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THE ARDEN EDITION OF THE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

MACBETH

Edited by
KENNETH MUIR

INTRODUCTION

1. TEXT

The Tragedie of Macbeth was first published in the First Folio of 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, and seventeen years after the play was first performed. The text follows *Julius Caesar* and precedes *Hamlet*. As it is mentioned in the *Stationers' Register* as one of those 'as are not formerly entred to other men',[1] it may be assumed that there was no quarto edition. Acts and scenes are indicated in Latin,[2] but there is no *dramatis personae*. It is by far the shortest of the tragedies, occupying only 21 Folio pages (compared with 30 for *Othello* and 31 for *Hamlet*). There is evidence, as we shall see, that there have been cuts in the text, as well as interpolations.[3]

The text was printed from the prompt-book, or more probably from a transcript of it prepared for the printers. It contains such indications of prompt-book origin as duplicated stage directions[4] and instructions for noises off (e.g. *Ring the Bell* and *Knock*)[5]; but there are also 'descriptive touches' in the stage directions 'to suggest the author'[6] and some vague touches characteristic of an author's manuscript which somehow got transferred to the prompt-book.

The textual problem is closely linked to the question of alterations made for different performances. The 1623 text contains passages which could not have belonged to the version performed in 1606; both differ from the version witnessed by Simon Forman in 1611; some critics believe[7] there was an earlier version dating from Elizabeth's reign; and almost all critics believe that one 1606 performance was at Court, and probably shortened for that reason.

1. S. Schoenbaum, *Records and Images* (1981), p. 221.

2. There are some inconsistencies, however. The first three scenes of Act II are virtually continuous, whereas the battle scenes of the last act are not divided.

3. See below, p. xxxii.

4. E.g. I. vi. S.D., I. vii. S.D.; V. viii. 34.

5. II. ii. 64; II. iii. 79.

6. Greg, p. 393.

7. See below, p. xvii.

It has been suggested that[1] the editors sent to the printers the version included in the First Folio because James I would have preferred it to the hypothetical longer version. But this was not the version performed at Court in 1606, and it seems more likely that when Hecate and the extra witches were introduced into the prompt-book, cut passages were discarded and were therefore not available in 1623.

The possibility that some whole scenes are missing from the extant text is discussed below.[2] Here it is necessary only to refer to the frequent mislineation, mainly in the second scene of the play, due possibly to the dislocation caused by cuts.[3]

It should be mentioned, however, that not everyone subscribes to these views on the text. Richard Flatter believed that the play showed no signs of editorial interference and that Shakespeare's Producing Hand may be discerned in it;[4] and D. A. Traversi warned us against the assumption that difficulties in the text can be explained by omissions:[5]

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

Here, surely, Professor Traversi was mistaken; but he wrote at a time when it was necessary to protest at the prevailing textual pessimism.

According to the standard work on the printing of the First Folio,[6] nine of the *Macbeth* pages were set by Compositor A, and twelve by Compositor B. A number of corrections were made in proof, but only two are of any consequence: *Roffe* was corrected to *Rosse* (IV. iii. 213) and 'on my with' to 'on with' (IV. iii. 154). As Hinman pointed out, the proof corrector did not usually refer to copy, his aim being merely to eliminate 'obvious typographical

1. Greg, p. 395.
2. See below, p. xxiv.
3. Not all the mislineation is the result of cuts. The last eleven lines of II. ii are printed as fifteen in the Folio. The stage directions necessitated the splitting of lines into two and this confused the compositor about lineation.
4. Richard Flatter, *Shakespeare's Producing Hand* (1948). His theories might have been more convincing if they had been applied to good quartos.
5. D. A. Traversi, *Approach to Shakespeare* (1938), p. 89.
6. Charton Hinman, *The Printing and Proof-reading of the First Folio* (1963). See I. 10–12 for an account of these two compositors and their characteristic habits. A was more accurate than B.

infelicities'.[1] In *Macbeth* he allowed twenty or more obvious errors to stand, and doubtless others which were not so obvious.

In most cases it is impossible to determine how these errors originated. Simple omissions, like that of 'break' (I. ii. 26), could be blamed on either the transcriber or the compositor. There are some misreadings, probably by the compositor (e.g. *Or* for *Are* (I. iv. 1), *sowre* for *sure* (II. ii. 56) and *Soris* for *Forres* (I. iii. 39), as well as a number of misunderstandings: e.g. *Heire* for *hair* (I. iii. 134). Dover Wilson thought[2] that 'Gallowgrosses' (I. ii. 13) could be explained as an actor's blunder strangely reproduced by the transcriber; and perhaps 'Barlet' (I. vi. 4) could be a blunder of the same kind. But it is impossible to suppose that an actor would say 'Can' for 'Came' (I. iii. 98).

2. DATE

In Simon Forman's manuscript[3] *The Bocke of Plaies and Notes therof per Formans for Common Pollicie* (i.e. affording useful lessons in the common affairs of life) there is a description of a performance at the Globe in the spring of 1611, as Forman states:

> In Mackbeth at the Glob, 16jo, the 20 of Aprill [Sat.], ther was to be obserued, firste, how Mackbeth and Bancko, 2 noble men of Scotland, Ridinge thorowe a wod, the[r] stode before them 3 women feiries or Nimphes, And saluted Mackbeth, sayinge 3 tyms vnto him, haille Mackbeth, king of Codon; for thou shalt be a kinge, but shall beget No kinges, &c. then said Bancko, what all to mackbeth And nothing to me. Yes, said the nimphes, haille to thee Bancko, thou shalt beget kings, yet be no kinge. And so they departed & cam to the Courte of Scotland to Dunkin king of Scots, and yt was in the dais of Edward the Confessor. And Dunkin bad them both kindly wellcome. And made Mackbeth forth with Prince of Northumberland, and sent him hom to his own castell, and appointed mackbeth to prouid for him, for he wold Sup with him the next dai at night, & did soe. And mackbeth Contrived to kill Dunkin, & thorowe the persuasion of his wife did that night Murder the kinge in his own Castell, beinge

1. Hinman, *ibid.*, p. 227. Owing to the normal method of type-setting, a compositor could be ignorant of the context and so fall into error: e.g. 'Lady Lenox' in II. i. 10 S.D., instead of 'Lady Macbeth as Queen, Lenox'.
2. Wilson. p. 89. I do not agree with him that *stuffed* (v. iii. 44) and *rooky* (III. ii. 51) should be blamed on Burbage's faulty memory. See notes to these lines.
3. Ashmolean MS. 208. Facsimile in S. Schoenbaum's *Records and Images* 1981).

his gueste. And ther were many prodigies seen that night & the dai before. And when Mackbeth had murdred the kinge, the blod on his hands could not be washed of by Any means, nor from his wiues handes, which handled the bloddi daggers in hiding them, By which means they became moch amazed and Affronted. the murder being knowen, Dunkins 2 sonns fled, the on to England, the other to Walles, to saue themselues. They being fled, they were supposed guilty of the murder of their father, which was nothinge so. Then was Mackbeth crowned kinge, and then he for feare of Banko, his old companion, that he should beget kings but be no kinge him selfe, he contriued the death of Banko, and caused him to be Murdred on the way as he Rode. The next night, being at supper with his noble men whom he had bid to a feaste to the whiche also Banco should haue com, he began to speake of Noble Banco, and to wish that he wer there. And as he thus did, standing vp to drincke a Carouse to him, the ghoste of Banco came and sate down in his cheier behind him. And he turninge About to sit down Again sawe the goste of banco, which fronted him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury, vtterynge many wordes about his murder, by which, when they hard that Banco was Murdred they Suspected Mackbet.

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

Obserue Also howe mackbets quen did Rise in the night in her slepe, & walke and talked and confessed all, & the doctor noted her wordes.

Forman gives an impossible date since 20 April did not fall on a Saturday in 1610; his account of the play was apparently mixed with memories of Holinshed;[1] the indelible stains of blood were presumably suggested by Macbeth's speeches after the murder and Lady Macbeth's in the sleep-walking scene; he makes a bad mistake in supposing that Macbeth was created Prince of Northumberland (or Cumberland);[2] he makes no mention of the cauldron scene although, as an astrologer, he should have been interested in the prophecies in this scene. Nevertheless there is no

1. E.g. '3 women feiries or Nimphes'. See J. M. Nosworthy, 'Macbeth at the Globe', *The Library*, II (1947–8), 108–18; Leah Scragg, 'Macbeth on Horseback', *SS 26* (1973), pp. 81–8; Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre* (1983), pp. 137–9.
2. Northumberland is mentioned in III. vi.

reason to believe that the play witnessed by Forman was substantially different from that performed before the King five years previously. Forman was inaccurate in his account of other plays and he may have recorded his impressions after a lapse of days or weeks.[1]

Although this performance, in 1611, is the first of which we have a definite record, we can be fairly certain that the play was in existence four years before, because of echoes of it in contemporary plays. In *Lingua* (1607), there are possible echoes of II. i, and what seems to be a parody of the sleep-walking scene. There are references to Banquo's ghost in *The Puritaine* (IV. iii. 89):[2]

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

and in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (V. i. 22–8),[3]

> When thou art at thy Table with thy friends
> Merry in heart, and fild with swelling wine,
> Il'e come in midst of all thy pride and mirth,
> Invisible to all men but thy selfe,
> And whisper such a sad tale in thine eare,
> Shall make thee let the Cuppe fall from thy hand,
> And stand as mute and pale as Death it selfe.

The Puritaine was published, and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* probably acted, in 1607. Allowing for the necessary interval for the writing, performing, and publishing of the former play, it is fairly certain that *Macbeth* was being performed in 1606. It is also certain that the reference to the King's Evil (IV. iii) and to the two-fold balls and sceptres of Banquo's descendants (IV. i) must have been written after the accession of James I in 1603.

If these passages were interpolations, the play as a whole might have been written earlier. It has, indeed, been argued by several critics that the play was originally written in the reign of Elizabeth I and revised in 1606. J. Dover Wilson believed[4] that Shakespeare visited Scotland and there perused William Stewart's *The Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland*, though he later retracted his

1. Forman does not mention Hermione's survival, nor the Queen in *Cymbeline*. Although some scholars suspected that the Forman MS. was a Collier forgery, its authenticity was established by Dover Wilson and R. W. Hunt, *RES* (1947), 193 ff.
2. Halliwell (*NV*).
3. Clarendon (*NV*).
4. Wilson, p. xli.

view, propounded originally by Mrs C. C. Stopes,[1] that this was a source of the play. Apart from that, he argued that numerous obscurities in the Folio text were caused by cuts in the original play, and that George Saintsbury was right to maintain that portions of the play and in particular 'the second scene are in verse and phrase whole stages older than the bulk of the play'.[2] Wilson believed that the second scene of the play must have been written soon after the Hecuba speeches in *Hamlet*;[3] but the resemblance can better be explained as a deliberate attempt on Shakespeare's part to adopt a style suitable for 'epic' narrative on the model of Marlowe's account of the fall of Troy in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and Kyd's account of the battle in *The Spanish Tragedy*.[4] Nothing can be deduced about the date when the *Macbeth* scene was written.

Arthur Melville Clark agreed[5] with Dover Wilson that the play was written in 1601, his main reason being that the play contained allusions to the Gowrie conspiracy of the previous year. None of these allusions is convincing and, even if they were, they could have been derived from the anonymous play, *Gowrie*, performed by Shakespeare's company in 1604.[6] If Clark had read H. N. Paul's *The Royal Play of 'Macbeth'*[7] he could hardly have thought that the Gunpowder Plot was less relevant to the play than the Gowrie conspiracy.[8]

A third critic, Daniel Amneus, has argued[9] for an even earlier date, 1599, for the composition of the play, partly because Shakespeare would not have dared to write a play which gave approval to a rebellion against a reigning monarch after he had

1. C. C. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Industry* (1916), pp. 93, 102–3. The relevant Stewart passages were reluctantly included in my original edition of *Macbeth*, and afterwards withdrawn.
2. George Saintsbury, *CHEL*, v. 203.
3. Wilson, p. xl.
4. J. M. Nosworthy, *RES* (1946), 126–30.
5. A. M. Clark, *Murder under Trust* (1982), pp. 109–13, 120–4. It should be mentioned that through age and infirmity Clark was unable to see his book through the press. Presumably for the same reason he seems to have consulted no book or edition of the play published during the last thirty years.
6. Performed December 1604. As there were official objections to it, Shakespeare would not have been encouraged to associate his play with the Gowrie conspiracy.
7. But Michael Hawkins, 'History, politics and *Macbeth*', in *Focus on Macbeth*, ed. John Russell Brown (1982), pp. 185–8, argues that there is ambiguity in the political 'lessons' in *Macbeth* and that Paul is wrong to assert that it was written by royal command.
8. Paul, pp. 226–47.
9. Daniel Amneus, *The Mystery of Macbeth* (1983).

learned of James's strong views on the matter. Against this it may be urged that Macbeth was a usurper and that Malcolm, having been made Prince of Cumberland, could be regarded as Duncan's rightful successor. Amneus is on stronger ground when he lists nineteen unsolved problems connected with the play,[1] which, he thinks, are due to the cuts and alterations made in 1606. Some of these problems may rather be due to carelessness on Shakespeare's part—there are similar discrepancies in many of his plays. The report by Forman may be influenced by memories of Holinshed;[2] and it is surely improbable that in the performance he witnessed Shakespeare's fellows used the 1599, not the 1606, version of the play, the earlier version being nevertheless unavailable to the Folio editors.

