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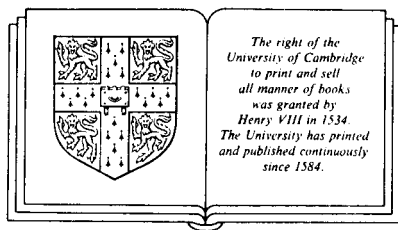
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Places where slight editorial changes or additions introduce variants from the first edition are, when possible, marked by a date [1950] in square brackets.

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To
former colleagues and fellow-students of
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
'GODBAIRN' OF THE KING FOR WHOM
MACBETH WAS WRITTEN
this recension is gratefully dedicated
by the editor

INTRODUCTION

This is a difficult play to edit. Few of Shakespeare's have been more discussed; yet, though the greatest critics have given their mind to it, they have not always done so wisely or with cogency. In few again is the textual basis so obscure or the necessity for a definition of it so compelling. With many plays one can pass direct to the dramatic problems without troubling about the history of the text,¹ but not with *Macbeth*; while the wildest and most divergent textual theories are current, are indeed endorsed by eminent writers. Readers of this Introduction are, therefore, asked to accept its long second section as a necessary evil, if they do not decide to skip it as they well may. On the other hand, I find my path eased by excellent and scholarly modern editions, among which special acknowledgements are due to that of Sir Edmund Chambers (1893), that of Sir Herbert Grierson and Dr J. C. Smith (1914), and that of Professor Kittredge (1939).² Further, the problem of contemporary staging, so important in *Macbeth*, which relies upon supernatural machinery more than any other play of Shakespeare's, and the kindred problem of contemporary demonology, have recently been much illuminated by *The Globe Playhouse* of Professor J. C. Adams (1943) and *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* of Professor W. C. Curry (1937); books that reached me from across the ocean in a happy hour.

¹ Cf. *Hamlet* ('New Shakespeare'), pp. xi-xii.

² Unfortunately the interesting edition by Professor J. Q. Adams (1931), which anticipates some of my findings, did not come to my hands until November 1946, when this edition was already in the press.

I. *The Macbeth myth, and what Shakespeare owes to it*

Little is known for certain about the historical Macbeth, who reigned in Scotland 1040–57; but what is, seems to point to a vigorous, successful, and, for his age, even religious, ruler. That he killed his predecessor, Duncan I, and was in turn killed by his successor, Duncan's son Malcolm III, is simply in the nature of things monarchical in tenth- and eleventh-century Scotland. Out of the nine kings who reigned between 943 and 1040 all but two were killed, either in feud or directly by their successors. And this state of affairs was the result, not so much of the general barbarism of the age, as of the ancient law or custom of alternate or collateral succession, which preceded the law of primogeniture in Scotland, Ireland and some other parts of Europe during the Dark Ages, and meant that, on the decease of a king, his crown passed, not to the direct descendant, but to the brother or cousin or even remoter collateral who seemed the strongest person within a certain family group. It was a system of obvious utility in a period when strength at the helm was a condition of survival for any institution; but it encouraged assassination, because the strong man would generally wish to 'mak sikker' by ending the ruling king's reign at a convenient moment for himself in advance of its natural term. Sometimes, however, it worked the other way. Malcolm II, for example, broke custom by killing off the members of the alternate branch in order to secure the throne for his grandson Duncan I. But by oversight or negligence he left one alive, a woman, Gruoch; and she later had a son by her first husband, and later still took as her second husband a formidable person called Macbeth, son of Findlaech, mormaer (earl) of Moray. Findlaech was not of Scottish blood royal. But Macbeth's mother is said by some to have been Malcolm II's sister; and, though this is doubtful, Macbeth could

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claim the crown on behalf of his wife and her son. Thus from the eleventh-century standpoint Duncan was the usurper, and Macbeth the vindicator of the true line of succession.

