

Macbeth's Motiveless Malignity: The "sweet discord" in Shakespeare's Craftsmanship

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Abstract:

Despite the enormous mass of critical scholarship available today to the student of Shakespeare, less has been said on the flaws that are inherent in the crafting of his plots compared with the enormous output we have on what I term his art: his vision, his poetry and the profound timeless truths that he has expressed about the human condition. Far from being the careful craftsman that many modern critics would have us believe he was, many of Shakespeare's dramatic plots suffer from the haste and carelessness with which they were often executed. In this paper, I focus on one of his great tragedies, *Macbeth*. My investigation into some of the play's oversights and structural weaknesses, especially with regard to the motives ascribed to Macbeth for the crimes he commits, sheds light on the flaws in Shakespeare's technique that we often overlook in our preoccupation with his artistry in this play.

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Macbeth has a long history of criticism behind it. Since its initial performance in the presence of King James I in the summer of 1606, it has been staged and read countless times and its many excellences in terms of language and thematic profundity have been the subjects of endless praise, debate and comment. But *Macbeth*, like most of Shakespeare's plays, has suffered from a surfeit of acclaim that, while deifying its author in the literary world, has also resulted in an unfortunate imbalance of perspective. Put another way, too many scholars have ignored some serious textual defects in Shakespeare's plays in general and *Macbeth* in particular.

The problem, as I see it, arises when what I term for the sake of convenience as Shakespeare's art is confused with his craft. For the purpose of this paper, I define as Shakespeare's art his creation of an unforgettable array of powerful characters as well as the poetry with which he has given a profound and complex unity to theme, emotion and action, particularly in his great tragedies like the one under discussion. Shakespeare's craft, on the other hand, reveals itself in his skill as a dramatist to construct a tightly knit and credible plot. Plot brings together the characters in a sequence of events and situations and the subsequent interplay between them constitutes dramatic action. Plot is, quite literally, the bare bones of any play, and like a skeleton, it is not visible and so, it does not intrude on our consciousness but without it, the play like the body, would suffer from having no form or shape.

However, because of its relative imperceptibility, a plot may contain flaws, some trivial and others serious, that are at times overlooked or excused, particularly when the craftsman also happens to be an artist of unparalleled genius as Shakespeare is. In his case, it has resulted occasionally in blame being ascribed to those who perceive a problem with his plot rather than to him. For example, commenting on those who are unconvinced of the dramatic necessity of the interminable dialogue between Malcolm and Macduff in Act 4 Sc 3, H. C. Goddard states, "If a passage with such patterns behind it is wanting in dramatic tension, it is surely more the actors' or readers' fault than Shakespeare's" (Goddard, 1951, p.131). It is a remark that forecloses criticism on the unnecessarily long exchange between Malcolm and Macduff, which I contend is actually detrimental to the mounting tension in the play's swift action. But more importantly, this remark overlooks the unpalatable motives that had undoubtedly prompted the dramatist to insert the flattering tributes, vital in an age of noble patronage, to the "king-becoming graces", "miraculous healing touch" and the "heavenly gift of prophecy" of his royal auditor. Assessments such as Prof. Goddard's attempt to ignore any shortcomings in Shakespeare's craft that may threaten to detract from his greatness as an artist.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind this distinction between Shakespeare's art and his craft when reading a play because it enables us to regard an oversight at the level of plot as precisely that and nothing more, instead of elaborately explaining it away as an instance of Shakespeare's artistry at work. Consider Goddard's solution to the problem of the Third Murderer in Act 3 Sc 3 in this context. Shakespeare's inclusion of a third murderer at the last minute is puzzling since in Act 3 Sc 1, Macbeth hires only two men to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. Shakespeare's oversight at this point is only in failing to show when or why Macbeth felt the need for a third murderer, although the Second Murderer's surly rejoinder, "He needs not our mistrust" in the opening lines of Scene 3 reveals that Macbeth's intrinsically suspicious nature may be the reason why he chooses another, presumably more trustworthy henchman, to spy on the other two to their resentment. However, Goddard postulates a more fascinating theory. He contends that when Macbeth retires to his chamber to rest before the banquet, he is so

