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A Study of the Moral Decay and Despair of Macbeth Through His Naive Imagination

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A STUDY OF THE MORAL DECAY AND DESPAIR
OF MACBETH THROUGH HIS
NAIVE IMAGINATION

by
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of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to show that the naive imagination of Macbeth reflects his moral decay and is actually one of the causes of his despair.

The incentive for writing on this subject came indirectly from Doctor John Arthos, professor of English at the University of Michigan. His compact essay on "The Naive Imagination and Destruction of Macbeth" suggested a fuller development of his ideas and a more conclusive proof of his novel approach.

Stofford Brooke, in his commentary on Macbeth, voiced the challenge:

Imagination—that is his trouble! I do not know whether this salient element in his character has been much dwelt on. It ought to be. We cannot understand Macbeth without it.2


A method of approach, therefore, must be found that will reveal the imagination of Macbeth from the very lines of the play. Any other approach to his imagination would itself be a creation of a new Macbeth from sheer fancy, a creature which neither Holinshed nor Shakespeare himself would recognize. The method, therefore, will be poetic as well as dramatic, employing the literary tools supplied by the poet and dramatist, William Shakespeare.

The point of view, however, will not be that of the groundling or average play-goer who is interested and absorbed in the story of the play. Granted that, as a drama, the story has a powerful grip upon the general audience; but what holds our attention, even after many viewings or readings, is Shakespeare's knowledge of the mind of man. Shakespeare's deep insight into human nature is the magnet which holds our interest. Consequently, our point of view will be that of Shakespeare and not of the historian, Holinshed; that of Knight who would have us appreciate the full wealth of meaning in Macbeth when he suggests:

Rather relinquishing our horizontal sight of the naked rock-line which is the story, we should from above, view the whole work extended, spatialized; and then map out imaginative similarities and differences, hills and vales and streams. Only to such a view does Macbeth reveal the full riches of its meaning.1

This method of scrutinizing the play is somewhat similar to a fluoroscopy in which the normal surfaces become transparent and almost invisible so that the inner structure may be observed and knowledge of the organism and its functioning increased in the process. What is attempted, moreover, is an imaginative interpretation of the tragedy, mainly through its poetic symbolism, in which is discerned purpose and pattern, by discussing it in relation to the principal critical commentaries and the findings of devoted scholarship.

Professor Elmer Edgar Stoll, however, refuses to be devoted to what he calls a "psychological" and "clinical" study of Shakespearean characters. "We should no more turn to drama," says Stoll, "for psychology or criminology than to sculpture or painting for anatomy."4

The present treatment, however, does not fall under Stoll's psychological censure. It is a study of Macbeth's mind, not for psychological purposes, and not by psychoanalysis in the modern connotation of the term, but for the purpose of understanding his character as delineated in his words and imagery. Call it poetical psychology, or better—poetical insight into character.

And yet, Professor Stoll continues to argue that plot

4 Elmer Edgar Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, New York, 1927, 400.
is the most important part of the play, and character study detracts from the realistic impressions of the audience. He goes further and says that any study of character reduces Shakespearean tragedy to a closet-drama.

Although Stoll does not state outright that he means external action in his evaluation of tragic drama, he certainly creates this impression in his commentary on Shakespearean characters. This, of course, is the loathsome realistic approach of which he has been accused by his critics, and especially by Stewart whose whole attack is directed against Stoll's realism and against his surface criticisms:

I am far from thinking that Shakespearean Tragedy, for example, can continue to stand without qualification in face of such researches as Professor Elmar Edgar Stoll's. But I believe that the 'realists' (as they have come to be called) are mistaken on the whole in the emphasis of their criticism, and that if they do indeed sometimes show that there is less in the plays than Bradley supposes, yet inquiries in quite other fields powerfully suggest that there is more—more, I mean, of that insight into the 'obscurer regions of man's being' which Bradley asserts and which the realists are inclined to deny.5

Stewart contends further that Stoll, though extremely sensitive to the plays, is, nevertheless, lacking in true per-

ception, falling short at the point where "the deeper mechanisms of dramatic illusion come into play." He attributes this de-
preciation of the truth of Shakespearean character to the tradi-
tion of performing the plays with as much spectacle and as little
poetry as possible, and to the literary realists, like Stoll, who
place undue emphasis upon the historical rather than poetical
criticism of drama.

From the observations of Stewart, therefore, it would
seem that Stoll overemphasizes the importance of external action
and plot in drama. The weight of competent authority opposes
Stoll on this point. Professor Butcher, illuminating the prin-
ciples of Aristotle, explains that the χαρακτήρ in the Poetica means
the characteristic moral qualities, the permanent dispositions of
the mind, which reveal a certain condition of the will, all of
which are interior. By πράξεως are meant actions in their
proper and inward sense. Butcher insists on this interior qual-
ity of actions:

An act viewed merely as an external process or re-
sult, one of a series of outward phenomena, is not an
object of aesthetic imitation. The πράξεως that art
seeks to reproduce is an inward process, a psychical
energy working outwards; deeds, incidents, events, sit-
tuations, being included under it so far as these spring
from an inward act of will, or elicit some activity of

6 Ibid., 10.
though of feeling.

In the sense of Aristotle, and in this sense alone, is plot the most important element in Shakespearean tragedy. The external world of human life, landscape, even of animals, is introduced by the poet in his plays only in so far as it forms a background for the struggle of soul so evident in his tragic characters. *Macbeth*, then, is no exception to this principle, for Shakespeare is interested in expounding circumstances in terms of character. "So far as the insistent demand of his public for story will permit, his scenes are but carefully chosen mirrors, indices, of character," writes Professor Baker. Since Shakespeare was primarily interested in character portrayal, and his audience in the story, the dramatist revealed his power to serve two masters at once: he carefully wove the characterization into an illustrative story of strong dramatic action, keeping his audience attentive, even as his scenes developed states of mind in a central figure or figures.

Stoll, nevertheless, attempts to explain away this reflection of inward struggle by attributing Macbeth's "apparent self-consciousness" to a "dramatic technique, a self-descriptive


8 George Baker, The Development of Shakespeare As A Dramatist, New York, 1914, 278.
method similar to the epical and the lyrical."9 Again his observation lacks true insight; he remains on the surface, too absorbed in the mechanical details. Had Stoll taken one step more, he would have perceived with the greater number of commentators that Macbeth's self-consciousness and poetical imagery is used as a stage technique to help us understand his ambitious thoughts and anguish of mind. This is the perspective of such literary greats as Bradley, Baker, Quiller-Couch, Knight, Brooke, Coleridge, Granville-Barker, and Chambers--to mention only a few.

The problem of the study at hand having been set forth, defined, and defended; the method of approach and point of view justified in the light of other Shakespearean commentators, and even in the face of Stoll's withering fire of objections, the stage is now set for dramatic action. Accompanied by a host of literary critics, we may now proceed to view the play of Macbeth which Bradley describes as the "most vehement, the most concentrated, perhaps we may say the most tremendous, of the tragedies of Shakespeare."10

As a playbill to the study of this highly imaginative

9 Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, 361.
tragedy, Chapter II will explain the hidden protagonist, the naive imagination of Macbeth, and its importance to Shakespeare as a poet and dramatist. Chapter III will employ Macbeth's spontaneous imagery as a mirror of his mind which reflects the difference in his moral character before and after the murder of Duncan. Particular emphasis will be placed upon the images of clothing, blood, darkness, and of total external disorder of nature because all this imagery is symbolic of the moral decay taking place in Macbeth's soul. Having viewed the effects of this decay, the cause may be traced to the internal conflict between his conscience and imagination in Chapter IV, which is the cause also of Macbeth's disordered mind and gradual despair. This will not be a contemporary diagnosis of a diseased mind, but a Shakespearean study of human nature and the workings of the human mind, the primary sources of every great author.

Chapter V will confirm by recourse to competent authority that Macbeth's spontaneous and overactive imagination is a definite cause of his despair. Contrary to Stoll's view, the only external forces (preternatural, political, domestic) are not the sole causes of Macbeth's destruction. His imagination is also a determining factor. The fact of his overwrought imagination established, this chapter will attribute to it more specifically his yielding to temptation, fears and suspicions, sleeplessness, distrust of others and withdrawal into himself, his false sense
of security; his final despair in life and welcoming of death.

If it still be urged by Stoll and his realistic school that this poetical approach to Macbeth's character is substituting a clinical for a dramatic method, and if they refuse to accompany us in the viewing of the play, insisting that "the play's the thing," they may be answered by Shakespeare himself:

[妃] the play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.11

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CHAPTER II

THE NAIVE IMAGINATION OF MACBETH

The power of the mind to apprehend what is nonexistent was called by the Elizabethans fantasy, and its effect a phantasme, but they more frequently employed the equivalent Latin terms imagination and image. Many years before the writing of Macbeth, Shakespeare expressed his thoughts about this faculty in his memorable lines in Midsummer-Night's Dream:

Lovers and madmen, have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear.
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

1 Midsummer-Night's Dream, V, i, 4-22, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 187.
In *Maccbeth*, Shakespeare has pictured the *via phantastica*, 'the force of the imagination', more vividly than in any other play. The majority of the critics are of the same opinion, including Bradley, Spurgeon, Knight, and Arthos. This point, however, will be taken up in a later chapter.

Macbeth's abnormal imagination almost completely dominates his mental processes; his thoughts take the form of vivid images. When he is tempted to murder Duncan, for example, this thought immediately takes the shape of a "horrid image." This is, moreover, a characteristic trait of his mental activity throughout the play: in almost every speech we find his thoughts expressing themselves in images so vivid as scarcely to be distinguished from reality.

Before treating Macbeth's imagination more in detail, the terms of this thesis must be understood. What is meant by *imagination*, by *image*, and especially by the term *naive* as applied to Macbeth's imagination?

