

MACBETH Heroic Imagination Stories Series

Rose Zimbardo

Introduction

I would like to begin by talking with you about two different ways of seeing / understanding a Shakespeare play. But first--as an aside—let me remind you that we never *see* a Shakespeare play as Shakespeare wrote it. We see somebody's—a director's, or a teacher's, or any reader's—*reading* of the play. So, for example Olivier's Hamlet is based on a very different “reading” of the play from that of David Tennant. But, to get back to the two basically different ways of *seeing* a Shakespearean play: the early 17th century perception or understanding and the late 18th century, or Enlightenment understanding (from which our own derives).



The philosopher Grygory Kepes, in a book called Language and Vision, said:
A revaluation of representational idioms [plays present representational images] comes about when new elements invade the





environmental field that are important enough to demand attention.

OK, what does that mean? To give you a simple example, I see and understand visual images differently from the way my students do. Why? Because digital and computer images *have not shaped my perception as they have theirs*. For me the “new elements that have invaded the environmental field” of representation—computer and TV generated—did not exist when I was seventeen. They demand my (and everybody’s) attention now, but they have not shaped my visual habits, my way of seeing, as they have yours.

The 17th to 18th centuries presented the most CRUCIAL “reevaluation of representational idioms” that has occurred in Western thought. As the cultural historian, Manlove explains, from the 17th century, when Shakespeare wrote, to the 18th century of Enlightenment, which shaped our own consciousness, “phenomena lose their *symbolic* roles in the teleological scheme [i.e., the universal order] and are increasingly seen simply as phenomena....The old network of universal analogy by which all things could figure one another...collapses.” In the course of time from the 17th to 18th century ‘REALITY’ became ‘interiorized.’” The philosopher Richard Rorty goes so far as to say that the very conception of the human mind as an “inner arena,” the locus of reality, was invented in the late 17th century.

For the Middle Ages and the 16th Century the world was “a place of interconnected *meanings*” not objects, and consequently artistic representation stressed INTERCONNECTEDNESS within a whole design and CONTINUITY between the microcosm (man and man’s world) and the macrocosm (the great metaphysical order toward which it pointed and/or to which it aspired.) Think, for example of Dante’s Divine Comedy.

So the late seventeenth to 18th Century brought to human perception: 1) First, separation and locatedness in time and space, 2) and then, the invention of an “inner arena” within each human psyche wherein his/her special reality was located. INSIDE THE HUMAN MIND, we no longer find Hellmouth, as we did in the Middle Ages and 16th Century. (as Shakespeare puts it in one of his sonnets “the center of my sinful earth”), but rather a new frontier for exploration, an inner reality. Montaigne says,

I turn my gaze inward, I fix it there and keep it busy... I

look inside myself; I continually observe myself...I taste myself.

...I roll about in myself.



Consequently the “nature,” or “reality” that a play imitates or represents means something quite different in the 14th, 15th, 16th Century from what it means in the 18th Century. And the meaning of a play changes drastically in less than a hundred years.

Let’s compare for a moment the extremes of visualizing Shakespeare’s plays on a continuum that stretches from conceiving nature as an abstract cosmological design to a time when nature is conceived of as the internal arena of the human mind and the material world of human action. Ben Jonson, Shakespeare’s contemporary, conceives of nature in the medieval/Renaissance way—that is, as proportions among parts within a system of interconnected meaning. Both Shakespeare and Jonson think that drama represents nature as a macrocosmic design: a theater is named “the Globe;” the stage is called “a little O.”

In “To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare and what he hath left us” Jonson writes,

“ Nature her selfe was proud of his designs

And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines,

Which were so richly spun and woven so fit”

Nature here is God’s design: art is structured to the lineaments of that design.

Jonson goes on:

Yet must I not give Nature all: Thy Art

My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part





For though the Poet's matter Nature be,

His Art doth give the fashion.

The anonymous I.M.S., writing in 1632, makes clearer still that what the early 17th Century admired in Shakespeare was his ability to “feign—or delineate a WORLD:

...to give a Stage

(Ample and true with life) voice, action, age

As Plato's Year [i.e. symbolically significant 7 year period] and

New Scene of the world...

