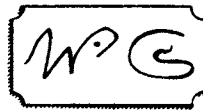


SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

AN ANNUAL SURVEY OF
SHAKESPEARIAN STUDY & PRODUCTION

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EDITED BY
KENNETH MUIR



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'MACBETH' IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

BY

G. K. HUNTER

DISINTEGRATION

All editions of *Macbeth* derive from one single and authoritative text—that of the First Folio. The number of substantive emendations that modern editors see fit to introduce is quite small; and there are no passages so hopelessly corrupt that the sense is obscured. All this would argue an uncomplex task for the editor, and a simple and mercifully brief narrative for the historian of criticism. This turns out not to be the case. The discovery that the two songs (whose first lines are invoked in III, v and, again, in IV, i) exist in full texts in the manuscript of Middleton's *The Witch* has unloosed a flood of disintegration. I am more or less discounting, of course, the views of chronic disintegrators like J. M. Robertson who found (*Literary Detection*, 1931) that 'there is clear literary evidence of the past existence of a lost pre-Shakespearean *Macbeth* by Kyd'; Middleton he found to have written the Witch-scenes, the Porter-scene and the couplet tags throughout the play; there is a case for Heywood's authorship of the closing scene. IV, iii and I, ii are non-Shakespearian but unassigned. More impressive are the views of Clark and Wright, not given to rashness, who excised whole areas of the play from the Shakespeare canon, finding the bleeding sergeant in I, ii an 'absurdity', his metre 'slovenly' and his 'bombastic phraseology . . . not like Shakespeare's language even when he is most bombastic'.

The editions of Henry Cunningham (1912)—who seems really to have despised the play that was foisted upon him—of J. Q. Adams (1931) and J. Dover Wilson (1947) continue the tradition of disintegration, though with decreasing confidence and increasing elaboration of argument. Dover Wilson's argument that there were three distinct *Macbeth* texts 'during the first dozen years of the 17th century' has found few imitators; its assumptions are more elaborate than is required to account for the facts of the text; and at the merest flourish of Occam's razor it would seem to shrink away. William Empson (*Kenyon Review*, 1952) points out that what Dover Wilson sees as muddles or abridgements may be deliberate effects, part of the play's 'atmosphere':

So far from being a cut version of a tidy historical play now unfortunately lost, it is a rather massive effort, very consistently carried out, to convey the immense confusion in which those historical events actually occur.

The work of J. M. Nosworthy has struck a welcome note of sense in all this confusion. In a series of articles he found Shakespeare parallels to make the point that the last forty lines were 'Shakespearian', found that the Hecate scenes were unlike Middleton, and that the 'bombastic' speech of the bleeding sergeant was both Shakespearian and entirely appropriate to his role as a 'passionate and weighty Nuntius'—the latter point reinforced by Holger Nørgard's discovery (*The Review of English Studies*, 1955) that the sergeant echoes Daniel's *Cleopatra*, which Shake-

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speare read in preparation for *Antony and Cleopatra*. The 'low soliloquy of the Porter' (Clark and Wright) was at the same time moving back into favour, for reasons I discuss below (pp. 10-11). Writing in *The Library* (1947) Nosworthy made the important point that Shakespeare had woven 'all the tractable material' in Holinshed into his play, and made the important deduction that *Macbeth* had never been a long play.

This work, and the movement of the tidal waters of reintegration, left the Hecate scenes the only part of *Macbeth* that continued to be generally suspect, though occasional throwbacks, like G. B. Harrison (1951) and Lily B. Campbell (1930), continued to cast aspersions at whole areas of the play. Verity in his edition of 1901 had defended Hecate's iambic speeches on the ground that 'Shakespeare would not make the classical goddess speak in the same manner as the grim, barbaric witches'. This point was taken up and greatly elaborated by G. Wilson Knight (*The Shakespearian Tempest*, 1932), who here argues along the lines that elsewhere have enabled him to posit the authenticity of the Vision in *Cymbeline*, and the Diana scene in *Pericles*. In relation to *Macbeth* as a whole he further extends this to a general interpretation of Evil, seen both as discordant with good (the Witches) and as completely at harmony with itself (Hecate); common-sense clearly will have greater difficulty in accepting this part of the argument. The other most vocal defender of the Hecate scenes is Richard Flatter (*Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 1957), who elsewhere (*Shakespeare's Producing Hand*, 1948) seeks to defend Folio lineation as deliberately contrived theatrical effect. Between 1958 and 1960 Flatter and J. P. Cutts carried on a somewhat iterative and indecisive argument about the stage-directions in the Hecate scenes, in the pages of *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*.

