'The coming-on of time': Restlessness in Macbeth

Introducing Macbeth's entrance, the Weird Sisters declare in chorus; 'Peace, the charm's wound up.'[1] Thus, the springs of time are set in readiness for Macbeth's arrival. From the very point of being 'referred… to the coming on of time with "Hail King that shalt be"' (1.5.8-9), Macbeth seeks to turn prophecy to deed, propelling the play's action forwards in a blistering tumult of ruthlessness whilst becoming increasingly mentally unsettled. Described by A. C. Bradley, Macbeth becomes 'a soul tortured by an agony which admits not a moment's repose,… rushing in frenzy towards its doom'.[2] The 'frenzy' which grips Macbeth and allows for no 'repose' destabilises not only his own success but also the progression of time itself. Like the cursed sailor for whom 'Sleep shall neither night or day / Hang upon his penthouse lid' (1.3.19-20), the entire denouement of the play becomes agitated with insomnia. The play's overall dramatic impression is one of fretful restlessness, devolving ultimately into a sense of tragic pointlessness. After Macbeth 'hath murdered sleep' (2.2.41), ghosts of the past infiltrate the present, apparitions of the future appear terrifying and grotesque, and all that once made sense devolves into nonsense, 'full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing' (5.5.27-8).

From the play's beginning, a temporal tension is set up which Macbeth is ready to mobilise in his favour. We are planted in the 'hurly-burly' (1.1.3) of civil war, at the end of the day, with time 'wound' and ready to unravel. The sing-song crescendo of opening 'When's (1.1.1-4) introduce an immediate sense of anticipation (for what 'will be' (1.1.5)) in the play. The rhythms of the witches' speech are at once musical and jaggedly irregular; structured in catechism, rhyming in couplets and triplets, yet metrically unstable and unusually written in heptameter. The future seems imminent in the accelerative rising rhythms and rhymes ('again? / in rain? / -ly's done, / and won.'), and yet unsure and confused in the reference to 'hurly-burly' and a battle 'lost, and won'. These equivocating premonitions proffered by the witches imbue the play's initial atmosphere with the same anxieties about the future which are to take hold of Macbeth and Banquo. The chain of looking forward begins here, soon to contaminate Macbeth's entire psyche as the witches' foreknowledge poisons him with an obsessive regard for what 'shalt be'. Scholarly contention has centred for centuries around whether the Sisters or Macbeth himself were accountable for his ultimate fate. Whilst I believe that Macbeth was always going to be 'King hereafter', really the question of whether Macbeth's fate was a case of predetermination or free will is irrelevant. What matters here is not what Macbeth is promised, but 'When… / When… / When…' it should come to fruition, and it is here that he takes the reins.

[1] Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth* ed. Stanley Wells, Oxford: Oxford UP (1990), p. 102
[2] Bradley, A. C., 'Lect. IX: Macbeth', *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Atlantic (2000), pp. 332-3.

In the witches' promises, 'Thane of Glamis. / … Thane of Cawdor / … that shalt be King hereafter' (1.3.48-50), it is the premonition of kingship which focuses Macbeth's attention – also the only true premonition, as Macbeth already holds the titles of Glamis and Cawdor (though he does not yet know it). The inception of Macbeth's obsession with the future and its possibilities is evident in the diction of his reply, referencing 'prospect' (literally 'forward vision') and 'prophetic greeting' (1.3.74-8). The witches' vague 'hereafter' needs elaboration – he urges, 'tell me more', 'Say from whence / You owe this strange intelligence', 'Speak, I charge you' (1.3.70-8). Being denied this charge, Macbeth allows his own words to 'tell' and 'Speak' his future tidings into fruition. In the aftermath of the confrontation we even see evidence for the growing seeds of Macbeth's jealous paranoia as he and Banquo's statements 'Your children shall be King. / You shall be King.' (1.3.86) impossibly share the same metrical line as they would never be able to share the throne. The tension between these two mutually exclusive 'shall's must be resolved. 'King hereafter', and 'The greatest is behind' (1.3.119), yet when is 'hereafter', and how far 'behind'? A preeminent hint of the 'frenzy' which Bradley describes, Macbeth reports later of how he 'burned in desire to question them further' (1.5.3-4). In no position to wait for a response, the rest of the play sees Macbeth solidifying his own promised future by linguistically and physically urging on 'the coming-on of time'. His proclaimed intentions to allow 'chance…crown me / Without my stir' (1.3.144-5) ring hollow in the light of his 'rapt' (1.3.143) and impatient zeal, already complaining to Banquo of the need for 'more time' (1.3.154). Indeed, the order, 'Let us toward the King' sounds equally as a subliminal order unto himself to pursue the throne as a direction to meet with Duncan.

