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The Role of Women as Tragic Hero in Shakespeare Plays

(with reference to Macbeth)

دور المرأة كبطل مأساوي في مسرحيات شكسبير

(دراسة حالة ماكبث)

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Qur'anic Verse

بـسم الـلـه الـرحمن الـرحيم

وَقُلِ اعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۖ وَسَتُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ
وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

[التوبة:١٠٥]

صدق الله العظيم

Dedication

I dedicate this research to

My parents ,

My family,

My teachers and colleagues,

And to everyone who helped me in a way or another

Acknowledgements

My first and foremost thanks go to the Almighty for giving me the strength to complete this research paper. I give my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor Professor Mahmoud Ali Ahmed for his precious comments, observations and guidance. Without his guidance it would not be possible for me to complete this research. I would also like to thank the staff in charge of teaching the Ph.D courses at Sudan University of Science and Technology . Lastly, I want to thank my family members and also my friends who supported me throughout this journey.

Abstract

William Shakespeare continued to be held high in esteem and admiration despite the passing of the years for quite a number of reasons. He is one the greatest dramatists the world has ever known that his plays continued to be displayed in the world's renowned theatres though the themes they have portrayed have been of strong relevance five hundred years ago. His perfect grasp of human nature and man's psyche has been one of the factors behind his success. He was able to grapple with some certain universal qualities of personality which he skillfully applied to his characters that remained celebrated across the centuries.

In this thesis which sets out to handle thematic elements of murder, the researcher has managed to investigate certain play (Macbeth) with specific reference to the female role in bringing about the calamities of the individuals involved. The ultimate aim is to find out how Shakespeare had managed to build up the theme of murder. The recurring reference to supernatural elements helped drive his themes to the intended end beyond question the value of these ghostly elements. Freudian's theory of psychoanalysis was touched upon as was unavoidable in such kind of project. The theory was found to be particularly much more applicable with Lady Macbeth whose conscience sways to and fro to give her the most painful moments of her life. Lady Macbeth was diagnosed by many critics as developing pathological fear that betrayed her conspiracy in the murder of King Duncan. In Othello, both Iago and Othello carry the seeds of a mental illness not mention that of Desdemona. Hamlet was such an exemplification mental disorder that he himself started to question his faculties. His mother Gertrude was seen journeying from one end of loving her son and have pity on him to another

extreme point of loving Claudius. Ophelia, who was in genuine emotional relationship with Hamlet, was forced and under coercion expressed her hatred to Hamlet. All the characters involved have their psychopathetic element including the Ghost Hamlet who orders his son to have mercy on his mother as she was naive. The characters in the selected plays as regards their struggle in life, they   sometimes bid success and sometimes their lives are full of pain, suffering and failure, echoing real life. It is this which substantially elongated the works of Shakespeare.

الملخص

استمر ويليام شكسبير في أن يحظى باحترام وإعجاب على الرغم من مرور السنين لعدد كبير من الأسباب. إنه أحد أعظم المسرحيين الذين عرفهم العالم على الإطلاق أن مسرحياته استمرت في العرض في المسارح الشهيرة في العالم على الرغم من أن الموضوعات التي صوروها كانت ذات صلة قوية قبل خمسمائة عام. كان فهمه التام للطبيعة البشرية ونفسية الإنسان أحد العوامل وراء نجاحه. كان قادرًا على التعامل مع بعض الصفات العالمية المحددة للشخصية التي طبقها بمهارة على شخصياته التي ظلت مشهورة عبر القرون. في هذه الأطروحة التي تهدف إلى التعامل مع العناصر الموضوعية للقتل ، تمكنت الباحثة من التحقيق في مسرحية معينة (ماكبث) مع إشارة محددة إلى دور المرأة في إحداث مصائب الأفراد المتورطين. الهدف النهائي هو معرفة كيف تمكن شكسبير من بناء موضوع القتل. ساعدت الإشارة المتكررة إلى العناصر الخارقة في دفع موضوعاته إلى الغاية المقصودة دون التشكيك في قيمة هذه العناصر الشبحية. تم التطرق إلى نظرية فرويد في التحليل النفسي كما كان لا مفر منه في مثل هذا النوع من المشاريع. تم العثور على النظرية لتكون أكثر قابلية للتطبيق بشكل خاص مع السيدة ماكبث التي يتأرجح ضميرها ذهابًا وإيابًا لمنحها أكثر اللحظات إيلامًا في حياتها. تم تشخيص السيدة ماكبث من قبل العديد من النقاد على أنها تطور خوفًا مرضيًا خيانة بذور مرض عقلي ناهيك عن أن Othello و Iago مؤامرة لها في مقتل الملك دنكان. في عطيل ، يحمل كل من Desdemona. كان هاملت اضطرابًا عقليًا نموذجيًا لدرجة أنه بدأ هو نفسه في التشكيك في قدراته. شوهدت والدته جيرترود وهي تسافر من نهاية حب ابنها وتشفق عليه إلى نقطة متطرفة أخرى من حب كلوديوس. أُجبرت أوفيليا ، التي كانت على علاقة عاطفية حقيقية مع هاملت ، وتحت الإكراه على التعبير عن كراهيتها لهاملت. جميع الشخصيات المعنية لها عنصرها النفسي بما في ذلك الشبح هاملت الذي يأمر ابنه بالرحمة على والدته لأنها كانت ساذجة. الشخصيات في المسرحيات المختارة فيما يتعلق بكفاحهم في الحياة ، يحاولون أحيانًا النجاح وأحيانًا تكون حياتهم مليئة بالألم والمعاناة والفشل ، مرددًا صدى الحياة الحقيقية. هذا هو الذي أدى إلى إطالة أعمال شكسبير بشكل كبير.

Table of contents

Item	Page
Qur'anic Verse	I
Dedication	II
Acknowledgements	III
Abstract	IV
Abstract (Arabic version)	V
Table of contents	vi

Chapter One

Introduction

Item	Page
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 Family Life	5
1.2 Childhood and Education	6
1.3 Aims	8
1.4 Macbeth both History and Tragedy Play	9
1.5 Statement of the Problem	10
1.6 Gender Roles	11
1.7 Significance of the Study	12

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Item	Page
2.1 Macbeth in Legend and History	15
2.2 Macbeth in the mind	16
2.3 Concepts of Manhood and Masculinity	17
2.4 Sovereign Flowers	35
2.5. Opposing Political Viewpoints	40
2. 6 Historian George Buchanan	42
2.7 Elements of Tragedy	45
2.8 Golgotha	48
2.9 Macbeth in Performance	50
2.10 Castle Shakespeare	51
2.11 Shakespearean's Power	52
2.12 Studying Shakespeare: The traditionalists' argument	54
2.13 Using Shakespeare: the cultural materialists' argument	57
2.14 Is Shakespeare 'simply the best'?	58
2.15 Does Shakespeare teach values?	61
2.16 Does Shakespeare have a universal appeal?	65

2.17 The effects of this debate on studying Shakespeare	66
2.18 Previous Studies	68

Chapter Three

Methodology

Item	Page
3.0 Descriptive analytic	71
3.1 Iambic pentameter	71
3.2 Wordplay	72
3.3 Early Modern England	72
3.4 Intellectual context	74
3.5 Cosmology	74
3.6 Universal hierarchy	75
3.7 Elements and humors	75
3.8 Religious context	76
3.9 The Reformation	76
3.10 The Act of Supremacy	77
3.11 Bloody Mary	77
3.12The Great Bible	78
3.13 Political context	79

3.14 Elizabeth I	79
3.15 Social context	80

Chapter Four

Discussion, and Results

Item	Page
4.0 Overview	82
4.1 The status of women	82
4.2 Daily life	83
4.3Mortality rates	83
4.4 London life	84
4.5The theatre	84
4.6 Performance spaces	85
4.7Actors and staging	86

4.8The printing press	86
4.9 Introducing Macbeth	89
4.10 Shakespeare’s tragedies	90
4.11The rise and fall of Macbeth	91
4.12 Historical sources of the story	92
4.13 The birth of the play	93
4.14 The ascension of James I	94
4.15 Divine right versus elected kingship	95
4.16 The Gunpowder Plot	96
4.17 Focus on the supernatural	97
2.18 Themes explored	98

2.19 Virtue versus evil	98
4.20 Reason versus passion	100

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Item	Page
5.0 Overview	102
5.1 Summary (Characters)	102
5.2 Gender roles	104
5.3 Nature out of order	104
5.4 Conclusion	105
Bibliography	106

Chapter One Introduction

1.0 Overview

The great English poet William Shakespeare began his work as an actor and playwright in London at the end of the 1580s or early 1590s. During the first decade he concentrated mostly on romantic comedies and on plays based on English history; around the turn of the seventeenth century, he turns towards tragedy and thence to a group of comedies at the end of his career sometimes called romances. Macbeth comes from the last quarter of Shakespeare's writing career. He probably wrote it in 1606 (see below for the particular echoes of contemporary events in the play). In chronological terms it comes amid other tragedies including King Lear and Anthony and Cleopatra, after Hamlet and Othello and before Coriolanus, the last of
Shakespeare's tragedies before he moves to the romances.
It shares a good deal with these other plays in the tragic genre: its use of soliloquy, its suspicion of women's agency, its interrogation of the resonant idea of 'nothing' and its depiction of interiority. Macbeth, though, extends Shakespeare's manipulation of the tragic genre in its unflinching depiction of a murderer. The judgment on Shakespeare's other tragic characters is often debatable, as their plays depict them as foolish or wronged, 'more sinned against than sinning' (King Lear's depiction of himself at
3.2.60), 'one that loved not wisely, but too well' (Othello's final self-summary at 5.2.344). Such ethical ameliorations of Macbeth's deeds are not permitted. The comic writer James Thurber's 'The Macbeth Murder Mystery' presents an avid detective-fiction reader encountering the play and pronouncing that Macbeth 'didn't do it' (according to the rules of the detective genre, the most obvious murderer is, of course, never the real criminal). The reason this is

funny is that it layers doubt onto a play which actually has very little of it. We see the Macbeths plan the murder and cover their traces afterwards. 'It may be', suggests Janette Dillon, 'that Shakespeare wrote the play precisely in order to test the limits of tragedy with this question: "can a monster be a tragic hero?" ' (Dillon, 124).

But he also seems to have written it to try to understand a 'monster' from within. For much of Macbeth we are caught inside the murderer's world and made to share his crazy, haunted perspective, as when, for instance, we see the ghost of Banquo when none of the guests does. And this empathy is achieved largely through a dynamic use of the device of soliloquy (speaking alone on stage): a dramatic technique that, for Shakespeare, seems to indicate that in its speaker there is a fascinating but potentially dangerous gap between his external appearance and inner emotion. In Macbeth he develops that insight in its most compelling way: Macbeth himself lacks the artfulness that often structures Hamlet's cleverly philosophical analyses of his situation, and tends to think within, rather than about, his situation. Macbeth's soliloquies capture the present-tense sense of his nervy, guilt-ridden existence.

Shakespearean's readers know, his plays are not easy. They are thoughtprovoking and complex texts that abound with romance, deceit, tragedy, comedy, revenge, and humanity shown at its very worst as well as its very best. In short, to read Shakespeare is to explore the depths and heights of humanity.

In his earlier tragedies, Shakespeare might be said to be concerned with the causes of particular actions. For Hamlet, finding out the cause of his father's death structures the play towards a final conclusion; Iago works on Othello's insecurity to bring about the murder of Desdemona in the play's final act. But here in Macbeth, as in King Lear, the focus is more on consequences than

causes. Here, the decisive action happens early in the play, and the subsequent scenes show how its effects ripple through the playworld. What happens toMacbeth after the murder of Duncan is of more interest in this play than the question of why Macbeth murders Duncan. This distinction changes the structure of the tragedy. Where other tragedies end with a bloodbath – the deaths of the Danish royal family at the end of Hamlet, for instance, or the 'tragic loading' of the corpse-strewn bed at the end of Othello (5.2.363) – in Macbeth blood is a central theme throughout. The apparently circumstantial question which opens the play's second scene, 'what bloody man is that?' (1.2.1) serves as a kind of epigraph to the whole play. Like its hero, the play of Macbeth is, within a short, intense spell, 'in blood/ Stepp'd in so far, that [. . .] Returning were as tedious as go o'er' (3.4.135–7). The contemporary dramatist Thomas Heywood wrote of tragedy 'beginning in calms, and ending in tempest', but from the start, Macbeth is marked by the brutal violence of war and treachery and the cosmic disturbance of the witches.

William Shakespeare, or the "Bard" as people fondly call him, permeates almost all aspects of our society. He can be found in our classrooms, on our televisions, in our theatres, and in our cinemas. Speaking to us through his plays, Shakespeare comments on his life and culture, as well as our own. Actors still regularly perform his plays on the modern stage and screen. The 1990s, for example, saw the release of cinematic versions of *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and many more of his works. In addition to the popularity of Shakespeare's plays as he wrote them, other writers have modernized his works to attract new audiences. For example, *West Side Story* places *Romeo and Juliet* in New York City, and *A Thousand Acres* sets *King Lear* in Iowa corn country. Beyond adaptations and productions, his life and works have captured our cultural imagination.

The twentieth century witnessed the production of a play and film about two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and a fictional movie about Shakespeare's early life and poetic inspiration in *Shakespeare in Love*.

Despite his monumental presence in The English culture, Shakespeare remains enigmatic. He does not tell us which plays he wrote alone, on which plays he collaborated with other playwrights, or which versions of his plays to read and perform. Furthermore, with only a handful of documents available about his life, he does not tell us much about Shakespeare the person, forcing critics and scholars to look to historical references to uncover the true-life great dramatist.

1.1 Family Life

Though scholars are unsure of the exact date of Shakespeare's birth, records indicate that his parents — Mary and John Shakespeare — baptized him on April 26, 1564, in the small provincial town of Stratford-upon-Avon — so named because it sat on the banks of the Avon river. Because common practice was to baptize infants a few days after they were born, scholars generally recognize April 23, 1564 as Shakespeare's birthday. Coincidentally, April 23 is the day of St. George, the patron saint of England, as well as the day upon which Shakespeare would die 52 years later. William was the third of Mary and John's eight children and the first of four sons. The house in which scholars believe Shakespeare to have been born stands on Henley Street and, despite many modifications over the years, you can still visit it today.

Prior to William Shakespeare's birth, John Shakespeare lived in Snitterfield, where he married Mary Arden, the daughter of his landlord. After moving to Stratford in 1552, he worked as a Glover, a moneylender, and a dealer in agricultural products such as wool and grain. He also pursued public office and achieved a variety of posts including bailiff, Stratford's highest elected position — equivalent to a small town's mayor. At the height of his career, sometime near 1576, he petitioned the Herald's Office for a coat of arms and thus the right to be a gentleman. But the rise from the middle class to the gentry did not come right away, and the costly petition expired without being granted. About this time, John Shakespeare mysteriously fell into financial difficulty. He became involved in serious litigation, was assessed heavy fines, and even lost his seat on the town council. Some scholars suggest that this decline could have resulted from religious discrimination. The Shakespeare family may have supported Catholicism, the practice of which was illegal in England. However, other scholars point out that not all religious dissenters (both Catholics and radical Puritans) lost their posts due to their religion. Whatever the cause of his decline, John did regain some prosperity toward the end of his life. In 1596, the Herald's Office granted the Shakespeare family a coat of arms at the petition of William, by then a successful playwright in London. And John, prior to his death in 1601, regained his seat on Stratford's town council.

1.2 Childhood and Education

Our understanding of William Shakespeare's childhood in Stratford is primarily speculative because children do not often appear in the legal records from which many scholars attempt to reconstruct Shakespeare's life. Based on

his father's local prominence, scholars speculate that Shakespeare most likely attended King's New School, a school that usually employed Oxford graduates and was generally well respected. Shakespeare would have started *petty school* — the rough equivalent to modern preschool — at the age of 4 or 5. He would have learned to read on a *hornbook*, which was a sheet of parchment or paper on which the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer were written. This sheet was framed in wood and covered with a transparent piece of horn for durability. After two years in petty school, he would have transferred to grammar school, where his school day probably lasted from 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning (depending on the time of year) until 5 o'clock in the evening, with only a handful of holidays.

Macbeth is based on the career of Scottish King Macbeth. The actual Macbeth lived from 1005 to 1057 and reigned from approximately 1039 to 1054. At that time in Scotland, it was not a horrific crime to take the throne away from a weak, royal relative. In fact, in eleventh century Scotland, the overthrow of a king was a common occurrence. As far as historians can tell, the actual Macbeth took the throne away from his ineffective cousin, King Duncan, in approximately 1039. As a grandson of King Malcolm II, Macbeth did have a claim to the throne of Scotland. King Macbeth gained the throne by a civil war rather than murder, and King Duncan died in battle. There is no historical evidence that Banquo existed. Also, the historical King Duncan was close in age to Macbeth, but Shakespeare altered the account to make King Duncan much older.

The historical Macbeth ruled Scotland with wisdom and grace for fifteen peaceful years. His rule came to an end when the exiled Prince Malcolm

invaded Scotland with English forces. The story of Macbeth as told by the historian Holinshed became based on legend as much as history. Holinshed portrays Macbeth plotting the murder of King Duncan with both his wife and Banquo after hearing a prophecy from the Three Witches. After the murder of King Duncan, King Macbeth rules well for about ten years. However, the witch's prophecy that Banquo will be the father of many kings begins to bother Macbeth. He orders the murder of Banquo and his son Fleance. However, Fleance escapes. Other nobles rise up against Macbeth and, led by Macduff, defeat Macbeth at Birnam Wood, carrying branches to camouflage their attack.

Shakespeare changed the plot about Banquo's responsibility for King Duncan's murder. Many feel that this was changed in order to keep pure the story of Banquo's being a father of the Stuart kings and the ancestor of James I. Most Shakespearean scholars think that the specific details of witchcraft came from the published work of King James I. Of course, Shakespeare took the time of ten to fifteen years and condenses it into a few days and nights.

1.3 Aims

The thesis aims at the following:

1. Role of women in general in Shakespearean's plays.
2. Role of Lady Macbeth in the play in that accentuating certain events.
3. The challenges posed by Lady Macbeth to the effect of bring unexpected conclusions.

The present work will concentrate on one play namely Macbeth with very special emphasis of highlighting the role of Lady Macbeth. Even though *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's shortest plays, it is considered by most experts to be one of Shakespeare's most powerful portrayals of how lust for power can corrupt a person's soul.

