“It is a Knell that Summons Thee to Heaven or to Hell”: The Christian Dimension of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

with a

Major in English

in the

College of Graduate Studies

University of Idaho

by

Jennifer Perez Lopez

Major Professor: Walter Hesford, Ph.D.

Committee Members: Stephan Flores, Ph.D.; Ellen Kittell, Ph.D.

Department Administrator: Scot Slovic, Ph.D.

May 2015

Authorization to Submit Thesis

This thesis of Jennifer Perez Lopez, submitted for the degree of Jennifer Perez Lopez with a major in English and titled "'It is a Knell that Summons Thee to Heaven or to Hell': The Christian Dimension of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,*" has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate studies for approval.

Major Professor: _____ Date: _____
Walter Hesford, Ph.D.

Committee Members: _____ Date: _____
Stephan Flores, Ph.D.

_____ Date: _____
Ellen Kittell, Ph.D.

Department Chair: _____ Date: _____
Scott Slovic, Ph.D.

Abstract

Can tragedy and the Christian message of eternal hope and salvation coincide? Not only are the two visions of mortal life not mutually exclusive, but the Christian dimension of eternity also brings to tragedy an even deeper significance. Comparing Greek tragedy with Shakespearean, and analyzing the Christian contributions to drama demonstrates that the Christian possibility of eternal salvation makes the potential for failing to achieve salvation infinitely more tragic.

"'It is a Knell that Summons Thee to Heaven or to Hell': The Christian Dimension of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" analyzes the rise and fall of Macbeth's power in terms of Christian understanding. Arguing that tragedy is possible within a Christian narrative, this essay studies the temptation of Macbeth and his willful descent into evil and the destruction wrought upon Macbeth as well as the whole of Scotland as a result of the poisonous effects of sin. Ultimately, the essay seeks to demonstrate that *Macbeth* exemplifies the essential and only tragedy possible in a Christian world: that a man may willingly choose his own damnation.

Acknowledgements

Instrumental in the composition of this thesis was Dr. Suzanne Stein, formerly of the University of South Florida, for pushing me to succeed in all I did and inspiring in me a love of Shakespeare. In conjunction, I would like to thank the University of South Florida for allowing me to participate in their pilot Honors Program in which I first began to develop the ideas about *Macbeth* contained in this thesis.

At the University of Idaho, I would like to thank Dr. David Sigler for admitting me to the program and helping me choose the thesis option. To Dr. Ellen Kittell for the opportunity to learn more about the real Macbeth in your wonderful Medieval State class and for acting as the outside reader of my thesis, thank you. I also appreciate Dr. Stephan Flores for agreeing to act as reader and for his Shakespearean expertise. Finally to my advisor, Dr. Walter Hesford for your support and encouragement. Thank you.

I am also indebted to the University of Idaho's Composition Department for honoring me with a teaching assistantship from which I gained valuable experience and the financial assistance to keep the wolf from the door.

Table of Contents

Preface

"More needs she the divine than the physician" (*Macbeth* 5.1.73)

Why even study Shakespeare? This may be a more pertinent question than it first appears. I asked Google how many high schools are still teaching Shakespeare and included on the first page of hits were 4 listings debating whether there was a need for teaching Shakespeare to high school students. Under Common Core, the focus of high school readings mentions only one of Shakespeare's plays in their list of suggested texts, *Macbeth* (*Common* 58). Note that this is a suggested text—there remains no guarantee that the teacher or the school district will choose to use *Macbeth*—or any other play of Shakespeare's for that matter.

Perhaps Shakespeare is too difficult or deals with topics too controversial for high school students. Surely colleges will require study of Western literature's undisputed master bard. According to a report, *The Vanishing Shakespeare,* by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, out of 70 total American universities surveyed, only 15 required English majors to take a course in Shakespeare (3). "Thus, 55 of the 70 schools. . . surveyed allow English majors—including future English teachers—to graduate without studying the language's greatest writer in depth" (Neal 4). If even students majoring in English are not required to take a Shakespeare course, what hope can we have that students in English or other majors volunteered to take Shakespeare for fun?

Why continue to study his work at all? Part of the current educational debate surrounding the Common Core standards, which are not only going to affect grade school children but also colleges through the alignment of the SAT's with Common Core's standards, is the question of what education is *for.* Look at any of the pages of the Common

Core standards themselves: the phrase "college and career readiness" appears over and over again (Common 10, 18, 22). Is this the purpose of education? To prepare children for work in college or work in a career? One might just as well design machines and fine tune them for career readiness—and in fact, there is now a machine that can make a perfect hamburger from start to finish, making cooks in fast food restaurants obsolete. If all a company requires of its workers is that they are prepared to be nothing more than workers, Shakespeare's works are outdated. After all, we are not investing in individuals with a heightened capacity for the appreciation of the sublime, a wonder for the miraculous, or a well-trained and exercised imagination, but worker-bees, preparing to take their place at the assembly line of some vast conglomerate.

What if this is not the purpose of education? What if education is *for* something very different? Perhaps the purpose of education is to open a mind to the greatest thoughts in human history. Perhaps the final end for education is to produce an individual capable of critical thinking and logical reasoning but also of appreciating beauty, understanding the eternal debates about the human condition, and creating new ideas and new wealth. What if education is for growing whole humans, capable of answering for themselves the deepest questions we wrestle with as an imaginative and intelligent species?

How can our society, as it becomes increasingly global, achieve new thought without first understanding old thought? And what other author of Western literature could have captured the varying aspects of the human condition so completely as Shakespeare? Who could argue that Shakespeare's works are not relevant to modern life? The human condition has not changed in four hundred years. We still experience loneliness, ambition, jealousy,

fear, and love; we still suffer from the actions of others when they seek to do us harm or restrict our passions out of hate or jealousy.

Not only do Shakespeare's works still speak to our lives today, but the foundational theology through which he wrote also remains pertinent. At their most basic level, religions seek to answer simple questions: Why am I here and what is the purpose of my life? By the time Shakespeare was born, these twin questions had been answered by Christianity with a single word: love. I am here because God loves me and my purpose is to love God; this is the root of all Christian doctrine. When a Pharisee asked Jesus which commandment was the most important, he responded, "'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soule, and with all thy minde.' This is the first and the great commandement. And the seconde is like unto this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self'" (*The Geneva Bible,* Matt. 22.37-39; to improve the readability of Biblical text from the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible, spellings have been updated when necessary, such that "u" has been substituted for "v," "j" for "i," and "s" for "f"). Though critical analyses of Shakespeare have not always recognized it, Shakespeare lived in a world gilded with Christian theology. To assume that these thoughts did not appear in his plays is folly.

While it would be impossible to know the religious beliefs of Shakespeare the man, critics of the twentieth century have thoroughly argued that his works are brimming with Christian thought, Biblical references and tropes, and possibly even didactic morals. Shakespeare's audience, as much as any reader today, also struggled with the heights and depths of the human condition. The answers they sought to the problems facing them happened to come from Christian doctrines and theology. I contend that those answers are still necessary and relevant to today's society.

I do not argue for enforcing Christian morals on society. I believe that would be immoral itself. I merely petition that for those of us still adhering to this faith, there should be voices which speak for us. I plead the case for maintaining the academic freedom to speak what has become intolerable to maintain true diversity of thought and ideas. *Macbeth* speaks to me and its message is so inherently Christian in nature that a reading of *Macbeth* that ignores its theology would be but a shadow of the great message it contains.

Nor am I alone in my analysis. While I have some support in these secular times, the majority of the voices which I seek to join achieved their heyday in the mid-twentieth century. By the mid-1990's new secular voices in literary criticism were moving past Christian readings of *Macbeth*. Why then do I feel that I must take the critical debate about *Macbeth* back a half century?

Because the Scottish play has not changed, nor has the human condition. The debate about how Shakespeare employed Christian thought in his plays was thought to have been settled with the arrival of a new critical lens in postmodern theory, but I still need to hear the old voices. It is their work on *Macbeth* that best matches the nobility and beauty that I find in this, the shortest and most powerful of Shakespeare's tragedies. I do not believe that I am alone either. I write this for those like me who look for the beautiful and sublime, who look for the love of God in the works of his followers. "More [need we] the divine than the physician," me thinks (*Macbeth* 5.1.) The message and warning of *Macbeth* is, perhaps, more necessary in our generation than ever—even as that same message is oppressed and labeled bigoted hate speech.

Introduction

"Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter
Of hell-gate, he should have old turning
The key." (*Macbeth* 2.3.1-3)

These are the ironic words of the Porter of Macbeth's haunted castle, after Lady Macbeth has filled her battlements with all manner of "murd'ring ministers" and evil spirits, turning her home into Hell on Earth (1.5.49). In the twentieth century there was a strong critical tradition to view the play *Macbeth* as a Christian drama, though what that meant changed from scholar to scholar. Generally from the 1930's to the mid-1990's, most prominent scholars publishing on *Macbeth* were engaged in squabbles over how precisely the play could be described as a Christian tragedy.

There were voices, too, like D. Douglas Waters, who denied Christian influence and interpreted from secular hermeneutics. Waters argues that the imagery, terminology, and events of the play are influenced by Christianity but manages to conclude that *Macbeth* is not a Christian play. Perhaps this paradox arises because of how inextricably intertwined Christianity and Western thought have become in two thousand years of mutual influence. Christianity has suffused and fundamentally shaped Western thought to such a degree that it may be difficult to disentangle from that which is commonly considered secular philosophy.

There is also a school of thought which denies that a tragic vision can coexist with a religion that promises victory even over death, exemplified by Barbara Hunt in *The Paradox of Christian Tragedy*. While Jesus promises final hope to all humanity, the religious practices of Christianity place emphasis on the individual's daily life and the consequences of the choices which one makes in the mystery of freedom. Salvation is always offered but not always chosen. Thus, the Christian dimension of Macbeth's tragedy is that any man can fall

victim to his own desires despite the warnings of his conscience and even against his own reason. *Macbeth* exemplifies both the epitome of personal Christian tragedy—that individuals can willingly choose their own damnation, and the devastating social fallout which arises from the poisonous effects of sin working in the world. Analyzing a Christian view of the world, with concessions to the freedom of humankind's will, aligns the Christian faith with the tragic vision as found in *Macbeth.*

Tragedy and Christianity: Defining Terms

"It was some time after its creation when most people
forgot that the very oldest stories of the beginning are,
sooner or later, about blood." (*The Hogfather*)

The tragic genre can be traced back to Greek culture's religious worship of Dionysus, portraying a world full of pain, evil, and unfair circumstances (Schwartz 227). Thousands of years later, humanity remains fascinated by tragic art, ranging from modern reinventions of the tragic form like Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* to the common spectacle of celebrities spiraling out of control and taking their own lives. What hideous impulses are these that move us to take pleasure in a display of ultimate suffering?

When director Mel Gibson's R-rated *The Passion of the Christ* was released in 2004, it was a global sensation. Eleven years later it still holds two impressive distinctions as "the highest-grossing R-rated film. . . in the United States" and "the highest-grossing non-English language film of all time" (O'Neill 1). *The Passion* earned its R-rating for the graphic depiction of the flogging of Jesus by Roman soldiers. Many found this scene extremely disturbing and yet millions report overall enjoyment of the movie. Christians I know—myself included—make watching *The Passion* part of their yearly celebration. There must be value in witnessing such pain and death.

Aristotle's *Poetics*, written three hundred and fifty or so years before the birth of Christ, proposed that the purpose for viewing tragedy was the achievement of *catharsis*—a purging of the emotions of pity and fear. In order to achieve a successful purging, the central tragic figure had to be believably human; while he may be "highly renowned and prosperous," it was essential that he display some fatal human flaw (Aristotle n.p.). Oedipus, for example, has a horrible temper and one day he failed to keep it in check. Essentially, then, the tragic

figure needed to represent an everyman with whom the audience could identify in situations that mimicked the natural human condition.

However, as James Hammersmith points out, Shakespeare had most likely never read Aristotle's theories about tragedy (245). Hammersmith laments that so many of his students readily identify the Aristotelian tragic flaw of Shakespearean figures. He attributes this to A. C. Bradley's 1904 *Shakespearean Tragedy*, which, while acknowledging Shakespeare's tragedy was not Aristotle's tragedy, yet maintains a theory of the tragic figure as having a tragic trait. Rather than, as Aristotle's theory requires, a fatal flaw which causes his downfall, the Shakespearean tragic character is both his greatness and his downfall—a predisposition toward some particular direction (247). In Christian theology, all humanity possesses such a tragic trait: the irreparable curvature of our natures toward those things that work against the goodness and will of the Lord. As this perversity of nature remains common to the human condition, there is no mystery about why both Greek and Shakespearean tragedy concerns itself with pain, suffering, and death—even the death of innocence and innocents.

Tragedy forces the audience to confront the darkness, pain, and sadness which many might choose to ignore in order to build up the strength to overcome these situations in reality. According to Fred Alford, tragedy serves a well-defined purpose: to cultivate the civilizing emotion of pity. Alford, supporting the idea that tragedy is didactic in purpose, explains pity as "the felt connection to the suffering of others like oneself," or in a more modern term, empathy (271). Thus "the solution of the tragic poets to the riddle of civilization is pity"; a distinctly human quality that can first empathize with others, recognize the possibility of similar misfortune, and then offer to commiserate—to share pain (260). The purpose of sharing pain is to offer even the small triumph of human comfort in a world of misery.

Tragedy schools its audience on the proper application of pity so that the emotion does not overwhelm the reason.

