

The Land of Macbeth

presents

7 essays of classic Macbeth criticism

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1. Psychoanalytical Criticism

The following essay deals with the effects of repressed emotion on the conscious and unconscious states of Lady Macbeth. In doing so it explores the motives behind the actions of the two central characters. An analysis of Lady Macbeth's repressed emotional complexes throws light on the motives behind the tragedy. American psychoanalyst, Isador H Coriat, states that she is not "a criminal type or an ambitious woman but the victim of a pathological mental dissociation arising upon an unstable daydreaming basis ...due to the emotional shocks of her past experiences". The past experience, which causes such a deep disturbance in Lady Macbeth, is the loss of her child.

Lady Macbeth's daydreams are partly ambitious, partly sexual. They demonstrate her desire to be queen and put an heir on the throne, as compensation for childlessness. She redefines both her own and her husband's sexual roles. Like the witches with their manly beards, she 'unsexes' herself. The hier she creates is the new unnatural Macbeth, "untimely ripped " from the bloody death of Duncan.

That Lady Macbeth had a child, or children, has been the subject of much discussion. The text clearly indicates that at some point she had "given suck, and know/How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" [I.vii.54-9]. We are not given any reference to what has become of the child, only that now they are childless.

Unlike other women in Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth is extremely isolated. She has no companion, no female confidante or children. Her life centres completely on her husband and

there is a strong bond between the two. She is his "dearest partner of greatness". He is the only person she reveals her thoughts to. The needs of the state, society and friendship are more prominent to Macbeth than to her, therefore she finds them easier to break. This isolation leads her to self-centredness, daydreaming and a state near hysteria, as shown by her reaction to Macbeth's letter. In analysis of hysterics one of the prominent characteristics of the patients is daydreaming.

In Lady Macbeth's reaction to the witches prophecy we can see the foundation of the illness which will lead to her mental disintegration. She suppresses her fear and assumes a bravery, which she does not really possess. The "valour" of her "tongue" is not the valour of her heart. She represses her 'womanly' nature, her compassion, humanity and cowardice. The horror of Macbeth's thoughts shows in his face and is always near his conscious thoughts. After Duncan's murder Macbeth expresses his fear and horror, but Lady Macbeth again chooses to repress her feelings [II.ii.30-31]:

"These deeds must not be thought

After these ways; so, it will make us mad."

Shakespeare shows an awareness of the damage caused by repressed emotion when Malcolm says to Macduff: "Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break." [IV .iii.208-1 0]

Lady Macbeth shows a "false face" to everyone, including herself Her true self is only revealed in an unconscious state -in her sleep and her eventual somnambulist state. With a great strength of will Lady Macbeth dominates the situation in her waking state to achieve her obsessive ambition for her husband. In the preparation for the murder she is cool and calculating, manipulating her husband's will to the extent of her own. She redefines manliness for him as the ability to be unfeelingly brutal and goads him into proving this to her. The sexual energy involved in her persuasion is evident in her language. This energy is sublimated into ambition and culminates with Duncan's murder and the bloody rebirth of Macbeth as an unnatural son and heir to the throne.

Ambition, in Macbeth's case, develops into criminality and like an uncontrollable force destroys the better part of him as the play progresses. He is described as "valiant cousin" and "worthy gentleman" in the first scene, after the brutal murder of the king's enemies. However, his reaction to the witches prophecy betrays a rather more devious nature. The witches instigate the tragedy by stimulating Macbeth's unconscious wish to be king. Macbeth starts with horror because he is torn between private ambitions and his public face. He wants to be considered valiant and worthy, but he also wishes to be king. The witches have offered this wish. Banquo, by contrast, is innocent of Macbeth's darker thoughts, and questions: "why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" [I.iii. 50-51]

Macbeth is already 'rapt' by a daydream of himself as king, which he passes on to his wife. His abilities, his power and skill as a bloodthirsty warrior are about to be turned on a society which doesn't suspect him. When addressing the king [I.iv .23-27] Macbeth uses words such as "service..loyalty..duties..love.. honour". Thirty lines later he states in an aside "Let not light see my black and deep desires". Macbeth's unconscious wishes have been brought forward into conscious thought where they will stay.

Lady Macbeth actively avoids thinking about what she has done. Progressively her unconscious works on her and betrays her in her dreams. It does not seem accidental that her mental fragility increases as the bond between husband and wife weakens. Her repressed fears emerge and cause the somnambulistic state in which she enacts a condensed panorama of her crimes. Lady Macbeth's predisposition towards daydreaming, the sublimation of her desire for a child and the repression of her guilt over Duncan's murder lead to this mental state.

