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### MACBETH: AN ESSAY

The discrepancy between character and act in Macbeth is one of the most striking accomplishments of Shakespeare's art. The deed is done, Duncan is killed, but Macbeth feels puzzled, perplexed, lost in the whirlpool of the dreadful act. He has murdered grace, divinity, loyalty, and he has also murdered sleep. He is shaken to the very roots of his existence so that he yearns for the impossible — Duncan's rise from the dead:

To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself, knock.

Wake Duncan with they knocking: I would thou couldst

(II, ii, 71-72)<sup>1</sup>

J. M. Murry states that the discrepancy between character and act in Macbeth is «turned consciously to account»<sup>2</sup>. It is the vortex from which the whole tragedy emerges, arousing great animation and expectation, illusion and disillusion, overwhelming ambition and dreadful despair. Macbeth, the mighty warrior, «the Bellona's bridegroom lapp'd in proof», and his seemingly iron-willed wife look at each other, after the murder, in puzzled astonishment, as if they were two naive children. They «see themselves», and what they see makes them tremble. That is why they try by all possible means to avoid looking into themselves. They resort to all human and superhuman resources in a desperate attempt to save the integrity of their souls. But it is of no avail; it is a destiny which they have to face. No escape is possible. And the mere realization of that drives them mad.

According to Murry, this fatal power to see themselves, «manifested as they manifest it, convinces us as nothing else could convince us, of their essential nobility of soul. And by this turn the situation becomes bottomless in profundity. That a man and woman should, in the very act of heinous and diabolical murder, reveal themselves as naive and innocent, convulses our morality and awakens in us thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls»<sup>3</sup>. The contrast here lies in the nobility of the protagonists' souls and the heinousness of their action. This leads one to examine the mysterious motive power that has disastrously worked havoc in the hearts of these two extraordinary personalities.

In *Othello*, Iago plays the part of the instigator, the tempter who puts the action into that rapid motion which results in the total destruction of the

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1. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* ed. W. J. Craig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 846-869.

2. J. M. Murry, *Shakespeare* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936), p. 211.

3. Murry, p. 325.

protagonist and his wife. The devilish agent takes the form of a human power embodied in a man dealing with men. In *Hamlet* the drama begins with the supernatural trying to impose its will on the natural order of things — the visitation of the Ghost reveals the secret of the murder of a king, mercilessly awakening Hamlet's deeply rooted suspicion. In *Macbeth*, the tempting powers are both human and superhuman. Macbeth's ambition, his wife's lustful desire for power and family aggrandizement, and the predictions of the Weird Sisters, all contribute to the bloody rise and harrowing downfall of the hero.

The role of the Weird Sisters has always been disputed by the Shakespearian critics. The question of whether they are natural or preternatural, human or superhuman, mere future tellers or destructive elements, cannot be answered simply or easily. Murry thinks that it is a gross mistake to represent the Witches as active factors practically working for the extermination of the unfortunate Macbeth. They, Murry insists, «do not hate or contrive or entangle». They merely reveal a future to him who will believe it»<sup>4</sup>. But whether or not they have an influential power over Macbeth, directing his steps to a predestined conclusion, will not be answered by Shakespeare. Undoubtedly Shakespeare was conscious of the medieval tradition with all its beliefs in preternatural agents able to reveal the secrets of the unknown. Stories of bargains between men and the powers of evil have been told throughout the ages, and the price has always been the same: man has to give up his soul to the devil.

The question that is important to ask is this: Is there any bargain between Macbeth and the Weird Sisters? Do they compel him to wade in the blood of his innocent victims? Do they ask for his soul in return for revealing a glimpse of the future? Murry's answer is unequivocal:

Macbeth makes no bargain with the emissaries of the power of darkness: nor are they bargainable. The knowledge offers itself to him: it is, indeed, as he says "a supernatural soliciting". But he is not solicited to the treachery and murder which he commits. It has been granted him to read a little in the book of destiny, and he has found its first sentence true, there is nothing that compels him to be assistant and accomplice to the working of the second<sup>5</sup>.