Modern psychiatrists have studied, too, the question of why we enjoy tragedy. Judson Mills' "The Appeal of Tragedy: An Attitude of Interpretation," assumes that people who believed that empathy with the suffering of others was morally good would find tragedy more appealing than those who did not see value in empathy (255). An interesting element arose as a result of the sequence of the study. To avoid influencing the results, the subjects needed to be ignorant of what the scientists were actually testing. Therefore, the researchers could not measure subjects' self-described empathy until after the viewing of the sad and tragic films. Although Mills recognized that the self-described empathy was greater in subjects who had viewed the highly-tragic version of a film, he attributed this to the recent nature of the exposure (262). Mills failed to consider that an incidental effect of viewing tragedy inspires empathy in viewers. As we will see from Kathryn Reklis, long-term exposure to tragedies might develop an initial empathy into deeper felt connections, creating citizens who empathize better with the suffering of others by developing a tragic sensibility.

The strength to survive painful life-experiences comes from the development of a tragic sensibility, described by Kathryn Reklis:

> More than the overflow of spontaneous emotion, a "sensibility" might be imagined as a well-worn groove through which emotions flow. Not merely the heightened capacity to feel in general, a "sensibility" is more like a disposition, a formed capacity to feel or respond in particular. (42)

A tragic sensibility develops a socially determined set of emotional responses to the hopeless struggles of humanity against the harsh realities of life, regulated by the moral parameters of

the larger sensibility of which the tragedy is a part. The larger sensibilities can and do differ. For the Greeks, the larger sensibility was that of Fate, an understanding that despite one's best efforts, circumstance and/or the gods will not allow for a happy resolution of the aspect of the human condition within the play. For the Elizabethans, the larger sensibility included the parameters of Christianity.

However, before we wrestle with the truly complex question of what Christianity is, yet one more aspect of tragedy must be addressed. In my own paper, "*Hubris, Hamartia,* and Hope: The Tragic Vision of Aeschylus' *Oresteia,*" I argued that "while tragedy must deal with the nature of evil in the human condition, tragedy is ultimately about the restoration of hope and civilization—even at the cost of the hero's life" (Perez Lopez 1-2). Though tragedy is the destruction and terror of a maelstrom, waiting at the edge for the storm to spend its fury is light and the promise of restoration. Typical of Greek tragedies, *The Oresteia* is composed of three plays: *Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers,* and *The Eumenides.*

Each has its own tragic figure beginning with Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter, Iphegenia. Clytemnestra, mother of the murdered child, avenges Iphegenia in an attempt to atone for the wickedness of the sacrifice, but only succeeds in creating a new disorder: the murder of the king. Zeus orders Apollo to command Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, to avenge the murder of Agamemnon. Two murders are crimes; one is justice. The murder of Iphegenia was enacted to appease Agamemnon's pride, making it an offense to the gods. Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, while partially motivated by revenge for the loss of her daughter, was performed because she had a lover she wished to set on her former husband's throne, again tainting what she thought justice, making it sin. Only Orestes' murder

of his mother was achieved out of devotion to the gods and only this justice restores the house of Atreus, lifting it from its curse.

Not only does the god-sanctioned execution of Clytemnestra by her own son restore the house of Atreus, it also succeeds in crafting a future of hope and justice. However, once Orestes performs his duty as ordered by Zeus, he is attacked by an alternate system of justice: the Furies. To them has been given the task of persecuting murderers whose hands are stained with the blood of their family. Two competing systems of justice—a court system of reason and evidence led by Athena and the wild mob of howling dog-women Furies—find reconciliation through Orestes' actions and his piety. Thus I conclude:

> *The Eumenides* taken on its own does not strictly adhere to the genre of tragedy. The conclusion of *The Eumenides* is joyous. The Furies as agents of justice are welcomed happily into the worship of Athena and joined forever in hand with the new system of court justice. *The Oresteia* as a trilogy concerns itself with a vision of hope emerging from the tragic world. Only by atoning for the abomination—generally by the death of the offending party—can peace and order be restored. Civilization can only survive if atrocities are swiftly rectified, even at the cost of blood. Thus the death of the tragic hero is a sacrifice to the gods of civility, allowing the continuation of peace and the hope that mankind can change for the future. (Perez Lopez 13)

Tragedy is often awash with blood, suffering, and death. Yet it leads to restoration, hope, and the creation of a citizenry who will remember those mistakes and perhaps avoid the doom of repeating them.

It should begin to be clear that I believe the Christian vision compatible with the tragic one. However, we should define what is meant by *Christian* considering there are currently more than 43,000 Christian denominations globally (Shaffer 1). Naturally, during Shakespeare's time, there were far fewer, but this places us chronologically distanced from a meaning of Christianity as well. Modern strands of Christianity are very different from those of the early modern period. What, therefore, can I mean when I state Elizabethan sensibility was formed in part by Christianity? What does it mean to say that *Macbeth* is a Christian play?

Christianity in the Elizabethan period was emerging out of an often-violent upheaval caused primarily by two people: Martin Luther in 1517 and Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII in 1531. Luther, protesting Church practices, nailed his famed "Ninety-Five Theses to a chapel door in Wittenberg, Germany," beginning a movement that eventually gave rise to Protestantism (McDonald 1180). Henry VIII initially denounced Luther and wrote a tract against him which occasioned the pope, in 1521 to name Henry "'Defender of the Faith'" (1180). However, in 1527, Henry VIII began to suspect that the reason he was unable to achieve a male heir was that his wife was widow of his brother and Henry petitioned the pope to annul the marriage (1180). When the pope refused, Henry took matters into his own hands.

In 1532, English churchmen were required to "cede legislative and administrative control to the king" (1180). Two years later, Henry VIII was named the head of what was has been since known as the Church of England and to solidify Henry's authority over the church, the state began to dissolve English monasteries and acquire their lands and properties (1180). In 1538, English churches were required to replace their Latin Bibles with English Bibles (1180). Until 1549, however, most of the upheaval had been primarily political. It was in this

year that Edward VI, son and successor to Henry VIII, decreed a Protestant liturgy which was "laid out in *The Book of Common Prayer*" (1180-81). One major change had arisen, however, out of Henry's sea change: the private conscience. "The new faith encouraged everyone to take responsibility for his or her own spiritual health, without mediation" by priests, bishops, or the pope (1181). Because the Bibles were published in English, those who were literate could read them and those who were illiterate could have them read aloud in their native tongue. The Word of God was not only more accessible to everyone, it was also important that everyone take personal responsibility in understanding and following it.

But the fight over English Christianity was far from over. When young King Edward VI died after only six years in power, his sister Mary I took the throne in 1553 (1183). Mary revoked her sovereignty over the church, restored power to the pope, and changed all the English Bibles for Latin ones (1183). During her five-year reign, Protestants were executed for failing to revert back to Catholicism (1184). When Elizabeth I came to power, she undid Mary's religious changes and restored her father's Church of England with herself as its head. Because of the violence of Mary, private beliefs or interpretations of Christianity could quite literally get you killed. It was important to know which doctrines were approved beliefs and which were not—especially as the monarchy was changing so quickly from Edward's Protestantism to Mary's Catholicism, and back to Elizabeth's Protestantism. Elizabeth was also not above a little execution of Catholics so closet-Catholics under her reign were also living a life in danger of discovery (1184). Their faith in God was so important to them that most were willing to die rather than accept an alternative interpretation. This is an attitude which will most likely be foreign to my modern audience.

Another important change which arose as a result of this political and religious upheaval was the tendency to interpret Biblical stories along political lines of thought. Because church and state were one, "the monarch was depicted as God's deputy on earth" (1183). The new approved doctrines of the Church of England were called *Homilies* and emphasized social order and political authority as much as religion (1181). Foundational Biblical narratives like the fall of Lucifer were interpreted to demonstrate the dire consequences of defying God—and by extension, of defying God's deputy (1183). In *Macbeth,* the titular character's first sin and crime is the murder of God's appointed king and Macbeth is driven from power by God's next chosen king, Malcolm.

In light of this upheaval surrounding faith before and during Shakespeare's lifetime, there is difficulty in distilling Christianity into a few common tenets. Yet I will attempt to do so, knowing full well that any or all of the elements identified here have been rejected by varying sects. These are the elements of Christianity I feel are necessary to the discussion on hand about *Macbeth* which will help us determine whether it can be called a Christian play and what it means if we do.

A Christian world-view and hermeneutical lens entails the belief that God created the world and wrote the truth of His existence and His laws on the hearts of all human persons: "For when the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by nature the things conteined in the Law, they having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves, which shewe ye effect of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witnes, & their thoughts accusing one another, or excusing" (*Geneva,* Romans 2.14-15). Because all humanity springs from the mind and love of God, all humans are gifted with an innate Godly conscience. This means, for example, that when Aristotle identifies pity for the suffering of others as a moral good and a

fundamental virtue of civilization, he reveals a Judeo-Christian truth, despite the fact that Jesus had yet to be born on Earth. In essence, Christianity seems to incorporate ideas that arose in other religions both before and after the appearance of the Christ because those religions and philosophers had unwittingly uncovered truths of the one true God that had stood since Creation.

God is a God of love and forgiveness but only if an individual repents and petitions these things. Because of free will, the gifts of God's mercy and love must be willingly accepted by the individual; they cannot be forced upon him. Using our ability to choose, some choose to reject God and therefore bring about their own damnation. This choice in Christian drama is the site of tragic action: that because of choices, people God loves live outside His influence and are separated from Him in both life and death.

God is also a God of tough love. To understand the light, we must first experience darkness. So too, to understand the goodness of God, we must experience a life without Him. Sometimes the worst thing God does is take us seriously when we tell Him we do not need Him in our lives. The Fall of Humanity is a perfect case in point. Before disobeying, Adam and Eve lived in peace with nature and experienced a perfect existence without disease, death, or suffering: the habit of the Lord to walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden daily is the perfect metaphor of a life lived in harmony with the peace of God. One day, a lie was spoken and the man and the woman came to believe they knew better than God did what was best for them—that God's commandment to leave the forbidden fruit alone was evidence that God was not truly good. By disobeying, they sent a clear message that they felt no need for God's rules. After the Fall, men and women fell under the consequences of a life lived outside of the protection and goodness of God—He gave them what they wanted: a life in which they would

be responsible for setting their own rules and abiding by the consequences; a hard life of suffering.

God has imposed a limit on His own actions in the world known as the freedom of humanity's will. Because every human can choose to disobey, free will imposes limits on God's ability to act within the world—He cannot force people to do his will and cannot protect people from the inevitable consequences of choice.

Although modern American churches would prefer to forget it, God is also a God of judgment: "For the wages of sinne is death" (*Geneva,* Romans 6.23). Blood sacrifice is also important to both Judaism and Christianity. Returning to the Fall, we discover God making the first sacrifice. God had warned His children that if they disobeyed and ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die. Adam and Eve did experience an immediate death as they were cut off from God, the source of their life; this is spiritual death. To forestall their physical deaths, God sacrificed animals so that death—in the spilling of blood—would cover Adam's and Eve's sin. To enhance this metaphor, while the death covered their deed, the animal skins were used to physically cover their nakedness. As the Jews discovered, the displacement of the death sentence onto animals was not a permanent solution and could never atone for the weight of the world's sin. A more perfect sacrifice was necessary in the form of God's son incarnate in human form. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus was needed for the atonement of all sins.

The nature of humanity is inclined to choose sin over the good willed by God:

> For we knowe that the Lawe is spiritual, but I am carnal, solde under sinne. For I alowe not that which I do: for what I wolde, that do I not: but what I hate, that do I. If I do then that which I wolde not, I consent to the Law, that *it is* good.

> Now then, it is not more I, that do it, but the sinne that dwelleth in me. For I knowe, that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to wil is present with me: but I finde no meanes to performe that which is good. For I do not the good thing, which I wolde, but the evil, which I wolde not, that do I. (*Geneva,* Romans 7.14-19)

Despite a desire to act in goodness, our weakness in the flesh causes us to sin against God's desires. Bradley's theory of the tragic trait—that the tragic figure's predisposition toward a course of action acts as both his greatness and his downfall—is consistent with this Christian teaching.

Jesus was not born only to die. Christians are to study His life and His teachings so they may continue His good works. Unfortunately, all Christians are hypocrites. Because the nature of humanity is inclined to choose sin over the good willed by God, Christians often fail to live up to the standards set by the Christ. Much damage has been done in Jesus' name by those who act according to their flawed and self-serving human desires but who claim to be acting out the will of God. Christians are only flawed reflections and show truly Jesus only when they copy His behavior.

Christianity is concerned especially with human nature and the human condition, attempting to subvert the flaws in our nature to achieve the loftier goals set by Jesus for the overall improvement of the human condition. Further, the choices a person makes in the mortal world are the determining factors in their immortal destination. Therefore Christianity is not a religion solely concerned with a mysterious and perfect afterlife. Mortal actions are very important because of their immortal consequences.

With this groundwork of Christian theology in place, it may be demonstrated that the vision of *Macbeth* in this paper is compatible with viewing the play as a tragedy as well important to the continuing production and study of Shakespeare's *Macbeth.*

Christian Tragedy: Building a Virtuous Society

"What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes!
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red." (*Macbeth* 2.1.123-27)

Is tragedy incompatible with a religion which offers the gift of everlasting peace? Since Jesus offers final redemption and salvation, some argue that there can be no sense of tragedy, no sense of the impossible struggle of humanity against the crushing odds of the human condition in a Christian understanding of the world. If as Kathryn Reklis pictures it, "a tragic view of the world is one in which things do not work out well in the end, even, or especially for, 'good' people," how can Christianity, which promises forgiveness for even the most grievous sins, allow for a tragic view of the human condition? (39).

