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Thomas Cartelli

Audiences, directors, and not a few scholars have long been fascinated by that pivotal moment in *Macbeth* when the ghost of Banquo takes Macbeth's seat at the banquet table and twice drives him to distraction while the dinner-guests look on, ignorant of what Macbeth sees. The shape our fascination takes is determined by our own or a given production's response to the staging problem this moment always poses: namely, does one fill Macbeth's chair with an actor portraying the nodding corpse of Banquo, or leave the chair empty since empty it seems to everyone onstage apart from Macbeth?[1] Choosing between these two possibilities clearly has profounder consequences for our reception of the play than those that follow from deciding to perform it in Renaissance or Victorian dress, and just as clearly involves important assumptions about audience/play interaction in *Macbeth*. If the ghost of Banquo physically appears onstage, Macbeth's dramatically private vision becomes an experience that is theatrically shared; that is, the offstage audience sees *with* Macbeth what the onstage audience—Lady Macbeth and the dinner-guests—do not and cannot see.[2] If, on the other hand, the chair remains empty, we—the offstage audience—share the perspective of the onstage audience, and see Macbeth looking "but on a stool."[3] In this respect, our perspective becomes

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[1] See Marvin Rosenberg's comprehensive account of the stage-history of the ghost's portrayals in *The Masks of Macbeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 439–451.

[2] In his discussion of this alternative, Rosenberg cites the observations of several of its most influential proponents, among them those of Nevil Coghill who has contended that "What is important is that the audience should see what Macbeth sees, and be identified with him, not his guests" (*Masks*, p. 443) and Arthur Quiller-Couch who has taken the high road indeed: "Who sees [the ghost]? Not the company. Not even Lady Macbeth. Those who see it are Macbeth and you and I. Those into whom it strikes terror. . . . Those whom it accuses are Macbeth and you and I. And what it accuses is what, of Macbeth, you and I are hiding in our own breasts" (*Masks*, p. 444).

[3] See Rosenberg's excellent account of this alternative, especially for his description of how the more advanced stage-technologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have enabled the play's producers to turn its obvious difficulties to positive theatrical advantage, pp. 442–43.

akin to Gertrude's in the Closet scene of *Hamlet* when she protests that she sees all there is to see, implying that what she cannot see "is not."

Allowing Macbeth's chair to remain empty may even become equivalent to transforming the tragedy of *Macbeth* into a modern morality play in which the "good" citizens onstage unite with their likenesses offstage to witness the psychological torment justly visited upon an increasingly isolated tyrant. The alternative—presenting Banquo's ghost "in the flesh"—has the opposite effect of sundering the superficial ties between on- and off-stage audiences, at least on a cognitive level, thereby making our response to Macbeth a psychologically problematic experience. Although there is nothing terribly original in accepting this alternative as the most "faithful" resolution to the staging problem, my reasons for doing so here are different from those of A. C. Bradley, Kenneth Muir, and others who prefer to view Banquo's ghost as a version of embodied hallucination.[4] I work from the assumption that the embodiment onstage of Banquo's ghost is the logical product or fruition of a dramatic process initiated by the "fair is foul" refrain of the witches at the beginning of the play and spurred on by Macbeth's murder of Duncan: a process that systematically undermines an ordered world of familiar verities and establishes a disordered world of unfamiliar phenomena in its stead. But what is most significant for our present purpose, I see what happens *dramatically* to the characters onstage as happening *theatrically* to the audience-at-large as the "first world" from which the play is viewed becomes displaced and enveloped by the prevailing atmosphere of the drama.[5]

Macbeth's success as a play is, I believe, predicated on this extension of its dramatic range beyond the limits of the stage into the province of the audience. The play achieves dramatic extension by actively engaging the audience from the start in what G. Wilson Knight once described as "a wrestling of destruction with creation."[6] By means of a steady succession of incantatory verse and violently strained imagery and a plot deliberately constructed to translate the unnatural into the realm of the natural, the play effortlessly but relentlessly disarms its audience of the same kind of imaginative constraint that compels Banquo, upon the disappearance of the witches, to ask whether he and Macbeth "have eaten on the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner" (I.iii. 84–85).[7] As first Lady Macbeth—"Come, you Spirits / That

[4] Bradley concludes his concise review of the hallucination theory with the following summation: "On the whole, and with some doubt, I think that Shakespeare (1) meant the judicious to take the Ghost for an hallucination, but (2) knew that the bulk of the audience would take it for a reality. And I am more sure of (2) than of (1)," in "The Ghost of Banquo," *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1963), pp. 401–02. Muir's opinion is rendered in the Introduction to his Arden edition of *Macbeth* (London: Methuen, 1980), n. 3, pp. lxii–iii. Also see Rosenberg, pp. 441–42. Jan Kott anticipates my own position in the following: "Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is not a psychological drama of the second half of the nineteenth century. Macbeth has dreamed of a final murder to end all murders. Now he knows: there is no such murder . . . . The dead do return," *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), p. 95.

[5] I take this distinction from Harry Berger, Jr., "Theatre, Drama, and the Second World: A Prologue to Shakespeare," *CompD*, II:1 (1968): "Where drama is a certain kind of action capable of representation in a variety of media, theatre is a particular medium—primarily visual (not primarily verbal) which embraces the network of actual circumstances and participants who cooperate in representing and observing a particular action" (4).

[6] Knight, *The Imperial Theme*, 3rd edition (London: Methuen, 1953), p. 153.

