THE ANXIETY OF POWER
AND SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH*

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In May 1603 the sharers in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, identified as "Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustyne Phillippes, John Heninges, Henrie Condell, William Sly, Robert Armyn, Richard Cowly, and the rest of their associats," were licensed under a Royal Patent as the King's Players (Murray, 1:146; Chambers 1923, 1:311; Schoenbaum, 249). From henceforth they were designated as Grooms of the Chamber, associated with the household of the newly installed King James I, the son of Mary Queen of Scots who was himself a recent arrival from Scotland. James came to England with considerable Protestant and monarchist intellectual baggage, and within a little more than a year dissidents within his new kingdom would begin planning a spectacular challenge not only to their king's authority but also to the entire national government, both civil and ecclesiastical. The Gunpowder plotters, who by November 1605 were prepared to strike a blow that would destroy Parliament as the king addressed it, thus conspired to lop off the topmost branches of the British nation. Instead, the failed *coup d'etat* only succeeded in solidifying support for the monarchy and for the official ideology that was designed to support it. Catholics as well as Protestants roundly condemned the Plot as criminal and sacrilegious.[1]

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[1] I recognize that the terms 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' are ambiguous in the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. A great many people were at heart Catholic and yet attended the services of the Church of England without objection; others did so only because they were coerced to do so. Recusancy, although encouraged by the Jesuit mission, was difficult, dangerous, and expensive. See Walsham, *passim*. There was also criticism by the more extreme Reformed element usually identified by the term 'Puritan' who tended to reject all forms of Catholic worship as well as the Church polity retained by the

The Protestant reaction to the Gunpowder Plot was immediate and hysterical, and its tenor may be gauged from the popular engravings which celebrated both the English victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the discovery of the Plot on 5 November 1605 in side-by-side representations as signs that God was England's protector on each occasion.[2] In his speech before Parliament following the discovery of the Plot, James is reported to have compared the projected destruction of the entire national government to "*Domes-dayes*," like Noah's Flood and the coming day of the Last Judgment, "wherewith GOD threatned to destroy mee and all of you of this little world that haue interest in me" (James I 1918, 282). That this also resonated in the theater among the King's Men we cannot doubt, for in the play that their principal playwright had under construction in the coming months we find the story of the killing of a king whose murder is reported in terms which identify the act as eliciting the very image of Doomsday. "Up, up, and see/ The great doom's image," Macduff cries upon his discovery of King Duncan's bleeding body, and Lady Macbeth makes reference to the alarm bell as a "hideous trumpet [that] calls to parley/ The sleepers of the house" (*Macbeth* 2.3.77-78, 82-83). The play was apparently completed in the summer of 1606 or at least not earlier than May of that year – that is, following the execution of the plotters and also the Jesuit Father Henry Garnet, who had prior knowledge of the plot. Garnet, as is well known, was the centre of the controversy over equivocation that swirled about the sensational Gunpowder conspiracy – a controversy that is noticed in the drunken Porter's speech in which he imagines that he is porter of Hell Gate (2.3.9-12). Henry Paul believed, on evidence that seems more slender today than nearly half a century ago, that the drama was written and produced with the royal audience in mind and that the play's premier was a special production on 7 August 1606, during the visit of the King of Denmark, the brother of Queen Anne (Paul,

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English Church. The Elizabethan settlement was in fact evolving, and with the philosophical base developed by Richard Hooker would develop into a more Catholic form of Anglicanism in the seventeenth century before the Civil Wars of the 1640s. I am here using the term 'Protestant' as shorthand for the Calvinistically and nationalistically inclined authorities and their wholehearted supporters.

[2] See, for example, the engraving designed by Samuel Ward, as illustrated in Tesimond, pl. facing 48; and the titlepage of *A Thankfull Remembrance of Gods Mercie*, illustrated in Williamson, pl. facing 156.

329-30). More recently Peter Thomson could still write that "*Macbeth* represents Shakespeare's most strenuous attempt to flatter James I" (177).

But if the play was intended *primarily* as a compliment to King James, one would hardly expect it to have focused on a regicide, the killing of a king of Scotland, especially since James was still king of that country in addition to his English crown. There is, to be sure, the patently flattering parade of the line of Banquo in act 4, scene 1, but even here it is a show put on by the witches, ambiguous creatures with powers derived from their devilish familiars – creatures who had been unequivocally condemned by the the king in his *Daemonologie*. While according to the prophecy the line of Banquo's descendants will "stretch out to th' crack of doom" (4.1.117) and thus will suggest a long rule for the house of Stuart, this "Horrible sight"(4.1.122) is credibly held to be demonic even by Macbeth, who pronounces the witches and their apparitions unreliable. When the "sisters" have vanished into thin air and Lenox has arrived on the scene, Macbeth curses even "the air whereon they ride" as well as those who, like himself, would attend to the witches' prophecies: "damned [be] all those that trust them" (4.1.138-39). Even the hour when the apparitions were set forth for him is to be "accursed in the calendar" (4.1.133-34).

