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"Nothing is but what is not": The Creative Evil of Macbeth[1]

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Macbeth comes to life by being summoned by the forces of evil. The weird sisters are given the dramatic force to convulse the cyclical feudal violence of Duncan's realm and to conjure Macbeth's imaginative consciousness. On the road to Forres, Macbeth is confronted by a radical intrusion from beyond his world, and, like a dark Saint Paul, he is irrevocably transformed by its call. I suggest that Macbeth exists at the crossroads of poetic creation, rapturous inspiration, and demonic negation of extant being. Macbeth voyages into "what is not" (I.iii.141) and that voyage brings him both to a heightened imaginative life and to deadness and closure. Blurring the boundaries between good and evil, the play opens unexpected connections between poetry, early modern theology, and more contemporary philosophy. All these modes – theology, poetry, and philosophy – take us beyond the immediate through a negation of what is. Macbeth suggests that there is something at once animating and potentially evil in the process of negating the world-that-is in favour of a vision of what is not. By giving dramatic life to Macbeth and withholding it from the 'good' characters, Shakespeare raises uncomfortable questions about the relationship between poetic creation and evil.

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Negation and Creation

Macbeth comes to dramatic life by being summoned by the forces of evil. On the road to Forres, Macbeth is confronted by a radical intrusion from beyond his world, and, like a dark Saint Paul, he is irrevocably transformed by its call. It is the weird sisters, and not God, who

1 Significant elements of this paper are drawn from Chapter 5 of Luke 2018. I would like to thank Cambridge University Press for allowing these passages to be reproduced here.

are given the dramatic force to convulse the dead world of Duncan's Scotland and conjure the new mode of being that is Macbeth's imaginative subjectivity. I suggest that Shakespeare draws on Pauline notions of conversion in a highly ambivalent manner that at once gives evil a generative power and pushes us to question our understandings of creativity and freedom. Macbeth may be summoned by something evil but this evil is intimately connected to the creative powers of imagination, poetry, and theatre.

According to John Donne, "the Church celebrates the Conversion of no man but [Saint Paul]" (Donne 1953-1962, 6:209), and central to that conversion is a process of creative negation. In a 1624/25 sermon, Donne describes Paul's experience on the road to Damascus as "a medicinall falling": first, "He *fell to the earth*; … [which entailed] his humiliation, his exinanition of himself, his devesting, putting off of himself"; but second, through this fall God "re-inanimate[d] him with his spirit; rather, […] pre-inanimate[d] him; for, indeed, no man hath a soule till he have grace" (Donne 1953-1962, 6:206, 212). The existing order was overturned by a sublime intrusion that was unjustified, unforeseen, and imposed from the outside. The experience is utterly compelling, in both the positive and negative senses of the word. The old man, Saul the pharisee, falls to the ground and dies, only to rise to a new form of life as Paul the Apostle, founder of the Christian church. Following Paul's radical break from the old law and language, there is a Western tradition that focuses on the birth of a new subject. Paul, who is dead to his old self, commands us to "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:24). In *Macbeth*, I suggest, Shakespeare explores the dark side of this creative negation. Before coming to the play, however, I will briefly sketch why this process has a significance beyond Paul's own conversion.

Most immediately, Paul himself stresses that the initial conversion prompts an *ongoing* conversion from world to spirit, from self to other, from what is to what is not. According to Paul, we should "be not conformed to this world; but be […] transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]" (Romans 12:2). And part of this renewal comes from looking beyond the wisdom of "this world" to the unseen promise of the life of spirit. "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Romans 8:24). Rather, we are to "hope for that we see

not" (Romans 8:25). The divine is associated with what is not, with what is 'nothing' according to the world, with what is radically other than our present existence. "To us God is the Stranger, the Other", the twentieth century theologian Karl Barth writes in his *Epistle to the Romans* (Barth 1968, 318). These ideas were very much taken up in Shakespeare's era. Early modern Protestant thinkers stressed that becoming a new man was an ongoing process that works through a spirit that comes from beyond our ordinary modes of thought. It is "the Spirit, the divine grace, [that] grants strength and power to the heart; indeed, he creates a new man who takes pleasure [in obeying] God's commandments" (Luther 2005, 81). For Martin Luther, man is transformed by divine grace, and while this grace becomes part of the individual's interiority, manifest as faith, it also remains unavoidably foreign. It is an "alien righteousness", a "righteousness of another, instilled from without" (Luther 2005, 135-36). Donne, similarly, preaches of "a *forraine Righteousnes*" (Donne 1953-1962, 8:84). We have, then, a distinctive motion of the subject's emergence, which entails the interruption and estrangement of the old self and its place within the existing codes of communication. Luther elsewhere writes that "we must first believe contrary to our experience what cannot be believed humanly, and that we must feel what we do not feel" (Luther 1973, 71). One must give up one's own wisdom, to mortify one's self, and become a sort of nothing. According to Kierkegaard, "self-annihilation is the essential form for the God-relationship" (Kierkegaard 1941, 412). Donne preaches of "a good nullification of the heart, a good bringing of the heart to nothing" that creates a void for the otherness of God to enter (Donne 1953-1962, 9:177). "By faith we are what we are not" (Barth 1968, 149). I argue that Shakespeare often employs a similar process of violent negation of existing being to birth a new consciousness (Luke 2018).

At this point, we can doubtless see clouds and difficulties looming. For what guarantees that this alien spirit is divine and not diabolical? Without objective criteria, how do we distinguish the compelling call from self-delusion or a devilish trick? In more literary terms, we might question what distinguishes these religious experiences from the "shaping fantasies" of the "lunatic, the lover, and the poet", which "apprehend more / Than cool reason ever comprehends" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.i.5-7)? But of course, Theseus, the speaker of these

lines, is himself an "airy nothing" bodied forth by the poet's shaping pen (V.i.16). The process of creative negation extends beyond the religious. Poetry brings forth "nothings" – "The forms of things unknown" (V.i.15) – through a temporary suspension (or negation) of our present world. "Only the poet," Philip Sidney writes, "doth grow in effect another nature". Transcending the existing world, the poet, "with the force of a divine breath […] bringeth things forth far surpassing [nature's] doings". As a creative "maker", the poet becomes an imitator – and potential demonic rival – to the divine creator ("the heavenly Maker"). The poet voyages into the unseen, "borrow[ing] nothing of what is", but ranging "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (Sidney 2002, 216-18). More recent aesthetic theories, meanwhile, have stressed how theatre can estrange us from "this world", in all its oppressive inequality. The Brechtian notion of theatrical alienation draws on a long philosophical tradition that stresses the need for some sort of rupture or negation to achieve genuine subjectivity.

