

The Symmetry of Evil:
An Examination of Guilt and Trust
in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Jessica Dawn Jackson

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Dr. Sean Lawrence

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* portrays one of the most famous crises of conscience in the canon of English literature. Unlike some of Shakespeare's other great villains, such as Iago or Richard III, Macbeth is not a true Machiavellian villain. His story is that of a good man who falls, and betrays those he loves to fulfil his greatest ambition. At the outset of the play, Macbeth is a moral character praised for his courage and loyalty to the king. Macbeth's great struggle is not against the witches or Macduff, but between his conscience and his ambition. Macbeth experiences guilt over the consequences of his actions, actions he commits despite knowing that they are wrong prior to committing them. His struggle lies not in committing his deeds but in his inability to forget what he has done. As the play progresses, Macbeth continues his bloody course of action despite being bombarded by feelings of guilt. This is a paradox which the works of Paul Ricoeur can help explicate.

Macbeth is a complicated play that explores issues of ambition, trust and betrayal. Macbeth's extreme guilt can be viewed as a response to his recognition that he has knowingly violated serious moral codes. I propose using the moral philosophy of Ricoeur to examine Macbeth's decision-making and subsequent actions. Such a reading places *Macbeth* within the context of Ricoeur's discursive responses to and multi-levelled analysis of evil. Ricoeur conceptualized evil as highly relational. He recognized that evil committed by one is experienced as evil undergone by another (Ricoeur 37). His relational understanding of evil creates a dark symmetry between those who commit and those who experience evil.

The relational nature of evil allows for the assignment and acceptance of blame between the actor and the victim. When evil is the result of human action the victim can

lament his or her suffering and lay the blame at the feet of the actor (Ricoeur 35). This leads to a second type of symmetry between those who commit and those who experience evil. It is in this second type of dark symmetry that Ricoeur recognized a great paradox at the heart of evil: in their guilt, the perpetrators of evil experience themselves as victims (Kearney 38). Guilt, experienced by the actor, is the recognition that he or she has committed evil and that his or her actions have led to the suffering of another. When Macbeth experiences guilt, he is figured as both victim and perpetrator of evil. Macbeth is a victim because of his recognition that his actions have caused others to suffer. It is this recognition which causes Macbeth tremendous guilt and anxiety.

This paper will use Ricoeur's philosophy to explore the paradox behind Macbeth's behaviour, specifically why he continues to commit further wrongs despite recognizing that such acts will cause him further guilt. It is the central argument of this paper that Macbeth's extreme guilt becomes a self-sustaining and perpetuating spur for further acts of violence and betrayal. He attempts to assuage his guilt by achieving his goals, believing that he will become less susceptible to guilt as he commits further acts of violence. Macbeth believes that obtaining his ambitions shall justify the initial guilt he experiences prior to becoming a practiced murderer.

Secondly, I will argue that the relational nature of trust mirrors the relational nature of guilt, as described by Ricoeur. In their guilt, perpetrators of evil experience themselves as victims because of the very guilt that causes them to recognize that their actions have led to the suffering of another. Similarly, trust is capable of both building and destroying relationships. Trust, which allows for the possibility of betrayal, can be a causative agent in the commitment of evil. Macbeth can murder Duncan because Duncan trusts him enough to

spend the night at his castle. Macbeth's feudal society is built on trust, and it is the intimate nature of these acts of betrayal which cause Macbeth such tremendous anguish.

Finally, this paper will discuss how images of the deaths of children, which appear throughout the play, represent the interaction between Macbeth's acts of betrayal, his guilt and societal breakdown. As previously suggested, Macbeth commits acts of violence in an attempt to reach a nihilistic state where he is totally unaffected by feelings of guilt. However, as Macbeth betrays those around him, his society begins to fall apart. The images of dead children in *Macbeth* are a powerful statement about the nature of trust and betrayal. As a society without children literally has no future, the images of death in *Macbeth* depict Hobbesian fears of societal breakdown and nihilism.

Over the course of his life Ricoeur developed two distinct taxonomies in an attempt to better understand evil. In *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur categorizes and describes four human responses to evil which he observed through his study of myth, literature, history and philosophy. These discursive responses provide a better understanding of Ricoeur's belief in humanity's predisposition towards goodness and justice. The discursive responses build on, but do not overrule each other. Ricoeur's multi-leveled analysis of evil comes from his later work, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology* and is distinct from his earlier taxonomy. He uses the levels to explain how evil has been understood over the course of history, from the earliest human myth to the present day. Each of the discursive responses can exist within each of Ricoeur's proposed levels of evil.