Murry's reading of the text does not differ much from that of his predecessor A. C. Bradley who states clearly that the Witches must not be labelled with the responsibility of Macbeth's guilt. Bradley contends that

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4. Murry, p. 320.

5. Murry, p. 326.

there is no indication whatsoever which would lead to the belief that Macbeth has been driven to his destiny by supernatural powers. The Witches and their predictions, says Bradley, «are presented simply as dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has to deal... Macbeth is, in the ordinary sense, perfectly free from them»<sup>6</sup>. Their main significance springs from the fact that they harp on Macbeth's thought as an echo of his murderous intentions:

1. Witch. All hail, Macbeht! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
2. Witch. All hail Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
3. Witch. All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be king hereafter.

Banquo: Good Sir, Why do you start, and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair?

(I. iii, 48-52)

Banquo's question is piercingly poignant. He notices that, on hearing the prophecies, Macbeth is startled, as if dazed. An innocent man would have never feared such a revelation, but expectedly, the Weird Sisters have given utterance to his own thoughts. The temptation does not come from without; it mainly springs from within creating havoc in the barbaric world of Macbeth. The Witches, as Roy Walker says, are instruments, not powers; they «would be defeated without a principal to enforce their attack upon Macbeth's soul»<sup>7</sup>. Against such a strong point of view, James Kirsch, in his valuable book *Shakespeare's Royal Self*, claims that Macbeth, due to an inherent weakness in his personality, falls a «helpless victim of the Witches' craft»<sup>8</sup>. The first part of Kirsch's contention is valid, but the rest of it is far from being true — Macbeth is not victimized by the Witches.

One does not hesitate to accept the full implications of Murry's conception of the Weird Sisters. Macbeth, after the fatal encounter could have held back, paying no heed to the prophecies, and forgetting all about the Witches. Such a supposition can be accredited and easily supported by Macbeth's own words:

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

6. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 343.

7. Roy Walker, *The Time is Free* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1949), p. 136.

8. James Kirsch, *Shakespeare's Royal Self* (New York: Putman's Sons, 1966), p. 333.

We shall have judgment here; that we but teach  
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
 To plague th' inventor:

.....  
 Besides, this Duncan  
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against  
 The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
 And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
 Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd  
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
 That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur  
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
 Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
 And falls on th'other.

(I, vii, 1-28)

There is no reference here to witchcraft or metaphysical aid. Macbeth does not make the slightest attempt to put the responsibility of his attitude toward the king on the shoulders of the mysterious hags; he does not even mention them. The instigation comes originally from within, not from without. Essentially it is his vaulting ambition» that causes his destruction; and in this sense he gains in depth and magnanimity as a tragic hero. To say that the Witches are the active agents that cause Macbeth's catastrophic end, is to destroy the whole conception and significance of the tragedy.

In point of truth the murder of Duncan has been meditated upon before the appearance of the Witches. Lady Macbeth's stunning question «What beast was't then, That made you break this enterprise to me?» (I, vii, 47) unequivocally implies that the murder has been a topic of discussion between Macbeth and his wife. Lady Macbeth has a full knowledge of her husband's psychological state. She can read his thoughts as easily as she reads his works. She is sure that his soul is yearning for Duncan's untimely end; yet she is also aware of his instability of purpose and his discouraging hesitation he «would not play false, but yet would wrongly win». What frightens Macbeth is not the murder itself, but the ensuing damnation of its discovery; he is ready to commit it, if ascertained that the world around him will not damn him with suspicious eyes. Being no Hamlet, he is not worried or impressed by the world-to-come; such a question can be burked, and the life-to-come can be jumped over. The murderer, says Murry, «who will jump the judgment of the life to come, and all that it implies, needs but the hope the murderer will be unknown to do the deed. That hope will come; it will



create itself. For the life of the judgment to come is projected conscience. Conscience once drugged Murder becomes but a matter of contrivance. And that is all, Macbeth is appalled not by the thought of the deed, but by the thought of failure to conceal it.»<sup>9</sup>

According to Murry, what Macbeth needs the drugging of his conscience, which, if achieved, would let loose all the furies of Macbeth's bloody imagination; he would challenge men and beasts, humans and superhumans, and even fate would not count too much for him, if it came into the list. But it all depends on whether his conscience will be effeciently drugged or not. This is marvelously achieved by Lady Macbeth — a woman who will be described by Malcolm as «the fiendish queen».

