

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij
College of Education
/ Ibn Rushd
University of Baghdad

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was "written in 1605-06 and was performed at Hampton Court in 1606 before James I of England and his brother-in-law, Christian [IV] of Denmark,"¹ as Sylvan Barnet remarks. King Christian IV is the brother of Queen Anne, King James I's wife, whose interest in drama had a great influence on her husband. It is no wonder that James I patronized Shakespeare's theatrical company, which bore his title and was called King's Men in 1603, the first year of his reign in England (1603-1625). He was Scottish by birth and was born in Edinburgh Castle in 1566. He was already King James VI of Scotland before he came to England as James I.

The main source of the play is Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577), but it seems that "Shakespeare used the second edition of this book, which was published in 1586,"² as Bernard Lott states. The time of the story goes back to the eleventh century during the reign of the pious king, Edward the Confessor, who ruled England between 1042 and 1066, a short time before the Norman conquest of England by William the Conqueror who ruled England from 1066 to 1087.

Macbeth "is the shortest..... and the speediest"³ of all the Shakespearean tragedies, to use Theodore Spencer's words, since "nothing like it has ever been constructed in twenty-one hundred lines,"⁴ as Mark Van Doren points out. It

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

has no secondary plot and it is concerned with Macbeth's conduct and his relations with other characters.

When Shakespeare wrote Macbeth, he had a political theme in mind. The play was enacted in the third year, namely 1606, of James I's reign in England. In the original story Banquo was an accomplice in the murder of the king, but in the Shakespearean play he is a nice and honourable man, especially when we know that Shakespeare's king was believed to be a descendant of Banquo, or as Oscar Campbell puts it:

In choosing and developing the story of Macbeth, Shakespeare sought to intrigue and flatter King James, before whom the tragedy was to be acted. James traced his title back to Banquo, an imaginary Scottish nobleman of the 11th century invented by the Scottish historian Hector Boece in order to provide the Stuarts with a suitably noble ancestry. . . . So James must have been pleased at the staging of the ancient supernatural predictions of his glory and his extended sway—prophecies that he was fulfilling in 1606.⁵

Undoubtedly it would have been very embarrassing if Shakespeare had made the king's ancestor a murderer. Accordingly the banquet scene following Banquo's murder is another invention of Shakespeare. Here in the play Banquo is made a foil to Macbeth whose country suffers because of his misdeeds.

We have also to know that in Holinshed the story is a little different from Shakespeare's, especially when King Duff is murdered by Donwald. To this effect Campbell gives more information:

Donwald, like Macbeth, was egged on by an ambitious wife. Since Shakespeare probably designed the play partly to please King James I, he may have substituted Donwald's crime for Macbeth's in order to make Duncan's murder more like Bothwell's murder of Darnley, King James' father. Thus he could involve more securely the king's horror and loathing of Duncan's murder.⁶

In the scene concerning King Edward's heavenly gift of curing the disease known as the evil or scrofula by a touch from his healing hand, Shakespeare again wants to please King James I who believed that he had inherited this power of healing sick people from the English kings, especially from King Edward. It is obvious here that Shakespeare wants to bolster up this notion.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

James I is once more pleased by Shakespeare in the witchcraft scenes. Witches and witchcraft were widely known in England during Shakespeare's time. Samuel Johnson tells us that in that period there was a lot of witches to the extent that there was "a village in Lancashire, where their number was greater than that of the houses."⁷ It is very interesting to quote Campbell commenting on this point, especially when the king believed that his marriage to Princess Anne of Denmark was delayed by witches:

The witches who instigated Macbeth to sin also dramatized and justified one of King James' most cherished superstitions. He was certain that witchcraft had repeatedly delayed and thwarted his efforts to marry Anne of Denmark. Spells wrought by black magic, so he thought, had stirred up terrible storms at sea which had driven his bride's ship back to its Norwegian port of embarkation again and again.

These machinations of Satan's crew had driven James to ferret out women suspected of witchcraft throughout Scotland, to throw them into prison, to appear at their trials, and to take a sadistic delight in cross-examining the wretched creatures himself. Under torture, they had confessed to performing some of the impossible deeds of which the witches in *Macbeth* boast. For example, one of the pain-crazed old women admitted that she was one of 200 witches who had gone to sea, each in a sieve, in order to wreck a ship returning from Denmark to England, perhaps the very one bearing Princess Anne.⁸

It is no wonder that King James I found fault with Reginal Scot's book, which was entitled *The Discovery of Witchcraft* and written in 1584. Scot denied the existence of witches and found it cruel to punish old women accused of working with the devil. In response to this view, King James I in 1597 refuted Scot's statements by writing a book entitled *Daemonologie* in which he confirmed the existence of witchcraft. Thus he attacked Scot who "is not ashamed in public print to deny that there can be such a thing as witchcraft."⁹

Again Campbell tells us how Shakespeare pleased King James I concerning the subject of the witches:

These witches conform exactly to King James' beliefs. Their every act confirms the truth of his suspicions. Shakespeare, all but ignoring the supernatural elements of their nature, presents them as the witches of popular

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

belief which the king passionately shared. They are wrinkled, ugly old women, or demons who have taken their shape. They have sold their souls to the devil in return for the gift of powers half-awful and half-grotesque. By seeking and accepting their aid Macbeth becomes guilty, albeit indirectly, of trafficking with the Prince of Darkness. This vivid way of dramatizing a man's bondage to evil has enthralled every spectator or reader of the tragedy, as, in a peculiar sense, it must have enthralled King James.¹⁰

Moreover the pageant, demonstrated by the witches in the first scene of act four where we see a procession of eight knights followed by Banquo, was also designed to gratify King James I, who is the ninth Stuart king.

Again Shakespeare departs from his source by adding more graces to the English king in order to indulge James I making him feel he is also meant by these graces. George R. Price comments on this point:

On the other hand, Shakespeare clearly expressed the ideal of a good king. In *Macbeth* Malcolm enumerates a formidable list of "the king-becoming graces;" there are twelve of these virtues, nine more than Holinshed's *Chronicle* says that Malcolm spoke of.¹¹

What else can Shakespeare do to delight his king?