More significant are the apparent changes with regard to the murder of Duncan. Lady Macbeth first decides to incite her husband to commit the deed; then she decides to use her keen knife herself; then she apparently proposes a joint murder, and finally Macbeth does the deed on his own. When Marvin Rosenberg carried out an experiment[3] on people who were ignorant of the play, they assumed at the end of the fifth scene that Lady Macbeth would herself carry out the murder.

Amneus argues ingeniously that in the original play Macbeth, not Malcolm, was made Prince of Cumberland—Forman's 'Northumberland' is a slip—and as this meant that he would succeed Duncan in due course, he decided not to murder him. He is later persuaded to murder Duncan in collaboration with his wife, and this murder took place on stage at 2 a.m. (cf. v. i. 33) not, as in the present text, soon after midnight. Amneus's theory is well-argued and the clues are marshalled with great skill; but from the nature of things it comes short of proof. It may be doubted whether Shakespeare could ever have intended Lady Macbeth to do the deed, whatever *her* intentions: it would have gone against the sources and against the poet's conception of the tragic hero. We may doubt, too, whether the murder ever took place on stage, or that this was altered to avoid giving offence to the King. The discrepancy between the times given for the murder would not be noticed by the audience. Shakespeare could not allow Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene to count *twelve* strokes. In any case the murder is a joint operation since Lady Macbeth drugs the possets of the grooms. Above all, I

1. Amneus, pp. 2–4.
2. Nosworthy. See p. xvi, n. 1.
3. Rosenberg. p. 242.

cannot believe that Shakespeare could have written the verse of *Macbeth* before that of *Hamlet* and *Othello*.[1]

There were cuts and topical additions in the version of the play performed in the summer of 1606; and, as we shall see, between 1606 and 1623 there were other changes, but for these Shakespeare was probably not responsible.

The play was therefore written, we may assume, between 1603 and 1606. The allusions to equivocation (II. iii. 9 ff.) and to the hanging of traitors (IV. ii. 46 ff.) were presumably written after the trial of Father Garnet (28 March 1606) for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. The words 'yet could not equivocate to heaven' imply that the speech was written after 3 May, when Garnet was hanged. Equivocation had been mentioned in *Hamlet* (V. i), but in the spring and summer of 1606 it had become a burning topic. John Chamberlaine wrote to Winwood on 5 April:[2]

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

Garnet admitted that equivocation was justifiable only when used for a good object;[3] but he argued that if the law be unjust, then there is no treason.[4] He prayed 'for the good Success of the great Action, concerning the Catholick Cause in the beginning of the Parliament' and then denied that this referred to the Gunpowder Plot.[5] He claimed that he could not reveal the plot because he was told of it in confession, though, as James I pointed out:[6]

1. Not so much because of the metrical tests worked out in the nineteenth century and tabulated by E. K. Chambers, but because of the impression of most critics of Shakespeare's stylistic development. See *Shakespeare's Styles*, ed. P. Edwards, I.-S. Ewbank and G. K. Hunter (1980).
2. Winwood, *Memorials*, II. 205–6.
3. *CSP (Domestic)* (1603–10), p. 306.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 308.
5. *State Trials*, I. 254.
6. *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain (1918), pp. 156–7.

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

When Garnet was asked if it were well to deny on his priesthood that he had written to Greenwell, or had conference with Hall, knowing his denial to be false, he replied that in his opinion, and that of all the schoolmen, equivocation may be confirmed by oath or sacrament, without perjury, 'if just necessity so require'.[1] At his trial Garnet excused a man who had perjured himself on his death-bed with the words: 'It may be, my Lord, he meant to equivocate'.[2] Finally, I may quote Dudley Carleton, who in a letter to John Chamberlaine on 2 May mentions the postponement of Garnet's execution and his surprise when told he was to die. Carleton tells his correspondent that the Jesuit shifts, falters, and equivocates, but 'will be hanged without equivocation'.[3] This grim jest, worthy of the Porter, is quoted by A. N. Stunz in his article on the date of *Macbeth*.[4] He goes on to argue that the Porter's references to drunkenness and lechery are also aimed at Garnet, who comforted himself with sack to drown sorrow, and was falsely accused of fornication with Mrs Vaux, a slander he repudiated in a speech he made on the scaffold. We may doubt, however, that there was any such implication in the passages about drink and lechery. Some critics have pretended that Shakespeare inserted allusions to equivocation to please the taste of James I or of the public; but there is every reason to believe that Shakespeare, even if he had secret sympathies with the old religion, would have been horrified at the 'dire combustion' of the Gunpowder Plot and would have agreed with his royal master on the subject:[5]

> And so the earth as it were opened, should haue sent foorth of the bottome of the *Stygian* lake such sulphured smoke,

1. *CSP*, p. 313.
2. A. N. Stunz, *ELH*, IX (1942), pp. 95–105.
3. *State Trials*, I. 266.
4. *CSP*, p. 315.
5. James I, *Workes* (1616), p. 224.

> furious flames, and fearefull thunder, as should haue by their diabolicall *Domesday* destroyed and defaced, in the twinkling of an eye, not onely our present liuing Princes and people, but euen our insensible Monuments . . .

It has been pointed out[1] that many of the conspirators came from the neighbourhood of Stratford-upon-Avon, including Catesby; that they trained at Clopton Hall; that some of them frequented the Mermaid Tavern in London; and that therefore the plot must have come as a shock to Shakespeare. Nor is there reason to doubt that Shakespeare agreed with the King and most of his subjects on the damnableness of equivocation. Devout Catholics like Anne Vaux were equally scandalized by Garnet's conduct: she remarked that she was sorry to hear that he was privy to the plot, as he had made many protestations to the contrary. At about the time *Macbeth* was first performed, the King, saved from death by what he regarded as a miracle, praised the wisdom of the Venetian Republic for the measures she had taken against the Jesuits:[2]

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

These quotations will give some idea of the climate of opinion in which *Macbeth* was written. Lord Salisbury's *Answer to Certain Scandalous Papers*, attacking equivocation, was being 'greedily read' as early as 5 February 1606;[3] and equivocation became a still more burning topic at the time of Garnet's trial and execution.

There are other scraps of evidence about the date. The price of wheat was low in 1605–7; but as the farmer who hanged himself was an old joke,[4] we cannot assume that the Porter's allusion refers to any particular year. The reference to French hose (II. iii. 14) seems to imply that it was close-fitting, but the joke was an

1. J. L. Hotson, *I, William Shakespeare* (1937), pp. 197–8.
2. *CSP (Venetian)* x. p. 361.
3. *CSP (Domestic)*, p. 286. Cited by E. K. Chambers.
4. Sordido in Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1605) hangs himself on the expectation of plenty. See also Beatrice D. Brown, 'Exemplary Materials underlying *Macbeth*', *PMLA*, L (1935), 712.

old one, and too much reliance cannot be placed on it.[1] Shakespeare was probably in Oxford in the summer of 1605[2] and he would then have heard that James I, on the occasion of his visit in August, approved of Matthew Gwinn's Latin entertainment, *Tres Sibyllae*, with its prophecies to Macbeth and Banquo and its allusions to James's supposed ancestry. Shakespeare may also have heard that James disliked long plays. One such play, Samuel Daniel's *Arcadia Reformed*—later entitled *The Queenes Arcadia*—was witnessed by the Queen, but not by the King, on 30 August. As there seem to be two echoes of the play in *Macbeth* (see notes on III. ii. 49–50 and V. iii. 39–45), Shakespeare may have been in the audience. He may also have heard that two of the subjects proposed for debate before the King were 'whether the imagination can produce real effects' and whether the morals of nurses are imbibed by babes with their milk.[3]

We may suppose that the poet began his play on his return to London in the autumn of 1605. The discovery of the Gunpowder Plot of 5 November and the subsequent trials inevitably left their mark on some scenes. Although the influence of the Profanity Statute of 27 May has been discerned in the last two acts, the purging is likely to have taken place at a later date. The play was probably performed at Hampton Court on 7 August 1606 before King Christian of Denmark and James I. This was either the first performance or, most likely, as J. G. McManaway argued,[4] 'the first performance of Shakespeare's abbreviated version'.

There are, however, two difficulties about this dating. As Bradley pointed out,[5] there are a number of parallels between *Macbeth* and Marston's *Sophonisba* and these persuaded Sir Edmund Chambers to put Shakespeare's play early in 1606 and to support Dover Wilson's argument that the references to Garnet were added for the Court performance. As *Sophonisba* was entered in the *Stationers' Register* on 17 March, it may be doubted whether Marston could have got his play written and performed in the few weeks which were supposed to have elapsed between the first performance of *Macbeth* earlier in the year and the entry of *Sophonisba*. The relevant passages in Marston's play are all an integral part of the text, and most of them are in

1. See II. iii. 14 n.
2. Paul, pp. 15–24.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 18 ff.
4. *SS 2* (1949), p. 149. But there is no proof that *Macbeth* was the play performed at Hampton Court.
5. Bradley, p. 471.

Act I. But need we assume that Marston was the debtor? By far the most striking parallel is the following:

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

> From Fife, great King,
> Where the Norweyan banners flout the sky,
> And fan our people cold. (I. ii. 49–51)

The Marston passage is more straightforward than Shakespeare's; for whereas eagles, quibbling on the bird, can readily be imagined as fanning cold air to the enemy, it is more difficult to see the aptness of the lines in which the inanimate banners actively fan the Scottish army. It is more likely that Shakespeare picked up one of Marston's best images than that Marston imitated several passages from one of the weakest scenes in *Macbeth* while he remembered nothing from later and greater scenes.

One other parallel remains to be mentioned.[1] In the anonymous play, *Caesar's Revenge*, there are lines which resemble the last lines of Macbeth's soliloquy in I. vii:

> Why thinke you Lords that its ambitions spur
> That pricketh *Caesar* to these high attempts. (1468–9)

This play was entered in the *Stationers' Register* in June 1606; but it is old-fashioned in style and may have been written in the previous reign. Shakespeare, if anyone, was probably the borrower; but the association of *spur*, *prick*, and *ambition* is a natural one.

From these probable or possible echoes it is reasonable to assume that *Macbeth*, at least in the form we have it, dates from 1606; but some passages, as Dover Wilson and others have noted,[2] appear to be interpolations—the passage about the hanging of traitors (IV. ii. 44–63), the 'milk of concord' passage (IV. iii. 99–100), and possibly the King's Evil episode (IV. iii. 140–59).[3] But there need not have been any great lapse of time between the writing of the original scenes and these interpolations.

Dover Wilson argued[4] that a number of scenes must have been cut: a scene between Macbeth and his wife between I. iii and I. iv; a scene in Act II in which Lady Macbeth went knife in

1. Malone (*NV*).
2. Wilson, pp. xxxi ff.
3. See above, p. xvii.
4. Wilson, pp. xxxiv ff.

hand to murder Duncan, and another dialogue between her and her husband; a speech in which Banquo, after Macbeth's accession, made it clear that he was not acquiescing in the murder because of the promise that he would beget kings; a scene to explain the presence of the Third Murderer; a scene in which Macduff explained why he had left his wife unprotected. Apart from the fact that there is no positive evidence for any of these cuts, the play would greatly suffer from any one of these speculative additions. More dialogues between Macbeth and his wife before the murder of Duncan would be dramatically disastrous; Banquo's conduct requires no explanation beyond what we are given; and any explanation of Macduff's 'desertion' would detract from the atmosphere of suspicion so necessary in this part of the play.

In all Shakespeare's plays there are loose ends, references to scenes which were deliberately left unwritten, and conflicting impressions of motives and characters. Nor are these dramatic weaknesses, but rather devices to create the illusion of life. Attempts to improve on Shakespeare by turning him into a naturalistic dramatist should be resisted.

