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MACBETH'S LAST WORDS

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I.

Last words – one supposes – have always been felt to be especially poignant. At any rate, "they say the tongues of dying men / Enforce attention." Although Macbeth is denied a death speech proper, he is given what comes as close as possible to being one, and it is only fitting that in his very last words he speaks expressly of damnation. That Macbeth is damned, cannot be doubted from almost any theological standpoint.

The reference to damnation is, however, so exiguous and indeed so oblique that we can understand why David Garrick should have wished to enlarge upon it. Playing Macbeth, Garrick chose to expire with the following lines composed by himself.

> . . . my soul is clog'd with blood –
> I cannot rise! I dare not ask for mercy –
> It is too late, hell drags me down; I sink,
> I sink, – my soul is lost forever! – Oh! – Oh![1]

Here is a death speech proper, in operatic style, in which Macbeth is seen to be writhing in the full consciousness of his own eternal damnation. Far be it from me to censure the great actor for wishing to milk the scene of all its dramatic potential. It is enough to observe that in the present instance it is the Elizabethan poet, and actor, Shakespeare who exercises the kind of cultivated self-restraint upon which the Augustans and post-Augustans were to pride themselves at his expense.

Shakespeare's restraint here is not confined to mere diction. Although his Macbeth does speak explicitly of damnation, he speaks of it in a peculiar way. The peculiarity is all the more brought home to us when we contrast Shakespeare's version with Garrick's. Garrick caters to the stock response. He gives us what we have every right to expect. In the case of Shakespeare, if we take Macbeth's last words *au pied de la lettre* we are forced to conclude that Macbeth at the end does not regard himself as damned. This is not to say that Macbeth simply ignores the question of damnation. He does not. He speaks of it. But the words he speaks presuppose that at least to his own mind he is not damned.

Macbeth's last words presuppose only that he is not damned at the moment when he utters those last words. In the very utterance of the words he envisages the possibility that he may in fact incur damnation in the immediate sequel. How he behaves in his combat with Macduff, will determine whether he will be damned – or saved.

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[1] *Macbeth*, ed. K. Muir, (Cambridge, 1957), p. xlvi.

Couched in the imperative mood, Macbeth's last words may be described as a curse. It is, however, a disjunctive curse, with divided reference applying equally, and indifferently, to himself and to Macduff. Hypothetical or conditional in its burden, the curse can only take effect if one or the other behaves in a certain way. Damnation is to be visited on Macbeth, or Macduff, on only one condition – if he plays the coward in the ensuing combat. Although we are not told how Macbeth conducts himself in that duel, we have taken the full measure of the man in the course of the play. "Blow, wind! come, wrack! / At least we'll die with harness on our back." According to his own lights Macbeth is not damned.

II

On learning that Macduff was not of woman born Macbeth says of the news that "it hath cowed my better part of man." Kittredge glosses the passage as follows: "my courage, which is a man's better part; the quality which, more than anything else, makes me a man."

Not courage but justice was always regarded by the Great Tradition, both biblical and classical, as the moral virtue *par excellence*. Macbeth replaces justice by courage, and it is for that reason that he can regard himself as saved in his last words. For if courage is the better part of man it is only the man who betrays that better part that deserves damnation. Momentarily cowed, Macbeth recovers his courage and fights to the end. With his final curse he affirms a deviant theology in which damnation and – by implication – salvation are made to depend the one on cowardice and the other on courage. Considerations of justice and injustice simply fall by the way as irrelevant to the main issue. The main issue is summed up at the beginning of the play: "Brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)."

Of Macbeth it might almost be said what was said of the thane of Cawdor: "Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it." But there the resemblance ends. Cawdor "confessed his treasons" and died in state of "deep repentance." I mention that minor episode only to show that Shakespeare had available to him, within the immediate resources of the play, the kind of option – orthodox and traditional – which Garrick exploited and the poet eschewed.

Dr. Johnson's principal criticism of Shakespeare is that "he seems to write without any moral purpose." On the plus side he says, "this . . . is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life." Johnson failed to see that there might be an intimate connection between Shakespeare's "praise" and what he called his "first defect," that the "defect" might in fact be in part the source of the "praise." It is not easy to see how the "mirror of life" can have a "moral purpose."