In this respect and as far as history, the political theme and national interest are concerned, Ashley H. Thorndike partially traces *Macbeth* to the history plays, but when it is compared with *King Lear*, it is more political:

The play is more dependent on the chronicle than "Lear," and pays more attention to the representation of history. In "Lear" the political and national importance of the events is forgotten, but in "Macbeth" the convulsion of kingdom is kept in mind, and the battles, political intrigue, and the prophecies of future dynasties recall the early chronicle plays.¹²

In this play the playwright wants to show us another important theme, which is the cosmic order and man's adherence to the natural law. Shakespeare's audience believed in a harmonious order between man (the microcosm) and the universe (the macrocosm). Any violation takes place in the little world of man is reflected in the outer world. Thus Macbeth's acts to upset the divine order of Providence is extremely detested by the Elizabethans and Jacobites. Macbeth, instead of bringing peace to his

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

kingdom, defies the natural law. After killing Duncan he plans to kill Banquo and others, and by doing so he has disrupted both man's world and the universe. He is ready to destroy everything in order to secure his throne. Thus he says:

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)¹³

By resorting the evil and departing from the laws of Nature and Nations Macbeth has brought confusion and chaos everywhere, or as Irving Ribner remarks by saying: "The tragedy is cast simultaneously on the planes of man, the state, the family and the physical universe; each is thrown into chaos by the sin of Macbeth, and evil is allowed to work itself out on each of these corresponding planes."¹⁴ E. M. W. Tillyard comments on this case as follows:

The personal tragedy of Macbeth, the terrible discrepancy between his virtuous understanding and his corrupt will, his vain conflict with an overruling Providence, and the prevailing theme of disorder seeking to upset the divine order of nature, are all more important than the actual political theme. Yet that theme is the instrument through which Providence works and is one of the motives that combine to make the play so rich.¹⁵

Macbeth's murder of Duncan, his king, kinsman and guest is considered an abhorrent disruption of the harmonious order. Regicide looks "like a breach in nature" (II.iii.110), and creates a big confusion in the universe as long as killing a king means, to the Shakespearean audience, killing order and the rule of law which are embodied in the king's person. In this regard Macduff says the following statement after Duncan's murder is discovered:

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence
The life o' the building!

(II.iii.61-64)

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

The foregoing quotation compares the king's body to a temple anointed by God. The murderer by breaking open this temple has committed a sacrilegious crime. This again leads us to the theory of the divine right of kings who were then considered God's representatives on earth and responsible only to Him, and not to their subjects. James I and his son Charles I especially exploited this principle to maintain their rule. It is no wonder that Shakespeare stresses this point in the play in order to curry favour with his king then, James I. Thus even before the murder of Duncan, Shakespeare makes nature and its creatures portentous in order to predict the king's death. Here Lady Macbeth foretells Duncan's death through the croaking of the raven, the bird of ill-omen:

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.

(I.v.36-38)

And again nature is still concerned with Duncan even during his murder. Thus when Macbeth, after murdering his king, asks his wife if she heard anything during the murder, she answers: "I heard the owl scream, and the crickets cry" (II.ii.15).

Moreover on the night of Duncan's murder the entire world is out of harmony when strange happenings take place to show the concern of the outer universe. The heavenly planets and the stars are affected. The moon "goes down at twelve" (II.i.3) instead of setting later, and the sky dims the stars lights and seems: "There's husbandry in heaven; / Their candles are all out" (II.i. 4-5). Even the sun was blotted out in the morning following Duncan's murder. Although it is daytime, the sky is still dark and the sun is choked by darkness. The bright day is dimmed because it is ashamed to see what has happened to the virtuous king. Thus Rosse tells the old man:

Ha, good father,
Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
Threatens his bloody stage: by the clock 't is day,
Ant yet the dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
Is 't night's predominance, or the day's shame,

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?

(II.iv.4-10)

And then Rosse goes on telling the old man that since the murder of the king is an unnatural act, strange and unusual things happen as the falcon, which usually kills owls, is killed by an owl: "A falcon, towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawked at, and killed" (II.iv.12-13). Stranger still Duncan's horses turned wild and "ate each other" (II.iv.19), as the old man answers. Lenox gives us another picture of the chaos happened at that night when he speaks of the shrieking owl, the shaking of the earth and the storms that felled chimneys:

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion, and confused events,
New hatched to the woeful time.

The obscure bird clamoured the livelong night:
Some say the earth was feverous, and did shake.

(II.iii.49-56)

Consequently Macbeth's violation of the laws of Nature and Nations has brought trouble to himself, to his wife and to the state which is threatened by a civil war and a foreign invading army.

Before we mention how Macbeth is driven by his ambition, or by his wife's and the witches' temptations to be king, we must see how Shakespeare deals with the witches in this play. He does not tell us obviously and directly about the real nature of the witches. They are old ugly women associated with evil and darkness. What is abnormal about them as human beings is that they have bearded faces and eat strange and detested food containing human and animal organs.

Yet the witches are called the weird sisters, which is a supernatural quality associated with fate. However their supernatural power is limited, as they cannot affect the soul and they cannot even sink *The Tiger*. They have masters and they are directed by Hecate, their queen. They appear with

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

thunder and lightning and they can easily vanish in the air. They can raise and control the winds. They look like devils. They can sail in a sieve, they can revenge and they can kill certain animals.

To Banquo the witches are associated with the devil: "What! can the devil speak true" (I.iii.107)? Also they are "instruments of darkness" (I.iii.124) trying "to betray's / In deepest consequence" (I.iii.125-126). But to Macbeth they are "supernatural soliciting" (I.iii.130), although to some extent he doubts their predictions. He also associates them with evil and they are the worst thing, as we can tell from his speech to his wife when he decides to have a meeting with them: "I am bent to know, / By the worst means, the worst" (III.iv.134-35). He feels sure of their deception when Birnam Wood seems to move and he begins "to doubt th' equivocation of the fiend, / That lies like truth" (V.v.43-44). When he believes that Macduff is of no woman born, he accuses them of lying and equates them with the devil: "And be these juggling fiends no more believed, / That palter with us in a double sense" (V.viii.19-20).