full of anxiety about the scene being enacted in the woods that he is actually capable, through the sheer force of his own imagination, of projecting his spirit into the embodiment of an accomplice beside the two murderers who already lay in wait for Banquo and Fleance. Goddard bases his argument mainly on the six separate utterances of the Third Murderer, in which he traces echoes of former speeches of Macbeth (Goddard, 1951, pp. 123-5). These traces serve as Goddard's proof that the Third Murderer is no more than the manifestation of the spirit of Macbeth himself. Now I can accept that Macbeth somehow accomplishes this mystic dissociation of his body and spirit by an extraordinary feat of imagination because it is true that his imagination is considerable, particularly when he is under great stress, as exemplified in the knives and ghosts it conjures up so effortlessly. However, if this is the case, then it follows that two dour, uncouth, illiterate men like the First and Second Murderers, who actually perceive simultaneously the materialization of Macbeth's spirit in a corporeal form beside them, have imaginations too of proportions on par with Macbeth's own, and that seems highly improbable to me. But readers who favor a prosaic explanation over a fanciful interpretation are themselves dismissed by Goddard in his concluding remarks, "All this about the Third Murderer will be particularly abhorrent to "realists" who would bring everything to the bar of the senses, and logicians, whose fundamental axiom is that a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time ..." (Goddard, 1951, pp.125-6).

Nor is Goddard alone in putting forward theories of the kind decried by the 'realists' and 'logicians' he deplores. Other critics have also contributed their share in building up Shakespeare's reputation for the thematic unity underlying his dramatic action and expressed through his imagery, by taking up and forcibly shaping every little incongruity at the level of plot to fit into a play's general scheme in the belief that everything in that play, however insignificant, has a dramatic purpose. "The creative imagination has an abundance and employs it lavishly, yet never casually, but always in contribution to the main design" (Evans, 1952). Ribner (1951) concurs by stating with reference to *Macbeth* that "*Macbeth* is a closely knit, unified construction, every element of which is designed to support an intellectual statement, to which action, character and poetry all contribute". Bloom (1998) echoes Ribner by remarking, "*Macbeth* is an uncanny unity of setting, plot and characters, fused together beyond comparison with any other play of Shakespeare." These words are expressive of the general direction taken by the critics and commentators who make little or no distinction between the artist and the craftsman in Shakespeare out of a desire to uphold the myth that Shakespeare is both a careful and conscious artist. The result is that at times even those among the critics who express opinions to the contrary come under attack themselves. Knights's criticism of Prof. O.J. Campbell is a case in point. In his essay entitled "Shakespeare and the 'New' Critics", Campbell challenged the proponents of New Criticism, Cleanth Brooks and D.A. Traversi, for their attempts to seek in the construction of each play "an integrated system of connotation based on the iteration of certain words" and in that "system of sequence and repetition of images all the poetry of the play ... fused into intense impression" (Knights, 1968, p.221). Campbell's attitude that "Shakespeare never seems to have manipulated his imagery in this consciously scheming fashion", forms much of the basis of L.C. Knights' counterattack in "Some Contemporary Trends in Shakespearean Criticism".

However, my intention here is only to give some samples of the kind of criticism that concerns itself almost exclusively with locating symmetrical patterns in Shakespeare's plays, and not to denigrate scholars who, in the main, have certainly done more to enlighten us about Shakespeare than that often-ambiguous gentleman himself. Despite the frequently arbitrary and

sometimes extreme critical stances adopted by many critics, concurrence must be absolute with Eliot who has been quoted as saying, "When a poet is a great poet as Shakespeare is, we cannot judge of his greatness unaided; we need both the opinions of other poets, and the diverse views of critics who were not poets in order to help us to understand" (in Halliday, 1949). Nevertheless, the onesidedness of this constant projection of Shakespeare as a deliberate rather than a spontaneous artist compromises much of that which is valuable in Shakespearean criticism. The danger in this for amateur readers in particular, is that it misleads them into thinking that if Shakespeare is a great artist it must somehow mean that he is a careful craftsman too. That this is not always true is the purpose of this investigation.

