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"Arden Shakespeare"

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THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE
GENERAL EDITOR: UNA ELLIS-FERMOR

MACBETH

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THE ARDEN EDITION OF THE
WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

MACBETH

Edited by
KENNETH MUIR
BASED ON THE EDITION OF
HENRY CUNINGHAM

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Henry Cuningham's edition of *Macbeth* first published 1912
It was reprinted five times
seventh edition (Kenneth Muir), revised and reset, 1951

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PREFACE

The original Arden *Macbeth*, edited by Henry Cuningham,
first appeared in 1912. The present edition owes much
to its predecessor, many of the notes being used with little
or no change; but there are substantial alterations. The
introduction is new; the text (for which Mr. Cuningham
was not responsible) has been revised, and several hundred
small alterations have been made in it -- most of them

consisting of a return to the First Folio; nearly all the notes contain alterations, and many are entirely new; and the appendices are new. There are, in fact, so many alterations that it was not possible to print from the old stereos.

Mr. Cuninghame disagreed with the General Editor of the series, and was not allowed to print his own text: he was thereby constrained to make a number of protests in the notes, which are happily now superfluous. Some of the differences between the present edition and Mr. Cuninghame's are caused by a change of attitude to the authenticity of the text. In 1912 it was still possible for Mr. Cuninghame to say:

"It is admitted by all competent scholars that the text of *Macbeth* has been more or less vitiated by the interpolation or additions of some dramatist other than Shakespeare."

But it is now generally agreed that such interpolations and additions are at least fewer than Mr. Cuninghame imagined.

It may be as well to mention one or two points about the present volume. First, the relevant parts of Holinshed's *Chronicle* are printed in the appendix, but, in order to save space, other parts have been curtailed. Secondly, the sections of the Introduction devoted to Date and Interpolations contain criticism necessary for the understanding of the final section, which is devoted to interpretation. Thirdly, though many of the annotations deal

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with questions of poetic imagery, I hope I have not lost sight of the fact that *Macbeth* is an acting play.

I am indebted to previous editors of the play, especially H. H. Furness, Jr. (1903), Sir Herbert Grierson (1914), and Dr. J. Dover Wilson (1947). I am grateful to many of my colleagues for assistance on different points, and particularly to Mr. Harold Fisch who has checked the collations and criticized the introduction. Professor P. Alexander has generously given me advice on textual matters; Professor R. Peacock supplied me with useful information; Mr. Roy Walker lent me the MS. of his valuable study, *The Time is Free*, and gave me permission to make use of it in my notes; Mr. J. M. Nosworthy sent me some unpublished notes; and, above all, Professor U. Ellis-Fermor has been all that a General Editor should be. I should add that Cleanth Brooks' essay in *The Well Wrought Urn* arrived too late for me to use it, though we agree on a number of points.

KENNETH MUIR

University of Leeds
Christmas, 1950

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INTRODUCTION

1. Text

The Tragedie of Macbeth was first published in the Folio of 1623, following *Julius Caesar*, and preceding *Hamlet*. As the play is mentioned in the Stationers' Register as one of those "as are not formerly entred to other men," it may be assumed that there was no Quarto. Acts and scenes, with certain exceptions mentioned in the notes, are indicated in the Folio, but not the *dramatis personæ*.

Macbeth was printed from a prompt-copy, or from a transcript of one,^{/1} as the text contains duplicated stage directions, characteristic of such a source.^{/2} The text was branded by the Cambridge editors as "one of the worst printed of the plays"; and they suggested that it was printed from a transcript of the author's MS., "which was in great part not copied from the original but *written to dictation*." There is little or no evidence of dictation, but there are a number of mistakes which could be explained on the assumption that the transcriber of the play for the printer was familiar with it on the stage and reproduced actors' blunders. Dr. Dover Wilson, whose theory this is,^{/3} instances "Gallowgrosses," "quarry," "tale Can," and "Rebellious dead." ^{/4} The first two of these may well be actor's blunders; but I think it most unlikely that an actor would change the simple "hail Came" into the unintelligible "tale Can," or that he would change the straightforward "Rebellion's head" into the obscure "Rebellious dead." The last example suggests that here at least the transcriber *misheard* the actor. But it is quite possible for a transcriber to make blunders which

^{/1} Cf. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i. 471; Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. 147; *Macbeth*, ed. Wilson, p. 87; Bald, *The Review of English Studies*, 1928, p. 429.

^{/2} Cf. II. iii. 81 and III. v. 33. ^{/3} *Op. cit.* p. 89.

^{/4} Cf. I. ii. 13; I. ii. 14; I. iii. 97-8; IV. i. 97. But I retain the last of these readings.

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seem to be aural rather than visual.^{/1} The explanation

is simple. I imagine that most transcribers of verse say the lines to themselves -- aloud or to their inner ear -- and are liable to make the same kind of mistake as someone copying from dictation. Indeed, they are really dictating to themselves. Such mistakes are more likely to appear where the transcriber is not required to respect every letter and comma of the original, and where he is familiar with the handwriting.

The play is abnormally short, one of the shortest in the whole canon. Dr. Greg remarks --

"Whether the multiplicity of very brief scenes is mainly due to cutting or to an unusual dramatic technique is perhaps uncertain; but there is clear evidence of cutting at some points in short abrupt lines accompanied by textual obscurities, and there are also some difficulties of construction." /2

Professor F. P. Wilson thinks that some of the cutting may have been due to censorship./3 R. C. Bald, referring to the stage directions for torches in the daylight scene, I. vi. argues that they must refer either to an indoor performance at the Blackfriars Theatre, or to a night performance at the Court,

"for it is only at the Court that night performances are recorded at this period."

The shortness of the play, he thinks, suggests a Court performance. But the torches can be otherwise explained,/4 and though I do not doubt that the play was performed at Court, I find it difficult to believe that scenes cut for such a performance would not be preserved, as they might be needed when the play was next performed in the public theatre.

But that there have been some interpolations is generally agreed; and there may have been some cuts to balance them. The text is disfigured by mislineation, which suggests that something has been added to, or subtracted from, the text, to the confusion of the printer or of the

/1 In copying Wyatt's poems from MSS. for my edition, I made one or two mistakes of this kind.

/2 Op. cit. p. 147. /3 Cited Greg, op. cit. 147. /4 See note to I. vi.

transcriber. Dr. Wilson says that this mislineation is most apparent in the second scene of the play and that it "grows noticeably less as the play goes forward," and that the process of abridgement was partly responsible for it./1 It must be pointed out, however, that Dr. Wilson

departs from the Folio lineation in only five places in I. ii.; and in some of these the Folio is defensible./² He departs from the Folio lineation much more in I. iii. and in II. iii. where more than twenty lines are affected by mislineation, though he does not suspect abridgement there. Mr. John Masefield, however, does./³ It would be dangerous to offer any theory about the mislineation. Human error, of one kind or another, must serve as an explanation, though there may well have been cuts to make room for the Hecate interpolations.

Mr. Flatter stands alone in his belief that the Folio text of *Macbeth* shows no trace of editorial interference, and that Shakespeare's producing hand may be discerned in it./⁴ But Mr. Traversi also warns us against assuming that difficulties in the text can be explained by the fact that there have been omissions:

"The verse of *Macbeth* is often, at first reading, so abrupt and disjointed that some critics have felt themselves driven to look for gaps in the text. Yet the difficult passages do not look in the least like the result of omissions, but are rather necessary to the feeling of the play." /⁵

The present text is, I believe, closer to that of the First Folio than any since the seventeenth century, especially with regard to lineation. In this I have probably been influenced by Mr. Flatter, though I could not always accept his views without qualification. I agree that Shakespeare's irregularities were deliberate, but it is not always possible to distinguish between such irregularities

/1 Op. cit. p. 90.

/2 He departs from the F lineation at I. ii. 33-5, 38, 42-3, 60-1. The F may be right in all these except the last. In I. iii. Wilson departs from F in the following lines: 81-3, 111-14, 131-2, 140-3, 149-53. In II. iii. he departs from F at 54-6, 59-61, 64-5, 84-5, 103-5, 121-3, 137-41.

/3 *Thanks Before Going*, 1947, p. 161.

/4 *Shakespeare's Producing Hand*, 1948, p. 94.

/5 *Approach to Shakespeare*, p. 89.

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and those for which transcriber or printer is responsible./¹ This being so, some compromise is inevitable.

I have also restored some of the Folio's capitals, where they seem to assist the meaning, in titles, personifications, and technical terms.

2. Date

The first recorded performance of *Macbeth* is in Dr. Simon Forman's manuscript, *The Booke of Plaies and Notes*

therof per Formans for Common Pollicie /2 (i.e. as affording useful lessons in the common affairs of life), which describes a performance at the Globe in the Spring of 1611.

In Mackbeth at the Glob, 16j0 [*a slip for 1611*], the 20 of Aprill, ther was to be obserued, firste, how Mackbeth and Bancko, 2 noble men of Scotland, Ridinge thorowe a wod, the[r] stode before them 3 women feiries or Nimphe, And saluted Mackbeth, sayinge, 3 tymes vnto him, haille mackbeth, king of Codon; for thou shalt be a kinge, but shalt beget No kinges, &c. then said Bancko, what all to mackbeth And nothing to me. Yes, said the nimphe, haille to thee Bancko, thou shalt beget kings, yet be no kinge. And so they departed & cam to the Courte of Scotland to Dunkin king of Scots, and yt was in the dais of Edward the Confessor. And Dunkin bad them both kindly wellcome, And made Macbeth forth with Prince of Northumberland, and sent him hom to his own castell, and appointed mackbeth to prouid for him, for he wold Sup with him the next dai at night, & did soe. And mackbeth Contrived to kill Dunkin, & thorowe the persuasion of his wife did that night Murder the kinge in his own Castell, beinge his gieste. And ther were many prodigies seen that night & the dai before. And when MackBeth had murdred the kinge, the blod on his hands could not be washed of by Any means, nor from his wiues handes, which handled the bloddi daggers in hiding them, By which means they became both moch amazed and Affronted. the murder being knowen, Dunkins 2 sonns fled, the on to England, the other to Walles, to saue themselues. They beinge fled, they were supposed guilty of the murder of their father, which was nothinge so. Then was Mackbeth crowned kinge, and then he for feare of Banko, his old companion, that he should beget kings but be no kinge

/1 Compare, for example, my treatment of Macbeth's aside (I. iii. 127 ff.) with the printing of 149-55 in the same scene. Mr. Flatter is most valuable in his suggestions about the metrical rules governing the entrance of characters, and the metrical relation of asides to the rest of the dialogue. I accept the principles, though there seem to be exceptions. But Mr. Flatter's book would have been even more valuable if he had applied his theories to a good Quarto, where one would expect to find Shakespeare's producing hand in greater evidence. /2 Ashmolean MS. 208.

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him selfe, he contriued the death of Banko, and caused him to be Murdred on the way as he Rode. The next night, being at supper with his noble men whom he had bid to a feaste to the whiche also Banco should haue com, he began to speake of Noble Banco, and to wish that he wer ther. And as he thus did, standing vp to drincke a Carouse to him, the ghoste of Banco came and sate down in his cheier be-hind him. And he turninge About to sit down Again sawe the goste of banco, which fronted him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury, vtteryng many wordes about his murder, by which, when they hard that Banco was Murdred they Suspected Mackbet.

"Then Mack dove fled to England to the kings sonn, And soe they Raised an Army, And cam into Scotland, and at dunston Anyse overthru Mackbet. In the mean tyme while macdouee was in England, Mackbet slewe Mackdoues wife & children, and after in the battelle mackdoue slewe mackbet.

"Obserue Also howe mackbets quen did Rise in the night in her

slepe, & walke and talked and confessed all, & the docter noted her wordes."/1

Although this performance, in 1611, is the first of which we have a definite record, we can be certain that the play was in existence four years before, because of echoes in contemporary plays. In *Lingua* (pub. 1607) there are possible echoes of II. i, and what seems to be a parody of the sleep-walking scene. There are references to Banquo's ghost in *The Puritaine*, IV. iii. 89:

and in stead of a Iester, weele ha the ghost ith
white sheete sit at vpper end a' th' Table'. . . .

/1 This account has been regarded as a Collier forgery, because i. Forman relies partly on Holinshed (e.g. "3 women feiries or Nimphes"); ii. he does not mention the Cauldron scene or the prophecies of the apparitions, which might have been expected to interest a professional astrologer; iii. he gives an impossible date (April 20 did not fall on a Saturday in 1610); and iv. the Globe, being an "open" theatre, was rarely occupied before May. But the authenticity of *The Booke of Plaies* was finally settled by Dr. J. Dover Wilson and Dr. R. W. Hunt in an article in *The Review of English Studies*, July 1947. Collier in his transcription of the account of the performance of *The Winter's Tale* misread "coll pixci" as "Coll Pipci": he would not have failed to recognize the word if he had forged the original. It is impossible to deduce very much about the characteristics of the play in 1611, as Forman probably did not write the description immediately after the performance, and his memories of the performance became mixed with his memories of Holinshed. We cannot assume, for example, that the first two scenes of the play were cut or non-existent, that Macbeth was made Prince of Northumberland, that there was an early reference in the play to Edward the Confessor, that there was a scene in which Macbeth and his wife tried in vain to wash the blood off their hands, and that there was no Cauldron scene. Cf. J. M. Nosworthy's article on "Macbeth at the Globe" (*The Library*, 1948).

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and in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, V. i. 26 ff.:

When thou art at thy Table with thy friends,
Merry in heart, and fild with swelling wine,
I'll come in midst of all thy pride and mirth,
Invisible to all men but thy self,
And whisper such a sad tale in thine ear
Shall make thee let the Cup fall from thy hand,
And stand as mute and pale as Death itself.

The Puritaine was published, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* probably acted, in 1607. Allowing for the necessary interval for the writing, performing, and publishing of the former play, it is fairly certain that *Macbeth* was being performed in 1606. On the other hand, the reference to the King's Evil (IV. iii.) and the two-fold balls and treble sceptres of Banquo's descendants (IV. i.) must have been

written after the accession of James I./1

The play was therefore written, we may assume, between 1603 and 1606. The allusions to equivocation (II. iii. 9 ff.) and the hanging of traitors (IV. ii. 46 ff.) must have been written after the trial of Father Garnet (28 March, 1606) for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. The words "yet could not equivocate to heaven" imply that the speech was written after Garnet's death by hanging (3 May). Equivocation had been mentioned by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* (V. i.), but in the Spring and Summer of 1606 it had become a burning topic. John Chamberlaine wrote to Winwood on 5 April:

So that by the Cunning of his Keeper, Garnet being brought into a *Fool's Paradise*, had diverse Conferences with *Hall*, his fellow Priest in the Tower, which were overheard by *Spialls* set on purpose. With which being charged he stifly denied it; but being still urged, and some Light given him that they had notice of it, he *persisted still, with Protestation upon his Soul and Salvation, that there had past no such Interlocution:* till at last being confronted with *Hall*, he was driven to confess; And being now asked in this Audience, how he could salve this *lewd Perjury*, he answered, *that so long as he thought they had no Proof he was not bound to accuse himself; but when he saw they had Proof, he stood not long*

/1 The play as a whole might have been written earlier, these passages being interpolations; but the "two-fold balls and treble sceptres" do not read like an interpolation.