The other function of the witches is to represent Macbeth's evil side, since their power is limited and as far as Duncan is concerned they have not asked Macbeth directly or indirectly to murder him. Macbeth's previous and latent thoughts concerning murdering the king are strongly reactivated by the witches' prophecy. In other words they stand for Macbeth's subconscious feelings which already dwell on the idea of murdering Duncan. It is no wonder that Banquo is surprised to see Macbeth preoccupied with the expectations of becoming king, as "he seems rapt withal" (I.iii.57) to the extent that he does not answer Banquo's question in this concern: "Good Sir, why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound fair" (I.iii.51-52)? Macbeth's not answering Banquo's question makes us believe that probably Macbeth's intrinsic evil ideas concerning regicide have been vigorously pushed forward, and he is now thinking of a way to put them into action. Moreover he cannot wait to tell his wife in person about the witches' prophecy, but hurriedly sends her a letter just "like a businessman briefing an associate on a piece of good news for the firm,"¹⁶ to use Mary McCarthy's words. He is fully susceptible to evil temptations now. even the wording of the letter itself incriminates him, since he insinuates to his wife that she will be great, which indirectly means "queen." Thus he addresses her as "my dearest partner of greatness" (I.v.9), and then asks her to keep the matter secret: "Lay it to thy heart, and farewell" (I.v.11). A. C. Bradley judiciously comments on this issue as follows:

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

There is no sign whatever in the play that Shakespeare meant the actions of Macbeth to be forced on him by an external power, whether that of the Witches, or of their "masters," or of Hecate. . . . Macbeth is, in the ordinary sense, perfectly free in regard to them: and if we speak of degrees of freedom, he is even more free than Hamlet, who was crippled by melancholy when the Ghost appeared to him. That the influence of the first prophecies upon him came as much from himself as from them, is made abundantly clear by the obviously intentional contrast between him and Banquo. Banquo, ambitious but perfectly honest, is scarcely even startled by them, and he remains throughout the scene indifferent to them. But when Macbeth heard them he was not an innocent man. . . . In either case not only was he free to accept or resist the temptation, but the temptation was already within him. . . . Speaking strictly we must affirm that he was tempted only by himself. *He* speaks indeed of their "supernatural soliciting"; but in fact they did not solicit. They merely announced events. . . . For all that appears, the natural death of an old man might have fulfilled the prophecy and day. In any case, the idea of fulfilling it by murder was entirely his own.¹⁷

It is true that the witches at the beginning want to meet Macbeth, but after the murders of Duncan and Banquo he himself goes to them, and when he meets them they prophesy more things to him. It is true they ask him through the apparitions to be "bloody, bold and resolute" (IV.i.79), but they also give him advice. They ask him to "beware Macduff" (IV.i.71), but they do not suggest killing his wife and children. Thus the murder of Macduff's family is his own planning. If Macbeth had had no evil intentions, he would not have gone to the witches, especially when "they do not, however, suggest evil to man; they suggest an object which may incite man's own inclination to evil which is the fruit of original sin, and they do this by means of prophecy,"¹⁸ to use Ribner's statement. Yet not all men are susceptible to evil. Banquo has never thought of murdering the king in order to make his issue kings, and what is more he associates the witches with the devils.

Through the witches' riddles and equivocations Macbeth's lust for power is stimulated. Not only their speech sounds unnatural, but also their strange food, their bearded faces, their ability to raise winds and vanish in the air, and the accompaniment of thunder and lightning during their appearances. Their food is a strange blend of pieces cut off from human dead bodies and animals. Yet their meal is a parody of Macbeth's death banquet in which the

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

ghost of the dead Banquo appears to horrify and discomfort Macbeth. The witches' meal is considered a "hell-broth" (IV.i.19), because of the demonic incantations accompanying it. Banquo's ghost attends Macbeth's banquet and smilingly appears while the witches are cooking. In the death banquet Banquo's ghost has bloody, or rather, "gory locks" (III.iv.51), while "a baboon's blood" (IV.i.37) is poured into the witches' cauldron in order to "cool it" (IV.i.37). There is also "sow's blood" (IV.i.65) in it. Moreover Macbeth is asked to "be bloody" (IV.i.79) while the cauldron is boiling.

Shakespeare gives a special importance to the witches by entirely allotting the first scene of the play to them. From the moment we see them we associate them with the devils, as it is believed they keep the devils in the form of pets. The first witch has a gray cat whose name is Graymalkin. The second witch has a toad which she calls Paddock, while the third witch's pet is unnamed. Their speech is full of equivocations and ambiguities. They say they will meet again "in thunder, lightning or in rain. . . / When the battle's lost and won" (I.i.2,4). They do not exactly say who is going to win or lose. They keep this matter unknown. Then they proceed to a more equivocal speech when they infuse goodness with badness by saying: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i.10), which is a perversion of values.

To make Macbeth associated with the witches, Shakespeare introduces him echoing their words when he says: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I.iii.38). Here Macbeth, like the witches' equivocation, mixes goodness with badness. The day is good, or "fair" to him, because he has won a battle already mentioned by the witches. But the day is bad, or "foul," because the weather is stormy and full of thunder and lightning as previously foretold by the first witch when she said in the first scene of the play that they would meet "in thunder, lightning or in rain" (I.i.2). Consequently the language of Macbeth and the witches are both ambivalent. In other words Macbeth's equivocal language is part of the witches' language. The witches talk of the foul weather, and later on Macbeth appears during that weather and refers to it. What is said and predicted by the witches is soon witnessed during Macbeth's first appearance. This is not a mere coincidence.

Since the witches are the agents of evil and darkness, many events in the play take place at night or in the dark. When Macbeth thinks of murdering Duncan, he wants to do it at night. He says that after Duncan has named his son an heir to the crown, and he himself has desired to go to Inverness to be Macbeth's guest at his castle:

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twajj

Start, hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
(I.iv.49-52)

And then he decides to go and see his wife before the king's arrival. This is again a strong evidence that Macbeth wants to discuss with his wife how to kill Duncan in their castle, and this is what really happens afterwards.

