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(Cambridge, 1947). "The New Shakespeare"

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THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE
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BY
JOHN DOVER WILSON

MACBETH

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MACBETH

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INTRODUCTION

This is a difficult play to edit. Few of Shakespeare's have been more discussed; yet, though the greatest critics have given their mind to it, they have not always done so wisely or with cogency. In few again is the textual basis so obscure or the necessity for a definition of it so compelling. With many plays one can pass direct to the dramatic problems without troubling about the history of the text,¹ but not with *Macbeth*; while the wildest and most divergent textual theories are current, are indeed endorsed by eminent writers. Readers of this Introduction are, therefore, asked to accept its long second section as a necessary evil, if they do not decide to skip it as they well may. On the other hand, I find my path eased by excellent and scholarly modern editions, among which special acknowledgements are due to that of Sir Edmund Chambers (1893), that of Sir

Herbert Grierson and Dr J. C. Smith (1914), and that of Professor Kittredge (1939).^{/2} Further, the problem of contemporary staging, so important in *Macbeth*, which relies upon supernatural machinery more than any other play of Shakespeare's, and the kindred problem of contemporary demonology, have recently been much illuminated by *The Globe Playhouse* of Professor J. C. Adams (1943) and *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* of Professor W. C. Curry (1937); books that reached me from across the ocean in a happy hour.

/1 Cf. *Hamlet* ('New Shakespeare'), pp. xi-xii.

/2 Unfortunately the interesting edition by Professor J. Q. Adams (1931), which anticipates some of my findings, did not come to my hands until November 1946, when this edition was already in the press.

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I. The Macbeth myth, and what Shakespeare owes to it

Little is known for certain about the historical Macbeth, who reigned in Scotland 1040-57; but what is, seems to point to a vigorous, successful, and, for his age, even religious, ruler. That he killed his predecessor, Duncan I, and was in turn killed by his successor, Duncan's son Malcolm III, is simply in the nature of things monarchical in tenth- and eleventh-century Scotland. Out of the nine kings who reigned between 943 and 1040 all but two were killed, either in feud or directly by their successors. And this state of affairs was the result, not so much of the general barbarism of the age, as of the ancient law or custom of alternate or collateral succession, which preceded the law of primogeniture in Scotland, Ireland and some other parts of Europe during the Dark Ages, and meant that, on the decease of a king, his crown passed, not to the direct descendant, but to the brother or cousin or even remoter collateral who seemed the strongest person within a certain family group. It was a system of obvious utility in a period when strength at the helm was a condition of survival for any institution; but it encouraged assassination, because the strong man would generally wish to 'mak sikker' by ending the ruling king's reign at a convenient moment for himself in advance of its natural term. Sometimes, however, it worked the other way. Malcolm II, for example, broke custom by killing off the members of the alternate branch in order to secure the throne for his grandson Duncan I. But by oversight or negligence he left one alive, a woman, Gruoch; and

she later had a son by her first husband, and later still took as her second husband a formidable person called Macbeth, son of Findlaech, mormaer (earl) of Moray. Findlaech was not of Scottish blood royal. But Macbeth's mother is said by some to have been Malcolm II's sister; and, though this is doubtful, Macbeth could

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claim the crown on behalf of his wife and her son. Thus from the eleventh-century standpoint Duncan was the usurper, and Macbeth the vindicator of the true line of succession.

But views change with changes in social custom, and if we ask how Macbeth came to figure in the chronicles and in Shakespeare as the crowned monster of Scottish history, the answer is first that the triumph of primogeniture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries taught men to regard the events of the preceding age in a new light; and second that Macbeth belonged to the House of Moray, which, unrelated to the royal stock and controlling a district still largely outside the authority of the Scottish kings, played a conspicuous, and being unsuccessful a discreditable, part in the later dynastic struggles that led to the aforesaid triumph of primogeniture. Thus, as one of a brood of traitors and would-be usurpers, and himself the slayer of Duncan I, who was now considered the rightful heir of Malcolm II, Macbeth was shaping well for the role of arch-usurper and tyrant by the end of the thirteenth century. It was however an event at the end of the following century which blackened his character finally and irredeemably. This was the occupation of the throne by a new dynasty, that of the Stewarts, a family which, reaching Scotland from Brittany, via Shropshire, where it had received lands from Henry I, stood in special need of an indigenous Scottish ancestry. A mythical genealogy was accordingly invented, with a mythical founder named Banquo, who was added to the ranks of royal martyrs credited to the House of Moray by means of a mythical murder at the hands of the already mythically infamous Macbeth, followed by the flight of a mythical son Fleance to Wales, from the borders of which the historical Stewarts are known to have come. And Fleance, it may be noted in passing, was important for another

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reason, since he was said to have married a Welsh

princess. Thus the house of Stewart could claim to be descended from Arthur himself; a claim of considerable value to its possessors in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries./1 Furthermore, the legend of Macbeth had by this date developed features which made it a peculiarly appropriate starting-point for the chronicle of a great line of kings, as may be seen by comparing the account of his reign in *The †Orygnale Cronykil of Scotland* by Wyntoun (c. 1424), a more than usually fabulous metrical history of the universal type, which knows nothing of Banquo, with that in the *Scotorum Historiae* (1527) by Hector Boece, who perhaps invented him, though he builds upon Wyntoun, the *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* of Fordun (ob. 1385) and other chronicles.

The Macbeth of Wyntoun is a most sinister person. To begin with, his mother, though described as Duncan's sister, is clearly some kind of witch, if one may judge from her suspicious delight in 'hailsume aire' and the woods, and from the fact that one day she meets there 'ane fayre man', alias the Devil, who becomes Macbeth's father and gives her a promise that the boy will prove a great warrior, invulnerable to all of woman born. Tenderly nurtured by his uncle Duncan, the infant no sooner grows to manhood than he attests his diabolical origin by murdering his kinsman and benefactor, marrying his widow (whom Wyntoun/2 identifies with Gruoch), and seizing his crown. But the most interesting part of the story is the vision which prompts Macbeth to perpetrate this crime. He dreams that he is hunting with Duncan when they encounter 'thre werd systrys' who hail him in turn Thane of Cromarty,

/1 See R. F. Brinkley, *Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century*, 1932, p. 16.

/2 See Bk. vi, l. 1877 (ed. Scottish Text Soc. iv, 275).

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Thane of Moray, and King of Scotland. Here was a golden opportunity for the chroniclers of the House of Stewart, inasmuch as all sound genealogical tales from the Book of Samuel downwards have opened with prophecy. It only needed to take dream for reality, substitute Banquo for Duncan as Macbeth's hunting companion, and continue the prophecy of the Weird Sisters in such terms as would make the promise equivocal to Macbeth and both sure and of eternal import to Banquo. Who first took this step we do not know, but we find the two legends combined in Boece,

from whom, with the aid of a translation by Bellenden,/1 Holinshed adopted the whole story and passed it on to Shakespeare. As an illustration of legendary accretion in other directions, it may be noted that whereas Wyntoun says nothing about Macdowald's/2 rebellion or the Norwegian invasions, which derive from Boece, he relates nearly all the facts we find in Shakespeare about Macduff, who is probably another mythical personage. With Wyntoun, however, the man not of woman born who slays Macbeth is an unnamed knight; with Boece it is Macduff himself./3

Though it must never be forgotten, and will be made clear in the Notes, that the witch-scenes probably owe much to Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584, to *Newes from Scotland*, 1591, which describes a famous witch-trial in which King James was involved, and to the *Daemonologie*, 1597, written by the king himself, Shakespeare's main historical source for *Macbeth* was the second edition (1587) of Holinshed's

/1 Boece is fuller than Bellenden, and Holinshed often reverts to the original. /2 See note 1.2.9.

/3 The foregoing paragraphs are indebted to conversations with Dr W. Croft Dickinson, Fraser Professor of Scottish History at Edinburgh, who, however, must not be held answerable for the views expressed.

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Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, which he had already used for his English histories./1 And he made the most of it. Holinshed's account of Duncan and Macbeth furnished him, of course, with the majority of his 'facts'; but he borrowed the circumstances of Duncan's murder from the murder of King Duff by Donwald, while the voice that Macbeth hears crying 'Sleep no more', together with his insomnia and the terrors he suffers, were clearly suggested to him by the account of King Kenneth./2 Moreover, as Sir Herbert Grierson has pointed out, he found in Holinshed not only the details of the story,

. . . but the tone and atmosphere of the Celtic and primitive legends of violent deeds and haunting remorse. He recognised in these turbulent Scottish kings and thanes a type of criminal quite distinct from the hard, unscrupulous, remorseless, and ambitious Norman nobles . . . of the early 'histories', and from the subtle and soulless Italian artist in crime such as he had portrayed in Iago. 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./3

We catch a glimpse here of something already noted in our introductions to the 'histories': Shakespeare's debt to Holinshed on the side of incident has been stressed enough, and more than enough; on the side of character it has still to be appreciated to the full.

Apart from the incorporation of such elements from other parts of the *Scottish Chronicle*, Shakespeare made free as usual with Holinshed's account of Macbeth's

/1 See W. G. Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p. x. Cf. note 1. 3. S.D. below.

/2 Cf. note 2. 2. 35.

/3 *Macbeth*, ed. by Sir Herbert Grierson and Dr J. C. Smith, 1914, pp. xviii-xix.

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reign. First, he compressed its seventeen years into about ten weeks; much as he had done with the reign of Henry IV and for much the same motives of dramatic art./1 In retailing, for example, the valiant deeds of Macbeth before the meeting with the Witches, he fused into one three separate campaigns referred to by Holinshed: (i) the revolt and defeat of Macdowald in Lochaber;/2 (ii) the invasion of Fife by Sueno, King of Norway;/3 (iii) the second invasion of Fife by King Canute, in revenge for his brother's defeat;/4 though it remains doubtful how much of this condensation belongs to his original draft and how much to the later processes of compression or abridgement. He transmuted, again, references to Duncan's 'feeble and slothful administration'/5 and to his 'too much of clemencie'/6 into a winning and gracious benevolence, which seems to overflow with generous impulses, while I suspect that the second phrase came to be associated in his mind with Macbeth himself. On the other hand, he suppressed every hint of a Macbeth who 'set his whole intention to maintayne justice', 'to punishe all enormities and abuses', and to furnish the realm with 'commendable lawes',/7 traces of the vigorous and firm ruler which had survived the tides of denigration above described, while he was careful to exclude also suggestions, likewise still discernible in Holinshed, that Macbeth possessed some claim to the throne./8 Shakespeare's Macbeth is a mere usurper (5. 8. 55), an 'untitled tyrant' (4. 3. 104), who after the murder of Duncan respects neither justice nor mercy. Here again

there are good dramatic reasons for the change; but

/1 See Introduction to *1 Henry IV*, p. xxi.

/2 Holinshed's *Scottish Chronicle* (ed. 1805), pp. 335-6.

/3 Ibid. pp. 336-7. /4 Ibid. p. 339.

/5 Ibid. pp. 341, 343. /6 Ibid. p. 335.

/7 Ibid. p. 341. /8 Ibid. p. 340.

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there are other reasons too. The process of defamation begun in the thirteenth century culminates in this play by a 'servant' of King James and a writer for the King's company of players. That the same writer also succeeds in endowing the 'tyrant bloody-sceptred' with enough nobility and 'human kindness' to claim our pity, is simply to say that he is Shakespeare.