The defenders of Hecate are, however, the exceptions; general opinion (represented *inter alia* by the editions of Kittredge (1939), Kenneth Muir (1951) and Eugene Waith (1954)) leans against authenticity; but the shaky ground on which the whole argument is conducted may be seen from Lily B. Campbell's assumption (*Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, 1930) that III, v must be non-Shakespearian, for the very reason that proves its Shakespearian quality to Flatter—its preparative function, in anticipation of IV, i.

A sensible middle opinion is represented (once again) by Nosworthy, who (*The Review of English Studies*, 1948) accepts the songs as Middleton's; and thinks that the Hecate speeches were written to introduce and justify the appearance of that lady in the songs. He does not exclude the possibility that they may have been written by Shakespeare.

TOPICAL REFERENCE

The connexion of this play with King James I has long been asserted. Capell could say (in 1779) that it was 'acknowledged on all hands'. Malone suggested that *Macbeth* might have been 'first exhibited' when King Christian IV of Denmark was visiting London (17 July-11 August 1606). These points have been taken up generally (e.g. by J. Q. Adams in his edition of 1931) and vastly expanded in the most important recent study—*The Royal Play of 'Macbeth'*, by H. N. Paul (1950). Paul adds some interesting new points to the argument that the play was written for the two kings. He notes that the second battle in Holinshed was fought against 'the Danes', and that Shakespeare alters this to 'the Norwayans'—as befits a courtier addressing the Scottish and Danish monarchs. He suggests that the 'milk of concord' line (IV, iii, 98) refers to

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the arch of welcome which greeted James and Christian on 31 July 1606. Elsewhere he greatly amplifies existing references, as where he traces James's changing taste in demonology, or his changing attitude to 'touching' for scrofula.

It must be added, however, that Paul exhibits more industry than discrimination. His notion of the play as an aesthetic organism is less effective than his sense of it as a compliment. Many of his arguments—such as the one that Macbeth is a conjurer in iv, iii—are both curious and unproductive. His use of details of poetic or theatrical technique is nearly always distorted by his desire to multiply topical references. The Appendix to Kenneth Muir's new Arden edition (ninth edition, 1962) provides a convenient short survey of principal points from Paul's book.

The references in *Macbeth* to 'equivocation' and to the Gunpowder plot have, likewise, a long history of comment; but their interest has been strengthened by some recent investigations. In *I, William Shakespeare* (1937) Leslie Hotson traces connexions between Shakespeare's known friends and men involved in the plot. H. L. Rogers (*Double Profit in 'Macbeth'*, 1964) sees the whole play riddled with references to equivocation and duplicity. In *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (1964) Frank L. Huntley discusses '*Macbeth* and the background of Jesuitical equivocation' and shows the extent to which the mode of the witches' prophecies echoes the Jesuit doctrine, substituting Satan for God.

SOURCES

No principal source of *Macbeth* has been found to replace Holinshed's *Chronicles*. H. N. Paul has picked up many supplementary suggestions that have attached themselves to the play—that Shakespeare had read Buchanan's Latin history of Scotland, Leslie's *De . . . Rebus Gestis Scotorum* and Skene's *Scots Acts*. Dover Wilson (1947) has repeated Mrs Stopes's suggestion (1916) that Shakespeare drew on William Stewart's *Chronicles of Scotland*. It may well be that Shakespeare had read one or all of these, but, if so, they do not seem to have influenced him into any piece of writing that was impossible to a creative use of Holinshed. Dr Gwinn's *Tres Sybillae*, who greeted James I when he went to Oxford in 1605, are more interesting; but have been known since the eighteenth century. The debates at Oxford on the questions 'whether imagination is able to produce real effects' and 'whether the child acquires characteristics from his nurse's milk', also cited by Paul, throw interesting sidelights on the kind of thinking that the seventeenth century brought to bear on such subjects. Lily B. Campbell (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1951), like Paul, and like Jane H. Jack (*ELH*, 1955), thinks of James I's *Basilicon Doron* as a source-book for the play; indeed she prefers to think that James's writings are the source of that passage in iv, 3, in which Malcolm denies the princely virtues, which Paul had referred to the arch of triumph welcoming James and Christian into London. Kenneth Muir in *Shakespeare's Sources* (1957) notices, in addition to matters already discussed, an apparent echo of Daniel's *The Queen's Arcadia*. He also discusses debts to Seneca and to the Bible, some of which have been known for a long time. The Biblical echoes are, of course, discussed at large in Richmond Noble's *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge* (1935).