1.4 Macbeth both History and Tragedy Play

It is important to remember that *Macbeth* is not primarily a history play but is considered to be one of Shakespeare's final tragedies. One helpful way to view this play is through the template of a tragedy. In Shakespeare's era, a tragedy always focused on the tragic protagonist: a person of high stature whose personal flaw causes him to choose wrongly. While the reader disagrees with Macbeth's actions, Macbeth is nevertheless a well-spoken and brave nobleman. Macbeth's wrong choice upsets the "Great Chain of Being," and the tragic protagonist pays the extreme penalty for this disorder. The Great Chain of Being was part of the Elizabethan worldview. It was a hierarchy, with God at the top of the chain and, in descending order, angels, kings, noblemen, commoners, and, finally, animals. If a person's ambition drove him or her to seek to escape from his or her place on the chain, this broke the ordained order and invited chaos in the world and in the personal life of the person who dared to act in such a way.

Also important to a tragedy is the progression of the tragic process: Dilemma, Wrong Choice, Suffering, Perception, Death, and Restoration to Order. Macbeth fits the tragic process perfectly. His dilemma was whether or not to

murder King Duncan. With his wife's strong prompting and prophesies from the Three Witches aiding his motive, he makes the wrong choice. Immediately after King Duncan's murder, Macbeth experiences extreme suffering. He cannot sleep, he has no joy in life, his wife dies, and almost all his friends reject him. He is isolated in every way. Even the cosmos reflects the disorder with evil omens and earthquakes. As Macbeth faces the final battle, he realizes that his ambition did not bring peace, and he sees that he must die to pay the penalty for the chaos he has caused. The crowning of Malcolm represents the Restoration to Order for Scotland.

The reader has to wonder what influence the Three Witches and Lady Macbeth had on Macbeth's choices. While their influence was intense, Shakespeare seems to show that Macbeth is ultimately responsible for his wrong choice. The terrible story of Macbeth's life and death.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

This part is so strongly connected with the character of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth himself. *Macbeth* is among the shortest and most intense of Shakespeare's plays, as well as one of the best known and most widely recognized. *Macbeth* is generally viewed as one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, in addition to *Hamlet, Othello,* and *King Lear*. The play's penetrating exploration of human nature, ambition, evil, gender, human relationships, and kingship — along with the periodic appearance of supernatural forces — has captivated audiences and critics for centuries.
Like all of Shakespeare's works, *Macbeth* is an incredibly rich and rewarding play to read and study. It was written more than 400 years ago, so this

introduction provides cultural, theatrical, and publication contexts. The introduction also highlights many of the themes and concepts that Shakespeare explores.

In a good tragedy, such as *Macbeth*, readers and audience members get pulled into the play by identifying with the protagonist, who is painted as a great and admirable person wielding considerable influence in society.
Having established this point of identification, Shakespeare then leads his audience through the downfall of this character, involving the audience in the hero's pain and suffering, as well as his or her mistakes. This identification slowly separates as, through the course of the play, the audience gains more knowledge of the situation than the hero does. This distance and enlarged view allows the audience to foresee the hero's demise. Though no longer identifying with the hero, the audience is still trapped in the tension of the play and released only by the protagonist's death.

In most tragedies, the decline of the character arises from circumstances of the protagonist's own creation. Because tragic heroes are almost always responsible for their demise, critics and scholars sometimes identify their mistakes as stemming from some sort of *tragic flaw*, be it indecision, ambition, pride, or jealousy. Though Shakespeare's tragic heroes are complex and cannot be easily reduced to one abstract principle, identifying a character's tragic flaw can provide a wonderful place to begin studying the play.

1.6 Gender Roles

Lady Macbeth is the focus of much of the exploration of gender roles in the play. As Lady Macbeth propels her husband toward committing Duncan's murder, she indicates that she must take on masculine characteristics. Her most famous speech addresses this issue. In Act I, Scene 5, after reading Macbeth's letter in which he details the witches' prophecy and informs her of Duncan's impending visit to their castle, Lady Macbeth indicates her desire to lose her feminine qualities and gain masculine ones. She cries, "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top full / Of direst cruelty" (I.5.38–41).

This request is part of what David Bevington, in his introduction to *Macbeth* in the fourth edition of the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, sees as "sexual inversion" in the play. Clearly, gender is out of its traditional order. This disruption of gender roles is also presented through Lady Macbeth's usurpation of the dominant role in the Macbeth's marriage; on many occasions, she rules her husband and dictates his actions.

The disruption of gender roles is also represented in the weird sisters. Their very status as witches is a violation of how women were expected to behave in Early Modern England. The trio is perceived as violating nature, and despite their designation as sisters, the gender of these characters is also ambiguous. Upon encountering them, Banquo says, "You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (I.2.45–47). Their facial hair symbolizes their influence in the affairs of the male dominated warrior society of Scotland. William C. Carroll, in his Bedford Cultural edition of *Macbeth,* sees the witches and the question of their gender as a device

Shakespeare uses to criticizes the male-dominated culture, where titles are acquired through what Carroll describes as
"murderous violence."

1.7 Significance of the Study

Many critics believe that this particular tragedy is greatly distinguished by its simplicity. Its plot is quite plain. It has very little intermixture of humor. It has little pathos except of the sternest kind. The style [of the play's language] . . . has not much variety . . . Like many speeches in *Macbeth,* each of these apparently straightforward claims is paradoxical: each is true and at the same time misleading. Further, these claims are both true and false to the play's life in the theatres of early Jacobean London and in the theatres of many times and many places since. Moreover, these claims are often false to the play's complex relation with the social and political circumstances in which it was first written and first performed. As I understand my introductory task, it is to give an account of a magnificent early seventeenth- century English play as it was originally conceived and as it might have been first played in a faraway and impossible-to-retrieve moment or series of moments in Jacobean London. It is also my task to present its afterlife in times and places very distant from the historical William Shakespeare, from his extraordinary acting company, and from their once living, now irretrievably lost, social, commercial, political, theatrical world.

To that end, I consider here: the play in its Jacobean, early-seventeenthcentury moments - especially its possible political meanings - and its likely relation to documentary sources; the play's treatment of time and of time's varied evocations (family, succession, birth and death); the many ways in which the play allows or withholds knowledge and belief for the characters and the

audience; the ways the play affects the audience through language; the ways the play has been performed in early and later times and in other places and media.

Well before Shakespeare's time, the inferiority of women was assumed *a priori* simply by virtue of their creation from the rib of Adam. During the early modern period, however, the inferiority of the female was further inscribed with notions which had ideological and political ramifications. Galenic theories of the body in the sixteenth century held that the body was a function of the four humors—blood, phlegm, yellow, and black bile—and the corresponding four elements.1 For the most part, therefore, male and female bodies were anatomically homologous and there was little or no difference between them. Men's ability to produce "heat" caused their sexual organs to protrude outwards. Women's *inability* to produce "heat" and their predisposition toward cold and moist humors, caused their sexual organs to invert inwards. The female uterus and womb were thus an inverted phallus. Galenic theories of body thus constituted the female as an inferior version of the male. The formulation of gender and sexual notions of the body in the sixteenth century therefore reinforced the superiority of the male and consolidated patriarchy's near-absolute authority over the female.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1 Macbeth in Legend and History

James Stewart or Stuart (i 566-1625), the sixth king of that name to rule Scotland, believed, or claimed to believe, that he descended from one Banquo, Thane of Lochaber in the eleventh century when Scotland's king was Macbeth (see illustration 1). In late March 1603, the same King James VI became the first of that name to rule England. Barely two years later, Samuel Calvert commented on political drama, public response to it, and official failure to react:

Calvert assumes that audiences would be 'afraid' to hear or see plays representing a living monarch, secrets of state, and controversial religious matters ('King, State or Religion'), and that such plays should be treated specially and usually censored. Samuel Calvert was probably right, or at least conventional for his time. Queen Elizabeth I's first proclamation seeking to control the subject and content of drama (16May 1559) used words that were regularly repeated and echoed in official and unofficial documents: 'her majestie doth . . . charge [her officers] . . . that they permyt none [i.e. no 'common Interludes'] to be played wherin either matters of religion or of the

governaunce of the estate of the common weale shalbe handled or treated . . .', and thirty years later the Privy Council sought closer theatrical control because the companies had 'handle[d] in their plaies certen matters of Divinytie and of State unfitt to be suffred'.2 To offer the public a play representing living monarchs almost always drew official attention and usually censorship. Less than eighteen months after James's accession, his newly patented London acting company, the King's Men, twice performed a now-lost play, 'the tragédie of Gowrie'. *The Tragedy of Gowrie* presumably dealt with the alleged attempt by the Earl of Gowrie and others to assassinate James on 5 August 1600, when he was still King of Scotland only.

Gowrie was quickly suppressed,1 and its fate suggests how politically and practically difficult it was to write and perform plays concerning the Stuart monarchy and its well-known vicissitudes in Scotland and in England. Many years later, the British monarchy, now Hanoverian, faced an effort to restore the Stuarts, and after the Battle of Falkirk (1746), when Scottish troops, supported by the French, won a temporary advantage, 'The king was advised to go to the theatre and to command the tragedy of Macbeth', and the play was performed.2 In the anxious times of a largely Scottish insurrection against the British (or English) central government in 1746, *Macbeth* was considered a pro-English, pro-monarchical, anti-rebel, and (curiously) anti-Stuart play.

2.2 Macbeth in the mind

SUCCESSION, TIME, AND FAMILIES

The historical era of Macbeth's reign was as controversial in Scottish political debate and historiography as the reigns of John or of Henry IV were in England. In both countries, the past and its most notably disputed successions

fostered, if censorship did not intervene, discussion of legitimate sovereignty, tyranny, usurpation, and deposition. Entering this simultaneously 'historical' and contemporary debate, *Macbeth* was indeed 'extremely problematic'.

Holinshed makes clear enough that the Duncan-Macbeth-Malcolm period saw Scotland begin to move from its traditional system of royal succession - tanistry – to primogeniture, the system which later became common and which was by Shakespeare's day long-established.1 Under tanistry, a ruler's successor was elected from a parallel family line, so that, for example, nephew (and not necessarily eldest nephew) succeeded uncle.2 When Duncan nominates (1.4.35-9) his eldest son, Malcolm, as his successor, he abruptly introduces a system half-way between tanistry and primogeniture. In this instance, Duncan wishes eldest son to succeed father, excluding any younger brothers (e.g. Donaldbain) or cousins, but the very nomination indicates that eldest son succeeding father (primogeniture) is not established practice.3 Henry VIII's controversial attempts to settle the royal succession made such questions vivid for an English audience, as did the recent, muchdebated succession of James himself. The system in early Scotland has been described as 'circulation with elimination' where 'Tension between incumbent and successor is relieved at the expense of increased conflict between the potential successors themselves', as indeed we see in *Macbeth.*

2.3 Concepts of Manhood and Masculinity

In dramatizing Lady Macbeth's ability to challenge Macbeth's masculine identity, the play thus becomes a site of cultural production in which notions of manhood are not only validated and affirmed, but also interrogated and challenged. I will make the argument that a patriarchal system designed to

validate man’s power and authority, paradoxically undermines man’s autonomy and independence of thought and action.

Despite his innate desire to be king, Macbeth, for example, knows that in committing regicide, he would be going against the moral order of the universe and that all of heaven would revolt. He knows, too, that in murdering the king, he would be setting a precedent and that he in turn may suffer the same fate. He knows that in killing Duncan who is his “kin,” his “guest,” and his king, he will be breaking laws of hospitality, loyalty, and solidarity, fundamental to the stability of society. Yet, compelled to authenticate his masculine virtue, Macbeth capitulates to Lady Macbeth’s desires. Through this one act, his life changes irrevocably and forever.

In dramatizing Macbeth’s rejection of communal bonds, Shakespeare underscores the importance of male friendships. Masculinity is not only achieved through the female/male relationship, it is also constituted and asserted through male friendships. According to Bruce Smith, friendship is an important component to understanding manhood in the early modern period. He states: “For Aristotle, and for his successors, Cicero, Montaigne, and Bacon, friendship between men who are social equals constitutes the most important human bond there is.”1 Friendship thus becomes an avenue through which manhood was achieved and affirmed. Smith argues, moreover, that “friendship also seems to be the bond that holds communities together, and lawgivers seem to attach more importance to it than justice.” Smith goes onto state that “Concord is the aim of lawmaking, and where friendship exists, there is already concord.”3 Macbeth, however, rejects the notion of community or communal life. He exists for himself, and by himself. Like the witches, he

remains outside of society, isolated, and alone. In Act 1, Scene 7, for example, Macbeth stands outside, alone, in the dark, contemplating the murder of his king, his" kin" and his "guest," while inside people are feasting and drinking. The hospitality that Macbeth extends to the king is supposed to guarantee and ensure his safety. Yet, this intimate social and family gathering ends in a treacherous act of betrayal and murder. This one scene reveals the deep complexities of Macbeth's character, which contributes to his alienation and isolation from the rest of his community. Similar sentiments are dramatized in Act 3, Scene 4. The appearance of Banquo's ghost triggers Macbeth's fear and guilt which disrupts the banquet, and his guests are asked to leave. Macbeth thus destroys the capacity of men to have a meal in safety and in peace. This notion is reinforced by the witches' parody of the symbolism of the shared meal in Act 4, Scene 1, in which they throw into their caldron frogs, pieces of liver, noses, lips, and aborted fetuses. Shakespeare's parody of the shared meal further underscores the importance of communal feasting in which bonds of friendship, trust, loyalty, and solidarity are formed. In dramatizing Macbeth's perversion of human relations fundamental to the stability of society, Shakespeare explores how these bonds are disrupted and destroyed by the notion of individualism and rationalism in which the individual is governed by his own ethical standards.

Chivalric codes of behavior not only become a source of disempowerment for Macbeth, they also are a means whereby the masculinity of all men is measured and determined. In making Banquo the source of their misery and suffering, Macbeth suborns the murderers to kill Banquo by impugning their masculinity. He suggests that rather than defend themselves against those who oppress them, the murderers are weak and effeminate who suffer injustice in

silence and fortitude by praying for those who destroy them, “Are you so gospelled, / To pray for this good man, and for his issue” (87– 88). Macbeth further repudiates the murderers’ masculine identity by making an analogous distinction between dogs. He suggests the murderers are essentially an inferior specimen of the male species because, unlike real men, they lack an innate killer instinct. Macbeth thus taunts the murderers as Lady Macbeth taunts him. The murderers are therefore forced to kill Banquo in order to reaffirm their masculine identity. Shakespeare reveals that heroic values are not only exploited by women, they become an avenue whereby men exploit each other.

Chivalric codes of honor become the impetus whereby paternal authority denies young men their identity, volition and autonomy. In willingly sacrificing their sons in defense of personal honor and family name, the nobility lends legitimacy to, and provides justification for, the destruction of its sons. For example, the older Siward’s indifference and callousness towards the death of his young son—“Had he his hurts before?” (5.7. 88) reveal how heroic values eclipse the intrinsic and fundamental human values of the individual. His father is not interested in the nature of his son’s death, or in the manner in which he died, but rather as to whether his son had stood and fought like a man. The older Siward feels no sense of loss or waste. He has no feelings of regret that having died, his son’s dreams and hopes have died with him. Instead, he rejoices that having died fighting like a man, his son has fulfilled his destiny on earth. Thomas More in *Utopia* satirizes chivalric codes of honor by having the Utopians describe honor as “nothing so much as glorie, as glory gotten in war.”5 More’s irony is meant to demean heroic notions of valor to suggest that like the thousands of young men who have died in battle, there is no “glorie” in war, except loss, suffering and devastation. He implies,

therefore, that patriarchy's desire to aggrandize itself from the death and suffering of its sons is, in and of itself, a violation of their intrinsic humanity.

This notion is reinforced by the older Siward's repetition of the word *worth* which ironically effaces his son's humanity in lieu of the heroic ideal. His father refuses Malcolm's attempts to honor his son for his bravery, "He's *worth* no more, / They say he parted well and paid his score" (5.7. 96–97), to suggest that his son exists solely to fulfill his father's needs and interests. Young Siward is his son, but he is more than that. He is tied irrevocably to his father, he is part of his father's inner being, reinforcing Roland Barthes' contention that the son is his father's "anteriority."6 His son therefore has no identity, no being apart from him. The younger Siward's life belongs to and proceeds from his father. His father knows all things, sees all things and encompasses all things. All power flows from the older Siward, and returns to him.

In dramatizing the relationship between father and son, in which the role of the female is completely excised, the play articulates a notion of gender relations in which the male assumes both the paternal and maternal role. The fantasy thus dramatized by Macbeth in the first Act of the play that men are indeed "exempt from the taint of women," a notion the play finally rejects, is a fantasy germane to paternal authority and power.7 Adelman states that "Even from the beginning of the play, the fantasy has not been Macbeth's alone: as the play's most striking bloody man, he is in the beginning the bearer of this fantasy for the all-male community that depends on his bloody prowess."8 The play thus articulates a set of beliefs which lends credence to the notion that women have no part in the creation of men. Rather, man not

only begets man, he is formed and borne by man. Man, therefore, is thus *exempt* from the fragile, weak and vulnerable nature of woman. It is this false sense of logic that the witches exploit and which ultimately contributes to Macbeth's downfall, "Be bloody, bold and resolute! / Laugh to scorn / The pow'r of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth (4.1. 78– 81). Although the nature of Macduff's caesarian birth destroys Macbeth's notions of invincibility, I submit that patriarchy's attempt to completely excise women from the world of the masculine is, in itself, an admission of the irrevocable ties that bind men to women, ties that are first forged in the womb, and that reinforce and consolidate men's relations to other men in life.

Shakespeare's critique of the heroic ideal suggests that chivalric codes of honor engender a single-mindedness that subordinates reason to passion and emotion, so that these values become distorted and contradictory. For example, Siward's unequivocal resolve: "Had I as many sons as he has hairs, / I would not wish them to a fairer death"(5.7. 1–92), suggests that these values, when given legitimacy, engender a notion of complacency and blindness so that man can no longer perceive or comprehend the truth. This is particularly evidenced in the notion that war is an extension of God's will for mankind, inherent in the older Siward's contention that having performed his duty on earth, his son is now "God's soldier." In seeking to lend Divine legitimacy to a cause which derives essentially from man's own ambition and designs, the play suggests that rather than advance the cause of mankind, heroic notions of chivalry ultimately threaten to undo those values fundamental to man's existence.