The Plebian Impe [Shakespeare] from lofty throne

Creates and rules a world...

And there did sing, or seeme to sing, the Choyce

Birds of foraine note and various voices.

Here hangs a mossy rock; there playes a faire

But childing fountaine perled; Not the ayre

Nor clouds, nor thunder but were living drawne.

So, in the early 17th Century Shakespeare was conceived as the imitator, or delineator of a whole world order.

At the other end of the spectrum Samuel Johnson *sees* in Shakespeare not the imitation of cosmic Nature, but rather a “mirroure of life.” Johnson shows us that by 1763 OUR OWN perceptual method of response to the drama—namely, “identifying with” or “entering into” the psychology of characters—was firmly established. He was aware of the earlier way of perceiving and condemned it. He says,



HEROIC IMAGINATION IN LITERATURE



This then is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed [i.e. deluded] his imagination in the phantoms which other writers raise before him, may be cured of his delirious ecstasies.... Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbole or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity as the writers of barbarous romances...and he that should form his expectations of human affairs from [their] play[s] would be equally deceived. Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied by *men*, who act and speak as the reader thinks he himself should have spoken or acted on the same occasion.

In the new “representational idiom” characterization is thought to be the imitation of actual human behavior. What is more, once characters are thought to represent real human beings, the reader/spectator presupposes in them an inner arena. Therefore, Johnson in examining the character Polonius, not only explores the character’s inner thoughts and feelings, he even constructs an imagined psychological history for him. To quote Johnson again,

Polonius is a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with



observation, proud of his eloquence and declining into dotage...Such

a man is positive and confident because he knows his mind was once strong,

and knows not that it has become weak. Such a man excels in general

principles, but fails in particular application. He is knowing in retrospect,

and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory and

can draw from his repositories of knowledge...he gives useful counsel,

but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent,

the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties....[and so on]



Johnson has ENTERED INTO THE IMAGINED CONSCIOUSNESS AND FEELINGS OF A LITERARY CHARACTER. A character (the word until the late 17th century meant “line drawing) is no longer a figure, or a type, or the delineation of an Idea , or—as in Dante—a sin. Rather a character is believed to have an inner life, or reality, which interior psychological arena has itself a history. From here to the 20th century, the critical argument that Hamlet has an Oedipal complex, or, as a former colleague of mine would have it, that before the play King Lear begins, King Lear has sexually abused his daughters is one small step. Of course neither Polonius nor King Lear *exists* “before the play begins.”

So, how should that affect our own understanding of Shakespeare’s tragedies? The theater historian Glynne Wickam said, “Where common sense tells us that Shakespeare and his contemporaries reaped the seed, tilth, and growing of preceding centuries, most modern criticism...has severed Shakespeare’s drama from its roots.” If we want to understand a Shakespeare play as nearly as possible to the way that its original audience MAY have understood it, we must try to connect it to its medieval





roots. To do that, we must abandon our Romanticism-conditioned, novel-conditioned mind set and try to perceive the *emblematic signs* that Shakespeare inherited from the Middle Ages in order to see what Shakespeare was doing with them.

For example, we will see in *Macbeth* what Wickam described as “a conflict between an emblematic theatre—literally a theatre which aimed at achieving dramatic illusion by figurative representation and a theatre of realistic illusion—literally a theatre seeking to simulate reality in terms of images.” In *Macbeth*, two *inherited symbolic configurations* meet, one of them spatial, the other temporal. Shakespeare derived both of them from medieval patterns of representation. BUT, *he also changed both of them in significant ways in order to create a perspective upon the human condition that is decidedly not medieval.*

The first pattern, which I shall call the **MACROSCOPIC** structure of *Macbeth*, is derived from the Mystery Plays (which were still performed in Shakespeare’s youth, and some scholars believe were performed in Stratford, where he lived.) The medieval Mystery Cycles staged a theater of the world where cosmic, worldly, and human time and space met and were made manifest in a symbolic design: ABOVE -HEAVEN; on the MIDDLE PLANE -EARTH, where human action is played, and BELOW -HELL. However, what is interesting in *Macbeth* is the change that Shakespeare makes in that symbolic structure. In Shakespeare, as in his contemporary John Davies of Hereford, writing in 1603, the macroscopic, three-planed structure is morally neutral:

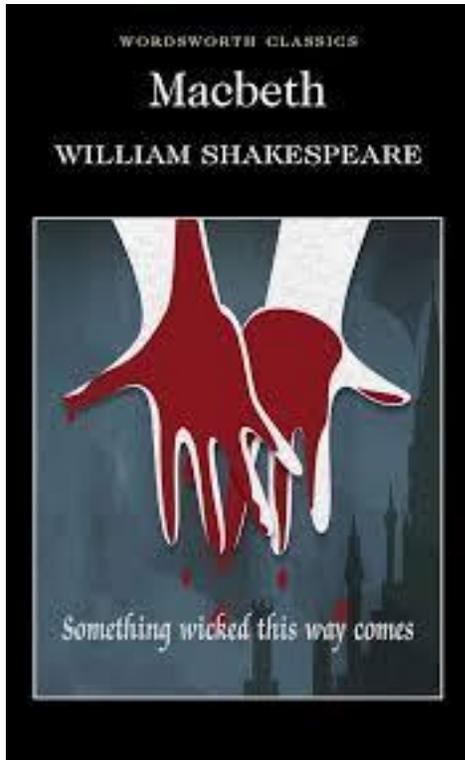
God is a sprite, the world a body is

Both which in Man are plain epitomized

A human being is a microcosm, who in himself epitomizes the macrocosm. The difference? In Shakespeare, EVIL IS NOT EMBODIED IN A PLACE. A human being MAKES evil, and thereby, as Macbeth does, MAKES HELL. He does so because he possesses what John Davies calls a “Fantastical”—i.e., an imaginative—faculty that spans the universe. The power of imagination is the soul’s way of knowing itself and its place in the cosmic order. Fantastical imagination can see the unseen. But, John Davies tells us, if it is not guided by Judgment, it can fall into the power of its own chimeras. Thought, Judgment, is the gatekeeper that separates Reason from fantasy and guides it:

Yet, lest the soule beholding her faire forme





Above herselfe, should of herselfe
aspire:

He [God] gives us proof, he can her
parts deforme

That formed her parts, if Pride
provoke His ire.

Then lets he fiends the Fancy enorme

With strong Delusions and with
Passions dire.

In murdering Duncan, Macbeth murders his own judgment, which has told him that he must not kill his king, who is also his kinsman and his guest. He thereby destroys the gatekeeper, “Intelligence” and falls into the Hell that exists potentially within himself. Hell for Shakespeare, as for John Davies, is not a PLACE BUT A MENTAL CONDITION,

because “Sin is nothing because it was made without Him, without Whom nothing that has been made, *is*.” A human being alone makes sin –“Noughty nothing that make all things nought,” and thereby makes Hell. When Macbeth’s reason/judgment loses sovereignty, his “fantastical imagination,” unchecked, takes over his mind and makes everything that is, “that which is not.” Hell is a state of mind, the play tells us, wherein “Nothing is/ But what is not.” (I, iii, 141, 142) Instead of, as in a Mystery Play, an evil king like Herod is carried off through Hellmouth by devils, Macbeth’s own mind becomes his Hell, and he himself, imprisoned in it, becomes a devil, “the Fiend of Scotland.”

Shakespeare derived his second, **MICROSCOPIC** scheme from the medieval Morality Plays. Humanum Genus, or Everyman, journeys his time on earth, encountering as he does a variety of allegorical figures—Wealth, Fellowship, Lust, etc., and he asks each of them to accompany him to his end. He wants to be saved. Each of them seems agreeable at first, but each falls away and deserts him. For example, Wealth seems so helpful at first that he thinks Wealth will gain him Salvation, but midway Wealth deserts him. Only Faith and Good works remain his companions and help him gain Heaven.





Macbeth makes a similar Morality journey from the outermost periphery of self-definition, where he acts the role of heroic man, carving his identity in defiance of death and fortune:

For brave Macbeth—well he deserves the name—
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion carved out his way. (I, ii, 16-18)

A human being carves out an heroic identity by his actions.

