to be over and makes the allusion that it is a mere fiction, a play, with a lot of noise and emotion, but without eternal meaning.

Analysis
The end is near for Macbeth. Although the initial prophecy of the three witches has been fulfilled (i.e., that Macbeth would be king), it was clear and straightforward, devoid of any subtle shades of meaning. The later prophecies are not so. In the manner of the Oracle of Delphi, these prophecies are vague, needing interpretation and circumspection if one intends to base actions on them. Yet Macbeth takes the prophecies at

face value, and by being so literal, he has blinded himself to any other interpretation. He has wagered his kingdom on this inadequate interpretation, and he is going to lose the bet.

Guilt has now completely blinded him to reality, especially the manner in which his actions will affect that reality. He has paid all to gain the throne: not only has he murdered Duncan, he has killed the two guards, and Banquo's wife and children, along with all the warriors whose lives will be lost in the upcoming battle. He has a heavy blood price on his hands, hands that he has not been able to wash clean.

Macbeth has even sacrificed his love for his wife. He is completely emotionless on learning of her death, saying coldly, "It were better if she had died hereafter." Whether the meaning of this statement is that she should have waited to die later, once the outcome is sure, or whether he means that she had to die sometime, Macbeth demonstrates that he no longer is human. He is the incarnation of evil ambition.

The repetition of "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" gives the audience the feeling of the relentless passing of time to the diseased mind of Macbeth. Each moment is unrelenting boredom, if not agony, to him because life has become totally meaningless. Macbeth is the ultimate nihilist in this speech. He has achieved his ambition of power and discovered that it was nothing. He has sold his soul to evil and has received nothing. He has lost power, home, and family, but he feels nothing.

Shakespeare's allusion to life as a play is a motif he uses frequently, one that makes a quick connection with the Elizabethan play-going audience of the day. In the manner of drama at the time, the extensive use of props was not used. No curtains signified the end and beginning of scenes. The simple entrance and exits of actors on stage kept the action going. Such is Macbeth's allusion to life as a "walking shadow" and a man as a "poor player," both in the sense that he has little respect in the larger community of the time and little control over his own actions. A man walks onto the stage of life, says his lines, then walks off and is "heard no more." Moreover, it is not even a good play, an intriguing play, an inspiring play. It is a "tale told by an idiot." Whether he is referring to man himself, to fate, or to God is unclear. A life may look impressive, "full of sound and fury," but in the end it is "signifying nothing."

Following this soliloquy, Macbeth learns the true meaning of the prophecies. Soldiers holding tree branches in front of them to hide their limited number appear to be "Great Birnam Wood" coming to "high Dunsinane Hill." At this he finally realizes that he has misinterpreted the latter prophecies. He is prepared for defeat at the hands of Macduff, who was born by caesarian section, thus not technically "born of woman."

Macbeth's defeat is total, leaving a legacy behind that is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." His pride and "vaulting ambition" have been his fatal flaws, thus leading to his tragic end. There is no remorse left in the hearts of the audience for this hero. Macbeth has won no moral victory over greater evil, as may be said in the case of Hamlet. Macbeth is the greatest villain of the play. His death does not bring any level of redemption to his life. It is one of utter and tragic defeat, without honor.

Macbeth: Themes

In *Macbeth*, ambition conspires with unholy forces to commit evil deeds which, in their turn, generate fear, guilt and still more horrible crimes. Above all, *Macbeth* is a character study in which not one, but two protagonists (the title character and Lady Macbeth) respond individually and jointly to the psychological burden of their sins. In the course of the play, Macbeth repeatedly misinterprets the guilt that he suffers as being simply a matter of fear. His characteristic way of dealing with his guilt is to face it directly by committing still more misdeeds, and this, of course, only generates further madness. By contrast, Lady Macbeth is fully aware of the difference between fear and guilt, and she attempts to prevent pangs of guilt by first denying her own sense of conscience and then by focusing her attention upon the management of

Macbeth's guilt. In the scene which occurs immediately after Duncan's death, Lady Macbeth orders her husband to get some water "and wash this filthy witness from your hand" (II.i.43-44). He rejects her suggestion, crying out, "What hands are here. Ha! they pluck out mine eyes! / Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (II.i.56-58). But she in turn insists that the tell-tale signs of his crime cannot be seen by others, that "a little water clears us of this deed" (II.i.64). But midway through the play, Lady Macbeth loses both her influence over her husband and the ability to repress her own conscience. Once her husband has departed to combat against Macduff's forces and Lady Macbeth is left alone, she assumes the very manifestations of guilt that have been associated with Macbeth, insomnia and hallucinations, in even more extreme form.

As for the motive behind the theme of guilt, it is ambition for power, and it does not require much for Macbeth to embrace the weird sisters' vision of him as the ruler of all Scotland. Macbeth is ambitious, but it is Lady Macbeth who is the driving force behind their blood-stained rise to the throne(s) of Scotland. Lady Macbeth is awesome in her ambition and possesses a capacity for deceit that Shakespeare often uses as a trait of his evil female characters. Thus, when she greets her prospective victim in Act I, she "humbly" tells King Duncan that she has eagerly awaited his arrival and that her preparations for it are "in every point twice done, and then double done" (l.vi.14-18). The irony here is that double-dealing and falsity are at hand, and Lady Macbeth's ability to conceal her intentions while at the same time making hidden reference to them has a startling effect upon us.

Beyond the evil that human ambition can manufacture, Macbeth has a super-natural dimension to it; indeed, the play opens with the three witches stirring the plot forward. Even before his encounter with the three witches, Macbeth finds himself in an unnatural dramatic world on the "foul and fair" day of the battle (I.iii.39). Things are not what they seem. After his first conclave with the witches, Macbeth is unable to determine whether the prophecy of the witches bodes "ill" or "good." He then begins to doubt reality itself as he states that "nothing is / But what it is not" (I.iii.141-142). The prophecy, of course, is true in the first sense but not what Macbeth takes it to be in the second. In like manner, the three predictions made to Macbeth in the first scene of Act IV seem to make him invincible; but the "woods" do march and Macbeth is slain by a man not ("naturally") born of woman.

Not only does an unnatural world overturn reality in Macbeth's experience, in Lady Macbeth's experience, this movement beyond nature is self-invoked. In an oft-cited speech, Lady Macbeth actively conjures up supernatural forces to change her into a creature without conscience or human (or "feminine") compassion.

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe topful
> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
> Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th' effect and it!
> (I.v.40-47)

Lady Macbeth alters herself into a monster, "de-sexing" herself into an embodiment of evil akin to the demon goddess Hecate. As many scholars have pointed out, unlike Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff, Macbeth and his wife are childless; there is no succession of kings behind Macbeth as there is behind Banquo. Having shorn herself of the ability to generate an heir, Lady Macbeth undergoes an alienation from both her gender and, as discussed below, from her marriage to Macbeth.

The waking world of reality and the unnatural world of evil intermingle in the paranoid hallucinations and, most markedly, in the insomnia of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth. After Duncan's murder, Macbeth hears that internal voice which commands him to "sleep no more" (II.ii.37). Restive to the end, Macbeth's insomnia is noted by his wife. She attempts to explain the more vivid and horrifying experiences that he undergoes, such as seeing Banquo's spectral effigy at the feast, by referring to natural causes, telling her husband that his vision stems from the fact that he lacks sleep. But then Lady Macbeth herself falls victim to a deep, somatic disorder. As the doctor who treats her insomnia is told, Lady Macbeth only begins to sleepwalk and to compulsively wash her hands when Macbeth is no longer present, the tyrant having taken to the field to stop Malcolm, Macduff, and their fellows from overturning his reign. In the end, Lady Macbeth enters into a limbo state of madness, sleepwalking between a horrible reality and a vision of the hell it portends.

The deterioration of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth as individuals is closely paralleled by the collapse of their marital relationship. Oddly, among all of Shakespeare's married couples, the Macbeths of Act I and Act II show the highest degree of bonding and cooperative spirit. The very first time that we see Lady Macbeth, she is reading a letter from Macbeth prefaced by the fond salutation, "Dearest Partner of Greatnesse." There is in the first two acts of the play a mutual admiration between the two, a dual respect based on their shared conviction that the manly Macbeth is fit to be king, while the commanding Lady Macbeth is his natural consort. When Lady Macbeth is first told that Macbeth has executed their plan and killed the king, she cries out "My husband."

But a change occurs in the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act II of Shakespeare's play. Once Duncan has been dispatched, Lady Macbeth becomes increasingly unimportant to her husband. After the murder of the King, Macbeth begins to withdraw from his marriage to Lady Macbeth. It is significant that Macbeth does not convey the graphic details of the King's death to his wife and that he departs (wisely, in fact) from his instructions to leave the daggers of the king's guards behind. Moreover, he keeps his plot against Banquo and Fleance from his wife, and she has no role at all in the killing of Macduff's family. Indeed, following her ineffectual efforts to control Macbeth when he sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet, Lady Macbeth virtually disappears from the plot. Not only is Lady Macbeth no longer directing the action in the natural domain of the play, she is now excluded by her husband from partaking in either the natural or the supernatural progression ahead.

When we see her again, Lady Macbeth is virtually unrecognizable, a shaken shell of her former self. As noted above, critical opinion about Lady Macbeth has moved in the direction of seeing her as either a pathetic character or as redeemed by her own suicide, in the sense that it demonstrates her underlying humanity. What is truly pathetic, as opposed to monstrous, about Lady Macbeth of Act V is that she no longer has any role in her partnership with Macbeth. She has voluntarily relinquished her natural role as Macbeth's wife to mobilize him into action, and in the unnatural world into which she has entered, she is no match for the witches who have assumed the function that she once performed on behalf of her partnership with Macbeth. Pathetically, Lady Macbeth yearns for the natural union that she had with her husband, for the role of nurturer and comforter, and that is no longer available to her. Lady Macbeth's last words are not expressions of guilt, but tender solicitous of care from her husband: "give me your hand … to bed, to bed, to bed" (V.i.66-68).

Macbeth: Character Analysis

Banquo (Character Analysis)

Banquo is a Scottish general in the king's army and Macbeth's friend. With Macbeth, Banquo helps Duncan's forces claim victory over the king of Norway and the thane of Cawdor. Following the battle, Banquo and Macbeth encounter the witches, who make several prophesies about Macbeth. They then speak to Banquo about his own future, saying that Banquo's descendants will be kings. Unlike Macbeth, who appears to be

fascinated by the weird sisters, Banquo expresses doubts about the witches and their prophesies. He comments to Macbeth, for example, that "oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray [us]" (I.iii.123-25).

This unwillingness to subscribe wholeheartedly to the visions of the witches, in addition to Banquo's demonstrated valor in battle, contribute to the view that Banquo is a virtuous man. Yet Banquo's virtue is an area of some controversy. A common view is that Shakespeare intended Banquo to be seen as a virtuous character who was not responsible in any way for Macbeth's murderous actions, despite the fact that the source material from which Shakespeare drew depicts Banquo as a co-conspirator in Duncan's death. This line of thinking is supported by the popular belief that *Macbeth* was performed (perhaps even written) for King James I in 1606. Historically, Banquo was an ancestor of King James, and some critics argue that because of this, Shakespeare would not portray him in an unfavorable way. Other observers argue that Banquo's inaction makes him in part morally responsible for the king's murder. These critics cite Banquo's soliloquy following Duncan's death as evidence of his knowledge of (and therefore at least partial responsibility for) Macbeth's actions. In this speech Banquo acknowledges to himself his suspicions about Macbeth's actions: "Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all, / As the weird women promis'd, and I fear / Thou play'dst most foully for't" (III.i.1- 3).

Shortly after Macbeth kills Duncan, he remembers the witches' prophesy regarding Banquo: that Banquo's descendants would be kings. Macbeth then arranges to have Banquo and his son Fleance murdered. Fleance escapes the attack; Banquo does not.

Macbeth (Character Analysis)

Macbeth is nobleman and a Scottish general in the king's army. At the beginning of the play, he has gained recognition for himself through his defeat of the king of Norway and the rebellious Macdonwald. Shortly after the battle, Macbeth and another of the king's general's, Banquo, encounter three witches (or weird sisters) who greet Macbeth as thane of Glamis, thane of Cawdor, and future king. Macbeth, unaware that King Duncan has bestowed upon him the title thane of Cawdor, appears to be startled by these prophesies. As soon as the witches finish addressing Macbeth, Banquo asks him, "why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (I.iii.51-52). The witches vanish after telling Banquo that he will father kings. Shortly thereafter, Rosse and Angus arrive to tell Macbeth that the title of thane of Cawdor has been transferred to him. Upon hearing this, he says to himself that the greatest title, that of king, is yet to come. When Duncan announces that his son Malcolm will be next in line for the throne, Macbeth acknowledges the prince as an obstacle which will either trip him up or one which he must overcome.

After Macbeth sends words to his wife about the witches prophesies, Lady Macbeth hears that the king will be coming to stay at the castle. She then decides that the king will die there. When Macbeth arrives at Inverness, Lady Macbeth discusses with her husband her intentions. Soon after, he reviews in his own mind the reasons for not killing the king. He has many, including his obligations to the king as a kinsman, a loyal subject, and a host. Other reasons listed by Macbeth include the goodness of the king and the general lack of any reason other than ambition. However, when his wife argues with him, attacking his manhood, Macbeth resolves to follow through with the murder.

The extent of Lady Macbeth's power over her husband is debated. Some critics blame Lady Macbeth for precipitating Macbeth's moral decline and ultimate downfall. Others argue that, while Lady Macbeth appears to be increasingly guilt-ridden as the play progresses as evidenced by her sleepwalking episodes, Macbeth becomes increasingly murderous.

After murdering Duncan, then framing and murdering Duncan's attendants, Macbeth, disturbed by the witches' prophesy about Banquo's descendants, orders the murder of Banquo and Banquo's son, Fleance. The son escapes, but Banquo is slain, as the murderers report to Macbeth at the banquet in III.iv. Upon hearing this news, Macbeth is haunted throughout the banquet by Banquo's ghost, who no one else can see. As the scene ends, Macbeth vows to visit the weird sisters again, which he does in IV.i. During this visit, Macbeth receives three messages from apparitions conjured by the witches. The first apparition warns Macbeth to beware the thane of Fife; the second tells him that he cannot be harmed by anyone born of a woman; the third states that Macbeth will not be vanquished until "Great Birnan wood to high Dunsinane hill" rise against him (IV.i.93-4). Next, Macbeth asks whether or not Banquo's descendants will ever rule Scotland, and the witches show him a vision of Banquo, followed by eight kings. The vision and the weird sisters disappear as Lennox arrives with the information that Macduff has gone to England and that Malcolm is there as well. At this point, Macbeth decides to have Macduff's family murdered.

As Act V opens, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking is revealed, Malcolm and Macduff have gathered an army against Macbeth, and many of Macbeth's own thanes have deserted him. But Macbeth seems to rely on his belief in his interpretation of the witches' prophesies, which he reviews in V.iii. He vows that his heart and mind will not "shake with fear" (V.iii.10). After learning of the his wife's death, however, Macbeth in a famous speech (V.v.16-28) expresses his weariness with life.

Clinging to the witches' words about his not being harmed by any one "of woman born" (IV.ii.80), Macbeth tells Macduff that his life is charmed, only to learn that his opponent was delivered via cesarean birth ("from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" [V.viii.15-16]). Offstage, Macduff kills Macbeth and returns with his severed head.

Overall assessment of Macbeth's character varies. Some view him as a tragic hero who held every potential for being a good man but was overcome by the evil forces in his world. Others argue that Macbeth completely lacked any moral integrity. Finally, he is viewed most harshly by some who see him as a Satanic figure, in that he knowingly chooses evil and unleashes it upon the world.

Additional Character Analysis
Macbeth commits a trio of heinous crimes in the course of the play: the regicide of Duncan, the murder of his closest friend, Banquo (and attempted murder of Fleance), and the wanton slaughter of innocents in the persons of Macduff's wife and child. Given all this, we may tend to forget that prior to his encounter with the weird sisters, Macbeth is a hero, a loyal warrior in service of the legitimate king of Scotland, Duncan. His decision to accelerate or to manifest the witches' prophecy that he will rule is marked by pangs of guilt at the thought of the sin entailed in the act of killing a king who had amply rewarded his courage and fidelity. Shamed into sin by Lady Macbeth, Macbeth assumes a practical orientation toward the crime at hand. When thoughts of slaying Duncan to obtain the crown first enter Macbeth's mind, his chief concern is that they not be detected. He proclaims, "Stars, hide your fires / Let not light see my black and deep desires" (I.iv.50-52); on the cusp of crime, he again calls on nature to mask his motives, entreating the earth, "Hear not my steps which way they walk" (II.i.57). As a man of action, Macbeth is convinced that, if only he can hide his crime and further the prophecy given to him by the witches, his ill feelings will naturally dissipate. This belief underlies his reaction to the murderer's news that Fleance has escaped the fate that Macbeth planned for him. Learning of this flaw in the execution of his scheme, Macbeth laments: "Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect; Whole as the marble" (III.iv.19-21). From Macbeth's standpoint, the reason that the ghost of Banquo appears at the feast is that the loose end of Fleance's remaining alive has left him "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in to saucy doubts and fears" (III.iv.23-24).

Those doubts and fears lead Macbeth back to the witches and toward still more evil deeds. Having dispatched Banquo to prevent one prophecy from coming true, he is later warned about Macduff and then seemingly reassured that no harm can befall him unless miraculous conditions occur—the marching of a wood, the

appearance of a man not born by woman. These things, of course, do take place, making Macbeth a victim of his own understanding. Macbeth reaches tragic heights in the soliloquy on the meaninglessness of life that he speaks after learning of Lady Macbeth's death. But even after it is plain that the prophecies of the witches are working toward his destruction, Macbeth displays his mettle. In their final encounter, Macbeth tells Macduff that "The mind I sway by, and the heart I bear / Shall never sag with doubt, nor shake with fear" (V.iii.9-10). He is then told by Macduff that his adversary is not "of woman born." Yet even after the last prop has fallen, Macbeth tells Macduff to "Lay on." Macbeth sinks into a slough of evil, his mind becomes disordered, yet in the final step, his warrior's instinct returns to him.

Lady Macbeth (Character Analysis)

Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's wife. When the audience first sees her in I.v, she is reading a letter from Macbeth about his encounter with the weird sisters and about his new title. Lady Macbeth promises to provide Macbeth with the courage he needs to make the prophecy come true, fearing that his nature is too soft to take the direct route to the throne.

There is some controversy over the role Lady Macbeth plays in the murders that follow. Some critics maintain that responsibility for the deaths of Duncan and Banquo rests solely with Macbeth, whose own ambition and nature are the cause of his deeds. Others cite Macbeth's reluctance prior to Duncan's murder and argue that Lady Macbeth goads her husband into the action. Lady Macbeth does, however, set the time and the place of Duncan's murder, claims that she would kill a baby at her breast to honor a vow, and argues that when Macbeth first conceived of killing Duncan, then he was a man.

In contrast to Lady Macbeth's forceful disposition on the first three acts of the play, her actions in the last two acts are much less confident or ambitious. Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene appears to be tormented by her knowledge of Macbeth's actions. In V.i, Lady Macbeth reviews the various crimes her husband has committed and appears to be attempting to wash blood from her hands. This scene contains Lady Macbeth's famous "Out damn'd spot!" (V.i.35) speech. The doctor diagnoses her mind as "infected" (V.i.72) and says she needs spiritual counsel more than she needs a doctor. Later she commits suicide.

Additional Character Analysis
The very name of Lady Macbeth conjures a legion of evil associations, for the female protagonist of Shakespeare's Scottish Tragedy has come to represent feminine treachery. Lady Macbeth's ambition, her duplicity, and, the unnatural absence, indeed, the outright rejection, of such female values as compassion and nurturance mark her as a heartless villain, more monster than woman. It is, of course, Lady Macbeth herself who spawns the plot to kill Duncan, who determines the setting and the specific actions through which this bloody deed will take place. The speech in which she "de-sexes" herself (Act I, scene v) is one of the most frightening expressions of unnatural evil in all of Shakespeare's works, ranking alongside the evil speeches of Iago, Richard III and the bastard Edmund of *King Lear*.

But this appraisal of Lady Macbeth's evil character, while certainly accurate, requires qualification if not some revision. There is, to begin, her affection toward Macbeth—a genuine, if distorted, bond of love holding the two together. More important, Lady Macbeth is humanized by her own decline into guilt-ridden madness. Until the death of Duncan, Lady Macbeth seems, in the words of A. C. Bradley, to be "invincible and inhuman." But when she reappears in Act V, Lady Macbeth has been reduced to a wretched state, and (presumably) to the taking of her own life. Touchingly, the "mad" Lady Macbeth turns to her function of protecting her husband even though Macbeth has quit all domestic concerns to defend his ill-gotten throne. As the doctor and others observe her actions, Lady Macbeth seems caught in the routine of assuring Macbeth that he has no cause for fear, as she speaks the lines: "Wash your hands, put on your night gown / Look not so pale. I tell you yet again / Banquo's buried. He cannot come out on's grave" (V.i.62-64). Here Lady Macbeth

is speaking to both her absent consort and to herself. But the union between Lady Macbeth and her husband has disintegrated under the weight of the evil that they have done and of the further evil that Macbeth does for their sake.

Macduff (Character Analysis)

Macduff, the thane of Fife, is a Scottish nobleman. He travels with Duncan to Macbeth's castle, and with Lennox, arrives the morning after the king has been murdered to awaken Duncan, but instead finds him dead. Macduff announces to the gathered nobleman, including the king's sons, that Duncan has been killed.

Macduff's words in the next scene are considered significant by some observers who argue that Macduff is the first character to suggest his suspicion regarding Macbeth's ascension to the throne. Macduff tells Rosse that he will not be attending Macbeth's coronation but will instead be returning home to Fife. After Rosse states that he will be going to the coronation, Macduff replies: "Well, may you see things well done there: adieu, / Lest our old robes dit easier than our new" (II.iv.37-8). Additionally, Macduff is not present at the banquet during which Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost. This absence is noted by Macbeth directly after the banquet, at which time Macbeth vows to see the weird sisters again. When he does, the apparition they conjure tells him to beware the thane of Fife; and just after the witches vanish, Lennox approaches with the news that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth then vows to have Macduff's family killed.

Meanwhile, Macduff has met with Malcolm in England. The two return to Scotland, having gathered an army with which to challenge Macbeth. At this time, Macduff learns of his family's death. Although many readers view Macduff, and Malcolm as well, as Scotland's saviors, Macduff is often harshly criticized for deserting his family. At the same time, critics have praised Macduff for not being ashamed to show his emotion when he learns that his family has been murdered.

In V.viii, Macduff and Macbeth confront each other. Macbeth appears to be convinced by the witches' prophesy that "none of woman born" can harm him. When he reveals this to Macduff, Macduff replies that he wasn't born of woman; rather, he was "from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" (V.viii.15-16). Macduff then kills and beheads Macbeth, clearing the way for Malcolm's ascension to the throne.

Additional Character Commentary
Macduff slays Macbeth and is in this functional sense the hero of the play. Macduff recognizes that Macbeth is behind the death of Duncan after Banquo is also slain, and he appoints himself to head the legitimate cause of the king's eldest son, Malcolm. It is interesting to consider how Macduff deals with the guilt that he feels over his indirect role in causing the slaughter of his family by Macbeth's henchmen. He first remonstrates with himself, acknowledging that he has been sinful in the sense that his innocent wife and children were slain for his opposition to Macbeth. Urged by Malcolm to "dispute it like a man" (IV.iii.219), Macduff agrees on the need to exact vengeance upon Macbeth, but tells the prince, "I shall do so; / But I must also feel it as a man" (IV.iii.220-221). In this natural frame of action, Macduff is able to move toward the final confrontation with Macbeth in a deliberate and highly focused manner, refusing to strike down the reluctant soldiers in Macbeth's force and seeking his revenge on Macbeth alone.

Malcolm (Character Analysis)

Malcolm is one of King Duncan's sons, the other being Donalbain. In the early part of the play, he is scarcely present, but overall he has one of the three main speaking parts, the other two being Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Early in the play, Malcolm introduces to King Duncan the sergeant who saved Malcolm from capture. When the king's assassination is discovered, Malcolm agrees with his brother's suggestion to flee for their lives, and he goes to England, where he is later said to be living at the court of King Edward the

Confessor, an English king noted for his holiness. The sudden departure of the king's sons casts some suspicion on their complicity in his murder.

In IV.iii, Macduff goes to England to seek Malcolm's help in restoring rightful rule in Scotland. In the interview that then takes place, Malcolm acknowledges his doubts about Macduff's motives quite directly to Macduff. He wonders whether Macduff is a paid agent of Macbeth, and he also questions why Macduff suddenly left his family unprotected to come to England. In order to test his suspicions about Macduff, Malcolm tells Macduff that he himself loves women, land and jewels, and discord among people. In sum, he accuses himself of lacking all kingly graces. When Macduff responds with a cry of hopelessness and despair for his country, Malcolm reveals that this is the first lie he has ever told. Later, Malcolm encourages Macduff to use the sudden news of his family's slaughter as a motive to fight Macbeth.

In the final scene of the play, Malcolm shows himself assuming the role of kingship with grace and dignity, expressing his concern for the soldiers who are not present, and urging Siward to take time to mourn for his son. In his final speech, he states his plans to inaugurate a new era in Scotland, rewarding the soldiers, calling home exiles, and serving by the grace of God.

Three Witches, The Weird Sisters (Character Analysis)

The witches in *Macbeth* are present in only four scenes in the play, but Macbeth's fascination with them motivates much of the play's action. When they meet with Banquo and Macbeth, they address Macbeth with three titles: thane of Glamis, thane of Cawdor, and king hereafter. Next, they predict that Banquo will father kings, though he will not be king himself. Refusing to answer questions, they vanish.

Later in III.v, Hecat lectures the witches for talking to Macbeth without involving her. In IV.i, when Macbeth pays another visit to the witches, Hecat has briefly appeared to the witches but leaves before Macbeth's arrival. Though the Riverside edition has her accompanied by three other witches, most editions do not. In this scene, the witches make a thick gruel in a cauldron, using animal and human body parts. Many of the animals are reptilian or associated with night. The human body parts come from people who were considered outsiders to the Christian world of the English Renaissance: Jews, Turks, Tartars. The witches refer to their activity as a "deed without a name" (IV.i.49). They sense that Macbeth is coming; one says she can tell "By the pricking of my thumbs, / Something wicked this way comes" (IV.i.44-45). This time, the witches submit to some of Macbeth's questions. They pour in sow's blood and a murderer's blood into the cauldron, and produce apparitions. When Macbeth has seen the apparitions (see Apparitions) and heard their messages, he demands to know about Banquo. The weird sisters then produce a show of eight kings followed by Banquo. As the witches produce this display, they say "Show his eyes, and grieve his heart" (IV.i.110). When Macbeth grows enraged, they dance and depart with great cheer.

There is a frustrating duplicity about the witches' nature as there is about their prophecies and predictions to Macbeth. They are interpreted variously as custodians of evil, spinners of the future, and as something slightly more neutral, creatures with knowledge of the future but with limited powers.

Other Characters (Descriptions)

Angus
Angus is a Scottish nobleman. He travels with Rosse to bring King Duncan news of the battle and to bestow upon Macbeth the title thane of Cawdor. Angus also accompanies Duncan on the journey to Macbeth's castle. Finally, he appears in Act V with the Scottish rebels.

Apparitions
In IV.i, three apparitions come from the witches' cauldron after animal and human blood is poured in on top of a variety of other ingredients. The first apparition, described in the stage directions as "an armed head," tells Macbeth to beware the thane of Fife (Macduff). The second apparition is a bloody child who tells Macbeth that "none of woman born" (IV.ii.80) can harm Macbeth. The third apparition is a child wearing a crown and carrying a tree in his hand. He tells Macbeth that he will not be vanquished until "Great Birnan wood to high Dunsinane hill" rise against him (IV.i.93-4).

Attendants
The king is surrounded by attendants who can carry out such tasks as helping the bleeding sergeant to find surgeons. They travel with the king. His personal attendants are supposed to guard him in his sleep. Macbeth stabs them in the confused moments following the discovery of the murdered king. Macbeth has his own attendants. They help with Macbeth's banquet and are with him in the castle in the last act of the play.

Boy
Macduff's son is a young boy. When the murderers sent by Macbeth arrive at the Macduff residence, the child tries to defend his father's honor and calls the murderer a name. After he is stabbed, he tells his mother to run away.

Cathness (in some editions, Caithness)
Cathness is a Scottish nobleman who is another one of the rebels against Macbeth under Malcolm's leadership.

Donalbain
Donalbain is the king's son and brother to Malcolm. He is present but silent in the early scenes with the king. When the murder of his father is disclosed, he suggests that he and Malcolm flee the country, and he leaves for Ireland. For a time, he and his brother are under suspicion for the murder. He is not present at the battle at the end of the play.

Duncan (King Duncan of Scotland)
Duncan is said by Macbeth to be virtuous and meek in his conduct in office and in his bearing. He seems to be regarded as a good king and, on the battlefield, he appears to be a competent leader who confronts both a rebellion and an invasion. He announces his son Malcolm as the prince of Cumberland, the next in line to the Scottish throne. Duncan does not seem to be a particularly good judge of character, since he misjudged both the former thane of Cawdor and his designated replacement, Macbeth, who murders Duncan in his sleep.

Earl of Northumberland (Siward, Earl of Northumberland)
See Siward

English Doctor
The English doctor comments to Malcolm on the healing touch of the saintly Edward, the English king. Edward's healing stands in contrast to Macbeth's murderous touch.

Fleance
Fleance is Banquo's son. He and his father encounter Macbeth just before Macbeth murders Duncan. Prior to the banquet to which Macbeth has invited Fleance and Banquo, father and son are approached by murderers who have been ordered by Macbeth to kill both of them. Fleance escapes the attack.

Gentlemen
Unnamed gentlemen are addressed by Rosse at Macbeth's banquet.

Gentlewoman
The gentlewoman is an attendant on Lady Macbeth. She speaks knowledgeably to the Scottish doctor about Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking routine.

Ghost of Banquo
Banquo's ghost appears at Macbeth's banquet scene and is only seen by Macbeth. It is commonly held that the ghost is a hallucination, conjured from Macbeth's guilt.

Hecat (also Hecate)
Hecat is the goddess of witchcraft. She is described by the weird sisters as looking angry when she first appears on stage. She scolds them for their dealings with Macbeth, who loves the witches not for themselves but for his own purposes. She plans apparitions that will confuse and mislead Macbeth. Accompanied by three other witches, she appears briefly in the cauldron scene, commending the witches and instructing them to dance and sing.

King of Scotland (King Duncan of Scotland)
See Duncan

Lennox
Lennox is a Scottish nobleman who appears with the king at his camp near the battlefield. He travels with the king to Macbeth's castle. The morning after Duncan's murder, Lennox arrives with Macduff, intending to awaken the king. Based on his initial survey of the evidence, Lennox speculates that the king's chamberlains were his killers. Lennox appears again in III.iv at Macbeth's banquet. During the hasty departure of the guests from the banquet, he wishes a better health to the king. In the final scene of Act III, he speaks of recent events in Scotland. In the first scene of Act IV, when he brings Macbeth word of Macduff's departure from England, he does not see the weird sisters vanish past him in the air. He is aligned with the Scottish noblemen rebelling against Macbeth in Act V.

Lords
Some unnamed lords attend Macbeth's banquet. One lord speaks to Lennox after the banquet about recent events in Scotland, the whereabouts of Malcolm and lately of Macduff, and the anger of Macbeth at Macduff's absence from the banquet. He prays for better times in Scotland.

Macduff (Lady Macduff)
Lady Macduff is Macduff's wife. When Macduff leaves for England, she is left unprotected with her son at her castle. She questions her husband's wisdom in leaving his family and later speaks gently yet seriously to her son of Macduff s absence, saying he is dead. They have a conversation about how they will live without Macduff. She and her son are murdered by those sent by Macbeth.

Menteth (in some editions, Menteith)
Menteth is a Scottish nobleman who is one of the rebels against Macbeth serving under Malcolm. He seems confident that their cause will succeed and restore peace and order to Scotland.

Messengers
One messenger brings news to Lady Macbeth that the king is coming to stay at their castle. Another messenger tries to warn Lady Macduff that her family is in danger at Macduff's castle. In the last act, as Malcolm's army advances under cover of branches cut from trees, another messenger brings Macbeth word that the woods seem to be moving.

Murderers (Three Murderers, or murtherers)
The murderers are hired by Macbeth to kill Banquo and Fleance. He speaks to two of them, who say they are

willing to perform as ordered. At the site of the murder, a third appears, apparently unknown to the other two, making the first two murderers think that Macbeth does not trust them. The first one goes with blood on his face to the door of Macbeth's banquet hall to tell him about the deed. Macbeth is happy about Banquo's death but shaken by the news that Fleance escaped. He plans to meet the murderers again. These may be the murderers who kill Lady Macduff also.

Officers
Nonspeaking parts. These would be appropriate to battle scenes, camp scenes, and Duncan's arrival at Macbeth's castle.

Old Man
The anonymous old man represents experience and memory, and is at least 70 years old ("Threescore and ten I can remember well" he says in II.iv.1). He comments on the disturbances in nature on the night of Duncan's murder, unprecedented in his recollection. He is referred to by Rosse several times as father. He wishes a blessing on Rosse as he travels to Scone.

Porter
He is the doorman at Macbeth's castle. He hears knocking but takes his time in answering the knocking, imagining that he is at hell's gate and letting in "some of all professions" into the "everlasting bonfire" (II.iii.18-19). After he opens the gate, admitting Lennox and Macduff, he reveals that he was up until the early hours of the morning, drinking and "carousing" (II.iii.24).

In his drunken rambling, the porter speaks at length about welcoming "equivocators" to the castle. In Elizabethan England, the word equivocate meant much more than speaking with a double meaning. Shakespeare's audience would most likely have been familiar with the Doctrine of Equivocation, which gave Catholics permission to perjure themselves for morally acceptable reasons. In 1606, two Catholics were interrogated about their role in what became known as the Gunpowder Plot, which was a conspiracy to kill King James I and blow up Parliament in an effort place a Catholic on England's throne. Henry Garnet and Guy Fawkes invoked the Doctrine of Equivocation during their trial. Critics note that in the porter's speech about equivocation, Shakespeare associates the use of equivocation by Elizabethan Catholics like Garnet and Fawkes with the words of the weird sisters. Like Garnet and Fawkes, the witches words invariably carry double meanings. Perhaps the most notable instance of this is when the witches tell Macbeth that "none of woman born" (IV.i.80) can harm him. Macbeth finds out just before Macduff kills him the real truth behind the witches' words: that Macduff was taken from his mother's womb through cesarean section.

Rosse (in some editions, Ross)
Rosse is a Scottish nobleman who reports to the king on the Macdonwald's rebellion and on the Norwegian king's desire to have a peace treaty. Rosse and Angus bring the news to Macbeth of his new title. He goes to Macbeth's castle with the king. Rosse comments on unusual things happening in nature after the king's assassination, such as the king's horses eating each other. He plans to travel to Scone to see Macbeth crowned. He attends Macbeth's banquet and notices that the king is unwell. Rosse's appearance at Macduff's castle is unclear in intent, but it seems to be only to check on Lady Macduff. He brings the news to Macduff of her death, but appears to have a difficult time stating clearly what happened, saying initially that Macduff's family is well and at peace. He appears with the rebelling Scottish noblemen in Act V, and he is present in the final scene bringing Siward news of his son's death.

Scots Doctor
The Scots (or Scottish) doctor attends to Lady Macbeth. He has watched for several nights and not seen the sleepwalking. He questions the gentlewoman about Lady Macbeth's actions during the sleepwalking and advises that Lady Macbeth needs spiritual rather than physical healing. When he reports to Macbeth, he gives his opinion that she is not sick but troubled by her imagination. He says to himself that if he can get away

from the castle, no desire for profit will make him come back.

Sergeant
This soldier, sometimes identified as a captain, is present only in the second scene in the play but introduces the image of the spreading bloodshed which stains the land. He begins reporting to Duncan on the battle and on Macbeth's bravery but is too weakened from his wounds to finish his speech.

Servant
In V.iii, a servant brings Macbeth news of the ten thousand English invaders approaching the castle.

Sewer
The sewer is a butler who waits on Macbeth and his guests at the castle. A supper goes on in the other room while Macbeth deliberates about Duncan's murder. This is not a speaking part.

Seyton
Seyton is Macbeth's only trusted subordinate at the end of the play. He brings Macbeth confirmation of battle reports. He also brings news of the death of Lady Macbeth. Although Macbeth calls for him impatiently, he does not scream at him the way he does at other messengers. It has often been noticed that his name resembles Satan.

Siward (Siward, Earl of Northumberland)
Siward's help for the Scottish cause is sought by Malcolm and Macduff at the English court of Edward the Confessor. Siward is described by Malcolm as an experienced and accomplished soldier. Siward and Malcolm enter Macbeth's castle together. Some of Macbeth's own people turn against him and join with the invaders. When Siward learns the news of his son's death in the final scene, he is satisfied that his son received his injuries on the front of his body, facing the battle rather than running away, and declares him now "God's soldier" (V.ix.13).

Siward (Young Siward)
Siward's son is a young man. He fights against Macbeth, and dies in the battle at Macbeth's sword.

Soldiers
The soldiers marching with Malcolm and the rebelling Scottish nobles in Act V suggest the numbers massing against Macbeth. The Scottish have their soldiers, and Siward arrives with ten thousand English soldiers.

Weird Sisters (Three Witches, The Weird Sisters)
See Witches

Witches (Three other Witches)
See Hecat

Macbeth: Principal Topics

Macbeth is a complex study of evil and its corrupting influence on humanity. Some critics argue that Shakespeare adapted historical accounts of Macbeth to illustrate his larger view of evil's operation in the world. The particular evil that the protagonist commits has wide-spread consequences, causing a series of further evils. As a result, the tragedy is not fully resolved through the fallen hero's death but through the forces of good that ultimately correct all the evil Macbeth has unleashed. The witches, through their ambiguous prophecies, represent a supernatural power that introduces evil into *Macbeth*. Their equivocations—the intentional stating of half-truths—conceal the sinister nature of their predictions, and Macbeth does not

consider the possibility that they are trying to deceive him. In fact, the Weird Sisters' attempts at misinformation succeed not only because they favorably interpret the hero's future but also because their revelations seem to come true almost immediately. Although inherently malevolent, the witches' prophecies do not necessarily signify the actual existence of evil but suggest instead the potential for evil in the world. The Weird Sisters themselves do not have the power to enact a diabolic course of events such as that which ensues in *Macbeth*; rather, their power lies in tempting humans like Macbeth to sin. When Macbeth succumbs to the temptation to commit murder, he himself is the active catalyst that unleashes evil upon the world. The evil, which initially manifests itself in Duncan's murder, not only disintegrates Macbeth's personal world but also expands until it corrupts all levels of creation, contaminating the family, the state, and the physical universe. For example, Macduff's family is murdered, Scotland is embroiled in a civil war, and during Duncan's assassination "the earth was feverous, and did shake" (II.iii.60).

Shakespeare's depiction of time is another central concern in *Macbeth*. Macbeth dislocates the passage of time—a process fundamental to humankind's existence—when he succumbs to evil and murders Duncan. Shakespeare uses this displacement as a key symbol in dramatizing the steady disintegration of the hero's world. Macbeth's evil actions initially interrupt the normal flow of time, but order gradually regains its proper shape and overpowers the new king, as demonstrated by his increasing guilt and sleeplessness. Ironically, the Weird Sisters can be seen as an element that contributes to the restoration of order. Although Macbeth disrupts the natural course of events by acting on the witches' early prophecies, their later predictions suggest that his power will shortly end. This premonition is apparent in the Birnam wood revelation; while Macbeth believes that the prediction insures his invulnerability, it really implies that his rule will soon expire. Some critics observe that different kinds of time interact in *Macbeth*. The most apparent form of time can be described as chronological. Chronological time establishes the sense of physical passage in the play, focusing on the succession of events that can be measured by clock, calendar, and the movement of the sun, moon, and stars. Another aspect of time, identified as providential, overarches the action of the entire play. Providential time is the divine ordering of events that is initially displaced by Macbeth's evil actions but which gradually overpowers him and reestablishes harmony in the world. Macbeth conceives of another kind of time that seems to defy cause and effect when he unsuccessfully attempts to reconcile his anticipation of the future with the memory of his ignoble actions. This dilemma initiates a period of inaction in the protagonist's life that culminates in his resigned acceptance of death as the inexorable passage of time. This confused displacement of time pervades the action of *Macbeth* until Malcolm and Macduff restore a proper sense of order at the end of the play.

Another important issue in *Macbeth* is Shakespeare's ambiguous treatment of gender and sex roles. In many instances, the playwright either inverts a character's conventional gender characteristics or divests the figure of them altogether. Lady Macbeth is perhaps the most obvious example of this dispossession. In Act I, scene v, she prepares to confront her husband by resolving to "unsex" herself, to suppress any supposed weakness associated with her feminine nature so that she can give Macbeth the strength and determination to carry out Duncan's murder. After the king is killed, however, her feelings of guilt gradually erode her resolve, and she goes insane. Macbeth is perhaps the character most affected by the question of gender in the tragedy. From the beginning of the play, he is plagued by feelings of doubt and insecurity, which his wife attributes to "effeminate" weakness. Fearing that her husband does not have the resolve to murder Duncan, Lady Macbeth cruelly manipulates his lack of self-confidence by questioning his manhood. Some critics maintain that as a result of his wife's machinations, Macbeth develops a warped perspective of manliness, equating it with the less humanistic attribute of self-seeking aggression. The more the protagonist pursues his ideal understanding of manliness—first by murdering Duncan, then Banquo, and finally Macduff's family—the less humane he becomes. Commentators who subscribe to this reading of Macbeth's character argue that the ruthlessness with which he strives to obtain this perverted version of manhood ultimately separates him from the rest of humankind. Through his diminishing humaneness, the protagonist essentially forfeits all claims on humanity itself—a degeneration, he ultimately realizes, that renders meaningless his ideal of manliness.