III

Macbeth in his last words speaks only of damnation. He does not mention salvation. It is Macduff who in an important passage speaks of salvation. He

speaks of Macbeth's salvation. He specifies the precise conditions under which Macbeth may be saved.

Macduff is full of the news of Macbeth's most horrible atrocity, the killing of his wife and children, when he entertains the possibility of Macbeth's salvation.

> But, gentle Heavens,
> Cut short all intermission; front to front,
> Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
> Within my sword's length set him; if he scape,
> Heaven forgive him too!

The words are extraordinary: "If I let him escape I will not only forgive him myself but I pray God to forgive him also" (Kittredge). Here indeed is Christian forgiveness but with a novel twist. God's mercy is being extended to the fiend of Scotland on one condition – that he succeed in outwitting or outfighting Macduff when they meet in mortal combat. The successful exercise of manly prowess can earn Macbeth full redemption for all his crimes. Here again it is courage or prowess that supersedes justice as the cardinal virtue. Macduff is found to share Macbeth's deviant theology.

Where the text has "if he 'scape" Kittredge provides the gloss "If I let him escape", but Macbeth may escape Macduff's vengeance without Macduff's *letting* him do so. Macbeth's escape may indeed occur through a failure of prowess on Macduff's part; it may equally occur simply through Macbeth's proving himself the stronger man.

Searching for Macbeth on the battlefield, Macduff exclaims, "Let me find him, Fortune! / And more I beg not." In particular, Macduff refuses to entreat Fortune, or God, or Heaven, to ensure his victory. According to the Great Tradition he would have every right to do so. Seeing that justice cries out for Macbeth's destruction, we might expect Macduff to invoke the formula of medieval chivalry, "By the grace of God and this mine arm/ . . . as I truly fight defend me heaven!" Not so. Macduff will rely solely on his arm.

IV

Despite his cult of manhood Macbeth should not be taken as being indifferent to considerations of justice. Challenged by Macduff, he warns him off with the words, "But get thee back! My soul is too much charged / With blood of thine already . . . / I bear a charmed life." From the moment that Macbeth kills Duncan he is never allowed to forget that his soul is too much charged with blood.

> But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
> I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
> Stuck in my throat.

Justice, guilt, remorse, compassion: these comprise one moral syndrome; courage, prowess, manhood, resolution ("Be bloody, bold and resolute") comprise a second. Although Macbeth is powerfully susceptible to the first

it is the manly syndrome that is seen finally to prevail in his deepest nature. (With Lady Macbeth the reverse proves true: "the valor of [her] tongue" gives way to a "mind diseased.") Even as Macbeth regards his soul as too much charged with blood he remains convinced that his better part of man stands inviolate. The two are not the same. In the last analysis Macbeth prizes his manhood more than he prizes his soul ("mine eternal jewel").

The genius of Garrick lay in giving full value, and more than full value, to the moral syndrome – what Nietzsche called "slave morality" as opposed to "master morality" – in Macbeth's character. The account of P. Fitzgerald in his "Life of Garrick" is most instructive.

> The expression of despair and agony and horror, as Garrick looked at his bloody hands, was long remembered. His face seemed to grow whiter at every instant . . . These were exquisite strokes altogether new to the audience . . . Instead of the daring and intrepidity, and perhaps cant and bluster, of the older conception . . . [he pursued] his idea of Macbeth being utterly oppressed and overcome by the sense of his guilt. But an anonymous critic pointed out to him that Macbeth was not a coward; and with that good sense and modesty which always distinguished him he adopted the advice.[2]

What advice? Garrick did not play Macbeth as a coward. He played him as overcome by the sense of guilt. Why should it be assumed that the latter entails the former? If a man having committed acts of grave injustice is utterly oppressed by guilt for what he has done there is *pro tanto* no cowardice in that. That Garrick and Garrick's critic and Garrick's biographer should all succumb to the fallacy of supposing a connection, proves the tremendous power of the cult of manhood; so that when Macbeth gives voice to his guilt, "I am afraid to think what I have done; / Look on't again I dare not," it is no wonder that he should be vulnerable to his wife's retort, "My hands are of your color; but I shame / To wear a heart so white."

Later, in the scene with Banquo's ghost, when she rallies him with, "Are you a man?" he will reply with testy pride, "Ay, and a bold one that dare look on that / Which might appal the Devil."