The first discursive response to evil is lament and blame. While both lament and blame are responses to suffering, lament is attributed to suffering which occurs without a responsible subject, for example in the case of a natural disaster. Suffering undergone as a

result of human action is different since human action becomes “an object of imputation, accusation, and reprimand” (Ricoeur 35). This allows the victim to lay the blame at the feet of the individual responsible for his or her suffering. Lament and blame diverge at the point where human action becomes involved, as lament makes the transition to blame when one is embittered by the involvement of personal responsibility. The relational structure of evil results in an interface where “the cry of lament is most bitter, when one person feels himself the victim of another’s wickedness” (Ricoeur 37). *Macbeth* demonstrates the recognition of this interface, not from the perspective of the victim, but from the protagonist's perspective of having caused his victim's suffering.

The relational structure of evil results in the first type of dark symmetry, where evil committed by one is replicated in the evil undergone by another. This same structure also results in the second type of dark symmetry, wherein the actor experiences guilt because of his recognition that he is responsible for a victim's suffering. Guilt, however, is not present in all situations where blame is laid on the actor, even in cases where the actor recognizes that his behaviors have caused another's suffering. The first of Ricoeur's discursive responses provides a framework for understanding how human choice, action, suffering, guilt and evil are all interconnected.

The second discursive response to evil described by Ricoeur is the tradition of myth, which incorporates evil into narratives of origin and makes evil familiar and bearable. For Ricoeur, myth attempts to provide humanity with consolation by addressing the lament of suffering. It does so by providing the history of the known universe and describing the events that led to the world as we know it. Ricoeur argues that myth expresses our sense of belonging to a history of evil, by expressing the feeling that those who commit evil acts

have been “seduced by superior forces” (38). In myth, human moral choice is “linked to cosmological cycles of fate, destiny, or predestination” making the evil figure a paradoxical figure “self-determined by some force beyond itself” (Kearney 91). Myth depicts what Ricoeur recognizes as the great paradox of evil: “at the very heart of doing evil, is that human beings feel themselves victims while at the same time being guilty” (38). This paradox can perhaps explain the crisis of agency that sometimes accompanies victimizing others, or in cases where the perpetrator's motives are unclear, even to himself.

The anguish experienced by characters of myth is an example of the first type of the dark symmetry of evil, where evil committed by one is replicated in the evil undergone by another. When human action is the result of predestination, evil characters may feel themselves to be victims of fate. It is important to note however, that this paradox of evil, and the dark symmetry between victim and perpetrator does not actually position the perpetrator along side the victim. The perpetrator is still the active agent in the commitment of evil. In the case of Macbeth, or any perpetrator of evil for that matter, the guilt of the actor does not absolve him of his actions.

If one were to lay the blame for Macbeth's actions on the intentions and workings of the witches, then Macbeth would become the dark figure of myth, one who is a victim of fate, destiny or predestination. The explanation that the witches' supernatural powers lead Macbeth to his violent misdeeds takes agency away from Macbeth and puts it in the hands of the witches. However, this explanation renders Macbeth a much less interesting character, one whose actions are due to the whims of forces of darkness he is unable to control. When one considers that Macbeth is not the only character to meet the witches, this explanation becomes especially problematic.

During his initial encounter with the witches Macbeth is accompanied by his trusted friend and fellow general, Banquo. In fact, although the witches first address Macbeth, Banquo actually sees them first (1.3.138-146). Banquo not only meets the witches, he also challenges them to reveal to him anything they may know about his future, as they did voluntarily for Macbeth (1.3.58-62). However, unlike his friend, Banquo does not endeavor to act on the witches' prophecies, as he makes no attempt to position his son to inherit the throne in order to fulfill the witches' prophecy that he shall beget a line of kings. As both Macbeth and Banquo meet and receive prophecies from the witches, the meeting is a constant rather than a variable and should not be considered the impetus for Macbeth's subsequent acts of evil. Shakespeare's exploration of evil in *Macbeth* is far more complex than a mythological explanation allows.

Just as the first discursive response of lament and blame makes the transition to myth, myth transitions to the third discursive response, wisdom. Ricoeur proposes that myth must now elaborate itself, and "engage in an argument in order explain why the human condition is the way it is for everyone" (165). Ricoeur differentiates the tradition of myth from wisdom, stating that "while myth narrates, wisdom argues" (167). With wisdom, humans seek not only to recount the origins of evil but also to justify why each of us struggles with the aforementioned paradox of evil (Kearney 92). Part of the fascination of *Macbeth* is that the title character struggles with the paradox of evil. Macbeth feels victimized by himself every time he takes action to fulfill the witches' prophecies.

The fourth discursive response to evil, which develops from wisdom, is the speculative. Ricoeur argues that the speculative begins with the development of Christian theology, particularly with Augustine. Augustine recognized that evil could not be regarded

as a physical substance, so he replied with a negative concept, the idea of nothingness. In doing so, Augustine proposes a new category, *nihil*, to construe evil as a deficiency in being. Ricoeur recognized that Augustine's conceptualization of evil causes the ontological question *Unde malum?* (where does evil come from?) to lose all its significance. However, the question that replaces it, *Unde malum faciamus?* (how does it come about that we do evil?), "tips the whole problem of evil into the sphere of action, of the will, of free will" (Ricoeur 46). Though one may struggle with a crisis of agency when committing acts of evil, the speculative response lays the problem of evil at the feet of the perpetrator, the mover or the actor. This is the problem Macbeth faces, when his guilt over Duncan's murder signifies that he is responsible for his actions, and that he, not the witches, has victimized himself. Ultimately, Macbeth's choices are his own, just as all of our choices are our own.