Before he murders the king, Macbeth knows very well that his nocturnal deed is associated with evil, witchcraft and Hecate:

Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep: witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings.
(II.i.49-52)

Moreover he compares himself with "the wolf" (II.i.53) which murders the innocent lambs especially at night, and "with Tarquin" (II.i.55) who ravishes at night Lucrece, his hostess and his friend's wife.

Macbeth's invocation of the dark night is once more demonstrated shortly before Banquo's murder:

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!
(III.ii.47-51)

Here Macbeth equates himself with "night's black agents" (III.ii.54), who are the wicked beings that work at night, and usually turn powerful when the "light thickens" (III.ii.51).

The minute Macbeth becomes a murderer after killing Duncan, he starts thinking of murdering the grooms. It is certainly Macbeth's idea to smear the sleeping grooms with Duncan's blood and to kill them. It is not his wife's idea. Moreover Macbeth does not ask help from his wife when he

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

decides to kill Bnaquo, since one murder leads to another murder and he knows now how to kill others. He only wants her to appreciate the deed after it is done: "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed" (III.ii.46-47).

Macbeth's horrible and bloody deeds reach their climax when he orders the murder of Macduff's wife and children who are all innocent. Once his murderous hands are stained with innocent peoples' blood, he is ready to kill as many additional people as possible without the slightest compunction. When he is in danger, he sends orders to chase and kill those who oppose him: "Send out more horses, skirr the country round; / Hang those that talk of fear" (V.iii.35-36). Macduff furnishes us with more information concerning Macbeth's tyrannical reign:

Each new morn,
New widows howl, new orphans cry: new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
As if it felt with Scotland, and yelled out
Like syllable of dolour.
(IV.iii.4-8)

Macbeth will not retreat from the bloody path he chose for himself, and he is so selfish that he pays no consideration to other matters which take a second place after his own offensive interests:

For mine own good
All causes shall give way: I am in blood
Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
(III.iv.135-38)

It is no wonder that Malcolm compares Macbeth after his death to a "dead butcher" (V.ix.35). Here we are reminded of Samuel Johnson's statement about Macbeth's end when he says that "every reader rejoices at his fall."¹⁹ Macbeth's end is very shameful and degrading, especially when his severed "cursed head" (V.ix.21) is held high before the spectators.

Yet a word must be given to show how the divine justice was meted out to Macbeth. Soon after Duncan's murder Macbeth feels the punitive measures taken against him, when he says: "Methought I heard a voice cry,

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

'Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep,'—the innocent sleep" (II.ii.34-35). This is a severe punishment, and the discomfort it causes is greatly felt by the person who is denied it. Sleep is a bliss from God. It is like a preservative or seasoning that prolongs life and activity, as Lady Macbeth tells her husband after his crime: "You lack season of all natures, sleep" (III.iv.141). When the first witch is denied chestnuts from the sailor's wife, she decides to punish her through her husband, the scapegoat, by making him sleepless: "Sleep shall neither night nor day / Hang upon his penthouse lid" (I.iii.19-20). Accordingly Macbeth suffers from different fears which afflict him with insomnia, and he thinks by killing Macduff he might "sleep in spite of thunder" (IV.i.86). The victims of Macbeth's tyranny know the blessing of sleep which Macbeth robbed them of. Thus the lord who talks to Lenox hopes that one day they might "sleep to our nights" (III.vi.34) if they could get rid of Macbeth.

Macbeth punishes Macduff through murdering his wife and children when he says the following words which soon he puts them into action:

The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
Seize upon Fife; give to th' edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line.

(IV.i.149-52)

Yet Macbeth is punished for his crimes through the incurable mental disease of his wife and her ultimate suicide at a time when he needs her beside him. After the king's murder the relationship between Macbeth and his wife is deteriorated and they are no longer close to each other. Both feel lonesome and each dies alone. He finds in the witches a substitute for her when he goes to consult them after Banquo's murder in order to get some information instead of listening to his wife's views any more. Again he feels that by denying his subjects their freedom and comfort he has forfeited their respect for him. Consequently he is lonesome and cursed:

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.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

(V.iii.24-28)

Furthermore Macbeth mocks his own kingship and sees his crown fruitless and his throne valueless:

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.

(III.i.60-64)

That is why he looks ridiculous in his kingly clothes which seem as false as his subjects' allegiance to him according to Angus:

Those he commands move only in command,
Nothing in love: now does he feels his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.

(III.ii.19-22)

He envies the dead Duncan because he is now at peace and nobody is plotting against him anymore. He is afraid of many people and eats only "in fear" (III.ii.17). He is troubled by "terrible dreams" (III.ii.18) and threatened by rebellions. His mind is shattered and "full of scorpions" (III.ii.36). As a result Macbeth's own life seems to him after he loses his wife and the loyalty of his people as if it were a small candle, a shadow and a foolish tale:

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.23-28)

Yet Macbeth is aware of God's punishment even before he kills his king. He is afraid of the bad consequences of the murder:

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

We but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends th' ingredients of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips.
(I.vii.8-12)

Also Macbeth "could not say, 'Amen,'" (II.ii.28) after the murder of Duncan, because God has dismissed him from His mercy.

Again Macbeth is punished by Banquo's ghost which fills him with terror and threat, as we see from his speech addressed to the ghost: "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (III.iv.50-51). He is once more chastized through Banquo's ghost when he meets the witches. He feels envious of the royal line descending from Banquo where eight apparitions of kings are seen followed by Banquo's smiling ghost:

And some I see
That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry.
Horrible sight! –Now, I see 't is true;
For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me,
And points at them for his.
(IV.i.120-24)

Since Macbeth follows the way of damnation, the other way of redemption has been closed before him and he must end in humiliation, deprivation and destruction.

Still Shakespeare shows us how Macbeth is abominable through a lot of comparisons, contrasts, juxtapositions and dramatic ironies. Duncan's mistaken conception of Macbeth's castle as an entirely peaceful place leads him to say:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.
(I.vi.1-3)

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

This mistaken admiration is taken up by Banquo when he looks at the martlet nest built on the outside walls. This bird has a religious feature because it usually builds its nest in churches and temples, and thus it lives peacefully and unharmed. Banquo also enjoys the nice weather outside the castle:

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutting, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle:
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
The air is delicate.