Building on Aristotle's definition, Reklis claims that the consensus among scholars for a definition of tragedy is as follows:

> [There is] a sense of struggling against fate, the awareness that good does not always triumph over evil or that even in doing good one may inadvertently do evil, and an overwhelming sense of sorrow at unjust human suffering, with no final redemption offered to transform or resolve the suffering. (39)

The tragic vision presupposes a world in which suffering is often unjust, evil more often than not triumphs over good, and despite the best of intentions, anyone can cause great evil in an attempt to do goodness. Does this sound incompatible with the world in which we find ourselves?

Joseph Schwartz attempts to reconcile the two seemingly antithetical views of the nature of the human condition in his article "Chesterton on the Idea of Christian Tragedy."

Schwartz explains that tragedy takes on an even deeper meaning when incorporated into Christianity. Claiming that Shakespeare's plays "were not written to illustrate Christian doctrine," Schwartz clarifies that as a writer, Shakespeare was responding "to centuries of Christianity in which he had been born, to certain forms and concepts regarding human experience such as love and goodness as held and proclaimed by Christian faith" (228). "A man's religious beliefs commit him to certain. . . beliefs, which lead to a recognition of permanent values with regard to God, man, nature, and society:" Shakespeare takes for granted a particular moral universe in which the rules of life are those defined by the most basic tenets of Christian doctrine (Schwartz 229).

Since art is an imitation of life, "in Christian tragedy everything counts; nothing is trivial or insignificant" (Schwartz 230). Because "human beings have immortal souls and the alternative between salvation and damnation is the final reality, . . . [and] because we are immortal, the stakes are the highest imaginable" (230-31). Therefore, the hazard of the Christian drama is far higher than in the Greek or secular visions of the human condition. The greatest tragedy for the Christian hero is not only the loss of his life, but also the loss of his eternal soul. Since the destination of the afterlife—an eternal paradise of peace and joy in the presence of God or an eternal, hopeless damnation of fire and suffering—is determined by the choices of the mortal life, all actions have potentially eternal consequences. Macbeth, as a tragic Christian hero, suffers the loss of his life and his soul.

Critics like D. Douglas Waters tend to disregard *Macbeth's* Christian dimension because they labor under the impression that Christianity and tragedy are incompatible. Water's book, *Christian Settings in Shakespearean Tragedies,* suggests an element of the Christian in Shakespeare's drama, yet Waters maintains *Macbeth* is a secular play. While

arguing for the play's secularity because there is no inherent Christian terminology, Waters claims the metaphor of the Fall of Man, in specific Christian imagery, remains *Macbeth's* main feature (141-73). Therefore, while the play contains no lesson plans on Christian doctrines, the main theme of the play is the trope of humanity's propensity to choose sin, or the recurring theme of the archetype of the Fall.

The archetypal image of the Fall occurs in Genesis with the Fall of Adam and Eve. Biblically, the same fall is echoed in the story of Cain, the story of the Flood, and in the story of Samson; it is the eternal story of the irreparable curvature of man's sinful nature. It is a central theme of the Judeo-Christian mythos and it seems to have been particularly interesting to Shakespeare, who used the concept of the Fall in *King Lear*, *King Henry VIII*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, to name just a few of his plays. Specifically in *Hamlet*, the fall imagery appears in Claudius' prayer scene.

The comparison of Macbeth to Claudius is apropos. Both Claudius and Macbeth perform the same crime for similar reasons. Both are offered opportunities to repent and mend the evil which they have unleashed on themselves and the polity. Dolora Cunningham compares Macbeth and Claudius:

> They cannot, as Claudius clearly sees, continue to eat their cake and be forgiven for having stolen it. In each case, the heart is so encumbered by the burden of its own fulfilled desires that it cannot be turned away from them….Claudius' failure to repent, like Macbeth's, hardens him to commit further evil actions. (42)

While Claudius has earthly desires which in some ways he feels validate his sin: "my crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" (*Hamlet* 3.3.55), Macbeth acknowledges that he has "no

spur / To prick the sides of [his] intent, but only / Vaulting ambition" (*Macbeth* 1.7.25-27). Furthermore, Claudius' reign is one in which people are free to carouse and drink merrily; while an ineffectual king, at least he never persecuted his people. Macbeth, having poisoned his soul, spreads his venom throughout his kingdom and becomes a despotic tyrant.

Waters states that Christian theologians are concerned only with "matters of grace," eternal damnation, and free will (151). He fails to recognize that neither individual Christians nor the Bard make claims of being theologians though we and Shakespeare are concerned with grace, damnation, and especially free will in the real-time of the mortal lifespan. Shakespeare's art utilizes the form of the tragedy to reveal elements of the human condition; this is the purpose of tragedy. It happens that the critical lens or the ideological framework for the examination of the human condition in *Macbeth* requires a Christian vision. God exists in the world of the play and sits in judgment of Macbeth's actions. To ignore the theology behind the play would reduce it to a senseless and useless bloodbath and noble Macbeth to an unfeeling butcher.

Waters' second objection against viewing *Macbeth* as a Christian tragedy focuses on the fact that the action of the play happens in the temporal realm of the mortal world, not the afterlife, so the play can have no Christian meaning (144). Waters argues that the events of the mortal world have no bearing on Christian meaning; for a tragedy to be Christian, it must deal expressly with the eternal fates of its characters. While Macbeth himself never uses the word Hell, the Porter's scene which contributes to the title of this work places Macbeth and his castle firmly inside a castle that, through the summoning of demons by his wife, has become truly a hell on earth. Macbeth also frequently hints that he is aware of the eternal consequences of his choice, both before the deed when he wishes to "jump the life to come"

and after when he laments his "eternal jewel / Given to the common enemy of man" (1.7.387, 3.1.66-67). What eternal jewel? Why, his soul—given over to the Devil through trafficking with witches and murdering the king.

There exists another objection against viewing Christianity and tragedy as compatible: the claim that "Christianity is concerned primarily with telling the story of God's action to the world"; the story of Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, and by extension, the final hope of humanity (Reklis 59). If Christianity is narrowly defined as Christ's personal story, tragedy is not possible in Christianity. The Jewish festival of First Fruits, celebrated on the first Sunday after Passover and the day Jesus rose from the grave, means that Death loses. All humanity has been released from the punishment of sin; this is far from tragedy. Yet the religion cannot be simply the personal story of the life of Jesus. Rather, it is a worldview which concerns itself with mortal humans, able in the mystery of their freedom to choose either salvation or damnation (Schwartz 230).

Unlike the Greek understanding of fate, Christianity allows for the perfect freedom of humanity as explained by Erasmus in *On the Freedom of the Will*. According to Erasmus' definition, the free will of man is a power gifted by the Creator, allowing people to make voluntary decisions as to whether they will apply themselves to salvation or to evil (*Freedom* 47). Since all people have free will, they are held personally accountable for their choices. In the Christian tradition, the only choice for salvation is accepting Jesus' sacrifice and seeking personal knowledge of him. Free will, the choice available to all humanity, which sanctions acceptance or rejection of salvation, allows for not only a religion of everlasting hope—antithetical to the tragic vision—but also for the possibility of choosing eternal damnation.

That individuals can willingly choose to reject Jesus is the epitome of a tragedy for those subscribing to the Christian worldview.

Macbeth is the man for whom no reason but "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself," willingly commits sins, willingly turns away from salvation, and experiences an immediate mortal punishment with a hint of the punishment to come. Therefore Waters' assertion, that *Macbeth* is concerned with the mortal world and cannot therefore have Christian meaning, is not in keeping with a Christian understanding of the world. Everything hinges on the actions of individuals during life, especially the blessings or curses humanity brings upon itself through its choices.

In fact, Waters' remarks on the conclusion of *Macbeth* unwittingly supports a Christian vision: "A life of suffering and a retributive death are parts of the inevitable consequences to Macbeth's disruption of natural order" (173). Even Waters' terminology "retributive death," "inevitable consequences," and "natural order" imply at the very least that there exists an order to the universe above the will of humanity (173). In a strictly secular play, an overarching order would be unnecessary; the very phrases Waters uses disprove his conclusion. In Christian doctrine, God has created the natural order and sets in motion the retributive death and inevitable consequences. The main tension, then, within Macbeth's mind is his struggle to renounce the reality that his mortal actions do have eternal consequences because God sits in judgment against him.

Waters' explanation of the cathartic effect of *Macbeth* also conforms to the Christian vision, claiming that while the punishments Macbeth suffers are pitiable and fearful, "our understanding of and emotional participation in Macbeth's criminal deeds" is "much more frightful and piteous" (173). His analysis of the cathartic effect on the audience exemplifies

the kind of moral lesson that Sir Phillip Sydney advocates as the main purpose of tragedy, and serves to underscore the Christian effect of the tragedy (117-18). *Macbeth* is not a sermon and does not claim to teach fundamental Christian doctrines or theology. In fact, as historian Nick Aitchison points out, Elizabethan and Stuart dramatists worked under strict censorship laws which prevented them from referring to religious issues (125). The underlying Christian theology of *Macbeth* is all subtext and metaphor to conform to the laws of the day. Rather, Shakespeare employs theology that his intended audience already took for granted in order to produce a specific effect: a fear of "our understanding and emotional participation" in the crimes and resulting effects of Macbeth's sin (Waters 173). In fact, for English Renaissance theorists George Puttenham and Sir Phillip Sidney, the purpose of tragedy was to demonstrate the earthly effects of crime to discourage the audience from committing similar crimes (Lemon 26).

Waters' objections demonstrate a distinctly modern idea: that religion is merely a set of moral ideals. For many Elizabethans and for practicing Christians of any generation, Christianity is not simply a generic code of morals or a collection of parables and ancient stories. All matters of life are colored with the particular sensibility of Christian teaching. From the meaning of relationships, to the purpose of a king, to the code of honor: all are understood through the laws of the Old Testament and the perfect example of Jesus Christ. As Erasmus states

> Do not think that Christ is found in mere ceremonies, that is, in precepts no longer seriously observed, and in the institution of the church. Who is a true Christian? Not just someone who is baptised or confirmed or who goes to

> mass: rather it is someone who has embraced Christ in the depths of his heart and who expresses this by acting in a Christian spirit. (*Education* 18)

The debate over whether tragedy can be Christian reduces Christian drama to reenactments of Biblical stories, or looks for specific doctrinal language or iconic symbols of the Church. Rather, as Erasmus teaches, the definition of a Christian entails certain spiritual commitments and loyalty to the Christian ethic in all aspects of so-called secular life; for the Christian, the secular does not exist. There is only the will of God and the work against God.

Therefore, according to Schwartz, it is not necessary for a Christian story to be about Christian figures; it must accept the Judeo-Christian mythos as a foundational truth and use Judeo-Christian theology to solve its problems (229). Reklis describes the Christian tragedy as the "awareness that we are capable of saying no to God in the mystery of our freedom," (55) which is validated by Bernad when he claims "the greatest tragedy" for Macbeth is that "having gained the world, he has lost his soul" (61). A thorough reading of *Macbeth* cannot be achieved without understanding that free will is at the heart of Macbeth's downfall.

What I mean, then, by Christian tragedy is the story of a person struggling to reconcile his or her own desires with the morality of the laws of God, choosing selfish interest over righteousness, and suffering the consequences of those choices. For the audience, the tragic character must inspire a felt connection; the audience must identify with him, sympathize with his difficult moral dilemma, and experience their own implication in his transgressions. Ultimately, the audience must see, by acting as witnesses to his suffering and the consequences of his choices, that a wrong choice no matter how well rationalized is still the wrong choice. The effects of the tragedy should inspire more compassion and empathy for each other as we all try to navigate difficult moral decisions and also arouse a little fear so

that next time when it is I making a difficult moral choice, I will succeed where Macbeth failed.

Macbeth as Christian Tragedy: Temptation and Fall

"Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his pent-house lid;
He shall live a man forbid:
Weary se'nnights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine." (*Macbeth* 1.3.19-23)

Now that we have established a working model of the marriage of Christianity with tragedy, I propose to demonstrate how *Macbeth* exemplifies this type of drama. First, the tragic character must fulfill a few qualifications. He must be believably human; that is, he must be a character who displays a capacity for moral virtue coupled with and at odds with a propensity toward his own self-serving goals at the expense of his morality. The audience must develop an attachment to him, must see him as a noble and valiant man, a man of character against whose example we should desire to measure ourselves.

From the very beginning of the play, Macbeth's is a name synonymous with blood but also with nobility and loyalty of character. The soldier calls him "brave Macbeth" as he describes his fearlessness in battle, "like valour's minion," who avenges his king's honor against the filthy traitor, MacDonwald (1.2.27, 30). To this, Duncan replies by calling Macbeth his "valiant cousin" and a "worthy gentleman" (1.2.35). Macbeth is also called "justice," and associated with two animals of nobility and strength: an eagle and a lion (1.2.40, 46). Before ever appearing on stage, all who know him testify to Macbeth's honor, loyalty, and prowess on the battlefield as Duncan's deadliest captain. He is a man other men would doubtless aspire to emulate.

He also is a different man than when Shakespeare found him. Rafael Holinshed's *Historie of Scotland* contains the source material adapted by Shakespeare for his dramatic purposes. In Holinshed's account, Macbeth's character falls short of these noble capacities.

Rather, Holinshed's Macbeth was born cruel, a remorseless killer. Of Macbeth's campaign against the rebel Makdonwald and his men, Holinshed explains Macbeth's reputation was so feared in the land that "the fame of his coming put the enimies in such feare, that a great number of them stole secretlie awaie from their capteine Makdonwald" (10).

