

## THE ETERNAL JEWEL AND THE COMMON ENEMY OF MAN. SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH* AND THE SYMBOLISM OF EVIL

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**Abstract:** Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is the shortest of the great tragedies, however, it is the most poetic one. The thesis of the paper is that this drama is Shakespeare's most radical vision of evil. This thesis is supported partly by a close reading of the play partly by the application of Paul Ricoeur's theory in his *Symbolism of Evil*. The French philosopher first discussed various stages in the symbolism of evil (stain, sin, guilt) and then proposed four different myths concerning the beginning and the end of evil. For our purpose Ricoeur's third mythic pattern: "The Adamic Myth and the Eschatological Vision of History" is adopted and it is demonstrated that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* perfectly fits into this pattern.

**Key words:** Macbeth, Evil, Devil, Satan, Symbol, Myth, Temptation

"and my eternal jewel  
Given to the common Enemy of man" (3,1,67-68)

In 1930 G. Wilson Knight was probably the first to interpret *Macbeth* as "Shakespeare's most profound and mature vision of evil" (Knight, 1930: 140). Three years later another British critic L. C. Knights published a provocative essay "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" in which he undermined A.C. Bradley's psychologizing method of his famous *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) and suggested that "*Macbeth* is a statement of evil" and that the play had "more affinity with *The Waste Land* than with *The Doll's House*" (Knights, 1979: 287). Caroline Spurgeon in her book on *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us* said: "Evil in Shakespeare's imagination is dirty, black and foul, a blot, a stain...sickness, an infection, a sore and an ulcer...smell, untended garden" (Spurgeon, 1935: 158-167).

With the school of Knight, Knights and Spurgeon the traditional character-analysis of the A. C. Bradley and his followers was replaced by studying the Shakespeare's plays as poems (Viswanathan, 1980). The idea that *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's "visionary drama" is also emphasized by Harold Bloom (Bloom, 1998: 521).

The thesis of my paper is that Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the shortest and most poetic of the great tragedies (it has only 2107 lines while *Othello* has 3924 lines) but it is also Shakespeare's most radical vision of evil. This thesis will be supported first by a close reading of Acts 1 of the play; then by exploring Paul Ricoeur's theory in his *Symbolism of Evil* (1967) and finally by integrating Ricoeur's insights into the analysis of the rest of the play.

### 1. A Close Reading of Act 1 of the Play

Kenneth Muir the editor of the second Arden edition of *Macbeth* was entirely right when he suggested that the main theme of the play is stated at the very beginning of the play:

First Witch

When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch

When the hurlyburly's done,

When the battle's lost and won.

"Hurlyburly" means "Uproar, tumult, confusion, esp. the tumult of sedition or insurrection". Agreeing with Knight he says that this expression suggests "the kind of metaphysical pitch-an-toss which is about to be played with good and evil" (Muir, 1984/1951: 3). Moreover, we may add, "hurly-burly" verbally anticipates the first dramatic climax in the play when Macduff discovers the murdered Duncan and exclaims: "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!" (2,3,65)

In the interpolated scene of Hecate in Act 3 Scene 5 Hecate says that the "illusion" of magic shall draw human being to his "confusion" (3,5,29). This confusion is the mixing of, moreover, the reversal of moral ethical and logical values as expressed by all the witches at the end of their opening ritual: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air." (1,1,10-11)

Reversing is "throwing across" and in Greek this is "diabolo" and the one is doing this is "Diabolos", the devil. As Macduff makes it clear: "Confusion" is an active agent who creates, just as artists do, "masterpieces".

In the following analysis we shall see that evil is both an agent (an active power) in the play but also an object (a “masterpiece”); that the end of his work is a reversed creation, i.e. “decreation”.

A. C. Bradley touched this aspect when discussing “the substance of Shakespearean tragedy” “Evil exhibits itself everywhere as something negative, barren, weakening, destructive, a principle of death. It isolates, disunites and tends to annihilate not only its opposite but itself” (Bradley, 1979:26).

Within the play evil will “grow” as an infection due to the magical activity of the weird sisters. Therefore evil is beginning to work when “the charm is wound up” (3,1,37).

In Act 1 Scene 2 we got an image of the heroic or even mythical nature of “brave” Macbeth who was “Disdaining Fortune”, (1,2,17). “Like Valours’s minion” (1,2,19), “Bellona’s bridegroom”. No wonder that Duncan decided to confer the title of the traitor Cawdor upon Macbeth.