But it was in his representation of the character of Banquo that he departs most strikingly from his source. And here also the desire to please his royal master and the demands of his art seem inextricably blended. Oddly enough Boece makes Banquo an accomplice in the murder of Duncan. 'At length', writes Holinshed of Macbeth, expanding Boece a little, 'communicating his purposed intent with his trustie friends, amongst whom Banquho was the chiefest, upon confidence of their promised aid, he slue the king at Envernesse.'/1 Traces of this complicity remain in the veiled approaches which Shakespeare's Macbeth appears to make towards Banquo at 1. 3. 153-5 and 2. 1. 20-9, while on the second occasion Banquo is thought by many, in my view mistakenly, to be aware that treachery is afoot./2 But Shakespeare could never have exhibited the ancestor of King James before his very eyes as a murderer's confederate. On the contrary, he makes him the soul of honour and loyalty, and (as I think) entirely unsuspecting of Macbeth's intentions beforehand, while to him is given the lofty protestation afterwards:

In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
Against the undivulged pretence I fight
Of treasonous malice.

Yet these brave words are followed by no action. And Bradley deduces from this and from his speech at

/1 Holinshed, *op. cit.* p. 340. /2 See note 2. 1. 25.

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3. 1. 1-10 that, though no accomplice, Banquo becomes an accessory after the act. Commenting upon the speech, he writes:

When next we see him, on the last day of his life, we find that he has yielded to evil. The Witches and his own ambition have conquered him. He alone of the lords knew of the prophecies, but he has said nothing of them. He has acquiesced in Macbeth's accession, and in the official theory that Duncan's sons had suborned the chamberlains to murder him./1

The passage shows Bradley at his weakest, treating Shakespeare as if he were a historian, answering questions that should not be asked of Elizabethan drama, and drawing deductions which assuredly the dramatist never in the least intended. For King James's ancestor could no more be a cowardly time-server than he could be privy to the assassination of his liege lord. And as if to prevent anyone supposing it for a moment, Shakespeare makes Macbeth pay a special tribute to 'his royalty of nature', the 'dauntless temper of his mind', and 'a wisdom that doth guide his valour'./2 Bradley quotes this to illustrate Macbeth's fear that Banquo is plotting against him, but fails to observe that it reflects upon the character of Banquo himself. Yet why is that, despite Macbeth's fears, Banquo never gives a hint of meditating any action, violent or otherwise? And why, a point Bradley overlooks, is his reply to the invitation to supper couched in respectful, almost obsequious, terms, although uttered immediately after his soliloquy referring to Macbeth's guilt? Is it not at least true to say, in the words of Sir Herbert Grierson, who does not subscribe to Bradley's explanation, that 'Banquo's position at Macbeth's court is a very

/1 *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 384-5.

/2 3. 1. 49-53.

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ambiguous one'/?/1 Some ambiguity there certainly is; and I think it may be accounted for, like other ambiguities in the text, by assuming that Banquo was given scope to make his position clear in the full-length play,/2 either by soliloquy/3 or in conversation with other thanes. Yet, even as the text stands, King James, we may be sure, perceived nothing but what was plain and right and proper; for his ancestor would be simply following the precepts of his most distinguished successor.

Usurper, tyrant, murderer as he was, Macbeth had been crowned at Scone; and according to James's ideas of kingship, as expounded in his *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*,/4 once a king has been anointed, be he 'an idolatrous persecuter' like Nebuchadnezzar or 'a bloody tyrant' and 'monster to the world' like Nero, his subjects' duty as laid down in Holy Writ, is perfect obedience and even prayers for his prosperity./5 But the 'right of kings' was hereditary as well as divine./6 There was one person, therefore, who might raise the standard against the usurper, and in whose cause Macbeth's subjects might take up arms against him, viz. the lineal heir of Duncan, Malcolm Prince of Cumberland. Macduff knows this and acts upon it; and it may well be that Banquo, with a 'wisdom that doth guide his valour' was made privy to his purposes in the unrevised play; certainly, the plot would gain from a scene

/1 Grierson and J. C. Smith, op. cit. p. 119.

/2 See § II, below.

/3 For example, by extension of the speech at the opening of 3. 1.

/4 Published in 1598, and reprinted in 1603, in both cases without James's name, though his authorship was an open secret.

/5 *The Political Works of James I*, ed. by C. H. McIlwain, 1918, pp. 60-1.

/6 Ibid. p. xxxiii.

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between the two immediately after 2. 3. in the existing text. Until Malcolm appears on Scottish soil, however, Banquo must behave to the reigning monarch like a loyal and respectful subject, as we find him doing.

It has long been supposed that Lady Macbeth is almost wholly a child of Shakespeare's invention; a supposition which rests on the assumption that Holinshed was Shakespeare's only historical source. Holinshed tells us that Macbeth had a wife 'verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene', who 'lay sore upon him to attempt the thing', and that Donwald also had a wife who 'counselled him (sith the King oftentimes vsed to lodge in his house without any garde about him, other than the garyson of the castell which was wholly at his commaundement) to make him away and shewed him the meanes whereby he might soonest accomlishe it'; which he did, 'though he abhorred the act greatlie in heart'./1 And that is all.

Shakespeare, however, as Mrs Stopes pointed out in 1916,^{/2} though no one appears to have noticed it, was probably acquainted with another source of Scottish history, since several of his points seem to be taken from it, points mostly connected with Lady Macbeth. This source was a manuscript of William Stewart's *Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland*, a metrical and expanded translation of Boece, said to have been made for King James V at the command of Queen Margaret, widow of James IV, and finished in 1535, though not printed until 1858. Stewart, who often gives us the actual words of his characters, relates that Macbeth's wife rated him and called him a coward, who 'durst nocht

/1 Holinshed, op. cit. pp. 295, 340.

/2 C. C. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Industry*, 1916, pp. 93, 102-3.

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tak on hand' the task of removing King Duncan;/1 that Donwald's wife bade him

Blyn of your baill, se ye be blyth and glaid,^{/2}

which may be translated:

Give o'er this gloom; see you look blithe and gay,

look, that is, as Macbeth's wife bids him look, at 1. 5. 62 ff.; that when the murder was discovered Donwald pretended to faint --

Dissimulat syne for to fall in swoun,
As he wer deid thair to the erth fell doun/³ --

as Lady Macbeth does; and that he afterwards ran up and down

With mony schout ay squeilland like a kid,^{/4}

as she promises to do at 1. 7. 78-9. Moreover, the prophecy to Banquo, which in Holinshed runs 'of thee those shall be borne whiche shall gouerne the Scottishe kingdome by long order of continuall discent',^{/5} becomes

Bot of thi seed sall lineallie discend,
Sall bruke the croun onto the worldis end,^{/6}

which brings it close to Shakespeare's

What, will th' line stretch out to th' crack of doom?

/1 Cf. note 1. 7. 43. Here Stewart keeps close to Boece who writes: 'acerrimis dictis incitat, ignavum ac timidum appellans, qui cantibus superis satisque portendentibus aggredi rem non audeat tam egregiam tamque praeclaram.'

/2 William Stewart, *Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland*, ii, l. 35,983 (Rolls Series, 1858).

/3 Ibid. ll. 36,161-2.

/4 Ibid. l. 36,172.

/5 Holinshed, *op. cit.* p. 340.

/6 Stewart, *op. cit.* ii, ll. 39,729-30.

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Now James knew the native chronicles of Scotland well. A Latin Boece and "the Scottis Chronicle, wrettin with hand" were among his books./1 The latter may have been Stewart, and anyhow Stewart which contained this version of the prophecy is likely to have been particularly interesting to him. Lastly, the lines in which Stewart describes the character of Macbeth himself may be quoted:

This Makcobey, quhilk wes bayth wyss and wucht,
Strang in ane stour, and trew as ony steill,
Defendar als with of the commoun weill . . . ,
Synne 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./2

Boece and Holinshed have nothing corresponding to this, and yet how well it sums up the pity of Macbeth's fall as Shakespeare represents it./3

The nature of the three Weird Sisters has been much discussed by critics;/4 yet it seems to have occurred to none of them that it was in all probability much discussed also by Shakespeare's public. The operation of spirits and devils was a favourite subject of speculation, not only among experts on demonology like King James, but with all students of 'philosophy', which we should now call science. And readers, busy with Scottish history at the beginning of James's reign, in order to become *au courant* with the new dynasty, could not possibly remain ignorant of the story, as told by Holinshed, of Banquo being promised that the House

/1 G. F. Warner, *The Library of James VI* (*Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.* 1893, p. xxxiv). /2 Ibid. ll. 39,822-30.

/3 For another parallel with Stewart v. note 1. 6. 14-18.

/4 See, for example, Spalding, *Elizabethan Demonology*, 1880, pp. 87-124; Kittredge, *Macbeth*, 1939, pp. xvi-xx; Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, 1937, ch. III.

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of Stewart should occupy the throne, and of the Norn-like 'goddesses of destiny' who as 'women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of an elder world'/1 uttered the great prophecy in question. So familiar was it indeed that students of St John's College dressed as 'tres quasi Sibyllae' had met James on his visit to Oxford in 1605 and recited Latin verses to him,/2 while, when the astrologer Simon Forman made notes of a performance of *Macbeth* seen at the Globe in 1611, his impressions were clearly influenced by memories of Holinshed's account./3 Yet, as such readers listened to the opening scenes of Shakespeare's play, they may well have asked themselves whether the august and auspicious figures which Holinshed describes and which appear as great ladies in his illustrations,/4 could possibly be the same as the foul hags rising from hell to claps of thunder, grinning and capering in obscene dances, gloating over parts of dismembered bodies, whom Shakespeare presents, 'Weird Sisters' though he might call them. On the other hand, he seems careful never to call them witches;/5 and though they behave as such at the beginning of 1. 3 and 4. 1, they have, as all critics have noted, something at once sublime and abysmally evil about them which marks them sharply off from the ordinary mortal witches such as his England and especially his Scottish king were thoroughly acquainted with. We can ourselves realise this distinction by comparing them with the witches in contemporary drama: with the merely nauseous hags of Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, for example,

/1 Holinshed, op. cit. p. 339.

/2 Why it is usually assumed that Shakespeare borrowed the notion of his *Macbeth* from this Oxford 'show' I cannot tell. He knew his Holinshed and had known it for years!

/3 See *The Review of English Studies*, July 1947.

/4 See Frontispiece.

/5 The term is only applied to them by the 'rump-fed ronyon' who is well punished for it.

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with the pitiful old village crone in *The Witch of Edmonton*, with the well-to-do wife and mother who

practises witchcraft in Heywood's *Lancashire Witches*, or with the meretricious sylphs whose trivial amours bore us in Middleton's *Witch*. Too witch-like to be Norns, too Norn-like to be witches, what then are they? The answer is that, borrowing from both conceptions, Shakespeare made something new of his own, as truly his own, Coleridge observes, 'as his Ariel and Caliban'. They had to be sufficiently like witches at first view for his audience to accept them as creatures within their ken; they had to seem increasingly mysterious and forbidding on further acquaintance to be recognised as creatures more terrible than witches. The Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* are the incarnation of evil in the universe, all the more effective dramatically that their nature is never defined. 'They are', writes Lamb, '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.'/1 And that, we can fancy Shakespeare echoing, is all ye need to know.

But one thing can be said of them: though 'Parcae' is the word in Boece which Bellenden translates 'weird sisters', they are not Fates or anything corresponding with that conception in Shakespeare; for *Macbeth* exercises complete freedom of will from first to last. They set the play moving because they bring with them 'the filthy air' of ineffable evil which is its atmosphere, but they are no more the agents of what follows than 'the infernal Serpent' is the author 'of all our woe' in Milton's epic. Just as *The book of Job* and

/1 *Works of Charles Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 'Miscellaneous Prose', p. 55.

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Goethe's *Faust* begin in Heaven, so by introducing the Weird Sisters into his introductory scenes Shakespeare begins *Macbeth* where Milton begins *Paradise Lost*, in Hell. For the theme of both is Temptation and Fall, the assault by Hell upon two great human souls.