In our everyday language the term *imagination* is used in a broad sense to mean any mental image. In this thesis, however, the term will be used partly in its technical sense and partly in its poetical significance. Webster's dictionary defines the former as "the act or power of forming mental images of objects not present to the senses, especially of those never perceived in their entirety." Caroline Spurgeon, in her excellent
treatise on Shakespearean imagery, explains the term *image* in its poetical sense:

I use the term *image* here as the only available word to cover every kind of simile, as well as every kind of what is really compressed simile—metaphor. I suggest that we divest our minds of the hint the term carries with it of visual image only, and think of it, for the present purpose, as connoting any and every imaginative picture or other experience drawn in every kind of way, which may have come to the poet, not only through any of his senses, but through his mind and emotions as well, and which he uses, in the form of simile and metaphor in their widest sense, for purposes of analogy.

The imagination, therefore, creates new images and pictures, new ideas from parts of these elements already experienced separately. For its operation, the imagination employs the memory, since the memory recalls former images in order to associate them with new experiences. In this sense, the present experience of an object is a mere occasion of the act of the imaginative faculty. The visible object, however, is not a necessary condition for the operation of the faculty of imagination because it can and usually does function in its absence. The external object at hand rather suggests other ideas to the imagination. In this respect, the imagination is like clay and the mind is the potter, who, without any actual object except his fancy and pleasure, molds it into whatever form he pleases.

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When a person is given by nature to moods of melancholy and day-dreaming, and also when the mind and senses are weary and overburdened, he more easily yields to such fanciful imagings. In the character of Macbeth, Shakespeare shows us a melancholy man who imagines that he sees or hears strange noises and sees weird visions which eventually lead to his destruction. We might say that such frightful illusions and hallucinations are machinations of the powers of evil working upon the deceived mind and overwrought imagination of Macbeth to lead him to despair.

Having discussed the imagination, we now turn to the term naive. We speak of a vivid imagination of a painter, poet, composer, and writer; but, when we apply the word to the imagination, what is meant? Of what importance, moreover, is this naive imagination, and what relation does it bear to the individual?

The term may be applied to the imagination of every individual, whereas a vivid or skilfully creative imagination may apply only to a certain talented class of individuals. Naive is derived from the Latin, nativus, which means 'innate' or 'native'. The naive imagination, then, reflects the very nature of a person. For this reason, naive images, or mental pictures, will be spontaneous, arising naturally and without any conscious provocation.

Schools of arts and letters develop this natural faculty; and yet, many of the world's masterpieces in art and lit-
erature are the products of the untaught, the artless, the naive imagination of artists in their respective fields. It cannot disguise its presence or operation under the veil of sophistication or pretense. The naive imagination possesses the simplicity of a small child.

In short, the naive imagination is the eye of the artless mind. As the eye of the body spontaneously and unconsciously depicts the material world on the screen of the retina, so does the naive image reflect the world of the inner man on the background of the mind. It reflects his innermost thoughts and feelings, loves and desires. As Spurgeon says, these images "reveal to us the man himself."3 Unconsciously, the naive image mirrors the mind and the will; it is a spontaneous faculty, simple and ingenuous. As a God-given faculty, it will never contradict its own nature, will never reflect false images of the true state of a man's mind and will. The naive image will always faithfully report the mental condition and moral fiber of a man's soul because it rises spontaneously from man's very nature, regardless of how a man may consciously try to deceive himself that these images are false. As the mirror of conscience, the naive imagination speaks out the truth frankly and boldly, unaffected

3 Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery, 11.
by any restraints from a perverse will. Like the voice of con-
sience, the sight of these images cannot be escaped since both
are interwoven into the very texture of existence. When a man
denies the truth of these faculties, his own nature and even life
itself becomes a contradiction to him.

Although such images arise from the very nature of a
person, their exact source is unknown. Since they arise uncon-
sciously, their origin in the body or in the mind remains a mys-
tery. When a writer or speaker, however, becomes aware of these
images, he describes their appearance through the medium of words.
These words often signify the special, even the hidden meaning
which their author has found symbolized in the naive image.
"The image," says Spurgeon, "thus gives quality, creates atmos-
phere, and conveys emotion in a way no precise description, how-
ever clear and accurate, can possibly do."4 The writer or
speaker is also aware that his imagination flashes several im-
ages in rapid succession across the screen of his mind, and that
he is free to choose the one which he wishes to describe for the
purposes of the moment. There are times, moreover, when the im-
age he chooses may have more than one meaning. Suppose, for in-
stance, that the familiar picture of his mother suggests itself
to the speaker's mind. When he describes this picture in words,

4 Ibid., 9.
he cannot help but be influenced by his feelings, by his mood or state of mind, and by what he wishes to express for his purposes at that moment. This image of his mother might suggest joyful thoughts of childhood days and bring back happy memories. On the other hand, it might arouse homesickness, or regrets, or sad memories. The speaker is happy or sad, or imagining those states; his mind is crowded with uplifting or depressing thoughts; and from the various images in his mind, he instinctively reflects upon his feelings and experiences, and he chooses those images which fit his state of mind at that moment. Sadness, for example, tends to recall pictures of gloomy weather, of poor food, of failures, of ingratitude and supposed persecution. A man with a feeling of guilt has constant fears, with the result that his imagination conjures up dreadful forms and accusing eyes and fingers, even in the external elements of nature.

There is another familiar characteristic of these naive images: some of them are persistent, they have the power of forcing themselves upon one's attention; they seem to crowd all other images into the background, leaving the mind no choice but to focus on one particular image. Such images demand expression as significant symbols. They symbolize the order in his imagination, throwing light on some arrangement of ideas that expresses a new meaning which previous thought failed to unearth. The mind employs this commanding image-symbol as a
means of understanding something which has a bearing on the individual’s experience.

Such naive and persistent images will reveal either the interior nature of the person himself, or some aspect of the external world around him. Unless a man believes in the truth of these images, he will have no certitude about his own nature, nor of any reality outside himself.

With regard to this important function of the naive imagination, Ribot says: "The peculiarity of the imagination is the production of a reality of human origin, and it succeeds therein only because of the faith accompanying the image."5

The naive imagination is also illustrated by the spontaneous association of religious symbols in the man of childlike faith. The image of two sticks crossed may suggest only a road sign or nothing at all to the average person; but to a religious mind, these crossed sticks might easily symbolize the Cross of Redemption. His attention might be wholly absorbed in the flow of spiritual thoughts which are aroused by such a conventional sign and religious symbol as a Cross. This thought process is a conscious one, but the spontaneous image of the Cross, or of Our Saviour on the Cross, arises unconsciously from the individual’s religious nature. Even in the absence of the external object,

the spiritual man will experience the same spontaneous flow of images, the creations of his naive imagination.

It is somewhat the same with a scrupulous man. Whereas a normal man may walk upon two straws in the form of a cross without reflecting on the dead, a scrupulous person would imagine that he is committing a sacrilege by treading upon the symbol of Redemption. Superstitious minds will also be haunted by images of unreal phantoms and by demons, the products of their overactive, creative imaginations. That Macbeth was of this latter frame of mind is attested to by Professor Paul in his scholarly research on the origin of this notion contained in the writings of King James. This point will be discussed in the last chapter.

In direct contrast to the overworrisome and superstitious individual, we know from the testimony of mystics that their minds are flooded with pictures of transcendent brightness and beauty. These images are usually symbols of another world, of another and higher level of existence. Since the mystic is in contact with this other world, his spontaneous and persistent images will mirror his very soul.

On the other hand, a man whose conscience is oppressed by some great crime will be tormented by naive images which un-
erringingly mirror the moral corruption of his character. His imag-
imagination becomes tainted by his crime, and he is haunted by the
picture of the evil deed continually flashing across his mind.
Socrates had a very simple explanation of these good and bad im-
ages of the na"ive imagination when he said:

And may we not say that the good, being friends
of the gods, have generally true pictures presented
to them, and the bad false pictures?7

We may take the word false in this description as meaning 'evil'
and 'corrupt'. In this sense, images of the persons, places, and
things connected with a heinous crime will assume grotesque and
terrifying shapes, reflecting the evil nature of the deed. This
is verified in the imagery of Macbeth's lines throughout the play.
The picture of blood and of the instruments of his unnatural crime
persistently force themselves into his mind and prey upon it.
His imagination repeatedly enlarges and embellishes every detail
of the deed, branding these images indelibly upon his memory. As
often as these guilty phantasms occur, they produce a shock; or
rather, a successive series of shocks which gradually shatter his
whole conception of life. The bloody dagger, Duncan's gaping
wounds, the prayer of the king's attendants, the livid and gashed
features of Banquo's ghost—all these images become symbols of

7 Plato, Philebus, 40 B, The Dialogues of Plato, tr. B.
guilt which obsess and overpower Macbeth's reason and imagination, finally destroying the power of the will over his thoughts and actions.

The naive and overactive imagination of Macbeth, therefore, makes him

afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.8

By this spontaneous reaction of his once noble nature, he is afflicted day and night by shocking dreams. He would rather be in his grave enjoying the sleep of the just

Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.9

9 Ibid., III, ii, 21-22.
CHAPTER III

THE REFLECTION OF MORAL DECAY

Having seen the relation of our naive imaginations to everyday life, we might ask of what importance is the naive image to Shakespeare as a poet and dramatist? Arthos answers: "What distinguishes a poet's mind from that of the ordinary man is the degree of its interest in ordering and exploiting images." Naive images, therefore, are the tools for the poet's trade furnished by his own talents. Without these natural images, the poet would be unable to express himself; he must use them as symbols to represent the creations of his imagination.