Bloom describes Macbeth as in possession of 'a proleptic imagination'.[3] From its Greek root *prolambanein* meaning 'anticipate', composed literally of 'before' (*pro*) and 'take' (*lambanein*), prolepsis seems a most apt attribution to Macbeth. The immediacy of his own *taking* of that which he is promised in anticipation of the throne is staggering; the plot to murder has been formed even before the second act, and is undertaken in the very next scene. From the outset of these enticing divinations, Macbeth's 'imagination' 'o'er-leap's (1.4.50) the present and into the future. Considering the Weird Sisters as an image of the three Fates, you could say that Macbeth acts as much in prognosis as the Sisters do as he, 'Disdaining Fortune' (1.2.16), fills in the ambiguities of the witches' vague forecasts with his own performative language.

Macbeth answers the witches' apparent physical and linguistic fickleness not with Banquo's doubts and misgivings, but with a determination to fix the prophecy into being himself, just as the Cawdor prophecy is spoken into being by Ross; 'call thee Thane of Cawdor: …hail most worthy Thane' (1.3.105-6) (echoing the witches' chorus of 'Hail's, a word which in itself is a crowning speech act).

[3] Bloom, Harold, 'An Essay by Harold Bloom', *Macbeth* ed. Burton Raffel, Yale UP (2005), p. 170.

After Banquo's declaration of wonder, 'Can the devil speak true?' (1.3.107), we begin to see Macbeth himself 'speak'ing his destiny 'true'. In his first extended aside euphemism becomes increasingly more explicit as Macbeth seeks to verbally assert his promised fate into actualisation. The evasive 'swelling act / Of imperial theme' (1.3.129-30) evolves into the clear fantasy of becoming 'King' (1.3.144) just as the enigmatic 'horrid image' (1.3.136) becomes explicitly, 'murder' (1.3.140). As these destinies become more real to Macbeth, the 'horrible imaginings' (1.3.135) which begin as 'fantastical' (1.3.140) are spoken into palpability.

Duncan's arrival triggers the clearest example of Macbeth solidifying his resolve by solidifying his words; 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly; if th'assassination' (1.7.1-2), and so on. The tongue-twisting here evokes the twisting and turnings of Macbeth's unsettled mind, attempting to have the deed 'done' through the mere power of speech, the elusive 'it' being asserted thrice before taking its true form; 'th'assassination'. He wishes 'that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all' (1.7.4-5), the onomatopoeia of 'blow' indicative of Macbeth's attempted facilitation of the deed through the simple instantaneousness of sound. There is an urgent desperation in the simultaneous will to action and undeniable hesitation, the tension of which creating an increasingly 'wound' temporal pressure. The future and present seem to be conflating as Macbeth dances between tenses. The anticipatory conditional tense ('If it were', 'Could', 'Might be' (1.7.1-5)) represents both that wavering which unsettles Macbeth and that temporal potential which he must harness for success; Lady Macbeth urges him not to let ''I dare not' wait upon 'I would'' (1.7.44). In Lady Macbeth's speech we see also a syntactical hurrying on of time, frequently hypermetric and littered with caesurae – the very rhythms of both Macbeths' soliloquys match in the restlessness of their anticipation. The proliferation of the conditional tense ('Thou wouldst have greatness', 'thou wouldst… That wouldst', 'yet wouldst… Thou'dst' (1.5.17-21)) once again sets up a temporal tension as the 'greatness' floats uncertain, and it is this lack of certitude which agitates the Macbeths. Whilst the deed is yet 'fantastical' rather than actual, a verbal restlessness reflects a psychological restlessness that consumes the couple. The overall effect is a sensation of ever-expounding agitation, eventually compelling them to action and ultimately, their own demise.

