HOLY TRINITY AND VILLAINOUS MULTIPLICITY IN THE CHRISTIAN SHAPE OF *MACBETH*

by

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis recapitulates the significance of number symbolism in *Macbeth* as outlined by A.L. Johnson and T. McAlindon and the significance of Christian imagery as outlined especially by R.M. Frye, Roy Walker and Glynne Wickham. It suggests that the three good kings in *Macbeth* are conceived as one of the play's trinities, with a level of allusion to the Christian Holy Trinity.

Secondly, the thesis identifies linguistic and metrical similarities between allusions to biblical villains, suggesting a more coherent pattern of such allusions than is usually suggested. Allusions (several not original) are suggested to the biblical narratives of Adam, Cain and Abel, Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, King Saul, Herod the Great, Herod Antipas and Lucifer.

Incidentally, new sources are suggested for Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, Macbeth's 'naked babe' soliloquy, and the death of Young Siward.

Finally, the thesis attempts to bring these insights into relationship with more recent general criticism of *Macbeth.*

36,542 words

For

Doug Gallaher

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HOLY TRINITY AND VILLAINOUS MULTIPLICITY IN THE CHRISTIAN SHAPE OF *MACBETH*

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this thesis I try to relate the number symbolism in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to the Christian imagery, in two main ways. First, I try to show that the three good kings, Duncan, Malcolm and Edward, can be counted as one of the play's several trinities. The key argument is that, since they are all holy and also respectively father, son and an unseen holy third, there is a level of allusion to the Christian trinity.

In the second section of the thesis, I try to show that Macbeth's moral decline is marked by allusion to a multiplicity of biblical villains. Most of them have been identified before. I argue that there is a more detailed and systematic relationship between them than has previously been suggested.

At the heart of this interpretation is a new reading of Act 4 Scene 3, the longest scene in *Macbeth*. In that scene, I argue that the very problematic characterisation of Malcolm is best explained by reference to Christ. Secondly, I suggest that the attributes of the unseen Edward can be explained by reference to the attributes of the Holy Spirit. Arguing outwards from Act 4 Scene 3, I look at the rest of Malcolm, most especially Act 1 Scene 4 and the final scenes. Next, I examine Duncan, both in terms of his role as *pater patriae*, but also in terms of the undeniable Christ-imagery which is clustered round his betrayal, death and wounded body.

In the second section of the thesis, I look first at the several accepted allusions to biblical villains in *Macbeth*. Then I draw attention to some linguistic, thematic and metrical similarities between them. In greater detail, I examine the possible villain references in turn, giving a chapter to each. This does result in some unevenness of length in the chapters; but one long chapter for this section of the thesis seemed the greater evil to avoid. In the last chapter of the thesis, I try to bring all these analyses into dialogue with more general recent criticism of *Macbeth*.

1. Number Symbolism

My starting point is the work on number symbolism in *Macbeth* carried out by T. McAlindon, which independently confirmed the very similar, slightly earlier, conclusions of A L Johnson. [1] I shall mainly refer to McAlindon. He convincingly demonstrates the play's concern with the dangers of multiplication, expressed both in the language of doubling and trebling and also in the presence of dangerous binities and evil trinities - most obviously the trinity of the witches, with their 'double double' and 'thrice...thrice...and thrice again'.

McAlindon relates this symbolism to the cosmology of Empedocles, which he regards as Shakespeare's preferred cosmological framework in the tragedies. Empedocles' view of the contrarious cosmos regarded a certain amount of strife between the four classical elements and humours as a continuous, proper and creative state of things. McAlindon argues that Shakespeare found this model best suited for his interpretive and expressive work. [2]

It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the general merits of this argument about Shakespeare's cosmology. I will return to it, to a limited extent, when discussing the

ending of *Macbeth*. Meanwhile, I would reiterate that the more specific argument about the number symbolism in the text is compelling, even when, as in Johnson's work, it is not related to any particular overarching cosmological theory.

The danger of multiplication, in the number theory of Shakespeare's time and earlier, was that it tended away from the ideal of Unity - Oneness - towards Infinity, which was equated with chaos. We tend to think of unity, only because we have first thought of division: when a politician pleads for party unity, or a bishop for church unity, we can be fairly certain that the party or the church is already riven by division. But to earlier thought, unity was literally prior. The Greek monad and Juadeo-Christian montheism emphasised that unity was the essence of One.[3] If human affairs showed signs of disunity, it was because they had fallen away from oneness. Doubling and trebling, the first steps in multiplication, were thus the first steps towards infinity and chaos.

However, in the number symbolism of the period, three-ness was not always evil. It could not be, because of the Christian notion of the Holy Trinity.[4] Pietro Bongo, for example, in his *De Numerorum Mysteria*, has close to a hundred pages on the number three and, in all of them, three-ness is a good thing - the next best thing, indeed, to one-ness. Bongo writes of three-ness in the sky, in the human body, in the human mind, three-ness in philosophy and many more. He has, in fact, more than thirty areas of thought or observation in which three-ness is a principle of description or interpretation, and it is always good.[5]

Three-ness was the second category of multiplication, but its numerical content was also held to offer a check to the dangerous multiplicatory process. This was because it had a

fixed central point of reference, which was always present as a remedy for the danger of ultimate division. Perhaps the easiest way to imagine this is as the number three appears on a die. The central point is deemed to hold the two outer points together, which might otherwise pull completely apart. And the central point is, again, One, as it would appear on the die without the outer two points.[6]

Bongo writes, '...for in the ternary there is beginning, middle and end, whence three is all things. And earlier theologians, as they ascribed the beginning, middle and end as attributes of God, offered three in sacrifices.'[7] In this move to the theological level of interpretation Bongo tends to use three-ness as a kind of *imago Dei* in the whole created order. That things can be interpreted in threes is thus a reflection of the fact that their Creator is himself a three-in-one.

The argument which I wish to make is thus completely compatible with the number symbolism of the period and its appearance in *Macbeth*. In McAlindon's terms, it is to propose, in the three good kings, a trinity of good, which is in contrarious strife with the evil trinities of the witches and their familiars.

The key elements of number symbolism in the language and action of *Macbeth* are binary and ternary multiplication (doubling and trebling) and the presence of binities and trinities. The fullest exposition of that symbolism so far has been made by McAlindon and Johnson, who agree, with only small differences, that the doubling and trebling, binities and trinities are uniformly sinister. There are three Witches: it is the first thing we are told about them. (1.1.1). They make their prophecies in threes: Glamis, Cawdor, King. (1.3.48-50). They

chant their dances in triple time: 'Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine/ And thrice again to make up nine.' (1.3.35-6). Macbeth himself is responsible for three crimes: the murders of Duncan, Banquo and Macduff's family. For the second of these crimes he mysteriously uses three murderers.

The witches also chant in duple time: 'Double, double, toil and trouble' (4.1.10). They induce a radical schism in Macbeth's personality. Just as Lady Macbeth picks up their triple language when she first greets her husband (1.5.54-5), so she also uses the language of duplicity when greeting Duncan: 'All our service,/ In every point twice done and then done double,/ Were poor and single business...' (1.6.14-16)[8]

That it is Lady Macbeth who is given this language also reinforces the obvious point that *Macbeth*, more than any other tragedy, is the tragedy not just of a single man, but also of a unity – a marriage – which is broken into its two constituent parts.

The unity of the Macbeths' partnership of greatness is necessary to the initial crime. Without her driving him, it seems that he would not kill Duncan; but in the king's bedchamber only he can do 'the deed'. In the commission of the murder, however, they become essentially separate, coming and going to and from Duncan's bedroom twice each, and still making a mess of things. Stephen Booth is exactly right to point out that this is a difficulty in finishing the business off[9] - in trammelling up the consequences - but it is also an exercise in contrary activity between two plotters who are supposed to have the same plan.

In the commission of the crime, in the planning of subsequent crimes, and in the mental torture which each suffers, they become entirely separate from each other. She cannot see his ghost: he cannot see her damned spot. They are in separate chambers of hell. Their crime breaks apart their partnership as surely as it ruins them individually and the nation corporately. The most tragic doubling in *Macbeth* is the separation between these two who were one.

The earliest, and in some ways most problematic use of 'doubly redoubling', is in the Captain's speech:

> If I say sooth, I must report they were
> As cannons overcharg'd with double cracks;
> So they
> Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe:
> Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
> Or memorize another Golgotha... 1.2.36-41

The Captain's words give early encouragement to the attempt to link the play's multiplication symbolism to its religious imagery. The Captain's thought progresses from sword strokes, through the wounds they make, to the blood flowing from the wounds of the crucified Christ, to Golgotha. Perhaps also, though, we see here the evil of the multiplicatory process moving towards what, in Christian terms, is evil's worst accomplishment: the killing of the Son of God.

The progression of evil is linked to numerical and temporal progression. Beatrice Kliman, without referring to number symbolism, makes the point that there is a recurring pattern of scenes in which either Macbeth or Lady Macbeth is first on stage alone and then joined by the other, and that these are counterpointed by scenes which start with or build to include

potentially large numbers on stage.[10] But the key numerical progression is from two to three. We see it most obviously in the Murderers of Banquo. Laurence Olivier, as Macbeth in the RSC Byam Shaw production, famously drew the two Murderers into a witchlike threesome on the stage in Act 3 Scene 1, even before the third Murderer is added at the murder scene. The mysterious addition of the Third Murderer, whoever it is, is made more sinister by the fact that we do not know his or her identity. While this has usually been understood to lend a certain eeriness to the Third Murderer's presence, it also makes it not impossible to view the process of evil as chilling, impersonal, mathematical progression.

The same numerical progression is in Macbeth's

> Two truths are told
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme. 1.3.127-129

And in Lady Macbeth's:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
> What thou art promis'd 1.5.15-16

> Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
> Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter!
> Thy letters have transported me beyond
> This ignorant present, and I feel now
> The future in an instant. 1.5.54-58

I have included the whole of the speech to show how closely this numerical progression is linked to the progression of time. Macbeth later says:

> She should have died hereafter:
> There would have been a time for such a word -
> To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time; 5.5.17-21

This is an easier speech to feel than to expound, but the triple repetition of to-morrow is part of the progression from two to three. Tomorrow is theoretically a binary word: it relates two days to each other. But here it moves towards threeness and thence to the infinity of death and nothingness.[11] That the progress of time may also be measured in syllables is a point to which I shall return.

In Act 4 Scene 3, as we shall see, the fear of nothingness and infinity is brought strongly into play in the imagery surrounding Malcolm and Macduff. Malcolm's harms are 'confineless' (4.3.55). Macduff is 'Naught that I am' (4.3.225).[12] McAlindon also points out that Macbeth always wants more and is contemptuous of enough.[13] Stephen Booth brings out powerfully Macbeth's inability to finish anything: the daggers, Malcolm, Fleance (even Banquo), Macduff.[14] Unfinishedness, infinity, and what Booth calls indefinition, are related concepts very often in play in *Macbeth*.

2. Christian Imagery[15]

The body of scholarship which deals with the play's Christian imagery is far more extensive than that which deals with its number symbolism. So far as I can discover, the three good kings have never been suggested before as a trinity, with or without reference to the Holy Trinity of Christianity. The closest, I think, is Anthony Paul:

> the heavy emphasis on Duncan as a vessel of divine grace is far from accidental, nor is it a matter of convention (or mere opportunistic flattery of the play's royal spectator): Shakespeare's kings are not particularly pious or virtuous; it is the more remarkable that this play contains three who are on the whole both. These good kings provide, obviously, a strong and in a sense simple dramatic contrast with the tyrant, but the contrast is also part of a consistent pattern of allusion to the central Judaeo-Christian myth of the Fall, and to Christ's redemption of fallen humanity.[16]

Scholars have also alluded to Duncan as *pater patriae*, and Malcolm as a Christ figure. No-one, so far as I know, has suggested any direct relationship between Edward and the Holy Spirit. There has been also an attribution of Christ-like qualities to Duncan. Reference to most of these streams of scholarship will be made in the main body of this thesis.

There is a sense that each of the kings gives one major problem to the argument I am proposing. With Malcolm, it is his fundamental credibility as a character or human being. Proposing so flawed a character as a Christ-figure may seem fraught with difficulty. The problem with Duncan is just the reverse. There is well-recognised Christ imagery all around him at some key moments: how can he figure as Father in a trinity? With Edward, there is quite a strong consensus that he is only present to please Shakespeare's royal patron. Most productions[17] cut Malcolm's description of him. It could seem improbable that one could successfully ascribe to him any real thematic significance.

On the other hand, the notion of kings as the 'little gods' of their realms was very topical at the time of *Macbeth*. As Garry Wills has noted, King James made precisely that point in his address to Parliament to justify his thesis that he had been inspired by God to see through the Gunpowder Plot.[18] Not all scholars accept the complete pervasiveness in *Macbeth* of the Gunpowder theme for which Wills argues, but this way of thinking about kings was in any case entirely characteristic of James who, in his coronation address, uses the Christ-models of shepherd and bridegroom to describe his relationship to his people.

I am aware of no reference to the King as reflecting the work of the holy trinity; but it is at least worth pointing out that one of the most famous examples of English royal iconography is the triptych of Charles I in which the king's head is painted three times.[19]

To my mind, two scholars stand out in the field of Christian interpretation of *Macbeth*: Roy Walker and R. M. Frye. Frye's contribution, set in a general framework of measured scepticism about the extent of Christian content in Shakespeare's plays, still holds good as an introduction to one side of the Christian resonance of *Macbeth*:

> That Macbeth degenerated into a viciously evil man, there can be no doubt, and it is also true that we can clearly trace in his degeneration the patterns of the course of sin which the theologians taught. *Macbeth* represents as fully drawn a portrait of human sin as anything in Bunyan or Milton or Dante, and I find no essential difference between Shakespeare's view of the devil's operation and theirs.[20]

The fascination of studying *Macbeth* lies very largely in considering the detail behind this generalisation about its main tragic protagonist (and, one would want to add, about Lady Macbeth) but, with the caveat that it *is* a generalisation, it still stands.

Walker's main contribution is to a Christian understanding of the other side of the contrarious strife. The significance of the Judas-Last Supper-Crucifixion imagery hovering around the death of Duncan, of the 'light of eternity...investing him with a golden halo of divinity...' of his burial at Iona: all these and more we owe in large measure to Walker's committed advocacy and detailed insight. Not everyone, by any means, would agree with all his conclusions, or with the weight he gives to them; but, in the discussion of the Christian significance of any part of *Macbeth*, his work cannot be ignored.[21]

Both these scholars worked some years ago. Christian themes have only recently begun again to form a large part of the critical debate about *Macbeth.* For the purposes of this thesis, however, some engagement will need to be made with recent views of Duncan and Malcolm (and, by implication, even Edward) which are quite sharply critical.

With this agenda in mind, I now turn to Act 4 Scene 3: the scene which Jane H. Jack describes as 'the most sustainedly and explicitly Christian in the tragedy.'[22]

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[1] T. McAlindon, *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 200-208. A. L. Johnson, 'Number Symbolism in *Macbeth',* Universita di Pisa: *Analysis,* 4 (1986) 25-41. I owe a personal debt to Professor McAlindon who, with great kindness and patience, read and commented upon some of my earliest thoughts on the themes of this thesis.
[2] McAlindon, pp. 1-13.
[3] 'Thus we compare God to the centre, about whom all things exist and from whom the whole universe proceeds in proper order to the world...He is called One because he is the beginning of all numbers. But also God because he is the end of all things, the peace of all, and absolute felicity.' Pietro Bongo, *Mysticae numerorum significationis liber,* (Bergamo: 1585) Citation from the expanded edition *De Numerorum Mysteria,* (Basel: 1618), pp. 184-185. The translation is my own.
[4] 'Why the number three should be associated with witchcraft in Christian tradition might seem puzzling. The Christian deity after all is a Holy Trinity; indeed in many cultures, three is a symbol of fullness, power and divinity. The explanation, of course, lies in the fact that witchcraft, like devilry, is a rival system which parodies that which it seeks to overthrow.' McAlindon, pp. 204-205
[5] Bongo, pp. 95-185
[6] Classically, though, the number three is usually represented as a triangle of points, the most basic figure which can enclose, or limit, a space. Number symbolism was Pythagorean in origin.
[7] Bongo, p. 96
[8] Quotations from *Macbeth*, unless otherwise stated, are from *Macbeth,* ed. by Kenneth Muir, 9th edn with corrections, The Arden Shakespeare (London and New York: Methuen, 1972). Hereafter cited as Muir.
[9] Stephen Booth, *'King Lear', 'Macbeth', Indefinition and Tragedy,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 93-94
[10] Beatrice Kliman, *Macbeth,* in the Shakespeare in Performance series, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 4
[11] See, especially, James L. Calderwood, ''More Than What You Were': Augmentation and Increase in *Macbeth', ELR,* 14 (1984), 70-82
[12] I here disagree with Muir's gloss that 'naught' is short for naughty – though the two meanings have, in any case, the same etymological root
[13] McAlindon, p. 201
[14] Booth, pp. 93-94
[15] I have used the term 'Christian'. I would wish at the outset, however, to acknowledge that those parts of this thesis which deal, for example, with Adam and Eve or Cain and Abel, deal with narratives which did not first belong to Christians.

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[16] Anthony Paul, *Macbeth, Tragedy and Chiasmus,* (Amsterdam: Thesis Publishers, 1992), p. 160. For pure comedy, W. A. Murray is also interesting: '....the play contains...not ONE but TWO saintly kings...' (his capitals). But it is not TWO but THREE! W. A. Murray, 'Why was Duncan's Blood Golden?', *Shakespeare Survey*, 19 (1966), 34-44

[17] For example, Orson Welles' film and Michael Bogdanov's television versions, to which reference will be made later.

[18] Garry Wills, *Witches and Jesuits,* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p. 18

[19] So far as I know, there is no particular trinitarian thinking behind the image, beyond the fact that tryptich is in itself a religious form influenced by the Christian doctrine of trinity.

[20] R. M. Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 144. The theologians referred to are Luther, Calvin and Hooker.

[21] Roy Walker, *The Time is Free,* (London: Greaves, 1948), passim: the citation is from p. 54.

[22] Jane H Jack, '*Macbeth*, King James and the Bible', *ELH*, 22 (1955), 173-193, p. 178

CHAPTER 2 ACT 4 SCENE 3

Introduction

The central idea of this chapter is that Malcolm's characterisation in Act 4 Scene 3 is an allusion to the temptation of Christ. There is, at once, a possible cue for the reference. Malcolm describes himself as 'a weak poor innocent lamb'. (4.3.16) Many scholars have noted the possible allusion to Christ the *agnus Dei*.[1] This argument also gives new significance to the description of Malcolm's extremely holy mother (4.3.109-111). In general, a religious interpretation of the scene is justified by the great deal of religious imagery in it, especially as very little of that imagery is present in the sources at this point.

Malcolm's two descriptions of himself, on this reading, are sourced from the biblical understanding of the temptation of Christ, and most especially from Hebrews 4.15: 'For wee have not an high Priest which cannot bee touched with the feeling of our infirmities, [but one who] was in *all things tempted in like sort, yet without sin.*'[2] The first part of the italicised section can explain the absoluteness of Malcolm's potential evil; the second part explains the description of his absolute purity. The explanations can help to bring together the insights of, for example, L.C. Knights,[3] who finds Malcolm expressing something more than the merely personal, and A.R. Braunmuller, who argues that both descriptions are potentially true of Malcolm as a person.[4]

The threefold structure of Malcolm's first self-description, accurately identified by Garry Wills,[5] is sourced in the New Testament narrative of the threefold Temptation of Christ in the wilderness by Satan. The tripleness of the Temptation was thought to be a particularly

important aspect of it, as is evidenced, in particular, in the Mystery Plays. This tripleness, and Christ's rejection of it, was held to be the mirror image of a tripleness in the temptation of Adam, to which Adam succumbed. At this point in the Chester Mystery Play cycle, an expositor comes on stage explicitly to make the comparison, immediately after the Temptation scene.[6] I shall raise the possibility of a similar relationship between the triple temptation to which Macbeth succumbs and the triple temptation which Malcolm here encounters and resists.

But Macbeth's primary role in Act 4 Scene 3 – into which, as James L Calderwood perceptively argues, he seems mysteriously to extend his presence[7] – is as the potential tempter and corrupter of Malcolm: 'Devilish Macbeth' who, says Malcolm, 'By many of these trains hath sought to win me into his power' (4.3.117-119). Diabolical imagery surrounds him in the scene: 'Devilish Macbeth' (4.3.117); 'the legions/ Of Horrid hell...a devil more damn'd/ In evils' (4.3.55-7); 'Oh Hell-kite!' (4.3.217); 'this fiend of Scotland' (4.3.233).

Earlier in the play we have seen Macbeth first ruin and then corrupt two, or possibly three people, turning them into murderers (3.1). In Act 4 Scene 3, the question is whether Macbeth can similarly corrupt Malcolm. If he can, the evil possibilities are literally infinite: 'confineless harms' (4.3.54); 'Boundless intemperance' (4.3.66); 'staunchless avarice' (4.3.78); 'all continent impediments 'o'erbear' (4.3.64). In Calderwood's terms, Macbeth will have extended his evil presence to the universal scale. In Macbeth's own terms, he will have incarnadined the multitudinous seas. In terms of the contemporary

number symbolism, he will 'confound/ All unity' (4.3.99-100) and usher in the chaos of infinity.

Malcolm could really take this route – as Christ could have – for the binary is truly ambivalent, as Braunmuller has most clearly seen. Vincent Hopper comments,

> The number two appears always to have carried with it the idea of mutual antithesis found in the duals of nature, whether in the great Manichean duad, or in the Christian God-man[8]

These words apply very much to Malcolm. But, from his binary options, he chooses the way of virgin purity, and the process towards infinite chaos immediately stops.

To complete the number symbolism, a third term – a third good king – is added to make up a trinity which is in Empedoclean contrarious strife with the trinities of the witches and the murderers. Around Edward clusters imagery of mysterious intercession, the seal of inheritance, gifts of prophecy and healing. In every case, these gifts are specific to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, and often found in lists together. I shall argue that Edward is not properly cuttable from *Macbeth*.

1. Religious imagery in Act 4 Scene 3

The extent of the religious imagery in 4.3 is often unnoticed.[9] The scene has 240 lines. By my count, religious imagery occurs in at least 72 of them. Broadly speaking, the religious imagery consists of the description of King Edward of England, diabolical imagery attached to Macbeth, and references by Malcolm and Macduff to heaven and the heavenly powers.

In this respect, the scene is very different from its sources. The only religious image that I can find in Holinshed at this point is Makduffe's, 'for auarice is the root of all mischief',[10] a biblical[11] reference which Shakespeare turns into 'This avarice/ Sticks deeper, grows with more pernicious root...' (4.3.84-85). The entirely religious description of Edward is probably sourced in Holinshed, but Shakespeare has brought it in from a different place in the source, and makes significant changes to it.[12]

There is a little more religious thinking in Buchanan:

> Macduff urged Malcolm to attempt the recovery of his paternal throne, especially, as he could not without the greatest guilt leave the impious murder of his father unpunished, neglect the miseries of a people committed to him by God himself, or turn a deaf ear to the just petitions of his friends. Besides, he might rely on the assistance of his ally, the excellent king Edward, and on the affections of the people, who hated the tyrant, nor would the favour of the Deity, to aid a just cause against the wicked, be withheld.[13]

Neither of these remotely accounts for the amount of religious imagery in Shakespeare's version of the scene. Given the amount of religious imagery he has added to 4.3, it makes good sense to attempt a religious interpretation of it.

Various religious interpretations have been attempted. Walker and Calderwood read Macduff's family as sacrificial victims.[14] Wills and Calderwood most strongly pick out the scene's ritual quality. Orson Welles' film version of the scene takes place with a massive cross in the background, though Malcolm's first self-description is cut.[15] Experts in the contemporary religious sources, like Elliott, Coursen, Siegel and Milward,[16] have identified the sources of a number of the scene's religious images.

However, no-one, so far as I am aware, has drawn a direct comparison to the Temptation of Christ. Perhaps Elliott comes closest:

> But every man who examines himself humbly and closely must perceive the germs of all sins in his own nature; and Malcolm knows that supreme power is the climate wherein they can terribly flourish. He hopes to avoid that fate by magnifying, for the purpose of full and clear scrutiny, his own potential wickedness. Accordingly, his long confessional speeches in the presence of Macduff have very much the quality and tone of soliloquies addressed to the audience and to God above.[17]

2. The characterisation of Malcolm - 'tis hard to reconcile'

L.C. Knights, without the same religious idea as Elliott, makes a similar point about the tone of Malcolm's address, when he writes that Malcolm here 'has ceased to be a person. His lines repeat and magnify the evils attributed to Macbeth.' Knights calls this 'choric commentary.'[18] Calderwood expresses what seems to me the same feeling, but with a slightly different analysis:

> Malcolm takes on Macbeth's evils at such rhetorical length and with such studied ostentation that we cannot help feeling a radical disproportion between form and function in this scene. Surely Shakespeare goes far beyond any tactical need for Malcolm to test Macduff's loyalty.[19]

The tone and address in these speeches is also, of course, a particular problem for the actor who plays them:

> Trader Faulkner, who played Malcolm in the 1955 Stratford production, recalls arguing with Keith Michell (Macduff), Laurence Olivier (Macbeth), and Byam Shaw (the director): 'They said, 'You're too convincing in the contradictory aspects of the character. You're convincing when you say you're true and you're totally convincing when you say, 'I didn't mean a word of it.'[20]

A. R. Braunmuller, who cites this story in his introduction to the New Cambridge *Macbeth*, uses it as part of an argument that both Malcolm's self-descriptions are capable of being believed of him as a person. In Braunmuller's argument, the question posed by the scene is which description of Malcolm will be accepted by Macduff as true. The

evidence for both descriptions is equal. Braunmuller thus plays up Malcolm's binary ambivalence to the full. He also has a way of explaining Macduff's lingering indecision, which is a factor significantly absent from the sources.[21] He does not make anything, however, of the scene's religious content, which seems to me an important weakness.