V

The key word of the play is the word "man". It is by ringing the changes on that word that the poet brings out much of the moral import – I do not say "moral purpose" – of the play.

Especially to be noticed are two exchanges featuring the word "man", one between Macbeth and his wife, the other between Macduff and Malcolm, that are strikingly akin. In the first we have: " 'I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none.' // 'When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And, to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man.' // 'Bring forth men-children only!' "

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[2] *A New Variorum Edition of Shakesspeare: Macbeth*, ed. H. H. Furness, (New York, 1963), p. 493.

In the second exchange there is an almost uncanny rehearsal of the first: "'Dispute it like a man.' // 'But I must also feel it like a man.' // '. . . blunt not the heart; enrage it.' // 'O! I could play the woman with mine eyes / . . . . Within my sword's length set him; if he 'scape, / Heaven forgive him too!' // 'This tune goes manly.'"

Although in the one we have the forces of evil and in the other the forces of good, in each exchange considerations of manhood are taken by both parties to be overriding considerations. That is never in question. What is in question is simply how the overriding considerations of manhood are to be interpreted. Do they allow for the natural grief of a father and husband? "All my pretty ones? / Did you say all? O Hell-kite! – All?" Do they allow for natural fear under any circumstances whatever? "If we fail?"

Again, in both cases it is the moderate position that is overborne by the extreme one: Macduff and Macbeth are both brought to heel. And in each case it is the weaker who through the valor of her tongue succeeds in goading the stronger. Malcolm (if I may say so) is a woman when juxtaposed with Macduff – if only because, though nominally Macbeth's chief adversary, he cannot be allowed to detract from the decisive role assigned to Macduff. He can, however, be given the part of Lady Macbeth: "blunt not the heart, enrage it."

Pity and fear: in regard to both of those passions the cult of manhood takes a very hard line. Needless to say, the tragic poet – if only for professional reasons – can never quite identify himself with the cult, though he may perhaps place his art in its service. He may see himself as rousing those passions in his audience for the sole purpose of *purging* them.

VI

Hardly is Macbeth dead but that grand soldier of the old school, Siward, learns that his son has been slain in the battle.

> Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt.
> He only lived but till he was a man,
> The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed
> In the unshrinking station where he fought,
> But like a man he died.

These words of praise might equally be applied, *mutatis mutandis,* to Macbeth himself. Coming hard upon his death they might well serve as his obituary notice, always remembering that in the long interim between confirming his prowess at the outset of the play – "Disdaining Fortune with his brandished steel" – and his dying like a man at the end of the play – "Yet I will try the last" – all his terrible career of injustice lies between. But if *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* the epitaph is not unsuitable. Young Siward being denied the long interim we do not know how he would have filled it.

Old Siward has only one question to ask. Where did his son receive his

wounds – on his front or on his back? No such question need be asked in the case of Macbeth: we know the answer.

As for the father shedding tears for his son, that is simply unthinkable. When Malcolm protests, "He's worth more sorrow," the old soldier is adamant: "He's worth no more; / They say he parted well and paid his score."

On learning that his son's wounds were on the front Siward says, "Why then, God's soldier be he!" It is thanks to his son's courage that the gates of Heaven will open to receive him. That his son exercised his courage in a just cause, is certainly important to Siward; but it is the courage that comes first, the justice second. Salvation itself consists in being God's *soldier*.

If Siward refuses on principle to grieve for his son; if Macduff refuses equally "to play the woman with mine eyes" and weep for his wife and children; how can it be expected that Macbeth should submit to the "compunctious visitings of Nature" and spare the life of Duncan? Macbeth is by no means alone in resisting, even while feeling deeply, the claims of "Pity like a naked new-born babe."

Macbeth, Macduff, Siward – these are hard men; they have been trained in a hard school; they are men of great moral seriousness who prize justice as well as courage; they are men of great heart who are open to the whole range of moral experience. But they are men by whom justice is largely taken for granted: it does not lie in the forefront of their moral concern. If only because they are soldiers by profession – "Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?" – they are peculiarly vulnerable to any imputation laid against their manhood.