We may conclude from this that Shakespeare as a poet has a definite poetic purpose when he employs naive imagery. By such a poetic and dramatic device, he gives expression to the general harmony of his own nature, and at the same time he symbolizes his concept of the harmony in the nature of one of his characters. As a result, all his imagery will be colored by the principles and ideals which regulate his own life, and more im-

important, by those norms which he conceives as governing the actions of his characters. Arthos gives a very pointed description of these principles which influence a poet's imagery:

In the course of his life he has come to certain conclusions concerning what is good or bad for him to do, what is agreeable to his conscience, what his interests are, and what activities serve to employ his faculties most fully. If he undertakes to put images rising from his feelings into poetry, he assumes that the understanding this poetry expresses is in harmony with the kind of life he is making for himself. To the extent that he conceives these images symbolically, he endeavors to use them in such a way that they will be consistent with the philosophic and ethical principles by which he believes he is ordering his life.²

Are we to conclude from these observations that we can always find the poet's character reflected in his poetic imagery? If this were the case, there would be the danger of reading into a poet's image a non-existent trait of his character. It is impossible to know with any certainty what takes place within the poet's mind merely from his literary productions. Because of circumstances unknown to the reader, the poet may in no way be voicing his true sentiments or his principles of life. Shakespeare, for example, must have written poems at the command of royalty or at the behest of friends which were by no means representative of his real thoughts and emotions. These images would be artificial and belabored, whereas naive imagery is gen-

² Ibid., 115.
wine and spontaneous.

As a general rule, however, the spirit and character of the poet is reflected in his imagery because words and word-pictures are the only norms by which we can judge thoughts and principles of others. Then too, these are safe norms in evaluating a poet's character and characterization because poetry is often defined as the spontaneous overflow of the noble emotions. When the poet strives to express these emotions in verse, almost invariably he impresses upon his imagery his own particular stamp. Substantiating this point, Woolbert and Nelson, in their popular textbook of speech, wrote:

A man cannot write honestly and leave out his philosophy of life . . . . Knowing something about the author, how he lived and felt, when he lived and with whom he associated, will often, but certainly not always, give clues about his manner of writing. The Cavalier poets wrote as they lived—lightly, gaily, nonchalantly, as if they were flicking a thread from the shoulder. Shakespeare . . . was a writer of rollicking farces as well as of tragedies. He wrote as he and his friends lived and thought . . . . 3

In order to further clarify the relation between naive images and character, another distinction should be made. Just as we cannot always determine his character from his imagery, so also we cannot judge a poet's philosophy of life from every naive image; that is, by considering each one separately. When, how-

ever, each image is examined in the general and overall light of his other works, or of his other images in the same work, the poet's particular mold of thought will be revealed. A comparative study of his imagery will point out the relationship between his characterization and his imagery. On this ground, Shakespeare is generally accepted as the philosopher of human nature, the naive psychologist.

In the light of these facts, we see that the whole character of the poet will form and color his mental images; his word-images, in turn, will reflect the inmost traits of his character.

When these principles are applied to the poetry of Shakespeare's plays, the conclusions seem absurd. Since the naive image reflects the poet's character, we would be saying that Shakespeare put his own character into Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, or Falstaff. The answer to this difficulty is comparatively simple: Shakespeare possessed all of their faults and virtues potentially, as all of us do. Even Stoll agrees to the nature of this vicarious experience founded on the possibilities of human nature. Stoll writes:

How much finer it is that the characters should be deftly transported into another world, and made subject to the high and all prevailing purpose of a tragic illusion; that the play should not be a transcript of fact, but as Pater says, of the poet's sense of action and fact—not a cluster of studies embedded in a story, but a new creation and an individual, un-
There is a marked distinction, therefore, between the naive images in the standard poem and those in the poetry of drama. In his lyric poems, Shakespeare gives expression to the general harmony of his own nature; whereas, in dramatic poetry, his naive imagery symbolizes his concept of the harmony of the nature of one of his creations, such as Macbeth. In a lyrical poem, one of his sonnets for example, the poet speaks his own thoughts about death, time love, etc. His imagery is colored by his own moods and feelings and they reflect his whole character as a poet. As a dramatic poet, however, he tries to express Macbeth's thoughts upon the main issues of life; he strives to mirror Macbeth's moods and attitudes and his whole character by placing himself in the circumstances, and consequent frame of mind, of an ambitious general in the king's service. With the aid of his vivid, creative imagination, Shakespeare visualized Holinshed's factual story and molded these historic facts into the form of an ideal tragic character. The poetic diction of such a character is that of the dramatist himself; the naive images, however, are those of the moods and thoughts, of the virtues and vices, of the ethical and philosophical principles of the character of Macbeth.

This ability to relive the experience of another so thoroughly and so realistically that the spontaneous flow of images no longer reflects his own character but that of Macbeth, is part of the creative genius of Shakespeare which has made him the most read and imitated dramatic artist of all times. Only Chaucer can rival Shakespeare in his deep insight into human nature. With a sort of empathy, Shakespeare projected himself into the character of Macbeth and re-created Macbeth's reactions to the forces acting upon his life. He feels Macbeth's power and freedom, his ambitious and murderous thoughts, his imaginary fears and anxieties of mind, his perverse will and guilty conscience, his moral disgust and darkening despair.

From these illustrations, the function of naive imagery in drama should be clear. Shakespeare's purpose as a dramatic poet was to interpret Macbeth's state of mind and soul, not his own. On the other hand, he could not help but unconsciously put his own experiences, his philosophy of life, and his own particular style into his play. It must be noted, however, that his personality reveals itself only in the details of this and other plays; it does not interfere with his character portrayals, but rather sharpens and highlights them. This observation is also made by Arthos:

We are of course aware that we do not create images out of our conscious will. When Shakespeare, for example, in the person of Macbeth called care a 'ravelled sleeve',

he had no way of understanding how that image had come into his mind. But once it was made known to him, he knew how to find the words for the image, how to use their meaning to express the image's meaning, and he knew how to exploit and control its relevance to the state of Macbeth's feeling at that time.  

The image of a "ravelled sleave" obviously originated from experience in the life of Shakespeare, but it symbolizes Macbeth's state of mind, worn and frayed by excessive use, hopelessly ensnared and tangled with bothersome worries—a striking reflection of his guilty mind after the murder of his king. Shakespeare never committed a murder, and most assuredly never killed a sleeping king; and yet, he knew the gnawing pains of cares, fears, and the soul-piercing voice of a guilty conscience. He had read the historical account of regicides and of other murders in Holinshed, and these facts became part of his vicarious experience. Moreover, since the dramatist had such a wide acquaintance with life, and was such a keen observer of the ways of men, he must have had many dealings with every type of criminal. In fact, he had been a fugitive from the law himself. Such contacts, therefore, provided a wealth of material for the coloring of his naive images by his creative imagination.

Wherefore, the term ravelled sleave is a relevant ex-


ample of Shakespeare's ingenious use of naive images. Being widely informed, the poet and dramatist drew his material from every walk of life. This metaphor under consideration is borrowed from knitting or weaving. **Sleeve**, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is the untwisted floss which tangles easily before it is knit into a garment. Often during his life, Shakespeare must have witnessed this familiar household task and marked how this loose, stringy floss was gradually woven into the shape of a garment. It should be noted that the phrase *ravelling sleeve* in Elizabethan times has come today to mean an 'unravelling sleeve.'  

It is easy to see how this image would arise spontaneously in the poet's mind when he endeavored to express the effect care has upon the whole state of man. We often speak of a person **going to pieces** under some form of mental or emotional stress, usually the result of undue excitement or worrisome cares. Even the physical appearance of such a person seems frayed, disordered, and unravelled. Nature's own cure, of course, is rest and sleep. The metaphor is complete, therefore, when Shakespeare says in the person of Macbeth: "Sleep that knits up the ravelling sleeve of care."  

This piece of symbolism is also a practical example of

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the description of the naive imagination given earlier in this thesis. The image arises spontaneously from the nature of the poet and from his experiences, and at the same time it is a perfect symbol of the state of Macbeth's mind and its gradual moral disintegration. His guilty conscience and overactive imagination prevent sleep and bring on despair. As a result, his mind and his moral character are like the unravelling sleeve.

Both in the field of poetry and in drama, therefore, naive images have a definite purpose and value as vehicles of expression. In lyric poetry, naive imagery expresses the general harmony of the poet's nature, of the external world, and sometimes of another's life. In drama, however, the main purpose of naive images is to express and symbolize the general harmony of the character in the spotlight, at the same time to create background and undertone for this character portrayal. Regarding the purpose and possibilities of such images, Spurgeon has the following comment:

The greater and richer the work the more valuable and suggestive become the images, so that in the case of Shakespeare I believe one can scarcely overrate the possibilities of what may be discovered through a systematic examination of them.9

Further on in her book, Spurgeon makes a practical application of her theme to Macbeth:

9 Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery, 5.
The imagery in Macbeth appears to me to be more rich and varied, more highly imaginative, more unapproachable by any other writer, than that of any other single play. It is particularly so, I think, in the continuous use made of the simplest, humblest, everyday things, drawn from the daily life in a small house, as a vehicle for sublime poetry.

The ideas in the imagery are in themselves more imaginative, more subtle and complex than in other plays, and there are a greater number of them, interwoven the one with the other, recurring and repeating.10

The best approach, therefore, to a study of Macbeth's imagination and its necessary reflection of moral decay, will be through his vivid, forceful, and highly imaginative words through the play, especially those of his soliloquies. Senecan recital of this sort afforded Shakespeare with the best possible opportunity of exhibiting the way the human imagination can do its strange work. By means of the poetic diction contained therein, the inmost thoughts of Macbeth's mind are revealed.

Most important of all, this diction paints in bold strokes his characteristic traits before and after his monstrous crime. Granville Barker sees the same reflections in this poetic diction when he writes:

We have, to convince us, the actors in their characters physically present; but the revealing speech admits us to an immaterial world of emotion and idea, in which physical action may be no more than a measure of the inner and true event, a metronome marking of the

10 Ibid., 324.
symphony . . . they have their full being in that world of passion and the spirit, to which poetry in some kind is our only witness.  