The unevenness of Shakespeare's craftsmanship in the matter of plot construction is apparent even in the examination of the first Folio of *Macbeth* that was published in 1623. Of this Folio it has been said,

"An unsatisfactory text. There has been cutting - apart from *The Comedy of Errors*, it is the shortest of the plays - adaptation, and interpolation: the Hecate scenes are probably by Middleton, for the songs indicated in the stage directions of III. 5 and IV. i, 'Come away' and 'Black Spirits' occur in full in his *THE WITCH*. F. was certainly printed from a prompt copy, for the bookkeeper's note Ring the bell (II.3) has been printed in the text:

Malcolme, Banquo,
As from your Graues rise vp, and walke like Sprights
To countenance this horror, Ring the bell.
Bell rings. Enter Lady"

(Halliday, pp. 449-450)

The fact that the first printed edition of *Macbeth* was published posthumously and in such a form (i.e., based on a promptbook that actors and directors alike, undoubtedly tinkered with, in the seven years that had elapsed between Shakespeare's death and the play's formal publication) in no way alleviated the problems that already existed in the text. Bullough (1973) feels that "the presence of loose ends and unexplained references, has led some critics to regard it as a shortened play" (p. 423), the commonly held theory being that James I, before whom it was performed was no lover of long plays. Whether or not the first performance of *Macbeth* was given before the king, the subsequent performances were based on the shortened text.

If Shakespeare wrote the play to meet the deadline for its performance before the royal audience, then he would have certainly written precipitately, and with little time, it would seem, for revision. Moreover, as Prof. Bullough and others have indicated, the ultimate shape of the story came from a bewildering range of versions of the original chronicle of Macbeth who reigned in Scotland for seventeen years until his death in 1057, and who for the most part was a good king, unlike his dramatic counterpart. Shakespeare took something from every source, and from this compilation, shaped his tragic masterpiece. But the problem in such an amalgamation of material being translated in rapid composition is the inevitable result of many "loose ends and unevenness of style" (Bullough, 1973, p. 423). Consider three of the errors noted by Bullough at this point. The first is the surprising exclamation of Lady Macbeth,

What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me? (1:7, 18)

It is unclear precisely when, in fact, Macbeth had broken that "enterprise" to her. In his letter to her he mentions no more than the prophecies of the Weird Sisters, and in the brief

conversation between them after his arrival home and before the banquet for Duncan, the murder is never discussed openly with the exception of her own rather cryptic words,

" He that is coming
Must be provided for: and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom." (1:5, 65-9)

Even the more lengthy details of the plan and provisions for the conferment of blame are only made two scenes later in Act 1 Sc 7, soon after the speech of Lady Macbeth quoted earlier. Bullough notes that Shakespeare cannot have cut out a scene unless his plan originally began before Donwald's revolt (and so before the chroniclers supplied any material), and this being most unlikely, he probably "put in the suggestion, regardless of previous scenes, to show that Macbeth was already guilty of more than 'fantastical' ambition." (ibid, p. 423). The possibility indicated by Shakespeare himself, whether accidentally or in design, that the initial suggestion for the "enterprise" came from Macbeth opens up a range of important questions and tends to diminish considerably Lady Macbeth's role in the instigation of her husband's crime.

