That Bellona's Bridegroom

Macbeth's Warrior Ethic

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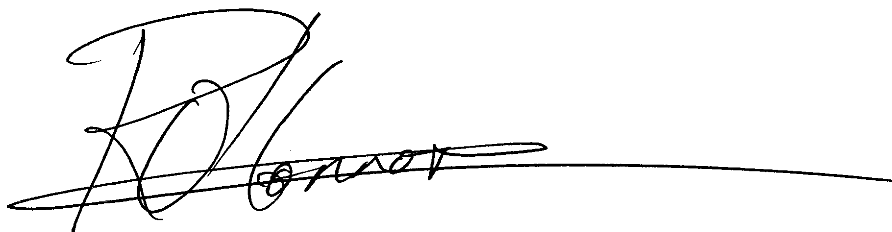
Declaration

Unless otherwise acknowledged, all material presented in this thesis is the original work of the candidate.



Robert F. O'Connor

Acknowledgements

I will submit this thesis with only days to spare, but I will stand by my oft-asserted opinion that the only rule about the time a PhD takes is that it takes as long as it takes.

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to engage with some recent paradigms of Shakespearean scholarship through an examination of the concepts of ethics, order and masculinity in *Macbeth*.

It addresses the imbalance in considerations of gender in recent historicist analyses of English Renaissance literature by developing a survey of the ideal of man-as-warrior in some prose writing of the late 16th Century. This survey is then applied to the study of *Macbeth* and the play's representation of a 'warrior ethic'; an ethic which was not only an artefact associated with a fictional Scotland but also a contemporary ideological framework subject to examination both within and outside the playhouses.

In further relating this survey to the representation of masculinity and metaphysical order in the play, the thesis endeavours to show that no single paradigm of right manly behaviour operates in the play; rather, the notion of what is appropriate to a man is largely dependent on his position within a social, political, and metaphysical hierarchy.

Finally, the play *Macbeth* is considered in its historical context, and is seen largely as both the product and representation of ethical and sexual uncertainties brought about by the accession of King James. In conclusion, the thesis asserts that there is no one interpretative key with which to unlock the play: its fluid signification is antagonistic to monolithic or prescriptive single-meaning readings of the play, and of other literature of the period.

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... in my opinion, the world giveth every writer so large a field to walke in, that before he set penne to the booke, he shall find him selfe ... uncertaine where to begin, or where to end.

Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*

1. Arma virumque cano

Bellona was a Roman goddess of war, probably inherited from the Etruscans. Accompanying Mars into battle, she is variously described as either his wife, sister, or daughter; she had a temple just outside the Roman city walls, where foreign embassies were often met and formal declarations of war were made. Her priests were drawn from the gladiators —successful ones, it seems prudent to assume. She has a fleeting appearance in Books VII and VIII of the *Aeneid*, a work which had special significance to many of the Elizabethan intelligentsia, particularly when it came to the providing of moral exemplars: Sir John Harington recommended the *Aeneid* to Henry, Prince of Wales, not long after James' accession to the throne, since "manly corage ys engendred by soche reeding, and the mynde encyted to good & vertuows practyses" (Harington: 2).

In Book VII, Juno —as was her wont —curses (again) Aeneas' band, and in particular the Trojan prince's newly-won Lavinia:

> O fatal maid, thy marriage is endow'd
> With Phrygian, Latian, and Rutulian blood!
> Bellona leads thee to thy lover's hand;
> Another queen brings forth another brand,
> To burn with foreign fires another land!
> A second Paris, diff'ring but in name,
> Shall fire his country with a second flame.
> (Keener: 194)

In Book VIII, she is invoked again, treading in the steps of Discord, and carrying a scourge (Keener: 236). She is, in this latter case, explicitly associated with disorder, and a disorder beyond that brought by war; as the quotation from Dryden's translation, above, indicates, Bellona brings self-destructive strife.

Early in the play *Macbeth*, the eponymous anti-hero is described, before we even meet him, as a powerful fighter, skilled in battle —he is, in fact, given the epithet of "Bellona's bridegroom": a man literally married to war. From this fleeting reference a whole host of implications may be drawn, but this is par for the course in the Shakespearean canon: the first few scenes of any play provide — out of necessity — a whole conceptual framework through which to 'read' the play.

What is unusual about *Macbeth* is its setting: Shakespeare was to visit Ancient Greece and Rome, contemporary Italy, and England itself many times, along with a number of purely fictional settings inspired by a broad range of sources. But there are two places he sees fit to visit only once: *Hamlet*'s Denmark, and the Scotland of *Macbeth*.

To the play-going Elizabethan Londoner, the North meant many things, principally trouble: borderline barbarism, recusancy and crypto-Catholicism, impoverished peasantry and frequent revolt. But Scotland? Scotland was even worse: a succession of plots, exploding Darnleys, the compound problems

of two Marys, a highly suspicious alliance with France, and a long history of cross-border conflict which remained an issue throughout the late 16th Century, and would become a problem again. To the play-going Elizabethan Londoner, Scotland was as alien a place as Hieronomo's Spain or Barabas' Malta, and as savage, too.

By the early 1600's, the heyday of the English History Play was largely past, perhaps discredited by its association with the Essex revolt, and so it is odd that Shakespeare should dip into Holinshed yet again for inspiration, some five or more years after his last visit — and, even stranger, this time he would seek his story not in the long and gory pageant of English history, but in the equally bloody chronicle of Scotland. There is no doubt that, for a dramatist, the story of the usurper Macbeth offered a wealth of material, and everything that a groundling might wish to see for his pennies — kings, witches, battles, betrayals, signs and portents, divers alarums and excursions and fresh blood from the slaughterhouses down the road, dripping from the hacked-off head of a stage traitor.

And yet ... given all of these things in Holinshed —for they are certainly there — Shakespeare saw fit to bring so many other things to the story. Some of these he also lifted, almost in their entirety, from elsewhere in Holinshed: the details of Duncan's murder from that of an earlier king, Duff; the brief tale of Young Siward from another Chronicle altogether, that of England. Other elements, according to various analyses of the

play, were found in contemporary events, many of them associated with the then-new king, James. Here, I am convinced, is the real inspiration behind Shakespeare's choice of the story of Macbeth: it is a contentious idea, but I too suspect that it is highly unlikely *Macbeth* would ever have been written or performed without a Scottish king on the English throne.

But, even beyond its obvious theatricality, there was more appeal in the story of Macbeth than the immediate presence of James; as I hope to show, it tapped into a wide range of concerns, from the nature and status of manhood, of masculinity, of true honour and virtue to the role of the warrior in an increasingly complex and threatening world. The play is preceded, in the popular literature at any rate, by a protracted investigation and defence of these ideas, and it would be tempting to say that the fact that these notions were being investigated and defended suggests that at least some Elizabethan writers felt that they were being undermined. In the chronicle tale of Macbeth and his various other sources, Shakespeare found a way to represent on stage the essence of these debates, particularly, I suggest, their engagement with masculine identity.

In *The Boke Named The Governour* (1531), his influential treatise on, among other things, the education of young men, Sir Thomas Elyot puts forward his idea of the essential male identity:

> A man in his naturall perfection is fiers, hardy, stronge in opinion, covaitous of glorie, desirous of knowledge, appetiting by generation to brynge forth his semblable (Lehmberg: 95).

What Elyot does, in effect, is divide the characteristics of a man into three categories, the physical ("fiers, hardy"), the intellectual or metaphysical ("stronge in opinion, covaitouse of glorie, desirous of knowledge"), and the sexual. His rhetoric gives a kind of structure to his ideas; the physical characteristics he identifies seeming to take precedence over the appetites for glory and knowledge, and these in turn are more important than a specific sexual quality, the fathering of (male) children — "appetiting by generation to brynge forth his semblable". Despite the religious sensibilities of his age, Elyot seems to privilege the physical over the metaphysical in the ideal man.

By later in the 1500's, Elyot's description of the "natural" or ideal man was no longer quite so current, the important physical attributes he seems to have preferred having been surpassed in significance by metaphysical qualities. He still, however, serves as a good example of the aspects of maleness, of masculinity, of being a *man* in Early Modern England that I hope to cover in this thesis. The primary archetype of manhood at the time was that of the warrior, and to many writers it was the warrior who was the embodiment of all the proper, manly qualities. Following Elyot's lead, Chapter 2 will identify the concepts of man-as-warrior which may have operated in

Elizabethan England. These concepts cluster around the general themes of virtue, honour, deeds or action, the warrior, and hierarchy or degree. These five themes relate to each other in particular ways, and all five to a sixth that forms for them a kind of metanarrative, namely the ideal of the king. All of these themes are to be found woven through the play *Macbeth*, and in illustrating these themes I will be drawing on a number of prose sources, primarily from the period between 1570 and 1600.

Chapter 3 will examine how the themes and ideas presented in Chapter 2 can be related to the play *Macbeth* — how similar notions of valour and virtue are described, destroyed, and re-established in the course of the play, through its focus on the actions, right and wrong, of the play's fighting men. These notions construct, for the world of the play, what I have called the warrior ethic —a set of values and ideals that survives the play largely unquestioned. It is paralleled, in Shakespeare's Scotland, by a similar but less well-defined ethical structure relating to the virtue and conduct of the king, and it is the differences —if not antagonisms —between these two structures which provides the impetus for much of the play's action. *Macbeth* is, I think, thematically linked to many other tragedies of the period, plays which deal with men, usually warriors, and in the upper echelons of their societies. As warriors and as noble-men, these characters have a duty to defend their society —and, in many cases, it is a duty they do not feel they have been adequately compensated for. Many of

them seek a way to redress this imbalance; Macbeth himself operates within rigid ideological and ethical frameworks, which he seeks to overcome. Like his contemporary literary fellow-travellers, he fails.

Anything I have chosen to call the warrior ethic in *Macbeth* is obviously going to be concerned with men; concerned not simply with their identity and function as warriors but as men, defined and identified in relation to each other, to women, to their king and to God —their position(s), no less, in Tillyard's Great Chain. Some of my concern is with the purely sexual, the biological, but principally I am interested in the cultural construct of gender, which, as a cultural construct, is part of the wider milieu, the ethos. It is as much part of the metastructure around Shakespearean drama as the monarchy, the court, or the Master of Revels. And part of my reason for wanting to address these issues is the simple absence of consideration of them in recent historicist analyses: New Historicism, for example, may have some interest in gender issues, but according to Walter Cohen, it understands gender "in relation to the body or to power more than in relation to women" (Cohen: 38). Even this criticism does not go far enough; as I hope this thesis will show, there is more to the consideration of gender — more to the issue of gender in Shakespeare — than the role or representation of women. Chapter 4 will therefore further examine the concept of the warrior ethic in terms of its being a gender-determined structure: one which is constructed, maintained, attacked and

defended by men. The construction of manhood itself within the play is also explored, in particular through its definition via a series of oppositions. This is related back to the idea of separate but parallel ethical structures in the play, showing how the play appears to suggest a different model of manhood for the king.

Chapter 5 will explore the patterns of chaos and order in the play; patterns which have attracted no small degree of critical attention in the past fifty or so years, but which also reveal the play as a product of its time. The play's complex dynamics of disorder are also studied in relation to several recent critical paradigms, and are related back to the broader issues of ethics and masculinity.

The play also has a complex relationship with its source material, as a dramatisation of historical events and historical figures —even if not particularly well-known ones. There are significant and extremely suggestive differences between the source material and the dramatic text, and throughout the following chapters I will endeavour to address some of these differences, to discover what they can tell us about the dramatic text they relate to, and why the author may have chosen to re-tell the story in the way he did.

The final chapter of this thesis will consider *Macbeth* and its various readings —ethical, gendered, and metaphysical —in relation to recent wider criticism of Shakespearean drama,

particularly the methodologically similar approaches of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism. This will then lead to an examination of the play within its historical context, relating it to something of the circumstances of the time, most importantly the accession of James and the affect this had on the playwrights, on their material, and on their audiences. I will attempt to draw some overall conclusions about the relationship(s) between *Macbeth* and the wider the discourses of politics and gender and, in particular, ethics, of Jacobean England, ultimately leading to statement of a primary hypothesis, and opening up some possibilities for further work.

2. The good and upright souldiar

> There is a certain wast[e] of the people for whom there is no use, but warre: and these men must have some employment still to cut them off ... If they have no service abroad, they will make mutinies at home. (Nashe: 25)

Scotland, invaded, beset by savage Irish mercenaries and the troops of the Norwegian king, has, it seems, two of its own to thank for its troubles. First, there is the rebel Macdonald —an evil man, says an anonymous captain. He is assisted, according to Shakespeare anyway, by the Thane of Cawdor, who, after the aborted coup, confesses to treason, sues for pardon, and goes to his execution with a manner that elicits admiration from the witnesses. His title passes to one of his fellow lords, the worthy Macbeth.

Here, indeed, is a mutiny at home, which in the world of the play *Macbeth* comes after a long peace under the reign of Duncan. Perhaps, as Nashe suggests, this is a mutiny which had its cause in the idleness of trained warriors. But a thane of Scotland, one would hope, would hardly count as one of the "waste of the people". Macdonald, untitled by Shakespeare, may have cause enough in ambition to start a war, but Cawdor has lands, position, honour, respect even in death, and it could be argued that there is little more he could expect from aiding Sweno than he already has. Little except ... more of the same.

According to Harry Berger

> there is something rotten in Scotland ... something intrinsic to the structure of Scottish society ... [which] generates ... tendencies toward instability, conflict, sedition, and murder ... it is not something the characters of the play ... seem aware of (Berger: 5).

Berger has some interesting things to say about Shakespeare's Scotland and the characters who populate it, and I shall return to his arguments later. I have my own ideas about what, exactly, it is that is rotten in the state of Duncan; and I feel that the clues to this are offered very early in the play.

In the second scene of the play, our first encounter with the Scottish king and his thanes, we learn something of the circumstances of the battle foreshadowed by the weïrd sisters; a rebellion, begun, as noted, by an ill-regarded man:

> The merciless Macdonald —
> Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
> The multiplying villainies of nature
> Do swarm upon him ... (I,ii,9-12)[1]

The rebellious warrior is almost self-evidently corrupt, morally questionable; self-evidently because he is a rebel, a rebel because he is corrupt. As I shall show later, it was clearly held, within the ethical milieu of *Macbeth* and its creator, that a

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[1] A.R. Braunmuller, ed., *Macbeth* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). All quotations from the play are taken from this edition.

rebel was in violation of fundamental laws of duty and obligation, of respect, honour, and right action. A rebel, and therefore a villain.

Set against the merciless Macdonald we have another warrior, a Scottish thane, "brave Macbeth". He, we soon discover, has almost single-handedly put paid to the traitor, and in a particularly gruesome fashion:

> ... brave Macbeth ...
> Like Valour's minion carved out his passage
> Till he faced the slave,
> Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
> Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps
> And fixed his head upon our battlements (I,ii,14-23)

Such is the 'rightness' of this action — the violent disembowelment of a fellow-countryman —that Duncan, the king, lauds him as "valiant cousin, worthy gentleman" (I,ii,24). This description of Macbeth seems a little curious, even when taking into account perhaps more squeamish late 20th Century tastes, and the epithet of "worthy gentleman", coming so soon after the report of a 'worthy' Macdonald, must make us wonder about Macbeth. Despite this, when he 'confronts' Macdonald's fellow-rebel Cawdor with "self-comparisons" and betters him, it becomes possible to see his personal victory over both insurgents as a mark of both his moral superiority over them, and as his status as a superlative warrior. The heroic thane is described, later in the scene, as "Bellona's bridegroom" (I,ii,54).

But at this stage of the play, we have not even met the man after whom it is named. All we know of him is his superlative skill as a warrior; and the admiration this elicits from his fellow-Scotsmen.

The status of the man-as-warrior in Shakespeare's England was, like so many other things, in a state of flux. Throughout Elizabeth's reign, the country faced a series of military challenges, most notably the Armada and the constant threat of invasion. The martial exploits of men like Sir Philip Sidney, the Earls of Leicester and Essex, Raleigh and others, were widely celebrated, the stuff of pamphlets, ballads, and —via the Tudor reconstruction of recent history — plays, representing what Leah Marcus has called "an aggressive and highly masculinist Protestant militarism" (Marcus: 91). And yet as Nashe's remark, however satiric, indicates, behind the celebration of victories — usually over the Spanish — there was an increasing uncertainty about the place of the warrior in an ever-more fluid society. Moreover, any interrogation of the status and role of the warrior inevitably led to similar interrogation of — and perhaps even uncertainty about —the role and status of men. In trying to tease out the nature of these interrogations, it is, I think, necessary to go beyond the walls of the playhouse, into the less widely-debated area of Elizabethan prose writings.

Elyot, as I have suggested, represents one level of these sources — the late books of *The Governour* elaborate on his ideas of the proper manly qualities, discussing specific virtues

and vices, how they may be encouraged or avoided. But it is quite a stroll out of the court and down the streets of 16th Century London to find some of the other sources —the diverse productions of the pamphletists. In her landmark study*The Elizabethan Pamphleteers*, Sandra Clark notes that the "decay of moral standards" was a common theme in the popular pamphlets of the period, particularly through "constant comparisons between the present and the heroic past" (Clark: 202). As indicators of popular concern —if not debate —the pamphlets represent a large and largely untapped resource for historicist research. It is clear, I would argue, through generations of formal scholarship, what might have been thought or argued or represented in relation to a range of issues at the play- and poem- and memoir-writing levels of Elizabethan society: the upper echelons of the emergent middle classes, the court, the more literate aristocracy. But —leaving aside the issue of whether such writers sought to reflect or mould popular opinion for later in this work —we cannot be sure if these more formal considerations of issues like the role of the warrior and his function and place in a changing society are really indicative of the scope or depth of thinking among the groundlings, the newly literate merchant class, the soldiers themselves. Hence my attempt to show, through such material, something of the concept of man-as-warrior that might have circulated through Elizabethan England. In particular, I would like to focus on two little known, and, as far as I can tell, now little-read pamphlets, Geffrey Gates' *The Defence of Militarie Profession* (1579), and William Blandy's *The Castle of*

Commonwealth, (1581), which, represented as the recollection of an earlier discussion the two had with their fellow-soldiers in "Friseland", engages in a kind of dialogue with Gates' earlier work. These two related pamphlets are, I feel, representative of a broader collection of works, works specifically concerned with what I call the warrior ethic.

Virtue

Certain manly virtues are espoused in much of prose writing of Elizabethan England. Blandy, for example, focuses his attention on four virtues: "equity", "puissance", prudence, and temperance (Blandy: sig. Di.v), virtues which he ascribes to greater or lesser degree to the various "estates" of his imaginary Commonwealth, of which more later. In going on for another ten or so pages in laying out his understanding of these virtues, he makes it clear that they are —as is the case for many of the writers on the matter —derived from the four so-called 'moral' virtues of scholastic philosophy, namely justice (what Blandy calls "equity"), fortitude, temperance, and prudence.

Other examinations of manly virtues expand on these notions. Castiglione —or at least Sir Thomas Hoby: in his 1561 translation of *The Book of the Courtier* —refers to "the vertues of the minde, as justice, manlinesse, wisdome, temperance, staidenesse, noble courage, sobermoode, etc" (Hoby: 369). The same basic virtues are here, extended by broader ideas which

could be said to relate to a man's *character*, if not to his moral worth. Like Blandy, and like many other writers, Castiglione goes beyond mere statement of what these virtues or qualities are, and attempts some kind of definition of them. What does *not* happen is any kind of explicit relation or connection of these virtues to the three 'theological' virtues of faith, hope, and charity. There is no attempt, in other words, to preserve the notion in Mediæval philosophy of seven 'Cardinal' virtues. This was a slippery concept at the best of times, never as clearly stated or widely accepted as its antithesis, the Seven Deadly Sins, but the absence of even a nod in the direction of the Cardinal Virtues seems to indicate a decreasing dependence on religious ideals in day-to-day didacticism.

What most of the writers on matters masculine *did* depend on was an almost exclusively martial interpretation of the traditional virtues. Francis Bacon, writing much later in his capacity as Attorney-General, saw the quality of fortitude as having a particular use to a man: it

> distinguisheth the grounds of quarrels, whether they bee iust; and not onely so, but whether they be worthy; and setteth a better price upon mens lives then to bestow them idely (Bacon, *Duels*: 13).

Bacon's consideration of this matter was a less than happy one; he was, in fact, lamenting the absence of this virtue in the duelling young bloods of the Jacobean court, but his treatment, though late in the period I am concentrating on, is nevertheless typical: discussions of the manly virtues often turn into

extended examinations of their place in a hierarchical society, and their significance to the man-as-warrior.

In describing fortitude in this way — as a quality of judgement — Bacon is in disagreement with many other writers, since most seem to see this virtue in a martial light, as akin to bravery, to courage in battle. Blandy, further, elaborates on fortitude as a more kingly virtue, one which “resteth in an invincible minde” (Blandy: sig. Dii.v). It is in disagreements like these, however expressed, that the real value of this material lies, when trying to arrive at any idea of the range of ideas about masculinity in Elizabethan England. Disagreements in definition, however, are not so common as those contradictions that arise out of the attempts by various writers to expound some kind of hierarchy to the virtues, to identify which of them are more important to a man than others. Courage, fortitude and justice usually come out on top in these discussions, perhaps for their significance to the man-as-warrior.

There were some willing to consider other, non-martial virtues, as of greater import to the modern man. “Iohn” Della Casa’s *A Treatise of the Maners and Behauiours*, translated into English by Robert Peterson in 1576, has a great deal to say in defence of the place of less well-known, less ‘martial’ virtues. The work is one in very much the same category as Castiglione’s earlier and much more influential *The Courtier*, in that it seems to be aimed more at the ‘Renaissance’ man, at the courtier whose interests may not be in feats of arms. Like

Castiglione, Della Casa acknowledges that the better known qualities, "iustice, fortitude, and the other greater, more noble vertues" *are* better, in a qualitative sense, but to his thinking they are not common —and those possessing them too often lack opportunity for deeds to express them (Della Casa: 2-3). He suggests further that deficiencies in either virtue or opportunities for great deeds can be made up for by what might, in late Twentieth Century terms, be called a good personality, particularly if one is seeking advancement:

> I could name you many, whoe, being otherwise of little account, have ben & be styll, muche estemed & made of, for their chereful & pleasaunt behaviour alone: which hath byn suche a helpe & advaunceme[n]t unto them, that they have gotten greate preferments, leaving farre behinde them, such men as have byn endowed with those other noble and better vertues, spoken of before (Della Casa: 3).

Certainly Della Casa sets himself up in opposition to more orthodox theorists here: he prefers to recommend manners and attitudes that will help a man with things as they are, rather than as they should be. He (or at least his English translator) also stands apart from other writers by insisting that there may in fact be *more* to being a man that martial prowess:

> albeit Liberalitie, or magnanimitie, of themselves beare a greater prayse, th[a]n, to be a well taught or manored man: yet perchaunce, the courteous behaviour and entertaynement with good maners and words, helpe no lesse, him that hath them: th[a]n the high minde and courage, advau[n]ceth him in whome they be (Della Casa: 2).

Martial virtues alone are not enough, but good manners (like justice, according to other commentators —see Blandy, later) will stand for themselves:

> there is no doubte, but who so disposeth himselfe to live ... in populous Cities, will think it a very necessarie thing, to have skill to put himselfe forth comely and seemely ... civilitie and courtesie, without other releefe or patrimonie, is riche of itselfe, & hath substance enough, as a thing [that] standeth in speache and gestures alone (Della Casa: 3-4).

Della Casa's belief in the virtue (term loosely used) of good manners is evident, but he is careful to qualify that they are a virtue of the court, or at best the city. The implications of this qualification — that different virtues have their different places — I shall consider later in this chapter.

Castiglione is less willing to rest on such a division. In the "Breef Rehearsal of the Chiefe Conditions and Qualities in a Courtier" at the end of Hoby's translation, he states that the Courtier should

> be skilfull in all kynd of marciall feates both on horsebacke and a foote, and well practised in them: whiche is his cheef profession, though his understandinge be the lesse in all other things (Hoby: 370).

Unlike Della Casa, Castiglione is unwilling to ignore the martial basis to the structure which has given the courtier his place.

While the virtues which best fit a man may have been (generally) agreed upon, there was disagreement over the question of what kind of man might be said to best embody such virtues. Vested interests certainly came into play; many of the authors of obvious military background were (unsurprisingly) of the conviction that it was the soldier or "martialist" who needed, represented and defended the virtues of manhood. Geffrey Gates, for example, asserts "The onely meane to uphold the seat of Iustice, & all other estates, is the profession of Armes", and then very quickly shows himself as having a very negative view of human nature, arguing that good laws (and good lawyers) alone are not enough:

> But forasmuch as the thoughtes of man are wicked even from his youth, and all his wayes naturally inclined to extreme evill, desirous to satisfie his owne lusts and affections with iniurie and crueltie, to revenge, and to reigne in his owne will and power without correction, and yeldeth not unto the obedience and direction of any other but for feare of stripes: There must bee therefore an other state and profession of men, whose power and prudence must comprehend the maintenaunce and defence, not onely of the Seate of Justice (Gates: 10).

More than almost any other author on the topic, Gates defends the 'martialist' or warrior as a paragon of virtue and the only true defender of justice. Alongside the marginal heading "The qualities of militarie men", he sets out his reasons for his position:

> The man that loveth right and honoreth iustice, is fit to be ye defendor of the same: he [that] is merciful

> to ye poore, and pitieth the afflicted, is a meete man to succour his countrie nation & against the violence of tirantes and oppressors: he that loveth the habitationes of the iust, & the prosperitie of ye righteous: he [that] tendereth ye widow and the fatherles; he that delighteth to se science, social amitie, and vertue to floorishe in his countrie, devine honour advanced, faith, peace, and equitie to reigne in everye fellowshippe, and hateth covetousnes, robbery, theft, extortion, brawlinges, striffe, murther, fornication, idlenesse and dronkenesse, that man is worthie and fit to be a Soldier (Gates: 35-36).

Gates maintains, therefore, that "Justice and Civil Policie" are dependent on security of arms, asserting that

> where militarie prowesse hath in any part of the world moste prevailed, there hath orderly most flourished, Justice, Noblenesse, Science and all manner of veruous and commendable occupations both of body & minde ... (Gates: 11).

It is no exaggeration to say that he paints his 'martialist' as the guardian of terrestrial and cosmic order. In particular, he sees the soldier as the real instrument of God's will; he attributes the success of the Protestant Reformation to the blessing of God on its soldiers:

> ... the Lord hath shewed and daylie doth more and more shewe, his wondeful works and power in this last restitution of his Gospel: which began in Germanie with peace, but was forced to holde on the way, by the ayde of warlike prowesse and fidelitie (Gates:16).

He insists, via numerous historical, Biblical, and contemporary instances, that military success is a sure sign of God's favour:

> And like wise when the Lord meaneth to advance a nation and to make any people famous and honorable upon earth: he stirreth them up to high courage, and maketh their mindes and bodyes apt to the warre, and in all points sufficient for the pursuite and accomplishment of Militarie travaile (Gates: 21).

In a not entirely relevant passage, he goes on to justify his position using examples from the then-current war in Holland, a cause of much English grief in the last few decades of the 1500's. He expresses his contempt for various unhelpful souls — particularly the Dutch themselves —before launching upon a spectacular diatribe:

> Praise God therefore, and geve honor to his faithfull Souldiers: & let the covetous merchant, and the ambitious lawier leave of his drudgreie for greedy lucre, despise the delicacie of his belly, & dassh ye wantonnes of his eyes, and cast his idol out of his servil hart: that is, senseles avarice, and put on Armes & furnishe himselfe with policie and warlike Prowesse, yf hee will iustely be numbred amongst the people of noblenesse & honor (Gates: 35)

Gates' feelings about lawyers are almost worth a lengthy analysis on their own — but that is a project for another time.

William Blandy's *Castle of Commonwealth* presents, as I have indicated, a kind of response to Gates: trying to temper some of the latter's more passionate assertions with

observations of his own. After being excused by his friend Edward Morris for his lack of experience as a warrior[2], Blandy then embarks upon a conversation with Gates himself, ultimately dividing his (Platonically spherical) "Archtecture" of "Pollicye" into six parts, and installing therein "A King, A Iusticer, A Souldiar, A Marchaunt, An Artificer, A Tiller of the Ground" (Blandy: sig. Biii.v). Like Gates, he assigns to each of these estates a proper virtue:

> To the Prince, preheminence, to the Iusticer, judgement, to the Souldiar, puissance, to the Marchaunt, desire to be enriched, to the Artificer, delight in his occupation, to the Tiller of the ground, true obedience (Blandy: sig. Biii.v).

Blandy also sees the soldier as a man of God, suggesting that his service should be directed to "the glory of Christ, the honor of our Prince, the cause of our countrye, the defence of our name and honesty" (Blandy: sig. Diiii.v). He sets up, in other words, a clear heirarchy of duty and obligation, and, like Gates, he places duty to God at the top of the list. Any other purposes than these, he says, are those of "men puft upp with vayne desire".

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[2] A rhetorical device; the title page identifies the pamphlet as "Handled in manner of a Dialogue betwixt Gefferay Gate, and William Blandy, Souldiars". Blandy, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, served in the English army in the Low Countries in 1580. There is no entry for Gates.

Another point he has in common with Gates is his consideration of the position of the lawyer or 'justicer' in a virtuous commonwealth, calling the justicer and the soldier "The two limmes that chiefly and above other, strengthe[n] the body of *Princely maiestie*", noting that

> The one executeth the will of his *Soveraigne* upon the offender at home, the other wreaketh the indignation of the Prince in the field, upon the body of his enemie. The one is chosen for his prudence, the other for his prudence, and puissance, the one for his rightfull dealing, the other for his upright minde ... The one with his toung keepeth peace, the other with the sword restoreth peace in danger (Blandy: sig. Eiii.r).

Nonetheless, despite conceding that neither he nor his interlocutor may be competent to judge on the matter, he does say that "I cannot finde in my poore and simple consideration, but that the souldiar in his proper right may challenge a kinde of superiority of the Lawyer", concluding that the "iusticer" should "have second place in this our commonwealth" (Blandy: sig. Eiiii.v).

Where Blandy differs from Gates, however, is in the embodiment of the broadest range of true virtues. To Blandy, it is not the warrior who is the defender of justice and order; rather he is the servant and defender of the prince, who is "garnisht, and deckt with all worthye, and noble vertues" (Blandy: sig. Eii.r). As I shall show shortly, the character of the king was very much an important part of any consideration of manly qualities in the writing of the period.

In a milieu which believed implicitly in the inherent superiority of some men over others, it is not surprising to find different thinkers giving such primacy to different kinds (often their own kind ...?) of men. Elyot argues simply that there are men superior in *understanding* to others, and in this faculty they are "most nyghe unto the similitude of god"; such men should, therefore, be held in higher estimation and place, if only because they can, by example of their own virtue, direct others of "inferiour understandynge ... to the way of vertue and commodious livynge" (Lehmberg: 4). There was, in fact, an almost utilitarian view of such men, virtuous in themselves but doubly praiseworthy for the example they provided for others.

William Blandy not only had a didactic purpose in writing his *Castle of Commonwealth*, he had also a quite specific example in mind when espousing the virtues of the military man. Feeling provoked by a motto "found in a olde monument", Blandy determines "to play the whetstone my selfe: whetting and setting on edge (by this slender and simple devise) the blunt mindes of my countrymen" (Blandy: sig. Aii.r). He therefore dedicates his work to Sir Philip Sidney, taking him as the embodiment of his purpose, a man

> who in my opinion is able & sufficient to be both the whetstone and the sword ... and to move and perswade other to all worthy & laudable actions (Blandy: sig. Aii.v).

Elyot's praise of exemplary men was more general, but Blandy and others were more passionate in their defence of a specific

class or type of person —the soldier —as not only a morally superior individual (charged as they were with the defence of a divinely-ordered state), but a guardian of morality itself (whatever it was). Much of this idea sprang from essentially pessimistic views of human nature: Gates, as I have shown, is convinced that it is the depravity of Man that makes the profession of arms necessary:

> For the first foundation and use of Armes was erected of necessitie, to restreine and to represse the violent crueltie, and beastly disorder of men, and to establishe social peace and Justice upon earth ... for that the nature of man is so evel, and his hart so perverse that there is no meane to bridle his furies, and to hold him any while in peacable order, but by feare of corporal punishment (Gates: 36).

There were some dissenting views: Bacon, for example, in his essay 'Of Goodness' takes that quality to be the greatest virtue, since it is of "the character of the Deity", and believes that "The inclination to goodness is imprinted deeply in the nature of man" (Hawkins: 37) —another view of his in which he takes a very different stand to that of his fellows. Yet for the majority of writers, philosophers and theologians of the period, the essential character of Man was corrupt, too easily inclined to evil, and therefore needing restraint or redress. Such was the origin, according to Gates and others, of the profession of arms. To Gates and others there is a direct and two-way relationship between the moral strength of such men and their status as warriors; Blandy, for example, refers the "good and upright minde" of the soldier, endangered if the commonwealth he

imagines is upset (Blandy: sig. Biii.v). The office of the soldier was, to such thinkers, one which grew out of necessity:

> Experience is the mother and nurse of the policies and governements, civill and martiall, private and publicke, guiding the counsailes and doinges of men with orderly discretion. Experience of the inordinate iniquities of me[n] founded the lawes and the iudgement seat. The experience of the troublesome furies of men founded Armes, and advaunced Militarie profession, for the repressing and the restraining of the tyrannies and noyfull malice of the wicked (Gates: 5-6).

Such is the need for moral excellence in the 'martialist' that Gates goes further in saying that the worst sort of men are not (contrary to the practise and opinion of some) fit to be soldiers, charged as they were with the defence of a divinely ordained and morally ordered society. Indeed, it is his strength of feeling on this issue that has driven him to publish: after elaborating further on the lessons of his experience, he adds that his "love" for arms and the "martial occupation" has

> made me (an unlettered man) to take unto me a notarie to sette downe in writing this drift in the defence and praise of warlike prowesse, against al co[n]temners of the same: for the benefite and encouragement of my countrie & countrimen (Gates: 6).

Gates' happy profession of his own ignorance of 'letters' —he has, after all, had to resort to a scribe — is in distinct contrast to Blandy's admitted lack of experience as a soldier, and yet both,

from very different worlds, as we can see, find themselves writing in praise or defence of the warrior.

Among other writers considering the importance of the warrior to a threatened England was Stephen Gosson, author of the notorious anti-theatrical polemic *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579). Early in his argument, Gosson engages upon a long digression upon the lost warrior tradition of the Britons:

> Consider with thy selfe ... the olde discipline of Englande, mark what we were before, & what we are now: Leave Rome a while, and cast thine eye backe to thy Predecessors, and tell mee howe woonderfully wee have been chaunged, since wee were schooled with these abuses. Dion sayeth, the english men could suffer watching and labor, hunger & thirst, and beare of al stormes w[ith] hed and shoulders, they used slender weapons, went naked, and were good soudiours, they fed uppon rootes and barkes of trees, they would stand up to the chin many dayes in marishes without victualles ... The men in valure not yeelding to Scithia, the women in courage passing the Amazons. The exercise of both was shootyng and darting, running & wrestling, and trying suche maisteries, as eyther consisted in swiftnesse of feete, agilitie of body, strength of armes, or Martiall discipline (Gosson: sig. B8?v-r).

The loss of these marvellous qualities is, to Gosson's thinking, something else to be laid at the door of the theatres. He cites "Bunduica a notable woman and a Queene of Englande" as an example, relating how she berated her Roman foes:

> because they were smoothly appareled, soft lodged, daintely feasted, bathed in warme waters, rubbed

> with sweet oyntments, strewd with fine poulders, wine swillers, singers, Dauncers, and Players (Gosson: sig. C5v).

Unlike her own naked, woad-painted Iceni, one assumes.