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in it. And then fell into a large Discourse of defending *Equivocations*, with many weak and frivolous Distinctions./1

Garnett admitted that equivocation was justifiable only when used for a good object;/2 but he argued that if the law be unjust, then there is no treason./3 He prayed "for the good Success of the great Action, concerning the Catholick Cause in the beginning of the Parliament" and then denied that this referred to the Gunpowder Plot./4 He claimed that he could not reveal the plot because he was told of it in Confession, though as James I pointed out:

"For first, it can neuer be accounted a thing vnder Confession, which he that reueals it doth not discouer with a remorse, accounting it a sinne whereof hee repenteth him; but by the contrary, discouers it as a good motion, and is therein not dissuaded by his Confessor, nor any penance enioyned him for the same . . . at the last hee did freely confesse, that the party reuealed it vnto him as they were walking, and not in the time of Confession . . . he confessed, that two diuers persons conferred with him anent this Treason; and that when the one of them which was *Catesby*, conferred with him thereupon, it was in the other parties presence and hearing: and what a Confession

can this be in the hearing of a third person?" /5

When Garnet was asked if it were well to deny on his priesthood that he had written to Greenwell or had conference with Hall, knowing his denial to be false, he replied that in his opinion, and that of all the schoolmen, equivocation may be confirmed by oath or sacrament, without perjury, "if just necessity so require." /6 At his trial Garnet excused a man who had perjured himself on his death-bed with the words: "It may be, my Lord, he meant to equivocate." /7 Finally, I may quote Dudley Carleton, who in a letter to John Chamberlaine on May 2 mentions the postponement of Garnet's execution and his surprise when told he was to die. Carleton tells his correspondent that the Jesuit shifts, falters and equivocates,

/1 Winwood, *Memorials*, ii. 205-6.

/2 *Calendar of State Papers (Domestic)*, 1603-10, p. 306.

/3 *Op. cit.* p. 308. /4 *State Trials*, i. 254.

/5 James I, *A Premonition in Political Works* (1918), pp. 156-7.

/6 *Calendar*, etc. p. 313 (28 April). /7 *State Trials*, i. 266.

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but "will be hanged without equivocation." /1 This grim jest, worthy of the Porter, is quoted by Mr. Stunz in his article on the date of *Macbeth*. /2 He goes on to argue that the Porter's references to drunkenness and lechery are also aimed at Garnet, who comforted himself with sack to drown sorrow, /3 and was falsely accused of fornication with Mrs. Vaux, a slander he repudiated in a speech he made on the scaffold. But there seems to me to be no such implication in the passages about drink and lechery. Some critics have argued that Shakespeare inserted allusions to equivocation in order to please the taste of James I or of the public; but although they doubtless did please the public, there is every reason to believe that Shakespeare with his views on Order would be horrified at the "dire combustion" of the Gunpowder Plot and would have agreed with his royal master on the subject:

And so the earth as it were opened, should haue sent forth of the bottome of the *Stygian* lake such sulphured smoke, furious flames, and fearefull thunder, as should haue by their diabolicall *Domesday* destroyed and defaced, in the twinkling of an eye, not onely our present liuing Princes and people, but euen our insensible Monuments. . . /4

Dr. Leslie Hotson has shown that Shakespeare must have been personally interested in the Gunpowder Plot:

When we consider that most of the traitors were native to his own countryside; that he had known Catesby and Grant from his child-

hood; that Tresham, Catesby, Grant, and the Winters were cousins and allies of the Bushells who were to be connected by marriage with his daughter, Judith; that in London the plotters frequented the Mermaid Tavern . . . ; that . . . Ben Jonson had dined with Catesby and Winter only a few days before the explosion was to have torn to bits the Earl of Southampton and the brothers of his friends Thomas Russell and William Leveson, it seems that the peculiar

/1 *Calendar*, etc. p. 315. Garnet was not alone in his views. Father Strange argued that the accused "can use equivocation, if he is unjustly interrogated, when it is a matter of prison, danger of death or torture" (quoted Hotson, *I, William Shakespeare*, p. 196). Cf. Strange's statement "that Catholics do hold that they may lawfully equivocate" and said that he "did hold it lawful also" (S.P. 14/17/No. 32, *Calendar*, p. 270, 12 Dec. 1605). There is a treatise on Equivocation in the Bodleian, probably by Gerard, with corrections in Garnet's hand. (Printed 1851, ed. Jardine.)

/2 *English Literary History*, 1942.

/3 *Calendar*, p. 305.

/4 James I, *Workes*, 1616, p. 224.

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horror of the dark design and its end in blood and revenge must have taken more hold on his feelings than we have suspected./1

Nor is there reason to doubt that Shakespeare agreed with the King, and most of his subjects, on the damnableness of equivocation. Devout Catholics like Anne Vaux were equally scandalized by Garnet's conduct: she remarked that she was sorry to hear that he was privy to the Plot, as he had made many protestations to the contrary./2 At about the time *Macbeth* was first performed, the King, saved from death by what he regarded as a miracle, praised the wisdom of the Venetian Republic for the measures she had taken against the Jesuits:

"O blessed and wise Republic . . . how well she knows the way to preserve her liberty; for the Jesuits are the worst and most seditious fellows in the world. They are slaves and spies, as you know." He then embarked on a discourse about the Society. By an able induction from all the kingdoms and provinces of the world he demonstrated that they have always been the authors and instruments of all the great disturbances which have taken place./3

These quotations will give some idea of the climate of opinion in which *Macbeth* was written. Lord Salisbury's *Answer to Certain Scandalous Papers* -- an exposure of equivocation -- was being "greedily read" as early as 5 February 1606;/4 but equivocation became a still more burning topic at the time of Garnet's trial and execution which must have preceded the writing of the Porter's speech.

There are various other scraps of evidence about the date. The price of wheat was low in the three years 1605-7; but as the farmer who hanged himself on the

expectation of plenty was an old joke, we cannot assume that the Porter's allusion refers to any particular year./5 The reference to French hose (II. iii. 14) seems to imply that it was close-fitting, but the joke was an old one, and

/1 Hotson, *I, William Shakespeare*, pp. 197-8. That Shakespeare had actually known Catesby and Grant is questionable. But the whole chapter, pp. 172-202, contains interesting sidelights on *Macbeth*.

/2 *Calendar*, p. 299. See also Garnet's letter to Anne Vaux, *op. cit.* p. 309.

/3 *Calendar of State Papers (Venetian)*, x, p. 361. June 14, 1606.

/4 *Calendar of State Papers (Domestic)*, p. 286. Cited by Chambers.

/5 Cf. *P.M.L.A.*, 1. p. 712.

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too much reliance cannot be placed on it./1 Shakespeare need not have heard of Matthew Gwynne's entertainment at St. John's College, Oxford, on the occasion of †Jame I's visit on 27 August 1605, for though this was based on the prophecies of the three Weird Sisters the poet knew his Holinshed. Nor need he have known of the investiture of Sir David Murray as Lord Scone, which was fancifully compared by Hunter to the investiture of Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor. All these facts, inconclusive as they are, do nothing to disturb the probability that *Macbeth* was written in 1606 -- a date that is supported by various metrical tests./2

There are, however, two difficulties about this dating. As Bradley pointed out,/3 there are a number of parallels between *Macbeth* and *Sophonisba*; and these impelled Sir Edmund Chambers to put Shakespeare's play early in 1606 and supported Dr. Dover Wilson's argument that the references to Garnet were added for a court performance. As *Sophonisba* was entered in the Stationers' Register on 17 March, one may doubt whether Marston could have got his play written and performed in the few weeks which were supposed to have elapsed between the first performance of *Macbeth* earlier in the year and the entry of *Sophonisba*. The relevant passages in Marston's play are all an integral part of the text and the most significant are in Act I, which he probably wrote first./4

/1 Cf. note *loc. cit.* Malone quoted Anthony Nixon's *Black Year*, 1606: "Gentlemen this year shall be much wronged by their taylers, for their consciences are now much larger than ever they were, for where they were wont to steal but half a yard of brood cloth in making up a payre of breeches, now they do largely nicke their customers in the lace too, and take more than enough for the new fashion's sake, besides their old ones." But Chambers argues that this refers only to the lace on the hose.

/2 E.g. there are many more overflows in *Macbeth* than in the other three "great" tragedies, and in one place there are nine successive overflows; there are many more light-endings (O. 2, H. 8, L. 5, M. 21) and in this respect

Macbeth approaches *Antony and Cleopatra*.

/3 *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 471.

/4 (i) *Sophonisba*, I. ii. 5-27; *Macbeth*, III. iv. 35. On the importance of ceremony. Bradley omits this.

(ii) *Sophonisba*, I. ii; *Macbeth*, I. ii. 49-51. Quoted below.

(iii) *Sophonisba*, I. ii. Cf. wounded Carthalon with the bloody Sergeant in *Macbeth*, I. ii.

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But need we assume that Marston was the debtor? There is reason to believe that Shakespeare was influenced by *Antonio and Mellida*,/1 and I think it can be shown that he was influenced by *Sophonisba* also. By far the most striking parallel is the following:

three hundred saile
Upon whose tops the *Roman* eagles streachd
Their large spread wings, which fan'd the evening ayre
To us cold breath, for well we might discerne
Rome swam to *Carthage*.

From Fiffe, great King,
Where the Norwegian Banners flowt the Skie,
And fanne out people cold.

The Marston passage is more obvious than Shakespeare's: for whereas eagles, by a quibble, can readily be imagined as fanning cold air to the enemy, it is more difficult to see the aptness of the lines in which the inanimate Norwegian banners actively fan the Scots' army. I assume with Mr. Nosworthy that the second scene of *Macbeth* is substantially authentic,/2 and that we should not, therefore, rely on a convenient interpolator to account for this and other echoes from *Sophonisba*. It is more likely that Shakespeare picked up one of Marston's best images from the second scene of *Sophonisba* than that Marston imitated several passages from one of the weakest scenes in *Macbeth* -- though it may have been better in its original form,

(iv) *Sophonisba*, I. ii. "yet doubtfull stood the fight"; *Macbeth*, I. ii. 7, "Doubtful it stood."

(v) *Sophonisba*, I. ii. "when loe, as oft we see"; *Hamlet*, II. ii. 499, 505, "for loe . . . But as we often see."

(vi) *Sophonisba*, III. ii. "Greefe fits weake hearts, revenging virtue men"; *Macbeth*, IV. iii. 214-5. And compare the ends of these scenes.

(vii) *Sophonisba*, IV. i. "I know thy thoughts"; *Macbeth*, IV. i. "He knows thy thought."

(viii) *Sophonisba*, V. iii. "Small rivers murmur, deep fulges silent flow"; *Macbeth*, IV. iii. 209-10. But this is a favourite quotation from Seneca.

/1 F. Radebrecht, *Shakespeare's Abhängigkeit von John Marston*, 1918. Cf. Thorndike, *Relations of "Hamlet" to Contemporary Revenge Plays*, P.M.L.A. xvii. pp. 200-1. Radebrecht is reviewed by Charlton in *M.L.R.* xvii. I owe these references to H. Harvey Wood's edition of Marston. See my letters in *T.L.S.* October 1948.

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before cutting -- while he remained uninfluenced by later and greater scenes.

One other parallel remains to be mentioned. In the anonymous play, *Cæsar's Revenge*, are the lines:

Why thinke you Lords that tis ambitions spur
That pricketh Cæsar to these high attempts,
Or hope of Crownes, or thoughts of Diademes.
-- (1468-70)

The resemblance to *Macbeth*, I. vii. 25-7 (spur . . . prick . . . ambition) is not likely to be fortuitous. *Cæsar's Revenge* was entered in the Stationers' Register in June 1606; but the play is old-fashioned in style, and might well have been written in the previous reign. We must assume that Shakespeare was the borrower in this case too.

If, therefore, Shakespeare borrowed from these two plays, very little remains of the case that a *Macbeth* existed before 1606. It has been suggested by Dr. Dover Wilson that the passage about the hanging of traitors (IV. ii. 44-63) is an interpolation, as it is prose in the middle of a verse scene.^{/1} This is not impossible; but there is no means of telling whether it was interpolated five minutes or five years after the scene was originally completed. Dr. Wilson suggests further that the "milk of concord" and the "King's Evil" passages ^{/2} were interpolated in 1606 for a Court performance. This is also possible; but the same caveat applies as before -- that there was an interpolation does not prove any great lapse of time between the composition of the original scene and its revision. Then Dr. Wilson thinks that the second scene of the play must have been written soon after the Hecuba speeches in *Hamlet*; but the resemblance can better be explained as a deliberate attempt on Shakespeare's part to adopt a style suitable for "epic" narrative, on the model of Marlowe's account of the fall of Troy in *Dido* and Kyd's account of the battle in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Nothing can be deduced about the date of the scene in *Macbeth*. Lastly Dr. Wilson argues that the play has been cut so

^{/1} Op. cit. p. xxxi.

^{/2} IV. iii. 91-100, 140-60. Cf. Wilson, pp. xxxi-xxxiii.

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expertly -- apart from what he regards as clumsy cuts for

which Middleton was responsible in I. ii. -- that only Shakespeare could have performed the operation./1 This is a large assumption, and is linked with the theory that there was a scene between Macbeth and his wife between I. iii. and I. iv.; that there was a later scene in which Lady Macbeth went with knife in hand to murder Duncan, and another dialogue between her and her husband; that Banquo in the original play made his position clear on the accession of Macbeth, and showed that he was not acquiescing in Macbeth's crimes; that the appearance of the Third Murderer was not mysterious in the original play; and that Macduff's desertion of his wife was adequately explained./2 I find it impossible to accept any of these hypotheses, not only because there is no positive evidence for them, but because the play would greatly suffer from any one of these speculative additions. Two more dialogues between Macbeth and his wife before the murder of Duncan would be dramatically disastrous -- "Enough -- or too much," as Blake remarked; for Macbeth to play, or even intend to play, a passive role in the murder would detract from his tragic stature; Banquo's conduct requires no explanation; and any explanation of the Third Murderer or of Macduff's "desertion" would detract from the atmosphere of suspicion so necessary in this part of the play.

Nor can I find any real evidence that *Macbeth* was first performed in Edinburgh before the death of Queen Elizabeth, or, for that matter, that Shakespeare had ever visited Scotland. Saintsbury's opinion that there are two strata in *Macbeth* is based on the characteristics of the second scene of the play, which have been explained above. The possibility that Shakespeare derived his portrait of Lady Macbeth from Stewart's *Metrical Chronicle* is, I believe, remote; and even if it were less remote, we need not assume that he read that poem in the Scottish capital,

/1 Op. cit. p. xxxiii.

/2 Lady Blakeney was not aware that her husband was the Scarlet Pimpernel! See Wilson, op. cit. pp. xvi, xxxiv-xxxix and my notes on I. ii., I. iv. 35, I. v. 68, I. vii. 48; III. i. 1-10, 129; IV. ii. 1, IV. iii. 99-100, IV. iii. 140-59.

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for he might have been lent a copy in England after James' accession had brought a flood of Scotsmen to London./1

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the play was first performed in 1606, first at the Globe, and afterwards at Court -- perhaps with a few minor alterations, and perhaps before King Christian of Denmark, who was

in England in July and August of that year on a visit to his brother-in-law, James I. It would be hazardous to attempt a more precise dating of the play./2

3. Interpolations

It would be a fruitless task to detail all the passages in *Macbeth* which, by one critic or another, have been regarded as spurious. I have referred to many of them in the notes to individual passages. The more important ones are as follows:

(i) Act I, Scene i. Cuningham thought it was written by Middleton.

(ii) Act I, Scene ii. The Clarendon editors and Cuningham suspected this scene was by Middleton. As I have suggested, Shakespeare was deliberately writing in an "epic" style./3

/1 Shakespeare's hypothetical debt to Stewart is discussed below under *Sources*, pp. xxxix-xliv.