As Makdonwald faced defeat, he fled to a castle wherein his wife and children waited. Makdonwald, aware that Macbeth would eventually take the castle, killed his own wife and children, then himself as an act of mercy. It were better his loved ones died at his hands than Macbeth's, though this did not protect Makdonwald from the wickedness of Macbeth:

> Makbeth entering into the castell by the gates, as then set open, found the carcasse of Makdonwald lieng dead there amongst the residue of the slaine bodies, which when he beheld, remitting no peace of his cruell nature with that pitiful sight, he caused the head to be cut off, and set upon a pole's end, and so sent it as a present to the king. . . . The headlesse trunke he commanded to bee hoong upon an high paire of gallowes. (Holinshed 11)

Holinshed's Macbeth displays no pity or human feeling—especially not fear. He knows only death and bloody-handed retribution. Morality is not a concern of this Macbeth.

Shakespeare's Macbeth displays a character of far more human complexity; he is a man of military prowess, and a standard of justice who yet has dark and sinister ambitions toward the crown. The great tension in the first part of the play is the struggle between his awareness of God's laws on his heart—his conscience or capacity for moral virtue—and his self-serving ambition, representing the darker propensity toward sin common to all people. His complex humanity presents itself also in his fears. Macbeth fears to violate his own moral code by murdering the king although apparently he had considered murder as a means to the

throne even before the action of the play begins. We can deduce this from two pieces of evidence. First, after the witches' prophesy his achievement of the thanage of Cawdor and of the kingship—and one of these comes true—Macbeth's aside reveals both his moral character and his secret speculative plan:

> Why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smother'd in surmise (1.3.210-217)

Never did the witches suggest murder as the means by which Macbeth would achieve the kingship. Why then does murder appear to be his only inclination? He claims the murder of Duncan was yet "but fantastical," indicating that he had already contemplated it before even meeting with the witches (1.3.215).

Second, Lady Macbeth reveals that the two of them had already considered the means by which Macbeth should attain the throne always led through the murder of Duncan. She worried, upon receiving his letter about the Witches, that her husband was "too full o' the milk of human kindness, / To catch the nearest way" to the throne; again, it is rather interesting that no one considers anything other than murder as the nearest way (1.5.293-95). During their lover's spat in scene seven, she berates him:

> Was the hope drunk,

> Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?. . . .
>
> What beast was't then,
>
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
>
> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
>
> And, to be more than what you were, you would
>
> Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place,
>
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
>
> They have made themselves. (1.7.415-16, 427-33)

How long ago was it that they first began to whisper to themselves? How long have they plotted that Macbeth should be on the lookout for a convenient time and place in which to secretly murder his king that he would be crowned in Duncan's place? They have thought about this at least since before Macbeth met the Witches.

And yet, his humanity can be found in the fear he expresses. It is one thing to whisper in the dark to your wife of ways by which you might make her queen; it is quite another to go through with something so against the natural laws of God. Macbeth's fear, if played well, should infect the audience with the moral horror he expresses in his speech of scene seven:

> He's here in double trust:
>
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
>
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
>
> Who should against his murtherer shut the door,
>
> Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
>
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
>
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues

> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off:
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind. (1.7.392-405)

Macbeth recognizes good reasons for restraining his desires. He is a man of moral character who understands fully the mortal, immortal, and social consequences of his choice. In fact, if not for his wife, he most likely would have convinced himself to repent of his potential wickedness and continued to serve Duncan as a loyal thane. Holinshed's Macbeth doubtless would consider fear of the deed pointless, nor would he have changed his mind once set because he knew murder to be wrong.

Macbeth's moral character is also enhanced by the character of Lady Macbeth. Set beside such a fiend-like creature, who could help but seem virtuous by comparison? Lady Macbeth's character lacks any humanity—at least for the first half of the drama. She seems even more malignant that the Witches, who by comparison are almost comical. Lady Macbeth calls upon demonic spirits to bless the murder of Duncan and hide it from the eyes of God; though she feels the need to ask the demons to unsex her and remove her conscience, there is no evidence that she had one from the beginning.

However, Shakespeare's Macbeth, being human, also has the capacity for great wickedness. Before he makes his final decision, the audience is reminded of this irreparable curvature of human nature by the comparison of Macbeth and the former thane of Cawdor.

Upon their first meeting, the Witches refer to Macbeth as thane of Glamis, a title he already owns; secondly as thane of Cawdor, relating the fate of Macbeth to the fate of the former thane of Cawdor (1.3.49). Echoes of the future persona of Macbeth can be found in the tale of the treachery of the former thane of Cawdor.

Significantly, Shakespeare uses the term "self-comparisons" to describe the meeting of Macbeth and the thane of Cawdor on the battlefield (1.2.56). At first, the line, "confronted him with self-comparisons" seems to enhance Macbeth's honorable nature; that the thane of Cawdor should have been as loyal to his king and country as good Macbeth (1.2.56). Yet the meaning of this line changes after Macbeth shows himself a traitor: suddenly this line ironically indicates that it is Macbeth who has followed Cawdor's example.

Malcolm's account of the execution of the former thane further enhances the importance of the comparison between Macbeth and Cawdor. Malcolm reports

> That very frankly he confest his treasons;
> Implored your highness' pardon; and set forth
> A deep repentance: nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it: he died
> As one that had been studied in his death
> To throw away the dearest thing he owed,
> As 'twere a careless trifle. (1.3.5-11)

Malcolm explains the former Thane of Cawdor freely confessed his treason, and begged pardon from the king in a way which revealed the thane had always had the capacity for honorable deeds. Malcolm laments that the thane had thrown away his honor and his life as though they were useless.

This short story of the death of the former thane is an example of a scaffold speech, a brief speech that a condemned prisoner would make from the executioner's scaffold to the crowd (Lemon 25). Rebecca Lemon summarizes the purpose of the scaffold speech:

> [Scaffold] speeches were meant to serve a didactic purpose. First, the spectacle of the prisoner on the scaffold itself instructed the audience to avoid such crime and its gruesome punishment. Second, the prisoner's speech often directly admonished the audience not to engage in criminal activity. (26)

Lemon finds in her research a substantial number of recorded scaffold speeches which were circulated around the country as a further means of dissuading people from committing crimes (33). Unfortunately, human nature being, after all, curved toward selfish interest, means that the warnings of scaffold speeches could not eradicate crime entirely. Scaffold speeches may not have been able to prevent all persons from committing crimes, but that did not prevent those in authority from continuing to use them as teaching aids.

J. A. Sharpe, like Lemon, surveys chapbooks that circulated in England before, during, and after Shakespeare's lifetime. While providing numerous examples of public executions and scaffold speeches, Sharpe summarizes the similarities he finds in numerous accounts of executions both of common men for common crimes, and of high-ranking men for crimes as important as treason. The purpose, according to Sharpe, of these dying speeches "was to remind spectators that the death of the condemned constituted an awful warning" (150). While Sharpe's main concern is how the warning applies to the ideological control employed by the ruling class, this awful warning was not merely political; there was an important religious aspect. Sharpe explains that most often, it was clergy who wrote and published chapbooks and who worked very hard to convince the criminals of the importance of

confession and the necessity of obtaining forgiveness before their death. Sharpe also notes that executions were highly ritualistic and often included religious sermonizing either by the convicted or by a member of the clergy (151).

Lemon also explains that for an English Renaissance theorist like Sir Phillip Sidney, the purpose of tragedy was also didactic, "cautioning its audience members against crime and tyranny" (26). Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is no different. The presence of a scaffold speech in the story of the former thane's execution should have caused Macbeth to think twice before committing treason himself, but as Lemon points out, this particular speech is ineffective for this particular witness (28). Macbeth ignores the lesson and in the end, pays for his treason with his life, just as the former thane of Cawdor did. The very tone of the play, the horrible effects of Macbeth's sin on both the man and the commonweal, indicate that the audience should learn from the mistakes of both the former and new thanes of Cawdor.

Despite Macbeth's honorable qualities, he also has a propensity to choose self-interest over honor. Another way to recognize this early on is by comparison with Banquo. Returning to Holinshed as Shakespeare's source material, we find a more drastic change in the character of Banquo. Historians today confidently assert that Banquo is an entirely fictional character who had been added to the story of the historical Macbeth by chroniclers whose work Holinshed used to write his own *Historie.* Yet during Shakespeare's time, it was widely held that the line of James traced itself back to Banquo and in both Holinshed's and Shakespeare's works, the Witches suggest Banquo's lineage will produce future kings for many generations. However, Holinshed's Banquo character is not nearly as honorable as Shakespeare's. Perhaps the saintly nature of Shakespeare's Banquo functions only as a shameless flattery of the king who claimed his proud lineage?

Yet even if the change in nature were motivated solely by the Stuart equivalent of brown-nosing, it also serves to more closely align the story of Banquo with the vision this paper espouses. Holinshed's Banquo is self-serving; though less murderously ambitious than his friend Macbeth, this Banquo first encourages and then supports the murder of Duncan: "At length therefore, communicating his purposed intent with his trustie friends, amonst whome Banquo was the chiefest, upon confidence of their promised aid, [Macbeth] slue the king" (13). This is hardly the saintly Banquo portrayed before his supposed descendant nearly six hundred years later.

The change Shakespeare makes in Banquo's character reforms him as a model of Christianity which casts a shadow over the more ruthless ambitions of Macbeth. In Christian philosophy, only one man has ever achieved sinless perfection: Christ himself. A Christian, therefore, is a constant hypocrite: a person committed to living a life modeled after the only perfect man, yet who, being human, constantly fails to live up to this expectation. Therefore we should not be surprised to find that even Shakespeare's Banquo expresses jealousy that the Witches do not promise him a good future and that he does request they give him a prophesy too. While commerce with witches is condemned by the word of God, Banquo's temptation and ambition cause him to fail to live up to the Biblical standard. To be human is to be fallible and Christians perhaps more so than others.

However, though Shakespeare's Banquo experiences this moment of weakness, he utterly fails to act upon it. Banquo recognizes these creatures as mouthpieces for the devil and knows better than to trust them (1.2.183). As in Holinshed, Macbeth tests Banquo's loyalty after receiving the thanage of Cawdor: "Do you not hope your children shall be kings, / When those that gave the thane of Cawdor to me, / Promised no less to them?" (1.3.194-96). Seeing

one prophesy come true, Macbeth becomes the voice of temptation to Banquo, testing his resolve and his loyalty to Duncan. Banquo answers

> That, trusted home,
> Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
> Besides the thane of Cawdor. But ‘t is strange:
> And oftentimes, to win us to our harm
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
> In deepest consequence. (1.3.196-202)

Macbeth finds this answer unsatisfactory; Banquo has ignored the question of the prophesy concerning his descendants entire and instead attempted to discredit the Witches—and by extension, the prophesies. Macbeth cannot gauge Banquo’s personal ambition or where his loyalties lie from this encounter.

He tries a second time: “Think upon what hath chanced; and, at more time, / The interim having weigh’d it, let us speak / Our free hearts each to other” and Banquo agrees (1.3.229-31). In the interval between this promise to speak more fully of both the fulfillment of one prophesy and the possibility of the others, many strange events occur which color the behavior of Banquo when he does get a chance to speak with Macbeth in Act II. We discover that the previous Thane of Cawdor was a skillful deceiver in whom Duncan had placed complete trust. As earlier argued, we are also aware of Macbeth’s treachery as he steps into the shoes of a traitor, though Duncan is again completely fooled. On the heels of one true prediction comes the destruction of the other for we also discover that Duncan has named his son, Malcolm, as his successor, making Macbeth’s kingship seemingly impossible. We also

meet Lady Macbeth, who, in comparison with even her warrior husband, seems an inhuman fiend, hell-bent and nearly mindless in her desire to murder Duncan. We see her summon demons, deny her own nature and that of her husband, brow-beat him until he believes that there are no alternatives other than regicide.

Perhaps most importantly, we learn to appreciate the humanity of Macbeth. Though from the first, his name is synonymous with death, it has always been in the course of justified warfare and not murder. He has ambition, true, but no greater than other men—even the good Banquo desires prophesies of future greatness for himself. Although through conversations with his wife we discover that he had already considered regicide, his soliloquys reveal a conflicted soul who recognizes the wickedness of murder. Between the promise to discuss these Witches with Banquo and the opportunity to do so, Macbeth's character emerges in opposition to his wife's as human but flawed—as we all are in the Christian vision. During this interval, Macbeth balks at the moral horror of murdering Duncan at least four times. However, by Act II, he appears to have finalized his decision to go through with it and this is the frame of mind in which he converses with Banquo.

Banquo, it seems, has also been contemplating these matters. Though he has not been privy to Lady Macbeth's conversations or Macbeth's darkest speculations, Banquo understands that temptations and ambitions are running rampant—even within himself. He finds sleep eluding him and walks, troubled, well past midnight, in a sky darkened by the sinking of the moon:

> There's husbandry in heaven,
>
> Their candles are all out. . .
>
> A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,

> And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers!
> Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
> Gives way to in repose! (2.1.4-9)

Even Banquo, the good Christian who knows the Witches do the Devil's work, feels his own thoughts betraying the goodness he strives to achieve. What thoughts are these he imagines and calls "cursed" (2.1.8)?