It is this extreme form of radical militarism that becomes central to humanists' repudiation of chivalric codes of honor in the sixteenth century.

Influenced by a new sense of historical perspective in which events in the present could be understood in the context of the historical past, humanists unequivocally rejected aggressive militarism as antithetical to notions of civic humanism. Erasmus saw all wars as unconscionable acts against humanity, except when attacked by anti-Christian forces. In the following paragraph, Wells cites Erasmus's denunciation of Henry VIII's militaristic activities as absolute folly:

Almost all wars between Christians have arisen from either stupidity or wickedness. Some young men, with no experience of life, inflamed by the bad examples of our forbearers told in the histories that fools have compiled from foolish documents, and then encouraged by flatterers and stimulated by lawyers and theologians, with the consent of connivance of bishops, and even at their desire—these young men, I say, go into war out of rashness rather than badness; and they learn, to the suffering of the whole world, that war is a thing to be avoided by every possible means.9 fragile, weak and vulnerable nature of woman. It is this false sense of logic that the witches exploit and which ultimately contributes to Macbeth's downfall, "Be bloody, bold and resolute! / Laugh to scorn / The pow'r of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth (4.1. 78–81). Although the nature of Macduff's caesarian birth destroys Macbeth's notions of invincibility, I submit that patriarchy's attempt to completely excise women from the world of the masculine is, in itself, an admission of the irrevocable ties that bind men to women, ties that are first forged in the womb, and that reinforce and consolidate men's relations to other men in life.

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Honor gained in battle was now replaced by honor gain through service to the state. In keeping with humanistic emphasis on education, Thomas Elyot in *The Governor* instituted an educational system for future governing elites, underscoring the notion that true nobility lies in service to the State.10 Influenced by humanists, moral philosophy became an important component of the curriculum of Tudor grammar schools in an effort to inculcate Christian virtues of piety and charity as a fundamental building block toward a more just society. With the introduction of programs of education for women designed by Erasmus and Vives for the betterment of wives, women proved that despite their gender, they were not devoid of scholastic aptitude. The education programs for women in the sixteenth century thus become a harbinger for the equality for women.

Moreover, with the dissolution of the feudal land system at the end of the fifteenth century and the introduction of new methods of warfare, a new code of values came into being: honor, originally constituted by blood and family

ties inherent in the gentry, was now seen as an attribute ascribed to the individual. 11 According to Daniel Javitch, the publication of *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldesar Castiglione in 1528 demarcates the end of feudal aristocracy and the beginning of a new era in which chivalric values and feudal nobility were replaced by new codes of behavior enforced by absolutist states.12 Stripped of their status and privilege they had so long enjoyed, feudal aristocrats were forced to adopt a new code of refinement and gentility in what was to be seen as a "civilizing process."13 Castiglione's courtier became the embodiment of what is known as s*prezzatura*—the ability to do the most "artful things in the most artless manner. "14 The courtier is to display a sense of harmony and decorum. His speech is to convey a sense of his gentility and grace, devoid of artificiality and exaggeration. His elegance and grace is a visible symbol of the court.

These ideas gained greater resonance during the latter part of the 17th century when "conduct" and "good-breeding" constituted the epitome of honor. Richard Braithwaite argued that "Virtue is the greatest signal of Gentry and is rather expressed by goodness of the *person* rather the greatness of place."15 The "well-ordered" country gentleman, the epitome of self-control and virtue, was seen as the embodiment of true nobility. Almsgiving, hospitality and an "open house," constituted the hallmarks of the virtuous landowner. In officiating as justices of the peace, the gentry legitimized public service as the new means of gaining honor.

Just as heroic notions of chivalry threaten to destroy those values fundamental to man's existence, heroic values threaten to disrupt and destabilize man's true understanding of himself. It is Shakespeare's insertion of Banquo's ghost for

dramatic purposes that deconstructs chivalric notions of masculinity and exposes the anomalies inherent in patriarchy itself. The ghost's appearance is so alarming that Macbeth's inability to control himself transmutes into ill-defined terror. The rational gives way to the irrational, and Macbeth expresses his fear against his better self, despite his better judgment, and against his own desire to contain his feelings. An occasion which is meant to legitimize and affirm his new reign, becomes instead a scene of chaos and instability. Rather than a celebration of order, power, grandeur and majesty which now inhere in Macbeth as king, his fear and outbursts undermine his rational faculties. Rather than legitimize and empower him, his reaction to the ghost diminishes and disempowers him, suggesting that patriarchal norms, designed to inoculate man against fear and conscience are simplistic, unorthodox and self-defeating.

Furthermore, contrary to heroic conventions, Macbeth's reaction to the ghost suggests that his conscience is an inherent part of his being. Macbeth's attempt, therefore, to silence his conscience, to repress his better self from himself, to deceive himself from himself, "Why, so; being gone, / I am a man again" (3.4. 125–126), is an exercise in folly and self-deception. Moreover, in connecting Macbeth's actions to the supernatural, the play lends credence to the notion that contrary to man's assertions, there is a moral order to the universe and that man's actions are therefore not accorded divine dispensation, but rather man will pay for his actions, if not in this world, then in the next. The play thus evokes contemporary notions of the self engendered by the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, in which subjectivity is now invested in the individual, rather than in a specific group or community.

As a consequence, conscience now resides within the individual, rather than in a shared community.

While Macbeth's irrational behavior increases his vulnerability to Lady Macbeth's scorn and derision, her inability to see the ghost reinforces patriarchy's prescriptions of masculinity and simultaneously deconstructs these structures. Her representation of Macbeth's fears as having no basis in reality, as an innate medical condition over which he has no control, and as analogous to fears experience by women on cold winter nights when stories are "handed down from women to women" (3.4. 71–77), reaffirm Macbeth's outbursts as despicable and reprehensible, antithetical to notions of heroic masculinity. In dramatizing Lady Macbeth's utter scorn of Macbeth's masculine virtue, "Are you a man?" (3.4. 68), "What! Quite unmanned in folly" (3.4. 85), Shakespeare interrogates and problematizes chivalric values to suggest that rather than affirm and validate his masculinity, heroic values destabilize man's inner coherence so that he can no longer make sense of the world and his place in it.

This becomes evident in Macduff's inability to assuage his grief on learning of the murder of his wife and children. While Malcolm's argument to take revenge sounds rational—"Dispute it like a man" (4.3. 256)—his admonition belies the destructive nature of his appeal. Macduff, however, knows full well the horrors of this truth. He has been forced to experience the brutal and vicious reality of chivalric values in the murder of his innocent wife and children whom he had left unprotected. Thus, Malcolm's admonishment does nothing to assuage Macduff's anguish. Rather than clarify his predicament, Malcolm's rebuke exacerbates and complicates Macduff's dilemma, "But, I

must first feel it like a man" (4.3. 221). Shakespeare thus problematizes chivalric notions of revenge to suggest that rather than being the "medicine" that cures, heals, and restores man's "deadly grief," heroic codes of honor undermine those values that inform man's actions for good so that man can no longer differentiate between good and evil; between moral and immoral actions. This one scene therefore becomes crucial in highlighting one of the play's major themes: heroic notions of revenge are infused with a sense of irrationality that needs to be subdued by man's more civilizing attributes: mercy and justice. Shakespeare's dramatization of Macduff's dilemma provides a chilling and ominous perspective: forsake man's most innate sense of being, and his capacity to feel and express emotion, and you forsake intrinsic human values which give meaning and value to life. No longer constrained by moral or ethical imperatives, man will be thrust back to a dark primal world where only the sword will be victorious. Shakespeare thus exposes an inherent danger in heroic values, to suggest that, if given legitimacy, these values may well be the single-most threat to society and to man himself. Robert Grudin claims that "Psychologically and politically, the glorification of violence as a social virtue is but one step away from its acceptance as a means of individual enterprise" (160). This becomes a reality in Macbeth's own life.

Like Lady Macbeth, it is Macbeth's fundamental disdain for human life and human laws that constitute a transgression of his kingly powers. Having corrupted his military skills to gain the kingship, Macbeth now seeks to maintain power by destroying not only human life but all that is fundamental to human existence. In Act 1, Scene 4, for example, Lady Macbeth "pours" her demonic spirit of violence, destruction and death into Macbeth who, she

feels, is "*too full of the milk of human kindness.*" On becoming king, Macbeth, who has been convinced by Lady Macbeth that being a ruthless killer constitutes true manhood, "pours" the "sweet milk of concord into hell," to suggest that he rules and governs by the same demonic spirit "pour[ed]" into him by the female forces of darkness. Thus, despite his desire to establish an identity separate and independent of Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's actions for the most part come to be seen as an extension of her will. His actions, moreover, suggest that while Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have the capacity to gain power, they do not have the capacity to rule or maintain power. Shakespeare uses the imagery of clothing in Act 5, Scene 2, "now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief" (5.2. 20–22), to suggest that the power of kingship is beyond the capacity of Macbeth to attain. Having usurped the kingship like a "dwarfish thief," he cannot realize the power invested in the "giant robe" of kingship because he lacks the legitimacy to rule. Moreover, the imagery of clothing "hang[ing] loose" evokes a sense of impotency and powerlessness to garner the majesty and mystical power inherent in kingship, to suggest that kings must have a greater vision; they must envision a reality beyond themselves and the present moment, to imagine a reality not as it is, but as it can be.

Macbeth, however, is the complete antithesis of kingly power. His actions envision a world in which all time, stability and order have been erased. Having sought guidance from the witches, he has forsaken reason, knowledge, and truth. As a result, his actions become irrational and chaotic: "From this moment / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The very firstlings of my hand." (4.1. 146–148), to suggest that Macbeth will do whatever he wills; whenever he wills; and to whomever he wills. His murder of Macduff's wife

and all their children, just to "make assurance doubly sure," comes to epitomize the notion of "Babylonical confusion" contained in the Homilies. The imagery evokes a king's loss of control of the body politic, which is analogous to the king's loss of reason.16 In Elizabethan terms, Macbeth is out of control and out of bounds.

According to the metaphor of the body, as monarch, the king is the head of the body and, therefore, is synonymous with reason and sound judgment. These ideas were reiterated by James I in *The True Law of Free Monarchies*. Macbeth' mental disintegration therefore suggests that while the analogy seeks to affirm the rationality of the king as head of the body, the analogy, by its very nature, also implicitly affirms its opposite. As he mentally disintegrates, Macbeth is seen as undermining, disrupting and demystifying normative paradigms of hierarchy and order, central to the ideology that underlies the monarchy.

In making and breaking laws at will, moreover, Macbeth becomes the embodiment of the Machiavellian tyrant. The play thus gives expression to one of the most influential political texts in the sixteenth century, Niccoli Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Influenced by his own socio-political experience, Machiavelli advocated a system of government oriented to the rational selfinterest of the State, overturning earlier political ideas promulgated by classical, Christian, and humanist writers. He argued in Chapter 18 of *The Prince* that "a prudent prince cannot and should not keep his word when to do so would go against his interest, or when the reasons that made him pledge it, no longer apply."

According to Holinshed's historical narrative, however, Macbeth is a typical figure whose political behavior in a sense is the norm in the history that he narrates.18 His violence and his utterly unscrupulous way of gaining and maintaining power is not unique or unusual. Macbeth, in fact, ruled for a whole decade before revealing his tyrannical bent. In making Macbeth a tyrant immediately upon his accession, and dramatizing the insidious nature of his crimes, including the murder of a child on stage, the play gives voice to arguments articulated by Scottish historians, that it is not a king's lack of legitimacy that necessitates his deposition but rather the "corrupting effects of power."19 This is reinforced by the notion that although Macbeth has killed the king and usurped his crown, the charge laid against him is not usurpation, but tyranny.

Macbeth's mental instability becomes symbolized in the play by his divided body. In indelibly ascribing the word "tyrant" to individual parts of Macbeth's body in Act 3, Scene 4: "tyrant's head," "tyrant's grasp" and "tyrant's name," Shakespeare leads us further into the "heart of darkness," which resides not in forces exterior to man, but rather in the complexities that lie in man himself. David Norbrook contends that in cataloguing Macbeth's body parts, Shakespeare "not only imitated but revised the Senecan mode." He states that Seneca used this device to indicate "the rational control of a passionate body." Norbrook argues that since Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are not given to "unruly passions," Shakespeare used this device to "[force] their bodies to carry through their calculating political stratagems."21 Notwithstanding Norbrook's argument, I submit that Macbeth's individual body parts become a metaphor for his own mental disintegration and instability and, more importantly, for his inability to develop an integrated sense of the self which

validates and reinforces life, as opposed to destroying it. This becomes manifested in the "body politic" by the shattered and disrupted bonds of human relations. Malcolm's declaration that he will "tread upon the tyrant's head, / Or wear it on my sword" (4.3. 51–52) reiterates the essential and necessary destruction of Macbeth, whose tyrannical actions emanate from his irrational, disturbed mind.

The image evoked by the "tyrant's name" comes to symbolize the evil inherent in Macbeth's own nature. According to Norbrook, the notion held by Camden that a title was "a natural sign," which reified the character of the nobleman, came to be part of a set of beliefs in sixteenth century England: "as though the names and natures of men were suitable and fatall necessities concurred herein with voluntary motion, in giving the name."22 Camden believed that there was a direct correlation "between name and the bearer," and that "a noble name" could inspire men to accomplish "great deeds."23 Thus, in inheriting the Thane of Cawdor, perhaps Macbeth unconsciously inherited Macdonwald's destructive and rebellious character. Macbeth's acknowledgement that the "witches gave the Thane of Cawdor to me," implicates the witches as the source of destruction and death and suggests that, given the nature of their relationship, the witches' violent and destructive tendencies may well have been transferred to him. In the exchange between Macbeth and Young Siward in Act 5, Scene 7, Macbeth declares, "My name's Macbeth" (9), to which Young Siward replies: "Thou liest, abhorred tyrant; with my sword /I'll prove the lie thou speak'st"(12– 13). The title then becomes a metonym for betrayal, murder, destruction, and death.

Inherent in the image of the "tyrant's grasp" is Macbeth's insatiable thirst for power. In analogizing tyranny to a disease whose "sole name blisters our tongue," Shakespeare gives voice to the horrendous nature of Macbeth's tyranny, which infects, destabilizes, and destroys the normal functioning of the human body and the body politic. The image accentuates with profundity the powerlessness and fear that grips a nation under siege, silencing the voices of its people. In destroying bonds of friendship, hospitality, loyalty and solidarity, Macbeth's tyranny engenders a climate of mistrust and suspicion, in which every man is seen as one's enemy. Scotland is thus no longer a place of conception, birth and natural growth, but rather a place of violence, destruction, and death, "It cannot / Be called our mother, but our grave" (4.3. 184–186). It is a place in which nothing grows and everything dies, in which "each new morn / New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows / Strike heaven on the face, . . ." (4. 3. 5–7). Shakespeare's repetition of the word "new" in the words "*new* morn," "*new* widows," "*new* orphans" and "*new* sorrows" accentuates the preponderance of Macbeth's crime and his blatant contempt for human life and human laws. This is brought home with greater resonance by Macduff's utter disbelief at the loss of his entire family:

Macduff: My children too?

Ross: Wife, children servants, all

That could be found. (4.3. 243–245). The utter horror of Macbeth's destruction underscores the notion that absolute power corrupts absolutely.24 In appropriating Macbeth's tyranny in order to establish Macduff's true identity, Macduff's declaration that Malcolm is not "Fit to govern!/No not to live" (4,4 116–117), lends legitimacy to arguments made by Scottish historians in the sixteenth century that tyrants must be resisted and deposed. The play thus gives expression to one of the most

polemic issues of the sixteenth century: the deposition of tyrants.25 Shakespeare thus undermines ideas of kingship promulgated by James I who argues in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* that rebellion against a king, even against a tyrannical ruler, can never be justified.26 This notion was contained in the *Homily against Disobedience and Willful Rebellion* which postulates that since the king is God's anointed, God Himself will remove a tyrannical king. His subjects were thus exhorted to obey even a tyrannical ruler, since rebellion against a king constituted an act of rebellion against God Himself, for which man will suffer eternal damnation.

2.4 Sovereign Flowers

Unlike Macbeth, Malcolm is analogized to a "sovereign flower" that "drowns" and drives out the weeds of evil inherent in Macbeth's tyranny. The play thus makes an opposition between a notion of kingly power that is metaphorically "feminine" and a notion of kingly power that is metaphorically "masculine." The former derives its power from an inner force of moral virtue that affirms life and engenders peace, harmony and abundance. The latter derives its power from man's own ambition, and is imposed on man by force that engenders fear, brutality, violence, and death. The play thus illustrates that the stability and harmony of a society is dependent to a large degree on the moral disposition and well-being of its king. The fertility, abundance and harmony which underlie Duncan's kingship, for example, reify his moral virtues. As the embodiment of all the kingly virtues, Malcolm is the "doctor" who heals and restores Scotland to health. Likewise, Shakespeare's portrayal of England as a land of stability and order, reify the moral virtue and holiness of its king. In contrast to the evil of Macbeth's tyranny which destroys life, Shakespeare's portrayal offstage of Edward II's healing powers, affirm and give life, reinforcing the notion that although evil is present, its power cannot prevail,

or triumph. In dramatizing these contradictions, the play underscores the overriding concern in the sixteenth century of the nature of a king's moral character and its direct relationship to the stability of his kingship. According to William C. Carroll, all three Scottish historians, John Major, Hector Boece, and George Buchanan give credence in their historical narratives to the healing powers of Edward the Confessor, thereby attesting to the importance of this issue.

While the play interrogates and challenges patriarchal power, the play also dramatizes a notion of masculine identity whose autonomy and independence derive from an inner force of stability and coherence. Banquo, for example, is a man who remains faithful to his own inner beliefs and truths, despite external temptations. Although Macbeth and Banquo both receive predictions, Macbeth feels compelled to bring the predictions to pass, while Banquo does not. Shakespeare, thus, portrays Banquo as a man who can be exposed to temptation, and perhaps even contemplate the temptation, but refuses to yield or be controlled by them. Banquo, therefore, becomes for the audience someone with whom they can identity and trust.