/2 Mr. Stunz argues that as James touched for the evil at about the time of Garnet's execution (cf. C.S.P. (*Venetian*) p. 344: "These last few days the King has been attending to his devotions, which, according to the custom of the country, occupy Holy Week. He has touched many for Scrofula, they say with hopes of good effects, remembering the earlier cases of healing conferred by his hand") and as there were bad harvests abroad which sent up the price of English wheat, the play must have been performed before August 1606. Stunz dates it May-June. But I doubt whether it is possible to tie it down so exactly, or whether we can estimate how long the play took to write. James was touching as early as 6 November 1604. J. M. Robertson argues in *Literary Detection* (1931) that the play was written in 1601-2. H. N. Paul, (*Review of English Studies*, 1947, pp. 193-200) suggests that the play was first performed at Hampton Court on August 7, 1606. J. G. McManaway, *Shakespeare Survey*, 2, p. 149, thinks that this "was most certainly the first performance of Shakespeare's abbreviated version." Mr. Paul also argues that IV. iii. 97-100 were interpolated, and that they were suggested to Shakespeare by Marston's entertainment before James I on 31 July, in which Concordia was deliver a Latin oration on Concord, Peace and Unity -- three words used in the alleged interpolation. This is quite possible.

/3 Cf. Nosworthy, *Review of English Studies*, 1946. He has since suggested privately that the battle descriptions might originally have formed part of a "prologue armed". Cf. *Troilus and Cressida*.

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(iii) Act I, Scene iii, 1-37. The Clarendon editors and Cuningham thought these lines were by Middleton.

(iv) Act I, Scene iii, 1-22. Coleridge and the Clarendon editors thought these lines were interpolated by the actors, and presumably also the bawdy dialogue which follows, 26-42.

(v) Act III, Scene v. Most editors regard this scene as spurious.

(vi) Act IV, Scene i, 39-43, 125-32. Many editors regard these lines as spurious.

(vii) Act IV, Scene ii, 30-64. Cuningham thought this

passage was spurious.

(viii) Act IV, Scene iii, 140-60. The Clarendon editors believed this to be an interpolation.

(ix) Act V, Scene ii. The Clarendon editors doubted the authenticity of this scene.

(x) Act V, Scene ix. The Clarendon editors thought this passage showed "evident traces of another hand."

Most of these do not require further discussion. Mr. Nosworthy has proved the authenticity of Nos. ii and x. Professor Knights and others have defended Nos. i and iii. No one who regards Nos. vii-ix as spurious has offered any serious evidence./1 There remain Nos. iv-vi. No. iv is worth discussing merely because it was an aberration of one of the greatest of critics; with regard to Nos. v and vi, I agree with previous editors that the passages are spurious, but I think it has been too easily assumed that the interpolator was Middleton.

(A) The Porter Scene

I have said enough, in discussing the date of the play, to indicate some of the contemporary significance of the Porter scene. Few critics would now agree with Coleridge that the soliloquy with which the scene begins was, apart from one obviously Shakespearean phrase, interpolated by the players./2

/1 Nor need we pursue that prince of disintegrators, J. M. Robertson, in his attempts to divide the authentic from the spurious in *Literary Detection*.

/2 Coleridge's *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Raysor, i. pp. 75-8. Coleridge had no love for low jokes; on the other hand he could not help noticing the Shakespearean ring of the phrase, "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." So, by giving the low jokes to another writer, and retaining for Shakespeare an indisputably Shakespearean phrase, Coleridge was able to safeguard the dramatist's moral, as well as his poetical, reputation.

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The scene is theatrically necessary, because the actor who plays Macbeth has to change his costume and wash his hands, and (as Capell suggested) it was necessary "to give a rational space for the discharge of these actions." Shakespeare himself was fully conversant with theatrical necessities; but if these were the sole reason for the scene's existence it might have been added by another hand.

Some scene there had to be between the exit of Macbeth and the entrance of Macduff. But this does not explain why Shakespeare should choose or permit a drunken Porter, when a sober Porter, singing an aubade, as in one of the German versions, might seem to do as well. Comic relief is a convenient, but question-begging, term; for Shakespeare, we might suppose, could have used

lyrical relief, if relief were needed. As Coleridge pointed out, Shakespeare never introduced the comic "but when it may react on the tragedy by harmonious contrast." A great dramatist does not laboriously create feelings of tension and intensity to dissipate them in laughter. Sometimes he may use humour as a laughing-conductor, so as to prevent the audience from laughing in the wrong place, and at the wrong things, thereby endangering the sublimity of the hero. In the present case, too, it is impossible to agree with those critics who think the function of the Porter is to take the present horror from the scene. On the contrary, the effect of the Porter's scene is almost the opposite of this. It is there -- I do not say for the groundlings, but for the more judicious -- in order to increase the horror of the situation. We are never allowed to forget, throughout the scene, the crime that has been committed and is about to be discovered. If we laugh, it not the laughter of oblivion.

It is, perhaps, in accordance with the Scottish national character that a Porter in his cups should talk in true Calvinistic fashion of damnation. In his opening words he identifies himself with the traditional figure of the miracle plays, the porter of hell-gate,^{/1} who was expected to make jests, but who was something more than a jester. The purpose of linking the Porter with this traditional character was two-fold: first, because it transports us

/1 Hales, Notes and Essays on Shakespeare, 1884, pp. 273-90.

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from Inverness to the gate of Hell, without violating the unity of place, for Shakespeare has only to tell us the name of the place we were in before. It is the gate of hell because Lady Macbeth has called on the murdering ministers, because Macbeth has called on the stars to hide their fires, and because hell is a state, and not a place, and the murderers might say with Mephostophilis --

"where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be."

Shakespeare's second reason for recalling the miracle plays was that it enabled him to cut the cable that moored his tragedy to a particular spot in space and time, so that it could become universalized on the one hand, or become contemporary on the other. Macbeth's tragedy might therefore appear as a second Fall, with Lady Macbeth as a second Eve; or it could appear as terrifyingly contemporary. As Mr. Bethell puts it,

the historical element distances and objectifies what is contemporary, and the contemporary element gives current significance to an historical situation. The equivocators, for example, had conspired to kill the king, as Macbeth was doing: and Macbeth's own regicide involved him in a life of equivocation. The whole atmosphere of treason and distrust which informs *Macbeth* found a parallel in the England of the Gunpowder Plot, so that a passing reference serves to define an attitude both to the Macbeth regime and to contemporary affairs./1

The reference to treason in the Porter's speech looks back to the executed Thane of Cawdor, the gentleman on whom Duncan had built an absolute trust; and it looks forward to the dialogue between Lady Macduff and her son, and to the long testing of Macduff by Malcolm -- which shows the distrust and suspicion which grow from equivocation and hypocrisy. Later in the play, Macbeth complains of

th' equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth;

and of those juggling fiends

That palter with us in a double sense,
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.

/1 *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, 1944, p. 46. P. Ure points out (N.Q., 28 May, 1949) that the chapter added to Warner's *Albion's England* (1606) dealing with the story of Macbeth is immediately followed by one on the Gunpowder Plot.

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Indeed, as Dowden pointed out,/1 Macbeth on his next appearance is compelled to equivocate. Later in the same scene there is an even more striking equivocation:

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.

The audience knows, as Macbeth himself was to know -- though he here intended to deceive -- that the words are a precise description of the truth about himself. Macbeth's own equivocation, by an ironical twist, becomes merely an aspect of truth. It is a brilliant counterpart to the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth: it is the equivocation of the murderer who utters truth like lies. Equivocation therefore links up with one of the

main themes of the play, and the equivocator would have earned his place in the Porter scene if Father Garnet had never lived.

Similarly, the unnaturalness of the avaricious farmer is contrasted with the images of natural growth and harvest which are scattered through the play; and he is connected with the equivocator, because Garnet went under the alias of Farmer. Even the tailor has his place in the scheme of the play, because of the clothing imagery which is so abundant in it./2

Nor is the style of the scene un-Shakespearean. Bradley pointed out resemblances between Pompey's soliloquy on the inhabitants of the prison in *Measure for Measure* and the Porter's soliloquy and between the dialogue of Pompey with Abhorson (IV. ii. 22 ff.) and the dialogue that follows the Porter's soliloquy./3 We may go further and suggest that one of the Porter's speeches, often bowdlerized out of existence, provides a valuable clue to one theme of the play. He is speaking of the effects of liquor, in answer

/1 *New Shakespeare Society Transactions*, 1874.

/2 Not only the image of the ill-fitting garments pointed out by Miss Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, pp. 325-7. Cf. notes on II. iii. 6, 9, 16.

/3 *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 397.

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to Macduff's question: "What three things does drink especially provoke?"

Marry, Sir, nose-painting, sleep and urine. Lechery, Sir, it provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him, and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and not stand to: in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and giving him the lie, leaves him.

Drink "provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance"; and this contrast between *desire* and *act* is repeated several times in the course of the play. Lady Macbeth, in invoking the evil spirits, begs them not to allow compunctious visitings of nature to shake her fell purpose,

nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it:

that is, intervene between her purpose and its fulfilment. Two scenes later she asks her husband:

Art thou afeard

To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire?

In the last scene in which the weird sisters appear (IV. i.), Macbeth gives some variation on the same theme:

The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,
Unless the deed go with it. From this moment,
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done . . .
This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool.

This passage is linked with one at the end of Banquet scene, where Macbeth tells his wife:

Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
Which must be acted, ere they may be scanned.

The opposition between the hand and the other organs and senses recurs again and again. Macbeth observes the functioning of his own organs with a strange objectivity: in particular, he speaks of his hand almost as though it had an independent existence of its own.

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He exhorts his eye to wink at the hand; when he sees the imaginary dagger, he decides that his eyes have been made the fools of the other senses, or else worth all the rest; later in the same speech his very footsteps seem, as it were, to be divorced from himself:

Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my where-about;

and, after the murder of Duncan, both criminals are obsessed by the thought of their bloody hands. Macbeth speaks of them as "a sorry sight" and as "hangman's hands" -- the hangman had to draw and quarter his victim; Lady Macbeth urges him to wash the "filthy witness" from his hand; and in the great speech that follows her exit, Macbeth asks

What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
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.

In the first line of this quotation the hand-eye opposition appears in its most striking, most hallucinated, form.

Lady Macbeth persists in her illusion that a little water clears them of the deed, -- an illusion she has to expiate in the sleep-walking scene. Just before the murder of Banquo, Macbeth invokes 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.

The bloody hand has now been completely detached from Macbeth and become a part of Night. Later in the play we are reminded of the same series of images when Angus declares that Macbeth feels

His secret murders sticking on his hands./1

/1 The hand-eye opposition was possibly suggested by the Biblical injunctions to pluck out the eye that offends, and to cut off the hand that offends; for these occur in chapters which are echoed elsewhere in the play. In *Matt. vi.* there are references to the single eye and to the fowls of the air, mentioned by Macduff's son; *Matt. v* is echoed several times in the scenes relating to the murder of Banquo; *Matt. xviii* contains references to the

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The Porter's words on lechery have yet another significance. They are written in an antithetical form: *provokes--unprovokes; provokes--takes away; desire--performance; makes--mars; sets on--takes off; persuades--disheartens; stand to--not stand to.* Here concentrated in half a dozen lines we find one of the predominant characteristics of the general style of the play -- it consists of multitudinous antitheses. The reader has only to glance at any page of the play./1 We may link this trick of style with the "wrestling of destruction with creation"/2 which Mr. Wilson Knight has found in the play, and with the opposition he has pointed out between night and day, life and death, grace and evil. Mgr. Kolbe likewise speaks of the play as a "picture of a special battle in a universal war" -- the war, that is, between sin and grace -- and he declares that

this idea is portrayed and emphasized in words and phrases more than 400 times. . . . Not a single scene in the play is without the colour. And the whole effect is enhanced by the twofold contrast we have already observed, -- Darkness and Light as a parable, Discord and Concord as a result./3

But the play contains many antitheses which are not to be found under such headings as Angel and Devil, good and evil. It may even be suggested that the iterative

image of ill-fitting garments is a kind of pictorial anti-thesis, a contrast between the man and his clothes, as in the lines --

Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.

Another recurrent image, -- not mentioned by Miss Spurgeon -- may be regarded as a contrast between the picture and the thing depicted:

everlasting fire and to offending "one of these little ones" (cf. IV. ii. 68); *Mark* ix contains the same references; and *Luke* xi mentions Beelzebub three times, and also knocking. Cf. note to II. ii. 58 and R. Walker, op. cit.
/1 E.g. in the First Act: i. 4, 11; ii. 26, 67; iii. 38, 41, 45, 51, 53, 61, 64-5, 81, 124, 131, 138, 141; v. 20-3, 49, 57, 68; vii. 6, 15, 20-1, 44, 46, 53, 82. *Much Ado* also contains much antithesis.
/2 *The Imperial Theme*, p. 153. /3 *Shakespeare's Way*, 1930, pp. 21-2.

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the sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil.

This is the very painting of your fear.

Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
And look on death itself! Up, up, and see
The great doom's image!

These images are linked with the equivocation, deceit, and treachery which have been noted by more than one critic as constituting one of the main themes of the play. These too are a contrast between appearance and reality./1

The style of the Porter's speech is not alien to that of the rest of the play. It possesses the antithetical characteristics of the verse, suitably "transposed" for semi-comic purposes. The whole scene is linked so closely with the rest of the play, in content as well as in style, that it is impossible to regard it as a barbarous interpolation of the actors. The antithetical style is a powerful means of suggesting the paradox and enigma of the nature of man,

The glory, jest, and riddle of the world,

the conflict within him between sin and grace, between reason and emotion, and the shadow which falls

Between the potency
And the existence

Between the essence
And the descent.

This discussion of the authenticity of the scene has led us imperceptibly into a consideration of the play as a whole; and this in itself may serve to show that the Porter is an integral part of the play. We might almost apply Bishop Wordsworth's remark on the scene -- though he meant something rather different: "I believe it may be read with edification."

/1 Cf. Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, 1949, pp. 140-59; Knights, *Explorations*, pp. 18 ff.; T. Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, pp. 153-62.

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(B) The Hecate Scenes

Two songs were interpolated in III. v. and IV. i. from Middleton's *The Witch*, a play which was not printed until 1778. It has, however, come down to us in a transcript by Ralph Crane, one of the scribes of the King's Men. He states that the play was "long since acted by His Majesty's servants at the Blackfriars"; and, as the company did not act there before the autumn of 1609, it can be assumed that the play was written after that date. The transcript has been roughly dated 1620-7, so that "long since" is likely to have been before 1620, and perhaps before 1615./1 Lawrence argues that *The Witch* was written soon after Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, and suggests that the same performers, the same dances, and the same costumes were used./2 This is plausible enough; but we cannot tell how long the performers and costumes would be available, if indeed they were available at all. Dr. Wilson thinks 1609-10 is a "highly probable date" for *The Witch*. But it may be that Middleton did not start writing for the King's men before 1614, and that *The Witch* was not written until 1616./3

It is impossible to determine when the two songs were added to *Macbeth*. Forman's account in 1611 does not help us one way or the other, because he does not mention the Cauldron scene. Perhaps the astrologer thought that no profitable moral "for common policy" could be drawn from the equivocating prophecies, which might warn spectators not to believe in the prophecies of even respectable astrologers./4 One would like to think that Shakespeare was dead and buried, or at least living in retirement at Stratford, before his fellows spoiled his play. It is reasonable to assume that Shakespeare himself would have been called in to revise the play, if he had been avail-

able. On the whole I am inclined to think that the play

/1 Cf. Greg, *Elizabethan Dramatic Documents*, pp. 358-9; F. P. Wilson's article on Crane in *The Library*, vii. 194-215; Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, ii. 510; Dover Wilson, op. cit. pp. xxvii-xxviii.

/2 *Shakespeare's Workshop*, pp. 28-33.

/3 Cf. Bald, *Modern Language Review*, xxxii. p. 43.

