

ONE-MAN TRAGEDY: THE DUALITY OF CHARACTER IN *MACBETH*

by

Crystal A. Sershen

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University

September 28, 2009

ABSTRACT

This work examines the enigma surrounding Shakespeare's *Macbeth* by exploring Macbeth's duality of character and its repercussions upon the traditional rituals of the tragic genre. Shakespeare's canon grew ever darker in its maturity, and his later tragedies turned toward an introspection and self-examination characteristic of the Renaissance ideal of "man as the measure of all things." This somber propensity was manifested in Shakespeare's evolution of the tragic form to the "inner tragedy," in which character and self-reckoning were paramount. The supreme specimen of inner tragedy, *Macbeth* infuses a single soul with the emotional and psychological qualities of both hero and villain. A solitary character filling the roles of both protagonist and antagonist, solely and simultaneously, is a discrete occurrence in the playwright's canon. Shakespeare accomplishes this by manipulating audience response through dramatic structure, most specifically his deft employment of the soliloquy and the aside, to engender communion between Macbeth and his audience. Shakespeare thereby asks the spectator to identify with a villain, negating a major component of the tragic formula, catharsis – a unique event in the history of the dramatic form. The origins of the enigma surrounding *Macbeth* can be traced to this breaking of the tragic formula.

The English Restoration began a long tradition of liberal adaptations and rewritings of Shakespeare's works that altered the plays' language, length, characters, and consequently their meaning. Further violence was done to his plays when they were mounted under the production values of the proscenium stage, which denied the connection between actor and audience essential to *Macbeth*'s dramatic success. The intimate relationship between player and playgoer so vital to Elizabethan stagecraft was eradicated, and a play such as *Macbeth* was doomed to misinterpretation.

The reembracing of Elizabethan stagecraft in the latter twentieth and twenty-first centuries led to a rediscovery of theatrical conventions native to Shakespeare's works. Thus, *Macbeth* could be reunited with the Elizabethan stage conventions essential to conveying the play's meaning as an exploration of the humanity of murder.

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“For the good that I would do, I do not;
but the evil which I would not do, that I do.”
– St. Paul

What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor,
An actor too perhaps, if I see cause.
– Puck, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (III.1.79-80)

ONE-MAN TRAGEDY: THE DUALITY OF CHARACTER IN *MACBETH*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Tragedy of Macbeth is perhaps Shakespeare's darkest, most intriguing and confounding dramatic work. For we cannot help but wonder at Macbeth, who begins his play an exalted hero but rapidly spirals headlong into murder, ruin, and self-destruction. For four centuries, theatre professionals and scholars alike have wrestled with the enigma of *Macbeth*. The theme of Ambition seems too easy, too small for the moral of this work, coming as it does from the playwright and poet who has imparted such timeless, humanistic truths to cultures the world over. Even among its fellow components of the Four Great Tragedies (*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*), which marked a turn toward darker themes and a seemingly more cynical world view, *Macbeth* stands out as the redheaded stepchild. Unwieldy in interpretation and rooted deeply in the sublime, oft produced but seldom well received, *Macbeth* remains largely untamed.

For the play is riven with dichotomy. It envelops us in darkness and evil yet unfurls some of Shakespeare's most beautiful poetry. Macbeth is both brutal warrior and sensitive poet. The play's short length and fast pace suggest stark production values, yet *Macbeth* opens itself to communion with audience more customary to a romance. As the Weird Sisters would have it, "[f]air is foul and foul is fair" (I.2.11). But most tellingly, *Macbeth* appears to be missing a character. It would seem there is no hero, or, conversely, no villain. Hamlet has his Claudius, Othello his Iago, and *Lear* contains any

number of villains. *Macbeth*, however, has only Macbeth. Herein lies the play's enigma, and also its key.

The dichotomies rife within *Macbeth* likewise abound in Macbeth himself. He is a virtual killing machine who is perpetually in fear; a man repulsed by his own actions; loyal subject turned usurper of the throne. Brutal and sensitive – a murderer with a moral compass similar to our own – Macbeth must carry his play in a way no other Shakespearean character must. For in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare quite purposefully crafted a character so divided within himself as to be capable of embodying the roles of both hero and villain. This bestowing of two roles upon a single character is exclusive to *Macbeth* among Shakespeare's works. While many Shakespearean characters can be termed "hero-villains," none of them is both protagonist and antagonist solely and simultaneously, as is Macbeth. Indeed, hero-villains are not hard to come by in Shakespeare's plays; his characters are complex individuals who possess an array of qualities. Othello, after all, murders Love. Even Hamlet – Shakespeare's golden boy – coldly slays Polonius, a character easily and often interpreted as innocent. And Shylock, the *Merchant's* "villain," possesses the pride and sincerity – and perhaps even endures the plight – of a tragic hero. Richard III is another case wherein one might apply the term hero-villain. Indeed, he is, like Macbeth, the sole main character of his play. While Richard is endowed with a showmanship that amuses us and his histrionics certainly carry forth the action of his play – at times even gaining our admiration – he is by no

means a hero. Nor does Richard possess the duality of character and division of self that characterizes Macbeth and, in effect, creates in *Macbeth* a one-man tragedy.

The distinctive characteristics of a Shakespeare play often reveal its underlying meaning, for Shakespeare wove theme and substance into dramatic structure. For example, the time compression of *Othello* reflects the immediacy with which the wounded heart and ego can turn from love to revulsion. The wildly varying landscapes and personages that populate *King Lear* resemble the addled mind of the foolish, aging monarch. With an enigmatic play such as *Macbeth*, we can examine its unique characteristics to decipher what Shakespeare perhaps intended in its composition. Here we are dealing with a complex unity and duality of character – the one-man tragedy, as I have termed it – as the predominant discrete characteristic. Since we can locate theme within dramatic structure, it would follow that once we have learned *how* Shakespeare crafted Macbeth's duality, we can begin to flush out the potential meaning behind it.

We are able to extract meaning from structure in this way because Shakespeare wrote for the Elizabethan stage, whose dynamics were so integral to the plays' form that they offer a guide to interpretation. Therefore, examining Shakespeare's works as plays – that is, focusing on the manner in which the plays were *performed* – can lead us to their meaning. So vastly different was the Elizabethan stage from its successor, the proscenium stage, that the meaning of works written for the Elizabethan stage can become distorted or even lost when rendered according to the production values of the proscenium. So we must consider Elizabethan stage conditions when setting out to

excavate *Macbeth*'s significance and determine how Shakespeare concocted his one-man tragedy.

Macbeth's dramatic structure is so singularly focused that it conspires to fuse hero and villain together in one man. So predominant a character is Macbeth that we have nowhere else to turn; the minor characters appear to be purposely underdeveloped so that our allegiance can reside with none other than Macbeth. And the speed of the play sweeps us up, its momentum inescapable. But it is Shakespeare's use of the soliloquy and the aside that effects Macbeth's duality by revealing his inner struggle and creating a bond with the audience. Our exposure to his struggle and the torment he suffers allows us to feel sympathy for Macbeth even when he commits villainous deeds. For unlike Richard, who revels in his malice, Macbeth is gravely disturbed by his propensity toward evil and despises his sins.

The dynamics of the Elizabethan stage fostered an intimate connection between the actor and spectator. With the platform extending well into the audience, which surrounded the stage on three sides, the illusive line separating player and playgoer that was drawn with the birth of the proscenium did not exist. Hence, the theatrical conventions of the soliloquy and the aside were natural opportunities for actor and spectator to join forces, often to such a marked degree that audience members held a participatory role in the play. As integral elements of Elizabethan stage dynamics, Shakespeare fine-tuned the soliloquy and aside to manipulate audience response. In *Macbeth* in particular, the title character's soliloquies breed an intimacy that draws us

into his inner struggle and aligns us with his point of view, encouraging and holding our sympathy. Thus, through his artful use of the Elizabethan stage conventions of the soliloquy and the aside, Shakespeare effects the duality of character in *Macbeth* that invites us to identify with the hero-villain and experience his plight as our own.

Rather than having solved our problem, however, this would seem to add to the enigma surrounding *Macbeth*, for identifying with the hero-villain creates a predicament all its own – one that negates the very parameters and function of the traditional tragic form. For if the character with whom we identify is both protagonist and antagonist, we are being asked to do something that tragedy has never asked of us before: to identify with the villain.

Traditionally the villain is a scapegoat of sorts, allowing the audience to identify and place evil outside itself. When hero and villain are separate characters, this is accomplished quite easily. Not so *Macbeth*. If we, as spectators, identify and align ourselves with Macbeth the hero, mustn't we also identify and align ourselves with Macbeth the villain? In all fairness, the answer is no. Shakespeare easily could have released us from responsibility and made Macbeth wholly unsympathetic as the drama proceeded and his crimes were carried out. But he did not. That would have rendered an allegory about a bad man performing evil acts. This is not drama; it especially is not Shakespeare.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare crafts a single character to serve as both hero and villain simultaneously, and to the very end – a vulnerable man with whom the audience can

sympathize, in spite of his brutal deeds. This true hero-villain must place and identify evil within himself. Because he is repulsed by that evil – showing his morality to be similar to our own – we identify with Macbeth and must also look inward to place and identify evil there. Shakespeare thus breaks the ritual of catharsis¹ – that golden chariot meant to whisk us away after we have endured the tragic unfolding – and leaves us with something else entirely: we dwell (this is, reside) within the play as active participants, and after it is over we dwell (that is, ponder) upon the play and our complicity as human beings capable of dark and unwholesome acts. This reversal of the tragic formula is the source of, and solution to, the enigma of *Macbeth*.

In composing *Macbeth*, Shakespeare meant to turn traditional tragedy on its head and demand that we look within to acknowledge that part of ourselves we are so loathe to see. For the exploration of darker subject matters characterized Shakespeare's mature tragedies. This period in the playwright's career rendered a complex portrait of the human spirit, perhaps best expressed by Saint Paul, whose writings were familiar to the Elizabethans: "For the good that I would do, I do not; but the evil which I would not do, that I do." Examining a dualism that would influence Renaissance artists and scholars for years to come, Shakespeare revolutionized Elizabethan drama and shaped theatre history

¹ According to Bedford/St. Martin's online Glossary of Literary Terms, catharsis means "purgation" and "describes the release of the emotions of pity and fear by the audience at the end of a tragedy.... The audience faces the misfortunes of the protagonist, which elicit pity and compassion. Simultaneously, the audience also confronts the failure of the protagonist, thus receiving a frightening reminder of human limitations and frailties. Ultimately, however, both these negative emotions are purged, because the tragic protagonist's suffering is an affirmation of human values rather than a despairing denial of them."

by developing an “inner tragedy” of the self – a coarse and honest examination of the human will.

By exploiting Macbeth’s duality of character, Shakespeare created an inner tragedy that spiraled out of traditional tragic ritual to express the Renaissance ideal of self-examination. In the chapters that follow, I will examine Shakespeare’s evolution of the tragic form toward the inner tragedy; consider the factors that contributed to the enigma of *Macbeth* as stage conditions transformed historically; explore Elizabethan stage dynamics and their inherent part in the interpretation of Shakespeare’s works; and interpret *Macbeth* from a perspective that concentrates on the intimacy and communion between actor and playgoer. In so doing, I hope to render an authentic visualization of *Macbeth* that considers what we are to take away from this complex tragedy of the self.

II. TRAGEDY: FROM THE ANCIENTS TO SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare’s was a craft unprecedented and unrivaled. Assimilating all that went before him – the drama of the Ancients, the lyric poetry of Petrarch and Ovid, the Mysteries and Morality Plays of the Middle Ages – he sculpted a keystone for our dramatic lineage as grand and diverse as its ancestral parts. Shakespeare developed a dynamic framework wherein all elements of the play acted in concert, so adeptly interwoven as to be inseparable in Shakespearean stagecraft. Dramatic structure echoed thematic principle. Theatrical conventions were enfolded into the fabric of the plays, creating a dynamic organism whose sundry components were interdependent. All of

these elements acted in concert to funnel the action of the drama through unique, dynamic characters.

This new dramatic form represented a great departure from the more formulaic patterns found in the dramatic genres of the Ancients and the Middle Ages. A primary principle of Ancient Greek tragedy required that character be subordinated to action and moral theme. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle heralded the preeminence of plot: “So plot is the basic principle, the heart and soul, as it were, of tragedy, and the characters come second: ... it is the imitation of an action and imitates the persons primarily for the sake of their action” (28). Taking stories from mythology, the essence of the Ancient tragedy resided in its didactic theme. Roman drama followed upon the same course. And though the drama of the Middle Ages utilized actual human beings as subjects, allegory was paramount, and stock characters were favored over individuals.

Shakespeare’s turn to character – unique, complex individuals – as the foundation of his works reflected an introspection reminiscent of the playwright’s Age of Rebirth. Scholars and artists had begun to look to *man* as the measure of all things, and in the arena of drama, Shakespeare championed this ideal through characterization. Indeed, so self-sustaining were his characters that the far-reaching influence of his dramatic works can be seen as a forerunner to the historical milestone of Cartesian dualism. The old guard – avowing the predominance of action over character – gradually would be effaced, mythology replaced by the inner lives of human heroes and villains. It was now *through character* that action was crafted and story related. The Shakespearean drama was not

one of foregone conclusion, but rather a story that elapsed in the moment, reaching out to and involving its audience in the peaks and valleys of its unfolding, striding well beyond the didactic allegories that preceded it. Shakespeare's were characters who developed over time, enacting their dilemmas and victories in the company of the spectator. Thus, the dramatic form experienced a metamorphosis under Shakespeare that would change the face of theatre for hundreds of years to come.

While Shakespeare manipulated overall dramatic structure to highlight and define character, it was largely through the use of soliloquy that he turned from the representational to the individual. Though it may seem to us now that soliloquy is a device inherently meant to serve character development and reveal emotional introspection, this was not the case in drama prior to Shakespeare. With plot and didacticism reigning over character, long set speeches were employed in Ancient drama that detailed events and evoked moral themes, but soliloquy was rare. Where it did exist, it played an expository role rather than one of introspection or self-revelation. And while early Renaissance drama began to employ soliloquy as a device for character development, it would be a long road to the psychologically revealing solo speeches of the Shakespearean heroes and villains who are emblazoned upon our minds and in our cultures. For it was through his complex, individual characters that Shakespeare transformed dramatic genre. Evolving the tragic form to embrace the Renaissance ideals burgeoning in his era, the playwright set the forefront for modern tragedy and, with *Macbeth*, ventured outside tragedy's paramount rule of catharsis.

A. TRAGEDY AND ITS ORIGINS: ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN TRAGEDY

If we are to explore the manner in which Shakespeare broke the tragic formula, we first must look at tragedy itself: its origins and purpose. Erasmus, in his Renaissance treatise on methods of teaching, stated:

In undertaking any piece of literature, it is advisable to show what kind of work it is, the nature of its subject-matter, and what especially is to be looked for in that kind of work.... In tragedy one looks especially for the emotional effects, which are quite strong, and then for the means by which these effects are excited.