(I.vi.3-10)

There is a dramatic irony in the foregoing speech, because Lady Macbeth has already thought of evil plans to have Duncan murdered inside the castle:

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.

(I.v.36-38)

Here we have two guests, the martlet in his nest outside the castle and Duncan in his bed inside the castle. The martlet is safe, while death is awaiting Duncan. There are pleasant breezes and "heaven's breath" outside the castle, but inside there are smells of blood. Thus beauty, peace, freedom and quiet sleep outside the castle are contrasted with murder, death, treachery, nightmares and sleeplessness inside the castle.

Moreover when Duncan enters the castle he calls Lady Macbeth: "Fair and noble hostess" (I.vi.24), which is reminiscent of "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i.10) of the witches' ambiguous speech. Lady Macbeth is not noble while she is hiding treacherous plots against the king. This is also a dramatic irony by which the spectators know that Duncan is wrong, as Lady Macbeth's false nobility is contrasted with her real criminal intentions.

The best way Shakespeare employs to uncover Macbeth's tyranny is when he contrasts Macbeth with "the most pious Edward" (III.vi.27), King of England. Edward calls upon God "above / To ratify the work" (III.vi.27-28) and "solicits heaven" (IV.iii.149), while Macbeth solicits help from the

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

witches and the devils. Edward cures the disease which "is called evil" (IV.iii.146), or scrofula, and "all swoln and ulcerous" (IV.iii.151) organs of the body with "holy prayers" (IV.iii.154), while Macbeth brings evil to his country, murders innocent people and invokes the devil for help. The afflicted Scottish people who are done an injustice, like Malcolm and Macduff, arrive into Edward's England where there are peace and justice in order to flee Macbeth's Scotland which is overwhelmed by tyranny. In England English and Scottish people are united, while in Scotland families are disintegrated as when Macduff leaves his wife and children. The people in England bless their king: "And sundry blessings hang about his throne" (IV.iii.158), while "curses, not loud but deep" (V.iii.27) the Scottish people present to Macbeth. Edward deals with heavenly acts, while Macbeth deals with hellish deeds, and accordingly Edward's England looks like heaven, while Macbeth's Scotland looks like hell. Macbeth's world is dark and affected by the witches who meet in thunder and lightning and hover in fog and dirty air. In England people meet at daylight even when they conspire against Macbeth.

Also indirect comparison between Malcolm and Macbeth shows us part of Macbeth's misrule. When Malcolm charges himself with false accusations, he reflects the horrible way Macbeth rules his country. Thus he tells Macduff, whom he suspects, of all the following bad qualities which are certainly not his, but Macbeth's. Yet these qualities are contrasted with better ones:

But I have none: the king-becoming graces,
As justice, verity, temperance, 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 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)

When Macbeth, in his second title as the Thane of Cawdor, is compared with the first thane of Cawdor who was treacherous to the king, we find that

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twajj

he is also as treacherous, or rather more treacherous, than his predecessor. Duncan refers to the first thane saying he has been deceived by him:

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.12-15)

Yet he is again deceived by the traitor's successor, Macbeth, who immediately comes after this speech and will do worse than what his predecessor did to the king.

As for Lady Macbeth there is nothing inside her showing a conflict between evil and goodness to the extent we see in Macbeth. She manipulates her husband for evil-doing more than he manipulates her for the same purpose. Soon after receiving her husband's letter concerning the witches' prophecies, she decides to have Duncan murdered in her castle. She is even ready to kill Duncan herself at the beginning, as she asks the smoke of hell to hide her knife:

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)

When her husband arrives, she tells him: "You shall put/ This night's great business into my despatch" (I.v.64-65), and "Leave all the rest to me" (I.v.71). She associates murder with courage and manliness. Thus when she notices Macbeth's procrastination to kill the king, she reproaches him saying that his delinquency in murdering Duncan is bestial and not a manly act:

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 what you were, you would
Be so much more than man.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

(I.vii.47-51)

Lady Macbeth teaches Macbeth to be hypocritical, hide his ill-feelings towards the king and “look like the innocent flower / But be the serpent under 't” (I.v.63-64). Thus the husband follows this ill-advice and tells her later:

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

(I.vii.80-83)

Again he applies her ill-advice when he becomes hypocritical and hides his evil intentions towards Banquo before having him murdered. Thus he insinuatingly tells her:

That we
Must lave our honours in these flattering stream,
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are.

(III.ii.32-35)

Womanhood and motherhood are symbols of peace, life, nourishment, mercy and generosity, but they do not apply to Lady Macbeth. She invokes the forces of darkness immediately after receiving Macbeth's letter to unsex her and make her always cruel:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direct 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 peace between
Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night.
(I.v.38-48)

She reproaches her husband for being irresolute about killing the king and speaks to him in a language showing outrageous feelings towards motherhood. She tells him that if a man promises to do something, he must keep his word. Accordingly Macbeth must put his words into action and kill Duncan. If she had sworn to kill her smiling and nursing baby as strongly as her husband had sworn to kill the king, she would have never hesitated to do that:

I have given suck, and now
How tender 't is to love 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, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.
(I.vii.54-59)

No mother but Lady Macbeth will say such a horrible thing. She is so cruel that she herself returns the daggers from the room of the murdered Duncan to the grooms' room. After the king's murder is done she thinks that washing away Duncan's blood from the bloody hands with little water will make her and husband forget about the crime: "A little water clears us of this deed: / How easy is it then" (II.ii.66-67)! Yet she is wrong, because this incident filled herself with so many fears and worries that she later had to contradict the foregoing statement and say the following: "Here 's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh" (V.i.40-41)!

As a result of Lady Macbeth's evil deeds, she is punished by the divine justice through different ways, one of which is the deterioration of the relationship between her and her husband. At the beginning they are close to each other and their closeness is proved through their plot against Duncan's life. Yet after the king's murder their relationship starts to stumble and abate, as he does not need her any more in his future plans of additional murders. He does not tell her directly about his plans for murdering Banquo.

He only asks her to wait and afterwards she will “applaud the deed” (III.ii.47), which he does not precisely specify.