However, Holinshed, in his historical narrative, states that Banquo is complicit in the murder of Duncan.29 In illustrating, for dramatic purposes, that Banquo had *no* part in Duncan's murder, Shakespeare demonstrates that Banquo's role is crucial to determining the degree to which Macbeth has volition and thus the degree to which he is responsible for his choices. The play thus gives expression to one of the major issues of the sixteenth century—the question of human freedom. This became one of the greatest ontological quarrels between Erasmus and Martin Luther. Luther believed that everything existed

by necessity and that man had no free will. He argued that because God was omnipotent, everything that happened was the direct result of God's will. Erasmus completely disagreed with Luther. He argued that for actions to be moral and meritorious, choices had to be freely made. Morals thus presupposed free will. Luther countered that faith, not works, was the means to salvation. Erasmus, however, drew on the philosophers of antiquity to illustrate that classical notions of truth, ethics, and divinity were in agreement with Christian truth.

Shakespeare demonstrates that chief among the values that constitute true masculinity is the virtue of prudence.30 According to Classical philosophers, prudence is associated with astuteness, extraordinarily good judgment and the notion of *coup d'oeil*—the ability to comprehend the complexities of a situation and then to immediately act in a judicious and prudent manner.31 Banquo, for example, refuses to meet with Macbeth to discuss the predictions since, in doing so, he would compromise his allegiance and loyalty to the king. Likewise, despite Macduff's earnest plea for help, Malcolm refuses to take Macduff at his word and instead seeks to establish his true identity. His determination to decipher appearance from reality, truth from untruth, suggests that Malcolm is not swayed by fleeting sensations, but is guided by an underlying set of moral principles. Malcolm's complete reversal upon determining the veracity of Macduff's assertions, "what I am truly / Is thine and my poor country's to command" (4.3. 146–147), suggests that he has the capacity for good judgment and wise action.

However, Shakespeare illustrates that human motivation is equivocal and ambiguous. Malcolm's appropriation of Macbeth's tyranny, for example, suggests that there is no guarantee that good kings will *not* become tyrants. Moreover, although Macduff is seen as the instrument of God's retribution, Malcolm questions his honor and his personal integrity in leaving his family unprotected. In the previous scene, his wife questions his love and commitment. Furthermore, Shakespeare's portrayal of Macduff as politically expedient, in his attempt to enjoin Malcolm to return to Scotland, is troubling. Macduff sees nothing wrong in young women becoming victims of Malcolm's supposed lust, which he states has "no bottom, none, / In my voluptuousness: your wives, your daughters, / Your matrons and your maids, could not fill up / The cistern of my lust" (4.3. 69–73). Macduff's argument that Malcolm can convey the pretense of virtue and still pursue his lust in private is a particularly chilling Machiavellian perspective. He sees nothing wrong in Malcolm's desire to cheat nobles out of their land, steal their wealth, and willing concedes all Scotland's resources to satisfy Malcolm's "stanchless avarice" (89). Shakespeare suggests that despite man's need for an absolute and moral understanding of the world, this is attenuated by human motivation which is more obscure and ambiguous than we might think.

Shakespeare's interrogation of manhood throughout the play thus gives voice to the emergence of a new conception of man in the Renaissance. Unlike medieval thought which held that man's position in the world is immutable, fixed and unchanging, humanists in the sixteenth century celebrated man's individuality and his boundless potential. According to Martin Wiggins in *Shakespeare and the Drama of His Time*,32 it is *Hamlet*, in the following soliloquy, who gives expression to the humanistic understanding of man:

"What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals . . . "33 Shakespeare's hymn of praise, "What a piece of work is a man!" celebrates man as the highest form of God's creation, surpassing all other creatures on earth. Humanists believed man's potential was *infinite*—that man could reach the heights of perfection, and that his capacity for comprehension and understanding were without limit or constraint. It is man's reason, however, that lends "nobility" to his endeavors, enabling him to comprehend the breadth, width and depth of the universe and thus unlock its mysteries. Humanists believed, moreover, that while man could aspire to, and achieve the perfection of "a god," he could also degenerate to the ranks of the beasts and become "the paragon of animals."

In this Chapter, I have demonstrated that patriarchy's prescriptions of gender not only constitute masculine identity, they simultaneously undermine and disempower that identity; an ideology that affirms man's power and authority, simultaneously is the source of man's disempowerment and destruction. The play thus articulates a process of subjectification in which men are seen as authors of their actions, and at the same time are restricted and constrained by forces beyond their control.34 However, in dramatizing that notions of masculine identity dramatized throughout the play are, for the most part, unstable and incoherent, the play suggests that Shakespeare is critical of the patriarchal system itself. That is, in predicating masculine identity on a discourse of gendered difference, heroic notions of masculinity shape a masculine identity that falsifies man's true understanding of himself and that, in turn, limits his ability to achieve his potential. The play thus interrogates

patriarchy's notions of masculine identity to suggest that perhaps the system serves as a function of expediency rather than a manifestation of an innate truth.

2.5. Opposing Political Viewpoints

In dramatizing these conflicts, Shakespeare exposes opposing political viewpoints prevalent during the 16th Century. Donald R. Kelley in "Elizabethan Political Thought" argues that "In general, European political thought in the 16th Century drew upon two major resources—Aristotelian philosophy, 'practical' as well as 'theoretical,' and Roman jurisprudence, which included canon and some parts of feudal as well as civil law." The former, inherent in James I's political beliefs, is a system of government grounded in common law with its appeal to tradition and the continuity of institutions. Hence, the Reformation was seen as return to the original church handed down by the monarch. This contrasted strongly with George Buchanan and his Scottish contemporaries, whose political worldview was grounded more in the "rationalistic" Roman civil laws. According to David Norbrook, "Scotland did not have a full equivalent of the English common law, and the language of tradition did not play such an important part in Scottish political discourse." The Reformation, therefore, provoked antimonarchy sentiments, which gave rise to a even greater "pride" in their own Scottish traditions (Norbrook 114).

5. Thomas More, *Utopia,* trans. and ed. Robert M. Adams, 2nd ed. (London: Norton, 1992), 19.
6. Roland Barthes, *On Racine* qtd. in Kahn 48.
7. Adelman 141.
8. Adelman 141.

9. qtd in Wells 13.
10. Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named The Governor* (London: J.M. Dent & Co, 1531), 69.
11. Foyster 33.
12. Daniel Javitch, Preface in *The Book of the Courtier*, by Baldesar Castiglione (New York: WW Norton 2002) viii.
13. Javitch viii.
14. Harry Berger, Jr., "Sprezzatura and the Absence of Grace" in Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier,* (New York: WW Norton 2002), 295.
15. Foyster 35.
16. As Macbeth mentally disintegrates, the play gives expression to one of the greatest social issues in the Renaissance: the notion of madness. Unlike modern practices, medicine and psychiatry in the sixteenth century were constituted as one branch of study in which the body became the site of both physical and mental disorders. Madness in the Renaissance thus was understood in terms of the humoral theory. Timothy Bright in his *Treatise on Melancholy* defined madness in terms of Natural and Unnatural Melancholy. In vacillating between extreme emotions of "love, hatred, hope and fear," Macbeth suffers from Natural melancholy. At the same time, in becoming a murderer and an infanticide because he feels he has been cheated out of establishing a dynasty, Macbeth's "bitter enmity" suggests that he suffers from Unnatural melancholy. As such, according to Bright, Macbeth fate is sealed. He cannot be cured and suffers the eternal agony of the damned. He states, "Here no medicine, no purgation, no cordiall, no tryacle or balme are able to assure the afflicted soule."
17. Machiavelli 48.

18. Alan Sinfield argues that perhaps "For the Jamesian reading, it is necessary to feel that Macbeth is distinctively 'evil.'" He goes on to point out, however, that although Macbeth is "a murderer and an oppressive ruler," he is not, as we see in Holinshed, the "polar opposite" but indeed 'one version" of an absolute monarch (Sinfield 124).
19. David Norbrook contends that in having Macbeth become a tyrant simultaneous with his accession to the throne, Shakespeare seems to suggest that "bad rule follows inevitably from lack of legitimacy" (Norbrook 96). However, he argues that as is evident from historical narratives, what becomes important to Scottish historians is the "corrupting effects of power" and the necessity that tyrants be removed (Norbrook 96).

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2. 6 Historian George Buchanan

Macbeth reiterates ideas held by Scottish historian George Buchanan who argued that the powers of kings were not absolute. In his essay, "Materialist Shakespeare," Alan Sinfield states: "Arguments in favor of absolutism constitute one part of Macbeth's ideological field - the range of ideas and attitudes brought into play by the text; another main part may be represented by Buchanan's De jure regni (1579) and History of Scotland (1582)." (Sinfield 82). For Buchanan, tyrannicide was a "heroic act" that rescued "public rationality" from the evils of "private passion" (Norbrook 92). Like the ancient Greeks, Buchanan sought to underscore the significance of this event by memorializing the tyrannicide of Mary, Queen of Scots in the issuance of a coin (Norbrook 92). The inscription on the coin: (if I deserve it the blade will be used in my defense. If not, it will be turned against me), reiterated his belief that sovereignty derived from the people and therefore the people had the right

to overthrow tyrants. (Norbrook 92). In "The Powers of the Crown in Scotland," Buchanan asserts that all kings "swear obedience to the laws" and their continued reign was contingent on that obedience (Buchanan 56).

25. According to W.C. Carroll, resistance to tyrants was established in Europe in the context of religious civil wars between Protestants and Catholics, well before the reign of the Stuart kings. Central to this discourse was the argument made by the Huguenots that monarchical governments had adopted Machiavelli's theory of government as a basis for governance. Thus, in 1579 Stephano Junio Bruot Celta argued in his most famous text, *A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants* that kings could be resisted both for "breaking the law of God and His church" and for "suppressing his people."

Tyranny was therefore resisted both on political and religious grounds. See W.C. Carroll, ed. *William Shakespeare's Macbeth: Texts and Context*, (London :Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), 44.

26. According to Norbrook, James I repudiated all of Buchanan's theories that subjects had the right to depose a tyrant and stated they must endure even a tyrannical king (Norbrook 93). Despite James I's attempt to abolish Buchanan's historical writings, Norbrook argues that they became the "most widely read book in the covenanting armies" and frequently cited after the deposition and murder of his son, Charles (Norbrook 93).

27. Alan Sinfield in his essay "*Macbeth: History, Ideology and Intellectuals,"* argues that the distinctions made by James I between "a lawfully good king" and a "usurping tyrant," outlined in his work "Basilikon Doron," falls apart, even by his own analysis. In ascribing to himself a duly sanctioned mandate to rule, the "lawful king" precludes the possibility of public scrutiny and the derision of his subjects, since all bad acts executed against him are now seen as acts committed against

God Himself (Sinfield 13). The definition, moreover, excludes the possibility that a good king may become a tyrant. As Sinfield points out, James I's definition falls apart even here since Mary, Queen of Scots is a "lawful ruler" who also becomes a tyrant. Furthermore, in making the distinction contingent on motive, rather than behavior, James' definition legitimizes the violent and tyrannical actions of a good king, made in the name of the State, as not only essential but legitimate (Sinfield 13).

28. William C.Carroll, ed *.Macbeth: Texts and Contexts* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 1999).
29. Raphael Holinshed, from *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* in *William Shakespeare's Macbeth: Texts and Contexts* (The Bedford Shakespeare Series) ed. W.C. Carroll (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), 143.
30. Montesquieu asserts that the origins of political greatness lay in "prudence, wisdom and perseverance" since prudence would "guard the passions of individuals for the sake of order and guard the guardians for the sake of freedom" (556). See Montesquieu. *Considerations on the Causes of the Romans' Greatness and Decline*, trans. David Lowenthal. (London:

Collier-Macmillan, 1965), 556.

31. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Six, Chapters 11 and 12, trans.

J.A.K. Thomson (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953).

32. Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of His Time* (Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 2000), 49.

33. William Shakespeare's, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, ed. Sylvan Barnet, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Putman, Inc., 1998). 2.2 305–9.

34. I have taken this definition of subjectification from Louis Montrose's *The Elizabethan Subject and the Spensarian Text* in which he explicates the dialectical relationship between subject and state as "a process of subjectification that, on the one hand, shapes individuals as loci of consciousness and initiators of actions; and on the other, positions, motivates and constrains them with networks of power beyond their comprehension or control" (Montrose 306). **2.7 Elements of Tragedy**

Like historians, dramatists during the 16th Century sought to impose a shape to their dramatic narratives.1 By selecting only those events in a king's reign that dealt with tyranny, corruption, or abuse of power, dramatists could portray the fall of kings or personages of high rank from a place of honor and majesty to a place of great depth, and their ultimate destruction and death by their own actions. This gave rise to the genre of tragedy with the successful production in 1561 of the first English tragedy.2 Shakespeare's selection of events in the latter part of Macbeth's reign, in which his tyrannical bent is manifested, permits Shakespeare to shape the play into a tragedy, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. In so doing, Shakespeare explores the psychology of power during Macbeth's reign and the political ramifications of his actions that lead to his demise.

Shakespearean tragedy, therefore, serves an important social function. In dramatizing Macbeth as both the hero and the villain, Shakespeare humanizes Macbeth's experience, thus allowing the audience to identity with him and thus experience his anguish and torment. In so doing, the audience can vicariously engage in criminal behavior and experience the process of purging those feelings, and in the end assent to the justice of his destruction.

Yet, the closure of play becomes very problematic. The necessary destruction of Macbeth and his refusal to repent complicates our understanding of

Macbeth as the tragic hero, and signals yet again that sense of moral ambivalence and uncertainty that resonates throughout the play. For Malcolm, Macbeth is a far cry from a tragic hero: "this dead butcher and his fiend like Queen" (5.7. 115). His view of Macbeth as an abomination to be rooted out and killed before any sense of civility can return creates a dilemma for the audience who must in some way identify with the Macbeth, if the play, as a tragedy, is to fulfill its objective.

Malcolm's sentiment finds resonance in Samuel Johnson's commentary on *Macbeth.* Writing in the eighteenth century, Dr. Johnson suggests that the Macbeths have no redeeming qualities and their actions have earned them nothing but disdain. He states "This play is deservedly celebrated for the propriety of its fictions, and solemnity, grandeur, and variety of action; but it has no nice discriminations of character, the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions . . . Their passions are directed to their true end. Lady Macbeth is merely detested; and though the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem, yet every reader rejoices at his fall." Dr. Johnson suggests that the Macbeths are antithetical to all notions of moral goodness.

However, Shakespearean scholar, A.C. Bradley, asserts that Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not ordinary men, of ordinary stature or consequence. On the contrary, they are men whose extraordinary acts of valor and feats of courage constitute a sense of greatness "that in real life we have known scarcely anyone resembling them" As a result, their fall from a place of high standing defies conventional morality and inspires not moral condemnation, but rather awe, wonder, and fear. Bradley suggests that tragedy, by its very nature, precludes moral judgment that inheres in traditional morality. Of the

Macbeths, he states, “These two characters are fired by one and the same passion of ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike. The disposition of each is high, proud, and commanding. They are born to rule, if not to reign. And if, as time goes on, they drift a little apart, they are the fruitlessness of their ambition. They remain to the end tragic, even grand?5 Unlike Dr. Johnson,

Bradley implies that Macbeth’s ability to look death in the face and defy its power, constitutes an act of heroic valor that is sublime and majestic, even “grand.” This notion is reinforced by T. McAlindon who argues that, “violent death is one of the tests of heroic authenticity, the event which above all others can give meaning and value.”

Yet, while the audience accedes to Macbeth’s necessary death, Macbeth’s lack of repentance denies the play from reaching full closure. Unlike Macbeth’s defiance, the repentance of the traitor Macdonwald at the beginning of the play restores a sense of moral order to the universe. In acknowledging his crimes against the king and imploring his forgiveness, Macdonwald’s repentance “nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it;” (1.4. 6–9), becomes the catalyst that heals and reconciles a society marred by the affects of violence and destruction. T. McAlindon states that “so important is the motif of forgiveness that it often extends beyond the death of the protagonist to form the basis of social reintegration or—a key word and stage image—‘joining.’” It is an unequivocal acknowledgement that in a moral universe, evil cannot prevail and that in the end, good triumphs over evil.

Unlike Macdonwald, Macbeth’s defiance and refusal to repent, “I will not yield /To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet /And to be baited with the rabble’s curse / Before my body / I throw my warlike shield: lay on

Macduff, /And damned be he that first cries 'Hold, enough'"(5.7. 67–74), destabilizes the very foundation of the moral universe and undermines the laws from which the stability of society derive. His defiance suggests that a culture that glorifies and perpetuates violence inevitably corrupts those principles which define and give shape to a system of values so that man's moral understanding of the universe is more obscure and equivocal. This is particularly manifested in Act 1, Scene 2, in which Shakespeare dramatizes the dialectical relationship between Macbeth as the resolute, predatory and fearless "man of action" and Duncan as the refined and virtuous king who extols Macbeth's savagery.

2.8 Golgotha

Shakespeare's use of the word "Golgotha" evokes the horror of man's inhumanity to man, encapsulated in the image of "reeking wounds" which reduce the battlefield to a sea of blood. In analogizing Macbeth's actions to Christ's crucifixion, Shakespeare suggests that unlike Christ who died to redeem man from death, sin, and evil, Macbeth's butchery reduces man to human carnage, devoid of human value and human dignity. Macbeth is not only interested in killing his enemies, he is determined to desecrate their humanity as he "carves out his passage" and "unseams" the traitor Macdonwald from "the nave to the chops" (1.2. 19–22). Duncan's exhalation, moreover, of Macbeth's barbaric and savage butchery: "O, valiant cousin! worthy gentleman"(1.2. 26), belies his own virtuous and noble character. As a result the means (savage brutality and violence) and the ends (peace and justice) are no longer seen as two separate and distinct entities, but rather become irretrievably fused and enmeshed so that the values that govern and underlie men's actions no longer provide moral clarity. In his essay *Shakespeare After Theory,* David Scott Kastan argues that "Macbeth's violent

defense of the king at once confirms Duncan's rule and collapses the distinction upon which it rests. Difference dissolves into disruptive similarity. Hero and villain, as Harry Berger has ingeniously demonstrated are disturbingly intertwined and indistinguishable."