3. THE PORTER SCENE

Although Pope and Coleridge agreed[1] that the Porter scene was interpolated by the players, enough has been said to indicate its topical significance; and although its topicality is not a proof that Shakespeare wrote it, a further consideration of the scene may establish his authorship, as well as having wider implications about the interpretation of the play.

The scene is theatrically necessary, if only because the actor who plays Macbeth has to wash his hands and change his clothes, and, as Capell suggested, it was necessary 'to give a rational space for the discharge of these actions'. Shakespeare was fully conversant with theatrical necessities and he always bowed to them; but if these were the sole reason for the scene's existence, it might have been added by another hand. Some scene, then, there had to be between the exit of Macbeth and the entrance of Macduff; but this does not explain why Shakespeare should introduce a drunken porter, or one suffering from a hangover, when a sober porter, singing an aubade, as in one of the German versions,[2]

1. Pope's edition of Shakespeare; *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, ed. T. Hawkes (1969), p. 215.
2. Schiller's.

might seem to serve as well. 'Comic relief' is a convenient, but question-begging term; for Shakespeare, we might suppose, could have used lyrical relief, if relief were needed. As Coleridge pointed out, Shakespeare never introduced the comic except when it may react on the tragedy by harmonious contrast. A good dramatist does not laboriously create feelings of tension and intensity only to dissipate them in laughter. Sometimes he may use the comic as a laughter-conductor, so as to prevent the audience from laughing at the wrong place and at the wrong things. Lear's sublimity is preserved for us by the Fool. In the present case it is impossible to agree with those critics who suppose that the function of the Porter is to take the present horror from the scene. On the contrary, the effect of the Porter scene is almost the exact opposite: it is there to increase our feelings of horror. We are never allowed to forget throughout the scene that a murder has been committed, and that it is about to be discovered. If we laugh, we never forget.

In his opening words the Porter identifies himself with the Porter of hell-gate,[1] who was expected to make jests, but who was something more than a jester. The plays in which he appears are on the theme of the harrowing of hell in the York, Chester, and Townley cycles, and it has been suggested by two recent critics[2] that the knocking on the gate and the entrance of Macduff recall the entrance of Christ into hell. The Townley porter, named Ribald, when he answers Christ's knocking, calls to Belzebub, as Macbeth's porter asks 'Who's there i'th' name of Belzebub?'

The purpose of recalling this traditional character was complex. First, it transports us from Inverness to the gate of hell, without violating the unity of place: Shakespeare has only to tell us the name of the place we were in before. It is hell because Lady Macbeth has invoked the murdering ministers, because Macbeth has called on the stars to hide their fires, and because hell is a state, not a place, and the murderers might say with Faustus's tempter,

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

1. W. E. Hales, *Notes and Essays on Shakespeare* (1884), pp. 273–90.

2. John B. Harcourt, 'I pray you remember the Porter', *SQ*, XII (1961), 393 ff.; Glynne Wickham, 'Hell Castle and its Door-Keeper', *SS 19* (1966), pp. 68–74 (reprinted in *Aspects of Macbeth*); W. A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Typology: Miracle and Morality Motifs in 'Macbeth'* (1970); Michael J. B. Allen, 'Macbeth's Genial Porter', *ELR*, IV (1974), 326–36, which, drawing on the classical links between porters and genii, suggests that the Porter symbolizes Macbeth's evil genius.

Shakespeare's second reason for recalling the miracle plays was that it enabled him to cut the cable that moored his tragedy to a particular spot in space and time, so that on the one hand it could become universalized, or on the other become contemporary. Macbeth's tragedy might therefore appear as a second Fall, with Lady Macbeth as a second Eve; or it could appear as terrifyingly topical. As S. L. Bethell put it,[1]

> the historical element distances and objectifies what is contemporary, and the contemporary element gives current significance to an historical situation . . . The whole atmosphere of treason and distrust which informs *Macbeth* found a parallel in the England of the Gunpowder Plot, so that a passing reference serves to define an attitude both to the Macbeth regime and to contemporary affairs.

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

> th'equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth:

and of those juggling fiends

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

Indeed, as Dowden pointed out,[2] Macbeth, on his first appearance after the discovery of the murder, is compelled to equivocate; and later in the same scene there is an even more striking equivocation:

> Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
> There's nothing serious in mortality;
> All is but toys: renown, and grace, is dead;
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of.

1. S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (1944), p. 46. Peter Ure pointed out (*NQ*, 28 May 1949) that the section added by Warner to *Albion's England* in 1606 on the Macbeth story was immediately followed by one on the Gunpowder Plot.

2. E. Dowden, *New Sh. Soc. Trans.* (1874).

The audience knows, as Macbeth himself was to know (though he here intended to deceive) that the words are a precise description of the truth about himself. Macbeth's own equivocation, by an ironical twist, becomes merely an aspect of truth. It is a brilliant counterpart to the equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth: it is the equivocation of the murderer who utters truth like lies. Equivocation therefore links up with one of the main themes of the play, and the equivocator would have earned his place in the Porter scene if Father Garnet had never lived or become involved in the Gunpowder Plot.

Similarly, the unnaturalness of the avaricious farmer is contrasted with the images of natural growth and harvest which are scattered through the play; and he is connected with the equivocator because Garnet went under the alias of Farmer. Even the tailor has his place in the scheme of the play, because of the clothing imagery which is so abundant in it.[1]

Nor is the style of the scene un-Shakespearian. Bradley pointed out[2] resemblances between Pompey's soliloquy on the inhabitants of the prison in *Measure for Measure* (IV. iii. 1–18) and the Porter's soliloquy, and between the dialogue of Pompey with Abhorson (IV. ii. 22 ff.) and the dialogue that follows the Porter's soliloquy. We may go further and suggest that one of the Porter's speeches, often bowdlerized out of existence, provides a valuable clue to one theme of the play. He is speaking of the effects of liquor, in answer to Macduff's question: 'What three things does drink especially provoke?'

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

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

1. Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1935), p. 324. H. L. Rogers has pointed out, *RES* (1965), 44, that the tailor may refer to a man associated in the public mind with the Garnet trial.
2. Bradley, p. 397.

> nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it!

(i.e. intervene between her purpose and its fulfilment). Two scenes later she asks her husband:

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire?

In IV. i. Macbeth gives some variations on the same theme:

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

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

> Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
> Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd.

The opposition between the hand and the other organs and senses recurs again and again. Macbeth observes the functioning of his own organs with a strange objectivity: in particular, he speaks of his hand almost as though it had an independent existence of its own. He exhorts his eye to wink at the hand; when he sees the imaginary dagger he decides that his eyes have been made the fools of the other senses, or else worth all the rest; later in the same speech his very footsteps seem, as it were, to be divorced from himself:

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

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

> What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

In the first line of this quotation the hand–eye opposition appears in its most striking, most hallucinated form. Lady Macbeth persists in her illusion that a little water clears them of the deed—an illusion she has to expiate in the sleep-walking scene. Just before the murder of Banquo, Macbeth invokes Night:

> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful Day,
> And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,
> Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond
> Which keeps me pale!

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

> His secret murders sticking on his hands.

The hand–eye opposition may have been suggested by the biblical injunctions to pluck out the eye that offends, and to cut off the offending hand;[1] for these occur in chapters which are echoed elsewhere in the play.

The Porter's words on lechery have yet another significance. They consist of a series of antitheses: *provokes—unprovokes; provokes—takes away; desire—performance; makes—mars; sets on—takes off; persuades—disheartens; stand to—not stand to.* Here concentrated in half a dozen lines we find one of the predominant characteristics of the general style of the play, multitudinous antitheses. The reader has only to glance at any scene of the play. We may link this trick of style with the 'wrestling of destruction with creation' which Wilson Knight has found[2] in the play, and with the opposition he has pointed out between night and day, life and death, grace and evil. Kolbe likewise spoke[3] of the play as a 'picture of a special battle in a universal war' (i.e. the war between sin and grace) and he declared that

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

1. I.e. Matt. v, vi, xviii, Mark ix, Luke xi. See II. ii. 58 n.; also Roy Walker pp. 71–2, and Rogers, p. 41.
2. *The Imperial Theme*, p. 153. See also G. I. Duthie, 'Antithesis in *Macbeth*', *SS 19* (1966), pp. 25 ff.
3. F. C. Kolbe, *Shakespeare's Way* (1930), pp. 21–2.

But the play contains many antitheses which are not to be found under such headings as Angel and Devil, good and evil. It may even be suggested that the iterative image of ill-fitting garments is a kind of pictorial antithesis, a contrast between the man and his clothes, as in the lines—

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

Another recurrent image may be regarded as a contrast between the picture and the thing depicted:

> The sleeping, and the dead,
> Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood
> That fears a painted devil.
>
> This is the very painting of your fear.
>
> Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
> And look on death itself!—up, up, and see
> The great doom's image!

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

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

> The glory, jest, and riddle of the world,

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

> Between the potency
> And the existence
> Between the essence
> And the descent.

1. Cf. G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (1949), pp. 140–59; L. C. Knights, *Explorations* (1946), pp. 18 ff.; Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (1943), pp. 153–62.

This discussion of the authenticity of the scene has led us imperceptibly into a consideration of the play as a whole; and this in itself may serve to show that the Porter is an integral part of the play.

4. INTERPOLATIONS

The Porter scene is not the only part of the play which has been regarded with suspicion. There are at least nine other passages or scenes which earlier editors have branded as spurious on insufficient grounds.

(1) I. i.	Written by Middleton (Cunningham)
(2) I. ii.	Written by Middleton (Clarendon; Cunningham)
(3) I. iii. 1–37.	Written by Middleton (Clarendon; Cunningham)
(4) III. v.	Spurious, probably Middleton (many critics)
(5) IV. i. 39–43, 125–32.	Spurious, probably Middleton (many critics)
(6) IV. ii. 30–63.	Interpolation (Cunningham)
(7) IV. iii. 140–6.	Interpolation (Clarendon)
(8) V. ii.	Dubious (Clarendon)
(9) V. ix.	'evident traces of another hand' (Clarendon)

There is now no need to authenticate 1, 2, 3 and 9, since they are universally accepted as Shakespeare's, with the exception of Granville-Barker who thought that Shakespeare's genuine work began with the entrance of Macbeth.[1] No. 8 contains examples of Shakespeare's characteristic imagery and is certainly his. Nos 6 and 7 (on the hanging of traitors and on the King's Evil) are probably interpolations, but by Shakespeare himself.

There remain to be considered Nos 4 and 5, and here there is good reason to suppose that Shakespeare was not responsible. Middleton has often been regarded as the author of these interpolations since two songs from his play *The Witch* were sung at III. v. 32 and IV. i. 43. This play was not printed until 1778, but it has come down to us in a transcript made by Ralph Crane, one of the scriveners of the King's Men. He states that the play was 'long since acted by His Majesty's servants at the Blackfriars'; and, as the company did not act there before the autumn of 1609, the play was presumably written after that date. The tran-

1. Barker, p. 61.

script has been roughly dated 1620–7, so that 'long since' is likely to have been before 1620, and perhaps before 1615.[1]

W. J. Lawrence argued that *The Witch* was written soon after Johnson's *Masque of Queenes* which was performed on 1 February 1609, and that the professional performers (as opposed to the aristocratic amateurs), the same dances, and the same costumes were used in Middleton's play. This seems a plausible hypothesis, but we cannot tell how long the costumes would be available, if indeed they were available at all. Perhaps the King's Men acquired them. Dover Wilson regarded 1609–10 as a 'highly probable date' for *The Witch*; but if Middleton began writing for the King's Men only in 1614, the play must have been later,[2] but it is now thought that his association with the company began as early as 1606.

Nor is it possible to determine when the two songs were added to *Macbeth*. Forman does not refer to the cauldron scene, so his account does not enable us to tell whether the interpolations were in the 1611 performance. Presumably not. One would like to think that Shakespeare was dead and buried, or at least living in retirement, before his play was spoiled. It is reasonable to suppose that Shakespeare, if he had been available, would have been asked to carry out the revisions.

The Hecate passages were clearly invented to introduce the songs and Middleton is usually blamed for these insertions. But, as J. M. Nosworthy pointed out,[3]

> The Hecate of Middleton's *The Witch* is a very different creature from the *prima donna* and *prima ballerina* of Macbeth. She is coarse, brusque and colloquial, speaking mainly in blank verse . . . and never in octosyllabic couplets . . . There is no reason why the Hecate so rudely thrust into *Macbeth* should not have had all the properties of her namesake in *The Witch*. Close comparison of the two plays has convinced me that, of all contemporary claims to the Hecate scenes, Middleton's is, in fact, the weakest.