The play, far from presenting the monarch as the rock upon which the realm might safely rest for generations hereafter,[3] reinforces a fear that the king's leadership would place him in a peculiar position of great danger in the realm – and that the danger to the king meant very real danger to the state which he represented. If James arrogated to himself the title of a "god" in little, set above his nation in the natural Chain of Being by the authority of the great God (James I 1918, 281), the Gunpowder conspiracy demonstrated that it was possible to challenge this order of things.[4] Indeed, the kingship might by itself prove to be

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[3] The rock was traditionally a symbol of stability and strength, as in Whitney, 96.

[4] I am assuming that the Gunpowder Plot was not a conspiracy organized by the government of James as a propaganda ploy against English Catholics, but cf. Williamson, *passim*. In any case, there is no likelihood that Shakespeare or most of his contemporaries, Catholic or Protestant, would have immediately suspected a government conspiracy except in the sense that the government conspired to allow the Plot to go forward after its discovery until a convenient time at which it might be "discovered" by the wise king himself.

an irresistible magnet to draw forth conspirators against the crown. Macbeth's irrational urge to overthrow the king, abetted by the prophecies of the witches and perhaps inspired by their gift of the evil eye (Davidson 1970, 45), may thus be seen as a sign of the lack of stability inherent in kingly power. Previously Queen Elizabeth I had been threatened by conspiracies and rebellions, and now James too would be the target of assassination by English hands. The murder of

Figure 1
Fortune shakes down rewards for those who greedily grasp for them. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Venice, 1669), p. 227.

Duncan, who at the beginning of the play already has required the help of the loyal Scottish aristocracy to put down rebellion and foreign invasion, may therefore appear to mirror a contemporary threat to good order and to stable monarchical government.

King James, who wanted very much to present himself as a wise monarch, also wished to be seen as the perfect embodiment of divine right. His sagacity was allegedly demonstrated, for example, in his decoding of the Monteagle letter that revealed the secret of the Gunpowder plotters. As a way of fashioning himself as an exemplary monarch he had himself represented on coins on horseback or seated on a throne, positioned between the pillars of Hercules (Goldberg, fig. 10), the latter originally borrowed from an *impresa* designed for Charles V and adapted by Queen Elizabeth after the defeat of the Spanish Armada (Yates, 54-58; Strong, 154). It would seem that thereby James wished to claim imperial power and, as a Protestant rather than a Catholic prince, wanted to position himself in relation not only to his people but also to the world beyond. Significantly, the king expected to be depicted as one raised up, either on a dais or throne, or on the back of a horse in an imperial pose. In the edition of his *Basilicon Doron* published in 1603 he had asserted that the role of the king involved being "*set (as it was said of old) vpon a publike stage, in the sight of all the people*," and in the main text of his treatise he had written that "It is a trew old saying, That a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold" (James I 1924, 5, 43). The king's outward appearance and stature are the basis of the people's judgment and hence are seen to be of very great importance for the reality of royal power. But to be placed on a stage logically also exposes the king more surely to dangers – dangers that would not be shared by persons among the lower orders of people in the commonwealth, where safety lies in their humble station in life. Kingly power presupposes anxiety about its role and maintenance.

The great, particularly the king who is the greatest of them all, among the people of a nation conventionally were regarded as most subject to fortune and chance. The iconography of Fortune's wheel is very well known and hardly needs comment here. Commonly Fortune, blind or blindfolded, stands turning her wheel, on which the rising figure at the left is being lifted up as Macbeth was in the early part of the play; then the next stage is to rule, but only temporarily,

whereupon comes the fall of the one who has reigned, represented by the man tumbling from the right side of the wheel. Deep-seated suspicion of ambition was implied in such iconography, as articulated, for example, in Herrad of Hohenbourg's *Hortus Deliciarum* in which the final stage of man's fall shows a figure plunging into an abyss below (2:351). In Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* Fortune may be presented in a different way, as a nude figure, bald behind and with a flowing forelock like the traditional depiction of Occasion. A later woodcut (*fig. 1*), not present in the 1603 edition, shows Fortune aloft and shaking down crowns, scepters, miters, helmets, and other symbols of authority from a tree to those who greedily grasp for them below (*Iconologia* 1669, 227). In the Hertel edition of the *Iconologia*, the artist interprets Ripa's text in another way: Fortune is standing precariously on a ball, which is a common sign of instability (Ripa 1971, 152). The association of height and of trees with the winds of chance was likewise commonplace, and informs an emblem (*fig. 2*) in Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna* of 1612; here the "loftie Pines" which "support the state / Of common wealthes, and mightie government" are said to "stoope [...] soon'st, vnto the blast of fate" (60). This emblem is closely related to James's statement to Parliament in 1605 that "all mankinde, so chiefly Kings, as being in the higher places like the high Trees, or stayest Mountaines, and steepest Rockes, are most subiect to the dayly tempest of innumerable dangers; and I amongst all other Kings haue euer bene subiect vnto them . . ." (James I 1918, 282).