In her somnambulism Lady Macbeth repeatedly acts out the events connected to and resulting from Duncan's murder: Macbeth's murder of Banquo; the murder of Macduff's wife and children; Macbeth's terror at the banquet; the letter of the witches prophecy. All these events torment her, demonstrating to the audience, not only repressed guilt at her own crimes, but guilt at helping to create a man who could commit these crimes. The central symbol of her guilt and fear is the smell and sight of blood. She demonstrates compulsive neurosis in the continual washing of her hands, which she feels, are contaminated. "A little water" cannot clear her of the deed which "cannot be undone". Her contamination is of both body and soul.

Awake, Lady Macbeth exhibits emotionless cruelty, while in a somnambulistic state she shows pity and remorse. Her sleeping personality must be taken as her true one because the unconscious is uninhibited and uncensored. Her true self is more powerful than the false warrior queen she plays in her waking hours. She ends in a state, which is neither awake nor asleep. Unable to live the lie or face the truth, her only escape is death.

2. Christian Perspectives on Macbeth

Macbeth's struggle with his conscience over the murder of Duncan is not merely an internal drama. Shakespeare externalizes the forces of evil in his creation of the witches. And, whilst there are no good angels, several characters are described as having some divine function or appealing to God. Hence, Macbeth dramatizes certain Christian beliefs that would have been understood as such by Shakespeare's contemporaries. Walter Clyde Curry writes: Shakespeare has informed Macbeth with the Christian conception of a metaphysical world of objective evil. The whole drama is saturated with the malignant presences of demonic forces; they animate nature and ensnare human souls by means of diabolical persuasion, by hallucination, infernal

illusion, and possession. They are, in the strictest sense, one element in that Fate which God in His providence has ordained to rule over the bodies and, it is possible, over the spirits of men.

The new king for whom Shakespeare wrote his play, James ~ popularized the idea of such forces of evil in his own work *Demonology*. Christian philosophy of the period imagined two opposing realms of good and evil, commanded by God and the Devil. The manifestation of each power on earth occurred internally in the spirit of man and externally in the activity of angels and demons.

Criticism of *Macbeth* inevitably centres on the symbolic battle between good and evil in the play. The characters are lined up on the appropriate sides. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, for their acceptance of demonic prophecy as well as their bloody deeds, are posed against the forces of heaven. The latter include most obviously Duncan and Edward, both 'holy' kings, Banquo who declares 'In the great hand of God I stand' (2.3.129) and Malcolm and Macduff who restore the kingdom to 'grace'. This structure of evil destroyed is viewed as an example of God's providence by most Christian critiques. Providence can be seen in the destruction of the criminal Macbeth; the restoration of Scotland to its rightful heir and the end of Macbeth's dark reign; but above all, in God's victory against Satan. One question the Christian critic must answer is why God has not intervened sooner. Macduff grieves at the murder of his family and asks: 'Did heaven look on/ And would not take their part?' (4.3.225-6). However, Robert Rentoul Reed argues that God's triumph is all the more impressive in the play because of this suspense: The bringing by God of a merely wicked man to judgement is worthy perhaps of a perfunctory glory. If, however, He brings to judgement a wicked man who has usurped, against God's law, the throne of a kingdom and who, for his own ends, has delivered that kingdom over to Satanic powers, over which he maintains a nominal command, has God not translated His otherwise perfunctory glory into a kind of magnificent resurrection, in which is seen His real glory? Such, at least, is the suggestion of the denouement of this play.

The argument for divine providence may also be extended to explain the rise of Macbeth himself. J. A. Bryant argues that God must have 'elected to correct Scotland in some way and prepare it for a much greater role in history under the treble sceptre of Banquo's descendant, James VI'.

The reductive implications of this critical approach are obvious. Macbeth becomes merely a foil to God's greatness or a pawn in the cosmic battle between good and evil. Christian criticism can offer a more character-based approach but again, this depends on Biblical allegory. Walker imagines the murder of Duncan as partaking of the central Christian tragedy, that is, the crucifixion of Christ. Macbeth/Judas describes how Duncan/Christ:

The storm during the night of the murder, the reference to the temple cracking and the linking of Macbeth with a second Golgotha all reinforce this association. The murder has also been likened to Cain's fratricide whilst Curry sees the moral degradation of Macbeth following

an archetypal pattern exemplified by Lucifer and Adam. Angel/man's self-love leads him to desire what is denied him by God. Crucially, it is at this point of turning away from God that man is vulnerable to the influence of the Devil's agents whether they are witches, demons or the promptings of another human being. Lady Macbeth's call upon 'murd'ring ministers', 'sightless substances' and 'thick night' to fill her with 'direst cruelty' (1.4.39-53) has often been referred to as a wish for demonic possession. Macbeth's relationship with evil is similar to that of Marlowe's Dr. Faustus. Macbeth imagines that he too has sold his soul to the devil for some temporal good: 'mine eternal jewel/ Given to the common enemy of man' (3.1.68-9). Like Faustus, he is unable to repent.