I concur with this verdict and believe that the Hecate passages were written by a writer, not without poetic talent, in order to

1. W. W. Greg, *Elizabethan Dramatic Documents*, pp. 358–9; Greg and F. P. Wilson, eds, *The Witch* (1950); F. P. Wilson, *The Library*, VII, 194–215; E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II. 510; J. Dover Wilson, pp. xxvii ff.

2. R. C. Bald, *MLR*, XXXII (1937), 43; W. J. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Workshop* (1928), pp. 28–33. R. V. Holdsworth (in a forthcoming book) is said to argue that Middleton was responsible for parts of *Macbeth* and *Timon of Athens*.

3. J. M. Nosworthy, 'The Hecate Scenes', *RES*, XXIV (1948), 138–9, and Rogers, p. 29, believe that the scenes may be Shakespeare's.

explain and introduce the two songs and the dance. It was then found necessary to make certain other alterations. This would account for the cuts in Act I and the possible rearrangement of some scenes later in the play.

It was pointed out long ago[1] that III. vi should chronologically follow IV. i, and that it was probably shifted to its present position, when the Hecate scene was interpolated, to prevent the juxtaposition of two witch scenes. Lenox and the anonymous Lord converse on matters which have not yet occurred and of which Macbeth was ignorant till the end of IV. i. At the end of the banquet scene Macbeth had decided to go early the next morning to consult the Weird Sisters; IV. i. presumably takes place only a few hours after this decision. Macbeth also declares that he will send to Macduff; yet in III. vi we hear that his messenger has already been repulsed by Macduff and that the latter has fled to England. Lenox appears in III. vi as a savage critic of Macbeth and in IV. i as an apparently loyal follower. Possibly his lines in IV. i were originally spoken by another character, or his feigned loyalty could exemplify the fact that Macbeth can trust no one. If III. vi followed IV. i it would be an effective means of expanding the brief announcement that Macduff had fled, without spoiling Lady Macduff's feelings of bewilderment in IV. ii. There is one slight difficulty. The banquet scene and the cauldron scene would thereby be juxtaposed, and the furniture of the former would have to be replaced by the cauldron. This operation could be effected either by an interval at the end of the act or by a lost intervening scene.[2]

Charles Lamb, in a famous paragraph, described the differences between Middleton's witches and Shakespeare's Weird Sisters:[3]

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

1. G. Crosse, *NQ*, 22 October 1898.
2. Cf. III. iv. 131–2 n. and Wheelock *MLN*, xv, 81. Rogers, p. 28, ingeniously suggests that lines in III. vi have been transposed, and that they should be printed in the following order: 37 '. . . pine for now.', 39 'Sent he to Macduff?', 40–3 'He . . . answer.', 37–9 'And this . . . war.', 43 'And that well might'. It should be mentioned that knowledge of Macduff's flight enables the audience to react to the irony of the words of the first apparition. Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (1971), p. 196, shows that if III. v is omitted, the Weird Sisters open both the main parts of the play, 'and if an interval were to follow the third act, the essential structural arrangement could be made clear to the audience'.
3. Charles Lamb, *Works*, ed. E. V. Lucas, *Miscellaneous Prose*, p. 55.

It may be observed, however, that the Weird Sisters do not plant the seeds of evil in Macbeth; that they have no power over the innocent; that they are not without human passions; and that Lamb had no reason to suppose that the Hecate scenes were spurious—as they doubtless are.

Farnham showed that both *hag* and *witch* could mean a demon, as well as a human being who had made a compact with the devil; and that in the three spurious passages Shakespeare's superhuman witches are changed into human ones. 'They are compared to fairies when they cease to be fairies'.[1]

Another point was made by D. L. Chambers.[2] The genuine speeches of the Weird Sisters 'are prevailingly tetrameter with a trochaic cadence'. The spurious passages, on the other hand, are in iambic measures, 'dull, mechanical, regular', in striking contrast with 'the grotesqueness, the freedom, the bold roughness of the colloquies and incantations of the weird sisters'.

It may be added that Middleton was influenced by *Macbeth* when he wrote *The Witch*;[3] and that there are also a number of parallels between the witch scenes of the two dramatists, doubtless because they drew on the same sources for their information.

1. W. Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier* (1950), pp. 74 ff.
2. D. L. Chambers, *The Metre of 'Macbeth'* (1903), p. 18. Cited W. J. Lawrence.
3. Several parallels between *Macbeth* and *The Witch* were pointed out by Steevens (*NV*): 'I spic'd them lately with a drowsy posset' (cf. II. ii. 6); 'There's no such thing' (cf. II. i. 47). Two others were pointed out in Clarendon ed.: 'The innocence of sleep' (cf. II. ii. 35); 'I'll rip thee down from neck to navel' (cf. I. ii. 22).

5. SOURCES

Since 1951, when the New Arden *Macbeth* was first published, there have been several discussions of the sources of the play, including my own (1957, 1977), and Geoffrey Bullough's (1973).[1]

William Kemp in *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder* (1600) refers to what was apparently a ballad on the subject of *Macbeth*, when he speaks of 'a penny Poet whose first making was the miserable stolne story of Macdeol, or Macdobeth, or Mac-somewhat, for I am sure a Mac it was, though I neuer had the maw to see it'.[2] On the following page he proceeds to advise its author to 'leaue writing these beastly ballets, make not good wenches Prophetesses, for litle or no profit'. As ballads were frequently based on plays and as the remark about prophetesses could refer to the Weird Sisters, there may have been a Macbeth play before 1600; and if there was one, Shakespeare may have known it. But, even so, Holinshed provided Shakespeare with his main source. As Grierson suggested,[3] he derived from the *Chronicles*

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

Shakespeare combined the story of Macbeth with the earlier account of the murder of King Duff by Donwald and his wife, thus replacing an open conspiracy, in which Banquo was an accomplice, with a secret murder of a royal guest. It would have been impossible to have depicted James I's reputed ancestor in such a role; but the dramatic advantages of the change were equally obvious. The fusion of the two stories was made easier by the fact that both men were driven to commit murder by their ambitious wives.

Shakespeare may have taken some hints from Holinshed's story of the noblemen who conspired with witches against King Duff,[4] and he took a number of details from the account of the murder by Donwald and his wife—the incitement by the wife, the fact that the King was a guest of the murderer and had just given him presents, the murder of the chamberlains whom Donwald and his wife had sent to bed drunk. But in Holinshed's

1. *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays; Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare.*
2. Ed. G. B. Harrison (1923), pp. 30–1.
3. *Macbeth*, ed. Grierson and Smith (1914), pp. xviii-xix.
4. See p. 164 below.

account the murder is carried out by Donwald's servants who remove the body from the castle. Holinshed's marginalia read almost like a running commentary on the play, and they may have suggested the dramatic treatment of the subject:

> A guiltie conscience accuseth a man . . . Donwald's wife counselled him to murther the king . . . The womans euill counsell is followed . . . Donwald a verie dissembler . . . Prophecies mooue men to vnlawfull attempts . . . women desirous of high estate . . . Mackbeth's guiltie conscience . . . Macbeth's dread . . . His crueltie caused through feare . . . Macbeths confidence in wizzards . . . Mackbeth recoileth [cf. v. ii. 23] . . . Mackbeths trust in prophecies.

The voice that cried 'Sleep no more' was probably suggested by the voice heard by King Kenneth after he had murdered his nephew[1]—as described by Holinshed (or Buchanan). One or two details were derived from the account of Edward the Confessor's reign, and by a lucky chance touching for the King's Evil was topical as well as historically accurate. But the main plot was taken from Holinshed's account of Macbeth, though with many alterations, made for dramatic reasons.[2] Shakespeare keeps close to the chronicler in his account of Macbeth's meeting with the Weird Sisters (except for their physical appearance) and in the scene between Macduff and Malcolm in England, partly because in both places Holinshed uses direct speech. Elsewhere Shakespeare occasionally uses single words which may have been suggested by the *Chronicles*, but not many.

The following are the most striking alterations: (i) Duncan, as depicted by Holinshed, is younger than in the play, and he is depicted as a feeble ruler. By making the victim old and holy, and by passing over his weaknesses as a ruler, Shakespeare deliberately blackened the guilt of Macbeth. (ii) There are three campaigns described in Holinshed which are condensed into one in the play: the defeat of Macdonwald's rebellion, the defeat of Sweno, and the defeat of Canute, who came with a new fleet to avenge his brother Sweno's overthrow. (The telescoping may be due partly to cuts.) (iii) Macbeth, according to Holinshed's account, has a genuine grievance against Duncan who, by proclaiming his son Prince of Cumberland, went against the laws of succession, and took away from Macbeth the prospect of the throne; which he had every reason to hope for, since he could

1. See p. 166 below.
2. R. A. Law, *University of Texas Studies in English* (1952), has a useful list of 35 incidents in the play which are not in Holinshed.

claim it on behalf of his wife and her son by her first husband. Shakespeare suppresses these facts, because he wished for dramatic reasons to accentuate Macbeth's guilt and to minimize any excuses he might have had. We hear nothing of a previous marriage of Lady Macbeth, though she states that she has given suck. It has been suggested, too, that because of 'the triumph of primogeniture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries'[1] the method of succession which existed in Macbeth's day was not understood in Shakespeare's, even by Holinshed. (iv) Banquo and others were accomplices in the murder of Duncan. It was much more dramatic to have Macbeth and his wife solely responsible, and this safeguarded the reputation of James's ancestor. The King had a particular dislike of political assassination, even of manifest tyrants, such as Nebuchadnezzar and Nero. 'The wickednesse therefore of the King can neuer make them that are ordained to be iudged by him, to become his Iudges.'[2] Shakespeare therefore took the details of the murder from the Donwald story. (v) Shakespeare omits the ten years' good rule by Macbeth between the murder of Duncan and the murder of Banquo. The omission was dramatically necessary. (vi) Shakespeare apparently invented the banquet scene and the appearance of Banquo's ghost. (vii) He omits the story of Macduff's refusal to assist in the building of Dunsinane Castle. (viii) Although the cauldron scene is based on the three prophecies mentioned by Holinshed, Shakespeare for reasons of dramatic economy substitutes the Weird Sisters for 'a certeine witch, whom hee had in great trust'. (ix) In the *Chronicles*, Macbeth surrounded Macduff's castle with a great power. It was more economical to use murderers. (x) The testing of Macduff by Malcolm is given in full by Holinshed (and it is also in Boece, Bellenden, and Stewart); but Shakespeare omits the fable of the Fox and the Flies, omits Malcolm's self-accusation of dissimulation, and adds other vices to those mentioned by Holinshed. In the *Chronicles* the testing of Macduff occurs after he has heard of his wife's death. Shakespeare's alteration made Malcolm's suspicions more understandable. (vi) Macbeth flees from Dunsinane Castle and is pursued by Macduff to Lunfannaine. This would have been dramatically irrelevant. (xii) Shakespeare invents the sleep-walking scene and the presumed suicide of Lady Macbeth. Holinshed says nothing about the fate of Macbeth's wife. or of Donwald's.

1. Wilson, p. ix.
2. James I, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, in *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain (1918), pp. 60–1, 66.

Other sources have been suggested for the plot of *Macbeth*. Mrs C. C. Stopes argued[1] that Shakespeare was acquainted with William Stewart's *Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland*, an enormous poem of over 42,000 lines which remained in manuscript until 1858. It was written 1531–5 by order of Queen Margaret, for the use of her son, James V. Mrs Stopes's theory was propounded in 1897,[2] accepted temporarily by Dover Wilson,[3] who later expressed doubts, and accepted more recently by Arthur Melville Clark.[4] The case seems to me to be very weak. Mrs Stopes fails to provide a single convincing verbal parallel between Stewart and Shakespeare. Although 'till the warldis end' resembles 'the crack of doom' (IV. i. 117) it was a common idea in the early years of James I's reign. Lancelot Andrewes, in his sermon on the coronation, spoke of the King's descendants, 'who shall (wee trust, and pray they may) stretch their line to the world's end'.

