

The Persecution and Assassination  
of Macbeth  
as Performed by Divers Illustrious Immortals  
of the French Theatre  
(with occasional reference to Shakespeare)

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WITHIN the field of European drama, there are no two tragic traditions more completely at variance with each other than those of Shakespeare and Racine. For the better part of three centuries, each tradition has expressed admiration for the other, while formulating obstinate reservations; and each has failed to produce a really satisfactory imitation. The English mind finds Racine's 'icy perfection' of form too static to be effective as theatre, too lacking in human warmth and richness and variety; the French, to whom Shakespeare remained virtually unknown until 1734, referred to him constantly as a 'barbarian' throughout the eighteenth century, and well into the 1850s the Comédie Française was preferring Ducis' adaptations in classical alexandrines to any closer approach to the original. Between 1776 and 1783, Pierre Letourneur produced the first complete French translation of the plays, comparatively accurate<sup>1</sup> and couched in unambitious prose; and it is the Letourneur text which furnished most of the Romantic generation with their knowledge of Shakespeare and fired their subsequent enthusiasm—to the point, for instance, that Stendhal actually learnt a sort of English in order to read the original. But, with the outstanding exception of Alfred de Musset, the practice of the Romantics owed less to Shakespeare than did their theory. Letourneur remained a text to be read rather than to be performed; and the Romantic theatre as such owed distinctly more to the melodrama than to *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*. In fact, when Shakespeare really did become acceptable to some audiences in France in the later 1820s, it was more on account of what he had in common with Gilbert de Pixérécourt than for his own original genius.

But as a general rule, if Shakespeare was to be performed at all in France, he had to be adapted, and ferociously adapted at that. In 1792, the ever-inventive Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who, ten years earlier, had given the world a French version of *Romeo and Juliet* under the title *Les Tombeaux de Vérone*, added *King Lear* to his repertory, calling it *Le Vieillard et ses trois filles*. This latter play, if not exactly authentic Shakespeare, none the less wrung many tears from audiences which, undoubtedly, would have walked out of any theatre which had presented a true image of the 'poor, infirm, weak and despis'd old man'. Mercier weeds out the high tragedy with a ruthless hand: the old King, now democratically reduced to plain Mr Lear, is a London tea-merchant with offices on Cheapside; and his project is to divide up the shares in the tea-company between his three daughters. The story follows its well-known course. Poor Mr Lear is thrown out into a blinding snow-storm on Cheapside by his ungrateful progeny, accompanied by the faithful Kent, alias Jones, chief cashier

<sup>1</sup> There are, however, occasional lapses. Hamlet's 'O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers' becomes 'Ô ma chère Ophélie, ces vers me rendent malade'.

in the tea-business, whence he is rescued by his only true daughter, Caroline; and the play ends in a welter of tears and forgiveness as the family is finally reunited in its middle-class prosperity.

In spite of the temptation to trace the subsequent career of *Le Roi Léar*, or for that matter of *Hamlet* or *Othello*, in the French theatre, I have preferred to take the case-history of *Macbeth*, for a number of reasons. One of the functions of Comparative Literature is to look at the sort of compromise which is effected when one culture attempts to assimilate elements from another which are fundamentally alien to it, and by this means perhaps to deduce something of value about both the cultures concerned, which might not have been discernible without this new perspective. The adaptation (rather than the translation) of a poem, and more particularly of a play, since the latter has to court the approbation of an audience in the mass rather than that of isolated readers, constitutes precisely such a compromise. But to reveal anything positive, the compromise must have at least a fair chance of success at the outset. In other words, the gap between the two cultures must not be so wide as to be virtually unbridgeable: and in this respect, among all Shakespeare's major plays with the exception of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth* offers the most favourable prospect.

For *Macbeth* in many ways is not all that different in conception and structure from a typical French tragedy, say *Horace* or *Phèdre*; or at least, there is less evident disparity than elsewhere. It is (at all events in the version which has come down to us) very short; there is a minimum of significant sub-plots and consequently something approaching unity-of-action; and the drama moves towards its first major crisis—the murder of Duncan in Act I, sc. ii—with a rapidity which might well have received the approval of Pierre Corneille. Furthermore, with the exception of the Porter scene, there are no comic interludes: it is virtually a 'pure' tragedy in the French Classical tradition—a tragedy based on the interaction between individual character and Destiny. And in this case, Destiny is externalized and incarnated in the figures of Hecate and the Three Witches, much as *Phèdre* sees Destiny incarnated in the figure of *Vénus*. Finally, the core of *Macbeth's* dilemma can at a pinch be seen as a conflict between private aspirations and public duties; and if this interpretation is accepted, then the play may appear as by no means dissimilar to *Le Cid* or *Horace* or *Cinna*, or even to those among Racine's plays which have a political background: *Andromaque* or *Bérénice* or *Phèdre* itself.

There is no prima-facie reason, then, why *Macbeth* should not, with intelligent adaptation, make a workable tragedy in the French tradition; yet quite clearly, in spite of the efforts of two Immortals of the Académie Française, of one competent theatrical artisan and of one genius, it does not. Or rather, it does not, as *Macbeth*; for the genius in question, Alfred Jarry, does unquestionably make a success out of *Ubu Roi*, but only by transforming the material so totally that it needs very careful reading to rediscover the tragic figure of the Thane of Glamis beneath the grotesque caperings of Père Ubu.

