O MOVING FROM Lear to Macbeth is to move into a different but related tragic world. Like Lear, Macbeth is the tragedy of a man who loses himself in the crisis of his life. The danger of such self-loss, as we have noted, is present in all of Shakespeare’s dramatic designs and is, even in the comedies, often at or near their center; but in the tragedies, it is more ominous and becomes in the end a destructive reality. The heroes are isolated, lost in a world they had taken for granted, but which suddenly takes on a menacing look and becomes an illusional landscape or enemy territory; as they lose themselves, they find death, whether at their own hand or that of others. All Shakespeare’s tragedies are in some sense tragedies of self-loss; but those generally considered his greatest, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Lear, have the best claim for this designation. They are tragedies of self-loss not merely in the sense that they depict it in the fate of their heroes but also in that they present patterns for the self-losses of men in general, address themselves to deep-seated fears and anxieties, and give us, so to speak, metaphysical shudders. Shakespeare’s earlier tragedies and their heroes do not have quite this effect. The wholesale murders and at times grotesque horrors of Titus Andronicus alternately numb and bewilder our sensitivities and make it difficult to accept the individual sufferings of its hero as psychologically convincing and truly tragic; moreover, it is not even clear which, if any, of his actions are to be attributed to moral failure. The serious self-losses in Romeo and Juliet are not those of the lovers, whatever their responsibility for falling precipitously in love and marrying without their parents’ consent; these losses are those of the quarreling Montagues and Capulets who create a world in which the lovers cannot live together and
must, crossed by fate, die together. *Richard III* is the tragedy of a villain’s self-loss, but the moral issue is somewhat perfunctorily treated. *Richard II* appears so much more tragic in the Shakespearian way because the play dwells on the hero’s state of mind and soul when he experiences grief and anxiety about his place in his kingdom and in the world. If one hesitates to mention the play in one breath with the great tragedies, it is because *Richard* is and remains too immature and self-pitying to attract full tragic sympathy and because the play is too lyrical and not sufficiently intense dramatically. Nor does *Julius Caesar* appear to be in the first rank of Shakespeare’s tragedies; although the political issues of the play are handled brilliantly, the hero, Brutus, does not permit a look into himself that shows us that his fortune has engendered a human reaction deep enough to experience vicariously. *Hamlet*, however, does attract tragic sympathy; he lives in an agony of uncertainty and expresses it hauntingly—a condition that is understandable to audiences and readers of all kinds and times because it goes beyond *Hamlet’s* particular problem of revenge to include a general anxiety about the human condition. In the major tragedies that I have called baroque, the application of the heroes’ particular situation to mankind’s general predicament comes about, I believe, in a somewhat different fashion. Their follies, passions, and crimes are so monumental and at the same time so convincingly depicted that Shakespeare’s art persuades us to accept them as symbolically heightening the self-losses all mankind is subject to. The huge and commanding *Othello* is turned into a tortured slave of jealousy and a wife-murderer in a way so convincing on the stage that it excites awe and fear about the destructive nature of human passions. *Lear*, who loses himself in incredibly foolish anger, gives a gigantic demonstration of the effects of blinding emotion, and his pain and madness are so agonizing as to create an empathy for not only his own suffering but that of mankind in general, which we and we come to feel him as symbolizing. In their destructive effects on others, the consequences of *Lear’s* self-loss go even beyond those shown in *Othello*.

Nowhere, however, did Shakespeare dramatize the phenomenon of self-loss more emphatically, explore it with greater seriousness, than in *Macbeth*, where he showed the effect of self-loss on the hero’s soul, that of his wife, and the fortune of a whole nation. *Macbeth’s* first crime, the murder of Duncan, is invested with a supernatural horror because of Macbeth’s temptation by the witches,
and it drains his moral being, losing him all relationships, including the association with his wife who urged him to commit the deed. Although the murder brings him the crown, it robs him of all peace of mind. To regain it and secure himself, he commits crime after crime and divests himself of the remnants of his human feelings. He attempts to replace his moral self by an amoral one and seeks to draw assurance and strength from the powers of evil. But he gains no satisfaction as either a man or a king, and, with the loss of his humanity, comes spiritual nihilism. Macbeth's self-loss is the greater because Shakespeare, after the murder of Duncan, never allows him to repent and acknowledge his responsibility as do Othello and Lear after their falls. And Macbeth's self-loss gains a spectacular national significance as it threatens the loss of Scotland's self when he throws the cloak of his bloody tyranny over her. Only his death rescues the country from total chaos.

The tragedy of self-loss thus has two aspects, a personal and a public one. The weight of interest of the personal tragedy lies in the earlier parts of the play, in Macbeth's state of mind before and after the murders of Duncan and Banquo; the public drama comes to the fore in the later parts when Macbeth recedes into the background and the spotlight is on the suffering of the Scots, most excruciatingly dramatized in the murder of Lady Macduff and her children. In the earlier parts, Macbeth suffers in struggling with his fear and guilt; in the later parts, Scotland groans under oppression and tyranny. The one suffering follows logically and consistently from the other.

Near the beginning of his career, in Lucrece, Shakespeare had dealt with the consequences that a crime committed by a public figure has on the psyche of the criminal and on the order and well-being of a state. If one makes allowance for the differences between narrative poetry and tragedy, Lucrece adumbrates much of the outer structure of Macbeth. The first half of the poem is devoted to the conception, preparation, and execution of Tarquin's crime, the second to the suffering of the violated heroine; but neither crime nor suffering is described as a merely personal act. The criminal is the son of the king of Rome, and his deed brings about a lack of political stability and threatens chaos. The core of Lucrece as well as that of Macbeth lies in the personal tragedy, in the harm the crime does to the souls of criminal and victim; the public consequences flow from that. But in Macbeth they flow more quickly and more naturally. In order to underline the public aspects of Tarquin's crime,
Shakespeare resorted to the far-fetched device of making the heroine recall a painting of the fall of Troy and reflect on the connection between personal guilt and general suffering. The political allegory is tenuous, and rather than explaining the connection, it tends to make it less plausible. With obvious application to Tarquin, Lucrece asks at one point, "For one’s offence why should so many fall, / To plague a private sin in general?" (1483–84), and indeed one wonders why they should. In Macbeth, there can be no such question, and that is not merely because Macbeth becomes king while Tarquin is a prince. Macbeth's crime is speedily reflected in the public chaos that, with tragic irony, he predicts immediately after the deed. The death of Duncan, so he intones elegiacally, has led to the loss of everything worthwhile: renown and grace are dead and the wine of life is drawn. The hypocritical dirge is proved to be prophetic not only by Macbeth's later weariness with life but also by Scotland's loss of all happiness. It is dramatically significant that this note of loss is struck in the presence of Duncan's sons, who are most directly affected. Donalbain's question "What is amiss?" and Macbeth's answer "You are, and do not know't" (II.iii.95) transfer the theme of self-loss from him to them. Donalbain's subsequent remark, "the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" (139–40), makes of this transfer almost a physical law. The conversation between Ross, Macduff, and the old man, which follows in the next scene, shows how doubts and fears spread further afield. Before Macbeth's death, all Scotland will be plunged into uncertainty and horror.