I agree with Braunmuller and Faulkner that Malcolm's description of his own evil should be played as really possible for the character, rather than as a pretence to test Macduff, or a more detached commentary on the state of Scotland or the nature of kingship. The first person is repeatedly insistent in both the grammar and the feeling of the lines, from line 50: 'It is myself I mean, in whom I know...' to line 102: 'I am as I have spoken.' To this extent, at least, Faulkner 's interpretation of lines 50-102 seems true to the text.

This impression is reinforced by three important liquid images, one in each passage of Malcolm's first self-description: 'The cistern of my lust' (4.3.63); 'a sauce/ To make me hunger more' (4.3.82); 'I should/ Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell' (4.3.98). Important, too, is the opposite image of taste: 'the king-becoming graces...I have no relish of them (4.3.91-95). Not to be too crude about it, the impression is of a man whose juices are flowing at the prospect of his own evil.

Calderwood is thus surely right when he says that Shakespeare has taken Malcolm way beyond a pretence to test Macduff. The whole difficulty of the scene – and Braunmuller correctly notes that it is a difficulty we share with Macduff – is in reconciling this apparent relish of evil with the second description of Malcolm's absolute purity.

Moreover, it is from Shakespeare, not the sources, that that second description comes. In Holinshed, Malcolm claims no particular virtue, but merely says:

> Be of good comfort, Makduffe, for I haue none of these vices before remembered, but haue iested with thee in this manner, onelie to prove thy mind:[22]

It would be not nearly so problematic if Malcolm's first self-description in *Macbeth* were followed by this moderate disavowal, rather than the claim to extreme virtue which we have in the text.

I take Hebrews 4.15 as the key to unlock this problem. As the writer to Hebrews describes Christ, so Malcolm also is 'tempted at all points like as we are, yet without sin.'[23] If you take the verse literally, and try to imagine what it would feel like as a psychology, you will find a problem of psychological improbability very closely congruent with the problem posed by Malcolm. Most people, or at least most men, are capable of imagining and enjoying some of the pictures of evil pleasure which Malcolm paints. But we would tend to think that this is so because we are imperfect beings - in Christian terms, sinful beings. Hebrews 4.15, if taken literally, invites us to consider a human being, who is tempted 'in all things' like as we are; (and who presumably, therefore, knows all Malcolm's pictures) yet who is absolutely sinless. Psychologically, this is extremely difficult to imagine, for the pictures themselves seem to us the products of our imperfection.

My point is that, psychologically, the Malcolm of Act 4 Scene 3 is difficult to imagine, and to play, in a precisely congruent sense. The picture of his virgin purity, unchanging honesty, unswerving loyalty, uncovetousness and delight in the truth is, as Macduff

rightly says, 'hard to reconcile' (4.3.138-139) with his intimate acquaintance with the pictures of evil.

3. The threefold structure of the temptation

The idea that allusion to the Temptation of Christ might explain the problematic characterisation of Malcolm is given strong reinforcement by Garry Wills' analysis of the ritual triple structure of Malcolm's first self-description:

> The first thing to notice about this scene is its ritual nature. Malcolm makes three charges against himself, and Macduff makes three formal answers of roughly the same length. Then when Macduff has passed the test, Malcolm abjures each of his three charges, leaving Macduff bewildered by the whole manipulative process.[24]

The narrative of the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness has exactly this triple structure: three temptations followed by three responses. In Matthew 4. 1-11, Christ is tempted to turn stones into bread, to allay his hunger; then to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, to test God and the angels' care of him; then to worship the Devil, for the sake of universal power. Christ responds first, 'Man shall not live by bread onely' (Matthew 4. 4); second, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God' (Matthew 4. 7); and third, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.' (Matthew 4. 10).

The temptation of Christ probably held an important place in the Christian and dramatic imagination of Shakespeare's time, not just because it was an important moment in the biblical narrative of the life of Christ, but also because it had been a major scene in the Mystery Plays. Thus in *Chester 12 (The Butchers),* Sathanas tests Christ three times and is astonished at having found a human being who can resist the triple temptation. He

makes direct comparison to his successful temptation of Adam, in a speech of bitter comedy:

> Out, alas! That me is woe
> for found I never so great a foe.
> Though I to threepe be never soe throe,
> I am overcommen thrye.[25]
> Alas, my slight nowe am I qwyt.
> Adam I founded with a fytt,
> and him in comberans soonne I knyt
> through contyse of my crafte.
> Nowe soone of sorrowe he mone be shitt
> and I punished in hell-pitt;
> Knewe I never man of such wytt
> as hym that I have lafte.
>
> Alas! For shame! I am shent
> With helhoundes when I am hent
> I must be ragged and all to-rent
> And dryven to the fyre.
> Therefore is nowe myne intent,
> Or I goe to make my testament.
> To all that in this place be lent
> I bequeath the shitte.[26]

Satan exits and an Expositor enters. What he expounds is essentially the argument of Romans 5: that, after Adam's succumbing to temptation, there is needed a second Adam who, when tempted, will not fall. Christ has proved to be that man. (Romans 5. 12-21). We are perhaps most familiar with the idea from Elgar's setting of Cardinal J.M. Newman's words in *The Dream of Gerontius*:

> O loving wisdom of our God, when all was sin and shame
> A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.
> O wisest love, that flesh and blood which did in Adam fail
> Should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.

The Chester expositor adds a further point: that the temptation of Adam and the Temptation of Christ are composed of an exactly congruent tripleness. Adam was tempted to gluttony, vainglory, and avarice, to exactly the same three sins as Christ.[27]

The tripleness of the temptation of Adam is hard to detect, as is the temptation of Christ to gluttony; but it does not matter, for the present purpose, that this is a very strained reading of both narratives. What does matter is that the comparison was still current in Shakespeare's time[28] and that the relationship thus described is again exactly congruent with that between Macbeth and Malcolm. Macbeth is tempted in triple form - Glamis, Cawdor, king - and succumbs to the temptation, plunging the whole realm into chaos and destruction. Malcolm is tempted in triple form and emerges virgin pure, raising the whole realm – indeed, the very time – into freedom and release.

1 will later set out other reasons for comparing Macbeth to Adam. In this context, I would only add that the triple form is very carefully reiterated in his wife's first greeting to him, and that the involvement of his wife in his temptation is the most obvious similarity between him and Adam. J.M. Nosworthy writes: 'Macbeth and Adam are, after all, the two characters who embrace sin with tragic consequences; Lady Macbeth and Eve the potent agents of temptation.'[29]

In his introduction to *Macbeth* in The Riverside Shakespeare, Frank Kermode writes:

> Macbeth is subjected to a temptation which, like those undergone by Christ, exactly reflects what the powers of evil know to be the desires of the mind. It is not inhuman or even extraordinary to undergo such a temptation, but to succumb to it is precisely to give one's soul to the common enemy of man.[30]

I agree, but would want to add that exactly the same is true of Malcolm, word for word. I must admit that I am surprised how little attention is paid to the idea of temptation in current scholarship on *Macbeth*. Kermode is unusual in making quite so much of it.

In particular, since Bradley, this omission has crucially complicated our view of Banquo. In terms of the orthodox [sc Augustinian] doctrine of temptation which would have been part of Shakespeare's mental furniture, at the end of the process of temptation lies the deed itself. Both Banquo and Malcolm are strongly tempted; but neither of them does the deed. If we do not understand this, we do not fully understand why 'the deed' is so important in *Macbeth*.

4. Devilish Macbeth

If Malcolm is the tempted, then the Tempter is Macbeth. A relationship between Lucifer or Satan and Macbeth has long been recognised. Lucifer was the archetypal Renaissance rebel. He is directly referred to in 4.3.22: 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.' For the Christ allusion for which I am arguing, it is not unimportant that we find these words specifically on the lips of Malcolm. In Luke 10. 18, it is Christ who says to his disciples, 'I sawe Satan, like lightning, fall downe from heaven.'

If we regard Malcolm's first self-description as one of his temptation, rather than just a pretence to test Macduff, he nonetheless directly attributes it to Macbeth, with a telling diabolical adjective: 'Devilish Macbeth/ By many of these trains hath sought to win me/ Into his power' (4.3.117). In fact, diabolical imagery surrounds Macbeth throughout the scene.

The first example may well be 'This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues...' (4.3.12). I have always imagined that our most famous theatrical superstition may have its

genesis in these words, but it is more pertinent that there was a popular fear of naming the Devil which may also have given rise to what Nicholas Brooke calls the insistent anonymity of 'th'other Devil' in the Porter scene (2.3.9).[31] Perhaps the theatrical superstition has more profound roots than we think.

Secondly, there is Malcolm's description of himself: 'When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head...' (4.3.45). In the context I have been describing, this picture of Malcolm's relationship to Macbeth is telling. The Edenic curse on the serpent, that the woman's seed would bruise its head, has been interpreted in all Christian eras as a prophecy that Christ, 'the Son of Man', would tread upon the head of Satan in ultimate victory. Genesis 3. 15 in the Geneva reads 'He shalle break thine head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. The glosses make clear that this means Christ will break 'the power of sinne and death' and that 'Satan shall sting Christ and his members, but not overcome them.'[32]

More obvious examples of diabolical allusion to Macbeth are:

Macd	Not in the legions[33] Of horrid Hell can come a devil more damn'd In evils to top Macbeth.	4.3.57
	......O Hell-kite	4.3.216
	Bring thou this fiend of Scotland...	4.3.233

The sense of Macbeth's extension of his malign presence into this scene is wonderfully caught by Calderwood:

> when Macduff in far-off England learns of his woes, Macbeth seems almost physically present, in part because of Malcolm's imitation of the tyrant in his testing of Macduff (IV.iii.1-114) and in part because of the contrast between the saintly hand of Edward the Confessor, whose touch heals 'evil' so easily, and the

> murderous hand of Macbeth; which has just reached forth its evil and touched Macduff. Macbeth has not merely erased in-betweeness; he has extended himself everywhere.[34]

5. Infinity, chaos, more and enough

The general lack of attention paid to the specific concept of infinity in Malcolm's first self-description must, I think, be called a real critical weakness, because the concept is so repetitively invoked. Malcolm's harms are 'confineless'[35] (4.3.55); 'there's no bottom, none,' in his voluptuousness (4.3.61); his desire 'all continent impediments would o'erbear' (4.3.64); his intemperance is 'boundless' (4.3.67); his avarice is 'staunchless' (4.3.78); he would 'confound/ All unity on earth...' (4.3.98-9).

Alongside this goes a desire for more and more. His poor country 'Shall have more vices than it had before,/ More suffer, and more sundry ways than ever'; (4.3.46-47) he has 'All the particulars of vice...' (4.3.51); no amount of women, any of condition, could fill up the cistern of his lust (4.3.61-63); his 'more-having would be as a sauce to make [him] hunger more' (4.3.81-82); he abounds 'In the division of each several crime,/ Acting it many ways (4.3.95-97).

These two things together are quite simply multiplication tending to infinity, like the grains of wheat on the chessboard.[36] This is intimately connected with Calderwood's idea of Macbeth's infinite extension of himself. We have already seen Macbeth, in Act 1 Scene 4, ruin and then corrupt two men, infecting them with his own hatred of Banquo and making them murderers like himself. Before the crime can be committed, they have been supplemented by a third, who may be some mysterious spirit figure, or Macbeth himself, or, more likely, just another poor victim of his corruption. Whoever the third is,

what we really need to realise, as McAlindon correctly notes, is that the two have very quickly become three (3.3.1).[37] Macbeth's contagion is spreading.

In this self-description, Malcolm raises the danger that he too will be infected with Macbeth's yearning for more – 'Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more...' (1.3.70) – and what McAlindon calls his contempt for enough[38] – 'And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!' (5.8.34). Macduff makes clear that this is the crisis. If Malcolm does become like this, if he falls to the temptation, there are no hopes for Scotland. It will be plunged into infinite chaos.[39]

6. Malcolm's holy mother

Finally, in relation the to the Christ-allusion in Malcolm, we need to notice Shakespeare's picture of his holy mother. 'The Queen, that bore thee,/ Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,/ Died ev'ry day she liv'd...' (4.3.109-111). This is quite unhistorical. It may be one of those places where Shakespeare has shifted a generation. Malcolm's wife, the saint-queen Margaret was like this, but not his mother. Richard P Wheeler writes that the description of Malcolm's mother makes him 'symbolically the child of something approximating virgin birth.'[40] Quite so.

'Died ev'ry day she lived' is usually referred to Paul's 'I die dayly' in 1 Corinthians 15. 31,[41] but there may be an allusion to the prophesied sword which would pierce Mary's soul in Luke 2. 35. Mary's suffering at the cross was a key dramatic component in her representation in some of the Mystery Plays. At Coventry, she cries, 'A deth, deth, deth, why wilt thou not me kylle?' and 'A hert, hert, why wylt thou not breke?'[42]

7. Edward of England and the gifts of the Spirit

Calderwood's contrast between the healing hand of Edward and the murderous hand of Macbeth is compelling. In each case, the king affects the action on the stage from a remote location. Edward's unseenness is an important part of the possibility that he can be likened to the Holy Spirit.[43]

In the New Testament epistles there are a number of attributes specific to the working of the Holy Spirit, as contrasted to those which are attributed to Christ or the Father. Lists of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5. 22) and the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12 passim) are present, as well as reflections on the ministry of the Spirit. The most characteristic gift of the Spirit was probably the gift of tongues, to which Paul may have been referring when he wrote in Romans 8. 26f,

> Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for wee know not what to pray as wee ought, but the Spirit itself maketh request for us with sighs, which cannot be expressed. But hee that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the meaning of the Spirit, for hee maketh request for ye Saints according to the will of God.

It is the second of these verses that may be important for an understanding of Edward. As with the Spirit, there is a mystery about the manner of Edward's intercession for the weak and infirm. 'How he solicits Heaven /He himself best knows...' (4.3.149-150). The gift of tongues was probably little practised in Shakespeare's time; but the idea of the Holy Spirit within the heart, helping the Christian to pray when he or she cannot find the words, has been a precious and central part of the doctrine of the Spirit in all Christian periods. Another idea associated exclusively with the Spirit is that of the seal or pledge of inheritance. The 'golden stamp' which Edward sets about the necks of those he cures is

not present in Holinshed, though it may have been known from other sources. In Shakespeare's version, it is immediately linked with the idea of inheritance: 'and 'tis spoken,/ To the succeeding royalty he leaves/ the healing benediction.' (4.3.154-156) Consider Ephesians 1. 13: 'yee were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Which is the earnest of our inheritance.'[44]

In the lists of the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament, the highest gift after the apostolate is the gift of prophecy. In the New Testament, prophecy is always an activity of the Spirit (as opposed to the Old Testament in which prophecy is usually, though not always, an activity of the Word of the Lord.) This gift is also attributed to Edward, as one of 'sundry blessings' which 'hang about his throne' and 'speak him full of grace.' (4.3.157-159). Grace, in the Greek, is *charis,* and the sundry gifts of the Spirit are literally *charismata* - things of grace.

8. Contrarious trinities

There is much more evidence about Duncan and Malcolm to be adduced from earlier in the play, but with the addition of Edward a trinity is completed. It is a trinity of holiness: the 'most sainted king' (4.3.109) Duncan; the pure sinless Malcolm, and the unseen Edward, mysteriously 'full of grace' (4.3.159).

If Malcolm is thus made a Christ figure, his resistance against temptation, as the middle term of the Trinity, makes him also exactly that central point in the three of a die which holds the centre and acts as the limit which prevents one-ness – unity – being confounded into infinity and chaos. The tension towards more and more - and thus towards infinity

is immense in his description of his temptations, but he holds firm. From this point onward, we never seriously doubt the victory of goodness over evil in the play.[45]

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[1] For example, Walker, *The Time is Free,* p. 158, although with a shift of emphasis: 'Macduff has offered up his young poor innocent lamb [sc. Young Macduff] to appease an angry god, but the lamb is not Malcolm and the angry god is not Macbeth. The Lamb is the Son, and wisdom it was to offer the Lamb though his Mother could not understand it.' The suggestive capitals are Walker's. See also Paul N. Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise,* (New York University Press: New York, 1957) , p. 145. For a different (but in my view very unconvincing) account of the lamb image, see Garry Wills, pp. 116-117.

[2] Biblical quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from the *Geneva Bible*, The Samuel Henson Simpson Memorial Edition, ed. by Michael H. Brown, (Pleasant Hope, Missouri: L. L. Brown, 1993).

[3] L.C. Knights, *Explorations,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 28

[4] *Macbeth,* ed. by A.R. Braunmuller, (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 92+93

[5] Wills, pp. 116-7

[6] *The Chester Mystery Cycle,* ed. by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills (London, New York, Toronto: OUP, 1974), p. 223.

[7] James L. Calderwood, 'Macbeth: counter-Hamlet', *Shakespeare Studies,* 17 (1985), 103-121

[8] Vincent Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 4

[9] For example, the scene of Malcolm's exile in England is immediately set by the image of his weeping in the shade (4.3.1-2). The archetypal biblical image of exile is similarly the children of Israel weeping under the willows by the rivers of Babylon (Psalm 137. 1-2) The allusion is not certain, but the similarity is suggestive.

[10] All references to Holinshed are from *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* (6 vols.) (London, J. Johnson et al., 1807) This one is from volume V, p. 274

[11] I Timothy 6. 10

[12] Holinshed, I p. 754

[13] Buchanan, *Rerum Scoticarum Historia,* (Edinburgi: ap. A. Arbuthnetum, 1582), tr. by J. Aikman, 1827. Cited in Muir, Appendix B p. 178. Bullough's version is slightly less clear.

[14] Walker in the passage last cited, Calderwood in James L. Calderwood, *'If It Were Done': 'Macbeth' and Tragic Action,* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 101

[15] *Macbeth*, Dir. Orson Welles. Morningstar Entertainment 1948

[16] G.R. Elliott, *Dramatic Providence in Macbeth,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), H.R. Coursen, *Christian Ritual and the world of Shakespeare's Tragedies,* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1976); Peter Milward, *Biblical Influence in the Great Tragedies,* Renaissance Monographs 11, (Renaissance Institute, Tokyo, 1985). Siegel, op.cit.

[17] Elliott, p. 170

[18] Knights, *Explorations*, p. 28

[19] Calderwood, *If it were done,* p.101

[20] Braunmuller, p. 93

[21] Braunmuller, pp. 92-94

[22] Holinshed, V p. 275

[23] The Authorised Version translation

[24] Wills, p. 116

[25] ie thrice. This relationship to threeness was an accepted part of the number analysis of the doctrine of this scene. Thus Bongo, pp. 106-107: 'But what is much more wonderful, is that in temptations, the Devil, having been overcome three times by us, goes away weak and confused, because he cannot shame us or make us worship him. Thus Satan is deservedly compared to a Panther, which in trying to capture its prey, unless it has caught up with its prey by the third leap, angrily gives up the chase. Such is the strength and potency of this number...By reason of this mystery Satan, waging war with Christ, repulsed and defeated three times, retreated.'

[26] *The Chester Mystery Cycle,* p. 223. The last four lines are from the alternative H reading.

[27] ibid pp. 224-225

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[28] The strength of this idea of the threeness of the temptation is remarkable. For example, in Thomas Taylor, *Christ's Combate and Conquest,* (Cambridge: Cantrelle Legge, 1618), the first page is devoted to a diagrammatic synopsis of the temptation of Christ, which is divided into three parts: preparation, combate and issue. Each of the first two is further subdivided into three, respectively: Christ's entering the lists; his expectance of the enimie; entrance of the adversarie; and then the three temptations themselves.
[29] J. M. Nosworthy, *Life and Letters*, 56 (1948), p. 258. Cited in Clifford Davidson, *The Primrose Way,* (Westburg: Iowa, 1970), p. 10
[30] *The Riverside Shakespeare,* ed. by G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edn. (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 1356
[31] *Macbeth,* ed. by Nicholas Brooke, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 81
[32] Cp also, the petition in the *Book of Common Prayer* Litany 'and finally to beat down Satan under our feet.'
[33] cp Mark 5. 9 'And hee asked [the unclean spirit], What is thy name? And he answered, saying My name is Legion: for we are many.'
[34] Calderwood, '*Macbeth:* counter-*Hamlet*', p. 106
[35] Not elsewhere used in Shakespeare, notes Muir.
[36] In the old story, which has many rescensions, the sultan asks the vizier to suggest a reward for his service. The vizier asks for one grain of wheat on the first square of the chessboard, two on the second, four on the third, eight on the fourth and so on. The sultan agrees, only to discover that he would be bankrupted long before the sixty-fourth square is reached, because of the power of the geometrical progression
[37] McAlindon, p. 205
[38] McAlindon, p. 201
[39] McAlindon, pp. 200-214 passim
[40] Richard P. Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and counter-turn,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 146
[41] So Malone, cited with some approval by Muir *ad loc*
[42] Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays,* (London: Routledge + Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 265
[43] I am indebted to my friend Doug Gallaher for first pointing out to me the importance of Edward's invisibility.
[44] I should point out, however, that the inheritance motif is firmly stated in Holinshed, I p. 754
[45] *Stet.* Postmodern attempts at Macbeth, amongst whom one would count Sinfield, Booth, Adelman, Evans, Berger, (and amongst directors Bogdanov) have challenged this moral alignment in the play. In the final section of this thesis, I shall attempt to bring some of those insights into dialogue with the interpretation which I here suggest. But I do think that this sentence stands.

CHAPTER 3 MALCOLM AND CHRIST IN THE REST OF THE PLAY

Introduction

The question for this chapter is whether the suggested allusion to Christ is a way to understand Malcolm in 4.3 only, or whether the allusion is maintained throughout the play. I argued that 4.3 has a pivotal place in the structure of *Macbeth* which depends on the Christ allusion. It follows that one would expect to find that pattern of imagery reiterated at other points in the play. The most important scene which I must next consider is the only one in which Malcolm and his father appear together at any length: Act 1 Scene 4.

1. Act 1 Scene 4

a. The penitence of Cawdor

In 1.4, Malcolm is given the speech which describes the dying Cawdor's repentance. The speech is addressed to Duncan. Repentance was routinely asked of those condemned to death, so that their physical death might lead to the eternal salvation of their souls. Perhaps we are most familiar with the genre from *Henry V*, where Scroop, Cambridge and Grey make set-piece speeches of repentance to the Christian king. For the sake of justice and the safety of the state, he condemns them to death. But he also feelingly prays for God's mercy on them.[1] At the time of writing of *Macbeth*, a number of religious figures, including the Jesuit Henry Garnet, would have been invited on the scaffold to repent of their part in the Gunpowder plot. Garnet was Superior of the English Jesuits. He used the alias 'Farmer' and upheld the idea of equivocation as ethically permissible for a Christian: that one might deliberately use words which were literally true, but which convey a misleading meaning to the hearers. Many critics therefore suggest that the Porter's 'farmer' (2.3.4) may allude to him. Whether Garnet 'confess'd his treasons' (1.4.5) was a matter of real political debate.

This topical theme may, to some extent, lie behind the description of the scaffold repentance of Cawdor.

Walker pointed out, further, the continuing comparison between the old thane of Cawdor and the new one.[2] After Malcolm's speech, when Duncan says of Cawdor, 'He was a gentleman on whom I built/ An absolute trust', Macbeth immediately enters to be greeted as 'worthiest cousin' (1.4.13-14); but we already know that the new Thane of Cawdor may prove as treacherous as the old. The contrast continues at the end of the play. Although Macbeth feels the blood of Macduff's family as a charge upon his soul, to the extent that he avoids him in the fight; he will not, nonetheless, put himself to public show as Cawdor has to, and courts damnation rather than blessing with his last words in the play: 'And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!' (5.8.34)[3]

All these insights have validity, but they miss one aspect of the speech which I think is vital: the importance of who speaks it to whom. It is Malcolm, the son, who represents Cawdor's repentance to Duncan, the father. This representational movement from son to father of the repentance of a sinner has interesting resonances of the relationship between Christ and the Father in the New Testament. In the heavenly courtroom scene, as the New Testament writers imagine it, God the Father is the Judge, while Christ the Son is the counsel for the defence on behalf of the sinner. (The prosecutor or 'accuser', incidentally, is Satan.[4]) *The locus classicus* for this image is 1 John 2.1: 'if any man sinne, we have an Advocate with the Father, Iesus Christ the Iust...' This intercession by Christ with the Father, on behalf of the penitent sinner, is conceived as an eternal part of the significance of Christ's heavenly presence: 'hee ever liveth to make intercession for them.' (Hebrews

7.25) It is the most characteristic image of the eternal relationship subsisting between Christ and the Father in the Christian tradition.

For this reason, Milton, for example, makes it central to the Father-Son relationship in *Paradise Lost* where, 'The Son of God presents to his Father the prayers of our first parents now repenting, and intercedes for them...' (*Book 11 Preface*).[5] It is too strong, perhaps, to say that Malcolm pleads on Cawdor's behalf, but he certainly represents Cawdor's repentance and his prayers for mercy to his father: 'very frankly he confess'd his treasons,/ Implored your Highness' pardon, and set forth a deep repentance' (1.4.5-6). The Thane is conceived as a penitent on a very orthodox model. That it is Malcolm who so describes him to Duncan is, I suggest, the most important aspect of the passage.[6]

It may be also that the image of the thane 'As one who had been studied in his death/ To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd,/ As 'twere a careless trifle' (1.4.8-10) is conceived from Christ's teaching in Matthew 16.25 that whosoever will lay down his lose his life for Christ's sake will find it - an image which resonates with Malcolm's holy mother who 'died ev'ry day she lived' (4.3.111). There is little doubt, I think, that Shakespeare's audience would have understood from this picture of Cawdor that he had duly repented and laid down his life in such a way as to 'find it' in the hereafter.

b. Messiah/Satan and the stone of stumbling

The mention of Milton brings me to the second passage in Act 1 Scene 4 that I want to consider: the election of Malcolm as Prince of Cumberland and successor to his father and Macbeth's reaction to it.