[7] All quotations from the text of the play refer to Kenneth Muir's Arden edition of *Macbeth*.

tend on mortal thoughts" (I.v.40ff)—and then Macbeth himself—"Thou sure and firm set earth,/Hear not my steps" (II.i.56ff)—appropriate the incantatory idiom of the weird sisters and begin to move dreamlike through a world in which "Nature seems dead," the audience is forced to cede its grounding in a reality more "sure and firm set" than that emanating from the stage and is eventually compelled to add Macbeth's peculiar ontological discovery, "Nothing is but what is not," to its own stock of available perceptions. The play, moreover, conditions the audience, entranced and no less "rapt" than Macbeth himself by the strange communion of "fair and foul," to respond sympathetically to Macbeth's ability to give visual substance to the forms of things unknown and to his propensity to translate what is known into other areas of apprehension entirely. In the Dagger speech, for instance, the audience both sees (in its mind's eye) and does not see a dagger that is at once visible and invisible to its cognitive surrogate, Macbeth:

> Is this a dagger, which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:—
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling, as to sight? or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> . . . . . .
> Mine eyes are made the fools o'th'other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest: . . .
>
> [II.i.33–39;44–45]

By leaving the audience alone with Macbeth as he performs this subtle balancing act between the "dagger of the mind" and the more "palpable" dagger he now proceeds to draw, Shakespeare draws the audience inside Macbeth's circuit of mixed perceptions and, in so doing, makes the audience itself increasingly susceptible to the suggestiveness of Macbeth's subjective preoccupations. Although Macbeth himself ultimately succeeds in distinguishing between the false forms that derive from within and the true forms that have their being from without—"There's no such thing./It is the bloody business which informs/Thus to mine eyes" (II.i.47–49)—the audience is conceivably left to ponder at greater length the notion that Macbeth finally discards, namely, whether the eyes, instead of playing fools to the other senses, are, indeed, "worth all the rest."

In short, Macbeth's manner of approaching the air-drawn dagger both conditions the audience to accept his ability to distinguish between the truth and falseness of appearances in consistency with what the audience itself sees and does not see visibly embodied on the stage, and persuades the audience that in *his* mind's eye, at least, Macbeth has seen the floating dagger, has, as it were, conjured up out of himself the form and figure of the deed he intends to commit. Indeed, the presence of "gouts of blood" on this dagger's "blade and dudgeon" places "false creation" and real dagger into so close a relationship that the false article actually anticipates the imminent exploit of the true one.[8] Macbeth's words effectively give substance to the

[8] Cf. David Willbern: "Macbeth is like a psyche turned inside out, its fantasies actualized as external events, agents, and obsessive repetitions," in "Phantasmagoric Macbeth," a contribution to the ISC seminar on the psychology of theatrical experience; and Richard S. Ide who writes that "the real dagger will gravitate towards the imaginary dagger his imagination has already bloodied, as if the present moment were dictated by the future vision," in "The Theatre of the Mind: An Essay on *Macbeth*," *ELH*, 42 (1975), 343.

undone deed and "create" a real dagger out of the false one he has so suggestively summoned up. Macbeth himself comes to assume in this scene the shape of a rather reluctant conjurer whose role it is to draw both himself and his audience into an apprehension of more than meets the common eye.

Macbeth is, however, less a conjurer than a character endowed with an extraordinary imaginative capability which, when wedded to an equally acute moral sensibility, makes him more conscious than anyone else onstage of the interpenetration of material and immaterial realities. And it is exactly the wide-ranging nature of his consciousness that allows him to comprehend immediately almost all the moral, personal, and social consequences of his murder of Duncan:

> What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.
>
> [II.ii.58–62]

> Had I but died an hour before this chance,
> I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
> There's nothing serious in mortality;
> All is but toys: renown, and grace, is dead;
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of.
>
> [II.iii.89–94]

I say "almost all" because in the second quoted passage Macbeth is playing a formal public role and may be speaking more wisely than he intends or knows, and in the first is expressing a truth whose imminent realization will strike him with the shock of first recognition when the green seas become red in the form of Banquo's ghost.[9] For in murdering Duncan, in attempting to "leap the life to come," Macbeth has, quite literally, brought that life down to earth, and has effectively answered Banquo's earlier doubts about the "fantastical" by making it a commonplace in the new order of reality he has spurred into being. The later embodiment onstage of Banquo's ghost is, therefore, nothing less than the visible consequence of every motion by Macbeth to realize the "future in the instant."

Shakespeare, nevertheless, goes to further trouble in the Banquet scene to persuade the audience of the reality of Banquo's ghost, to make the audience perceptually intimate with Macbeth at the precise moment when he becomes perceptually estranged from his only confidante, Lady Macbeth. Unlike the audience, Lady Macbeth is unaware of the immediate occasion of Macbeth's distraction, his murder of Banquo. Macbeth has, we recall, kept her "innocent of the knowledge" until she might "applaud the deed." She is not, however, unaware of Macbeth's imaginative and moral acuity. She has heard of the "air-drawn dagger," chided him for dwelling

[9] Simon O. Lesser anticipates both my observation and my conclusion in the following: "[Macbeth] is here trying to make himself one with the others lamenting the murder, but . . . , ironically, the occasion provides a welcome opportunity to say something he deeply feels; and his prognosis of his own situation is uncannily accurate," in "Macbeth: Drama and Dream," *Literary Criticism and Psychology*, ed., Joseph P. Strelka (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 151–52.

too precisely on the event ("Consider it not so deeply," she responds, to his inability to say "Amen"), and witnessed at first-hand the defensive intensity that seems now to fill all his days made night and nights made day. But Lady Macbeth is a rationalist, skeptical of Macbeth's penchant for penetrating the superficial trappings of what passes for objective reality. She is a firm believer in the capacity of strong-minded men and women to exert rational control over themselves and their environment; "They must lie there!" she commands as the distracted Macbeth returns from the murder, bloody daggers in hand. She is, in short, ignorant of the immaterial realities that increasingly dominate Macbeth and which will later drive *her* to suicide in the closing moments of the play. And it is this same ignorance that prevents her from seeing, in the Banquet scene, that all that "is not" is all there is, that the ghost of Banquo is no "dagger of the mind" or "false creation:"