Reflecting on those lines we are inevitably led to the conclusion that only some accident of fate, some unlucky turn of the wheel of fortune, can explain why it is that Macbeth and not Macduff or Siward or even Banquo (as I hope to show) should be singled out to become the fiend of Scotland. That accident of fate may be seen as bodied forth in those "instruments of darkness," the Weird Sisters: in Holinshed it is suggested that they may be the "goddesses of destiny."

Although Macbeth is morally responsible for his crimes, it is an accident of fate that those crimes should be committed by him and not by Macduff or Siward whom we have found to be his moral equivalents. There is thus some basis for Macbeth's atheistic speech: life is a "tale told by an idiot." Much of the babblings of the Witches are the babblings of an idiot, quite literally "signifying nothing."

VII

In the manuals of moral philosophy the ethical question *par excellence* is taken to be "why ought I to be moral?" meaning "why be moral rather than simply hearken to the dictates of self-interest?" It may not be altogether self-evident that moral considerations should be allowed to override prudential ones.

When Macbeth shrinks from killing Duncan he is seen to be deterred by *both* moral and prudential considerations operating together, the one assum-

ing the form – principally – of pity, the other giving rise to fear. He does not doubt that the contemplated act is as much imprudent as it is immoral. Quite apart from the claims of justice to which he is highly sensitive, merely consulting his own self-interest in cold-blooded fashion would suffice to keep Macbeth innocent of the crime.

Seeing that the manuals of moral philosophy are of no help to us in understanding the present case, we may suspect that they provide only an impoverished account of moral experience. Besides morality and self-interest there is a third factor that is not inferior to either of the others. It is to that *tertium quid* that Lady Macbeth appeals. She knows her husband well; she knows how to release the mainspring of his character; she does not appeal to his self-interest; she does not even appeal to his ambition. Johnson's statement cannot be improved.

> She urges the excellence and dignity of courage, a glittering idea which has dazzled mankind from age to age, and animated sometimes the housebreaker and sometimes the conquerer . . . This topic, which has been always employed with too much success, is used in this scene, with peculiar propriety, to a soldier by a woman. Courage is the distinguishing virtue of a soldier; and the reproach of cowardice cannot be borne by any man from a woman without great impatience.[3]

Although there is a "peculiar propriety" in having the theme enacted by a soldier and a woman who are also, we might add, husband and wife, Johnson sees that the theme is too universal to be confined to special conditions. Mankind taken in general, and perhaps the best men quite as much as the others, are liable to be so *dazzled* by the glittering idea of manhood that moral and prudential considerations, acting separately or acting together, are only too readily eclipsed. When cold warriors armed with atomic bombs engage in "brinkmanship", as in the Cuban missile crisis, they do not find it easy to back down from advanced positions, and it cannot be assumed that even the most elementary consideration of self-interest, sheer survival, will always restrain them; to save face they may jump the death to come.

When I contrast moral and manly considerations as diverse I am to be seen as yielding to contemporary usage. According to Aristotle courage and justice are both moral virtues – for the simple reason that a moral virtue is taken to be any praiseworthy trait of character, and it is not to be doubted that courage as well as justice is a praiseworthy trait of character. If we accept that account of moral virtue we may venture to say (doubtless with exaggeration) that Macbeth kills Duncan for the sake of virtue, for the sake – at any rate – of one of the virtues.

Hobbes breaks with Aristotle in denying that courage is a moral virtue; for him it is merely a passion. Again, the reason is simple. Hobbes understands the moral virtues as "means of peaceable, sociable and comfortable living," and courage as such is not directed to that end.[4] If we accept this

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[3] *Op. cit.* p. 105.

[4] *Leviathan*, part I, chapter 15 *ad finem*. Cf. chapter 6 on the passions.

account we will find nothing odd in the description of Macbeth given by Henry Irving. "Of Macbeth's bravery there can be no doubt whatever . . . Indeed Shakespeare insists throughout on this great manly quality . . . It is to his moral qualities which I refer when I dub him villain."

There is a pertinent passage in Machiavelli in which he equivocates beautifully in his use of the word "virtue." It is his description of Agathocles that is almost equally appliable to Macbeth, himself an equivocal case.

