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PART II.

A TIME-ANALYSIS OF THE PLOTS OF
SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS:

- I. COMEDIES.
- II. TRAGEDIES.
- III. HISTORIES.

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MACBETH.

First published in Folio, 1623. Divided into acts and scenes. The last scene of the folio, *Scena Septima*, has been variously divided by modern editors. The Globe editors, following Dyce, divide it into two, marking a fresh scene (viii) at Macbeth's last entry -- "Why should I play the Roman fool," &c.

Day 1. Act I. sc. i. The Witches. They propose to meet with Macbeth after the battle, "upon the heath," "ere the set of sun."

Act I. sc. ii. "Alarum within." We are, then, supposed to be within ear-shot of the battle. Duncan meets a bleeding Captain [Serjeant in the text] who brings news of the fight -- Macbeth has defeated the Rebels under Macdonwald, and is now engaged with the king of Norway. Ross and Angus [Mem. Angus does not speak nor is he mentioned in the text, and is struck out of modern editions] now enter. They come from Fife, and Ross announces the victory over Norway and Cawdor. Duncan commissions Ross to pronounce the present death of Cawdor and to greet Macbeth with his title.

Where is this scene laid? Modern editors say, at Forres. I presume because in the next scene Macbeth, who is on his way to the king, asks "How far is't called to Forres?" Forres is, then, within ear-shot of Fife.

Act I. sc. iii. The Witches meet with Macbeth and Banquo upon the "blasted heath." Time near sunset, it is to be presumed, as agreed on in sc. i. Ross and Angus come from the King. Ross describes how the news of Macbeth's success reached the King, by

post after post. He appears to have entirely forgotten that he himself was the messenger; he however greets Macbeth with the title

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of Cawdor, and Angus informs Macbeth that Cawdor lies under sentence of death for "treasons capital," but whether he was in league with Norway, or with the rebel [Macdonwald], or with both, he knows not. Ross did know when, in the preceding scene, he took the news of the victory to the King; but he also appears to have forgotten it; at any rate he does not betray his knowledge. Macbeth's loss of memory is even more remarkable than Ross's. He doesn't recollect having himself defeated Cawdor but a few short hours -- we might say minutes -- ago; and the Witches' prophetic greeting of him by that title; and Ross's confirmation of it, fill him with surprise; for, so far as he knows, (or *recollects*, shall we say?) the thane of Cawdor lives, a prosperous gentleman.

However, Macbeth and the rest now proceed toward the King, and here we must end the first day of the action, at near sunset.

Day 2. Act I. sc. iv. We are now, it is to be presumed, at Forres, and on the following morning. Duncan is here with his sons and with certain Lords. The commissioners charged with the judgment and execution of Cawdor are not yet returned, but news of his death has been received. Ross was charged with this business, and undertook it, but it is evident he can have had no hand in it. He and Angus now make their appearance, with Macbeth and Banquo, who are welcomed by the king.

Duncan determines that he will from hence to Inverness; and Macbeth, undertaking himself to be his harbinger, departs at once. "Let's after him," says Duncan.

Act I. sc. v. The scene changes to Macheth's castle at Inverness. Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband, telling her of his meeting with the Witches in the day of his success. This letter must have been written and despatched at some time between scenes iii. and iv. A messenger announces the approach of Macbeth, followed by the king. Macbeth himself arrives, and confirms the news that the King comes here to-night.

Act I. sc. vi. The King arrives, and is welcomed by Lady Macbeth. He has coursed Macbeth at the heels, and has had a "day's hard journey" (see sc. vii., l. 62). The scene is headed with the

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stage direction, "Hautboys and *torches*;" yet Banquo talks of the swallows which have made their nests upon the castle walls, as though it were still day. The stage direction should surely give way before the authority of the text: *torches* is very generally omitted, but the whole direction was probably caught from the next scene, which is headed with a like direction.

Act I. sc. vii. "Hautboys and *torches*." The service of the King's supper passes over the stage. Macbeth hesitates at the great crime he and his wife had agreed to commit. She now again confirms him, and they settle the details of the King's murder. The King has almost supp'd when Lady Macbeth comes to her husband.

Day 3. Act II. sc. i. Past midnight. "The moon is down." "And she goes down at twelve." Banquo and Fleance, retiring to

rest, meet with Macbeth; they tell him that "The King's a-bed." Banquo mentions that he "dreamt last night of the three weird sisters." This *last night* must be supposed between scenes iii. and iv. of Act I.: there is no other place where it could come in.