As he thinks them, he finds himself confronted by Macbeth, the only person with whom he can share his thoughts and his fears about the prophesies. During this exchange in the wee hours of the morning, Macbeth finally gets the evidence of Banquo's loyalties he needs to finalize his plans. When Banquo freely admits he had been dreaming of the Witches' words, Macbeth tries for the third time to tease Banquo's secret thoughts out of him: "If you shall cleave to my consent,--when 't is, / It shall make honour for you" (2.1.25-26). The response both disappoints Macbeth and stiffens his resolve to commit himself to the regicide: "So I lose none, / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / My bosom franchised, and allegiance clear, / I shall be counsell'd" (2.1.26-29). Banquo remains honor-bound to his king and his words are a warning to Macbeth that his morality, though perhaps tempted, remains firm. Shakespeare's Banquo, unlike Holinshed's, will not support Macbeth's intention to murder Duncan. He has learned that Banquo's heart lies with the light. He cannot trust Banquo to support him; the ambition of Banquo is tempered by too much Christian duty. Banquo's virtue seals his fate for his human frailty—these cursed thoughts—are turned to suspicion when Duncan's body is found.

Following the murder, the audience should feel even more pity, though mixed liberally with horror, for Macbeth's situation. Berated and cowed by a ferocious she-devil, Macbeth

performs the act which he had been nearly too afraid to mention aloud. Having done it, his fear increases. He laments that though he "had most need of blessing," he could not say "'amen'" (2.1. 96). This time he has an auditory hallucination: "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep nomore! / Macbeth does murther sleep'" (2.1.99-100). And again: "'Sleep no more!. . ./ Glamis hath murther'd sleep: and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!'" (2.1.105-07). When his wife reminds him that they need to make it appear the grooms had done the deed by returning the daggers and smearing the men with blood, Macbeth refuses to return to the chamber, afraid to remember the deed, never mind see it again (2.1.114-16).

However, to achieve the desired effect of tragedy, to achieve this pity and fear response, the audience must also be turned away from their initial sympathy of Macbeth. They must appreciate, with appropriate horror, the dire consequences Macbeth has brought upon himself. Then they must come to judge him for his sinful choice. To this end, we witness his horrible descent from a man of morality who could feel the moral repugnance against evil to a man willing to drench himself in innocent blood. In this, the Witches have a part to play and so we must discover their natures and their role.

The Witches are creatures of the spiritual realm, perhaps women aided by demonic powers or perhaps demons themselves. Walter Curry believes them to be the latter: "all of their really important actions in the drama suggest that they are demons in the guise of witches" (415). They refuse to be questioned and they release information as they choose, drawing Macbeth "on to his confusion," as demons are expected to do in Christian theology (3.5.29). As one might imagine, trafficking with such creatures was not recommended.

While the Witches foreshadow the treason of Macbeth with comparisons, they also tempt him with his own desires. Upon being called "king hereafter," Macbeth's mind automatically jumps directly to murder as the only means by which he will obtain the kingship (1.3.50). However, it is important to point out that the Witches never in any way suggest the method by which Macbeth's kingship may be attained. Since Macbeth and his wife have already planned to murder Duncan for the crown, the Sisters' prophesy validates their already chosen course of action and guarantees success. Macbeth's kingship is ensured by those who can tell the future and have already been proven to speak true with Macbeth's acquisition of the position of thane of Cawdor.

Also important is the difference between Macbeth's and Banquo's reactions to the Sisters. As Reid says, Banquo "is absolutely clear as to the unholy provenance of the witches and their wisdom," unequivocally identifying the witches as demons: "can the devil speak true?" (Reid 22, *Macbeth* 1.3.107). Later, Banquo cautions Macbeth that "oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence" (1.3.123-26). This echoes the story of the Fall of Man found in Genesis. The serpent deceives Eve by teasing her with partial truths, those "honest trifles" (1.3.125), and neither the serpent nor the witches present outright lies. They simply withhold crucial elements of the truth. In the Garden, the serpent tells Eve, "Ye shal not dye at all" and in a way it speaks the truth; Adam and Eve do not physically drop down dead on the spot and because they have immortal souls, they will never experience lasting death (*Geneva* Genesis 3:4). However, the serpent fails to mention that they experience an immediate spiritual death; that is the severance of their connection to God which provided them with

security and love. The murder of Duncan is a sin of a particular nature which Richard Waswo explains.

According to Waswo, the type of sin that Macbeth initially commits is an unforgiveable sin. Macbeth's conscious decision to ignore the moral code of God imprinted on his conscience becomes an unforgiveable sin. Basing his argument on St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, Waswo explains that a sin committed through reasoned choice is a direct sin against the Holy Spirit which resides in all persons (75). Macbeth has reasoned that the murder of Duncan is an absolute affront not only to the human laws of decency ("He's here in double trust"), but also to God, and yet he still chooses to murder his king (1.8.12, 25). Waswo explains that this type of sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable because this sin expels the Holy Spirit and leaves the sinner entirely unable to feel the necessary emotions that initiate genuine repentance and would therefore allow for forgiveness.

In order to fully understand this claim, Aquinas uses the Gospel of Mark: "Verely I say unto you, all sinnes shal be forgiven unto the children of men, and blasphemies, wherewith they blaspheme: but he that blasphemeth against the holy Gost, shal never have forgiuenes, but is culpable of eternal damnation" (*Geneva,* Mark 3.28-29). The note in the margin of the Geneva Bible explains further: "Which is, when a man fighteth against his owne conscience, & striveth against the trueth which is reveiled unto him" (*Geneva,* Note on Mark 3.28-29). In short, when a people know their choice is wrong but commit themselves to the choice knowing the consequence, they cast the Holy Spirit from their hearts, and lose the ability to recognize their own sinfulness so that they fail to recognize the need for repentance.

Aquinas then goes into detail to explain the effects of sin or "blaspheme" against the Holy Spirit:

> A disease is said to be incurable in respect of the nature of the disease, which removes whatever might be a means of cure, as when it takes away the power of nature, or causes loathing for food and medicine, although God is able to cure such a disease. So too, the sin against the Holy Ghost is said to be unpardonable, by reason of its nature, in so far as it removes those things which are a means toward the pardon of sins. (n.p.)

The sin that Macbeth initially commits, explained by Aquinas as sinning "through a certain malice, i.e. through the very choosing of evil," removes the benefit of the Holy Spirit from his soul (42685). This disease is incurable because it removes the means for forgiveness, not because forgiveness is impossible: "This does not, however, close the way of forgiveness and healing to an all-powerful and merciful God" but because Macbeth is now unable to feel genuine remorse and humility, he will not willingly choose repentance (Aquinas n.p.). This spiritual death, and inability to feel the proper emotional responses to his own sinful nature will prevent Macbeth from choosing to relinquish his crown and from choosing to ask for forgiveness. They will also lead him to die an ignoble death unworthy of the man he was before he murdered his soul.

The Wages of Sin is Death

"Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy." (*Macbeth* 3.2.19-22)

As soon as the Witches' prophesies are accepted by both Macbeth and his wife, nothing remains but to put the plan into action, and so falls the great hero of Scotland. The consequences of Macbeth's sin against the Holy Spirit which sever Macbeth's ties to God are immediate. The first outcome is what Reid calls, "the loss of benison" (29). Macbeth reports to his wife that even as he stood in the chamber with his hands drenched in the innocent blood of his king, he "could not say 'Amen'" (2.2.28). He bewails that he "had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' stuck in [his] throat" (2.2.31-32). Macbeth greatly fears this withdrawal of God's blessing, reading into this strange circumstance a fear of his damnation which is later confirmed by the appearance of the Ghost of Banquo (Myrick 232-33).

The second consequence of Macbeth's sin is his loss of security, explained through the motif of sleep as a representation of security and as a representation of the peace found in death. Macbeth feels the effects of sleeplessness and his loss of security throughout the entire play. The witches serve to foreshadow Macbeth's loss of security as embodied by sleep when they describe what they will do to a sailor:

> Sleep shall neither night nor day
> Hang upon his pent-house lid;
> He shall live a man forbid:
> Weary se'nnights nine times nine
> Shall he dwindle, peak and pine. (1.3.19-23)

Indeed, Macbeth is unable to rest or achieve peaceful sleep beginning with his commitment to the murder of Duncan. He lives "a man forbid," demonstrated when he tells his wife that his mind is filled with scorpions (1.3.21, 3.3.177).

The Witches' threat echoes eerily after Macbeth has murdered Duncan:

> Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
> 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. (2.2.32-42)

Here we have a flowery description of the importance of sleep and the body's and mind's great need for it. His description of sleep is so peaceful and alluring that the contrast with words like murder seems particularly horrible, as Macbeth will discover (2.2.35). Macbeth begins to be plagued by terrible dreams for the first time: "wicked dreams abuse the curtain'd sleep," contrasting again the restful quality of sleep to a violent disruption of that which should be the "balm of hurt minds" (2.1.50-51, 2.2.38).

This same voice continues: "'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more,—Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (2.2.41-42). After he is crowned king and he has his heart's desire, Macbeth still finds himself unable to sleep and is afflicted by "these terrible dreams that shake [him] nightly" (3.2.18-19). His wife tells him that he needs more sleep but to no avail for he has lost all sense of security and peace (3.4.42). According to Reid, "Macbeth lacks sleep because the whole natural rhythm of his life is dislocated"; this is an unfortunate side effect of sin: the loss of benison mentioned earlier (36).

Sleep is referred to as "the death of each day's life," but also as the "balm of hurt minds," as death becomes an ironic representation of security and peace for Macbeth (2.2.37-38). Lady Macbeth chides her husband for being afraid of the face of death by saying: "the sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures" (2.2.52-53). While Lady Macbeth wishes to avoid the grim reality of murder and death, Macduff's line, "shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit, / And look on death itself," serves to remind the audience that death is *not* sleep but an appallingly permanent dearth of life (2.3.78-79). For Macduff, death is a finality entirely different from sleep.

However horrifying to Macduff is the comparison between sleep and death, for Macbeth the equation of death with sleep comes to represent a peace he has trouble finding in life. He begins to envy those he has sent to death:

> Better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
> After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
> Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,
> Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
> Can touch him further. (3.2.19-26)

Macbeth's naked jealousy of Duncan negates any desire he may have had for the throne. Macbeth has dared the wrath of God and the kingdom to steal the crown but now finds the burden of his conscience too much to bear. He admits his mind is so tortured that he welcomes death as a final respite from his own punishing thoughts.

The jealousy of the peace of the dead is perfectly captured in Macbeth's famous soliloquy:

> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (5.5.19-28)

This soliloquy reflects the emptiness of life without God. It is the inevitable conclusion of atheism. Macbeth supposes there is no God, time is blind and cruel, life is meaningless, and *if* there is a God, he must be an idiot.

This despair of all life inevitably leads to his expressed desire for death and the peace that he associates with death: "I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun" follows "I have lived long enough… / And that which should accompany old age… / I must not look to have" (5.3.49, 22-26). "So barren is Macbeth now of humane feeling that...when he learns it is his own wife who has died, he can only shrug wearily over what he cannot feel, and then lament a life devoid of all human meaning" (Ramsey 298). According to Miguel Bernad, Macbeth succumbs to despair and finds a life without God is meaningless (61). His comparisons between life and the stage in this famous speech "express the meaninglessness of life to a man

who has…lost all" (Bernad 61). The only tragedy in a Christian vision of the world is a final failure to repent, resulting in eternal damnation.

In our theory of Christian tragedy, these consequences of sin on Macbeth's person alone constitute a dire warning. Because the audience still retains some sympathy with Macbeth, they can empathize with his suffering. However, they must simultaneously stand in judgment of him. He must reveal an attitude and behavior which cause the audience to disassociate from him.

Once Macbeth expels the Holy Spirit by sinning against his conscience, he begins to lose his humanity—he indulges in wickedness and loses his capacity for goodness. Having murdered Duncan, he does not hesitate to commit two more murders almost immediately, killing Duncan's grooms to prevent them from being questioned. Then, seemingly his first act as king is to deceive some unfortunate men and convince them to kill Banquo and Fleance for him:

> Have you consider'd my speeches? Know
> That it was he, in the times past, which held you
> So under fortune, which, you thought, had been
> Our innocent self. . . .
> How you were borne in hand, how cross'd; the instruments;
> Who wrought with them; and all things else that might,
> To half a soul, and to a notion crazed,
> Say "Thus did Banquo." (3.1.74-82)

Within the scope of the play it is impossible to know with any certainty who these men are and whether their initial suspicions—that Macbeth had been the reason for their

misfortunes—were justified. However, considering what we know of Banquo's upstanding character, we can be sure that Macbeth is lying to these men.

Yet it is the attitude of these murderers that is important here. Macbeth stirs their sense of outrage until they promise to kill Banquo no matter what the consequences:

> 2nd MURDERER: I am one, my liege,
> Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
> Have so incensed, that I am reckless what
> I do to spite the world.
> 1st MURDERER: And I another,
> So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
> That I would set my life on any chance,
> To mend it, or be rid on't. (3.1.106-12)

Their attitudes should caution the audience that these men deserve no other names than that of Murderer. They risk all to improve their stations and see only murder as the means by which they will achieve their desires. Does this sound like anyone else we have met?

Indeed Macbeth can now be described solely with the reductive term of murderer. The man we met in the opening of the play who was fearsome and bold with a capacity for honor despite his baser propensity toward self-serving interests has become a monster who uses the death penalty to simply eliminate the obstacles in his path. Like the story of the first sacrifice, blood must be spilled, the payment must be made. The payment for Macbeth's sin, were he to repent, would still be blood and Jesus would have paid the price for him. However, since Macbeth has not repented, his blood sacrifices are offerings but to the wrong god.

Duncan and Banquo are indeed sacrifices to a dark god of evil. Macbeth and his wife have trusted in the powers of darkness to achieve their desires. Thus these sacrifices, these innocents offered up to pay for Macbeth's crown, are a perversion of the freedom offered by God through the sacrifice of Jesus. The perceptive audience should recognize this demonic perversion as Macbeth changes from an honorable general to a wicked tyrant drenched in the blood of innocents.