When considering evil it is important to bear in mind the historic location of specific instances. Actions that were considered evil at one time may be laudable in another. In the case of *Macbeth*, the act of regicide must be considered both within the frame of the setting and the time that the play was written. For example, at the outset of the play Macbeth is praised for killing Macdonald, who led a rebellion against Duncan. Macbeth's killing of a rebel causes him no guilt, whereas his killing of Duncan causes him to be overcome with guilt. From a Renaissance perspective, in murdering Duncan Macbeth has violated the Great Chain of Being, which accounts for the metaphysical responses to the killing of Duncan. For example, on the night of Duncan's murder Lennox describes how the owl, which was believed to prophesize strange events, "Clamoured the livelong night. Some say the earth / Was feverous and did shake" (2.3.61-62). It is worth noting that Macbeth's

subjugation of Macdonald and his role in ending the initial rebellion means that Macbeth has experienced the other side of treason and has felt the anguish of betrayal.

Macbeth is distinct from other Shakespearean villains in that he is not psychopathic. Unlike Richard III, Iago, or Aaron, Macbeth's great crisis lies not in committing his acts, but in forgetting them (Jackson, Woodworth and Lawrence). As the perpetrator of evil, Macbeth is faced with questions of his own responsibility. Macbeth's motive, his desire for the crown, while seemingly obvious, is an insufficient explanation for his actions, even to Macbeth himself who declares prior to killing Duncan, "I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on th' other—" (1.7.25-27). With no logical explanation for his act of betrayal, Macbeth's guilt becomes especially problematic in that he needs to justify it *post facto*. Unable to entirely convince himself of his reasons for his actions prior to killing Duncan, Macbeth is unable to accept his guilt and instead seeks to escape it. Macbeth's guilt, however, should not be confused with metaphysical fear. As demonstrated by the same contemplations prior to killing Duncan show; "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" (1.7.2-7) Macbeth does not fear the afterlife.

Following Duncan's death Macbeth continues to commit acts that he knows to be wrong in the hopes that finally achieving his ends shall justify his means. It is Macbeth's guilt which spurs on his actions. Initially, Macbeth is highly distressed by his disloyal thoughts and actions. For example, after being greatly disturbed by the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth tells his wife that his behavior is the result of "the initiate fear,

that wants hard use./ We are yet but young indeed" (3.4.144-145). In contrast, on hearing women cry in response to the death of Lady Macbeth, Macbeth replies,

I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
 The time has been, my senses would have cooled
 To hear a night-shriek, and my fell hair
 Would at the dismal treatise rouse and stir
 As life were in't. I have supped full with horrors,
 Direness familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
 Cannot once start me. (5.5.9-15)

However, with each misdeed Macbeth descends further into nihilism. Eventually, he recognizes that his thoughts and acts of treason and murder have left him entirely cold and unfeeling.

Initially, the noble Macbeth experiences guilt at the very thought of killing Duncan, as evidenced by his thoughts yielding "to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use of nature" (1.3.134-137). Macbeth thinks of killing Duncan immediately, as soon as Ross and Angus deliver the news that he has been made the Thane of Cawdor:

My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
 Shakes so my single state of man that function
 Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
 But what is not. (1.3.140-143)

Macbeth finds his thoughts of murdering Duncan to be more frightful and disturbing than a visit from witches or the aftermath of a rebellion, as he suggests when he claims that

"Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings" (1.3.1138-139). It should be noted, however, that Macbeth's thoughts are entirely his own, as the witches never suggest that Macbeth kill Duncan.

Immediately following Duncan's murder Macbeth is overcome with guilt. Prior to washing away Duncan's blood, evidence of his crime, Macbeth declares that "To know my deed, 'twere best not to know myself" (2.2.70). Macbeth's comment can be seen as highlighting the importance of Socrates' direction to "know thyself," in beginning one's quest for knowledge and establishing one's morality (Avnon 305). Macbeth, who was unable to maintain his morality, desires to have no knowledge of what he has done. In forgetting what he has done, Macbeth believes he shall forget that he, like the previous Thane of Cawdor, has become a traitor.