Wherefore, using poetry as a witness, we may examine the speeches of Macbeth before the murder of Duncan. In this first part of the play, Macbeth's imagery is lively and frank; his words are vivid, concrete, more figurative and imaginative than any other Shakespearean tragic hero. These word-pictures are brimming over with zest for life and cascade with hope and ambition. The quick succession of images and the rapid pace of the thought in each line reflect Macbeth's highly sensitive and well-developed imagination, that of a poet during his moments of sublimest inspiration. This is especially true and noticeable in his frequent use of personifications which are so filled with life that they almost take on human shape and speech. Before the murder of his king, Macbeth pictured the world predominantly in terms of personification, and in this way his ambitions express themselves:

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
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin hors'd

Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th' other.12

This quick-moving passage is filled with lively thoughts, giving
voice to Macbeth's strong personality and highly sensitive nature.
His thoughts throughout this soliloquy are mainly centered around
the consequences of the murder. A hardened criminal, contrary to
Stoll's insinuations,13 does not usually have such worries or
qualms of conscience. Furthermore, he would have devoted little
or no thought at all to the goodness of the man standing in the
way of his ambitions, and pity for his victim would be of no con-
sequence to him. In fact, Macbeth is so far removed from such
calloused feelings that effectual silencing of thoughts of retr-
bution is impossible before his first crime. His excitable and
overactive imagination, which is really a sign of a delicate con-
science, will never allow him to enjoy the fruits of his crime.

From his imagery in these passages, it is also evident
that Macbeth is more worried about his reputation than he is about
moral guilt. He fears the immediate consequences rather than re-
 mote punishment; he fears that the shameful act will be detected

12 Macbeth, I, vii, 16-27, Complete Works, ed. Craig,
850.

13 Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, 363.
by every eye in Scotland, and that these eyes will accuse him of regicide. This fear arises from the deep roots of his ambition for the kingship and from his inordinate desire for popularity. If the love and respect of his subjects and followers are lost, the crown will become an empty and bottomless pit. This fear of detection and of its consequent ill-fame has such great weight with Macbeth that he resolves to proceed no further in his plans. Conscience has won a temporary victory. When he manifests this decision to his wife, he does so in personified figures of speech. His word-pictures show his high regard for the opinions of men:

We will proceed no further in this business;  
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought  
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,  
Which would now be worn in their newest gloss,  
Not cast aside so soon.14

This personified imagery is also reflected in one speech in which he calls Chance the goddess who will crown his desires.15 In another place, Macbeth's first important soliloquy before the murder of Duncan, we find the same vivid and lively imagination endowing abstract ideas with human personality:

If th' assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,

14 Macbeth, I, vii, 31-34, Complete Works, ed. Craig,
15 Ibid., iii, 143, 848.
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cares  
We still have judgment here, that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice  
Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips.16

This summary examination of Macbeth's diction before the  
murder should be sufficient grounds for understanding and contras-
trasting his imagery immediately before the deed and especially 
after it.

After Macbeth has seen the dagger, his imagery is still  
personified, but there is a noticeable change in his choice of 
details. His images lack their former life and force, and they 
seem to clothe themselves in dark and dreary material details; 
they avoid the light and dwell upon the world of shadows and 
superstitions; they are even eerie and repulsive. The external 
world takes on an ugly shape; all the creeping animals on the 
face of it seem bent on murder and destruction:

New o'er the one half-world  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtain'd sleep. Witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd Murder,  
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,  
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost.17

In this same speech his fear leads him to imagine life and speech

16 Ibid., vii, 2-12, 850.
17 Ibid., II, 1, 49-56, 852.
in the earth and stones, although Macbeth undoubtedly recognizes this for the fiction which it represents:

Thou sure and firm set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. 18

We see from this last apostrophe that inanimate nature reminds Macbeth of his guilty state of mind, and he fears lest nature herself will reveal his black purpose. In fact, the hostility of the material world surrounding Macbeth is but a reflection of his own nature rebelling against such an unnatural crime as the murder of his king, his friend, his trusting guest. Caroline Spurgeon places particular stress upon this idea of unnaturalness in her lucid explanation of the subordinate imagery which is woven into the play in a definite pattern:

Other subsidiary motives in the imagery, which work in and out through the play, insensibly but deeply affect the reader's imagination. One of these is the idea of the unnaturalness of Macbeth's crime, that it is a convulsion of nature. This is brought out repeatedly and emphasised by imagery, as are also the terrible results of going against nature.

Macbeth himself says that Duncan's wounds 'look'd like a breach in nature For ruin's wasteful entrance,' and Macduff speaks of his murder as the sacrilege of breaking open the Lord's anointed temple. The events which accompany and follow it are terrible because unnatural; an owl kills a falcon, horses eat each other, the earth was feverous and did shake, day becomes night;

18 Ibid., 56-60.
all this, says the old man, is unnatural 'Even like the deed that's done.'

The feeling of dislocation is expressed by such images as 'let the frame of things disjoint,' and by Macbeth's conjuration to the witches in which he lists the terrible convulsions of nature that may result from their answering him. The doctor attending Lady Macbeth gives the final diagnosis which applies to Macbeth's moral nature as well as to the external world of the whole play: 'A great perturbation in nature.'

This drift of unnaturalness and disorder is so vividly portrayed by the dramatist that Wilson Knight devoted a whole chapter to what he calls "The Metaphysic of Evil" in the Macbeth world, and Mark Van Doren conceives the whole atmosphere of the play as "murky with unwelcome miracles." Bradley, Kittredge, Quiller-Couch, Arthos, and even Stoll are in complete agreement on this point.

The horrible blackness of Macbeth's own mind, therefore, is mirrored in external nature. He views the world through the now-distorted eye of his imagination. This is the reason for the sad transformation of his imagery immediately after the murder of Duncan. By means of his diction, Macbeth signifies his growing despair and the confused condition of his mind. His clouded

19 Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery, 332-333.
Imagination absorbs the light from his imagery, and his personifications are slowly sapped of their lively strength.

This absence of light, or predominance of darkness in the play, is one of Shakespeare's major pieces of symbolism. Spurgeon considers it as one of the most recurrent of the images which run through almost every scene of the play:

Another constant idea in the play arises out of the symbolism that light stands for life, virtue, goodness; and darkness for evil and death. 'Angels are bright,' the witches are 'secret, black and midnight hags,' and, as Dowden says, the movement of the whole play might be summed up in the words, 'good things of day begin to droop and drowse.'

Here is another striking instance of reflecting and symbolic images. These images of external darkness are but shadows and reflections of the dark evil in Macbeth's soul, of the black desires in his heart: "Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires." Macbeth's mind, moreover, is lightened by the fires of hell, while Duncan's soul is flooded with warm, consoling heavenly light:

But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers."  

Bradley has written at great length on Shakespeare's use of imagery in Macbeth, and he finds that this light and dark imagery

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22 Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery, 329.
24 Ibid., 41-42.
emanates from the very soul of the tragic hero. Bradley also says:

Darkness, we may say even blackness, broods over this tragedy. It is remarkable that almost all the scenes which at once recur to memory take place either at night or in some dark spot. The vision of the dagger, the murder of Duncan, the murder of Banquo, the sleep-walking scene of Lady Macbeth, all come in night-scenes. The Witches dance in the thick air of a storm, or, 'Black and midnight hags' receive Macbeth in a cavern. The blackness of the night is to the hero a thing of fear, even of horror; and that which he feels becomes the spirit of the play. . . .25

Thus, through the symbolic imagery of darkness we see the terrible effects of an unnatural crime. By taking another's life, Macbeth has robbed himself of the light of life; he has even murdered on of its mainstays, peaceful sleep. Immediately after the murder, Macbeth foretells the drastic change in his life from that moment onward. He foresees the gradual decay of his whole nature, the materialization and imminent disintegration of his mind and body when he confesses:

Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast,—26

Life for Macbeth begins to fall away in parts, weakly personified, and with little hope for the future; it no longer holds his in-

25 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 333.
26 Macbeth, II, 11, 36-40, Complete Works, ed. Craig,
terests or his ambitions, but becomes tiresome and dull. As long as his thoughts remain with him, Macbeth's whole outlook will be upset by worries and fears. The voice of conscience will, day and night, din into his every thought and will flood his mind with horrible naive imagings.

From this murder scene in Act II until the very end of the tragedy, inanimate objects present themselves more and more vividly. Macbeth's imagination is overwhelmed by the image of the innocent blood that his hand has spilt. Thoughts of blood become indelible in his mind and are imagined to be indelible on his hands:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. 27

This indelible blot of lifeless blood stains his every image and turns his thoughts to ugly material details. It is imagined by him to have the power of changing the color of the sea. So too, does it possess the power to overcome the natural order of his life, to flood his mind with a sea of blood, and to drown his ambitious thoughts in its swirling tide. This guilty stain predominates in the speeches after the murder of Duncan. The image of blood appears in almost every scene, not only being suggested by the events, but also recalled by full descriptions and repe-

27 Ibid., 61-64, 853.
tion of the word in unlikely parts of the dialogue. Macbeth, in his declaration of the murder of Duncan to Donalbain, the king's son, opens the flood-gates of this blood imagery. It is rather an unusual way to break the news of a father's death to his son:

The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood Is stopp'd, the very source of it is stopp'd. Then Lennox joins in with the gory details:

Their hands and faces were all badg'd with blood; So were their daggers, which unwip'd we found Upon their pillows.

The next passage is one of the most vivid examples of Macbeth's continual absorption in physical details. Life for him has now turned into inanimate statues and still pictures. We realize in Act II that his nature is beginning to turn hard and cruel, though never criminal to the core, when he says:

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood;
For ruin's wasteful entrance; there, the murderers, Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers Unmannerly breech'd with gore...