Scotland thus becomes an extension of the self of Macbeth, a motif that is underlined by thematic echoes. In a moment of near-repentance after Duncan's murder, Macbeth admits, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (II.ii.73). Later, when Ross comes to inform Lady Macduff of her husband's flight, he expresses his fear for Scotland and himself in words that seem to echo Macbeth's: "But cruel are the times, when we are traitors / And do not know ourselves" (IV.ii.18–19). The continuation of the speech also recalls an earlier sentiment of Macbeth's. We lose the knowledge of ourselves, according to Ross,

when we hold rumor
From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,
But float upon a wild and violent sea
Each way and none.

(19–22)
This recalls Macbeth's agitated state of mind at the witches' prophecy:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Present fears} \\
\text{Are less than horrible imaginings.} \\
\text{My thought, whose murder is yet but fantastical,} \\
\text{Shakes so my single state of man} \\
\text{That function is smother'd in surmise,} \\
\text{And nothing is but what is not.}
\end{align*}
\]

(I.iii.137-42)

Macbeth's fear of facing his deed and knowing himself is once more echoed by Ross when he joins Malcolm and Macduff in England and reports on the condition of Scotland: "Alas, poor country, / Almost afraid to know itself!" (IV.iii.164-65). Ross's description of the suffering of the Scottish people, whose "violent sorrow seems / A modern ecstasy" (169-70), recalls the tortures of the mind, of which Macbeth speaks earlier, in which he lies in "restless ecstasy" (III.ii.22). Macbeth overcomes the affliction of his terrible dreams only by inflicting similar anxieties on Scotland. He makes the macrocosm a reflection of his chaotic microcosm; he tyrannizes Scotland in a kind of attempt to purge himself from fear by creating fear, just as Iago purges his jealousy by creating it in Othello.

Such forceful projection of the self as that of Macbeth is a feature inherent in the heightening of the heroes and villains in Shakespeare's later plays. Analogies between man and the universe on this basis differ in their one-sidedness from the structural dependence Renaissance moralists saw between microcosm and macrocosm. When Lear in his anger "Strives in his little world of man to outscorn / The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain" (III.i.10-11), he makes the storm of nature into a symbolic projection of the power of his own tempestuous soul. And Prospero, as we shall note, succeeds by his will to make his island realm a reflection of his own painfully achieved self-control. In Macbeth, it is the negative aspect of the hero that imprints itself in such fashion on the country that he rules.

Personal and public self-loss are more strongly interlinked in Macbeth than in Lucrece for still another reason besides the dynamic way in which the latter loss is shown to be the result of the former. In Macbeth, both individual and general affliction arise more believably from a substance of evil that suffuses the universe. In Lucrece,
Shakespeare seems to have been hard put to it to explain how suddenly evil springs up in Tarquin's soul: "Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud?" (848). And indeed one might wonder why. In Macbeth, one does not wonder; one feels horror and awe. Yet the reason for the existence of evil is hardly different: it is a metaphysical fact and a mystery. The "explanation" given in Lucrece is that "no perfection is so absolute / That some impurity does not pollute" (853–54)—the perfection being the human soul, created divine and immortal. But in Macbeth, there is no bald statement of this kind, which can only be intellectually unsatisfactory; rather, the hero is dramatically confronted with the horrifying shapes of the weird sisters, creatures of destiny and symbols of evil. They predict the outcome of Scotland's battle and the future glory of Macbeth; they tempt him to shape his fate to his own and his country's undoing. In addition, Macbeth is urged on by a wicked wife who invokes spirits of evil to unsex her and fill her with direst cruelty. Later he draws reassurance from a visit to the weird sisters. The supernatural forces that tempt and support Macbeth do not cause his murderous thoughts or his oppressive reign, but their presence adds an element of cosmic mystery to Macbeth's submission to, and persistence in, evil. We may speak of the greatness of his temptation, of the bad influence of his wife, of his anxiety to secure his position; but we cannot help feeling that there is something mysterious, an element that defies final analysis, in the urge that drives him to kill and kill again and that his nature has a subhuman or superhuman stratum that responds powerfully to the suggestion of evil.

Because Macbeth's infection with evil is quasi-demonic, it is much more serious than that of Tarquin, and the evil with which he infects Scotland is too pervasive to be healed by human power alone. It is not accidental that the forces destined to heal the sickness of the body politic of Scotland gather at the English court, where the saintly Edward cures the scrofula by touch. At the end of the play when "the time is free," Malcolm acknowledges the "grace of Grace" that has helped him to restore order and, he prays, will help him to perform his royal duties.

The story of personal self-loss, which will be examined in the remainder of this chapter, can have no such happy ending. The soul of Scotland can be cleansed; that of Macbeth, which has incurred mortal sin, cannot. Here again, the basic pattern is that adumbrated in Lucrece. Although Tarquin feels sorry for what he has done
whereas Macbeth does not, what is at stake in both cases is quite similar. One might say that the formula on which Shakespeare constructed the two personal tragedies is the winning-losing antithesis of Mark viii.36: “For what shall it profit a man if he win all the world and lose his own soul?” The Genevan side-note explained this question in words that are echoed by both Tarquin and Macbeth: “They are the most foolish of all men, which purchase the enjoying of this life with the loss of everlasting bliss.” Tarquin senses even before his crime the foolishness of what he seeks to win—“A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy”—and yet goes on to sell “eternity to get a toy” (211-14). Macbeth realizes his bad bargain after his first murder:

For Banquo’s issue have I fil’d my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder’d;
Put rancours 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!

Tarquin conquers the body of Lucrece, but loses his soul. Macbeth wins the crown, and also loses his soul.

Yet, quite apart from the fact that for most of us murder is a more serious crime than rape, the case of Macbeth is not quite the same as that of Tarquin. Macbeth does not face up to what he loses as does Tarquin; he never attains Tarquin’s recognition of the greatness of his crime or the immensity of his responsibility before heaven. Macbeth regrets the loss of his “eternal jewel” only because it has not brought him the full gain he expected, a firmly held crown. Moreover, he hesitates to admit the seriousness of his loss and covers it through a semantic ambiguity. What exactly is the “eternal jewel” whose loss he laments? One might take it to mean “soul,” but the preceding “vessel of my peace,” which the image varies, suggests that Macbeth means merely his peace of mind. And even “common enemy of man” is an evasive phrase for whatever power of evil Macbeth has in mind.