It seems to me that the resemblances between Stewart and Shakespeare are accidental, and that any poet expanding the bare facts of the story would tend to develop Lady Macbeth's character in the same way. From Holinshed Shakespeare would learn that Donwald committed the murder of Duff *through setting on of his wife*, who *bare no lesse malice in hir heart towards the king* and showed Donwald *the meanes wherby he might soonest accomplish it.* Although Donwald *abhorred the act greatlie in heart, yet through instigation of his wife* he bribed the servants to do the deed. In the section of the *Chronicles* relating to Macbeth himself Shakespeare would have read that *his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she was verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene*. From these hints of the ambition and determination of the wife and the moral scruples of the murderer, it would not be difficult for any competent dramatist to depict a Lady Macbeth who called her husband a coward, bade him play the hypocrite, and who herself pretended great indignation after the murder to cover up their guilt. Even the swoon of Lady Macbeth, whether real or feigned, does not need to have a source. Nor would it be difficult for two poets independently to have arrived at the idea of Banquo's descendants reigning till the end of the world. Holinshed's 'long order of continuall descent' and Matthew Gwinn's prophecy to Banquo's descendants of *imperium sine fine* express the same idea. No one, moreover, has provided any

1. *Shakespeare's Industry* (1916), pp. 102–3.
2. When her theory appeared in a periodical.
3. Wilson, pp. xviii ff.
4. *Murder Under Trust* (1981).

plausible explanation of how Shakespeare obtained access to the manuscript of Stewart's poem.

It is much more likely, as M. H. Liddell[1] and H. N. Paul have argued, that Shakespeare had read Buchanan's *History of Scotland* in its original Latin. His hero is, perhaps, closer to Buchanan's portrait of Macbeth than to Holinshed's. According to Buchanan,

> he was a man of penetrating genius, a high spirit, unbounded ambition, and, if he had possessed moderation, was worthy of any command however great; but in punishing crimes he exercised a severity, which, exceeding the bounds of the laws, appeared oft to degenerate into cruelty.

Holinshed speaks of him merely as a 'valiant gentleman'. The account given by Buchanan of King Kenneth's remorse is likewise closer than Holinshed's to Macbeth's:

> His soul disturbed by a consciousness of his crime, permitted him to enjoy no solid or sincere pleasure; in retirement the thoughts of his unholy deed tormented him; and, in sleep, visions full of horror drove repose from his pillow. At last, whether in truth an audible voice from heaven addressed him, as is reported, or whether it were the suggestion of his guilty mind, as often happens with the wicked, in the silent watches of the night, he seemed thus to be admonished.

Buchanan's statement that 'the command of Cumberland was always considered the next step to the crown' is nearer to Macbeth's lines (I. iv. 48–50) than the corresponding passage in Holinshed.

Paul has also argued[2] that Shakespeare knew Leslie's *De Origine, Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum* (1578), in which the Weird Sisters are devils disguised as women, as they may be in Shakespeare's play, and in which there is a genealogical tree of Banquo's descendants with roots, leaves, and fruit. This may well have caught Shakespeare's eye and left its mark on the imagery of Act III.[3] Leslie, moreover, makes no mention of Macbeth's accomplices, he stresses the way in which Lady Macbeth persuaded her husband by showing him how the deed could be successfully accomplished—as Donwald's wife does in Holin-

1. Ed. *Macbeth* (1903). Rogers, pp. 6–7, doubts whether Shakespeare read Buchanan or Leslie.
2. Paul, pp. 171 ff.
3. Cf. 'root' (III. i. 5); 'Stick deep' (III. i. 49); 'seed' (III. i. 69); 'snake', 'serpent' (III. ii. 13, III. iv. 28), the last three being suggested by the fruit and the serpentine trunk of the genealogical tree.

shed—he speaks of 'the most holy king Duncan', and he gives a more vivid account than Holinshed of Macbeth's reign of terror. Paul also thought[1] that Shakespeare consulted Skene's *Scots Acts* (1597); but he did not need to read this book in order to depict Duncan as 'a good and modest prince' and Macbeth as 'a cruel tyrant'.

Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran pointed out[2] that the Table of all the Kings of Scotland in *Scots Acts* was reprinted in London in *Certeine Matters concerning the Realme of Scotland* (1603), where it was more accessible to Shakespeare. He also suggested that *Macbeth* may have been influenced by some details in the career of James Stewart of Bothwellmuir, who fell from power in 1585 and met his death in 1595. He became Earl of Arran and was spurred on by the ambition of a wicked wife. The 'highland oracles' had shown her that Gowrie should be ruined, but she 'helped the prophecy forward as well as she could'. Stewart was slain after he had tried to avoid the circumstances 'which it had been prophesied would attend his death', and his head was cut off and set on a pole. Stewart's wife was suspected of trafficking with witches and she was described as 'a meete matche for such a spouse, depending upon the response of witches, and enemie of all human societie'.[3] Shakespeare was probably ignorant of these matters, but they provide further evidence that the atmosphere of the play was not alien to Shakespeare's contemporaries.

B. J. Burden has pointed out to me (privately) a number of resemblances between *Macbeth* and *Arden of Feversham*. The conscience-stricken soliloquies of Michael before Arden's murder (II. ii, III. i), Mosbie's soliloquy after the murder (III. v), and the knocking at the door (V. i) may be compared with Macbeth's speeches before and after the murder of Duncan. But knocking on the door occurs after the murder of Desdemona.

It is more certain that three of Shakespeare's early works had some influence on *Macbeth*. The theme of witchcraft in *2 Henry VI* and the equivocating prophecy in the first act of that play seem to have called up a number of associations in Shakespeare's mind.[4] More significant are the echoes in *Lucrece*, such as the stage imagery pointed out by Walter Whiter,[5] the setting of Duncan's murder resembling that of Lucrece's rape, as Macbeth

1. Paul, pp. 220 ff.
2. *Shakespeare's Scotland* (1957), p. 6.
3. Wardlaw MS. 182.
4. See G. Wilson Knight, *The New Adelphi* (1927).
5. *A Speciment of a Commentary*, ed. A. Over and M. Bell (1967), p. 136.

himself recognizes (II. i. 55), and as Warburton pointed out, and the realization by both Macbeth and Tarquin that their crimes will make them lose the blessings which should accompany old age (V. iii. 24–5; *Lucr.*, 141–7). Shakespeare uses some of the same imagery in both works, and in both he shows the conflict between temptation and conscience.[1]

There are many echoes of *Richard III*.[2] In both plays the hero wades through slaughter to a throne; both are tyrants, usurpers, and murderers; both courageous, cruel, and treacherous. But Richard chooses evil without reluctance, Macbeth only after an agonizing conflict, his conscience operating before, during, and after his crimes. We hear of Richard's timorous dreams, as we know of Macbeth's insomnia; but it is not until the eve of the battle of Bosworth that we see Richard display any consciousness of his guilt. (See below, p. lii.)

Richard III and *Macbeth* have been regarded as the most Senecan of Shakespeare's plays, in which he made use of the *Tenne Tragedies* translated by Heywood, Studley, and others, but also, at times, referring to the originals.[3] There seem to be echoes of five of Seneca's plays, scattered through nearly all Shakespeare's scenes.[4] These include versions of popular quotations,[5] but others coloured his treatment of scenes and characters. Lady Macbeth is modelled partly on Clytemnestra,[6] but her invocation of evil spirits, her wish to be unsexed, and her pretended willingness to dash out the brains of her infant are clearly influenced by Seneca's portrait of Medea.[7] Cassandra's foreseeing of the murder of Agamemnon has affinities with two famous speeches of Macbeth.[8] She declares that

> No vision fond fantasticall my senses doth beguile;

and Macbeth, overwhelmed by temptation in the third scene of the play, speaks of his 'thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical', and just before the murder, when he sees the imaginary dagger, asks

1. See M. C. Bradbrook, *SS 4* (1951); reprinted in *Aspects of Macbeth*.
2. F. M. Smith, *PMLA* (1948), pp. 1003 ff., compares the two plays and discusses a number of parallel passages.
3. Wilson, p. xliii.
4. *Hercules Furens, Hercules Oetaeus, Agamemnon, Medea*, and possibly *Phaedra*. For *Hercules Oetaeus* see E. B. Lyle in *English Studies*, LIII (1972), 109–12.
5. See G. K. Hunter, *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition* (1978), pp. 159 ff., for a critical account of the Senecan influence.
6. Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, and Bullough.
7. I.-S. Ewbank, 'The Fiend-like Queen', *SS* 19 (1966), pp. 82 ff.
8. Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight?

Finally, it should be mentioned that Shakespeare took the trouble to read more than one of James I's works. There are several echoes of *Daemonologie*[1] and one from his *Counterblast to Tobacco*.[2] It is possible that Shakespeare also perused *The True Law of Free Monarchies, Basilikon Doron*, and *A Fruitfull Meditation*,[3] but the parallels with these are more dubious.

6. THE PLAY

'This dead butcher and his fiend-like queen.'

Malcolm's epitaph on the murderers of his father is understandably harsh. Whereas Hamlet has flights of angels to sing him to his rest, Antony and Cleopatra are eulogized by their chief enemy, Coriolanus is praised by his assassin, and even the wife-murderer Othello is complimented after his suicide on his greatness of heart, the hell-hound Macbeth has no one to speak for him; and when Samuel Johnson commented on the play in his edition (1765), he expressed the general view that '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.'[4]

Although the play has been described as Shakespeare's 'most profound and mature vision of evil',[5] 'a statement of evil',[6] and 'a play about damnation', it is plain that in order to show how the hero comes to be damned, Shakespeare had to describe and create the good which Macbeth had sacrificed. Few modern critics share Johnson's attitude to the protagonists.

In some ways, as we have seen, Macbeth resembles the murderer and usurper, Richard III;[7] and like Claudius, he is led

1. Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 217.
2. Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources* (1957), p. 177.
3. Jane H. Jack, *ELH* (1955), pp. 173 ff. Ann Pasternak Slater, *EC*, XXVIII (1978), 112–28, points out a number of parallels with Thomas Nashe's *The Terrors of the Night*, of ideas more than of words. J. J. Tobin, *The Aligarh Journal of English Studies*, VII (1982), 72–8, argues that there are parallels with Nashe's *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*. They include the following: base, pluckt, bone, gums (ed. Mckerrow, pp. 70–1; cf. I. vii. 54–7); bankes, shole, come (p. 68; cf. I. vii. 6–7); birdes doe, the Pyt-fal, the nette, the Ginne (p. 169, cf. IV. iii. 32–5).
4. *Dr Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (1969), p. 133.
5. G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (ed. 1949), p. 140.
6. L. C. Knights in 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?'; reprinted in *Explorations* (1946), p. 18.
7. See above, p. xlii.

from crime to crime in the attempt to achieve security. Macbeth is a humanized version of the previous villains. Shakespeare wished to get under the skin of a murderer, and to show that the Poet for the Defence, though extenuating nothing, can make us feel our kinship with his client, can make us recognize that if we had been so tempted, we too might have fallen. In Donne's words, applied by Peter Alexander,[1]

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

So, although Macbeth is 'a miserable, and a banished, and a damned creature', yet he is God's 'creature still and contributes something to his glory even in his damnation'.[2] Macbeth is a noble and gifted man who chooses treachery and crime, not believing he has any justification for his deeds, but knowing them precisely for what they are. In altering his sources in this respect, Shakespeare deprived his hero of mitigations and excuses. In the tragedy immediately preceding *Macbeth*, evil is concentrated in the savage quartet of Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund, who are able to bring about the ruin of their moral superiors by making use of their weaknesses in the shape of lust, credulity and pride. In *Macbeth*, the evil is transferred from the villains to the hero and heroine, influenced, if not dominated, by the evil embodied in the Weird Sisters.

Yet there is no play which puts so persuasively the contrasting good. Shakespeare makes Duncan venerable and saintly, Malcolm an image of perfection, Macduff a righteous avenger. The long scene in England contrasts the portrait of a good king (as Malcolm will be) with that of the tyrant he pretends to be, and the account of Edward the Confessor's powers presents a good supernatural to counterbalance the evil of the Weird Sisters.[3] Apart from these things, it is by the imagery and symbolism that the good is presented.[4] The contrast between light and darkness symbolizes a general contrast between good and evil, devils and angels, hell and heaven. The disease images clearly reflect both the sin which is a disease and Macbeth himself who *is* the disease,

1. *Shakespeare's Life and Art* (1939), p. 173.
2. *Donne Poetry and Prose*, ed. J. Hayward, p. 663.
3. L. C. Knights, *Explorations*, p. 32.
4. See Kenneth Muir, 'Image and Symbol in *Macbeth*', *SS 19* (1966) (reprinted in *Aspects of Macbeth* [1977]) and the longer essay in *Shakespeare the Professional* (1973), pp. 128–57.

from which Scotland suffers. Wilson Knight has an effective chapter[1] on the 'life-themes' of the play, in which he makes the point that Lady Macbeth 'wins largely by appealing to Macbeth's valour'; and Cleanth Brooks in a well-known essay[2] writes on her appeal to his manliness. All through the play Shakespeare continually juggles with the different meanings of 'honour'—military honour, honour bestowed by a king, free honours, mouth-honour. The ambiguity in the word is brought out in the exchange between Macbeth and Banquo just before the murder of Duncan:

> If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
> It shall make honour for you.
> So I lose none
> In seeking to augment it, but still keep
> My bosom franchis'd, and allegiance clear,
> I shall be counsell'd.