Lady Macbeth's influence over her husband is tremendous. She is handling a man with whom she has lived both physically and spiritually. He has a conscience which must be «drugged», if that deed is to be done. He is for the murder of Duncan, but he does not want to be himself the murderer. She would drug his conscience, overcome his hesitancy, fill him with her own spirit and drive him forward to achieve all the wished for greatness:

Hie thee hither,  
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;  
And chastise with the valour of my tongue  
All that impedes thee from the golden round,  
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
To have thee crowned withal.

(I, v, 27-32)

The news of Duncan's passing the night in her castle is beyond her expectation. It is her golden opportunity and it must not be lost. Still, she is afraid of her husband's faltering virtue — a fact which is confirmed by Macbeth's helpless words:

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

(I, vii, 30-32)

Macbeth is afraid lest the murder should undo him; it would mean the perdition of his existence.

At once, Lady Macbeth reacts, and her reaction is overwhelming, so much so that Macbeth stands gazing at her in amazement, as if stunned. She attacks him ferociously, shaking him to the very roots of his being. To her, his

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9. Murry, pp. 327-328.

hesitation is cowardice, his fear is childish, and even his masculinity is doubtful. Kingship and manhood, she believes, cannot be separated; so, he would be much more the man, if he becomes the king. She has prepared everything for the final scene — the grooms are drugged, the daggers are ready, and Duncan sleeps happily and unsuspectingly after being generously treated by his «honour'd hostess». There is no possibility of failure. All they need is determination; the chance must not be missed, and the deed must be done. To be a man that deserves her veneration Macbeth must overcome his «cowardice» and put an end to his fear. Her argument with him is rounded up with the nerve shattering lines.

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

(i, vii, 54-59)

These lines may be interpreted as the expression of a diabolical creature — a woman without pity, without fear, void of the milk of common humanity. To put it summarily, she appears to be a woman without regrets, especially if seen in the light of her

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from crown to toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty!

(I, v, 41)

This has tempted some critics to consider Lady Macbeth as the embodiment of absolute evil. Roy Walker represents her as a «Gorgon» a «she-devil,» who is ready to be «denatured and unsexed» for the sake of attaining the crown. Macbeth, says Walker,

...might overcome his own temptation to murder Duncan, might face the Witches and break the spell that binds him to his burning desire for the crown. But when he confronts the fiend, in limb and motion feminine, whose prayer to Hell that she may be unsexed and filled from crown, to toe with direst cruelty has been answered, his return upwards to the light of day is for ever lost.<sup>10</sup>

With this view James Kirsch concurs, though he gives his interpretation the

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10. Walker, p. 43.

psychological coloring of Jung and his school of thought. To Kirsch, Lady Macbeth is

...a continuation of the Witches into the human realm. She has no moral scruples whatsoever. She intends to be quite active in Macbeth's plans, to stimulate his anima with her criminal intentions. She incarnates his murderous impulses.... She is more goddess than human being, and must therefore be understood as a representation of Macbeth's unconsciousness.<sup>11</sup>

By goddess here Kirsch means the goddess of darkness, villainy and dire cruelty who fears neither Heaven nor Hell, and who cares not for either blessing or damnation; her main aim is to strike with all her might in order to have the «golden round.»