> It cannot be called virtue to kill one's fellow-citizens, betray one's friends, be without faith, without pity, and without religion; by these methods one may indeed gain power but not glory. For if the virtues of Agathocles in braving and overcoming perils, and his greatness of soul in supporting and surmounting obstacles be considered, one sees no reason for holding him inferior to any of the most renowned captains. Nevertheless his barbarous cruelty and inhumanity, together with his countless atrocities, do not permit of his being named among the most famous men. We cannot attribute to fortune or virtue that which he achieved without either.[5]

VIII

If "man" is the key word of the play it is "woman" with which it is essentially contrasted.

When Lady Macduff learns that the assassins are at her door her first thought is, "I have done no harm." If she has done no harm how can she be punished? And if she is to be punished must she not be guilty of some sin? To think thus is to trust the moral order of the world. Her first thought gives way to a second, "But I remember now / I am in this earthly world where to do harm / Is often laudable." She explains her first thought as owing to failure of memory. It is as if she were an angelic soul who suddenly remembers that, no longer in heaven, it has been cast adrift on earth. But this thought gives way to a third, "Why then, alas! / Do I put up that womanly defence, / To say, I have done no harm?" Even women are not allowed to be womanly.

To trust the moral order of the world, is to be womanly; to distrust it is to be manly. Carried to its extreme, that distrust issues in the conviction that life is a tale told by an idiot. Lady Macduff unsexes herself in a fashion reminiscent of Lady Macbeth. There is indeed this difference: the one takes the hard, manly line in suffering injustice, the other in inflicting it. We may admire the one even as we detest the other. The fact remains that the two women are alike in taking the hard, manly line and in rejecting their nature as women. If Macduff is the alter ego of Macbeth, Lady Macduff is in turn the alter ego of Lady Macbeth.

Although Lady Macduff herself takes the hard line, we in the audience are invited to take the soft. The scene as a whole is so pitiable that it would be unbearable if it were not so mercifully brief. In a word, it is "womanly": we do not hesitate to "play the woman" with our eyes even if her husband refuses.

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[5] *The Prince*, translated by L. Ricci and E. R. P. Vincent ,(New York, 1940), chapter 8, "Of those who have attained the position of prince by villainy."

The scene is crucial to the play, whether it be dramatically or spectatorially or thematically considered. Dramatically, it presents the hard, manly line of Macbeth being carried to the *reductio ad absurdum* of wanton cruelty. Spectatorially (if I may coin a barbarism), it elicits to the highest degree the soft and womanly in us as observers of the action. Thematically, the hard and the soft, the manly and the womanly – which constitute together the theme of the play – are so intertwined in the very texture of the lines that we can scarcely disentangle them.

Macduff's son has only one brief moment to live but thanks to the providence of the poet's art a whole lifetime is telescoped into that one moment, as we see the child proceed in three stages, from tender innocence to knowing worldliness and ending in brave defiance. In the first stage Lady Macduff says to him, "Sirrah, your father's dead: / And what will you do now? How will you live?" He replies, "As birds do, mother," expressing thereby his trust and faith in the natural order.

The specific reference here to *Matthew* 6:26 recalls the more general reference to the New Testament where Macbeth says to the embittered men whom he is hiring to kill Banquo, "Are you so gospelled / To pray for this good man . . . / Whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave?" They reply simply, and *sotto voce*, "We are men, my liege." That is enough. They are men, not women. To be a man is to be ungospelled. To be gospelled is to be a woman. If the moral is contrasted with the manly, then to be moral is to be gospelled and womanly. The root of the distinction between the manly and the moral proves to be the natural difference between man and woman.

Macbeth himself is both manly and womanly, as his wife knows only too well. "Yet do I fear thy *nature:* / It is too full o' the milk of human kindness." Milk is the natural portion of women, and therefore when she unsexes herself she summons the Spirits with the words, "Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall." The root of the moral is to be found in human kindness, in being gospelled, in being womanly. Lady Macbeth's object in unsexing herself, in transforming herself into a man, is to become "top-full / Of direst cruelty." Manliness pushed to the extreme is cruelty.

If Lady Macbeth unsexes herself Macbeth may be said to dehumanize himself. I use the word advisedly. To be a human being is to share by nature in both the manly and the womanly. If the human being is a man the manly should indeed predominate but the womanly must not be suppressed. If the human being is a woman the womanly should predominate but the manly is there as well. The tragedy of Macbeth and his wife may be traced to the terrible violence which each inflicts on his own nature. The violence is the greater in the case of Lady Macbeth. He merely suppresses the subordinate element in his nature, whereas she affronts her central core. Even he is appalled: "Bring forth men-children only! / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males." It is altogether unnatural in a woman. It is no wonder, then, that her self-violence should issue in her suicide.