Having found that indeed 'the devil [can] speak true', he in a letter to Lady Macbeth renders the words of those 'imperfect speakers' (1.3.70) into the 'perfectest report' (1.5.2), thus aggrandising the verbal substantiality of the premonitions to facilitate his own aggrandisement to power. The emphatic superlatives continue as he refers to his wife as 'my dearest partner of greatness… what greatness is promised thee' (1.5.10-2). He obliterates the condition 'hereafter' from the prophecy entirely, stating his future as 'King that shalt be' (1.5.9). That which 'shalt be hereafter' has turned

into what 'shalt be' *now*, as we see Macbeth's hopes for the future through a lens of present urgency. Macbeth does not simply accept the prophecy given to him, but himself 'speak[s] true' his own destiny; verbally planting his future into the present. Lady Macbeth decries that her husband's 'letters have transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in an instant.' (1.5.55-7) Comparable to that 'Marlovian impetus'[4] which Harry Levin identifies in Marlowe's tragedies, the forward propelling dramatic momentum which is to ruin the Macbeths comes to the fore. The declaration, 'I feel now / The future in an instant' projects time's mechanical action as an impulse of human sensation. In response to Macbeth's verbal urging of the 'coming-on of time', Lady Macbeth embraces not only a self-expulsion from 'The ignorant present' but calls upon 'The future' to rush into the current 'instant'.

The tension of time in the atmosphere of the play pervades the very physicality of *Macbeth*. Macbeth appears in between the environs of the first two scenes. From a world of human mortality, in which ones 'words become thee as thy wounds' (1.2.43), Macbeth steps into the Sisters' dark and supernatural world of prophecy. Whilst the bloody soldier outlines that which has just passed, the sisters' foretell what is to come. Macbeth's placement between the worlds of the past and the future pulls on those 'wound' springs of time which dictate the atmosphere of his entrance, and this tension only tightens as the play goes on. The 'fantastical' (1.3.53) sisters have now planted within him the 'thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical' (1.3.140). However, whilst this inward 'toil and trouble' bubbles and brews like the Sisters' cauldron, Macbeth's intentions are hid in asides, his own 'words' not yet having 'become' 'wounds'. Bloom describes this dangerously brewing 'solipsism' as 'a representation of the simultaneous necessity and disaster of a constantly augmenting inwardness that we have not caught up with… yet'.[5] The all-encompassing nature of Macbeth's solipsism is captured by Ian McKellen's 1978 film portrayal, uttering zoomed-in spotlight-lit soliloquys on a black, circular set.[6] With only lighting adjustments indicating changes of setting, the stage seems more the portrait of Macbeth's 'black and deep desires' (1.4.52), a psychological landscape, rather than the geographical landscapes of the narrative. The restlessness which consumes Macbeth can be understood as an ever-expanding Pandora's Box of the mind, whose 'inward' intentions are to be urged into physical manifestation, but once expelled will unleash a plague of horrors upon the stage.

The premonitions begin to take literal shape as Macbeth finally undertakes 'th'assassination'. Macbeth seeks to solve his internal conflictions by externalising them, beginning a torrent of

[4] Levin, Harry, *The Overreacher*, London: Faber and Faber (1965), p. 14.
[5] Bloom, Harold, 'Introduction', *Modern Critical Interpretations*, Chelsea House Publishers (1987), p. 3.
[6] *Macbeth*, dir. Philip Cassoon, perfs. Ian McKellen, Judi Dench, Thames Television: 1978, accessed on YouTube, 9/11/14.