It is in these terms that Macbeth's decision to embrace evil and to wade in blood is explored. He is a man guilty of self-love who is influenced by the witches and by his wife to murder Duncan.

Having achieved the throne, he continues in his course, not because of any predestination, but to defy providence which will give his crown to Banquo's heirs. Moreover, Reed argues that Macbeth's increasingly bloody acts are a deliberate attempt to silence his conscience but also to destroy his moral nature, which manifests his bond with God. Macbeth struggles to become an enemy to providence and to God himself.

There are a number of obvious limitations to this critical perspective. It cannot explain why an audience will identify with the murdering, 'hell-hound' Macbeth (for an excellent analysis of this imaginative sympathy sees Robert B. Heilman's 'The Criminal as Tragic Hero'). Furthermore, Macbeth and his wife are inevitably reduced to puppets, either literally possessed by evil spirits or subject to the great operation of divine providence. Neither of these perspectives allows for the complexity of Macbeth's characterization nor for his own lack of religious guilt. He does not show any repentance at the end nor does he recognize his crimes as crimes against God, which the morality play certainly required (see Morris). It might also be argued that although there are a number of important Biblical allusions here these do not add up to an equal battle between good and evil. The latter is a far more powerful and immediate force in the play.

3. Macbeth: 'The frame of Things Disjoint' or Deconstruction Enacted

Trying to define 'deconstruction' is rather like being asked to weigh air -it is, to say the least a nebulous concept to grasp. However, considering deconstruction in relation to Macbeth may give the theory some substance and may help to open up angles on the play that would not otherwise be considered.

The words 'fair is foul and foul is fair' (1.1.10) shake our whole universe of meaning. If either can signify the other, where do we look to for stability, or is there no such thing as stability in the world of Macbeth? A world where everything is clearly and correctly labelled is a safe and comforting place. A world where labels can be erased is threatening to contemplate. The crisis at the heart of Macbeth is in some ways a perfect expression of what some 20th century theorists call 'deconstruction'. It is important, though, to keep in mind that when considering the play in this light, we are imposing a modern day notion on the play, which it was not written to fit.

Many times in this play, binary oppositions are invoked only to be subverted -the foul/fair pairing in the first brief scene alerts us to this and the witches themselves are not easily labelled since they 'look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earthl And yet are on't' (1.3.339-341). Macbeth and Lady Macbeth embody subversions of the expected gender attributes -Macbeth is 'too full o'th'milk of human kindness' (1.5.16) whereas Lady Macbeth wishes to be 'unsexed' and offers her 'milk for gall' (1.5.47). However, deconstruction is not concerned with mere reversals of order, but with a sense of undecidability once an accepted order has been shaken. It denies the ultimate polarization of meaning of binary oppositions such as foul/fair good/bad, man/woman and suggests that meaning is not so clear-cut. Banquo can only conceive of a world where meaning is secure. Although he acknowledges that 'instruments of darkness' may exist, his view that they 'Win us with honest trifles, to betray's\ In deepest consequence' (1.3.123-124) is the usual black/white, good/bad view which Macbeth immediately decentres, introducing disorder where Banquo has seen order with 'This supernatural soliciting Cannot be ill, cannot be good' (1.3.129-130). The traditional 'lit. crit.' description of this being the 'sickening see-saw' of Macbeth's mind perpetuates the idea of oppositions, suggesting that Macbeth is vacillating between good and evil, a view which does not allow for the possibility of something of each being present. Macbeth's ability to recognize that the significance of something is in fact undecideable is partly what makes his character so disturbing and yet so fascinating.

Trying to see the play from a deconstructionist angle (if there is such a thing, since it must by definition defy description) makes us realize that to see Macbeth as an out and out 'baddie' is too simplistic a view.

Macbeth fights against the 'undecideable' as the play progresses. When the witches insist that they do 'a deed without a name' (4.1.64) Macbeth insists that he must know it at any cost - 'even till destruction sicken' (4.1.76). The answers that the witches then give him are enigmatic and lead him to false conclusions, proving that to try to 'name' the 'deed' will only result in inaccuracy, since the 'undecideable' cannot be pinned down. In the final act of the play it seems as if Macbeth has found that he cannot live with 'indecision' and he tries to become a man of action. In a few lines at the end of 5.3, Macbeth uses an astonishing number of imperatives - 'send', 'skirr', 'hang', 'give', 'cure', 'pluck', 'raze', 'cleanse' (5.3.37-46) as if finally trying to ground himself in a world of fixed meaning but the moment is brief. The death of Lady Macbeth precipitates his full recognition of emptiness and futility. To conclude that everything signifies nothing is to partake of a profoundly nihilistic vision. Macbeth asks the age-old questions about

the meaning of life and realizes that there are no answers since anything that can be expressed is not the answer .