/4 Forman successfully prophesied the day of his own death, and the sceptical have therefore suspected that he took his own life.

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was contaminated after the performance witnessed by Forman, and possibly -- if the same performers and costumes were used -- soon afterwards.

But was Middleton himself responsible? Mr. J. M. Nosworthy points out that

The Hecate of Middleton's *The Witch* is a very different creature from the *prima donna* and *prima ballerina* of *Macbeth*. She is coarse, brusque, and colloquial, speaking mainly in blank verse, . . . and never in octosyllabic couplets.

He goes on to argue that

there is no reason why the Hecate so rudely thrust into *Macbeth* should not have had all the properties of her namesake in *The Witch*. Close comparison of the two plays has convinced me that, of all contemporary claims to the Hecate scenes, Middleton's is, in fact, the weakest./1

Mr. Nosworthy is surely right, and I believe that the Hecate passages (III. v.; IV. i. 39-43, 125-32) were all written by an anonymous writer not without poetic ability, who was instructed to explain and introduce the two songs and the dance which had been interpolated from *The Witch*. It was then found necessary to make certain other alterations in the play. Perhaps some cuts were made in I. ii. iii. and iv.; and apparently there was some re-arrangement of scenes later in the play.

Fifty years ago it was conjectured by Crosse /2 that III. vi. should follow IV. i. and he suggested that it was shifted to its present position, on the interpolation of the Hecate scene, so as to prevent the juxtaposition of two witch scenes. Lenox and the Lord, Crosse argued, converse on matters which have not yet occurred, and of which Macbeth was ignorant until informed by Lenox at the end of IV. i. Chambers points out that Macbeth decides (III. iv. 132-3) to go on the following morning to the Weird Sisters, and IV. i. presumably takes place only a few hours after the end of the Banquet scene. Macbeth at the same time declares that he will send to-morrow to Macduff; and yet in III. vi. we hear that his messenger

/1 *The Review of English Studies*, April 1948, p. 138.

/2 *Notes and Queries*, 22 October 1898.

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has already been repulsed by Macduff, and that the latter has fled to England. A considerable interval is therefore required between III. iv. and III. vi. It might be added that Macbeth's spy at Fife must have been singularly incompetent not to discover that Macbeth had fled until after the "Lord" had told Lennox. Now Shakespeare has elsewhere deliberately departed from chronological sequence for the sake of some dramatic effect,^{/1} and his dramatic time is seldom realistic, but in this case the loss of dramatic surprise at Macduff's flight (IV. i. 142) is a heavy price to pay for some increase of irony (IV. i. 82). I think we must assume (1) that III. vi. originally followed IV. i. and (2) that Lennox's speeches in one scene or the other originally belonged to another character. This scene, III. vi., would then be an effective means of expanding the brief announcement that Macduff had fled at the end of IV. i. There is, however, a difficulty. The Banquet scene and the Cauldron scene would thereby be juxtaposed, and the furniture of the former would have to be removed. This might be done by drawing a traverse on the departure of the guests in the Banquet scene; or there might be an interval; or III. vi. may consist of an amalgam of two scenes, one of which came before, and one after, the Cauldron scene.^{/2}

Middleton was himself influenced by *Macbeth* when he wrote *The Witch* as the following parallels will show:

- (i) "For the maid servants and the girls o' th' house,
I spic'd them lately with a drowsy posset."
(IV. iii. 17) "Francisca is watching late at night to encourage
the perpetration of a murder" (Steevens). Cf. *Macbeth*, II. ii. 6.
- (ii) "the innocence of sleep" (IV. iii. 47). Cf. *Macbeth*, II. ii. 35.
- (iii) "There's no such thing" (IV. iii. 78).
"Francisca when she undeceives her brother, whose imagination
has been equally abused" (Steevens). Cf. *Macbeth*, II. i. 47.

/1 *Troilus and Cressida*, III. iii. must come chronologically before III. ii.

/2 But see note on III. iv. 131 and *M.L.N.* xv. p. 81. R. Walker, *The Time is Free*, Chap. 5, has a detailed defence of III. vi. which brushes aside the difficulties; but J. Q. Adams in his edition, 1931, argues that the scene is spurious.

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(iv) "I'll rip thee down from neck to navel" (V. i. 16). Cf. *Macbeth*, I. ii. 22.

(v) "Why shak'st thy head so,
And look'st so pale and poorly?" (III. ii. 145-6).
Cf. *Macbeth*, I. vii. 37; II. ii. 64, 71.

There are also a number of parallels with the Witch scenes in *Macbeth*, which may be explained by the fact that the two dramatists drew on similar sources for their information. Some of these parallels are with the Hecate scenes.

Lamb, in a famous passage, described the differences between Middleton's witches and the Weird Sisters:

His witches are distinguished from the witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first met Macbeth he is spellbound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These witches can hurt the body, those have power over the soul. Hecate, in Middleton, has a son, a low buffoon: the hags of Shakspeare have neither child of their own, nor seem descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them. Except Hecate, they have no names; which heightens their mysteriousness. The names, and some of the properties, which Middleton has given to his hags, excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But in a lesser degree, the Witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power, too, is, in some measure, over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, *like a thick scurf o'er life.*^{/1}

It may be observed, however, that the weird sisters do not plant the seeds of evil in Macbeth; that they have no power over the innocent; that hatred and the love of power are, alas, human passions; and that Lamb had no reason to suppose that the Hecate scenes were spurious -- as they doubtless are.^{/2}

^{/1} *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets.*

^{/2} "The speeches of the three weird sisters . . . are prevailingly tetrameter with a trochaic cadence, the rhythm which Shakespeare almost always, if not always, adopts in songs and in lyrical passages hardly to be told from songs. . . . The fact that the speeches of Hecate and the First Witch

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4. Sources

The main source of *Macbeth*, and perhaps the only one, was Holinshed's *Chronicles*; but Kempe, in his *Nine*

Daies Wonder (1600), refers to what was apparently a ballad on the subject, and ballads were frequently based on plays:

I met a proper vpright youth, onely for a little stooping in the shoulders, all hart to the heele, a penny Poet whose first making was the miserable stolne story of Macdoel or Macdobeth or Macsometwhat, for I am sure a Mac it was though I neuer had the maw to see it.

Kempe proceeds to advise its author to "leauē writing these beastly ballets, make not good wenches prophetesses for little or no profit" -- which may well be a reference to the three Weird Sisters. As Kempe seems very vague about the details it is difficult to deduce anything definite from this reference: but he presumably would not speak of a stolen story if it were merely taken from *Holinshed*, and it is reasonable to assume that the ballad was based on a play -- perhaps on a play with which Kempe was not personally acquainted. Shakespeare may have seen this ballad, and may have known the play on which it was based./1

(III. v. 4-43; IV. i. 39-43, 125-32) are in iambic measures creates, I think, a strong presumption against their Shakespearean authorship. . . . What is more, the metre of these speeches of Hecate -- dull, mechanical, regular, touched with favour and prettiness -- is in striking and almost amusing contrast with the grotesqueness, the freedom, the bold roughness of the colloquies and incantations of the weird sisters" (D. L. Chambers, *The Metre of "Macbeth"*; quoted Lawrence, op. cit. pp. 36-7).

/1 Collier professed to discover the following entry in the Stationers' Register: "27 die Augusti 1596. Tho. Millington -- Thomas Millington is likewyse fyned at ijs vjd for printinge of a ballad contrarye to order, which he also presently paid. *Md. the ballad entitled the taming of a shrew. Also one other Ballad of Macdobeth.*" Unfortunately the italicised words are almost certainly a modern fabrication. See Greg's remarks, *The Library*, VIII, 418, and *M.L.N.* 1930. Mrs. Stopes mentions, *Shakespeare's Industry*, pp. 95-6, that between 14 July 1567 and the following March there was performed "a tragedie of the King of Scottes; to ye which belonged the scenery of Scotland and a gret castle on the other side" (Harl. MS., 146, fo. 15). This might be an early play on *Macbeth*. A play called *Malcolm Kyng of Scottes* is mentioned in Henslowe's diary (April 1602), perhaps about the *Malcolm* of Shakespeare's play, but more probably about Duncan's grandfather and predecessor on the throne.

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Mrs. C. C. Stopes and Dr. Dover Wilson have argued that Shakespeare was acquainted with William Stewart's *Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland*, an enormous poem of over 42,000 lines which remained in manuscript until 1858. It was written 1531-5 by order of Queen Margaret, for the use of her son, James V. Mrs. Stopes' essay was written in 1897, but it has not found many supporters./1 She argues:

In every case in which Stewart differs from *Holinshed*, Shakespeare

follows Stewart! . . . It is Stewart who makes Donewald's wife bid her husband look up clear, and leave all the rest to her. It is Stewart who turns the conversation after supper to Donewald's indebtedness to the king; . . . It is Stewart who suggests the idea of a swoon, not in the lady, however, but in Donewald himself. . . . It is Stewart who expands the feelings of the Kenneth who murdered Malcolm into visions similar to Macbeth's. It is Stewart who represents Macbeth brooding over the king's injuries, and who suggests the opinions of others as to his character before his wife induced him . . . who sketches the character of Lady Macbeth fully, and speaks of her scolding her husband, and calling him a coward . . . who describes Macbeth as a fatalist throughout, and who sketches the picture of him standing, paralysed by the forest having moved, refusing to fight, while his followers desert him . . . who broaches the idea of perpetuity to Banquo's race. . . . So many other suggestions, phrases, and words even, given only by Stewart, are followed by Shakespeare, that I can only believe that he either directly consulted Stewart's work, or some other play based on that work.

It is necessary to question some of these arguments. The feelings of Kenneth do not seem to me to be expanded in Stewart's poem; Macbeth is not paralyzed in Shakespeare's play when he hears that the forest has moved, but when he hears that Macduff was not born of woman; and neither Mrs. Stopes nor Dr. Wilson give any example of a real verbal parallel between Stewart and Shakespeare, except possibly "til the warldis end" and "the crack of doom" (IV. i. 117). Even here it may be noted that Lancelot Andrewes, in his sermon on the coronation of James I, speaks of the King's descendants, "who shall (wee trust, and pray they may) stretch their line to the world's end." Dr. Wilson adds to the above arguments the suggestion that the summary of Macbeth's character in Stewart's poem is applicable to Shakespeare's hero:

/1 Shakespeare's Industry, 1916, pp. 102-3 [George Bell].

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This Makcobey, quhilk wes bayth wyss and wycht,
Strang in ane stour, and trew as ony steill,
Defendar als with of the commoun weill,
So just ane juge so equale and so trew,
As be his deidis richt weill befoir ay schew,
Syne throw his wyfe consentit to sic thing,
For till distroy his cousing and his king;
So foull ane blek for to put in his gloir,
Quhilk haldin wes of sic honour befoir.

But it seems to me that the resemblances between Stewart and Shakespeare are accidental, and that any poet expanding the bare facts of the story would tend to develop Lady Macbeth's character in the same way. From

Holinshed Shakespeare would learn that Donwald committed the murder of Duff *through setting on of his wife, who bare no lesse malice in hir heart towards the king and showed Donwald the meanes wherby he might soonest accomplish it.* In the section of the *Chronicle* relating to Macbeth himself Shakespeare would have read that his wife *lay sore vpon him to attempt the thing, as she was verie ambitious, burning in vnquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene.* From these hints of the ambition of the wife and the moral scruples of the murderer, it would not be difficult for any dramatist to deduce that Lady Macbeth called her husband a coward, bade him play the hypocrite, and herself pretended great indignation after the murder to cover up their guilt. Even the real or feigned swoon of Lady Macbeth need not necessarily have been suggested by the pretended swoon of Donwald. Nor would it be difficult for two poets independently to have arrived at the idea of Banquo's descendants reigning till the end of the world from Holinshed's "long order of continuall descent" or the corresponding passage in Boece./1 Although

/1 Mrs. Stopes says that "there were doubtless many manuscript copies at one time" of Stewart's poem and that "it is quite possible" that the King lent it to Shakespeare. I think it unlikely that there were more than a handful of copies of the poem in existence in Shakespeare's day. H. N. Paul (*Adams Memorial Studies*, p. 263) argues that Shakespeare might have derived some ideas from the picture of the Banquo tree in Leslie's *De origine*, 1578, including "root" (III. i. 5), "Stick deep" (III. i. 49), "seeds" (III. i. 70), and "snake" (III. ii. 13; III. iv. 29), the two last being suggested by the fruit and

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I am sceptical about Mrs. Stopes' theory, passages from Stewart's poem are printed in the Appendix (pp. 189-94) so that readers can form their own judgment.

In any case, there is no doubt that Holinshed was the main source, and that Shakespeare combined the account of the murder of King Duff with the later account of Macbeth. He may have got some hints about witchcraft from Holinshed's story of the noblemen who conspired with witches against King Duff; and he certainly took several details from the murder of Duff by Donwald and his wife, including the incitement by the wife, the fact that the king was a guest of the murderer and had just given him presents, the murder of the chamberlains whom Donwald and his wife had sent to bed drunk, the pretended indignation of Donwald, and the various portents accompanying the murder. But the murder itself is actually carried out by four of Donwald's servants, who remove the body from the castle./1

The voice that cried "Sleep no more" was probably

suggested by the voice heard by King Kenneth after he had murdered his nephew. One or two details were derived from the *Chronicle* of Edward the Confessor's reign. But the main plot was taken from Holinshed's account of Macbeth, though with many alterations. Shakespeare keeps close to the chronicler in his account of Macbeth's meeting with the Weird Sisters and in the scene between Macduff and Malcolm in England. In

the serpentine trunk of the tree in the picture. Paul also comments on the show of eight kings, and points out that James I in a speech (March 1607) expressed the hope that he and his posterity might "rule over you to the world's end".

/1 A later passage speaks of Donwald's "vile treason in murdering his naturall lord," and there is a reference to Donwald in the margin which may have caught Shakespeare's eye: "A giltie conscience accuseth a man" (p. 151). Also in the margin are the following: "Donwald's wife counselled him to murder the king. . . . The womans euill counsell is followed. . . Donald a verie dissembler" (pp. 150-1); "Prophesies mooue men to vn-lawfull attempts . . . women desirous of high estate . . . Mackbeths guiltie conscience . . . Mackbeths dread . . . His crueltie caused through feare. Makbeths confidence in wizzards. . . . Makbeth recoileth (cf. V. ii. 23). . . . Mackbeths trust in prophesies (pp. 171-5). These marginalia read almost like a running commentary on the play, and would have given hints to Shakespeare on the dramatic treatment of the subject.

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these two scenes there are a number of verbal parallels, partly because in both places Holinshed uses direct speech. Elsewhere Shakespeare occasionally uses single words which may have been suggested by the *Chronicle*, but not many.

The following are the most striking differences:

(i) Duncan, as depicted by Holinshed, is younger than in the play, and he is depicted as a feeble ruler. By making the victim old and holy and by passing over his weaknesses, Shakespeare deliberately blackened the guilt of Macbeth.