Dun. Sons, kinsmen, Thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm; whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland: which honour must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers. 1.4.35-42

Holinshed has 'Macbeth was sore troubled herewith, for that he saw by this means his hope sore hindered'.[7] The laws of succession in Scotland at this time are not entirely clear, but Duncan's choosing of his son to succeed him, and Macbeth's disappointment at it, were historical facts according to Shakespeare's sources. However, this is also a moment in which several commentators - Coleridge being the most famous - have seen a Christ allusion.[8]

Coleridge's insight seems to have worked through the medium of Milton. He probably detected a resonance, not of Christ *simpliciter*, but of a passage in *Paradise Lost* depicting Christ and Satan. I have to be rather vague here, because Coleridge left only the lecture note 'Messiah/Satan'. Terence Hawkes writes: 'H.N. Coleridge [who worked up Coleridge's lecture notes into publishable form] interprets this, rightly I think, as a comparison of Malcolm and Macbeth to Milton's Messiah and Satan, *Paradise Lost V 600-615.*'[9] This version, worked up by Coleridge's later editors, is cited by Bradley, when commenting upon Macbeth's restless decision to attack Macduff's castle. Bradley's comment '[Macbeth] can still destroy..' is accompanied by the footnote:

> For only in destroying I find ease
> To my relentless thoughts Paradise Lost IX.129
>
> Milton's portrayal of Satan's misery here, and at the beginning of Book IV., might well have been suggested by *Macbeth*. Coleridge, after quoting Duncan's speech, I.iv.35f says, 'It is a fancy; but I can never read this, and the following speeches of Macbeth, without involuntarily thinking of the Miltonic Messiah and Satan.' I doubt

> if it was just a fancy. (It will be remembered that Milton thought at one time of writing a tragedy on Macbeth.)[10]

The last sentence is perhaps overstated. Milton left a long list of notes, naming several stories which might be worked up into a tragedy. Macbeth is briefly mentioned in the list, without reference to Shakespeare's play.[11] I know of no evidence that he took the project any further.

It will be noted that Coleridge and Bradley are commenting on different passages in *Macbeth* and that we have no direct information about where in *Paradise Lost* Coleridge found a similarity to *Macbeth* Act 1 Scene 4. Almost certainly, he was thinking of *Book 5.600-665*. It is worth quoting the first part of this, which certainly has a similar feel and structure to Duncan's election of Malcolm:

> Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
> Hear my decree which unrevok't shall stand.
> This day have I begot whom I declare
> My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
> And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
> All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord;
> Under his great Vicegerent Reign abide
> United as one individual Soule
> For ever happie... *Paradise Lost* 5.600-611

If Coleridge had in mind a later passage, in which Satan's jealous feelings are supposed to be like Macbeth's, it is probably this:

> But not so wak'd
> *Satan,* so call him now, his former name
> Is heard no more in Heav'n; hee, of the first,
> If not the first Arch-Angel, great in Power,
> In favour and prae-eminence, yet fraught

With envy against the Son of God, that day
Honourd by his great Father, and proclaimed
Messiah, King anointed, could not beare
Through pride that sight, and thought himself impaired.
Paradise Lost 5.657-665

John W Hales wrote:

> Milton presents..the fall of Satan and...gives us a scene exactly parallel to that in *Macbeth*, where the already demoralised Macbeth receives a first strong impulse towards his fatal corruption through the preferment of Malcolm to be Prince of Cumberland...In *Paradise Lost* the appointment of by God of His Son to be his Vicegerent awakes similarly the evil - how strange and unaccountable an inmate! - in the bosom of Satan.[12]

One can see Hales's point. Yet, reading these passages, my own feeling is that it is the first resemblance, between the election of Christ and the election of Malcolm, which is closer than the second, between Satan's response and Macbeth's. It depends partly how you think the latter should play. Commonly, modern productions suggest that Macbeth, hearing Duncan begin to speak, thinks that the succession is about to be promised to him.[13] But, even if this is so, there is no envy in his response: merely the tactical recognition that a second obstacle has been put in his path to the throne:

The Prince of Cumberland! - That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. 1.4.48-50

The more interesting aspect of Macbeth's response is its resonance of a different biblical image, which one or two less famous commentators have noticed: the image of Christ the stumbling block.[14]

In the discourse of Paul's Letter to the Romans, Christ - especially Christ crucified - is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the 'stone of stumbling' (Isaiah 8. 16 A.V.) Christ, the stone thus personified, is a stumbling block to the disobedient, who do not accept him.[15]

When Macbeth uses the very similar image 'a step on which I must fall down' (1.4.49) to describe the Prince of Cumberland, it greatly strengthens the suggestion that there is a Christ reference in the whole election episode. In Buchanan, Macbeth regards Malcolm's appointment as an 'Obstacle of Delay',[16] but the idea of Macbeth's falling down is nowehere in the sources.

What is going on then? Bradley's suggestion, that Milton used *Macbeth* as a source for some parts of Paradise Lost, seems to me implausible. So far as I am aware, it is not one that has been followed by Milton scholars. Was the Satan reference stronger for Coleridge, as it certainly was for Bradley, or did he primarily notice the Christ reference, which I have argued is stronger? The evidence perhaps suggests that it was the similarity of the relationship between the two pairs, Messiah/Satan and Cumberland/Macbeth, which struck him.

I find the arguments for and against Coleridge's view about Macbeth and Satan finely balanced. I have already set out what seems to me the significance of the diabolical imagery which clusters round Macbeth, especially in Act 4 Scene 3. Coleridge's suggestion is completely consistent with what I there argued and with the presence of such imagery elsewhere in the play, even though I do not detect quite the same note of envy in Shakespeare's Macbeth as in Milton's Satan, as Coleridge apparently did.

One would love to know more of the insight that lay behind Coleridge's very brief lecture note. We do not know, for example, whether the notion of the stumbling block played any part in Coleridge's thinking. However, I think there is ample evidence to argue that

Macbeth's aside, joining the resonance of the stumbling block to the new title by which Malcolm is now to be known, greatly strengthens the case that there is some level of allusion, in Duncan's election of Malcolm, to the election of Christ by his Father. The relationship between Shakespeare and Milton at this point is thus not that Milton used Shakespeare as a source, but that both passages deal, albeit at different levels, with the Father's election of Christ the Son.

c. The Elect and the stars of heaven

Election is one of the most debated doctrines of the Christian faith; never more so than at the time of the Reformation. When I come to consider Duncan's wider role at the beginning of the play, I will mention the close relationship in early modern Christian thought between God as elector and God as giver of names. However, for the purposes of the present allusion, I need to make clear that the classical doctrine of the election of the people of God begins with the election of Christ. The church, the Body of Christ, is chosen insofar as it is 'in Christ.'

The key biblical text here is Ephesians 1.3:

> Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Iesus Christ, which hath blessed vs with all spirituall blessing in heavenly things in Christ. As hee hath chosen vs in him...

For Paul's time 'heavenly' denotes a location, as well as a quality. It means 'in the sky' The picture of Duncan's followers, shining like stars as they share the honour which he has just bestowed upon his chosen son, might therefore be taken from this frame of reference. It would appear that when Shakespeare thinks of Malcolm upon his throne, he habitually

thinks of him surrounded by shining followers, for a very similar picture appears at the end of the play:

> *Macd* Hail, King! for so thou art. Behold where stands
> Th'usurper's cursed head: the time is free.
> I see thee compassed with thy kingdom's pearl,
> That speak my salutation with their minds;
> Whose voices I desire aloud with mine, -
> Hail, King of Scotland!

Images where the redeemed believers gather round the throne of Christ, shining like stars, have been a commonplace of piety in all Christian eras. Consider for example John Donne:

> As God registers the Names of his Elect, and of his Instruments, so doth he the Number...[Donne then cites Psalms 147. 4:]...Hee counteth the Number of the Starres, and calleth them all by their names...says the Psalmist; which many Expositors interpret of the Elect.[17]

Psalm 147v4 may be a direct source for Duncan's election of Malcolm and his star-shining followers. I think an even more likely source, however, is Matthew 13. 43, perhaps best known to us from its setting in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*: 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in their heavenly Father's realm.'[18] The pun on 'sun' exists only in English, of course, and to a lesser extent in related Germanic languages; but it has proved irresistible to piety. We thus read, 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the Son in their heavenly Father's realm', which brings us very close indeed to the thought of Duncan's speech, where all deservers shine in the reflected honour of the chosen son.

d. Summary

Taking it all together, then, we find in Malcolm's election by his father a number of points which suggest a Christ reference. The election of the chosen son encompasses the election of his followers. The followers will similarly shine in the father's kingdom. The son is a

stumbling block to the one who does not accept his being chosen. Taken together with Malcolm's representation to his father of the penitence of Cawdor, these allusions in Act 1 Scene 4, give strong support to the Christ reference which I suggested as the key to understanding Act 4 Scene 3.

They also make clear that the relationship between Malcolm and his father is in some aspects exactly congruent with the relationship the first two persons of the Christian trinity, reinforcing the thesis of the trinity of the play's three good kings.

2. Act 5 Scenes 7-10

a. Hail King! for so thou art

The play's final picture, which is the fulfilment of Malcolm's election by his father, is particularly worthy of attention. The image of the surrounding followers as pearls, coming as it does right at the end of the play, is most strongly reminiscent of the endpiece of the biblical narrative in Revelation in which the twelve gates surrounding the New Jerusalem, each with its angel, are each made of a single pearl, inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. Surrounded by the pearls, in *Macbeth* as in Revelation, is the ['weak, poor, innocent'] Lamb upon the throne.[19]

The king at the centre of this pearly circle is properly to be addressed as 'thou'. We would conventionally expect the second person plural in Macduff's address to the new king here. His use of the second person singular - 'Hail King! for so thou art' (5.9.20) - has been

something of a puzzle.[20] But the Christ referent fully and adequately explains this. Consider, for example, Revelation 5. 8-9:

> ..and the foure and twentie Elders fell downe before the Lambe.....And they sung a new song, saying, 'Thou art worthy..

No particular biblical reference need be imagined, however: it is sufficient to argue that the consistent pattern of Christ imagery surrounding Malcolm here extends to the way in which he is formally to be addressed.

b. Young Siward

Finally, in this list of allusions to Christ, I want to draw attention to some hitherto unnoticed aspects of the death of Young Siward. There are a number of puzzling aspects about this episode, but one really includes all of them: it just seems inexplicably important. First, it was important enough for Shakespeare to have altered the facts of history: Young Siward was really Duncan's contemporary - Malcolm's uncle, not his cousin - and there is no historical suggestion that he was killed by Macbeth personally. There is even some doubt about whether he was killed in this battle or an earlier one.[21] Secondly, the Siward episode is important enough for the fight between Young Siward and Macbeth to be enacted at some length and discussed at some length.

The effect of these changes is twofold. First, they give Malcolm a cousin of similar age to himself. Secondly, they make that cousin the forerunner of Malcolm's forces into the final battle and the last person to be killed by the tyrant before Malcolm's ultimate victory. In the light of the Christ allusion which we have seen consistently applied to Malcolm, it is interesting to bring these changes into relation with the New Testament narrative. There,

Jesus Christ does have a cousin, John the Baptist, who was his contemporary to within six months, and who was indeed put to death by a tyrant. John the Baptist is still called, liturgically, The Forerunner. As well as the last, he is in some sense the greatest of the pre-Christian prophets, because he prepares the way for Christ; but in the New Testament he himself strongly makes the point that he cannot, of himself, achieve the necessary victory. It will be won by him 'who comes after me.'[22]

The dramatic representation of John in the Mystery Plays is particularly interesting. It is now usually accepted that the Porter in *Macbeth* is drawn from the Porter of Hell-gate in the Mystery Play, The *Harrowing of Hell*. In York, the Baptist has his own *play (21 The Barbours)* in which he explicitly calls himself the forerunner (fore-reyner).[23] In play *37, (The Sadilleres), The Harrowing of Hell*, Baptistas addresses Christ, who has come to free the souls in hell:

> A! Lorde, I love the inwardly,
> That me wolde make thi messengere,
> Thy coming in erth for to crye,
> And teche thi faith to folk in feere,
> And sithen before the for to dye
> And bringe boodworde to thame here,
> How thai schulde have thyne helpe in hye.[24]

In other words, John the Baptist is Christ's forerunner here not only in his life, but in his death, where he goes before Christ into hell to tell the people there that Christ is coming to release them. At Coventry, the relationship between Christ and the Baptist is explicitly recalled. In *'The Harrowing of Hell'*, the Baptist says, 'I am thy cosyn my name is Johan'.[25]

This comparison of Young Siward with the Baptist depends mainly, though, on a simple verbal cue. Having killed Siward, Macbeth has a rather intrusive jingle in which one idea is unnecessarily repeated:

> Thou wast born of woman:
> But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
> Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born. 5.8.11-13

The key verse is Matthew 11.11:

> Verely I say unto you, Among them which are begotten of women, arose there not a greater than Iohn Baptist, notwithstanding, he that is least in ye kingdom of heauen is greater than he.

The phrase 'begotten of woman'[26] occurs in the New Testament twice only - in this verse and its Lukan parallel. I have found only Braunmuller who cites the verse as a source for the phrase 'born of woman', but, because he has not drawn the Malcolm/Christ parallel, he naturally does not notice the Baptist/Siward parallel.[27]

I am not quite sure that the Baptist allusion illuminates the peculiar conversation between Malcolm and Old Siward about the death of the latter's son (5.9.5-19). Certainly Old Siward's two allusions to God (5.9.13 + 19) are absent from the sources and we may justifiably say that the incident has been spiritualised or Christianised to that extent. It is true too that this is one of the not very frequent occasions when the afterlife is mentioned in Shakespeare as anything more than sleep. 'God's soldier be he...God be with him' can only refer to Young Siward's hereafter. We have already been told by Malcolm that Old Siward is a soldier of 'Christendom' (4.3.192) and that he thus epitomises the relationship between Edward's power and 'the Powers above' (4.3.238). He continues to be a soldier of Christendom here.

Malcolm's response to Siward is, 'He's worth more sorrow,/ And that I'll spend for him.' (5.9.16-17). If there is any specifically Christian significance in this rejoinder, I think it can only be a reference to the insufficiency of the sacrifice of John and the need for the sacrifice of Christ. To outward historical appearance, the deaths of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth must have seemed at first very similar in importance: each was the leader of a popular religious movement which was a threat to the existing religious and secular authorities and, therefore, each was executed. The New Testament, as we have seen, very definitely subordinates John to Jesus, as you would expect. So you could say, just, that man, 'born of woman' can only be redeemed by the 'more sorrow' which Christ, the Man of Sorrows, will spend for him at Calvary - the only sufficient sacrifice. On the whole, however, as I shall argue in more detail later, it is probably a mistake to deal individually with any response to personal bereavement in *Macbeth*. There are so many such moments: - and the pattern of them seems to be that there is no pattern.

c. The Harrowing of Hell

It is interesting indeed to compare the medieval Mystery Play, *The Harrowing of Hell* with the taking of Macbeth's castle. Glynne Wickham writes:

> On the medieval stage, hell was represented as a castle...Its gate was guarded by a janitor or porter. Christ, after his crucifixion, but before his resurrection, comes to this castle of hell to demand of Lucifer the release of the souls of the patriarchs and prophets...The gate eventually collapses, allowing the Saviour-avenger, accompanied by the archangel Michael with his flaming sword, to enter and release the souls held prisoner there.[28]

Wickham is utterly convincing as he argues that the Porter, with his challenge in the name of Beelzebub and 'th'other devil' is directly drawn from the Porter of Hell-gate, sometimes

called Rybald because, like the Porter in *Macbeth*, he was lewd and comical. Wickham similarly sees an allusion to the Harrowing of Hell in the final battle, but confuses, I think, the champion and the king when he writes:

> As Christ harrowed Hell and released Adam from Satan's dominion, so afflicted subjects of mortal tyranny will find a champion who will release them from fear and bondage. This Macduff does for Scotland; and in due season Fleance, who escaped the murderers' knife just as Jesus did, by flight, will have heirs who become kings.[29]

Malcolm has been neglected here. The castle is liberated in his name. Macduff is indeed his champion, but he is thus to be likened to Michael, who, as Wickham himself points out in the passage previously cited, bears the flaming sword on Christ's behalf.

Wickham does not argue the case for an allusion to Christ in Malcolm, and thus inevitably does not see the John the Baptist referent in his cousin Young Siward. He does, however, pick up Young Siward's tyrant reference as part of a general argument about a similarity between Macbeth and Herod the Great, to which I shall return. John the Baptist's very specific role in the Harrowing of Hell was, as we have seen, to say that he had died to go as Christ's forerunner into hell, to tell them in hell, as he had told them on earth, that the Saviour was just behind him. He is then released, with the other captives, into the life of heaven.

As Wickham shows, the Porter himself identified for us the nature of the Macbeths' first castle, once Duncan had been killed there. The Macbeths may now have moved, but the presence of the suggestively named Seyton has a similar effect. Perhaps we see most clearly in Lady Macbeth, that the place has become a murky living hell for her. In the battle, there is the sense that the inmates of the castle are glad to be freed, rather than to

oppose the liberating forces - 'We have met with foes who fought beside us'. Then, there is the binding of Macbeth: 'They have tied me to the stake/ I cannot fly.' Compare these two things with Christ's words about casting out the Devil in Mark 3.25-7:

> Or if a house bee divided against itselfe, that house cannot continue. So if Satan make insurrection against himselfe and be divided, he cannot endure, but is at an end. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and take away his goods, except hee first binde that strong man, and then spoyle his house.

Augustine writes:

> And so the Devil is bound throughout the whole period embraced by the Apocalypse...But the Devil will be unloosed when the 'short time' comes; for we are told that he will rage with all his strength..And yet those against whom he has to wage war will be the kind of people who cannot be conquered by his great attack.[30]

This might describe the Macbeth of the final scenes rather well. First tied to the stake, he is then released to rage against his enemies for a time, until he meets Macduff 'who cannot be conquered by his great attack.'

d. The cloudy messenger

In Revelation, the leader of the heavenly forces in the final battle is the warrior Archangel Michael.[31] We have seen that Macduff fulfils the role of Malcolm's champion here. It is worth noting, too, that there is other angelic imagery clinging to Macduff throughout the play. Consider:

> *Len.* Sent he to Macduff?
> *Lord.* He did: and with an absolute 'Sir, not I,'
> The cloudy messenger turns me his back,
> And hums, as who should say, 'You'll rue the time
> That clogs me with this answer.

The grammar of this passage, with its peculiar insertion of 'me', is difficult. The other difficulty is that, strictly speaking, the 'cloudy messenger' ought grammatically to be the person who says, 'Sir, not I' - who must surely be Macduff. Yet it seems more likely that

Macbeth's messenger, rather than Macduff, would make the threat: 'You'll rue the time that clogs me with this answer.'

'Cloudy', says Muir, means 'cloudy-visaged, sullen'.[32] This is an arguable - perhaps the most arguable - reading in the context. I have a lingering feeling, however, that in the iconography of this play, a 'cloudy messenger' really ought to be an angel. Herald or messenger is, of course, the basic meaning of the word angel; and the link between angels, clouds and the ultimate victory of Christ is strong in New Testament apocalyptic.[33] In *Macbeth*, the 'heaven's cherubins' are 'hors'd/ Upon the sightless couriers of the air...' (1.7.22-3) The angels, if they are not exactly messengers, do 'plead..trumpet-tongu'd..' (1.7.19) And grammatically, this phrase ought strictly to apply to Macduff, who, as we have seen, very closely fits the role of Michael to Malcolm's Christ in the final battle. In the same scene as 'the cloudy messenger', we have:

> Some holy Angel
> Fly to the court of England, and unfold
> His message ere he come (3.6.45-47)

Now, of course, Macduff has officially become the messenger, but the angel is a separate entity. When Macduff gets to England, Malcolm says to him,

> That which you are my thoughts cannot transpose:
> Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell (4.3.22-23)

thus asking, by implication, whether Macduff is a bright or fallen angel: Scotland's messenger or Macbeth's. The rest of the scene is full of the imagery of the heavenly powers, though none of it applies directly to Macduff. One might add that, when the Devil left Christ, after the temptation in the wilderness, to which I compared the first part of 4.3, the scriptural narrative speaks of Christ being ministered to by angels.[34] And, finally and

most obviously, Macduff was not born of woman, as angels tend not to be. This is all very tantalising. Walker called Macduff Malcolm's Gabriel - though I think he might have meant the warrior archangel Michael.[35] I tend to agree that there is just enough, in these passages and in Macduff's role in the final battle, to support the suggestion that the idea of an angel informs his depiction in certain scenes.

One would have to imagine, however, that the allusion is in no way consistent. The following lines contain some of the most deeply felt humanity in the piece and, in particular, set Macduff in a thoroughly mortal perspective with regard to an inscrutable but morally authoritative heaven:

> But I must also feel it as a man:
> I cannot but remember such things were,
> That were most precious to me. - Did Heaven look on,
> And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff!
> They were all struck for thee. Naught that I am,
> Not for their own demerits, but for mine,
> Fell slaughter on their souls: Heaven rest them now. (4.3.221-227)

We read again here the play's remarkable concern with personal bereavement. This depiction of a grieving father and husband, with anger at heaven turning to guilty self-accusation and ending in prayer, rings true even at four centuries' distance. But as we leave 4.3 behind, notice again a very probable biblical source for Macduff's self-accusation: 'For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, *and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children...*'[36]

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[1] *Henry V* 2.2 *passim*. The resonances of Portia are obvious.
[2] Walker, p. 37
[3] McAlindon notes 'Macbeth's fondness for the word 'more ('Tell me more!') and his contempt for 'enough'...' as part of the imagery of multiplication tending beyond limit. McAlindon, p. 201
[4] Revelation 12. 10

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[5] References to *Paradise Lost* are from *The Poetical Works of John Milton,* ed. by Helen Darbishire, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), I *Paradise Lost.* This one is from p. 242
[6] An interesting aside from Bradley, discussing the surprising interchangeability of who speaks speeches in the play as an indication of slightness of characterisation in the minor characters: 'Can....[the reader]...find...any signs of character...to determine that Malcolm must have spoken I. iv. 2-11 ?' Yes, say I. A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy,* 2nd edn. (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 326
[7] Holinshed, p. 269
[8] See also Siegel, p. 145
[9] *Coleridge on Shakespeare,* ed. by Terence Hawkes (Harmondsworth and Victoria: Penguin, 1969), p. 212
[10] Bradley, p. 304
[11] *Complete Prose Works of John Milton,* ed. by Maurice Kelley, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), VIII (1666-1682), pp. 582-3
[12] John W. Hales, *The Nineteenth Century,* 30 (1891), p. 929
[13] Most recently Antony Sher in Greg Doran's production for the RSC, 1999.
[14] eg Peter Milward, *Biblical Influence in the Great Tragedies,* Renaissance Monographs 11, (Tokyo: Renaissance Institute, 1985), pp. 120-2
[15] See also esp. I Peter 2. 8. Probably, the New Testament picture refers specifically to non-acceptance by contemporary Jews that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth can be the promised Messiah.
[16] Bullough, p. 513
[17] John Donne, *Essayes in Divinity,* ed. by Evelyn M. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 52
[18] Geneva has 'Then shall the iust men shine as the sunne in the kingdome of their Father.'
[19] Revelation 21. 12-14
[20] 5.9.20. When Adrian Poole previewed his 1999 British Academy Lecture on the 'Third Person in *Macbeth*', at the Shakespeare Institute, Stratford, this use of the second person singular was touched on in the questions afterwards. I had not previously known that it was problematic. Poole's Third Person in Act 4 Scene 3, incidentally, is Rosse. This still seems to me a valid insight, even though, as I have argued, I think that the ultimate Third Person in that scene is Edward. Thematically, I think Rosse is better thought of as a Second Person - an ambiguous and equivocal figure. The Lecture will be published in the Proceedings of the Academy in due course.
[21] Holinshed, I p. 748-749. Holinshed himself makes clear that his sources are contradictory as regards the involvement of both Siwards in Malcolm's campaign against Macbeth. There is no doubt though, that the changing of the generations and the personal fight between Macbeth and Young Siward are Shakespeare's own invention, present in none of the sources.
[22] Matthew 3. 11-12
[23] *The York Plays,* ed. by Richard Beadle, (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), p. 181
[24] ibid, p. 342
[25] *Ludus Coventriae,* (London: for OUP, 1922 and 1960), p. 318
[26] Geneva. The Great Bible, Douai-Rheims, Bishops Bible and the King James all have 'borne of woman' or 'borne of women'.
[27] For another religious view of the Young Siward episode see E. Pearlman, 'Malcolm and Macduff' *Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Studies in the Humanities,* 9 (1981), 5-10, esp p. 10: 'Young Siward stands in for Malcolm; he is the only casualty of the invading forces - the drop of young blood that must be spilt. The mythic action demands a sacrifice.'
[28] Glynne Wickham, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage,* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 216
[29] ibid
[30] Augustine of Hippo, *City of God,* (Harmondsworth etc: Penguin, 1972), pp. 910-911
[31] Revelation 12. 7
[32] Muir cites *1 Henry IV* 3.2.83: 'Slept in his face and render'd such aspect/ As cloudy men use to their adversaries.
[33] Eg Revelation 10. 1; Matthew 24. 30-1
[34] Mark 1. 13
[35] Walker, p. 159: 'In the coming battle...[Macduff]...is Malcolm's Gabriel.' It is an odd lapse. I can think of no biblical association between the archangel Gabriel and battle. The four references to Gabriel by name in Daniel 8. 16 and 9. 21, and Luke 1. 19 and 1. 26 show him as a revelator, rather than a warrior. Walker

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may have known some extra-biblical allusion of which I am unaware, but I think it is more probably just a slip.

[36] The idea can be found in any of Exodus 20. 5, 34. 7, Numbers 14. 18, Deuteronomy 5. 9. The version cited, with my emphasis added, is from the Book of Common Prayer.