In Act 1 Scene 3 Shakespeare presents us the exciting the encounter of the supernatural-diabolical world with the world of the natural human beings. Macbeth immediately perceives that they have entered into an unusual confused climate: “So foul and fair a day I have not seen.” (1,3,38)

Having given the three prophetic “Hails” to Macbeth and the three strangely ambiguous “Hails” to Banquo and having eventually vanished is the more outspoken and extravert Banquo who seems to recognize the infective and the seductive nature of the apparition: “have we eaten on the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner?” (1,3,84-85).

The oracle is immediately partially fulfilled when Angus and Ross bring the amazing news of Macbeth’s unexpectedly earned title of the Thane of Cawdor. The reactions of Banquo and Macbeth conspicuously diverge upon receiving this news: Banquo speaks out openly while Macbeth begins to talk in “Asides” thus the audience or the reader may enter into his inner thoughts and feelings. The fulfillment of the prophecy for Macbeth is thus a “swelling act”, the beginning of something that has just started to grow.

It is important to bear in mind that no Lady Macbeth is needed for Macbeth, to think immediately of murdering of Duncan. By scanning his feelings Macbeth is shocked by his own desires:

Two truths are told,  
 As happy prologues to the swelling act  
 Of the imperial theme...  
 This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
 Against the use of nature? Present fears  
 Are less than horrible imaginings:  
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
 Shakes so my single state of man that function  
 Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
 But what is not. (1, 3,128-143)

Ironically, this “swelling” or “growing” is echoed in Duncan’s words who, with conferring upon him the new title, is about to “plant” Macbeth to make him “full of growing” (1,4,28-29). The audience knows, however, that the “Duncanian” planting and growing is but a weak parody of the real growing of the power of evil.

There are three stages in Lady Macbeth’s reaction to Macbeth’s report of his encounter with the weird sisters. The first is the one when she is reading and commenting upon Macbeth’s letter. The next stage is when the Messenger arrives and the third one after Macbeth eventually arrives.

She is afraid that Macbeth’s nature “is too full o’ the milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way” (1,5.17-18) Lady Macbeth knows that her husband is ultimately a good man who wants to do things “holily”, who “would not play false” (1,5,45) and therefore she wants to transfuse her nature, or, rather her “spirits”: “Hie thee hither, That I may pour my spirits in thine ear” (1,5,25-26).

The next stage is when she learns from the Messenger that Duncan is staying in their castle. Then she is invoking the evil spirits (an inverted “Veni Sancte”) to unsex her. What she wants to give up is not her gender only but her humanity. She is asking the murdering

ministers to murder her human nature so that “That no compunctious visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose” (1,5,45).

By the time her husband arrives Lady Macbeth is so determined that Macbeth is paralyzed. He is voluntarily accepting the role of the passive partner upon whom his hyper-active wife’s magic would work. His face is being read by her as he is being taught by her: “look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under't.” (1,5,64-5)

Macbeth in his long monologue “If it were done...” in Act 1 Scene 7 is still alive as he is conscious-stricken which means that he still has a soul. He is aware of the divine retribution of sin, which he is afraid of, and he lists all the positive qualities of Duncan. Eventually he admits that it is only ambition that motivates him in carrying out the deed. The key-word is “quickly”: sin has to be done quickly just as Judas was told by Jesus: “that thou doest, do it quickly (John 13,27). This means that Macbeth is fully aware of his crime as a Judas-like betraying of his own soul. This is important because human beings tend to argue that during the destruction of evil they are mere victims of that power. The story of Macbeth and that of Judas reveal that however powerful evil is around us we are always accomplices in our falls and not passive or blameless agents.

When Macbeth is still hesitating Lady Macbeth’s new strategy is to blackmail her husband by appealing to his manhood, more exactly, the lack of his manhood.

From this time  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard  
To be the same in thine own act and valour  
As thou art in desire? (1,7,38-41)

This is a sensitive point for a man. Macbeth reacts: “I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none.” (1,7,46-47)

Lady Macbeth is using more and more seductive and aggressive images as if she were deflowering a still reluctant virgin. Macbeth recognizes that he himself is the un-male partner in this relationship. “Bring forth men-children only; / For thy undaunted mettle should compose Nothing but males.” (1,7, 73-74)

By the end of Act 1 Macbeth is “made ready”, the temptation succeeds and he “the virgin” yields to his tempter. Moreover, though in different words, Macbeth repeats the lesson he learned from Lady Macbeth.