(qtd. in Cunningham 16). Erasmus spoke of literature, but his theory may be applied to any manner of artistic medium. So let us look at the “kind of work” we are to explore: the tragedy, a genre of Western drama with its origins in Ancient Greece.

Originally associated with communal worship and celebration, tragedy gradually developed into a form more akin to the drama we know today. According to Kimball King, the drama of classical antiquity was a form of religious song offered during the festival of Dionysus (3). Aristotle opined that tragedy developed out of the preludes of this choral poetry, when the chorus leader separated from the rest of the chorus and became a distinct character, speaking in dialogue with them (6). This was the apparent stepping stone to full-scale tragic works like those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The first tragedies of this type were performed in 534 B.C. as part of the Dionysian festival in Athens (9). The celebration was attended by thousands of citizens, lasted several days, and concluded with sacrificial rites and feasting. During the final

three days of the festival, a competition in tragedy was held, wherein each of the tragic poets mounted three tragedies followed by a satyr-drama (9).

The literal translation of the word tragedy is “goat-song.” In an article exploring the etymology of the word, Louis H. Gray states: “It has been held by practically every investigator, from the *Etymologicum Magnum* onwards, that τραγῳδία [tragedy] means ‘goat-song,’ but the efforts to account for such an appellation have been more ingenious than convincing....” Various suppositions are: (i) the goat was a prize for the winner of the tragic competition, (ii) the tragedies featured men dressed in goat skins singing songs, or (iii) a goat was sacrificed at the festival’s conclusion (61). Dionysus, god of wine, was associated with male fertility. Satyrs – mythical creatures who were half-men and either half-horse or half-goat – were associated with sex drive and were companions to Dionysus. That tragedies were performed with an attendant satyr-drama, featuring a chorus of satyrs, may be the source of the term “goat-song” (King 12).

It would seem that tragedy’s ancient roots preclude us from knowing it in the way the Greeks knew it. Indeed, as Brett M. Rogers points out, “despite its near ubiquitous presence in modern Western culture, classical drama is equally an encounter with the strange, an engagement with a foreign world whose practices we no longer follow and whose values we rarely share” (qtd. in King 3). Though we may be disconnected from tragedy’s origins, we know much about its substance and structure as it moved from religious rite to the theatrical event with which we are familiar today. Arising as they did out of ancient worship rituals, the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides

maintained a connection to worship through character, theme, and subject matter.

Indeed, mythology and moral lessons were their foundation.

Greek tragedy deals explicitly with the “emotional effects” of which Erasmus spoke in order to accomplish its function as a tool of moral guidance. The Greeks stood in awe of the myths from which tragedians took their stories, whose high drama was intended to evoke a cathartic release, purging emotions. Samuel Coleridge, speaking of Ancient tragedy, tells us:

Tragedy, indeed, carried the thoughts into the mythologic world, in order to raise the emotions, the fears, and the hopes, which convince the inmost heart that their final cause is not to be discovered in the limits of mere mortal life, and force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which those struggles of inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved...

(*Elizabethan Dramatists* 11). By focusing on the lofty world of the gods, the tragedy of Ancient Greece was crafted to arouse and manipulate the emotions of the individual to effect a realization of his subordinate position. The design was to neutralize individual will in the interest of the collective. Thus the classical tragedy formed a ritual bound in the purification and cleansing of the people. Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, described the effective tragedies of his day: “Tragedy, then, is a process of imitating an action which has serious implications ... through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts....” (25). But because the characters were gods – figures exalted and far removed from the ordinary citizen – their calamities and emotions could be experienced at a safe distance, with woe and wonder subsiding in the spectator at the conclusion of the

tragic event. The Greeks could therefore walk away from the tragedy unburdened, free of any implication, while being edified as to the consequences of unchecked passions and individual will.

The foundations of Ancient Greek drama migrated to the Roman Empire and were pervasive in the tragedies of Seneca, the most influential of the Roman tragedians upon Renaissance dramatists. Known for the revenge play, Seneca's works were a model for the early English tragedy, as well as for Shakespeare. Seneca drew heavily upon Greek tragedy and mythology and applied similar structures to his works – with prologues and episodes broken up by choral interludes (King 26-27). The chorus was an important and pervasive theatrical device in Greek and Roman drama, particularly in tragedy, acting as a mediator between actors and spectators. Serving predominantly as an expository device, the chorus focused attention, interpreted events, and guided the feelings (Honigmann 17). The soliloquy was rarely used in Ancient drama, as the chorus negated the need for it (Russell 3). However, the set speech – a “continuous spoken passage that stands out noticeably from the general run of the dialogue by reason of its length and structure, its theme, or its significance” (Clemen, *English Tragedy* 12) – was quite common in the theatre of antiquity. A manner of dialogue occurring when other characters are present onstage, the set speech differs from the soliloquy, where a character speaks when he is alone or believes himself to be alone.

Both the set speech and the soliloquy, when employed in classical tragedy, functioned in an expository capacity. Wolfgang Clemen, in his study of pre-Shakespearean tragedy, put it thusly:

In these speeches is incorporated everything that later – in the realistic drama, and to some extent already in Shakespeare – is expressed by a whole variety of other methods: by means of gesture and movement about the stage, by means of eloquent silences, of misunderstanding, and of inarticulate utterance, by means of a significant reaction on the part of one of the characters in a particular situation, and by means of directly presented action and counteraction. In the rhetorical drama – and pre-Shakespearean drama is to a very large extent rhetorical drama – all these things are translated into words, into high-sounding speech.

(*English Tragedy* 13). The expository set speech of Ancient tragedy would develop into the declamatory soliloquy in early Renaissance drama, eventually evolving under Shakespeare's capable pen to become the rich and complex theatrical convention that revealed and developed character. Assigning the expository role of the set speech to action on the stage, Shakespeare was able to devote his soliloquies to character development and self-discovery, and through character, funnel the action of the drama. Each soliloquy would be monogrammed to character and woven into the fabric of the play to render a dynamic theatrical convention integral to Elizabethan stagecraft.

B. MYSTERIES AND MORALITY PLAYS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Middle Ages saw a long period of artistic drought. Formal theatre was extinct until the Mystery Plays that developed from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries. I will turn to Coleridge for a description of how the Mysteries came about in England:

The ignorance of the great mass of our countrymen was the efficient cause of the reproduction of the drama.... The people were not able to read, the priesthood were unwilling that they should read; and yet their own interest compelled them not to leave the people wholly ignorant of the great events of sacred history. They did that, therefore, by scenic representations.... They presented Mysteries.... But these Mysteries, in order to answer their design, must not only be instructive, but entertaining....

(*Elizabethan Dramatists* 23). Thus drama was revived – again as a religious and instructional event – in the form of the Mysteries, in which Biblical stories were enacted, from the Creation to the Last Judgment. When the Mysteries fell out of favor during the Reformation due to their connection to Catholic traditions of iconography, next to come were the Morality Plays, which were also religious in theme. With stock characters like Mankind, Everyman, Vice, and Devil, these allegorical tales placed a common man in the midst of some temptation and saw him through to his ultimate salvation (King 36). Alan Dessen provides an example of the sin and temptation to which the unsuspecting Christian might find himself exposed: *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* relates the career of Worldly Man who – unlike his counterpart Heavenly Man – is not satisfied with Enough and chooses Vice, in the character of Covetous, and misuses his worldly possessions (37).

Throughout the course of the story relayed by the Morality Play, the tempted soul expresses his inward struggle through monologue. Morris LeRoy Arnold draws a link to antiquity, pointing out that “Everyman’s simple, heart-felt summaries of the action between the various episodes of the drama perform a function similar to that of the Greek chorus” (8). He additionally notes that though these speeches are designed as sermons – their moralizing themes predominant – the monologues present “introspection, together

with a disclosure of the workings of conscience” that would be found in Shakespearean soliloquies to come (8). Interestingly, the most predominant figure of the Morality Plays was the Vice, who had a special relationship with spectators and spoke directly to them. The Vice is akin to the choral figure of ancient classical drama, except that he is a villain who, according to King, continually fails in his purpose but nonetheless gets all the best lines: “[h]umorous, witty, and seemingly free to mingle with the audience in ways other characters are not, the Vice character lived on in later plays in creations such as Shakespeare’s Iago, Richard III, Feste, Falstaff, or Edmund” (36-37).

From Antiquity to the Middle Ages, drama continued its religious affiliation, though it began to filter down from the gods to the commoner, marking a movement toward focus on the individual. Though the characters are stock and the stories allegorical, they are not those of the gods but rather express the everyday reality of the spectator who surrounded the stage in the marketplaces where the Mysteries and Morality Plays were mounted. Thus, Renaissance tragedians had as their reference points the high mythic Ideals of the Ancients and the allegorical morality tales of their more recent ancestors. The Renaissance movement thriving about them would take drama down from Mount Olympus, out of the hands of the clergy who presided over the drama of the Middle Ages, and into the laps of the individual citizen, whose preeminence reigned in the hearts and minds of this roiling new world.

C. EARLY RENAISSANCE DRAMA

The Renaissance in England is generally regarded as beginning in 1485 and ending in 1660 (King 33). After nearly a millennium in the Middle Ages, beginning with the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Western world was being reborn. The works of Italian scholars and artists such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Michelangelo (1475-1564), and Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) – author of *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, heralded as the “Manifesto of the Renaissance” and a key text of Renaissance humanism – began a way of thinking far different from their predecessors. The Ancient focus on Ideals and mythology, and the church-supervised lifestyle of the Middle Ages gave way to a new philosophy: man as the measure of all things. This epoch of burgeoning new ideas, art, and philosophy produced a book culture that spread the new ideals of humanism, a movement that “stressed the value of ancient texts and the potential of individuals to achieve an almost divine potential” (King 32).

Reflecting this new fascination with the individual, by the middle of the sixteenth century, plays began to surpass the thematic parameters of the Morality Play and illustrate historical events featuring historical individuals. *Gorboduc*, written in 1562 by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, relates the story of a bloody struggle between two princes for their father’s crown. King notes that “[l]ike a moral play, *Gorboduc* explores abstract ideas, but the characters are drawn from history, adding an element of realism and social commentary not present in the earlier genre” (37). The precursor to the history

play, which would become so prevalent in Shakespeare's canon and well received by Elizabethan audiences, had arrived.

Renaissance England also saw the advent of professional theatres, and plays were no longer relegated to public spaces. In the 1570s and 1580s, the first public theaters and permanent acting companies were established, giving rise to a demand for plays. That demand was met by a group of highly educated men known as the "university wits":

Deeply educated in classical literature, they brought to their writing a reverence for authors such as Seneca in tragedy and Terrence and Plautus in comedy. Originality was less of an artistic goal than creative imitation, as authors turned to extant plays or stories and retold them in English, proud of rather than embarrassed by their wholesale borrowings. Formally, these early plays often retain a stiffness that shows these borrowings were not yet integrated to the local scene, but two plays in the 1580s, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, show native tradition and classical learning coming together in powerful and epoch-changing ways.

(King 38). While the early Renaissance dramatists borrowed heavily from their predecessors, works began to tend toward some originality, and a new approach to dramatic structure was bound to unfold. The soliloquy was chief among the dramatic elements that would evolve over time. According to Arnold, the classical forms of soliloquy were reasonably well established in England by 1587. Though Shakespeare's predecessors utilized the device more readily and less formulaically than their ancestors, they did little to advance its technique, and it retained a moralizing and didactic character even in its more diverse usage. But soon thereafter, Arnold holds, the English soliloquy

developed an introspection “distinguished by a spontaneity characteristic of the Renaissance” (11).

Many scholars point to Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (ca. 1586, often considered the precursor to *Hamlet*) as the milestone for this development. Kyd’s play drew upon the tradition of Seneca, master of the revenge tragedy. Its protagonist, Hieronimo, seeks justice for the murder of his son. King observes of Hieronimo that in soliloquy “his thoughts and very identity seems [sic] to change during the course of his speeches in ways that no morality play character’s ever did” (39). Here we catch the first glimpse of character development occurring during the elapsing time of the play. King notes an interesting development in dramatic structure as well: “*The Spanish Tragedy* creates an ambiguous moral as well as physical universe, in which the right deed is no longer as clear-cut as in medieval drama – we are now seeing Renaissance skepticism, unsure of how justice or salvation are possible in a world gone astray” (39).

While *Gorboduc* and *The Spanish Tragedy* each made their mark in the progression of Renaissance drama toward a more original, organic, and evolving form, it was the works of Christopher Marlowe, most particularly his *Doctor Faustus* (1588-89), that contributed most markedly to the development of soliloquy as a dramatic device for the expression of character. Arnold notes that though Marlowe’s soliloquies evince no significant innovation as to technique and subject matter – there are laments and exultations, the cravings of ambition, and many suicide and death soliloquies – he contributed heavily in terms of style and dramatic integration. Marlowe utilized

soliloquy to highlight character, adding polish and infusing spirit (12). Indeed, Arnold asserts that Marlowe “consecrated the soliloquy as a revelation of thought and feeling” (13). In the hands of a craftsman like Marlowe, the dynamics of the new Elizabethan playhouse rapidly made their mark upon dramatic structure.

Discussing the importance of *Faustus* in the development of the English soliloquy, Clemen notes that Marlowe developed a new type of soliloquy, one that for the first time in English drama expressed the inner experience of the character (*English Tragedy* 151). Indeed, Marlowe is widely recognized as having had the most influence on the Shakespearean soliloquy. Of Shakespeare’s predecessors, Marlowe’s talent and diversity most nearly approached Shakespeare’s, and his contributions were many. He not only continued to explore moral ambiguity, as first seen in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, but he also brought a poetry to the tragic form never experienced before in English drama (King 39).

It was then that Shakespeare arrived in this London of the Renaissance, with new forms of art and ideas stirring the atmosphere, its population exploding and desirous of entertainment, its newly formed theatre companies churning out plays that began to stretch the boundaries of genre and form. He would follow the lead of Kyd and Marlowe, taking the dramatic form to new heights, his works borrowing from but ultimately surpassing those that paved his way. Using the dyes of the Ancients, the threads of the Mysteries and Morality Plays, and the loom of the early Renaissance playwrights, he

would weave a tapestry so fine in detail and rich in hue as to earn him the title of The Immortal Bard.