By having Macbeth express a sense of indefinite anxiety but punctuate it with traditional ethical and religious images, Shakespeare emphasized the moral consequences of Macbeth’s fall without having him confess them. Macbeth is thus a much more believable
criminal than Tarquin, who is a "heavy convertite" and knows his soul indelibly spotted when he steals away from Lucrece. For that matter, Macbeth is a much more believable human being. We know only too well that it is human nature to embellish faults and only half-admit guilt and responsibility if admit them at all. There is just a little of Macbeth in all of us so as to make us understand his evasions if not to sympathize with them.

If the winning-losing formula is used with greater psychological subtlety in Macbeth than in Lucrece, it nevertheless enters more prominently into the texture of the language. The antithesis is immediately struck in the first scene, so atmospheric and foreboding, when the witches appear only to agree to meet again "when the battle's lost and won." What winning and losing means to these evil creatures is inhuman; for them "fair is foul and foul is fair"—as the immediately following paradox suggests. This suggestion of a reversal of values tinges with irony the words of Duncan that immediately precede the reappearance of the witches: "What he [Cawdor] hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won" (I.ii.68). Macbeth is to win from the Thane of Cawdor not only his title of thane but also his evil nature and the title of traitor, and for whatever he wins, he loses his soul. Macbeth's first appearance when he approaches the witches, but does not yet see them, associates him with their topsy-turvy values: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I.iii.38). It is a day of victory in battle and a dark day not only in weather but also in the hero's life.  

The relevance of the winning-losing formula to Macbeth is emphasized by the contrast between his and Banquo's reactions to the witches' prophecies. Although Banquo too is given expectations of future glory, at least for his family, he realizes at once the seductive danger of the promise:

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.

(I.iii.123–26)

Banquo appears to fear from the beginning that the witches' prophecy might enkindle Macbeth to gain the crown by foul play. This is surely the reason for his brief conversation with Macbeth
just before the murder of Duncan when he broaches the subject of the witches by saying that he dreamed of them. When he notes on this occasion that to Macbeth they have brought some truth, he does so evidently in order to elicit from Macbeth an indication as to whether he is affected by temptation. Macbeth first evades the implied question; but then the idea of testing Banquo in return occurs to him. He says that he will later discuss the matter with Banquo when it will “make honor” for him if he “cleaves” to Macbeth’s consent. But Banquo rules himself out as a possible ally; he rejects the idea of winning dishonestly and sets himself unequivocally in contrast to Macbeth:

So I lose none [honor]
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom franchis’d and allegiance clear.
(II.i.26–28)

Duncan’s death makes into near-certainty Banquo’s suspicion that Macbeth has succumbed to the witches’ lure, has played “most fouly” for what they promised (III.i.1–3). If Banquo does not openly oppose Macbeth now but rather professes loyalty, the reason is surely not (as Bradley thought) Banquo’s hope to make the witches’ prediction for his children come true. Only lack of opportunity and time prevents him from opposing the tyrant. That even Banquo must give “mouth-honor,” must lie and prevaricate, is symptomatic of the falseness that Macbeth has injected into the life of Scotland. For men whose intentions are fair this country has become an alien place, where, as Lady Macduff later says, “to do harm / Is often laudable, to do good sometime / Accounted dangerous folly” (IV.ii.74–76). But in Banquo’s conscience, fair is still fair and foul is foul. He is the foil of Macbeth, and he represents the positive case of the winning-losing formula. Although he does not actively seek to make the witches’ prediction come true, he reaps the profit and becomes the ancestor of a royal dynasty.

Macbeth recognizes the fundamental contrast between Banquo and himself when he details the reasons why Banquo must die. He fears Banquo not merely because his designation as the ancestor of future kings limits his own power and glory but also because in Banquo’s “royalty of nature / Reigns that which would be fear’d.” Macbeth feels that by him “My genius is rebuk’d, as it is said/
Mark Antony's was by Caesar” (III.i.49 ff.). The remark not only anticipates Antony and Cleopatra but also looks back to the struggle of Brutus's "genius" with his "mortal elements" in Julius Caesar (II.i.66); yet neither Antony nor Brutus feels threatened because he thinks himself morally inferior to his adversary. To adapt a phrase Iago applies to Cassio, Banquo has a daily beauty in his life that makes Macbeth feel ugly. And thus Banquo must die.

This hatred of Banquo's moral superiority marks Macbeth as an envious and an evil man. He does not appear to me ever really to show the essential or original nobility so many critics and actors have read into his character, misled, I think, by the attribution of nobility to him early in the play and perhaps also by some general ideas about what a tragic hero is or should be, notions on which Aristotle's definition has had considerable influence. We all know, theoretically at least, that Aristotle's model of a noble and above-average character is not properly applicable to Macbeth—for Aristotle a villain did not make a fitting tragic hero anyway—but we find it in practice difficult to get away from the generalizations of The Poetics. If Macbeth is greater than the average, it is not because of his nobility but because of the magnitude of his crime and through what is at stake in his grasp for power—not only his kingdom but also his immortal soul. And, I think, Macbeth is tragic not because of the ruination of his alleged nobility but because of the intensity of his emotional states that, in heightened form, depict the self-loss sin and crime bring with it.

More than one critic has found the idea of nobility hard to reconcile with Macbeth's criminal nature. Some, like Robert Bridges, have seen here an inconsistency that cannot be psychologically resolved and is explainable only by Shakespeare's sacrificing character consistency to theatrical effect. The reputation of nobility, it should be said, rests on Macbeth's martial courage, which is notably contrasted with his private insecurity. L. L. Schücking has noted that "Macbeth is certainly a lion in the field of battle; open and visible dangers leave him unmoved. But this is not compatible with the fact that, at heart, he is greatly dependent on other people, is always prey to fear and feels himself helpless in every moral conflict into which his actions lead him." Schücking came to see in this contradiction an antithetical character construction, peculiar to the baroque. However this may be, I do not think that the character of Macbeth lacks in psychological consistency, provided one realizes
the limited nature of the nobility attributed to him. Richard Moulton appears to me to have seen his nature clearly when he described it as a "union of superficial nobility with real moral worthlessness . . . connected with the purely practical bent of his mind." 9

Macbeth's nobility is shown to be superficial quite early in the play in one of the kind of indirect and ironic revelations of character that Shakespeare practiced since Measure for Measure. Indeed, it comes in that famous phrase of the "milk of human kindness" of which the Lady says her husband is too full (I.v.14)—a phrase we have often heard applied benevolently to Macbeth. But of that milk, nothing is evident in him; it is a measure of the Lady's perversion of standards that she should consider whatever reluctance to murder exists in Macbeth as due to kindness and holiness. What she actually says about her husband's morals is quite damaging if one makes allowance for her peculiar definition of terms:

Thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holly; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win.
Thou'dst have, great Glamis, that which cries
"Thus thou must do," if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.