Various image patterns support the sense of corruption and deterioration that pervades the dramatic action of *Macbeth*. Perhaps one of the most dominant groups is that of babies and breast-feeding. Infants symbolize pity throughout the play, and breast milk represents humanity, tenderness, sympathy, and natural human feelings, all of which have been debased by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's evil actions. Another set of images focuses on sickness and medicine, all of which occur, significantly, in the last three acts of the play after Macbeth has ascended the Scottish throne. These patterns are given greater depth through Shakespeare's graphic depiction of blood in the tragedy. The numerous references to blood not only provide Macbeth's ruthless actions with a visual dimension, they also underscore Scotland's degeneration after Macbeth murders Duncan and usurps the crown. Ironically, blood also symbolizes the purifying process by which Malcolm and Macduff—the restorers of goodness—purge the weakened country of Macbeth's villainy. Other major image patterns include sleep and sleeplessness, order versus disorder, and the contrast between light and darkness.

Macbeth: Essays

Character Study of Macbeth: From "Brave Macbeth" to "Dead Butcher"

There can be no play without characters to tell the story. In Shakespeare's plays, though he borrowed many of his stories, the characters are his own inventions based on various sources. Although there is no mention anywhere in the text of the play of any of Macbeth's physical characteristics, such as height or hair and eye colour, we do see a psychological progression from 'brave Macbeth' (1.1.16) to 'dead butcher' (5.9.36). The playwright, through the actor playing the role, gives us an almost diagrammatic study in the destruction of a man and his reputation, as well as the rebirth of Scotland.

Unlike many other Shakespeare plays, the eponymous hero does not make his entrance until the third scene of Act I. When the play opens, we are given only a brief sketch to whet our expectations. The witches are the first characters we see, and if Shakespeare intended to grab our attention, this opening surely does it. They are 'real' in the sense that we can actually see them, but they are also supernatural in that we believe witches belong to the world of evil spirits and sing-song spells. In lines 7-8, they inform us that they are to meet Macbeth upon the heath - nothing else. But we must wonder: why Macbeth? Why on the heath? What do they want?

The following scene takes us to a battlefield. King Duncan receives details of a fight between his forces and the rebels forces led by Macdonald and troops from Norway. The Captain tells the King that 'brave Macbeth' (1.2.16) met the traitor Macdonald with his sword drawn and killed him in a very horrible and gory manner. Thus our first description of Macbeth is that of a brave, loyal soldier defending his King and country from those who would take the throne and enslave the people. The King is so pleased with Macbeth's performance that he gives Macbeth the traitor's title, Thane of Cawdor, calling him 'noble Macbeth' (1.2.67). Thus we are led to believe that Macbeth is a good man, loyal, courageous, and determined. He has proven his valour and is duly rewarded by the King.

Immediately following, however, we are shown the witches for the second time in three scenes, effectively framing Macbeth the soldier with witches, which could imply that Macbeth is no ordinary warrior. When Macbeth enters, his opening lines echo those of the witches in the first scene:

> Witches. Fair is foul and foul is fair … (1.1.12)
> Macbeth. So foul and fair a day I have not seen (1.3.36)

Obviously, then, there is some link between Macbeth and the witches. At this point, however, we do not know the nature of the relationship, only that the witches intend to meet Macbeth, but the implication is that this is an unholy alliance.

It is not long before we witness the meeting. While Macbeth's friend, Banquo, stands near him, the witches greet Macbeth as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and 'king hereafter' (1.3.43). Macbeth is startled by what he hears. He knows he is already Thane of Glamis, but does not know, as we do, that Duncan has promoted him to Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth, and we as well, are surprised by the promise of kingship. Banquo's prophecy is even more fantastic: he will be the father of kings but not king, and will be greater and happier than Macbeth! Yet, just like us, Macbeth wants to know more. Why did the Weird Sisters address him as Cawdor and king? Where did they get their information? Why deliver the prophecies on the heath? We know about the heath and Cawdor, but we do not know the source of the other prophecies. Is it possible that the witches are able to tell the future?

When Ross and Angus enter to proclaim Macbeth's promotion, the announcement comes as a surprise to him, and temporarily our attention is diverted since the two men merely state what we have already seen. More subtly, however, as Macbeth believes the event to be a fulfilment of a prophecy, we note somewhere in the back of our minds that we do not have any information about Macbeth that would allow us to understand how he could become king, especially since we are unaware of any problems with the present King. What Shakespeare is doing here with Macbeth is comparable to peeling an onion: this character will be revealed layer by layer.

In the next few lines it becomes apparent that Macbeth not only has thought about being king, but he also believes what the witches tell him is true:

> Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor:
> The greatest is behind …
> Two truths are told,
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme. (1.3.115-116, 126-128)

Macbeth knows that in order to become king, Duncan must die, by natural or unnatural means, and this last thought strikes him with panic and fear while he debates the good or bad of the prophecies. That he did not dismiss them right away as ridiculous indicates that in spite of his bravery as a soldier, Macbeth is not totally committed to Duncan. He has ambitions for himself, and if anything stands in his way, he will probably eliminate it. Macbeth's change has begun.

When Macbeth presents himself before Duncan, however, he pledges his 'service and loyalty' (1.4.22) to Duncan without reservation. Once Duncan announces he has made his eldest son, Malcolm, his heir and Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth's response is immediate:

> … that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. (1.4.48-50)

As rapidly as we are thrown into the events of the play, we are shown that Macbeth not only loves his King and country, but also himself. It still remains to be seen what action he will take.

We do not have to wait long, because the next scene takes us to Macbeth's home where we meet his wife, Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth has just received a letter from her husband in which we learn more about him. Apparently in an effort to find out more about the prophecies, Macbeth has had the witches investigated and

has

> … learned by the perfectest report that they have more in them than mortal knowledge.
> (1.5.2-3)

It is clear that after calling the witches 'imperfect speakers' (1.3.68), Macbeth has now changed his mind. Macbeth also mediates and interprets the prophecies and conveys his version to his wife which differs to the one we know.

Macbeth calls Lady Macbeth 'my dearest partner of greatness' (1.5.9-10) and here it seems he is sincere. Lady Macbeth, however, is determined that her husband becomes king and in her speech, implies he lacks the qualities necessary to assassinate Duncan without remorse or regret. She waits anxiously for Macbeth so that she can spur him on to regicide. She is so bent on the 'golden round' (1.5.26) that she prays for supernatural help to devoid her of any feminine traits and reinforce her 'fell purpose' (1.5.44). When her husband arrives, she begins her campaign by greeting him with the two titles he has and implies the third - king.

The rest of scene involves Lady Macbeth telling her husband to 'Leave all the rest to me' (1.5.71). These six words not only implicate Lady Macbeth in the murder of Duncan, but they also cause us to wonder if the pair will succeed in their act of assassination. Given that Macbeth has shown some doubt, perhaps the plan will fail.

Duncan arrives at the castle and while the King eats dinner and prepares to sleep peacefully, Macbeth is still debating how he can achieve the crown without getting caught or punished. His wife joins him in this reverie, and severely rebukes him for his confusion. She tells him that he is less than a man if he does not carry out the murder, and that she, a mere woman, has more strength of purpose than he. As Lady Macbeth unfolds the details to her husband, she is also telling us the plan and implicating us as we sit helpless in the audience. The two are in agreement as we move closer and closer to the murder of the King.

In the opening scene of Act II, the murder is committed. In the short space of eight scenes, Shakespeare gives us all the information (and a bit more) that we need to understand the character of Macbeth. We have seen him at his best and at his worst. We have witnessed his succumbing to the entreaties of his wife, and we have seen him go off to kill not only the King, but also any witnesses to the act. Everything that happens from this point forward will be based on our observations: Macbeth seizing the crown; the dissolution of his marriage and the death of his Queen; the murders of Banquo, Lady Macduff and the children; the death of Lady Macbeth; Macbeth's defeat and death.

Macbeth will consult the witches once more and since he believed their prophecies at the beginning of the play, we know that he will believe the Apparitions that he forces them to conjure. However, we also know that because of his inability to think clearly, he will not understand their true meaning and arrive at his own erroneous conclusions. But this character in the person of the actor tells more than one story.

According to Machiavelli in *The Prince*, the ends of political power justify any means taken to achieve them. Macbeth clearly shows not only the action of unbridled ambition, but also its results. Perhaps one of the reasons for the play's continued popularity is its portrayal of a politician that we can all recognise in our present day systems.

The character of Macbeth also serves as a metaphor for birth and death on several levels. On the one hand, Macbeth marks the birth of a new political ideology and the death of a tradition. On another, Malcolm's creation of the first Scottish earls from the thanes marks the birth of a new society, while Macbeth's death signals the end of the old. Still further, the childlessness of the Macbeths compared to the families of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff reflects these societal changes. Perhaps most uniquely, *Macbeth* lacks any sub-plot and

therefore, there is no comedy (except the Porter, 2.3) to offset the intensity of the tragedy nor is there any thread of bawdiness (except the Porter, 2.3 and the witches, 1.3 and 1.4).

Although *Macbeth* is the shortest of all of Shakespeare's plays (2,108 lines), the playwright does not take any shortcuts in developing Macbeth as a human being who, when given a choice, chooses his own gain instead of his people's welfare. He also puts himself before any consideration of family or the community that is comprised of those families. We are presented not only with a soldier who killed his way to the throne of Scotland, but also a man who could be our next-door neighbour. And that, with the warning of the witches, is really scary.

Who are the Witches?

Shakespeare's handling of the three witches or "weird sisters" of *Macbeth* is in itself equivocal. He assigns them the first dozen lines of the play their proclamation that "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I, i., .11) setting the tone for the horrid events ahead. When their prediction of Act I, scene iii that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor comes true almost instantaneously, the broad contours of the play's plot are set; Macbeth will become king of Scotland and this will require the elimination of Duncan and his sons. While the witches perform seminal and salient functions in the play, their appearance on stage is nonetheless limited. Assuming that Act III, scene v. of *Macbeth* as we have it was written into the play after the Bard's death, Shakespeare gives us only one more glimpse of the weird sisters in Act IV, scene i. with its famous "double, double, toil and trouble" (l,10) invocation of evil. We see very little of the witches and this, in turn, contributes to our uncertainty about who or what they are. They clearly possess supernatural powers, including the capacity to foretell the future and to read the minds of the mortals with whom they come in contact, and this suggests that they are real but supernatural. On the other hand, even after their final manifestation at the start of Act IV, Shakespeare undercuts the reality of the witches, again raising the possibility that the weird sisters are an hallucination, an emanation from the human psyche.

The key characteristic of Macbeth's witches is that while they can influence Macbeth's actions, they cannot compel him to commit the evil deeds that he undertakes in the course of the Scottish tragedy. This limitation on the power of the weird sisters, their dependency upon human will to work their black arts, is highlighted by the difference between Banquo's reaction to their initial predictions and that of Macbeth. After their encounter with the witches in Act I, scene iii, Banquo wonders aloud about whether they were real or whether he and Macbeth are suffering from some type of hallucination: "Were such things here as we do speak about?/Or have we eaten on the insane root/That takes the reason prisoner?" (I, iii., ll.83-85). It is not Macbeth, but Banquo, who first notices the witches on the heath, asking Macbeth: "What are these/So withered and so wild in their attire/That look not like th' inhabitants of the earth/And yet are on't" (I, iii, ll.39-42). Banquo then asks the witches directly whether they "live or are "aught" and Macbeth demands further, "Speak, if you can, what are you?" (I, iii., l.47). They do not respond to these questions, but simply hail Macbeth, first as Thane of Glamis, then as Thane of Cawdor, and finally as "King hereafter." When Banquo asks that witches if they can foretell future, they hail him as a future sire of Scottish monarchs, and when Macbeth then asks the witches to explain their salutations and the means by which foresee future, they vanish into thin air. Banquo ultimately concludes that the witches are not an hallucination, nor are they of substance, explaining to Macbeth that, "the earth hath bubbles, as the water has/And these are of them" (I, iii, ll.79-80).

Since both Macbeth and Banquo actually see the witches, and since both are of sound mind before and immediately after this encounter, the alternative thesis that the witches are only mental figments seems false. Moreover, Lady Macbeth (while she is in her right mind) accepts the reality of the witches having an independent existence. Nevertheless, Shakespeare deliberately upsets any firm conclusions as to who or what the weird sisters are. When Lennox arrives in Act IV, scene i, after the witches have vanished into air, Macbeth asks whether he saw them. Lennox replies with a simply no, and while his failure to see them is most

plausibly the result of his having entered the scene too late, we are again thrown off balance.

Leaving the issue of the witches' nature aside for the moment, we find that while the weird sisters can influence humans like Macbeth to carry out heinous acts, they cannot force them to do so, nor do they intervene directly in the commission of crimes. In facing the weird sisters, Macbeth undergoes a two-stage process: he first determines that they are credible and then decides to act upon this assumption. The first step occurs when word comes through Rosse and Angus that King Duncan has directed them to call Macbeth by his new title of Thane of Cawdor. Both Macbeth and Banquo then lend credence to the witches' ability to see into the future. Banquo, however, refuses the temptation of taking the second step, saying that, "The instruments of darkness tell us truths,/Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's/In deepest consequence" (I, iii., ll.124-126). Macbeth, however, furnishes the witches with the essential ingredient for the mayhem they are brewing, the agency of his will. He first assumes a neutral stance toward acting upon the prediction that he will become king, asserting that "This supernatural soliciting/Cannot be ill, cannot be good" (I, iii., ll.130-131). Macbeth presumes that even though his encounter with the witches incites terror in him, it cannot be "ill" because it augured his success in becoming Thane of Cawdor. At this juncture, Macbeth has headed down a slippery slope: once he proceeds with "weighing" the value of the witches' predictions he is only a short distance from subordinating his own will into an instrumentality of evil.

The contrast between Banquo and Macbeth in relation to the witches surfaces again at the start of Act II when Banquo confides to Macbeth that he has dreamt of the three weird sisters, while Macbeth replies that "I think not of them" (l.22). This is, of course, a lie and a denial of reality, for right after this exchange and once Banquo leaves, Macbeth sees a dagger hovering before his eyes, and places it in the specific context of his meeting with the witches: "Now o'er the one half world/Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse/The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates/Pale Hecat's offerings" (II, i., ll.49-51). It is important to note that in his second (and final) encounter with the witches (Act IV, scene i.), Macbeth takes an active hand in conjuring the apparitions that furnish him with an equivocal security about his future as Scotland's king. In the course of the play, the witches paradoxically become less real, but more potent. In the end, the reality of the witches is predicated upon the willingness of human beings to perform their evil handiwork and in the character of Macbeth, this willingness is plainly present.

Why Does Macbeth Change His Mind About Killing Duncan?

At end of Act I, Macbeth declares, "I am settled, and bend up/Each corporal agent to this terrible feat" (I, vii, ll.79-80). Given the witches' prediction that he will become Scotland's king, we have ample reason to believe that Macbeth and his partner in regicide, Lady Macbeth, will succeed in their enterprise of murdering Duncan. What is most remarkable is that just fifty lines earlier, Macbeth has flatly told his wife that they shall proceed no further in the bloody business at hand; in the midst of Lady Macbeth's subsequent argument against such "unmanly" inaction, he commands her to hold her peace. Lady Macbeth defies him, and the spurs embedded in her reply tap deeply into Macbeth's psyche. Most interpreters have focused on Lady Macbeth's skillful manipulation of gender identities and the strong innuendo of sexual tension between the two in their explanations of why Macbeth changes his mind and decides to kill the king. But Macbeth is not merely a susceptible puppet of his wife's finely-honed goading, for while she is the prime mover in the assassination of Duncan, the other murders in the play (of Banquo and MacDuff's family) are exclusively Macbeth's doing and this shows that he retains the capacity for independent action. Lady Macbeth's influence is a catalyst, but Macbeth is a willing object of her persuasions, but the seeds of his decision are sown well before the end of Act I.

The witches' promised intention to meet Macbeth aside, the first we hear of him is in Act I, scene ii, as a wounded sergeant reports that "brave Macbeth" swathed in the blood of the rebels, "unseam'd" the old Thane of Cawdor "from the nave to th' chops" (I, ii., l.22) and then impaled his head upon battlements. The loyal

officer Rosse then says that Macbeth is "Bellona's bridegroom" (I, ii., l.54), Bellona being the virgin goddess of war. Even before he arrives on stage, we know that Macbeth is capable of bloody deeds (in a good cause), while the figurative reference to Bellona will soon materialize in the character of Lady Macbeth. It is after this, in Act I, scene iii, the Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches with their intriguing prediction that Macbeth will become Scotland's monarch. Macbeth leaves open the normative question of whether this prediction is good or ill, but when he becomes Thane of Cawdor by "chance," he speculates that it may be possible for him to become king "without my stir" (I, iii, l.143).

Macbeth's hopes for a passive and legitimate route to the throne are dashed in the very next scene of the play. In Act I, scene iv, the good King Duncan tells Macbeth that he owes more to his loyal general than he can pay (l.20), and Macbeth then dutifully replies that the service and loyalty he owes to the king are payment in itself. This is somewhat illogical, but for a brief moment it appears that Macbeth might becoming king without "stirring," that Duncan might name him as his successor. But after Duncan names his son Malcolm as heir apparent, Macbeth realizes that the prophecy that he will become Scotland's monarch will not unfold without action on his part. He acknowledges that this will entail Duncan's murder and that his ambitions have caused him to develop a still notional murder plan. Toward the end of the scene, Macbeth withdraws and, in a stage aside, he tells us the naming of Malcolm is a step that bars his ascent to the throne. His ambition is so powerful, moreover, that he fears that his evil intentions will be discerned, saying "Stars, hide your fires,/Let not light see my black and deep desires (I, iv, ll.50-51).

At the start of Act I, scene vii, Macbeth is considering the technical parameters of a hypothetical murder, finding "If it were done, when ti's done, then 'twere well/It were done quickly" (ll.1-2). When his fears about the consequences of detection surface, Macbeth begins to list the reasons for not assassinating the king. He turns first to customary personal loyalty, observing that Duncan is a blood relative and, as such, that Macbeth should protect the king against knife rather than wield it against him. Secondarily, he says that Duncan has been a good king, against whom he has no grievance. But he fails to mention the most obvious reason for refraining from murder, that it is morally wrong, a cardinal sin that deserves damnation whether detected by human agency or not. Instead, he urns to making an inventory of the resources he would need, should he decide to move forward. On this count, Macbeth finds one thing lacking, "I have no spur/To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself" (I, vii, l.25-27).

It is then that the "spur" appears (almost as if Macbeth had conjured it into being) as Lady Macbeth enters the scene. Initially, Macbeth is adamant in his rejection of the course that they both know must be taken if he is to become Scotland's ruler, and tells his wife that they shall proceed no further in this business. Now Lady Macbeth launches into her argument, and the "spur" that has captured the critic's attention is her charge that Macbeth is a coward. In fact, she does not directly say this (she merely asks if her is prepared to live like a coward), nor is it the crux of her case. Indeed, Macbeth has a rebuttal to the coward charge, asserting to Lady Macbeth, "I dare do all that may become a man;/Who dares do more is none" (I, vii, ll.46-47), and he then commands her to be silent. But Lady Macbeth need not heed her duty toward her husband, for there is a second plank to her counter-argument; she tells Macbeth that if he does not follow through on their developing plot then he has broken a promise to her. She first asks whether the "hope" that he raised for their royalty in the letter that he sent to her after meeting the witches was "drunk." She then says that since the expectations he raised in this missive were false, she will accord his professions of love to her to be equally false. That being so, some "beast" must have egged Macbeth on to breaking the bonds of trust with his wife by making promises (the attainment of the throne) that are then withdrawn.

It is at this juncture that Lady Macbeth enters into her famous "phantom child" speech, saying to Macbeth: "I have given suck, and know/How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me; I would, while it was smiling in my face,/Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,/And dashed the brains out, had I shown as you/Have done to this" (I, vii, ll.54-58). Although the attention of modern critics has centered upon the gender and sexual aspects of this speech, especially in conjunction with Lady Macbeth's earlier "desexing" soliloquy in

Act I, scene v, ll., the thrust of the argument pivots on trust, specifically the trust that unites husband and wife.

Lastly, Macbeth returns to practical issues of execution. He seems to seek reassurance rather than an opportunity to back out, having already determined that his bond to Lady Macbeth requires him to act, when he asks her "what if we should fail?" Lady Macbeth has her follow-on answer and the details of the murder plan set. She says that only fear will cause their plan to fail and then lays out plot that pivots around pinning the blame for king's death upon "spungy officers" drugged into "swinish" sleep (her reference to "swine" creating one of many associations between Lady Macbeth and the witches). The irony here is Macbeth's decision to murder Duncan rests upon what he sees as the dictates of his natural relation with his wife, but the relation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is no longer natural, but purposively unnatural, Lady Macbeth having shorn herself of maternal gender, Macbeth having entered into an unholy relation with the witches that will ultimately supplant his marriage to Lady Macbeth altogether.

Character Study of Lady Macbeth

With the possible exception of King Lear, no character in any of Shakespeare's plays undergoes such a radical devolution as that which transforms Lady Macbeth from a nearly superhuman character in the first act of Macbeth into a sleep-walking zombie at the start of Act V. When we first see Lady Macbeth on stage, she is plainly in command of her faculties and, in fact, she has deliberately intensified her capacity to realize her royal ambitions for power. But after her ineffective efforts to control Macbeth's reaction to the Ghost of Banquo in Act III, scene iv., in which she says that all her husband and partner in crime needs is sleep, Lady Macbeth disappears from the play. We learn of her again at the start of Act V when a doctor and one of her ladies in waiting discuss her insomnia. This hardly prepares us for the spectral figure who next appears, as Lady Macbeth enters sleepwalking uttering words that are laden with guilt and a pathetic longing for the comfort of her absent husband. Even before Macbeth is told by Seyton that Lady Macbeth is dead (Act V, scene iv), we recognize that she is no longer herself but merely a shadow, a living ghost.

We first see Lady Macbeth in Act I, scene v. alone and reading a letter from her husband that speaks about his meeting with the weird sisters and their prophecy that he will become Scotland's king. Lady Macbeth issues no response to Macbeth's fantastic story. She focuses instead on the prospects for Macbeth's acting to fulfill the prediction and finds that he may be too full of the milk of human kindness to carry out the required deed of killing Duncan. She then summons her husband in a conjuring spell: "Hie thee hither,/That I might pour my spirits in thine ear,/And chastise with the valor of my tongue/All that impedes three from the golden round,/Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem/To have thee crown'd withal" (I, v., ll.25-29). Her designs are congruent with those of the weird sisters, but Lady Macbeth's invocation is far more splendid and powerful in its language than the inarticulate (but cunning) statements of the witches.

Learning that King Duncan is coming to their castle and thereby providing an opportunity to kill him, Lady Macbeth calls upon spirits to unsex her, "And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full/ Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;/Stop up the access and passage to remorse,/That no compunctious visitings of nature/Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between/The effect and it" (I, v, ll.46-51). The speech resembles Macbeth's "stars hide your fires" speech in the prior scene, but we also note that Lady Macbeth fails to consider that "compunctious visitngs of nature" might arise after the crime has been committed, and that her voluntary "de-sexing" alters her natural bond with Macbeth.

After Lady Macbeth has ceremonially drained all feminine kindness from her spirit, Macbeth enters, and Lady tells him that Duncan must be "provided for," the innuendo being that it is murder that comprises the night's business. He puts her off, saying that they shall speak about the matter later, but we note that Lady Macbeth does not name the deed at hand, referring to as "this enterprise." Since the two speak openly about their plot, we cannot ascribe this reticence to name the deed to simple prudence; it may be that moral inhibitions prevent

Lady Macbeth from naming the sin she has in mind. But when Duncan arrives in Act I, scene vi, he is greeted first by Lady Macbeth alone, she uses an ironic pun in saying that everything has been "doubly done" on Duncan's behalf, the connotation of duplicity suggests that Lady Macbeth may use her ability for verbal equivocation to some advantage. In short order, this impression is reinforced, for she easily persuades Macbeth to take the plunge into regicide in Act I, scene vii.

Things do not go as planned. Not only does Macbeth fail to carry out his wife's instructions concerning the placement of the murder daggers, the blame does not fall upon Duncan's guards but upon Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's two sons, who have fled the scene. At the midpoint of the play, in Act III, scene ii, Lady Macbeth worries aloud, asks a servant whether Banquo is gone from the castle, and then sends him with a message for King Macbeth. For the first time we see that Lady Macbeth is not satisfied with the outcome of her plan, saying in a soliloquy, "Nought's had, all's spent/Where our desire is go without content;/'Tis safer to be that which we destroy/Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy" (III, ii., ll.4-7). When Macbeth enters, she chastises him for leaving her alone and then advises him to "sleek over" his "rugged looks," and be "bright and jovial" at banquet. (III, ii. ll.27-28). He first advises her to do the same and then says that she should remains ignorant of his plans to dispose of Banquo and Fleance. In the banquet scene itself, Lady Macbeth is unable to rein in her husband's guilty horror at seeing Banquo's ghost, and her handling of the guests is inept.

Lady Macbeth is absent for the play and her reappearance at the opening of Act V is presaged by the worried comments of her doctor and one of her gentlewomen. As Lady Macbeth enters silently, the two refer to her behavior as if she no longer existed. They note her compulsive habit of washing her hands, and, consistent with this diagnosis, the first words that the devolved Lady Macbeth speaks are "a spot." We soon realize that in her own mind, Lady Macbeth's hands are unclean and that she cannot command an imagined "damn'd spot" to disappear. Completely oblivious to those around her, Lady Macbeth transfers this symptom of guilt to Macbeth, saying "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on 's grave" (V, i., ll.62-64). Macbeth, of course, is not present, for he has gone to the battlefield, but in her final speech, Lady Macbeth's desire for conjugal partnership comes forth, as she says to her imagined husband, "To bed, to bed, there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed" (V, i., ll.66-68). In Act V, scene iii, Macbeth commands the doctor to cure Lady Macbeth, to which the physician replies, "Therein the patient must minister to himself" (V, iii, l.45), and shortly thereafter Macbeth is told of his wife's death, presumably as a result of suicide.

Looking back, After the murder of the King, Macbeth withdraws from his marital relationship to Lady Macbeth and no longer relies upon his wife's capacity to interpret events for him. He keeps his plans to have Banquo and Fleance killed from her, saying to his one-time partner, "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck/Till thou applaud the deed" (III, ii, ll.50-51). By the banquet scene of Act III, Lady Macbeth is no longer part of her husband's world, he no longer needs her as a spur to ambition. Deprived of her function in directing Macbeth's acts, Lady Macbeth is left alone and without further purpose. Long before Macbeth concludes that life is a tale told by an idiot, Lady Macbeth, no longer a wife nor even a natural woman, has entered into a twilight realm in which there is no active role for her to perform nor any means through which guilt can be extinguished.

Macbeth: On Stage, Screen, and Television

The complexity of the character of Macbeth and the 'curse' that attends its performance in the theatre would seem to make it a poor choice for performance. It is these very qualities, however, that make it one of the most popular plays in the canon. The role of Macbeth has the ability to provoke sympathy and ire occuring in the text simultaneously, but these qualities only become clearer when an actor brings the play to life on the stage, in a film, or in a television programme. Which element is emphasised is the choice of the director, and this

choice affects the play's balance and overall impact.

Unlike many of Shakespeare's plays, there is an eye-witness account of a performance at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London: '…*Makbeth* at the Glob, 1610, the 20 of Aprill.' Dr. Simon Forman, an advisor to the Privy Council during the Gunpowder Plot investigation, made this entry into his diary, and although Dr. Forman gets quite a few of the details of the play incorrect, there is no doubt that he did indeed see the play.

After the English monarchy was restored in 1660, theatres which had been closed by Oliver Cromwell were re-opened by King Charles II. He granted royal patents to William Davenant and Thomas Killegrew for theatres to be established on former tennis courts. Shakespeare's plays were divided between the two men, with Macbeth going to Davenant. Samuel Pepys noted in his diary on 5 November 1664 (the fifty-ninth anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot) that the play was 'a pretty good play, but admirably acted'. The popularity of Davenant's production was partly attributable to the singing and dancing witches who also flew around the stage, thereby creating comedy absent from the text. Treating the witches as comic eliminates any threat they pose to Macbeth or Lady Macbeth, and weakens one of the main arguments of the play: free will versus Fate. The burden of malice therefore lands on Lady Macbeth. This event has the knock-on effect of making Macbeth a hero controlled and spurred on in his murderous reign by a cold, ambitious, deceitful wife. Clearly this is only one of many interpretations of the text.

In 1744, David Garrick performed the role in a text that he himself had revised to be closer to the First Folio text (1623). The version seen by Samuel Pepys (Davenant's) did, however, influence Garrick. Unfortunately, in Garrick's version, he cut much of the text and inserted his own written speeches, such as a death speech for Macbeth in which he tries to repent but gives up hope:

> I cannot rise! I dare not ask for mercy -
> It is too late, hell drags me down; I sink,
> I sink - Oh! - my soul is lost forever!
> Oh!

John Philip Kemble, an actor-theatre manager, trimmed even more text than either Davenant or Garrick by cutting Lady Macduff, her son, and the Porter, while he emphasised spectacle. Instead of three witches, Kemble had a singing, dancing comic chorus of more than fifty people, in a version that held the stage from the end of the 18th century well into the 19th. As with Davenant, cutting the text of the shortest play in the Shakespeare canon resulted in shifting the emphasis on evil from the witches to Lady Macbeth in both the Garrick and Kemble productions.
As cultural attitudes toward women began to mitigate and change in the mid-nineteenth century, however, the interpretative focus moved once again. While the witches and Lady Macbeth were relieved of much of their comic evil and malice, Macbeth himself was severely indicted for his innate greed and ambition, especially in productions and performances by William Macready at The Drury Lane Theatre, London. The production was a milestone in the staging of the play which was done in the Jacobean style, and thereafter, Macbeth was almost always a darker character than he had been previously. After Macready, the *Macbeth* productions most acclaimed were those by Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

Irving's Macbeth was more indecisive than any Hamlet, yet an unrepentant villain. The choice of this stress on Macbeth meant that Lady Macbeth became a devoted, gentle wife who only wanted the best for her husband. Critics attacked this view, claiming it made the marriage unbelievable and contrary to Shakespeare's play.

For Tree, a stickler for highly detailed, representational staging, Macbeth was a ghost-inhabited dreamscape in some sections, and critics thought that Tree's performance was ineffectual and forgettable. Some of his staging, such as Macbeth speaking the prophecies of the Apparitions, continued to influence 20th century productions, especially those of the Royal Shakespeare Company headquartered in Stratford-upon-Avon.

The next important and acclaimed English productions starred Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in 1955, and Ian McKellan and Judi Dench in 1976-1978, both at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. In this outing, Olivier's Macbeth was heroic but fatally flawed, while Leigh's Lady Macbeth was weak and frail. Directed by Trevor Nunn, now director of the National Theatre in London, the McKellan-Dench production characterised the witches as demonic forces with far-reaching influence. The emphasis on the joint crime of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth did not allow either of them to escape responsibility for their horrible deeds. Yet at the same time, the audience's sympathy for their tragedy was paradoxically aroused.

Where were the Americans in all this? Because American theatre until the late 19th century consisted mostly of touring companies from England who performed only sections of the play, it was up to the famous Cushman Sisters to bring the complete play to American theatres in the late 1800's with a text that Charlotte Cushman felt 'restored' Shakespeare, but which was simply the First Folio text. The biggest contribution of the Americans was their desire to make use of the new medium of film, and advances in film technology meant that the witches and Apparitions no longer presented much of a problem for filmic expression. Orson Welles, considered a wunderkind after his debut as writer/director of the film classic *Citizen Kane*, staged the play in 1936 in a Caribbean context and earned the production the nickname 'voodoo *Macbeth'*. He nonetheless based his 1948 treatment on his stage production. The Welles effort, based on a highly edited text, uses many of film noir's filmic expressions, producing a group of menacing hag-witches, a dark, brooding, villainous Macbeth, and a sexy but aggressive Lady Macbeth.

Two other notable film efforts are Japanese director Akira Kurasawa's Kumonosu-ju (*Throne of Blood*, 1957), and Roman Polanski's text-based film (1971). Kurasawa's film is more aptly called an appropriation of the play. It omits Malcolm and the business around him, and the Porter. The three witches are reduced to one, and Kurasawa draws heavily on the conventions of Japanese Noh drama which dictates minimal and sometimes mechanical movement.

Polanski's interpretation of the play, though panned by the critics at the time, illustrates some of the descriptive passages of the text with strong, visual images, such as the execution of Cawdor, and, most notably, the murder of Duncan, which in the play, takes place offstage. It remains the only depiction of the murder, either on stage or film. Polankski, like Franco Zeffirelli in the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*, used a very young couple for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Despite re-ordering the plays' scenes, this Macbeth remains 'bloody, bold, and resolute' as his wife remains tender and adoring. She dies by throwing herself from a tower and audiences witness Macbeth's head rolling down a street, but the focus is on the malevolence of the witches: an old hag, a middle-aged disfigured woman, and a young girl. The women are part of an all-female coven that in Act IV, scene i, meet in the nude. Overall, the film retains its thoughtfully created strongly male, unrelenting violent impact.

Versions for television have been less successful, although two are outstanding: the BBC Shakespeare (1982) with Nicol Williamson and Jane Laportaire, and *Macbeth on the Estate*, directed by Michael Bogdanov (1997). In the BBC version, Macbeth is weak and Lady Macbeth is sexy and strong in Act I, scene i. These roles reverse themselves subtly throughout the play, so that by the conclusion, the two are destroyed by their own weaknesses.

Macbeth on the Estate takes place in a public housing development in a ghetto of a Northern English city. The political conflict is between two rival gangs. The letter from Macbeth to Lady Macbeth at the opening becomes a message left on an answering machine. The witches are two young boys and a little girl. The most interesting choice is the line taken with Lady Macbeth. She is close friends with Lady Macduff and frequently baby-sits for the Macduff children, including an infant. When Lady Macbeth receives Macbeth's message, she retreats to a small nursery with an empty crib and a baby's picture on a chest of drawers. The 'unsex me here' speech (1.53-52) is delivered while Lady Macbeth crouches in a corner of the nursery, but the heartbreak

ultimately drives her to madness when she witnesses the murders of Lady Macbeth and the children by her husband. The film's brutal honesty underline Macbeth's brutality, and, without undermining the power of the witches, demonstrates that Macbeth is open to free choice, but chooses badly.

The most recent staging to receive critical approval is that of Sir Antony Sher and Harriet Walter in a Royal Shakespeare Company production that toured the United Kingdom, the United States, and several other countries. The production was filmed and blocked for television and aired on 2 January 2001 in England. It takes place in a modern setting and many of Macbeth's speeches are heard in voice-over. The production is tense, dark, and unforgiving, showing Macbeth as a murderer who has lost any capacity for remorse. The play lends itself readily to such broad and differing interpretations over the centuries because Shakespeare has taken great care in creating a character who is not only multifaceted, but also multidimensional. Whether a director, a critic, or a student of the play chooses only one of Macbeth's many characteristics as a main point of interest, it is never completely possible to define Macbeth in concrete terms. The play's text may remain constant, but Macbeth, the King and killer, has the ability to speak to all times and all cultures.

Macbeth: Victim of Historians

The Tragedy of *Macbeth* is undoubtedly one of the darkest portraits of a villain that Shakespeare could have written. Macbeth is without any redeeming qualities whatsoever, as he and his venomous Queen murder their way to the throne of Scotland, before revenge and insanity take their toll. Is it possible that the people of Scotland would have tolerated such an ignoble pair? As experience has taught, trying to understand British history from Shakespeare's history plays is a wasted effort, since the playwright was in the business of filling his playhouse with plays that people would pay to see. Naturally, he would take an incident and turn it into a spell-binding yarn to satisfy the patrons. If this is so, then it is necessary to look at Macbeth as he appears in history to find out if he really was all that bad or is a victim of the historians and the playwright.

If, like Shakespeare, we depend on 16th century historians, we get a limited view of Macbeth. The truth is that these writers produced their histories some 500 years after the death of Macbeth, and Shakespeare's play was almost 600 years later in 1606. In order to get a more accurate picture of Macbeth, his Queen, and their reign, we must go back to the 11th century and seek contemporary accounts. FN1

Archaeological information from the 11th century is scant at best, with only one axe head being extant in Great Britain. There are no potteries, jewellery, or coins to help, but there is a piece of Gaelic poetry, "The Prophecy of Bierken", which gives a physical description of Macbeth. The poem says that Macbeth was a 'furious red king' (meaning he had a ruddy complexion) and that he had flowing blonde hair, both contradictions to the traditional casting for an actor in the role.

The actual Macbeth was not a thane (or local magistrate), but a warlord who ruled in the Scottish Highlands as the Mowmar of Murray, effectively a mini-kingdom. This kingdom was very important to King Duncan because of its strategic position between the English Northumbrians who threatened Scotland from the South and the Viking raiders who lived in the North. Macbeth, however, did not have an easy succession to the mowmarship. His cousin killed Macbeth's father when Macbeth was a teenager and took control of Murray. In 1035, Macbeth burned his cousin and fifty of his followers alive, taking back Murray and marrying his cousin's widow, Gruagh. Macbeth's wife is the first Queen to be named in Scottish history and was a member of the royal line as Duncan's aunt. Her marriage to Macbeth was probably a political arrangement that benefited them both. She was a good woman who generously funded and gave land to the Caudies monks who transcribed manuscripts on an island in Loch Levlan, Fife. As a royal relative to Duncan and a link to Kenneth I, Gruagh enhanced Macbeth's status and reputation.

The historical Macbeth was well versed in warfare. In addition to regaining Murray, he did take part in the defeat of the Norwegian lord, Svend Estridsen or Sweno at Torfness. Although not solid evidence of this particular battle, 'Sueno's Stone', discovered in the 19th century, stands near Forres, Scotland, Macbeth's home in the play. The stone depicts excessive carnage, such as severed heads and decapitated bodies, which gives a good idea of what warfare was like in Macbeth's day. The stone, however, does not tell us that the 'battles' were actually skirmishes that lasted only about thirty minutes. The 'armies' were small bands of men from the land that Macbeth ruled. He may have worn protective armour for the battle, but his poor soldiers would have only had swords, spears, or axes with which to defend themselves. These skirmishes were not 'little' in their intensity, violence, or bloodshed. The swords, spears, and axes were designed to kill, and if they did not, they left the receiver of their blows horribly maimed or totally disabled.

As such a great warrior, did Macbeth actually kill Duncan? To understand what happened, we must understand something of the political process in Scotland at the time. In selecting a king, the system of tanistry was 'a royal kin group electoral college system'. FN2 It meant that, unlike today when the oldest male child succeeds his father (primogeniture), the king could be elected from anywhere in the male royal line. There were two branches of the royal line descending from Kenneth Macalpine, or Kenneth I. Over the years, the election of the king had rotated from one branch to the other. Malcolm II decided unilaterally to change the system and since he had no sons, named his grandson, Duncan, heir to the throne, in an effort to establish primogeniture over tanistry in Scotland.

That Macbeth killed Duncan is documented in several sources, but there is question about how Duncan died. Some sources say he was fatally wounded in a battle with Macbeth at Pitgavaney. According to a historian writing twenty years after the death of Macbeth, Malebrichter the Hermit, Macbeth killed Duncan at the Hass of the Blacksmith, and that the King died at Elden Cathedral. Macbeth in killing Duncan restored the tanistry system by force, and in the Scottish view, was justified in doing so. Macbeth's claim, however, could not be ratified until he sat on the Stone of Destiny.

This stone was the traditional place of installing a new king. It had been in Westminster Abbey, London, until it was recently returned to Scotland and is now kept with the Scottish crown jewels in Edinburgh Castle. At the time of Duncan's assassination, the stone was kept in the Abbey Church at Scone. Macbeth would, as in the play, have had to go to Scone, where after a bard had recited the long list of fifty-seven Scottish kings, he would have been presented with a sword to protect his people. Crowning the king was a much later ritual. Becoming king in his early 30s, Macbeth was a good ruler, generous and fair. He travelled throughout a united Scotland that was wealthy, safe, and secure. In 1050, Macbeth made a pilgrimage to Rome, a trip he would never have undertaken if there had been any unrest in Scotland. According to Professor Ted Cowan of Glasgow University, the purpose of this trip may have been 'to bind Scotland more closely' to the European Church.

Other characters that affect Macbeth in the play, such as Macduff, Banquo, and the witches, were added much later. In 1590-1591, the North Berwick witch case was much discussed. Dozens of witches, whom James VI questioned himself, had planned to destroy him through witchcraft. In addition, Dr. David Caldwell of the National Museums of Scotland thinks that it is possible that Shakespeare was poking fun at Scottish cooking. Since Scots are fond of soups, porridge (oatmeal), and boiled meats cooked in large pots, the playwright has the witches mix up a most vile brew in the cauldron. The truth about the witches is that more were burned in the 17th century than any other period. In 12th century Scotland, the Church had no desire to confront old gods or traditional beliefs. It was the practice to incorporate them into religious events or to dismiss them as nonsense.

In addition to the fascination with witches and their craft, Macbeth is drawn in a stereotypical fashion that agreed with 16th century writers. In about 1547, Andrew Boorde, a doctor living and practising in Glasgow, wrote:

> I Am a Scotyshe man, and trew I am to Fraunce;
> In every countrey, myself I do avaunce;
> I wyll boost myselfe, I will crake and face;
> I love to be exalted, here and evry place.
> an Englyshe man I cannot naturally love,
> Wherefore I offend them, and my lord above…
> I am a Scottyshe man, and have dissembled muche,
> and in my promise I have not kept touche.
> Great morder and theft in tymes past I have used… FN3

This picture of the Scots as boastful allies to England's enemy, France, with no regard for the codes of gentlemanly behaviour, can be found in many extant documents. Even today in England, there is a great divide between the northern and southern sections of the country: the North is supposedly violent and uneducated, while the South is presumably the opposite. As with all prejudices, this bias was and is irrational, but does contain an element of truth.