murders which translate verbal assertions into physical compulsions. After the witches make 'themselves air' (1.5.4) when Macbeth asks for clarity, he asserts his future by physically manifesting the immaterial himself. Macbeth's murderous intent becomes clear upon his note that 'The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step / On which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap, / For in my way it lies' (1.4.49-50). Already Macbeth sees obstacles to the throne as literal obstacles, and in the physicality of this metaphor we understand that the solidity of his volition is a literal solidity. Malcolm is a mere object to disposed of, something which Macbeth must physically 'o'er-leap' (echoing that 'Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself' (1.7.27) described later on), lest he 'fall down'. Likewise, Stephen Greenblatt writes of Lady Macbeth's plea 'Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear' (1.5.24-5), stating that this, 'like all of her expressions of will and passion… strain[s] toward bodily realisation, even as they convey a psychic and hence invisible inwardness'.[7] The Macbeths' 'psychic and hence invisible inwardness' not only metaphorically 'strain toward bodily realisation', but are physically materialised at the hands of the couple themselves. Our very first description of Macbeth is of a man who 'with his brandished steel / Which smoked with bloody execution, / Like Valour's minion carved out his passage' (1.2.19). Indeed, this report of 'bloody execution' to Duncan is a foreboding proleptic gesture to his own execution yet to come ('bloody business' (2.1.49), the 'bloody' nature of which haunts both Macbeth and his wife into madness. The portrait of Macbeth even before he meets the witches is of one who 'with his brandished steel' 'carve[s] out his own passage', and once again we see metaphor becoming literal as Macbeth 'carve[s]' out his destiny in the slaughtering of those which lie 'in [his] way'. It is notable that just before storming Macbeth's castle, Seyward says to Malcolm and Macduff, 'The time approaches / … / Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate, / But certain issue, strokes must arbitrate – / Towards which, advance the war.' (5.4.16-21) Ironically it would appear that Macbeth's own philosophy, hyper-aware of the 'approach' of time and deeming that 'strokes must arbitrate' 'Thoughts speculative', is spoken by the army that will kill him. The will to action which Macbeth has spurred on throughout the play will now be his demise.

In slaughtering his rivals for the throne, Macbeth is most crucially concerned with the threats of the future generation. Macbeth exhibits a profound fear of nature and the ability for the children of these various men to destabilise his position. He states that it is Banquo's 'royalty of nature / … which would be feared.' (3.1.48-50) This works in tandem with Banquo's own soliloquy which opens the same scene, himself stating 'myself should be the root and father / Of many kings.' (3.1.5-6) Macbeth declares it is the royalty of Banquo's 'nature' which frightens him, later referencing 'the seeds of Banquo' (3.1.69), an analogy which is echoed in Banquo's own identification as the 'root' of

[7] Greenblatt, Stephen, 'Shakespeare Bewitched', *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Text, Representing History*, Delaware: University of Delaware Press (1993), p. 33.

kings . The projection of Mother Nature as a force of disturbance in Macbeth's plans is indicative of his role as a destructive, rather than a creative, force. Childless, he seeks to obliterate aspects of the future which threaten him, unable to create posterity for himself. Macbeth laments, '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' (3.1.60-9). The germination metaphor extends into problems of fertility as Macbeth declares himself 'barren' and 'fruitless'. Freud called 'the curse of childlessness Macbeth's motivation for murder and usurpation'; Bloom elaborates, 'murder increasingly becomes Macbeth's mode of sexual expression. Unable to beget children, Macbeth slaughters them'.[8] His impotent sperm is usurped with *blood* as he stands 'bloody-sceptered' (4.3.104) in the face of barrenness. Notions of creation and destruction thus collapse into each other as the act of murder displaces sexual reproduction.

Lady Macbeth fully renounces from herself any propensity for the maternal, declaring 'unsex me here' (1.5.40) and 'Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers' (1.5.46-7). Surrendering her own 'milk' to the 'ministers' of 'murd[er]', that same 'milk of human kindness' (1.5.16) which she scorns out of Macbeth, she goes further to describe 'the babe that milks me; / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out' (1.7.55-8). This abhorrently shocking rejection of motherhood paints a visceral picture of the Macbeths' incongruity with natural processes. In an image of terrifying ruthlessness, Lady Macbeth denounces reproductive processes for the forces of annihilation. Likewise, whilst Macbeth's phallic 'sceptre' is 'barren', his 'brandished steel' still 'smoke[s] of bloody execution' (1.2.18) and thus seeks to override his sexual impotency. Childless himself and having attained his predicted future, Macbeth is holding it in his grasp by slaughtering those of the future generation. As noted by Robert N Watson, 'the forces of generational and seasonal rebirth unite against [Macbeth's] craving for rest'[9] when he looks for reassurance in the witches and comes upon the apparition of 'a child crowned, with a tree in his hand' (4.1.99.2). The 'child crowned' is the very symbol of his fear, with 'a tree' representative of that 'seed' and 'root' which Macbeth disdains, and of course, proleptically projects the image of the Birnam Wood which will be his demise. Reacting to notions of 'generational and seasonal rebirth' with nothing but fear, and absorbing the ghostly image of Banquo's future children as a 'Horrible sight', Macbeth's absolute revulsion with natural processes rings clear. Watson describes 'Macbeth's foolish wish to replace natural succession with abrupt violence'.[10] In a further perversion of fertility, despite Duncan