CHAPTER 4 DUNCAN, *PATER PATRIAE*

Introduction

Braunmuller identifies the relationship between father and son (Banquo/Fleance, Macduff/Young Duff, Old Siward/Young Siward, Duncan/Malcolm) as an important theme in the play, especially compared to Macbeth's childlessness and 'barren sceptre' Of Duncan's election of Malcolm he writes: 'Primogeniture and Duncan's ad hoc proposal both value father-to-eldest-son successions exclusively and thus strongly imply the age-old metaphor of the king as 'father' to his subjects (*pater patriae)*' [1] I want to unpack the very specific way in which Duncan is depicted as *pater patriae*, first to balance what seem to me some recent misapprehensions about his character and relationship to the state and secondly to set the context for the crucifixion imagery which surrounds his death and which presents an obvious difficulty for the general theory which I am propounding.

1. All the blessings of a glad father

Duncan's first key role in the play's early scenes, and his key patriarchal function, is to be the bestower of benedictions, including honorific adjectives, epithets, titles and names. The extent of this phenomenon in Duncan's direct and reported speech is extraordinary. The count is difficult to make but, trying to take account of half lines as well as full ones, I calculate that more than two thirds of Duncan's approximately 57 lines contain an honorific name, title, laudatory adjective or commendation. This includes his brief commendation of the castle at Inverness, but not the indirect speeches on his behalf, such as Rosse's extensive messages in 1.3.89-107 and Banquo's shorter greeting to Lady Macbeth in 2.1.16. And because the honorifics are often clustered ('Valiant cousin, worthy gentleman'

(1.2.24); 'Fair and noble hostess' (1.4.24)) their number is even greater than the number of lines in which they appear.

In 1.2, Duncan's first description of Macbeth is 'valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman' (1.2.24). Next, he tells the sergeant that his wounds and words 'smack of honour both' (1.2.44-45). Enter Rosse, to be addressed as 'worthy Thane?' (1.2.49). Next, 'Great happiness!' (1.2.59) is the essence of benediction. Then he gives orders for Macbeth to be greeted with a new title, emphasising that he has won it by being 'noble Macbeth' (1.2.67-69).

In 1.4, I argued, the relationship of Duncan as Father to Malcolm as Son is a persistent theme, but the benedictory element is also pervasive. Even Cawdor was 'a gentleman on whom I built/ An absolute trust.' Enter Macbeth, 'O worthiest cousin...Thou art so far before...More is thy due. (1.4.13-21)' Then 'I have begun to plant thee, and will labour/ To make thee full of growing' (1.4.28-29), followed by 'Noble Banquo...' (1.4.29) and the sudden move to what is the climax of the whole benedictory process, the election of Malcolm and its reflection on 'all deservers' (1.4.35-42).

There may be resonances here of the New Testament images of God as 'the Father of lights',[2] from whom comes 'every good giuing and euery perfect gift' and 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom is named the whole familie in heauen and in earth',[3] as Duncan gives both Malcolm and Macbeth new names and bestows shining signs on them and others. We saw in John Donne how the themes of election, naming and the stars of heaven are closely related in early modern Christian understanding. As Macbeth subsequently

exits, Duncan describes him to 'worthy Banquo' as 'full so valiant' and 'a peerless kinsman', in whose commendations Duncan is fed (1.4.54-56).

In 1.6 Duncan does for Macbeth's castle what he has already done for its owner: he eulogises it, and then does the same for Lady Macbeth: 'our honoured hostess' (1.6.10); 'Fair and noble hostess' (1.6.24) The honorific 'hostess' is Duncan's last word in the play - both here directly (1.6.31) and indirectly in Banquo's report of Duncan's gift of the jewel (2.1.16). Here Duncan uses it at the end of another speech expressing his love for Macbeth.

This benedictory expression is Duncan's primary role in the early scenes. It is shared, to a lesser extent, by Malcolm, whose honorifics and eulogies are a small but important part of the Trinitarian theme I am suggesting. Critics often compare Malcolm's wary guardedness with Duncan's over-trusting nature. I have already argued that 4.3 is not fundamentally about Malcolm's suspicion of Macduff. At this early point in the play, it is also clear that, if Duncan's over-confiding nature is evidenced from his capacity to think and speak well of everybody, it is a characteristic which Malcolm invariably shares.

Malcolm has just three speeches before his father's death. The first includes 'good and hardy soldier...Hail, brave friend!' (1.2.4-5). His second, in its entirety, is, 'The worthy Thane of Rosse' (1.2.46). His third is the eulogy of the penitent Cawdor (1.4.2-11). He thus has no speech, before Duncan's death, in which he does not share the function of benediction with his father. This benedictory role, principally of father, but also of son, resonates again with the verses from Ephesians which are key texts for the election of

Christ: 'Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath blessed vs with all spirituall blessing in heauenly things in Christ. As he hath chosen vs in him...'[4]

There is, of course, a shadow side to all this, insofar as it applies to Macbeth. The Witches also give Macbeth benedictions: three titles which 'sound so fair' [5] Lady Macbeth immediately picks them up: 'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be/ What thou art promis'd' (1.5.15-16) Then she eulogises his good qualities, only to review them as obstacles in their path (1.5.16-25). When he finally enters, she greets him with the three titles, each with an added honorific: 'Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!/ Greater than both...' (1.5.54-55). So the Witches and Lady Macbeth similarly speak false benedictions, which are the shadow side of Duncan's.

This benedictory role is obviously expressive of fatherhood in Shakespeare's time, when a father's blessing was profoundly important in spiritual, social and economic terms.[6] Fatherhood may also be reflected in one further image which has a biblical root: the king-gardener of 'I have begun to plant thee and will labour/ To make thee full of growing.' In the Old Testament, God is the planter, principally, of the vine of Israel.[7] In the New Testament, we find Jesus saying specifically: 'I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman' (or vinedresser).[8]

2. Duncan and the poetry of St Robert Southwell

It may be objected that my choice of the religious terms 'benediction' and 'eulogy' for Duncan's invariable mode of expression is arbitrary. But they precisely say what Duncan and Malcolm principally do: they 'speak well'[9] of people. Moreover, in describing the

phenomenon of Duncan in religious terms, one only does what the characters almost invariably do themselves. Duncan's death is 'Most sacrilegious Murther' (2.3.66). He is 'The Lord's anointed Temple' (2.3.67), 'gracious Duncan' (3.1.65), a 'most sainted King' (4.3.109) who 'hath borne his faculties so meek' (1.7.17), whose 'virtues...plead like angels' (1.7.18) and whose body, its 'silver skin lac'd with his golden blood' (2.3.110), is 'Carried to Colme-kill, [Iona]/ The sacred storehouse of his predecessors' (2.4.33-34).

All this is well accepted. Garry Wills further suggests that the iconography of the 'naked babe' passage is taken from Robert Southwell's poem, *'The Burning Babe'*, an image of the infant Christ. There are obviously some similarities, but I think that Southwell's translation of *New Heauen: New Warre* from *St Peter's Complainte*[10] should also be considered:

> This little Babe so few dayes olde,
> Is com'd to ryfle sathans folde;
> All hell doth at his presence quake,
> Though he himselfe for cold doe shake:
> For in this weake vnarmed wise,
> The gates of hell he will surprise.
>
> With *teares* he fights and winnes the field,
> His *naked* breast stands for a shield;
> His battering shot are babish cryes,
> His Arrowes lookes of *weeping eyes*,
> His Martiall ensignes cold and neede,
> And feeble flesh his *warriers steede.*
>
> His Campe is pitched in a stall,
> His bulwarke but a broken wall:
> The Crib his trench, hay stalks his stakes,
> Of Sheepheards he his Muster makes;
> And thus as sure his foe to wound,
> The *Angells trumps* alarum sound.
>
> My soule with Christ ioyne thou in fight,
> Stick to the tents that he hath dight;
> Within his Crib is surest ward,
> This little Babe will be thy guard:

If thou wilt foyle thy foes with ioy,
Then flit not from the heauenly boy.

Here we have the angel trumpets, the weeping eyes, the naked babe upon a horse, all in the space of twelve lines. *The Burning Babe* has the words 'newly born' and 'blows the coals' as well as the weeping, but does not have the horse, the nakedness or the angel trumpets. So, I suggest, *New heauen: new warre* is a better fit.[11] The likelihood is, however, that if Shakespeare knew one of these poems, he knew both; and that the similar iconography of both may have fed his imagination. Both potential sources reinforce the consistent sense of the religious in the description of Duncan. Each, also, refers directly to Christ, rather than to the Father – a point to which I will return.[12]

3. 'All things come from you, and of your own do we give you'

Duncan's primary role, then, expressed in what he says, is to be the bestower of benediction, and it is not improper to suggest that that role, like what everyone says about him, has religious overtones. His second role, expressed in what people say *to* him, is to be the receiver of duty and homage. It is very noticeable that Macbeth, Banquo and Lady Macbeth are all given set-piece speeches acknowledging their duty to him. These speeches share one simple idea: that nothing belongs to the speaker. Everything they are and have is from Duncan and is owed in duty back to him. Thus Macbeth: 'Your Highness' part/ Is to receive our duties etc' (1.4.22-27); Banquo: 'There if I grow,/ The harvest is your own' (1.4.32-33); Lady Macbeth: 'Your servants ever/ Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs, in compt,/ To make their audit at your Highness' pleasure,/ Still to return your own' (1.6.14-19).

In liturgical terms, this is the language of Offertory. Indeed, one could insert Lady Macbeth's speech at the Offertory in the Eucharistic Liturgy with no alteration: '...for everything in heaven and on earth is yours./ All things come from you,/ and of your own do we give you.'[13] Lady Macbeth's speech may be partly sourced in the Parable of the Talents.[14] If so, there may be a sting in the tail. Like the good servants, Banquo offers the *increase* to Duncan, whereas it is the wicked servant who merely returns his one talent with words Lady Macbeth may echo: 'beholde, thou hast thine own.'[15]

In general, however, the point is that the speeches which describe the characters' duty to Duncan would be perfectly adequate as an expression of their duty to God. To my ear, indeed, they are more appropriate for the expression of that duty than for the expression of duty to the King. But I do not feel really competent to say whether that would have been true for a Jacobean audience. Broadly speaking, the English religious settlement and its expression in English liturgy may be said to have brought the ideas of God and the King somewhat closer together than the Christianity of other places. James I, perhaps above all other monarchs, brought the two concepts very close together in his own thinking. That partly lays the ground for the general thesis I am proposing, but it does make it difficult, in the present instance, to be exactly sure which of the two resonances a contemporary audience might have picked up, or whether they might have picked up both.[16]

4. The entry to Inverness

I argued earlier that the Christ-Malcolm of 4.3 is second Adam to Macbeth's first. An important part of the latter suggestion is Duncan's entrance into the Macbeths' castle at Inverness. The Macbeths' castle may be said to have a brief development within the first

acts of the play. It moves from being the beautiful place which Banquo and Duncan describe, to being a place which has a Porter very clearly drawn from the Porter of Hell-Gate in the mystery play of *The Harrowing of Hell*.[17] This simple progression has tended to be obscured by very varied readings of the earlier passage:

> *Dunc* This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.
> *Banq* This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle:
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd
> The air is delicate 1.6.1-10

Scholarly assessment of this passage ranges from those who find it a 'combination of natural sweetness and supernatural 'grace' - so Traversi[18] - to those who find it 'fatuous' - so Booth.[19] Even Bradley thought that although the passage was beautiful in itself, it carried a heavy charge of irony, given what we know about the evil lurking inside the walls of the castle.[20] Commentators who criticise Duncan, similarly, tend to suggest that this is another example of his inability to see beyond faces and surfaces. Muir gives tentative support to Caroline Spurgeon's view, that the martlet may be equivalent to the house-martin - a bird proverbially known for its gullibility about the safety of its nesting places.[21] Traversi and McAlindon agree, broadly, that this description of the harmonious order of nature (or fertile cohabitation of nature's opposites) reflects the proper order within the state under Duncan's headship.

McAlindon writes:

> ...Shakespeare delineates the essential significance of Duncan's character in the superb passage where he and Banquo evoke an image of nature's opposites, both elemental and sexual, joyfully united in a procreant harmony[22]

All shades of critical opinion thus seem to agree that the description tells us something important about Duncan and Banquo, and rather neglect the possibility that it might tell us something about the Macbeths. But why should this description of the castle be so exclusively applied to the character of the people who look at it, rather than to the character of the people who live in it? I agree exactly with McAlindon that there is here an image of nature's sexual opposites joyfully united in a procreant harmony, but I would argue that we are thus to understand that before the events which *Macbeth* expounds, two dear partners of greatness live joyfully in harmony here.

The suggestion of an ironic reading again underestimates the distance in *Macbeth* between the temptation and the deed. We do know, of course, that even as Duncan and Banquo speak, evil is being planned within the walls. There is, too, a natural order which the death of Duncan disrupts, as the Old Man's and Rosse's choric commentary makes clear.[23] But Duncan and Banquo are simply guests arriving at the home of their hosts. This is a new place to them. They share with each other their first impressions of the place where the Macbeths live, and they describe it as it truly is before its corruption - after the temptation, but before the deed. Inverness is, as the Macbeths themselves make clear, in some sense held on trust from and for Duncan, and it is important that its joyful harmony has been experienced under his auspices; but it could not be made much clearer in the text that the castle is their place: they the host and hostess, Duncan the guest. Its description tells us essentially about them, not him.

The time of day is important here. Directors and editors have not agreed whether the scene should be staged in the day or at night. The stage direction requires torches, but the characters can apparently see well enough to describe the castle from a distance. Amongst editors, Muir suggests that the scene should thus be played at dusk, between day and night; a view which Brooke describes as an 'irrelevant rationalisation'[24], but which seems to me just to make sense of the fact that the characters can see, but also need torches. Moreover, Muir's view seems thematically correct. The night has not yet come, but we know that it threatens to be dreadful. Perhaps other listeners and readers do not find it so; but in my imagination the whole of Act 1 happens in the same day, leading inexorably to the darkness of the murder of Duncan.[25]

The time of this episode is thus something of a critical crux. Less frequently commented upon is the weather. There is a breeze, mentioned three times. The air moves 'nimbly and sweetly' (1.6.1-2); 'the heaven's breath/ Smells wooingly' (1.6.5-6); 'The air is delicate' (1.6.1-10).

Taking these things together, the best evidence is that this scene takes place at what Genesis 3.8, depending upon the translation, calls either 'the cool of the day', or 'the time of the evening breeze':[26] that is to say, the time at which God comes into the garden of Eden looking for Adam.

That this hauntingly beautiful picture of Inverness might stand as an image of Eden before the Fall is a suggestion which a few critics have made.[27] One might call it the paradise which the Macbeths stand to lose - eventually do lose - by their fall from grace. At any

rate, Duncan enters it, at the time of the evening breeze, and asks a significant question: 'Where's the Thane of Cawdor?' (1.6.20).

> Afterward, they heard the voyce of the Lord God walking in the garden in the coole of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God...But the Lord God called to the man and said unto him, Where art thou?[28]

H R Coursen[29] makes a similar same point, but with regard to Duncan's calling for Macbeth from the banquet. In fact, we never see Duncan after his entry to Inverness, but this is the first of several times we have the sense of him looking for Macbeth, who is clearly hiding.[30]

Understood in this way, the picture of Inverness is a vital part of what makes *Macbeth* a true tragedy. Into this picture we should read not what Duncan or Banquo is like, but what the Macbeths are like before the temptation to kill Duncan. It is that temptation that tears them from one another and from the better part of their male and female humanity, breaking the harmony within them and between them, of which their castle is the symbol.

5. Duncan's last supper

The betrayal, last supper and death of Duncan are attended by images of Christ which are quite obviously problematic for my thesis of the Holy Trinity of kings.[31] Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 7 is full of such images. It is now well accepted that there is an allusion to Christ's words to Judas: 'That thou doest, doe quickly'[32] in Macbeth's: 'If it were done...then 'twere well/ It were done quickly.' The first to mention this, so far as I know, was Walker.[33] Muir, citing him, adds, 'Both Duncan and Jesus have 'almost supped', when the betrayer leaves the chamber. The allusion to the Last Supper may have suggested to Shakespeare the chalice [in line 11 of the same speech].'[34]

The speech continues with the image of the naked babe. Agreeing with Garry Wills, I have tried to show that the imagery of this passage is sourced in one or both of the Southwell poems, *The Burning Babe* and *New Heaven: New Warre.* Both poems are obviously about Christ. Later, I shall argue that there is also a reference to Pontius Pilate in the Macbeths' concern with washing Duncan's blood from their hands. Finally, there is the fact, again noticed by Walker, that Duncan, like Christ, has two companions as he dies.

Macbeth describes Duncan's dead body in imagery which is startling for various reasons. He who after 'the deed' could not face returning to the chamber, has been back, killed the guards and now plays pretty pictures with the charnel house he has created. M J B Allen links these wounds to the gashes of the Sergeant in Act 1 Scene 2:

> The bleeding Sergeant becomes by association Golgotha's victim, whose gashes cry for help as the gashes of the saintly King of the Scots and his grooms are to cry out that very night [sic][35]... Throughout this description we are made aware of the role played by the sacrificial victim...[36]

This is a little far-fetched, I think, but it does make the important point that the note of Golgotha is sounded loud and early in *Macbeth* and that it resonates with the more general importance in the play of wounds. Duncan's wounds are not the only wounds that matter in *Macbeth.* We also know that the Sergeant's wounds 'smack of honour' (1.2.45); that Banquo has 'twenty trenched gashes on his head' and 'his throat is cut' (3.4.15, 26); that Young Siward had 'his hurts before' (5.9.12).

I have no doubt that all of this is compelling evidence for an allusion to the Last Supper and the Crucifixion in the death of Duncan. Is it fatal for the thesis of the Trinity of the

three good kings? Well, yes and no. It clearly relativises it somewhat, but it cannot make the very detailed pattern of imagery which I have so far described - especially the Christ-Father parallel in Duncan-Malcolm - simply disappear. My attempt at an explanation would be in two parts. First, if you look at it from a writer's point of view, the death of Duncan and his eventual succession by his son are, on the one hand, irreducible necessities of the historical plot. On the other hand, if you wanted to make some level of allusion to Christian divinity in the kings, the only thing to do with the death of the one king who has got to die would be to attach crucifixion imagery to it: exactly what Shakespeare does.

Secondly, I would want to make the further point that this imagery is directly attached to Duncan's death and not to Duncan himself. Specific imagery of Fatherhood and divinity flows from and to Duncan himself while he is onstage, whilst very specific imagery of Christ, as we have seen, attaches to Malcolm. But what is most notable about Duncan himself, from his entry to Inverness up to his death and the description of his body, is that he is completely absent from the stage. All the Last Supper, naked babe, crucifixion and wounds imagery of which we are speaking occurs in the space of his absence. That absence is a very complicated dramatic phenomenon, about the merits and the causes of which critics diametrically disagree. I am not claiming that the requirements of the Christian imagery necessitate it. I am only saying that any Christ imagery attached to Duncan is in that period of absence only, and refers specifically to his death.

6. The nature of kingship

Finally, it is important to recognise that the relationship between the death of Duncan and the crucifixion of Christ may have important consequences for what we think about

Duncan's vulnerability. Duncan's trust and vulnerability are sometimes overestimated. It is not clear that sleeping in the house of his most trusted noble, with his sons and other trusted nobles in the house and two grooms for bodyguards, is a dangerous or irresponsible action.[37] Nevertheless, one vital theological resonance of the incarnation of Christ, from the naked babe of Bethlehem to the victim of Golgotha, is that it represents the willed vulnerability of the Creator putting himself in the hands of his creatures. On such a reading, Duncan's vulnerability would flow not from any weakness in his nature, but from his essential goodness. I confess that I think this a more natural reading of the text.

It follows also that the very current debate about the nature of kingship in *Macbeth* needs to take account of the paradoxical nature of the crucified kingship of Christ in Christian doctrine. Is Duncan firmly in control of things? Is he a weak and womanish king whom the play implicitly disapproves? Is he the first Christian king in Scotland, leading it out of a pagan warrior culture represented by Macbeth? Is Malcolm an English puppet, imposing alien models of ennoblement to replace a better indigenous system? Is he a cagey master of *realpolitik*? Is Edward an irrelevance, imported to please the patron?

Or should we think of the three of them together, as representing a paradoxical model of kingship which transcends and might transform the powers and principalities of the kingdoms of this world? A model in which kingship consists of vulnerability to one's friendly enemies; of purity in the face of temptation; and of the healing touch of grace for the wretched and despairing?

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[1] Braunmuller, p. 16
[2] James 1. 17

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[3] Ephesians 3. 14-15
[4] Ephesians 1. 3
[5] 1.3.52. Like Duncan, the Witches also eulogise Banquo, although, at this stage, this is less significant than their eulogising of Macbeth. The primary eulogiser of Banquo will eventually be Macbeth himself. (3.1.48-59)
[6] Eg 'Now all the blessings / Of a glad father compass thee about!' *The Tempest* 5.1.179-180
[7] eg Psalm 80. 8; Isaiah 5. 1
[8] John 15. 1 Janet Adelman, *contra,* suggests that this and other images of nurture surrounding Duncan show a feminine side to his rule which the play implicitly disapproves. Janet Adelman, *''Born of woman': Fantasies of maternal power in 'Macbeth.'* in *'Macbeth'* ed by Alan Sinfield, New Casebook (London: Macmillan, 1992), passim. Cp also Anthony Paul, p. 165 who argues, somewhat obscurely, that the references to planting and growing point to pre-Christian deities.
[9] Greek *eulogein*, Latin *benedicere*
[10] The version cited is from: Robert Southwell, *St Peter's Complainte,* (London: I Haviland + Robert Allott, 1630). The dating of *St Peter's Complainte* is in itself problematic, but on any reading it predates *Macbeth.* It was available in printed form from 1595 onwards and seems to have been very fashionable at that time. For a full discussion of the dating problems, see *The Poetry of Robert Southwell S.J.* ed. by James H. Macdonald and Nancy Pollard Brown, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. lii-xcii
[11] To my surprise, I have found no-one else who makes the connection with this second Southwell text, which is now famously set to music in Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony Of Carols.*
[12] It is not impossible that there is also an allusion here to the deep damnation of the betrayal, torture and eventual 'taking-off' by execution, of the saintly Jesuit priest-poet, later beatified, St. Robert Southwell. I think there is more work to be done on Southwell and *Macbeth.*
[13] *The Alternative Service Book,* (London: Collins, 1980), Holy Communion Rite A, p. 129
[14] Matthew 25. 14-30
[15] Matthew 25. 25. I cannot find it in my notes, but I have a lingering feeling that I owe this reference to the parable of the talents to someone else. My apologies, if so.
[16] One scholar who seems to take the religious view is Siegel: 'The words have a further significance than the ceremonious statement of feudal vassalage. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth disregard their debt to the One to whom they owe everything.' Siegel, p. 144
[17] Glynne Wickham, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage,* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 216
[18] Derek Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare,* 3rd edn. 2 vols (London: Hollis and Carter, 1969), II p. 124
[19] Booth, p. 106
[20] Bradley p. 284
[21] Muir, *ad loc*
[22] McAlindon, p. 199
[23] 'Tis unnatural,/ Even like the deed that's done...Turn'd wild in nature...'Gainst nature still...' (2.4.10, 16, 27)
[24] Brooke, p. 2
[25] It cannot be really so, of course. Consider, for example, Banquo's 'I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters.' (2.1.20) At least one night has supervened since they met them
[26] Geneva has 'coole of the day' with the gloss that the Hebrew word means wind
[27] Eg Milward, p. 123
[28] Genesis 3. 8-9
[29] H. R. Coursen, *Christian Ritual and the world of Shakespeare's Tragedies,* (Lewisburg Pa: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1976), p. 341
[30] Here, 1.6.29, 1.7.30, 2.1.11
[31] It was Professor McAlindon who early made the point to me.
[32] John 13. 27. Braunmuller, *ad loc*, is another recent editor who takes the note.
[33] Walker, p. 53
[34] Muir, *ad loc*
[35] It will be noted that Allen erroneously asserts as fact what I said was my own imaginative feeling: that the action up to the death of Duncan occurs in one day and night.

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[36] Murray, passim, argues that Duncan's blood is golden because, in Paracelsus' terms, it is already in the hand of God.

[37] King James' father Darnley, after all, albeit only a self-styled King of Scotland, died after being dragged from his room in the royal apartments themselves. I often wonder what Darnley's son made of the death of Duncan.

SECTION II

CHAPTER 5 MULTIPLYING VILLAINIES

Introduction

In this second principal section of this thesis, I want to argue that the Macbeths' decline is marked by allusions to a number of biblical villains. I do not mean that all these villains, or their actions, form a particularly important part of how the internal life of the Macbeths is imagined or realised. Rather, the allusions to them function as markers that the general kind of decline which is being imagined and realised is in line with orthodox Christian conceptions of temptation, fall and sin. In other words the general pattern which Frye observed to be not incongruent with contemporary theological patterns of corruption is embellished by allusions which suggest a closer adherence to that pattern than has usually been suggested.

The one villain who perhaps may have influenced the conception of the Macbeths' inner life is Cain - to whom quite a lengthy chapter will be therefore devoted in this section. Other chapters are much shorter. When I had almost finished this work, Catherine Belsey's book on the Genesis fall stories, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden,* was published. I have been able to profit from some of her helpful general insights. In particular, her extensive examination of the use of pictorial illustration was an area of which I am almost wholly ignorant, and of which my own list of cultural sources for the Genesis stories ought certainly to have taken more account.

Some of the villain allusions for which I argue in this section - Judas, Lucifer - are almost universally acknowledged; some - Adam, Eve, Pontius Pilate, Herod the Great - are often

referred to in the critical literature, but usually thought to be more coincidental similarities than effective allusions; some - Cain, Saul - have been suggested by a few scholars, but do not appear much in the mainstream of criticism. One - Herod Antipas - is, so far as I know, original to me.