His degradation is apparent in those moments in which he has the opportunity to stop this madness and make amends instead. Yet he always chooses evil. In scene two of act three, he has a chance. Although he knows he has already convinced two men to murder Banquo and his son, he has not yet sent them. There is still time to call them back. In speaking with his wife, even though it is his intention that Banquo will not attend the feast, he advises her to "let [her] remembrance apply to Banquo; / Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue" (3.2.171-72). He complains to her that Banquo may give them trouble and hints that he will solve that problem tonight. He ends with another resolution: although murdering Banquo and his son is wrong, he will proceed, for "things bad begun make themselves strong by ill" (3.2.196). Macbeth strengthens his resolve to act only in ways that serve his selfish interests despite their immorality.

After Banquo, Macbeth discovers a new target: Macduff has ignored an invitation to come to the banquet, arousing suspicion of his loyalty. We can see now that Macbeth has abandoned all of his former morality when he says

> I will to-morrow
>
> . . . to the Weird Sisters:
>
> More shall they speak. For now I am bent to know,

> By the worst means, the worst: for mine own good,
> All causes shall give way; I am in blood
> Stepp'd 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. . . .
> We are yet but young in deed. (3.5.352-64)

Although he can recognize that trafficking with witches is wrong ("by the worst means"), he no longer cares (3.5.355). He is willing to brave the destruction of anyone and everyone around him for his selfish desires. And, unfortunately, there will be no stopping him; he is determined to wade even deeper and no conscience or morality will deter him.

The Witches have another part to play in Macbeth's continual search for a peace which eludes him and in helping the audience to begin distancing themselves from him. Plotting the murder of Banquo, Macbeth says, "To be thus is nothing: / But to be safely thus," and as long as Banquo and his son live, Macbeth cannot anticipate feeling "safely thus" (3.1.41-48). Unfortunately, Fleance escapes and Macbeth's hopes for security are dashed again: "Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect. . .but now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears" (3.4.21-25). With his loss of security comes a growing loss of freedom; he has already lost his soul and he fears now the loss of his life so strongly that he desperately seeks solace in the untrustworthy Witches.

Hecate's scene is important for understanding why Macbeth seeks the Witches again. Hecate tells her sisters she has business in the air of "a dismal and fatal end," that she means to brew a potion so strong that it will

. . .raise such artificial sprites,

As, by the strength of their illusion,

Shall draw [Macbeth] on to his confusion:

He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear

His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear. (3.5.21, 27-31)

Hecate boasts that she will fool him with illusions and half-truths and Macbeth, desperate to convince himself that peace of mind is possible, will be so emboldened by the prophesies that he will feel invincible.

By the time he seeks them out, Macbeth is already one of the walking dead: a man who has willingly murdered his soul and severed nearly all connections to that which made him human (Walton 117). Thus the witches do not recognize him for man or even beast; he has become merely "something wicked" (Reid 38). It is at this point in his life that he shows his utter disregard for life:

—answer me:

Though you untie the winds, and let them fight

Against the churches; though the yesty waves

Confound and swallow navigation up;

Though bladed corn be lodged, and trees blown down;

Though castles topple on their warders' heads;

Though palaces and pyramids do slope

Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure

Of nature's germens tumble all together,

Even till destruction sicken,—answer me

To what I ask you. (4.1.51-61)

Witness the tyrant: the man who would be king proves his unfitness to wear the crown by placing his own selfish desire for personal security before the health of his polity. He dares the destruction of his entire kingdom simply for the means by which he "may tell pale-hearted fear it lies, / And sleep in spite of thunder" (4.1.85-86). He seeks the witches for security and finds it, for if "none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth," "then he need recognize no common denominators either of origin or of mortal vulnerability with his kind" (*Macbeth* 4.1.80-81, Ramsey 292-93). Thus Hecate's line: "security/Is mortal's chiefest enemy" is a reference to Macbeth's overconfidence which ultimately leads to his death (3.5.33-34). The three Apparitions the Witches raise for him contribute to his confusion and lull him into a false sense of security.

As this explanation confirms our theory of Christian drama, the audience should now feel more comfortable sitting in judgment of Macbeth's growing monstrosity. To seal his fate and to lose the audience's sympathy, his very next deed is his most wicked: Macbeth orders the murder of Lady Macduff and her children. Until now, Macbeth has only killed grown men who were rivals to his power. Now he shows his black heart and proves he is no longer fit to live. Macbeth must be stopped.

Even he recognizes it. He has signed his own death warrant and life has lost all joy. In the end, Macbeth succumbs to fear, hopelessness, and apathy:

I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf:
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have; but, in their stead,

Curses not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not (5.3.131-38)

Though it is impossible to tell Macbeth's age, most productions place him as younger than Duncan and somewhere in his early thirties to late forties. He has not yet reached middle age and already he tires of living. Macbeth has achieved everything his heart desired but to do so, he has lost himself. His dreams have yellowed like an autumn leaf and he has been left with nothing.

For Macbeth and his wife, those repercussions of sin truly do become "a horror beyond expression" (Schwartz 235-36). *Macbeth* is the perfect example of a true Christian tragedy in which a great and noble man chooses to succumb to temptation and then suffers the effects of "the inner tragedy of the sinner's life" (Cunningham 41). Cunningham's "inner tragedy of the sinner's life" is the guilt, disconnection, loss of security, and fear which plague the unrepentant sinner (41). This spiritual death which causes Macbeth's dreams to turn to ash in his mouth leaves him with only empty bitterness against a God he no longer believes in, so that he imagines life to be "a tale / Told by an idiot. . . signifying nothing" (5.5.219-20). Finally, confronted by Macduff who fulfills the final prophesy that "none of woman born" shall have the power to harm him, Macbeth dies a monster's death (4.1.76).

These are hard lessons. In Christian tragedy, the audience learns first to recognize themselves in the character of Macbeth, then to empathize with his fear and the torment which arose as a natural consequence of his sin, and finally to judge him worthy of death. The audience's emotions of pity and fear have been evoked and finally their sense of justice prevails with the traitor's death. Yet the drama of *Macbeth* is not limited solely to the spiritual

death Macbeth brings upon himself. It also includes the devastating effects his sin has on the entire nation of Scotland.

Macbeth's Christian Universe

"Thou canst not say I did it: never shake
Thy gory locks at me." (*Macbeth* 3.4.269-70)

While the critics were debating how and why *Macbeth* could represent a Christian tragedy, a school of thought arose that considered *Macbeth* in light of medieval dramatic traditions. Edwin Hunter sought to demonstrate that *Macbeth* should be viewed as a morality play. Morality plays, like the *psychomachias* which had preceded them, intended to dramatically portray the struggle of the soul between good and evil (Spivak 83). The action of morality plays does not occur in the realm of reality, but rather in a landscape of the soul; the spiritual conditions of humanity such as Vice, Goods, Greed, or Sloth, among others, appear personified onstage. According to Rainer Pineas, morality plays taught "the way to heaven, a path paved with the sacraments of the Church. . . and taught men to avoid. . . the evil of neglecting the sacraments and committing any or all of the Seven Deadly Sins" (157). Morality plays demonstrated basic Christian theology, especially the means of salvation, to a public who may never have been able to read the Bible for themselves (Pineas 157).

This is not, however, the goal of Shakespearean drama. Explicit Christian terminology and lessons about the doctrines are missing from *Macbeth* in the overt forms in which they appeared in the earlier morality plays. One reason for this, as Nick Aitchison explains, was the Elizabethan and Stuart censorship laws which prohibited religious expression onstage (125). While *Macbeth* does borrow much from the tradition of the morality plays, Shakespeare lives in the age of Christian humanism, a movement which brought the focus of religion back to the everyday mortal life and the drama of the soul into the realm of reality.

Thus the setting of *Macbeth* remains firmly Scotland and England, not as Richard Ide claims, Macbeth's soul. However, this vision of Scotland does not conform to a secularist

view: the main characters all believe they exist within the realm of the Judeo-Christian world. While attempting to ignore its existence, Macbeth himself declares the existence of the "life to come" as he imagines somehow avoiding its judgments (1.5.7). Banquo, the Old Man, Lennox, Malcolm, Macduff, the English King, the Gentlewoman, the Doctor, and Lady Macbeth also use language which indicates they believe they are living in the Christian world and subject to the order of God. That these characters believe in the existence of an ultimate Creator God is evident in their diction: Malcolm claims to abide in "Christendom," the Old Man blesses Macduff by saying "God's benison go with you," and the Doctor calls, "God, God forgive us all" to state a few examples (4.3.191, 2.4.40, 5.1.75)

Not only do the characters believe they inhabit a Christian world presided over by God, but the world of the drama provides clues as well. Evidence of what has been reductively referred to as the supernatural abounds in *Macbeth,* beginning with the Witches. Kenneth Myrick explains the role of the witches within the play:

> Explicit allusions to the fate of souls after death are fewer in *Macbeth* than in *Othello* or *Hamlet,* but they are implicit in all the activities of the Weird Sisters. Whatever the precise nature of these beings, traffic with them would be instantly recognized in Shakespeare's day as a damning sin. . . . Such demonic beings were thought by Christians to have no power to decree the future or destroy man's free will. . . [but] were armed with power to foresee the future and allure [Macbeth] with false appearances. In this menacing atmosphere of the supernatural, the brief allusions to the state of the soul after death take on a profound imaginative force. (230-31)

Myrick reasserts Waters' claim that the terminology of damnation is simply not prevalent in the play, yet Myrick finds that the very presence of the witches and their numinous powers suggest the existence of an afterlife and therefore the possibility of eternal damnation.

While Myrick focuses on the witches, Richard Ide argues that the suggestion of an afterlife is best expressed in the ghost of Banquo. Ide explains:

> The ghost symbolizes more than its royal offspring. Macbeth refers repeatedly to Banquo's fearful resurrection from the grave (III.iv.70-72, 78-82, 92), for the ghost represents proof and embodiment of the life-after-death which Macbeth is so anxious to deny (III.iv.69, 92-94, 105-06). In fact, in the tragic hero's psyche, Banquo came first as an accusation at a tribunal of judgment. (352)

Between these two critical theories, the presence of the Witches confirms the existence of the world beyond and the appearance of the Ghost of Banquo proves that there is an afterlife. As Ide claims, Macbeth fears the judgment that Banquo's return represents (352). As king in a secular world, Macbeth's own code of moral laws would be the highest standard by which he may be judged, yet he fears a judgment higher than his own.

Besides witches and ghosts, the unnatural, or the numinous, also takes the form of the classic struggle between darkness and light. In the Christian teachings, light symbolizes Jesus: "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the worlde. He was in the worlde, and the worlde was made by him" (*Geneva,* John 1.9-10). Darkness is the world without the order and grace of God, it is what exists before the making: "And the earth was without forme & voyde, and darkenes was upon the depe" (*Geneva,* Genesis 1.2). This distinction is borne out by the way characters appeal to either power. For Duncan, Macbeth,

and Banquo, the light of the stars symbolizes heaven's goodness and security (*Macbeth* 1.4.41). Macbeth implores, "Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires," begging the light, as representative of God, to ignore the evil in his heart (1.4.50-51).

In the first scene of Act II, Banquo calls the stars candles while bemoaning the treacherous dream he had earlier the same night (2.1.5). The stars symbolize the goodness of God as they illuminate Banquo's path and assist him in turning from the temptation of his dream. Lady Macbeth also fears that God may bear witness to her and her husband's crimes unless she calls upon the powers of darkness to help her:

> Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
> Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark. (1.5.51-54)

Of the previous quote, B. L. Reid says Lady Macbeth "invites the night, by covering the deed, to make an insane cancellation of its reality" (25). Both Macbeth and his wife summon "the fitting atmosphere, the shrouding and amoral night, to divide both the crime from view and the guilt from the heart" (Reid 23). Lady Macbeth both requires the night to hide their deeds and attempts to order God to remove himself from their location, leaving the void of darkness in His place.

Two visions of Macbeth's fortress emerge from scene five to scene six of Act I. First, there is Lady Macbeth's prayer to the "murd'ring ministers":

> Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full

> Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief! (1.5.39-53)

Jarold Ramsey and J. K. Walton approach this prayer to demonstrate the terrifying power of Lady Macbeth's iron will; her desire to unsex herself they use as proof that the concept of manhood in *Macbeth* has been perverted by this fiend-like woman. However, as Walter Clive Curry attests, this passage suits better a discussion of the darkness which Lady Macbeth calls upon to hide the murder from the eyes of God. Curry's argument is that Lady Macbeth "is possessed of demons" and notes that she invokes spirits and "murd'ring ministers" rather than an amorphous ideological evil (420, *Macbeth* 1.5.49). These are demons she summons. Therefore the battlements of Lady Macbeth have become "a charnel house of ravens, hell smoke, night," and swirling demonic forces (Reid 25-6).

This same fortress, which has become a second home for the denizens of Hell itself, is described by Duncan in the following scene as pleasing and even heavenly. Duncan and Banquo see goodness for it shines in their hearts:

> DUNCAN: This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.

> BANQUO: This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his lov'd mansionry, that the heavens' breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed
> The air is delicate. (1.6.1-10)

There is falsehood and trickery here. This same castle, home to invisible evil spirits, is haunted also by the same bird who symbolizes the purity of the Church. Such a pleasant description of such an evil place echoes Lady Macbeth's previous instruction that her husband "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't," which had appeared only eight lines pervious, and the Lady's summoning of demonic powers had occurred a paltry twelve lines before that (1.5.67-8). Not only do the faces of Macbeth and his Lady hide the evil intentions beneath, but even the atmosphere of the castle does not betray the truth of the darkness that now lies within. Yet following the murder of Duncan, the world itself will quickly begin to manifest the spiritual evils of this pair to echo the poisonous effects of their sins on Scotland.