I am settled, and bend up  
 Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.  
 Away, and mock the time with fairest show:  
 False face must hide what the false heart doth know. (1,7, 80-84)

The sole hero Act 1 of *Macbeth* is the soul of Macbeth the Scot. Shakespeare is not only an excellent psychologist, he is not only interested in the motivations, reactions, ambiguities and ambitions of the human psyche but he is interested in deeper, perhaps less visible but more sensitive and vulnerable layers of the human being, what Lady Macbeth called the “compunctious visitings of nature” (1,5,45). It is the conscience, the divine imprint or spark in human nature, it is what the New Testament calls the *pneuma*. Man, in a figurative sense, is “alive” until this “organ”, the “divine light” is functioning in him/her. There is light in and around the human being until this inner light is on, until this burning light is not quenched by “yielding” to something alien to it.

Act 1 Scene 1 is the Tragedy of Macbeth the Scot who is not just a hesitating hero unable to carry out what he desires but who acts out step by step the spiritual agony of his own downfall. The more he is a villain the less he is a man. By the time he is “settled” and “bend up” he is potentially to execute his original divine *imago*, his conscience, his *pneuma*. If the play is ultimately about the distortion or loss of the original divine nature, then theoretical reflection, whether theological or philosophical, is justified.

This leads us to the ideas of Paul Ricoeur who explored this issue at great length in his early book *Symbolism of Evil* (1967).

## 2. Ricoeur’s Ideas About the Symbols and Myths of Evil

Paul Ricoeur emphasizes several times that the dogma of original sin is not a biblical idea but was construed by St Augustine. The task of hermeneutics is to deconstruct this idea and recognize its mythical and symbolical components.

Our starting point should be that we all experience evil and we cope with our experience by confessing it. While the Greek proposed a philosophical and dramaturgical purification of evil, the Jews had always considered evil as a physical reality, something of a burden. This is powerfully expressed by the authors of the Hebrew Bible. These writers confess that they are impure, have unclean lips (Isaiah) and ask the Creator “to wash us of our iniquity” (Psalm 51).

The first stage of the symbolism of evil is defilement and stain, the experience of something that comes from outside. The second stage is “sin” a negative state as e.g. “missing the target”; “deviating from the way”; “violating the covenant”, “forgetting”, “blinding”, “hardening”. We can understand sin, argues Ricoeur, only in retrospect, once we have experience deliverance from that state. The Jewish prophets, unlike the Greek philosophers, do not “reflect” upon the sin but prophesy against it. The third state of the symbolism of evil is “Guilt”, the individualization of the collective or communal experience. Its schema is that evil is an “act” which each individual begins. Penalty or penal imputation is a consequence of guilt. Therefore it leads to a scrupulous conscience.

According to Ricoeur the symbolism of evil is recapitulated in the concept of the servile will. This is best expressed by the idea of captivity. We may enrich Ricoeur’s ideas by quoting John Donne “Batter My Heart” the most graphic expression of the idea of the servile will:

Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you  
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
 That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
 Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
 I, like an usurped town to another due,  
 Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end,  
 Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
 But is captived, and proves weak or untrue,  
 Yet dearly' I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
 But am betrothed unto your enemy,  
 Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.  
 (Smith, ed.314-5)

However, evil is not only experienced or expressed by various stages of symbols but it is also narrated. This takes us to the question myth which tells the story about the beginning and the end of evil.

Ricoeur distinguishes four main types of myth: (1) the Sumerian theogonic creation myths which suggest that evil is primordial; (2) the myth of the wicked God of the Greek tragedies; (3) the Adamic myth; (4) the myth of the exiled soul or Orphic myth.

In our analysis of *Macbeth* we are going to focus on "The Adamic Myth and the Eschatological Vision of History". Ricoeur says that the Adamic myth is the *par excellence* anthropological myth as Adam is man. The Adamic myth has three characteristic features: 1) it is an etiological myth as it is concerned with the origin of evil; 2) it suggests that, unlike in theogonic myths, good is primordial not evil. It even presupposes the idea of freedom, namely, that human creature can undo himself, 3) the central figure of the primordial man (Adam) is decentralized by other figures such as Eve and the snake.