This reading is partly accepted by G. Wilson Knight who believes that Lady Macbeth is the incarnation of «evil absolute and extreme» for «only one mighty hour.» But after that, when the terrifying deed is done and Duncan is removed forever, she becomes what by nature she is — a woman with all the frailties of womanhood: «She faints at Macbeth's description of Duncan's body. As her husband grows rich in crime, her significance dwindles: she is left shattered, a human wreck who mutters over again in sleep the hideous memories of her former satanic hour of pride.»<sup>12</sup>

What must be stressed is that Lady Macbeth is a great woman of mighty will, unequalled courage, and unique power of determination; her self control is admirable, her presence of mind is perfect, and her belief in herself is almost absolute, that is why she towers over all those around her. Hence springs that flaw that creates the crack, the discrepancy which in its turn destroys her mercilessly. Lady Macbeth is a woman who had miscalculated the limits of her strength and overestimated her «powers of endurance.» The fact that she commits this fatal mistake proves that she is human. To borrow the words of Somerville, Lady Macbeth is a woman only, not a superwoman.

To this great woman, notes Murry, Macbeth submits, and the moment of his submission becomes the moment of his perdition. It means that he is forever lost, without any hope of redemption or any glimpse of salvation.

Lady Macbeth: My husband:

Macbeth: I have done the deed. Did'st thou not hear a noise?

Lady Macbeth: I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry. Did you not speak?

Macbeth: When?

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11. Kirsch, p. 345.

12. G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel Fire* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 152.





the two characters essentially are and what, after the murder, they have consequently become, is a string on which Shakespeare harps with masterful skill. It becomes the predominant feature of the tragedy. It is the callous power that drives the wheel of fortune full circle, ending in the destruction of Macbeth and his wife. Lady Macbeth cracks under the burden of consciousness and a conscience emerging, despite her desperate attempt to smother it, from the subconscious. She walks in her sleep, confesses her guilt on paper, seals it, murmurs in a whimpering voice about what is, what has been, and what is to be:

The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast;

Lady Macbeth: What do you mean?

Macbeth: Still it cried, «Sleep no more!» to all the house: Glamis hath  
murther'd

Sleep, and therefore Cawdor

Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!

(II, ii, 34-42)

Murry's comment on these lines is one of the most interesting things he says. He believes that by murdering sleep, Macbeth has murdered time, human time; so it becomes inevitable that he should take the plunge into the horror of the metaphysical. Macbeth's time is now timeless. His existence is annihilated by the timelessness of time; he is bound to the devastating wheel of fire, «the victim of Uninterrupted and unending time, chained to the wheel of the everlasting Now».<sup>14</sup> From such a condition to escape is possible. Lady Macbeth commits suicide, but even death would not save her soul. Those who have murdered sleep, have «murdered death also.» In such a state of existence, life become meaningless:

Macbeth: Wherefore was that cry?

Out, damned spot! out, I say? — One; two:

Why, then 'tis time to do't. — Hell is murky!

Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who  
knows it, when none can call our power to account? — Yet who  
would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in  
him?

(V, i, 38-44)

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14. Murry, p. 333.

And later on Lady Macbeth says:

Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh!

(V, i, 55-57)

The burden is more than she can bear, and the inner struggle is beyond her power of endurance. She has overestimated herself and miscalculated the limits of her strength. «It would drive us mad,» she tells Macbeth, and it does.

Macbeth, on the other hand, is puzzled and frightened by the strangeness and unexpectedness of the event. He is unable to recognize what is real and what is fanciful. Tumult within and outside him play havoc in his soul; he hears strange voices and listens to terror-striking words:

Macbeth: Methought, I heard a voice cry, «Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder Sleep,» the innocent Sleep!  
Sayton: The Queen my lord, is dead.  
Macbeth: She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

(V, v, 15-28)

Murry's interpretation of the first part of Macbeth's speech is indisputably unique. He admits frankly that he cannot fully grasp the meaning of the first five lines. Still, he rejects Johnson's reading which states that the Queen's death «should have been deferred to a more peaceable time.» This is the common explanation of the text which necessitates no diving deep into the real state of Macbeth's strange world. But, Murry strenuously disputes the point,