D. SHAKESPEARE AND THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE DRAMATIC FORM

It is not merely the poetic splendor of Shakespeare's plays that garners the veneration of the spectator. Nor is it simply his uncanny ability to portray the sublime reaches of human emotion that conjures our awe. It is the manner in which these two elements flow through the vessel of character – and yield intricately crafted, individual souls – that revolutionized the dramatic form and made Shakespeare's works timeless classics to which we continually return. The touchstones of language and emotion are implicitly tied in Shakespeare's works, for the language must be heightened to encompass the depth of emotion dwelling in his richly textured characters. A far cry from the mythological heroes of the Ancients, the stock characters of *Everyman*, and the more rudimentary characters of Early Renaissance dramatists, Shakespeare's characters were uniquely drawn, and for the first time we find consistent character development within the elapsed time of the play. This pronounced focus on character naturally led to the exploration of characters' inner lives, and Shakespeare employed the theatrical device of soliloquy both to mine character and develop a bond between player and playgoer. For the Elizabethan stage onto which Shakespeare's characters stepped would invite the audience to experience and share in their confusion, love-sickness, torment, elation, and self-disdain.

Shakespeare tailored soliloquy both to character and the world of the play in which it resided. For he crafted a play as though it were a living organism, its holistic being reliant upon each of its vital organs. This is Shakespeare's stagecraft – an organic approach to the dramatic form that serves as its nervous system, while character forms the heart, pumping blood through the veins of dramatic structure to the brain of plot line, the lungs of theatrical device, the spleen of verse. Action, character, and dramatic structure are inseparable, woven into the thematic principles of the play; theatrical devices are innovated and integrated to feed the whole. This integral unity was inspired and augmented by the dynamics of the stage for which Shakespeare wrote. Another newcomer on the scene of the English Renaissance, the Elizabethan stage (discussed at length in Chapter IV) had a profound impact on audience experience. Dramatists used the stage to its full potential, evolving the dramatic form and crafting plays whose structure adeptly guided and manipulated audience response.

The beauty of Elizabethan stagecraft was its simplicity. Devoid of sets and scant of properties, the platform stage jutted out into the audience, placing the actors in the midst of the spectators, who surrounded the players on three sides as well as from above, in the higher rows, and from below, in the pit. The scarcity of scenery and properties endowed Elizabethan playwrights with a freedom to put emphasis on the language, and in turn actively call upon the imagination of the audience. Wolfgang Clemen, speaking of the paramount importance of heightened language in Elizabethan plays, has noted:

[S]uch a vigorous, high-flown form of expression had its own special *raison d'être* on a stage which, in comparison with later times, was poorly equipped with properties, scenery, and decorative effects, and had at the same time to suggest frequent changes of scene. For on this stage the spoken word alone, working on the imagination of the audience, had to give shape to everything that would be visibly present on the stage of later days. Language could be, and indeed had to be, used more boldly and vigorously because it had to create not only scene and atmosphere, but often too the illusion necessary to a particular role.

(*English Tragedy* 42). The Elizabethan platform stage was a theatrical amalgam – its elements melted together and poured into a free-forming die-cast – liberating playwrights and players and enfolding playgoers into the world of the play.

The dynamics of the Elizabethan stage led to the creation of new theatrical conventions as well as the innovation of traditional ones. These conventions would both serve and shape the formulaic principles of the dramatic form and spawn their metamorphoses. The bond forged between actor and audience, for example, made the soliloquy ripe for development. In soliloquy, the character is alone on stage (or believes himself to be alone), with the audience in close proximity, sharing private moments that span a wide range of emotional extremes. The dynamics of the Elizabethan stage made soliloquy the perfect device through which to plumb the depths of character – exposing the playgoers to characters' inner psychological workings and revealing their private thoughts, yearnings, fears, and anxieties – pivotal elements not shared even with other characters in the play. Shakespeare employed soliloquy to manipulate audience response by aligning spectators with certain characters, drawing them into the action of the play, and ultimately even implicating them.

Because character became such a crucial element in Shakespeare's works and action was funneled through character, this era of drama began to see characters develop and evolve within the real time of the play. While this may seem commonplace now, prior to Shakespeare and his immediate predecessors, there was no real character development during the course of a dramatic work, nor did action advance in the moment. In his book *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare*, Clemen details the manner in which action was conveyed in the early days of English tragedy:

[E]vents were explained or described in retrospect instead of being directly exhibited on the stage.... [I]t is not the immediate event, not life lived in the present moment, that are put before us, but what has gone before and what is still to come, while anything truly dramatic, anything that gives a sense of immediacy and actuality, seems almost to be outlawed from the drama.... Action is pondered over, action is spoken about, but of itself it is not represented, or at most in snippets. It is a far cry from the inertia of this procession of massive, sluggishly-moving monologues and dialogues to the liveliness and variety of Shakespeare's history plays and tragedies.

(24). The immediacy afforded by action occurring in real time created a new experience for audiences and certainly must have served to heighten the playgoer's experience of active participation in the play. Brown notes that for the first time it was possible for the players to "speak the verse as if it were meant – as if, at that instant, it sprang from the mind of the speaker" (*Plays* 19). Add to this characters communing with the spectator in soliloquy – sharing their decisions, inner struggles, and emotional lives – and a one-on-one relationship between player and playgoer has been born in which the two are intimately connected.

This new, lively dramatic form – born of the Elizabethan stagecraft that embraced its audience and employed its theatrical devices and dramatic structure to serve the living organism of the play – would further evolve under Shakespeare to challenge and shatter the constraints of genre itself.

E. THE SPLITTING OF GENRE AND EMERGENCE OF THE INNER TRAGEDY

As the dramatic form was experiencing a sea change in structure and device in the Elizabethan era, the dramatic genres that contained them consequently were pushed to the edges of their traditional parameters and began to evolve as well. Just as he took the lead in development of character and theatrical device, Shakespeare was the forerunner in this arena also. Indeed, within the Shakespeare canon there is a splitting and combining of genres, for the complexity of his stories and depth of his characters could no longer be contained by the traditional parameters of comedy and tragedy. Shakespeare never bent to type, always exploring the gray areas of human consciousness and the human conscience. Moral and ethical issues are viewed through complex, kaleidoscopic filters, and his characters present us with real-life ambiguities: like *Measure for Measure*'s Isabella, who chooses the preservation of her virginity over the chance to save her brother's life; or Iago, who orchestrates his villainy with bravado, reigning victorious throughout so much of *Othello* before finally he is brought down. These are the kinds of characters that created the need for the further subdivision of Shakespeare's works beyond the typical delimitations of other playwrights. To Shakespeare's plays have been added the categories of Dark Comedy (of which *Measure for Measure* is a primary

example), Romance (*The Tempest*), and Romantic Tragedy (*Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*). And his History Plays are so much more than history plays because of Falstaff, Mistress Quickly, and Hal; not to mention Richard III, in a category all his own. Indeed, perhaps scholars have found so many “problems” in Shakespeare’s plays because his characters are so roundly drawn. They do things one should not do, even to the better of their own judgment, because they mirror the inexplicable wonder of being human.

Though his heroes and villains always possessed a surpassing complexity, Shakespeare’s focus on character as the paramount driving force of his dramatic creations was gradual. The tide began to turn with *Julius Caesar*. Christine Dymkowski, in her work on the contributions of Harley Granville-Barker to contemporary Shakespearean study and performance, shares his observations:

For Barker, Shakespeare’s turning point comes with *Julius Caesar*, for in this play, the author’s “care is not for what his hero does, which is merely disastrous, but for what he *is*; this is the dramatic thing, and the essential thing”.... From this point on, ... his subject is “the passionate, suffering inner consciousness of man, his spiritual struggles and triumphs and defeats in his impact with an uncomprehending world....”

(98). In *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, Granville-Barker also astutely notes:

“*Hamlet* the play made one long contrivance for the revelation of Hamlet the character....

He must still have action; he must at any rate have movement; but movement itself is now to be made expressive of character or theme” (70). This Renaissance reflection of man as the measure of all things would reach its height in Shakespeare’s mature

tragedies, where his turn toward introspection would result in a genre of tragedy focused on examination of the self.

Just as his movement toward the tragedy of the self was a gradual, almost organic transformation, so was the development of the tragic soliloquy in Shakespeare's works. For his stagecraft insisted that they go hand in hand. James Shea, in his treatise on the soliloquy in Shakespearean tragedy, notes on the trajectory of this theatrical device:

The soliloquies of the earlier tragedies certainly reveal the influence, in both form and function, of the set speeches in pre-Shakespearean drama, especially those of Kyd and Marlowe. There is a gradual maturation, however, from a highly rhetorical form of versification to a style more characteristic of spontaneous speech, from the conventional function of direct self-explanation to a purpose more wholly integrated with character, situation and theme.

(60). Indeed, Shakespeare's focus on character, coupled with the dynamics of the Elizabethan stage and his development of soliloquy, lent themselves to the playwright's next innovation – this time to genre itself – in his creation of the inner tragedy. Shakespeare's evolution of the tragic form would relocate conflict from the social to the individual – personal, internal turmoil would supersede external, social conflict. This was a natural progression for the playwright laureate of the Age of Rebirth, for it demonstrates the opposition between Ancient and Renaissance philosophies. Samuel Coleridge is particularly eloquent on this point, and I must paraphrase him here. Coleridge posited that the Greeks idolized the finite, the forms and unities of the Ancient stage being expressive of a homogeneity that appealed to an ideal state rather than an existing reality. The Renaissance mind, however, revered the infinite: their own

passions, hopes and fears, grand and moral feelings, their wandering through the unknown, their more august conception of man as man, their future rather than their past – in a word, their sublimity. Here, Coleridge asserts, lies the essence of Shakespearean drama: in the contemplation of humanity's inward nature (*Elizabethan Dramatists* 16, 26). *Macbeth* would prove the quintessential example of man's internal unrest, his incessant self-examination, his struggle against his own will, his losing battle with his conscience.

While Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* exhibited the beginnings of a dramatic form focused on internal struggle, he relied upon external representations of vice and virtue in his use of good and evil angels vying for Faustus' soul. Remnants of the Morality Play linger here in dramatic structure and theatrical device, and, as Alan Dessen has noted, "the subjective forces that in reality belong to man himself in the most personal sense [are] transformed by the poet into visible, external forces operating upon man...." (128-29). Faustus, like the stock characters of the Morality Plays, undergoes a struggle of the will. As the forces driving him are external, man himself is not endowed with full responsibility for his desires and actions. The true inner tragedy – within the individual soul of the hero, who explores a rift within the *self* – would begin with Shakespeare. Comparing the tragedy of the early English Renaissance dramatists to Shakespearean tragedy, Professor Clemen wrote:

Once more Shakespeare was the first to attach a deeper meaning to the idea of suffering. This is true also of his new conception of the tragic, which had so far been dominated by the medieval view of tragedy as the

fall of a great man from high estate into great misfortune, it being unthinkable that such a fall should not be accompanied by outward manifestations of violence, by bloodshed, deprivation of rights, defeats in battle, rape, and the like. What we understand nowadays by “inward” tragedy was unknown.

(*English Tragedy* 39-40). In Shakespeare’s development of the inner tragedy, traditional formulaic elements of the genre would fall away or be reversed, piece by piece, until finally the pinnacle of the tragic experience – catharsis – would be negated. For in his one-man tragedy *Macbeth*, Shakespeare makes certain that we share the inner tragedy of a man who is both a hero and a villain at the same time.

Hamlet is a high point on the way to the supreme offering of *Macbeth* in Shakespeare’s progressive development of the inner tragedy. Indeed, in *Hamlet* we begin to understand why Harold Bloom credits Shakespeare with inventing personality as we have come to recognize it: “Insofar as we value, and deplore, our own personalities, we are the heirs of Falstaff and of Hamlet, and of all the other persons who throng Shakespeare’s theater of what might be called the colors of the spirit” (4). For it is Hamlet’s own weakness, in his inability to take action against his father’s murderer, that is both the crux of the story and the source of his inward struggle and self-deprecation. But in *Hamlet* there remain some traditional signposts of the tragic form, such as the social, external conflict with Claudius. Though this external source of tension pales in the shadow of Hamlet’s own internal conflict, Claudius plays the role of the villain and affords the audience a place outside itself to assign the quality of evil. Yet another traditional formulaic principle of *Hamlet* is his elevated stature as Prince of Denmark.

He additionally suffers undeserved pain in the experience of his father's murder and his mother's hasty marriage to her brother-in-law on the heels of her husband's death. While Hamlet is not wholly innocent – his stabbing of Polonius is untenable at best and his hand in the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern quite nearly unforgivable – it is still a good deal more than a stone's throw from Hamlet to Macbeth, where Shakespeare takes the inner tragedy to its height.

In *Macbeth*, the inner tragedy is perfected, the duality of character developed to such an extreme as to produce a one-man tragedy, wherein the roles of hero and villain are embodied in a single character. All outward, social conflict has been transformed to the tragedy of the individual – a man torn within himself. The hero's inner struggle is of such magnitude that it tears his soul asunder. There is no villain in the play other than Macbeth. He has not been wronged. All the pain Macbeth experiences comes to him by his own hand, refuting the tragic principle of undeserved pain. He commits regicide solely for personal gain and continues to murder in fear for his own safety. But there is no question that Macbeth is also the hero. For he reviles his own deeds, and his conscience murders his soul long before his physical body is slain by Scotland's avengers. Macbeth garners our sympathy because he possesses a morality similar to our own. Because Macbeth despises himself for his wrongs, we are able to align ourselves with the hero in him who looks aghast upon his own actions. And because we are aligned with Macbeth the hero, we are implicated when Macbeth the villain looks into his sullied heart. Appalled and sickened by his evil acts, he experiences nothing but pain and panic

from the moment he kills the king, his conscience haunting him day and night, the stake of inward reflection driven ever deeper, to the murky recesses of his soul. This is Shakespeare's ultimate revelation of the Renaissance self – wherein the far reaches of human emotion, capability, and culpability are sounded in the individual.

Here, full responsibility is assigned to the protagonist/antagonist, and so to the audience. Shakespeare refutes the Ancient ideal of cathartic release that offered the audience absolution from the tragic event, continuing his trajectory toward introspective, personal reflection – a microcosmic world of both good and evil residing within each and every individual. *Macbeth* plumbs the depths of our own conscience and shows us our inner villain:

[I]f by conscience we have in mind the primitive and etymological meaning of the word, a vivid inner consciousness of the nature of the evil to which one is tempted, Shakespeare pours all the resources of his art into the representation of that consciousness in *Macbeth*. He is even conscious, like Faustus, that he has sold his soul to the devil (“mine eternal jewel given to the common enemy of man”); in other words, Shakespeare is depicting, without any of the old religious symbolism of the Faust legend, the same inner tragedy which Marlow [sic] had treated in a more childlike way. All this helps to identify *Macbeth* with every man who has said to himself, with Ovid, “Video meliora, deteriora sequor [I see and approve the better course, but I follow the worse],” or with St. Paul, “What I would not, that I do.”

(Alden 276). There is no escape from Shakespeare's inner tragedy in its final form, as we are taken to a place inside the play that insists we identify with the villain within it, and so with the villain within ourselves – who lurks in our conscience the days and nights.

