

Dowden 1877 Edward Dowden, Shakspeare (London, 1877). 'Literature Primers.'

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32. **Macbeth** was seen acted at the Globe by Dr. Forman — who gives a detailed sketch of the play — on April 20, 1610. But the characteristics of versification forbid us to place it after *Pericles* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, or very near *The Tempest*. Light endings begin to appear in considerable number in *Macbeth* (twenty-one is the precise number), but of weak endings it contains only two. Upon the whole, the internal evidence supports the opinion of Malone, that the play was written about 1606. The words in *Macbeth's* vision of the kings (Act IV. Sc. i. L. 120),

Some I see
That twofold balls and treble sceptres carry,

refer to the union of the two kingdoms under James I. James had revived the practice of touching for the king's evil, described Act IV. Sc. iii. L. 140-159. "Here's a farmer that hang'd himself on the expectation of plenty" (Act II. Sc. iii. L. 5) may have

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reference to the unusually low price of wheat in the summer and autumn of 1606. "Here's an equivocator that could swear in both scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake; yet could not equivocate to heaven" (Act II. Sc. iii. L. 9) has been supposed to allude to the doctrine of equivocation, avowed by Henry Garnet, Superior of the order of Jesuits in England, on his trial for the Gunpowder Treason, March 28, 1606, and to his perjury on that occasion. In 1611 the ghost of Banquo was jestingly alluded to in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

The materials for his play Shakspeare found in Holinshed's *Chronicle*, connecting the portion which treats of Duncan and Macbeth with Holinshed's account of the murder of King Duffe by Donwald. The appearance of Banquo's ghost and the sleep-

walking of Lady Macbeth appear to be inventions of the dramatist.

Thomas Middleton's play of *The Witch*, discovered in MS. in 1779, contains many points of resemblance to *Macbeth*. The Cambridge editors, Messrs. Clark and Wright, are of opinion that *Macbeth* was interpolated with passages by a second author – not improbably by Middleton – after Shakspeare's death, or after he had ceased to be connected with the theatre; the interpolator expanded the parts assigned to the weird sisters and introduced a new character, Hecate. The following passages are pointed out as the supposed interpolations: Act I. Sc ii., iii. L. 1–37; Act II. Sc i. L. 61, iii. (Porter's part) Act III. Sc v.; Act IV. Sc. i. L. 39–47 and 125–132, iii. L. 140–159; Act V, (?) ii., v. L. 47–50, viii. L. 32–33 ("Before my body I throw my warlike shield") and 35–75. This theory of interpolation must be considered as in a high degree doubtful, and in particular the Porter's part shows the hand of Shakspeare. As to Middleton's *The Witch*, it was probably of later date than Shakspeare's play.

While in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Hamlet* we feel

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that Shakspeare now began and now left off, and refined upon or brooded over his thoughts, *Macbeth* seems as if struck out at a heat, and imagined from first to last with unabated fervour. It is like a sketch by a great master in which everything is executed with rapidity and power, and a subtlety of workmanship which has become instinctive. The theme of the drama is the gradual ruin through yielding to evil within and evil without, of a man, who though from the first tainted by base and ambitious thoughts, yet possessed elements in his nature of possible honour and loyalty. The contrast between *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth*, united by their affections, their fortunes, and their crime, is made to illustrate and light up the character of each. *Macbeth* has physical courage, but moral weakness, and is subject to excited imaginative fears. His faint and intermittent loyalty embarrasses him – he would have the gains of crime without its pains. But when once his hands are dyed in blood, he hardly cares to withdraw them, and the same fears which had tended to hold him back from murder, now urge him on to double and treble murders, until slaughter, almost reckless, becomes the habit of his reign. At last the gallant

soldier of the opening of the play fights for his life with a wild and brute-like force. His whole existence has become joyless and loveless, and yet he clings to existence. Lady Macbeth is of a finer and more delicate nature. Having fixed her eye upon an end — the attainment for her husband of Duncan's crown — she accepts the inevitable means; she nerves herself for the terrible night's work by artificial stimulants; yet she cannot strike the sleeping king who resembles her father. Having sustained her weaker husband, her own strength gives way; and in sleep, when her will cannot control her thoughts, she is piteously afflicted by the memory of one stain of blood upon her little hand. At last her thread of life snaps suddenly. Macbeth, whose affection for her was real, has sunk too far into the apathy of joyless crime to feel deeply her loss. Banquo, the loyal soldier, praying

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for restraint of evil thoughts which enter his mind as they had entered that of Macbeth, but which work no evil there, is set over against Macbeth, as virtue is set over against disloyalty. The witches are the supernatural beings of terror, in harmony with Shakspeare's tragic period, as the fairies of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* are the supernatural beings of his days of fancy and frolic, and as Ariel is the supernatural genius of his latest period. There is at once a grossness, a horrible reality about the witches, and a mystery and grandeur of evil influence.

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