The four texts here under consideration are spread over a period of two

centuries, and are as unlike each other as it is possible to imagine. The first is *Macbeth* by Jean-François Ducis, who, incidentally, in 1779, had been elected to Voltaire's seat in the Académie, mainly on the strength of his reputation as an adaptor of Shakespeare. Ducis' version dates from 1784, but was revised in 1790. It is a five-act tragedy in alexandrines, much in the manner of the later Voltaire; and it was the first version of the play ever to be performed on the French stage. The second is *Les Visions de Macbeth, ou les Sorcières d'Ecosse*, compiled by Augustin Hapdé, a prolific literary hack, written in 1812 but forbidden by the Napoleonic censorship, revised and performed in 1816: a 'Mélodrame à grand spectacle' in three acts of rather curious prose, complete with melodrama-villain, hordes of bards performing on antique harps, storms, lighting-effects, transformation-scenes, machinery galore, and a full-scale 'Palace of Illusions' with which the Witches dazzle the eyes and ambitions of a somewhat bewildered hero. The third is Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (five acts, prose and parody), first written for marionettes in 1888, when Jarry was fifteen, but revised for the living actors of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896: a grotesque, *guignol*-type caricature of crude and violent archetypes with simplified outlines, and one of the precursors of Surrealist drama. And the final version is Eugène Ionesco's *Macbett* (so spelt, the author claims, to help the audience distinguish it from Shakespeare's), written in 1972, just after Ionesco's election to the Académie in succession to Jean Paulhan: an essay in late-Absurdism, a stream of post-Surrealist dialogue unbroken by intervals, embodying a complex and didactic exposé of political nihilism.

Now, what is of immediate interest is that these four versions, having virtually nothing in common with each other save the source and origin of their inspiration, none the less all show an identical dramatic and cultural tradition at work; and all, in their modification of Shakespeare's text, modify it at the same points and in the same, or at least in a similar direction. And from studying the nature of these modifications it will, I think, be possible to understand something of the nature of the tradition which occasions them.

The first series of modifications concerns the actual structure of the play itself. To the French Mind, the original *Macbeth* is a cumbersome, misshapen, formless, untidy drama; and the immediate necessity is to tidy it up.

And straight away, something significant emerges: for, if the French Mind feels the play to be untidy, it is because it sees it from the very outset as something decidedly different from what Shakespeare intended. For Shakespeare, *Macbeth* was a metaphysical play in a political setting; it was a play about the cumulative nature of evil; and this cumulative effect is shown by the way in which an original, reasonably well-motivated crime (the murder of Duncan) leads eventually to gratuitous and unmotivated crimes (the murder of Banquo, finally the murder of Lady Macduff and her children). In this sense, therefore, the murders of Banquo and of Lady Macduff are more significant than the murder of Duncan; it is these, and not the assassination of the King, which

make the point which Shakespeare is driving at. And when a Ghost appears, it is—it must be—the Ghost of Banquo.

But to the French Mind, obsessed then as now with theories of politics, *Macbeth* is a political play in a setting of tragic predestination: like *Cinna*, like *Bérénice*. And so the first concern of the adaptor is to eliminate anything arbitrary which might distort or obscure the political message, whether he approves of that message or not.

From this point of view, evidences of the gratuitous and the arbitrary in Shakespeare are all too numerous. The Porter, to start with: he goes out straight away, and not so much as a hint of him appears in any of our four texts. Similarly, Lady Macduff and her children are wholly expendable and vanish; and even Macduff himself is granted but a fleeting appearance (by Hapdé, as 'Tutor to Melcôme') on one solitary occasion. Banquo's son, Fleance, follows the Macduffs into oblivion even more rapidly than in Shakespeare. On the other hand, Duncan's second son, Donalbain, presents more of a problem. His role in the play as such is wholly superfluous; the fact remains, however, that he *was* an historical figure and, in addition, that he *was* the son of a King. In the French Classical tradition, sons of Kings do not disappear without explanation. So Ducis gives him a real, but past, existence: he had previously been slain by the villainous 'Cador' at the age of four, much to the grievous distress of his father. Ionesco, by contrast, eliminates the problem by admitting that he is definitely alive, but temporarily absent, reading for a Degree in Business Studies at the University of Ragusa:

*Macbett:* That's the first I've ever heard of anyone called Donalbain.

*First Witch:* Never you mind about that, Sir Macbett, it's not even worth remembering the name, don't worry, it won't be mentioned again.

In effect, the disappearance of the Macduffs radically alters the significance of the play, just as the disappearance of the Porter alters its tonality; but the liquidization of Fleance and Donalbain does reveal the purposelessness of their roles, and makes one wonder about the whole function of Shakespeare's minor characters who, in this case at least, lead nowhere and have nothing to justify their existence in the play save historical veracity.

However, the French Mind, having begun by eliminating the gratuitous characters, then proceeds to the business of correcting Shakespeare's more obvious blunders in the domain of political logic. *Macbeth* is a political play; consequently, the focal point of its action must be the major political event—the murder of Duncan; and consequently again, if the central action is to be highlighted by the appearance of a Ghost, political logic demands that this should be the Ghost of the murdered King, and certainly not that of the subsidiary and irrelevant Banquo. (Ionesco, in this respect a stickler for academic accuracy, does allow a fleeting reappearance of his 'Banco'; but only framed in the safeguarding context of a double reappearance of Duncan.) Moreover, as the rationalistic French Mind knows, Ghosts do not exist anyway. So the whole

crazy thing has to be explained away: neurotic guilt-complex, psychological hallucination. It is interesting to find that protagonist of the irrational and the Absurd, Eugène Ionesco, offering precisely the same explanatory rationalization as the Voltairian Ducis.

Finally, there is the problem of the last-act overthrow of Macbeth—Macbeth slain—according to Shakespeare—by Macduff. Why Macduff, of all people? When a King is assassinated, his Kingdom usurped and his son and heir driven into exile, there must, according to the most elementary political logic, be only one person fitted to kill the usurper and thus regain his heritage: the displaced heir himself. So exit the poor widower Macduff; and Malcolm is restored to his rightful place as the slayer of Macbeth.

But Shakespeare was not only erratic and unpredictable in his political thinking; he was even worse in his psychology. He was forever creating, or referring to, characters—interesting, powerful characters, full of dramatic possibility—and then forgetting to give them any proper motivation, or even, in some cases, to produce them on stage at all. Take, as a start, the case of Glamis.

At the most dramatic moment of all in the opening scenes of the play, the Witches address Macbeth:

*First Witch:* All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

*Second Witch:* All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

*Third Witch:* All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!