The other punishment is that she is afflicted by sleepwalking, nightmares and terrible thoughts following Duncan's murder. Thus while “her eyes are open. . . / Ay, but their sense are shut” (V.i.20-21). This serves her right, because her “unnatural deeds/ Do breed unnatural troubles” (V.i.59-60), as the doctor says of her. She even suffers from mental sickness and derangement. The doctor says there is no cure for her sickness “As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies, / That keep her from her rest” (V.iii.37-38), and that “More needs she the divine than the physician” (V.i.62). In her sleepwalking she is troubled by the horrible scenes she has already witnessed or heard of. She is troubled now by remembering the bell which she herself struck as a signal to let her husband go ahead with the plan of murdering the king. Thus she says: “One; two; why, then 't is time to do 't” (V.i.28-29), and then she is haunted by the memory of Duncan's blood: “Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him” (V.i.31-32)? She thinks her hand is still spotted with Duncan's blood: “Yet here 's a spot” (V.i.25), and she is troubled by being reminded of the murder of Macduff's wife: “The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now” (V.i.34)? She is again annoyed when she imagines she is talking to her husband during the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the banquet: “No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting” (V.i.35-36).

Consequently her mental sufferings and derangement lead her to commit suicide and die alone while her husband is fighting, which makes it impossible for him to see her before or after her death. Her husband has already disintegrated Macduff's family and he must witness his own disintegration now. She has caused a lot of fear in many people, and William Hazlitt prudently says: “She is a great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate.”²⁰

Despite the unpleasant events and gloomy atmosphere in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare provides other scenes which make us feel to some extent optimistic and less worried. It is true that many crimes happen in the play, yet it has its own bright sides throughout the dark situations. Jan Kott is very pessimistic when he says that “*Macbeth* begins and ends with slaughter. . . . There is only one theme in *Macbeth*: murder,”²¹ and there is nothing in it but “those who kill and those who are killed,”²² and each “new king will be the man who has killed a king.”²³ Thus Kott sees nothing behind what he has just said.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

There is no doubt that Macbeth is a tyrant, but has his tyranny lasted? It is his tyranny that paved the way for his destruction and replacement by a rightful and virtuous king. Macbeth's death has brought the birth of a new kingdom which has a promise of justice and freedom. Malcom would not have become king so soon if Macbeth had not killed Duncan. The conscientious King Edward would not have helped the uprising against Macbeth, if Macbeth had been just. Harmony is restored out of corruption and chaos which come to an end after Macbeth's death. The downfall of a tyrant raises the hopes of restoring a harmonious universal order. As the evil of Macbeth's rule was preceded by the prosperous rule of the virtuous Duncan, it will also be succeeded by the happy reign of Malcolm who will restore justice.

Evil is short-lived and followed and preceded by virtue and goodness. Shakespeare does not say that only Macbeth is tempted by evil. Banquo is tempted but he never resorts to evil acts to put the witches' prophecy into action, although he is told that his descendants will be kings. He heard the evil soliciting, but he was more suspicious than believing in it. Yet he is tempted by the witches' prophecy, but he never occupies his mind with any evil plan. He is still hopeful that one day the witches' prediction concerning his issue will come true. This he tells Macbeth:

Yet it was said,
It should not stand in thy posterity;
But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them
(As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine),
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,
And set me up in hope?

(III.i.3-10)

No matter how evil is strong it cannot destroy everyone. Macduff, Malcolm and Fleance are safe and protected from Macbeth's plans. They come back to establish a just rule and to extend help to the people in general, especially those who have been afflicted by tyranny. When order is restored the prophecy of the lord speaking to Lenox will be hopefully expected to come true:

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

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.33-37)

The very last words spoken by Malcolm are not simply about the power of evil which has come to its end. He also speaks of repatriation and reunion of disintegrated families by God's grace:

What 's more to do,
Which would be planted newly with the time,--
As calling home our exiled friends abroad,
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny;
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher, and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 't is thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life;--this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
We will perform in measure, time and place.
So thanks to all at once, and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.

(V.ix.30-41)

The foregoing speech is very optimistic, which reflects the general estimation of the play. It makes the listeners forget about the gloomy past and look forward to a better and prosperous future.

Macbeth before temptation is not the tyrannical Macbeth of the later scenes. He has no direct schemes against the king before his mind is poisoned by the witches, and before he is instigated by his wife to go ahead with their murderous schemes. The first mention of Macbeth gives a good impression about him. He is said to be "brave" (I.ii.16), "valour's minion" (I.ii.19), "valiant cousin! worthy gentleman" (I.ii.24), "Bellona's bridegroom" (I.ii.56), "noble Macbeth" (I.ii.70), "worthy Cawdor" (I.iv.47) and "full o' the milk of human kindness" (I.iv.15). His military prowess is so great that he slits with his sword the enemy's body "from the navel to the chaps" (I.ii.22).

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

The idea of murdering the king makes Macbeth's hair stand on end. He feels this is against the natural law, and wanders why he harbours such an unlawful thought:

Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature?

(I.iii.134-37)

He thinks Duncan's murder is wrong and it will beget his own murder:

We but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor.

(I.vii.8-10)

He goes further and weighs the moral values involved in killing Duncan who is his guest, relative and king. Thus his pricked conscience makes him utter the following speech:

He 's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. 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;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe, . . .
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind.

(I.vii.12 ff.)

He knows that regicide is a bestial act and against manhood: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (I.vii.46-47). Thus

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

“the best evidence of his essential goodness is his vacillation before the murder,”²⁴ as Wayne Booth remarks.

Macbeth's conscience is immediately pricked after the murder to the extent that he wishes he could bring back Duncan to life. Hence when he hears knocking at the door, he says: “To know my deed, 't were best not know myself. / Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would thou couldst” (II.ii.72-73)!

