Macbeth: Easy Questions, Difficult Answers

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Macbeth is not an obscure play. The course of the action, unlike that of *Hamlet*, can easily be summarized. Most readers and audiences can come to some general agreement on what the play is about, provided that they can offer answers to the two major questions of understanding that the play poses. These answers, it need hardly be said, cannot be precise and absolute, since Shakespeare's plays, like life, never allow us the delusion of perfect understanding. Nevertheless, we do need to decide what we are invited to think and feel about Macbeth and what he does. In particular, we have to consider why he acts as he does; why, in the first place, he kills Duncan, and then why, acting as he does, he can still attract our interest, sympathy, even admiration. The answer to the first of these questions appears to be the easier, but is in fact the more difficult. I shall argue that in the end, the answer to both questions is the same: he acts, and we respond, because we recognize in him and in ourselves an all too human, ordinary fallibility. He is neither the puppet of evil forces that some critics would make him, nor the inhuman monster that Malcolm's final dismissal of him as "this dead butcher" would suggest.

The quick but not very helpful answer to why Macbeth murders Duncan is to say that he does it because of ambition. This is only another way of saying that he wants to be King, a desire not in itself disastrous; the real question is why he believes he must commit a murder to be so, and how, knowing all the time that his action is morally indefensible, he can believe there is any sense in which he is justified. No doubt it would be easier for us (and for him) to accept his crime, if it could be felt that some external, irresistible power of evil compelled him to the deed, but that solace is withheld, even though there are some such suggestions: the witches perhaps, or even Lady Macbeth herself, as an agent of the powers of darkness. In the end, though, we and Macbeth himself must face the fact that he is morally responsible for his actions. Evil is real, but, as always in Shakespeare's plays, it resides in human appetites, human frailty. Macbeth makes the choices that destroy him.

To take the witches first: there is no doubt about the sinister impression they make in the play's opening scene, even on a

twentieth-century audience. Their "fair is foul, and foul is fair", so soon to be echoed in Macbeth's first words in the play, prepares us for the sort of confusion between good and evil that Macbeth will create for himself, but we are never asked to see that confusion as inevitable. Their predictions for Macbeth only remind him of what he has already contemplated. By their own testimony, they cannot direct human affairs; rather, like the air-drawn dagger that Macbeth later sees, they can seem to encourage him in the way he is going. They do not *suggest* Duncan's murder, for not only do we have Banquo's

> Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear
> Things that do sound so fair?
> (I.iii.51)

which indicates something in Macbeth's consciousness that equates the getting of the crown with guilt and horror, but we later have Lady Macbeth's

> Nor time, nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.
> (I.vii.5)

This can only mean that she and her husband have discussed not only the possibility of winning the crown, but ways in which to do so. The witches cannot destroy Macbeth, any more than they can destroy the Master of the *Tiger*, but they can encourage him to destroy himself, and they can, in dramatic terms, make us more plainly aware of what is happening inside his mind. In the same sort of way Lady Macbeth, a powerful character in her own right and ambitious for herself as well as for her husband, is also a dramatic representation of a part of his consciousness, the part that urges him to the deed; while in his own person he can suggest the hesitations and fears that are the other half of his internal struggle. By turns she encourages him and impugns his manhood, but I cannot believe that she browbeats him into doing something that he really doesn't want to do. If we trace the course of his resolution from that first revealing start, through "Stars, hide your fires . . ." and "If it were done . . ." to the preparations for the murder and his last-minute qualms, there is little sense of his being dragged in a direction he doesn't want to go, by what one of our current jargons would call a sexually potent, high-dominance female. The relation between them is more interesting than that. The deed they plan, the murder of a good, old, defenceless King, who is their kinsman and their guest, is so horrible that their natures abhor it, yet, in different ways, they stifle that abhorrence, thinking only of what they want, and not too directly

of the way they will get it. Lady Macbeth's reaction is the more obvious of the two: in her famous "unsex me here" speech she tries deliberately to suppress her own humanity, transposing the horror of the deed into images of a terrible resolution, so that she will be able to do something that she knows is vile. Of course she cannot wholly succeed. The sleeping King reminds her of her father; the blood that is spilt returns to haunt her and drive her to distraction. She, like Macbeth himself, is far too vulnerable to be seen as any kind of embodiment of pure evil.