(ii) There are three campaigns described in Holinshed which are condensed into one in the play: the defeat of Macdonwald's rebellion, the defeat of Sweno, and the defeat of Canute, who came with a new fleet to avenge his brother Sweno's death. (iii) Macbeth in the *Chronicle* has a genuine grievance against Duncan, who by proclaiming his son Prince of Cumberland went against the laws of succession, and took away from Macbeth the prospect of the throne; which he had every reason to hope for, since he could claim it on behalf of his wife and her son by her first husband. Shakespeare suppresses these facts, partly because he wished for dramatic reasons to accentuate Macbeth's guilt and to minimize any excuses he might have had, and partly for accidental reasons. Macbeth was the murderer of James I's ancestor, and could not be depicted in a favourable light, and because of "the triumph

of primogeniture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries" the method of succession which existed in Macbeth's day was not fully understood in Shakespeare's, even by Holinshed. (iv) Banquo and others were accomplices in the murder of Duncan, which was carried out as an open political assassination. This was altered, partly because it was more dramatic for Macbeth and his wife to bear the whole responsibility for the murder, and partly because Banquo's reputation as James I's ancestor had to be safeguarded. James had a particular dislike of political assassination, even of manifest tyrants./1 Shakespeare

/1 Cf. James, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, in *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain, pp. 60-1, 66: "And although there was neuer a more monstrous persecutor, and tyrant nor *Achab* was: yet all the rebellion, that *Elias* euer raised against him, was to flie to the wildernes: where for fault of sustentation, he was fed with the Corbies. . . . Vnder the lawe, *Ieremie* threateneth

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therefore took the details of the murder from Donwald's murder of Duff. (v) Shakespeare omits the ten years' good rule by Macbeth between the murder of Duncan and the murder of Banquo. It would obviously have ruined the play by breaking it into two and by interfering with Shakespeare's conception of the workings of conscience. (vi) Shakespeare invents the Banquet scene and the appearance of the ghost of Banquo. (vii) He omits the story of Macduff's refusal to assist in the building of Dunsinane Castle. It would have been difficult to dramatize and was not strictly relevant to the main theme of the play. (viii) The Cauldron scene is based on the three prophecies mentioned by Holinshed, but Shakespeare substitutes the Weird Sisters for "a certeine witch, whome hee had in great trust." (ix) In the *Chronicle*, Macbeth surrounded Macduff's castle with a great power. It was more economical dramatically to use murderers. (x) The testing of Macduff by Malcolm is given in full in Holinshed (and it is also to be found in Boece, Bellenden, and Stewart); but Shakespeare omits -- at least in the existing text -- the fable of the Fox and the Flies and adds other vices to those mentioned by Holinshed. In the *Chronicle* the testing of Macduff occurs after he has heard of his wife's death. Shakespeare's alteration enabled him to motivate Malcolm's suspicions. (xi) In the *Chronicle* Macbeth flees from Dunsinane Castle and is pursued by Macduff to Lunfannaine -- an incident which would have been dramatically irrelevant. (xii) Shakespeare invents the sleep-walking scene and the presumed suicide of Lady Macbeth. Holinshed says nothing about the fate of Macbeth's wife or of Donwald's.

the people of God with vtter destruction for rebellion to *Nabuchadnezar* . . . who although he was an idolatrous persecutor, a forraine King; a Tyrant, a vsurper of their liberties; yet in respect they had once receiued and acknowledged him for their king, he not only commandeth them to obey him, but euen to pray for his prosperitie, adioyning the reason to it; because in his prosperitie stood their peace . . . that king whom *Paul* bids the *Romanes* obey and serue for conscience sake, was *Nero* that bloody tyrant, an infamie to his aage, and a monster to the world, being also an idolatrous persecutor. . . . The wickednesse therefore of the King can neuer make them that are ordained to be iudged by him, to become his Iudges." One wonders what *James* would have said of the assassination of *Athaliah*, though approved by scripture, and of *Racine's* glorification of it.

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As there is nothing to show that Shakespeare had studied *Holinshed's* sources, and as there may have been a source play, there is no point in discussing the variants of the *Macbeth* story in *Fordun*, *Andrew of Wintoun*, *Boece*, or *Bellenden*; and there would be still less point in trying to isolate the "historical" *Macbeth*; for few would agree with *Sir Herbert Tree's* remark that "we must interpret *Macbeth*, before and at the crisis, by his just and equitable character as a king that history gives him."/1

It has been suggested by *Sir Herbert Grierson* that Shakespeare derived from *Holinshed's Chronicles*

the tone and atmosphere of the Celtic and primitive legends of violent deeds and haunting remorse. . . . Story after story told him of men driven by an irresistible impulse into deeds of treachery and bloodshed but haunted when the deed was done by the spectres of conscience and superstition./2

/1 Cited by *Knights, Explorations*, p. 15. *Hales, Essays and Notes on Shakespeare*, p. 291, mentions ironically that *Macbeth*, historically speaking, was a good churchman. *Hooker, Ecclesiastical Polity*, provides the evidence: "Will any man deny that the Church doth need the rod of corporal punishment to keep her children in obedience withal? Such a law as *Macabeus* made among the Scots, that he which continued excommunicate two years together, and reconciled not himself to the Church, should forfeit all his goods and possessions." Cf. *Holinshed*, op. cit. pp 171-2.

In *Wyntoun's Original Chronicle*, *Macbeth* is begotten by the Devil on a witch:

"Gottyn he was on ferly wise.
His modyr to woddis made rapayr
For the delyte of haylsum ayr.
Swa scho past apon a day
Til a wode hir for to play;
Scho met of casse withe a fayr man,
Neuir nane sa fayr, as scho thought than,
Before than had scho sene withe sycht. . . ."

This man, who is none other than the Devil, tells her

"that hir son suld be
A man of gret state and bounte,

And na man sulde be born of wif
Off powar to reiff hym his lif."

(VI. xviii. 1900 ff.

Wyntoun describes a dream of Macbeth that he is hunting with Duncan when they encounter the three weird sisters. This dream had become a reality in Boece, who also substitutes Banquo for Duncan, and adds the prophecy about his descendants. Holinshed used Bellenden's translation of Boece as well as the original. See Stopes, op. cit. pp. 78-109 and Wilson, op. cit. pp. viii-xi. /2 *Macbeth*, ed. Grierson, 1914, pp. xviii-xix.

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This is true; but it should be added that there is little evidence of remorse in Holinshed's account of Macbeth, and it is only implied in his treatment of Donwald.

5. *Macbeth*, 1606-1948

Most of the great actors and actresses during the past three hundred years have appeared in *Macbeth*, from Burbage to Mr. John Gielgud; but between 1674 and 1744 the play was performed only in D'Avenant's adaptation./1 Garrick restored most of Shakespeare's text /2 and Macready most of the rest.

Although the play was regularly acted, it evoked little interesting criticism until the end of the eighteenth century, presumably because there was little disagreement about it. There would be some dissentients when Johnson complained of the meanness of some of Shakespeare's language,/3 but he probably expressed the general view when he summarized the play in these words:

"This play is deservedly celebrated for the propriety of its fictions, and solemnity, grandeur and variety of its action; but it has no nice discrimination of character; the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions, and the course of the action necessarily determines the conduct of the agents.

"The danger of ambition is well described; and I know not whether it may not be said, in defence of some parts which now seem improbable, that, in Shakespeare's time, it was necessary to warn credulity against vain and illusive predictions.

"The passions are directed to their true end. Lady Macbeth is merely detested; and though the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem, yet every reader rejoices at his fall."

/1 E.g. I. v. opens with a dialogue between Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff; Act II. ends with a scene in which the Macduffs encounter the witches on the blasted heath; a scene between Macbeth and his wife, expressing her remorse, is interpolated in Act IV.; the testing of Macduff by Malcolm is cut; and much of the poetry appears in a debased form.

/2 But Garrick inserted the following death speech of his own composition:

"'Tis done! the scene of life will quickly close.

Ambition's vain delusive dreams are fled,
And now I wake to darkness, guilt, and horror;
I cannot bear it! let me shake it off --
It will not be; my soul is clog'd with blood --
I cannot rise! I dare not ask for mercy --
It is too late, hell drags me down; I sink,
I sink, -- my soul is lost for ever! -- Oh! -- Oh!"

/3 Cf. note on I. v. 51.

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But when these words were published in 1765 the attitude implied in them was already breaking down: the performances of Garrick and Mrs. Siddons directed people's attention to the characters they played; the rise of the novel and the spread of *sensibility* put more emphasis on character than on plot; and the growth of romanticism completed what sensibility had begun. William Richardson analysed the character of Macbeth in 1774; at about the same time Whately compared Macbeth and Richard III; Cumberland followed on the same subject in *The Observer*; and J. P. Kemble answered Whately in the same year. There were a few remarks on *Macbeth* in Morgann's *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Falstaff* (1777)./1

Coleridge's surviving remarks on *Macbeth* are mostly concerned with the first act. Some of them are valuable, but I find it difficult to agree with Mr. Raysor when he says that Coleridge's "psychological genius is most apparent in the analysis of *Macbeth*."/2 Hazlitt in *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* owed something to Coleridge and Lamb, and something, perhaps, to Whately; but his essay is the most satisfying written on the play up to this date. He shows that the play is distinguished from the other great tragedies by "the wildness of the imagination and

/1 Richardson, *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (1774); Whately, *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare* (1785, but written 1770); J. P. Kemble, *Macbeth Reconsidered* (1786); and *The Observer* (1786). Whately argued: "Macbeth has an acquired, though not a constitutional, courage, which is equal to all ordinary occasions; and if it fails him upon those which are extraordinary, it is, however, so well formed as to be easily resumed as soon as the shock is over. But his idea never rises above manliness of character." Kemble regarded these remarks as "villifying" and argued "That Shakespeare has not put into any mouth the slightest insinuation against the personal courage of Macbeth is in itself a decisive proof that he never meant his nature should be liable to so base a reproach." But the disagreement between these two critics was really verbal. Richardson was mainly concerned with the drawing of morals. "Thus, by considering the rise and progress of a ruling passion, and the fatal consequences of its indulgence, we have shown, how a beneficent mind may become inhuman: and how those who are naturally of an amiable temper, if they suffer themselves to be corrupted, will become more ferocious and more unhappy than men of a constitution originally hard and unfeeling" (op. cit. edn. 1784, p. 85).

/2 Cf. notes on I. i; I. ii. 7-23; I. iii. 41-2; I. iv. 22-7; II. iii. Raysor's

remark is quoted from his Introduction to his edition of Coleridge's *Shakespearean Criticism*, p. lviii.

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the rapidity of the action."/1 Nor should it be forgotten that Hazlitt was the best of dramatic critics and that in praising Mrs. Siddons he often made revealing remarks about the play itself. Mrs. Siddons' own analysis of the character of Lady Macbeth, though not well written, shows that the great actress had thought deeply about the part she played so often, and the well-known account of her first experience of learning the part shows that she was moved by the play with which she moved others:

"I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night (a night I can never forget), till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. . . . I clapt my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out, and threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes."/2

Apart from De Quincey's great essay *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth* there is little to detain us between Hazlitt and Dowden (*Shakespeare, His Mind and Art*, 1875), except G. Fletcher, whose *Studies of Shakespeare* (1847) have been lately praised. The merit of Fletcher's analysis is that he does not subordinate everything else to the character of the protagonists, and that he shows that Macduff and his Lady

"are the chief representatives in the piece, of the interests of loyalty and domestic affection, as opposed to those of the foulest treachery and the most selfish and remorseless ambition."

But our respect for Fletcher diminishes when we find him saying that Macbeth, being intensely selfish,

"is incapable of any true moral repugnance to inflicting injury upon others; it shrinks only from encountering public odium" --

or that the poetry delivered by Macbeth

"springs exclusively from a morbidly irritable fancy";

and finally expires when he characterizes Macbeth's

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soliloquy (V. iii. 22-8) as "mere *poetical whining* over his own most merited situation."/1

R. G. Moulton wrote a fine essay on the all-pervasive irony of the play and a less satisfactory one on Macbeth and his wife. The former is partly spoiled by a moralizing strain, and the latter by his assumption that because Macbeth offers only practical objections to the murder of Duncan he has no moral ones -- Lady Macbeth being regarded as an embodiment of the inner life./2

After this date the interpretations of *Macbeth* multiply like the villainies of the merciless Macdonwald. Kirke argues that the terrible dreams that shake Macbeth and his wife are caused by "a remorse in which there lurks no hope of redemption. It is the remorse of the damned."/3 J. C. Carr thinks the murder of Duncan "had long been the subject of conjugal debate"; and Symons contrasts Macbeth's attempt to stand against the temptation with Lady Macbeth's prayer for power to carry out the deed./4 This brings us to Bradley, whose *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) contains the most influential of all criticisms of the play.

Later criticism by Robert Bridges, Maeterlinck, Sir Herbert Grierson, Professor W. C. Curry, Mr. John Masefield, Mr. Wilson Knight, Professor L. C. Knights, Mr. J. Middleton Murry, and Dr. Dover Wilson is mentioned in the next section of the introduction. We need only notice here first, a reaction against elaborate character analysis and an increasing emphasis on the poetry of the play; secondly, a greater understanding of *Macbeth* as an acting play; and thirdly, an examination of the play, from the standpoint of Elizabethan demonology.

/1 Op. cit. pp. 109 ff. and 166.

/2 *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, 1885. /3 *Atlantic Monthly*, 1895.

/4 Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures*, 1897, pp. 24 ff. A word is due to the ingenious Libby who, in *Some New Notes on Macbeth*, 1893, demonstrated to his own satisfaction that Ross is the real villain of the play, who first gets the Thane of Cawdor executed on a false charge of treachery, then murders Banquo, disguised as the Third Murderer, is Macbeth's agent in the murder of Macduff's family, and then, seeing that Macbeth's power is on the wane, he deserts to Malcolm and is rewarded with an earldom.

1

6. The Play

Macbeth, as we have seen, was first performed in the

year 1606; that is to say, it comes after *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *King Lear*, and before *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. The play is linked to *Hamlet* in more ways than one:/1 Macbeth's shrinking from the murder of Duncan, and the infirmity of purpose with which his wife charges him, are similar to Hamlet's inability to carry out the instructions of the Ghost -- though Macbeth's act is "evil" and Hamlet's (at least in his conscious opinion) is "good". Macbeth also resembles Claudius in that both are murderers and usurpers. Macbeth is (consciously) willing to jump the life to come, and we cannot imagine him on his knees; Claudius tries to repent: but both are led from crime to crime in their attempt to achieve security. Macbeth may, in a sense, be regarded as a humanization of Claudius: Shakespeare wished to get inside the skin of a murderer, and to show that the Poet for the Defence, though he extenuates nothing, can make us feel that we might have fallen in the same way, so that we may even assent to Professor Alexander's application of Donne's words:/2

"Thou knowest this man's fall, but thou knowest not his wrastling; which perchance was such that almost his very fall is justified and accepted of God."

Though Macbeth is a *miserable, and a banished, and a damned creature, yet he is God's creature still and contributes something to his glory even in his damnation.*/3 We have the same feeling about his crime as we do about Angelo's -- and the echoes from *Lucrece* pointed out in the Appendix show the link between lust and murder in Shakespeare's mind -- because just as Angelo learns that he must not judge Claudio, so the audience learns not to judge Angelo.

/1 Cf. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Industry*, pp. 72-77, and Draper's article in *Bull. Hist. Med.* x. R. Walker, op. cit. chap. 9, says that "if *Hamlet* is a study of moral man in an immoral society, *Macbeth* is a study of immoral man in a moral universe." Cf. Max Plowman's *The Right to Live*.

/2 *Shakespeare's Life and Art*, p. 173.

/3 Donne, ed. Hayward, 1929, p. 663.

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Othello was "an honourable murderer"; Macbeth is a noble and gifted man who falls into treachery and crime, not deluded into believing that he has any justification for his deeds, but knowing them precisely for what they are. In *King Lear*, the evil is concentrated in the savage quartet, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, and Cornwall, who are able to bring about the ruin of better people than themselves by making use of their weaknesses -- pride,

credulity, and lust./1 In *Macbeth*, the evil is transferred from the villains to the hero and heroine.