Now we know that Macbeth *did* subsequently become King of Scotland; and we know that he also became Thane of Cawdor. But all he says about becoming Thane of Glamis is that he was perfectly well aware of the fact already. This is puzzling. It would seem to suggest itself, that if he *had* become Thane of Glamis, then there must logically have been a previous Thane, whose Thaneship, by some means or other, he had acquired. Shakespeare, admittedly, is a bit reticent on this point. We have to turn to Holinshed to find the answer: historically, 'Thane of Glamis' had been one of the titles of Macbeth's father; the latter had recently died, and Macbeth had inherited the title. But Holinshed was unknown, at least to Ducis and Hapd ; and in any case, the whole factual explanation is disastrously undramatic. How much more effective actually to have a Thane of Glamis on stage, and for the audience to be able to observe the means by which Macbeth grabs the coveted title. And so Glamises (in Ionesco's case, a 'Glamiss') multiply. For Ducis, and again for Hapd , Glamis figures as a wise and elderly courtier, playing in relation to Duncan much the same role as Th ram ne in relation to Th s e, and is murdered by Macbeth in the same instant as his noble Lord and Sovereign; for Ionesco, he materializes as a kind of discontented Greek or Spanish Colonel, ally of Cawdor, member of a Junta, one of the original leaders of the Insurrection against the King. Thanks to the French adaptors, Glamis is at last beginning to acquire something of that forfeited reality which Shakespeare, in his miserly way, had withheld from him.

And similarly with Cawdor. Admittedly, from Shakespeare, we learn a little more about Cawdor than about Glamis: how he had allied himself with MacDonald of the Isles and Norwegian Sueno to harass Duncan's kingdom; and how, when the invasion had been driven back by Banquo and Macbeth, he had been captured and executed as a traitor, and his lands and title made forfeit to the General of the King. But again, what a waste of potential dramatic possibilities—the whole menace of evil, of destruction, of alien invasion, subdivided among three subsidiary characters—Cawdor, Sueno and MacDonald—not one of whom appears! How much more effective to roll the three parts into one, to create one 'enemy', one Satanic figure, an Attila, a Scourge-of-God, a Ghenghiz Khan, an Auk—in fact, a Cawdor. And thus is Cawdor (or 'Cador', or 'Baron Candor') re-created; and the part which Shakespeare forgot about at last brought properly to life.

But the most fascinating evolution of all is that of Banquo. For Shakespeare, Banquo has the stature of heroic loyalty—and in reward is gratuitously murdered by Macbeth. But Holinshed's portrait is not so flattering: Banquo (or Banquho), the Chronicler suggests, did probably at least connive at Duncan's murder, even if he did not actively participate in the deed. However, the dynastic genealogists of Shakespeare's time believed that Banquo was a direct ancestor of James VI of Scotland (this is the 'line of kings' which, according to the Witches' prophecy, Banquo is destined to beget); and James VI of Scotland now sat, as James I, upon the English throne. So it behoved Shakespeare to be careful: a little whitewashing of Banquo might not come amiss.

But neither Ducis, nor Hapdé, nor Jarry, nor Ionesco, was a subject of His Majesty King James; and so in France, Banquo begins to emerge at last in his true light—as the hypocrite, the dynamic force of human (as opposed to super-human) evil, the seducer of Macbeth: Oenone crossed with Iago. 'Herward' in Ducis—then veering rapidly towards the true villain of melodrama, 'Sir Ervard', in Hapdé. 'Capitaine Bordure' (= 'bordel' + 'ordure') in Jarry; and, most precisely of all, 'Général Banco' in Ionesco. It is Banquo who has the ambitions; Banquo who persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan; 'Général Banco' who heads that Spanish Junta and who has as his subordinates those ruthless *falangistes*, Baron Glamiss and Baron Candor. Here is a French Banquo in action: the villainous Sir Ervard soliloquizing over his plots in relation to Macbeth:

Betwixt myself and the Throne there stands but one impassible barrier: Macbeth, illustrious Defender of his Sovereign and of the Realm; would it not be a most subtle scheme, to cause to burgeon in the heart of this Macbeth the ambition to place upon his own head the Crown of Scotland, by steeping his hands in the Royal blood? This dire deed once accomplished, then should I reveal the author thereof to the People, thereby avenging the spirit of Duncan . . . and assuring that Macbeth shall be no more. So, by the acclamation of the People, shall I be hailed the avenger of a weeping Realm, and from the brow of slain Macbeth shall I seize a diadem that, on the brow of noble Duncan, was destined e'er to elude my grasp . . .

And then, of course, there is the problem of Lady Macbeth sleepwalking. In Shakespeare, this wonderful scene is all mystery and suggestion; little is spoken, everything is implied. It is pure, almost abstract dramatic poetry of the highest order. Unfortunately, to the French Mind (here swayed, perhaps, in the first instance by Lctournéur's pedestrian translation) it is just inchoate. Not only does it need to be tidied up, but it needs to be assimilated properly into the plot. Shakespeare simply throws away his effects: he has potentially a tremendous scene at his fingertips and he wastes it.

Jarry and Ionesco give up, and leave the scene out altogether; but Ducis and Hapdé are made of sterner stuff. Perhaps inspired by his discovery that Lady Macbeth had a Christian name—and a most euphonious one at that: Frédégonde—Ducis not merely persuades her to sleep—soliloquize coherently enough to give away the entire plot of the murder and its consequences, but to soliloquize in such a manner and place that she may be overheard both by Melcôme and by the latter's foster-father, a Noble Savage from the Scottish Highlands, Sévar by name (another character, incidentally, whom Shakespeare forgot about). Thus Melcôme is apprised that Macbeth is his father's murderer, the source of Evil in the land, and, with commendable promptitude and logic, plans and carries out his own revenge. Meanwhile Frédégonde, having completed her soliloquy, and still in the trance of sleep, stumbles out dagger in hand, and (offstage of course) plunges it into the breast of her own sleeping son. The son of Macbeth and Frédégonde; another vital character in the plot now properly reconstructed, now finally tied in; and of whom more later.