II. The three *Macbeths*

But before we turn and consider *Macbeth* as a dramatic masterpiece, we have first to make up our minds what the *Macbeth* we are to consider precisely is. Does the only text which has survived, namely that in the First

Folio, represent the play as Shakespeare left it, or does it, as W. J. Lawrence declares and many others believe, resemble the ruin of some 'vast and venerable Gothic cathedral, tastelessly tinkered by an unimaginative restorer'/?/1 To few questions about Shakespeare have the answers been more various and more disparate. Pass these answers in review, however, and two points emerge: first, that, if we ignore modern throw-backs like the 'Arden' edition of 1912, which rejects as 'spurious' some 167 lines, opinion among scholars has grown steadily more optimistic since 1872, when the old Cambridge editors actually queried 300 lines in their Clarendon Press edition; and second, that the literary critics who are most sweeping in their condemnation of the text are often loudest in their praise of the play. Mr Masefield, for example, in a recent little book on *Macbeth*, estimates that at least thirty pages were torn from Shakespeare's manuscript 'by men who preferred a jig or a tale of bawdry, or were certainly asleep',/2 and yet at the same time displays boundless enthusiasm for

/1 W. J. Lawrence, 'The mystery of *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare's Workshop*, 1928, pp. 24-5.

/2 John Masefield, *A 'Macbeth' Production*, 1945, p. 8.

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the dramatic wreck such botchers would undoubtedly have left behind them. Again, while all agree that *Macbeth*, which, with its 2,084 lines, is the shortest play but two in the canon,/1 must at one time have been longer, few will quarrel with another recent critic who notes that 'no significant scene seems to be missing' and pronounces it 'incomparably brilliant as it stands, and within its limits perfect'./2 From such a dilemma only one escape appears possible: if our incomparable *Macbeth* is an abridged text, Shakespeare himself must be the chief abridger.

Nor does this solution rest on common sense alone; for it is possible to argue that during the first dozen years of the seventeenth century three distinct *Macbeths* were produced: (i) an original play by Shakespeare of unknown length and unknown date; (ii) an abridgement of this, also by Shakespeare, intended as the brevity of the Folio text suggests/3 for a performance limited to about two hours; and (iii) a rehandling of this abridgement in turn by the 'unimaginative restorer' mentioned above, whom it will be convenient to rid our hands of first.

The 'restorer' is now generally identified with

Thomas Middleton, whose *Witch*, as Steevens first noted, contains the full text of the two songs referred to by title only in the Folio stage-directions of *Macbeth* at 3. 5. 33 and 4. 1. 43, while the influence of the same play is evident also in the context of these stage-directions. The most extravagant theories of Middleton's interference with other scenes have been advanced from time to time, but the majority of serious students will to-day

/1 *The Tempest* runs to 2015 lines and *The Comedy of Errors* to 1753 according to Mr Hart's count; v. *The Review of English Studies*, viii, 21.

/2 Mark [†]van Doren, *Shakespeare*, 1939, p. 252.

/3 See E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i. 471.

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subscribe to Sir Edmund Chambers's verdict that his interpolations are in the main

confined to three passages (3. 5; 4. 1. 39-43, 125-32) in the witch-scenes, which can be distinguished from the genuine text by the introduction of Hecate, by the use of an iambic instead of a trochaic metre, and by [†]prettiness of lyrical fancy alien to the main conception of the witches./1

I confess to finding with others a non-Shakespearian flavour in *Macbeth*'s comment upon the third Apparition in 4. 1, while I am tempted, again with others, to assign the more vapid of the numerous couplets to Middleton whose attested plays show him to have had a fondness for that form of verse./2 But I am satisfied that, apart from the passages specified by Chambers, the Folio *Macbeth* is substantially of Shakespeare's composition.

On the other hand, I am equally sure that it does not contain all Shakespeare left in his manuscript when he last handled it; for the sorry state of the second scene, the only blot, but a real blot, upon the play's perfection, is demonstrably the work of an alien hand. The scene has undoubtedly been drastically and crudely cut, and may even be a cento of two or more original scenes not too carefully stitched together; and if one asks why so many nineteenth-century students have believed *Macbeth* to be mutilated throughout by an unintelligent adapter, the answer is that they jumped to the con-

/1 E. K. Chambers, op. cit. I, 472.

/2 See notes below, 2. 1. 60-1; 2. 4. 40-1; 4. 1. 153-4; 4. 3. 239-40; 5. 2. 29-30; 5. 4. 19-20 and D. L. Chambers,

The Metre of 'Macbeth', 1903, who shows (p. 18) that, whereas *Macbeth* has 108 lines of rhymed pentameters, *Hamlet* (almost twice as long) has only two-thirds of this, and *Antony and Cleopatra* (a little shorter than *Hamlet*) one-third.

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clusion after perusing this scene. The verse, except for a word or two here and there, is certainly Shakespeare's;/1 but the broken lines, the irregular metre and lineation, and the abrupt transitions, together with a number of little obscurities or difficulties in construction and meaning,/2 tell a tale which can have but one interpretation. One of these difficulties, a favourite theme of editors since Dr Johnson, concerns the treacherous Thane of Cawdor, whose title is conferred upon Macbeth, and who is spoken of at 1. 2. 52-4 in terms implying that he is an ally of the King of Norway and fighting by his side against Macbeth; an implication not only inconsistent with Macbeth's astonishment, twice expressed, when he hears of Cawdor's treachery in the next scene, but dramatically exceedingly inept, inasmuch as the prophecy of the second witch loses more than half its virtue if Macbeth knows already that Cawdor is a notorious and defeated traitor. The real explanation is, as Angus hints at 1. 3. 111-16 in reply to Macbeth's second expression of astonishment, that Cawdor had been *secretly* in league with both Norway and the rebel Macdonwald;/3 and we need not doubt that this was

/1 Few question this to-day; those who do may be referred to J. M. Nosworthy's notes on the scene in *The Review of English Studies*, April 1946.

/2 Most of these are brought out in the notes on 1. 2 below.

/3 I owe this point to Kittredge, who, however, claims that Angus's words prove the difficulty about Cawdor to be 'quite imaginary'. He forgets that a dramatic explanation must be absolutely clear to be effective, whereas this one is so obscure that nobody seems to have tumbled to it before himself. He forgets too that an explanation of Macbeth's ignorance, furnished after the Witch's prophecy, is furnished too late. See *Macbeth*, ed. G. L. Kittredge, 1939, pp. vii-viii and notes therein on 1. 2. 52; 1. 3. 72-3.

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made perfectly plain in 1. 2 before the adapter got to work upon that scene and cut out the relevant passage. But why did he not make it plain then also, as he might

have done in three words? Here is the reference to Cawdor as it stands in the Folio context:

And fanne our people cold.
Norway himselfe, with terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyall Traytor,
The *Thane* of Cawdor, began a dismall Conflict.

He had only to rearrange the lineation and add a phrase like 'in secret wise' after 'numbers' and all would have been well. That he failed to do so can, I think, be explained in one way alone: he knew enough of the play to realise the importance of preparing for the prophecy in 1. 3 by a mention of the treachery of Cawdor in 1. 2; he did not notice that it was equally important to retain some reference to its secrecy. In a word, he was not the author.

I suggest that this botcher is Middleton, who, having interpolated some fifty lines of his own in the witch-scenes, is here seen robbing Shakespeare of lines in exchange in order not unduly to increase the length of the play in performance. There are, of course, pretty obvious traces of cutting elsewhere. Chambers, for example, notes that the short lines at 2. 3. 103; 3. 2. 32, 51; 3. 4. 4; 4. 3. 28, 44 are abrupt and give rise to obscurities,^{/1} while Bradley finds it 'difficult not to suspect some omission or curtailment' at 1. 4. 33-43, where the naming of Malcolm as Prince of Cumberland is 'extremely sudden', and 'the abruptness and brevity of the sentence in which Duncan invites himself to Macbeth's castle are still more striking'.^{/2} But none of

^{/1} E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.* i, 471.

^{/2} Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 468. Cf. also notes 3. 1. 129, 137 below.

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these are as crude as those in 1. 2, and though some of them may be Middleton's all may equally well be Shakespeare's. The important point is that Shakespeare can be completely acquitted of the murder of his second scene; how important we shall see when we come to consider the problem of Macbeth's character.

At what date was Middleton concerned with *Macbeth*? The answer depends upon the date of his *Witch*, which, not printed before 1778, has come down to us in a late transcript conjecturally assigned to 1620-7.^{/1} But we now know that the scribe was Ralph Crane, one of the scribes of the King's men;^{/2} and we can there-

fore accept with some confidence his statement in the title of the MS. that the play was 'long since acted by His Majesty's servants at the Blackfriars', and deduce therefrom that it was acted in or after the autumn of 1609 when the King's men probably first occupied that theatre./3 Further, I find it difficult to set aside Lawrence's argument that *The Witch* can hardly be much later than Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, produced at Whitehall on 2 February 1609, seeing that it clearly owes much to the Antimasque of Witches with which that masque opens, while its Hecate scenes may even have been played by the same performers, dancing the same dances in the same costumes./4 In a word, late 1609 or early 1610 seems a highly probable date for *The Witch*. And I accordingly assign a date somewhere in 1610 or 1611 to Middleton's production of *Macbeth*, since, being chiefly concerned with the addition of witch-songs and witch-dances to the text,/5 he would naturally be using

/1 Greg, *Elizabethan Dramatic Documents*, pp. 358-9.

/2 See the article on Crane by Prof. F. P. Wilson in *The Library*, 1926, vii, 194-215.

/3 E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, ii, 510.

/4 W. J. Lawrence, *op. cit.* pp. 28-33.

/5 See notes on 4. 1 below.

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the same performers and costumes once again. As his cuts in 1. 2 seem to display anxiety not to exceed a two hours' performance, I am inclined to think this production was intended once again for the court. But if so, it was first tried out in the popular theatre or was shortly after transferred thither, since the old astrologer Simon Forman witnessed a performance at the Globe on 20 April 1611./1

Forman records the earliest performance of *Macbeth* for which we have external evidence. We have, however, internal evidence of a positive kind that it was being acted in 1606, and we can be almost certain that it was one of the plays given at Court on the occasion of King Christian of Denmark's visit to his sister Anne and his brother-in-law James. Date and occasion were first suggested by Malone /2 who pointed out that the drunken Porter's welcome to Hell of 'an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven' was obviously intended to refer to Henry Garnet, Provincial of the Jesuit Society in England, who was tried on 28 March 1606, for his

complicity in the Gunpowder Plot (on which day King James himself attended the trial incognito),/3 confessed to the use of equivocation and was hanged on 3 May. Further, the words 'yet could not equivocate to heaven',

/1 For Forman's account, and the date of his visit, which he writes '1610' in error, see the reprint of his MS. *Bocke of Plaies* in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, ii, 337-41, and cf. pp. lxix-lxx, below. The *Bocke* has recently been declared a Collier forgery by Dr Tannenbaum (*Shakesperian Scraps*, 1933, pp. 1-35) following a suggestion by Prof. J. Q. Adams (*Macbeth*, 1931, p. viii). But for evidence in favour of its authenticity see *The Review of English Studies*, July 1947. /2 See Boswell's *Malone*, ii, 407 ff.

/3 G. B. Harrison, *Jacobean Journal*, 28 March 1606.

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and the assumption that the equivocator had already found his way to Hell, surely imply that Garnet was a dead traitor when the speech was first uttered. And this is supported by another passage which, as Bradley noted, actually links equivocation with the hanging of traitors. 'What is a traitor?' asks little Macduff of his mother, and the dialogue continues:

Lady Macduff. Why, one that swears and lies.

Son. And be all traitors that do so?