This last I have already dealt with. Herod Antipas was the tyrant responsible for the death of John the Baptist. I suggested in the Young Siward episode that the allusion to John the Baptist is cued by the reference 'born of woman' (5.7.11+13). I noted previously that the allusion to Christ in Malcolm was similarly cued in the 'weak poor innocent lamb' (4.3.16). The two villain allusions which are usually acknowledged have their cues also: Judas - "twere well/ It were done quickly' (1.7.1-2); Lucifer - 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell' (4.3.22). It will be reasonable to assume that one test of the suggestion of further allusions will be whether they are similarly cued.[1]

1. Sibilant syllables in similar soliloquies

I want to begin a systematic discussion of the place of these biblical villains in *Macbeth* by looking at some similarities between a number of soliloquies. In the first, the allusion to a biblical villain is, as we have seen, a fairly well accepted reference:

Macb If it were done when 'tis done – then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all - here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. 1.7.1-7

Muir rightly suggests that these lines should be dealt with as a single unit. In that unit, the repetition of 'done...done...done', and the word 'quickly', are held by Walker, with some approval from Muir and Braunmuller, to be reminiscent of John 13.27:

> After the soppe, Satan entered into him [sc. Judas]. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, doe quickly.

As Muir notes, Duncan is coming, like Christ, to the end of his last supper, and Macbeth is betrayer to Duncan as Judas was to Christ.

Walker writes of this soliloquy:

> This is indeed the life and death struggle of the man who is tempted to memorize another Golgotha and whose crime when consummated raises among men the awful cry:
>
> > Confusion now hath made his masterpiece.
> > Most sacrilegious murther hath broke ope
> > The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence
> > The life o'th'building
>
> The murder of Duncan and its consequences are profoundly impregnated with the central tragedy [sic] of the Christian myth.[2]

The idea that this might be an allusion to Judas is also strengthened by the fact that the notion of killing Duncan quickly goes undeveloped in the rest of the soliloquy. The rest of the argument is simply that if killing Duncan would have no temporal consequences, Macbeth would not bother about the eternal consequences for his soul, 'but, in these cases we still have judgment here...' and so on. The necessity of doing the thing quickly is not, so far as I can see, part of this argument at all. It really does look as though the principal effect of 'quickly' is to point the Judas reference.

In the language of the soliloquy, Wolfgang Clemen[3] notes the marked shift from Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done...'; to Latinate polysyllables: 'if th'assassination could trammel up the consequence... surcease. .success.' I think he does not quite notice the shift back. In the seven lines I am considering, the only true disyllable after 'success' is 'upon'

I want to add a third feature – the emphasis on sibilants in the Latinate section: 'assassination...consequence...surcease, success' The last two words, each a disyllable containing three sibilant sounds, are particularly unusual. There are very few English words which have those characteristics. To find two of them in alliterative combination is particularly interesting. But are we looking at one phenomenon or three? Are these changes in language linked to the Judas allusion, or merely coincidental with it? I want to investigate that question by bringing into play three other soliloquies.

First,

Macb This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good:
If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? 1.3.130-137

The fist line obviously combines the two linguistic phenomena I suggested in the previous soliloquy. It is a polysyllabic combination of sibilant alliteration. One should notice also the sibilants in 'earnest of success commencing...' and the sibilant alliteration towards the end of the soliloquy, 'Shakes so my single state of man,/ That function is smother'd in surmise'.

(1.3.140-141). L.C. Knights, in a very well known passage of criticism of this soliloquy, fascinatingly comments on its 'sickening see-saw rhythm', without making direct comment upon the sibilant alliteration. It reads, however, as though the alliteration had found its way into his thoughts.[4]

Between these two brief sibilant passages, we have 'cannot be ill; cannot be good.' If it is right to consider 'quickly' as a resonance of Judas, it is probably right to see here, also, an allusion to the temptation of Adam. I have already mentioned what seem to me good grounds for thinking of Macbeth as Adam to Malcolm's Christ and as the Adam sought by the godlike Duncan at the time of the evening breeze. Knights called this soliloquy 'temptation, presented with concrete force'; and Wilson Knight, 'the moment of the birth of evil in Macbeth.'[5] Just so. And at this vital moment of his first temptation, what Macbeth needs but very precisely lacks is the knowledge of good and ill.

The words 'evil' and 'ill' (or 'yll') were used interchangeably in this period and earlier to describe the tree from which Adam and Eve should not eat. In the York mystery plays, for example, it is the tree of the knowledge of 'good and yll' In *Play IV, The Fullers*, we find:

> Thys tre that beres the fruyte of lyfe[6]
> Luke nother thou nor Eve thy wyf
> Lay ye no handes theretyll.
> For-why it is knowyng
> Bothe of good and yll

Both the theme and the metre of this soliloquy are again extremely problematic. Knights' 'sickening see-saw rhythm', is a rather poetic way of saying that it does not scan. The metre is very irregular. In Muir's *Arden* edition, reverting to the Folio as against earlier

editors' revisions of it, there are, as well as regular pentameters (130, 135-8, ?141), four-foot lines (131, 140, 142), six-foot lines (134, 139) and apparently uniambic lines (132-3).

The thematic confusion of the soliloquy actually works quite well. Macbeth confuses the notions of essential good and evil on the one hand, and what bodes well or ill for himself on the other. The supernatural soliciting 'cannot be ill' because it bodes well for Macbeth; but 'cannot be good' because it tempts him to an evil act. This moral confusion is quite effective. Frye picks up the allusion: '"The sinner," says Calvin, "tries to evade his innate power to judge between good and evil." and we see Macbeth's attempt to evade a moral choice by confusing the alternatives...'[7] Yet, taken with the irregularity of the rhythm, there remains, to my mind, the feeling that the soliloquy is struggling to make sense of the cue, in the same way that the first soliloquy has to make some sense out of the intrusive 'quickly'

The second soliloquy is:

Macb 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. 2.2.58-62

The last line is surely the prime example of Latinate polysyllables in *Macbeth*, with 'incarnadine' as a verb, probably Shakespeare's own coinage. The biblical allusion, if there is one, is obviously to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea who symbolically washed his hands to show that he had no guilt in the death of Christ. I have already suggested that this is one of the cluster of images which contributes to Walker's view of the relationship between the death of Duncan and the crucifixion of Christ. Reinforcing this

impression is the reference to the Roman god Neptune, one of Pilate's own gods, of course, and the only direct reference to a Roman god in the play. (The only other possibility is the rather dubious reference to Mars: 'Bellona's bridegroom...' (1.2.55) This Roman aspect of the reference to Neptune and hence to Pilate seems to be usually missed, leading Naseeb Shaheen, for example, to call it 'perhaps an analogy rather than a reference.' [8]

Finally:

Lady M Come, you Spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances,
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, 'Hold, hold.' 1.5.40-54

In this invocation of evil spirits, the sibilant alliteration is clearest in 'sightless substances' – 'substance' being another of the rare category of disyllables with three sibilants. One should notice also the sibilants in 'Stop up th'access and passage to remorse.'

I want to argue that the hiss of the sibilants is the hiss of Satan and the other fallen angels in *Paradise Lost.* It is the voice of the serpent tempter. It does not appear in the Pilate allusion, precisely because there is no reference to Satan in the biblical story of Pilate. But the Adam and Eve narrative clearly includes the Devil as serpent, while the Judas narrative

refers to Satan putting the betrayal into Judas' heart. There is also sibilant alliteration in the lines which I suggested cued a reference to John the Baptist and his murderer Herod Antipas: 'Swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn...' (5.7.12) Lady Macbeth's invocation of the evil spirits is something of a test case. If one thinks that, in the other examples, the sibilants refer to the foremost evil spirit, one would certainly expect to find the same sibilant alliteration in this passage where she specifically calls upon evil spirits to help her, and this proves to be the case.

The second linguistic feature that these soliloquies have in common is the move to Latinate polysyllables. I doubt, however, that the Latinity of these long words is important. What matters is that they are polysyllabic. If you try to think of English polysyllabic words which are not Latinate, you will find that it is not easy.[9] The incidence of five-syllable words in the verse passages of *Macbeth* is tiny. Apart from the examples in the soliloquies I here consider, I count only 'unaccompanied' (1.4.40); 'metaphysical' (1.5.29, again in a soliloquy in which Lady Macbeth refers to pouring her spirits into Macbeth's ear); and 'voluptuousness' (4.3.61, in Malcolm's description of his own evil.) In addition, occurring only once in verse but several times in the Porter's prose, are 'equivocation' and 'equivocator' This key theme word in *Macbeth* is another Latinate polysllable, with its underlying suggestion of doubleness, and is similarly closely associated with hell. It is the language of the fiend (5.5.43) and the language of the way to the hell: 'could not equivocate to heaven...' (2.3.11)

2. The syllable as a unit of time

Not many words do their job as well as 'polysyllable'. The presence of the word 'syllable' itself, in Macbeth's great 'tomorrow' soliloquy, is important background to the discussion which follows. The use of the syllable as a unit of time, in the soliloquy which invokes triplicity in its first three words, demonstrates that the idea of syllables multiplying towards infinity is present to the author's mind. Johnson writes:

> In the memorable speech...that best conveys the loss of moral and existential meaning that his life has suffered, we find threeness and twoness winding down, in three successive lines, towards a figure that is less than one...The triadic iteration of 'to-morrow' in line 19 leads to the dyadic iteration of 'day' in line 20 (supported by binary alliteration in 'petty pace') to something that is less than whole – less than unity - a 'syllable' that is viewed as the residual share of an irretrievably lost logos. A 'syllable' will be too small to carry its own meaning, and it symbolises the withering of words (and the 'word' that is life) if isolated from their natural context. As in the 'single state of man' speech in 1.3, the 'supernatural soliciting' or 'spellbinding' that has cast a negative predominance of twoness and threeness over Scotland ends up by fragmenting unity to 'maddened' fractions deprived of meaning, 'Signifying nothing.'[10]

Johnson's argument here seems to me to become so detailed that the possibilities for magnification of error are too large. A syllable might indeed be a residual fragment of the irretrievable word of life, incapable of bearing meaning; but to express the thought is more like beginning a new poem than commenting on the existing one. Yet the assertion that syllables and multiplicity are still themes in this soliloquy is important. Notice, also, that Johnson is a second scholar who, when discussing syllabic use in *Macbeth,* unconsciously (I think) cites sibilant alliterative passages: 'single state of man...supernatural soliciting...spellbinding...signifying nothing.'

On the same speech, McAlindon has:

> The last expressions of threeness are given to the two Macbeths, and they function clearly as elements in the pattern of condign punishment which characterises the

> latter part of the play. Lady Macbeth's final words are 'To bed, to bed, to bed (v.i.64): and her sleepless husband sees himself condemned to a near-interminable succession of days and nights: 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...'[11]

What is clear, I think, is that the number symbolism of *Macbeth* is in play in this soliloquy, which starts with a triple repetition and ends with 'nothing' And, while the number symbolism is thus linked directly to the process of time, the measuring unit of time is a syllable. In the soliloquies I am considering, the number of syllables in the words has a similar thematic significance.

3. Untramelled consequences

The presence in these soliloquies of 'supernatural', 'assassination' and 'multitudinous', each in conjunction with another three or four syllable word, looks as though it cannot be random, given the paucity of such polysyllabic words elsewhere in the play. The syllables multiply, in these references to biblical villains, and they quite specifically multiply towards the ultimate evil of chaos, which we hear in the chaos of the metre and which is also a resonance, as Johnson rightly points out, of the disintegration of Macbeth's personality. More importantly, in these early scenes, the syllables show Macbeth that once he has begun the process of evil, it will take on a life of its own, which he cannot possibly control and in which he will eventually suffer ruin.

In this respect, 'multitudinous seas incarnadine' is a particularly fine example, in which the multiplication of the syllables, like word-painting in a madrigal, illustrates the idea that the consequences of Macbeth's evil deed will multiply to the infinity of the sea. In a converse sense, Macbeth realises clearly that 'th'assassination' cannot 'trammel up the consequence' It will all unravel into uncontrollable chaos. Knights' comments upon the

scansion of the 'ill-good' soliloquy make a similar linguistic point. In their rhythm as well as their length, the polysyllables are getting out of hand.[12] The polysyllables show that Macbeth's evil tends to infinity, to chaos, and to his own destruction. The clustering of the polysyllables round the biblical cues tends to show that that process of corruption is biblically conceived.

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[1] A point first made to me by Professor McAlindon. Although the notion of 'cues' may seem to connote the intention of the author, I have at all points avoided that language. I am not sure that the attempt to do so is always convincing.
[2] Walker, p. 55
[3] Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeare's Soliloquies,* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987) ad. loc.
[4] L.C Knights, *Explorations,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 20
[5] L.C. Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), p. 121; G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire,* (London: Methuen, 1949), p. 153
[6] A very common confusion. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are two trees in the Genesis narrative, not one. The point is theologically important because Adam and Eve are allowed to eat the fruit of the tree of life, but not the fruit of the other: ie they were intended for immortality, but mortality is the punishment for eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They are banished from the garden so that they that can no longer eat of the fruit of the tree of life.
[7] Frye, pp. 258-9
[8] Naseeb Shaheen, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays,* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), *ad loc*
[9] Unless, of course, they are formed from the Greek, like 'polysyllable' itself.
[10] Johnson, p. 36
[11] McAlindon, p. 208
[12] Dr Pamela Mason, in the process of lineating the text for the New Arden edition, says of several of these soliloquies: 'Macbeth is out of synch.'

CHAPTER 6 ADAM AND EVE

Introduction

Two general quotations make a useful introduction:

> There is, indeed, no direct reference to the Adam story in *Macbeth* (except perhaps in: 'Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it') nor could the parallel be worked out in detail. But the significance of the *Macbeth* story is possible largely because Shakespeare lived in a world which accepted simply as fact the story of an original man and woman seeking greatness unlawfully, suffering from their own unlawful act, and involving others in their suffering.[1]

> Although I have not come across it, someone must surely have proposed man's primal Fall as a mythic analogue to the murder of Duncan by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The parallels of plot are obvious: a beneficent divine father, feminine temptations of the hero to aspire high, an act of disobedience that generates disorder in nature as well as guilt and vulnerability in fallen man...Of course, the Macbeths murder the 'father' whereas Adam and Eve merely disobey Him. Yet our first parents were inspired like Lucifer by an impulse to deify themselves, to 'be as gods,' the serpent suggested, by knowing what God knew. Instead, they learn only what Macbeth learns, that in quest of divine immortality they have eaten the fruit of "Of that Forbidden Tree," as Milton says, "whose mortal taste Brought Death into the World, and all our woe."[2]

This seems to be pretty much the state of critical consensus. Though the parallel is obvious enough, there is no direct allusion to Adam and Eve in *Macbeth* and the parallel cannot be worked out in too much detail. Few people go so far in drawing the shape of the parallel as Calderwood but, as I have tried to show, I think he is exactly right about the beginning of the play. To reiterate: I have already argued that the allusion to Christ in the Malcolm of Act 4 Scene 3 includes a reference to him as second Adam to Macbeth's first: that whereas Macbeth succumbs to temptation and plunges the kingdom into grief, Malcolm fully resists temptation and is therefore capable of redeeming the kingdom. We saw how this was a key theme in at least some of the Mystery Play renderings of the triple Temptation of Christ and of Adam.

In addition, I argued that Duncan's entry into the Macbeths' beatifically described castle, looking for its master, his subject, at the time of the evening breeze, has strong overtones of God's entry into Eden, looking for Adam.

Thirdly, I suggested that the polysllables and sibilants of the 'supernatural soliciting' soliloquy are cued as an allusion to the hissing serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve, by the oblique reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and ill. I turn now to consider the Adam allusion more closely.

1. Suggestion, fascination, delectation and temptation

In an interesting essay, King-kok Cheung uses Kierkegaard's concept of 'dread' to explain how Macbeth is both fearful of and fascinated by the 'suggestion' to which the witches' prophecy gives rise. For Kierkegaard with regard to Adam - and thence, for Cheung with regard to Macbeth

> the prohibition alarms Adam [ie induces a state of dread] because the prohibition awakens him in the possibility of freedom...the alarming possibility of *being able*...after the word of prohibition follows the word of judgment: "thou shalt surely die"...The infinite possibility of being able (awakened by the prohibition) draws closer for the fact that this possibility indicates a possibility as its consequence.[3]

Cheung is not here equating Macbeth with Adam, but this application of Kierkegaardian psychology is interesting. This was a fairly pervasive modern verdict on *Macbeth* before the postmodern deconstruction of the author's intention, the objective meaning of the text, and the existence of the essential self. This line, or some variation of it, seems to me to inform, at least to some extent, the views of Germaine Greer, Calderwood himself, Harvey Birenbaum, A P Rossiter and others.[4] Here we see a kind of existentialist's Macbeth viewed not as a rebel but as a human being who dares to become responsible for his own

selfhood and destiny. His tragedy is that he destroys his better self by the very act which he commits to give himself full scope for self-realisation.

Even in their own terms, though, I think, first, that such views take too little account of the goodness of Duncan and the irreducible inhumanity of murdering him. It is interesting that more recent postmodern attempts at criticism of *Macbeth*, some of which I will try to deal with later, tend to view Duncan's supposed goodness as a key point to attack. Secondly, there is a tendency here to ignore what is fairly clear in the text, that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have to suppress one part of their nature to commit the evils to which their ambition tempts them.[5] Anthony Paul, for example, at one point describes Macbeth as 'living his own nature and experience to the limit,'[6] whereas I think it would be more accurate to say that he lives one part of his nature beyond its appropriate limit and lets another part of his nature die. There are probably better ways of expressing it than that, but the point is essentially a simple one: if Macbeth's nature is 'full o'th'milk of human kindness', (1.5.17) it is hard to see how one can say that he lives his nature to the limit by killing people. In the sentence cited, Paul uses the word 'limit' in a sense exactly opposite to its function in the thought world of *Macbeth.* In that thought world, Macbeth *transgresses* the limits which are there precisely to stop human behaviour degenerating into chaos and universal destruction - Malcolm's 'confineless harms' (4.3.55).

I think also that Macbeth's self-awareness before 'the deed' is exaggerated in this kind of view. Germaine Greer, whose sensitivity to the spiritual aspects of *Macbeth* is otherwise illuminating, regards him as the one character in the play with real spiritual awareness. For

Greer, Macbeth's tragic stature partly consists in his knowing that the murder of Duncan will destroy him, but still daring to commit it:

> In Macbeth Shakespeare creates a character who is capable of carrying out the act, of knowing exactly how heinous his crime is, and of sticking to it once done. The irony is of the bitterest: Macbeth is damnable because he is a hero. Yet his damnation is not inevitable. Because he is more spiritually aware than anyone else on the stage, Macbeth himself reminds us of the existence of heaven and the action of grace. [7]

But I think that there is sometimes a spiritual childishness about the Macbeth of the early scenes. A spiritually mature Macbeth ought to know whether this supernatural soliciting is good or ill (1.3.130-131), should not be fearful of nor fascinated by it (1.3.51) and, in what seems to me his most childish moment, ought to be perfectly clear why he cannot say 'Amen' to a prayer when he is contemplating a murder (2.2.30).

The 'If it were done' soliloquy (1.6.1-28) does show that Macbeth knows that it is wrong to murder Duncan and that he risks eternal damnation by it. He does realise afterwards that he has put rancours in the vessel of his peace, defiled his mind and given his soul to the devil (3.1.64-68). But, at the outset, he somehow has not the spiritual wherewithal to cope with the witches. In this he is sharply contrasted to Banquo. Macbeth is both frightened and fascinated by the witches, begging and longing for them to stay, but terrified by the suggestion which they engender in his mind. Both reactions are rebuked by Banquo's, 'who neither beg, nor fear,/ Your favours nor your hate' (1.3.60-61).[8] Later Banquo says,

> 'And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence. - 1.3.123-6

McAlindon rightly calls this 'standard Christian doctrine'.[9] In fact, Banquo's refusal to fear the witches on the one hand or beg favours from them on the other, is also a model orthodox Christian approach. He is not untouched by the temptation, as his later - again strictly orthodox - invocation of the protection of the 'merciful powers' will show (2.1.7-9). But he very specifically does not 'yield to...suggestion', whereas Macbeth does (1.3.134). It is not coincidence that it is against this orthodox Christian standard that Macbeth is found wanting. The issue is a spiritual one. And here, though with respect for Greer's perceptive concern with spiritual issues,[10] one again departs from her view. At all points, Banquo is far more 'spiritually aware' than Macbeth - which is not to deny that he is a dramatic creation of obviously smaller stature.

In this context, 'suggestion' is a term of art. The orthodox doctrine of temptation, like all other Christian doctrines in Shakespeare's time, owed much to Augustine. Thomas Taylor's account in *Christ's Combate and Conquest* clearly shows the debt.[11] In both, the first phase of temptation is 'suggestion'. Secondly, the one tempted begins to play with the sinful ideas thus suggested. This is called 'delectation ' in Augustine or 'the rising of sinful desires' in Taylor. Thirdly, there is consent to the act and fourthly the act itself.

2. Partners of greatness

Both Augustine and Taylor clearly take as their archetypal model the first biblical temptation: that of Eve by the serpent. First the serpent makes the suggestion of eating the apple. Next, Eve sees that the tree is 'pleasant to the eyes' (Augustine's delectation) and 'a tree to be desired to get knowledge' (Taylor's rising of the sinful desires), and so on. But at

the end of the process, irreducibly, stands 'the deed' and the question of whether one does it or not.

One of the factors which most obviously suggests a resemblance between Macbeth and Adam is what Calderwood calls 'feminine temptations to aspire high'. But any attempt to compare Lady Macbeth with Eve runs into the immediate question, 'Which Eve?' - the Eve of the Genesis narrative, or of the theologians, or of the wider culture? I would not want to push the comparison beyond the obvious structural pattern in which Lady Macbeth participates in the temptation of her husband. And even then, it should be remembered that the idea of Lady Macbeth's ambition is very much present in the sources.[12]

What seems to me vital, however, is that there must be a sense of the Macbeths' closeness and their partnership.[13] This is marked by their repeated use of respectful and loving terms: 'dearest partner of greatness' (1.5.11), 'Love' (3.2.29), 'dearest chuck' (3.2.45), 'dear wife' (3.2.36), 'Sweet remembrancer' (3.4.36), 'gentle my Lord' (3.2.27), 'worthy Thane' (2.2.43), 'My royal Lord' (3.4.31), 'My worthy Lord' (3.4.82). There is good reason to believe that Duncan's view of their relationship is right. Their love is great (1.6.23). Its proper context is their beautiful castle at Inverness.

Barbara Everett describes the Macbeths as 'Shakespeare's most thoroughly married couple'.[14] McAlindon writes:

> Macbeth and his wife had, it would seem, a true bond. His deep love for her is economically but firmly indicated...Her tenderness manifests itself after Duncan's murder when her own misery responds to Macbeth's and she seeks to comfort him with gentle words...[15]

This is part of an argument about the wider opposition between love and strife in the play, whereby McAlindon points out the struggle within the two individuals between their gentler milky side and their fiery courage. This line of argument runs contrary to the tendency of some recent criticism of *Macbeth,* which tends to suggest that the play tacitly disapproves the feminine side in Macbeth and other men, as much as it openly disapproves the masculine side in Lady Macbeth. McAlindon's argument, derived from the cosmological understanding of the propriety of a state of controlled contrarious strife, suggests that the play's view is that, while feminine qualities ought to predominate in woman and masculine in man, the presence of a mettlesome side to Lady Macbeth, as recognised by her husband, and a milky side to Macbeth, as recognised by his wife, is a proper and vital part both of their individuality and of their preceding partnership of greatness.

This partnership is destroyed not by the murder of Duncan, but by the temptation to commit it, to which he is first exposed and to which he then exposes her. We see only the ashes of their love. There is no scene in the play in which we see them happy together, but, by the endearments and by their concern for each other, we know that they have been. Indeed the suggestion is of more than mere happiness: it is of the fiery and tender union of two great individuals in a generous partnership of mutual giving. *Macbeth* is the tragedy of a marriage, as well as of two individuals, a kingdom and a cosmos.

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[1] L Cormican, *Scrutiny,* 17 (1950-51), 298-317 (p. 313)
[2] Calderwood, *"If it were done',* p. 91
[3] King-kok Cheung, 'Shakespeare and Kierkegaard: 'Dread' in *Macbeth*', *SQ* 35 (1984), 430-439, p. 434
[4] Germaine Greer: *Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 1986); James L. Calderwood, *'Macbeth:* Counter-*Hamlet' Shakespeare Studies,* 17 (1986), 103-121; Harvey Birenbaum, 'Consciousness and Responsibility in *Macbeth', Mosaic,* 15 (1982), 17-32; A P Rossiter, *Angels with Horns (and other Shakespearean lectures),* ed. by G. Story, (London: Longmans, 1961), pp. 209-234, amongst others.

[5] 'According to the chivalric model, and the mythic one which underpins it, her gentleness should have moderated his martial fire and in so doing have helped him to achieve and maintain heroic integrity. What happens instead is that Lady Macbeth, in her desire to help her husband realise his ambition, effects a willed but temporary suppression of her 'feminine' qualities, allows the 'masculine' element in her nature to predominate, and at the same time brings about a complete suppression of those 'feminine' elements in her husband's nature which are essential to full humanity.' McAlindon, p. 210

[6] Paul, p. 142. In his conclusion, though, Paul reverts to the view that that Macbeth *transgresses* the appropriate limits.

[7] Greer, p. 61

[8] This is in very direct contradiction of Holinshed, where Banquo asks the weird women, 'What manner of women...are you, that seeme so little fauourable vnto me...appointing foorth nothing for me at all?' V p. 268. Thus Shakespeare saves James' ancestor from the sin against which he warns young Henry in the *Basilikon Doron.* See below p. 106.

[9] McAlindon p. 202

[10] For example: 'Macbeth is trying to kill his soul, which as resolutely refuses to die. Guilt joins forces with grace to prompt him to repent, but he will not.' Greer, p. 61

[11] Taylor, op. cit. I am indebted to a discussion of the relationship between these two authors in Brian Holloway: 'Vincentio's Fraud: Boundary and Chaos, Abstinence and Orgy in *Measure for Measure'* *SRASP* Vol 21, (1998) accessed on 26 November 1998 at www.marshall.edu/engsr/SR1998.html by way of Terry A Gray's gateway site: http://daphne.palomar.edu.shakespeare . Holloway argues that *Measure for Measure* deals with temptation as 'assaying' the character of Angelo, Isabella and Claudio successively. It would be quite possible to make a similar case about Malcolm's temptation in Act 4 Scene 3.