Alain Badiou has recently led a philosophical return to Paul, describing the road to Damascus event as "a thunderbolt, a caesura, and not a dialectical reversal. It was a conscription instituting a new subject" (Badiou 2013, 17). Paul is a model for Badiou's radical idea that we become genuine subjects only when we break from our inherited positions and direct ourselves toward a "truth-event", be it in the field of politics, art, science, or love. Such an event, according to Badiou, forces the void of a situation – the truth that had been ignored or repressed and which counted for nothing according to the prevailing logic – into the light (see Badiou 2005a, 55-56, 109; Badiou 2005b, 116-19). In less extreme ways, a range of modern and postmodern thinkers have suggested that we only shift from our unthinking acceptance of the status quo through a transformative encounter with the negative. According to Hegel, one must "tarry […] with the negative" and open oneself to its "astonishing" and "magical power" in order to dismember the familiar (Hegel 1977, 18-19). "In its self-negation", Theodor Adorno writes, "the mind transcends itself" (Adorno 1973, 392). Derridean deconstruction, meanwhile, employs a process of negation or unsaying to open us to the other and the unforeseen. According to David Newheiser, what unites the postmodern Derrida and the tradition of negative theology is that both "insist upon practices that open the individual to that which is beyond themselves" (Newheiser 2019, 63).

In Shakespeare, too, a sense of otherness, of something coming from outside the frame, is often associated with negation and the word 'nothing'[2]. The "realm of NOTHING", Harold C. Goddard writes, incorporates "the infinitely infinite realm of what might have been but was not, of what may be but is not". "[O]ut of something nothing new ever came without the aid of 'nothing' in this high potential sense. Nothing is thus practically a synonym for creativity" (Goddard 1951, 272). In this paper, I suggest that Macbeth exists at the crossroads of poetic creation, rapturous inspiration, and demonic negation of extant being. Macbeth voyages into "what is not" (I.iii.141)[3] and that voyage brings him both to a heightened imaginative life and to deadness and closure. Blurring the boundaries between good and evil, the play thereby opens unexpected connections between poetry, early modern theology, and more contemporary philosophy. My suggestion is that all these modes – theology, poetry, and philosophy – take us beyond the immediate through a negation of what is. They seek to break us from our immediate or pre-existing understandings, representations, and imaginaries, in order to lead us to something Other. *Macbeth* suggests that there is something at once animating and potentially evil – something inimical to life, care, and human connection – in the process of negating the world-that-is in favour of a vision of what is not. Ewan Fernie, in his book on the demonic, notes how, "pushed to its limits, the ethics of otherness exhibits an unsuspected diabolical tendency, where we seek to undo and depart from what we are and have in favour of what is different and ultimately uncreated, with real and deleterious consequences in terms of our responsibilities to our established selves, our intimates and the world at hand" (Fernie 2013, 32). *Macbeth*, I argue, pushes us to interrogate poetic and critical tendencies that we might rather ignore. More specifically, I explore how Macbeth's road to Forres encounter with the weird sisters works as an unjustifiable dramatic election by which he is called by the Other and ceases to conform to the old world. What calls him may be evil – in the sense of a deprivation and destruction of life and goodness – but it speaks to something at the heart of Shakespeare's creativity.

2 I explore these ideas more fully in Luke 2024.

3 References are to Shakespeare 1997.

The World and its Other

Paul establishes a foundational dichotomy between conformity to "this world" and the happening of grace that transcends the world and transforms selfhood, language, and relations. In *Macbeth*, "this world" is established in the second scene. Duncan's world is a sort of pre-history or canvas for the creative emergence of the new man. The first key feature (or repressed truth) of this world is that individuals are rendered indistinct by the cyclical bloodshed in which roles and fortunes are reversed as a matter of course. The scene's first line has the king asking, "What bloody man is that?" (I.ii.1), which suggests that singularity is precluded by the general slaughter. We then hear of the battle in which Macbeth turns the tide by "unseam[ing]" the rebel Macdonald "from the nave to th' chops" (I.ii.22). There is a gleeful barbarism to the Captain's account and to the reaction of the king, who praises Macbeth as his "valiant cousin" and "worthy gentleman" (I.ii.24) for this unseaming. This world is all far more grotesque and explicit than the weird sisters' opening, in which the unfortunate sailor can be "tempest-tossed" but "cannot be lost" (I.iii.23-24). And it has its own gory economy: through his bloody deeds "noble Macbeth hath won" what Cawdor "hath lost" (I.ii.66). Duncan's world here resembles the cyclical instability of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in which Scotland veers between destruction and renewal. Amidst the perpetual upheaval, nothing new emerges in Holinshed, there is only a tidal movement of blood, now more and now less.

Such a perpetual crisis recalls Benjamin's idea that in the "tradition of the oppressed […] the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin 1992, 248). In other words, the military tumult that begins *Macbeth* is not a genuine "emergency" but expresses this world's underlying structure. We get a hint of this structure when the Captain describes the "[d]oubtful" outcome of the battle through the metaphor of "two spent swimmers that do cling together / And choke their art" (I.ii.7-9). As Harry Berger Jr shows, the metaphoric "clinging together" of authority and rebellion "produces a dysfunctional solidarity" (Berger Jr 1997, 75). It is the weird sisters, then, that follow Benjamin's "task" of "bring[ing] about a real state of emergency" (Benjamin 1992, 248), as opposed to this entrenched quasi-emergency. They interrupt the cyclical model of history, which

is soon overrun by Macbeth's vital presence. The weird sisters turn dead history into something living and dramatic. It is their weirdness, appearing only to vanish into air, neither fully embodied nor disembodied, – "The earth hath bubbles", Banquo tells us, "And these are of them" (I.iii.77-78) – that is able to get under the skin of this corpse-ridden feudal merry-go-round and conjure something other.

The second key feature of Duncan's world is its language, which supposes an unproblematic unity of words and events. The seemingly straightforward ability to name events is evident as the Captain reports his "knowledge of the broil" (I.ii.6): for a moment, "fortune" smiles on its "damnèd quarry" (I.ii.14) Macdonald, but "justice" (I.ii.29) promptly destroys him. Justice comes in the form of Macbeth who is justly rewarded. Not only are events capable of simple narration, but they are also susceptible to clear judgement. "Justice" is a motionless absolute that sublates everything local, vaporising all difference and singularity. Soon, however, "noble Macbeth" (I.ii.66) will be unseaming enemies not for 'justice' but for evil. The result is that 'justice' and 'rebel' become hollowed out, abstract terms. Within the language of the situation – that of Duncan, Malcolm, and Macduff – these terms are overlaid on all circumstances, so that Macbeth can replace Macdonald, and Macduff Macbeth, without any change in language or structure. With the only possibilities being complete belonging to the established order or the utter chaos of evil rebellion, the self-contained language of Duncan's Scotland annuls the possibility of creative freedom, be it personal or political.