James, like the Tudors before him, was deeply concerned about the dangers against which the monarch lacked immunity. As the king explained to Parliament after the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot, he had first been exposed to mortal danger while he "was yet in my mothers belly," and as a young king in Scotland he was in constant danger (James I 1918, 282). Following the Gowrie conspiracy in 1600 he had even more reason to remain continually fearful – a natural consequence of such a traumatic experience. Nor was he safe from treason upon his arrival in England. Further, he also had observed the fortunes of his mother, who was eventually executed by her cousin Elizabeth's counselors in 1587. When he became king of England, he made use of the system of informers which had been developed under the Tudors and had served in lieu of a police force to ferret out not only subversion but also, more significantly, religious nonconformity. The bad reputation of James's spies – and of Eliza-

Ni vndas ni vientos .   60

W HO wouldſt diſpend in Happines thy daies,
     And lead a life , from cares exempt and free,
See that thy mind , ſtand irremoou'd alwaies ,
Through reaſon grounded on firme conſtancie,
  For whom opinion doth * vnſtaiedly ſway ,
  To fortune ſooneſt , ſuch become a pray .

Ye loftie Pines , that doe ſupport the ſtate
Of common wealthes , and mightie government ,
Why ſtoope ye ſoon'ſt , vnto the blaſt of fate ,
And fawne on Envie , to your ruine bent :
  Be taught by me , to ſcorne your worſer happe ,
  The waue by Sea , or land the Thunderclap .

* Maximum indi-
ciem malæ men-
tis fluctuatio . Se-
neca in proverb :

K 2 .   *In*

Figure 2

An exposed tree is more susceptible to wind ("the blast of fate" described
in the text below the woodcut) than one that is located in a more
protected location. Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britanna* (1612), p. 68. By
permission of the Glasgow University Library, Department of Special
Collections.

187

beth's before him – seems reflected in Macbeth's tyrannical use of such agents in Scottish households: "There's not a one of them, but in his house/ I keep a servant fee'd" (3.4.130-31). Scotland has become a land of fear: "where nothing,/ But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile" (4.3.166-67). These lines seem to echo the state of things in many Catholic households, where priests said Mass and hid in special priest holes such as the ones still to be seen in the Throckmorton's Warwickshire house, Coughton Court (Pevsner and Wedgwood, 246). And when captured these members of the Roman clergy were subjected to terrible torture and bloody execution.

Leslie Hotson has linked Shakespeare to the network of Catholic families in the Midlands that suffered under the religious persecution of the reigns of Elizabeth and James I (172-202), and recent scholarship has tended to corroborate the connection (Taylor, 290-304; Wilson, 11-13). His mother's family was apparently solidly Roman Catholic, his father had literally pledged himself to the Old Religion in a document that was discovered in the eighteenth century, and one daughter Susanna, was cited in 1606 as "popishly affected" (Honigmann, 116)[5] while another, Judith, married into a family that was distantly related to the Gunpowder plotters (Hotson, genealogical chart facing 144). Indeed, Warwickshire was a center for Catholic missionary activity in the period when Shakespeare was growing up, and it has been speculated that the future playwright was possibly swept up in enthusiasm for the faith. In his childhood his schoolmasters, Simon Hunt and John Cottom, at the Stratford school were Catholic not only in sympathy but in fact (Honigmann, 40-49; Wilson, 11-13). His father's absences from church services at Stratford's parish church were, he claimed, due to his fear of attachment for debt. Adherence to the Old Religion may have been a factor, however, since to have been openly a recusant would have cost ruinous fines that would quickly have destroyed him financially. John Shakespeare's wealth was, however, substantial before the mid-1570s, when he apparently went into a period of decline (Thomas and Evans, 315-18). In c.1580 he had signed a Spiritual Testament, written by St. Charles Borromeo, by which he made a profession of loyalty to the Roman Church (Milward, 20-21, 44). He seems to have died a Catholic, and it is not absolutely certain

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[5] Susanna was of course later to marry Dr. John Hall, regarded as a Puritan.