[8] Bloom, 'Introduction', *op. cit.*, p. 185.
[9] Watson, Robert N., 'Thriftless Ambition, Foolish Wishes, and the Tragedy of Macbeth', *Modern Critical Interpretations*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

'plant[ing] thee' and encouraging Macbeth to be 'full of growing' (1.4.29-30), his only 'swelling act' (1.3.129) is one of Duncan's own murder. These images of germination, 'growing' and 'swelling' are distorted, suggesting that the infertile and perversely unnatural Macbeths will only ever gestate 'act's of murder. Instead of children, only 'dire combustion and confused events/ [are] New-hatched' (2.3.58-9) in Scotland.

Macbeth appears to desire the eradication of not only these children in specific, but the entire notion of a future generation at all; he has supplanted himself into the present, and now wishes to stay there. Macbeth desires to manipulate the very workings of time as we know it, an act described in terms of trickery; Lady Macbeth orders 'beguile the time' (1.5.62), and Macbeth urges her to 'mock the time' (1.7.83). Macbeth takes comfort in the Sisters' apparition which tells him 'none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth', accepting this backwards and unnatural statement as true as this is the reality which he seeks to obtain. The resolution comes only of course, when Macduff, from 'his mother's womb / Untimely ripped' (5.7.45-6) eradicates this fantasy; his premature birth results in Macduff's overdue death, rebalancing the natural order. Despite Macbeth's attempt to 'be safely' (3.1.48) in a future which he has sole control over, as Bloom states, when 'the usurper goes on murdering, [he] achieves no victory over time or the self'.[11] Macbeth's attempts to create new possibilities for himself through destruction are truly 'fruitless', for they do not work.

Redolent of the 'multiplying villainies of nature' (1.2.11) referred to by the bloody soldier, the compulsive augmentation of Macbeth's 'doubly redoubled strokes' (1.2.38) appears to spiral out of control as he imposes more 'villainy' on 'nature'. He says of his position as King, threatened by Banquo's sons, 'To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus.' (3.1.7-8) The deed of Duncan's murder having caused Macbeth such previous turmoil, now seems to him 'nothing' in the light of new dangers. Saying 'There is none but he / Whose being I do fear' (3.1.53-4), we know this 'fear' will yet again be redirected towards Macduff. Macbeth appears to be on a never-ending course of physical assertion, the 'fruitless'ness of which is evoked in the 'nothing' which prefigures his conclusion that all of this 'Signifi[es] nothing' (5.5.28). Maynard Mack Jr. writes of 'the constraining pressures of the practical and expedient – what must be done because something else was done and cannot be undone'.[12] Even in the somewhat convoluted syntax of Mack's own criticism we see reflected the sense of stumbling with which Macbeth proceeds through the rest of the play. Bloom references Wilbur Sanders in describing Macbeth's actions as 'a kind of falling forward', though Sanders' original 'falling in space' appears more apt as the 'forward'ness of Macbeth's falling seems a mere illusion, his future growing only increasingly uncertain as his villainies multiply. Indeed, perhaps it is

[11] Bloom, 'An Essay by Harold Bloom', *op. cit.*, p.202.
[12] Mack Jr., Maynard, 'The Voice in the Sword', *Modern Critical Interpretations*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

more fitting to describe the motion of Macbeth's murderous action as, to use his own words, his 'fall down' (1.4.50).