Shakespeare breaks other tragic traditions with *Macbeth* as well. Ironically, though he is so much the individual that he is both hero and villain, he is more Everyman than almost any other tragic hero in Shakespeare. The elevated status of Hamlet and King Lear keeps them at arm's length. While Othello is slightly more pedestrian in terms of stature, he remains well removed from us throughout his play – the action in Iago's hands – nearly every line of soliloquy discharged from his twisted lips. Though a thane and a general, Macbeth seems closer to our kind than even Othello. Because of our intimate relationship with Macbeth, which is accomplished largely through soliloquy, we never feel that Macbeth is of the “elevated status” typical of the tragic formula. Indeed, the relationship between character and audience has never been so strong in Shakespearean tragedy. Though Macbeth is crowned king, the majesty and reverence of the golden round never sounds with the audience, for we commune with the frightened, panicked man whose internal terror is the heart of the story and is shared with us more than any character in the play. He is no king, but rather a man isolated and paranoid, incapable of ruling even his own mind.

Shakespeare crafted his new genre of inner tragedy through dramatic structure and the manipulation of audience response, seeing to it that whatever the circumstances, the audience aligned itself with his tragic hero. He employed soliloquy to its utmost, for his development of the theatrical device made it ideal for the expression of inner turmoil and establishing intimacy with the audience. Tailoring soliloquy to character, and marrying theme and dramatic structure to character development, Shakespeare wielded a

powerful tool in his orchestration of audience response. In both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the connection between character and spectator is fostered largely through the mastery of verse in soliloquy. The soliloquies of these tragic heroes lay bare their very souls, and the spectator has nowhere to look but into their hearts. And because they are men of honor, we bond with them and take their struggles and sorrows into our own breasts. This bond not only fosters an alliance between character and playgoer but also involves the audience in the stakes of the play in a way that is essential to the inner tragedy; indeed, without soliloquy, *Macbeth* would fail.

Shakespeare's use of soliloquy during the period when the Four Great Tragedies were composed became very precise, and the device was applied according to a play's theme and dramatic structure. In *Othello*, for example, soliloquy is used to garner our sympathy – not for the soliloquizer, Iago, but rather for the characters upon whom Iago unleashes his ill will. Rather than aligning us with the character who speaks the soliloquy, the device is deftly employed to create a thread of tension and keep it taut throughout the entirety of the play. Iago's revelation of his dark heart through soliloquy does not create communion because his moral center is foreign to us. In the inner tragedies, soliloquy is employed quite differently, exposing us to the inner turmoil of the tragic heroes. This is Shakespearean stagecraft at its finest: where theme, dramatic structure, character, and convention fit together seamlessly to support the living organism of the play.

Long gone are the homogeneous, expository set speeches of the Ancients – the tales of the gods now replaced by the lives of individuals: sometimes villains sharing their treachery, injecting tension and suspense into the play; sometimes heroes whose problems are made our own. The microcosm of the inner self has become the mysterious terrain of exploration in the Shakespearean inner tragedy – its heroes complex and evolving before our eyes, as they commune with us by sharing their heterogeneous, inward, fractured selves. Forging a personal connection with the audience, Macbeth pulls us into his world. Through dramatic structure and the manipulation of audience response, Shakespeare sees to it that we do not escape.

F. A DARKENING CANON: *MACBETH'S* PLACE AMONG THE MATURE TRAGEDIES

As Shakespeare's dramatic works matured, they were characterized by ever-darkening thematic tones. The tendency of his early works to celebrate the resilience of the human heart faded into a navigation of the murky depths of the soul. The mature tragedies located darkness not externally, as a force to overcome, but as emanating from within – an organic, magnetic force-field against which his heroes would struggle in vain:

The natural tendency of his youth had been to see good everywhere. He had even felt, with his King Henry, that “there is some soul of goodness in things evil.” Now, when the misery of life, the problem of evil, presented itself to his inward eye, it was especially the potency of wickedness that impressed him as strange and terrible. We have seen him brooding over it in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*. He had of course recognized it before, and represented it on the grandest scale; but in *Richard III*, the main emphasis is still laid on outward history; Richard is the same man from his first appearance to his last. What now fascinates Shakespeare is to show how the man into whose veins evil has injected some drops of its

poison, becomes bloated, gangrened, foredoomed to self-destruction or annihilation, like *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear*.

(Brandes 93). This sober reflection and self-examination is echoed in the Sonnets as well, which Shakespeare is reputed to have written just before the cycle of the mature tragedies, between 1594 and 1597. In many of the Sonnets, we find a brooding Shakespeare whose reflections upon jealousy, rejection, death, regret, and old age reveal a poet whose muse has led him to a precipice overlooking the abyss of human existence.

But we must expect the dark depths of the human condition from the poet upon whose verse our hearts have soared into the abandonment of youthful love with *Romeo and Juliet*. The human condition, which Shakespeare mined to its depths, insists that it must be so. For there will always be vice lurking behind virtue, greed slithering alongside generosity, wickedness drowning out the rays of gentle kindness. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare indulged in a self-reckoning that could not be experienced in the works of the Ancients and the Mysteries and Morality Plays of the Middle Ages. Even in the majority of Shakespeare's own tragedies – where the heroes suffer undeserved pain and which possess separate and distinct, readily identifiable villains – we are granted the tragic release of catharsis because we can locate evil outside ourselves. With *Macbeth*, this practice ceased. All roads lead inward: Shakespeare gathers the darkening storm of the macrocosm and locates it deep within the human organism.

Had *Macbeth* fallen in the earlier period of Shakespeare's canon, it may well have been another *Richard III*, for Richard is indeed the sole main character of his play. Both

men are usurpers of the throne and confide in us through soliloquy. But Richard is truly and solely a villain. Nothing heroic emerges from him – not guilt, not indebtedness, not conscience. Richard revels in his villainy; Macbeth is tormented by his. Macbeth reveals his humanity through soliloquy, and we commune with him and find his plight truly tragic. Though Richard may be amusing and emit a fleeting charm, we *tolerate* Richard – even allow ourselves to be entertained by him – but he does not gain our sympathy:

[I]n the story of *Richard the Third* Shakespeare is standing outside the villain, showing us his deeds and – to some extent – his thoughts, with extraordinary vividness and intensity, yet never bringing us into such intimate relations with him that we seem ourselves to be thinking his thoughts with him, and even, in a strange vicarious way, to be sharing his deeds.... The same thing is true of ... Iago.... No reader says to himself, “Under the conditions, I myself might do as Iago did”; but the thoughtful reader has some such shuddering notion respecting Macbeth. For here, if the drama has taken its proper hold upon us, we so follow the course of his inner feeling and motive ... that we are strangely identified with him, and cannot view him as a monster whose destruction may be watched with equanimity....

(Alden 275-76). Richard thrills in his villainy, while Macbeth’s conscience revolts against him, casting him into a nightmarish world of paranoia and terror.

Even when Richard’s conscience affects him – though this occurs solely in his subconscious and comes to him in sleep – it somehow seems *outside* of him, imposed upon him as an external device. Macbeth, however – addled with guilt and suffering hallucinations manifested by his conscience – earns our sympathy. We desire Richard’s destruction but not so Macbeth’s, whose recognition of his wrongdoing mirrors our own feelings. Though we do not support Macbeth’s crimes, we somehow fear for him:

Richard and Macbeth are the only heroes who do what they themselves recognise to be villainous.... The difficulty is that the spectator must desire their defeat and even their destruction.... Shakespeare gives to Richard therefore a power which excites astonishment, and a courage which extorts admiration. He gives to Macbeth a similar, though less extraordinary, greatness, and adds to it a conscience so terrifying in its warnings and so maddening in its reproaches that the spectacle of inward torment compels a horrified sympathy and awe which balance, at the least, the desire for the hero's ruin.

(Bradley 22). Though similar circumstances surround the characters of Macbeth and Richard, *Macbeth* became not a chronicle drama but a personal tragedy (Alden 274).

When Richard commits a heinous crime, the focus is upon its implications in society.

When Macbeth murders Duncan, the focus is upon what the murder does to Macbeth.

Richard III is another hybrid of genre, being both history play and tragedy. I believe that *Richard III* ultimately takes its place alongside the history plays in the Shakespeare canon because there is no apparent hero. One could argue that England is the hero, for its strength – in the collective body of its people – finally overthrows Richard. However, the true (if hidden) hero of *Richard III* is in fact a heroine: the divine feminine, represented in the characters of Anne, Elizabeth, and Margaret. For every word of every curse they cast upon Richard is manifested, revealing theirs to be the only power in this violent, male-dominated play that can fell the cursed dog.

Macbeth's uniqueness among the mature tragedies lies in its extreme and utter interiority. We the audience experience Macbeth's torment along with him. There is no other point of view in the play. Like Horatio to Hamlet, the audience is Macbeth's only friend and confidante once he removes himself from even his own wife's society. By

confessing to us and sharing his inner torments in soliloquy, we are taken directly into Macbeth's world, onto the stage – an acting partner for this isolated man whose soliloquies comprise approximately 10 percent of stage time. In this way, his tragedy is made very personal to us. As Arthur Sewall has said, Macbeth is like a soul in hell, “and we know a little more about hell because Macbeth has had a glimpse of it” (qtd. in Rosen 80). We, like Macbeth, are swallowed by the darkness that consumes the atmosphere of the play and made to realize that it is a representation of the shadow side of our human hearts. Our sorrow for and identification with Macbeth substitutes for the ritual of tragic release – forcing us to look inside and experience our darker natures, in line with the thematic drive of Shakespeare's later canon. For Macbeth “depicts the corruption of a soul ... sufficiently like our own in motive and passion to cause us to seem to share the awful possibilities of its capacity for self-destruction” (Alden 279). Macbeth is a man who knows from the very first that murdering Duncan will destroy him, and he does it anyway. Therein lies the true tragedy of *Macbeth*.

III. PRODUCTION HISTORY AND CRITICISM: *MACBETH* LOST AND FOUND

A. IMPROVING SHAKESPEARE

The enigma surrounding *Macbeth* can be traced further to the transformation of the dramatic form following Shakespeare's departure from London and the fate of his works in the hands of Restoration dramatists who sought to “improve” him. Radical changes befell the English theatre in the period approaching the Restoration to reflect the tastes of a society that craved spectacle and high entertainments in favor of lengthy

dramas. Though he was one of few Elizabethan- or Jacobean-era playwrights to survive the crush of the Restoration, Shakespeare's plays underwent dramatic alteration and liberal interpretation to fit the lavish predilections of the period. Less than 50 years after he retreated to his Stratford-upon-Avon, both the city and the stage that ignited the genius of England's greatest poetic dramatist had faded as if "a weak and idle theme / No more yielding but a dream" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* V.1.427-28).

Under the Puritanical Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, the production of public plays was prohibited by Parliament in 1642. But theatre artists found creative ways of circumventing the law, putting on entertainments such as rope-dancing and drolls, which were abbreviations or "immitations" of plays (Granville-Barker, *Companion* 325). England then underwent a harsh, ten-year civil war resulting in the execution of King Charles I, the exile of his son Charles II, and the replacement of the English monarchy with the Commonwealth of England. When the monarchy was restored in 1660 (hence the term "Restoration"), the theatres reopened. Then, in 1666, the Great Fire of London gutted the city. Exiled royalists returning to their native land and citizens seeking to escape the severe social and economic strife caused by the Great Fire desired high entertainment, and the bawdy Restoration Comedy became a recognizable genre. A courtly entertainment called the masque – involving acting, music, and dance – was also popular, with its emphasis upon the visual and ornate (King 45-46).

While these factors had a deleterious effect on the interpretation of Elizabethan plays, it was the gradual advent of the proscenium stage that would make Shakespeare's

work seem implausible, somehow foreign on the stages of his homeland. Together, these forces would bring the freedom and movement of Elizabethan stagecraft to its knees. That free-flowing, unlocalized dramatic form would be weighted down by heavy set design and clumsy properties. The conventions wrought from the dynamics of the Elizabethan stage, most particularly the soliloquy, would appear crude and “unrealistic” on the proscenium stage. The soliloquy – that Elizabethan stage convention developed and transformed by Shakespeare so crucial to the success of *Macbeth* – would be lost in the rough behind the proscenium arch.

During this period, the physical structure of the stage and playhouses slowly transformed to accommodate the new dramatic forms and audiences who crowded into the now-darkened interior theatres to see them. Because Elizabethan plays were so integrally bound to the dynamics of the stage for which they were written, this change in structure and production values had grave consequences for the Shakespearean reproduction:

The stage still projected a long way in front of the proscenium ... an open platform with the audience on three sides of it. Yet the implications of the change were important. In the first place, the complete and definite localisation of the scene had at least begun ... and was to lead to much difficulty and violence in the production on a localised stage of so loosely localised ... a drama as Shakespeare's. Secondly, the idea of scenery and of spectacle as things to be cultivated for their own sakes was transferred from the masques ... to drama that had been written for very different purposes; and the implication was that drama might be sacrificed at pleasure to the claims of scenery and spectacle.

(Granville-Barker, *Companion* 328-29). As the dynamics and production values that were the heart of Elizabethan stagecraft fell out of fashion, Shakespeare's plays suffered under their new dramatic environment.

Shakespeare's majestic poetry and universal appeal clearly prevailed in the Restoration period, or his works would have suffered the fate of the majority of his contemporaries and have never seen the darkened interiors of the new English stage. But Restoration dramatists saw Shakespeare's stagecraft – and the problems resulting from producing Elizabethan plays in the new dramatic environs of the Restoration – as something to be “fixed” and sought to fit him into their own mold. This took the form of rather bold adaptations. As M.C. Bradbrook points out: “Since the earlier stage was generally condemned, its traditions were soon forgotten; and his admirers considered that the happiest service they could perform for Shakespeare was to bring him up to date” (7). Indeed, the Restoration was to begin the perpetual revision and adaptation of the great poetic dramatist. For example, in 1667 William Davenant turned *The Tempest* into a spectacular entertainment, with liberal textual alterations and additions of character. John Dryden in 1677 rewrote *Antony and Cleopatra* as *All for Love*, in the manner he felt it *should* have been written. *King Lear* was likewise “fixed” to appeal to contemporary taste by Nahum Tate in 1681, and any number of “imitations” of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies were produced over the next 150 years: changing text; applying song and dance; and altering, removing, or adding characters. As Franklin J. Hildy so adeptly notes, when viewed from this perspective, our modern-day adaptations seem

rather tame and comparatively faithful to Shakespeare's dramatic works (qtd. in Kattwinkel 101).