Because of northern Scotland's rugged terrain and unpredictably harsh weather patterns, the Highlanders, or Celts, tended to focus on survival. They organised themselves into clans and conducted themselves according to strict codes of honour which the English could not comprehend and which were foreign to their sensibilities. Scottish amusements were seen as inferior to the theatre which thrived in England. The portrait of the Scotsman as an uncivilised barbarian capable of human cruelty and violence may have been a myth, but it is a myth in which Macbeth the man is shrouded.

As for Macbeth's overthrow, Malcolm began his campaign for the revenge of his father's death in 1054. There actually was a battle at Dunsinane on the 27 July 1054, and Macbeth was defeated. But he escaped with his family to his Highlands stronghold, Lumphanon. Malcolm rushed to Scone to be ratified as King, but Macbeth was still alive. This meant that Scotland now had two kings: one in the South, one in the North. On 14 August 1057, seventeen years to the day that Duncan died, Malcolm attacked and Macbeth was killed. The fall-out from the historical Macbeth's defeat was to have long lasting effects. Malcolm moved his court south and married an English princess. With this one action, he altered the course of Scotland. The country's whole orientation changed from Celtic to Anglo-Norman which meant that its Celtic roots were severed in favour of development along European lines. If Macbeth, 'the last great Celtic King of Scotland' (FN4) had survived, it is possible that Celtic Scotland may have been preserved and Scotland would be very different today.

It is Shakespeare's play that has created the majority of mythic tales that concern Macbeth. Why should the playwright write such as villain? Mindful of his eye on box office receipts, Shakespeare took his story from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, first published in 1577 (expanded edition, 1587) in two separate books that contained three volumes. Volumes One and Two contain the history of England before and after the conquest of William the Conqueror. Volume Two covers the history of Scotland and Ireland. It is here that the account of Macbeth's rise and reign is told, possibly drawn from other sources such as Hector Boece's *Scotorum historiae* (1526, 1575) and John Bellenden's translation of Boece into Scots (1540?).

According to Holinshed, Macbeth reigned for ten years during which he was a good king and met his responsibilities to his people. Holinshed, however, also described Macbeth's belief in witches and the Birnam Wood incident. Interestingly, Holinshed placed a genealogy of Scottish kings descended from Banquo in the middle of the story about Macbeth. In Holinshed, it is Lady Macbeth who has the driving ambition to usurp the throne, and it is she and Banquo who are Macbeth's co-conspirators in Duncan's murder. Holinshed is very clear that Macbeth's tenure as king was also controversial because of changes to the method of succession to the Scottish throne. As we have seen, these histories and the 'facts' they convey are suspect because of their time distance from the events. Repeatedly throughout the play, the juxtaposition of Macbeth's personal actions to his public persona is emphasised by the words 'blood' and 'bloody'. As far as his education and cultural life,

he does not read in the play and only writes one letter. The only songs are those of the witches. When compared to other Shakespeare tragedies or history plays, Macbeth has a higher proportion of scenes that cannot be fixed as to place or time and apparently are outdoors. This inability to be tacked down underscores his barbarity and lack of polish. Shakespeare's possible motive for maligning this last Celtic king might have been political, to please the new King, a Scot, who had become his patron.

Furthermore, the play touches on what had been a delicate issue: succession to the throne. In *Macbeth*, Duncan nominates his oldest son, Malcolm, to succeed him. For Jacobeans, the recent debate about Elizabeth I's childlessness and reluctance to name an heir, and the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne, would have made the problem all too real.

The myths about Duncan's murder, the prophecies of the witches, and the role of Lady Macbeth in the proceedings are just that - myths. In essence, Shakespeare provided his patron and King, and the members of the audience with great entertainment at the expense of Macbeth's real place in Scottish history.

NOTES

1. The information contained in this essay draws heavily on *The Real Macbeth*, written by Tony Robinson; directed by David Willcock. Spire-Films Production for Channel Four Television Corporation, 2000. Air date 1 January 2001. All quotations are taken from this programme except where otherwise indicated. The speakers have been duly footnoted.

2. Ron Geer, Clan Duncan Museum, Scotland.

3. Andrew Boorde. *Fryst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge*. F. J. Furnivall, ed. Early English Text Society, Extra Series n10, 1870, pp. 135-136.

4. Prof. Ted Cowan, University of Glasgow.

The Theme of Guilt in Macbeth

Through the experiences of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare demonstrates that self-destructive guilt cannot be assuaged by recourse to action nor by even the most determined effort to expunge the pangs of conscience by active engagement in denial and transference. In the course of the Scottish tragedy, Macbeth repeatedly misinterprets the guilt that he suffers as being simply a specimen of fear. Consequently, his characteristic way of dealing with his guilt is to face it directly by committing still more misdeeds, and this, of course, only generates further shame. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, is fully cognizant of the basic difference between fear and guilt, and she attempts to preclude the onset of the latter by first denying her own sense of conscience and then by focusing her attention upon the management of Macbeth's guilt. These acts of internal repression do not work, and, once her husband has departed to the field of combat and she is left alone, Lady Macbeth assumes the very manifestations of guilt that have been associated with Macbeth. Yet in *Macbeth*, we are furnished with several examples of how remorse can be addressed, most notably in Macduff's response to the slaughter of his wife and children. Therefore, while Shakespeare show us that feelings of guilt can unleash self-destructive drives, he also teaches us that it is the way in which we cope with guilt which is determinative of its ultimate effects.

A warrior by vocation, Macbeth is accustomed to overcoming self-doubts by confronting his fears with sword in hand. When thoughts of slaying Duncan to obtain the crown first enter his mind, Macbeth's concern is that they not be detected. Hence, he proclaims, "Stars, hide your fires/Let not light see my black and deep desires," (I, v, 11.58-59), and, when on the cusp of crime, he again calls on nature to mask his motives, entreating the

earth, "Hear not my steps which way they walk" (II, i, 11.65-66). As a man of action, Macbeth is convinced that if only he can hide his crime and further the prophecy given to him by the witches, his ill feelings will naturally dissipate. This belief underlies his reaction to the murderer's news that Fleance has escaped the fate which Macbeth planned for him. Learning of this flaw in the execution of his scheme, Macbeth laments: "Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect; Whole as the marble" (III, iv, 11.25-26). For Macbeth, the reason that the ghost of Banquo appears at the feast, then, is that the loose end of Fleance's remaining alive has left him "cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears" (III, iv, 11.30-31). Finally, in his encounter with Malcolm, Macbeth uses the crutch of the prediction that no man born of woman can harm him to buckle his courage, for that being so, "The mind I sway by and the heart I bear/Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear" (V, ii, 11.9-10). Consistently, Macbeth construes his mental problem as one of grappling with fear. We realize, of course, that it is not cowardice, but the operation of guilt that drives Macbeth toward his tragic end. After all, Macbeth has displayed almost superhuman courage on the field of battle. But Macbeth remains blind to this, and comes to believe that the mental torture he is experiencing is rooted in some external threat.

It is this misinterpretation of guilt as fear which explains Macbeth's assumption of the role of plotter from his wife following the murder of the king. We recall that the scheme to dispatch with Duncan is spawned by Lady Macbeth, and that she is only able to enlist her husband's participation in the murder by implying that he is a coward. Macbeth counters this charge by killing Duncan once he has "screwed up his courage," and, thereafter, he takes the leading part in orchestrating still more misdeeds, including the use of hirelings to assassinate Banquo and, later, the family of Macduff. Indeed, having proven his mettle to himself by slaying Duncan, Macbeth deliberately keeps his intention to complete the crime by ordering the deaths of Banquo and Fleance from his wife, telling her, "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck/Till thou applaud the deed" (III, ii, 11.50-51). It is significant that immediately after his vision of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's mind is drawn to the external problem of Macduff's suspicions. Hearing that Macduff has left for England, Macbeth propounds that, "From this moment/The very firstlings of my heart shall be/The firstlings of my hand" (IV, i, 165-67). As the play unfolds, Macbeth remains under the impression that what bothers him is not the psychological impact of his past crimes, but his failure to conduct still more carnage, that is, his inability to grapple with fear and do what must be done to vanquish its inhibitory power.

In contrast to her consort, Lady Macbeth knows well in advance of Duncan's murder that her participation in the crime will expose her to the ravages of guilt. Thus, in an oft-cited speech, she conjures supernatural forces to transmute her into a being shorn of conscience.

> Come you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between
> The effect and it (I, v, 11.44-51).

This invocation embodies a shortcoming which will prove to have ironic consequences. We note that while Lady Macbeth implores the spirits to relieve her of those pangs of guilt which might deter the accomplishment of her purpose, she does not extend the "spell" beyond the commission of the crime. Lady Macbeth believes that the prospective remorse which she faces is an obstacle to the plot which she has hatched to gain the throne, but she does not consider the possibility that guilt might reverberate after Duncan has been slain. This view is reinforced when she herself contemplates stabbing Duncan in his sleep, but refrains from doing so because he resembles her father.

With Duncan's death, the potentially negative effects of guilt are denied by Lady Macbeth, for, after all, in her conception, guilt is only a problem insofar as it stands as a barrier to attainment, having no substantive consequences once this initial hurdle has been overcome. Having denied the after-effects of guilt, Lady Macbeth's subconscious method for coping with it is to concentrate on the symptoms of guilt which arise in her husband. In the wake of his crime, Macbeth hears that internal voice which commands him to "sleep no more" (II, ii, 11.50-51). Restive to the end, Macbeth's insomnia is noted by his wife, and she attempt to explain the more vivid and horrifying experiences that he undergoes, such as seeing Banquo's spectral effigy at the feast, by referring to natural causes, telling her husband that his vision stems from the fact that he lacks "the season of all'natures, sleep" (III, iv, 1.73). In the scene which occurs immediately after Duncan's death, Lady Macbeth orders her husband to get some water "and wash this filthy witness from your hand" (II, ii, 11.61-62). He rejects her suggestion, crying out, "What hands are here. Hal they pluck out mine eyes!/Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/Clean from my hand?" (II, ii, 11.77-79). She, in turn, insists that the tell-tale signs of his crime cannot be seen by others, that "a little water clears us of this deed" (II, ii, 1.85) . For Lady Macbeth, then, the means through which she responds to the guilt that besets her is to concentrate on her husband's irrational behavior lest it betray their common part in perfidy.

The innate limitations of Lady Macbeth's way of managing her own guilt by bolstering Macbeth become plain in the play's final act. As the gentleman informs the doctor who has been called to cure her insomnia, Lady Macbeth only begins to sleepwalk and to compulsively wash her hands when Macbeth is no longer present, the tyrant having taken to the field to stop Malcolm, Macduff, and their fellows from overturning his reign. Indeed, as the doctor and the gentleman observe her actions, Lady Macbeth seems caught in the routine of assuring Macbeth that he has no cause for fear, as she speaks the lines: "Wash your hands, put on your night gown/Look not so pale. I tell you yet again/Banquo's buried. He cannot come out on's grave" (V, i, 11.56-57). At this juncture, Lady Macbeth has so suppressed her own feelings of guilt that she can only address them indirectly, resorting to an imagined effort to calm her husband. The problem, of course, is that Macbeth is not there to divert her attention from her own sense of guilt, and she must therefore confront a state of mind which her narrow understanding of guilt as a deterrent to action cannot accommodate.

Although both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth suffer irrevocably from the torment of guilt, throughout the play we are presented with characters who experience guilt but nonetheless deal with it effectively. The first of these is the erstwhile Thane of Cawdor. On the execution block, Macbeth's predecessor takes active measures to alleviate his soul of the guilt of rebellion. It is reported of him to Duncan, "That very frankly he confessed his treasons/Implored your highness' pardon, and set forth a deep repentance" (I, iv, 11.5-7). The insurgent Thane, then, acknowledges his crime, begs the forgiveness of its target, and expresses his regret. Similarly, it is by disclosing his shortcomings to Macduff that Malcolm frees himself of his feelings that he will prove a greater tyrant on the throne than Macbeth and is able to abjure "the taints and blames laid upon myself" (IV, iii, 1.138). But the most important example of how guilt can be overcome is that of Macduff. Apprised that his family has been killed by Macbeth's henchmen, Macduff is urged by Malcolm to "dispute it like a man" (IV, iii, 11.257). He agrees on the need to exact vengeance upon Macbeth, but tells the prince, "I shall do so/But I must also feel it as a man" (IV, iii, 11.258-259). Macduff then remonstrates with himself, acknowledging that he has been "sinful" in the sense that his innocent wife and children were slain for his opposition to Macbeth. Yet once this guilt is openly acknowledged, Macduff is able to move toward the final confrontation with Macbeth in a deliberate and highly focused manner, refusing to strike down the reluctant soldiers in Macbeth's force and seeking his revenge on Macbeth alone.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare reminds us that sin and accompanying guilt is ubiquitous, and warns us of the dire consequences of an uneasy conscience. At the same time, in Macduff and in other figures in the play, Shakespeare shows us that guilt can be overcome when it is recognized as such. Plainly, neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth rises to this task. Macbeth attempts to substitute fear for guilt and to deal with it through action, while his wife acknowledges the debilitating effect of guilt she constricts it into a deterrent, using the management of her husband's guilt as a means for diverting her attention away from her own sense of shame.

Both of these courses prove ruinous, and, at bottom, the depth of tragedy which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergo stems not from their heinous deeds alone, but from their inability to accept the guilt that issues from their crimes.

Lady Macbeth: A Liberated Woman?

The question of Lady Macbeth's degree of liberation may be seen from two opposing viewpoints. If we define a "liberated woman" as one who has found her own strength, one who is able to function independently of the traditional subservient roles, Lady Macbeth clearly does not fit. She defines herself, and is defined by others, as a wife to Macbeth. Her ambitions are for him, and she willingly places herself in a secondary position in their relationship. She acknowledges his primary social position and his superior physical strength, and does not attempt to compete with him.

She functions flawlessly as the "woman of the house", the mistress of the castle, the hostess. On the other hand, a case could be made for the fact that Lady Macbeth struggles with what she defines as her own feminine nature's weakness, and overcomes that weakness long enough to participate in the bloody murders. We first meet Lady Macbeth as she reads the news of the witches' prophecies. With a grim determination she resolves to make the promises come true. Her motivation is clearly her husband's hesitant nature:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd: yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full of the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition; but without
> The illness should attend it.
> (Act I, Scene v.)

Realizing that she will have to be the prime mover of the plot to murder Duncan, Lady Macbeth prayers for the spirits to "unsex" her, to be given freedom from any interference by her natural feminine gentility. She renounces compunction and remorse, which she recognizes to be her own natural responses. Ironically, however, after the murder, it is the seemingly steely-natured Lady Macbeth who begins to capitulate to the first onslaughts of an uneasy conscience:

> These deeds must not be thought
> After these ways; so, it will make us mad.
> (Act II, Sc. i)

As the play progresses it becomes more and more clear that Lady Macbeth is not able to put aside the natural feminine components of her psyche. She errs, it seems, in defining her delicacy in such matters as weakness. She is clearly not a liberated woman because she feels that in order to be strong she must deny her womanliness. Unable to reconcile her own ambivalence, she moves in a steady progression to those fateful moments of insanity which lead to her death. She first fears madness and then experiences overwhelming guilt:

> Naught's had, all's spent,
> Where our desire is got without content:
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
> Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy.
> (Act III, Sc. ii)

In the banquet scene, wherein Macbeth is haunted by the ghost of the murdered Banquo, Shakespeare further advances Lady Macbeth's collapse. Consistent with her role as wife and hostess, she skillfully saves her husband's honor by dismissing the company before the stricken Macbeth is carried further into hallucination. She has always played the role of wife very well - at his side, coaching and coaxing. But after the departure of the guests, it is evident that she has changed. Her tirade of the first act in which she persuaded Macbeth to murder Duncan finds no parallel here. Instead of scornful anger, Lady Macbeth speaks in brief sentences to her husband words which suggest resignation rather than castigation. At this moment in the play Lady Macbeth is perhaps most herself.

In the last act of the play, driven by a conscience that would try to usurp its own gentle nature, Lady Macbeth wanders through the castle in her sleep, reliving the horror of Duncan's murder. Her final lines in the scene suggest both the horror and the pitiable spectacle of a woman who wanted too much, not solely for herself, but for the man she loves:

> Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale: - I tell you yet again, Banquo'a buried; he cannot come out on's grave....To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate: come, come, come, come, give me your hand: what's done cannot be undone: to bed, to bed, to bed.
> (Act V, Sc.l)

There is the sharpness of the stronger woman contrasted with the brooding terror of the conscience-stricken which makes these moments so memorable. We are reminded of the ambitious woman who scoffed at her husband's bravery in order to prod him into action; It is the Lady Macbeth who had to take control of the situation at the peak of its danger; it is the wife who had to lead her husband with threats and encouragement through the murderous ritual. At the same time, Shakespeare presents a touching picture of a woman who has been destroyed by her daring disruption of her own sensitive nature. She is the one who finally breaks; she is the stricken, weaker partner.

In the course of the play Macbeth and Lady Macbeth reverse their positions. Macbeth grows from a reasonable and loyal nobleman to a tyrannically murderous despot. Lady Macbeth first appears to us to be a woman who is struggling to overcome her feminine delicacy, then succeeds, and then fails. Her initial cruelty seems born of the desperation of the moment, rather than a basic element within her nature. In times of crisis, someone must be strong; she is that one. Even Macbeth connects this burst of violence from Lady Macbeth with the emergence of a masculine side of her personality, although he states it in terms of her female reproductive capabilities:

> Bring forth men-children only;
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males.
> (Act I, Scene vii)

A further point should be made regarding Lady Macbeth as a liberated woman. Shakespeare makes it quite clear that the marriage relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is a cornerstone of the tragedy. As the events of the play unfold, Macbeth and his wife are swept apart by the consequences of their action. She becomes guilt-ridden and inactive while he lusts for more confirmed power, thereby becoming his own driving force. Earlier, however, it was not so. They loved each other and respected the mutuality of their marriage vows. The tragedy of Macbeth is greatly enhanced by the realization that, for all practical purposes, love brought dishonor and death to both. Their lives as loving partners in the early part of the play reminds us of the essential humanity, and therefore, fallibility of these people. Without the background of these qualities, Macbeth and his Lady seem barbarically cruel.

Thus, while arguments might be made that Lady Macbeth attempted too be a "liberated woman", it seems clear that she was not. She functioned best in her role of wife. Her attempts to find strength in cruelty, in a denial of her own feminine nature, ended in disaster. The truly liberated woman finds strength in recognizing and nurturing her own natural qualities, not in denying them or in attempting to act like a man. Indeed, Lady Macbeth seems to confuse strength, bravery, cruelty and masculinity: "When you durst do it, then you were a man;" (I,vii) she replies when Macbeth insists that he dares "do all that may become a man".

In the final analysis, Lady Macbeth is not liberated. She is, in fact, a prisoner of her own misdeeds and of her own guilty conscience. When she invoked the spirits to "Come to my woman's breasts/ And take my milk for gall" (I,v), she did not know that that gall would ultimately poison her. The only liberation, ultimately, for Lady Macbeth, is death.

The Guilt of Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's moat fascinating creations. One immediately reacts to her image as if all the forces of cunning and heartlessness in the universe combined to form the prototype of the femme fatale. And yet, upon examination of the character as she speaks in the play, one is drawn to the conclusion that there is more of the woman and wife than of the witch about her.

The reader first meets Lady Macbeth as she reads the news of the witches' salutations and prophecies. With a grim determination she resolves to make the promises of the black sisters come true. It is interesting to note, however, that her motivation is clearly her husband's hesitant nature:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd: yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full of the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
> Art not without ambition; but without
> The illness should attend it. (Act I, sc. v)

Realizing that she is to be the prime mover of the plot to murder Duncan, Lady Macbeth intones a prayer:

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
> And fill me, from the crown to the top, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature –
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it! (Act I, Sc. v)

The prayer uses most specific images which suggest that Lady Macbeth is not a coldly calculating predator. She wishes to be unsexed, to be given freedom from any semblance of feminine gentility; she renounces compunction and remorse, rather delicate terms which suggest a thoughtful, conscientious nature. In other words, Lady Macbeth is not going to allow herself to be dissuaded by those taunts of conscience which trouble her husband during the early stages of their plotting. Ironically, however, after the murder, it is the seemingly steely-natured wife who begins to capitulate to the first onslaughts of an uneasy conscience:

> These deeds must not be thought
> After these ways; so, it will make us mad. (Act II, Sc.i)

From the haunting similarity between the sleeping Duncan and her own father, Lady Macbeth moves in a steady progression to those fateful moments of insanity which lead to her death. Along the way, as is evident in the above quotation, she first fears madness, and then experiences the emptiness of their triumph and a palpable guilt:

> Naught’s had, all's spent,
> Where our desire is got without content:
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
> Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy. (Act III, Sc, ii)

In the banquet scene, wherein Macbeth is haunted by the ghost of the murdered Banquo, Shakespeare further advances Lady Macbeth's collapse. Consistent with earlier behavior, she skillfully saves her husband's honor by dismissing the company before the stricken Macbeth is carried further into hallucination. She has always been on his side, strongly coaching and coaxing. But after the departure of the guests, it is evident that she has changed. Her tirade of the first act wherein she persuaded her lord to consider Duncan's murder finds no parallel here—and it certainly calls for a cautionary rebuke. Instead of scornful anger, Lady Macbeth speaks in brief sentences to her husband words which suggest resignation rather than castigation. It is an interesting and touching moment in the tragedy.

The unfortunate woman makes her next appearance in the last act of the play. Driven by a conscience that would try to usurp its own gentle nature, Lady Macbeth wanders through the castle in her sleep, reliving the horror of Duncan's murder. Her final lines in the scene suggest both that horror and the pitiable spectre of a woman who wanted too much for the man she loved:

> Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale—I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave. . To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate: come, come, come, come, give me your hand: what’s done cannot be undone: to bed, to bed, to bed. (Act V, Sc. i)

There is the sharpness of the stronger woman contrasted with the brooding terror of the victimized conscience that makes these moments some of the most memorable in the play. The reader is reminded of the ambitious woman who scoffed at her husband's bravery in order to prod him into action; it is Lady Macbeth who had to take control of the situation at the peak of its danger, it is the wife who had to lead her husband with threats and encouragement through the murderous ritual. And, at the same time, Shakespeare is presenting a marvelously touching picture of a woman who has been destroyed by her daring disruption of her own sensitive nature. She is the one who must be led away now; she is the stricken, weaker member.

During the course of the tragedy, both protagonists cross paths, so to speak. Macbeth grows from a reasonable, loyal nobleman to a tyrannically murderous despot. He abandons morality after weighing all sides. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, plunges directly into the fray. She boldly prays not to let her own good instincts blunt, even for one moment, the fierce determination she must effect to achieve her desired ends. Only gradually does human nature assert itself in her character. And when it does, the burden of guilt proves too much for her mind. She becomes the moral recluse while her husband continues his struggle for conquest and power.

Viewed in this light, the character of Lady Macbeth becomes more understandable end certainly much more convincing. Her cruelty seems born of the desperation of the moment rather than a basic element within her nature. In times of crisis, someone must always be strong; she is that one. Unfortunately, her strength achieves tragic dimension.

One other point which perhaps has not been made as evident as it might be is the relationship that exists between husband and wife. It is, after all, the cornerstone of the tragedy. As the events of the play unfold, Macbeth and his wife are swept apart by the consequences of their action. She becomes guilt-ridden and inactive while he lusts for more confirmed power, thereby becoming his own driving force. Earlier, however, it was not so. They loved each other and respected the mutuality of their marriage vows. The tragedy of Macbeth is greatly enhanced by the realization that, for all practical purposes, love brought dishonor and death to both. Their lives as loving partners in the early part of the play reminds us of the essential humanity, and therefore, fallibility of these people. And, in point of fact, discarding the gory particulars, one feels in this tale of ambition run amuck a mythic tone which suggests success and happiness are perhaps man’s greatest trials.

The Witches in Macbeth

Throughout *Macbeth* there exists confusion as to what is real and what imaginary, and, for the most part, it is Macbeth himself who is confronted with these confusions. The question of whether or not the witches are real must be examined in relation to them.

The Weird Sisters always appear in thunder and either vanish mysteriously or are swallowed up in a mist. They play a prophetic role, and, at the beginning of the play, inform the audience that they are to meet with Macbeth. From the beginning, then, their existence outside of the imaginings of any of the other characters, is established. The witches appear in scenes where no other characters are present, and therefore can be seen to have an independent existence.

On their first encounter with other characters, the Weird Sisters are seen not only by Macbeth, but by Banquo, too. The latter, unsure as to their form, asks whether they are spirits, proclaiming that they do not look like "inhabitants o’ th’ earth," (I.iii. 41.) Both Banquo and Macbeth take the prophecies of the witches seriously, though not comprehending the nature of the three. Banquo demands of them whether not they are imaginary. Macbeth knows that they will disappear with the thickening mist, and when they do, comments that "wat seemed corporal, melted,/ As breath into the wind." (I.iii.81-2) Once they have vanished, Banquo questions whether he and his companion have been subject to an illusion:

> Were such things as do speak about?
> Or have we eaten on the insane root
> That takes the reason prisoner? (I. iii. 83-5)

If the Witches were not real, then they can only have existed in the imagination of himself and Macbeth. But, considering the prophetic nature of the words conveyed, it would seem that the Witches should be credited with some existence of their own.

Banquo links them with the devil, calling then the "instruments of darkness," (I. iii. 124) while Macbeth alludes to "supernatural soliciting." (I. 111. 130) In his case, the appearance of the witches has lent his imagination — which had been considering murder, to gain the positions the witches endowed him with — a greater degree of reality.

When the dagger appears to Macbeth he immediately questions its reality, being more unsure of its real existence than he is of that of the witches. As with the witches, the appearance of the dagger reflects the thoughts in his mind, for he had been contemplating murder with the use of such a weapon. Macbeth can definitely conclude, though, that "There's no such thing," (ll.i.47) he has imagined the existence of the dagger, which appeared only to him.

Following the murder of Duncan, Macbeth is again disturbed by a phenomenon that only he is the subject of: he hears voices accusing him of his crime. Lady Macbeth must reassure him that his imagination is responsible, for he is thinking too much of his deed.

When the ghost of Banquo appears and sits in Macbeth's seat, it is again only the latter who can see it. Lady Macbeth both equates his "vision" with that of the dagger, which she explains as products of his imagination, stemming from fear. Macbeth, however, believes the ghost of Banquo is real. When it appears a second time, he is afraid and calls it imaginary, an “Unreal mock'ry." (III.iv.107) However, when the ghost disappears, and he is himself again, he believes in its reality and cannot understand why his guests can remain calm. The apparition appeared to him without his instigation. Yet, he can summons the witches to appear before him, arranging a meeting with them to gain further knowledge about the events of the future.

Later, Hecate shows her disapproval of the witches’ actions, and threatens to conjure up genuine apparitions to confuse Macbeth. She, too, grants the Weird Sisters an independent existence.

Confusion as to their reality arises from the means by which the witches appear and disappear. In the cavern scenes, they arise from the flames of the cauldron, and again disappear without trace.

The witches would seem to be real in that Macbeth can converse with then and question them, whereas the ghost of Banquo, which was projected from his imagination, did not speak to him. Neither do the apparitions, which the witches conjure up, have the ability to answer his questions. They may only repeat their warnings to him.

Whereas other "visions" in *Macbeth* bear direct relation to the King’s guilt, having reference only to his thoughts and actions, and appearing only to Macbeth, the witches represent more than this limited aspect of evil; they also refer to killings outside of Macbeth's mind and actions. They make reference to deeds they have done which do not touch the King, nor the events of the play. The ambiguity that is maintained as to their real form, seems to indicate that it is not even necessary to establish whether or not they are real; it is enough that they perform the function of representing evil and prophesying future events. They are not completely of the earth, demonstrating supernatural qualities.

Macbeth believes in the reality of the witches, and the fact that he sends for information — which he receives — as to their nature, confirms their existence outside of his imagination. He knows where to gain information about them, and where to find them when he needs their assistance.

The whole play is concerned with unnatural acts and the chaos that necessarily results, in the world of man, and in nature. The natural order of things is overturned, and what was previously thought impossible, becomes the reality. The doubtful existence of the witches reinforces this theme; they help to illustrate the predominating evil, presenting not only Macbeth’s evil, but that existing all through the world. This wider role helps to establish them, however, outside of the imagination of Banquo and Macbeth.

Macbeth: Criticism

Overview

The brevity of *Macbeth* is so much a function of its brilliance that we might lose rather than gain by turning up the lost scenes of legend. This brilliance gives us in the end somewhat less than the utmost that tragedy can give. The hero, for instance, is less valuable as a person than Hamlet, Othello, or Lear; or Antony, or Coriolanus, or Timon. We may not rejoice in his fall as Dr. [Samuel] Johnson says we must, yet we have known too little about him and have found too little virtue in him to experience at his death the sense of an

unutterable and tragic loss made necessary by ironies beyond our understanding. He commits murder in violation of a nature which we can assume to have been noble, but we can only assume this. Macbeth has surrendered his soul before the play begins.

When we first see him he is already invaded by those fears which are to render him vicious and which are finally to make him abominable. They will also reveal him as a great poet. But his poetry, like the poetry of the play, is to be concerned wholly with sensation and catastrophe. *Macbeth* like *Lear* is all end; the difference appearing in the speed with which doom rushes down, so that this rapidest of tragedies suggests whirlwinds rather than glaciers, and in the fact that terror rather than pity is the mode of the accompanying music. *Macbeth*, then, is not in the fullest known sense a tragedy. But we do not need to suppose that this is because important parts of it have been lost. More of it would have had to be more of the same. And the truth is that no significant scene seems to be missing. *Macbeth* is incomparably brilliant as it stands, and within its limits perfect. What it does it does with flawless force. It hurls a universe against a man, and if the universe that strikes is more impressive than the man who is stricken, great as his size and gaunt as his soul may be, there is no good reason for doubting that this is what Shakespeare intended. The triumph of *Macbeth* is the construction of a world, and nothing like it has ever been constructed in twenty-one hundred lines.

This world, which is at once without and within Macbeth, can be most easily described as strange. The world, like the witches, is always somewhere doing its work. Even in the battle which precedes the play the thane of Glamis has made "strange images of death" [I. iii. 97], and when he comes home to his lady his face is "as a book where men may read strange matters" [I. v. 62-3]. Duncan's horses after his murder turn wild in nature and devour each other—"a thing most strange and certain" [II. iv. 14]. Nothing is as it should be in such a world. "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" [V. i. 39-40]. There is a drift of disorder in all events, and the air is murky with unwelcome miracles.

It is a dark world too, inhabited from the beginning by witches who meet on a blasted heath in thunder and lightning, and who hover through fog and filthy air as they leave on unspeakable errands. It is a world wherein "men must not walk too late" [III. vi. 7], for the night that was so pretty in *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice* has grown terrible with ill-smelling mists and the stench of blood. The time that was once a playground for free and loving spirits has closed like a trap, or yawned like a bottomless pit. The "dark hour" that Banquo borrows from the night is his last hour on an earth which has lost the distinction between sun and gloom.

> Darkness does the face of earth entomb.
> When living light should kiss it.
> [II. iv. 9-10]

The second of these lines makes a sound that is notable in the play for its rarity: the sound of life in its normal ease and lightness. Darkness prevails because the witches, whom Banquo calls its instruments, have willed to produce it. But Macbeth is its instrument too, as well as its victim. And the weird sisters no less than he are expressions of an evil that employs them both and has roots running farther into darkness than the mind can guess.

It is furthermore a world in which nothing is certain to keep its shape. Forms shift and consistencies alter, so that what was solid may flow and what was fluid may congeal to stone.

> The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
> And these are of them,
> [I. iii. 79-80]

says Banquo of the vanished witches. Macbeth addresses the "sure and firm set earth" [II. i. 56], but nothing could be less firm than the whole marble and the founded rock he has fancied his life to be. At the very moment he speaks he has seen a dagger which is not there, and the "strange infirmity" he confesses at the banquet will consist of seeing things that cannot be. His first apostrophe to the witches had been to creatures

> That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
> And yet are on 't.
> [I. iii. 41-2]

So now a dead man lives; Banquo's brains are out but he rises again, and "this is more strange than such a murder is" [III. iv. 81-2].

> Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
> Shall never tremble.
> [III. iv. 101-02]

But the shape of everything is wrong, and the nerves of Macbeth are never proof against trembling. The cardinal instance of transformation is himself. Bellona's bridegroom has been turned to jelly.

The current of change pouring forever through this universe has, as a last effect, dissolved it. And the dissolution of so much that was solid has liberated deadly fumes, has thickened the air until it suffocates all breathers. If the footing under men is less substantial than it was, the atmosphere they must push through is almost too heavy for life. It is confining, swarming, swelling; it is viscous, it is sticky; and it threatens strangulation. All of the speakers in the play conspire to create the impression that this is so. Not only do the witches in their opening scene wail "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" [I. i. 11], but the military men who enter after them anticipate in their talk of recent battle the imagery of entanglement to come:

> Doubtful it stood,
> As two spent swimmers that do cling together
> And choke their art....
> The multiplying villainies of nature
> Do swarm upon him....
> So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come
> Discomfort swells.
> [I. ii. 7-9; 11-12; 27-8]

Macbeth's sword is reported to have "smok'd with bloody execution" [I. ii. 18], and he and Banquo were "as cannons overcharg'd with double cracks" [I. ii. 37]; they

> Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.
> [I. ii. 38]

The hyperbole is ominous, the excess is sinister. In the third scene, after what seemed corporal in the witches has melted into the wind, Ross and Angus join Banquo and Macbeth to report the praises of Macbeth that had poured in on Duncan "as thick as hail" [I. iii. 97], and to salute the new thane of Cawdor. The witches then have been right in two respects, and Macbeth says in an aside:

> Two truths are told,
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme.
> [I. iii. 127-29]

But the imagined act of murder swells in his mind until it is too big for its place, and his heart beats as if it were choking in its chamber.

> Why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.
> [I. iii. 134-42]

Meanwhile Lady Macbeth at home is visited by no such fears. When the crisis comes she will break sooner than her husband does, but her brittleness then will mean the same thing that her melodrama means now: she is a slighter person than Macbeth, has a poorer imagination, and holds in her mind less of that power which enables it to stand up under torture. The news that Duncan is coming to her house inspires her to pray that her blood be made thick; for the theme of thickness is so far not terrible in her thought.

> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
> To cry, "Hold, hold!"
> [I. v. 50-4]

The blanket of the dark—it seems to her an agreeable image, and by no means suggests an element that can enwrap or smother. With Macbeth it is different: his soliloquy in the seventh scene shows him occupied with images of nets and tangles: the consequences of Duncan's death may coil about him like an endless rope.

> If it were done when't is done, then't were well
> It were done quickly. If the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success; that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump me life to come. But in these cases
> We still have judgement here, that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague the inventor.
> (I. vii. 1-10)

And his voice rises to shrillness as he broods in terror upon the endless echo which such a death may make in the world.

> His virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin hors'd

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind.
[I. vii. 18-25]

It is terror such as this that Lady Macbeth must endeavor to allay in what is after all a great mind. Her scolding cannot do so. She has commanded him to screw his courage to the sticking-point, but what is the question that haunts him when he comes from Duncan's bloody bed, with hands that can never be washed white again?

Wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.
[II ii. 28-301]

He must not consider such things so deeply, his lady warns him. But he does, and in good time she will follow suit. That same night the Scottish earth, shaking in a convincing sympathy as the Roman earth in *Julius Caesar* never shook, considers the grievous state of a universe that suffocates in the breath of its own history. Lamentings are heard in the air, strange screams of death, and prophecies of dire combustion and confused events [II. iii. 56-8]. And the next morning, says Ross to an old man he meets,

By the clock 't is day,
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
[II. iv. 6-7]

Macbeth is now king, but his fears "stick deep" in Banquo [III. i. 49]. The thought of one more murder that will give him perhaps the "clearness" he requires [III. i. 132] seems for a moment to free his mind from its old obsessive horror of dusk and thickness, and he can actually invoke these conditions—in the only verse he ever uses with conscious literary intention.

Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale! Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
[III. ii. 46-53]

The melodrama of this, and its inferiority of effect, may warn us that Macbeth is only pretending to hope. The news of Fleance's escape brings him at any rate his fit again, and he never more ceases to be "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" [III. iv. 23]. He is caught in the net for good, his feet have sunk into quicksands from which they cannot be freed, his bosom, like Lady Macbeth's, is "stuff'd" with "perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart" [V. iii. 44-5]—the figure varies, but the theme does not. A strange world not wholly of his own making has closed around him and rendered him motionless. His gestures are spasmodic at the end, like those of one who knows he is hopelessly engulfed. And every metaphor he uses betrays his belief that the universal congestion is past cure:

What rhubarb, senna, or what purgative drug,
Would scour these English hence?

[V. iii. 55-6]

The answer is none.

The theme never varies, however rich the range of symbols employed to suggest it. One of these symbols is of course the fear that shakes Macbeth as if he were an object not human; that makes him start when the witches call him "King hereafter," that sets his heart knocking at his ribs, that wrings from him unsafe extremities of rhetoric, that reduces him to a maniac when Banquo walks again, that spreads from him to all of Scotland until its inhabitants "float upon a wild and violent sea" of terror [IV. ii. 21], and that in the end, when he has lost the capacity to feel anything any longer, drains from him so that he almost forgets its taste [V. v. 9]. Another symbol, and one that presents itself to several of our senses at once, is blood. Never in a play has there been so much of this substance, and never has it been so sickening. "What bloody man is that?" II. ii. 1]. The second scene opens with a messenger running in to Duncan red with wounds. And blood darkens every scene thereafter. It is not bright red, nor does it run freely and wash away. Nor is it a metaphor as it was in *Julius Caesar*. It is so real that we see, feel, and smell it on everything. And it sticks. "This is a sorry sight," says Macbeth as he comes from Duncan's murder, staring at his hands [II. ii. 17], He had not thought there would be so much blood on them, or that it would stay there like that. Lady Macbeth is for washing the "filthy witness" off, but Macbeth knows that all great Neptune's ocean will not make him clean; rather his hand, plunged into the green, will make it all one red. The blood of the play is everywhere physical in its looks and gross in its quantity. Lady Macbeth "smears" the grooms with it, so that when they are found they seem "badg'd" and "unmannerly breech'd" with gore, and "steep'd" in the colors of their trade. The murderer who comes to report Banquo's death has blood on his face, and the "blood-bolter'd Banquo" when he appears shakes "gory locks" at Macbeth [IV. i. 123], who in deciding upon the assassination has reflected that

I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
[III. iv. 135-37]

Richard III had said a similar thing, but he suggested no veritable pool or swamp of blood as this man does; and his victims, wailing over their calamities, did not mean the concrete thing Macduff means when he cries, "Bleed, bleed, poor country!" [IV. iii. 31]. The world of the play quite literally bleeds. And Lady Macbeth, walking in her sleep, has definite stains upon the palms she rubs and rubs. "Yet here's a spot....What, will these hands ne'er be clean?...Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" [V. i. 31; 43; 50-1].

A third symbol, of greater potency than either fear or blood, is sleeplessness. Just as there are more terrors in the night than day has ever taught us, and more blood in a man than there should be, so there is less sleep in this disordered world than the minimum which once had been required for health and life. One of the final signs of that disorder is indeed the death of sleep:

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep....
Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more."
[II. ii. 32-3; 39-40]

Nothing that Macbeth says is more terrible than this, and no dissolution suffered by his world is more ominous. For sleep in Shakespeare is ever the privilege of the good and the reward of the innocent. If it has been put to death there is no goodness left. One of the witches knows how to torture sailors by keeping sleep from their pent-house lids [I. iii. 19-20], but only Macbeth can murder sleep itself. The result in the play is an

ultimate weariness. The "restless ecstasy" with which Macbeth's bed is made miserable, and

> the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly
> [III. ii. 18-19]

—such things are dreadful, but his final fatigue is more dreadful still, for it is the fatigue of a soul that has worn itself out with watching fears, wading in blood, and waking to the necessity of new murders for which the hand has no relish. Macbeth's hope that when Macduff is dead he can "sleep in spite of thunder" [IV. i. 86] is after all no hope. For there is no sleep in Scotland [III. vi. 34], and least of all in a man whose lids have lost the art of closing. And whose heart has lost the power of trembling like a guilty thing.

> The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
> To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
> Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
> As life were in 't I have supp'd full with horrors;
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once start me.
> [V. v. 10-15]

Terror has degenerated into tedium, and only death can follow, either for Macbeth who lacks the season of all natures or for his lady who not only walks but talks when she should sleep, and who will not die holily in her bed.