The second error is Macbeth's apparent ignorance of Cawdor's treachery in Act 1 Sc 3, 72-3, although Ross knows of it and suggests that he (i.e., Cawdor) was with the Norwegian King when Macbeth defeated the latter. The third inconsistency that appears between Act 3 Sc 6, 37-9 and Act 4 Sc 1, 139-143, has a more serious implication since "they make Macbeth aware of Macduff's flight before he is told (to his surprise) after the witches have vanished, that the thane has fled to England" (ibid. p. 52). In Act 3 Sc 6, in the conversation that takes place between Lennox and another lord, a speech transpires in which the nobleman informs Lennox that Malcolm is residing in the court of the English King and that "Thither Macduff/ Is gone to pray the holy king, upon his aid" and a few lines later, "And this report / Hath so exasperate the king (i.e., Macbeth) that he/ Prepares for some attempt of war." Despite this clear indication that Macbeth was already aware of and angered by Macduff's flight, yet, in the following scene, during his visit to the witches he seems ignorant of Macduff's flight when he decides to kill him after having already been warned against him. In addition, he displays surprise and chagrin when being told by Lennox shortly afterwards that "Macduff is fled to England." The earlier conversation between Lennox and the lord might have served as an excellent example of irony, had the line "And this report" been deleted, for then the audience alone would have known that Macbeth's victim has escaped before the tyrant is given pretended security by the witches in Act 4 Sc 1.

We can overlook discrepancies of this kind if they are too trivial to interfere with the action in the play. Take, for instance, the time element in the famous Banquet scene of Act 3 Sc 4 in which the nobles are invited to dinner at seven. However, the appearance of the ghost and the subsequent agitation of Macbeth disrupt the feast and force the guests to leave unceremoniously before they have a chance to begin their repast. Yet, in the brief conversation that ensues afterwards between husband and wife, Macbeth asks Lady Macbeth the time and she replies,

"Almost at odds with morning, which is which." (l. 127)

In other words, it is almost dawn already!

At this point, Macbeth decides to visit the witches, which raises an interesting question as to how he could have known where to find them, for presumably, as spirits of the air, they have

no fixed address. (Banquo: Whither are they vanished? Macbeth: Into the air; and what seemed corporal melted, / As breath into the wind....(1:3.80-3)) Nevertheless, because such inconsistencies do not impede the flow of action, nor do they detract from the overall impression the play leaves upon us, they can be set aside in a willing suspension of disbelief.

But other oversights can be significant especially if they occur at the level of the plot, for then, the resultant incongruities in the dramatic action can render much of the purpose of the play meaningless. Such is the case with the motives ascribed to Macbeth for the murders he commits. It is common knowledge among students of Shakespeare that *Macbeth* is a tragedy of ambition. Macbeth kills Duncan in order to become king. But for a general of his stature, who defeats two armies in one afternoon in Act 1 Sc 1, he and his wife plan a murder that is clumsy to say the very least. They also plan an equally crude ruse, whereby they daub the blood of Duncan on the faces and persons of his sleeping bodyguards after using their knives to kill him, seemingly unaware of the unlikelihood of 'murderers' to conveniently fall asleep by their victim's body after the commission of a crime of such magnitude. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's lack of foresight and psychological myopia results in a ruse that is so transparent in its child-like simplicity that it fools nobody. (For example, Lennox: Those of his chamber, as it seemed, had done't. (2:3, 100, my emphasis); Macduff's suspicions covertly conveyed in his refusal to attend Macbeth's coronation; Banquo's conviction more overtly expressed: "... and I fear/ Thou play'dst most foully for't" (3:1, 2-3), and finally, Donalbain's observation to Malcolm "the near in blood, the nearer bloody."(2:3, 140-1))

So, in fact, Macbeth who has been powerfully described as "an icon of one of the great potentialities of life", whose "deed of revolt is a deliberate defiance of the whole work of nature and a conscious enlightenment under the powers of evil " (Holloway, 1961, p. 73) emerges strangely in the light of logic, as a man lacking the most mundane of human qualities: commonsense! Granted, the ideas are mostly Lady Macbeth's; nevertheless, they have Macbeth's full approval, and she receives for her pains, the highest accolade a medieval man could offer: "thy undaunted mettle should compose nothing but males." (1:7, 73-4)