But views change with changes in social custom, and if we ask how Macbeth came to figure in the chronicles and in Shakespeare as the crowned monster of Scottish history, the answer is first that the triumph of primogeniture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries taught men to regard the events of the preceding age in a new light; and second that Macbeth belonged to the House of Moray, which, unrelated to the royal stock and controlling a district still largely outside the authority of the Scottish kings, played a conspicuous, and being unsuccessful a discreditable, part in the later dynastic struggles that led to the aforesaid triumph of primogeniture. Thus, as one of a brood of traitors and would-be usurpers, and himself the slayer of Duncan I, who was now considered the rightful heir of Malcolm II, Macbeth was shaping well for the role of arch-usurper and tyrant by the end of the thirteenth century. It was however an event at the end of the following century which blackened his character finally and irredeemably. This was the occupation of the throne by a new dynasty, that of the Stewarts, a family which, reaching Scotland from Brittany, via Shropshire, where it had received lands from Henry I, stood in special need of an indigenous Scottish ancestry. A mythical genealogy was accordingly invented, with a mythical founder named Banquo, who was added to the ranks of royal martyrs credited to the House of Moray by means of a mythical murder at the hands of the already mythically infamous Macbeth, followed by the flight of a mythical son Fleance to Wales, from the borders of which the historical Stewarts are known to have come. And Fleance, it may be noted in passing, was important for another

reason, since he was said to have married a Welsh princess. Thus the house of Stewart could claim to be descended from Arthur himself; a claim of considerable value to its possessors in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹ Furthermore, the legend of Macbeth had by this date developed features which made it a peculiarly appropriate starting-point for the chronicle of a great line of kings, as may be seen by comparing the account of his reign in *The Orygnale Cronykil of Scotland* by Wyntoun (c. 1424), a more than usually fabulous metrical history of the universal type, which knows nothing of Banquo, with that in the *Scotorum Historiae* (1527) by Hector Boece, who perhaps invented him, though he builds upon Wyntoun, the *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* of Fordun (ob. 1385) and other chronicles.

The Macbeth of Wyntoun is a most sinister person. To begin with, his mother, though described as Duncan's sister, is clearly some kind of witch, if one may judge from her suspicious delight in 'hailsome aire' and the woods, and from the fact that one day she meets there 'ane fayre man', alias the Devil, who becomes Macbeth's father and gives her a promise that the boy will prove a great warrior, invulnerable to all of woman born. Tenderly nurtured by his uncle Duncan, the infant no sooner grows to manhood than he attests his diabolical origin by murdering his kinsman and benefactor, marrying his widow (whom Wyntoun² identifies with Gruoch), and seizing his crown. But the most interesting part of the story is the vision which prompts Macbeth to perpetrate this crime. He dreams that he is hunting with Duncan when they encounter 'thre werd systrys' who hail him in turn Thane of Cromarty,

¹ See R. F. Brinkley, *Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century*, 1932, p. 16.

² See Bk. vi, l. 1877 (ed. Scottish Text Soc. iv, 275).

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Thane of Moray, and King of Scotland. Here was a golden opportunity for the chroniclers of the House of Stewart, inasmuch as all sound genealogical tales from the Book of Samuel downwards have opened with prophecy. It only needed to take dream for reality, substitute Banquo for Duncan as Macbeth's hunting companion, and continue the prophecy of the Weird Sisters in such terms as would make the promise equivocal to Macbeth and both sure and of eternal import to Banquo. Who first took this step we do not know, but we find the two legends combined in Boece, from whom, with the aid of a translation by Bellenden,¹ Holinshed adopted the whole story and passed it on to Shakespeare. As an illustration of legendary accretion in other directions, it may be noted that whereas Wyntoun says nothing about Macdowald's² rebellion or the Norwegian invasions, which derive from Boece, he relates nearly all the facts we find in Shakespeare about Macduff, who is probably another mythical personage. With Wyntoun, however, the man not of woman born who slays Macbeth is an unnamed knight; with Boece it is Macduff himself.³

Though it must never be forgotten, and will be made clear in the Notes, that the witch-scenes probably owe much to Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584, to *Newes from Scotland*, 1591, which describes a famous witch-trial in which King James was involved, and to the *Dæmonologie*, 1597, written by the king himself, Shakespeare's main historical source for *Macbeth* was the second edition (1587) of Holinshed's

¹ Boece is fuller than Bellenden, and Holinshed often reverts to the original.

² See note 1.2.9.

³ The foregoing paragraphs are indebted to conversations with Dr W. Croft Dickinson, Fraser Professor of Scottish History at Edinburgh, who, however, must not be held answerable for the views expressed.