The questions about the authorship of some parts of the play mean that the accepted view of Macbeth as being 'by William Shakespeare' has been shaken and replaced by an 'undecideable', the truth of which will probably never be known. The Complete Oxford Edition lists Macbeth as being 'by William Shakespeare (adapted by Thomas Middleton)' and it is now generally thought that the scenes featuring Hecate were probably penned by Middleton, but the exact extent of Middleton's involvement with the play will remain a ground of 'undecidability' among scholars. Shakespeare's intention in writing the play is an 'undecideable' which will never be known. The play has been seen as courting the favour of King James by dealing with one of his favourite subjects, witchcraft, and showing Banquo, whose descendant James claimed to be, in a good light.

It can also be argued that these things are superficial and that the play can be read as subversive of the monarchy. The rather puzzling and much neglected 'English' scene between Malcolm and Macduff (4.3) can be illuminating here. Malcolm, for no apparent reason convinces Macduff that he is really a depraved figure before telling him that this was an invention. Macduff's reaction 'Such welcome and unwelcome things at once 'Tis hard to reconcile' (4.3 .139-40) reminds us of Macbeth's 'So fair and foul a day I have not seen' (1.3.36) which in turn links us back to the words of the witches 'Fair is foul and foul is fair'. This makes an traceable line from the witches to the next King of Scotland (a line taken up in Polanski's film of the play) and thus arrests any heroic momentum that the play might have had since the potential monarch is given at least a taint of that which we have associated with Macbeth, the monarch who is in place through murder. Like the 'yin' and 'yang' sign where the black has a tiny dot of white and the white has a tiny dot of black, the 'good' and 'bad' in this play are not as easily defined as one might think. The function of the English scene is therefore extremely important for it implicitly shakes the very concept of the divine right of kings by pointing out that the label 'king' is just that -a label with no 'essence' of divinity in it.

At the risk of perpetrating a gross anachronism, it can be said that Macbeth recognizes, long before Derrida, that signifiers have no meaning in themselves. The essence of things is not in their labels and is in fact inexpressible. That is why, in performance, Macbeth's line "Twas a rough night' (2.3.60) usually receives a laugh -after Lennox's extraordinary description of the unruly elements, the line reveals the inadequacy of any words to describe the horror of events. Why, then, does Shakespeare take the length of a whole play to tell us that he cannot adequately express what he means? Of course, Shakespeare was not a deconstructionist and so was not constrained by such terms. Perhaps the deconstructionist view can be thought of as being like a game of charades -the word itself cannot be uttered and you use many words to get around it and communicate what you mean to others. Except that, for the deconstructionist, there is no word waiting to be revealed, for the real essence of anything is incommunicable. Any word that is revealed will still be a charade and the game is never over . To consider a play in this way is

4. Macbeth and Feminism

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a tragedy that embodies the polarities of male and female power, a play which seems to dramatize the deep divisions that characterize male-female relationships in all his plays. As Janet Adelman writes, "In the figures of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the witches, the play gives us images of a masculinity and a femininity that are terribly disturbed." At the same time, critics have tended to discuss the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in a way that further highlights this division, viewing Macbeth as a victim of overpowering feminine influences that characterize the world around him, from the appearance of the bearded Witches at the beginning of the play, to the presence of Lady Macbeth throughout. Sigmund Freud writes of Lady Macbeth, that her sole purpose throughout the play is "that of overcoming the scruples of her ambitious and yet tender-minded husband...She is ready to sacrifice even her womanliness to her murderous intention..." For many feminist critics, however, the opinion of Freud and other critics that Macbeth is merely a victim of feminine plotting is an unsatisfactory response to this play. On the most basic level, it is Macbeth who actually murders the king while Lady Macbeth is the one who cleans up the mess.

A more fruitful approach would be a closer examination of the different types of women who are being represented throughout the play, rather than viewing the women en masse, as part of a dark and evil force "ganging up" on Macbeth. Indeed, feminist criticism can help to point the way towards a clearer understanding of the sort of society Shakespeare is portraying in this tragedy.

Terry Eagleton points out his belief that "the witches are the heroines of the piece",

As the most fertile force in the play, the witches inhabit an anarchic, richly ambiguous zone both in and out of official society; they live in their own world but intersect with Macbeth's. They are poets, prophetesses and devotees of female cult, radical separatists who scorn male power.

For Eagleton, the witches, existing on the fringes of society, are not necessarily the "juggling fiends" (5.7.49) that Macbeth professes them to be at the end of the play. Instead, as feminist critics, we might well ask ourselves about the brutal nature of the society in which Macbeth is living and the effects that traditional labels of "masculinity" and "femininity" have on that society.