Macbeth is Shakespeare's "most profound and mature vision of evil";/2 "the whole play may be writ down as a wrestling of destruction with creation";/2 it is "a statement of evil";/3 "it is a picture of a special battle in a universal war, and the battleground is in the souls of Macbeth and his wife";/4 and it "contains the decisive orientation of Shakespearean good and evil."/5 The play, we may add, is about damnation; and a modern dramatist with a taste for fancy titles might have called it *The Primrose Way*. Yet in order to show how his hero comes to be damned, in order to present a convincing image of damnation, Shakespeare had to describe and create the good which Macbeth had sacrificed; so that although there is no play in which evil is presented so forcibly, it may also be said that there is no play which puts so persuasively the contrasting good. This is done by means of the characters, certainly, though Duncan and Malcolm, the Macduffs, the messenger who comes to warn Lady Macduff, and even Banquo are little to place in the scales against the Macbeths and the Weird Sisters. It is done more effectively by means of imagery, symbolism,

/1 Charlton, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 1948, pp. 14, 189, argues that *Macbeth* was written before *Lear* because Shakespeare's themes become progressively more primitive from *Hamlet* to *Lear*, *Hamlet* dealing with the civilized world, *Othello* with a clash of two worlds, *Macbeth* with the period when the moral sense was emerging, and *Lear* with the primitive human family, when man was near the animal level. But surely in Duncan and Edward the Confessor and in the frequent references to Christian conceptions there is evidence that Professor Charlton is wrong about the play.

/2 Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, 1949, p. 140; *The Imperial Theme*, p. 153.

/3 Knights, *Explorations*, p. 18. /4 Kolbe, *Shakespeare's Way*, p. 20.

/5 Traversi, *Approach to Shakespeare*, p. 86.

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and iteration. The image of the ill-fitting garments, pointed out by Caroline Spurgeon, I have already discussed;/1 the contrast between light and darkness is part of a general antithesis between good and evil, devils and angels, evil and grace, hell and heaven./2 The image of the deed too terrible to look at requires no interpretation;/3 and the disease images in IV. iii and in the last act clearly reflect both the evil which is a disease, and Macbeth himself who *is* the disease from which his country suffers. Mr. Wilson Knight has an essay on the "life-themes" in the play, which he classes under the headings of Warrior-honour, Imperial magnificence, Sleep and Feasting, and Ideas of creation and nature's innocence./4 He makes the point that Lady Macbeth "wins largely

by appealing to Macbeth's 'valour'."/5 All through the play Shakespeare continually juggles with the different meanings of "honour." Both the words and the wounds of the bloody sergeant are said to smack of honour; but so also do the titles bestowed by Malcolm at the end of the play. "Honour" thus means both "worth" and the titles that reward it. An anonymous "Lord" pines for "free honours," and he speaks as a Chorus. Macbeth in the last act laments that he has mouth-honour instead of honour, where the word means reverence or respect; just as in the first act he wishes to wear the golden opinions he has purchased by his bravery.

The ambiguity of *honour* is best brought out in the exchange between Macbeth and Banquo just before the murder of Duncan:

If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
It shall make honour for you.

So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom franchis'd, and allegiance clear,
I shall be counsell'd.

/1 Cf. p. xxxiii. ante, and the note on V. ii. 21-2.

/2 Kolbe, op. cit. pp. 21-2. See p. xxxiii. ante, and e.g. I. iv. 41, 50; I. v. 51; II. i. 4; †I. iv. 7, 9; III. ii. 46, 52; IV. i. 48; IV. iii. 22; V. i. 23.

/3 Cf. II. ii. 53; II. iii. 76; III. iv. 60; IV. i. 113; V. v. 20.

/4 *The Imperial Theme*, p. 125 /5 Op. cit. p. 127.

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Closely connected with "honour" are the feudal ideas of "duties" and "service," the repetition of which helps to create a picture of an orderly and closely-knit society, in contrast to the disorder consequent upon Macbeth's initial crime. The naturalness of that order, and the unnaturalness of its violation by Macbeth, is emphasized by the images of planting and sowing, and the images of sleep and milk contrast with the images of unnatural disorder and the reiteration of fear and blood./1 The contrast is most apparent in the lines which express so violently Lady Macbeth's violation of her sex:

"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. . . ."

By such means Shakespeare builds up the order of Nature and examines the nature of order; so that the violation of order in the state by the assassination of Duncan is

seen to be an unnatural horror, inevitably attended by portents./2

Nevertheless the presentation of the good which counterbalances the evil is done most effectively through Macbeth and his wife, who are unwilling witnesses to the good they renounce. Macbeth is aware that the deed he contemplates is evil from the very beginning. He admits that its "horrid image" makes his hair stand on end, and his heart knock against his ribs. Although he never discusses with his wife the morality of the murder, although he hardly faces it himself, every word he speaks shows

/1 I am indebted here to at least four critics, Knight, Knights, Traversi, and Kolbe. See also an eloquent passage in Masefield's lecture, *Shakespeare and Spiritual Life* (*Recent Prose*, 1932, pp. 270 ff.) on the significance of the portents in *Macbeth*.

/2 Presumably the riding images, mentioned by Miss Spurgeon, suggest only that Macbeth is riding for a fall. She also records four reverberation images which, she thinks, suggest the "overwhelming and unending nature of the consequences or reverberations of the evil deed." It may be worth noting that Erasmus in the same colloquy echoed in III. i. has the following passage: "I would desire to have a certain honourable renown of my name, which may Eccho again throughout the whole world, and which may become more famous with my age, and at last may grow more renowned after my death" (trans. H.M. 1671, p. 478).

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that he is struck to the soul with a realization of the horror of the deed. The half-demented language he uses immediately after the murder expresses fear, but not of detection; and although he fears Banquo for prudential reasons, he fears him also because of his own sense of guilt. Macbeth is never in doubt of the difference between good and evil; nor is Lady Macbeth, not even in the speech in which she deliberately chooses evil as a means of achieving the "good" of the crown; not, indeed, is the audience. Inexorably the action rams home the well-worn moral that "Crime does not pay," that "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," and that, to those who destroy life, life itself becomes merely "a tale told by an idiot."

To some critics, however, the play has seemed to be lacking in inevitability and coherence. Robert Bridges complained that the Macbeth we have cause to admire could never have committed the murder of Duncan, and that Shakespeare deliberately throws dust in the eyes of the audience, not clearly telling them whether Macbeth decided to murder Duncan before the beginning of the play, or whether the idea was imposed upon him by the witches, or whether he was urged to it by his wife --/2

"We may combine the two latter motives, and see hell and home leagued against him: the difficulty lies in the unknown quantity of the first motive, his predisposition; which, if it be allowed to be only in the exact balance required for these other agencies to carry it, is still contradictory to the picture of nobility impressed on us by Shakespeare."

A Macbeth who feels the horror of the deed as deeply as Shakespeare's hero (thinks Bridges) would not be able to commit it. The argument is that Shakespeare sacrifices psychological consistency to theatrical effect. Professor Stoll makes a similar point, though without regarding this characteristic of the play as necessarily a fault. As he points out --/3

/1 Murry, *Shakespeare*, pp. 331-6, has a good passage on the use of time in *Macbeth* to reveal the damnation of the murderers. Cf. also Spender's article (*Penguin New Writing*, No. 3) in which he discusses the same subject from a different angle; and R. Walker, *The Time is Free*, *passim*.

/2 Bridges, *The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Dramas*, ed. 1927, p. 14.

/3 *The Review of English Studies*, xix. p. 27.

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"If Macbeth had been thwarted or (to use Holinshed's word) 'defrauded,' as having, at this juncture, a better title to the throne than Malcolm, or had thought himself better fitted to rule; or, again, if Duncan had not borne his faculties so meek and been so clear in his great office, as in the tragedy but not the chronicle he is; why, then, Macbeth's conduct in killing him would have been more reasonable and more psychologically in keeping, to be sure, but less terrible, less truly tragic."

Shakespeare was not so much concerned with the creation of real human beings, but with theatrical, or *poetical*, effect. He was fascinated by the very difficulty of making the psychologically improbable, by sheer virtuosity, appear possible. According to Schücking, Shakespeare made

"the bold experiment of a character with a strongly marked mixture of qualities of which the one seems almost to preclude the other. . . . So he creates a hero such as Macbeth, who is a moral coward and for a while a henpecked husband, who in critical moments is rebuked like a schoolboy by his wife and who, on the other hand, proves himself a lion on the battlefield./2 Or the same character is brutal enough to murder his crowned guest, but retains notwithstanding the nobility of spirit -- or superstitious fear of fate? -- to feel the disgracefulness of assassinating his victim in his sleep so deeply as to become possessed of the idea of having incurred the punishment of eternal insomnia. In this case, too, the interpretation has only too often missed the meaning of the author. By unduly simplifying the complicated psychological facts it has done less than justice to the wonderful and unique results of that hazardous antithetical character-construction which was favoured by the style of the time."

It is only fair to Shakespeare to add, and Professor Stoll does not always make full allowance for this, that ideas about what is psychologically possible change from age to age, and that what Bridges thought impossible seemed perfectly possible to the readers of Timothy Bright and even, to judge from criticism of the play, right down to the end of the nineteenth century./3 Bridges

/1 *The Baroque Character of the Elizabethan Tragic Hero*, 1938, pp. 21-2.

/2 It should be said, however, that many lions have been tame at home.

/3 I am constrained to add that conversely Shakespeare's contemporaries would have been baffled by the psychology of Margaret, the heroine of Bridges' own *Palicio*, who betrays her lover in the hope that with the failure of his conspiracy he will abandon politics, and devote himself to her happiness. We are not meant to regard her as half-witted. Bridges could not blame the Victorian audience for the faults of his plays, as he blamed Shakespeare's, as they were not really intended for the stage. There is a good reply to Bridges in J. I. M. Stewart's *Character and Motive in Shakespeare* (1949).

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under-estimates the potentialities for evil in the virtuous, and for virtue in the wicked; and there is reason to believe that the sheep and goats of our "judgement here" are not necessarily the same as those of "the life to come." "Our life is but a mingled yarn, good and ill together." Besides all this, there is something artificial in Bridges' assumption that if Macbeth has enough predisposition to be driven to murder by wife and witches combined he is too ignoble to be the tragic hero envisaged by the dramatist. For it is never possible to determine the exact share of blame to be allotted after a crime to the three factors, heredity, environment, and personal weakness; and only the morally complacent could witness a good performance of *Macbeth* without an uneasy feeling that if they had been so tempted they might conceivably have so fallen. We cannot divide the world into potential murderers and those who are not. It consists of imperfect human beings, more or less ignorant of their own selves, and not knowing (though they have been told often enough) the way to be happy. If they commit evil it is because they hope thereby to avoid another evil, which seems to them for the moment to be worse, or obtain another good, which seems attractive if only because it is not in their possession. The direct cause of sin, as Thomas Aquinas explains, is the

"adherence to a mutable good, and every sinful act proceeds from an inordinate desire for some temporal good; and that one desires a temporal good inordinately is due to the fact that he loves himself inordinately."/1

Macbeth has not a predisposition to murder; he has

merely an inordinate ambition that makes murder itself seem to be a lesser evil than failure to achieve the Crown.

Lady Macbeth, however, accuses her husband of having proposed the murder to her before Duncan announced his intention of visiting Inverness, before time and place cohered. This made Coleridge argue that the murder had been discussed before the opening of the play, and led Bradley to suggest ingeniously that

/1 Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns, pp. 111-12. The italicized words are direct quotations from Thomas Aquinas.

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"if they had had ambitious conversations, in which each felt that some half-formed guilty idea was floating in the mind of the other, she might naturally take the words of the letter, as indicating much more than they said."/1

Dr. Dover Wilson uses this passage (I. vii. 47-52) to support his theory that in the original play there was another scene between Macbeth and his wife after he met the Weird Sisters, and before he knew that Duncan was coming to Inverness, and that this scene was afterwards cut by Shakespeare himself. He rejects Coleridge's view that the murder had been discussed earlier, because he thinks that Macbeth's aside (I. iii. 130 ff.)

"depicts the terror of Macbeth's soul when the idea of murder *first* comes to him";

and that Lady Macbeth's soliloquy at the beginning of I. v. proves that "so far he has refused to entertain any but honourable thoughts."/2 But Macbeth's aside, by a common Shakespearean convention, does not so much express the birth of murderous thoughts as refer back to the guilty start to which Banquo calls attention earlier in the scene,/3 a start which could not be explained earlier without holding up the action of the scene./4 It could either represent the birth of guilt, or else show that Macbeth's mind has been

"rendered temptable by a previous dalliance of fancy with ambitious thoughts"/5

Lady Macbeth's soliloquy does not prove that her husband did not have these thoughts, or what Bradley calls "some vaguer dishonourable dreams": they prove only that she believed, and rightly, it appears, that Macbeth's conscience or conventionality was liable to prevent him from

achieving the Crown by foul means, even though he may have proposed the murder when the question was merely theoretical.

/1 Bradley, op. cit. pp. 480-4. Cf. Charlton, op. cit. p. 166.

/2 Op. cit. p. xxxvi. /3 I. iii. 51.

/4 Just as the soliloquy at the end of *Hamlet*, Act II, expresses the thoughts which had been passing through the hero's mind during the recitation of the Hecuba speeches.

/5 Coleridge, op. cit. i. 68.

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I do not find, therefore, the inconsistency of which Bridges speaks; nor do I think there is enough evidence to support Dr. Dover Wilson's theory of a former version of the play in which all was clear./1 Even if Lady Macbeth refers to a time between I. iii. and I. iv. Shakespeare might (and, in my opinion, would) have left the scene unwritten.

In the same essay, Bridges speaks of Macbeth's *poetic imagination*. In this opinion he was following Bradley, who had argued that

"Macbeth's better nature -- to put the matter for clearness' sake too broadly -- instead of speaking to him in the overt language of moral ideas, commands and prohibitions, incorporates itself in images which alarm and horrify. His imagination is thus the best of him, something usually deeper and higher than his conscious thoughts; and if he had obeyed it he would have been safe."/2

Sir Herbert Grierson goes even further, and paradoxically compares Macbeth to Bunyan, in that

"his own deepest thoughts and feelings come to him as objective experiences, as visions of the bodily eye, as voices that ring in the ear. . . . The obscure processes of his own soul translate themselves into the voices and visions, and their significance is a better clue to the working of his moral being than are his articulate statements. He may profess contempt of moral scruples and supernatural inhibitions, and declare that if he were safe in this world he would 'jump the life to come'. The voices that he hears and the visions that he sees give him the lie."/3

We are here on very dangerous ground. It is perfectly legitimate to disagree with Moulton who had argued that Macbeth's soliloquy in I. vii. shows that he was deterred not by moral scruples but by a fear of the consequences; for the imagery of the speech shows that Macbeth is haunted by the horror of the deed, and impresses that horror on the audience./4 But if we go further and pretend that

/1 See above p. xxv. It is unreasonable to praise Shakespeare as the perfect artist on the strength of a hypothetical version of the play at the same

time as one assumes that Shakespeare cut the play in such a way as to spoil the earlier perfection.

/2 Op. cit. p. 352. /3 Grierson, ed. cit. pp. xxv-xxvi.

/4 Cf. K. Muir, *Penguin New Writing*, No. 28 (Summer 1946), p. 114, and Bradley, op. cit. p. 352: "His conscious or reflective mind, that is, moves chiefly among considerations of outward success and failure, while his inner being is convulsed by conscience."