As a matter of fact Shakespeare puts more emphasis on Macbeth's pricked conscience before and after killing Duncan than on the murder of Duncan. The king is murdered offstage and there is no mention of yelling and crying from the victim during the crime. The murder is not widely narrated, either. It is only reported by Macbeth in a short sentence: “I have done the deed” (II.ii.14), and the word “deed” is substituted for “murder” in order to alleviate the shocking effect of it. In *King Lear* Shakespeare has Gloucester's eyes put out onstage in full view of the audience in order to focus on the crime, but here the focus is on Macbeth's conscience. Generally speaking Duncan's action in the play is overshadowed by Macbeth's. If Macbeth is cheated by the witches, Duncan is cheated by the man who is himself cheated by the witches, namely Macbeth. Duncan is also cheated by the first thane of Cawdor and Lady Macbeth. Macbeth knows very well his enemies, but Duncan does not, as when he says after he has been cheated by the first thane of Cawdor:

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.12-15)

He repeats this mistake when he trusts the second thane of Cawdor, Macbeth, thinking he is safe and secure with him. While Duncan tries to make Macbeth “full of growing” (I.iv.29), Macbeth has “black and deep desires” (I.iv.51) to stop Duncan's growing.

The same is true with Lady Macbeth. She is not entirely evil. There are some traces of humanity in her despite her disagreeable and atrocious deeds. She does not dare to kill Duncan herself because he looks like her father: “Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done 't” (II.ii.12-13). Her pricked conscience makes her sleepwalk, mentally demented and

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

ultimately commit suicide. Her femininity is proved in her taste for "the perfumes of Arabia" (V.i.40) whose good qualities lots of women know. When she adds that these Arabian perfumes "will not sweeten this title hand" (V.i.41), we feel that she is conscience stricken and senses the hideous crime of having incited her husband to murder Duncan.

Now we turn to the structure of the play, and as we have said before, it is the shortest of the Shakespearean tragedies. Its actions pass very quickly. All the scenes take place in Scotland, but for the third scene of the fourth act which takes place in England. It has only one plot. Yet it has a comic-relief scene where the drunken porter inside Macbeth's castle thinks he is in hell when he compares himself to the "porter of hell-gate" (II.iii.1). He alludes to the devils, especially to "the name of Balzebub" (II.iii.3). He refers to the kind of people who knock at hell's gate like "an equivocator" (II.iii.10) and a thievish "traylor" (II.iii.12). This comic-relief scene has affinity with the whole play, as it deals with its general idea but on a comic level. The porter is the first person who claims that Macbeth's castle is hell-like, or hell itself. This means that the crimes of murdering Duncan with his grooms in it are hellish and the residents, Macbeth and his wife, are devilish. Their end will be like that of the equivocator and the tailor who ended up in hell. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth will suffer from what they have done. They are living now in hell (their castle), and will ultimately go to hell in the second life. If the witches tempt Macbeth to evil with their equivocations, the same is true with the porter who tempts the knockers at the gate to enter hell.

Most of the important scenes in the play take place in the dark or at night. The witches who are "the instruments of darkness" (I.iii.124) appear only when there are thunderstorms and lightning. They usually meet Macbeth in dark places like a cavern. Macbeth asks the stars to "hide your fires" (I.iv.50) in order to commit his crime, and he sees the dagger in the air at night before he kills the king. He compares himself to "the wolf" (II.i.53) which kills innocent lambs, especially at night. He also compares himself to "Tarquin" (II.i.55) who rapes at night Lucrece, his hostess and his friend's wife. Both Duncan and his grooms are murdered at night. Lady Macbeth invokes the "thick night, / And . . . the dunnest smoke of hell" (I.v.48-49) in order to have Duncan murdered in "the blanket of the dark" (I.v.51). She sleepwalks at night. The fatal bell announcing the commencement of Duncan's murder rings at night, and when he is murdered "The obscure bird clamoured the livelong night" (II.iii.55). Even the sun following Duncan's murder is blotted out: "By the clock 't is day, / And yet dark night strangles

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

the travelling lamp" (II.iv.6-7). As a result "darkness does the face of earth entomb" (II.iv.9), and "the night has been unruly" (II.iii.49). Still on the night of Duncan's murder the moon "goes down at twelve" (II.i.3), and it seems "There 's husbandary in heaven; / Their candles are all out" (II.i.4-5). Macbeth in order to have Banquo murdered calls upon the "seeling night" (III.ii.47) to come. He is glad when

Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.

(III.ii.51-54)

The traveller spurs his horse on so that he will not get benighted: Now spurs the lated traveller apace, / To gain the timely inn" (III.iii.6-7). In the long nights of the play we hear the owls shrieking, the ravens croaking and the crickets making shrill sounds, and "the sun seems to shine only twice; first, in the . . . passage where Duncan sees the swallows flitting round the castle of death; and, afterwards, when at the close the avenging army gathers to rid the earth of its shame,"²⁵ to use Bradley's words.

Besides the darkness which permeates *Macbeth*, there is a lot of ambiguity, equivocation, contrast, doubleness and appearances confused with realities. The witches speak "in a double sense" (V.viii.20). The first witch ambivalently tells Banquo that he will be "lesser than Macbeth, and greater" (I.iii.65), and the second witch speaks of the battle without explicitly explaining how it will be "lost and won" (I.i.4). They tell lies which look like truths and vice versa, as the devil can "speak true" (I.iii.107) and yet he "lies like truth" (V.v.44). The witches's food is as ambiguous as their speech, it is "hell-broth" (IV.i.19) having a lot of strange ingredients. We hear of strange things, like when horses "ate each other" (IV.ii.19) and a falcon killed "by a mousing owl" (II.iv.13).

Good things are confused with bad things: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i.10), as the witches say and then Macbeth echoes them saying: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I.iii.381). Malcolm speaks of himself in England, but indirectly he means Macbeth. He seems outwardly bad when he falsely abuses himself, but inwardly he is good. Macbeth outwardly seems good, but inwardly he is bad especially when his wife eagerly asks him to "look like the innocent flower / But be the serpent under 't" (I.v. 63-

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

64). Lady Macbeth looks “fair and noble” (I.vi.24), but she is only a “fiend-like queen” (V.ix.35).

The play abounds in contrasts. Thus while King Edward cures evil, Macbeth brings evil. Edward's England looks like heaven, Macbeth's Scotland is affiliated with hell. Macbeth's castle harbours two guests. Outside there is the martlet which feels secure and happy, as “this castle hath a pleasant seat” (I.vi.1) for it while lying in its nest, especially when the air smells “sweetly” (I.vi.2). The other guest, Duncan, is inside the castle lying dead in his bed which smells of blood.