Macbeth desires to lose all memory of his deed, because knowledge of Duncan's murder furnishes him with the title of traitor and murderer. This is the same title which was rightfully held by the previous Thane of Cawdor, which Macbeth inherited just prior to the Thane's execution for his part in the rebellion. Macbeth experiences guilt precisely because he knows what he has done, and how it has affected his victim. Macbeth hopes that by absolving himself of his actions, he will be absolving his identity. Thus begins Macbeth's downward spiral into immorality. From this point on, Macbeth desires to be able to act with no thoughts of the consequences for others, considering only his personal gain. He comments on this at least twice: "Strange things I have in head, that will to hand, / Which must be acted, ere they may be scanned" (3.4.140-141); "And even now / To crown my thoughts with acts— be it thought and done" (4.1.163-164). The problem with Macbeth's solution, however, is that each act only makes him more guilty. While Macbeth is able to do

almost anything, he is still unable to forget what he has done, and therefore unable to forget who he has become. This effectively traps Macbeth in a vicious cycle of action, consequence and guilt where his guilt becomes self-sustaining and perpetuating.

As Macbeth experiences and struggles with his guilt, his guilt itself begins to influence his decisions. Macbeth feels defiled, and reasons that he has lost his soul to the devil in murdering Duncan: "mine eternal jewel / Given to the common enemy of man" (3.1.67-68). The notion that evil leaves one defiled is especially important in Ricoeur's earlier work, *The Symbolism of Evil*, and frequently figures in the second discursive response to evil, myth. For example, in chapter four of Genesis God places a mark upon Cain for killing his brother Abel (King James Bible Gen. 4.15). God places this mark on Cain so that others may recognize him for what he has done. Macbeth is similarly defiled, marked with his guilt for killing Duncan. For example, immediately following Duncan's murder Macbeth declares:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No— this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (2.2.59-62)

Though he declares that all of the waters of the ocean will not make him clean again, Lady Macbeth suggests that disposing of the evidence of their deed will clear it from their minds and calmly asserts that "A little water clears us of this deed" (2.2.66). Macbeth's guilt, initially represented by the stain of Duncan's blood, is later represented by Macbeth's insomnia and images of dead children. Each of these images symbolizes feelings of defilement which effects Macbeth's decisions.

Lady Macbeth herself, despite her bold declarations, is also unable to wash away the stain of her guilt. As she descends into madness she becomes convinced that her hands are literally stained with blood, declaring "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" (5.1.41). In a declaration that is similar to that made by her husband after being disturbed by the sight of Duncan's blood on his hands Lady Macbeth wails in her madness: "Here's the smell of blood still— all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O" (5.1.48-50). Macbeth is also unable to easily wash away his guilt. However, rather than falling into madness, Macbeth attempts to escape his guilt by not allowing all his suffering to be for naught. This, of course, only leads Macbeth to kill further in his attempt to obtain his goal, which in turn only makes him more guilty.

After the murder of Banquo and the attempt on Fleance's life, Macbeth's guilt drives him even further. Once again using imagery of blood to represent defilement, Macbeth reflects that he is "in blood / Steeped so far, that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.135-137). Macbeth reasons that the guilt he experiences over killing Banquo is the result of having not committed enough misdeeds. He believes that he experiences his "strange and self-abuse" (3.3.141) because it is unfamiliar to him. Trapped in a cycle in which his guilt drives him to try to achieve a level of success in which his actions are justified, Macbeth is driven by the hope of exorcising his stain from himself. Macbeth himself recognizes that he must act increasingly rashly, as he has no explanation for his actions except for the desire to absolve himself of his own guilt and feelings of defilement. For example, after learning from the witches that Macduff is a threat, Macbeth decides to kill Macduff's entire family. Even as he determines to do so, Macbeth admits that "The flighty purpose is ne'er o'ertook / Unless the deed go with it" (4.1.145-146). Macbeth

recognizes that unless his actions immediately follow his intentions, he will not follow through with them. Macbeth sees evil as something that he must become accustomed to, though he is only able to achieve such nihilism near his end. It should be noted that though Macbeth articulates experiencing guilt and anxiety, his defilement is not necessarily conscious, though I suspect that it is. Indeed, there is a great deal of difficulty in determining what Macbeth thinks and feels, especially amid his conflicting feelings and desires. However, Macbeth's further acts of violence serve the practical purposes of maintaining the throne and reducing feelings of guilt. Even if Macbeth's actions are driven in whole or in part by a subconscious feeling of defilement, he still approaches a state of nihilism whether he wishes to or not.