Like Blandy and Gates, Gosson sees the soldier as somehow partaking of the divine, although he expresses this idea in far more florid terms than even Gates: after maligning "Fencers", Gosson qualifies his remarks by saying that

> I goe not aboute the bushe with Souldiers, Homer calleth them the Sonnes of Iupiter, the Images of GOD, and the very sheepeheards of the people: beeing the Sonnes of Iupiter, they are bountifull too the meeke, and thunder out plagues to the proude in heart: beeing the Images of GOD, they are the Welspringes of Justice which giveth to every man his owne; beeing accoumpted the shepeheards of the people, they fight with the Woolfe for the safetie of their flock and keepe of[f] the enimie for the wealth of their Countrie (Gosson: sig. D6?v-r).

He rounds off his discussion on the subject by warning

> Bee not carelesse, Plough with weapons by your sides, studye with a booke in one hande, a darte in the other: enjoy peace, but provision for war ... the least discontinuaunce of Martiall exercise give you the foyle (Gosson: sig. D8?v).

To Gosson, as for many others, the soldier was the constant and unheralded defender of both his own and the nation's virtue, too little appreciated by wits like Nashe: "Some there are," he

wrote, "that make gods of soldiers in open warrs, & trusse them up like dogs in the time of peace" (Gosson: sig. D?7r).

As I have indicated, at the same time that there were points of agreement on various moral issues, there were important signs of dissent, particularly in relation to whether what might be agreed upon to be virtuous was virtuous in all situations. It is very clear that many writers believed that the virtues they espoused *in theory* for the court and the city did not apply to the battlefield. Della Casa, in the passage quoted above, makes it clear that he is, after all, making recommendations to men who will "live ... in fellowship with men, and in populous Cities" (Della Casa: 3).

Like Della Casa, Geffrey Gates seems more of a realist than a theorist, since much of his *Defence* focuses — somewhat disgustedly — on things as they are, rather than how one might wish them to be —though Gates is entirely clear on how he would like them to be. He insists, for example, that a prince should ideally be a paragon of virtue, yet he realistically acknowledges that this is often not the case:

> seeing that corruption doth stick so fast in flesh and blood, that neither Prince nor vassall can be without imperfections: we must allowe more libertie of infirmities, in the citie then in the field (Gates: 37).

There is an odd couple of ideas here. All through this work, Gates insists on the essential depravity and corruption of men, and of the need for the soldier, the "martialist", not only to

control men's excesses, but also to somehow rise above them. Gates is convinced of the moral superiority of the true professor of arms, and of the necessity of the soldier in a society where all men are not martialists. Yet he is not only willing to allow that some soldier-princes are not paragons, he is — unlike many monarchical apologists — willing to recognise that this is unavoidable. Further, he maintains that human society (in cities at least) is so corrupt that not even a prince can avoid being tainted by it. Finally he suggests that this is also to be accepted; but contrary to what one might expect, moral turpitude is not to be allowed on the battlefield — he insists on extreme punishment of transgressive soldiers, for example:

> For as the Armed hoste is the extreeme remedie to chastise, and to represse the insolencie, iniuries, and offences of others, so shoulde the regiment of warre be free from the same: & every vice in a Souldier strongly bridled and extremely punished ... For where corruption and libertie is suffered in a Souldier, there is the shame and confusion of Armes ... it is moste true, He that is fitte for the Chappell, is meete for the fielde (Gates: 37).

Obviously, Gates believes there is an essential *moral* difference between city and field — but he does not explain (or defend) that difference. This is a clear indication of moral pluralism, similar to that found in Della Casa: and yet completely antagonistic to the moral absolutism of their contemporaries. This is an issue I intend to engage further in later chapters.

The issue of the proper place of specific virtues also extended into considerations of social place. The 'confusion of degree' that was the source of so much anxiety to so many writers resulted in explicit attempts by Elizabethan authorities to quell —at least in the lower ranks —the restlessness which this confusion caused, and from which it was, in a large measure, derived. The most conspicuous result of these efforts were the *Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches*, collected and published a number of times during both Elizabeth's and James' reigns. Of uncertain authorship, but possibly revised at one stage by Elizabeth herself, they were, according to two modern editors, "designed for the maintainence of the establishment" (Homilies: viii). A number of the *Homilies* dealt, unsurprisingly, with issues of virtue, but one in particular has some interesting things to say. 'An Homily Against Wilful Rebellion' was issued as a separate publication in 1570, and collected and issued with the rest the following year (Homilies: vii), and it is quite clear on the subject of at least one virtue: "obedience," it says, "is the principal virtue of all virtues, and indeed the very root of all virtues, and the cause of all felicity" (Homilies: 559). It is, in fact, a virtue understood to belong to the ruled, and not the ruler: "the best subjects," it goes on to say, "are most firm and constant in obedience, as in the special and peculiar virtue of all good subjects" (Homilies: 564). As I will show, the obedience due a king by his subjects is of particular significance to *Macbeth*. It is presented, more than once, as part of a series of catalogues of virtues, catalogues which Shakespeare has various characters

express at various times. As I will show, the virtues agreed upon by Gates and Gosson, Blandy and Elyot and others all emerge in the text of *Macbeth*, often to be subverted —but not irredeemably so — by subsequent developments.

Honour, Deeds, and the Man of Action

Honour was an equally important component of the construction of masculinity in the English Renaissance. Notions of honour in Shakespearean England were still very much dependent on Classical Greek and Roman ideals, particularly in relation to the man-as-warrior. Elyot, for instance, extols Homer as a moral exemplar,

> For in his bokes be contained ... the documentes marciall and discipline of armes, but also incomparable wisdomes, and instructions for the politike governaunce of people ...where with the reders shall be so all inflamed, that they most fervently shall desire and coveite, by the imitation of their vertues, to acquire semblable glorie (Lehmberg: 36-37).

It is worth noting that Elyot gives the martial values precedence; it is almost as if Homer would be valuable for this alone, even if he (his works) are lacking in representations of other virtues.

There were some small departures from the Classical ideal —Blandy, for instance, rejects the notion that there can be anything honourable in the Roman tradition of falling on one's

sword (Blandy: sig. Diiii.r) —but in general the Classical world also served as a catch-all moral exemplar; there seemed to be, in the minds of many Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, a simple rule of thumb: if the Greeks and Romans did it, it had to be a good thing. And, of course, the converse held; Bacon upholds the Classical ideal in the prosecution of a duelling case, cited earlier. Bacon condemns the practise of duelling as not in keeping with the ancient models of honour:

> memory doth consent that Grecia and Rome were the most valiant and generous Nations of the world, and that which is more to bee noted they were free estates, and not under a Monarchy, whereby a man would thinke it a great deale the more reason that perticuler persons should have righted themselves; and yet they had not this practise of Duells, nor any thing that bare shew thereof; and sure they would have if there had bin any vertue in it (Bacon, *Duels*: 22).

The star Chamber Decree which resulted from the case — printed with Bacon's address on the matter —wholeheartedly endorses this view, adding that "nothing can be honourable that is not lawfull" (Bacon, *Duels*: 56).

Geffrey Gates, unwilling to let history stand in the way of a good rant, was also willing to espouse the Roman and Greek ideals as a model for his wayward countrymen. He sees particular promise in the way in which both ancient states hardened their young men for war, and using the occasion — typically — to take a swipe at the more mercenary elements of contemporary society. In his *Defence*, he reports how the

Spartans hardened their young men for war, and goes on to note that:

> The like considerations made the Romanes to pursue the exercise of warre (for many yeares at the foundation of their state) without wages or stipende: and whilest they did growe, there was never Citizen in Rome esteemed noble for his riches, but for his prudence & prowesse. Nay, the man of Rome that omitted armes, and became a merchant, for gathering aboundance of riches, was rather reckoned amongst the servaunts, then esteemed as a very Romane (Gates: 48).

Gates and other writers early in the period I am examining were more certain in their understanding of honour than later writers appeared to be. There was concern on the part of the latter that the true idea of honour was being lost somehow. Bacon lamented the "false and erroneous imagination of honour and credit" that lay behind the duelling in James' court, labelling it "a kind of satanicall illusion and apparition of honour; against religion, against lawe, against morall vertue" (Bacon, *Duels*: 11-12). As noted earlier, he and his fellow Star Chamber magistrates perceived the cause of this misunderstanding as a failing of judgement, certainly in individuals, but perhaps also in the body politic, the society as a whole. Bacon insisted that part of the problem was a lack or loss of "Fortitude" (Bacon, *Duels*: 13). The Star Chamber decree that was published with Bacon's speech also attributed the problem to a poor understanding, calling it "no magnanimity or greatnes of mind, but a swelling & tumor of the minde, where there faileth a right and sound Iudgement" (Bacon, *Duels*: 56).

The authors of the decree were quite clear, in their own minds, as to the ultimate cause of this deficient understanding: the rise of duelling and the misapprehension of true honour were both attributable to a "confusion of degrees", to social turmoil and uncertainty — a strange opinion, given Bacon's common origins. This was a manifestation of the chaos with which much Elizabethan polemic and religious literature had been concerned; Bacon himself, in his famous essay 'Of Revenge', referred to that act as "wild justice", one which, like duelling, arrogated the exercise of that prerogative from the King. In condemning duelling, however, Bacon adds to the charge the arrogance of the young bloods in believing that it was they themselves who were the arbiters of honour. His concern about the loss of life resulting from ill-conceived notions of honour was, however, a purely practical one:

> it is a miserable effect, when young men, full of towardnesse and hope ... in whom the expectation and comfort of their friends consisteth, shall be cast away and destroyed in such a vain manner [duelling]; but much more it is to bee deplored when so much noble and gentle blood shall be spilt upon such follies, as if it were adventured in the field in service of the king & realm, were able to make the *fortune* of a day, and to change the fortune of a kingdome ... what a desperate evill this is; it troubleth peace, it disfurnisheth war, it bringeth calamity upon private men, peril upon the state, and contempt upon the law (Bacon, *Duels*: 10-11).

In effect, Bacon is reinforcing the notion that it is not only honour that duellers are risking, but their lives; to presume to throw them away "in such a vain manner" is a sin against the

complex arrangement of duty and obligation and expectation that surrounds them. Again, the associated Star Chamber decree likewise lamented the loss, but further saw a propagandist purpose to maintaining the strength and passion of the nation's men for the wars. It regrets

> the casting away of much good blood, which being spent in the field upon occasion of service were able to continew the renown, which this Kingdom hath obtained in all ages (Bacon, *Duels*: 41).

Whether this "confusion of degrees" and decline in any certainty about notions of honour and virtue was more widespread is an issue I intend to engage in a later chapter.

To Blandy, as to many other writers of the period, honour was a quantity which might be innate in a man, but still had to be earned. Such was the quality of the Romans, he notes, "that not onely noble men were wonderfully inflamed with the love of glorye, but very many of the common people" (Blandy: sig. Diii.r). He refers to

> a thousand more being no gentlemen borne, which notwithstanding through theyr passing skill and experience in feates of Armes were advaunced to honour, and promoted to high estate, leaving to posterity fame and immortalitye (ibid.).

The implications of this are clear: a man of honour could expect to have his honour recognised — and rewarded — through "feates of Armes". And that was pretty much it. Della Casa may have felt that "chereful & pleasaunt behaviour" would gain a

man advancement, but his is a minority opinion; to Blandy and others feats of arms are the only way for a man to signal his worthiness. As he indicates, elaborating on the Roman ideal,

> herehence the armes and cognizaunces of honor and noblenesse, which even in these our dayes are borne, and had right worthely in estimation, did fetch their originall and first beginning (Blandy: sig. Diii.r).

While it was recognised that it was through the performance of notable deeds that honour could be attained, and therefore one's virtue amply demonstrated, it was also true that deeds alone could guarantee nothing; what was needed was an appreciative audience for those deeds. Castiglione notes that the courtier should ensure

> To undertake his bould feates and couragious enterprises in warr, out of companye [ie: alone] and in the sight of the most noble personages in the camp, and (if it be possible) beefore his Princis eyes (Hoby: 371).

He felt that even the rehearsal of martially-oriented activities had its proper place: he recommends some courtier's qualities — "To swimme well. To leape wel" and so on — as best done "Sildome in open syght of the people", but others —running at tilt and ring, tourneying and so on —should be done "in open syght to delyte the commune people withall" (Hoby: 371).

If it was only through noble deeds being witnessed —and witnessed, moreover, by the right people —that honour could

be accrued, then it might be said that honour was more something conferred than attained, and conferred, obviously enough, by those possessing themselves the requisite quality of honour. William Blandy makes this same point in defence of his position as a writer rather than a soldier; he insists that he too has his contribution to make to the discourse of honour, policy, and virtue, and in a rather bad prefatory poem he points out that not only do both the quill of Pallas and the sword of Mars have their uses, but that without the former, the deeds of the latter would go unremembered (Blandy: sig. Aiiii.v).

In general, though, it was understood that —as Castiglione points out —there were few who could serve as appropriate witnesses to one's great deeds, few who could confer the reward of honour on the doer. Bacon takes this idea of honour being conferred to its logical end in claiming that since the notable acts of any man should ultimately be done in service to his king, it is only through the recognition by the king of the quality of a subject's deeds that honour is conferred upon doer:

> The fountaine of honour is the King, and the accesse to his person continueth honour in life, and to be banished from his presence is one of the greatest eclipses of honour that can bee (Bacon, *Duels*, 17).

To Bacon, it is *only* the king who can confer 'honour' upon his subjects, and he recommends that this idea be exploited as a way of checking the rising frequency of duelling in the Jacobean court, since "there is noe man that hath any good blood in him, will commit an act that shall cast him into that

darknesse, that he may not behold his Soveraignes face" (Bacon, *Duels*: 17-18). The extrodinarily florid and penitent letters despatched earlier in the period by courtiers exiled from Elizabeth's presence show that this shame was one strongly felt, even if it meant only that opportunities for influence and advancement were being lost.

The relationship of one's actions to one's honour was therefore clear: it was through one's actions that one's honour — and, as I have pointed out, one's virtue —could be recognised. The obvious performer of these deeds, the man whose objective was always the achievement and preservation of his own honour — and, therefore, the king's — was the warrior.

Hierarchy

According to Sandra Clark, the notion of hierarchy, or degree, was a "magnetic" concept,

> around which was built up a complex of associations so vivid, so all-embracing, so universally explanatory, that all kinds of tenuously related notions were drawn towards it (Clark: 214).

It was, in other words, as much an obsession to pamphleteers like Blandy and Gates, to more respected prose writers like Nashe and Bacon, as it was to the authors of now better-known poetic and dramatic works of the period. Like their arguably more respectable fellows, "The pamphleteers universally

deplored the breaking of class barriers and the blurring of distinctions" (Clark: 185).

There was a definite tension between older, more orthodox ideas about society, about honour and masculinity and moral absolutes, and what might be called more realistic —perhaps cynical — views. The common ground between the two seemed to be the belief in the essential corruption of human nature, ever needing correction by law and force of arms. The tension between orthodox (absolutist) and more progressive (relativist) notions of morality was one that spilled over into the theatres, precipitating dramas not only on the stage, but in debates about the stage. These tensions will also be more fully dealt with in later chapters.

There is little questioning, in period literature I have examined, of the idea that the monarchical system was somehow ordained, that society was ordered in a particular way. That there were still fairly orthodox —which is to say almost Mediæval —views of how society was (or should be) structured is evidenced by Blandy's *The Castle of Commonwealth*. The metaphorical physical structure described in his imagined conversation with Geffrey Gates, mentioned above, is an example not only of this kind of thinking, but also its persistence into and beyond the Elizabethan period.

Blandy does more than describe his ideal Commonwealth, however; he also tries to justify it, and, in doing so, to priase

the perfection of the invention. He insists (in response to a question from his interlocutor) that no more is necessary to the commonwealth than the six estates of "A King, A Iusticer, A Souldiar, A Marchaunt, An Artificer, A Tiller of the Ground"; no one can "controle this division, adde unto, or diminish the number" since "The workmanship is so rare, the strength whereof standeth on the combination of the partes within contayned" (Blandy: sig. Biii.v). This "Palace" maintains itself in its perfection, its "proportion", and anything which threatens or upsets its stability has dire consequences:

> That which doth most firmely and stro[n]gly joyne and knitte these partes together is Proportion: which broken and defaced, not onely renteth and plucketh in sunder the frame, but tottereth withall, and tumbleth down the Prince, perverteth iustice, poysoneth and plucketh downe the good and upright minde of the Souldiar, robbeth the Marchaunt, ransacketh the Artificer, spoyleth utterly the simple and poore laboursome man (Blandy: sig. Biii.v).

Blandy subsequently sets forth the roles of both the Justicer and the Soldier in preventing this kind of chaos overthrowing his design, but it is interesting that in his warning against this chaos, it is the Soldier whom he identifies as the conscience of his commonwealth: it is "the good and unpright minde of the Souldiar" that he seems to most fear for. His belief in the significance of the warrior in this ideal social structure is explained at length in his book —though he is more willing to admit to the necessity of other professions than Gates. Nonetheless, it is also clear that, like Gates, he sees the soldier

as having as much importance to the *moral* quality of the commonwealth as he does to its defence.

What is also found in Blandy's argument, and is, furthermore, characteristic of this kind of work, is a discussion of the relative importance of each of these estates. Blandy and Gates and others are, as I have said, very much of a mind as to the importance of the warrior in the defence of the hierarchy, it is therefore, by their arguments, obviously the warrior who must, short of the king, take the highest place. Gates certainly seems to think that his fellow-Englishmen have forgotten this. He begins his *Defence* by asking which profession is most "honorable in worldly estates", which is "most necessarie for the maintainence and preseruation of the common wealth" (Gates: 9), and after a (tongue-in-cheek?) compliment to the "preheminence" of the lawyer in maintaining England's peace — "happie is the state where this is accomplished by the industrie and prudence of the peaceable Lawyer" (Gates: 10) — Gates becomes more aggressive. As I have pointed out, he asserts that "The onely meane to uphold the seat of Iustice, & all other estates, is the profession of Armes" (ibid.), then going on to betray his real sentiments when he condemns the lack of respect afforded his profession. To say that he turns vituperative would be an understatement; England is lucky in being an island, he says, since if the nation "stood in the continent of the world environed with mightie nations" it would need (and appreciate) its warriors more:

> then should it know ye value of a soldier, & lick the dust off the feete of her men of prowesse: then would the lawer & the marcheant humble themselves to the warriers, & be glad to geve honour & salary to the martialist (Gates: 18).

He is as sure that he and his fellow-soldiers are not being given the respect they deserve, as he is that his country will come to regret its disdain. He is not alone in claiming so, either. As the imagined interlocutor of William Blandy, in the latter's *Commonwealth*, he is a particpant in their attempts to resolve this dispute of precedence. Blandy, too, eventually comes down in favour of the soldier, mainly because of the sacrifices he must make:

> ... the souldiar so little esteemeth safety at home, content in his mate, pleasure in his children, solace with his friendes, that where his fidelity to his *Prince*, love to his countrey, honor of his upright minde, shall be brought in question, and stand to be tryed, he will not onely most willingly forgoe all these, but cherefully vow and consecrate his lustye limmes to tiresome labours, his body richly clad, to pinching nakednesse, his feeding nature, to starving hunger, his fresh and lively lookes to lothsome languishing; his sinowes to be severed, his ioyntes to be cut in two, his blood to be spilt, his carcase to be stamp to dyrt & myre. Where fore I see noe reason but that the souldiar may in the common wealth be preferred before the iusticer (Blandy: sig. Eiii.v).

Implicit in the belief in an unquestionable and (hopefully) unassailable hierarchy was the idea that men at different levels of society were possessed of different abilities, different qualities, and were therefore bound, perhaps, by different

moral rules. Less consideration is given, in Blandy and elsewhere, to the "estates" lower down this hierarchy; almost all discussions of virtue and honour, of right action and noble deeds have as their unstated starting point the fact that these are the concerns not only of men, but of men at the top of their society. Little in the way of good or right conduct —certainly less understanding of it — could be expected of the lower classes. The corollary to this was that the higher classes were proportionally greater bound by duty and expectations, and correspondingly more to be condemned for slipping from them. In a way, it could be said that the hierarchy described by Elizabethan writers was a structure of virtue; of a greater and more demanding range of virtues at the top, of different virtues for different classes. Nevertheless, the primary focus of *all* examinations of virtue and honour was the very top, the man held to be the paragon of virtue and the fountain of honour, the witness of deeds and the ultimate warrior: the king.

The King

The moral purpose of the soldier was as clear to Bacon, Blandy, Elyot and their fellows as the moral excellence of its embodiment, the king. To their thinking, the king or prince, "The cheefe man", is at the head of a

> militarie order ... ech sovereigne prince in his state & governement ... being a man compleat in all the vertues & condicions that are behoofull to one of that charge and profession (Gates: 36).

He is (ideally) a man

> wise in counsaile, temperate in life, affable in speach, faythful in words, courteous in greeting, wakefull in charge, provident in perill, abstinent in dyet, continent in life, apt to travaile, prudent and couragious in Battell, constant in wisedome, prowesse, and vertue: bountifull to the worthie, amiable to the honest, severe to the wicked, gratious to the afflicted, and mercifull to the Captive, modest in victorie, and constant in magnanimitie, not fearing the frailetie of warlike state and prosperitie, nor drowping under the alteration of the same (Gates: 37-38).

Gates is fond of providing examples of such men, both Biblical and historical, and he does so (at length) here —yet this is the same Gates who is willing to admit that too often rulers did not measure up to such standards. Gates not only believes that the ideal leader should be fit for the battlefield, he also maintains that the hot forge of war and the natural moral superiority of the true soldier are what *make* kings. He is convinced of the unshakeable connection between virtuousness and nobility, martial prowess, and a man's fitness to rule:

> But this is generally to be noted in the warlike Princes and Nobilitie: that as they exceede in militarie prowesse and worthines, so doe they excell in wisedome and all noblenesse of hart: and hee that will worthely bee called a militarie man, must cast off all vilanies and basenes of minde: and full charge his thoughtes and doinges with honeste inclinationes and like effectes. Neither are the commendable vertues of the minde so necessarye for any occupatione, as they are for them that professe and exercise armes (Gates: 17-18).

It was important that the king be free of "all vilanies and basenes of minde", that he be a man self-evidently morally apart from other men.

It is, however, on the issue of the king that Gates seems to differ from the majority opinion — an issue, too, where the lack of information about him becomes all the more tantalising. As I have pointed out, he seems to be a firm believer in the status of the warrior as an instrument of God's will. The warriors he chooses to praise tend to be Biblical or Classical; where contemporary they are heroes of the (militant) Protestant Reformation:

> For when the time was come, in the yere of our Saviour Christ 1517, that y[e] Lord set foote on earth to restore his Sanctuary, he beganne his businesse by a poore ministrie under the covert & protection of the most worthie prince Duke Frederick of Saxonie, and so encreased under the defence of the most noble Princes, Iohn Duke of Saxonie, & Philip Lantgrave of Hesse ... (Gates: 22).

and so on, at length, about the military birth of the Reformation. He is consistently full of praise for these noble leaders of the struggle against "the champions of the kingdome of darknesse ... the troupes of the Philistims [sic]"; equally consistent in his condemnation of various Catholic kings. And he does also spare some words for those "many Princes of the Christians, greatly endued with wisdome, civill vertues, and prowesse" (Gates: 40), naming various "Emperours of the olde

time" and more recent rulers, including "Renowmed [sic] Kings of England", familiar from Shakespeare's Histories:

> And hee of them that exceeded in miltary feates and prowesse, the same ... excelled also, in wisdome, isutice, and civill vertues. As did *Arthur* amongst the Brutes ... *William* the conqueror himselfe, *Henry* the second, *Richard* the first, *Edward* the first, *Edwarde* the thyrde, *Henry* the fifte, and *Henry* the seventh, and *Henry* the eighte (Gates: 41).

But he also shows himself to be a supporter of the 'rejection' of cruel and overbearing rulers: after expounding again at length on a favourite subject —the Protestant Dutch war against their Catholic Spanish masters —Gates relates how the Duke of Alva failed to recall the long defence by the Dutch of their "ancient compositions: and how they shooke of the tyrannous Soveraigntie of the French kings". Had he done so, Gates says,

> he would have endevoured his wisdome and labour to reconcile them by mollifying the government, and by gratious gentlenes and bountie, rather then proudlye to presse downe the yoke that had already wearied them (Gates: 27).

These may be strange sentiments for a proponent of the martial virtues —the winning of a kingdom by "gentlenes and bountie" — but the more important issue, to Gates, is the Dutch defence of their liberties. The kind of oppression they have endured, he warns, "cannot prosper ... for the Lord God in his Juistice hateth tyrannie" (ibid.). I do not know, however, if this is enough to put Gates within the ranks of one of the various stripes of miltant Puritans, advocates of tyrannicide, or other

politically unacceptable factions of Elizabethan England. He sees a clear difference between a tyrant and a true king, obviously, but —as I have pointed out —he is willing to recognise that "neither Prince nor vassall can be without imperfections". He will not bear "Dissolute soldiers" within the ranks of his army; how much the less is an immoral king to be borne?

To Gates, to Blandy, and to others, it was the essentially evil nature of humanity that gave rise to the office of kings — but only because the first kings were themselves above the taint of their fellow-men. Blandy, for example, discusses at length (Blandy: sig. Ciiii.r-Di.v) the primal chaos of human existence (and in men's minds) occasioned by the overthrow of reason by passion in the Fall. He attributes Man's escape from "this great darknes" to the advent of kings, and their noticeable moral strength and superiority:

> In this great darknes, in this common miserye, in this universall woefulnes, there appeared a man, who through his cleane and unspotted handes, his cleare & pityfull eyes, his streight and upright minde, drewe many extremely handled, to his reverence, love, and honor. Whome when they had noted, not onely to abstaine himselfe from villainy, but bend to Caytives and Murtherers a sterne and irefull countenaunce, and take commiseration of the afflicted: then these wretched wormes crawled unto him ... of whose sutes and lamentable complayntes, when he had taken compassion, and sought by witt and pollicie to ayde and assist, became unto them at length, a lanterne of Justice, a mirrour of mildnes and courtesie ... Behold here ... the fountayne and headspring from whence hath flowed the power and authoritye of kinges, the preheminence, and

> prerogative of princely government. Herehence soveraigntye, and the cause of all renowne and glory was derived (Blandy: sig. Di.v).

It was not only the moral superiority of such men that made them deserve to be kings, it was what made them kings in the first place; Blandy tells his interlocutor Gates that

> equitye and puissance were the rootes and raysers of royaltie, and that no king can holde long his sceptre sure, if his minde become base through injustice and dastardly feare (Blandy: sig. Di.v).

Blandy in fact develops as his principal theme the notion of the kingly virtue, and does so in far more detail than does Gates. He insists, as I have pointed out, that there are four "vertues" necessary to a king: "equitye", "puissance", prudence, and temperance. Of these, he considers justice (equity) to be pre-eminent:

> each kinde of vertue being voyde of Justice, hath lost his honor and estimation, whereas Iustice alone secluded from other vertues, retayneth still his especiall grace & dignitie (Blandy: sig. Dii.r).

He also, however, discourses at length on 'fortitude' as a kingly virtue: it "resteth in an invincible minde," he says, "Attempting for the love of some excellent thing, great, difficult, and dangerous actions" (Blandy: sig. Dii.v). He does not, unfortunately, clarify what "excellent thing" this virtue is to be exercised for, and indeed is never entirely clear on the nature of fortitude as he understands it. Sometimes it seems to be

conflated with his second-named virtue, "puissance", sometimes with courage. What he *is* clear on is that it is a virtue deserving of "many worthye and noble ensignes, and titles" (Blandy: sig. Dii.v). "[I]t is playne," he says, "that fortitude openeth the way to worshippe, and bringeth us most redyly to the beholding the exceeding bright and cleare nature of true nobility." (Blandy: sig. Diii.v). He goes on to explain how fortitude in the face of "calamities" distinguishes the noble from the base.

Blandy's third virtue of a king is Temperance, which "standeth in the true and iust moderation of our actions" (Blandy: sig. Diiii.v). While he insists that it comes "from a kinde of propentio[n], or inclynation, which is most deepely by nature in us imprinted," he also seems to say that it is *not* 'natural' or 'normal':

> For by nature we waxe hoate, angry, and cholericke ... This man therefore that can thus governe, and moderate the motions of the minde, hath wonne the love of Temperaunce, and shall be honoyred of all men as one indued [sic] with a rare, and singular vertue (Blandy: sig. Ei.r).

Of prudence, the fourth kingly virtue, Blandy assures Gates that it

> is the very ornome[n]t and garland of the other two, without which, they before spoken of, can no wise florish ... Prudence therefore resteth in the knowledge of civile governement: which learneth us not onely to governe wisely our sleves, and families, but to rule poleticklly great Cittyes and Commonwealthes (Blandy: sig. Ei.v).

It is a virtue to be 'traced out' "by the love of Eloquence, by the honor of chivalrye, by the knowledge and studye of the civile lawes" (ibid).

Blandy also puts foward a kind of map of the relationship between these virtues of a king, and what might be called the trappings or 'perks' of monarchy, identifying the ruler as one

> whose Scepter iustice raysed, whose soveraigntye fortitude defendeth, whose preheminence prudence ruleth, whose prerogative temperaunce keepeth in most safe and quiet estate (Blandy: sig. Eii.r).

What prerogative is being tempered here is not explained, but he does go on to explain that all of these virtues must "reste alwayes in perpetuall moving", so that no one of them may wither.

Above all of these virtues, however, is the important point of the king's own, higher, duty — to God:

> This is also to be required & chiefely looked for, of a king, y[e]t what noble acte soever he take in ha[n]d, whether it appertayne to civille governme[n]t in tyme of peace, or to martiall prowes, in tyme of warre, his clearnes and excellencye, geve most manifest notice and signification, that he setteth not store by humaine thinges, but doth with most earnest indevour & intention of minde, affect those thinges that be heavenly, and everlasting (Blandy: sig. Eii.r).

His interlocutor Gates agrees wholeheartedly with Blandy on all this, recalling that "As you in our March discoursed in this manner", he and their fellow-soldiers were 'minded' of "a Queene of place then farre of", about whose exemplary nature all then "with one voyce asse[n]ted". In some ways this seems to have been the cue (so to speak) for which Blandy has been waiting: he holds forth on Elizabeth as

> the perfection of a Prince ... whose fayth in Christian Religio[n], whose knowledge in learning, whose policie in governing, whose cleme[n]cy in pardoning, whose bountifulnesse in preferring, whose pittifull and tender commiseration of the poorest wretch that liveth within her dominio[n]s, doth not without great cause establish her loving subiects in honoring her, powring out dayly most fervently their prayers for her safe, long, and prosperous government (Blandy: sig. Eii.v-Eiii.r).

in short, the absolute model of all that he has put forward. It is worth noting here that there is, throughout Blandy's pamphlet, an erratic use of italics, and it is difficult to be sure whether their use is at the instruction of the author — a reasonable assumption — or at the whim of the compositor. In either case it is hard to see whether their use uniformly signifies emphasis; the entirety of Blandy and Gates' discussion of Elizabeth, however, is italicised, in this case obviously to draw the reader's eye to it — which leads me to speculate, given the dedication of the pamphlet to Sir Philip Sidney, that perhaps Blandy was seeking office.

For men so devoted to the martial arts and virtues as Gates and Blandy — indeed, to any warrior, perhaps to any man of the time —Elizabeth's presence on the English throne must have been at best disturbing. As is well known, she went to great lengths to avoid outright conflict with England's enemies, and this pacifism, combined with her gender, must have led to despair those who saw the root of manly virtue in deeds of note. 'Policy' was often a term of derision in the literature of the period, yet this was where Elizabeth's strengths were most manifest. The myth of kingship —dynamic, evolving even as Blandy and others tried to describe it —required that the true prince prove his virtue by means other than successful negotiation. In somehow dealing with postlapsarian chaos, the character of the king — indeed, the office of king —was formed in the same way Gates believed that the heat of was was still the test of a true man. To rise as king out of this turmoil was not only to be a paragon of virtue, but to be *the* paragon of warriors. To many of the proponents of soldierly virtue, this notion was so overriding as to suggest that any king who was not a warrior of note was not worth his title. After remarking on the interest of poets in "Bucklers, Battails, Lances" and so on, Stephen Gosson notes (from Homer, one assumes) that

> Agamemnon beyonde the name of King hath this title, that he was a Souldier. Menelaus, because he loved his Kercher better then a Burgonet, a softe bed than a hard fielde, the sounde of Instrumentes then neighing of Steedes, a fayre stable then a foule way, is let slippe without prayse (Gosson: sig. D6).

But by the time Gosson and his fellows were writing this notion hardly held any of its former weight; the king had become, perversely, a 'warrior' who did not fight. Instead, there had developed around the king or prince the complex rhetoric of monarchy, the notions of the duty or service done for the king, that the king was himself the ultimate source of and reason for honour, and the generally-accepted idea that the King was in all other ways the most virtuous of men.

After expounding upon the virtue of obedience, the 'Homily Against Wilful Rebellion' goes on to explain that for all the importance of obedience by good subjects, the "virtue and godliness ... wealth and prosperity of a kingdom" rely more on "a wise and good Prince" than on the people; it suggests, as Gates comes close to, that "an undiscreet and evil Governor" will be more destructive to a realm than unvirtuous subjects (Homilies: 563). And as clear as the Homiles are on the virtue of the ruled, and as other writers are on the virtues of the king, Francis Bacon was aware of the "vices of authority", those things which might create or infect an "evil Governor": "delays, corruption, roughness, and facility", he calls them, before going on to prescribe their cure. He gives special attention to "roughness", as "it is a needless cause of discontent: security breedeth fear, but roughness breedeth hate" (Hawkins: 32-33). As we shall see in *Macbeth*, an understanding of the possible vices of authority was an important part of the picture of its virtues.

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What I have presented here is an interlinked structure of ideas. Beginning with notions of virtue, I have shown how prose writers of the period related these to concepts of honour. These in turn were manifested in the worth of certain kinds of deeds, performed by certain kinds of men in support of a definite hierarchy, one which was, in turn, intimately related to —if only in theory —the notions of virtue with which I began. There were further relationships between these five concepts: being granted honour in turn granted or confirmed status in the hierarchy, and it was one's status which determined the nature of the honourable deeds one undertook. These deeds were, perhaps, held to be a manifestation not only of honour but of virtue, and the paragon of all these was, in the first instance, the warrior —whose objective, after all, was the display or achievement or confirmation of his honour.

At the centre of all of this was the king. It was the king who was the paragon of virtue, who, it could be said, determined what *was* virtuous. He conferred honour, through 'witnessing' honourable deeds. He was, in an odd way, the paragon of warriors, and at the same time both the head and the symbol of the hierarchy the warrior was to protect.

The close interrelationship of all these concepts was —as Blandy asserted — the strength of the structure. But it was also its most vulnerable feature: a challenge to any one of these concepts was a challenge to the whole intricacy of Elizabethan society. It was, moreover, a purely theoretical structure, one

which reflected less and less the true character of the society it represented, and the men it gave purpose to.

The texts I have skimmed over here cover a range almost a century, from Elyot's *Governour* (1531) to Bacon's *Charge Touching Duels* (1614) and a late (1623) edition of the *Homilies*. Like Gates' and Blandy's work, however, most of the pamphlets dealing explicitly with the issues of martial virtue and the status of the warrior cluster in the last two decades of the 16th Century: for example Giles Clayton's *Approved Order of Martiall Discipline* (1591), Richard Compton's *The Mansion of Magnanimitie* (1599), and Barnabe Rich's *A Path-Way to Military Practise* (1587), with similar works being published right up to the Civil War. What this demonstrates, I feel, is an on-going concern not only with England's military security and the status of the warrior, but also — as extensive Shakespearean scholarship and criticism has shown — apprehensions about the essential nature of masculinity, and its defence in the face of perceived threats from the theatre, foreign influences, and a luxurious court —hence two of the best-known tracts from the heydey of England Renaissance theatre, *Hic Mulier: or, The Man-Woman* and *Haec-Vir: or, The Womanish-Man*, both published in 1620, and, like Gates and Blandy, feeding off each other in a philosophical/moral strange loop.