Macbeth's meaning is stranger than that. Hereafter, I think, is purposely vague. It does not mean later; but in a different mode of time from that in which Macbeth is imprisoned now. Hereafter in the not-now: there would have been a time for such a word as the Queen is dead. But the time in which he is caught is to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, one infinite same-

ness, in which yesterdays have only lighted fools the way to dusty death. Life in this time is meaningless, a tale told by an idiot, and death also. For his wife's death to have meaning there needs some total change, a plunge across a new abyss into a Hereafter.<sup>15</sup>

Murry's thesis of the timelessness of time in *Macbeth* and his explanation of the meaning of the «hereafter,» in connection with Lady Macbeth's death, seem somewhat puzzling, if not perplexing to some critics and commentators. Kenneth Muir, in his notes on *Macbeth*, states that Macbeth's «she should have died hereafter» is ambiguous. He refers to Arrowsmith Wilson's interpretation: «She would have died sometime,» and to Johnson's «Her death should have been deferred to a more peaceful hour; had she lived longer, there would have been a more convenient time for such a word,» following these two readings by Murry's criticism of Johnson's. In this very short comment on Murry's statement, Kenneth Muir's perplexity is quite apparent; he does not accept Murry's reading of the text, but at the same time, he does not refute it. He finds a way out of the impasse by stating: «that Shakespeare would have been puzzled by this explanation is not necessarily a condemnation of it.»<sup>16</sup>

Roy Walker, in the main, agrees with Murry's thesis of time in *Macbeth*, though he blames Murry for not referring to the resumption of «human time» at the end of the play. Analyzing Macbeth's «She should have died hereafter,» Walker draws attention to the fact that the statement is meaningless; Macbeth himself has realized that, «for time itself —time past, time present and time future— is meaningless; he has jumped the life to come. Time is a nightmare succession of incidents without significance.»<sup>17</sup>

Time according to Walker, «is rooted in the eternal» which cannot be «mocked» and from which there is no escape; it is different from Macbeth's time which is

...not joined to the days of the year, to the natural rhythm of seasons, the cycle of death and resurrection. It is a chaos of separate to-morrows in which the to-morrow that is a time for planting and the to-morrow that is time for plucking up never comes.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly there is no fundamental difference between Murry's and Walker's explanations, though Walker, in his introduction, gives the impression that he is going to advance a new theory of the time process in *Macbeth*:

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15. Murry, p. 335.

16. Kenneth Muir, ed., *Macbeth*, New Arden Edition (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 159.

17. Walker, p. 190.

18. Walker, p. 194.

How much I agree with this judgment (Murry's) the following pages show, but Murry does not observe the resumption of what he calls 'human time' it is essentially superhuman time in the final scene, expressed by the flood of daylight and summed in Macduff's words: The time is free.<sup>19</sup>

Walker's veiled attack, in the form of a reservation and an unqualified objection, is pointless, for Murry's concentration is on the question of time is free or not, is not Murry's main contention, the title of this article being «The Time has Been,» not the time will be. Moreover, Walker's rejection of Murry's «human time,» by alleging that

...it is essentially superhuman time, is a grave misunderstanding of Murry's point of view. By writing about human time, Murry is referring to the time process before the murder of Duncan, for, Murry asserts, the selfsame moment Duncan's blood is shed the blessed time is gone, an accursed time is come. And what an accursed Time may be, we glimpse in the speech: She should have died hereafter. The blessed time does not appear very blessed to us — a time that when the brains were out, the man would die, a time when Macbeth's senses would have cool'd to hear a night shriek. Nevertheless, that time was human<sup>20</sup>.

To agree with Roy Walker that the time was superhuman is to take the risk of accepting a critical absurdity.