Meanwhile, however, another element has gone awry, and it is one so fundamental to man's experience that Shakespeare has given it a central position among those symbols which express the disintegration of the hero's world. Time is out of joint, inoperative, dissolved. "The time has been," says Macbeth, when he could fear; and "the time has been" that when the brains were out a man would die, and there an end [III. iv. 77-9]. The repetition reveals that Macbeth is haunted by a sense that time has slipped its grooves; it flows wild and formless through his world, and is the deep cause of all the anomalies that terrify him. Certain of these anomalies are local or specific: the bell that rings on the night of the murder, the knocking at the gate, the flight of Macduff into England at the very moment Macbeth plans his death, and the disclosure that Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd. Many things happen too soon, so that tidings are like serpents that strike without warning. "The King comes here tonight," says a messenger, and Lady Macbeth is startled out of all composure: "Thou 'rt mad to say it!" [I. v. 31]. But other anomalies are general, and these are the worst. The words of Banquo to the witches:

> If you can look into the seeds of time,
> And say which grain will grow and which will not,
> [I. iii. 58-9]

plant early in the play a conception of time as something which fulfills itself by growing—and which, the season being wrong, can swell to monstrous shape. Or it can find crannies in the mold and extend secret, sinister roots into dark soil that never has known them. Or it can have no growth at all; it can rot and fester in its place, and die. The conception wavers, like the courage of Macbeth, but it will not away. Duncan welcomes Macbeth to Forres with the words:

> I have begun to plant thee, and will labour
> To make thee full of growing.
> [I. iv. 28-9]

But Macbeth, like time itself, will burgeon beyond bounds. "Nature's germens" will

> tumble all together,
> Even till destruction sicken.
> [IV. i. 59-60]

When Lady Macbeth, greeting her husband, says with excited assurance:

> Thy letters have transported me beyond
> This ignorant present, and I feel now
> The future in the instant,
> [I. v. 56-8]

she cannot suspect, nor can he, how sadly the relation between present and future will maintain itself. If the present is the womb or seed-bed of the future, if time is a succession of growths each one of which lives cleanly and freely after the death of the one before it, then what is to prevail will scarcely be recognizable as time. The seed will not grow; the future will not be born out of the present; the plant will not disentangle itself from its bed, but will stick there in still birth.

> Thou sure and firm set earth,
> Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
> And take the present horror from the time,
> Which now suits with it,
> [III. i. 56-60]

prays Macbeth on the eve of Duncan's death. But time and horror will not suit so neatly through the nights to come; the present moment will look like all eternity, and horror will be smeared on every hour. Macbeth's speech when he comes back from viewing Duncan's body may have been rehearsed and is certainly delivered for effect; yet he best knows what the terms signify:

> Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
> There's nothing serious in mortality.
> [II. ill. 91-3]

He has a premonition even now of time's disorders; of his own premature descent into the sear, the yellow leaf [V. iii. 23]; of his failure like any other man to

> pay his breath
> To time and mortal custom.
> [IV. i. 99-100]

"What, will the line stretch out to the crack of doom?" he cries when Banquo's eight sons appear to him in the witches' cavern [IV. i. 117]. Time makes sense no longer; its proportions are strange, its content meaningless. For Lady Macbeth in her mind's disease the minutes have ceased to march in their true file and order; her sleep-walking soliloquy [V. i] recapitulates the play, but there is no temporal design among the fragments of the past—the blood, the body of Duncan, the fears of her husband, the ghost of Banquo, the slaughter of Lady Macduff, the ringing of the bell, and again the blood—which float detached from one another in her memory. And for Macbeth time has become

a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.
[V. v. 26-81]

Death is dusty, and the future is a limitless desert of tomorrows. His reception of the news that Lady Macbeth has died is like nothing else of a similar sort in Shakespeare. When Northumberland was told of Hotspur's death he asked his grief to wait upon his revenge:

For this I shall have time enough to mourn.
[*2 Henry IV*, I. i. 136]

And when Brutus was told of Portia's death he knew how to play the stoic:

With meditating that she must die once,
I have the patience to endure it now.
[*Julius Caesar*, IV. iii. 191-92]

But Macbeth, drugged beyond feeling, supped full with horrors, and tired of nothing so much as of coincidence in calamity, can only say in a voice devoid of tone:

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
[V. v. 17-18]

There would, that is, if there were such a thing as time. Then such words as "died" and "hereafter" would have their meaning. Not now, however, for time itself has died.

Duncan was everything that Macbeth is not. We saw him briefly, but the brilliance of his contrast with the thane he trusted has kept his memory beautiful throughout a play whose every other feature has been hideous. He was "meek" and "clear" [I. vii. 17-18], and his mind was incapable of suspicion. The treachery of Cawdor bewildered him:

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust
[I. iv. 11-14]

—this at the very moment when Macbeth was being brought in for showers of praise and tears of plenteous joy! For Duncan was a free spirit and could weep, a thing impossible to his murderer's stopped heart. The word "love" was native to his tongue; he used it four times within the twenty lines of his conversation with Lady Macbeth, and its clear beauty as he spoke it was reflected that night in the diamond he sent her by Banquo [II. i. 15]. As he approached Macbeth's castle in the late afternoon the building had known its only moment of serenity and fairness. It was because Duncan could look at it and say:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.
[I. vi. 1-3]

The speech itself was nimble, sweet, and gentle; and Banquo's explanation was his tone:

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his loved masonry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here; no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle.
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd
> The air is delicate.
> [I. vi. 3-10]

Summer, heaven, wooing, and procreation in the delicate air—such words suited the presence of a king who when later on he was found stabbed in his bed would actually offer a fair sight to guilty eyes. His blood was not like the other blood in the play, thick and fearfully discolored. It was bright and beautiful, as no one better than Macbeth could appreciate:

> Here lay Duncan,
> His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood
> [II. iii. 109-10]

—the silver and the gold went with the diamond, and with Duncan's gentle senses that could smell no treachery though a whole house reeked with it. And Duncan of course could sleep. After life's fitful fever he had been laid where nothing could touch him further [III. ii. 22-6]. No terrible dreams to shake him nightly, and no fears of things lest they come stalking through the world before their time in borrowed shapes.

Our memory of this contrast, much as the doings of the middle play work to muffle it, is what gives power to Malcolm and Macduff at the end.

> Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.
> [IV. iii. 22]

Scotland may seem to have become the grave of men and not their mother [IV. iii. 166]; death and danger may claim the whole of that bleeding country; but there is another country to the south where a good king works miracles with his touch. The rest of the world is what it always was; time goes on; events stretch out through space in their proper forms. Shakespeare again has enclosed his evil within a universe of good, his storm center within wide areas of peace. And from this outer world Malcolm and Macduff will return to heal Scotland of its ills. Their conversation in London before the pious Edward's palace [IV. iii] is not an interruption of the play; it is one of its essential parts, glancing forward as it does to a conclusion wherein Macduff can say, "The time is free" [V. ix. 21], and wherein Malcolm can promise that deeds of justice, "planted newly with the time," will be performed "in measure, time, and place" [V. ix. 31, 39]. Malcolm speaks the language of the play, but he has recovered its lost idiom. Blood will cease to flow, movement will recommence, fear will be forgotten, sleep will season every life, and the seeds of time will blossom in due order. The circle of safety which Shakespeare has drawn around his central horror is thinly drawn, but it is finely drawn and it holds. (pp. 252-66)

Mark Van Doren, "Macbeth," in his *Shakespeare*, Henry Holt and Company, 1939, pp. 252-66.

Evil

Irving Ribner
I
Macbeth is in many ways Shakespeare's maturest and most daring experiment in tragedy, for in this play he set himself to describe the operation of evil in all its manifestations: to define its very nature, to depict its seduction of man, and to show its effect upon all of the planes of creation once it has been unleashed by one man's sinful moral choice. It is this final aspect which here receives Shakespeare's primary attention and which conditions the sombre mood of the play. Shakespeare anatomizes evil both in intellectual and emotional terms, using all of the devices of poetry, and most notably the images of blood and darkness which so many commentators have described. For his final end of reconciliation, he relied not upon audience identification with his hero, but rather upon an intellectual perception of the total play. In this lay his most original departure.

Macbeth is a closely knit, unified construction, every element of which is designed to support an intellectual statement, to which action, character, and poetry all contribute. The idea which governs the play is primarily explicit in the action of the central character, Macbeth himself; his role is cast into a symbolic pattern which is a reflection of Shakespeare's view of evil's operation in the world. The other characters serve dramatic functions designed to set off the particular intellectual problems implicit in the action of the central figure. The basic pattern of the play is a simple one, for which Shakespeare returned to an earlier formula he had used in *Richard III*. The hero accepts evil in the third scene of the play. In the second act he commits the deed to which his choice of evil must inevitably lead him, and for the final three acts, as he rises higher in worldly power he sinks deeper and deeper into evil, until at the end of the play he is utterly and finally destroyed.

There is here no pattern of redemption or regeneration for the fallen hero as in *King Lear*. Shakespeare's final statement, however, is not one of despair, for out of the play comes a feeling of reconciliation which does affirm the kind of meaning in the world with which great tragedy must end. In the earlier tragedies this feeling had been created largely through the regeneration of an essentially sympathetic hero. In *Macbeth*, however, there can be little doubt of the final damnation of "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen" [V. ix. 35]. The audience is made to see, however, that Macbeth is destroyed by counterforces which he himself sets in motion. We may thus, viewing the play in its totality, see good, through divine grace, inevitably emerging from evil and triumphant at the play's end with a promise of rebirth. (pp. 147-48)

The action of *Macbeth* falls into two distinct parts, each carefully shaped as part of the greater whole. There is first a choice of evil by the hero, in which Shakespeare defines the nature of evil and explains the process by which man is led to choose it. This occupies roughly the first two acts, although Shakespeare by recurrent image and symbol keeps these dominant ideas before his audience throughout the rest of the play. The last three acts exhibit the manner of evil's operation simultaneously on four levels: that of fallen man himself, that of the family, the state, and the physical universe. As evil operates on each of these planes, however, it generates at the same time forces of good, until at the end of the play we see evil destroyed on each of the four planes of creation and the harmonious order of God restored. The play is an ordered and controlled exploration of evil, in which Shakespeare fulfills the function of the philosophical poet as surely as did Dante in the *Divine Comedy*.

II
It has been pointed out that Othello and Lear in their falls parallel the fall of Adam, and like Adam they are able to learn in their disasters the nature of evil and thus attain a kind of victory in defeat. The destruction of Macbeth, on the contrary, is cast in the pattern of the fall of Satan himself, and the play is full of analogies between Satan and Macbeth. Like Satan, Macbeth is from the first entirely aware of the evil he embraces, and like Satan he can never renounce his free-willed moral choice, once it has been made. It is thus appropriate

that the force of evil in *Macbeth* be symbolized by Satan's own sin of ambition. This sin for Shakespeare, as it had been for Aquinas, was an aspect of pride, the worst of the medieval seven deadly sins. In the neatly ordered and harmonious universe of which Renaissance man conceived, it stood for a rebellion against the will of God and thus against the order of nature.… Macbeth, through love of self, sets his own will against that of God, chooses a lesser finite good—kingship and power—rather than a greater infinite one. Shakespeare in Macbeth's moral choice is offering a definition of evil in fairly traditional terms.

The ambitious man will strive to rise higher on the great chain of being than the place which God has ordained for him. To do so he must break the bond which ties him on the one hand to God and on the other to humanity. Immediately before the murder of Banquo, Macbeth utters lines which often have been misinterpreted by commentators:

> Come seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces the great bond
> Which keeps me pale!
> [III. ii. 46-50]

The "great bond" has usually been glossed either as the prophecy of the witches or as Banquo's lease on life, neither of which is very meaningful within the context of the passage. The bond … can only refer to the link which ties Macbeth to humanity and enjoins him to obey the natural law of God. Macbeth is calling upon the Satanic forces of darkness to break this bond of nature and thus enable him again to defy the laws of man and God, to murder his friend and guest. (pp. 148-50)

Macbeth's sin, like that of Satan before him, is thus a deliberate repudiation of nature, a defiance of God. All of the natural forces which mitigate against the deed are evoked by Macbeth himself:

> He's here in double trust,
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife himself. Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off.
> [I. vii. 12-20]

His realization of the unnaturalness of the act he contemplates is in his reply to his wife's reflection on his courage:

> I dare do all that may become a man,
> Who dares do more is none.
> [I. vii. 46-7]

It is Macbeth's knowing and deliberate denial of God and his rejection of the law of nature which set him apart from the heroes of *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Lear*. His voluntary choice of evil, moreover, closes the way of redemption to him, for in denying nature he cuts off the source of redemption, and he must end in total destruction and despair. He is like [Christopher] Marlowe's Faustus in this. Once he has given his "eternal jewel" to the "common enemy of man," he must abide by the contract he has made. (p. 150)

III.

The characters of *Macbeth* are not shaped primarily to conform to a psychological verisimilitude, but to make explicit the intellectual statements with which the play is concerned. They have choral and symbolic functions. The illusion of reality with which Shakespeare endows them serves merely to embody their symbolic functions in specific emotional terms. Successful as the illusion may be, Lady Macbeth, Banquo, and the witches are not whole figures about whom we can ask such questions as [A. C.] Bradley asked [in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*], and could only answer by divorcing them from the context of the play. All that we need know about the witches is that they are, as [John] Dover Wilson has well put it in the Cambridge edition of *Macbeth*, "the incarnation of evil in the universe, all the more effective dramatically that their nature is never defined." They are no more than convenient dramatic symbols for evil. To question closely the motives of Banquo or Lady Macbeth, with their many and obvious inconsistencies, is equally fruitless, for they function primarily as dramatic vehicles whose action is governed by the demands not of fact or psychology, but of intellectual design.

As symbols of evil, the witches are made contrary to nature. They are women with the beards of men; their incantation is a Black Mass, and the hell broth they stir consists of the disunified parts of men and animals, creation in chaos. They deliberately wait for Macbeth and Banquo, as they wait for all men. They do not, however, suggest evil to man … for the impulse to evil must come from within man himself. They simply suggest an object which may incite the inclination to evil which is always within man because of original sin, and they do this by means of prophecy. Thus the good man, like Banquo, can resist their appeal, for man shares in the grace of God as well as in original sin.

The witches hold forth the promise of worldly good, as all evil must, for if it were not attractive it would offer no temptation to man. What Shakespeare wishes to stress is that its promises are false ones, that seeming truths are half truths, and that, in general, evil works through deception, by posing as the friend of man. Thus Eve had been seduced by Satan, and thus Othello had been seduced by "Honest" Iago. Banquo recognizes the Satanic origin of the witches: "What, can the devil speak true?" [I. iii. 107], and he perceives the manner in which they work:

> And oftentimes, to win us to our harm.
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence.
> [II. iii. 123-26]

To make this statement about the deceptive nature of evil, Shakespeare works into the texture of his play the theme of appearance versus reality which so many critics have noticed. There is always confusion and uncertainty in the appearance of evil, darkness rather than light, never the clear, rational certainty which is in the natural order of the good. This theme is in Macbeth's opening remark: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" [I. iii. 38]. "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" [I. iv. 11-12] says Duncan, and Lady Macbeth cautions her husband to "look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't" [I. v. 65-6]. Macbeth himself acknowledges that "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" [I. vii. 82].

Not until the very end of the play does Macbeth learn how evil works. It offers to him, it seems, the finite good, kingship and power, which his perverted will causes him to place above the infinite good of God's order; thus evil becomes his good. He relies upon this promise, trusting the prophecy of the witches to the very last, and thus unknowingly bringing about his own destruction and the restitution of natural order. Only when Birnam wood has in fact come to Dunsinane and he faces a foe not born of woman, does the deception in the witches' promises become apparent to him:

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.
[V. viii. 19-22]

Banquo, as [Leo] Kirchbaum has indicated, stands opposed to Macbeth as a kind of morality figure [see excerpt in section on Banquo]. The witches offer him temptation not unlike what they offer Macbeth, and Banquo is sorely tempted, as any man must be. This is best revealed in a short speech which both for Bradley and [G.] Wilson Knight [in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*] was evidence that Banquo too had been corrupted by evil:

yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,
But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them—
As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,
And set me up in hope? But hush! no more.
[III. i. 3-10]

The difference between the two men is that Banquo is able to resist the temptation to which Macbeth succumbs. Banquo is an ordinary man, with his mixture of good and evil, open to evil's soliciting, but able to resist it. It is in such a man, Shakespeare is saying, that the hope for the future lies. This hope is embodied in Fleance, and thus, in terms of the play's total conceptual pattern, it is impossible for Macbeth to kill him. Evil can never destroy the ultimate promise of good.

Banquo, humanly weak and subject to temptation, stands nevertheless, "in the great hand of God" [III. iii. 130]. Symbolically he represents one aspect of Macbeth, the side of ordinary humanity which Macbeth must destroy within himself before he can give his soul entirely to the forces of darkness. For this reason he must murder Banquo, and it is why the dead Banquo returns to him as a reminder that, as a man, he cannot easily extinguish the human force within himself, that the torment of fear, the "terrible dreams / that shake us nightly" [III. ii. 18-19], the scorpions in his mind [III. ii. 36], will continue until his own final destruction. Banquo and his ghost are used to illuminate the basic conflict within the mind of Macbeth.

Macduff and Malcolm serve similar symbolic functions. Macduff, in particular, is a force of nemesis generated by Macbeth's own course of evil. Malcolm … is Shakespeare's portrait of the ideal king, and his function chiefly is to represent a restitution of order in the state. (pp. 151-53)

Just as Banquo symbolizes that side of Macbeth which would accept nature and reject evil, Lady Macbeth stands for the contrary side. Her function is to second Macbeth in the moral choice which is his alone, to mitigate against those forces within him which are in opposition to evil. Macbeth is thus much in the position of the traditional morality play hero placed between good and evil angels.

The side of his wife seduces him, and that of Banquo must be destroyed.

It is for this reason, as has so often been pointed out, that the imagery of her speeches draws upon corruptions of nature and reversal of the normal life impulses. She calls upon the forces of darkness to support her in her purposes:

Come you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visiting of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my women's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall me in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold.'
[I. v. 40-54]

It is fitting that Shakespeare should use a woman for this purpose, for woman is the normal symbol of life and nourishment, and thus the dramatist can emphasize the strangeness and unnaturalness of the very contraries to which Lady Macbeth appeals and for which she stands. She must become unsexed, and her milk must convert to gall. Her very need, moreover, to put aside her feminine nature informs the illusion of reality in her characterization and gives to her emotional appeal as well as intellectual meaning.

The motif of the unnatural is evoked again in her savage cry:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums
And dash'd the brains out.
[I. vii. 54-8]

We cannot say whether she actually has children or not, for this speech is not designed to convey fact. It is a ritual statement in which Shakespeare seizes upon a strikingly unnatural image to emphasize that she is urging Macbeth on the basis of all which is opposed to nature and the order of God. If Shakespeare, later in the play, in Macduff's "He has no children" [IV. iii. 216] seems to indicate that Macbeth is childless, it is not that he has forgotten the earlier speech. There he wishes merely to emphasize the intensity of Macduff 's feeling in the same ritual manner.

Throughout the play Lady Macbeth's femininity is held in constant juxtaposition to the unnatural forces she would call into play. In the murder scene her unnatural aspect is dominant, but her femininity comes through in her inability to kill the king herself. When the body is discovered, she is the first to collapse. This careful juxtaposition of contraries comes to a head when she walks in her sleep in the fifth act. Here the images of blood are mingled with her feminine desire for the "perfumes of Arabia" to "sweeten this little hand" [V. i. 51]. No more than Macbeth can lightly break his bond with humanity, can his wife escape the woman in her which mitigates against the unnatural force of evil which in the thematic structure of the play she represents. In her death by suicide, moreover, there is further emphasis upon the theme which dominates the play; that evil inevitably must breed its own destruction. (pp. 153-54)

IV.

The specific act of evil occurs on two planes, that of the state and that of Macbeth's "single state of man" [I.

iii. 140]; the crime is both ethical and political, for Macbeth murders not only his kinsman and guest, but his king as well. Once evil is unleashed, however, it corrupts all of the planes of creation, not only those of man and the state, but those of the family and the physical universe as well. Action, character, symbolic ritual and the powerful emotional impact of poetic imagery all combine to further a specific intellectual concept: the all-embracing destructive force of evil which touches every area of God's creation.

That the physical universe itself is thrown out of harmony is made clear in the speech of Lennox immediately following the murder:

> The night has been unruly: where we lay,
> Our chimneys were blown down: and, as they say,
> Lamentings heard i' the air: strange screams of death,
> And prophesying with accents terrible
> Of dire combustion and confused events
> New hatched to the woeful time: the obscure bird
> Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
> Was feverous and did shake.
> [II. iii. 54-61]

This theme is even more strongly emphasized in a short scene in which Ross speaks to a nameless old man. The strange phenomena here described are all perversions of physical nature which indicate that one man's crime has thrown the entire universe out of harmony:

> Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act.
> Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock 'tis day,
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:
> Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb.
> When Living light should kiss it?
> [II. iv. 5-10]

The order of nature is reversed, the sun blotted out. On the animal level, a falcon is killed by a mousing owl, and most horrible of all:

> Duncan's horses—a thing most strange and certain—
> Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race.
> Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
> Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
> War against mankind.
> [II. iv. 14-18]

Man by his sin has forfeited his dominion over nature: horses turn against their natural master, and, as the old man affirms, "they eat each other" [II. iv. 18].

This perversion of nature, however, contains within itself the means of restoring harmony, for Shakespeare uses the very perversion itself, a moving forest and a child unborn of mother to herald the downfall of the tyrant and thus to restore the physical universe to its natural state of perfection. That the forest does not really move, and that Macduff was only technically so born is of no significance, for Shakespeare is giving us here not scientific fact, but dramatic symbol to emphasize the theme of the play that in the working out of evil is implicit a rebirth of good.

On the level of the state Macbeth unleashes the greatest evils of which Shakespeare's audience could conceive, tyranny, civil war, and an invading foreign army. The tyranny of Macbeth's reign, moreover, is set off by the initial description of the gentility and justice of Duncan's previous rule. Shakespeare here deliberately alters his source, for Holinshed had stressed Duncan's feeble and slothful administration, and he had, by way of contrast, praised Macbeth for his striving after justice and for the excellence of at least the first ten years of his reign.

The disorder in the state as it works out its course is also the source of its own extinction and the restoration of political harmony. The very tyranny of Macbeth arouses Macduff against him, causes Malcolm to assert the justice of his title, and causes the saint-like English King, Edward the Confessor, to take arms against Macbeth. King Edward's curing of the scrofula [IV. iii. 146-49], an episode which Dover Wilson, like so many other critics, has regarded as "of slight dramatic relevance," is Shakespeare's means of underscoring that Edward is an instrument of supernatural grace, designed to cleanse the unnatural evil in the state, just as he may remove evil from individual man. It is Macbeth's very tyranny which has made him "ripe for shaking, and the powers above / Put on their instruments" [IV. iii. 238-39].

On the level of the family, the relationship between Macbeth and his wife steadily deteriorates. At the beginning of the play their relationship is one of the closest and most intimate in all literature. She is "my dearest partner in greatness" [I. v. 11], and much as it harrows him himself to think of its implications, he sends her immediate word of the witches' prophecy, so that she may not "lose the dues of rejoicing" [I. v. 12]. The very terror of the murder scene only further emphasizes the closeness of the murderers. But as the force of evil severs Macbeth from the rest of humanity, it breaks also the bond which ties him to his wife. He lives more and more closely with his own fears into which she cannot intrude, as the banquet scene well illustrates. She cannot see the ghost which torments her husband.

The gradual separation of man and wife first becomes apparent just before the murder of Banquo. No longer does he confide in her. At the play's beginning they plan the future together; at the end each dies alone, and when the news of her death comes to Macbeth, he shows little concern:

> She should have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word
> [V. v. 17-18]

This theme of family disintegration is echoed, moreover, in Macduff's desertion of his wife and children to be destroyed by the tyrant whom the father flees.

It is upon the disintegration of Macbeth himself, however, that Shakespeare lavishes his principal attention. He is careful to paint his hero in the opening scenes as a man of great stature, the savior of his country, full of the "milk of human kindness" [I. v. 17], with an infinite potentiality for good. He has natural feelings which link him to his fellow men and make him view with revulsion the crime to which ambition prompts him. Once the crime is committed, however, these feelings are gradually destroyed, until at the end of the play he is a symbol of unnatural man, cut off from his fellow men and from God. As his link with humanity weakens, moreover, so also does his desire to live, until finally he sinks into a total despair, the medieval sin of *acedia* [apathy], which is the surest evidence of his damnation.

Macbeth's extraordinary powers of imagination have been amply commented upon. Imagination itself, however, cannot be viewed as a cause of man's destruction within any meaningful moral system. Shakespeare endows Macbeth with this ability to see all of the implications of his act in their most frightening forms, even before the act itself is committed, as an indication of Macbeth's initial strong moral feelings. Bradley wisely recognized the "principle of morality which takes place in his imaginative fears." Imagination enables Macbeth emotionally to grasp the moral implications of his crime, to participate imaginatively, as does the

audience, in the full horror of the deed. Macbeth is entirely aware of God's moral system with its "even-handed justice," which "commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice / To our own lips" [I. vii. 10-12]. His great soliloquy in contemplation of Duncan's murder [I. vii. 1-28] is designed to underscore Macbeth's initial feelings of kinship with the natural order.

As he prepares to commit the act he dreads, he calls for the suppression of these feelings within him. In a kind of devilish incantation he calls for darkness and the extinction of nature, conjuring the earth itself to look aside while he violates the harmonious order of which he and it are closely related parts:

> Now o'er the one half world
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtain'd sleep, witchcraft celebrates
> Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
> Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
> Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
> With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
> Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
> Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
> And take the present horror from the time,
> Which now suits with it.
> [II. i. 49-60]

The figure of the wolf is an appropriate one, for here Macbeth allies himself with the destroyer of the innocent lamb, symbolic of God, just as he allies himself with the ravisher Tarquin, the destroyer of chastity, symbolic in the Renaissance of the perfection of God.

That Macbeth cannot say "amen" immediately after the murder is the first clear sign of his alienation from God. He will sleep no more, for sleep is an aspect of divine mercy. Steadily Macbeth moves farther and farther from God and his fellow men, and his bond with nature is weakened. He becomes committed entirely to an unnatural course from which he cannot retreat:

> For mine own good,
> All causes shall give way: I am in blood
> Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
> [III. iv. 134-37]

He has become the center of his own little alien world, for which "all causes shall give way." Now Macbeth is ready to seek the witches out, a commitment to evil as total as that of Marlowe's Faustus in his summoning of Mephistopheles. And the words of the weird sisters lead him to the most horrible excess of all, the wanton murder of the family of Macduff. At the beginning of the play, evil had come to Macbeth unsought, as it does to all men; he had followed its promptings in order to attain definite ends, and not without strong misgivings. Now he seeks evil himself; he embraces it willingly and without fear, for no other end than the evil act itself.

The divided mind and the fear felt by the early Macbeth were not weakness; they were ... signs of his kinship with man and God. But, by the fifth act:

> I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
> The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
> To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair

> Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
> As life were in't: I have supped full with horrors;
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once start me.
> [V. v. 9-15]

With the loss of human fear, Macbeth must forfeit also those human attributes which make life livable: "that which should accompany old age, / As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" [V. iii. 24-5]. There is nothing left for him but the utter despair of his "Tomorrow and tomorrow" speech [V. v. 19-28]. Even with this unwillingness to live, which is in itself a denial of the mercy of God (as the medieval mind conceived of *acedia*), Shakespeare will not allow Macbeth the heroic gesture of suicide which he grants to Brutus [in *Julius Caesar]* and Othello. Macbeth will not "play the Roman fool" [V. viii. 1]. His spiritual destruction must be reflected in an ignominious physical destruction, and thus the play ends with the gruesome spectacle of the murderer's head held aloft in triumph. (pp. 155-59)

If we are to isolate a dominant theme in the play, it must be one of idea: that through the working out of evil in a harmonious world order good must emerge. This idea is embodied in specific action and specific character, and thus by imaginative exploration the dramatist is able to illuminate it more fully than any prose statement ever could. Great tragedy involves a tension between emotion and intellect. The horrors of the action move our emotions as the play progresses, but when the last curtain has fallen and we can reflect upon *Macbeth* in its totality, we see that although one man has been damned, there is an order and meaning in the universe, that good may be reborn out of evil. We may thus experience that feeling of reconciliation which is the ultimate test of tragedy. (p. 159)

Irving Ribner, "*Macbeth*: The Pattern of Idea and Action," in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. X, No. 2, Spring, 1959, pp. 147-59.

J. Lyndon Shanley

Nowhere can we see the essential humanity of Shakespeare more clearly than in *Macbeth*, as he shows that the darkest evil may well be human, and so, though horrible, understandable in terms of our own lives and therefore pitiable and terrible. Yet nowhere apparently are we so likely to miss the center of Shakespeare's view of the action; for *Macbeth*, while less complex than Shakespeare's other major tragedies, frequently raises the crucial question: Is Macbeth's fall really tragic?

Many who are deeply moved by the action of the play cannot satisfactorily explain their feelings. The doctrine of *Tout comprendre, c'est tout par-donner* ("if all is understood then all is pardoned") leads them to think (most of the time) that there is no guilt, that there should be no punishment. When faced with unpardonable evil and inescapable punishment for the guilty, and when moved at the same time to pity and fear by the suffering of the evil-doer, they are confused. Since they confound the understanding of an act with the excusing of it, they are prevented from understanding acts (and their reactions to them) for which excuse is impossible. Some, of course, find an excuse for Macbeth in the witches. But those who do not see him as the victim of agents of destiny appear to wonder if they have not been tricked into sympathy by Shakespeare's art. How, they ask, in view of Macbeth's monstrous career and sorry end, so different from those of Hamlet, Lear, or Othello, how can his fortunes win our pity and arouse our fear?

I

Macbeth is defeated as is no other of Shakespeare's great tragic figures. No pity and reverent awe attend his death. Dying off-stage, he is, as it were, shuffled off, in keeping with his dreadful state and the desire of all in his world to be rid of him. The sight of his "cursed head" is the signal for glad hailing of Malcolm as king; all thought of him is dismissed with "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen" [V. ix. 35]. The phrase is dramatically fitting, but it does not express the whole truth that Shakespeare shows us of Macbeth's story.

Seldom do we feel so strongly both the justice of the judgment and the retribution and at the same time pity for him on whom they fall; for behind this last scene lies the revelation of Macbeth's almost total destruction.

Hamlet, Lear, and Othello lose much that is wonderful in human life; their fortunes are sad and terrible. So near, their stories seem to say, is man's enjoyment of the world's best gifts—and yet so far, because his own errors and weakness leave him unable to control his world. To lose Hamlet's delight in man and his powers, and the glory of life; to have Cordelia's love and tender care snatched away, after such suffering as Lear's; or to have thrown away the jewel of one's life as did Othello—this is painful. But their fortunes might have been worse. At one time they were: when the losers thought that what they had served and believed in were mere shows that made a mockery of their noblest love; when life and all their efforts seemed to have been utterly without meaning.

But before the end they learned that their love had value and that life had meaning. On this knowledge depends the two-fold effect of the heroes' deaths: death at once seals, without hope of restitution, the loss of the world and its gifts, but at the same time it brings relief from the pain of loss. Furthermore, this knowledge restores the courage and nobility of soul that raise them far above their enemies and the ruins of their world. Without this knowledge, Hamlet and Lear and Othello were far less than themselves, and life but a fevered madness. With it, there is tragedy but not defeat, for the value of what is best in them is confirmed beyond question.

But in the end of *Macbeth* we have something fundamentally different. Macbeth's spirit, as well as his world, is all but destroyed; no great recovery is possible for him. He does not, for he cannot, see that what he sought and valued most was good and worthy of his efforts. He is aware that he has missed much; shortly before Lady Macbeth dies, he broods over the "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" [V. iii. 25] he has lost and cannot hope to regain. But this knowledge wins no ease for his heart. It does not raise him above the conditions that have ruined him. Macbeth, it is true, is no longer tortured as he once was, but freedom from torture has led only to the peace of despair in which he looks at life and denounces it as "a tale told by an idiot" [V. v. 26-7].

Bitter as life was for Hamlet, Lear, and Othello, it was not empty. But all Macbeth's efforts, all his hopes and dreams were in vain, because of the way he went; and when he discovers that they were, he concludes that nothing can be realized in life. Hence his terrible indictment of life—terrible because it reveals him to be all but hopelessly lost in the world of Shakespearean tragedy, as he desperately and ironically blasphemes against a basic tenet of that world, to the truth of which his own state bears overwhelming evidence: that man's life signifies everything.

It is the despair and irony in this blasphemy that makes Macbeth's lot so awful and pitiful. We see the paralyzing, the almost complete destruction of a human spirit. The threat of hostile action galvanizes Macbeth into action to protect himself, but the action is little more than an instinctive move toward self-preservation and the last gesture of despair. "At least," he cries, "we'll die with harness on our back" [V. v. 51]. There is no sense of effective power and will to give life meaning, such as there is in [Gerard Manley] Hopkins' lines:

> Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
> Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
> In me or, most weary, cry I can no more. lean;
> Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.
> [*Carrion Comfort*]

Here the speaker knows despair for what it is, and knows that something else is both possible and worth any effort. But not so Macbeth; he can see only the circumstances from which his despair arises; he can imagine no condition of life other than that he is in.

He has not even the bitter satisfaction of rebelling and saying, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods" [*King Lear*, IV. i. 36]. Only sheer animal courage remains to flash out and remind us of a Macbeth once courageous in an honorable cause. This reminder is pitiful, for Macbeth has not even the slim hope of a trapped animal which, if it fights loose, has something to escape to. All Macbeth did resulted in nothing; whatever he does now will result in nothing but the anguish of meaningless action. It is hard enough to realize that one has been on the wrong track for part of life; to be convinced that there is no right track to get on because there is no place for any track to go—this is to be lost with no hope at all.

At the very end we see some saving touches of humanity in Macbeth: he has not lost all human virtue; he would have no more of Macduff's blood on his soul; and even with the collapse of his last security, his bravery does not falter. These touches show him a man still, and not a fiend, but they by no means re-establish him in his former self. There is no greatness in death for him. Rather than the human spirit's capacity for greatness in adversity, we see its possible ruin in evil. Because we never see Macbeth enjoying the possession of the great prize he sought, and because from the beginning of his temptation we have no hope that he will be able to enjoy it, his loss of the world's gifts is not so poignant as that of Hamlet, Lear, or Othello. But to a degree that none of them does, Macbeth loses himself, and this is most tragic of all.

II

It may be objected, however, that Macbeth alone of Shakespeare's great tragic figures is fully aware of the evil of the act by which he sets in motion the train of events leading to his ruin. His culpability seriously weakens the sympathy of many. In the face of this difficulty, some interpreters justify sympathy for Macbeth by seeing him as the victim of the witches, the agents of destiny. This point of view, however, seems to cut through the complex knot of human life as Shakespeare saw it, instead of following the various strands which make it up. We cannot dodge Macbeth's responsibility and guilt—he never does.

His ruin is caused by the fact that he sins: he willfully commits an act which he knows to be wrong. This ruin and sin are seen to be tragic, as Shakespeare, like Dante, reveals the pity and fear in a man's succumbing to grievous temptation, and in the effects of sin on his subsequent thoughts and deeds. Macbeth's guilt and the circumstances upon which it depends do not decrease our pity and fear; they produce it; for Shakespeare presents Macbeth as one who had hardly any chance to escape guilt.

The concatenation of circumstances which make Macbeth's temptation is such as to seem a trap. At the very moment when he is returning victorious from a battle in which he has played a chief part in saving his country from disaster, there comes to him a suggestion—touching old dreams and desires—that he may be king. Shakespeare uses the witches to convey the danger of the suggestion. The witches and their prophecies are poetic symbols of the baffiingly indeterminate character of the events that surround men. The witches force nothing; they advise nothing; they simply present facts. But they confound fair and foul; just so, events may be good or ill. The witches will not stay to explain their greetings any more than events will interpret themselves. The witches' prophecies and the events that forever surround men are dangerous because they may appear simple and are not, because they may be so alluring as to stultify prudence, and because their true significance may be very hard to come at. Depending on conditions, they may be harmless, or they may be delusive, insidious, and all but impossible to read correctly.

Macbeth is in no condition to read them aright. He had restrained his desire for greatness in the past since he would not do the wrong which was needed to win greatness. The hunger of his ambitious mind had not died, however; it had only been denied satisfaction. Now, when the sense of his own power and his taste of it are high indeed, the old hunger is more than re-awakened; it is nourished with hope, as immediate events seem to establish the soundness of the suggestion. Enough hope to lead him to ponder the suggestion seriously, and then, in spite of an attempt to put it out of his mind since he recognizes the evil of his thoughts, to retail the wonderful news of possible greatness to his wife.

There follow immediately two events which press the matter on most hastily. The king proclaims his eldest son as his heir, and in the next breath announces his visit to Macbeth's castle. Thus, while desire and hope are fresh, Macbeth sees put before him, first, an obstacle which time will only make greater, and then an opportunity for him to prevent time from working against him. "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly" [I. vii. 1-2]. In fact, it must be done quickly if it is to be done at all.

Desire, apparent promise of fulfillment, need for speedy action, and immediate opportunity fall together so rapidly as to create an all but inescapable force.

Yet Macbeth would have resisted temptation had he been left to himself. Great though his hunger for power and glory, especially when whetted by such circumstances, it would not have completely overcome his fears and scruples. Even if he were to jump the life to come, he knew that if he could and would kill Duncan, another might well do the same for him. On a higher plane, the double loyalty he owed to the king held him back. Finally, a point that reveals the virtue that was in him, he felt the goodness of Duncan so strongly that killing him seemed too terrible a thing to do. Worldly prudence, loyalty, reverence for what is good—these turned Macbeth back. Lady Macbeth's fears were well founded; his nature was not such as to let him "catch the nearest way."

But that nature could, as she felt, be worked. It was good, but not firm in its goodness. Macbeth is a moderately good man, no better, but also no worse, than the next one. The point is (and it is a grim one) that the virtue of the ordinarily good man is not enough to keep him from disaster under all possible circumstances—especially when some of them are such as may be for good or evil.

This was the nature of Lady Macbeth's influence on Macbeth. She could sway him because she understood him and loved him, and because he loved her and depended on her love and good thoughts of him. She could and would have urged him to noble deeds had occasion arisen. To prevent her from urging him on to evil ones, he needed more than the ordinary firmness to act as he saw right. But to cut clear of such a source of strength and comfort is difficult; too difficult for Macbeth. It is the old story of the perversion of the potentially good, and of the problem of getting only the good from the baffling mixture of good and evil in all things.

Just after Macbeth has decided to give up his murderous plot, but before intention can harden to resolve, Lady Macbeth adds the force of her appeals to that of Macbeth's desires and the press of circumstance. She sees his chance to win the prize of life; she knows he wants it, as she does not know in their full strength his reasons for renouncing it. She beats down, at least long enough for her immediate purpose, the fears and scruples which would otherwise have kept him from the crown, and murder and ruin. She does not answer Macbeth's scruples; her attack is personal. Whether she knows or simply feels his need of her admiration and support, she strikes at the right point. The spur of ambition did not drive Macbeth too hard toward his great opportunity, but her goading taunts he could not withstand, though they drove him on to horrors.

All this does not excuse Macbeth; no excuse is possible for one who, with full knowledge of the nature of the act, murders a good man to whom he owes hospitality, loyalty, and gratitude. Shakespeare makes us realize, however, how dangerous the battle, how practically irresistible may be the forces arrayed against a man. Some men are saved from evil because they marry a Cordelia or a Viola (in *Twelfth Night*); others because opportunity never favors their desires; and still others because the stakes do not justify the risk of being caught in evil-doing. For Macbeth, the stakes are the highest, the opportunity golden, and the encouragement to evil from a wife whom he loves and needs.

Macbeth is terrified by the warnings of his conscience, but he cannot surrender. That he acts with full knowledge of the evil only increases the pity and fear aroused by his deed. For this knowledge causes much of his suffering; it makes his condition far worse than it would have been had he acted with less-than-complete

knowledge; and, finally, it emphazises the power of the trickery, the lure, and the urging to which he was subjected. We pity his suffering even as he does evil because we understand why he could not hold on to the chance which he ought to have taken to save himself; and we are moved to fear when we see his suffering and understand how slight may be the chance to escape it.

III

Once that chance is lost, greater suffering and evil follow inescapably. The bloody career on which Macbeth now embarks can no more be excused than could his first crime, but it increases rather than detracts from our pity and fear. The trap of temptation having been sprung, there is no escape for Macbeth, and his struggles to escape the consequences of his sin serve only to ensnare him more deeply. As we witness that struggle, our pity and fear increase because we feel how incompetent he is to do anything but struggle as he does.

Evil brings its own suffering with it, but Macbeth cannot learn from it. The unknown fifteenth-century author of *The Book of the Poor in Spirit* wrote of evil and suffering: "One's own proper suffering comes from one's own sins and he suffers quite rightly who lives in sins, and each sin fosters a special spiritual suffering....This kind of suffering is similar to the suffering in hell, for the more one suffers there the worse one becomes. This happens to sinners; the more they suffer through sin the more wicked they become and they fall more and more into sufferings in their effort to escape." Just so did Shakespeare conceive of Macbeth's state.

Macbeth has no enemy he can see, such as Iago or one of Lear's savage daughters; he is within himself. In first overriding the warnings of his conscience, he brings on the blindness which makes it impossible for him to perceive his own state and things outside him as they really are, and which therefore sends him in pursuit of a wholly illusory safety. When he puts away all thought of going back on his first evil deed, he deals the last blow to his conscience which once urged him to the right, and he blinds himself entirely.

No sooner does he gain what he wanted than he is beset by fears worse than those he overrode in murdering Duncan. But having overridden the proper fears, he cannot deal rightly with the new ones. His horror of murder is lost in the fear of discovery and revenge, and the fear of losing what he has sacrificed so much to gain. Briefly at least he wishes the murder undone and Duncan waking to the knocking at the gate. But just as earlier he thought, but failed, to put the witches' prophecies and his evil thoughts out of mind, so now his better thoughts die. By the time he appears in answer to the knocking at the gate, he is firmly set on a course to make good the murder of Duncan and to keep himself safe.

All is terrible irony from this point on. With a new decisiveness Macbeth kills the grooms in Duncan's chamber; alive, they were potential witnesses; dead, they can serve as plausible criminals. Then he plays brilliantly the part of a grief-stricken host and loyal subject:

> Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for from this instant
> There's nothing serious in mortality;
> All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of.
> [II. 111. 91-6]

Irony could not be sharper. At the very moment when he seems to himself to be complete master of the situation, Macbeth, all unknowingly, utters the bitter truth about his state. He is still to be troubled by thoughts of evil, but the drive of his desire for peace from fear is greater; and to win security he is hurrying on the way in which he thinks it lies, but it is the way to the utter, empty loneliness he describes for us here.