As I have indicated, I have discovered little about William Blandy and Geffrey Gates other than the fact that they each

saw fit to publish their respective pamphlets at a time of on-going concern about England's military capabilities and national stature. Blandy has a brief entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, mentioning only his education and his service in the Low Countries in 1580. No other dates are given, and he is remarked on only as a writer on political and social mores. There is no information for Gates at all: the "unlettered man" leaves only a single tract to posterity. It could be suggested that the paucity of information about them undermines what little status they might have as representatives of a broader group of work, that their inclusion with such august company as Bacon and Elyot is ... questionable. But there is no doubt, in my mind, of their representativeness. They each express, in their own way, similar concerns to those voiced elsewhere in the literature of the period, particularly in the drama. They each put forward similar ideas about the nature and composition of the warrior ethic, the qualities and virtues that should be possessed by a man, or more specifically by a man who calls himself a soldier. They and the other works I have used here form the foundation of a debate which, like so many other issues, found itself being played out on the stages of Elizabethan-Jacobean London. Many of the martial virtues trumpeted by Gates and Blandy and others are bruited about in almost exactly the same terms by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and the other leading lights of the theatre.

Whether the work is by Bacon or Blandy, Marlowe or Middleton, the same concepts arise: prudence, justice, courage,

fortitude, “perseverance”, “puissance”; the idea that these virtues are found, or should be found, in the soldier; that they should certainly be seen in the king. Macbeth, as a (fictional) soldier fighting his battles in this milieu, is both acting out and acting in defence of these ideas. He is, as I have pointed out, immediately introduced to us in opposition to a rebel, a disloyal countryman, a man possessed of “multiplying villainies”. But, as we know, the eponymous martialist of the tragedy *Macbeth* is no paragon of these virtues or any others; he is a figure whom Alexander Leggatt suggests “comes closer than any other tragic hero in Shakespeare ... to being a figure of pure evil” (Leggatt: 189). And this leaves us with an apparent contradiction between the representation of Macbeth-as-warrior, and the wider cultural understanding of what that should have implied.

3. In vertuous maners

> For honour is, or should be, the place of virtue; and as in nature things move violently to their place, and calmly in their place; so virtue in ambition is violent, in authority settled and calm.
>
> Bacon, 'Of Great Place'
> (Hawkins: 33)

And so we are back to Duncan and his thanes, waiting on the blasted heath — on the stage of the Globe, or in Blackfriars, or in a dining hall in the King's Presence. Banquo and Macbeth, both, as yet, unmet, are reported in a way as to make them seem single-handedly responsible for the victory over the rebels Cawdor and Macdonald, and the invading forces of the King of Norway. Something in the ferocity of the battle seems to inspire the "captains", we hear —"they were/As cannons over-charged with double cracks;/So they doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe" (I,ii,36-38). It is only after all of this report, however, that the unnamed captain making it allows that he is "faint" and wounded, and now that this part of his duty to his king has been carried out, he is allowed to withdraw with high praise from his sovereign: "So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;/They smack of honour both" (I,ii,43-44).

And almost at the play's outset, we can see some of the concepts discussed by Blandy and company being presented. The captain is praised not merely for his wounds, obviously, but for the actions in defence of his king and the realm that

they represent. These actions —and his eloquent relation of them, even if his own part in them is not mentioned —are lauded, and it is since this praise comes from the king that we know it to be true. Here is the captain's reward: the recognition, by the "fountaine of honour", of the honourable nature of his deeds.

Blandy, as part of his explanation of the deserts of the true warrior, notes from Solon the use of "preferment, & punishme[n]" as the means for providing "the securitye and preservatio[n] of a Commonwealth" (Blandy: sig. Dii.v). With the report from Ross and Angus that "The victory fell on us", we see Duncan put the precept to performance. The battle won, he announces

> No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive
> Our bosom interest. Go pronounce his present death
> And with his former title greet Macbeth.
> (I,ii,63-65)

The traitor punished; the loyal warrior rewarded. But in this case the reward is more than simply praise from the king, it is a notable —and noticeable —addition of honour: a new title. A captain who is described as a sergeant cannot, obviously, expect as much in the way of a reward as a thane described as a captain. It is, however, only by Duncan's description of him as a "cousin" and a "gentleman" that we can know, at this stage, of Macbeth's 'nobility'. It is not until we meet Macbeth himself — and he has met the weïrd sisters — that we can be sure that he is numbered among Scotland's gentry, as the Thane of Glamis;

so it might seem that it his through his great(er) deeds that he merits such great(er) rewards. And so Cawdor's lost honour is added to Macbeth's, in what various critics have seen as a premonitory remark by the king (Braunmuller: 108).

When we finally meet this paragon of warriors, it is, as I have noted, as he himself meets the three strange women of "prophetic greeting". Their disappearance is followed hard upon by the reappearance of Ross and Angus, fresh from their audience with Duncan. Ross mentions twice in seven lines Duncan's 'praises' of Macbeth before he informs him of his new title[1], "an earnest of a greater honour". Leaving aside some of the implications of Macbeth's response to this honour for a later chapter, we can focus instead upon the reactions of his fellow thanes. Banquo describes him as "rapt", noting that "New honours come upon him/Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould,/But with the aid of use" (I,iii,143-145). It is not immediately clear whether Macbeth's discomfiture is a result of his not being accustomed to praise and reward from his king — a bit hard to believe — or some noble modesty; perhaps part of the rhetoric of honour and reward which prevails here is a certain 'aw shucks' stance in relation to them. Gates and company give us no clues to this, however: while being clear on how one might come to deserve such merit, they do not bother to describe in what spirit one should accept it. Perhaps the truly noble man or warrior simply 'knows'; perhaps it is part of the underlying model of manhood which props them up. In this

1 This is the first of many instances where Ross appears as a herald of what always, ultimately, plays out as bad news —a messenger simply crying out to be shot.

case, as soon becomes obvious, it is from the play itself that we can find the means to decipher Macbeth's response.

Before that, however, we have the strange relation of Cawdor's death:

> ... very frankly he confessed his treasons,
> Implored your highness' pardon, and set forth
> A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it. He died
> As one that had been studied in his death,
> To throw away the dearest thing he owed
> As 'twere a careless trifle. (I,iv,5-11)

Unlike Macdonald —untitled, as I have pointed out —Cawdor, too, was numbered among Scotland's nobility. There is no reason given for his rebellion, though many could be inferred. This, in fact, is the most we learn about him —that, all honour lost, he still manages to go to his death in a manner that elicits praise from his former fellow-countrymen. But a single remark here is a telling one: "Nothing in his life/Became him like the leaving it". It is almost as if the nobility that was his by title was significantly lacking in his character, only to be manifested at the last by his "deep repentance" and Stoic acceptance of death. Why, then, if he was so conspicuously 'unbecoming' was he a gentleman so trusted by his king? And why is it that the manner of his death is so admired by those who saw and hear of it?

I suspect that the idea, here, is not that an evil man may be redeemed by the manner of his death, but that the man was

so vile that the *only* meaningful thing he could do was die well. This is another important point, one also well established very early in the play. The notion of a 'good' death is one with a long history in Christian philosophy, and an important part to play in *Macbeth* —particularly since it is another action that a man might perform in front of the right audience, another mortal deed by which his honour may be measured or increased. I shall return to this point towards the end of this chapter.

But we also have Duncan's response to the news of Cawdor's death to take into consideration:

> There's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face.
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust. (I,iv,11-14)

Since we cannot know a man's soul —or at least thoughts —we have to judge them by either their words or their deeds. Cawdor has been so judged, and accepted, and yet this judgement and acceptance has obviously — from his recent actions — been based upon erroneous perceptions. As many commentators on the play have noted, it is no accident that, this warning having been subtly given, Macbeth finally arrives in the presence of his king.

Duncan feels, for some reason, that he has sinned in his ingratitude to Macbeth (I,iv,15), who responds:

> The service and the loyalty I owe,
> In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part
> Is to receive our duties, and our duties
> Are to your throne and state, children and servants,
> Which do but what they should by doing everything
> Safe toward your love and honour. (I,iv,22-27)

Macbeth, when not yet fully committed to the murder of this king, still perceives his own position within the political and ethical structures of Scotland in terms of duty. It is peculiar, however, that at this point there is no mention of what the king, who lies at the focus of all this "service and loyalty", may owe his subjects beyond the gracious and grateful receipt of their "duties". Even their protection is out of his hands; it is clearly another duty of his thanes. The king, the other thanes, and all the people of the realm can expect of the thanes and warriors their duties, their defence of the realm and the king; what the warriors can — and, ideally, should —expect in return is gratitude expressed, recognition given, and honour accorded. It is worth noting here that at the end of the play pretty much the same situation prevails, since it is clear that, even before he becomes king, Malcolm can expect the obedience and loyalty of the thanes.

The real obligations here appear to flow in only one direction —from the lower ranks, the warriors, to the king. It might sound cynical to point out that 'all' Macbeth and the other thanes can expect in return is greater honour, more recognition —that was, after all, how the system worked. But the mere fact that Cawdor —and perhaps the more mysterious

Macdonald — have seen fit to rebel against this 'system' (or at least its embodiment in Duncan), and the fact that Macbeth will shortly do so, are indicative of a feeling among some of Scotland's thanes that *more* is not enough.

What is clear, from these various exchanges, is that even before the first act is over, even before the real juggernaut of the play's plot has begun its motion, certain concepts are laid out before an audience or a reader. A framework of right action and attitude — a moral framework — is carefully, subtly constructed around the principal characters of the play. It is this framework that I refer to as the warrior ethic, and it is characterised by prowess in battle in the service of the king; honesty and openness; obedience; loyalty; duty; honour earned through great deeds and recognised by the king; a proper bearing in the face of adversity, bordering on Stoicism; and, ultimately, a noble death, ideally in battle. Some of these concepts are already familiar —they haunt the pages of Gates and Blandy's pamphlets, of Elyot's treatise and Bacon's essays — and they have stalked the stage in their purest form in the earlier history plays. It is this framework, the warrior ethic, that is my principal concern in this work, and particularly in this chapter — but in this chapter I will limit my examination of it to the way it is represented, deliberately demolished, and then aggressively restored through the course of the play. Many of its wider implications — and many of the play's meatier, well-known scenes —will only be glossed over here, saving their consideration for the following chapters, in relation

to some of the broader issues surround the ideal of the warrior ethic.

Harry Berger, like Thomas Nashe, sees cause for concern in Scotland's relationship with its warriors:

> In a society which sanctions violence, which relies on the contentiousness of its members no less than on their solidarity; and in which ferocity and praise mutually inspire, intensify, each other, the success of outstanding warriors must always be greeted with muffled concern as well as "great happiness". (Berger:14)

He is not alone in feeling so; Carolyn Asp has pointed out that

> Duncan's sentimental joy over the bloody victory emphasizes the fundamental weakness of a warrior society that condones and rewards in its heroes a violence that, unregulated by ritual or power, can turn against it (Asp: 154).

So the fundamental flaw of this system is that it is, after all, violent deeds — of a particular kind, pre-determined to be 'right' —that it rewards. This is behind even the looser notion of 'deeds' already discussed in relation to period texts, the "couragious enterprises in warr" mentioned by Castiglione. And Asp is, I believe, spot on in saying that there is a need, in this society, for "ritual or power" to circumscribe the articulation of violence in its warriors. In theory, all power is, in such a system, vested in the king; with their rather formulaic feel, both Macbeth's remarks to Duncan, and the purely rhetorical apology for ingratitude which inspired them, obviously form

part of the "ritual" which likewise constrains soldierly aggression.

Yet Duncan scarcely pays attention to Macbeth's response, further skipping over his thanks to Banquo to get on to the issue that he is, at this juncture, more concerned with – his successor:

> We will establish our estate upon
> Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
> The Prince of Cumberland, which honour must
> Not unaccompanied invest him only,
> But signs of nobleness like stars shall shine
> On all deservers. (I,iv,37-42)

Duncan is suggesting that by bestowing this honour upon Malcolm, he is somehow adding kudos to those he has already awarded; as if the reflected glory of Malcolm's coming accession will add to the honour of the other nobles —and, as king, he will, as his father, become the fount of honour to his fellow Scotsmen. But it is also clear that he is suggesting that such rewards must be 'accompanied' by other "signs of nobleness" if they are to mean anything. Implicit in this is his belief that Malcolm is obviously possessed of these signs of nobleness, and thus deserving of this reward. We eventually discover that the new Prince of Cumberland is certainly of noble character, and perhaps deserving of recognition for this alone, but in the terms of the warrior ethic of Shakespeare's Scotland, he has a telling flaw.

Like Macbeth, Malcolm is brought to our attention with no explanation of his status; certainly his appearance in I,ii contains nothing to let us know he is the king's eldest son, with all that might suggest to both an Elizabethan and a modern audience. We do not find this out until after the battle has been won, the danger averted, and the rewards doled out. As a matter of fact, the first thing that we learn about Malcolm is that he's not much of a warrior: he has to be rescued by that "bloody man" who brings the newest report of the war (I, ii,3-5). Macbeth, almost single-handed, can turn the tide of the battle, but the man eventually named heir to the throne has to be rescued by a lowly sergeant — whose reward, as I have pointed out, is little more than a pat on the back. Compared to Macbeth, or even the sergeant, what has Malcolm done —and remember, it is deeds that are supposed to be rewarded here — to deserve the title of Prince of Cumberland and the anticipation of the throne?

It would seem, from this, that something of a double standard is being applied; despite the fact that a single political structure prevails in Shakespeare's Scotland, at least two ethical structures exist as well. One of these is the network of ideals I have called the warrior ethic; the other, less easily identifiable, seems to be associated with the king, and the expectations and privileges of that rank. This should be no surprise: as I showed in the previous chapter, considerations of manly qualities and warrior virtues often extended to the king as a special case, as the living embodiment of the principles to

which other men aspired. Kings were still seen, however, as part of the same unified framework.

In Shakespeare's Scotland, though, the difference between Macbeth's deeds and rewards, and Malcolm's, and the different standards they suggest, place the king and his sons outside the structure of duty and obligation which surrounds the thanes, locating them, perhaps, in an associated but distinct ethical structure of their own. There is a clear distinction between the separated structures, too, one which the previously-cited 'Homily Against Wilful Rebellion' helps to illustrate, through its insistence on obedience as a virtue of the subject; a virtue belonging to the ruled, and not the ruler. Again, it is an expectation which works one-way; there is no countenancing of the idea that the king should be obedient to the reasonable wishes of his subjects. The duty or virtue of the obedience of the subject is another matter which becomes important in the play's resolution, and I shall deal with this later in this chapter.

Given the distinction of the virtues of the ruler and the ruled, it becomes obvious from his exchange with Duncan that Macbeth is a man expected to operate only within one of these ethical structures —the warrior ethic —and not the other, the shape of which is not yet clear. It is possible even that Macbeth is not aware of the existence of this separate ethical structure, one based in part on ties of blood. What, then, would a man raised within, thoroughly imbued with, the warrior ethic, make

of Duncan's reward to Malcolm[2]? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that it is immediately after this discussion and bestowing of honours that Macbeth clearly indicates he has begun to think about the weïrd sisters' suggestion. As Macbeth leaves, we hear Duncan agreeing with Banquo about Macbeth's 'peerlessness'. This quality is, perhaps, something at the forefront of Lady Macbeth's mind as she receives her husband's letter in the following scene.

Despite Macbeth's status as a superlative warrior, his wife's first apprehension about his character, on receiving his report of his meeting with the weïrd sisters, is that he is "too full o'th'milk of human kindness" (I,v,15) —at least when it comes to serving his ambition. Within the ethical framework that has, thus far, been established in the play, there has been little overt consideration of ambition, though almost any reader or attender of the play would be aware of it as a possible motive for Cawdor and Macdonald's rebellion. It was, at best, a problematic virtue to the writers of the period. Bacon wrote that

> Ambition is like choler: which is an humour that maketh men active, full of alacrity, and stirring, if it

[2] It has been pointed out to me that another issue, here, is that 11th Century Scotland did not base the succession on primogeniture; by nominating Malcolm, Duncan was, in fact, skipping over the next in line for the throne — Macbeth — and breaking Scottish law. Whether this would have been significant to the way the play was received is dependent on the audience's knowledge of this tradition —a question which is, ultimately, unanswerable. I suspect that the familiar territory of father to son succession would have been far more important to an audience's reading of the play, and their reactions to Macbeth, that the finer points of medieval Scottish law.

> be not stopped. But if it be stopped, and cannot have his way, it becometh adust, and thereby malign and venomous (Hawkins: 113)

It was, in these terms, something which, in its proper place, was certainly in keeping with the other manly, soldierly virtues discussed by Bacon, Blandy, Gates and others —an active man was one who, 'perpetually moving' to paraphrase Blandy, was perpetually demonstrating his virtue. But the authors of the Homilies understood some kinds of ambition to be unambiguously dangerous, most particularly "the unlawful and restless desire in men of higher estate than God hath given or appointed to them." (Homilies: 595). Before this qualification of 'unlawful' ambition is made, however, they make their case quite forcefully:

> ambition and desire to be aloft, which is the property of pride, stirreth up many men's minds to rebellion; so cometh it of a Luciferan pride and presumption (Homilies: 581).

The association with the forces of evil is reinforced by the comparison of rebellious states to Hell, and the assertion that the devil will not allow thoughts of rebellion to remain just thoughts, Lucifer being, after all, the captain of all rebels (Homilies: 586). Scotland, in this light, is crawling its way out of its own descent into Hell, a Hell possibly created by its own warrior ethic — after all, we know nothing of the state of Scotland before Cawdor's rebellion, whether his — and others' — ambition was "stopped"

In Holinshed, this driving ambition belongs to Lady Macbeth herself, “burning in vnquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene” (Boswell-Stone: 25). This is something only implicit in *Macbeth*, though easy enough to see in her derisive concern about her husband’s ‘drive’. Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth believes ambition should be accompanied by “illness” (I,v,18), sentiments which are perhaps the most revealing about her character —and they are almost the first ones we hear her express. When her husband arrives, she urges on him exactly that deceit for which Cawdor —whose title Macbeth now bears — died:

> Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
> May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
> Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue; look like th’innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under’t. (I,v,60-64)

Transported by thoughts of their future together, she can reject any notion of honesty, of adherence to a moral code, in favour of pure expedience.

Duncan’s belief that one could “find the mind’s construction in the face” (I,iv,12) could be seen as the dearly-held ideal of a man himself both honourable and honest —but it is a belief which has led him to be dangerously deceived, and Macbeth cannot but be aware of this. Coming so soon after Duncan’s observation, Lady Macbeth’s remarks cannot go unheeded by an audience. Yet they may come as a surprise; though we saw him troubled by his earlier encounter with the weïrd sisters,

our last sight of Macbeth was of a man apparently resolved to pursue the possibilities ~~the~~ they presented to him. Despite the fact that no one else in the world of the play appears has to have seen anything of concern in him, Lady Macbeth sees something in his face to make her doubt his resolve —he is unable to conceal his mind's construction from her, and her suggestion that 'fear' alters his 'favour' may indicate that he has again changed his mind —as we know he will do again. It is, perhaps, suspicion of this that leads her to say "Leave all the rest to me" (I,v,71).

Alternatively, he may already be practising the kind of deception his wife recommends. Either way, both are open to the possibility of taking advantage of their king's trust, of subverting the ethical framework of their world.

Duncan's arrival in the following scene carries on this newly-embraced practise of deceit. Once again, appearance is misinterpreted —the "pleasant seat" of Macbeth's castle gives no forewarning of the turmoil to come. The martlet, according to Banquo, only 'haunts' those places where "the air is delicate" —but this is not such an atmosphere. Significantly, the birds are also described as "procreant"; Macbeth's castle is where they breed, yet the castle's lord is himself childless.

Lady Macbeth repeats her husband's earlier evocation of duty, adding a little to our picture of Scotland's double ethics:

All our service,
In every point twice done and then done double,

> Were poor and single business to contend
> Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
> Your majesty loads our house. (I,vi,14-19)

The king's mere presence is a source of honour, another opportunity to serve. The real reward of this service is, of course, more service, and by her expression of this idea Lady Macbeth shows us that, as a woman of the Scottish nobility, she too is aware of the debt owed the king. Coming so soon after her reunion with her husband, however, her welcoming speech has a distinct air of hypocrisy, her duplicitous double doubling serving to mock, in its exaggeration, the ideal of service she pays lip-service to. Her husband's absence from this greeting scene is perhaps indicative that, unlike his wife, for whom this may be a well-travelled path, he is still uncomfortable with — or is it ineffectual at? — the practise of deceit.

In the following scene, Macbeth shows that he is developing a degree of moral fluidity, though of a particularly naïve kind —he wishes, child-like, to escape the consequences of his actions, to "jump the life to come". But he has not yet lost his awareness of the morality of his situation:

> But in these cases,
> We still have judgement here that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which being taught, return
> To plague th'inventor. (I,vii,7-10)

He seems, at this juncture, aware of his status as a moral exemplar, that others will imitate his actions, bad and good. He has, immediately behind him, the "Bloody instructions" of

Cawdor's revolt, and the personal knowledge of the effects of this lesson — hence his pause.

There is also, for Macbeth, a further moral issue:

> Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off. (I,vii,16-20)

In a telling but subtle deviation from the source material, Duncan is portrayed by Shakespeare as a virtuous king. In Holinshed, he is something less than this:

> Makbeth [was] a valiant gentleman, and one that if he had not beene somewhat cruell of nature, might haue beene thought most woorthie the gouernement of a realme. On the other part, Duncane was so soft and gentle of nature, that the people wished the inclinations and maners of these two cousins to haue beene so tempered and interchangeablie bestowed betwixt them, that where the one had too much of clemencie, the other of crueltie, the meane vertue betwixt these two extremities might haue reigned by indifferent partition in them both, so should Duncane haue proued a woorthie king, and Makbeth an excellent captaine (Boswell-Stone: 18-19).

Duncan's "clemencie" was seen as a direct cause of Scotland's troubles:

> after it was perceiued how negligent he was in punishing offendors, manie misruled persons tooke occasion thereof to trouble the peace and quiet state of the common-wealth, by seditious commotions

> which first had their beginnings in this wise (Boswell-Stone: 19).

He is indeed meek, but too much so; to paraphrase Harry Berger, he is the antithetic extreme of softness to Macbeth's hardness (Berger: 27).

There are, in Shakespeare's adaptation of this material, still indications of Duncan's weakness —the rebellion, the fact that he can be deceived by his closest thanes, the fact that he has to be fought for —but the more consistent, overt picture is of a virtuous man, *beatus vir*, a "sainted king" as Macduff later describes him. It still might be possible, however, for a reader so disposed to see Duncan's saintliness as the real cause of both Cawdor's and Macbeth's (more successful) revolt — but to Macbeth it is far more significant that Duncan is meek and virtuous, establishing the two as moral or ethical rivals, rather than political ones. The "double trust" he sees in Duncan's visit is an indication that, even on the verge of regicide, he is very much in two minds. In fact, he is in transition from the familiar moral framework of the warrior ethic to the strange, dimly-perceived and perhaps ill-defined morality of a king. It is, for Macbeth, a leap into the unknown — and one he quickly decides —temporarily —not to make. He asserts that his recently-won honours should be enjoyed (I,vii,32-35), not cast away with an act he knows will win no praise from the king — quite the opposite. Lady Macbeth's derision of him, here, is something I shall consider at length in the next chapter; for the time-being I will note only that her ability to once again sway her husband's

opinion is indicative of her weaker allegiance to the warrior ethic, if not her outright rejection of it. Eventually, her urgings have the desired effect, leading Macbeth to revisit the image of the deceptive visage: "mock the time with fairest show,/False face must hide what the false heart doth know." (I,vii,81-82)

In spite of a fresh —and more material —reward from his king, Macbeth, re-persuaded, can now go so far as to reject the familiarity of the warrior ethic by lying to Banquo, his other potential partner in greatness, denying that he has had any thought of the weïrd sisters since their encounter with them. But while Macbeth seems now willing to follow the weïrd sisters' lead, his fellow-nobleman is still uncertain; given almost the same temptation as Macbeth, Banquo cannot countenance any action that might detract from his honour:

> MACBETH: If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
> It shall make honour for you.
> BANQUO: So I lose none
> In seeking to augment it, but still keep
> My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,
> I shall be counselled. (II,i25-29)

Banquo shows himself to be still very much mindful of the proper teaming of honour with ambition — that honour can only be 'augmented' in certain ways; it is something that can only be granted, not seized.

After the murder of Duncan —which will be explored at greater length in a later chapter —Banquo soon has suspicions.

He ponders upon the prophecy made for him, "that myself should be the root and father/Of many kings" (III,i,5-6). For him, this seems to be enough "hope"; even with his apprehension, he remains clear on one thing —his duty to the king, whoever that might be, however he may have come to the throne:

> Let your highness
> Command upon me, to the which my duties
> Are with a most indissoluble tie
> Forever knit. (III,i,15-18)

Despite the manifest chaos attendant on — and perhaps resulting from — Duncan's murder, Banquo (James' ancestor, after all) at least is still capable of upholding the warrior ethic. The sentiments he expresses to the new king are almost identical to those expressed earlier by Macbeth, after his first encounter with the weïrd women, but before — we may imagine —he had conceived any plan. Perhaps at the time he expressed them, he meant them, but it is more certain that, in Banquo's mouth, at any time, they are sincere sentiments indeed. It is possible, in fact, that Banquo was never in any doubt about the more fitting response to the weïrd sisters' promises —to do nothing that might detract from honour. It is hard to believe that he ever considered acting in assistance to their prophecies, so when, before the murder, Macbeth wished him good repose, he would, unlike the sleepless usurper, get it.

Uncertain of the expectations of him in his new role, and confused in a new moral environment, almost the first action Macbeth performs as king is one born of paranoia, sexual and

moral insecurity, and a persisting reliance on the better-known requirements of the warrior — a violent reaction to any (perceived) threat to the monarch. As such, it is an action arguably worthy of a warrior — but certainly unbecoming a king. It is in this scene that we discover that Macbeth has decided to have Banquo and his son murdered, supposedly to forestall the "barren" effect of the sceptre. What he also sees is a threat of another kind:

> To be thus is nothing,
> But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
> Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
> Reigns that which would be feared. (III,i,49-52)

Macbeth has no fear of Banquo wanting his own shot at the throne —he certainly seems to think that Banquo is sincere in his obeisance, marking him, in his unwavering adherence to the martial code, as a morally superior being. This is almost certainly an invention of the dramatist's — the Holinshed Banquo is complicit in Duncan's murder (Boswell-Stone: 27), but in Shakespeare's scheme he becomes an important moral contrast to Macbeth. We already know Banquo to be a warrior the equal of Macbeth, but clearly someone who seeks to be no more, since he is a man who knows the appropriate limits to the warrior's deeds:

> 'Tis much he dares,
> And to that dauntless temper of his mind,
> He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
> To act in safety. (III,i,52-55)

He is not only 'royal' of nature, but brave — brave within reason, not foolhardy, a subtle addition to the warrior model.

"Under him," says Macbeth, "My genius is rebuked". Macbeth pales in comparison to this paragon.

But even with his personal rejection of the warrior ethic he has supported all his life, Macbeth still knows that it is something respected in Scotland, upheld by his fellow thanes, now his subjects. Despite the fact that this code persists, however, he is now too aware that others may find reason to try and escape from its strictures, much as he has done. It is, therefore, something he must now maintain as king, for its usefulness to him; in the banquet scene in III,iv he is more than happy to be toasted by the assembled thanes with "Our duties and the pledge" (III,iv,92). Again, this is a reminder of the 'duty' Macbeth himself claimed— as thane — to owe Duncan.

It is easy to imagine the earlier scene at Scone, after the tragic death of the old king. The new king, cousin to his predecessor, is sworn to protect Scotland, and receives the oath of allegiance from his friends, his colleagues, his fellow warriors. The oath would, I suspect, be similar in form to that made by Macbeth on receiving the new honours from Duncan; similar to that made by his wife on welcoming the king to her house; similar to the vows made personally by Banquo and collectively by the feasting thanes. But at both Scone and the banquet a particular was figure was conspicuous — to Macbeth — by his absence: Macduff. I say conspicuous to Macbeth because, like Macbeth himself, and like Malcolm, Macduff is introduced to us with little information — even his name

escapes us for some time. At his first appearance, admitted with Lennox by the drunken porter, he is just another thane, though he soon becomes a horrified 'witness' to the king's murder. He even seems, in his subsequent conversation with the hapless Ross, to accept the 'evidence' of Malcolm and Donaldbain's flight as proof that they have murdered their father the king. We, in the audience, or reading the play, have no reason to single him out from his fellow-Scotsmen, no reason to read any special significance in his absence, later, from Macbeth's coronation, and the (celebratory?) banquet.

But this absence is noted. At the end of the disordered banquet we discover that Macbeth did not "send to him" direct; as king, he could expect Macduff's obedience to his "great bidding" —even, it seems, a bidding un-made. His absence is material enough that, perhaps when combined with the shock of the grisly visitor to his feast, Macbeth can resolve to re-visit the weïrd sisters — where he quickly learns enough to turn his fears from the now-dead Banquo to the still-living Macduff. Indeed, there is, from this point of the play, a subtle shift in the focus of the action. Even in his persistent absence, it is now Macduff who seems to matter more, to become the subject of most interest to the weïrd sisters, to Ross, to the other thanes, and eventually to Malcolm. Someone we may have thought, up to this point, to be a minor figure, part of Scotland's martial ethos, becomes the single most-discussed character in the play.

After Macbeth's decision to consult the weïrd sisters, and their (in some versions of the play) fleeting frolic with Hecate, there is a confusing scene which does little for the development of the play's plot — little, that is, beyond first introducing to the audience the suspicions of Macduff, and now, perhaps, other thanes, about Duncan's murder and the real character of his successor. It is a scene whose confusion has been attributed by Nicholas Brooke and others to either uncharacteristic untidiness on the part of the compositor, or to a poor manuscript (Brooke; 52). He goes so far as to suggest that the scene is, in fact, unperformable as is — and it is, indeed, often cut in performance. Yet to do so is to deprive an audience of a key turning-point in the play's consideration and representation of moral issues. Lennox' speech, here, indicates more than his apprehensions about Macbeth. It also indicates a deep, if satirically expressed, moral disgust at what has transpired, as shown by the particularly value-laden terms he uses to relate what has happened: "gracious Duncan" is murdered, as is the "right-valiant Banquo". The moral of the latter tale, he suggests, is that "Men must not walk too late", a remark which might, if recalled later, undermine the both manliness of the sleepless (and therefore late-walking) Macbeth, and the inhumanity of the usurper and his sleep-walking wife. His doubts about Macbeth are confirmed by the carefully ambiguous gloss on Macbeth's murder of Duncan's grooms: "Was not that nobly done?" (III,vi,1-24).

Malcolm, the legitimate heir, as we must now see him, is, we learn, at "pious" Edward's court, and has become the focus of Scottish hopes; through him, says the nameless Lord

> ... we may again
> Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
> Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
> Do faithful homage and receive free honours,
> All which we pine for now. (III,vi,32-37)

There is an explicit desire for a return to the former state of things, when both homage and honours were freely given rather than constrained and extorted.

All of this is clear enough; the real confusion in the scene relates to Macduff, and from whom he received his summons (III,vi,40). This is not something I intend to try and resolve here —more important is that Macduff responds "with an absolute 'Sir, not I'" (III,vi,41). From this peremptory response, even though it is something we hear reported, rather than see for ourselves, we can discern something more of Macduff's so-far obscure character. Short-tempered, perhaps even aggressive his answer may be (though we already know this to be no fault in Shakespeare's Scotland), but it is also indicative of strength. Unfortunately, it also indicates the kind of moral absolutism which Shakespeare seems often to condemn. And so he remains ambiguous, mysterious; it is not until Macbeth's second encounter with the weïrd sisters —about which more later — that Macduff's importance becomes clear to the reader, to the spectator, and to Macbeth.

Arguably, Macbeth's second action as king —after deciding upon Banquo's murder —is to visit those same supernatural solicitors whose urgings have, apparently, led him to abandon the moral security of the warrior ethic for the constant uncertainty of the crown. This alone is enough to suggest — as if we needed the hint —that he is not fit to be king, a notion confirmed by the witches' anticipation of him as "Something wicked", and by his reactions to the various apparition's prophecies. The Child crowned's advice to Macbeth —"Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care/Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are" (IV,i,89-90) — is certainly not good advice for a king — any king — to follow, yet Macbeth immediately takes it to heart.

After the parade of phantom kings which so disheartens him, Macbeth is informed of Macduff's flight to England. Hard on the heels of the apparitions' warnings, it is doubly dismaying to Macbeth, and perhaps precipitates his vow that "From this moment,/The very firstlings of my heart shall be/The firstlings of my hand" (IV,i,145-147). What this promise represents is the fulfilment of part of the Third Apparition's 'bodement' — Macbeth has already begun to be proud and careless. The intemperate behaviour he has now embraced is unbecoming of any man, and noble, any king, if only because it represents a resignation to the impulses of emotion, of feeling, since it is the 'firstlings' of his heart he will follow. He follows this vow with a decision to "crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done" (IV,i,148). Following hard upon this is his

third action as king, one as unbecoming as his earlier royal acts: to determine upon another murder, this time of Macduff's "wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls That trace him in his line" (IV,ii,151-152). He seeks to perform the same total erasure of a Scottish noble line as he did with Banquo, and perhaps we can believe that his attempt, this time, will be equally ineffective, though equally bloody.

Poor Ross, again the bearer of bad news which he barely understands, tries to deliver warning of Macbeth's plans to Lady Macduff. An unfortunate effect of his warning, for the audience at least, is to further complicate whatever picture might be developing of her husband's character, particularly his moral standing in this increasingly immoral milieu. Having learned —from Lennox, in the previous scene — that "Macduff is fled to England" (IV,i,141), we hear Lady Macduff attribute his flight to "fear" (IV,ii,4). Ross suggests instead that it may have been from "wisdom" — a proposition she promptly rejects. She questions the 'wisdom' of his departure, and in addressing the puzzle there is a particular hierarchy of importance —in her mind —to what he has abandoned: "his wife ... his babies, His mansion, and his titles" (IV,ii,6-7), in that order. "He loves us not," she says, "He wants the natural touch" (IV,ii,8-9). There is a degree of histrionics here, sure, but Macduff's flight is one of the great mysteries of the play, one of the great callous deeds of the canon. It may, however, be an action questionable on emotional grounds — but it *is* the action of a warrior loyal to his true king *above all else*. Is this more important? Not to his

wife: to her it "runs against all reason" (IV,ii,14). And it is not only unreasonable to desert his family, it is unnatural —she cites the wren, "most diminutive of birds", as more willing to defend its brood than her husband.

But Ross disagrees. Macduff has his reasons, he asserts: "He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows/The fits o'th'season" (IV,ii,16-17). From the stand-point of the warrior ethic, familiar ground to Ross, this loyalty to the true king is perfectly understandable —yet the action that has precipitated this dialogue suggests — even to a modern audience, with less well-articulated or deeply held notions of honour —that Macduff is *not* noble, wise, or judicious.