(I.v.15–22)

The Lady does not really credit her husband with a moral nature, but sees in him a lack of determination to execute evil by "catching the nearest way." There is irony in her calling him "great Glamis," and, significantly, she says that he would "wrongly win." Banquo makes it clear that he would not. What the Lady appears to have in mind is not that Macbeth is too kind but that he has a residual consciousness of being of humankind and subject to its laws. This is a far cry from the nobility some commentators have seen in him and rather bears out Moulton's characterization, old-fashioned as it may appear in its moral tone, that Macbeth has no "real love of goodness for its own sake, founded on intelligent choice or deep affection." 10

Macbeth's residual consciousness of belonging to humanity does indeed contribute to his suffering and makes him at times appear less evil than Richard III or Iago. But it should be said that neither
of these villains ever quite designs and personally executes a murder as Macbeth does Duncan's; neither of them, therefore, is quite tested in his commitment to evil as he. Nor, for that matter, is the Lady, who prides herself on her superior strength. Although she entertains the notion of killing Duncan herself and grandiloquently announces that he may leave everything to her, she cannot actually do the deed.

One should resist the temptation of constructing a character for Macbeth before he appears and confronts the evil sisters; but given the man presented in the play, it is difficult to think of him as ever having been positively good and noble. He is certainly not merely duped by superior demonic forces and an evil, scheming wife. Even though the witches are at least partially prescient, knowing as they do that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and king, they are not executors of fate; they do not decree how he is to become king, whether by fair means or foul. Macbeth himself considers the possibility that he might be crowned without any effort of his own. Presumably the witches know that he will become king because he is ready to get the crown by foul means. Although their prophecy stirs the thought of murder in Macbeth's brain, the thought is still his own. And he appears to have had it even earlier; the Lady's question, what made him "break this enterprise" to her when he now seems reluctant to execute it, indicates that Macbeth considered murdering Duncan when there were no evil spirits yet to tempt him.

Macbeth's intense fascination with evil (accompanied as it often is by weak recoils) is unparalleled among Shakespeare's villains. On his first appearance, he reacts with a kind of a psychic shock to the witches' greetings, but Banquo remains calm and unperturbed. The latter notes how Macbeth "starts" and seems "rapt withal" (I.iii.57). He recovers temporarily, only to be again "rapt" (142) when he is promptly awarded the title of Thane of Cawdor. Banquo is as much surprised by his partner's extraordinary reaction as he is by the appearance of the witches. Macbeth is given to states of feverish excitement in which he is attracted to evil as much or more than he shrinks from it. These psychic states are not absorptions in thought, but "raptures," that is, turmoils of the spirit in which thought, imagination, and passion circle wildly around the events; they are neurotic anxieties, transportations of fear, hallucinations, and strange obsessions. They are not reactions to stimuli commen-
surate with them. Macbeth is as profoundly affected by the illusion of the dagger he knows to be merely in his mind as he is by the ghost of Banquo that is for him—and was for Shakespeare's audience—real enough. If he did not almost crave the fright that the specter produces, he would hardly repeat the name of Banquo that brought about its first appearance. Lady Macbeth's explanation at the banquet that he has been subject to seizures since his youth (III.iv.54) has a ring of truth. Associated from the beginning with a "bloody execution" as Macbeth is and reacting emphatically to the suggestion of evil as he does, he is destined by character and temperament to do a gigantically monstrous deed.

But Macbeth's "raptures" represent not only a psychological phenomenon but are also a dramatic device comparable to similar dramatic devices in Shakespeare's baroque plays. The moments of Macbeth's greatest attraction to evil have an outward resemblance to Lear's penetration to goodness in his intuitive realization of his and Cordelia's true values in that both Macbeth and Lear are in trance-like states. Different as the inner conditions of these two heroes are, both of them achieve the strongest emotional expression of their characters by at least partial removal from their surroundings. And we may also recall Othello's passionate breakdown, which is called a "trance" by the Folio stage direction, and by Iago (to Cassio) an "epilepsy" and (to Othello) an "ecstasy" (IV.i.43,50,78). We shall observe a similar tendency of heightening passion into ecstasy in The Tempest when Prospero takes leave of his island spirits. The strong movements toward self-loss or self-finding by the heroes of Shakespeare's later plays are given an extraordinary emotional emphasis.

I think that the psychological and dramatic movement of the earlier parts of Macbeth derives not, as is frequently explained, from a conflict between ambition and conscience in Macbeth but from his intense reaction to evil and from the impact of the strong will of the Lady on his weaker but also criminal will. Of the dynamic interplay of these two characters' wills something must be said later. As to the matter of Macbeth's conscience, it is surprising that, in view of the role it has played in the analysis of his character, Macbeth himself never speaks of "conscience." It is notable that there is something inexplicable for him (and, as I have argued, also for us) in why he acts as he does; and that puzzlement includes for him also why he feels as he does. He cannot explain why the appear-
ance of the weird sisters shakes him so violently and sets his whole being adrift. He is dimly aware that he violates human and divine laws, and yet he is compelled to commit his crimes. The imaginary dagger terrifies him and yet draws him to Duncan's chamber. He appears to know that he cannot rely on the evil sisters—"damn'd all those that trust them," he says to Lennox (IV.i.139)—and yet he is reaffirmed by them in his evildoing. But though he never speaks of conscience, he often speaks of, and evinces, fear. Of course, one may see in this fear and its accompanying phantasmagoria a subconscious reassertion of his conscience; but then one must also acknowledge Macbeth's conscience to be a fear-inspired psychic state, a conscience of the most conventional and unexamined kind and one difficult to distinguish from neurosis. Marlowe's reputed utterances concerning religion indicate that some free Renaissance spirits wanted to relegate all manifestations of conscience to a conditioning in fear. But the orthodox, then as now, attempted to distinguish between conscience and fear. They contrasted the "honest fear" of conscience, which included some intellectual considerations, focusing on a moral view of man and a reverence of God and his laws, with a "dishonest," that is, practical and cowardly, fear. The latter could become pathological, and, as such, it interested not only the moralists but also doctors like Timothy Bright, for whom it was a form of the all-inclusive psychological illness of melancholy (by which, in this case, he meant neurotic disorders). Admitting the difficulty of distinguishing between conscience and fear-melancholy, Bright saw the latter characterized by vivid conceits, fearful apparitions, imagined voices, and frightful dreams.  