Macbeth finds that the death of the grooms was not enough; Banquo and Fleance must go if he is to be free from torment. Through Macbeth's conversation first with Banquo about his journey, then with the murderers, and finally with Lady Macbeth, we comprehend to its full extent the disastrous change in him; he now contemplates murder with hope rather than horror. He still sees it as something to be hidden: "Come, seeling night, scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day" [III. ii. 46-7]. But he is willing to do more evil since he believes it will ensure his safety: "Things bad begun make good themselves by ill" [III. ii. 55). With the appearance of Banquo's ghost comes the last flicker of conscience, but also an increasing terror of discovery and revenge which drives Macbeth further than ever: "For mine own good all causes shall give way" [III. iv. 134-35J.

The only thing he can gain in his blinded state is the very worst for him. He now seeks out the witches to get that reassurance in his course which he cannot find in himself. Although they will not stay for all his questions, he unhesitatingly accepts their equivocations; since they do reassure him, his doubts of them are gone. With their answers, and having lost "the initiate fear that wants hard use" and being no longer "young in deed" [III. iv. 142-43]. Macbeth enjoys the sense of security of any gangster or tyrant who has the unshrinking will to crush any possible opponents, and who thinks he has power to do so with impunity. All that he has gained, however, is the freedom to commit "every sin that has a name to it" [IV. iii. 59-60].

His delusion is complete; his ruin inevitable. Not until he experiences the bitter fruition of his earthly crown does he discover what has happened to him. Even then, however, he sees only in part; the blindness he suffered when he succumbed to temptation was never to be lightened; and hence the final irony of

> a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.
> [V. v. 26-8]

In [Nathaniel Hawthorne's] *The Scarlet Letter* when Hester Prynne seeks mercy for Dimmesdale from Roger Chillingworth, the old physician replies: "It is not granted me to pardon. I have no such power as thou tellest me of. My old faith, long forgotten, comes back to me, and explains all that we do, and all we suffer. By thy first step awry thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has all been a dark necessity." So we feel, in part, about Macbeth, since we see him, not as a victim of destiny, but as one responsible for the misery and deaths of others as well as for his own suffering. But in spite of his responsibility we cannot withhold our sympathy from him.

The action of *Macbeth* evokes a somber "there but for the grace of God." We understand but we do not therefore pardon all. Rather we acknowledge the evil and the guilt and so acquiesce in the inevitable retribution, but at the same time we are deeply moved by Macbeth's suffering and ruin because we are acutely aware of the dangerous forces before which he falls, and because we recognize their power over one like ourselves—a moderately good man who succumbs to temptation and who, having succumbed, is led to more evil to make good the first misstep, until there is no chance of withdrawal or escape. As we watch him, we know that he should not have fallen; he might have resisted; but Shakespeare's vision here is of a world in which men can hardly do better amid the forces of circumstance; and in which, if men do no better, they must suffer, and lose not only the world but themselves as well. Of such suffering and loss is tragedy made. (pp. 305-11)

J. Lyndon Shanley, "*Macbeth*: The Tragedy of Evil," in *College English*, Vol. 22, No. 5, February, 1961, pp. 305-11.

Supernatural Elements

That the Weird Sisters possess ... perennial and astounding vitality is attested by the whole sweep of Shakespearean criticism. All hands seem to be convinced that they symbolize or represent evil in its most malignant form, though there is to be found little unanimity of opinion regarding the precise nature of that evil, whether it is subjective or objective or both, whether mental or metaphysical. (pp. 55-6)

The single purpose of this study is to examine, as thoroughly as possible, the nature of that evil which the Weird Sisters are said to symbolize or represent, and to reproduce one aspect at least of the metaphysical groundwork of the drama. It presupposes that in Shakespeare's time evil was considered to be both subjective and, so far as the human mind is concerned, a non-subjective reality; that is to say, evil manifested itself subjectively in the spirits of men and objectively in a metaphysical world whose existence depended in no degree upon the activities of the human mind. This objective realm of evil was not governed by mere vague and irrational forces; it was peopled and controlled by the malignant wills of intelligences—evil spirits, devils, demons, Satan—who had the ability to project their power into the workings of nature and to influence the human spirit. Such a system of evil was raised to the dignity of a science and a theology. (p. 58)

Since ... this belief was so universal at the time, we may reasonably suppose that Shakespeare's Weird Sisters are intended to symbolize or represent the metaphysical world of evil spirits. Whether one considers them as human witches in league with the powers of darkness, or as actual demons in the form of witches, or as merely inanimate symbols, the power which they wield or represent or symbolize is ultimately demonic. Let us, therefore, exercise wisdom in the contemplation of the nature, power, and illusions of unclean spirits.

In the meantime, we may conveniently assume that in essence the Weird Sisters are demons or devils in the form of witches. At least their control over the primary elements of nature ... would seem to indicate as much. Why, then, should Shakespeare have chosen to present upon his stage these witch-likenesses rather than devils in devil-forms? Two equally valid reasons may be suggested. In the first place, the rather sublime devil and his angels of the earlier drama, opponents of God in the cosmic order and destroyers of men, had degenerated in the hands of later dramatists into mere comic figures; by Shakespeare's time folk conception had apparently so dominated dramatic practice and tradition that cloven hoof, horns, and tail became associated in the popular imagination only with the ludicrous.... In the second place, witches had acquired no such comic associations. They were essentially tragic beings who, for the sake of certain abnormal powers, had sold themselves to the devil. As we have seen, everybody believed in them as channels through which the malignity of evil spirits might be visited upon human beings. Here, then, were terrifying figures, created by a contemporary public at the most intense moment of witchcraft delusion, which Shakespeare found ready to his hand. Accordingly he appropriately employed witch-figures as dramatic symbols, but the Weird Sisters are in reality demons, actual representatives of the world of darkness opposed to good. (pp. 59-61)

[The] Weird Sisters take on a dignity, a dark grandeur, and a terror-inspiring aspect which is in no way native to the witch-symbol as such. In the first place, they are clairvoyant in the sense that whatever happens outwardly among men is immediately known to them. In the thunder and lightning of a desert place they look upon the distant battle, in which Macbeth overcomes the King's enemies, and conjecture that it will be lost and won before the day ends. They do not travel to the camp near Forres where Duncan receives news of the battle, but when Macbeth is created Thane of Cawdor they seem to know it instantly. They must be aware that it is Macbeth who murders Duncan, because Hecate berates them for having trafficked with him in affairs of death without her help. All the events of the drama—the murder of Banquo and the escape of Fleance, the striking down of Lady Macduff and her children, Macbeth's accumulating sins and tragic death—must, as they unfold in time, be immediately perceived by these creatures in whom the species of these things are connatural. Moreover, by virtue of their spiritual substance they are acquainted with the causes of things, and, through the application of wisdom gained by long experience, are able to prognosticate future events in

relation to Macbeth and Banquo: Macbeth shall be king, none of woman born shall harm him, he shall never be overcome until Birnam wood shall come against him to Dunsinane; Banquo shall be no king, but he shall beget kings. The external causes upon which these predictions are based may to a certain extent be manipulated by these demonic forces: but the internal causes, *i.e.*, the forces which move the will of Macbeth to action, are imperfectly known and only indirectly subject to their influence. They cannot read his inmost thoughts—only God can do that—but from observation of facial expression and other bodily manifestations, they surmise with comparative accuracy what passions drive him and what dark desires of his await their fostering. Realizing that he desires the kingdom, they prophesy that he shall be king, thus arousing his passions and inflaming his imagination to the extent that nothing is but what is not. This influence gained over him is later augmented when they cause to appear before him evil spirits, who condense the air about them into the shapes of an armed Head, a bloody Child, and a crowned Child. These demonic presences materialize to the sound of thunder and seem to speak to him with human voices, suggesting evil and urging him toward destruction with the pronouncement of half-truths. These are illusions created by demonic powers, objective appearances with a sensible content sufficient to arouse his ocular and auditory senses.

Indeed, the Weird Sisters are always illusions when they appear as such upon the stage; that is to say, their forms clothe the demonic powers which inform them. This is suggested by the facility with which they materialize to human sight and disappear. King James suspects that the Devil is able to render witches invisible when he pleases, but these Weird Sisters seem of their own motion to melt into thin air and vanish like a dream. Instead of disappearing with the swift movement which characterizes demonic transportation of bodies, they simply fade into nothingness. This suggests that their movements from place to place are not continuous necessarily. Though one of them plans to sail to Aleppo in a sieve, we feel that for the most part they appear in one place at one instant and at another place the next instant, or at whatever time pleases them, without being subject to the laws of time and place. I would not, however, force this point. At any rate, all their really important actions in the drama suggest that they are demons in the guise of witches.

But the witch-appearances constitute only a comparatively small part of the demonic manifestations in *Macbeth*. Many of the natural occurrences and all of the supernatural phenomena may be attributed to the activities of the metaphysical world of evil spirits. Whether visible or invisible these malignant substances insinuate themselves into the essence of the natural world and hover about the souls of men and women; they influence and in a measure direct human thought and action by means of illusions, hallucinations, and inward persuasion. For example, since they are able to manipulate nature's germens and control the winds, we may reasonably suppose that the storm which rages over Macbeth's castle and environs in Act II is no ordinary tempest caused by the regular movements of the heavenly bodies, but rather a manifestation of demonic power over the elements of nature. Indeed, natural forces seem to be partly in abeyance; o'er the one half-world nature seems dead. A strange, mephitic atmosphere hangs over and pervades the castle and adjacent countryside; an unnatural darkness, for ages the milieu of evil forces, blots out the stars and in the morning strangles the rising sun. Where Lennox lies—evidently not far distant—the night is so unruly that chimneys are blown down, lamentings and strange screams of death are heard in the air; and the firm-set earth is so sensitized by the all-pervading demonic energy that it is feverous and shakes. Macbeth senses this magnetization, and fears that the very stones will prate of his whereabouts. As the drunken Porter feels, Macbeth's castle is literally the mouth of hell through which evil spirits emerge in this darkness to cause upheavals in nature. Within the span of his seventy years the Old Man has experienced many strange and dreadful things, but they are as trifles in comparison with the occurrences of this rough night. Demonic powers are rampant in nature. (pp. 77-81)

Macbeth's vision of a dagger is an hallucination caused immediately, indeed, by disturbed bodily humours and spirits but ultimately by demonic powers, who have so controlled and manipulated these bodily forces as to produce the effect they desire. And a like explanation may be offered of the mysterious voice which Macbeth seems to hear after the murder, crying exultantly to all the house, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep" [II. ii. 32-3]. (p. 84)

Banquo's ghost is an infernal illusion, created out of air by demonic forces and presented to Macbeth's sight at the banquet in order that the murderer may be confused and utterly confounded. The second appearance of Banquo's ghost, together with the show of eight kings [IV. i. 112], is undoubtedly the result of demonic machinations. Having persuaded and otherwise incited Macbeth to sin and crime, the Devil and his angels now employ illusions which lead to his betrayal and final destruction.

And finally, certain aspects of Lady Macbeth's experience indicate that she is possessed of demons. At least, in preparation for the coming of Duncan under her battlements, she calls upon precisely those metaphysical forces which have seemed to crown Macbeth. The murdering ministers whom she invokes for aid are described as being sightless substances, *i.e.*, not evil thoughts and "grim imaginings" but objective substantial forms, invisible bad angels, to whose activities may be attributed all the unnatural occurrences of nature. Whatever in the phenomenal world becomes beautiful in the exercise of its normal function is to them foul, and *vice versa*; they wait upon nature's mischief. She recognizes that they infest the filthy atmosphere of this world and the blackness of the lower regions; therefore she welcomes a night palled in the dunnest smoke of hell, so dense that not even heaven may pierce the blanket of the dark and behold her projected deed. Her prayer is apparently answered; with the coming of night her castle is, as we have seen, shrouded in just such a blackness as she desires. (pp. 85-6)

What happens to Lady Macbeth in the course of Act IV is not immediately clear. Apparently there is a steady deterioration of her demon-possessed body until, at the beginning of Act V, the organs of her spirit are impaired to the point of imminent dissolution. Such a great perturbation of nature has seized upon her that she walks night after night in slumbery agitation, with eyes wide open but with the senses shut. There appears a definite cleavage in her personality. Her will, which in conscious moments guards against any revelation of her guilty experiences, is submerged; and her infected mind is forced to discharge its secrets in the presence of alien ears. Her symptoms in these circumstances resemble those of the ordinary somnambulist, but the violence of her reactions indicates that her state is what may be called "somnambuliform possession" or "demoniacal somnambulism." ... The most outstanding characteristic of this demoniacal somnambulism, which in the course of history has been more common than any other form of possession, is that the normal individuality disappears and seems to be replaced by a second personality, which speaks through the patient's mouth. This strange individuality always confesses wrong-doing, and sometimes relates a sort of life-history consisting frequently of the patient's reminiscences or memories. Now the physician to Lady Macbeth recognizes these symptoms in his patient. Sometimes, to be sure, he has known those who have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds. But this disease is beyond his practice; this heart sorely charged with perilous stuff needs the divine more than the physician. The demonic substances she welcomed into her body now employ her bodily functions to disclose her criminal experiences. (pp. 89-90)

Shakespeare's age would undoubtedly have pronounced Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking an instance of demoniacal somnambulism. Practically everybody, so far as may be determined, accepted demonic possession as an established fact. The New Testament affirmed it; the Church Fathers had elaborated and illustrated it; the Catholic Church made of it a firm article of faith and proceeded to exorcise demons by means of recognized rituals involving holy water and cross, bell, book, and candle; and Protestants could not consistently deny it, or if some of them did, peremptory experience forced them to take a doubtful refuge in the conception of obsession, which produced the effects of possession.... Fortunately Shakespeare has spared us, in the case of Lady Macbeth, a representation of the more disgusting physical symptoms of the diabolically possessed, such as astounding contortions of the body and fantastic creations of the delirious mind. He merely suggests these horrors in the report of the Doctor that the Lady is troubled with thick-coming fancies and in the expressed opinion of some that she took her own life by self and violent hands. He is interested primarily in presenting not so much the physical as the spiritual disintegration of this soul-weary creature possessed of devils.

In this manner, it seems to me, Shakespeare has informed *Macbeth* with the Christian conception of a metaphysical world of objective evil. The whole drama is saturated with the malignant presences of demonic forces; they animate nature and ensnare human souls by means of diabolical persuasion, by hallucination, infernal illusion, and possession. They are, in the strictest sense, one element in that Fate which God in his providence has ordained to rule over the bodies and, it is possible, over the spirits of men. And the essence of this whole metaphysical world of evil intelligences is distilled by Shakespeare's imagination and concentrated in those marvellous dramatic symbols, the Weird Sisters. (pp. 91-3)

Walter Clyde Curry, "The Demonic Metaphysics of *Macbeth*," in his *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, Louisiana State University Press, 1937, pp. 53-93.

Time

Tom F. Driver
In *Macbeth* there are three kinds of time: (1) time measured by clock, calendar, and the movement of sun, moon, and stars, which for the sake of convenience we may call "chronological time;" (2) an order of time which overarches the action of the entire play and which may be called "providential time;" and (3) a time scheme, or an understanding of time, belonging to Macbeth, which maybe called "Macbeth's time." (pp. 143-44)

The play contains a very large number of references to chronological time; that is, to the day, the night, or the hour. There is no point in citing all of them, but one example may serve to show the deliberateness with which the hour is sometimes established. Act I, Scene vii, in which the resolution to commit the murder of Duncan is made firm, takes place at supper time.

The next scene (II. i) must establish that the hour has come for all to be retired, a matter accomplished in four lines:

> Banquo:
> How goest the night, boy?
>
> Fleance:
> The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.
>
> Banquo:
> And she goes down at twelve.
>
> Fleance:
> I take 't, 'tis later, sir.
>
> Banquo:
> Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven: Their candles are all out.
> [II. 1. 1-5]
> (p. 145)

In addition to such specific references to time (of which there are many) the play contains a very great number of lines which give merely a sense of time, inducing in the spectator a kind of temporal anxiety. For instance, there is such a large number of speeches employing the words "when," "yet," and "until" that the effect is striking. As an example, the opening lines of the play:

1 Witch:
When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

2 Witch:
When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
[I. i. 1-4]

Throughout the play, adverbs of time are important because the Weird Sisters, at the beginning, put the future into our minds. In Scene iv, Macbeth, having learned that two of the prophecies are true, talks with himself about the third:

Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise....
[I. iii. 137-41]

At the end of the scene he invites Banquo to speak with him "at more time" regarding what has transpired, and arouses our expectations with the concluding phrase, "Till then, enough" [I. iii. 153, 156]. (p. 146)

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare, as usual, is careful in his "imitation" of chronological time. He is not slavish to detail, but he strives for an effect in which the feeling of being in a real world of time is extremely important. Shakespeare's adroit compression of time, his use of a fast and slow scheme of double-time, his concrete references to passing time, and the temporal note diffused throughout the speeches, all locate the audience in a temporal world and prepare it to accept time as a meaningful reality upon which rests much of the imaginative structure of the play.

Connected with chronological time in *Macbeth*, but not equated with it, is providential time, which is to say, time as an expression of social and universal righteousness. (p. 148)

How does Shakespeare communicate the idea of a providential time? In the first place, he assumes an objective, temporal order, distinguished on the one hand from mere chronology and on the other hand from anyone's subjectivity. Early in the play, Duncan sets the order of historical succession:

Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland; which honor must
Not unaccompanied invest him only.
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers.
[I. iv. 35-42]

Here is the proper relationship of past and future, the historical succession guaranteeing order a passage through the present into what comes "hereafter." To such historical order, Macbeth is immediately thrown into opposition:

Macbeth:
(Aside) The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies.
[I. iv. 48-50]

The prophecies of the Weird Sisters also contribute to an idea of objective time. They provide a sense of destiny, or an order in future events already set. The objectivity of the time they represent would, of course, evaporate if it were admitted that the Weird Sisters are primarily a symbol of Macbeth's imagination. That they are not. They appear to the audience before they are seen by Macbeth, so that the spectator naturally takes them to have an existence apart from Macbeth. The sisters therefore stand for a knowledge of the future, and the accuracy of their knowledge is confirmed in the unfolding events of the play. After seeing them, the audience harbors a conception of what is *supposed* to happen, which it continually plays off against what it sees taking place.

The Weird Sisters' first speeches to Macbeth [I. iii] imply a fulfillment of time. "Glamis," "Cawdor," and "King" are not only names designating rank in the Scottish hierarchy, they are also, in this case, expressions of past, present, and future; Macbeth has been thane of Glamis, he this day becomes thane of Cawdor, and he shall "be King hereafter" [I. iii. 50]. (pp. 149-51)

In Macbeth's second meeting with the weird sisters the temporal note is struck yet more distinctly. Macbeth is given assurance of victory until a certain event ("until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him"—[IV. i. 92-4]). Although he does not know it, the moment of his defeat is set. It is noteworthy that he is not given a certain number of days, but rather he is vouchsafed power until certain things shall come to pass. He is actually given a lease which will expire very shortly, while he confidently interprets it to be "the lease of nature" [IV. i. 99]. In this scene also there is a return to the theme of historical continuity. The time which the Weird Sisters proclaim is partner to the time which Duncan had represented in establishing the historical succession upon his son. The show of eight kings, which is set before Macbeth upon his own insistence to know the future of Banquo's line, implies a continuation of the historical succession through Banquo's descendants as far as the mind can reach:

What, will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom?
Another yet! A seventh! I'll see no more.
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more.
[IV. i. 117-20]

This vision of the ordering of the future, bringing the constituted authority in a straight line to Shakespeare's new monarch, James I, and on to the rim of time, is a step which Macbeth cannot o'erleap. It is a "horrible sight" [IV. i. 122] and because of it Macbeth damns the time in which he stands: "Let this pernicious hour / Stand aye accursed in the calendar!" [IV. i. 133-34].

It is possible to see the full reality of providential time only when Macbeth's time is thrown into relief against it. More than one critic has noticed that a change takes place in Macbeth's understanding and experience of time. (pp. 151-52)

Macbeth opposes a more ultimate time than his own. He would "let the frame of things disjoint" [III. ii. 16]; he would "jump the life to come" [I. vii. 7]; he murders sleep, that daily symbol of man's finitude in time; he destroys the meaning of tomorrow and tomorrow, the ironic consequence of his attempt to control the future.

In his attempt to gain control over the future ... , Macbeth reveals that his experience of time is compounded of memory and anticipation. In order to gain control of the future, to o'erleap the steps which lie in his way, he must create memories. Memories, the past haunting the present as guilt, reduce Lady Macbeth to her pitiful end. Her "What's done is done" of Act III [III. ii. 12] later becomes, "What's done cannot be undone" [V. i. 68]. It is as a bulwark against memories that Macbeth erects his doctrine of the meaninglessness of life.

Much as he would like, Macbeth cannot separate the present from the past and the future. By the act of murder he has made his own history, and the rest of the play is the account of the fulfillment of that history, ultimately self-defeating. His sin (skillfully portrayed by Shakespeare as a combination of will and temptation) blinds him to the meaning of providential time, while it does not remove him from subordination to it, nor does it remove him from his own inner historical experience. He therefore continues ... to make use of biblical images of history and human finitude, although entirely without the biblical awareness of grace. The petty pace creeps in "To the last syllable of recorded time" [V. v. 21], a phrase which not only recalls Macbeth's earlier vision of the line which stretches out "to the crack of doom" [IV. i. 117], but which also reflects biblical eschatology. This picture of the mortality of time is followed by that of man's mortality, sketched in four images: the brief candle, the walking shadow, the strutting and fretting upon the stage, and the tale which is told, each of which has biblical parallels. Even in his final despair, therefore, Macbeth is made to speak of an order of time which he has not been able to destroy, although that had been his hope when he and his Lady stood in what proved to be a completely decisive moment upon the "bank and shoal of time" [I. vii. 6]. (pp. 153-54)

Tom F. Driver, "The Uses of Time: The *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Macbeth*," in his *The Sense of History in Greek and Shakespearian Drama*, Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 143-67.

Stephen Spender

I do not know whether any Shakespearean critic has ever pointed out the significant part played by ideas of time in *Macbeth*.

One often hears quoted:

> Come what may
> Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.
> [I. iii. 146-47]

Actually the tragedy of Macbeth is his discovery that this is untrue.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are ... haunted ... by the sense of time. After she has received his letter describing the meeting with the witches, Lady Macbeth's first words to her husband are:

> Thy letters have transported me beyond
> The ignorant present, and I feel now
> The future in the instant.
> [I. v. 56-8]

Their trouble is though that the future does not exist in the instant. There is another very unpleasant instant preceding it which has to be acted on—the murder of Duncan.

In the minds of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth there are, after the prophetic meeting with the Weird Sisters, three kinds of time: the time before the murder, the time of the murder of Duncan, and the enjoyable time afterwards when they reap the fruits of the murder. Their problem is to keep these three times separate and not to allow them to affect each other. If they can prevent their minds showing the sense of the future before the

murder, and of the past, after it, they will have achieved happiness. As soon as the murder has been decided on, Lady Macbeth scents the danger:

> Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
> May read strange matters: to beguile the time,
> Look like the time.
> [I. v. 62-4]

How little Macbeth succeeds in this, we gather from his soliloquy before the murder:

> If it were done—when 'tis done—then 'twere well
> If it were done quickly: if the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease, success: that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
> But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'ld jump the life to come. But in these cases
> We still have judgement here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague th' inventor.
> [I. vii. 1-10]

Macbeth certainly has good reason to fear "even-handed justice" [I. vii. 10]. But, I think, the second part of this speech is only a rationalization of his real fear, as unconvincing in its way as Hamlet's reasons against self-murder. The real fear is far more terrible: it is a fear of the extension into infinity of the instant in which he commits the murder. "The bank and shoal of tune" is time that has stood still; beyond it lies the abyss of a timeless moment.

He loses his nerve, but Lady Macbeth rallies him:

> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And, to be more than what you were you would
> Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
> They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you.
> [I. vii. 49-541]

She forces his mind upon the conjunction of time and place which may never occur again. They never do, indeed, recur. The murder of Banquo is ill-timed, Malcolm escapes, everything is botched, and Macbeth swears that after this he will carry out those crimes which are the "firstlings of his heart" [IV. i. 147].

The soliloquy in which Macbeth sees the dagger before him is the first of his hallucinations. Yet the delusion is not complete. He is able to dismiss it from his mind, and he does so by fixing down the time and place, in order to restore his mind to sanity:

> There's no such thing:
> It is the bloody season which informs
> Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half world
> Nature seems dead.
> [II. i. 47-50]

He reminds himself of the exact tune of night, and this calms him. He invokes the hour, and he invokes the place, with a reason: to relegate this moment preceding the murder to the past from which it cannot ever escape into a future. As some people say, "I will remember this moment for the rest of my life," Macbeth tries to say, "I will uproot this moment from my memory."

> Thou sure and firm-set earth,
> Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
> Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
> And take the present horror from the time
> Which now suits with it.
> [III. i. 56-60]

He is more afraid of the associations of the stones than any evidence they may actually reveal to living witnesses.

Immediately after the murder we are left in no doubt that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have failed in their main purpose of killing in memory the moment of the murder itself.

Macbeth tells his wife how he could not say "Amen" to the prayer of the man in his sleep. "Amen" is the conclusion of prayer, which is inconcludable. "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep'" [II. ii. 32-3].

There is no "Amen" nor night of sleep which will ever end that moment which opens wider and wider as the play proceeds. Macbeth's speech in the next scene is a naif deception, which happens also to be the truth wrung from his heart:

> Had I but [died] an hour before this chance,
> I had lived a blessed time.
> [II. iii. 91-2]

With this he tries to fob off his followers. Meanwhile, one is left in some doubt as to Lady Macbeth's state of mind. The Sleepwalking scene is a shocking revelation which shows that the moment when she smeared the faces of the grooms has died no more for her than has the murder for Macbeth. "Here's the smell of blood still" [V. i. 50]. The ailment of indestructible time is revealed by Macbeth to the doctor:

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff: bosom of the perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?
> [V. iii. 40-5]

Thus, after the murder the past comes to life again and asserts itself amid the general disintegration. An old man appears on the stage to compare the horrors of the past with the monstrosities of the present. Ross says:

> By the clock 'tis day.
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
> [II. iv. 6-7]

The present disgorges the past. The horror of not being able to live down his deeds is symbolized by the appearance of Banquo's ghost. Macbeth looks back on a time when the past was really past and the present present:

> The time has been
> That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
> And there an end.
> [III. iv. 77-9]

There is no end within the control of Macbeth. In the fourth act, we even have a feeling that everything has stopped. The play seems to spread out, burning up and destroying a wider and wider area, without moving forward.

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow" [V. v. 19-28] is not merely the speech of a disillusioned tyrant destroyed by the horror which he has himself created; it has a profound irony, coining from Macbeth's mouth, because he of all people ought to have been able to make tomorrow different from today and yesterday. But all his violence has done is to create a deathly sameness.

This view of *Macbeth* struck me as I was reading it recently. The only doubt in my mind was whether the last speech in the play would bear out my theory that it was time which, even more than in *Hamlet*, had got out of joint in *Macbeth*. This is what Malcolm says to the lords who have rebelled against the tyrant:

> We shall not spend a large expense of time
> Before we reckon with your several loves
> And make us even with you.... What's more to do,
> Which would be planted newly with the time ...
> We will perform in measure, time, and place.
> [V. ix. 26-39]

The emphasis of Malcolm is on time and measure and place, which he is restoring.

Macbeth is naturally the play of Shakespeare's to which we are most likely to turn if we look for parallels with the present. It is impossible to read the lines beginning "Our country sinks beneath the yoke; It weeps, it bleeds" [IV. iii. 38-9], without thinking of half a dozen countries under the yoke of a tyrant. It is impossible not to wonder whether modern tyrants are haunted by their Banquos, and surrounded by a sense of gloomy waking nightmare. But the instruments of justice are weaker than in Shakespeare's time; the consciences of men, brought up on an inverted philosophy of materialism, are not so tender, or so superstitious perhaps. The loss of the sense of time and measure and place, the past rising in solemn visions and portents in the midst of the present, the sense of endless waiting and of time standing still in the midst of the most violent happenings; these provide deeper parallels.

In his book *Pain, Time and Sex*, Gerald Heard claims that man has reached a stage in his evolution in which he has to take a great and decisive step forward which would involve revising not only his social institutions but also his whole conception of the meaning of life. A tyranny, a murder, and a great decision at the end, are the plot of *Macbeth*. The chaos of time, the sense of being haunted by past examples, is connected not only with the tyranny, but also with the decision. The strange scene between Malcolm and Macduff in which Malcolm recites all the vices of past kings and declares that he embodies them; and then contradicts himself and stands forth in his virginity; this is a ranking of all the forces of evil against the forces of the good; and the decision is for the good.

But Malcolm is a restorer, not a revolutionary or an innovator. He takes it for granted that the strange confusion of time that has opened out in *Macbeth* is wrong. It is here that the parallel of our own day with Shakespeare fades. It is even possible that in a sense the stage which we have reached is an advance on Shakespeare. We are living in an age of chaos and confusion, but we cannot go back, we have to go forward. It may be then that the very disorder may show us the way out of our confusion. Our loss of the sense of the continuity of time may give us an entirely new idea of time within which it will be possible to establish a new kind of order. We cannot dismiss the dreams and hallucinations of art in our time as a sign of decadence and of an end. They may be an end; on the other hand, they may be the beginning of something. We only know that we do not exist to restore a past, but to create a future which embodies the greatness of the past. (pp. 120-26)

Stephen Spender, "Books and the War—II," in *The Penguin New Writing*, No. 3, February, 1941, pp. 115-26.

Gender and Sex Roles

One of the organizing themes of *Macbeth* is the theme of manliness: the word (with its cognates) echoes and re-echoes through the scenes, and the play is unique for the persistence and subtlety with which Shakespeare dramatizes the paradoxes of self-conscious "manhood." In recoiling from Macbeth's outrageous kind of manliness, we are prompted to reconsider what we really mean when we use the word in praising someone. Macbeth's career may be described in terms of a terrible progressive disjunction between the manly and the humane. In any civilized culture—even among the Samurai, Macbeth's counterparts in feudal Japan—it would be assumed that the first set of values is complementary to and subsumed in the second. But, as he so often does, Shakespeare exposes with memorable clarity the dangers of such a comfortable assumption: the more Macbeth is driven to pursue what he and Lady Macbeth call manliness—the more he perverts that code into a rationale for reflexive aggression—the less *humane* he becomes, until at last he forfeits nearly all claims on the race itself, and his vaunted manhood, as he finally realizes, becomes meaningless.

After the play begins with the three witches promising a general season of inversion—"Fair is foul, and foul is fair" [1.ll]—in I.i, the human action commences with the arrival of a wounded sergeant at Duncan's camp: "What bloody man is that?" [I. ii. 1] The sergeant's gore, of course, is emblematic of his valor and hardihood and authorizes his praise of Macbeth himself, "valor's minion"—and it also betokens his vulnerable humanity, his mortal consanguinity with the King and the rest of his nation, which he like Macbeth is loyally risking to preserve. These are traditional usages, of course, and they are invoked here at the beginning as norms which Macbeth will subsequently disjoin from each other and pervert.

That process of disjunction begins in Scene v when Lady Macbeth contemplates her husband's heretofore humane character against what the coming-on of time might bring:

> It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily—wouldst not play false
> And yet wouldst wrongly win.
> [I. v. 17-22]

Greatness must be divorced from goodness, highness of estate from holiness, "the nearest way" from "human kindness"—with, as usual, a serious Shakespearian play on *kind*ness: charity, and fellowship in the race. And then, carrying the process to its logical end, Lady Macbeth ritually prepares herself for the deed her husband must commit by calling on the spirits of murder first to divest her of all vestiges of womanliness—"unsex me

here" [I. v. 41]—with the implication that she will be left with male virtues only; and then to nullify her "kindness" itself: "Make thick my blood, / Stop up the access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose" [I. v. 43-6].

In his great agonized soliloquy while Duncan is at dinner, the object of this dire rehearsal sternly reminds himself that he owes the King a "double trust," as subject to his monarch, and, on the basis of kindness again, simply as host to his guest. He then clinches the argument by conjuring up that strange image of "pity, like a naked newborn babe / Striding the blast" [I. vii. 21-2]—strange indeed for the battle hero, so recently ruthless in his king's behalf, to embrace this vision of an ultimate object of human pity. The sexless naked babe is the antithesis of himself, of course, as the manly military cynosure: and Macbeth's failure to identify with his own cautionary emblem is foretold, perhaps, in the incongruously strenuous postures of the babe: "*striding* the blast," "*horsed* / Upon the sightless couriers of the air" [I. vii. 22-3].

At any rate, Lady Macbeth enters and makes short work of her husband's virtuous resolution. The curious thing about her exhortation is that its rhetorical force is almost wholly negative. Dwelling hardly at all on the desirability of Duncan's throne, she instead cunningly premises her arguments on doubts about Macbeth's manly virtue. All of his previous military conquests and honors in the service of Duncan will be meaningless unless he now seizes the chance to crown that career by killing the king. And, striking more ruthlessly at him, she scornfully implies that his very sexuality will be called into question in her eyes if he refuses the regicide—"From this time / Such I account thy love" [I. vii. 38-9]. When Macbeth sullenly retorts, "I dare do all that may become a man, / Who dares do more is none" [I. vii. 46-7], he gives Lady Macbeth the cue she needs to begin the radical transvaluation of his code of manliness that will lead to his ruin. As Robert Heilman has observed about this and other plays [in "Manliness in the Tragedies: Dramatic Variations," in *Shakespeare 1564-1964*, ed. Edward A. Bloom], the psychic forces concentrated in that code are all the more potent for being ill-defined; and in the scene at hand, Lady Macbeth's onslaught against Macbeth—coming from a woman, after all, his sexual partner—is virtually unanswerable:

> What beast was it then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man,
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man....
> [I. vii. 47-51]

Against Macbeth's stern but theoretical retort that he will perform only that which becomes a man, and no more, she replies that, on the contrary, by his own manly standards he will be a dull-spirited beast, no man, if he withdraws from the plot.

Then, with a truly fiendish cunning she goes on to tie up all the strands of her argument in a single violent image, the murder of her own nursing infant. In this, of course, she re-enacts for Macbeth her earlier appeal for a strategic reversal of sex—the humiliating implication being that she would be more truly masculine in her symbolic act than he can ever be. And in offering to dash out the brains of "the babe that milks me" [I. vii. 55], in effect she ritually murders the naked babe of pity that Macbeth has just summoned up as a tutelary spirit. The upshoot of this incredible mixture of insinuation and bullying is that Macbeth is forced to accept a concept of manliness that consists wholly in rampant self-seeking aggression. True masculinity has nothing to do with those more gentle virtues men are supposed to share with women as members of their kind; these are for women alone, as Lady Macbeth's violent rejections of her own femaleness prove. When she has finished the exhortation, Macbeth can only respond with a kind of over-mastered tribute to her ferocity, which would be more proper in him—"Bring forth men children only, / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" [I. vii. 72-4].

When the murder of Duncan is discovered, Macbeth betters his wife's instructions to "make our griefs and clamors roar / Upon his death" [I. vii. 78-9], and slays the grooms outright, before they can talk. Even in his state of grief and shock, the humane Macduff is astonished at this new burst of violence—"Wherefore did you so?" [II. iii. 107]—and, in a speech that verges steadily towards hysteria, Macbeth explains that he slew the grooms in a reflex of outraged allegiance and love for his murdered king. It is the praiseworthy savage and ruthless Macbeth of recent military fame who is supposed to be talking: his appeal is to a code of manly virtue he has already perverted. "Who can be wise, amazed, temperate, and furious, / Loyal and neutral, in a moment? *No man*" [II. iii. 108-09]. The speech runs away with itself, but after Lady Macbeth's timely collapse, Macbeth collects his wits and calls for an inquest: "Let's briefly put on manly readiness, / And meet in the hall together" [II. iii. 133-34]. "Manly" here, of course, means one thing—vengeful self-control—to the others, and something else—the ability to be crafty and dissemble—to Macbeth.

In Act III, confirming Hecate's later observation that "security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy" [III. v. 32-3]—or in this case the vexing lack of it—King Macbeth seeks to be "safely thus" by killing Banquo and cutting off his claims on the future in Fleance. Macbeth's exhortation to the three murderers is an instance of the general principle of repetition and re-enactment that governs the entire drama and helps give it its characteristic quality of compulsive and helpless action. Macbeth begins his subornation by identifying for the murderers the very same grievance against Banquo he has just named for himself—

> Do you find
> Your patience so predominant in your nature
> That you can let this go? Are you so gospeled,
> To pray for this good man and for his issue,
> Whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave
> And beggared yours forever?
> [III. i. 85-90]

When the First Murderer retorts ambiguously, just as Macbeth has earlier to Lady Macbeth, "We are men, my liege" [III. i. 90], the King twists this appeal from an undefined code of manliness exactly as his wife taught him to do in I. vii—

> Aye, in the catalogue ye go for men,
> As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
> Shoughs, water rugs, and demiwolves are clept
> All by the name of dogs.
> [III. i. 91-4]

In protesting that he and his fellows are *men*, the First Murderer means that they are as capable of moral indignation and of violent response to wrongs "as the next man." But Macbeth, like his wife before him, undermines this position by declaring that this hardly qualifies them as men or even as humans, except in the merely zoological sense. There is simply no intrinsic distinction, no fundamental basis of identity to be had in declaring one's male gender and beyond this one's membership in the human race. What Macbeth in the next scene refers to as "that great bond / Which keeps me pale" [III. ii. 49-50], that shared humanity deeper than sex or class denoted in the cry "Man overboard," is here pronounced to be a mere figment valid neither as a source of positive virtue nor as the ultimate basis of moral restraint. "*Real* men" (the argument is old and has its trivial as well as its tragic motives) will prove their manhood in violently self-assertive action: Macbeth is, in a sense, talking here to himself, still answering his wife's aspersions.

Those aspersions return to haunt him—along with Banquo's ghost—in the banquet scene. As he recoils from the bloody apparition, Lady Macbeth hisses, predictably, "Are you a man?" and his shaky reply, "Aye, and a bold one, that dare look upon that / Which might appall the Devil" [III. iv. 57-9], she mocks with another

insinuation that under duress he is womanish. One thinks of Goneril's sneer at Albany, "Marry, your manhood! Mew!" (*King Lear*, IV. ii. 68), but Lady Macbeth's humiliating slur is a continuation of her strategy of negative exhortation—

> Oh, these flaws and starts,
> Imposters to true fear, would well become
> A woman's story at a winter's fire
> Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!
> [III. iv. 62-5]

When the ghost reappears, Macbeth in a frenzy "quite unmanned" recapitulates as if by rote everything he has heard against his manliness. Once more there is the dubious appeal to a perverted code—"What man dare, I dare" [III. iv. 98]. And then follows the references to beasts, here prefiguring Macbeth's own fall from humaneness to bestiality—the beasts he names *would be* fitting adversaries:

> Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
> The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger,
> Take any shape but that and my firm nerves
> Shall never tremble.
> [III. iv. 99-102]

and then an almost pathetic desire to prove himself in single combat, like the old Macbeth: "Or to be alive again, / And dare me to the desert with thy sword" [III. iv. 102-03], and finally a humiliating comparison, worthy of his wife, to the antithesis of manliness: "If trembling I inhabit then, protest me / The baby of a girl" [III. iv. 104-05].

This harrowing scene concludes with Macbeth—now isolated not just in his crimes from his peers but in his hallucination from Lady Macbeth—brooding on the emblematic meanings of blood: the gore of regicide and homicide, of retribution in the name of human blood-ties he had denied. The "bloody man" of the first scenes, whose wounds, like Macbeth's, were public tokens of his manly courage and valor, is now succeeded wholly in the play's imagery by "the secret'st man of blood" [III. iv. 125].

The final step in the degeneration of Macbeth's manliness comes in Act IV when he appears before the witches demanding to know his manifest future more certainly. The first of the prophetic apparitions, an "Armed Head," is suggestive both of the traitor Macdonwald's fate and of Macbeth's own gruesome final appearance; the second apparition, a bloody child, points backward to the "naked newborn babe" of pity and to Lady Macbeth's hypothetically murdered child, and ahead to the slaughter of Macduff's children, as well as to Macduff himself, Macbeth's nemesis, who was from his mother's side "untimely ripped." With a fearsome irony, the prophecy of the second apparition, an object of pity, serves to release Macbeth from all basic humane obligations to his fellows. If "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth" [IV. i. 80-1], then he need recognize no common denominators either of origin or of mortal vulnerability with his kind, and nothing in the name of "kindness" can interfere, it seems, with the perfection of his monstrous "manliness." "Be bloody, bold, and resolute, laugh to scorn / The power of man" [IV. i. 79-80].

The pageant of Banquo's lineage and the bad news of Macduff's flight to England, which follow immediately according to the breakneck pace of this play, only serve to confirm Macbeth in his new freedom from all kindness: henceforth, beginning with the slaughter of Macduff's family, he will act unconstrained either by moral compunction or by reason. "From this moment / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand" [IV. i. 146-47]. So, having earlier remarked, ominously, that "Returning were as *tedious* as go o'er" [III. iv. 137], and having just witnessed a seemingly endless procession of Scottish kings in Banquo's line, he now enters fully into what can be termed the doom of reflex and repetition, in which Lady Macbeth,

with her hellish somnambulism, shares.