It would be more true to say that Macduff is fit *for* the season, a season of uncertainty and violence:

> ... cruel are the times when we are traitors
> And do not know ourselves, when we hold rumour
> From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,
> But float upon a wild and violent sea,
> Each way and none. (IV,ii,18-22)

The moral fabric of Scotland is now so disordered that its thanes feel lost, and even Macduff's young son has a notion of the zeitgeist: "the liars and the swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang them up" (IV,ii,55-56). The Messenger's arrival, however, suggests that there are some remaining in Scotland with enough honour to know the right thing to do and to act on it,

but Lady Macduff's response to his warning highlights —as if we needed reminding —the inverted moral values which now prevail:

> Whither should I fly?
> I have done no harm. But I remember now
> I am in this earthly world where to do harm
> Is often laudable, to do good sometime
> Accounted dangerous folly. (IV,ii,70-74)

Like the wren, whatever efforts she may make to protect her brood are futile.

The murder of Macduff's family marks the point at which the old ethics of Scotland —of unquestioning defence of the realm and the king, of duty and honour —are cast aside, at least for the duration of Macbeth's reign. We know, by now, that we cannot even expect Macbeth to uphold those vaguely-defined values that might be associated with the king, since with this premeditated slaughter of innocents he corrupts the very *raison d'être* of both warriors and the warrior ethic. Gefferey Gates described the ideal soldier in part as "he [that] tendereth ye widow and the fatherles" (Gates: 35), and while such sentiments are never explicitly expressed in the course of the play, they are, I think, so much part of the broader moral fabric — particularly the tradition of chivalry — behind the play that they would have been taken as givens by the original spectators. The warrior — and more importantly the king —as a champion of justice is supposed to defend the weak, not wield the sword himself.

The murder of Macduff's family also leads into the most morally complex scene of the play: Malcolm's 'interview' with Macduff. There is something about the prince's early lines in this scene — the first we have seen of him since his precipitate flight from his father's murder — which suggest that he is suspicious of Macduff, and part of the basis for this suspicion is the latter's relationship with the tyrant: "you have loved him well — He hath not touched you yet" (IV,iii,13-14). He appends to this his first insinuation of his own 'fault'; a comparison to Macbeth that would warrant his, Malcolm's, sacrifice, rather than let him grow to become another tyrant. Macduff's response to this tacit invitation — "I am not treacherous" —cuts straight to the heart of Malcolm's concerns, and is a foretaste of his later replies to Malcolm's imputation of his own sin; he will excuse almost any fault in a true king, and will not embrace the treachery of acting against one.

Malcolm's counter-charge contains within it an echo of Gates: Macbeth is treacherous, he points out, and, as if explaining how this has come about, notes that "A good and virtuous nature may recoil/In an imperial charge" (IV,iii,19-20). Gates may have been willing to entertain the possibility that kings might be less than virtuous, but there is, I think, something more in Malcolm's words here. Malcolm is allowing that there is something in the nature of an "imperial charge" that may corrupt a good man, yes, but he is also suggesting that the charge requires something more than the nature proper to a man —indicating a belief that being a king is beyond 'mere'

men, even 'virtuous' ones. His use of angels as a symbol is a pointer to his thinking: theologically they are more than men, distinctly *not* men, and a king, as a being approaching the angelic, even the divine, is likewise more than a man. And if this is so, a usurper is surely something approaching the infernal.

His real concern, however, is that Macduff may have 'fallen' under Macbeth's influence. He is sure of Macduff's constancy — "That which you are, my thoughts cannot transpose" (IV,iii,21) — but he is not sure of what Macduff may be constant to. When he finally voices the source of his "doubts" we discover that they are very much the same as our own:

> Why in that rawness left you wife and child,
> Those precious motives, those strong knots of love,
> Without leave-taking? (IV,iii,26-28)

An action that we already feel to be morally questionable, and which we know to have had tragic consequences, is of primary concern to this young prince, and the concern that a reader or a spectator might have felt about it is now related to the broader issues of ethics which run through the play. Macduff has, as I have tried to indicate, been a figure who has remained, thus far, of uncertain morality. He was introduced to us in anonymity, without the accolades that heralded the appearance of Macbeth, and even Banquo. We have seen or heard of him doing a number of very strange things, things which might serve to suggest that he is at best aloof, at worst heartless and careless, culminating in this notorious action which no one else

in the play, sharing the same ethical framework, operating with the same notions of right action and duty, can understand.

Malcolm is Duncan's nominated successor, the legitimate king, and, therefore it is now he who is, for the Scottish noblemen, the true fount of honour. It then follows that any action he can call into question cannot be honourable. Thus, Macduff's desertion of his family receives the ultimate condemnation of a true king — and so Macduff's standing reaches its nadir in the eyes of an audience. It is this same betrayal that makes Malcolm cautious, apprehensive of a lesser treachery anticipating a greater one, treachery to the king. Macduff complains "I have lost my hopes" (IV,iii,24), but to Malcolm —to us —the abandoned wife and children are these 'hopes', and as his hopes they should have been more important. Macduff is so offended by this slur upon his character that he threatens to leave.

Malcolm withdraws, slightly, voicing his concerns for the state of his kingdom, and begins his real trial. He makes his second insinuation that he is possessed by 'vices' (IV,iii44-47) — and it is a measure of Macduff's attitude towards him that he does not, at first, believe that Malcolm's oblique reference is to himself:

> MACDUFF: What should he be?
> MALCOLM: It is myself I mean — in whom I know
> All the particulars of vice so grafted
> That when they shall be opened, black Macbeth
> Will seem as pure as snow ...

> ... I grant him bloody,
> Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
> Sudden, malicious, smacking over every sin
> That has a name. But there's no bottom, none,
> In my voluptuousness ... (IV,iii,49-53, 57-61)

The odd thing about the vices attributed to Macbeth — the same vices that Malcolm grants himself —is that we, in the audience or reading the text, have seen little of them. We have seen malice, yes, towards Banquo, towards Macduff, and we have also —as I have elaborated —seen deceit. The closest we have seen to luxuriousness, however, is the banquet scene, a scene more significant, I suggest, for the appearance of Banquo's ghost than for any moral overtones. Indeed, any indication of luxuriousness that might be read in to the scene would be very much dependent on the inclinations of a director or an individual reader. The only other hint in the play is one contradicted by the play's broader strokes —the same saintly Duncan whom Malcolm is to succeed is described, shortly before the king's murder, as having been engaged in "unusual pleasure" (II,i,13). Perhaps the king's habitual abstemiousness has fallen by the wayside under the influence of the scheming Macbeths. The suggestion of over-indulgence is also one with possible implications to the world outside the play: Anne Somerset notes Bishop Godfrey Goodman's lament on the extravagance of James' court: "Being a time of peace," he says, "we fell to luxury and riot" (Somerset: 37).

With Malcolm's condemnation of Macbeth it is, in some ways, as if we have returned to the same kind of moral

reductivism observed at the beginning of the play. Much as Cawdor and Macdonald were seen as evil men because of their rebellion —and later elaboration on Cawdor's character does little to suggest otherwise —so Macbeth, as a usurper, is now being seen as the embodiment of all sin. Perhaps, in the moral hierarchy of Scotland, treason and regicide are first in the rank of evil, and any man capable of them must, perforce, have come to them via an whole array of other sins —but this is not what we have seen.

The denigration of Macbeth represents another significant departure from the source material. In Holinshed, after the murder of Duncan, the new king "Makbeth" immediately sets out to undo those ills which had arisen in Scotland through "the feeble and slouthfull administration of Duncane":

> Makbeth ... set his whole intention to mainteine iustice, and to punish all enormities and abuses ... shewing himself thus a most diligent punisher of all iniuries and wrongs attempted by anie disordered persons within his realme, [he] was accounted the sure defense and buckler of innocent people; and hereto he also applied his whole indeuor, to cause yoong men to exercise themselves in vertuous maners (Boswell-Stone: 32).

He is, in other words, a paragon of the chivalric ideal: a defender of the weak, a champion of justice. He does, however, ultimately prove a bit of a let-down:

> such were the woorthie doings and princlie acts of this Makbeth ... that if he had atteined therevnto by

> rightfull means, and continued in vprightnesse of iustice as he began, he might well haue beene numbred amongest the most princes that anie where had reigned ... But this was but a counterfet zeale of equitie shewed by him, partlie against his naturall inclination, to purchase thereby the favour of the people. Shortlie after, he began to shew what he was, in stead of equitie practising crueltie (Boswell-Stone: 32-33).

Macbeth the upright soldier and worthy king soon shows himself to be Macbeth the political opportunist. His major failing — mentioned at the beginning of the Chronicle, and alluded to earlier in this chapter —is cruelty, and later in his reign this becomes his most notable — or notorious — characteristic. It is something inherent in him, and it is seen, again from the outset, as a problem; it is not even excused as something fitting to or useful in a warrior. Its re-manifestation in Macbeth the king has a particular cause: his wrongful seizure of the crown:

> the pricke of conscience (as it chanceth euer in tyrants, and such as atteine to anie estate by vnrighteous means) caused him euer to feare, lest he should be serued of the same cup, as he has ministred to his predecessor (Boswell-Stone: 33).

Other than his abiding faith in "wizzards", this cruelty is the only vice attributed to Macbeth in Holinshed; certainly the litany of sin given from Malcolm's lips is nowhere to be found.

So the charges of corruption that so colour our perception of Macbeth in the play do not spring from the source: they are

an an invention out of whole cloth, one owing extensive debts to the latent mediæval notion of the Deadly Sins and the Vice tradition in the Mystery Plays. They are, here, an invention necessary to the advancement of various moral propositions in the play, propositions which are either wholly absent from, or not materially relevant to, Holinshed's telling of the tale. In *Macbeth* the play, these propositions lead to the establishment of various moral antipodes between Macbeth and a succession of other Scotsmen: Macdonald, Cawdor, Duncan, Banquo, Macduff, and eventually Malcolm himself.

In Shakespeare's version of the story, Malcolm, having thoroughly maligned Macbeth's moral worth, continues his test of Macduff with an interrupted point-by-point elaboration of his own supposed corruption. The first sin he details is "voluptuousness", as he calls it, but Macduff places it with the broader category of intemperance. Perhaps an astute observer of human nature, Macduff is willing to gloss over this defect by assuring Malcolm —and himself —of the sexual appetites of Scotland's "willing dames", something of which he seems strangely proud.

Malcolm then assumes the vice of "avarice". This, too, Macduff is able to excuse, again with an odd kind of patriotism, a faith in Scotland's wealth. Surprised, Malcolm abandons his elaboration to insist upon his complete immorality:

> MALCOLM: The king-becoming graces —
> As justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness,

> Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
> Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude —
> I have no relish of them, but abound
> In the division of each several crime,
> Acting it in many ways. Nay, had I power, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth. (IV,iii,91-100)

He would, in other words, do exactly as Macbeth has — or at least exactly as he suggests that Macbeth has. He compares himself, both at the beginning and the end of this exercise, with the usurper, and claims, moreover, to be even worse. He seeks, point by point, to test the limits of what Macduff is willing to excuse in a king, and in the short but comprehensive catalogue of absent graces he hits his mark:

> MALCOLM: If such a one be fit to govern, speak.
> I am as I have spoken.
> MACDUFF: Fit to govern?
> No, not to live. (IV,iii,101-104)

For Macduff, the charges that Malcolm has laid against himself are so incredible as to make him doubt the 'truth' of Malcolm's origins:

> Thy royal father
> Was a most sainted king; the queen that bore thee,
> Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,
> Died every day she lived. (IV,iii,108-111)

Macduff proclaims Malcolm's enumeration of his sins to be the end of his — Macduff's — "hope". This is the hope which surpassed the one he abandoned —his wife and child —and is, from his reaction, the superior hope which drove him to weigh

the two against each other and act as he did. It is no wonder, then, that he despairs as much has he does at Malcolm's words.

This exchange between Malcolm and Macduff is another significant deviation from the play's source. Much as in Shakespeare's rendition of the scene, the Holinshed Malcolm decides to test Macduff by accusing himself of a succession of vices. In the Chronicle, however, there is a definite hierarchy of vice involved: the first, "intemperancie", is conceded by Macduff to be "a verie euill fault", but one which he can nonetheless overlook —so long as it is indulged in secret. The second, avarice, is "a far woorse fault than the other", but again, Macduff manages to let it alone. Perhaps exasperated, Malcolm plays his trump card:

> I am furthermore inclined to dissimulation, telling of leasings, and all other kinds of deceit, so that I naturally reioise in nothing so much, as to betraie and deceiue such as put anie trust or confidence in my woords. Then sith there is nothing that more becommeth a prince than constancie, veritie, truth, and iustice, with the other laudable fellowship of those faire and noble vertues which are comprehended onelie in soothfastnesse ... you see how vnable I am to gouerne anie prouince or region (Boswell-Stone: 39).

This, finally, is more than Macduff can take: "This yet is the woorst of all," he responds, "and there I leaue thee". Of this particular self-recrimination by Malcolm there is no sign in Shakespeare; it is an exchange telling in its absence from *Macbeth*. Here is one of the faults we can be sure Macbeth

himself possesses, yet it remains unconsidered by Shakespeare's Prince of Cumberland. When assumed by the Chronicle Malcolm it provokes in the Chronicle Macduff the reaction that needs a whole, if compressed, catalogue of sins in the play.

Truthfulness is, clearly, an important virtue to Holinshed, but for Shakespeare it is encompassed by the whole of Malcolm's "false telling", and is claimed, with a host of other qualities, in the prince's confession. The allusion to "constancie, veritie, truth, and iustice" is the closest Holinshed's Malcolm comes to the recitation of "king-becoming graces" that he utters in the play, and when he has received from Macduff the reaction he has sought, he does not even follow it up in the Chronicle with the systematic recantation we see in the play — saying that "I haue none of these vices before remembred" (Boswell-Stone: 40).

In Shakespeare's version of this discussion, Macduff's reaction to his prince's putative immorality is far stronger than that found in the source, and to Malcolm, this response is 'right'; it is a true and manly "passion":

> MALCOLM: Macduff, this noble passion,
> Child of integrity, hath from my soul
> Wiped the black scruples, reconciled my thoughts
> To thy good truth and honour. (IV,iii,114-117)

His "modest wisdom" has led him to be cautious in dealing with newly-arrived refugees from Macbeth's Scotland,

> ... but God above
> Deal between thee and me, for even now
> I put myself to thy direction and
> Unspeak my own detraction, here abjure
> The taints and blames I laid upon myself,
> For strangers to my nature. I am yet
> Unknown to woman, never was forsworn,
> Scarcely have coveted what was mine own,
> At no time broke my faith, would not betray
> The devil to his fellow, and delight
> No less in truth than life. My first false speaking
> Was this upon myself. (IV,iii,120-131)

Again, he gives us a list of virtues, this time his own. He repudiates lust, deceit, covetousness, faithlessness, disloyalty and falsehood — essentially the same charges he has laid against Macbeth. The correspondence to his earlier-recited list of "graces" is not exact, but it is clear enough, now, from his recitation of them that Malcolm knows exactly what they are, and holds each of them dear and true. Perhaps ironically, however, these virtues appear to give him little insight into his fellow-Scotsmen: he sees fit to ask the astonished Macduff, "Why are you silent?"

Malcolm's list of "king-becoming graces" also does not quite match the earlier list of vices, but what it does correspond with, and very closely, is the range of martial and kingly virtues explored by Geffrey Gates, by William Blandy, by Bacon and Elyot and others. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, most of the relevant texts (with the exception of Bacon's *Charge Touching Duels*) were written and circulated in the latter half of the 16th Century, anywhere between ten and eighty years

before the ill-defined first performance date of *Macbeth*. Yet despite this span of time here are the same ideas, catalogued and represented on stage, being — we are encouraged to believe, for a short time —enthusiastically tossed out by the legitimate heir to the Scottish throne; and this action itself, in a situation the implications of which I will deal with later, is being performed before a king who is, in the world outside the play, the incumbent on both the Scottish and English thrones. More relevant here, however, is the fact that this list of graces, unlike the preceding catalogue of sin, is not entirely a creation of the dramatist, but an appropriation of matter from an earlier and obviously extensive debate.

The various lists in this scene — Macbeth's vices and Malcolm's own, supposedly absent and then suddenly restored virtues — show that Malcolm is possessed of a clear moral sense, even if he is representing it, here, by inversion. By so demonstrating his awareness of the warrior virtues under siege in Scotland, and forcefully declaring his allegiance to them, Malcolm is establishing himself as the obvious candidate to oversee their restoration. A spectator of an early performance of *Macbeth* would have been no more convinced by Malcolm's self-accusations than a late 20th Century reader, intimate with the whole of the text, since there are, after all, certain inescapable 'rules' to the development of plot in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and one of them —rarely violated —is than some hope of redemption must remain in the play. Even without an appropriate knowledge of 11th century Scottish

history and the but-newly-crowned King James' ancestry, an astute spectator of the play would, after the debate with Macduff, have readily targeted Malcolm as the choice candidate. Alongside his now-obvious moral worth, he is also— as I have pointed out several times — the named heir, and that, in itself, would have been enough for a London playgoer, still recovering from the uncertainty about the succession which had dogged most of Elizabeth's reign.

In falsely likening himself to Macbeth, Malcolm establishes the final moral antipode to the usurper. Much as the former thane confronted Cawdor with "self-comparisons", so, it seems, will this Prince of Cumberland confront this new rebel, with the same result —the triumph of a morally upright man, one true to the warrior ethic, over another possessed of "The multiplying villainies of nature". And yet —again —an observer with the privileged position of an experienced reader will know that things do no, in fact, fall out in quite this way. It will not be Malcolm who ultimately deals with this new rebel, but his subject, the far less morally unambiguous Macduff. Malcolm's conspicuous absence from the ultimate violent resolution of moral conflict in the play is not, I suggest, without precedent in the world of the play — but this is a point I shall cover towards the end of this chapter.

I will insist, however, that at this stage Macduff does remain a morally ambiguous character. Integrity he may possess but, however strong his ultimate indignation, his

desperate willingness to excuse increasingly outrageous vice in his liege lord do little to encourage us to see him as any paragon himself. He remains tainted by his aloofness, by his abandonment of his family —until, that is, his obvious grief at the report of their murders. In a return to the beginning of his trial, he again rejects tears as a fit response to this new crime, choosing instead a vow of "manly" action: "Front to front / Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself; / Within my sword's length set him" (IV,iii,235-237). Much of the implications of Macduff's grief-waxing-wroth, and Malcolm's feeding of it, I will leave until the following chapter; for the time-being I will return to my main theme here and note that Macduff's promise of action is one certainly consonant with the warrior ethic. Moreover, it is a promise which signals Malcolm's final commitment to the re-establishment of this ethic within Scotland.

This is certainly borne out in the following scene, where the other Scottish thanes are preparing to abandon the usurper and join the true king. Lennox notes that in the 'file' of Malcolm's men are "many unrough youths" (V,ii,10) of untried mettle. They are, we soon realise, participants in a moral struggle, between the inverted morality of the usurper, and the ancient order of duty and obligation he has overthrown. Caithness reports of Macbeth that

> Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him
> Do call it valiant fury, but for certain
> He cannot buckle his distempered cause
> Within the belt of rule. (V,ii,13-16)

Macbeth's 'cause' is beyond rule, beyond order. Since the proper order of things has been disrupted by his actions, he cannot rely upon it helping him. "Those he commands," notes Angus, "move only in command,/Nothing in love" (V,ii,19-20). The 'service' and 'loyalty' Macbeth admits owing to Duncan are not due to him, and he is aware of this, lamenting, in the following scene, that "honour" and "obedience" are no longer things he can claim to possess, or look forward to (V,iii,24-26). Those thanes who have not already deserted him recognise this as well: "march we on", adds Caithness, "To give obedience where 'tis truly owed" (V,ii,25-26). The forces of the Scottish nobility are now, as they were at the play's outset, committed to the defence of Scotland's king, and the warrior ethic they have seen undermined. In some ways, moreover, this late moral awakening of the other thanes might do something to redeem Macduff to us — he has, after all, already give his "obedience" to the 'right' person.

Malcolm is certainly aware that the obedience he is owed as legitimate heir is something he can now count on. He has been appraised — possibly by the defecting thanes — of the state of things in Scotland; that Macbeth, now a true tyrant, cannot rely on, and does not deserve, the loyalty of his people: "none serve with him but constrainèd things/Whose hearts are absent too" (V,iv,13-14). Macduff immediately underscores the legitimacy of Malcolm's efforts, declaring

> Let our just censures
> Attend the true event and put we on
> Industrious soldiership. (V,iv,14-16)

There is no doubt —obviously —that this is what is needed now. It is the warrior ethic that binds these men together, "industrious soldiership" under the leadership of the legitimate king that will restore the code to Scotland. Malcolm himself acknowledges this by observing that "certain issues strokes must arbitrate" (V,iv,20).

One curious feature of the battle which began the play is that Duncan, lord of the realm, is not a participant in it. This is not, I concede, stated explicitly in the play's text —and I am sure that there is a long performance tradition of *Macbeth* which would have Duncan entering, armed cap-a-pìe, in vigorous defence of his realm. But amidst a host of other kings, true and false, who enter the stage fighting furiously, Duncan is presented to us with alarums and attendants, "meeting a bleeding Captain", who is obviously coming from the battle in which it is difficult to imagine the saintly Scottish king participating. Like a modern-day general he inhabits —one may imagine —his field tent, receiving the latest despatches and reports, perhaps sending off his instructions, but leaving the actual fighting to his thanes. There are a number of possible explanations for this — Duncan is, after all, old, and his absence from the field may be due to no other reason. But to Gates and Blandy and company, the warrior was the paragon of virtue, and the king the paragon of warriors. It was through testing

and proof in battle that men showed themselves fit to be kings —and yet, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, they were writing in defence of this idea at a time when it was highly unlikely that a king would take to the field in defence of his own kingdom. That successive English kings were later to do so in civil wars which would, I think, have led Gates and Blandy, had they still been alive, to fight on opposite sides, was not something that either of them would have been able to believe possible —certainly not with the example of Elizabeth before them.

None of the virtues in Malcolm's catalogue of kingly graces — "justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness, Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude" —are explicitly martial. All of them, certainly, are set out by Gates and Blandy as martial virtues, but none of them —with the possible exception of courage — relate to a man's capabilities on the battlefield; only to his moral fitness to properly exercise those capabilities in the service of his king. The king, in turn, is the embodiment and focus of these virtues; he has other men, lesser men, to fight for him; he himself has nothing to prove, no greater honour to earn. This is confirmed by the nature of Malcolm's repudiation of his own supposed vices: whereas the warriors of Scotland are measured by their deeds, their moral worth gauged by things they have done, the legitimate future king asserts his own moral worth in terms of things he has *not* done. This absence of action is, to my thinking, the most impotant difference between the well-established warrior ethic

of Scotland's thanes, and the connected but distinct moral framework of the king which was so subtly mapped out at the beginning of the play.

Macbeth, when we return to him, is holed up in Dunsinane. He has called for —and, eventually, received —his armour; he has vowed that he will "fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked" (V,ii,32). But despite the assurances of the various apparitions, he now seems reluctant to venture the field. We have been told (V,ii,12) that he has strongly fortified the castle; now, as we have already learned from Malcolm and his followers, he is prepared for a siege:

> Our castle's strength
> Will laugh a siege to scorn; here let them lie
> Till famine and the ague eat them up.
> Were they not forced with those that should be ours,
> We might have met them dareful, beard to beard,
> And beat them backward home. (V,v,2-7)

Macbeth has been assured of an almost-invulnerability; it is he who is to "laugh to scorn" the power of men. But here he is relying on the strong defences of a castle to protect him. He wishes the sickness of Scotland upon his foes, and uses the 'betrayal' by the thanes as an excuse to not fight. Where is that "brave Macbeth ... Valour's minion", of whom we were told at the beginning of the play? Where is the model of martial prowess, "Bellona's bridegroom"? Perhaps, as a king, he is aware that —as king —he does not have to fight. But unlike Duncan, he cannot count on his thanes and fellow-countrymen

to fight for him. Like the long-defeated rebel Cawdor, he has had to resort to savage Irish mercenaries. But after report of his wife's death, and a series of increasingly despairing soliloquies, Macbeth finally shows himself to be —in the play's own terms — no true king, by undertaking to fight. It is almost as if he has, somehow, been spurred on by Lady Macbeth's death; without his dearest partner of greatness — without "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" (V,iii,25), as he laments earlier — he can seen no other option but to hasten the end. After a final wish for chaos, for and end to his life and everything else, he returns at last to the familiar standards of the warrior ethic, still entirely inappropriate to a king: "Blow wind, come wrack;/At least we'll die with harness on our back" (V,v,50-51). Like Cawdor at his end, Macbeth is still subject to the soldierly paradigm which sees a death in battle as the only way to go.

He soon shows himself, however, to have become something of a coward. In an echo of Blandy, Macbeth refuses suicide, the escape of the "Roman fool" (V,viii1-2), and then admits that, despite the second Apparition's warning — contradicted by the first — he has "avoided" Macduff. The confrontation is inevitable, however, and when they finally meet he shows traces of guilt, remorse, perhaps even mercy, all of which spring only from the fear he must feel for the man he now faces, the man whose wife and son he had killed, rather than from any resurrected moral sense. The fear takes its deepest root when Macduff confirms his bloody birth, and

Macbeth realises the way he has been deceived. The true measure of how far he has fallen from the warrior ideal comes when he refuses to fight Macduff (V,viii,22). To the latter, another man thoroughly imbued with Scotland's warrior ethic, this refusal is a clear indication of Macbeth's cowardice, and, by extension, his lack of fitness to be either king or warrior; it is only in the face of degrading comparisons, to monsters and things less than human, that Macbeth finally fights.

Unlike Macbeth, Malcolm's only appearance on the field is after the battle has been lost and won, and even then, it is in association with a conspicuous lack of martial violence, when he is welcomed to Macbeth's "gently rendered" castle (V,vii,25). Like his father —like, we may suppose, any true king —there has been no need for this prince to fight, and this might suggest a return to the two-fold moral order represented at the play's outset. There is further evidence to support this in the source material, evidence which suggests that the virtuous Malcolm may be even more like his saintly father than might be immediately obvious. Early in the Chronicle version of the story Duncan is described as having "small skill in warlike affaires", a deficiency which leads Macbeth, "speaking much against the kings softnes", to take charge of the battle:

> he promised notwithstanding, if the charge were committed vnto him and vnto Banquho, so to order the matter, that the rebels should shortly be vanquished & quite put down (Boswell-Stone: 20).

In the similar warrior ethic of Holinshed's Scotland — and in the thinking of Gates and Blandy — Macbeth's success in this enterprise would clearly indicate his greater suitability for the throne. Yet it is Duncan who is King of Scotland, and his son Malcolm — who we may still assume to be a less-than-competent warrior — who succeeds him: both men who are poor representations of the warrior ethic.

Malcolm's accession to the throne indicates that the pre-existing kingly ethic (for want of a better term) has been restored; our confirmation that the warrior ethic once again prevails comes with the report of a new, if posthumous, embodiment of the warrior ethic. Siward, reassuring the new king that the day was won cheaper than they might expect, is told that the price is dearer than he knows, and just as Malcolm has stepped into his father's role, we hear of another young nobleman who has fulfilled his father's — very different — expectations[3]. Once again it is Ross who must deliver bad news, and once again he is completely wrong in his expectations of how it will be received:

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

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[3] In Holinshed, this anecdote is related to the story of Macbeth, but only in the report of an earlier English invasion of Scotland during his reign — one led by the same "warlike Siward". This encounter likewise results in Young Siward's death, with much the same sentiments being expressed. That Shakespeare chose to include it in his version of Macbeth's tale only confirms, to me, the importance of the story to his picture of the warrior ethic.

But like a man he died. (V,ix,5-9)

Young Siward has confirmed his adherence to the warrior with a bloody chrism, through fighting —and dying —in a battle to restore a true king. Ross, characteristically, puts the best spin he can on things, but even with this distinctly positive report behind him, it could be that he — and certainly Malcolm — expect more of a reaction from Siward:

> SIWARD: Had he his hurts before?
> ROSS: Ay, on the front.
> SIWARD: Why then, God's soldier he be;
> Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
> I would not wish them to a fairer death.
> And so his knell is knolled. (V,ix,12-17)

To "warlike Siward", this is, if not the best he could have hoped for in his son's first protestation of manhood, certainly among the better outcomes: a fair death and a proven worth. Malcolm, however, obviously feels more of an epitaph is needed; "He's worth more sorrow," he says, "And that I'll spend for him". Siward is nonetheless adamant: "He's worth no more;/They say he parted well and paid his score, /And so God be with him" (V,ix,18-20). Malcolm has accepted a king's role; Young Siward has played out a soldier's. With the nominated successor about to troupe off to Scone with his troops of friends, and with an expression of admiration for a noble death like —yet totally unlike —that granted to Cawdor, it is easy to believe that Scotland has come full circle, and returned to the same ethical structures which it inhabited before, capped of by a virtuous king on the throne. We even have, perhaps, a replacement for

Macbeth —for the original, virtuous Macbeth —in the tyrant-slaying Macduff.

This possible circularity in *Macbeth* is an issue I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 5; for the present, I will suggest only that at play's end there has in Shakespeare's Scotland been no moral evolution, only restoration, and a restoration entirely unquestioned. No one in the world of the play seems to see the root of Scotland's recurrent ills in its warrior ethic, in its pattern of duty and obligation that appears, to the cold eye of the critic, to flow all one way. Malcolm's reaction to Siward's phlegmatism is the only hint, here, that there may be a more complex ethos evolving in Scotland, but I suspect it is a misleading hint. This is the same Malcolm who, after all, turned Macduff away from an emotional response to the news of his family's murder. He is not, however, being inconsistent and urging Siward to a greater display of emotion; rather, he is urging the better recognition of a soldierly, manly death — the same kind of recognition that could give respect to Cawdor even on the block. And so the same warrior ethic which was represented so graphically in the play's opening scenes still prevails, bloodily reinforced by the new comfort of a traitor's head.

4. His naturall perfection

> CLAUDIO: O, what men dare do! what men may do! what men daily do, not knowing what they do!
> *Much Ado About Nothing*, IV,i,17-18

> "The artifice of theatre reveals the artifice of gender."
> (Dollimore: xxxvi)

The title of "Bellona's bridegroom" immediately introduces, through Macbeth, the question of gender relations in the play: between a man and his wife, certainly, but also, through its explicit connection of an aggressively male warrior with a female god of war, a man's notions of his own sexuality, and, through the understanding of war as a collective (male) effort, his relation to other men, other warriors, around him. It also raises questions about a man's identity in relation to a pagan god, perhaps even, by extension, to the Christian one.

But before Macbeth is granted this deeply allusive label, we have already heard something of him, through the offices of the three witches and their portentous remarks. The weïrd sisters have been the subject of extensive analyses of the play's gender and power relations: marginalised, re-centred, dissected and reconstructed. They do, I concede, represent one of the extremes of gender identity in *Macbeth*, particularly since their gender is,

so early in the play, called into doubt. Certainly the witches, as powerful women, constitute a potential site of subversion in the play, even when their superficial female exterior is balanced against the interior male substance of the actors playing the roles. This, in itself, is also a focus of a great deal of critical attention, some of which I will touch upon in the course of this chapter, but in general I am deliberately avoiding any examination of the witches' status as contentious women; my interest here is on the less well-mined vein of Scotland's men. Some of the ideas of manhood which are represented in the play do, however, consider Scotland's men in relation to its women, most notably Macbeth's complex relationship with his wife.

If Macbeth is "Bellona's bridegroom", how then are we to see his wife? Can we see her as this ancient personification of armed conflict? Obviously not: ~~all~~ she takes no part in the two battles which frame *Macbeth* — but, as is well known, she provides to her husband a strong impetus early in the play, one which, puzzlingly, frustratingly, seems to disappear after Duncan's murder. Lady Macbeth's relationship with her husband, her understanding and endorsement of the warrior ethic, and her failure to maintain her early and — in the context of the play — thoroughly masculine aggression, are all at the core of an important aspect of Scotland's ethical structures: their gender specificity.

Michel Foucault notes, with particular reference to Classical Greek ethics, that

> It was an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written, and taught by men, and addressed to men ... it did not try to define a field of conduct and a domain of valid rules ... for the two sexes in common; it was an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to their behaviour (Foucault, 1992: 22-23).

Historically, this has continued to be the case, and it is certainly the case in *Macbeth*: the play's warrior ethic is one constructed and operated by, for, and about men, and there is little sign of a parallel, even limited structure for women.

When Lady Macbeth receives her husband's letter relating his first encounter with the weïrd sisters, it inspires in her — as I have shown — a concern for the strength of her husband's ambition. She manifests what would be, to Elizabethan sensibilities, a particularly unwomanly lack of compassion in fearing Macbeth's too-kind nature. This is soon followed, however, with a promise to employ a woman's weapon — her tongue (I,v,25) — to "chastise" Macbeth to the crown. Across the Shakespearean canon, words are seen as the woman's domain, almost antithetical to the manly prerogative of action. Related to this is the notion of silence as a virtue in women, noted by Catherine Belsey; the 'fault' of volubility she analyses in relation to *Coriolanus*' Volumnia is

also ascribed to Lady Macbeth (Belsey: 183), suggesting that in more general terms it underlines the absence of a fixed place or voice for women. For a woman to presume to speak for herself was to usurp the role of her husband or father, to try to become a man (Belsey: 180).

In her short speech after reading her husband's letter Lady Macbeth manages to identify herself as a woman, but one seeking to empower herself through both womanly words and manly cruelty:

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
> And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
> Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose nor keep between
> Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief. (I,v,38-48)

In this, one of the play's more notorious passages, Lady Macbeth manages to provide meat for generations of critics, many of whom have focussed on the gender-related aspects of her wishes. It could be argued that "unsex me" expresses a desire to be re-sexed, as it were: to become male, to partake of the male potency which obviously determines everything of weight in this world. But there is also another implication to this small element of her

fantasy. If, as is a common pun in Elizabethan drama, female (genitalia) is equivalent to nothing, then unsexing her, removing her physical sex, is to make her less than nothing, and therefore less than human, rather than male.

The problem with looking at things this way, however, is that 'sex' was a broad signifier; it could not be taken, here or almost anywhere else, to refer *only*, or even principally, to primary or secondary physical sexual characteristics. In most cases in Elizabethan/Jacobean literature, it performs a semantic function similar to the broad range of meanings associated with the term 'gender' in modern usage. I feel that her cry of "unsex me here" would, to a contemporary audience, have lent itself to the notion that she was becoming something less than human, if only by seeking to abandon her divinely-ordained sex/gender role. She immediately rejects both the female nurturing role which is antithetical to cruelty, and the decidedly non-martial, unmanly feelings —such as remorse —associated with it. As cruelty is an explicitly male 'quality' both within the play and without, her embrace of it serves to further undermine her status as a woman and as a human being. Her husband may be cruel, or at least violent, but it is — again, in the play's own terms —a 'just' cruelty (at this stage, anyway); she wishes for an unprincipled, unrestrained cruelty beyond even his.

Confusingly, Lady Macbeth wishes to be 'unsexed', yet to retain a more obvious secondary sexual characteristic, her breasts. Their milk — immediately suggestive of her recent use of the word — is first associated with kindness, and then with bitterness, murder and mischief — with, perhaps, infernal qualities. A mother or nursemaid's milk could be a source of some concern in Elizabethan England. It was suspected to have some influence other than merely nutritive on a child, particularly in moral terms. Elyot notes that "some ancient writers do suppose, often times the child sucketh the vice of his nurse with the milk of her pap" (Lehmberg: 15), suggesting a direct, causal link between a bad choice of wetnurse and, one assumes, a depraved and shameful child — or adult.

In the thinking of the period, Lady Macbeth's wish for a corrupted, bitter milk would have been a source of some alarm, particularly in relation to her children — and remember, at this stage of the play a naïve reader or spectator of the play would have no reason to suspect the Macbeths to be childless. Her status as a nurturer has been undermined, if not completely destroyed, since she rejects archetypical maternal female attributes. But she is not necessarily substituting them with masculine ones, unless we take murder and cruelty to be masculine 'qualities'. In any case whatever substitution she makes is not, as we will see, permanent.