In regard to the kind of conscience with which Macbeth is endowed, a comparison with Tarquin in _Lucrece_ is illuminating. Shakespeare almost appears to invite a comparison when Macbeth "With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design / Moves like a ghost" (II.i.55–56). But the Tarquin of Shakespeare's poem goes through a long debate between reason and passion before he strikes, and the former is given a hearing even if its arguments are rejected. Macbeth's internal conflict never leads to a real weighing of alternatives, not even in the first aside after the witches' prophecy when, as Coleridge surmised, the decision to kill or not to kill is still in his power. But I believe it is clear that Macbeth is already yielding to the evil in his heart:
This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings.  
(I.iii.130-38)

These lines do reflect Macbeth's struggle with good and evil; but they depict a morally confused struggle that betrays the tremendous impact the suggestion of evil has on him. Macbeth is confused about what is "good" and "ill." The fulfillment of the first part of the witches' prophecy is "good" because it is a happy prologue to the imperial theme of which he dreams. Good is what brings power. What is "ill" is less clear. Is it the "horrid image," the personified imaginary murder of his thought, or is it the fear that makes him shrink from the image? Certainly, if "present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings," a good way to go about restoring the "smothered function" is to commit the murder. The reason Macbeth kills Duncan is surely not merely that he wants to become king. That wish is the one Lady Macbeth has for her husband; she appears to have no other motive. The traditional roles of man and woman are here reversed: it is she who has the acquisitive urge and he who has the scruples, weak and confused as they are. Macbeth, who mentions ambition only once, compares it to a horse that overleaps itself under the spur of the human will and declares it to be an insufficient motivation (I.vii.25-27).

What then, if not ambition, drives Macbeth to kill? To the degree that an answer can be given, it must be sought in the nature of the fear that both drives him on and makes him recoil. One need not subscribe to Lily Campbell's thesis that the whole of Macbeth is a study in fear in order to accept her arguments on the significance of this emotion in the hero's psychological constitution. The man who is introduced as "brave Macbeth" and "valor's minion" and who is called "valiant cousin" by Duncan and "Bellona's bridegroom" by Ross before we even meet him is, during much of the action of the play, under the spell of fear. Shakespeare surely intended the irony
and wished to make some statement concerning the nature of courage and fear.

Miss Campbell explains, I think correctly, Macbeth’s courage in battle as what the moralists called “false courage” or “rashness,” a passion devoid of reason and opposite to fear. True courage was the Aristotelian mean between the excesses of rashness and fear. Macbeth veers from one of these excesses to the other. There is something excessive in that first action reported of this minion of valor when he slew Macdonwald, not desisting “Till he unseam’d him from the nave to th’ chaps, / And fix’d his head upon our battlements” (I.ii. 22–23). Although this deed is applauded, it gives the impression of being committed by a man who is easily carried away. And when Macbeth says he killed the sleeping grooms because the expedition of his violent passion (his alleged love for Duncan) outran “the pauser, reason” (II.iii.109), the explanation sounds most appropriate for a man with a reputation of rashness. Later, Macbeth contrasts himself enviously with Banquo: “And to that dauntless temper of his mind / He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour / To act in safety” (III.i.51–53). Banquo’s is the true courage.13

The combination of military courage and moral cowardice in Macbeth, antithetically baroque as it has been thought, is yet plausible in our psychology as well as that of the Renaissance. According to humanistic moralists, excessive courage or rashness could be the expression of an underlying fear. Charron noted that some military courage was of this kind:

This military valor is pure and natural in beasts, with whom it is as well in females as in males. In men it is often artificial, gotten by fear and the apprehension of captivity, of death, of grief, of poverty; of which things, beasts have no fear. Human valor is a wise cowardliness, a fear accompanied with foresight to avoid one evil by another; choler is the temper and file thereof. Beasts have it simply.

The driving force of Macbeth is well characterized by Charron when he describes the “dishonest fear” that impels man to evil as that vicious fear that troubleth and afflicteth, which is the seed of sin, the twin of shame, both of one womb, sprung from that close and cursed marriage of the spirit of man with a diabolical persuasion. . . . It is a deceitful and malicious passion and hath no other power over us, but to mock and seduce us. It serves its turn with that which is to come; where though we seem to foresee much, we
see nothing at all... for fear seemeth not to other end than to make us find that we fly from. Doubtless, fear is of all other evils the greatest and most tedious, for other evils are no longer evils than they continue and the pain endureth no longer than the cause; but fear is of that which is and that which is not and that perhaps which never shall be, yea, sometimes of that which cannot possibly be.  

Charron's is the perfect explanation of the feverish state of the imagination in which Macbeth's function is smothered in surmise, and "no thing is but what is not." Charron elsewhere shows how false fear can drive a man to violent deeds. This fear, he says,

ariseth from dangers and many times casteth us into dangers; for it engendereth in us such an inconsiderate desire to get out that it astonisheth, troubleth, and hindreth us from taking that order that is fit to get out. It bringeth a violent kind of trouble whereby the soul, being affrighted, withdraweth itself into itself and debateth with itself how to avoid the danger that it presented. Besides that great discouragement that it bringeth, it seizeth on us with such an astonishment that we lose our judgement, and there is no longer reason or discourse in us.

The fear described by Charron is the kind of emotion that besets Macbeth when his soul withdraws into itself during his raptures. It vitiates his attempts to assess his situation rationally and makes him prefer the quick solution to the moral and prudent one.

This urge to extricate himself from trouble by a quick action prevents Macbeth from ever fully probing his condition. His nervous, disjointed, and equivocal soliloquy before he murders Duncan—"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly"—is an example how Macbeth approaches the great moral issue at stake, but then quickly evades it. The residual compunction and weak recoil from the deed are overcome by his leap forward, not in courage but in cowardice, so he can catch what the Lady calls "the nearest way":

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.

(I.vii.2-7)
Macbeth in this speech does not make clear to himself and to us what he really fears, whether it is the possibility of failing and with it the punishment of worldly justice, or, in spite of success, the punishment of God. The logic of the argument, such as it is, favors the former interpretation; some of the terms and images, it is true, the latter. "The life to come" echoes the prayer-book phrase for the after-life, "the life of the world to come." Yet Macbeth continues with "we still have judgment here. . . ." And even if one assumes him to be vaguely afraid of spiritual consequences, the question is still whether he thinks of these as a risk to be taken or a threat to be evaded—"jump" could have either meaning. In both cases, the energetic action suggested by the image contrasts sharply with the vague if imaginatively beautiful evocation of the retardative forces. The "even-handed justice" Macbeth fears seems to be temporal punishment; but when he says that it "Commends th' ingredience of our poison'd chalice / To our own lips," he appears to think of a spiritual affliction. When he imagines that the old king will attract pity to himself because of his meekness in office, Macbeth thinks in a very practical way about the murder and its consequences; but when he likens pity to a "naked, new-born babe" and to "heaven's cherubin hors'd" and sees Duncan's virtues plead like angels "against / The deep damnation of his taking-off," the religiously tinged language evokes a hazy, child-like picture of divine vengeance. However, Macbeth uses these images merely as analogies, and the specific reasons he marshals against killing Duncan are not in themselves particularly spiritual: Duncan is his kinsman and his lord as well as his guest, and the laws of family loyalty and hospitality demand that he should be protected rather than murdered. Never does Macbeth face directly the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." If his argument against the killing were that murder, heinous by itself, is still more heinous in this case, it would be strong; but because Macbeth evades the main moral issue, the wrongness of murder, the reasons he gives do not serve to underline his recoil as much as they bring his monstrous ingratitude to our minds.