beyond all doubt that his son William also did not die "a papist," as Richard Davies, former chaplain of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, claimed (Chambers 1923, 2:257).[6] Recent discoveries have given support to the argument of E. A. J. Honigmann (18-39) and others that Shakespeare's "lost years" were spent in Lancashire in Catholic households. In London thereafter he associated with such men as Ben Jonson, who was for many years a Catholic and who supped with the Gunpowder plotters at William Patrick's house in the Strand in October 1605 (Hotson, 187). Yet, as a playwright and player in the King's Men, it would seem that Shakespeare never, at least as a mature adult, would have had sympathy for the radicalism of the plotters or with their agenda. In this regard he was much like the English Catholics, the majority of whom prayed for toleration though they had lost hope that the "Old Religion" would be actually restored as the religion of all England at any time in the near future. Still, the Catholic connection, tentative though we must be about defining many of the specifics, would seem to explain the uniqueness of the playwright's intellectual stance and his writing of plays that represent kingship as problematic in relation to matters of power and control even in dramas designed for staging in the royal presence.

Shakespeare, as a playwright working in the theater in late Elizabethan London, had frequently emphasized the precarious and ambiguous power of the throne in his history plays, including *Richard II* with its deposition scene that remained censored and unpublished while Elizabeth was alive (Chambers 1923, 1:353-55). On a well-known occasion in 1601 his *Richard II*, including its deposition scene, was revived in order to support the conspiracy of Essex and his co-conspirators, though Shakespeare's company, which had mounted the play at their request, insisted later that they had no knowledge of the abortive real-life coup.[7] By the time the composition of *Macbeth* was underway, however, the

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[6] Honigmann, on the basis of Shakespeare's will, believes that he died a Protestant (9). It would probably be safer to say that he probably died an Anglican, submitting to the broader Church of England as it was evolving – a Church which had found room, if not particularly comfortable room, for people who would have preferred much of what the "Old Religion" represented. The matter is not settled.

[7] Essex and his fellow conspirators apparently, like many "post-modern" theorists, woefully overestimated the power of the stage. As Blayney has conclusively demonstrated, playbooks were not a particularly impressive part of the market for books (383-422, esp. 416) – a sign of a more modest role for the stage generally in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

playwright was in the midst of writing his greatest tragedies, which would analyze the problem of royal power in even greater detail than in the histories. In *Hamlet* the reigning monarch is the corrupt and slippery Claudius, who has murdered his way to the throne and whose authority therefore lacks legitimacy, and in *King Lear* the story focuses on a king who gives away his symbols of rule and his royal authority to his two evil daughters, who represent an egregious abuse of power thereafter. The themes of insecurity, legitimacy, and abuse, set off against a pattern of civil disorder and anarchy, had, of course, been already honed in the histories. The uneasy crown on Henry IV's head is taken from him only at his death, and then by his son Hal, but the king's ambition and Machiavellian rise are shown early in his reign to serve to draw forth rebellion to challenge the Lancastrian king. And the rebellion is no small matter. One rebel, the prominent Archbishop of York, Richard Scrope, who was regarded locally after his death in 1405 as a saint and whose image still appears in stained glass in the choir clerestory at York Minster (Davidson and O'Connor, 172), would be part of the conspiracy against King Henry. The subsequent internal history of England in the fifteenth century was likewise unstable and, for the monarchs, a slippery arena for the display of power. The chaos of the times was to culminate in the reign of Richard III, depicted by Shakespeare in one of his early plays as the villain unfit for rule of the Tudor history books, which had already transformed his reputation for piety into hypocrisy (Sutton and Visser-Fuchs). As a bloody-handed killer of children who have claims to royalty, Shakespeare's Richard is presented as a villain who seems to be a more slick cousin of Herod, a type which had in fact appeared in the splendid amateur theatre of Coventry in the pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors – a pageant that the boy Shakespeare from nearby Stratford would almost certainly have witnessed before the suppression of Coventry's Corpus Christi cycle in 1579. His description of theatrical ranting, "it out-Herods Herod" (in *Hamlet* 3.2.14), seems to be a remembrance of the Coventry Herod who, according to the stage directions of the Shearmen and Taylors' text, "ragis in þe pagond [wagon] and in the strete also" (l. 728 *s.d.*). Shakespeare's handling of kingship is, of course, more subtle than this since Herod's anxiety is of the broadest and crudest sort.