Lady Macduff. Everyone that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged./1

'It is to be feared', comments Bradley, 'that the audience applauded this passage',/2 and I think it safe to assume that both it and the Porter's speech were written after the great Jesuit had paid the last penalty. As against this we have to reckon with the echoes of *Macbeth* noted below/3 in Marston's *Sophonisba*, entered in the Stationers' Register on 17 March, i.e. before Garnet's trial and certainly acted some weeks earlier; echoes which led Sir Edmund Chambers 'tentatively' to 'put *Macbeth* early in 1606'./4 But it was customary for the

/1 4. 2. 46-50.

/2 Bradley, op. cit. p. 397, n. 1.

/3 The following are the chief parallels to *Macbeth* noted in plays acted or printed in 1606-7: 'In stead of a Iester, weele ha the ghost ith white sheete sit at vpper end a' th' Table' (*The Puritan*, 4. 3. 89; perhaps by Middleton, probably acted 1606); another obvious reference to Banquo's ghost at 5. 1. 20-30 of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c. 1607) which is quoted on p. lxix below; and several

slight, but convincing, echoes in Marston's *Sophonisba* pointed out by Bradley (p. 471), e.g.

'Upon whose tops the Roman eagles streachd
Their large spread winges, which fan'd the evening ayre
To us cold breath.' (1. 2; cf. *Macbeth*, 1. 2. 50-1.)

/4 *William Shakespeare*, i, 475.

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players to 'exercise themselves' before acting at court by first trying the play out on the popular stage, and the other echoes of *Macbeth* traceable in the drama of 1606 and 1607 make it certain that Shakespeare's tragedy was being publicly performed at this time. The foregoing apparent conflict of evidence may accordingly be resolved if we suppose the allusions to Garnet were added to the text after these public performances, while that they are additions will presently be shown. A further complication must, however, be noticed in passing, viz. that the Jesuit doctrine of equivocation had been a subject for stage jesting at least since the time of *Hamlet*.¹ It is not necessary to suppose therefore that a general expression like 'th' equivocation of the fiend' (5. 5. 43) was intended as a reference to Garnet.

Christian IV's visit lasted from 17 July to 11 August, and the passages on the hanging and damnation of equivocators, written, I assume, after 3 May, bring the play close to that period. Its production at court cannot be proved but is strongly suggested by its brevity,² and by the fact that the passages in question together with others seem to have been added, for the entertainment of the royal audience, to an already existing text. Examine in its context, for instance, the dialogue just quoted from 4. 2. Although the boy's first question is

¹ See *Hamlet*, 5. 1. 134, and my note thereon.

² See A. W. Pollard on short plays in *Aspects of Shakespeare*, pp. 13-14, and a Note by R. C. Bald in *The Review of English Studies*, iv, 429-31. It seems unlikely that all plays given at Court were short, though plays for particular occasions, i.e. for weddings or as part of an evening's entertainment might well be, especially when the chief guest was a foreigner with but slight understanding of English, as was probably the case with King Christian in 1606 and the German bridegroom of Princess Elizabeth before whom *The Tempest*, another short play, was given in 1612.

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preceded by another, 'Was my father a traitor, mother?' which harks back to l. 4, 'traitors' is there used in a very different sense, while 'hanging' has no relevance to Macduff whatever. And when it is further observed that the dialogue stands at the beginning of a prose passage (ll. 46-63) which occurs in the middle of a scene otherwise in verse, the likelihood of an insertion is increased.

And a quite certain example of rewriting may, I think, be seen at 4. 3. 97-100, which is the culmination of Malcolm's self-detraction, that innocent deception practised on Macduff in order to test his loyalty and followed by a recantation. The episode, as every commentator has noted, is little more than a paraphrase of Holinshed. What has not been noted is that whereas Malcolm 'unspeaks' the three vices, lechery, avarice, and falsehood, which Holinshed names, and repudiates the third with particular emphasis, he does not actually accuse himself of this third vice at all; for after following his source faithfully with the first two, Shakespeare suddenly deserts it and makes Malcolm confess to a crime not even hinted at therein, that of contentiousness. A strange vice and expressed in strangely modern terms!

Nay, had I power, I should
Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
Uproar the universal peace, confound
All unity on earth.

That we have here an instance of rewriting after the composition of the original dialogue cannot, I think, be denied. Nor is it difficult to see for what purpose the change was made. Shakespeare had come to know more of his royal master's mind in the interval and to realise, as a modern apologist puts it, that 'he was haunted by thoughts of the unity of the Christian world under one

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faith',/1 or, to use the words of a less favourable historian, that he was 'the most thorough-going pacifist who ever bore rule in England'./2 It seems that the crowning horror in Malcolm's self-indictment is violent opposition to King James's cherished foreign policy! Yet the words have a special point as well, appropriate to the summer of 1606 and to no other time. For Rome followed up the outrage of the Gunpowder Plot in England by laying the ancient republic of Venice under an interdict, and it was confidently predicted

in this country that the act would precipitate a general European War with England, France, and Venice on one side, and Spain and the Pope on the other. At an interview on 14 June 1606, James unburdened himself of a 'long discourse' on the subject to the Venetian ambassador, his conclusion being that the Jesuits were 'authors and instruments of all the great disturbances' in the world./3 Clearly Shakespeare's Malcolm poses as a kind of Jesuit. Need we hesitate to assume that this *bonne bouche* was concocted for the dish which His Majesty was to share with a foreign monarch?

Similarly, I suspect with others that the episode of the King's Evil (4. 3. 140-59), which has but slight

/1 See Prof. Sisson's essay on James I in *Seventeenth Century Studies presented to Sir Herbert Grierson*, p. 60.

/2 G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England*, p. 385. It is significant that James's earliest attempt to become the Peacemaker of Europe was on the occasion of his visit to Denmark in 1589-90; v. *Calendar of State Papers (Scotland)*, 1936, vol. X, p. xvi.

/3 *Calendar of State Papers (Venice)*, 1603-7, vol. X, pp. 359-61. I owe this reference to an interesting paper by Miss F. A. Yates on Paolo Sarpi's 'History of the Council of Trent' in vol. vii of *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*.

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dramatic relevance and is so self-contained that it may be omitted without damage to the context either in metre or meaning, was also added in 1606. It is another *bonne bouche*, since though based on Holinshed, it flattered James by emphasising his descent from St Edward the Confessor, by hinting, in the reference to the latter's 'heavenly gift of prophecy', that James was also inspired as his bishops were fond of saying,/1 and by paying tribute to the miraculous healing power of his sacred touch, which he affected to smile at while he delighted in showing it off./2 Moreover, his dear brother Christian of Denmark could lay claim to none of these 'king-becoming graces'.

We have, then, proof that passages of *Macbeth* were written in the summer of 1606 and pretty clear evidence that other passages were added to an already standing text to please Shakespeare's royal master. Is there anything to show that some, if not all, of these additions were part of a general revision, that the 1606 text was in fact an abridgement of a longer play, as its brevity suggests

and as many critics have supposed? If Shakespeare undertook such an abridgement, one thing is certain: he went to work in a very different fashion from Middleton in the second scene. It may well be that some of the short lines and abrupt transitions outside that scene were left by his cuts, but the splendour of the play as a whole indicates that the abridgement, if abridgement there was, must have been a masterly operation, involving no doubt the sacrifice of speeches, episodes, scenes for which room could not be found within the narrower frame, but proceeding in the main by compression, readjustment, recasting and rewriting.

/1 See Harington, *Nugae Antiquae* (1804), i, 181-2 and note 4. 3. 157 below.

/2 Cf. note 4. 3. 146.

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In a word it was a process not of botching but of gestation.

It follows that it will be far less easy to detect than it was to catch Middleton out in 1. 2. Yet if we look closely, it is possible, I think, to find a birthmark or two in the re-born *Macbeth*, pointing to its previous existence as a longer text. An obvious example, obvious because it has given rise to much comment, but actually so inconspicuous that it passed unnoticed until one Hans Koester drew attention to it in 1865,^{/1} is Lady Macbeth's taunting reference at 1. 7. 47 ff. to an occasion on which her husband first broached the 'enterprise' of Duncan's murder. No trace of any such occasion is to be discovered in the text as it stands, and efforts have been made to explain it away, both (i) on psychological grounds as a bold lie ^{/2} or as an exaggeration,^{/3} based on his letter to her, and (ii) on technical grounds, as an 'episodic intensification' like the allusion to Lady Macbeth's children,^{/4} or as a piece of dramatic legerdemain resorted to in order to stress at this juncture the less admirable side of Macbeth's character.^{/5} The trouble with this last explanation, in some ways the most plausible of the four, is that as no spectator or reader apparently observed the point until 1865, it can hardly

/1 *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, I, 146.

/2 *Macbeth*, ed. par James Darmesteter, Paris, 1887, p. 35, and ed. by Sir Herbert Grierson, 1914, p. 107.

/3 Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 483. See also his whole Note CC, 'When was the murder of Duncan first plotted?'

/4 See note 4. 3. 216, and Schücking, *Character Problems*

in *Shakespeare*, pp. 113-6. The best discussion of this matter is the earliest, i.e. by Goethe in *Conversations with Eckermann*, April 18, 1827, quoted below in note 1. 7. 54.

/5 R. Bridges, 'The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama, (*Shakespeare: Stratford Edition*), 1907, vol. 10, and *Collected Essays, etc.* 1927, i, 13-19.

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have been intended to stress anything. And if it had been, why should Shakespeare write the first six scenes in such a manner that practically all readers since then have imagined quite another state of affairs and *continued to imagine it* after reading the passage which is troubling us?/1

Moments of dramatic tension are not the time a practised playwright chooses for the communication of new and important facts; and the truth is the highly emotional situation leaves us no wits to notice that Lady Macbeth is speaking of something which transforms our idea of Macbeth's character, still less of something which has never taken place at all. And yet, *once our attention is directed to her words*, we see that they are far too positive and too pointed to be susceptible of any of the foregoing explanations. Consider, for instance, the following:

Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you.

She is recalling him to a situation fresh in the minds of both (and surely, we now feel, also in the minds of the audience), to a time before Duncan arrived at Inverness or was expected to arrive there, to a discussion between them of how nevertheless the assassination might be contrived; and she is comparing his behaviour then with his behaviour now. This earlier conversation had taken place; of that there can be no reasonable doubt, as we read the passage by itself. Yet, if so, when? On the

/1 My question is a free paraphrase of a sentence in Bradley. It need hardly be added that there is nothing in common between Lady Macbeth's allusion and those improbabilities in the antecedents, <exō tēs tragōidias>, common in Greek drama, such as the ignorance of Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles.

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one hand, the previous scenes are so closely knit together as to allow no moment anywhere when it could have taken place, while on the other, critics who imagine Macbeth and Lady Macbeth discussing the murder before the play opens, or in some scene that has dropped out or been 'cut' out, only do so by ignoring the plain sense of the scenes before them. They must overlook, for example, 1. 3. 130-42, which depicts the terror of Macbeth's soul when the idea of murder *first* comes to him;/1 and 1. 5. 14-24, in which Lady Macbeth makes it clear that so far he has refused to entertain any but honourable thoughts; while the dialogue at the end of 1. 5 may be read as either implying an earlier conversation or as the earliest occasion upon which the murder has ever been talked of between them.

We seem to be turning round and round; and critics will continue so to do while they think of the play as without a history, or as a text shortened merely by the omission of scenes and episodes. But believe that Shakespeare revised his own play, that the earlier *Macbeth* was not rough-hewn but re-born as the *Macbeth* of 1606, and all is plain. The mysterious conversation to which Lady Macbeth so positively alludes is then seen to belong to the longer play, and to have been squeezed out in the tightening-up process. That in such circumstances Shakespeare by inadvertence or indifference should have left a reference to it standing at 1. 7. 47 is likely enough and has many parallels in the texts of his other plays. He knew an audience would not notice the implications and it added another lash to the Lady's chastising tongue. Nor is there any difficulty in supposing that another and larger dramatic frame contained a scene in which the Thane of Cawdor designate called at Inverness on his way to Forres, told his wife of the Weird Sisters, and -- no doubt prompted by her -- confessed

/1 See p. lv below.