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Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, which he had already used for his English histories.¹ And he made the most of it. Holinshed's account of Duncan and Macbeth furnished him, of course, with the majority of his 'facts'; but he borrowed the circumstances of Duncan's murder from the murder of King Duff by Donwald, while the voice that Macbeth hears crying 'Sleep no more', together with his insomnia and the terrors he suffers, were clearly suggested to him by the account of King Kenneth.² Moreover, as Sir Herbert Grierson has pointed out, he found in Holinshed not only the details of the story,

...but the tone and atmosphere of the Celtic and primitive legends of violent deeds and haunting remorse. He recognised in these turbulent Scottish kings and thanes a type of criminal quite distinct both from the hard, unscrupulous, remorseless, and ambitious Norman nobles...of the early 'histories', and from the subtle and soulless Italian artist in crime such as he had portrayed in Iago. Story after story told him of men driven by an irresistible impulse into deeds of treachery and bloodshed but haunted when the deed was done by the spectres of conscience and superstition.³

We catch a glimpse here of something already noted in our introductions to the 'histories': Shakespeare's debt to Holinshed on the side of incident has been stressed enough, and more than enough; on the side of character it has still to be appreciated to the full.

Apart from the incorporation of such elements from other parts of the *Scottish Chronicle*, Shakespeare made free as usual with Holinshed's account of Macbeth's

¹ See W. G. Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p. x. Cf. note 1. 3. S.D. below.

² Cf. note 2. 2. 35.

³ *Macbeth*, ed. by Sir Herbert Grierson and Dr J. C. Smith, 1914, pp. xviii-xix.

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reign. First, he compressed its seventeen years into about ten weeks; much as he had done with the reign of Henry IV and for much the same motives of dramatic art.¹ In retailing, for example, the valiant deeds of Macbeth before the meeting with the Witches, he fused into one three separate campaigns referred to by Holinshed: (i) the revolt and defeat of Macdowald in Lochaber;² (ii) the invasion of Fife by Sueno, King of Norway;³ (iii) the second invasion of Fife by King Canute, in revenge for his brother's defeat;⁴ though it remains doubtful how much of this condensation belongs to his original draft and how much to the later processes of compression or abridgement. He transmuted, again, references to Duncan's 'feeble and slothful administration'⁵ and to his 'too much of clemencie'⁶ into a winning and gracious benevolence, which seems to overflow with generous impulses, while I suspect that the second phrase came to be associated in his mind with Macbeth himself. On the other hand, he suppressed every hint of a Macbeth who 'set his whole intention to maintayne justice', 'to punishe all enormities and abuses', and to furnish the realm with 'commendable lawes',⁷ traces of the vigorous and firm ruler which had survived the tides of denigration above described, while he was careful to exclude also suggestions, likewise still discernible in Holinshed, that Macbeth possessed some claim to the throne.⁸ Shakespeare's Macbeth is a mere usurper (5. 8. 55), an 'untitled tyrant' (4. 3. 104), who after the murder of Duncan respects neither justice nor mercy. Here again there are good dramatic reasons for the change; but

¹ See Introduction to *1 Henry IV*, p. xxi.

² Holinshed's *Scottish Chronicle* (ed. 1805), pp. 335-6.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 336-7.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 339.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 341, 343.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 335.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 341.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 340.

there are other reasons too. The process of defamation begun in the thirteenth century culminates in this play by a 'servant' of King James and a writer for the King's company of players. That the same writer also succeeds in endowing the 'tyrant bloody-sceptred' with enough nobility and 'human kindness' to claim our pity, is simply to say that he is Shakespeare.

But it was in his representation of the character of Banquo that he departs most strikingly from his source. And here also the desire to please his royal master and the demands of his art seem inextricably blended. Oddly enough Boece makes Banquo an accomplice in the murder of Duncan. 'At length', writes Holinshed of Macbeth, expanding Boece a little, 'communicating his purposed intent with his trustie friends, amongst whom Banquho was the chiefest, upon confidence of their promised aid, he slue the king at Envernesse.'¹ Traces of this complicity remain in the veiled approaches which Shakespeare's Macbeth appears to make towards Banquo at 1. 3. 153-5 and 2. 1. 20-9, while on the second occasion Banquo is thought by many, in my view mistakenly, to be aware that treachery is afoot.² But Shakespeare could never have exhibited the ancestor of King James before his very eyes as a murderer's confederate. On the contrary, he makes him the soul of honour and loyalty, and (as I think) entirely unsuspecting of Macbeth's intentions beforehand, while to him is given the lofty protestation afterwards:

In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
 Against the undivulged pretence I fight
 Of treasonous malice.