Duncan's language cocoons him from the scandalous intrusion of evil – or otherness. He seems hermetically sealed, without the physicality or puns that are the usual lifeblood of Shakespearean speech. Everything exists in report for Duncan. He alternates between questioning others about events, "Dismayed not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?" (I.ii.34), and dealing out praise and courtesies, "O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!" (I.ii.24). Duncan's almost contentless language neither touches the physical world nor connects images to the material, or does so only ironically and unintentionally: "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour / To make thee full of growing" (I.iv.28-29). Sealed from the vital and irruptive, the only value expressed by Duncan's language is formal courtesy: "O worthiest cousin, / The sin of my ingratitude even now / Was heavy on

me!" (I.iv.14-16). The result is that the 'good' characters of *Macbeth* are strangely undramatic. They are, by and large, not with the dramatic moment. So, for instance, Duncan's first question, "What bloody man is that?" establishes that he is playing catch-up. He must ask an anonymous blood-smeared soldier for a "report […] of the revolt" to which he was not present. We see a similar belatedness with Macbeth's nemesis, Macduff. The Porter delays opening the door to Macduff's knocking before he enters with the task of waking the king: "He did command me to call timely on him. / I have almost slipped the hour" (II.iii.45-6). But, of course, the king is already dead[4].

Such is the world as it stands: feudal, brutal, repetitive, and strangely lacking in dramatic presence. However, there is also the world that is not: the world of desire, of the call. We are introduced to this alternative world in the play's first scene. The weird sisters *precede* and almost direct our experience of the historical world. They set the time and place for our meeting of Macbeth:

> First witch
> When shall we three meet again?
> In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
> Second witch
> When the hurly-burly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won.
> Third witch
> That will be ere the set of sun.
> First witch
> Where the place?
> Second witch
> Upon the heath.
> Third witch
> There to meet with Macbeth.
> (*Macbeth*, I.i.1-7)

The weird sisters both call Macbeth, and call us to expect Macbeth. The call is unjustified and unexplained. There is no reason given for Macbeth's centrality. Nonetheless, Macbeth is unmistakably the object, the target, of their weirdness and conjuring. They *name* him, which has its own peculiar power. They are without identifiable history, but

4 I address Macduff's belatedness in more detail in Luke 2018, 146-48.

they are somehow entering the historical realm, altering it, and calling Macbeth out of this world in almost comic language. The 'comic', here, is language's excessive and shifting quality. It does not stay where it should but breaks the rules and inverts things. Their almost childlike rhyme, playful word-choice ("hurly-burly"), reference to legendary tales ("Grimalkin" the Scottish faery cat), and characteristic inversions ("[f]air is foul, and foul is fair"), speak to a sort of superabundant playfulness (I.i.8-11). Describing the "weird sisters" as "the heroines of the piece", Terry Eagleton writes that "[t]heir riddling, ambiguous speech […] promises to subvert" the existing hierarchal structure and reveal "the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare" (Eagleton 1986, 2). They are heroines because they estrange the world as it is, in all its systemic violence. Their origin-less, over-spilling quality not only defies teleology, it relates to the historical world of Duncan's Scotland in a manner that recalls the disturbing intrusion of the divine summons. They introduce something *other*. Eagleton's postmodern thought here aligns with the theological idea that we need a divine disturbance to break from the way of the world. Barth writes of the "fruitful disturbance", or "divine disturbance", that opens the hearts of the faithful to a new mode of life (Barth 1968, 403; 445). More directly, Eagleton draws on Benjamin's idea that we need a real state of emergency – a messianic break – to escape the tragic history of the victor. Or as Adorno writes: "Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light" (Adorno 1978, 247). Brecht expresses something similar when he writes of a "disconcerting but fruitful […] alienat[ion of] the familiar" (Brecht 1964, 192). *Macbeth*, we shall see, both confirms the creativity, and reveals the potential evil, of such processes of other-focused negation.

"Speak, if you can" – Dark Openings

The weird sisters' second entrance is again marked by "*Thunder*" (I.iii.1sd). They then mirror their martial counterparts by recounting their recent endeavours. But while the military talk was functional and enclosing, the weird sisters' account of "tempest-toss[ing]" a hapless sailor (I.iii.3-24) is non-functional and excessive. There is something comic about their speech and its irrelevance to the main

plot; something absurd in the pre-occupation of these profound forces with a sailor's wife who refused to hand over the "chestnuts in her lap", which she "munched, and munched, and munched" (I.iii.3-4). The comic specificity of the "chestnuts" speaks to a very different sort of history than Duncan's, in which an overlying concept of "justice" overrode all particularity. Rather than such indistinct mass movements and faceless cycles, we have significance and action ("I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do" (I.iii.9) at the lowest level of detail, so that nothing is inconsequential. Spirits can come anywhere, anytime, to transform lives. Even for chestnuts. Creativeness creeps in through the rifts and crevices. The world "bubbles" (I.iii.77) with dark life.

Macbeth enters on the back of the weird sisters' account and his speech is immediately distinct from Duncan's battle talk, in which he made simple, unambiguous pronouncements – "Great happiness" (I.ii.58) – about events at which he was not present. While Duncan speaks belatedly, Macbeth is part of the day: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I.iii.36). His opening words establish a clear link between Macbeth and the weird sisters' "foul is fair" inversions, which challenge the stability and univocality of "Justice". His words also establish that Macbeth is *present* in the day. He has "seen" it. He is disorientated by its weirdness and is conscious of his own disorientation. We are no longer in a historical narrative; rather, strange things are happening right now before us. In a sense, Macbeth exits the historical tale – in which his deeds are recounted in I.ii – and begins to become something else in his very first line. He alone experiences the play as we experience it: not merely as a normative account of revolt and restoration but also as the spectral emergence of a mind.

The weird sisters of *Macbeth* are, in large part, the weird sisters of Macbeth. From the outset, it is him that they call: they go to "meet with Macbeth". What happens – the spectral that invades the structural violence – happens to him. Indeed, the fact that Macbeth enters speaking the weird sisters' "fair is foul" language, suggests that he has been *conjured* by evil. As Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern note, Macbeth's first line is cued by the weird sisters' charm:

> [Charme's] [wound] up. *Enter…*
> So foule and faire a day I have not seene.
> (Palfrey and Stern 2007, 98)

It highlights the character's indebtedness to a weirdness that lies outside of him: to an "alien [un]righteousness" (to abuse Luther) that has already begun to transform and perhaps even possess the character. Banquo's mundane and functional first words, "How far is't called to Forres" (I.iii.37), immediately tell us that he is not a twin to Macbeth. He is not operating in the same dual sense:

> How far is't called to Forres? – What are these,
> So withered, and so wild in their attire,
> That look not like th'inhabitantso'th'earth
> And yet are on't? – Live you, or are you aught
> That man may question? You seem to understand me
> By each at once her choppy finger laying
> Upon her skinny lips. You should be women
> And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
> That you are so.
> (*Macbeth*, I.iii.37-45)

Banquo's long-winded questioning is plainly inadequate to this strange happening. The gap, or hyphen, between his mundane opening and his "What are these" marks the convergence of two worlds hereto separated. Banquo feels the explosiveness of the occasion, but tries to contain it by placing the weird sisters in nameable categories through a series of dichotomies: on the earth or not; alive or not; questionable or not; women or not. In this sense he is Duncan's true heir, demanding that existence fall within stable evaluations (justice or rebellion). Although his speech does attempt to get at the strangeness of the happening, the "not" in the second half of each equation suggests a bewildering beyondness with which his language cannot deal. Banquo is not open to the other's binary-blurring ("fair is foul") call, but rather seeks to define the intrusion in an all-or-nothing manner.