In the middle distance of the journey, Macbeth and Banquo are presented with a vision of Everyman's Fate in mutable nature: the Weird Sisters (Wyrd means Fate in Old English, and these, to my mind, are the Three Fates). The vision presented by the Weird Sisters is subject to conflicting interpretation. Remember that the "soule's eye" is that which can see the unseen and, guided by judgment, can reveal to the mind a human being's place in the social and cosmic order; it can determine whether a human being's fate will be governed by reason or by fantastical imagination. Macbeth is at first horrified by the ambivalence of what is revealed:

Whose horrid image doth unfix my air
And make my seated heart knock at my sides
Against the use of Nature. (I, iii, 20,21)

The images that his fantastical imagination present to him shake him and make him aware that his mind can *make* "that which is not."

Macbeth travels on to his castle, which, as in the medieval Morality "The Castle of Perseverance," is symbolic of the the SELF conceived as a battleground on which good and evil forces contend (Faith, Charity, Prudence, etc. fight against the Seven Deadly Sins for possession of the castle). The castle can be a "pleasant seat," a center of the harmony is nature, or it can be a sepulcher, a tomb, as Lady Macbeth envisions it:

The raven himself is hoarse





That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan

Under my battlement. (I, v, 38-40)

Macbeth enters his castle/self and gives himself over to the interpretation of his fate that Lady Macbeth offers. Lady Macbeth, feminists notwithstanding, is not the portrait of a woman. Like every other character in the play, she is an emblematic figure. She symbolizes one kind of *anima*, or property of the soul: the drive to power, the will that makes itself will only, all-will, the will that causes a human being to define him/herself *against* the Other, in opposition to the Other, in isolation from humankind's brotherhood, sisterhood, creaturehood. Consider Lady Macbeth's evocation of the power that she wants to enter and govern her:

Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts...

Fill me, the crown to the toe, topful of direst cruelty...etc.

[We will examine the passage more closely when we analyze the play.]

Accepting Lady Macbeth's influence as his guide, Macbeth kills Duncan, and once he has killed his king (the apex of the social order) and kinsman (in violation of the blood order) he ENTERS HELL. The Porter at the Gate scene is clearly reminiscent of Hellmouth; the Porter is the mischievous satirist-devil of the Mystery and Morality Plays. The image of Hellmouth is part of the perceptual set of a Jacobean audience in Art as well as drama. But, here again we find a distinctly Shakespearean overlay (II, iii, i) Hellmouth is *no longer a place*; it is a portal of mind that exists within Macbeth—metaphorically within his castle.

Macbeth's descent into Hell occurs in progressive steps into negation. He becomes ANTI-THANE, killing his king who is also his guest; he becomes ANTI-KING, killing his subject, Banquo, instead of protecting and nourishing him; he becomes ANTI-LIFE, killing Lady Macduff and her fledgling children. And finally, he becomes ANTI-GOD, the FIEND OF SCOTLAND. Human time and all human order no longer exist for him. Isolate, he is caught in a fragmented, meaningless "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow..."



Analysis of the play

1. Why does the play begin with the Weird Sisters (or Witches, depending upon which early edition you examine)? How do you understand them? As a vision? As figments of the imagination? As outpourings of the “fantastical” mind?

2. What is our initial impression of Macbeth? Heroic, chivalrous, loyal to the king. He carves out his Fate in defiance of Fortune. He makes his heroic identity.

3. What does the Witches “fair is foul; foul is fair” suggest if we think of them as the Fates? The ambiguity suggests that while every human being’s fate is fixed (Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos) each human being can, and must interpret what his fate means to him. Will a human being hold himself as his only good and fall “sere o’ the leaf,” as Macbeth does, or will he value self in relation to other, equally valuable selves. Will he affirm the human community, and thereby pay his debt to fate but live forever in his progeny, as Banquo does?

4. What is the significance of Banquo’s saying that the Witches are “bubbles of the earth?” In what sense is each human being’s fate a bubble, or exhalation of the earth? The fate of each human being is the consequence of our being “of the earth,” creatures. Like every dog, or cat, or bird, we have a span of life from birth, to full growth, to death. So, though we carve out our unique identities by our actions, we are also caught on the wheel of nature’s time over which we have no control.