IX

No account of the play "Macbeth" can be adequate that fails to give full value to the Witches. It is not enough to dismiss them as mere stage properties that serve as an "objective correlative" for the interior drama within Macbeth's soul. The Witches enjoy an irreducible exteriority that we are enjoined to respect. At the same time they are inherently mysterious: their place in the cosmic order is so obscure that only some deviant theology – so we are moved to surmise – could be expected to accommodate them. Here, if anywhere, the critic must proceed with especial caution. It is not for him to render transparent that which by its very nature is opaque.

Although the Witches are "not to be commanded," Macbeth is seen at the very top of his form when he undertakes, in Act IV, scene 1, to master them: "I will be satisfied! . . . / . . . for now I am bent to know, / By the worst means, the worst." This heroic effort to master the "instruments of darkness" comes late in the play. It does not express Macbeth's characteristic attitude toward the Witches. That attitude may be summed up in one word: trust.

Macbeth trusts the Witches; he has faith in their predictions of the future and acts accordingly. At the outset of the play Macbeth is introduced to us as "Disdaining Fortune with his brandished steel." The man who trusts the Witches ceases to disdain Fortune: he becomes its anxious slave. For if the Witches are not the "goddesses of destiny," they are certainly related to Fortune in some important, albeit mysterious, way.

We have seen that Macbeth pursues the manly at the expense of the moral. Now we find him betraying the manly on its own ground. To be manly is to be self-reliant. To be manly is to disdain Fortune. By accepting the "metaphysical aid" of the Witches he surrenders his autonomy: "I bear a charmed life."

If Macduff is the alter ego of Macbeth there is yet one decisive point of difference between them. "Let me find him, Fortune! / And more I beg not." Macduff also asks something of Fortune but how little, how very little compared with Macbeth. The one asks only the opportunity to be self-reliant, the other wants everything. Macduff might even be said to strike a bargain with Heaven, and what a bargain! "Within my sword's length set him," that is all I ask, no more, and in exchange for that small favor, "gentle Heavens", let Macbeth receive divine absolution if I fail to kill him altogether on my own. The *quid pro quo* is so unequal that we may indeed say, with Malcolm, "this tune goes manly."

Why "*gentle* Heavens"? The Heavens have not been gentle to Macduff. But is he not, with the word, placating the Heavens, so eager is he to win the chance to fight Macbeth?

In the light of these considerations it is by no means accidental that Macduff defeats Macbeth.

I think that we can pinpoint the precise moment at which Macbeth ceases to disdain Fortune. The moment is instructive. "If Chance will have me King, why Chance may crown me, / Without my stir." The thought is

morally unobjectionable. That is to say, it is morally unobjectionable when viewed from the standpoint of "slave morality." Judged by the standards of "master morality" it constitutes a serious lapse. For he is now prepared to welcome the highest rewards from Fortune without so much as exerting himself.

The subtle power of the Witches to demoralize is evidenced even in the case of Banquo, despite his "royalty of nature." Although Banquo suspects that Duncan was murdered by Macbeth, that suspicion does not deter him from cherishing the thought that if the Witches can "shine" on Macbeth, "May they not be my oracles as well, / And set me up in hope?"

That Banquo initially turns a deaf ear on the blandishments of the Witches, is not surprising. The rewards they offer him seem at the time so remote that even Macbeth pays them no heed.

I submit that almost any man no matter how self-reliant would become promptly demoralized – as Banquo and Macbeth are demoralized – by the oracular unveiling of his own personal future (and that of his progeny). Credence being purchased by means of some "verities . . . made good," it should not be difficult to unhinge a man through the further use of prophecies, good or bad, more riddlingly expressed. Here surely we may say, with Johnson, that Shakespeare "has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies but as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed."

Newton's first law of motion describes how every body would act *if* it were free of all impressed forces. Owing to universal gravitation there is, and can be, no such body. Revealing the nature of every body "as it would be found in trials to which it cannot be exposed," Newton's first law is to be seen as a true contrary–to–fact conditional in the subjunctive mood. No mere "mirror of life," it is in his subjunctive not indicative mood that the poet can best emulate the physicist. Although oracular witches are contrary to nature, the poet may invoke them in the antecedent of a contrary–to–fact conditional and thereby reveal, in the consequent, what no mirror of life could reveal.