At this point in the play, as he so often does in the histories and tragedies, Shakespeare widens our attention beyond the fortunes of the principals; we are shown the cruel effects of such villainous causes, and much of the action on this wider stage parallels and ironically comments on the central scenes. The evils of Macbeth's epoch are dramatized in a peculiarly poignant way, for example, in IV. ii., when Lady Macduff denounces her virtuous husband to their son for what seems to her to be Macduff's unmanly, even inhuman abandonment of his family. It is a strange twisted version of Lady Macbeth's harangue and her husband's responses earlier; there is the inevitable appeal to an assumed human nature, and even the by-now-familiar comparison of man and beast—

> He loves us not,
> He wants the natural touch. For the poor wren,
> The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
> Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
> [IV. ii. 8-11]

And this poor woman, who fears her husband lacks that milk of human kindness that Lady Macbeth deplores in *her* spouse, ends her life with a terrible commentary on the badness of the times, in which to protest one's innocence is accounted mere womanish folly. Macbeth's reign of "manliness" prevails: "Why, then, alas, / Do I put up that womanly defense, / To say I have done no harm?" [IV. ii. 77-9]. This lament assumes a really dreadful irony in the next scene when Ross assures Malcolm in Macduff's presence that "your eye in Scotland / Would create soldiers, make our women fight / To doff their dire distress" [IV. iii. 186-88].

In this next scene, before Macduff learns of the sacrifice he has made to his patriotism, he labors to persuade young Malcolm to lead an army of "good men" in the liberation of Scotland. For the first time since the opening scenes, a concept of manly virtue that is alternative to Macbeth's is broached; it is, of course, the code that Macbeth himself once served so valorously. Malcolm shrewdly responds to the invitation with a remarkable double test of Macduff as the emissary of the Scottish loyalists—first and directly of his honesty and allegiance (is he really only another assassin sent by Macbeth?), and second and indirectly of the depth and quality of that allegiance. By representing himself vice by vice as a monster even more depraved than Macbeth, by forcing a disjunction of patriotism from morality, the politic Malcolm can determine the exact limits of Macduff's offered support. As King he could not, presumably, accept an allegiance so desperate and indiscriminant that it would ignore the total viciousness he paints himself with. (pp. 286-94)

Given Macduff's straightforward soldierly goodness, his fervent hopes for his country, and his
rant, it is a deeply cruel if necessary test, one that the unhappy patriot must painfully "fail" in order to pass. In its tone and in the logic of its placement, the entire scene in London is analogous to that remarkable sequence of scenes in *2 Henry IV*—Hal's oblique denunciation of Poins and other small beer [II. ii], Lady Percy's denunciation of Northumberland [II. iii], and Hal and Poin's spying on and rather brutal exposure of Falstaff [II. iv]. There, as here, a persistent cruelty between allies seems to signal the beginnings of a drastic homeopathic cure of the whole diseased nation.

In *Macbeth*, this homeopathy takes a predictable form: in order to purge Scotland of Macbeth's diseased "manliness," the forces of right and order must to some extent embrace that inhuman code. As Macduff collapses under the news of his family's slaughter, Malcolm exhorts him to convert his grief and guilt without delay into "manly" vengeful rage: "Be comforted. Let's make us medicines of our great revenge / To cure this deadly grief.... Dispute it like a man." To which advice Macduff cries back, "I shall do so, But I must feel it like a man" [IV. iii. 214-15; 220-21]. Nowhere in the play is there a more cruel disjunction of the moral claims on "Man," between a narrow code of manliness, and a general "natural" humaneness. Soon Macduff is driven into that familiar harsh polarization according to sex of human feelings that should belong to the race

as a whole: "Oh I could play the woman with mine eyes" [IV. iii. 230]. In other circumstances, Macduff would be profoundly unworthy of his manhood if he could not feel and show his losses, and Malcolm's impatient urgings would simply be intolerable. As it is, if his strategy is cruelly necessary, there is an unpleasant note of politic satisfaction in his endorsement of Macduff 's wrenching of private grief into public wrath, the wrath, after all, that will place Malcolm on the throne: he says, briskly, "This tune goes manly" [IV. iii. 235]. As Edmund says to the murderer of Cordelia in a very different context, "men / Are as the times is" [*King Lear*, V. iii. 30-1]: the reformers, it seems, to a considerable degree, as well as the evildoers. Whatever his kingly virtues otherwise, it seems clear that Malcolm will never rule Scotland with the simple graciousness and humane trust of a Duncan. The times forbid it; Macbeth's savage reign requires that he be succeeded by a king of cold blood and clear mind who stands with that Shakespearean company distinguished by "little love but much policy" [cf. *Richard II*, V. i. 84]....

In the concluding scenes, while Macbeth betrays his special preoccupations by referring to "the *boy* Malcolm" and abusing his servant as "lily-livered *boy*," [V. iii. 2,15] Malcolm has, we are told, enlisted the support of a whole generation of untried "boys" whose valorous service in his great cause will "Protest their first of manhood" [V. ii. 11]. Young Siward is their leader, and his subsequent brave, fatal encounter with Macbeth is recognized by all as evidence of a resurgent true manliness in Scotland, based (as Macbeth's conduct was at the beginning!) on selflessness and heroic violence in the cause of right and justice. Old Siward refuses to allow Malcolm to lionize his dead son beyond the simple terms of Ross's eulogy:

> He only lived but till he was a man,
> The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed
> In the unshrinking station where he fought
> But like a man he died.
> [V. ix. 6-9]

The larger questions in this familiar declaration of praise—"What *is* a man? What should he be? What standards of manhood?" are begged, as they were in the beginning of Macbeth's story: indeed, there is again the existentialistic implication that man's nature is not an *a priori* [presumptive] constant but rather an evolving and unstable set of possibilities. But if young Siward's kind of manliness is seen in the context of the story as being ambiguous, volatile, capable of hideous perversions as well as of glories, it is nonetheless offered to us dramatically as the only moral alternative in the play, in the familiar Shakespearan manner, a hypothetical code has been realistically *tested* in action for us as viewers—not merely nullified and replaced with another set of unexamined verities. No one would deny that young Siward has indeed achieved a form of manhood—but the structure of the play allows us to cherish no illusions about that kind of achievement.

The swift resurgence of a measure of sympathy for Macbeth in the last scenes has always been recognized as one of Shakespeare's most brilliant maniuplations of tone. As Wayne Booth [see excerpt in section on Macbeth's character] and others have demonstrated, it is based upon our almost insupportable intimacy with Macbeth—we know him as no one in his own world does—and upon the terrible imaginative fullness of his knowledge of his crimes, if not of the effects of those crimes on himself. What triggers an access of sympathy in the final scenes is chiefly his return to a semblance of direct, uncomplex action, "we'll die with harness on our back," [V. v. 51] so painfully suggestive of the old Macbeth. But now he is champion of nothing human or humane; he must "try the last" [V. viii. 32] in utter alienation from the community of men, which in some other life would have granted him, as to any man, "that which should accompany old age, / As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends" [V. iii. 24-5]. At the last, all the invidious comparisons of earlier scenes between men and beasts come due as he feels himself reduced to the state of a solitary animal in a bear-baiting: "bear-like I must fight the course" [V. vii. 1-2].

Nowhere is Macbeth's alien condition more starkly revealed than at the moment of his wife's death in Scene v. As he and his followers doubtfully parade on stage with banners and prepare for the siege of Dunsinane, there

comes a "cry of women" offstage [s.d., V. v. 7]. It is a hair-raising stroke of theater, worthy of the Greeks: at the death of the ambitious wife who would have unsexed herself to provoke her husband into forgetting his ties with humanity, the women of Dunsinane raise the immemorial voice of their sex in grief and sympathy, so long banished from Scotland. It is as if a spell is broken; all the deaths in the play are bewailed, those of the victims as well as that of the murderess—but so barren is Macbeth now of humane feeling that it takes Seyton to tell him that what he has heard is "the cry of women" [V. v. 8], and when he learns it is his own wife who has died, he can only shrug wearily over what he cannot feel, and then lament a life devoid of all human meaning: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" [V. v. 19]. After a brutal career of striving "manfully" to impose his own consequentiality upon the future, Macbeth now foresees a future of mere repetitive subsequence—"time and the hour" do *not* "run through the roughest day" but are stuck fast in it [I. iii. 148]. The First Witch's curse against the Master of the *Tiger*, "I shall drain him dry as hay" [I. iii. 18], has come true in Macbeth's soul.

Yet it is still a human soul, and in the last scene Shakespeare seems to take pains to enforce our unwilling rediscovery of that fact. Confronted at last by Macduff, Macbeth recoils momentarily with an unwonted remorse: "get thee back, my soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already" [V. viii. 5-6]. And when he perceives that Macduff is the object of the witches' equivocation, the mortal man Fate has chosen to be its instrument against him, Macbeth gains the last and fullest fragment of tragic knowledge the dramatist grants him in this tragedy of limited and helpless knowledge. Though he confesses that Macduff's revelation "hath cowed my better part of man" [V. viii. 18]—meaning the reckless, savage manhood he has embraced—the insight itself suggests a step back towards the common human condition and its "great bond":

> be these juggling fiends no more believed
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear
> And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.
> [V. viii. 19-22]

The plurality of these pronouns is more than royal: having already extrapolated from his own ruin to a nihilistic view of all human life in the "tomorrow" speech, Macbeth here generalizes validly for the human race at large. Fate is enigmatic to us all; it is, he realizes too late, one of the immutable common denominators of our condition; no career of rampant "manly" self-assertion can hope to circumvent or control it.

In this frame of mind, then, at least tenuously reawakened to the circumstances binding him to his race, Macbeth is roused by Macduff's threat that he will be exhibited "as our rarer monsters are" if captured alive [V. viii. 25], and hurls himself into single combat for the first time since he was "valor's minion." There is no more question of redemption than of escape, of course, as Macbeth himself knows: but who would deny a stirring of fellow-feeling at this spectacle of a single mortal man actively facing his mortality, "trying the last" [cf. V. viii. 32]? When Macduff reappears bearing Macbeth's severed head, and Malcolm triumphantly announces his succession to "this dead butcher and his fiendlike queen" [V. ix. 35], it seems impossible to deny the sense of a dramatic imbalance between the claims of justice and those of humaneness. We know Macbeth far better than do any of the Scottish worthies who celebrate his gruesome death; we have been privy to all the steps of his ruin: the tragic paradox in his nature is that the medium of his degeneration—his extraordinary imaginative susceptability—is also the medium of our never wholly suspended empathy with him. Such is the main thrust of these concluding scenes: they reveal Macbeth to us as a monster of degenerate "manliness"—but as a human monster for all that. The circle of human sympathy and *kind*ness, broken by Macbeth's career of regicide and slaughter, is reformed: narrowly and vengefully, on-stage; broadly and with a heavy sense of man's undefinable limits and capabilities, in the audience. (pp. 295-99)

Jarold Ramsey, "The Perversion of Manliness in *Macbeth*," in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Spring, 1973, pp. 285-300.

Imagery

The total meaning of [*Macbeth*] depends on a complex of interwoven patterns and the imagery must be considered in relation to character and structure.

One group of images to which Cleanth Brooks called attention [in his *The Well-Wrought Urn*] was that concerned with babes. It has been suggested by Muriel C. Bradbrook that Shakespeare may have noticed in the general description of the manners of Scotland included in Holinshed's *Chronicles* that every Scotswoman 'would take intolerable pains to bring up and nourish her own children [*Shakespeare Survey 4* (1951)]; and H. N. Paul pointed out that one of the topics selected for debate before James I, during his visit to Oxford in the summer of 1605, was whether a man's character was influenced by his nurse's milk [*The Royal Play of* '*Macbeth*']. Whatever the origin of the images in *Macbeth* relating to breast-feeding, Shakespeare uses them for a very dramatic purpose. Their first appearance is in Lady Macbeth's invocation of the evil spirits to take possession of her:

> Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief.
> [I. v. 47-50]

They next appear in the scene where she incites Macbeth to the murder of Duncan:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me—
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this.
> [I. vii. 54-9]

In between these two passages Macbeth himself, debating whether to do the deed, admits that

> Pity, like a naked new-born babe
> Striding the blast,
> [I. vii. 21-21]

would plead against it; and Lady Macbeth, when she first considers whether she can persuade her husband to kill Duncan, admits that she fears his nature:

> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way.
> [I. v. 17-18]

Later in the play, Malcolm, when he is pretending to be worse even than Macbeth, says that he loves crime:

> Nay, had I pow'r, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound All unity on earth.
> [IV. iii. 97-100]

In these passages the babe symbolizes pity, and the necessity for pity, and milk symbolizes humanity, tenderness, sympathy, natural human feelings, the sense of kinship, all of which have been outraged by the murderers. Lady Macbeth can nerve herself to the deed only by denying her real nature; and she can overcome Macbeth's scruples only by making him ignore his feelings of human-kindness—his kinship with his fellow-men.

Cleanth Brooks suggests therefore that it is appropriate that one of the three apparitions should be a bloody child, since Macduff is converted into an avenger by the murder of his wife and babes. On one level, the bloody child stands for Macduff; on another level, it is the naked new-born babe whose pleadings Macbeth has ignored. Helen Gardner took Cleanth Brooks to task for considering these images in relation to one another. She argued that in his comments on 'Pity, like a naked new-born babe' [I. vii. 21] he had sacrificed

> a Shakespearian depth of human feeling ... by attempting to interpret an image by the aid of what associations it happens to arouse in him, and by being more interested in making symbols of babes fit each other than in listening to what Macbeth is saying. *Macbeth* is a tragedy and not a melodrama or a symbolic drama of retribution. The reappearance of 'the babe symbol' in the apparition scene and in Macduff's revelation of his birth has distracted the critic's attention from what deeply moves the imagination and the conscience in this vision of a whole world weeping at the inhumanity of helplessness betrayed and innocence and beauty destroyed. It is the judgment of the human heart that Macbeth fears here, and the punishment which the speech foreshadows is not that he will be cut down by Macduff, but that having murdered his own humanity he will enter a world of appalling loneliness, of meaningless activity, unloved himself, and unable to love. [*The Business of Criticism*]

Although this is both eloquent and true, it does not quite dispose of Brooks's interpretation of the imagery. Miss Gardner shows that, elsewhere in Shakespeare, 'a cherub is thought of as not only young, beautiful, and innocent, but as associated with the virtue of patience'; and that in the *Macbeth* passage the helpless babe and the innocent and beautiful cherub "call out the pity and love by which Macbeth is judged. It is not terror of heaven's vengeance which makes him pause, but the terror of moral isolation." Yet, earlier in the same speech Macbeth expresses fear of retribution in this life—fear that he himself will have to drink the ingredients of his own poisoned chalice—and his comparison of Duncans virtues to 'angels, trumpet-tongued' [I. vii. 19] implies a fear of judgment in the life to come, notwithstanding his boast that he would 'jump' it. We may assume, perhaps, that the discrepancy between the argument of the speech and the imagery employed is deliberate. On the surface Macbeth appears to be giving merely prudential reasons for not murdering Duncan; but Shakespeare makes him reveal by the imagery he employs that he, or his unconscious mind, is horrified by the thought of the deed to which he is being driven.

Miss Gardner does not refer to the breast-feeding images—even Cleanth Brooks does not mention one of the most significant—yet all these images are impressive in their contexts and, taken together, they coalesce into a symbol of humanity, kinship and tenderness violated by Macbeth's crimes. Miss Gardner is right in demanding that the precise meaning and context of each image should be considered, but wrong, I believe, in refusing to see any significance in the group as a whole. *Macbeth*, of course, is a tragedy; but I know of no valid definition of tragedy which would prevent the play from being at the same time a symbolic drama of retribution.

Another important group of images is concerned with sickness and medicine, and it is significant that they all appear in the last three acts of the play after Macbeth has ascended the throne; for Scotland is suffering from the disease of tyranny, which can be cured, as fever was thought to be cured, only by bleeding or purgation. The tyrant, indeed, uses sickness imagery of himself. He tells the First Murderer that so long as Banquo is alive he wears his health but sickly; when he hears of Fleance's escape he exclaims 'Then comes my fit again' [III. iv. 20]; and he envies Duncan in the grave, sleeping after life's fitful fever, since life itself is one long

illness. In the last act of the play a doctor, called in to diagnose Lady Macbeth's illness, confesses that he cannot

> minister to a mind diseas'd, Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, Raze out the written troubles of the brain, And with some sweet oblivious antidote Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous
> stuff Which weighs upon the heart.
> [V. iii. 40-51]

Macbeth then professes to believe that what is amiss with Scotland is not his own evil tyranny but the English army of liberation:

> What rhubarb, cyme, or what purgative drug
> Would scour these English hence?
> [V. iii. 55-6]

On the other side, the victims of tyranny look forward to wholesome days when Scotland will be freed. Malcolm says that Macbeth's very name blisters their tongues and he laments that 'each new day a gash' [IV. iii. 40] is added to Scotland's wounds. In the last act Caithness refers to Malcolm as 'the medicine of the sickly weal',

> And with him pour we in our country's purge
> Each drop of us.

Lennox adds:

> Or so much as it needs
> To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds.
> [V. ii. 27-30]

Macbeth is the disease from which Scotland is suffering; Malcolm, the rightful king, is the *sovereign* flower, both royal and curative. Macbeth, it is said,

> Cannot buckle his distemper'd cause
> Within the belt of rule.
> [V, ii. 15-16]

James I, in *A Counter-blast to Tobacco*, referred to himself as 'the proper Phisician of his Politicke-bodie', whose duty it was 'to purge it of all those diseases, by Medicines meet for the same'. It is possible that Shakespeare had read this pamphlet, although, of course, disease-imagery is to be found in most of the plays written about this time. In *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* it is applied to the body politic, as indeed it was by many writers on political theory. Shakespeare may have introduced the King's Evil as an allusion to James I's reluctant use of his supposed healing powers; but even without this topical reference, the incident provides a contrast to the evil supernatural represented by the Weird Sisters and is therefore dramatically relevant.

The contrast between good and evil is brought out in a variety of ways. There is not merely the contrast between the good and bad kings, which becomes explicit in the scene where Malcolm falsely accuses himself of avarice, lechery, cruelty and all of Macbeth's vices, and disclaims the possession of the king-becoming graces:

Justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude.
[IV. iii. 92-4]

There is also a contrast throughout the play between the powers of light and darkness. It has often been observed that many scenes are set in darkness. Duncan arrives at Inverness as night falls; he is murdered during the night; Banquo returns from his last ride as night is again falling; Lady Macbeth has light by her continually; and even the daylight scenes during the first part of the play are mostly gloomy in their setting—a blasted heath, wrapped in mist, a dark cavern. The murder of Duncan is followed by darkness at noon—'dark night strangles the travelling lamp' [II. iv. 7]. Before the murder Macbeth prays to the stars to hide their fires and Lady Macbeth invokes the night to conceal their crime:

Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry 'Hold, hold'.
[I. v. 50-4]

Macbeth, as he goes towards the chamber of the sleeping Duncan, describes how

o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep.
[I. v. 49-51]

The word 'night' echoes through the first two scenes of the third act; and Macbeth invokes night to conceal the murder of Banquo:

Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day. . .
Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to th' rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
[III. ii. 46-53]

In the scene in England and in the last act of the play—except for the sleep-walking scene—the darkness is replaced by light. The symbolism is obvious. In many of these contexts night and darkness are associated with evil, and day and light are linked with good. The 'good things of day' [III. ii. 52] are contrasted with 'night's black agents' [in. ii. 53]; and, in the last act, day stands for the victory of the forces of liberation [V, iv. 1; V. vii. 27; V. ix. 3]. The 'midnight hags' are 'the instruments of darkness' [I. iii. 124]; and some editors believe that when Malcolm (at the end of Act IV) says that 'The Powers above / Put on their instruments' [IV. iii. 238-39] he is referring to their human instruments—Malcolm, Macduff and their soldiers.

The opposition between the good and evil supernatural is paralleled by similar contrasts between angel and devil, heaven and hell, truth and falsehood—and the opposites are frequently juxtaposed:

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good.

[I. iii. 130-31]

Merciful powers
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!
[II. i. 7-9]

It is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
[II. i. 63-4]

Several critics have pointed out the opposition in the play between night and day, life and death, grace and evil, a contrast which is reiterated more than four hundred times.

The evidence for this has gone beyond imagery simile, but the visual symbols implied by the dialogue, which would be visible in performance, and even the iteration of key words. . . . *Macbeth* is about blood; and from the appearance of the bloody sergeant in the second scene of the play to the last scene of all, we have a continual vision of blood. Macbeth's sword in the battle 'smok'd with bloody execution' [I. ii. 18]; he and Banquo seemed to 'bathe in reeking wounds' [I. ii. 39]; the Sergeant's 'gashes cry for help' [I. ii. 42]. The Second Witch comes from the bloody task of killing swine. The visionary dagger is stained with 'gouts of blood' [II. i. 46]. Macbeth, after the murder, declares that not all great Neptune's ocean will cleanse his hands:

this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.
[II. ii. 58-60]

Duncan is spoken of as the fountain of his sons' blood; his wounds

look'd like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance.
[II. iii. 113-14]

The world had become a 'bloody stage'. Macbeth, before the murder of Banquo, invokes the 'bloody and invisible hand' of night [III. ii. 48]. We are told of the twenty trenched gashes on Banquo's body and his ghost shakes his 'gory locks' at Macbeth, who is convinced that 'blood will have blood' [III. iv. 121]. At the end of the banquet scene, he confesses wearily that he is 'stepp'd so far' in blood, that

should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
[III. iv. 136-37]

The Second Apparition, a bloody child, advises Macbeth to be 'bloody, bold, and resolute' [IV. i. 79]. Malcolm declares that Scotland bleeds,

and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds.
[IV. iii. 40-1]

Lady Macbeth, sleep-walking, tries in vain to remove the 'damned spot' from her hands:

> Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
> [V. i. 50-1]

In the final scene, Macbeth's severed head is displayed on a pole. As [Jan] Kott has recently reminded us, the subject of the play is murder, and the prevalence of blood ensures that we shall never forget the physical realities in metaphysical overtones.

Equally important is the iteration of sleep. The first statement of the theme is when the First Witch curses the Master of the *Tiger*:

> Sleep shall neither night nor day
> Hang upon his penthouse lid.
> [I. iii. 19-20]

After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth and his wife

> sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly;
> [III. ii. 17-19]

while Duncan, 'after life's fitful fever . . . sleeps well' [III. ii. 23]. Anonymous lord looks forward to the overthrow of the tyrant, when they will be able to sleep in peace. Because of 'a great perturbation in nature', Lady Macbeth

> is troubled with thick coming fancies
> That keep her from her rest.
> [V. iii. 38-9]

The key passage in the theme of sleeplessness. . . occurs just after the murder of Duncan, when Macbeth hears a voice which cries 'Sleep no more!' [II. ii. 38]. It is really the echo of his own conscience. As [A. C] Bradley noted, the voice 'denounced on him, as if his three names [Glamis, Cawdor, Macbeth] gave him three personalities to suffer in, the doom of sleeplessness' [*Shakespearean Tragedy*]; and, as [J. M.] Murry puts it:

> He has murdered Sleep, that is 'the death of each day's life'—that daily death of Time which makes Time human. [*Shakespeare*]

The murder of a sleeping guest, the murder of a sleeping king, the murder of a saintly old man, the murder, as it were, of sleep itself, carries with it the appropriate retribution of insomnia.

As Murry's comment suggests, the theme of sleep is linked with that of time. Macbeth is promised by the Weird Sisters that he will be king 'hereafter' and Banquo wonders if they 'can look into the seeds of time' [I. iii. 58]. Macbeth, tempted by the thought of murder, declares that 'Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings' [I. iii. 137-38] and decides that 'Time and the hour runs through the roughest day' [I. iii. 147]. Lady Macbeth says she feels 'The future in the instant' [I. v. 58]. In his soliloquy in the last scene of Act I, Macbeth speaks of himself as 'here upon this bank and shoal of time' [I. vii. 6], time being contrasted with the sea of eternity. He pretends that he would not worry about the future, or about the life to come, if he could be sure of success in the present; and his wife implies that the conjunction of time and place for the murder will never recur. Just before the murder, Macbeth reminds himself of the exact time and place, so that he can relegate (as Stephen Spender suggests) 'the moment to the past from which it will never escape into the future' [see excerpt in section on Time]. Macbeth is troubled by his inability to say amen, because he dimly realizes

he has forfeited the possibility of blessing and because he knows that he has become 'the deed's creature'. The nightmares of the guilty pair and the return of Banquo from the grave symbolize the haunting of the present by the past. When Macbeth is informed of his wife's death, he describes how life has become for him a succession of meaningless days, the futility he has brought upon himself by his crimes:

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death.
> [V. v. 19-23]

At the very end of the play, Macduff announces that with the death of the tyrant 'The time is free' [V. ix. 21] and Malcolm promises, without 'a large expense of time' [V. ix. 26] to do what is necessary ('which would be planted newly with the time' [V. ix. 31]) and to bring back order from chaos 'in measure, time, and place' [V. ix. 39].

From one point of view *Macbeth* can be regarded as a play about the disruption of order through evil, and its final restoration. The play begins with what the witches call a hurly-burly and ends with the restoration of order by Malcolm. Order is represented throughout by the bonds of loyalty; and chaos is represented by the powers of darkness with their upsetting of moral values ('Fair is foul and foul is fair' [I. i. 11]). The witches can raise winds to fight against the churches, to sink ships and destroy buildings: they are the enemies both of religion and of civilization. Lady Macbeth invokes the evil spirits to take possession of her; and, after the murder of Duncan, Macbeth's mind be-suffer' [III. ii. 16] merely to be freed from his nightmares. Again, in his conjuration of the witches in the cauldron scene, he is prepared to risk absolute chaos, 'even till destruction sicken' through surfeit [IV. i. 60], rather than not obtain an answer. In his last days, Macbeth is 'aweary of the sun' and he wishes 'the estate of the world' were undone [V. v. 48-9]. Order in Scotland, even the moral order in the universe, can be restored only by his death. (pp. 45-51)

All through the play ideas of order and chaos are juxtaposed. When Macbeth is first visited by temptation his 'single state of man' is shaken and 'nothing is but what is not' [I. iii. 140-42]. In the next scene [I. iv] Shakespeare presents ideas of loyalty, duty, and the reward of faithful service, in contrast both to the treachery of the dead Thane of Cawdor and to the treacherous thoughts of the new thane. Lady Macbeth prays to be spared 'compunctious visitings of nature' [I. v. 45] and in the next scene, after the description of the 'pleasant seat' of the castle with its images of natural beauty, she expresses her gratitude and loyalty to the king. Before the murder, Macbeth reminds himself of the threefold tie of loyalty which binds him to Duncan, as kinsman, subject and host. He is afraid that the very stones will cry out against the unnaturalness of the murder, which is, in fact, accompanied by strange portents:

> Lamentings heard i' th' air, strange screams of death,
> And prophesying with accents terrible
> Of dire combustion and confus'd events
> New hatch'd to th' woeful time.
> [II. iii. 56-9]

The frequent iteration of the word 'strange' is one of the ways by which Shakespeare underlines the disruption of the natural order. (pp. 51-2)

Reference must be made to two other groups of images . . ., those relating to equivocation and those which are concerned with with the contrast between what the Porter calls desire and performance. The theme of equivocation runs all through the play. . . . [It] links up with 'the equivocation of the fiend / That lies like truth'

[V. v. 42-3], the juggling fiends 'That keep the word of promise to our ear / And break it to our hope' [V. vi 21-2], and Macbeth's own equivocation after the murder of Duncan:

> Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
> There's nothing serious in mortality—
> All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of.
> [II. iii. 91-6]

Macbeth's intention is to avert suspicion from himself by following his wife's advice to make their 'griefs and clamour roar upon' Duncan's death [I. vii. 78]. But, as he speaks the words, the audience knows that he has unwittingly spoken the truth. Instead of lying like truth, he has told the truth while intending to deceive. As he expresses it later, when full realization has come to him, life has become meaningless, a succession of empty tomorrows, 'a tale told by an idiot' [V. v. 26-7].

The gap between desire and performance, enunciated by the Porter, is expressed over and over again by Macbeth and his wife. It takes the form, most strikingly, in the numerous passages contrasting eye and hand, culminating in Macbeth's cry—

> What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes—
> [II. ii. 56]

and in the scene before the murder of Banquo when the bloodstained hand is no longer Macbeth's, but Night's:

> Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale.
> [III. ii. 46-50]

In the sleep-walking scene, Lady Macbeth's unavailing efforts to wash the smell of the blood from her hand symbolize the indelibility of guilt; and Angus in the next scene declares that Macbeth feels

> His secret murders sticking on his hands.
> [V. ii. 17]

The soul is damned for the deeds committed by the hand. (pp. 52-3)

A study of the imagery and symbolism in *Macbeth* does not radically alter one's interpretation of the play. It would, indeed, be suspect if it did. In reading some modern criticisms of Shakespeare one has the feeling that the critic is reading between the lines and creating from the interstices a play rather different from the one which Shakespeare wrote and similar to a play the critic himself might have written. Such interpretations lead us away from Shakespeare; they drop a veil between us and the plays; and they substitute a formula for the living reality, a philosophy or a theology instead of a dramatic presentation of life. I have not attempted to reshape *Macbeth* to a particular ideological image, nor selected parts of the play to prove a thesis. Some selection had to be made for reasons of space, but I have tried to make the selection representative of the whole.

We must not imagine, of course, that *Macbeth* is merely an elaborate pattern of imagery. It is a play; and in the theatre we ought to recover, as best we may, a state of critical innocence. We should certainly not attempt to notice the images of clothing or breast-feeding or count the allusions to blood or sleep. But, just as Shakespeare conveys to us the unconscious minds of the characters by means of the imagery, so, in watching the play, we may be totally unconscious of the patterns of imagery and yet absorb them unconsciously by means of our imaginative response to the poetry. In this way they will be subsumed under the total experience of the play. (p. 53)

Kenneth Muir, "Image and Symbol in *Macbeth*," in *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespearian Study and Production*, Vol. 19, 1966, pp. 45-54.

Macbeth

Wayne C. Booth

Put even in its simplest terms, the problem Shakespeare gave himself in *Macbeth* was a tremendous one. Take a good man, a noble man, a man admired by all who know him—and destroy him, not only physically and emotionally, as the Greeks destroyed their heroes, but also morally and intellectually. As if this were not difficult enough as a dramatic hurdle, while transforming him into one of the most despicable mortals conceivable, maintain him as a tragic hero—that is, keep him so sympathetic that, when he comes to his death, the audience will pity rather than detest him and will be relieved to see him out of his misery rather than pleased to see him destroyed. Put in Shakespeare's own terms: take a "noble" man, full of "conscience" and "the milk of human kindness" [I. v. 17], and make of him a "dead butcher" [V. ix. 35], yet keep him an object of pity rather than hatred. If we thus artificially reconstruct the problem as it might have existed before the play was written, we see that, in choosing these "terminal points" and these terminal intentions, Shakespeare makes almost impossible demands on his dramatic skill, although at the same time he insures that, if he succeeds at all, he will succeed magnificently. If the trick can be turned, it will inevitably be a great one. (p. 17)

I

The first step in convincing us that Macbeth's fall is a genuinely tragic occurrence is to convince us that there was, in reality, a fall: we must believe that Macbeth was once a man whom we could admire, a man with great potentialities. One way to convince us would have been to show him ... in action as an admirable man. But, although this is possible in a leisurely novel, it would, in a play, have wasted time needed for the important events, which begin only with Macbeth's great temptation at the conclusion of the opening battle. Thus the superior choice in this case (although it would not necessarily always be so) is to begin your representation of the action with the first real temptation to the fall and to use testimony by other characters to establish your protagonist's prior goodness. We are thus given, from the beginning, sign after sign that Macbeth's greatest nobility was reached at a point just prior to the opening of the play. When the play begins, he has already coveted the crown, as is shown by his excessively nervous reaction to the witches' prophecy; it is indeed likely that he has already considered foul means of obtaining it. But, in spite of this wickedness already present to his mind as a possibility, we have ample reason to think Macbeth a man worthy of our admiration. He is "brave" and "valiant," a "worthy gentleman"; Duncan calls him "noble Macbeth." These epithets have an ironic quality only in retrospect; when they are first applied, one has no reason to doubt them. Indeed, they are true epithets, or they would have been true if applied, say, only a few days or months earlier.

Of course, this testimony to his prior virtue given by his friends in the midst of other business would not carry the spectators for long with any sympathy for Macbeth if it were not continued in several other forms. We have the testimony of Lady Macbeth (the unimpeachable testimony of a "bad" person castigating the goodness of a "good" person):

> Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full of the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it. What thou' wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
> And yet wouldst wrongly win.
> [I. v. 16-22]

No verbal evidence would be enough, however, if we did not see in Macbeth himself signs of its validity, since we have already seen many signs that he is *not* the good man that the witnesses seem to believe. Thus the best evidence we have of his essential goodness is his vacillation before the murder. Just as Raskolnikov is tormented [in Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment*] and just as we ourselves—virtuous theater viewers—would be tormented, so Macbeth is tormented before the prospect of his own crime. Indeed, much as he wants the kingship, he decides in Scene iii against the murder:

> If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,
> Without my stir. . . .
> [I. iii. 143-44]

And when he first meets Lady Macbeth he is resolved not to murder Duncan. In fact, as powerful a rhetorician as she is, she has all she can do to get him back on the course of murder.

In addition, Macbeth's ensuing soliloquy not only weighs the possible bad practical consequences of his act but shows him perfectly aware, in a way an evil man would not be, of the moral values involved:

> He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off. . . .
> [I. vii. 12-16]

In this speech we see again, as we saw in the opening of the play, Shakespeare's wonderful economy: the very speech which shows Macbeth to best advantage is the one which shows the audience how very bad his contemplated act is, since Duncan is blameless. One need only think of the same speech if it were dealing with a king who *deserves* to be assassinated or if it were given by another character commenting on Macbeth's action, to see how right it is as it stands.

After this soliloquy Macbeth announces again to Lady Macbeth that he will not go on ("We will proceed no further in this business" [I. vii. 31]), but her eloquence is too much for him. Under her jibes at his "unmanliness," he progresses from a kind of petulant, but still honorable, boasting ("I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" [I. vii. 46-7]), through a state of amoral consideration of mere expediency ("If I should fail?" [I. vii. 59]), to complete resolution, but still with a full understanding of the wickedness of his act ("I am settled... this terrible feat" [I. vii. 80]). There is never any doubt, first that he is bludgeoned into the deed by Lady Macbeth's superior rhetoric and force of character and by the pressure of unfamiliar circumstances (including the witches) and, second, that even in the final decision to go through

with it he is extremely troubled by a guilty conscience ("*False* face must hide what the *false* heart doth know" [I. vii. 82]). In the entire dagger soliloquy he is clearly suffering from the realization of the horror of the "bloody business" ahead. He sees fully and painfully the wickedness of the course he has chosen, but not until after the deed, when the knocking has commenced, do we realize how terrifyingly alive his conscience is: "To know my deed, 't were best not know myself. / Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!" [II. ii. 70-1]. This is the wish of a "good" man who, though he has become a "bad" man, still thinks and reels as a good man would.

To cite one last example of Shakespeare's pains in this matter, we have the testimony to Macbeth's character offered by Hecate:

> And which is worse, all you have done
> Hath been but for a wayward son,
> Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
> Loves for his own ends, not for you.
> [III. v. 10-14]

This reaffirmation that Macbeth is not a true son of evil comes, interestingly enough, immediately after the murder of Banquo, at a time when the audience needs a reminder of Macbeth's fundamental nobility.

The evil of his acts is thus built upon the knowledge that he is not a naturally evil man but a man who has every potentiality for goodness. This potentiality and its frustration are the chief ingredients of the tragedy of Macbeth. Macbeth is a man whose progressive external misfortunes seem to produce, and at the same time seem to be produced by, his parallel progression from great goodness to great wickedness. Our emotional involvement (which perhaps should not be simplified under the term "pity" or "pity and fear") is thus a combination of two kinds of regret: (1) We regret that any potentially good man should come to such a bad end: "What a pity that things should have gone this way, that things should *be* this way!" (2) We regret even more the destruction of this particular man, a man who is not only morally sympathetic but also intellectually and emotionally interesting. In eliciting both these kinds of regret to such a high degree, Shakespeare goes beyond his predecessors and establishes trends which are still working themselves out in literature. The first kind—never used at all by classical dramatists, who never employed a genuinely degenerative plot—has been attempted again and again by modern novelists. Their difficulty has usually been that they have relied too completely on a general humane response in the reader and too little on a realized prior height or potentiality from which to fall. The protagonists are shown succumbing to their environment—or, as in so many "sociological" novels, already succumbed—and the reader is left to himself to infer that something worth bothering about has gone to waste, that things might have been otherwise, that there is any real reason to react emotionally to the final destruction. The second kind—almost unknown to classical dramatists, whose characters are never "original" or "fresh" in the modern sense—has been attempted in ever greater extremes since Shakespeare, until one finds many works in which mere *interest* in particular characteristics completely supplants emotional response to *events* involving men with interesting characteristics. The pathos of Bloom [in James Joyce's *Ulysses*], for example, is an attenuated pathos, just as the comedy of Bloom is an attenuated comedy; one is not primarily moved to laughter or tears by events involving great characters, as in *Macbeth*, but rather one is primarily interested in details about characters. It can be argued whether this is a gain or a loss to literature, when considered in general. Certainly, one would rather read a modern novel like *Ulysses*, with all its faults on its head, than many of the older dramas or epics involving "great" characters in "great" events. But it can hardly be denied that one of Shakespeare's triumphs is his success in doing many things at once which lesser writers have since done only one at a time. He has all the generalized effect of classical tragedy. We lament the "bad fortune" of a great man who has known good fortune. To this he adds the much more poignant (at least to us) pity one feels in observing the moral destruction of a great man who has once known goodness. And yet with all this he combines the pity one feels when one observes a highly characterized individual—whom one knows intimately, as it were, in whom one is *interested*—going to

destruction. One difference between watching Macbeth go to destruction and watching the typical modern hero, whether in the drama (say, Willy Loman [in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*]) or in the novel (say, Jake [in *The Sun Also Rises*] or any other of Hemingway's heroes), is that in *Macbeth* there is some "going." Willy Loman doesn't have very far to fall; he begins the play on the verge of suicide, and at the end of the play he has committed suicide. Even if we assume that the "beginning" is the time covered in the earliest of the flashbacks, we have not "far to go" from there to Willy's destruction. It is true that our contemporary willingness to exalt the potentialities of the average man makes Willy's fall seem to *us* a greater one than it really is, dramatically. But the reliance on convention will, of course, sooner or later dictate a decline in the play's effectiveness. *Macbeth* continues to be effective at least in part because everything necessary for a complete response to a complete action is given to us. A highly individualized, noble man is sent to complete moral, intellectual, and physical destruction.

II

But no matter how carefully the terminal points of the drama are selected and impressed on the spectator's mind, the major problem of how to represent such a "plot" still remains. Shakespeare has the tremendous task of trying to keep two contradictory dynamic streams moving simultaneously: the stream of events showing Macbeth's growing wickedness and the stream of circumstances producing and maintaining our sympathy for him. In effect, each succeeding atrocity, marking another step toward complete depravity, must be so surrounded by contradictory circumstances as to make us feel that, in spite of the evidence before our eyes, Macbeth is still somehow admirable.

The first instance of this is the method of treating Duncan's murder. The chief point here is Shakespeare's care in avoiding any "rendering" or representation of the murder itself. It is, in fact, not even narrated. We *hear* only the details of how the guards reacted and how Macbeth reacted to their cries. We *see* nothing. There is nothing about the actual dagger strokes; there is no report of the dying cries of the good old king. We have only Macbeth's conscience-stricken lament for having committed the deed. Thus what would be an intolerable act if depicted with any vividness becomes relatively bearable when seen only afterward in the light of Macbeth's suffering and remorse. This may seem ordinary enough; it is always convenient to have murders take place offstage. But if one compares the handling of this scene, where the perpetrator must remain sympathetic, with the handling of the blinding of Gloucester [in *King Lear*], where the perpetrators must be hated, one can see how important such a detail can be. The blinding of Gloucester is not so wicked an act, in itself, as murder. If we had seen, say, a properly motivated Goneril come in from offstage wringing her hands and crying, "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more' [cf. *Macbeth*, II. ii. 32]. Goneril does put out the eyes of sleep... I am afraid to think what I have done," and on thus for nearly a full scene, our reaction to the whole episode would, needless to say, be exactly contrary to what it now is.

A second precaution is the highly general portrayal of Duncan before his murder. It is necessary only that he be known as a "good king," the murder of whom will be a wicked act. He must be the *type* of benevolent monarch. But more particular characteristics are carefully kept from him. There is nothing for us to love, nothing for us to "want further existence for," within the play. We hear of his goodness; we do not see it. We know practically no details about him, and we have little, if any, personal interest in him at the time of his death. All the personal interest is reserved for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. So, again, the wickedness is played up in the narration but played down in the representation. We must identify Macbeth with the murder of a blameless king, but only intellectually; emotionally we should be concerned as far as is possible only with the *effects on Macbeth*, We *know* that he has done the deed, but we *feel* primarily only his own suffering.

Banquo is considerably more "particularized" than was Duncan. Not only is he also a good man, but we have seen him acting as a good man, and we know quite a lot about him. We saw his reaction to the witches, and we know that he has resisted temptations similar to those of Macbeth. We have seen him in conversation with Macbeth. We have heard him in soliloquy. We know him to be very much like Macbeth, both in valor and in being the subject of prophecy. He thus has our lively sympathy; his death is a personal, rather than a general,

loss. Perhaps more important, his murder is actually shown on the stage. His dying words are spoken in our presence, and they are unselfishly directed to saving his son. We are forced to the proper, though illogical, inference: it is more wicked to kill Banquo than to have killed Duncan.

But we must still not lose our sympathy for Macbeth. This is partially provided for by the fact that the deed is much more necessary than the previous murder; Banquo is a real political danger. But the important thing is again the choice of what is represented. The murder is done by accomplices, so that Macbeth is never *shown* in any real act of wickedness. When we see him, he is suffering the torments of the banquet table. Our incorrect emotional inference: the self-torture has already expiated the guilt of the crime.