5. What is Macbeth’s initial response to the prophecy? The right one. “If chance will have me king, chance may crown me/ without my stir.” He will do nothing to make himself a king.

6. What is Banquo’s first response? Banquo is more cautious in interpreting the prophecy. He fears the consequences of Macbeth’s being told he will be king. He sees that the witches may be “instruments of darkness” who tell us truths “to win us with honest trifles.” Banquo takes the possibility of misinterpreting the threat in the message more seriously than Macbeth does.



7. Take a look at Duncan's greeting of Macbeth and Banquo. READ I, 4. Duncan is the ideal king. An ideal king is a gardener whose function it is to plant the Heavenly Harmony on earth. Banquo says, "There if I grow/ The harvest is your own." If a particular plant accepts his place in the order, he grows—and he also reinforces the whole design of the garden. The Heavenly Harmony (or music of the spheres) occurs because *each* sphere [planet] has its own unique note to sound; it is vital to the operation of the whole. But its note must stand in right relation to all the other notes for the harmony to occur. The two plants—Macbeth and Banquo—are put in their proper places by Duncan the gardener/king in the order he implants in the world. If a particular plant accepts his place and stands in right relation to the others, the garden grows. If a particular plant refuses its proper place in the order and desires to be the ALL, it disrupts the order and, isolated, falls finally "sere o' the leaf."

8. Now take a look at the "investment scene." I, iv, l. 33ff. Malcolm's investment as Duncan's heir is derived from a Mystery Play scene in which God the Father declares his Son to be the Messiah. Satan's response to the Son's investment is rebellion against God, warring with God, and falling to Hell. The "stars" around Malcolm that will shine in the order that Duncan has established are symbolic of the heavenly spheres. Duncan is drawing the heavenly order on the earth. The "shining" of each star in "nobleness" rests on its position in the whole. But, like Lucifer, who brings himself and 1/3 of the angels in Heaven to ruin, Macbeth will bring himself and all of Scotland to ruin because he wants to be king. Macbeth thinks of the investment of Malcolm as a "step" he must "o'erleap." And his response is markedly Satanic. His "stars hide your fires" is his desire to cut off his connection to the heavenly order. Worse still, he does not want to *know* what he is doing—"Let the eye wink at the hand" etc, He no longer will carve out an heroic identity by his actions because he has submitted himself to his "dark and deep desires." He gives his Reason over to Will, craving what he *wants* rather than what he knows is good.

9. Lady Macbeth's response is much more extreme. Look at what *she wills*. I, v, l. 40ff

READ: She wills to be cut off from any impulse to be open or compassionate: "Stop up th' access and passage to remorse/ That no compunctious visitings of Nature/ Shake my fell purpose."

10. Why does she ask to be unsexed? Because sexual differentiation, or gender, the basic, natural differentiation of identity, is necessary to the order. Each self must be separate and unique but each must also be in interplay with all other individual selves





11. “thicken my blood.” In Renaissance physiology Blood is the medium through which the Will, or spirit reaches *outward* beyond the self. (Out from heart, back to heart).

Davies says,

And, for the Veines and Arteries need each other,

And that their succors should be neere at hand,

They meete, and...goe together

Thereby to vigorize the vitall Bond

...to learn us mutual love..

Thickened blood would seal the spirit in self and block the desire to see ones' self in relation to others.

12. Turn my “milk into gall”? Turn the fluid nourishment of life into the bitterness of death on a Cross. Lady Macbeth makes herself an instrument of the will to power and negation ONLY. She allows herself no other identity, no extraneous purpose.

13. How does that relate to her eventual fate? Madness=the inability to differentiate. She ends up being the container of chaos.

14. Take a look at Macbeth’s desire I, vii, I What does he want? He wants Duncan to be murdered without any consequences. He wants the murder to be a single, isolated moment, an act unrelated to any other act and evoking no response from other people .Is that possible? Ever?

15. How does Lady Macbeth want Macbeth to view himself? I, vii, 30. When Macbeth, for a moment, sees himself in relation to others he wants to abandon the plan. He wants the “golden opportunities” Duncan gave him to define his place in relationship to others. She says that that is not enough. She wants him to *enlarge* himself, to blot out all thought of relatedness. She would dash out the brains of her nursing child to preserve the plan. So, Lady Macbeth becomes the *minister*, the enabler of his “deep and dark desires.”