[12] E.g. Holinshed, I p. 269

[13] Amongst productions which I have seen, Ian McKellen and Judi Dench have perhaps given the strongest impression of this, in Trevor Nunn's production for the RSC.

[14] Barbara Everett, *Young Hamlet,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 103.

[15] McAlindon, p. 209

CHAPTER 7 CAIN AND ABEL

1. Wandering in the Land of Nod

The biblical story of Cain and Abel is one of the most persistent myths of English-speaking culture, even in our mainly post-Christian era. Consider, for example, the following titles of modern novels, of varying types: *East of Eden; The Land God Gave to Cain; Kane and Abel.*[1]

The land God gave to Cain, east of Eden, was the Land of Nod. At some point, the phrase 'the Land of Nod' came, in English, to mean sleep. The earliest example in literature is Swift, who 'in *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation,* said that he was "going into the Land of Nod" meaning that he was going to sleep, which meaning it has retained ever since.'[2]

We cannot be sure that Shakespeare was familiar with this meaning of the phrase, which thus first appears a hundred years after *Macbeth* was written; but we do know for certain that he imagined Cain wandering through the night stricken by a guilty conscience. At the end of *Richard II*, Bolingbroke says to the murderer Exton:

> The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labour,
> But neither my good word nor princely favour;
> With Cain go wander thorough the shades of night,
> And never show thy head by day nor light (5.6.40-44)[3]

Cain in his exile was sealed by God with an indelible mark. Again, this motif of the narrative, the mark of Cain, is an enduring feature of English culture, even to the present day. Shakespeare would have been thoroughly familiar with it. In the Genesis narrative, the Mark of Cain is a protective seal, but in the wider culture, including the marginalia of the

Geneva Bible, it was thought of as 'some visible signe of God's judgement that others should fear thereby.'[4]

The possibility which I am suggesting seems so simple that I have been very surprised not to find the suggestion made by anyone else. The scholarly consensus is that Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is sourced only in Shakespeare's imagination. Yet we know for certain that the picture of a murderer, marked with an indelible mark, was present in the most obvious literary source available to him, and that he imagined that murderer as wandering through the night wracked with guilt. And it is entirely possible that the place of Cain's wandering, the Land of Nod, was already a synonym for sleep in Shakespeare's time: indeed it is not easy otherwise to say why Shakespeare should have imagined Cain as wandering in the night in *Richard II.* In the bible, the Land of Nod has no connotations of night time at all: it is the place where Cain raises his family and builds the first city.

It is notable, finally, that this reading of the scene would lead us to expect exactly what does happen: that Lady Macbeth should escape vengeance or execution at the hands of the conquering forces of Malcolm. Probably, she kills herself 'as 'tis thought', but certainly no other human hand does her violence. In the Genesis narrative, as we have seen, it is to ensure this that Cain is given his mark. We have in Lady Macbeth, then, a murderer, wracked with guilt, marked with an indelible mark, wandering in the Land of Nod, who escapes physical punishment and revenge. The idea that this episode is unsourced is at least questionable.

It is hardly necessary to point out that this sourcing, if such it be, by no means determines the whole meaning or importance of the scene. Lady Macbeth's separation is not only from the world of light, daytime and inner peace. Amongst all these and other things, the scene also vitally points up her separation from Macbeth, which is a key repeated theme in Act 5. From Act 3 onwards she has had no real communication with him and in Act 5 we never see them together. But in her sleep she talks to him a lot (5.1.34-36, 42-43, 58-60, 62-65).

2. Sources seen and unseen

In Shakespeare's period, the myth of Cain and Abel was a cultural construct drawn from at least five major sources: the bible narrative; bible marginalia; the seminal doctrine of Augustine of Hippo; the many Cain and Abel dramas in the medieval mystery plays; and the insight of theologians in the new bible commentaries. In the last case, Calvin's magisterial commentary on Genesis is obviously of prime importance. But in truth, as Catherine Belsey has most recently demonstrated, the myth was so widespread as to have a more or less independent life in the cultural imagination of early modern England and Europe.[5]

In general, it is fair to say that Cain is more harshly treated in every other source than he is in the narrative of Genesis itself. This is quite clear in the marginalia. For example on Genesis 4.5 - 'but unto Kain and to his offering he [God] had no regard', - the Geneva Bible has, 'Because hee was an hypocrite, and offered onely for an outward shewe without sinceritie of heart.' This is pure editorial. Genesis is silent about why Cain's offering was not acceptable - a fact which, ironically, will enable later Calvinists to treat it as a story of pure election: God is wroth with whom he will be wroth. To some extent, however, the

harshness of the judgment on Cain is taken from the intra-biblical commentary on the story in 1 John 3: 12f:

> Cain which was of that wicked one, and slew his brother, and wherefore slew he him? because his owne workes were evill and his brothers good

and in Jude 11

> Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain...

The cultural version of the myth rather sharpens the price Cain has to pay in judgment. Shakespeare's version, the guilt-wracked wandering in the dark, is standard. Thus Calvin:

> Cain was not only condemned to personal exile, but was also subjected to still more severe punishment; namely that he should find no region of the earth where he would not be of a restless and fearful mind.[6]

This is indeed the judgment which, in Genesis, Cain fears; but God relents: the mark is set upon Cain so that he will not have to fear being killed. Thus protected, he raises a family and builds the first city.[7]

Augustine's *City of God* may be said to take up the story from this point. The narrative is fundamental to the entire construction of that great work. In Augustine, Cain and Abel become the fathers of 'the two lines of descent of the human race, advancing from the start towards different ends.'[8] Cain's descendants belong to the city of man, whereas Abel's belong to the eponymous city of God.

> Scripture tells us that Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one. For the city of the saints is up above where with their Prince, 'the king of ages', they will reign world without end.[9]

The editorial allegorising is obvious here; but it is important for our purposes to note that this understanding of Cain and Abel as direct moral and spiritual opposites with strongly contrasted posterities would have been normal and prevalent amongst educated people in

Shakespeare's time because of the all-pervading influence of Augustine. As we shall see, those few *Macbeth* critics who take seriously the possibility of an allusion to Cain in the play nearly always refer to Macbeth's murder of Duncan and the judgment arising from it. But, as I have already tried to show, the text generally, and Macbeth himself within the text, directly counterpoise his moral and spiritual nature and behaviour, and the posterity arising from them, not primarily with Duncan, but with Banquo.[10]

Before we move on to consider the relationship between them, I want to make one or two general comments about the Cain and Abel mystery plays. The subsequent prosperity of Cain is usually absent from the mystery plays. Indeed, the Chester and Coventry plays seem to have had no mention of the mark of Cain, either. A great deal is made of the respective offerings, with Abel encouraging Cain to give the best of the sheaves of wheat, and Cain, sometimes quite comically, offering the last leavings of the harvest, or deliberately overcounting how many sheaves he gives. The general motive for Cain's murder of Abel, in the Mysteries as in Augustine,[11] is envy.

It is this jealousy, and particularly the fact that it is a *moral* jealousy, which seems to me to resonate with Macbeth's clearly painted moral jealousy of Banquo in Act 3 Scene 1. On one level, Macbeth kills Banquo, and attempts to kill Fleance, because of his insecurity about the succession. But on another level, he quite clearly kills him because Banquo's royalty of nature is a rebuke to his own guilt.

3. Macbeth and Banquo, Cain and Abel, transference, denial and hypocrisy

Acts 2 and 3 both begin with important soliloquies by Banquo (2.1.4-9, 3.1.1-10). Banquo does occasionally have a choric function. But Adrian Poole makes the further point that the murder of Banquo, its motivation and its consequences, are a much more central theme of Acts 2 and 3 than the murder of Duncan.[12]

L Kirschbaum, commenting on the conversation between Macbeth and Banquo in Act 2 Scene 1 - 'I dreamt last night of the Weird Sisters...etc' writes -

> [I]f one regards the two speakers here not so much as people but as morality play figures who have chosen different sides in the battle between Heaven and Hell, there is little difficulty. Macbeth is the representative of the Tempter, and Banquo refuses the bait, not with polite evasiveness but with formal rejection. For there is a dichotomy both in Macbeth and in Macbeth's world as long as Banquo represents the good; from Macbeth's viewpoint, Banquo must either be absorbed or destroyed if Macbeth is to gain ease...[13]

Both Macbeth's role as Tempter and his restlessness about Banquo can be read from Act 3 Scene 1. R. Watkins and J. Lemmon write of the two murderers:

> ...to us in the audience these new arrivals are not yet identified: they are merely 'those men' who waited outside...This anonymity of the two men is Shakespeare's deliberate purpose.[14] By the end of this scene they will have *become* murderers: the tension of this leisurely episode lies in the fact that it is a scene of temptation...Macbeth has given his soul to the common enemy of man, and is now about the business of his master, the Devil - the corruption of other men.[15]

I am in complete agreement with this. It additionally explains, in particular, that the resonances of Matthew 5, which Muir found throughout the scene, are integral to its meaning.[16] When speaking of the heavenly courtroom scene, I mentioned that the Accuser, in the New Testament, is Satan. Notice here that the temptation of the murderers consists of accusation at two levels. There is first the false accusation that Banquo is the source of these men's troubles and then, secondly, the accusation that they may not be men enough

to do anything about it. Satan's other stock-in-trade, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, is lies or deception, again the technique which Macbeth uses here.[17]

But as well as being, like Act 4 Scene 3, one of the play's several temptation scenes, this is also a scene permeated with the stock psychological ideas of transference and denial: indeed I am always surprised that psychologising interpretations have done little with it.[18] Transference and denial are key psychological motifs in the narrative of Cain and Abel. The anger which Cain feels against God is redirected against his brother. The blame which belongs to him he transfers to his brother. And when God comes to ask what he has done he denies it, denying also any knowledge of his brother's whereabouts. We have seen, however, that Shakespeare shared the dominant cultural view that Cain was wracked by felt guilt. Thus, in the myth as Shakespeare knew it, conscious and subconscious are in conflict. Cain knows that he is really guilty, but erects the subconscious defences of transference and denial.[19]

In Act 3 Scene 1 the complex pattern of transference all revolves around the relationship between Macbeth and Banquo. Before the murderers enter, Macbeth has said that he has both rational and irrational fears of Banquo and that they 'stick deep'. The rising anger and remorse of his soliloquy make clear that this is indeed the case.

Macb: Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd: '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 rebuk'd; as, it is said,
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the Sisters,

When they first they put the name of King upon me,
And bade them speak to him; then, prophet-like,
They hail'd him father to a line of kings:
Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murthr'd;
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! 1.3.48-70

As his fear strikes ever deeper, there is a kind of perverse accounting. By the murder of the gracious Duncan, Macbeth has won the kingship, but lost his present peace of mind and the eternal jewel of his soul hereafter. He hates the thought that Banquo might, in a sense, keep all three. He still has inner peace: his 'bosom franchised'; and salvation: 'in the great hand of God'; and he may yet have, in his issue, the kingship for which Macbeth has given them away. Such gain as Macbeth gets, he will have as king in the present: Banquo's gain, like that of Augustine's Abel, is all hereafter; but it will be, as the Witches promised, 'greater'

In the scene which follows, Macbeth begins by transferring guilt to Banquo. The murderers previously thought that it was Macbeth who had crossed them and borne them in hand. We have no reason to doubt that this really had been the case. Macbeth lays the guilt of this on Banquo in extravagant language:

Macb know
That it was he, in the times past, which held you
So under fortune, which you had thought had been
Our innocent self? This I made good to you
In our last conference; pass'd in probation with you
How you were borne in hand; how cross'd; the instruments;

> Who wrought with them; and all things else, that might,
> To half a soul, and to a notion craz'd,
> Say, 'Thus did Banquo (3.1.75-83)

This extravagance of language is continuous with the rising anger and remorse of the soliloquy. The most piteous note is struck by the reference to 'Our innocent self'. We have just heard Macbeth's grief for the loss of his innocent self: 'have I fil'd my mind...the gracious Duncan have I murther'd;/ Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,...and mine eternal jewel/ Given to the common Enemy of man...' His innocent self has been lost for ever (literally) and his grief is bitter. The person in this scene with only 'half a soul', (a ruined 'eternal jewel') is Macbeth, and it is he whose mind[20] is 'craz'd' by fantasies of his innocence and Banquo's guilt. The murderers were already convinced yesterday: Macbeth is fantastically trying to convince himself that 'Thus did Banquo.' But it was he: just as it was he, not Banquo, who succumbed to the Witches. He hates, fears and envies Banquo for it, and so begins this scene by painting the picture of a guilty Banquo to set between himself and the picture of his own guilt.

By means of this first transference of his guilt to Banquo, Macbeth effects a second: he creates two more people who hate Banquo as he does. 'Are you so gospell'd,/ To pray for this good man...' Banquo is indeed a good man. This is one of those several occasions when Macbeth tells the truth, even though he is being sarcastic, or deceitful.[21] Banquo is indeed a good man; but there are three of us that hate him now.

Worse is to follow. The third transference in the scene is simply that Macbeth shares his real guilt with the two murderers. He turns these desperate men into murderers like himself. They are, if you like, the first two incarnadined droplets in the 'multitudinous seas'.

Macbeth is a spreading contagion.[22] As McAlindon notes, before this plot is accomplished, he will out of nowhere have contaminated yet one further murderer, to make up another evil trinity.[23]

And all this is done, at least in part, just so that he can say, 'Thou canst not say, I did it' (3.4.49); not only denying it to 'certain friends that are both his and mine' (3.1.120) for political purposes, but also in the continuing vain attempt to deny it to himself: 'To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself...' (2.2.72). But he always does know: what he was, what he has become, what he is becoming and what he has lost. He defies it, but he always knows it. Political 'deniability' is of no help with this knowledge: it literally haunts him.

This moral envy and transference are at the very heart of the Cain and Abel narrative. In his commentary on Genesis, Calvin writes of Cain, 'not only was he seized with a sudden vehement anger, but...from a lingering sadness, he cherished a feeling so malignant that he was wasting with envy...'[24] and 'Thus all wicked men, after they have been long and vehemently enraged against God, are at length so convicted by the divine judgment, that they vainly desire to transfer to others the cause of the evil...'[25] So also, Augustine: 'Cain...slew his brother. And for what reason? Because his deeds were of evil intention, and his brother's were righteous.'[26] And again: '...it was certainly envy which goaded and inflamed Cain to his brother's destruction...'[27]

We should note further that denial of the crime was of great importance both to doctrinal understanding of the narrative[28] and, of course, to its dramatic presentation in the mystery plays. The best known line from the Genesis account is still probably 'Am I my brothers

keeper?' As we have seen, Macbeth openly and subconsciously denies his responsibility for killing Banquo. And when Banquo 'fails his feast', Macbeth pretends not to know where he is.

God's response to 'Am I my brothers keeper?' is, 'the voyce of thy brothers blood crieth unto me from the earth.'[29] Blood is everywhere in *Macbeth*, but one first couplet in Macbeth's response to Banquo's ghost is particularly interesting in this regard:

> Blood hath been shed ere now, i'th'olden time
> Ere humane statute purg'd the gentle weal 3.4.74-5

Various suggestions have been made about when 'th'olden time' was. L. C. Knights writes that Macbeth 'glances back to a time when murder was common, to what will later be known as the Hobbesian state of nature.'[30] Wilbur Sanders and Paul A. Cantor suggest a reference to a primitive warrior culture, of which Macbeth is the representative, having to give way to a civilised culture, of which Duncan, Malcolm and Banquo are the representatives. For Cantor, the latter culture is specifically Christian: it is the time when 'they rise again'.[31] The only scholars I have found who make what seems to me the obvious gloss are J. H. Blits and Peter Milward. Blits writes:

> Macbeth distinguishes between the earliest time, when men lived in lawless savagery, and more recent times when they live under more humane or civilizing law (perhaps the Mosaic law).[32]

And Milward:

> In these words there may well be an echo of the first shedding of blood by Cain in Genesis 4.[33]

This Judaeo-Christian conception of time divided into the different dispensations of God is the one which Shakespeare uses in *Measure for Measure*. *Measure* reflects the time when

the Mosaic law - the Justice - has sway over the commonwealth and with what the New Testament suggests was found wanting in that dispensation. The dispensation immediately before the Law is the time when, as Paul puts it in Romans, 'death reigned from Adam to Moses'.[34] There is no doubt at all that Abel's is the archetypal blood shed in that period. And we know, of course, that the primitiveness of 'the eldest primal curse' is a key aspect of Shakespeare's imagination of it. It is worth noting, also, that this reference to the reign of death comes right in the middle of that passage in Romans 5 which I argued dominates the conception of the relationship between Malcolm and Macbeth in Act 4 Scene 3.[35]

Let me turn, next, to the theme of offering. I have already made a case for seeing in Duncan a thoroughly worked out allusion to God. As I pointed out earlier, it is very noticeable that, as part of that allusion, Macbeth, Banquo and Lady Macbeth are all given set-piece speeches acknowledging their duty to him, which share the simple idea that everything they are and have is from Duncan and is owed in duty back to him.

All three speeches are compatible with this interpretation, and hence with the resonance of the Cain and Abel narrative which I have been suggesting. Key to this understanding is the emphasis that in the cultural myth, (though not necessarily in Genesis) Cain's offering, like that of the Macbeths, was hypocritical. We saw before the Geneva gloss on Genesis 4.5: 'Because hee was an hypocrite, and offered onely for an outward shewe without sinceritie of heart.' We noted too Cain's sometimes comical miscounting or giving poor quality sheaves in the mystery plays.

One of the few scholars who regards the Cain allusion as an important theme in *Macbeth* is Paul A Jorgensen:

> The betrayal is thus made to include the killing of kin. The Biblical archetype of killing a kinsman is Cain's murder of Abel, and once again a theological meaning is not only tempting but necessary. Only by associating Macbeth's crime with that of Cain can we, with the help of Renaissance commentary on Genesis, adequately account for much of the subsequent torture of Macbeth, notably the kind of fear that precedes his despair.[36]

'Only' may be an exaggeration, I think. Very few commentators do associate Macbeth's crime with that of Cain, and they do not find themselves at a loss to account for his fear and inner torture. Nevertheless, it is true that Cain was, for Shakespeare's culture, the archetypal murderer and that, in that culture, his subsequent experience was held to be one of perpetual guilty fear.

For Jorgensen, clearly, it is the killing of Macbeth's kinsman Duncan which evokes the Cain parallel. If I am right that the sleepwalking may have its source in the myth, it is nonetheless clear also that Lady Macbeth's guilt is about the murder of Duncan, in which she colludes, rather than that of Banquo, from the planning of which she is strongly excluded (3.1.43, 3.2.45-46). But the religious imagery surrounding Macbeth's reaction to the death of Duncan (Judas, Pilate, the Last Supper, the naked babe and so on) all resonates with the death of Christ, as we saw. Macbeth's motivation for and reaction to the death of Banquo are much more interesting in relation to the Cain and Abel myth than his motivation for and reaction to the death of Duncan.

There are, of course, problems with such a view. If there is some truth in the view that Banquo is conceived to please King James - and I think there must be *some* truth in it - can

one really suggest, in addition, such a different layer of meaning? Moreover, Banquo is not Macbeth's kinsman, as Duncan was; and he is not killed by Macbeth's own hand, as Duncan was. The nub of the Cain and Abel myth is, after all, that Cain and Abel are brothers and, as Catherine Belsey has most recently demonstrated at length, the familial aspect of the Genesis narratives was so important as to be normative for some aspects of the understanding and interpretation of family life in Shakespeare's culture.[37] Shakespeare's other direct allusion to the myth, in *Hamlet* 3.3.36-38, also stresses the fraternal aspect.[38]

In fact, this last factor is what immediately seems wrong with Jorgensen's argument. One intuitively feels that the generations are wrong. Macbeth does not kill in Duncan a brother, an equal, someone of whom he might be jealous, even a rival. To kill Duncan, as Lady Macbeth shows us, is to kill a father figure (2.2.13), an old man (5.1.37-38), more like parricide than fratricide.[39]

Macbeth's rivals are Banquo and Macduff, the Thanes of similar age and stature.
And that, with the *caveats* thus expressed, is really the point to which I return: the imaginative feeling that, in killing Banquo, Macbeth does kill a rival, an equal, of whom he is jealous, and, especially, morally jealous. Like Cain who 'slew his brother...because his owne workes were evill and his brothers good' (I John 3. 12-13), Macbeth conceives a passionate envy of Banquo which is fundamentally based on Banquo's 'royalty of nature... dauntless temper...wisdom...valour.'

4. Brothers in arms

There remains, though, Jorgensen's starting point: Duncan really is Macbeth's kinsman, whereas Banquo is not, and we know from *Hamlet* (3.3.36-38) that the fraternal aspect of the narrative was at least present to Shakespeare's mind. To reflect on this, we return to Act 3 Scene 1, and Macbeth's description of his jealousy of Banquo. I want to compare it with the following speeches of Oliver from *As You Like It*, Act 1 Scene 1. Like Macbeth in Act 3 Scene 1, Oliver is trying to bring about a murder by convincing the potential murderer that the intended victim is his (the murderer's) enemy:

> he will practise against thee by poison, entrap thee by some treacherous device, and never leave thee till he hath ta'en thy life by some indirect means or other; for I assure thee, - and almost with tears I speak it, - there is not one so young and so villainous this day living. I speak but brotherly of him...
> *As You Like It* 1.1.158-164[40]

Here is the same transference as we saw in Macbeth's description of Banquo - again with the sense that Oliver can almost convince himself that this is true, and that his tears are real. The same moral jealousy also follows:

> I hope I shall see an end of him*; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he*. Yet he's gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved, and, indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised. But is shall not be so long; this wrestler shall clear all... *AYLI* 1.1.173-179

The direct comparison is between the words italicised and Macbeth's 'there is none but he/ Whose being I do fear: and under him my genius is rebuked; as it is said, /Mark Antony's was by Caesar.' (3.1.53-56)

Louis Adrian Montrose writes of the early scenes of *As You Like It:*

> What echoes deeply through the scenes I have discussed is the fourth chapter of Genesis, the story of Cain and Abel and what another of Shakespeare's fratricides calls 'the primal eldest curse...'...The wrath of Cain echoes in Oliver's fratricidal

> musings at the end of the first scene... Shakespeare is creating a resonance between his romantic fiction and Biblical history[41]

Very recently, Catherine Belsey has made the same point:

> The closest analogue in Shakespeare's works to the story of Cain and Abel is the rivalry in *As You Like It* which prompts Oliver to plot the murder of his younger brother, Orlando. Oliver's motivation ... is his own misprision... Oliver claims that Orlando's virtues attract the love of the world, and make him correspondingly ugly... Augustine accounts for the first murder in similar terms. 'Cain's envy...was of that diabolical sort that the wicked feel for the good just because they *are* good, not wicked like themselves.' Cain and Abel are not mentioned in *As You Like It*, but the analogy with the familiar story gives added point to the archetypal name of old Adam... [who]... behaves in many ways like a stand-in for Orlando's dead father.[42]

Perhaps it will be felt that I have dragged this reference in from too remote a distance; but I want to make the simple point that in these passages which so closely resemble *Macbeth* 3.1 in the speaker's purpose, tone and feeling, the framed protagonists are two brothers, of whom the elder bitterly resents the younger's goodness and feels himself slighted by it. I do not think that the resemblance is merely coincidental. My view is that these comments on the early scenes of *As You Like It* apply also to the very similar Act 3 Scene 1 of *Macbeth.*

5. Going to the dogs

There is one small detail more, which I rather hesitate to mention. At other points where I have suggested an allusion to a biblical villain, there is something like a verbal cue. The sleepwalking and the reference to the blood of th'olden time are good enough cues for the Cain-Abel reference, I suggest, in the scenes in which they appear. But there appears no cue for the Cain-Abel reference I am suggesting in Act 3 Scene 1. There is one possibility, however; though I must confess that it is somewhat speculative.

One of the most problematic passages in the scene is Macbeth's long list of dogs (3.1.92-100). The point that there are different kinds of dogs, with different values, just as there are different kinds of men with different values, is obvious enough. And that is rather the problem: Macbeth, with his list, does labour the point at surprising length. Unnecessary multiplicity in this play is always to be suspected. Up to and including the word 'dogs' itself, there are in fact nine kinds of dog listed. The kind of breed Macbeth is looking for, though, is a murderer. If such an adjective existed, he might be said, amongst the file of men, to be seeking the Cainine. The English adjective canine or caninal was apparently just coming into being at this time, although 'canini' as a Latin word to describe the canine teeth in humans was much older. OED records caninall in 1599 and canine teeth in 1607. So it is just possible - you must promise not to stop reading from this point forward - that this list of nine sorts of dogs is a list of the Cain-nine: and that that is how the Cain allusion is cued.

6. The Three Murderers

After 400 years, it is perhaps wise to admit that there are some questions which will remain unanswered, however often we revisit them. The question, 'Who is the Third Murderer?' is probably one such. I have nothing to add to the speculations about Macbeth himself, his 'evil genius', Seyton, Rosse, Lady Macbeth in disguise and so on. I fully accept, though, McAlindon's simple insight, that the progression from two to three and the creation of an evil trinity is part of a consistent pattern of number symbolism, whatever the identity of the third person.

The reading of Act 3 Scene 1 as a temptation scene says something about the nature of the first two murderers, however. The question is why Macbeth needs murderers who want to kill Banquo on their own account, rather than mere hired assassins.[43] I have suggested a number of answers which arise from his own inner conflict and, further, that Macbeth's inner need is intimately connected with a statement about the nature of evil. Something is being said here about the plans of Satan at a theological level, and how they work through human beings at a psychological level. It is thematically important that we think of the Murderers as men who are not necessarily prone to violence or evil by nature, without the provocative stimulus that Macbeth provides.