Yet these brave words are followed by no action. And Bradley deduces from this and from his speech at

¹ Holinshed, *op. cit.* p. 340.

² See note 2. 1. 25.

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3. 1. 1-10 that, though no accomplice, Banquo becomes an accessory after the act. Commenting upon the speech, he writes:

When next we see him, on the last day of his life, we find that he has yielded to evil. The Witches and his own ambition have conquered him. He alone of the lords knew of the prophecies, but he has said nothing of them. He has acquiesced in Macbeth's accession, and in the official theory that Duncan's sons had suborned the chamberlains to murder him.¹

The passage shows Bradley at his weakest, treating Shakespeare as if he were a historian, answering questions that should not be asked of Elizabethan drama, and drawing deductions which assuredly the dramatist never in the least intended. For King James's ancestor could no more be a cowardly time-server than he could be privy to the assassination of his liege lord. And as if to prevent anyone supposing it for a moment, Shakespeare makes Macbeth pay a special tribute to 'his royalty of nature', the 'dauntless temper of his mind', and 'a wisdom that doth guide his valour'.² Bradley quotes this to illustrate Macbeth's fear that Banquo is plotting against him, but fails to observe that it reflects upon the character of Banquo himself. Yet why is it that, despite Macbeth's fears, Banquo never gives a hint of meditating any action, violent or otherwise? And why, a point Bradley overlooks, is his reply to the invitation to supper couched in respectful, almost obsequious, terms, although uttered immediately after his soliloquy referring to Macbeth's guilt? Is it not at least true to say, in the words of Sir Herbert Grierson, who does not subscribe to Bradley's explanation, that 'Banquo's position at Macbeth's court is a very

¹ *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 384-5.

² 3. 1. 49-53.

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ambiguous one’?¹ Some ambiguity there certainly is; and I think it may be accounted for, like other ambiguities in the text, by assuming that Banquo was given scope to make his position clear in the full-length play,² either by soliloquy³ or in conversation with other thanes. Yet, even as the text stands, King James, we may be sure, perceived nothing but what was plain and right and proper; for his ancestor would be simply following the precepts of his most distinguished successor. Usurper, tyrant, murderer as he was, Macbeth had been crowned at Scone; and according to James’s ideas of kingship, as expounded in his *Trew Law of Free Monarchies*,⁴ once a king has been anointed, be he ‘an idolatrous persecuter’ like Nebuchadnezzar or ‘a bloody tyrant’ and ‘monster to the world’ like Nero, his subjects’ duty as laid down in Holy Writ, is perfect obedience and even prayers for his prosperity.⁵ But the ‘right of kings’ was hereditary as well as divine.⁶ There was one person, therefore, who might raise the standard against the usurper, and in whose cause Macbeth’s subjects might take up arms against him, viz. the lineal heir of Duncan, Malcolm Prince of Cumberland. Macduff knows this and acts upon it; and it may well be that Banquo, with a ‘wisdom that doth guide his valour’ was made privy to his purposes in the unrevised play; certainly, the plot would gain from a scene

¹ Grierson and J. C. Smith, *op. cit.* p. 119.

² See § II, below.

³ For example, by extension of the speech at the opening of 3. 1.

⁴ Published in 1598, and reprinted in 1603, in both cases without James’s name, though his authorship was an open secret.

⁵ *The Political Works of James I*, ed. by C. H. McIlwain, 1918, pp. 60–1.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. xxxiii.

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between the two immediately after 2.3. in the existing text. Until Malcolm appears on Scottish soil, however, Banquo must behave to the reigning monarch like a loyal and respectful subject, as we find him doing.