Macbeth is similarly eager to know what these alien figures are but he is not blocked by the need to name events as "here" or "not". Whereas Banquo creates a wall of sound that insulates him, Macbeth exposes himself to the otherness of their speech: "Speak, if you can. What are you?" (I.iii.45). After Banquo's flailing attempts to answer his own questions, Macbeth's short question and command to speak indicate a radical openness to their bubbling excess and dangerous ambiguity. He responds to a call from beyond himself. It is this sense

of risk and exposure that rebuffs the traditional idea that Macbeth is already secretly ambitious or guilty. It blunts A. C. Bradley's claim, in comparing Macbeth to Banquo, that "no innocent man would have started, as he did, with a start of *fear* at the mere prophecy of a crown" (Bradley 1932, 344). Rather, their differing responses stress Macbeth's opening to a dimension beyond Duncan's realm. It is a dimension that cannot be clearly categorised – the weird sisters perform "A deed without a name" (IV.i.65) – or judged: "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good" (I.iii.129-30). Unlike Banquo, Macbeth turns to face the void from whence the summons comes. We might draw a dark parallel between the road to Forres and the road to Damascus. In both, something intrudes into existing chronicles and language, and in both the intrusion is only really addressed to one man. In Acts 9, Saul asks "Who art thou, Lord?" while, in contrast, "the men which journeyed with him stood speechless" (Acts 9:5-7). The voice speaks before others but calls forth only one new man, one "chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15). "We go to meet Macbeth". I therefore reject Hegel's characteristic argument that, despite "appear[ing] as external powers determining Macbeth's fate", the weird sisters really declare "his most secret and private wish" (Hegel 1988, 1:231). Rather, the weird sisters are given the dramatic and imaginative force to convulse the dead world and conjure Macbeth. There is no "wish", no Macbeth, before their appearance. One might here turn Hegel's master-slave dialectic against his Shakespeare criticism: it is only by encountering the weird sisters that Macbeth's "consciousness has been fearful", that his "whole being has been seized with dread, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations". For Hegel, this fearful shaking, this "absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness" (Hegel 1977, 117). It is through such a seizure or "melting-away" – "what seemed corporal / Melted as breath into the wind" (I.iii.79-80) – that Macbeth becomes an 'other' for himself. It is pure fantasy, then, to imagine that "when Macbeth heard them he was not an innocent man" (Bradley 1932, 344). For it is only through the weird sisters' invocation of the imagination that Macbeth comes to be. "Innocence" and "guilt" do not seem to pre-exist their intrusion. The weird sisters are not merely "dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has

to deal" (Bradley 1932, 343), they are the disturbing, unaccountable summons – the play's foundational happening – through which the "action bursts into wild life" (Bradley 1932, 332).

"What is not"

The centrality of Macbeth's imagination has long been recognised:

> This bold ambitious man of action has, within certain limits, the imagination of a poet […] Macbeth's better nature – to put the matter for clearness' sake too broadly – instead of speaking to him in the overt language of moral ideas, commands, and prohibitions, incorporates itself in images which alarm and horrify. His imagination is thus the best of him, something usually deeper and higher than his conscious thoughts; and if he obeyed it he would have been safe. (Bradley 1932, 352)

Macbeth's conscience is a sort of linguistic surplus that works through poetic images rather than functional speech. It infiltrates Macbeth as "images which alarm and horrify", making Duncan's simple self-presence impossible. But while Bradley may attempt to distinguish between the "good" and "bad" aspects of this imagining, indeed, to limit Macbeth's imagination to "moral" conscience, the play does no such thing. Macbeth's imagination is not the "best" of him in a moral sense, even if it is in a dramatic sense. His entire consciousness and not just his "better nature" works through imaginings. It is his imagination that draws him to evil.

After asking them to speak, Macbeth says nothing when the weird sisters hail him as Cawdor and king. His silence is far from dumb, however, as Banquo's question indicates: "why do you start and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (I.iii.49-50). While Banquo is outwardly eager to know his prophecy, he is not transported elsewhere like Macbeth, who is envisioning something different to his ordained future within the situation; something different to life as Glamis. The weird sisters thus open the possibility of an imaginative and poetic Macbeth. That he is possessed by his vision of the future-to-come is confirmed twice more. First, Banquo again takes up the questioning because Macbeth "seems rapt withal" (I.iii.55), indicating that Macbeth's mind remains elsewhere. Second, after Ross and Angus confirm that he is Cawdor, Macbeth barely speaks to these

emissaries from the king's world but is again rapt: "Look how our partner's rapt" (I.iii.141). We might link this rapture to theatre itself. Bert O. States quotes Heidegger's observation that in "the vicinity" of a work of art "we are suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be". We experience "the sense that what is before us [...] offers a different kind of *here*" (States 1985, 4). Theatre temporarily and provisionally negates what we know – that the character is an actor, that we are sitting in a theatre watching a fiction – in order to create another form of presence. Taking up Derrida's words about the "irruptive force fissuring the space of the stage", States suggests that theatre "does not [simply] represent something *in advance* [but] becomes a blank check, an open presence; it becomes the source of something *not yet here*" (States 1985, 113). It summons something that did not before exist: the play-world but also the theatrical person, Macbeth, whose mind and presence become real for us. In his rapture, the audience and Macbeth coincide. As Macbeth is lifted out of Holinshed's time (Duncan's time) our usual sense of time is suspended. His conversion, his animation, is thus open to us: we are both transported into a new "here".

There is thus a strange tension between closedness and openness in *Macbeth*. On the one hand, we might say that Macbeth's calling is fundamentally closed off. Whereas Paul's conversion led to the preaching of good news to all, the weird sisters' conversion of Macbeth is intended to damn one man and address death to many. Whereas Paul is a universalist in his vision of the unseen, Macbeth is resolutely particular in his vision: one man wearing a crown and voiding all others. Indeed, in many ways Macbeth *repeats* the structural violence of Duncan's world in his unending murders and closure from others. In this sense, Macbeth fits with one of Badiou's three types of Evil, the "simulacrum" of a truth-event. Badiou writes: "When a radical break in a situation [...] convokes not the void but the 'full' particularity or presumed substance of that situation, we are dealing with a *simulacrum of truth*". Badiou's chief example of this evil is the Nazi movement, which is not a truth-event because, rather than naming "the void of the earlier situation", it sought to carry "the absolute particularity" of "a particular community, the German people, toward its true destiny, which is a destiny of universal domination". Macbeth pursues his solitary domination of the realm based

on a prophecy addressed only to him, by means "of 'voiding' what surrounds [him]" (Badiou 2001, 72-74). On the other hand, however, there is also a dramatic creativity and vitality that does not conform to Badiou's philosophical categories. Macbeth's emergence is genuinely new and irruptive, opening us to an imaginative subjectivity and language that was impossible within the existing situation. It breaks the world apart and creates a new mind. And while the old order may be resumed at the play's end, in dramatic terms, it is not resumed for us. Macbeth dominates our imaginative experience of the play and we depart the play-world with his demise. Malcolm may restore "measure, time, and place" (V.xi.39) at the play's end, but this order has itself been infected by evil, for it is only through the weird sisters' riddling 'prophecy' that the old regime is reinstated. The supposed naturalness and self-unity of order are now infiltrated by the unnatural. It, like Macbeth, ends up in league with the weird sisters, who are given the prophetic and dramatic agency to bring the wood to Dunsinane and return us to the old world of linear history.