It is important to bear in mind that the biblical temptation-story is a drama and it begins as a dialogue between the serpent and Eve. The serpent is the only figure that has remained from the theogonic myths. The temptation begins with a question "Has God truly said?", an interrogation of the Interdit. As a result "dizziness begins as alienation from the commandment which becomes insupportable; the creative limit becomes hostile relativity... A 'desire' has sprung up, the desire for infinity; but that infinity is the ....desire itself, it is the desire of desire" (Ricoeur, 1967: 23). To the question why the serpent approaches the woman rather than the man, Ricoeur's reply is "the woman represents the point of least resistance of finite freedom to appeal to the Pseudo, of the evil infinite" (Ricoeur, 1967: 255). But Ricoeur does not speak sexist language: to make it sure: "Every woman and every man are Adam; every man and every woman are Eve; every woman sins 'in' Adam, every man is seduced 'in' Eve" (Ricoeur, 1967: 255).

The serpent for Ricoeur represents the experience of quasi-externality. Evil is already there but also within us. Temptation is not only seduction from without because there is an inner vulnerability within us. This "finally, to sin would be to *yield*" (Ricoeur, 1967: 256). The serpent is part of ourselves which we project into the seductive object, it "represents the psychological production of desire" (Ricoeur, 1967: 257). Therefore says St James in the New Testament: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God...every man is tempted

when he is drawn away of his own lust” (James, 1,13–14). “Our own desire projects itself into the desirable object, and so when he binds himself – and that is the evil thing – a man accuses the object in order to exculpate himself” (Ricoeur, 1967: 257).

Once again: we can interpret the symbolism and the mythology of evil only from retrospect, from the perspective of the eschatological symbols of deliverance. This comes down to us from the counter-drama of temptation, the drama of redemption or deliverance.

### 3. Application of Ricoeur to the Analysis of *Macbeth*

It can be easily accepted that William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is about the beginning and the end of evil, therefore it is legitimate to interpret it in the frame of myth. As 16<sup>th</sup> century culture was entirely determined by Christianity it is appropriate to turn to the biblical Adamic myth. According to Ricoeur there are two characteristic features of the Adamic myth: “On the one hand, it tends to concentrate all the evil of history in a single man, in a single act – in short, in a unique event. On the other hand, the myth spreads out the event in a ‘drama’ which takes time, introduces a succession of incidents, and brings several characters into the action” (Ricoeur, 1967: 243).

In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* the Adamic “one man” is Macbeth himself and the characters on the temptation story are Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters. However, unlike in the Adamic myth Lady Macbeth is not tempted by the weird sisters; if ever, she had already been tempted long before the play.

Shakespeare tragedy, as most tragedies, are characterized by a pyramidal structure where there is rising action from the exposition to the climax and then the action is reversed and going to fall from the climax to the final catastrophe. Evil, as I argued elsewhere (Fabiny, 1989), is not only a subject matter or an overall symbolism within the plays but a “figurative protagonist” whose birth, growth, climax, weakening and disappearance can easily recognized in the plays. So Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is not only the tragedy of Macbeth the Scot but it dramatizes the myth or the narrative of the beginning and end of evil. It reenacts the pattern of the medieval *rota fortunae*, the wheel of fortune, namely: it is evil who climbs upon the wheel (*regnabo*), it is evil who reigns upon the wheel for a while (*rengo*); it is evil who falls from the top of the wheel (*regnavi*); it is evil who is without a rule (*sum sine regno*) when “the time is free” (5,9,21) (Fabiny, 1989).

In the rest of the paper I am going to follow the dramatic trajectory of evil first in the growing action and then in the falling action. In our close reading of Act 1 we have seen that the wicked power of the prophecies as “the happy prologues to the imperial theme” (1,2,128) was immediately conceived in Macbeth’s heart. Not only his ambition was stirred by the verbal infection of the witches but he immediately associated the idea of murdering Duncan. We remember Ricoeur’s words: “to sin is to yield”- and we cannot but notice how Macbeth was shocked by his own ambitions and the terrible plans to realize this ambition:

why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
And make my seated heart knock against my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings.  
My thought, whose murder, yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single surmise,  
And nothing is but what is not. (1,3,137-42)

I propose that there are three cycles of evil in *Macbeth*: the first and most elaborated is the killing of Duncan, the second is the hiring the murderers to kill Banquo and the third cycle of evil is the slaughtering of Macduff family. In crying out the murders Macbeth is less and less involved directly and personally and he is more and more a totalitarian tyrant: first he kills Duncan with his own hands; when he is already king he hires two or three murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance; and eventually the machinery of his totalitarian state wipes out Macduff’s wonderful family.