When, after this soliloquy, the Lady enters, the reasons Macbeth gives her for wanting to desist are even weaker than those he gives to himself. They are strictly prudential rather than ethical, and they demonstrate, as Moulton has it, his practical mind rather than his moral nature: Duncan has honored him of late and he has gathered golden opinions from others. The Lady could easily refute these ob-
jections by reminding him that the murder of Duncan will bring him even greater honor: the crown. But she does not choose to reason with her husband in this fashion; rather, she accuses him of cowardice and admonishes him to be a man. She makes him afraid of being thought afraid. And surely she does so because she thinks that he is at heart a coward who is willing to silence his humanistic conscience if he is assured of success. That she is proved right proceeds from Macbeth's last and weakest objection to the murder, "If we should fail" (59). To demonstrate her own superiority to such weakness as his, she proclaims her readiness to dash out her child's brain had she sworn to execute this deed as he has the murder—a remark that elicits from Macbeth the half-admiring, half-horrified exclamation "Bring forth men-children only." Her "undaunted mettle" dissuades him from the fear that they might fail, and her "example" energizes him: "I am settl'd, and bend up/Each corporal agent to this terrible feat" (79-80). Earlier, the Lady had asked him to "look like th' innocent flower,/But be the serpent under't" (I.v.62-63). Macbeth now accepts this Machiavellian principle and reciprocates with the advice: "Away, and mock the time with fairest show;/False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (I.vii.81-82).

For the ideological and dramatic pattern of the drama, it is significant that in the clash between Macbeth and the Lady two concepts of manhood are evoked, the one humanistic, the other antihumanistic and tinged with Machiavellism as it was understood in Shakespeare's time. Manhood and its relationship to courage and fear is a major issue of the play; all through the action, Macbeth feels challenged in his status as a man. There is something in him that requires him to prove himself as such. At the Lady's charge of cowardice in that moment of hesitation before the murder of Duncan, he seeks to take refuge in the notion that being a man means to accept moral limitations: "I dare do all that may become a man;/Who dares do more is none" (I.vii.46-47). Sarcastically, the Lady retorts: "What beast was't then/That made you break this enterprise to me?" Her specious contrast of man and beast flouts the humanistic doctrine of moral decorum based on the distinction of man and beast. For her, Macbeth can prove himself "more the man" if he can throw off his moral fetters. She sees man as an exclusive product of his will, a will strong enough to impose its laws on the world.

Here, as before, the Lady assumes the traditionally masculine
role; she resembles the kind of "new man" embodied by Iago. Her acceptance of the philosophy of seeming and her glorification of the will as the victorious agent in a battle that has to be fought by assuming the "condition of the beast" make her a "Machiavellian." She prides herself in possessing the psychic strength that some of Machiavelli's disciples identified with their master's concept of virtù and that they thought free of all ethical limitations. Gabriel Harvey, as we observed, was one of the stealthy Machiavellians; and his secret acclaim of man's psychic resources is worth quoting in full:

Quicquid est in deo, est deus;
Quicquid est in viro, sit virtus et vis;
Quicquid cogitat, vigor;
Quicquid loquitur, emphasis;
Quicquid agit, dynamis;
Quicquid patitur, alacritas.
Totus vita entelechia, furo, zelus, ignis.17

Force in thought, emphasis in speech, dynamism in action, courage in suffering—qualities characteristic of the baroque age of energy—were traits that fascinated Shakespeare when he created the heroes and villains of his later tragedies. But unlike Harvey, he did not identify a collection of such traits with manhood, as is evident by his representing them, strongly and in an unalloyed manner, in his villains. An Iago and an Edmund are deficient as human beings because they possess much force, emphasis, dynamism, and courage, and very little else.

In Macbeth, the psychological dynamics bears a certain resemblance to that in Othello: one of the two major characters supplies the ethically unrestricted will that triggers the passionate action of the other—or so, at least, it is for Macbeth's first crime. But there are major differences. In Macbeth, the process is not a seduction away from good and toward evil, for Macbeth is already under the spell of evil; it is merely an infusion of energy to keep him on his path. Macbeth's "humanism" is halfhearted; it gives the impression of having been learned by rote rather than ever deeply felt. He has an old-fashioned sense—one that, by now, is quite unusual in Shakespeare—that the world should have a firm, "framed" order that comprises matter and spirit, microcosm and macrocosm:
Macbeth: Losing the Self

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly.

(III.ii.16-19)

Yet this humanistic assertion of a universal cohesiveness (earlier, he speaks of the “single state of man”) only springs to his mind when he ponders murder. It is an acquired, mechanical reaction accompanying the ambiguous fear that both makes him shudder and drives him on; it is not a deeply felt conviction.

Different from Othello also is the profoundly ironic effect of the infusion of energy that takes place in Macbeth. The man of passion does indeed succeed in suppressing his disturbing emotionalism, and he acquires the qualities of vis that Harvey admired (although he does not, I shall argue, retain his most aspired-to acquisition, courage, to the very end); but this gain comes at a terrible price: he loses all humanity and becomes alienated from himself, his wife, and the world. And the Lady breaks under the strain of her absorption of these qualities. She, no less than he, is a most conspicuous example of the folly and tragedy of trying to force human nature into a mould of superhuman hardness.

The irony of the Lady’s self-proclaimed dehumanization becomes apparent first: she fancies herself to have derived her strength from evil spirits and to have divested herself of all womanly and motherly feelings; yet her influence on her husband, diabolical as one might call it, is not exerted in any supernatural way. No superhuman force is needed to dispel the compunctions of this mechanical humanist. Moreover, although the Lady rises in words to demonic power, her deeds do not carry the same conviction. She does not actually make the wound in Duncan’s body with her keen knife as she envisaged that she would (I.v.49). Her spirit buoyed up by alcohol, she is bold enough to smear the grooms with the blood from the daggers Macbeth thoughtlessly brought back with him. But there is some lack of logic in her reproach of him for refusing to return to the place of his crime: “the sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures; ’tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil” (II. ii.53-55). It was with the eye of childhood that she looked at the sleeping Duncan and found herself incapable of murdering him. A
substratum of human nature that she mistakenly thought did not exist in her comes to the surface when she faints during her husband's account of his murder of the grooms. Ironically, her composure leaves her just when he excuses his act as inspired by courage to make known his love (II.iii.117)—she appears to have overrated her own courage and demonic strength; the alternate explanation that she is merely feigning here has no support in the text or in the stage directions. She does recover temporarily from this failure of her nerves, and even acts once more as her husband's support when he is unnerved by fear at the appearance of Banquo's ghost and quite "unmanned in folly" (III.iv.74); and once more she urges her concept of manhood on him. But she has the advantage of not seeing the ghost. Notably, she now conjures up no more evil spirits to help herself or him.