Macbeth's state of mind is more complex, and perhaps therefore more likely to attract our sympathy. Complexity and sensitivity though, even a developed moral consciousness, do not necessarily confer moral intelligence, or translate into admirable moral action. For some recent critics, Macbeth's consciousness is almost enough to excuse his actions, which is odd, but of a piece with a trend in the criticism of Shakespearean tragedy that is itself odd. It seems distressing to some critics and directors that these plays should depict men and women who are in some ways noble and worthy of our sympathy and admiration, and who yet come to tragic ends. By denying them these admirable qualities, the plays can be made less disturbing: Othello, Hamlet, Lear, Antony and Cleopatra can be variously described as stupid, egotistical, self-deluding, luxurious, self-pitying and generally either cunning and corrupt, or ignorant and ludicrous. The impulse to deny greatness to such characters, who, because they are also human, are fallible, seems very strong, but apparently less strong in the case of a Macbeth or a Coriolanus, who are in some ways so obviously wrong that we feel less threatened. For them we can afford to make excuses, and by making excuses, we simplify and weaken the tragic effect. Just as the simultaneous recognition of what is noble and admirable in Hamlet with what is mistaken and perverse is too difficult for some readers, who must make him either the one thing or the other, when it is the essence of his tragedy that he is required to be both, so some must find excuses for Macbeth's actions, even admire him for only a part of what the whole play shows him to be. Because of the fearful price he pays, we do not despise him for not obeying his conscience, but that is not to say that we are required to see his actions as justified.

One excuse often advanced is the savage state of Scotland. In the opening scenes we hear of a rebellion bloodily put down and a Norwegian invasion repelled, largely because of the strength of arms and physical courage of Macbeth and Banquo. How can

Duncan, this argument runs, be the good old King that some sentimental readers make him, when he so enthusiastically applauds and rewards Macbeth's unseaming of Macdonwald "from the nave to the chops". Isn't it reasonable for Macbeth to expect to be King when the kingdom's very existence depends on his fighting ability? One can only reply that the play doesn't say so, any more than does our contemporary political experience. A society's best defenders are not necessarily its best governors. What Macbeth does is unequivocally wrong, and the strongest testimony to that fact comes from Macbeth himself, who feels the guilt for all his crimes in prospect, in commission and in retrospect. It is he, the would-be murderer, who tells us that

> this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office . . .
> (I.vii.16)

He never, even to himself, attempts to suggest that he has any *right* to the throne. The consideration that he may come to it by fair means

> If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me
> Without my stir . . .
> (I.iii.143)

occurs only to be dismissed. It is, indeed, only contemplated when he is made uneasy by the prospect of action.

Why, then, does Macbeth do it? I think it is part of this play's particular power that we can never offer a really satisfying answer to that question. He isn't driven to it by external forces. He knows that what he does is wrong and he also knows that he is most unlikely even to get away with it. We need to look with care at his great soliloquy in Act I, Sc. vii:

> If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly. . . .

As D. H. Rawlinson remarks in his commentary on this scene in *The Practice of Criticism*:

> Whatever he tells himself, he still feels morally. What he would like to commit, he says, would be a crime in which the consequences are somehow averted:
>
> . . . if the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease, success . . .
>
> but what he expresses here is an overpowering conviction that the consequences can only be averted by a miracle. (p. 37)

Even at the moment of excitement when he accepts Lady Macbeth's plan for casting the guilt for Duncan's murder on the

drugged grooms, both he and she know that they will not be believed:

> Who dares receive it otherwise?

They won't get away with it, but by then they will be King and Queen, and who will then dare accuse them of murder? In the end, we can probably say no more than that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth convince themselves that they will get from the crown what they would have had if they had come by it legitimately. They dare not recognize that what they want—a greater abundance of the respect and affection that they already enjoy—will be destroyed by the nature of their deed, even though that nature has always been plain to them. Because they know that they have deserved love and honour, they think that these will continue to be theirs, no matter what they do. It is only too easy for them to believe that they are entitled to what they most want; it is a very common sort of delusion, and one not incompatible with the extreme moral sensitivity Macbeth can show at other times. At the moment of the murder he can block out that sensitivity for long enough for him to act, even forget what he knows the consequences must be, but he cannot remain in that state, nor, having killed his King, can he ever return to what he was before.