The nature of gender roles in *Macbeth*--a play which is ostensibly about the exchange and usurpation of political authority amongst men--is brought to the fore at the very beginning of the play, in the figures of the three Witches in Act One, scene one: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" they tell us. Marilyn French points out the role of the Witches in establishing what she sees as the dynamic of ambiguity that will characterize gender relationships throughout the play. As she writes: They are female, but have beards; they are aggressive and authoritative, but seem to have

power only to create petty mischief. Their persons, their activities, and their song serve to link ambiguity about gender to moral ambiguity.

The witches challenge our assumptions about masculine and feminine attributes from the very start, with their beards and their prophecies. In juggling with the contradictory values of fair and foul, they call into question the moral systems and standards upon which this play will operate. Shakespeare's witches exist on the fringes of a society in which feminine attributes denote powerlessness and destruction (Duncan, Lady Macduff) and in which traditionally masculine values are equated with power.

Indeed, Macbeth's first appearance, covered with blood and receiving high praise for the slaughter of others, gives us our first idea about the acceptable patterns of behavior, which govern the "masculine" side of this world.

Macbeth receives the title of "brave Macbeth" amongst his peers for his role as butcher and killing machine. His ruthlessness is welcomed as valorous and wins him the accolades of his male peers.

Thus, masculine power in the play, the society represented by Duncan, is more like the world of "juggling fiends" to which Macbeth links the witches when they cease to be of use to him at the end of the play.

As Macbeth's "partner of greatness"(1.5.10), Lady Macbeth's "sacrifice of her womanliness" to echo Freud--"unsex me here"--further highlights the importance of the acceptance of traditionally masculine qualities in order to achieve power in the play. "Come to my woman's breasts/ And take my milk for gall"(1.5.46-47) she asserts, reinforcing the fact that she is trading her traditional feminine role as mother and nurturer in exchange for a power which accords with the violent, masculine world of which her husband is a part. In this world, femininity is not an attribute to be equated with power and, in the murder of Duncan (a king whom Janet Adelman describes as weak and ineffectual), feminine attributes lead to virtual erasure in terms of power politics. Here, there is no place for vulnerability.

Lady Macbeth, in moving from nurturing mother to infanticide, represents a shift from the passive "milky" masculinity she associates with the weak men in the play to a power position which resonates with a sense of maternal evil. While this is one of the most disturbing points in the play, it also marks the crossing of a divide between male and female power, a transgression which is marked by such. Violent and disturbing imagery. In the murder of Duncan, Macbeth also highlights the violent nature of male-female divisions, especially, as Janet Adelman points out, in envisioning himself as a Tarquin figure in approaching the Isleeping king: "..thus with his stealthy pace,/With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design/Moves like a ghost" (2.1...). Tarquin, the rapist, the violator of female innocence, becomes Macbeth, the killer of kings and usurper of power. Here, power relationships! amongst men pivot upon images of male sexual aggression and violence.

At the end of this play, power will be assumed by a man who is not born of any woman, as the witches prophesy: "for none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.94-95). This prophesy is misread by Macbeth and yet it is extremely telling, since it predicts the complete eradication of female power which will ensue at the end of the play, with Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff dead.

Now widowed, Macduff, who was born by caesarean section, is a man with no mother, especially since a caesarean birth in Shakespeare's time inevitably led to the death of the mother. In the end, it is in the divide between male and female worlds in Macbeth that the nucleus of tragedy lies.

5. New Historicist Criticism: Macbeth and Power

Stripped of Shakespeare's poetic style and skilful characterization, Macbeth is revealed as little more than a petty tyrant. Like Machiavelli's Prince, Macbeth seeks power as an end in itself and sees any means as justified provided it helps him achieve his goal. It is a standard image of power:

an individual, or small group, occupying a position of authority from which he (seldom she) attempts to force his will upon others. Today's equivalent of a feudal monarch is the power-hungry

politician, the cult leader, or the ruthless business tycoon. But the new historicist conception of power is different; rather than being a top-down affair that originates from a specific place or individual, power comes from all around us, it permeates us, and it influences us in many subtle and different ways. This idea of decentralized power, heavily indebted to post-structuralist philosophy (see Derrida and Foucault), is sometimes difficult to understand because it seems to have an intangible, mystical quality. Power appears to operate and maintain itself on its own, without any identifiable individual actually working the control levers.

This new historicist notion of power is evident in Macbeth in the way in which Macbeth's apparent

subversion of authority culminates in the re-establishment of that same type of authority under Malcolm. A ruthless king is replaced with another king, a less ruthless one, perhaps, but that is due

to Malcolm's benevolent disposition, not to any reform of the monarchy. Similarly, the subversion

of the play's moral order is contained, and the old order reaffirmed, by the righteous response to that subversion. In other words, what we see at the beginning of the play--an established monarch

and the strong Christian values that legitimize his sovereignty--is the same as what we see at the end of the play, only now the monarchy and its supporting values are even more firmly entrenched

thanks to the temporary disruption.