28 Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 333.
31 Ibid., 118-123.
Again, before the murder of Banquo, we hear Macbeth invoking the night to scarf up the eye of pitiful day, and to tear to pieces the great bond that keeps him pale. 32 This is personification, but of a rather weird type: the elements of nature are made agents in his crime. Such a personification takes away life and light from the scene. Notice, also, that even the "invisible hand" that is to tear the bond is imagined as covered with blood. There is the murderer, for example, appearing at the door of the banquet room with Banquo's blood upon his face. Then the ghost of Banquo with "twenty trenched gashes on his head," with "gory locks," or "blood boltered" and smiling in derision at his murderer. "It will have blood," says Macbeth; "they say blood will have blood." 33

This recurrent blood imagery, therefore, is a reflection and symbol of Macbeth's guilt. It also represents the disintegration of his mental and moral fiber. His corrupted thoughts and morals keep apace with the materialization of his imagery. These sordid images spring from his very nature since they are naive or spontaneous images which are neither under the control of his desires or hopes or even his will, perverse as it is. Macbeth has the power of changing these haunting specters to more

32 Ibid., III, i, 47-48, 857.
33 Ibid., iv, 123, 859.
pleasant fancies, but he never can eliminate their source nor stem their spontaneous flow across the mind. His moral guilt stains and taints his whole character, and his imagination, as a vital part of his nature, cannot escape the ensanguined mist of guilt which hangs over it. Consequently, he is gradually blinded to all reality except that of the glaring reflection of his own moral decay.
CHAPTER IV

THE CONFLICT OF CONSCIENCE AND IMAGINATION

We have seen the effects of Macbeth's moral decay mirrored in his spontaneous imagery, but what is the cause responsible for all these lifeless, dark, unnatural and abnormal images? Judging from numberless doubts, uncertainties, and irrationalities expressed by Macbeth throughout the play, there must be some underlying cause for these wavering states of mind, some internal struggle of soul. Blackmore, whose whole study is devoted to this inward struggle of Macbeth, would call the play "A Great Soul in Conflict." More specifically, it is the conflict of conscience allied with naive imagination against his false imagination which deceives his mind and influences his will. In other words, the forces of Macbeth's true and noble nature against the promptings of infernal powers, is the essence of the soul-shaking conflict. Macbeth, therefore, is the tragic and dramatic story of another Faustus who sells his soul to the devil for the paltry price of a golden round, the story of a courageous soldier who turned ambition's sword upon all that was noble and good in his nature, but

1 Simon A. Blackmore, S.J., A Great Soul in Conflict, Chicago, 1914.
who never succeeded in conquering its defenders, conscience and naive imagination.

Although it is the consensus of most commentators that Macbeth did succeed in silencing the voice of conscience before his murder of Banquo, yet, this cruel falconer was never able to seal the sensitive eye of his naive imagination. The latter was one faculty of nature over which he had no control, as has been pointed out in Chapters II and III. Despite his persistent efforts to escape it, this vivid imaging power never ceased to remind Macbeth of his violated conscience, and prevented him from the enjoyment of his ill-gotten honors. Macbeth made the fatal mistake of distrusting the reality of these naive images, refusing to believe the truths they reflected, and of trusting the unreality of his creative imagination which formed its images from the false and empty promises of his evil tempters. As a result, his "single state of man" becomes so shaken, so divided against itself, that unreality becomes reality in his disordered mind, "and nothing is But what is not."2 Facts are lost sight of and he sees nothing but what is unreal, nothing but the specters of his own fancy.

Before this study becomes lost in theoretical psycho-

2 Macbeth, I, iii, 140, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 848.
logy, however, the basic supposition of the chapter should be explained; namely, that there does exist such a mental struggle in the character of Macbeth. It is even more necessary because Stoll and his school of critics deny any struggle in the play except the concrete external conflict of the protagonist with his environment. This realistic school claims that Macbeth's apparent self-consciousness is merely another instance of the Sane-can self-descriptive method, a dramatic technique to make the hero and the audience see all the horror of his deed. In the following passage, Stoll denies the relation between conscience and sorrow for sin, not only in Macbeth, but with regard to all the Shakespearean tragic heroes:

In Shakespeare and the Elizabethan drama in general conscience is often presented thus pragmatically and concretely. It concerns itself with punishment, and expresses itself rather in terms of punishment than of sorrow for the sin. As we have seen, the wicked suffer remorse for the most part just before death.3

In another passage, Stoll scoffs at the notion of remorse and qualms of conscience in these characters, attempting to draw even Bradley into his camp:

Of unrepentant horror there is more in Shakespeare's characters than has ordinarily been observed, even in those who are not unmitigated villains or Machiavels. Macbeth is commonly spoken of as a tragedy of remorse, and in hero and heroine as criminals 'par passion' or

3 Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, 353.
'par occasion' (which, we need not determine) remorse would not have been out of place. But remorse really they have none. Professor Bradley, following Campbell, grants as much in the case of Lady Macbeth; yet, although he recognizes that at its face value the language of Macbeth does not bear him out in this opinion, he holds that the inner being of the thane and king is convulsed by conscience. Professor Sharp, on the other hand, contends that in both hero and heroine there is not remorse, but fear, 'not sorrow for sin, but fear of the dagger and the poisoned cup'.

Stoll, therefore, agrees wholeheartedly with Sharp and attributes Macbeth's scorpions of the mind and terrible dreams to external fears, fears of a nemesis. He goes on to admit, however, that Macbeth had a certain "preoccupation with the horror of the deed, not only before but after it." And where, we may ask, does this preoccupation take place if not in Macbeth's mind? This horror must originate either from deep remorse, or from the convulsions of conscience, or especially from his excited imagination, or better, from all three. Certainly this is the accepted opinion of other critics. Furnivall goes so far as to say that Macbeth is a "play of conscience." Butcher speaks about the conflict as "the inward discord of the hero's own divided will" and how a "vivid imagination works in him as a subtle poison."

4 Ibid., 351.
5 Ibid., 361.
7 Butcher, Aristotle's Theory, 300.
William Topmoeller, in his fine analysis of Macbeth's conscience according to scholastic aesthetics, finds an ideal imitation of nature in Shakespeare's artifice of making the "voice of conscience speak to him through the inner sense faculty of imagination in vivid poetic diction." Wilson Knight points out the same fact in the characters of both Brutus and Macbeth, describing from textual similarities how they are attacked by the symbols of their deeds of destruction and by "their own trammelling and hindering conscience," and concluding that

one simple statement can be made of both Macbeth and Brutus, due to conflicting impulses, for and against murder. Their inner disharmony is given an almost identical reflection in words—not only in terms of logical statement, but in terms, too, of the more important verbal colour and association, imagery, rhythm—in short, of poetry.

Professor Bradley, moreover, is in complete agreement with Knight and with the theory set down as a supposition in this chapter. Despite Stoll's belief to the contrary, Bradley opposes him on his every observation, and places particular emphasis on Macbeth's naive imagination as it has been described in Chapter II. Bradley, of course, sees supernatural and spiritual in-

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9 Knight, "Brutus and Macbeth," The Wheel of Fire, 142.
fluences working upon Macbeth, whereas Stoll, lacking this deep insight sees only a pagan nemesis behind the scenes. In the following passage, Bradley draws the true picture of the Shakespearean tragic hero, Macbeth:

This bold ambitious man of action has, within certain limits, the imagination of a poet, —an imagination on the one hand extremely sensitive to impressions of a certain kind, and on the other, productive of violent disturbance both of mind and body. Through it he is kept in contact with supernatural impressions and is liable to supernatural fears. And through it, especially, come to him the intimations of conscience and honour. Macbeth's better nature— to put the matter for clearness' sake too broadly—instead of speaking to him in the overt language of moral ideas, commands, and prohibitions, incorporates itself in images which alarm and horrify. His imagination is thus the best of him, something usually deeper and higher than his conscious thoughts; and if he had obeyed it, he would have been safe.10

The truth of Bradley's statement that Macbeth's imagination is the best part of him, can be seen very clearly as we become one with his terrible experience, with his ambitions and fears and horrors. When the images of his conscience are active, we watch him with our every sense: we are fascinated, feel suspense, dread; we taste the bitter dregs of his despair, hear the ominous knocking at the gate, even smell the fetidness in the cavern of the apparitions and touch the bloody daggers. Throughout the last scenes we feel confined and hemmed in by some in-
explicable sense of constricting evil. Lastly, our senses and our sympathies are made completely one with Macbeth's great soul-struggle through the medium of his spontaneous and vivid imagination. These feelings vanish, however, as soon as his active imagination ceases to function, because when he is no longer infirm of purpose, he becomes a pitiless, even brutal and hardened criminal. Bradley confirms this observation when he says:

Whenever his imagination stirs, he acts badly. It so possesses him, and is so much stronger than his reason, that his face betrays him, and his voice utters the most improbable untruths or the most artificial rhetoric. But when it is asleep he is firm, self-controlled and practical. . . .\textsuperscript{11}

But Macbeth is not the practical man of action that we see in an Othello, nor an introspective procrastinator like Hamlet. He is a man of extremes, now hesitating and now rushing impulsively into crime. What, then, is the reason behind these falterings and misgivings? To some extent it is remorse; and yet, it seems to be a selfish remorse, an indirect sense of guilt. Thus, his conscience, instead of acting directly in the form of remorse, takes the shape of imaginary terrors, which in turn react on his conscience, as fire is made hotter by the current of air which itself generates. If Macbeth is the remorseless villain that Stoll would have him to be, why is he fascinated and spellbound by im-

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, 356.
aginary fears, and how can we explain his uncontrolled irri-
tability of imagination? Why does the horrid image of Duncan's
murder make his hair stand on end? Why does his heart knock un-
naturally against his ribs and the thought of crime shake the
very roots of his being so that function of his faculties is
strangled by surmise? Macbeth himself replies:

But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice
Commands th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips.12

And why does a prayer and blessing stick in his throat after the
murder of his king? Why is he afraid to even think on the deed?
Most important of all, would a remorseless murderer long that
his victim could hear again the knocking of the forces of awak-
ened life? Furthermore, could we say that Macbeth's conscience
is completely seared and calloused, even after the murders of
Duncan and Banquo, if the "strange things" he has in mind "must
be acted ere they may be scann'd,"13 if he resolves: "This deed
I'll do before this purpose cool: But no more sights"?14 And

12 Macbeth, I, vii, 7-12, Complete Works, ed. Craig,
850.

13 Ibid., III, v, 140, 859.

14 Ibid., IV, i, 154-155, 862.
finally, would a pagan Machiavel turn his back upon a Macduff, the only remaining obstacle to his sovereignty, and say:

But get thee back; my soul is too much charg'd with blood of thine already.15

At the mention of a Machiavel, Stoll finds grounds for a further objection against this interior spiritual struggle of Macbeth's conscience and imagination. Stoll refers us to his chapter on "The Criminals" where he describes the Machiavels as Shakespeare conceived of them. In this chapter, Stoll points out:

But the less deeply dyed in evil of Shakespeare's time, and also before his time and after, are gloomy, and suffer in this rather external spiritual way. It is nemesis, and certainly the example of the Greek Orestes and the Senecan Hercules affects the poet, as well as his own moral and theological psychology. A similar torment of mind, from without rather than from within, is to be found not only in Shakespeare's earlier plays but in may other of the time . . . .16

In all respect to Stoll's noble effort to explain this struggle, how can one suffer in an "external spiritual way" without a concomitant internal reaction? The ancient notion of fire, brimstone, and thunderbolts should be ruled out in such a discussion of Shakespeare's portrayal of the forces of justice and retribution. And furthermore, mental torment may certainly have a cause from without, but what about the tormenting itself—what

15 Ibid., V, vii, 34, 368.
16 Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, 354.
forces of human nature are responsible for it?