Hapdé has Melcôme and his tutor Macduff imprisoned in Macbeth's castle, and truly in dire straits. They wander in the garden at night, despairing of escape. To them, again a Frédégonde, asleep but in narrational mood. Again, the whole plot is revealed, including this time details of Macbeth's foul purpose to murder even Melcôme himself; but then, in place of the dagger, she takes a key from off her *châtelaine*, and, still sleeping, hands it to Duncan's son. She vanishes; the key proves to be that of the gate of the garden wall. Hitherto doomed, Melcôme and Macduff escape in spite of all; and the plot proceeds to its predictable *dénouement*.

Tidier, neater: unity-of-action made absolute; unity-of-time—the action taken at its crisis, then rapidly dissolving; unity-of-place where possible, save in Hapdé, where extravagant scene-changes are an essential part of the attraction of the 'grand spectacle'. This is the structure of *Macbeth* as Shakespeare ought to have written it; as undoubtedly he would have written it, had he been born with the planets in true Cartesian conjunction. Only Jarry stands a little apart, half-welcoming the arbitrary and the irrational. But then Jarry was a poet and a genius, and at the age of fifteen probably understood the reality of Shakespeare better than people half a century his senior.

The second step, evident to the French Mind, which needs to be taken, is to clarify the psychology; for there is more than one Shakespearean notion of



human motivation, both moral and spiritual, which is frankly unacceptable: even 'barbaric'.

It is unacceptable, for instance, that Macbeth, and still more Lady Macbeth, faced with a choice between Good and Evil, should freely and deliberately choose Evil rather than Good—and yet still remain both tragic and sympathetic. It is not as though it were a result of moral miscalculation, in an instant when the soul is blinded by passion, as is the case with Andromaque or Phèdre. Nor is it even, in the case of Lady Macbeth, the case of a pitiful human victimized by a whim of the Gods. Shakespeare allows his people their full quota of free will; and lucidly, deliberately, they abuse it. Such beings cannot be granted the heroic stature of tragedy: they are dangerous grotesques. And when Jarry transforms the Thane of Glamis into Ubu, a dangerous grotesque is precisely what he becomes.

There is also difficulty over the way in which Shakespeare interprets his Aristotle—or it may have been his Seneca. Here we are on rather more difficult ground, for both Corneille and Racine also based their understanding of tragic psychology on Aristotle, and yet the outcome in either case is wholly different. The stumbling-block is the Aristotelian definition of the ideal tragic hero as a Good Man brought to ruin by the presence of a single flaw in his character. Shakespeare, accepting this precept as he found it, interpreted it in terms of exactly observed human behaviour, and portrayed his characters *gradually* destroyed by their single defect. In other words, for him, Macbeth's ambition, Othello's jealousy are integral parts of their life-pattern, at first barely distinguishable from that in them which is noble and heroic, and only in the course of months or years undermining the rest, until the Good lies in ruins, and only the tragic wreck of a human destiny remains.

The French Classical dramatists, by contrast, took the Aristotelian dictum in conjunction with what sixteenth-century theorists had deduced must be the inviolable 'Rules' of tragedy, and in particular in conjunction with the Unity-of-time: the action must be taken at its crisis, and unroll from beginning to end within a span of twenty-four (or thirty-six) hours. This meant that the whole process essential to tragedy, Good undermined and finally destroyed by Evil, by weakness or by Destiny, had to be speeded up; and the Shakespearian concept of the 'integrated flaw' became so *invraisemblable* if it were made to operate within twenty-four hours that it had to be discarded. In its stead, a Racine (even more clearly, in a comic context, a Molière) substituted a 'flaw' which is in absolute contradiction to the pattern of a life, and therefore which can destroy the entirety of that life almost in an instant. A Miser in love with a *poor* girl; a Misanthropist fascinated by a coquette; passion and duty, love and jealousy in immediate and irreconcilable opposition. In real life, such sharpness of contradiction is rarely encountered; thus there is very little 'realism' in Racine's tragic developments. Shakespeare works through the *observation* of psychological truth; Racine through its *allegorization*.

Consequently, in the adaptation of *Macbeth*, some means has to be found to

speed up the Shakespearian psychological process to the pace of Racinian allegory. Macbeth is not allowed time to develop slowly; he has to be shown with an 'irreconcilable opposition' present in him from the outset. He has to be shown as incontrovertibly and unmistakably evil from the start . . . and he becomes the Père Ubu. Or as a consummate hypocrite from the start—as is Macbett. Or overwhelmed and entirely subjugated by the other characters around him, by a Herward and a Frédégonde, so that he never has a chance. Or—in the most extreme instance—as literally 'possessed' by an evil spirit, as he is shown to be by Hapdé, so that his own 'true' character can be ousted and set aside and another substituted for it: the work of an instant, and the transformation is complete. Once again, despite the extreme disparity of the various versions, the principle underlying the transformations is identical in each case.

A final element in Shakespearian tragedy which appears unacceptable—in this case, perhaps incomprehensible—to the French Mind is the fact that the richness and the reality of Macbeth's language are inseparable from his moral credibility. Macbeth is rooted by his language in the real world. This means that 'Destiny'—an *abstract* force by definition—is comparatively irrelevant. To alter the concrete qualities of Shakespeare's language is effectively to transform the metaphysical status of the characters who speak it. A Macbeth compounded of abstractions is far more at the mercy of that Queen of Abstractions which is Destiny than a Macbeth who has his roots solidly planted in the language of men and the rich earthiness of the world. Ubu alone has something of this Shakespearian or Rabelaisian brutality which is at the same time autonomy; none of the others do. And so, in each case, the power of Destiny over human action is enhanced.

As a result of the presence of all these various unacceptable elements which lie at the very root of Shakespeare's conception of the tragic character, the French Mind senses, not so much that *it* has missed something, as the fact that something is missing. The psychological motivations seem shallow and inadequate; and it must be Shakespeare's fault. Something has obviously to be done about it.

The answer is plainly to invent further motivation, in order to give the characters that substance of psychological reality which they appear to lack. And the first of these is the 'mother-child' motivation.