Once the seductive power of the Witches to corrupt is acknowledged, it strikes me as an open question – which the critic would be wise to leave to moral casuists to debate – whether Macbeth is to be held fully accountable for his crimes. "Diminished responsibility" is a concept of recent British jurisprudence that might be held to fit the case.

X

Macbeth is a man who is ruled by women, not one woman but four. Without derogating from their preternatural dignity we may yet say of the Witches that they are, in their own way, women. Did not Machiavelli say that Fortune was a woman and that if you wish to master her you must conquer her by force? Macbeth does not master Fortune; it is Fortune that masters Macbeth.

Macbeth is "Valor's minion" in both senses of the word "minion": he is Valor's toady as well as Valor's darling. As he "struts and frets his hour upon the stage" his daring and intrepidity are almost always separated by a very thin line from mere cant and bluster. Having opted for "master morality," he is not even master in his own house. His wife does not hesitate to browbeat him with the characteristic words, "What! quite unmanned by folly?" when he is stricken with fear and trembling by Banquo's ghost. And though he insists (it is no more than the simple truth), "What man dares, I dare," he quite concedes her point when, the ghost having vanished, he says, "I am a man again." To be afraid is to cease to be a man. If we were to accept that article of "master morality" we would be forced to say – seeing that throughout the bulk of the play Macbeth is almost continuously in a state of fear – that he has relinquished his manhood: always excepting his last words where with everything against him he renews his lapsed disdain of Fortune.

Challenging the ghost to "be alive again", Macbeth is all bluster when he says, "If trembling I inhabit then, protest me / The baby of a girl." But Macbeth is in fact, as each of us is, the baby of a girl. To be the baby of a girl is simply to be of woman born. Macbeth aspires not to be of woman born. He aspires to be all man, and indeed he can only be defeated by one who is not of woman born. It is Macduff who is all man. He may be contrasted with Jesus who was, so to speak, *only* of woman born.

It is because the natural origin of each of us is to be found in the union of man and woman that we all share by nature in the womanly as well as the manly, in the soft as well as the hard. If these be "the most heterogeneous ideas" it is to be hoped that they can be reconciled without being "yoked by violence together." In Macbeth the manly and the womanly, the hard and the soft, master morality and slave morality, are indeed yoked by violence together.

After saying in one breath that Macduff is all man we do not hesitate to retract it in another; and if we cannot preserve a strict logical consistency, we do not despair of achieving a certain poetic consistency – suitable to the subject-matter – in our discourse. We have found heretofore that, like Macbeth himself, Macduff shares in the womanly. In fact if Macduff excels Macbeth in intrinsic manliness it might be argued that he is also more womanly than Macbeth. On his receiving the terrible news there is this remarkable utterance:

> Did Heaven look on,
> And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff!
> They were all struck for thee.

What is it – exactly – that Lady Macduff takes to be womanly? It is the conviction that moral blamelessness entails exemption from at least the worst misfortunes. Therefore it follows by what the logician calls *modus tollens* that if one is struck by a terrible misfortune he must be morally guilty. Macduff then must be morally guilty. How else explain the absence of divine intervention? Here we have the womanly trust in the moral order pushed to

its ultimate conclusion, in the face of evidence that might lead anyone to infer that life is a tale told by an idiot.

That Macduff should feel guilty, is very natural. It is true that all of Macbeth's previous crimes having been purely "political" he was not to know that Macbeth was capable of wanton cruelty. But though reason may exonerate Macduff I believe that any man placed in his position – the position as it were of deserting his wife and children in time of danger – could not but feel guilty in his heart.

Someone may wish to conclude that it is in Macduff that the manly and the womanly are reconciled, precisely through his carrying each to the last extreme. My own opinion is that for the reconciliation we must look elsewhere – to the poet himself. With Dryden I should say that "of all modern and perhaps ancient poets" it is Shakespeare who has "the largest and most comprehensive soul." It is the sheer largeness and comprehensiveness of Shakespeare's soul, even more than his art, that can encompass such polarities.

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