Stranger still, things and happenings are confused and full of ambiguities and double meanings. Banquo's ghost is seen and not seen. Birnam Wood moves and does not move. Macduff is born and not born of a woman. Lady Macbeth's “eyes are open. . . . / Ay, but their sense are shut” (V.i.20-21) while she is sleepwalking. She speaks of nursing a baby: “I have given suck” (I.vii.54), while her husband is childless. If Macbeth has no children and knows very well that no descendant of his will ever succeed him as king, it sounds ridiculous then when he is worried that Banquo's children will usurp the throne from his own child, who in reality does not exist: “No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so, / For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind” (III.i.63-64)!

Appearances do not reflect inner intentions: “There 's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face” (I.iv.12-13). Macbeth kills the king's grooms willingly, but hypocritically claims: “O! yet I do repent me of my fury / That I did kill them” (II.iii.103-4). He himself kills the king, but puts the blame on the grooms pretending he feels sorry for this big crime, because the king's “gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature” (II.iii.110), as he claims.

In this play strange things happen. Lady Macbeth is a woman who knows how tender it is to be a mother nursing a baby, yet she wants to be unsexed. She is also ready to swear and bet on killing her baby and dashing his “brains out” (I.vii.58). The witches are old women, but they have bearded faces like men. Macbeth puts Duncan to an everlasting quiet sleep, but it turns out that he will be afflicted by nightmares and “shall sleep no more” (II.ii.42). He lusts for self-aggrandizement, but he looks like “a dwarfish thief”(V.ii.22) in his royal clothes, and a “dead butcher” (V.ix.35) when he is dead. Lady Macbeth wants only “little water” (II.ii.66) to wash away Duncan's blood, but soon discovers that “all the perfumes of Arabia” (V.i.40) cannot do that.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

Certainly *Macbeth* is one of the greatest Shakespearean tragedies. It has many things which its spectators demand and desire for. It has magic and witchcraft; loyalty and treachery; reality and appearances; frankness and equivocation; fears and hopes; death and life; tragedy and comedy; poetry and prose; men and women; moral and advice; gloomy scenes and optimistic future. If it has not been a successful play, it would not have been enacted in many places, read and taught in many schools and translated into various languages. It teaches patience and acceptance of life as it is till opportunities come and make it better. Evil cannot last forever and its forces are ultimately overpowered by good forces. Goodness and order come out of chaos and disorder which strongly stimulate and activate good and virtuous people to uproot evil. The play ends with the hope that justice and freedom will be restored after the downfall of tyranny. Whatever ends happily and optimistically makes us overlook and forget the unhappy and pessimistic past, which is overshadowed by the good present and the promising future, and all that ends well is well.

NOTES

¹Sylvan Barnet, "Introduction" to William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: New American Library, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, 1963), p.xxii.

²Bernard Lott, "Introduction" to William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Bernard Lott (London: Longman Group Ltd., New Swan Shakespeare, 1975), p.xiii.

³Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1969), p.154.

⁴Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1939), p.217.

⁵Oscar James Campbell, "*Macbeth*: Comment," in Oscar James Campbell and Edward G. Quinn, eds., *The Raeder's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.), p.484.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

⁶Oscar James Campbell, "*Macbeth*: Sources," in Oscar James Campbell and Edward G. Quinn, eds., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966), p.482.

⁷Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, vols. 7 & 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 8:755.

⁸Campbell, "*Macbeth*: Comment," p.484.

⁹King James I, in Campbell, "*Macbeth*: Comment," p.484.

¹⁰Campbell, *Macbeth*: Comment," p.484.

¹¹George R. Price, *Reading Shakespeare's Plays* (Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1962), p.47.

¹²Ashley H. Thorndike, *Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1908), p.171.

¹³William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Bernard Lott (London: Longman Group Ltd., New Swan Shakespeare, 1975). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text.

¹⁴Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), p.154.

¹⁵E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp.356-57.

¹⁶Mary McCarthy, "General *Macbeth*," in William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: New American Library, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, 1963), p.230.

¹⁷A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1986), pp.285-86.

¹⁸Ribner, p.158.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

¹⁹Johnson, p.795.

²⁰William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.14.

²¹Jan Kott, *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p.87.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Wayne Booth, "Shakespeare's Tragic Villain," in Laurence Lerner, ed., *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), p.182.

²⁵Bradley, p.277.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnet, Sylvan. "Introduction" to Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Sylvan Barnet. New York: New American Library, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, 1963, pp.xxii-xxxiii.

Booth, Wayne. "Shakespeare's Tragic Villain." In Lerner, Laurence, ed. *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964, pp. 180-190.

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Hreemwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publicantions, Inc., 1968.

Campbell, Oscar James. "*Macbeth*: Comment" In Campbell, Oscar James and Quinn, Edward G., eds. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966, pp.484-85.

Campbell, Oscar James. "*Macbeth*: Sources." In Cmapbell, Oscar James and Quinn, Edward G., eds. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966, pp.482-83.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij

- Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Johnson, Samuel. *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Vols. 7 & 8. Edited by Arthur Sherbo. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Kott, Jan. *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary*. Translated by Boleslaw Taborski. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966.
- Lott, Bernard. "Introduction" to Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Bernard Lott. London: Longman Group Ltd., New Swan Shakespeare, 1975, pp.v-xxviii.
- McCarthy, Mary. "General Macbeth." In Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Sylvan Barnet. New York: New American Library, The Signet Classic Shakespeare, 1963, pp.229-40.
- Price, George R. *Reading Shakespeare's Plays*. Woodbury, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1962.
- Ribner, Irving. *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy*. London: Methuen & Co., 1971.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Edited by Bernard Lott. London: Longman Group Ltd., New Swan Shakespeare, 1975.
- Spencer, Theodore. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*. London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1969.
- Thorndike, Ashley H. *Tragedy*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1908.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *Shakespeare's History Plays*. New York: Collier Books, 1962.
- Van Doren, Mark. *Shakespeare*. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1939.

Themes, Motives and Equivocation in William Shakespeare's Macbeth
Prof .Dr. Mohammed Baqir Twaij