Closely connected with 'honour' are the feudal ideas of 'duties' and 'service', the repetition of which helps to create a picture of an orderly and closely knit society, in contrast to the disorder consequent upon Macbeth's initial crime. The naturalness of that order, and the unnaturalness of its violation by Macbeth, are emphasized by the images of planting and sowing;[3] and the images of sleep and milk contrast with the images of unnatural disorder and the reiteration of fear and blood. The contrast is most apparent in the lines which express so violently Lady Macbeth's violation of her sex:[4]

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn . . .

By such means Shakespeare builds up the order of Nature and examines the nature of Order; so that the violation of order in the state by the murder of Duncan is seen to be an unnatural horror, a deed too terrible to behold,[5] inevitably attended by

1. *The Imperial Theme* (ed. 1951), p. 125.
2. *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), pp. 22–49. See also Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (1957), pp. 61 ff.
3. Andor Gomme has suggested (privately) that the idea of planting was derived from its biblical use in e.g. Jer. xii. 2, xxiv. 6, and 2 Sam. vii. 10.
4. See n. 2 above.
5. See II. ii. 53; II. iii. 71; III. iv. 60; IV. i. 113.

portents.[1] Caroline Spurgeon recorded[2] four reverberation images which, she argued, suggest the 'overwhelming and unending nature of the consequences or reverberations of the evil deed'.[3]

Nevertheless the presentation of the good which counterbalances the evil is done most effectively through Macbeth and his wife, who are unwilling witnesses to the good they renounce. Macbeth is aware from the very beginning that the deed he contemplates is evil. He admits that its 'horrid image' makes his hair stand on end, and his heart knock against his ribs. Although he never discusses with his wife the morality of the murder, which she always mentions euphemistically,[4] and although he hardly faces it himself, every word he speaks shows that he is struck to the soul with a realization of the horror of the deed. The half-demented language he uses immediately after the murder expresses fear, but not of detection; and although he fears Banquo partly for prudential reasons, he fears him also because of his own sense of guilt. Macbeth is never in doubt of the difference between good and evil; nor is Lady Macbeth, not even in the speech in which she deliberately chooses evil as a means of achieving the 'good' of the crown; nor, indeed, is the audience. Inexorably the action rams home the moral that all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten the little hand of the murderess, and that, to those who destroy life, life itself becomes merely 'a tale told by an idiot'.

To some critics, however, the play has seemed to be lacking in inevitability and coherence. Robert Bridges complained[5] that the Macbeth we have cause to admire could never have committed the murder of Duncan, and that Shakespeare deliberately throws dust in the eyes of the audience, not clearly telling them whether Macbeth decided to murder Duncan before the beginning of the play, or whether the idea was imposed upon him by the witches, or whether he was urged to it by his wife:

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

1. John Masefield, 'Shakespeare and Spiritual Life', reprinted in *Recent Prose* (1932), pp. 270 ff., discusses the significance of the portents.
2. *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1935), p. 329.
3. Erasmus in the colloquy Shakespeare echoed in III. i has the following passage on the reverberation of good deeds: 'I would desire to have a certain honourable renown of my name, which may Echo again throughout the whole world, and which may become more famous with my age, and at last may grow more renowned after my death' (trans. H. M., 1671, p. 478).
4. See I. v. 66–8, I. vii. 48, 73.
5. *The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Dramas* (ed. 1927), p. 14.

A Macbeth who feels the horror of the deed as Shakespeare's hero would not, Bridges thought, be able to commit it. The argument is that Shakespeare sacrificed psychological consistency to theatrical effect. Edgar Elmer Stoll made[1] a similar point, though without regarding this characteristic of the play as a fault. He pointed out that if Macbeth had had a better title to the throne than Malcolm, or if Duncan had been depicted as a feeble rather than as a holy king, 'Macbeth's conduct in killing him would have been more reasonable and more psychologically in keeping, to be sure, but less terrible, less truly tragic'. Shakespeare was not so much concerned with the creation of real human beings, but with theatrical or *poetical* effect. He was fascinated by the very difficulty of making the psychologically improbable, by sheer virtuosity, appear possible. As Schücking said,[2] Shakespeare made 'the bold experiment of a character with a strongly marked mixture of qualities of which the one seems almost to preclude the other'—a brave warrior who is a moral coward, a brutal murderer who is racked by feelings of guilt, and so on. Maurice Morgann made the same point[3] when he wrote of the conflicting impressions of a character deliberately set in motion by the dramatist.[4]

It is only fair to Shakespeare to add, and Stoll did not always make full allowance for this, that ideas about what is psychologically possible change from age to age, and that what Bridges thought impossible seemed perfectly possible to the readers of Timothy Bright and even, to judge from criticism of the play, right down to the end of the nineteenth century. Eighty years after Bridges' complaint, it is his conception of psychology which seems simplistic.[5] For he underestimates the potentialities for

1. E. E. Stoll, 'Source and Motive in *Macbeth* and *Othello*', *RES*, XIX (1943), 27.
2. L. L. Schücking, *The Baroque Character of the Elizabethan Tragic Hero* (1938), pp. 21–2.
3. Maurice Morgann, *Shakespearian Criticism*, ed. Daniel A. Fineman (1972), *passim*.
4. Kenneth Muir, *The Singularity of Shakespeare* (1977), pp. 1–19, and 'Shakespeare's Open Secret', *SS* 34 (1981), pp. 1–9.
5. There is a good reply to Bridges in J. I. M. Stewart's *Character and Motive in Shakespeare* (1949), Chapter V.

evil in the virtuous, and for virtue in the wicked. The sheep and goats of our 'judgement here' are not necessarily the divisions of the life to come. 'Our life', remarked a wise character in *All's Well that Ends Well*, 'is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together'. Besides all this, there is something artificial in Bridges' assumption that if Macbeth has enough predisposition to be driven to murder by wife and witches combined, he is too ignoble to be the tragic hero envisaged by the dramatist. For it is never possible to determine the exact share of blame to be allotted after a crime in the real world to the three factors, heredity, environment, and personal weakness; and, in a play, between three comparable factors, fate, external evil, and the character of the hero. We cannot divide the world into potential murderers and those who are not. It consists of imperfect human beings, more or less ignorant of their own selves, and not knowing (though they have been told often enough) the way to be happy. If they commit evil it is because they hope thereby to avoid another evil, which seems to them for the moment to be worse, or obtain another good, which seems attractive only because it is not in their possession. The direct cause of sin, Thomas Aquinas thought,[1] is the

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

Macbeth has not a predisposition to murder; he has merely an inordinate ambition that makes murder itself seem to be a lesser evil than failure to achieve the crown and so satisfy his wife. They both misjudge, destroying themselves for the sake of the other.

Lady Macbeth, however, accuses her husband of having proposed the murder before Duncan announced his intention of being their guest, before time and place cohered. This made Coleridge argue[2] that the murder had been discussed before the opening of the play, and led Bradley to suggest[3] ingeniously that

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

1. Curry, pp. 111–12. The italicized words are quoted from Thomas Aquinas.
2. *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, ed. T. Hawkes (1969), p. 209.
3. Bradley, pp. 480–4.

Dover Wilson used[1] this passage (I. vii. 47–52) to support his theory that in the original play there was another scene between Macbeth and his wife, after the meeting with the Weird Sisters, and before he knew that Duncan was coming to Inverness. He rejected Coleridge's view of a prior discussion because he felt that Macbeth's aside (I. iii. 130 ff.) 'depicts the terror of Macbeth's soul when the idea of murder *first* comes to him'; and that Lady Macbeth's soliloquy at the beginning of I. v proves that 'so far he has refused to entertain any but honourable thoughts'. But Macbeth's aside, by a common Shakespearian convention, does not so much express the birth of murderous thoughts (though it still may do that) as refer back to the guilty start to which Banquo calls attention earlier in the scene (I. iii. 51), a start which could not be explained earlier without holding up the action.[2] It could either represent the birth of guilt, or else show that Macbeth's mind has been 'rendered temptable by a previous dalliance of fancy with ambitious thoughts'. Lady Macbeth's soliloquy does not prove that her husband did not have those thoughts, or what Bradley called 'some vaguer dishonourable dream': they prove only that she believed, and rightly it appears, that Macbeth's conscience or conventionality was liable to prevent him from achieving the crown by foul means, even though he may have proposed the murder when the question was merely theoretical. I do not find, therefore, the inconsistency of which Bridges spoke; nor do I think there is sufficient evidence to support Dover Wilson's theory of an earlier version of the play, in which all was clear. Even if Lady Macbeth refers to a time between I. iii and I. iv Shakespeare might (and, in my opinion, would) have left the scene unwritten.[3]

In the same essay Bridges speaks of Macbeth's poetic imagination.[4] In this opinion he was following Bradley, who had argued[5] that

1. Wilson, p. xxxvi.
2. Cf. the soliloquy at the end of Act II of *Hamlet*, which tells us what had been passing through the hero's mind during the recitation of the Hecuba speeches.
3. See above, p. xxv.
4. *Op. cit.* p. 13.
5. Bradley, p. 352. Is this wholly true? For Macbeth's imagination also feeds his ambition. G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, VII (1973), 458, quotes from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* on the force of imagination: 'Some ascribe all vices to a false and corrupt imagination, anger, revenge, lust, ambition, covetousness, which prefer falsehood before that which is right and good, deluding the soul with false shows and suppositions'.

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

Sir Herbert Grierson went even further,[1] paradoxically comparing Macbeth to Bunyan, in that

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

Now it was perfectly legitimate to disagree with Moulton who, by ignoring the poetry, had argued that Macbeth's soliloquy in I. vii shows that he was deterred only by fear of the consequences;[2] for the imagery of the speech shows that Macbeth is haunted by the horror of the deed, that he impresses that horror on the audience, and that he resolves not to go ahead with the murder. But such an argument has to be used with great caution. If we go further and pretend that this poetic imagery is a proof that Macbeth had a powerful imagination, that he was in fact a poet, we are in danger of confusing real life and drama. Every character in a poetic play may speak in verse, may speak poetry: but this poetry does not necessarily reflect their poetic dispositions—it is merely a medium. The bloody Sergeant utters bombastic language, not because he is himself bombastic, but because such language was considered appropriate to epic narration. The First Murderer (to give an extreme example) echoes Samuel Daniel and gives us a lovely vignette of twilight,[3] not because he was of a literary turn of mind, but because his creator was a poet, and in the second passage required some verbal scene-painting on the bare Jacobean stage. So, too, with Macbeth, we may say that his imagery expresses his unconscious mind (that poetry can

1. *Ed. cit.*, pp. xxv ff.
2. R. G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (ed. 1892), pp. 151–3.
3. III. i. 11, III. iii. 4 and nn.

do this is one of the greatest advantages it has over naturalistic drama) but we must not say that he is therefore a poet. Hamlet, despite the sublime poetry of his soliloquies, and despite his reputation for his pen as well as his sword, tells Ophelia that he is a bad poet: 'I am ill at these numbers.'[1]

Maeterlinck, in words echoed by Granville-Barker, spoke[2] of the way in which the 'essence of the dramatic poet's art consists in speaking through the mouth of his characters without appearing to do so'; and he declared that the mode of life in which the protagonists of *Macbeth*

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

The characters are thus subordinated to the poetry, rather than (as in much earlier criticism) the poetry to the characters. But the danger which has been mentioned above remains. Lascelles Abercrombie in his *Idea of Great Poetry* has a brilliant discussion[3] of why we enjoy tragedy which seems a version of 'the mere evil of life'. In answering this question he gives a generally convincing analysis of *Macbeth*. In the last act of the play, the hero's world 'turns into a blank of imbecile futility'; yet he

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

After quoting Macbeth's speech when he hears of his wife's death, Abercrombie comments:

1. *Hamlet*, II. ii. 119.
2. *Fortnightly Review*, April 1910, pp. 696–9.
3. *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925), pp. 176–7.