> O proper stuff!
> This is the very painting of your fear
> This is the air-drawn dagger, which, you said,
> Led you to Duncan. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
> You look but on a stool.
>
> [III.iv.59–62;66–67]

By speaking of the dagger and Banquo's ghost as if they were similarly derived phenomena while the stage holds the crucial difference before us, Lady Macbeth actually forces the audience to distinguish between them, to make, with Macbeth, a distinction which she ("innocent" of such knowledge) is incapable of making for herself:

> . . . the time has been,
> That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
> And there an end; but now, they rise again
> With twenty mortal murthers on their crowns,
> And push us from our stools. This is more strange
> Than such a murther is.
>
> [III.iv.77–82]

The exactness of Macbeth's anatomy of the new world that has supplanted the old constitutes the last step in a dramatic process that negotiates our collective surrender to the powerful illusions cultivated by the play, and that makes us, for better or for worse, Macbeth's visionary accomplices.

Having provided for the ghost, I should now like to provide for our increasingly hypothetical audience. What, first of all, does the shared nature of our vision really suggest in regard to the audience relationship with Macbeth? If Shakespeare has succeeded in making us Macbeth's visionary accomplices, does that fact imply that we are his emotional accomplices as well? Secondly, what happens to the protected theatrical space occupied by the audience (if that space is ever truly protected) if our collective imagination is solidly linked with Macbeth's and alienated from the on-stage audience that is alienated from him? Do we, in short, lose our neutrality, our objectivity, and begin ritually to engage in the terrible intensity of life lived on the emotional edge?

Even speaking conservatively, it seems clear that when Banquo's ghost takes Macbeth's seat at table, the audience must be moved out of its characteristic complacency to attend to what announces itself dramatically as an extraordinary event. The moment virtually requires the kind of alienation that is, in Brechtian terms, best depicted as the movement from one perceptual mode to another, although in this instance the Brechtian movement from involvement to detachment must be reversed. The audience is simultaneously compelled to become aware of a choice between Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's competing estimates of the situation, and to recognize that its own choice has already been made once it has been sufficiently absorbed in the dramatic process that culminates in the ghost's appearance. Hence, the alienation occasioned by the extraordinary event makes the audience shift its ground as the drama itself shifts ground. Through this movement between different ways of seeing, the audience gains visible access to what amounts to a fourth dimension of dramatic reality. As the dinner-guests and Lady Macbeth look on in wonder and annoyance respectively, our own perspective opens up and we are exposed to an area of dramatic experience that conceivably externalizes even our own most suppressed fears and anxieties.

But what really do we, as audience, *see* when we share Macbeth's vision of Banquo's ghost? What is the substance and what are the consequences of the shared vision? What we see vividly embodied onstage is, to distort slightly Macbeth's own defensive formulation, an "Unreal mock'ry" of life that turns all our pretty fictions to no account, that penetrates what David Willbern terms "the conventional confine of theatrical space" and, in so doing, breaks or, at least, bends the theatrical frame which divides art and life, illusion and reality.[10] As if Shakespeare were offering us dubious compensation for his second-hand portrayal of the murdered Duncan, we see "death itself," the "great doom's image," presiding over a world in which every deed has its immediate consequence objectified in material reality: a world in which "present fear" combines with "horrible imagining" to undermine the formal mastery of threatening fantasy-material which dramatic art usually expedites. Seeing the ghost does, then, clearly involve leaving our protected space as we experience with Macbeth what life in this fourth dimension of dramatic reality actually entails. The shared vision serves as our rite of passage through a theatrical gate of horn into a frontier of dramatic perception in which what we experience has far greater validity and staying power than any mere dream or nightmare can command. Whether or not we become emotionally committed to Macbeth himself once we have passed through this gate, we are, I believe, intellectually committed to exploring the new dimension of dramatic reality Macbeth now inhabits, committed to seeing (if not

[10] This is essentially where I part ways with Willbern who, in "Phantasmagoric Macbeth," concludes that "What ultimately controls this potentially dangerous psychological event is the conventional confine of theatrical space (and genre), as well as the varying scope of our own imaginative responses to Shakespeare's questioning vision." Given the nature of my own imaginative response to the play (which I may, admittedly, be guilty of unduly generalizing), I believe that what sets *Macbeth* apart from Shakespeare's other tragedies is its implicit refusal to observe what Keir Elam—in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 88—terms the "definitional constraint" of the theatrical frame which conventionally serves to hold threatening fantasy material in check. For more detailed discussions of the theatrical frame and the variability of audience response, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 123–155, and Joan Marx, "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief," yet another of the several contributions to the ISC seminar to which I owe a manifest debt.

exactly feeling) what he and no other character onstage can see and feel. And it is precisely this intellectual commitment that allows us to comprehend what Macbeth himself later comprehends when he stands, as it were, on the far side of existence, looking back on life as he has lived it.:

> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.
>
> [V.v.24–28]

Macbeth's powerful conceptualization of life as "a walking shadow" is profoundly indebted to his earlier confrontation with Banquo's ghost, the "horrible shadow" that silently departs at his bidding but essentially shapes his final metaphorical persuasion. It is substantiated by his now complete identification with the same shadow-world of "Direness" grown familiar that first loosed the ghost of Banquo upon the stage of his existence. For the audience, complete understanding of the speech becomes contingent, therefore, on having achieved and maintained the intellectual courage to look at the world from Macbeth's perspective of closed possibility, and to do so without flinching. It requires much the same type of psychological freedom that informs Macbeth's tough-minded estimate of a life demystified of its comfortable illusions and pleasant fictions. To meet the challenge posed by this speech, the audience must, in other words, be able to overcome the predictable anxiety inspired by Macbeth's insistent presentation as fact of rather unnerving conceptions of the human condition.