This is the last time she appears as her husband's monitor. As he becomes increasingly self-directed, the embodiment of vis in Harvey's Machiavellian sense, he needs her less and less. He keeps the details of his plan to murder Banquo from her; in the killing of Lady Macduff and her children she has no role at all. She drops from sight after the banquet, and when she reappears in the sleepwalking scene, nature has taken its revenge. When Macbeth was obsessed with the notion that an ocean could not wash Duncan's blood from his hand, she scoffed at his distraction; a little water, she thought, would clear them both of the deed. Now all the perfumes of Arabia cannot wipe the spot from her hand. But her insanity and death, presumably by suicide, are merely side issues of the story.

The main issue, to which the Lady is a mere contributor, is the loss of Macbeth's self, a loss that consists in a progressive self-reduction to nothingness. This movement is the main psychological one of Macbeth in the later parts of the play; but it begins with his neurotic self-alienation immediately after the murder of Duncan when Macbeth is frightfully shaken and, in his fearful anxiety, looks at himself, as it were, from the outside: the man who committed the deed is a man whom he does not know. The voice he hears cry "sleep no more" addresses him as a triple stranger: "Glamis hath murder'd sleep; and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more—Macbeth shall sleep no more" (II.ii.42-43). He views in horror his own bloody hands as if they did not belong to him: "What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes" (59). When the Lady now
admonishes him "be not lost / So poorly in your thoughts," Macbeth answers in a sentence pregnant with meaning: "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" (II.i.73).

This sentence is deceptively simple, and hard to paraphrase. On the primary level, it can be read (as does Kenneth Muir) to show Macbeth's shrinking from reality: "It were better for me to remain permanently 'lost' in thought, i.e., self-alienated, than to be fully conscious of the nature of the deed." But the disjunctive syntax of Macbeth's sentence supports an interpretation that makes it another instance of his evasion of moral responsibility and of his unwillingness to admit the existence of a conscience. One might expect Macbeth, that is, a stronger, moral Macbeth, to have said, "To know, i.e., fully acknowledge, my deed would mean to feel repentance." Instead, Shakespeare's Macbeth gives the sentence the cognitive meaning recognized by Professor Muir. But the disjunctive syntax also makes the second part of the sentence a kind of answer to the first, an answer that draws a balance, such as in Una Ellis-Fermor's paraphrase: "If I am to live on terms with this deed, I must break with my real—my former—self." The sentence is thus a diagnosis of Macbeth's state of mind, an evasion of his guilt, and a program for the future.

With regard to Macbeth's evasion of the name and idea of conscience, it is interesting to note that, according to an old theological definition, the conscience could be described as the soul's knowledge of itself. William Worship noted the definition in The Christian's Jewel (1617):

> Conscientia, saith Saint Bernard, soundeth as much as cordis scientia because it [i.e., the soul] knows itself and many other things. Conscientia, saith Aquinas, is scientia cum alio, a knowledge with another; which combination hath either reference to the soul, reflecting upon itself, or else to God, who is privy to her inmost contents. ... What man knows the things of man, saith Saint Paul, save the spirit of man which is in him?

There is no indication, however, that Macbeth uses the phrase "know myself" in Worship's sense; and in the seventeenth century, as we have noted, an ethical-religious definition of self-knowledge was no longer taken for granted. But by shrinking from such a definition and from acknowledging his guilt, Macbeth stops far short of self-discovery. The vague and ill-defined way in which he uses the term
indicates that he tries to transfer the awareness of his guilt from the ethical sphere to the intellectual one. Macbeth's "to know my deed, 'twere best not know myself" thus marks a missed anagnorisis, paradoxically by invoking the idea of self-knowledge.

For a self-knowledge with an ethical basis, Macbeth tries to find a substitute in an arcane knowledge of evil he need not share with others, not even with his wife. The term of endearment he has for her when he refuses to satisfy her inquiry into his plans for Banquo ironically emphasizes the distance that begins to separate him from her: "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed" (III.ii.45–46). However, the "knowledge" he keeps from her is actually quite indebted to her teaching; when he goads the murderers to kill Banquo, he does so by questioning whether they are men, ready to avenge wrongs: the strategy of questioning the manhood of the two daredevils is the same the Lady applied to him. A common "manhood" associates him now with the two villains, for whom he feels such contempt.

He is, however, not immediately successful in his attempt to break with his former self. Banquo's ghost shocks him once more into fear. But since he alone sees the specter, this event contributes to his isolation and self-alienation:

> You make me strange  
> Even to the disposition that I owe,  
> When now I think you can behold such sights  
> And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,  
> When mine is blanch'd with fear.  
>

(III.iv.112–16)

But he determines to readjust his values to his new self and calls the brief resurgence of fear his "strange and self-abuse," which is only "the initiate fear that wants hard use" (142–43). He decides to visit the weird sisters in order to obtain the knowledge he needs to still his fear and harden his heart: "For now I am bent to know / By the worst means the worst" (134–35). Again, Macbeth follows the method he had seen the Lady use; she, too; called upon the spirits of evil to fill her with direst cruelty.

Macbeth's visit to the weird sisters is the dramatic climax of the play, the summa epitasis. Structurally, it introduces the counter-movement, the revenge action of Malcolm and Macduff, through
the apparitions of the armed head, the bloody child, and the crowned child, bearing a tree. Macduff's flight to Malcolm, which is reported immediately afterwards, confirms the success of the countermovement and highlights Macbeth's increasing isolation. But, deluded by false knowledge, he takes the witches' warnings about the man of no woman born and about the moving of the wood to Dunsinane Castle as assurance of his invulnerability. His desire to know finds thus its specious gratification in equivocations that he takes to be certificates of security. The visit to the witches does indeed produce the "new Macbeth," formed in the image of manhood proclaimed by the Lady, the man free from fear and from the remnants of his moral self. But the visit also emphasizes the barrenness of this achievement by the show of the eight kings symbolizing the succession of Banquo's line. Macbeth is isolated not only in his time, but also in history. He wears a useless crown. He reacts in passion; once more he is in the throes of one of the raptures through which threatening events register on his nervous system: he stands "amazedly" (IV.i.126). But he has no moral recoil now even while he recognizes the horror of the event: "Let this pernicious hour / Stand aye accursed in the calendar" (133–34). As in Job iii.5, to which Macbeth's words form a kind of ironic parallel, this is the hour of darkness stained by the shadow of death. There is no substitute for self-knowledge; the knowledge of evil Macbeth seeks is a denial of the principle of life.