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that 'thoughts of murder had crossed his mind'; a scene, in fact, that probably supplied much of the material for the first thirty lines of the surviving 1. 5.

Yet if 1. 5. be a reconstructed scene it must contain material from the original scene in which Lady Macbeth receives news of Duncan's approach under her battlements; for it will be granted, I hope, that such a scene was to be found in the earlier play. And part of this material was, I think, an invocation to the spirits 'that tend on

mortal thoughts' very similar to, if not identical with, the speech we now have; since, unless I am much mistaken, the speech in question reveals a second indication of something lost or squeezed out. The whole point of Lady Macbeth's invocation is that she intends to murder Duncan herself. She speaks of 'my knife' and of 'my fell purpose'. And the same resolve is implied in everything she says to Macbeth after his entry. She bids him put

This night's great business into *my* dispatch;

she tells him he need do nothing but look the innocent and kindly host; she dismisses him with the words 'Leave all the rest to me'. All this seems obvious directly it is pointed out, though once again no one appears to have noticed it before,^{/1} simply because in the end the murder is of course performed by Macbeth himself; and must be, however the drama is shaped. But that implies a change of plan and such an important change ought by all dramatic rights to be explained to the audience. This was originally done, I suggest, by means of a further dialogue between husband and wife, preceded perhaps by a scene in which, going to the bedroom knife in hand, she cannot bring herself to the action; and I further suggest that when he reached this point in 1606 Shakespeare found he had no room for such

^{/1} See, however, J. Q. Adams, *Macbeth*, 1931, pp. 150-3, 164-5.

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developments and had to extricate himself as best he could. And how triumphantly he does it! First he writes a soliloquy ('If it were done, when 'tis done') for the beginning of scene 1. 7, which conveys the impression that Macbeth was intending all along to do the deed himself; he then later in the same scene makes the guilty pair talk as if they were proposing to do it *together*; and finally, though he sends Macbeth to the bedroom alone, he brings Lady Macbeth on to inform us that she has already been there, and -- crowning touch -- that

Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't.

The broken thread, as I believe it to be, is so dexterously woven back into the new stuff that no one, not even lynx-eyed Bradley himself, has noticed the join. Yet the

words just quoted tell the whole story, since they provide us, not only with the dramatic reason for the change of plan as it was explained, I believe, in the original dialogue, but also with a technical reason for the introduction by Shakespeare of a change of plan at all. One thing can be said with certainty about the longer *Macbeth*, that it shed greater light, light we would willingly recapture, upon the character of Lady Macbeth. How much more effective would be this unexpected revelation of her 'human kindness', had the audience been first led to believe that she, and not Macbeth, was to do the murder! Yet when she prays

That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose,

she at once acknowledges her weakness and gives spectators their warning. These words and those cited above form, I suggest, the two ends of the original thread.

Nor is the extrusion of material like this the end of the matter. Apart from the short and abrupt lines noted

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above, the puzzles of Banquo's behaviour after Macbeth's coronation/¹, the appearance of a third murderer in 3.3/², and Macduff's desertion of his wife are also best explained by compression, while once this factor be admitted it becomes obvious that many original scenes and episodes may have been sacrificed without leaving a trace, unless it be in 'the multiplicity of very brief scenes' to which Greg draws attention./³

But if the 1606 *Macbeth* be an abridged text, what can one say about the length, character and date of the earlier play? Nothing, I fear, but guesses; one or two of which may perhaps be hazarded, if only to provoke better guesses by others.

First, then, my impression is that while the process of compression affected the play throughout, it was most drastic in the first half. Many spectators and readers are, I think, conscious of something a little wrong, or unusual, about the balance of the plot: the murder of Duncan, which forms as it were its peak, belongs by rights to Act 3 and not the beginning of Act 2. And this hypothesis would help to account for another phenomenon, the fact that irregularity of verse-division, which is so marked a feature of the Folio text, is almost entirely confined to the earlier scenes. My second guess -- a confident one -- is that the earlier and longer *Macbeth* was intended for King James just as much as the

shortened version of 1606. Indeed, I cannot believe that this chronicle-play of the house of Stewart, with its witch-scenes full of points likely to be of interest to the author of *Daemonologie*, was written for any eyes but his./4 And if readers be ready to grant this royal interest

/1 See above, pp. xvi-xvii.

/2 See notes 3. 1. 129, 137; 3. 3 (head).

/3 Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. 147, and *Alcazar and Orlando*, p. 94, n. 3.

/4 See below, pp. xliv-xlv.

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in the play, they will allow at least the possibility that the abridgement of 1606 was undertaken by express command of His Majesty who wished his brother of Denmark to witness what he probably looked on as his own special piece.

My next guess, though at first sight irreconcilable with the foregoing, and founded upon the contentious ground of style, can at least show powerful support for part of its claim. It was the considered opinion of a supreme taster of poetic vintage, George Saintsbury, an opinion twice expressed, that those who believe Shakespeare wrote the whole of *Macbeth* in 1605-6 'must have curious standards of criticism', inasmuch as portions of it, and in particular 'the second scene, are in verse and phrase whole stages older than the bulk of the play'./1 And this verdict, Sir Herbert Grierson, Saintsbury's successor at Edinburgh, has endorsed with certain modifications./2 Encouraged by a hint from Coleridge,/3 I would dare to offer a modification in my turn, question the words 'whole stages older', and setting the second scene of *Macbeth* beside the Pyrrhus speech in *Hamlet*, suggest that they belong to approximately the same date. It is unnecessary here to note the many striking similarities in imagery and phrasing, since that task has recently been performed by Mr. Nosworthy./4 What I would point to are the echoes in the two scenes of contiguous lines from Marlowe's description of the slaughter of Priam in *The Tragedy of Dido*. Here are the three passages:

/1 *Cambridge History of English Literature*, v, 203. Cf. Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody*, ii, 41-2.

/2 *Macbeth*, ed. Grierson and Smith, p. xii.

/3 Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, i, 67 (opening paragraph on *Macbeth*).

/4 *The Review of English Studies*, April 1946, pp. 126 ff.

But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
Th' unnerved father falls. *Hamlet* 2. 2. 477-8.

Till he unseamed him from the nave to th' chops.
 Macbeth 1. 2. 22.

Which he disdainning whiskt his sword about,
And with the wind thereof the king fell down:
Then from the navell to the throat at once
He ript old Priam. *Dido* 2. 1. 283-6.

It seems likely that what put Shakespeare in mind of Marlowe's lines was his desire to contrast his Prince of Denmark with Pyrrhus, the classical type of ruthlessness, and, if this is so, the line in *Macbeth* must be, not 'whole stages', but only some four or five years older than the rest of the play. Again, it has often been observed that Hamlet and Macbeth are complementary characters; the one never being able to begin, the other never being able to leave off;/1 while I find further similarities in rhythm and phrase, thought and action, when I compare the scene in which Macbeth provokes the murderers to kill Banquo (3. 1. 73 ff.) with that in which Claudius eggs Laertes on to a like purpose (4. 7). In a word, my guess is a very daring one, viz. that the earlier *Macbeth* was the next play undertaken after *Hamlet*, i.e. that it was written in the second half of 1601 or early in 1602.

That means pushing back into Elizabeth's reign a play just claimed as intended from first to last for King James. 'How shall we find the concord of this discord?' At this point I tremble, and then, remembering I am on good Scottish soil, take the boldest step of all./2 Shakespeare's fellows are recorded as acting before the Queen

/1 see Saintsbury, loc. cit. Cf. note 4. 3. 44-132, below.

/2 The bolder that it follows the now discredited F. G. Fleay; v. his *Life and Work of Shakespeare*, 1886, p. 43.

in the winter of 1602;/1 but nothing is known of *his* doings during her last years after the fall of Essex. We do know, however, that 'English comedians' were in Scotland from 1599 onwards, to the scandal of the Edinburgh Kirk Sessions/2, and that they were led by

one Laurence Fletcher, whose name later appears with Shakespeare's as one of the principal members of the King's company constituted by royal patent on 19 May 1603. We know too that players can do nothing without plays; and, though no title or tittle of what they acted has survived, it is at least conceivable that Shakespeare's longer *Macbeth* was first produced by Fletcher's company in the capital city of Scotland. Indeed, if I may continue to live dangerously, it is even possible that Shakespeare visited Scotland himself. Somehow or other he learned that the Setons were the royal armour-bearers/³ and seems to have become acquainted with William Stewart's *Croniclis of Scotland*./⁴ The only surviving copy of this found its way from Scotland to Cambridge via Bishop Moore's library,⁵ but there are not likely to have been many copies in England at any time, and Holinshed does not use it. Did Shakespeare read it in Edinburgh? But enough of guessing.

III. 'The Tragedy of Macbeth'

One of the most difficult of Shakespeare's tragedies to classify, or seemingly to fit into our modern conception of tragedy at all, *Macbeth* has meant different things to different generations. In Shakespeare's own day,

/1 E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, ii, 205-6.

/2 Ibid. pp. 266, 270; and A. J. Mills, *Medieval Plays in Scotland*, 1927, p. 299.

/3 See note 5. 3. 29 S.D.

/4 See also notes 4. 3. 107; 5. 8. 33.

/5 See Preface to Stewart's *Croniclis*, op. cit. pp. vi-vii.

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Seneca being the ideal for tragedy, the end of poetry being 'to teach and to delight', and the components of true tragedy being therefore Seneca and instruction, the Senecan *Macbeth*, with its exhibition of a tyrant in action, its revelation of his innermost soul, and its demonstration of the just retribution that inevitably awaits him, probably seemed to critics a more satisfactory tragedy than any other of his plays./¹ Indeed, it almost looks as if in the writing of it Shakespeare had consciously in mind Sidney's famous description of

... high and excellent tragedy that openeth the greatest wounds, and sheweth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue;/² that maketh kings feare to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannicall humors; that, with stirring the

affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded; that maketh us know

Qui sceptrā saevus duro imperio regit,
Timet timentes, metus in auctorem redit./3

Every point tallies, including the quotation from

/1 That Shakespeare knew Seneca's *Hercules Furens* at least, if not other dramas of his, will appear from the notes on 1. 7. 8-12; 2. 2. 37-40, 59-63; 5. 3. 22, 40. As Grierson and Smith point out, '*Macbeth* has three pairs of neighbouring passages paralleling three pairs of neighbouring passages in *Hercules Furens*', while the parallel at 2. 2. 59-63 makes it pretty certain Shakespeare read it in the Latin (see my note). Cf. too J. W. Cunliffe, *Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy*, 1893.

/2 Cf. *Hamlet* 3. 4. 147-9:

'It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption mining all within
Infects unseen.'

/3 Sidney, *Apology for Poetry* (Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, i, 177). The verse comes from *Oedipus*, ll. 705-6.