False seeming—an outer beauty masking an inner wickedness—is another recurring Christian motif, though doubtless it appears in other schools of thought as well. Here, in Ezekiel, it applies to the angel Lucifer, the most beautiful and wisest of all God's angels:

> [Thou] art full of wisdom and perfect in beautie. Thou hast bene in Eden ye garden of God: every precious stone was in thy garment, ye rubie, ye topaze &

> the diamód, ye chrystle, ye onix, & the jasper, ye sapphire, emerald, & the carbuncle & golde: ye workemanship of thy timbrels, & of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that ye wast created. Thou art the anointed Cherub, that covereth, and I have set thee in honour: thou wast upon ye holy mountaine of God: ye hast walked in ye midst of the stones of fyre. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, til iniquitie was founde in thee. (*Geneva Bible* Ezekiel 28:12-15)

Lucifer himself was the most beautiful of all the angels. To look upon him, none would suspect the darkness which lurked in his breast. Shakespeare does not err when he has Lady Macbeth reference serpents; it is in this guise that Lucifer first tempted humanity away from the harbor of God's presence.

Darkness is crucial for Macbeth as well as his wife; while plotting with the Murderers, he cautions them to wait until the night has fallen to kill Banquo and Fleance (3.1.130). Waiting for darkness and the return of the Murderers, Macbeth cries:

> Come, seeling night,
> Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
> Which keeps me pale!—Light thickens; and the crow
> Makes wing to th'rooky wood:
> Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;
> Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse. (3.2.187-94)

Macbeth begs the night to hide the eyes of day, or God, with bloody hands, associating darkness and night with wickedness and murder. Furthermore, Macbeth summons the powers of darkness to suppress his conscience—"that great bond / Which keeps me pale" (3.2.48-9). Hoping to draw strength from the anonymity of darkness, Macbeth prays for the will to ignore the warnings of his guilt, just as his wife, in her attempt to unsex herself, asked demons to "stop up th'access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature" would stop her plans (1.5.43-5).

Christian doctrine teaches that God invented the rules by which the universe functions, especially the laws of morality by which God judges all things accordingly. These rules are knowable by all people; while God's moral laws are found primarily in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, these rules are also written on the hearts of all people:

> For when the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by nature the things conteined in the Law, they having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves, which shewe ye effect of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, & their thoughts accusing one another. (*Geneva,* Romans 2.14-15)

Both Macbeth and his wife recognize their conscience as an aspect common to all humanity, consider their inner moral compass a hindrance, and strive to break free from the binding laws of God.

Thus, when confronted by the Ghost of Banquo, Macbeth cannot understand why darkness has been unable to hide this sin. He laments that "the time has been, / That, when the brains were out, the man would die, / And there an end; but now they rise again," and rails at the Ghost of Banquo: "Avaunt! And quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!" (3.4.78-90, 93).

But the horrible truth which dawns on Macbeth is that the earth and darkness cannot hide his treason and his sin. Not only is he doomed to punishment in this life, but he recognizes he is also doomed to it in the afterlife. Banquo's Ghost, as Ide indicates, is a warning of the extension of life after death, and a veiled threat signifying Macbeth's damnation (352). Even more horribly, Macbeth has murdered his conscience, his last remaining connection to the bonds of humanity, and has doomed himself to wander "a limbo all [his] own, forever alien to the times and ways of men" (Reid 28). "For what avatageth it a man, if he winne the whole worlde, and destroye himself"; Macbeth reaches for the world and loses himself, leading to a loss of security and essential human connection (*Geneva,* Luke 9.25).

The Transpersonal Nature of Tragedy:
The Infection of Sin

ROSS: "And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and certain),
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would
Make war with mankind."
OLD MAN: "'T is said, they eat each other." (2.2.296-300)

However, the darkness does not just infect the souls of Macbeth and his suicidal wife. The darkness and the consequences of Macbeth's sins come to infect the entire polity. Numerous references to both atmospheric and social conditions attest to the transpersonal nature of the tragedy. According to Christian teaching, humans are gifted with a three-fold nature: body, or the flesh; mind, which is the consciousness; and spirit: the soul which is immortal and belongs by nature to the realm of the spiritual (Waswo 71). Humans live simultaneously in both the physical and spiritual worlds. Actions by humans in the flesh can create spiritual diseases in themselves and others which may in turn manifest in the physical world. Both Dolora Cunningham and Miguel Bernad emphasize the Christian concept that sin acts similar to a disease in the polity and especially in the soul and mind.

For example, Lady Macbeth's grim prophesy in reference to Duncan waking in the morning, "O never shall sun that morrow see." is fulfilled when, following the death of the king, Ross and the Old Man discuss a day over which the sun refused to show its face (1.5.62-3):

> Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
> Threatens his bloody stage: by the'clock 'tis day,
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:
> Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,

That darkness does the face of the earth entomb,

When living light should kiss it? (1.4.5-10)

Literally the sun has never seen the day Duncan woke, for Duncan will never wake again. Despite the hour, the sun has not risen on Scotland, symbolizing the loss of a benevolent king, the rise of a tyrant, and God's withdrawal from the affairs of Scotland.

Yet this is not the first unnatural occurrence to disrupt the God-forsaken land:

LENNOX: The night has been unruly: where we lay,

Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,

Lamentings heard i'th'air; strange screams of death;

And prophesying, with accents terrible,

Of dire combustion and confused events

New hatched to th'woeful time: the obscure bird

Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth

Was feverous and did shake. (2.3.55-62)

It seems a wonder Lennox would have waited for morning before entering the castle if such disturbances prevented rest that night. Further, strange omens in the animal world abound: "a falcon, towering in her pride of place / Was by a mousing owl hawkt at and kill'd," and Duncan's horses run wild until, horribly against nature, they *eat* each other (2.4.12-18). The heinous murder of the pious King Duncan by Macbeth in the demon-infested castle has set off incredible supernatural events that strain credulity. Macbeth has disrupted nature herself.

Poetically, the Third Apparition forecasts the means by which the darkness infecting Scotland will be purged using nature herself: "Macbeth shall never vanquisht be, until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him" (4.1.92-94). To which

Macbeth, who has lost all connection to humanity and to God, who has lost the ability to comprehend this prophesy, replies

> That will never be:
> Who can impress the forest; bid the tree
> Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements! Good!
> Rebellion's head, rise never, till the wood
> Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth
> Shall live the lease of nature. (4.1.94-99)

Having denied God, Macbeth cannot imagine a power in Scotland capable of moving the forest. The last line is particularly ironic for he surely will live only to the lease of nature: the natures of men who will not suffer a tyrant to hold their people in thrall.

Chapters eight through eleven of Ezekiel tell a tale of Israel's growing immorality as they turned from the will of God. With their multitudinous sins and abominations, they slowly cast God out of their secular spaces, then out of the outer temple, then from the inner sanctuary, and then from Israel herself: "The iniquitie of the house of Israél, and Judáh is exceeding great, so that the land is full of blood & the citie full of corrupt judgement: for thei say, The Lord hathe forsaken the earth" (*Geneva,* Ezekiel 9.9). So too does the corruption and wickedness of King Macbeth cast God out of Scotland. Life in this country surpasses our capacity for imagination:

> Each new morn
> New widows howl; new orphans cry; new sorrows
> Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
> As if it felt with Scotland, and yell'd out

Like a syllable of dolour. (4.3.5-8)

Macduff reports the country as bleeding, to which Malcolm replies, "I think our country sinks beneath the yoke; / It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash / Is added to her wounds" (4.3.39-41).

The barren and miserable Scotland's state of affairs is further verified by the arrival of Ross:

Alas, poor country,—
Almost afraid to know itself! It cannot
Be call'd our mother, but our grave: where nothing
But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile;
Where sighs, and groans, and shrieks that rent the air,
Are made, not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems
A modern ecstasy: the dead men's knell
Is there scarce askt for who; and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or e'er they sicken. (4.3.164-73)

Under Macbeth's tyranny, the air is filled with cries of pain and torment, recalling Dante's vision of Hell in the *Inferno*. So many die that apathy has settled over the people; they no longer question after the identity of the dead. Macbeth holds his commonweal in this Hell on Earth.

One question at issue during this time period was the nature of kingship. Nearly one hundred years before *Macbeth*, Desiderius Erasmus published a treatise called *The Education of a Christian Prince.* In this work, Erasmus relies on classical writers, like Plato, Isocrates,

and Aristotle, as well as Christian philosophies to paint a picture of tyranny set against right kingship. As Macbeth becomes a monster, Erasmus' tyrant too is monstrous:

> A terrible, loathsome beast: formed of a dragon, wolf, lion, viper, bear, and similar monsters; having hundreds of eyes all over it, teeth everywhere, fearsome from all angles, and with hooked claws; having a hunger that is never satisfied, fattened on human entrails and intoxicated with human blood; an unsleeping menace to the fortunes and lives of all men, dangerous to everyone especially to the good, a sort of fateful blight on the whole world, which everyone who has the interests of the state at heart curses and hates; intolerable in its monstrousness and yet incapable of being removed without great destruction to the world. (27)

The physical beastly attributes enhance the horror of the tyrant; these are metaphors of his lust for power, wealth, territory, and security. Notice that Erasmus also sees the acts of the tyrant as effecting the whole world as a blight.

The spiritual and physical ramifications of the wickedness of Macbeth are possible only within a Christian vision of the world. Who else can darken the sun so she does not have to witness Duncan's silver blood stain his skin? Not only have the people of Scotland turned against Macbeth, but God has done so as well. As Jane Jack explains, "the punishment for false allegiance involves the whole people and is directly ascribed to God's angry intervention or the withdrawing of his protection" (180). Macbeth's transgressions act like a poison, flooding the kingdom with supernatural darkness and evil. The forest marching to end his tyranny is both a clever ruse and a reassertion of the power of God as Ruler and Creator of Nature.

Truly God moves against Macbeth to restore His peace over Scotland. A very brief history lesson is necessary here to illuminate the significance of the English kingship of Edward. Briefly mentioned in the Holinshed account of Macbeth's ascension and rule is Edward's kinship: "Saint Edward the sonne of Ethelred recovered the dominion of England from the Danish power" (13). Just as Scotland is ruled by a false king in Macbeth, England has been ruled by the Danish king—a usurper. Edward is described as a saint, indicating both his high moral character as a representative of Christ on Earth and his righteous rule, sanctioned by God.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* this saintly nature takes the form of a healing touch. In scene three of Act IV, Malcolm and an English doctor discuss Saint Edward's healing powers:

> DOCTOR: There are a crew of wretched souls
> That stay his cure: their malady convinces
> The great assay of art; but, at his touch,
> Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,
> They presently amend. (4.3.367-71)

Sanctioned by God, King Edward heals people miraculously. The disease, called "the evil," cannot be cured by doctors but by the fervent prayers of God's appointed king (4.3.372).

Malcolm, who has witnessed the healings, elaborates:

> A most miraculous work in this good king:
> Which often, since my here-remain in England,
> I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
> Himself best knows: but strangely-visited people,
> All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,

> The mere despair of surgery, he cures;
> Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
> Put on with holy prayers: and ‘t is spoken,
> To the succeeding royalty he leaves
> The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
> He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy;
> And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
> That speak him full of grace. (4.3.373-85)

Theories of kingship were popular in Shakespeare’s day. Even King James I had published a treatise on kingship. The powers of King Edward, by their supernatural force, mark this king as God’s chosen representative. He can heal by the power of God and has the gift of prophesy. Because he works God’s will, he and his kingdom are blessed while Macbeth, who defies God’s will curses himself and his kingdom.

Returning to *The Education of a Christian Prince,* we can achieve a clear vision of what it means to be God’s representative on earth as king. One prerequisite for Godly kingship, naturally, is “constantly absorbing” the teachings of Christ so that the king “loves and honours virtue as the most beautiful thing of all” and “the greatest source of happiness” (Erasmus 13). Therefore, “a beneficent prince, as Plutarch said with all his learning, is a kind of living likeness of God, who is at once good and powerful. His goodness makes him want to help all; his power makes him able to do so” (22). Saintly King Edward’s Christian duty towards his people is thus revealed in the treatment of the disease and because of his power in England and his Christian desire to work God’s will in the world, Edward is in a unique position to help Malcolm restore God’s kingdom in Scotland.

Because of King Edward's righteousness, he functions as the hand of justice against Macbeth. He cares for Prince Malcolm:

> The son of Duncan,
> From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
> Lives in the English court; and is received
> Of the most pious Edward with such grace,
> That the malevolence of fortune nothing
> Takes from his high respect. (3.6.424-29)

He also offers the warrior leader of Northumbria, Siward, with an army of ten thousand men to roust Macbeth from Malcolm's throne (4.3.360). God has withdrawn from Scotland to England where he marshals the king of his choosing, Malcolm, and the armies of His servant, Edward, to bring justice to the suffering of Scotland.

Recalling our earlier discussion of tragedy, we must find that a Christian tragedy ends with the restoration of civilization and peace to a world disordered by the actions of the tragic figure. This can only be achieved in Christian tragedy by removing Macbeth's tyranny and replacing it with a king who can function as God's representative on Earth, Malcolm. In an effort to test Macduff, Malcolm bears false witness against his own character, portraying himself as more wicked than Macbeth in lust for women, wealth, and power. Yet this is all pretense intended to test Macduff's true loyalties and once Macduff turns away from a Malcolm he feels would be an even worse king for Scotland than the one they have, Malcolm reveals his true honorable nature:

> I am yet
> Unknown to woman; never was forsworn;

> Scarcely have coveted what was mine own;
> At no time broke my faith; would not betray
> The devil to his fellow; and delight
> No less in truth than life: my first false speaking
> Was this upon myself: what I am truly,
> Is thine, and my poor country's to command. (4.3.351-58)

He is a virtuous man, called by God, and like Christ, views himself as a servant of his people rather than their ruler.