In an article (*Shakespeare Survey* 4, 1951) that is unusually thoughtful for a source-study Muriel C. Bradbrook makes the point that the political 'sources' of *Macbeth* are in the end less important than an analogue like *Lucrece* which traces the 'inner structure' of the play from violence to self-destruction.

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THE WITCHES

Those who survey the history of witch-definition in *Macbeth* are liable to find the identity of these ladies as equivocal as their prophecies. The very source, indeed, supplied Shakespeare with two contradictory definitions, speaking of 'three women in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of elder world . . . these women were either the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say) the goddesses of destiny or else some nymphs or fairies, endued with knowledge of prophecy by their necromantical science'.

Bradley, holding that 'character in action' is the stuff of Shakespearian tragedy, was not willing to admit that the witches were more than clairvoyant: 'There is not a syllable in *Macbeth* to imply that they are anything but women.' He sees that the power of the protagonist is fatally infringed if he cannot choose his own destiny and therefore asserts that 'the prophecies of the Witches are presented simply as dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has to deal . . . Macbeth is, in the ordinary sense, perfectly free in regard to them.' Shakespeare took over, in Bradley's view, the descriptions of witch-superstitions which he found in Reginald Scot, and used them to operate upon the minds of his audience, to provide convenient symbols for the evil tendencies in the world at large. Shakespeare took nothing from Holinshed except the name 'Weird Sisters'—'which certainly no more suggested to a London audience the Parcae of one mythology or the Norns of another than it does today'.

The Norns had been suggested by Fleay (1876) and by Miss Charlotte Carmichael (1879); later the suggestion was lent greater authority, when it was adopted by Kittredge (1939). Kittredge, without Bradley's interest in avoiding even the suggestion of fatalism, baldly supposes that Shakespeare must have meant what Holinshed meant by 'Weird Sisters': 'they not only foresaw the future, but decreed it. . . . Thus the tragedy of *Macbeth* is inevitably fatalistic, but Shakespeare attempts no solution of the problem of free-will and predestination. . . . He never gives us the impression that a man is not responsible for his own acts.'

Walter Clyde Curry, in *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (1937), investigates, with great assiduity and learning, the whole 'metaphysic of evil' that appears in *Macbeth*. Starting from the definition of 'nature's germens' (IV, i, 58)—in the scholastic thought which he supposes Shakespeare to have 'more or less unconsciously assimilated'—he finds that the witches 'are not ordinary witches . . . are demons or devils in the form of witches'. The witch-attributes he takes to be 'popular domestic symbols'; but the philosophical reality is 'the metaphysical world of evil intelligences [but] distilled by Shakespeare's imagination and concentrated in those marvellous dramatic symbols, the Weird Sisters'. Curry's demonic forces can 'animate nature and ensnare human souls by means of diabolical persuasion, by hallucination, infernal illusion and possession'. They cannot plant thoughts in the mind. But they may 'incite to thought' and kindle desires. They cannot know what *must* happen, but have a contingent knowledge of the future. And they wait everywhere to disturb and torment human weakness.

H. N. Paul, *The Royal Play of 'Macbeth'* (1950), thinks that the witches are not simply witches, but (more precisely) 'Scotch witches', i.e. witches as described in the *Demonology* of James I, and found in action in Holinshed's account of King Duff and the witches of Forres, working under the control of the devil.

Another view of Shakespeare's attitude to the double definition of the witches in Holinshed

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appears in Willard Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier* (1950). Farnham quotes very extensively from the literature of this period to show how far 'fairy', 'elf', 'hag' and 'witch' were interchangeable terms. For example Peter Heylyn's 1625 account of the Macbeth story speaks of 'Fairies, or Witches (Weirds the Scots call them)'. Farnham's final suggestion is that Shakespeare used the words of Holinshed's first definition, i.e. 'Weird Sisters', but interpreted them in the light of his alternative definition, as 'nymphs or fairies', able to see the future, but not to control it.