The focus of much earlier scholarship, including some of my own, was on the handling of rebellion as studied against the theory of an ideal monarchical poli-

tical order, but it also called attention to the providential British history of the period leading up to Queen Elizabeth. There is no doubt that the official royalist doctrines were reflected in *Macbeth*, written at a time – perhaps the only time after his initial arrival in the country – when King James achieved genuine popularity. The killing of Duncan, for example, is presented in imagery that embeds references to the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, as Roy Walker suggested long ago (53-55), and the crime is unsuccessful in establishing civic order, as the Elizabethan *Homilies* said would be the case following the violent overthrow of a monarch. The orthodox Tudor and Jacobean political doctrines are part of the intellectual milieu of Shakespeare's plays. Nevertheless, it is absolutely true that there is much more than a mere display of the official party line to be seen in a play such as *Macbeth* or in Shakespeare's history plays, for the playwright's inherent interest in the consequences of the urge to power displays the futility of ambitious acts and the anxiety with which power will be accompanied. At the same time there is hope in his work for the achievement of a stable order in which religion and civil society can flourish. To be sure, then, Richmond's return to England, his marriage to Elizabeth of York, and his achievement of the throne are depicted as fortuitous in ultimately achieving peace and prosperity, which should endure in spite of vicissitudes through the reign of the granddaughter of Henry VII. Yet Shakespeare also confirmed his deep sympathy for St. Thomas More, martyred by Henry VIII, since his contribution to the play of *Sir Thomas More* displayed considerable feeling in favour of the legendary Londoner. Ambition in kings could be brutal and tyrannical, but nevertheless the playwright recognized that the lack of power, as in the case of Lear, only created a gap into which a more wicked person or persons could step. The dilemma is that royal power is necessary, while at the same time it is always capable of being abused to a lesser or greater degree.

Shakespeare's ambiguous attitude toward power, then, is part of the great attractiveness of his work, and more than anything this may be the reason that he was for so long celebrated for his "greatness of mind" and his essential humanity. He was one who could simultaneously give sympathetic treatment to Catherine of Aragon in his *Henry VIII* and celebrate, through Cranmer's words, the birth of Princess Elizabeth as a "royal infant" who "yet now promises/ Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings,/ Which time shall bring to ripeness" (5.4.17-20).

While it is also clear that he accepted a large portion of the Elizabethan ideal of kingship with its emphasis on the identification of the monarch with the people, he also saw the glaring ways in which the administration of Elizabeth acted when it regarded its authority to be threatened – ways that today would be classified as violations of basic human rights, anachronistic though it may seem to apply this Enlightenment concept here. In *Macbeth* the playwright would take the negative side of kingship as he knew it, and he would dwell upon the consequences of a truly bad king who in the course of the play must therefore totally lose the sympathy of his people. Macbeth is a king who represents the violation of his office from the very beginning of his reign, since his accession to the throne is tainted by an offense against the legitimate succession and by the criminal act through which he has placed himself on the throne. In the view of Rossaeus (William Reynolds) in the exposition of J. N. Figgis (183), the king's "power is given *in aedificationem*, it must not be used *in destructionem*." The king rightly is to serve the commonwealth, but Macbeth represents an extreme disjuncture between monarch and people which may legitimately result in his deposition, as Catholic political theory taught (Bossy, 237; Figgis, 184-85). This ruler therefore through his illegitimate acts makes himself particularly vulnerable and insecure, but the solution to the situation is hardly the one argued in the *Homily Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion*, which was written in response to the Northern Rebellion in 1569 (Bond, 40-45) and countered the bull *Regnans in excelsis* by Pope Pius V in 1570 (Elton, 414-18). The *Homily* proclaimed essentially that "the first founder of rebellion and graund captayne of all rebels" was Satan (Bond, 235). Since rebellion never has right on its side, the wrongs committed by a ruler must be endured in submission with prayers for the ruler's amendment. In its most rigid form, this political doctrine claimed that even disloyal thoughts are not to be permitted. As Sir Edward Coke argued at the trial of the Gunpowder plotters, "It is treason to imagine or intend the death of the King, Queen, or Prince" (Jardine, 2:123).

In his depiction of Macbeth as a thoroughly bad rebel-king, Shakespeare likewise depicted his character as similar to Lucifer, whose attempt at revolution in heaven led to his downfall and whose ambition was thereafter held to be the model for all earthly pride and rebellion (Ribner, 155-57). Also Macbeth's entrance into criminality further replicates in part the fall of Adam, especially in the

matter of the role of Eve as temptress (Cormican, 312-13). There are, in other words, human factors grounded in the post-lapsarian condition that serve to make life dangerous and precarious for even the most sainted kings – and in Duncan Shakespeare apparently wanted to create a monarch whose stature would differ significantly from the feeble king of Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Macbeth, in contrast to Duncan, is darkened in the course of the play's action to the point where he will also become linked with the archetypal figure of despair, the betrayer Judas, whose suicide and consignment to hell were the result of his total lack of hope, his belief in himself as one who was beyond the possibility of forgiveness. But the sickness unto death which Macbeth represents has also become the source of general disease in the body of the state, and health can only return from outside Scotland's boundaries – that is, from England, the country over which the sainted King Edward the Confessor reigns. If King James had been so bad a king as this, we would expect the dramatist to have approved the actions of the Gunpowder plotters. But Shakespeare was neither sympathetic to the lunatic fringe of Catholic society nor insensitive to the human cost of the success of such an endeavor. Further, as a member of the king's household at the time following the discovery of the plot when James's reputation was at a high peak, he apparently joined the overwhelming majority of people, Protestant and Catholic, in seeing the Gunpowder Plot as heinous. Revealing nervousness about the succession in the case of a *coup d'etat*, Shakespeare posits in his play the worst possible case, and he makes the bad ruler credible since he has opened the action with a character who represents a man of ideals whom we thereafter see corrupted by stages until in the end he is only a hollow shell of a human being.