A similar fusion of values is seen in the last scene of the play when Macduff hands Malcolm the decapitated head of Macbeth: "Hail King! for so thou art. Behold where stands / Th'usurper's cursed head: the time is free" (5.7. 98–99). Malcolm's response is with filled gracious simplicity and hospitality. His use of the words "loves," "friends," and "home" evoke a celebratory tone of restoration, order and civility. His invocation of the "grace of Grace" implies the kingship is now under the direction of, and guided by, a Divine Power, "What's more to do, / Which would be planted newly with the time, /As calling home our exiled friends abroad . . . / That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace / We will perform in measure, time, and pace: / So thanks to all at once, and to each one, / Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone"(4.7. 110–121). In dramatizing this contradiction, Shakespeare problematizes heroic values which legitimize and provide justification for the use of barbaric force and savagery to suggest that in the pursuit of an even greater principle, moral values themselves become compromised. Shakespeare refuses to give us any easy answers. He provides no solution to the problem he dramatizes. Macbeth's refusal to repent thus provokes issues far greater and more profound which are beyond the scope of the play to address.

Yet, things do not change when Macbeth is finally destroyed. Notions of heroic masculinity remain alive and well. As Shakespeare dramatizes, in leading Malcolm's army against Macbeth and destroying him, Macduff assumes the role played by Macbeth in the beginning of the play, to suggest that in corrupting his military skills, Macbeth's actions are not the *cause*, but

the *effect*, of a system in which men are seen as representatives or "products" of a society, and not the creators of evil.

2.9 Macbeth in Performance

The history of *Macbeth* performed shows that there are only a few main production decisions. The answers make a performance taxonomy that persists through changes in costume and cast, changes in political and social emphases, changes in ideas of heroism, of the supernatural, and of the relation between women and men, parents and children, humankind and time. Equally, the history of *Macbeth* on stage shows how difficult theatrical interpretation, like dramatic criticism, has found those decisions. How should the sisters be represented? When did the idea of killing Duncan occur to Macbeth or Lady Macbeth? Which of the two is the stronger, the more resourcefully dedicated to death and supremacy? How should an actor perform what Michael Redgrave called the 'notoriously' difficult part of Macbeth? Redgrave specified the apparent contradiction that Macbeth 'is described as noble and valiant', although 'during the whole play we see him do nothing that is either noble or valiant'.1 Should the audience witness a palpable Ghost of Banquo in Act 3, Scene 4, or should the actor playing Macbeth in sheer imagination create the ghost as he created the dagger in Act 2, Scene i? How is an actor to perform Macbeth after his long absence between Act 4, Scene 1, and Act 5, Scene 3?

2.10 Castle Shakespeare

Shakespeare has become a literary institution, seen by many teachers and lecturers as the unquestionable centre of English studies, and a figure familiar to anyone who knows anything about literature. In her book *Letters to Alice, on First Reading Jane Austen,* the contemporary novelist Fay Weldon (b.

1933) suggests that writers ‘build Houses of Imagination’ and where these houses cluster together is ‘the City of Invention’. This city has an ‘all male suburb of sci-fi’, a ‘Romance alley’ and ‘public buildings and worthy monuments, which some find boring and others magnificent’. The city is a particularly interesting metaphor for literary value, since, just as in any city, some districts are ‘better’ than others. She writes that at the ‘heart of the city is the great Castle Shakespeare. You see it whichever way you look. It rears its head into the clouds reaching into the celestial sky, dominating everything around.’ Although the huge castle is a ‘rather uneven building, frankly…shoddy, and rather carelessly constructed in parts’, Weldon writes that it ‘keeps standing through the centuries and, build as others may, they can never quite achieve the same grandeur; and the visitors keep flocking, and the guides keep training and re-training, finding yet new ways of explaining the old building’. Weldon is showing us the way Shakespeare holds his place at the heart of the canon, while, apparently, other authors try in vain to achieve his stature and literary critics offer new ways of approaching his work.

But the institution of Shakespeare stretches well beyond the world of literature. Jonathan Bate, a leading Shakespearean specialist, writes in his book *The Genius of Shakespeare:*

> *“In British life he seems to be everywhere. He is quoted and adapted daily in newspaper headlines and advertising copy… He has a national, massively subsidized theatre company named after him and committed to the regular revival of all his works. Driving down the M6 motorway, you pass signs indicating the new county you are entering: Cheshire, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire. But the sign does not say Warwickshire—it says ‘Warwickshire: Shakespeare’s County’. Handing over a cheque guarantee card, one presents as a mark of its authenticity a hologram of Shakespeare’s head.”*

On 1 January 1999, listeners to BBC Radio 4's news and current-affairs programme *Today* voted Shakespeare the 'British Person of the Millennium'. Shakespeare's phrases have even entered the English language—as the journalist Bernard Levin pointed out, if you have ever not slept a wink, refused to budge an inch, made a virtue of necessity, knitted your brows, stood on ceremony, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, you're quoting Shakespeare. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) called him 'an inventor of language'.

2.11 Shakespearean's Power

Shakespeare is considered so important by so many people in the United Kingdom that he is the only compulsory author on the National Curriculum and the only author named by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in their A-level guidelines. This means that it is effectively a legal requirement for anybody educated in the UK to study Shakespeare. After women's writing, his work is the most studied subject on university English syllabuses— which makes him by far the most-studied single author.

However, it's not immediately obvious to everyone *why* you should have to study Shakespeare, and certainly not to students. For an article called 'Reading Shakespeare, or Ways with Will', John Yandell, Head of English at an East London school, asked a group of 12- and 13- year-olds why they would be studying Shakespeare in the year ahead. They gave various answers: 'It's part of our education'; 'Because he was the best'; 'You don't hear of no other people who do plays like him'; 'When his plays came out, the first people who saw it thought it was really good, but it's hard for us to understand it because times have changed'; 'We've got to because of the exam; because the play is written in English'.

These different answers are all, in fact, quite similar. To say that you have to study Shakespeare's plays for the exam, or because they are on the curriculum, or simply because they're in English, is only to say, really, that you study Shakespeare's plays 'because you're told to'. The students who say, before they've actually studied Shakespeare, that he is the best or that the first people who saw his plays thought them excellent also sound as if really they're answering 'because we're told to': they have been *told* that the plays are the best or were much appreciated by early audiences, so they have taken Shakespeare's excellence for granted. John Yandell interviewed teachers, too. One responded,

> *"when kids go 'I hate Shakespeare' I can honestly say 'I really understand that, I'm not telling you that it's brilliant'. And sometimes they ask 'Why have we got to study this?' and the personal side of me thinks 'I haven't got an answer for that—I had to, you have to'…it's never very satisfactory."*

The same question arises: But why? There must be better reasons to study Shakespeare than 'because you have to'. Certainly many critics and academics have tried to offer reasons. As with many other issues in English, the study of Shakespeare is the focus of a highly contentious debate, which has not yet filtered down to most students. This debate has been running since the mid-1970s, when all that was 'traditional English' began to come into question. As Shakespeare was (and still is) seen by so many as central to English courses, the debate over why he should be studied has led to some particularly fierce arguments. Roughly speaking, there are two camps: on the one hand there are those who might be called the *traditionalists;* on the other are a number of critics who Jonathan Bate describes as the 'New Iconoclasts' (an 'iconoclast' is literally an 'icon-breaker', and means a person who attacks established

ideas). Many of those who attack the institution of Shakespeare describe themselves as *cultural materialists*. As you might expect, there is no neutral view on this: both camps have presuppositions that determine their opinions. The rest of this chapter sketches their arguments, then outlines what effect these have for doing English.

2.12 Studying Shakespeare: The traditionalists' argument

Shakespeare's friend Ben Jonson (1572–1637) wrote that Shakespeare is 'not of an age, but for all time': this might be the motto of the traditionalists' argument for the study of Shakespeare. Simply, they argue or assume that Shakespeare's plays are the greatest literary texts, which makes the study of them invaluable. It is possible to break this argument down into three parts:

- The artistic (or aesthetic) worth of Shakespeare's plays
- The values taught by Shakespeare's plays • The universal appeal of Shakespeare's work.

The traditionalists' argument suggests that Shakespeare's plays are unarguably the pinnacle of literary art and that their aesthetic worth cannot be rivalled. There are examples of this unquestioned assumption all over the place. *Desert Island Discs,* a long-running radio programme, again on BBC Radio 4, hypothetically leaves its guests stranded on an abandoned island with eight records of their choice, a luxury item, the Bible, a book of their choice and—because it's the best—the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*. You might come across a student guide called *Studying Shakespeare,* by Katherine Armstrong and Graham Arkin. This asks 'Why study

Shakespeare?', then answers it by saying 'We need look no further than the opening exchange of *Hamlet*'. It offers a critical analysis of the passage and it repeats this with passages from the plays *As You Like It* and *King Lear.* This is as if to say, 'If we just look at a passage of Shakespeare, its brilliance will

convince us that Shakespeare is the best and so deserves more study than the work of other writers.' The journalist James Woods discusses the ending of *King Lear* in a review for the *Guardian,* writing that it 'is difficult to watch *King Lear* in a theatre and not hear people crying at this moment in the play'. Shakespeare, for Woods and for these others, is simply the best. Traditionalists also argue that Shakespeare is the best teacher of values. Sometimes this is in the form of windy rhetoric: exaggerated praise and empty words. In his book *Representative Men* (1850), American poet and critic Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) wrote of Shakespeare:

> "What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office, or function, or district of man's work, has he not remembered? What king has he not taught state…? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What lover has he not outloved? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behavior?"

Shakespeare is seen as a font of wisdom and a source of truth about human behaviour, good and bad. For traditionalists, literature teaches values and ideals and Shakespeare's works are the highest form of literature. This means that to study Shakespeare is not just to study one man's work but to study 'the human spirit' at its finest.

What is particularly interesting is that people with very different values find their own values reflected in Shakespeare. For example, in his book *Shakespeare,* the critic Kiernan Ryan describes how the plays 'sharpen our need to forge a world from which division has been purged'. For him, Shakespeare's plays are radical, suggesting that the established order needs to

be shaken up and reformed. In contrast, as Jonathan Bate points out, the right-wing British politician Michael Portillo quoted Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* in a speech in 1994 to explain 'how order in society depends on a series of relationships of respect and duty from top to bottom'. He was attacking those who 'had become "cynical" about Britain's ancient institutions and traditional values' and so defending the established order. Both these examples focus on the 'universal' values the plays are said to present.

This leads to the final part of the traditionalists' views: that because everybody is moved and affected by Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare embodies universal values and has something to say to all people at all times and in all places. Traditionalists often suggest that anybody seeing or reading the plays feels that Shakespeare is speaking to them and their innermost thoughts. In a lecture in 1990, the American poet, writer and activist Maya Angelou (b. 1928) described her love for Shakespeare. Growing up in poverty in the southern United States and experiencing American racism, she said that she felt Shakespeare spoke to her so completely that she knew 'William Shakespeare was a black woman'. The traditionalists argue that Shakespeare's works should be studied precisely because of this universal quality. They might be said to express the basic emotions, thoughts, ideas, hopes and fears of everybody in the world.

For the traditionalists, Shakespeare's plays are like a star: beautiful, remote, independent of the earth and worldly concerns, to be wondered at and admired. Yet, like medieval sailors navigating by the night sky, we are given direction by the star. It gives us core values, and by studying Shakespeare we learn those values.

2.13 Using Shakespeare: the cultural materialists' argument

Opposed to the traditionalist arguments are critics and thinkers who can roughly be described as *cultural materialists*. A cultural-materialist critic is principally interested in the way material factors—like economic conditions and political struggles of all sorts—have affected or even created a text. In turn, they argue that any text can tell us about these material conditions. Because their interest is in the context of works, they argue that all works of culture—here, Shakespeare's plays—are involved with politics and the world. (This reveals the extrinsic attitude I discussed in Chapter 4, where critics look beyond the text to other non-literary ideas.) For a cultural materialist,

> 'Shakespeare' —both the plays and the institution—is a construct of present-day political, cultural and economic interests, rather than a transcendent font of beauty, wisdom and values. Where traditionalists understand Shakespeare as a beautiful remote star, cultural materialists see his plays as trees, growing from the soil of political concerns in the world. They absolutely reject all the 'traditional' claims made for Shakespeare's plays.

2.14 Is Shakespeare 'simply the best'?

To begin with, they oppose the 'aesthetic worth' argument and deny that Shakespeare is 'simply the best'. In addition to suggesting that 'the best' in literature is not as straightforward as it seems—Whose best? Who decided? Why? —the cultural materialists have two arguments. First, they describe the development of Shakespeare's reputation, showing that the idea of Shakespeare as the 'best' is not the result of the quality 'shining through' but instead the result of historical events. Second, they compare Shakespeare's

reputation with the reputation of other writers to highlight the elements of historical chance.

The story of how Shakespeare the Playwright became Shakespeare the Institution is a long one, and there are a number of easily available sources that cover it in detail (see pp. 143–4). Roughly, it suggest that, although Shakespeare was successful during his career as a dramatist, he was not seen as outstanding. For example, Shakespeare was buried quietly in 1616: in contrast, when his friend and rival Ben Jonson died in 1637, a crowd followed the coffin to St Paul's Cathedral. Historians of Shakespeare's reputation argue that its first boost came in 1660. From 1642 to 1660, during the Civil War and Commonwealth, theatres first in London, then throughout England, were closed as the country's rulers—Oliver Cromwell (1599– 1658) and Parliament— considered plays immoral. In 1660, the theatres were reopened. Lacking any recent material, theatre owners and managers were forced back to plays from the past, including Shakespeare. A handful of editions of Shakespeare's plays were brought out by theatre managers for use in the theatre. However, as Gary Taylor points out in *Reinventing Shakespeare,* a very readable study of Shakespeare's changing reputation, between 1660 and 1700 as many as thirty editions of plays by Shakespeare's near-contemporaries Beaumont and Fletcher were published. This shows that Shakespeare was not seen as the most important playwright. Nevertheless, towards the end of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth, Shakespeare's reputation began to grow. As the market for books grew, editions of Shakespeare grew—there were editions in 1709, 1725, 1733, 1747, 1765 and 1768. In fact, it became quite the thing for somebody with literary

ambitions to edit Shakespeare as a marker of their own importance and seriousness.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the growth of the Romantic movement in the arts helped to foster Shakespeare's reputation. Romantics considered the 'creative force' to be vitally important, and they saw Shakespeare as a leading example of creativity. His work was read more widely and the characters of his plays began to take on their own life. As Henry Crawford, a character in Jane Austen's (1775–1817) *Mansfield Park* (1814), says: 'Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere, one is intimate with him by instinct.' Shakespeare, to adapt T.S.Eliot, is in an Englishman's bones (see Chapter 5). The idea that Shakespeare was the central figure of literature, especially English literature, began to grow. The expansion and consolidation of the British empire took Shakespeare's reputation with it and, as Chapter 1 outlined, used Shakespeare to its own ends; his texts became the touchstones of 'Englishness' to which the empire referred. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Shakespeare had become an icon. In 1910 the British poet Swinburne (1837–1909) wrote that the word Shakespeare connotes more than any other man's name that ever was written or spoken on the earth…It is not only the crowning glory of England, it is the crowning glory of mankind, that such a man should ever have been born as William Shakespeare.

The use of Shakespeare for patriotic propaganda during the two world wars set the final seal on his reputation as the greatest English writer. Since then, Shakespeare's reputation has been caught up in a snowball effect. As

‘everyone’ seems to agree that Shakespeare has the highest prestige, people try to associate themselves with ‘the Institution’ of Shakespeare as a sign of their own value. For example, if an aspiring theatre director wants to show that she or he can be considered highly talented, they take on the ‘hardest’ challenge of the ‘greatest’ plays—Shakespeare. Actors often say they knew they had ‘made it’ when they played their first Shakespeare role. TV series like *Star Trek* use Shakespeare to sound serious. Film studios make ‘Shakespeare’ films to prove their artistic credentials. And if such people keep demonstrating that they see Shakespeare as the ‘best’, others will believe it. However, looking more closely at this history of Shakespeare’s reputation, the cultural materialists argue that the assumption that Shakespeare is the best relies not simply on the quality of his work but on historical chance. This is highlighted by comparing his work to that of other writers. There are a number of authors who could be considered just as ‘great’ as Shakespeare but, lacking the support of an empire and all the cultural power of ‘England’ and ‘the English’ over four hundred years, they simply don’t have the same reputation. The Athenian playwright Sophocles (c. 496–c.406 BC) had a major influence on the genre of tragedy, but only 7 of 120 or so of his plays survive. The prolific Spanish writer Vega de Lope was born in 1562, two years before Shakespeare. He wrote many more plays than Shakespeare, for a similar audience and they were very popular. Jonathan Bate takes up this case in *The Genius of Shakespeare,* pointing out that ‘Spain went into decline and Lope was not translated. The whole of Shakespeare has been translated into a score of languages; less than ten per cent of Lope’s surviving plays has ever been translated into English.’ According to Bate, the decline of Spain as a political power led to the failure of Vega de Lope to survive as a ‘great world writer’.

While the English empire expanded, and took Shakespeare to its colonies, Lope became less and less wellknown.

2.15 Does Shakespeare teach values?

The second traditionalist claim I discussed was that texts transmit universal values applicable to all people at all times ('not for an age, but for all time'). The cultural materialists oppose this, saying that the time and place in which works were written and are being read are vitally important. A great work isn't 'neutrally' great, but has been acclaimed as great for certain reasons. A cultural materialist might ask, suspiciously, why any particular judgement was made at any particular time, or why that play was popular at that historical moment. One example of this is the popularity of *Henry V*. Interpreted as a patriotic play celebrating British victories abroad in adversity, it was (unsurprisingly) very popular during World War II. Where a traditionalist might argue that Shakespeare speaks to everyone, a cultural materialist argues that class, ethnicity, gender, age, education and so on make a great deal of difference. No text can speak in the same way to everybody: some people might even say the text doesn't speak to them at all.

For a cultural materialist, it is no surprise that both people on the Right and the Left can find their values reflected in Shakespeare. They argue that there is no one 'right' meaning in Shakespeare: we each read into the plays what we will, depending on our world-views. What is interesting to the cultural materialists, if there is no essential meaning or universal value to be sought, is the way Shakespeare's plays are *used:* plays can be used to transmit views, as well as reflecting them. In his very accessible and witty books *That Shakesperian Rag* and *Meaning by Shakespeare,* Terry Hawkes, a leading

figure in this movement, argues that there is no ‘real’ Shakespeare, and his plays are not ‘the repository, guarantee and chief distributor next to God of unchanging truths’. ‘Shakespeare’ is only the name for a cultural tool to convince people of a series of ideas. As an institution, Shakespeare has a great deal of authority—if someone wishes to persuade you of an idea, calling on Shakespeare as evidence seems to give that idea more strength.