It has long been supposed that Lady Macbeth is almost wholly a child of Shakespeare's invention; a supposition which rests on the assumption that Holinshed was Shakespeare's only historical source. Holinshed tells us that Macbeth had a wife 'verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene', who 'lay sore upon him to attempt the thing', and that Donwald also had a wife who 'counselled him (sith the King oftentimes used to lodge in his house without any garde about him, other than the garyson of the castell which was wholly at his commaundement) to make him away and shewed him the meanes whereby he might soonest accomlishe it'; which he did, 'though he abhorred the act greatlie in heart'.¹ And that is all. Shakespeare, however, as Mrs Stopes pointed out in 1916,² though no one appears to have noticed it, was probably acquainted with another source of Scottish history, since several of his points seem to be taken from it, points mostly connected with Lady Macbeth. This source was a manuscript of William Stewart's *Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland*, a metrical and expanded translation of Boece, said to have been made for King James V at the command of Queen Margaret, widow of James IV, and finished in 1535, though not printed until 1858. Stewart, who often gives us the actual words of his characters, relates that Macbeth's wife rated him and called him a coward, who 'durst nocht

¹ Holinshed, *op. cit.* pp. 295, 340.

² C. C. Stopes, *Shakespeare's Industry*, 1916, pp. 93, 102-3.

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tak on hand' the task of removing King Duncan;² that
 Donwald's wife bade him

Blyn of your baill, se ye be blyth and glaid,³

which may be translated:

Give o'er this gloom; see you look blithe and gay,

look, that is, as Macbeth's wife bids him look, at
 1. 5. 62 ff.; that when the murder was discovered
 Donwald pretended to faint—

Dissimulat syne for to fall in swoun,
 As he wer deid thair to the erth fell doun³—

as Lady Macbeth does; and that he afterwards ran up
 and down

With mony schout ay squeilland like a kid,⁴

as she promises to do at 1. 7. 78–9. Moreover, the
 prophecy to Banquo, which in Holinshed runs 'of thee
 those shall be borne whiche shall gouerne the Scottishe
 kingdome by long order of continuall discent',⁵ becomes

Bot of thi seed sall lineallie discend,
 Sall bruke the crown onto the worldis end,⁶

which brings it close to Shakespeare's

What, will th' line stretch out to th' crack of doom?

² Cf. note 1. 7. 43. Here Stewart keeps close to Boece who writes: 'acerrimis dictis incitat, ignavum ac timidum appellans, qui cantibus superis satisque portendentibus aggredi rem non audeat tam egregiam tamque praeclaram.'

³ William Stewart, *Buik of the Cronicles of Scotland*, ii, l. 35,983 (Rolls Series, 1858).

⁴ *Ibid.* ll. 36,161–2.

⁵ *Ibid.* l. 36,172.

⁶ Holinshed, *op. cit.* p. 340.

⁷ Stewart, *op. cit.* ii, ll. 39,729–30.

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Now James knew the native chronicles of Scotland well. A Latin Boece and "the Scottis Chronicle, wrettin with hand" were among his books.¹ The latter may have been Stewart, and anyhow Stewart which contained this version of the prophecy is likely to have been particularly interesting to him. Lastly, the lines in which Stewart describes the character of Macbeth himself may be quoted:

This Makcobey, quhilk wes bayth wyss and wycht,
 Strang in ane stour, and trew as ony steill,
 Defendar als with of the commoun weill . . .
 Syne throw his wyfe consentit to sic thing,
 For till distroy his cousing and his king:
 So foull ane blek for to put in his gloir,
 Quhilk haldin wes of sic honour befoir.²

Boece and Holinshed have nothing corresponding to this, and yet how well it sums up the pity of Macbeth's fall as Shakespeare represents it!³

The nature of the three Weird Sisters has been much discussed by critics;⁴ yet it seems to have occurred to none of them that it was in all probability much discussed also by Shakespeare's public. The operation of spirits and devils was a favourite subject of speculation, not only among experts on demonology like King James, but with all students of 'philosophy', which we should now call science. And readers, busy with Scottish history at the beginning of James's reign, in order to become *au courant* with the new dynasty, could not possibly remain ignorant of the story, as told by Holinshed, of Banquo being promised that the House

¹ G. F. Warner, *The Library of James VI* (*Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.* 1893, p. xxxiv). ² *Ibid.* ll. 39, 822-30.

³ For another parallel with Stewart v. note 1. 6. 14-18.

⁴ See, for example, Spalding, *Elizabethan Demonology*, 1880, pp. 87-124; Kittredge, *Macbeth*, 1939, pp. xvi-xx; Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, 1937, ch. III.