The difficulty of the witches for a modern audience is an old subject of discussion. A. P. Rossiter gives it a new and more authentically theatrical twist by suggesting (*Angel with Horns*, 1961) that only masks as vile as those of some African devils would serve today to make the point required. J. R. Brown, *Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Macbeth* (1963), quotes Ingmar Bergman on the same theatrical difficulty.

INTERPRETATION

Macbeth has long been considered one of Shakespeare's 'most sublime' plays, if only because of the obvious analogues between it and Greek tragedies—see 'Shakespeare's *Macbeth* arranged as an ancient tragedy' in R. G. Moulton's *Ancient Classical Drama* (1890). But in this century it has probably attracted fewer enthusiasts than the other 'great' tragedies in Bradley. John Bailey, *Shakespeare* (1929), finds that 'it neither interests the mind nor moves the heart, nor fills the imagination, as do *Hamlet* and *Othello* and *Lear*'; G. B. Harrison (*Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 1951) thinks that '*Macbeth* has been extravagantly over-praised. It is the weakest of Shakespeare's great tragedies, and so full of blemishes that it is hard to believe that one man wrote it.' On the other hand those who have preferred 'poetry' to 'drama' (supposing these to be separable) have continued to be attracted by its intensity. Of the Bradleian 'great' tragedies, *Macbeth* is probably the one which is least centred on reactions to quasi-real characters; Johnson's comment is worth remembering here: 'It has no nice discrimination of character; the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions, and the course of the action necessarily determines the conduct of the agents.' It is no accident that F. R. Leavis's anti-Bradleian spoof question 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' was referred to this particular play.

In fairness to Bradley it has to be pointed out, however, that some of the finest statements of the indeterminacy of 'character' in a poetic structure appear in the *Macbeth* essays in *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, he tells us, 'are never detached in imagination from the atmosphere which surrounds them and adds to their grandeur and terror. It is, as it were, continued into their souls. For within them is all that we felt without—the darkness of night, lit with the flame of tempest and the hues of blood, and haunted by wild and direful shapes.' Bradley's evocation of the poetic atmosphere of *Macbeth* is justly celebrated as a *locus classicus*: Images like those of the babe torn smiling from the breast and dashed to death; of pouring the sweet milk of concord into hell; of the earth shaking in fever; of the frame of things disjointed; of sorrows striking heaven on the face, so that it resounds and yells out like syllables of dolour; of the mind lying in restless ecstasy on a rack; of the mind full of scorpions; of the tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury;—all keep the imagination moving on a 'wild and violent sea' while it is scarcely for a moment permitted to dwell on thoughts of peace and beauty. In its language, as in its action, the drama is full of tumult and storm.

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Bradley had not, of course, developed the study of themes and images in the systematic way of Miss Spurgeon and her successors; and it may be thought that it is in such works that *Macbeth* has come into its own. In *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1935) *Macbeth* occupies more space than any other single play. Miss Spurgeon sees it as 'more rich and varied, more highly imaginative, more unapproachable by any other writer than any other single play . . . the ideas in the imagery are in themselves more imaginative, more subtle and complex than in other plays'. She pays special attention to trains of images concerned with clothing, with light and dark, with reverberation, with disease and with horse-riding.

Cleanth Brooks also chooses this play, in his celebrated essay, 'The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness' (*The Well Wrought Urn*, 1947), to make the general point that images that may seem pointlessly grotesque in isolation turn out to be structurally important when pursued throughout a play. Starting from the celebrated image of the chamberlains' daggers 'unmannerly breeched with gore' he shows how this may be justified in terms of the importance of disguise throughout the play. In a critical atmosphere which rated irony and paradox as the highest virtues *Macbeth* was unlikely to be an underrated play. H. L. Gardner has, however—in *The Business of Criticism* (1959)—pointed out a tendency in Cleanth Brooks's essay to substitute patterns for the genuine 'Shakespearian depth of human feeling' in the individual passage; and perhaps this is inseparable from sustained image-study.