To round up Murry's argument, one must stress the fact that the protagonist and his wife have been destroyed by a discrepancy between what they are and what they, after the murder, have subsequently become. They have overthrown order and broken harmony in the natural order of society; the coherence of life has been desecrated. By trying desperately to grasp the future in the instant, they have murdered the symbol of a divine order, thus murdering sleep, dislocating time, and taking the plunge into timeless world of metaphysical horror. Their desperate attempt to hold the self and not-self together — what they have been and what they have become — is absolutely futile, for it demands a more-than-human effort. Under such a terrifying burden the cords of their existence snap and finally their life cracks and collapses. Time which has been violated, but never successfully mocked, takes revenge. The queen, mercilessly attacked by the great instant which has sunk into the subconscious to emerge every now

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19. Walker, p. ix.

20. Murry, p. 336.



and then driving her mad, commits suicide. Macbeth, in his terrifying attempt to disjoint the frame of things and make «both worlds suffer» in order to escape the fear of the moment, is fully annihilated by the fatal stroke of the grace of Grace, represented by Macduff and embodied in his final words: «The time is free».

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

#### Αφροδίτη Παναγή, *Macbeth — Μια άποψη*

Υπάρχει μια ασυμφωνία ανάμεσα στον χαρακτήρα και στην πράξη του Μακμπέθ, κι αυτή είναι από τα πιο εντυπωσιακά επιτεύγματα του Σαίξπηρ. Ο Μακμπέθ σκότωσε τον Ντάνκαν, αλλά ο ίδιος νοιώθει παραζαλισμένος και μπερδεμένος. Μακάρι να ξαναζωντάνευε ο Ντάνκαν. Ο J. M. Murry βρίσκει πως ακριβώς αυτή η παραάλλη δημιουργεί την τραγικότητα. Είναι η μεγάλη αναμονή που καταλήγει στην ψευδαίσθηση και απογοήτευση, η συντριπτική φιλοδοξία που οδηγεί το χέρι του φονιά, και η τρομερή απελπισία, γιατί αυτός ο άξιος άντρας έγινε φονιάς. Μετά το φονικό, ο αντρειωμένος πολεμιστής και η γυναίκα με τη σιδερένια θέληση κοιτάζονται στα μάτια με έκπληξη και ανάμεικτα συναισθήματα, σαν δυο άγνωρα παιδιά. «Βλέπουν τον εαυτό τους» κι αυτό τους κάνει να τρέμουν. Γι' αυτό ο καθένας τους φοβάται να κοιτάξει τον εαυτό του.

Να φταίνει τάχα οι Μάγισσες; Αυτό το θέμα έχει πολυσυζητηθεί από τους κριτικούς, κι ούτε ο ίδιος ο Σαίξπηρ βοηθά στην απάντηση. Ο άνθρωπος που πουλά την ψυχή του στο διάβολο είναι παλιό θέμα στη λογοτεχνία. Οι Murry και Bradley λένε πως δεν είναι οι Μάγισσες υπεύθυνες για την ενοχή του Μακμπέθ. Τα πρώτα συναισθήματά του, όταν αυτές τον προσφωνούν με όλους τους τίτλους που θα πάρει, είναι ξάφνιασμα και κατάπληξη, όχι φόβος. Ο πειρασμός έχει έρθει από μέσα του, όχι απ' αυτές, λοιπόν. Φαίνεται πως τον σκέφτηκε τον φόνο του Ντάνκαν, προτού να τονβάλουν στο μυαλό του οι Μάγισσες. Ακόμα και τα προκλητικά λόγια της γυναίκας του, όταν αυτός δειλιάζει μπρος στην πράξη, δείχνουν πως της είχε εμπιστευτεί τη μύχια φιλοδοξία του.