The audience conceivably negotiates this confrontation with anxiety by drawing strength from the collective nature of its earlier encounter with Banquo's ghost which can be recreated in the following manner. As the vision of Banquo's ghost isolates Macbeth completely from the onstage community that looks on uncomprehendingly, it also estranges the offstage audience from that community as well, if only in cognitive terms. To say it simply, the audience sees more than the characters onstage do, is aware of more than they can imagine, knows more about what sights the flesh is heir to when it would go beyond what flesh can bear. As Macbeth transcends the normative vision of reality he once superficially shared with the onstage community, he sunders the audience's normative connection with its surrogates onstage. One of the consequences of this dramatic transaction is the breakdown of the audience's individually differentiated responses to what is happening onstage. That is, the shared vision virtually forces the audience to come together perceptually around one common focus of theatrical discourse; it generates a perceptual consensus out of a pre-existing mass of differentiated responses, transforms an audience of mutually exclusive individuals into an attentive and attending community. In the process, it reduces the anxiety of remaining a private individual in a company of anonymous "others" by making the source of that anxiety the basis of collective perception.

This theory can be illustrated quite nicely in performative terms. We have all, in attending the theatre, experienced that peculiar intensity which takes charge of an audience when a single dramatic moment so actualizes itself that we attend to the

play in question as if for the first time. This is usually the moment when the coughs cease, people stop shifting in their chairs and eagerly lean forward, all eyes and ears. The moment can be the Storm scene in *King Lear* or the third act of *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, or it can be stimulated by some unusually fine acting in an otherwise forgettable production. At such a moment the play in process takes complete charge of our senses, indeed, heightens them, makes us so alert to the smallest nuance of speech and gesture that we begin to lose touch with our more immediate surroundings in the theatre proper. The play may at this point come to define itself in qualitatively different terms from those to which we had become accustomed; it may suddenly disclose new and striking levels of meaning, or make completely explicit for the first time dramatic possibilities and potentials which had been previously submerged in a pattern of suggestiveness. When such a moment occurs in *Macbeth*—as it most certainly does in the space between the first entrance and second exit of Banquo's ghost—it raises the audience's sights above and beyond the normative perceptions of the other characters in the play and rivets them to the explicit revelation of the drama's prevailing concern with Macbeth's own victimization by the very forces of malevolence he has unleashed upon his world. When, for instance, we see Macbeth raise his cup and hear him say, "I drink to th'general joy o'th'whole table,/And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss;/Would he were here." (III.iv.88–90), and see at the same time the silent ghost again make its way to the head of the table, we are given such direct insight into the dreadful irony of Macbeth's immediate situation that we are transformed into privileged initiates in mysteries that must necessarily pass beyond the knowledge of those not given our sight.[11]

But for how long, one may ask, do we remain Macbeth's visionary accomplices? Does what follows in the play compel us to maintain our intellectual alliance and complicity with Macbeth, or does our privileged community dissolve beneath the gathering force of Macbeth's imminent defeat and destruction? To begin with, Shakespeare goes to great lengths in the ensuing scenes and thereafter to discredit Macbeth and to disengage the audience from sympathy with him, visionary or otherwise. He not only attempts to establish a moral opposition to Macbeth that is decidedly associated with all that is great and good in the daytime world of men, but also deploys a series of what David Kranz has called "illusion breakers" in order to subvert the systematic entrancement of the audience by Macbeth.[12] The first of

[11] In *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner, 1953), p. 398, Suzanne Langer quotes a remarkably similar passage from a largely forgotten essay by Charles Morgan, entitled "The Nature of Dramatic Illusion"—originally published in R.W. Macan, ed., *Essays by Divers Hands*, Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, N.S. Vol. XII (London, 1933)—the conclusion of which (although written for general application) bears directly upon my own: "This great impact is neither a persuasion of the intellect nor a beguiling of the senses. . . . It is the enveloping movement of the whole drama upon the soul of man—we surrender and are changed" (orig. pp. 63–64).

[12] In "The Mated Mind in *Macbeth*," the third of the ISC seminar-contributions to which I have occasion to refer, Kranz starts from the proposition that "It might be salutary to calculate what contextual effects result from Shakespeare's characteristic use of illusion-breakers (plays-within-plays, anachronisms, comments about the Globe theater, etc.) rather than assume that their presence guarantees a static psychic distance from the fictional situation throughout." Although I depart from Kranz' approach to *Macbeth* in a number of crucial ways, I confirm the general usefulness of this starting proposition in much of what follows.

these illusion-breakers is, appropriately enough, the generally discredited Hecate scene (III.v) which immediately follows the exit of the Macbeths in III.iv.[13] In this scene a new variable intrudes upon the drama in the person of Hecate, who enters with the three witches in tow ostensibly to inform the audience that she and her confederates are going to give Macbeth a very hard time of it in the near future. She promises, in brief, to so manipulate Macbeth by means of strong illusions that "He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear/His hopes bove wisdom, grace, and fear" (II.v.30–31). In so doing, she implicitly alerts the audience to the danger of maintaining Macbeth as its surrogate by giving the audience ample forewarning of Macbeth's imminent misreadings of the messages of the three apparitions. As we subsequently witness Macbeth selectively accept what he deems good news and deny whatever seems implausible, impossible, or just plainly unpleasant, we may, therefore, be apt to withdraw back into our protected space and, in withdrawing, to recognize that Macbeth's boldness is indistinguishable from the foolishness that is mortal to all such playthings of the gods.[14] We may be apt, moreover, especially when the series of apparitions culminates in the reappearance of Banquo's ghost, to revise our earlier estimate of that ghost as an independent embodiment of the dark forces Macbeth himself had unleashed, and to reinterpret the ghost as a deliberate "plant," placed in Macbeth's chair by the witches to taunt and terrorize him. Indeed, a close retrospective look at the timing of the ghost's two entrances and exits may well indicate the insidious working of supernatural agents whose puppet the ghost may be. By having the ghost appear at the precise moments when Macbeth summons up remembrance of Banquo and observes his absence, and by having it twice depart when Macbeth demands its departure, these supernatural agents may, in short, be seducing Macbeth into a mistaken belief in his continued capacity to dominate his dramatic environment.