It is almost as if some outside force carefully orchestrates events in order to strengthen the existing

power structures. Consider, for example, a military leader who becomes afraid of the peace that undermines his position in society. In response to his insecurity, he creates in people's minds the fear of an impending enemy--whether real or imaginary, it doesn't matter.

As a consequence of their new feelings of insecurity, people desire that their leader remain in power and even increase his power so that he can better defend them from their new enemy. If the more evil and threatening our enemies are made to appear, the more we believe our own aggressive response to them is justified, and the more we see our leaders as our valiant protectors (Zinn, *Declarations of Independence* 260-61, 266). Military or political power is strengthened, not weakened, when it has some kind of threatening subversion to contain (Greenblatt 62-65).

The important point about the new historicist notion of power, however, is that it is not necessary for anyone to orchestrate this strengthening of authority. Duncan certainly doesn't plan to be murdered in order that the crown will be more secure on Malcolm's head after he deposes Macbeth.

The witches can be interpreted as manipulating events, but there is nothing to indicate that they are

motivated by a concern to increase the power and authority of the Scottish crown. It is not

necessary to believe in conspiracy theories to explain how power perpetuates itself; the circular and

indirect, rather than top-down, way in which power operates in society is enough to ensure that it is

maintained and its authority reinforced.

The theater illustrates this point in that the Renaissance theater--its subject matter, spectacle, emphasis on role-playing--drew its energy from the life of the court and the affairs of state--their ceremony, royal pageants and progresses, the spectacle of public executions (Greenblatt 11-16).

In

return, the theater helped legitimate the existing state structures by emphasizing, for example, the superior position in society of the aristocracy and royalty.

These are the class of people, the theater repeatedly showed its audience, who deserve to have their stories told on stage, while common people are not worthy subjects for serious drama and are

usually represented as fools or scoundrels.

Revealing the inherently theatrical aspects of the court and affairs of state runs the risk of undermining their authority--if people on stage can play at being Kings and Queens, lords and ladies, then there is always the possibility that the audience will suspect that real Kings and Queens, lords and ladies, are just ordinary people who are playing a role and do not actually deserve their position of wealth and privilege. But the very existence of the theater helped keep the

threat of rebellion under control by providing people with a legitimate, though restricted, place to express otherwise unacceptable ideas and behaviour (Mullaney 8-9). Within the walls of the theater, it is acceptable to mock the actor playing a king, but never the king himself; it is acceptable

to contemplate the murder of a theatrical monarch, but never a real one.

Macbeth deals with the murder of a king, but Shakespeare turns that potentially subversive subject

into support for his king, James I. Queen Elizabeth died without a direct heir, and a - power vacuum is a recipe for domestic turmoil or even war. The consequences of Macbeth's regicide and tyranny illustrate the kinds of disruption that were prevented by the peaceful ascension to the throne of James, son of Mary, Queen of Scots. The "good king" of England (4.3 .147) who gives Malcolm sanctuary and supports his cause as the rightful successor to the Scottish crown is an indirect reference to James I. Macbeth is about treason and murder, but Malcolm's description of the noble king (147-59), and the stark contrast between him and Macbeth, reinforces the idea that good subjects should see their king as their benefactor and protector.

Shakespeare was not coerced into flattering his king. There was official censorship in his time, but

it is unlikely that he needed anyone to tell him what he could or could not write; he knew the types

of stories that were acceptable to authority and desirable to his paying public. Whether or not

Shakespeare felt constrained by these limitations, or even consciously recognized them, is not the

point; the point is that he worked within a set of conventions and conditions which relied upon and

reinforced the governing power relations of his time, and so there was no need for him to be

manipulated by a government censor looking over his shoulder. If Shakespeare had not known the

boundaries of the acceptable, or had not conformed to the demands of power, he would never have

become a successful playwright.

According to new historicism, our own relationship to power is similar to that of Shakespeare's: we

collaborate with the power that controls us. Without necessarily realizing what we are doing, we help create and sustain it, thus reducing the need for authority figures to remind us what to do or

think. Once we accept the cultural limitations imposed on our thought and behaviour, once we believe that the limits of the permissible are the extent of the possible, then we happily police ourselves.

6. Marxist Criticism: Macbeth as Ideology

Macbeth embodies aspects of the dominant ideology of Shakespeare's time; today, his plays are regarded as cultural icons because their underlying ideas are still useful to the ideology of our time.