Once Duncan is dead, Macbeth becomes the deed's creature.[1] Banquo, who knows of the prophecy, is now a danger. He must be silenced, and Fleance disposed of too, so that the prophecy may be improved. But Banquo's ghost attends the banquet, obedient to Macbeth's "Fail not our feast"; more suspicions are aroused or confirmed. Macbeth must trudge on along his bloody path, trying to keep secure a position which no longer has any worth or meaning for him and which is now a punishment rather than the anticipated goal.

Shakespeare's deviation from his sources here, allowing the regicides no period of peaceful acceptance and enjoyment of the throne, emphasizes the immediate awareness in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth of what they have destroyed. Just as Macbeth had foreseen, the forces of retribution are created by the first murder, and strengthened by the second. Banquo, alive or dead, is a danger; so is Macduff, who doesn't obey his new sovereign's bidding. Macbeth is allowed no moment of trust and tranquillity,

1 Since writing this essay, I have found that John Bayley also applies this phrase (used by De Flores to describe Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*) to Macbeth, in *Shakespeare and Tragedy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1981.

those qualities so movingly, if briefly, celebrated in the verse of Duncan's arrival at Inverness. The point is made immediately after the discovery of Duncan's body, when Macbeth has a speech which is at once a piece of conscious deceit and an unconscious lament for his lost innocence:

> Had I but died an hour before this chance
> I had liv'd a blessed time. . . .
> (II.iii.91)

From that moment, peace and contentment are strangers to him.

The anguish of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth must be intensified by their recognition that they have been right about so much, but wrong about the most important thing of all. They have, as they thought they would, got away with Duncan's murder; there are suspicions, but nobody is brave enough to voice them openly. Yet in no sense have they got what they wanted. Macbeth's soliloquy in Act III, sc. i:

> To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus . . .

is soon echoed by his wife's

> Naught's had, all's spent
> When our desire is got without content.
> (III.ii.4)

This sense of having destroyed what they most value is confirmed by the collapse of the ceremony of the banquet into disorder, as Macbeth responds to the ghost that only he can see. D. J. Enright comments, in *Shakespeare and the Students*, that "Macbeth has murdered ceremony" (p. 143) and he knows it, just as he knew earlier that he had murdered sleep, his own ability to rest. After the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's assessment of his future is bleak indeed:

> I am in blood
> Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
> (III.iv.135)

There is, in any case, no way back; as the play progresses, the terrible nature of that tedium is revealed to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. She cracks under the strain; he goes grimly on.

To say this, though, is not to imply that the play, after the murder of Duncan, or at least after the murder of Banquo, lacks interest or tension. This could only be so if the central interest were the conflict within Macbeth's conscience, on whether or not to commit the initial murder. In fact this has hardly been an issue; he has always known that to do so is wrong; he has also always known that he will do it. What speculation he has allowed him-

self has been confined to the practical consequences of the murder. At no point that I can see does he later express anything that could be called contrition. When he talks of his own damnation, the emphasis falls on his awareness that in return he hasn't got what he wanted. Even at the very end, what he expresses is anger at having been tricked, and defiance, which isn't much like repentance, or even remorse. Nevertheless the sustaining interest does lie within Macbeth's consciousness, and it is our awareness of the development here that wins for this somewhat unlikely hero our sympathy and even our admiration.

I call Macbeth an unlikely hero for the obvious reasons. At the play's beginning he is presented to us as a courageous soldier, but thereafter he seems, in his actions, almost wholly bad. What he does is stab a defenceless, sleeping old man; kill two innocent unconscious men, whom he has previously drugged; employ hired murderers to assassinate his unsuspecting friend and his son (though Fleance escapes) and then in a fit of frustration, despatch more murderers to slaughter the wife and children of his enemy Macduff, who himself is beyond his reach in England. In his fight against the forces of retribution, led by Malcolm, Macduff and Siward, he can hardly show courage, for he believes himself to be invulnerable, and why should a man who cannot be hurt be afraid of battle? It is much easier to list reasons why we should not admire Macbeth than to explain why we do. There are his actions, cowardly and brutal, whether calculated or on the spur of the moment. He is wicked without justification, without even believing himself justified. Despite the acuteness of his moral sensibility, which offers him an awareness of what he is doing in images of such horror that some critics have called it "poetic", he is not deterred from his course. He hardly expresses a word of regret for what he has done to others. His wife's suicide is dismissed as if it were of little consequence. He does not even learn very much: what he at last discovers about the witches, that they have deceived him, Banquo knew from the very beginning:

> oftentimes, to win us to our harm
> The instruments of Darkness tell us truths;
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
> In deepest consequence.
>
> (I.iii.123)

Even his final awareness of the consequences of his actions is little more than what he foresaw in the "If it were done . . ." soliloquy, in Act I.

What then remains? Principally, I think, our sense of Mac-

beth as a suffering human being, who can show a kind of moral courage even though physical courage is denied to him, in facing up to what he has done to himself, to his own life. He becomes progressively more aware that he has destroyed everything that he cares about; and what he cares about we care about too, for whatever his actions, his instincts are those of mankind. This insistence on his inability to stifle his human feelings is made more forceful by the fact that the play presents him in a moral context in which he has no serious rival.

It is a truism of the criticism of Shakespeare's tragedies that they are very different from each other, that it is very difficult to abstract from them something that we can call Shakespearean tragedy. This is in part because each play creates a different set of moral criteria by which the characters in that play are judged. These criteria are relative, not absolute, and they cannot be reduced to such abstractions as love, tolerance, self-knowledge, ambition, lust and so on, though of course the recognition of these qualities in the dramatic representation of human beings has much to do with our response to the plays. Clearly the standards of moral conduct that Hamlet demands from his world and from himself are very different from those which exist in *Macbeth* or in the more expansive lives allowed to Antony and Cleopatra. The moral framework of that play, in turn, with its experienced lovers, is quite different from the claustrophobic atmosphere of *Othello*, where much of the success of Iago's plot depends on the inexperience in love of Othello and Desdemona. The more open sensuality of Antony and Cleopatra is contrasted only with the cold, ungenerous political ambition of Caesar, and isn't ever subjected to the critical scrutiny that the piercing intelligence of a Hamlet would provide. Thus we are willing to allow to Antony and Cleopatra the admiration that the glowing poetry of the play confers on their love, without being checked by the presence in the play of an equally attractive, opposed value. Clearly the presence in *Macbeth* of any Hamlet-like scrupulousness would completely change our view of Macbeth himself, who would become a Claudius-like character. Macbeth is, it is true, given to thinking about himself and his situation, but he lacks that quality of self-critical intelligence that distinguishes Hamlet. Nor, with the exception of Duncan, who is soon disposed of, is there another character in the play who appears as his clear opposite, a rival for primacy in our consciousness. Consider how Shakespeare treats other such possible rivals. Banquo, though more sensible

than Macbeth in his response to the witches, is clearly subordinate to him in military achievement and authority. Just before his murder, he is expressing, in soliloquy, qualms about Macbeth's path to the throne, but because the play doesn't allow him time to act on his suspicions, we are left with the slight feeling that he may be an equivocator. I am not suggesting, as some have done, that Banquo is meant to be seen as corrupted—that would be no way to present to King James his reputed ancestor—but circumstances allow just enough uncertainty to prevent an absolute opposition between Banquo's honesty and Macbeth's surrender to temptation.

In the same sort of way, the flight of Malcolm and Donalbain after their father's murder may be prudent, allowing as it does the restoration of good government to Scotland at the play's end, but it isn't likely, in the theatre, to seem wholly sympathetic. They run away, and whatever one may think about Macbeth's courage — Bradley calls it "frightful" — he doesn't run away. Macduff's treatment is interesting. He refuses to associate himself with the acceptance of Macbeth's rule, and by not attending the banquet, attracts Macbeth's hostility. Not even the riddling assurance of the witches that "none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth" can shield him from the tyrant's intentions, but when the murderers come to Fife, he is in England, and his wife and children are killed instead. As with the flight of the King's sons, his action is perfectly defensible. He is at the English court, visiting Malcolm and enlisting the help of the saintly Edward against Macbeth. What he does brings about Macbeth's defeat and death, but from our point of view, that hardly matters when we remember Lady Macduff saying:

> Wisdom! to leave his wife, to leave his babes,
> His mansion, and his titles, in a place
> From whence himself does fly? He loves us not:
> He wants the natural touch . . .
>
> (IV.ii.6)

Macduff gets his revenge in the end, but that is no compensation, for nothing he can do to Macbeth is as bad as Macbeth's recognition of what he has done to himself.