It would seem that the haste for such a badly planned and ill-executed murder is in part instigated by the fact that Duncan has formally appointed Malcolm as the Prince of Cumberland and therefore, his successor to the throne. It is, as Macbeth thinks of at one point, " a step / on which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap, / For in my way it lies" (1:3, 48-50). How Macbeth proposes to 'o'er-leap' it is the question. This is what Prof. Bullough has to say about the old royal Scottish laws of succession. The great-grandfather of the historical Macbeth and Duncan, Kenneth II "had arbitrarily changed the law of royal succession. Previously, there had been a complicated system of alternate succession by different branches of a family whereby a member of the king's predecessor inherited when a monarch died. In addition, there was an elective custom, for if an heir seemed too young or incapable to bear the rigors of leadership in that wild age, a more competent relative could be elected by the nobility. Kenneth II, anxious that his own son Malcolm should succeed him, introduced a law of primogeniture which was not universally agreeable. This is important for our knowledge of the historical Macbeth." (Bullough, 1973, p. 431)

It is also important for our knowledge of Shakespeare's Macbeth, who agonizes over the killing of the king, when its commission would have gained him little, with an heir already appointed to the throne. A practical alternative would have been for Macbeth to depose the king and his heir in a military coup, as it has so often happened in history, but this of course, has little literary interest. Instead, Macbeth chooses the secret path of murder, and, as pointed out earlier,

lacking foresight into its more obvious consequences, he could hardly have had the prescience to predict that Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's sons, would so conveniently flee, leaving the way clear for him. It is dramatic expediency, of course, without which another murder, that of Malcolm, would have been necessitated in order to secure the throne for him. The argument that Malcolm is under age holds little conviction, for he is obviously not a child in the sense that Macduff's son is; and anyway, only a few months later within the encompassment of the dramatic time element, Macduff is pleading with him for his return. Had Macbeth seized the throne on the pretext of Malcolm's youth, the law still required him to be elected by the nobles. It is not certain whether he would have secured the support of the Scottish thanes who, already suspicious of him, would not have gone, in any case, against the publicly stated wishes of the dead and much-loved Duncan. The Prince of Cumberland is introduced as a spur to goad Macbeth and his wife into action; yet the irony is that had there been no Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth's spiritual indecision over the commission of regicide would have had greater plausibility, for the death of the king would have smoothed his path, as the elder kinsman, to the throne. It is true that Macbeth thinks that he has the prophecy of the witches on his side. But even then, when he takes matters into his own hands, he would have known that he would eventually have to contend with the hurdle posed by Malcolm. It is this opacity of vision that contradicts the earlier presentation of Macbeth as the general and leader of men.

Interestingly enough, most of Shakespeare's dramatic flaws, even major ones like this, seem to consist of brief sentences or phrases that hold up the logic of the action only momentarily and unobtrusively. It is for this reason that they are often passed unnoticed or sacrificed to the more profound excellences of the play as a whole. The Prince of Cumberland and Macbeth's reaction to him are mentioned only once in Act 1 Sc4. He does not figure thereafter in his official capacity as the heir to the throne in the subsequent moments leading up to his father's murder. Macbeth's myopia may have been accidental; the shortsightedness of the critic, however, who sees a credible design in this, is deliberate. Prof. Charlton says of this point, " ... But very soon afterwards, the easier way is barred. Malcolm, now named as hereafter to bear the title Prince of Cumberland stands in the road by which, should Duncan by course of nature prematurely die, Macbeth might have hoped to climb into the royal inheritance. This unexpected turn of events is decisive." (Charlton, 1948, p.165) But he stops short of speculating why Shakespeare does not explain to his audience precisely how this problem can be circumvented with the murder of Duncan.