Macbeth's rapture recalls the ambivalence of Montaigne's writing about imagination. Montaigne "feele[s] a very great conflict and power of imagination" (Montaigne 1980, 1:92). "Even from my infancie", he writes, "Poesie hath had the vertue to transpierce and transport me" (Montaigne 1980, 1:246). It lies at the heart of his empathetic and wide-ranging thought, allowing him to "insinuate [his] selfe into [the] place" of others (Montaigne 1980, 1:243). On the other hand, however, Montaigne's very sensitivity to imagination, his "want of strength to resist her" transporting power, causes him to "avoid it" (Montaigne 1980, 1:92). He withholds himself from the passionate raptures of the "vulgar sort":

> [T]he principall credit of visions, of enchantments, and such extraordinary effects, proceedeth from the power of imaginations, working especially in the mindes of the vulgar sort, as the weakest and seeliest, whose conceit and beleefe is so seized upon, that they imagine to see what they see not. (Montaigne 1980, 1:94)

Such moderate and reasonable judgements are present in Shakespeare too. Banquo warns Macbeth that the "instruments of darkness" may "tell us truths" to "win us to our harm" (I.iii.121-122), and we are well aware that Macbeth will be tricked and destroyed. The

play again and again registers the terrifying and dominating power of the imagination. In the thrall of diabolic forces, Macbeth kills pretty much everyone he can, including women and children. And yet, although being the "seeliest" may open Macbeth to destruction and duplicity (to being "seized upon" by evil), imaginings are not *just* imaginings in Shakespeare. Montaigne sees no path between such fantastical visions and the everyday world, but in *Macbeth* imaginings transform the world, albeit in nightmarish fashion. As Fernie puts it: "Duncan's murder acts as a ritualistic induction into a new existential or spiritual state, which is at once a state of death but equally and troublingly of more vivid life" (Fernie 2013, 61). Macbeth's mind lies in "restless ecstasy" (III.ii.24), while his wife's is ultimately overwhelmed with "thick-coming fancies" (V.iii.40). Imagination and material existence blur, as exemplified by the famous moment when the "dagger of the mind" becomes "palpable" (II.i.38-40) to the hand. "Things are *hatching*" (Fernie 2013, 63) and new forms of life are being born. Indeed, there is an almost insane escalation from words and visions to horrific reality. In an extraordinary passage, we first hear that Duncan's horses ran "wild" after his murder, then that the horses "ate each other", and finally that Ross, who had first told us of the horses running, actually saw this cannibalistic scene with his own "eyes" (II.iv.14-20).

Macbeth is not content to rest in the imaginary world. Even amidst his initial scepticism there is a smothered but urgent desire for his imaginings to come true: "The Thane of Cawdor lives, / A prosperous gentleman, and to be king / Stands not within the prospect of belief, / No more than to be Cawdor" (I.iii.24-27). From their arrival as fantastical figures, suddenly present on the road, the weird sisters bring the imagination to life, but what radically shifts Macbeth's "prospect of belief" is the revelation that he has been made Thane of Cawdor. The 'prophecy' does not just entice Macbeth's imaginings, it establishes their *reality*. Here we might turn to Michael Witmore's observation that in early modern religious thought "God's providential presence is uncovered in encounters with accidents" (Witmore 2001, 10). Understood "as occasions for storytelling and the expression of immanent forms of value" (Witmore 2001, 10), however, the "providence" revealed by such "accidents" need not be godly. For instance, for "[a] man who is ploughing a field [and] stumbles upon buried treasure", it is "'as if'

he were doing the ploughing to find the treasure" (Witmore 2001, 36). The accident fuses with, or activates, a narrative that inspires the imagination: buried treasure. More profoundly, accidents may strike the individual with "wonder", which "marks the moment when an individual's attention or 'regard' is suddenly detached from the concerns of the world and turned elsewhere" (Witmore 2001, 148). Macbeth is not only "hailed" by the weird sisters, he is hailed by the 'accident' of becoming Cawdor and transported 'elsewhere'. Or, as Lady Macbeth puts it: "Thy letters have transported me beyond / The ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant" (I.v.54-56). As with Paul, an unprecedented happening inspires the individual's hope and faith in what is not seen. A vision of the transcendent or timeless – what Paul calls "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) and Lady Macbeth "the future in the instant" – emerges through a compelling personal feeling in the present ("I feel now").

Once Macbeth's imagination is gripped by the narrative of his path to kingship, the confirmation of its happening is incredible and energising. Hence Macbeth's declaration that "[t]he greatest is behind" (I.iii.114). While this is often glossed straightforwardly as the greatest is "to come" (Shakespeare 1997, 2569)[5], the line has another important resonance. The greatest has already happened – "is behind" – because the "accident" of becoming Cawdor reveals that the world of imagining can enter the material. Dreams can come true. Life can be transformed. The seemingly unalterable facts of the world in which Glamis is Glamis, Cawdor is Cawdor, and Duncan King are suddenly shaken. The feudal scales fall from his eyes and material facts lose their inevitability: "what seemed corporal / Melt[s] as breath into the wind" (I.iii.79-80). Imaginings become his reality:

> MACBETH
> Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings.
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.
> (*Macbeth*, I.iii.136-41)

5 I.e., the "greatest", being the kingship, lies *behind* Cawdor; lies next in line.

Contrary to the old idea that "Macbeth's character is determined by his passion of ambition" (Hegel 1988, 1:578), "ambition" is not a stable, pre-existing trait but only becomes meaningful and powerful insofar as it is a fantastical vision whose realisation is suddenly believable. Dramatically, Macbeth emerges as a compelling consciousness not because he is already an "ambitious man" (Bradley 1932, 352), but because he becomes so urgently and rapturously conscious of the fact that something has happened to him. He is strikingly aware that the exhilarating vision enticed by the weird sisters has *changed* him: that he is "unfix[ed]" "knock[ed]", "shake[n]", and "smothered" by this "horrid image" (I.iii.134; 131). He is not what he was. It is by this convulsion that he gains "the imagination of a poet" (Bradley 1932, 352). Unlike in Holinshed, where Makbeth is established as a "valiant gentleman" but "somewhat cruell of nature" at the outset (Holinshed 2008-2010, 5:168)[6], there is no Macbeth before the weird sisters. And, even if we were to infer a pre-existing Macbeth, it must be in terms of the Holinshedian world of I.ii, which is to say a flat and immediate Macbeth whose unified "single state" and "seated heart" allowed no "surmise", contradiction, or otherness.