Even more interesting is Hawkes’ idea that the ‘institutionalisation’ of Shakespeare makes the plays into ciphers. In *Reinventing Shakespeare,* Gary Taylor compares Shakespeare to a black hole:

Shakespeare himself no longer transmits visible light: his stellar energies have been trapped within the gravity well of this own reputation. We find in Shakespeare only what we bring to him or what others have left behind; he gives us back our own values.

For Taylor, all the work done on Shakespeare by academics, teachers, critics, students, theatre directors, actors, film-makers and so on has obliterated Shakespeare, and what is left is merely a reflection of their own values. Sometimes it seems that Shakespeare is so much part of our society that we don’t even need to read his plays: you can see a film of *Romeo and Juliet* and it will give you an idea of what it’s about. You may feel you know the play, but in fact you have seen someone’s interpretation of the text, with issues emphasised by the director, because those were important to her or him. If this is the case, you are learning more about the director’s values than you are about Shakespeare’s play. And if you then read the original text, it may well be harder to interpret it another way, once you have certain ideas—

presuppositions —in your mind. There is so much talk about Shakespeare, and so many ideas about the plays crop up in everyday English life, that it is perhaps impossible to think about the text itself rather than what people have said about it.

One important example of this is the way in which Shakespeare— the Institution—is used as a national symbol. Praise has been heaped on Shakespeare for describing the 'English' spirit (paradoxically, this usually occurs at the same time as praising him for being 'universal'). The *Royal* Shakespeare Company is identified with the monarch, the Head of State, and so with the rest of the United Kingdom. A speech from *Richard II* (Act II, scene i), where England is described as This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, This other Eden, demiparadise is regularly taken completely out of its context and used, with swelling music, in advertisements and in party political broadcasts to help raise a patriotic fervour. Admiring Shakespeare creates a 'we', a sense of shared identity, and to dislike Shakespeare is seen almost as a declaration that you are not 'one of us' and not 'patriotic'. Teaching Shakespeare, the national poet, conveys (somebody's) idea of 'Englishness'. You might also notice that lots of guides to Shakespeare use 'we' throughout—'through studying Shakespeare *we* learn' and '*we* need look no further'. This seems innocent enough, but any 'we' ('us here') needs a 'they' ('them over there') in order to define itself: Shakespeare is used as a key tool of that definition. It may be wise to wonder about who this 'we' —teachers, students, academics, the government—actually is and what other ideas this 'we' might be passing on to you. This is not to say that the 'we' has always to be elitist. Indeed, in *The Genius of Shakespeare,* Jonathan Bate argues that hakespeare has been used

as subversive anti-elitist force. As an example, he cites a version of *The Tempest* by the Martinique-born writer, Aimé Césaire (b. 1913). In this version, from 1968, the play is retold from the point of view of the slave Caliban. The 'wise old man', Prospero, is seen as a totalitarian slave-owner. Shakespeare here is being used to oppose racism and highlight Europe's slaveowning past.

Another case of Shakespeare reflecting values is the link made between class, education and Shakespeare. For example, a critic called David Hornbrook writes that, for most people, Shakespeare 'is inescapably associated with social snobbery'. Students (especially in school) who enjoy Shakespeare are usually the 'academic' ones, the 'literary A stream'. As this is usually a minority of students, Shakespeare is thus seen as elitist. The central role of Shakespeare in the examination system and its links with success and rewards in education leads to an understanding that Shakespeare divides the good from the bad. Knowing about Shakespeare is a badge of admission into a certain group. It is because the institution of Shakespeare divides as much as it unifies that Fay Weldon's image of Shakespeare as a castle is soapt—a castle means security for those living within, but is imposing and even threatening to those outside. Medieval rulers built castles as a sign of ownership and authority, and aimed to frighten their subjects into submission.

2.16 Does Shakespeare have a universal appeal?

Cultural materialists also question the traditionalists' third supposition—that Shakespeare has universal appeal. I have already quoted the journalist James Woods and his belief that it 'is difficult to watch *King Lear* in a theatre and not hear people crying'. In reply, John Yandell writes that the 'reality is,

though, that it is very easy to find performances of *Lear* at which no-one cries, at this or any other moment'. Does everybody even understand Shakespeare the first time they read him, let alone have a strong response? There are, as might be expected, formidable resources for helping to teach Shakespeare's plays at A level, on Access courses and beyond. One example is *Secondary School Shakespeare: Classroom Practice,* edited by Rex Gibson, the director of the effective and useful 'Shakespeare in Schools' project, which aims to bring Shakespeare to life in school. It is full of suggestions and ideas for teaching Shakespeare's plays. Throughout, 'Shakespeare' is invoked: 'Shakespeare isn't neutral'; 'Begin Shakespeare early'; 'How to begin Shakespeare'. Notice how the word 'Shakespeare' is almost a verb and a noun in some of these cases. In the last example, it could mean 'how to begin *to study* Shakespeare and his plays', or 'how to begin *to Shakespeare*'. It ends with an entreaty, 'Trust the students— and trust Shakespeare'. Shakespeare sounds more like 'Disney' or 'Coca-Cola' or 'God' than a 400-year-old playwright. The paradox is, of course, that if Shakespeare did speak to everybody all these efforts to make his work seem accessible and exciting simply wouldn't be necessary. This is not to say that everything you study should come easily, but rather that if it doesn't come easily it may not speak to everyone.

For the cultural materialists, then, it is impossible to get to a 'real' Shakespeare. Moreover, Shakespeare the Institution is never innocent or neutral. More than any other name, more than any other series of literary texts, Shakespeare is *used*. On top of this, he has not even always been considered 'the best' and his plays may only have survived because of historical chance.

2.17 The effects of this debate on studying Shakespeare

These academic arguments about Shakespeare's reputation and the way in which the plays are understood have direct effects on the way you *do* Shakespeare. The United Kingdom National Curriculum takes for granted the 'traditionalist' understanding of Shakespeare. For example, it suggests that students 'should discuss the themes, settings, characters and literary style' of the plays. This is usually translated into studying Shakespeare through plot, character and themes, as any A-level study guide will show. The plot is studied because it is the easiest to understand. The characters are studied because it is assumed that Shakespeare still 'speaks' to us through the characters. And the themes are studied not just because 'doing English' has traditionally concentrated on finding the 'message' in a text, but also because the themes of Shakespeare are 'universal' and so reveal 'universal values'.

However, the cultural-materialist viewpoint brings with it a whole range of fascinating new questions you could use to approach Shakespeare. Some of these questions might focus on how Shakespeare's plays are used—Why do productions of his plays differ? What lies behind the differences in film versions of the plays? Others might explore the cultural power of Shakespeare—Why are quotations from Shakespeare found throughout the British press? Why do so many novels, from all genres, use Shakespearean quotations as titles? Other questions might focus on the editions themselves—should editors modernise the spelling of the plays or leave it in 'the original'? What is at stake in this choice? Why do teachers tell you to read one edition rather than another?

In relation to the plays themselves, there is an even wider range of questions. In a book for teachers by Susan Leach called *Shakespeare in the Classroom,* the author suggests the following examples:

- Who holds the power in the play?
- What is the economic basis of the play?
- Is the power held/obeyed/challenged/overthrown?
- What is the framework within which the plays operate?
- Is it possible to make easy judgements about the behaviours of any character?
- How does gender work in the play?
- How are women presented?

These questions, which don't take the greatness of Shakespeare or the universal values of his plays for granted, move a long way from the familiar trinity of plot/character/themes.

Exploring this debate shows that thinking about what we read, like thinking about how we read, leads to all sorts of questions about how we see the world. Asking 'Why study Shakespeare?' leads directly into questions about the relationship between art and politics, between literature and history, and is interwoven with important issues like gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and national identity. Despite being opposed to the traditionalist view, the cultural-materialist approach doesn't necessarily argue that Shakespeare isn't worth studying, or that all artistic values are relative: but it does insist that it's worth questioning assumptions about the poet and the plays. As everybody uses the institution of Shakespeare—from the government to A level examiners, to the writers of *Star Trek*—it's almost impossible to avoid some contact with it. However, it is vital not just to assume Shakespeare's greatness but also to

think about how we construct it. What is at issue is not just the plays but *how we look* at the plays. Meanwhile, the debate goes on— Castle Shakespeare is under constant siege.

2.18 Previous Studies

As far as this portion of the work is concerned most work of Shakespeare has been done abroad. Books, theories and treatises were compiled in England and Western Europe in general. Much of the adaptations in this chapter can be taken to solidify this fact.

Some have written about Macbeth in Shakespeare's career others Macbeth in historical context. Shakespeare began his work as an actor and playwright in London at the end of the 1580s or early 1590s. During the first decade he concentrated mostly on romantic comedies and on plays based on English history; around the turn of the seventeenth century, he turns towards tragedy and thence to a group of comedies at the end of his career sometimes called romances. Macbeth comes from the last quarter of Shakespeare's writing career. He probably wrote it in 1606 (see below for the particular echoes of contemporary events in the play). In chronological terms it comes amid other tragedies including King Lear and Anthony and Cleopatra, after Hamlet and Othello and before Coriolanus, the last of Shakespeare's tragedies before he moves to the romances.

Summary

- Shakespeare has become an institution, not only in literature but in British cultural life. It’s almost impossible to avoid the institution of Shakespeare.
- The ‘traditionalists’ argue that Shakespeare should be studied because of the aesthetic worth of his work, because he communicates values shared by everyone and because he has universal appeal.

The ‘cultural materialists’ are more interested in the way the institution of Shakespeare is related to politics and history.

They argue that he is considered ‘the best’ through historical chance, that the values we see in Shakespeare depend upon our own ideas, or those of others who ‘use’ the Institution, and that the plays do not speak to everyone.

Cultural materialists argue that ‘Shakespeare’ is only the name for a key cultural tool used to convince people of a series of ideas. This tool is often used to divide people. Whichever approach you agree with, the debate shows the importance of thinking about how you look at Shakespeare’s work.

Chapter Three Methodology

3.0 Descriptive analytic

The most appropriate approach for the literary genre is the analytical descriptive approach which readily addresses the language of the author and the different types of figure of speech used to convey their message. Readers encountering Shakespeare for the first time usually find Early Modern English difficult to understand. Yet rather than serving as a barrier to Shakespeare, the richness of this language should form part of our appreciation of the Bard.

One of the first things readers usually notice about the language is the use of pronouns. Like the King James Version of the Bible, Shakespeare's pronouns are slightly different from our own and can cause confusion. Words like "thou" (you), "thee" and "ye" (objective cases of you), and "thy" and "thine" (your/yours) appear throughout Shakespeare's plays. You may need a little time to get used to these changes. You can find the definitions for other words

that commonly cause confusion in the glossary column on the right side of each page in this edition.

3.1 Iambic pentameter

Though Shakespeare sometimes wrote in prose, he wrote most of his plays in poetry, specifically blank verse. Blank verse consists of lines in unrhymed *iambic pentameter*. *Iambic* refers to the stress patterns of the line. An *iamb* is an element of sound that consists of two beats — the first unstressed (da) and the second stressed (DA). A good example of an iambic line is Hamlet's famous line "To be or not to be," in which you do not stress "to," "or," and "to," but you do stress "be," "not," and "be." *Pentameter* refers to the *meter* or number of stressed syllables in a line. *Penta*-meter has five stressed syllables. Thus, Romeo's line "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?" (II.2.2) is a good example of an iambic pentameter line.

3.2 Wordplay

Shakespeare's language is also verbally rich because he, along with many dramatists of his period, had a fondness for wordplay. This wordplay often takes the forms of double meanings, called *puns*, where a word can mean more than one thing in a given context. Shakespeare often employs these puns as a way of illustrating the distance between what is on the surface — *apparent* meanings — and what meanings lie underneath. Though recognizing these puns may be difficult at first, the glosses in the right-hand column point many of them out to you.

If you are encountering Shakespeare's plays for the first time, the following reading tips may help ease you into the text. Shakespeare's lines were meant to be spoken; therefore, reading them aloud or speaking them should help with comprehension. Also, though most of the lines are poetic, do not forget to read complete sentences — move from period to period as well as from line to line.

Although Shakespeare's language can be difficult at first, the rewards of immersing yourself in the richness and fluidity of the lines are immeasurable.

3.3 Early Modern England

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) lived during a period in England's history that people have generally referred to as the English Renaissance. The term *renaissance*, meaning rebirth, was applied to this period of English history as a way of celebrating what was perceived as the rapid development of art, literature, science, and politics: in many ways, the rebirth of classical Rome.

Recently, scholars have challenged the name "English Renaissance" on two grounds. First, some scholars argue that the term should not be used because women did not share in the advancements of English culture during this time period; their legal status was still below that of men. Second, other scholars have challenged the basic notion that this period saw a sudden explosion of culture. A rebirth of civilization suggests that the previous period of time was not civilized. This second group of scholars sees a much more gradual transition between the Middle Ages and Shakespeare's time.

Some people use the terms *Elizabethan* and *Jacobean* when referring to periods of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These terms correspond to the reigns of Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and James I (1603–1625). The problem with these terms is that they do not cover large spans of time; for example, Shakespeare's life and career span both monarchies. Scholars are now beginning to replace Renaissance with the term Early Modern when referring to this time period, but people still use both terms interchangeably. The term *Early Modern* recognizes that this period established many of the foundations of our modern culture. Though critics still disagree about the exact dates of the period, in general, the dates range from 1450 to 1750. Thus, Shakespeare's life clearly falls within the Early Modern period.

Shakespeare's plays live on in our culture, but we must remember that Shakespeare's culture differed greatly from our own. Though his understanding of human nature and relationships seems to apply to our modern lives, we must try to understand the world he lived in so we can better understand his plays. This introduction helps you do just that. It examines the intellectual, religious, political, and social contexts of Shakespeare's work before turning to the importance of the theatre and the printing press.

3.4 Intellectual context

In general, people in Early Modern England looked at the universe, the human body, and science very differently from the way we do. But while we do not share their same beliefs, we must not think of people during Shakespeare's time as lacking in intelligence or education. Discoveries made during the Early Modern period concerning the universe and the human body provides the basis of modern science.

3.5 Cosmology

One subject we view very differently than Early Modern thinkers is cosmology. Shakespeare's contemporaries believed in the astronomy of Ptolemy, an intellectual from Alexandria in the second century A.D. Ptolemy thought that the earth stood at the center of the universe, surrounded by nine concentric rings. The celestial bodies circled the earth in the following order: the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the stars. The entire system was controlled by the *primum mobile*, or Prime Mover**,** which initiated and maintained the movement of the celestial bodies**.** No one had yet discovered the last three planets in our solar system, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus published his theory of a sun-based solar system, in which the sun stood at the center and the planets revolved around

it. Though this theory appeared prior to Shakespeare's birth, people didn't really start to change their minds until 1610, when Galileo used his telescope to confirm Copernicus's theory. David Bevington asserts in the general introduction to his edition of Shakespeare's works that during most of Shakespeare's writing career, the cosmology of the universe was in question, and this sense of uncertainty influences some of his plays.

3.6 Universal hierarchy

Closely related to Ptolemy's hierarchical view of the universe is a hierarchical conception of the earth (sometimes referred to as the Chain of Being). During the Early Modern period, many people believed that all of creation was organized hierarchically. God existed at the top, followed by the angels, men, women, animals, plants, and rocks. (Because all women were thought to exist below all men on the chain, we can easily imagine the confusion that Elizabeth I caused when she became queen of England. She was literally "out of order," an expression that still exists in our society.) Though the concept of this hierarchy is a useful one when beginning to study Shakespeare, keep in mind that distinctions in this hierarchical view were not always clear and that we should not reduce all Early Modern thinking to a simple chain.

3.7 Elements and humors

The belief in a hierarchical scheme of existence created a comforting sense of order and balance that carried over into science as well. Shakespeare's contemporaries generally accepted that four different elements composed everything in the universe: earth, air, water, and fire. People associated these four elements with four qualities of being. These qualities — hot, cold, moist, and dry — appeared in different combinations in the elements. For example,

air was hot and moist; water was cold and moist; earth was cold and dry; and fire was hot and dry.

In addition, people believed that the human body contained all four elements in the form of *humors* — blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile — each of which corresponded to an element. Blood corresponded to air (hot and moist), phlegm to water (cold and moist), yellow bile to fire (hot and dry), and black bile to earth (cold and dry). When someone was sick, physicians generally believed that the patient's humors were not in the proper balance. For example, if someone were diagnosed with an abundance of blood, the physician would bleed the patient (using leeches or cutting the skin) in order to restore the balance.

Shakespeare's contemporaries also believed that the humors determined personality and temperament. If a person's dominant humor was blood, he was considered light-hearted. If dominated by yellow bile (or choler), that person was irritable. The dominance of phlegm led a person to be dull and kind. And if black bile prevailed, he was melancholy or sad. Thus, people of Early Modern England often used the humors to explain behavior and emotional outbursts. Throughout Shakespeare's plays, he uses the concept of the humors to define and explain various characters.

3.8 Religious context

Shakespeare lived in an England full of religious uncertainty and dispute. From the Protestant Reformation to the translation of the Bible into English, the Early Modern era is punctuated with events that have greatly influenced modern religious beliefs.

3.9 The Reformation

Until the Protestant Reformation, the only Christian church in Europe was the Catholic, or "universal," church. Beginning in the early sixteenth century,

religious thinkers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, who claimed that the Roman Catholic Church had become corrupt and was no longer following the word of God, began what has become known as the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants ("protestors") believed in salvation by faith rather than works. They also believed in the primacy of the Bible and advocated giving all people access to reading the Bible.

Many English people initially resisted Protestant ideas. However, the Reformation in England began in 1527 during the reign of Henry VIII, prior to Shakespeare's birth. In that year, Henry VIII decided to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, for her failure to produce a male heir. (Only one of their children, Mary, survived past infancy.) Rome denied Henry's petitions for a divorce, forcing him to divorce Catherine without the Church's approval, which he did in 1533.

3.10 The Act of Supremacy

The following year, the Pope excommunicated Henry VIII while Parliament confirmed his divorce and the legitimacy of his new marriage through the *Act of Succession*. Later in 1534, Parliament passed the *Act of Supremacy*, naming Henry the "Supreme Head of the Church in England." Henry persecuted both radical Protestant reformers and Catholics who remained loyal to Rome.