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

Abercrombie seems here to be confusing the powers of expression supposed to be possessed by Macbeth with the poetic powers of his creator. Once again it must be emphasized that because Shakespeare makes Macbeth talk as only a great poet could write, we are not to deduce that Macbeth is a great poet: he is merely part of a great poem. His consummate expression of the meaninglessness of life signifies only that life is meaningless to him: it cannot be taken to signify that he has overcome that meaninglessness by the very act of expressing it. Nor, of course, does it mean, as Bernard Shaw and others have surmised,[1] that Shakespeare was expressing his own pessimistic ideas about the universe. What gives satisfaction to the spectator or reader is not the comprehension of experience by Macbeth, but that the poet is revealing experience through the mouth of his hero. Macbeth, by his own actions, has robbed life of meaning: Shakespeare restores meaning to life by showing that Macbeth's nihilism results from his crimes.

Not, of course, that he is merely a callous criminal. As James pointed out,[2] tragic heroes must be 'finely aware' and this '*makes* absolutely the intensity of their adventures, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them'. Macbeth arouses our sympathies more than Richard III does precisely for this reason. The difference between the two characters is partly the result of Shakespeare's increased understanding of human nature. All his mature tragedies may be regarded as 'melodrama humanized'. Richard is a conscious villain and admired only for his commitment to evil. Macbeth embarks on his career of crime with anguish and reluctance, 'as if it were an appalling duty'.[3] He is humanized by his fears,[4] which prove him to be a man, and not the monster his oppressed subjects believe him to be. 'Those are my best dayes,' he might have said, 'when I shake with fear'.[5]

1. *Shaw on Shakespeare*, ed. Edwin Wilson (1969), p. 27.
2. Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*, Preface.
3. Bradley, p. 358.
4. Hardin Craig, *The Enchanted Glass* (1936), p. 232.
5. John Donne, Holy Sonnets, xix.

Richard, though he suffers from the same terrible dreams, is depicted from the outside, and not without appreciation of his sardonic humour;[1] but as Macbeth goes the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire, we see with his eyes. Richard is the villain as hero; Macbeth is a hero who becomes a villain.

It should be remembered that the Elizabethans, bred on Seneca, did not adhere to Aristotle's view that the overthrow of a bad man is not a tragedy at all. They were content with Sidney's statement, with Seneca in mind, that 'high and excellent Tragedie . . . maketh Kings feare to be tyrants'.[2] This does not mean that Shakespeare's imagination was cabined, cribbed, and confined by this conception, any more than he was bound within the Senecan form and structure. His imaginative perception of the human heart made it necessary for him to investigate the steps by which a noble and valiant man is brought to his damnation, and to present the process in such a way as to arouse our pity and terror.[3] For although, in the last resort, Macbeth is responsible for his damnation, he is sorely tempted. 'The power of divels', wrote George Giffard in 1603,[4]

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

So James I himself declared[5] that the devil allures persons,

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

Shakespeare concentrated on the third passion; but he could not represent devils in a tragedy because they had acquired comic associations. Witches served his turn. They were tragic creatures who, 'for the sake of certain abnormal powers, had sold themselves to the devil'.[6]

We do not know Shakespeare's private opinion of witchcraft—whether he accepted the tenets of James's *Daemonologie*, or whether

1. H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1948), pp. 24 ff.
2. Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, E4v. Cited Dover Wilson.
3. Charlton, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
4. *A Dialogue Concerning Witches* (ed. 1843), pp. 22–3.
5. James I, *Workes* (1616), p. 98.
6. Curry, p. 61.

he adhered to the sceptical position of Reginald Scot, which seems to us to be so much more sane. But, whatever his views, the belief in witchcraft could be used by him for dramatic purposes at a time when most people supposed that witches were 'channels through which the malignity of evil spirits might be visited upon human beings'. W. C. Curry argued[1] that the Weird Sisters are not witches, but demons or devils in their form. Nevertheless,

> whether one considers them as human witches in league with the powers of darkness, or as actual demons in the form of witches, or as merely inanimate symbols, the power which they wield or represent or symbolize is ultimately demonic.

Kittredge, however, believed[2] that the Weird sisters were Norns, 'great powers of destiny, great ministers of fate. They had determined the past; they governed the present; they not only foresaw the future, but decreed it'. 'Weird Sisters' was Gavin Douglas's translation of *parcae*.[3] Witches, devils, fates—the conflicting interpretations reflect the elusive ambiguity of Shakespeare's creations. It should be noted, however, that the Weird Sisters tempt Macbeth only because they know his ambitious dreams—and 'in dreams begins responsibility'[4]—and that even so their prophecy of the crown does not dictate evil means of achieving it—it is morally neutral. 'Chance may crown me / Without my stir', Macbeth admits, and he never thinks of blaming the Weird Sisters for tempting him to the murder of Duncan, though he later blames the 'juggling fiends' who have lulled him into a false sense of security. As the author of III. v says:

> And you all know, security
> Is mortals' chiefest enemy.

He knows that the first step along the primrose path was taken on his own responsibility.

Macbeth's first crime is inspired by ambition and carried through by his wife's determination; the remainder, from the murder of the grooms to the slaughter of Macduff's family and the reign of terror of which this is an example, are inspired by fear, fear born of guilt. Timothy Bright, writing of neurotic fears,[5] distinguished them from those caused by the pangs of conscience:

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 61. 2. *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, p. 1114.
3. *Aeneid*, tr. Gavin Douglas, III. vi. 24. Cf. Surrey's translation of Book IV. 581.
4. W. B. Yeats, Epigraph to *Responsibilities*.
5. Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (1586), p. 193.

> Whatsoeuer molestation riseth directly as a proper object of the mind, that in that respect is not melancholicke, but hath a farther ground then fancie, and riseth from conscience, condemning the guiltie soule of those ingrauen lawes of nature, which no man is voide of, be he neuer so barbarous. This is it, that hath caused the prophane poets to haue fained Hecates Eumenides, and the infernall furies; which although they be but fained persons, yet the matter which is shewed vnder their maske, is serious, true, and of wofull experience.

These are the terrible dreams that nightly shake Macbeth and his wife; and the apocalyptic imagery that precedes and follows the murder of Duncan may be ascribed to the same cause, rather than to Macbeth's poetic temperament. Plutarch, in his *Morals*, declared[1] that

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

Before the end of the play Macbeth, having 'supped full with horrors', is no longer tortured by such 'fearfull perturbations': this is the measure of his damnation. As Curry says,[2] 'in proportion as the good in him diminishes, his liberty of free choice is determined more and more by evil inclination and . . . he cannot choose the better course.'

Although, as we have seen, the murders after the first are all motivated by a frantic desire for security, there are differences between them. The murder of Banquo is not merely due to his knowledge of the Weird Sisters' prophecy, which makes him a menace to Macbeth; nor is it due merely to the promise that Banquo's descendants would inherit the throne, powerful though both motives be. Macbeth fears Banquo's 'royalty of nature', the 'dauntless temper of his mind', and his wisdom. He fears them because they are a standing reproach to his own character, now stained with crime—'under him / My Genius is rebuk'd'. He hopes that by murdering Bánquo he will rid himself of this reproach; yet the act merely ensures that the reproach will be

1. *Morals*, tr. P. Holland (1601), pp. 545–6; cited Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (1930).
2. Curry, p. 105.

eternal. We may, perhaps, apply what J. P. Sartre says of murder to the killing of Banquo. He argues[1] that the murderer perpetuates the intolerable situation for which he did the deed by the act itself; for he kills his victim because he hates being the other's *object*, and by the murder this relationship is rendered irremediable. The victim has taken the key of this alienation into the tomb with him. 'So hatred is transformed into frustration even in its triumph.'

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

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

Yet at the beginning of the third act we find that he has done nothing to implement his vow; and Bradley argued[2] that

> 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.

Although Dover Wilson was right to protest that we should not treat a playwright as though he were a historian, although this interpretation of Banquo's character that 'he has yielded to evil' seems to be contradicted by Macbeth's tribute later in the scene, unless irony is intended, and although James I would not have approved of an unflattering portrait of his reputed ancestor, yet there is no need to suppose that an uncut version of the play (in which, for example, Banquo was in secret communication with Malcolm) would have made all plain.[3]

What ought Banquo to have done? It could be argued that he ought to have behaved loyally to Macbeth until Malcolm had set foot on Scottish soil. James condemned rebellion even against manifest tyrants. As he says in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*,[4]

> The wickednesse therefore of the King can neuer make them that are ordained to be iudged by him, to become his Iudges. . . Next, in place of relieuing the commonwealth out of distresse

1. *L'Etre et le Néant* (1943), p. 483.
2. Bradley, pp. 384–5.
3. Wilson, p. xvi.
4. *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain (1918), p. 66.

> (which is their onely excuse and colour) they shall heape double distresse and desolation vpon it; and so their rebellion shall procure the contrary effects that they pretend it for.

Even a bad king maintains order in the commonwealth, and except where his lusts or passions are involved, he will generally favour justice. If there is no king, James argued, there is a breakdown of morality: 'nothing is vnlawfull to none'.

On the other hand James was careful to point out that[1]

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

The situation was different in the Scotland of Duncan's time. Malcolm had been made Prince of Cumberland, but Macbeth had been elected by the thanes. Banquo had strong suspicions about the murder of Duncan; he feared that Macbeth had played most foully for the throne; but his duty was not by any means certain.

The long dialogue between Macbeth and the murderers of Banquo recalls John's temptation of Hubert and Claudius's temptation of Laertes. It shows us a Macbeth we had only glimpsed before and could not have foreseen before his first murder. He is revealed as a smooth-tongued 'politician', well able to 'beguile the time'. If it be said that the two murderers would have been content to do the deed without all this persuasion—that they only wanted the cash—it may be answered that Macbeth[2]

> wanted to subdue their wills. One sees him pacing the floor and weaving words like spells round the two wretches, stopping every now and then to eye them hard and close.

He wants them to do the deed out of hatred of Banquo, and not out of the need of money, so that he himself shall be relieved of some part of the guilt—so that he can cry, 'Thou canst not say I did it.' His speech about dogs, regarded by some as the least necessary speech in the play, serves to present one aspect of the order which he himself is destroying. There is a further signifi-

1. *Political Works*, ed. McIlwain (1918), p. 69.
2. Barker, p. 75.

cance of the scene: the cluster of echoes from the Sermon on the Mount make Macbeth bear witness, apparently unconsciously, to the ethic he is violating.

The later massacre of Macduff's family is not calculated to achieve a particular end. Destruction, though originating in fear, has come to be an end in itself. It has the effect of turning the man Macbeth fears into a determined avenger.

We must turn now to consider the other protagonist, the accomplice as well as the temptress of Macbeth. According to Coleridge,[1] she is not the monster, the fiend-like queen, that most eighteenth-century critics assumed her to be. On the contrary

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

Coleridge is reading back into the early scenes of the play the evidence provided by the sleep-walking scene. But although it is true that Lady Macbeth is not naturally depraved or conscienceless (any more than Satan was) she deliberately chooses evil, her choice being more deliberate than her husband's. Macbeth speaks of his ambition being his only spur; but he would never have overcome his reluctance to commit regicide without the chastisement of his wife's tongue, and she persuades him only after she has invoked the powers of darkness to take possession of her. The invocation is not metaphorical or symbolical, but in deadly earnest, and with belief in its efficacy. Curry argued:[2]

> Her prayer is apparently answered; with the coming of night her castle is . . . shrouded in just such a blackness as she desires. She knows also that these spiritual substances study eagerly the effects of mental activities upon the human body, waiting patiently for evidences of evil thought which will permit them entrance past the barriers of the human will into the body to possess it. They tend on mortal thoughts. For, says Cassian: 'It is clear that unclean spirits cannot make their way into those bodies they are going to seize upon, in any other way than by first taking possession of their minds and thoughts.'

1. *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, ed. T. Hawkes (1969), p. 218.
2. Curry, pp. 86–7.

> Thus, instead of guarding the workings of her mind against the assaults of wicked angels, Lady Macbeth deliberately wills that they subtly invade her body and so control it that the natural inclinations of the spirit toward goodness and compassion may be completely extirpated... And without doubt these ministers of evil do actually take possession of her body even in accordance with her desire.

W. Moelwyn Merchant more recently has argued[1] that Lady Macbeth's 'willed submission to demonic powers, her unequivocal resolve to lay her being open to the invasion of witchcraft, is held in dramatic contrast to the painful, casuistic deliberations of Macbeth'.