That Prof. Charlton was aware of it is evidenced in another place where he has quoted from Holinshed upon whose Chronicles Shakespeare drew mainly for the plot of *Macbeth*. He says, "But shortly afterwards, Duncan promoted his elder son Malcolm, Prince of Cumberland 'as it were thereby to appoint him his successor in the kingdom.' Macbeth was sore troubled by this - and apparently it would seem to have been an attempt to forestall the old laws of the realm, which barred succession to a minor" (p. 158-9). Again, the point has been cursorily dismissed, for nowhere is there evidence that Malcolm is, in fact, a minor. Certainly, his very first speech in the play, "This is the sergeant, / Who like a good and hardy soldier fought / 'Gainst my captivity" (Act 1 Sc 2, 3-5) is hardly reminiscent of an adolescent, let alone a child. And this impression is almost universally borne out by the fact that stage and film directors alike generally present Malcolm as a young man. Moreover, without the concrete presentation of any information in the play, it would be doubtful if Shakespeare's mainly English audience would have been conversant with the intricacies of the centuries-old Scottish laws of accession which, in contradistinction to

the English law, permitted a relative rather than a legitimate son of the king to succeed the throne.

If Shakespeare's first flaw was to include the mention of the Prince of Cumberland, his next one was to exclude the mention of Macbeth's children, or at least, a son. In *Antony and Cleopatra* too, Antony's children by Cleopatra (despite the evidence in Plutarch that they existed) are absent in the action, but then, they were, strictly speaking, not necessary in a play that dealt emphatically with adulterous love and not, like *King Lear*, with the parent-child relationship. In *Macbeth*, however, the existence of a son would have greatly enhanced Macbeth's motives for killing Banquo. In this, of course, Shakespeare who borrowed his material from historical gossip, was not wholly to be blamed, for in none of the many and varied reports on his life is there ever mentioned that Macbeth had any children. The historical Macbeth was succeeded by his stepson Lulach, who was killed after a brief year-long reign. Lady Macbeth's famous "I have given suck" (Act 1 Sc 7, 54) may have referred to the children she bore her first husband Gillecomgain, for there is no evidence that she had any children by Macbeth. In fact, certain well-known Shakespearean essays such as Cleanth Brooks' "The Naked Babe And The Cloak Of Manliness" have been worked around the theme that because he was barren (a point echoed by Macduff in his cry "He has no children" {Act 4 Sc 3, 217}), Macbeth waged war against other people's children. Sigmund Freud underlined this when he said of the prophecy made to Banquo, the father of a future line of kings, "Macbeth is incensed by this decree of destiny. He is not content with the satisfaction of his own ambition. He wants to found a dynasty - not to have murdered for the benefit of strangers. This point is overlooked if Shakespeare's play is regarded only as a tragedy of ambition. It is clear that Macbeth cannot live forever, and thus there is but one way for him to invalidate the part of the prophecy which opposes him - namely, to have children himself who can succeed him." (p. 41). The child, in different forms, becomes one of the central motifs in the play.

The theme of childlessness may seem rather outdated today but it furnishes me with an illustration of how Shakespeare's art can be in conflict with his craft over the question of Macbeth's motives for murder. The explicit reason for the attempted murder of Fleance according to the plot is that Macbeth wants to secure his throne for his (albeit non-existent) line from Banquo's descendants. Yet, there is also credible evidence gleaned by the proponents of the theme of childlessness from the various dialogues in the play to support their argument that Macbeth wants to avenge his childless state and get back at men who are fathers by killing their children. However, in reality, essays like those of Freud, Mahood and Adelman that are elaborate studies of this theme are based on a wealth of imagery from the play liberally supplied by Shakespeare the artist but which Shakespeare the craftsman fails to sustain because the plot of *Macbeth* does not support the notion that the attempted murder of Fleance, in particular, is due to any cause other than political expediency.