Shakespeare seems consistently to be shielding his hero by presenting all those around him as lesser beings, not necessarily as morally inferior, or less absolutely worthy, but as *smaller* and so less deserving of our attention and interest. The lengthy scene in the English court, in which Malcolm and Macduff indulge in a prolonged bout of verbal fencing, to see who should trust whom,

is perhaps to be explained in these terms. Many theatre-goers and readers have speculated on the purpose of this somewhat tedious scene, other than the customary fourth act rest for the principal actor. I think it perhaps over-long, but the thematic purpose is plain enough. The mistrust between Malcolm and Macduff dramatically enacts all those many poetic statements of the disorder in the land since the source of order, the throne, has been usurped and corrupted. As far as Malcolm is concerned, Macduff may be Macbeth's agent, sent to lure him back to destruction. To Macduff, Malcolm may be another Macbeth, eager to seize and abuse power. Eventually each is satisfied that the other is what he seems, but something rather odd has happened during the testing. Malcolm has pretended to a set of vices even more horrific than those that Macbeth has demonstrated, for he, at any rate, hasn't been particularly avaricious, or sexually voracious. Malcolm's pretence leads us a little way towards attributing to him not only prudent deceit, but perhaps also a trace of potential for this sort of corruption. Macduff, in turn, with his weary acceptance of a soiled Malcolm as preferable to Macbeth, is also compromised. "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell" (IV.iii.22) says Malcolm, musing like his father before him, on the impossibility of judging what men and women are from their appearances. But where Duncan trusted, Malcolm mistrusts, and the effect of what he does is somehow to associate himself, too, with the taint of seeming. Of course it is all soon put right, but the impression of Macbeth as the brightest, even though now fallen, is not dispelled. Malcolm reveals that far from being a bloody, greedy lecher, he, Malcolm, is still a virgin, and Macduff's trustworthiness, by a bitter irony, is proved by the news of the murder of his wife and children. Nevertheless, I feel there has been something slightly unedifying about the whole scene, an impression that Malcolm's eagerness to put Macduff's grief to his own use does nothing to remove.

If then, we are thus prevented from giving our whole-hearted support the forces of good in Acts IV and V, how are our sympathies directed? Undoubtedly our interest focuses on Macbeth himself. Lady Macbeth recedes, progressively shut out of his life. Even the sleepwalking scene, charged with pathos as it is, serves to contrast her breakdown of will with his own state of mind. What we really care about is Macbeth's awareness of what he has done to himself. This is what he broods on, and speaks of, constantly. Intent to discover as he says, "by the worst means,

the worst", he goes to the witches to find out what will happen to him, but the equivocal guarantees of safety they give are of little consolation in the light of his growing awareness of how little life now means for him. Actually, this awareness has started to develop surprisingly early in the play, as has our own sympathetic response to it. How else are we to understand our acceptance of the astonishing reversal in Act III, Sc. ii, by which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth can see themselves as the true victims of Duncan's murder, and Duncan himself as an object of envy?

> How now, my Lord! Why do you keep alone,
> Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
> Using those thoughts, which should indeed have died
> With them they think on? Things without all remedy
> Should be without regard: what's done is done.
> (III.ii.7)

The dull, hopeless rhythms of this bleak attempt at consolation are soon echoed in Macbeth's envious

> 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 ecstacy
> (III.ii.19)

and in his horrified vision of the evil that he is about to unleash again:

> Light thickens; and the crow
> Makes wing to th' rooky wood;
> Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse,
> While Night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
> Thou marvell'st at my words; but hold thee still;
> Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
> (III.ii.50)