Harold C. Goddard writes, 'Deeds… are [his] only opiates for fears', stating further, 'the dose must be increased with an alarming rapidity'.[13] Use of the words 'opiate' and 'dose' reminds us of the narcosis implicit in Banquo's question after meeting the Sisters; 'have we eaten on the insane root / That takes the reason prisoner?' (1.3.84-5). Indeed, instead of 'Deeds' providing Macbeth with any kind of 'opiate' relief, he experiences a 'falling in space'; his agitation becomes even more disordered when fed by the insatiate physical compulsions of self-assertion. The futile movements of drunkards are elaborated upon by the Porter, who describes how alcohol provokes 'lechery… : it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance… it makes him, and it mars him' (2.3.25-30). In this we see a suitable metaphor for Macbeth's own psychology, as unable to 'perform' sexually he displaces 'the desire' of lechery into brutality, his ambition both 'mak[ing]… and … mar[ring]' him. In this way, the lens of intoxication is a useful one through which to view the play's unfolding narrative. Not only do the Macbeths become disabled and incapacitated by their actions, but the entire landscape of the play appears affected by some 'wretched' (4.3.141) haze. This 'root' of insanity planted in Macbeth will indeed see 'reason' taken 'prisoner' as the sense of the play begins to dissolve; disembodied screams in the night-time, 'a falcon' 'killed' 'by a mousing owl' (2.4.12-3), horses eating horses. The aforementioned Pandora's Box, Macbeth's previously solipsistic 'black and deep desires', has now been unleashed on the world of the play itself. Already we have commented upon what Watson calls Macbeth's 'crime against the regenerative cycles'.[14] He continues, 'an attack on the cycle of the parents and children necessarily affronts the cycles of night and day, sleeping and waking… as well'.[15] The restlessness in the former half of *Macbeth* is felt in its verbal and physical compulsiveness, but though Banquo and Macbeth do suffer from a lack of 'repose' (2.1.9) and 'rest' (2.1.13), the latter half sees insomnia infect the very fabric and sense of the play. Just before murdering Duncan Macbeth himself proclaims 'Nature seems dead' (2.1.51); after he famously 'hath murdered sleep' (2.2.41) the 'regenerative cycles' break down as Macbeth appears to have broken time itself. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking is deemed 'a great perturbation in nature' (5.1.9). Insomnia plagues not only Macbeth, but afflicts the entire nation of Scotland, where 'shrieks… rend the air' (4.3.166) and 'sleep to our nights' (4.1.34) is no longer given. What was previously primarily a linguistic and nervous restlessness becomes a very literal and traumatic sleeplessness.

[13] Goddard, Harold C., 'Macbeth', *Modern Critical Interpretations*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[14] Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 144
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 137

After Macbeth 'hath murdered sleep', time fractures as we plunge into an eternal night; 'O never / Shall sun that morrow see.' (1.5.69-60). Time itself is 'woeful' (2.3.60) as Macbeth's destruction of the 'regenerative cycles' refuses us a new day. In Macbeth's exhaustive restlessness death appears as respite, and he longs for sleep to 'balm' his 'hurt [mind]' (2.2.38) but instead, he must suffer 'the torture of the mind to lie / In restless ecstasy.' (3.2.24) Reflected in the proliferation of disjointed half lines in this soliloquy, the twisting and turnings of Macbeth's psyche turn into a literal 'restless'ness as the time for rest never comes. What were once 'horrible imaginings' of the future have formed into a perpetual, 'present horror' (2.1.60), described by Bradley as a 'perpetual agony of restlessness'.[16] Notions of past and future are undermined as we are granted both apparitions of the future and 'graves [that] send / Those that we bury back' (3.4.71-2). In killing Duncan, Macbeth declares 'Now… wicked dreams abuse / The pale curtained sleep' (2.1.50-1). This 'Now' verbally plunges the future which Macbeth has been chasing into the present, becoming to his horror an awful, torturous, and perpetual 'now'. Bloom writes, 'That "now" is the empty world of Macbeth'.[17] This 'empty world' of 'perpetual agony' transforms the play's world into a purgatory, the stage ('this place') becoming a 'Hell Gate' (2.3.1-16). Goddard writes, '*Macbeth* is Shakespeare's descent into Hell'.[18] Macbeth does indeed seem to 'descend', to 'fall down', as we have said, but his state of purgatory seems more existential in a secular way than that suggested by Goddard. Their condition is one of restlessness, irrationality, confusion and hallucinations; all recognisably symptomatic of insomnia at its worst. Says Levin, 'Damnation is portended by the curse of sleeplessness'[19]; the Macbeths' 'damnation' is not so much religious as one of 'slumbery agitation' (5.1.11). 'Hell is murky' (5.1.14), says Lady Macbeth whilst sleepwalking in fits of madness, 'Hell' here metaphorically and emphatically evoking the torturous nature of their endless day, their 'black and deep desires' having become figured in the 'murky' shadows of the stage which paints the devolved state of their psyches.