But even in this matter Shakespeare the craftsman has been negligent. He could have utilized the license so freely granted the writers of his times and tampered with history at this point to invent a son for Macbeth, even if only in passing reference, in order to give credibility to his murderous intentions towards Banquo and his son Fleance. After all, as Hapgood has noted, "Shakespeare did not often invent his plots but usually drew them from other works, still his unvarying practice was to rework them in such a way as to make them his own. And in performance his plots remain his 'and his alone'(my emphasis)" (Hapgood, 1988, p. 64). Instead, at the crucial juncture in the play when Macbeth entertains the idea of killing Banquo and

Fleance, the artist in Shakespeare triumphs over the craftsman to produce yet another of Macbeth's powerful soliloquies:

"Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings."
(Act 3 Sc 1, 60-9)

Under the circumstances, Macbeth's stated motive for murder here is a curious one indeed, for he wants to remove Banquo and Fleance in order to secure the throne for a non-existent child; a child, moreover, which he cannot be sure of begetting even at this point in the story. Macbeth's directive to his wife "Bring forth men children only" (Act 1 Sc 7. 72) seems a fairly clear indicative that she has not already done so. In fact, in light of his childlessness, the other motive Macbeth mentions at the beginning of Act 3 Sc 1 when he speaks of Banquo appears more plausible, but it also makes it akin to Iago's diabolical "motiveless malignity". The lines,

" 'Tis much he dares,
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and under him
My Genius is rebuked " (3:1. 50-5)

recall Iago's jealous recognition that both Othello and Michael Cassio are better men than he, instigating him to plot against them. A similar sense of envy furnishes Macbeth with a better reason for plotting the destruction of Banquo, rather than the suggestion that in conniving in his murder, he was merely attempting to thwart the witches' prophecies that he will be succeeded by Banquo's descendants.

The points made by Hapgood in the following observation "... the witches' prophecies are the most consistently important in Duncan's death; but in that case they are one instigating factor among many whereas with Banquo they are a prime consideration: the prophecies are the principal reason given for Banquo's hopes and Macbeth's fears" (Hapgood, 1988, p. 69), do not add up because Macbeth's fears have little credibility in the face of the nonexistence of a son and heir.

The third murder, the most bloody and brutal one of all, that of Lady Macduff and her children, is a senseless murder - the word "massacre" or the phrase uttered by Ross, "savagely slaughtered" (Act 4 Sc 3. 5) being more apposite. Again, Macbeth displays a singular lack of judgment, and like Othello, rushes into action when a little forethought might have saved him much grief later. As an experienced general, used to military campaigns and knowing well the useful bargaining points prisoners-of-war make, it is strange that he does not consider that, with Lady Macduff and her children taken hostage, he will be in a stronger position to bargain with Macduff. The motive suggested by Hapgood for the massacre of Macduff's family lacks

conviction when examined against actual textual evidence. He has said, "The prophecies in Part Three provide a second set of influences that affect the rest of the play. For Macbeth is warned to beware not only Macduff but all future holders of his title ("the thane of Fife"). This logic is so lightly indicated though, that few commentators have noticed it" (p. 69). So lightly indeed, that it does not appear that Macbeth notices it, either! This occurs in Act 4 Sc 1, 70-83. The Apparition says: "beware Macduff, / Beware the thane of Fife." Now, the apparition does mention Macduff specifically by name, which weakens the theory somewhat. Macbeth's response is indicated in two places. In line 74, he says, "Thou has harped my fear aright ", which as an indicator, could be read either way, i.e., "You have spoken rightly of my fears of Macduff " or else, "You have spoken rightly of the threat the entire Macduff clan poses for my security." Yet lines 82-4 make it explicit which of these alternatives is actually on Macbeth's mind. He says: "Then live, Macduff: what need I fear of thee? / But yet I'll make assurance double sure, / And take a bond of fate: thou shalt not live ..." Obviously, the annihilation of Macduff's bloodline is not what he is thinking about, at this point. That comes later as the result of thwarted fury and the outwitted tyrant's desire for vengeance. Hapgood (1988) has recapitulated Macbeth's motives thus, although the remarks in parenthesis are my refutations. He says: "... His prime motive in Part One is ambition for the glory of the crown; (but an ambition rendered pointless by the existence of the Prince of Cumberland.) in Part Two, he is most concerned with keeping safe the continuity of his line; (though such concern is meaningless to a childless man) while in Part Three he adds to that a concern for his survival (the subsequent events prove that the deaths of Lady Macduff and her children actually threaten his survival for they finally outrage his enemies into taking decisive action against him, an outcome which he should have been able to predict, knowing Macduff is in England to raise an army against him.)" (Hapgood. 1988, p. 67)