This involves believing the murderers when they describe the disasters and misfortunes which have brought them to their present position. It might involve, also, the possibility that the murderers may not be eternally lost. As we have come to expect from the middle person of a trinity, the Second Murderer is a somewhat equivocal, ambiguous figure. We know that the First Murderer carried out the murder of Banquo. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that it was the Second Murderer who, somehow or other, let the easier prey Fleance escape. 'We have lost / Best half of our affair' (3.4.20-21) purportedly refers to the escape of Fleance, but it may also refer to the realisation that they have now become murderers like Macbeth and lost their 'better part of man' - a moment of spiritual cognition.

If I were directing *Macbeth*, the First Murderer would be the one who goes back to report to Macbeth the successful murder of Banquo, and the First and Third Murderers would be the Murderers at Fife. But the Second Murderer would be the otherwise unexplained

messenger who somehow knows the plan, and tries to give Lady Macduff warning of the approaching danger.

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[1] By John Steinbeck, Hammond Innes and Jeffrey Archer respectively.
[2] *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,* 14th edn. (London: Cassell, 1989), *ad loc.*
[3] *Richard II,* ed. by Peter Ure, 5th edn, (London: Methuen, 1961)
[4] Marginal comment on Genesis 4. 15 *ad loc.*
[5] Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden,* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1999). Belsey illustrates her work with numerous pictorial representations of the story. She says nothing specifically about *Macbeth.*
[6] J. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis,* trans. and ed. by J King, (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), p. 198
[7] Genesis 4. 17
[8] Augustine, *City of God,* (Harmondsworth, New York, Ringwood, Markham, Auckland: Penguin, 1972), p. 595
[9] ibid, p. 596
[10] See eg Wayne Booth, 'Macbeth as Tragic Hero' in *Macbeth,* ed. by Harold Bloom, in the series Major Literary Characters, (New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1991), p. 97; V. K. Whitaker, *The Mirror up to Nature,* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1965), pp. 268-9
[11] Augustine, p. 605
[12] In the 1999 British Academy Lecture, yet to published, but which I heard in preview at the Shakepeare Institute at Stratford in March 1999. Probable title, 'The Third Person in *Macbeth'.*
[13] L. Kirschbaum, 'Banquo and Edgar: Character or Function?', *Essays in Criticism,* 7 (1957), 1-21 p. 5. For a contrary view of Banquo, see amongst others Bradley, pp. 379-386 and Booth, p. 106.
[14] Those were the days.
[15] *Macbeth,* ed. by R. Watkins and J. Lemmon, (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1974), pp. 94-95. I have not found any particular rival interpretations of 3.1, though some commentators find little purpose in it. Bradley, for example, regarded it as a candidate for cutting (along with 4.3, unsurprisingly). Bradley, p.403.
[16] Muir, note on 3.1.87-8 *ad loc.* On Macbeth's deception of the murderers see also H. Birenbaum, 'Consciousness and Responsibility in *Macbeth', Mosaic,* 15 (1982), II 17-32, esp p. 21
[17] The ideas of Satan's deception and accusation are closely associated in Revelation 12. 7-10
[18] Birenbaum is the exception but, to my mind, he is better on the psychology of the murderers than he is on Macbeth's.
[19] Belsey's work argues throughout that the Adam/Eve, Cain/Abel stories were normative for how people thought about relationships within the nuclear family. It was (is) normal to interpret the Cain and Abel story in what we might think of as a psychological way.
[20] The meaning of 'notion' as given by Muir, *ad loc.*
[21] As, most obviously in his report of Duncan's death: 'The wine of life is drawn…etc'. In a real sense, this is how the sin of equivocation in *Macbeth* 'returns to plague the inventor'.
[22] See Calderwood, '*Macbeth* Counter-Hamlet', p. 106)
[23] McAlindon, p. 205.
[24] Calvin, p. 198
[25] ibid p. 199
[26] Augustine, p. 604
[27] ibid p. 605
[28] ibid p. 574
[29] Genesis 4. 10
[30] Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes*, p. 133
[31] Paul A. Cantor, *Macbeth und die Evangelisierung von Schottland,* (Munchen: C F von Siemens Stiftung, 1993), passim, esp p. 34; Wilbur Sanders and Howard Jacobson, *Shakespeare's Magnanimity,* (London; Chatto and Windus, 1978), pp. 57-69
[32] J. H. Blits, *The Insufficiency of Virtue,* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), p. 120

[33] Milward, p. 140

[34] Romans 5. 14. The Geneva gloss on 5. 13 is also interesting: 'That this is so, that both guiltinesse and death began not after the giving and transgressing of Moses' law, it appeareth manifestly by that, that men died before that law was given.'

[35] See also Galatians 3. 16-22

[36] Paul A. Jorgensen, *Our naked frailties,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 200

[37] Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden,* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1999) Belsey illustrates her work with numerous pictorial representations of the story. She says nothing specifically about *Macbeth.*

[38] Belsey suggests quite an important general relationship to the Cain/Abel myth throughout *Hamlet.* I have not yet had time to look at her arguments in detail.

[39] But it is also, as I have suggested, to kill a higher order of being. Compare, for example, the pictures of Banquo and Duncan's respective corpses. Banquo is dead in a ditch, with his throat cut and twenty trenched gashes in his head (3.4.15, 25-27). Duncan's body, 'His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood' (2.3.110), is sacredly buried at Iona (2.4.32-35.)

[40] Quotations from Shakespeare, unless otherwise stated, are from *The Oxford Shakespeare,* ed. by W. J. Craig, (London, New York, Toronto: OUP, 1905)

[41] Louis Adrian Montrose, 'The Place of a Brother' in *As You Like It*: Social Process and Comic Form, *SQ,* 32 (1981), 28-54, p. 56

[42] Belsey, p. 139

[43] In the sources, the Murderers are merely hired assassins, used by Macbeth to establish deniability by doing the murder 'something from the palace.'

CHAPTER 8 KING SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR

Introduction

The next biblical figure to be considered is King Saul. Saul, a Benjaminite, was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be first king of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah. In the list of biblical figures which I am suggesting, Saul is *sui generis*. So far as I am aware, there is no play devoted to him in the Mystery Plays. He does not figure obviously in the schematic exposition of salvation history which the Mysteries sought to represent: the cosmic drama of paradise lost and regained in the two Adams. With regard to *Macbeth*, however, he is a particularly interesting character for one overriding reason: he is depicted as an initially good king, but is then tormented by an evil spirit and condemned because, amongst other things, he consults a witch. And there is no doubt that Shakespeare's royal patron was very interested in him.

1. *Basilikon Doron* and *Daemonologie*

Jane H. Jack argued that many Christian themes in *Macbeth* are inspired by a reading of King James' *Daemonologie* and *Basilikon Doron.*[1] Jack went a step further than Frye when she wrote

> The explicitly Christian quality of *Macbeth*, the fact that it is an imaginative exploration of evil in biblical terms, is the key to the tragedy.[2]

In particular, she argued that Macbeth's visit seeking out the Witches in Act 4 Scene 1 was a reflection of King James' interest in Saul. James was very interested in witchcraft, but there are very few witches in the bible. Easily the most famous is the Witch of Endor, whom Saul consults about his future, when threatened by the Philistines.[3] She summons up the shade of the prophet Samuel, who accurately prophesies Saul's defeat and death,

and that his kingdom will be given to a new King, David. The story is part of some of the most vivid narrative writing in the historical books of the Old Testament.

As Jack points out '...an early part of [the *Daemonologie*] was devoted to a long discussion of Saul's crime...'[4] Moreover,

> ...in the *Basilikon Doron...Henry* is warned..."Consult therefore with no Necromancier nor false Prophet, vpon the successe of your warres; remembering on King *Saules* miserable end.[5]
>
> Like Saul, Macbeth hears from the witches the confirmation of what he most fears. The crisis of the story is the victory of the witches: the resolution of the story is the judgment passed upon Macbeth at the end - the same judgment that is passed upon Saul: "So Saul dyed for his transgression, that he committed against the Lord, *euen* against the worde of the Lord, which he kept not, and in that he soght and asked counsel of a familiar spirit."[6]

Jack also adds the evidence of Saul's beheading:

> Macbeth's crime is the same as Saul's, and his end is the same. When his head was borne in impaled on a pole at the end of the play the audience could not have failed to be reminded of I Samuel, xxxi, 9: "And they cut off his head, and stripped him out of his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines on euerie side, that they shulde publish it..."[7]

This is an interesting point, but 'could not have failed' is a little strong, I think. Apart from anything else, Shakespeare's audience might more likely have been reminded of beheadings much more recent and closer to home. It is worth adding, too, that the head on a pole motif is taken straight from Holinshed's account of Macduff's dealing with Macbeth's body.[8]

Nonetheless, Jack's argument for the allusion to Saul is consistent with the pattern of reference to biblical figures which I have thus far outlined. Macbeth ends this episode with the words: 'Let this pernicious hour/ Stand aye accursed in the calendar.' There is a certain rhetorical quality in the lines which takes the hearer into a future that seems more

distant than the end of *Macbeth*. The reference to the calendar and to the sempiternal 'aye' are consonant with the feeling that the narrative has other layers of significance than its place in this play. There is a similarity to Malcolm's 'confound all unity on earth' - a sense of a cosmic scale of relevance.

2. Macbeth and Banquo, Saul and David, and the crack of doom

As well as being a king who tried to benefit from witchcraft, Saul would also have been topically interesting to James, because of the story that he had been afflicted by an evil spirit. Saul's successor as king was David. There are a number of accounts of David's rise to prominence, but in one of them he comes to Saul's court as a musician sent to play his harp for the king, so that the evil spirit will not torment him. The boy David would play his harp for Saul and the demon would leave him.[9] This may give us the clue to another one word cue embedded in the text of this scene. Macbeth says to the first apparition, 'Thou hast harp'd my fear aright' (4.1.74).

Thematically, the contrast between the posterities of Banquo and Macbeth dominates the ending of the Act 4 Scene 1. Macbeth's barren sceptre is contrasted with the line of Banquo, which stretches out to the crack of doom. As is well known, James was thought to stand in Banquo's succession. But if Saul is the dominant biblical referent for Macbeth here, then the dominant referent for Banquo is the second king of Israel, David. The spirit of the prophet Samuel, which the witch has called up to speak to Saul, says, 'for the Lord will rent the kingdome out of thine hand, and give it thy neighbour David.'[10] It should be noted that, in Christian doctrine, the line of David does indeed 'stretch out to the crack of

doom', because Christ is seen as the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy of a king in David's line.

There is a continuity here with the Cain-Abel parallel which I earlier suggested in Macbeth and Banquo. God's choice of the second king David over the first king Saul is, of course, similar in pattern to the choice of Abel the younger over Cain the older, (the younger Jacob over the older Esau, second Adam over first Adam and so on). We saw that for Augustine, Cain, the first city builder, was the inheritor of the city of man; whereas Abel was to be inheritor of the City of God - the new, heavenly, Jerusalem. But the founder of the first Jerusalem as Zion, the city of God, was King David, who made the Jebusite stronghold his capital, and sited the Ark of the Covenant there. On a Christian understanding, Abel's posterity and David's are similarly eternal: they stretch out to the crack of doom and beyond.

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[1] Jane H. Jack '*Macbeth*, King James and the Bible', *ELH*, 22 (1955), 173-193
[2] ibid, p. 180
[3] I Samuel 28
[4] Jack, p. 181
[5] ibid, p. 181
[6] ibid, p. 181
[7] ibid, p. 182
[8] Holinshed, I p. 277
[9] I Samuel 16. 23
[10] I Samuel 28. 17

CHAPTER 9 HEROD

Introduction

The most obvious of all the biblical villains whom Macbeth resembles is Herod the Great, tyrant slaughterer of the innocents. Even in his own time, Herod's cruelty was proverbial, as far away as Rome. If any of the Mystery Play cycles was particularly familiar to William Shakespeare of Stratford, surely it would have been Coventry, from where we also have one of the most atmospheric of old English Christmas carols. The Coventry Carol includes the words:

> Herod the King, in his raging, charged he hath this day
> His men of might, in his own sight,
> All young children to slay

According to the New Testament narrative, Herod the Great, client king in the Roman province of Judaea, was terrified that a new king of the Jews had been born in Bethlehem, according to astrology of the Magi and the Jerusalem scribes' reading of the prophecy of Micah. In order to make sure that the child was put to death, he had all male children under the age of two in Bethlehem put to death.[1]

1. The Slaughter of the Innocents

Emrys Jones writes:

> Herod and Macbeth are both confronted by prophecies which seem to entail their own displacement from the throne. Both lash out violently in a vain attempt to escape their destiny. Herod is a killer of innocent children and so – later in the play – is Macbeth. Indeed Banquo's son Fleance is also presented as a child and he is included in Macbeth's murderous plans (he corresponds, one might say, to the infant Jesus). But just as the one child Herod must kill escapes, so the one child Macbeth must kill also escapes.[2]

Jack's similar view is again mediated through her overarching theory that *Macbeth* especially reflects King James' specific biblical interests - in this case, in the Book of

Revelation. In the next quotation, she is dealing also with the 'naked babe' soliloquy. The quotation begins with a now familiar dangerous formula:

> I do not think that a contemporary audience could have failed to be struck by Macbeth's increasing similarity to Herod as the tragedy progressed: surely the Book of *Revelation* was much in Shakespeare's mind as he wrote the play. Here is how Herod appears in that Book:..."and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God and to his throne"...Surely it is this passage which explains transition from the concept of a pitiful helpless babe to that of a power striding the blast.[3]

As we have seen, Southwell is almost certainly the literary source for the transition from naked babe to mounted warrior, but Jack may convincingly have identified Southwell's biblical source - or, to be more strictly accurate, the biblical source of the original poem which Southwell translated and adapted.

Jack is on slightly firmer ground here when she speaks of what Shakespeare's audience 'could not have failed to be struck by' Raging Herod was one of the great roles of the Mystery Plays (and is, indeed, still just about the best part in the Sunday School nativity play). It is clear from Hamlet's speech to the Players that Shakespeare could take for granted his audience's knowledge of this theatrical Herod.[4]

In the biblical narrative, Herod flies into a rage when he realises that the wise men, whom he had sent to bring him word of the whereabouts of Christ, have gone home by another way. He decides to kill all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age.[5] Similarly, Macbeth, as soon he finds out that Macduff has escaped him, lashes out at his wife and children.

Jones adds that Macbeth's banquet may have been suggested by the memory of a Mystery Play representation of the banquet at which Herod died. At Coventry, Herod formally invites the knights to sit with him:

> *Herod:* Now am I sett at mete
> And wurthly servyd at my degre
> Com forth knyghtys, sytt down and ete
> And be as merry as ze can be
> *Miles:* Lord at zoure byddynge we take our sete[6]

Then Mors (Death) enters and kills Herod and his knights as they brag about the slaughter of the innocents. It is also the case that in some cycles Herod has a scene with the two knights he has chosen to carry out the killing, which may have prompted the scene in which Macbeth deals with his two murderers.

All this is obvious, and a number of critics mention it. It is simply unimaginable that, if I have been right about the biblical imagery so far, Shakespeare would not have had Herod in mind when writing the murder of young Macduff. Apart from anything else, it is notable that the murder of the child seems more central than the murder of the woman.[7] I must admit, however, that although the pattern seems so compelling, this would be the one allusion to a biblical villain for which I cannot find a specific cue. Just possibly the suspiciously repeated '...fled to England...Fled to England?' (4.2.141-142) may suggest an assonant reference to the Flight into Egypt. The New Testament tradition is that Mary's husband Joseph, warned of Herod's intent, flees with her and her child into Egypt. This is the biblical precursor of Herod's decision to slaughter the innocents. Such an allusion would be reinforced by Macbeth's immediately succeeding reference to 'The flighty purpose' (4.2.145); but it is not wholly convincing.

2. Multiplying villainies and total depravity

There are thus allusions to seven biblical villains in Macbeth's descent into depravity: Adam, Judas, Pilate, Cain, Saul, Herod the Great and Herod Antipas. In six cases, there are verbal cues, in four of which there are clusters of polysyllabic words and patterns of sibilant alliteration. Six of the seven cases are episodes usually presented in the Mystery Plays. Frye argued, with good evidence, that the Macbeths' progress into depravity was consonant with the contemporary theology of evil. This evidence suggests that that process is signposted by references to the seven biblical villains.

The list of seven leaves out of account Lucifer/Satan. He is referred to in 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell' and is, I am quite sure, the model for Macbeth as tempter of the murderers and Malcolm. As an evil spirit or fallen angel, rather than a human being, Lucifer is in a different category from the other villains.

The sibilant alliterations may suggest, even, that the Macbeths are somehow possessed by the spirits of those villains. Possession was traditionally thought to happen in sevens. In the bible and in all number symbolism, seven, like three, was a holy and magical number with an evil shadow side. In the Christian tradition, Jesus was said, in particular, to have cast out seven devils from Mary Magdalene.[8] It is a particularly interesting question whether Lady Macbeth's is successful in her evocation of the evil spirits. For me, the sense is never lost that Lady Macbeth has a finer nature which she is struggling to suppress. Sleepwalking was one recognised symptom of demon possession, which was highly topical at the time when *Macbeth* was written. Yet we have no difficulty explaining her

perturbation by ordinary psychological categories and she does no harm or evil in her nightly perambulations: unless, perhaps, it is in the course of them that she kills herself.

It is not clear how much is added to the general picture of Macbeth's descent into evil by these biblical signposts. There is an obvious twofold process in which his conscience is tormented by guilt, but in which he stifles its voice by plunging into worse and worse crimes. I think it is right to say that the murder of Duncan, although it is the first and greatest crime in the cosmic scheme of things, is nonetheless not so meanly evil in human terms as the murder of Banquo, the attempted murder of Fleance, and the murder of Young Macduff. There is a sense of degeneration into deeper and deeper depravity.

The 'total depravity' of humanity was postulated by Calvin as the consequence of Adam's fall. It meant not that all human were beings were totally depraved, but that all human beings were tainted by Sin and that of themselves they were incapable of putting this right: they needed the salvation which only God in Christ could effect. Nevertheless, if you did want to portray the process from prelapsarian innocence to total depravity within one human being, then that human being might certainly look very like Macbeth, who moves from being a man of nobility, full of the milk of human kindness, to being a murderer of innocent children. That sense might be reinforced by reference to great sinners in the biblical tradition.

It is also worth noting that these come in exact biblical order, with the exception of the Judas and Pilate allusions, which have to be moved to the crucifixion imagery surrounding the death of Duncan. The allusions to Adam, Cain and Abel, Saul, Herod the Great, the

temptation of Christ, John the Baptist/Herod Antipas, the fall of Hell castle and the Lamb upon the throne, are in exact biblical sequence, increasing the sense that there is an ethical and temporal progression depicted in the person of Macbeth himself. The importance of time in the tragedy is noted by most critics. To move from the fall of Adam and Eve in the Eden of Genesis to the Lamb upon the throne in the New Jerusalem of Revelation is, in terms of the Christian narrative, to encompass the whole of human time.

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[1] There is no extra-biblical corroboration of this particular massacre, but it would not have been especially out of character for Herod.
[2] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 82
[3] Jack, p. 192
[4] *Hamlet* 3.2.16
[5] Matthew 2. 16
[6] *Ludus Coventriae*, (London: for OUP, 1922 and 1960) p. 174
[7] Cp also, obviously, the deaths of Young Siward and the attempted murder of Fleance.
[8] Mark 16. 9. Seven evil spirits are also mentioned in Matthew 12. 45. The seven sons of Sceva cast out demons in Acts 19. 14.

CHAPTER 10 DIALOGUES WITH CRITICISM

Introduction

The view of *Macbeth* for which I have argued takes little account of some more recent critical and theoretical strands. Before finishing, I ought at least to try to bring my insights into dialogue with some of the more recent criticism of *Macbeth.* The most obvious tensions between postmodern criticism and this thesis would seem to surround the nature of kingship. It may appear that I have naïvely accepted what the play seems to assume: that to have a good king is a state of blessedness for a nation. In truth, this partly stems from my relatively conservative - perhaps again naïve - assumptions about the nature of text and discourse, and critical theory. By the end of this chapter, those fundamental tensions will remain: they are part of a wider debate beyond the scope of this thesis. But there will at least have been a conversation.

1. Criticism of the kings

The assumption that Duncan, Malcolm and Edward are self-evidently good characters and good kings has come under increasingly fierce attack in post-war criticism and performance. From Bradley onwards, the same had been already true of the assumption that Banquo, the supposed father of the line of kings in which James Stuart himself stood, is a uniformly good character. Recently, in the work especially of Anthony Paul and Paul A. Cantor, there has perhaps been the beginning of a swing back to a more sympathetic view.

There are at least two main strands of criticism of the kings, which seem sometimes to overlap and sometimes to contradict each other. In the first strand, kings like Duncan,

Malcolm and Edward, however sympathetically described in the play, are now necessarily suspect because they are the figureheads of absolute monarchy - in itself an oppressive system - or merely the temporary leaders of whichever oppressive elite can achieve or hold power by violence. Whether or not Shakespeare or his period held this to be the case, we as modern audiences, readers and critics, are not obliged to share his assumptions.

By a similar reasoning, the kings are suspect to feminist critics, because they are powerful males, and the leaders of a patriarchal system which systematically oppresses and marginalises women. Feminist readings of *Macbeth* tend to suggest that the play exhibits fear of strong women, who are perceived to threaten male role, space and domination. The Witches do this in several ways. First they are women with a certain androgynous quality, symbolised by their beards. Secondly, they are women who, from the margins of society, directly attack the centre of the patriarchal system by aiming at the life of the king.[1] Thirdly, they attack the psyche of Macbeth himself, making him afraid of every little noise and undoing his 'better part of man.' Lady Macbeth similarly invades male space, by asking the evil spirits to unsex her, by taunting her husband's lack of manhood, and by taking the lead role in the conspiracy.

2. Criticism of Duncan

Within this pattern, it is argued, Duncan is perceived by the play as womanish, and therefore too weak to rule. The feminine imagery of 'the pendent bed and procreant cradle' (1.6.8) in which Banquo discusses Inverness with Duncan, and the nutritive imagery of making Macbeth and Banquo full of growing, goes with an overtrusting and unperceptive nature: 'There's no art/ To find the mind's construction in the face:/ He was

a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust...' (1.4.11-14) to make the picture of a soft, weak-minded, feminine king, who foolishly trusts Macbeth. When Macbeth goes to kill Duncan, his reference to Tarquin makes the imminent murder tantamount to rape. Macduff's subsequent allusion to 'a new Gorgon' (2.3.71) is another telling feminine image applied to the dead king.

The most convincing proponent of this kind of pattern is Janet Adelman: 'The witches' sexual ambiguity terrifies....Is their androgyny the shadow side of the King's?'[2] Or again, Duncan 'is killed for his womanish softness, his childish trust, his inability to read men's minds in their faces.' The play's remedy for this situation is a new king, Malcolm, who represents, Adelman suggests, utter separation from the feminine – 'yet unknown to woman' – bolstered by a champion, Macduff, protected from harm by not being 'born of woman.'

According to Harry Berger Jr, similarly, Duncan is failing to control Scotland from the outset. It is threatened by rebellion from within and aggression from without. Cawdor, MacDonwald, Sweno and Macbeth all perceive the opportunity that flows from Duncan's 'displays of milky kindness', which show an absence of hardness. Like Adelman, Berger sees here a threat to masculinity. He thinks that the characteristic tone of the characters' address to Duncan is one of 'irritability, perhaps condescension.'[3] Similarly, Malcolm Evans calls 'naïve' the order which Banquo and Duncan represent, as understood in their description of the Macbeths' castle, and even the kind of discourse it consists of.[4] Duncan's regime thus becomes an inevitable target. Not all these analyses suggest that Macbeth is justified in killing Duncan. Macbeth, for Alan Sinfield, is just another example

of the absolute monarch: a different kind of man, but still cruelly and murderously holding a morally indefensible position by force.[5]

It is necessary, first, to point out how sub-textual[6] these analyses are. There is no overt criticism of Duncan's kingship in the real text; whilst Berger's reading of the tone of the characters' address to Duncan is inevitably subjective. Perhaps more telling is the description of Duncan in his absence. For example, the meekness with which Duncan bears his faculties, and his incorruptibility, are specifically called virtues by Macbeth himself, who freely acknowledges that he has no spur to prick the sides of his intent, but vaulting ambition.

This is in direct opposition to the sources, where Duncan's ineffectual weakness makes him ultimately the target of the nobles – including Macbeth and Banquo – who have previously had to rescue his rule from other rebels. Shakespeare has decisively and declaratively changed the historical Duncan's weakness into the dramatic Duncan's virtue. He has similarly changed the historical Macbeth's mixed motivation by removing his exasperation at the king's incompetence and leaving his vaulting ambition. It is not an impossible move, in current critical theory, to suggest that the play subliminally argues something which goes in a directly contrary direction to the author's manipulation of his sources, but it sits uneasily here, I think.[7]

I would question, too, Adelman's interpretation of the imagery which is thought to depict Duncan as womanish. As I have argued, the imagery of the pendent bed and procreant cradle, which comes from Banquo, is applied not to Duncan, but to the Macbeths' castle.

Duncan's kingship may appropriately be thought of as an integral part of this fertile order, but detaching this imagery from the Macbeths is neither necessary nor, in my view, justified. The second nutritive image - that of the one who plants people and makes them full of growing, - really does apply to Duncan; but it is only the usual image of the king-gardener, and it is masculine and paternal throughout the canon, at both the conscious and, I think, the subconscious level. The king plants the upright seed in the country's earth, which is consistently the mother. The king who does *not* do it, Richard II, is the king who is criticised as effeminate. I hope I have shown also that Duncan's benignity - or at least his verbal benignity - is affirmative rather nutritive and that this role is quintessentially patriarchal.

The strongest part of Adelman's evidence, in my view, is the sense that the penetration of Duncan's body carries with it an undertone of rape. Not all daggers are phallic symbols, and not all stabbings are suppressed sex, but the reference to the rape of Lucrece in 'Tarquin's ravishing strides' does make this particular dagger seem an especially appropriate candidate.