Macbeth is impelled towards evil, in part at least, by Lady Macbeth. But, as we have seen, to assume a free, deliberate and lucid choice of evil by Lady Macbeth is inconsistent with the vision of her as a tragic heroine. To be granted that status, she must be furnished with an *acceptable* motivation; and the most acceptable of all motivations, at least to the disciples of Rousseau, Greuze and their latter-day descendants is the love a mother has for her child.

Lady Macbeth herself tells us that she has borne children; but Shakespeare seems somehow to have missed the point. It can only be *because* of the love she has for her first-born child, Macbeth's heir, and her ambitions for his future, that she forsakes the Good in favour of Evil. 'Je suis mère, Macbeth!'

exclaims Ducis' Frédégonde; and while Macbeth is in Duncan's chamber, supposedly carrying out the murder, she emphasizes the theme:

Strike then, Macbeth! and reign. And thou, ambition's blaze,  
Dazzle mine husband's eyes! Yet to me be a guide!  
Dear son of mine! What fire to inflame a mother's pride:  
One day shalt *thou* be King!<sup>2</sup>

It is in view of this, of course, that Frédégonde's stabbing of this same 'dear son' at the conclusion of the sleepwalking scene assumes such portentous significance; and in his own comments on the first production, Ducis observes that this was the highest dramatic moment of the play.

Ducis reinforces the theme by having Melcôme ignorant of the fact that he is Duncan's son until informed of the fact by the sleepwalking Frédégonde; at which point all his filial emotions come to a head with a rush, justifying, in their turn, the murder of the murderer of his father. The rapidity with which emotional impulses accumulate is in itself the first step towards the moral justification of heroic stature in Classical tragedy, as opposed to the gradual evolution of the inevitable which characterizes the Shakespearian destiny. The Macbeth children play a not dissimilar, although less marked role in Hapdé. Jarry (wisely) leaves them alone; but Ionesco, somewhat surprisingly, revives the child-theme, albeit in a distorted version, by making 'Macol' turn out to be, not the son of Duncan, but, unknown to himself, the long-lost son of Banquo: thus on the one hand acting as substitute for the gratuitous and discarded Fleance; and on the other, removing what is in Ionesco's case the undesired moral justification for his final murder of Macbett. Since *Macbett* is a play precisely about the immoralism of power-politics, moral justification is the very last thing that is needed.

A second series of additional psychological motivations furnished by the French Mind can conveniently be summarized as the 'blame-motif.' In Shakespeare, after his first outbursts following the murder of Duncan, it is noticeable that Macbeth blames nobody: neither Lady Macbeth, nor (barring a few comments on their treachery) the Witches. He accepts his responsibility (and damnation) without a trace of Sartrian fuss.

The adaptations, by contrast, exploit the 'blame-motif' as basic to the very structure of the play. Post-mortem recriminations abound—whether on the human or on the supernatural level. In the human context, Père Ubu automatically blames Mère Ubu when *anything* goes wrong. More specifically, Ducis' Macbeth not only blames his Frédégonde for the murder, but actually threatens to stab her—

*Macbeth:* 'Tis thou, foul fiend, 'tis thou, with thy barbaric art,  
Hast us'd mine hand to plunge a dagger to his heart!  
Thine own death should expunge . . .  
*Frédégonde:* Strike thy inhuman blow!

<sup>2</sup> All the translations in this essay are my own responsibility. My instinct tells me to apologize for the badness of my attempt at alexandrines in English, but the badness of the English exactly mirrors the badness of the French.

—and from that moment onwards he rejects her utterly. Nothing of the original Macbeth's haunting pity: 'She should have died hereafter' ennobles his reaction to the news of her death. Hapdè's Macbeth goes still further, rejecting not only Frédégonde ('Unworthy woman! Behold *thy* work!'), but in addition his own son ('That brat! Progeny of *two* monsters!'); and Macbett likewise allays his own feelings of guilt by placing the blame fair and square on the shoulders of that odd female composite consisting of Lady Macbett/First Witch/Lady Duncan.

But it is when the blame is laid, not on human partners, but on the divine or supernatural forces lumped together as 'Destiny' that we get a sudden insight into the basic nature of Racinian and post-Racinian French tragedy. For what we are made to realize, observing the difference between Shakespeare's attitude towards personal responsibility and that of his adaptors, is the extent of the Racinian hero's or heroine's reluctance to accept that they and they alone may be responsible for what has happened. Whatever Athalie may have done, it is God she blames, never herself:

Impitoyable Dieu! Toi seul as tout conduit!

—and there is (to the Shakespearian) an appalling scene at the end of Act IV of *Phèdre*, when the heroine of the play lays all the blame for the lies, the violence and the tragic misunderstandings which accumulate as a result of her impassioned emotional miscalculations, on the unscrupulous, but all in all devoted and well-meaning Oenone. These last ten lines of Act IV are undoubtedly the worst in the play, so perhaps Racine himself had some doubts as to what might be inferred from this unhappy outburst. But, to return to the adaptations: in all cases save that of *Ubu*, it is the Racinian attitude which prevails. The blame is laid, not on Self, but on an Outside Power. Personal responsibility is rejected with abhorrence. And one is led to wonder whether this might not be something almost inseparable from the French tragic tradition: the feeling that 'pure' tragedy and absolute personal responsibility are fundamentally incompatible. In which case it might be debated whether Racine's contortions with Jansenist theology might have been, not so much the fount and origin of his tragic vision, as its consequence: the search for some rational justification for what may have been his instinctive urge to create tragic characters who invariably lay the blame anywhere rather than on themselves.

There is a third series of additional psychological motivations which may be summarized under the single word: Idealism. Of this, in Shakespeare, there is no trace. We know *why* Macbeth wanted to be King; we know nothing of what he wanted to do with his Kingdom once he had got hold of it. Shakespeare does allow himself a slight degree of *idealization*, particularly in relation to Duncan, who, historically, far from being a venerable and saintly ruler, was in fact an irascible young nuisance—but that is a different matter.