Yet, of all his murders, only Macbeth's massacre of the Macduff family, if taken as vengeance, is psychologically sound, based on the mentality of the despot. It also widens Macbeth's alienation from the audience. Goddard has said, "Deeds of violence that come exclusively out of the brute in man have no tragic significance and take their place in human memory with convulsions of nature and the struggle to survive of the lower orders of life ..." (Goddard, 1951, p. 115). The loss of his humanity disqualifies Macbeth as a worthy candidate for our pity, and as a murderer, he sinks in rank with the lower classes of the criminal. There is an interesting passage in *The Tempest* that recalls in many ways Macbeth himself and what he has become.

Sebastian : I remember / You did supplant your brother Prospero
 Antonio: True / And look how well my garments sit upon me, /
 Much feater than before: my brother's servants / Were
 then my fellows, now they are my men.
 Sebastian : But, for your conscience -
 Antonio : Ay, sir: where lies that? If 'twere a kibe / 'Twould put
 me to my slipper: but I feel not / This deity in my
 bosom: twenty consciences, / That stand 'twixt me
 and Milan, candied be they, / And melt ere they molest
 (Act 2 Sc 1, 2669-277)

This exchange carries the overtones of *Macbeth* perfectly, even to the echo of the clothes imagery that is one of the dominant motifs in the play (Spurgeon, 1930 and 1935 and Brooks, 1947). It illustrates the fact that Macbeth robbed by now of conscience and poetry, is about as

interesting a criminal as Antonio is. Goddard, of course, has defended Macbeth from the monstrous charge of being uninteresting. He says, in continuation of his previously quoted words, " ... But when a man of imagination - by which I mean a man in whom the image of God is distinct - stoops to crime, instantly transcendental powers rush to the scene as if fearful lest this single deed shift the moral center of the gravity of the universe, as a finger may tip an enormous boulder ... " (p. 115). This is powerful rhetoric but it fails to conceal the fact that the imagination that had characterized Macbeth earlier has been deadened completely in him now. For Lady Macduff and her children, he no longer has the sentiments once so finely expressed: "And pity, like a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast, or Heaven's cherubim horsed / Upon the sightless couriers of the air, / Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye, / That tears shall drown the wind." (Act 1 Sc 7. 21-6)

The tragedy of Macbeth is the isolation that all men who sacrifice honor and friendship to ambition, must eventually face from God and their fellow-men. Prof. Bamborough (1952) who has written a very interesting account of Renaissance psychological theory has mentioned among other things, that the Elizabethans believed that "to fall into Despair wherein the Soul loses faith in the infinite mercy of God would be a crime worse than any" (p. 51). The hellishness of the death-in-life situation of the pariah finds its final expression in poetry,

"My way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath
Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not."
(Act 5 Sc 3. 22-8)

When viewed within the context of the religious convictions of the Middle Ages, this is the ultimate crime of all, the only one in *Macbeth* to spring out of causes that are convincing. Macbeth dies damned, because he neither asks for nor receives forgiveness, either divine or human. And so, in the tragic darkness of his doom, his crimes have little significance and his motives even less. This is why it is possible to display an indulgence towards Shakespeare's carelessness in matters of plot, not usually extended to other writers, because by favoring art over craft, he seems to be saying in effect, "It does not matter what man does or why he does it. The consequences that he is left with are all that ultimately matters." And who can fault that?

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