Now it may surely be argued that Shakespeare is, in the Hecate scene and throughout the fourth and fifth acts, doing no more than fulfilling his own preconceived dramatic design for the play as a whole and, for that matter, is doing so in obvious deference to moral imperatives in which (we have good reason to believe) he believed fervently. But I would qualify such an argument by suggesting that Shakespeare is reluctantly pulling back here, is, in other words, inclined to confirm the step he has already taken but not really willing to permit the audience to make its way across this dramatic frontier undirected.[15] He is specifically reluctant at this

[13] The judgement against Shakespeare's authorship of III.v expressed by J.M. Nosworthy in "The Hecate Scenes in *Macbeth*," *RES*, XXIV (1948), 138–39 remains the prevailing one; see, for instance, Muir's confirmation of it in the Introduction to his Arden *Macbeth*, pp. xxx–xxxiii. But I am of the opinion of G. Wilson Knight – first expressed in "The 'Hecate' Scenes in *Macbeth*," in *The Shakespearian Tempest* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932) – and Marvin Rosenberg that, given firmer proof to the contrary, there really is no substantive reason "to reject Shakespeare's authorship of the dialogue as part of the original *Macbeth*" (*Masks*, p. 491).

[14] Cf. Wilbur Sanders, " 'An Unknown Fear': *The Tragedie of Macbeth*" in *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), p. 281.

[15] My flirtation with the intentional fallacy here and elsewhere in this essay is motivated by my attribution to Shakespeare of at least the intuition that "tragic insight," in the words of Nietzsche, "merely to be endured needs art as a protection and a remedy" (*The Birth of Tragedy*, Walter Kaufmann, trans., *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* [New York: Random House, 1968], p. 98).

particular point in the drama – the much disputed interval between III.iv and IV.i – to allow Macbeth's second interview with the witches to occur without some fairly obvious form of dramatic mediation, unsure, perhaps, of the audience's capacity to recognize the hopelessly misguided nature of Macbeth's misreading of the apparitions' pronouncements without first being placed in a position of critical detachment from Macbeth. This mediation may have been initially provided by the questionable Hecate episode (a very stiff piece of dramatic construction and overly obtrusive signpost whatever its origin), or it may have been negotiated by the more artfully ironic Lenox scene (III.vi), the second of the play-text's illusion-breakers, which some scholars would, however, place after, not before, IV.i.[16] Although the exact origin and placement, respectively, of each of these scenes remains uncertain, both clearly serve the same essential dramatic purposes: to disengage the audience from and to discredit Macbeth; to alert the audience to the moral and intellectual dangers of maintaining Macbeth as its surrogate; and to impede or block the dramatic momentum which has, heretofore, made some measure of audience identification with Macbeth unavoidable.[17] In presenting the audience with its bitterly sarcastic and completely demystified version of Macbeth's murderous career, the more textually reputable Lenox scene additionally serves to reintroduce that influential strain of choric authority which has been comparatively silent since the brief dialogue between Rosse and the anonymous old man at the beginning of II.iv. Lenox begins to sound this note in the following persuasive manner:

> . . . The gracious Duncan
> Was pitied of Macbeth: – marry, he was dead: –
> And the right-valiant Banquo walk'd too late;
> Whom, you may say (if't please you) Fleance killed,
> For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.
> Who cannot want the thought, how monstrous
> It was for Malcolm, and for Donalbain,
> To kill their gracious father? damned fact!
> How it did grieve Macbeth! did he not straight,
> In pious rage, the two delinquents tear,
> That were the slaves of drink, and thralls of sleep?
> Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too;
> For 'twould have anger'd any heart alive
> To hear the men deny't . . . .
>
> [II.vi.3–16]

In their ensuing conversation, Lenox and the anonymous lord who is his companion directly refer to Macbeth as a tyrant while speaking in laudatory and reverential terms of the redemptive force embodied by Macbeth's opposite, "the most pious Edward" of England, "the holy King" whose work is ratified by "Him above." They thus encourage the audience to readjust its attitude towards Macbeth, to bring to conscious awareness a set of moral assumptions it needed, consciously or otherwise, to block out or suppress entirely in order to allow its fantasies free rein.

[16] See Muir, pp. xxxi–xxxii.

[17] Cf. Ide, 338, where a similar point is made in regard to this "counter-movement," the commencement of which is traced to what Ide terms the play's "structural seam," III.vi. I strongly disagree, however, with Ide's rather doctrinaire conclusion that, as a consequence of this shift in emphasis, "those who once looked *with* Macbeth are asked to look *at* him, to judge the murderer from an enormous distance, from God's eye, as it were, who so clearly directs the forces of restoration."