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this poetic imagery is a proof that Macbeth had a powerful imagination, that he was in fact a poet, we are confusing real life and drama. Every character in a poetic play may speak poetry: but this poetry does not necessarily reflect their poetic dispositions -- it is merely a medium. The bloody sergeant utters bombastic language, not because he is himself bombastic, but because such language was considered appropriate to epic narration. The First Murderer quotes Samuel Daniel,^{/1} and gives us a lovely vignette of twilight,^{/2} not because he was of a literary turn of mind, but because Shakespeare was a poet, and in the second passage required some verbal scene-painting. So, too, with Macbeth, we may say his imagery expresses his unconscious mind (that poetry can do this is one of the greatest advantages it has over realistic drama) but we must not say he is therefore a poet.^{/3}

Maeterlinck speaks of the way in which the "essence of the dramatic poet's art consists in speaking through the mouth of his characters without appearing to do so," and he declares that the mode of life in which the protagonists of *Macbeth*

"are steeped penetrates and pervades their voices so clearly, animates and saturates their words to such a degree that we see it much better, more intimately and more immediately than if they took the trouble to describe it to us. We, like themselves, living there with them, see from within the houses and the scenery in which they live; and we do not need to have those surroundings shown to us from without any more than they do. It is the countless presence, the uninterrupted swarm of all those images that form the profound life, the secret and almost unlimited first existence of the work. Upon its surface floats the dialogue necessary to the action. It seems to be the only one that our ears seize; but, in reality, it is to the other language that our instinct listens, our unconscious sensibility, our soul, if you like; and, if the spoken words touch us more deeply than those of any other poet, it is because they are supported by a great host of hidden powers."^{/4}

The characters are thus subordinated to the poetry, rather than (as in much nineteenth-century criticism) the poetry to the characters. Lascelles Abercrombie in his *Idea of*

^{/1} III. i. 111. ^{/2} III. iii. 5-8.

^{/3} Hamlet, despite the sublime poetry of the soliloquies, tells Ophelia "I am ill at these numbers," i.e. "I am no good at writing poetry."

/4 Tr. by Alex. Teixeira de Mattos, *Fort. Rev.*, Ap. 1910, pp. 696-9. Cf. H. Fluchère, *Shakespeare: Dramaturge Elisabethain*, 1948, p. 300.

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Great Poetry has a brilliant discussion of why we enjoy tragedy which seems a version of "the mere evil of life." In answering this question he provides an eloquent analysis of *Macbeth*. In the last act of the play, the hero's world "turns into a blank of imbecile futility"; yet he

"seizes on the appalling moment and masters even this: he masters it by knowing it absolutely and completely, and by forcing even this quintessence of all possible evil to live before him with the zest and terrible splendour of his own unquenchable mind."/1

Abercrombie quotes Macbeth's words when he hears of his wife's death and comments:

"Tragedy can lay hold of no evil worse than the conviction that life is an affair of absolute inconsequence. . . . And precisely by laying hold of this and relishing its fearfulness to the utmost, Macbeth's personality towers into its loftiest grandeur. . . . We see not only what he feels, but the personality that feels it; and in the very act of proclaiming that life is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing personal life announces its virtue, and superbly signifies itself."/2

The fallacy here is simply that Abercrombie is confusing the powers of expression possessed by Macbeth with the poetic powers of Shakespeare himself. Once again it must be emphasized that because Shakespeare makes Macbeth talk as only a great poet could talk, we are not to assume that Macbeth is a great poet: he is merely part of a great poem. His consummate expression of the meaningless of life signifies only that life is meaningless to him: it cannot be taken to signify that he has overcome that meaninglessness in the very act of expressing it. Nor, of course, does it mean that Shakespeare was expressing his own pessimistic ideas about the universe. What gives satisfaction to the spectator or reader is not the comprehension of experience by Macbeth, but the poet revealing experience through the mouth of his hero. Macbeth, by his own actions, has robbed life of meaning. Shakespeare restores meaning to life by showing that Macbeth's nihilism results from his crimes./3

/1 Op. cit. p. 176.

/2 Op. cit. p. 177. But it should be added that Abercrombie is one of the best critics of our time, and one would like a comprehensive selection of his prose.

/3 On the other hand Macbeth is not just a callous criminal. Tragic heroes, as James points out in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, †mus_

For Macbeth, though a tragic hero, is a criminal; and though he arouses our sympathies more than Richard III does, he has some resemblances to him, as the earliest critics of the play pointed out./1 The difference between the two characters is mainly the result of Shakespeare's increasing understanding of human nature. All his mature tragedies may be regarded as "melodrama humanized." Richard is a conscious villain, and a deliberate Machiavel; Macbeth embarks on his career of crime with anguish /2 and reluctance, "as if it were an appalling duty."/3 He is humanized by his fears,/4 which prove him to be a man, and not the monster his oppressed subjects believe him to be. "Those are my best dayes," he might have said, "when I shake with fear."/5 Richard, though he suffers from the same terrible dreams, is depicted from the outside, and not without appreciation of his sardonic humour;/6 but as Macbeth goes the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire, we see with his eyes. Richard is the villain as hero; Macbeth is a hero who becomes a villain.

It should be remembered that the Elizabethans, bred on Seneca, did not adhere to the Aristotelian dictum that the overthrow of a bad man is not a tragedy at all. They were content with

"the high and excellent Tragedie . . . that maketh Kings feare to be Tyrants . . . that maketh vs know,

*Qui scepra saevus duro imperio regit,
Timet timentes, metus in authorem redit."/7*

These lines from Seneca's *Ædipus*, which, as Dr. Dover Wilson suggests, would be a suitable motto for *Macbeth*, are thus translated in *Tenne Tragedies*:

"Who so the cruel tyrant playes, and guiltlesse men doth smight,
Hee dreadeth them that him does dread, so feare doth cheifly light
On causers chiefe. A iust reuenge for bloody mindes at last."

be "finely aware" and this "makes absolutely the intensity of their adventures, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them. We care . . . comparatively little for what happens to the stupid, the coarse and the blind; care for it, and for the effects of it, at the most as helping to precipitate what happens to the more deeply wondering, to the really sentient."

/1 Cf. p. xlvii. ante. /2 I am thinking of the Existential "anguish" of choice.

/3 Bradley, op. cit. p. 358. /4 H. Craig, *The Enchanted Glass*, p. 232.

/5 Donne, *Holy Sonnets*, xix. /6 Charlton, op. cit. pp. 24 ff.

/7 Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, facs. E 4v. Cited by Wilson.

There is also a passage in James I's *Basilikon Doron* which forms an interesting commentary on the play --

"For a good King (after a happie and famous reigne) dieth in peace, lamented by his subiects, and admired by his neighbours; and leauing a reuerent renowne behinde him in earth, obtaineth the Crowne of eternall felicitie in heauen. And although some of them (which falleth out very rarelie) may be cut off by the treason of some vnnaturall subiects, yet liueth their fame after them, and some notable plague faileth neuer to ouertake the committers in this life, besides their infamie to all posterities hereafter":

-- the "even-handed justice" of which Macbeth speaks --

"Where by the contrarie, a Tyrannes miserable and infamous life, armeth in end his owne Subiects to become his burreaux: and although that rebellion be euer vnlawfull on their part, yet is the world so wearied of him, that his fall is little meaned by the rest of his Subiects, and but smiled at by his neighbours. And besides the infamous memorie he leaueth behind him here, and the endlesse paine hee sustaineth hereafter, it oft falleth out, that the committers not onely escape vnpunished, but farther, the fact will remaine as allowed by the Law in diuers aages thereafter."/1

I have not quoted from King James in order to suggest that *Macbeth* was written as a compliment to him./2 Even though the subject was chosen originally to gratify the King, since it combines two themes on which he was an expert -- witchcraft and his own ancestry -- and even though Shakespeare mentions touching for scrofula, and pre-nuptial chastity, two other subjects in which James was interested,/3 he did not drag these things into the play as irrelevant flattery. Still less ought we to assume that Shakespeare's treatment of Banquo was circumscribed by royal susceptibilities, or that the dialogue between Macduff and Malcolm on the nature of Kingship was inserted to please James./4

Nor, to return to the Senecan conception of tragedy as applied to *Macbeth*, should we imagine that Shakespeare's

/1 *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain, p. 19.

/2 Cf. Draper's article in *Eng. Stud.* 72 and Wilson, op. cit. pp. xliv-xlv.

/3 McIlwain, op. cit. p. 34: "yee must keepe your bodie cleane and vn-polluted, till yee giue it to your wife, whom-to onely it belongeth. . . . Be not ashamed then, to keepe cleane your body, which is the Temple of the holy Spirit." James ascribed his success in touching for the evil to prayer. Cf. notes to IV. iii. 99-100, 140-59. /4 Cf. Wilson, op. cit. p. xliv.

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imagination was cabined, cribbed, confined by this, any more than he was bound within the Senecan form and structure. His imaginative perception of the human

heart made it increasingly difficult for him to regard any character as a mere villain -- even Iachimo repents -- and *Macbeth* is the story of a noble and valiant man who is brought to his damnation, presented in such a way as to arouse our pity and terror./1 For though, in the last resort, Macbeth is damned by his own sin, he is sorely tempted. "The power of divels," wrote George Giffard in 1603,

"is in the hearts of men, as to harden the heart, to blind the eyes of the mind, and from the lustes and concupiscences which are in them, to inflame them unto wrath, malice, envie, and cruell murthers: . . . And about these things they work continually, and with such efficacy, that without the power of the glorious passion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we have by faith, they cannot be withstood."/2

So James himself declared that the devil allures persons,

"euen by these three passions that are within our selues: Curiositie . . . thirst of reuenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedy appetite of geare."/3

Shakespeare could not represent devils in a tragedy because they had acquired comic associations; but witches were tragic creatures who,

"for the sake of certain abnormal powers, had sold themselves to the devil."/4

We do not know Shakespeare's personal opinion of witchcraft -- whether he accepted the tenets of James's *Dæmonologie*, or whether he adhered to the sceptical position of Reginald Scot which seems to us to be so much more sane. But the belief in witchcraft could be used by him for dramatic purposes at a time when almost everybody supposed that witches were

"channels through which the malignity of evil spirits might be visited upon human beings."/5

/1 Cf. Charlton, op. cit. p. 182.

/2 *A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcrafts*, ed. 1843, pp. 22-3.

/3 *Workes*, p. 98. /4 Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, p. 61.

/5 *Ibid.* p. 61.

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Professor Curry has argued that the Weird Sisters are in reality demons, or devils, in the form of witches; but

"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 yield or represent

or symbolize is ultimately demonic."/1

It should be noted, however, that the Weird Sisters tempt Macbeth only because they know his ambitious dreams; and that even so their prophecy of the crown does not dictate evil means of achieving it -- it is morally neutral. Macbeth himself never thinks of blaming the Weird Sisters for tempting him to the murder of Duncan, though he blames the "juggling fiends" who have lulled him into a false sense of security. He knows that the first step along the primrose path was taken on his own responsibility:

"And as Hell fires, not wanting heat, want light;
So these strange witchcrafts which like Pleasure be,
Not wanting faire inticements, want delight,
Inward being nothing but deformity;
And doe at open doores let fraile powers in
To that straight building, Little-ease of sin."/2

The first crime is inspired by ambition; the remainder, from the murder of the grooms to the slaughter of Macduff's family, are inspired by fear, a fear that is born of guilt. Timothy Bright distinguished between neurotic fears and those that are caused by the pangs of conscience:

"Whatsoever molestation riseth directly as a proper object of the mind, that in that respect is not melancholicke, but hath a farther ground then fancie, and riseth from conscience, condemning the guiltie soule of those ingrauen lawes of nature, which no man is voide of, be he neuer so barbarous. This is it, that hath caused the prophane

/1 Curry, op. cit. pp. 59, 61. Curry points out that "their control over the primary elements of nature, the *rationes seminales*, would seem to indicate that the Weird Sisters were demons disguised as witches." It should be pointed out, however, that the Weird Sisters do not claim this power, though Macbeth assumes that they have it, and that they call their "masters" in IV. i. Kittredge, *Complete Works of Sh.* p. 1114, argues, however, that the Weird Sisters are norns. "They were great powers of destiny, great ministers of fate. They had determined the past; they governed the present; they not only foresaw the future, but decreed it." Douglas, *Aen.* iii. translated *parcae* by "weird sisters."

/2 Greville, *Caelica*, cii. 19-24.

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poets to haue fained Hecates Eumenides, and the infernall furies; which although they be but fained persons, yet the matter which is shewed vnder their maske, is serious, true, and of wofull experience."/1

These are the terrible dreams that nightly shake Macbeth and his wife; and the apocalyptic imagery that precedes and follows the murder of Duncan may be ascribed to the same cause, rather than to Macbeth's poetic tem-

perament. Plutarch, in his *Morals*, declares that

"wickednesse ingendering within it selfe . . . displeasure and punishment, not after a sinfull act is committed, but even at the very instant of committing, it beginneth to suffer the pain due to the offence . . . wheras mischievous wickednesse frameth of her selfe, the engines of her owne torment . . . many terrible frights, fearfull perturbations and passions of the spirit, remorse of conscience, desperate repentance, and continuall troubles and vnquietnesse."/2

Before the end of the play *Macbeth*, having "supped full with horrors," is no longer tortured by such "fearfull perturbations": this is the measure of his damnation. As Professor Curry says --

"in proportion as the good in him diminishes, his liberty of free choice is determined more and more by evil inclinations and . . . he cannot choose the better course."/3

Although, as we have seen, the murders after the first are all motivated by a frantic desire for security, there are differences between them. The murder of Banquo is not merely due to his knowledge of the Weird Sisters' prophecy which makes him a menace to Macbeth; nor is it due merely to the promise that Banquo's descendants would inherit the throne -- powerful though both

/1 Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy*, p. 193.

/2 *Morals*, tr. P. Holland, pp. 545-6. Cited by Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, and by Charlton, op. cit. p. 187.

/3 Curry, op. cit. p. 105. I dissent, therefore, from Wilson Knight's opinion, expressed in *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 155, that Macbeth "contends for his own individual soul against the universal reality . . . and emerges at last victorious and fearless." I dissent still more from this sentence on Macbeth in *Christ and Nietzsche*, p. 85: "Starting with the disrupted, anxious, accents of a nervous wreck, he is, poetically, a new man after the first murder, dramatically a more violent one after the second, and philosophically a noble, though unrepentant, creature of sublime and courageous self-knowledge and superb poetry at the close when at last an honest and therefore sin-free relation to the world is established."

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motives might be./1 Macbeth fears Banquo's "royalty of nature," the "dauntless temper of his mind," and his wisdom. He fears them because they are a standing reproach to his own nature, now stained with crime --

"under him
My genius is rebuk'd."

He vaguely hopes that by murdering Banquo he will rid himself of this reproach; yet the act merely ensures that the reproach will be eternal. We may, perhaps, apply

what M. Sartre says of murder to the killing of Banquo. He argues that the murderer perpetuates the intolerable situation for which he did the deed by the very act of murder: for he kills his victim because he hates being the other's *object*, and by the murder this relationship is rendered irremediable. The victim has taken the key of this alienation into the tomb with him:

"The death of the other constitutes me as irremediable object, exactly as my own death would do. So hatred is transformed into frustration even in its triumph."/2

Some think that Banquo scarcely deserves the compliment of admiring hatred, in that he seems to have come to terms with evil. Before the murder, he is determined to lose no honour in seeking to augment it; and after the murder, with suspicion of Macbeth in his mind, he declares:

"In the great hand of God I stand; and thence
Against the undivulg'd pretence I fight
Of treasonous malice."

Yet at the beginning of the third act we find that he has done nothing to implement his vow, and Bradley argues that

/1 Without raising the vexed question of how many children Lady Macbeth had, we may observe that there is no certainty that Macbeth had any. "Bring forth men-children only" (I. vii. 72) seems to imply that he expected children; but "barren sceptre" (III. i. 61) may mean, though not necessarily, that he was without children. S. Freud, *Collected Papers*, IV, 1934, pp. 328 ff., suggests that "it would be a perfect example of poetic justice in the manner of the talion if the childlessness of Macbeth and the barrenness of his Lady were the punishment for their crimes against the sanctity of geniture."