Macbeth's imagination – the imaginings that constitute his so-called "ambition" – spills from the void opened by this "surmise". He is invigorated by the realisation that visions can be made real. As such, he repeatedly describes "ambition" in the language of the imagination: "suggestion", "horrid image", "horrible imaginings", "thought", "fantastical", "surmise", "what is not". There are, of course, clear signs of conscience in imagination's "horribleness", but the overwhelming feeling is of an irresistible, albeit awful, allure that "make[s] [his] seated heart knock at [his] ribs" (I.iii.135). It usurps the material so that "nothing is / But what is not". The weird sisters open another "order" – "beyond / The ignorant present" – into which Macbeth, dreamlike, plunges. Fittingly, it is here, sharing a line with Macbeth's "what is not", that Banquo observes, "Look how our partner's rapt" (I.iii.141). Macbeth is possessed by an imagining that is far more electric than guilty conscience: it is the opening of a new horizon of possibility. He puts his hope, his soul, into what is unseen. Whereas Banquo was caught in an anxious series of dichotomies be-

6 Whereas Duncan is "soft and gentle of nature".

tween what is and is not, Macbeth arrives as a mind committed to the obscure power of "what is not".

We can here see the links between theology, philosophies of otherness or becoming, and the power of theatre to animate "something *not yet here*" (States). As with Paul, Shakespeare's new man emerges through his death to his old self. In Hegel's terms, Macbeth is transformed by desire. The weird sisters conjure a vision of what is not (yet) that inflames his desire for a new future and causes him to negate what is (himself, his political role, his social order). The not-yet is thus not simply an abstraction, or spiritual yearning, it enters and transforms the world. Hegelian freedom, according to his interpreter Alexandre Kojève, emerges not through "a *choice* between two *givens* [...] [but through] the *negation* of the given, both of the given which one is oneself (as animal or as "incarnated tradition") and of the given which one is not (the natural and social *World*)". Freedom of thought and action entail "overcoming the given in favor of what does not (yet) *exist*, thus realizing what was never *given*" (Kojève 1969, 222-23). Nothing is but what is not. Nothing, the not (yet), is the gateway to a new life of spirit. And there is a similar sense in Benjamin, Adorno, Derrida, or Badiou, in their very different ways, that the self must be opened to what is other if it is to see beyond the narrowness of its inherited subject position.

The demonic, too, can work in this manner: "The demonic *is* evil, for sure, in its violent hostility to being. And yet, it involves a potential for creativity over against what merely is, which is something other than evil – and indeed, if we are to pay heed to contemporary philosophy and culture, may be a central component of the Good" (Fernie 2013, 10). It is here worth returning to Montaigne, who describes how the "Poeticall furies, which ravish and transport their Author beyond himselfe", must be put down to "good fortune", since the author "acknowledgeth to proceed from elsewhere, than from himselfe, and that they are not in his power" (Montaigne 1980, 1:128). Montaigne here articulates an almost miraculous view of poetry: poetry is a supernatural calling that comes from outside, from "elsewhere", through a sort of unexplained moment of grace (or inspiration) that transports the author away from "himselfe" and thereby creates something new. Sidney likewise calls poetry his "unelected vocation" (Sidney 2002, 212). Here we perhaps see why Macbeth can be said to have "the im-

agination of a poet". It is not only because his imaginings are poetic but also because the manner in which he arrives as an imaginative consciousness resembles the poetic process itself – or at least the violent ravishment of the sublime. The "sacred inspiration of the Muses [...] stir[s] up the Poet with a kinde of agitation [...] beyond himselfe" (Montaigne 1980, 1:246), and this transcendent agitation then travels like electricity or sickness from poet to actor to audience. The confronting implication of *Macbeth* is that this poetic transportation is uncontrollable. That it is beyond, or at least before, good and evil.

Indeed, Macbeth's energising excess recalls "Nietzsche's view" that "we are most ourselves when we are in this destructive, dangerous and suffering state of freedom, violating the restraints of the very history which has produced us". As Jonathan Dollimore continues, "*Macbeth* does not warn against hubris and ambition; on the contrary it affirms their attraction" (Dollimore 2004, xxxi-xxxii). *Macbeth* also rebuffs the historicist impulse, deadening the world of historical progression whilst animating the passionate, brutal action of one man. As Nietzsche poses: "imagine a man seized by a vehement passion, for a woman or for a great idea: how different the world has become to him!" Such a seizure transforms the world so that "all is so palpable, close, highly coloured, resounding, as though he apprehended it with all his senses at once" (Nietzsche 1983, 64). Far from being unproblematically liberating, however, Nietzsche's description of this experience could easily apply to Macbeth:

> It is the condition in which one is least capable of being just; narrow-minded, ungrateful to the past, blind to dangers, deaf of warnings, one is a little vortex of life in a dead sea of darkness and oblivion: and yet this condition – unhistorical, anti-historical through and through – is the womb not only of the unjust but of every just deed too. (Nietzsche 1983, 64)

In a manner that ironically links with Saint Paul's conversion and Badiou's event, Nietzsche affirms that transfiguring action requires a dangerous break with history in which the present bursts with irreducible life and urgency. The passionate drive for something beyond one's existing life is enlivening and creative; it is the womb of action, both good and evil. Macbeth becomes "a little vortex of life" within the "dead seas" and "oblivion" of the Holinshedian realm. Although I.ii sets up the pattern that Macbeth will ultimately repeat by taking

up Cawdor's role of traitor, the historical narrative is quite simply "less than [Macbeth's] horrible imaginings". Nietzsche's "vortex" is the antithesis of Montaigne's quest for moderation, in which he declares that "Wee never governe that thing well, wherewith we are possessed and directed" (Montaigne 1980, 3:258). As much as Montaigne might be "right", his praise of the moderate man who "marcheth alwaies with the reines in his hand" sounds more like Malcolm than Macbeth. Shakespeare's major tragic figures seldom march "with the reines in […] hand". Indeed, they often become themselves by letting the reins fall. They rise to a higher plane, to adapt Montaigne's words against immediate passion, through imaginative "torments" and "afflictions", through "violent" and at times "tyrannical" desires, and through the "rash motions" that "transport" them to new modes of being (Montaigne 1980, 3:258-9). They arise through negation. Montaigne values control. Duncan and Malcolm value control. By and large, criticism values control. In plays such as *Macbeth*, however, Shakespeare escapes our control. Dark things flame forth only to return to darkness: things that elude our names and categories. An imaginative excess emerges from "what is not" and crosses over, like a demonic "dagger of the mind", to transpierce the material world.