Mrs Siddons likewise declared[2] that Lady Macbeth, 'having impiously delivered herself up to the excitements of hell . . . is abandoned to the guidance of the demons she has invoked'. The great actress's belief is one of the reasons why her performance of the part has probably never been surpassed. In our own day Judi Dench's triumph in the part depended largely on the sense she gave of horrified belief in the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts. We need not assume that Shakespeare himself believed in demoniacal possession, any more than we need decide whether he followed Reginald Scot in his views of witchcraft,[3] or King James in his views on Divine Right. But in writing *King Lear* he had depicted Poor Tom as a feigned demoniac and he drew on Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impostures*[4] for details of the portrait, and this book would have made most readers sceptical. Yet there can be little doubt that he intended Lady Macbeth to believe herself to be possessed. In addition we can suppose that diabolical possession explains the unnatural portents on the night of the murder and what Curry calls[5] the 'demoniacal somnambulism' of the sleep-walking scene.

Some critics have sentimentalized the character of Lady Macbeth. She has been depicted as the loving wife with an affectionate and gentle disposition, a maternal figure, a sensual woman, and a neurotic.[6] Some have argued that her cry 'The

1. *SS* 19; reprinted in *Aspects of Macbeth*, ed. K. Muir and P. Edwards (1977).
2. Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (1834), II. 10 ff. For Judi Dench's performance (1977), see G. Lloyd Evans in Brown, p. 108.
3. Reginald Scott, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584).
4. *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (1952), Appendix.
5. Curry, p. 90.
6. Rosenberg, pp. 158 ff. For stage history of the play see also Dennis Bartholomeusz's *Macbeth and the Players* (1969) and G. Lloyd Evans's chapter in Brown.

Thane of Fife had a wife' shows that 'as a woman she can still feel for a murdered woman'. On the other hand, Bradley agreed[1] with Campbell when he insisted that 'in Lady Macbeth's misery there is no trace of contrition'. But this, surely, is to take the sleep-walking scene too literally. Although Lady Macbeth's obsession with the blood stains on her hand, and particularly with the *smell* of the blood, might be interpreted as a mere fear of detection, it also symbolizes, as Forman noticed,[2] her consciousness of guilt and the outrage she had committed on her own soul. It must be admitted, however, that a second personality which speaks through the patient's mouth, confessing sins and sometimes relating memories, was thought to be a characteristic of demoniacal somnambulism.[3] It may be retorted that the starless night, the prodigies accompanying the murder, the voice that cried 'Sleep no more' and the sleep-walking can all be explained without bringing in the supernatural at all. This may reflect an ambiguity in Shakespeare's mind, which he cultivated for dramatic reasons. The audience could take it either way, though the supernatural was to most of Shakespeare's original audience the more natural.

On the other hand it must be admitted that the wonderful scene in the third act where we see that the crime has not brought the criminals closer together, but has set an impassable barrier between them—this picture 'of the haunted desert of their souls'[4] which reveals that Lady Macbeth now realizes (what her husband knew at the time of the murder) what it is they have done—does not require, and may even be thought to exclude, that she should still be actively possessed; and the banquet scene, in which she recovers for a while and for the last time some semblance of her indomitable will, is not easy to reconcile with the demoniac theory; for in that case Satan would seem to be divided against himself, on the one hand driving Macbeth to exhibit his guilt, and on the other enabling Lady Macbeth to shield him. So in the sleep-walking scene, whether her involuntary confessions are the outpourings of her repressed conscience, or the treacherous words of the demon within her, we need not deny her (what Shakespeare must have given her) pity, as well as the terror she has never failed to arouse. The scene is so poignant that, as Bradley remarked,[5] for the moment 'all the language of

1. Bradley, p. 378.
2. See above, p. xvi. It recalls Pilate's symbolic washing of his hands.
3. Curry, p. 90.
4. Barker's phrase, but untraced.
5. Bradley, p. 400.

poetry . . . seems to be touched with unreality, and these brief toneless sentences seem the only voice of truth'. The language is almost that of the nursery:[1]

> One; two: why, then 'tis time to do't. . . . Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?. . . The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?. . . What, will these hands ne'er be clean?—No more o'that, my Lord, no more o' that. . . Here's the smell of the blood still.

The fact that we no longer believe in demons , and that Shakespeare's audience mostly did, does not diminish the dramatic effect for us; for with the fading of belief in the objective existence of devils, they and their operations can still symbolize the workings of evil in the hearts of men. It is not only the superstitious, but the guilty, to whom sleep is 'a verie hell and a place of damned persons', for it presents unto them[2]

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

The changes in custom and belief do not seriously detract from the universality of the tragedy. A. A. Smirnov, for example, had no difficulty in interpreting the play so as to make it conform to modern ideas of the supernatural:[3]

> The conversations of Macbeth with the witches and phantoms, like the famous dialogue of Ivan Karamazov with the devil, are but the inner dialectical struggle of Macbeth with himself. The struggle is projected on the supernatural plane, just as the socio-historical events arising from Macbeth's concrete actions are projected on the spiritual plane.

The trouble with such an interpretation is that the Weird Sisters on their first appearance were seen and addressed by Banquo; and although the ghost of Banquo has been regarded as a mere hallucination, like the air-drawn dagger, it was clearly more than a projection of guilt. Shakespeare is again ambiguous. The appearance to Macbeth alone would have seemed the same whether the ghost was indeed Banquo's, or imaginary, or (as Curry

1. Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence* (1972), p. 153.
2. Plutarch, *Morals*, tr. P. Holland (1601), p. 260.
3. A. A. Smirnov, *Shakespeare* (1937), p. 72.

argues[1]) an infernal illusion created by devils to bring about Macbeth's ruin. Devils 'are able to assume bodies of air, condensing it by virtue of their angelic natures insofar as is necessary for the forming of assumed bodies. . . Demons are enabled to induce in the imaginations of men, either waking or asleep, whatever visions and hallucinations they please.'

It is sometimes stated that, apart from the Macbeths, Banquo, and Macduff, the characters are 'flat' and lacking in individuality, and that some scenes are undramatic and (compared with the scenes in which Macbeth appears) rather dull. The flattening of the minor characters, however, is a legitimate dramatic device, used consistently by Shakespeare in order to focus attention on the protagonists.[2] Rosse, Angus, the Old Man, Lenox, Another Lord, the two Doctors, and the Waiting Gentlewoman, although depicted with few individualizing touches, together act as a kind of chorus. The words and actions of Rosse and Lenox are confusing, if not confused. Possibly some points have been obscured by cuts;[3] but any audience would obtain a general impression, which is all that is needed, of the gradual desertion of the thanes to Malcolm, so that at the end Macbeth is virtually alone. Two scenes which are most obviously choric (II. iv, III. vi) are by no means dull. The second of them, indeed, begins with a masterly exercise in irony.

It is not altogether accidental that some of the scenes which earlier critics regarded as of doubtful authenticity, or as irrelevant compliments to a king they dislike, or as concessions to the taste of the groundlings, or even as pieces of relaxed writing, have now come to be regarded as essential to the understanding of the play. The Porter scene, the passage about dogs, the speech on the King's Evil, and the first two scenes of the play have been discussed elsewhere.[4] But something may be added about the scene in England, particularly the self-accusation of Malcolm, which has been condemned as long-drawn-out and absurd. Harley Granville-Barker, while admitting what he regarded as lack of spontaneity in the writing, pointed out[5] the importance of the scene in the scheme of the play. It is the starting-point of the play's counter-action, the audience needs a breathing-space, and

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

1. Curry, pp. 73, 75.
2. U. Ellis-Fermor, *Shakespeare the Dramatist* (1961), p. 85.
3. See above, p. xxv.
4. See above, pp. xxv ff.
5. H. Granville-Barker, *Prefaces 6* (1974), p. 81.

The scene can also be defended as a 'mirror for magistrates', a discussion on the contrast between true royalty and tyranny that is very germane to the matter, and which readers of Holinshed would expect to be dramatized.[1] It would have pleased James I, who wrote on that subject in *Basikilon Doron*:[2]

> For a good King (after a happie and famous reigne) dieth in peace, lamented by his subjects, and admired by his neighbours; and leauing a reuerent renowne behinde him in earth, obtaineth the Crowne of eternall felicitie in heauen. And although some of them (which falleth out very rarelie) may be cut off by the treason of some vnnaturall subiects, yet liueth their fame after them, and some notable plague faileth neuer to ouertake the committers in this life, besides their infamie to all posterities hereafter: Where by the contrarie, a Tyrannes miserable and infamous life, armeth in end his owne Subiects to become his burreaux: and although that rebellion be euer vnlawfull on their part, yet is the world so wearied of him, that his fall is little meaned by the rest of his Subiects, and but smiled at by his neighbours. And besides the infamous memorie he leaueth behind him here, and the endlesse paine hee sustaineth hereafter, it oft falleth out, that the commiters not onely escape vnpunished, but further, the fact will remaine as allowed by the Law in diuers aages thereafter.

Perhaps, too, as L. C. Knights suggested,[3] the scene acts as a choric commentary:

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

Above all, the scene demonstrates effectively how Macbeth's misrule has made even the good suspect each other of treachery. It is worth remembering that the scene came over with painful vividness in the years immediately preceding World War II, at a

1. See IV. iii. Headnote.
2. James I, *Political Works* (1918), p. 19.
3. L. C. Knights, *Explorations* (1946), p. 28.

time when refugees were arriving in Britain with poignant tales of the effect of totalitarianism, with its terror, treachery, and suspicion, on family loyalty and the trustfulness of friends. Lastly, it should be stressed that the scene needs no apology in the theatre. The idea that the scene provides choric commentary rather than dramatized action is based, as Marvin Rosenberg points out,[1] on hindsight:

> If we know the outcome, we may be tempted to agree that Malcolm's antics with Macduff are 'tedious', a 'dull . . . perfunctory paraphrase from Holinshed'; a conventional exercise in deception leading without suspense to a foregone conclusion. To the *naive* spectator, however, the first half of the scene points dangerously to possible disaster, and the later part is charged with emotion.

The audience knows, as Malcolm and Macduff do not, that news is about to arrive of the extermination of the latter's family. Even with knowledgeable spectators, the scene is always successful, and it is greeted with prolonged applause. For the first time their moral sentiments and their aesthetic responses are able to coincide.

When the seventh edition was published in 1951, I was unduly anxious to defend imagistic criticism from attacks by admirers of Bradley, who complained that by concentrating on themes and images the new critics were leading readers away from action and character. Although Leavis and Knights campaigned against what they regarded as Bradley's weaknesses, Wilson Knight regarded himself as a follower. Of course the poetic dramas of Shakespeare are plays to be performed, not poems to be read—nearer to Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* than to *The Waste Land*.[2] Wilson Knight, who had played Shakespeare's major roles and had written on Shakespeare production, was never in danger of forgetting this.[3] Shakespeare wrote plays which are great poetry, as well as poetry which is embodied in great drama—and it is not always easy to preserve a nice balance between the two halves of this statement. Then, again, in the process of analysing one of the tragedies, and separating their themes, we are apt to fossilize the living substance, and to impose a modern, psychological, or an Elizabethan, meaning on its stranger and less formulable

1. Rosenberg, p. 543.
2. Knights, *op. cit.*, p. 18. '*Macbeth* has greater affinity with *The Waste Land* than with *The Doll's House*.'
3. Nor was I: in three different productions I have played three different parts.

significance. For what the groundlings and even the 'judicious' thought in Shakespeare's day may fall—did fall—as far short of a comprehensive and Shakespearian understanding of *Macbeth* as the speculations of Andrew Bradley or Wilson Knight.

The plays are so vast and so complex that we can make statements about them which seem contradictory, while both express some aspect of truth. We may, indeed, call *Macbeth* the greatest of morality plays, at the same time as we are aware that Shakespeare transcends the sublime story of a human soul on the way to damnation and that he shows us also indomitable energy, cherubim *horsed upon the sightless couriers of the air*, *Pity, like a naked new-born babe, striding the blast*, the very *frame of things disjoint*, and human life, a brief candle quenched in the dust of death, in all its splendours and miseries, and even in its crimes, not

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

We may not agree with Campbell when he spoke of *Macbeth* 'as the greatest treasure of our dramatic literature'[1] or with Masefield who called it 'the most glorious'[2] of Shakespeare's plays; but, despite its weaknesses (for which Shakespeare was probably not responsible), glory it certainly has, of a peculiar richness and intensity, which the poet seldom equalled and 'the achieve of, the mastery of the thing' which he surpassed, perhaps, only in *King Lear*.[3]

1. Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (1834), II. 6.
2. John Masefield, *Poetry* (1931), p. 13.
3. One is tempted to add, 'before the cuts made in the First Folio'.