After the murder of Banquo there is no feeling of relief, just the heavy sense of near-despair, expressed in that image of wading through more and more blood, coupled with the forlorn hope that more practice in these horrors will make them seem less horrible:

> My strange and self-abuse
> Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use.
> We are yet but young in deed.
> (III.iv.141)

We must be careful not to think of such utterances as the pangs of conscience, or even necessarily as indicative of any sense of sorrow for the victims. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are feeling far too sorry for themselves to have time for anyone else. Nevertheless, few critics seem tempted to call them self-pitying, a charge often levelled by the tougher members of the critical community at Hamlet, Othello, the blind Gloucester, or even King

Lear, who would seem to have rather more justification for such emotions. I suppose Macbeth is too grim a figure to be accused of something that is misguidedly felt to be unmanly, but sorry for himself he undoubtedly is. There is no doubt that what confronts him is despair. Even after Fleance's escape, he may still have had some hope that he could adjust the initial prophecy to suit his own desires, but the weird sisters' reiteration that it is Banquo's line that will succeed destroys that illusion, and makes the apparent assurance of his personal invulnerability as much a torment as a comfort. He doesn't lack the courage to go on, but he doesn't want to be reminded of what he is going towards: "no more sights".

The values that Macbeth still wants to live by are the ones that he violated by his murder of Duncan. He wants to be loved and trusted by his subjects but he knows, now that it is too late, that because he broke trust, he can never expect to trust or be trusted again. What is utterly missing from his life now is any sense of enjoyment, of contentment, even of rest. The man who was so admired is now detested. The point is probably sufficiently obvious throughout Act V not to need much labouring, but two of Macbeth's best known speeches demand some comment. Both, I believe, reveal so unflinching an acceptance of his responsibility for what he has lost that it can only be called a kind of moral courage.

> I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends
> I must not look to have.
>
> (V.iii.22)

It is the "troops of friends" that is so moving here, evoking as it does not only the world of authority well used and respected, but also the world of common humanity that Macbeth used to inhabit and from which he has cut himself off forever. He recognizes that his isolation is total. His intimacy with his wife is lost, perhaps because he cannot admit, even to her, the full enormity of the course of action in which he is imprisoned. As he strives to be more callous, she becomes less so, and so is for him yet another reminder of what he has destroyed. Even his ostensible questioning of the Doctor on the progress of her disease (V.iii.36–53) is a further exploration of his own consciousness, as the Doctor's shrewd use of the masculine pronoun in his reply points up:

> Therein the patient
> Must minister to himself . . .
> (V.iii.45)

Macbeth's response, "Throw physic to the dogs—I'll none of it" reveals that he too knows that it is his own state they are discussing. When the news of Lady Macbeth's death finally comes, it is just one more blow, and one more loss, but every word and every moment in his most famous speech

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow . . .
> (V.v.19)

shows that no matter how much he may long to do so, he has not lost the ability to feel. Because he never does, we never lose our respect for him as a suffering human being. What the speech offers is not a Shakespearean summing up of the futility of human existence, but Macbeth's final survey of the desolation that he's made of his life. He does not shrink from it and the courage it takes not to do so is what makes him heroic.

The final scenes are busy, but less significant. Macbeth's imagination finds the appropriate images for his state, trapped inside his assurances of personal safety: a bear, tied to the stake, a body continuing to fight until the flesh is hacked from its bones. One touch of the old Macbeth remains. Having heard almost with relief that Macduff is technically not "of woman born", Macbeth knows that all his charms have been proved spurious, and so it is as an ordinary man, at last undeluded, that he goes to meet his death. He can be brave again: there is something not far from a kind of jauntiness in his last words:

> Lay on Macduff;
> And damn'd be him that first cries, "Hold, enough!"
> (V.ix.33)

Just for a few seconds, Macbeth as he was, and as he might have been, is recalled to our attention.

As is the case with many of the great tragedies, the last moments seem deliberately anti-climactic, weary, spent. Malcolm and the English have won. Macduff has had his revenge. Good government will be restored to Scotland, which we know is right and proper. But there is little, if any, sense of triumph for anyone except Malcolm. Those whom Bradley has called "the two great terrible figures, who dwarf all the remaining characters of the drama" (p. 349) are both dead, and we know with absolute certainty that it was about them that we cared.