But the politically-oriented French Mind cannot conceive of a man aspiring to rule a country without his having a theory about the way he intends to

run it. Père Ubu's theory of undiluted egoism and personal self-aggrandisement is merely the obverse side of the medal to Ducis' Rousseau-esque optimism. Ducis has only to veer slightly off-course from Shakespeare's portrait of the venerable and saintly King, to produce a Voltairian caricature of the *Ancien Régime*: of Louis XVI, perhaps—an effete and gullible no-hoper:

Why fight, where lies the sense? And why defend my throne?  
... For me, the end is nigh.

Set against this, Ducis' Macbeth is all virile Enlightenment; he is imbued with the full flavour of *Contrat-Social* egalitarianism, in the quintessential form that it assumed during the brief honeymoon period, humanitarianism wedded to revolutionary fervour, between Rousseau and Robespierre. Macbeth promises far more than military security against 'Cador'; he promises virtually the whole essence of Rousseau-ism, from Impartial Justice to the Freedom of the Citizen under the Law of Reason. The scene of his coronation, dismissed in a few lines by Shakespeare, becomes a major episode in Ducis. Before him appears Lochlin, bearing the Book of the Laws, upon which Macbeth—the ideal Constitutional Monarch, the Sovereign of 1789 as envisaged in the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*—is to swear his coronation oath:

*Lochlin*: Upon this Awful Book, before us thou shalt swear  
To heed the common good, the common toil to share;  
First Citizen of all, Prince in Equality;  
Within the Law, a King; without, a Nullity.

If Ducis' Macbeth had a tragic flaw, it is not so much that, from sheer personal ambition, he forgot his duties to the State and murdered a King (although this is serious enough); but that, having done so, he failed to live up to the idealistic pretentiousness of his declaration of constitutional sentimentalism. Some two centuries later, the nihilistic Ionesco, quintessentially extracting all the disillusionment of a dozen failures in revolutionary idealism, puts a similar programme of political Utopianism, not into the mouth of the honest Lochlin, but into that of the Witches, the temptresses, the instruments of Hecate and the Devil of Destruction:

*Second Witch* (to Macbeth and Banco): Now then, you two, you're going out to  
build a better society for all of us, a brave, new, happy world

—which is the surest encouragement which Macbeth can receive to embark upon a career of Stalinist tyranny and Ubuesque cynicism.

There are elements of this—particularly among the earnest enthusiasms of Ducis—which may seem to verge on the absurd. And yet the very absurdity may provoke enquiry and reflection. Why is it that Shakespeare suggests absolutely *nothing* concerning the political ideology of Macbeth? For, according to Holinshed, during the ten years or so that he reigned, Macbeth was an enlightened and an efficient ruler. The answer once again, but now even more

emphatically, is that for Shakespeare *Macbeth* was a metaphysical and not a political play.

In comparison with *Richard II*, for instance, or *Julius Caesar*, the absence of political comment in *Macbeth* is indeed striking. In Act I, sc. vii, where Macbeth is pondering on the arguments for and against the assassination of Duncan, Shakespeare permits him the following considerations opposed to the deed:

He's here in double trust:  
First as I am his kinsman and his subject—  
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murder shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against  
The deep damnation of his taking off . . .

In this passage, it is only the last three words of the second line—'and his subject'—which give any hint of a political situation. The other factors are all of a personal or moral nature. *Macbeth*—I must insist upon it yet again—is a play about murder; it is only incidentally a play about the murder of a King. Moreover, in 1606, with the Gunpowder Plot still all too fresh in everyone's mind, it was perhaps wise of Shakespeare not to dwell too heavily upon the theme of political assassination.

But, as we have seen, to the French Mind, *Macbeth* is first and foremost a play about politics; and, given this, there are two possible attitudes that can be adopted towards it: either it is a very dangerous play advocating regicide, and as such to be treated with extreme circumspection; or else it is a brutal and realistic analysis of the plain, unpalatable facts of political power. In the event, Ducis and Hapd  adopt the first interpretation; Jarry and Ionesco the second.

The conviction that *Macbeth* is a very dangerous play indeed, to be handled as though it were a barrel of gunpowder, is most clearly expressed in Hapd 's *Pr face*, which was written in 1816, less than a year after the final fall of Napoleon, and with Louis XVIII seated even more insecurely upon his throne than James I had been in 1606. Referring to his transformation of Banquo into the melodrama-villain, Sir Ervard, Hapd  comments:

This role weakens the two principal parts, of that I am well aware; none the less, by fragmenting a will to crime which hitherto had been single and undivided, and by linking this evil intention with the notion of charms, spells and witchcraft, I have so contrived the play, that the populace shall be more attentive to the spectacle than to the criminality, and that no pernicious impression shall be derived from the witnessing of so heinous a deed . . .

In fact, nearly all of Hapd 's major changes, and a great many of Ducis', are made with this particular preoccupation in mind. Neither can seriously doubt

for a moment that the play *is* about the killing of a King; but at least this fact should be disguised as far as possible.

The most curious of the solutions to be envisaged—and even more strangely, to be adopted by Jarry and Ionesco as well as by Ducis and Hapdé—is to leave the audience in permanent doubt as to who actually *did* kill the unfortunate Duncan. For Ducis (who, incidentally, never uses the dread word 'régicide', but replaces it invariably with 'parricide'), it would appear to have been Macbeth who was responsible; but it *could* have been Frédégonde—each in turn accuses the other—and, since the murder takes place while Macbeth's castle is actually being attacked by 'Cador', and while his rude and licentious soldiery is swarming all over it, the murder could have been no murder at all, but simply an act of war. In the case of Hapdé, by contrast, there is no doubt whose *hand* killed Duncan: it was that of Macbeth. But, as we have seen, Hapdé insists again and again on the idea that Macbeth at the critical instant was literally 'not himself'. Not only does he emerge from the fatal chamber 'in a delirium', but the whole plot turns on his actually being 'possessed' by an alien spirit. So although the hand was Macbeth's, the mind which guided it was not. In fact, it is by no means clear whose mind did do the guiding. Macbeth's mind was 'possessed' by Frédégonde; hers in turn by Sir Ervard, who has received this supernatural power of 'possession' from the Witches, who are the tools of Hecate, who is in the power of Satan. Further and further away from Macbeth drifts the responsibility for the killing; and thus the authorship of the crime is blurred as effectively by Hapdé as by Ducis. Jarry employs no such subtleties: when the instant arrives for Venceslas to be murdered, the stage-direction says simply 'All strike at the King'. Ionesco, by contrast, seems almost to hark back to Hapdé, since his Lady Macbett is also Lady Duncan, and both are identities assumed by the First Witch. Consequently the murder of Duncan, whose authorship is in any case uncertain, since it could have been committed either by Macbett himself, or by Gén. Banco, or by Lady Duncan, can also be seen as the work of Lady Macbett, or as that of the Witches.