16. If you were directing this play how would you stage these exchanges between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? Consider: 1) she is taunting him with being weak, 2) she is threatening to withhold love if he does not kill Duncan, 3) she is daring him to prove his





macho. When Macbeth puts himself into the hands of Lady Macbeth, he is giving himself up to his own desire—the human desire to control and own everybody and everything. Self over all--consider the horror which this idea led the Nazis to commit.

So, Macbeth kills Duncan

17. Why can't Lady Macbeth kill Duncan herself?

Because he reminds her of her father and therefore she sees in him the BLOOD RELATIONSHIP, she tried to deny. Also, Lady Macbeth symbolizes a force within the mind, the *drive to action*, but not action itself.

18. The first consequence of killing Duncan for Macbeth is psychological. He divorces *action from knowledge of his action*: II, ii, 71. “To know my deed, ‘twere best not know myself.” When, in Act I, Macbeth said that the thought of killing was equivalent to murdering thought, he was prophetic: “My thought whose murder yet is but fantastical...” The ambiguity in “whose” is significant. The imagined fantasy of killing Duncan, the orderer, brings to Macbeth the knowledge that in killing Duncan, he will murder a part of his own mind.

19. The knocking at the gate summons Duncan to Heaven and Macbeth to Hell. The Porter at the gate is clearly derived from the comic/satiric devil who drags souls through Hellmouth in the medieval drama. Let's read his speech carefully: II, iii, i. and ask ourselves why equivocation should lead to Hell? In Renaissance thinking [see Dante] virtue is a positive trait; it is not merely absence of, or resistance to vice. Virtue empowers. The equivocator gives up his ability to differentiate between good and evil, i.e., he willingly gives up Reason.

20. Where is Hell in the play? Hell is IN Macbeth, in his own mind. How should we read these lines, II, 3, 89ff: “Had I but died before this chance”...From the moment that he kills Duncan and falls into Hell (which is his own mind) there is no positive reality for Macbeth.

NOTICE HOW THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY CHANGES: Not the narrative structure of pre-murder, but choppy, almost disconnected scenes, rapid movement.

21. Why does Macbeth kill Banquo and try to kill Banquo's son?



- a. Banquo and Macbeth are the choosers of how to interpret everyman's Fate. Banquo has chosen *for* order; Macbeth has wrenched himself *out* of the order and tries to make the ALL subject to his will.
- b. Especially important! From the moment that he kills Duncan Macbeth can only will NEGATION. He can no longer *create* his identity by his acts—as he did in the very beginning of the play. He can ONLY destroy everything outside of himself in the attempt to enlarge and preserve his false identity; he is not a king but a shadow king.

22. What in Banquo does Macbeth fear? His wisdom. Banquo does not act and blind himself to his action, as Macbeth has done. His wisdom guides his valor.

23. In hating Banquo because Banquo will father a line of kings what is Macbeth attempting to do in regard to time? He would like to stop the movement of time, which from generation to generation recapitulates the individual self (symbolized in “king”) and to arrest time in himself, in his moment. He does not want Banquo's heirs to have the kingship he murdered to get.

Lady Macbeth wants to know why Macbeth “keeps alone.” Why does he? He must be/ is forever alone because he has negated everything outside of himself and made the hell in which he is now imprisoned.

24. Why doesn't Macbeth tell Lady Macbeth that he is going to kill Banquo? She is no longer necessary. She no longer embodies the “deep and dark” desire for kingship that led him to kill Duncan. It is now he who cuts the bonds of fellowship, of relationship to all humanity. Read III, ii, 46 “Come sealing night...”

25. When Macbeth says “things bad begun make strong themselves by ill,” what is he acknowledging about evil? That NEGATION, destroying all for the sake of self, has assumed a power of its own; it increases as it overwhelms and cancels the positive. By the way, is that true in our own time, does evil beget evil, violence beget violence?

26. What are we to make of the feast that is really an anti-feast in which Banquo's ghost appears and sits in Macbeth's chair?