Other themes have been pursued by other authors. Few image-hunters seem to have followed the counter-stroke of Wolfgang Clemen who, in *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1951), excluded *Macbeth* from his image-study of the tragedies. John Lawlor (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1957) sees the idea of *Macbeth* as an actor 'alone against a potentially dangerous world of observers' as central. The imagery of time in the play is eloquently explored by Stephen Spender (*Penguin New Writing*, 1941)—a point on which, however, he had been anticipated by J. M. Murry, *Shakespeare* (1936).

Another theme—that of manhood—is taken up by Eugene Waith in *ELH* (1950): Lady *Macbeth*'s power over her husband depends on persuading him to accept a partial and improper definition of manliness. As Waith says, 'the soldier may avoid the danger of effeminacy only to incur the still greater danger of brutishness'.

Brents Stirling, on the other hand, sees the play as unified round the themes of 'raptness' ('look how our partner's rapt') and inverted nature (*Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy*, 1956). Francis Fergusson (*The Human Image in Dramatic Literature*, 1957) takes the phrase 'outrun the pauser reason' to be the key to the thematic structure.

It has indeed become something of a cliché of modern criticism to say that the essential structure of *Macbeth* is 'to be sought in the poetry' (L. C. Knights), that the characters 'are not shaped primarily to conform to a psychological verisimilitude, but to make explicit the intellectual statements with which the play is concerned' (Irving Ribner), that Lady *Macbeth*, *Macbeth* and Banquo 'are parts of a pattern, a design; are images or symbols' (A. P. Rossiter). The packed and economical structure of the play (often noticed) and the relative absence of episodes of detached realistic observation (like those of the players or the gravediggers in *Hamlet*) have made *Macbeth* seem particularly suitable for symbolic (or dogmatic) interpretations, and expositions of this kind have not been lacking. A great many of the subsequent lines of such interpretation appeared first in G. Wilson Knight's essay 'The Milk of Concord' in *The Imperial Theme*

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(1931), a more complete, more coherent and (I think) a more influential treatment than that in *The Wheel of Fire* (1930). 'The Milk of Concord' presents a structure tensed between 'life-themes' and 'death-themes'; attention is directed to the failure of such 'natural' activities as sleeping and eating. The broken feasts of Act I and Act III find their answer in the witches' banquet of Act IV. Time is disordered; the future is compromised and the *natural* processes of childhood and development are cut off. The perception that the play is 'about' Nature and unnaturalness has been developed more sensitively (but also more moralistically) by L. C. Knights (*Some Shakespearean Themes*, 1959). Nature offers man a choice between creativeness and destructiveness. We respond to the choice because it is embodied in the poetic texture of the play.

Symbolic interpretation of a Shakespearian play which is full of Biblical phrases and images is bound to become explicitly Christian sooner or later, and there is quite a body of modern criticism which has explicitly Christian designs on *Macbeth*. Roy Walker, *The Time is Free* (n.d. (1949)), is less critically hamstrung by this intention than one might have supposed he would be. Excesses of interpretation, such as finding Seyton equivalent to Satan, equating Hecate with 'Lady Macbeth's guilty spirit', or treating Macbeth's pursuit of 'the son' (Malcolm, Donalbain, Fleance, young Macduff) as an analogy of anti-Christ—these are not central to the book. Acute perceptions abound (some anticipated by Wilson Knight); one may cite his antithetical placing of the two women in the play (p. 153).

The same general point may be made about J. A. Bryant, Jr (*Hippolyta's View*, 1961). Bryant's central critical point is that Macbeth's two great qualities, loyalty and bravery, are released from their double harness by the witches' prophecy, and, pulling against one another, pull Macbeth apart. This is not necessarily a Christian interpretation, though in Bryant's handling it becomes one, and one can enjoy its incidental acutenesses without accepting the whole framework in which they appear.

The other complete volume devoted to christianizing *Macbeth*—G. R. Elliott's *Dramatic Providence in Macbeth* (1958)—is, unfortunately, without acuteness. Elliott's book is much more tied to character-response than either Walker's or Bryant's; he asks us to identify with a sinful soul set in a theological framework. We are supposed always to be on the edges of our seats watching for signs of grace or repentance. Thus, speaking of 'Wake Duncan with thy knocking . . .', etc., at the end of II, ii, he says 'Will Macbeth's deepening remorse open the way for true humility and repentance? That major question overshadows the minor one: will his guilt be discovered by his peers?' (p. 90). One feels that Mr Elliott would have profited greatly by reading H. L. Gardner's 'Milton's "Satan" and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabethan Tragedy' (*Essays and Studies of the English Association*, 1948), where the dangers of simple-minded christianizing are spelled out with lucid perceptiveness.