By "ideology" Marxism does not mean simply a belief system, but a deliberately manipulative set

of ideas that benefit the ruling classes and encourage the majority of people to have a false understanding of social reality and its socio-economic foundations. According to traditionalists, Shakespeare transcends ideology and socio-economic relations; studying his plays, according to this point of view, increases people's knowledge of their national and linguistic heritage, reveals to

them eternal truths about the human condition, and develops in them a more sophisticated sense of

aesthetic taste. Seen from a Marxist perspective, however, there is a more insidious reason for keeping Shakespeare in the schools:

Shakespeare is beloved of educators and politicians because he is useful in legitimizing established

authority and its supporting values and beliefs.

Macbeth's ambitious violence subverts his world's natural order (see Tillyard for a discussion of the

Elizabethan idea of an ordered world), and it results in the ruin of himself and those around him.

Macbeth perverts the play's religious order by consulting evil spirits; like Adam he undermines the

patriarchal order by giving in to his wife's temptations; he violates the political order by regicide and tyranny; and he violates the moral order with lies and murder. The consequences of this

disorder are inescapable and are manifested in cosmic upheaval (2.3.50-57), insanity, and military defeat.

The play's underlying message assumes that society's natural condition is a God-given harmonious

order. Such religious beliefs might be incompatible with today's more secular perspectives, but the

logic of the argument remains the same even if we believe that our essentially ordered state of affairs is the result of a representative government and the self-regulating processes of private enterprise and the free market. Either way, disorder results from challenges to the status quo, that is, to the state of affairs that is generally considered to be natural and good--at least by those in society who benefit from them. In Macbeth disorder takes the form of rebellious lords, evil spirits,

political scheming and violence; modern demons of chaos come disguised as Communists, homosexuals, unwed mothers, and the lazy poor. Ideology leads us to believe that if it were not for

these "unnatural," debilitating afflictions, society would be more or less perfectly ordered and without conflict. Ideology encourages us to count as enemies anyone who we are told defies established authority and disrupts the social order and to believe that these enemies are fully deserving of our contempt and persecution.

Marxism argues that our ideas and beliefs are intimately connected to our material and social reality--they evolve out of that reality and reflect it. Art expresses, in new and unusual ways, our ideas and beliefs, but this does not mean that all art is ideological. To understand a work of art's connection to ideology, it is necessary to examine how it is used in a specific cultural context: is it

used primarily to support the status quo or to challenge it? Many of our most cherished notions

have achieved their importance in art, religion and politics because of their usefulness to those in power--that is, because they have proved useful in glossing over the contradictions and difficulties

of social reality.

Throughout history cultures have developed social and economic inequalities of one kind or another, such as those between rich and poor, men and women, one race and another. If society is

to operate smoothly, then it is necessary that these various inequalities be accepted, or at least passively tolerated, by the different groups involved. The purpose of ideology is to provide explanations for socio-economic inequalities, to convince the oppressed groups in society that their

condition is justified and a result of their own failings, and to reassure the dominant groups that they deserve their superiority .

Although the dominant groups benefit most from these social arrangements, it is not quite accurate

to say that they produce ideology .The true champions and makers of ideology are society's "intellectuals" (Chomsky 72-74); in other words, those people who, in one way or another, tell people what they should think and do: teachers, priests, social scientists, political pundits, philosophers, artists and their critics. Intellectuals have always considered their mental labor to be

superior to the physical labor of the masses, and so they have felt a natural affinity toward the upper echelons of society. Intellectuals tend to look to the wealthy, ruling classes for protection and

patronage; in return they offer justifications for the current social arrangements and assure the ruling classes that they deserve their superior status. More importantly, intellectuals soothe the troubled minds of the rest of us with such platitudes as "We must obey our leaders and learn to accept our proper place in society" ; "If you are poor , you have only yourself to blame"; "Do not

despair if you are treated unfairly, because heaven will be your reward"; and "Leave all that tricky

political stuff to the experts and watch a play instead." By this definition, Shakespeare was an "intellectual" of Renaissance England: he relied on the ruling classes for patronage, and he knew how to support the status quo and keep his plays respectable so as not to fall out of favor. As the Marxist writer George Orwell puts it,

Shakespeare liked to stand well with the rich and powerful, and was capable of flattering them in the most servile way. He is also noticeably cautious, not to say cowardly, in his manner of uttering

unpopular opinions. Almost never does he put a subversive or sceptical remark into the ..mouth of

a character likely to be identified with himself (430)

The bawdy, irreverent ramblings of the Porter in Macbeth hardly count as serious social criticism.

However, no one can blame Shakespeare for wanting to avoid being hung, drawn and quartered by

offended aristocrats. It is possible to argue that Shakespeare subtly challenged authoritarianism in

his own way and that dissent in the mouth of a fool is better than no dissent at all. Then again, it is

also possible to argue that a good way to convince people you are not an establishment stooge is to

pretend to be a clandestine dissident.