There is a second way, however, of softening the impact of a play about régicide, and that is to increase the sense of remorse experienced by Macbeth after the murder. Ducis is strongly aware of this; but surely the most remorse-stricken Macbeth to appear on any stage must belong to Hapdé. As Hapdé's Macbeth emerges, 'dizzy and delirious', from Duncan's room, he sways in the grip of indescribable agonies: 'He is beside himself', states the stage-direction; 'he no longer recognizes anyone'. Whereupon, enter up-stage a singular figure, who proceeds to grab at the guilty man: Remorse—

REMORE is to be presented on the stage by a species of Infernal Spirit, whose fingertips are to be extended into the shape of immense claws, and upon whose belt the Public may discern, written in large letters, the appellation: R.E.M.O.R.S.E.

Macbeth flees. REMORSE pursues, now catching, now losing his quarry. Meanwhile, the chamber door opens unperceived, and the Ghost of Duncan, with

rapid strides, joins in the chase. Round and round they go, until at the last Macbeth collapses, overwhelmed with terror and exhaustion, while REMORSE clutches avidly at his vitals, and the Ghost stands menacingly by. Hapdè's solution to the problem of theatrical regicide may seem to us a little exaggerated; but no doubt it served its purpose, as well as ensuring 'that the populace shall be more attentive to the spectacle than to the criminality'.

The alternative political interpretation of *Macbeth*—as a grim and cynical play about the corrosive nature of power—also inspires some very interesting variants. As with all 'realistic' approaches to a subject, the greatest enemy is the Ideal; and so the first move is to scrap the tragic dignity with which Shakespeare had ennobled his Macbeth, and to hunt for the unlovely man beneath the mask. In a word, to seek out the socio-historical truth of the situation and to revel in the authentic nastiness of Scottish power-politics as they were enacted in the year AD 1035. 'I was determined to re-establish the truth of history', M. Eugène Ionesco remarked recently to the present writer—an undoubtedly sincere statement of intention, even though the result involved confusing Malcolm II Duff with Malcolm III Canmore. However, Ionesco certainly read up his Holinshed and other annals of Scottish history; and I think we may deduce that Jarry's school-text of *Macbeth*, which he studied at the Lycée de Rennes, contained extracts from Holinshed as part of its introductory material. In which case, alongside the unpopular schoolmaster M. Hébert, Oedipus and Gargantua, we must include among the models for the immortal Père Ubu, not only Shakespeare's but also Holinshed's Macbeth.

There is, moreover, one very curious scene in Shakespeare (incidentally, one which is taken almost word for word from Holinshed), which evidently fascinated both Jarry and, more especially, Ionesco. This is the episode, Act IV, sc. iii, in which Malcolm 'tests' the character and uprightness of Macduff by telling him in detail exactly what a ruthless, sadistic and evil King he will make when he ascends the throne. Many Shakespearian critics have been baffled by this scene—Traversi, for instance, resorts to the assertion that Malcolm is 'talking in symbols and allegories', whatever that may mean in the context. For Ionesco, however, there is no problem. There is nothing either allegoric or symbolic about Malcolm's outburst: it is simply a clear, lucid exposition of his genuine political programme, and as such constitutes the whole meaning of Shakespeare's play. More than that; Malcolm is not merely describing *his* policy; he is describing the eternal characteristics of *all* political power. Consequently, Ionesco displaces this scene from Act IV to the very end of the play, after the slaying of Macbeth; and the curtain falls on 'Macol', with power now firmly in his grasp, setting off to tyrannize the Realm of Scotland exactly in the way that Shakespeare's Malcolm had proposed.

Even Ducis seems to have been disturbed and fascinated by this scene, and his Duncan, at the beginning of the play, is shown fretting away neurotically at the idea that his son might prove unfitted for the Crown:

How were it, should this son prove but an *evil* King?



he asks Sévar; and it is indeed this worry which has caused him to have Malcolm brought up in ignorance of his title, surrounded by the peasant simplicity of the Highlands, far from the temptations and sophistications of the Court. Jarry too seems to have used this strange scene, along with Holinshed, as the inspiration of the programme outlined by his megalomaniac Ubu. Both Jarry and Ionesco, in fact, take this scene—and indeed the play as a whole—as the clear and prophetic vision of an apocalyptic *Realpolitik*. And both see Shakespeare as the ultimate political nihilist.

At bottom, however, all the patterns and variants which we have examined are secondary. Overriding them all in importance is something far more fundamental: a conflict of ideas concerning the real nature of a tragic destiny. Shakespeare had one concept, Racine had another; and for the French Mind to adopt the Shakespearian vision appears at times to verge upon impossibility. The barrier between the two cultures is no longer literary, but metaphysical.