The comparison between Herod and Macbeth is also useful but only up to a point. Macbeth, like Herod, attempts to cut off a young royal claimant, in this case Fleance, and furthermore at the crisis of the play he goes on a child-killing spree. In the Coventry Shearmen and Taylors' pageant, Herod's soldiers were sent by the irascible Herod on a mock-chivalric mission to kill all possible candidates so that "thatt kerne of Bedlem [...] schal be ded" and the event foretold in prophecy prevented (ll. 729-30). The killing of Macduff's children in *Macbeth* likewise follows upon a prophecy, in this case one derived from a demonic rather than divine source. The episode seems specifically designed to awaken the audi-

ence to the king's tyranny. Unlike the dolls apparently used in the Coventry play to represent the Innocents, actual child players are required in *Macbeth* and their murder signals the point where the audience is to abandon the king to his fate (Davidson 1970, 77-78). The scene is a powerful one, and it gives emphasis to Macbeth's extreme malevolence and, indirectly, to his sterility (see 4.2.216: "he has no children"). From this scene until he is "ripe for shaking" (4.3.238) the time will not be long, and thereafter the day is "near at hand,/ That chambers will be safe" once more (5.4.1-2). The comparison of the tyrant to a tree now to be shaken is consistent with the imagery of instability both in the play and in proverbial lore. Authority over a nation may be achieved by a tyrant like Macbeth, but its exercise as unalloyed power, unscrupulous and self-directed, can only lead to catastrophe. If power even in the most ideal of circumstances is synonymous with anxiety and insecurity, the mad "butcher" of Scotland, who has used all the techniques of tyranny, is all the more proof that political control is hopeless as a substitute for the willing obedience and loyalty of a people.

The predicament in Scotland under Macbeth is far more extreme than it was in Protestant England, where to be sure pursuivants were always available to betray lay Catholics and priests ordained abroad, the latter being subjected to terrible torture and brutal execution, as in the cases of Edmund Campion, whose direct contact with Shakespeare and his family has been argued, and of the playwright's schoolfellow Robert Debdale (Wilson, 11-12). Macbeth's Scotland is a land [w]here sighs, and groans, and shrieks that rent the air / Are made, not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems / A modern ecstasy" (4.3.168-70). The cure for this extreme illness, depicted as like a most terrible visitation of the plague, will come from outside, as noted above, from England where the Catholic king, Edward the Confessor, reigns. A scene in the play is devoted to Edward's touching for the King's Evil as a sign of his ability to bring health, and indeed he is represented as the ideal English king about whose throne "sundry blessings hang" (4.3.157). Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have been aware of St. Edward's shrine, which after its desecration had been restored, though not to its former thirteenth-century glory, by the last abbot of Westminster Abbey, John Feckenham. As a memorial to an English king, Elizabeth had allowed the shrine to remain, and it is still in its place in the abbey in the present day. Elizabeth and James had also both claimed the right to touch for the King's Evil (Paul, 368-

77), and it was an element in their claims to legitimacy as English monarchs – claims which Shakespeare does not deny. Yet the defence of revolutionary action against the evil king in *Macbeth* very much does run strongly counter to the Tudor and Jacobean doctrine of kingship which was designed in the first instance to counteract the bull *Regnans in excelsis* and also to proclaim as if by fiat a stable monarchy.

The inability of Macbeth and his wife to sleep in the play provides almost a parodying of the famous Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth at Hatfield House with its portrayal of her cloak emblazoned with myriad eyes and ears that represent her awareness of all that is occurring in the realm. In the portrait the queen appears as Astraea, who is the personification of Justice returned to the earth; she is the sun which is the source of the rainbow that she holds and that is a conventional symbol of hope (Strong, 50-53, and frontispiece; cf. Yates, 216-19). Light is implied in her chosen motto, *Veritas temporis filia*, which is connected with a popular emblem showing Time bringing Truth out of a dark cave (Saxl, 197-222; see also King, 229). In contrast, the paranoia ascribed to Macbeth, whose reign is spoken of in terms of darkness, causes him to remain always wakeful and fearful, always threatened by the fear that the truth will be revealed and his power taken away. Yet he has a perceived need to know his fate. Fearing "the worst," he will choose to seek "[b]y the worst means" to know what lies ahead (3.4.133-34). Yet it will need to be remembered that the Rainbow Portrait, painted for the Cecil family near the end of Elizabeth's reign, provides a sanitized and flattering representation of the aged queen's role in authorizing the ferreting out of information through the use of professional spies and of officially sanctioned torture. It is the dark side of the Tudor and Jacobean monarchy that finds its way into the distillation of evil in *Macbeth*, where the alertness of officialdom is transformed into paranoia far more extreme than James's, and the pursuivants and administrators of English justice into criminal death squads and total repression of a people.