The problem in all this is that Shakespeare's attempt at mediating our relationship with Macbeth threatens the very ends the playwright has just been working towards in the recently concluded Banquet scene. If, in fact, audience alienation from Macbeth follows hard upon the most pivotal stage of its cognitive identification with Macbeth, the only purpose that can have been served in establishing such identification in the first place must, in the words of Simon O. Lesser, be the "cautionary" one of vividly reminding us of "the terrible price the gratification" of forbidden desires always exacts.[18] Although I would be among the first to confirm the validity of Lesser's argument, I would like to propose an equally valid way of approaching the problem-at-hand. As I suggested above, the insertion of either the Hecate or the Lenox scene at this point in the drama can be plausibly attributed to Shakespeare's own anxiety about the powerful fantasy-content not only of the Banquet scene but of every episode in Macbeth's history of transgression, and to his uneasiness with Macbeth's divisively partisan visionary appeal.[19] Viewed from this perspective, Shakespeare's anxiety becomes the source of the formal pattern of defenses he establishes at the end of the third act and elaborates on in the last two acts of the play. It is, then, conceivable that Shakespeare's ambivalence about his overall dramatic project may make itself felt in the very attempt to manage or control the psychologically provocative interactions between play and audience generated by the shared vision of Banquo's ghost, and may, therefore, undercut his own express design. Since the establishment of Shakespeare's defensive pattern effectively requires the play to assume what will amount to a morally exemplary approach to its subject that clearly distinguishes between black and white, the audience will, for instance, presumably register the play's conspicuous departure from a prevailing dramatic persuasion that has refused to make such distinctions, premised as it has been on the image of nights that are "Almost at odds with morning, which is which." The purposed transformation of the audience's potentially dangerous and unseemly alliance with Macbeth into a safer detachment consequently may become so clearly discernible to the audience itself that it may resist so palpable an attempt to manipulate its sympathies, especially given its continued responsiveness to what Kranz (in "The Mated Mind") terms "the memory" of earlier moments in the play "when [its] unconscious wishes were granted more room to exercise."

Now it may, of course, be objected that, however palpable Shakespeare's designs seem, they are not at all inconsistent with the tendency of theatrical representation – and of literary art generally – to transform the pleasures of vicarious fantasy-fulfillment into the pleasures of protection from the anxieties aroused by a fantasy fulfilled. Norman Holland describes this transaction in the following:

> . . . the key to the most successful literary works (in my experience, anyway) is that their very defenses give me pleasure.
>
> The reason seems to be that pleasure from defenses has a peculiarly powerful effect. . . . In life, defenses stand off and modify drives and so cut down the amount of pleasure we get even if the drives are gratified. If, however, the defense itself gives pleasure, there is a net increase in pleasure, and that increase in pleasure (according to Freud) buys a

[18] See Lesser, p. 172.

[19] Lesser has himself noted that Shakespeare possibly "let things well up from the unconscious to an exceptional degree while writing *Macbeth*" (p. 152). If what Lesser calls his "guess" is correct, then, according to Freud's economic model of the workings of the psyche, what wells up must, eventually, be suppressed or, at least, resisted.

> permit for "a still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources," the gratification from the drive (or, in literature, unconscious content). Thus even the pleasure from satisfying the drive becomes greater.[20]

At first glance, Holland's formulation seems to provide the perfect solution to our present difficulties, especially since it supplies a psychological paradigm that corresponds quite closely to the overall dramatic structure of *Macbeth*. But I am not, in the end, persuaded that Shakespeare managed his dramatic mediation so effectively that his formal defenses do, in fact, yield the kind of pleasure Holland has in mind, much less protect the audience from continued immersion in the Macbeth phenomenon. I say this because in drama fantasy-content frequently proves more powerful than the defenses that are set up against it, the immediate appeal of performance more perdurable than the studied imposition of a moral dimension upon it. And in terms of performance appeal alone, neither the scenes centering on Hecate and Lenox, nor those that follow thereafter can match the profound impact and staying power of the Banquet scene and what has led up to it. Nor can they summarily moralize our response to a character whose appeal to his audience is already partially defined in moral terms. I introduce the moral element here because it is Shakespeare's own preoccupation with the same that characterizes his next challenge to our already threatened visionary company. This challenge is advanced by the integration of such obvious illusion-breakers as the Hecate and Lenox scenes into the drama's increasingly dominant moral concern with the gathering momentum of Macbeth's enemies (especially Malcolm and Macduff) and the domestic tragedies of Scotland (localized in the sad case of Lady Macduff). With the establishment of this countermovement in the drama, Shakespeare effectively doubles the focus of his audience's attention; he reinvokes dramatically the morally normative society Macbeth had previously transcended and places that society in critical juxtaposition with the morally defiant world Macbeth has spurred into being.[21] In psychological terms, he implicitly begins to focus his play's energies on a climactic competition between unmanageable fantasy-material and what Holland would probably call "meaning as defense."[22] Even more broadly, Shakespeare places his audience at the heart of that peculiar tension between performance appeal and normative persuasion which must be considered a primary subject of critical scrutiny for any developing psychology of theatrical experience.

It is my own considered opinion that our response to plays like the first and second parts of *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Richard III*, and *Macbeth* is shaped

[20] Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 131–32.

[21] See Lesser's discussion of what he terms Shakespeare's own "double vision of almost every scene of *Macbeth*," pp. 155–58.

[22] Holland moves his chapter on "Meaning as Defense" (*Dynamics*, pp. 162–190) towards conclusion in the following summary manner: "Defense, in a literary work, takes one of two general modes: meaning or form. Typically, the unconscious fantasy at the core of a work will combine elements that could, if provided full expression, give us pleasure, but also create anxiety. It is the task of the literary 'work' to control the anxiety and permit at least partial gratification of the pleasurable possibilities in the fantasy. The literary work, through . . . 'form,' acts out defensive maneuvers for us: splitting, isolating, undoing, displacing from, omitting (repressing or denying) elements of the fantasy. Meaning, whether we find it or supply it, acts more like a sublimation, giving the fantasy material a disguised expression which is acceptable to the ego, which 'makes sense' " (p. 189). Applied to *Macbeth*, Holland's formulation provokes us to consider whether or not Shakespeare's imposition of a moral dimension—that is to say, a "meaning"—upon his fantasy material effects a successful sublimation.