/2 Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 483 (paraphrased).

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"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."/1

Although we may well agree with Dr. Dover Wilson that we should not treat Shakespeare as if he were a historian; although this interpretation of Banquo's character, that "he has yielded to evil," seems to be contradicted by Macbeth's tribute later in the same scene; and although James I might not have approved of an unflattering portrait of his ancestor: yet, nevertheless, Dr. Wilson's theory of a cut at this point is too convenient to be convincing, and we may reasonably doubt whether, according

to James' theories of Divine Right, Banquo ought to have behaved loyally to Macbeth until Malcolm set foot on Scottish soil. As we have seen, James condemned rebellion even against manifest tyrants. There was nothing new in this, and the Tudors would all have agreed with every word in this passage from *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*:

"The wickednesse therefore of the King can neuer make them that are ordained to be iudged by him, to become his Iudges. . . . Next, in place of relieuing the commonwealth out of distresse (which is their onely excuse and colour) they shall heape double distresse and desolation vpon it; and so their rebellion shall procure the contrary effects that they pretend it for."/2

Even a bad king keeps order in the commonwealth, and except where his lusts or passions are involved, he will generally favour justice. If there is no king, James thought, "nothing is vnlawfull to none." Yet he was also careful to point out that

"the duty and alleageance, which the people sweareth to their prince, is not only bound to themselues, but likewise to their lawfull heires and posterity . . . it is alike vnlawful (the crowne euer standing full) to displace him that succeedeth thereto, as to eiect the former: For at the very moment of the expiring of the king reigning, the nearest and lawful heire entreth in his place: And so to refuse him, or intrude

/1 Bradley, op. cit. pp. 384-5. †R_ Walker, op. cit. chap. 5, argues from the dialogue following Banquo's soliloquy that he is not "fishing for an understanding with Macbeth" but "is anxious to tell him nothing and get away as quickly as possible."

/2 *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain, p. 66.

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another, is not to holde out vncomming in, but to expell and put out their righteous King."/1

It is surely clear that Banquo ought not to have awaited Malcolm's invasion of Scotland before taking any steps against the usurper: he should have defended the son's title to the throne on the death of Duncan./2

The long dialogue between Macbeth and the murderers of Banquo looks back to John's temptation of Hubert and Claudius' temptation of Laertes. It shows us a Macbeth we have only glimpsed before, a smooth-tongued "politician," well able to "beguile the time." If it be said that the two murderers would have been content to do the deed without all this persuasion -- that they only wanted the cash -- it may be answered that Macbeth

"wanted to subdue their wills. One sees him pacing the floor and

weaving words like spells round the two wretches, stopping every now and then to eye them hard and close."/3

He wants them to do the deed out of hatred of Banquo, and not out of the need of money, so that he himself shall be relieved of some part of the guilt -- so that he can cry, "Thou canst not say I did it." His speech about dogs, regarded by some as the least necessary speech in the play, meet for the cutter's pencil, serves to present one aspect of the *order*, which he himself is destroying./4 There is one significance of this scene which up till now has not been fully appreciated -- the echoes from the Sermon on the Mount by which Macbeth, all unconsciously, bears witness to the ethic he has violated./5

The later murder of Macduff's family, also executed by underlings, is a pointless massacre which proves to be Macbeth's own death-warrant. It is not calculated to achieve a particular end: destruction, though originating in fear, has come to be an end in itself.

According to Coleridge the other protagonist, the accomplice as well as the temptress of Macbeth, is not the

/1 Op. cit. p. 69.

/2 James had no legitimate reason to complain of the portrait of Banquo who, in the *Chronicles*, was Macbeth's accomplice.

/3 Granville-Barker, op. cit. p. xl. /4 Knights, op. cit. p. 24.

/5 Cf. note on III. i. 87-8.

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monster, the fiend-like queen, that most eighteenth-century critics assumed her to be:

"on the contrary, her constant effort throughout the play was to *bully* conscience. She was a woman of a visionary and day-dreaming turn of mind; her eye fixed on the shadows of her solitary ambition; and her feelings abstracted, through the deep musings of her absorbing passion, from the common-life sympathies of flesh and blood. But her conscience, so far from being seared, was continually smarting within her; and she endeavours to stifle its voice, and keep down its struggles, by inflated and soaring fantasies, and appeals to spiritual agency."/1

It is true that Lady Macbeth is not naturally depraved or conscienceless (any more than Satan was): but she deliberately chooses evil, her choice being more deliberate than her husband's. Macbeth speaks of ambition being his only spur; but he would never have overcome his reluctance to commit murder without the chastisement of his wife's tongue. She, not metaphorically or symbolically, but in deadly earnest, invokes the powers of darkness to take possession of her; and, as Professor Curry, has cogently

argued,

"Her prayer is apparently answered; with the coming of night her castle is . . . shrouded in just such a blackness as she desires. She knows also that these spiritual substances study eagerly the effects of mental activities upon the human body, waiting patiently for evidences of evil thoughts which will permit them entrance past the barriers of the human will into the body to possess it. They tend on mortal thoughts. For, says Cassian: 'It is clear that unclean spirits cannot make their way into those bodies they are going to seize upon, in any other way †that by first taking possession of their minds and thoughts.' Thus, instead of guarding the workings of her mind against the assaults of wicked angels, Lady Macbeth deliberately wills that they subtly invade her body and so control it that the natural inclinations of the spirit towards goodness and compassion may be completely extirpated. . . . And without doubt these ministers of evil do actually take possession of her body even in accordance with her desire."/2

Mrs. Siddons was right when she said that Lady Macbeth,

/1 Op. cit. ii. 270-1. Probably the reporter of the *Bristol Gazette* was not quite accurate in his account of what Coleridge said. Macbeth and his Lady together, Freud declared, *Collected Papers*, IV, 1934, p. 333, "exhaust the possibilities of reaction to the crime, like the two disunited parts of the mind of a single individuality." /2 Curry, op. cit. pp. 86-7.

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"having impiously delivered herself up to the excitements of hell . . . is abandoned to the guidance of the demons she has invoked." /1

The great actress's realization of this fact is one of the reasons why her performance of the part was more effective than that of any other actress, and why naturalistic interpretations are foredoomed to failure. We need not necessarily assume that Shakespeare himself believed in demoniacal possession, any more than we need decide whether he followed Reginald Scot in his views on witchcraft, or King James in his views on Divine Right: but that he intended Lady Macbeth to be literally possessed it is difficult to doubt. Such an interpretation explains the unnatural darkness, and the equally unnatural portents on the night of the murder,/2 as it explains what Professor Curry calls the "demoniacal somnambulism" of the sleep-walking scene./3

Some critics have sentimentalized the character of Lady Macbeth and have argued that her cry,

"The Thane of Fife
had a wife . . ."

shows that "as a woman she can still feel for a murdered woman." On the other hand, Bradley agreed with Campbell when he insisted "that in Lady Macbeth's misery there is no trace of contrition." /4 But this, surely, is to take the sleep-walking scene too literally. Although Lady Macbeth's obsession with the blood-stains on her hand, and particularly with the *smell* of the blood, might be interpreted as evidence that she fears detection, it also symbolizes, as plainly as if she had cried it from the rooftops, her consciousness of guilt and the outrage she has committed on her own soul. It must be admitted, however, that a second personality which speaks through the patient's mouth, confessing sins and sometimes relating memories, was thought to be a characteristic of demoniacal somnambulism. It may be said that the night without stars,

/1 Quoted in *New Variorum*, pp. 472-3.

/2 Cf. Masefield, *Recent Prose*, pp. 270-2.

/3 *Op. cit.* p. 90. /4 Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 378.

/5 Curry, *op. cit.* p. 90.

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the prodigies accompanying the murder, and the sleep-walking of Lady Macbeth can all be explained without bringing in the supernatural at all -- and this fact may well reflect an ambiguity in Shakespeare's mind. The audience could take them either way, though the supernatural way was to Shakespeare's original audience the more natural. On the other hand it must be admitted that the miraculous scene in the third act where we see that the crime has not brought the criminals closer together, but has set an impassable barrier between them -- this picture "of the haunted desert of their souls" which shows that Lady Macbeth now realizes (what her husband knew at the time of the murder) what it is they have done -- does not require, and may even be thought to exclude, that Lady Macbeth should still be actively possessed: and the Banquet scene itself, in which she recovers for a while and for the last time some semblance of her will, is not easy to reconcile with the demoniac theory; for in that case Satan would seem to be divided against himself, on the one hand driving Macbeth to exhibit his guilt, and on the other enabling Lady Macbeth to shield him./1 So in the sleep-walking scene, whether her involuntary confessions (so poignant that, as Bradley remarked,/2 for the moment

"all the language of poetry . . . seems to be touched with unreality, and these brief toneless sentences seem the only voice of truth")

are the outpourings of her repressed conscience, or the treacherous words of the demon within her, we need not deny her (what Shakespeare must have given her) pity --

/1 The ghost of Banquo has been regarded as a hallucination, like the air-drawn dagger, but clearly it was something more than a projection of guilt. The ghost of Hamlet's father was invisible to Gertrude, though few would question its objective existence. Banquo's ghost appeared to Macbeth only because he alone was guilty; and the manifestation would have been the same whether the ghost was indeed Banquo's and had come to demand vengeance or whether, as Professor Curry thinks (op. cit. pp. 73, 75), it is an infernal illusion created by devils to bring Macbeth to his material ruin. Devils "are able to assume bodies of air, condensing it by virtue of their angelic natures insofar as is necessary for the forming of assumed bodies. . . . Demons are enabled to induce in the imaginations of men, either waking or asleep, whatever visions and hallucinations they please."

/2 Op. cit. p. 400.

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as well as the terror she has never failed to arouse. There is pity even on Dante's *Inferno*.

The fact that we no longer believe in demons, and that Shakespeare's audience mostly did, does not diminish the dramatic effect for us; for with the fading of belief in the objective existence of devils, they and their operations can yet symbolize the workings of evil in the hearts of men. It is not only the superstitious, but the guilty, to whom sleep is "a verie hell and a place of damned persons," for it presents unto them

"terrible visions and monstrous fancies; it raiseth diuels, fiends and furies, which torment the poore and miserable soule; it driueth her out of her quiet repose by her owne fearfull dreames, wherewith she whippeth, scourgeth and punisheth herselfe (as it were) by some other, whose cruell and vnseasonable commandements she doth obey." /1

The changes in custom and belief do not seriously detract from the universality of the tragedy.

Nor need we suppose that cuts and alterations have greatly damaged the unity and power of the play./2 Some critics, indeed, have complained that most of the characters in the play are "flat" and lacking in individuality, and that certain scenes are undramatic and even dull. The levelling of the characters is, however, a legitimate dramatic device, which has the effect of focusing attention on the main characters. Rosse, Angus, the old Man, the other Lord, Lenox, the two Doctors, and the Waiting-Gentlewoman have scarcely any recognizable traits, and the characteristics of Rosse and Lenox seem to be self-contradictory: but together these characters form a chorus which comments on the action of the play.

The other complaint, that certain scenes are undramatic,

I have, perhaps, already answered, at least by implication. It is not altogether accidental that some of the scenes which earlier critics regarded as of doubtful authenticity, or as

/1 Plutarch, *Morals*, tr. Holland, p. 260. Cited by Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, p. 212. A. A. Smirnov, *Shakespeare*, 1937, p. 72, even argues that "the conversations of Macbeth with the witches and phantoms, like the famous dialogue of Ivan Karamazov with the devil, are but the inner dialectical struggle of Macbeth with himself. The struggle is projected on the supernatural plane, just as the socio-historical events arising from Macbeth's concrete actions are projected on the spiritual plane."

/2 See pp. xxv.-xxvi. ante.

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irrelevant compliments to King James, or as concessions to the taste of the groundlings, or even as pieces of relaxed writing, have now come to be regarded as essential to the understanding of the play. The Porter scene, /1 the passage about dogs, /2 the speech on the King's Evil, /3 the first two scenes of the play, /4 and the dialogue between Macduff and Malcolm /5 in Act IV, Scene iii have been discussed elsewhere: but it may be worth while to add a note on the last of these passages which has been condemned as long-drawn-out and absurd. Sir Harley Granville-Barker, who thinks there is a lack of spontaneity in the writing of the scene, points out its importance in the scheme of the play. It is the starting-point of the play's counter-action, the audience need a breathing-space, and

"That Malcolm might be what his self-accusation would make him, that Macduff might be Macbeth's spy, that each then should turn from the other in loathing, and that Macduff should not be too easily convinced of the truth -- all this is necessary as a solid foundation for the moral dominance of the rest of the play by these two. And the whole matter must be given space and weight to the measure of its importance." /6

The scene can also be defended as a "mirror for magistrates" -- a discussion of the contrast between true royalty and tyranny that is very germane to the matter. /7 It can demonstrate effectively how Macbeth's misrule has made even the good suspect the good of treachery. Perhaps, too, as Professor Knights has suggested, /8 the scene acts as a choric commentary:

"We see the relevance of Malcolm's self-accusation. He has ceased to be a person. His lines repeat and magnify the evils that have already been attributed to Macbeth, acting as a mirror wherein the ills of Scotland are reflected. And the statement of evil is strengthened by contrast with the opposite virtues."

Professor Charlton complains /9 of critics who treat

Shakespeare's characters "as plastic symbols in an arabesque of esoteric imagery" or as "rhythmic ripples intoned in a chromatic ritual"; and though we may doubt

- /1 Cf. notes on the scene and pp. xxvii, ff. /2 Cf. p. lxviii.
/3 Cf. note on IV, iii. 140-59. /4 Cf. notes on I. i., I. ii., and I. ii. 7-23.
/5 Cf. p. xlvi. and note on IV. iii. /6 Op. cit. p. xlvi.
/7 Wilson, op. cit. p. xliv. /8 Op. cit. p. 28. /Op. cit. p. 1.

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whether these phrases aptly describe the practice of post-Bradleian critics, we may agree that the poetic dramas of Shakespeare are plays to be performed, and not merely poems to be read. On the other hand the distinction between art and life must be preserved, as it is not always preserved in the psychological critics of the past century and a half. Shakespeare wrote plays which happen to be poems, as well as poems which happen to be plays -- and it is not always easy to preserve a nice balance between the two parts of this statement. Then, again, in the process of analysing one of the tragedies, we are only too apt to fossilize the living substance of the original, and to impose a modern, or an Elizabethan, meaning on its stranger and less formulable significance. For what the groundlings or even the "judicious" thought in Shakespeare's day may be as far from a complete, a Shakespearean, understanding of *Macbeth* as the speculations of an Andrew Bradley. The plays are so vast and so complex that we can make statements about them which seem contradictory, and yet both express some aspect of the truth. We may, indeed, call *Macbeth* the greatest of morality plays, at the same time as we are aware that Shakespeare transcends the sublime story of a human soul on the road to damnation and that he shows us also indomitable energy burning *in the forests of the night, cherubim horsed upon the sightless couriers of the air, Pity, like a naked new-born babe, striding the blast, the very frame of things disjoint, and human life, a brief candle quenched in the dust of death, in all its splendours and miseries, and even in its crimes, not*

"a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

We may not agree with Campbell when he spoke of *Macbeth* "as the greatest treasure of our dramatic literature" or with Mr. Masefield, who called it "the most glorious" of Shakespeare's plays; but glory it certainly has, of a peculiar richness and intensity, which the poet

seldom equalled and "the achieve of, the mastery of the thing" which he surpassed, if immeasurables can be compared, only once.