They part, and Macbeth proceeds to commit the murder.

Act II. sc. ii. The same. Lady Macbeth is waiting for the fatal news. Macbeth re-enters with the daggers; he has done the deed. In his horror he dares not return to the King's chamber with the daggers; Lady Macbeth takes them. Knocking is heard within. They retire.

Act II. sc. iii. The same. The knocking has aroused the drunken Porter, who proceeds to open the gate and admit Macduff and Lennox. It is yet early morning, but they have command to call timely on the King. Macbeth makes his appearance, and talks with Lennox while Macduff goes to the King's chamber. Macduff re-enters with the news of the murder. Macbeth and Lennox go to see for themselves, while Macduff raises the house. Lady Macbeth and then Banquo enter. Macbeth and Lennox, with Ross [how came Ross there?] return from the King's chamber. The King's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, enter, to be informed of their father's murder, and that Macbeth has slain the grooms of his chamber as the culprits. All now retire, to meet again presently in the hall

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to discuss matters, save Malcolm and Donalbain, who resolve on flight.

Act II. sc. iv. Later in the day Ross and an old man discuss the events of the past night. Macduff joins them, and we learn that Malcolm and Donalbain have fled, and that Macbeth has been chosen King and has gone to Scone to be invested. Ross determines to go thither, but Macduff will not, he will to Fife.

An interval, the reasons for which are set forth in the comment on the following scenes, must now be supposed.

Day 4. Act III. sc. i. to iv. Macbeth is now established on the throne. In these scenes the murder of Banquo is plotted and effected, and his ghost appears at the banquet. The night is almost at odds with morning when these scenes end, and Macbeth determines that he will to-morrow, and betimes, to the weird sisters.

Act III. sc. V. During the same day Hecate meets the Witches and apprises them of Macbeth's purposed visit.

Between Acts II. and III. the long and dismal period of Macbeth's reign described or referred to in Act III. sc. vi., Act IV. sc. ii. and iii., and elsewhere in the play, must have elapsed. Macbeth himself refers to it where, in Act III. sc. iv., speaking of his Thanes, he says:

"There's not a one of them but in his house
I keep a servant fee'd." --

And again --

"I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

Yet, almost in the same breath he says, --

"My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use:
We are yet but young in deed."

And the first words with which Banquo opens this Act -- "Thou hast it now," &c. -- would lead us to suppose that a few days at the utmost can have passed since the coronation at Scone; in the same scene, however, we learn that Malcolm and Donalbain are bestowed in England and in Ireland: some little time must have elapsed

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before this news could have reached Macbeth. Professor Wilson suggests a week or two for this interval. Mr. Paton would allow three weeks./1

Note in sc. iv., quoted from above, Macbeth's reference to Macduff:

"Mac. How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?"
"Lady M. Did you send to him, sir?"
"Mac. I hear it by the way; but I will send."

It is clear then that up to this time Macbeth has not sent to Macduff.

[Act III. sc. vi. It is impossible to fix the time of this scene. In it "Lenox and another Lord" discuss the position of affairs. The murder of Banquo and the flight of Fleance are known to Lenox, and he knows that Macduff lives in disgrace because he was not at the feast, but that is the extent of his knowledge. The other Lord informs him that Macbeth did send to Macduff, and that Macduff has fled to England to join Malcolm. And that thereupon Macbeth "prepares for some attempt of war." All this supposes the lapse, at the very least, of a day or two since the night of Macbeth's banquet; but in the next scene to this we find we have only arrived at the early morning following the banquet, up to which time the murder of Banquo could not have been known; nor had Macbeth sent to Macduff, nor was the flight of the latter known. The scene in fact is an impossibility in any scheme of time, and I am compelled therefore to place it within brackets. -- See Professor Wilson's amusing account of this "miraculous" scene in the fifth part of *Dies Boreales*: reprinted in *N. Sh. Soc. Trans. for 1875-6*, part ii. p. 351-8.]

Day 5. Act IV. sc. i. We find ourselves in the witches' cave, on the morning following the banquet, and Macbeth fulfilling his purpose, then expressed, of consulting the weird sisters. It seems

/1 I have had the advantage, while writing this article, of consulting an edition of *Macbeth*, published by Mr. A. P. Paton in 1877, to which is appended a scheme of time for the play. My division of time agrees generally with Mr. Paton's: the chief differences being that I place within brackets Act III. sc. vi. while he includes it in Day 4, and that Act V. sc. i. to which he assigns a separate day I include in Day 7.