In his guilt, Macbeth experiences himself as a victim because he recognizes that his actions have led to the suffering of others. For Macbeth, guilt is associated with defilement and as a consequence he is unable to accept his guilt. By attempting to escape the reality of his guilt Macbeth becomes nihilistic. I have proposed as my second thesis that the relational nature of trust mirrors the relational nature of guilt. In *Macbeth* trust allows for the possibility of betrayal and is an active agent in the commitment of evil. This relates to Ricoeur's second taxonomy, his multi-leveled analysis of evil. The first level of evil is description, where one considers the various configurations or forms of evil. The second level is the structure or origin of evil. This, however, is different from origin in the physical or organic sense. Instead, evil is a question of a "negative legitimation" (Changeux and Ricoeur 284). According to Ricoeur, at some point we all experience evil in such a way that we come to the realization that evil is something that is continually present in the world. This realization could be described as an acknowledgement of the heritage of evil

(Changeux and Ricoeur 284). Our sense of personal responsibility, and our struggle to behave ethically, which according to Ricoeur is best evaluated by our interactions with others, must now be reconciled with the notion that evil is ever-present in the world. Ricoeur asserts that evil is continually present in the world, which suggests that evil is ubiquitous and necessitates a sense of ethical responsibility. However, the ubiquity of evil also leads into Ricoeur's third level of evil, which suggests that evil's definitional other, goodness, is also ubiquitous.

For Ricoeur, the third level of evil is actually the tradition of goodness. The third level is “that of a call for help, of trust in a fundamental rescue” (Changeux and Ricoeur 285). Ricoeur argues that the problem posed by the great myths is how to give a voice to this fundamental act of trust. In the discursive response of myth, the radicality of evil is superimposed on the originality of good. According to Ricoeur,

the wisdom of the Egyptians, Hebrews, and Mesopotamians resides in precisely this, the telling of a story, for lack of anything better since they were not equipped to speculate in the manner of Kant, Hegel, or Nietzsche. But something fundamental is preserved by this art of storytelling: the predisposition to goodness is stronger, more profound than the propensity for evil.

(Changeux and Ricoeur 287)

I propose that because good is original, it has the possibility of being corrupted. People do not fail in acting ethically because of the assumption that evil everywhere, and as a consequence view evil unfortunate inevitability. Rather, evil is ubiquitous because, wherever there is goodness, there is the possibility for corruption. What is good can be

used to aid what is evil, but what is evil can never be used to support what is good (Ricoeur 165).

At this point I propose an addition to the work of Ricoeur, that trust can also be viewed as original not only because it is good, but because it can only be broken once it has been established. This would require trust to exist first. Society is built upon trust, yet suspicion and distrust exist because trust exists; there will always be those who betray their positions of trust. The witches' infamous chant that "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (1.1.11) in the truest sense applies to trust. Macbeth is able to commit the initial murder of Duncan in large part due to the trust placed in him by others. The play deals with trust in a very sophisticated way in that it demonstrates how the establishment of trust always opens the possibility for its betrayal. Macbeth's opening line of the play, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.38) underscores how the original goodness of trust may be corrupted. This notion is established early on, at Macbeth and Banquo's first meeting with the witches.

When the witches vanish without explaining themselves, their purposes, or their intent, Macbeth questions whether or not they have been truthful in their prophecies. He does so by asking his friend if he hopes the witches' prophecy regarding his son becoming king shall come true: "Do you not hope your children shall be kings / When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me, / Promised no less to them?" (1.3.119-121). It is worth noting that Macbeth appears to trust in his friend's judgment. Banquo's reply to his friend is reminiscent of a Greek tragedy in that it is filled with suspicion and foreshadows the possibility of betrayal. Banquo points out,

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of darkness tell us truths,

Win us with honest trifles, to betray's

In deepest consequence. (1.3.120-126)

Banquo recognizes that dark forces sometimes rely on trust and often win individuals over with truths. In this sense, what is "true" is neutral, and can be good or bad depending on one's intent.

In a highly relational society, honesty and trust are of great practical benefit. However, because trust comes first, in the originality of goodness, we often run the danger of being seriously betrayed because the good can be corrupted by evil. This line of reasoning is continued when Macbeth later reflects on the witches' prophecies:

This supernatural soliciting

Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,

Why hath it given me earnest of success,

Commencing in a truth? (1.3.130-133)

The comment, "Cannot be ill; cannot be good" (1.3.131) echoes the witches' famous "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (1.1.11). Macbeth's consternation regarding the witches' prophecy is that he is unsure of whether to fully trust them. In Macbeth's mind, "ill" is not associated with truth. Though Banquo comments to the contrary, Macbeth is unable to recognize that something or someone "ill" is capable of telling the truth, and using it to gain trust. This situation demonstrates how trust can be corrupted and used to betray others, as I have previously suggested, in the same way that the good can be corrupted and used to support evil.

Issues of trust weave themselves into the lives of other characters as well. For example, upon hearing that the former Thane of Cawdor has been executed for treason, Duncan declares that

There's no art

To find the mind's construction in the face:

He was a gentleman on whom I built

An absolute trust. (1.4.11-14)

Duncan's statement highlights the insidious nature of trust and can be used to establish his capability as a ruler. In productions where Duncan is presented as an ineffectual ruler, this line can be used to demonstrate his lack of statesmanship. Alternatively, Duncan's comment could demonstrate a form of kingship built entirely on loyalty and trust. I have proposed that trust is original and that society is built on trust. In this case Duncan's leadership would represent such a belief, in marked contrast to Macbeth's strategies for obtaining and keeping the throne which are more akin to a type of Machiavellian leadership.