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Seneca's *Oedipus*, which might have stood as a motto on Shakespeare's title-page had he elected to publish this play. When we remember too that *Macbeth* was *the* tyrant of Scottish history, and that the play was written for the delight of a Scottish /1 king, who was in his own conceit the inspired exponent of the rights and duties of Christian monarchy, /2 its didactic implications for Shakespeare's original audience become still more obvious. Lastly, think of *Macbeth* as a tragic 'mirror for magistrates', /3 and you have an entirely satisfactory explanation of the dialogue between Malcolm and Macduff in 4. 3, on bad kings and good, which seems to us a tiresome digression chiefly because we have ceased to interest ourselves in a topic that much engaged the minds of the British Solomon and his court. It had engaged his indeed from boyhood; for had not that stern tutor, George Buchanan, dedicated to him, while still a lad of ten, a Senecan tragedy on Herod and John the Baptist, 'quod tyrannorum cruciatus, et, cum florere maxime videntur, miserias dilucide exponat'? /4

But James was interested in it for another reason also. As Shakespeare's most direct and elaborate treatment

/1 Cf. an interesting article by J. W. Draper, 'Macbeth as a compliment to James I', *Englische Studien*, 1937-8, pp. 207 ff.

/2 See *The Political Works of James I*, ed. by C. H. McIlwain, 1918, *passim* and p. xvi, above.

/3 Cf. E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, pp. 315-16. Dr Tillyard does not refer to the dialogue in question, and I do not subscribe either to his interpretation of *Macbeth* or to the notion, which runs through his book, that Shakespeare drew much inspiration from *The Mirror for Magistrates* itself, a volume I doubt whether he ever looked into, unless to read Sackville's contributions.

/4 Dedication to *Baptistes* by George Buchanan, 1576.

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of the mysterious yet very actual realm of evil, which pressed close upon men's minds in that age, and was believed to be thronged with malignant spirits able at once to direct the operations of nature and to influence the human soul, *Macbeth* undoubtedly appealed even more powerfully to the author of *Daemonologie*, 1597, than did its anatomy of tyranny to the author of the *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, 1598, and *Basilikon Doron*, 1599. Indeed, just as a knowledge of ghost-lore is necessary to the full understanding of *Hamlet*, so the present-day spectator of *Macbeth*, who lives in a scientific age from which witchcraft has been long since banished, and in which the terrors of hell have given place to the terrors of the atomic bomb, must miss not only more than half the feeling of awe and dread which the play originally inspired, but also a very great deal of the point and relevancy of the text. This is a matter to which I must return later. At the moment it is enough to note that *Macbeth* still retained this appeal in some measure throughout the eighteenth century, and that the following account, written in 1774, of the emotions aroused in the breast of one enthusiastic and intelligent spectator probably gives us a fair idea of the attitude of an audience in Shakespeare's day. After citing *Macbeth* as an example of Shakespeare's power of exhibiting the process of change in human character, Maurice Morgann continues:

The Weird Sisters rise, and order is extinguished. The laws of nature give way, and leave nothing in our minds but wildness and horror. No pause is allowed us for reflection: Horrid sentiment, furious guilt and compunc-

tion, air-drawn daggers, murders, ghosts, and enchantment, shake and *possess us wholly*. In the mean time the *process* is completed. Macbeth changes under our eye, *the milk of human kindness is converted to gall; he has supped full of horrors, and his May of life is fallen into the sear, the yellow*

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leaf; whilst we, the fools of amazement, are insensible to the shifting of place and the lapse of time, and till the curtain drops, never once wake to the truth of things, or recognise the laws of existence./1

Is this how Mr Gielgud's or Mr Wolfit's audiences experience *Macbeth*? I think not. Nor do I think them capable of entering with much understanding into the 'process' of the hero's 'change' as Shakespeare first conceived it, which was no other than the history of a human soul on its way to Hell, a soul at first noble, humane, innocent; then tempted through ambition to commit an appalling crime; and last, passing through the inevitable stages of torment and spiritual corruption that precede damnation. And what of the play's 'enchantment', the atmosphere supplied by witchcraft and apparitions, thunder and lightning, 'fog and filthy air'? Does it not seem more than a little childish to spectators *blasé* with synthetic mickey-mouse magic? Yet it was just this, we can be sure, that most arrested groundlings and judicious alike in Shakespeare's day. *Macbeth* was, indeed, a triumph of the latest stage-technique -- the witches rising up and down from the 'cellarage' or 'hell' through traps, or vanishing into artificially created mists, the stage likewise artificially darkened in the scene after Duncan's murder, the 'blood-boltered' Ghost of Banquo suddenly appearing upon Macbeth's stool, the three apparitions springing out of the blazing cauldron in the cave, the wonderful 'show of eight kings' passing one by one across the back of the stage. Nothing of its kind so bold or so elaborate had been seen before, and it was the desire to exploit these purely theatrical attractions still further which led to the degradation of the text at the hands first of Middleton,

/1 Maurice Morgann, Essay on the Dramatic Character of Falstaff, 1777, p. 69. The italics are his. For 'May of life' see note 5. 3. 22 below.

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and later of D'Avenant. No: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

possessed a fascination and a meaning for King James and his Jacobean which have now to a large extent passed away and even passed out of mind.

Yet, their date was not out for another hundred and fifty years. Though, debased in D'Avenant's recension and padded out with songs and dances, the *Macbeth* which Pepys and Restoration London admired for its 'divertisement' became a kind of tragic opera,^{/1} its moral and spiritual appeal remained unchanged. Pepys speaks of it as 'a deep tragedy', by which he meant no doubt that it was profoundly edifying, while the neo-classic principles upon which this conception was based were still inspiring Johnson in 1765 when he added a postscript to the play which concluded with these words, words that might have been written by Sidney himself:

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.^{/2}

If Lady Macbeth is no longer 'merely detested', and we now admire in Macbeth something more than courage, that is due to what may be called the Shakespearean character-writers, who were already getting to work in Johnson's day, just as the play's original appeal was beginning to fade. The first serious study of the hero, which was written in 1770, by Thomas Whately, uncle of the famous archbishop, drew special attention to the 'apprehensions' which are so marked a feature of his character and distinguish it in particular from Shakespeare's earlier Senecan figure of Richard III. Hazlitt praised this essay and borrowed from it, while it seems

^{/1} See *Stage-History*, pp. lxx, lxxii, and Pepys's *Diary* (Globe edition), p. 453.

^{/2} Cf. his *Preface to Shakespeare*, 'the end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing.'

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likely that Coleridge had read it too, since his notes on the play are largely taken up with just those 'recoilings' and 'terrors' which are Whately's theme. But while Coleridge followed his predecessors in associating these with a troubled conscience, he originated the idea, which most have since held, that Macbeth seems himself to be largely unaware of the conscience that troubles him. It was he too who first stressed the essential womanliness of Lady Macbeth, who was only a 'monster' to Steevens and other eighteenth-century critics, and

'a splendid fiend' even to her great impersonator, Mrs Siddons. Yet, as we shall see, Coleridge to some extent darkened counsel, while it is strange that the author of *Biographia Literaria* should never have attributed an 'imagination' to Shakespeare's greatest man of imagination, or that the creator of *The Ancient Mariner*, which owes so much to this play, should not even have spoken of him as a poet. It was left to Andrew Bradley to discover these things, and they were great discoveries indeed. But when Bradley insists that the imagination is limited, that Macbeth 'shows no sign', for example, 'of any unusual sensitiveness to the glory or beauty in the world or in the soul', and when he gives this as in part the 'reason that we have no inclination to love him and that we regard him with more of awe than of pity', one is amazed. For are not

And pity, like a naked new-born babe,

and

Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,

a distillation, as it were, of all that Blake wrote of innocence and experience? Does not

Ere the bat hath flown
His cloistered flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note

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read like a passage from some lost masterpiece by Collins; and

Can such things be
And overcome us like a summer's cloud
Without our special wonder,

match Wordsworth at his most inspired? Or does not

This my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

offer an angel-view of the whole ocean-girdled globe. which outsoars even Milton 'towering in his pride of place'; while

But here upon this bank and shoal of time

extends that horizon across the vasty deep of eternity? In truth, as John Bailey has said, 'there is no one in all Shakespeare who so continually, almost invariably, speaks the very greatest poetry as Macbeth'.^{/1} But it is in his reluctance to pity Macbeth that Bradley seems to come most short; and it is at same time most surprising, since pity is of the very essence of tragedy. Yet he could hardly help himself; since, though he set it down as an effect of Macbeth's poetic limitations, his hesitation really sprang from quite other causes, causes connected with the textual situation discussed in our second section.

For critical opinion about Macbeth had taken another turn in the second half of last century. With the exception of Johnson, the majority of eighteenth-century critics who speak of him as he was before he met the Witches discover a very noble soldier, full of that 'milk of human kindness' which his wife herself attributes to him. And

^{/1} John Bailey, *Shakespeare*, 1929, p. 182.

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even Johnson was so moved by the proud magnanimity of

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

that he declared the lines 'ought to bestow immortality on the author, though all his other productions had been lost'.^{/1} Schlegel perhaps best expressed the general view when he declared that, though he might have portrayed 'a hardened villain', Shakespeare preferred

to exhibit a more sublime picture: an ambitious but noble hero, yielding to a deep-laid hellish temptation; and in whom all the crimes to which, in order to secure the fruits of his first crime, he is impelled by necessity, cannot altogether eradicate the stamp of native heroism.

And, in taking leave of the play, he adds:

However much we may abhor his actions, we cannot altogether refuse to compassionate the state of his mind; we lament the ruin of so many noble qualities.^{/2}

Goethe implied the same when he ranged Macbeth with Hamlet and Brutus, and found him driven like them into a toil from which he was unable to extricate himself./3 Coleridge too spoke of his 'heroic character'./4 Yet his references elsewhere to an early 'birth-date of guilt'/5 and to a 'mind rendered temptable by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts'/6 raised doubts of his nobility for the first time; and the doubts seemed amply confirmed by Koester's article/7 in

/1 Raleigh, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, p. 171.

/2 Schlegel, *Dramatic Literature* (Bohn's Library), pp. 408-9.

/3 Goethe, *Shakespeare und kein Ende* (1813-16).

/4 Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, i. 82.

/5 *Ibid.* p. 70. /6 *Ibid.* p. 68.

/7 See above, pp. xxxiv ff.

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1865, which came to be accepted by most as proof that Macbeth had schemed the murder before the opening of the play./1 And though Bradley, we have seen, did not accept it as such, it clearly shook him, and led him to scrutinise the text narrowly for evidence of the earlier and more favourable conception of the hero's character, with the result that while admitting 'a keen sense both of honour and of the worth of a good name', and again that 'he was far from devoid of humanity and pity', he found it impossible to subscribe either to his nobility or to his 'human kindness'./2 Meanwhile Koester's discovery ruled out in the eyes of most subsequent critics even the good that Bradley allowed for; and so Macbeth became the 'hardened villain' which earlier critics believed Shakespeare had rejected in favour of 'a more sublime picture'. Let that honest and sensitive writer John Bailey, who found it impossible to brush Koester aside, speak for all. Campbell, he first reminds us, called *Macbeth* 'the greatest treasure of our dramatic literature', and then he continues:

I do not know whether anyone would to-day repeat that judgment, which I confess I do not understand. In nearly all the qualities which make up the greatness of a great tragedy it seems to me to come distinctly behind its three great rivals. It neither interests the mind, nor moves the heart, nor fills the imagination, as do *Hamlet* and *Othello* and *Lear*./3

He does not explain how, if it satisfies neither mind

nor heart nor imagination, it can rightly be called a tragedy at all. Maybe, remembering Aristotle's

/1 This deduction was first drawn, not by Koester himself, but I believe by H. N. Hudson in 1872; see his *Shakespeare's Life*, etc. ii. 328. For its influence on Irving see below, p. lxxix.

/2 Op. cit. p. 351. /2 Bailey, op. cit. p. 180.

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exclusion from the category of tragedy all drama which exhibits 'an extremely bad man falling from happiness into misery',/1 he thought it wiser not to try.