*Macbeth*, as we have seen, is closer than most Shakespearian dramas to the French tradition; and it is closer also in one further respect, namely, that the Three Witches, who are in a sense 'professional' practitioners of their trade, foretell a detailed and positive future for Macbeth, which contrasts sharply with the negative vagueness of the Soothsayer's 'Beware the Ides of March', or the retrospective irony of Brabantio's 'She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee'. The Witches, then, predict a future: but of that future, one part has already been fulfilled; one part is in process of fulfilment (Duncan has already decided in his mind to give Cawdor's title to Macbeth); only the third part is genuinely a prediction. And it could well be argued that all that in fact happens is that the Witches awaken an ambition in Macbeth, who then collaborates with the prediction to ensure that it is fulfilled. In other words, the Witches may or may not have supernatural powers; but they act as psychological instigators of an idea, which Macbeth, of his own free will, then proceeds to realize. The Witches, like Macbeth himself, are rooted by their language in the real world; and Shakespeare creates around them a deliberate ambiguity, half-way between psychological realism and supernatural Destiny.

But the Racinian concept of Destiny is very different, and so the Witches, in the French versions, change completely. They do not 'predict' a future, which awakens a slumbering desire in Macbeth, which desire then of its own accord contributes to fulfilling the prophecy; they *will* a future, which then inexorably comes to pass, *in spite of* the resistance of the mortals involves.

At bottom, there are three concepts of 'fatality' in the tragic theatre, and in any given dramatist, these are interwoven in such a way as to give his drama the particular tonality which we associate with it.

First, the concept of a timeless Divine Will, for which all things past, present and future exist as ordained in an eternal-instantaneous present. To the time-bound mortal, this appears as the controlling operation of a Will-outside-Self

driving him onwards to a predestined future; but this is only because his limited faculties cannot perceive the instantaneous totality.

Second, a continuity-in-time which, in theory at least, permits a total freedom of choice and action to every human being. This theoretical liberty, however, is at best restricted, at worst illusory. In reality, there is a whole range of factors which may determine a choice at any given juncture: innate mental patterns established by past choices; the operation of the laws of nature, in accordance with which certain causes will produce predictable effects, regardless of whether those causes are known or not; the influence of the social, political or intellectual climate in which the individual is situated. . . . Within this conception of 'fatality', there are two possible explanations of 'prediction'. Either the prophet is simply an individual with a sharpened faculty for perceiving hidden causes and other determining factors; or else it may be that certain exceptionally gifted beings can 'project' themselves in such a way as to see time-future as though it were time-past. In other words, there is freedom-to-choose in a time-flow which is sufficiently real for the future to be determinable *only* by positive factors already established in the past and the present (and not by any timeless Divine Will); and if, within this time-flow, certain exceptional creatures have the ability to swim a short way ahead of the others, this does not significantly alter the conception of Time as the all-important and unchangeable framework in which the patterns of human destiny are worked out.

Third, an historical time-past, which, belonging inexorably to the past, is unalterable, and therefore 'fatal'; yet which, through the illusion of Theatre, appears to the audience, in their suspension of disbelief, as time-present; and which, to the actor who has learnt his part by heart from beginning to tragic *dénouement*, is simultaneously unpredictable and inevitable. The Illusion of Theatre exactly counterbalances the irreducible facticity of history and of the text.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, like *Polyeucte*, like *Bajazet*, is, give a little, take a little, an historical tragedy: that is, for any dramatist who uses the material, it involves acceptance of our third—or existential—concept of tragic Destiny: the inevitability of time-past, counterbalanced by the theatre-illusion of freedom of choice towards an unknown future, counterbalanced again by the 'fatality' to which the actor submits at the bidding of the text.

But whereas, for Shakespeare, this existential concept is combined with the metaphysical dimension of a time-flow as defined under the second concept of fatality—

*Banquo:* If you can look into the seeds of time  
And say which grain will grow and which will not . . .

—for Racine, and similarly for Ducis, for Hapd , for Ionesco and for the French tradition as a whole, the third or existential concept is combined with the metaphysical dimension of an instantaneous-eternal pattern of timelessness

reflecting the structure of a Divine or Absolute mind, which I have described as the first. Where time has no reality, the individual who knows this fact knows that there is no freedom. Everything *is*. But to state what *is*, to him who believes in time and freedom, is to *will* it to come to pass. And so the French Witches *will* the destiny of Macbeth; and Macbeth is powerless to defeat it.

We can take this further: for a 'tragic fatality' is a conflict between a determinism (whether of the timeless 'this-is', or of unalterable time-past, or of the laws of cause-and-effect) and a freedom—in short, between a 'fixed pattern' on the one hand, and an element of unpredictability or arbitrariness on the other. But whereas, in the Racinian tradition, the 'fixed pattern' lies in areas outside the individual, while the arbitrary freedom resides inside, in the Shakespearean tradition, the converse is true: the pattern is dictated from within, the arbitrary forces lie without. For Racine, as for Claudel, for Sartre, even for Hapdé, there is a static, external pattern of structured timelessness, against which human freedoms batter themselves in all directions at once; and this random battering is usually called 'Racinian psychology'. Whereas, in the Shakespearean—perhaps ultimately in the Jungian—tradition of psychology, there is a comparatively static, internal pattern, developing but not radically changing with the passage of time, and predictably orienting in accordance with its own rigidities of direction whatever arbitrary forces may batter up against it from the unpredictable world outside. Shakespeare's Macbeth forges his own destiny, and takes the Witches with him in his stride, because they point the way *he* wants to go; Augustin Hapdé's Witches, like Ionesco's, *will* what must be if only because it *is*, and there is nothing that Macbeth can do to alter his inexorable destiny.

Kathleen Raine, scholar, poet and a great representative of the Shakespearean tradition, has written:

If in the course of time we come a little into our own, we begin to see reflected in the seemingly fortuitous succession of events the inner pattern of our own nature, of what was predestined for us through what we are. Only when it has reflected that inner order can that which has befallen us truly be called our life

—or for that matter the life of Othello, Lear, Hamlet, Timon . . . or the ill-fated Thane of Glamis. For Shakespeare, it is the 'inner order' which is essential. Not the 'outer order', ordained by Athalie's 'impitoyable Dieu'. The difference is fundamental.

To English readers, the efforts made by the French Mind to assimilate Shakespeare's drama may well be felt as a Persecution and Assassination of Macbeth. But what they represent in reality is a desperate and unavailing attempt to transform one concept of tragic fatality into another exactly its opposite.