As I have noted, her decision having been made, she urges upon her newly-arrived, newly-elevated husband the practise of deceit, "To beguile the time". The putative moral influence of her corrupted milk, transmitted through her tongue, through womanish words, begins to cause in her husband unmanly —in the play's terms — behaviour.

When Lady Macbeth later berates her husband for his decision that they "will proceed no further in this business" (I,vii,31), she confirms that she is fully aware of Scotland's warrior ethic. But her awareness of it is flawed, like her concept of masculine aggression. She berates her husband for his inability to act, understanding that it is by action that a man earns recognition and honour, but she forgets that the character of a warrior's action is an important factor in its contribution to his worth, his manhood. She simplifies things further with her notion that living itself is equivalent to doing —that without 'acting' on his desire, Macbeth will only have an "ornament" — a sham, an illusion —of a life. His response to this accusation elicits from her a scathing dismissal of Macbeth's manly worth, his *virtu* and virility. In an exchange which serves to subtly sexualise the killing of the king, Lady Macbeth taunts of her husband with imputations of impotence; as Carolyn Asp puts it, "she challenges an essential element of his self-image, that of the potent male" (Asp: 160). She also notes that after the murder is carried out, Lady Macbeth

addresses her husband as husband for the only time in the play — indicating, perhaps, a kind of consummation has taken place. The sexual basis of the scene is also confirmed by Macbeth's own oblique comparison of himself to Tarquin; as David Norbrook points out, it was Tarquin's rape of Lucretia which led to the downfall of the Roman kings (Norbrook: 101); the almost sexual penetration that Macbeth and his wife are about to perform on the inviolable —politically and morally chaste —body of the king will have almost the same effect on Scotland.

With the suggestion of impotence, Lady Macbeth succeeds in re-moulding her husband's notions of proper manhood —and his own masculinity —by tapping into the existing streak of cruelty we have already heard report of. Her equation of manly action with cruelty is, as I have said, reductive, yet by the end of the scene Macbeth is convinced that this kind of behaviour —violent treachery and deceit —is quintessentially male; in the face of his wife's "undaunted mettle" he abandons his fear of unmanly daring and grasps the nettle.

Lady Macbeth may have developed an extremely limited and limiting idea of proper manhood, but it soon becomes obvious that she fails in her attempt to take it upon herself. *Macbeth* has inspired, particularly over the past twenty-five years or so, a number of psycho-analytic readings which often descend into an almost clichéd use of Freud: every sword becomes a phallic

symbol, every stabbing a pseudo-sexual penetration, or —in any passage relating to Macduff —a combination castration/caesarean section. There is, however, certainly something sexual in Lady Macbeth's short speech before the murder of Duncan, when she enters, drunk:

> That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold:
> What hath quenched them, hath given me fire
> (II,ii,1-1)

But then we soon hear, after her husband's entrance, that she has not in fact carried out the murder of Duncan — "Had he not resembled/My father as he slept, I had done't" (II,ii,12-13). In essence, Lady Macbeth admits, immediately after suggesting sexual failure on her husband's part, to a kind of alcoholic impotence, identical to that described by the soon-to-be-encountered gatekeeper — who speaks specifically of drink's effect on men. The fact that it appears to have the same effect on Lady Macbeth might suggest that she has succeeded in her desire to be re-sexed — rendered male —by being unsexed. Yet once the deed has been consummated, she becomes capable of the necessary follow-through; in a strange transference of sexual potency, she insults Macbeth as "Infirm of purpose!" when he admits his reluctance to return the two, decidedly firm, phallic daggers to the murder scene — and promptly does so herself.

The whole of Duncan's murder scene —the murder of a man we last heard was at "unusual pleasure" — is framed by intemperate remarks on the effects of drink; remarks which, in the broader historical context of the play, seem even more intemperate. James' court — scene of one of the earliest, if not the first, performances of the play —was one which quickly became renowned for overall indulgence. In describing the licentiousness of James' court, Anne Somerset notes the King's own reputation as a drinker, and the excessive consumption of alcohol which became a noted feature of his court (Somerset: 36). In particular, she relates various observations made on the "stupendous drinking bout" occasioned by the visit of the Queen's brother, King Christian IV of Denmark — the occasion of the aforementioned early performance. Sir John Harrington, writing of the same visit, paints it as one long and increasingly incoherent drunken debauch: "those whom I could never get to taste good liquor," he says, "now follow the fashion and wallow in beastly delights" (G.B. Evans: 201).

Yet, in front of such a distinguished audience, and in the face of their probable inebriation, we have a series of scenes which themselves stumble drunkenly along. The Porter in particular elaborates, with relish, on the specific sexual effects of alcohol, telling Macduff and Lennox that drink provokes "sleep" — an

effect it conspicuously does not have on Macbeth or his wife. But then he goes further:

> Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and takes him off; it persuades him and disheartens him, makes him stand to and not stand to. (II,iii,24-8)

It doesn't take much imagination to see the sexual innuendo behind the Porter's lines: indeed, this is the common part-reading usually given. The connection to Lady Macbeth's speech is less obvious, and yet the parallel is there. Whatever tipple she has served up to Duncan's guards "hath made them drunk", and made her "bold"; yet, like an over-indulging man, it robs her of the ability to carry out her intended deed.

A fundamentalist Freudian could have fun with this: the drink she has shared with Duncan's grooms certainly sets her on, to a metaphorical penetration of the inviolable, masculine and arguably paternal body of the king — a penetration which she then finds impossible to carry through. Like a man (according to the Porter) she is set on, and taken off, persuaded and disheartened, and is certainly forestalled in the performance of her desire. I find, almost against my will, that I lean towards such a way of seeing things myself — and I have come to do so through

a minor etymological point. The word 'foin' is a fencing term meaning a stab or thrust; in some schools it also indicates the pointed fore-part of the blade itself, the part used to stab or thrust. But it is also an Elizabethan slang term for fornication, for sexual penetration, suggesting that the parallel between the thrust of a weapon —a dagger —and the thrust of a penis is one that could have been made even at the time the play was written: it is entirely possible, in other words, that the relatively recent Freudian way of looking at Lady Macbeth's drunken 'impotence' is not so outrageous.

But does Lady Macbeth's failure underline, or undermine her unnaturalness? To her way of seeing things, aggression is a fundamental male characteristic, expressed in prowess in battle, the ability to wield a sword. In the warrior ethic, the sword is to be wielded, however, in defence of the kingdom and the king, not in assault upon it — the latter inherently and inescapably an ignoble action. Lady Macbeth's flawed understanding of the warrior ethic fails to encompass this, and it might be that her weaker womanly understanding is what leads her to fail. As a supposedly weak woman, she is incapable of performing the quasi-sexual, quasi-martial action she has determined upon, and this does, to a certain extent, undermine her unnaturalness —she has not, after all, been able to escape her sex, her essential gender role. But to the extent that she has been capable of conceiving the

action, she is still reinforcing her assumed unnaturalness, through her rejection of female nurturing, filial duty, and the proper respect due a man and a king.

It is this failure to perform that is, I suspect, behind Lady Macbeth's puzzling lack of spine in her later appearances in the play. Her fainting after the 'discovery' of Duncan's murder could be a manifestation of this weakness, but its first real appearance comes after her husband has been crowned king. Just before the haunted banquet, she allows a hint of creeping despair —perhaps even guilt — to show through:

> Nought's had, all's spent
> When our desire is got without content.
> 'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
> Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (III,ii,4-7)

The woman who urged her husband to screw his courage to the sticking-place, who advised him to "Beguile the time", is now, after the deed has been done and the prize gained, disturbed by Macbeth's wrathful passion. When he himself encourages her to deceive Banquo, to "make our faces vizards to our hearts", she shies nervously from the topic: "You must leave this" (III,ii,35). The same woman who could be an active agent in the murder of a king is now deliberately kept "innocent of the knowledge" of a similar "deed of dreadful note" —and it seems that she is happy with this arrangement.

The only thing that re-ignites her passion is the by-now familiar question of Macbeth's manliness. When confronted with Banquo's ghost, he is "unmanned" by fear, and she once again enthusiastically harps upon her theme —but by the end of the scene (III,iv) she is reduced to one or two line statements, acting only as a narrative foil to her husband. Ultimately, she too falls victim to sleepless delusions; our last sight of her is of an unnaturally troubled babbling somnambulist; our last word of her her death, allegedly a suicide. It could be that, in seeking to subvert the fundamental identity proper — according to the thinking of the time — to her sex, she shakes her own state; that in unsexing herself she has, literally, become nothing.

The notion that there was, in fact, an essential gender identity for men and women was one fiercely defended at the time, particularly in the face of the perceived threat of the theatre. According to Laura Levine, there was a serious contradiction in the gender-related attacks on the theatre: in seeking to defend the idea that there was, in fact, an essential gender, the antitheatrical pamphletists such as Gosson were falling victim to "the fear that costume could actually alter the gender of the male body beneath the costume" (Levine: 3); the fact that the sight of an ungendered and eventually unstable Lady Macbeth might also defend the idea of an essential gender was, to those concerned, secondary to the fact that the representation was being performed by a male actor.

How exactly that essential gender was constituted was never made clear — many of the discussions of the idea in the literature of the time rest on simple assertion, backed up with Biblical 'proof'. As I have already made clear, in the previous chapter, at least part of the constitution of manhood — particularly for warriors —was through deeds. Levine has also shown, however, that even this idea was underpinned by uncertainty: she notes, before considering a range of texts from the period 1579 to 1642 that

> it is the peculiarity of the texts ... to think *only* of masculinity as needing to be performed in order to exist; it is as if femaleness were the default position, the thing one were always in danger of slipping into (Levine: 8).

It is action that is the point of conflict between Lady Macbeth and her husband —his refusal, initially, to act on the suggestions of both the weïrd sisters and his wife; her inability to act in his stead. As much as anything else, this observation highlights the contrast between manly action and woman's words —and this, in turn, points to the whole series of binary oppositions through which masculinity in particular, and gender in general, is constructed in the period, and in *Macbeth*.

When Macbeth tells his wife of his decision to "proceed no further in this business", she responds with a vituperative slur

upon his manhood, one resting partially, as I have indicated, on suggestions of sexual impotence. But her disgust also introduces into the play the first of the oppositions by which masculine identity is constructed. His rejection of acting further is based, in part, on the warrior ethic's ideals: "I dare do all that may become a man; /Who dares do more is none" (I,vii,46-47). To Macbeth, killing his king does not 'become' a man; it is, in fact, the act of someone very much less than a man. His manhood is something which has recently been confirmed, publicly displayed in battle and rewarded by the fount of all honour (and the very object of his murderous plan). His manhood is among those recently-purchased honours he is reluctant to "cast aside"; the erosion of this hard-won honour would make him no-man, less that a man; in the stratified perception of gender which prevailed, it would perhaps even equate him with a woman.

Lady Macbeth responds by introducing another alternative: to her, no-man, less than a man, equates with animal, and it must have been some animalistic impulse which made Macbeth resile from manly action:

> LADY MACBETH: What beast was't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man.
> And to be more than you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. (I,vii,47-51)

She inverts her husband's sentiments — he was a man in daring to do what was planned, but in actually carrying it out he would have become more than a man. To Macbeth, to be a man is to know one's place, and not to seek to be more than you are. To Lady Macbeth, it is at least to strive.

To be no man — to be less than a man — is to be a boy, a child, a woman, a beast — perhaps even a devil; this much is clear. To be more than a man is a more complex, less well-defined option. To be more than a man is, perhaps, to be an angel, to partake of the divine. But in the wider moral rhetoric of the play, to be more than a man — to be something outside or beyond the warrior ethic — is to be the king. As I will discuss in a later chapter, this kind of thinking may not have been terribly acceptable to a king like James; the notion that one may 'become' a king, and so become more than a man, is subversive to the whole idea of the divine right, of a divine mandate to rule. Macbeth's eventual fate is perhaps the only thing that makes the suggestion acceptable, with its subtle implication that he is never a 'real' king. Much of the play's consideration of ethical questions and kingly and manly virtues, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, certainly reinforces this reading —that Macbeth, in seeking to become more than a man, more of a man, becomes less.

Duncan's murder, successfully carried out, quickly renders Macbeth uncertain of his position in a wider metaphysical

hierarchy. Circumstances dictate that he not only feign shock at his king's killing; they also dictate that he both dispose of potential witnesses and provide credible suspects — and so he hastily kills Duncan's grooms. It is an action immediately called into question by his fellow thanes, and perhaps a source of some of their (and Malcolm's) suspicions. In explaining this action, he sets up another description of not-man: "who can be wise, amazed, temp'rate, and furious,/Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man" (II,iii,101-2). I am, he seems to insist, a mere man, incapable of this kind of almost-divine, almost kingly self-restraint. But in announcing that it was his "violent love" for Duncan which "Outran the pauser, reason", he is, in fact, emphasising his own newly revealed status as not-man, as less than man, "a beast which wants discourse of reason". It has been suggested that this may be the common complaint of all the stunned thanes: Macbeth's instruction that they all "put on manly readiness" (II,iii,126) indicates "that the observers have been unmanned, weakened, by Duncan's death" (Braunmuller: 157). But the association of 'manliness' with 'readiness' reminds the other thanes not only of his unpreparedness, therefore serving as a feeble alibi, it also reminds them of the fact that this murder has, after all, taken place in his own castle; his unpreparedness to either commit (as we know) or prevent Duncan's murder must further call his manhood into question.

The haste Macbeth indulged in killing Duncan's grooms seems, later, to infect his own ideas of proper manly qualities: he asks the murderers he has engaged to slay Banquo, "Do you find your patience so predominant in your natures?" (III,i,86-87), as if somehow patience is antithetical to the nature of manhood — unencumbered by it, they should be 'real' men. But after this weak flattery he calls their manhood into question — "in the catalogue ye go for men," he says, but —in a conceit Shakespeare uses frequently — notes that 'men' are distinguished by a "Particular addition", a single 'gift' or quality. Their quality, to Macbeth, is that which is expressed by the Second Murderer:

> I am one ...
> Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
> Hath so incensed that I am reckless what I do
> To spite the world.
> FIRST MURDERER: And I another,
> So weary with disasters, tugged with fortune,
> That I would set my life on any chance
> To mend it or be rid on't. (III,i,107-113)

It is their recklessness which is useful to Macbeth, and their recklessness which marks them as kindred spirits. William Blandy condemns recklessness along with suicide, seeing as contemptible all those who "hasten theyr dying day". Those who "offer themselves to daunger, not with iudgeme[n]t, and prudent advise", but out of "rage or fury of minde conceived either of hatred, envy, or some other earnest & hoat affection", are not to be esteemed as

true soldiers, as real men, as they have missed "the true & good purpose of Action" (Blandy: sig. Diiii.r-Diiii.v). Macbeth manifests this kind of intemperance and impatience when he kills Duncan's grooms, unintentionally suggesting afterwards that this marks him as no-man, and by attributing the same deficiency to these 'men' he is aligning himself with them. They are, almost by definition, dishonourable men, perhaps persecuted by Macbeth himself in his earlier incarnation as an upright thane, a champion of justice —men whom he grants as being "Not i'th'worst rank of manhood". We soon realise this to mean that, if they have not yet hit rock bottom, they are not far from it, and Macbeth's comparison of the "catalogue" of men with the variety of dogs reinforces both their beastliness and his own.

Macbeth's lack of action — and therefore his manliness — again becomes an issue when Banquo's ghost visits the celebratory banquet. His horrified reaction leads Lady Macbeth to once again question her husband's manhood, but this time he gives a more emphatic, though still unbelievable response:

> Are you a man?
> MACBETH: Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
> Which might appal the devil. (III,iv,58-60)

Lady Macbeth berates him again as womanly, as no true man — "quite unmanned in folly" (III,iv,73), but he still insists on his

manliness, resorting to the familiar terms of the warrior ethic and the construction of masculinity through violent though noble deeds:

> What man dare, I dare;
> Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
> The armed rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcan tiger,
> Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
> Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,
> And dare me to the desert with thy sword;
> If trembling I inhabit then, protest me
> The baby of a girl. Hence horrible shadow,
> Unreal mock'ry hence. (III,iv,99-107)

Banquo's unreal, unnatural (in several senses of the word) appearance is beyond the ability of a mere man to deal with; but the most dangerous natural challenges a man may face are, because natural, within his capabilities. Perhaps significantly, the first three natural challenges mentioned are beasts, inhabitants of the natural rather than the human world. By seeking to exceed the limitations of his manhood, his nature and his place, Macbeth has brought upon himself only unnatural challenges —spectres, weïrd sisters, unborn foes and walking trees. Nonetheless, he must assert his courage when confronted with normal, natural challenges. By the end of the play, however, the excess of strife that he has survived has purged from him the ability to fear anything at all from him, leaving him immune to any horror which might assault an ordinary man:

> I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
> The time has been, my senses would have cooled
> 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 supped full with horrors;
> Direness familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
> Cannot once start me. (V,v,9-15)

But before he descends so far, he asserts his masculinity in the face of 'normal' challenges, contrasting it with as unmanly an image as he can conjure: "The baby of a girl". Again, there is a clear opposition being established between the appropriate manly response to dangerous beasts and the "trembling" of a woman — but there is more to this almost casually tossed off remark. A "baby of a girl" could be taken to mean a female baby, doubly weak through its age and its sex. It could also, however, mean the baby of a girl, a child, suggesting perhaps that the baby of a young, immature female would somehow be smaller, sicklier, than an infant born of a mature woman. It is as weak and pathetic an image of an unmanned man he can think of —and one he knows to be too fitting in this instance; as soon as Banquo's ghost vanishes he announces "I am a man again" (III,iv,108). Macbeth is disturbed by how far the appearance of the ghost has driven him from his 'normal' being; it makes him "strange Even to the disposition that I owe" (III,iv,112-113); the disposition, we must suppose, towards aggressive manliness.

When, after his post-banquet visit to the weïrd sisters, Macbeth is informed of Macduff's flight to England, he vows that

"From this moment,/The very firstlings of my heart shall be/The firstlings of my hand" (IV,i,145-147). Hard on the heels of the apparitions' warnings, the news is doubly dismaying, and the promise it precipitates represents the fulfilment of part of the Third Apparition's 'bodement' — Macbeth has already begun to "Be lion-mettled, proud" and careless. The intemperate behaviour he has now embraced is unbecoming of any man, and particularly any king, if only because it represents a resignation to the impulses of emotion, of feeling, since it is the 'firstlings' of his heart he will follow. He has given up his divinely-granted (manly) reason to become more of a beast, a not-man, than ever; he follows his vow with a decision to "crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done" (IV,i,148). Even so, Macbeth can delude himself into believing that he is still *acting* like a man — "No boasting like a fool", or a woman, no unpacking his heart with words.

The appearance, during his visit to the witches, of two children — one bloody, one crowned — must also strike at Macbeth's fears in a way additional to the disheartening information they offer him. As I have noted in passing ~~before~~, the Macbeths are childless; the "procreant cradle" of their castle is, for them, an empty one. Elyot suggests that the propagation of children, particularly male children, is an important part of the 'natural' and 'perfect' man; in measuring himself as a man,

Macbeth must know that he has failed in this regard —failed to visibly demonstrate his sexual capabilities by the fathering of a child. In the face of this failure of Macbeth's, the supposed, arch-Bradleian mystery of 'how many children had Lady Macbeth?' is irrelevant: more important is that Macbeth recognises her sexual potential, and in particular her capacity to produce male children:

> Bring forth men-children only,
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males. (I,vii,72-74)

Unfortunately, this, like other aspects of her character, is manifested in her claim to excess masculine cruelty —the ability to dash out the brains of a (male) infant to serve her ambition. It might be that this observation of Macbeth's inspires the retrospective interpretation of Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" as meaning to make her male. In all of the oppositional definitions of manhood which she seeks to thrust before her husband, the one he eventually offers himself — the baby — must be the most galling.

However, the challenge to Macbeth's sense of himself as a sexually capable — virile — male comes not only from his wife and her "undaunted mettle", but also from the men around him. All of Macbeth's significant foes are fathers; moreover, they are fathers of sons —Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff all have with them or

leave behind them male children, all of whom he seeks to destroy. According to Joost Daalder, their status as fathers, as demonstrably sexually capable males, is enough reason for Macbeth to single them out for bloody action (Daalder: 376-377). His impotence — his inability to "to brynge forth his semblable" as Elyot puts it — is certainly the root cause of his antipathy towards his old friend Banquo:

> Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
> Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
> For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
> For them, the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
> Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
> Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
> Given to the common enemy of man,
> To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings.
> (III,i,62-71)

Having bowed to supernatural solicitation, Macbeth becomes completely aware of what he has done, of what it will mean for him personally, and of the morality he has firmly, and irrevocably, rejected. But what galls him most is that he will remain childless, while the virtuous, valorous, vigorous Banquo will sire a line of kings, and this fear preys upon him even before his second visit to the weïrd sisters; even before they have shown him the fruitlessness of anything he does. The bloody child of the witches' prophecies is not only a representation of Macduff's

violent birth — it is also an anticipation of the murder of Macduff's unnamed son, a recollection of the attempt upon Fleance, and a reminder of the imminent end of Macbeth's own line.

All of Shakespeare's martially-inclined tragic heroes — all those for whom the resolution of their tale is at the point of a sword — are characterised in part by their (sexual) relations with women. It could be said further that these relations are fundamentally flawed, almost without exception resulting in the death of the female counterpart as well as the tragic hero himself. The connection between martial prowess and sexual energy was one observed at the time, with Bacon noting that

> I know not how, but martial men are given to love: I think it is but as they are given to wine; for perils commonly ask to be paid in pleasures (Hawkins: 30).

We can see, in *Macbeth*, that all of Scotland's warrior caste —with the exception of Macbeth — are "given to love", in the physical sense. Macbeth's impotence sets him apart, but not in a positive way; in a sense, it could serve to undermine his status as a warrior, as well as his manhood.

But the other obvious exception to *Macbeth*'s array of manifestly sexually potent male enemies is Malcolm; he makes much of his virginity — or, rather more importantly, his chastity —

when recommending himself to Macduff. It could be that this is another example of the (true) king's separate status in Scotland's moral schema —yet the fact that the heir to the throne remains sexually untried means that he is also sexually unproven, and that he will bring with him to the throne the uncertainty of no clear heir. There is also the apparent contradiction of holding up both the sexually experienced, sexually capable — but obviously not 'luxurious' — Duncan and his very much less sexualised son as paragons of virtue.

The virtuous Malcolm's testing of Macduff is another of the play's scenes where its construction of masculinity becomes a foreground element —and it does so from the scene's first lines, from Malcolm's suggestion that they "seek out some desolate shade and there/Weep our sad bosoms empty" (IV,iii,1-2). Like the use of words, weeping — expressing grief generally — is at worst seen as womanish, at best rejected as simply unmanly. The notion is introduced earlier, at a critical juncture of the play, through Malcolm's apparent lack of grief at his father's death. "To show an unfelt sorrow," he says, "is an office/Which the false man does easy" (II,iii,129-30). With the privileged knowledge of the reader, we can see that the "false man" is Macbeth, showing a false grief at a murder he is responsible for. Malcolm is declaring himself to be no "false man"; he is also rejecting Macbeth's false grief, but not necessarily the demonstration of grief itself. It has

been noted that Malcolm's refusal to mourn his dead father is "unusual" (Braunmuller: 89) in the wider Shakespearean canon, and the society which produced it — but it is not inconsistent with the fictional Scotland's construction of masculinity, and the warrior ethic which is crucial to it.

Malcolm's suggestion that he and Macduff indulge in womanish weeping is, in the broader context of the scene and the play, the first movement in his testing of Macduff. As someone who has already rejected unseemly grief himself, Malcolm wishes to see how his fellow Scotsman, possibly corrupted by Macbeth's influence, might entertain the idea. Macduff rejects it thoroughly:

> Let us rather
> Hold fast the mortal sword and like good men
> Bestride our downfall birthdom (IV,iii,2-4)

As a good man, as a good warrior who wishes to fight to restore the proper king to his "birthdom", Macduff evokes the symbol of the warrior's role: the sword. The manly, possibly virile (phallic) symbol is set up in antithesis to the supposedly female position espoused by Malcolm; manly action is opposed to womanly weeping.

When he receives word of his family's murder from the hapless Ross, Macduff is, initially, silent. Malcolm urges him to

give vent to his grief, seemingly contradicting his own espoused position:

> What, man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows:
> Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak,
> Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break.
> (IV,iii,210-212)

It is important to note, again, that Malcolm has previously rejected the ostentatious display of false grief —but has denied himself the opportunity to express it, at least in public. In urging it upon Macduff, here, he is demonstrating yet again the separate 'rules' for Scotland's ordinary men, and for its true king — Macduff is allowed his 'manly' grief; Malcolm is not.

But Malcolm suggests that Macduff speak of his grief only quietly, as if a great outpouring of grief —ranting and raging — would be as unbecoming a display as false grief. But the true king Malcolm, with a greater purpose in mind, may also be trying to limit his liegeman's outpouring of sorrow so as to encourage its transmutation into a useful (to him) anger:

> Let's make med'cines of our great revenge
> To cure this deadly grief ...
> Be this the whetstone of your sword, let grief
> Convert to anger. Blunt not the heart, enrage it.
> (IV,iii,216-217, 231-232)

He is urging Macduff to a righteous revenge, to express his anger and grief through deeds, as becomes a man —and through violent deeds, as becomes a warrior. And he is strong enough in wanting this useful wrath that he urges Macduff to act on his grief not once but twice.

Macduff's response to his true king is, however, one of those points in the play where the previously clear paradigms of manhood are suddenly muddied. When told to "Dispute it like a man, " Macduff replies, "I shall do so;/But I must also feel it as a man" (IV,iii,223-224). He obviously understands — here, at least — that a man is composed of feelings, of emotions, as well as deeds and action. And yet even for him there are limitations to the manly expression of manly feelings:

> O, I could play the woman with mine eyes
> And braggart with my tongue. But gentle heavens,
> Cut short all intermission. Front to front
> Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
> Within my sword's length set him. If he scape,
> Heaven forgive him too. (IV,iii,233-238)

Macduff's reaction to the imagined "fiend", Macbeth, is identical to that of the usurper to Banquo's ghost —the desire to translate the encounter into the familiar province of manly action. Like Malcolm, like Macbeth, Macduff also holds fast to the idea that weeping and taking refuge in words are options only for women,

for those who are not men. He embraces the possibility of manly emotion, but rejects its expression through tears and words, adding to the distinction between man and not-man (and, in this case, between man and woman) that the play develops. In doing so, however, he seems to be adding something to the map of manhood that the play may be trying to set out. To Malcolm, this is hardly important: in rejecting womanish grief, Macduff has, as far as Malcolm and his paradigm of manhood is concerned, chosen the right path. "This tune," says the Scottish prince, "goes manly".

But is it really the case that Macduff is elaborating on the play's kingdom's paradigm of manhood? There is another way to read what happens here. Macduff is almost overcome with grief; he cannot even begin to articulate his feelings, possibly because of the limiting paradigm of masculinity he has been raised within. His inability to express himself at this moment is remarkable — literally —even to those with him, even to the prince who can only see this moment as a useful emotional lever. Silent, he is urged to speak, but in doing so he is obviously expected to say certain things, to express himself in a certain way. Perhaps to Malcolm's surprise, Macduff is not quite so thoroughly indoctrinated as to be only able to think of bloody revenge. He clutches at the opportunity to *feel* his grief ... and it is snatched from him, by the prince who needs every anger-whetted sword he can bring to his side. In the face of Malcolm's urgings, Macduff

rejects his womanly emotions, and embraces action. There is, after all, only one way for a man — a warrior — to conduct himself.

In one of the more interesting debates the play has provoked, Macduff ends up at the focus of conflicting claims about who, in Shakespeare's Scotland, represents the true ideal of a well-rounded, well-balanced and morally upright man. Much of the recent critical inspection of the play has focussed on its representations of gender, on the way it presents men and women and the interactions between them. Given that Shakespeare's Scotland is a male world, it is not surprising, then, that the issue of masculinity in *Macbeth* becomes a major concern. To Maryanne Horowitz, these issues are an interest of Shakespeare's which are not limited to *Macbeth* — she sees a kind of 'play' in Shakespeare's representations of men and women, suggesting that

> the much-acclaimed Renaissance self-fashioning goes hand-in-hand with playful and creative experimentation with gender distinctions (Brink et al.: ix).

But — as she notes later — "playing with gender" may not be enlightening or liberating: it may lead to "increased opportunities for some and increased repression for others" (Brink et al.: xiii). The twin possibilities of opportunity and repression mirror the antithetical poles of man/not-man which are continually stated in

the play. Perhaps the most important of these oppositions is that between 'man' and 'woman'.

Lady Macbeth presents for her husband a range of carefully-expressed possibilities, possibilities which extend from the physical to the metaphysical. Her exposition of the place and character of a man comes after the expression of her desire to embrace them herself, a desire which leads her to reject those 'female' characteristics — "love, compassion, pity, remorse" — which she also seeks to repress in her husband. According to Robert Kimbrough, this is not simply a rejection of her 'sex', but her humanity — "she moves," he says, "toward the demonic." (Kimbrough: 181). Furthermore, the desire for masculine potency which she expresses is one which no one in the play is free from; even Macduff's unnamed wife has, according to Linda Bamber, no purer a vision of her husband's manhood, despite his abandonment of her and their family:

> In *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus*, the two most important representations of the feminine are even more committed than the heroes to a code of manliness that emphasizes power, honor, war, and revenge. They both prefer a bloody ambitious sort of honor over traditionally feminine values in general and womanly love in particular (Bamber: 91).

Part of the reason for this is the lack of any alternative to the dominant paradigm of the warrior ethic, and she suggests further

that it is this absence of a basis for comparison or contrast which leads to both Macbeth's overstated masculine aggressiveness and a supposed confusion about his gender roles and identity. The principal female characters in the play, she notes, "are not Other to the hero ... They do not present him with the challenge of the Other" (Bamber: 92), leaving the masculine values apparently unchallenged.

But in some ways, Lady Macbeth is 'other' to the play's warrior ethic. According to Bamber, she is "hostile to the hero's public role when it calls him away from her". His absence cannot be justified to her, and so she is overtly antagonistic to a code which privileges 'state' over family; she is, however, "left unanswered" (Bamber: 93-4). It is this separation of male from female, of husband from wife, that is, to Bamber, fundamental to the "tragic process" in Shakespeare, since it is "always paralleled ... by the process of separation from the feminine" (Bamber: 92).

To Carolyn Asp, however, it is Lady Macbeth's "assumption of a masculine role" which "distances" her from her husband: "As long as he retained elements of so-called feminine sensibility" — the supposedly female qualities of compassion and kindness —"he was susceptible to her appeal" (Asp: 161) — in this case, her appeal to that daring which would usurp his king. As Macbeth becomes more than a man ("assumes the stereotype", as Asp puts

it), Lady Macbeth is less able to manipulate him, and, ironically, is forced into the secondary position that the male-dominated hierarchy demands of her sex:

> By making him "manly" she has guaranteed that he will think of her as a subordinate and unworthy of truly sharing power (Asp: 162).

To Janet Adelman, however, the actions of the men in the play — and particularly those of the eponymous usurping thane — represent attempts to escape or exclude the feminine, specifically the maternal (Adelman: 130).

But the supposed antagonism between male and female in the play is, I believe, too simplistic a reading of its gender dynamics, if only because in Lady Macbeth, Macduff's wife, and the once-seen nurse, we do not have enough (contrasting) examples of 'female' characters behaving in 'female' ways to construct an unambiguous alternative model —a point reinforced by Banquo's confusion about the gender of the weïrd sisters. Most of Shakespeare's plays are set —unsurprisingly —in predominantly male worlds, but this does not prevent him from putting on his stage convincing and even admirable female characters. His fictional Scotland, however, is too much of a man's world to admit women.

But Shakespeare's artful representations of gender conflict have allowed other critics to maintain that his position on matters of gender in *Macbeth* is more ambiguous than most are willing to entertain. According to Robert Kimbrough,

> By Shakespeare's day ... Two worlds had evolved, two cultures had been created, masculine and feminine — not in a parallel relationship, but hierarchial (Kimbrough: 175).

Certainly few of the previously mentioned critics would disagree with this, but there is, according to Kimbrough's reading of things, "a tendency in Shakespeare to want to break down the barriers between the sex-genders". He goes on to suggest that

> Shakespeare sensed that humanhood embraces manhood and womanhood. Shakespeare sensed that so long as one remains exclusively female or exclusively male, that person will be restricted and confined, denied human growth. Each will be the prisoner of gender, not its keeper (Kimbrough: 175).

I find this assertion hard to accept, myself; for anyone with historicist leanings, even a casual trawl through the non-dramatic literature would, at the very least, question whether any of the concepts Kimbrough so densely packs into these two sentences would have been even possible within the admittedly broad Elizabethan mindset. And which 'Shakespeare' is it who so delicately senses these things? The Shakespeare of the histories,

for whom female characters are rarely more than ciphers, mothers of heirs, victims of plots? The Shakespeare of the comedies, whose women often verbally better their male foils — but who eventually seem, for the most part, glad to step back into their women's weeds, and back into the shadows? Or the Shakespeare of the tragedies, whose heroines range from the hapless victim, Lavinia, to the emasculating Volumnia? Or the Shakespeare who penned the six female characters of Macbeth, four of whom stoke the fires of the gender war, another who ends up one of its more pathetic victims, and the last, another cipher, who frets her hour and is heard no more, except, perhaps, as a wail from off-stage?

All of the above? None of the above? Certainly not, I think, the last.

Despite this vagueness, Kimbrough asserts that "the drama of *Macbeth* contains a fierce war between gender concepts of manhood and womanhood played out upon the plain of humanity" (Kimbrough: 176). In doing so, however, he prioritises gender issues in the play, seemingly above all else; he claims that

> Macbeth's death ... stems from his failure to allow the tender aspects of his character to check those tough characteristics which are celebrated by the chauvinistic war ethic of his culture ... we are moved through pity to understand and to fear the personal

> destructiveness of polarized masculinity and femininity. (Kimbrough: 177)

But I think he would have trouble making his case to the many militarist apologists of early modern London. His is an interesting reading — but one which is in many ways an oversimplification of the play.

Even more surprisingly, to Kimbrough the true hero of the play — or at least of the gender war —is Macduff. He "declines to be merely manly" when he hears of the murder of his family. And, according to Kimbrough, Malcolm recognises this. As should be clear from my own analysis of the scene earlier in this chapter, I do not agree with his reading of their exchange, as Macduff actually rejects 'womanish' manifestations of grief. Nonetheless, Macduff rises to the peak of Kimbrough's estimation: "he expresses a fuller range of his being: his humanhood ... [his] response is a fully-realized human response." (Kimbrough: 178). The goal is not to respond, to feel, or even to act as 'man' or 'woman', but as a sexually complete being, as an androgyne, since

> While Shakespeare in *Macbeth* criticises the destructive polarity of masculine versus feminine, constantly informing the play in his recognition of a fuller, healthier way of life, his vision of potential human wholeness, his androgynous vision (Kimbrough: 188).

Shakespeare: front-line shock-trooper in the gender war.

This, too, is not a reading I am comfortable with. Much of Kimbrough's analysis focuses on a few — too few — passages which he stretches to their ideological limits, and in a thoroughly predictable way. Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" could be taken to mean a reduction to the androgynous —but it is accompanied by destructive imagery elsewhere (both in *Macbeth* and other canonical texts) associated with male actions and desires.

Kimbrough is not, however, alone in finding androgynous leanings in the play. Joost Daalder likewise turns his attention to Lady Macbeth's dark plea —but he sees her attempt to cross the gender divide as a failure, because in crossing it she leaves too much of herself —too much of the womanly —behind. The same applies to the Weïrd Sisters; to Daalder, the true sign of their evil is the confusion about their gender evinced by Banquo (Daalder: 373). They, too, have abandoned the feminine —something which Macbeth fails to notice, or at least to comment on.