Τρομάζει ο Μακμπέθ, όχι για τον φόνο, αλλά για το τί θα γίνει, όταν

μαθευτεί από τον κόσμο η πράξη του. Δεν είν' αυτός σαν τον Άμλετ που δεν τον νοιάζει για τον κόσμο που θα 'ρθει. Ο Μακμπέθ δεν αντέχει να δει τα μάτια του κόσμου να τον καταδικάζουν. Το ένοχο ζευγάρι καταφεύγει σ' όλες τις ανθρώπινες δυνάμεις, για να σωθεί η ακεραιότητα της ψυχής τους, αλλά μάταια. Είναι πεπρωμένο να αντιμετωπίσουν την πράξη τους. Κι αυτή η γνώση τους τρελλαίνει. Γιατί δεν είναι γεννημένοι φονιάδες, έχουν αρχοντιά κι ευγένεια. Μόνο για λίγο ξεπερνά τον ανθρώπινο εαυτό της η λαίδη Μακμπέθ, υποχωρώντας στον πειρασμό ενός στέμματος, για να εμψυχήσει στην ψυχή του άντρα της το θάρρος που του λείπει. Τον προκαλεί για έλλειψη αντρισμού, για να τον ζωντανέψει και καταφέρνει να ναρκώσει τη συνείδησή του. Σωστά είπε ο Murry, πως ο Μακμπέθ θέλει να σιγάσει τη συνείδησή του κι όταν δεν την ακούει πια, τότε μπορεί να προκαλέσει ακόμα και τη Μοίρα.

Κι αυτός, λοιπόν, είναι ο ρόλος της «διαβολικής βασίλισσας», όπως την ονομάζει ο Malcolm. Οι κριτικοί την έκαναν ενσάρκωση του κακού. Όμως, μετά το έγκλημα η λαίδη Μακμπέθ ξαναγίνεται η γυναίκα, μ' όλες τις αδυναμίες του φύλου της. Κι όσο ο Μακμπέθ πλουτίζει την εγκληματική καριέρα του, τόσο εκείνη γίνεται πιο ασημαντή. Μένει ένα ερείπιο, ανθρώπινο ναυάγιο, που μουρμουρίζει ξανά και ξανά στον ύπνο της τις αποτροπιαστικές αναμνήσεις της πρωτινής, σατανικής εποχής του περήφανου εαυτού της. Πρέπει να τονιστεί πως ο χαρακτήρας της λαίδης Μακμπέθ είναι γιγάντιος. Έχει δυναμισμό, άφθαστο θάρρος, αξιοθαύμαστο αυτοέλεγχο, περιφρόνηση για την αδυναμία της γυναίκας - μάνας. Αλλά ακριβώς αυτό είναι το ελάττωμα που ξεπερνά μονάχα στην περίφημη σκηνή πριν απ' τον φόνο. Είναι μια γυναίκα που δεν υπολόγισε καλά τη δύναμη της αντοχής της, κι αυτό προξενεί τη ρωγή που την καταστρέφει. Κι όμως, αυτό είναι που την κάνει αδύναμη κι ανθρώπινη.

Η σύγχυση αρχίζει από την έλλειψη αυτογνωσίας των πρωταγωνιστών. Ο φόνος που έκαναν φέρνει στροβίλισμα στην ψυχή τους, από τη στιγμή που τον κάνουν χωρίς να το γνωρίζουν. Ο Murry ισχυρίζεται πως ο Μακμπέθ σκοτώνει τον χρόνο, τον ανθρώπινο χρόνο. Ο χρόνος του είναι άχρονος, είναι η αιωνιότητα. Η ύπαρξή του, εκμηδενισμένη απ' αυτή την αιωνιότητα του χρόνου, είναι δεμένη στον τροχό της φωτιάς, αλυσσοδεμένη στον τροχό του παντοτινού Τώρα. Η λαίδη Μακμπέθ αυτοκτονεί. Κι αυτός; Όποιος σκότωσε τον ύπνο, σκότωσε και το θάνατο. Σε τέτοια ύπαρξη η ζωή δεν έχει νόημα. Ο Μακμπέθ κι η γυναίκα του καταστράφηκαν ανάμεσα στο ό,τι και ό,τι έγιναν. Απελπισμένα αδράχνοντας το μέλλον στη στιγμή, δολοφόνησαν το σύμβολο μιας θείας τάξης, και έτσι σκότωσαν τον ύπνο, χάλασαν τη σειρά του χρόνου και βυθίστηκαν σ' ένα αέναο κόσμο μεταφυσικής φρίκης.