Upon the establishment of a new regime by Malcolm at the end of the play, the exiles who "fled the snares of watchful tyranny" will be called home to Scotland (5.9.32-33), and those things are promised which are needful to be done to create a free society. As Macduff holds up the "usurper's cursed head," he proclaims: "the time is free" (5.9.21). While Time has indeed brought into the open

the crimes of the criminal (that is, what Macbeth's cunning has hidden) just as, according to Coke, it had revealed the perfidy of the Gunpowder plotters (Fraser, 225), there is nevertheless an element of uncertainty implied in the play's conclusion. It may be assumed that at the end the playwright intended the despairing Macbeth to be regarded as damned, his soul "[g]iven to the common enemy of man," a fate predicted by the usurper himself earlier in the play (3.1.68). His head, severed from his body, would presumably have been destined for the usual exposure (after boiling to preserve it). Thus the heads of the Gunpowder plotters Robert Catesby and Thomas Percy had been placed over the House of Lords as a deterrent to others' ambitions (Hotson, 199). But as the playwright knew from his reading of Holinshed and other sources, the death and deposition of Macbeth was not the end of the story, for Malcolm, whose reign did much to encourage Christianity in Scotland, was to be followed by his brother Donalbain, who initially had fled "[t]o Ireland" (2.3.138) and who upon his return was revealed to be, like Macbeth, an unsatisfactory ruler. When we look back at Donalbain's speech upon their flight in act 1, the irony becomes all the more evident: "our separated fortune / Shall keep us both the safer" (2.3.138-39).

Like most of Shakespeare's other tragedies, *Macbeth* has a plot which leads the audience (or readers) through a demonstration of the fragility of rulership and the instability of power to a resolution that more or less patches things over with the appearance of benign stasis. Here and elsewhere in Shakespeare's work the temptations of ambition and innovation are shown to be snares, while the will to power is an exercise in illusion in spite of the need for authority to help to regulate civic society. It is, then, in the nature of Shakespearean tragedy to "untune the string" of individual and/or civic harmony and to observe the dislocation that follows when the regular order of the society is fractured: "hark what discord follows" (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.109-10). The Great Chain of Being, an idea described at great length by Arthur O. Lovejoy, is one of the components of Shakespeare's plays, as we might expect from an author who was the son of the sometime chamberlain of Stratford-upon-Avon. Oligarchies that controlled towns in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were very conscious of status at the same time that they regularly participated in rituals affirming the unity of the civic organization (see Phythian-Adams 1972, 57-85). Merchants

and craftsmen alike took their position in the social hierarchy seriously, both in market towns like Stratford and in larger cities. At Coventry the guilds participating in the Corpus Christi procession through the city were given their specific places according to their prestige, which might differ considerably from their level of wealth (Ingram 1981, 16-17). But it was the rule in such processions that "the last shall be first," according to the biblical command in Matthew 19:30, a passage asserting the principle that humility is the greatest among the virtues and the way to peace of conscience. This is a precept that, in reverse, is demonstrated in the case of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth, the latter seen rubbing her hands as if washing them and fearing even in her hallucinatory state that they shall "ne'er be clean" (5.1.43). Not all the pomp and wealth of royalty can cure her "disease," which would require not physical medication but confession and absolution. So too her husband reveals the profitlessness of ambition as he remarks on the futility of the days that merely creep onward "in this petty pace [...] / To the last syllable of recorded time" (5.5.20-22) – that is, to the final moment of history when the day of God's judgement has come. His remark again affirms his despair, his representation of his own life as desiccated, a waste land, and his actions but those of "a poor player [...] upon the stage" (5.5.24-25), terminology which strangely resonates with King James's words describing the elevated position of kingship in his *Basilicon Doron*.