Like Kimbrough, Carolyn Asp argues for Macduff as a "complete", sexually integrated human being, and as such he is the only one who "can confront and conquer the "fiend" that Macbeth has become" (Asp: 155). Like Kimbrough, however, she does not address the issue of Macduff's abandoned family. Perhaps it is this

act of sacrifice which forges the complete being? I think not. She seems to suggest that this model of fully-integrated humanity can be possessed of overweening and unhealthy ambition himself: she ascribes Macduff's complaint of "He has no children!" to "his frustration at being baulked of complete vengeance" — to carry his revenge beyond the prime agent of evil. A paragon indeed.

Janet Adelman is unable to so easily ignore Macduff's abandonment of his family. In an analysis of the play which too often descends into Freudian cliché, she allows that he is able to expand the play's prevailing definition of manhood to encompass "humane feeling" (Adelman: 143), but notes that his "accession to full masculine power" is at the cost of his family, and is for this reason alone unwilling to see him as the play's ideal. In contrast to Kimbrough and Asp, Adelman assigns the role of androgynous 'ideal' to Duncan:

> he is the centre of authority, the source of lineage and honor, the giver of name and gift; but he is also the source of all nurturance, planting the children to his throne and making them grow (Adelman: 132).

One can't help but feel that Adelman would have made a fine apologist for the divine right, expressing the quasi-mystical view of the king as progenitor that she does. But she does acknowledge that Duncan fails to live up to this ideal; she sees him as "largely ineffectual", and, like Harry Berger, is inclined to ascribe the rebellion to his weak kingship. With his death, he becomes "an

emblem not of masculine authority but of feminine vulnerability" (Adelman: 132). This vulnerability is, she says, a "taint deriving from women" (Adelman: 141), one which Macbeth is (initially) credited with having avoided —though I cannot myself see how. But it later becomes manifest that Malcolm, by his own admission, is free of this 'taint' (Adelman: 146), and so, in a different way, is Macduff (Adelman: 143-4).

The same issue — Macduff's abandonment of his family —has led other critics away from suggesting him as the play's masculine ideal. According to Alexander Leggatt, Macduff's origins suggest "not a miracle but a horrible perversion," a work of the hand of man, not God:

> When he deserts his family, his wife declares, 'He wants the natural touch' ... as though from his birth there was something not quite human about him (Leggatt: 190).

Marilyn Williamson likewise has no delusions about Macduff. To her, he is "the totally male instrument of inherited authority" (Williamson: 163), a weapon which Malcolm tests, primes, and aims at the throat of his enemy.

The apprehension about the blurring of predetermined gender roles provoked no small amount of debate throughout the flowering of English Renaissance theatre, in part being driven by the playhouses themselves. The level of apprehension manifested,

and the way that various pamphletists and others engaged with it, make it hard for me to believe that the play is seriously suggesting any kind of androgynous ideal, at least to anyone but a late 20th Century literary critic. No more so is it offering Macduff — or any of the other thanes — as a paragon of manly virtue, sexual potency and firmly established gender integrity: I doubt that Macduff's abandonment of his family could be seen by any audience, anywhere, as an altogether admirable action. There is a further question surrounding Macduff, one associated with the apparent circularity of events in Shakespeare's Scotland. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, and as I will show further in the next chapter, the warrior ethic is firmly re-established at the end of *Macbeth*, suggesting that the gender-determined ideas which underpin it have also survived — or been restored — with as little likelihood that they have been subjected to any interrogation. Macduff occupies the same site at the heart of this restoration that Macbeth did at the play's beginning, with almost precisely the same potential for becoming a source of future turmoil. That historically he did not is not a reassurance that could be drawn from the play itself.

The search for a single paragon of manhood in *Macbeth* is a pointless as the search for a single paragon of virtue — not forgetting, of course, the root of the word 'virtue' in the Latin *vir*, man, and in *virtus*, excellence overall but manly excellence in

particular. Any *man* in *Macbeth* who could be seen as a model of virtue is, almost by definition, a model of manhood — but as I have shown, there was more than one ideal of manly virtue being offered in the play — and if Malcolm cannot be judged by the same moral standards as Macbeth, Banquo and Macduff, no more so can he be judged by the same standards of manhood.

The chastity which sets Malcolm — and to a much lesser extent, Duncan — apart draws on a long philosophical/religious tradition which was still influential during the English Renaissance. Michel Foucault notes that certain "themes, anxieties, and exigencies ... marked the Christian ethic and the morality of modern European societies" (Foucault, 1992: 15), and that these 'themes' were largely drawn from pre-existing Graeco-Roman thought. A feature of this 'ethic', according to Foucault, was "an example of abstinence":

> In some people, such extreme virtue was the visible mark of the mastery they brought to bear on themselves and hence of the power they were worthy of exercising over others (Foucault, 1992: 20).

He notes further the insistence on moderation and self-control in Greek thought, and one of its implications:

> the man who ought to lead others was one who had to be completely in command of himself: both because,

> given his position and the power he wielded, it would be easy for him to satisfy all his desires, and hence to give way to them, but also because disorderly behavior on his part would have its effects on everyone (Foucault, 1992: 80).

Preceding the above, but perhaps contingent upon it, Foucault claims that Greek focus on self-control did not mean that they expected it of the lower orders:

> the person who, owing to his status, was under the authority of others was not expected to find the principle of his moderation within himself; it would be enough for him to obey the orders and instructions he was given (Foucault: 1992, 80).

The influence of Aristotle, Plato and others on Elizabethan English thinking is open to debate —what influence there was occurred principally through other, later, Roman and Latin writers. Inasmuch as the same thinking permeates Christian New Testament attitudes towards sexuality —particularly those found in Paul's epistles — the same ideals of self-mastery and the proper exercise of (moral) power would have been part of the milieu in which Shakespeare was writing, if not, strictly speaking, the milieu *of* which he was writing. Yet it may be that, as Foucault suggests, these ideals were not expected to be adhered to by the hoi polloi; as I pointed out in the previous chapter, the Homilies show that the expectations of the lower orders were not as high — it was enough that they merely obeyed.

All of these ideals are clearly applicable to Malcolm, and they thoroughly displace him from the ethical framework which surrounds his morally and politically subordinate thanes. To a lesser extent, they also distance him from the supposedly splendid moral example of his father, who after all got married, 'knew' a woman, sired children. During Malcolm's testing of him, Macduff describes Duncan as "a most sainted king", adding "the queen that bore thee,/Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,/Died every day she lived" (IV,iii,109-111). His mother is the only woman with whom Malcolm is associated, and then only in this fleeting reference — but this is enough to confirm the purity of his origins, enough to confirm — through the evident sanctity of his mother — his freedom from the 'taint' of women.

Janet Adelman's psychoanalytic readings aside, the notion of women as a source of corruption was certainly present —perhaps even prevalent —at the time. Elyot's idea's about the potential moral effects of breast-milk, quoted above, confirm this suspicion — at least in some writers. But Elyot also sees a potential positive moral influence in the presence of

> another woman of approved virtue, discretion and gravity, who shall not suffer in the child's presence any act ... dishonest, or any wanton or unclean word to be spoken; and for that cause all men, except physicians only, should be excluded and kept out of the nursery (Lehmberg: 15-16)

He is obviously speaking, here, of very young children, and indeed explains later that this state of affairs should continue only until the child is seven, from which age his companions should be only "an ancient and sad matron" and a tutor (Lehmberg: 19). It is almost as if the principal cause for concern is women of child-bearing age, women who are therefore assumed to be sexually active, sexually capable, and —therefore? —a possible source of immoral influence. Indeed, Elyot does prohibit young women from the presence of his future governor, but it is also obvious, from the above, that he is worried —perhaps even equally —about young men, who obviously cannot be trusted to behave themselves. Even so, the principal source of concern was women: Jean E. Howard notes from various anti-theatrical tracts (especially, in this case, Philip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses*) that "women and actors are constructed, interchangeably, in the same rhetoric of contamination and adulteration" (Howard and O'Connor: 169).

Malcolm is considered to be of exceptional virtue, but it is a virtue totally distinct from that embraced by his fellow-Scotsmen, and it is one measured not by his prowess in manly, martial deeds, but —as I pointed out in the previous chapter —one asserted in terms of things he has not done. Foremost among his virtues is chastity, the absence of potentially destructive, potentially corrupting carnal knowledge. But the standards by

which Malcolm's moral worth are measured are not only different to those applied to other Scots noblemen; they are, in fact, not even Scottish.

Both Malcolm's parents —particularly, in this instance, his mother — are ~~are~~ shown as people of exceptional worth, characteristed, at this late stage of the action, in overtly religious terms which are notably absent from the rest of the play; the only exceptions —and those minor ones — are all associated with Duncan: the allusions to St. Colm's Inch (I,ii), the prayers of his grooms (II,ii,29-36), and his burial at Colmkill/Iona. The exchange between Malcolm and Macduff takes place during the former's sourjourn in the court of the English king, Edward —a figure of almost legendary sanctity himself, later made a saint and almost certainly immediately recognised as such by an Elizabethan audience. We have had fore-taste of this with the anonymous Lord's description of him as "pious Edward" (III,vi,27); after Macduff's frantic lament for Malcolm's parents —but before he learns of his own, personal tragedy — we hear further of Edward's amazing qualities:

> A most miraculous work in this good king,
> Which often since my here-remain in England
> I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven
> Himself best knows, but strangely visited people,
> All swoll'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
> The mere despair of surgery, he cures,

> Hanging a golden stamp about their necks
> Put on with holy prayers, and 'tis spoken
> To the succeding royalty he leaves
> The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
> He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,
> And sundry blessings hang about his throne
> That speak him full of grace. (IV,iii,149-161)

In what has been seen as a late interpolation to the text of *Macbeth*, the explicity (but 'strangely') virtuous Edward is described almost enviously by Malcolm, who has just asserted his own self-worth, but in terms nowhere near as glowing as these. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, however, it may be that some of Edward's miraculous capabilities rub off on Malcolm.

While Duncan's virtue is largely an invention of Shakespeare's, Edward's is not. The same qualities are found in Holinshed's portrait of the Confessor, with the same interesting observation that Shakespeare makes, namely that he "left that vertue as it were a portion of inheritance vnto his successors the kings of the realm" (Boswell-Stone: 40). There is a subtle suggestion, in this, that the saintly Edward is, among his other virtues, possessed of the sexual fertility proper to a man, hence he will pass on this gift to his heirs. But the suggestion is a misleading one: in an extra-textual point which could not have been lost on the audience at the time, Edward did not, in fact, leave any direct heirs. His piety may have been seen by his subjects as impressive, but he was also "so devout that he refused

to give his wife a child and his realm an heir" (Bryant, 1984: 82); something which Malcolm also conspicuously failed to do. The confusion over the succession which Edward left behind him was largely responsible for the Norman Conquest, and the ensuing generations of turmoil, but in Malcolm's case his childlessness is less of an issue — we know, from the play itself, that it is Banquo, through Fleance, who will become the progenitor of a dynasty of kings, stretching out "to th'crack of doom", guaranteeing for Scots, one might suppose, a continuity and security that their English cousins might envy. In the wider context of the play, there was, of course, a special significance to this, Fleance being the legendary ancestor of the House of Stuart.

Edward's piousness ties him, indirectly, with Duncan and his unnamed wife; his chastity with his Scottish parallel, young Malcolm. His gift of prophecy also connects him, obliquely, with Macbeth, who is criticised twice in Holinshed for his faith in "wizzards" and prophecies (Boswell-Stone: 36, 41) — the same prophecies made by the weïrd sisters' three apparitions in Shakespeare's version. But Edward's gift of prophecy is obviously divine in origin, a "heavenly gift"; Macbeth's information comes from arguably pagan, possibly infernal sources, a point underlined by his inability to "pronounce 'Amen'" in response to the prayers of dead Duncan's groomsmen. All these factors combine, with the minimal religious references elsewhere in the play, to establish a

distinction between a Christian England and a pagan Scotland, and, by the end of the play, Malcolm is firmly associated more with the sensibilities of the former; with the English/Christian paradigm of chastity, rather than the Scottish/pagan one of libidinity. Any awareness of the ultimate end of Holinshed's tale of Macbeth might serve to reinforce the significance of his chastity: Malcolm is succeeded, on his death, by his brother Donaldbain. To a reader or spectator of the play, ignorant of the quasi-elective system which prevailed in 11th century Scotland, the presentation of this minor datum could suggest that Malcolm would remain unmarried, chaste and untainted — and therefore a fine moral exemplar to the end. And through his association with a Christian England, Malcolm also becomes connected, in the variable 'now' of the stage, with the resurgent Protestant militarism celebrated by Gates and Blandy; a Protestant militarism embodied, in the thinking of the recent Elizabethan past, in figures like Drake, Raleigh, Sidney, Leicester and Essex.

5. Confusion's Masterpiece

> God hath his influence into the very essence of all things, without which influence of Deity supporting them their utter annihilation could not choose but follow.
>
> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (McGrade and Vickers:279)

> Moreover, take away order from all things, what should then remain? Certes nothing finally, except ... *Chaos* ... where there is any lack of order needs must be perpetual conflict (Lehmberg: 2).

Bellona, following in the steps of Discord, is evidently a figure of chaos, and from the first her supposed bridegroom is himself associated with disorder. The witches' anticipation of "hurly-burly" and the turmoil of battle itself align them immediately with the same forces of inversion and chaos which they then invoke; Macbeth's place, in the middle of all of this, is extremely suggestive.

When we first hear of Macbeth, it is, as I have noted, in the thick of battle. But we soon realise that this is not unusual for either Macbeth or Scotland; the chaos of war is a common enough thing that it is hardly worth commenting on, and Macbeth's association with it passes relative unremarked upon by his king

and fellow thanes, except in the admiring way I have already described. As a matter of fact, it might seem, initially —despite the hints of the play's opening scene —that Macbeth is associated with forces of order, acting as he does to defeat the rebel Cawdor and restore Scotland to its proper state. But the reappearance of the weïrd sisters soon allows Macbeth to begin —assuming it is necessary for him to do so — to change his allegiance.

The weïrd sisters' second appearance confirms their status as agents of turmoil; they describe with malicious glee the various mischiefs they have been about, and when they are met by Macbeth and Banquo the first comment passed upon them reinforces both their sexual ambiguity and their chaotic nature:

> What are these,
> So withered and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth
> And yet are on't? ... you should be women,
> And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
> That you are so. (I,iii,37-45)

It is noteworthy that it is Banquo who is uncertain here; in a remark with broad implications for his status as a defender of the Scottish realm, all Macbeth has seen fit to remark upon is the strange weather, and he does so in exactly the same terms as the witches, who may in fact be responsible for it. It is Banquo, too, whom the weïrd sisters seek to silence —they want to hear from

Macbeth, and it is in answer to a question from him that they make their prophecies. But it is Banquo who again first responds to them, seeking some similar "great prediction". Their reply is characteristically self-contradictory —lesser and greater, "Not so happy, yet much happier" — giving him little immediate satisfaction. Even so, they have finally said enough to provoke Macbeth, who queries their imperfect speaking in an almost sceptical manner before they disappear.

Banquo's reference to "the insane root" is the best sense he can make of what has just happened, but Macbeth can cut to the heart of the matter: "Your children shall be kings". It is almost as if he is more impressed by this that his own promise of greatness — and perhaps, if he is already preyed upon by the knowledge of his own impotence, this may be so. Again, when Ross and Angus bring news of the battle —and the association of Macbeth with "Strange images of death" — the new-named Thane of Cawdor immediately focuses on the core question at the heart of the conflict: the present status of the former owner of his "borrowed robes". Since Macbeth's reward is one that we, in the audience or reading the text, have had forewarning of, it is, obviously, less of a surprise to us than to Macbeth, and this, combined with Ross' description of the "addition" as a foretaste of further advancement, might make us regard the Sisters' promises with less scepticism than either Macbeth or Banquo. But in a subtle

way, once Macbeth has been reassured of the fate of the traitor, he shows himself to be well down the path that leads to his destruction: He asks Banquo

> Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
> When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
> Promised no less to them? (I,iii,117-119)

Macbeth is sadly — and ominously —mistaken in this remark; the title of Thane of Cawdor was given to him by Duncan, his king, not by the weïrd sisters. As king, Duncan is the only one who can confer such honours, and, as I have already elaborated, they had to be earned, not simply given away. It is as if Macbeth has already forgotten the proper way of things in Scotland, in anticipation of the "greatest" promise made to him.

Banquo's response to Macbeth's query is typically upright: he notes both the uncertain nature of their recent vision, and the unreliability of the information they have heard:

> ... oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence. (I,iii,122-5).

This leads Macbeth to muse upon the weïrd sisters' words, and their effect upon him, now, is to throw him into confusion, into microcosmic disorder:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good.
> ... why do I yield to that suggestion,
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought ...
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is,
> But what is not. (I,iii,129-141)

The description of Macbeth's "single state of man" indicates, according to Braunmuller, "'unitary condition', 'singular existence'". He notes further that "'State' probably evokes analogies with the human body, the body politic, and the macrocosm" (Braunmuller: 117). The strange eruption in the state which Macbeth is about to precipitate is anticipated by his own disarray, a sensation that he can only describe to himself in terms which are once again reminiscent of the witches' self-contradictory rhetoric, and in his first dissimulation he decides to conceal his thoughts from his fellow thanes. Likewise, when he finally returns to the king's presence, he offers what we can now see as lip-service to Duncan, pretending to pay homage to a man he has already begun to plot against. Duncan, as has been noted, is more interested, during this encounter, with naming Malcolm as his heir, proclaiming to the assembled thanes a nobleness in his son which we —and they — have not seen demonstrated in the manner crucial to the warrior

ethic. Duncan describes his son's apparent honour as shining like a star, eliciting from Macbeth his first explicit wish for disorder: "Stars, hide your fires ..." (I,iv,50).

Somewhere in all of this, Macbeth has found time to write to his wife, explaining to her all that has happened, all that has been "promised". Her response is far more immediate than his, and far more passionate —and, again, takes the form of an overt wish for disorder, a displacement of the natural hierarchy of husband over wife and king over subject. She seeks to efface her own gender, to take upon herself the characteristics both of man and beast; like her husband, she also sees herself, now, as an agent of night and darkness:

> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
> To cry, 'Hold, hold.' (I,v,48-52)

Like her husband, she is aware enough of the immorality of her desires that she wishes them to be hidden, even from her own sight. But far more than her husband she is willing to embrace those forces which both of them see —wrongly —as responsible for the reward of Cawdor's title: Macbeth seeks only to be hidden from the stars, his wife from heaven itself. Duncan's murder is carried out that night.

In that same darkness we encounter Banquo and —for the first time —Fleance, about the castle. Coming so soon after the suggestion of Macbeth's impotence, the presence of this man-child with his warrior father serves to reinforce the Thane of Cawdor's increasing distance from his fertile fellow-Scotsmen. As Macbeth and his wife have foreseen, the very stars have hidden from what is happening: "There's husbandry in heaven," says Banquo, "Their candles are all out." (II,i,14-5) —Macbeth's plot against the king has had an immediate effect on the natural order of things. And, like Macbeth later, Banquo finds he cannot sleep —he is almost afraid to; kept awake by some strange premonition that his king is under threat. In a gesture appropriate to the warrior ethic and the defence of the king, he draws his sword at the approach of the not-yet identified Macbeth, and since we know the threat comes from Macbeth himself, Banquo's reaction to him is more fitting than he knows. The gesture also confirms, with his remarks to Macbeth later, that Banquo is holding true to the principles of the warrior ethic; sleeplessness is now all that the two have in common.

With Banquo's departure, Macbeth begins to hallucinate, an obvious manifestation of his inner shaken state. He can understand his present position only in terms of disorder —witchcraft and murder, stones 'prating' of his whereabouts (II,i, 58) —and once the deed is done his mind continues to run along

the same track. His inability to respond to the grooms' prayers and the disembodied voice robbing him of sleep are, to his wife, merely symptoms of 'brain-sickness'; to Macbeth, they are signs — along with his bloody hands and their capacity to stain the ocean — of his self-derived confusion. The immediate effects of Duncan's murder are, however, greater than even Macbeth himself suspects: the stones may not shout, but the confusion that Macbeth has felt about the killing of his king is now loose in the world:

> LENNOX: The night has been unruly: where we lay,
> Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
> Lamentings heard i'th'air, strange screams of death
> And prophesying with accents terrible
> Of dire combustion and confused events,
> New hatched to th'woeful time. The obscure bird
> Clamoured the livelong night. Some say, the earth
> Was feverous and did shake. (II,iii,46-53)

Macbeth's contribution is a model of understatement: "'Twas a rough night".

At this crucial stage, Macduff — all unaware — finds himself at the centre of things: discovering Duncan's body he proclaims "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece" (II,iii,59). Yet who is the author of this work? Macbeth himself, who —to our eyes — weakly feigns his ignorance of the cause of Macduff's distress. From the outset he has been associated with disorder, and both

Lennox's speech and Macduff's subsequent dismay confirm his status as 'confusion's masterpiece'. He emphasises the present rule of chaos in Scotland, and his own part in it, by later lamenting that "from this instant,/There's nothing serious in mortality./All is but toys; renown and grace is dead" (II,iii,85-7). As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, he also quickly indicates the uncertainty which now surrounds his position in a wider metaphysical hierarchy.

The chaos attendant on Duncan's murder is not limited to Forres: the perversions of the natural order described by Ross and the Old Man (II,iv,5-20) — darkness during daytime, falcon-killing hawks, cannibalistic horses —are particularly startling; that they happen in the natural realm, and not the human one, makes them all the more abominable, as if the less-than-human, less-than-manly actions of Macbeth have degraded the entire Great Chain. A note of protest creeps in to things as well: Duncan's horses, their master's 'men', are described as "Contending 'gainst obedience", seeking almost to "make war with mankind" —as if, in fact, they wish to exact their own revenge on Macbeth, the architect of this disorder and the wellspring of new disobedience. The extremity of these events is reinforced by the Old Man's "Threescore and ten", the Biblical limit of a human life, and therefore, possibly, the limits of experience. Perhaps the ensuing events of the play

therefore take place in some semi-magical realm, outside time, outside 'normal' experience.

In a remark typical for him, Ross can only address the approaching Macduff with a polite inconsequence: "How goes the world, sir, now?" From Macduff's reply —"see you not?" (II,iv,21) — we can be certain that Scotland's disorder is manifest; he makes a mockery of Ross' question, introducing a tone of 'things are *exactly* as they seem'. Yet to Ross at least, there is no questioning of Macbeth's spin on Duncan's death, and the convenient flight of the latter's sons — "'Gainst nature still" — both reinforces the theme of inversion of natural order, and encourages him to support Macbeth's accession to the throne. Macduff is already wary, however —he withdraws to Fife rather than see the new king crowned, and he asks Ross to ensure that things are done "well". It is curious that, if he has (unexpressed) concerns, he chooses to see the family he later abandons, rather than bring his own proper witness to Scone.

The departure of Duncan's sons is one of the play's great mysteries: why do Malcolm and Donaldbain flee Scotland? Any number of dramatically expedient explanations could be offered, but none satisfactorily justify this disturbing turn in the plot, particularly since it is accompanied by a conspicuous lack of grief on the part of the two young princes. Malcolm is clear (II,iii,113-

4) that they should take the opportunity to speak out, perhaps even to accuse their host of the murder, if that is their thinking on the matter. Donaldbain, however, is aware that their situation is even more precarious than their father's: "The murderous shaft that's shot/Hath not yet lighted" (II,iii,134-5). If Duncan's sanctity could not protect him, what hope have they? What is even more odd, however, is that they show broader suspicions —Malcolm says that they should "not consort with them", implying that he has his misgivings even about the other thanes: perhaps the "undivulged pretence" of Duncan's assassination, the lack of a new claimant to the throne, has fired his mistrust. The simplest explanation for their departure is the one they themselves hint at: it would not be safe for them to remain in Scotland, and they know it. But more than this it is necessary for the brothers to depart so that at least one of them — almost certainly the nominated heir — will be free to return and set things to rights.

The disordered state in which they leave Scotland would, according to several well-established readings of the play, have elicited a quiet horror from an Elizabethan audience — but, Tillyard's increasingly disreputable view of things aside, there may be another way of looking at things, one I have drawn from a collection of essays published in the early 1990's. Edited by N. Katherine Hayles at the University of Chicago, the title of the collection is *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and*

Science; a title which, I am sure, would catch the eye of anyone whose introduction to Shakespeare was at least partially through the offices of E.M.W. Tillyard[1]. In some respects, this book represents an extension of one of the most rapidly growing fields in publishing, a field generally referred to as 'popular science'. It is not really a new phenomenon —it extends, I think, at least as far back as Thomas Browne or Francis Bacon — but in its most recent manifestation it can probably be said to have developed in the wake Stephen Hawking's much-unread *A Brief History of Time*. Chaos theory —the impetus behind the work of Hayles and company —has accounted for no small number of books in this field.

Hayles' collection is by no means a major work, nor does it represent a new theoretical paradigm; it is simply an attempt to extend some of the ideas behind a relatively new scientific development into the domain of literature. The reason for attempting to do so, according to Hayles, is that

> cultural traditions ... are encoded not merely into words but also into practices, institutions, and material conditions ... this means that chaos theory can scarcely

[1] Much of the following argument is taken from a paper presented to the Australia/New Zealand Shakespeare Association biennial conference in February, 1994. This paper, titled 'The Better Concludes a Worse? Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, and Disorder', was published in *Shakespeare: Readers, Audiences, Players* (University of Western Australia Press, 1998), edited by R.S. White, Charles Edelman, and Christopher Wortham.

> avoid having implications for culture beyond its technical achievements (Hayles: 4).

This is a point on which Hayles would find little disagreement in some circles, and indeed she and her fellow-contributors are well aware of the relationship of chaos theory to other postmodern and poststructural theories (Hayles: 5, 10-11).

Notions of chaos and order remain important preoccupations within Shakespearean criticism. Both old and New Historicists and Cultural Materialists have focussed no small amount of attention on the representations of chaos, and the endorsements of order, found in Elizabethan drama. E.M.W. Tillyard has famously asserted that fear of chaos, and its corollary desire for order, was one of the defining characteristics of the Elizabethan psyche (Tillyard: 25-26), but its presence in the drama was more problematic:

> the conception of order is so taken for granted, so much a part of the collective mind of the people, that it is hardly mentioned at all except in explicitly didactic passages (Tillyard: 18).

In this way, concepts of chaos and order constitute a kind of Derridan trace for Tillyard and his successors. Representations of disorder are, however, far more frequent in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama than Tillyard's "explicitly didactic" pro-order

passages, and New Historicism follows his lead in seeing them as working upon this pervasive fear of chaos, 'rehearsing' disorder in the playhouse, so as to 'contain' it within the playhouse (Greenblatt, 1988: 40). Cultural Materialism, on the other hand, sees the same representations of disorder as blatantly deconstructive, since in the process of 'rehearsal' the order overturned in the playhouse is "interrogated" to the point of becoming subversive (Dollimore: xxi). These are, apparently, our two alternatives: containment or subversion; order or disorder. In many ways Hayles' book complicates this debate, since in applying chaos theory to literary analysis it makes the status of disorder itself far more complex, since it can no longer be assumed, according to Hayles, that chaos is negative (Hayles: 1-3).

In essence, chaos theory has two main branches: one which proposes that what appears to human perceptions to be chaos "may have deep structures of order encoded within it" (Hayles: 3), and another which suggests that chaos may itself lead to order. Hayles concedes that none of the ideas behind chaos theory are 'new' (Hayles: 3), but I would like to go so far as to say that neither of these two main propositions are alien to Elizabethan thinking; it would be no great leap to see, for example, the connection between the 'encoded order' and repeated patterns of chaotic systems and the well-known Tillyardian 'Great Chain': it is a common conceit in the theological writings of the Elizabethan

and Jacobean periods to assert that what appears chaotic and incomprehensible to Man must surely not be so to God, tying in to chaos theory's notions of implicate order. But it is the other proposition of chaos theory —that chaos can lead to order —with which I am more concerned. This branch of chaos theory has, according to Hayles,

> a vision of the world that extends its significance ... into the cultural realm ... It envisions a world that can renew itself rather than a universe which is constantly running down (Hayles: 12-13)

It is, in some respects, the more radical, less respectable side of chaos theory, and one which has significant philosophical implications; it goes against the grain of some of the most fundamental principles of modern and ancient science. It may also seem to be antagonistic to Renaissance thinking, but I hope to demonstrate otherwise.

It might seem out of keeping with the methodology I have applied elsewhere in this thesis to approach the ideas of chaos and order in Elizabethan drama through the vehicle of a late 20th Century scientific theory, but I have found several expressions of the relevant idea — that chaos can promote the formation of order — in Renaissance sources, one of the more obvious being the widespread and persisting belief in spontaneous generation, the idea that insects and some animals developed from inert or

decomposing matter. An extreme example of this is reported by Carlo Ginzburg in his account of the heresy trials of a late 16th-century Italian miller. He quotes the following extraordinary cosmology from Inquisitorial records:

> My opinion is that God was eternal with chaos ... that he was made from chaos ... I believe that it was with God as with the things of this world that proceed from imperfect to perfect, as an infant who while he is in his mother's womb neither understands nor lives, but outside the womb begins to live, and in growing begins to understand (Ginzburg: 54-55).

While this is hardly an orthodox view, it is nonetheless remarkable; it demonstrates at least the possibility of such thinking. It also shows as much the influence of Ovid as it does of the scriptures, and it is Ovid who confirms that such thinking was not limited to northern Italy: in his notes to his 1632 translation of *Metamorphoses* George Sandys glosses Ovid's account of the Creation by suggesting that the Chaos which preceded it was "ordered, as they say by *Love*", by the Creator who "gave form to the deformed, and perfection to the imperfect ... The better concludes a worse, which was *Chaos*" (Hulley and Vandersall: 49). A more influential expression of the same idea, and one that would have been more familiar to Shakespeare, his audiences, and his players, is the following:

> that which thou sowest, it is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall bee ... The body is sowen in corruption, and is raised in incorruption ... For this corruption must put incorruption: and this mortall must put on immortality. (I Cor.15:36-53)

It is possible, of course, that it was this passage which led both Sandys and Ginzburg's miller to express things the way they did; indeed, Sandys goes so far as to suggest that Ovid himself may have been influenced by the scriptures — "doubtless he had either seene the Books of *Moses*, or receaved that doctrine by tradition".

It is clear, then, that the idea that order could grow out of chaos was not alien to Renaissance thinking, admittedly with the proviso that the divine hand always seems to be involved. This is the principle difference between the expression of this idea in Shakespeare's time, and in our own; it is not a new idea, as Hayles admits, but an old one that is continually rearticulated in the terms of changing dominant discourses. In any case, what chaos theory is effecting is a change in the perception of change: chaos becomes a means by which significant transformations of structure are carried out.

The perception of change in Elizabethan drama is likewise problematic. It is possible to see in much of the writing of the Elizabethan period a resistance to change, especially social or

political change. This is intimately related to the fear of chaos: the social or political order of the monarchy which existed was one ordained by God, as the endless and often repetitive arguments of various authors point out. Such arguments, according to Catherine Belsey, depended upon the fear of chaos for their strength, intended, as they were, to shore up an at best shaky structure:

> The arguments ... have in common a tendency to fix difference as antithesis, to restrict the imaginable possibilities to two: on the one hand, this government, or on the other, no government, the present order or its opposite, which is always chaos ... The project is, of course ... to close off any consideration of a third possibility (Belsey: 94).

In this way, fear of chaos becomes a fear of change, since any alteration to the prevailing structures can, in theory, have no result but to destroy the structures. But to suggest that the result would be a resistance to, or a fear of, any change at all would be wrong: Jonathon Dollimore has demonstrated that there was a clear difference in Elizabethan thinking between change-as-decline, and change-as-alteration — decay and mutability (Dollimore: 92-99). He draws a distinction between two prevailing philosophies which would have affected the individual's perception of change. The first, which he ascribes to Augustine, held that the most significant event of history was the Fall: the universe may have been created perfect but it was corrupted by Man's transgression and had been steadily declining since. The

other, which he credits to Aquinas, acknowledges the significance of the Fall but held that some of the perfection which preceded it was recoverable; it "affirms man's ... rational potential" and "exalted nature", rather than his depravity (Dollimore: 161-166). The tension which exists between these two views is by no means unique to the English Renaissance; there will at any time, I think, be a balance between the belief that things are steadily getting worse —the 'Augustinian' view —and the belief that things are slowly getting better — the 'Aquinian' view. The dominance of one or the other of these views in a culture or an individual will affect how changes to society, to political or ethical structures, will be perceived; it would determine whether the political revolutions portrayed in *Julius Caesar* or *Coriolanus*, for example, would be seen as changes for the better or worse. This would also depend on the 'distance' (so to speak) between the values and structures of the spectator, or of the audience, and those represented in the plays. In these and in several other Shakespearean plays it is possible to see a process of change via a passage from order, to chaos, to a re-ordering. *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* are biased toward representing this process as a change for the worse; the 'new' order which results is somehow inferior — especially on ethical grounds — to the one it has replaced. In most cases, however, the end result of the process of re-ordering is more ambiguous: *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, and *King Lear* can each

be seen as rehearsing this process of order-chaos-reorder, but the resulting ethical or political restructuring can be read either way.

When I first began to look at *Macbeth*, it was these possible ethical and political changes in the play that were my principal interest. Chaos theory has, at least peripherally, influenced the way I look at these changes. Disorder can operate as a kind of discourse within an ethical or political framework, since it is possible to learn more about such structures when they have been, as it were, torn apart. *Macbeth* is obviously an important text in this regard, since representations of disorder are more frequent, and possibly more significant, than in any other Shakespearean play.

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With Duncan's murder, the ethical, sexual and political structures which operate in Shakespeare's Scotland have been ripped apart, with visible chaos as a result. After the killing of his king, the usurper Macbeth is so determined to be "safely thus" that he is willing to wish further chaos upon the world:

> But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly. (III,ii,16-19)

But does he sleep? Clearly not — he now envies the dead; he envies Duncan his rest, while he, Macbeth, must suffer nightly turmoil. And is that a royal 'we', or is Lady Macbeth likewise afflicted by dreams? Perhpas significantly, it is at this point that Lady Macbeth ceases to have any active part in Macbeth's machinations, and she later shows herself to be affected by the same personal disorder that plagues her husband: her doctor explains her sleepwalking by observing that "unnatural deeds/Do breed unnatural troubles" (V,i,61-62).

Whereas earlier in the play, before the deed was done, it was Lady Macbeth who could make the explicit invocation of the forces of darkness, it is now Macbeth who calls upon infernal forces:

> Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale. Light thickens,
> And the crow makes wing to th'rooky wood;
> Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
> Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
> (III,ii,46-53)

The invisible bloody hand of chaos immediately recalls Macbeth's own, the same that he refused to recognise as his own after Duncan's murder, the same hand he even earlier wished his eyes

would "wink at". It is this hand which has torn the "great bond" — the warrior ethic and his allegiance to the king —which Macbeth now feels has him pale with sickness, perhaps even cowering with fear — but it also keeps him "pale" in the sense of its being a fence, a limitation on his ambitions and desires. The drooping and drowsy "Good things" that begin to withdraw from the night obviously do not include Macbeth, his wife, and Banquo's murderers: the association of the Macbeths with night and darkness is clear. With the unnamed Lord's later interpretation of the 'moral' of Banquo's tale as "Men must not walk too late", it is also obvious that it is becoming well understood in Scotland, too.