Regarding the poet's moral and ethical psychology, one should go to the Christian rather than the pagan source, or try to show the relation between the two in Shakespeare's dramatic technique. William Grace, in his Christian appraisal of Macbeth, goes to the heart of this struggle and shows the relation between the Christian and pagan influences in the play, "Macbeth," says Grace, "is the spiritual autobiography of a man unable to assimilate the new Machiavellianism because of an undying orthodox conscience."17 Grace proceeds to explain that Machiavellianism is the denial of Providence since it proposes a world of chaos in which only the man of strong will can succeed where those who are crippled by ethics and conscience must fail. In this same explanation, Grace rejects the argument of namesis and directly rebuffs those who hold that Macbeth has no control over his fate, "a self-conscious windlestraw upon the remorseless floods of fate,"18 when he defends the case of free will in Macbeth: "Shakespeare, however, avoids the ultimate consequences of pes-


simian by maintaining the free will of man. Man can be the target of demonic temptation, but man's will is his own."19

Further on in Grace's article, we find a direct contradiction of Stoll's view on Macbeth's torture of mind. That Grace is insistent on the fact of the hero's sensitive conscience, can be seen from the following:

But Macbeth's orthodox conscience does not die easily. Shakespeare has a profound knowledge of the ways of temptation, and the artistic skill to make the audience realize his knowledge. The struggle in Macbeth is poignant and prolonged. When Macbeth is allowed a moment to think for himself, his conscience is tormented because of his powerful imagination, which gives concrete and compelling symbols to his fears.

Macbeth lives through an experience before it arrives; his senses are those of a poet, and he must pay the double penalty of anticipation and realization.20

Donald Stauffer has also given this problem much serious consideration. He reiterates the findings of Grace, Bradley, and of this whole thesis with regard to the continual conflict that takes place in Macbeth's mind. Stauffer says:

The simple central idea—that the moral order exists in the microcosm, that there is no escape from conscience, that man is at once a criminal and his own executioner—is realized in pure dramatic form so that the introspective nature of the proposition is hardly noticed by reader or spectator, and is never stated directly. The


20 Ibid., 34.
theatre of the essential struggle is in Macbeth's mind. Macbeth is his own antagonist, and fights a doomed battle not only against the world but against himself. Morally considered, the play is nevertheless more than a melodrama because the villain is the hero, who suffers more from his own vice than from external retribution. 21

On Stauffer's suggestion, therefore, we will take a brief look into the microcosm, or, as Macbeth would put it, the "single state of man," 22 the theatre of the struggle between the forces of conscience and naive imagination on the one hand, and the traitorous forces of passionate and disordered ambition on the other. Convincing proofs for the existence of this struggle have been given already from the authority of the critics. To these proofs can be added that of textual criticism. The text itself reveals Macbeth's mental torment as he is torn between the reality of his naive imagination and the unreality of his bewitched and deceived creative imagination.

Besides the places in the text already quoted to substantiate Macbeth's remorse, there are several other passages throughout the play which depict him reflecting on the rightness and wrongness of his actions.

In Act I, iii, after his temptation by the witches, his


22 Macbeth, I, iii, 140, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 848.
conscience warns him through spontaneous images that his ambi-
tious thoughts are horribly wrong:

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good; if ill
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature.23

This speech contains the germs of the whole play: the horrible
imagings of the supernatural and fantastical; the chaos of unreality; the disorder on the physical, mental, and moral planes.
Like a pebble cast into a calm pond, this experience of Macbeth
sends ripples of itself expanding over the whole play. "This is
the mental experience," says Knight, "which he projects into ac-
tion, thereby plunging his land, too, in fear, horror, darkness,
and disorder."24

In this first important soliloquy, therefore, Macbeth's
mental excitement is heightened by a disturbed imagination; he
wavers concerning the good or evil nature of the Weird Sisters'
promise. By the standards of conscience, how can it be good when
it suggests for its fulfillment a bloody deed whose horrid, naive
image stirs his whole being to revulsion? By his worldly judg-
ment, however, how can success be an evil thing, since it is al-

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23 Ibid., 130-137.
24 Knight, Wheel of Fire, 168.
ready partially founded in fact? But he cannot understand his nature's reaction to such ambitious thoughts, for he says:

Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.25

In these lines Shakespeare defines with the accuracy of a psychologist the devious way in which Macbeth's imagination will accomplish his destruction. The murderous design, which as yet exists only in his imagination, so shakes his power of control over his other faculties, that action is overruled by imagination, and nothing exists for him but an imaginary world of his own making. To escape the rack of his conscience, he at once flees from reality to unreality where fair is foul, and foul is fair. Macbeth's confusion and bewilderment, then, will grow in proportion to his trust in his creative imagination and distrust of his imagination's natural functioning. Like a child who lives in the world of its imagination, Macbeth will grasp for power in one continual dream until his tragic end; or, as Knight describes it, "one continual nightmare; a dream-consciousness."26

In Act I, vii, Macbeth's opening lines reflect his dis-

25 Macbeth, I, iii, 137-142, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 848.

26 Knight, Wheel of Fire, 161.
ordered and ensnared mind. He is occupied with images of nets and tangles; he fears that the consequences of Duncan's death may coil around him like an endless rope. Yet, even when he worries about his own fate, his conscience draws before his mind the heinous vileness of the deed in the form of a vivid, personified, and pitiful phantasm. Macbeth imagines himself "shutting the door," and "bearing the knife." Duncan's virtues are pictured as trumpeting angels; pity assumes the form of a "naked, new-born babe"; cherubim ride through the air, and "tears drown the wind"; his passion pricks him like a spur, and he fancies himself as a horseman mounting and falling from his saddle. This last image foreshadows his ambitious climb to the saddle of supreme power, his springing too high and falling disgracefully into the deep pit on the other side of eternity.

Concerning the famous dagger scene in Act II, Professor Paul has the following explanation of Macbeth's reactions to the instrument of his crime:

The supreme exhibition of the power of Macbeth's imagination is the vision of the bloody dagger which the murderer sees as he goes to Duncan's chamber. In this familiar scene he debated with himself whether the imagination can produce such real effects. His mind insists on the reality of that which the bodily sense asserts to be nonexistent. Finally he admits that 'there's no such thing,' realizing that the hallucination springs from his own wish that it be true. The handle is toward his hand because he wishes it so. The gouts of blood appear on the blade because he wishes them there. Later on Lady Macbeth says that her husband told her that this air-drawn dagger 'led him to Duncan,'
showing how well he knew that he had let his imagination thus tempt and control him in violation of his conscience.27 Although some Shakespearean critics, such as Stauffer, hold that this air-drawn dagger is the ghost of Macbeth's murdered conscience, Henry Paul seems to have the most reasonable opinion. The faculty which Paul envisions as tempting and controlling Macbeth is, of course, the hero's uncontrolled and deceived imagination, not the spontaneous image of his real soul, but the fiendish silhouette which gestures to him, beckoning Macbeth on to his black purpose.

Immediately after the murder of Duncan, Macbeth is so filled with remorse and horror that he dares not look upon his deed, "Look on't again I dare not,"28 and is afraid even to think what he has done. The sleeping and the dead are not but pictures to this murderer—"they are the images of murdered conscience, the haunting reflections of his monstrous, unnatural crime. Macbeth's naive imagination lends him the innocent eye of childhood with which to see his guilt. Roy Walker draws a striking analogy to Scripture in commenting on the symbolism in Act II, ii:

Since the eye that winks at the hand is evil, his body is full of darkness resembling that which has engulfed the whole atmosphere of the tragedy. His hands, moreover,

27 Henry Paul, The Royal Play, 68.
move instinctively to pluck out the eyes that betrayed this pristine vision. His eye has offended; he will pluck it out so that vision may be single and light be returned to his body. All of these reactions to his crime are the convulsions of the imagination under the direction of reason and memory, struggling to re-create cleansed vision. His misguided reasoning, however, triumphs and shrouds all his faculties in darkness. 29

After the murder of Duncan, therefore, Macbeth is plunged in moral darkness, because, as he admits himself, he had "Put rancour in the vessel of my peace," and his eternal jewel, his soul, he has "Given to the common enemy of man," 30 even calling upon the powers of eternal darkness as an instrument of personal power. From this moment, Macbeth poisons his conscience with the rancour of hell itself; his whole nature becomes a prisoner of the world of evil, shackled more securely by each successive act of murder. His mind becomes so ensnared, disordered, warped, and denatured that he imagines the murder of Duncan is a proof of his love for his wife, and that his hired murderers can best prove their love and loyalty to himself by murdering Banquo and Fleance.