The attempt of Restoration dramatists to "fix" Shakespeare was based on a desire for balance. Works were altered for symmetry of plot and consistency of character (Granville-Barker, *Companion* 329, 330). This was a death knell to Shakespeare's plays, with their kaleidoscopic viewpoints and complex characters. It annihilated the very gray areas and anomalies that make Shakespeare's works unique and lasting representations of the human condition. His comedies were considered too bawdy, his tragedies too dark for Restoration sensibilities. *Macbeth*, an inner tragedy that broke the boundaries of genre and was an experimental milestone in Shakespeare's oeuvre, would suffer considerably under these conditions. Macbeth was often made a purely evil character – a villain from the first, no hero at all. Harley Granville-Barker describes a liberally adapted, though not uncommon, production of the play:

[D'Avenant's] *Macbeth* shows still more strongly his desire for balance and for consistency. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are both more wholeheartedly and simply evil than in Shakespeare; and to balance the evil pair there must be a consistently good pair, Macduff and Lady Macduff. The Porter must go, since this is a tragedy. At the end all the poetry is cut out of Macbeth's part; and as for the diction, it is hard to say whether D'Avenant's rhymed couplets or his blundering blank verse are less like the Shakespeare they replace. But they are certainly more refined.

(*Companion* 330). It is easy to see from this early sample how the enigma of *Macbeth* began and the rich duality of character – and consequently, the meaning of the play – were lost under production values so alien to the modus operandi of *Macbeth*.

Emendations and drastic alterations like D’Avenant’s were commonplace and probably most enthusiastic and far-reaching with a challenging play like *Macbeth*, which did not adhere to the norms of the tragic formula. The modus operandi of the play – aligning the audience with the hero-villain in a call to dwell upon the dark recesses of the human soul – was obliterated.

Since his text was freely altered, it is not hard to imagine what the Restoration dramatists who sought to improve Shakespeare might have done with *Macbeth*’s soliloquies. Undoubtedly they did not reflect the vulnerable, conflicted soul who gains our sympathy and alliance. The Restoration’s desire to tidy up Shakespeare into neater, symmetrical, more innocuous bundles flew in the face of the complex genre of the inner tragedy. But the fatal blow to soliloquy was yet to come, in an alteration to the playing space that would suffocate the spirit of the Elizabethan drama.

B. SHAKESPEARE BEHIND THE FOURTH WALL

While the dynamics and conventions of the Elizabethan stage were still at play during the Jacobean period, theatres had begun to move indoors. Written early in the Jacobean era, in 1606, *Macbeth* was performed on the Elizabethan stage at Shakespeare’s Globe, at newer indoor theatres, and at court for King James I. M.C. Bradbrook, in her article “Shakespeare the Jacobean Dramatist,” details the increased intimacy and powers of inner exploration fostered by the Jacobean stage, an atmosphere that would have been extremely well suited to *Macbeth*: “In the new intimacy of a closed theatre, the subtlety of the actors brought them and the audience together to study personal conflicts....

Shakespeare with Montaigne turned from social issues to the proper study of Mankind, a being ‘ondoyant et divers’ [undulating and diverse]” (qtd. in Muir, *New Companion* 141-42). This environment seems tailor-made to *Macbeth*. As a playwright who employed every available element of his stagecraft in the construction of his works, Shakespeare was very likely influenced by the new potentials of the indoor theatre.

The physical structure of the Restoration stage strongly resembled the Jacobean stage, but the popularity of theatrical productions eventually led to further structural changes to the indoor playhouse to accommodate larger audiences. Not only were Shakespeare’s plays freely adapted and tamed to the taste of the era in which they were produced, but they would soon be mounted upon a stage that would do further violence to their foundation:

[I]n the [late Restoration] era, ... a physical change was made of an importance which few can have then foreseen. In order to make the pit bigger, Rich, the manager of Drury Lane, cut off some of the fore-stage.... The more the play was pushed back towards and behind the proscenium arch, the more need there was for a new technique in production; and henceforth there was a continuous series of attempts ... to fit Shakespeare ... into a stage for which his plays were not written.

(Granville-Barker, *Companion* 335). The theatrical conventions of the Elizabethan playwright were at odds with the production values of the proscenium stage, for they were philosophically incompatible. Elizabethan plays revel in intimacy with the spectator and invite audience participation, while the proscenium drama centers on a convention wherein player and playgoer mutually agree that the other does not exist.

Thus, the involvement of the audience – so inherent to the dramatic structure of the Elizabethan play and essential to the success of *Macbeth* – was gone.

The “realism” of the proscenium stage is in fact merely theatrical convention, as fitting to the proscenium as direct address to the audience was upon the Elizabethan stage. However, when compared to the vibrancy and dynamism of Elizabethan stagecraft, the proscenium’s two-dimensional, picture-frame approach simply fails Shakespeare’s idea of total theatre. This attempt at realism the dramatic form underwent with the development of the proscenium stage, accompanied by the notion that Shakespeare’s stagecraft was somehow primitive and immature, would make his works virtually unplayable behind the fourth wall.

This incompatibility led to a critical approach to Shakespeare – during the majority of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and a good portion of the twentieth century – as a poet rather than a dramatist. His works were analyzed as texts, and criticism was given to literary theory and in-depth character analysis rather than production and performance. According to M.C. Bradbrook:

Hamlet, deprived of an adequate forestage, had to hurl his soliloquies at the audience. Coleridge said, he “never saw any of Shakespeare’s plays acted but with a degree of pain, disgust and indignation....” He was therefore not distressed at the enormous size and monopoly of the theatres, which drove Shakespeare from the stage to find his proper place in the heart and the closet, where he sits with Milton....

(12-13). In a play such as *Macbeth*, which relies so heavily upon communion with the audience, the proscenium stage would prove a guillotine to an already dying Elizabethan

form. Annihilating the participatory role of the audience and insisting that actor and audience engage in a mutual denial of the other's presence, *Macbeth* is left quite alone upon the stage, behind a very distant fourth wall.

The incongruity of the Elizabethan dramatic form played upon the proscenium stage further contributed to the enigma surrounding *Macbeth*. For the duality of character made possible through Shakespeare's use of the soliloquy is inexpressible without the full power of that convention and the compelling connection to the audience it proffers.

Like the dramatists of the Restoration period and the later eighteenth century, theatre artists of the nineteenth century had an enthusiasm for Shakespeare but held little regard for him as a dramatist. While his works continued to enjoy production upon the proscenium stage, the main focus now turned upon the performance of *virtuosi* actor-managers who appropriated the plays to promote their star power. Shakespeare was again tailored to the tastes of the age, often from hand-me-down interpretations that were further muddled for use as star vehicles – with the cutting, extending, and rewriting of scenes to accentuate command performances and encourage applause (Dymkowski 17).

It is natural that soliloquy would take the most damaging blow upon the proscenium stage, and with it the attendant intimacy it fostered with the spectator. Indeed, once the proscenium was firmly established, the convention of soliloquy was disregarded as a technical tool and rarely used in modern productions, where the audience

was drawn ever farther away from the players. On the proscenium stage, the soliloquy fell flat:

Gone is the neutral ground of the Shakespearean stage, where the actor might be so close that he could almost touch his spectators, where the setting might be any place and almost any time, the stage which encouraged the long soliloquy, the act of confidential self-revelation. Instead, the actor has withdrawn behind the proscenium, ... able to emerge from the frame only at the risk of breaking the illusion.

Such are the reasons, largely technological, which have led to the questioning of the soliloquy. As Paull has remarked, "a convention that is questioned is doomed; its existence depends upon its unhesitating acceptance." The moment a convention is questioned, it snaps the imaginative hold it requires, and the pact between playwright and audience is in danger of being abrogated.

(Russell 67-68). Breaking so violently the rules of proscenium production values, the soliloquy became a ridiculous aberration, and it would soon fall out of use as a theatrical convention altogether until it was revisited, on a much smaller scale, by Eugene O'Neill in his *Strange Interlude* (1923).

The direct contact and resultant shared emotion between player and playgoer that made the Elizabethan theatrical event a living, breathing, participatory creation was gone. With the actor no longer amidst his audience, alone and withdrawn behind the proscenium arch, the heartbeat of the Shakespearean play slowed to a murmur, and Shakespearean plays continued to produce volatile results upon the boards of the proscenium stage. But in the twentieth century, scholars and theatre professionals would reembrace Shakespeare's stagecraft in search of more authentic interpretations of his

works, and the Elizabethan stage ultimately would be revived to excavate the stagecraft upon which his plays were born.

Theatre artists began to realize that the Shakespeare criticism that prevailed from the Restoration to the early twentieth century – which embraced Shakespeare’s plays as literature in an attempt to faithfully interpret them – ultimately deprived his dramatic works of their full and complete realization. For a literary approach to Shakespeare’s plays neglects the value of the medium of the drama and, as Granville-Barker said, “the effect of human association in an audience” (qtd. in Dymkowski 86). For the Shakespearean drama must be *played* – engaged in and digested as the live production it was so carefully crafted to be. Jean Howard makes clear in *Shakespeare’s Art of Orchestration* that Shakespeare “consciously or intuitively developed strategies and techniques for shaping the three-dimensional event to make the greatest emotional and intellectual impact upon the spectators” (3). The emotional response derived from reading his plays on the page cannot approach the emotional engagement between player and audience. A playgoer need only experience Lady Macbeth – sleepwalking onto the stage, ghostly illuminated by the light of her “brief candle,” now merely the shell of a woman, a hollow soul already dead save for her physical body, as she smells the blood on her hand and tries in vain to remove the consequence of her horrible deed, and utters the haunting refrain “all the / perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten this little / hand” (V.1.50-51) – to know that the printed word – no matter how majestic, how poetic – can never approach the electricity of emotion we experience when attending and participating

in a live performance. Any true interpretation must come from a work as it was meant to be experienced.

The movement to revive Shakespeare's plays as Elizabethan dramatic works – in their original form and in their entirety – began in the twentieth century. This endeavor would eventually reunite Shakespeare's plays with the Elizabethan stage on which they were born. Archaeologically excavating the dynamics of Elizabethan stagecraft and organically mining the plays for meaning, a Shakespearean Renaissance in the true spirit of The Immortal Bard was about to unfold that would have exceptional results and long-lasting consequences in the perpetual interpretation of Shakespeare.

IV. A SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY: REEMBRACING THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE

That Shakespeare survived centuries of stage adaptations, the treatment of his plays as literature in scholarly circles, and the advent of the proscenium stage is a testament to the timeless quality of his dramatic works. While adaptations were an homage to his plays, they so greatly distorted Shakespeare's work that scholars craved to know it authentically and turned to the text for interpretation. But here the full impact of the drama could not be experienced. After years of producing Shakespearean drama behind the fourth wall, a tradition of "scenic Shakespeare" was instituted that also inhibited authentic interpretation. For under these conditions, Shakespeare's stagecraft was choked, and the theatrical conventions so integral to his Elizabethan plays proved unseemly under the proscenium arch. Another crucial element of Shakespeare's stagecraft atrophied under proscenium staging: the audience – the very heart of the

dramatic act and the live production – was relegated to an insignificant, inactive role. The treatment of the audience as a sedentary, uninvolved, receptive body refuted the very idea of the Elizabethan stage play. With such little regard for the playgoer – upon whose role, opinions, and participation Shakespeare relied in the creation of his works – the heart of the Elizabethan drama was lost.

But somehow we have continued to search for meaning in Shakespeare’s works, and they have proven relevant the world over for four centuries and counting. And if we continue to do so, ought we not learn his art in its purest form? This is not to say there should be no adaptations; the adaptation is inevitable and attests to Shakespeare’s universalism. But knowing the works in their purity can only strengthen and solidify our knowledge in the quest to realize our own contemporary experience through his timeless truths. In his article “Why Elizabethan Spaces?,” Franklin J. Hildy discusses his philosophy to approaching classical works:

If the past has no relevance to the present, we should be writing new plays, not reinterpreting old ones. But if there is something in these old plays that is worth conveying to those living in the present, we must translate that something into terms a contemporary audience will understand. And surely we want the translators to be competent in both the contemporary language and the language of the source. The reconstruction of Elizabethan spaces and their use for the exploration of original staging practices make us better translators.

(qtd. in Kattwinkel 116). The exploration of Elizabethan stage dynamics would indeed result in new findings in Shakespeare’s works, leading us closer to the meaning of difficult plays like *Macbeth* to discover what Shakespeare intended in the creation of

such a work. For as we approach the plays in their pure form, on the stage for which they were written, we must entertain the idea of Shakespeare's intention.

The long history of adaptations and proscenium staging of Shakespeare resulted in fewer productions as time went on; indeed, the twentieth century saw a decline. With scenic Shakespeare the trend in both England and the United States, the number of commercial productions steadily diminished (Kattwinkel 17). However, a kind of archaeological exploration of Elizabethan stages and stage practices had begun at the turn of the century that would have far-reaching implications. Experiments of staging plays in "Elizabethan mode" by William Poel in England and George Pierce Baker in America led to traveling productions that visited universities, as well as outdoor Shakespeare festivals. These productions, requiring the simplicity of the unlocalized stage for the sake of mobility and economy, tested the Elizabethan stagecraft that was then beginning to undergo academic examination (Kattwinkel 8). This new attention to Elizabethan stage conditions eventually led to numerous replications of the Elizabethan playing space, such as the Folger in Washington, D.C., the Globes at San Diego and Chicago, the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, and the Ashland Elizabethan Theatre. Today, Shakespeare's Globe has been replicated in countries around the world, including England, the U.S., Japan, Czech Republic, Italy, and Poland (Kattwinkel 84, 122).

The endeavors of Poel and Baker gained a following of actor-scholars who would change the face of Shakespeare studies and production in the twentieth century. The Shakespeare-in-performance movement inspired by Harley Granville-Barker and carried

on by J.L. Styan, John Russell Brown, and others restored Shakespeare's scripts to their original form and sought to enhance the audience's understanding of the plays through stagecraft (Kattwinkel 75). As Granville-Barker noted, "it should follow that only in the theatre, and perhaps only in such a theatre as this for which he wrote them, will [Shakespeare's plays] be fully alive[,]” for the Elizabethan stage gave birth to a craft and art of its own (*Companion* 83). This “fresh” look at Shakespeare caused scholars and theatre professionals to realize that an organic approach to Shakespeare – one that emphasizes the foundation of his stagecraft – affords a more authentic interpretation and comprehensive understanding of the playwright. Replica stages on which Shakespeare's stagecraft can be practiced became standard and preferred in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, testimony to the successful reconsideration of Shakespeare's stagecraft as part and parcel of the creation, production, and comprehension of his works.

The Shakespeare-in-performance movement had a profound impact on traditional Shakespearean criticism, which for the first time since a formal criticism had developed began to reflect the exploration of Elizabethan stagecraft. At last Shakespeare was taken out of the literary closet and regarded as a dramatist in scholarly circles. For it was discovered that understanding Shakespeare's stagecraft, and using it as a tool of interpretation, not only provided new insights to the plays but likewise prevented and corrected misinterpretation (Bradbrook 5-6). Elizabethan stage conventions now came into sharper focus, like the soliloquy and the aside, which fell flat upon the boards of the proscenium stage; or the setting of scene and atmosphere with the actors' speech, which

often involves direct address to the audience; or the rhyming couplet indicating the swift movement of one actor's exit and another's entrance, which often was obfuscated by the cutting or extension of scenes.