The interrupted banquet begins with a reminder of the order that Macbeth has subverted — "You know your own degrees," he insists (III,iv,1). At this stage — despite the sentiments he has expressed two scenes before —he seems intent on preserving the traditional order, and yet his next sentiment serves to overturn it: "Our self will mingle with society and play the humble host". Humble it may be to do so, but what this supposed magnanimity really shows is that the new-crowned Macbeth, a man not intended to occupy the throne, does not know his own place. He leaves his wife in state — itself, possibly, an inversion of the normal order of things — and seeks, however temporarily, to resume his former position. But he cannot —first the murderer and then Banquo's ghost prevent him. Despite his

desire to re-join his comrades, to return to the familiar environment of the warrior ethic, there is no indication that Macbeth ever manages to take his seat —Lennox, after all, invites him to do so (III,iv,39).

Macbeth seems to be aware of how far from the normal state he has pushed things:

> Blood hath been shed ere now, i'th'olden time,
> Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;
> Ay, and since too, murders have been performed
> Too terrible for the ear. 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 murders on their crowns
> And push us from our stools. This is more strange
> Than such a murder is. (III,iv,75-83).

As king he is supposed to be the living embodiment of "human statute", of the rule of law; he is supposed to defend the commonweal and its members from murder, not thrust it upon them. That Banquo can — to Macbeth's eyes at least —roam, dead, is a reminder to him of the disorder he has inflicted upon the realm. Indeed, he is berated for this by his wife: "You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting/With most admired disorder" (III,iv,109-110). The imagined roving of the dead Banquo also reinforces the idea that Scotland is now, somehow, a realm outside time, beyond the normal limitations of mortality.

Even within this scene, the point is further reinforced by Macbeth's apprehension that he may be betrayed by natural forces:

> It will have blood they say: blood will have blood.
> Stones have been known to move and trees to speak.
> Augures, and understood relations, have
> By maggot-pies, and choughs, and rooks brought forth
> The secret'st man of blood. (III,iv,122-126)

Faced with her husband's "admired disorder", Lady Macbeth dismisses the thanes: "At once, good night./Stand not upon the order of your going,/But go at once" (III,iv,118-120). The broken meeting of the banquet ends with a clear evocation of the disorder which now plagues Scotland: even the normal ceremony of the court is thrown out.

As I have noted in the previous chapter, the reappearance of Banquo's ghost becomes, for Macbeth and his unknowing wife, a question of his manhood: he is unable to rouse the courage to confront this unnatural challenge. But he is confident of his ability to confront natural enemies, and his subsequent visit to the weïrd sisters convinces him of his invulnerability to any but unnatural foes. It is a fair comment on Macbeth's transformation —if that is what it is —that he now knows exactly where to find the weïrd sisters, and his 'conjuration' of them (IV,i,49-59) uses imagery of inversion and excessive destructiveness, continuing the theme of

disorder which has become associated with him. The nature of the apparitions emphasises Scotland's disordered state, particularly its dislocation from normal time — the spectres present images which resonate back and forward through the play's action and beyond, placing the perspective of the witches, the usurping king and, by extension, the whole of Scotland outside mere human time.

The first apparition, "an armed Head", warns Macbeth "Beware the Thane of Fife" (IV,i,71). The apparition's warning is straightforward enough, and after the previous confusing scene may serve to clarify some things in the audience's mind. The appearance of the apparition is something else altogether; it would be obvious to see it as both a recollection of the decapitation of the traitor Macdonald, and an anticipation of Macbeth's ultimate decapitation at the hands of Macduff. But it could also be taken as an image of Duncan, of Malcolm and his relationship to his usurped kingdom —a premonition of the restoration of order to the kingdom. Macbeth has cut off Scotland's head, but it will return, armed, to its proper place.

The second apparition is a "a bloody Child". Its warning relates intimately to the first, and yet Macbeth, unknowing, uses its admonition to dismiss his fears of Macduff — but he still decides he will kill Macduff to "tell pale-hearted fear it lies,/And sleep in spite of thunder" (IV,i,84-85). He will defy augury despite

all of the prophecies which have so far come true. Again, an alert audience member might recall this apparition later, seeing the bloody child as the "Untimely ripped" Macduff, but there are other bloody children in the play, both seen —Macduff's unnamed son, murdered by Macbeth's assassins —and unseen —the imaginary baby dashed against a wall by Lady Macbeth. In the latter case, it is apparition which reminds the audience of her distorted sexuality, and the corruption of the natural order which her ambition and destructiveness inspire.

The third apparition, "a Child crowned, with a tree in his hand", is a less ambiguously interpreted image — the untried, virginal and therefore child-like Malcolm, camouflaged by the boughs of Birnam Wood, coming to reclaim his kingdom. There are, in this image, obvious connections to the Green Man, to the spring of rebirth that will come, with the legitimate king, to return order to the realm, and these are connections which are proper to Macbeth, the witches, and the pagan Scotland they inhabit. But the vision also serves to anticipate something we do not yet know of Malcolm: his exceptional virtue. "Who can impress the forest, bid the tree/Unfix his earthbound root?" asks Macbeth (IV,i,94-95), and the answer is obvious: no normal man, born of woman or not; it would be an action of almost divine will, if it were to come literally true. The final apparition, and the words it speaks, also build upon the previous apparitions to suggest, again, the disorder

that Macbeth has brought to Scotland: armed heads, bloody and crowned children, unborn men and walking trees are all unnatural events. That the apparitions' prophecies are fulfilled in so prosaic a fashion is a mark of how easily Macbeth is led astray by forces which, like Mephistoheles to Faust, deliver none of the things they promise. And it is odd that, with all he has seen, Macbeth refuses to acknowledge the possibility of any of the newly-foretold events coming to pass.

The final vision, the 'show of kings' —the "two-fold balls and treble sceptres" shown to Macbeth— is significant in a number of ways. It certainly relates to the politics of the world outside the play —James' accession, perhaps even the visit of the King of Denmark —but it also, arguably, foreshadows the coming political change within the world of the play —the accession of a king strongly allied to England. Macbeth's description of the royal pageant has always suggested, in my mind, a kind of masque: it would be easy to imagine Inigo Jones' sketches for appropriate sets and costumes. Given James' fondness for ornate displays in masques, it possible that the infamous court performance might have entailed all sorts of devices and extravagances, but beneath them all would have been the not particularly subtle stroking of the royal ego.

But to a certain extent the parade must act on Macbeth in such a way as to undo much of the assurance he has obtained from the previous apparitions. This is, after all, a vision he has asked for, but also one he has been, for whatever strange reason, warned away from. Yet he insists —and the result is a show to "grieve his heart", and for which he curses the witches. It is after this disconcerting exhibition —and the news of Macduff's flight — that he vows to crown his thoughts with acts, and while action itself may be manly and proper, what Macbeth promises is intemperate, impulsive action. In short, he is now undertaking to visit upon Scotland and its people as much chaos as he can muster to his side.

Macduff's flight is itself a manifestation of the disordered state of Scotland. His departure makes little sense to anyone in the play, and, despite the best efforts of decades of Shakespearean criticism, it makes even less sense to the changing sensibilities of audiences. Like the departure of Duncan's sons, it is something that only makes sense in terms of its being dramatically expedient —but even that explanation introduces more complications. If Malcolm's self-imposed exile can be interpreted as a necessary removal from his corrupted realm, making him the focus of the play's and the kingdom's aspirations towards restored order, then Macduff's exodus might seem redundant: one could imagine the returning true king confronting the usurper with self-comparisons

and besting him, acting in his own interests to resolve the crisis himself. But as I have shown, the paradigm of martial skill which operates in Scotland does not extend to the king — he is not expected to fight. But even if Malcolm is not constrained by the separate ethical structure which surrounds him, there is another, perhaps even more important reason why he cannot be the agent of his own delivery. Though Macbeth is a usurper, he *is* king — crowned, anointed, witnessed. As such, he is granted a degree of sanctity and protection, whether he deserves it or not. The Homilies were quite clear on this point —even the most immoral of rulers was to be endured:

> Yet let us believe undoubtedly ... that we may not obey Kings, Magistrates, or any other ... if they would command us to do any thing contrary to God's commandments ... But nevertheless, in that case we may not in any wise withstand violently, or rebel against rulers, or make any insurrection, sedition, or tumults (Homilies: 110).

This was an issue about which James himself felt strongly, arguing — most notably in *Basilikon Doron* — against the overthrow of tyrants. The problem, of course, is that Malcolm does "withstand violently". Shakespeare is treading a very fine ethical line here, suggesting at one and the same time that Malcolm is the true, if thwarted, king of Scotland —but that the usurper Macbeth is also a king. The latter obviously orders many things "contrary to God's commandments", but not to either Malcolm or Macduff —and in

any case, should Malcolm have obeyed an instruction from this questionable king? I suspect that this is not a question that even the various authors of the Homilies — perhaps even Elizabeth herself — would have been comfortable trying to answer. For Shakespeare, the solution to this sticky moral dilemma is neat, if evasive — whatever else Malcolm does, he is not individually responsible for the death of a king.

If it cannot be Malcolm who kills the tyrant Macbeth, then another candidate must be found —and so the relocated Macduff becomes the instrument who, at his king's proper direction, will administer the appropriate chastisement to the latest rebel — much as Macbeth himself did with Cawdor. But the murder of Macduff's family makes his interest in Macbeth personal — it pushes his motivation over the line from just punishment and in to the problematic domain of revenge. This is where the supposed parallels between Macbeth and Macduff break down, in both Holinshed and in Shakespeare's version of the story: Macbeth has no personal motivation beyond ambition in anything he does — his killing of the rebel Cawdor, his assassination of Duncan, his disposal of Banquo. Even in the case of Macduff's family, his motive is hardly revenge; it is malice, pure and simple, a symptom of his cruelty and of his now chaotic nature. The Thane of Fife, through his connection with the notorious "wild justice" of revenge, is likewise a figure of disorder —but a very, very minor

one. For Macduff, there are no witches or forces of darkness —not even an ambitious wife —to spur him on, and whatever his other motivations, in killing Macbeth he is also carrying out the instructions of his true king. But he is not, as Macbeth was, seen as single-handedly responsible for the true king's victory over a rebel; he is not, not even as Macbeth was, an agent of order: that province is left entirely to Malcolm.

Ross' description of Scotland, when he greets Malcolm and Macduff in England, is more in the unnatural events/disorder vein:

> ... sighs, and groans, and shrieks that rend the air
> Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
> A modern ecstasy. The deadman's knell
> Is there scarce asked for who, and good men's lives
> Expire before the flowers in their caps ... (IV,iii,170-174)

Too polite and well-meaning still, Ross tells Macduff his wife and children are "well ... well at peace". He avoids explaining this, choosing instead to address Malcolm —and to credit him with a possible positive inversion of the natural order of things:

> Your eye in Scotland
> Would create soldiers, make our women fight
> To doff their dire distress. (IV,iii,188-190)

The bloodthirstiness of even Scotland's women was legendary in Shakespeare's time, but it is, perhaps, the disorder which prevails in Scotland that makes this particular miracle possible; either that, or the inspirational effect of the return of the true king. Ross' remarks preface a number of scenes in which the response of various Scots —the thanes, the Doctor, the common people — to the prospect of their true king's return are contrasted with their increasing antipathy towards the "tyrant".

Several of the thanes discuss their intention to join Malcolm's forces. Menteith expresses his confidence in Malcolm and the "good Macduff", and notes, as Ross did, Malcolm's ability to inspire loyal Scotsmen:

> The English power is near, led on by Malcolm,
> His uncle Siward, and the good Macduff.
> Revenges burn in them, for their dear causes
> Would to the bleeding and the grim alarm
> Excite the mortified man. (V,ii,3-5)

Braunmuller glosses 'mortified' in this case as both meaning both dead and insensible (Braunmuller: 221), the latter suggesting, perhaps, that Scotland and its warriors have been numbed by the excesses of Macbeth's reign. But it is the first, and, to my thinking, more obvious meaning he offers — dead —, which is most interesting: Ross may have observed, earlier, that Malcolm could excite Scotland's women to fight for their freedom, but here, we

discover that he can inspire even the dead to rise. Edward may be able to heal the King's Evil, but Malcolm can — at least metaphorically — defy even death — a possible indication of a divine connection, a heavenly anointing of him as the true king. To Macbeth, the revenant spirit of Banquo is a threat, but to Malcolm the vengeful dead of Scotland are another ally, assisting in the restoration of "measure, time, and place".

The perception of Macbeth deteriorates even further; Caithness reports:

> Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him
> Do call it valiant fury, but for certain
> He cannot buckle his distempered cause
> Within the belt of rule. (V,ii,13-16)

Macbeth's 'cause' is beyond rule, beyond order. Since the natural order of things — the warrior ethic and its expectation of obedience — has been disrupted by his actions, he cannot rely upon it helping him: "Those he commands," notes Angus, "move only in command,/Nothing in love" (V,ii,19-20). The "service" and "loyalty" Macbeth admits owing to Duncan are not due to him, and those thanes who have not already deserted him now see this (but why did they not before?): "march we on", adds Caithness,

> To give obedience where 'tis truly owed;
> Meet we the med'cine of the sickly weal,
> And with him pour we in our country's purge
> (V,ii,26-28)

Again, this could be taken to suggest Malcolm's divine nature, perhaps even his superiority to even the holy King Edward; the English king can cure his subjects, but Malcolm will 'purge' an entire kingdom. Scotland's sickness is a reflection of Macbeth's own inner turmoil, his shaken "single state of man" — both the body of the king and the body of the kingdom are afflicted by the disorder of disease, manifested within by his "heat-oppressèd brain" and his strange fits, outwardly by the widely-noted turmoil in the natural world. Malcolm is the proper "med'cine" for both, but he will administer only appropriate physic: "so much as it needs," says Lennox, "To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds" (V,ii,29-30).

The translation of the action to Macbeth's heavily fortified castle continues the previous scene's image of a diseased body needing treatment. Macbeth sneeringly dismisses the "false thanes" who have flown to "the English epicures" (V,iii,8-9); despite being accused of luxuriousness and indulgence himself, Macbeth feels free to characterise his foes as voluptuous, soft — the opposite, in his mind, of the battle-hardened Scots, ruled by

the warrior ethic he has forsaken. As I have noted in Chapter 3, he begins to show a kind of despair:

> I have lived long enough. My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
> 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,22-28)

The images are of decay, age, impotence and failure. In some ways he is comparing himself, here, to Duncan, and finding both himself and his rule lacking. Like Angus and Caithness, he is aware that he no longer has the true loyalty of his people, that same loyalty he gave apparently freely to his king at the play's outset. The Doctor's entry extends the disease metaphor to Lady Macbeth, despite his diagnosis of her as "Not so sick ... As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies/That keep her from rest" (V,iii,38-40). "Cure her of that," says Macbeth

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart? (V,iii,38-46)

Assured of the Doctor's professional impotence in this, he famously proclaims "Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it", and, resigned to no other cure, calls — for the third time — for his armour and prepares to fight. Medicine at the time was predicated on the restoration of balance to a disordered body, and Macbeth's lack of faith in physic reinforces — as if we needed it, at this stage of the play — how far from his world's notions of order and regularity he has travelled, particularly since the advancing Malcolm, the true king, is seen as the "antidote" to Macbeth's poison. Yet he still seeks for some other possible, easier remedy

> If thou couldst, doctor, cast
> The water of my land, find her disease,
> And purge it to a sound and pristine health,
> I would applaud thee to the very echo
> That should applaud again ...
> What rhubarb, cynne, or what purgative drug
> Would scour these English hence? (V,iii,51-57)

The disease is, of course, Macbeth himself, and the called-for purge is on its way — but what is odd, here, is his desire that Scotland be purged of the English. This may be an unnoticed hangover from the play's source, but a quick examination of that source introduces some interesting implications. In relating incidents beyond the end of Macbeth's reign, Holinshed notes the enthusiasm with which the Scots greeted Malcolm's successor, his brother Donaldbain:

> For manie of the people, abhorring the riotous maners and superfluous gormandizing brought in among them by the Englishmen, were willing inough to receiue this Donald for their king, trusting (bicause he had beene brought vp in the Iles with the old customes and maners of their ancient nation, without tast of the English likerous delicats) they should by his seuere order in gouernement recouer againe the former temperance of their old progenitors (Boswell-Stone: 42).

This is, obviously, the source of Macbeth's dismissal of "the English epicures" —but it is also something which joins a long list of source-related questions, all of which are unanswerable without some idea of the familiarity the play's various audiences may have had with the Chronicle. In Shakespeare, we have the "seuere" Macbeth wanting to expel the invading English: in Holinshed it is the Scottish people themselves, seemingly mourning that same severity, who want the influence of the English removed. But the obvious source of that influence is the good, virtuous and — in both Shakespeare and Holinshed — temperant Malcolm. The Scots —and James' court —may have been notorious for their drinking, but in Holinshed it is the "English likerous delicats" that are cause for concern. If the court was at all familiar with Holinshed —and there is good reason to believe that many of them were —then this swipe at the English would have been risible, but, like Lady Macbeth's and the Porter's remarks on drinking earlier in the play, it may have also raised a

few eyebrows. In the Globe, however, this petty put-down of the English may have inspired more than casual laughter —it must have been quite humorous to hear a 'Scottish' 'king' denouncing the intemperance of the English. Likewise, Macbeth's expressed desire to have the English 'purged' from his kingdom could hardly have gone unnoticed; there were many Londoners who felt the same way about James' Scots.

By this stage of the play, Macbeth has begun to realise that his cause is hopeless, and even the news that his wife, his dearest partner of greatness, is dead, a possible suicide, cannot move him from the dismay which now grips him:

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,
> 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,18-27)

He trails off into yet another image of disorder, of meaningless "sound and fury" instead of divinely mandated peace and order. With the news that Birnam Wood is moving towards the castle, his despair is almost complete:

> I pull in resolution and begin
> To doubt th'equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth ...
> I 'gin to be aweary of the sun
> And wish th'estate o'th'world were now undone.
> (V,v,41-49)

With this final wish for chaos, he is ready to fight. With his departure, Siward is able to invite Malcolm into the "gently rendered" Dunsinane: he notes that in the chaos of battle (and, of course, the chaos of Macbeth's Scotland), "The tyrant's people on both sides do fight" (V,vii,26), but the thanes, with their allegiance to the restored king confirmed, are doing exactly what the warrior ethic requires of them —they "do bravely in the war". The night and disorder associated with Macbeth are being overcome, and "The day almost itself" aligns with Malcolm, the true king who, restoring order, has little to do.

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There are several key elements in the play's last scenes which reinforce the apparent circularity of events in Scotland. One of these, as I noted in Chapter 3, is the persistence or re-establishment of the warrior ethic, graphically represented by the death of Young Siward and the way it is perceived. Another is the endurance of certain of the play's paradigms of masculinity,

although these are complicated by the contradictory expectations surrounding Malcolm. A third is stated explicitly by Macduff, seeking vengeance on Macbeth for his own peace; he declares that he will not fight with the "wretched kerns" Macbeth has under hire: like Sweno and Macdonald, the tyrant has resorted to mercenaries. All of this has been noted by many critics, but of particular relevance here is the shrewd analysis of Harry Berger. He suggests that

> Shakespeare is centrally interested ... in dramatizing failures or evasions of responsibility correlated with problematic structural tendencies that *seem* benign because it is in the interest of self-deceiving characters to view them that way (Berger: 3).

Even so, he questions the emphasis in much criticism of the play on disruption and restoration of order, disagreeing that the realm was ~~was~~ governed in or by "unity and harmony", and insisting that there is a "settled instability" (Berger: 4), a pre-existing tendency toward disorder "which makes ... harm probable".

The 'structural tendency' which he sees as responsible for Scotland's turmoil is what I have called the warrior ethic; in Berger's reading it is a lingering cause of strife, and will be so again:

> Macduff's killing Macbeth recalls Macbeth's victory over Macdonwald [sic]: Macbeth also has Kernes fighting for him, and his head, Macduff threatens, will end up on a pole, if not on battlements. This may be viewed as poetic justice, the wheel come full circle. But it may also be simple recurrence, more of the same. In killing Macbeth, Macduff steps into his role. Will he become Malcolm's Macbeth? (Berger: 4)

He has an ally in believing this in Marilyn Williamson, who suggests that "the repetition of elements raises a question about whether the time is truly free. The surplus of violence silently remains" (Williamson: 164). To suggest this, however, is to (once again) ignore the implications of the source material, to fail to take into account the understanding of it by the various segments of the audience: there is no hint, in Holinshed, that Macduff will go on to become a new threat to Scotland's stability, that Malcolm will face the same challenges as his too-gentle father.

Nonetheless, the circularity is there to be seen, and, once seen, can easily become an overriding factor in any reading of the play as a whole. In many ways, *Macbeth* represents a kind of antithesis to the model of order-chaos-reorder that I proposed earlier in this chapter, since it could be argued that the process fails to operate in the play. Carolyn Asp emphasises that the play's resolution does not involve a structural change to Scotland's governing ethic, insisting that

> Society has not changed; it has merely eliminated two extremists [Macbeth and Lady Macbeth] who pushed the stereotype of manliness beyond the limits it was established to serve (Asp: 169).

In other words, if order is re-established at the play's end, it is not the subtly transformed order which characterises the conclusion of *Hamlet*, or the questionable political re-ordering at the end of *Julius Caesar* or the beginning of *Coriolanus*. The process of re-ordering fails to operate any *distinct* change in the world of the play: there are only suggestions of change, possibilities of difference. Some of these are, however, more obvious than others. Malcolm promises the restoration of order, of "measure, time, and place". Scotland will be returned from its strange dislocation from human time, back in to the normal flow of mortality, of cause and effect. He will perform the restoration of order to Scotland in and from his proper place, place both geographical —the crowning at Scone, to which he has invited all his thanes (and what hint is there here that Macduff won't turn up this time?) —and socio-political, with all those accompanying him restored to theirs. Newly hailed as Scotland's king, he readily adopts the royal 'we' and grants to his loyal thanes a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon —which is to say English —title. It is this English influence which is the only hint of change in Shakespeare's Scotland. But we hear, too, of "exiled friends abroad", including Donaldbain — a future king who will, according to Holinshed, undo

the damage wrought by "English epicures" —and the promising Fleance, ancestor to both the Tudors and the Stuarts.

Hayles notes the importance of the ideas of order and chaos in many creation myths (Hayles: 3-4); a deity's preference of one over the other will act so as to legitimate one or the other. In the space of the last act, Malcolm is described as having the ability to inspire the dead to fight for him; to bring Birnam Wood to Dunsinane; to cure the sickness of his kingdom; to rout the infernal chaos of Macbeth and his savage allies and bring peace back to his country. It is almost as if something of the holy Edward has rubbed off on him; the divine powers granted the English king inspire Malcolm to perform his own, smaller miracles. Further, Malcolm is now firmly associated with Christian England, and, as I have shown from Holinshed, historically he will continue to be perceived as under English influence — but not, in the source at any rate, in any way that is to be admired. In the play, however, the new Christianised king has defeated a chaotic usurper and, by extension, the pagan forces associated with him; like the Young Siward, he is "God's soldier", a soldier of light and right and the restoration of (divine) order. According to Marilyn Williamson,

> *Macbeth* concludes with a single ideological orientation, through which the cultural problem of violence and other contradictions peep, to be sure, but the end

> seems to be a victory for natural, virtuous, legitimate sovereignty (Williamson: 149).

In restoring order to Scotland, Malcolm duplicates the fundamental act of creation, and in doing so legitimates himself: it would be obvious that only a divinely sanctioned monarch could hope to achieve what he has. By the end of *Macbeth* the rightful king is on his throne, the prophecies of the weïrd sisters' apparitions have been fulfilled in a surprisingly trivial way, and we can assume Fleance is off somewhere begetting kings. If, as I have observed, the same political and ethical structures prevail at the end of the play as did at the beginning, then chaos has not led to a new order, but the same one, reinforced. If so, then this is what is truly tragic about Macbeth the man, and the play named after him: for all his pride and ambition, for all his sin, for all the chaos he has caused, he has changed nothing.

I concede that, in many ways, this conclusion could be argued with — and I intend to address some of these arguments in the next, last, chapter. Nonetheless, I would maintain that the absence of any significant *re*-ordering — one which might otherwise result in a *new* order —still reveals a great deal about the play. Historicist analyses of Shakespeare's plays, and the manner in which disorder is represented in other Elizabethan writing, have encouraged the view that the chaotic middle stage of the re-ordering process is a disaster, something to be remedied as

quickly as possible. Chaos theory, however, suggests that the chaotic phase is somehow *necessary*, that the re-ordering which occurs at the end of many Elizabethan and Jacobean plays is a result of the disorder which precedes it.

6. The trim of the old times

I began, not with a desire to speak with the dead, but with a need to argue with the living.

When I first began studying Elizabethan literature in the early 1980s, I did so at what was — at that stage — a very conservative university, which taught very conservative courses very conservatively. Certainly, part of the recommended reading for any course on Shakespeare and his contemporaries was E.M.W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*, and it was largely addressed in lectures and tutorials as an authoritative text, as THE Elizabethan world picture. Along with Bradley — and perhaps, on the rare occasion, Jan Kott — the book represented at the very least a good grounding in what was what.

In calling his work *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Tillyard was establishing a number of points before a prospective reader even opened the book. First, it was clear that there was — at least according to Tillyard — only one Elizabethan world picture, a single, coherent pattern of image and inter-reference. Second, of course, was where to find it. Here, in your hands.

What this idea and the way it was taught lead me to believe was not just the notion that there was a single, recognisable Elizabethan world picture, a Renaissance English

mind-set, but also that this mind-set was somehow recoverable, that if I were to immerse myself thoroughly in the period —its history, its texts, its own cultural and intellectual background — then I could somehow come to approximate that mind-set in myself, and therefore possess a better insight into the drama than might otherwise be the case.

Coming back to the same university to do so, a few years later, was a definite shock to the system. Encountering — relatively late — Jonathon Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* was even worse. Here was someone, speaking of and in and to a wider discourse of which I was largely unaware, telling me (bluntly) that Tillyard and Bradley and their fellows were *wrong*, that the Great Chain and divine order and the overweening fear of chaos which permeated the Elizabethan mind were fictions, political constructs, ideological tools not only of the Tudor monarchs but also of the critics who wrote about them and the times in which they wrote.

Much of Tillyard's argument was, indeed, based on his reading of Elizabethan notions of chaos and order. What he produced was certainly an admirable piece of scholarship, but I soon realised, re-addressing it armed with a new-cast arsenal of lit-theory weapons, that the nature of the book, and of the argument, was such that it could only be described as prescriptive: it set out to give the (decidedly male) reader all he needed to know about the background to Elizabethan drama, and, at the same time, to convince him that here *was* all he

needed to know. That a number of subsequent critics, and critical schools, have seen fit to take Tillyard to task is not, therefore, really surprising; as criticism spirals up and away from some numinous point of conception —turning and turning in the widening gyre, so to speak — it covers old ground merely by encompassing it, and perhaps it is inevitable that there should develop an antipathy toward what has gone before, towards (in this case) Tillyard's style of monolithic, prescriptive reading.

What I did find surprising, however, was the realisation that Dollimore *et al* were not really so far from Tillyard as they imagined. Dollimore criticises —perhaps rightly —the over-prescriptive, single-minded readings of early critics, but only, it seems to me, to replace their readings with his own. Consider this: early in his argument in *Radical Tragedy*, Dollimore sets out what is, I think, his central idea in that work. He asserts that

> a significant sequence of Jacobean tragedies, including the majority of Shakespeare's, were more radical than has hitherto been allowed (Dollimore: 3).

As far as I can tell, Dollimore follows up this statement-of-position with a fairly repetitive analysis of a variety of 'late' plays, and in which he continually re-asserts his claim of a re-discovered radicalism. The arch-conservatives of Tillyard's old world order are unexpectedly shown to be cunning subversives, the red lining on their robes suddenly showing through.

It is never made clear, in the course of *Radical Tragedy*, exactly what Dollimore means by "sequence", or even by "significant". It could be said that the significance of the plays he analyses lies principally in their impact on his argument: *Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* aside, most of the plays he focuses attention on are second-stringers at best. In his preface to the second edition he tempers his position somewhat when he concedes that

> A particular play might offer a radical critique of providentialist ideology while being inherently conservative in other respects (Dollimore: xxi).

In saying this, he acknowledges an essential conservatism in theatrical practice in Jacobean London, while still asserting that *some* playwrights, *particular* plays, were subversive.

Dollimore nonetheless believes still that there was a "crisis of confidence in those holding power" which made "effective ideological control" an imperative. He is certain of the importance of this control, of a suspicion of the theatres and the performers which led to there being arrayed against them a whole mechanism of repression:

> That the theatres in early seventeenth-century England were a potentially subversive context is evidenced by the fact of their censorship (Dollimore: 22).

He attempts to convince the reader that repressive mechanisms existed at least in part by using the word "censorship", fully

aware of all that the term implies and the reactions it is likely to provoke. This issue of subversiveness proven by so categorising the extant mechanisms of control in Jacobean London is one I shall return to shortly.

But Dollimore and other Cultural Materialists are not the only recent critics to address the legacy of Tillyard and Bradley. Set against his radical subversion we have Stephen Greenblatt's belief that "Shakespeare's plays are centrally, repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder" (Greenblatt, 1980: 40). Subversive readings are possible, he says, only because they are immediately contained, the ideas they represent shown to be disastrous, even unthinkable:

> Criticism can legitimately show that Shakespeare relentlessly *explores* the relations of power in a given culture. That more than exploration is involved is much harder to demonstrate convincingly (Greenblatt 1980: 254).

Greenblatt's image of early modern England is of what he calls a 'totalizing society',

> one that posits an occult network linking all human, natural, and cosmic powers and that claims on behalf of a ruling elite a privileged place in this network (Greenblatt 1988: 2).

Behind the pageantry which propagandised this myth, however, were —according to Greenblatt —"anxious rhetorical attempts to conceal cracks, conflict, and disarray", and it was

this fear of disorder —*pace* Tillyard —which led to the period being one of "censorship and repression". Like Dollimore, he believes that restrictive control was a feature of the practise of Shakespearean drama.

And also like Dollimore, Greenblatt suggests that his reading is a rediscovery of the 'truth' about Elizabethan drama. Dollimore asserts that the 'majority' of Jacobean plays were subversive, Greenblatt that they were quite the opposite. And not only do these readings seem to me as monolithic as anything proposed by Bradley or Tillyard, they are in some ways far more sweeping, far more generalising. Are we to believe, with Dollimore, that all the fellowship of Jacobean playwrights were, at some stage, undermining the social structures which furnished the demand for their plays, which built their playhouses, which —in short —lined their pockets? Are we to believe, with Greenblatt, that in all of this 'exploration' of "the relations of power", Shakespeare never once crosses the bounds of orthodoxy?

Delight in disorder

Both Cultural Materialism and Greenblatt's New Historicism are, as I have indicated, interested in very much the same issues as Tillyard: issues of order and chaos, and their conflation with a whole range of binary oppositions, not the least of which bleats, like Orwell's sheep, 'order good, chaos bad'. But 'order' is a slippery term in Tillyard's (and Dollimore's, and Greenblatt's)

analysis; it does not merely indicate structure, or control —the divine order of the Great Chain — but also the interrelated network of political order, social order, moral order, a whole comprising a kind of metastructure, an *ethos*, from which it is difficult to separate individual components. Tillyard and his successors have focussed upon the traces of this metastructure within the drama, but the problem with reading these signs arises from their very tenuousness: what you see of these signs depends very much on where you stand.

Consider *Macbeth* as an example: at the beginning of the play a political order is clearly established; a feudal monarchy represented initially by Duncan, and which is underlined by his naming of his son Malcolm as his successor. In the course of the play this political order is overturned by a violent murder, which leads to further strife, order corrupted and turning again to chaos. At the end of the play political order is re-established by the accession of the named successor to the throne. The relation of this political order to any kind of social or ethical order is, as I have said, a complicated one. But what order is it that is restored? Is it the same one that prevailed at the beginning of the play? It is, after all, the nominated successor–son of the old, dead, thoroughly legitimate king-who is off to Scone at the end of the play. But on the other hand, there is the question of this new king's alliance to England, and his overt undermining of the old order by declaring his loyal thanes to be earls.

It would be easy to guess at how either Jonathon Dollimore or Steven Greenblatt might address the play. But either, in doing so, would, I suspect, arrive at a single conclusion, sweeping aside a plurality of interpretations in their pursuit of some ideological/methodological truth.

Both critics and their respective camps are well-enough established that other critics have addressed this feature of their work. Walter Cohen, for example, lumps both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism together as historicist analyses, and ascribes to both a basis in the work of Michel Foucault, leading, he says, to an over-dependence on "ideology":

> The obvious question with both the conservative and the subversive Foucauldian readings is whether the initial methodological orientation predetermines the political outcome of the empirical analysis (Howard and O'Connor: 29).

The privileging of ideology over text is certainly a feature of both these approaches, although Stephen Greenblatt seems to be less than comfortable with it. His inclination, his training, he says, is more toward the text, but he never explicitly claims not to privilege ideology. This practise is, on the other hand, self-justifying in Cultural Materialism, through its claim to (and pride in) political awareness —or is it simply that it does not (like its fore-runners) claim to be politically neutral?

More recently, and at greater length, Graham Bradshaw has addressed the critical impact of Dollimore and others in his

book *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists.* Much of his prologue focuses on the inconsistency of, or "contradiction" in, Materialist analyses of Shakespeare. But even this has its down side: Bradshaw may address the monolithic interpretations of arguably ideologically over-committed critiques, but only to take them to task for revising —as Dollimore evidently does, in his preface to the second edition of *Radical Tragedy* —their earlier position. Where is it written, however, that the Critic must be consistent? And in these criticisms, where is the allowance for evolution in the Shakespearean's thinking, even if only an evolution within a rigid ideological framework? And if we are to allow for an 'evolution' in the thinking of the Critic, how much more important is it that we allow it in the thinking of the Dramatist? There must be space for both. We cannot, as Dollimore Greenblatt do, insist that Shakespeare was always *thus*. And if there is a single point I would like to address in the course of this thesis, it is this: that there is more than one way to skin the textual cat.

The repressive hypothesis

Both Cultural Materialism and New Historicism follow Tillyard's lead in focussing on the idea that the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were sites of ideological contestation in a struggle to preserve some kind of moral, political or social order. Both suggest that an important manifestation of this struggle was the mechanism of control which grew up around

and alongside the drama, a mechanism involving the licensing of plays by the Master of Revels and the very real danger of painful punitive measures if some ill-defined line was crossed; that both Thomas Kyd and Ben Jonson and others ended up falling foul (to greater and lesser degrees) of a censorious state is proof enough of this. For Dollimore, as I have said, the existence of this mechanism is both a necessary and sufficient proof of his hypothesis.

What both Dollimore and Greenblatt seem to be convinced of is the essentially and inescapably repressive nature of *any* articulation of state power. If, as Cohen suggests, part of the foundation of both schools lies in the work of Michel Foucault, then this conviction is, arguably, a little odd. Foucault himself — at least at one stage of his explorations of the subject — "doubts" that "the workings of power ... really belong primarily to the category of repression" (Foucault: 10). There is more to the exercise of state power that the boot-heel.

Nonetheless, Dollimore's way of looking at the mechanisms of licensing and control surrounding the practise of drama Shakespeare's time remains a prevalent one. Even Greenblatt agrees: he goes so far as to suggest that an author of a potentially subversive text may have been much absorbed into the dominant ideologies of the time that he would be unaware of his text's potential subversiveness —witness Thomas Kyd. Recent non-literary studies in the period have more than amply demonstrated that Elizabethan and Jacobean England

was both censorious and repressive, particularly when compared to 'modern', supposedly more liberal perspectives. But recent work by Richard Dutton suggests that even if formal censorship was practised, its primary purpose may not have been to prevent the circulation of 'dangerous' ideas. In *Mastering the Revels*, he seriously questions the idea of a repressive structure governing all public performance in London. It is true that to get a play onto the stage in Elizabethan and Jacobean London both the company and the theatre had to be licensed, and the play itself passed by the Master of Revels, but the objective of this practice may not have been formal censorship, at least as we at the tail-end of the twentieth century might understand it: the Master was, according to Dutton,

> a consensus figure, there to filter out contentious material or over-personal comment but not to stifle all debate (Dutton: 47).