It is not easy in any case to regard Macbeth as a tragic hero in Aristotle's sense./2 But having disposed of Koester we can at least return to the old notion, which Shakespeare found explicit in Stewart's *Croniclis*, of a character that begins by being admirable and falls from grace under the stress of great temptation. Such a hero will be capable of moving us to compassion; of making us feel that, given his stature and the strength of the temptation which assails him, we might have endured a like fate; of compelling us to cry out 'God, God forgive us all', as we contemplate the spectacle of his tremendous catastrophe. By setting that cry on the Doctor's lips Shakespeare associated pity with the ruin of his 'fiend-like queen'. Is it not likely that he, of all dramatists, would invite pity also for the other and more human protagonist?/3 And if so, how could he contrive it except by representing Macbeth as a hero in the full sense of that word at the outset of the play, as one who possessed the instincts of a Henry V if without his stability, and above all as a great Elizabethan gentleman, tender, magnanimous and honourable as well as brave? Holinshed offered him, in the three campaigns against Macdonwald, Sweno and Canute, excellent material for the display of such qualities. But we shall never know whether or how far he made use of the opportunity, because some other hand has cut to pieces the scene or

/1 *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, trans. I. Bywater, § 13.

/2 See the remarks of S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry*, p. 322.

/3 See the eloquent paragraph on *Macbeth* in *A Critical History of English Poetry*, by Sir Herbert Grierson and Dr J. C. Smith, 1944, p. 116.

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scenes dealing with these campaigns. All that remains is the picture of 'Bellona's bridegroom', a skilful general and a soldier of superhuman strength and bravery.

Yet more may be legitimately inferred. Speaking of the treacherous Cawdor, Duncan announces in the last line of the same scene:

What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.

That word 'noble', thus placed and winged with rhyme, was surely intended to introduce us in the next scene to something more than a great soldier./1 Mr Masefield, again, noting the politeness with which he takes leave of Ross and Angus at the end of this same next scene, remarks on 'the delicate good manners, which make him so winning a man', and bids actors who play him 'ever remember that Shakespeare gave Macbeth an exquisite sensibility, a charm hard to resist, an eloquence like the tongue of an angel'./2 When I read this, it carried instant conviction; for I recollected not only that Shakespeare bestowed his finest poetry upon him, but that he wrote it for the golden voice of Richard Burbage. Nor do I doubt that Lady Macbeth (perhaps played in 1606 by the young eyes who was presently to 'boy' Cleopatra's greatness) was meant to be equally captivating. They make, in fact, the perfect host and hostess; and the lovely sunlit scene in which she welcomes Duncan under her battlements is, for all the irony that mocks it, none the less a thing of sheer delight in its display of beautiful courtesy on both sides. Further, having endowed his hero with supreme poetic genius, could Shakespeare deny him what in his own experience was inseparable therefrom, a human heart? He found in Holinshed a Macbeth 'somewhat cruell of nature';

/1 Bradley, op. cit. refers to this passage in a footnote to p. 351, but dismisses it as irrelevant to Macbeth's character.

/2 Masefield, op. cit. p. 38.

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and his Macbeth after he has 'supped full with horrors' becomes cruel enough, though never I believe 'of nature'. But before the first murder he is, Lady Macbeth tells us, 'too full o'th' milk of human kindness'. She speaks no doubt in impatience and with some contempt. But impatient contempt makes the testimony more and not less striking./1 And, as Kittredge points out, it is conformed by Macbeth's unconscious self-revelation in the great tribute to Pity in the soliloquy

of scene 7./2 For my own part, I suspect that Shakespeare, reading in Holinshed that Duncan 'had too much of clemency', translated the phrase into his own words and transferred the quality to the yet untempted, unstained Macbeth.

Assuming then, that Macbeth was no criminal to start with but an honourable soldier, cast in titanic mould, and that the initial step in his tragedy was

So foull ane blek for to put in his gloir,
Quhilk haldin wes of sic honour befoir,

I propose to round off this section by tracing in brief outline his spiritual development, utilising for the

/1 Bradley (op. cit. p. 351) tries to make light of it by saying she 'did not fully understand him'. But this is not *dramatic* criticism. Shakespeare gives her the words to illuminate Macbeth as well as herself; that she does not 'fully understand' his poetic imagination is another matter. Sir Edmund Chambers makes light of it in another fashion, by paraphrasing 'the milk of human kindness' as 'the commonplace ordinary qualities and tendencies of human kind'. A sentence or two earlier he writes: 'Away from the battlefield his greatness is gone, he sinks to the level of quite common men' (*Shakespeare: a Survey*, p. 235). To this had Macbeth come in 1904-08 when these words were first written.

/2 Kittredge, op. cit. p. 112.

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purpose at once the findings of modern Shakespearian critics and our limited knowledge of what the original audience thought and felt about the forces of evil in the universe, which form the background of the tragedy as is made clear by the prologue-like appearance of the Weird Sisters in the first and third scenes.

Temptation first comes to Macbeth with the fulfilment of the second prophecy of the Sisters immediately after their disappearance. The 'start' he gives when hailed 'King hereafter' shows indeed that his mind had been 'rendered temptable by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts'./1 But *murderous* thoughts are not born until Ross and Angus bring tidings that he is Thane of Cawdor and he realises that 'the devil can speak true'. The thoughts come suddenly, and obviously quite unexpectedly. They fill him with horror; his hair stands on end; his heart knocks against his ribs; he is lost in trance. It is an astonishing glimpse this, of a stricken soul at the very moment of temptation; and it is given

us that we may be under no misunderstanding. For if the thought that now 'shakes so his single state of man' had long been his, if he were not an innocent spirit reeling under an entirely unforeseen attack, the symptoms we are shown would be meaningless. The internal struggle is also quite obviously a conscious one, while the assault of the Tempter seems at first repelled; for Macbeth flings free with

If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.

Yet his next aside,

Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

/1 Coleridge, op. cit. i, 68.

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is less positive, and there are other signs that ambition,
like

rank corruption mining all within,
Infects unseen.

Thus when the next direct attack comes with Duncan's public nomination of Malcolm as his heir, which destroys all possibility of ambition being satisfied except by unholy means, Macbeth's powers of resistance have clearly weakened. For, though the thought is no less detestable and the deed is as terrible as ever, still too terrible to be named, he has moved appreciably nearer to it.

Stars, hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

'Yet let that be!' -- there speaks an already lost soul. And he has still to encounter Satan's sworn ally at his own hearth in the person of his wife and 'dearest love'.

To get the full measure of Lady Macbeth's intervention, it is necessary to realise the appalling character of the prayer she offers to the spirits of murder and destruction, when on her first appearance she hears of Duncan's impending visit. To take this as a mere rhetorical expression of her determination is to miss

more than half the horror of it. When Jacobean readers heard

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty. . . . Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief,

they interpreted the words literally: she was in fact invoking the Powers of Hell to take possession of her

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body, to suck her breasts as demons sucked those of witches, to expel from her not only all signs of grace but the least 'compunctious visitings of nature'. Many of Shakespeare's audience must have imagined her as indeed 'possessed' from this time onwards. Yet Shakespeare himself leaves it open. The demons she summons do not rid her of all 'visitings of nature', since when it comes to the point Duncan's resemblance to her father as he slept *does* shake her fell purpose, while the sleep-walking scene shows that her creator still felt and claimed pity for her. Yet here was a temptress more inescapable than the Witches themselves, one whom Goethe, not without reason, names the Super-witch.

That she knows her man is shown in her comments upon his letter, and when they meet she rides him at first on the snaffle: she hints at the deed, no more; and once assured by his downcast eyes that he is hers, instead of pressing her advantage by forcing him to speak of it openly, she leads him unconsciously forward by removing from his path the terror that immediately confronts him. 'No,' she says in effect, 'there is no need for you to think about the night's business at all. Your task is to look like the innocent flower. . . . Leave all the rest to me.' There follows, as we have seen, a dramatic lacuna of some kind;¹ and when we are next allowed to look into Macbeth's mind, the great soliloquy which opens 1. 7 reveals a fresh stage of his disease. The assassination, never named before, is now debated, at first quite coolly, and not on moral grounds at all but purely from the point of view of self-interest. What alone checks his hand, he tells himself, is the thought of the evil consequences that may ensure for the assassin, in this world. Assassination is catching, and others may try it on him; as kinsman, subject and host he will seem a

/1 See above, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

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triple traitor in men's eyes; Duncan is so virtuous and excellent a king that his death will excite the pity of the whole world and draw down a universal curse upon the murderer: such is the drift. Coleridge seems to suggest that until after the murder Macbeth succeeds in hiding from his conscience,^{/1} and Stoll that that conscience is conceived by Shakespeare as something external to the criminal.^{/2} There is no evidence for such views before this soliloquy. On the contrary, the struggle between good and bad has clearly, I said, been internal and perfectly conscious up to this point, and the chief purpose of the soliloquy is to show that the struggle is ceasing, that evil is very nearly triumphant. Yet the voice of the good angel can still be heard by us, though not by Macbeth, speaking through the poetry which reveals his sub-conscious mind.^{/3} 'We'd jump the life to come' shows him far gone indeed on the road to perdition; yet in the same breath he uses a metaphor, 'this bank and shoal of time', which shows that thoughts of eternal issues are near at hand. And the angel-voice grows yet more audible in the Blake-like imagery which comes to him as he contemplates the martyrdom of the King; calls up awe-inspiring visions of Doomsday, and Pity, and God's all-seeing cherubim; and works up to a tremendous climax which leaves the speaker exhausted.

Coleridge sums up the soliloquy: 'Macbeth enumerates the different worldly impediments to his scheme of murder: could he put them by, he would "jump the life to come".'^{/4} He does not notice that the impediments enumerated all proceed on the assumption that the deed is to be performed openly: could Macbeth

^{/1} Coleridge, *op. cit.* i, 75, 80; ii, 270.

^{/2} Stoll, *Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 349-51.

^{/3} A point suggested to me by Dr Duthie.

^{/4} Coleridge, *op. cit.* ii, 270.

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procure Duncan's death without being known as the murderer, the assassination would trammel up every consequence he can think of. It is, moreover, still the problem of the consequences to himself that engages his conscious thought for the rest of the scene, which can only be rightly understood if we grasp that fact. For he

is no longer held back by any but 'prudential fears', and it is these which inspire the objections he now urges upon his wife, viz. the risk of putting his newly-won glory in jeopardy, and the risk of failure. What he needs is the ring of Gyges, the receipt of fern-seed that he may walk invisible. Lady Macbeth taunts him with cowardice; tells him his love for her is worthless; shows herself, a mere woman, far more resolute than he: he remains sullen, unresponsive through it all. And then, by teaching him that all suspicion of the murder may be shifted to the grooms, she suddenly hands him the talisman his soul craves./1 He is at once afire, lost in admiration for her single-minded determination, and eagerly filling in the details of her scheme! Bailey calls the latter 'absurd';/2 and Bradley maintains that she invents it 'on the spur of the moment, and simply in order to satisfy' him./3 Perhaps so; but at any rate he *is* satisfied. 'I am settled', he declares; and never after swerves from his purpose. She has given him his orders; the tactical plan lies clear before him. How soldier-like it all is! As for conscience, it is now utterly insensible, and only reawakens for a time when he finds himself confronted, there on Duncan's bed, with

The deep damnation of his taking-off.

And between these two points comes the soliloquy of 'the air-drawn dagger', which is *his* sleep-walking scene.

/1 The point was first made, I believe, by Professor W. C. Curry; v. *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, p. 119.

/2 Bailey, *op. cit.* p. 185. /3 Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 367.

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The whole is spoken in trance; in, I believe, a horrible smiling trance. He is 'settled'; has at length yielded himself a passive agent; and, when the dagger points him towards the fatal chamber, begins moving softly and involuntarily thither 'with Tarquin's ravishing strides', as if led by some invisible hand.