The same devices work in the murder of Lady Macduff and her children, the third and last atrocity explicitly shown in the play (except for the killing of young Siward, which, being military, is hardly an atrocity in this sense). Lady Macduff is more vividly portrayed even than Banquo, although she appears on the stage for a much briefer time. Her complaints against the absence of her husband, her loving banter with her son, and her stand against the murderers make her as admirable as the little boy himself, who dies in defense of his father's name. The murder of women and children of such quality is wicked indeed, the audience is made to feel. And when we move to England and see the effect of the atrocity on Macduff, our active pity for Macbeth's victims is at the high point of the play. For the first time, perhaps, pity for Macbeth's victims really wars with pity for him, and our desire for his downfall, to protect others and to protect himself from his own further misdeeds, begins to mount in consequence.

Yet even here Macbeth is kept as little "to blame" as possible. He does not do the deed himself, and we can believe that he would have been unable to, had he seen the wife and child as we have seen them. . . . He is much further removed from them than from his other victims: as far as we know, he has never seen them. They are as remote and impersonal to him as they are immediate and personal to the audience, and personal blame against him is thus attenuated. More important, however, immediately after Macduff's tears we shift to Lady Macbeth's scene—the effect being again to impress on us the fact that the punishment for these crimes is always as great as, or greater than, the crimes themselves. Thus all three crimes are followed immediately by scenes of suffering and self-torture. Shakespeare works almost as if he were following a master-rulebook: By your choice of what to represent from the materials provided in your story, insure that each step in your protagonist's degeneration will be counteracted by mounting pity for him.

All this would certainly suffice to keep Macbeth at the center of our interest and sympathy, even with all our mounting concern for his victims. But it is reinforced by qualities in his character separate and distinct from his moral qualities. Perhaps the most important of these is his gift... of expressing himself in great poetry. We naturally tend to feel with the character who speaks the best poetry of the play, no matter what his deeds (Iago would never be misplayed as protagonist if his poetry did not rival, and sometimes surpass, Othello's). When we add to this poetic gift an extremely rich and concrete set of characteristics, over and above his moral qualities, we have a character which is in its own way more sympathetic than any character portrayed in only moral colors could be. Even the powers of virtue gathering about his castle to destroy him seem petty compared with his mammoth sensitivity, his rich despair. When he says:

> my way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf:
> And that which should accompany old age.
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.
> I must not look to have.
> [V. iii. 22-6]

we feel that he wants these things quite as honestly and a good deal more passionately than even the most virtuous man could want them. And we regret deeply the truth of his conclusion that he "must not look to

have" them.

III

If Macbeth's initial nobility, the manner of representation of his atrocities, and his rich poetic gift are all calculated to create and sustain our sympathy for him throughout his movement toward destruction, the kind of mistake he makes in initiating his own destruction is equally well calculated to heighten our willingness to forgive while deploring. On one level it could, of course, be said that he errs simply in being overambitious and underscrupulous. But this is only partly true. What allows him to sacrifice his moral beliefs to his ambition is a mistake of another kind—of a kind which is, at least to modern spectators, more probable or credible than any conventional tragic flaw or any traditional tragic error such as mistaking the identity of a brother or not knowing that one's wife is ones mother. Macbeth knows what he is doing, yet he does not know. He knows the immorality of the act, but he has no conception of the effects of the act on himself or on his surroundings. Accustomed to murder of a "moral" sort, in battle, and having valorously and successfully "carv'd out his passage" with "bloody execution" [I. ii. 18-19] many times previously, he misunderstands completely what will be the devastating effect on his own character if he tries to carve out his passage in civil life. The murder of Duncan on one level resembles closely the kind of thing Macbeth has done professionally, and he lacks the insight to see the great difference between the two kinds of murder. He cannot foresee that success in the first murder will only lead to the speech "to be thus is nothing; But to be safely thus" [III. i. 47-8], and to ever increasing degradation and suffering for himself and for those around him. Even though he has a kind of double premonition of the effects of the deed both on his own conscience and on Duncan's subjects ("If it were done when 't is done, then 't were well..." [I. vii. lff.]), he does not really understand. If he did understand, he could not do the deed.

This ignorance is made more convincing by being extended to a misunderstanding of the forces leading him to the murder. Macbeth does not really understand that he has two spurs "to prick the sides" of his intent [I. vii. 26], besides his own vaulting ambition. The first of these is, of course, the witches and their prophecy. A good deal of nonsense has been written about these witches, some in the direction of making them totally responsible for the action of Macbeth and some making them merely a fantastical representation of Macbeth's mental state. Yet they are quite clearly real and objective, since they say and do things which Macbeth could know nothing about—such as their presentation of the ambiguous facts of Macduff's birth and the Birnam wood trick. And equally they are not "fate," alone responsible for what happens to Macbeth. He deliberately chooses from what they have to say only those things which he wishes to hear; and he has already felt the ambition to be king and even possibly to become king through regicide. Dramatically they seem to be here both as a needed additional goad to his ambition and as a concrete instance of Macbeth's tragic misunderstanding. His deliberate and consistent mistaking of what they have to say objectifies for us his misunderstanding of everything about his situation. He should realize that, if they are true oracles, *both* parts of their prophecy *must* be fulfilled. He makes the mistake of acting criminally to bring about the first part of the prophecy, and then acting criminally to prevent the fulfilment of the second part, concerning Banquo. But only if they were not true oracles would the slaying of Duncan be necessary or the slaying of Banquo be of any use. Macbeth tries to pick and choose from their promises, and they thus aid him in his self-destruction.

The second force which Macbeth does not understand, and without which he would find himself incapable of the murder, is Lady Macbeth. She, of course, fills several functions in the play, besides her inherent interest as a character, which is great indeed. But her chief function, as the textbook commonplace quite rightly has it, is to incite Macbeth to the murder of Duncan. Shakespeare has realized the best possible form for this incitation. She does not urge Macbeth with pictures of the pleasures of rewarded ambition; she does not allow his thoughts to remain on the moral aspects of the problem, as they would if he were left to himself. Rather, she shifts the whole ground of the consideration to questions of Macbeth's valor. She twits him for cowardice, plays upon the word "man," making it seem that he becomes more a man by doing the manly deed. She exaggerates her own courage (although significantly she does not offer to do the murder herself), to make him fear to seem cowardly by comparison. Macbeth's whole reputation for bravery seems at last to be at stake, and

even questions of success and failure are made to hang on his courage: "But screw your courage to the sticking-place / And we'll not fail" [I. vii. 60-1]. So that the whole of his past achievement seems to depend for its meaning on his capacity to go ahead with the contemplated act. He performs the act, and from that point his final destruction is certain.

His tragic error, then, is at least three-fold: he does not understand the forces working upon him to make him commit the deed, neither his wife nor the weird sisters; he does not understand the differences between "bloody execution" in civilian life and in his past military life; and he does not understand his own character—he does not know what will be the effects of the evil act on his own future happiness. Only one of these—the misunderstanding of the witches' prophecy—can be considered similar to, say, Iphigenia's ignorance of her brother's identity [in Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris*]. Shakespeare has realized that simple ignorance of that sort will not do for the richly complex degenerative plot. The hero here must be really aware of the wickedness of his act, in advance. The more aware he can be—and still commit the act convincingly—the greater the regret felt by the reader or spectator. Being thus aware, he must act under a special kind of misunderstanding: it must be a misunderstanding caused by such powerful forces that even a good man might credibly be deceived by them into "knowingly" performing an atrocious deed.

All these points are illustrated powerfully in the contrast between the final words of Malcolm concerning Macbeth—"This dead butcher and his fiendlike queen" [V. ix. 35]—and the spectator's own feelings toward Macbeth at the same point. One judges Macbeth, as Shakespeare intends, not merely for his wicked acts but in the light of the total impression of all the incidents of the play. Malcolm and Macduff do not know Macbeth and the forces that have worked on him; the spectator does know him and, knowing him, can feel great pity that a man with so much potentiality for greatness should have fallen so low. The pity is that everything was not otherwise, since it so easily could have been otherwise. Macbeth's whole life, from the time of the first visitation of the witches, is felt to be itself a tragic error, one big pitiful mistake. And the conclusion brings a flood of relief that the awful blunder has played itself out, that Macbeth has at last been able to die, still valiant, and is forced no longer to go on enduring the knowledge of the consequences of his own misdeeds. (pp. 18-25)

Wayne C. Booth, "Macbeth as Tragic Hero," in *The Journal of General Education*, Vol. VI, No. 1, October, 1951, pp. 17-25.

Mary McCarthy

He is a general and has just won a battle; he enters the scene making a remark about the weather. "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" [I. iii. 38]. On this flat note Macbeth's character tone is set. "Terrible weather we're having." "The sun can't seem to make up its mind." "Is it hot/cold/wet enough for you?" A commonplace man who talks in commonplaces, a golfer, one might guess, on the Scottish fairways, Macbeth is the only Shakespeare hero who corresponds to a bourgeois type: a murderous Babbitt [in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*], let us say.

You might argue just the opposite, that Macbeth is over-imaginative, the prey of visions. It is true that he is impressionable. Banquo, when they come upon the witches, amuses himself at their expense, like a man of parts idly chaffing a fortuneteller. Macbeth, though, is deeply impressed. "Thane of Cawdor and King." He thinks this over aloud. "How can I be Thane of Cawdor when the Thane of Cawdor is alive?" [cf. I. iii. 72-5] When this mental stumbling-block has been cleared away for him (the Thane of Cawdor has received a death sentence), he turns his thoughts *sotto voce* [under his breath] to the next question. "How can I be King when Duncan is alive?" The answer comes back, "Kill him" [cf. I. iii. 137-42]. It does fleetingly occur to Macbeth, as it would to most people, to leave matters alone and let destiny work it out. "If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me, Without my stir" [I. iii. 143-44]. But this goes against his grain. A reflective man might wonder how fate would spin her plot, as the Virgin Mary must have wondered after the Angel Gabriel's visit. But Macbeth does not trust to fate, that is, to the unknown, the mystery of things; he trusts only to a

known quantity—himself—to put the prophecy into action. In short, he has no faith, which requires imagination. He is literal-minded; that, in a word, is his tragedy.

It was not *his* idea, he could plead in self-defense, but the witches', that he should have the throne. *They* said it first. But the witches only voiced a thought that was already in his mind; after all, he was Duncan's cousin and close to the crown. And once the thought has been put into *words*, he is in a scrambling hurry. He cannot wait to get home to tell his wife about the promise; in his excitement, he puts it in a letter, which he sends on ahead, like a businessman briefing an associate on a piece of good news for the firm.

Lady Macbeth takes very little stock in the witches. She never pesters her husband, as most wives would, with questions about the Weird Sisters: "What did they say, exactly?" "How did they look?" "Are you sure?" She is less interested in "fate and metaphysical aid" [I. v. 29] than in the business at hand—how to nerve her husband to do what he wants to do. And later, when Macbeth announces that he is going out to consult the Weird Sisters again, she refrains from comment. As though she were keeping her opinion—"O proper stuff!" [III. iv. 59]—to herself. Lady Macbeth is not superstitious. Macbeth is. This makes her repeatedly impatient with him, for Macbeth, like many men of his sort, is an old story to his wife. A tale full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Her contempt for him perhaps extends even to his ambition. "Wouldst not play false, And yet wouldst wrongly win" [I. v. 21-2]. As though to say, "All right, if that's what you want, have the courage to get it." Lady Macbeth does not so much give the impression of coveting the crown herself as of being weary of watching Macbeth covet it. Macbeth, by the way, is her second husband, and either her first husband was a better man than he, which galls her, or he was just another general, another superstitious golfer, which would gall her too.

Superstition here is the opposite of reason on the one hand and of imagination on the other. Macbeth is credulous, in contrast to Lady Macbeth, to Banquo, and, later, to Malcolm, who sets the audience an example of the right way by mistrusting Macduff until he has submitted him to an empirical test. Believing and knowing are paired in Malcolm's mind; what he *knows* he believes. Macbeth's eagerness to believe is the companion of his lack of faith. If all works out right for him in this world, Macbeth says, he can take a chance on the next ("We'd jump the life to come" [I. vii. 7]). Superstition whispers when true religion has been silenced, and Macbeth becomes a ready client for the patent medicines brewed by the jeering witches on the heath.

As in his first interview with them he is too quick to act literally on a dark saying, in the second he is too easily reassured. He will not be conquered till "great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him." "Why, that can never happen!" [cf. IV. i. 92-4] he cries out in immediate relief, his brow clearing.

It never enters his mind to examine the saying more closely, test it, so to speak, for a double bottom, as was common in those days (Banquo even points this out to him) with prophetic utterances which were known, to be ambiguous and tricky. Any child knew that a prophecy often meant the reverse of what it seemed to say, and any man of imagination would ask himself how Birnam Wood *might* come to Dunsinane and take measures to prevent it, as King Laius took measures to prevent his own death by arranging to have the baby Oedipus killed [in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*]. If Macbeth had thought it out, he could have had Birnam Wood chopped down and burned on the spot and the ashes dumped into the sea. True, the prophecy might still have turned against him.... but that would have been another story, another tragedy, the tragedy of a clever man not clever enough to circumvent fate. Macbeth is not clever; he is taken in by surfaces, by appearance. He cannot think beyond the usual course of things. "None of woman born" [IV. i. 80]. All men, he says to himself, sagely, are born of women; Malcolm and Macduff are men; therefore I am safe. This logic leaves out of account the extraordinary: the man brought into the world by Caesarean section. In the same way, it leaves out of account the supernatural—the very forces he is trafficking with. He might be overcome by an angel or a demon, as well as by Macduff.

Yet this pedestrian general sees ghosts and imaginary daggers in the air. Lady Macbeth does not, and the tendency in her husband grates on her nerves; she is sick of his terrors and fancies. A practical woman, Lady Macbeth, more a partner than a wife, though Macbeth treats her with a trite domestic fondness—"Love," "Dearest love," "Dearest chuck," "Sweet remembrancer." These middle-aged, middle-class endearments, as though he called her "Honeybunch" or "Sweetheart," as well as the obligatory "Dear," are a master stroke of Shakespeare's and perfectly in keeping with the prosing about the weather, the heavy credulousness.

Naturally Macbeth is dominated by his wife. He is old Iron Pants in the field (as she bitterly reminds him), but at home *she* has to wear the pants; she has to unsex herself. No "chucks" or "dearests" escape her tightened lips, and yet she is more feeling, more human finally than Macbeth. She thinks of her father when she sees the old King asleep, and this natural thought will not let her kill him. Macbeth has to do it, just as the quailing husband of any modern virago is sent down to the basement to kill a rat or drown a set of kittens. An image of her father, irrelevant to her purpose, softens this monster woman; sleepwalking, she thinks of Lady Macduff. "The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?" [cf. IV. i. 150-53]. Stronger than Macbeth, less suggestible, she is nevertheless imaginative, where he is not. She does not see ghosts and daggers; when she sleepwalks, it is simple reality that haunts her—the crime relived. "Yet, who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" [V. i. 39-40]. Over and over, the epiphenomena of the crime present themselves to her dormant consciousness. This nightly reliving is not penitence but more terrible—remorse, the agenbite of the restless deed. Lady Macbeth's uncontrollable imagination drives her to put herself in the place of others—the wife of the Thane of Fife—and to recognize a kinship between all human kind: the pathos of old age in Duncan has made her think, "Why, he might be my father!" This sense of a natural bond between men opens her to contrition—sorrowing with. To ask whether, waking, she is "sorry" for what she has done is impertinent. She lives with it and it kills her.

Macbeth has no feeling for others, except envy, a common middle-class trait. He *envies* the murdered Duncan his rest, which is a strange way of looking at your victim. What he suffers on his own account after the crimes is simple panic. He is never contrite or remorseful; it is not the deed but a shadow of it, Banquo's spook, that appears to him. The "scruples" that agitate him before Duncan's murder are mere echoes of conventional opinion, of what might be *said* about his deed: that Duncan was his king, his cousin, and a guest under his roof. "I have bought golden opinions," he says to himself (note the verb), "from all sorts of people" [I. vii. 32-3]; now these people may ask for their opinions back—a refund—if they suspect him of the murder. It is like a business firm's being reluctant to part with its "good will." The fact that Duncan was such a good king bothers him, and why? Because there will be universal grief at his death. But his chief "scruple" is even simpler. "If we should fail?" he says timidly to Lady Macbeth [I. vii. 59]. Sweet chuck tells him that they will not. Yet once she has ceased to be effectual as a partner, Dearest love is an embarrassment. He has no time for her vapors. "Cure her of that" [V. iii. 39], he orders the doctor on hearing that she is troubled by "fancies." Again the general is speaking.

The idea of Macbeth as a conscience-tormented man is a platitude as false as Macbeth himself. Macbeth has no conscience. His main concern throughout the play is that most selfish of all concerns: to get a good night's sleep. His invocation to sleep, while heartfelt, is perfectly conventional; sleep builds you up, enables you to start the day fresh. Thus the virtue of having a good conscience is seen by him in terms of bodily hygiene. Lady Macbeth shares these preoccupations. When he tells her he is going to see the witches, she remarks that he needs sleep.

Her wifely concern is mechanical and far from real solicitude. She is aware of Macbeth; she *knows* him (he does not know her at all, apparently), but she regards him coldly as a thing, a tool that must be oiled and polished. His soul-states do not interest her; her attention is narrowed on his morale, his public conduct, the shifting expressions of his face. But in a sense she is right, for there is nothing to Macbeth but fear and ambition, both of which he tries to hide, except from her. This naturally gives her a poor opinion of the inner man.

Why is it, though, that Lady Macbeth seems to us a monster while Macbeth does not? Partly because she is a woman and has "unsexed" herself, which makes her a monster by definition. Also because the very prospect of murder quickens an hysterical excitement in her, like the discovery of some object in a shop—a set of emeralds or a sable stole—which Macbeth can give her and which will be an "outlet" for all the repressed desires he cannot satisfy. She behaves as though Macbeth, through his weakness, will deprive her of self-realization; the unimpeded exercise of her will is the voluptuous end she seeks. That is why she makes naught of scruples, as inner brakes on her throbbing engines. Unlike Macbeth, she does not pretend to harbor a conscience, though this, on her part, by a curious turn, *is* a pretense, as the sleepwalking scene reveals. After the first crime, her will subsides, spent; the devil has brought her to climax and left her.

Macbeth is not a monster, like Richard III or Iago or Iachimo [in *Cymbeline*], though in the catalogue he might go for one because of the blackness of his deeds. But at the outset his deeds are only the wishes and fears of the average, undistinguished man translated into halfhearted action. Pure evil is a kind of transcendence that he does not aspire to. He only wants to be king and sleep the sleep of the just, undisturbed. He could never have been a good man, even if he had not met the witches; hence we cannot see him as a devil incarnate, for the devil is a fallen angel. Macbeth does not fall; if anything, he somewhat improves as the result of his career of crime. He throws oif his dependency and thus achieves the "greatness" he mistakenly sought in the crown and scepter. He swells to vast proportions, having supped full with horrors.

The isolation of Macbeth, which is at once a punishment and a tragic dignity or honor, takes place by stages and by deliberate choice; it begins when he does not tell Lady Macbeth that he has decided to kill Banquo and reaches its peak at Dunsinane, in the final action. Up to this time, though he has cut himself off from all human contacts, he is counting on the witches as allies. When he first hears the news that Macduff is not "of woman born" [V. viii. 12-15], he is unmanned; everything he trusted (the literal word) has betrayed him, and he screams in terror, "I'll not fight with thee!" [V. viii. 22]. But Macduff's taunts make a hero of him; he cannot die like this, shamed. His death is his first true act of courage, though even here he has had to be pricked to it by mockery, Lady Macbeth's old spur. Nevertheless, weaned by his very crimes from a need for reassurance, nursed in a tyrant's solitude, he meets death on his own, without metaphysical aid. "Lay on, Macduff" [V. viii. 33].

What is modern and bourgeois in Macbeth's character is his wholly *social* outlook. He has no feeling for others, and yet until the end he is a vicarious creature, existing in his own eyes through what others may say of him, through what they tell him or promise him. This paradox is typical of the social being—at once a wolf out for himself and a sheep. Macbeth, moreover, is an expert buck-passer; he sees how others can be used. It is he, not Lady Macbeth, who thinks of smearing the drunken chamberlains with blood (though it is she, in the end, who carries it out), so that they shall be caught "red-handed" the next morning when Duncan's murder is discovered. At this idea he brightens; suddenly, he sees his way clear. It is the moment when at last he decides. The eternal executive, ready to fix responsibility on a subordinate, has seen the deed finally take a *recognizable* form. Now he can do it. And the crackerjack thought of killing the grooms afterward (dead men tell no tales—old adage) is again purely his own on-the-spot inspiration; no credit to Lady Macbeth.

It is the sort of thought that would have come to Hamlet's Uncle Claudius, another trepidant executive. Indeed, Macbeth is more like Claudius than like any other character in Shakespeare. Both are doting husbands; both rose to power by betraying their superior's trust; both are easily frightened and have difficulty saying their prayers. Macbeth's "Amen" sticks in his throat, he complains, and Claudius, on his knees, sighs that he cannot make what priests call a "good act of contrition." The desire to say his prayers like any pew-holder, quite regardless of his horrible crime, is merely a longing for respectability. Macbeth "repents" killing the grooms, but this is for public consumption. "O, yet I do repent me of my fury, That I did kill them" [II. iii. 106-07]. In fact, it is the one deed he does *not* repent (*i.e.,* doubt the wisdom of) either before or after. This hypocritical self-accusation, which is his sidelong way of announcing the embarrassing fact that he has just done away with the grooms, and his simulated grief at Duncan's murder ("All is but toys. Renown and

grace is dead, The wine of life is drawn" [II. iii. 94-5], etc.) are his basest moments in the play, as well as his boldest; here is nearly a magnificent monster.

The dramatic effect too is one of great boldness on Shakespeare's part. Macbeth is speaking pure Shakespearean poetry, but in his mouth, since we know he is lying, it turns into facile verse, Shakespearean poetry buskined. The same with "Here lay Duncan, His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood..." [II. iii. 111-12]. If the image were given to Macduff, it would be uncontaminated poetry; from Macbeth it is "proper stuff"—fustian. This opens the perilous question of sincerity in the arts; is a line of verse altered for us by the sincerity of the one who speaks it? In short, is poetry relative to the circumstances or absolute? Or, more particularly, are Macbeth's soliloquies poetry, which they sound like, or something else? Did Shakespeare intend to make Macbeth a poet, like Hamlet, Lear, and Othello? In that case, how can Macbeth be an unimaginative mediocrity? My opinion is that Macbeth's soliloquies are not poetry but rhetoric. They are tirades. That is, they do not trace any pensive motion of the soul or heart but are a volley of words discharged. Macbeth is neither thinking nor feeling aloud: he is declaiming. Like so many unfeeling men, he has a facile emotionalism, which he turns on and off. Not that his fear is insincere, but his loss of control provides him with an excuse for histrionics.

These gibberings exasperate Lady Macbeth. "What do you mean?" [II. ii. 37] she says coldly after she has listened to a short harangue on "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!'" [II. ii. 32]. It is an allowable question—what *does* he mean? And his funeral oration on *her*, if she could have heard it, would have brought her back to life to protest. "She should have died hereafter" [V. v. 17]—fine, that was the real Macbeth. But then, as if conscious of the proprieties, he at once begins on a series of bromides ("Tomorrow, and tomorrow..." [V. v. 19ff.]) that he seems to have had ready to hand for the occasion like a black mourning suit. All Macbeth's soliloquies have that ready-to-hand, if not hand-me-down, air, which is perhaps why they are given to school children to memorize, often with the result of making them hate Shakespeare. What children resent in these soliloquies is precisely their sententiousness—the sound they have of being already memorized from a copybook. (pp. 3-12)

The play between poetry and rhetoric, the *conversion* of poetry to declamation, is subtle and horrible in *Macbeth*. The sincere pent-up poet in Macbeth flashes out not in the soliloquies but when he howls at a servant. "The Devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon! Where got'st thou that goose look?" [V. iii. 11]. Elsewhere, the general's tropes are the gold braid of his dress uniform or the chasing of his armor. If an explanation is needed, you might say he learned to *use* words through long practice in haranguing his troops, whipping them and himself into battle frenzy. Up to recent times a fighting general, like a football coach, was an orator.

But it must be noted that it is not only Macbeth who rants. Nor is it only Macbeth who talks about the weather. The play is stormy with atmosphere—the screaming and shrieking of owls, the howling of winds. Nature herself is ranting, like the witches, and Night, black Hecate, is queen of the scene. Bats are flitting about; ravens and crows are hoarse; the house-martins' nests on the battlements of Macbeth's castle give a misleading promise of peace and gentle domesticity. "It will be rain tonight," says Banquo simply, looking at the sky (note the difference between this and Macbeth's pompous generality), and the First Murderer growls at him, striking, "Let it come down" [III. iii. 16]. The disorder of Nature, as so often in Shakespeare, presages and reflects the disorder of the body politic. Guilty Macbeth cannot sleep, but the night of Duncan's murder, the whole house, as if guilty too, is restless; Malcolm and Donalbain talk and laugh in their sleep; the drunken porter, roused, plays that he is gatekeeper of hell.

Indeed, the whole action takes place in a kind of hell and is pitched to the demons' shriek of hyperbole. This would appear to be a peculiar setting for a study of the commonplace. But only at first sight. The fact that an ordinary philistine like Macbeth goes on the rampage and commits a series of murders is a sign that human nature, like Nature, is capable of any mischief if left to its "natural" self. The witches, unnatural beings, are

Nature spirits, stirring their snake-filet and owl's wing, newt's eye and frog toe in a camp stew: earthy ingredients boil down to an unearthly broth. It is the same with the man Macbeth. Ordinary ambition, fear, and a kind of stupidity make a deadly combination. Macbeth, a self-made king, is not kingly, but just another Adam or Fall guy, with Eve at his elbow.

There is no play of Shakespeare's (I think) that contains the words "Nature" and "natural" so many times, and the "Nature" within the same speech can mean first something good and then something evil, as though it were a pun. Nature is two-sided, double-talking, like the witches. "Fair is foul and foul is fair," they cry [I. i. 11], and Macbeth enters the play unconsciously echoing them, for he is never original but chock-full of the "milk of human kindness" [I. v. 17], which does not mean kindness in the modern sense but simply human "nature," human kind. The play is about Nature, and its blind echo, human nature.

Macbeth, in short, shows life in the cave. Without religion, animism rules the outer world, and without faith, the human soul is beset by hobgoblins. This at any rate was Shakespeare's opinion, to which modern history, with the return of the irrational in the Fascist nightmare and its fear of new specters in the form of Communism, Socialism, etc., lends support. It is a troubling thought that bloodstained Macbeth, of all Shakespeare's characters, should seem the most "modern," the only one you could transpose into contemporary battle dress or a sport shirt and slacks. (pp. 12-14)

Mary McCarthy, "General Macbeth, "in her *The Writing on the Wall and Other Literary Essays*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970, pp. 3-14.

Lady Macbeth

Maternal power in *Macbeth* is not embodied in the figure of a particular mother (as it is, for example, in *Coriolanus*); it is instead diffused throughout the play, evoked primarily by the figures of the witches and Lady Macbeth. Largely through Macbeth's relationship to them, the play becomes (like *Coriolanus*) a representation of primitive fears about male identity and autonomy itself, about those looming female presences who threaten to control one's actions and one's mind, to constitute one's very self, even at a distance. (p. 90)

The witches constitute our introduction to the realm of maternal malevolence unleashed by the loss of paternal protection; as soon as Macbeth meets them, he becomes. . . their "wayward son" [III. v. 11]. This maternal malevolence is given its most horrifying expression in Shakespeare in the image through which Lady Macbeth secures her control over Macbeth:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
> As you have done to this.
> [I. vii. 54-9]

This image of murderously disrupted nurturance is the psychic equivalence of the witches' poisonous cauldron; both function to subject Macbeth's will to female forces. For the play strikingly constructs the fantasy of subjection to maternal malevolence in two parts, in the witches and in Lady Macbeth, and then persistently identifies the two parts as one. Through this identification, Shakespeare in effect locates the source of his culture's fear of witchcraft in individual human history, in the infant's long dependence on female figures felt as all-powerful: what the witches suggest about the vulnerability of men to female power

on the cosmic plane, Lady Macbeth doubles on the psychological plane.

Lady Macbeth's power as a female temptress allies her in a general way with the witches as soon as we see her. The specifics of that implied alliance begin to emerge as she attempts to harden herself in preparation for hardening her husband: the disturbance of gender that Banquo registers when he first meets the witches is played out in psychological terms in Lady Macbeth's attempt to unsex herself. Calling on spirits ambiguously allied with the witches themselves, she phrases this unsexing as the undoing of her own bodily maternal function:

> Come, you Spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here.
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, topfull
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse;
> That no compunctious visitings of Nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers.
> [I. v. 40-8]

In the play's context of unnatural births, the thickening of the blood and the stopping up of access and passage to remorse begin to sound like attempts to undo reproductive functioning and perhaps to stop the menstrual blood that is the sign of its potential. The metaphors in which Lady Macbeth frames the stopping up of remorse, that is, suggest that she imagines an attack on the reproductive passages of her own body, on what makes her specifically female. And as she invites the spirits to her breasts, she reiterates the centrality of the attack specifically on maternal function: needing to undo the "milk of human kindness" [I. v. 17] in Macbeth, she imagines an attack on her own literal milk, its transformation into gall. This imagery locates the horror of the scene in Lady Macbeth's unnatural abrogation of her maternal function. But latent within this image of unsexing is the horror of the maternal function itself. Most modern editors follow [Samuel] Johnson in glossing "take my milk for gall" as "take my milk in exchange for gall," imagining in effect that the spirits empty out the natural maternal fluid and replace it with the unnatural and poisonous, one. But perhaps Lady Macbeth is asking the spirits to take her milk as gall, to nurse from her breast and find in her milk their sustaining poison. Here the milk itself is the gall; no transformation is necessary. In these lines Lady Macbeth focuses the culture's fear of maternal nursery—a fear reflected, for example, in the common worries about the various ills (including female blood itself) that could be transmitted through nursing and in the sometime identification of colostrum as witch's milk. Insofar as her milk itself nurtures the evil spirits, Lady Macbeth localizes the image of maternal danger, inviting the identification of her maternal function itself with that of the witch. For she here invites precisely that nursing of devil-imps so central to the current understanding of witchcraft that the presence of supernumerary teats alone was often taken as sufficient evidence that one was a witch. Lady Macbeth and the witches fuse at this moment, and they fuse through the image of perverse nursery.

It is characteristic of the play's division of labor between Lady Macbeth and the witches that she; rather than they, is given the imagery of perverse nursery traditionally attributed to the witches. The often noted alliance between Lady Macbeth and the witches constructs malignant female power both in the cosmos and in the family; it in effect adds the whole weight of the spiritual order to the condemnation of Lady Macbeth's insurrection. But despite the superior cosmic status of the witches, Lady Macbeth seems to me finally the more frightening figure. For Shakespeare's witches are an odd mixture of the terrifying and the near comic. Even without consideration of the Hecate scene [III. v] with its distinct lightening of tone and its incipient comedy of discord among the witches, we may begin to feel a shift toward the comic in the presentation of the witches: the specificity and predictability of the ingredients in their dire recipe pass over toward grotesque

comedy even while they create a (partly pleasurable) shiver of horror. There is a distinct weakening of their power after their first appearances: only halfway through the play, in [IV. i], do we hear that they themselves have masters [IV. i. 63]. The more Macbeth claims for them, the less their actual power seems: by the time Macbeth evokes the cosmic damage they can wreak [IV. i. 50-61], we have already felt the presence of such damage, and felt it moreover not as issuing from the witches but as a divinely sanctioned nature's expressions of outrage at the disruption of patriarchal order. The witches' displays of thunder and lightning, like their apparitions, are mere theatrics compared to what we have already heard; and the serious disruptions of natural order—the storm that toppled the chimneys and made the earth shake [II. iii. 54-61], the unnatural darkness in day [II. iv. 5-10], the cannibalism of Duncan's horses [II. iv. 14-18]—seem the horrifying but reassuringly familiar signs of God's displeasure, firmly under His—not their—control. Partly because their power is thus circumscribed, nothing the witches say or do conveys the presence of awesome and unexplained malevolence in the way that Lear's storm does. Even the process of dramatic representation itself may diminish their power: embodied, perhaps, they lack full power to terrify: "Present fears"—even of witches—"are less than horrible imaginings" [I. iii. 137-38]. They tend thus to become as much containers for as expressions of nightmare; to a certain extent, they help to exorcise the terror of female malevolence by localizing it. (pp. 96-9)

Lady Macbeth brings the witches' power home: they get the cosmic apparatus, she gets the psychic force. That Lady Macbeth is the more frightening figure—and was so, I suspect, even before belief in witchcraft had declined—suggests the firmly domestic and psychological basis of Shakespeare's imagination.

The fears of female coercion, female definition of the male, that are initially located cosmically in the witches thus find their ultimate locus in the figure of Lady Macbeth, whose attack on Macbeth's virility is the source of her strength over him and who acquires that strength, I shall argue, partly because she can make him imagine himself as an infant vulnerable to her. In the figure of Lady Macbeth, that is, Shakespeare rephrases the power of the witches as the wife/mother's power to poison human relatedness at its source: in her, their power of cosmic coercion is rewritten as the power of the mother to misshape or destroy the child. The attack on infants and on the genitals characteristic of Continental witchcraft belief is thus in her returned to its psychological source: in the play these beliefs are localized not in the witches but in the great central scene in which Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to the murder of Duncan. In this scene. Lady Macbeth notoriously makes the murder of Duncan the test of Macbeth's virility; if he cannot perform the murder, he is in effect reduced to the helplessness of an infant subject to her rage. She begins by attacking his manhood, making her love for him contingent on the murder that she identifies as equivalent to his male potency: "From this time / Such I account thy love" [I. vii. 38-9]: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" [I. vii. 49]. Insofar as his drunk hope is now "green and pale" [I. vii. 37], he is identified as emasculated, exhibiting the symptoms not only of hangover, but also of the green-sickness, the typical disease of timid young virgin women. Lady Macbeth's argument is, in effect, that any signs of the "milk of human kindness" [I. v. 17] mark him as more womanly than she; she proceeds to enforce his masculinity by demonstrating her willingness to dry up that milk in herself, specifically by destroying her nursing infant in fantasy: "I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, / And dash'd the brains out" [I. vii. 56-8]. That this image has no place in the plot, where the Macbeths are strikingly childless, gives some indication of the inner necessity through which it appears. For Lady Macbeth expresses here not only the hardness she imagines to be male, not only her willingness to unmake the most essential maternal relationship: she expresses also a deep fantasy of Macbeth's utter vulnerability to her. As she progresses from questioning Macbeth's masculinity to imagining herself dashing out the brains of her infant son, she articulates a fantasy in which to be less than a man is to become interchangeably a woman or a baby, terribly subject to the wife/mother's destructive rage.

By evoking this vulnerability. Lady Macbeth acquires a power over Macbeth more absolute than any the witches can achieve. The play's central fantasy of escape from woman seems to me to unfold from this moment; we can see its beginnings in Macbeth's response to Lady Macbeth's evocation of absolute maternal power, Macbeth first responds by questioning the possibility of failure ("If we should fail?" [I. vii. 59]). Lady

Macbeth counters this fear by inviting Macbeth to share in her fantasy of omnipotent malevolence: "What cannot you and I perform upon / Th'unguarded Duncan?" [I. vii. 69-70]). The satiated and sleeping Duncan takes on the vulnerability that Lady Macbeth has just invoked in the image of the feeding, trusting infant: Macbeth releases himself from the image of this vulnerability by sharing in the murder of this innocent. In his elation at this transfer of vulnerability from himself to Duncan, Macbeth imagines Lady Macbeth the mother to infants sharing her hardness, born in effect without vulnerability; in effect, he imagines her as male and then reconstitutes himself as the invulnerable male child of such a mother:

> Bring forth men-children only!
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males.
> [I. vii. 72-4]

Through the double pun on *mettle/metal* and *male/mail*, Lady Macbeth herself becomes virtually male, composed of the hard metal of which the armored male is made. Her children would necessarily be men, composed of her male mettle, armored by her mettle, lacking the female inheritance from the mother that would make them vulnerable. The man-child thus brought forth would be no trusting infant; the very phrase *men-children* suggests the presence of the adult man even at birth, hence the undoing of childish vulnerability. The mobility of the imagery—from male infant with his brains dashed out to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth triumphing over the sleeping, trusting Duncan, to the all-male invulnerable man-child, suggests the logic of the fantasy: only the child of an all-male mother is safe. We see here the creation of a defensive fantasy of exemption from the woman's part: as infantile vulnerability is shifted to Duncan, Macbeth creates in himself the image of Lady Macbeth's hardened all-male man-child; in committing the murder, he thus becomes like Richard III, using the bloody axe to free himself in fantasy from the dominion of women, even while apparently carrying out their will. (pp. 100-03)

Janet Adelman, "'Born of Woman': Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*," in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, edited by Marjorie Gruber, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 90-121.

Banquo

A. C. Bradley

The main interest of the character of Banquo arises from the changes that take place in him, and from the influence of the Witches upon him. And it is curious that Shakespeare's intention here is so frequently missed. Banquo being at first strongly contrasted with Macbeth, as an innocent man with a guilty, it seems to be supposed that this contrast must be continued to his death; while, in reality, though it is never removed, it is gradually diminished. Banquo in fact may be described much more truly than Macbeth as the victim of the Witches. If we follow this story this will be evident.

He bore a part only less distinguished than Macbeth's in the battles against Sweno and Macdonwaid. He and Macbeth are called 'our captains,' and when they meet the Witches they are traversing the 'blasted heath' alone together. Banquo accosts they will not, or must not, speak to *him*. To Macbeth's brief appeal, 'Speak, if you can: what are you?' [I. iii. 47] they at once reply, not by saying what they are, but by hailing him Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King hereafter. Banquo is greatly surprised that his partner should start as if in fear, and observes that he is at once 'rapt'; and he bids the Witches, if they know the future, to prophesy to *him*, who neither begs their favour nor fears their hate. Macbeth, looking back at a later time, remembers Banquo's daring, and how

he chid the sisters,
When first they put the name of king upon me,
And bade them speak to him.
[III. i. 56-8]

'Chid' is an exaggeration; but Banquo is evidently a bold man, probably an ambitious one, and certainly has no lurking guilt in his ambition. On hearing the predictions concerning himself and his descendants he makes no answer, and when the Witches are about to vanish he shows none of Macbeth's feverish anxiety to know more. On their vanishing he is simply amazed, wonders if they were anything but hallucinations, makes no reference to the predictions till Macbeth mentions them, and then answers lightly.

When Ross and Angus, entering, announce to Macbeth that he has been made Thane of Cawdor, Banquo exclaims, aside, to himself or Macbeth, 'What! can the devil speak true?' [I. iii. 107]. He now believes that the Witches were real beings and the 'instruments of darkness.' When Macbeth, turning to him, whispers,

Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?
[I.iii. 118-20]

he draws with the boldness of innocence the inference which is really occupying Macbeth, and answers,

That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown
Besides the thane of Cawdor.
[I. iii. 120-22]

Here he still speaks, I think, in a free, off-hand, even jesting, manner ('enkindle' meaning merely 'excite you to *hope* for'). But then, possibly from noticing something in Macbeth's face, he becomes graver, and goes on, with a significant 'but,'

But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.
[I. iii. 122-26]

He afterwards observes for the second time that his partner is 'rapt'; but he explains his abstraction naturally and sincerely by referring to the surprise of his new honours; and at the close of the scene, when Macbeth proposes that they shall discuss the predictions together at some later time, he answers in the cheerful, rather bluff manner, which he has used almost throughout, 'Very gladly.' Nor was there any reason why Macbeth's rejoinder, 'Till then, enough' [I. iii. 156], should excite misgivings in him, though it implied a request for silence, and though the whole behaviour of his partner during the scene must have looked very suspicious to him when the prediction of the crown was made good through the murder of Duncan.

In the next scene Macbeth and Banquo join the King, who welcomes them both with the kindest expressions of gratitude and with promises of favours to come. Macbeth has indeed already received a noble reward. Banquo, who is said by the King to have 'no less deserved' [I. iv. 30], receives as yet mere thanks. His brief and frank acknowledgment is contrasted with Macbeth's laboured rhetoric; and, as Macbeth goes out, Banquo turns with hearty praises of him to the King.

And when next we see him, approaching Macbeth's castle in company with Duncan, there is still no sign of change. Indeed he gains on us. It is he who speaks the beautiful lines,

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
> The air is delicate;
> [I. vi. 3-10]

—lines which tell of that freedom of heart, and that sympathetic sense of peace and beauty, which the Macbeth of the tragedy could never feel.

But now Banquo's sky begins to darken. At the opening of the Second Act we see him with Fleance crossing the court of the castle on his way to bed. The blackness of the moonless, starless night seems to oppress him. And he is oppressed by something else.

> A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
> And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,
> Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
> Gives way to in repose!
> [II. i. 6-9]

On Macbeth's entrance we know what Banquo means: he says to Macbeth—and it is the first time he refers to the subject unprovoked,

> I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters.
> [II. i. 20]

His will is still untouched: he would repel the 'cursed thoughts'; and they are mere thoughts, not intentions. But still they are 'thoughts,' something more, probably, than mere recollections; and they bring with them an undefined sense of guilt. The poison has begun to work.