Indeed, the primary interest of those granted a patent as Master of Revels may have been in the income to post could generate for them —while still, of course, keeping the Lord Chamberlain happy (Dutton: 3). Furthermore, the patents to act as Master of revels were granted, with consistent terms, to specific individuals, and "The powers of dramatic regulation and censorship were never vested in a court or state post as such" (Dutton: 49). He notes as well that the relationship between the players and the Master was a mutually beneficial one (Dutton: 45), and one which neither party could have been too interested in upsetting. The 'fact' of 'censorship' may be

established, but it is questionable if the intent —and, therefore, the effect? — was as repressive as Dollimore supposes.

If the milieu in which Shakespearean drama evolved and matured was, in fact, so repressive, then a number of interesting questions arise, principal among them being one raised by Dutton: if the Master of Revels and his superiors were so intent upon stamping out unorthodox ideas in the theatre, why didn't more plays, more playwrights, fall foul of them? If Dollimore's thesis of radical subversion is correct — if Greenblatt's belief in unconscious subversion is tenable —why didn't more plays earn their authors a summons before the Privy Council? Some plays did run into trouble, and we have adequate documentation of this, if not the texts of the plays themselves. And all evidence indicates that early modern audiences were at least as sophisticated as 'readers' as their critical successors three-and-a-half centuries later —in some ways, more so. As Leah Marcus notes:

> State censorship can itself be understood as an agenda for stabilizing meaning, at least in the sense that a play licensed for production is officially declared free of a whole range of potentially subversive significations. But censorship was as erratic as the interpretation it sought to control, and did not necessarily dampen the fervour for interpretation (Marcus: 28).

Given this, it seems to me that if a 'modern' reader is capable of generating a subversive reading of a Jacobean play, then the groundlings in the Globe and the Master of Revels in his

chambers must also have been capable of doing so. Certainly, developments over the past three centuries allow the Bardolatrous hordes in their universities a greater range of radical readings to choose from, but there is still great scope for subversive readings of Shakespearean drama within the epistemological limitations of the age. Yet so few dramatists ended up in ideological hot water.

Or so it might seem. The problem with this idea is that it is contingent on the plays being *read*. How they were *heard* may be different, as Andrew Gurr has pointed out. After a long discussion on the dramatists' understanding and expectations of their audience, he reminds us that the plays were after all primarily an oral art, intended to be spoken, intended to be heard. He also points out that a densely layered text of Classical allusions and Latin quotations — and he takes Webster to be an example of this kind of writing — would have been fully accessible to only a small segment of the audience; to the rest, such craftsmanship would have been so much verbiage. And after saying so, he takes a lead from Richard Levin in pointing out that, if nothing else, this "casts doubt on the existence of predominantly allegorical or allusive reading of the drama by Shakespearean playgoers." Contemporary scholars —by which he means that small and relatively well-defined section of the playwright's audience who bought copies of the plays —may have been able to note and remark on such allusions, but not a play*goer*, "Reading being a more leisured form of assimilation" (Gurr: 99). The implication of this for recent and current sub-

textual *readings* of the plays are clear: it is difficult to assert that a given work, or even a given scene, is subversive, if most of the audience would not have recognised it as such. In any case, it would have been the more educated members of an audience who would have been the most capable 'readers', and therefore the most likely to be able to spot — or imagine — subversive sentiments. But they were also the members of the audience who were most likely to feel threatened by theatrical subversion: their own dependence on the existing political and social structures was too great. If Dollimore's understanding of things is correct, there should have been a queue of mortified *nouveau riche* outside the Master of Revels' door. Then their were the interests of the players themselves: Dutton suggests that the practise of patronage and licensing meant that the actors themselves had a vested interest in maintaining order (Dutton: 24-25).

Dutton also considers the suggestion made by earlier scholars that the accession of James to the throne was followed by a relaxing of some of the strictures governing the licensing of plays — but he rejects the idea. If anything, the opposite was the case — and this, in itself, raises another interesting point. The players and playwrights of Elizabethan and Jacobean London seemed to accept the Master of Revels — Jonson, for example, actively sought the post for himself. The office had been continuously occupied since 1545, growing out of the earlier position of the Master of Tents and Revels created during the reign of Henry VII. During the period 1540-1577,

for comparison, the post of Lord Chamberlain had been vacant twice, for up to seven years. This is not to suggest that the Revels office was a more important one than the office of Chamberlain, but it does, nonetheless, represent an integral part of the court structure, and one which almost pre-dates the flowering of secular public theatre in London. It could be said, therefore, that the playwrights and their companies had little choice in the matter: the oversight of the Master of Revels was something the dramatists were used to, no more seen fit to question, perhaps, than the Court itself.

What may appear to be another aspect of the 'repression' of the theatre — the limiting of the number of licensed companies —was, as much as anything else, another measure that operated to the advantage of both the players and the Master. Nonetheless, there *were* limitations, but they obviously had their compensations. In 1603 the company that had been operating under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain — Shakespeare's company — became the King's Men. The tragedian Edward Alleyn became rich enough — and respectable enough —to found a school, and Shakespeare was able to successfully complete his father's abandoned pursuit of a coat of arms. Some players, in short, became gentlemen. An unforgiving judge could say that they had sold out — or that the mechanisms of repression were *so* effective that the entire practice of playing was arrogated into those mechanisms, and that those who controlled the mechanisms knew, as all autocrats must, how and when to reward a faithfully bowed

neck. To such a reading the inventiveness of the 'authorities' could even provoke a kind of admiration: so pervasive and persuasive was their influence that even the plague was incorporated into these mechanisms of repression and control.

Perhaps so. But even if the censorship of the drama was this effective it is arguable whether the measures employed were, as I have indicated, intentionally repressive. Certainly the theatres were seen as potential sources of unrest —the Lord Mayor and many other notables of the town wrote several times to the Privy Council, the Lord Chamberlain, and others at court to complain about the "vagrant persons, masterless men and other idle and dangerous persons" who frequented the theatres, venues which also drew "apprentices and other servants from their ordinary works" (G.B. Evans: 6). The distracted apprentices rioted more than once, and the theatres were perceived as a cause. The intention of the Master of Revels may not have been to censor the plays —but some critics believe it was. The intention of the playwrights may not have been — almost certainly was not, in my view —to provoke the groundlings to revolt —but revolt they did. The measures that were put in place to control playhouses and plays were, primarily, measures of *control*, and not censorship: the cause of the unrest was not —was never suggested to be —subversive ideas.

The purposes of playing

The association of the theatres with social unrest was at the centre of a protracted debate which lasted right up to the closing of the theatres in 1642. On one side were those who condemned the theatres as centres of vice and corruption, of immorality, of "vagrant persons". On the other were the playwrights themselves, the poets, noblemen, and apologists, who all argued in favour of some moral or didactic purpose to the theatre: Thomas Nashe wrote that

> they show the ill-success of treason, the fall of hasty climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the misery of civil dissension, and how just God is evermore in punishing of murder (G.B. Evans: 14).

To one side, a Machiavellian figure on-stage represented a serious challenge to the moral paradigms of the age, a kind of negative role-model. To the other it was just a tool to show the inevitable workings of divine punishment, a moral exemplar of a more orthodox sort.

Strangely enough, there are few explicitly positive role-models in Shakespearean tragedy: if there is a moral purpose operating in these plays, it operated (or sought to) by aversion. In the Histories, however, fine examples of upright, noble, God-fearing men abound, kings and princes all. But what kind of example was this to provide an apprentice, a servant, or a vagabond? If the drama of the period was seeking "to conceal cracks, conflict, and disarray", as Greenblatt puts it, then it does

so — according to some arguments — by representing an ordered society with a divinely-ordained structure and a determined place for every individual. One thing this kind of 'totalizing' society prohibits is any kind of social mobility, any kind of movement between levels. What was the point of representing to such a society's lower castes a king, a prince or a noble warrior as a role-model? It was certainly nothing they could aspire to. And yet the kind of social mobility contradicted by the theories of absolute monarchy (or at least feudalism) and the myths the Tudor regime was, in fact, going on, and was evidenced by the very means employed to refute it. The position of players, of merchants or entrepreneurs, even, to a certain extent, courtiers, was ambiguous at best — certainly never clearly understood or defined. Yet they could, as I have noted, achieve some degree of upward mobility; the ideological use of the theatre became the source of a paradox.

What this reveals to us, four centuries later, is that the society, the structure which was being defended by the drama no longer existed, or was at least a politically useful illusion. Dollimore uses notions derived from the work of Raymond Williams to describe Jacobean England in terms of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural elements, and in these terms the social stratification espoused by the Tudor theorists was certainly residual — a hangover from a lost age. The role models represented for the edification of apprentices and servants were also a residue from this bygone era: great men, perhaps, but not — or no longer — real men. But a similar problem

applied to 'real' people — Sidney or Spenser or (for a while) Essex, though admired, were, I think, seen as exceptional even in their own time, and even the actors, "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time", may have felt that these were unreachable — and therefore unrealistic — role models. Even with the example of men like Bacon, Drake or Raleigh, who rose from common origins to become men of note, the distance between what was being represented on stage and the 'real' world must have been perceivable, if not confusing. This 'distance', and the difference in social standing between himself and the drama's characters could have as easily frustrated a restless apprentice as it may have inspired him. Perhaps the Lord Mayor was right in supposing the theatres a source of unrest — but not for the reasons he believed.

Signifying something

A further problem with the use of the stage for didactic purpose was the nature of the representations it employed. Audiences were surely accustomed to 'reading' what they saw on-stage as fiction, though a problem here is the uncertain nature and status of 'fiction' at the time. The Mystery plays, for example, were a significant influence on the development of Elizabethan drama, and in this tradition what was represented in performance was literally true — it was, after all, from the Bible — at the same time that it was a story. A similar ambiguity may have surrounded the performance of a secular history play. In the Graeco-Roman dramatic tradition, tragedies

were, similarly, literally true; comedies certainly were not. Yet all were stories, known by both actors and audience to be inventions, perhaps by one of their own number. As fictions the plays become morally questionable; the issue is not simply the moral use or significance of drama alone, but of fiction and storytelling and legend. History, at least, was, to many Elizabethan thinkers, less didactically suspect.

But the status of a play as a fiction also poses a threat to the 'playwright as subversive' theories of Cultural Materialism. If, because of the mechanisms of 'repression' that existed, the only place that radical (by Elizabethan standards) ideas — moral relativism, for example, or republicanism, or atheism —could be entertained was on stage, then these ideas are compromised by their association with an art form which presents them as fictions, as, essentially, unreal, unachievable, and therefore, perhaps, undesirable. The drama itself becomes a means of subverting its own subversion.

A similar problem with ideologically driven interpretations of Shakespearean drama lies in the nature of the material being examined. Take, for instance, the issue of plays such as *Eastward Ho* or *Sejanus*, plays which provoked the arrest of their authors: the surviving relevant documents may tell us what happened, but the texts that occasioned the exercise of the full force of state censure have not survived, perhaps because of the effectiveness of the measures of 'repression'. It is, therefore, impossible to guess what it was about the texts

that elicited such a response: Jonson very carefully (and very politely!) passes the buck on the issue of who was responsible for the objectionable parts of *Sejanus* in the introduction, 'To the Readers', of the 1616 edition. Any speculation about the nature of the objectionable material in this or any other suppressed play would be entirely derived from the ideological bent of the critic.

Which is not to say some constructive conclusions cannot be drawn from other plays. Unfortunately, a great deal of the material of the period that would support the belief in Jacobean theatrical subversion (as read by either New Historicism or Cultural materialism) is ideologically ambiguous. Take, for instance, the later pamphlet *Hic Mulier: or, The Man-Woman*, published in 1620. How does one approach this text? Was it really serious, proposing a removal of deterministic gender barriers, using clothes as a metaphor for social position, and suggesting that things should change? Obviously not, since the pamphlet never really shakes off the idea that the masculinized woman and the effeminized man who debate the issue are more than faintly ridiculous. Yet the pamphlet was taken seriously enough at the time to provoke a response, itself ambiguous: *Haec-Vir: or, The Womanish-Man*, in the same year. If one were looking for subversive opinions in the literature, then the latter and supposedly more 'orthodox' of these two pamphlets is a prime source:

> Bondage or Slavery, is a restraint from those actions, which the minde (of it owne accord) doth most

> willingly desire: to performe the intents and purposes of anothers disposition, and that not by mansuetude or sweetnesse of intreatie: but by the force of authoritie and strength of compulsion (*Haec-Vir*: sig. B.r).

This condemnation of "the force of authoritie" is certainly a remarkable (and subversive) opinion, if honestly expressed — but it is fiercely contested later in the same pamphlet. Selective quotation would certainly be useful here. Nonetheless, the fact that the earlier piece did occasion such a response indicated that it was capable of being *read* subversively even it the time it was produced, a point which reinforces the reading of Jonathon Dollimore and Cultural Materialism. But can such a text be taken as significant to an analysis of (earlier) Jacobean drama? Since both pamphlets post-date most of the plays examined by Dollimore it could be said that they are less than useful. Logic might insist that one should only consider contemporary or earlier material as giving some indication of the historical-textual background to a play; yet one could argue, equally logically, that a later text will also provide useful insights, since it grows out of the same material conditions which produce the early text under consideration. This raises a particular methodological issue, one I do not intend to try and resolve here.

Furthermore, the ambiguity of the material creates a problem of proof in any analysis of Shakespearean literature. Arguments depending on ideology are, to all intents, non-verifiable, even non-falsifiable outside their own ideological context. In as subjective a field as literary criticism, however, it

is questionable whether it is worth getting hung up on issues of 'proof'; truthfully, it is difficult to *prove* anything, when so many of the facts in any case are contestable. This tilting at proof is not a feature of Cultural Materialism alone, but it does seem to me that *Shakespearean Negotiations*, as an example of a New Historicist text, makes a more concerted attempt at 'proving' its case than *Radical Tragedy*. Nonetheless this is an issue, and one which any critic must eventually engage: in analysing a text, arriving at particular conclusions, and holding forth on them in an article, a conference paper —or even a doctoral thesis —there is the constant concern with backing them up, with justifying your own conclusions by relating them — if only antithetically —to other texts: to other plays, to other materials, to other critics. This, in itself, can have an profound effect on the nature of the conclusions reached, as well as the means employed to get there.

These few precepts

Writing of "Marlovian rebels and skeptics", Greenblatt notes that

> they simply reverse the paradigms and embrace what the society brands as evil. In so doing, they imagine themselves set in diametrical opposition to their society where in fact they have unwittingly accepted its crucial structural elements (Greenblatt 1980: 209).

Immorality, then, is no morality; or at least, it is no *new* morality. If there is a kind of subversion in Sejanus' manipulations or Tamburlaine's destructive glee, then it must

be a rather frustrating one; it presents no real alternative to the structure it seeks to undermine; it indulges itself in hollow —and fairly pointless —rejection. This is not subversion. It is simply discontent.

A slightly different version of Greenblatt's point can be turned back against him, against the Materialist thesis of subversion and the Historicist insistence on containment. In seeking to overturn or correct what may have gone before, critically speaking, one still has to accept the earlier paradigms. Dollimore in particular seems reluctant to acknowledge this, despite the fact that much of the early part of *Radical Tragedy* is an elaboration, from a Marxist, Foucauldian, post-structuralist perspective, of Tillyard's ideas about order and chaos and providentialist ideology —his first chapter, after all, he calls 'Contexts'.

Dollimore's portrait of the Jacobean context — the ethos, the milieu — rests on some of the same premises as Tillyard, but his interpretation of those premises is, as I have indicated above, coloured by his ideological position. But I do not think that he makes it clear what his pet dramatists are subverting, any more than Greenblatt makes it clear what is doing the containing. Their focus on the overtly political in the plays is, perhaps, too narrow, since the political comprises only part of an interrelated network —the metastructure or ethos I have referred to earlier. In another, equally specialised sense the plays are even more confusing; as Greenblatt indicates, there is

no morality, no ethical structure being represented in the plays but the one which surrounds them: the ethics of Shakespeare's age, whatever they may be, that produce the plays and the players and their audience, and govern all interaction and communication between them.

I am not clear what the ethics of Renaissance England were, or even if they were the same as those which seem to operate in Shakespeare's plays. I have an idea about what *some* of them may be — which suggests, I suppose, that I do not think that there is a single set, a single ethical discourse which governs (or tries to) all the attitudes and actions of king and courtier, player and playwright, warrior and noble and peasant, either on-stage or off it. Such is the case: to me it seems obvious that one cannot talk about Shakespeare's ethics, without first explaining which play(s) one is referring to. And beyond that: that one has to clarify which *character* is being considered, since I believe that any Shakespearean text will contain a multiplicity of ethical frameworks, associated with individual characters and determined by their gender, their position in a social or political hierarchy, and what kind of hierarchy it is —perhaps even their age, their nationality, the condition of their birth (legitimate or otherwise). What I hope I have done over the course of this thesis is to provide a partial proof of this idea —while still acknowledging the impossibility of *proving* anything. I say partial, because rather than embark upon painting some grand canvas, I have focussed instead upon

a synedochal miniature: showing how the various hues of what I call the warrior ethic hint at the stronger colours of the whole.

Expectations of greatness

Imagine a graph, a plot of values over time, a smooth curve recording how those values might change from some point in the past, through a nebulous now and away into the future.

Now imagine that, at some point in time, those values change abruptly, so that instead of a smooth curve there is a sudden change in value, without any transition. In mathematics, such a change is called a discontinuity, and if we could plot the changes in English moral or ethical values over time, we might find such a discontinuity hovering around the first few years of the 17th Century. At one of those vague historical points like the start of a war or the end of an era, almost everything changed; many of the certainties of life the English had grown to appreciate under the old queen had been thrown into doubt.

The death of Elizabeth and the accession of James to the throne of England stands as a point of discontinuity in the development of certain ideas and their representation in the drama of the period. *Macbeth* the play itself represents this discontinuity —it represents this process of change from one ruler to another, from one form of rule to another, from one ethic of ruling to another. It represents this transition not only

in the sense that it is a product of that transition, but also in that the action of the play itself, the movement from the rule of Duncan, through that of Macbeth, to that of Malcolm is, in a way, a representation of the transition from the rule of Elizabeth to the rule of James. Under Duncan, Scotland experienced — knew, understood, and appreciated — a rule dependent on expectations of duty and obedience, with proper performance of a subservient role being recognised and rewarded with public praise and an increase in honour. Under Malcolm ... well, the loyal thanes were rewarded for their loyalty and sacrifice, but not in quite the same way, and, as I have shown, there were open questions in Holinshed — and perhaps subtle ones in Shakespeare's version — about whether things were quite up to the old standard under this new, untried king. Really, no one hanging around after the death of Macbeth could have known what to expect.

Under Elizabeth, England experienced —knew, understood, and appreciated —a rule dependent upon her ability to keep conflicting forces within the court and the country balanced against each other, a feat of prestidigitation she managed for more than forty years. Through a combination of open consultation, prevarication, careful preferment, casual dalliance and outright deceit, she managed to steer her realm through a succession of crises, and to do all of this when, particularly with the example of various Marys before them, a significant proportion of the English people remained unhappy with the fact that they were being ruled by a woman. Under James ...

who was an ardent proponent of an absolute monarchy and was to remain — as was his successor — in constant conflict with Parliament ... well, again, no one could have known, in the first few years after his accession, quite what to expect.

In his diary entry describing the news of Elizabeth's death, the lawyer John Manningham reported the way James' nomination as successor was received:

> The people is full of expectation and great hope of his worthiness, of our nation's future greatness; everyone promises himself a share in some famous action to be hereafter performed for his prince and country. (G.B. Evans: 185)

Even for a lawyer —that most contemptible of people to the warrior Geffrey Gates — the possibilities inherent in the accession of a new king were seen in terms of an "action" to be "performed". There is, here, a hope for a distinctly martial action, leading to the recognition and advancement that the performance of some notable deed could earn. But events were to show that this was a false hope: James' fondness for the masque and the unusual peace the country experienced during his reign meant that the best action an ambitious man could hope to perform would be theatrical.

James soon became a source of disappointment, attracting (quiet) criticism on a number of grounds. The martial expectations of everyone from John Manningham to Sir Walter Raleigh — among others — were to be defeated by James'

pacifism, and he soon became known instead for his extravagance, his constant financial difficulties, and favouritism even more galling than Elizabeth's. Thomas Howard, writing to Sir John Harrington, notes that the King seemed particularly — if not overly — interested in his courtiers' attire, and suggests — very carefully — that this might indicate the King was less than interested in "the endowments of the inward sort, wit, valour, or virtue":

> the King saith, he liketh a flowing garment; be sure it be not all of one sort, but diversely coloured, the collar falling down somewhat, and your ruff well stiffened and bushy. We have lately had many gallants who failed in their suits for want of due observance of these matters. The King is nicely heedful of such points, and dwelleth on good looks and handsome accoutrements. (G.B. Evans: 193)

Howard also describes the unsuccessful petition of another courtier, whose sin was to fail to notice —and praise —the new gilt trappings on the King's favourite mount. He also makes a telling comparison between James' rule, and Elizabeth's.

> You have lived to see the trim of old times, and what passed in the Queen's days; these things are no more the same. Your Queen did talk of her subjects' love and good affections, and in good truth she aimed well; our King talketh of his subjects' fear and subjection, and herein I think he doth well too, as long as it holdeth good. (G.B. Evans: 194)

Love and affection versus fear and subjection — a familiar contrast to any reader or spectator of *Macbeth*. The ruling ethic

James established certainly held good long enough for him, but not for his son.

The royal play

Throughout the first decade of the 17th Century, the character of the drama itself changed, and changed in quite fundamental ways. Arguably, in the evolution from 'Elizabethan' to 'Jacobean' drama, English theatre ceased being a public theatre — or at least became much less so. After the accession of James, and certainly after the elevation of the Lord Chamberlain's Men to the status of King's Men in 1603, the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries became much more a court drama. The Master of the Revels was no longer necessarily the man who gave them license to perform — that came from the King — though he was the instrument by which a play might be performed before the court. Certainly before this date court performances on demand were not uncommon, but is does seem that they became far more common during James' reign. Gary Taylor and John Jowett note, among other innovations, the increasing use of intervals and the performance of music during them, and the King's Men's move into the former children's company theatre at Blackfriars' in 1608/9 (Taylor and Jowett: 5-25; 30-37). In their analysis, the use of an indoor theatre had an almost immediate effect on the character of the performances, leading even to changes to matters like plot structure (Taylor and Jowett: 40-42). The use of indoor performance spaces also leading to the use stage machinery,

lighting and so on. Certainly, the changes that came about in the form of the drama itself were, at least partially if not principally, the result of evolutionary processes which had already been set in motion by the time of James' accession, but it is possible that the fundamentally different character of James' court — and his style of rule — accelerated this process of change, as well as encouraging mutation (so to speak) into other forms. It is perhaps significant that particular genres of the drama — most notably the revenge tragedy — reached their zenith during James' reign. The sudden and quite elaborate development of the masque is also indicative of this evolution in the drama; it is particularly telling that the masque form often used members of the court and the royal household itself as performers, and it could be the case that this association of dramatic performance with the royal court was a factor in the later closure of the theatres by parliament.

Strange days

Macbeth is an important play in that it is far more directly intimately associated with the reigning monarch than any other of Shakespeare's works (with the possible exception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*). This may be an indication of the uncertainty that dramatists and —perhaps —the society as a whole felt towards this new ruler, this strange Scottish man. Because he was strange: he was nothing like Elizabeth. This was widely known even before he arrived in London during mid-1603. Elizabeth herself knew as much; some four years earlier,

before she had made up her mind to grant him the succession, she wrote to him in anger at his assertion of his right to it. It was to his 'discredit', she said, that he even brought the matter up: "I see well," she wrote, "wee two be of very different natures" (Strachey: 105).

James was Scottish, and the Scots had a particularly bad reputation with the English, their long alliance with France being a particularly sore point. An account of James' trip back to Scotland in 1617, attributed to Sir Anthony Weldon, describes the Scots in no glowing terms:

> They christen without the cross, marry without the ring, receive the sacrament without reverence, die without repentance, and bury without divine service: the keep no holy-days, nor acknowledge any saint but St Andrew ... They hold their noses if you talk of bear-baiting, and stop their ears if you speak of play; fornication they hold as but a pastime, wherein man's ability is approved, and a woman's fertility discovered; at adultery they shake their heads; theft they rail at; murder they wink at, and blasphemy they laugh at (Brown: 101).

Weldon must have been a complex man indeed, if he could condemn the Scots for both their irreverence and their dislike of "play", and about the only accusation he does not level at them —drunkenness —is well-remarked upon elsewhere. The rise in duelling in London— lamented by Bacon and the Star Chamber in the *Charge Touching Duels* — and the general increase in violence in and around the court were seen by

many as inevitable, given the barbaric and treacherous nature of the Scots.

Far more significant, however, to the way the English received their new King —perhaps uneasily —was his gender. Elizabeth's sex, according to some historical readings of the period, was something the English were never entirely comfortable with. There were a great many excuses, apologies and arguments made in favour of Elizabeth as a *queen*, but their character often boils down to an emphasis on her masculine qualities —her self-proclaimed manliness somehow erasing her womanhood. Invidious comparisons with Lady Macbeth could obviously be made here, a point which makes the notorious court performance of *Macbeth* all the more intriguing.

But then, after years of arguing their way in and out and around all of this, the crown's supporters and apologists are suddenly confronted with a man on the throne again —and a virile man at that, a sire who already has heirs, so his sexual potency — his manliness — is, in this respect at least, proven. He therefore brings with him almost a guarantee that the aberration of a woman on the throne need not happen again; that the trouble and turmoil —the *chaos* —that seemed to attend Elizabeth's reign will not return. But he is also a man who — unfortunately — complicates things by being an intellectual, with his own very clear opinions on a range of subjects from witchcraft to the divine right of kings. And any

uneasiness this might engender is exacerbated by his overt pacifism. His conciliatory attitude towards the Spanish won him no friends among the militant Protestant faction which had enjoyed reasonable success under Elizabeth. He must have created more than a little discomfort as well, through the excessive (especially by comparison to what had gone before) homosocialization of his court. He was known to have his male favourites, and competition between them was often a source of strife in the court, much as it had been for his predecessor. Some historians of the period are certainly inclined to see homoerotic elements in James' relationships with these favourites, much as many have read strong sexual —physically sexual —characteristics in Elizabeth's dalliances with Raleigh, Essex and Leicester. There is little wonder so many English *men* transferred their hopes — soon dashed — to the young, physically active and martially inclined Prince Henry.

More than anything else, the accession of James created a great deal of ethical uncertainty, an uncertainty which manifests itself in Macbeth, both the character and the eponymous play. As I hope I have demonstrated, the play can be read as a thoroughly orthodox endorsement of the warrior ethic, and of particular noble and kingly values. Indeed, it is almost as if the play is trying to reinforce these values; is trying, in fact, to defend these values in the face of their assault by the unruly court of the new king. On the other hand, it is also possible to read the play as subverting these ideas, as suggesting that the warrior ethic is an altogether too gruesome

thing. The gentility of Duncan and Malcolm, and the civilising influence that the English have obviously had on the latter, suggest that the aggressive Scots temperament is something that needs to be reformed. The question of the warrior nobleman defending the crown, and yet at the same time being a threat to it, reveals itself as an issue to be addressed, as does the contradiction inherent in a warrior ethic which endorses prowess in battle above all else, but which is exercised —both within the play and without —in defence of a king who does not fight.

For most of the audience, whether at Blackfriars' or the Globe, the figure whom these contradictions would have immediately called to mind was the late Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. A well-connected and personable young man, he was an almost instant hit at court, despite the disadvantages of a chequered family history. He was intelligent, physically (and almost certainly sexually) active, an ardent Protestant and a capable soldier; as a result of his bold —if impulsive —actions during the 1596 raid on Cadiz, he became a popular hero and an icon of English militarism, and English manhood.

But impulsive he was, and though a capable soldier he was a terrible general, responsible for spectacular —and expensive —failures in both the Canaries and Ireland. He was too willing to exploit both his position at court and his popularity; at court he consistently underestimated the queen's strength and overestimated her patience; his popularity was to prove,

eventually, a chimaera. He was proud, arrogant, and thin-skinned; he appeared to deeply resent his necessary subservience to a woman while being more than willing to participate in the subtle, flirtatious dance she expected of him; his stated belief in the fallibility of princes was the least of the opinions counted against him. In terms of the warrior ethic, Essex was a mass of inconsistencies: puissance, courage and fortitude he may have possessed, but patience, meekness, and obedience were notably absent from his character. Yet it must be said that some of these inconsistencies were inescapable for a man of his position at the time, largely the result of the tension between a highly gendered discourse of honour and valiant action, and an aging, demanding queen who could not let her manly favourites stray too far from her side.

Essex bargained, entreated, cajoled and threatened Elizabeth for several years, desperate for an opportunity to prove his manly and martial worth in some “famous action”. When she did finally release him to the field —invariably after changing her mind several times —he was only to make her regret giving in to him; but though his martial exploits were to earn him the admiration — deserved or not — of the nation, Essex was never to earn the esteem and gratitude of the fount of all honour, his prince. Like Macbeth, he would fight in defence of crown and country, only to become a serious threat to both himself: to all appearances his self-control and sanity declined rapidly in the last year of his life, leading him,

ultimately, to an abortive coup and an appointment on Tower Hill.

Writing of England's descent into political chaos in the 1640's, Mark Kishlansky notes that

> Royalists fought for the traditions of religion and monarchy that their ancestors had preserved and passed on to them as a sacred inheritance. They believed in ... the divine right of kings ... Their fundamental principle was loyalty — an instinct deeply etched in the patriarchal nature of their society. Disloyalty was base —a violation of a code that made oaths as strong as contracts, voluntary obedience more dependable than law, and self-sacrifice was a welcomed duty. (Kishlansky: 151)

In short, according to Kishlansky at any rate, the Royalists in the Civil War fought for the very principles embodied in Malcolm and Duncan and so violently overthrown by Macbeth. Shakespeare's Scotland goes through a period of immense turmoil, experiencing threats which England itself faced, but never actually had to confront: foreign invasion, assassination, civil war — perhaps even religious strife. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that this disorder in Scotland makes no difference, that the essential values of the warrior ethic, of the king and his thanes, have not changed. The same values —in a warrior particularly —are, as I have indicated, espoused at both the beginning and the end of the play. And yet things do change: there is a fundamental political change, intimately related to Malcolm's sojourn in the civilising English court, and there is some hope that this new king will not make the same

mistakes as his too-trusting father. Harry Berger may believe Macduff may turn out to be Malcolm's Macbeth, but Macduff has been subjected to a test by his king which —as far as we know — the "dead butcher" never experienced at Duncan's hands. Nevertheless, some uncertainty remains: what guarantee of the succession is there in a king unknown to woman, and seemingly proud of it?

Things are the same. Things are different. Which is it? Well, it doesn't necessarily have to be one or the other; it can, in fact, be both. The transition from Elizabeth's rule to James' created a great deal of uncertainty, which *Macbeth* represents by allowing both readings, without really preferring either. Could we say, then, that underneath this arguably positive uncertainty, there is a nervousness, a desire for firmer moral ground, perhaps even new moral ground? And perhaps, beneath this uncertainty, there is the apprehension that this new Scottish king is not going to be the one to provide it.

Purposes mistook

I used to think that there was a single, 'right' interpretation of Shakespeare; that it was recoverable, accessible through a kind of total immersion in the period. By trying to become a 'Renaissance Man', one could come close to recovering something of the original meaning(s) of, say, *Macbeth* —by speaking with the dead, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it. I am not, for various reasons, disposed to believe this any more —but I

am still inclined towards historicist approaches as the best (for me) methods of generating such readings. I accept that the range of possible meanings associated with, or generated by, a text are not/no longer limited to those which may have prevailed at the time — but it is still possible to get off-track, to invent readings which bear little relation to the text. In a historicist approach, the age itself becomes the text, the 'meta-text'. The whole range of material conditions governing the production of the individual literary entities we are accustomed to calling 'texts' become the instrument that generates meaning to the historicist critic.

In historicism, there seems to be a continuum between monolithic, prescriptive readings of the kind generated by Tillyard, Dollimore, or Greenblatt, and the kind of plurality described by Terence Hawkes, namely, as he says in the abstract to *Meaning by Shakespeare*, "that Shakespeare's plays have no essential meanings, but function as resources which we use to generate meaning for our own purposes". A smear from one meaning, to several, to many, to so many that there may as well be none — but, all being equal in an intellectual climate, no one of these positions is any better than another. I am sympathetic to this idea; I resist the idea that Shakespearean drama is only ever trying to do one thing, but I am also and equally antagonistic to interpretations which allow the plays to mean any old thing at all.

What I am most interested in, despite their ambiguity on a number of terms, are the moral or didactic uses to which the drama was (intentionally or otherwise) put. Specifically, I am intrigued by the representation of role-models of manhood, of the whole issue of ethics and its relation to gender, to masculinity, in Shakespearean tragedy. I believe I have had to limit my consideration of this issue to tragedy for several reasons, not the least of which is the sheer volume of material I would have to consider otherwise. Any issue — but most particularly those related to matters of gender — is often treated differently in Shakespearean comedy; an added complication, but not an irresolvable one. It could be argued that the Comedies, by providing a kind of distorted reflection of the age in Hamlet's mirror, could as usefully furnish some insight into the operations of gender and masculinity in the drama as any of the Tragedies. But a boundary has to be drawn somewhere.

For me, the exact position of this boundary is, the above notwithstanding, difficult to site/sight/cite. In a more ambitious work it might be possible to develop, before even approaching any plays, a kind of map of the territory, a map of concepts rather than topography. By looking at other, non-dramatic material from the period dealing with manhood, specifically the man-as-warrior, it might be possible to develop some better notion of the range of ideas about the man-as-warrior which operated in the period, and any thoughts about this issue which might be generated from the plays would have

to be justified by the 'meta-text' as I have described it above; they would, in short, be interpretations which would fall within the boundaries of the map. But of necessity such a 'map' would have to be limited —we do not, after all, have access to all the material which might define its topography, and in any case it would probably be beyond the capabilities of any one work, of any one critic, to produce such a map. I considered trying to do so myself —but eighteen months down this side-track left me no clearer about the terrain than when I set out.

Perhaps the territory of masculinity in early modern England was not that well defined. This admits the possibility that a play representing ideas about masculinity, one which admits of a reading of 'there's got to be more to it than this' (for example), may not go so far as to suggest an alternative. Perhaps the ideas of alternatives, or the words for them, did not exist? A Sidney or a Spenser would, by virtue of (superior?) education (to say the least), be aware of alternatives — but may not have been any more able than the groundlings in the Globe to express them, to act on them. If there is such a questioning of ideas, a searching for alternatives, it would settle a suspicion of mine about the character, the ethos, of Renaissance England: I cannot help but feel that it was, ethically, a transitional phase between older, more rigid and deterministic ethics, and more sophisticated models, ones which, due to the events of the late 1620's, did not achieve any definite final form.

It remains to be seen —but not in this thesis —whether questions of notions of manhood, interrogations of the warrior ideal, lie within the boundaries of an ideological map. If these questions exist, do they fit within a wider tendency to interrogate the world? Do they fit within the sense of crisis and dislocation described by Dollimore and Greenblatt — a Lyotardian mistrust of metanarratives, perhaps? If this interrogation exists, then its character is yet to be determined —but it must be remembered that criticism does not imply subversion. In looking at historicist criticism of Shakespeare, I have tried to apply something of its methods and, where possible, shed some light from outside the theatres on the text in hand.

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