This tremendous picture of a human being, first tempted, then little by little possessed by the idea of murder, and last so completely under its sway that he becomes oblivious of everything else, has no parallel that I know of in literature except Dostoieffsky's description of the stages through which Raskolnikoff passes on his way to the flat of the old miser; and Shakespeare has something Dostoieffsky lacks, the poet's tongue.

Thereafter, however, the two heroes proceed in

opposite directions: Raskolnikoff climbing painfully towards redemption, Macbeth plunging furiously downwards along the road to Hell. I have space for only one or two comments upon this phase of Shakespeare's tragedy. First, it may be asked, of what nature are the 'terrible dreams that shake him nightly', or the 'restless ecstasy' that makes his bed a 'torture of the mind'? And there are other references to night as a time of terror. 'You lack the season of all natures, sleep', his wife says, as if to explain his conduct in the banquet scene; 'Duncan is in his grave', he himself says enviously;

After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;

while he gives as his reason for Macduff's death

That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder.

Two things may, I think, be said with certainty about this. On the one hand, as all have noticed, Macbeth himself associates these 'rancours in the vessel of his peace' with a sense of danger and insecurity, so that

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their effect is to drive him on from crime to crime. Hence his 'fears in Banquo stick deep' and he dreams apparently that he is being murdered by him; /1 fears and dreams that can only be stilled by his death; hence, no sooner is Banquo removed, than Macduff takes his place as the imagined menace; hence at a later stage the unpremeditated and senseless murder of Lady Macduff and her children; hence finally an indiscriminate slaughter, so that Scotland hears

Each new morn
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face.

On the other hand, all this is somehow connected with the dreadful voice, which he hears immediately after the assassination of Duncan, crying 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep ... Macbeth shall sleep no more!' The cry in fact introduces a leading theme of the dramatic poem as a whole, which, enveloped as it is in 'thick night' from first to last, may be described as in one aspect a study in sleeplessness. Furthermore, as scene succeeds scene, Macbeth's nerves get more and more out of hand, intense irritability alternating with

lassitude./2

Bradley, following Coleridge, puts all this down to a troubled conscience disguising itself as fear; and there is nothing in the text which forbids us to agree with them. Yet there is equally nothing to show that Macbeth's conscience is alive at all during the last three acts, while quite a different explanation no doubt suggested itself to a Jacobean audience and in particular to the royal author of *Daemonologie*, viz. that Macbeth, once he had delivered himself up to the Devil by murdering Duncan,

/1 See note 3. 2. 18.

/2 See notes 3. 4. 133; 5. 2. 15, 23; 5. 3. 19, 50.

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became 'possessed'. Learned doctors disputed whether demoniacal possession meant that devils actually entered the minds or bodies of their victims, but all admitted that God allowed them dominion and power over men 'guilty of grievous offences', whom they strove to ruin body and soul by 'afflicting, tormenting and vexing their person', by driving them forward ever deeper into sin and by procuring their early and violent death./1 Furthermore, the theory of Macbeth's possession finds support in a feature of his character which does not appear to have attracted much attention among critics: I mean the defiant impiety that is his after Act 2, and takes the form of a craving for destruction which involves far more than the death of individual human beings.

At the thought of Banquo's heirs succeeding him he cries

Rather than so, come fate into the list,
And champion me to th' utterance!/2 --

which might be the mere hyperbole of passion, were it not that a similar determination to proceed to all lengths is heard shortly afterwards, on a more strident note and in more precise terms, when he declares that to escape the terrors that afflict him he is ready to 'let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer'./3 Kittredge calls this an outburst of 'magnificent egoism'; and he is right. But it carries with it most shockingly blasphemous implications, hardly possible to any but those in a state of damnation. And a willingness to contemplate, if not to rejoice in, that universal dissolution which the Powers

/1 See King James, *Daemonologie*, 1597, 'Bodley Head Quartos'. ed. by G. B. Harrison, pp. 62-4, and Deacon and

Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Devils*, 1601,
p. 340.

/2 3. 1. 70-1. /3 3. 2. 16.

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of Hell constantly strove to bring about may be seen
again in his conjuration to the Witches:

Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of Nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you./1

The culminating image here, and one upon which the
speaker obviously dwells in delight, seems to envisage
a stage even beyond the triumph of Hell and the destruc-
tion of 'both the worlds', namely the discovery, through
that catastrophe, of the hidden seeds of life whether in
heaven or earth; seeds which, originating in the mind
of God, could not themselves be destroyed but might be
rendered for ever barren, or productive of mere
monstrosity, if tumbled all together in devilish confusion./2
In other words, Macbeth speaks of a time when the
Devil will not only have made an end of God's world,
but have rendered its re-creation for ever impossible.
After the contemplation of so dreadful a contingency,
the words

I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,
And wish the estate o' th' world were now undone

seem almost tame, and are, I think, intended to mark
the sinking of the volcanic fires before the end.

/1 4. 1. 52-61.

/2 For 'Nature's germens' v. note 4. 1. 58-60, and
Curry op. cit. (ch. II), who does not, however, explain the
point of 'tumble all together'.

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To sum up, Macbeth's whole mind is set on destruc-
tion. With Milton's Satan he might say

For only in destroying I find ease
To my relentless thoughts./1

Shakespeare had to avoid blasphemous words; and there is nothing in these passages for the censor to take hold of. But he certainly wished his audience to imagine a Macbeth thinking blasphemous thoughts and, like Satan and Marlowe's Faustus, an enemy of God as of man./2 Yet when we ask whether he also intended them to imagine him a man 'possessed', all we can say is that, as with Lady Macbeth, he leaves it open for them to do so, and that, contemporary opinion being what it was, many of them probably did, while he left it equally open for those who preferred the theory of a tortured conscience to adopt that explanation instead. Further, we must not forget that regicide, the crime for which he was tormented, was one of a peculiarly appalling nature, especially in the eyes of King James. In short, a study of Elizabethan and Jacobean demonology, as the recent work of Professor Curry has shown, is of first-class importance for *Macbeth*, though not quite for the reasons Professor Curry supposes. What it tells us is not what Shakespeare intended his audience to think of mysterious personages and events like the Weird Sisters, the Ghost of Banquo,/3 the air-drawn dagger, the voice that cried 'Sleep no more', the prodigies that follow the murder of Duncan, the apparitions in the cave; but what he knew they were capable of thinking. Take the voice, for

/1 *Paradise Lost*, ix, 129-30. Cf. Bradley, op. cit. p. 362 n.

/2 Cf. the important article by Dr Greg on 'The Damnation of Faustus' in *The Modern Language Review*, April 1946.

/3 Cf note 3. 4. 37 S.D.

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example. Was it a devil, a good angel, or conscience speaking, or was it, as Macbeth himself explains the dagger, a mere hallucination,

a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

Here are four explanations easily possible for a seventeenth-century spectator, and the other phenomena just mentioned were capable of a similar variety of explanations. Thus the right attitude towards 'the demonic metaphysics of *Macbeth*' is to think of it and use it in the way Shakespeare himself

thought of it and used it, namely as a source of suggestion and atmosphere, not of information. *Macbeth* was not intended to supply the age with a spiritual or psychological exposition of the criminal mind, still less with 'a dialogical discourse of spirits and devils', but to enthral London with a new play in which the author took for his high light, as a change from the themes of *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Lear*, the mind of a great man turned criminal, and availed himself of the demonological notions of his audience to intensify the chiaroscuro.

Furthermore, *Macbeth's* heaven-defying fury, which first led me to the foregoing observations, has a purpose more relevant to dramatic art than any revelation of his psychological processes could be: it shows him as a rebel against fate, against the whole 'estate o' the world', against 'both the worlds', natural and supernatural; a rebel refusing to recognise defeat and fighting his last and hopeless battle with growing despair but undiminished resolution. For *Macbeth* is a Shakespearian hero; and, though

his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek,

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he still looks out at us 'under brows of dauntless courage', still rears a mighty form which

had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined.

I apply to *Macbeth's* words used of Lucifer in Hell because I think either hero helps us to understand the other. That the two figures are closely akin both Shakespeare and Milton acknowledge; Shakespeare by the line

Angels are bright still though the brightest fell,

which flashes out like a jewel in the midst of a rather ordinary piece of dialogue, and shows what he had in mind; Milton by the fact that he himself contemplated at one time the writing of a play on *Macbeth* and by the many indications in *Paradise Lost* of his study of Shakespeare's play. In short, *Macbeth* is not a moral treatise, as King James and his successors down to the

time of Dr Johnson may have supposed, or a profound psychological analysis of two criminal types as Coleridge and his disciples have tended to assume, or even an essay in Jacobean demonology as modern sociological critics might imagine, but a great tragedy.

Its theme is that of all Shakespeare's mature tragedies, man and the universe, and its purpose is to present us with a 'dazzling vision of the pitiful estate of humanity'. The words are Walter Raleigh's, and I know of no account of Shakespearian tragedy in general and of *Macbeth* in particular at once more illuminating and more satisfying than the paragraph that follows them. Written forty years ago, it might have been directly inspired by 'the pitiful state of humanity' of which we to-day are all too conscious. It may serve to remind us also how greatly opinion about *Macbeth*, which stands

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from age to age as 'an ever fixed mark', has changed and deepened since it was first presented to the view of King James. Observing that Shakespeare's tragic vision is 'so solemn and terrible and convincing in its reality' that we try to escape from it by expounding his tragedies as moral fables, Raleigh continues:

But here we have to do with an earthquake, and good conduct is of no avail. Morality is not denied; it is overwhelmed and tossed aside by the inrush of the sea. There is no moral lesson to be read, except accidentally, in any of Shakespeare's tragedies. They deal with greater things than man; with powers and passions, elemental forces, and dark abysses of suffering; with the central fire, which breaks through the thin crust of civilisation, and makes a splendour in the sky above the blackness of ruined homes. Because he is a poet, and has a true imagination, Shakespeare knows how precarious is man's tenure of the soil, how deceitful are his quiet orderly habits and his prosaic speech. At any moment, by the operation of chance, or fate, these things may be broken up, and the world given over once more to the forces that struggled in chaos./1

To this I will dare to add but one point: the sense of exultation and atonement which the spectacle of such tragedy leaves behind. We rise from the all-engrossing experience, which Morgann so vividly describes and Raleigh illuminates, not appalled but awed, not depressed but enlarged. For, though life has been revealed in the wizard's glass as a thing of overwhelming horror and pity, we have discovered there too a grandeur and

significance far beyond our own limited unaided vision. 'This dead butcher and his fiend-like queen' is the world's epitaph upon Macbeth and the woman who treads the path to Hell with him. But we know better. For we have caught our breath at the utterances of her invincible spirit and subjected our imaginations to the

/1 Walter Raleigh, *Shakespeare*, 1907, pp. 196-7.

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'most commanding and perhaps the most awe-inspiring figure that Shakespeare drew';/1 while as for the husband, of mettle at first less undaunted but always of finer temper than hers, not all the blood he spills can extinguish his native humanity or blot out his splendour. Rather, as the play moves to the inevitable catastrophe and we sit watching his soul in process of dissolution, while we never for a moment condone or excuse his crimes, the personality of the man seems to become at once more portentous and more appealing. And if we ask how this can be, the answer is that, by one of those paradoxes of which Shakespeare possessed the secret, in this volcanic character which through his 'multiplying villainies', growing callousness and ever-louder maledictions, holds us tighter and tighter in the grip of terror, we also see a gigantic reflexion of our sinful selves thrown upon the immeasurable screen of the universe, and giving eternal expression, 'with an eloquence like the tongue of an angel', to the cynicism, disillusion, and despair, which are the wages of sin, whatever be the creed of the sinner, whatever the origin of

that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart.

J. D. W.

Edinburgh, August 1946.

/1 Bradley op. cit. p. 366.