In the dagger-monologue (2,1,33-61) Macbeth envisages the murder as sexual violence as he identifies himself with “Tarquin’s ravishing strides” (2,1,5). The murder is taking place offstage between Scene 1 and 2 of Act 2 and Macbeth reports to his wife: “I have done the deed” (2,2,14). Duncan’s sons Malcolm and Donalbain were sleeping in the chamber next to their father’s and Macbeth’s most shocking experience was that he was unable to say “Amen” while they were praying half-asleep.

The sign of Macbeth’s loss of *imago dei* is reflected in the loss of his ability to pray. Strangely enough, Macbeth is so overwhelmed by the loss of his ability to communicate with

God that he needs Lady Macbeth to notice his bloody hands when she insists that “wash this filthy witness from your hand” (2,2,45).

Now, we have arrived at what Ricoeur called the first stage of the symbolism of sin: stain and defilement. Macbeth is still aware that his sin is so great that it cannot simply be washed away by water; on the contrary the stain or defilement he got on his hands will infect a whole sea.

What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes.  
 Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
 Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
 The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
 Making the green one red. (2,2,58-62)

With his remark Macbeth is still a real and not a ‘pseudo’ human being. However, he will start to pretend, dissimulate soon, and for a while successfully, proving that his role-playing and feigning can work. By role-playing Macbeth, just as Richard III, enters into an illusionary, virtual world (what Ricoeur called the “Pseudo”) which he more and more gets identified with. His tragedy is that he cannot get out of his role any more, he is trapped and swallowed by the pseudo-world.

“I am in blood  
 Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,  
 Returning were as tedious as go o'er”. (3,4,135-7)

The words are said after the murdering of Banquo, the second cycle of evil in the play. By that time Macbeth’s heart has gradually become harder and harder and he has become so much captive of his pseudo-world that he has become totally blind and sensitive to real feelings and reality in general. This is the stage of, what we may call, “heart-sclerosis” which Ricoeur has called the concept of the servile will. By giving up humanity rooted in divinity he has become a virtual being for whom reality is the grasping and the keeping of power.

This humanity rooted in divinity was called “Nature” by the Elisabethans. This nature is ultimately benevolent, good. However, when it is disturbed and violated whether by

supernatural power or by the human being, things and humans become “unnatural”. The word “unnatural” is used with a conspicuous frequency in Shakespeare’s plays and we can simply translate it as “evil”.

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* shows the process of how the protagonist gradually, step-by-step becomes “unnatural”. The reality of evil is usually perceived and accurately described by the minor characters of the play. Such is the conversation of Ross and the Old man in Act 2 Scene 4 when they perceive and see “heavens, as troubled with man’s act” (2,44,5). It is the Old Man calls this “unnatural” and evokes the Bosch-Breughel-Picasso-like images of the falcon being hawked at by a mousing owl and the horses eating each other (2,4,12-16).

The Doctor when suspecting the real cause of the sleepwalking of Lady Macbeth remarks: “More needs she the divine than the physician” (5,1,71). With this observation he cautiously describes the mechanism of evil. His guarded language allows saying that: “unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles” (5,1,68-69).

Evli indeed begets evil. Macbeth is not safe on the throne of Scotland as he remembers the prophecy given to Banquo and his descendants. The power he attained brings him only fear instead of freedom. If the prophecy concerning Banquo and his descendants is fulfilled then he has a “fruitless crown” (3,1,60) upon his head. Macbeth realizes that he was stupid enough to have betrayed his soul “only for them” (3,1,67). Here comes the most tragic sentence of the drama: Macbeth seems to be entirely aware of the weight of his crime, his “faustian” betrayal of his soul when he free willingly gave it to the principle of darkness:

and my eternal jewel

Given to the common Enemy of man. (3,1,67-68)

The eternal jewel is a metaphor of the human soul and the “common Enemy of man” is Satan whose Hebrew name Satanos means “enemy”. In the Gospel of John Jesus says of Satan that he was the enemy, the accuser, the murderer of man from the very beginning (Jn 8,44). The sentence is extremely loaded with tragic pathos as Macbeth is fully aware of what he had done, of what he had betrayed, of what he had lost.