Embracing the organic mechanism of the play led to a rediscovery that Shakespeare's stagecraft is embedded into his language. One need look no further than the actors' lines to find instruction on stage movement, location, props, gesture, appeal to the audience. The language acts as a topographic map, the Elizabethan platform stage the terrain upon which that map is based, its dynamics and conventions clues to the treasure buried within. Upon the bare Elizabethan platform, Shakespeare set his stage with poetry. His words – flowing through the actor – painted the scenery, set lighting, conjured atmosphere, revealed emotional temperament, and placed the actor in a location – whether it be Rome one moment or Egypt the next. Behavioral instructions and movement are built into the text. The Ghost in *Hamlet* “stalks away” (I.i.50); Juliet approaches Friar Lawrence's cell “O, so light a foot” (II.vi.16); after his first meeting with the Weird Sisters, Macbeth is “rapt” (I.iii.143). And so for scenery and atmosphere as well: the thunder, lightning, rain, and fog conjured by the strange cadence of the Weird Sisters envelops us from the first beat of the play. Just before Macbeth murders Duncan, Fleance's observation that the “moon is down” (II.i.2) surrounds us in the dark of night while Banquo's line thickens that darkness: “There's husbandry in heaven, / Their candles are all out” (II.1.4-5). With neither moon nor stars, we are swallowed in the blackness of *Macbeth*. Shakespeare strikes the same atmospheric note – with mosaic

tones so that it creeps in around us organically – until darkness and evil impregnate the theatre in an inescapable pall. Scenery and lighting are embedded in the play – metaphysically, beneath its skin – not merely the artificial setting or façade of the proscenium stage – but a living, breathing atmosphere shared by player and playgoer.

It was the simplicity of the open Elizabethan platform stage that encouraged Shakespeare to conjure any location, atmosphere, or mood necessary, at any moment he might require it, with the poetry flowing from his pen, through the being of his actors, to the active imagination of the audience: “The simple sweep of the Elizabethan platform not only lent the playwright the freedom he wanted, but also cleared the mind of the spectator for conjuring up visions. By its nature, Shakespeare’s was a stage which invited the spectator to ‘play with his fancies,’ as the Prologue to *Henry V* puts it” (Styan 29-30). With nothing but the actors, the language, and the stage, worlds were drawn, souls bared, joy and tragedy shared with the audience. For the platform stage connected the actor with the audience and invited, indeed demanded, its active participation. Out on the apron with the audience surrounding him on three sides, the actor and spectator shared the same space and confronted one another face to face.

This dynamic between player and playgoer made the Elizabethan stage conducive to expressing the full range of human emotion. As Styan has noted: “A theatre which could permit both the rant and the whisper encouraged Shakespeare to develop a structural technique which exploited both” (37). In this theatre that mandated connection with the audience, playwrights and actors relied upon interaction with the spectator as

part and parcel of the performance. Direct address to the audience under these conditions was as natural as two people conversing in public, reinforcing the feeling that the audience had an active role in the play. In fact the actors addressed the audience throughout the play, not merely during the soliloquy or the aside:

What has been called the actor's "direct address" to the audience, usually with reference to the soliloquy, is but one small part of a whole stage technique which takes into account the actor playing towards or away from his spectators.... Writing for the open stage is likely to make for a form of dialogue which, while it is not soliloquy or aside, yet often involves address to the audience. The "eloquence of emptiness", our sense of a player alone or apart on the open spaces of the unlocalized stage, permits a direct relationship between actor and spectator, and characters will seem to move out of and back into the scene. It is as if the scene takes the actor upstage from time to time, ... while release from the action allows him to become in part a spectator himself, bringing him downstage to be in touch with his audience.

(Styan 94). The Elizabethans were accustomed to the direct address by their theatrical history as well. In the Morality Plays that preceded Elizabethan theatre – on whose platform the Elizabethan stage was modeled – direct address was common practice.

Not surprisingly, the audience has become the major focal point in the reconstructed Elizabethan playing space. Vanessa Schormann, in her article "Shakespeare's Globe Theatre: Where History Meets Innovation," shares the discoveries made at the Globe in London since its opening in 1997. There, says Schormann, architecture, play, and audience are inseparable, and the actor's ability to interact with the audience is key (qtd. in Kattwinkel 122, 127):

The more lively an audience the more challenging is the acting onstage, as the actors have to work hard to get back the people's attention. This is

when the interaction begins and the audience becomes a partner to the actors.

Past seasons at the Globe have shown that it is the standing audiences in front of the stage that are the steering wheel of a performance. They can sway the mood of the whole theatre as they carry the energy of the stage to the people sitting further away and above.

(qtd. in Kattwinkel 131). Schormann further emphasizes that actors must be vigilant in their awareness of the audience and realize that the manner in which they use the language gives them power to manipulate audience reaction and create sympathy for character. After several seasons at the Globe, its principals have come to believe that Shakespeare anticipated provocative reactions from the audience and consequently built the actor's reaction into his dramaturgy (qtd. in Kattwinkel 132).

This is the experience of Shakespeare's total theatre, with full reciprocity between actor and audience. For audience members must have felt as Puck did in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor, / An actor too perhaps, if I see cause" (III.1.79-80). Indeed, the role of the audience has become the major focal point in the research of Elizabethan stagecraft at the Globe:

We realize, besides all the scholarly work on text and dramaturgy in combination with the building, that it is the audience that should now become the focus of our research. The productions at the Globe clearly show that the audience ... is the touchstone of success. It is the playhouse's architecture that supports a direct and active engagement between actors and audience, and the play texts written for these Elizabethan playhouses are full of devices that enhance that engagement.

(Kattwinkel 132). The shared experience between actor and audience stems from the physical proximity afforded by the dynamics of the stage, as well as its theatrical

conventions. Based on both scholarly and empirical research into the dynamics of the Elizabethan stage, it appears that the actors' connection to the audience and the audience's active role in the drama were instrumental elements of Elizabethan theatre.

Communication between actor and audience was such a natural element of Elizabethan stage dynamics that Shakespeare often referenced the event of the performance itself. What was for the Elizabethans natural and commonplace became known as "metatheatre" in the age of the proscenium arch. But for Shakespeare, it was part of total theatre. Whether it be an aside to the audience, reference to a current event, or an appeal by Prologue or Epilogue – or some other character in the play, such as Prospero in *The Tempest* or Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – for attention or applause, there is ample evidence of the direct contact between the player and his audience (Styan 36). This reciprocal acknowledgement of shared experience was so much a part of Shakespeare's total theatre that, in most somber moments, the playwright often emphasized the fact that there was an actor, acting upon the stage, at that moment in time. Ian McKellen speaks of Shakespeare's tendency to refer to the actor in moments of heightened emotion, deepening the intimate connection with the audience:

Often when a character is at the peak of his emotional problems he compares himself with an actor: "struts and frets his hour upon the stage." This has a wonderful resonance for an audience, reminding them that they are in a theatre and that the man who is speaking the lines is not only the character he is exploring.... When you are in a theater ... you are not only there listening to and watching the actors but you are aware that the person next door to you is doing so also. And the person along the row behind you and in front of you. And when those words Time, Death, Grave, Man, Woman, Child, Father, Son reverberate round the theater you are

reminded of your own humanity and your relationship with other people's humanity.

(qtd. in Barton 230). The actor examining and sharing his humanity with the spectator, who receives and reciprocates, producing a surge of emotion in the house – this is an experience that cannot be realized by reading words on a page, however moving and poetic they may be. The theatrical event is one of communion, an active reflection upon our shared human condition.

The intimacy cultivated by this reciprocal relationship puts a certain onus on the audience that can be manipulated by the actor to establish complicity, particularly in a private moment of soliloquy. The introspective soliloquy upon the Elizabethan stage focuses all attention upon the player. The forward motion of the play stops, and we are in intimate physical and emotional proximity to the actor. In *Macbeth*, it is the theatrical convention of the soliloquy that makes Macbeth's duality of character a reality for the audience. Indeed, the play would not succeed without it. Macbeth exposes the darkest depths of his soul in soliloquy, standing before us, confused and terrified, overcome by a malevolent power that is somehow natural to him but makes his hair stand on end all the same. He muses. He asks us why. Somehow we respect – even admire – his honesty, his willingness to reveal an inner darkness that we all share but cannot admit even to ourselves. And we give him our sympathy because his inner torment reveals that his moral compass is set to the same north as our own. And so he secures our complicity, and we also must look into the darkness of our souls.

The intimate relationship crucial to the success of *Macbeth* was lost behind the fourth wall of the proscenium stage. Neither could it be experienced through literary scholarship, though critics like A.C. Bradley who focused on characterization in Shakespeare did indeed find sympathy for Macbeth. But this cannot compare to the communion experienced in the energy of a live production, an *event* crucial to the success of the inner tragedy *Macbeth* – where his duality of character *is* the drama, the plot, the tragic unfolding, where a single man must embody both hero and villain. Without the communion effected through soliloquy and the complicity it establishes with the audience, Macbeth is quite alone upon his stage, and we passively watch a story about a bad man doing bad things, and *Macbeth* remains an enigma.

And that is not the Shakespeare we know. Through the rediscovery and examination of Elizabethan stagecraft, we can find the playwright's meaning in writing such a work:

Shakespeare had the talent to exploit a ripe and evolving theatre in its own terms, and in discovering that what he had to say and the way in which the audience received it had to go together like flesh and blood, he chanced upon an imperishable stagecraft.... [A]ny estimate of his value as a dramatist must take into account how he gains an audience's full participation....

(Styan 196). Through soliloquy, we are made to mirror the duality of Macbeth; we sympathize; we are complicit; we play the Horatio to his Hamlet. It is with an eye toward this intimate relationship that next we shall meet ... upon the heath ... there to meet with Macbeth.

V. *MACBETH*: SHAKESPEARE'S ONE-MAN TRAGEDY

As I have argued that Shakespeare must be *played* and not merely read, in this chapter I will look at *Macbeth* with a director's eye. According to the director's duty of interpreting the play for the audience, it is my goal to follow Shakespeare's stagecraft – the use of theatrical conventions, dramatic structure, and the manipulation of audience response – in approaching the translation from text to stage. As a detailed run-through of the entire play is not within the parameters of this paper, I will focus mainly on portions of the play that establish the bond between Macbeth and the audience essential to rendering Macbeth's duality of character and the success of *Macbeth* as a one-man tragedy.

I would like to begin with a quote from Harley Granville-Barker: "Shakespeare – though he had his lapses – was not in a twaddling mood when he wrote *Macbeth*" (*More Prefaces* 60). When approaching the production of any dramatic work, we must entertain the idea of the playwright's intention. This is a complicated, if not thorny, subject – particularly with regard to Shakespeare. In a troublesome play like *Macbeth*, however, I believe we must strive to interpret the play as authentically as possible. From the outset, to revisit Erasmus, we can look to the "emotional effects ... and then for the means by which these effects are excited" (qtd. in Cunningham 16). The emotional effects of *Macbeth* are fear, guilt, and remorse stemming from the commitment of cardinal sin. Because the experience of the audience is made to mirror Macbeth's own, we likewise are meant to feel fear, guilt, and remorse. The means by which these effects are created

are the elements of Elizabethan stagecraft. Through dramatic structure and the use of the soliloquy, Shakespeare so strongly and unmistakably aligns us with his hero-villain that we must share in the self-reckoning that acknowledges our darker natures.

This is the mood with which we must approach the play. And we must have a Macbeth who is both a hero and a villain, who elicits sympathy and solicits empathy. In order to be successful, our Macbeth must embrace the audience fully and make himself utterly vulnerable to it. This is a tremendous task for an actor. Harold Bloom notes that

[e]ven great actors do badly in the role, with only a few exceptions, Ian McKellen being much the best I've attended. Yet even McKellen seemed haunted by the precariousness of the role's openness to its audience. I think we most identify with Macbeth because we also have the sense that we are violating our own natures, as he does his.

(534). The production of which Bloom speaks – directed in 1976 by Trevor Nunn at the Royal Shakespeare Company's theatre The Other Place – is widely regarded as the most successful twentieth-century production of *Macbeth*. Significantly, Nunn's production values were in line with the essential elements of Elizabethan stagecraft, in that the playing space was unlocalized and aware and inclusive of its audience, which was in close proximity to the players. Most importantly, Ian McKellen's portrayal of Macbeth – as a dualistic, vulnerable, tormented soul – was noted as the key element of the production's great acclaim. I shall use this production – the 1978 Thames Television version – as an occasional reference point in this chapter's discussion as well.

The dramatic structure of *Macbeth* is all unity and focus. From the first moment of the play we are swallowed in darkness – a darkness in nature and in the human soul.

Macbeth is unrivaled among Shakespeare's works for its focus on a single character; Macbeth is either physically present or spoken about in nearly every scene. The play contains no subplots. Its secondary characters lack detail and dimension, save for Lady Macbeth, with whom Shakespeare dispenses after Act III, Scene 4, except for her brief reappearance at the top of Act V. Excepting the Porter's scene – which is the closest approximation to catharsis Shakespeare will allow and engineered specifically to enable the audience to survive the play – there is no room for comic relief in this world.

Macbeth runs like a locomotive, the title character our engineer, and we are caught up in Macbeth's experience with nowhere else to turn. As noted by Simon Williams, the action of the play so centers on one character that the stage world becomes an embodiment of his inner consciousness (qtd. in Wells 123). The connection between Macbeth and the audience is so pronounced, and our response to events so carefully designed, that our experience mirrors Macbeth's from gloomy start to tragic end. There are no eyes other than Macbeth's through which to see *Macbeth*.

Before moving on to the story, let us discuss our main characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Dichotomy rules Macbeth. He is a fierce, brutal warrior who spends his play in perpetual fear. Though he is a man of war, Macbeth is no ruffian. He speaks with sumptuous poetry. His imagination is extravagant. He knows that killing Duncan is wrong. He knows that killing Duncan will ruin him – that he cannot spiritually survive such an act. He does it anyway. In his relationship with his wife – a deeply loving relationship – he appears to be the more passive. Shakespeare has purposefully given our

hero these disparate attributes, for the duality of his character exists long before he plots to murder the King. I believe that Macbeth's duality derives from an emptiness deep within him – some incompleteness for which his war victories compensate (inadequately). He is the man who *might* be great. His poet's imagination fills out this emptiness with fantasy, calling out to his ambition. This is the key to his desire to be king. Indeed, his emptiness is the key to all. For mustn't it be that Lady Macbeth *knows* his emptiness and, in her whole and sound love for him, believes that the crown will heal him and make him a whole man – a true and complete husband? On the battlefield, his war victories fill his emptiness. At home, Lady Macbeth completes him. Her savage love for Macbeth makes him feel greatness, and this is the root of her powerful sway over him.