The passage that follows Banquo's words to Macbeth is difficult to interpret:

I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters:
To you they have show'd some truth.
Macb. I think not of them:
Yet, when we can entreat an hour to serve,
We would spend it in some words upon that business,
If you would grant the time.
Ban. At your kind'st leisure.
Macb. If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, It shall make honour for you.
Ban. So I lose none
[II. i. 20-30]

Macbeth's first idea is, apparently, simply to free himself from any suspicion which the discovery of the murder might suggest, by showing himself, just before it, quite indifferent to the predictions, and merely

looking forward to a conversation about them at some future time. But why does he go on, 'If you shall cleave,' etc.? Perhaps he foresees that, on the discovery, Banquo cannot fail to suspect him, and thinks it safest to prepare the way at once for an understanding with him (in the original story he makes Banquo his accomplice *before* the murder). Banquo's answer shows three things,—that he fears a treasonable proposal, that he has no idea of accepting it, and that he has no fear of Macbeth to restrain him from showing what is in his mind.

Duncan is murdered. In the scene of discovery Banquo of course appears, and his behaviour is significant. When he enters, and Macduff cries out to him,

> O Banquo, Banquo,
> Our royal master's murdered,

and Lady Macbeth, who has entered a moment before, exclaims,

> Woe, alas!
> What, in our house?

his answer,

> Too cruel anywhere,
> [II. iii. 86-8]

shows, as I have pointed out, repulsion, and we may be pretty sure that he suspects the truth at once. After a few words to Macduff he remains absolutely silent while the scene is continued for nearly forty lines. He is watching Macbeth and listening as he tells how he put the chamberlains to death in a frenzy of loyal rage. At last Banquo appears to have made up his mind. On Lady Macbeth's faulting he proposes that they shall all retire, and that they shall afterwards meet,

> And question this most bloody piece of work
> To know it further. Fears and scruples shake us:
> In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
> Against the undivulged pretence I fight
> Of treasonous malice.
> [II. iii. 128-32]

His solemn language here reminds us of his grave words about 'the instruments of darkness' [I. iii. 124], and of his later prayer to the 'merciful powers'. He is profoundly shocked, full of indignation, and determined to play the part of a brave and honest man.

But he plays no such part. When next we see him, on the last day of his life, we find that he has yielded to evil. The Witches and his own ambition have conquered him. He alone of the lords knew of the prophecies, but he has said nothing of them. He has acquiesced in Macbeth's accession, and in the official theory that Duncan's sons had suborned the chamberlains to murder him. Doubtless, unlike Macduff, he was present at Scone to see the new king invested. He has, not formally but in effect, 'cloven to' Macbeth's 'consent'; he is knit to him by 'a most indissoluble tie' [III. i. 17]; his advice in council has been 'most grave and prosperous' [III. i. 21]; he is to be the 'chief guest' at that night's supper. And his soliloquy tells us why:

> Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
> As the weird women promised, and, I fear,
> Thou play'dst most foully fort: yet it was said

> It should not stand in thy posterity,
> But that myself should be the root and father
> Of many kings. If there come truth from them—
> As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—
> Why, by the verities on thee made good.
> May they not be my oracles as well,
> And set me up in hope? But hush! no more.
> [III. i. 1-10]

This 'hush! no more' is not the dismissal of 'cursed thoughts': it only means that he hears the trumpets announcing the entrance of the King and Queen.

His punishment comes swiftly, much more swiftly than Macbeth's, and saves him from any further fall. He is a very fearless man, and still so far honourable that he has no thought of *acting* to bring about the fulfilment of the prophecy which has beguiled him. And therefore he has no fear of Macbeth. But he little understands him. To Macbeth's tormented mind Banquo's conduct appears highly suspicious. *Why* has this bold and circumspect man kept his secret and become his chief adviser? In order to make good *his* part of the predictions after Macbeth's own precedent. Banquo, he is sure, will suddenly and secretly attack him. It is not the far-off accession of Banquo's descendants that he fears; it is (so he tells himself) swift murder; not that the 'barren sceptre' will some day droop from his dying hand, but that it will be 'wrenched' away now. [III. i. 62], So he kills Banquo. But the Banquo he kills is not the innocent soldier who met the Witches and daffed their prophecies aside, nor the man who prayed to be delivered from the temptation of his dreams. (pp. 379-86)

A. G. Bradley, "Lecture X: *Macbeth*," in his *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on 'Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 1904. Reprint by Macmillan and Co., 1905, pp. 366-400.

Leo Kirschbaum
If we consider Banquo as a dramatic function rather than as a character in the usual sense, we shall be able to avoid [A.C.] Bradley's erroneous and confusing misreading of him as another whom the witches' influence finally debases [*Shakespearean Tragedy*). Bradley, with his customary approach, tended to consider Banquo as a whole man, a psychologically valid being; he did not see that the playwright has so depicted the character that he will always be a dramaturgic foil to Macbeth.

As Banquo and Macbeth meet the witches in [I. iii], Banquo notes that Macbeth 'start[s]' and 'seem[s] to fear' the witches' [I. iii. 51] prophecies, that he 'seems rapt withal'; but by his bold words to them, Banquo indicates that *he* has a free soul, 'who neither beg nor fear / Your favors nor your hate' [II. iii. 60-1]. Again, when Ross calls Macbeth Thane of Cawdor, it is Banquo who once and for all clearly indicates to the audience the true nature of the witches: 'What, can the devil speak true?' [III. iii. 107]. Although Banquo suspects nothing of Macbeth's intentions, he does know the nature of man and of Satan:

> And oftentimes to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence.
> [III. iii. 123-26]

Hence, he already knows what Macbeth does not learn completely until the very end: he has immediately recognized the witches as cunning emissaries of the enemy of mankind. And it is significant that Macbeth immediately wants to win Banquo to his side: 'let us speak / Our free hearts each to other' [III. iii. 154-55]. *Free* means *open* as well as *innocent.* Banquo replies, 'Very gladly.' The ease of the answer indicates once more a truly free heart. So, already, Shakespeare's pattern is emerging; Macbeth, tempted by evil, feels a

strong desire to negate the difference which Banquo stands for.

In [I. v]. Lady Macbeth prays (I mean this word literally) the 'murth'ring ministers' to unsex her. Begging the devil to deprive her of the ordinary human qualities of pity and remorse, she requests the 'dunnest smoke of hell' [I, v. 51] in which to commit the crime. It is meaningfully to Banquo in [I. vi] that Shakespeare gives the lines describing Inverness castle in semi-religious terms—'temple-haunting martlet', 'heaven's breath', 'pendent bed and procreant cradle' [I. vi. 4-8]. We are meant to feel deeply here the contrast between Banquo's vision and the devil-haunted castle of actuality. The
next scene, [I. vii] shows us a Macbeth who almost seems to have felt the implications of those words of Banquo;

> [Duncan's] virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
> The deep damnation of his taking off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind.
> [I. vii. 18-2S]

But his devil-possessed lady wins him over. And note how tightly Shakespeare has woven his pattern of contrasts: In [I.v] Lady Macbeth prayed to Satan to turn her 'milk' into 'gall'. In [I. vi] Banquo referred to the evidence of a godly home, the 'procreant cradle'. In [I. vii] Macbeth speaks of 'pity, like a naked new-born babe' [I. vii. 21]. Later in [I. vii] Lady Macbeth says that she could snatch the smiling babe from her breast and dash its brains out!

At the beginning of Act II, just before the entrance of Macbeth, who will leave the stage to murder Duncan, Shakespeare once more presents Banquo. In his customary manner, he is aware of the supernatural powers above and below. It is a dark night: 'There's husbandry in heaven; / Their candles are all out' [II. i, 4-5]. ('Stars, hide your fires!' 'Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark' [I. iv. 50, I. v. 53]. Apparently, the demonic prayers of Macbeth and his lady have been answered.) But though the night is indeed dark, Banquo's words have, beyond his awareness, a prophetic undertone: if *husbandry* means thrift, it also means wise management. Hence, through Banquo, obliquely, the irresistible justice and omniscience of heaven is being urged. Banquo continues to Fleance, 'A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, / And yet I would not sleep' [II. i. 6-7]. The first line might suggest that the dark powers are working upon him to get him out of the way of the criminals; at any rate, his soul apprehends evil. So, being the kind of man he is, he prays to the instruments of light to fight against the instruments of darkness:

> Merciful powers,
> Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
> Gives way to in repose.
> [II. i. 7-9]

To Bradley, 'the poison [of the witches] has begun to work' but that is not at all the purport of these lines; they are there for comparison. Everyman is constantly being tempted by evil: during waking hours, he is free to expel it from his mind; but while he and his will are asleep, the demons can invade his dreams. (Macbeth a few lines later puts the matter clearly: 'wicked dreams abuse / The curtain'd sleep' [I. ii. 50-1].) Therefore, Banquo prays for grace, for holy power outside himself to repel the demons. In contrast Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have prayed far otherwise.

After Macbeth's entrance, Banquo declares: 'I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters. / To you they have showed some truth' [I. ii. 20-1]. These are the 'cursed thoughts' that Banquo wishes to expunge—and it is as though Banquo, as instrument rather than as character, unwittingly, is testing Macbeth. Macbeth feels this, he wants to get Banquo on his side, he wants to talk to Banquo about the witches.

> *Ban*. At your kind'st leisure.
> *Mac*. If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
> It shall make honor for you.
> *Ban*. So I lose none
> In seeking to augment it but still keep
> My bosom franchis'd and allegiance clear,
> I shall be counsel'd.
> [I. ii. 24-9]

Bradley found this Banquo-Macbeth colloquy 'difficult to interpret'. So it is, inspected as realism, but if one regards the two speakers here not so much as people but as morality play figures who have chosen different sides in the struggle between Heaven and Hell, there is little difficulty. Macbeth is the representative of the Tempter, and Banquo refuses the bait, not with polite evasiveness but with formal rejection. For there is a dichotomy both in Macbeth and in Macbeth's world as long as Banquo represents the good; from Macbeth's viewpoint, Banquo must either be absorbed or destroyed if Macbeth is to gain ease.

In [II. iii], when Macduff tells Banquo that their king has been murdered, Lady Macbeth cries, 'Woe, alas! /What, in our house?' [II. iii. 87-8]. Banquo's reply is a semi-rebuke that comes automatically to his lips, 'Too cruel anywhere' [II. iii. 88], He is not hiding anything: there is such correspondence between his mind and his mouth that his three words dismiss his hostess' apparently limited morality and express a universal reaction. But Banquo is not suspicious of any single person, yet; he does not know who or what the enemy is, yet. All he knows is that he is innocent and that a great crime has been committed:

> In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
> Against the undivulg'd pretense I fight
> Of treasonous malice.
> [II. iii. 130-32]

Note how the combatants in the action have been depersonalized by Banquo's words; the war between Good and Evil is larger than people. (pp. 2-5)

Act III begins with Macbeth king, and Banquo suspecting he played most foully for it. It is not allowable, dramatically speaking, to conjecture anything about Banquo between his last appearance and his present appearance. Furthermore, the 'indissoluble tie' is that between a king and his subject, and there is nothing evil in it. The 'grave and prosperous' advice [III. i. 21] is not criminal aid to the murderer but political counsel to his sovereign. As to Banquo's character and motives in regard to the crown, all the soliloquy tells us is that he anticipates great honour as a founder of a royal line. There is not a hint that he will play 'most foully' to make the prophecy come true. Primarily, the soliloquy is meant to remind the audience of what the witches told Banquo two full acts back, for that promise may be said to guide the action of the play until the blood-boltered Banquo points at the show of the eight kings—and even then Macbeth's horror at this truth motivates his slaughter of Lady Macduff. As usual Shakespeare's purpose with Banquo here is not similarity but dissimilarity. Dramaturgically, Banquo *must* be maintained as contrast.

That it is not Banquo so much as person but what he still epitomizes which prompts Macbeth to kill his one-time companion is brought out, I believe, in Macbeth's famous soliloquy:

To be thus is nothing
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd. . . .
[III. i. 48-51]

What is it that Macbeth fears? Is it really Banquo the man? Or is it the latter's still unsullied qualities—his natural royalty, his dauntless temper, his wise valour? Banquo represents what a part of Macbeth wants and, also, what a part of Macbeth hates. He is truly, as the witches declared, both happier and greater than the regicide. Let us put it this way: Macbeth is jealous of Banquo's virtues, wants them but cannot have them, feels belittled by them, fears them, and hence must destroy them. The killing of Banquo may be interpreted as a futile effort on Macbeth's part to destroy his own better humanity; it is a ghastly effort to unify Macbeth's inner and outer world, for Banquo has a daily beauty in his life that makes Macbeth ugly. The fear of an 'unlineal hand', the belief that Banquo's issue will immediately succeed him are rationalizations, the false coinage of an agonized man who has sold his soul to the devil, who has exchanged his 'eternal jewel' for a poisoned, tortured mind. It is not really Banquo the person whom Macbeth fears: it is Banquo as symbol, he who stood 'In the great hand of God'. (pp. 6-8)

Leo Kirschbaum, "Banquo and Edgar: Character or Function?" in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. VII, No. 1, January, 1957, pp. 1-21.

Macbeth: Selected Quotes

Nothing in his life
became him like the leaving of it.
(1.4.7-8)

Act 1, scene 4 is a continuation of the battle scene of Act 1, scene 2. Sandwiched in between is Macbeth's first encounter with the witches and their prophecy that he will be Thane of Cawdor. In scene 2, King Duncan has ordered Cawdor's execution, and here in scene 4, Malcolm, Duncan's son reports on how the execution went. For the Jacobeans who frequently witnessed executions by beheading, the prisoner pledging loyalty at the last minute was frequently rewarded with pardon. Cawdor, however, does not survive, in spite of confessing 'his treasons', imploring the King's 'pardon', and showing 'a deep repentance'.

...the milk of human kindness.
(1.5.15)

As Lady Macbeth waits for her husband to arrive home after she has received his letter with the news of his promotion and the prophecies, she decides that her husband will be king only through her iron determination since he is sometime too full of compassion, a very unmanly trait. The phrase is therefore at the top of Lady Macbeth's insult list so that when we use the phrase to approve of someone's compassion, we are changing it from an insult to a compliment.

The be-all and the end-all
(1.7.5)

According to the OED, Shakespeare invented this phrase and all subsequent uses by other authors are borrowed from the playwright. In the play, Macbeth is debating with himself about committing the murder of Duncan and becoming king without getting caught. If killing the King would have no consequences, he would have no other problems. But Macbeth knows regicide can never be so simple. For us, it means an event or

person that is the beginning and end of all things in one package; an ego maniac; a conceited person.

Knock, knock. Who's there…?
(2.3.5-6)

In one of the very few comedy bits in Macbeth, the Porter is roused to open the gate just after the murder of Duncan. As he goes to the gate half asleep, he engages in a conversation with himself and several others of his own creation. It seems that Shakespeare is responsible for the beginning of the 'Knock Knock' joke. Variety, an entertainment industry magazine, reported on 19 August 1936 that America was caught up in a 'knock-knock craze', and on 14 November 1936, England fell for the tasteless pun answers to the question 'knock-knock' when radio comedian Wee Georgie Wood told several of the jokes on a radio show. Nowadays, the 'knock-knock' joke is an integral part of panto (short for pantomime), a form of interactive theatre that stages children's fairy tales, especially at Christmas in Great Britain.

What's done is done.
(3.2.12)

Here a very calm Lady Macbeth chides her husband for still thinking about Duncan's murder. She tries to tell him that there is nothing that can be done about it: dead is dead. Interestingly this advice to her husband emerges in a negative sentence in her sleep-walking: 'What's done cannot be undone' (5.1.68). Her guilty conscience is even more forceful than the seemingly simple advice she gives Macbeth. Not only can nothing be done about Duncan's murder, but nothing can be done to undo it.

Double, double toil and trouble.
(4.1.10)

Before Macbeth arrives to ask for more prophecy from the witches, they are seen mixing up a potion in a cauldron. This phrase is part of the chant that casts the spell of hard labour and tribulation. In these lines Shakespeare abandons iambic pentameter for tetrameter (four beats per line) which resembles basic song rhythm. With this language and their description as 'unnatural hags', Shakespeare single-handedly created our image of the Halloween witch.

The crack of doom.
(4.1.116)

To the Jacobeans, a 'crack' of thunder announced 'doom' or Doomsday, also known as Judgement Day. In this scene Macbeth has urged the witches to show him more prophecy and when the Apparitions of eight young kings appear in a never-ending line, Macbeth thinks they will 'stretch out to th'crack of doom'; in other words, Banquo's children will be kings for a very long time. This passage would be considered a compliment to James VI of Scotland who, as a Stuart, had recently become King James I of England, taking over from Elizabeth I, the last of the Tudors.

One fell swoop.
(4.3.231)

While we would recognise 'fell' as the past tense of 'fall', Shakespeare's audience would interpret this invented phrase as an extension of Macduff's poultry metaphor when speaking of his wife and children. For the audience, 'fell' meant 'fierce, cruel, or savage' and the word 'swoop' would mean the attack pattern of a bird of prey like the kite in line 219. To Macduff, Macbeth's attack on his family and their murder is like the attack of a kite on defenceless chickens. For us, the phrase means all at once, which is not too similar from Macbeth's murder of Macduff's family.

Out, damned spot.
(5.1.33)

Possibly one of Shakespeare's most famous scenes, the sleep-walking Lady Macbeth speaks out in her dream what she and her husband have done to gain the throne. One of the themes of Macbeth is how difficult it is to wash a sin from the soul, using blood on the hands as a metaphor. The Macbeths learn to their peril that their sins will never be washed away by physical means. This phrase has been used frequently to sell everything from toothpaste to car polish.

The patient must minister to himself.
(5.3.45-46)

A doctor has been summoned to cure Lady Macbeth of sleep-walking, but he tells Macbeth that any cure for the Queen is not within his power. In essence, the doctor is telling Macbeth that guilt will not go away until the guilty party acknowledges the wrong and makes amends, and that Lady Macbeth's walking and talking in her sleep is Macbeth's problem.

Come what may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.
(1.3)

Macbeth mutters this sentence to himself in the scene with the witches. He is confused and bewildered by the witches' prediction that he will become king, but at the end of the scene he comes to believe that he indeed may become king.

All our service
In every point twice done, and then done double
(1.6)

Lady Macbeth's evil cunning is all the more chilling because of her language. Here she welcome's Duncan, whom she has plotted to kill. Her words take on double meaning; she makes hidden references to her plans even as she conceals them.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.
(1.7)

Macbeth, at Lady Macbeth's urging, finally resolves to murder Duncan. At the conclusion of the scene, he tells Lady Macbeth to leave him, and entertain the guests as if everything is normal.

Go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand
(2.1)

After the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth assists Macbeth in wiping away any traces of the crime. Her "management" of Macbeth and his guilt is one of the characteristics of her behavior throughout the play.

What hands are here? Ha, they pluck out mine eyes!
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?
(2.1)

In the same scene, Macbeth expresses anguish, realizing that nothing will be able to wipe the guilt from his conscience. He proclaims, figuratively, that nothing can wash the blood from his hands, not even all of Neptune's ocean.

Here's the smell of the blood still:
all the perfumes of Arabia
will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!
(2.1)

As the play progresses, Lady Macbeth deteriorates under the psychological burden of her deeds. Just as Macbeth proclaimed earlier with a similar figure of speech, she realizes that nothing can clear her conscience. Finally, in act V, her guilt becomes too great, and she commits suicide.

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.
(5.5)

Macbeth's famous words after being told of Lady Macbeth's death; he is filled with anguish, and a expresses a view found in many of Shakespeare's characters, that of life and its seeming futility.

Macbeth: Suggested Essay Topics

Act I
1. Macbeth struggles with his conscience and the fear of eternal damnation if he murders Duncan. Lady Macbeth's conflict arises when Macbeth's courage begins to falter. Lady Macbeth has great control over Macbeth's actions. What tactics does she use to gain control over him? Cite examples from Act I. Does she solve her conflict through her actions? Cite examples from Act I.

2. Shakespeare begins *Macbeth* with Witches talking on a barren stretch of land in a thunder storm. This creates a certain atmosphere and mood. What images contributed to the evil atmosphere? Do you feel this mood continues through Act I? Did the actions and dialog of the main characters reinforce this atmosphere?

Act II
1. The Witches are characters that have a powerful impact on the play, but have very few lines. Banquo says that he cannot sleep because he is thinking about them. Macbeth says that he has not thought about them at all. How do the characters of Macbeth and Banquo differ and what influence have the Witches had on each character?

2. Macbeth is alone while Lady Macbeth returns the bloody daggers when he says, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather The multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red." Lady Macbeth returns will blood on her hands as well. What does the blood symbolize? Cite examples from the play.

Act III
1. There is a turning point in Act III, Scene 4. What is that turning point and how do you think Macbeth will respond throughout the rest of the drama? Cite examples from the play.

2. Compare and contrast the murders of Banquo and Duncan. How does the murder of Banquo show the change in Macbeth?

Act IV
1. What is the symbolic purpose of each prophecy the Apparitions state in the play? What interpretation can be drawn from the way each are dressed. Do you feel there is a hidden meaning? Cite examples from Act IV.

2. Act IV, Scene 2 is the only scene Lady Macduff is in. Why do you feel Shakespeare chose to have the murder in the scene instead of having it reported, as with Duncan's murder?

Act V
1. Describe Macbeth's reaction to Lady Macbeth's death. Compare his reaction to the reaction he had after the murder of Duncan.

2. Elaborate on the importance of the scene when Lady Macbeth says, "Out damned spot! out, I say! One; two. Why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to accompt? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" This scene illustrates a change in the character of Lady Macbeth?

Macbeth: Sample Essay Outlines

These analytical papers are designed to review your knowledge of the drama and apply that knowledge to a critical paper. The topics may request that you examine the conflicts, themes, or question a standard theory about the play.

Topic #1
The term tragic hero refers to a central character who has a authoritative status in the drama, but through a flaw in his or her character brings about his or her demise. The flaw may consist of a poor decision that is made and creates a situation the character cannot change or control. The tragic hero recognizes his or her flaw, however there is nothing that can be done to avert tragedy. Macbeth is seen as a tragic hero. Write a paper tracing the sequence of events that contribute to Macbeth's demise and tragic end.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: Macbeth is seen as a tragic hero. He compromises his honor and negates moral responsibility to attain power and position which result in his tragic end.

II. Definition and characteristics of a tragic hero
1. Fate
2. Weakness
3. Poor decision making resulting in a catastrophe
4. Realization of flaw but unable to prevent tragedy

III. The Witches
A. Plan to meet Macbeth
B. Statement that fair is foul, and foul is fair

IV. Allegiance to Scotland and Duncan
A. Battle with Macdonwald
B. Battle with the King of Norway
C. Duncan's Response

1. Honor bestowed on Macbeth
2. Duncan's opinion of Macbeth

V. Witches on the battlefield
A. The prophecy
B. Macbeth's Response
C. Banquo's Response

VI. Macbeth's meeting with Duncan
A. Duncan greets Macbeth with respect
B. Macbeth's reaction to Duncan naming Malcolm as his successor

VII. Decisions made before Macbeth is king
A. Lady Macbeth's plan
1. Macbeth's response
2. Lady Macbeth's Influence on Macbeth
3. Macbeth's decision
B. Eve of the Murder
1. Floating Dagger
2. Macbeth's reaction
C. Duncan's Murder
1. Murder of the guards
2. Response
D. Discovery of Duncan's body
1. Macbeth's reaction
2. Duncan's sons
3. Macbeth named as king

VIII. Decisions made as King
A. Banquo
1. Fear of prophecy
2. Hires Murderers
B. Banquet
1. Reaction to Murderers
2. Ghost
C. Meeting with the Witches
1. Response to Prophecy
2. Macduff and family
3. Leaving for Dunsinane in England
D. Battle with Malcolm's forces
1. Dunsinane prophecy
2. Young Siward
3. False sense of security
E. Reactions to Lady Macbeth's illness and death
F. Meeting Macduff
1. Guilt
2. Revealing prophecy to Macduff
3. Macbeth's realization that the Witches told him half-truths

IX. Macbeth's tragic end
A. Macduff's victory

B. Malcolm’s speech

Topic #2
Lady Macbeth is seen as a controlling factor in Macbeth’s life. She is able to control his actions and events. However, she loses control of Macbeth. Write a paper describing what control she has in Macbeth’s life and how the loss of that power contributes to her demise.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: Lady Macbeth’s desire for power prompts her interest in controlling Macbeth’s actions. However, she loses control which contributes to her tragedy.

II. Introduction of Lady Macbeth
A. Reading Macbeth’s letter
B. Witches prophecy fulfilled
C. Opinion of Macbeth
D. Desire for Power
1. Strength needed
2. Her plan
III. Meeting with Macbeth
A. Affection towards each other
B. Lady Macbeth’s plan

IV. Power over Macbeth
A. Macbeth’s Decision about Lady Macbeth’s plan
1. Lady Macbeth’s response to Macbeth
a. Attacks his manhood
b. Calls him a coward
c. His fear
d. Her anger
2. Macbeth’s decision after they speak
a. Agrees to the plan
b. Recognizes her strength and vicious nature
B. Macbeth’s vision of the daggers
V. Loss of Control over Macbeth
A. Duncan’s murder
1. Guards
2. Voices
3. Fearful to return to Duncan’s chamber
B. Banquo
1. Hires Murderers
2. Murder of Banquo
C. Banquet
1. Reaction to Ghost
a. Lady Macbeth is unable to control Macbeth’s response
2. Confession from Macbeth
3. Guest leaving upon Lady Macbeth’s request
4. Macbeth turns to the Witches for advice

VI. Decision’s made without Lady Macbeth’s advice
A. Banquo’s murder
B. Murder of Macduff’s family

C. Leaving for England
D. Battle with Malcolm and Macduff

VII. Lady Macbeth's loss of control of her own life
A. Inability to kill Duncan herself
B. Taking the bloody daggers back to Duncan's chamber after the murder
C. Realization she has no control over Macbeth's decisions
D. Guilt Feelings

VIII. Resolution
A. Tragic end
1. Lady Macbeth's
2. Macbeth's

Topic #3
A motif is a word, image, or action in a drama that happens over and over again. There is a recurring motif of blood and violence in the tragedy Macbeth. This motif contributes to the theme of the drama. In a paper trace the use of blood and violence and cite images that contribute to the theme.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: The use of blood and violence occurs throughout the tragedy of Macbeth. These images contribute to the understanding of the vicious nature of Macbeth.

II. The Witches
A. On the battlefield during the battle
B. Statement to make foul things fair and fair things foul
C. Story of the sailor and his wife
D. Creating a potion
1. Using blood in the potion
2. Second Apparition appearing to Macbeth

III. Murders Macbeth commits
A. Duncan and his guards
1. Inability to say amen
2. Voices speaking to Macbeth
3. Inability to smear blood on guards
4. Macbeth's description of the murder
B. Banquo
1. Murder committed on stage
2. Vicious nature of the crime
C. Macduff's family
1. Murder committed on stage
2. Defenseless victims
D. Young Siward

IV. Lady Macbeth
A. Plot to murder Duncan
B. Bloody Daggers
1. Returning daggers to Duncan's chamber
2. smearing guards with Duncan's blood
3. Having the blood on her hands

C. Guilt feelings
1. Sleep walking
2. Confession of the murders
3. Recalling the events associated with the murders
4. Inability to wash the guilt, the blood from her hands
5. Her tragic end

V. Battles Macbeth is involved in
A. Duncan's Army
1. Macdonwald's murder
2. King of Norway
B. Malcolm's forces
1. Young Siward's death
2. Macbeth's forces
C. Macduff's Revenge
1. Macbeth's reluctance to battle with Macduff
2. Macbeth's tragic end

Topic #4
When a comparison is made between two characters the events that happen, the situations that occur, and the characteristics of each character are shown to be similar. When a contrast is made the differences are acknowledge. Write a paper that compares and contrast the characters of Macbeth and Macduff.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: The characters of Macbeth and Macduff are adversaries in the tragedy, however certain similarities can be cited. The differences and similarities contribute to Macbeth's tragic ending and Macduff's resolution.

II. Similarities between Macduff and Macbeth
A. Name
B. Married
C. Soldiers in Duncan's Forces
D. Honor
1. Macbeth's honor at the beginning
2. Macduff's honor
a. Loyalty to Scotland
b. Loyalty to his family

III. Differences in Macduff and Macbeth
A. Duncan's Murder
1. Macduff's response
2. Macbeth's response
B. Coronation
1. Macbeth's acceptance of the Crown
2. Macduff's disagreeing with the selection
a. Refuses to attend coronation
b. Leaving for England
c. Joining Malcolm's fight against Macbeth
C. Macbeth's Suspicions of Macduff
D. Witches Warning
1. Second Apparition

2. Macbeth orders Macduff’s family to be murdered
E. Death of Wife
1. Macduff’s reaction
a. Shock
b. Grief
c. Wants to know who is responsible
d. Vow to seek revenge
2. Macbeth’s reaction
a. No emotional response
b. Does not inquire to the circumstances of her death

IV. Motive for Murder
A. Macbeth murders out of selfish greed and lust for power
B. Macduff murders to avenge the murder of his family

V. Resolution
A. Macduff returns peace to Scotland by killing Macbeth
B. Revenge is achieved
C. Restores Malcolm to the throne of Scotland

Topic #5
The Witches are seen as a force working to bring about the demise of Macbeth. They are known as the antagonist in the drama. They foreshadow events that create suspense in the drama and Macbeth makes decisions based on their prophecies. Write a paper describing how the Witches are a controlling factor in Macbeth’s destiny.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: Macbeth makes decisions effecting his future based on what the Witches have told him. He guides his destiny based on their prophecies.

II. Statements made by the Witches in the opening scene
A. “When the hurlyburly’s done, When the battle’s lost and won.”
B. “Fair is foul, and foul is fair
Hover through the fog and filthy air.”

III. Exhibition of Witches’ Power
A. Prophecies
1. First battle over
2. Macbeth’s title
3. Macbeth to be made King
4. Banquo’s sons to be Kings
5. Three Apparitions prophecies
a. Beware of Macduff
b. No man born of woman will harm Macbeth
c. Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
B. Story of the Sailor
C. Hecate’s speech
D. Spell cast when potion is made

IV. Macbeth’s reaction to prophecies
A. Disbelief

B. Anxious for power
1. Lady Macbeth's plan
2. Fear of retribution
3. Decision to kill Duncan
4. Vision of bloody dagger
C. Duncan's Murder
1. Guards murdered
2. Reaction to the murder
3. Public reaction to the murder
D. Banquo
1. Murder of Banquo
2. Reaction to Banquo's ghost
3. Confession at the banquet
E. Three Apparitions
1. Decision to leave Scotland for England
2. Murder of Macduff's family
3. Engage a battle with Malcolm
F. Inability to make rash decisions
1. Murders
2. Battles

V. Treatment of Lady Macbeth
A. Affectionate before murder
B. Avoidance
C. Disinterested
D. Lack of grief when he is told of her death

VI. Resolution
A. Inability to make rational decisions
B. Guilt feelings consume his mind
C. Realization of the Witches' prophecies being half-truths
D. Macbeth's death

Macbeth: Modern Connections

The witches, or weird sisters, of *Macbeth* have remained one of the most popular aspects of the play. The three witches, the first characters the audience encounters, are mysterious beings who set the tone for the rest of the play, most of which takes place in a similarly dark and stormy atmosphere. When the play was performed during the late English Renaissance, the witches would make their initial appearance coming up and out of the trap door on the stage of the Globe theater. Later productions included singing, dancing, and flying witches, attached to ceiling wires.

The witches also perform a more serious function than that of entertainment: their appearance in the play poses the question of whether Macbeth's actions are governed by fate or determined by his own free will. Critics have questioned the meaning behind the witches statement "All hail, Macbeth! That shall be King hereafter!" (I.iii.50). Is this statement a warning to Macbeth or does it tempt him to consider possibilities he may have thought of before? Or, is it a prophesy of the future? Through the witches, some maintain, Shakespeare questions whether our own lives are governed by fate or free will.

Questions regarding gender roles in *Macbeth* may also strike modern students as particularly compelling, as these roles in contemporary society continue to shift and evolve. Some observers read Lady Macbeth's persuasion of her husband to follow through on the murder of Duncan as being guided by her fascination with male power. She appeals to her husband's sense of manhood, and in effect, some maintain, uses seduction and humiliation to convince him to commit the murder. It has also been argued that Lady Macbeth rejects her own feminine "sensibilities" and takes on a more masculine role for herself because of her perception that femininity is equated with weakness. She assumes this masculine role for herself in an effort to act on her own ambition and desire for power.

Masculinity in this play appears to be defined almost exclusively by violent action, and Macbeth seems driven to prove his manhood through violent deeds, first in battle, then by murder. Macbeth's brutal slaying of Macdonwald is detailed by a sergeant: "he unseam'd him from the nave [navel] to the chops [jaws], / And fix'd his head upon our battlements" (I.ii.22-3). When Macbeth begins to back away from the thought of murdering Duncan, telling his wife "We will proceed no further in this business" (I.vii.31), she questions his manhood, stating that when he initially broached the subject with her, then he was a man (I.vii.48-49). By the end of the scene, he has decided that he will kill the king. In addition to murdering Duncan, Macbeth murders the king's guards and then orders the murders of Banquo, Fleance, and Macduff s family. When Macduff learns of these last killings, Malcolm urges the grieving Macduff to take revenge, to act "like a man" (IV.iii.219).

It has been argued that Macbeth himself is distanced somewhat from the violence of the play in that he commits the murders of Duncan offstage, and he orders other people to commit the murder of Banquo, Fleance, and Macduff's family, rather than committing them himself. The notion that in the society in which Macbeth lived the stereotypical male was characterized by violence and that the violence was legitimized through warfare is agreed upon by many critics, however. Just as Macbeth uses violent means to further his own ambition, the play ends with Macbeth's violent removal from the throne and with Macduff appearing on stage with Macbeth's severed head.

Finally, the theme of ambition and how it relates to governance is a major issue in the play. Macbeth lets his ambition supersede his own judgment. In I.vii, he discusses the reasons why he should not kill Duncan. He states that his loyalty to the king has several layers: he is the king's subject, his kinsmen, and his host. After highlighting the king's virtues, Macbeth acknowledges that the only reason to kill Duncan is his own "vaulting ambition" (I.vii.27). At this point, his thoughts are interrupted by Lady Macbeth. He seems to have had a change of heart, but after his wife's speech, Macbeth is determined to murder the king. After he himself is crowned, he is driven to protect what he has gained by ordering the deaths of anyone whom he considers a threat. While violence is an integral part of this warrior society, Macbeth's use of it off the battlefield to further his personal ambition, while unchecked through most of the play, is in the end not tolerated by his subjects. The twentieth century provides numerous examples of world leaders who to varying degrees abused power until their actions were checked by the citizens of their own nation or by the rest of the world. This abuse of power could take the form of one man's effort to improve his own political position, as in the case of Richard M. Nixon; his actions resulted in his resignation from the presidency. A far more extreme example would be that of Adolph Hitler, who used the power he attained to practice genocide until he was stopped through international warfare.

Macbeth: FAQs

Was there an actual Macbeth?

Shakespeare took the skeletal outline of Macbeth from Holinshed's Chronicles and these historical annals do record that Scotland was ruled by a King Macbeth between 1034 and 1037 AD and that he succeeded to the throne after the assassination of King Duncan. But Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy is substantially different

from the account given in Holinshed. Three discrepancies stand out in this regard. First, in Holinshed's history, Banquo is a co-conspirator who connived with Macbeth to murder the king. Second, according to the historical account, Duncan was not a mature, strong king who is unjustly slain; he is, instead, a weak-willed young man unequal to the task of governing his realm. Third, although Holinshed's Macbeth was married, the character of Lady Macbeth as an active participant in the evil deeds committed by Macbeth is entirely Shakespeare's creation.

Why are there three witches?

Some Shakespeare scholars have speculated that the three witches in Macbeth are intended to represent the three Fates of ancient mythology. But the latter are goddesses with powers far greater than the three hags of Shakespeare's tale, and the connection is, at best, dim. Three is a recurrent figure in Macbeth. In Act I, scene iii, one of the weird sisters invokes magical powers, "Thrice to thrice, and thrice to mine/And thrice again, to make up nine" (I, iii, ll.35-36). Again, at the start of Act IV, the first witch projects the time of Macbeth's second encounter with the weird sisters by noting that "Thrice the brindled cat hath mew'd" (IV, i., l.1). There are several other instances in the play in which the number three resonates with the incantations of the witches, as for example, in the three murderers of Banquo. At an abstract level, Macbeth occurs in a twilight world that is neither day nor night, but something else. The recurrence of "three" may signify unresolved ambiguity.

Did the Macbeths have any children?

In Act I, scene vii, Lady Macbeth says to her husband, "I have given suck, and know/How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (I, vii, ll.54-55). The reference to a nursing baby is all the more striking given that Lady Macbeth has already called upon the powers of evil to unsex her and to "take my milk for gall" (I, iv., l.48), but aside from horrifying rhetoric, some critics have argued that the Macbeths had a child who is now dead. The textual evidence here is circumstantial: the Macbeths never discuss any lost children, but even in their private conversation, the Macbeths tend toward euphemisms, as when Lady Macbeth refers to the assassination scheme as an "enterprise." There is no conclusive answer to this question, but the notion that the Macbeths have lost a child does lend an additional dimension to their turn toward unnatural evil.

Why does Macbeth forget to take the daggers from the guards?

In Act II, scene ii., Macbeth reports to his wife that the foul crime is done, that Duncan is slain while his guards lay in a drug-induced sleep. Shaken by the experience, Macbeth's account is interrupted by Lady Macbeth as she spies the daggers in his hand that were meant to be left by the sides of the guards, thereby implicating them in the crime. When she directs him to go back and lay the daggers by the guards, he refuses, saying that he fears to look upon the aftermath of his bloody deed. She blurts out, "Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers" (II, ii., 49-50). Macbeth's failure to carry out his wife's instructions about the daggers performs a key function. By undertaking the errand herself, Lady Macbeth physically soils her hands with the king's blood. Not only does this provide a basis for her incessant washing of the "spots" on her hands, it takes Lady Macbeth further into the execution of the crime than she is prepared to go. We recall her assertion that she would have killed Duncan herself had he not resembled her own father in his sleep. Yet her behavior after Duncan's death casts doubt upon this claim. Paradoxically, the dagger ruse proves unnecessary, for the Scottish court places the blame for Duncan's murder on his sons. Neither Lady Macbeth nor her husband is able to act with perfectly deliberate calculation.

Why does Macbeth slaughter Macduff's family?

Macduff harbors suspicions about the actual murderer of Duncan, is notably absent from Macbeth's coronation and joins Malcolm in gathering and leading the forces that defeat the play's title character. Learning that Macduff has turned against him, Macbeth dispatches murderers to kill Macduff's family. Apprised that this heinous act is at hand, Lady Macduff reacts by asking the messenger "Whither should I fly?/I have done no harm" (IV, ii., ll.73-74). Unlike the other evil deeds that Macbeth and his wife commit, the slaughter of Macduff's family has no instrumental value; it occurs after Macbeth has realized his ambition and does nothing to cover his crimes. That is, in fact, the point: Macbeth's evil is now so deep that it is without any human purpose. Lady Macduff is the only "human" female character in the play other than Lady Macbeth. By showing us Lady Macduff as a fond mother, Shakespeare heightens the contrast between a "natural" family and the unnatural character of the childless Lady Macbeth.

Why does Malcolm test Macduff?

In Act IV, scene iii, Malcolm tests Macduff's character. Macduff has just been told that Macbeth has murdered his wife and children and has ample cause to seek personal revenge. As the heir apparent to the throne, Malcolm tells Macduff that once he is Scotland's king, he will strip the nobles of their estates and perform other tyrannical acts. In response, Macduff does not abandon Malcolm's cause but instead grieves for his country. Malcolm then reveals his intention to restore just rule to Scotland. On one level, this test of Macduff's loyalty is meant to determine the strength of the hero's commitment to the campaign against Macbeth, Malcolm noting that Macduff once "loved" his fellow-in-arms, Macbeth. But more importantly, it establishes Macduff's motivation in the battle against Macbeth as a matter of patriotism rather than private vengeance.

Macbeth: Bibliography and Further Reading

*If available, books are linked to Amazon.com

Adventures in English Literature. Shakespeare, William, “Macbeth.” Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.

Boyce, Charles. *Shakespeare A to Z*; New York: Roundtable Press, Inc., 1990.

Bradley, A.C. "Macbeth," Shakespeare: Macbeth, A Casebook. Ed. John Wain. London: MacMillan, 1968, pp.116-130.

Elliott, George Roy. Dramatic Providence in Macbeth. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960.

Everett, Barbara. "Macbeth: Succeeding," Young Hamlet: Essays on Shakespeare's Tragedies. Oxford, UK: Oxford-at-the-Clarendon Press, 1989, pp.83-105.

Frye, Northrop. Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.

Goddard, Howard C. The Meaning of Shakespeare. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.

Hopkins, Lisa. The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands. London: MacMillan, 1998.

Jorgensen, P.A. Our Naked Frailties: Sensational Art and Meaning in "Macbeth". Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971.

Kahn, Coppelia. Man's Estate. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981.

Kimbrough, Robert. "Macbeth: Prisoner of Gender," Shakespeare Studies. Vol.16 (1983), pp.175-190.

McAlindon, Thomas. "Macbeth," Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.197-219.

Muir, Kenneth. William Shakespeare: The Great Tragedies. London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1966.

Schmidt, Alexander. Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary; Vol. I and II. New York: Dover, 1971.

Spivack, Bernard. Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Macbeth and Witchcraft,"Focus on Macbeth. Ed. John Russell Brown. New York, NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, pp.189-209.

Stirling, Brents. Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy: The Interplay of Theme and Character. New York: Gordian Press, 1966.

Taylor, Gary. *Reinventing Shakespeare*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Wells, Stanley. "A Scottish Tragedy: Macbeth," Shakespeare: A Dramatic Life. London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994, pp.282-299.

Willborn, David. "Phantasmagoric Macbeth," English Literary Renaissance. Vol.16, No.2 (autumn, 1986), pp.520-549.

Wilson, Harold S. On the Design of Shakespearian Tragedy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957.

Macbeth: Pictures

Copyright