- a) Banquo's ghost, a shadow-thane, sits in the king's place and thereby negates Macbeth's place as king. The ghost drives out Macbeth, the false king, and shows



that he is an anti-king because a true king does not kill his subjects but “plants” and nourishes them, as Duncan did.

b) Shadow-reality, or what Davies called the diseased “fantastical power,” has taken over Macbeth’s mind, has driven out any conception of reality. The anti-feast ends with “stand not upon the order of your going.” So Macbeth is now the negative, or anti-king and the order a good king establishes is shattered.

27. Macbeth wanted to get McDuff into his clutches at the feast but McDuff did not come to the feast. So what does he do? He tries to destroy everything and everyone for “mine own good”. Read III, v, 135ff Whereas Duncan was a gardener-king, Macbeth is a destroyer of the natural. He wills evil now because he is so evil, so “steeped in blood,” that he is incapable of exercising any impulse toward good. He wills more and more evil, to make greater and greater nothingness. And when Macbeth seeks out the Weird Sisters again, he wills chaos, i.e., for the whole world to be destroyed. He wants “[his] own good” even if the whole world, civilization, all nature must be destroyed and only he himself be left standing.

28. Why does Shakespeare follow the scene of the Weird Sisters’ final prophecy with the playful scene of Lady McDuff with her little son? To show us the current of life, the line from mother and father to child generation by generation, that is CUT OFF by Macbeth. He denies the future of the race of humankind for the sake of self. Macbeth has now become ANTI-LIFE.

29. The scene switches to McDuff soliciting Malcolm to raise an army and invade Scotland. Why does Shakespeare have Malcolm falsely accuse himself of all kinds of evil?

a) On the level of plot, Malcolm does not trust anybody who comes to him from Scotland because Macbeth in the past has sent assassins disguised as ambassadors to get Malcolm back to Scotland.

b) On the metaphoric level, Malcolm is negating himself for the good of all; the opposite of Macbeth who negates all for the good of himself. That indicates that Malcolm will be a good king.

30. The goodness of a good king is further confirmed by the entrance of the English King, Edward the Confessor. As the doctor shows in his description, the good king cures





rather than kills. His stamp upon diseased nature restores it to health. Edward the Confessor is, of course, a saint, a human being who is “more the man” not in Lady Macbeth’s sense, but because he makes himself a conduit between heaven and earth.

31. What is Macbeth’s response to the death of Lady Macbeth? Read V, v, 16ff?

Indifference

Lady Macbeth has become mad—the inevitable effect of her having sealed herself off from all the “compunctions of nature.” There is no reality for her, only constant nightmare. She is nothing more than the crime she willed to happen, caught in the moment of her fall into Hell. [Cite Minos in Dante and the Japanese Noh play]. Macbeth cannot respond to her death because he has shattered time. Time, for him, is now a meaningless progression of isolated days. In his view, the whole of his own life and any human life is “a walking shadow; it is a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing.” When the battle begins, he realizes that his time is wound up and he stands like a baited bear tied to a stake.

Finally, Macbeth encounters McDuff, who in some metaphoric sense is his doppelganger. McDuff, through no fault of his own, was ripped out of nature, and, with the death of his wife and children, has been ripped out of the progression of nature’s time. Macbeth, of course, ripped himself out of the human and natural order by his own will.

When Macbeth says “Lay on, McDuff” he shows that a tragic hero need not be a good man. Macbeth is heroic only because he stands looking into the jaws of death and stands tall. The play ends with Malcolm, Duncan’s son and heir, replanting the King’s Garden. He will call back the exiles and reset the right order.

Learning Assignment for the Macbeth Essay

“Humanum Genus, or Everyman, journeys his time on earth, encountering as he does a variety of allegorical figures—Wealth, Fellowship, Lust, etc., and he asks each of them to accompany him to his end. He wants to be saved. Each of them seems agreeable at first, but each falls away and deserts him.” Rose Zimbardo

Write a two-page essay: Reflect on these allegorical figures of Macbeth and how they came and went in his life. Examine your life’s journey so far and how have you “invited” these elements of life to journey with you. Have you experienced their abandonment of you?