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of Stewart should occupy the throne, and of the Norn-like 'goddesses of destiny' who as 'women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of an elderworld'¹ uttered the great prophecy in question. So familiar was it indeed that students of St John's College, dressed as 'tres quasi Sibyllae' had met James on his visit to Oxford in 1605 and recited Latin verses to him,² while, when the astrologer Simon Forman made notes of a performance of *Macbeth* seen at the Globe in 1611, his impressions were clearly influenced by memories of Holinshed's account.³ Yet, as such readers listened to the opening scenes of Shakespeare's play, they may well have asked themselves whether the august and auspicious figures which Holinshed describes and which appear as great ladies in his illustrations,⁴ could possibly be the same as the foul hags rising from hell to claps of thunder, grinning and capering in obscene dances, gloating over parts of dismembered bodies, whom Shakespeare presents, 'Weird Sisters' though he might call them. On the other hand, he seems careful never to call them witches;⁵ and though they behave as such at the beginning of 1. 3 and 4. 1, they have, as all critics have noted, something at once sublime and abysmally evil about them which marks them sharply off from the ordinary mortal witches such as his England and especially his Scottish king were thoroughly acquainted with. We can ourselves realise this distinction by comparing them with the witches in contemporary drama: with the merely nauseous hags of Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, for example,

¹ Holinshed, *op. cit.* p. 339.

² Cf. article by H. N. Paul in *J. Q. Adams: Memorial Studies* (1948), pp. 253ff. for links between this Oxford 'show' and *Macbeth* as we have it. [1950.]

³ See *The Review of English Studies*, July 1947.

⁴ See Frontispiece.

⁵ The term is only applied to them by the 'rump-fed ronyon' who is well punished for it.

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with the pitiful old village crone in *The Witch of Edmonton*, with the well-to-do wife and mother who practises witchcraft in Heywood's *Lancashire Witches*, or with the meretricious sylphs whose trivial amours bore us in Middleton's *Witch*. Too witch-like to be Norns, too Norn-like to be witches, what then are they? The answer is that, borrowing from both conceptions, Shakespeare made something new of his own, as truly his own, Coleridge observes, 'as his Ariel and Caliban'. They had to be sufficiently like witches at first view for his audience to accept them as creatures within their ken; they had to seem increasingly mysterious and forbidding on further acquaintance to be recognised as creatures more terrible than witches. The Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* are the incarnation of evil in the universe, all the more effective dramatically that their nature is never defined. 'They are', writes Lamb, 'foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them.'¹ And that, we can fancy Shakespeare echoing, is all we need to know.

But one thing can be said of them: though 'Parcae' is the word in Boece which Bellenden translates 'weird sisters', they are not Fates or anything corresponding with that conception in Shakespeare; for Macbeth exercises complete freedom of will from first to last. They set the play moving because they bring with them 'the filthy air' of ineffable evil which is its atmosphere, but they are no more the agents of what follows than 'the infernal Serpent' is the author 'of all our woe' in Milton's epic. Just as *The Book of Job* and

¹ *Works of Charles Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 'Miscellaneous Prose', p. 55.

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MACBETH

Goethe's *Faust* begin in Heaven, so by introducing the Weird Sisters into his introductory scenes Shakespeare begins *Macbeth* where Milton begins *Paradise Lost*, in Hell. For the theme of both is Temptation and Fall, the assault by Hell upon two great human souls.

II. *The three Macbeths*

But before we turn and consider *Macbeth* as a dramatic masterpiece, we have first to make up our minds what the *Macbeth* we are to consider precisely is. Does the only text which has survived, namely that in the First Folio, represent the play as Shakespeare left it, or does it, as W. J. Lawrence declares and many others believe, resemble the ruin of some 'vast and venerable Gothic cathedral, tastelessly tinkered by an unimaginative restorer'?¹ To few questions about Shakespeare have the answers been more various and more disparate. Pass these answers in review, however, and two points emerge: first, that, if we ignore modern throw-backs like the 'Arden' edition of 1912, which rejects as 'spurious' some 167 lines, opinion among scholars has grown steadily more optimistic since 1872, when the old Cambridge editors actually queried 300 lines in their Clarendon Press edition; and second, that the literary critics who are most sweeping in their condemnation of the text are often loudest in their praise of the play. Mr Masefield, for example, in a recent little book on *Macbeth*, estimates that at least thirty pages were torn from Shakespeare's manuscript 'by men who preferred a jig or a tale of bawdry, or were certainly asleep',² and yet at the same time displays boundless enthusiasm for

¹ W. J. Lawrence, 'The Mystery of *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare's Workshop*, 1928, pp. 24-5.