Another ill of Macbeth which must be rectified to restore God's kingdom is to cleanse Scotland of the sacrifices of blood Macbeth offered to his own dark god. As Erasmus explained, one of the troubles with tyrants is that removing them will cause "great destruction to the world"; many will suffer both under his tyranny and in the course of removing him from power (27). Macbeth, spilling the blood of innocents to cover his crime, has poisoned Scotland with tainted and wicked offerings. Only the offer to sacrifice oneself can cleanse the polity. As Jesus laid down his life for all humanity, so Malcolm, Siward, Macduff, Menteith, Caithness, Angus, Lenox, and the unnamed soldiers in Malcolm's avenging army offer themselves as a sacrifice to God's will: "To give obedience where 't is truly ow'd: / Meet we the medicine of the sickly weal; / And with him pour we, in our country's purge, / Each drop of us" (5.2.104-7). Siward's own young son, pays the blood price for his righteousness as he dies at the hands of the tyrant himself and Siward proclaims: "Why, then, God's soldier be he!" (5.7.330).

Macduff and Macbeth fight offstage and Macduff returns bearing the tyrant's head, proclaiming "Hail, king! for so thou art: Behold, where stands / The usurper's cursed head:

the time is free" (5.7.337-38). The world has been released from the bondage of Macbeth's tyranny and Malcolm is free to take the kingship. His first act as king is to improve upon even the good rule of his father by elevating his thanes to earls: "My thanes and kinsmen, / Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland / In such an honour named" (5.7.345-47). Civilization has not merely been restored; it has been born again into an even brighter glory, especially as it now has a king willing to work God's will at the expense of his own: "and what needful else / That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace / We will perform in measure, time, and place" (5.7.354-56). It promises to be a glorious future.

Conclusion: Implications of the Christian Dimension for *Macbeth*

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Rase out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?" (*Macbeth* 5.3.149-54)

In the course of this work, we have theorized the elements of both tragedy and Christianity and determined the means by which these two achieve harmony. We have seen that when adding Christianity to tragedy, actions of humans have supernatural consequences in both the mortal world and the life to come. Macbeth, as the tragic figure, experiences the spiritual death described by St. Thomas Aquinas as he forsakes God and his own moral compass to grasp the thing he desires. He falls into a life of fear and torment until his pain becomes so unbearable he denies God's existence. Though he hates his life and envies the peace of death, he fights to cling to even the miserable life he leads—perhaps because he is aware an even more horrible fate awaits him on the other side of the veil.

We have seen that in a universe ordered by God, there are spiritual consequences not solely for Macbeth but also for all of Scotland as his sin infects the entire country like a poison. His dark and bloody sacrifices to the god of his own desires spread pollution throughout the land and creates a hell on earth. This disruption of nature can only be cured, by the sanction of God, with the removal of the cancer from Scotland: the death of the tyrant and the restoration of civilization by placing Malcolm, the godly king, on the throne. Seeing the play through Christian theology, we can discover how deep the implications of sin truly are. Sin, like cancer, corrupts not only the sinner but the entire world as its darkness spreads and chokes the life from innocents.

Now that we have seen how important a Christian hermeneutic is to the fullest understanding of *Macbeth,* we might turn to a production which has ignored the redeeming Christian virtues. In 2010, PBS Great Performances produced a film version of Macbeth, directed by Rupert Goold and set in a twentieth-century warzone. This adaptation stars Patrick Stewart as Macbeth and Kate Fleetwood as his wife. If there are any Christian redeeming qualities to this adaptation, they are heavily suppressed by the copious blood, the truly chilling performance of a serpentine Fleetwood, and Stewart's monotone delivery. Early in this adaptation, the Witches, disguised as nurses, kill the soldier who reports to Duncan the state of the battle. One reaches into his chest and plucks out his heart—an ignoble end to a valiant warrior.

Stewart, who shines in other roles like Captain Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* or as Professor Xavier in the *X-Men* series, delivers a rather blank performance as Macbeth. I have argued that of utmost importance to Christian tragedy the tragic figure must be sympathetic and believably human—both capable of goodness and prone to self-interest. Stewart's Macbeth may recite all the lines which reveal his fear of wickedness and the torment of a life of spiritual death, but he fails to impress upon the audience any genuine moral horror. I found it difficult to believe that he was afraid of the deed or that he suffered from nightmares. I imagine an audience might have difficulty recognizing themselves in him or pitying his situation. Even the final scene fails to inspire—at least in myself—empathy for he who was once an upstanding, moral man.

After the death of Macbeth and the final lines of the play are delivered, Malcolm will be crowned king. But Lord and Lady Macbeth, both dead, appear in an elevator. This elevator has a gate rather than a door so that figures within can be seen from without. It has been used

several times throughout the production and is one site connected to the Witches. After their first prophesies to Macbeth, they enter the elevator and although it does not move, once inside, they disappear. The implication appears to support at least the idea of an afterlife although it is not a Christian understanding of life after death. In Christian philosophy, souls have two destinations and in neither do they haunt the places they once lived. One might imagine that forever haunting the same place which together they turned into their own personal hell might be punishment enough, but it still refuses to conform to the Christian vision whose importance I have here emphasized.

There also is no immediate sense of the restoration required by our theory of tragedy. From the beginning, it is clear that Scotland—if this is still Scotland—is at war. With only a few exceptions, all of the action in the film takes place indoors. There are a few familiar locations: a hallway of what looks like a building converted into an triage hospital, Lady Macbeth's kitchen and home, the aforementioned elevator, and an open space just outside the room where Duncan dies which has a large sink. The lighting and the walls are grey. The atmosphere is often slightly clouded. In the background can be heard what sounds like bombs and the spray of machine gun fire.

At the height of Macbeth's power as king, the color pallet moves from grey to red so that all is bathed in a scarlet light. In the end, Malcolm holds and contemplates Macbeth's head as he delivers his final lines in a world restored to the grey color of the beginning. He is standing in the same hallway converted into an emergency surgery wing where Duncan stood when he asked a bloody soldier how the battle was going in the beginning. There is not so much a sense of healing the evil and ushering in a new era of peace and safety as there is a sense of circuity. We have been here before. Will the next king be the same?

The sense of being cursed to perpetuate the same horror is enhanced by the final scene I described earlier of ghostly Macbeth and Lady Macbeth trapped in the elevator. Their evil has not left—it lingers forever. The world has not been healed. This is not the Christian restoration of God's will. Overall this particular production leaves an impression of meaninglessness and despair which perverts *Macbeth* from the sad and tragic cautionary tale I have described into a "tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (5.5.218-20). What value does this adaptation have besides its own fascination with horror? Perhaps it should rather receive the classification of horror than tragedy as it refuses to conform to our theory of tragedy?

Without the Christian reading of *Macbeth*, his story is nothing more than simply horrible. Not only horrible for the man who lived it, but for his wife who experienced such torment she killed herself. Women and children suffer fear, horror, and death because of one man's ambition. The terror of life under Macbeth is meaningless unless it can eventually be corrected by the restoration of Christian virtue and peace.

Works Cited

Aitchison, Nick. *Macbeth: Man and Myth.* Phoenix Mill: Sutton Pub., 1999. Print.

Alford, Fred. "Greek Tragedy and Civilization: The Cultivation of Pity." *Political Research Quarterly* 46.2 (1993): 259-80. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 April 2015.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica.* 1274. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. MobileReference, 2008. Ebook.

Aristotle. "The Poetics of Aristotle." *The Works of Aristotle.* Trans. S.H. Butcher. *Kindle Edition by Anthology Books,* 2009. Ebook.

Battenhouse, Roy. *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.

Bernad, Miguel A. "The Five Tragedies in Macbeth." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13.1 (1962): 49-61. *JSTOR.* Web 26 Jan 2010.

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy.* 1904. London: MacMillan & Co, 1919. Print.

Common Core State Standards For English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Common Core Standards.org, 2010. Web. 24 Nov. 2014.

Cunningham, Dolora G. "Macbeth: The Tragedy of the Hardened Heart." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14.1 (1963): 39-47. *JSTOR.* Web. 2 March 2010.

Curry, Walter Clyde. "The Demonic Metaphysics of 'Macbeth'." *Studies in Philology* 30.3 (1933). *JSTOR*. Web. 26 Jan. 2010.

Erasmus, Desiderius. *The Education of a Christian Prince.* 1536. Trans. Lisa Jardine. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

---*On the Freedom of the Will*. 1524. Trans. Philip S. Watson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1995. Print.

The Geneva Bible. 1560. Trans. William Whittingham et. al. Ed. Lloyd Berry. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2007. Print.

Golden, Leon. "Othello, Hamlet, and Aristotelian Tragedy." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.2 (1984): 142-156. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 Feb. 2010.

Hammersmith, James P. "Shakespeare and the Tragic Virtue." *Southern Humanities Review* 24.3 (1990): 245-254. *Jsu.edu.* Jsu.edu, 1998. Web. 15 April 2015.

Hogfather. Dir. Vadim Jean. Perf. David Jason, Marc Warren, Michelle Dockery, Ian Richardson. The Mob Film Co., 2007. DVD.

Holinshed, Rafael. "The Reigns of Duncan and Macbeth" *Shakespeare's Macbeth with the Chapters of Holinshed's 'Historie of Scotland' on Which the Play is Based.* 1863. Ed. W.S. Dalgleish. Charleston: Nabu Press, 2013. Print.

Hunter, Edwin R. "Macbeth as a Morality." *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin* 12.1 (1937): 217-35. Print.

Ide, Richard S. "The Theatre of the Mind: An Essay on Macbeth." *ELH* 42.3 (1975): 338-361. *JSTOR.* Web. 3 Feb. 2010.

Jack, Jane H. "Macbeth, King James, and the Bible." *ELH* 22.3 (1955): 173-193. *JSTOR.* Web. 2 March 2010.

Jaffa, Harry V. "Macbeth and the Moral Universe." *Claremont Review of Books* 8.1 (2007): 27-33. *H.W. Wilson.* Web. 2 Sept. 2010.

Lemon, Rebecca. "Scaffolds of Treason in 'Macbeth." *Theatre Journal* 54.1 (2002): 25-43. *JSTOR.* Web. 22 April 2010.

Macbeth. Dir. Rupert Goold. Perf. Patrick Stewart, Kate Fleetwood, Suzanne Burden, Ben Carpenter, Michael feast, et. al. PBS Great Performances, 2010. DVD.

McDonald, Russ and Lena Cowen Orlin, Eds. *The Bedford Shakespeare.* Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2015. Print.

Mills, Judson. "The Appeal of Tragedy: An Attitude Interpretation." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 14.3 (1993): 255-71. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 14 April 2015.

Myrick, Kenneth O. "The Theme of Damnation in Shakespearean Tragedy." *Studies in Philology* 38.2 (1941): 221-245. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 Feb. 2010.

Neal, Anne D. and Charles Mitchell. *The Vanishing Shakespeare.* Goacta.org, 2007. Web. 24 Nov. 2014

O'Neill. "'The Passion of the Christ' A Decade Later." *National Catholic Register.* EWTN Global Catholic Network, 25 Feb. 2014. Web. 3 April 2015.

Perez Lopez, Jennifer. "*Hubris, Hamartia,* and Hope: The Tragic Vision of Aeschylus' *Oresteia."* 2011. TS.

Pineas, Rainer. "The English Morality Play as a Weapon of Religious Controversy." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 2.2 (1962): 157-180. *JSTOR.* Web. 2 Sept. 2010.

Ramsey, Jarold. "The Perversion of Manliness in Macbeth." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 13.2 (1973): 285-300. *JSTOR.* Web. 26 Jan 2010.

Reid, B.L. "'Macbeth' and the Play of Absolutes." *The Sewanee Review* 73.1 (1965): 19-46. *JSTOR.* Web. 6 April 2010.

Reklis, Kathryn. "A Sense of the Tragic in a Christian Theology of Freedom." *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 37-60. *Academic Search Premier.* 3 Feb. 2010.

Schwartz, Joseph. "Chesterton on the Idea of Christian Tragedy." *Renascense* 53.3 (2001): 227-238. *Academic Search Premier.* Web. 7 Feb. 2010.

Shakespeare, William. "*Macbeth*." *Shakespeare's Macbeth, with the Chapters of Holinshed's 'Historie of Scotland' on Which the Play is Based.* 1863. Ed. W.S. Dalgleish. Charleston: Nabu Press, 2013. Print.

---"Hamlet." *The Collected Works of Shakespeare.* Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1998. 670-713. Print.

Sharpe, J. A. "'Last Dying Speeches': Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England." *Past & Present* 107 (1985): 144-167. *JSTOR.*

Sidney, Sir Phillip. *The Defence of Poesy.* 1595. Introduction Geoffrey Shepherd. Edinburgh: R.&R. Clark, Ltd., 1967. Print.

Spivak, Bernard. *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. Print.

Walton, J.K. "Macbeth." *Shakespeare in a Changing World.* Ed. Arnold Kettle. London: Farleigh Press Ltd., 1964. 102-22. Print.

Waswo, Richard. "Damnation, Protestant Style: Macbeth, Faustus, and Christian Tragedy." *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4.1 (1974): 63-99. Print.

Waters, D. Douglas. *Christian Settings in Shakespeare's Tragedies.* Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994. Print.