A production where Duncan is portrayed as an effective ruler, would actually make Macbeth's betrayal much more horrific. It should be noted that Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* comments on Duncan's lack of leadership ability (Nicoll 207). Shakespeare, however, does not include this historical detail from his source text, rooting Macbeth's decision to overthrow Duncan entirely with Macbeth himself. Duncan trusts those around him fully. It appears as though he does not conceive of the possibility of being betrayed, despite having been betrayed by the previous Thane of Cawdor.

After Duncan's murder, his son Donalbain's comments echo those of his father regarding men's duplicity. His observation that "there's daggers in men's smiles" (2.3.140) also echoes Hamlet's comment that "one may smile and smile and be a villain" (1.5.108). Macbeth, however, demonstrates a very different understanding of trust than the man he overthrows. When he says that he must "mock the time with fairest show, / False Face must hide what the false Heart doth know" (1.7.81-82) he recognizes that to achieve his ends he must maintain Duncan's trust throughout the evening and hide his true intentions. Whereas trust was the basis for Duncan's kingship, betrayal shall be the basis for Macbeth's.

The issue of trust becomes extremely problematic for the moral Macbeth when he initially considers killing Duncan. Macbeth recognizes that his act of regicide would unleash further acts of violence and refers to "Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return / To plague the inventor" (1.7.9-10). Macbeth considers how his betrayal of Duncan would serve as an example and set the stage for a lawless Scotland where each nobleman would serve his own ambitions and best interests. Macbeth's comments on how "This even-handed justice / Commends th' ingredience of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips" (1.7.10-12) could be a reference to either civil war or attempts on his own life later on. When we consider that we may betray others, we must recognize that others may betray us as well. The possibility of civil war underscores how complicated matters of trust become once trust has been broken.

Macbeth's guilt, therefore, only partly explains why Macbeth sees himself as a victim as well as a perpetrator. In betraying others Macbeth has broken an original bond of goodness and in doing so unleashes the suspicions of those around him. After their father's

murder both Donalbain and Malcolm flee for their lives. Prior to committing murder Macbeth reasoned that the killing of Duncan would lead to more murders because Malcolm had already been declared the heir to the throne by his father, "Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter / The Prince of Cumberland" (1.4.39-40). Had Malcolm and Donalbain not fled, Macbeth would have proved himself correct. Duncan's sons were rightly suspicious and fearful for their lives, though they did not know where to direct their suspicion.

Macbeth further considers the problem of trust when he points out that he would be seriously betraying Duncan by murdering him as he sleeps, not only "his kinsman and his subject" (1.7.13) but also "as his host, / Who should against his murtherer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself" (1.7.14-16). In a final attempt to halt the plan Macbeth tells his wife that he does not want to assassinate Duncan because

He hath honoured me of late,
And I have bought golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon. (1.7.31-35)

Macbeth enjoys being known as a trusted and loyal soldier, a reputation which he recognizes that he has rightly earned. This suggests that Macbeth's reputation as a man one can trust has intrinsic value for him. Macbeth's reputation as a loyal soldier not only serves him well in life but also makes him happy.

Macbeth's use and misuse of trust demonstrates a paradoxical structure of trust which is similar to the great paradox of evil discussed by Ricoeur. To trust another leaves open the possibility of being betrayed and betrayal leads to an experience where one

bitterly laments the dark side of trust, the pain and anguish of being wronged by those one has loved and trusted. The guilt Macbeth experiences is especially profound because he has betrayed bonds of trust, which he himself recognizes are not only as useful, but also intrinsically important. Macbeth is defiled not only by his feelings of guilt, but also by the suspicion cast on him by his peers.

In a late conversation between Banquo and Macbeth, Banquo points out to his friend that the witches “have show’d some truth” (2.1.21). Previously, on leaving the heath Macbeth commanded his friend to “Think upon what hath chanc’d; and at more time, / The interim having weigh’d it, let us speak / Our free hearts each to other” (1.3.152-153). At this point Macbeth ceases to be honest with his friend when he claims he has not thought of the witches (2.1.23). Macbeth has, in fact, already made his decision to kill Duncan, and asks his friend if he will support him if the witches' second prophecy leads him to the throne. Macbeth asks for his friend's support should the time come and says, “If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis / It shall make honor for you” (2.1.25-26). In his reply Banquo demonstrates his commitment to his friend, while maintaining his loyalty to Duncan:

So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom franchis’d and allegiance clear,
I shall be counsell’d. (2.1.27-29)

From the moment that Macbeth decides to betray Duncan, he also begins to betray Banquo, and begins lying to him. However, Macbeth also seeks to use his position of trust with Banquo to strengthen his future position after he kills Duncan. This demonstrates how one

is rarely able to isolate or contain abuses of trust, especially in a feudal society such as the early Scotland Macbeth inhabits. From the moment he decides to kill Duncan, Macbeth descends into a dark world of betrayal.