In Act III, v, we see the complete dissolution of Macbeth's conscience. His conscience has become calloused, but he still fears his vivid and overactive imagination:

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30 Macbeth, III, i, 66-68, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 856.
For mine own good
All causes shall give way: I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er;
Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd. 31

What a change from the man who thought of Duncan's virtues and of
pity like a naked new-born babe! With what clear insight does he
willingly ride the tide to hell. He admits his own delusion,
which he calls "self-abuse," and falsely attributes it to ini-
tial fear that must be crushed. He has dealt the fatal blow to
his conscience and pity, only to let loose a flood of torturing
images from within and from without. Both his worlds suffer:
his tortured mind within lies in restless ecstasy upon the af-
fliction of terrible dreams, and the outside world reflects only
the hideous and unnatural. He is obsessed by images of scorpions
and snakes, of bats, carrion birds, of darkness and of blood.

In Act V, v, however, Macbeth has reached complete
spiritual dissolution and despair. He has killed not only his
conscience, but also his tender emotions, his lively imagination,
and the worst murder of all—the very desire to live. Coldly he
says:

I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair

31 Ibid., IV, 135-140, 259.
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in 't: I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direnness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.

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.32

Thus it might be said that Macbeth was dead before he died by
Macduff's sword, because, says Granville Barker, "insensitiveness
is a sort of death."33 Insensitiveness to conscience and to im-
agination and to pity, therefore, is the life of a brute beast.
It is the unnatural murder of all that is human in man, a death
in life. It is like being buried alive!

The long battle between conscience and a deceived im-
agination is at last over. The thread of life is all but cut, the
snare of hell are tied in a Gordian knot around his soul. At the
end, Macbeth fights with the desperate courage of a trapped beast,
surrounded both by the powers of good and evil, one seeking his
mortal life, the other the everlasting death of his soul. Macbeth
learned too late that the order of nature in his mind and outside

32 Ibid., V, v, 9-14, 23-28, 367-368.

33 H. G. Barker, "Shakespeare's Dramatic Art," Com-
panion to Shakespeare Studies, 80.
of him cannot be outwitted or outwilled without suicide to his "single state of man." 34

34 Macbeth, I, iii, 140, Complete Works, ed. Craig,
CHAPTER V

THE CAUSE OF MACBETH'S DESPAIR

If the effects of Macbeth's moral decay are reflected in his imagery, and if the cause of this moral decay is the hardening of his heart and conscience, what, then, is the cause of his final destruction? The term destruction, however, is misleading since it implies an external cause. The preternatural, political, and domestic forces which bring about Macbeth's destruction are external causes, and as such will not be considered here. The interior moral forces, moreover, should be left to the theologians and their discussions of a perverse will. If the term downfall were substituted for destruction, one would expect a treatment of Macbeth's tragic flaw, ambition, but this theme has been worn threadbare by Shakespearean commentators. Granted that ambition, considered as an inordinate desire for power in Macbeth's mind, is an internal cause which occasions his destruction and downfall; is it, however, the only cause of despair? Can it be said that hope and desire bring about despair? The final cause of Macbeth's destruction, downfall, and despair, therefore, must be assigned to frustrated ambition.
And yet, what is frustrated ambition but the bursted bubble of desire, the toppling of one’s dream—castle which the imagination has built on the sands of unreality?

Macbeth’s spontaneous and overactive imagination, moreover, frustrates his dreams of power and immunity from punishment. It causes his aberrant plans to fail, baffles and hinders his every move towards the peaceful enjoyment of his ill-gotten goods; and finally, its haunting images turn his gains into airy nothings. In order to escape this grim world of reality, the world of truth presented to him by the rebellious forces of his inner nature, Macbeth sought refuge in the dream-world of unreality founded on the deceitful promises of the equivocating "juggling fiends." Although he is "cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d, bound in" by countless doubts and fears, he feels a certain sense of security when he relies on their promises. He imagines himself bearing a "charmed life," cloaked in the armor of their double assurance:

Be bloody, bold, and resolute;
laugh to scorn
The power of man, for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.¹

And the second promise makes assurance double sure because its threat seems so unnatural, so seemingly impossible of ever taking

¹ Macbeth, IV, i, 79-80, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 361.
Be lion-mettled, proud; and take no care
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:
Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him. 2

Seduced by these delusive promises, Macbeth feels certain that he
will live to enjoy his ambitious dreams. His fatuous belief
lends him the strong hand of fearless resolve to kill Macduff,
lends him the voice of courage that he may "tell pale-hearted
fear it lies, And sleep in spite of thunder." 3 Placing all his
hope in his bewitched imagination, Macbeth can laugh to scorn his
former fears, his memories, even the threat of conspiracy. Hav-
ing escaped the world of fact, he grows stronger and more re-
solute, a bold man of action who steels his heart against pity,
who blinds his mind and his mind's eye to reality and to truth.
Macbeth can now boast:

The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. 4

Macbeth's self-credulous imagination, however, spurs
on his hopes to dangerous heights. Unaware of his fate, he is
being led by the fiend himself to the very pinnacle of despair.

2 Ibid., 90–94.
3 Ibid., 85–86.
4 Ibid., 147, 262.
Since his faculties are in a state of disharmony and confusion, Macbeth fails to see the infernal light by which his hopes are illumined until he has plunged over the precipice. Even when he stands on the battlements of Dunsinane and watches Birnam Wood rising in rebellion against him, Macbeth clings desperately to the promise that none of woman born shall harm him. His kingdom may topple about his ears, his forces desert and join the enemy, friends and love and respect he must never hope to have. His wife dies, and he has even "lived long enough," but he rushes forth with reckless abandon into the midst of his foe, driven on by the fatal delusion of his deceived imagination that he was destined to die a natural death. This one thought kept him from utter despondency and consequent suicide because he feared death more than he despairs of life. His short span of tomorrows contained the last dawning of all his hopes, for, by jumping the life to come and selling his eternal jewel to the common enemy of men, Macbeth had damned himself to everlasting despair.

What a rude awakening from his dream-world Macbeth must have suffered when he finally realized on the day of battle that the promises of the fiends were vanishing into the airy nothingness whence they came! Only when it was too late did the powers of hell allow Macbeth to see "the angel whom thou still hast
serv'd,"5 as Macduff tells us, the angel of light, Lucifer, who
lights the way to "dusty death" and who "lies like truth."6 What
a rude shock to his fanciful hopes to face the world of cold fact
and reality again, as he says:

I pull in resolution, and begin
To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth; 'Fear not, till Birnam wood
Do come to Dunsinane'; and now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane. Arm, arm, and out!
If this which he avouches does appear,
There is nor flying hence nor tarrying here.
I 'gin to be a-weigh of the sun,
And wish th' estate o' the world were now undone,
Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! come, wrack!
At least we'll die with harness on our back.7

Alternating between frenzy and apathy, his mind is thrown into
hopeless confusion, but his natural valor and energy reassert
themselves at the end of his speech. Like the unrepentant sinner
before his Divine Judge, Macbeth sees the folly of his life flash
before his mind's eye and he condemns himself to ruin, destruc-
tion, and eternal chaos.

The most soul-rending shock of all, however, comes to
Macbeth when the last bubble of his bloated hopes is pricked by
the words of Macduff: "Macduff was from his mother's womb

5 Ibid., V, vii, 44, 369.
6 Ibid., v, 44, 368.
7 Ibid., 42-52.
Untimely ripp'd."\(^8\) Only now, when he has despaired of his charm, will Macbeth admit his self-deception. He sees again with the naive eye of childhood, he sees with the discerning eye of Banquo that the devil can speak truths to "win us with honest trifles, to betray's In deepest consequence."\(^9\) What a dazzling light of truth shines through the thickening clouds of his despair when Macbeth warns us:

\begin{quote}
And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.\(^10\)
\end{quote}

Here is the tragedy of tragedies—a once-noble soul which perceives its fatal delusion, and yet, which turns its back on truth, refuses to abandon disordered passion, and hurls itself into the abyss of eternal despair.

Shakespeare, therefore, as has been seen above from the running commentary on the text, endowed this ambitious man of action with an overactive imagination, an imagination so strong as to lead him step by step through his life of crime to his destruction, downfall, and ultimate despair. That such an imagination is the underlying cause of Macbeth’s tragedy, is also confirmed by the authority of the leading commentators on Shake-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \(^8\) Ibid., vii, 45, 369.
  \item \(^9\) Ibid., I, iii, 125-126, 848.
  \item \(^10\) Ibid., V, vii, 48-51, 869.
\end{itemize}
Professor Bradley has already told us in the previous chapter that Macbeth has "one marked peculiarity—an imagination which keeps him in contact with supernatural impressions and liable to supernatural fears." He went on to explain that this imagination was the mirror of Macbeth's better nature, the visionary medium of conscience and honor, the source of his horror and fear and alarms, the accusing eye staring into his soul and reflecting his terrible guilt. Bradley concludes that Macbeth's imagination "is thus the best of him. . . . If he had obeyed it he would have been safe." We may go one step further and say that Macbeth trusted his naive imagination all too little. Had he believed its reflection of truth and reality, he would have been safe; but he fled a world of unreality and trusted the diabolical lies of evil suggestion.

George Kittredge, commenting in his splendid notes on the "horrid image" which shakes Macbeth's resolution before the murder of Duncan, makes the following observation on his vivid imagination:

Macbeth has a visualizing imagination. What to most men would be a vague idea, is to him a thing seen

11 Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy*, 353.
12 Ibid.
in all the colours of reality. When it occurs to him that the quickest way to get the crown would be to kill the King, in a flash he sees himself actually committing the murder. 13

Professor Chambers helps to explain how Macbeth can be a practical man of action and yet highly imaginative, "a prey to countless terrible imaginings." 14 In close agreement with Chambers, Quiller-Couch adds that Macbeth proceeds to his crime under "some fatal hallucination." 15

Donald Stauffer places particular emphasis upon Macbeth's overactive imagination which he traces through the vivid imagery of his speeches. He finds Lady Macbeth lacking in sensitivity of conscience and imagination in her waking hours, but "Macbeth's imagination ranges forward and backward in time; and an act, even before it is done, enlarges in frightening import and glares its consequences in his mind." 16

Stewart lends especial assurance to the points brought out earlier in this chapter. In refutation of Stoll's objection to a study of the "psychological elements" in Shakespearean tra-

13 Kittredge, Sixteen Plays: Macbeth, 900.
14 Chambers, A Survey, 236.
16 Stauffer, World of Images, 215.
gedy, Stewart defends the imaginative approach in the following statements:

But Shakespeare did conceive of Macbeth as 'imaginative' in all but the highest degree . . . imagination, with its extreme sensibility to sinister and morbid impressions—seems to me to be one of the cardinal facts of the play.