² John Masefield, *A 'Macbeth' Production*, 1945, p. 8.

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the dramatic wreck such botchers would undoubtedly have left behind them. Again, while all agree that *Macbeth*, which, with its 2,084 lines, is the shortest play but two in the canon,¹ must at one time have been longer, few will quarrel with another recent critic who notes that 'no significant scene seems to be missing' and pronounces it 'incomparably brilliant as it stands, and within its limits perfect'.² From such a dilemma only one escape appears possible: if our incomparable *Macbeth* is an abridged text, Shakespeare himself must be the chief abridger.

Nor does this solution rest on common sense alone; for it is possible to argue that during the first dozen years of the seventeenth century three distinct *Macbeths* were produced: (i) an original play by Shakespeare of unknown length and unknown date; (ii) an abridgement of this, also by Shakespeare, intended as the brevity of the Folio text suggests³ for a performance limited to about two hours; and (iii) a rehandling of this abridgement in turn by the 'unimaginative restorer' mentioned above, whom it will be convenient to rid our hands of first.

The 'restorer' is now generally identified with Thomas Middleton, whose *Witch*, as Steevens first noted, contains the full text of the two songs referred to by title only in the Folio stage-directions of *Macbeth* at 3.5.33 and 4.1.43, while the influence of the same play is evident also in the context of these stage-directions. The most extravagant theories of Middleton's interference with other scenes have been advanced from time to time, but the majority of serious students will to-day

¹ *The Tempest* runs to 2015 lines and *The Comedy of Errors* to 1753 according to Mr Hart's count; v. *The Review of English Studies*, viii, 21.

² Mark van Doren, *Shakespeare*, 1939, p. 252.

³ See E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i, 471.

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subscribe to Sir Edmund Chambers's verdict that his interpolations are in the main

confined to three passages (3. 5; 4. 1. 39-43; 4. 1. 125-32) in the witch-scenes, which can be distinguished from the genuine text by the introduction of Hecate, by the use of an iambic instead of a trochaic metre, and by prettiness of lyrical fancy alien to the main conception of the witches.¹

I confess to finding with others a non-Shakespearian flavour in Macbeth's comment upon the third Apparition in 4. 1, while I am tempted, again with others, to assign the more vapid of the numerous couplets to Middleton whose attested plays show him to have a fondness for that form of verse.² But I am satisfied that, apart from the passages specified by Chambers, the Folio *Macbeth* is substantially of Shakespeare's composition.

On the other hand, I am equally sure that it does not contain all Shakespeare left in his manuscript when he last handled it; for the sorry state of the second scene, the only blot, but a real blot, upon the play's perfection, is demonstrably the work of an alien hand. The scene has undoubtedly been drastically and crudely cut, and may even be a cento of two or more original scenes not too carefully stitched together; and if one asks why so many nineteenth-century students have believed *Macbeth* to be mutilated throughout by an unintelligent adapter, the answer is that they jumped to the con-

¹ E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.* I, 472.

² See notes below, 2. 1. 60-1; 2. 4. 40-1; 4. 1. 153-4; 4. 3. 239-40; 5. 2. 29-30; 5. 4. 19-20 and D. L. Chambers, *The Metre of 'Macbeth'*, 1903, who shows (p. 18) that, whereas *Macbeth* has 108 lines of rhymed pentameters, *Hamlet* (almost twice as long) has only two-thirds of this, and *Antony and Cleopatra* (a little shorter than *Hamlet*) one-third.

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clusion after perusing this scene. The verse, except for a word or two here and there, is certainly Shakespeare's;¹ but the broken lines, the irregular metre and lineation, and the abrupt transitions, together with a number of little obscurities or difficulties in construction and meaning,² tell a tale which can have but one interpretation. One of these difficulties, a favourite theme of editors since Dr Johnson, concerns the treacherous Thane of Cawdor, whose title is conferred upon Macbeth, and who is spoken of at 1. 2. 52-4 in terms implying that he is an ally of the King of Norway and fighting by his side against Macbeth; an implication not only inconsistent with Macbeth's astonishment, twice expressed, when he hears of Cawdor's treachery in the next scene, but dramatically exceedingly inept, inasmuch as the prophecy of the second witch loses more than half its virtue if Macbeth knows already that Cawdor is a notorious and defeated traitor. The real explanation is, as Angus hints at 1. 3. 111-16 in reply to Macbeth's second expression of astonishment, that Cawdor had been *secretly* in league with both Norway and the rebel Macdonwald;³ and we need not doubt that this was

¹ Few question this to-day; those who do may be referred to J. M. Nosworthy's note on the scene in *The Review of English Studies*, April 1946.