Lady Macbeth is the supreme, the divine feminine – pure form, strength, and grace. Her love for Macbeth supersedes all other considerations in her life. Her wish for him to be great, to be king, is a manifestation of that love. Macbeth's emptiness has become a source of tension in their marriage, and Lady Macbeth has learned to circumnavigate that tension by manipulating Macbeth, which she does quite masterfully, using sex and sensuality to overpower him. She too possesses dualistic qualities – femininity and power, a loving and controlling nature, willfulness and loyalty. Lady Macbeth comes to virtually the same end as her husband. While she does not suffer in the same way as he, it is because naïveté works in her favor. She does not know killing in the way that Macbeth knows killing. She cannot comprehend its repercussions or the

way in which Macbeth's conscience torments him, as we learn in her sleepwalking scene when she utters "a soldier, and afear'd?" (V.1.35). But the Lady's conscience undoes her as well, and she is exposed by her somnambulism before finally she takes her own life.

I believe that the Macbeths suffered the loss of a child, which affected them both very deeply and is a further source of tension in their marriage. It is certainly a principal factor in the emptiness and incompleteness that drives Macbeth. Lady Macbeth uses the memory of their child in her strategy to convince Macbeth to take the crown by force:

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

(I.7.54-59)

While this may seem utterly heartless and is undoubtedly manipulative, rather than being a cold, calculated utterance, I believe it is a testimony of Lady Macbeth's love and loyalty. She truly would do anything for him: "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't" (II.2.12-13). But she knows how the memory of their dead child will affect Macbeth, and she believes that taking the crown will complete her husband and save their marriage. As Antony Sher, who played Macbeth with the Royal Shakespeare Company, has noted about this passage:

Shakespeare editors invent all sorts of fiction to explain these lines, fiction about the baby being a product of a previous marriage, and so on. Cis Berry's point is proved again: you shouldn't just read Shakespeare, you should perform him. You can't play a previous marriage – never referred to in the text – but you can play a married couple who have had to deal

with the death of a baby. For Harriet [Lady Macbeth] and me it became a pivotal factor in our relationship, and a pivotal point in that short scene, which begins with Macbeth resolving not to kill Duncan and ends with this dramatic u-turn. Why? Because she brings up the taboo subject, ... the tragedy at the centre of their partnership, the dead baby. This has an enormous impact on him. From an emotional point of view he suddenly needs to stand by her at all costs. There's a practical side too: the baby was their hope for the future. Nothing else is left; so they need to grab power now – now, in their own lifetimes.

(qtd. in Smallwood, *Players* 5 107). So I think the child, while not a character, plays an extremely important role in Macbeth's psychology and motivations, and the special dynamics of the Macbeths' relationship.

A word of caution before we move on to the story: it is of utmost importance – and very difficult indeed with so renowned a play and playwright – that we proceed as though we are ignorant of the plot and the story's outcome. We cannot know that Macbeth will murder Duncan until Act 2, Scene 2. Everything prior to the murder points to the fact that Macbeth cannot commit himself to execute this heinous deed and that he is terrified and tormented by the prospect. If we do not play those moments of indecision, fear, and torment with an eye toward two possible outcomes, the play is not alive and the audience is not with us. In order to accomplish this, Macbeth must be a man riven, mentally and emotionally.

To set the scene of this “Scottish play,” I find it helpful to turn to its prologue – found in *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Ireland*, by Raphael Holinshed and others, Shakespeare's history source for *Macbeth*. Holinshed recounts that:

King Duff became afflicted with a strange illness, which his people blamed on a group of witches living in the town of Forres. Donwald, the captain of the castle of Forres, who was loyal to the King, learned of the witches' plot against the King's life through a soldier who was having an affair with one of the witches' daughters. At Donwald's instigation a party of soldiers broke into the witches' house and found them casting spells against the King. They were burning a wax image of him, and as it burned the King's fever worsened. The image was broken, the witches were executed, and the King was cured.

(qtd. in Leggatt 15). This is the world in which *Macbeth* is located. As noted by Georg Brandes, the spirit world and witchcraft meant something quite different to Shakespeare's contemporaries. They believed in a great variety of evil spirits, who disturbed the order of nature, produced storms by land and sea, foreboded calamities and death, and disseminated plague and famine (97). In 1597, King James himself produced a treatise on witchcraft entitled *Daemonologie*, and in 1598 he caused no fewer than 600 old women to be burnt. In 1604, a bill against sorcery was passed by Parliament (98). It is in this atmosphere of supernatural soliciting that we encounter the first crashes of thunder and lightning in Act I, Scene 1 of *Macbeth*.

The violence of nature that opens the play reflects its principal theme: the inherent violence within human nature – something of which we are aware but loathe to acknowledge. We are deluged by harsh and unfamiliar surroundings – the brewing storm, the strange yet human forms of the Weird Sisters, the odd rhythm of their language pattern, their guttural voices – all of which set a chaotic tone and demand the audience's heightened attention. I would add to this atmosphere the moan of a dull, droning musical instrument, like a didgeridoo, beneath. The thunder should be so loud as

to frighten the audience on one particularly strong crack. Questions abound in this scene, further disorienting us and instilling the sense of the unknown. (In fact, the first four scenes of Act I begin with questions.) We meet the Weird Sisters at the end of their ritual, during which they have divined that Macbeth will be their man in the field. As they part, each of the Sisters should hold a chappy finger to her skinny lips (as they later will upon meeting Macbeth and Banquo) and make a connection with the audience, signifying our part in the play: “Don’t tell. You’re in this now.” A dissipating intoxication encircles them as they part ways.

A bleeding soldier then rushes onstage (I.2) to inform the King and his retinue that the valiant hero Macbeth – so fierce a warrior that he is termed “Bellona’s bridegroom” (I.2.55), who unseams his enemies “from the nave to the chops” (I.2.22) – has defeated the rebel uprisings and saved the kingdom. So exalted is the description of Macbeth and his glorious victories that even before we meet him, he is lauded as the greatest of heroes. A kind of abscess or infection within the kingdom is established as well, as the number of uprisings by formerly loyal subjects reflects a dark variable in human nature that manifests itself in a hunger for power and place. Under these auspices, King Duncan declares that Macbeth – presently Thane of Glamis – shall receive ample reward for his heroic performance and be invested with the title of his defeated foe, Thane of Cawdor, as well.

Act I, Scene 3 finds the Sisters reunited upon the heath, their intoxication rising in anticipation of their meeting with Macbeth. As Macbeth enters and utters his first line,

“So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (I.3.38), he echoes the exit lines of the Sisters in Act I, Scene 1 (“Fair is foul and foul is fair”) (I.2.11), perhaps suggesting a tacit connection to the darker forces of nature. While Banquo muses over the Weird Sisters, Macbeth *commands* them, evincing a greater fear than his companion as well as a discomfort being in the presence of these creatures. The Sisters lay their prophesy upon Macbeth, hailing him Thane of Glamis, Cawdor, and King hereafter (I.3.48-50), and Banquo’s lines “why do you start” and “he seems rapt withal” (I.3.51, 57) inform us that a shock has run through Macbeth upon hearing these words. For the idea of kingship is not new to him, and their words have instilled in Macbeth a poisonous seed whose germination is now unstoppable. After the Sisters have vanished, Macbeth’s wish that they had stayed (I.3.82) belies him – his former fear replaced by burning desire – and dark thoughts of murder immediately overwhelm him.

With the arrival of Rosse and Angus, bringing news of Macbeth’s new title, Macbeth at first must be terribly afraid, because if *this* is true, it must be true that he should be king. And so the prospect of becoming king (by means untoward) looms ever larger in his imagination. Though he and Banquo share a brief revelation at the truth of the Sisters’ prophesies, it is to the audience that Macbeth turns to reveal his dark inner thoughts. Banquo’s turn of the conversation toward a negative connotation of the prophesy, with

But ‘tis strange:
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—

(I.3.122-26)

causes Macbeth to turn away from him, the dash after “consequence” suggesting an action by Macbeth causing an interruption to Banquo’s speech. Macbeth’s self-absorption and/or dismissal of Banquo spurs Banquo to take his next line, “Cousins, a word...” at I.3.127 to Angus and Rosse, leaving Macbeth to his thoughts.

Now reeling from his one-on-one meeting with the Sisters and the immediate realization of their prophesies, Macbeth turns to the audience for communion – to work through his thoughts and unload his conscience in a lengthy aside. Unable to confide in Banquo, the audience must become his acting partner, the Horatio to his Hamlet, as he confesses his dark desires:

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. ...
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? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man,
That function is smother'd in surmise,
And nothing is, but what is not.

(I.3.127-42)

Thus, in his very first scene, Macbeth takes the audience into his confidence, engaging us in a long aside.

Macbeth is *electrified* – dazed, frightened, confused, and terribly excited. And this energy is shared with us, directed at us. Shakespeare’s use of the aside here is very much like soliloquy. Its length, the delicacy of its subject matter, and the fact that Macbeth is so rapt in thought that he appears oblivious to the presence of the others onstage are all traits of the soliloquy. Macbeth shares very private thoughts and undergoes psychological and emotional changes during the aside, revealing the duality of his character. Indeed, our valiant, bloody warrior is suddenly terrified. He does not shelter us from his dark desires, speaking readily of the prospect of the horrific deed and the violent effect it has upon his “single state of man” (I.3.140). He then launches into the internal debate and torturous contemplation that will haunt him – first consciously, then subconsciously – for the rest of the play. Macbeth’s first encounter with the audience plunges us headlong into his inner turmoil and the duality of his character. Thus we have been introduced to our protagonist, whose good nature and valiant heroism firmly establish him as a hero, but whose “black and deep desires” (I.4.51) may lead him on the path to villainy.

In the next scene, Macbeth receives accolades before the King for his loyalty and war victories. And Duncan happens to choose this moment to appoint his successor to the throne. When Duncan appoints his son Malcolm, Macbeth’s hope to attain kingship by honorable means are dashed, and his dark thoughts loom larger. It was not

unwarranted for Macbeth to believe that he might be named the next king under the laws of succession in Scotland at the time. Indeed, the very nomination indicates that eldest son succeeding father (primogeniture) was not yet the established practice (Braunmuller 16). Macbeth's esteemed victories certainly make him a likely candidate. Duncan's choice of an inexperienced youth over a seasoned warrior and renowned hero such as himself outrages Macbeth, gnawing at the wound of emptiness that causes him to feel less a man, and he shares this with us in another aside as he leaves Duncan:

The Prince of Cumberland!—That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

(I.4.48-53)

While social and political protocol would certainly dictate that Macbeth invite the King to his home after receiving such high praise and honor, we must wonder at the totality of his motives.

Act I, Scene 5 contains the play's first proper soliloquy. Alone upon the stage, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband telling of the Sisters' prophecies and alluding to the Macbeths' imminent rise to glory. The fact that Macbeth shares this extraordinary news with his wife in a letter preceding his arrival, and refers to their rise to power as one of partnership, reveals the strength and complete trust of their bond. While this first soliloquy is not spoken by the main character, it is *about* him, and Shakespeare reveals yet another facet of Macbeth's complex character through the woman who knows

him best. Lady Macbeth's characterization of her beloved as being "too full of the milk of human kindness, / To catch the nearest way" (I.5.17-18) suggests that though Macbeth may be unstoppable on the battlefield, his constitution is more naturally geared toward right action and propriety than ill-gotten gain. This picture of Macbeth supports the characteristics of the hero we know Macbeth to be thus far. However, as the idea of murder as a means to the "golden round" is the first instinct of both Macbeth and his wife, we must suspect that they have spoken of this before – however vague or merely hopeful that conversation may have been.

Interrupted by news of the King's imminent arrival, Lady Macbeth reels with terrified anticipation, as demonstrated in her second soliloquy wherein she appeals to the dark forces of nature for strength to fell Duncan. While this communion with the dark spirits could certainly render a fiendish, willful, power-hungry woman, the very fact that she must call upon evil spirits to accomplish the deed reveals that it is not within her own constitution to submit to the evil task; her request to be "unsexed" shows that the very idea does violence to her divine feminine nature. Indeed, in Nunn's production, Judi Dench kneels and extends her hand to conjure the spirits. Upon feeling their presence, she cries out, jumps up, and turns away – terrified of what she has come in contact with. While Lady Macbeth strongly desires their joint rise to power, she believes that kingship will fill the void inside her husband and make him a whole man – that the rise to greatness will fill the emptiness that haunts him, the emptiness she cannot fill – and so it

is for her love's sake that Lady Macbeth communes with the murdering ministers and trades her milk for gall.

The Macbeths' reunion must be a truly passionate one. Sex and sensuality will demonstrate the strength of their relationship and heighten the intoxicating idea of their ascension. We learn that Lady Macbeth is the certain source of will in this union, as she prods Macbeth on to action. Macbeth's parting words to her, as she exits to receive the King and his retinue are "We will speak further" (I.5.71), revealing that Macbeth's better nature continues to fight against the spirits his wife has poured into his ear. Shakespeare has now shown us the many sides of Macbeth: a fierce warrior and loyal subject nearly incapacitated by the idea of murder, vacillating between evil thoughts and the inner moral compass that tells him they are wrong, driven by an aggressive but loving wife who wants for her husband what she knows he so badly needs.

Macbeth's retreat from the feast and subsequent soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 7, paint the picture of a man ambivalent at best, talking himself *out* of the act of murder. He considers, one by one, the weighty reasons he should not do it. The passivity with which this soliloquy begins – "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly" (I.7.1-2) – portrays Macbeth's reluctance to take ownership of or responsibility for the deed, which exists more as a frightful prospect than a realistic plan. Macbeth weighs both the mundane and spiritual repercussions of such an act, details the threefold improprieties of killing his own kinsman, and then visualizes – with lavish poetry – its consequences:

Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And Pity, like a naked new-born babe
Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind.

(I.7.16-25)

Indeed, it seems that remorse has preceded the act of murder for Macbeth. Finally, he realizes that his only motive for committing such a heinous crime – ambition – is poor and paltry indeed, and that the outcome would surely be disastrous. This is not the portrait of a callous man about to commit murder. Rather, it is a man with whom we can sympathize, whose human nature is much like our own.

Lady Macbeth's quick and effective manipulation of her husband in the moments that follow demonstrate her powerful influence over him. Macbeth has decided *not* to do the deed. Defending his decision, Macbeth sounds like a child lashing out at his mother:

We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

(I.7.31-35)

Macbeth's seemingly subordinate position here instills a reminder of his deep-seated emptiness. But Lady Macbeth knows all too well how to manipulate her man. She withdraws from him in disgust, calls him coward, and finally uses the memory of their dead child – the very seed of Macbeth's emptiness – to sway him to her side. So settled,

Macbeth determines to fill his emptiness with a weighty crown he instinctively knows will ruin him. Shakespeare quite purposefully gives Lady Macbeth the power and influence over Macbeth in this scene to sway him from a decision that he will not commit the murder to acquiescing to her desires. He likewise places the preparation of the deed in her hands – all so that we know that Macbeth would not have committed the murder if not for her.