Macbeth is like a man moving in a blood-drenched trance, subject to visual and auditory hallucinations, uncertain of the boundaries of actuality and dream.

He has been betrayed by his intensely realising imagination, in itself a splendid thing, which, in a period of weakened rationality, has exhibited himself to himself as the central figure in a drama colossal scale and influence. 17

Professor Henry Paul has recently published a study of Macbeth in which he deals with the historical, dramatic, and literary elements found in this "Royal Play." After a thorough analysis of Shakespeare's use of source material, he summarizes the contents of two books which, besides the Chronicles of Holinshed, had the greatest influence upon the composition of Macbeth, namely, Basilikon Doron and Daemonologie, both written by Shakespeare's reigning sovereign, James I of England. The former book deals with the qualities of a kingly conscience, and the latter with the workings of a strong imagination as witnessed in the hallucinations and illusions of people investigated by the king himself. Paul says that the interest of James in these workings of the imagination induced Shakespeare to develop his psycholog-

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17 Stewart, Character and Motive, 91, 93, 94.
ical theme of conscience and imagination beyond their development in his other plays. Paul also arrives at the same conclusions found in this thesis. He clarifies his point by an apt comparison to the character of Hamlet:

Just as Hamlet’s too great indulgence in reflection overmasters his power to act, so Macbeth’s progressive seduction by his imagination overmasters his conscience. The bad habit which wrought his destruction was the substitution of the imaginary for the real.19

Wilson Knight is another strong advocate of the imaginative element in the play. He thinks that the text of the play, if it were given, should read: "Nothing is but what is not," because reality and unreality change places throughout the play. In the following passage, Knight identifies the atmosphere of the play with Macbeth’s state of "dream-consciousness."

Knight writes:

We must see that Macbeth, like the whole universe of this play, is paralysed, mesmerized, as though in a dream. This is not merely 'ambition'—it is fear, a nameless fear which fixes itself to a horrid image. He is helpless as a man in a nightmare: and this helplessness is integral to the conception—the will-concept is absent.20

Finally, Simon Blackmore traces the source of Macbeth’s despair and attributes it to the powers of evil who inflate his

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18 Paul, The Royal Play, 4.
19 Ibid., 14.
20 Knight, Wheel of Fire, 168-169.
imagination with dreams of false hope before his crime and then afterwards turn his hopes to fears, terrible dreams, and disappointments. Blackmore expresses this deception of Macbeth in precise terms when he says:

The powers of evil turn Macbeth's remorse into despair to prevent return to God by true penitence. Before the murder they minimized the crime and its consequences; but after it they magnify them with the view of inducing despair.21

Thus, we see from the testimony of authority that Macbeth's spontaneous and overactive imagination played a definite role in his downfall and was one of the underlying causes of his impenitence and final despair.

Macbeth's overactive and overwrought imagination, however, was not only the cause of his final despair, but was also the occasion of the mental states which brought on this utter despondency.

In the first place, Macbeth's strong imagination was the occasion of his yielding to temptation. His mind, says Coleridge, is "rendered temptible by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts."22 That he had ambitious visions of kingship before the witches approached him, is borne out by his reactions to their prophecies. Macbeth's concatenating imagination

21 Blackmore, A Great Soul in Conflict, 275.
brought up before his mind's eye the previous images of fanciful hopes. "Look," says Banquo, "how our partner's rapt."23 Notice that Banquo, though promised a royal line of successors, is lost in no such raptures. That Macbeth has let his imagination toy with the means to the throne in this temptation scene and even before the action begins, is also the opinion of Quiller-Couch and Blackmore. Whatever the case may be, however, one fact remains clear: Macbeth's vivid and overactive imagination was fruitful soil for the seeds of diabolical temptation. The tempters infatuate his soul through the agency of his lively fancy. They dazzle his mind with the picture of the golden diadem, bewitch his ambitious nature with the glowing but exaggerated vision of royalty, and thus distract him from the enormity of the crime and its future punishment when he finally gives full consent to their suggestions and to their most powerful human agent, Lady Macbeth.

Macbeth's great fault, then, is his bad habit of taking the unreal to be real and allowing it to master him because it corresponds precisely with his wishes. Against his better judgment, he has put his actions under the control of his imagination,
with the result

that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not. 24

He has eaten of the insane root, a wild imagination, which takes
his reason prisoner.

The second step in Macbeth's despair also originates in
his imagination: the nightmare of fear and its hideous brood of
worries, anxieties, doubts, and suspicions. This stifling, para-
alyzing fear springs from Macbeth's overwrought imagination be-
cause not until the very end of the play are there real objects
to arouse his fears and suspicions. Before the murder of Duncan,
this ambitious dreamer had built sand-castles of the kingship,
but once he becomes king his fatuous hopes are swept away in the
tide of fears for his security and suspicion of every thane and
vassal. Fear drives Macbeth from one sin to another; he exerts
all his energies to win his one big gamble, the murder of Duncan,
and ever after that he lives in dread of discovery and of the loss
of the stakes for which he played. Henry Norman Hudson also calls
imagination the cause of Macbeth's further crimes:

It is a natural result of an imagination so re-
dundant and excitable as Macbeth's that the agonies
of remorse should project and embody themselves in
imaginary terrors, and so spur him on to further crimes
for security against those terrors. To give himself

24 Ibid., 140-141.
peace, he must still keep using his dagger; and yet every thrust he makes with it stabs a new wound in his own soul. Such is the dreadful madness which guilt engenders in him! His moral forces, indeed, turn to a down-right fury and venom of infatuation, insomuch that he boldly enters the lists against the very powers in which he trusted.25

Fear, therefore, is predominant in Macbeth's mind and in the whole murky atmosphere of the play. "Macbeth's world," writes Wilson Knight, "is one of rumours and fears."26 Caroline Spurgeon calls the whole play an "image of fear,"27 and accuses fear of casting out all love from Macbeth's heart.

Furthermore, fears and doubts make Macbeth cry out in anguish when he learns that Fleance has escaped:

But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in To saucy doubts and fears.28

Even at the very outset of the play, Macbeth admits that his state of fear is only "fantastical," that is, imaginary, and has no grounds in reality. It is ironical, however, that after he had supped full of horrors and forgotten the taste of imaginary fears that he rushed blindly into the one real object he should have

26 Knight, Wheel of Fire, 158.
27 Spurgeon, Imagery, 156.
28 Macbeth, III, iv, 24, Complete Works, ed. Craig, 358.
feared, Macduff. Only then does Macbeth know the taste of real fear which he had so long anticipated. Only too late does his hope in the promises of the fiends turn to fear and black despair.

The natural offshoot of harassing fears and terrible dreams is sleeplessness. This insomnia not only reflects the disordered state of Macbeth's mind, but also is a contributing cause to his rapid physical and moral deterioration. By his murder of Duncan, the symbol of all goodness in life, Macbeth condemns himself to lie "on the torture of the mind In restless ecstasy"29 both day and night. Rather than suffer this unnatural rack of pain, he thinks it better to be sleeping peacefully with the dead. Sleep, peaceful sleep, in Shakespeare is ever the privilege of the good and the reward of the innocent. If it is murdered, there is no goodness left, and the result is an ultimate weariness of soul.30 In Act III, therefore, we see the tempest of despair rising in Macbeth's soul; the frame of things disjointing. The inevitable result is not peace and sleep, but chaos and final disintegration.

We have seen before how Macbeth tries to escape the growing chaos and confusion of his mind by withdrawing into a dream world of his own making. Macbeth's imaginative temperament,

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29 Ibid., ii, 21, 257.
30 Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, 261.
therefore, makes him distrust others and withdraw into himself. After his first crime, he fails to confide even in the partner of his crime, his wife. After his last visit to the witches, moreover, the following scenes of Act IV show the separation from man as well as from God, and the miserable, trustless isolation that sin brings in its wake.

The last stage of Macbeth's mind before his final despair is the most fatal. Now that he has escaped the shocking reality of fears and suspicions, he feels a weird sense of self-complacency. According to Chambers, the inhuman powers instil a false sense of security in Macbeth's imagination which "lures him on the slippery path to retribution."31 This feeling of impunity is caused by a strong imagination which has been completely disillusioned by empty promises. His absolute belief in the oracular promises of the Weird Sisters impels him blindly and boldly to enter upon a course of action which will verify their equivocal predictions and inevitably lead him to his own physical and moral ruin.32 With reckless abandon, then, Macbeth rushes into the gaping jaws of hell.

Macbeth's final act of despair is caused by his real-

31 Chambers, A Survey, 239.
32 Blackmore, A Great Soul, 212.
ization of how the powers of evil have dazzled his imagination with false hopes and of how he has deceived himself by his strong imagination. Thus, from the conviction of his inevitable fate, and not from physical cowardice, does he refuse to fight with the man not born of woman. Rather than yield to Macduff, however, and bow down his proud spirit at young Malcolm's feet, Macbeth vainly joins battle with doom's man-of-fate. The terrible tragedy of it all—he will not serve an earthly king, but chooses to serve the everlasting Prince of Darkness!

Thus, we have witnessed the frightful effects of an overactive, vivid, and overwrought imagination in Macbeth. The text of Macbeth might well read: Fortis imaginatio generat casum. 'A strong imagination begets a fall.'
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The thesis submitted by William J. Holmes, S. J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Signature of Adviser