When Macbeth decides to kill Duncan his comments eerily echo Duncan's earlier remarks following the previous Thane of Cawdor's execution for treason:

I am settled, and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:

False face must hide what false heart doth know. (1.7.79-82)

Both men recognize that trust is built on our lack of ability to know a person's true intentions. I consider this to be further evidence that trust is original, as it is built against the natural background of our limited amount of information about each others' intentions. If there were an art to "find the mind's construction in the face" (1.4.12) as Duncan acknowledges, then there would be no need for us to trust each other at all.

Macbeth himself also falls victim to the abuses of trust. At the point of committing to Duncan's murder, Macbeth's only reason to trust in the witches' prophecy that he will be king is that their prophecy that he would be made Thane of Cawdor came true. However, Macbeth never considers Banquo's advice about how truths can be used to win someone over only to betray them later, and he never considers that the witches may have lied about him becoming king, and that killing Duncan might prove futile. This is especially ironic in the face of Macbeth's own dishonesty. The witches use trust in the same way Macbeth does, as a tool to accomplish their own goals. In doing so they demonstrate the importance of the very value they subvert.

Both the witches and Macbeth's subversion of trust, indeed their subversion of the good, relates to Ricoeur's third level of evil, the tradition of goodness. Ricoeur himself put the matter of evil in Kantian terms, saying "if evil is radical, goodness is original – that is, inherent in man" (Changeux and Ricoeur 283). By superimposing itself on the good, evil is able to maintain itself when human action corrupts and subverts the good. In this sense, evil is parasitic. As I have previously proposed, just as trust allows for the possibility of betrayal, evil survives off what is good.

While Macbeth's guilt and his desire to escape it perpetuates his acts of violence, he also possess a secondary argument for committing further acts of violence. In the first case, Macbeth does not want to experience guilt because this new emotion is simply unbearable to him. In addition, Macbeth does not want the guilt he feels to be wasted on obtaining a "fruitless crown" (3.1.54). In his fear that he has lost his soul to the devil only so that someone else's child may begin a line of kings, Macbeth determines to kill Banquo and Fleance:

If't be so,
 For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind,
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murther'd,
 Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
 Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common enemy of man,
 To make them kings—the seeds of Banquo kings! (3.1.63-69)

According to Macbeth's logic, his guilt will not be experienced for naught so long as he is able to pass on his throne to a son. Macbeth's need for, and lack of a child deserves special

consideration given the importance of the imagery of the death of children in representing guilt, loss of trust and a Hobbesian fear of complete nihilism and no rule of law.

The images of the deaths of children in *Macbeth* demonstrate the defilement Macbeth experiences as a result of his guilt and the suspicion cast on him because of his betrayal of trust. These images also symbolize a general loss of trust, as well as societal breakdown and nihilism. The death of children trope is established early in the play, when Lady Macbeth contemplates Duncan's murder after reading Macbeth's letter. In a scene evocative of a reverse exorcism, Lady Macbeth comments that her husband is "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" (1.5.17) and asks that spirits "Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall" (1.5.47-48). Lady Macbeth's comments are only the beginning of a series of images that are representative of the complex relationship between guilt, suspicion, and trust, and larger social issues reflecting on a loss of values.

Despite the importance of children in both the plot and the development of imagery in *Macbeth*, the play contains only three instances of parents interacting with their children. There are two instances of Banquo with his son Fleance, the first the night of Duncan's murder, and the second when Macbeth's hired murderers kill Banquo and make an attempt on Fleance's life. Lady Macduff is shown speaking to her young son, prior to their murder. Significantly, they are discussing what is to be done about evil men, who clearly outnumber the good. Though there are only a limited number of actual appearances of children in the play, children are central to both the plot and imagery of *Macbeth*. For example, in his frustration over the prospect of holding a "barren sceptre" (3.1.61), Macbeth kills Banquo in an attempt to prevent his friend from establishing a line of kings. Later, as Macbeth struggles with the notion of Duncan's murder, he objects to killing him on

the grounds that Duncan is a virtuous man and king. Macbeth describes how “pity like a naked new-born babe” (1.7.21) shall wail and scream over Duncan’s murder and “Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye, / That tears shall drown the wind” (1.7.24-25). The purity and innocence of children is used early on and throughout the play as an image of virtue.

The more acts of violence and betrayal Macbeth commits the more the very society he so desires to rule breaks down into chaos and civil war. Macbeth cannot accept his guilt and constantly seeks to escape it. His continuation of violence, especially directed at women and children, means life is unable to move forward. Macbeth attempts to move on by committing rash acts of violence in the faint hope that he shall prevent Banquo from providing Scotland with a line of kings, something of which Macbeth, in his childless state, is entirely incapable.