"The Eye Wink at the Hand"

While Macbeth's opening to "what is not" brings him to dramatic life, it is evil in the way that utterly closes him off from "what is". Not only are his imaginings black, Macbeth envisages shrouding the act of realising them in darkness: "Stars, hide your fires, / Let not light see my black and deep desires; / The eye wink at the hand" (I.iv.50-52). Macbeth attempts to separate what is imagined from the action that will realise it, to insulate the mind from the act. He later declares:

> If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly. If th'assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success: that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all, here,
> But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come.
> (*Macbeth*, I.vii.1-7)

The "If", of course, is impossible. Indeed, Macbeth's own speech immediately negates it. The done-ness is imaginatively overridden when he pre-visions how Duncan's murder will play in the minds of others. He in fact concludes that the act is not "done", first, because it will "teach / Bloody instructions" that "return / To plague th'inventor" (I.vii.8-10), and second, because "pity" will "blow the horrid deed in every eye" (I.vii.17-24). The explicit focus on the outward consequences of the act (particularly evident in Macbeth's tremulous question: "If we should fail?" (I.vii.59) gives some credence to Bradley's conclusion that Macbeth's "conscious or reflective mind […] moves chiefly among considerations of outward success and failure, while his inner being is convulsed by conscience" (Bradley 1932, 353). And yet, surely Macbeth *does* consciously address the moral horror of the act when he describes "pity […] blow[ing] the horrid deed in every eye". He is picturing the murder as others will, which is a form of shamed conscience. The trouble is – and this is the critical point Bradley misses – that Macbeth separates the "horrid deed" from the allure of "what is not". There is thus a deeper conflict at play than Bradley's opposition between "good" imagination and "bad" conscious thought: there is a split between the self and the act. Macbeth divorces his vision of the future from the evil action that will consummate it. Hence how Macbeth can somewhat contradictorily foresee that others will be both inspired to repeat the action (it will "teach / Bloody instructions") and be repulsed by the "horrid deed". What is "horrible" about his imaginings is attributed to the one-off act, while what is "enticing" about them is attributed to the vision (and future self) that the act will bring about. The separation between the two implies – or hopes – that the act will be over and "done" *for Macbeth*, even as it continues to horrify (or inspire) others. He hopes to bring about a settled state by way of a "be-all" and "end-all" blow: "The future in the instant" (I.v.56). As Stanley Cavell writes, "I hear Macbeth's speculation of deeds done in the doing, without consequence, when surcease is success, to be a wish for there to be no human action", a "wish for an end to time" (Cavell 2003, 233-34). Macbeth seeks to ground time's flow "here, / But here upon this bank and shoal of time". The double "heres" form an impossibly absolute present that annuls the world of human action and relation.

But that is not the whole story, for Macbeth's desire to reach a final resting place fails both metaphysically and dramatically. He

is perpetually embroiled in the present that he wants to overleap. His mind is never still but moves with the phantoms that possess it. And this tortured movement births the play's peculiar form of life. In becoming "what he has done" there is, as Philip Davis notes, "almost incredibly, a sort of horrified innocence of realization. "Look at me! at what I have come to!" (Davis 1996, 25). He does not reach the envisioned future ("what is not") but becomes the evil he would overleap. And he is *amazed* at his own evil. Like us, and ultimately like Lady Macbeth herself, Macbeth cannot follow his wife's prosaic advice – "These deeds must not be thought / After these ways. So, it will make us mad" (II.ii.31-32) – but stares in appalled fascination at his own nightmare: "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep'" (II.ii.33-34). He undergoes a "torture of the mind", which writhes in "restless ecstasy" (III.ii.23-24). As Bradley writes, "the image of his own guilty heart or bloody deed [...] hold[s] him spell-bound and possess[es] him wholly, like a hypnotic trance which is at the same time the ecstasy of a poet" (Bradley 1932, 354). The "horrible imaginings" that overtook "present fears" now overrun the solid world.

Macbeth comes to apprehend everything as an imagining. "Conscience" comes to consciousness as the uninvited trespass of a foreign voice: "Sleep no more". At one level, this is a brilliant way of dramatising how conscience encroaches as an external force: "Of such marvailous-working power is the sting of conscience: which often induceth us to bewray, to accuse, and to combat our selves" (Montaigne 1980, 2:45). But it is also fundamental to Macbeth's mode of life. Not only is conscience apprehended in this manner, Macbeth apprehends all ideas and actions through traumatic visions. Fittingly, Duncan's murder, the play's central action, is not staged. It is not that sort of play. We do not see it, as we see Desdemona's murder, but apprehend it as Macbeth does: as a haunting. It disappears, along with the rest of the material world. Macbeth's mind shrinks from the material act and into "what is not", which is both the promise of the imagination (new life) and his desultory isolation (death). Macbeth hears a voice crying that he "does murder sleep". *That* is the act for Macbeth. It is an intrusion he cannot stop. He is "afraid to think what [he] has done" (II.ii.49). The act therefore becomes something else; it is translated into voices and apparitions. As strikingly conscious as

he is of his changed self, Macbeth's torturous guilt also operates, paradoxically, to *maintain* his old self. His guilty imagination insulates him from the full terror of the act, which becomes a floating, foreign vision, a haunting ghost, never fully belonging to "Macbeth". It is for this reason that Kierkegaard uses Macbeth to illustrate a demonic "[d]espair over sin", which is "an attempt to maintain oneself by sinking still deeper" into sin, reaching the point where "it is eternally decided that one will hear nothing about repentance, nothing about grace" (Kierkegaard 1970, 241). Kierkegaard points to Macbeth's lines after Duncan's murder:

> from this instant
> There's nothing serious in mortality.
> All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.
> (*Macbeth*, II.iii.88-90)

In Paul's terms, Macbeth is closed to both the world ("renown") and the new life of spirit ("grace"). Shut-off within himself, no longer really speaking to anyone living, he now dismisses the possibility of transformation. But this despair also serves a 'positive' function: it serves to maintain his demonic self-consistency. In a sense, he avoids the full terror that would come if grace and goodness were admitted – if he acknowledged that he could turn aside from his bloody course. We see this demonic consistency in Macbeth's ultimate response to his ongoing hell: "Strange things I have in head that will to hand, / Which must be acted ere they may be scanned" (III.iv.138-39). The most straightforward reading is that he must enact his murderous thoughts before others suspect them. He must kill Macduff. But it also implies that he refuses to scan them before they are put to hand. To some extent, acting before scanning is a continuation of the eye winking at the hand.