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evident too that he cannot yet have sent to Macduff; for news is now brought him that Macduff has anticipated his purpose and has fled to England. Lenox tells him this news, and Lenox himself apparently has but just received it from the "two or three" horsemen who bring it; yet Lennox was informed of this and more in the preceding scene by the other Lord; he was even informed that Macbeth was preparing for war in consequence of Macduff's flight which he, Macbeth, now in this scene, hears of for the first time.

On hearing of Macduff's flight, the tyrant resolves immediately to surprise his castle, and "give to th' edge of the sword / His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line," and accordingly in

Day 6. Act IV. sc. ii. Lady Macduff and her children are savagely murdered. We may possibly suppose for this scene a separate day, as I have marked it. Mr. Paton would allow an interval of two days between this and the preceding scene. Professor Wilson fixes its time at "two days -- certainly not more -- after the murder of Banquo"; but the general breathless haste of the play is, I think, against any such interval between Macbeth's purpose and its execution; the utmost I can allow is, that it takes place on the day following sc. i. of Act IV.

An interval, for Ross to carry the news of Lady Macduff's murder to her husband in England where, in the next scene,

Day 7. Act IV. sc. iii., we find Malcolm and Macduff. The latter has not long arrived. Ross joins them with the dreadful news. At his departure from Scotland "there ran a rumour / Of many worthy fellows that were out," and he had himself seen "the tyrant's power a-foot." In this scene in particular is to be observed the suggestion of a long period of desolation for Scotland from the coronation of Macbeth to the flight of Macduff; a period, however, which the action of the play rigorously compresses into two or three weeks at the utmost.

Malcolm's power is ready, and they have but to take leave of the English king and start on their expedition.

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Act V. sc. i. At Dunsinane. Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep. "Since his majesty went into the field" this has been customary with her; but the Doctor has watched two nights and till now has seen nothing. The time of this scene may be supposed the night of Day 7. The mention of Macbeth's being in the field must refer to his expedition against the rebels; also mentioned by Ross in the preceding scene, where he says that he had seen "the tyrant's power a-foot."

An interval. Malcolm returns to Scotland with the English forces.

Day 8. Act V. sc. ii. The Scotch thanes who have revolted from Macbeth, march to Birnam to join with the English power led by Malcolm, which we learn is now near at hand. We also learn that Macbeth is back in Dunsinane, which "he strongly fortifies;" it is clear, therefore, that a considerable interval must be supposed between sc. i. and ii. of Act V.

Act V. sc. iii. In Dunsinane Macbeth prepares for his opponents.

We may fairly allow one day for these two scenes; although no special note of time is to be observed from here to the end of the play: they may be supposed to end the last "interval" and serve as an introduction to

Day 9 and last. Sc. iv. The Scotch and English forces join, and march to Dunsinane screened with the branches cut in Birnam wood.

Sc. v. In Dunsinane. The death of the Queen is announced. Birnam wood is seen to move, and Macbeth sallies out to attack his foes.

Sc. vi. The combined forces under Malcolm arrive before the castle and throw down their leafy screens.

Sc. vii. and viii. (one scene only in Folio). The battle in which Macbeth is slain, and Malcolm restored to his father's throne.

Time of the Play nine days represented on the stage, and intervals.

Day 1. Act I. sc. i. to iii.

" 2. Act I. sc. iv. to vii.

" 3. Act II. sc. i. to iv.

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An interval, say a couple of weeks. A week or two -- Professor Wilson; three weeks -- Paton.

Day 4. Act III. sc. i. to v.

[Act III. sc. vi., an impossible time.]

" 5. Act IV. sc. i.

[Professor Wilson supposes an interval of certainly not more than two days between Days 5 and 6; Paton marks two days. No interval is required in my opinion.]

" 6. Act IV. sc. ii.

An interval. Ross's journey to England. Paton allows two weeks.

" 7. Act IV. sc. iii., Act V. sc. i.

An interval. Malcolm's return to Scotland. Three weeks -- Paton.

" 8. Act V. sc. ii. and iii.

" 9. Act V. sc. iv. to viii.