Many of the horrific images of the death of children centre around the female characters, Lady Macbeth and the witches. In one of the most chilling images in the entire play, Lady Macbeth describes to her husband how she would be willing to kill her own child when he declares that he will not proceed with Duncan’s murder.

I have given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
 And dash'd the brains out, had I sworn as you
 Have done to this. (1.7.53-58)

Lady Macbeth, claims that her husband has sworn that he will kill Duncan, though it is worth noting that Macbeth is never seen making such an oath. Lady Macbeth stresses that she is in a position to make this claim because she has actually had a child and nursed it. Lady Macbeth's description of killing her own child is demonstrative of an utter ruthlessness and societal breakdown. Images of dead children are also used by the witches, significantly in their incantations. Several of the witches' ingredients in their spell scene are especially gruesome. For example, the ingredients in their final, dramatic spell include "finger of birth-strangled babe / Ditch-delivered by a drab" (4.1.30-31) and "sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow" (4.1.64-65). The ingredients in the witches' spells, in combination with the defilement of Macbeth's guilt, are also representative of societal breakdown.

Macbeth's childless state also influences his decision making, as he kills the children of those around him because he has none of his own. Macbeth's lack of children makes it difficult to see a world beyond his own existence, and that which is materially important to him. Because he has no sense of futurity other than his own state, Macbeth is especially ruthless and dangerous. This makes the imagery of the deaths of children especially powerful. For example, after learning from the witches that he should fear Macduff, Macbeth decides that he will storm Macduff's castle and kill all who live there, including his wife and children:

The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line. (4.1.154-168)

Macbeth's comments about killing them can be contrasted with comments he made prior to killing Duncan. When considering whether or not to go through with Duncan's murder, Macbeth reflects on Duncan's innocence, and how "pity like a naked new-born babe" (1.7.21) shall wail and scream over Duncan's murder.

Macbeth's determination to murder Macduff's children also demonstrates exactly how Macbeth is reaching the nihilistic, guiltless state that he so desires. When he declares "No boasting like a fool; / This deed I'll do before the purpose cool" (4.1.153-154) he suggests that he is rash because he has to be. In doing so Macbeth is also fulfilling his earlier promise that "the very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand" (4.1. 147-148). The choice of the word "firstlings" in this passage is also significant. Literally, meaning "first offspring," (*OED*) it underscores that without children, Macbeth literally has no place in the future.

It may be suggested that in *Macbeth* Ricoeur's ideas of relationality become dangerously and bizarrely close to narcissism. For example, one may argue that Macbeth aggressively kills and then just as aggressively occupies the position of the victim. However, rather than highlighting narcissism, I believe Ricoeur's works highlight Macbeth's nihilism. For example, in his famous speech after learning about his wife's death, Macbeth famously sees the future as only the passing of days, "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, / To the last syllable of recorded time" (5.5.19-21). He sees no impact or significance in his actions, as all actions lead only to "dusty death" (5.5.23) and all will soon be forgotten. Macbeth appears to believe that a lack of children renders his actions meaningless because he has no future. This, however, is an especially callous statement when one considers Macbeth's victims,

who have suffered dire consequences as a result of Macbeth's actions. While Macbeth's statement could be read as reflexive narcissism, I propose that (given Macbeth's perspective) his statement regarding a lack of futurity is nihilistic because Macbeth no longer has any relationships. As previously stated, Macbeth is not psychopathic. Initially, Macbeth was greatly concerned with how his decisions would affect the lives of those around him. However, without any relationships Macbeth is devoid of any ability to understand how actions have affected others. His view that life is “a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound an fury, / Signifying nothing” (5.5.27-28) can be read as a statement of the achievement of a nihilism which has left him entirely cold and unfeeling.

By the end of the play, Macbeth has actually achieved his goal of being unaffected by guilt. However, Macbeth recognizes that his actions have actually caused him to lose the very things that he valued and cherished. Macbeth dies, alone, with no hope for the future and the belief that life is completely devoid of meaning. Ricoeur's moral philosophy demonstrates how evil, trust and guilt are both related and relational. The great paradox at the heart of evil, described so eloquently by Ricoeur, helps explain why Macbeth continually commits acts that he knows are wrong, acts which he recognizes would normally make him feel guilty.

Macbeth, in his guilt, not only recognizes that he is the perpetrator of evil, but also experiences himself as a victim. His extreme guilt becomes a self-sustaining and perpetuating spur for further acts of violence and betrayal. In destroying trust, Macbeth effectively destroys every relationship that was once important to him. Cut off from society, Macbeth desires to descend into nihilism, in the hopes of escaping his guilt. Macbeth highlights how the loss and abuse of trust depicts our greatest fears of a nihilism that leads

to violence and ruthlessness. This is depicted throughout the play with images of the deaths of children.

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