An emblem by Crispyn de Passe from Gabriel Rollenhagen's *Nucleus emblematum selectissimorum* (c. 1611), reprinted in George Wither's *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635), 98, has the motto *Sic transit gloria mundi* and illustrates a great bonfire burning crowns, a tiara, a cardinal's hat, and various other symbols of power (*fig. 3*). Wither's verse comments on such things as "Scepters, Miters, Crownes" and on "Riches" – all "poore Vanities" which ultimately are seen to be "fruitlesse, mere "Bubbles" or "Smoke." Wither's English motto explains: "Even as the Smoke doth passe away;/ So, shall all Worldly-pompe decay." The deprecation of worldly power and of its symbols acquires significance when it is realized that Wither's book was dedicated to King James I's son and successor, Charles I, who was to be identified as a martyr in the *Book of Common Prayer* from 1662 to 1859. Not even a king could expect to live forever, even though he might be exemplary in every way. Only someone as foolish as the proud king who brags "I schal lyue evermo" in the fragmentary fourteenth-century morality

197

The Pride of Life (Davis 1970, 95) could expect to defeat death. And in the face of Death, the great leveller, the earthly symbols of power and power itself are but transitory things. So Prince Hamlet, standing with Horatio in the church-yard as the gravediggers prepare Ophelia's grave, is made to meditate on the skull of the jester Yorick (5.1.173-217). All, from the greatest to the lowliest, return to dust in the end of this earthly life, as the Ash Wednesday liturgy

Figure 3

"Sic transit gloria mundi." The symbols of earthly greatness are imper-manent. George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635), p. 98. By per-mission of the Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Col-lections.

asserts. The greatest monarch in the world thus must play his final scene on the world's stage and come to this. The graveyard scene in *Hamlet* may seem to lack high seriousness, but it ultimately makes one of the play's most serious state-ments, its iconography only a short distance away from that of the transi tomb. An early example of this type of double-decker tomb was prepared for Arch-

bishop Henry Chichele (*fig. 4*), who was buried in Canterbury Cathedral in 1424: above he appears in all his earthly splendor in his vestments with angels supporting his head and kneeling monks praying for him at his feet, while below he is depicted nude, as his body was when laid in earth, emaciated and lying on his shroud, no more handsome or grand than the lowliest beggar (Cohen 15-16). The lower level has an inscription which comments on Chichele's lowly origins, his elevation to the see of Canterbury, and, in Kathleen Cohen's translation, "Now I am cut down and ready to be food for worms/ Behold my grave./

Figure 4
The *transi* tomb of Archbishop Henry Chichele (1424) which shows him as he was in life, above, and with his body in decay, below. RCHME ©Crown Copyright.

Whoever you may be who passes by, I ask you to remember,/ You will be like me after you die;/ All horrible, dust, worms, vile flesh" (Cohen 1973, 16n).

Sometimes things which one has seen in childhood press themselves most securely on the mind and are vividly retained in the memory for one's entire life. Though it is not possible to prove that Shakespeare retained such a remembrance of the wall painting of the Dance of Death on the north wall of the nave in the Stratford Guild Chapel, one may at least speculate as much. It is known

that Shakespeare's father, acting to comply with iconoclastic legislation of the
time, was responsible as Stratford's chamberlain in 1563–64 for whitewashing
over and partitioning off the Guild Chapel wall paintings that were regarded as
"papist" (Savage, 128).[8] Less well known is that all the wall paintings were not
at this time thus removed from view, for in 1576 John Stow made an addition
to Leland's *Itinerary* that reported the survival of the scenes in a Dance of Death
series.[9] Fragments of this series were discovered in 1955 and described by
Wilfrid Puddephat (29-35), who also provided a drawing documenting Death
coming to the king with the words of John Lydgate's dialogue below the
picture. Puddephat's drawing of the king is a reconstruction, but it nevertheless
purports to be a reasonably faithful reproduction of the original illustration and
a careful restoration of the text, which reports the king's reaction to being asked
by Death to join the dance. Pride is of no value at this point, and "Grete and
small" are alike summoned, with the meek having the "most avauntage, / For we
shall all to dede ashes tourne" (Davidson 1988, 52). And there was more at the
end of the Dance of Death series: a painting of a "Dead King eaten by worms"
(op. cit., 52). The emphasis in all of this was on the insubstantial nature of the
power and glory of kingship and on the kinship of all human beings up to the
point of death. One may wonder, therefore, if this wall painting, along with the
playwright's contact in his youth with intense Catholic religiosity in War-
wickshire, might not together have served to provide a dimension crucial to the
almost metaphysical linking of ideas and the thoughtful presentation of the
instability and fragility of power in his dramatization of the history of "high
plac'd Macbeth" (4.1.98).

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[8] The royal injunctions that demanded the defacing of "superstitious" images "so that remain no memory
of them" (Frere, 3:16) had been promulgated more than four years before, and it would seem that John
Shakespeare and the Stratford corporation were slow about complying. That William Shakespeare
probably felt strong revulsion at such iconoclastic acts, including his father's, may be gauged by Edward
IV's words: ". . . and defac'd / The precious image of our dear Redeemer" (*Richard III* 2.1.123-24).

[9] Bodleian Library, MS. 464, vol. 5, fol. 60ᵛ; see Leland 2:49.

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