by the respective manner in which each stages its conflicts between the otherwise proscribed or unavailable gratifications of fantasy-fulfillment and the satisfactions attendant upon remaining attached to values that are at least supposed to prevail in our lives outside the theatre. The Marlowe plays most notably encourage their audience to engage to the utmost in fantasy-fulfillment: to engage, moreover, in fantasies that are, to say the least, subversive of the very moral order to which most members of the audience superficially subscribe. The plays provide their audience with a kind of psychological liberated zone within which civilized repressions find release in the most grandiose and aggressive fantasies. Shakespeare's work in this mode is much less straightforward than Marlowe's. It is characteristically complicated by formal or moral restraints that insistently alert the audience to the social and personal limits of aggressively commanding behavior. Shakespeare tends to let an audience fulfill its wanderlust only up to a point before attempting to pull it back to a proper (civilized) sense of proportion. He will, for instance, have Richard of Gloucester work his audience mercilessly until he has it eating out of his crooked hand only to shift gears upon Richard's ascension to the throne and require a normative moral allegiance to the performatively unappealing likes of Richmond. Although the transition in this instance is not terribly smooth, the shift tends to succeed onstage, mainly because Richard's own performance appeal diminishes considerably in the closing movement of the play.[23]

Shakespeare's management of audience response in the artistically more mature *Macbeth* is, of course, far less obviously programmatic than it is in *Richard III*. Macbeth doesn't capture his audience through sheer intellectual wizardry and performative guile (as does Richard) or by dint of pure theatrical energy (as does Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*). Rather, his appeal has its most accessible basis in the same fantasy of daring ambition and aggression that motivates Marlowe's Tamburlaine, although its true source must be sought in the more proscribed channels of parricidal rumination.[24] Unlike Tamburlaine, however, Macbeth does not operate in either a moral or mimetic vacuum; his comparatively naturalistic attempt to transcend the normative order of ordinary men does not smoothly effect the kind of unconditional fulfillment that extends outwards to embrace Marlowe's audience's own awakened fantasies of omnipotence. It leads, instead, to sleepless nights, haunted days, and terrifying confrontations with the likes of Banquo's ghost. Consequently, the tension between performance appeal and normative persuasion is presumably raised to a critical level, with the audience placed in the position of having to decide whether or not to forsake its alliance with Macbeth and accept in its stead the more pedestrian pleasures of moral detachment. But Shakespeare again undermines the audience's capacity to choose between clear-cut alternatives by having already internalized within the central character himself a version of that tension between performance appeal and normative persuasion which is more

[23] Shakespeare, of course, "liberates" Richard within the confines of a history play which, because of its fidelity to its sources, must eventually rein him in. The *form* of the play—drawn from its *format* as chronicle—may, in fact, have served to relieve Shakespeare of any anxiety attendant upon loosing such an appealing villain on the stage in the first place. For an interesting discussion of Shakespeare's approach to history in *Macbeth*, see Jan Kott, pp. 85–87.

[24] As David Willbern has observed, "Psychological perspectives typically interpret the regicide as patricide or matricide," n. 1, "Phantasmagoric Macbeth."

usually externalized in the form of mutually exclusive competing demands. When, therefore, Shakespeare dramatically reinvokes the morally normative society in the last two acts of the play, he does so at the expense of summarily reducing Macbeth to the more manageable proportions of a morally bankrupt Richard. In an effort to mediate the potentially dangerous alliance which obtains between Macbeth and the audience, he at once attempts to reduce the compass of Macbeth's performance appeal and to disprize Macbeth's far from negligible moral consciousness of his own position by showing Macbeth to poor advantage beside the normative likes of his morally self-righteous opposition. He attempts, in other words, to distort his uncompromisingly complete dramatic conception of Macbeth in order to protect the audience not only from Macbeth but from itself, from the psychologically problematic position it has occupied since the shared vision of Banquo's ghost. And, as in the Hecate and Lenox scenes, the attempt, in my opinion, fails; Shakespeare's anxiety about his own creation never develops sufficient dramatic power and integrity to measure up to (much less overwhelm) the power and integrity of his earlier achievement.

It is, for instance, striking that almost every effort by a character in the last movement of the play to portray Macbeth as a bloodthirsty monster, or to reduce him to the lowly proportions of a coward is ultimately countered by strong evidence to the contrary. One such moment is provided by the conversation of Macbeth's enemies in V.ii concerning Macbeth's present state of mind which immediately prefaces his next appearance onstage and consequently seems to have been intended to condition the audience's reception of him. In response to Cathness' comparatively even-handed treatment of Macbeth—"Some say he's mad; others, that lesser hate him,/Do call it valiant fury: but, for certain,/He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause/Within the belt of rule" (V.ii.13–16)—Angus delivers the following subjectively charged commentary on the present state of Macbeth's soul:

> Now does he feel
> His secret murthers sticking on his hands;
> Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach:
> Those he commands move only in command,
> Nothing in love: now does he feel his title
> Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
> Upon a dwarfish thief.
>
> [V.ii.16–22]

Angus' rhetorical strategy of reiterating the adverb "Now" has as its indirect dramatic goal the sundering of the audience's attachment to a conception of Macbeth that existed "then," in the less-immediate past of the play when that attachment was first negotiated. It has its dramatic virtue in the fact that some of what he says—namely, that "Those [Macbeth] commands move only in command,/Nothing in love"—will soon be verified by none other than Macbeth himself in one of the most affecting passages in the play:

> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but in their stead,

> Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
>
> [V.iii.24–28]

But when Angus likens Macbeth to "a dwarfish thief," he runs afoul of his own occupational need to reduce to manageable proportions the far from dwarfish stature of the still commanding character of Macbeth who, in the above passage, demonstrates a profounder understanding of his situation than does Angus and, in the face of his wife's disintegration, can imperiously say, "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it" (V.iii.47).