And yet, perhaps there is also something of a dark fidelity to the imagination here, for Macbeth now knows that the horror inevitably will follow the act: that these "[s]trange things" *will* be "scanned". Just as Banquo is only really there for Macbeth after his murder, – "Hence, horrible shadow, / Unreal mock'ry hence!" (III.iv.105-6) – these dark thoughts will only be truly felt (always through a visual scanning) once they are done. Knowing this, Macbeth's decision to put all his horror to hand is almost a demonic consecration: he push-

es "what is not" to its consummation so it can be scanned. For Kierkegaard, a thinker acutely aware of the closeness of good and evil, most people are "only momentarily conscious, conscious in the great decisions", and are therefore only "spirit (if this word may be applied to them) once a week for one hour", which "is a pretty bestial way of being spirit" (Kierkegaard 1970, 236). In contrast, Macbeth's nightmare visions speak to a mind inescapably aware of its being in sin. Macbeth thereby achieves a demonic consistency – a "continuity of sin" or "consistency in something higher" (Kierkegaard 1970, 236; 238) – which, however dark, makes him a man of "spirit". The demonic rejection of the good can thus be seen, paradoxically, as both an evasive attempt to "maintain oneself" by "sinking still deeper" into sin (Kierkegaard 1970, 241) and as a courageous pursuit of "what is not". More positively put, greatness for Kierkegaard is not essential, but is a matter of what one is attached to: "everyone became great in proportion to his *expectancy*" (Kierkegaard 1985, 50). Insofar as Macbeth expects a new horizon of life and thought, the weird sisters are a creative opening (and call) to otherness. In Badiou's terms, they are an event. Insofar as he expects to usurp the role of king, to merely reshuffle the bloody deck, the weird sisters are an evil temptation or tragic repetition of the existing order. In Badiou's terms, they are a simulacrum. Shakespeare thus creates a hero who embodies both creation and evil; a hero whose horizons of expectation are both the greatest and the lowest. We have an indication of drama's ability to rest in uncertainty, in a way that philosophy cannot. Or, to return to Bradley, "the elements in" Macbeth's "nature are so inextricably blended that the good in him, that which we admire, instead of simply opposing the evil, reinforces it" (Bradley 1926, 88-89).

Negative Creation

The play embarrasses our humanist impulses by placing the powers of imagination and poetry in the service of an attractive evil. The consciousness that *Macbeth* conjures is magnetic and alive, but it is summoned to utter alienation in a living hell. Philosophical and ethical categories, along with historical context, struggle in the face of Shakespeare's drama because its creation of presence – that Macbeth *does* come alive – almost becomes a cardinal virtue that overruns reg-

ular virtues. Shakespeare's "impartiality makes us uncomfortable", Bradley writes: "we cannot bear to see him, like the sun, lighting up everything and judging nothing" (Bradley 1926, 255). Drama is animating: it brings "what is not" to life. *Macbeth* suggests that poetic affect need have no grounding in anything ethical or emancipatory; that new horizons of possibility may turn out to be nightmares; that the "new man" may turn out to be a murderous paranoiac. Macbeth both bursts into "wild life" from a dead situation and also comes to destroy all that lives. He may (to put it mildly) tip too far into the negative, but that tipping, in all its violence and peril, is essential to creative endeavour, which necessarily breaks from "what is". Creative freedom, according to Kojève, is exercised "through the negation or transformation of the given, starting from an idea or an ideal that does *not* yet *exist*, that is still nothingness (a 'project')" (Kojève 1969, 48). Paul's rapturous calling was a destructive madness to the pharisees, a demonic delusion that threatened to destroy religious tradition. We might think, here, of Juliet's violence toward her name, family, and past joys; Desdemona's violence toward her father and place; Hamlet's murderous rashness; Cordelia's "Nothing". *Macbeth* reveals that such animating breaks are far closer to "evil", to demonic birth, than is comfortable. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare seems to extract and distil the destructive aspect of poetic creation – the "not", the break, the negative – and make *it* the subject. And he thereby pushes us to ask whether this is, at base, what creation means: is becoming "what is not", and thereby destroying the world that is, what it means to create? Is this the heart of Shakespeare's extraordinary power to conjure character?

Macbeth, in death, thus brings us face to face with something at the heart of life. And it is hard not to acquiesce. Besmeared in blood and gore, the devil yet has an attractive face. For the devil is in us, if we truly live. In the sublime raptures of poetry, religion, or passion, the lines between good and evil become hard to distinguish. The issue is an ancient one, with us since eyes "beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18): how to distinguish evil from the sublime? Such arresting and domineering experiences are, as Montaigne writes, "beyond rules, and above reason": "the splendor of a lightning flash" has "no communitie with our judgement; but ransacketh and ravisheth the same" (Montaigne 1980, 1:246). *Macbeth* thus

prompts us to consider Shakespeare's relation to his art. Macbeth's substitution of the world for the linguistic excess of the weird sisters' supplementary realm is a deal with the devil that both brings spirits to life and makes the world barren. The black arts, but also art, seem to be supplements that are gained at the expense of living. Macbeth's relentless course is reminiscent of Faust's fatal refusal to burn his books, but it also foreshadows how Prospero's drowning of his book leads to a recuperated (if diminished) life. Books, reading, writing, creativity, magic, illusion, and imagining are both gateways and threats to living in these tales. "What is not" threatens to usurp "what is". We might turn, here, to the double-edged writing of Derrida's "Dangerous Supplement". First, "[t]he supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence" (Derrida 1992, 83). It is, for Macbeth, energising and animating; it brings "something more" into the narrowness of Duncan's realm. But, secondly, the "supplement supplements", it "adds only to replace". The supplement "intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place of*" "the thing itself" (Derrida 1992, 83). The weird sisters' realm supplants the world it supplements. Macbeth destroys his world so that "nothing is but what is not". Macbeth's "horrible imaginings" give birth to an impossible desire for a world beyond action or representation; for a world that is "done".

The play leaves us with an undecidable: do we prefer the animated evil of Macbeth or the lifeless goodness of Malcolm and Macduff? In a sense, the play does not allow us to answer, for it takes Macbeth from us even before the end. The new man, the man of spirit, collapses into a form of deadness. "[A]weary of the sun" (V.v.47), he welcomes death: "I have lived long enough. My way of life / Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf" (V.iii.23-24). Suffering an apparently providential revenge upon his sins, Macbeth seems to acknowledge his own evil and consent to his own destruction. On the other hand, by restoring "measure, time, and place" (V.xi.39), the good men of order, Macduff and Malcom, end the drama and pull us out of the vitalising excess of Macbeth's "what is not". We have either the hollow men, never quite with the play's dramatic moment, or the man of shadows ("Life's but a walking shadow", V.v.23). By giving life to Macbeth and refusing it to others – by raising him above (and then dropping him below) the undifferentiating feudal bloodshed of Duncan's world – Shakespeare leaves us walking

among the shades of what might have been. How might Macbeth's poetic and imaginative potential have been freed from the brutal cycles of violence, the drive to individualistic power, that dominates his political world? How can one live with the negative power – the "what is not" – without it becoming all? There are no clear answers, of course, and so the play leaves us caught between poetic creation and destructive evil. It pushes us to acknowledge that our most passionate moments, intense imaginative visions, and daring leaps, may lead us well to hell as to heaven. There is a precariousness, an arbitrariness, a compulsiveness, to these creative moments and the way they may seize us. As much as the play is a teleological tale of rebellion and restoration, it is also a deeper ungrounding of personal teleology. A revelation of the fundamental tenuousness of our life, which may be seized or not, called or not, by forces outside of us. Life is at once transfigured by Macbeth's supernatural calling and returns to its old tragic cycles. The call at once means everything and collapses into "sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (V.v.26-27). Ultimately, perhaps, the play leaves us with the mystery and paradox of poetry, which can be both a creation and a closure, new life and deadness, without final resting place.

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