In the second cycle of evil Macbeth does not need support from Lady Macbeth any more. Lady Macbeth had managed to transfuse her supernatural-diabolical energy into her “dearest partner of greatness” (1,5,11) and Macbeth has not only learned the lesson (be like an

innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't" (1,5,65-66) but has successfully absorbed his Lady's energy and will to power and managed to extinguish his conscience, the "compunctious visiting of Nature" (1,5,45). For a while he wanted to remain a man "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none." (1,7,46-47) but after the first successful murder this project is not on his agenda any more. Lady Macbeth might only suspect something of Macbeth's plan of murdering Banquo but now, having internalized all her energy Macbeth acts entirely on his own, proudly dismissing her wife's question "What's to be done?" by saying: "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, Till thou applaud the deed" (3,2,45). Macbeth already knows that the events of the darkness will be "deed of dreadful note" (3,2,43). This time it is Macbeth alone who turns for supernatural aid to the powers of darkness:

Come, seeling night,  
 Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;  
 And with thy bloody and invisible hand  
 Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond  
 Which keeps me pale! Light thickens; and the crow  
 Makes wing to the rooky wood:  
 Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;  
 While night's black agents to their preys do rouse. (3,2,46-56)

It is in the feast-scene (Act 4 Scene 4) when Lady Macbeth proves to be not only active but she can still prove to be a true to her "partner of greatness" when Macbeth, alone seeing the ghost of the murdered Banquo, almost betrays himself.

As in most Shakespearean tragedies so is it *Macbeth*: when evil is getting to lose his energy, we begin to hear the voices of the agents of redemption. In the conversation between Lennox (3,6) and the Lord (a nobleman) there is already hope in the midst of horror. They mention that Macduff fled to England to the court of the holy King where Malcolm had received shelter. Instead of the language of curse and violence we hear the language of prayer and blessing:

Some holy angel  
 Fly to the court of England and unfold  
 His message ere he come, that a swift blessing

May soon return to this our suffering country  
Under a hand accursed! (3,6,45-49).

We know that the witches are manipulative but Macbeth goes to them because he wants to be manipulated. That is the stage of moral blindness or the exclusive dominance of passion.

Macbeth, now a professional black magician, again a distant relative of Doctor Faustus, conjures up the witches and demands answers concerning his future. Only the first apparition, an armed head, warns of a danger: "beware Macduff" (4,1,171); the second apparition, a bloody child, however is more encouraging: "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth" (4,1,80-91); and on hearing third message carried by a child crowned, with a tree in his hand, is triumphantly optimistic: "Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill Shall come against him." (4,1,92-94)

Now Macbeth leaves the place intoxicated. Here he indeed dresses himself into "drunken hope" as at the beginning Lady Macbeth suggested (cf.1,7,35-36). Macbeth by now had totally lost contact with reality. He lives, or rather exists in an illusory world and thus behaves as a pitiful clown, a man without substance.

However this clown, though empty of humanity is still a poet whom we admire whether or not we embrace his philosophy he shares with us upon being told his wife's death.

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. (5, 19-26)

The third cycle of evil is then the slaughtering of Macduff's family. In the drama the domestic episode, i.e. the witty chat between Lady Macduff and her son marks the most humane, realistic scene which is suddenly counterpointed by the Herod-like massacre of the innocents. Tragic waste is never more obvious than here.

This charming and heart-breaking scene, however is followed by a rather long and artificial dialogue between Macduff and Malcolm. Nevertheless this has its dramatic propriety. Though the dialogue is indeed slow-moving we should not forget that we are in the court of Edward the Confessor, the holy King. And Macduff's ritual visit has its meaning; he goes to borrow grace to fight evil (Knights, 1933).

Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene is the culmination of the symbolism of evil, a dense dramatic illustration of Ricoeur's theory of stain, spot and defilement. Her madness brings to the surface the texts of her oppressed feelings and fears: "Out, damned spot! out, I say!—One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.—Hell is murky!" — (5,1,33-34). "Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (5,1,47-8).

The doctor can only say: "This disease is beyond my practice." (5,1,55) "More needs she the divine than the physician." (5,1,71) Seeing the consequences of the "unnatural deeds" which no physician can cure we are comforted by the agents of redemption in the next scene where Lennox and the other Scottish noblemen explicitly talk about real "medicine" that is going to purge their country (5,2).

There is a vibration of quickly changing scenes as woe and weal prophecies and the accelerating speed of the drama (in fact similar to the image of horse-riding, frequently mentioned by Macbeth) leads up to the culmination which is the final clash between Macduff and Macbeth and to the solemnious catharsis when Malcolm announces that "Time is free" (5,9,21). This means Scotland is free, that the dark cloud is gone from Scotland's sky.

The story of evil – conceived, born, grown, climaxed, reversed, declined, has not only withdrawn but has eventually come to an end.

At least in the drama.

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