Images become uncanny and people become unfamiliar as the 'strange intelligence' (1.3.76) granted by the Sisters 'saturate[s]' the play with 'strangeness', says Goddard.[20] The imprisonment of 'reason' renders even the connection between the Macbeths, previously so in tune, now discordant. They become unrecognisable ('Who's there? What ho?' (2.2.9)) and incomprehensible ('What do you mean?' (2.2.39)) to one another. Macbeth's physical and mental capabilities completely denigrate, stating 'I'll go no more / I am afraid to think', 'I dare not' 'Look' (2.2.49-51). All that once seemed to make sense now doesn't, and Macbeth becomes so infirm that not only does he not understand his

[16] Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 360.
[17] Bloom, 'An Essay by Harold Bloom', *op. cit.* p. 198.
[18] Goddard, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[19] Levin, Harry, 'Two Scenes from Macbeth', *Modern Critical Interpretations*, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
[20] Goddard, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

wife but can neither 'know myself' (2.2.73). Mack comments upon Macbeth being 'drained of internal significance', and in parallel with his degeneration, the play itself devolves into cacophony, the stage becoming a dissonant echo chamber of drums, knocks, 'hautboys', crows and bells; 'sound and fury / Signifying nothing' (5.5.8). Signifiers are divorced from referent as the play descends into nonsense, the witches alluding to a 'deed without a name' (4.1.63), an echo of that nameless deed which triggered all this madness. Says Goddard, 'This is Hamlet's… quintessence of dust, carried to [its] nadir. The kingdom Macbeth's ambition has conquered turns out to be a limbo of blank idiocy'.[21] There appears even a meta-theatricality to the realisation of his own narrative's pointlessness as life becomes 'a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more' (5.5.4-6). Macbeth is a 'poor player' simply following the script both in his prophecy and literally the play-script itself, his existence one of mere role fulfilment. In the 'limbo' before the inevitability of death and the play's end, what meaningful sense can be worthily made at all? Macbeth decrees after Duncan's murder, 'from this instant there's nothing serious in mortality – / All is but toys' (2.3.5-6). In his purgatorial insomnia life is but a 'stage', a vessel for meaningless frivolity, until Macbeth is murdered, and 'the time is free' (5.7.85).

Bloom states that 'The world of *Macbeth* is one into which we have been thrown'.[22] The shortest of the tragedies, not only are we thrown into the world of *Macbeth*, but *through* it, the running time itself necessitating a sense of urgency. The Macbeths' restless encouragement of 'the coming-on of time', making their future ambitions real in the 'present instant', only results in disaster. Time itself mourns the fracturing of natural cycles as distinctions between creation and destruction blur and the day never ends. The 'present instant' is achieved but must be relentlessly endured, a sleepless purgatory full of 'sound and fury', hallucinations and spectral figures. As stated by Levin, upon Macbeth's death 'we welcome the daylight as if we were awakening from a nightmare'[23] and to our relief, when the 'poor player' is killed and 'heard no more', after suffering through the eternal night-time of the play our own insomnia is relieved and we too are permitted a new day.

[21] Goddard, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[22] Bloom, 'An Essay by Harold Bloom', *op. cit.*, p.172.
[23] Levin, 'Two Scenes from Macbeth', *op. cit.*, p. 131.

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