Henry VIII's death in 1547 brought Edward VI, his 10-year-old son by Jane Seymour (the king's third wife), to the throne. This succession gave Protestant reformers the chance to solidify their break with the Catholic Church. During Edward's reign, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer established the foundation for the Anglican Church through his 42 articles of religion. He also wrote the first *Book of Common Prayer*, adopted in 1549, which was the official text for worship services in England.

3.11 Bloody Mary

Catholics continued to be persecuted until 1553, when the sickly Edward VI died and was succeeded by Mary, his half-sister and the Catholic daughter of Catherine of Aragon. The reign of Mary witnessed the reversal of religion in England through the restoration of Catholic authority and obedience to Rome. Protestants were executed in large numbers, which earned the monarch the nickname *Bloody Mary*. Many Protestants fled to mainland Europe to escape persecution. Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, outwardly complied with the mandated
Catholicism during her half-sister Mary's reign, but she restored Protestantism when she took the throne in 1558 after Mary's death. Thus, in the space of single decade, England's throne passed from Protestant to Catholic to Protestant, with each change carrying serious and deadly consequences. Though Elizabeth reigned in relative peace from 1558 to her death in 1603, religion was still a serious concern for her subjects. During Shakespeare's life, a great deal of religious dissent existed in England.

Many Catholics, who remained loyal to Rome and their church, were persecuted for their beliefs. At the other end of the spectrum, the Puritans were persecuted for their belief that the Reformation was not complete. (The English pejoratively applied the term *Puritan* to religious groups that wanted to continue purifying the English church by such measures as removing the *episcopacy,* or the structure of bishops.)

3.12The Great Bible

One thing agreed upon by both the Anglicans and Puritans was the importance of a Bible written in English. Translated by William Tyndale in 1525, the first authorized Bible in English, published in 1539, was known as the Great Bible.

This Bible was later revised during Elizabeth's reign into what was known as the Bishop's Bible. As Stephen Greenblatt points out in his introduction to the *Norton Shakespeare*, Shakespeare would probably have been familiar with both the Bishop's Bible, heard aloud in Mass, and the Geneva Bible, which was written by English exiles in Geneva. The last authorized Bible produced during Shakespeare's lifetime came within the last decade of his life when James I's commissioned edition, known as the King James Bible, appeared in 1611.

3.13 Political context

Politics and religion were closely related in Shakespeare's England. Both of the monarchs under whom Shakespeare lived had to deal with religious and political dissenters.

3.14 Elizabeth I

Despite being a Protestant, Elizabeth I tried to take a middle road on the religious question. She allowed Catholics to practice their religion in private as long as they outwardly appeared Anglican and remained loyal to the throne. Elizabeth's monarchy was one of absolute supremacy. Believing in the divine right of kings, she styled herself as being appointed by God to rule England. To oppose the Queen's will was the equivalent of opposing God's will. Known as *passive obedience*, this doctrine did not allow any opposition even to a tyrannical monarch because God had appointed the king or queen for reasons unknown to His subjects on earth. However, as Bevington notes, Elizabeth's power was not as absolute as her rhetoric suggested. Parliament, already well established in England, reserved some power, such as the authority to levy taxes, for itself.

Elizabeth I lived in a society that restricted women from possessing any political or personal autonomy and power. As queen, Elizabeth violated and

called into question many of the prejudices and practices against women. In a way, her society forced her to "overcome" her sex in order to rule effectively. However, her position did nothing to increase the status of women in England. One of the rhetorical strategies that Elizabeth adopted in order to rule effectively was to separate her position as monarch of England from her natural body — to separate her *body politic* from her *body natural*. In addition, throughout her reign, Elizabeth brilliantly negotiated between domestic and foreign factions — some of whom were anxious about a female monarch and wanted her to marry — appeasing both sides without ever committing to one. She remained unmarried throughout her 45-year reign, partially by styling herself as the Virgin Queen whose purity represented England herself. Her refusal to marry and her habit of hinting and promising marriage with suitors both foreign and domestic helped Elizabeth maintain internal and external peace. Not marrying allowed her to retain her independence, but it left the succession of the English throne in question. In 1603, on her deathbed, she named James VI, King of Scotland and son of her cousin Mary, as her successor.

3.15 Social context

Shakespeare's England divided itself roughly into two social classes: the aristocrats (or nobility) and everyone else. The primary distinctions between these two classes were ancestry, wealth, and power. Simply put, the aristocrats were the only ones who possessed all three.

Aristocrats were born with their wealth, but the growth of trade and the development of skilled professions began to provide wealth for those not born with it. Although the notion of a middle class did not begin to develop until after Shakespeare's death, the possibility of some social mobility did exist in

Early Modern England. Shakespeare himself used the wealth gained from the theatre to move into the lower ranks of the aristocracy by securing a coat of arms for his family.

Shakespeare was not unique in this movement, but not all people received the opportunity to increase their social status. Members of the aristocracy feared this social movement and, as a result, promoted harsh laws of apprenticeship and fashion, restricting certain styles of dress and material. These laws dictated that only the aristocracy could wear certain articles of clothing, colors, and materials. Though enforcement was a difficult task, the Early Modern aristocracy considered dressing above one's station a moral and ethical violation.

Chapter Four Discussion, and Results

4.0 Overview

This chapter focuses on further analyzing some of the elements that constitute the basic theme of the research. In this present research it is the character of Lady Macbeth that matter most as she and her husband are the tragic heroes.

4.1 The status of women

The legal status of women did not allow them much public or private autonomy. English society functioned on a system of patriarchy and hierarchy (see "Universal hierarchy" earlier in this introduction), which means that men controlled society beginning with the individual family. In fact, the family metaphorically corresponded to the state. For example, the husband was the king of his family. His authority to control his family was absolute and based on divine right, similar to that of the country's king. People also saw the family itself differently than today, considering apprentices and servants part of the whole family.

The practice of *primogeniture* — a system of inheritance that passed all of a family's wealth through the first male child — accompanied this system of patriarchy. Thus, women did not generally inherit their family's wealth and titles. In the absence of a male heir, some women, such as Queen Elizabeth, did. But after women married, they lost almost all of their already limited legal rights, such as the right to inherit, to own property, and to sign contracts. In all likelihood, Elizabeth I would have lost much of her power and authority if she had married.

Furthermore, women did not generally receive an education and could not enter certain professions, including acting. Society relegated women to the domestic sphere of the home. In *Macbeth,* Shakespeare explores questions about the roles of women through the character of Lady Macbeth, who is not content to take the traditional subjugated role of a wife. Lady Macbeth plays a very assertive and active role in her marriage and in the plot of the play.

4.2 Daily life

Daily life in Early Modern England began before sun-up — exactly how early depended on one's station in life. A servant's responsibilities usually included preparing the house for the day. Families usually possessed limited living space. Even among wealthy families, multiple family members tended to share a small number of rooms, suggesting that privacy may not have been important or practical.

Working through the morning, Elizabethans usually had lunch about noon. This midday meal was the primary meal of the day, much like dinner is for modern families. The workday usually ended around sundown or 5 p.m., depending on the season. Before an early bedtime, Elizabethans usually ate a light repast and then settled in for a couple of hours of reading (if the family members were literate and could bear the high cost of books) or socializing.

4.3Mortality rates

Mortality rates in Early Modern England were high compared to our standards, especially among infants. Infection and disease ran rampant because physicians did not realize the need for antiseptics and sterile equipment. As a result, communicable diseases often spread very rapidly in cities, particularly London.

In addition, the bubonic plague frequently ravaged England, with two major outbreaks — from 1592–1594 and in 1603 — occurring during
Shakespeare's lifetime. People did not understand the plague and generally perceived it as God's punishment. (We now know that the plague was spread by fleas and could not be spread directly from human to human.) Without a cure or an understanding of what transmitted the disease, physicians could do nothing to stop the thousands of deaths that resulted from each outbreak. These outbreaks had a direct effect on Shakespeare's career, because the government often closed the theatres in an effort to impede the spread of the disease.

4.4 London life

In the sixteenth century, London, though small compared to modern cities, was the largest city of Europe, with a population of about 200,000 inhabitants in the city and surrounding suburbs. London was a crowded city without a sewer system, which facilitated epidemics such as the plague. In addition, crime rates were high in the city due to inefficient law enforcement and the lack of street lighting.

Despite these drawbacks, London was the cultural, political, and social heart of England. As the home of the monarchy and most of England's trade, London was a bustling metropolis. Not surprisingly, a young Shakespeare moved to London to begin his professional career.

4.5The theatre

Most theatres were not actually located within the city of London. Rather, theatre owners built them on the South bank of the Thames River (in Southwark) across from the city in order to avoid the strict regulations that applied within the city's walls. These restrictions stemmed from a mistrust of public performances as locations of plague and riotous behavior. Furthermore,

because theatre performances took place during the day, they took laborers away from their jobs. Opposition to the theatres also came from Puritans who believed that they fostered immorality.
Therefore, theatres moved out of the city, to areas near other sites of restricted activities, such as dog fighting, bear- and bull-baiting, and prostitution.

4.6 Performance spaces

Theatres in Early Modern England were quite different from our modern facilities. They were usually open-air, relying heavily on natural light and good weather. The rectangular stage extended out into an area that people called the *pit* — a circular, uncovered area about 70 feet in diameter. Audience members had two choices when purchasing admission to a theatre. Admission to the pit, where the lower classes (or *groundlings*) stood for the performances, was the cheaper option. People of wealth could purchase a seat in one of the three covered tiers of seats that ringed the pit. At full capacity, a public theatre in Early Modern England could hold between 2,000 and 3,000 people.
The stage, which projected into the pit and was raised about five feet above it, had a covered portion called the *heavens*. The heavens enclosed theatrical equipment for lowering and raising actors to and from the stage. A trapdoor in the middle of stage provided theatrical graves for characters such as Ophelia in *Hamlet* and also allowed ghosts, such as Banquo in *Macbeth*, to rise from the earth. A wall separated the back of the stage from the actors' dressing room, known as the *tiring house*. At each end of the wall stood a door for major entrances and exits. Above the wall and doors stood a gallery directly above the stage, reserved for the wealthiest spectators. Actors occasionally used this area when a performance called for a difference in height — for example, to represent Juliet's balcony or the walls of a besieged city. A good

example of this type of influenced Shakespeare's and his contemporary playwrights' thematic explorations of cross-dressing. Though historians have managed to reconstruct the appearance of the Early Modern theatre, such as the recent construction of the Globe in London, much of the information regarding how plays were performed during this era has been lost. Scholars of Early Modern theatre have turned to the scant external and internal stage directions in manuscripts in an effort to find these answers. While a hindrance for modern critics and scholars, the lack of detail about Early Modern performances has allowed modern directors and actors a great deal of flexibility and room to be creative.

4.7**Actors and staging**

Performances in Shakespeare's England do not appear to have employed scenery. However, theatre companies developed their costumes with great care and expense. In fact, a playing company's costumes were its most valuable items. These extravagant costumes were the object of much controversy because some aristocrats feared that the actors could use them to disguise their social status on the streets of London. Costumes also disguised a player's gender. All actors on the stage during Shakespeare's lifetime were men. Young boys whose voices had not reached maturity played female parts.

4.8The printing press

If not for the printing press, many Early Modern plays may not have survived until today. In Shakespeare's time, printers produced all books by *sheet*— a single large piece of paper that the printer would fold in order to produce the desired book size. For example, a folio required folding the sheet once, a quarto four times, an octavo eight, and so on. Sheets would be printed one side at a time; thus, printers had to simultaneously print multiple nonconsecutive pages.

In order to estimate what section of the text would be on each page, the printer would *cast off* copy. After the printer made these estimates, *compositors* would set the type upside down, letter by letter. This process of setting type produced textual errors, some of which a proofreader would catch. When a proofreader found an error, the compositors would fix the piece or pieces of type. Printers called corrections made after printing began *stop-press* corrections because they literally had to stop the press to fix the error. Because of the high cost of paper, printers would still sell the sheets printed before they made the correction.

Printers placed frames of text in the bed of the printing press and used them to imprint the paper.

They then folded and grouped the sheets of paper into gatherings, after which the pages were ready for sale. The buyer had the option of getting the new play bound.

The printing process was crucial to the preservation of Shakespeare's works, but the printing of drama in Early Modern England was not a standardized practice. Many of the first editions of

Shakespeare's plays appear in quarto format and, until recently, scholars regarded them as "corrupt."

In fact, scholars still debate how close a relationship exists between what appeared on the stage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and what appears on the printed page. The inconsistent and scant appearance of stage directions, for example, makes it difficult to determine how close this relationship was.

We know that the practice of the theatre allowed the alteration of plays by a variety of hands other than the author's, further complicating any efforts to extract what a playwright wrote and what was changed by either the players, the printers, or the government censors. Theatre was a collaborative environment. Rather than lament our inability to determine authorship and what exactly Shakespeare wrote, we should work to understand this collaborative nature and learn from it.

Shakespeare wrote his plays for the stage, and the existing published texts reflect the collaborative nature of the theater as well as the unavoidable changes made during the printing process. A play's first written version would have been the author's *foul papers*, which invariably consisted of blotted lines and revised text. From there, a scribe would recopy the play and produce a *fair copy*. The theatre manager would then copy out and annotate this copy into a playbook (what people today call a *promptbook*).

At this point, scrolls of individual parts were copied out for actors to memorize. (Due to the high cost of paper, theatre companies could not afford to provide their actors with a complete copy of the play.) The government required the company to send the playbook to the Master of the Revels, the government official who would make any necessary changes or mark any passages considered unacceptable for performance.

Printers could have used any one of these copies to print a play. We cannot determine whether a printer used the author's version, the modified theatrical version, the censored version, or a combination when printing a given play. Refer back to the "Publications" section of the "Introduction to William

Shakespeare" for further discussion of the impact printing practices have on our understanding of Shakespeare's works.

Passing through many of the stages explained above, *Macbeth* was not published until the 1623 First Folio — seven years after Shakespeare's death. The published play is thought to be a revision of the original 1606 version penned by Shakespeare. Scholars have asserted that a fellow playwright, very possibly Thomas Middleton, added at least two songs and some dialogue to the work. See the following "Introduction to *Macbeth"* for a more detailed account of these additions.

4.9 Introducing Macbeth

Macbeth is among the shortest and most intense of Shakespeare's plays, as well as one of the best known and most widely recognized. *Macbeth* is generally viewed as one of Shakespeare's four great tragedies, in addition to *Hamlet, Othello,* and *King Lear*. The play's penetrating exploration of human nature, ambition, evil, gender, human relationships, and kingship — along with the periodic appearance of supernatural forces — has captivated audiences and critics for centuries.

Like all of Shakespeare's works, *Macbeth* is an incredibly rich and rewarding play to read and study. It was written more than 400 years ago, so this introduction provides cultural, theatrical, and publication contexts. The introduction also highlights many of the themes and concepts that Shakespeare explores.

4.10 Shakespeare's tragedies

Although Shakespeare wrote many comedies and history plays, he seems to be best known for his tragedies. A tragedy usually depicts the fall of a man of high station or class, such as a king, a prince, or a general. Occasionally, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, it portrays the fall of a couple. Main characters in a tragedy can fall from power or fall from happiness, but they almost always die by the end of the play.

In a good tragedy, such as *Macbeth*, readers and audience members get pulled into the play by identifying with the protagonist, who is painted as a great and admirable person wielding considerable influence in society. Having established this point of identification, Shakespeare then leads his audience through the downfall of this character, involving the audience in the hero's pain and suffering, as well as his or her mistakes. This identification slowly separates as, through the course of the play, the audience gains more knowledge of the situation than the hero does. This distance and enlarged view allows the audience to foresee the hero's demise. Though no longer identifying with the hero, the audience is still trapped in the tension of the play and released only by the protagonist's death.

In most tragedies, the decline of the character arises from circumstances of the protagonist's own creation. Because tragic heroes are almost always responsible for their demise, critics and scholars sometimes identify their mistakes as stemming from some sort of *tragic flaw*, be it indecision, ambition, pride, or jealousy. Though Shakespeare's tragic heroes are complex and cannot be easily reduced to one abstract principle, identifying a character's tragic flaw can provide a wonderful place to begin studying the play.

4.11The rise and fall of Macbeth

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's fastest and most straight-forward tragedies in its portrayal of the rise and fall of Macbeth, a nobleman of Scotland who is also a successful military leader. Early in the play, he encounters three "weird sisters," usually referred to as witches. These witches refer to him by his current title, Thane of Glamis; then by a title that he is not yet aware of, Thane of Cawdor; and finally by a title that he does not yet possess, King of Scotland. When Macbeth later learns that he has been named Thane of Cawdor, he begins to believe that the weird sisters have the gift of prophecy. He then must decide between waiting patiently for the prophecy to come true or killing the current king, Duncan, and forcing it to come true. Prompted by his wife (and by the announcement that Malcolm, Duncan's son, is the heir to throne), Macbeth kills Duncan and becomes the King of Scotland.

Unfortunately for Macbeth, the witches' prophecy also indicated that although he would be king, his friend Banquo's descendents would establish a line of kings after Macbeth. (An apparition that Macbeth sees in Act IV, Scene 1 of the play indicates that Banquo's line stretches all the way to King James VI of Scotland, who became King James I of England during Shakespeare's lifetime.)

Threatened by Banquo's prophecy, Macbeth begins to behave like a tyrant, killing Banquo and trying to kill his son, Fleance. His paranoia takes over, and he begins to kill anyone who seems to pose a threat to his reign. Literally haunted by apparitions, Macbeth continues his horrific behavior until Malcolm returns with the help of Macduff, another Scottish nobleman, and support from England. Macbeth is killed, and at the play's end, Malcolm becomes king and restores Duncan's line to the Scottish throne. We do not see the witches' prophecy for Banquo come true, but because Fleance survives the

attempt against his life, the possibility exists that Banquo's line will someday assume the throne.

4.12 Historical sources of the story

Though *Macbeth* is not considered a history play, the title character is a Scottish historical figure. As we shall see when we look at its cultural context, this play also has intimate links with Early Modern England. Historically, Macbeth ruled as King of Scotland for 17 years, from 1040 to 1057. The accounts of this period in Scottish history vary. They all agree, however, that Macbeth gained the throne by killing King Duncan and lost the throne to Malcolm by being killed. Shakespeare relied upon these histories as well as other sources in the composition of this play. Specifically, he drew heavily from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587), but he may also have been familiar with George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historae* (1582).