Macbeth's visual hallucination of the dagger in Act II, Scene 1 is necessary to hold him to his resolve. The dagger appears to Macbeth because, just at that moment – when the reality of what he must do looms before him – he decides yet again that he can go no further. This skillful use of the imagined dagger – so real to Macbeth that it causes him to draw his own dagger – would not be necessary had he been ready to commit the murder. Though he tries to will it away, the dagger – now dripping blood – insists that Macbeth carry out the action as he and Lady Macbeth have planned it. Because the audience experiences Macbeth's struggle with this "dagger of the mind" in soliloquy, sympathy for his character builds alongside the tension and suspense of the scene, as we hope against hope that Macbeth's better nature will win out. But then the soliloquy turns on its head – into an incantation of sorts – which Macbeth needs to compel his physical being to execute the crime that his mind has resolved will occur. As he communes with, almost summons, the darker side of nature that surrounds him, the audience cannot help but be drawn into his spell and feel the lump that Macbeth must surely have in his throat

as he prepares to violate his nature and wrongfully take a human life. We feel Macbeth's fate hang in the balance as he strides forth to commit this spiritual suicide.

To keep the audience aligned with this hero turning villain before our eyes, Shakespeare took great care to conceal the murder from us. It takes place offstage, and we never hear so much as a murmur from the slain man. After Macbeth exits the stage, Lady Macbeth enters – her anticipation palpable. It is through the Macbeths that we experience the event of the murder. For the focal point of the scene is not the murder itself, but rather its repercussions on Macbeth. Indeed, the soul who emerges from Duncan's chamber – bloody daggers unknowingly still in hand – is a ruined man, nearly catatonic, afraid to think what he has done (II.2.50). The tension of the murder scene could not be more tightly wound, as Shakespeare works to keep our heartbeat and Macbeth's at the same rate. Set up by Lady Macbeth's brief soliloquy – in which she is frightened by the owl's shriek and must endure hearing Macbeth cry out from offstage, within Duncan's chamber – the scene becomes a rapid-fire exchange between husband and wife when Macbeth reappears, a man whose soul has already suffered the consequences of his deed.

Relating to Lady Macbeth the scene she had overheard, where two men in the chamber adjacent to Duncan's awoke as he committed the murder, Macbeth's concern is not for his own safety – that he might be discovered – but rather, his mind is plagued with the fact that he could not commune with the men in prayer:

Macb. There's one did laugh in's sleep and one cried 'Murther!',
That they did wake each other: I stood and heard them'
But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep.

Lady M. There are two lodg'd together.

Macb. One cried, 'God bless us!' and, 'Amen,' the other
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
List'ning their fear, I could not say, 'Amen,'
When they did say, 'God bless us.'

Lady M. Consider it not so deeply.

Macb. But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat.

(II.2.34-39)

In the Trevor Nunn production, Ian McKellen plays a terrified, almost simpering little boy who is hopelessly lost and cannot collect himself. He is a man who fears only for his soul, and nothing else enters this dismal psychological aftermath of the murder.

And then comes the knocking at the door, when the outside world rushes in and all is lost. In many senses, the play ends here. For we know that the Macbeths will be found out. We know that they will suffer. But punishment in the form of societal repercussions is not what Shakespeare wants to explore in this inner tragedy. It is the suffering of the soul – the torment experienced when one has done something horribly wrong and cannot take it back – on which Shakespeare wishes us to dwell. And since audience response has been so carefully manipulated to make us complicit with Macbeth, we experience the knock at the door not as relief, but with fear and apprehension. Our

worry instead is that he will be found out. We desire his escape, and so ourselves feel complicit in the crime.

For the man who looks down upon his own hands when Lady Macbeth exits the stage to smear the grooms with blood is a man worthy of our sympathy. As though seeing them for the first time since he has emerged from Duncan's chamber, Macbeth utters a horrified, regretful lament:

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

(II.2.57-62)

His sober realization of the immensity and fatal consequence of his deed undoes us in much the same manner his deed has undone him.

Shakespeare goes back in time – in perhaps the very first instance of an intercut – for the Porter's scene. For the knocking at the door begins well before Lady Macbeth exits to smear the grooms with blood and reenters to usher her husband off to their bed chamber. The only comic relief in the play, the Porter's scene is a greatly needed change of rhythm and atmosphere that allows the audience the nearest experience to cathartic release Shakespeare will allow. The Porter is somewhere between a state of drunkenness (where reality is altered) and a state of being hung-over (where reality is grim) – afflicted by the consequences of the desire for short-term gratification, the result of a deed that cannot be undone. So while we are being granted a bit of relief, the state of the Porter

reflects upon Macbeth, maintaining the play's unsettled, uncomfortable atmosphere. Here Shakespeare calls attention to the event of the play by including among the Porter's imaginary entrants prominent subjects of recent news. The "equivocator," for example, is a reference to the Gunpowder Plot trial of early 1606 (the year *Macbeth* was first performed), a failed assassination attempt against King James I, where equivocation was used as a means of defense. But our respite from the action is short lived, as the entrance of Macduff and Lennox reignites our anxiety and carries us to the discovery of the murder.

In Act II, Scene 3 – the revelation of the regicide – Macbeth's mettle is tested, and proven, almost immediately. For when he returns to Duncan's chamber after Macduff's horrified discovery, Macbeth slays the grooms to safeguard himself. This aberration in their plan – along with Macbeth's woeful description of the slain king – causes Lady Macbeth to faint. While it is often interpreted that Lady Macbeth faints as a ruse to take the focus from her husband in a situation of heightened emotion and risk, I believe that this is the moment at which Lady Macbeth's evil spirits leave her and her divine femininity returns. Unable to accept her part in these horrific crimes, the heart of the Lady faints dead away.

In Nunn's production, this scene has been noted for McKellen's tenderness toward Malcolm when he informs him that his father is dead. Here, Macbeth's realization that he has taken a father from a son – as his son was taken from him in death

– exposes the tender side of this now-triple murderer, and we are shown Macbeth’s dualism coexisting in one and the very same moment.

Once Duncan’s sons have fled Scotland in fear for their lives and Macbeth is invested as King, we begin to see our hero take the face of a villain with certainty. Macbeth’s survival is now the sole motivation for his conscious actions. Though we are exposed to a hardened exterior unfamiliar to us – one that would allow emotional separation from Macbeth – his subconscious takes over, tormenting Macbeth so strongly that we are able to feel pity for him even yet, as his conscience begins to haunt and slowly destroy him. Plagued by paranoia and nightmares, Macbeth isolates himself – even from his wife. Fear grips him at every moment; indeed, fear becomes the epicenter of the play. Everything that occurs from this point forward is the result of Macbeth’s unrelenting fear.

As he is about to contract the murders of Banquo and his son Fleance, we are alone with Macbeth for the first time since just before Duncan’s murder. Thoughts of safety and fear begin his soliloquy:

To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus:
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:

(III.1.47-54)

In these first eight lines of soliloquy, some form of the word “fear” is mentioned three times, “safe” twice. And then Macbeth’s soliloquy cuts to the core of his subconscious motives: the wound unhealed from the loss of his child. It eats away at him that there will be no royal succession under the name Macbeth:

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 murther’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!

(III.1.60-68)

The Weird Sisters’ prophesy that Banquo’s sons will be kings must have gnawed at Macbeth from the start; then Lady Macbeth’s reminder of their dead child rubbed salt into the wound. Now Macbeth must level the playing field by eliminating his rivals’ children.

In the following scene with Lady Macbeth, just before the banquet, Macbeth lets his guard down and waxes poetically of the plight he now endures:

Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams,
That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,

Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further!

(III.2.17-26)

Several lines later, as Macbeth communes with his wife for the last time, he cries out:

“O! Full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!” and we see that this villain still possesses the conscience of a hero, one that is rapidly destroying him – the very same conscience that shall soon come to life in the form of Banquo’s Ghost.

Ian McKellen’s performance in the banquet scene is unrivaled and is the precise and utter telling of the tale of Macbeth. For the first time since attaining the crown, Macbeth is afforded the opportunity to enjoy publicly the status he has so desperately coveted, to experience the wholeness his imagination has dangled before him like a jewel, to be King in more than title alone. Perhaps because he has arranged for Banquo’s murder, he may even feel safe now, that things could turn out all right after all. But as Macbeth raises his glass to his absent guest, the conscience of our hero-villain takes on a new, horrifying form in the gory image of Banquo. His first words to this ghost of his mind, “Thou canst not say, I did it” (III.4.49), seem so utterly helpless and childish that we cannot help but feel sorry for this man, so maddened by subconscious remorse that his addled mind produces bloody apparitions to torment him and ensure his demise.

Banquo’s ghost is the imaginary product of a man who has done violence to himself. It is Macbeth’s conscience risen up against him. By the scene’s end, McKellen is literally foaming at the mouth – a ruined, maddened, shell of the human being who struggled so mightily *not* to do evil. This scene is akin to a soliloquy for Macbeth, as – in

his maddened state – he is oblivious of the presence of the others throughout the majority of the scene. That Banquo’s ghost symbolically usurps Macbeth’s throne – as the apparition is seated upon Macbeth’s stool – does not even occur to Macbeth in his deranged state. As the hallucination subsides and the party is dismissed, Macbeth returns to his epicenter of fear – now plotting against Macduff, whom he must eliminate in his frenzied quest for safety.

The slaying of Lady Macduff and her children is adeptly orchestrated by Shakespeare. Macbeth’s name is not so much as mentioned. Indeed, the scene opens with Lady Macduff condemning her own husband for fleeing and leaving his family vulnerable and alone. She goes so far as to deny his love for them, and tells her little boy that his father is dead. Lady Macduff’s outrage at Macduff’s fatal error overshadows the scene, taking focus off Macbeth. When the murderers arrive to carry out their deed, it is the fallen responsibility of Macduff – invoked by his wife – that holds a refrain over Macbeth’s last sinful deeds.

Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene – which opens Act V – is soliloquy turned interior monologue. Here, Shakespeare gives the audience *direct access*, in the most intimate and vulnerable of circumstances, to the subconscious of this ghostly physical form whose soul has already perished. Only her body and her conscience remain – in a painstakingly remorseful “speech” the like of which we have never seen in Shakespeare. Lady Macbeth’s futile attempts to wash her hands clean belie the naïveté of the woman

who uttered “A little water clears us of this deed” (II.2.66). Her soul already retreated, she has only to remove her physical form from its murky hell.

Macbeth’s swan song – the final two monologues of this now-hollow man, who deluded himself into believing that he could somehow fill his emptiness with a heavy crown got from blood – brings us back to the hero we once knew Macbeth to be.

Preparing for battle against Malcolm’s forces, Macbeth’s words are not those of a hardened murderer or a brutal warrior heading into battle. Rather, Macbeth laments his very life and the choices he has made. He pines for normalcy, companionship, love:

I have liv’d long enough: my way of life
Is fall’n into the sere, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

(V.3.22-28)

These are the words and shared emotions of the vulnerable, suffering man who shared his soul with us not two hours hence. And the audience remembers him, and cannot help but share in the loneliness and sorrow that afflict him. Upon being informed of his wife’s death, Macbeth’s remorseful poetry unfurls upon his audience, spreading its billowing sail over every seat in the house.

As noted by Ian McKellen, Shakespeare uses moments of extreme emotion to point up the event of the performance – to call attention to the actor, acting upon the stage, and the human experience being shared with the audience. Here Shakespeare

lashes us tightly to his hero-villain in an experience of human contact and communion that makes his theatre so powerful:

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;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(V.5.17-28)

McKellen noted of his own performance as Macbeth: “the stage [is] empty now except for Macbeth; so who could I talk to other than you? Fixing someone in the audience with my eye, I said the next line to him, ‘There would have been a time for such a word...’” (McKellen 2-43). He specifically states that “Macbeth is not thinking aloud but is talking to you; not just talking about himself but about us all. You are being implicated in what’s happening on this stage. You are in the play” (McKellen 2-44). And:

I wouldn't be doing it here now if you hadn't turned up to witness me doing it. You see how you're being implicated in what's happening on the stage? This is the emotional climax of the play, when you'd assume the author wanted you to forget that you are in a theatre unaware of the distractions of the next-door neighbor, rustling playbill and candy paper and snoring and coughing. Yet this is the very moment that Shakespeare insists that you're in a theatre. Here are candles. Here's a player. Here's a stage. This is a play that you and I are meeting over....

(McKellen 2-46).

The man with whom we are face to face in this act of theatre is now hero, villain, actor, human being – his duality surpassed by the multi-faceted surfaces of being human, and the sharing of that humanity that Shakespeare insisted upon in his orchestration of total theatre. And because it is in this way that we have come to know Macbeth, we are willing to follow him down his tangled path, to sit with him in his dusky isolation, and to identify with a man who, for the evil that he would not do, that he did. Because Shakespeare saw to it that his audience would be an auditor, and an actor too, if it saw cause.

VI. CONCLUSION: DWELLING IN AND ON *MACBETH*

I believe that, at its heart, *Macbeth* is a play about two people who have done something dreadfully wrong and cannot take it back. Coleridge said that upon the Elizabethan stage, “the dramatic poet there relies upon the imagination, upon the reason, and upon the noblest powers of the human heart; he shakes off the iron bondage of space and time; he appeals to that which we most wish to be, when we are most worthy of being...” (*Shakespeare and Milton* 98). Indeed, the Elizabethan stage gave way to an expression of humanity unrivaled in the history of Western drama. For Shakespeare brought every hue of human experience to life, and that life was shared openly with the human beings who sat and stood at arm’s reach from the players. He wrote of love and abandon, jealousy and rage, grief and revenge. Of course he would write about the humanity of murder. For are there not many a murderer in prison? Are we not all capable of it? Hasn’t each of us committed some act we most terribly regret? In his

works, Shakespeare consecrated both the harmonious and the discordant notes of humanity through rich, complex characters who were close enough that we might see their hearts beat with fury, their eyes fill with tears, the hairs on their arms straighten in fear. Upon a Shakespearean production, we ride the sublime orchestral swell of being human.

Shakespeare's works do hold up without his stagecraft, for his mellifluous poetry seeps into the spectator's heart and soul. Indeed, his plays have been produced four centuries hence – upon every kind of stage, under every circumstance imaginable. But when Shakespeare's works are reunited with the Elizabethan stagecraft that gave them life, the play that merely moved now soars, and we experience authentically the total theatre the Bard intended to bestow upon us. With a play like *Macbeth*, the Elizabethan stage convention of the soliloquy – and the attendant communion it breeds with the audience – is essential to experiencing its true, full meaning. The quintessential inner tragedy, an expression of the fracture deep within each of us that sways like an eternal tide between good and evil, *Macbeth* must be shared with its audience. Macbeth's revelation of his dual character through soliloquy must pull us into the play and make us complicit. The ritual of catharsis thereby broken, *Macbeth* becomes more than a play we see and leave behind. For by ensuring that his audience dwells in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare makes certain that afterward we dwell upon his exploration of the terrifying humanity of murder.

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