Analogous to the Christian view of the play is that approach which looks upon it as a myth or ritual, but without specific meaning. Thus John Holloway, *The Story of the Night* (1961), finds Macbeth (like other tragic heroes) to be 'a scapegoat, a lord of misrule who has turned life into riot for his limited time, and is then driven out and destroyed by the forces which embody the fertile vitality and the communal happiness of the social group'.

H. C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (1951), sees the play as a winter-spring ritual, in which the spring maiden overcomes the winter king. Both these authors make much of May-

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game analogies to Malcolm's army advancing on Dunsinane with green boughs held over their heads—presumably the clearest 'anthropological' moment in the play.

Yet another way of looking at the play, without putting response to individual characters at the centre, is to call it a morality play, and this has been done by several authors; but it is not clear that this nomenclature can take us very far, critically. A. E. Hunter, writing in *Shakespeare Association Bulletin* for 1937, was probably the first to devote much space to 'Macbeth as a Morality'. The most useful element in the morality analogue would seem to be that which concerns 'flat' characterization—a feature of *Macbeth* that had drawn discriminating praise from Quiller-Couch (*Shakespeare's Workmanship*, 1918). F. P. Wilson (*Elizabethan and Jacobean*, 1945) notes that: 'In *Macbeth* many characters are brought in with no attempt to make them individual: the sergeant, the messenger, the doctor, the waiting-woman, the murderers, the "Old Man" and we may add Ross, Angus and Lennox . . . are without personality as much as the characters in a morality-play.'

IV, iii is one scene in the play which has been particularly affected by this modern tendency to take 'flatness' as description rather than evaluation. Traditionally, this has been considered the least successful scene in the play, close to Holinshed only because Shakespeare was not interested enough to create new material. Grierson in his edition of 1914 calls it 'a perfunctory paraphrase from Holinshed'. To many critics interested in theme, however, the scene appears to be brilliantly successful, a keystone of the structure. Francis Fergusson sees it as the *peripeteia*, the point at which the tide turns effectively against Macbeth, in which the isolation of his victims is overcome by Grace and by suffering. The thematic significance of *testing* our friends, of the 'good' King Edward, and of 'the Evil' that he cures, are points regularly made in this context.

The flatness of the individual characters who make up the opposition to Macbeth is sometimes thought to mark a weakness in the play. Mark Van Doren (*Shakespeare*, 1941) finds that '*Macbeth* is not in the fullest sense a tragedy' and William Rosen (*Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy*, 1960), taking up the same point, compares the simple optimism at the end of *Macbeth* with the intense questioning generated at the end of *Lear*, to the discredit (of course) of the former.

From another point of view, the simplicity of the end of *Macbeth* is a mark of its relation to the history plays. The relationship between the Christian view and the historical view is the subject of an article by Jane H. Jack (*ELH*, 1955). Mrs Jack shows how James I's political interests were coloured at every turn by his conviction that the Kingdom of Satan was everywhere around him. *Macbeth* echoes the obsessions of James (and the age), finding its Christian focus in the Old Testament (Saul and the Witch of Endor) and in the Apocalypse, rather than in the Gospels. Tyranny is represented as a spiritual condition rather than a political problem. The historical action of the play becomes 'an imaginative exploration of evil in Biblical terms'.

W. A. Armstrong (*The Review of English Studies*, 1946) sees the play in terms of a recurrent 'dramatic convention' which sets the lawful and hereditary king (Duncan, Edward, Malcolm) against the criminal and usurping tyrant. Hardin Craig (1948) classes *Macbeth* (along with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*) as a 'Great Political Play'. The most successful treatment of *Macbeth* along these lines is probably that of E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944). Tillyard sees *Macbeth* as the 'culminating version' of Shakespeare's concern with the man of action ' . . . the finest of all mirrors for magistrates'. The relationship of 'flat' characterization to this focus is quite obvious from his comment on Malcolm: '[Malcolm] is the ideal