Shakespeare deviates from these historical sources a great deal in his exploration of the themes of kingship, human nature, and evil. These alterations to the story include portraying the tragic hero in a more evil manner while painting Banquo (King James I's ancestor) in a more sympathetic light. For example, Holinshed's and Shakespeare's depictions of Duncan differ wildly. Historically, Duncan is described as a young, weak, and ineffective king. But Shakespeare's Duncan is an older, benevolent, influential, and virtuous king, whose murder is a crime against nature itself. Furthermore, in Holinshed's account, Banquo figures more prominently in Macbeth's ascension to the throne because he serves as Macbeth's accomplice in Duncan's murder. Shakespeare's Banquo maintains his loyalty to Duncan, telling Macbeth that he will help as long as it does not compromise this

loyalty: “So I lose none / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / My bosom franchis’d and allegiance clear, / I shall be counsell’d” (II.1.26–29).

In Shakespeare’s play, Macbeth’s descent into tyranny occurs over what seems a matter of weeks, and there is no mention of the ten years of peaceful rule that Scotland enjoyed under Macbeth. The final major alteration concerns Lady Macbeth, who figures very little in the historical accounts but is quite prominent in Shakespeare’s play. Lady Macbeth appears only once in Holinshed’s *Chronicles,* and her only action is to persuade her husband to commit *regicide* (the murder of a king). Critics have speculated that Shakespeare’s depiction of Duncan’s murder and Lady Macbeth’s active and ambitious role (drugging the servants and smearing them with blood) may be borrowed from Holinshed’s account of Captain Donwald and his wife’s murder of King Duffe. As we can see, in addition to revising historical sources, Shakespeare frequently integrated various accounts to construct one coherent story.

The revisions to the historical accounts of Macbeth are more easily understood when we understand the culture in which Shakespeare was writing. Pinpointing the date of composition for this tragedy will allow us to get a better glimpse at the play’s immediate context.

4.13 The birth of the play

The earliest published version of *Macbeth* appears in the First Folio in 1623, though many critics feel that this edition of the play is modified from the lost original. The first reference to a production of *Macbeth* pushes the play’s date back to 1611. A Jacobean playgoer named Simon Forman recorded in his *Book of Plays* that he saw this work performed on April 20, 1611 at the Globe theatre. Upon examining references to contemporary events and people,

however, critics have concluded that *Macbeth* was most likely written and first performed in 1606. In the intervening 17 years, the play was revised (around 1609), most likely by dramatist Thomas Middleton, who added some of the witches' songs in Act III, Scene 5 and Act IV, Scene 1. Middleton may also be responsible for other lines in the play, though we cannot be certain. Keep in mind, as explained in the "Introduction to Early Modern England," that a play belonged to the theatre company.

Therefore, revisions by other playwrights were common. Middleton's additions to *Macbeth* do not detract from the quality of Shakespeare's work; rather, they provide scholars and critics with opportunities to learn more about the ways in which plays were produced in Early Modern England.

4.14 The ascension of James I

The event that had the biggest impact on the 1606 production of *Macbeth* — and which may have been responsible for Shakespeare writing this play — is the ascension of King James VI of Scotland to the English throne, thus becoming King James I of England. In May 1603, shortly after he became king, James became the personal patron of Shakespeare's acting company, causing it to change names from the Lord Chamberlain's Men to the King's Men. This patronage provided many benefits to the theatrical company, including increased opportunities to perform at court and financial assistance when the theatres were closed because of plague. Because of this, some critics view the production of *Macbeth* a mere three years after James's ascension to the English throne as Shakespeare's tribute to his company's patron. Others have argued the opposite — that this play is more a criticism of King James than a tribute to him.

4.15 Divine right versus elected kingship

Regardless of Shakespeare's intentions toward the king, James and his beliefs play a large part in this play. James was supposedly a direct descendent of Banquo, and critics assert that in Macbeth's apparition of Banquo's royal descendents (in Act IV, Scene 1), James is the last king portrayed in the vision. As discussed in the "Introduction to Early Modern England," King James believed in the divine right of kings, which is the assertion that the king is God's emissary on Earth and that kingship is passed patrilineally through the father. This belief system led to the practice of *primogeniture*, which meant that a king's eldest son inherited the throne. In the eleventh century, Scotland changed the way it selected its kings. Prior to that time, kings were elected by a council of noblemen (or thanes). In the eleventh century, Scotland adopted the patrilineal system, so the throne was passed from father to eldest son. This historical information is important to our understanding of the play. After Macbeth kills Duncan, Malcolm and Donalbain fear for their lives and flee the country. Thus, Duncan's sons are suspected of playing an active role in their father's death. This implication and their absence leaves the throne available to Macbeth. In Act II, Scene 4, Macduff tells fellow nobleman Ross that Macbeth "is already nam'd, and gone to Scone / To be invested." That Macbeth is *named* king implies a reversion to the process of election to the throne.

These questions of kingship could be found in Shakespeare's England as well. Because Elizabeth did not marry, she never produced a male heir. This fact prompted anxieties and questions over succession in the minds of many people in Early Modern England. Without a male heir, Elizabeth named James VI of Scotland (who could trace his lineage to Henry VII, Elizabeth's grandfather)

as King of England on her deathbed. Though James's succession did not face much opposition, Shakespeare is clearly grappling with questions of kingship that were raised during James's succession of Elizabeth.

4.16 The Gunpowder Plot

Macbeth also mirrors a plot to assassinate King James that had been discovered in 1605 — a year before Shakespeare's play appeared on stage. This curtailed attempt at James's life is commonly referred to as the Gunpowder Plot, because officials found a large amount of gunpowder and iron bars in a basement below Parliament the day before King James was to personally open a new session. Under divine right, regicide was the worst crime possible. It is no coincidence that one of the most striking references to early seventeenth-century.

England in *Macbeth* appears directly after Macbeth kills Duncan. At the beginning of Act II, Scene 3, Macbeth's porter answers the knocking at Macbeth's gate that began in the previous scene. While complaining about the incessant pounding, the porter refers to the person knocking as an "equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale" (II.3.8–10). Modern editors and scholars, such as Stephen Greenblatt and David Bevington, assert that this line is a direct reference to the Jesuit thinker Henry Garnet. In addition to being executed for his participation in the Gunpowder Plot, Garnet wrote *A Treatise of Equivocation,* which provided a justification for lying. The treatise argued that a statement was not a lie if it could possibly be true from another perspective. Consequently, this reference is one of the ways in which modern editors have placed *Macbeth's* composition in 1606.

4.17 Focus on the supernatural

In addition to exploring theories of kingship in the play, Shakespeare also capitalized on James's interest in the supernatural. Though interest in witches

and the supernatural existed during Elizabeth's reign, James's fascination extended to a personal interaction with these forces.

News from Scotland (1591) recounts the trial of Scottish witches from the town of Forres. The witches allegedly had attempted to kill James while he was king of Scotland by trying to cause a shipwreck during his voyage to Denmark. The publication includes a woodcut of James, who had presided over the trial, personally interrogating the witches.

The weird sisters in *Macbeth* resemble these witches in their activity. Before Banquo and Macbeth encounter them in Act I, Scene 3, the weird sisters discuss sending tempestuous storms to a sailor's ship because his wife would not share her chestnuts with one of them. In addition, Banquo, just before he sees the weird sisters, asks Macbeth, "How far is't call'd to Forres?" (I.3.39). Thus, these weird sisters are linked to the witches in *News from Scotland* both by their behavior and their geographical location.

James himself wrote a work about witches called *Daemonologie* (1597). In this work, James discusses not only how witches operate and the extent of their power, but also their relationship to the Devil. According to James, the purpose of witches was to harm the king; thus, witchcraft was considered treason. Certainly, the witches in *Macbeth* wield considerable influence over the regicide of Duncan.

James also believed that witches were agents of the Devil who could bestow prophecies. Witches would use these prophecies to tempt the faith and virtue of men. Interestingly, the weird sisters tempt both Banquo and Macbeth in the play. Macbeth succumbs to his desires and ambitions while Banquo (supposedly James's ancestor) remains loyal and virtuous.

However, the presentation of the witches may not be as flattering to James as it appears. In his Bedford Cultural edition of the play, William C. Carroll notes

that under James's influence, the Scottish people believed in and hunted witches. The English, on the other hand, were slightly more skeptical about the existence of witches. Obviously, the presence of a king who believed in witches caused a stir in England.

The controversy over the existence of witches may be reflected in this play. As Greenblatt points out in his introduction to *Macbeth* in the *Norton Shakespeare*, while these weird sisters seem to figure prominently, only Banquo and Macbeth see them or know of their existence and their role in the rise of Macbeth to the throne of Scotland. This obscurity, some critics argue, pushes them to the margins of the play. Thus, Shakespeare presents their influence and even existence ambiguously. Some modern critics have even speculated that they might be a psychic projection by Macbeth, though this would not explain why Banquo sees them as well.

2.18 Themes explored

Though *Macbeth* may be one of Shakespeare's most topical plays, with its strong links to current events in Jacobean England, it also explores a wide variety of themes that do not necessarily relate to specific events. For instance, Shakespeare explores a great number of dichotomies — or paired opposites — such as good and evil, order and disorder, reason and emotion, and reality and illusion. Using these dichotomies, he investigates themes related to human nature, ambition, gender, and the family.

2.19 Virtue versus evil

Many of the major characters in this play are virtuous; the major exceptions are the Macbeths. Macbeth begins as an admirable character whose loyalty to Duncan and military prowess gain him the title of Thane of Cawdor. However, upon hearing the prophecy of the weird sisters, he begins to contemplate the murder of Duncan. His thoughts turn to "horrible imaginings" (I.3.139).

By using the word "horrible" to describe his thoughts of regicide, Macbeth alerts us that he is acutely aware of the nature of his actions. He acknowledges more than once that Duncan does not deserve to die. In his first true soliloquy, Macbeth imagines that Duncan's "virtues / Will plead like angels trumpet-tongu'd against / The deep damnation of his taking-off " (I.7.18–20).

After killing Duncan, Macbeth initially is haunted by the horror of his actions and regards himself with repugnance. But he soon becomes more callous as his murder of innocents continues with Macduff 's family. By the end of the play, his tyranny has reached its peak as he continues to destroy anyone who opposes him, including Young Siward. Through Macbeth's descent into tyranny, Shakespeare explores the power of evil and illustrates how it can use human ambition to consume a person.

Lady Macbeth presents a slightly different case study of evil. Like her husband, she clearly is not a virtuous character. But while Macbeth becomes increasingly evil and less sympathetic as the play progresses, Lady Macbeth moves in the opposite direction. In the early stages of the play, when Macbeth hedges about whether to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth convinces her indecisive husband to follow through with his plans. Greenblatt notes in his introduction to *Macbeth* in the *Norton Shakespeare* that she accomplishes this in two primary ways. First, she questions his masculinity by connecting his ability to murder Duncan with his manhood. She taunts her husband by asking him if he would prefer to "live a coward in thine own esteem"

(I.7.43).

Second, Lady Macbeth is rhetorically much more vicious than her husband in her beliefs and her determination. In a statement that is often cited to demonstrate the evil nature of Lady Macbeth, she claims that she would

willingly sacrifice her own child if she had sworn to do so. Despite their atrocity, these are only words. And despite being the primary force behind Macbeth's actions, Lady Macbeth ultimately seems to be more haunted by their deeds than Macbeth is. Unlike Macbeth, she cannot descend fully into evil.

After many murders have taken place, Lady Macbeth repeatedly sleepwalks, rubbing her hands in a vain effort to wash off a spot of blood that she sees continually. In exasperation, she asks, "[W]ill these hands ne'er be clean?" (V.1.38). Her mental struggles escalate, and Lady Macbeth eventually commits suicide, suggesting that her conscience provides her with a sort of redemption that Macbeth could never find.

4.20 Reason versus passion

During their debates over which course of action to take, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth use different persuasive strategies. Macbeth is very rational, contemplating the consequences and implications of his actions. He recognizes the political, ethical, and religious reasons why he should not commit regicide. In addition to jeopardizing his afterlife, Macbeth notes that regicide is a violation of Duncan's "double trust" that stems from Macbeth's bonds as a kinsman and as a subject (I.7.12).

Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, has a more passionate way of examining the pros and cons of killing Duncan. She is motivated by her feelings and uses emotional arguments to persuade her husband to commit the evil act. Interestingly, though she usesher zeal to convince her husband to kill Duncan, she adopts a detached and pragmatic view of their crimes after they are committed, while Macbeth becomes emotionally gripped with horror and repugnance. Lady Macbeth even returns the daggers to the king's bedchamber

and smears blood on his servants to implicate them in the crime. From her perspective, “what’s done is done” and need not be regretted
(III.2.12)

Despite this initial detachment from guilt, Lady Macbeth ultimately is unequipped to deal with the consequences of their actions. Conversely, Macbeth initially reacts emotionally with repugnance and remorse but later reasons that “blood will have blood” (III.4.122). Macbeth coldly deduces that he must continue to act villainously in order to maintain his crown. His continued villainy is accompanied by a deadening of emotions. Macbeth realizes that he will be unable to clean himself of the crime of regicide, saying that his hands could turn the green seas red (II.3.61–63). He reasons that, having chosen his course of action, “returning [would be] as tedious as go[ing] over” (III.4.138). The deadening of his emotions culminates in Act V when Macbeth greets news of his wife’s death with no outward grief, saying that “[s]he should have died hereafter” (V.5.17).

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.0 Overview

This thesis sets out to examine Lady Macbeth as a tragic hero of Shakespearean's tragedy Macbeth. It started with a thorough introduction of the overall research. It looked into the historical nature of the play as opposed to its genre as a tragedy. Though *Macbeth* is not considered a history play, the title character is a Scottish historical figure. As we shall see when we look at its cultural context, this play also has intimate links with Early Modern England. Historically, Macbeth ruled as King of Scotland for 17 years, from 1040 to 1057. The accounts of this period in Scottish history vary. They all agree, however, that Macbeth gained the throne by killing King Duncan and lost the throne to Malcolm by being killed. Shakespeare relied upon these histories as well as other sources in the composition of this play. Specifically, he drew heavily from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587), but he may also have been familiar with George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historae* (1582).

5.1 Summary (Characters)

Many of the major characters in this play are virtuous; the major exceptions are the Macbeths. Macbeth begins as an admirable character whose loyalty to Duncan and military prowess gain him the title of Thane of Cawdor. However, upon hearing the prophecy of the weird sisters, he begins to contemplate the murder of Duncan. His thoughts turn to "horrible imaginings"

By using the word "horrible" to describe his thoughts of regicide, Macbeth alerts us that he is acutely aware of the nature of his actions. He acknowledges more than once that Duncan does not deserve to die. In his first true soliloquy,

Macbeth imagines that Duncan's "virtues / Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against / The deep damnation of his taking-off"

After killing Duncan, Macbeth initially is haunted by the horror of his actions and regards himself with repugnance. But he soon becomes more callous as his murder of innocents continues with Macduff 's family. By the end of the play, his tyranny has reached its peak as he continues to destroy anyone who opposes him, including Young Siward. Through Macbeth's descent into tyranny, Shakespeare explores the power of evil and illustrates how it can use human ambition to consume a person.

Lady Macbeth presents a slightly different case study of evil. Like her husband, she clearly is not a virtuous character. But while Macbeth becomes increasingly evil and less sympathetic as the play progresses, Lady Macbeth moves in the opposite direction.

In the early stages of the play, when Macbeth hedges about whether to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth convinces her indecisive husband to follow through with his plans. Greenblatt notes in his introduction to *Macbeth* in the *Norton Shakespeare* that she accomplishes this in two primary ways. First, she questions his masculinity by connecting his ability to murder Duncan with his manhood. She taunts her husband by asking him if he would prefer to "live a coward in thine own esteem"

Second, Lady Macbeth is rhetorically much more vicious than her husband in her beliefs and her determination. In a statement that is often cited to demonstrate the evil nature of Lady Macbeth, she claims that she would willingly sacrifice her own child if she had sworn to do so. Despite their atrocity, these are only words. And despite being the primary force behind

Macbeth's actions, Lady Macbeth ultimately seems to be more haunted by their deeds than Macbeth is. Unlike Macbeth, she cannot descend fully into evil.

5.2 Gender roles

Lady Macbeth is the focus of much of the exploration of gender roles in the play. As Lady Macbeth propels her husband toward committing Duncan's murder, she indicates that she must take on masculine characteristics. Her most famous speech addresses this issue. In Act I, Scene 5, after reading Macbeth's letter in which he details the witches' prophecy and informs her of Duncan's impending visit to their castle, Lady Macbeth indicates her desire to lose her feminine qualities and gain masculine ones. She cries, "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top full / Of direst cruelty" (I.5.38–41).

5.3 Nature out of order

The disorder of nature, as well as gender, is a major theme in this play. The hierarchical view of the universe described in the "Introduction to Early Modern England" is violated and disrupted at almost every turn. The unnatural and disruptive death of the monarch is paralleled by equally violent disruptions in nature.

On the night of Duncan's death, the nobleman Lennox claims there were "Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death / And prophecying with accents terrible / Of dire combustion and confus'd events / New hatch'd to the woeful time" (II.3.61–64). Many critics see this parallel between Duncan's death and disorder in nature as an affirmation of the divine right theory of kingship. As we witness in the play, Macbeth's murder of Duncan and his continued tyranny extends the disorder to the entire country.

5.4 Conclusion

Though *Macbeth* is firmly rooted in the contexts of Early Modern England, this play remains timeless for its penetrating and extensive portrait of the evils that humans can commit. It depicts Macbeth's conscious decision to descend into evil and tyranny in the name of personal ambition, and it illustrates the disorders in politics, gender, nature, and religion that this decision causes.

Unlike many of Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, Macbeth feels the agony of his decision in the beginning rather than the end of his fall. Emotionally deadened by his actions, Macbeth ends the play with a terrible determination to fight against fate and die in the process. Moments before he dies offstage, he tells his foe, "Lay on, Macduff, / And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold enough!'" (V.8.33–34). Shakespeare's play reveals a great deal about the political, social, and theatrical beliefs and practices of Early Modern England. It also reveals a great deal about being human.

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