I do think that the notion of Duncan's murder as rape is important. But I am not sure that what is raped here is to be thought of as feminine.[8] In Duncan, what is raped is the beauty of holiness. Macbeth's rhapsodic and beautiful description of Duncan's body, after the penetration, is as thoroughly religious in tone and meaning as Macduff's first announcement of his death. Meditation on the wounds of Christ was a discrete genre in the Catholic spirituality of Shakespeare's time. I suspect that this spirituality, rather than the medical philosophy of Paracelsus, may be in play in Macbeth's description of Duncan's

wounds.[9] I drew attention earlier to the deep damnation of the taking off of Robert Southwell. More topical still is the fact that Henry Garnet was apparently proud to be executed on a feast day of the commemoration of the cross, seeing his wounds as a particular *imitatio Christi*.

In its religiosity of tone, Macbeth's description of the body is of a piece with the apocalyptic imagery of the 'naked babe' soliloquy: the other place where he speaks at length about Duncan. In that soliloquy Macbeth deals with Duncan's meekness not as a weakness, but as a virtue. The soliloquy itself makes clear what in Southwell's source poem is even more graphically presented: that this meekness, of which Christ is the archetype, is paradoxically a warrior virtue in spiritual warfare. As we saw, Christianity tends to assert of Christ a paradoxical kingship of which meekness and vulnerability are the key components. There is no escape from a theological and eschatological discussion of the meaning of Duncan's meekness. The idea that the play, at any level, disapproves this meekness in a king seems odd to me. Duncan's meekness, Malcolm's purity, Edward's holiness: in *Macbeth,* these are the things that make a king a king.

Another version of Duncan's inability to control Scotland, accompanied by an analysis less critical of him, has come recently from Paul A. Cantor, who regards Duncan as the first representative of Christian monarchy in Scotland and Macbeth as a throwback to an earlier system of heroic warrior leadership.

> A new gospel is going round the land, which teaches a Christian way of life, a gospel of peace and meekness, which is strongly opposed to the way of life of the warriors....This analysis of the basis of *Macbeth,* helps to clarify Duncan's problem in the piece. Duncan has trouble controlling a not fully Christianised land as a Christian monarch. He is an obviously unwarlike king. Within the categories of the

> piece, he seems a sort of anomaly in Scotland. All the other leaders in Scotland are warlike men, great generals like Macbeth, Banquo and Macduff.[10]

For Cantor, Edward's England, to the south, represents the Christian state towards which Scotland is moving, under the leadership of Duncan. Macbeth's rebellion is the death throes of the warrior culture, a culture also represented by the King of Norway from the barbaric north. As we see from Holinshed, the historical Macdonwald is supposed to have said something rather like this about the historical Duncan – that he was more fit to lead a monastic order than a nation of warriors.

It is true that Duncan is not a warrior. He is not alone in this, however. No true king fights in this play. Others fight on their behalf and, in this respect, the three good kings are very much alike. In Act 4 Scene 3, Malcolm's presence as the rightful king-to-be is essential to the rightness of the cause, which would be hopeless without him. But other hands than his will need to be uplifted in his right: he will not fight himself. There is, then, a real contrast between Christ-like kings and their warriors in the play, but there are also Christian warriors, whose job is to fight on the Christ-like kings' behalf. The pattern is set very early by the Sergeant who fights directly on behalf of Malcolm (1.2.4-5). Old Siward is a soldier of Christendom. Young Siward goes to be God's soldier. If Walker is right, Macduff is Malcolm's warrior archangel, but on any reading he comes to England to be Malcolm's warrior. Macbeth is not an independent warrior: he is Duncan's warrior -'our captain' (1.2.33) - who chooses to rebel.

Moreover, although he is indeed a warrior, his character cannot remotely be reduced to this one dimension. His whole tragedy depends also on his choosing to suppress that part

of his nature which is 'full o'th' milk of human kindness' (1.5.17). Furthermore, Macbeth does not commit the crimes of a warrior rebel, as Macdonwald and Cawdor do, by raising troops to fight against Duncan's army. Rather, he treacherously murders Duncan asleep in his bed, has Banquo ambushed under cover of darkness and has innocent women, children and servants needlessly and savagely murdered. The reassertion of his physical courage in the final scenes reminds us of the honourable warrior status from which he has fallen into cowardly and ignoble treachery, just as his acknowledgement of his guilt about Macduff's family reminds us of the goodness of his nature at the beginning.

3. Criticism of Malcolm

Malcolm can be criticised in at least two related ways. He can simply be criticised as a badly drawn, unconvincing character. The implausible psychology of Act 4 Scene 3, which I discussed at some length, is obviously the heart of this criticism. The second kind of criticism, in which Adelman again leads the way, suspects him on a moral basis. For Adelman, as I set out, Malcolm represents utter separation from the feminine. His father Duncan was too womanish to be king and the play's response to this is to offer a king, Malcolm, who is 'unknown to woman' and his champion, Macduff, who is not 'of woman born'

In a footnote, Adelman quotes Wheeler's view, which I obviously share, that the picture of Malcolm's holy mother suggests something tantamount to a virgin birth. Feminism has had a divided view of the virgin Mary, but I suppose it is now more or less orthodox to argue that the commendation of her virginity is motivated by a fear of female sexuality and a desire to control it. Nonetheless, the author has here gone out of his way to associate

Malcolm with a woman, when he simply had no need to do so. It seems to me not unproblematic to argue that Malcolm represents total separation from woman, when he has been rather pointedly furnished with a spiritually heroic mother absent from the sources. As with the rape of Duncan, what matters here is not gender but holiness. Both Malcolm's holy parents, male and female, are mentioned, as Macduff reminds him that it would 'blaspheme his breed' if he were to fall into sin (4.3.108).

E. Pearlman has a related but slightly different view of Malcolm and Macduff. Here 'Malcolm and Macduff are physically free from the influence, power or taint of women...but...they represent different kinds of masculinity. Macduff replicates Macbeth's violence, while Malcolm transcends it.' [11] Pearlman's resolution is similar to Cantor's. Malcolm becomes the Christian king, in Edward's image, but needs the support of the warrior Macduff, rather as Edward needs old Siward. Pearlman's essay is remarkable for bringing out a number of major themes of subsequent scholarship in a very short space. Nobody else I have found brings the feminist perspective and the Christian perspective into relationship.

Some scholars find other grounds for suspicion of Malcolm. Thus, Harry Berger Jr:

> Malcom's [sic] final triumphant crowing over 'this dead butcher, and his fiend-like queen' seems itself a mental and rhetorical act of butchery, though it produces a nice morality-play antithesis to Macduff's earlier praise of Malcolm's parents as 'a most sainted King' and pious queen.[12]

Many scholars argue that these epithets of Malcolm's are inappropriate. I do not quite find it so. Macbeth is the murderer of his king/guest/kinsman, his friend, innocent women, children and servants, making new widows and orphans each new dawn: and Malcolm is

one of the orphans in question. Although Malcolm speaks here of his father's murderers, however, I doubt if there is meant to be any particular personal angle and I very much doubt if he can be said to be 'crowing'. This is ordinary truth, rhetorically expressed as you would expect it, in the new king's speech in the final scene. But it is the truth of what Macbeth has become, not of what he was. For a more balanced view, here is McAlindon:

> It is perfectly true...(and herein lies much of the greatness of the tragedy), that Malcolm's concentration on the image of the butcher who would 'confound/ All unity on earth'...in no way obliterates – in fact intensifies – our poignant awareness of the valiant partner, gentle husband, and sensitive man the protagonist once was. The perception voiced in the epilogue to *Doctor Faustus* is implicitly, and far more powerfully, embodied here: 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight.'[13]

Another very critical view of Malcolm comes from Wilbur Sanders:

> Duncan is replaced by the cagey young master of *realpolitik*, his eldest son. This one has made a science of the mistrust he finds foisted upon him. Anything, for Malcolm, will serve as a whetstone for the sword – including the distress of a bereaved man. There is, after all, no substitute for accurately directed force.[14]

The view that Malcolm deals cynically with Macduff's grief rather ignores the fact that, at the beginning of the same scene, Macduff did something similar with Malcolm's. Malcolm wants to weep, but Macduff tells him that they should rather 'hold fast the mortal sword and like good men/ Bestride our downfall birthdom' (4.3.3-4). The last time we saw Malcolm, his tears were 'not yet brewed' (2.3.122). Now, they may not be shed. At the end of the scene, the same idea, even down to the image of the sword, is played back to Macduff in his own grief (4.3.228).

It is mistake, I think, to treat any one personal bereavement in this play in isolation from all the others. There are several announcements of death, received by the bereaved, and several attempts to give comfort or to challenge the bereaved persons' reaction. Consider the manner of the giving and hearing of the announcements of the deaths of Macdonwald,

Cawdor, Duncan (several times), the grooms, Banquo, Macduff (*sic*: see 4.2.30), Young Macduff (by himself to his mother), Macduff's wife, children and servants, Lady Macbeth (by Seyton and Malcolm), Young Siward and Macbeth himself.

What is remarkable is the variety – indeed the seeming contradiction – so often involved. Thus Macduff will not let Malcolm grieve, but then insists on grieving himself. Malcolm then refuses to let Macduff grieve, but almost upbraids Old Siward for apparently refusing to grieve for his son. Macbeth uses inappropriately flowery language to inform Malcolm of his father's death, which Macduff cuts through with the blunt statement of fact. Rosse vacillates and equivocates before he can bring himself to tell Macduff of his family's murder, but then produces a model of direct but feeling communication to tell Old Siward of his son's death. Most famously, Macbeth's unfathomable response to his wife's death – 'She should have died hereafter' – leads directly into the despair of the 'Tomorrow' soliloquy. If that is the most puzzling reaction, however, the most puzzling announcement is surely Lady Macduff's inexplicable announcement to her son of the fictitious death of his father.[15] So whatever is happening in Malcolm's dealing with Macduff's grief, it cannot be considered in isolation from Macduff's dealing with Malcolm's grief or Malcolm's dealing with Siward's.

The idea that Malcolm is a consummate master of *realpolitik* has recently been expressed in performance, as well as by critics. Jack Davenport's Malcolm in Michael Bogdanov's '*Macbeth* on the Estate'[16] is a repellent young upper class Englishman, whose concern is only to get hold of the reins of power. In fact, all the nobles in Bogdanov's production are specifically not Scottish, emphasising that their power games are carried out in complete

isolation from any concern for the people they are supposed to govern. Duncan (Philip Madoc) is clearly Welsh. Macduff (Lorcan Cranitch) is clearly Irish.

The setting is post-industrial and post-religious – the churches and the factories are similarly ruined – and, I think, post-Thatcherite. The ruined sets and the wasteland highlight the fact that the nobles are only interested in power and not in the wellbeing of the people. There is even a sense that this land has been so ruined by previous bad government that it is not worth having power over, unless power is the only thing that interests you. Duncan, Macbeth, Malcolm – none of them will do anything for the real people of the estate.

Malcolm, in exile in England, languidly takes his ease, and hears of Scotland's ruin with complete detachment. Macduff, in this scene a provincial out of his element in sophisticated England, may believe, or not, in Malcolm's virtue: Malcolm does not care. The deal with England is already done, and represented as a sell-out. The tones of Parry's *Jerusalem* in the final scene make clear that Malcolm will be an English puppet king.[17]

There is, inevitably, a pretty startling distance between an interpretation which offers Malcolm as a Saviour and one that regards him as the villain of the piece. Davenport's Malcolm actually does play, given that Malcolm never plays that well anyway. But in Act 4 Scene 3 his manner has to ignore the words of the text. With all proper respect to politicians, I take it that no master of *realpolitik* could honestly say with Malcolm that he:

Malc: never was forsworn...
At no time broke my faith: ....
.....and delight

No less in truth than life

Crucially, also, Edward has to be cut completely to make this work. As a comment on how England has dealt with Scotland, and on the nature of monarchy, the result may have some claims to historical accuracy; but it does violence to the play's number symbolism, its Christian imagery and, indeed, its view of England. Above all, it fails to understand Malcolm.

Cutting Edward actually means cutting Malcolm's description of Edward – a speech in which he affirms his value for the king's grace and his charity to the wretched and disfigured. The tradition of touching for the king's evil clearly owes much to the biblical tradition of Christ's touching and healing the lepers and other outcasts of his society. It really is far-fetched to imagine this speech as a piece of *realpolitik*. If it stays in, I think, it must be played for virtue – both in Edward and in Malcolm. The fact that there have always been good reasons of performance for cutting it, may have affected our general judgment of Malcolm more than we realise. The cutting of the speech certainly facilitates the Bogdanov/Davenport interpretation of him.

Stephen Booth's criticism of Malcolm has overlapping elements of critique of his characterisation and his behaviour as a participant in the story. Booth's general insight about characterisation is that:

> Macbeth is the only character in the play who is our size... the events of the play never evoke from Banquo more than gentlemanly musings. Duncan sounds hardly more than bemused at Cawdor's treachery; he immediately resumes his complacent confidence in the social order. Banquo and Duncan sum up their radical blandness in their slow, luxuriously fatuous commentary on the salubrious climate at Macbeth's castle. As to Lady Macbeth – waking, she treats any challenge as a limited challenge in logistics. Macduff, who responds passionately,

> if unimaginatively, to Duncan's murder, is thereafter principally noteworthy for absenting himself from one place to another.[18]

Applied to Malcolm, part of what this means is that Shakespeare undermines him[19] by giving him weak lines like the 'O! by whom?' with which he responds to his father's death.[20] Secondly, it means that the apparent resolution in which Malcolm becomes king is made merely provisional. Booth points out that Malcolm's promise to do more 'in measure time and place' is no different from Duncan's earlier unfulfilled promise to give stars of nobleness and to make Macbeth full of growing. Macduff is to Malcolm, at the end, as Macbeth was to Duncan at the beginning: the man whose 'personal venture in the rebels' fight' (1.3.91) has killed the chief rebel and restored the kingdom to the king. Macduff is to Macbeth as Macbeth was to Cawdor.

4. Is it finished?

A number of other interpreters have seen this uncertainty or lack of finality in the ending of *Macbeth.* Most famously, Roman Polanski's film version ends with the forgotten Donalbain approaching the bothy of the witches.[21] Then there is a line of criticism, in which I tend to think of Stepehen Booth, Calderwood, Berger, Sanders and Horst Breuer, which argues that Macbeth's own commentary on the ending of the play is more compelling than Malcolm's or Macduff's. Calderwood, in particular, makes clear that Macbeth's weary realism is a deeply authentic reflection on his experience and, as such, gets some of the play's very best poetry.[22] Similarly, Breuer argues that the play does not convincingly celebrate a triumphant return of the avowedly feudal Duncan/Malcolm order of kings. The 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...' soliloquy is a more compelling text about Time than 'The time is free.'[23] As with Booth, everyone in this line has a point

to make about the stature of Macbeth in comparison to the other characters. This feeds the sense that they - and most especially Malcolm - cannot, on the play's own evidence, be regarded as satisfactory successors.

It might be reasonably be thought that, on the interpretation of the play which I have offered, the crowning of the Christ-figure Malcolm, the 'weak poor innocent lamb' now upon the throne, surround by his kingdom's pearl, is a vision of finality. I do indeed think so, but I also think that one cannot sensibly ignore the weight of the perception by critics and directors alike that there is something unsatisfactory about it.

McAlindon's view of Shakespeare's Empedoclean cosmology perhaps offers an historical way of expressing the sense that, in the tragedies, Shakespeare did not expect the restoration of an unchanging order and stability at the end of the tragic strife. The tragedies do end with a settlement, but the continuing low-level strife of the cosmos may again erupt into war between good and evil, if human beings are careless of their own safety:

> ...although the tragedies leave us with many unanswered questions, ethical, axiological and metaphysical, they do include in their endings a measure of reintegration and harmony – psychic (within the hero), or interpersonal, or social or all three. This note of unity is always muted or qualified, it varies in degree and kind from play to play, and it never undermines the underlying impression of violent strife and calamitous loss (except perhaps, in *Antony and Cleopatra)*; but it is real and significant nonetheless.[24]

At the end of a tragedy the stage is inevitably left, after the death of the main protagonist, to lesser dramatic figures. Yet the nagging sense that this is unsatisfactory is much more intense in *Macbeth* than in, for example, *King Lear*. Albany and Edgar have made mistakes, but they have also developed as characters, their essential goodness is

unquestioned and they, especially Edgar, have intervened to bring about the victory of right.

None of these things can be said with the same certainty about Malcolm. It is our nagging suspicion of him that makes us uneasy. We have heard him describe his lusts in terms of egregious evil, and, with Macduff, we are not wholly convinced by his subsequent claim to virtue. We have seen his apparent lack of sympathy for Macduff's grief. We have heard Macbeth's contempt of his youth. It is Edward's power, and no particular inspiration of Malcolm's, which brings about his victory. In the final battle, Young Siward bravely dies, while young Malcolm seems not to fight. Macduff, not Malcolm, wins the victory over Macbeth, while Malcolm's dismissal of Macbeth as a butcher can grate on our sense of the Macbeth whom we have heard in the soliloquies. Even at the end, although Malcolm has the final speech, it is not remotely as strong as Macduff's, which immediately proceeds it.

In *Macbeth*, I want to argue, what McAlindon calls the 'measure of reintegration' is quite large, if we understand the framework of the play's Christian imagery. The image of the lamb upon the throne surrounded by his pearly followers, addressed in the second person singular which belongs to deity, is the utterly ultimate image of the Christian narrative.[25] But in Act 4 Scene 3, the literalness of that very same Christian imagery distorts for us (and for Macduff) the plausibility of Malcolm as a character or a human being. Our feeling about an ending of which the central figure is Malcolm on the throne can thus very easily remain ambivalent, if not actively hostile.

However, Booth's argument about the ending rests not just on his view of Malcolm, but on the idea of unfinishedness and indefinition in the play:

> Finality is regularly unattainable throughout *Macbeth*: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth cannot get the murder of Duncan finished: Lady Macbeth has to go back with the knives. They cannot get done with Duncan himself: his blood will not wash off. Banquo refuses death in two ways: he comes back as a ghost, and (supposedly) he lives on in the line of Stuart kings into the actual present of the audience...[26]

If I have understood the argument aright, this inability to finish things is at the heart of Macbeth's tragedy, and it shows us that tragedy itself is a genre which defies limitation. In *Macbeth,* the tragic genre may enable the audience to feel that there are limitless possibilities for redefinition of good and evil while comforting them that the form of their experience – the two hour play - is the limited sphere in which the limitless is possible. Anthony Paul is arguing something related, I think, when he sees Macbeth as testing to destruction the limits of human possibility within himself, but thereby losing himself in a unreal world of impossibility. [27]

The problem with Booth's view, in terms of the argument which I have been outlining, is that it does nothing with the idea of the danger of infinity which is quite clearly stated in *Macbeth*, as I hope I have shown. In the thought world of the play, it is Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who cannot finish things, because evil tends to infinity. It is inappropriate to apply that logic to Malcolm, the second person of the trinity of kings, the mid-point of the die, who is the point to which the number process can return, in Bongo's terms, 'as to a limit.'[28] For all the dissatisfaction which we feel with Malcolm as a character, his place in the scheme both of the number symbolism and the Christian symbolism of the play compels

the view that in him, the time has really returned to freedom and the danger of infinite chaos has been averted.

5. Conclusions

What might be added to our understanding of *Macbeth* by the general argument of this thesis? First, it obviously becomes more likely that one can talk of *Macbeth* of as a Christian tragedy. In broad sweep and in detail, I have tried to show, the Christian narrative, from Genesis to Revelation, sets the structure and the process of the drama and informs the language and the characterisation of the protagonists. *Macbeth,* on this understanding, is a piece conceived, and not just illustrated, in Christian terms.

However, at first sight, this understanding might appear to explain the weaknesses of the play better than its strengths. First and foremost, I have offered an explanation of Malcolm. But while I think that explanation plausible - indeed correct - I do not think that it can rescue Malcolm from the general sense that he is an unsatisfactory dramatic creation. His characterisation is, I hope, a little better explained; but the explanation may not help the character to work better on the stage. The same observation might apply to a number of characters. I have offered a new explanation for the way Edward is dealt with in the play, but I doubt whether it would convince many directors to leave him in. Similarly, what some critics see as Duncan's bland benignity and Banquo's mouthing of Christian orthodoxy are here newly explained, but the crescendo of post-Christian critical disapproval and dislike of them is not likely to be abated. Perhaps, indeed, the explanations I offer only explain more fully what it is in them that post-Christian criticism finds so hard to like. In terms of language also, the Christian explanation often seems required to explain

an oddity or inelegance, rather than an excellence: the list of dogs, the insertion of 'quickly', the jingle at the death of Siward, the sickening see-saw, and so on. And while I would want to argue that I have offered valid new insights into the temptation of the murderers, Act 4 Scene 3, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking and the Young Siward episode, I do not think it can particularly be claimed that those scenes would work better dramatically if actors and directors took my view of them. On the surface, then, it is very possible to argue that the Christian resonances in *Macbeth* are often a weakness rather than a strength. And if the play truly is a great piece of drama, it might be thought that its Christian content is no part of its greatness.

I am not sure that I would call *Macbeth* great, but I do think of it as a viscerally effective play. To explain its effectiveness, one would have to say something, I suppose, about the shocking pace and vivid intensity of it, and something about the powerful poetry of Macbeth's despair. And the Christian framework in which the action is set is in fact vital to this effectiveness, because it sets the pace. The terrifying pace of Macbeth's degeneration is set by the sweep from prelapsarian innocence - 'the milk of human kindness' - to the total depravity of the slaughter of the innocents. So also, Lady Macbeth's vertiginous decline from greatness to nothingness, from partnership to loneliness, from heaven's breath to the murk of hell, is set in a Judaeo-Christian frame by the reference to the judgment on Cain. The rapidity of Scotland's movement, from Duncan's beneficent rule to Macbeth's murderous tyranny, and back to the settlement under Malcolm, is set by the sweep of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation: from Eden to the New Jerusalem by way of the Harrowing of Hell.

The paradox is that time seems to Macbeth to creep along, syllable by syllable, when events are in fact moving with bewildering rapidity. His guilty mind is full of bloody colours, but he lives in a world of gathering grey. By the end he can barely summon the energy to be frightened. There is nothing left to fear, because he has nothing worth the keeping left to lose. The lonely, colourless, tasteless, slow monotony is part of his torture. He is tied to the stake, not so much by the superior military forces that surround his castle, but by the knowledge that all he has left to do is wait to die.

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[1] So that Terry Eagleton, for example, can say, 'To any unprejudiced reader…it is surely clear that the positive value in *Macbeth* lies in the three witches. The witches are the heroines of the piece…' Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare,* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 1. I am not sure what 'unprejudiced' means here.

[2] Janet Adelman, *'Born of woman:',* in *Macbeth,* ed. by Alan Sinfield, in the *New Casebook* series, p. 54

[3] Harry Berger Jr., 'The Early Scenes of *Macbeth* · Preface to a New Interpretation', *ELH,* 47 (1980), 1-31

[4] Malcolm Evans, *Truth's true contents in Shakespeare's text,* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), pp. 113-120

[5] Alan Sinfield, '*Macbeth* : History, ideology and intellectuals' *CQ,,* 28(1986), 63-77

[6] Sinfield calls this reading the text 'against the grain'

[7] The commonsensical view is simply expressed by F. Willard Farnham: 'In Holinshed, Macbeth kills Duncan who...is on the whole a weak and unworthy king…In Shakespeare, on the other hand, Macbeth murders a completely worthy king who is 'clear in his great office.' F. Willard Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 79-80. Sinfield (*op cit*) points out that Buchanan's *History,* which was banned in England at the time of the writing of *Macbeth,* clearly preferred the Scottish system, without earls, as it was before Malcolm.

[8] Is there, indeed, a homoerotic tinge to the description of Duncan's body?

[9] For the contrary view, see Murray, passim. Perhaps the two strands can be held together, however.

[10] Cantor, pp. 16 + 26. The translation is mine. So far as I know, the book has not yet been published in English. See also Wilbur Sanders and Howard Jacobson, *Shakespeare's Magnanimity,* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1978), pp. 57-61

[11] E. Pearlman, 'Malcolm and Macduff', (Indiana, Pa: Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Studies in the Humanities, 9 (1981), 5-10.

[12] Berger, p. 16

[13] McAlindon, p. 219

[14] Sanders and Jacobson, pp. 71-2

[15] For a more detailed discussion of the whole phenomenon of personal bereavement in *Macbeth,* see T. McAlindon, *Shakespeare and Decorum,* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 141-146. I think McAlindon slightly underestimates, though, the tension within and between the bereavement episodes.

[16] *Macbeth on the Estate,* Dir. Michael Bogdanov, Granada/Channel 4 (1997)

[17] Perhaps, in terms of current British politics, there is a resonance here of New Labour's alleged pursuit of middle England at the expense of the poorer classes and the Scots (and Welsh). The production is pre-devolution.

[18] Booth, p. 106. For a similar view of the play's other characters, see Birenbaum.

[19] I am not quite clear whether Booth regards this as deliberate, if we can still use the term.

[20] As I have already said, I think that these reactions to the announcement of death in *Macbeth* need to be treated as a class, rather than individually. Cp, obviously, 'She should have died hereafter', which might or might not be a line as weak as Malcolm's, if only we knew what it meant.

[21] *Macbeth,* Dir. Roman Polanski, Columbia/Playboy (1971)
[22] Calderwood, '*Macbeth* counter-*Hamlet*', esp. p. 118 - a particularly fine passage, with respect.
[23] Horst Breuer, 'Disintegration of Time in Macbeth's Soliloquy, Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. ', *MLR* 71, (1976), 254-271
[24] McAlindon, *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos,* p. 12
[25] There is a certain irony in Bogdanov's use of Parry's *Jerusalem* at the end. The lamb upon the throne is the temple of the New Jerusalem in the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation, the last book of the Christian scriptures.
[26] Booth, pp. 93-4
[27] Paul, passim
[28] Bongo, p. 96

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