Because Macbeth never acknowledges what was at stake, he never admits what he has lost. He does subsequently deplore the side-effects of his self-loss when he speaks of having lost the comforts of life:

My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

(V.iii.22–28)

These lines are not an appeal to sympathy; they are a demonstration of the moralists' warnings against the suppression of all fear. As Coeffeteau says,
There is a kind of people which fear nothing, that is to say, such as have renounced all feeling of things whereof we have just cause to apprehend the loss, as they which have lost all honor, abandoned all shame, wasted their fortunes and their goods, and those whose lives are tedious unto them. For what can they fear who have nothing remaining to trouble them."

Macbeth is now a symbol of the emptiness of life and of the inanity of trying to impose an amoral self on the world. He had envisaged the even-handed justice of temporal punishment, and he had even glanced at the risks in the life to come; but he had not thought of what actually becomes his fate: his reduction to a meaningless existence. In this progressive loss of his self in this life, not in his death or in any consequences to his soul in the hereafter, lies his tragic predicament.

As the others lose all trust in him, so he loses all trust in them, clinging only to the hope of survival given him by the weird sisters. While he goes through the motions of activity, fortifying Dunsinane, he does so without any sense of the significance of his actions either for himself or for Scotland:

Some say he's mad, others, that lesser hate him,
Do call it valiant fury; but for certain,
He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause
Within the belt of rule.

(V.ii.13-16)

With the loss of his fear, he loses also all power to feel compassionate. The women's shriek that heralds his wife's death elicits from him the boast that he has almost forgotten what fear tastes like. When the cry is interpreted as due to his wife's death, he has no word of sympathy and pity; he expresses no sense of loss at the news of her death, only annoyance at the untimely event and disgust with the monotony and uselessness of life. With the loss of his moral self, Macbeth has gained only a meaningless life: it is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing. The utter impersonality of this most pessimistic passage in all Shakespeare marks it not as the poet's ipse dixit, but as a dramatic expression of the price of self-loss. The generalization is grand and false.

After the exhaustion of his life substance, to have provided Macbeth with even a shred of repentance would have weakened the im-
pression of the tragic consequences of self-loss and sentimentalized his character. Shakespeare did not make this mistake. Macbeth never admits his responsibility for his fall; as he begins to realize the danger threatening him, he blames the witches, not himself. The final change in Macbeth's psyche—and another ironic turn in the play—is provided not by a repentance but by a reemergence of that fear Macbeth thought he had extinguished.

The first blow falls when Birnam Wood actually comes to Dunsinane. "I pull in resolution," says Macbeth, "and begin / To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend / That lies like truth" (V.v.42-44). Interestingly, when he now remembers the witches' prophecy, it is not quite in the form it was given. "Fear not, till Birnam wood / Do come to Dunsinane" (44-45) is his version, but the witches said: "Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him" (IV.i.92-94). Yet he does not admit fear but evinces disgust with the world: "I gin to be aweary of the sun, / And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone." And he actually recovers temporarily his heroic stance: "At least we'll die with harness on our back" (V.v.49-52).

But stark, naked fear breaks out in Macbeth when he confronts Macduff. His puzzling refusal to fight Macduff even before the latter reveals that he was untimely ripped from his mother's womb may be a combination of weariness and of that instinctive fear of the Thane of Fife he had expressed earlier (IV.i.74). He had surely not avoided Macduff "of all men else" because of what he gives as the reason for his refusal to fight: "My soul is too much charg'd / With blood of thine already" (V.viii.5-6). To read into this sentence a repentance is to disregard the meaninglessness of the concept of soul for the Macbeth who has lost his self. And undisguised fear is his reaction to Macduff's revelation of himself as the man of no woman born: "Accursed be the tongue that tells me so, / For it hath cow'd my better part of man!" (17-18). His belief of having won a new self, free from fear, is shown to be an illusion. Thus again, just before the catastrophe, Macbeth avoids a true self-discovery; he fails to "know himself" in the ethical-religious sense of the humanists, although he knows himself as a coward well enough.

We are the more aware of his moral failure because of the great number of explicit *nosce teipsum* references—*Macbeth* can be said to have more of these than any other play of Shakespeare. The tragedy that presents self-loss on the largest scale also reasserts
most strongly the value and significance of the humanistic concept of self-knowledge.

In its last scenes, the play points up the self-destructiveness of a manhood such as Macbeth’s that lacks all ethical considerations. Macbeth’s cry of fear when he faces Macduff demonstrates that the acquired vis, emphasis, and dynamis are not enough to preserve Macbeth’s alacritas, that painfully acquired courage. The phrase “better part of man,” generally used to refer to the soul, has an ironic ring in the mouth of the man whom Macduff calls hell-hound and traitor; the phrase might well be transcribed as “hope for survival.” Macbeth’s last fear is the fear of death. Macduff has to shock him into fighting by threatening to display him as a monster for public show, as a beast rather than a man. That Macduff on this occasion calls him “coward” may also awaken that old fear in Macbeth of being thought fearful—so potent in him, as the Lady knew—and help to lash him into a last desperate action.

Macduff’s fight with Macbeth takes place behind the stage, so we never really learn whether Macbeth’s last stand (or is it a run?) is as determined as he would have it; but the last words we hear, “And damn’d be him that first cries, ‘Hold, enough!’” sound like a self-pronounced epitaph. Also, the episode intervening between his cry and Macduff’s return with the head of Macbeth would lose its significance if it were not intended as a contrast to the death of a coward. In this episode, Ross reports the death of young Siward to his father:

Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier’s debt.
He only liv’d but till he was a man;
The which no sooner had his prowess confirm’d
In the unshrinking station where he fought
But like a man he died.

(V.viii.39-43)

There is an irony in young Siward’s dying like a man whereas Macbeth, who had so strenuously sought to be what the Lady suggested to him, “more than man,” has become no better than a beast. The “unshrinking station” where the young man ends his life evokes by contrast the shrinkage of Macbeth’s world; and old Siward’s acclaim of his son’s prowess points up the cowardice of the tyrant. The father takes consolation in his son’s bearing his
wound in front: “Had I as many sons as I have hairs,/ I would not wish them to a fairer death” (48–49). We are not told whether Macbeth receives his fatal wound in front or in back; nobody asks Macduff, and Macduff merely presents “the usurper’s head” without comment. At any rate, Macbeth’s end, however exactly it comes about, is not “fair.” Nothing is falser to the spirit of the play than the final bravado performance often given by actors of the role. Macbeth’s death is not even worthy of the epitaph usually bestowed on the hero at the close. In his concluding speech, Malcolm merely refers in passing to “the dead butcher and his fiend-like queen.” We realize in the flash of the reference that even the memory of the man who lost his self will soon be lost in Scotland.