Macbeth is, of course, throughout V.iii artificially puffed-up by his absolute trust in his mistranslation of the apparitions' prophecies. But even in V.v, immediately before he says that he begins "To doubt th'equivocation of the fiend," Macbeth stands well beyond the moral and rhetorical pale within which his enemies (and, perhaps, Shakespeare himself) attempt to confine him:

> I have almost forgot the taste of fears.
> The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
> To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
> Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir,
> As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors:
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once start me.
>
> [V.v.9–15]

This is clearly not the speech of a mere tyrant or monster who is incapable of recognizing the difference between good and evil. Rather, it is the speech of a man isolated in the full consciousness of his own irreversible alienation from the world of ordinary men, who nostalgically recalls (as we recall with him) a time when he was less courageous than he must be now in order to contend with the terrors of the quotidian. Although Macbeth does suffer a temporary lapse in courage when he finally encounters Macduff in V.viii, he sufficiently recovers to again raise his stature to the performative level of his original transgression and supply an embodied denial of Macduff's understandable but uninformed accusation of cowardice:

> Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
> And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
> Yet I will try the last: before my body
> I throw my warlike shield: lay on, Macduff;
> And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough.'
>
> [V.viii.30–34]

Indeed, the sharp, incisive heroic couplet that closes off Macbeth's dramatic existence once and for all may well represent the resurgent attempt of the play's fantasy content to achieve gratification at the cost of the anxiety provoked upon its final brutal suppression by Macduff who re-enters in the play's last scene carrying what he calls "Th'usurper's cursed head" and announcing that "the time is free" (V.ix.21).[25]

[25] Cf. Robert Egan, "His Hour Upon the Stage: Role-Playing in *Macbeth*," *CentR*, 22 (1968), 342–43.

I would argue from this evidence that Shakespeare's anxiety about Macbeth—as well as his continued devotion to the strength of his own dramatic conception—is so clearly discernible in the misrepresentations of his character advanced by his enemies, and so generally suffused throughout the last two acts of the play that he fails really to provide a morally normative alternative to Macbeth that is either dramatically convincing or appealing. Although Shakespeare expends much time and effort in developing his conditioning apparatus, the alternatives to Macbeth never fully come to represent characters with whom an audience can ally itself, or even accept as the representatives of a moral order that stands in contradistinction to Macbeth.[26] Malcolm, for example, as Robert Egan has noted, "gives evidence of a far subtler and more politic performance" of royal prerogative than Macbeth, revealing a profoundly suspicious and suspect nature, when he puts Macduff through his deliberately ambiguous paces in the first part of IV.iii.[27] Furthermore, his relentlessly insensitive attempt to exploit Macduff's sorrow for his own political ends after Macduff learns of the slaughter of his family bears an uncannily apt resemblance to Lady Macbeth's earlier inquisitorial manipulation of Macbeth. So apt that one wonders whether Shakespeare consciously planned it this way—and if so, to what purpose?—or unconsciously found himself compelled to work within the same influential pattern established in the earlier episode. Indeed, when Macduff responds to Malcolm's injunction to "Dispute it like a man" by saying, "I shall do so; But I must also feel it like a man," an unmistakeable sense of repetition obtains that would seem to undercut Shakespeare's conscious designs and that is, moreover, soon compounded by Malcolm's closing speech at the end of the play which closely echoes Duncan's remarks in the play's first act.[28] Even the sympathetic appeal of the superficially more straightforward Lady Macduff murder scene is compromised by reason of the scene's immediate status as a palpable conditioning device, and because both Macduff and Macbeth's distance from the scene of the crime ultimately casts as much doubt on the former's wisdom and judiciousness as certainty on the latter's cruelty.[29] In short, it seems as if Shakespeare's anxiety about Macbeth is actually an anxiety about the Macbeth in man generally and that, try as he might in composing the closing movement of the play, he could not escape remaining absorbed in the most disturbing aspects of his own dramatic creation.

[26] Cf. Lesser, p. 157 and Egan, 343–45.

[27] Egan, 345.

[28] Egan notes that "an undercurrent of uneasiness must mingle with our appreciation of Malcolm's triumph, marked as it is by several echoes of the earliest scenes in the play" (343). For a persuasive reinterpretation of the supposedly sacrosanct moral order embodied by Duncan in these early scenes, see Harry Berger, Jr., "The Early Scenes of *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation," *ELH*, 47 (1980), 1–31.

[29] The question of Macduff's accountability is an old and involved one that deserves (though seldom rewards) more consideration than I have room to give it. It is, however, treated both sensitively and concisely by A.C. Bradley, whose lead I am pleased to follow: "That his flight was 'noble' is beyond doubt. That it was not wise or judicious in the interest of his family is no less clear. But that does not show that it was wrong; . . ." (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 312).

Nor could he escape what remains an essential ingredient of theatrical experience, the fact that the theatre (as Brecht writes) "theatres it all down," measures mainly in performative terms anything one tries to get across that discernibly lacks sufficient performance appeal.[30] Shakespeare's failure to neutralize completely the dramatic impact of the shared vision of Banquo's ghost may be viewed, in this respect, as an inevitable concession to the psychological power of theatrical experience; his failure to protect the audience from continued contact with the Macbeth phenomenon as dramatic evidence of his own play's capacity to penetrate the invisible frame that conventionally separates the audience from the stage. In attempting to distract his audience from, and otherwise to discredit, Macbeth by turning its sights on the comparatively decent but performatively unappealing men who are his antagonists, Shakespeare finally succeeds in making Macbeth the only complete embodiment of the prevailing tensions and energies of his drama. When the play ends Macbeth consequently succeeds Banquo's ghost as the primary focus of a vision we in the audience continue to share with each other, even as we separate in the black of night or light of day.

[30] "The Literarization of the Theatre (Notes to the *Threepenny Opera*)," in *Brecht on Theatre*, John Willett, trans. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), p. 43.