Modern political critics argue that Shakespeare's plays ingeniously subvert establishment orthodoxy by exposing how power and ideology operate in society (see Greenblatt, Dollimore, and

Kavanagh). Their arguments are intriguing, but rather than assume that Shakespeare's plays exemplify a modern political attitude, it is just as easy to believe that literary critics are simply

skilled at reading him in such a way as to give credence to their own beliefs (Levin 500-2).

Regardless of Shakespeare's intentions or political motivations, it is how his plays have been used

that indicates their true cultural significance. As I have argued, Macbeth, like the rest of his plays,

has proved useful, in his time and ours, as ideological support for the beliefs that our social order and established authority is fair and that those who threaten it deserve whatever punishment and suffering they get. This kind of ideology creates in people, especially those who suffer due to society's socio-economic inequalities, an attitude of passive resignation, and it encourages the opinion that change is undesirable and, even if attempted, unlikely to succeed.

7. Structuralist criticism and Macbeth

Structuralism arose from among the individual works of linguists in Europe and America in the 1950s, the foremost proponents being Ferdinand de Saussure, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf

and Leonard Bloomfield. Its fundamental claim is that the association between words and things is

arbitrary -that a word 'means one thing because it doesn't mean something else -as Terence

Hawkes puts it, 'Dog means dog not because of what it is but because of what it is not: because it is

not bog and it is not god or log. Thus, the meaning of words lies not in the words themselves but in

the relationships which language establishes between them.' (Terence Hawkes, 'Shakespeare and New Critical Approaches', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. by Stanley

Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.289) Written works do not represent

'reality', but are made by a system whose relation to 'reality' is arbitrary, and it is this system of signification which is the concern of the structuralist. Structuralism escaped the linguists and

entered other human subjects via Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, and it was the latter

who forced students of literature to confront its implications. In his essay of 1968, 'The Death of the Author', he argued that authors were unable to express a novel or individual vision in any meaningful sense because he was forced to work within the system of signifiers which constituted

his language and culture: anything he might write was 'always already written'. The effect of this on

literary criticism was to fundamentally question the concept of realism in plot and in the psychological portrayal of character, which had been so much a part of the inheritance from A.C. Bradley.

There is no large body of structuralist criticism of Shakespeare, but Terence Hawkes sees it anticipated in the work of G. Wilson Knight and L.C. Knights, whom he calls 'quasi-structuralists'

(Hawkes p.290). These writers were attacking the Bradleian psychological approach from the 1930s onwards, Knights evoking Bradley directly in his essay 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?: An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism'. The sort of question posed in this title is irrelevant, Knights argues, because the appearance of the children to which Lady Macbeth has given suck is made for poetic effect: individual characterisation is subordinate to

the poetic construction of the work as a whole. Later he would write that 'the essential structure of

Macbeth, as of the other tragedies, is to be sought in the poetry' ('Macbeth.' Some Shakespearean

Themes (London: Chat to & Windus, 1959), p.102). Wilson Knight refused to use criticism as a tool for discovering authorial intent, claiming that the work itself was 'a visionary whole, close-knit

in personification, atmospheric suggestion, and direct poetic-symbolism: three modes of transmission equal in their importance' (G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p.11). He concentrated on the themes and images, and the metaphysical

significances of a work, without allying them to orthodox philosophies or religions.

These critics anticipated structuralism insofar as they attempted to exclude authorial intention and

notions of realism from their accounts of Shakespeare's work: authority lies in the text, not in the author. But the New Critical 'well wrought urn' aspect of their work, as well as Wilson Knight's metaphysical zeal, is still far from the austerity of the structuralism of the 1960s and 1970s.

There is no structuralist account of Macbeth to compare with Roman Jakobson's and

Lawrence Jones' analysis of Sonnet 129, but one indirect debt to structuralism may be found in the way the text of Macbeth now appears to us. The work of the editor had once been to attempt to

recreate an authoritative text -that is, the text which best represents the one which the author had intended. In asserting that the author was dead the structuralists gave editors the opportunity to focus on the text divorced from a single authorial genius. Shakespeare: The Complete Works, edited by Gary Taylor, Stanley Wells, John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986) chose to site authority in the original theatrical performances. Graham Holdemess' and Bryan Loughrey's Shakespearean Originals series sited it in the texts of the first editions, even when these are the so-called 'bad' quartos, which had long been dismissed as corruptions of Shakespeare's work. In these cases authorial intent is no more important than the various other forms of transmission - adaptations for theatrical performance, memorial reconstruction by actors, type-setting by the printers -through which the text is filtered. In the case

of Macbeth, which is only known from the First Folio, this allowed Stanley Wells and James Rigney -the play's respective editors in the two projects -to present it as a theatrical adaptation by another Jacobean playwright, Thomas Middleton. However, both of these approaches to editing leave the text to consider social, economic, political, and even technological ways of accounting for it - ultimately it seems that structuralism has not proved an attractive way of analysing Shakespeare's dramatic works.