² Most of these are brought out in the notes on 1. 2 below.

³ I owe this point to Kittredge, who, however, claims that Angus's words prove the difficulty about Cawdor to be 'quite imaginary'. He forgets that a dramatic explanation must be absolutely clear to be effective, whereas this one is so obscure that nobody seems to have tumbled to it before himself. He forgets too that an explanation of Macbeth's ignorance, furnished after the Witch's prophecy, is furnished too late. See *Macbeth*, ed. G. L. Kittredge, 1939, pp. vii-viii and notes therein on 1. 2. 52; 1. 3. 72-3.

made perfectly plain in 1. 2 before the adapter got to work upon that scene and cut out the relevant passage. But why did he not make it plain then also, as he might have done in three words? Here is the reference to Cawdor as it stands in the Folio context:

And fanne our people cold.
Norway himselfe, with terrible numbers,
 Assisted by that most disloyall Traytor,
 The *Thane* of Cawdor, began a dismall Conflict.

He had only to rearrange the lineation and add a phrase like 'in secret wise' after 'numbers' and all would have been well. That he failed to do so can, I think, be explained in one way alone: he knew enough of the play to realise the importance of preparing for the prophecy in 1. 3 by a mention of the treachery of Cawdor in 1. 2; he did not notice that it was equally important to retain some reference to its secrecy. In a word, he was not the author.

I suggest that this botcher is Middleton, who, having interpolated some fifty lines of his own in the witch-scenes, is here seen robbing Shakespeare of lines in exchange in order not unduly to increase the length of the play in performance. There are, of course, pretty obvious traces of cutting elsewhere. Chambers, for example, notes that the short lines at 2. 3. 103; 3. 2. 32, 51; 3. 4. 4; 4. 3. 28, 44 are abrupt and give rise to obscurities,¹ while Bradley finds it 'difficult not to suspect some omission or curtailment' at 1. 4. 33-43, where the naming of Malcolm as Prince of Cumberland is 'extremely sudden', and 'the abruptness and brevity of the sentence in which Duncan invites himself to Macbeth's castle are still more striking'.² But none of

¹ E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.* i, 471.

² Bradley, *op. cit.* p. 468. Cf. also notes 3. 1. 129, 137 below.

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these are as crude as those in 1. 2, and though some of them may be Middleton's all may equally well be Shakespeare's. The important point is that Shakespeare can be completely acquitted of the murder of his second scene; how important we shall see when we come to consider the problem of Macbeth's character.

At what date was Middleton concerned with *Macbeth*? The answer depends upon the date of his *Witch*, which, not printed before 1778, has come down to us in a late transcript conjecturally assigned to 1620-7.¹ But we now know that the scribe was Ralph Crane, one of the scriveners of the King's men;² and we can therefore accept with some confidence his statement in the title of the MS. that the play was 'long since acted by His Majesty's servants at the Blackfriars', and deduce therefrom that it was acted in or after the autumn of 1609 when the King's men probably first occupied that theatre.³ Further, I find it difficult to set aside Lawrence's argument that *The Witch* can hardly be much later than Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, produced at Whitehall on 2 February 1609, seeing that it clearly owes much to the Antimasque of Witches with which that masque opens, while its Hecate scenes may even have been played by the same performers, dancing the same dances in the same costumes.⁴ In a word, late 1609 or early 1610 seems a highly probable date for *The Witch*. And I accordingly assign a date somewhere in 1610 or 1611 to Middleton's production of *Macbeth*, since, being chiefly concerned with the addition of witch-songs and witch-dances to the text,⁵ he would naturally be using

¹ Greg, *Elizabethan Dramatic Documents*, pp. 358-9.

² See the article on Crane by Prof. F. P. Wilson in *The Library*, 1926, vii, 194-215.

³ E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, ii, 510.

⁴ W. J. Lawrence, *op. cit.* pp. 28-33.

⁵ See notes on 4. 1 below.